

KINSHIPS

A NOVEL

G. H. SHOHEE

The Approach I

THE QUALITY OF INFINITY....

"And It Will Come To Pass In The End Of Days:

"That I will make the heavens to tremble.
And the earth shall be shaken out of her place,
For wrath of the Lord of hosts,
And for the day of His fierce anger...

"For the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof
Shall not give their light;
The sun shall be darkened in his going forth,
And the moon shall not cause her light to shine....

(Then) "Behold, I create new heavens
And a new earth:
And the former things shall not be remembered,
Nor come into mind.
But be ye glad and rejoice for ever
In that which I create...
And the voice of weeping shall be no more heard....
There shall be no more thence an infant of days,
Nor an old man that hath not filled his days;
For the youngest shall die a hundred years old....
They shall not build, and another inhabit,
They shall not plant, and another eat.
For as the days of a tree shall be the days of My people,
And Mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands....
And it will come to pass that before they call I will answer,
And while they are yet speaking, I will hear.
The wolf and the lamb shall feed together,
And the lion shall eat straw like the ox;
And dust shall be the serpent's food....
And the suckling child shall play on the hole of the asp,
And the weaned child shall put his hand on the basilisk's den.
They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain;
For the earth shall be full of knowledge of the Lord,
As the waters cover the sea." (Isaiah)

THE APPROACH 2

"WE THE LIVING IN TIME, IN A ~~REALM~~ PHANTASIA OF DREAMLAND--

IN AND OUT OF THE EARTH!"

Dr. Capen: "where did you get that from?"

George: "From the cat, the dog and the horse."

Dr. Capen: "You think the animals live in a phantasia of dreamland?"

WE, THE LIVING
(Living in Time)

A Novel

G. H. Shoet

BOOK ONE

School Days

.....

PART ONE
Hope Eternal

Chapter One

His Father's voice

When the echoing footsteps rushing to the first morning classes had died, and the silence in the Halls of Portgrave High was at its deadliest ebb, because of the sudden sharp contrast, George Sheraton, with long strides, was on his way to English I. This was one of the not infrequent times when he had been late to class, especially the first one at eight o'clock. But he stopped abruptly when he saw the old janitor's plight. Jan Jensen was staggering, struggling desperately for air, his face a swollen purple. Lifting him up in his arms he set him gently down on the stairs beneath an open window, and began fanning him furiously.

"The good old air," he whispered in his ear, "in a moment you'll be as good as new."

The old man opened his eyes. There was recognition in them as he smiled at George. His lips parted to speak, but George put two fingers to his lips warning silence.

George kept up his fanning, and soon observed with prayerful
+ thankfulmess

George: "The same as we --- only without evil or fear."

Dr. Capen: "Fear of what?"

George: "DEATH! Of which nothing they know. A PHANTASIA of happiness!"

Dr. Capen: "But we do - is that it, especially when we get up the ladder of days?"

George: "And nights! I am on the peak of the mountain with you, when it ~~is~~ comes to count the nights and the days."

Dr. Capen: "But you are in the pink of the light of the mountain - your youth!"

George: "MY FATHER..." (but read on)

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fulness that his efforts were being crowned with success. There was a noticeable receding of the deadly livid cyanosis, and the creeping forward of living pink, first on the cheekbones then to the balding crown of the janitor's head. The stertor had silenced, and the bellows of the thorax had resumed its regular normal rhythm of inhale and exhale.

"That's better," George smiled down on the old man, patting his head. "Much better." There was a happy ring to his voice. For there was a strong bond formed between them. The old man was his own, his particular creature. Doesn't he owe his life to him?

What if he had died?

He had witnessed death once before - just once. His father's death. He was only ten. And in those benumbed moments he was conscious only of one reality: that his father's lips ceased moving, and that a peculiar greyish hue had spread over his features. He had stood there long, oblivious to the presence of his mother and Dr. Capen, remembering his father's last words, but realizing that his father had departed never to return.

But the janitor, had he departed and returned?

What if he had died?

Was it a delving into the mysterious and the occult? It ^{WAS} the cursed polio of his childhood that had attenuated his body, sharpened his senses and put an extra keenness of perception in his mind, his subconscious, attuning it to his father's voice pouring a stream of words into it. It reached and finally stirred his consciousness, bringing life back to him. Dr. Capen said his father had brought about a miracle which medical science could never have wrought. For he was doomed to die. It were as if Fate had intervened to strike him down so he would lie helpless at the mercy of his father, his mind a blank disk, and his father impressing on it his own thinking, his own words.

Where and what is the kinsnip between living life and life in a vacuum?

Under Dr. Capen's devoted ministrations his physical development has balanced his mental acuity during three years at high school. But he felt like an old man among his classmates, a mental monstrosity. He wanted so much to be one of them. His illness had retarded him two years in his curricular work - but his mental attitudes! He reveled in the stamina and power of his body, his almost overpowring height; but at other moments he condemned this grotesqueness in him, this young body topped off with an old head.

The brutality of it!

This constant thinking, probing!

Is all life bound up in the soul when it departs? he asked himself stubbornly. Could life, like his own, suddenly evaporate? It was an aberration at this moment to think of the lovely Cynthia, who sat next to him in the classroom, whom he likened to a flower opening its tender blooms to the first spring dawn; or of the fiery Blanca, who kindled in him the flames of young manhood. These are longings of the soul and therefore not ephemeral.

He bent over the janitor, who was stirring as if in deep sleep. His soul had ^{been} hovering on the brink, and suddenly was summoned back. It did come back in obedience to a call, to inhabit and metamorphose a livid corpse into a living body! Where did it come from, and to what sort of summons did it respond? Is there a line, a boundary, where life and death meet? And is there a return? Is death a negation?

"Like a fog lifting," murmured Jensen.

"The mist of mystery," George joked.

"But it's the truth. How did you know?"

"Know what?" George was puzzled.

"The mystery."

"Fog covers everything in mystery, even if there is none. Like a whispering secret."

"But there was a mysterious image, which came with the mist, settling like a curtain before my eyes."

"Now you are talking in riddles," George ridiculed. "It's an aura that comes with weakness."

"But the thing was real," the old man insisted. "It first came like a flash. Then flames... with a brilliant halo around the flames... and smoke curling upward in the midst of the flames... the familiar walls of the school tumbling in flames... Then something let go in me, which set me free and made me light. Like floating in the air. I was running. Suddenly there was a squeezing tumbling pain in my chest," pointing to a spot in his chest, "and I knew no more."

"Of course, the walls of your beloved school! Always on your mind. But you are talking altogether too much," George reprimanded mildly.

"I am quite all right now. Just a bit weak. The little bird in my chest here has closed its wings and is fluttering no more. But Dr. Monarch says that someday I'll put it to flight if I am not careful."

"Dr. Monarch! I thought he had given up practice?"

"That he has, but only for paying patients. I am not one of them. At least not to the lights of the good doctor, who never took payment from me. He says we aged together, and that I began my apprenticeship as a janitor while he was at school. No, the old grizzly never would, but he always keeps on harping on giving up my job. Huh!"

"Old Doc's got something there. Certainly it would help the bird in the cage, as you put it."

"Maybe," the janitor shook his head violently, "but I stay put..."

"All right, all right..." a little impatiently, "right now I am taking you down to the basement where you can lie down and rest."

"I am well able doing it on my own." As he turned to go, "Thanks, my boy. You have a good heart. And true. You'll go far. I know. But don't run the stairs. The old heart you know, even in one young as you."

"Okay, Jan. Be sure to take it easy."

"Take it easy...!" Jansen giggled the old man's whiny laugh, "take it easy. Doc tells me to take it easy." He took advantage of an old man's privilege of repetitiousness without offense. "Take it easy. Hmm! How can a janitor take it easy carrying barrels from the basement! But I can't give it up." Looking into George's eyes, a wan smile on his face, he continued musingly, "Those old discards, throwaways ... clinkers, ashes... Treasures. My mother's house, my father's house. My house! My children's House." He caught himself wiping his eyes with a trembling hand. "I am a doddering old fool."

"I understand." George put a comforting hand on the man's shoulder. "This is your life. We are your children. You have always stood up for us, defending our many ^o _λfibles. The masters have deferred to your judgment. Your place in here and your privilege are as sound and secure as the rock of Gibraltar."

As if the tribute was too much for him, the janitor started on his way without another word.

At the classroom door George hesitated. Not a sound came through the door. He knew what would confront him when he had entered. So smug they'd look, their noses buried deep in their books, with but the slightest hint of a snicker, and a merry twinkle in their eyes. "There is George late again," would be written on their faces. But they would keep a straight face and assume the serious mien of innocence. Children playing a game. How he envied them! Of course, one should be on time for the good of all, but fate seemed always to push him into a rat-hole. Now he is later than ever. Could he ever explain to those guys what

it means to have Fate play tricks on you. Like this morning!

A loud guffaw suddenly burst through the door. It startled him. As he listened it subsided into the sibilance of the wind soughing through leaves, and then louder again, even as the murmur of the restless waves of the sea. A feeling of nostalgia seized him. Why couldn't he be one of them! The thought of being left out of things was beginning to boil up in him, as with a mien of stern defiance he burst into the room.

The sea of faces before ^{him WAS} were in such serene repose that he began to doubt that he had ^{been} the butt of hilarity of the moment before. Was it just his suspicious nature? Yet, there ^{seemed} to be too much benignity about.

Miss Martha Macdowel, motherly as usual, was on her dais; her honest full-moon face in the half grin of an Oriental Goddess. She never let the importance of her position as head of the English Department weigh heavily on her, nor to prevent her bestowing upon her charges a motherly affection.

He heard her kindly voice: "Your paper is here, George."

He knew now that his syllogism among the others, passed in the day before, had been read to the class, and that the bright laughter he had ^r heard before was directed at his offering. He meant it in fun, a prankish lilt of levity in him, an unsupported cleverness. A syllogism fashioned of the words NOTHING and SOMETHING indeed! Such damnable, supercilious, contemptible conceit!

Cynthia Clark said, "Hello, George," when he sat down next to her in boiling confusion.

It was a sweet chant in his ears. "Hello, Cynthia," he said numbly.

Foster Forrest reache^d across Cynthia and squeeze^d his hand reassuringly.

Blanca Dervin looked around from her seat, three rows in front, and blistered him with a lightning streak from her flashing black eyes.

It hurt her enchroned arrogance that George had taken up with Cynthia even for that brief spell. It sniped at her pride that her cousin should have been the object of discussion, an oddity for hilarity. It's that nonsense he writes. Her proud and practical nature caused her face to flame a deep crimson whenever her cousin's stuff came before the class.

Harold Brandt at her side trumpeted a defiant note through the ample caverns of his beak-like nose. The class knew that Harold blew when anything went against him, the angrier the more tremulous and protracted the blast. What troubled Blanca irritated him, and he was always there to give her moral support if nothing else. This cousin of hers, this George, stood too much in his way to get on with her. Thus far to him she had been dark danger, enticing dark beauty. Siren like! A slender Goddess whom he must worship at a distance. Compared to the tall, brawny George he was but a pudgy midget. Paradoxically, his hopes lay in Blanca herself. For the two of them were more like-minded than she and her cousin. Both were practical. His gimlet, squinting eyes told him she wouldn't long go along with George, who hardly has his feet on the ground. Just a young girl's first brush with love. An infatuation. George was brilliant, has the mechanics to make a girl's heart, but he has the patience that goes with^h determination. And he is determined.

"Now, George," Miss Macdowel was saying, "your own version."

George stood up. He looked across the room to read meaning in his teacher's face. But there wasn't the slightest hint of mockery in her eyes. Her face was as placid and pleasant as ever. Her eyes already bent toward her desk, in a repose of attention.

He stood staring ahead of him, unconscious of everything but a furious throbbing in his chest. It caught his breath, but only momentarily. He remembered being stretched on Dr. Capen's examining table,

the good doctor pounding away with his finger tips, listening to his heart, and pronouncing it a normal healthy. Whatever that meant. Only that he gets emotionally upset, and his heart, like a good race-horse responds immediately. He was defiant. No worry about the pulse-like throb in his throat. It'll be over in a moment.

"Your own version!" he repeated her words to himself. Is there more than one version? His father's version! The recall of that twilight of his life, when he was floating in limbo. The brilliant flashes of light that came through that twilight world. The light that flooded every part of his being, and gave him back to life! The same lights playing on his mind - like the imprint of an old record.

When deep emotion plays tricks on him! That rebellious part of his nature getting the upper hand. Well, he has no desire to control it. They guffawed before - presumeably at his syllogism - let them have their fill of levity. A bacchanal of words! Just this once let them have the fury of the ranges of his peculiar thinking.

He took a glance at the paper and laid it back on the desk.

"Something and Nothing," he said.

"If Something had come from Nothing - and it could have as far as our physical senses could ^{fathom it -} ~~inform us~~ - it could equally be true that Nothing, unforeseen in time, may be the end result of Something." Spurious thinking, an aberration of the mind, but can they disprove it? Faces, faces, blank as the walls of this room. Only Cynthia has the light of understanding in her eyes. "Man, therefore," he cried out, as if the thought were indwelling and pressing for release, "Man, full-blooded - marvelous in its organization and its precision of performance - having the intricacies and development of elements endless in time and limitless in space, now, isn't it also possible, since the human mind is incapable of conceiving such immensities in time and space, that the Origin of Man and all Creation might have come - as far as we

are concerned, and in our ignorance - from Nothing!"

A smile played on his lips, a smile of irony, as he looked into the faces of his classmates around the room.

"But this is all heresy, an aberration of the mind, a playing with words. So confusing that none here have a word which would gain-say it. The Fury of Time and the Elements were all in God, the Creator, when He brought them forth. 'Then the Lord God formed man out of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. And man became a living soul.' But there had to ^{be} first the kernel of dust.

"The origin, the kernel of creation! The swarm and swamp of life; the inscrutable, incredulous forces of life! Solar energy, myriads upon myriads of invisible radiant particles and drippings of distant Nebulae and the Milky Way, undulating and pulsating in the steaming vortex of creating - uniting and combining in chemical cohesion, and reuniting, to form a protoplasmic unit, the first cell, the first integrated unit of Life! The first step in the creation of Man - in God!

"The grain of wheat, the pollen seed, the hickory nut, the winter bud, the grain of 'dust' on the tip of the root, the microbe the amoeba, the sperm cell, the ovum, the cry of the infant, the hiss of the cobra, the flash of lightning and the crash of thunder, the flight of comets and suns in their orbits --- they are all wrapped up in the kernel of dust, in their untold myriads, in the unit-measures of time and space! In that kernel is locked up the power and fury of millions of years that went into its formation. And more everlasting aeons in the crucible of creation till Man's progenitor came upon the scene.

"And in the reverse process in the unbeheld years of the future, in the crucible of disintegration and change, in the fire of intense cold of the absolute Zero, will we return to nothingness of the original all embracing element, which as far as we are concerned is ob-

*Too heavy? Too involved? This troubled soul.
(on the other hand it's good for it)*

IS

livion and nihility, or physical nothingness? Or will it be death in limbo, awaiting^g resurrection in another world, to be called into being in another future? For there is no absolute Nothing. There always is 'Something in Nothing' The Eternal, the Infinite: the Origin, the Kernel!"

There was a conscious momentary silence in the room, as if by common consent. Something fleeting and brooding which they couldn't comprehend. A ghostly echo of a Voice they couldn't hear but listened to from within.

An enchantment. A power!

The vehemence of passion was within Cynthia, as with deliberate action she took George's hand and squeezed hard. This thing within her was overwhelming and disturbing, upsetting the delicate balance of timid reserve in her young and inexperienced body.

George felt a quaking, as of a chill, at the touch of her hand. It evoked a fear in him as of an overhanging doom, a clairvoyance, which he condemned as a madness.

Had he spoken the words which brought him a kinship with his father's spirit? Had his father spoken through him?

CHAPTER II

Miss Macdowel

Miss Martha Macdowel was nibbling daintily on a chocolate mint pattie George had offered her from not so dainty @ small brown paper bag. George had received a summons from Miss Macdowel to see her after