

Baby With The Bathwater
By Christopher Durang

Act II Scene 3

A desk and a chair. The Principal is seated.

She is dressed handsomely, but looks somewhat severe.

PRINCIPAL (*to intercom*): you can send Miss Pringle in now, Henry. (*Enter Miss Pringle, a sympathetic-looking teacher*). I love having a male secretary. It makes it all worthwhile. (*Into intercom*) Sharpen all the pencils please, Henry. Then check the coffee pot. Hello, Miss Pringle, how are you?

MISS PRINGLE: I'm fine Mrs. Willoughby, but I wanted to talk to you about Daisy Dingleberry.

PRINCIPAL: Oh yes, that peculiar child who's doing so well on the track team.

MISS PRINGLE: Yes, she runs very quickly, but I felt I should...

PRINCIPAL: Wait a moment, would you? (*Into intercom*) Oh, Henry, check if we have enough non-dairy creamer for the coffee, would you? Then I want you to go out and buy my husband a birthday present for me, I don't have time. Thank you, sweetie. (*Back to Pringle*) Now, I'm sorry, what were you saying?

MISS PRINGLE: Well, I'm worried about Daisy. She's doing very well in track, and some days she does well in her classes, and then some days she just stares, and then she's absent a lot.

PRINCIPAL: Yes. Uh huh. Uh huh. Yes, I see. Uh huh. Uh huh. Go on.

MISS PRINGLE: Well it's her summer essay, you know..."What I Did Last Summer"?

PRINCIPAL (*with great interest*) what did you do?

MISS PRINGLE: No, no, no, it's the *topic* of the essay: what you did last summer.

PRINCIPAL: Mr. Willoughby and I went to the New Jersey seashore. He was brought up there. It brings back fond memories of his childhood. Bouncing on his mother's knee. Being hugged, being kissed. Mmmmm. Mmmmmm. (*Makes kissing sounds, hugs herself; into intercom*) Henry, sweetie, I want you to buy my husband underwear. Pink. The bikini kind. Calvin Klein or something like that. Or you could use your "Ah Men" catalog if it wouldn't take too long. Mr. Willoughby is a medium. Thank you, Henry. (*To Pringle*) I'm sorry, what were you saying?

MISS PRINGLE: About Daisy's essay.

PRINCIPAL: What about it?

MISS PRINGLE: Well...

PRINCIPAL: Wait a moment, would you? (*To intercom*) Henry, I mean Mr. Willoughby is a medium *size*; I don't mean he holds séances. (*Laughs; to Pringle*) I didn't want there to be any misunderstanding. I don't think there was, but just in case. I myself am into black magic (*takes out a black candle. To intercom*) Henry, I have taken out a black candle and I am thinking of you (*to Pringle*) Do you have a match?

MISS PRINGLE: No, I'm sorry. About Daisy's essay.

PRINCIPAL: I'm all ears.

MISS PRINGLE: Well...

PRINCIPAL: Which is a figure of speech. As you can indeed see, I am a great deal more than just ears. I have a head, a neck, a trunk, a lower body, legs and feet. (*To intercom*) I have legs and feet Henry. I hope you're working quickly.

MISS PRINGLE: Pay attention to me! Focus your mind on what I'm saying! I do not have all day.

PRINCIPAL: Yes, I'm sorry, I will. You're right. Oh, I *admire* strong women. I've always been afraid I might actually be a lesbian, but I've never had any opportunity to experiment with that side of myself. You're not interested, are you? You're single. Perhaps you *are* a lesbian.

MISS PRINGLE: I'm not a lesbian, thank you, anyway.

PRINCIPAL: Neither am I. I just thought maybe I was. (*Into intercom*) Henry, you don't think I'm a lesbian, do you? (*Listens*) The intercom only works one way, it needs to be repaired. Of course, Henry's a mute anyway.

MISS PRINGLE: Mrs. Willoughby, please, put your hand over your mouth for a moment and don't say anything.

PRINCIPAL: I'm all ears (*puts her hand over her mouth*)

MISS PRINGLE: Good, thank you. I was disturbed by Daisy's essay. I want you to listen to it. "What I Did For My Summer Vacation." By Daisy Dingleberry. "Dark, dank rags. Wet, fetid, towels. A large German shepherd, its innards splashed across the windshield of a car. Is this a memory? Is it a dream? I am trapped, I am trapped, how to escape. Old people and children get discounts on buses, but still no one will ever kill me. How did I even learn to speak, it's amazing. I am a baked potato. I am a summer squash. I am a vegetable. I am an inanimate object who from time to time can run very quickly, but I am not really alive. Help, help, help. I am drowning, I am drowning, my lungs fill with the summer ocean, but still I do not die, this awful life goes on and on, can no one rescue me." (*Miss Pringle and Principal stare at one another*) What do you think I should do?

PRINCIPAL: I'd give her an A. I think it's very good. The style is good, it rambles a bit, but it's unexpected. It's sort of an intriguing combination of Donald Barthelme and Sesame Street. All that "I am a baked potato" stuff. I liked it.

MISS PRINGLE: Yes, but don't you think the child needs help?

PRINCIPAL: Well, a good editor would give her some pointers, granted, but I think she's a long way from publishing yet. I feel she should stay in school, keep working on her essays, the school track team needs her, there's no one who runs as fast. I think this is all premature, Miss Pringle.

MISS PRINGLE: I feel she should see the school psychologist.

PRINCIPAL: I am the school psychologist.

MISS PRINGLE: What happened to Mr. Byers?

PRINCIPAL: I fired him. I thought a woman would be better for the job.

MISS PRINGLE: But do you have a degree in psychology?

PRINCIPAL: I imagine I do. I can have Henry check if you insist. Are you sure you're not a lesbian? I think you're too forceful, it's unfeminine. And I think you're picking on this poor child. She shows signs of promising creativity, and first you try to force her into premature publishing, and now you want to send her to some awful headshrinker who'll rob her of all her creativity in the name of some awful God of normalcy. Well, MISS PRINGLE, here's what I have to say to you: I will not let you rob Daisy Dingleberry of her creativity, she will not see a psychologist as long as she is in this school, and you are hereby fired from your position as teacher in this school. Good day! (*To intercom*) Henry, come remove Miss Pringle bodily from my office, sweetie, would you?

MISS PRINGLE: No need to do that. I can see myself out. Let me just say that I think you are insane, and I am sorry you are in a position of power.

PRINCIPAL: Yes, but I *am* in a position of power! (*To intercom*) Aren't I, Henry? Now get out of here before I start to become violent.

MISS PRINGLE: I am sorry you will not let me help this child.

PRINCIPAL: Help this child! She may be the next Virginia Woolf, the next Sylvia Plath.

MISS PRINGLE: Dead, you mean.

PRINCIPAL: (*screams*) Who cares if she's dead as long as she publishes? Now, get out of here!