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Headlong

Michael Frayn



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Invited to dinner by the boorish local landowner, Martin Clay, an easily distracted philosopher, and his scrupulous art-historian wife find themselves enlisted to assess the value of three dusty paintings moldering in the freezing breakfast room. But blocking the soot from the chimney is nothing less -- Martin believes -- than one of the world's lost treasures, camouflaged by misattribution and the grime of centuries. There it is: Martin's new distraction. So begins a wild trail of lies and concealments, soaring hopes and sudden panics as Martin embarks on an obsessive quest to prove his hunch, win over his wife, and resolve one of the great mysteries of European art.Martin's increasingly desperate scheme turns out to involve betting all that he owns -- and much that he doesn't. He falls from his domestic haven into a kind of comic hell as he is drawn into an ever more tangled web of deceit -- and an ever more hair-raising intimacy with the landowner's reckless wife.Writing with biting wit and a perfect eye for the lessons of art and the shifting shapes of self-deception, Michael Frayn has given us entertainment of the highest order.

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