Charles & Ruth

CHARLES (*coming over to the breakfast-table to face* RUTH, *who is folding the cloth*) Please, Ruth—be reasonable.

RUTH. I'm perfectly reasonable.

CHARLES. I wasn't pretending—I really did believe that I saw Elvira, and when I heard her voice I was appalled.

RUTH. You put up with it for five years.

(RUTH *puts the chairs back up* R *and downstage* L. CHARLES *takes the table off stage during the next few lines*)

CHARLES. When I saw her I had the shock of my life. That's why I dropped the glass.

RUTH. But you *couldn't* have seen her.

CHARLES. I know I couldn't have, but I *did*.

RUTH. I'm willing to concede, then, that you imagined you did.

CHARLES. That's what I've been trying to explain to you for hours.

RUTH (*moving to* C *below the armchair*) Well then, there's obviously something wrong with you.

CHARLES (*sitting on the* L *arm of the sofa*) Exactly; there is something wrong with me. Something fundamentally wrong with me. That's why I've been imploring your sympathy and all I got was a sterile temperance lecture.

RUTH. You had been drinking, Charles. There's no denying that.

CHARLES. No more than usual.

RUTH. Well, how do you account for it, then?

CHARLES (*frantically*) I can't account for it; that's what's so awful.

RUTH (*practically*) Did you feel quite well yesterday—during the day, I mean?

CHARLES. Of course I did.

RUTH. What did you have for lunch?

CHARLES. You ought to know, you had it with me.

RUTH (*thinking*) Let me see now, there was lemon sole and that cheese thing.

CHARLES. Why should having a cheese thing for lunch make me see my deceased wife after dinner?

RUTH. You never know. It was rather rich.

CHARLES. Why didn't you see your dead husband then? You had just as much of it as I did.

RUTH. This is not getting us anywhere at all.

CHARLES. Of course it isn't; and it won't as long as you insist on ascribing supernatural phenomena to colonic irritation.

RUTH. Supernatural grandmother.

CHARLES. I admit she'd have been much less agitating.

RUTH (*standing at the back of the armchair*) Perhaps you ought to see a nerve specialist.

CHARLES. I am not in the least neurotic and never have been.

RUTH. A psycho-analyst, then.

CHARLES. I refuse to endure months of expensive humiliation only to be told at the end of it that at the age of four I was in love with my rocking-horse.

RUTH. What do you suggest, then?

CHARLES. I don't suggest anything, I'm profoundly uneasy.

RUTH (*sitting in the armchair*) Perhaps there's something pressing on your brain.

CHARLES. If there were something pressing on my brain I should have violent headaches, shouldn't I?

RUTH. Not necessarily. An uncle of mine had a lump the size of a cricket ball pressing on his brain for years and he never felt a thing.

CHARLES. I know I should know if I had anything like that. (*He rises and goes over to the fireplace*)

RUTH. He didn't.

CHARLES. What happened to him?

RUTH. He had it taken out and he's been as bright as a button ever since.

CHARLES. Did he have any sort of delusions? Did he think he saw things that weren't there?

RUTH. No, I don't think so.

CHARLES. Well, what the hell are we talking about him for then? It's sheer waste of valuable time.

RUTH. I only brought him up as an example.

CHARLES. I think I'm going mad.

RUTH. How do you feel now?

CHARLES. Physically, do you mean?

RUTH. Altogether.

CHARLES (*after due reflection*) Apart from being worried, I feel quite normal.