



Antonio

Richard Pooler

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This is an erotic historical romance based on a journal written at the start of the 16th century by a young man called Antonio, who grew up in the village of Cortona in northern Italy. His mother died in childbirth, his brother moved away to find work in Perugia, and he was left living with his father Giorgio, from whom he learned the trade of carpentry. The novel takes the form of a picaresque adventure in search of work. This leads to his meeting several of the famous artists of the time, painting frescoes in different churches. As he progresses past adolescence, he discovers women to his delight. Antonio is clearly an honest, generous, affectionate and good looking young man. As he moves from one village to another, he meets a variety of young women whose wishes and desires he is unable to resist. Increasingly he becomes aware of the wider world and the fractious politics of the time. The Borgias are in power in the Vatican, and Cesare Borgia is rampaging through Tuscany, working his way towards Cortona. He sends his agent, Leonardo da Vinci, to survey the local fortifications, and Antonio almost meets him. There is also a studious side to his nature, and he finds a mentor at the local monastery who teaches him how to write, and keeps him informed about the events of the day, including the scandals surrounding the Borgias. Other events include meeting a ghost at an ancient monastery, and consulting a soothsayer who reveals his future. Running through this story is a golden thread, with one end being his abiding love for a particular woman, the great love of his young life, who seems beyond his reach. As he moves from one romantic attachment to another, it is his true love who really occupies his thoughts. As his future unfolds, we see him holding onto that thread, and somehow hoping that he would never have to let it go. How the story is played out against the short term vicissitudes of his life is finally revealed in the last chapter. This story is truly a Rite of Passage from youth to manhood.

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