

PLACES FOR TWO

By MILDRED WHITE.

Sarah drew aside the ruffled curtain to look down the country road. It was not a cheery outlook, with rain making pools of the deep worn ruts, and somber clouds turning the twilight to darkness. But Sarah took in the view philosophically, just as she took the cheerlessness and somberness of her own life.

Time had been, years ago, when the roadside cottage was a house of mirth, merry with young people's laughter and comfortable with the protecting presence of the old.

Sarah's parents had long since passed to their reward, while the sisters, who were all older than she, lived in various distant homes, more or less selfishly absorbed in their own families. Sarah had clung to the old place, at first through duty to her older invalids, then because there was no place else to go.

She managed to keep the cottage heated and comfortable; to tend and sing over the vegetables in her garden, to keep there, aside, a little plot of flowers with which to cheer the sick or rejoice, perhaps, in some affair of the living.

Sarah was always glad when the stories ended happily, and sometimes, after she had laid the paper aside, she would sit in the cozy, silent room before the fire, picturing to herself a romance which might have been her own. Sarah was sixty now—a good, wholesome, pink-cheeked sixty—but she had put her hope of love aside.

She lighted another yellow shaded lamp in the small yellow dining room and moved about setting the supper table.

She smiled with a sort of weary amusement as she put down a second cup and plate opposite her own, then added a knife and fork for company.

For twenty years Sarah had been doing this same useless thing. It seemed less like being alone to see that other place ready—and waiting, almost as if the door might open at any moment to admit her companion. Then when the supper was quite ready Sarah went out to the stable to shut up old Moll for the night.

Moll was the white horse, and Sarah's desolation so preyed upon her out there in the rain and the darkness that she was tempted to linger beside old Moll, just to feel the comfort of a living presence. And as she stumbled up the steps of the back porch she came all at once face to face with the human presence of a smilingly apologetic and very wet old man.

Raindrops were gleaming on his white beard, rivulets ran from the brim of his felt hat.

"Beg pardon, ma'am," said the old man gently, "but I reckon I've come pretty far in the storm and can't get on to where I was going'. Kin I dry up a spell by your fire which shines through the window? It looks inviting, I must say." And as the old man's request was coupled with a very evident shiver, Sarah's protective heart immediately responded.

"Go right in ahead of me," she said cordially; "it ain't no time for formalities."

But when the old man was rid of his overcoat and was resting in Sarah's father's arm chair he smiled again in his deprecatory way and took a card from his pocket.

"That's my name," he said, "Ebenezer Styles. Reckon you're acquainted with young E. Styles? Well, he's my son."

"Eben Styles," Sarah repeated, awed, "the lawyer down to the village—him, your son? Hadn't you better telephone to keep him from worryin' for fear you ain't coming back."

The old man sadly shook his head.

"The only thing that'll worry Eben—or leastways Eb's wife," he said slowly, "is the fear that I will come back. Seems I kind of make 'em ashamed all the time. Eb's wife she ain't been used to my kind. An' reckon—"

The wrinkled face lit up with grim humor. "Reckon I don't never want to get used to her kind. So when I telephone 'em it'll be just to say that I ain't goin' back."

"But what," asked Sarah wonderingly, "he you goin' to do?"

"That," Ebenezer Styles replied, "will be decided later. I've sold property, an' I get my interest regular from the money what I sold it for."

"Jest now, then," Sarah said briskly, "come an' have a little supper."

The old man looked hesitatingly at the table laid so neatly for two. "You was expectin' company," he said, "ain't I puttin' somebody out?"

"For twenty years," she said, "I bin expectin' somebody, an' until tonight nobody ever came."

Long the man and woman sat in the sunshine of the yellow lamp, with the storm but an echo outside, pouring into each other's sympathetic and understanding ears a story of lonely years past.

"For being with just folks," Ebenezer told her, "can't always keep one from bin' lonesome; why, when I used to walk up here an' sit to the side of the road a-watchin' an' watchin' you in your garden, seemed you must be like—a. Seemed it'd be mighty nice if I could work beside you there. But land!" he exclaimed, "you will think I'm queer goin' on like this."

Sarah's eyes were visionary. "You watched me?" she asked slowly, "in my garden?"

Ebenezer nodded.

"My! you are like ma," he said admiringly.

And this was Sarah's romance.

THE NEGRO FOURTH ESTATE AND PRE-WAR PROSPERITY

(Continued From Page One.)

Every paper has correspondents in all of its territory and in states beyond that might be supposed to be its territory. There are also news agencies. The most important of these by far is the Associated Negro Press. Through special correspondents in every city of the country it gathers the racial news and sends this out regularly to its large membership. About seventy-five papers receive these communications directly, but all get it sooner or later. Nothing racial escapes the Argus-eyed colored press.

The editorial writer, the reporter, and the poet are ably seconded by the picture-maker. A half-dozen very effective cartoonists are providing single papers or groups with the story of current events: riots, lynchings, travesties of justice, jim crowism, disfranchisement, and all the effects of racial prejudice and hate. Everybody can read a picture. Nor does the scene it conjures up fade out of the soul.

This press features two or three classes of items of a racial import. Equal prominence is given on the front page and in the headlines to the wrongs and injustices inflicted upon the Negroes because of color, and to racial achievements, new activities, new business firms and enterprises, Negro benevolences, and the like. Race progress—race persecution: that is their main story. But a third species of news ranks close to these, sometimes taking precedence: news of movements on the part of the whites toward real race adjustment on the basis of justice, news of serious efforts toward racial co-operation, news of forthright utterances in advocacy of their cause. This news they offer on their front page under conspicuous headlines.

Neglecting White Press.

The new-born prosperity of the Negro press signifies a corresponding neglect on the part of the colored people of the white press. They will no longer trust the whites to furnish them the news, to teach them how to think. Too often have they been beguiled. The saying now runs: "There's a white man somewhere in the wood-pile." In the columns of the "colored papers alongside of expressions of exultation in their own success run the severest arraignment of the white press for its falsification and suppression of racial news, for prejudiced comment, and for

neglect of the Negro—except to report his crimes (alleged). The white papers by their false and flaring headlines and exaggerated, mainly fictitious, accounts of Negro assaults upon white women are denounced by the colored editors as responsible for practically all of the race riots of last year.

The universal radicalism of the Afro-American press—using that term in the sense of demanding a fundamental change; the almost absolute unanimity of that press in its statement of grievances and demands—many voices, but only one mind; the resoluteness of tone and manifest determination never to withdraw from the battle for "equal rights"—these are the impressions that are the most outstanding with me from my much perusal of the weeklies that regularly reach me.

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