

Chapter 1

My new rocking horse was very beautiful. It was stained a lovely chestnut brown, and its mane seemed perhaps to be made from real horsehair. Looking at it, gratitude to George for indulging me so very thoroughly swelled inside my chest.

My new rocking horse looked very sturdy, and it had adjustable stirrups that a grown wife like me could use to find the best possible position in which to ride.

Finding the best possible position was going to be essential, because of the part of the new rocking horse that made the little girl inside me blush crimson as I looked at it: the leather phallus that stuck up from its saddle like a naughty sentinel, slightly bent as if to beckon me towards it.

"Daddy?" I said.

"Yes, sweetheart?" my husband asked.

"Do I have to ride my rocking horse right now?"

"Yes, sweetheart, you do. Daddy wants to see you on it."

"But..."

"But what, Caroline?" His voice was becoming a little stern, and I knew even as I continued that no good would come of it, at least as far as the immediate state of my backside was concerned. An essential element of our dynamic, though, was this never-ending fount of shame into which I loved to think myself beyond anything—to be a little girl, so embarrassed about these new things my daddy wanted me to do and wanted to do with me and to me.

"Couldn't I ride it by myself the first time?"

"What do you mean, sweetie?" He furrowed his brow, as if puzzled by the suggestion that a girl would want to enjoy a toy without her daddy present.

"Couldn't I have it to myself for a little while?"

George sighed—a little theatrically, I thought, and said, with the tone of authority that goes straight to my loins, "Caroline, bend over and touch your toes, please."

"Daddy, no!"

"I don't know how I failed to get this message across to you, but this rocking horse is something you and I will be playing with together. You may call it yours if you like, and sometimes if you're very good I may allow you to go for a ride by yourself, but in reality it is MY rocking horse, that I built so that I could play with my little girl."

His voice was so very stern now that I obeyed and bent all the way over just as he had asked, knowing as always that my nakedness exposed me almost entirely before him in that position.

"Spread your feet a bit, sweetheart," George said, more gently now in view of my obedience.

I pushed my feet apart, feeling the way the parting of my thighs let even more of the naughtiest parts of me come into contact with the air of the big room in the basement that we called the playroom. I closed my eyes for a moment, but that made it impossible to keep my balance, so I opened them again and tried to look only at the rug, as I heard George opening the cabinet that had his daddy-toys, as I always thought of them. I swallowed hard.

"Little Caroline," he said, "Daddy doesn't want to hurt you, but he needs to help you understand how important it is that you please him." His hand came to rest lightly atop my head, the long, straight, light-brown hair now all around my face. He adjusted my hair tenderly so that it all fell on the right side, while he stood on my left. "Do you understand, little girl?"

"Yes, Daddy," I said. I felt his body tense slightly, and then I felt the little puff of air that always comes before the paddle hits my bottom. "Ow!"

"Count, please, sweetheart," George said.

"One, Daddy." I made the little sobbing sound in my throat that I always make.

"Two! Daddy, how many?"

"As many as I think you need, sweetie."

"Three! Oh, please..."

"Please, what?"

"Please may I ride your rocking horse now, Daddy? Ow! Four!" I straightened up, unable to help myself.

"Get that head down, Caroline!"

I made it even worse: I put my hands on my bottom to cover it; I didn't know what had gotten into me. Something about the rocking horse was turning me into the sort of naughty girl I never, ever was with my Daddy.

(Well, really, I was pretty much that naughty all the time, but part of the magic was that we could both imagine that I was almost always a good girl whom my Daddy only spanked once in a while—really only because he liked to spank his little girl, and not because I was naughty.)

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I'm getting way ahead of myself, though. I should probably tell you about how we got to this point, with a new, shamefully phallus-bearing rocking horse in the playroom. Indeed, I need to tell you how there happened to be a playroom at all.

George and I had been married five years when the change that led to the rocking horse began. We had met in college, acting together in some of the more serious plays put on by student groups: Ibsen, Chekhov, Shakespeare. Neither of us was good enough to contemplate trying to go on in theatre, but both of us loved acting and had been the stars of our high-school productions. We met during our freshman years in a production of *The Winter's Tale* but didn't really notice each other, except the way every college actor sizes up every other college actor as competition for the good parts; neither of us impressed the other.

Sophomore spring, when he played Lorenzo to my Jessica in *The Merchant of Venice*, the sparks began to fly. Our first date, from the outside, must have been absolutely disgusting: a continuous recitation of all the great parts we'd had and all the funny theatre stories we had accumulated to that point. We were sleeping together before opening night. We both came from the suburbs of the Northeast: George from New Jersey and I from Long Island, and both of us had the traditional script very much ingrained in our imaginations: marriage, two careers, children "someday," cared for by a combination of both parents plus daycare and nannies and au pairs until they became self-sufficient and left the nest to continue the cycle.

George proposed right after we graduated. This story is about sex, of course, so even if I'm not graphic in discussing our erotic lives up until the point where our story really begins, I probably should at least be frank. I suppose on a purely objective scale, the sex was good. I mean, one hears and even reads about a lot of people can't even get it to work right. But, as you'll see over the course of the beginning of the story, there were aspects of it that didn't match what was in my imagination. That wasn't really a problem in the beginning when the newness of the thing

and the contentment of having a stable relationship, when so much else in our lives was changing so quickly, could carry us through any doubts about the erotic dimension.

So, to establish a baseline: missionary position or me on top, occasional oral—and a couple of times, in the very early days, sixty-nine. That was it. I didn't come during sex, certainly, but George was happy enough to lick me to an orgasm afterwards, though there was always something about it that felt wrong to me, as if his dutiful lapping were the reversal of the natural—or at any rate the imaginary, as far as my own imagination is concerned—order of the world. (So now I'm getting into it, but I'm going to make you wait a little while as I fill in some of the more boring details.)

I'm a professor of English and George is a corporate lawyer. We both value our careers very highly. The electricity of our early drama days never really went away, but you get distracted. Research needs to get done and briefs need to be written. Suddenly you find you haven't had sex in months, and you haven't even noticed, and you aren't even spending very much time together. You used to go to the movies every weekend and to the opera every month and go to plays three times a season, but now you sit and watch TV, waiting for him to come home, and when he does, your resentment is so great that you don't even talk to him. The worst part is you can't even figure out why you resent him.

In one sense, this story ends up being about how we figured out at least part of where the resentment was coming from.

See, here's the thing I haven't told you yet: the reason we weren't having sex was that I was avoiding it. I was avoiding it because I was having more and more trouble reconciling myself to the distance between what I fantasized about when I was by myself (and sometimes even when George was atop me going about his vanilla business) and what the actuality was of being in bed with George.

I wanted to be vanilla the way I thought George was vanilla. I wanted to yearn for tender, affectionate lovemaking the way it happened (or seemed to be about to happen) in Shakespeare and Jane Austen and Anthony Trollope. I suppose that means that I wanted to *want* to be vanilla. But I couldn't help myself; when I read *Lolita* I was, horrifyingly, constantly aroused, constantly having to pull my hand away from whither it inevitably drifted down as I imagined the terrible things Humbert Humbert enforced on his nymphet. When I read *Clarissa*, I imagined what the monstrous Mr. Solmes wanted to do to the heroine, had she been forced to marry him the way her family wanted. Their wedding night would have been a terrible ordeal, and terrible was the longing that I felt for that kind of wedding night. Watching *La Bohème*, or even simply listening to it, I imagined—not that Rodolfo and Mimi shared passionate kisses, but that he spanked her for her naughtiness and called her "good girl" when she took his sex deep into her bohemian throat.

George seemed to me still to be perfectly happy. He caught me more or less by surprise with a passionate kiss on a Saturday night, to have his missionary way with me and then go down on me until, guiltily fantasizing about something very, very dirty, I finally came with a pallid sort of orgasm. The problem was I felt wretched about it afterward and then generally looked forward in low-grade misery to the next time it would happen. I didn't feel wretched because I had lost any affection for George—on the contrary, as the years went by I was more and more grateful for him and more and more convinced of his great merits as a man and as a spouse. I felt wretched because I wanted more, or different, when it came to the erotic part of my life, and even as time brought new conviction of my husband's good nature, it also brought confirmation that there was something wrong with me when it came to sex.

The things that I thought about were dirty, plain and simple, according to the understanding of the clean and the dirty with which I had been raised. Spankings, and anal sex, and little girls made to do shameful things. Truthfully, it's really a misnomer to say I had been "raised" with those values because that word implies that my parents had intentionally inculcated those values in me. In fact, I had simply been left to my own devices to pick up from the culture around me—and above all, from the stories I loved—what my values about sexuality were. Those were stories of princesses, and later, of gentlemen's daughters. Princesses and gentlemen's daughters, however, are never fucked up their proper backsides by an authoritative, paternal, older man the way I, to my distress, wanted to be.