

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.

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.