

Abishag (2007)

Houston Hodges, for Writer's Corner on WLRH, Huntsville, AL USA

There's a charming, obscure little passage in the first book of Kings in the Hebrew scriptures about a time when King David was old, maybe as old as I am, so old that the cold really seeped into his bones. I understand that profoundly. It says,

"So they sought for a beautiful maiden throughout all the territory of Israel, and found Abishag the Shunammite, and brought her to the king. The maiden was very beautiful, and she became the king's nurse and ministered to him; but the king knew her not."

That "knew her not" phrase is a euphemistic way of saying they snuggled, but didn't go any farther than that.

I found myself trying to imagine my way into the mind of that girl, thrust suddenly into the unimaginable task of warming the king. Here's what I came up with — even with the differences between me and her of gender, of age, and — oh, yes — of three thousand years.

They call me Abishag... and other things.
The kitchen girl just smiles and sings
A wicked ditty she's made up
Of country girls and kings.

She knows I'm young and thinks that David's old.
She'll never know that when I hold
Him close all night and talk and talk
He keeps me from the cold.

And all day long the servant-vultures pry,
And David's rivals gloat and try
To say my master's not a man --
But I will love him 'til I die.