



The Unknown Masterpiece and Other Stories

Honore de Balzac

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One of the fathers of Realism was the famed 19th century French writer Honore de Balzac. His works are best known for their shrewd, yet honest, interpretation of real life problems within the social classes of French society. He believed that explaining a character would not inform the reader about the character's personality; however, describing their home, possessions, and other details would tell the reader about the character's true nature. With that in mind, he wanted to mold his characters to be as realistic as possible. He did not rely on outdated tropes and stereotypes. His characters were neither wholly good nor wholly evil. Instead, they were motivated by their own personal interests and believed that they were truly doing the right thing. The most famous set of stories that he wrote are known as "La Comedie Humaine," or "The Human Comedy." The tales follow various characters throughout their lives in France. The story "The Unknown Masterpiece" is the tale of a painter looking for a model for his upcoming masterpiece. When the man finally finds a suitable woman to serve as the subject, he completes the painting almost immediately. Yet it is impossible to distinguish whether the painter is a genius or just mad, as the painting is only of a foot amidst a swirl of colors. Readers will be both entertained and informed by this and other tales in this collection of Balzac's stories.

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