

# The Passion of the Hausfrau

## An Illuminated Solo Comedy

by Bess Welden, Annette Jolles, & Nicole Chaison

Projection Art by Nicole Chaison

Adapted from *Hausfrau Muthah-zine* by Nicole Chaison

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**THE PASSION OF THE HAUSFRAU is performed by one actor, female 35-45, who plays all of the following characters:**

The Hausfrau (HF)  
Dora, her young daughter  
George, her young son  
Craig, her husband  
Mother  
Romo  
Mildred, her grandmother, speaks with a life-long smoker's rasp  
Lenny, the contractor  
Plumber  
Carnie  
Shelly, the babysitter  
John  
Girlfriend, speaks with a sexy foreign accent  
Mom 1: Sanctimonious Magazine Quoter  
Mom 2: The Fearmonger  
Mom 3: Nosey Competitor  
Mom 4: Relentless Micromanager  
Crunchy Hausdaddy  
Simon Winchester, speaks with a British accent  
Linda  
Parenting Teacher  
Kathy, the dance teacher

**Production Notes:**

**All images in the script appear as projections during the show. Text indicated as "Title Card" is also projected.**

**Ideally, the set and props should be as minimal as possible (e.g. a sizeable bench, a white backdrop for projections, and a large backpack from which the journal and other essential props come and go).**

## PROLOGUE

HF: Dora, come on, sweetie, we have to pick up George.

DORA: Mama, help me!

HF: Dora, what's wrong?

DORA: My shoe fell in the potty.

HF: What?

DORA: My shoe...

HF: Oh my God. Okay. Just leave it. We'll fish it out later. Come on, we gotta get your brother. We're gonna be late!

It's Wednesday afternoon at 3:00 p.m. - what I call the needy hour – that fragile time between school pick-up and dinner. Dora has once again refused to take a nap so any attempt I might have made at cleaning or cooking or whatever has been completely quashed. This past week she has developed a preternatural ability to survive without sleep night and day and we are both exhausted. In fact, I am feeling as sleep-deprived as I did when she was a newborn and instead of taking my morning vitamin, I swallowed a vaginal suppository. And, I'm getting sick. And, tomorrow just happens to be my 39th birthday. But I ignore my massive headache and the tightness in my chest and buckle Dora into her car seat to make the short drive to school and, of course, as soon as I back out of the driveway, she drops off.

3:15 p.m.

True to form, my nine-year-old son refuses to leave the premises of his school.

HF: George, honey, you can't play baseball right now. It's Wednesday, remember?

He screams at me in front of all of the other nice parents.

GEORGE: Mom! No! I can't believe you're doing this! Why?

HF: Even though it is now spring and the school year is almost over, it would seem that in George's mind, each day happens afresh without any recollection of the routines and rules and schedules and requirements of all of the previous days so the memory that, say, on Wednesdays mom picks me up from school and then we go grocery shopping has absolutely no relevance for him.

We really do need to go grocery shopping because this is what's in the cupboard at home: a bag of stale cranberries, a package of whole wheat spaghetti, a very old box of falafel mix, and some grain I bought in bulk several years ago, but have no idea how to cook it or

even what it is. It looks like couscous, but it is not, I assure you.

GEORGE: Mom! I was in the middle of the most important game of my life!

DORA: George, you woke me up!

HF: 3:30 p.m.

We arrive in the vicinity of the grocery store triangle that is Hannaford, Wild Oats, and Whole Grocer, and I am once again thrown into my weekly dilemma: to which of these establishments in the grocery store triangle should I give up our scant and hard-earned clams? That deep dark ache in my head has now rooted behind my eyes and from it a decision tree begins to sprout above my head. It looks something like this: If I go to Hannaford, it's the least expensive and they have those red plastic carts that look like sports cars for the kids, but George always smashes into other shoppers and also he'll throw a fit in the candy aisle. If I go to Wild Oats it's so flippin' expensive that I'll blow my whole wad there but they do have the deli and the kids are getting hungry. But then if they don't have those chicken wings, Dora will scream bloody murder again. If I go to Whole Grocer, it's nice and small and not so overwhelming and they have those mango raspberry popsicles that have saved me before.

GEORGE: Mom, can I have a snack?

DORA: Me too!

GEORGE: Can I have chocolate?

DORA: No, I'm allergic to it!

GEORGE: But I'm not.

DORA: That hurts my feelings!

GEORGE: So what.

DORA: You dumb boy. Mama, George is hurting my feelings.

GEORGE: I'm just hungry, Mom, for god's sake!

HF: Knock it off right now, the both a ya! Knock it off right now or you'll get nothing. And like it!

3:35 p.m.

Inside Whole Grocer, I am alerted to the dwindling window of time I have to provide nourishment to my charges when my daughter's speech regresses to that of a toddler speaking a crude cave man language:

DORA: Me hungry! Me want treat!

HF: She bangs the push bar from atop her perch in the shopping cart. George catches a free

ride and hangs off the side so that if I take a hand off the cart to, for example, reach for a food item, I will upset the delicate but crazy symbiotic balance here and the cart will flip over and my daughter will crack her head open.

GEORGE: Hey! I want a mango raspberry popsicle! Mom! I want a mango raspberry popsicle! Can I have a popsicle? Mom! I want a popsicle!

HF: I cut my losses and high tail it over to the frozen foods section, where I grab a couple of popsicles from the frosty chamber. I rip off the wrappers like a crack addict trembling for a hit, pass them to the kids, and then: Ahhhhh. Sweet silence.

I calculate that I now have approximately seven minutes max in which to round up the ingredients I'll need to provide a tasty and nourishing meal that evening. I snag some grass-fed hamburger meat and a jar of organic marinara to go with the spaghetti in my cupboard and also some of those greens in a bag, a.k.a. salad.

3:42 p.m.

At the register, the pierced and tattooed cashier takes a disapproving gander at my kids who are greedily licking the juice off the popsicle sticks before they pass me the sticky wrappers for scanning. Then they rush the cart corral, and climb the gate.

DORA: George, look at me. I'm a monkey.

GEORGE: Watch the door. I'm magic. Open. Close. Open. Close.

HF: And I just know that this cashier is judging me and my food choices and my wild off-spring, and I am suddenly overcome with the urge to drop to the floor and beg for mercy. Please! I am a fragile and vulnerable human being! Please take pity on me! But instead, after four failed attempts to remember the PIN number of my debit card, I write a check for the groceries, roughly equivalent to my hubby's weekly salary, gracefully balance the bags of food and waltz the children out the door. And just as I am buckling Dora's car seat, an alarm goes off in my head.

*A cell phone rings.*

HF: Hello.

CRAIG: Hey, hon. How's it going?

HF: It's my hubby sounding calm. I'm just leaving the store and I have a splitting headache and I can barely breathe and I think I have a fever and...how are you?

CRAIG: I'm fine. Actually great. This conference today was really inspiring. I went to a session on organizing space.

HF: You see this is how people sound after sitting on their butts for eight hours, listening to some expert who gets paid big bucks telling other people how to manage their environments.

CRAIG: So I know you said no gifts this year, but I've got this really great idea. I think that for your birthday we should hire this woman to come to the house and help us organize and get everything cleaned up and uncluttered.

HF: I try to let his groovy vibes wash over me, but it is too late. I can feel the snakes starting to emerge from my head.

GEORGE: Mom! Are you okay?

DORA: Mama!

HF: Help us get everything \*&@! cleaned up? \*&@! uncluttered? What the \*&@! do you think I do all day long? My whole \*@?!\* life is about organizing our sorry asses! Holy \*@?!\*!

*The woman collapses to the ground. In the blackout we hear ambulance sirens.*

*Lights slowly rise on the woman lying in bed. She wakes up and finds a wrapped gift and card on the floor.*

HF: *(reading front of card)* To my dear daughter on her 39th birthday.

MOTHER: Every writer should have a great collection of books to inspire her, so here's one to add to your shelves. I thought you'd really get a kick out of it. Can you imagine? Your old friend Billy wrote a book, and he doesn't even have a Master's degree like you. I hope you haven't given up your dream of writing your own book someday, though we both know that you have completely embraced your life as a hausfrau. But as I always say, "that's nothing to be ashamed of." With love, your mother.

HF: Billy? Bill Romanowski?! Romo: My Life on the Edge: Living Dreams and Slaying Dragons. Billy Romanowski wrote a book? But he's a football player. Oh, I see, he needed a co-writer and a "performance" coach to help him. I cannot believe this. This is my birthday gift? *(reading from book)* "I recognize now, though, that I've become my most important obstacle to happiness and fulfillment. I'm my own biggest dragon. Aren't we all?" Are you freaking kidding me? Okay, I get it, mom. Billy wrote a book and I haven't. I gave it up and I'm a total failure.

*Phone rings.*

HF: Hello? Mom? I'm in bad shape. I collapsed in the grocery store parking lot and they had to call an ambulance. No, I was not smoking. Yes, I am on antibiotics. Yes, I know they are wonder drugs. Listen, mom, I'm really not feeling well... No, I can't think of anything right now. I mean, it would be great if you could come up and help take care of the kids. Craig was up all night trying to finish a grant and he really needs to get to the office. Why can't you? You're at the Edward Gorey Museum all week? Can't they find someone else to take over. You're just a volunteer, right? Why do you even offer if you can't really help? You know what, Mom, just forget it. And what the hell were you thinking sending me this outrageous piece of trash for my birthday? A book written by a mostly brain dead football player? This is ludicrous. I am hanging up!

*Eerie sounds begin. Voice-overs of selected portions of the following scene increase and overlap as they build in intensity. This all suggests a hallucination.*

MOTHER (VO): We both know that you have completely embraced your life as a Hausfrau.

CRAIG: Sorry you were so sick for your birthday, hon.

GEORGE: Mom! The ambulance was awesome.

DORA: Mama, are you going to get better soon?

HF: Don't worry, sweet girl, I'm going to be okay.

MOTHER (VO): Billy wrote a book and he doesn't even have a Master's degree like you.

GEORGE: Oh gross, Mom, you smell really bad.

CRAIG: I'm gonna take the kids for some pizza. We love you.

MOTHER (VO): ...though we both know that you have completely embraced your life as a hausfrau.

ROMO: Hey, remember me? Billy? Bill Romanowski? Bet you never thought I'd write a book.

*There is a crescendo of all sounds that then fade to a lower level through the end of the scene.*

MILDRED: Hello, dear. Happy birthday. It's been too long.

HF: Grandma? Grandma Millie?

MILDRED: Yes, dear, it's me.

HF: Wait! Grandma, you are dead.

MILDRED: True, but what difference does that make? When I see my favorite girl is in trouble, I don't let a little thing like that stand in my way. I knew you needed my help. So, I see you're pretty sick.

HF: Well, if you're here, then I must be totally over the edge.

MILDRED: You are over the edge, dear. You think I don't check up on you? I am worried about you. That's why I'm here.

HF: I just haven't been taking care of myself.

MILDRED: In so many ways, dear. I've been wracking my brain for some way to help you, and

then I bumped into Joseph Campbell and it all made sense.

HF: Joseph Campbell? You met him?

MILDRED: Yes, dear. You know, where I am these days you meet the most interesting people. But anyway, we were talking about his book that you always loved so much, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, and I suddenly realized what you needed.

HF: I'm not following you...

MILDRED: It's time, dear. This can't wait any longer. Just be strong. And remember all the heroes who have gone before you. You're never risking the adventure alone.

HF: Grandma, what are you talking about?!



## SCENE 1

Title Card:

*The Land B.C.*

*(Before Children)*

*Where every journey begins with a blunder*

HF: Hey, I recognize this place. Oh my god, it's been so long. This is where people lay around on Sunday mornings, drinking coffee and reading the New York Times Book Review. This is where people have enough brain function to meet a 48-hour writing deadline in 48 hours. This is where people urinate in privacy, and, yes, even married people have sex.

HF: Craig! I'm home. Sorry I'm late.

CRAIG: I was starting to worry, hon. Is everything okay?

HF: Better than okay. My agent called right as I was leaving.

CRAIG: Oh, your high powered agent, huh?

HF: Yes! He got me a totally fantastic offer, but I had to wait to print out these materials because I need to whip up an outline this weekend.

CRAIG: What's the gig?

HF: Get this. The Morgan Library in New York wants me to write the catalogue for their new traveling exhibit of illuminated manuscripts. The curator read that article I did for *New York Magazine* about Medieval art, and he thinks I'm their gal. *(She hands him a print out of several color illuminated manuscripts.)*

CRAIG: That's great, hon. Really great. Wow, these are very cool.

HF: It's at least a year's worth of work. I'll have to edit tons of material translated from the French and Italian. The money's good, but, of course, it means I probably won't have any time to work on my own book now.

CRAIG: Hey, hon, you'll have time for your book after. Can't you just enjoy for a minute?

HF: Okay.

CRAIG: How about we open that good bottle we've been saving and have a toast? To illuminated manuscripts and to my beautiful, intelligent, successful wife. I love you, hon.

HF: I love you, too.

CRAIG: Hey, since we're feeling celebratory do you think there's any possibility that you might want to... you know?

HF: Absolutely.



HF: Shit.

MOTHER: I am not ready to be a grandmother yet. How did you let this happen? Oh, my goodness, you have no idea what's coming. No idea at all. Now you'll never be able to finish that museum catalogue, not with a newborn attached to you. I suppose it was inevitable that you'd become a hausfrau?

HF: What the hell is a hausfrau?

**HAUSFRAU** (hous'frou')  
n. A housewife, from  
the German haus  
(house) + frau (wife).

HF: What?

## SCENE 2

Title Card:

*The Land A.D.*  
*(After Dilation)*

HF: Craig, this is it.

CRAIG: What?

HF: My water just broke, and I think I saw my bloody show.

CRAIG: Oh. Okay. Okay. Should I clean it up?



HF: Just get me to the car.

HF: What do you mean you have no rooms? This is a freakin' utility closet. You expect me to give birth in here? *(She has a huge contraction)* Do you have any doctors? Or are you out of those, too? Or will the custodian be attending the birth? *(She has another huge contraction)* Don't tell me to calm down!

*She bears down and pushes several times, then takes her baby in her arms.*



### SCENE 3

Title Card:

## Home of the Old Wise Woman

HF: Grandma, this is George. We named him after grandpa.

MILDRED: He's marvelous. Absolutely marvelous. And you, my dear, have joined the sacred circle of motherhood. You must be doing everything just right – you look like shit. Or is that because you stopped to see your mother on the way?

HF: No, I didn't stop. I just can't see her right now.

MILDRED: You know, dear, I share your sadness about your mother. If I've learned anything, it's that there's something inherently thorny between every mother and daughter, even in the best of circumstances.

HF: I thought after George was born that things would be different – that I would maybe even finally understand her or she would understand me; that I'd somehow be miraculously transformed into a "real mother" and radiate the deep wisdom of the universe. But instead I feel like I'm just one giant breast. And what's worse is that I think she was right. I really am just a hausfrau, now. This boy needs every ounce of me. I can't do anything else.

MILDRED: You'll find a way, dear. It ain't gonna be easy, but I know you'll figure it out. Here, I painted the cover especially for you. *(She hands her a blank journal.)*

HF: Grandma, this is amazing. I never knew that you...

MILDRED: Use it well, dear.

*The woman takes the journal and explores it like a rare treasure. When she looks up, Mildred is gone.*

HF: Grandma Millie.

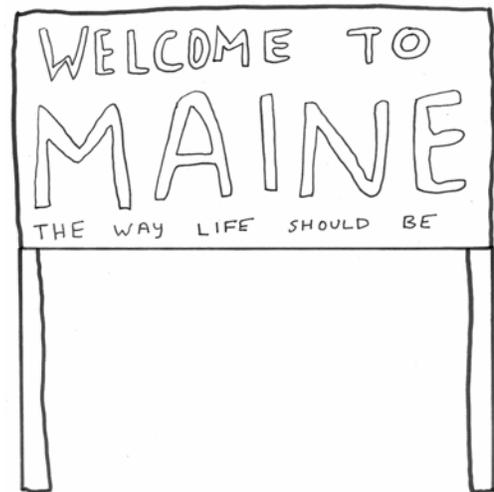
*The woman puts the book into her backpack.*

#### SCENE 4

Title Card:

### The Great Northern Adventure

CRAIG: Okay, hon, here's the plan. I'll quit teaching and finally start that non-profit we've been talking about. We'll set up your office right next to George's room, so you can write from home. We'll fix up the rest of the house, rent out the first floor and everything will be perfect.



HF: Right! Perfect! We were in a serious state of denial, you might even say delusional, believing we could fix up this ramshackle Victorian we had just purchased for a song. Problem was, we possessed none of the tools necessary for a decade-long foray into complete home renovation, which include but are not limited to reliable childcare, yogi-like self-discipline, patience and money. But the promise of renewal had me hooked. So, we hired a contractor named Lenny who showed up wearing a Lynrd Skynrd t-shirt and toting an ancient boom box blasting southern fried rock.

LENNY: Yeah, demolition is like my middle name. I can bust these babies down in a day or two. You can pay cash, right?

Seeing the space transform almost immediately was seductively encouraging, but for some reason Lenny found it necessary to leave a heaping pile of caustic debris right in the middle of our home that grew to gargantuan size after only a couple of days. George couldn't resist the sharp wooden sticks jutting out from the pile.