

start:

CHARLES. Yes – I suppose so.

RUTH. I must say it was extremely funny at moments.

CHARLES. Yes – it certainly was.

RUTH. What's the matter?

CHARLES. The matter?

RUTH. Yes. You seem old, somehow. Do you feel quite well?

CHARLES. Perfectly. I think I'll have a drink. Do you want one?

RUTH. No, thank you, dear.

CHARLES. (*Moving to the drinks table and pouring out a whisky and soda.*) It's rather chilly in this room.

RUTH. Come over by the fire.

CHARLES. I don't think I'll make any notes tonight. I'll start fresh in the morning.

(*CHARLES turns, the glass in his hand. He sees ELVIRA and drops the glass on the floor.*)

My God!

RUTH. Charles!

ELVIRA. That was very clumsy, Charles dear.

CHARLES. Elvira! – then it's true – it was you!

ELVIRA. Of course it was.

RUTH. (*Starts to go to CHARLES.*) Charles – darling Charles – what are you talking about?

CHARLES. (*To ELVIRA.*) Are you a ghost?

ELVIRA. (*Crossing below the sofa to the fire.*) I suppose I must be. It's all very confusing.

RUTH. (*Moving to right of CHARLES and becoming agitated.*) Charles – what do you keep looking over there for? Look at me. What's happened?

CHARLES. Don't you see?

RUTH. See what?

CHARLES. Elvira.

RUTH. (*Staring at him incredulously.*) Elvira!!

CHARLES. (*With an effort at social grace.*) Yes. Elvira dear, this is Ruth. Ruth, this is Elvira.

(*RUTH tries to take his arm. CHARLES retreats downstage left.*)

RUTH. (*With forced calmness.*) Come and sit down, darling.

CHARLES. Do you mean to say you can't see her?

RUTH. Listen, Charles – you just sit down quietly by the fire and I'll mix you another drink. Don't worry about the mess on the carpet, Edith can clean it up in the morning.

(*She takes him by the arm.*)

CHARLES. (*Breaking away.*) But you must be able to see her – she's there – look – right in front of you – there!

RUTH. Are you mad! What's happened to you?

CHARLES. You can't see her?

RUTH. If this is a joke, dear, it's gone quite far enough. Sit down, for God's sake, and don't be idiotic.

CHARLES. (*Clutching his head.*) What am I to do! What the hell am I to do!

ELVIRA. I think you might at least be a little more pleased to see me. After all, you conjured me up.

CHARLES. I didn't do any such thing.

ELVIRA. Nonsense; of course you did. That awful child with the cold came and told me you wanted to see me urgently.

CHARLES. It was all a mistake, a horrible mistake.

RUTH. Stop talking like that, Charles. As I told you before the joke's gone far enough.

CHARLES. I've gone mad, that's what it is, I've just gone raving mad.

RUTH. (*Pouring out some brandy and bringing it to CHARLES below the piano.*) Here – drink this.

CHARLES. (*Mechanically – taking it.*) This is appalling!

RUTH. Relax.

CHARLES. How can I relax? I shall never be able to relax again as long as I live.

RUTH. Drink some brandy.

CHARLES. (*Drinking it at a gulp.*) There! Now are you satisfied?

RUTH. Now sit down.

CHARLES. Why are you so anxious for me to sit down? What good will that do?

RUTH. I want you to relax. You can't relax standing up.

ELVIRA. African natives can. They can stand on one leg for hours.

CHARLES. I don't happen to be an African native.

RUTH. You don't happen to be a *what*?

CHARLES. (*Savagely.*) An African native!

RUTH. What's that got to do with it?

CHARLES. It doesn't matter, Ruth; really it doesn't matter.

(*CHARLES sits in the armchair. RUTH moves above him.*)

We'll say no more about it. See, I've sat down.

RUTH. Would you like some more brandy?

CHARLES. Yes, please.

(*RUTH goes up to the drinks table with the glass.*)

ELVIRA. Very unwise. You always had a weak head.

CHARLES. I could drink you under the table.

RUTH. There's no need to be aggressive, Charles. I'm doing my best to help you.

CHARLES. I'm sorry.

RUTH. (*Coming to CHARLES with the brandy.*) Here, drink this; and then we'll go to bed.

ELVIRA. Get rid of her, Charles; then we can talk in peace.

CHARLES. That's a thoroughly immoral suggestion. You ought to be ashamed of yourself.

RUTH. What is there immoral in that?

CHARLES. I wasn't talking to you.

RUTH. Who were you talking to, then?

CHARLES. Elvira, of course.

RUTH. To hell with Elvira!

ELVIRA. There now – she's getting cross.

CHARLES. I don't blame her.

RUTH. What don't you blame her for?

CHARLES. (*Rising and backing downstage left a pace.*) Oh, God!

RUTH. Now, look here, Charles. I gather you've got some sort of plan behind all this. I'm not quite a fool. I suspected you when we were doing that idiotic séance.

CHARLES. Don't be so silly. What plan could I have?

RUTH. I don't know. It's probably something to do with the characters in your book – how they, or one of them, would react to a certain situation. I refuse to be used as a guinea pig unless I'm warned beforehand what it's all about.

CHARLES. (*Moving a couple of paces towards RUTH.*) Elvira is here, Ruth – she's standing a few yards away from you.

RUTH. (*Sarcastically.*) Yes, dear, I can see her distinctly – under the piano with a zebra!

CHARLES. But Ruth –

RUTH. I am not going to stay here arguing any longer.

ELVIRA. Hurray!

CHARLES. Shut up!

RUTH. (*Incensed.*) How dare you speak to me like that?

CHARLES. Listen, Ruth. Please listen –

RUTH. I will not listen to any more of this nonsense. I am going up to bed now; I'll leave you to turn out the lights. I shan't be asleep. I'm too upset. So you can come in and say goodnight to me if you feel like it.

ELVIRA. That's big of her, I must say.

CHARLES. Be quiet. You're behaving like a guttersnipe.

Stop