

Setting

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

~

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 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.

Stephanie and Zach have been discussing whether or not to help out, and if so, how to do so. 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.

Barbara Gardener

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

~

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.