

Setting

Act II, Scene 3 (AHM) — Six years later

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This party marks Stephanie's 23rd birthday and she has brought her boyfriend, Zack Bloom. Zack and Stephanie know each other from high school, and Zack has had a troubled past. He went to juvie several times for drug-related offenses and assault. While he hasn't been arrested since he turned 18, Barbara and Charles are not certain they trust his claims of being clean. There were rumors that he was dealing serious drugs to his classmates, and even that he was part of a gang. His tattoos and shaved head don't make him easy to trust.

After the drunk driving incident, William's help allowed Stephanie to get off easy. But the intervening few years have been hard. Stephanie wound up on drugs and was forced to go through court-mandated rehab. However, since William died of a sudden heart attack a few years back, Stephanie has pulled herself together. After his death, she finally realized that no one would be there to pull her out of the next fire and started taking care of herself. She got a job at the supermarket and moved out into a small apartment in town.

She met Zack again at the supermarket and they began reminiscing about high school. Soon enough they were dating, and now, almost six months later, they have come to this party to announce their engagement. While Charles has his concerns, he is mostly just happy to see Stephanie moving on with her life, but Barbara is worried. She really hoped that Stephanie would pull herself together and go to college, and now she's afraid that won't happen. She's even more worried that Zack might still be dealing, and that this could set Stephanie up for a relapse.

Barbara Gardener

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You're worried about your daughter, Stephanie. Of course, you're almost always worried about your daughter, but this time it's different. She's been seeing this Zack for almost six months now and you're concerned that the two of them are getting serious. While Stephanie has had a number of relationships before now, many of which disturbed you, Zack's history is horrible. You don't want your daughter getting seriously involved with someone who sold cocaine to kids in high school!

Since her uncle William passed away a few years ago, Stephanie has finally been getting her life in order. You're terrified that Zack will lead her down a very dark path again. She got off light several years back when William got her an easy pass for her first DUI. That let her feel like she could get away with anything for the couple of years that followed. In hindsight, it was a horrible decision and one that you don't want to make again.

You need to straighten your daughter out, however rough it will be in the short-term. You love her and you need her to realize that she can't have bad influences like Zack around. He's no good for her and if she doesn't make the changes in her life that need to be made, she's going to wind up in a very bad place in the years to come.

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Charles Gardener

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You're really worried about Stephanie's new boyfriend, Zack. He reminds you too much of yourself as a young man, and not in good ways. He was in and out of juvie up until he turned 18. He seems to have straightened out, but it's hard to tell whether he really has or whether he's just gotten better at hiding it. Even if he has cleaned up, he might go back to his old ways the first time things get difficult. You've heard rumors that he used to deal drugs. Will he start again when money gets tight?

Of course, Stephanie has finally started pulling herself together in the past few years, and she has been dating Zack through some of that time. Maybe he really is getting his act together. If so, he might even be a good influence on her. They could either help each other out or start a cycle and drag each other back down. That is, assuming he isn't still using, and you're not sure about that.

You know that Zack is important to Stephanie, and you would never be one to look down on the demands of the heart. If they truly love each other, that's enough of an answer for you, but you need to make sure Stephanie is sure about this, and that she knows what she's getting into.

You don't want your future grandchildren being raised by a drug dealer, or worse, being abandoned by a useless addict.

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Zachary Bloom

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You were alternately ecstatic and terrified driving over to the family gathering with Stephanie. You love her madly and when she accepted your proposal of marriage, it was better than any high. You know she loves you too and that the two of you are going to make a life together, but you're very worried about how the announcement is going to go with her parents, Barbara and Charles.

Yes, you had a troubled adolescence. So did Stephanie. But both of you got your shit together. You got clean and you're staying clean. Hell, you don't even drink. In the past few years you have held down a steady job at a garage and managed to get by on your own. With Stephanie, you're convinced that all the worst of your troubles are far behind you and it is smooth sailing ahead.

Now you just need to be able to convince Stephanie's parents of this.

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Stephanie Gardener

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This party is very important to you. Zack just proposed, and this is your opportunity to tell your parents. You know they're worried about him, and you understand why, but Zack is clean these days, and his determination has helped you stay clean as well. If your parents can't look beyond his past, how can they look beyond yours? It's not like your father has a sterling history himself.

Sure, you met him in high school when you were both struggling, but seeing his progress has made you aware of what is possible. If he was able to pull himself out of serious addictions and very lucrative dealing, surely you could deal with your own problems. When you met him at the supermarket, you were amazed at how different he had become.

You are going to marry Zack regardless of what they say. You love him and you are happy together. Being with Zack is the first time your life has actually felt stable or made sense. You both have jobs; you're paying rent; you're getting by. You've even started talking about having kids together.

Your parents have a very simple choice: either they accept Zack and you, or they reject you both and you go on with your life without them.