

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.

William Gardener

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The last several years have been good for you. With Barbara and Charles finally settled down, and no significant demands on your own time, you've poured yourself into your work. To say that your career is going well is an understatement.

You appreciate these family garden parties every year. They're a nice chance to relax a bit and pamper your young niece, Stephanie. You gave her a dozen gifts earlier on this evening, most of which she utterly adored. You know that Barbara and Charles are going through a rough time financially right now, so you're happy to give Stephanie the toys her parents couldn't afford.

You were very sorry to hear about Virginia's recent stroke. The thought of being trapped in a failing body and mind horrifies you more than a little bit and dealing with Virginia this evening has been a challenge. You don't know how Barbara and Charles manage to live with it every day, especially with the four of them packed in a small two bedroom house. They have some hard decisions to make about what to do as Virginia continues to slide downhill. You don't at all envy them having to sort it out.