

## Augustine & Floria

A letter to Augustine from his lady, Floria.

(The following is from a manuscript found in an antique bookstore by Josteen Gaarder and published as *Vita Brevis*.)

*"...One afternoon you turned to me in a sudden rage, it was after we had shared the gifts of Venus again. Then you hit me. Do you remember how you hit me? You, Aurel, you who were once a respected teacher of rhetoric, you beat me almost senseless because you had allowed yourself to be tempted by my tenderness. So it was I who had to bear the blame for your lust. I have already cited Horace, but I will gladly do so again: When foolish people want to avoid making a mistake, they usually do the opposite thing!*

*You hit me & screamed, Bishop, because now I posed a threat again to the salvation of your soul. Then you seized a stick & beat me again. I wondered if you might want to beat the life out of me, for that might serve the same purpose as if you had castrated yourself. I was not so afraid for my own skin, I was just so broken, so disappointed & so ashamed of my Aurel that I clearly & distinctly remember wishing that you would do away with me now once & for all, Suddenly I had become something you could not just turn your back on for the sake of your soul's salvation. I myself had become the bleeding sacrificial lamb that was necessary to open the gates of heaven.*

*Then you wept, I shall not forget that. You had stopped beating me, but I had several bleeding wounds. And you wept, & you comforted me, & you begged me for forgiveness. Everything was so different now Monica was no longer here, you explained. You folded your hands & begged, now me, now your God, for pardon. You found some cloth & bound up my wounds. I myself was merely cold & frightened, cold because I was bleeding, & frightened because I had seen right into a kind of wickedness I had no inkling of.*

*It was as if something completely new had begun, a new time. The old time, that came to an end when we two crossed the River Arno together. Then followed several years of confusion & doubt. Then the new time began when you suddenly hit me. I thought only one thought: 'You, Aurel! You!' You sent me back to Carthage. I heard no more from you before Adeotatis (son) died two years later..."*

- Excerpted from *Vita Brevis* by Jostein Gaarder

