

# Schneider

*Shaw empties the bottle.*

Cheers!

*They drink.*

Well, we do appear to be having a real old heart-to-heart, don't we?

*As Shaw says this he reaches for the hidden half bottle of blended scotch whisky under the table and pours. Beat.*

How'd you get that beautiful broken nose, Mr. Schneider?

**SCHEIDER.** The 1946 Diamond Gloves Tournament. I was thirteen. I lost by technical knockout to Myron Greenberg.

**DREYFUSS.** You were a boxer?

**SCHEIDER.** Welterweight.

**SHAW.** Now that's a real man's profession. Not like this—poncing about on a soundstage covered in makeup like a prostitute!

**DREYFUSS.** Was your father a boxer?

**SCHEIDER.** He was an auto mechanic. He ran the local gas station; typical blue-collar guy but full of contradictions. He hates everyone: Blacks, Catholics, Jews, Communists. Yet he married a Catholic, was friendly with the Jewish people who ran the local store, and his dentist was Black. But behind closed doors, all that bile came pouring out. He made derogatory remarks right in front of us.

**SHAW.** ~~Did you fight with him?~~

**SCHEIDER.** ~~Yeah.~~ He beat the hell out of me. My biggest crime was disagreeing with him. I realised as an adolescent that what my father was telling me wasn't true. I took the beatings to let him know he wasn't fooling me. My mother couldn't intervene. I got the support I needed from a man who worked at the gas station. One of my father's Black employees, as a matter of fact. A guy named Friend Avery.

**DREYFUSS.** ~~I bet you wanted to run as far as you could from the family business.~~

**SCHEIDER.** ~~It's complicated.~~ I was a sick kid. I had rheumatic fever, I'd get these horrendous attacks. My mother stayed home to take care of me. She thought I was gonna die. I spent an awful lot of time in bed. Thinking, dreaming, creating. A lot of fantasy worlds

that probably led me into acting. To this day I cannot stand to be in a room with an unmade bed...or drawn drapes. I want to throw them open and let in the fresh air, the sunshine...

**DREYFUSS.** Well, my dad wanted me to be a lawyer. I know—typical Jewish family, you gotta be a lawyer, or a doctor. You may find this difficult to believe but I was kind of an irritating kid...

**SHAW.** No, no!

**DREYFUSS.** Yeah, yeah...short, scrawny, overconfident... I saw *The Great White Hope* on Broadway. I didn't like the play, didn't like the direction, but in two scenes Jane Alexander and James Earl Jones got me so badly, so deeply, that I was not only crying, I was snorting gracelessly down my face! Beyond hope! But when it ended, I leapt into the air—I was wearing my little bar mitzvah suit on a trip to the city—and I was shaken to my core. So later I was sitting with my mother at the kitchen table and I told her I want to be an actor and she said "Well, don't just talk about it, do it!" So I got up, and I auditioned for a play at the West Side Jewish Community Center.

*Shaw tops up Dreyfuss.*

Dad was not happy. But you should hear him now on the subject of "My son, the famous actor."

**SCHEIDER.** Yeah, my dad's the same—when I was nominated for *French Connection*, he wouldn't even come to the phone, but now he gets a real kick out of it!

*Beat.*

Your father still around, Robert?

**SHAW.** No... He killed himself when I was twelve.

**SCHEIDER.** Shit.

**DREYFUSS.** Really?

**SHAW.** Oh yes. Christ, he's been gone such a long time. He was a Victorian... Funny to think that, isn't it? Different era. An extraordinary man...marvellous man. He was a doctor in the Orkneys, those terrible islands where there's wind and sea and you get hundred-mile-an-hour gales. He was the lighthouse doctor, and he used to keep a medical bag on each island, and when the boat couldn't get in because the sea was so rough, he used to tie a rope around his