

Setting

Act I, Scene 3 (BDF) — Two years later

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Barbara's marriage to William is well and truly on the rocks. The question isn't simply whether the marriage will survive long-term. The big question is: will their marriage even survive tonight's party?

Over the past two years, William has thrown himself more and more into his work. The relationship between him and Barbara - never a terribly passionate one - has grown more and more distant and strained. William loves her in his own way, but the only way he knows to show it is by working hard for her, bringing home a good paycheck, and making sure that she has a stable life.

Meanwhile, Barbara is bored stiff. She craves attention and passion. She misses the passion that she had with Charles, and wonders whether she made the wrong decision in marrying William. Charles has gone off to start a new job teaching theater at the University, and his life finally seems to be coming together. Barbara has recently found out that she is pregnant, and she is terrified that having a child with William will trap her in this boring life forever.

Charles has phased in and out of Barbara's life. He will try to be there for her and comfort her, then find himself getting too close and leave. She made her choice and he doesn't want to betray his brother again. They have gotten a little too close once or twice, but each time, Barbara has stood her ground, and Charles has felt guilty and left them alone, sometimes for months. It's hard for him to be around them. He can't stand to see Barbara so lost and lonely.

Virginia is very worried about the state of her daughter's marriage. She is hoping desperately that Barbara and William can resolve their issues, but she also worries about Barbara feeling trapped. She hopes that a child might help the marriage, but is afraid that they will have a child first, and divorce after. Will Barbara and William's marriage survive?

Barbara Gardener

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How did it come to this? A dull and empty marriage, and now you with a child on the way.

You have a horrible feeling about tonight. You know that you need to tell William about your pregnancy, but somehow that will make everything all too real. You will find yourself trapped for the rest of your life this way. A big house, nice things, a child, but a passionless and rarely-home husband.

It isn't that William doesn't provide for you, or that he is off being irresponsible like his brother Charles would have done. No, he's out working hard at the law firm because he wants to give you all the material comforts you could ever need. Somehow that makes it all that much worse. After the past few years, any hope of real passion in this marriage has dried up.

You know that you're keeping the child. Despite everything, you couldn't imagine not having it. This little child will need and care for you in a way that no one else has. The question is whether or not the stability and financial support that William provides is enough. Can you stick it out purely for these things, or do you need to get out now, however hard it will be for you and your child alone?

There aren't any easy answers, but you and your child are going to have to live with whatever you choose, for the rest of your lives.

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Charles Gardener

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Since Barbara accepted William's proposal, you have tried very hard to move on. You briefly dated Karen, a secretary at the high school where you worked. She was in a play with you and it was exciting for a little while, but she could never measure up to Barbara. When you got a job teaching theatre at the college, you and Karen parted ways.

Recently, it has been getting harder and harder to keep away. You can't stand watching Barbara wither away like this. William loves her, you know that, but he never shows it. He doesn't give her any of the love, passion and attention that you could give her. Barbara needs to get out of that marriage before she's trapped by a child. She's wasting away.

It's not just for you. Sure, you would take her back if she came to you. Of course you would; you still love her. She's still the only woman in the world to you. Really, though, you would want her to leave William even if you knew she would never come back to you. She's dying in that relationship.

You haven't pushed because you didn't want to hurt your brother, but you can't watch this any longer. Whatever happens, you need to convince her to get out of that relationship before she loses herself altogether.

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William Gardener

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The past year has been a rough one for your marriage. You're making a name for yourself in the law firm, but you see very little of Barbara. Every time you do see her, she seems colder and more distant. You've responded by working that much harder, and by buying things for her. It is what you can do to show her that this has all been for her, however hard these few years have been.

More and more, you're convinced that the two of you should have a child. The next few years are going to be particularly busy for you, and Barbara clearly needs someone there for her in the nice new home you bought a few months ago. A child would give her someone that can be there for her all the time while you move up the next few steps in your workplace.

Tonight at least you've managed to get the evening off. It was a close thing and you owe more than a few favors at work for it. Still, it is Barbara's birthday, and having the family together for it will be good for her.

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Virginia Vela

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Your daughter's marriage is falling apart, and William doesn't understand why. You know he loves her, but she needs to know it. You know what it's like to hang on for years in a loveless marriage, and Barbara doesn't even have a child to keep her company. Women need a little more passion, a little more intensity. Women are emotional creatures. William thinks that bringing home a good salary should be enough, but he doesn't understand.

Meanwhile, Barbara is at her wits end. If things don't change, you expect that she will leave him. You have talked with her about ways to bring him out, ways to make things better, but nothing she does seems to help. It's possible that a child is the right answer here. With a child, maybe William's stability would be more important than his distance. A child could provide the love that Barbara is missing, and might even bring William out a little more.

On the other hand you're worried that she'll try to patch things up, have a child, and then wind up leaving him anyway. If she's going to leave him, she should do so now, before there are any children in the picture. She needs to make a decision soon, one way or the other.