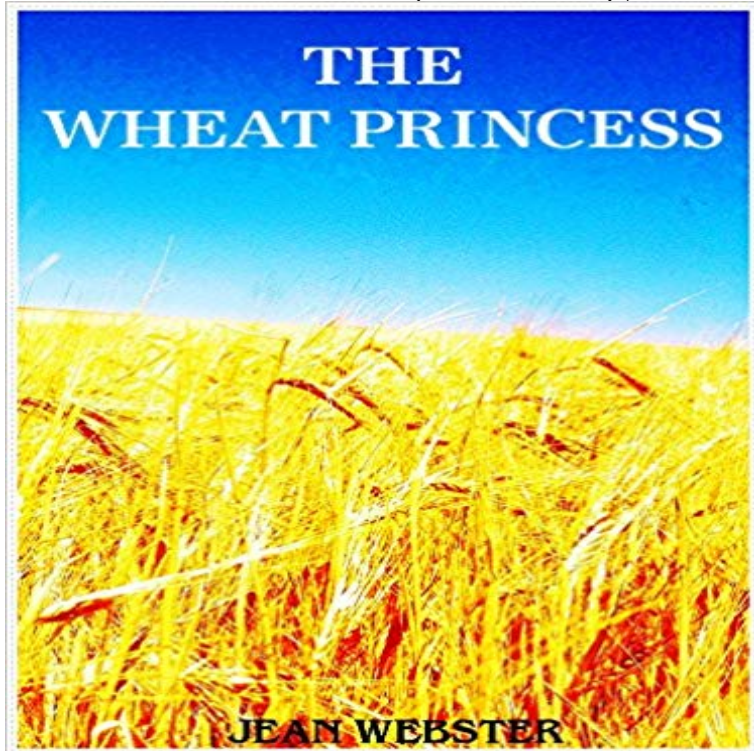


The Wheat Princess (Interesting Ebooks)



Example in this ebook If you leave the city by the Porta Maggiore and take the Via Pr?nestina, which leads east into the Sabine hills, at some thirty-six kilometers distance from Rome you will pass on your left a grey-walled village climbing up the hillside. This is Palestrina, the old Roman Pr?neste; and a short distance beyond also on the left you will find branching off from the straight Roman highway a steep mountain road, which, if you stick to it long enough, will take you, after many windings, to Castel Madama and Tivoli. Several kilometers along this road you will see shooting up from a bare crag above you a little stone hamlet crowned by the ruins of a mediaeval fortress. The town Castel Vivalanti was built in the days when a stronghold was more to be thought of than a water-supply, and its people, from habit or love, or perhaps sheer necessity, have lived on there ever since, going down in the morning to their work in the plain and toiling up at night to their homes on the hill. So steep is its site that the doorway of one house looks down on the roof of the house below, and its narrow stone streets are in reality flights of stairs. The only approach is from the front, by a road which winds and unwinds like a serpent and leads at last to the Porta della Luna, through which all of the traffic enters the town. The gate is ornamented with the crest of the Vivalantia phoenix rising out of the flame, supported by a heavy machicolated top, from which, in the old days, stones and burning oil might be dropped upon the heads of the unwelcome guests. The town is a picturesque little affair it would be hard to find a place more so in the Sabine villages, it is very, very poor. In the march of the centuries it has fallen out of step and been left far behind; to look at it, one would scarcely dream that on the clear days the walls and towers of modern Rome are in sight on the horizon. But in its time Castel Vivalanti was not insignificant. This

little hamlet has entertained history within its walls. It has bodily outfaced robber barons and papal troops. It has been besieged and conquered, and, alas, betrayed and that by its own prince. Twice has it been razed to the ground and twice rebuilt. In one way or another, though, it has weathered the centuries, and it stands to-day grey and forlorn, clustering about the walls of its donjon and keep. Castel Vivalanti, as in the middle ages, still gives the title to a Roman prince. The house of Vivalanti was powerful in its day, and the princes may often be met with not always to their credit in the history of the Papal States. They were oftener at war than at peace with the holy see, and there is the story of one pope who spent four weary months watching the view from a very small window in Vivalanti's donjon. But, in spite of their unholy quarrels, they were at times devout enough, and twice a cardinal's hat has been worn in the family. The house of late years has dwindled somewhat, both in fortune and importance; but, nevertheless, Vivalanti is a name which is still spoken with respect among the old nobles of Rome. To be continued in this ebook.....

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