

Ex-Willowbrook patient's wedding raises immigration questions

By ANEMONA HARTOCOLLIS

Wisdom of the ages says love is blind. It also has been said that America is the land of opportunity. Both adages are tried and true. But which one is being tested in the strange case of Joan Winter?

Miss Winter is a 35-year-old mentally retarded woman, incarcerated in the Willowbrook State School for the Retarded, now Staten Island Developmental Center, as an infant.

On Feb. 1 she married a 24-year-old Egyptian visiting the United States on a tourist visa; 10 days later, at her request, she was discharged from the state's care and responsibility, into the arms of her husband.

In the eyes of Miss Winter's former supervisors with the state, they make an unlikely couple: The poised young foreigner from an apparently privileged family; and the awkward woman, consigned after her illegitimate birth to a stunted, institutional background.

Interviews with Miss Winter and her husband, and with state authorities, have produced sharply divergent pictures of the circumstances surrounding Miss Winter's marriage. All sides profess that their first concern is for her well-being and integrity. And that, they concur, pivots on whether she has been married in good faith or duped.

Because motives behind the marriage are a matter of speculation and no formal charges have been lodged, three

names in this article have been changed. Joan Winter, Ahmed and Tina Rigas are pseudonyms.

As an alien, Ahmed stood to gain considerably more than a spouse from his union with Miss Winter. As a student of business management in Cairo, with a year to go toward his degree, it would not be simple for Ahmed to persuade immigration authorities to let him stay long in this country. He possessed neither essential job skills nor a close relative with established residency — the basic requirements for non-tourist status.

According to Ahmed, he married for love. According to immigration officials, it is "very common" for "aliens to

(Continued on Page 4)