

# HEARTS WALKING

Mrs. Harry Pugh Smith

## CHAPTER X Synopsis

Since her husband's death, Anne Phillips has worked to support her children. Berenice, the eldest, is married to Bill Carter. Jim, Anne's son, has let his infatuation lead to an engagement with the rich Helen Sanders. Anne suspects that Cathy, widowed little dancer, is in love with Jim. Janet, Anne's younger daughter, is unhappy because her well-to-do friends neglect her. She is commissioned by Tony Ryan to help him restore the old Phillips estate which he has bought. Janet believes Tony is getting it ready for Priscilla Leigh and himself.

"He was nearly grown and he must have missed me terribly at first, but he ended by tearing me right out of his heart. He didn't mean to let me hurt him any more by not being there when he needed me. He ran away three days later. I employed detectives. I was frantic. They found him at last. He'd been killed riding the rods on a freight

train out West. He died, Anne, putting as much space between us as possible. A lot of me died that day."

"I'm so sorry," she whispered, putting her hand over his. "That's what I am doing down here," he said. "When I get to where I can't stand the blankness any longer I look up Tony Ryan. He is a lot like the boy I lost. Hard-boiled on the surface and proud as Lucifer, but with a big ache inside him. You and he are the only persons I've ever told."

Tears were sliding down Anne's cheeks. "Thank you for telling me," she said. "He put her hand to his lips. 'I knew the minute I saw you that I'd be able to tell you.'"

"I'd as soon be boiled in oil," said Jim fiercely, "as get stuck on a party like that one last night." Cathy smiled. It was the next evening and Jim was taking her for a little drive into the country before she had to go to work. Danny lay sound asleep doubled up on the seat between them, his curly head on his mother's lap, his chubby legs across Jim's knees.

"I like people," went on Jim, "but I can't go the asinine round of empty flourishes that's called society. It's so infernally futile."

Cathy's slim fingers caressed Danny's moist brow. "It's so much waste effort."

"I'll say!" cried Jim. "Principally it's keeping up with Lizzie and fawning on people you dislike, and I'm not clever at dissembling."

Cathy nodded. "That's why people depend on you. You are sincere."

Jim grinned. "The judge says, contrary to the general opinion, honesty is the best policy even for a lawyer."

"He's getting so he depends on you a lot, too."

Jim frowned. "The Judge's not so young as he was. Naturally it's a relief if I can shoulder the routine jobs. I owe him so much."

ed and when she went on her voice quivered. "Just the way I can never pay back how kind you've been to me."

Jim stared down at her in astonishment. "Kind to you? Heck, Cathy, it isn't charity to have you around, you and the kid. I like you, see? I don't know anyone I like more."

"Do you, Jim?" whispered Cathy.

They took Danny home. Jim carried him upstairs without waking him. Jim drove Cathy around to the rear of the night club where there was an employee's entrance and he waved reassuringly as he started off. It struck him that she looked as if she were about to cry.

"Poor kid!" muttered Jim. "Life's never given her a chance. I'll hang around the office and pick her up afterwards."

However, Jim did not see Cathy again that night. When he came into the building which housed Judge Hetchcote's office Jim found a telegram pushed under the door. The signature leaped out at him like a blow from a hammer.

"Am passing through Bay City tonight at nine five on the way to New York," the telegram read. "Must see you. Come down to the station and ask for Father's private car. (Signed) Helen."

The old clock on the discolored wall behind the Judge's desk pointed to six minutes to nine. It was eleven blocks to the station and the esplanade was crowded with machines waiting for the express from New Orleans. Jim did not have time to look for a parking space. He left his battered old flivver leaning against a "Don't Stop Here" sign and raced into the depot. The train to New York was heading in. Jim galloped down the track beside it.

"Jim!" called a clear imperious voice from the observation platform of the rear car. There she stood, leaning out to beckon to him.

Somehow he was beside her on the platform and she was in his arms clinging to him, her lovely red mouth lifted to his. He kissed her, and it was ecstasy and it was torment, just as it had been in all the dreams he had dreamed about her.

"I've missed you so!" she cried. "I ran away from you and every day I've wanted to come back. I love you!"

Jim was certain he would not lift a finger to save himself if Helen Sanders ordered him to get down on all fours at her feet; "We've only ten minutes here," she explained breathlessly, "and you have to see Father."

She caught his arm and pulled him into the car. A stout bald man with a harassed face and snapping brown eyes was sitting in a large wicker chair dictating to a solemn young fellow wearing thick tortoise-shell glasses.

"Father!" cried Helen rapturously. "It's all right! Everything's all right! This is Jim. We're going to be married."

She kept her arm about Jim's neck as she shoved him forward. He was horribly embarrassed.

Mr. Clive Sanders cleared his throat. "So this is Jim," he said with an amiable though slightly rusty smile. He put out a strong chubby hand. "Congratulations, my boy. You seem to have successfully harnessed this young typhoon of mine."

Jim swallowed painfully. "I—er—"

Helen interrupted. "We simply haven't time for the customary conventional speeches," she said impatiently. "We've got to go on to New York tonight, but we'll be back. In about four days."

Ahead the engine gave a warning blast. "Oh!" wailed Helen. "We'll be pulling out in a minute. Oh, Jim, darling!"

She began to draw him back to the platform. Jim's head was whirling. He tried to murmur something respectful to his future father-in-law, but he was prevented by the sweet delirium of Helen's lips again pressed to his for kisses.

"Four days is forever!" she cried tragically. "How can we bear it?"

The station was slowly sliding past. Jim nervously disengaged himself from her embrace. He stooped and kissed her.

"Do you love me?" she cried. "Yes, yes, God knows I do!" he stammered. "But I—I've got to go, dear. I can't afford to be carried along. Goodbye, goodbye, my darling!" he cried a little frantically and dropped off the end of the observation platform.

He was whistling when he came into the flat, whistling unsteadily because his head was still whirling.

"Dearest!" Anne cried. "I haven't heard you sound so cheerful in ages. Jim swooped her off her feet, held her up suspended in mid-air, kissed her soundly.

"Prepare for a shock!" he cried gaily. "I'm going to be married!" "To Cathy! Oh, Jim, I'm so glad!" cried Anne joyously. Jim stared at her as if he had walked off into nothingness. "To Helen Sanders," he corrected her roughly.

"If only she makes you happy," said Anne in a broken voice. "What more could a man ask?" demanded Jim.

It was the next day at noon. Janet on her way home from school had encountered her sister on the corner outside her office. "Jim's going to marry the daughter of a multimillionaire? I can't believe it!" exclaimed Berenice. "It's true, worse luck," Janet glanced at Berenice curiously. "What have you been doing to yourself? You look terrible, as if you'd been to the wars or something." Berenice flushed. "I'm doing nicely, thank you." "I still say you don't look it," persisted Janet.

"Are you and Bill fighting again?" "No," said Berenice with a bright metallic laugh. "Bill and I don't fight any more. You see, she drew a ragged breath, "he's left me."

"Berenice!" "Yes," said Berenice laughing shrilly, "he packed up and moved out a week ago while I was at work."

"Oh, Berenice, I'm sorry. This will break Mother's heart!" "You aren't to tell her!" cried Berenice, gripping her arm. "I won't have her told. It would worry her to death. You've got to promise. I'll keep you here until you do."

"All right," said Janet wearily. "I promise."

Berenice had felt sorry for Bill after he failed to win in the contest. She had made up her mind to be more gentle and considerate.

She had even refused several invitations and stayed quietly at home with him for a night or two. They had played chess and had a pleasant time. It had been almost the same as it used to be when they were first married and so in love with each other, except that Berenice was no longer in love with Bill. She merely felt sorry for him, she thought. Poor Bill!

Then they had another quarrel and all Berenice's antagonism was aroused. It was about Guy Shelton. Bill had never liked Guy and Bill liked him still less as his wife's employer. Bill said Guy Shelton was a disgusting old fool who had never had a decent thought about a woman in his life.

"I know his kind," said Bill, "and it burns me up to think of my wife being associated with that brand of skunk! He can't walk by a pretty girl without touching her."

Berenice had to admit that there was some justice in the charge. Guy was a big open-faced man with a jovial laugh and the bluff hearty tactics of an overgrown boy. If he had a few drinks he was inclined to fondle any woman in sight. It was a joke in The Bunch. His wife laughed about it.

Berenice felt very virtuous because she had no intention of getting rid of Bill. She thought she was a martyr to go on and on being miserable, but refusing to free herself because poor Bill could not live without her. And then he left her. She was late getting home from the office that afternoon. She stopped downstairs for a cocktail. She expected Bill would have started dinner, but he was not there when she came in. She did not discover the note at once. She kept listening for his step. Even after she read the note she did not believe it.

"I'm getting out," it said, "and this time I won't be back. I tried to keep you out of the gutter because I used to love you and I owe your mother a great deal. But you've killed my love for you and you won't let yourself be saved, so there's no point in carrying on. If I had made a lot of money it might have been different. But I failed in that just as I failed with you. Probably it's more my fault than yours. Maybe you might have had some respect for my opinions if I had been a success."

"As it is, you've butchered my pride and shattered my self-confidence. For weeks I've been living in hell, ashamed to look you or anyone else in the eye. A man can't hold up his head when his own wife feels nothing for him but contempt. Just the same, I might have gone on with you like a millstone about my neck if I hadn't stood in a vacant office across from Guy Shelton's today and watched him kiss you."

(Continued Next Week)

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