

CHARLIE. Oh, Froggy. For someone I see so little, you're such a good friend, I—. I'm so bad at talking to people. But I—I think you ought to know. Mary—Mary doesn't like me, very much.

FROGGY. Go on. ("Pull *the other*.")

CHARLIE. No, no. The fact is, she finds me boring.

FROGGY. No.

CHARLIE. Yes. Yes. (*Pause.*) Yes. (*Pause.*) That's why she wanted me to go away, you see. She simply finds me shatteringly, profoundly—boring.

FROGGY. Now, why would she think that, eh?

CHARLIE. Oh, because I am. I know it. There I've sat behind my grey little proofreader's desk for twenty-seven years, now—. I sometimes wonder whether a science-fiction magazine even *needs* a proofreader. Does anyone really care whether there is one K or two in "Klatu, barada, nikto"? No, no, I'm boring, all right. I've often wondered—how does one acquire personality? What must it be like, to be able to tell a funny story? To arouse laughter. Anger. Respect. To be thought—wise? How must it be?

FROGGY. You were a good officer.

CHARLIE. Not much of a trick in peacetime.

FROGGY. Well, we can't always 'ave wars, yer know. You would've faced enemy fire with the best if you'd 'ad to.

CHARLIE. That is something I shall always wonder.

FROGGY. Well, don't wonder. And don't wonder about Mary, either. I don't know 'er very well, but I know that a looker like wot she is, she's 'ad 'er chances. She could've cast 'er eye on some other bloke, but she never 'as, now, 'as she? (*No answer.*) Eh? (*Pause.*) 'As she?

CHARLIE. (*Who hadn't intended to admit this.*) Oh. . . .

FROGGY. Naaow.

CHARLIE. Yes. . . .

FROGGY. All right, all right. You've caught 'er flirtin' with some bloke, is that it? Caught 'er makin' eyes at some bloke?

CHARLIE. Yes. . . .

FROGGY. Where was it?

CHARLIE. The shower. . . .

FROGGY. Oh, God.

CHARLIE. Yes. . . .

FROGGY. Well, all right, all right. It 'appens in the best of marriages. Eh? One little mistake. One little dalliance, that's no reason for you — for you to —. (*Seeing Charlie's expression.*) More than one? (*Charlie nods.*) More than — two? (*Another nod.*) 'Ow many, then?

CHARLIE. Twenty-three.

FROGGY. Naaow!

CHARLIE. More or less.

FROGGY. Mary?

CHARLIE. Yes. . . .

FROGGY. I don't believe it.

CHARLIE. Quite true. Actors, writers. All the glamorous professions, you see. Criminals. . . . Veterinarians. . . .

FROGGY. Gor . . . ! And did you— know?

CHARLIE. Oh, yes. Mary wanted me to. She flaunted them at me.

FROGGY. Tsk! I don't believe it.

CHARLIE. Well. . . .

FROGGY. And you still — ? I mean, after all that, you still — ?

CHARLIE. Love her? (*Nods.*) More than anything on earth. Love is not love, Froggy, which alters when it alteration finds.

FROGGY. No. . . . (*Pause.*) 'Oo said that?

CHARLIE. Shakespeare.

FROGGY. Ah, yes. (*Pause.*) 'E could turn a phrase, couldn't 'e?

CHARLIE. Yes. . . .

FROGGY. (*Poetically.*) "Love is not love, Froggy, which —" what?

CHARLIE. "Which—which alters when it alteration finds."

FROGGY. Yes. Quite true.

CHARLIE. He—he didn't say "Froggy."

FROGGY. No. No, 'e wouldn't, of course. (*A silence.*) 'Ave you talked to anyone else about this?

CHARLIE. I've tried to. But I—I'm no good at it, you see. Talking. Talk. I—. One is expected to talk these things out, but I—I can't seem to—. I never finish sentences, I—. I have an active fear of—of—of—

FROGGY. Talk?

CHARLIE. Yes. Lately. Even idle conversation—terrifies me. Simply knowing that in another moment, it's going to be my turn, again. My turn to—to—to— .

FROGGY. To talk.

CHARLIE. Yes.

FROGGY. Well, yer won't 'ave ter worry 'ere. Betty'll do all the talkin' for both of yer.

CHARLIE. (*Alarmed.*) What?