

Setting

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

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Stephanie and Zach Bloom are doing fairly well. They have two children; Jessica, age 10, and Michael, age 7. They've had their financial struggles, but they have managed to get by. Since Michael started school, Stephanie has been taking night classes to get a bookkeeping certificate. Zach's boss wants to retire soon, and has been talking to Zach about arranging for him to take over the garage where he works.

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 it 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. After watching her mother struggle to care for Virginia, she doesn't want to take on that sort of responsibility. At the same time, the family doesn't have a lot of extra money to go around. They could possibly pay for someone to come in and help out Barbara one or two days a week, but money would be really tight. Stephanie could try to get over to pitch in a few days a week, but she's already very busy, between work, taking care of her kids, and her own school work. At the same time, if she doesn't help in some way, she's not sure how long her father can keep going.

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?

Stephanie Bloom

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You're worried about your parents. You're so grateful that your mother finally reached out, but you still haven't entirely forgiven her. At the same time, no matter how angry you still are, it's painful to see her suffering. Your mother's MS has been getting steadily worse, and she had to quit her job this year. Your father isn't coping well at all. You're almost surprised he's still there.

You and Zach aren't struggling too badly right now. Maybe you could give your father some money to help hire someone to come in and help out a few days a week. It isn't much, but it might make the difference. It would make things tighter for your family, but someone needs to take care of your mother and you really don't have the time. On the other hand, is that really what you want to do? If you want to rebuild a relationship, is buying someone else's time the right way to do it? You feel you should help out more yourself, but you have work, classes, and two young children to care for. You can't spare much time. Besides, are you really ready to spend that much time around your mother after all these years? You saw your mother nearly go crazy trying to take care of you and your grandmother at the same time, and you have two children. On the other hand, you're not sure you can really spare the money.

You just don't know what to do. You want to help out, but you still resent her rejection of you and Zach. You feel so lost.