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Erotica

Carrie's Story: An Erotic S/M Novel
Molly Weatherfield
Cleis Press
978-1-57344-908-3
(February 14, 2013)

Lots of girls dream of having a pony sometime in their tweens, but none, as far as this reviewer knew, grow up to desire to act and be treated like ponies in their most private lives. Now, that's where an erotic S/M novel like the entertaining *Carrie's Story* can enlighten and inform! On the other hand, who didn't dream of interrupting the unceasing rigor of their graduate studies with a powerful, shall-we-say, interlude? Combine these two narrative currents, toss in a literate, pretty, and likable young woman who works as a bike messenger while pursuing her PhD at Berkeley, and a plot begins to emerge. Honest.

Emerging is a significant theme throughout Molly Weatherfield's saucy and acclaimed 1995 book, reprinted (again) last Valentine's Day by Cleis Press. Yes, there's a lot of tumescence, as one expects, and its resultant f***ing four ways from Tuesday. A great, relatable scene has Carrie returning home by bus from a particularly debauched session and wondering if any of her fellow riders can sense her contentment. But the larger issue is the surprising—even to her—emergence of Carrie's wish to be utterly dominated by a complete (albeit inestimably wealthy and handsome) stranger. In the custody of Weatherfield (who pays her utility bills as Pam Rosenthal), that content is grist for the mind mill (no, I haven't forgotten those ponies, either). Most provocatively, perhaps, is the question of how feminist readers—of whom self-reflective Carrie would certainly count herself— understand, accept, and/or judge such a protagonist. And that's the thing about this genre, when it's successful. Ultimately, we don't understand, accept, or judge Carrie. But we do give her the benefit of the doubt and enjoy her company. And when she bathes the occasional welt, we find that our boundaries are being tested along with hers.

Okay, about those ponies. If we are to believe the story line, California's Central Valley can boast more than a superior agricultural industry among its innovations. As it turns out, bits, reins, whips, and small carriages are not solely the props of the equine realm. Ditto for owners,

trainers, and auctions. Get the picture? The key to the delivery of this information is that we are introduced to everything through Carrie's equally disbelieving—yet receptive—eyes and body. The book's sensual descriptions, naughty and nice, are exceptional.

Carrie's Story is surprising on many levels, not the least of which is its ability to convince readers of "good" books of its merit. The sequel, *Safe Word*, purportedly finds Carrie in an even trickier bind.

Julie Eakin