

Miss Carrie: a novel

Judson N. Hout

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Strong characters highlight this coming-of-age and end-of-life tale.

Miss Carrie, by Judson N. Hout, is a delightful book about a boy growing up in Arkansas during World War II and how he finds home. Heartwarming and loving, this sentimental story will charm even the coldest of hearts.

On Halloween, friends dare Ben Williams to approach their town's haunted house to see the witch who lives there. Much to Ben's surprise, a lovely old woman, Miss Carrie, pulls him inside and helps him clean up from the night's shenanigans. She invites him back to visit anytime, as she does not leave her scary-on-the-outside yet beautiful-on-the-inside home. Ben comes back to visit often, talking with Miss Carrie about his life, his family, and more. His father left to fight and eventually die in World War II, leaving Ben to live with his heartbroken grandmother, who passed away not long after Ben's father. With no family, he is sent to live in an orphanage hours away from the town he has always known. Miss Carrie fights for, and is eventually granted, the right to raise Ben in her home, watching his life unfold.

The author, a retired doctor, was raised in Arkansas and was heavily influenced by two elderly women and many aunts, grandmothers, and others who inspired his title character. Miss Carrie offers Ben wise tidbits of advice, such as "Always know that beautiful things are not always good, but good things are always beautiful." Hout captures the feelings of an orphaned boy simply, in a way that cuts right to the heart: "It felt nice to have someone care enough about me to fuss at me."

Simple yet strong characters are this novel's main forte. Though we are informed of where the book takes place and basics of the characters' appearances, there is not a lot of description about how people, places, and things look. Set during World War II in the southern United States, there are people of different races, but none of the problems one would expect. Substantial characters are written with depth and emotion, drawing the reader into the world of this novel.

Both a coming-of-age and an end-of life tale, this novel will appeal to a wide audience. An engaging and lovely, quick read, *Miss Carrie* is an endearing story of real love.

BETH VANHOUTEN (November 6, 2014)

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