

(LADY ANGKATELL exits left. JOHN crosses to the writing table, and takes a note from his pocket. He reads it, then crumples it and throws it into the waste-paper basket. He sits, sighs heavily and starts to write. VERONICA enters up centre from left. She carries a large, very flamboyant, red suede handbag.)

VERONICA. *(standing at the French window up centre; imperiously)* John.

JOHN. *(turning; startled)* Veronica. *(He rises.)*

VERONICA. *(moving down centre)* I sent you a note asking you to come over at once. Didn't you get it?

JOHN. *(pleasantly, but with reserve)* Yes, I got it.

VERONICA. Well, why didn't you come? I've been waiting.

JOHN. I'm afraid it wasn't convenient for me to come over this morning.

VERONICA. (*crossing to left of JOHN*) Can I have a cigarette, please?

JOHN. Yes, of course. (*He offers her a cigarette from his case.*)
(*Before he can give her a light, VERONICA takes her own lighter from her handbag and lights the cigarette herself*)

VERONICA. I sent for you because we've got to talk. We've got to make arrangements. For our future, I mean.

JOHN. Have we a future?

VERONICA. Of course we've got a future. We've wasted ten years. There's no need to waste any more time. (*She sits on the sofa, centre of it, and puts her handbag on the right end of the sofa.*)

JOHN. (*easing to right of the sofa*) I'm sorry, Veronica. I'm afraid you've got this worked out the wrong way. I've - enjoyed meeting you again very much, but you know we don't really belong together - we're worlds apart.

VERONICA. Nonsense, John. I love you and you love me. We've always loved each other. You were very obstinate in the past. But never mind that now.

JOHN crosses above the sofa to left of it.

Look, our lives needn't clash. I don't mean to go back to the States for quite a while. When I've finished the picture I'm working on now, I'm going to play a straight part on the London stage. I've got a new play - Elderton's written it for me. It'll be a terrific success.

JOHN. (*politely*) I'm sure it will.

VERONICA. (*condescendingly*) And you can go on being a doctor. You're quite well known, they tell me.

JOHN. (*moving down left centre; irritably*) I am a fairly well-known consultant on certain diseases - if it interests you - but I imagine it doesn't.

VERONICA. What I mean is we can both get on with our own jobs. It couldn't have worked out better.

JOHN. (*surveying her dispassionately*) You really are the most interesting character. Don't you realize that I'm a married man - I have children?

VERONICA. *(rising and crossing to right of JOHN)* Well, I'm married myself at the moment. But these things are easily arranged. A good lawyer can fix anything. *(softly)* I always did mean to marry you, darling. I can't think why I have this terrible passion for you - *(she puts her arms around JOHN 's neck)* but there it is.

JOHN. *(shaking her off; brusquely)* I'm sorry, Veronica. *(He moves to the fireplace.)* It's out of the question.

VERONICA. But I tell you a good lawyer can easily fix ...

JOHN. No good lawyer is going to fix anything. Your life and mine have nothing in common.

VERONICA. *(moving to right of JOHN and facing him)* Not after last night?

JOHN. You're not a child, Veronica. You've had two husbands and, I've no doubt, a good many lovers. What does "last night" mean exactly? Nothing at all, and you know it.

VERONICA. If you'd seen your face, yesterday evening - when I came through that window - we might have been back in the South of France all those years ago.

JOHN. I was back in the South of France. *(gently)* Try to understand, Veronica. You came to me last night straight out of the past. I'd been thinking about you. Wondering whether I'd been as wise a young man as I'd thought myself - or whether I'd simply been a coward. And suddenly - there you were - like a dream come to life. But you were a dream. Today I'm back in the present, a man ten years older. *(He crosses to left of the sofa.)* A man you don't know and probably wouldn't like very much if you did know him.

VERONICA. Are you telling me that you prefer your wife to me?

JOHN. Yes - yes, I am. *(He sits on the sofa at the left end of it.)* I've suddenly realized how very much fonder I am of her than I knew. When I got back to this house last night - or in the early hours of the morning - I suddenly saw how stupidly I'd risked losing everything

in the world I need. Fortunately, Gerda was asleep.
She'd no idea what time I got back. She believes I left
you quite early.

VERONICA. Your wife must be a very credulous woman.

JOHN. She loves me - and she trusts me.

VERONICA. She's a fool! *(She crosses to left of the sofa.)* And
anyway I don't believe a word of what you say. You love
me.

JOHN. I'm sorry, Veronica.

VERONICA. *(breaking down centre; incredulously)* You don't love
me?

JOHN. I've been perfectly frank with you. You are a very
beautiful and very seductive woman, Veronica - *(he
rises and moves up right of the sofa)* but I don't love YOU.

VERONICA. *(furiously)* You belong to me, John. *(She moves
below the sofa.)* You always have. Ever since I got to
England, I've been thinking about you, planning how
best to meet you again. *(She kneels on the sofa.)* Why do
you think I took this idiotic cottage down here? Simply
because I found out that you often came down for
weekends with the Angkatells.

JOHN. So it was all planned last night. *(He crosses above the
sofa to right of the armchair left centre.)* I noticed your
lighter was working this morning.

VERONICA. *(rising and turning)* You belong to me.

JOHN. *(coldly angry)* I don't belong to anyone. Where do
you get this idea that you can own another human
being? I loved you once and I wanted you to marry me
and share my life. *(He moves to the fireplace and stand
with his back to it.)* You wouldn't.

VERONICA. My life and my career were much more
important than yours. Anyone can be a doctor. *(She
stubs out her cigarette in the ashtray on the coffee table.)*

JOHN. Are you really quite as important as you think?

VERONICA. *(crossing to right of JOHN)* If I'm not right at the
top yet, I will be.

JOHN. I wonder. I rather doubt it. There's something lacking in you, Veronica - what is it? Warmth - generosity - you give nothing. You take - take - take all the time.

VERONICA. *(speaking in a low voice convulsed with rage)* You turned me down ten years ago. You've turned me down today. My God, I'll make you suffer for it!

JOHN. I'm sorry if I've hurt you, Veronica. You're very lovely, my dear, and I once cared for you very much. Can't we leave it at that?

VERONICA. No. *(She crosses to the French windows up centre, turns and stands in the window.)* You be careful of yourself, John Cristow. I hate you more than I ever thought it possible to hate anyone.

JOHN. *(annoyed)* Oh!

VERONICA. And don't fool yourself that I believe you're turning me down because of your *wife*. It's that other woman.

JOHN. What other woman?

VERONICA. The one who came through that door last night and stood looking at you. If I can't have you, nobody else shall have you, John. Understand that.

(She exits angrily up centre to left, leaving her handbag on the sofa. JOHN stands looking after her for a moment, then crosses to the writing table, picks up the letter he has been writing, tears it up and puts it in the waste-paper basket. GUDGEON enters right, crosses to left of the sofa, turns and sees JOHN.)