



LITERATURE CONNECTIONS

The Sandstorm

IN SHABANU: DAUGHTER OF THE WIND, Suzanne Fisher Staples tells about 11-year-old Shabanu, the youngest child in a family of nomadic camel herders. Shabanu lives in the Cholistan Desert with her parents; her older sister, Phulan; her grandfather; and an aunt with two young children. She also has a camel named Mithoo and a pet dog named Sher Dil. In this hot and dry area of Pakistan, blinding sandstorms can strike without warning. When they do, they threaten the lives of the people who make the desert their home and of the camels they depend on for their livelihood.

One night Phulan shakes me awake in the middle of a deep sleep.

“Shabanu!” she shouts from such a great distance I can barely hear her.

She yanks the quilt away, and suddenly my skin is pierced by thousands of needles. The wind is howling around us. I can’t see anything when I open my eyes, but I can tell by the sound and feel that it’s a monstrous sandstorm, the kind few living things survive without protection. Phulan pulls me by the hand, but I yank away.

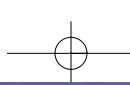
“Mithoo!” I stumble about the courtyard, tripping over huddled chickens, clay pots, and bundles of reeds that have broken away from the entrance. “Mithoo!”

Hands outstretched, I feel my way around the courtyard wall, where Mithoo normally sleeps. When I get to where the reeds were stacked on their stalks, lashed side by side and tied to cover the doorway, there is a gaping hole. Quickly I make my way around the courtyard again. Mithoo is gone.

1. A loose robe, worn by Islamic women, that covers the body and most of the face; also spelled *chador*.

2. A freshwater pond that serves as a water supply for desert nomads.

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"You can't find him without a light and something to put over your eyes!" Phulan shouts, pulling on my arm. Together we drag the bed through the doorway. Mama struggles to close the window shutters and Phulan and I manage to push the door shut and wedge the bed against it. Dadi lights a candle and swears softly as the light fills the room. Grandfather and Sher Dil are missing too.

"Where can he have gone?" Mama gasps, her eyes bright with fear. Grandfather had been sound asleep, and the storm must have wakened him.

Dadi uses the candle to light the kerosene storm lantern and pulls the bed away from the door. Mama throws a shawl around his shoulders. He pulls it over his head and I follow him out to the courtyard, where *khar* shrubs, their shallow roots torn from the dry sand, tumble and hurl themselves against the walls.

With my *chadr*¹ over my face, I can open my eyes enough to see the haze of the lantern in Dadi's hand, the light reflecting from the dust in a tight circle around him.

Auntie has already closed up her house, and Dadi pounds on the door for several minutes before she opens it again and we slip inside.

"Have you seen Grandfather?" asks Dadi.

"And Mithoo and Sher Dil?" I shout.

She stands in the center of her house, mouth open and speechless, her hands raised helplessly. My cousins stand behind her skirt, their eyes wide. From between her feet Sher Dil's black nose glistens in the lamplight. But no Grandfather and no Mithoo.

"Come to our house," Dadi orders her, handing me the lantern. "I'll close up here. Shabanu, come back for me," he says, bending to light Auntie's storm lantern.

When I return, Dadi holds the light so we can see each other.

"Mithoo will be fine," he says, and I know it is a warning not to ask to look for him. "When the wind has died and it's light, we'll find him standing near a tree by the *toba*."²



Reading

THE LITERATURE

In this selection, the author draws on almost all of the five senses to help the reader understand what it might be like to live through a sandstorm. Find an example of how each sense is used to make the account more vivid.

Thinking About

THE LITERATURE

What role does nature play in the lives of Shabanu and her family? How does the author make clear the challenges of living in the Cholistan Desert?

Writing About

THE LITERATURE

In this story, Shabanu and her family work together to survive the sudden sandstorm. How do the members of the family help one another overcome the dangers of the storm?

About the Author

Suzanne Fisher Staples

(b. 1945) has traveled widely as a reporter for a global news service. In 1979, she went to work in Southern Asia, covering such events as the civil war in Afghanistan. A 1985 trip to Pakistan, where she conducted a study of poor rural women, led her to write *Shabanu*. Staples currently lives in Florida.

Further Reading *The Land I Lost* by Huynh Quang Nhuong takes the reader to a tiny village in the central highlands of Vietnam, years before the Vietnam War. The book has won many awards, including selection as an ALA Notable Book.