

[Convalescent Home]

[?] [????] [?]

IN A CONVALESCENT HOME

as told to

Arnold Manoff

The scene is a room in a large converted private house, situated on a rather quiet street. Furnished cheaply with four beds - two on either side - with the customary small night-tables in between, the room might be one in a small mountain hotel that has not been repainted or re-decorated for a long time.

There are three inmates present, the typical kind one would expect in a home for the aged. Unprofessional-looking nurses come and go and a shirt-sleeved, beer-smelling orderly drops in, altogether too often it seems, looks at one or the other parts of the quarters, and then disappears.

Our informant is a white-haired old lady of 83 years of age. She is blind, was born in Smargon, a village in Russia near the Polish border. Has lived in the United States for the past thirty years, fifteen on New York's East Side and just as long in the Bronx around Prospect Avenue. She has a large head; her face is still un wrinkled. Believes her time is up, perhaps another year to live; appears untidy - hair unkempt and shaggy.

It is lunch time. The two other old women are eating, one is being fed by a nurse. Our informant is seated near her bed at a small table on which her lunch is placed.

She recognizes the voice of her visitor, who has known her for a number of years. She suddenly smiles and rejects his assistance when he notices that she has to grope for her

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food. The conversation is in Yiddish. Invited to say something of her daily life, or anything else she cares to talk about, she appears more than willing:

You see. They give me to eat, chicken, all sorts of things. Aa but it's not like at home. It has no taste. Today have they given me chicken. Yesterday have they they have not given me chicken. Who knows. They have everybody given chicken yesterday. Me had they left out. They know I can't see. Let them catch the cholera. They are murderers. (Then softly without venom) It is raining in the street. All day long. I know. Yesterday too it rained. How is it outside now? Still raining. See that empty bed over there. She died Friday. One hundred and fifty thousand dollars. She died. (laughing) A lot good it did her, I feel not to talk much. There is enough trouble in the world. What is the use to cry all the time? What hears from the outside? Are they killing themselves yet? What is he doing now? I think Czechoslovakia will fight with him. It used to be good when I had my radio in the house. I knew everything that was happening. I remember about Napoleon. They put him on a little island somewhere. A soldier came to him and asked him did he want poison. He was not through. That's how it is. He came back but he went to Russia and the whole army got frozen. They all died from the cold. I think Hitler if he goes to war now will get the same thing. How is it in Japan?

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Don't tell this to anyone. Listen this is to laugh. When I lived on Home Street all the women started to go to school. Old ones, young ones, everybody. A new madness. Everybody wanted to learn to read the English papers. This was two years ago. Yes. And me. I let them talk it in to me. So one fine day I pick myself up. I take my feet on my shoulders and I go to school. There is a young teacher there and it is very funny. I squeeze myself into the little seat and I sit. Inside I am dying laughing. You know. I am a laughing one. I do this. I do that. I am dying laughing. Do me something. The young one she writes on the blackboard in English. It is easy. I know what she is trying to do. She writes in English, goat. And then she says in Yiddish, goat. And then she asks what is a goat in Yiddish and she wants they should answer her in English. Listen good. There is a woman there, an old

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little one, she understands not a word. Hardly does she know what is going on. What is a goat, the young one asks. A pretty one the young one. I felt for her. Such dumb women to teach English. The old one picks herself up. She looks this way. She looks that way. A goat she says is maa maa, like that, maa maa. In me it explodes the laughing. Maa maa makes the old one like a sheep. I can't hold myself in. I let out the whole laughing and I can not bear it anymore. I am ashamed. It is so comical. I pick myself up and I go home. That's how I went to school. What did I need school. Everything I want I used to hear on the radio. There was one, the limping philosopher he called himself. Now he has a band and singers. Everything is on the radio. He called himself the limping philosopher. What it means? Aa— a limping one. He limped. You think there will be war? What does he say, the bolshevik, Stalin? And what is in Palestine? England, England, she could stop it. They're all the same. Well, I think I'll take myself a little sleep now. I sleep so much here. (She sighed, her big shaggy head drooped tiredly; I got up to go. She probably heard me getting up from the chair, and muttered sleepily:) Go healthy. Go healthy.