

## III

VENUS OR VESTA

CAIUS OPIUS TO TULLIUS

ON my departure from Rome thou toldest me that I should doubtless meet some alluring Asiatic or bewitching Jewess who would know how to beautify my exile, and thou claimest to be the necessary depository of my confidences.

Well, my dear friend, if I write to thee now, it is less to assure thee of my friendship than to recount to thee the beginning of an adventure which may become a delicious idyl or a tragedy. Does Venus punish me for having despised her in the last letter which I wrote thee? Or does Vesta wish to reward me for having sung her praises? As yet I know nothing of all this, but am inclined to believe that it is not a priestess of Aphrodite but rather a vestal virgin whom I met two days ago.

I was coming on horseback from a trip into Tiberias, when I perceived in an avenue leading to an enchanting villa, a young woman or girl, accompanied by her attendant, climbing the hillock with hurried steps. I saw that she was fleeing with fright from a young man who ran after her and who was about to catch up with her. I flew to her aid and had only to draw my sword for the intruder to take his flight.

She thanked me with emotion, and I accompanied her to the door. She invited me to enter, but scarcely raised her eyes as she spoke. I declined the invita-

tion a  
but sh  
house  
My  
neithe  
Well,  
seem  
even s  
eyes i  
Thou  
clever  
her ho  
the m  
She is  
her fo  
veil a  
marine  
the sky  
lightni  
abunda  
Whc  
live al  
but I w  
I affirm  
and tha  
it told l  
Dece