

the grande dame of hollywood



With a career spanning more than 60 years, screen legend Lauren Bacall looks back at a life lived to the full – from her great love for Humphrey Bogart and the joys of motherhood to her timeless on-screen performances – as she speaks frankly to SHARON KRUM.

In the beginning there was the look and the look was Lauren Bacall. Sexy, petulant, teasing, hers was a face that launched a thousand fantasies, an epic love story and a remarkable second act. Even former US President Bill Clinton, looking squarely at that face – still head-turning in its seventh decade – at a Kennedy Center Honors ceremony in 1997, confessed that he was right then and there falling under its spell.

"It all began with the look – and I can still hardly stand it," he said, blushing as he awarded her a medal for her contribution to the arts. "A downward cast of the chin, a shy, yet sly, upward glance of the eye. The look captured Bogie and made Lauren Bacall a legend. Tonight, on behalf of all Americans, I salute you, Lauren Bacall, as our woman of the year and an actress for all time."

The applause was thunderous. Yet as Lauren stood and basked in the love of her peers, her thoughts momentarily darted across more than 50 years of extraordinary events and people that brought her to that moment. How a young girl burning to be an actress was plucked from obscurity by a svengali to become a star. How that girl then fell hopelessly in love with Hollywood's leading man, married him, lived in domestic bliss, then lost him 10 years later to cancer. How that girl, now a woman with two children, had her heart broken twice again, then returned to the theatre to wide acclaim. And how that woman, whose own father rejected her, befriended Katharine Hepburn, Gregory Peck, Cole Porter, Spencer Tracy, David Niven, Adlai Stevenson and Bobby Kennedy. What an amazing ride, she thought. And the best part? It isn't over yet.

"When I think about the past, I can't believe I ever lived that way," Lauren says of her life as Mrs Humphrey Bogart, the most famous of all her incarnations. "And I have to tell you, I never lived that way again. Can you imagine finding yourself at 20 with a butler, cook and gardener?" ▶

SCREEN GODDESS



financial constraints. So Lauren, who at 18 had grown into a lanky beauty with cheekbones that could cut glass and a voice that sounded like sex mixed with gravel, went to work as a model and theatre usherette, auditioning for plays on the side. In 1942, she landed her first appearance on stage. It was a walk-on part, but no matter, she was on her way.

In 1943, Lauren appeared on the cover of the March edition of US *Harper's Bazaar*. Slim Hawks, wife of the legendary movie director Howard Hawks, saw it and knew she had found the answer. "Howard Hawks had always wanted to create a star out of an unknown," explains Lauren.

Howard Hawks flew 19-year-old Betty to Hollywood for a screen test, changed her name to Lauren, then cast the starlet opposite Humphrey Bogart in the 1944 thriller *To Have and Have Not*.

When she met Bogie, there was "no clap of thunder, no lightning bolt, just a simple, 'How do you do?'"

Those first days on set, Lauren was understandably tense. Romance never

was standing behind me, we were joking as usual, when suddenly he leaned over, put his hand under my chin and kissed me."

And so began an affair that would set the world on fire. In 1945, the unhappily married Bogie divorced his third wife, Mayo Methot, and married the now 20-year-old Lauren Bacall. The press and the public went crazy. He was a Hollywood legend old enough to be her father, she was the cinema's newest femme fatale. "I have to say, nobody has ever written a romance better than we lived it," she says.

When *To Have and Have Not* was released in 1944, Lauren drew critical and commercial acclaim. When she uttered the famous line, "You know how to whistle, don't you, Steve? You just put your lips together and blow", she reduced grown men to jelly.

"I was announced as the Second Coming," Lauren says with a sigh. "I was this combination of Garbo, Dietrich, Bette Davis and Mae West all rolled into one – that was just in one movie. Now,

by Bogie's unorthodox reaction. "After I told him, we had the biggest fight we'd ever had. I was in tears. Bogie was so full of sound and fury signifying that he hadn't married me to lose me to a child."

Yet, once the baby was born in 1949, Bogie proved to be an adoring father, while Lauren worshipped her son.

"I was crazy about the baby," she says. "I wanted to do everything for him, spend every minute with him."

Her infatuation with her son, which she admits came between her and Bogie, would be temporarily curtailed in 1951, when she accompanied her husband to the Congo to shoot *The African Queen*.

"I had made a commitment to Bogie to be there for him," she says of why she left Stephen to spend weeks in the jungle. Though Lauren missed her baby son desperately, life in Africa brought her one consolation. She met and made friends with Bogie's co-star, Katharine Hepburn. It was a friendship that would endure until Hepburn's death in 2003.

"Katie Hepburn made me aware of ▶



Above: Jason Robards, 38, and Lauren, 36, cut the cake at their wedding in 1961. Below: Lauren and Bogie with fellow Hollywood star Marilyn Monroe in the '50s.

I FOUND OUT VERY QUICKLY WHAT A TERRIFIC MAN BOGART



Top: Lauren (centre) on location with Bogie and Katharine Hepburn for *The African Queen* in 1951. Above: Bogie, 55, and Lauren, 30, in Hawaii with their son, Stephen, five, in 1954.

Lauren's rise from struggling actress to overnight success to living legend is precisely the stuff of which movies are made. How ironic then that she never wanted to be a movie star. As she explains in *By Myself and Then Some*, an update of her prize-winning 1979 autobiography *By Myself*, "all I ever wanted was to be on stage. I wanted to see my name in lights."

Lauren Bacall was born Betty Perske on September 16, 1924 in New York, the only daughter of Jewish immigrants William, who was a salesman, and Natalie, a secretary. Her parents divorced when she was five. Three years later, William severed all ties with his daughter. Natalie reverted to her maiden name, Bacal. Later, Lauren would add an extra L to her surname to aid in pronunciation.

From the time she was very young, Betty (as she is still known by family) became infatuated with performing.

"I idolised Bette Davis and I spent my young girlhood sneaking into cinemas to watch her. Yet, even though I loved movies, all I thought about was the stage."

In high school, Lauren took Saturday acting classes at the New York School of the Theatre and later went to the American Academy of Dramatic Arts, but dropped out after only a year due to

crossed her mind. Ironically, that tension would serve her well, giving birth not only to a star, but a catchphrase.

After the movie was released, Lauren Bacall was dubbed "The Look", thanks to the face down/eyes up stare she would throw Bogart in the film. Little did audiences know that the "look" was the direct result of a serious case of nerves.

"My hand was shaking – my head was shaking – the cigarette was shaking. I was mortified. The harder I tried to stop, the more I shook ... I realised that one way to hold my trembling head still was to keep it down, chin low, almost to my chest, and eyes up at Bogart."

Lauren recalls that she warmed to him immediately. "I found out very quickly what a terrific man Bogart was. He did everything possible to put me at ease, he was on my side. I felt safe, but I didn't flirt with him. There was much kidding around, our sense of humour went well together."

Three weeks into the shoot something changed. Though he was 45 and married, and she was 19 and a virgin, she says her heart would pound when he looked at her. His, she soon discovered, was behaving the same way. "I was in my portable dressing room when Bogie came in to say goodnight.

was ... he was on my side. I felt safe, but I didn't flirt with him."

you know damn well there was no way I was any of that." In fact, Lauren reveals that the vixen image Howard Hawks created for her was the complete opposite of who she was, a young woman with zero experience with men.

"People don't believe it, but I've always had a sense of insecurity ... The image they have of me, this tough, formidable dame, that came from the parts I played and the lower register of my voice."

The newlyweds starred together in three more movies, *The Big Sleep* (1946), *Dark Passage* (1947) and *Key Largo* (1948), but, once she married Bogart, Lauren's ascent in Hollywood was over. "People stopped thinking of me as an actress and more as Mrs Bogart."

Yet that was a part she would play to perfection. She and Bogart moved into a mansion in LA, where she hosted parties for the new Rat Pack: Frank Sinatra, Peter Lawford and Sammy Davis Jr. She also befriended Gregory Peck, David Niven and Cole Porter.

Though watching her career stall hurt her, Lauren says she was so in love with Bogie and so intent on becoming a mother, she weathered the disappointment. Yet when she finally became pregnant with son Stephen, her joy was severely muted



ways to live. She was so independent, fearless, ambitious and devoted to Spencer [Tracy]. An inspiration, always." The stars dined together regularly for 50 years.

In 1952, Bacall and Bogie became parents for a second time, with daughter Leslie. Once again, Lauren was in her element, but she conceded motherhood wasn't enough exercise for her brain. So she began stumping for the Democratic presidential candidate Adlai Stevenson, the beginning of a lifelong commitment to Democratic politics.

"I needed to dream. I needed to reach out, to stretch myself," she says.

By the mid-'50s, Lauren's career had picked up and she made *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying* (1953) and *Blood Alley* (1955). The former saw Lauren co-star with Betty Grable and Marilyn Monroe. "Betty Grable was a funny, outgoing woman, totally professional and easy. Marilyn was frightened, insecure, trusted only her acting coach and was always late. And yet I couldn't dislike Marilyn, she had no meanness in her, no bitchery."

In 1956, tragedy struck. Bogie was diagnosed with throat cancer and underwent surgery. After a courageous battle, he died on January 14, 1957. Lauren had gone to pick up her children from Sunday school when he first passed into a coma. His last words to her were, "Goodbye, kid".

"It's been hyped so much," she says of

WHY WOULD I STOP IF I CAN STILL WORK? I love acting and I have never done enough of it to suit me, to be honest.

their romance. "But, of course, it was a great love story. Listen, I lucked out at a very young age."

One year later, Lauren began seeing, then became engaged, to an old family friend, Frank Sinatra. Friends worried it wouldn't last and warned Lauren that Sinatra couldn't be monogamous, but she needed him. "He represented physical health, vitality, I needed that," she says.

Frank dumped her 12 months later, unable to cope with the idea of getting married. "Actually, Frank did me a huge favour, he saved me from the disaster our marriage would have been."

Initially, after Bogie's death, Lauren focused all her energies on the children, but soon she returned to work, believing it would be a salve for her grief.

She starred in *Designing Woman* with

Lauren Bacall on . . .

NICOLE KIDMAN "I love Nicole. She is very special. I think she is an excellent actress and very intelligent. Trust me, a lot of actresses are not so smart. She is interested in taking chances and that's important. I have to tell you, though, I do worry that she works too hard."

CATE BLANCHETT "Honestly, Nicole and Cate Blanchett, what incredible actresses. Did you see her in *The Aviator*? She was fabulous! I tell you, Australia is taking over the world."

RUSSELL CROWE "I do think Russell is a good actor, but, frankly, I'm a Hugh Jackman person."

HUGH JACKMAN "I saw *The Boy from Oz* on Broadway three times. I have never seen any man do what he does on the musical stage. He was dazzling. I went backstage to meet him and he was so adorable."

Gregory Peck (1957), *The Gift of Love* (1958), *Sex and the Single Girl* (1964) and *Harper* (1966), before resolving to return to her first love, the theatre.

Yet before Lauren would go on to win Tony Awards for her star Broadway turns in *Applause* (1970) and *Woman of the Year* (1981), there would be more soaring love and heartbreak for Lauren.

In 1960, she met actor Jason Robards. Though wildly charismatic and talented,

for her again. She starred in *Misery* (1990), *Ready to Wear* (1994), *My Fellow Americans* (1996), then won a Golden Globe Award for Best Supporting Actress for *The Mirror Has Two Faces* (1996).

At 80, Lauren's celluloid renaissance continues unabated with *Dogville* (2003), *Birth* (2004), both with Nicole Kidman, *Manderlay* and the romantic period drama, *These Foolish Things*, both due out this year. "People ask me, why are you still working? Why would I stop if I can still work? I love acting and I have never done enough of it to suit me, to be honest. I don't enjoy going to lunch or cocktail parties. It doesn't interest me."

She cites her favourite actresses of our era as Cate Blanchett – "Did you see her in *The Aviator*? She was fabulous! She didn't look like Katie, but she captured her energy" – and Nicole Kidman, whom she regards as a close friend, insisting she never claimed Nicole was not legend material, as reported recently. ("None of us can be legends until we're dead.")

"I met her on the set of *Dogville*," Lauren says. "This was right after she and Tom had broken up and she was not in wonderful shape. At night we would go to dinner. And we just hit it off."

While Lauren's respect and admiration for Nicole and Cate is undeniable, in her opinion, nobody working today has the X-factor of stars of old.

"I don't think anybody resembles what used to be," she says, when asked if Cate

is the new Kate, or Russell Crowe the new Humphrey Bogart.

"When you think of the quality of Spencer Tracy, Humphrey Bogart, Jimmy Cagney, James Stewart, Gregory Peck, Henry Fonda, just those six, what do we have now? It's not the same. I don't think many actors today have the quality of those men of the past."

For the past 25 years, Lauren has lived alone in New York's famous Dakota Apartments, her adored papillon dog, Sophie, her constant companion.

Her children and grandchildren visit often, but no man has replaced Bogie in her heart or life. "It's sometimes lonely, but I am a loner at heart, I think."

By Myself and Then Some, by Lauren Bacall, is published by Hodder Headline, pp \$49.95.