

SARAI As was your father before you and every father before him.

AVRAM Hagar? Your consent to this?

HAGAR Already given.
It would honor me.

AVRAM She is but a child, Sarai.

HAGAR I was a child
until a moment ago.

SARAI A son, Avram, a son.

AVRAM A son.

TRIO: HAGAR, SARAI, AVRAM AVRAM
Could it be? Could it be?
I would then envy none,
content with my time in the world.

HAGAR
It honors me, the source of new life,
the future of the world,
a new world about to be begun.

SARAI
I would be the complete wife,
she who gives a son
to the husband she loves,
I give you a son.

SARAI
Thighs
harboring the scent of figs...,
eyes, dark, deep...,
and how beautifully she sighs.
Lie with her and tomorrow rise...

SARAI and HAGAR ...the man you were meant to be, a father.

AVRAM You are very wise Sarai, or very foolish.

SARAI Perhaps both, Avram.

AVRAM stretches out his hand to HAGAR, who then walks slowly, but with conviction, towards him. They stand close together, looking intently at each other.

SARAI (*with some force*) Let wild dogs bay,
the earth tremble, today,
Avram, from the line of Shem and Terah,
after having lived eighty-six years, begets...

Scene 4

The stage is quickly filled with men and women (village elders) who have gathered in some open meeting place to discuss the news.

ELDERS (*as though finishing the above*) A son! A son!
It is sure to be a son. It can only be a son.
Avram will have an heir, at last.
The Egyptian girl is with child.
God be praised.

Scene 5

During the above, the scene shifts and the lights continue changing. When complete, a tented chamber is revealed. HAGAR sits doing some chore or other. SARAI rushes in, excitedly.

SARAI Hagar, is it true, what I hear? true?

HAGAR I do not bleed.

SARAI How long?

HAGAR Three months, since summer ended.

SARAI And I not told?

HAGAR No one was told.

SARAI Yet all know, except me.

HAGAR I saw no need,
I wanted only to...

SARAI Was this planned, intended,
you do not bleed,
I not told? Answer. I demand!

HAGAR I waited, to be sure.

SARAI And? And?

HAGAR (*tenderly, yet resolute*) It is as you wished for, Sarai.

SARAI (*cautiously*) As I wished for...

HAGAR There is a life breathing in me,
breathing me, my scent, my air;
a life that drinks my tears,
thinks my thoughts, shares my blood;
a life that feeds on me
and grows yet keeps me whole;
a life that sees and knows my soul
making me invincible!
Endless!

HAGAR takes SARAI's hand and places it on her belly. SARAI slowly, but with conviction, takes her hand away.

HAGAR: I awaken, dazed,
Breathless, I spin, reel,
see clouds in shapes they have never taken,
and feel younger, yet older, think the sun never blazed
brighter, the water run colder,
I tremble, amazed that from me, out of me will soon come another--
I will be a mother.

SARAI (*after a moment; coldly*) And I not told, Hagar?

HAGAR I only meant to keep my secret, secret.

SARAI Even from me, Hagar?

HAGAR Yes, to not share, to keep for my very own, for as long as possible...

SARAI The thought, the plan was of my devising;
and I was to be included.

HAGAR I only did what was asked of me, what you were unable to do.

SARAI What are you saying?

HAGAR You know—it was *your* plan, Sarai.

After a brief moment, her anger having risen to the surface and unable to control it, SARAI strikes HAGAR, slapping her in the face. BOTH remain immobile, stunned, EACH not believing what has just occurred, and then they draw closer and embrace, as though EACH was apologizing to the other. BOTH suggesting the fault was hers alone, but the embrace is a cautious one, tentative.

SARAI Could it be?

HAGAR I am certain.

THEY remain in the fading light until the stage bursts with color and light; NEIGHBORS and RELATIVES have gathered to celebrate the birth of ISHMAEL.

Scene 6

NEIGHBORS/RELATIVES A son! A son!

Tents, tables, wine skins and platters of food are arranged in the yard in front of AVRAM's dwelling place.

NEIGHBORS/RELATIVES Come! Gather and rejoice! Dance! Sing!
God has heard his voice, and Avram is now a father,
and that father has a son who shall become king.

The NEIGHBORS/RELATIVES dance around the yard, and as the dancing comes to an end. AVRAM enters the scene. HE is regally dressed and carries the new-born.

AVRAM (*holding high the blanketed child*) My son!

NEIGHBORS/RELATIVES God be praised!

AVRAM He will grow to be a man of might, a lion,
to be held in awe. See, his fists are iron, his eyes flame.

NEIGHBORS/RELATIVES His name?

AVRAM He will lead a nation, write law,
a wonder, a wild-ass of a man,
one whose voice will thunder
as only a son of mine can,
yet be sweet as music sung in praise of God.

NEIGHBORS/RELATIVES (*as SARAI and HAGAR, elegantly dressed, enter*) His name? His name?

AVRAM He shall be called Ishmael!

SARAI and HAGAR (*echoing quietly*) Ishmael!

AVRAM, SARAI and HAGAR God listens! God has heard!

NEIGHBORS/RELATIVES God listens! God has heard!
Let every heart be light,
the beginning of a promised age is upon us,
and the world shall become rich with the children of Ishmael.

AVRAM hands the baby to HAGAR and kisses her. The festivities continue as HAGAR proudly parades, showing her son to the assembled NEIGHBORS/RELATIVES. SHE stops in front of SARAI, handing her the baby.

ALL Ishmael! Ishmael!

The NEIGHBORS/RELATIVES "freeze" in positions and the lights change, leaving only HAGAR, AVRAM and SARAI illuminated.

SARAI (*with the baby*) I shall look upon Ishmael as my own, as I must,
Now, and after he is grown, he is mine, my son.

NEIGHBORS/RELATIVES Ishmael! Ishmael!

AVRAM A son, by God's design.

HAGAR (*with the above and following, yet somewhat exposed musically*) No rain, no tear will wash away...,
no dust, no desert sand hide...,
no wind, no changing season erase
the truth scarred on my heart:
Ishmael is mine. Always, and far beyond forever, mine.

SARAI and AVRAM (*overlapping*) Ishmael! My son.

SARAI and HAGAR My son, my son. Mine!

NEIGHBORS/RELATIVES Ishmael! Ishmael!

Lights coming back up; chorus coming out of their "frozen" positions

NEIGHBORS/RELATIVES God has heard his voice, and Avram is now a father,
and that father has a son who shall become king.

AVRAM (*to the SERVANTS*) Bring more wine, and after that more wine!

The scene erupts into a joyful, exuberant frenzy and then suddenly stops. A BLACKOUT ends the act, with two spotlights lagging behind the others, briefly illuminating HAGAR and SARAI, staring at one another, on opposite sides of the stage.

End of Act I

twelve moons have come
gone
look for us then

AVRAHAM With eagerness, my lords.

THREE MEN *(in unison)* By which time, Sarah shall have been delivered of a son.

AVRAHAM *(incredulous)* A son?
(after a moment; puzzled)
A moment. My wife, you know her name.
How?

THREE MEN *(in unison)* Sarah shall have borne you a son.

SARAH has re-entered and has overheard.

SARAH I have a son.
We have a son.
Ishmael.

AVRAHAM Almost a man.
Good sirs, I am old, weak!

THREE MEN *(alternating; overlapping)* a son
who will grow to fortune
fame
we know whereof we speak
his name
by design
to be remembered
(in unison)
Itshak!

AVRAHAM and SARAH Itshak!

AVRAHAM My lords, with respect, it can not be.
My wife? Sarah?.

SARAH, after a moment, realizing the THREE MEN are serious, and finding the idea ridiculous, laughs.

SARAH *(good-naturedly; laughing)* Impossible! Withered as I am?

THREE MEN *(alternating; overlapping)* laugh
why laugh
who says impossible
a year and a day hence
when a number of moons
the sum
of three and nine
have come
gone
a son

AVRAHAM *(aside)* Who are these men? Who sends them? Why?
What do they know?
(to and with SARAH)
Dare I believe?
Dare I believe?

THREE MEN *(alternating; overlapping)* it shall be
she
will conceive
we know what is known
already done
from whom learned
matters not
when we
shall have returned
there will be
a son

SARAH

I have looked at nests rebuilt each spring, meant
to be filled, then were,
with life, and cried,
but I am now content, thrilled
with Ishmael.
If ever I have said otherwise, I lied.
Laugh? Good sirs, you, you and you, I have no reason, no room,
(painfully)
no womb left for jests.
(after a moment)
So, withered as I am, I do laugh,
(with an edge)
and yet do not laugh.

AVRAHAM *(with the appearance of a SERVANT)* Come, my lords, to eat and rest.

SARAH exits followed by ABRAHAM escorting the THREE MEN. HAGAR enters from one side, obviously having heard the previous scene.

HAGAR

I also do not laugh.
If this were this to happen, should the prophesy come to pass,
indeed, were a son born, what then of Ishmael?
(after a moment)
Sarah would have a right to joy,
yes, a mother's joy, nothing less,
the same joy I came to know years ago
as my milk flowed into Ishmael.
What now of Ishmael?
What now of my Ishmael?

A sudden change of light hides HAGAR, and reveals ISHMAEL, still with his MEN.

ISHMAEL

Tents and enclosures to the south need mending.
Avraham and his son, Ishmael, agree.
See that it is done.

FIGURES *(bursting forth; overlapping the previous)*

After Nahor lived twenty-nine years, he begat Terah;
after Terah lived seventy years, he begat Avram;
after Avraham lived one hundred years,
he begat—

Scene 2:

The stage again fills with color and light as NEIGHBORS and RELATIVES gather to celebrate the weaning of ITSHAK. SARAH enters carrying the baby ITSHAK. AVRAHAM, beaming, follows close behind.

SARAH *(as though finishing the above)* Itshak!

AVRAHAM Itshak!

NEIGHBORS/RELATIVES Come! Gather and rejoice! Dance! Sing!

SARAH I have been given laughter, and all who here shall laugh with me,
for now and always after.

NEIGHBORS/RELATIVES God has heard his voice, and Avraham is now a father,
Sarah is now a mother, a miracle has happened, and the son shall be king.

Almost as a repeat of the earlier party scene, although now more stylized, NEIGHBORS/RELATIVES dance, showing their delight. ISHMAEL, in general high spirits, strides boldly Over to SARAH and, without saying a word, Takes ITSHAK by the hand and walks away. SARAH stands dumbfounded, perplexed, angry.

ISHMAEL *(parading; hand in hand with ITSHAK)*

Friends, relations, I call: Come! One and all! See!
Itshak! My brother!
He is all of that, and more.
What is there to doubt? He has my eyes, my chin,
were I again his age, he would be my twin. Itshak! My brother!
Look! What is here not to adore?
(to ITSHAK)
You will be loved and, I promise, never know harm.
And when you become a man, you shall become my right arm.
Itshak! My brother!

NEIGHBORS/RELATIONS

Itshak! His brother!
God has heard his voice, and Avraham is now a father...

SARAH hasn't moved. SHE has been watching the parading ISHMAEL in stony silence. SHE now turns away, staring straight ahead, determined. The NEIGHBORS/RELATIONS continue swirling around ISHMAEL and, in the fading light THEY work their way offstage, leaving SARAH alone.

SARAH

*(warmly; overlapping the fading chorus
as "My Brother!" echoes)*
And I his mother.

(after a moment)

Itshak no longer seeks a breast, and now walks alone,
easily settling into his own, becoming a person, as he should be.
A joy to see; I am blessed.

(after a moment; icily)

Yet--for some time I have known
I must be resolved, unshaken.
allowing no anguished moan,
no remembered warmth melt my heart, rend me apart,
deter me from the path which must be taken,
now, before Itshak has grown.
The dilemma has been solved.

Scene 3:

The lights change swiftly, harshly and, with an abrupt change of scenery, take us to some formal place in the compound. AVRAHAM is discovered pacing. SARAH has yet to move from her previous position.

SARAH

(stormy; insistent)
Itshak! Itshak! Itshak!
Itshak inherits!
Only he merits,
only he, the true fulfillment of the promise.
Only he, my one true son,
born of what was and is in me.
Only he, our son will lead,
not the other, not the son of my slave.

AVRAHAM

They are both my true sons,
born of what was and is in me.
They are my shining suns
giving light to old and tired eyes,
Equals! Each has a brother
he adores. One smiles, the other laughs;
one hurts, the other cries.

SARAH

No! Ishmael cannot stay.
He goes with his mother.

AVRAHAM

Sarah, do you hear what you say?
Where would you send them?

SARAH

Away! Into the desert, back to Egypt.
It matters not.

HAGAR

(stepping forward; desperate)
But why? What have we done?
(after a moment, during which both SARAH and AVRAHAM turn away)
Sarah?
(to AVRAHAM)
Avraham? Your son?

AVRAHAM

(with difficulty)
To plead is useless, I have no choice,
although my heart will - does - bleed.
Ishmael is of my seed, but I am commanded to heed
Sarah's voice.

HAGAR

Avraham? What now of Ishmael?

SARAH

(with finality)
The question of inheritance has been answered.
(with some pain)
Ishmael is being returned to you.
Go, he is once again yours.

HAGAR

Once again mine, exiled, condemned!
Once again mine, sent to die in the desert.

The THREE stand silently for a moment.
TRIO: Avraham, Hagar, Sarah

AVRAHAM

Could it be?
 Can I banish my son, whom I love?
 Sarah has spoken, it is resolved.
 Could it be? My son.

HAGAR

How can it be?
 Where will we go?
 What can I do?

SARAH

I have done what needs to be done;
 And so, it has to be.

AVRAHAM

(after pacing, deep in thought; to HAGAR)
 Take as much food and water as you are both able to carry.

HAGAR

(bitterly)
 Into the desert to die.

SARAH

Go! Go!

The lights begin to fade. The BOY ITSHAK enters, running into his mother's arms. SARAH lifts the child, holding him high. The projected faces of children cover the stage yet another time.

HAGAR

(with the changing light)
 To have a son and be alive to know
 he will not grow to have a son.
(after a moment)
 Bury a child? No mother should have to bury her child.

FIGURES

(with conviction)
 after Nahor lived twenty-nine years, he begat Terah;
 after Terah lived seventy years, he begat Avram;
 after Avraham lived eighty-five years,
 he begat...

With the recitation of the FIGURES, the projections fade, as do the lights. SARAH and the BOY ITSHAK exit, leaving AVRAHAM alone for a moment.

AVRAHAM

(in the fading light; finishing the recitation; painfully)
 Ishmael!

Scene 4:

The changing lights, during which we see HAGAR and ISHMAEL walking slowly through the desert. They pause to rest.

ISHMAEL

Is there more water?

HAGAR

No.

ISHMAEL

Can you walk further?

HAGAR

No.
(After a moment, quietly)
 I knew that this day might come,
 We were both always at their mercy;
 And yet, I know you loved them both—
 I loved them once as well.
 And they gave me you,
 And they gave me you,
 —no dust, no desert sand will hide...

ISHMAEL

(angrily)
 Now that desert sand will swallow our bones!
[music becomes more agitated]
 Mother, they are monsters.

HAGAR

What can I do? How can I comfort you?

ISHMAEL

Mother, they are monsters!

HAGAR

Oh Ishmael, I cannot bear to watch you die!

ISHMAEL walks over to HAGAR and embraces her.

HAGAR and ISHMAEL

(alternating lines, and some in unison)
(after a moment; as if remembering)

I will scent your cradle with myrrh,
weave you blankets of gold, love you long, deep and strong.
(after a moment)
...sweeten your milk with honey and berries,
fill you with breath and song, and joy and hope and angels and...

HAGAR *(breaking off, unable to be brave anymore)*
Oh...oh my child....

ISHMAEL and HAGAR embrace once again.. The lights begin to change, fading, and we hear the FIGURES.

Scene 5:

FIGURES *(quietly, ominously)*
After these things, God tested Avraham, saying:
Avraham: take your son—your only son—whom you love—

(AVRAHAM and SARAH appear on different sides of stage)

AVRAHAM Itshak!

SARAH Itshak!

AVRAHAM, SARAH move towards each other.

SARAH You would do this?

AVRAHAM Have I a choice?
God commands, I must obey.

SARAH Itshak dies. Why?

AVRAHAM Sarah, the world is filled with many 'why's.
You spoke and Ishmael was gone.
You are who you are, I am who I am,
And God...is who God is.
(after a moment)
I go, Sarah, It must be. I go with Itshak. *(Goes offstage)*

SARAH *(left alone)*
(quietly, in shock)
To have a son and be alive to know
he will not grow to have a son.
(with considerable emotion)
Bury a child? No mother should have to bury her child.
(quieter)
She has better things to do.
...fill him with breath and song and joy
and hope and angels and...
(after a moment)
But Avram was promised—
We were promised—
We journeyed to this land—
Descendants, numerous as stars...
(after a moment, passionately)
To have a son and be alive to know
he will not grow to have a son.

AVRAHAM reappears on another part of the stage, as if on the mountain.

AVRAHAM And so it ends. Yes, it is clear,
End it will here
On a remote hill in the land of Moriah.

SARAH *(together with AVRAHAM's lines above and below)*
Bury a child! No mother should have to bury her child!

AVRAHAM Amid the thorn and thistle, on piled rock and stone,
I will make of you, my dearest Itshak,
charred proof of my love of God.

FIGURES *(Together with AVRAHAM and SARAH's lines above, growing in intensity)*
After Terach lived seventy years, He begat Avram;
After Avraham lived one hundred years, He begat Itshak;
After these things, after these things....

SARAH Avraham! Avraham!

FIGURES

Avraham! Avraham!

AVRAHAM looks up as if responding to the voices, and remains in that position as lights fade on him.

SARAH

My precious boy, my precious boy...No one! No one....
Itshak...my son...
Ishmael....Hagar... No one....

FIGURES

Avraham....Avraham...

SARAH and FIGURES' calls getting more and more quiet, as the lights fade, and then a quiet interlude follows to signify a long passage of time and to take us to a new locale.

Scene 6:

The lights very slowly change to define a cave-like burial chamber. A man (OLD ITSHAK) stands before a draped body (AVRAHAM), softly humming a wordless tune. After a moment or two, another man (OLD ISHMAEL) enters. HE stands aside for a moment. OLD ITSHAK senses someone is in the cave with him. HE turns.

OLD ITSHAK

Ishmael?

OLD ISHMAEL

Itshak.

OLD ITSHAK

You have come.

OLD ISHMAEL

In spite of everything, he was my father. I had to see him.

OLD ITSHAK

I am so glad you are here.
(after a pause)
I wasn't sure...wasn't sure if you were alive.

OLD ISHMAEL

Yes, we survived, that time many years ago.

OLD ITSHAK

I, too, was brought inches from death. Our father...

OLD ISHMAEL

Our father loved us both...in his own way.

OLD ITSHAK

Yes. And now he has died—and we both are here.

OLD ISHMAEL

(turns to look at ITSHAK)
Itshak, you are as I remember.
Now a man, of course, but I see the same gentleness in your eyes,
sense in you the same strength of purpose.

OLD ITSHAK

Exactly what I see in you. We could almost be twins.

OLD ISHMAEL

Yes, it is clear that we are of the same family..

BOTH

Avraham! Father of multitudes!

OLD ITSHAK

Are you married?

OLD ISHMAEL

An Egyptian woman, like my mother.

OLD ITSHAK

(softly; kindly)
Hagar. I was too young to really know her.
But I know how much she loved you.

OLD ISHMAEL

Sarah?

OLD ITSHAK

(gesturing to another grave site)
There. Gone some years ago. Died when she thought that I...
(after a moment)
Children?

OLD ISHMAEL

Two sons. Nebaioth and Kedar. And you?

The faces of children very slowly begin covering the stage.

OLD ITSHAK

My wife is with child, our first. She thinks it may be twins.

OLD ISHMAEL

So we're not the last of a line. The family grows.

OLD ITSHAK

And grows.

BOTH

(with bigger smiles)

Avraham! The father of multitudes!

OLD ITSHAK Will you stay for the burial?

OLD ISHMAEL There may be those that would not welcome me.

OLD ITSHAK He was your father. You are his son.

OLD ISHMAEL Let us be content with simply, "I am your brother."

*THEY stand silently for a moment, after which there is a brief embrace.
Once again FIGURES remerge from the darkness and begin their recitation.*

FIGURES *(overlapping, echoing)*
Nebayot! Kedar! Adbeel! Mibsam! Mishma! Dumah!
Massa! Hadad! Tema! Jetur! Naphish! Keddmah! Machalat!
Esav! Yaakov! Reuven! Shimon! Levi! Yehudah! Issachar! Zevulun!
Dinah! Yosef! Binyamin! Dan! Naftali! Gad! Asher!

OLD ITSHAK, then OLD ISHMAEL *(over part of the preceding)*
Roots spreading, threading
through lives, joining each to the other,

BOTH brother to brother, father to son, daughter, mother.

SARAH and HAGAR become visible on opposite sides of the stage.

SARAH Pained, we cause pain,

HAGAR hurt, we must leave,

OLD ISHMAEL and ITSHAK apart, we grow,

SARAH and HAGAR together, we grieve,

SARAH and OLD ITSHAK we hope, believe and disbelieve

HAGAR and OLD ISHMAEL as lives and histories
interweave,

ALL FOUR as human miseries
and sacred mysteries
make us many and make us one.
Many and one!
Ever unique, yet joined together,
As we live our future.

AVRAHAM *(appearing; standing between SARAH and HAGAR)*
I, Avraham, was the child of my father,
And in turn the father of children,
Sarah, look! Your children!
Hagar, look! Your children!
And God, look! My children!
Numerous as stars in the heavens!

FIGURES Serug begat Nahor,
Nahor begat Terah,
Terah, Avram,
Avraham...

HAGAR Ishmael!

SARAH Itshak!

OLD ISHMAEL Nebayot! Kedar!

OLD ITSHAK Esau! Yaakov!

The FIGURES begin a litany of names, softly, repeating, overlapping them from here until the end of the opera.

FIGURES Nebayot! Kedar! Adbeel! Mibsam! Mishma! Dumah!
Massa! Hadad! Tema! Jetur! Naphish! Keddmah! Machalat!
Esav! Yaakov! Reuven! Shimon! Levi! Yehudah! Issachar! Zevulun!
Dinah! Yosef! Binyamin! Dan! Naftali! Gad! Asher!

FIGURES and ALL CHARACTERS *(in counterpoint to the litany of names)*
Children, our (your) children...
Numerous as stars in the heavens...

The promise fulfilled...
Many and one...
My brother, my brother...
Roots spreading, joining each to the other...
Itshak! Ishmael! Ishmael! Itshak!....

As the recitation by the FIGURES swells, the the lights fade, first on ISHMAEL and ITZHAK, then on AVRAHAM, the last being SARAH and HAGAR as THEY turn to look at each other, and the opera ends.

End of Act II

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