

Scene Two

(Two hours later. NIGEL is seated on the sofa. He is a neat, military man, clipped moustache and a sharp boned face. He has CECILY's note in his hand. MAVIS stands watching. There is silence for a while.)



NIGEL. I'm sorry to make such an ass of myself, but it's been a bit of a shock. I mean, on top of the excitement of coming back.

MAVIS. I know.

NIGEL. I can't believe it. Cecily. What am I going to do, Mavis? What *am* I going to do? I mean, it was everything, all my work – the whole reason...

MAVIS. What can I say? How can I –?

NIGEL. I wish I hadn't been so impatient with her on the phone. God, if I'd realised!

MAVIS. I simply can't understand where she's gone.

NIGEL. What's the time now? Three o'clock. I never dreamed it was as serious as this.

(He reads the note for the tenth time and laughs bitterly.)

"P.S. Your ring has gone to the cleaners, you shall have it as soon as it comes back." She's thought of everything, hasn't she?

MAVIS. If only she'd talked to me more about it, but she's been bottling it up inside her for weeks, it was only this morning, as I told you, that she really laid her cards on the table.

NIGEL. *(Reading.)* "I'm sorry, I can't go through with it, please don't wait for me, there's nothing to be gained by it. I'm terribly sorry, but one must be honest." It's this stinking, filthy money! Damn and blast it!

MAVIS. "The root of all evil," as Auntie Loo-Loo would say. Aren't some of these old clichés sickeningly right on occasions? Like some frightful old bore saying: "I told

you so", and talking of old bores, thank heavens it was I who found you waiting outside instead of Auntie Loo-Loo.

(She is talking for the sake of it. He isn't listening.)

NIGEL. What?

MAVIS. Look here, do you think it's wise to stay? I mean, we've no idea when Cecily will be back.

NIGEL. *(Grimly.)* I'll wait - a week if necessary.

MAVIS. Auntie Loo-Loo might be back before Cecily, it'll all have to be explained, it'll be ghastly for you.

NIGEL. Nothing can be worse than this. I'm going to wait and see her.

MAVIS. Really, I'm afraid...

(NIGEL rises in an outburst.)

NIGEL. God! What do you think I'm made of? Do you think I'm going to sit back and do nothing? No, by hell! I'm going to make a fight for it.

MAVIS. *(Relieved.)* Ah, that's better.

NIGEL. All this time, out in that bloody place, lying there in a muck sweat, night after night, I dreamed of today. It's funny, isn't it? The things I've given up, for nothing - nothing!

MAVIS. *(Helplessly.)* Oh, Nigel.

NIGEL. Sorry, Mavis. This is a poor show for you. Don't you worry about me, old girl, you go out. It's a lovely day, at least it seemed it when I landed. To think it was less than three hours ago. I shall be all right, honestly.

MAVIS. Well, if you'd rather I left?

NIGEL. Oh, no, no, it isn't that.

MAVIS. Then I'll stay.

NIGEL. It's damn good of you. But I'm not much fun this afternoon. Rather "The Wreck of the Hesperus". Never mind, we'll get things straight, somehow; I shall be able to laugh her out of it - we've always had the same sense

of humour. I can't see anything particularly funny in it at the moment, but I dare say it'll come.

(The front door slams. AUNTIE LOO-LOO is heard offstage.)

AUNTIE LOO-LOO. *(Offstage.)* Children! Children!

MAVIS. Oh, Lord! Nothing funny about that!

(AUNTIE LOO-LOO bursts into the room. She makes straight for NIGEL and does not notice CECILY's absence.)

AUNTIE LOO-LOO. Nigel! At last! Let me take a good look at you! Oh, but how well you're looking! Perhaps a teeny bit greyer round the temples, but it suits you, and what does a little grey hair matter when you're as happy as you are? How are you? Splendid? Good! I never saw you looking so debonair and gay, and darling Cecily's been bubbling over with excitement, haven't you, Cec -?

(She looks round.)

Oh, but - but where is she? I was so absorbed in you, Nigel, that I thought Mavis was Cecily; aren't I a silly!

(She laughs affectedly then becomes aware of the stony faces of NIGEL and MAVIS.)

But where is Cecily?

(There is complete silence.)

Is anything wrong?

MAVIS. Everything's wrong, Miss Garrard. Cecily's gone out. She wasn't here when Nigel arrived.

AUNTIE LOO-LOO. Wasn't here when -?

MAVIS. She's broken off the engagement.

AUNTIE LOO-LOO. Cecily? I don't believe it.

(NIGEL hands her CECILY's note. AUNTIE LOO-LOO sits on the sofa and reads the note with growing dismay.)