**Charles, Ruth, Elvira**

CHARLES (*crosses to Ruth*) Ruth—please——

RUTH. Don't come near me!

ELVIRA. Let her have a nice cry. It'll do her good. (*She saunters round to downstage* L)

CHARLES. You're utterly heartless!

RUTH. Heartless!

CHARLES (*wildly*) I was not talking to you! I was talking to Elvira.

RUTH. Go on talking to her then, talk to her until you're blue in the face, but don't talk to me.

CHARLES (*crossing to Elvira*) Help me, Elvira——

ELVIRA. How?

CHARLES. Make her see you or something.

ELVIRA. I'm afraid I couldn't manage that. It's technically the most difficult business—frightfully complicated, you know—it takes years of study——

CHARLES. You are here, aren't you? You're not an illusion?

ELVIRA. I may be an illusion, but I'm most definitely here.

CHARLES. How did you get here?

ELVIRA. I told you last night—I don't exactly know——

CHARLES. Well, you must make me a promise that in future you only come and talk to me when I'm alone.

ELVIRA (*pouting*) How unkind you are, making me feel so unwanted. I've never been treated so rudely.

CHARLES. I don't mean to be rude, but you must see——

ELVIRA. It's all your own fault for having married a woman who is incapable of seeing beyond the nose on her face. If she had a grain of real sympathy or affection for you she'd believe what you tell her.

CHARLES. How could you expect anybody to believe this?

ELVIRA. You'd be surprised how gullible people are; we often laugh about it on the Other Side.

(RUTH, *who has stopped crying and been staring at Charles in horror, suddenly rises*)

RUTH (*gently*) Charles!

CHARLES (*surprised at her tone*) Yes, dear——

(CHARLES *crosses to her*, R)

RUTH. I'm awfully sorry I was cross.

CHARLES. But, my dear——

RUTH. I understand everything now. I do really.

CHARLES. You do?

RUTH (*patting his arm reassuringly*) Of course I do.

ELVIRA. Look out—she's up to something.

CHARLES. Will you please be quiet?

RUTH. Of course, darling. We'll all be quiet, won't we? We'll be as quiet as little mice.

CHARLES. Ruth dear, listen——

RUTH. I want you to come upstairs with me and go to bed.

ELVIRA. The way that woman harps on bed is nothing short of erotic.

CHARLES. I'll deal with you later.

RUTH. Very well, darling—come along.

CHARLES. What are you up to?

RUTH. I'm not up to anything. I just want you to go quietly to bed and wait there until Doctor Bradman comes.

CHARLES. No, Ruth, you're wrong——

RUTH (*firmly*) Come, dear——

ELVIRA. She'll have you in a strait-jacket before you know where you are.

CHARLES (*coming to Elvira—frantically*) Help me—you must help me——

ELVIRA (*enjoying herself*) My dear, I would with pleasure, but I can't think how.

CHARLES. I can. (*He moves back to Ruth*) Listen, Ruth——

RUTH. Yes, dear?

CHARLES. If I promise to go to bed, will you let me stay here for five minutes longer?

RUTH. I really think it would be better——

CHARLES. Bear with me, however mad it may seem, bear with me for just five minutes longer.

RUTH (*leaving go of him*) Very well. What is it?

CHARLES. Sit down.

RUTH (*sitting down*) All right. There!

CHARLES. Now listen, listen carefully——

ELVIRA. Have a cigarette; it will soothe your nerves.

CHARLES. I don't want a cigarette.

RUTH (*indulgently*) Then you shan't have one, darling.

CHARLES. Ruth, I want to explain to you clearly and without emotion that beyond any shadow of doubt, the ghost or shade or whatever you like to call it of my first wife Elvira is in this room now.

RUTH. Yes, dear.

CHARLES. I know you don't believe it and are trying valiantly to humour me, but I intend to prove it to you.

RUTH. Why not lie down and have a nice rest and you can prove anything you want to later on?

CHARLES. She may not be here later on.

ELVIRA. Don't worry—she will!

CHARLES. Oh God!

RUTH. Hush, dear.

CHARLES (*to Elvira*) Promise you'll do what I ask?

ELVIRA. That all depends what it is.

CHARLES (*between them both, facing up stage*) Ruth—you see that bowl of flowers on the piano?

RUTH. Yes, dear, I did it myself this morning.

ELVIRA. Very untidily, if I may say so.

CHARLES. You may not.

RUTH. Very well—I never will again. I promise.

CHARLES. Elvira will now carry that bowl of flowers to the mantelpiece and back again. You will, Elvira, won't you? Just to please me.

ELVIRA. I don't really see why I should. You've been quite insufferable to me ever since I materialized.

CHARLES. Please!

ELVIRA (*going over to the piano*) All right, I will just this once. Not that I approve of all these Maskelyne and Devant carryings-on.

CHARLES (*crossing to the mantelpiece*) Now, Ruth—watch carefully!

RUTH (*patiently*) Very well, dear.

CHARLES. Go on, Elvira—take it to the mantelpiece and back again.

(ELVIRA *takes a bowl of pansies off the piano and brings it slowly down stage, below the armchair to the fire; then suddenly pushes it towards Ruth's face, who jumps up and faces Charles, who is at the mantelpiece*)

RUTH (*furiously*) How dare you, Charles! You ought to be ashamed of yourself.

CHARLES. What on earth for?

RUTH (*hysterically*) It's a trick. I know perfectly well it's a trick. You've been working up to this. It's all part of some horrible plan . . .

CHARLES. It isn't—I swear it isn't. Elvira—do something else, for God's sake!

ELVIRA. Certainly—anything to oblige.

RUTH (*becoming really frightened*) You want to get rid of me—you're trying to drive me out of my mind——

CHARLES. Don't be so silly.

RUTH. You're cruel and sadistic and I'll never forgive you.