

ELGIN. (*Offstage.*) Good evening, sir.

OLIVER. (*Offstage.*) I've come to see Mrs. Brown.

ELGIN. (*Offstage.*) Oh yes, sir. What name, sir?

OLIVER. (*Offstage.*) Mr. Costello.

ELGIN. (*Offstage.*) This way, sir.

(ELGIN enters from the hall and stands to one side. OLIVER COSTELLO enters. He is a theatrically handsome, dark man with a rather unpleasant face.)

If you'll wait here, sir. Madam is at home. I'll see if I can find her. Mr. Costello, did you say?

OLIVER. That's right. *Oliver Costello.*

ELGIN. Very good, sir.

(ELGIN exits to the hall, closing the door. OLIVER looks around the room, listens at the hall door and the library door, then makes to the desk. He bends over it, looking at the drawers. He apparently hears something and moves away. CLARISSA enters by the French windows. OLIVER turns, surprised.)

CLARISSA. (*Intensely.*) You?

OLIVER. Clarissa! What are you doing here?

CLARISSA. That's a rather silly question, isn't it? It's my house.

OLIVER. This is your house?

CLARISSA. Don't pretend you don't know.

OLIVER. It's charming – used to belong to old what's-his-name, the antique dealer, didn't it? He brought me out here once to show me some Louis Quinze chairs.

(He takes his cigarette case from his pocket.)

Cigarette?

CLARISSA. No, thank you. And I think you'd better go. My husband will be home quite soon and I don't think he'll be very pleased to see you.

OLIVER. But I particularly do want to see him. That's why I've come here, really, to discuss suitable arrangements...

CLARISSA. Arrangements?

OLIVER. For Pippa. Miranda's quite agreeable to Pippa spending part of the summer holidays with Henry, and perhaps a week at Christmas. But otherwise...

CLARISSA. (*Interrupting.*) What do you mean? Pippa's home is here.

OLIVER. But, my dear Clarissa, you're surely aware that the court gave Miranda the custody of the child?

(He picks up a bottle of whisky off the drinks tray.)

May I?

(He pours a drink for himself.)

The case was undefended, remember?

CLARISSA. Henry allowed Miranda to divorce him, but it was agreed between them privately that Pippa should live with her father. If Miranda had not agreed to that, Henry would have divorced *her*.

OLIVER. You don't know Miranda well, do you? She so often changes her mind.

CLARISSA. I don't believe for one moment that Miranda wants that child or cares twopence about her.

OLIVER. But you're not a mother, my dear Clarissa. You don't mind my calling you Clarissa, do you? After all, now I'm married to Miranda we're practically relations-in-law.

(He swallows his drink in one gulp.)

OLIVER. Yes, I can assure you, Miranda is feeling violently maternal.

CLARISSA. I don't believe it.

OLIVER. Please yourself. After all, there was no arrangement in writing, you know.

CLARISSA. You're not going to have Pippa. The child was a nervous wreck. She's better now, and happy at school, and that's the way she's going to remain.

OLIVER. How will you manage that, my dear? The law is on our side.

CLARISSA. What's behind all this? What do you really want? Oh! What a fool I am. Of course, it's blackmail.

(ELGIN enters abruptly from the hall.)

ELGIN. I was looking for you, madam. Will it be quite all right for us to leave now, madam?

CLARISSA. Yes, quite all right, Elgin.

ELGIN. The taxi has come for us. Supper is laid all ready in the dining room.

(He eyes OLIVER.)

Do you want me to shut up in here, madam?

CLARISSA. No, I'll see to it.

ELGIN. Thank you. Good night, madam.

CLARISSA. Good night, Elgin.

(ELGIN exits to the hall.)

OLIVER. Blackmail is a very ugly word, Clarissa. Have I mentioned money?

CLARISSA. Not yet, but that's what you mean, isn't it?

OLIVER. It's true that we're not very well off. Miranda, you know, has always been extravagant. I think she feels that Henry might be able to spare her a somewhat larger allowance. After all, he's a rich man.

CLARISSA. Now listen. I don't know about Henry, but I do know about myself. You try to get Pippa away from

here and I'll fight you tooth and nail, and I don't care what weapons I use.

(OLIVER chuckles.)

It shouldn't be difficult to get medical evidence proving Miranda's a drug addict. I'd even go to Scotland Yard and talk to the Narcotic Squad, and I'd suggest they kept an eye on *you*.

OLIVER. Henry will hardly care for your methods.

CLARISSA. Then Henry will have to lump them. It's the child that matters. I'm not going to have Pippa bullied or frightened.