Queen Abigail

As the tribes of Israel strive to create a unified kingdom, Abigail, a stunning young woman- graceful and clever as a caracal lynx- is ensconced with her parents in a daughter village of Beth-Shemesh. Her village has begun to flourish on its terraced mountain hillside. The village families have painstaking encouraged their herds to multiply and olive groves to produce.

Abigail experiences the elation of her brother’s birth- a sign of divine blessing on the community; her father’s flocks will grow, her mother will be cared for in her old age. But her sense of childhood haven is imperilled eight days later, when her brother dies after his circumcision.

Her grieving parents, locked in conflict over opposing religious beliefs about the death, don’t recover. Her mother abandons her. Abigail concludes life is not worth living without a son.

She implores the young man she loves, Hakiah, to ask for a marriage bond. To her disappointment, her angry father refuses to allow her to wed Hakiah because he is from the Levite priestly family that performed her brother’s circumcision. To avoid repeating a similar tragedy, the devastated Hakiah pursues perfect purity- he vows to remain celibate.

Abigail’s father wanders listlessly and is killed by Philistines. Without family who is able to care for her, Abigail faces what she has scorned at the holy shrine- the curse of a begging widow’s straw mat, filthy and spat on.

She feels forced to accept a previously arranged marriage to an arrogant wealthy drunk but does not get pregnant. She’s ashamed when her husband Nabal antagonizes a powerful warrior, David, who threatens to kill Nabal’s entire village entourage. Hakiah- about to become the village priest- warns Abigail. She goes behind her husband’s back to save the village she loves. Humiliated, Nabal dies of a heart attack.

To avoid the despondency of widowhood, Abigail tantalizes the warrior David into wooing her. They marry, but his focus on securing political marriage alliances means she must immediately vie with cowives to conceive her son, Ileab. When David becomes king, Abigail connives to become an invaluable asset to the functioning of his kingdom. She manoeuvres Hakiah into a position as scribe in the palace priesthood, he feeds her valuable information. As she overcomes obstacles with her wits and builds alliances among the cowives, especially Bathsheba, her faith in her own power grows until it transcends any need to trust others.

Abigail and Ileab’s hard-fought standing in the palace is diminished by her son’s preference for lion hunting over palatial politics. Ileab believes Abigail is unreasonably suspicious when she warns him of an assassination banquet planned by her rivals. Bathsheba heeds Abigail’s warnings and saves her son, Solomon. In the chaotic aftermath of the banquet, no trace can be found of Ileab.

Tragic deaths befall the conspirators and other heirs. When King David is on his deathbed, the missing Ileab is next in line for the throne. Abigail is frantic to keep open the possibility. Hakiah exhorts her to give up her dangerous ambition. When she refuses to give up her search, David’s prophet Nathan banishes Abigail to her childhood village. She stubbornly evades Nathan. Disguised among the servants, she discovers Nathan and Bathsheba have conspired to put Bathsheba’s son Solomon on the throne. She is left furious and dismayed, she had considered Bathsheba an ally.

Determined to stay in the palace until she finds what happened to Ileab, Abigail convinces King Solomon’s new Egyptian wife that the palace is treacherous. The young vulnerable Egyptian princess appoints Abigail as her vizier.

 Hakiah brings Abigail evidence that Ileab had taken her advice. He avoided the banquet by going on a hunt, only to be killed by a lion. Hakiah offers to take distraught Abigail to their childhood village, he will give up everything for her. She knows she is past childbearing age and they will be impoverished. Hakiah might be executed for leaving the palace with dangerous knowledge. She refuses his offer.

Heartbroken, Abigail ‘adopts’ the son of the Egyptian princess as her substitute progeny of palace power. He secures Abigail a comfortable haven for her old age at goddess Astarte’s temple. Abigail is horrified to learn they sacrifice children. Though her own relationship with Israel’s deity has ebbed and flowed, she has had enough of killing first born sons. She refuses to take up his offer and must flee for her life from the Egyptian Prince’s angry reprisal.

 She escapes to Solomon’s opulent new Temple, where Hakiah is head scribe. She confides to him that the Egyptian prince is planning a coup that will require the kingdom to worship Astarte. Hakiah hides her. The Egyptian prince is tragically assassinated by his grandmother Bathsheba. Abigail is sentenced to death for her power mongering to put him on the throne. She is yanked from hiding and taken before Bathsheba. She sadly fears Hakiah betrayed her.

She boldly confronts Bathsheba, who claims her own actions were in accordance with divine will and Abigail’s were selfish and rebellious. To try to get her to conform to Nathan’s exile, Bathsheba- via Hakiah- sent Abigail the evidence her son had been killed.

Astarte’s temple warriors interrupt them, assassinate Bathsheba and attempt to kill Abigail in retaliation for the killing of the Egyptian Prince. Hakiah rescues her.

Hakiah pleads that he only stayed close to Bathsheba to record the kingdom’s true history. Abigail and Hakiah reconcile. Convinced Abigail and Hakiah are in Astarte’s court, Solomon’s soldiers pursue them. Hakiah is killed so she can escape.

Wounded and chased, she flees to the hills of her childhood. She loses the soldiers by hiding in an oak tree. She experiences a dark night of the soul- she’s at ease about her brother’s death and saving her village from David’s bloodlust, but repentant about where those events led her. She destroyed both her ‘sons.’ She decides to beg a sin sacrifice from the villagers she saved, so she can die in peace on a widow’s mat at her childhood shrine.

At her childhood home in the village, Ileab greets her. He faked his death to avoid assassination and went back to her village to hunt lions. The villagers she rescued long ago have embraced him. He couldn’t send word because it was too dangerous for all of them.

Abigail dies at peace, surrounded by grandchildren as the villagers shower her with petals.