



Safe Word: An Erotic S/M Novel

Molly Weatherfield

Cleis Press (Jan 1, 2013)

Hardcover \$19.95 (264pp)

978-1-57344-935-9

Literary prose and in-depth character exploration elevate this S&M novel above others in the market.

“You’re afraid but you also can’t wait—to be seen, to be touched, to be commanded, forced, used,” asserts Carrie, the submissive, literate protagonist of Molly Weatherfield’s titillating new offering, *Safe Word: An Erotic S/M Novel*, sequel to *Carrie’s Story*. Also a master of erotica written under her real name, Pam Rosenthal, the author’s decisive logophilic character represents a welcome change from the dithering Anna in the popular *Fifty Shades* erotica series.

Carrie definitely seeks domination and eagerly serves her masters. Thralldom and words fascinate her, especially when combined: “Those slaps—they’re ... communication: simple syntax in the pidgin of dominance and submission.” The author smoothly initiates readers into this pidgin by telling the novel from three viewpoints: that of Carrie, the slave; Jonathan, the wealthy urbane master to whom she has just returned; and that of an omniscient third-person narrator. The novel moves seamlessly among points of view, providing a thought-provoking examination of pleasure and pain as well as the nature of storytelling. Jonathan demands tales from her year abroad after he auctioned her off to become a human racing pony. While put through her paces, Carrie delves into a new kind of S&M, retaining her sense of self and matter-of-fact irony. Carrie’s inner strength and Jonathan’s conflicting feelings for her give the story nuance.

In this S&M world run by “protocols and decorum” readers can see through Carrie’s eyes the difference between hurting a slave for one’s entertainment and being unnecessarily cruel to a submissive, as well as why Jonathan enjoys domination. The protocols and decorum dictate Jonathan must not develop feelings for his thrall. These nuances will arouse lovers of S&M erotica, while Carrie and Jonathan’s alternating viewpoints help the uninitiated understand why the pair savors pleasure and pain.

The book benefits from sumptuous description in addition to superior character development. The frequent sexual scenes come across as elegant and direct, expertly portraying emotions as well as actions—no extraneous prose or euphemisms here. Carrie recounts two women having sex with her: “They took turns ... speeding up and slowing down, squeezing and slapping my breasts ... They kissed and stroked each other too ... [W]hen I felt the tears soaking the blindfold, I knew I was crying because I was lonely. I wanted one of them to kiss or stroke me.” Weatherfield works her magic on words having nothing to do with sex, bringing readers deeper into her narrative: “sudden bursts of whimsy and humor” and “islands of memory.” These turns of phrase elevate *Safe Word* above much erotica because the story is simultaneously arousing and literary.

Devotees of *Fifty Shades* should submit to wry Carrie and intellectual Jonathan and *Safe Word*. Those brave enough to leave the comfort of mass market S&M will find a succulent novel. And those who already enjoy S&M erotica will feel blissfully sated upon finishing this book. Reading *Carrie’s Story* first is preferable but not necessary, as Weatherfield provides readers with sufficient background.

JILL ALLEN (Fall 2013)

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