

DELMORE SCHWARTZ

**In Dreams
Begin Responsibilities**

AND OTHER STORIES

Edited with an Introduction by James Atlas

Foreword by Irving Howe

A NEW DIRECTIONS BOOK

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America!

America!

When Shenandoah Fish returned from Paris in 1936, he was unable to do very much with himself, he was unable to write with the great fluency and excitement of previous years. Some great change had occurred in the human beings he knew in his native city, whom he had sought out before his stay in Europe. **The depression had occurred to these human beings. It had reached the marrow at last;** after years, the full sense of the meaning of the depression had modified their hopes and their desires very much. The boys with whom Shenandoah had gone to school no longer lived in the same neighborhood, they no longer saw much of each other, they were somewhat embarrassed when they met, some of them were married now, and many of them were ashamed of what they had made or what had been made of their lives. After visits which concluded in perplexity, Shenandoah ceased to try to renew his old friendships. They no longer existed and they were not going to rise from the grave of the dead years.

Yet Shenandoah was not troubled by his idleness. **He would have liked to be in Paris again,** and he expected to go back next year. He did not know then that it would be impossible for him to go back. Meanwhile, as his mother said, he was taking it easy, and enjoying an indolence and a relaxation which, though peculiar in him, seemed unavoidable after the prolonged and intense activity of the year before.

He slept late each morning, and then he sat for a long time at the breakfast-table, listening to his mother's talk as she went about her household tasks. It was simple and pleasant to shift attention back and forth between what his mother said and the morning newspaper, for in the morning sunlight, the kitchen's whiteness was pleasant, the newspaper was always interesting in the strength of attention possible in the morning, and Shenandoah found his mother's monologue pleasant too. She spoke always of her own life or of the lives of her friends; of what had been; what might have been; of fate, character and accident; and especially of the mystery of the family life, as she had known it and reflected upon it.

After two months of idleness, Shenandoah began to feel uneasy about these breakfast pleasures. The emotion which often succeeded extended idleness returned again, **the emotion of a loss or lapse of identity.** "Who am I? what am I?" Shenandoah began once more to say to himself, and although he knew very well that this was only the projection of some other anxiety, although he knew that to work too was merely to deceive himself about this anxiety, nonetheless **the intellectual criticism of his own emotions was as ever of no avail** whatever.

On the morning when this uneasiness of the whole being overtook Shenandoah seriously, his mother's monologue began to interest him more and more, much more than ever before, although she spoke of human beings who, being of her own generation, did not really interest Shenandoah in themselves. She began to speak of the Baumanns, whom she had known well for thirty years.

The Baumanns, said Mrs. Fish, had given Shenandoah a silver spoon when he was born. Mrs. Fish brought forth the silver and showed Shenandoah his initials engraved in twining letters upon the top of the spoon. Shenandoah took the spoon and toyed with it nervously, looking at the initials as he listened to his mother.

The friendship of the Fish family with the Baumann family had begun in the period just before the turn of the century. Shenandoah's father, who was now dead, had gone into what was then entitled the insurance *game*. The word rang in Shenandoah's

mind, and he noted again his mother's fine memory for the speech other people used. Mr. Baumann who was twenty years older than Shenandoah's father, had already established himself in the business of insurance; he had been successful from the start because it was just the kind of business for a man of his temperament.

Shenandoah's mother proceeded to explain in detail how insurance was a genial medium for a man like Mr. Baumann. **The important thing in insurance was to win one's way into the homes and into the confidences of other people.** Insurance could not be sold as a grocer or a druggist sells his *goods* (here Shenandoah was moved again by his mother's choice of words); you could not wait for the customer to come to you; nor could you like the book salesman go from house to house, plant your foot in the doorway, and start talking quickly before the housewife shut the door in your face. On the contrary, it was necessary to become friendly with a great many people, who, when they came to know you, and like you, and trust you, take your advice about the value of insurance.

It was necessary to join the lodges, societies, and associations of your own class and people. This had been no hardship to Mr. Baumann who enjoyed groups, gatherings, and meetings of all kinds. He had in his youth belonged to the association of the people who came from the old country, and when he married, he joined his wife's association. Then he joined the masonic lodge, and in addition he participated in the social life of the neighborhood synagogue, although he was in fact an admirer of **Ingersoll**. Thus he came to know a great many people, and visited them with unflinching devotion and regularity, moved by his love of being with other human beings. A visit was a complicated act for him. It required that he enter the house with much amiability, and tell his host that he had been thinking of him and speaking of him just the other day, mentioning of necessity that he had just *dropped* in for a moment. Only after protestations of a predictable formality, was Mr. Baumann persuaded to sit down for a cup of tea. Once seated, said Mrs. Fish (imposing from time to time her own kind of irony upon the irony which sang in Shenandoah's mind at every phase of her story), once seated it was hours before Mr. Baumann arose from

the dining room table on which a fresh table-cloth had been laid and from which the lace cover and the cut glass had been withdrawn.

Mr. Baumann drank tea in the Russian style, as he often explained; he drank it from a glass, not from a cup: a cup was utterly out of the question. And while he drank and ate, he discoursed inimitably and authoritatively upon *every topic of the day*, but especially upon his favorite subjects, the private life of the kings and queens of Europe, Zionism, and the new discoveries of science. A silent amazement often mounted in his listeners at the length of time that he was capable of eating, drinking, and talking; until at last, since little was left upon the table, he absentmindedly took up the crumbs and poppyseeds from the tablecloth.

Mrs. Fish had not known Mr. Baumann until he was near middle age. But she had heard that even in his youth, he had looked like a banker. As he grew older and became quite plump, this impression was strengthened, for he took to pince-nez glasses, and handsome vests with white piping. Shenandoah remembered that Mr. Baumann resembled some photographs of the first J. P. Morgan. His friends were delighted with all the aspects of his being, but they took especial satisfaction in his appearance. They were shamed often enough into allowing him to write a new insurance policy for them, for it was a time of general prosperity for these people: most of them were rising in the world, after having come to America as grown or half-grown children. Their first insecurity was passed and hardly borne in mind, except in the depths of consciousness; and now they were able to afford an insurance policy, just as they were able to look down on newcomers to America, and their own early lives in America, a state of being which was expressed by the word, *greenhorn*. Mr. Baumann's friendship was a token of their progress; they liked him very much, they were flattered by his company, and when he paid them a visit, he conferred upon the household a sense of the great world, even of intellectuality. This pleased the husband often because of what it implied to his wife; it implied that although he, the husband, was too busy a man in the dress business to know much of these worldly matters, yet he was capable of having the friendship

and bringing into the house this amiable and cultivated man who spoke English with a Russian accent which was extremely refined.

Shenandoah's mother explained then that in the insurance business a good man like Mr. Baumann soon arrives at the point where there is no urgent need to acquire new customers and to write new policies. One can live in comfortable style off the commissions due you as the premiums continue to be paid from year to year. You must maintain your friendship with the policy-holders, so that the stress of hard times as it recurs does not make them give up their policies or stop paying the premiums. But this need of reassuring and cajoling policy-holders did not for Mr. Baumann interfere with a way of life in which one slept late in the morning and made breakfast the occasion for the most painstaking scrutiny of the morning newspaper. One can go for vacations whenever one pleases, and Mr. Baumann went often with his family, on religious holidays and on national holidays. In fact, Mr. Baumann had frequently written some of his best policies during the general high spirits which are the rule on vacations and at resorts. He was at his best at such times and amid such well-being.

Here Shenandoah recognized in his mother's tone the resentment she had always felt toward those who lived well and permitted nothing to stop their enjoyment of life. It was the resentment of one who had herself never felt the inclination to live well, and regarded it as unjustified, except on the part of the very rich, or during holidays.

Mrs. Fish continued, saying that an insurance man is faced with one unavoidable duty, that of putting in an appearance at the **funerals** of human beings with whom he has been acquainted, even though he has not known them very well. **This is a way of paying tribute to one of the irreducible facts upon which the insurance business is founded.** And it provides the starting-point for useful and leading conversation.

"Yes," Mr. Baumann often said, "I was at L——'s funeral today." His tone implied the authoritative character of his presence.

"Yes," he reiterated with emphasis, squeezing the lemon into his tea, "we all have to go, sooner or later!"

Then he dwelt on the interesting incidents at the funeral, the children's lack of understanding, the widow's hysterical weeping, the life-like appearance of the corpse.

"He looked," said Mr. Baumann, "just like he was taking a nap."

And indeed, apart from *doing business*, Mr. Baumann enjoyed funerals for their own sake, for they were comprehensive gatherings of human beings with whom he had everything in common and to whom he was a very interesting and very *well-informed* man, even a man, as he seemed to some and to himself, who was a sage although without rabbinical trappings.

Here, having said this with unconscious disdain, Mrs. Fish finished ironing a tablecloth, folded it carefully, placed it with other ironed linens, took a new piece, and permitted herself no pause in her monologue.

She said that Mrs. Baumann was the one person who was unable to take Mr. Baumann with the seriousness he expected and received in all quarters. She preferred the neighborhood rabbi as a sage. She and her husband shared so many interests that there was a natural and extensive antagonism between them. Whatever gentleman occupied the rabbinical position in the neighborhood synagogue surpassed her husband at his own game, so far as she was concerned: surpassed him in unction, suavity, and fecundity of opinion.

Next to her husband, Mrs. Baumann seemed small and almost tiny. She was nervous and anxious, while he was always assured; and he merely smiled when she attacked him or criticized him before other people, or told him that he was talking too much, or said that he did not know what he was talking about. However, they loved the same things, and some of her resentment of her husband had as its source his freedom to have a full social life while she had to take care of the children. For her children, her friends, and all things Jewish, she had an inexhaustible charity, indulgence, and attentiveness, and consequently she sometimes neglected her household in order to make many visits and tell many stories, stories of patient detail and analysis which had to do with her friends. In the time before the World War, Freud and Bergson were celebrated in Jewish newspapers as Jews who had made a great fame for themselves in the Gentile

world. Mrs. Baumann relished their fame to the point of making out a misleading and mistaken version of their doctrines; and in this way, Shenandoah's father, who visited the Baumann household very often before his marriage, learned of the teachings of Freud and passed them on to the salesmen who worked for him in the real estate business.

Only one thing excited Mrs. Baumann more than the success of a musician or an inventor who was Jewish; and that one thing was a new fad, especially fads about food. She often spoke of herself as having a new *fad*, and she often said that everyone should have fads. For the word pleased her, and some of its connotations had never occurred to her. She said often that she wished that she were a vegetarian.

As Shenandoah listened to his mother, he became nervous. He was not sure at any given moment whether the cruelty of the story was in his own mind or in his mother's tongue. And his own thoughts, which had to do with his own life, and seemed to have nothing to do with these human beings, began to trouble him.

What is it, he said to himself, that I do not see in myself, because it is of the present, as they did not see themselves? How can one look at oneself? No one sees himself.

As the Baumann children grew up, they seemed to gain vitality from the intensive social life of the household. For their small apartment near a great park came to be a kind of community center on Sunday nights. All whom Mr. Baumann met on his leisurely rounds were invited to come at any time. Both husband and wife knew very well how glad lonely human beings are to have a house to visit, a true household; and especially the human beings who have gone from the community life of the old country and foundered amid the immense alienation of metropolitan life. And the Baumanns also knew, although they were too wise to express the belief, that it was very important to have something to eat amid the talk, for people do not continue very long without the desire to eat; and in addition, the conversations, the jokes and the comments are improved, heightened, or excited by food and drink, by sandwiches, cake, and coffee; and the food one gets in another's household seems *exceptionally appetizing*.

Shenandoah as he listened tried to go back by imagination or imaginative sympathy to the lives of these people. Certainly in the old country there had been periods when food was scarce, so that one of the most wonderful things about America was the abundance of food. But it was impossible for Shenandoah, who had always been well fed, to convince himself that he knew what their feelings about food had been. He returned to his mother who had begun genre studies of Sunday nights in the Baumann household.

Each of the Baumann children as they grew up amid these scenes of much sociability acquired social talents which gained them gratifying applause from the visitors, who were expected, in any case, in a profound, unspoken understanding, to make much of the children of any household. Dick, the oldest of the three children, learned to play the piano very cleverly, and he recited limericks and parodies. Sidney, the youngest one, was enchanted by the Sunday nights to the extent that he brought his neighborhood cronies to the house, which was a revelation most children avoided and dreaded because they were ashamed that their parents spoke broken English or a foreign tongue.

Sidney was less gifted than his brother; yet he was liked a good deal because he was small and *cute*. Martha, the girl, suffered from the intense aversions, shames, and frustrations of girlhood; and, as her father remarked, she *took it out* upon the piano, playing romantic music from morning to night. She was very smart and clever; and her remarks were often so biting that she was scolded helplessly, vainly, and tirelessly by her mother. Visitors, however, were charmed and not annoyed, when she was *fresh*. And as she became older, she defended herself by saying that she had learned her wit and irony at the Sunday night school of gossip, when all who were present analyzed the failings of their absent friends. Nonetheless, despite her bitter remarks about the household, she loved its regime very much, though annoyed to see how she depended upon it to nourish the depths of her being.

It was when Dick and Martha were old enough to need jobs that Shenandoah's father and Mr. Baumann went into partnership in the real estate business. Shenandoah's father had been in business for himself for some time and he had pros-

pered greatly. It was his need of capital, which however he might have secured elsewhere, and his fondness for the Baumann's household which had made him suggest the partnership. The suggestion was made in a moment of weakness and well-being, when Mr. Fish had just enjoyed a fine dinner at the Baumann's. Whenever Shenandoah's father was pleased and had enjoyed himself very much, he suffered from these generous and unexpected impulses; but this did not prevent him from repairing the evil consequences of his magnanimity with an equally characteristic ruthlessness as soon as it was obvious that it not only had been costly (for then, he might forget about it), but that the cost would continue.

The difficulty soon showed itself, for Mr. Baumann and Dick made it clear that their habits of life were not going to be changed merely because they were now part of a *going concern*. Father and son arrived at work an hour before noon, which permitted them just enough time to look at the mail before departing for an unhurried lunch. They *drew* handsome salaries, and this was what troubled Shenandoah's father most of all. When it was a question of making a sale, Mr. Baumann often allowed his interests of the moment, which were often international in scope, to make him oblivious of *the deal*. He ingratiated himself with the customer very well, but this process ingratiated the customer with Mr. Baumann, and thus the mutual bloom of friendship, made business matters unimportant or a matter for tact and delicacy. **Dick followed in his father's footsteps.** He took customers to the ball game, which was well enough except that he too forgot the true and ulterior purpose of this spending of the firm's money. In three months, Shenandoah's father appreciated his error to the full; and for a week of half-sleepless nights, he strove to think of a way to free himself of his pleasure-loving partner. In the end, and as often before, he found only a brutal method; he sent Mr. Baumann a letter stating his grievances and dissolving the partnership. For a time, this summary dismissal ended the friendship of the two families. But Mr. Baumann was utterly unable to sustain a grudge, although his wife was unable to forget one, and *pestered* him about his weakness in forgiving those who had injured him.

Dick Baumann seemed to be unable to keep a job and he showed few signs of being able to make his way in the world. But he was popular, he had an *immense* number of friends, he was in request all over because he was always truly and literally the life of every party. At one such party, he met his future wife, an extremely beautiful girl who was also successful and had her own business. She was the only child of a mother deserted by her husband, and never had she been so charmed as by Dick, by Dick's parodies, imitations, out-goingness, and his fine air of well-being and happiness. Although somewhat perplexed by the girl's intense and fond looks, since he had not paid much attention to her, Dick had invited her to the Baumann ménage, where Mrs. Baumann immediately fell in love with her. Dick was pliant and suggestible, Mrs. Baumann was the only strong-willed one in the family, and soon she had arranged matters in such a way that after a certain amount of urging on her part, everyone recognized the inevitability of the marriage.

First, however, Dick had to make a living. His intended had her handsome business, which she *ran* with a cousin. But this did not seem right to Mrs. Baumann; it offended her sense of propriety. She expected that it would end very soon, and she spoke of its ending all the time. She insisted that it must end before the marriage took place, since it was not only intolerable that a wife should make her own living, should go to work each day, but it was wrong that the wife should earn more money than the husband. As it happened, Dick was in no hurry to get married. He wished to please his mother, as he wished to please all. But from morning until night, he enjoyed being *single*; yet he did not conceive of his marriage as bringing about any great change in his habits, or any new goodness.

Shenandoah listened with an interest which increased continuously; and yet his own thoughts intervened many times. **He reflected upon his separation from these people, and he felt that in every sense he was removed from them by thousands of miles, or by a generation, or by the Atlantic Ocean.** What he cared about, only a few other human beings, separated from each other too, also cared about; and **whatever he wrote as an author did not enter into the lives of these people,** who should have

been his genuine relatives and friends, for he had been surrounded by their lives since the day of his birth, and in an important sense, even before then. But since he was an author of a certain kind, he was a monster to them. They would be pleased to see his name in print and to hear that he was praised at times, but they would never be interested in what he wrote. They might open one book, and turn the pages; but then perplexity and boredom would take hold of them, and they would say, perhaps from politeness and certainly with humility, that this was too *deep* for them, or too *dry*. The lower middle-class of the generation of Shenandoah's parents had engendered perversions of its own nature, children full of contempt for every thing important to their parents. Shenandoah had thought of this gulf and perversion before, and he had shrugged away his unease by assuring himself that this separation had nothing to do with the important thing, which was the work itself. But now as he listened, as he felt uneasy and sought to dismiss his emotion, he began to feel that he was wrong to suppose that the separation, the contempt, and the gulf had nothing to do with his work; perhaps, on the contrary, it was the center; or perhaps it was the starting-point and compelled the innermost motion of the work to be flight, or criticism, or denial, or rejection.

Mrs. Fish had gone to the roof for more wash. She told Shenandoah as she returned that it was time for him to dress (for he had been in dressing-gown and pajamas all the while), and in her imperative tone, he recognized the strain and the resistance which was part of the relationship of mother and son; which had its cause in the true assumption that mother and son would disagree about what was the right thing to do, no matter what the problem might be.

The *engagement* of Dick and Susan was a protracted one; and after two years, the youthful couple had begun to take their intermediate state for granted. Mrs. Baumann in pride told her friends that Susan *practically* lived with them. It was by no means unusual for Susan to be at the Baumann household on every weekday evening, and on such evenings, as Dick read the sport pages with care, his mother interrupted him persistently to demand that he admire Susan's profile as she sat near the

window, sewing. Susan was very beautiful indeed; and her business grew more and more prosperous as Dick went from job to job, unperturbed that a girl waited for him, a fact to which Mrs. Baumann often summoned his attention.

At last, being impatient, Mrs. Baumann arranged that the marriage should occur at the beginning of one of Dick's business ventures, the capital for which had been provided by Mr. Baumann and Susan. It was as if, remarked Shenandoah's mother, Mrs. Baumann was afraid to await the outcome of the new venture. And she had been right, for within eight months the business had to be given up to avoid bankruptcy, and Susan had to return to work as an assistant where before she had been *her own boss*, a humiliation which left Susan without any further illusions about her mother-in-law. The two never again managed to get along very well, although Mrs. Baumann's admiration of her daughter-in-law remained undisturbed. Mrs. Baumann was unable to understand Dick's failure to get rich, for no one failed to be delighted by his charm and his intelligence; and he always seemed to have a great deal of information about each new business. But somehow he was unable to make a success of it, or even to make it *pay*.

After his marriage, Dick frequented his parents' household as often as before marriage, a simple enough matter since he and his bride had taken an apartment near the parents to please Mrs. Baumann. And when Susan had to go back to work, it became convenient for the young married couple to have dinner every night with the whole Baumann family, a procedure Susan resented very much, although she was of a divided heart, since she too often enjoyed the conviviality of the family circle as much as before marriage.

One subject prevailed above others in the Baumann circle, the wonders of America, a subject much loved by all the foreign-born, but discussed in the Baumann household with a scope, intensity, subtlety, and gusto which was matchless, so far as Mrs. Fish knew. One reason for this subject's triumph was Mr. Baumann's interest in science, and one reason was that he was very much pleased with America.

When the first plane flew, when elevators became common,

when the new subway was built, some newspaper reader in the Baumann household would raise his head, announce the wonder, and exclaim:

“You see: America!”

When the toilet-bowl flushed like Niagara, when a suburban homeowner killed his wife and children, and when a Jew was made a member of President Theodore Roosevelt’s cabinet, the excited exclamation was:

“America! America!”

The expectations of these human beings who had come in their youth to the new world had not been fulfilled in the least. They had above all expected to be rich, and they had come with a very different image of what their new life was to be. But a thing more marvellous than fulfillment had transformed their expectations. They had been amazed to the pitch where they knew that their imaginations were inadequate to conceive the future of this incredible society. They expected and did not doubt that all the wonders would continue and increase; and Mr. Baumann maintained, against rising and rocking laughter, that his grand-children would return from business by a means of transit which resembled the cash carriers which fly through tubes in department stores. Mrs. Baumann’s conception of the future was less mechanical and scientific. She hoped and expected her grandchildren would be millionaires and grandsons, rabbis, or philosophers like Bergson.

Sidney, the youngest child, had arrived at the age when it was expected that he too should earn a living for himself. But the disappointments Dick had caused were nothing to the difficulties Sidney made. Dick had been an indifferent student, but Sidney flatly refused to continue school at all after a certain time, and he displayed unexampled finickiness about the job Mr. Baumann’s friends gave him, or helped him to get. He left his job as a shipping clerk because he did not like *the class of people* with whom he had to work, and he refused to take a job during July and August on the ground that he suffered greatly from summer heat, a defense natural to him after the many family discussions of health, food, and exercise. His mother always defended and *humored him*, saying that his health was

delicate. But Mr. Baumann was often made furious and at times of an insane anger by his youngest son's indolence. Mrs. Baumann pointed out that Sidney was to be admired, after all, since in being unable to work he showed a sensitivity to the finer things in life. But Mr. Baumann knew too much of the world not to be concerned about the fact that both of his sons appeared to be unable to make out well in the world. In anger, he blamed his wife and his wife's family; but on other occasions, he discussed the problem with his friends, once with Shenandoah's father after the two were reconciled.

"I'll tell you what to do," said Mrs. Fish, "but you won't do it."

"Tell me," said Mr. Baumann, although he knew well enough he was not likely to take his friend's advice.

"Ship Sidney out into the world," said Shenandoah's father, "make him stand on his own two feet. As long as he has a place to come home to and someone else to give him money for cigarettes, and plenty of company in the house, he's not going to worry about losing a job."

"But if a boy does not have ambition," Mr. Baumann replied, "is that enough? I always say, it all depends on the individual. His home has nothing to do with it. It is always the character of the person that counts."

"Sure it depends on character," said Mr. Fish, "but a fellow only finds out about his own character when he's all by himself, with no one to help him. Why if I had been your son," said Shenandoah's father, flattered that his advice was asked and wishing to please his friend, "I would have quit work myself and taken it easy and enjoyed the pleasant evenings."

A year after, Sidney was sent to Chicago to be on his own, although not before he had been given the addresses of many friends and relatives of the family. In three months, he was back; he had quarreled with his boss about working hours and he had exhausted his funds. He was welcomed into the bosom of the family with unconcealed joy. Although Mr. Baumann grumbled, and Martha addressed habitual ironic remarks to her brother as a captain of industry, no one had failed to feel his absence keenly and to be pleased deeply by his return.

“Well: you can try in New York as well as Chicago,” said Mr. Baumann, “a smart boy like you is bound to get started sooner or later.”

Mrs. Baumann believed that Sidney would fall in love one day, and this would prove the turning point. Either he would meet a rich girl who would be infatuated with *his personality*, or he would meet some poor girl and his desire to marry her would inspire him. **In America, everyone or almost everyone was successful.** Mrs. Baumann had seen too many fools make out very well to be able to believe otherwise.

And now all he had heard moved Shenandoah to remember all he himself knew of the Baumann family. The chief formal occasions of the Fish family had always been marked by the presence of the Baumanns. Each incident cited by his mother suggested another one to Shenandoah, and he began to interrupt his mother's story and tell her what he himself remembered. She would seize whatever he mentioned and augment it with her own richness of knowledge and experience.

As a girl, Martha had suffered an attack of polio, which left her with a curvature of the spine, which in turn made it unlikely that she would be able to have children, Martha had then decided that this defect and her plainness of appearance, a plainness which, although she did not know this truth, disappeared in her natural vivacity and wit—would prevent her from getting a husband. **She would be an old maid, the worst of shames from the point of view of a Jewish mother. The belief that she would never marry heightened Martha's daring wit and nerve.** She was the one who continued her father's intellectual interests. **As he would cite the authors he had read in Russia as a young man, Pushkin, Lermontov, and Tolstoy, so she was much taken with Bernard Shaw and H. G. Wells, and spoke with bitter passion about women's suffrage.**

And then, to the amazement of all, a young doctor who had frequented the household, a very shy young man who was already very successful, asked Martha to marry him, pale with fear that she would laugh at him and attack him with her famous sharpness and scorn. When she told him that he would have to go through life without children, he replied with a fine

simplicity that he loved her and expected her to make a home for him which would be like her mother's household.

This marriage became the greatest satisfaction of the Baummanns' life, although it did not compensate for the shortcomings of the sons in business. Mrs. Baumann tirelessly praised her son-in-law, and marvelled infinitely at his magnanimity in marrying a girl who was unable to have children. She took especial pride in his being a very good doctor, a fact which impressed the women of her acquaintance because they wished most of all for sons or sons-in-law who were doctors. But it was for Mrs. Baumann a triumph chiefly because of her passionate interest in health.

Martha's harshness and sharpness rose to new heights with her marriage, and she became more relentless than ever with her brother, while often Maurice, her husband, found it necessary to protest gently, from a profound gentleness of heart, because she had once again called both brothers failures. Maurice had an admiration for the arts which gave him the conventional independence of conventional business values. He tried to argue with Martha that she was being *very conventional* and accepting conventional views of what success was. Martha, inspired by an enjoyment of her own brutality of speech, replied that there was one thing the Baummanns were wonderfully successful at, and that was marriage: they made first-class marriages. She was referring then not only to her own husband's prosperity and generosity, but also to Susan, who had started her own business again, and for years now had supported her husband and herself, and provided Dick with the capital for each new enterprise he attempted, spurred by his mother's anguish at the way things were.

Martha became more impatient with her family year by year, and after a time she did not wish to see them at all. But Maurice gently insisted that she pay her parents a weekly visit, and he sought to soothe the parents' hurt feelings when Martha saw to it that they lived in a suburb distant from the Baummann household.

America! America! The expression began to recur in Shendoah's mind, like a phrase of music heard too often the day

before. He was moved, and in a way shocked, as his mother was too, that Martha the family rebel, the one who had repudiated the family circle many times, should be the one who made out well in life. Shenandoah's mother amazed him by remarking that the two sons were unsuccessful because they were like their father, who had been successful, however, because of what he was. The sons had followed the father and yet for some unclear cause or causes, the way of life which had helped him to prosper prevented them from prospering.

And now Shenandoah remembered his last meeting with Mrs. Baumann, two years before. Late in the afternoon in October, as Shenandoah rewrote a poem, Mrs. Baumann's voice had come through the closed bedroom door. And he had been annoyed because he now had to come from his room, pale and abstracted, his mind elsewhere, to greet his mother's friends. It turned out that Mrs. Baumann had come with a friend, a woman of her own age, and when Shenandoah entered the living room, Mrs. Baumann, as voluble as Mrs. Fish, told Shenandoah in a rush the story of her friendship with this woman.

They had come to America on the same boat in the year 1888, and this made them *ship sisters*. And then, although their friendship had continued for some years, one day at a picnic of the old country's society, a sudden storm had disturbed the summer afternoon, everyone had run for cover, and they had not seen each other for the next nineteen years. And Mrs. Baumann seemed to feel that the summer thunderstorm had somehow been the reason for their long and unmotivated separation. The two old women drank tea and continued to tell the youthful author about their lives and how they felt about their lives; Shenandoah was suddenly relaxed and empty, now that he had stopped writing; he listened to them and drank tea too. Mrs. Baumann told Shenandoah that in her sixty-five years of life she had known perhaps as many as a thousand human beings fairly well, and when she tried to sleep at night, their faces came back to her so clearly that she believed she could draw their faces, if she were a painter. She was sickened and horrified by this plenitude of memory, although it was wholly clear why she found the past appalling. Yet these faces kept her from falling

asleep very often, and consequently she was pleased and relieved to hear the milkman's wagon, which meant that soon the darkness would end and she would get up, make breakfast for her family and return to the world of daylight. Mrs. Baumann felt that perhaps she ought to see a psychoanalyst, like Freud, to find out what was wrong with her.

Her companion offered advice at this point; she said that everyone should have a hobby. Her own hobby was knitting and she felt that without her knitting in the morning, she would go crazy. This woman's daughter had married a Gentile, and she was permitted to visit her only child on monthly occasions when the husband had absented himself. Her one longing, one which she knew would never be satisfied, was to return and visit the old country.

"You would like it there," she said to Shenandoah, speaking of the country of her young girlhood. Shenandoah was flattered.

And as he listened to the two old women, Shenandoah tried to imagine their arrival in the new world and their first impression of the city of New York. But he knew that his imagination failed him, for nothing in his own experience was comparable to the great displacement of body and mind which their coming to America must have been.

Although almost finished with her ironing, Mrs. Fish was far from finished with her story. She was able to illustrate all that she said with fresh or renewed memories. And what she said bloomed in Shenandoah's mind in forms which would have astonished and angered her. Her words descended into the marine world of his mind and were transformed there, even as swimmers and deep-sea divers seen in a film, moving underwater through new pressures and compulsions, and raising heavy arms to free themselves from the dim and dusky green weight of underseas.

Shenandoah's mother now had progressed to the period of great prosperity in America. The worst animosity had come to exist between Mr. Baumann and his son Sidney, for whenever Sidney was criticized by his father for not earning his own living, he replied by citing the success of his father's friends, many of whom were becoming rich. Few of them had the charm

or presence of Mr. Baumann, but they were able to give their sons a start in life. Sidney, an avid reader of newspapers like his mother, had acquired a host of examples of immigrants who had made a million dollars. The movie industry was for Sidney a standing example of his father's ineptitude, his failure to make the most of opportunity in the land of promise. It seemed unfair to go outside the family circle of friends, but Sidney was merciless when criticized, and *stopped at nothing*. And Mr. Baumann was left helpless by Sidney's attack, for **he felt there was something wrong not only with the comparisons his son made, but the repeated and absolute judgment that his life had not been successful. He himself was satisfied and felt successful. He had always provided for his wife and his children, and kept them in comfort.** It was true that he did not work very hard, but then there was no need to work very hard, he made out well enough, since he had an income from the insurance policies he had written for the last thirty years, when the premiums were paid or when the policy was renewed. Yet Sidney used these professions as obvious admissions of weakness. He observed that the sons of other men had a *ten-dollar bill* to spend on a girl on Saturday nights, but he did not. The more unsuccessful he was, the more outrageous became his verbal assault upon his father for not having made a million dollars. He was provoked to these attacks by renewed efforts to get him to work, and by the citation of young men of his age who would soon be wealthy men in their own right, although they came from the households of parents who were really *common*.

During the period of great prosperity the Baumanns and Shenandoah's mother became intimate friends, since Shenandoah's father had left her. And often Mrs. Baumann and Mrs. Fish discussed the fate of the Baumann children. Mrs. Fish had once given Mrs. Baumann what she still regarded as very good advice, she had told her friend that the salvation of the family would have been the summer hotel business, which they had once considered seriously as an enterprise. No one would have been better suited for that business than the Baumanns, and this was indeed a *high compliment*.

When his mother said such things, Shenandoah suffered for

the moment, at any rate, from the illusion that his mother had a far greater understanding of the difficulties of life than he had. It seemed to him at such times that the ignorance he saw in her was a sign of his own arrogant ignorance. Her understanding was less theoretical, less verbal and less abstract than his, and such privations were in fact virtues. She was never deceived about any actual thing by words or ideas, as he often was. And she had just perceived perfectly a profound necessity which he himself knew very well in literature, the necessity that the artist find the adequate subject and the adequate medium for his own powers. No one could deny that the proper medium for the gifted Baumanns was the summer hotel.

What Mrs. Baumann did not understand and sought to explain to herself and Mrs. Fish was the paradox that her sons, who had a good bringing-up unlike many successful young men, had made out so poorly in comparison with most of them. She wished to know whose fault it was, if it were her fault, if she ought to blame herself, as her husband blamed her, for *humoring* and *indulging* the boys. The head start, and the fine home which the boys had, seemed to be a handicap, but this was an impossible thing to think. Mr. Baumann had remembered the advice given him by Mr. Fish, that the boys would be more ambitious if they had no home to come to, and he had distorted this counsel into an explanation which declared that Mrs. Baumann had pampered her sons. Mrs. Baumann returned with this problem many times, eager to be reassured and anxious to be told that on the contrary she was a wonderful mother. Shenandoah's mother was already prepared to blame someone for everything that happened, but she had a general and theoretical interest in the problem which left her free of her natural prepossessions. She observed that one defect of the Baumann sons was their unwillingness to go from door to door for the sake of getting some business. They had not been reared to expect *hard knocks* and rebuffs, and here precisely was where boys of meaner families had the advantage. It was a strange and sad thing, both women agreed, that a certain refinement—nothing like the Four Hundred, *you understand*—but merely a simple taste for the normal good things of life should be a severe and conclusive handicap.

The greatest handicap, said Mrs. Fish, was the fine family circle; this was what had weakened the boys for a world where you had to fight for everything you wanted, and you had to fight all the time just to keep what you had. Mrs. Fish observed again that this was a *cut-rate cut-throat world*, an expression which was her version of the maxim, *dog eat dog*. The best preparation for such a world, as Mrs. Fish's experience had proved many times, was to be born into a family of thirteen children where there was never enough for everyone to eat.

After 1929, when those who had been successful lost so much, Sidney mounted to new summits of scorn. Before 1929, he had been contemptuous of *the system*; now that no one made out well Sidney took the national depression as a personal vindication. Every banker or broker caught in some kind of dishonesty became an instance to Sidney of his own integrity. He suggested that if he had been prepared to do such things, he too might have enjoyed their success.

And now Mr. Baumann was no longer able to support an idle son, for with the hard times people abandoned their insurance or borrowed on it. The father's difficulties and the son's arrogance made their quarrels more and more desperate. As Mr. Baumann dressed to pay a visit one Saturday night, he was unable to find the pair of shoes he wanted. As always, he was concerned about his appearance, and he became very irritated at being unable to find his shoes, and came into his son's bedroom to ask him if he had seen the shoes, and Sidney, outstretched upon his bed, reading and smoking, was annoyed to be interrupted, and replied that his father ought not to be concerned about such a cheap pair of shoes. The shoes were not cheap, in any case, and this typical judgment of his taste by his son, whose standards were derived from his Christmas jobs in fashionable clothing stores, infuriated Mr. Baumann. He hit Sidney with the flat of his hand, and only Mrs. Baumann's screaming entrance prevented a fist-fight. The day after, Sidney had a black eye which he tried to conceal with powder. It was a Sunday and the Baumanns were going to pay a visit. Sidney wished to go with them, being unable to endure solitude at any time, and having nowhere to go that afternoon. But his

mother reminded him of his black eye and his father added that he had no clothes, especially no shoes, suitable for the visit they were going to make. When the Baumanns returned at midnight, they found an emergency wagon and the police in front of the apartment house. Sidney had tried to kill himself by turning on the gas in the kitchen, there had been an explosion, and he had not even been injured. Sidney was taken to Bellevue and kept there for a number of months. When visited by his mother, he told her *she should remember* that it was his father who had driven him to insanity. Hearing this, Mr. Baumann retaliated by saying that his son had been unable to be anything but a failure, even at suicide; and he reported to all that at the hospital, Sidney could not be made to take up any of the forms of occupational therapy. It seemed an epitome to Mr. Baumann that even at this extreme his son should refuse to do anything *remotely resembling work*. It was not customary for Mr. Baumann to be as harsh as this with any human being, but nothing would help Mr. Baumann to forget what Sidney had said to him during the early years of the depression, when Mr. Baumann's income had first begun to be sharply curtailed. He said to his father that *the old oil* no longer worked, and when his father said in perplexity and anger, *what oil? what is this oil?*, Sidney had replied, *banana oil!*, laughing with his whole body at his witticism and then explaining to his father that it was foolish to expect to persuade anyone that insurance was anything but a *gyp* by the old methods of striking up a friendship and paying long visits, *spouting* like the neighborhood sage.

Sidney remained under observation, and Dick assisted his wife in her thriving business. He had a child now. Martha and her husband prospered more and more because the practice of medicine was not as bound to general prosperity as business itself. And after an operation and much nervousness, Martha too had a child. Both grandchildren were daughters, which was a disappointment, but which showed, at any rate, that all disappointments were not financial in origin. As Dick often said,

"Money is not everything," to which his sister always replied,

"Money helps," smiling at her own irony.

They were all ashamed of Sidney's *smash-up*, as Dick termed it, but this did not keep them from speaking of it openly with all their friends. Mr. Baumann at seventy was still able to eke out a living for himself and his wife, but he was a disappointed and disillusioned man. He blamed everything on the individual and on his sons' lack of will-power. Mrs. Baumann blamed everything on her husband. She said to Mrs. Fish, however, speaking of Sidney:

"You see: this is what we came to America for forty-five years ago, for this."

Shenandoah was exhausted by his mother's story. He was sick of the mood in which he had listened, the irony and the contempt which had taken hold of each new event. He had listened from such a distance that what he saw was an outline, a caricature, and an abstraction. How different it might seem, if he had been able to see these lives from the inside, looking out.

And now he felt for the first time how closely bound he was to these people. His separation was actual enough, but there existed also an unbreakable unity. As the air was full of the radio's unseen voices, so the life he breathed in was full of these lives and the age in which they had acted and suffered.

Shenandoah went to his room and began to dress for the day. He felt that the contemptuous mood which had governed him as he listened was really self-contempt and ignorance. He thought that his own life invited the same irony. The impression he gained as he looked in the looking-glass was pathetic, for he felt the curious omniscience gained in looking at old photographs where the posing faces and the old-fashioned clothes and the moment itself seem ridiculous, ignorant, and unaware of the period quality which is truly there, and the subsequent revelation of waste and failure.

Mrs. Fish had concluded her story by saying that it was a peculiar but an assured fact that some human beings seemed to be ruined by their best qualities. This shocking statement moved in Shenandoah's mind and became a generalization about the fate of all human beings and his own fate.

"What will become of me?" he said to himself, looking in the looking-glass.

“What will I seem to my children?” he said to himself. “What is it that I do not see now in myself?”

“I do not see myself. I do not know myself. I cannot look at myself truly.”

He turned from the looking-glass and said to himself, thinking of his mother's representation of the Baumanns, “No one truly exists in the real world because no one knows all that he is to other human beings, all that they say behind his back, and all the foolishness which the future will bring him.”