

THE MISER

(Written for "The Listener" by ALLONA PRIESTLEY)

SHE trudged resentfully up the hill, basket in hand, tugging at the child who dragged behind her. It was one of those days when nothing would go right. She recognised the feel of it surging up in her, the choking tenseness, the anger.

"Oh, do come on," she flung at the child. She knew she was walking too fast, that his arm was tired, but the anger dried up pity. She was unreasonable and hated it, but the anger would not let her alone.

It's not fair, she said to herself. It's not fair. I don't get a chance to be a person any more. If you're a mother you get left out of all the fun. It's not fair.

She reached the house at last. The child was tired and difficult. He defied her till the resentment seemed to choke her. Crossly she dumped him in his cot. For a time his wailing dragged at her like prickly tentacles of sound, but at last he dropped asleep.

I'll feel better after a rest, she thought.

She settled with a magazine. The stories were all about rich women with no children, women with careers of their own, women idolised by exciting and virile men. The resentment crouched at the back of her mind, waiting. The uneasy weight of tasks stretching ahead was like a smothering cloud.

When at last she forced herself back into time, she was late. Now she would have to hurry all afternoon.

TOO soon the children were home from school. They and their friends came in like a wave, spreading through every part of the house. Impossible to escape them, their noise, the mess. They chattered together, each trying to be the first to tell a piece of news.

"Oh, be quiet," she snapped. The chatter faltered, trailed off. Slowly they went. Soon she heard the radio turned on, heard mounting scuffles and shrieks from the sitting room. She went in savagely. The cushions were flung about.



The children were dancing noisily to the music.

"Get out of here," she said. "Get right out of here. I've had as much as I can stand."

They went before her anger.

Nothing but noise, she thought. Beating at me like blows. Noise and work. That radio . . . She went quickly to turn it off.

Then she paused, her hand on the switch. It was a choir singing. Clear

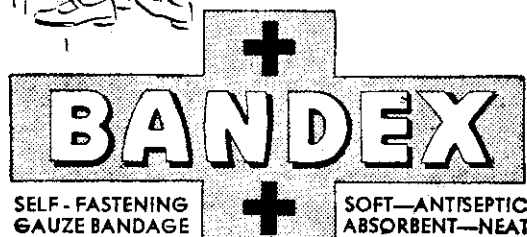
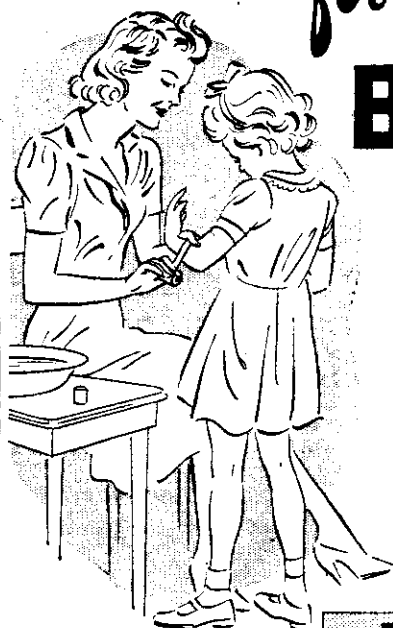
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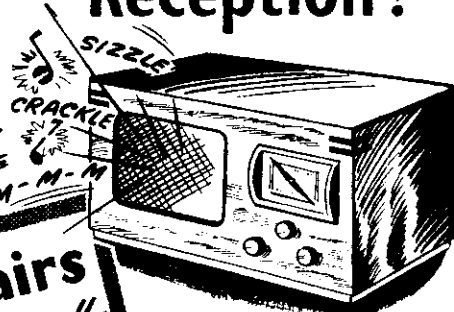
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