

*(VERONICA CRAYE enters on the terrace up centre from left and stands posed in the French windows. She is a very beautiful woman and knows it. She wears a resplendent evening gown and carries an evening bag. Her appearance causes a sensation. JOHN stares at her like a man dazed. MIDGE and LADY ANGKATELL rise. They all turn and stare at VERONICA.)*

**VERONICA.** *(moving to right of LADY ANGKATELL)* You must forgive me - for bursting in upon you this way. I'm your neighbour, Lady Angkatell - from that ridiculous

cottage, Dovecotes - and the most awful thing has happened. *(She moves centre and dominates the scene.)* Not a single match in the house and my lighter won't work. So what could I do? I just came along to beg help from my only neighbour within miles.

**LADY ANGKATELL.** Why, of course. How awkward for you.

**VERONICA.** *(turning right and affecting to see JOHN quite suddenly)* Why, surely - John! Why, it's John Cristow. *(She crosses to left of JOHN and takes hold of both of his hands.)* Now isn't that amazing? I haven't seen you for years and years and years. And suddenly - to find you - here. This is just the most wonderful surprise. *(To*

**LADY ANGKATELL.)** John's an old friend of mine. *(She retains hold of JOHN's left hand.)* Why, John's the first man I ever loved.

**SIR HENRY.** *(moving above the sofa with two drinks)* Sherry? Or dry Martini?

**VERONICA.** No, no, thank you.

**JOHN** takes a sherry from **SIR HENRY.**)

**LADY ANGKATELL.** *(resuming her seat in the armchair left centre)*

Midge dear, ring the bell.

*(MIDGE moves below the fireplace and presses the bell-push.)*

**VERONICA.** I hope you don't think it's just too awful of me butting in like this.

**LADY ANGKATELL.** Not at all.

**SIR HENRY.** *(moving up centre)* We are honoured. *(He indicates*

**MIDGE)** My cousin, Miss Harvey. Edward Angkatell.

*(He looks towards GERDA.)* Er ...

*(GERDA eases down right of JOHN .)*

**JOHN.** And this is my wife, Veronica.

**VERONICA.** *(crossing below JOHN to left of GERDA and taking her by the hand)* Oh, but how lovely to meet you.

*(GUDGEON enters left.)*

**GUDGEON.** You rang, m'lady?

**LADY ANGKATELL.** A dozen boxes of matches, please,  
Gudgeon.

*(GUDGEON is momentarily taken aback, but regains his normal impassivity immediately and exits left.)*

**SIR HENRY.** And how do you like living at Dovecotes?

**VERONICA.** *(turning)* I adore it. *(She crosses upstage to left of the sofa and looks off right.)* I think it's so wonderful to be right in the heart of the country - these lovely English woods - and yet to be quite near London.

**SIR HENRY.** You've no idea what a thrill you've caused in the neighbourhood. But you must be used to that sort of thing.

**VERONICA.** Well, I've signed a few autograph books, *(She eases below the left end of the sofa.)* but what I like about it here is that one isn't in a village, and there's no-one to stare or gape. *(She sits on the sofa at the left end.)* I just appreciate the peacefulness of it all.

*(GUDGEON enters left. He carries a packet of a dozen boxes of matches on a salver.)*

**LADY ANGKATELL.** *(indicating VERONICA)* For madam.

*(GUDGEON crosses to VERONICA.)*

**VERONICA.** *(taking the matches)* Oh dear, Lady Angkatell - I can't really accept. ..

**LADY ANGKATELL.** Please. It's nothing at all.

**VERONICA.** Well, I do appreciate your kindness.