



On the Doorstep of the Castle: A Play of Teresa of Avila and Alma de Leon

Elizabeth Clark-Stern

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Our setting is 16th century Spain. The Inquisition has expelled the Jews or forced them to convert. Teresa of Avila is igniting the imagination of the country as the nun who receives messages directly from God. Alma de Leon, a young Jewish converso, appears on Teresa's doorstep, petitioning to become a novice in her care. Their complex relationship explores the feminine archetypes of the Amazon, and the Medial Woman, in a story that unveils the foundations of psyche's movement toward wholeness: Kabbalah, and Christian rapture, in an oppressive yet luminous time. This play is a work of creative imagination based on the interaction of a true historical character and a fictional one. Teresa of Avila is admired to this day not only by Catholics and Christians, but by Taoists and Buddhists, psychologists and poets. Carl Jung was fascinated by her master work, *The Interior Castle*, for its description of the journey of the soul toward intimacy with God. The fictional character, Alma de Leon, is inspired by twentieth century Jewish philosopher, Edith Stein, who chanced to read Teresa's autobiography, and experienced a profound spiritual awakening that led her to become a Carmelite nun. "What if these two were to meet?" the playwright asked herself, crafting the character of Alma as a Jewish woman true to her time and place in history. The teaching of the ancient Jewish mystical tradition, the Kabbalah, was strictly forbidden by the Inquisition, and yet Alma is haunted by it, even as she dons the habit of a nun and struggles to find her identity in the presence of her passionate, spiritually adventurous mentor.

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