

DEBUT (PRIZE-WINNING SHORT-STORY)

She was a big, blonde woman, with corn coloured hair sweeping up in a roll from her baby-sweet face. Just now a frown furrowed the ivory of her brow, and her vivid blue eyes seemed to have tremendous worry behind them. She was waiting for something - some thing possibly unpleasant, for she paced restlessly up and down the room, her high-heeled shoes making no noise on the thick pile of the carpet.

The room was very small, and there was little space for perambulation. She sat down suddenly in the austere wooden chair and glanced at her watch for the fiftieth time since leaving her home in Wimbledon some two hours before.

God, how the time dragged.

She hadn't thought it would be as bad as this. Nervousness, yes, but not this all-pervading fear, which seemed to start from somewhere in her stomach and travel all over her body till her knees felt weak and her fingertips shook with fright.

She thought of all the months they had spent coaching her at the Announcers' School. She couldn't let them down now, she just couldn't.

Ten more minutes. How could she stand it? She rose unsteadily from the chair and opened the door. There were some messenger boys in the hall outside. She beckoned to one of them.

'Fetch me a glass of water, please', she smiled conciliatingly.

The boy looked surprised. 'There's a faucet in the studio you've just left, Miss.' he said.

'Oh' she murmured faintly, and followed him into the room.

'There you are, Miss'.

She fumbled for a coin, but he was gone before she even had her bag open. The water made her feel better. She was ready for the ordeal now, even if her knees were a bit shaky still. She looked at her watch again. Five minutes. A panel slid back and a man's head poked through.

'O. K.', he mouthed cheerfully. She nodded. Three minutes. She took another turn up the room, then pushed the chair over to the table and sat down. She coughed and looked at her watch again. Almost time. She thought of them at home. They'd be having tea now and wondering. A warning buzzer went, with shattering effect. She clutched the table top and waited, her heart pounding. The round disc in the panel before her glowed red.

She spoke into the microphone. 'That was a B. B. C. recording.' she said.

F. A. B.