



Going Home Through the Sandstorm

A Full English translation is available.

沙塵暴裡要回家

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In the distant Sahara Desert, fierce and sudden sandstorms transform the lives of several beings. Mimi, a beautiful little sand dune, becomes a haven for foxes, jerboas, camels, and flocks of sheep. Yet the wind refuses to let her remain still. Scattered into countless grains of sand and losing her original form, Mimi is carried into the crevices of Black Rock Mountain. Even so, she believes that her inner essence remains.

Meanwhile, seven-year-old Haji sets out on his first solo journey herding sheep, only to be caught in a sudden sandstorm that blots out the blue sky and leads him into danger. As night falls and water runs out, desert spirits and animals—hedgehogs, jerboas, sandgrouse, and fennec foxes—rally to help him, even as snakes and hyenas lurk menacingly.

Drawn from the author's own experiences in the Sahara, this fantastical adventure weaves together human courage, the compassion of unseen beings, and the gratitude of animals, forming a cycle of love that carries all through crisis. Amid the storm, the story shows how care and connection allow life to move forward, and invites reflection on coexistence and the sustainability of our fragile environment. It also reminds us that identity and purpose can endure even when outward forms are transformed.



Author **Shiren Cai**

Shiren Cai earned a doctorate in Cultural Anthropology and Ethnology from the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (EHESS) in France. Based in Morocco, Cai aims to address climate change by promoting in-depth Sahara expeditions, ecotourism, and desert tree-planting initiatives.



Illustrator **Nan-Jun**

Born in Changzhi, Pingtung, Nan-Jun was inspired by the exquisite illustrations in picture books during his elementary school years. These have shaped his future aspirations. He enjoys starting his creative process with a cup of black coffee to awaken his soul, then retreats to his own small studio, where he picks up his paintbrush and begins to dream on paper. Committed to drawing by hand, he cherishes the way watercolor dances on paper, sometimes unpredictably. He embraces the beauty and uniqueness of original artwork.

The Desert's Invisible Web: Care, Love, and Co-Existence in a Harsh Landscape

by Kuo-Neng Hsu

Going Home Through the Sandstorm unfolds on a grand scale. At first glance, it seems to depict nature's retaliation against human destruction of the environment. Two fierce and sudden sandstorms transform a set of lives. Yet the author Shiren Cai also transcends this conventional framework and explores the central theme of love. The Sand Spirit remembers that humans saved its migratory bird friends, so it chooses to help a seven-year-old shepherd boy survive a sandstorm. The animals also come to his aid. Though they resent humans, they do it to repay Sand Spirit for its care. In the end, the story shows how love, once given, returns in life-affirming ways.

Cai possesses both extensive knowledge of the Sahara Desert and a deep emotional connection to it, transforming what might seem a lifeless wasteland into a place rich with feeling and vitality. Each character comes vividly to life on the page. The instincts and traits

of desert flora and fauna are faithfully rendered, while their humanized qualities bring the story closer to a child's inner world. Through the narrative, readers gain insights into natural science, and through that knowledge are led back to humanistic reflection.

Beyond its moving themes, Cai demonstrates remarkable artistry. The prose glows with poetic luminescence, dialogue rings true to each character's voice, and lush, evocative imagery transports readers into an immersive and unforgettable world.

This afterword has been edited for the purposes of this booklet.

Kuo-Neng Hsu earned his Ph.D. from the Graduate Institute of Chinese at National Taiwan Normal University. He is currently a faculty member in the Department of Chinese at National Taiwan Normal University.

Seeing the Many Faces of the Sahara: A Note from the Author

by Shiren Cai

More than a decade ago, standing among the dunes, I made a wish: to write desert stories for island children from within the desert itself. In the spring of 2014, accompanied by camels, my husband Besan and I camped among the sand dunes. At first, the vast silence of the wilderness filled me with fear. Yet after seven full days away from human company, I found myself growing attached to that boundless quiet. When we finally left the dunes, a faint glimmer caught my eye and made me turn back. On the sand were rows of tiny footprints. Besan said, "A fennec fox came by last night."

Under the morning sun, the dunes glowed with a golden light. A voice seemed to whisper in my ear, and with it arose my desire to tell stories, for a golden dune had already taken root in my heart.

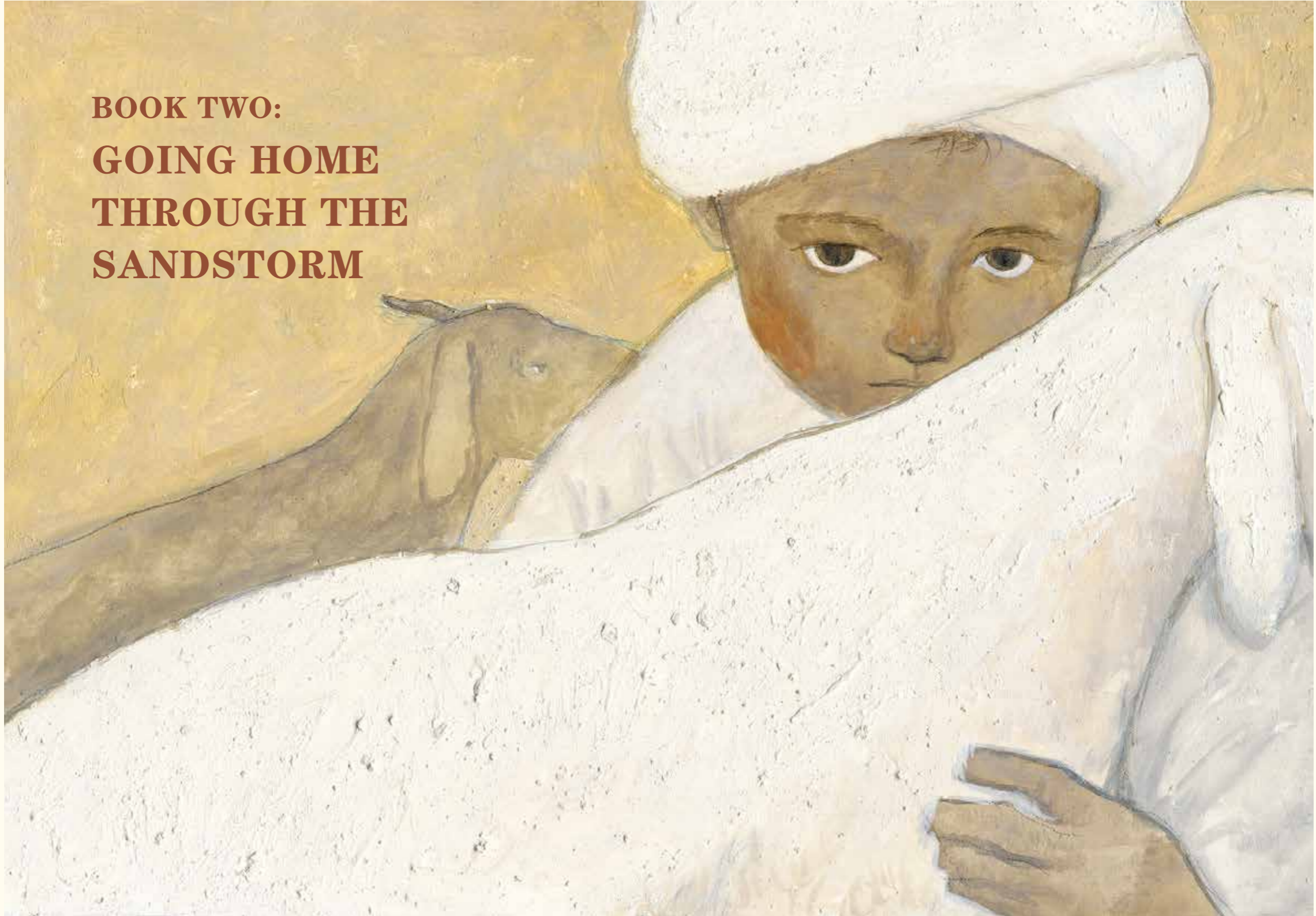
This fairy tale is grounded in reality. The natural landscapes in the story—among them the blossoming Black Rock Mountain and the ancient tree that shelters wild animals—truly

exist in the Merzouga region where I live. The prototype of the boy Haji and the inspiration for his story come from Besan, who was born into a nomadic family and once lost his way in a sandstorm as a child. The concept of spirits draws from Islamic belief, the animals in the story are native species of the Sahara, and the portrayal of nomadic life is based on many years of field research.

Weaving together natural ecology, the life experiences of those around me, and my own reflections, I shaped this story in the hope of sharing with island children the many faces of the Sahara, a place where cruelty and tenderness coexist. A sandstorm may obscure and even devastate the land before us. Yet, it also nourishes distant, unseen places. Love allows life to flow and continue. All living beings exist within an invisible web, subtly connected and mutually sustaining.

This essay has been edited for the purposes of this booklet.

**BOOK TWO:
GOING HOME
THROUGH THE
SANDSTORM**



Chapter Five: Desert Spirits

A Wind Child descended gently on the dunes in a flow of rainbow light, bringing from the Desert Eagle a message: at dusk, a great sandstorm, greater than any in history, would descend on the Sahara.

The desert appears empty, its silence so complete that no sound could be contained there. In reality, it is filled with protective spirits.

In the oasis dwell the tree spirits and water spirits. In the gravel plains dwell rock spirits. Where the gravel plains touch the sand dunes, and plants grow densely, grass spirits dwell. In the vastly beautiful dunes, there are sand spirits. Even the currents of air

are directed by wind children. These spirits each have their own responsibilities, closely tracking each of the living beings in their domain, nurturing them with care.

Of these spirits, the Sand Spirit has the most special responsibilities, and is most closely tied to the wind children.

When violent gales blow, the Sand Spirit cautions insects and animals alike, encouraging them to shelter quickly in their nests. When rain comes, the Sand Spirit reminds the grains of sand to clutch the beads of water, rather than let them slip back into the sky. The Sand Spirit tends to the ecosystem of the dunes with such care that even the nomads bring their flocks to graze

in its territory.

Humans are unable to see the spirits, nor sense that they are under the spirits' care.

It is the Great Spirit who governs all of the earth and sky.

Nobody knows where the Great Spirit dwells, nor what the appearance of the Great Spirit might be, for all messages pass through the Desert Eagle.

In truth, even the origin and appearance of the Desert Eagle remain a mystery.

As the dark of night vanished in the first golden rays of dawn, a

