

Setting

Act I, Scene 1

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It is Barbara's twenty-first birthday and she is having a small garden party in the beautifully tended garden at her mother Virginia's house. Two young men, brothers, Charles and William, have been invited to the party. Barbara has been dating the stable and reliable William for six months to the day now. She had previously dated Charles in a whirlwind romance that ended as abruptly as it began.

The relationship between William and Barbara is... stable. One might say dull. He is calm, assured, considerate, and almost entirely predictable. There is warmth, but more than that, there is security.

The relationship between Charles and Barbara had been anything but sedate. It was dramatic and passionate, an affair of vibrant emotions and hormones. The fights were as heated as the romance, and they eventually led to the break-up.

What is not known to Barbara is that both young men intend to propose to her tonight. William is planning a quiet proposal at the end of the evening. Charles, on the other hand, has decided that the passion he still feels for Barbara is not something he wishes to contain and plans a large and showy proposal on the spot. This will spur on William to act in making his own proposal, not as he would have wished, but in self-defense.

This evening, Barbara will have to decide which of the two brothers she wishes to wed. William offers her someone she can trust, and a predictable and stable life. Charles still ignites her passion, but everything about him is a risk.

With her daughter caught at a crucial turning point in her young life, Virginia hopes to provide support and guidance. Virginia's own marriage while beginning in passion, turned into a loveless thing after a few years. In their day, divorce was not so common and there was Barbara to think about, so they remained together until his passing five years ago. Whether Virginia will try to turn her daughter towards one of the two men or to allow her daughter to make her own decision without influence is up to her.

William Gardener

Act I, Scene 1

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Your palms are sweaty, your chest is tight, and you're trying not to stutter over every word. You don't know how you're going to get through the evening with nerves like this. Of course, it isn't every day that you are prepared to propose to the woman of your dreams.

She will say yes, won't she? Of course she will. You've been together for six months now and it has been pretty close to perfect. She's beautiful, witty, and charming. You've been attentive, caring, supportive, and completely head over heels for her. You'll be a good husband and eventually a father. The two of you can get married in another six months on your one-year anniversary. It will be perfect.

You're worried about your brother, Charles. He's got that too-calm look on his face that always suggests he's planning something. He better not spoil your surprise by blurting it out before you have a chance to propose. That would be all too like him. You almost wish you hadn't told him last night, but you couldn't help it. He's your brother and, whatever your differences, you needed his support. He had a right to know, especially since he had previously dated Barbara.

That had been a disaster, of course. Charles has never had anything like a stable relationship. Charles just feels things, he doesn't think about them. One day everything will be great, the next, who knows? You love your brother, but he's just not grounded in the real world the way you are. It was inevitable that Barbara would leave him after he abandoned her one time, just disappearing after a fight.

It was several months after that you and Barbara got together. At first, you had just been a supportive friend, someone able to understand the ups and downs of your brother. Eventually, it became more. You were the confidante, the stable one, the person she could always rely on to be there. You were the man who understood her, cared for her, and would always be there for her. And you have been, and you will be, for the rest of your life.

You spoke with Virginia, Barbara's mother, last week. Since Frederick, Barbara's father, died five years ago, you couldn't ask him for permission to wed Barbara. So, you went to Virginia. You explained how very much you loved Barbara, how you would care for her, and take care of her. She gave you permission, with a smile. You hope that Barbara's father would have approved as well.

Your own father died 8 years ago. You had been 15 and Charles was 13. It was a hard time for you, for Charles, and for your own mother. You grew up a lot that year, becoming the man of the house. You learned a lot about responsibility, the importance of stability, and dedication to your family. Charles took it much harder than you did and started acting out. You had to watch out for him constantly. You've never stopped watching out for him really. You just hope that he'll stay in control of himself tonight, of all nights.

Now you just have to make it through the party. You will propose at the end. You've got the ring burning a hole in your pocket. You just have to stay calm for a few more hours, and propose just as the sun is going down. She loves the sunset, and it will be perfect. Nothing can go wrong, as long as you just keep breathing and stay calm. By this time tomorrow you'll be engaged and well on your way to the life of your dreams.