

Imprints (On a Healing Heart): Revised Edition - 12/04/07**Dick Gibson**

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"With a son in drug rehab his fiancée dead and his professional life in shambles he was apprehensive. Small wonder." *Imprints* rejoins the life of a recently downsized Rob Grant who is saddled with calls from bill collectors in 1970. Thoughts of poor young Marianne struck down by leukemia in her mid-twenties penetrate his once laissez-faire mindset. He becomes sometimes reflective more aware of inner beauty's lasting merit though on-the-spot judgments based on appearance and availability do occur. His deadpan but amazingly complete assessment of two relationships—"You're here. She isn't."—is an expression of Calvin Coolidge-like minimalism.

Two previous divorces created commitment phobia but Rob isn't meant to be alone. He's a serial triogamist with a growing desire to choose the right partner and forge ahead with the next stage of life. The finalists are: Kim a not quite unmarried mother and loyal friend; Helen a holdover from the NYC rat race; and Sarah a schoolteacher. If only he could know for sure which love is durable enough for the long haul. The best available job is a headhunting position in Manhattan striving for occasional placement fees. Funds are low. Suburban living on the commuter line in Sheffield Connecticut is now beyond Rob's means so he considers a slower-paced property management situation near his tiny getaway cottage on Hampden Lake.

The household is transitioning into an empty nest. Older son Mike is grown up to the stage of living partly at home and partly with friends partying a little and painting houses for a real estate broker in the resort country of rural Massachusetts. Younger son Greg a guest of the state actually becomes focused and happy in a highly structured school. Rob visits him with different girlfriends as company.

Welcome flourishes of craft include a jokey bow to metafiction. A character casually "...pulled out a paperback copy of Stanley Elkin's book *The Dick Gibson Show...*" an actual current title in 1971 though not about this book's same-named author. The epilogue is both an indulgence and a bonus gift. Characters' fates are projected forward from 1974 practically a formal announcement of the roman &224; clef form.

How emblematic Rob Grant is of the optimistic but muddled Seventies: reaching for new freedom existing for the present. Yet here it is necessary to work incessantly for his living and relationship decisions have consequences. The challenges expand his consciousness. He may be a largely benign anti-hero we find ourselves sympathizing with or he could be an essentially good man marred by a weakness for acknowledgment. No matter the readers' opinions all will agree he is markedly memorable. As a study in human nature and the impulse for self-improvement this book is a fine stand-alone but the full story offers more beginning with *Deliberate Steps (Along a Familiar Path)* and then *It Isn't Easy Being a Lion*. *Imprints* caps this unique trilogy with satisfying resolution.

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