

# Setting

## Act I, Scene 3 (ADF) — Two years later

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

Since the fight over Karen, nothing has gone well for them. Barbara hasn't really trusted him since, but she's never dug up any evidence that he did cheat on her. Charles has only grown more distant. They barely talk except when they're fighting. Sometimes Barbara almost wishes she had found evidence of an affair. Then at least there would be someone to blame it on. As it is, everything is falling apart and neither seems to know why.

Meanwhile, Barbara has been wondering more and more whether she should just leave Charles and try to start over. Recently, however, that option has gotten more complicated: Barbara is pregnant. She hasn't yet told anyone she's pregnant. If she tells Charles that she's pregnant with his child, he'll almost certainly do everything he can to make up with her. At this point, she's not sure she wants that. Maybe she could still leave Charles and patch things up with William. William has his own problems, but at least he's stable.

Meanwhile, Charles got a new job teaching theater at the local college. However, with Barbara so upset, Charles has become ever more volatile. He doesn't understand what's going on with her, and he can't fix it, which just makes him angry and frustrated. All he wants is to resolve things, but sometimes he thinks it's not even worth it anymore. He feels like he doesn't even know his own wife, and doesn't know what to do.

Virginia is watching this all from the sidelines with tears in her eyes. She is hoping desperately that Barbara and Charles can resolve their issues. Will their marriage survive all the betrayals?

# *Barbara Gardener*

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How did it come to this? You feel like you barely know Charles anymore. He's hardly ever home. He's always out drinking or, worse, gambling away money you need to pay the rent. He's always been irresponsible, but this crosses all boundaries. At first you thought he was having an affair, maybe with Karen, but you have searched and searched, and never found any evidence. In some ways, you almost wish he was having an affair. That would be easier to deal with than knowing that he just doesn't care enough to come home.

You have a horrible feeling about tonight. You know that you need to confront Charles about his instability - the drinking, the disappearances, the fights - and find out if he is still committed to this marriage. He deserves to know about the child you are carrying, but you need to know first whether or not there is a marriage worth trying to save.

If Charles isn't going to, or can't focus on your marriage, you need out now. You aren't sure what you are going to do if it comes to that, but you won't raise your child in a situation like this. You just can't, no matter what comes of it.

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# *Charles Gardener*

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You don't know what's happened to Barbara lately. You've been trying so hard, but it seems like everything you do is wrong. You can't handle it. Everything you say leads to a fight; every time you try to make up with her she winds up in tears. You love her so much, but you can't handle this anymore.

You know you shouldn't leave as often as you do, but you can't handle the screaming matches. It's not like you're doing anything wrong when you leave. Maybe you drink a little too much, maybe you put a little too much money on the cards down at the bar, but you've never cheated on her and you always come home eventually. Even if it takes a few weeks sometimes.

You know you're not the easiest person to live with, but this isn't fair. You love Barbara and want to be with her, but you just can't seem to make her happy and every time you fight things get worse. Lately you only see that passion in her eyes when she's yelling at you. It almost makes you glad of the fights. When you aren't fighting, she hardly looks at you at all.

You really don't want to leave Barbara. She's the love of your life, and you want to be with her and raise children together, but you can't take much more of this. If something doesn't change soon, one day you're going to walk out the door and not come back.

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# *William Gardener*

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Your brother has ruined the best thing that ever happened to him: his marriage to Barbara. He's gone more nights than not drinking, gambling, or just out making trouble. You don't know if you can ever forgive him for what he has done to Barbara. You've been as supportive of Barbara as you possibly could, but you don't know how much more she can take. At first you thought he must be having an affair, but if so, you haven't found out about it. He's just this irresponsible, even without any distractions.

You plan on calling out Charles for his bad behavior tonight and challenging him to shape up. You hate to ruin Barbara's party, but something needs to give. Better to take the time now than to see this drag on any longer. They're both suffering, and if neither of them will take action, it will have to be you.

You get the feeling from talking to Barbara that she realizes this as well and that some kind of breaking point is necessary. Over the past several weeks, she's been so... quiet. You think she's finally realizing, just as you have, that things can't go on without a real change. Tonight is the time for that change.

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# *Virginia Vela*

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Your daughter's marriage is falling apart, and sometimes you think you're more upset about it than she is. She and Charles have been fighting constantly. You've heard rumors that there's another woman. The past month, things seem to have gotten even worse. You don't know what happened, but Barbara has just snapped.

You're worried that Charles and Barbara are going to divorce, but you're even more worried that they're not going to do it until too late. Barbara and Charles both want children, and if it wasn't for all this fighting, now would be the time. Charles just got a good job at the local college, teaching theater: exactly the sort of work he's always wanted. They're settling down, this could help smooth things out.

Right now, the thing that you're most worried about is that they'll try to patch things up, have a child, and then wind up divorcing anyway. If they're going to get divorced, they should do so now, before there are any children in the picture. It may be too late for the marriage (though you hope it's not), but it's not too late to deal with this before there are children to be hurt by it.