



A delightfull readable yet profound survey of the way stories inform our faith and values, and are essential to our Christian witness. Ralph Milton at his best.

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**Abigail**  
**...a feisty lady with a sense of humour**  
**a soliloquy**  
**based on 1 Samuel 25:2-43**  
**by Ralph Milton**

*There's a bit of hard language in this story. Please give it a read before you share it with others.*

"And how would you like a swift kick in the family jewels?" That's what I'd tell them when they pounded on the door in the middle of the night looking for cheap wine and cheap sex.

My besotted father ran a wine shop in the slums of Carmel. The stuff we sold was cheap rot-gut, that eventually kills most people if they drink enough. And our customers all drank enough. They'd buy a skin of wine in the afternoon, spend the evening getting themselves thoroughly bombed, then come staggering back at all hours of the night looking for more.

Papa was in no condition to help them by that point. He'd sampled his own merchandise steadily all day, and by nightfall, he was zonked out, snoring away in the back of the shop.

My four older brothers were even less help. They spent most of their time and all of dad's money chasing around town with their buddies, and when they came home they'd devote themselves to making my life miserable. I ran the wine shop most of the time, and learned to think on my feet.

The only thing that made life bearable was Atarah, my younger sister. She was born when I was only ten, and I became her mama, because my mother died a few days after. Papa's been drunk every day since.

So by the time I was fifteen, I knew how to handle babies. I knew how to handle drunks. I even knew what to say to the bozos who'd pound on our door at midnight looking for more cheap wine to kill themselves with. They'd ask for wine and then they'd proposition me.

Usually I'd just insult their masculinity. "Go to hell, I'd say. You're too drunk to get it up anyway." That would usually send them off muttering. But some would persist, and then I'd threaten to kick them in the knackers and on more than one occasion I did exactly that. So by the time I hit twenty, I was an old maid with a reputation. Every man in town was scared of Abigail the nutcracker.

Hey, was I surprised when dad announced one morning that I was engaged! "Last night," he said. "I got Ichabod the herdsman drunk. He signed the marriage contract."

"You what?" I demanded. "Thanks for nothing. I whacked old Ichabod on the beak with an empty goat skin once. He wouldn't marry me if I was the last woman in Carmel. Besides, he's an ass and he smells of garlic."

"Of course he's an ass. You were expecting maybe Jonathan, the king's son? The rabbi was there to witness the marriage contract. So it's a done deal. He and the rabbi drank your dowry. Two flasks of wine."

I don't cry often, but I bawled that day. Thank God for Atarah, who listened to me rant and yell and cry and threaten. She was just a girl of ten but she knew how to be my mother and my friend. She had a sense of faith and a sense of humour. We prayed and laughed together often, and sometimes I couldn't tell which was which. All I know is, it kept me from falling apart.

"Every girl dreams of a man who is strong, witty, good looking, intelligent, sensitive and rich. Ichabod may be a fool, a nabal, but he's rich. One out of six ain't bad for an old maid with two flasks of wine for a dowry."

"A herd of sheep is rich?"

"A nabal with a herd of sheep is better than a genius with a herd of cockroaches."

"Married to a nabal. I go from being the daughter of a drunk to the wife of a nabal. How come such good things keep happening to me? How come I'm so doubly blessed?"

"I'm coming with you," said Atarah. "If I stay here with father, I'll be raped and pregnant by one of those drunks before you know it. I don't even mind being a second wife to the nabal if that's how it works out."

"Two brides for two flasks of wine? Such a deal."

Now it was Atarah's turn to cry. "Life is just so hard for women," she moaned. "We don't get to choose anything for ourselves."

"No sis, we don't. We do what we have to do, right? But you and me are going to plow into life snoot first and take our lumps. That's the only choice we have – to laugh at life and to pray to God. Then sometimes – not very often but sometimes – we can get to choose the lumps. Maybe we don't have to take absolutely everything this rotten life throws at us. We can't choose much, but we can choose something. Especially if we can manage a private laugh, you and me, now and then. We'll make it. God will help us, Atarah. We are going to make it."

"We'll call him Nabal. You and I. When there's just the two of us, that's what we'll call him."

So Nabal he was. The word means fool. At least it does when you're in polite company. I've heard more colorful definitions in the wine shop.

You should have seen Atarah laugh when I told her about our wedding night. Nabal had all the finesse of a billygoat in full rut. And then he wanted me to tell him the next morning how wonderful he was. I said, "Well, love. You *were* enthusiastic!"

As for David, my second husband. Well, he didn't write the Song of Songs either, let me tell you. But at least life with him was never boring. Terrifying often, but never boring.

Funny, you know. It was saving Nabal's backside that got me married to David. At that time, the great King David was nothing but a petty warlord running a protection racket in the hills around Carmel.

David was in trouble with King Saul because the old king was nuttier than a fruitcake but not so nutty that he didn't realize David was going to take the throne away from his son Jonathan.

So David was on the run and had to make a living somehow. He collected a bunch of ruffians who were also in trouble with the law, and they'd go to the herdsmen around and say, "How about giving me some food and wine and stuff as payment for 'protecting' you." And if they didn't come across, funny things would start to happen to the herd and to the shepherders.

David and his gang decided the folks around Carmel needed a lot of "protecting." People just paid up. What could they do?

Everyone except our brilliant Nabal. Nabal decides to be courageous. Nabal, with fifteen sheepshearers working for him and one rusty sword in the tent decides to stand up to David – the same David who killed Goliath. When David sends his flunkies with a very "polite" request for some food and wine, Nabal tells them to stuff it in a place where the sun don't shine. And surprise! David and his boys strap on their swords and head out to teach Nabal some manners.

David would have wiped us out. All of us. Except I heard what Nabal had said from one of my servants, so I grabbed all the food and wine I could get my

hands on and headed out to intercept David. There he was – coming down the road – blood in his eye.

I did my "sweet young thing" act. I opened my cloak to show a nice bit of ripe young bosom. I minced up to him wiggling my backside and flattered him and fawned over him.

Hey, you think that's easy? For some women, maybe. I went to finishing school in dad's wine shop, remember? Learning how to whack a knee into a guy's groin when he's all over you is not the best training to be a sex kitten. But you do what you have to do. The game is survival.

I told David what an ass Nabal was. And that's the name I used. Nabal. "He can't help being stupid. Nabal's mamma must've dropped him on his head when he was a tadpole."

I knew that flattery and the food wouldn't be enough. David was no dummy – they said he was sharp as a whip. But listening to those guys in the wine shop, I had learned about men and the macho games they play in their heads.

Even the sharp guys, the bright ones, play those games. It's amazing. For some reason, when Jewish guys have their pride punctured, they want revenge, but they want one of their buddies to get that revenge for them. Makes them feel right good inside to have loyal comrades who go and do their dirty work for them. So I worked David over on that one.

And I called him "King of Israel." You always call a guy something he would like to be. Never what he really is, which in this case was a bush-fighter smelling of smoke and urine.

"I know how badly you would feel, O king-in-waiting, if you had to take revenge on Nabal for yourself. You'd feel guilty about that, wouldn't you? Why not consider my gift a payment for his insult? I know I'm just a woman and you are so strong and handsome and people say you are kind and gentle with poor women and young children."

He bought it. I felt like a bit of a floozy manipulating the man like that, but you do what you have to do. And hey, did Atarah and I ever have a good laugh over it. It felt good to know I could outwit a guy like the famous David.

Nabal didn't laugh. Not at that. He was giggling in a corner, absolutely stone bottle-eyed drunk when I got home. So I waited till the next morning when he got out of bed with his head feeling tighter than a donkey's ass in fly season.

"Nabal, baby," I said to him. Then I realized I had called him that to his face. But I went right on. "Your sweet little wifey saved your backside yesterday. You spit in David's eye. I went and bought him off with good food, a lot of wine and a large dose of old-fashioned femininity. Because, ducky, David was on his

way here with a whole bunch of guys, ready to string you up by your toes and slice you into very thin strips."

His face went the color of a baboon's backside. He sputtered a few times, then he went pure white. He just sat there. For ten days Nabal sat there, not saying or doing anything. Then he fell over dead.

The local gossip had it that David said this was God taking revenge on Nabal. God did it for David. Folks said David really believed it. It's true. He really believed it!

Well, I did a pretty fair job of mourning my late, great husband. Sack cloth. Ashes. Ky-yay-ying. The works. You do what you have to do. What I hadn't counted on was being a widow. Nabal and I had no kids so I had a reasonable chance of hanging on to Nabal's estate. And I knew I could run the place a whole lot more efficiently and profitably than Nabal, which isn't saying a whole lot. But no sooner was the official mourning period over, than David sent one of his flunkies to tell me how highly David thought of me and what a beautiful and clever woman I was.

I said to Atarah. "Isn't this wonderful. I am being wooed." She giggled. Then I thought, do I want to be married to a petty warlord who runs a protection racket and lives in caves and smells of smoke and urine?

Then Atarah asked, "Do you have a choice?"

She was right of course. If David's pride was hurt because Nabal told him to shove it, the guy would have had a cat fit if a woman told him "no." He'd slice me into little pieces the way he planned to slice up Nabal!

The next day, another messenger from David came along and got right to the point. "David wants you for his wife." I shrugged and thought, "What you gotta do you gotta do."

But I said to the messenger, "Look, I'm not used to living in caves with a whole bunch of men. I want to bring along my sister for company." I had a sneaking hunch that David might not be a great conversationalist.

David was only slightly better as a conversationalist than he was as a lover. My wedding night with David was a slow-motion replay of my wedding night with Nabal. Except that David's idea of romantic conversation was to talk about how many sheep and goats and other stuff we had there on the homestead.

"It kind of puts romance in context," I said to Atarah, and we had a good laugh over that.

Look, I'm not complaining. Lots of women got things a whole lot worse than I did. I was never hungry. I was mad and frustrated lots of times. And scared. Never bored.

They said David was a man of God. It's hard to see a man of God when he's standing beside your bed, pot-bellied and stark naked. He might have been. Occasionally I thought so to.

I know that Atarah was a woman of God. She helped me laugh. She helped me pray. She helped me survive.

"We women don't get much to work with in this world," I said to Atarah. "The breaks don't just naturally go our way. We use every bit of wit and savvy and faith we've got."

"Well sis," she said. "We've learned to laugh and pray. That doesn't make life easier, but it sure has helped us survive."

**Ralph Milton has written a number of books,  
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