

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.