

Girl, Groomed: A Therapist's Memoir of Trauma

Carol Odell

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Girl, Groomed is a riveting, often disturbing memoir about redemption from sexual abuse through therapy.

Carol Odell's intimate memoir is about how her childhood trauma impeded her relationships with others.

Odell began riding horses as a child and was swept up into life in the stables. She spent endless hours grooming horses, maintaining the stables, and learning to ride. She began to train for competitions, too, becoming an active and successful participant on the horse-jumping circuit.

However, Odell's successes were thwarted by the sexual abuse she endured from the owner of the stables, Clarentine. What began as innuendo when she was still an adolescent led to physical confrontations later. Odell felt helpless. She worried that she'd be forced to leave the stables and the sport she adored if she complained.

Even years later, the incidents haunted her, impacting her marriage. In desperation, Odell sought the assistance of a therapist, Gary. In his clinic's safe atmosphere, she began to address what she'd endured, to reclaim her sense of self, and to correct her hobbled relationships with those whom she loved.

The memoir flips back and forth in time, tracking both the original trauma in its multiple manifestations and its later impact on Odell's life. Short chapters are dedicated to describing the way she was targeted by Clarentine; these memories are interspersed with recalled conversations with Gary. The former sections are graphic, with upsetting details of Clarentine's abuses and threats—toward not just Odell but other girls involved with the stables too. The latter illustrate concerted efforts to understand past grooming; they break down Clarentine's abuses of power in a practical manner that is more analytical than raw.

Odell's testimony is detailed in nature. She walks through what happened from the start to the finish in a straightforward manner, providing information regarding the painful events that occurred early in her life and the healing achieved when she sought outside help. Those who have endured similar circumstances will find the book empathetic. The nature of the grooming of little girls by men in power—most especially its manifestation in the world of competitive sports—is described with clarity throughout. And toward the book's end, resources are named for ensuring balance between girl athletes and their coaches, like SafeSport, formed in 2017. The book also acknowledges the #MeToo movement as playing a role in correcting situations such those that Odell experienced.

Girl, Groomed is a riveting, often disturbing memoir about redemption through therapy and starting anew after experiencing serious trauma.

CAROLINE GOLDBERG IGRA (January 24, 2025)

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