



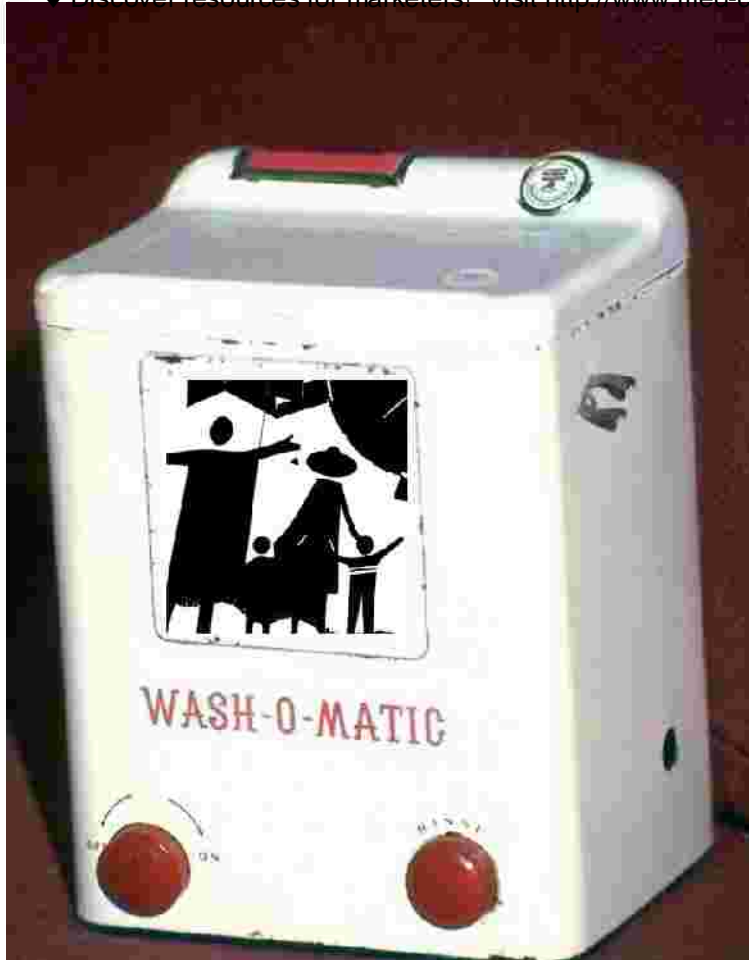
## **Fried-Cassorla Communications, Inc.**

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7408 Woodlawn Avenue, Melrose Park, PA 19027 ♦ Phone: (215) 635-5189

♦ Fax: (215) 635-0461 ♦ e-mail: [albert@fried-cas.com](mailto:albert@fried-cas.com)

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## **Life in a Washing Machine**

**a play by Albert Fried-Cassorla**

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7408 Woodlawn Avenue  
Melrose Park, PA 19027

## LIFE IN A WASHING MACHINE

### CAST OF CHARACTERS

Hubie Midthassel-Kazarnowicz (ka-ZAR-no-vich)	husband, father, software programmer, a man in his mid—30 's
Helen Midthassel-Kazarnowicz	wife, mother, boutique owner
Hermione Midthassel-Kazarnowicz	their twin daughter, age 6
Gingold Midthassel-Kazarnowicz	their twin son, age 6
Valery Wolf	an intimacy trainer and Wolfian therapist
Carl Clank	Hubie's colleague at work, a fellow <i>software</i> programmer and a Cybernetic therapist

### Setting

The modernistic but disheveled living room of the Midthassel-Kazarnowicz's. In the room are a a giant flat screen, 3 laptops, 4 smart-phone, a Wiii set for ping pong or tennis, end tables and coffee tables with smart phones and remotes on them, easy chairs, a cordless phone, a children's basketball game and area rugs. A work table is against one wall and has a sophisticated telephone on it, with many switching buttons and flashing lights.

### At Rise

Helen is reading a book but having trouble concentrating. Hubie is on the telephone. Gingold is playing a video game on the computer, while

munching popcorn. Hermione is listening to music on a smart phone and playing pickup sticks by herself.

*(A racket of phone conversation, computer game noise, and other distracting sounds are heard. HELEN tolerates this with growing impatience.)*

GINGOLD

Go! Baby, go! Wow, Herm, I caught 97 babies already. Mostly from the burning building. That's twelve more than Jason ever caught!

HERMIONE

Isn't it my turn to play yet?

GINGOLD

In a sec...

*(GINGOLD returns to his game with renewed passion. HERMIONE keeps playing pick-up sticks.)*

HUBIE (into phone)

...courts on... hmm, hold on here a sec while I check my calendar...

*(HUBIE punches a few keys on his computer)*

Yeah, Saturday's fine...Eleven?...Oh, I'm sure. Don't worry, Helen'n the kids'll find something to do...

*(A phone rings.) Hold on a sec, Elliot...*

*(HUBIE punches a button on the phone.)*

Midthassel—K's, whatta ya say? Oh, hi Tony! How are you?...Great! . . .Oh?

*(HUBIE talks inaudibly. HERMIONE abandons her*

*pickup sticks and picks up a bunch of brightly colored socks lying in a pile nearby her. She approaches GINGOLD.)*

HERMIONE

Ging, wanna have sox?

GINGOLD

No. I told you, not while I'm playing with my computer.

HERMIONE

But we used to have so much fun playing! (*cunningly*) You're much better at catching them when they fly over the door than I am. (*disappointed*) You never want to play what I'm playing anymore!

*(HERMIONE throws the sox on the floor.)*

GINGOLD

I liked it when we were five.. .but we're six now.

HERMIONE

Well I still like it, an' I'm six!

HELEN

Gingold, have sox with your sister. Be a sweetheart.

GINGOLD

Aw Mom! Do I have to?

*(HELEN nods "yes." GINGOLD begins a game with HERMIONE, which is played by taking turns tossing pairs of bundled socks over a door while the other player tries to catch as many as possible.)*

HUBIE

I was protesting this jerk when you were watching Spongebob Squarepants. I mean, in college we used to call him the Pittsburgh Porker. That's when he was crackin' heads on campuses all across the state. How do you think I got this way? Ha, ha, ha! ..No, I'm not challenging your credentials. And I'm not backing out, either. It's just that these days I need time to spend with my family and... and it's damn hard getting any...

*(GINGOLD makes a spectacular catch.)*

HERMIONE

Great catch!

HUBIE

I don't think that adds any dimension to what we're talking about. So sure "the Guatadorans need time with their families, too." You don't have to point that out to me. Point it out to President Mellon!

HELEN

Dear, why not play with the children before they have to go to bed?

HUBIE

Hold on a sec ——— *(Placing a hand over the receiver. To Helen:)*

Is it their bedtime already?

HELEN

Not yet, but soon.

HUBIE

I'll be off in less than a minute, sweetie. That's a promise.

*(HELEN eyes him skeptically and returns to her book.)*

HUBIE *(continued)*

Look, Tony, we're getting our wires crossed here, and I don't know why. Certainly I think protesting aid to the Guatadoran mercenaries is important. And I'm gonna make time for that, too... Tell ya what... we're going to be there ——— the whole family, from 10:30 am to 11 am on the 26th at the Federal Courthouse, all right? Pardon me, but there's a call on the other line. Ciao. (punches button) Elliot?.. Yeah. Sorry to keep you waiting so long... Right...

*(HUBIE's conversation with Elliot is inaudible to the audience.)*

GINGOLD

Mom, can we play Catch the Babies now instead?

HELEN

That horrible game? I don't know why your father even brought it into the house.

HERMIONE

Please, mom.

HELEN

Well... if Hermione wants to.

*(HERMIONE sits down beside GINGOLD and joins him in the computer game.)*

HUBIE

found everything taking longer than expected...

*(HUBIE smiles.)*

No, that's the one exception, thank God.. Well, then you can deal with it in that very wise way you have. Ha!... Yeah, that'll be great. Listen, gotta go now. Carl'll be over here any second.. No, this is kinda business. It's this, uh...

*(HUBIE looks at HELEN, who is listening intently.)*

...wouldn't even use the word. Difficulties, maybe, but "problems" is so, so retrograde....Well, sure I'll tell you. I always share my miseries with you, pal. That's what you're good for No, that's one of the privileges of friendship. It's just that now's not the ---ahh. Listen, Ell, is it O.K. if I don't go into it? My circuit's kinda overloaded and... Yeah. Catch up with ya later. Be well.

*(HUBIE hangs up, flops totally exhausted onto a couch or chair. HELEN stands, paces with agitation.)*

HELEN

Do you realize all this is getting out of hand? No — correction. It long ago got out of hand.

HERMIONE (*to GINGOLD*)

Let's have sox now!

GINGOLD

Okay.

*(HERMIONE and GINGOLD 'have sox' through the following scene by throwing pairs of sox across the set from various positions.)*

HUBIE

What's out of hand? Phone calls?

HELEN

All of this!

*(HUBIE looks around the room.)*

HUBIE

You mean the way the kids're behaving, playing computer games and having sox all the time?

HELEN

No, I don't mean that.

*(HELEN acts distraught, turns her back away from HUBIE. He approaches her, touches her sensitively.)*

HUBIE

Then what is it, darling. I mean, we've both had long days. I don't have the patience for Twenty Questions.

HELEN (*breaking away*)

I.... hardly know where to begin! Don't you feel it too?

HUBIE

Okay, I feel it. I mean, I have an inkling. But I don't want to put my concerns in your mouth. But I want to know what you're feeling, exactly. And I'm sure the kids do, too.

GINGOLD (*stopping his game for a second*)

Yeah, mom. I haven't seen you all googly-eyed like this in a whole lot of years.

HERMIONE

Well, I remember when she missed that three—day sale at ——

HUBIE

What's enough! Now, listen, this is no time to tease your mother. She's in the throes of a dilemma.

HERMIONE (*innocently to GINGOLD*)

Did you see her throw anything?

*(GINGOLD acts puzzled, holds up the palms of his hands.)*

HELEN

We're all in a bind! Don't you see that? Don't you feel that?

HUBIE

Well, I suppose something's wrong. You've pointed it out to me several times.

*(HELEN is thoroughly exasperated with HUBIE and pounds the heel of her hand against her forehead. HERMIONE and GINGOLD stop playing to listen.)*

HELEN

I've pointed it out to you? Don't you feel it yourself yet? Lord, I don't pretend to be innocent. But I don't pretend it doesn't exist either! (pacing) I'm managing the shop, planning meals and trying to keep customers' dress sizes straight, getting frantic about who's gonna take care of Gingold if he comes down with the Hermione's chicken pox —— and then....looking for



just one lousy spare hour a week for a spinning class and not finding it. I don't know — I even wonder if I'm not hugging you or the children as much as I used to, because I'm so crazed. And then, I find myself stopped dead before the racks, wondering if I'm wondering too much... Ya know what Cary said to me today?

HUBIE

I hope you didn't allow her to be nasty again.

HELEN

Who can fault the woman for being honest? She said I looked like a strung out speed freak and that, "Frankly, Mrs. Midthassel-Kazarnowicz, you're heading for a meltdown." Damn! It was good she said it.

HUBIE

She doesn't have a right to talk to you that way!

HELEN

Are you kidding me? That was the wake-up call I needed! Read my lips: I - don't - mind. I went into the ladies room and gave myself a long, hard look in the mirror.

HERMIONE

Didja lose a lens?

HELEN

No, my mind, sweetheart. I saw a very bedraggled woman of only 39, someone who thought she'd worked out a very nice, a rewarding, almost beautiful life for her family and herself... But this face, this was an elaborately made up hag.

*(to HERMIONE and GINGOLD,  
stroking HERMIONE's hair)*

Do you know what a hag is?

HERMIONE

Ummm. Is it a poor lady, like a bag lady?

HELEN

Well, not exactly. It's a woman who's out of control. The pieces of her life don't fit anymore. I mean, forget the fact that my earrings didn't match.... This was life out of kilter. This woman. . . this woman was everywhere and nowhere. It was downright scary.

HUBIE (*pacing and gesturing*)

Ya know? You're right. We're overbooked. That's the trouble. Maybe we should stay home on Saturday nights. No, maybe we should cut down on reading.... No, we should do more reading and less lawn mowing. It's that edging that's such a killer. The edging and that encyclopedia browsing I always do before I wake up you and the kids weekdays. I could spend that time being with you more, and——

HELEN

It's not just being overbooked. It's over-hooked, it's too many desires.

HUBIE (*disbelieving*)

Welllll...

HELEN

Yes!

HUBIE

Now let's not go too far —— we're hardly the most materialistic family in Philadelphia. Let's not be too self—critical. Look at what we don't do-- e don't drive expensive cars, we don't get new wardrobes every season. I mean, we consider pizza international cuisine. C'mon honey, let's be real.

HELEN

That stuff doesn't matter. We've got all these stupid unfulfilled wishes that seem to —— to spout out of nowhere.

HUBIE (*snaps fingers in discovery*)

I got it! -- (*points to her*) Sounds like you're trying to be SuperMom!

HELEN

Hubie, please! If I wanted cliches, I'd turn on the darned TV!

HUBIE

Hey, if the cape fits...

HELEN

SuperMom is a super-acquisitor! She's a get-ahead maniac, and I'm not. Neither are you! My desires, our desires are all so decent, so fucking human...

*(contritely, to the children)*

Oh, forgive me, sweethearts.

HERMIONE

That's okay. Jessica uses the F word lotsa times.

GINGOLD

And so does Timmy when he strikes out. But *I* don't.

HELEN

That's another thing you and Gingold should be doing — more sports.

HUBIE

We follow car racing together, and——

HELEN

That's not what I mean... There's an important 3-syllable phrase I think you should both get more familiar with.

HUBIE

Cruise control?

HELEN

No, cardiovascular!...I don't know — maybe this fitness thing we're being programmed to want so...

HUBIE

That's ridiculous! How can fitness be bad for you!? C'mon kids, let's show Mom how many sit-ups we can do!

*(All but HELEN do situps.)*

HELEN

... goddamn much. And I don't just mean things.

*(returning to reverie, as if speaking  
to the lady's room mirror)*

I asked this person in the mirror, I asked this confused face:  
"Excuse me!", cause she looked pretty busy... "How can I not want?"

*(slowly, with resentment)*

And she... didn't... have the slightest.

HERMIONE

Mom, I don't need to have so many things. Like I don't have to use my  
purple hair-spray anymore.

*(HERMIONE gets up, picks up her can of purple  
hair spray, and walks over to a wastebasket.  
She is about to toss it in when she spies her  
Barbie doll.)*

Do you think I could keep it only for fixing up Barbie?

*(HELEN nods assent. HERMIONE goes to work  
with great delight, spraying Barbie's hair.)*

GINGOLD

And I'll be more active, Mom, I promise. I know how it bothers you when  
my eyes get glazed. How 'bout if I only play computer games on Tuesdays  
and Thursdays?

*(HELEN is appreciative.)*

HELEN

Fine, sweetheart.

GINGOLD

And Sunday afternoons?

*(HELEN nods. GINGOLD rushes over to her,*

*gives her a big hug around the knees.)*

GINGOLD

Thanks! You're the best mom a dude ever had!

*(HUBIE rests his arms on his waist,  
pleased that all is resolved.)*

HUBIE

Ha, ha! That wasn't nearly as hard as we all thought. And the rest isn't going to be so hard, either.

HELEN

Oh yes it is. You don't change a family's way of living with a few simple resolutions.. .and I didn't hear many from you, by the way.

*HUBIE (drawing up a list on his i-phone)*

Well. ..uh.. .I'll give up tennis on Wednesdays — though it pains me. And... ahhh. . .no more lane jockeying on the Schuylkill. Now how about yourself?

HELEN

I'm gonna cut down — out of sheer frustration. I don't think it's the answer, but it might give me more space to think. I'm going to drop out of my businesswomen's success support group,

*(HUBIE jots more notes.)*

the babysitting co—op, and—HUBIE *(excitedly)*

And the Aggressiveness Training workshops?

HELEN *(with a trace of a smile)*

Assertiveness. I don't think so.

HUBIE

That's okay. Well, we're off to a flying start!

HELEN

It's a start, but I don't think you have the overall picture... And

HUBIE

I'll try to be a better planner, too. And more considerate, too.. .Okay, tootsie?

*(HUBIE sits down. HELEN approaches him and drapes her arms around him from behind, as both face the audience.)*

HELEN

You're usually considerate. That's not—— *(HELEN paces.)*

HUBIE

I do try.

HELEN

Of course you do. But there are things that might seem small to you, that aren't to me. Like for example, your inviting Carl Clank over here tonight. Why didn't you ask me if tonight was a good night? Or if I had other plans?

HUBIE

Well, I would've. It's just that he got free time for us with that great life coach tonight.. .and there aren't that many open slots.

HELEN

Life coach!! My schizoid life is way beyond coaching?! And don't you realize that when mine life's out of whack, yours is going to be, too? And what does a coach have to do with our family life?...

HUBIE

Well, I——

HELEN

Besides, it so happens that I've invited Valery Wolf over here tonight.

HUBIE *(surprised, then outraged)*

You did? Well, you didn't ask me !

*(This never occurred to HELEN before,  
and she is unsure of herself.)*

HELEN

I didn't? Hmm, I suppose not. Well, it was...one of those things.  
*(HELEN sits down.)*

But I should've.

HERMIONE

An' you didn't ask us.

*(HUBIE stands up, angry, and shoos both  
children out of the room.)*

HUBIE

We don't need comments like that. Now I'd like you and Gingold to go to  
your rooms.

*(Hermione and Gingold reluctantly shuffle off)*

GINGOLD

Aw Dad, why can't we be a part of this? These are our watershed years!

HERMIONE

Now's when we can really imprint!

*(HELEN holds her head.)*

HELEN

I knew getting them that Golden Treasury of Psychology would be a  
mistake.

HUBIE

Now shuffle along, or both of ya's'll imprint from my foot. Do something  
constructive...

GINGOLD (*excited*)

I know! Let's play laser tag. I'll be Eugene Hasenfus.

HERMIONE

Yeah! And I'll shoot you down.

GINGOLD

Great.

*(GINGOLD marches off first, with HERMIONE close behind. While walking, GINGOLD slips in:)*

HERMIONE

And tie you up.

GINGOLD (*turning for a second*)

Why do you always have to get kinky on me!

*(Exit HERMIONE and GINGOLD through an alcove to their bedroom. HUBIE shakes his head.)*

HUBIE

And I wanted so much for them to be precocious.

HELEN

I know. I wanted Jim Henson and PeeWee Herman, but you insisted on Piaget and Masters and Johnson.

*(HUBIE sits, head down, acknowledging disappointment.)*

HUBIE

What's best for the children --- that's all either of us ever wanted.

*(HELEN wraps her arms around HUBIE from behind, consoling him.)*

HELEN

We get carried away, hon. And hey I'm no better. That's what we've got to be clear about. We both try so damned hard!



HUBIE (*smiling*)

But we've got to keep right on tryin'.

HELEN

What else do we know to do?...

*(HELEN swings down beside HUBIE, so they're now side by side, holding hands and facing the audience.)*

So tell me — what'd you hope to accomplish by having this Carl person over here tonight?

*(HUBIE rises, waxing enthusiastic.)*

HUBIE

Carl, ya see. Let me tell ya about Carl. He's not like you and me. No sir! He's not bounded by normal human constraints.

HELEN

Your basic superior being.

HUBIE

You could say that ——— though Carl never would.

HELEN

Not the boastful type?

*(HUBIE shakes his head "no.")*

But to give you an example of the man's powers of communication.. .We had this Apple MacIntosh Plus and this Epson IBM clone that everyone'd given up on. Totally non-communicable. We were depending on this communication, see? The whole office'd come to a dead crawl. Well, along comes Carl, inserts an RS232 adapter cable in the serial port, logs onto Crosstalk, and within fifteen nanoseconds the ASCII (ASS— kee) characters are flyin' every which way!

*(HUBIE wipes a joyful tear from his eye.)*

What a guy! We all just stood there, dumbstruck. I mean, here was this electronic wall that he'd just poked a man—size hole in. No shocks, no static. Heh, old Jamison even took him to lunch. I mean, man, it was pristine!

HERMIONE

Julie had a Sweet Pristine.

HELEN (*to HUBIE*)

Well then. Helping mere people should be no more complicated than-- than plugging in a flash drive.

HUBIE

You're catching on faster'n I thought! Honey, you're gonna love this guy.  
Now tell me about Valery —— where'd you hear about her?

HELEN

Everyone's heard of her. Haven't you? She does great work.

HUBIE

Oh? How do you know that?

HELEN

I've...seen her a few times.

*(HUBIE registers mild surprise.)*

Is that all right?

HUBIE

Well certainly. It's just that it's the kind of thing I would think you'd want to  
let me know about.. .That's all.

HELEN

You're right. I was looking for a time to tell you —— a good time and—

HUBIE

What kind of therapy does she do?

HELEN

Wolfian —— I mean she founded Wolfian therapy, after all.

HUBIE

Wolfian?

*(HELEN nods.)*

You mean the deep...

*(HUBIE works his hands, as if deeply massaging  
someone. HELEN nods again.)*

I can't believe it. Why her? You couldn't get Hulk Hogan?

*(HELEN saunters behind HUBIE, who now sits. She gently massages his back, which he enjoys.)*

HELEN (*sexy-voiced*)

Don't you like the art of sensual massage? She can rub away an entire family's troubles with her hands.

HUBIE

Mmmmm! ..Does she use body lotions?

HELEN

Only if you're nice.

HUBIE

I was nice.. .once.

HELEN

I remember. In '07.

HUBIE

After Zeenie's graduation.. .Oooh. Do it right there. It feels so good.

HELEN

Your parents were riding in our car. You kept your hands off me for five minutes and 43 seconds.

HUBIE

Well, someone had to shift.

*(CARL knocks at the front door.  
HERMIONE and GINGOLD come running  
at breakneck speed from their bedroom, brandishing  
laser tag guns.)*

HERMIONE

I'll get it!

GINGOLD

No, I will!

HERMIONE

My turn!

GINGOLD

You got it the last time!

*(HERMIONE and GINGOLD each get a grip on part of the doorknob. They open the door, letting in CARL. The kids zap him. He flinches, unnerved.)*

HERMIONE

You're dead, evil emperor!

CARL

Well, well, well!

GINGOLD

You didn't fall down!

*(HUBIE and HELEN approach the front door and greet CARL, who carries a portable computer.)*

HUBIE

Hiya, Carl C'mon in!

*(CARL enters warily.)*

CARL

You're sure I won't get vaporized?

HUBIE

Not till they get to know you a little better, honest.

HELEN

They only dematerialize the ones they really love...But really, I'm very glad you were able to come.

*(CARL doffs his coat, which HUBIE bangs up.)*

CARL

Good! Then Hubie outlined how I go about things to you, I'm sure.

HELEN

Well, just a bit. But he says you've done wonders for other, ah, programs.

CARL

Oh yes. And for people, too. HA! Ha! Ha!

HELEN and HUBIE

Hal Ha! Ha!

*(CARL sits down on a couch and gestures for HELEN and HUBIE to sit nearby.)*

CARL

Please. Let's get comfortable.. Now then. I don't know what Hubie's told you exactly, so why don't I explain my method.

HUBIE

What a treat ——— hearing about Cybernetic Therapy from the master!

CARL *(to HELEN)*

Your husband is very flattering. What I do, you see, is marry the best of traditional behavioral therapy to the finest tools modern science makes available... In this case, it is the computer, combined with galvanomic skin response mechanisms...Here, let me show you.

*(CARL pulls out a group of wires from a compartment on the side of the computer and begins attaching them to HELEN, then to HUBIE. GINGOLD and HERMIONE watch with fascination.)*

GINGOLD

Wow! Are you turning Mom into a CB? Awesome!

HERMIONE

Mister! Could you—

HUBIE

Honey, be polite — call him Carl.

CARL

Yes, I'd like that, sweetheart. You know, I never did learn your name.

HERMIONE

I'm Hermione.

*(CARL shakes HERMIONE's hand.)*

HELEN

And this is her twin brother, Gingold.

CARL

Hi, pal.

*(CARL shakes GINGOLD's hand.)*

HERMIONE

Carl, when you're done with my Mom and Dad, could you make me into a radio antenna?

CARL

Ha, ha, ha! *(to HELEN and HUBIE)* These pikers're so cute! *(to HERMIONE and GINGOLD)* Your parents aren't going to be radio antennae at all. I'm just wiring them for emotions. It's a common procedure!

GINGOLD

We do it all the time. Mom's always sayin' Dad's so wired.

HELEN

Ha, ha, ha. Um, how does this work exactly? Do you ask us a lot of

questions and then enter it into a program?

CARL

Only key questions, you see. The rest comes telepathically. Now, you're certain you want the children here? I approve of it, by the way, since it adds to the psycho—familial dimension...but of course the matter is entirely up to you.

HUBIE

Well, they're a big part of our life.. .so why not? How do you feel, honey?

HELEN

I'll try anything half-way.

CARL

Good. I don't knock fifty percent. Most of the components in this machine were purchased at a 50% discount! Ho, ho, Ho!...

*(CARL begins attaching electrodes to  
HERMIONE and GINGOLD, who are excited.)*

Here you go. A little inter—cerebral hard wiring for your little cherubim. Now, let's all think.. .think very hard about whatever is your greatest psychosocial dysfunction...

*(HUBIE smiles at CARL with admiring amazement.  
CARL is displeased.)*

HERMIONE

What's that mean, Mom?

HELEN

He's talking about our problems.

CARL *(sing-song voiced)*

I want to see you thinking.

*(All family members close their eyes and show  
deep thought.)*



CARL

Harder!

*(Family members squint with eyes shut, to show deeper thought. CARL watches his monitor with pleasure.)*

CARL

Yes.. .this is very revealing. I see my clock icon moving into top position. Yes, there's that heart icon nudging up behind it.. .and what's that? Ah—ha! The hot dog. Haven't seen that one in a long time. The food icon. Mm—hm. It's all there.

GINGOLD

Does that mean that on Saint Valentine's Day we're gonna eat hot dogs?

HERMIONE

In London, below Big Ben?

CARL

No—ho—ho, my little world travelers.

HELEN

Then what does it mean?

CARL *(fiddling with dials)*

Patience. We're not done yet. The code for Google wasn't written in a day, either. Now up, up with all of you.

*(The family members rise. CARL intertwines their arms so that they form a circle. CARL places hassocks under the kids' feet, so that their shoulders are almost at adult level.)*

A little adjustment here...a little enhancement of the electromagnetic configuration...There. Much better! Okay, now concentrate on whatever it is that you think will make life better for you. More money, more toys, more loving, fewer commercials ——— you think of it. And hum while you do that.

*(CARL pulls out a “Big Mouth Singers” musical toy and plays a note for each family member. Each hums that note after hearing it.)*

Hubie, here’s your note....And Helen, this is yours. Hermione, can you hit this one?...Good! And here’s a dulcet tone for you Gingold... Hey, not bad — next year you’ll be in the Mummer’s Parade! Okay now, group, let’s concentrate... Harder! I’m just getting fuzzy images. Better. Solutions, now. Paradise, ultimates, you know what you want. I don’t. I can only guide you to it. Cm’on. Ahhh, Eubie, that’s good. A little risqué, but it’s a solution to something.

HUBIE

Sorry. Don’t let the kids see that.

HERMIONE

See what?

HELEN

Hubie, keep it clean. Please!

HUBIE

He tells me think paradise, you tell me keep it clean — I need a subliminal traffic director!

HELEN

That’s what a super-ego’s for.

CARL

None of that, m’ dear. We’re way beyond the id, kid. This is microchip heaven, and we’re gonna leave the Freudians snoring on their couches, Okay, ‘kay...this is very, very good. But I want you to think harder!

*(Family members hum loudly and concentrate.)*

Beautiful! Got it on the disk. You can stop now and swing round to see what I’ve got....

*(Family swings around to view the set, not*

*visible to the audience.)*

I just run this data through my Family Disparity Blender...

*(The sound is heard of a blender crushing ice, as CARL hits a key on the computer. Then he pulls out a disk and holds it up for all to see.)*

GINGOLD

Looks like a disk to me!

*(Telephone rings. GINGOLD picks up the cordless phone.)*

Hello....Oh, hi, Grandma!....Yeah, m—hm. Sure! When can you send it to us?

HUBIE  
*(smiling)*

Grandparents! They're such soft touches.

CARL

I run it through, and here we go.. Hmmm! Interesting results. Okay, your biggest problem seems to be time management. But it really isn't. It's priority management.

HERMIONE

What's that?

*(GINGOLD rests the phone on a pillow and starts playing with electrodes.)*

CARL

It's figuring out what matters in your life, and sticking to it. Can't you use your humble little imaginations? They're probably filled to brimming with lowly aspirations. Perhaps it's having a boyfriend, getting good grades, making more money, being at peace with your soul. Pardon my honesty, but . . .you people're wiffed!

HELEN

Do you charge people good money to tell them they're wiffed? And do people pay you?

*(CARL stands, indignant.)*

CARL

Well, frankly, I was doing this as a friend and a colleague. To be honest, the Governor had asked me to help cyber-analyze his son this evening, but I declined, having made this prior engagement... or shall I say prior error. *(rising)* But I can very easily eject my disk and --

HELEN

No, no, it's my fault. I'm just very tense. I want a quick solution.

*(CARL sits.)*

HERMIONE

Mommy always wants things fixed fast.

HUBIE

Where's Grandma?

GINGOLD

I put her behind the chocolate pudding. She's resting.

*(HUBIE rushes over to the phone and picks it up. He speaks angrily to GINGOLD.)*

HUBIE

That's no way to treat the father of your mother. I mean the mother of your father....Hello, Mom? Yes...Yes...Well, we're in the middle of a therapy session....Oh, I....gee, I... I suppose you can....

*(To HELEN.)*

Hon, do you mind if Mom listens?

HELEN

Why not? I mean, everyone knows privacy is useless in therapy.

HUBIE

Really, c'mon Wouldja mind terribly?

*(HELEN reluctantly nods her head, her body language saying "What's the use of fighting?")*

HUBIE

Thanks. *(to his mom)* It's okay, Mom, just don't bring up any of this at Thanksgiving, 'kay? Ha-ha—ha! *(to HELEN)* She says she just wants the juice, not the gravy.

*(HUBIE rests "Grandma" against a book or nicknack. CARL sits back down, seems understanding.)*

CARL

That's splendid. After all, intra-familial mediation can only enhance! Now let me explain what I mean by "wiffed."...It means you people have a DSM99427.

GINGOLD

Wow, he knows our license plate!

CARL

No—no—no. That's your syndrome number. The verbal name for the number is Hyper—Spatial Familial Dyslexia.

HELEN

We don't speak Armenian.

CARL

Okay, here's the plain poop. You're trying to do too many things at the same time because you don't know what you really want!

HELEN (*fuming*)

But we know that!

CARL

You do????

(*Hubie whispers to Helen*)

HUBIE

We can't let the man think he's failed!

HELEN

And why not?!

(*CARL studies his screen.*)

CARL

Hold it, there's more.

(*CARL returns gets more readout. He is pleased.*)

I've placed your true values in logical order for you. Ready? Now these are group values, homogenized. Nobody gets exactly what he or she wants, but everybody gets something of what they want.

GINGOLD

Why?

CARL

Cause that's the way life is, my little precocious peppercorn. Its like being in a candy store and trying to eat everything. Those of us who do get very, very sick. So here are your value parameters... Love...very American, very common but not diminished by this fact.

HELEN

I like that.

CARL

Toys.

HUBIE

Toys beat out sex?

CARL

May I remind you, this analysis is based on how strongly you want something. And these two...hey, they want their toys pretty bad...And, uh, yes it shows a Bugati for Hubie and a Silver Fox stole for Helen...Then in rank comes laughter, followed by ice cream, sex, clothes...and oh yes, peace on earth.

HUBIE

We're a progressive family!

HELEN

All this is very nice. But what do we do?

*(HELEN struts about. GINGOLD fetches a transformer toy.)*

CARL

Doing requires insight.

HELEN

Well, don't you have some?

CARL

Why of course not! Not me personally — my program. It's got an insight chip by Intel.

HELEN

Great, maybe we can get some implanted.

CARL

Wait — I'm dialing up some insights and remedies for you. Hmm, hm... Here it comes. First, it says: everybody, slow down. Second, it advises daily meetings at a scheduled time to discuss family priorities. And third, it recommends erasing your temp files and back-up flash drives, since the information on them could lead to commitment to a psychiatric institution for some of you. And here's the recommended daily schedule advised... Holy system failure!

GINGOLD

What'd ya do, blow a chip?

CARL

Nah, I have a loose connection on my Emotion Card. Here, I can snap it out in the back...

*(CARL goes to the back of the computer  
and pops out a "card.")*

Hubert, have you a soldering iron? I really should un-glitch this right now.

HUBIE

Sure, it's down in the basement on the pegboard. You won't have any trouble finding it. And the outlet's above the work table. Here, I'll turn on the light for you.

*(HUBIE turns on the light leading to  
the basement for CARL, who exits through the basement  
door. HUBIE returns to the group and relaxes in his  
easy chair. Everyone returns to their activities from  
before Carl's arrival. "Grandma" starts whining in a*



*high—pitched voice.)*

HUBIE

Someone attend to Grandma. And don't leave close to the trash compactor!  
You know what the vibrations do to her nerves.

HELEN

Hermione, tell Grandma about your class recycling trip.

HERMIONE

Aw Mom, when I think about that incinerator and all those seagulls, it  
makes—me—retch!

HELEN

Here.

*(HELEN hands HERMIONE a plastic bag.  
HERMIONE speaks with "Grandma" inaudibly.  
She pauses when she has a line.  
HELEN addresses HUBIE:)*

I hope that after Carl has his insight chip soldered into his cranium, you'll  
show the good fellow to the door.

HUBIE

Helen, I can't believe you're so negative! The man s already given us loads  
of ideas. Ways we can become a more together, coordinated family!

*(HELEN approaches HUBIE from behind and wraps her arms  
around his neck. She leans over and gives him a kiss.)*

HELEN

I've been thinking about another program...one I developed.

HUBIE

Oo—hoo —— scientific intrigue! What does it do?

*(HELEN kisses HUBIE.)*

HELEN

Well, for a very small investment... *(kiss)* it converts your floppies... *(kiss)* to hard.

GINGOLD

Stop that lip-suckin'!

HERMIONE

Yeah, you guys 're making us nauseous.

HUBIE

I'm weak... *(kiss)* I'm venal... Somehow I'd trade 10 good insights for a real thrill. It's our downfall, isn't it.

HELEN

Mmm. But what a way to go.

*(HELEN leans over for a harder embrace and falls onto the floor, with HUBIE. Someone knocks at the door. HERMIONE runs to the door and opens it. VALERY rushes in and hugs HELEN as HELEN straightens herself out.)*

VALERY

Helen, you doll! How are you?

*(Helen adjusts her hair)*

HELEN

About the same as last time I spoke to you. But before I get into that, I'd like to introduce you to my family...

*(VALERY pulls HELEN aside and whispers)*

VALERY

Do they always have those... things sticking out of their head?

HELEN *(laughing)*

No, heavens no! Those are cerebral conduits!

VALERY *(laughing)*

Oh, of course!

*(VALERY hides a confused grimace.)*

How foolish of me!

HELEN

This is my husband, Hubie.

*(HUBIE shakes VALERY's hand. HELEN speaks in an angry hush to GINGOLD.)*

Have you taken your ear medicine yet?

*(GINGOLD sheepishly fetches his medicine bottle.)*

HUBIE

Charmed!

VALERY

I've heard so much about you.

*(HUBIE smiles at first, then looks with annoyance at HELEN, who ignores this.)*

HELEN

And here is Hermione... and her twin brother Gingold.

*(GINGOLD is chugging a bottle of pink amoxicillin,  
lying down. He finishes it and tosses the bottle away,  
then burps.)*

HERMIONE (*sugary*)

I am so pleased to meet you.

GINGOLD

*(In a deep, hoodlum voice, waving an arm  
in an indifferent “hello” wave.)*

Greetin's, babe.

HELEN (*outraged*)

Gingold!

GINGOLD

Ah, pleased to meet you mademoiselle.

VALERY

It's a pleasure to meet you, too ——— and I can't wait to get started.

*(VALERY approaches them.)*

I've never had a chance to work with such a... pure nuclear family.

*(HERMIONE in a loud whisper to GINGOLD:)*

HERMIONE

Wait till she finds out we're all anti-nuke!

*(GINGOLD slaps his thigh and laughs conspiratorially.)*

VALERY

Now let's get down to business. I understand from conferring with Helen that your family is choked with value clusters. And bound and gagged by time conflicts. Well, that's nothing I haven't seen before. But after being Deep Wolfed, you'll be a bunch—a loose geese. So get down on your bellies!

HUBIE

What? Here?

VALERY

No, on Uranus! Down, I said!

*(HERMIONE, GINGOLD, HELEN and HUBIE all lie down on the floor on their bellies. VALERY stands over them like a tough drill sergeant. She steps on HUBIE's back.)*

Get that gut flush to the floor!

HUBIE

Did you say she's Mistress Valery?

VALERY

Keep your mouth shut, swine! I'm the therapist here. I give directions. You just shut up, do what I say — and improve.

*(HELEN appears concerned, approaches VALERY.)*

HELEN

Is this what you always do in group?

VALERY

There is no "always." Except I don't always give my best — and that's what I'm giving Hubie right now.

*(VALERY sits on HUBIE's back and tugs on his upper arms. HUBIE grunts.)*

VALERY *(continued)*

You've got evidence of trauma right there. I could tell just by the way you stand.. . slightly stoop-shouldered. Did you have a bad experience?

HUBIE

Before today?

*(VALERY pulls on HUBIE 's arms painfully. He groans.)*

VALERY

Don't toy with me, little man. Tell me about it. Tell me what hurt you.

HUBIE

Well, when I was sixteen, I got close to Sharon the Shape. Then she shot me down just before the prom and I was... I guess you'd call it "wasted" today, eh Gingy?

HELEN *(angrily)*

Who's Sharon the Shape?

GINGOLD

Nah, Dad. You were totalled.

VALERY

I knew there was a woman in there. Now we're going to get her out.

*(VALERY yanks ferociously on HUBIE's arms, pulling them upwards. She gouges her knee into the small of his back.  
HUBIE lets loose painful yowls.)*

HERMIONE *(to GINGOLD)*

See? I told you ladies could be good wrestlers.

GINGOLD

Yeah, well she's no Hulk Hogan, right Dad?

*(GINGOLD gets down on the floor, face to face with HUBIE.)*

HUBIE

Yaaahh—arrrrghh!

GINGOLD

Dad, do somethin', before she pins ya!

VALERY

All right, I can feel that bitch comin' out of your body. That sniveling, big-boobed ignoramus!

HUBIE

How —— did you know she was busty?!

HELEN

Who is this woman, and why haven't you ever mentioned her to me before?

HUBIE

I didn't have the time. That's our whole problem, remember?

VALERY

Time. Hah! You'll have no trouble finding it when I'm done with you.

HUBIE

People.. spend whole weeks in traction.

GINGOLD

Dad, she's gonna pin ya! Move!

HUBIE

Why do all our problems have to be concentrated in my back? And what's this supposed to convince me of, anyway. Cause I'm unconvinced!

VALERY

Do you understand, now, that there are more important things in life than your puny little schedule??

*(VALERY yanks hard. HUBIE howls.)*

HUBIE

Yes, I see how trivial the whole thing is. It doesn't matter if a family is at the end of it's rope, if we're booked to our ears, if nobody knows who's on first and who's goin' out the door.

HELEN



Then what's the really important thing, dear?

HUBIE

Relief from pai—ai-ai-ain!

*(“Grandma” complains again. GINGOLD placates her, listens for awhile, then talks inaudibly. VALERY dumps HUBIE, then walks behind HELEN, maliciously sizing her up with a sneer. From behind HELEN, she throws her down on the floor flips her over and sits on her belly. VALERY’s hands work over HELEN’s upper arms, kneading them.)*

VALERY

Your arms are full of time.

HELEN

My arms? Are you sure?

VALERY *(sniffing)*

They reek of minutes and hours... You'll have fragrant, leisurely arms when I'm through.

*(VALERY puts HELEN’S arm in an armlock)*

VALERY *(continued)*

There...we're putting Francois away, where the ecstasy you shared can no longer reach and harm you with sadness.

GINGOLD

Who's Francois, Mom?

HUBIE

Yes, an acquaintance from a prior life?

HELEN (*to VALERY*)

Why are you doing this to me? Keep our private work out of this!

VALERY

Now we're beginning to get somewhere with you, my dear.

*(VALERY massages HELEN's bicep, while keeping it in an armlock.)*

Ahhh! Now we're grinding schedules and commitments out of your very bones!

HELEN

Leave the bones, please. They help me get around. Ouch!!! That hurt!

VALERY

As mature people, we should own our pain.

HELEN

I prefer to rent mine.

HERMIONE (*to GINGOLD*)

Can you really rent pain?

GINGOLD

I didn't see it at the mall. Maybe it'll be out in a few months.

VALERY

Pain means healing...the hotter it gets, the better it drives out the bad. Ha, ha, ha. Here we go for real.

*(VALERY applies intense pressure.)*

Is it working?

VALERY

What's that, my toasty frito?

HELEN (*louder*)

Is it working!

(*VALERY's pressure gets even harder.*)

VALERY

What, my little satchel of worries?

HELEN (*irate*)

Goddamit, IS IT WORKING!!!

(*CARL's voice is heard from the basement.*)

CARL

Yeah! The card's in good shape. Be right up!

VALERY

Who is that?!

HERMIONE

He's another therapist. And he's much better'n you. All he does is tangle us in wires.

GINGOLD (*to HERMIONE*)

Where do Mom and Dad collect these weirdos?

VALERY

What's the meaning of this? I don't allow my results to be clouded by other forces.

HUBIE

Well, it's my fault, really...You see, Carl is a cybernetic therapist who happens to work with me. It's an avocation that he's turning into a——

(*CARL emerges from the basement, card in hand.*)

CARL

I'll pop this in and we'll have you folks into macro time in a jiffy. All I——  
Oh, hello.

HELEN

Carl, I'd like to introduce you to Valery Wolf.

*(CARL tries to restrain a giggle.)*

CARL

You mean THE Valery Wolf, the baddest bonecracker in all of therapy?

VALERY

Don't call me a bonecracker if you know what's good fer ya, chiphead.

CARL

Well, I don't mean to disparage. To tell the truth, though, I'm a bit confused.

VALERY

Probably congenital.

CARL *(to HUBIE)*

I thought I was working on the Midthassel-Kazarnowicz's exclusively. On a scientific basis, Hubert... As we discussed at work... Without a lady Sumo wrestler contaminating my data.

HUBIE

That's the way I'd planned it, Carl. Ya haveta believe me. Ya see—

VALERY

Cut the blather, Humbert.

*(VALERY saunters like a tough cowboy over to CARL.)*

I have a deal for Mr. Chips that oughta clear the air.

CARL

Oh?

VALERY

I can see by the way you stand ——— and a few other things -- that you've got some trauma trapped in your body. I'll help ya get it out. No charge.

*(VALERY spits on the floor.)*

CARL (*smugly*)

Hm. Reminiscent of Dollar Days at JC Penney. Well, in the interests of scientific inquiry, I'll accept your little offer. And I'll be glad to return the favor with a little cybernetic treatment — at no expense, of course.

*(VALERY removes her outer garment, revealing a tiger or leopard—patterned bra/halter.)*

VALERY

And we'll see who makes the other feel...more "well." Right, byte-brain?

HUBIE

Isn't this getting a little childish for, for...

HELEN

For two highly esteemed professionals who should be placing their patients' needs first?

GINGOLD

Oh boy, it's gonna be therapy to the finish!

HERMIONE

This is better'n Hulk Hogan meets Bonkers Bananas!

*(CARL prepares to attach electrodes to VALERY'S head. She looks up with surprise.)*

VALERY

What's this?

CARL

I've got to wire you for sanity.

VALERY

I saw "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest." Is he tryin' ta get with that Electro-Repulsive Therapy!?

CARL

Of course not! These are biofeedback tools. They tie in to a sophisticated computer therapy program that benefits everybody. (*To HELEN and HUBERT:*) Isn't that right?

HELEN

It doesn't help, er, hurt.

VALERY

If you say so, Helen. You're the only one I respect, no offense to your ludicrous family. But if I get so much as a twinge, I'll Wolf this ape's cajoonies into crushed walnuts!

HUBIE

Colorful, isn't she?

CARL

Now then...

*(CARL puts one pair of electrodes on himself, and one on VALERY. Wires lead to the computer. CARL turns on the computer and stands behind VALERY.)*

Let's think circles...Uniform circles of happiness, little airborne bubbles of wellbeing...Circles, circles, circles...

VALERY

Oh brother. I bet he gets a hundred bucks a pop for this.

CARL

You're beginning to even out...yes, if you'll concentrate a bit more, I'm sure you can form a more perfect circle. Right now, I'm getting an ellipsoid.. . Hmmm, let's see if I can fine-tune it. There might be a bug in the horizontal hold...

*(CARL steps over to the monitor. VALERY sneaks up from behind and gets him in a half-nelson.)*

CARL

What in the world are you doing?

*(VALERY and CARL stagger around the set  
in this half—nelson lockstep.)*

VALERY

Eradicating your subluxations...I know there's deep trauma in that back of yours, and I'm the one to get it out!

*(VALERY hurls CARL onto the floor and ends  
up on his back, maintaining the half-nelson.)*

CARL

What the--

VALERY

It was a rejection, a painful rejection by a love long—gone...

CARL

Arrgh!

VALERY

Her name was Twyla, and after three months of dating, you were flipped

*(VALERY flips CARL onto his belly.)*

out over her bewitching beauty. But she said she found you shallow, a technotwerp with a dead right brain. She called you an emotional quadraplegic, jettisoned you into the mating jungle. And you went screaming!

*(VALERY wrenches CARL.)*

CARL

Yaah!!! What a coefficient of craziness this bird has!

VALERY

Coefficient, huh? See how coefficient I am at this!! Urrgh!

*(CARL and VALERY roll and entangle. HELEN opens the front door, and both therapists roll out of the house. HELEN closes and locks the door, with a smile. She sits down. HUBIE sits by her. HERMIONE sits in HUBIE's lap, and GINGOLD in HELEN's.)*

HERMIONE

Dad, I love when we have mind-fixers visit.

GINGOLD

Yeah Mom, can we have some more nuts over?



HELEN

Not for awhile, sweetheart. We've got quite enough nuts in this house as it is.

HUBIE

And ya know what? I think if we try hard, we can iron out these, these seeming difficulties that so bedevil us.

HERMIONE

What's bedevil?

HELEN

Well, it's things driving people crazy. Like getting up at 6 every morning...

HUBIE

making sure you guys get dressed and have breakfast on time...

HUBIE

Rotating the tires...

GINGOLD

Making lunches that you forgot to make the night before?

HELEN

That's it, darling! And working hard all day, then rushing to get to the afterschool program on time and ——

HERMIONE

Taking us to ballet lessons and soccer practice?

HUBIE

That's the ticket. It's all stuff we want to do —— but it's also what's bedeviling us.

GINGOLD

Is that called a problem?

HUBIE

It's called Life in a Washing Machine. Some people say it's the American Way.

HELEN

But we think it's insane... Dear, aren't you concerned about having to face Carl at work next week?

HUBIE

Carl will be deep into de-bugging his software next week. Plus there's an advantage to being analytically keen and emotional fogged — you never understood in the first place, so you don't know enough to be hurt. He'll probably spend weeks looking for a bug in the program...Ya know, I'm glad we had those loonies here.

HELEN

You are?

HUBIE

Sometimes it takes a genuine crackpot to show you what sanity is.

HELEN

So tell us.

HUBIE

Okay, it's something colorless and odorless.. .so it's perfectly clear.

HELEN

Go on.

HUBIE

You just see what counts. And you count on nothing but.

HELEN

Children, it's bedtime. Go brush your teeth.

HERMIONE & GINGOLD

Aw, Mom!!

HUBIE

Run along now. I'll be in to read you a story in a little while.

*(HERMIONE & GINGOLD leave the room.  
HELEN curls up on a loveseat next to HUBIE.)*

HELEN

Make it a short story, sweetheart. I have a little romantic tale I'd like to share with you afterwards.

HUBIE

Oh?

*(HELEN nods suggestively.)*

Oh!

*(HUBIE walks over to “Grandma” and picks her up.)*

Goodnight, Mom.. .Yes, how did you know? . . .Well, we’re just getting out of the Spectrum now... . Right again. And that wrestling was as good as it sounded... .Sure we’ll take you to Sixers-Celtics. Goodnight, Mom.

*(HUBIE hangs up.)*

Ya know, this time business...it’s really not easy.

HELEN

I know.

*(Pause. HUBIE reflect, stands, turns towards audience as he speaks.)*

HUBIE

It’s like...it’s like the impossibility of two things being at the same place at the same time....

*(HUBIE pushes two fists together, knuckles against knuckles.)*

Can’t do it. Sometimes I’m at the console, looking at meaningless digits, these alphanumeric of sameness...and I wonder why I’m there doing that... instead of being home with the kids, with you...

HELEN

*(walking to where HUBIE stands, putting her arms around him from behind)*

Don’t be too hard on yourself. honey. You get paid for your alphanumeric.

HUBIE

Sometimes it seems an especially lousy trade...no matter how much fun the little games are...I mean, who's gonna pay us back for the lives we forget to live?

HELEN

So let's not forget.

HUBIE

Time is too precious to give to the time—counters. Half our lives're spent trying to ignore that simple fact. Do you know what I mean?

HELEN

Of course I do, honey. But we're not rich, so we have to ignore it sometimes. Or we wouldn't be able to live in the real world. We wouldn't be able to pay the damn bills. But the trick is...

HUBIE

There's a trick? Thank God!...I was hoping there'd be a trick.

HELEN

The trick is remembering some of the time what's important in life --- enough to keep us on our toes. We cant go through our days wishing we were home with each other, wishing we could look into Gingold's eyes and kiss our Hermione.

HUBIE

Why not? I want that trick.

HELEN

Because we wouldn't be able to function! And that dismal word "functioning" is important in this world, for Christ's sake! But like I said, the trick is to stop functioning when we can --- and start living!

HUBIE

Damn! I was hoping for a trickier trick --- like Thoreau's trick, or a lottery—winner's trick.

HELEN

Sweetheart, you're not Thoreau. (*fondling HUBIE's hair.*) And I'm not Thoreau's wife.

HUBIE

He was single.

HELEN

See? Hey, what about Carl? How're you going to be able to look at him?

HUBIE

Well, let's not forget — we didn't throw Carl out. He rolled out. Anyhow, I won't see his face for a week.

HELEN

Why not?

HUBIE

Cause that's how long I'm taking off. Here's a riddle: what can you do with a washing machine that's spewing suds all over?

HELEN & HUBIE

You can pull the damned plug!

*(HUBIE and HELEN embrace and kiss. They stand near a lamp or wall—switch. HUBIE reaches over, still hugging, and turns out the light. Blackout.)*

**THE END**