

Asthma: The Soap Opera

Angela: I'm sorry... my love. I can't. My father said no.

Mario: Think of yourself. Think of us. Our love.

Angela: I will think of you always. I love you. But our love can never be.

Mario: Please don't do this to me. First, my wife died in a car crash. Then, our baby son got sick. And now, losing you. It's too much for me.

Angela: I have no choice. I want to stay, but I cannot.

Mario: When you leave, you are taking my heart. How can I live without you?

Angela: I will love you always. Never forget me!

(Angela leaves. Mario is crying. The doorbell rings.)

Director: Cut! Cut! Cut!

Mario: What?

Director: The doorbell was ringing. You have to answer it.

Mario: How can I answer the door? My life will never be the same.

Director: Exactly. So the doorbell rings, and you answer it. Why are you over here crying by the baby?

Mario: Because... The baby has asthma. He can't breathe!

Director: Didn't you read the script? The story is about you and your lost love. Not the baby. Forget about the baby.

Mario: Didn't I read the script? Didn't you read the script? The script says, the baby has asthma. How can I forget about my baby son? My little boy needs my help. He needs me.

Director: It's just asthma. It's no big deal.

Mario: What do you mean no big deal? I don't think you know enough about asthma.

Director: *Me?* I don't think *you* know about asthma. Just read your lines, what's written on the paper.

Mario: Well, I can't do this if I don't know about asthma.

Director: The story has nothing to do with asthma. It's a love story.

Mario: A love story. About a father and a son, and the son can't breathe!

Director: Okay. Okay! We'll get you help. I'll call experts, some people who know about asthma. Are you happy? Okay! Everyone, that's enough for today. Tomorrow, we'll try this again.

Mario: These are the experts?

Director: Yes! They know all about asthma. So, you all have asthma. You don't look so bad to me. You look pretty healthy. Right?

Man: Of course I'm healthy.

Girl: I have a totally normal life.

Mario: But if you can't breathe, how can you be healthy? It must feel terrible when you can't breathe.

Boy: When it gets bad, it feels like a big elephant is sitting on me.

Director: But you don't feel like that every day, do you?

Boy: No, not every day, but when it happens, it's scary.

Girl: For me, it's like trying to breathe through a straw.

Man: But having asthma doesn't mean you are sick all of the time. I've had asthma for many years. Sometimes it gets bad. But most of the time, it's okay.

Girl: Most of the time, I feel fine.

Boy: Yeah. I play basketball every day after school.

Director: Okay then. It's time to get back to work.

Director: Let's go back to the girlfriend leaving.

Camera

Person: Scene 1, take 13.

Director: And, action!

Angela: I have no choice. I want to stay. But I can't.

Mario: When you leave, you are taking my heart. How can I live without you?

Angela: I will love you always. Never forget me.

*(Mario is crying. The doorbell rings.
Mario answers the door.)*

Mario: María!

María: I heard your girlfriend left you. You know, I have never stopped loving you. I am here for you. Let me take care of you.

Mario: No, María! I can't!

María: Yes! Yes, you can!

Mario: No! I must, I must, I must take my baby to the doctor! I am his father.

Director: Cut! Cut! Mario, what are you doing? There is no doctor here.

Mario: I know, but I put it in. It's important. You heard the experts. Asthma is serious.

Director: It is not about asthma.

Mario: Yes, it is.

Director: No, it is not!

Mario: Yes, it is.

Director: Somebody, get the experts back here!

Mario: If you have asthma, don't you have to go to the doctor?

Girl: Yes. Not just when you feel sick.

Director: But, Mario... in the story, you're poor. You can't afford to go to the doctor. It's impossible.

Man: Not in New York. Everyone can get health care in New York City. Rich and poor.

Girl: That's right. If you call 311, you can get health insurance for your child.

Boy: And there are special clinics just for kids, too.

Director: You don't need a green card?

Girl: Nope. Everybody has a right to health care. In New York, you don't need to have papers to see a doctor.

Mario: So you don't have to have a lot of money to get good health care. It's your right, right?

Director: Okay, okay everyone. We're going to take a break. I have a little work to do. We'll start again in half an hour.

Mario: Mario is taking his son to the doctor.

Mario: María, thank you for bringing me here. How can I ever repay you? What can I do? Doctor, is it serious?

Doctor: (*looking at María*) It may be.

Mario: Doctor, excuse me?

Doctor: I mean, I hope your son feels better. But you and your...

Mario: Friend.

Doctor: Friend? Well, you must take care of your son. And everything will be fine.

Nurse: Doctor... Don't you have to tell them about the medicine?

Doctor: The medicine?

Nurse: The medicine.

Doctor: Of course. You must give your son medicine every day to control the asthma. Here. Take these. For your son.

Nurse: And he will have to make a plan to manage his son's asthma.

Doctor: Yes. We must make a plan.

María: A plan?

Nurse: Yes, a plan, for Mario to manage his son's asthma.

Mario: Manage?

Director: Cut! Mario! That was great. Are you happy now?

Mario: Well, I don't know. I'm a little confused.

Director: Confused? It's simple. The doctor fell in love with María. And the nurse...

Mario: No, no, no. I don't understand what "manage" means. The nurse said I have to manage my baby's asthma? What does that mean?

Director: Oh no, not again. Okay, experts. Where are the experts?

Man: Yeah, manage. There are things you must do to help your son control his asthma.

Girl: Even when your son feels good, he needs medicine. He needs to take it every day.

Boy: The doctor gave you two of these pumps, remember? They are called inhalers.

Man: I have two different kinds of medicine in these pumps. This medicine, I take every day. Even when I feel good. This other medicine, I take as soon as I start to have problems breathing.

Girl: I use this one when my asthma acts up. And this one every day.

Director: Acts up?

Boy: You know. If I start to feel like I can't breathe, I use this pump. Right away. And I always use my spacer, so the medicine gets right into my lungs. See, like this.

Girl: I never leave home without my inhaler.

Man: I never leave home without mine either. You never know when you might need it.

Director: Great. Got it, Mario? Let's get back to work.

Girl: Wait. Not yet. That's just the medicine. There's more you need to know.

Man: That's right. There are many triggers that can make your asthma get worse. You need to get rid of them.

Mario: Triggers?

Man: Yeah. Doctors call them triggers. For me, it's anything with dust. I need to clean the apartment all the time.

Mario: No dust. Got it. What else?

Girl: My asthma used to get worse at night. I found out that

it was because of my pillow. I had to get rid of my favorite pillow. And, my parents had to buy me a new blanket, too.

Man: My wife had to quit smoking. I tried to get her to stop for many years. When she learned that her smoking made my asthma worse, she finally did it. She quit. Now, I can breathe. And so can she.

Mario: What about you? What did you have to give up?

Boy: I used to have a cat. But then, I had to say goodbye to her. I had no choice. The cat made my asthma worse.

Mario: Oh, I'm sorry.

Boy: I feel much better now.

Mario: Wow. I didn't know there were so many things, so many triggers, that make asthma worse. We have to find out what makes my son's asthma worse.

Director: Okay, great! Let's get back to work.

Girl: Wait! One more thing. Cockroaches. Those little brown bugs. They make asthma worse.

Mario: Roaches? You're kidding.

Man: Yeah, roaches. You've got to get rid of them completely. But... Don't use a spray to get rid of them. That could make your son's asthma act up.

Mario: Roaches. We have to put that in the story.

Director: Mario, this is a love story. Can we get back to work now?

Mario: Mario's house must be cleaned.

Mario: This doesn't fit. Can we get another one?

Director: Just clean the house, Mario. Action!

María: What about the bedroom? To clean. To get rid of the

dust in there.

Mario: Yes, yes. Of course.

Director: Cut! Cut! What are you doing with that?

Mario: You heard the experts. Smoking is terrible for asthma.

Director: There is no smoking in this story. No one smokes a single cigarette!

Mario: But, what if my friends come over? They need to know.

Director: What friends? Okay, okay. Put up your sign. Let's get back to work.

Mario: Angela. You're back. Is it really you?

Angela: Yes, it is. It is me. My love.

María: Mario, what about the pillows?

Mario: María!

Angela: Mario!

Mario: Angela! It's not what you think, Angela.

(The doorbell rings and the doctor enters.)

María: Mario's son has asthma.

Mario: Doctor?

María: Doctor.

Mario: You came all the way here to see my son?

Doctor: No.

(The doctor and María leave together.)

Mario: *(to Angela)* Are you back?

Angela: Yes, I'm back. I'm yours. I'll be with you. Forever.



Mario: But, what about your family? What about your father?
Angela: I told him how you take care of your son. He knows that you are a good man.

Mario: You mean, he will let us...

Angela: Yes. Our dream will finally come true. We can be together... at last.

Mario: Forever?

Angela: Forever and ever.

(Music plays. Mario and Angela kiss. Fireworks go off. The director takes off her headphones and declares...)

Director: Okay, great. We're finished. That was beautiful.

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