

THEODORE
DREISER

Sister Carrie

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Introduction by

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and no channel of satisfaction is provided; if there be ambition, however weak, and it is not schooled in lovely principle and precept—if no way be shown, be sure it will learn a way of the world. Need it be said that the lesson of the latter is not always uplifting. We know that the common run of mortals *struggle* to be happy. Is not that comment sufficient?

Lastly, let all men remember that in the main, the world's virtue has never been tested. Wherefore was he good—the heavens rained goodness on the soil that nourished him. Where severe tests have been made, there have been some lamentable failures. Too often we move along ignoring the fact of our own advantages in every criticism we make concerning others. We do this because we are ignorant of the subtleties of life. Be sure that the vileness which you attribute to some object is a mirage. It is a sky illumination of your own lack of understanding—the confusion of your own soul.

In the light of these truths, it is well to admit the possibility of persuasion and control other than by men. Did Drouet persuade her entirely? Ah, the magnitude attributed to simple Drouet! The leading strings were with neither of them.

Carrie was an apt student of fortune's ways—of fortune's superficialities. Seeing a thing, she would immediately set to inquiring how she would look properly related to it. Be it known that this is not fine feeling; it is not wisdom. The greatest minds are not so afflicted, and on the contrary the lowest order of mind is not so disturbed. Fine clothes to her were a vast persuasion; they spoke tenderly and Jesuitically for themselves. When she came within earshot of their pleading, desire in her bent a willing ear. Ah, ah! the voices of the so-called inanimate. Who shall yet translate for us the language of the stones.

"My dear," said the lace collar she secured from Pardridge's, "I fit you beautifully; don't give me up."

"Ah, such little feet," said the leather of the soft new shoes, "how effectively I cover them; what a pity they should ever want my aid."

Once these things were in her hand, on her person, she might dream of giving them up; the method by which they came might intrude itself so forcefully that she would ache to be rid of the canker of it, but she would not give them up. "Put on the old clothes—that torn pair of shoes," was called to her by

her conscience in vain. She could possibly have conquered the fear of hunger and gone back; the thought of hard work and a narrow round of suffering would, under the last pressure of conscience, have yielded—but spoil her appearance—be old-clothed and poor-appearing—never.

Drouet heightened her opinions on this and allied subjects in such a manner as to weaken her power of resisting their influence. It is so easy to do this when the thing opined is in the line of what we desire. In his hearty way, he insisted upon her good looks. He looked at her admiringly and she took it at its full value. Under the circumstances, she did not need to carry herself as pretty women do. She picked that knowledge up fast enough for herself. Drouet had a habit, characteristic of his kind, of looking after stylishly dressed or pretty women on the street and remarking upon them. He had just enough of the feminine love of dress to be a good judge—not of intellect but of clothes. He saw how they set their little feet, how they carried their chins, with what grace and sinuosity they swayed their bodies. A dainty, self-conscious swaying of the hips by a woman was to him as alluring as the glint of rare wine to a toper. He would turn and follow the disappearing vision with his eyes. He would thrill as a child with the unhindered passion that was in him. He loved the thing that women love in themselves, grace. At this, their own shrine, he knelt with them, an ardent devotee.

"Did you see that woman who went by just now?" he said to Carrie, on the very first day they took a walk together.

It was a very average type of woman they had encountered, young, pretty, very satisfactorily dressed so far as appearances went, though not in style. Drouet had never seen the perfectly groomed ladies of the New York social set, or he would have been conscious of her defects. Carrie had spied her first, though with scarce so single an eye.

"Fine stepper, wasn't she?"

Carrie looked again and observed the grace commended.

"Yes, she is," she returned cheerfully, a little suggestion of possible defect in herself awakening in her mind. If that was so fine she must look at it more closely. Instinctively she felt a desire to imitate it. Surely she could do that too.

When one of her mind sees many things emphasized and