

Setting

Act I, Scene 4 (BG) — 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 William and Barbara divorced, Barbara has struggled as a single mother. William has contributed financially to Stephanie's upbringing, but rarely visits. Since he made partner in the law firm, he hasn't had enough time to help out. Besides, he still finds it hard to see Barbara like this, but he knows that he can't go back.

Charles has remained connected, at least as connected as Charles ever was. He has drifted in and out of Barbara and Stephanie's lives. They have been involved on and off, but he is such a destabilizing influence that Barbara never wanted him to be too present in Stephanie's life. She always felt that letting Charles become a father-figure to Stephanie would be worse than no father. With his flair for the dramatic, he could break her heart almost by accident. She's young and grows attached too easily. How could she handle it if he suddenly disappeared? Still, they reconnect occasionally, and Stephanie is quite fond of him.

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 needs to decide whether to care for her in her home or send her to a nursing home. Without additional help, she probably can't afford the cost of a nursing home. 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 might make that impossible. At the same time, tuition might make the costs of a nursing home even more prohibitive.

Barbara Vela

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You had so many dreams at one point. You wish you knew what happened to them. You never imagined that you'd wind up a divorced, single mother, working a dead end job, while also trying to support an ailing mother. Life can be bitterly cruel.

William provides some financial support for Stephanie. If it wasn't for that, you really don't know what you would do. Still, it isn't enough now that Virginia can't help with Stephanie during the time you need to work. You're going to have to ask William to either fork over some more money for day care or spend some of his precious time with his own daughter. His career is so important to him, though, that you can't imagine he'll choose the latter. Probably for the best anyway.

You're neck-deep in forms to help cover some of the costs associated with Virginia's medical care now. She was living with you and Stephanie before the stroke, but since then, everything has just spiraled out of control. As much as you hate to do so, you don't have any choice but to put her in a nursing home. She isn't doing well enough to get by on her own while you're working and you have to spend almost as much time helping her as helping Stephanie while you're home. You have no clue how you'll afford it, but you don't have a choice.

Charles... you wish you knew what to do about Charles. It is clear to you now that he cares for you more than William ever did. Hell, he even cares more for his niece, Stephanie, than does William. He'd love to help out, but you don't trust him and you wouldn't trust yourself around him. The last thing your life needs is more complications, and Charles is one big complication.

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Charles Gardener

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It's been hard watching Barbara as a single mother. You've tried to reach out to her, but she pushes you away. You can't really blame her, it's not like you're a great role model for a kid. You like your little niece, but you don't get to see her often enough. You try to bring her treats and things, but she is fickle as small children are, and often seems hardly to recognize you one time to the next.

Since the divorce, your brother threw himself headlong into his work. He provides reasonably well for Barbara and Stephanie, but rarely sees his daughter. He thinks he can pay his way out of being a father, and Barbara mostly lets him. Meanwhile, you can see how overwhelmed Barbara is with being alone.

Until recently, Virginia was able to help out, but since the stroke, Barbara has been spending almost as much time caring for Virginia as for Stephanie. You wish you could help out, but you don't have the money to help with a nursing home, and Barbara pushes you away when you try to assist her. Maybe this is your opportunity to offer something.

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William Gardener

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Since the divorce several years ago, your career has done very well. While it was painful at the time, you threw yourself into work in the aftermath and you've really built something for yourself. Barbara could have been a part of it if she wanted, but she made her decision years ago. Now she has to live with some of the consequences.

You provide more than adequately for your daughter Stephanie, something that Barbara hasn't been able to manage on her own. Still, it galls you that after everything you offered to Barbara, all she wants these days is money. That, and the demands of your career, have kept you more distant from Stephanie than you might have preferred. It is not your daughter's fault that things turned out this way, but money for the things she otherwise wouldn't have will have to do.

Charles has continued to drift in and out of all of your lives. He's got a teaching job, but he's never really made anything of himself. One more person who wasted their chances and potential. It is a shame, but people have to live with the choices they make. You love your brother, but you learned long ago that charity only helps so much and that personal responsibility has to take care of the rest.

You were very sorry to hear about Virginia having a stroke. She was a very nice woman and you always liked her. You don't know exactly how Barbara will be able to take care of both Virginia and Stephanie. You expect that she'll be asking for more money from you to take care of it all. That seems to be your role: a font of money to solve the problems of the people that betrayed you. You'll probably help out for Stephanie's sake, but you need to make it clear that this has to stop somewhere.

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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.