

CARRIE: THE BESTSELLER I THREW IN THE BIN

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My wife made a crucial difference during those two years I spent teaching at Hampden. If she had suggested that the time I spent writing stories was wasted time, I think a lot of the heart would have gone out of me.

Two unrelated ideas, adolescent cruelty and telekinesis, came together, and I had an idea. The story remained on the back burner for a while, and I had started my teaching career before I sat down one night to give it a shot.

I did three single-spaced pages of a first draft, then crumpled them up in disgust and threw them away.

The next night, when I came home from school, Tabby had the pages. She'd spied them while emptying my waste-basket, had shaken the cigarette ashes off the crumpled balls of paper, smoothed them out, and sat down to read them. She wanted me to go on with it, she said. She wanted to know the rest of the story. I told her I didn't know jack-shit about high school girls. She said she'd help me with that part. She was smiling in that severely cute way of hers. 'You've got something here,' she said. 'I really think you do.'

The manuscript of Carrie went off to Doubleday, where I had made a friend named William Thompson. I pretty much forgot about it and moved on with my life - teaching school, raising kids, loving my wife, getting drunk on Friday afternoons, and writing stories. My free period that semester was five, right after lunch. I usually spent it in the teachers' room, grading papers and wishing I could stretch out on the couch and take a nap. The intercom came on. I had a phone call. My wife, sounding out of breath, but deliriously happy, read me a telegram. Bill Thompson (who would later go on to discover a Mississippi scribbler named John Grisham) had sent it after trying to call and discovering the Kings no longer had a

phone. 'Congratulations,' it read. 'Carrie officially a Doubleday book. Is \$2,500 advance OK? The future lies ahead. Love, Bill.'

We spent the advance on a new car and I signed a teaching contract for the 1973-4 academic year. Carrie had fallen off my radar screen almost completely. Then one Sunday, I got a call from Bill Thompson at Doubleday.

'Are you sitting down?' Bill asked.

'No,' I said. Our phone hung on the kitchen wall. 'Do I need to?' 'You might,' he said. 'The paperback rights to Carrie went to Signet Books for \$400,000.'

I was completely speechless. Bill asked if I was still there, kind of laughing as he said it. He knew I was.

When the conversation was over, I tried to call Tabby at her mother's. Her youngest sister, Marcella, said Tab had already left. I walked back and forth through the apartment, shaking all over. At last I pulled on my shoes and walked downtown. The only store that was open on Bangor's Main Street was the LaVerdiere's Drug. I suddenly felt that I had to buy Tabby a Mother's Day present, something wild and extravagant. I tried, but here's one of life's true facts: there's nothing really wild and extravagant for sale at LaVerdiere's. I did the best I could.

I got her a hairdryer.

When I got back home she was in the kitchen, unpacking the baby bags and singing along with the radio. I gave her the hairdryer. She looked at it as if she'd never seen one before. 'What's this for?' she asked.

I took her by the shoulders. I told her about the paperback sale. She didn't appear to understand. I told her again. Tabby looked over my shoulder at our shitty little four-room apartment, just as I had, and began to cry.

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