

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.

Charles Gardener

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Even though you and Barbara divorced, you have tried very hard to be a good father to little Stephanie. Despite Barbara having remarried William, you don't want Stephanie to grow up thinking of him as father instead of you. Your schedule is more flexible than William's, and since Barbara has been busy with an ailing mother, you've been taking Stephanie at least one day a week.

You always try to do something fun. You don't have a lot of money, but you want Stephanie to remember her time with you as exciting, something to look forward to. Sometimes you just go to the park or the zoo, but you have also splurged on trips to the state fair and other events. You have been saving up to take her to Disneyland this summer. You're not great with money, but for your little daughter you can save.

Barbara and William seem happy and you try very hard not to begrudge it. You certainly played your part in the breakup of your marriage. You miss Barbara terribly, but the two of you never worked very well. At least Stephanie doesn't see her parents fight every day. You try hard to get along with them, you don't want to hurt Stephanie.

Barbara's mother Virginia has been really going downhill since the stroke. Barbara and William have been debating whether or not to put her into a nursing home. Virginia still resents you for the way your marriage ended, but you want to be there for them. If there's any way you can help, you're willing to try.