

Barbara Gardener

Act II, Scene 4 (AHJMO) — Fifteen years later

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It seems like every week there is something else you can't do for yourself as the MS continues in its relentless course. Almost worse than what it is doing to you is what it is doing to your family. Increasingly, you lay awake at night wondering whether it wouldn't just be better for everyone if you were dead.

Charles... what this has done to Charles is almost unthinkable. The passion he's carried throughout his life seems to at last be ground down by something, and it is terrible to see. He's trying so hard to be careful and considerate around you, reining in all that he's feeling and trying to be a stable force. As terrible as it is, sometimes you find yourself going out of your way to pick fights with him just to see his passion flare again.

You know how badly he wants to run away at times, and you don't blame him for it at all. Sometimes you think it would be better if he would, even though it would really leave you alone. You don't have many more years at this point, but what those years will do to him... you don't want to think about. Yet, a prisoner in your own body, you have little else to think about.

You're so proud of your daughter, Stephanie, and what she's made of her life. Despite all of your concerns, and there were a lot of them, Zach turned out to be a good husband for Stephanie and a wonderful father as well. You also love your two grandchildren. Seeing them is one of the greatest joys in your life, but you worry about them seeing all of what you're going through and only remembering you this way.

You know that everyone has been talking about whether or not to put you in a nursing home or to dedicate more personal time with you. You remember all those years ago when you and Charles made the decision to try to take care of your mother, Virginia. It was incredibly painful for all of you, and now you understand better how willing she was to just let go at the end and not be a burden anymore. As much as it terrifies you, it may be best if you begin the process of separation from your family soon as well. Going into a nursing home and sparing them some of what you went through may be for the best. You love them all, and it is precisely for that reason that you would rather they remember you in better health than personally doing everything for you while you slowly fade away.