

THE KITCHEN TABLE
D.A. Parker, Paradise Valley Community College
Third Place, One Act Play

CHARACTERS: HUSBAND, thirties
WIFE, thirties with long hair worn down
SON, in mid-teens, must be able to act like a small boy.

TIME: The 1990's

SETTING: Black box setting. A kitchen table and two chairs at center stage.

(HUSBAND stands at stage left and WIFE at stage right. Each speaks to the audience not each other, they move a step closer to stage center)

- WIFE: I was married that summer men landed on the moon. We weren't hippies, most people weren't, not really. I watched the protesters march against the war on TV and prayed for my best friend's brother but he was killed in Da Nang. I had a big crush on him.
- HUSBAND: She was so hot in those miniskirts and her long hair drove me crazy. I had to have her. The draft was gonna nail me so I asked her to marry me.
- WIFE: I worked at Woolworth's counter selling perfume and keeping an eye out for shoplifters. I wanted to get married and get off my feet. It was a small wedding, not like the big fancy ones girls have these days. Mom sewed my dress, I wore flowers in my hair He had these long sideburns that drove my Dad crazy.
- HUSBAND: Men suffer through weddings to get to the honeymoon, that's our payoff. I couldn't get enough of her in those days. She was something else.
- WIFE: *(sits at kitchen table)* Look at my old table. *(Wipes hand over surface)* So many scratches and dings now. I remember when my husband and I bought it as newlyweds. We couldn't eat on the floor, you know. First piece of furniture we bought along with our double bed.
- HUSBAND: *(stands beside her)* Honey, pick out anything you want. I want to spend the rest of my life eating dinner across from you.
- WIFE: We ate a lot of tuna fish casseroles, mac and cheese, and hamburgers in those days.
- HUSBAND: Yeah. It was tough but I'm gonna get ahead and start buying steaks and take her on those fancy vacations at Club Med.
- WIFE: We were young and I thought I was in love. What more could any young wife want? Children, yes, they soon came.
- HUSBAND: What? You're pregnant? I thought you were on birth control. We can't afford babies right now. Maybe you could...

WIFE: No, I would not. One of the few times in my life I said no to him or anybody, I had the baby and the next two in five years.

HUSBAND: We can move out of this apartment. I got a raise. Let's buy a house.

WIFE: So we did. Lovely little house. We bought a new dining set and moved this table into the kitchen.

HUSBAND: The kitchen is where families make decisions. When I want a contract signed, I sit with the clients at the kitchen table. Works like a charm. *(steps backward and is in tableau)*

WIFE: Fed my kids at this table, drank my coffee here. Wept a few tears here.

SON: *(runs in from stage right)* I'm old enough to take the training wheels off my bike. Can I, huh can I, can I, Mom?

WIFE: Go ask your Dad. He'll help you take the wheels off.

SON: Thanks Mom. *(runs off stage left)*

WIFE: Broke his arm three days later. When he started first grade he had trouble writing his letters. He didn't get a good start in school.

HUSBAND: *(steps forward into spotlight)* You coddle him too much. What's wrong with you?

WIFE: I was a mother. I know you have to take off the training wheels and go it alone, but not when you're only six years old. We began arguing over the kids a lot and he started staying at the office later and later.

HUSBAND: I'm getting ahead. Making money to pay for new shoes for the kids and braces. I put the food on the table. Why can't she show a little gratitude?

WIFE: I took care of the house, fed the kids, made the beds, and helped with the homework. Why didn't he ever say thanks for all my hard work?

HUSBAND: We never go out anymore. You're always too tired.

WIFE: I knew he started sleeping with his secretary. God, I know that is such a cliché. But that miserable bitch waited for me to divorce him but with three kids under seven, how could I walk away? So I didn't.

HUSBAND: Hey, I'm a man with a man's appetites. I told the WIFE I had to work late and go on business trips. But hell, I was dancing at the disco and snorting lines with Jessica who was sexy as hell. I didn't care if anyone believed me or not. I was doing my thing.

WIFE: I was too. But I thought that was life, you struggle through it together. I joined the PTA, I lost the weight and I let his passion burn itself out. The bitch moved on. I hear she's VP of sales in California.

HUSBAND: Jessica left me. But hey, the wife lost weight and we got back together. Started having fun with the family. Couldn't stand infants but the boys were great. I started running, ran for years till the hamstrings strung me up for the last time. *(turns to WIFE)* Hon, I got a major promotion at work. Let's move, ok?

WIFE: *(ties up her hair into bun for more mature look and stands up)* A good wife follows her husband across the country if she must. I said yes, packed up the house, said goodbye to my friends and moved my furniture, including this old table.

HUSBAND: She didn't want to move, but she did it for me. Man, I was gonna do right by her and the kids.

WIFE: The eighties were good to us. Reagonomics at work. You know the rising tide that lifts all boats including ours, especially ours, or so I thought back then.

HUSBAND: This is the good life isn't it? God, the money rolled in. I made all the right moves and look at us. Fancy car, house, kids doing good in school. I wanted to get rid of all the old stuff and buy new. She said ok, but she wouldn't get rid of that old table. I mean look at it, the kids carved their initials in it and the dog gnawed on the legs.

WIFE: He hired a decorator for the house, didn't trust my judgment. Our home looked like something out of Better Homes and Garden. We couldn't afford the Architectural Digest look. It made him happy, but he banished the children to the kitchen and family room.

HUSBAND: She had finally learned to cook and made fabulous dinners for my clients and the boss. I discovered golf, made a lot of great deals on the course and at the nineteenth hole while the kids and wife ate dinner in the kitchen, more homey she said. *(steps backward and is in tableau)*

SON: *(saunters in stage left with attitude and ball cap)* Hey, where's Dad? He said he'd take me fishin'.

WIFE: He has to work.

SON: Where's Dad? He promised to watch my baseball game.

WIFE: He's busy with work. Too busy for us.

SON: Ok, later. I'm gonna go hang with my friends. I don't need this. *(exits stage)*

WIFE: Work is a harsh mistress. One that I couldn't compete against. So I took the new car, the jewelry and started eating again.

HUSBAND: (*steps forward*) Well, the wife packed on the pounds again, more than just few, but hey, the women at work are seriously hot these days. So independent. Don't want to get married, just have a career, fine by me. One wife is more than enough. Women will drain your wallet dry if you give them half a chance. (*Steps back and is in tableau*)

WIFE: He lost interest in me. I joined Weight Watchers and watched Oprah for advice. But like the kids, I figured it was just another phase, we'll get through it like everything else.

SON: (*saunters in stage left, with leather jacket slung over shoulder*) I got my driver's license. Can I drive the car?

WIFE: No, it's too soon.

SON: Oh, please Mom.

WIFE: Please stop asking me.

SON: I passed with an "A" in Driver's Ed. I'll be good.

WIFE: Well, (*pause*) all right, you can take the car if you follow the rules. Do you promise? (*takes car keys from pocket and holds them out*)

SON: Thanks, Mom. You're the best. I'll be careful. I promise. (*grabs keys, runs offstage*)

WIFE: He was careful. He kept his promise, the police said so. But he died all the same.

HUSBAND: (*steps forward*) Christ, what will we do now? He was my firstborn, my son.

WIFE: It took the wind right out of our sails. What kept me moving was work. You still have to do the laundry, cook the meals, wash the dishes and set the table. Meanwhile, the endless days slip past, a relentless current that eventually drives you from wallowing in grief into a safe harbor, of sorts.

HUSBAND: Things aren't so good at work anymore. We're going to have to sell the big house. They let me go.

WIFE: Yes, of course, I said yes. How could I say no? We bought a small house, just like our first one. He found another job in sales. I started working again, part-time to help out with the bills. It was hard, but I discovered that I could do something more than just cook and clean and wait for him to come home.

HUSBAND: The wife was crying all the time. Sales sucked big time and I began having a few drinks with the guys after work. She began to check up on me too.

WIFE: We stayed together for the children. I wanted them to finish high school without regrets. He started drinking, tried to hide it from me for a long time, but I found out.

HUSBAND: (*steps forward with bottle*) Bitch, if you hadn't given him the keys. He would still be alive.

WIFE: I blamed myself, I blamed God. I blamed everybody including the guy who invented the wheel.

HUSBAND: I blamed her.

WIFE: Finally I couldn't take it anymore. When he asked me for a divorce in a drunken rage, I said yes, once again I said yes to him.

HUSBAND: She said yes to the judge when he asked us if we both wanted a divorce, but hell I was on the sauce. What did I know?

WIFE: He knew. But for the first time, I didn't say yes when he wanted to see me again.

HUSBAND: I quit the job and left town. Went lookin' for Jessica or somebody just like her. *(exits stage left and jangling car keys)*

WIFE: Finally, my last two children said goodbye to me. Told me "*So Long Mom. We're off to college. We'll miss you, but it's time.*" *(puts on reading glasses and sits at table)* I sold the house and bought this condo. Most of the furniture didn't fit, but I kept my pictures, my old table and the memories. Good and bad. No, how can you say no to life? I couldn't. I look back now and when should I have said no?

