

B.B.B.B. (B.B.B.B.) (b.b.b.b) (B. B. B. B.)...

By Barbara **B**latner

WHY I LIKE IT: *Drama Editor JANET EHRLICH COLSON writes... Written as “a short Zoom or stage play”, Barbara Blatner’s B.B.B.B packs it in, touching on the foibles of relationships, parenting, conscious living, gender-bending, climate change, and more! Not to mention that there’s this COVID thing going on... Fortunately, an end to the collective nightmare is in sight (please!) and we have Barbara Blatner’s sharp play to help us get back on track. B.B.B.B. offers a radical approach to becoming better parents (and better people) that involves acquiring new brains created by a child genius who dreams of sustainability and eating kale. Here’s to the future generation (even if you just had them to add to the carbon footprint)! I love this play on so many levels. I love that the parental banter is so accurately precious, but noxious at the same time. I love that the possibility of gender neutral casting allows the play to both lean into and against stereotype. I love that these nit-picky nose-picking characters who are turned on by aerosol pollutants are so grievously relatable. Laughter is surely the key to building back better in this au courant Ozzie and Harriet (or Ozzie and Ozzie as the case may be) playlet. Format and spacing is playwright’s own.*

Here’s an excerpt:

ALEX

Dearest, you *really* wanna do ideological battle with your child over burger?

BOBBY

You fight with her about your SUV.

ALEX

I love that fat car. She won’t admit she loves sleeping in the back of it.

BOBBY

I love looking down at little people in little cars below. I love it helplessly.

ALEX

So what if it pigs out on gas.

BOBBY

Thank god you stood firm and told her *no* to heating this house with solar panels.

B.B.B.B.

A short Zoom or stage play

by Barbara Blatner

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Characters

BOBBY – parent, any gender, partnered with ALEX

ALEX – parent, any gender, partnered with BOBBY

GEORGE – BOBBY and ALEX's daughter, 7 years old, can be played by an actor of any age

BOBBY, in the bedroom, obsesses about what to wear to her/his/their anniversary lunch happening very soon at BOBBY's mother's house. Clothes are strewn all over the room, bed and floor, and s/he/they will pull more and more clothes out of the closet to try. In the room is a window through which ALEX will later climb.

ALEX, in the bathroom, in a Zoom closeup, is dressed for the party in a nice winter shirt and pants, trims his/her/their ear hairs with a nose hair implement at the mirror.

GEORGE is in her room, behind closed doors. Her room has two doors - a main door accessible to BOBBY in the bedroom, a door accessible to ALEX in the bathroom)

| | |
|--|-------|
| Knock again. | BOBBY |
| Why don't you. | ALEX |
| I'm getting dressed. What are <i>you</i> doing? | BOBBY |
| Trimming ----- ear hairs. | ALEX |
| Is that important right now, my love? | BOBBY |
| "Sir, your nose is....hmm....it is...very big." | ALEX |
| What?! | BOBBY |
| Cyrano de Bergerac. "It's a rock, it's a peak, it's a cape... No, not a cape, it's a peninsula!" And yet, "A large nose is the mark of a witty, courteous, affable, generous and liberal man." | ALEX |
| | BOBBY |

Yes you're all those things, darling. But you'll be wearing a mask, no one will notice the glories of your nose.

ALEX

I'm not wearing a mask to this party. I'm done with masks.

BOBBY

I'm so sick of masks. I won't wear one either.

ALEX

She didn't peep when I banged on *this* door. Can you lure her out to get her - whitish - vegan lunch together to take to your mother's?

BOBBY

I say: You want a burger, don't molest plants into burger shape and call it burger. Eat a burger, made of c-o-w.

ALEX

Dearest, you *really* wanna do ideological battle with your child over burger?

BOBBY

You fight with her about your SUV.

ALEX

I *love* that fat car. She won't admit she loves sleeping in the back of it.

BOBBY

I love looking down at little people in little cars below. I love it helplessly.

ALEX

So what if it pigs out on gas.

BOBBY

Thank god you stood firm and told her *no* to heating this house with solar panels.

ALEX

This climate crisis thing is *so* down the road, Bobby. We'll never get fires like out West.

(Pulls a nose hair too hard, holds up nose hair implement)

Ow!! This damn thing!

(ALEX knocks on GEORGE's bathroom door, shouts to GEORGE:)

ALEX continued

We're leaving for Granma Noni's in— *(looking mistakenly at nose hair implement, as if it's a cell phone, then picking up and looking at phone)* – eight minutes! You don't want to make us late for our own anniversary lunch, do you?

BOBBY

Tell her her grandmother will be agitated if we're late! And she'll-

ALEX

(Quick Beat. GEORGE is talking, we can't understand HER)

No, Noni doesn't recycle and has plastic everything in her house, she's *old*, honey. You *know* she'll be agitated if we're late and sit by her window and scream at birds! What?!

(Quick beat. GEORGE is talking)

We *know* you hate grandma screaming at innocent birds, so we can't be late! Open up!

(ALEX jiggles door knob. We hear music in GEORGE's room, and maybe she drops something. ALEX opens door suddenly- it wasn't locked. Revelation of GEORGE's space: A kid's room piled high with strange contraptions she's building. A blast from HER room of a Beethoven symphony, before we see HER hand shut the door in ALEX's face, then hear her lock it. ALEX returns to mirror, tweezes nose hairs with nose hair implement)

ALEX continued

Let George do her thing five more minutes.

(Considering nose hair implement)

Is this a torture instrument?

(We hear GEORGE singing along loudly with the Beethoven)

BOBBY

(Shouting to GEORGE, continuing with clothes, etc.)

What *are* you doing in there, offspring?!

(We hear GEORGE humming more loudly)

ALEX

O to have off-sprung – off-sprung? a genius kid who builds all sorts of contraptions.

BOBBY

Did I tell you I'm getting a license plate that says "my child is a genius," for the SUV?

ALEX

Put her IQ on it, it's flashier.

BOBBY

What did Smile-a-lot say her IQ was?

ALEX

Smile-a-lot...?

BOBBY

Her science and tech teacher.

ALEX

Why do you call him Smile-a-lot? He never smiled at *me*.

BOBBY

He *smote* me with smiles, pre-COVID, of course.

ALEX

Does he have the hots for you?

(Pulls a nose hair too hard, throws nose hair implement on floor)

Damn!

BOBBY

I dunno. Maybe.

ALEX

Wait. Do you - return his hots?

BOBBY

I like that he said George was a genius. Who eats tempeh dogs and makes us use ugly environmental light bulbs and-

ALEX

You're not answering me: do you return his hots?!

(ALEX removes hair from nose hair implement. BOBBY goes to, knocks on

GEORGE

BOBBY

Time to get your kale wrap, kale chips and kale soda together pronto!! We are leaving for the party at Noni's, you hear me? George, do you hear me?!

(Beat. We hear movement in GEORGE's room. To ALEX:)

She's getting up.

(We hear this door locking)

ALEX

Bobby, will you answer me?!

BOBBY

She locked *this* door! Has she *ever* locked herself in her room before?! We *are* gonna be late for Noni's!

ALEX

Bobby—

BOBBY

Done with your ears?

ALEX

I'm weeding my nose now, but this damn thing- ! Bobby!

BOBBY

Alex, go outside, go to her window and see what's going on.

ALEX

Why can't you answer?!

BOBBY

I'm getting dressed!

ALEX

You've been getting dressed for two weeks! Do you have-?!

BOBBY

(Breaking frame, holding up outfit, asking "audience":)

I gotta make a decision! How 'bout - this one? Is this good? Yeah? Okay, I'm goin' with it!

(BOBBY finally gets dressed. ALEX dresses in heavy winter coat, hat, gloves, etc.)

ALEX

Do-you-have-the-hots-for-Smile-a-lot?!

BOBBY

Geez Louise, what do *you* think?

ALEX

You – don't...? You're sure. You're sure?!

BOBBY

The guy's rabid about aerosol pollution! Please *please* go outside, look in her window?!

ALEX

(Relieved)

Getting on my jacket and hat and scarf and gloves and socks and boots and-

BOBBY

Why does everything seem slowed down like in a dream where I can't get anywhere?

(ALEX EXITS to the frigid winter outside. We hear winds raging and whistling when HE opens the door)

ALEX

Into the New Jersey Arctic!

(ALEX EXITS, plunging into the snow and cold)

BOBBY

(Finishing dressing, picks up cell phone, calls mother)

Mom, we're gonna be a little late. No everything's fine, it's just that George is – *(Beat)* Yes she wants to be called George, you should *know* that by - what?! You're telling sparrows to "go to hell"?! Calm down, will you? We'll be there – in twenty minutes. Did you just call a cardinal a "bastard"?! Mom, I'm gonna take away those bird feeders I got you. *(Beat)* No, they don't understand what you're saying, but-- yes it upsets George, you gotta *not* be doing it when we get there. Get away from that window and check the bundt! *(Beat)* The *bundt*, the cake with the hole! No, don't worry about the hole, worry about not burning the bundt! We'll be there soon, just – get away from that window!

(Hangs up)

(ALEX ENTERS through the bedroom window, breathing hard, breathing out steam from the cold, shivering and panting. BOBBY watches him)

BOBBY

What the hell, Alex?

ALEX

(Panting, entering through the window)

I locked myself out! She's making contraptions. I trudged through knee-deep snow to her window and spied on her. She looked up. I tell you, Bobby, when people *gaze* in your direction, in this case, when I gazed in *her* direction, *at* her, she felt it and looked up. She *felt* it, Bobby.

BOBBY

Omigod, is that important now?! We gotta get moving!

ALEX

She got up with a frowny face and closed the blinds on me! She pushed me away, I feel hurt!

(ALEX throws off coat onto floor, takes off and throws down gloves, hat, etc., will strip down to briefs/underwear)

BOBBY

Don't take anything off, we're about to gotta go!

ALEX

She closed the shade on me, Bobby, it was upsetting! This coat is boiling!

(BOBBY frantically gathers stuff to take to party, will get and put on winter coat and clothing, etc.)

BOBBY

What do we do about her, Alex?!

ALEX

Leave her here?

BOBBY

She's seven!

ALEX

We ditch the party? What'll we miss? Your mother screaming her mouth dry at crows?!

BOBBY

It's *our* party, for *our*- O god, what are you doing in your underwear?! This is one of those awful slowed-down dreams!

ALEX

My party shirt's all sweaty! I can't stand it!

(ALEX looks for a new shirt to wear, will eventually put one on and start dressing again.

BOBBY goes to GEORGE's door:)

BOBBY

Get out here and get your food immediately, or your dad will come in through the window and pull you out and take you to the party where you'll eat Noni's un-organic pot roast with plastic silverware and-! What?!

(Quick Beat)

Better her yelling at blue jays than at you, right?! George! You want us to love *all* creatures, every last creature on this earth! Your parents who want to celebrate their 10th anniversary are also creatures, so open this door immediately!

ALEX

You're a swamp creature, Bobby! Ha ha, right? Kinda disorganized, kinda – crawly? I'm – a tundra creature. Clean and cold.

BOBBY

What? Are you insulting me, Alex?

ALEX

What? Nooooo, I'm just - wondering outloud if – what kind of swamp creature you are. Definitely from the deep dark slimy depths and-

BOBBY

You're insulting me!

ALEX

I am not! I adore you!

BOBBY

You insult me like at an angle, Alex, like you did when we met ten years ago, then deny you're doing it! Christ, time *is* going backwards here!

ALEX

You're over the top, like *you* were ten years ago!

BOBBY

You're *still* insulting me and denying you're-!

ALEX

(Agitated, looking for shirt)

I'm looking for a clean shirt!

BOBBY

Happy anniversary, jerk!

ALEX

Happy anniversary, jerk, too! 'Too' or 'two'? Jerk number two or jerk in addition?!

(Doubles over in laughter)

BOBBY

Screw you! Just-

(Door opens, GEORGE emerges, holding two items she has built)

GEORGE

(Very excited)

Look look look Mommy daddy! *(or daddy daddy! etc.)* I made something *awesome* for you two for your anniversary! I got the idea from Mr Smile-a-lot's class, and and and and from TV! Mommy daddy *(or daddy daddy! etc.)*, your brains don't work right, your brains are old and worn out and you know they keep saying on TV, um, "Build Back Better" right?! for when nobody's sick anymore?! But I did it when everyone still has to stay inside, I worked all night in my room! I call these *(showing what's she's built)*, um um: BBBB. No! B.B.B.B., with periods between each B! It stands for Build - Back - Better - Brains! I built you – tada! new brains! Granma Noni's brain's too old to be fixed but *yours* can be! Put them in, do it before we go, you'll be able to deal with Granma better and and and protect the birds and make everything better! Mommy daddy *(or daddy daddy! etc.)*, here are your new brains!

(ALEX, BOBBY express....something on their faces.....before...)

LIGHTS OUT)

END OF PLAY

THE PLAYWRIGHT SPEAKS:

I wrote B.B.B.B. in response to a prompt - "build back better" - given by the theater I work with, New Circle Company in Manhattan. What could we build back better than our own brains, I wondered sardonically. And so I created a couple cavalier about environmental issues who are taken to task by their seven-year-old daughter George, a genius girl who builds them new brains for their anniversary present so that they can think better about the world they live in. I wrote the play for Zoom, using as well as I could the limitations and perks of the small screen. Alex, tweezing nose hairs, we see up close; Bobby, trying on one outfit after another for her anniversary lunch, suddenly asks the viewer how they like a particular outfit. The absurdity of the play borrows something from Ionesco and other absurdist guys, and I tried to quicken the dialogue and charge it with ridiculousness, to counter the weight of the topic.

AUTHOR'S BIO:

BARBARA BLATNER is a playwright, poet and composer. Her Zoom play SHE CAME IN THE DOOR was produced by New Circle Theatre Company, Scribe Stages, and Hong Kong's Aurora Theatre. LIGHT was featured in the New Play Development Workshop at the 2020 Theatre in Higher Education Conference. TWO SISTERS, published in *Synkroniciti*, will

be produced online by Spark Creative Works and featured at the Inge Play Festival 2021. Three monologues from full-length scripts will be published by Applause Books. YEARS OF SKY was produced by Scripts Up! at the 59E59 Theatres and was read at the Great Plains Theatre Conference. A monologue from YEARS OF SKY was published in *Best Men's Monologues of 2019*. NO STAR SHINES SHARPER, was produced for radio by New Voices/Public Media Foundation, published by Baker's Plays, aired repeatedly on Christmas eve on NPR stations, and acquired by New York's Museum of TV and Radio.

GUERNICA 2003 appeared in the American Globe Theatre's 15-minute Play Festival, GRASSY KNOLL in New York's Turnip Theatre Short Play Festival, the First Annual Boston Theatre Marathon and was published in Baker's Plays anthology of plays selected from that event. SHADOW PLAY received a workshop production in the Cleveland Public Theatre's 1993 New Plays Festival. Barbara's adaptation of Tadeusz Borowski's THIS WAY FOR THE GAS, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN was commissioned by New Voices and staged at the Boston Public Library. THE CHOICE, a video about childbearing, was shown in the International Women's Video Festival. Early versions of CLEARING and WHITE ASHES were Finalists in the O'Neill Playwrights Contest, POSTURES was staged by the Capital Repertory Company, and THE FAIR was produced by the Albany Playwrights' Workshop which she co-founded. New York Quarterly Books published Barbara's two poetry collections, THE STILL POSITION (2010) and LIVING WITH YOU (2012). Poetry, fiction and reviews have appeared in *Beloved on this Earth* (anthology), *Heliotrope*, *House Organ*, *Poetry Northwest*, *The New York Quarterly*, *Lift*, *Apalachee Quarterly*, *13th Moon*, and others.

Ms. Blatner is a Senior Lecturer in Writing at Yeshiva University. She has been a fellow at many residencies, including Tyrone Guthrie Center, Blue Mountain Center, Banff Colony, Ragdale, Virginia Center for the Arts, Jentel Foundation, HBMG Foundation's National Playwrights Retreat and La Mama Umbria International Playwrights Retreat.

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NPX link: <https://newplayexchange.org/users/3713/barbara-blatner>