

Setting

Act II, Scene 2 (AHL) — Eight years later

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This year, the garden party is celebrating Stephanie's 17th birthday, but all is not well in the Gardener family. Stephanie has been caught driving drunk and her court date is next week. While this is the first time she has been caught, everyone knows it's not the first time she has been off drinking. Barbara and Charles are concerned about her behavior.

William has strong connections, and with a little pushing, he could get the case put in front of a lenient judge, and either get her off entirely, or get her off with a slap on the wrist. He has certainly done it for Charles in the past. At the same time, after he refused to help when they were in financial trouble, can they get his help now? Even if they can, is it a good idea to get Stephanie off the hook for this?

If she does get convicted, she will lose her license until she's 18. She has an after school job working at a restaurant that she needs the car to get to. Barbara has been very busy with her new teaching job, and could not drive her. If Stephanie gets convicted, she would probably have to quit her job. Barbara encouraged her to get a job in the first place to learn some responsibility, and the money has really helped the family. If she has to quit over this it might be a good lesson, but it would also leave the family on even more tenuous financial footing.

Barbara Gardener

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Stephanie takes after her father far too much for your liking at times, and this is certainly one of those times. The recklessness, the pleasure-seeking, the impulsiveness, and the blindness to the consequences... you don't know what to do with her. It has taken decades for Charles to mostly grow up, but you despair of what might happen to your daughter if she doesn't learn right from wrong sooner rather than later. The kind of thrills that kids today are chasing after are a far cry from the relative innocence of your youth.

The question now is what to do about Stephanie. Next week she has a court date. A court date! You never wanted to wind up one of those parents who takes their teenager to a court date! She was driving while seriously intoxicated. She was damn lucky that neither she nor anyone else wound up hurt or dead. The worst of it is that she just doesn't seem to care, or to grasp the severity of the situation.

William is now a very well-respected and well-connected lawyer in the local community. He could probably pull a few strings and see that nothing too terrible happens to Stephanie. However, you aren't sure whether or not that is the right thing to do. If Stephanie really just doesn't get it yet, maybe losing her driver's license and having to do a lot of community service would be a good thing. Maybe it would scare her straight in a way that coddling sure hasn't.

At the same time, that would mean that Stephanie couldn't keep her current job. You'd been pushing for awhile for her to get a part-time job after school, and she got one just recently. A car is needed for her to get to the restaurant and, with your own work schedule, you couldn't drive her there. If she can't drive there, she can't work. Times are tight financially, and without what she brings in your family would be struggling that much more.

Tonight, which was supposed to be a celebration, looks like it is going to be a lot more of a headache than anyone imagined. You just wish you knew what the right thing was to do for your daughter.

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Charles Gardener

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It's your fault. Since you've been struggling so hard for money, you've been working long hours doing extra tutoring at the college to make ends meet. You haven't been around to take care of Stephanie and help her through the hard times.

And blood matters too. Stephanie got this from you and you know it. You were 17 the first time you got caught driving drunk, too. Of course the penalties weren't as bad then. Kids make mistakes. She shouldn't have to suffer too badly for making a stupid teenage mistake.

Of course, maybe if someone had really hit you hard, taught you a lesson when you were a teenager, you would have learned something. Your brother always protected you since your father died. People make a lot of allowances for struggling teens. Does that help them or hurt them? You didn't really start taking account of your own behaviors until you had to figure out how to pay rent and feed your child in hard times. That made you grow up.

Your brother may still have issues with you, but you know he cares about his niece. He might help her out of trouble if you asked. But do you want him to?

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William Gardener

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Watching your niece, Stephanie, is like watching your brother Charles back in the day. She's every bit as reckless and wild as he was, only today that means it is a lot more dangerous. You always did your best to watch out for your younger brother and you hope that you can do something at least to help out with Stephanie.

Charles has matured somewhat in the past few years. Having to raise Stephanie and watch her make so many of his own early mistakes has to have had an impact. The question now is whether or not he is ready to really step up and do what is right by his own daughter. Both Barbara and Charles have some hard decisions to make about how to get Stephanie back on the right path.

You know you could call in a few favors and see that Stephanie gets only a slap on the wrist for this. You've had to do this sort of thing for your brother in the past, as much as you disliked doing so. You haven't helped them out financially the past few times they were in tight straits. Because of that, the income from Stephanie's job, which can only be reached by car, means a fair bit to their family. That said, there does have to be a line somewhere. If Charles and Barbara do ask you for help, exactly how much are you willing to do for them?

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Stephanie Gardener

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Seriously. How is this a big deal? You had a couple of beers, that's all. If your family had money, this would be over already. Your friend Rebecca got caught last month, but it just got handled. This isn't really a big deal.

But you can't lose your license! Your job is the only freedom you have. As long as you have a job you still have some spending money. If you didn't have money of your own, you couldn't go out with your friends, and you'd be stuck wearing clothing from Goodwill all the time. Plus there are some days you think your job is the only reason your mom lets you out of the house. Your family really needs the money.

Your uncle William is a big lawyer. He could fix this problem; you just need to convince him that he should help you out.