

Setting

Act I, Scene 4 (AG) — Five and a half years later

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This year, as for the past four years, the garden party has been shifted from Barbara's birthday to that of her five-year old daughter Stephanie. After Charles and Barbara divorced, Barbara remarried William. While the relations between the brothers have been strained, Charles is very involved in Stephanie's life, and has tried hard to be a good father. Even through the divorce, fatherhood has brought some stability to his life, and he lives for his weekends with his daughter. He has dated a few other women, but none seriously.

Barbara and William are doing well. William has a good job at a law firm, and, while their marriage lacks the passion that Barbara's relationship with Charles had, it also lacks the tumult. William works long hours, but since Stephanie was born, Barbara has been relatively content to focus on her young daughter.

Recently, however, a new issue has come up. Barbara's mother, Virginia, has had a stroke, and can no longer manage on her own. Barbara and William need to decide whether to care for her themselves, or send her to a nursing home. They recently bought a new house, and the cost of a nursing home would be hard on them. However, Barbara is very busy chasing after Stephanie, and the extra work of caring for an ailing parent would be difficult. She has been considering going back to college to become a teacher once Stephanie is in school, and caring for Virginia would make that very difficult. At the same time, tuition might make the costs of a nursing home even more prohibitive.

Barbara Gardener

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Stephanie is a joy in your life, but also a headache. The antics of a five year old are both delightful and never-ending. With her entering school, you had been planning on going back to college yourself. You'd like to see if you could get the education you need to be a teacher; working with Stephanie has made it clear how much you enjoy teaching and working with young children.

However, a few months ago your mother Virginia had a stroke. After she got out of the hospital, she's come to live with you. William's salary lets you afford a rather large house and there was room to bring Virginia in due to the fact that she can't entirely manage on her own. Between struggling to help your mother in her limited capacity and taking care of a five-year old child though, you fear that your dream of being a teacher may not be reachable.

While you hope to be able to enjoy the garden party with the family, it is a good time to also talk about what is going to be done with Virginia. If she is put in a nursing home, she will almost certainly be able to get better care than you can provide. At the same time, it is both expensive and she won't be with family all of the time. You'd visit, probably daily as much as possible, but it still wouldn't be the same. And, it may enable you to go back to school after all for a teaching degree.

Even thinking about the last part makes you guilty though. Do you really want to stick your mother in a nursing home just so you can pursue your dream? Wouldn't it be better (and less expensive) to simply buckle down and care for her at home yourself? You aren't sure how many years she has left and with Stephanie soon to be in school, it would be manageable.

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Charles Gardener

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Even though you and Barbara divorced, you have tried very hard to be a good father to little Stephanie. Despite Barbara having remarried William, you don't want Stephanie to grow up thinking of him as father instead of you. Your schedule is more flexible than William's, and since Barbara has been busy with an ailing mother, you've been taking Stephanie at least one day a week.

You always try to do something fun. You don't have a lot of money, but you want Stephanie to remember her time with you as exciting, something to look forward to. Sometimes you just go to the park or the zoo, but you have also splurged on trips to the state fair and other events. You have been saving up to take her to Disneyland this summer. You're not great with money, but for your little daughter you can save.

Barbara and William seem happy and you try very hard not to begrudge it. You certainly played your part in the breakup of your marriage. You miss Barbara terribly, but the two of you never worked very well. At least Stephanie doesn't see her parents fight every day. You try hard to get along with them, you don't want to hurt Stephanie.

Barbara's mother Virginia has been really going downhill since the stroke. Barbara and William have been debating whether or not to put her into a nursing home. Virginia still resents you for the way your marriage ended, but you want to be there for them. If there's any way you can help, you're willing to try.

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William Gardener

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You're worried about Barbara and the stress of trying to take care of both Stephanie and Virginia. In addition, you know how much Barbara wants to go back to college to get a teaching degree. Barbara just can't do all three of these things at the same time, no matter how much she might feel she can. You have to help her make the right decision.

You make good money at the law firm. Sure, a lot of the income is tied up with the new house and there are plenty of costs associated with a five year old. Still, money isn't the real issue here; time is. While you're sure that Barbara would like to personally take care of her mother, you're worried that she'll be sacrificing her future career if she does so. Virginia is going downhill and she'd probably be better off with professional care anyway. If you can delicately convince Barbara that it would be better to put Virginia in a nursing home, Barbara would be able to take the classes she needs to work on her teaching degree.

Stephanie will be in school this year and this is the time for Barbara to really reach out and expand her possibilities. She needs to have more and better opportunities for the future, not less.

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Virginia Vela

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You know something important is happening tonight. It's one of those parties. You like the parties. Everything has gotten a lot harder since the stroke. You just need things to get back to normal.

You should get a cup of tea. You'll feel better with a cup of tea. It's ok, mom will take care of things.

No, wait. That's not right. You're here with your daughter Barbara. She's trying to take you out of your house because she thinks you can't take care of yourself. That's not true. You can handle things ok. You just wish you could talk a little more clearly so you could explain that to her.

She wants to put you in a nursing home. You don't want to go to a nursing home. You want to stay home where you belong. You like it here. Plus the roses would die if you left.