

Side Three

All characters

Cissy We call him Il Duce –

Jean How very amusing. Il Duce. Yes, I see why. (She doesn't.) I have to say I was dreadfully disappointed to have so many chorus members pointed out to me. I don't know any of them personally, of course, but one or two I thought I'd seen before. And so many orchestral musicians. I had hoped there'd be a great many more - what shall I say? - virtuosi.

Cissy Frank White is here but I don't think for much longer. They'll send him away. He's not at all well now, poor lamb. Can hardly breathe. Too sad. And I'm not even sure he knows where he is. He keeps to his room and doesn't want any visitors. Not even me. But what a star he was. And so strong. We were friends once. Occasionally, he let me hold his flute.

Wilf chuckles.

Gold and gleaming it was. He could make it sound like a choir of angels.

Jean And could that have been Bobby Swanson lurking in a corner?

Wilf Indeed it could.

Jean He cut me dead.

Wilf His sight isn't what it was. They were waiting for his cataracts to ripen but now they say cataracts don't have to ripen, it's all microsurgery, bloody doctors.

Jean Such an intense little man. He looked as though he were spying for a foreign power.

Wilf Bobby's all right, just disappointed, that's all. And why should he be different from anyone else? He wanted to conduct. They wouldn't let him. I thought he was a miracle-worker.

Jean Yes, someone I knew, Enrico Cardinale, you might remember him, he swore by Bobby. I forget what they did together but Enrico needed a lot of help. In more

ways than one. And, of course, I always thought that he and Bobby - *(She breaks off)*

Cissy And we all have our little areas to which we gravitate and call our own. This is ours. This little terrace and the music room. When I arrived the walls were hung with nothing but still life paintings, dead fish, dead birds and artichokes. Too depressing. So I was allowed to redecorate.

Jean Yes, I can see. I never thought style your strong point.

Cissy We like to think of ourselves as a rather exclusive club.

Wilf The élite, that's what we are, the élite –

Cissy And when I say you're very welcome to join us I'm sure I speak for everyone.

Reggie You don't speak for me.

Wilf But you must obey our motto, Jean. NSP. No Self Pity. And there are two questions you must never ask: how are you and what are your plans for today? That's all you have to remember.

Jean I must say I've had the most lovely welcome. Walking through the dining-room, everyone seemed to recognize me. There was even a little patter of hands. So touching. Rather like the other night, at the opera house, as George's guest. When I entered his box I received a standing ovation. Wasn't that something?

Cissy Once, in New York, I received a standing ovation.

Wilf The smart thing to receive in New York is a sitting-down ovation.