

high voices echoing through vaulted space, moving and weaving like colours in a pattern.

It's lovely, she thought. I've heard it before, I think. It's lovely.

She dropped into the chair beside the radio. The clear high voices rose on wings, beyond time and space. Slowly her tensed body relaxed. Her arms hung heavy, her shoulders lay back against the chair. The taut anger in her face died away. It's like happy solemn children, she thought. Like children dancing sedately. She thought of her own children dancing. I shouldn't have snapped at them. Just because I feel like this. But they never let me alone.

On and on wove the voices, deep voices now, moving up and through the pattern of clear high sound. Infinite patterns, weaving surely towards some rest.

A new part of her seemed to grow from the music. They never let you alone because you are always running away, it said. What a queer idea, she thought. But it's true isn't it? I wouldn't like to be single again. The emptiness of the good times rushed suddenly at her from the old days. Oh, it was all right then. I was young. But I've grown out of that really. This is my life. This is the work for me to do. Why do I keep running away?

Up and up soared the voices, carrying her with them. You're afraid, the voices told her. You're afraid you'll lose something. You're a miser. You hoard yourself.

That's true, the new part of her cried.

Now the voices reached the end to which they had moved, perfect and inevitable. Suddenly she felt that she too had reached an end. She was at rest. The resentment had gone, the hot choking and the anger had gone. She felt serene, completely at peace.

"You have been listening..." Quickly she switched it off. If it had a name it would just be a piece of music. She would feel she'd been silly. The resentment would come again.

* * *

SHE went to the door. The children were playing in the half light. They saw her and checked uncertainly. When she smiled they shouted and went back to play with new zest.

She turned back to the dishevelled room. It's only the cushions, she thought, putting them back. Now the furniture was quiet too, watchful but content. It even seems to affect the house when I'm cross.

She looked at her soiled apron and untidy shoes. I'd better change, she said to herself. The clock struck. She was amazed. But it's only ten minutes since I sat down. It seems hours. I'll have plenty of time.

The serenity glowed in her. It won't last, she said, hurting herself. But the new part of her said, You'll lose it, but you'll find it again. Once you know it you'll find it again.

Over the dinner table her husband looked at her.

"What's made you so pleased?" he wanted to know.

She looked at them all. The children were chattering again, the baby was struggling messily with his plate.

"I was thinking what a nice family this is," she said.

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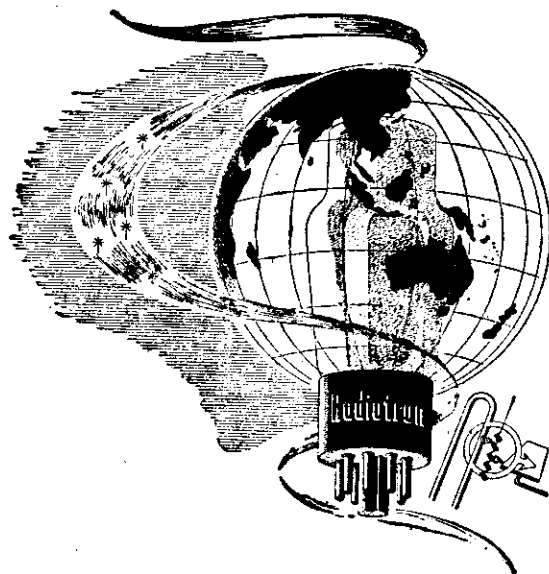
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