

Setting

Act I, Scene 4 (BH) — 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. Barbara and William are doing well. William has a good job at a law firm, and, while their marriage has never been passionate, it is stable and seems to be working these days. William works long hours, but since Stephanie was born, Barbara has been relatively content to focus on her young daughter.

Charles has remained connected, at least as connected as Charles ever was. He has drifted in and out of Barbara and William's lives. Since the problems before Stephanie's birth, Barbara has kept Charles at arm's length. He still tries hard to connect with his brother, but William was never terribly good at reaching out. Charles is still teaching at the local college, but no one, not even him, seems quite sure how he keeps that job.

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 challenging. At the same time, tuition might make the costs of a nursing home even more prohibitive.

Barbara Gardener

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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; working with 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's come to live with you. William's salary lets you afford a rather large house and there was room to bring Virginia in due to the fact that she can't entirely manage on her own. Between struggling to help your mother in her limited capacity and taking care of a five-year old child though, 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 both expensive and she won't be with family all of the time. You'd visit, probably daily as much as possible, but it still wouldn't be the same. And, it may enable you to go back to school after all for a teaching degree.

Even thinking about the last part makes you guilty though. Do you really want to stick your mother in a nursing home just so you can pursue your dream? Wouldn't it be better (and less expensive) to simply buckle down and care for her at home yourself? You aren't sure how many years she has left and with Stephanie soon to be in school, it would be manageable.

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Charles Gardener

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It's so hard watching Barbara, William and Stephanie as the perfect, happy family. You have drifted from girlfriend to girlfriend, never staying in a relationship for too long. You're still almost amazed that you've kept your job at the local college. The changing students help - there are always new kids, with new ideas. That's fun at least.

Sometimes you think you should stop coming to these parties, but it's almost your only contact with Barbara and William these days. William is too busy with work, Barbara is too busy with Stephanie. Mostly you just try to drink enough to make these parties bearable without making a fool of yourself.

You wish you could at least be part of Stephanie's life. She's your niece. You deserve some connection to her. You brought her a new doll. Maybe you could offer to take her for a day at some point. Not that Barbara let you the last few times you offered.

You just want to feel like you're part of your own family again.

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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.

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Virginia Vela

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You know something important is happening tonight. It's one of those parties. You like the parties. Everything has gotten a lot harder since the stroke. You just need things to get back to normal.

You should get a cup of tea. You'll feel better with a cup of tea. It's ok, mom will take care of things.

No, wait. That's not right. You're here with your daughter Barbara. She's trying to take you out of your house because she thinks you can't take care of yourself. That's not true. You can handle things ok. You just wish you could talk a little more clearly so you could explain that to her.

She wants to put you in a nursing home. You don't want to go to a nursing home. You want to stay home where you belong. You like it here. Plus the roses would die if you left.