

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.

Virginia Vela

Act I, Scene 1

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Your little daughter Barbara is all grown up. She's 21 and she seems so happy. For all the troubles in your marriage, you wish her father, Frederick could have lived to see this day. He died while she was still in high school and never truly got to see the beautiful young woman that she has grown into. He died just a few weeks after her 16th birthday, and every birthday since has been hard, watching her growing up and knowing he would never see her. This is one of the hardest. You and Frederick married a month before your 21st birthday.

You remember being 21, newly married and so desperately in love. At that age, everything was perfect between you and Frederick. You were so happy, so passionate. Everything he did was magic. Even when you fought, you knew you could look forward to it being over and resting in his arms.

Of course, it didn't last. After Barbara was born, you and Frederick drifted apart. The passion and the magic faded away. There was no cheating, no blaze of passionate fury. You just drifted apart. As you changed diapers and cared for a baby, he worked longer and longer hours. Soon you had nothing in common except Barbara. At first you resented him being gone so much, then you came to appreciate it. You had plenty of time with just Barbara and your friends. The hardest times came when Frederick was home. Sometimes you fought, but that was less painful than the hours of silence. As much as you would never admit it to anyone, when he died of a heart attack five years ago, it was almost a relief. Finally you were free to live without that silence hanging over you.

Barbara has been dating William for six months now. William Gardener is solid and responsible. He will be a good husband and a responsible father. He came to you last week and asked your permission to propose to your daughter. Since she didn't have a living father to ask, he wanted to ask you. You thought it was sweet, and gave your permission, of course. It's Barbara's decision. Still, you worry. Barbara doesn't look at William with longing, with passion. They don't seem to have the intensity that you and Frederick had. At the same time, maybe that's better. Maybe this is maintainable.

There's only one man you have ever seen Barbara look at the way you remember looking at Frederick. That is William's brother, Charles. Charles is everything William is not: wild, passionate, exciting. They dated before Barbara started dating William, but their relationship ended in a bitter fight, after which Charles left for three weeks. Barbara cried the whole time he was gone. When he got back, she chewed him out and left him. But you know she still pines for him. You've seen the way she still looks at him.

With William, Barbara will have a safe, dependable life, but she will never know the sort of love and passion she could have with Charles. Charles could leave tomorrow, but she would have passion. At the same time, if she does wind up with Charles, will that passion last? Your deep love with Frederick didn't make it past Barbara's infancy. Does love like that always burn itself out? Or is that deep love her chance for true happiness?

Barbara has always been a good girl, obedient to you and her father. You don't want to sway her too much on something this important. At the same time, you want to be sure that she's really ready to settle down with William before she answers his proposal.