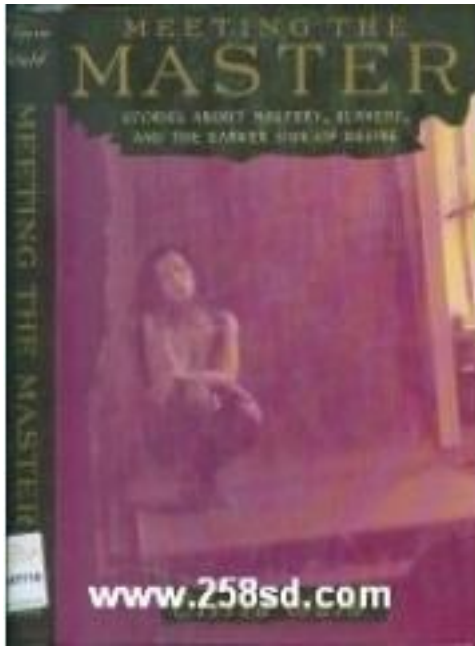


Meeting the Master



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From Publishers Weekly While the eight psychologically complex stories in Wald's fiction debut deal mainly with relationships involving dominance and submission or sadomasochism, their human interest extends in many directions. In "The Resolution," Charlotte, a successful actress who, at 15, ran away from an orphanage and worked in a circus food concession, clings to her friend and former lover, Jorge, a gay Puerto Rican circus performer who tests HIV-positive. Her love for him is indelibly linked in her mind with Christa, her Native American orphanage pal and lover, who died of rubella. In "The Illustrating Man," Harlem tattoo artist Darwin Godfrey murders his evil landlord, who had stolen an armless girl's prosthetic limbs, refusing to return them until he received unpaid rent. The narrator, a journalist, recounts the stories of clients whose lives have been transformed by

Godfrey's tattoos, and herself receives a tattoo from the now imprisoned artist. "Therapy" oscillates between a dominatrix's bedroom sessions and her sessions with her psychiatrist, who traces the roots of her predilection to past rejections. In "The Houseboy," a rich Pennsylvania high-school wrestling star, misrepresenting himself, lands a job in New York as the housekeeper of a flinty CIA agent and Vietnam veteran, whom he servilely worships. Both are closet homosexuals, and the story pivots on mutual deceptions and revelations. Wald, who has worked in the circus, as a stripper and as a counselor to prostitutes, clearly knows her varied characters, whom she portrays in a sympathetic yet unsparing light. Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Kirkus Reviews Strange and unsettling stories of sadomasochism (originally self-published) from a newcomer who obviously knows the territory. Most literary depictions of the S&M scene simply aim for titillation, but Wald's approach, while hardly demure, seems more ambitious. Her characters--usually young, ordinary suburbanites from Middle America--become Masters or Slaves the way other teenagers become rock climbers or Rangers fans, and the real measure of her success is her ability to make the bizarre and highly perverse subculture of the dungeons seem comprehensible and almost normal from an outsider's point of view. In ``The Houseboy," for example, a perfectly unremarkable high-school senior becomes so obsessed by an Army recruiter (and intelligence operative) that he travels to New York and invents an excuse to move in with him as a kind of au pair; in ``Turned Out," a recently sprung ex-con finds himself unable to cope with the freedom of a life without constraints. The dominatrix in ``Therapy," who finds herself beaten at her own game by her shrink, is one of the less convincing characters here, as is the Catholic schoolgirl of ``Resolution," who runs away with a circus to lose her sexual inhibition and discovers herself in the process. For the most part, however, these stories are inhabited by thoroughly credible characters whose peculiarities serve to inspire curiosity rather than boredom or disgust--such as the college girl of ``Missing the Boat," whose interest in S&M seems to proceed from an overwhelming sense of her own boredom unrelieved by any sense of her own identity. Remarkable and fascinating, if somewhat crudely drawn. Wald writes with a simplicity and frankness that are unusual but perfectly suited to her subject. -- Copyright ©1996, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.

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