

Child of the Dark Study Guide

Child of the Dark by Carolina Maria De Jesus

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Plot Summary

The diary of Carolina Maria de Jesus begins on July 15, 1955, the birthday of her youngest child and only daughter, Vera Eunice. Carolina writes that she wants to buy shoes for Vera Eunice, but has no money. Instead, she finds some in the garbage, cleans them and patches them for the little girl. On any given day, Carolina goes for water at a public spigot, and then faces a day that typically involves a search for a way to feed her family. During the day, she usually finds time to write and to read. She says that she intends to fight her way out of the terrible life she lives by selling her writing.

Carolina lives in a "favela" - a ghetto of sorts in Sao Paulo, Brazil. She lives in a shack that she built herself with her two sons, Jose Carlos and Joao, and her daughter, Vera Eunice. She isn't married and never has been, saying that she doesn't need a man in her life. She never mentions the men who fathered the boys but interacts occasionally with Vera's father. The man pays a small monthly stipend for support and to ensure Carolina's silence. Carolina is sometimes angry that he lives in comfort while his daughter lives in squalor, often hungry.

Hunger is the basis of life for those in the favela. On most days, Carolina walks the streets in search of anything that she can use herself or sell for scrap. Sometimes, she finds vegetables that she cooks for her family. She often stops at the slaughterhouse where she begs for bones to boil for broth. Merchants often dump their rotten food in the area around the favela, which is located near the river. Carolina calls it persecution of a sort. By throwing the rotten food where the hungry children can find it, the businessmen are tempting the children to eat food that will make them sick. Carolina once saw a hungry child eat rotten meat. The next day, she found him dead.

The constant search for food tires her and the inadequate diet works against her, but Carolina still manages to make time to follow her dream - becoming a writer. She calls herself a "poetess" and submits her writing to various editors and publishers, eventually earning publication of a book and a newspaper series.

The "Child of the Dark" is the story of her life for part of 1955, all of 1958 and 1959. The reader will journey through the ups and downs as she sometimes finds strength to go on against incredible odds and sometimes loses faith to the point that she says she considers a suicide pact with her children.



1955

1955 Summary and Analysis

The diary of Carolina Maria de Jesus begins on July 15, 1955, the birthday of her youngest child and only daughter, Vera Eunice. Carolina has no money and scavenges in the trash bins for food and clothing for herself and her children. She is ill and also disappointed that her wait for a special "someone" is in vain. A charity gives Carolina rice, beans and macaroni and she feels less stress, although her son, Jose, misbehaves and neighbors want him punished. She says that women in the favela are childish for fighting with actual children. The other women harass Carolina regularly. Carolina has no tolerance for adults who do not work, who drink, and who live off charity or parents.

On July 19, Carolina carries water, cleans their little shack, and sells some papers to buy milk and bread, then hires Senor Ireno Venancio da Silva to build a teeter-totter. She pays him sixteen cruzeiros and hopes that the toy will keep her children in their own yard and out of trouble with the neighbors. There is some kindness among the people. Carolina sells papers and scraps to a man named Senor Manuel for thirty-one cruzeiros. While Carolina is happy, she asks if he made a mistake because her sack of scraps wasn't worth that much. She notes that thirty-one cruzeiros is exactly what she needs to pay the light bill. Though Carolina doesn't use the electricity that runs into the favela, she is forced to pay a share. Carolina says people are unkind, but she also describes several acts of kindness. Carolina says she is determined to better herself.

Carolina is superstitious and uses folk remedies for health problems. She worries about money and her one possession, a radio. She laughs at herself when she says she would like a meat grinder and sewing machine, since they would just be another cause of worry. She implies that she works as a prostitute and that she is favored by the "more distinguished" men, which is a source of envy among the other women in the favela. She writes constantly, thinking that someday she will sell her writing and improve her family's life. She has much faith in herself and her abilities and is optimistic in a situation that causes most people much despair.



May through June 7, 1958

May through June 7, 1958 Summary and Analysis

Carolina gets a summons for her son, Jose Carolos to appear in court, which she ignores. She finally appears and the lieutenant she meets with is sympathetic to living in the favela. Her children are always hungry, which keeps them from being picky, and Carolina is always scrambling to feed them, selling newspaper and other junk. Politicians manipulate the favela, buying votes, but then forget about them. Store owners "donate" cans of food that is bulging and rotten. She says that the favelados are cats and the politicians are birds and watch out if the bird ever loses its protective cage. One candidate promises to do away with the favela. No one believes him.

Carolina takes Vera along as she searches for paper. Vera tells a woman she smells good and the woman gives Carolina some money. Carolina wants no husband because they only lie around or drink. She tries to prevent crime, but it's a losing venture; children who are well-behaved when moving to the favela learn foul language within days. Carolina writes about the never-ending quest for food and that some die eating bad food from the garbage. Politicians know of the conditions, but nothing ever changes. Every time they eat something out of the trash, they wait to see if they get sick and/or die. One day she buys a roll and rationalizes the expenditure saying she needs the energy to earn money.

People come and go in the favela, some from the country who come and work in the city and leave when they've earned enough money. One woman said pigs would think the favela beneath them. Carolina talks of the relationships between men and women. She says that arguments are common, some women "collect men" and give away the resulting offspring, and that children observe these behaviors. In June, Carolina gets a proposal from Senor Manuel. She says that he would not want a wife who gets up in the middle of the night to write and that she prefers to live alone with her ideals. Carolina tells of a woman named Leila who some believe to be a witch, whose son is even afraid of her.

Carolina says those who live at the riverbank are considered "marginal people." There are no more buzzards going through trash because people have taken over the jog. She tries to feed a man dying of hunger, but he says to save it for her children; he'll be dead soon anyway. Clean water is difficult to obtain; one woman says that a flood should just wipe out the favela. Ironically, that woman's grandson later died in a flood. Carolina believes it was punishment that this woman denied others access to her water.

Analysis

Carolina says that she is not lazy. Her next statement is that she "tries to keep up her diary." It seems that she's not talking about her willingness to work at finding scrap for selling, but of her lack of regularly writing in her diary. She continues to insist that her



writing is her way out of the favela. Carolina says that people have visited "us" and said, "only pigs could live in a place like this." She doesn't elaborate but it seems likely that it's the entire favela, not her home specifically.

Carolina talks of how life in the favela has changed over the past few years. She says that in the early 1950s, there were parties and people sang, but that there is no happiness there now. Carolina's son, Jose, is a bit wild. Once he is missing and she is relieved to find him in court—how sad to be relieved to find a child in court, since the alternative could have been he was dead.

One day when it is raining, Carolina sends Joao to sell what little scrap and he spends a little of it on mineral water. She is furious that he has such "highborn" tastes. But Carolina herself has high hopes for the family's future. Carolina says that she is poor and the poor are treated like dirt. She was sick and found no help. She says, "Welfare agency! Welfare for whom?" Carolina's hopelessness shows through in her entry of May 23. Those "trapped" in the favela simply have no need to "look up." She's not lazy, but there is just no opportunities to better one's situation.

Saturdays are stressful for Carolina because she has to arrange for food for Saturday and Sunday. They have rice, beans, pepper, a sausage and fried mandioca, prompting Vera to declare the day a "Negro's holiday." When she has a day to clean the house, she feels better about life in general; so much depends on getting food.



June and July, 1958

June and July, 1958 Summary and Analysis

One day in June, Carolina hears that there is a free movie shown by the health department tells them not to drink river water and to build bathrooms. When finding food is a daily struggle, it's hard to think about building bathrooms. She says the weak succumb to suicide as a way out of their hungry misery. Carolina says that she has written plays and taken them to the producers of circuses. One says that it's "a shame" she's black. She says she is proud of her heritage and that if she were reincarnated, she'd want to be black.

Medicine is primitive. The health department comes to the favela and Carolina wonders if they might be handing out medicine for the many children who are afflicted. She makes her sons go to school even though they seldom have shoes, and she worries about Vera's health. Carolina says the people of the favela love handouts of any kind. One day, there are people passing out invitations to a party given by a man, who only has only bread to eat.

Carolina says that some of the low men of the favela don't actually live there. One man was picking up scraps on Carolina's turf. He wanted alcohol. Carolina finds tomatoes near the canning factory but fears picking them up because the manager is watching. Some would rather see a tomato lie on the ground and rot than to have someone who needs it picked it up.

One day a woman asks Carolina to loan her a book of poetry. She gives an address, saying Carolina can retrieve the book whenever she wants. When Carolina goes to the city to find the woman, she can't locate the address. She ends the passage by saying "the day that I run into that nigger Vitoria, she's going to be sorry." Carolina talks of the vile attitude of some. She says that a woman named Dona Rosa is rents out shacks, though shacks in the favela are not supposed to be for rent. One day, Carolina returns home to find that Dona Rosa has thrown dog shit at the children. She wonders why the poor can be so mean, even to each other.

On July 6, Carolina gives syrup to a neighbor child who has a cough and no mother. It seems she is predestined to pick things up, except for happiness. Brother Luiz gives lessons in the catechism. He preaches about humility but would have a different attitude if his children were eating ruined food. Brother Luiz brings nurses to the favela to tend the sores of the children and wonders how it is that he came to know of their physical sores. Carolina is able to put on a tough front and acted like she was crazy when a man told her the firewood she was gathering was his.. She says that all a person has to do is tell someone what the favela is and they're immediately afraid of that person. Carolina registers to vote though it costs sixty cruzeiros for a photograph before she can complete the registration. Before she leaves, she talks to all of her children and



discovers that the younger two have been out "begging." She says tells her son that he should be studying but she smiles.

Carolina goes out to look for scraps and arrives home to find a woman accusing Joao of trying to rape her two-year-old daughter. The case doesn't come to court until September. That night, she has nightmares. She says she takes all the children with her now to gather paper because she wants to keep an eye on Joao. Carolina says she's feeling ill and that it's physical as well as moral. She talks about fights in the favela and is surprised that some of the fighters are not locked up. Carolina has no money to buy soap and says the filth wants to make her vomit. When she does get soap, the neighbors are scandalized to see how much laundry she has.

Carolina goes to the Divine Master Center where she receives light jackets and pullovers for the children and recounts the warnings about "snail disease." Carolina says there are many cases of the disease in the favela. She doesn't get tested because she can't afford the cure. Senor Manuel gives her eighty cruzeiros. She didn't want to take it; she told him not to come around because she doesn't want a man.

On July 30, Carolina stops by the shoemakers to pick up Vera's shoes, who smiles, which Carolina feels vicariously. A neighbor boy wishes he were her son because he wouldn't be hungry. Carolina recalls the day of Vera Eunice's birth. She says she was at home alone with only the two boys when she gave birth. She has said that it's not good to have friends but said it seems that there are times when friendships would be positive. She often talks of borrowing food items from someone so it seems there are friendships available to her, but she apparently holds herself - and her business - apart at least to some degree.

After Vera's so ill, Carolina buys her shoes and then has to make soup with bones from the slaughterhouse. Children in their situation cannot afford to be squeamish about their food. It's interesting that she buys shoes for the girl when the boys are also without shoes. There's no indication that the boys might resent this or any real reasoning behind Carolina's decision to buy the shoes rather than food.

Carolina talks often of the effects of alcohol. She wonders why no one offers beans or rice, only alcohol. Carolina seems to be losing control of her children. One day, she says that her boys are outside and run at the sound of her voice. Carolina tells many stories of fights, arguments and the outcomes. A woman named Dona Chiquinha - who Carolina considers a friend - throws water on Jose Carolos. When Carolina asks why, she says only that she'll throw hot water "with soda to blind him" if he bothers her again. The next day, she overhears a neighbor trying to pick a fight with Jose Carolos. Carolina talks about the state's shelter for homeless children. She says she talked to someone about the possibility of interning her children.

She never says what becomes of the allegation of rape against Joao. She doesn't want to talk to him about sex, but he is already interested at age eleven. She might believe him guilty. Carolina writes about feeling ill and her writing has taken on a desperate tone. She seems constantly worried about money. Carolina talks of suicide. The



recurring theme of her writing at this point is her desire to write and her constant hunger combined with the worry over her children. At one point, she says that she sometimes can't believe that she allowed men to trick her into having children. She knows who Vera's father is and will later say that on a particular day she went to the welfare office to collect the money sent by Vera's father. Carolina doesn't speak of the fathers of the boys.



August through December, 1958

August through December, 1958 Summary and Analysis

On August 3, Carolina says that the family will eat beans because there is nothing else. On August 6, Carolina gives her son "congratulations" on his tenth birthday and it's all she has to give him. She walks with her children to town and writes the Vera "choked on her own saliva" as she looked at cheese in a shop window. The sole words of August 10 are, "Father's Day. What a ridiculous day!" A nine-year-old boy who smells of alcohol throws stones at Carolina's children. Carolina sends a note to the Mello Brothers Circus, asking for a job as a singer. She writes of other neighborhood gossip.

Carolina hears of a place where she might get papers and goes there with Vera. They ride the elevator to the fourth floor and the woman gives her bags of newspapers. She meets a senator on the way down who looks at her in disgust. She says that she made one hundred cruzeiros and that she'll never work that hard in her life again. A few days later, she and Vera go out and she gathers scraps that bring her one hundred, ninety-one cruzeiros. With the money, she buys some food then Joao asks to have an aching tooth pulled. It costs one hundred cruzeiros. She thinks the price is exorbitant but Joao is already in the dentist's chair and she pays it.

Over the next few days, Carolina describes several arguments, gathering paper and scraps to sell, and then taking the children with her as she goes to the school for a parent conference. She notes that it's amazing that old women are excited to have a bone from the slaughterhouse and that her children are always anxious to go with her when she gathers papers because they know she'll buy them food when she has money. She says that a mother is "always worried" that her children will be hungry. A few days later, she notes that someone entered her shack and stole her hatchet.

On September 2, Carolina goes to the store and buys an orange. When she returns home, Vera is out of the yard and "I gave her a beating." On September 3, she dreams that she is an angel and thanks God for sending her the only escape she has from her harsh reality - a dream. There is a gap from September 3 through September 8, but on that day, Carolina says that she is inexplicably happy. She says she is singing. The mood continues on September 18 and this time she explains that it's because she's had enough to eat over the past few days. The next day her sole entry is that the slaughterhouse has stopped putting their garbage on the streets because of the people eating the rotten meat.

Carolina gets into a debate about race on September 20 when a storeowner says that Carolina and a white customer are equal when it comes to spending money. Carolina disagrees, saying that whites can always spend more, but doesn't explain her reasoning. She says that being prejudiced against a race of people is "like trying to discriminate against the sun." She then says that God made all races at the same time,



meaning they're equal. She says that if God had made the Negro after the whites, the whites "should have done something about it then."

On September 25, Carolina is notified that Joao is to appear in court on the charges of attempted rape. She goes to vote and has to take Vera and is told children cannot come inside the voting room. The politician elected raised the transportation costs significantly; there are riots. Vera and Carolina have lunch at Dona Julita's house and Carolina says that the food leaves her dizzy. Dona Julita gives her soap, cheese, lard and rice. Senor Manual helps her regularly and she misses him when he isn't there, but curses him when he is. A fight breaks out between two young girls who are prostitutes and vying for the same men. A priest comes to the favela and tells them to have children and that the church will provide bread. She says that the priest who is willing to provide bread isn't considering that children also need shoes and clothes.

Carolina says she's sick of living. A few days later, she is vomiting in the morning from hunger. She sends Joao to sell some scraps and says that there isn't enough to make soup. A few days later, she wakes feeling better and is again making plans for the future. On Christmas Eve, Carolina hears a car in the favela and asks the driver what he's handing out and he says he only came to drop off someone. She explains that at Christmas, a car means someone is handing out gifts and he says he'll never again come to the favela at Christmas. She goes to the Spirit Center where people are handing out food and gifts, and she's invited to return as often as she wants.

On Christmas day, Joao is sick and Carolina knows that it's from eating rotten melons. She says that the merchants dump rotten food near the river purposely to tempt the hungry children to eat food that will make them sick. On the last day of the year, a gypsy widower comes to Carolina's shack at her invitation. She says that he hugs and kisses her and asks her to marry him. She says she couldn't live the traveling life of a gypsy but the man tells her that the life is "poetic" and that a gypsy's love is "as deep as the ocean and as hot as the sun." She says she decides that when she is old, she will be a gypsy.

Analysis:

On August 2, Carolina stops at the slaughterhouse and picks up some bones. She sees some women digging in the garbage looking for edible meat. They say it's for their dogs. Carolina notes that she would say the same thing. It seems a matter of pride that she would not be digging in the garbage for food for her family.

On August 13, a mulatto named Zefa fights with another woman. Carolina notes that she's pretty but doesn't know how to read and that she "had two children and forgot to feed them. So they died." Her tone on the subject is matter-of-fact and she immediately moves on to the next topic. She later uses that same tone to say that "a child died," and that his life would have been one of hunger had he lived. In another instance, she tells of a woman who has been in labor for three days and her husband refuses to spend any money on a hospital because he is saving to return to the north. The story abruptly



stops and when she again writes, three days later, she says that she would have gone on but was discouraged.

One day at a store, Carolina is waiting to buy ink when a man asks if she can read. She says she can and he writes that he was wondering if she is married, and that if she isn't he would like to sleep with her. She hands it back to him without saying anything. It seems that she is desperate for money but resist the temptation to take the easy way out for cash by prostituting herself. She will later say that prostitution is "the moral defeat of a woman."

The trouble with Jose Carolos seems to be getting worse. Though she doesn't say why, Carolina writes that he is hiding from her on September 2 because he fears getting a beating. She says that she has now built a pigpen and that she's going to make him sleep in it. Later, she says that she sent Joao to buy sugar and "the donkey bought rice."

On September 25, Carolina says that she feels as if she might die. She blames "reporter Audalio Dantas," saying that if he hadn't taken her notebooks she would have sent them to America. Dantas is the Brazilian reporter who discovers Carolina. He has taken her notebooks to edit them for publication but she seems to be indicating that it is taking too long. It seems that she has decided that she should have sent them to America for publication.

One day, Carolina arrives home to find that Joao hasn't built a fire, has left the door open and shoes thrown around on the floor. Carolina says that when he comes home she beats him with a stick and a belt. She then tears up his comic books. She says she hates the comics. It's interesting that she has no tolerance for his dreams and for the fact that he has a way to escape reality.

Carolina prepares one day for a bath and says that someone had told her that she smells like a codfish. She says that a person who works as hard as she is bound to sweat. It's interesting that she so often says that the comments from other people don't bother her, but this indicates that it sometimes does.



1959

1959 Summary and Analysis

Carolina says that her children always want dried fish but that she can't afford it. She says that she hopes she'll be able to provide that for them before she dies. Carolina's relationship with the gypsy Raimundo deepens. She says that she is like a shoe that has found its mate. The feeling isn't to last and a short time later she notes that he is carefully watching a fourteen-year-old girl, and discovers that he has sexual intentions toward this girl. Carolina realizes that she could never leave Vera with this man. When he leaves for a job at a steel mill, he says that he'll bring Carolina a gift when he returns and she notes that she'll have a jail cell awaiting him. While she's spending time with Raimundo, Manuel is coming around often. He grows angry at one time, saying he won't be back, but then returns and Carolina says that he spends the night on occasion, though she doesn't fully explain that situation. On January 15, Carolina says she has three hundred cruzeiros. She makes this notation just after saying that Manuel had walked to her house in the cold rain, but doesn't say whether the money has anything to do with his visit.

In mid-January, Carolina gets her manuscript returned from Readers Digest in America. She says that it's the "worst slap" a writer can get. Carlos apparently has an argument with Raimundo and doesn't return home until two in the morning. Carolina says she isn't going to let him in but he sits on the steps and cries, and she relents.

In late January, Carolina becomes very ill. She says the boys remain at her side, never leaving her alone for fear that death will come while they are away. Carolina says they are good boys but notes that they are afraid of being taken to the Children's Home. Manuel feeds the family during Carolina's illness and she seems to be better by mid-February when she is arguing with Orlando Lopes who tells Carolina that he's going to charge her for using an iron. She says that she doesn't use an iron and he argues, but she stands her ground and doesn't pay. He leaves, saying that he's rigged the outlet so that if she does plug in an iron, it will short out.

In April, Carolina is saddened by the suicide of a man named Senor Thomas. She says that if everyone who is hungry and tired of the struggle to live gave in to suicide, there would be no one left in Brazil. In May, Carolina has a neighbor butcher the pig she has raised. She catches the blood to make blood pudding, and then begins to render the meat. Everyone in the favela is asking for a portion or some of the lard but Carolina is adamant that she raised the pig to feed her children. She hurriedly gets the meat inside but spends the next days fighting the cats away from her shack and worrying that someone will break in and take what's left. She doesn't say where the puppy came from, but says she wakes the morning after killing the pig to find the puppy dead from overeating.



On May 6, Carolina meets with the reporter who takes photos of Carolina, then takes Carolina and Vera into town where he buys Vera a doll and tells people that her diary is going to be published in "O Cruzeiro." For several days that month, Vera and Jose Carlos are ill and Carolina can't work. On June 5, she notes that Vera cries because she doesn't want to eat oatmeal, but Carolina slaps her and she eats. It's on June 8 that Carolina returns home to find that the reporter working with her has been there. He left a note and Carolina reads that the first section of her diary will be published in the newspaper on June 10 and that her diary would be published as a book. Manuel is skeptical, saying that the reporter will make money from the deal and that Carolina will lose her work.

In mid-June, Vera's father comes to visit, having received a letter from Carolina that Vera was ill. She tells him that he wants to be a pianist and Carolina says that "his other children" are musicians. She says that she has pledged to protect his identity, not to reveal his name in her diary for publication. He leaves her with one hundred cruzeiros. When she goes a few days later to pick up the money he paid monthly, she talks to several people about her article. She buys a copy for herself and encounters the wrath of the women of the favela who say she has demoralized their lives. She then meets Orlando who says she is four months behind on her electric payments. She asks why and he counters that she wrote about him - saying that he didn't work.

Carolina is taken to the offices of another newspaper, Diario da Noite, where she is feed steak and potatoes and is photographed. On June 16, she writes that there is nothing to eat and that she wants to "invite the children for a mutual suicide" but resists. The situation doesn't change through the month of June but Carolina abruptly changes the tone of her writing to note the beautiful sky overhead.

In July, Carolina and Vera pick up the money from Vera's father and she says that she loves her father. She's previous said she hates him when he failed to pay. Carolina notes that he's a professional and is rich but is willing to let his child live in hunger. She wonders what would happen if she went to his office and demanded money. She talks of the cases of molestation that go on in the favela, and that she overhears these events so often that she is sickened.

On July 30, Carolina dreams that she and her sons have a wonderful house and sacks of beans, prompting her to tell her son that they can "give misery a kick." The following day, she spends a few cruzeiros on meat and a dog comes by, snatching the meat, though Vera was supposed to be watching it. Carolina calls her worthless and warns that because of her action, today she will eat shit. She later sees a cat, says she's never eaten a cat but that if it were in a pan with onions and tomatoes, she would eat it.

On August 7, Carolina gets payment from the newspaper - five hundred cruzeiros. She doesn't say how she spends the money but by August 13, she has no money to buy bread and Vera's father has missed another payment. On December 31, Carolina buys what the family needs for the following day - a holiday. She wakes at midnight to the factory whistle ushering in the new year, and prays for Brazil and for her family in the coming year. On January 1, 1960, she rises early and goes to get water.



Carolina's writings are complicated when it comes to the affairs of the heart and to her relationships with men. She says that she doesn't need a man and that she despises those who offer themselves as prostitutes. She tells of many offers of sex or marriage that she turns down. She tells Raimundo that she would not have anything go on in front of her children, though he argues that it would be alright once the children are asleep. Then she says that she rises one morning at six o'clock because when Manuel spends the night he doesn't like her to get up early. On another occasion, Vera's father returns to the shack and he gives the children some money for candy, sending them away so that he and Carolina are alone. She doesn't elaborate on the event but says that she is "sometimes disgusted to be a woman." Still later, Manuel offers her two hundred cruzeiros at a time when she claims to be desperate but she tells him then that she doesn't have time for a man, prompting him to take his money and leave.

The reader should remember that Carolina is writing knowing that others will read it. It's not a diary in the sense that it's to be kept private, therefore a place for her most secret thoughts and actions. It's human nature to put oneself in the best light possible and it seems that Carolina is doing that, at least to some degree. It's up to the reader to determine the depths of her truthfulness.

In May, Carolina admits that Manuel has been gone for several days and that she realizes that she missed him. When a neighbor comes around, she makes fun of the situation, calling Carolina "Mrs." Carolina says it doesn't matter because their friendship is already strong.

In mid June, Carolina talks of being hungry and that there is no food in the house. However, a few days later she recounts the story of a man who tried to sell her shriveled potatoes. When she asks if he wants food, he says yes and she feeds him macaroni, pig's lung and cracklings, indicating that she has at least some of the pork left. She doesn't explain.

Carolina talks about a woman, Laura, who went to the hospital to have a baby, but the child died. She says that there was another woman who had a son who lived. Both mothers were crying, Laura because she had lost a son and the second because she was saddled with a child she couldn't care for and with no husband to help. Laura agrees to take the child, cares for him and he lives until July of 1959 when he is killed in an accident involving electric lines. Carolina points out that there is "but one way to be born but many ways to die."



Characters

Carolina Maria de Jesus

Carolina Maria de Jesus is a black woman living in a favela - a ghetto of sorts - in Sao Paulo, Brazil. She has three children and has never been married. She's a complicated person with dreams of escaping the life she lives, both for herself and for her children.

Carolina's days are spent looking for scrap to sell and for cast off food and clothing for her family. While she sometimes takes handouts, she seems to deplore begging. She says that she reserves her kind words for children and "the employed." She says that prostitution is morally wrong, but often has men spend the night with her. She has offers of sex, cohabitation and marriage, but rejects them all, saying she doesn't need a man for her life to be complete.

Through all the hard work and struggle to survive, Carolina writes. She writes plays and poetry and calls herself a poetess. She also keeps a diary. She has almost no schooling but says what she had was enough to shape her character. Her children read, a novelty in the ghetto where many people can't read and don't care to learn. Carolina's writing is no secret, nor is the fact that she plans to have her work published. She apparently submits manuscripts on a fairly regular basis and speaks of a rejection from Reader's Digest. She is eventually discovered by a reporter who edits her diaries for publication as a serial in a newspaper and then helps prepare them for publication as a book. Her success helps her escape from the favela, though the "Child of the Dark" ends before that happens.

Senor Manuel

Manuel is the man who overpays Carolina for her sack of scraps so that she has enough money to pay her light bill. Later, Carolina asks if he's made a mistake in the opposite direction, underpaying her. She says that he wants to marry her. She speaks well of him, saying that he works hard, never misses a day and is "distinguished." Over the course of the book, Carolina interacts with Manuel often. She says that he sometimes says he's never coming back, but that he does. In June of 1958, Carolina gets a proposal from Senor Manuel. She says that he would not want a wife who gets up in the middle of the night to write and that she prefers to live alone with her ideals. This is because one day, she says that she arose at six o'clock to write and that Manuel won't allow her to rise early when he spends the night. When she is ill in 1959, he provides money for her family to eat until she can return to her work.

Raimundo

Raimundo is a gypsy who is a widower and interested in Carolina. He asks her to marry him or live with him but she declines. He makes the gypsy life sound appealing and



Carolina says that she will become a gypsy when she is old. While the relationship grows, Carolina considers that she might be just the influence needed to encourage Raimundo to settle down in one place, giving up the nomadic life. Then she discovers that he is seducing young girls of fourteen. In at least one instance, he claims that she is his sister but Carolina does not believe him. He eventually moves off to work for a period of time at a steel mill. As he is leaving, he promises that he'll have a gift for her when he returns. She says that her gift to him will be a jail cell.

Vera Eunice

Vera Eunice is two-years-old in 1955 when Carolina begins writing her diary. There is little said about the child early on other than the fact that she wants shoes. Carolina is unable to afford new ones so finds some in the garbage, cleans them up and patches them for the child. She is Carolina's youngest child and the only girl. Sometimes, Carolina carries Vera Eunice along as she gathers scraps for sale. Later, she hates being without shoes, is sometimes in trouble for crying about the food they have to eat, and knows how to flatter people. Her father is sometimes in the picture and is supposed to pay a monthly stipend though he seldom does.

Jose Carolos

Jose is Carolina's son. It's Jose Carlos who finds crackers in the trash in 1958 and brings them home. Carolina talks of the fear of eating food from the garbage but says that the crackers were delicious. Carlos apparently begins to run a bit wild, and Carolina once locks him out of the house. At eleven, he sits on the doorstep and cries until she relents. It's also noted that once in 1958, he is missing and Carolina goes looking for him. She says that she finds him in juvenile court and that she's relieved to find him there - relieved as only a mother could be who knows that there could have been worse outcomes.

Joao

Joao is Carolina's son. Joao is-eight years-old in 1955. He is the son Carolina often sends to purchase items. She notes that once she sends him for several things, including two aspirin. He loses the aspirin and she returns with him along the route in an effort to find the missing aspirin, but doesn't. Joao is later accused of trying to rape a two-year-old girl but the outcome of the case is not revealed. It's Joao who once tells Carolina that she'd promised they would eat no more food from the trash but that she'd broken that promise. Carolina tells him that it's because the government officials broke their promises.



Leila

Leila is the woman who is believed to be a witch. She takes control of another woman's house and convinces the woman's son, Nilton, that she will turn him into an elephant if he tries to leave. He remains until he's hungry and Carolina notes that "hunger acts as a judge." In 1958, Leila has two "tender aged children" and sometimes gets so drunk that someone carries her home. Carolina worries that she'll roll around on her bed and kill one of the children.

Dona Chiquinha

Dona is a seamstress who lives near Carolina and her family. Carolina notes that she considers Chiquinha a friend and would do what she could to help her until the day the woman threw cold water on Jose Carlos. She says that the next time he bothers her, she'll throw hot water "with soda to blind him."

Nilton

Nilton is the young boy who stays with Leila as he believes she is a witch and that she will turn him into an elephant if he tries to leave. When he grows hungry, he does leave anyway. Carolina notes that hunger makes a good judge.

Arnoldo

Arnoldo is the man who sells Carolina an array of goods, including food and aspirin. He runs a store, and Carolina frequents his business.



Objects/Places

Sao Paulo

Sao Paulo is the city where Carolina lives with her three children.

Favela

Favela is a ghetto of sorts, made up of shacks built of whatever scraps can be had. Carolina built the shack she and her children live in herself.

Spiritist Center

Located at 103 Vergueiro Street, the Spiritist Center hands out food and staples to the families of the favela.

Street Markets

Street markets are outdoor open-air, portable stalls where vendors sell goods. Carolina says that many of the people in the favela pick up the fruits and vegetables that fall from the street markets as they are being moved from place to place.

Zinho

Zinho is where Carolina goes to sell scrap and encounters a young black boy who finds meat in the garbage. He roasts some for himself and eats it. Carolina finds him dead the following day.

Negro, Yes Sir!

One of the three classifications of Negro in the favela, a Negro, Yes Sir! is of society. The other classifications are Negro tu, which is a "regular Negro," and Negro turututu, which is one who is "not worth anything."

The Divine Master Center

The Divine Master Centers is where Carolina goes to get free clothing for her children.



Ibirapuera Palace

Ibirapuera Palace is the Mayor's Office.

Sao Paulo Venice

Sao Paulo Venice is the nickname given to the favela because of the tendency toward flooding during the rainy seasons.

Bom Jardim Butcher Shop

Bom Jardim Butcher Shop is where Carolina is turned away. She asks for meat or lard, and is told there is none for sale, but the clerk sells lard to the next customer who arrives.

O Cruzeiro

O Cruzeiro is the newspaper that publishes Carolina's diary as a series.



Themes

Hunger

Constant hunger and its impact on everyday life is the recurring theme of this book. The diary details Carolina's life and one thing readers will notice is that exact prices are often recorded. She tells how much she earned from a particular scrap sale, and then gives the prices and the weights of everything she buys with that money. In Carolina's world, there is seldom enough money to buy more than a few basic necessities. When she is unable to go out because of rain or because one or more of the children are ill, she describes being nervous, of pacing the house and being anxious to go to work gathering scraps. The reason isn't that she wants to work or that she hates being inside, it's that she's constantly worried about food.

Carolina's own hunger isn't the only issue. She talks often of how heartbreaking it is for a mother to hear her child ask for more when the mother knows that there is no more. She writes once of traveling uptown and stopping in front of a window where there was cheese for sale. She says that Vera almost choked on her own saliva.

Carolina is generous to a fault. She writes of an encounter with an old man who was falling-down weak from hunger. She offered him some of her little money so that he could buy himself coffee. She talks of other situations in which she loans a few beans to someone or makes other overtures of generosity. However, when Carolina kills the pig that she's raised, she hoards the meat and lard jealously. She says that she is afraid that others will break into her shack and steal some of the meat. She refuses requests for lard or meat and says that she is afraid that the people of the favela will storm her little shack.

The Need to Be Loved

Carolina often says that she doesn't need a man, but she occasionally has a male visitor overnight, indicating that she's not being completely truthful. In fact, Carolina does meet up with a man - a gypsy - named Raimundo who has a significant impact on her life. She says that one of Raimundo's children was always trailing after her and that she was kind to his children. Then she says that her kindness is a way to attract his attention because if she's kind to the children, the father is pleased. After seeing Raimundo for a while, Carolina admits that she feels as if she is a shoe and that she's only just found her other half. She doesn't go deeply into detail of her feelings after she ends the relationship but she does seem to indicate that she's saddened.

It's during the time that she's seeing Raimundo that Manuel begins to make his feelings known. He's apparently no stranger to Carolina's bed but she has resisted having him be anything more. Not long after Carolina ends her relationship with Raimundo, she notes that she has seen little of Manuel for several days and that she misses him. When



he comes back around, she seems more receptive again but there's no resolution between the two of them before the book ended.

It's interesting to note that there's little overt affection between the parents and children, even between Carolina and her own three children. It seems possible that it's because so much time and energy is spent on trying to feed the family that Carolina has little time left to show that affection.

The Ability to Dream

Carolina's dream is obvious to everyone who knows her. She wants to be a published writer and to make money from her writing. She is constantly carrying a notebook with her and has even promised anonymity to the father of her youngest child - a promise she keeps even when he has missed child support payments. Her dream doesn't win her many friends among the people of the favela. She is taunted and teased about her passion for writing and is hated once the dream comes to fruition with the newspaper publication.

It's difficult to tell whether Carolina wants to be a published writer simply for the sake of being published or if she is looking toward the money. In Carolina's world, the constant need for food makes it impossible to distinguish that need from anything else. Carolina says that she wants to be able to feed her children. She says that when she brings home food to the children, they cheer. She says it makes her happy but after a while, she's simply lost her ability to smile.

Caroline isn't the only one with a dream. Her children also dream of having a better life, though their dreams may be slightly on the childish side. For example, Vera wants to have an automobile and she says that she will allow only beautiful people to ride around in her car. One of the boys wants a brick house. Carolina wants a home and other nice things, but also wants some of the simpler pleasures. She once writes that dried fish is expensive but her children often beg for it. She says that she hope, before she dies, to be able to afford dried fish for her children.

Style

Perspective

The book is written entirely in first person from the perspective of Carolina Maria de Jesus. The book is a diary so is told through daily entries. While Carolina notes that she is truthful about life in the favela, it seems possible that she writes about herself in the best possible light.

In some cases, the reader is left to fill in gaps or gets only pieces of stories. For example, Carolina tells of her son being accused of trying to rape a two-year-old girl. Months pass with no other mention of the incident except Carolina saying that she keeps a close eye on him so that he can't get into more trouble. Then she writes that he is summoned to court but the outcome is not reported. The boy is apparently released but there's no indication of a trial or any sort of punishment.

It's likely that some readers will be disappointed by some aspects of the book. Though it's touted as a true look at life in the favela, the details that are omitted are sometimes distracting to the point that it's difficult to catch up to Carolina's next narrative.

Tone

There are sections of the book that are written in a very forward style but other sections are rather difficult to grasp. It's left to the reader to determine the meaning of some of those statements. For example, Carolina writes in 1958, "Lentils are 100 cruzeiros a kilo, a fact that pleases me immensely. I danced, sang and jumped and thanked God, the judge of kings! Where am I to get 100 cruzeiros?" It could be that this is merely sarcasm, but again, it's left to the reader to determine the meanings of these sections. There are also segments of the reading that seems to be contradictory but likely exemplify the evolving opinions of this writer as she ages and matures. Carolina tells of reserving her kindness for "children and the employed" in 1955. Three years later, she says that she reserves her "soft words for the workers, for the beggars, who are the slaves of misery." She seems to have gained some respect for the beggars. She then offers at least some explanation by saying that on a Saturday when it's raining, she's unable to go out to find scrap to sell and is reduced to begging herself.

Structure

The book is divided into years. The first section is brief and covers the writings for 1955. There follows a section covering May through December of 1958 and then January through December of 1959. The sections are further divided into daily entries, as a diary would be. The entries are dated and the book flows completely in chronological order. This is an effective literary device to some degree. However, this method of telling the story is limited to only those things that Carolina wants to tell. There is also a lack of



explanation in many cases. For example, Carolina talks of various people but there is only an occasional identification of those people. For example, she may mention selling scrap to a specific person or hearing a couple fighting followed immediately by descriptions of the actions of others. Especially early in the manuscript, it is easy for the reader to get bogged down trying to keep names straight when some are mentioned only once before Carolina moves on to the next thing that catches her interest.

Some readers may be disappointed in the repetition. Carolina talks often of the gossiping that goes on at the public spigot where she goes to get water in the mornings. After several days of these conversations, they begin to blur so that they seem to have little meaning.

Some versions of the book include photos of Carolina, her children and life in the favela. For those who enjoy the visual aspect of learning, the photos can be a positive tool. It should be noted that some books also include a foreward and afterward that describe how the book came to be published and tells of Carolina's life after she leaves the favela. This book does not reach that point and ends with Carolina still struggling to make it through each day. She does move out of the favela with her children, has limited success with future publications and is soon broke again because of her generosity and willingness to lend money to anyone asking for a handout.



Quotes

"July 5, 1955 The birthday of my daughter, Vera Eunice. I wanted to buy a pair of shoes for her, but the price of feed keeps us from realizing our desires. Actually we are slaves to the cost of living. I found a pair of shoes in the garbage, washed them, and patched them for her to wear." 1955, Page 3

"I got one kilo of ham and one kilo of sugar and spent six cruzeiros on cheese. And the money was gone." 1955, Page 3

"I can take the ups and downs of life. If I can't store up courage to live, I've resolved to store up patience." 1955, Page 10

"I don't know how to sleep without reading. I like to leaf through a book. The book is man's best invention so far." 1955, Page 17

"I've made a promise to myself. I want to treat people that I know with more consideration. I want to have a pleasant smile for children and the employed." 1958, Page 21

"I classify Sao Paulo this way: The Governor's Palace is the living room. The Mayor's office is the dining room and the city is the garden. And the favela is the backyard where they throw the garbage." 1958, Page 24

"Oh Sao Paulo! A queen that vainly shows her skyscrapers that are her crown of gold. All dressed up in velvet and silk but with cheap stockings underneath - the favela." 1958, Page 34

"There are people who go to a dance every Saturday. I don't dance. I think it's ridiculous to keep turning this way, then that. I have to twist and turn too much just to get money to eat." 1958, Page 48

"I must create an atmosphere of fantasy to forget that I am in a favela." 1958, Page 52

"Actually, the world is the way the whites want it. I'm not white, so I don't have anything to do with this disorganized world." 1958, Page 63



"Why is it that the poor don't have pity on the other poor?" 1958, Page 73

"He talks to me and I tell him of the unfortunate things that exist in the world. My son now knows what the world is; between us the language of children has ended." 1958, Page 84

"July 15 Today is the birthday of my daughter Vera Eunice. I can't give her a party for this would be just like trying to grab ahold of the sun with my hands." 1958, Page 85

"I started thinking about the unfortunate children who, even being tiny, complain about their condition in the world. They say that Princess Margaret of England doesn't like being a Princess. Those are the breaks in life." 1958, Page 95

"I have to admire these souls in the favela. They drink because they're happy. And drink because they're sad. Drink here is a comforter, in the sad as well as glad moments." 1958, Page 128A

In my opinion the merchants of Sao Paulo are playing with the people just like Caesar when he tortured the Christians. But the Caesars of today are worse than the Caesars of the past. The others were punished for their faith. And we, for our hunger." 1958, Page 134

"When I find something in the garbage that I can eat, I eat it. I don't have the courage to kill myself. And I refuse to die of hunger!" 1959, Page 159

Topics for Discussion

Where does Carolina live? Describe life in the favela.

Carolina constantly struggles to buy food for her children. How does she feed the family? What kinds of food do they eat? What are her children's attitudes about food?

Why does Carolina write? Why is this remarkable?

What is the reaction when Carolina's diary is published? Why?

Who are Carolina's children? What is known about Vera's father?

What is Carolina's attitude about men? Describe some of her encounters and how they conflict with each other.

How does Carolina feed her children? What are some of the statements she makes about hunger?