

Song of Songs 3

Woman:

¹ Upon my bed at night
I sought him whom my soul loves;
I sought him, but found him not;
I called him, but he gave no answer.

² 'I will rise now and go about the city,
in the streets and in the squares;
I will seek him whom my soul loves.'
I sought him, but found him not.

³ The sentinels found me,
as they went about in the city.
'Have you seen him whom my soul loves?'

⁴ Scarcely had I passed them,
when I found him whom my soul loves.
I held him, and would not let him go
until I brought him into my mother's house,
and into the chamber of her that conceived me.

⁵ I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem,
by the gazelles or the wild does:
do not stir up or awaken love
until it is ready!

⁶ What is that coming up from the wilderness,
like a column of smoke,
perfumed with myrrh and frankincense,
with all the fragrant powders of the merchant?

⁷ Look, it is the litter of Solomon!
Around it are sixty mighty men
of the mighty men of Israel,

⁸ all equipped with swords
and expert in war,
each with his sword at his thigh
because of alarms by night.

⁹ King Solomon made himself a palanquin
from the wood of Lebanon.

¹⁰ He made its posts of silver,
its back of gold, its seat of purple;
its interior was inlaid with love.

Daughters of Jerusalem,
¹¹ come out.
Look, O daughters of Zion,
at King Solomon,
at the crown with which his mother crowned him
on the day of his wedding,
on the day of the gladness of his heart.

Meditation

Most scholars read this poem as a dream vision. It is constructed as a series of contrasting scenes: The woman's sleeplessness, her dangerous wandering through the city until she finds her lover and brings him to her mother's house, ending with a vision of King Solomon's wedding. The surreal juxtapositions express a love that is at once vulnerable and empowering, impulsive and selfless. The woman speaks to the Women of Jerusalem and repeats her admonition to them (2:7, 3:5): *do not stir up or awaken love / until it is ready!* The focus on women is unusual: the woman walks alone through the city, she brings her lover to her mother's house, and she envisions Solomon's mother giving him the diadem traditionally worn by a bridegroom. This focus transforms what would otherwise be a bride's powerlessness as property or as an object of man's desire into a strength that is made possible by the kinship of women. In this dream, it is women who give each other the support and the agency that makes love possible. Love is grounded in the bonds that have made us who we are, and it comes to fruition only by going beyond them.