F. J. Bergmann - Duration

We lost the second search party’s signal just beyond the far side of the crater. Our own signals went unanswered except for the faint hum reflected from the clouds. A two-year tour of duty was at least a year too long. Just before sunset, the wind rose. The landscape dissolved in red mist. We had been guests on that planet for over three hundred years without learning each others’ languages. They would come out to listen anyway when we signaled. They answered each burst with sharp cries. It seemed to excite them; perhaps it was like singing. We wondered if they had a word for *bliss.*

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