

An excerpt from  
***The Song of Songs***  
 by Joseph Aragon



*(Teresa's chambers.)*

- JUAN: Your experiences are vivid, Madre. But are they real?
- TERESA: They're real enough.
- JUAN: You remember when you sent me to cure that girl in Medina of demonic possession?
- TERESA: Yes, and it turned out to be simple melancholy. I know what you're implying, Fray Juan, but I must disagree. I am not some screeching Alumbrada. There are visions from God and visions from the devil and I can tell between the two.
- JUAN: How?
- TERESA: I just can. From a lifetime of discernment and constant questioning. Testing every message, consulting the small, still voice that dwells within. A child knows her father's voice.
- JUAN: But the devil is a shrewd impostor.
- TERESA: I can see through his tricks. I know when the voices are false because they feel false.
- JUAN: I thought you sought my opinion, Madre.
- TERESA: And what is your opinion?
- JUAN: We can never truly know whether a vision is from God or the devil, if we can call them visions at all. If God wanted to communicate with you, He would flash the knowledge straight into your heart and not bother with the senses at all.
- TERESA: Yes, I know this. But divine revelation is not just something to be known. It is something to be experienced. It's a blow to your chest, it's an explosion behind your eyes, it's—
- Have you ever been in love, Fray Juan?
- JUAN: In love.
- TERESA: Yes.

JUAN: You mean, with a woman?

TERESA: Yes, I mean with a woman.

JUAN: What does earthly love have to do with divine revelation?

TERESA: Everything! Haven't you read the Song of Solomon?

JUAN: Of course I have.

TERESA: And?

JUAN: I see it as a proper and convenient analogy.

TERESA: An analogy? That's all? "While the king was on his couch, my nard gave forth its fragrance. My beloved is to me a bag of myrrh that lies between my breasts." I should give you my translation by De León.

JUAN: De León? But he was censured by the Inquisition.

TERESA: Who hasn't been censured by the Inquisition.

JUAN: You must dispose of it immediately.

TERESA: Yes, Padre Gracián told me the same thing. And as far as he knows, I have. But for you . . . (*produces the book and puts it on a table*) . . . I think a little heresy would do you some good.

JUAN: Madre Teresa, as a friend and former confessor, I urge you to dispose of that book.

TERESA: It's the Song of Solomon, Juan. There is no heresy in it. Just a lush, vivid translation created by a divinely inspired and unjustly censured mind.

JUAN: Sometimes, Teresa, I just cannot understand you.

TERESA: Maybe if you read the book you would understand me more.  
You didn't answer my question. Have you ever been in love?

JUAN: . . . No. At least, not a love that was ever requited.

TERESA: Unrequited love. It's still a good start.

JUAN: And you? I suppose you've been in love?

TERESA: Once or twice. And I tell you, Fray Juan, being in love is not an intellectual flash, it reverberates through the body. It envelops you. It's cruel and torturous and it clutches your heart in its fiery fist yet against all reason you

yearn for more. You delight in the pain. So it is with a lover, and so it is with God. God is the ultimate lover.

Does it shock you that I say that? It shouldn't. It's all in here, Juan. And it must be of great value to us or else what is it doing in the Bible in the first place? This book . . . this poem, this song . . . that love between the groom and his bride . . . their delight in each other's perfumes and aloes, his unbridled praise of her hair, face, breasts . . . and hers of his arms, his countenance . . . it speaks . . . of the divine force . . . His divine force . . . it surges . . . it crackles . . . it pulls . . .

Just read the book, Juan. It's in our vernacular, without the gauze of Latin or Greek shrouding it. And the words are very artfully chosen.

*(Pause. JUAN takes the book.)*

Good lad.

JUAN: But still, Madre, you must be careful. If not for the sake of your salvation, then at least for your physical safety. Your raptures may be mistaken for Alumbrada witchcraft.

TERESA: I cannot control them. When God seizes me, he takes me body and soul. Some of the sisters have even said that I float six inches off the ground.

JUAN: Well, for your own sake, perhaps you should limit your levitation to two or three inches.

TERESA: I'll do my best.

JUAN: I don't know whether to thank you for this book or not, but I will examine it.

TERESA: Do more than examine it, Fray Juan. Savour it.

*(JUAN leaves.)*

TERESA: We never understood each other. Not completely. As much as I admired and cared for Juan, I never could fully embrace the philosophies of men like him.

Then I realized . . . the Christian Church is ruled by men like him.



End of Excerpt