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THE GOOD PLATES

Dialogues / Dramedy / 4-5 min
Cast 3 Female x3

After fourteen months, Ellie has finally brought her girlfriend Sam to Sunday dinner at her mother's house. Margaret has the good plates out. She also has a list of small tests. Sam has decided not to take any of them.

CHARACTERS

MARGARET - late 50s, Ellie's mother. Hospitable, sharp, scared of being left out and hiding it behind lamb

ELLIE - late 20s, the daughter. Braced for impact, has rehearsed this in the car

SAM - late 20s, Ellie's girlfriend, a paramedic. Direct, warm, does not do tests

SETTING

The dining room of a family home, Sunday dinner, early fall.

*A dining room set for three. The good plates.
MARGARET adjusts a napkin that does not need
adjusting. ELLIE hovers. SAM holds a bottle of
wine like a shield.*

MARGARET

You didn't have to bring anything.

SAM

It's just a red. I didn't know what you were making.

MARGARET

Lamb.

SAM

Then it's the right red.

MARGARET

Is it.

ELLIE

Mom.

MARGARET

I'm just saying I don't know much about wine. Your father did the wine.

ELLIE

Dad drank the wine. That's not the same.

MARGARET

Sit down, both of you. Sam, you're there. Ellie, your usual.

They sit. Margaret serves. It is a lot of lamb.

MARGARET

Sam. Ellie says you're a nurse.

SAM

Paramedic.

MARGARET

Same sort of thing.

SAM

Not really. I'm the one in the ambulance.

MARGARET

Well. That must be hard. The hours.

SAM

They are.

MARGARET

Ellie's father worked nights for a while. It almost ended us.

ELLIE

Mom.

MARGARET

What? I'm making conversation.

ELLIE

You're making a point.

MARGARET

I don't make points. I make lamb.

Sam laughs. Genuinely. Margaret is not sure how to take that.

SAM

Sorry. That was a good line.

MARGARET

(thawing slightly)

It was, wasn't it.

ELLIE

Can we just eat.

They eat. A moment of quiet.

MARGARET

You've been together how long now?

ELLIE

You know how long.

MARGARET

I'm asking Sam.

SAM

Fourteen months.

MARGARET

Fourteen. And this is the first time I'm seeing you at this table.

ELLIE

Because every time I brought it up you said the kitchen was being redone.

MARGARET

The kitchen was being redone.

ELLIE

For a year?

MARGARET

Terrible contractors.

SAM

Mrs. Kelly.

MARGARET

Margaret.

SAM

Margaret. Can I say something, and you can throw me out after if you want?

MARGARET

I'd never throw anyone out. I'd just serve dessert very slowly.

SAM

Okay. Ellie's been dreading today for a month. She rehearsed it. In the car she said, "If Mom mentions Dad's shifts, that means she's decided she doesn't like you."

Margaret looks at Ellie. Ellie looks at the lamb.

SAM

And you mentioned the shifts about four minutes in. So I'm just gonna ask you straight. Have you decided?

MARGARET

Well.

SAM

Because if you have, that's fine. I'll be polite and eat the dessert at whatever speed it comes. But if you haven't, I'd rather we skip the part where you test me and I pretend not to notice.

Silence. Margaret puts down her fork.

MARGARET

She used to tell me everything. When she was little. Who she was fighting with. Who she loved. Everything.

ELLIE

Mom.

MARGARET

And then one day she didn't. And I've spent ten years trying to figure out what I did. And now there's someone she does tell everything to, and that someone is sitting at my table holding a bottle of wine like

I'm gonna hit her with it.

Sam puts the bottle down.

SAM

I'm not the reason she stopped.

MARGARET

I know that.

SAM

But I might be the reason she starts again.
If you let me.

Margaret looks at Ellie. Ellie, finally, looks back.

ELLIE

(small)

The lamb's good, Mom.

MARGARET

(briskly, to Sam)

Open the wine. Ellie, your father's glasses
are in the china cabinet. You know where.

*Ellie gets up. Margaret watches her go. Then,
quietly, to Sam:*

MARGARET

Fourteen months.

SAM

Fourteen.

MARGARET

You should've come sooner.

SAM

I was told the kitchen was being redone.

*Margaret nearly laughs. Ellie returns with the
glasses.*

END OF SCRIPT