

SMOKE

TEN MINUTE PLAY

By Dan Bancroft

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SYNOPSIS: A dying man's love of cigarettes and Lauren Bacall.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(2 MEN)

BABY (m).....A once glamorous, dying drag queen.
Baby should be played with a hint of
past outrageousness, but with dignity.

STANLEY (m).....Baby's longtime companion.

SETTING

A hospital room. Baby is seated throughout, stage right. A framed photo of Baby dressed as a young woman, in the style of Lauren Bacall, sits at a side table, visible to the audience.

PROPERTIES

- One stuffed chair & ottoman, one side chair
- Side table
- Framed photo of Lauren Bacall
- Cigarette & Book of Matches/Lighter
- Optional - Hospital Bed/wheelchair
- Glamour Magazine
- Assorted Pill Cups
- Pitcher of water

AT RISE:

BABY is in her bathrobe, wearing a shoulder-length wig (Bacall-like), asleep in the chair as STANLEY enters carrying flowers (pink). He puts the flowers in a vase on the table, then walks to her side, looks at her, then kisses her gently. She opens her eyes, smiles, then begins to cough. After a moment, she catches her breath and takes his hand. He pulls the side chair close and sits.

BABY: You brought me flowers. What a sweetheart you are. They're beautiful!

STANLEY: You are beautiful. How did you sleep? You look—

BABY: Awful? That's because I feel awful. (*Coughs.*) Damn nurses, always fussing and poking. I keep telling them, "Just leave me alone and let me be," but no-o-o-o, that's not going to happen, is it? That's the last thing they'll do. (*Beat.*) Speaking of last things— (*She leans towards him and whispers.*) Did you bring me what I asked for, Stanley?

STANLEY: Baby, don't start again, please. You know damn well that's what put you here!

BABY: You put me here! (*Beat, as she regrets her accusation and continues, now trying to charm him.*) I know you brought it. You had to, didn't you? How can you deny a girl her last wish? (*Laughs, followed by another coughing spasm.*) C'mon, Stanley, what have you got in your pocket?

STANLEY: Maybe I'm just happy to see you!

BABY: Ooh, I haven't heard a line like that in ages. You are a devil, you are! But don't change the subject, Stanley.

STANLEY: Forget it. Stop asking. It'll kill you.

BABY: Oh, don't be so dramatic. Look at me. A couple of days or weeks... It's not going to make a difference.

STANLEY: It will to me.

BABY: Not to me. (*Beat, she looks at him then away. She picks up the photo.*) You used to say I looked like Bacall. They lit up the screen in that movie where they first met— (*Coughs.*)

STANLEY: "To Have and Have Not."

BABY: That's the one. And I mean lighting it up. They were smoking!
It was better than sex! (*Coughs.*) She was beautiful! He wasn't bad either. Remember how she'd hold that cigarette? Just hold it like she was caressing him. She'd look at him, he'd look at her. You could feel them heating up, right there on the screen. Then he'd light a match and come closer and closer. You remember that, don't you?

STANLEY: Oh yes, Baby, I remember.

BABY: Remember when we felt that way?

STANLEY: There was nothing like it. (*Beat.*) And do you remember what happened to them?

BABY: They fell for each other, hard. She was barely 20, and he left his wife for her! They felt it, alright. No one ever smoked liked they did. (*Beat.*) She brushed by me once.

STANLEY: Did she? (*He's humoring her, having heard the story hundreds of times, and their exchange quickens.*)

BABY: (*Ignoring him. She's not even aware of him - she is seeing it and she's telling this story - to her fans.*) It was at the Stork Club in New York City. It was—

STANLEY AND BABY: (*Together.*)—the place to see and be seen. (*He laughs. She's momentarily annoyed.*)

BABY: All of a sudden there was a commotion at the front door. Well, there were all kinds of celebrities there, so I knew this had to be someone special.

STANLEY: And it was.

BABY: It was them. Bogie and Bacall. She brushed my arm. They'd just made the movie—

STANLEY: "To Have and Have Not."

BABY: (*Ignoring him.*) They were SO in love! I could feel it across the room! I tried not to stare, but after all, she was just the most gorgeous woman in the world. And then, she leaned over and he lit her cigarette—

STANLEY: I love this part!

BABY: (*Continues, ignoring him, she's in the memory.*) Time stood still. We all watched and waited as they looked into each other's eyes—

STANLEY: I know.

BABY: Where was I? (*Confused.*)

STANLEY: Looking into each other's—

BABY: Eyes, yes. Then she leaned in toward him and closed her eyes. When he lit her cigarette, I swear, the only sound you could hear in that dining room was the match being struck and then her breathing in, taking that first, long, puff of smoke. It was...divine! (*Long beat. As she comes out of the dream, she looks around, trying to focus and orient herself.*)

STANLEY: He died of throat cancer. (*He hands her a piece of licorice/lollipop; something to distract her instead of the cigarette she wants. She takes it, looks at him, disgusted, and throws it across the room.*)

BABY: You're an old fart! Sometimes I wonder what I ever saw in you! I could have had anyone.

STANLEY: And you chose me.

BABY: What was I thinking? (*Coughing.*) Stanley, this is something I can't do by myself. You know that. Look at me. (*Beat.*) Now tell me what you see.

STANLEY: My Baby. As beautiful as ever—

BABY: You're either blind or crazy!

STANLEY: And I see someone who wants to leave me.

BABY: Wah-wah-wah. No, what you see is a decrepit creature who can't get out of her chair without help, whose hands shake so much she can't hold a glass of water, let alone light a cigarette! (*Beat.*) You know, maybe this isn't about leaving you, it's about ME, making decisions about my life. Isn't that worth something? Doesn't that matter?

STANLEY: You were always the strong one! You always knew what you wanted.

BABY: I didn't ask for this. Not any of it. (*She pulls off her wig, shows him her hairless scalp under the wig.*) Look at me! I don't get to make a lot of decisions these days, in case you haven't noticed. They come in, they wash me, they dress me, some days they put me in this chair. Isn't life grand? (*Coughs.*) I need your help. You get that, don't you?

STANLEY: Let's talk about something else for a while, okay? I'm not ready... Just give me a little more time...

BABY: That's what I don't have - time! (*Throws the magazine, struggles to raise herself from the chair, then collapses, leans her head back and sighs, fusses with her wig.*) Okay, sure, what do you want to talk about? Do you want to hear about my day, Stanley? My days, I should say. There's very little difference, you know, but sometimes... Why, I think it was yesterday, this very nice girl came in and read to me...until I fell asleep, that is. Oh, I wish I could remember the name of the book, you might like it—

STANLEY: Stop it! Just stop!

BABY: Okay, Stanley, you tell me. What do you want to talk about? How about how you brought me here, to this place? Signed me in so they can fill me with morphine. Look at me, Stanley, look what they've done to me! (*Beat.*) Is that what you want to talk about?

STANLEY: I did it for you, Baby. You were sick— (*He starts to help her replace the wig.*)

BABY: You did it for you, Stanley. I'm still dying. Only now I've got no say in it, and you get to go home. (*They've begun to escalate their lines, overlapping each other.*)

STANLEY: I didn't want to lose you! You were sick. I couldn't take care of you.

BABY: Did you ask me first? Did you even think to ask before you took away everything!

STANLEY: I was scared. You needed better—

BABY: Spare me. I needed someone who cared enough to give me what I need. (*Grabs STANLEY's hand. Short beat.*)

BABY: Just tell me, did you bring me that cigarette?

STANLEY: You're crazy, you know that? This—this is crazy, I don't know why I'm doing this! (*He takes the cigarette out of his pocket, then hesitates and puts it down on the table, near the photo, just out of BABY's reach.*)

BABY: Ah, that's my Stanley. I knew you'd come through!

STANLEY: A minute ago I was your worst enemy. What am I now?

BABY: Oh, Stanley, you are my sweetie pie. (*She gives him her best Bacall, a long, sultry look, and begins to sing.*) "Was I gay/'Til today/Now he's gone/And we're through/Am I Blue?"

STANLEY: Cut it out, will you?

BABY: What's the matter, Stanley, am I too much woman for you?

STANLEY: You're impossible, is what you are.

BABY: You bet. Now, come closer, hold me. (*STANLEY comes over and wraps his arms around BABY, just for a moment, then she begins coughing violently.*)

STANLEY: Baby! (*She's gasping for breath.*) Nurse! (*She waves him off.*)

BABY: I'm...alright. Just – give – me – a – minute. (*Her breathing slowly returns to normal.*) There, that's better. Now, hand me that cigarette.

STANLEY: You've got to be kidding!

BABY: I'm 100% serious, Stanley. Now give it to me. You brought it. Why bring it if you're not going to give it to me?

STANLEY: (*He picks up the cigarette, looks at it, then hands it to her.*) There you go. Are you happy now? Do you— (*Unsaid, "realize what it is you're doing?"*)

BABY: Shut up, Stanley, you're ruining the moment! (*She takes the cigarette, then closes her eyes as she brings it to her face, smells it, rubs it gently against her cheek, then slowly and sensually, places it between her lips and opens her eyes.*)

STANLEY: Don't leave me.

BABY: I'm not going anywhere, sweetie-pie, I'm right here. (*She looks directly at him, lets her hair fall across her face, Bacall-like, and lowers her voice to a sultry level.*) How do I look? (*Lights dim. STANLEY leans toward her. Single spot as he strikes a match/clicks open the lighter and holds it to her cigarette. We see the puff of smoke.*)

BLACKOUT.

THE END