

# *Setting*

**Act I, Scene 4 (AH) — 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. Since Barbara got pregnant, both Charles and Barbara recommitted to their marriage. While there have been many fights since, and many of the same problems are still present, the birth of their daughter Stephanie strengthened their marriage. Even during the worst times, both of them have reason to stay and work things out.

William has never married, but has become a very successful lawyer. He is a doting uncle, giving Stephanie many gifts, and sometimes taking the entire family to the zoo or other events. He doesn't have a lot of free time with his practice, but much of what he does, he spends on his niece.

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 Charles 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. Charles doesn't make a lot of money at the college. 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 studying 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*

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

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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; raising 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 came to live with you. That has changed everything; Charles' salary barely covered the cost of living for the three of you and now you have to take care of your mother as well. Virginia can't entirely manage on her own anymore and the four of you are piled in a two bedroom house. Between struggling to help your mother in her limited capacity and taking care of a five-year old child, 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 expensive and she won't be with family all of the time. You'd visit, probably daily when possible, but it still wouldn't be the same. The cost means you probably won't be able to go back to college for a teaching degree without significant financial aid. Is it just better to forget about that for a few years? It pains you, but the answer is probably yes.

Charles is not dealing with the situation well at all. You're worried that all the stress is taking a toll on your marriage in a way that nothing has in years. You know he wants to see Virginia in a nursing home, but you feel terrible about what seems to be a choice between his comfort and your mother's wishes. Some kind of decision needs to be made, but you don't know what it is going to be.