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Would Hurstwood keep his fortune had he never encountered Carrie?

Browsing through Hurstwood's life, a downward pattern could easily be spotted by the readers since the part that the man found himself obsessed with sister Carrie. As wealthy as he was back during the his early days in Chicago, he went down the economic ladder soon after his wife taking away his fortune due to his adultery. He went further down by fleeing firstly to Canada and then to New York due to his embezzlement of money, and finally had himself killed in a shabby apartment. While it seems that none of the above would happen had he not encountered Carrie and not been overwhelmed by his sexual desire, this essay wanted to argue that his downfall was a result of multiple factors, each had a bigger significance than a woman. In other words, Carrie was not to blame for Hurstwood's loss of money, and without Carrie, Hurstwood might lose his fortune as well.

One major reason that Hurstwood could not keep his money, providing that Carrie was non-existent, is because he had lavishing lifestyles and no money plans, even during times he had not settled in a new city. Just when his business in New York showed a sign of inclination, as narrated by Dreiser, he "began to allow himself more clothes" (537). While it is understandable, given the American materialist context in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, that many people spent like Hurstwood did, he was still too persist in remaining his old lifestyles, without really seeing into his new situations. His poor ability in taking care of his fortune was further seen in his entering into gambling sites, in which he lost the great majority of his fortune and deprived himself of the possibility to bounce back. At the end, he came to be a petty little man, forced (by himself) to live in a shabby hotel and even on streets, had only 10 dollars at hand, asked for money from Carrie and finally saw his demise in a room.

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Hurstwood's inability to save money was coupled with his inability to reassess himself in accordance to changing circumstances. Dwelling in a metropolis like New York, Hurstwood, in the words of Dreiser, "would be but an inconspicuous drop in the ocean...[and the ocean is] full of whales" (520). Against such a pool of talents, Hurstwood first failed his first job, and then lost hope in finding another one. The reason that he failed to make ends meet was not because he was incapable to, but that he wanted no jobs other than those that could help maintain his high profile, save his face, and keep him in a relatively high social hierarchy to which he no longer belong. The thing he did most frequently, for survival, was cutting down his expenditure, rather than fitting himself in the new norm of actual poverty. Gradually, through on-and-on failures, he learned to stay nonchalant whatever happened in life, even for his appearance to which he used to attach the utmost importance, he grew "beard [that] was at least four days old" (Dreiser 633).

Some, in front of the argument that Hurstwood led to his own downfall, might argue that Carrie was the direct influence leading to his breaking away with his family, his stealing money from his employer and his relocating to an unfamiliar city, since she was constantly in Hurstwood's mind when he was wavering about stealing and moving to another city: "he was drawn by such a keen desire for Carrie, driven by such a state of turmoil in his own affairs that he thought constantly it [stealing] would be best..." (Dreiser 468). For Carrie, he seemed to have left everything behind, "Chicago, his wife, the elegant resort" (Dreiser 504), yet if we explore deeper, we could find that Carrie was nothing more than an excuse for his poor decision. Against the lure of money, it was more about his dishonest and greedy nature than about Carrie that he performed the misconduct. It was Hurstwood himself who was lost in the

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moral borderline, no one forced him to, neither was there emergent situations required him to. Since he could not stop even if he foresaw the consequence of stealing, he definitely deserved the indirect punishment of stealing: that he lost important former ties to Chicago, which further deprived him of the chance for a monetary gains.

Some might also argue that without Carrie, he would not lose his fortune in the first place by dividing up with his family. While it is true that his sexual desire directly contributed to his familial isolation, it is not necessarily the case that he could keep his fortune in front of the engulfing desires of his family members over his fortune. His wife, most notorious in calculating gains and losses, had tight control over every income Hurstwood earned and every small affair that might affect the family's status. Under such an environment, Hurstwood found the tiniest amount of love within the family, and he responded by showing "cynicism, indifference, and neglect he had heretofore manifested and would continue to manifest so long as she [Mrs. Hurstwood] would endure" (Dreiser 384). Also, at an occasion the family was talking about another family's wealth, Hurstwood "wished to leave early" (Dreiser 157). Given all such evidence, it seemed that Hurstwood's sexual desire was just a consolation for his broken heart, as well as a remedy for his subordinating status at home. Even without the sexual passion over Carrie, he might leave the family due to other passions, and whatever the passion is that set Hurstwood on a different route away from the family, he will be punished and have his fortune taken away.

In conclusion, this essay argued that Hurstwood led to his own economic demise, with or without the presence of Carrie. His lavish lifestyle, immediate gratification, dishonesty and embezzlement all contributed his precarious state. All such, plus that he allowed his fortune

to be under the guardian of his greedy wife, minimalized his ability to keep his fortune.

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#### Works Cited

Dresier, T. (1965). *Sister Carrie*. Oxford University Press.