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Wisdom's Gate

By Margaret Ayer Barnes

The butler was standing on the dining room threshold, regarding the guests with professional detachment.

"Come to luncheon," called Aunt Muriel, her bright eyes wandering over the room full of relatives, lingering for an instant with a gleam of amusement on Aunt Isabel's grim countenance. "Albert will you call the children? Ed, give one arm to Isabel and the other to Jane. You come with me, Stephen, we've got too many women. The rest of you can straggle."

They hadn't Uncle Robin—the thought came to Cicily as the little procession was informally forming—and she thought with a pang of her former father-in-law of whom she had been fond, and of how he'd loved Jack and of how their divorce had distressed him. You couldn't do anything about such flashes of pain. No use regretting that she'd never told him, at the time of the catastrophe, how badly she'd felt about it. She missed him, however, at this first family reunion since his death eight months ago. Belle must be missing him. She was certainly thinking of him, for she murmured, "You mustn't mind Mother. She's nervous. She's been at loose ends since Father died."

"Oh, I understand," said Cicily the things that she didn't say shone in her eyes. This confidential exchange contributed materially to their sense of recaptured intimacy and Cicily added daintily, "Mumsy says it upset her to have Albert and me turn up."

"But isn't that ridiculous?" said Belle very calmly, making her attitude definite and clear. Those four words of Belle's cheered Cicily tremendously. They also excited her, for the situation was charged with emotional tension and made her eager to continue her conversation with her cousin. Belle's a good sport, she kept thinking, missing some of the observations of Mr. Shanks on her right and Mr. Hessler on her left as soup followed the oysters and turkey the soup and salad the turkey and ice cream and mince pie set a crown on the meal. She couldn't see Belle across Aunt Muriel's centerpiece of snowball crystals and chrysanthemums, but she thought of her affectionately, commending her generosity.

I hand it to her, thought Cicily as the women arose from the tables and across the chrysanthemums Belle's eyes met her own. It was clear from their expression, questioning yet inviting, that she shared Cicily's temptation to go on with their disturbing conversation. And why not? Inclination led Cicily to arrive at the conclusion, "It would probably be good for us to blow off a little steam." But the children must be dealt with; Bertie settled for his nap on the guest room lounge and the older ones established in the sun room again, where Aunt Muriel had arranged a tournament of checkers. When all that was done, the two young women drifted diffidently together. "Shall we sit here?" asked Belle, indicating two armchairs drawn close to a window. Privacy was assured there, for the men of the party had remained in the dining room and the rest of the women were gathered around the fire.

"Fine," said Cicily, accepting her coffee cup from the tray of the butler. The pause that followed was slightly disconcerting, and Cicily broke it. "I'm glad to be home again."

"Are you really?" asked Belle. You could tell from her tone that she had found in that statement something to interest her. As Cicily hesitated she added, "Why?" "I hardly know why," said Cicily evasively, not looking at her cousin, for eyes could be mirrors and the wrath of Audrey Diston had risen before her. She hadn't even thought of her for over two hours. This respite was unprecedented and she had Belle to thank for it. She wondered if Belle knew that Albert had declined the post of Valparaiso. They had told Dad and Mumsy and Aunt Muriel and Ed Brown.

"Would you have liked Chile? So she obviously did. "Albert wouldn't have, would he?" Cicily said hastily. "We had to come home. We were broke."

To cover her confusion Belle was asking politely. "Has Albert any plans?" "Not yet." She hated to admit it. "Of course he expects to go back to the foreign service."

Belle made no comment, but her silence asked—how? "Uncle Alden says my bank stock will pay dividends some day." The statement had no relevance for either of the women who had married Albert Lancaster.

"Oh—it stopped paying?" "Yes. Temporarily. The Bay State Trust Company isn't going to fail or anything." Cicily wanted to make that quite clear. "That's lucky."

"But in the meantime—well,

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Ellen's Diary

By an Island Farmer's Wife

CONDUCT WIDESPREAD STUDY
LONDON — (CP) — Eight expeditions will leave Britain this summer to study animal and bird life in the Arctic and Antarctic regions and in the Swiss Alps.

UNEARTH HASTINGS DEAD
BATTLE, Sussex, England — (CP) — Remains of Saxon warriors believed killed in the Battle of Hastings in 1066 were unearthed in the Deanery Gardens here recently.

Small measure of regret then that we today saw the unmistakable signs which mark the close of the seedtime, when the machinery used then was returned to its storage up at the clatter of it, to watch our farmers leave the yard on a first trip thither, disc harrows trailing the car. "Cropping's done!" I commented to grand-daughter. She had come to beg "water from the pump" to be used in her morning batch of mud pies. A dusting of sand lay on a cheek and a bit of it too clung to small bare feet. And of course not knowing anything of the import of my words though doubtless sensing the underlying regret she repeated slowly: "Cropping's done!"

The machines that in the freshness of Spring had seemed part and parcel of it were now strangely out of place in the scene, that gave opening roses to the lawn and daisies to silver the meadows. Gone now is the seedtime leaving rich memories to store away with those of past Springs — of steaming fields, awakened and presently patterned fetchingly in the cultivating of teams sweat-stained coming home to drink at the tubs; of seeds in sacks by a fence, and James at the sowing with the old seeder. Not that our younger farmer could not attend to this, but it is especially James' rite — like an Elder who passes the elements of the Sacrament in the old Kirk, so James must always attend to the sowing. Never at Alderlea would I be the seedtime, without James, scoring the seat of the machine, since it "inclines one to laziness," following patiently after the horses, and briskly, at the sowing of our fields. Farm-folk up early, no idling at noon; homing at edge of dusk — is the seedtime now come to an end.

A truck heaped high with sacks of feed for the summer hogs came today. "A few of those" James observed calculating the cost "would soon run into the price of a farm!" and an Anniversary returned to the old folks here. Bound up with utopian memories. "There's been many a change in the community," since we were married, Ellen James said, mentioning the names of loved ones and old friends, gone the way of all flesh. And Jock over-hearing smiled: "But you couldn't expect those old fellows to live forever!" However, one does always peeping familiar scenes with those who may not walk therein again... But now James, snoring in the hammock beneath the old birch the coolness that has followed the heat of today, calls me here on a verandah. His words are amusing but now that I weigh them, most reassuring: "Come over here, Ellen — and hold hands like we used to!" It's the night slipping in softly above the hills, the fragrance over all, and old memories crowding this evening — at end of June!

Until tomorrow — Diary — Good-night.

nearly everything I have is invested in it." Belle received this statement with her receptive silence and, feeling a fool, as everyone does who has allowed money to evaporate, Cicily continued in defensive explanation: "Uncle Alden's been managing it. The depression came along and he was easy to fool. He's hard up himself. He lost a lot in Kruegar. Some of my money, too."

(To Be Continued)

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