

Setting

Act II, Scene 4 (BGIMO) — 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 Barbara. A few years back, Barbara was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. This year she had to quit her job, and has gone on disability. Charles has been coming by to help out a bit, but he's not the most reliable caretaker. Money has been very tight since Barbara stopped working and what the state provides doesn't go very far. A state nurse stops by once a week, but Barbara really needs more help than that.

Stephanie and Zach have been discussing whether or not to help out, and if so, how to do so. After watching her grandmother languish alone in a nursing home, Stephanie feels like she should provide more personal care to her mother, maybe even buying a larger house and inviting Barbara to move in. At the same time, with two children, Stephanie's work, and Zach's business, none of them have much time to help. They could pay for someone to come in and help out Barbara a few days a week, but Stephanie feels like she should do more. Will that even help enough to make a difference? Maybe Barbara really needs to be in assisted living somewhere. Can Stephanie and Zach afford that? Do they want to?

Barbara Vela

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You didn't ask for any of this. A loveless marriage, divorce, raising your daughter alone, and now being trapped inside your own body. Yet, despite all of this, letting go of what little life you have left terrifies you completely. You're not going to let what little you do have slip away without a fight.

It seems like almost every week there is something more you can't do for yourself as the MS continues on its relentless course. The disability and welfare money you have coming in doesn't go very far and the once-a-week visit from a state nurse increasingly just doesn't cut it. Charles comes over somewhat erratically, but it often feels like a pity-fest for him. That's Charles though; he's never been good at the practical things. Still, you take what you can get.

You know that Stephanie and Zach are trying to decide what to do with you. Well, you aren't going to just give up and be shipped off to a nursing home for their convenience. Yes, you did it to your own mother, Virginia, and that decision haunts you today. You gave birth to Stephanie and raised her; she isn't going to just abandon you when you need her the most.

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Charles Gardener

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Even after all these years, it's hard to see Barbara suffering. You try to come by to help out some, but you've never been very good at this sort of thing. You try to cheer her up, but you can't really give her the regular help she needs with chores, or taking care of herself. You don't really even know why you still come by. You've gotten a little closer since William died, but the spark has been gone for many years. If you had any sense you would just leave town.

But that would mean leaving your job, and leaving your niece and her kids. You love spending time with Jessica and Michael. You've always loved kids. Why did you spend so long pining after Barbara? You could have had grandchildren of your own to play with. You've had plenty of girlfriends. You could have been happy with one of them, couldn't you?

And yet, here you are, in your 60s, still traipsing after Barbara. Years after her divorce, years after your brother's death. You just can't leave her to suffer alone. It's not like Stephanie and Zach do much to help.

That's not fair and you know it. They're raising two young children. They both work. You just wish you had a better solution.

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Zachary Bloom

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Your life with Stephanie has been a complex, but wonderful one. The two of you have both wrestled with so much in your past, but have found strength together. You now have two amazing children, stable employment, and a comfortable home. Yes, it has been a struggle, but you've made it here together.

Your own parents both died when you were younger and you've come to know and accept Barbara as a new mother, albeit a cranky one. Despite a rocky start due to concerns about your past, she eventually accepted you and brought you into the family. Watching Barbara slowly deteriorate has been incredibly painful.

It is going to be a hard balance with all of the responsibilities that you and Stephanie share, between your own jobs and your two children, but you want to see if there is some way that the two of you can pitch in personally. You know that Stephanie still feels some pain about seeing her own grandmother only occasionally in a nursing home and if possible you'd like to avoid having her deal with the same with her own mother. Plus, Barbara did take you in, and you want to show her that you care and appreciate her, and won't abandon her now just as her life is at its toughest.

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Stephanie Bloom

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You're worried about your mother. Her MS has been getting steadily worse, and she had to quit her job this year. Charles has been helping out a little, but it's hard on him. Between her portion of your father's inheritance and the little she gets from the government, she's getting by, but she's not doing well. She needs more help than she's getting. You need to help out more, but you have a full time job and two young children to care for. You just can't spare much time.

You and Zach are doing all right financially. Maybe you could hire someone to come in and help out a few days a week. It isn't much, but it might make the difference. On the other hand, things are only going to get worse. Maybe you should pool your savings and get your mother into assisted living while she can still make the move.

On yet another side, you remember what it was like watching your grandmother dying in a nursing home. She was so angry, being cared for by strangers. No matter how often you and your mother visited, she always felt alone. That sort of care should really be provided by someone the patient knows and loves. Maybe you could buy a larger house and move her in with you. Would Zach put up with that? What would that do to Jessica and Michael, living around your ailing mother for years, watching her die?

You just don't know what to do. You know you need to help out, but you feel so lost.