

Smoke Gets In Your Eyes (conclusion)

Written by Smoke Signals

Saturday, 01 November 2014 02:24 - Last Updated Saturday, 01 November 2014 03:10

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by Freida Theant

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Eleanor fled the great ball room of Stoppard Hall, parting the milling throng; jostling party goers as she escaped. That was, until she herself was brought up short by a familiar face.

He raised his gloved hand to hail her, "Eleanor, so glad I caught you!"

This most distinguished man, had he had worn a top hat, he could have sat for the Monopoly millionaire's image, with his tuxedo and cummerbund. Silver haired, walrus mustache, balding with a visible paunch, in his late sixties, he greeted her warmly, and moved towards her briskly with open arms. "Eleanor! Chaz! You two haven't done your piece yet have you?"

"Oh, Mister Iverson," she stammered. Stepping gracefully into his embrace, she gushes, "We had no idea you'd be here tonight."

The fates were clearly in control tonight, crossing paths with the principal stockholder of their corporation. "But of course I should have known that you'd attend; you and our hostess Leslie are such friends. And no we haven't presented our entry yet."

Chaz likewise greets the chairman of the board, "Will you be competing in the movie game, Mister Iverson?"

"Oh not at all," he laughed. "Actually I'm here to see how you fare," he said merrily. "I heard you entered Leslie's competition, so I came to support you two on behalf of the agency; cheerleading as it were."

Iverson's attention is momentarily diverted because Leslie, tonight's gracious hostess seized the microphone preparing to speak.

Chaz whispers to Eleanor, "I guess we're back in the running, eh?"

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“Yes, of course,” she replied; resigned, even resentful, “It would be professional suicide to disappoint him now.” The ‘faux Betty Davis’ opens her purse and fires up a Newport immediately to help calm her exasperation at witnessing the competitors in their stellar presentation and frustration at being thwarted from leaving the party. She put the filter to her lips and shot the light-up exhale out with the force of a spit hair. Eleanor pumped the cigarette with an unusually long pull, cycling the massive draft into her lungs and then forced it back out through her nostrils. Simultaneously double pumping the second draught, both exhales merged into a smoke curtain, obscuring her agony from everyone but Chaz. Her third pump on her Newport was visible only as an orange glow of the coal at the heart of a dense fog, with no details like the cigarette or lips actually visible.

“Couple number two,” Leslie broadcast, beckoning the next players.

The male lead in his snap-brim Fedora Hat and double breasted dark suit, white dress shirt and short, wide tie waits at the bar where the female lead (medium cut blond hair and a black and ivory checkered skirt suit, fitted with ultra-broad shoulders) enters and joins him. They greet, and move to one of the café tables. Seating themselves, the male lead asks, “So why is it you wanted to meet me here tonight?”

The female lead first orders a scotch and soda, “I’m glad that you solved the case my father hired you for, Mr. Marlowe.” She reaches into her purse, seizes a folded piece of paper and thrusts it toward the detective. “I hope that’s enough.” The ‘Bacall’ stares him down as he unfolds her check.

“Five hundred dollars! That’s generous, maybe a little too much....but welcome none-the-less,” the detective comments, amused.

“Well, now that your case is over,” she pleads, “tell me just what my father wanted you....”

The ‘Bogey’ cuts her off, “Did your father send you to pay me off?”

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“No, I used my own judgment. My father the general’s very sick.” at which time she retrieves her pack of Chesterfields and extracts one. As she places the Chesterfield in the center of her bemused smile, the Marlowe character strikes a match and lifts it towards her. She bends forward barely, draws briefly and jets off the puff nervously. She lifts the cigarette out of her lips gently, since these cigarettes lacking filters, are inclined to stick to the lips and maybe tear.

“Anyway, what do you do when you’re not gum-shoeing?” she quizzes sarcastically.

“When I’m not working, sometimes I play the ponies,” he says casually. Eyes still fixed on him, she pulls on her cigarette briefly. She releases the exhale in a lazy cone that tumbles across the table towards the detective.

“I just wonder what kind of horses you bet on?” she muses, taking a second short drag, and speaking through her exhale. “I’m guessing you favor the ‘come from behind nags’ that no one else sees coming,” she says, teasingly. She de-ashes the Chesterfield and sips a short draft before offering, “You know, when we first met, I thought you liked me.”

“I do,” Marlowe says.

“Well you never did anything about it,” she replied.

“Neither did you,” he quipped back.

“You said we could have fun together,” she taunted him.

“We still can,” the Marlowe said. “But why you’re trying to sugar me off like this?”

That message hit her like a slap across the face. She lowered her arm and thrust the cigarette

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down into the base of the ashtray. Crushing it out angrily, she rose and turned to leave.

“Look, I don’t know what kind of deal you made with John Mars, but my business is with your father,” the Marlowe character commented. She exits angrily.

The audience burst into applause, passionately displaying their warm approval.

“Bogey and Bacall,” Iverson guessed.

“I think Bogey’s supposed to be Philip Marlowe,” Chaz offered.

Leslie returned to the dais to introduce ‘couple number three’, who were likewise decked out in film noir costumes, and who spent their two minutes doing an altogether different film, and owing to the blond hair, heavy, throaty German accent, with her very provocative, even seductive pulls on her cigarette, showed herself to be a Marlene Dietrich enactor. The audience gave them a medium warm applause which raised Eleanor’s spirits slightly.

The remaining parade of skits produced several mediocre performances owing to the copious martinis that they used to loosen up prior to show-time. The Jean Harlow piece was baffling to most of the viewers, ditto the Joan Crawford, which some older members recognized by the eyebrows alone. Everyone, on the other hand, got the ‘Holly Golightly’ in ‘Breakfast at Tiffany’s’ since the slim black outfit, exaggerated pulls on the cigarette and overlong cigarette holder virtually gave away the answer.

At last, their big moment! Leslie tags Eleanor, “You two go next.”

While Lesley introduces the opening for ‘couple number eleven,’ Eleanor sets the scene. She walks to the tall French window, opens it to peer outside intently and trembles in anticipation of ‘Jerry’s’ appearance. She had replicated Bette Davis’s ‘Charlotte’ look by dying her hair deep brunette, and styling it as an updo that features a prominent wave, pompadour style that formed

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a canopy over the peak of her face. Eleanor completed the emulation with a white silk blouse that was amply ballooned and a floral-print full-length skirt.

Chaz, playing 'Jerry,' glides in from behind toward the window, turns and faces her. Smiling knowingly in his impeccable double-breasted navy business suit, white dress shirt, and dark tie, he drinks in her figure as a vision of forbidden love. 'Charlotte's' face is crossed with pain but seeing him like this, she manages a brave smile.

"You worked a miracle with my daughter Tina in post therapy," he opens, cautiously. He does a monologue about how grateful he is to Charlotte for her mentoring his fragile daughter, while 'Charlotte' listens in pained silence. "I hope you will continue to offer her the comfort and healing of your home and friendship," he concludes.

She stares out the window while answering, "I shall look after Tina as if she were my own. But, we must never resume our earlier relationship..... the one we so enjoyed on the steamship voyage to Rio."

"You're right. After all, I'm still married and while my wife and I do not love each other, I cannot ask for a divorce while she suffers from her lengthy illness. But at least I can visit Tina at your home in Boston from time to time, can't I?"

The Bette Davis voice warms in the hope offered by this new agreement, "Of course, Jerry, it's your place too, now."

They move toward each other, but never quite touch, merely enjoying those temporary and rare moments of nearness. Seconds pass in this exquisite dance of silence and then...."Well then it is agreed? Chaz's character suggests soothingly. "Shall we have a cigarette on it?"

In answer, she lifts an ornamented cigarette box; raises the lid for him to select a pair of Camels. Setting both in his mouth, 'Jerry' lights them simultaneously and turns one over to 'Charlotte', before moving slightly towards her. With the tenderness of proscribed love, she receives the cigarette inclined downward and kisses it softly. The acute angle allows a runner of

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smoke to slide up the cylinder and stings her eyes as soon as she takes that first loving draw. The smoke tears her slightly but because she's in the middle of her presentation, she can only blink away the pain. The net effect is Charlotte eyes are brimming with tears barely under her fragile control as she watches 'Jerry' through the salty blur.

Both actors project the smoke plumes simultaneously in two modest rolling exhales that collide together and mingle as one. 'Charlotte's' eyes are now entirely teared over, the picture of bitter-sweet love in restraint but hopeful of an uncertain future.

"And will you be happy, Charlotte?" he asks.

"Oh Jerry," she sighs through the sweet agony, "Let's don't ask for the moon. We already have the stars."

They turn and face the audience, bow slightly, and back away, exiting. The audience, spellbound suddenly realizes that the piece is finished, and breaks into cheers.

Iverson rushes up, aglow with pride. Leslie Stoppard joins him, both bubbling over with admiration.

"Capital piece," Iverson booms, clapping each on the back in the crowd afterwards. "You showed us off to the highest possible advantage tonight. Well done!"

Leslie returned to the microphone to broadcast, "The results of this competition will take a while to tally, so please rejoin your parties until I get the finals." With that the band broke into "Take the A-Train" and swing tempo took over again.

The band managed a few more dance pieces before Leslie reappeared before the throng to broadcast the final results.

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Third place goes to Madeleine and Roger Rochefort's inimitable 'Holly Golightly' in 'Breakfast at Tiffany's.' The second most recognized piece was performed by our own infamously daring Sarah Katzman and Herb Salmon for their "Sharon Stone' in 'Basic Instinct.' And first place is awarded to Amelia and Teddy Van Der Vliet for their absolutely flawless 'Bogey and Bacall' as portrayed in the 'Big Sleep.' The audience approved by its warm, lengthy and generous applause.

"However," Leslie advised, "There is an award category not based on balloting; that I have entitled 'Best of Show,' and that goes to Eleanor and Chaz of the Iverson and Bracebridge Ad Agency for their 'Bette Davis and Paul Henreid' of 'Now Voyager.'

The crowd broke out in a louder applause, and in the extended roar of appreciation, calls of 'bravo' were heard through-out.

Iverson floated one foot above the floor so delighted was he with the results. "Capitol, absolutely first class!"

"I can't get over your eyes filled with restrained tears in that scene," Leslie said admiringly, when she descended from the dais to congratulate them. "the spirit of Bette Davis must have been with you tonight. For an amateur performance that was star-quality!" Chaz whispered to her, "That was inspired," he commented in awe. "How did you manage that?"

"Simple," she said with that Bette Davis New England matter-of-factness. "Sometimes smoke gets in your eyes."