

# *Setting*

## **Act I, Scene 2 (A) — Two years later**

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Barbara's garden party birthday is going to be difficult this year. Tensions are running high, and her marriage to Charles has been going through a rocky time.

Barbara and Charles Gardener have been married for nearly two years now. There have been many ups and downs: periods of fiery passion, followed by periods of heated arguments, distance and tearful making up. Right now they are in one of the hard times. They still love each other deeply, but they have been fighting, mostly about trivial things: where to go to dinner, whether to have friends over on a given night, how often to see Barbara's mother Virginia, or Charles's brother William. Sometimes the fights have been more serious: money and Charles's spendthrift habits, whether or not they are ready for a child.

When they are fighting, Charles frequently disappears: usually for the evening, occasionally for the night, once for almost a week. Barbara fears that he is cheating on her, but he denies it, and she has found no evidence. With Charles gone, Barbara has been spending more time with her brother-in-law, William. William has been offering her comfort and reassurances, while worrying about the degradation of the marriage. At the same time, some of the old spark has kindled between William and Barbara. Seeing the problems in her relationship with Charles, Barbara has begun to wonder if she would have been better off with the reliable William.

Meanwhile, Virginia has been watching Charles and Barbara's deteriorating relationship with great concern. While her marriage had its problems, she believes in the sanctity of marriage, and wants her daughter to try to resolve her own marital issues. At the same time, she is very worried that Charles might be off with another woman. If things must come to a head, she wants it to happen before children are involved.

# *Charles Gardener*

## **Act I, Scene 2 (A) — Two years later**

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Tonight is the two year anniversary of the party at which you asked Barbara to marry you. It should be a happy night, you should be celebrating her birthday and your relationship, but you just can't stop thinking about Karen. You met Karen a few months ago, when you were both in a production of *The Tempest* for your local community Shakespeare group. She played Miranda and you played Ferdinand. As your romance played out on stage, something blossomed between the two of you as well. You never quite crossed the line with Karen, but you dreamed of her many a night after that show.

You know it's wrong, and, since the play, you have tried so hard to avoid Karen. She was recently hired as a secretary at the high school where you teach English, so it hasn't been easy. You're terrified that Barbara will find out. You love Barbara desperately, and couldn't stand to have her leave you, but with Karen, everything is so easy.

You and Barbara have been fighting a lot recently. Mostly over stupid stuff. Money is tight. You've been talking about trying to break into a career in theater. Barbara wants you to keep the job you already have. You desperately want a child, but Barbara isn't sure she's ready. You know that if you had a child to care for it would make everything better. That's what you really need, a child to bring your relationship closer.

It's so hard to be around when you and Barbara are fighting. You can't stand to see her mad at you, but you can't give up on how you feel. When things get too bad, you storm out. Usually you just go to a bar for a few hours and drink and play cards. A few times, you've just gotten in the car and driven all night. Once, last summer, you just took off and drove until you couldn't drive any further, and slept in the car. You did that for three days before you were ready to turn around. But, so far, there's one thing you haven't done. You haven't turned to Karen.

Even if things get better, even if you have a child, could that really let you forget about Karen? That beautiful long, blond hair. Those perfect lips. Those dark blue eyes. She's so beautiful, and you see her at school every day. How long can you really hold out, especially when you and Barbara are fighting like this?