

Bottle Baby

by Lindsay Price

Characters

BEEB Recovering alcoholic. Just starting college. One year sober.

ALICE High school senior. Ordinary girl. Walks with a slight limp.

Setting

A kitchen. All you need is table and two chairs.

The lights come up on BEEB sitting at a kitchen table. She stares at a bottle of tequila. It's as if she's hypnotized. From offstage there is the sound of a door slam.

ALICE: (offstage) Beeb!

BEEB does not react.

ALICE: (offstage) Beeb! Bee Bee! Where are you?

BEEB starts as if just hearing her name called. She looks around.

ALICE: (offstage) Anybody home?

BEEB puts her hand on the bottle as if not knowing whether to move it or hide it. ALICE enters but stays on the edge of the space. She doesn't see the bottle.

ALICE: There you are. Didn't you hear me?

ALICE dumps her backpack and immediately exits again. During the following BEEB takes the crumpled paper bag the tequila came in, smooths it out and puts it on the bottle. She also takes the cap she's been wearing and puts that on top of the paper bag. She moves slowly, as if underwater.

ALICE: (offstage) You will never guess what happened today. I had the best day. A+ on my English test, thank you very much. It's about time. That rat bag eggplant is finally acknowledging I'm working my ass off. And Brittany Anderson came to school with this absolutely hideous dye job. (She reappears at the edge of the stage for a second.) She kept saying it was done at some top salon and she paid so much for it and she is so suing. (she exits again) But

I think she did it herself and she screwed it up. It looks so bad. Orange. She's a carrot top. You want something? And, and, and – David Hoss nodded in my general direction today. He nodded and he said “hey.”

ALICE re-enters with a couple of sodas and a bag of cookies. She sits with BEEB. ALICE walks with a slight limp.

ALICE: I know, I know, not earth-shattering but he definitely nodded at me and Sharon totally... (She sees the bottle and stops suddenly.) What's that?

BEEB: I didn't hide it very well.

ALICE takes off the cap and the paper bag to reveal the tequila.

ALICE: Did you go to class this afternoon?

BEEB: It's not open.

ALICE: Did you go to class?

BEEB: I've been staring at it all afternoon. Watching the light through it.

ALICE: Did you—

BEEB: I was going to go.

ALICE: Beeb...

BEEB: I had my bag and my car keys. I got in the car. I was planning to go. I was driving and it was fine but then... I should have turned left. I missed the turn and I... I don't know... All of a sudden, I'm in. I'm out. I'm here. All afternoon. I wasn't thinking.

ALICE: You have to call your person, your – Steve.

BEEB: I tried. (she picks up her cellphone from the table and stares at it) Something's up with his phone.

ALICE: (grabbing the cellphone) So call again.

She looks at the phone, presses the re-dial button and waits. She gets nothing.

BEEB: Maybe today's the day he volunteers at the General. They don't let you use cellphones in hospitals.

ALICE: *(she's studying the phone, looking for a number)* I thought he was supposed to be available all the time.

BEEB: It's been a year.

ALICE: Why don't you have Dad's number? *(she exits)*

BEEB: *(she sighs and rests her head on the table)* I wasn't thinking. I think that's why I've been so tired lately. All the thinking I have to do. I have to think twenty-four hours a day. If I wake up in the middle of the night, the first thing I have to do is think so I don't just... *(she gestures vaguely)* do something without thinking.

ALICE re-enters with an open address book in one hand. She's just finished dialling a number.

ALICE: *(on phone)* Marilyn this is Alice.

BEEB: *(sitting up)* I didn't open it.

ALICE: *(on phone)* I need – I'm fine. I – school's fine.

BEEB: *(she puts her head back on the table)* I'm not going to.

ALICE: *(on phone)* No, really. She – *(she looks at BEEB)*

BEEB: I'm not going to. I just need it... around.

ALICE: *(on phone)* Is my dad there? It's an emergency.

BEEB: It's not an emergency.

ALICE: *(on phone)* It's sort of an emergency.

BEEB: It's not in me. It's just close by.

ALICE: *(on phone)* Do you know when he'll be back?

BEEB: He's at that meeting in Phillips. He won't be back till dinner.

ALICE: Oh. Right. *(on phone)* If you hear from him, will you tell him to call home? Thanks.

She hangs up and paces. BEEB stares at the bottle.

BEEB: Life is smooth and easy when you don't have to think. It just whooshes along.

ALICE: *(to herself)* I don't know what to do.

BEEB: Don't turn left and a bottle of tequila lands in your lap. Whoosh.

ALICE: I thought you weren't carrying money around so "things" wouldn't fall in your lap. Where'd you get it?

BEEB: Do you want a cookie?

ALICE: Are you drunk?

BEEB: I'm not going to drink. I don't want to. Not badly.

ALICE: Where'd you get the money?

BEEB: Your hidden stash isn't that hidden.

ALICE: It's starting again.

BEEB: It's not! I'm not, I swear Al, I'm not.

ALICE: You planned this. You knew Steve wasn't going to be available. You knew Dad was going out of town.

BEEB: That's not it at all.

ALICE: You stole my money!

BEEB: *(with a sigh, apologetic)* I couldn't help it. You shouldn't hide stuff in your underwear drawer. That's the first place everybody looks.

ALICE stands staring for a moment. She then grabs for the bottle. For the first time BEEB moves quickly. She clamps her hand on top of ALICE's.

BEEB: What are you doing?

ALICE: Throwing it out.

BEEB: No.

ALICE: You just said you weren't going to drink.

BEEB wrestles the bottle from ALICE and cradles it in her arms.

BEEB: I know.

ALICE: So you don't need it and if you don't need it –

BEEB: I need it.

ALICE: What for?

BEEB: I need to hold on to something.

ALICE: So hold on to a football, or a stuffed animal or –

BEEB: *(interrupting)* I heard from Mom today.

ALICE: What?

BEEB: I heard from Mom.

ALICE: That's great! You see I was right, you just needed to give her more time.

BEEB pulls out a letter from her pocket and slides it across the table. She goes back to cradling the bottle.

ALICE: What's this?

BEEB: Read it. It was delivered this morning.

ALICE: Who's Bergman and Lehr?

BEEB: Aaron Bergman is mom's lawyer.

ALICE: I don't understand.

BEEB: Read it.

ALICE: *(reading)* Dear Ms. Millay. I am writing to acknowledge your phone message of May 13, 2011 *(current year)* to my client Adrienne Laxton. At this time Ms. Laxton is not prepared to consent to your request for a meeting. Furthermore – *(she stops reading)* What is this?

BEEB: This is a fancy way of saying “Don't call me, I'll call you when hell freezes over.”

ALICE: I don't believe it.

BEEB: She doesn't want to see me. She doesn't want anything to do with me.

ALICE: She told me you called. She – last weekend. She didn't seem angry or anything. Why would she do it like this?

BEEB: I think she's still angry.

ALICE: But she – do you want a cookie?

BEEB: Sure.

ALICE gets a cookie for both of them.

ALICE: You'd never guess. The lawn's recovered.

BEEB: I just wanted to tell her how I'm doing. Tell her about school.

ALICE: She can't stay mad forever.

BEEB: She's so mad, she has other people writing me, writing me letters.

BEEB holds the bottle even closer.

ALICE: Do you have to do that?

BEEB: What?

ALICE: Cradle the bottle.

BEEB: Yes.

ALICE: But you're not going to drink.

BEEB: I'm not going to throw a year down the toilet. I'm not. I know I'm not.

ALICE: I'm going to try Steve again. *(she dials the phone but gets nothing)*

BEEB: I'm better now. I'm better.

ALICE: *(hanging up phone)* Shoot.

BEEB: What if she never forgives me?

ALICE: I forgave you. Dad forgave you. You totalled his car and he forgave you. And I – don't you think it's kind of huge that I forgave you?

BEEB: I thought she'd come around. She'd see – she'd be happy I put my life back together.

ALICE: Maybe she's not happy you put your life back together.

BEEB: But why? Why can't she be happy? I exploded everything to bits and I put the pieces back together. I've been working so hard. I –

ALICE: *(she's had enough)* !! !! !! !! Maybe this not about you! Maybe everything is not about you! *(pause)* I'm sorry. I didn't mean to shout. I have a headache. I can't talk to you when you're holding on to that bottle for dear life. It's scary.

BEEB: Ok. *(she puts the bottle on the table)*

ALICE: (*she sighs*) You've been doing so well.

BEEB: Maybe it's all just a sham.

ALICE: Don't say that.

BEEB: I have been sitting here starting at this bottle, my life jacket, thinking if I can just hold out till Alice gets home I won't drink. If I can just make it till then.

ALICE: (*to herself*) Just another life jacket.

BEEB: If I crack the bottle I'm done for, so all I have to do is focus on Alice and block out everything else; block out all the voices in my ear, everyone I used to know telling me to come out and play. But I didn't listen. I knew you'd come home and save me.

ALICE: (*rubbing her head*) I have a headache.

BEEB: What would I do without you?

ALICE: I guess you'd be passed out under the table right about now. Ha.

BEEB: That's not funny.

ALICE: This isn't the way it's supposed to go Beeb. I'm not supposed to save you. You're not supposed to rely on me. Lean on me. Who do I lean on?

BEEB: You don't need anyone.

ALICE: And why is that?

BEEB: You're the rock. The good one.

ALICE: (*mocking*) The good one. Isn't that great. Golly-gee-whizz, isn't that peachy keen.

BEEB: It's a compliment. I admire you.

ALICE: Well, I didn't ask you too, did I? Did I?

BEEB: I'd kill to be the good one.

ALICE: I hate it.

BEEB: Don't say that.

ALICE: I absolutely hate it.

BEEB: Poor you. It must be terrible being loved and adored.

ALICE: People don't love me. They barely see me. Particularly next to hurricane Barbara. When you're good and you dress in pretty clothes, and you're polite and nice and you get good grades, no one gives a crap about you. I can see their eyes gloss over and I can hear inside their heads: "Thank God. I don't have to worry about her. I don't have to think about her. Thank God she's quiet. Thank God she's quiet and smart and sane and pretty and nothing like her sister."

BEEB: You want to know what I see in people's eyes? Do you know what it's like to see distrust and disbelief and hate? I would kill to be barely noticed. I'm always noticed and I haven't done anything in a –

ALICE: A whole year. I know. What do you want, a medal?

BEEB: You bet I do. Particularly from someone who has no idea how bad life can be! You're in your own perfect little world where nothing goes wrong and the biggest problem is whether some guy said hi to you or not.

ALICE: Alice the good. Alice has no idea what it's like to be bad. That must be the way it is. Never mind, I learned from the master. Well, I learned from your mistakes. Your brilliant flashes of light. You pulled out a flask in English class. I have headaches.

BEEB: What are you talking about?

ALICE: (*very matter of fact*) I have terrible headaches. Everyone knows. I was in this "little" car accident a year ago. No one ever questions that I have a big bottle of aspirin in my backpack. And no one ever shakes the bottle. No one's ever wondered why there aren't any pills. How come I don't hear any pills? How come it sounds like liquid in there? How could that be? I had a cough syrup bottle for a while, liquid for liquid, but I thought, that's too easy. This past year has been the most fascinating experiment. I should have documented the whole thing for posterity. "How far can an Invisible Good Girl go before anyone pays attention?" What the hell do I have to do to get noticed in this town?

BEEB: I don't believe you.

ALICE: The funny thing is no one notices. No one cares. They see a good girl and that's what they believe. They see a bad girl and that's what they believe. Good ole, hell raising, car smashing, money stealing, amount to nothing, take her little sister for a joy ride on a bottle of Jack so she almost killed her, bad girl Beeb.

BEEB: I know you. I'd know if you were drinking. I'd know it.

ALICE: Ok. If you're right, I won't be able to handle a pull from that bottle.

BEEB: You're bluffing.

ALICE: Give me the bottle.

BEEB: That's enough!

ALICE: What are you afraid of? You're right aren't you?

BEEB takes the bottle and cracks the lid open. She slowly pushes the bottle across the table. ALICE wipes her mouth, tips up the bottle and takes a long pull. It's obvious she's done it before. BEEB stares at her. She starts to cry. She puts her head on the table.

ALICE: Who's the bottle baby now, huh Bee Bee? Who wears the crown? Who's the one who drinks her liquor straight from the bottle, no mix, no nothing and it's smooth like butter. You think you're the only one who sneaked drinks at Mom's? You think you're the only one who got Roger Thompson to buy you bottles? You think you're the only person in this house? This world? (*BEEB cries and ALICE watches her.*) Aw Beeb don't cry. You're not supposed to cry. How can I feel good about being bad if you cry?

BEEB: My fault. All my fault.

ALICE: Don't give yourself so much credit. I can screw up my life all on my own.

BEEB: But why? Why would you do that?

ALICE: I don't know. Because you did, I guess. Maybe.

BEEB: You've got everything ahead of you. You have everything.

ALICE: Maybe it's not the right kind of everything. (*pause*) We should get dinner ready. (*pause*) What are you going to do? Are you going to tell Dad on me? (*pause*) Beeb?

BEEB: I... you're right. I shouldn't... I'm not the only one in this house... I shouldn't be in this house... (*she stands*) I'll call Dad tonight, tell him not to worry.

ALICE: (*confused*) Where are you going?

BEEB: I'll pay you back the money. (*She picks up the bottle, holding it away from her, not cradling it.*) And I'll toss this down the sink.

ALICE: Where are you going?

BEEB: I've spent so much time staring at my skin... I should have noticed and I didn't see a damn thing. I'm sorry Alice. I'm so sorry.

BEEB exits. ALICE is alone. She stands frozen for a moment. She then runs to her backpack. She pulls out her aspirin bottle, and drinks from it. She holds the bottle close to her chest as if it is a comfort.

— THE END —