

WHO'S MARGARET?

by

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1/09

CHARACTERS

- Susan Walters: A woman in her mid 40s.
- Ray Walters: Susan's husband, an assistant district attorney, mid 40s.
- Erica Walters: Their daughter, about 15
- Art Pierce: Susan's dad, a recent widower, mid to late 60s. A touch eccentric but not crazy.
- AJ Peterson: Erica's date, a clueless 16 year-old.

SCENE

The living room of the Walters home in Richmond, VA.

TIME

Spring, present day

- Scene 1: About 4:30 on a Friday afternoon
- Scene 2: A little after 6:00
- Scene 3: Several hours later

ACT ISCENE 1

SETTING: It is an upper-middle class home, comfortable and pretty but not ostentatious. The only piece of furniture that doesn't fit is an armchair. Over the armchair hangs a photo of man in mid-20s in uniform and a framed set of medals. There are exits to front door, kitchen and hallway.

AT RISE: SUSAN is straightening room and dusting. She looks very frantic. ERICA bounds in from the front door looking like a typical teenager. She is carrying a beat-up looking backpack that is pretty full - she drops this on the floor.

ERICA
Mom, I've got great news.

SUSAN
Oh good, you're home. We need to talk --

ERICA
You'll never believe -- who's coming?

SUSAN
What do you mean?

ERICA
The cleaning service was here yesterday. You wouldn't be cleaning unless --

SUSAN
It was really quite a surprise.

ERICA
Is it Aunt Lorraine? She'll be so excited --

SUSAN
Grandpa called --

ERICA
AJ Peterson asked me out!

SUSAN
He's staying a couple of weeks --

ERICA
We're going to the Spring Fling tonight.

SUSAN
His new apartment isn't ready --

ERICA
Mary said that Paul said that AJ wanted to ask me but had to work --

SUSAN
He closed on his house --

ERICA
. . . and Aunt Lorraine told me --

SUSAN
I didn't even know he had an offer --

ERICA
. . . to tell Mary to tell Paul to tell AJ I knew he had to work --

SUSAN
The movers came yesterday --

ERICA
So it'd be okay if he got out of work and asked me at the last minute --

SUSAN
The movers knew before me.

ERICA
. . . and it worked!

SUSAN
Why didn't Grandpa call sooner?

ERICA
Aunt Lorraine will be so excited!

SUSAN
But you know how he is.

ERICA
He? Who?

SUSAN
My dad.

ERICA
Grandpa?

SUSAN

Yes.

ERICA

Grandpa and Aunt Lorraine are both coming?

SUSAN

Aunt Lorraine?

ERICA AND SUSAN

You haven't listened to a thing I've said.

(ERICA and SUSAN stop
and look at each
other.)

SUSAN

I'm sorry honey. You had some exciting news?

ERICA

(excited again)

AJ Peterson's taking me to the dance tonight. He thought he had to work but now he doesn't and he's taking me!

(ERICA screams.)

SUSAN (excited)

That's wonderful, dear. I'm sure you'll have a fabulous time.

ERICA

Why is Grandpa coming?

SUSAN

Well you know he was planning on moving to town --

ERICA

Yeah. But he's moving into that old folk's home . . . isn't he?

SUSAN

Retirement community. Yes he is. But his apartment isn't ready. So he's staying here in the meantime.

ERICA

Why doesn't he just stay in Charleston?

SUSAN

I don't know honey. He called this morning and said he'd closed on his house yesterday, went by the cemetery to see Grandma and left town this morning.

ERICA

You'd think he could give us more warning.

SUSAN

You know Grandpa. He likes to surprise people. By the way, he's staying in your room.

ERICA

My room? Why my room?

SUSAN

Where do you expect me to put him?

ERICA

Uhh, I don't know, maybe the guest room.

SUSAN

But you're staying there.

ERICA

ME?

SUSAN

I thought you'd prefer that over the fold-out couch.

ERICA

I'd prefer my own bed.

SUSAN

But Grandpa will be there.

ERICA

Isn't the guest room for guests?

SUSAN

Normally. But I can't put Grandpa in there. It's full of Grandma's things. It would be too sad for him.

ERICA

I still don't understand why we moved all Grandma's pictures and the stuff she made for you into the guest room.

SUSAN

It was just too difficult for me to look at those things everyday.

ERICA

Uncle Eric's dead and you have his picture and medals hanging on the wall. Not to mention his ugly old chair.

SUSAN

That's different. Eric died a long time ago.

ERICA

Yeah. But six months later I was born, and you named me after him. Grandma died eight months ago and you still haven't --

SUSAN

It's entirely different. Eric was a test pilot. His death wasn't my . . . I wasn't there when my brother died.

ERICA

Whatever.

SUSAN

I really don't see what the problem is. It's just for a few weeks.

ERICA

A few weeks? I won't be able to have any of my friends over.

SUSAN

Why not?

ERICA

Grandpa's bizarre sense of humor has gotten just plain weird since Grandma died.

SUSAN

Erica!

ERICA

You know what I mean. Whenever you tell someone he lost his wife he says, "I didn't lose her. I know exactly where she is. Six feet under at Willowbrook Cemetery."

SUSAN

Everyone deals with death in their own way. Humor is his.

ERICA

Humor? You call it humor when he tells everyone he makes a killer potato salad because Grandma died while eating it?

SUSAN (very sharply)

Erica! It wasn't Grandpa's potato salad that killed Grandma it was . . .

ERICA

I know, a heart attack.

SUSAN

Yes, a heart attack. Now take your backpack to your room please.

ERICA

And he's always talking to her like she's in the room. I'm glad he didn't have her cremated. He'd probably have put her ashes in a vase and brought her to the table for dinner every night.

(RAY enters from front door wearing a conservative suit and carrying a briefcase.)

RAY

Who's coming to dinner every night?

ERICA

Grandma.

(ERICA flounces off stage.)

RAY

What?

SUSAN

Never mind, dear.

(They kiss.)

Hi. How did the deposition go?

RAY

Don't ask. So who's coming?

SUSAN

My dad closed on his house today and is on his way here. He'll be staying with us.

RAY

Do you think that's a good idea? I mean last time he was here your mother . . .

(He glances a place on the floor in front of the couch.)

I mean, she was right there . . . on the floor --

SUSAN

That wasn't the last time. He came back to the house that night before we drove to Charleston for the funeral. Besides, he doesn't have much of a choice. His apartment won't be ready for a few weeks so he's --

RAY

A few weeks? Susan, why didn't you tell me about this sooner?

SUSAN

Because I just found out this morning.

RAY

He didn't tell you the house had sold? I told you you've been pushing him too hard.

SUSAN

Pushing him?

RAY

Margaret's only been dead eight months, and you've already put him in an old folk's home.

SUSAN

It's a retirement community and a very nice one at that. Besides I didn't put him there. He wanted to move.

RAY

You didn't give him a choice.

SUSAN

Well, we're in here and Lorraine is in Washington. It doesn't make sense for Dad to stay in Charleston all alone.

RAY

Susan, he's lived there over 50 years. He won't be alone.

SUSAN

He'll love the retirement community. They have bridge and Movie Night and --

RAY

I know, I know. It's wonderful. It's just so soon. He's just lost his wife, now he's losing his home, his friends, his furniture . . .

(SUSAN starts cleaning again to avoid looking at RAY.)

SUSAN

He doesn't have to get rid of anything he doesn't want to.

RAY

Yeah. Like all his stuff will fit in the old folk's home.

SUSAN

Retirement community.

RAY

Sorry.

(SUSAN looks at RAY)

SUSAN

Why can't you just give it a chance?

RAY

Why can't you give your dad a chance? Let him get used to the idea of living without Margaret before you make him move.

(SUSAN goes back to cleaning.)

SUSAN

We have been over this a hundred times. It doesn't make sense for him to rattle around in that big house. And it'll just depress him to stay there.

RAY

I think he's doing fine so far. He works in the garden, has his friends over for poker and every widow in three counties has brought him dinner.

SUSAN

(to herself)

And you think I'm moving fast.

RAY

I think he likes eating breakfast at the same table where he ate breakfast with your Mother for 50 years and sitting in --

SUSAN

That's exactly what I'm worried about. Mom's presence is everywhere. The wallpaper she picked out, the pillows she embroidered --

RAY

Those ugly vases she made.

SUSAN

Ray! She only started making those when her eyesight failed, and her hands shook too much to do needlework.

RAY

A perfect time to take up pottery.

SUSAN

Well, that was Mom.

RAY

Yep. Queen of the Unexpected. Do you remember the time Eric was transferred to Athens, Georgia and she

SUSAN AND RAY

Took Greek lessons!

SUSAN

How about when you convinced her you needed a special left-handed hammer and screwdriver.

(RAY and SUSAN both
laugh.)

RAY

Oh, but my favorite was when she thought Jesse Jackson was one of the Jackson Five.

(RAY and SUSAN both
laugh. Then they're
quiet for a minute.)

RAY

You know, this is one of the few times you've talked about your Mom since she died. It must have been pretty traumatic to have her die at the dinner table.

SUSAN

Ray, she didn't die at the dinner table.

(pause)

She died right here. In front of the couch.

(Phone rings.)

While I was . . .

(SUSAN can't go on any longer and buries her head in her hands. RAY looks at her. The phone rings again and he picks it up. During the phone call SUSAN composes herself.)

RAY

Hello . . . Oh hi Art. I hear you're going to stay with us for a while . . . Yeah, it's fine, I just was surprised you didn't tell us the house had sold . . . About six? Just in time for dinner . . . Who did you say you were bringing with you?

(hesitantly)

Yeah, that's fine. We'll set another place for dinner . . . See you then, bye.

(RAY hangs up phone.)

SUSAN

Who is he bringing with him?

RAY

He said . . . Margaret.

SUSAN

Mom?

(ERICA enters in a bathrobe nibbling from a box of crackers.)

RAY

I don't know. He just said he and Margaret would be here about 6 for dinner.

ERICA

Who's Margaret?

SUSAN

My mom.

ERICA

I know that. But he can't mean Grandma. She's dead.

RAY

I don't know.

ERICA

I know he talks to Grandma, but this is ridiculous.

SUSAN

Maybe he's forgotten Mom died?

ERICA

That's kinda hard to forget.

(brightly)

Maybe he's got Alzheimer's or something.

SUSAN

Maybe we should humor him.

ERICA

Great. Do you want me to set a place for Grandma?

RAY

That's not a bad idea.

ERICA

Daaaad.

RAY

Well, let's not jump to conclusions. Granted Art's a little quirky, but he's not crazy. We don't know who Margaret is. Art might just be bringing someone to dinner.

ERICA

Like a date? Gross.

SUSAN

Oh no. He would have told me if he was dating someone.