

The Magic Skin eBook

The Magic Skin by Honoré de Balzac

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Contents

The Magic Skin eBook.....	1
Contents.....	2
Table of Contents.....	3
Page 1.....	4
Page 2.....	5
Page 3.....	8

Table of Contents

Section	Table of Contents	Page
Start of eBook		1
EPILOGUE		1
ADDENDUM		2



Page 1

EPILOGUE

“And what became of Pauline?”

“Pauline? Ah! Do you sometimes spend a pleasant winter evening by your own fireside, and give yourself up luxuriously to memories of love or youth, while you watch the glow of the fire where the logs of oak are burning? Here, the fire outlines a sort of chessboard in red squares, there it has a sheen like velvet; little blue flames start up and flicker and play about in the glowing depths of the brasier. A mysterious artist comes and adapts that flame to his own ends; by a secret of his own he draws a visionary face in the midst of those flaming violet and crimson hues, a face with unimaginable delicate outlines, a fleeting apparition which no chance will ever bring back again. It is a woman’s face, her hair is blown back by the wind, her features speak of a rapture of delight; she breathes fire in the midst of the fire. She smiles, she dies, you will never see her any more. Farewell, flower of the flame! Farewell, essence incomplete and unforeseen, come too early or too late to make the spark of some glorious diamond.”

“But, Pauline?”

“You do not see, then? I will begin again. Make way! make way! She comes, she is here, the queen of illusions, a woman fleeting as a kiss, a woman bright as lightning, issuing in a blaze like lightning from the sky, a being uncreated, of spirit and love alone. She has wrapped her shadowy form in flame, or perhaps the flame betokens that she exists but for a moment. The pure outlines of her shape tell you that she comes from heaven. Is she not radiant as an angel? Can you not hear the beating of her wings in space? She sinks down beside you more lightly than a bird, and you are entranced by her awful eyes; there is a magical power in her light breathing that draws your lips to hers; she flies and you follow; you feel the earth beneath you no longer. If you could but once touch that form of snow with your eager, deluded hands, once twine the golden hair round your fingers, place one kiss on those shining eyes! There is an intoxicating vapor around, and the spell of a siren music is upon you. Every nerve in you is quivering; you are filled with pain and longing. O joy for which there is no name! You have touched the woman’s lips, and you are awakened at once by a horrible pang. Oh! ah! yes, you have struck your head against the corner of the bedpost, you have been clasping its brown mahogany sides, and chilly gilt ornaments; embracing a piece of metal, a brazen Cupid.”

“But how about Pauline, sir?”



Page 2

“What, again? Listen. One lovely morning at Tours a young man, who held the hand of a pretty woman in his, went on board the *Ville d’Angers*. Thus united they both looked and wondered long at a white form that rose elusively out of the mists above the broad waters of the Loire, like some child of the sun and the river, or some freak of air and cloud. This translucent form was a sylph or a naiad by turns; she hovered in the air like a word that haunts the memory, which seeks in vain to grasp it; she glided among the islands, she nodded her head here and there among the tall poplar trees; then she grew to a giant’s height; she shook out the countless folds of her drapery to the light; she shot light from the aureole that the sun had litten about her face; she hovered above the slopes of the hills and their little hamlets, and seemed to bar the passage of the boat before the Chateau d’Usse. You might have thought that *La dame des belles cousines* sought to protect her country from modern intrusion.”

“Well, well, I understand. So it went with Pauline. But how about Foedora?”

“Oh! Foedora, you are sure to meet with her! She was at the Bouffons last night, and she will go to the Opera this evening, and if you like to take it so, she is Society.”

ADDENDUM

The following personages appear in other stories of the Human Comedy.

Aquilina

Melmoth Reconciled

Bianchon, Horace

Father Goriot

The Atheist’s Mass

Cesar Birotteau

The Commission in Lunacy

Lost Illusions

A Distinguished Provincial at Paris

A Bachelor’s Establishment

The Secrets of a Princess

The Government Clerks

Pierrette

A Study of Woman

Scenes from a Courtesan’s Life

Honorine

The Seamy Side of History

A Second Home

A Prince of Bohemia

Letters of Two Brides



The Muse of the Department

The Imaginary Mistress

The Middle Classes

Cousin Betty

The Country Parson

In addition, M. Bianchon narrated the following:

Another Study of Woman

La Grande Breteche

Canalis, Constant-Cyr-Melchior, Baron de

Letters of Two Brides

A Distinguished Provincial at Paris

Modeste Mignon

Another Study of Woman

A Start in Life

Beatrix

The Unconscious Humorists

The Member for Arcis

Dudley, Lady Arabella

The Lily of the Valley

The Ball at Sceaux

The Secrets of a Princess

A Daughter of Eve

Letters of Two Brides

Euphrasia

Melmoth Reconciled

Joseph

A Study of Woman

Massol

Scenes from a Courtesan's Life

A Daughter of Eve

Cousin Betty

The Unconscious Humorists

Navarreins, Duc de

A Bachelor's Establishment

Colonel Chabert

The Muse of the Department

The Thirteen

Jealousies of a Country Town

The Peasantry

Scenes from a Courtesan's Life

The Country Parson



The Gondreville Mystery
The Secrets of a Princess
Cousin Betty



Page 3

Rastignac, Eugene de

Father Goriot

A Distinguished Provincial at Paris

Scenes from a Courtesan's Life

The Ball at Sceaux

The Interdiction

A Study of Woman

Another Study of Woman

The Secrets of a Princess

A Daughter of Eve

The Gondreville Mystery

The Firm of Nucingen

Cousin Betty

The Member for Arcis

The Unconscious Humorists

Taillefer, Jean-Frederic

The Firm of Nucingen

Father Goriot

The Red Inn