

Hagar's Story

By Caleb Yoder

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How have I come to this moment? We're out of water, and my precious son isn't going to make it.

I've laid him into his grave beneath that shrub. I can't do this. He's no longer responding, and his skin is so pale.

Ishmael, I feel like I've abandoned you. I can't bear to watch you die, but even with my back turned, I can't get your dark chestnut eyes and your soft curls out of my mind.

I'd give you my tears to drink, except that tries scorching wind dries them before they've barely left my eyes.

How could I have protected you? What choice did I have?

Your father used to have great affection for you. He even seemed sad and weary when he sent us away. But he still disowned us, no matter how you look at it. He does whatever Lady Sarah tells him – she's the one that really rules the roost.

As far as masters go, your father and his wife used to be decent people. My son, you don't want to know what I suffered before I became their slave.

I hoped you would have a better life. It pains me so much to see you suffer like this.

We slaves have no control of our own lives. No dreams or a future. You dare not even think about such things. I didn't choose to become a mother, but I have loved you and considered you a gift of God since the day you were born.

Now the joy of that day is only replaced with bitterness.

Ishmael, I never told you what happened before you were born.

When I became pregnant with you, I felt something special was happening.

I realized that my life must serve a purpose, knowing that you were growing inside of me. I had always thought I was nothing more than Lady Sarah's slave. But then I saw Sarah for what she was – just another human being, with her own problems and pain. I could almost pity her.

I started looking at her instead of keeping my head down. I guess Sarah could tell in my eyes that I thought less of her. Or rather, that I no longer saw myself as less than her.

But Sarah, of course, couldn't handle that. I heard her arguing one night with your father. I heard him tell Sarah she could treat me however she wanted.

I felt betrayed. And it sure enough, when I burnt dinner, Sarah asked ol' Eliezer to beat me. I don't think he really wanted to – he always seemed a very decent man.

But I could not risk anything happening to you, Ishmael, so I left. I started on the road to Egypt, even though I don't really have a place among my own people.

That desert journey wasn't so bad – I found a spring of water.

I was sure there was no one around for miles, but when I turned there was a man – a messenger of God!

He asked me what I was doing. He told me to go back to Sarah – not the words I wanted to hear.

But then he went on to promise that you would become a great and numerous nation! I couldn't believe what I was hearing.

That was when I knew this must be a messenger of God.

Your name, Ishmael, it means God hears. God saw my suffering and heard me.

A God who sees and hears.

I went back because I trusted that messenger. And things *were* better. You were born, and your father embraced you as his firstborn son. Until Sarah managed by some weird magic to have a son of her own.

Now that Isaac has made it this far, they've got their son and don't need us anymore. That's how this works.

What about the promises of God's messenger? I guess God's promises are no better than your father's.

Ishmael, if only I could hear your laughter one more time. Are you still drawing breaths, or are you already gone?

Where is God now? Does God see or hear us now?