

Last Nights of the King©

by Katie Sawhill

3rd edition (70 min)

Original Production mounted in the Piedmont College Black Box, Demorest, GA. April, 2010.

Filming production by Byron Thompson, Affilimity Creations at the Piedmont College Ray Cleere Mainstage Theatre, December 2010.

Staging notes: Each woman is signified with a different shawl or scarf, applied during transitions. Abishag alone does not have a shawl. The set is simple. One stage area, beginning in scene two, should be devoted as David's bedchamber and includes a chair or small bench, a thick scroll (or scrolls), and candle with holder. Additional props are two baskets, in which to hold the scarves, a tambourine, and a staff. Music notes are from original score by Byron Thompson of Affilimity Creations.

SCENE 1

Abishag, age sixteen, enters the quarters of Abigail, wife of David, carrying the “laundry,” represented by a basket of shawls.

Abishag: So, royal laundry doesn't fold itself. Who knew?

She begins to playing with the shawls, reenacting her “deportment” in melodramatic fashion. She begins by throwing a shawl over her shoulder and pretending to ride a camel. She pauses and mimes blowing an instrument in a fanfare, then dismounts and announces,

As the men: “Good sir, we come in the name of King David, searching for the most beautiful maiden in all Israel to keep the aging king warm at night. We have heard of your daughter's beauty and now see the tales are true! We must convey her to the palace immediately!”

She wraps a shawl around her belly to reenact her portly father.

As her father: “She is soon to marry. If she is to go with you, we must come to some arrangement.”

As the men: “Everything on these camels is now yours, sir.”

As her father: “God bless the king!”

As herself: “Father?”

As her father: “On your way, Abishag, the king is not getting any warmer! Don't worry! It is an honor to serve the king!”

An honor. Uh! I hate my life. Is this what being honored looks like? *She examines the bags under her eyes in the mirror and spies Abigail, now standing in the room. Caught and embarrassed:* Your clothes, madam – my apologies – Abigail. They are clean, maybe a bit wrinkled. How long were you standing— ? It was...just a bit of fun, really, only— You look so beautiful... positively radiant! Do you use anything for your eyes? Please tell me your secret; I've hardly slept these two weeks and now – look at these bags under my eyes! I can't nap during the day for the incessant scratch of his quill- scribbling on scrolls for hours on end, and at night – even if I snored like my father, I couldn't compete with the king. The first watch: mumbling. Second watch: snoring. Third watch: relieving himself, then tossing and turning. And

the fourth watch starts the cycle all over again. When I do fall asleep, he'll brush me with his icy fingers, and I nearly jump out of the bed! I should pity him; after all he's nearly dead. *Catches herself.* I apologize. I don't know how much longer I can endure this! I could have disobeyed my father's call and lost myself roaming the market. Then the king's envoys never would have seen me, never would have had the chance to judge my face as pleasing or my spirit as 'docile and suited for caretaking.' What could they know of my spirit through a single introduction? I would be married now, tending my own house, trying to time my pregnancies with my friends'. But now, I am forever consigned to the king's service, and, after he dies, I will be alone, save the company of the concubines and wives, who are all old enough to be my mothers and grandmothers. No offense. And I will die a virgin. There, I said it. My only consolation is that I'll die of sleep deprivation before I reach old age. Here lies Abishag, the sixteen year-old, husbandless, childless laundry maid with premature wrinkles and bags under her eyes! Forgive me, madam; I don't know why I have released all of this on you. I suppose you make me feel safe. What am I to do? *Transition into Abigail.*

Abigail: Wait. Sit, my daughter. You may ask me anything, but first I will ask you. Do you really think it was the king's men who chose you? Take issue not with the king, but with the LORD. He knows your spirit; he gave it to you. Do you think he would suffocate his own gift in royal confines? My husband may indeed be a fading king who snores as well as he sings, but his spirit captivates me now just as it did when I first met him. A fiery spirit, perhaps of the same kindling I see catching in you. My advice is this: fulfill your role as caretaker. You have been taught to read, yes? When he cannot sleep, read to him the Annals of his reign. In them you will see many women have attempted to understand his heart. Imagine them, learn from them about the king you serve before you judge him so quickly. For some reason, my dear Abishag, the Lord has given you the last nights of the king. Do not waste them.