

# The Story of Mariana



SÓROR MARIANA

Mariana Alcoforado was born in Beja, daughter of landed proprietor of Alentejo Francisco da Cunha Alcoforado, born at Cortiços, Macedo de Cavaleiros, and first wife Leonor Mendes. She had three brothers - Baltasar Vaz Alcoforado, Miguel da Cunha Alcoforado, and Francisco da Cunha Alcoforado - and two sisters - Ana Maria da Cunha Alcoforado, wife of Rui de Melo Lobo Freire, and Maria Peregrina Alcoforado. Beja was the chief garrison town of the province and the principal theatre of the twenty-eight years' war with Spain that followed the Portuguese Revolution of 1640. Mariana's widowed father, occupied with administrative and military commissions, placed her in the wealthy convent of Convento de Nossa Senhora da Conceição for security and education.

Thus Mariana began her time as a Franciscan nun and lived a routine life until her twenty-fifth year, when she met the young French nobleman Noël Bouton. This man, afterwards known as Marquis de Chamilly and Marshal of France, was one of the French officers who came to Portugal to serve under Captain Frederick Schomberg, 1st Duke of Schomberg, the re-organizer of the Portuguese army, campaigning against the Spanish army in the Alentejo.

During the years 1665-1667 Chamilly spent much of his time in and about Beja, and became acquainted with the Alcoforado family through Sórora Mariana's brother, who was a soldier. Custom permitted those in religious orders to receive and entertain visitors, and Chamilly found it easy to be in contact with the trustful nun. Before long their affair became known and caused a scandal. Chamilly deserted Mariana and returned to France. This resulted in Mariana writing the a series of letters detailing her feelings for Chamilly. These letters became the basis of the book "*Letters of a Portuguese Nun.*"

There are signs in the fifth letter that Sórora Mariana had begun to conquer her passion. After a life of rigid penance, accompanied by much suffering, she died, at the age of 83. Sórora Mariana Vaz, Mariana, published by Aliform Publishing in 2005.



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MARIANA



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