looking for a clock. Finally she sees one on a far-off wall. It's twelve o'clock.

Annie jumps up from the sunken armchair as if pricked by needles. Only one thought resounds in her head: Let her not be late! Two hours of work would also be good!

By a Far Shore

(MARCH 15, 1942)

Translated by Myra Mniewski

THE OCEAN HERE, where the palms are green, where the sun shines the whole year, where the air is as mild and gentle as the breath of a child—the ocean here is so soft and gentle; it doesn't storm, it doesn't fling its waves as if it were trying to shed parts of itself, it doesn't tumble with thick foamy lips, it doesn't bite into the shore as if releasing all of its suffering rage. The ocean here, under this endless blue sky, stretches out peacefully, reclining quietly, softly spreading out, whispering so softly and calmly—as quiet as the old folks who sit by these shores of Miami.

The old folks like to sit by the seashore and look out far across the sea, thinking muddled thoughts, remembering fragments of memories. Their former lives are like tales from *A Thousand and One Nights*. One moment you're born and growing up in a tiny village across a faraway sea with no inkling of the wider world. The village, fenced in by faraway skies, where women toil at their clay ovens, stoking embers with their pokers, rocking little ones in rigid cradles, nursing them until they're already walking, the little ones going over to their mothers' breasts and grabbing them to their mouths as if they were hunks of bread. And inside the women, in their bellies, yet another

little soul rises like leavened dough, already pushing its way into the world, moving the women to yet again prepare a cradle.

The men have gone to the markets to do business, traveling over the countryside in sleet and snow, making their way to the nobleman, to bow to him, their eyes brimming, feeling no bigger than a worm, thinking this is how they will endure life forever. But then they are crossing wide oceans to arrive at a big, free country, their eyes wide and bright. Their hands get moving, they begin building—stores and houses, upright and square, in a frenzy, at the same feverish pace as baking matzo for Passover. Opulent houses sprout up and it is still not enough. Children are educated, molded into honorable people who then become estranged from their parents.

And suddenly, with the speed of a dream, everything changes. Everything disappears with the wind. And now they are old and as helpless as children. No place had been prepared for them. They remain wanderers, having transmigrated to yet another faraway shore, a shore where it is eternally summer, where a strange golden holiday shimmers before them. Every day, in their holiday finery, their tribe plods with canes in their hands, their businesses closed forever. And yet, a frail, muted longing pulls at their hearts, as if craving to retrieve something from their dreams, but they can't quite grasp what it was. How did this happen? Their bygone lives appear before them like rubbed-out handwriting. Their aged eyes flutter.

The old folks move closer together. They want to be with each other. That way they might hear something from someone. Some news. So they sit here in this little park by the faraway Florida shore. These former doers and builders who were once magnates sit in the sand or on benches, shaded by the palms that sway in the gentle breeze, their thin branches crackling like dry, old fingers.

Those sitting on the sand expose those parts of themselves that are in pain—the parts they have come here to heal. Each one of them exposes her old body to the sun as if it were God's eye, so that it should see them and work its miracle.

Also sitting there are old folks in their holiday best. These ones

are sitting on benches. Nothing hurts them, only old age. They are probably aware that there is no cure for that, that old age cannot be healed. So they seem to be as lost as the others, as they whisper quietly among themselves, their lips like weak waves.

Two old women have shuffled up to each other on a bench. They've been watching each other for a while—have acknowledged each other. One of them is older than the other. The older one is close to seventy. The younger one—around sixty. The older one is not a greenhorn anymore. She's been coming here for years already and always loves to meet new people, especially since this year there are fewer of her old acquaintances and this one here looks familiar.

"Excuse me," the older one volleyed out the first question, "weren't you here last year?"

"No, this is my first time here," the younger one answered, a little lost.

"Is that so."

"And you? You were here last year?" The younger one was surprised at the older woman's temerity, to undertake such a journey a second time.

"Me? I've been here many times already," she replied, and it was impossible to tell from her tone if she was bragging or ashamed.

"When did you arrive?" the older one asked again.

"The day before yesterday. And you? You got here a while ago," the younger one guessed.

"Yes, quite a while ago," the older one replied. "Where are you living, seeing that you've only just arrived?"

"Over there," the younger one turned and pointed to a white, flat-roofed building, partitioned into small rooms and even smaller kitchens.

"You don't say!" the older one rejoiced to her new neighbor. "I live in the building right next door."

"Really."

The two women remained quiet for a while, looking down at their laps, since it was no longer necessary to scrutinize each other's faces. There was no need to further examine each other. They'd already got-

ten to know one another. Their congeniality made them feel familiar. After all, some time ago they had lived the same life, breathed the same air, cooked the same treats, thought the same thoughts, had the same worries. That way of life had by now practically vanished, but it was still present in their faces, and they recognized it.

"If you'll pardon my asking," the older one again took the lead, "are you, God forbid, suffering from some ailment, or have you come for no particular reason?"

"Do I know?" the younger one muttered. "The doctor said the heart maybe, a little bit."

"Really," the older one answered, grasping that this one here was not of her class.

"And you? What ails you, that you've been coming here for how many years now?"

"Me?" The old woman looked away absentmindedly, staring into the air. Then she added, "You understand of course that an old person is not a young person; when a pot is used for a long time it gets worn down and battered. It hurts and sometimes it coughs too, but by no means can I complain about my health, at my age—no."

"Then do you come here because you like it?"

"Do I like it? Yes and no. What's liking it got to do with anything? Wherever a person is used to living, that's where she likes it."

The younger one felt a heaviness in the older one's tone and her curiosity was piqued.

"Please, pardon me for what I'm about to ask you," the younger one said, taking on the older one's boldness. "But do you live with your children back home?"

"Children!" her elder blurted out. "I have only one child—a one and only daughter, may she be healthy and well! May no Jewish children be deprived of a life like hers. She lives like an aristocrat! If only I had more children! Not to wish it on anyone but they haven't stayed close to me."

"And you don't live with this daughter? You don't get along with your only daughter? Forgive me for putting such questions to you."

"Get along?" the old one repeated, as if to herself. And why not let

the younger one ask her such inappropriate questions. Let her, on the contrary, it felt good to talk about it.

"Live in peace together?" she said again, as if to herself. "No it's not a question of getting along. Why shouldn't we get along? I lived with my daughter for years, even then when she lived in the Bronx. But then my son-in-law hadn't yet worked himself up, my grandchildren were still little then, and I was younger then too. My dear woman, you get it, don't you," she said, putting her hand on the younger one's knee. "Work, I had enough. And I was happy too. I was used to working and taking caring of a big house. And if I occasionally got lonely, because my daughter often entertained high-minded, clever folks, I would go out and meet up with my former girlfriends—my friends. I had people to talk to. Now, you understand, it's a whole different story."

"What goes on now?" the younger one asked with interest.

"Now," the older one resumed weaving her yarn, as if she needed to unburden herself completely—a person mustn't shut herself off, it's hard to exist with locked lips— "Now, since my son-in-law, there should be no evil eye, has achieved such success, my daughter lives on Central Park West. The grandchildren are grown, perfect Americans. They don't understand a word I say. A Negro in a white cap wanders about through the house, on the parquet floors; the furniture is constantly being changed—everything has to be the latest style! You get it, my dear woman, an old piece of furniture like me is out of place there. Sometimes I even let out a little cough too, like an old person. Could I possibly fit into such a scene? I ask you my dear woman! They haven't thrown me out, by no means. My daughter is kindhearted, my son-in-law too. It's not that—there is just no place for me there; not in the house and not outside, where the gentiles and their dogs roam about. And lately my daughter has been traveling a lot. She used to go to Europe all the time. That's where the party was—Europe! Then when that became unfashionable it's just trips; every so often a trip! So I get stuck with the Negro staring at me like a puppy at its father. I never see my grandkids. Do they need me or care about me? So then my daughter convinced me to come here; she said it would be good

for my health. So I let myself be persuaded, even though I was scared. It seemed like the end of the world to me. But on the other hand, what did I have to lose? And so now I can't even remember how long I've been coming here. And believe me, it's not like you disappear here—we're among our own people here. In the summer my daughter rents me a room by the sea or in the country also among my people. So now I'm constantly traveling. You understand, I'm a traveler."

"No need to confess," the younger one cut her off. "Believe me, it could be worse."

"Of course—God forbid! I'm not complaining," the old one retorted. "I'm not the only one who travels around like this. Do you see the old folks sitting on those benches? They all gallivant around. They come here every year, not because they're sick, but because they're old. Their children didn't feel right about putting their aged mother or father in a home; respectable folk don't look kindly on that. And in their posh homes there's also no place for them. So they send them around—winter here and summer there. So the old folks travel around. I've given it a name: The Traveling Old Age Home . . . Ha, ha, ha! I should have it so good! I gave it that name myself! But listen to this, there's a very old one here, she got tired of roaming, so now she stays put right here. Winter and summer she sits here all alone like a stone. She cooks herself her bit of food and makes her bed up tidy. When Friday comes, she welcomes the Sabbath for herself with challah and fish, blesses the candles and comes here and sits on a bench all alone. I'll point her out to you tomorrow. She's as quiet as a dove—talks very little. *Nu*, what's this little bit of life that's left us worth? Ha! I'd better not go astray with such talk."

"Why talk that way? You shouldn't talk that way! Believe me, the world is good; and sweet even to the aged palate. And this here is a true paradise! The air is a joy here! May we only not need it," the younger one ended quietly to herself.

But the older one caught her last words and cracked up, laughing silently, the skin on her neck scrunching up like an old elephant's. "Ha-ha-ha, I scored a good one with you! That's well put: may we not

need it. May I live not to!" and she again cracked up, furrowing her aged neck.

The younger one didn't understand what was so funny about it all.

The two of them again fell silent, looking around at those who slowly, one by one, were getting up from their benches to go home. They looked like shadows gradually descending into town. The sun was about to set and an early evening breeze floated in; the sea rippled gently and all the colors of the rainbow played off it. The lights further uptown were already flickering on; the entertainment spots, winking electricity from afar, enticed everyone to the nightlife that was about to get going. Young people and middle-aged folks began moving uptown. Women in flannel pants and colorful jackets; men, their collars open, their heads bare and tussled, proceeded in the soft evening air, as if on wings, or more like moths to the evening flame.

"We should go already," the older woman said, spent and in need of nourishment. "We have to go prepare our bit of food. Come, are you going? Let me at least find out what your name is!"

"Mine is Mrs. Bloom," the younger one replied.

"And mine is Mrs. Diamond. Let's go, Mrs. Bloom!" And they both got up from their bench and went on their way, like two old friends.