

# *Red Wind Blowing*

by Susan Yoder Ackerman  
art by Mark Schroder



Mark's feet spurted sand behind him as he ran, but his eyes were turned toward the sky. Big scary clouds from the north were rolling higher and higher. They were not dark with rain. They were red-brown with sand from the Sahara Desert.

"Where's Ibrahim?" Mark called to his neighbors.

Ibrahim's mother was pulling on a rope to tie the sides of her tent down flat against the strong wind. "At the river," she said.

Fine grit blew into Mark's eye, and it hurt. He had heard about sandstorms since moving to Mauritania, but this was the first one he'd seen.

"He might get lost," said Mark. "Look how dark it is for noontime."

"It's not far. He'll find his way back," said Ibrahim's mother. She pulled the long loose end of her blue dress across her face to keep from breathing the gritty dust that was blowing nonstop.

"Mark!" his dad called from their door.

Mark ran home across drifting sand. The house looked scared, shutters pulled in tight to hide the windows from the storm.



Inside, Mark's feet crunched on the floor. Mom had stuffed towels under windows and doors, and still the air was foggy with sandy, red dust.

"It's dark in here!" said Mark.

"Electricity's off," said Dad. He held a camera to a window to try to take a picture of the huge dust cloud. Dad looked funny. His hair was sticking up. Sand stuck to his face where he'd been sweating.

"You have a red mustache, Dad," said Mark.

"So do you!" said Dad. Mark rubbed his face. It felt like someone had sprinkled salt all over it.

It must have felt like salt inside the camera, too, because suddenly it just stopped working.

"Oh no," said Dad. "There must be dust in the works. It's a good thing we covered the computer."



Mark went out into the dark kitchen. He found a match and lit a candle, so he could get a drink of water. When he picked up his glass, it left a white circle on the brown table. But wait, that table was supposed to be white, not brown! Mark touched the table. It felt like the seashore, all sandy. Where the glass had sat, the table was still white.



"There's dirt everywhere!" said Mark, as he rinsed the glass and got a drink.

"At least we're all safe," said Mom. "People get lost in storms like these."

"I hope Ibrahim got home," said Mark. "And I wish the wind would stop. I can't breathe."

His skin was slippery with sweat. He wanted to run outdoors and see blue sky. He wanted to know that Ibrahim was all right.

By candlelight, the family tried to play games, but the dominoes felt gritty. They tried to read books, but the pages stuck to their hands.

Toward evening, light showed in the cracks of the shutters. The wind stopped blowing.

Mark stepped outside. There were sand dunes everywhere. Mom threw open the shutters. "It will take us two days to dust and scrub this house," she groaned.

Mark ran next-door. "Where's Ibrahim?" he asked.

"We haven't seen him yet," answered Ibrahim's mother.

Mark was scared. Maybe his friend was lost in the desert.



But Ibrahim's mother didn't seem worried. She was busy. She pulled the big rugs and cushions out of the tent and shook them. She spread them back down over the sand, nice and clean. She tied back the sides of the tent so the fresh air could blow through. Now her housecleaning was done.

"Hey, Mark!" It was Ibrahim in his long white robe. His head was wrapped in a *howli*, so only his eyes were

showing.

"You're not lost!" shouted Mark.

"You can't get lost if you sit still," said Ibrahim. "That's what our parents tell us. Sit till the red wind stops blowing. It's the safest thing to do!"

"Come," said Ibrahim's mother. "I'm making tea."

Green tea and sugar and mint made a delicious smell, bubbling over and hissing on the fire. Mark knelt to help Ibrahim fan the charcoal under the enamel teapot.

"I'm glad the storm is over," he said.

