

Setting

Act II, Scene 1 (ADEHJ) — Four years later

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Since Virginia moved in with Barbara and Charles, the financial issues that they faced have gone from bad to worse. They were having a hard time paying rent, but then the medical bills leading up to Virginia's death put them further into debt, and her funeral strained their already tenuous situation to the breaking point. Barbara is still considering applying to college, but she doesn't have the money for tuition. They have been having a hard time just paying for rent and groceries. Charles' job at the college doesn't pay very well, and their 9-year old daughter Stephanie brings her own expenses.

Last week, things got even worse. Frustrated by the issues at home, Charles took off for a few days. He spent most of that time playing cards and drinking, and he lost more money than they can afford. If they don't get some extra help from somewhere, they will be risking eviction. Barbara has been alternating between yelling at Charles and crying. Neither of them know what to do, or where to go from here. Barbara has considered trying to find work, but she has no marketable skills and a young daughter to care for. Meanwhile, Charles has been working up his courage to ask William for a loan. William still hasn't forgiven Charles for all the heartache he caused Barbara, and Charles doesn't want to humiliate himself in front of his brother again.

Meanwhile, William isn't sure whether to volunteer to help. He's doing well on his own, but he tries to be responsible and save. He's helped Barbara out with small things a few times before, mostly gifts for Stephanie. He doesn't want to reward Charles' bad behavior. If Charles gets forgiven and helped every time he screws up, how will he ever learn? It will be just like the affair Charles had all over again. Besides, if William helps now, what about the next time? How can he draw a line to keep this from happening again?

Barbara Gardener

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The past few years have been the hardest you've ever faced in your life. From giving up on your dreams of a college degree to your mother's death a few months ago, it is hard to imagine how much worse things could get. To make matters worse, Charles has failed you, both financially and emotionally. While you've struggled to care for Stephanie and deal with your grief, he's been more combative and distant than ever before.

Last week, he disappeared for a few nights. Desperately, you even tried to get ahold of him at his job at the college, but he had blown off from there too, calling in sick. When he eventually came back home, he was still wasted and your bank account was almost empty. You don't even know how many hours you spent yelling and crying at him about what he had done to your family.

Your last hope is with William. If you can't get some financial help from him, there is a very real chance of losing the house you rent, not to mention having more of your various debts go into collections. You know that Charles doesn't want to rely on his brother. There isn't any choice though, and if it ends up hurting Charles enough to motivate him more in the future, all the better.

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Charles Gardener

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You've really done it this time. Everything was hard to begin with. After Virginia died, you didn't really have enough money to deal with the funeral and Stephanie's expenses. You were struggling, and when you're struggling, you and Barbara fight.

You've gotten better at dealing with it, but this time it was too much. So you did what you usually do when that happens: you went out to drink and play cards with your friends. This time, however, you had too much too drink, stayed out too long, and lost too much money on the cards. You barely have enough to pay rent this month, let alone Stephanie's expenses.

You've worked so hard since Stephanie was born. Now you don't know what to do. You could probably turn to William for help, but he's never completely forgiven you for hurting Barbara because of the affair you had several years ago. You can't stand to humiliate yourself in front of him, yet again. He might well help, but can you stomach asking?

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William Gardener

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Life has been going very well for you over the past few years. While you've never found someone right to marry, you also don't have any of the extra costs in terms of time or energy associated with a marriage. You've had that time and energy to invest in your career, and it has paid off well. You're one of the top stars at the law firm, frankly earning more than you know what to do with these days.

Barbara and Charles have not been doing nearly as well. You were very sad to hear about Virginia's death last year; you always liked her. Barbara has taken it very hard, and the terrible behavior of your brother hasn't helped matters. You were infuriated last week when Barbara called you to ask if you had heard anything from Charles, who had apparently gone missing again. Sure, it was the first time in several years, but it just reinforced for you exactly how irresponsible your brother still is.

You've helped Barbara out a little bit in the past, mostly by way of gifts and practical things for your niece, Stephanie. You've been very cautious about giving too much though; you don't want to reward Charles' bad behavior. After what he put Barbara through during his affair several years ago, this latest betrayal is inexcusable. Charles needs to learn to live up to his responsibilities to Barbara and Stephanie; you can't always be the one there to save him like you were when the two of you were children.

You expect that Charles and Barbara may well ask for some financial help this evening. They've been struggling to get by with the costs of Virginia's funeral and Charles' latest escapades have pushed them over the edge. Whether and how much you are willing to help is something about which you aren't at all certain. If you do help, you need to make very sure that Charles understands how badly he's failed and that he can't just rely on you in the future if he screws up again.

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Stephanie Gardener

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Money's tight. You know that. Money's always tight. That's just the way things are. Your parents try to protect you from it, but you're old enough to know what's going on. In the past few weeks though, things have gotten worse. Dad did something dumb again. You know that much. There have been a lot less treats in the past few weeks, and mom and dad have been fighting even more than usual.

Mostly when they're fighting like this, you just try to calm things down. There's nothing you can really do to make it better, but maybe you can at least get them to stop fighting. At least the tea party is still fun! You know uncle William helped pay for the party this year. You hope he brought something fun. Uncle William always brings the best presents.

Maybe the best present would be for your parents to stop fighting over money for a little while.