

Setting

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

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Stephanie and Zach Bloom are doing well. They have two children: Jessica, age 10 and Michael, age 7. Stephanie has recently gone back to work as an accountant. With her help, Zach bought the garage where he works, and the business has been fairly successful. He has even hired a couple new people to help out.

Things have not been going as well for Charles and Barbara. A few years back, Barbara was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. This year she had to quit her job, and caring for her has been taking more and more of Charles' time. Money has been very tight since Barbara stopped working, and Barbara and Charles are fighting about money yet again. Things are made even worse by the fact that Charles can't leave: Barbara can't make do without him, even for a few days.

Since Charles and Barbara refused to accept Zach twelve years ago, Stephanie's relationship with her parents has been very strained. Last year, Barbara reached out to her daughter. With her failing health, she wanted to mend fences. Since then, Stephanie has been talking more with her parents, and she and Barbara have begun to rebuild their relationship.

Stephanie and Zach have been discussing whether or not to help out Charles and Barbara, and if so, how to do so. Stephanie is still very angry at her parents for their rejection of Zach, but Zach worries that if she doesn't help, and her parents continue to suffer, Stephanie will regret it. If Zach and Stephanie do decide to help out, they have the money to make a difference. They could pay for someone to come in and help out Barbara a few days a week, but that won't mend the wounds the way personal care would. After watching her grandmother languish alone in a nursing home, Stephanie feels like she should be the one to care for her mother. Just providing money won't heal their relationship. At the same time, with two children, Stephanie's work, and Zach's business, time is limited.

Will Stephanie and Zach help at all? If so, will Stephanie devote time to caring for her mother, or will she simply pay for help and be done with it? Can Barbara and Stephanie mend their broken relationship this late in the game?

Charles Gardener

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You're really glad that Barbara finally reached out to Stephanie and Zach. It's so good to see them and your grandchildren more often. You felt terrible about what happened when they announced their engagement. It's been so hard seeing your grandchildren so rarely. You're happy to play with children again and hear about how their lives are going. There has been so little joy in your life lately.

The last few years have been very hard on you. You never realized how much you relied on Barbara until she got sick. All the little things she used to do around the house, all the cooking and cleaning, keeping up with the garden. The two of you have been fighting constantly. You fight about finances, about how you do what used to be her chores, about everything. You know she's in pain, and you know it's hard on her, but you don't know how long you can cope with this. Since she had to give up her job, everything has gotten harder. She's around all the time, and there's not enough money coming in.

The worst part is, you can't even get away from it. You can't leave Barbara alone. Even when you're gone for work it's hard on her. She has trouble doing basic things for herself, especially when she's having a bad day. In the past when the two of you were fighting, you could always leave for a day or two. Now the best you can do is go to a bar for a few hours, and you still feel guilty about doing that.

If you had the money, you could hire someone to take some of the load off, but getting by is hard enough right now. The money you got from William's inheritance has mostly gone to pay medical bills, and Barbara's disability doesn't go very far.

You just don't know how much longer you can deal with this.