

# The Desk

by  
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## Characters

**Elaine**, mother of recently married daughter

**Younger Elaine**, about 20 years younger

**Don**, Elaine's husband, Jill's father

**Jill**, newly married daughter setting up first home

**Young Jill**, school aged

**Ian**, Jill's husband

Setting : Elaine and Don's house. Center stage is a desk set perpendicular to the front row. There are two chairs, one on either side. On the desk is a typewriter, and three picture frames; one small round or oval, one black 8 x 10, one silver 8 x 10 or larger.

**ELAINE:** *(Speaking to the audience as if they are DON.)* Jill will be here soon and I will have to give her an answer. Since our phone call last night, I haven't been able to decide whether I still use it or not. Maybe I haven't written anything at that desk in a long time, okay, maybe I haven't written anything at all in a while, but does that mean I'm not using it? She wants the desk, **our** desk. I don't know if I want to do this. I know Jill doesn't have her own, we never bought her one. Why would she ever need one her own? We never thought about when she wouldn't be here anymore. We all just used this desk.

*(YOUNGER ELAINE and DON come out to sit at the desk now. ELAINE narrates what they are doing to the audience.)*

**ELAINE:** You sat across from me, our feet entwined, writing out complicated word problems while I corrected the night before's homework. Sometimes you reached across the flat smooth oak

surface to touch my hand. We organized ourselves in separate piles and angles when I typed an article. You hid tiny plastic frogs or handblown glass flowers in the left hand drawer for me to find when I was knee-deep in rewrites.

*(YOUNGER JILL comes out and crawls under the desk.)*

**ELAINE:** Jill crawled underneath to tickle the toes of the lion footed legs. She could get the desk to laugh in your special desk belly laugh. *(DON laughs loudly.)* Jill sat on your lap and traced the lines you drew for her to learn the alphabet. *(YOUNGER ELAINE and YOUNGER JILL dance offstage and JILL comes onstage. She sits in YOUNGER ELAINE's seat next to DON.)* With your chair pulled up along hers, she struggled through her first theorem proof. *(DON and JILL high five and DON leaves the stage. JILL uncovers the typewriter and feeds a sheet of paper into it. ELAINE walks over to stand by JILL's shoulder.)* She and I wrote and edited her essays long into the night, until the final ones when she submitted her college applications.

*(After they "type" up a page or so, JILL removes it from the typewriter, replaces the cover, and leaves, waving at ELAINE, who watches her go.)*

**ELAINE:** My old typewriter is still on the desk, covered up so dust won't get in the keys. How many times did we have to get that thing cleaned? You used to tell me that no one uses a typewriter anymore. But, I love the sounds the keys make thudding against the paper and how my fingers get smudged when I have to change the tape. *(ELAINE removes the cover, feeds a sheet of paper and types out a few sentences.)* Typing's good therapy for me.

Oh, *(YOUNGER JILL comes back onstage and is hiding under the desk, crying.)* Here's where she accidentally scratched the desk with the letter opener when she was ten. It was the one day in her whole life she was ever afraid of you. Oh, how she cried, certain that she'd ruined the desk. *(DON comes onstage and finds the scratch and YOUNGER JILL crying. He coaxes her out and onto*

*his lap.) You*

told her that it made it even more important to you, that it was her signature on the desk. Then a big secret between the two of you, you showed her where you had cracked the bottom of the right

hand drawer with your knee. (*DON and YOUNGER JILL look under the desk, laugh together, then leave stage.*)

**ELAINE:** We each have our own drawer on the front side of the desk. I never asked either of you what you kept stored away in those drawers. Jill finally cleared hers out when she married Ian. From the time she was two and all through college, she had little things stashed in her center desk drawer.

Somehow the three of us managed to share this one desk just fine all those years. (*There is a group of family photos to the side of the typewriter which ELAINE goes to now. ELAINE picks up each frame in turn as she speaks about the photos in them.*) She was such a sweet baby, always laughing and smiling. How proud we were at her graduation. We were such a young, happy couple, all decked out! What a nice silver frame your mother gave us for our wedding portrait. When I look at these pictures, I wonder where they went, where these people are now.

**ELAINE:** (*She opens the left drawer and pulls out a stack of papers.*) All of your old letters and pieces of stories and poems you sent me. I know so many of your words by heart, your unfinished stories are part of our history. (*She reaches further in the drawer and pulls out photos.*) These are what I am really looking for, those pictures of you where you look most like yourself. These are my favorites.

Here you are leaning against the metal cabin, wearing your swimming trunks after a dip in the lake. You must be forty something, but you remind me so much of that young lifeguard my sister Anne had a crush on. All that summer she tried to get your attention. I barely noticed you, wanting nothing more than to read my books quietly in the sun. And, you were almost too shy and nervous, not sure what a math geek and a literary nerd

could have in common. I didn't even like swimming until you took me to this cabin at the lake for the first time.

**ELAINE:** In this one, the sun is casting that warm golden wash I love best on the mountain range behind the cabin and you were bare-faced that spring. It wasn't often that you shaved your beard and I never could decide which way I liked better. With a beard you look so academic, so much the math professor, and without it, you have such a babyface, so boyish, so charming.

I need a glass of water. (*ELAINE walks towards the back of the stage, as if walking through the house.*) I am considering the rest of the furniture, what I am using and what I might suggest Jill take with her. Of course, I still need your old reclining chair, but the end tables could go. She should take the dining room set. I usually eat on the deck looking out at the lake, weather permitting, or at the stove anyway. (*She walks back to the desk.*) It dawns on me that I am not really using a lot of stuff in this house, nor do I need much of it. While all of the furniture holds memories and stories I don't need the dining room table to remember the romantic or funny dinners we shared. Of course, I won't give up your chair, sitting in it we are snug together.

There's a copy of a photo in an album somewhere with the caption "the summer of love, with the ever present Milo". You and that dog, Jill and that dog, oh that dog! Our first summer, we drove to Montana, camped out in a different place every night, got to know each other, without the interruptions of life or other people, just Milo. He was a good dog, no doubt about it, never jealous, but not used to sharing you, always trying to sleep between us. And you were adamant that I accept your dog sleeping with us. That dog.

When we drove back from Montana we stopped in a little shop on a dusty side road. I rummaged around while you walked Milo. In a corner under stacks and stacks of old stoneware was this desk. I admired the shape of the legs and the carved feet. The metal handles on its three drawers are all different. Pulling the drawers open I found them empty. I went outside so we could

trade off. A few minutes later, the owner came out, and taking Milo's leash told me I was needed inside.

*(YOUNGER ELAINE and DON come onstage.)*

**DON:** You need to see what's inside that center drawer.

**ELAINE:** Really?

**DON:** Really. *(Kneels down and pretends to tie his shoe.)*

*(ELAINE opens the center drawer and finds a folded up piece of paper. She opens it, reads it and jumps.)*

**YOUNGER ELAINE:** Yes! *(DON and YOUNGER ELAINE walk off stage arm in arm.)*

**ELAINE:** You bought the desk and all the stoneware. Even though the owner gave us a big discount we were so broke we ate peanut butter sandwiches and sardines on crackers for the rest of the trip. It was impractical, and romantic.

*(ELAINE picks up the stack of photos.)* Look, here you are with Jill the day we brought her home from the hospital. I came out of the shower and found you fast asleep in the reclining chair with your daughter curled up on your chest. How peaceful the two of you are, and when you are both sleeping I can see how much she resembles you. That way your eyelashes tilt up at the corners, the way your mouths rest in perfect smiles. I tiptoed as close as I can and held the shutter button down until I was back in the hallway so it wouldn't click and wake you both up. I sat at the desk and wrote a little poem about my husband and daughter being my roots and branches. Putting it in the center drawer which we shared at the time I forgot to show it to you. You found it by accident shortly after she had gone to college. I walked into the office and found you crying.

*(Offstage there is a knocking. ELAINE puts the photos back down and walks to the back of the stage to let JILL and IAN into the*

house.)

**ELAINE:** Hello, you two sweethearts! (They all hug.) Now, don't you two really need a dining room set?

**IAN:** Yes, but I can't fit that and the desk...

**ELAINE:** I was thinking you need a place to eat. After all, it's much more practical for a young couple.

**JILL:** When you are done with the desk, though, Mom...

**ELAINE:** Of course. What do you say, after you two load the table and chairs, let's take my car down to the diner on the lake?

**JILL:** Sure, Mom.

**IAN:** Thanks, it was a bit of a drive out here.

(JILL and IAN walk to offstage. ELAINE goes back to the desk and the photos. She shuffles a few, then puts all but one back into the left drawer.)

**ELAINE:** When the morning is foggy, or there's been a rain and the mist still floats low about the lake in little pockets, if I happen to look out in the early morning when it's just so, I can't help but think of this last picture. You are walking away from the dock, away from our house, walking away. Your hands are in the pockets of the dark grey overcoat you are wearing, your hat is pulled down around your ears, trailing to one side is that dark green scarf I knitted for you the one time I ever knitted anything. The fog is heavy around you, enveloping you. You are so far away from me in this picture.

I see you on the shore just like that some mornings. I want to call out to you, I want to see you turn around, give a wave, and start back home to me. That's really when I remember.

