

Setting

Act II, Scene 1 (ADEHJ) — Four years later

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Since Virginia moved in with Barbara and Charles, the financial issues that they faced have gone from bad to worse. They were having a hard time paying rent, but then the medical bills leading up to Virginia's death put them further into debt, and her funeral strained their already tenuous situation to the breaking point. Barbara is still considering applying to college, but she doesn't have the money for tuition. They have been having a hard time just paying for rent and groceries. Charles' job at the college doesn't pay very well, and their 9-year old daughter Stephanie brings her own expenses.

Last week, things got even worse. Frustrated by the issues at home, Charles took off for a few days. He spent most of that time playing cards and drinking, and he lost more money than they can afford. If they don't get some extra help from somewhere, they will be risking eviction. Barbara has been alternating between yelling at Charles and crying. Neither of them know what to do, or where to go from here. Barbara has considered trying to find work, but she has no marketable skills and a young daughter to care for. Meanwhile, Charles has been working up his courage to ask William for a loan. William still hasn't forgiven Charles for all the heartache he caused Barbara, and Charles doesn't want to humiliate himself in front of his brother again.

Meanwhile, William isn't sure whether to volunteer to help. He's doing well on his own, but he tries to be responsible and save. He's helped Barbara out with small things a few times before, mostly gifts for Stephanie. He doesn't want to reward Charles' bad behavior. If Charles gets forgiven and helped every time he screws up, how will he ever learn? It will be just like the affair Charles had all over again. Besides, if William helps now, what about the next time? How can he draw a line to keep this from happening again?

Stephanie Gardener

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Money's tight. You know that. Money's always tight. That's just the way things are. Your parents try to protect you from it, but you're old enough to know what's going on. In the past few weeks though, things have gotten worse. Dad did something dumb again. You know that much. There have been a lot less treats in the past few weeks, and mom and dad have been fighting even more than usual.

Mostly when they're fighting like this, you just try to calm things down. There's nothing you can really do to make it better, but maybe you can at least get them to stop fighting. At least the tea party is still fun! You know uncle William helped pay for the party this year. You hope he brought something fun. Uncle William always brings the best presents.

Maybe the best present would be for your parents to stop fighting over money for a little while.