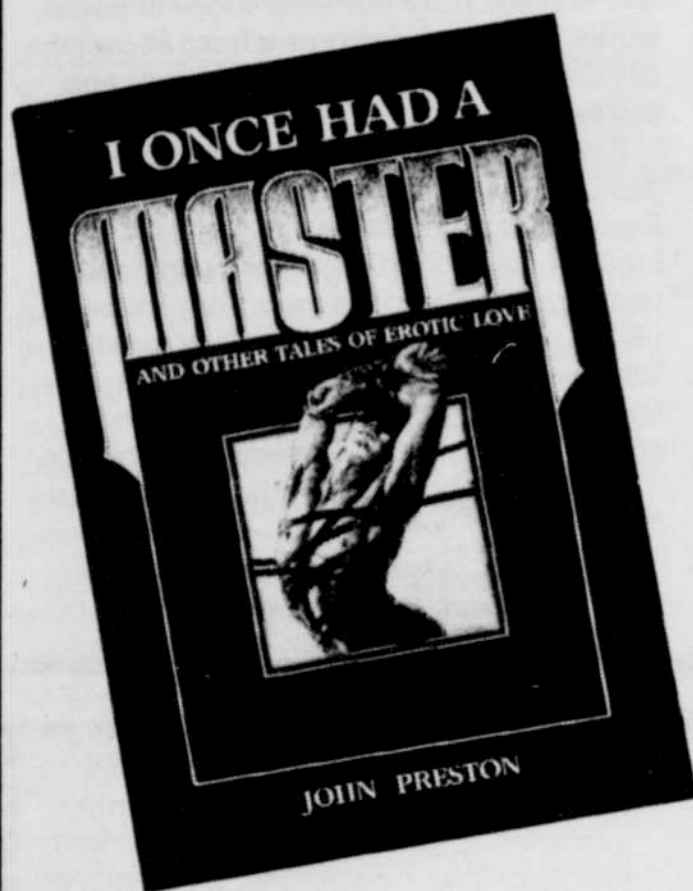


R E V I E W

Slave to Master



by Jim Hunger

John Preston's *I Once Had a Master*, just out from Alyson Publications, is a series of autobiographically based short stories, which, as the name suggests, contain a strong master-slave theme, though no extreme violence. In fact, the primary acts of physical violence are spankings and nipple biting. As the author himself readily defines his stories in his epilogue, they are basically pornographic, but they are also more than that.

For one thing, they are an interesting organization of vignettes which chronicle the sexual evolution of the narrator, noting the major milestones in his odyssey from eager slave to admired master. The stories are introduced by a short story with the same title as the book, and the first line of the story begins, "I once had a master..." which lends a sort of legendary or fairy tale quality to the collection. The main character has embarked upon a journey of learning and self-realization, as is also common in folk tales.

I Once Had a Master is an example of the sum being greater than the parts. Individually, the stories can only be defined as pornographic; the main character spots someone he wants to have sex with, and then they do it. In the initial stories, however, the narrator is a

slave, or submissive type: in the first he is an urban dweller who travels great distances to be with his taciturn country master; in the second he is a teenager whose coming-out relationship is with a dominating truck driver of Portuguese descent. In the later tales he is a belt-slapping, handcuff-toting master of some prowess. In the end he finds — dare we hope? — true love, or so we are led to believe.

One problem with *I Once Had a Master* is organizational. The epilogue, "On Writing Pornography," would better serve as a prologue, since some of the information provided here by Preston would be of interest to the reader at the outset. In this section the author discusses his plan and objectives in writing *Master*, as well as his philosophy concerning pornography in general. While Preston is a more than adequate spinner of yarns, this collection of stories is more impressive together than the individual components would be separately, and the discussion in the epilogue would make this more readily apparent.

One area in which Preston is particularly successful in *Master* is in the revelation of s/m persona, for better or worse. The reader may or may not agree with the rightness of an integral part of the sex act being domination by one person and submission by another, but if the motivations and drives of s/m devotees is of any interest, Preston does a good job of unraveling his characters. The narrator periodically discusses his philosophies, and he and his liaisons often have revealing conversations which explain their actions and

interests.

Comprising only 120 pages, *I Once Had a Master* is very undemanding of one's time, and it's written in easy-flowing, very readable prose. The title story even possesses a poetic, mystical quality about it, which may destine it to a position of eminence in s/m literature.

The collection of stories contains no cruel viciousness, nor does it espouse that kind of behavior. What it does do is chronicle the evolution of a person in this sub-culture of a sub-culture, and it does this rather well.

Yes, sir!

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