

Setting

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



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?

Barbara's affair with William ended a month ago at William's prodding. Barbara has decided it was a mistake and moved on, blaming her indiscretion on Charles' own bad behavior. William, however, has been carrying guilt for the affair ever since. He feels that this has been going on too long and he can't bear the secret of his betrayal of his brother, no matter what Charles himself has done. Tonight he plans to confess and beg Charles' forgiveness.

Meanwhile, after the end of the affair, Barbara has been wondering more and more whether she made the right decision. She's pregnant, and, not only is she not entirely sure whose child it is, she's not sure which she would prefer. While she was in the affair with William, she could see the stability that she had given up. Now that it's over, she's left without a buffer against the tumult of her marriage. She hasn't yet told anyone she's pregnant. If she tells Charles that she's pregnant with his child, he'll almost certainly forgive her any trespass. On the other hand, if she can convince William it's his, maybe she could leave Charles and marry William - if William would even have her after the past few months.

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 doesn't know for sure about the affair, but 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 had been cheating on your husband - with his brother. You are now two and a half months pregnant, and you can't be sure who is the father. Where do you even go from here? You wish you knew.

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. If he is, you need to figure out what and how to tell him. He needs 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.

William is wracked by guilt over the affair and you're worried he'll just blurt it out to Charles. It was William that ended the affair because he just couldn't stand the thought of hurting his brother anymore. But right now, your needs and the needs of your child-to-be come first. You and your child are going to need to know where you stand and anything else is secondary.

If Charles isn't going to, or can't focus on your marriage, you need out now. You could try to convince William that the child is his. Either way, 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 Gardner

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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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How did it come to this? What were you possibly thinking? An affair with your brother's wife?

The affair with Barbara went on for the better part of the last year. It was only a month ago that you broke it off, but it had been eating away at you since almost the beginning. Even if Charles has been a terrible husband, out drinking, gambling and disappearing for days or weeks at a time, it doesn't justify what you've done to him. That is why you need to confess and apologize tonight. No matter what comes of it, you can't live with the lie anymore.

Barbara... you love her. There is no doubt about it. But she made her choice when she married Charles. It has taken you this long to really and truly come to grips with it, but you have at last. She may regret it at times, but it was the decision that she made and you can't help her, your brother, or yourself by denying it any longer. What she needs... what all of you need is to start acting like adults and living with the choices that have been made.

Their marriage needs help, lots of it. You can't be part of the problem anymore. You just can't and won't do that now or ever again.

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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. The past month, things seem to have gotten even worse. You don't know what happened, but Barbara has just snapped. You used to blame it all on Charles, but right now he seems desperate to make things work, and she won't even listen to him.

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.