

CHILDISH

A SATIRE ABOUT THE CLASSROOM

by Leon Kaye

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Cast of Characters

Agnes – 60's, desperate woman
Beth – 30's, quiet and composed
Teacher - 30's, at the end of her rope

Nine year olds...
Dan – athletic
Millie –smart-aleck
Hank – “yes” man
Alexa – sweet
Bud – class clown
Erin – lots of facts

Setting – Empty stage with possibly two or three bar stools spaced far enough apart so that the children may sit on the floor in between. Present day. Each woman may have a pocket book.

(Manuscripts in hand, AGNES and BETH are sitting on the bar stools as TEACHER leads her class of students into the room. AGNES and BETH stand.)

TEACHER

All right, class. Please sit on the floor like we practiced.
(to AGNES and BETH)

Hello.

(Meanwhile, the children sit on the floor, possibly carpeted, at the feet of the authors and a bit upstage, face the audience.)

AGNES

Thank you for having us.

BETH

Thank you.

TEACHER

Oh, you're very welcome.

(turns to the students)

Okay, children. We have for you today a very unique and special occasion. Noted children's book authors, Agnes Chicken and Beth Matthias have graciously offered to come today to read excerpts from their upcoming books. And these books are still not finalized. Am I right?

AGNES

You're right, yes.

TEACHER

They are still works in progress, so our authors are very eager to hear any questions, concerns or thoughts you students might have regarding these books.

AGNES

Fire away. (laughs)

TEACHER

Well, I hope any questions will help the creative process and make the books better.

ALEXA

(raises hand)

Are there pictures?

TEACHER

No, not yet. Just the text.

HANK

Test?!

TEACHER

No, text. Text. Just the words. No illustrations.

ERIN

(raises her hand)

Do we say which book we like better?

TEACHER

No, no. Absolutely not. What we're looking –

AGNES

(Stands)

May I?

TEACHER

Oh yes. Go ahead.

AGNES

You see, right now my book is a B-plus. But I want my book to be an A-plus.

DAN
So you're looking for the answers.

AGNES
Yes, exactly. I am coming to you children for the answers. Good analogy.

DAN
My name isn't analogy.

TEACHER
No, she means you made a good comparison.

DAN
Oh.

AGNES
Yes, that's exactly what I meant.

BETH
I'd like to know your name.

DAN
Oh. It's Daniel.

AGNES
(very interested)
Daniel? Daniel, is it? I'm sorry, Daniel.

TEACHER
In any case, before we begin... do any of you children have questions?

MILLIE
I have a question for Mrs. Chicken.

AGNES
You want to know if that's my real name, don't you?

MILLIE
No. I was going to ask you if you had false teeth.

(The KIDS laugh. Though embarrassed, AGNES tries to laugh along.)

TEACHER

(Perturbed, she claps to restore order)

Millie, that wasn't a nice question.

MILLIE

Sorry.

AGNES

Oh, there's no problem. I have my own teeth. But I do have a bridge if that answers your question.

BUD

Does it come out?

AGNES

No, it doesn't.

DAN

Do you have an abscess?

AGNES

My, what precocious little children. Little cherubs. So wonderful.

DAN

Do you have an –

AGNES

No. No abscess.

(smiles broadly)

TEACHER

Please, children, we are here to discuss these new and exciting books.

ALEXA

(raises her hand)

Are there book covers?

AGNES

No, it's still early in the process to --

BETH

I have a cover.

AGNES

Oh?

(BETH takes a cardboard cover out of her bag. All the children stand with eagerness. A colorful "HOLLY HAS TWO NANNIES" cover emerges with a picture of a smiling little girl, two women and a man.)

TEACHER

That's lovely.

ERIN

Is that Holly?

(points to the little girl in the picture)

BETH

Yes.

HANK

And these are the two nannies?

(points to the two women in the picture.)

BETH

No. That's the mommy. That's one nanny.

(points to the man)

And that's the other nanny.

AGNES

Oh? Interesting family.

BETH

Yes. Isn't it?

HANK

When can you read it?

BETH

Well, soon. Right?

TEACHER

Yes. Are there any other questions?

(AGNES starts to raise her hand, then thinks better of it and lowers it.)

TEACHER

Okay then... Sit.

(The children sit.)

So here is Beth Matthias and her story, Holly has two nannies.

BETH

Do you want me to read the forward by Michael Moore?

TEACHER

Maybe later. I think we should get right to the story.

BETH

(reads)

Holly's daddy was far away
 Keeping peace in Iraq, they say.
 Haliburton' pawn on foreign soil
 Holly's daddy was securing oil.
 So mom drove Holly each day to school
 In an S-U-V that burned much fuel.

(AGNES giggles. All look to her.)

AGNES

Charming. Charming. Carry on.

BETH

Mommy had too much to do.
Working and cleaning all the day through.
A helper for Mommy was Holly's hope
Cause it seems that Mommy just could not cope.
She called the paper and placed an ad
To help her Mommy not be so sad.

(ERIN raises her hand)

BETH

Yes?

ERIN

Is Holly allowed to place an ad? Are little girls allowed to call newspapers and place ads?

AGNES

No, they're not.

BETH

No, you're right. But this is just a fun story.

MILLIE

Can I place an ad?

DAN

Yeah, but you have to pay.

TEACHER

No, no.

(to BETH)

Maybe the mother can place the ad? Maybe you can change it?

BETH

(A big smile, and silence)

Umm, I guess. Or maybe Holly's aunt or Grandma. I'll look at it.

AGNES

Ah, the rewriting process. It's almost like reinventing the wheel.

DAN

Reinventing the wheel? Are you really that old?

AGNES

No, no.

TEACHER

No, what she meant --

HANK

Oh, reinventing, right?

AGNES

Yes.

ERIN

That's copying.

TEACHER

No, it was just an expression.

AGNES

Yes, I meant to say that rewriting is very difficult. It's almost like writing the entire book a second time.

BUD

So why didn't you say that?

MILLIE

Are you really a writer?

AGNES

Yes, yes, little girl. I've written over thirty children's books, thank you very much, and... (calms herself, smiles through gritted teeth) I am delighted that you

are part of the writing process. (under her breath) Albeit, a very small part.
 (rights herself) Now then... (to BETH) Your Heather was making an
 unsupervised phone call. Carry on.

BETH

Yes... (reading) Many nannies had questions to ask.
 They called at all hours and took Heather to task.
 Were they required to cook, and what was the pay?
 What were their hours? And where would they stay?
 Was Heather mentally challenged? Must the nanny make beds?
 Was Heather in Special Olympics? And did she take meds?

ALEXA

(raises her hand)

In the Special Olympics, do they have the three legged race?

AGNES

Oh, that is just grotesque.

TEACHER

I think Alexa means the race where two people have one of their legs tied to the
 other person's.

AGNES

Well, if each has three legs, it would be a six legged race, wouldn't it? Three
 times two, right, Alexa?

ALEXA

What?

TEACHER

(closes her eyes, hold out a hand as if to say stop.)

Mrs... Mrs...

AGNES

Chicken.

TEACHER

Yes. You have never heard of a three legged race?

AGNES

(smiling)

It sounds like great fun.

(Teacher shakes her head in amazement.)

BETH

I'm just gonna... read on.

TEACHER

Yup.

BETH

What was she like? And was there a pet?
So Heather scanned her photo on the internet.

TEACHER

Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa. You can't have her posting photos on the internet.

BETH

It's fiction.

TEACHER

Still. You can't do that. Kids will copy that behavior.

BETH

I can add a disclaimer.

TEACHER

It's unconscionable. And how important is that line to your story, anyway? It doesn't even make sense. Was there a pet? Who cares if there's a pet!

BETH

(hurt)

Oh.

TEACHER

I don't usually interject, but this is children's safety.

BETH

Right. Well, it rhymed, so...

TEACHER

Right. With internet. So if you take that line out. You can take two lines out.

BETH

Two lines out? (flustered) And how would I replace them?

TEACHER

Maybe with a picture?

AGNES

Or a dancing chicken. That's what I do.

HANK

When are we gonna read your book?

AGNES

You want me to read mine, don't you?

(HANK nods. AGNES quickly hands him a ten dollar bill.)

HANK

Wow. Ten dollars.

AGNES

(quietly)

There's more than that if you play your cards right.

TEACHER

What is this? (takes the bill) A bribe?

AGNES

No, no, not a bribe. Maybe... a tip?

TEACHER
A tip?

AGNES
Actually, pizza for the class. Does everyone like pizza?

KIDS
Yeah!

TEACHER
Pizza for the class is a bit more than ten dollars.

AGNES
Okay,,, what about frozen pizza? The cheapest supermarket brand they sell? Eh?

(Tepid cheers)

TEACHER
Just take the dirty money back. (hands AGNES the bill, then TEACHER to herself...) This is so juvenile.

AGNES
(quietly to TEACHER)
She started it...(referring to BETH) ...with her book jacket and her fancy pants...

TEACHER
Why don't you take a time out?
(to BETH)
Miss Mathias, we're ready for your story.

BETH
(erasing)
Just one second.

TEACHER
The children are getting restless.

BETH
(crossing out text)

Well, it's so disjointed now... but, here goes nothing...

There were two nannies that Heather liked best.
She sent rejection notices to all the rest.

ALEXA

(to AGNES)

What's a rejection notice?

AGNES

Oh, it's a terrible terrible thing publishers do to some writers. Not me, or JK Rowling, mind you. But other writers that don't get published.

ERIN

JK Rowling was turned down by sixteen publishers.

AGNES

The poor dear. And now she's a multi-billionaire. I see your point.

BETH

Megan was clever and full of delights,
But she had another job and could only work nights.
Kevin was a chef at a restaurant, and nice as can be.
But he had to pack up his knives, and be out the door by three.

DAN

Oh, I get it. So Heather has one nanny in the day, and another at night.

BETH

Well, don't ruin it for everyone else.

ALEXA

But we know that's what's coming.

BETH

Yes, but it goes on for three more pages.

ERIN

But that's all denouement, right? I mean, once you've got to the climax...

TEACHER

Erin's been reading some Oscar Wilde.

AGNES

My goodness.

ERIN

I still haven't figured out why it's so important to be called Earnest.

BETH

So you're saying I should end the story here?

AGNES

(raising a hand)

Do we vote?

DAN

I wouldn't end the story here. I'd make a twist, like on C-S-I.
(stands, looks over Beth's shoulder)

BETH

But there is a twist already. Remember, back in the beginning of the story.

DAN

No. Another twist. Something that makes things more complicated.

ALEXA

(stands next to DAN)

Like maybe one of the nannies is offered another job, and –

ERIN

A job that pays more.

ALEXA

Right. But the nanny will stay only if... only if... only if...

What? BETH

I don't know. But something big. ALEXA

ERIN
(stands next to the other two.)
Only if Heather fires the other nanny?

Wow. BETH

Because the nannies don't like each other. HANK

The chef nanny can be very critical. DAN

Right. (writes feverishly) BETH

MILLIE
Always wanting things his way. And he criticizes how the other nanny makes
pancakes. And ruins all his pans.

Yes, yes. That's good. BETH

And does the father come home? HANK

Is this a fairy tale? MILLIE

I guess that would be no, then. HANK

BUD

But Heather likes the chef nanny better.

DAN

She can't like the chef nanny better. Then she would just say no to the girl nanny.

ERIN

She likes them both the same. They're both her friends.

BETH

Yes! It's a dilemma. Heather must choose. This is much, much better.

AGNES

Okay, is it my turn?

TEACHER

I guess so. (to students) Now, class, I know you will give Mrs. Chicken just as much attention as you did Miss Matthais.

HANK

More.

(She slaps a dollar into his hand. The standing
Students sit.)

TEACHER

Mrs. Chicken, can you begin your story?

AGNES

Yes, first, let me say that my cover will have a dancing chicken in the middle with a backward kick. Kind of like this... (raises her hands to her face, foot kicks back almost to her buttocks. She freezes this pose.) Get the idea?

MILLIE

Good God, yes.

BUD

Can you do that again?

AGNES
 What? The kick?

BUD
 Yes, please.

AGNES
 Oh no. (giggles) You don't want to –

BOYS
 Yes!

AGNES
 Well... (kicks, giggles, kicks again)

(The KIDS LAUGH.)

AGNES
 Okay, enough fun.

TEACHER
 (under her breath)
 I had a nice gig at a private school. But it was fifteen minutes out of my way.
 (hits her head)

AGNES
 A quick synopsis of my story... Andy Chicken works hard in the store by day.
 But at night, he goes to the disco... where he's the disco chicken.

BETH
 Ah, ah, ah, ah, staying alive, staying alive.

ERIN
 (to other girls)
 What's that?

ALEXA
 Grown ups are so weird.

