

Hagar and Ishmael,
Jean-Charles Cazin, 1880

by [Margaret Mackinnon](#) in the [January 2024](#) issue

*And she departed, and wandered about in the
wilderness of Beer-sheba. (Gen. 21:14)*

Those who know the story know God's voice
will soon arrive. Miraculous water will appear.
But in Cazin's vision of this afternoon, there's only

heaviness in the sky. The hint of a ruined moon
marks their yellow world, a landscape bleached,
unblessed. A patch of wild yucca made softer

only in the day's dim light. Even the evergreen
is distant, though the mother and her son
imagine they still hear a small bird there,

its song hovering both in and outside time.
There are so many ways to tell their tale—
the shame of it, the loss, their fear. And yes,

God's angel will be heard. The story turns—
but on these old and ordinary days, Hagar
can't imagine such an end to exile.

Still, there is not so much sorrow
that we can't see the boy who embraces her.
In Cazin's version of the story, it's an innocent son

who steadies her, his arms suddenly
wrapped around her waist—
and Hagar weeps with love for him.

Light and dark, dark and light.
Her hopeful boy holds his mother tight.

This child for whom she'd give her life

has saved her here—

the way my own child saved me, too.

So love kept me from drowning in our rainless air.