

“OUT OF A CLEAR SKY”

Night has fallen. A kerosene lamp and a fire burning in an old-fashioned range give the only light to the roughly-furnished kitchen-living-room of a wayback farm in Northern Victoria—now known as the New Mallee, since all this happened very long ago.

At the table, finishing his evening meal, sits JIM, a big broad-shouldered, kindly-faced man, with a ruddy complexion and a bushy fair beard. He is tired from his day's labors, but pleasantly so, being a man physically strong and fitted to work in the open air.

At the door to the adjoining bedroom stands BESS, a gaunt hard-faced woman clothed in bodice and skirt of a sad-colored hue, with her hair drawn tightly to a knot at the back of her head. She has been putting the children to bed.

BESS (at door of bedroom): Good night, children. Now, go to sleep. I'll leave the door a weeny bit open so that you can see the light, but you mustn't talk—you must go right off to sleep. (She leaves the door slightly ajar, and moves to stove.)

JIM: Been a fine day, Bessie.

BESS: Yes.

JIM: One out of the box. Well, the sowing's all done.

BESS: Good.

JIM: If only the rain comes at the right time this year we should be in Easy Street.

BESS: It looks like a good season at last.

JIM: At last! Strewth! The times we've had. It's up to the weather to give us an even break. Bad seasons and bad seasons and bad. Still—we've held on.

BESS: Yes.

(Pause.)

JIM (ruminating): Funny thing, old girl, I got thinking out there, as I sowed the last furrow. Don't often think nowadays somehow—lost the trick of it.

BESS: There've been times when to think would have meant madness, and so you—just didn't.

JIM: That's it, I s'pose. Just lived from one day to another—hardly hoping, even. Ten years—by gum!

BESS: Yes Ten years!

JIM: Kids all right?

BESS: Jamey has a bit of a cold, but fev'rish, nothing much. He'll be all right in the morning.

JIM (sharply): Sure?

BESS: Yes.

JIM: Oh, well, a man can't help being anxious—we've lost two kids, you know—two boys.

BESS: I know.

JIM: It's been hard to rear them.

BESS: It was hard to lose our first—our two first.

JIM: Yes, specially both of them being boys. Still, long as Jamey gets on all right we won't complain, will we, Mother?

BESS: It's wonderful how strong the girls are. Never an ache or a pain. They're growing up fine.

JIM (heartily): Too right, they are. They'll make fine wives for farmers some day. But Jamey, now! Well, with a good season or two this farm ought to be all right for him, eh, Bess?

BESS: Yes. Jamey's made up to you for a lot, hasn't he, Jim?

JIM: Too right. Though I wish the other two boys could have lived. Well—it's no use looking back.

BESS: No. Never any use looking back.

JIM: Funny thing though, that's just what I have been doing all day to-day. Looking back. You've had a rough spin, old girl.

BESS: Yes.

JIM: Well, we've got on all right—somehow. It's fine just to have the prospect of a good season and to feel safe. Safe! By Jove! Do you remember when we *didn't* feel safe?

BESS: Yes.

JIM: Not to feel safe! Cripes! That's the worst part of all. Worse than hunger and cold and bad times. To cringe and creep and be afraid to say "Good day" to a neighbour. Always to be hiding.

BESS: Well that's all over.

JIM: Yes, I guess we're all right now. Ten years is a long time, and our little trouble has been forgotten long ago—by Jake and the police and—everyone.

BESS (shuddering uncontrollably): Jake!

JIM: Yes, Jake! Your husband, Bess. I wonder what's become of him. The only man who could've ever identified me—the only man who would gladly do us harm. Whew! Wonder what's become of him. Dead, perhaps! Or married again, thinking you dead.

BESS (violently): I hope to heaven he is dead.

JIM: Curse him, so do I, the swine.

BESS: I remember him always. How he used to kick me with his heavy boots—cuff and hit and swear at me—and I a young, pretty thing then.

JIM: Don't think of it, Bess. Well, I got you away from him and all that, anyway.

BESS: I guess a woman's justified in leaving a man who treats her like Jake treated me.

JIM: Sure thing.

BESS: Wonder what he's doing now.

JIM: Doing bad, whatever he's doing. My, if he ever found us out!

BESS: Yes. I suppose he's the only man who could connect you with that trouble ten years ago.

JIM: Yes. Well, the bit of money I got from that hold-up got us safely away and kept us hidden till the hue and cry blew over.

BESS: I don't regret the robbery.

JIM: No. If only—if only—

BESS: If only Sam Martin hadn't used his gun!

JIM: If only! The blasted fool.

BESS: And you could never prove you didn't do the shooting if you were caught.

JIM: Me shoot! Cripes, no! I couldn't shoot a man.

BESS: I guess you couldn't, Jim. You're one of the soft sort.

JIM: Yes, I s'pose I'm soft. We might have got on better—go! ahead more—if I'd been harder. More Jake's sort, eh?

BESS (shuddering): Don't, Jim. You're a good husband to me and a good father to the kids, and that's more than getting on would be.

JIM: Sure, Bess, you haven't regretted it?

BESS: Never! With Jake I was in hell!

JIM: I guess you were.

BESS: I wish, though, we could've been married, if only for the children's sakes.

JIM: But what difference does it make, anyway? I guess marriage is only for town folks. People who haven't got enough work to do to keep them out of mischief—idle fools.

BESS: It's a protection for a woman though, Jim. S'pose now you fancied another girl and went off with her. Where would I and the kids be?

JIM: What for should I fancy another girl? I was never a bloke for women, anyway. What a man wants in a god-forsaken place like this is a mate. And a woman makes the best mate for a man. Now, here all alone year after year with another man, we should have got on one another's nerves. I camped with a chap once on the mines, all alone we were for six months. Lord, how we hated one another before the time was up. But with a woman it's different, somehow. There's something between you, keeps you right.

BESS: Yes.

JIM: And, so long as a man's got his own woman, what does he want with any other? That's what I want to know.

BESS (grimly): Jake could always do with two or three.

JIM: Huh! Jake! Swine! His sort are the kind they have to make laws for, else they'd foul the whole world.

BESS: Well, one good thing is, even if he did run into us now, he'd never know us.

JIM: Never know us! Why not?

BESS: We've changed so. Hard times and anxiety and work and worry and—having babies and all the rest of it. Why, I wasn't a bad-looking girl ten years ago, and look at me now!

JIM: What's wrong with you? Bit thin, and you don't frizz your hair any more, but you don't look much different to me.

BESS: Don't I? Well, that's good, anyway.

JIM: And what about me? Have I changed so much?

BESS: You! Oh, yes! You were a thin, lanky lad when I first knew you. Clean shaven and bashful and—look at you now.

JIM: Well, I s'pose I've broadened out a bit and this beard is a good disguise, of course. We always thought that.

By DORIS HAYBALL

BESS: Yes. I daresay Jake has changed a bit, too.

JIM: Most likely—but I reckon I'd know him if I saw him! Oh, I guess we're safe enough now. Cripes, how I used to lie awake nights dreading his happening along. Once I couldn't abide a knock at the door in case it was him come to look for us. The only man who could connect me with that store robbery—the only man who'd want to make out I was responsible for killing that storekeeper. Me—who couldn't stand the sight of firearms in those days!

BESS: Well—you've had to get used to them since, Jim. Many's the time we've relied on your rifle for our daily meal.

JIM: Yes. I hated killing birds and rabbits at first, but "needs must when the devil drives"—and it makes a man a man to have a woman and kids depending on him. Still, that's not taking a human life, old girl.

BESS: No.

JIM: I know I'm soft-hearted, and slow too, belike. My word, we'd never have got through if it hadn't been for your pluck and grit and quick wits. I remember . . . we've been pretty close to it many a time.

BESS: Yes, it's a good thing one of us is hard and quick.

JIM: You're quick, but you're not hard, Bessie.

BESS: Oh, I don't know. I wasn't once, of course, but life makes you. If a thing has got to be done, then it's got to be done, and I realise that. Funny—hardest thing I ever did was to leave Jake, bad as he was. I'd been brought up pious. But once I made up my mind to that—well, the rest came easy.

(Silence. JIM gets out his pipe and tobacco and smokes.)

JIM (comfortably): My rose trees are coming on nicely, Bessie. If things only go right. If the rain comes when it oughter, we'll have a little garden yet.

BESS (kindly): You and your garden.

JIM: Well, why not? A garden's a thing to make a man glad, I always say. Flowers! Dunno. Somehow they make me feel—all different—flowers—and the kids—and you—make it all seem worth while.

(From the bedroom comes the sound of a child's voice, crying.)

BESS (preparing to go to him): That's Jamey!

JIM (good-humoredly): Tell him if he doesn't go right off to sleep I'll come and give him paddy-whack the drumstick.

(She goes to the bedroom, closing the door after her. A knock sounds at the house-door. JIM jumps up to open it, as offstage a man's voice calls: Hullo, there!)

JIM (cheerily, at the door): Good night, Stranger. What can I do for you?

STRANGER: Sorry to disturb you, mate, but I'm right out of tucker, and

yours is the only house I've seen within miles.

JIM: We are a bit off the beaten track and neighbours're pretty scarec. Come in.

STRANGER: Thanks.

(He comes in and drops his pack by the door. He is a tall, dark man, much lined and thin, wearing khaki breeches and overcoat. He takes his wide hat off, disclosing black close-cropped hair, thickly sown with grey.)

JIM (at the stove): We can give you a bit of supper, mate, but we've no beds to spare.

STRANGER: That's all right. I'm used to camping out, and the night's fine.

JIM: Sit down, mate; and have a drop of stew.

STRANGER (sitting in seat vacated by JIM): Thanks. (Receiving stew): Thanks, old man.

JIM (pouring tea): Hoofing it?

STRANGER: No, riding. My horse is outside. He's got his nosebag.

JIM (sitting in BESS's chair): Water?

STRANGER: Yes, we watered at your dam down lower. After chancing on it, I saw your light, and thought I'd come on here and see if I could get something for myself.

JIM (heartily): That's the way.

STRANGER: Good stew, this!

JIM: My wife makes a good stew, though I say it as shouldn't.

STRANGER: Oh, as to that, I've always found a word of praise goes a long way with the women.

JIM: Yes—and yet there's them that never gives it.

STRANGER: That's true.

JIM: My missus reckons that kind words mean more to a woman than gifts or jewellery.

STRANGER (laughing): Well, that's good, anyway—they're a lot cheaper.

JIM (laughing, too): That's so.

STRANGER: Funny thing—your voice seems sort of familiar to me. Can't just place it.

JIM (easily): Go on. Can't say as how I know you at all, mate.

STRANGER: Queer—queer; like an—echo. You a Melbourne man?

JIM (a shade too sharply): No, came here from the Old Country.

STRANGER (contemptuously): The Old Country! Huh! Pommies!

JIM (amusedly): You don't like Pommies?

STRANGER (rudely): No! Curse of the country! You don't sound like a Pommy, though! Sound like an Aussie to me!

JIM: Oh, the wife and I're Londoners, but we've been out here a tidy time. What with one thing and another I guess we've picked up the Aussie lingo.

STRANGER: Huh! It's your voice, though. Swear I'd heard it before.

JIM: Not likely.

STRANGER: You don't know me?

JIM: Can't say I do, mate.

STRANGER: Ever been in Melbourne?

JIM: Just passing through.

STRANGER: Came straight here, did you, when you landed?

JIM: Straight here.

STRANGER: How've you done?

JIM: Oh, poorly. Things are looking up now though. We've had a hard struggle. If we get a good season this year we should be on our feet. Everything promises well.

STRANGER: And if you don't?

JIM: God knows! Start again, I s'pose.

STRANGER: You wouldn't pull up stakes and make for Home then?

JIM: Oh, no! No, we'd never do that.

STRANGER: Why not? Most Poms I know don't stick things. A bad year or two and they're off back.

JIM (good-humoredly): Oh, nonsense; there's plenty of immigrants about here, all sticking it.

STRANGER (muttering): Funny, funny! You don't look like anyone I've ever known—but your voice!

(At that moment BESS returns, opening and shutting the door very quietly, so as not to awaken the now sleeping children.)

BESS (as she enters): They're asleep at last. They heard someone knock, and that woke them up properly. Had quite a job getting them quiet again.

(She comes forward. The STRANGER swings round to look at her.)

STRANGER (sharply, fiercely): Lizzie! (Rises.)

BESS (staring at him, after a frozen pause): What do you mean?

STRANGER: Lizzie! Lizzie! My wife!

JIM (springing to his feet): What? What?

STRANGER: My wife!

JIM (thunderstruck, as the truth dawns on his slow mind): Jake Hamilton!

JAKE: That's right! That's right! You know me, do you? I know you, too. I know you! Jim Staley! JIM STALEY! (His voice rises to a shout.)

JIM: No, no! You're wrong! You're mistaken. That's not my name!

JAKE (very ugly): Not your name, eh? You call yourself something else now, of course. But you can't tell me! I know you! You and my runaway wife! My precious—runaway—wife! . . . To find you—like this! After all these years! Here! When I'd almost forgotten! By accident! By GOD!

JIM: You'll let bygones be bygones, Jake?

JAKE: What? You're mad! My precious wife and her—

JIM (thundering): Stop!

JAKE: Stop? Why should I stop, you—you— Why, why—you're wanted—wanted for robbery—robbery and murder.

JIM (conciliatingly): Now, Jake, you know I never did no murder.

JAKE: Know, do I? I guess I know more than that! And that's that my evidence will hang you!

BESS (seeing that the game is up): Jake!

JAKE (snarling): Don't Jake me, you hell-cat! By God, I'll settle you both!

(Continued overleaf.)

IMPRESSIONS IN WAX

by NORMAN BALMER

("Eddie" of 3KZ)

MYSTIC WOODS (Poet and Peasant) and *CROWN OF LIFE* (Columbia DOX 458).—Present writer has always felt that the rendition of a worthy musical work in a form other than that for which it was originally composed is akin to drinking champagne from a china cup. Even after witnessing swaying masses enjoying the waltz tempo set to Fibich's famous *Poeme*; even after realizing that Mr. Peabody's banjo record of the sextette from *Lucia* had quite good sales; this dislike of wrong media has persisted.

Recently, however, Columbia has released *Raymond Overture* and *Poet and Peasant* in a vocal setting, sung by the B.B.C. Wireless Chorus, and the execution is such that one forgets the novelty—usually so nauseating—and appreciates the recording for the work of art it really is. *Crown of Life* (the title given to Von Suppe's number in this vocal form) might be in any connoisseur's collection.

CORONATION MARCH (from "The Prophet") and *LARGO* (Handel) (Columbia DOX456).—The aforesaid connoisseur might also do worse than secure this record, one of the last we will be hearing from the Bournemouth Municipal Orchestra with Sir Dan Godfrey as its leader. Although very, very familiar, the numbers are played to the satisfaction of all, and give indication of the work this famous conductor has done for so many years, in helping to spread appreciation of good music amongst England's prosaic masses.

KERRY DANCE (Columbia BO1327).—Here is high artistry from an unexpected quarter at a low price. Carroll Gibbons and John W. Green, two American pianists, with a little additional instrumental assistance, almost succeed in bringing a breath of Erin from off the wax.

MILIZA KORJUS (Soprano).—This artist arrived with some heralding; it was therefore the more surprising to find the familiar plum label adorning her records. The young coloratura has only two records on sale in this country as yet (C2688 and C2664), and as *Proch Variations* and *Una Voce* are amongst the four titles sung, it is possible to compare her with many reigning and passe artists. Overseas critiques already perused—particularly those dealing with numbers not yet released here—prophecy so brilliant a future for this young lady that these first two records may become historic. Their quality and freshness, however, are sufficient reasons for their acquisition.

RICHARD CROOKS.—This tenor, who has so many fine records to his credit, here makes on DB2336 a record probably destined to be his best seller amongst 12-inch numbers. It is a pity.

Kathleen Mavourneen is certainly not a typical Irish rendering, and has a shaky passage at the commencement. In the Lehar number on the reverse (*Merry Widow Waltz Songs*), there is trouble in the upper register. His subsequent number (*Killarney* and Tosti's *Good-bye*

—DB2337) is also barely past mediocrity.

RAPSODIE ESPAGNOLE (DB2367/8, H.M.V.)—As is the case with the majority of leaders in any new form of art, Ravel is eschewed by the majority. His *Bolero*, because of one or two simple renditions being available, gets by. The usual criticism of his compositions is to the effect that one is always waiting for something to happen and nothing ever does. Part 2 (*Malaguena*) of this work confounds this generalism.

The work is performed by Leopold Stokowski, who, of late years, has developed into one of the greatest exponents of modern music. The recording is brilliant; the work is also brilliant, if not beautiful.

MURDER IN MAYFAIR (H.M.V. C2697) and *MOONLIGHT IS SILVER* (C2710) recordings are now available. Gertrude Lawrence and Douglas Fairbanks, junr., make the latter; Ivor Novello appears with Edna Best in Part 1 and Fay Compton in Part 2 of the record from his own play. All amateur actors should study Part 2 of the *Mayfair* record; Novello's breathing control and Miss Compton's laughter are above reproach.

Some indication of the various sound effects available on records, and which can be of interest to amateur societies, will be given next month.

"OUT OF A CLEAR SKY"—cont.

BESS: Jake! Jake! I've never done you any harm.

JAKE (sarcastic, slowly, sneering): No! Is—that—so? Well, we'll see!

JIM: Can't you forget, man? We've got three kiddies, and what's to become of them and Bess if you send me up?

JAKE (mockingly): Three kids, have you? Well, of all the cheek! Who are you to have three kids? You're not married, are you?

JIM (sullenly): Good as.

JAKE: Good as! Pah!

BESS (coming forward): We're not married, Jake—as you know. There are three babies, and it's been hard to rear them, too. You can't blame me for leaving you. You gave me a—well, you know what sort of a time you gave me, I guess. (She can't plead—though she tries.)

JAKE (snarling): None of your lip, now. You were my wife, weren't you?

BESS: What are you going to do?

JAKE: Do? Do the two of you!

That's what I'm going to do! Finish your little games! Hell! I've dreamed of meeting you two some day—and here you are! Here we all are! Right into my hands.

JIM (pleading): Jake. Don't. What good will it do you? Give us a chance.

JAKE: Keep your talk. You'll need it before a judge and a jury, my man! Don't waste your breath on me.

JIM (hopelessly): You always were a hard man, Jake.

JAKE: I'm going. Thanks for your hospitality (ironically)... Next time we meet, you will be in the dock.

BESS: No! No!

(With an evil laugh JAKE goes out the door, slamming it after him).

(JIM and BESS stand looking at one another).

JIM (wearily): And to think I didn't recognise him! I never thought! If only I had, I might have got rid of him before you came in.

BESS (after a long moment, slowly): You can't let him get away like that, Jim.

JIM: No. (He goes for his rifle, standing in a corner, picks it up, sees that it is loaded, and starts for the door. At the door): It's all right, old girl, I'll fix him.

BESS (hardly): I will be listening for the shot.

(She stands, listening—waiting—) (There is a long moment of intense silence. Then suddenly the door bursts open and JIM reappears, wildly).

BESS (astounded): JIM! But I heard no shot!

JIM (stumbling forward, groaning): Bess—I couldn't do it. I couldn't do it.

BESS (unbelieving): He's got away? Got away! You let him go? Then—we're NOT safe!

JIM (dropping into a chair and hiding his head in his arms on the table—in a kind of wail): I couldn't do it, Bessie! I COULDN'T DO IT!

(BESS stands transfixed with horror, as JIM's loud, hard sobs fill the silence).

(Slowly the curtain falls).

This play may be performed in public only by arrangement with "The Playbill"