

## **When Life Finally Comes Into Full Circle**

I dare to bet that when Caroline Meeber was little, she was content by her life in the farm. She didn't have anything to worry about, because she led such simple life with her family in Columbia City. Hadn't she grew up and know all about the big city, she wouldn't have to think about going to Chicago and having much more than what she had already have. However, growth is inevitable; her ears and mind collaborated in a conspiracy to take over her heart, and her heart ultimately thinks for her. Not long after that, she boarded into the afternoon train leaving for Chicago without any well-thought preparation. Impulsive? Perhaps. But it is this very decision that made her the woman she is in the end of the story.

When she got into the train, Carrie was not really sure about anything. She was still having doubts about getting to Chicago and leaving her parents behind. But as she gazed out the window, she started to wonder about the wonderfulness of the big city and what Columbia City lacked. She was young, and "when a girl leaves her home at eighteen, she does one of two things. Either she falls into saving hands and becomes better, or she rapidly assumes the cosmopolitan standard of virtue and becomes worse" (1). Unfortunately for Carrie, she did fall into saving hands, but those saving hands aren't the best hands she could fall into. Drouet's first words in her ear are what actually started a feeling of big expectations in Carrie's heart. She was nervously looking for familiarity, and that's what Drouet gave her: a nice conversation, good manners (including his clothes), a sign of successful life, and his final smile when leaving the station. However,

his kind gestures are only a device to attract Carrie like a magnet, and before long, she already felt his absence though was accompanied by her sister.

Carrie's sister, Minnie, had a family of her own. She lives with her husband and child. Her husband, Hanson, is a blue-collar worker and didn't seem to make much of a living. Carrie's living there appeared to be not unwanted, but more like expected to not make it harder if not contribute more. So when she learns the fact that inviting Drouet over might cause Minnie and her husbands' a burden, she felt a feeling of something missing and bigger unhappiness in her life now because she really wanted to get to know Drouet. She wanted to know the life Drouet leads. Curiosity is now a part of Carrie's new life – a second step in her life cycle – and she is now determined to get a job and her own place in order to be able to get to know Drouet.

As she walks through in the streets of Chicago to get a job and place, she was lost in a fairy land where "it was all wonderful, all vast, all far removed, and she sank in spirit inwardly and fluttered feebly at the heart" (13). Carrie's fallen in love with the mystery she now sees in front of her eyes, and wanted something more than just to meet Drouet. She wanted to be a part of the metropolitan life; to be able to drive through the streets, or at least be inside of the shops and department stores, even if it means she has to work for \$4.50 a week in a shoe factory. On one occasion, she wanted to go to the theatre, but since Minnie and her husband didn't approve, she backed off her plan. Instead, she went out by herself on a Saturday. Her idea of a Saturday promenade gave ideas into her head and, eventually, opened her eyes to the evident wealth there in Chicago; she then felt that Minnie's apartment is too narrow.

As does the Rolling Stones have sung, "I can't get no satisfaction," Carrie feels the same way. This feeling of unsatisfactory plays a major part in Carrie life. In fact, throughout the story, everything she does is based on this feeling. In the beginning of the book, the feeling piles up by the uncomfortable working situation – the way her back aches by sitting on the stool – and the way she feels embarrassed by the better dressed people walking pass her, "she felt ashamed in the face of better dressed girls who went by. She felt as though she should be better served, and her heart revolted."(33) She is considered very lucky to get a job as soon as she did since she does not have any experience in working a machine. But instead of being grateful about it, she seemed to be getting less and less interested about it. Even when Minnie and Hanson tried to be nice and asked Carrie about her new job, they were surprised of the lack of enthusiasm Carrie has for it.

Another habit that dragged Carrie into the glamorous life of the big city is that she always goes downstairs of Minnie's flat and stands in the door. She, once again, finds a new world for her that is totally different from Columbia city or Minnie's flat. "The life of the streets continued for a long time to interest Carrie...Her imagination trod a very narrow round, always winding up at points which concerned money, looks, clothes, or enjoyment" (41). This is the trigger that made her realize that with her \$4.50 a week, she couldn't even afford to pay for her car fare, let alone afford her wonderful things, because she has to pay \$4.00 to help the Hansons with the rent.

When finally she met Drouet again, he paid for her food and gave her, as a favor, "two soft, green, handsome, ten-dollar bills." (50) Before that second encounter with Drouet, she lost her job because she fell ill and couldn't afford to buy winter clothes. So

Drouet's gesture of lending the money made her fall for Drouet again. But not only for Drouet, she had also fallen for money. "Money: something everybody else has and I must get,' would have expressed her understanding thoroughly."(51)

Carrie almost never felt complete throughout the story. Constantly she wanted more and more than what she's given. When Drouet asked her to pretend to be Mrs. Drouet, she was confused of why they didn't get married and hinting that they should, while they've only known each other for a little while. But then when she has an affair with Hurstwood, she no longer wanted to marry Drouet. Instead, she wanted Hurstwood – a man with wife and children – more than she wanted Drouet who was her first seducer.

Throughout the story, it is obvious that Carrie is interested in money and wealth more than anything else. She does everything to ensure that her life gets better than just living the way she's been living including her decision of living an almost-independent life after depending on people like Drouet, Hurstwood, and even Minnie.

Now we see Carrie having a little more control of her life, different from her original self that was dependent. She is now taking a turn of the passive role into the active role. Yes, Drouet did give her the chance of being an actress acting in a play; nevertheless, she made the choice of agreeing to act in the play. This is her next step in life, because after this occasion, she takes more roles in determining her fates, including eloping with Hurstwood to New York.

So far, we've seen Carrie journeying through life as a girl who was once content with her life, led by curiosity to the city, and now willing to take a chance to fulfill her goals. But is she now satisfied yet with her new life? Not yet. Because the road she's now following after eloping with Hurstwood is filled with rocks.

If her life is a river, then it's no smooth sailing for Carrie's relationship with Hurstwood. Firstly, her relationship with Hurstwood is based on deception (her lying to him about her marriage with Drouet, him who turned out to already having a family) so it is hard for them to communicate honestly. Second, Carrie is much younger than Hurstwood, so his lack of attention is something she couldn't put up with for a very long time. Third, Carrie always compares Hurstwood to Drouet since Hurstwood is tighter about money than Drouet had always been. Step by step we learn that even though Carrie wanted to have a life with Hurstwood, her insurance of owning lovely things and happiness – money – is more important than living with him.

However, the Carrie we know now is different than the Carrie we knew fleeing Columbia then. At least now she's living in the big city, and has Hurstwood as someone to come home to. She's no longer a parasite in someone else's house; instead she now owns her place together with the man she loves.

But then, just when we thought Carrie's now less unsatisfied with her life compared to the time she was in Chicago, she is enticed by glamour one more time when she was introduced to Broadway by Mrs. Vance – her neighbor who dresses much better than she does. By looking at the way Mrs. Vance dresses and glamorous passersby there in the neighborhoods of New York, Carrie immediately realizes that she is out of place and needs to be wealthier in order to fit into the Broadway scene, resolving not to return until she looks better.

When things finally at the verge of falling apart, Carrie told Hurstwood that she needs to start making a living and her way of doing that is coming over to an agent office and convince the agent that she can become an actress. Here we need to notice how she

differs now from her time in Chicago; she is confident, able to enter the agent's rooms without too much fear, and certain that she wants the job. This differs noticeably from her initial job hunt where she hated the work, was terrified of the employers, and had no confidence.

Carrie's independence continues to grow at this point, so much that she is now able to support herself as well as Hurstwood. Her advancement in the chorus is partially the result of value, but also marks her chance of playing a role. This independence gives her the financial security to consider leaving Hurstwood. The next step will be her emotional security, for leaving Hurstwood without fearing the results. In fact, as a symbol of determinacy, when Carrie deserts Hurstwood, she only leaves behind a short note and twenty dollars. With this scene, Dreiser brings the novel almost full circle – for it was with two "soft, green, handsome ten-dollar bills" that Charlie Drouet first tempted Carrie to leave the Hansons. She once cashed in the two ten-dollar bills, but now she hands them out of her pocket.

As we flip the pages of *Sister Carrie* near the end, we learn that Carrie has become a well-known stage actress and is now getting real attention from the papers and thus gaining more prestige in the theatre world and this means more money. Let's go back to where poor Carrie Meeber accepted two soft, green, handsome ten-dollar bills for her desirous self. She felt happiness, a feeling of satisfied, and that situation is the similar to the situation she is in now. Only she's older, has a bigger name, and of course, a bigger sum of money. And when she had in hand "a hundred and fifty dollars" (362), Carrie Madenda, the actress, found herself rich beyond belief and, for a moment, happy.

At last, she gets what she had always wanted. A life in a big city, a wonderful career as an actress, a lovely hotel suite with luxurious things, a life with many important people in it, and most importantly, her insurance for her happiness: money. The latter part is very important to the different interpretation to the story. Sure, readers may say that Carrie Meeber is a *material girl*, if you will; however, who's to say women can't have luxurious goods with her own effort? This book shows how wanting and needing money is a natural side of human beings. Sooner or later each of us will find out that money *can* buy happiness.

As something to be considered, an interesting part of the story is that Carrie never mentioned her home in Columbia except in the early parts of the book. It seems like she's trying to forget her home, if not trying to find herself a new home, which, incidentally named Chicago. All in all, perhaps this last part is sort of a revelation that she has indeed found her place, where she wanted and really does belong: Chicago, where she feels safe. She now has the metropolitan life, where her dreams had been fulfilled; and when her life has come full circle.

Reference:

1. Dreiser, Theodore (1972), *Sister Carrie*. New York: Bantam Books

2. "Sister Carrie." *Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia*.

<[http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Sister\\_Carrie&oldid=30551632](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Sister_Carrie&oldid=30551632)>

3. Smith, J. N.. "GradeSaver: ClassicNote: Sister Carrie."*Gradesaver*.

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