



THE GOLDEN HAWKS OF GENGHIS KHAN



RITA RITCHE



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“You know this is forbidden,” Cephas warned.

“I know,” Jalair said, his throat suddenly dry.

Where the design had come from and what it meant, Jalair could not tell. It was a picture that had been in his mind all his life. He called it the Golden Hawk, in honor of the real Golden Hawks he had never seen, though he was determined to recover the strain someday.

Young Jalair yearns to recover the Golden Hawks that were stolen from his father. His grandfather has different plans for his future, and hawks are not a part of it. When Jalair escapes to the land of the Mongols in search of his father’s hawks, he has no idea how much he will learn from the adventures that await him.

► “Adventure is combined with a complex plot in this historical novel set during the Mongol Empire. This book is a wonderful literary gem.” —Jenny Phillips



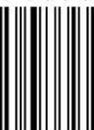
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This unabridged version has updated grammar and spelling.

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CHAPTER 1

The House of Kurush

Jalair opened his eyes to the mid-morning sun flooding into his room. In no hurry to arise, he stretched lazily, enjoying the luxury of sleeping late now that he was home from school for the summer.

Through the open window, he studied the clear blue sky beyond the high stone wall surrounding his grandfather's house, and he could just see the treetops of the parks that circled Samarkand.

Puzzled, he frowned. Already the trading season had begun, yet the sky above the parks was strangely empty.

Then his heart leaped, for a hawk shot up clear of the trees. From its color and markings, Jalair knew it for a kestrel.

The hawk ringed upward, the sun flashing on its brown back and slate-gray wings. The kestrel reached its pitch and hung in the sky. Jalair knew what it was waiting for.

Often visitors to Samarkand, impatient with the hours it took for a caravan to be made up, would gather in the parks to match their hawks' performance. The master of the kestrel would soon start swinging the padded and feathered lure.

There!

The kestrel's keen eyes must have caught the circling lure, for it suddenly snapped its wings flat to its sleek body and plunged down and down, head foremost. The hawk's stoop took it out of Jalair's view, but he knew that at the last instant, the kestrel would swing upward and, with closed talons, deal a mighty blow to its mock prey.

Jalair leaned against the sill of the open window, thinking of past summers when his grandfather Kurush allowed him to ride his pony beyond the walls of the house. He always directed Cephass, his ever-present servant and bodyguard, toward the parks to see the hawkers and their birds. He would watch them breathlessly, dreaming of slipping the Golden Hawk from his fist while the other men gasped in astonishment at the finest hawk in the world.

Suddenly Jalair pulled on his clothes. How could he possibly have forgotten that this was a special day? He laughed at himself as he slipped into his white outer tunic, belted it at his waist, and stepped into his sandals.

Cephass, in a long white robe and plain turban, entered Jalair's room with a bowl of water. "What, up already, young master? The boat bringing you home from Guzar arrived so late last night that Master Kurush said you might sleep your fill."

Jalair laughed again, thinking of at last joining the hawkers in the parks. "Cephass, do you remember what day this is?"

"Your first in Samarkand this summer," the servant replied. He went to the bundles on a low shelf and began unpacking Jalair's things.

"It is the day I go to Eli the Levantine's to select the pair of hawks Kurush promised last year to buy for me." He washed his face at the bowl Cephass had brought and then rubbed vigorously with a towel the servant handed him. "What kind shall I get, Cephass?"

The servant sorted and folded Jalair's winter clothes, setting some aside to be mended. "I know nothing of hawks, young master. But surely, you have decided after thinking of them for a year."

"For years and years," Jalair corrected. "The peregrine is best, but it is hardest to train." He sat on his bed and watched the unpacking. "What made Kurush change his mind about the hawks?"

Cephas shook his head. "I know not, young master. But your grandfather may have wearied of your constant efforts to persuade him. Perhaps this is his way of keeping you from idling with men in the street at Eli the Levantine's. In truth, such conduct is not becoming of the grandson of the Treasurer's Steward of Samarkand. Someday you may rise to a position in the city government, Jalair, and you must be a gentleman."

"But Eli is my friend," Jalair protested. "And so are the men who buy their hawks from him."

Cephas nodded. "I have seen the happy hours you spent with them while I held our mounts. Yet your grandfather Kurush wishes you to be careful in selecting your companions."

"I know," Jalair said shortly. "That is why he sends me to Guzar."

Guzar was a tiny village tucked away in the hills high above the great Oxus River Valley. Its people lived by fishing and a little farming. The few boys Jalair's own age worked from dawn to dusk, sowing and reaping or helping pull in the nets and clean the fish. For his only companion, Jalair had Sayyid Hussayn, with whom he lived and studied most of the year in a small mosque much in need of repair. After the day's school work was done, they went for walks, and in the evening they played chess. The school year was long and tiresome, but at least Jalair was not continually watched by Kurush, whose anger was so easily aroused.

But now he would have his long-awaited hawks, and he could take them back to Guzar. Sayyid Hussayn had promised to give him a storeroom in one of the little-used minarets to turn into a hawk mews.

"Jalair!" Cephas said sharply. "What have you done?"

Startled, he turned toward Cephas and saw in the servant's hand a small plaque Jalair had carved during the school year. In low relief was a hawk plunging earthward to its sighted prey. Beneath it was chiseled the jagged line of a thunderbolt.



caravans wore full battle armor. The armor would be taken off when they reached Khoesrm, for they traveled as traders, not warriors.

Leaders, with the crests of their rank flowing from their helmets, galloped up and down the trains, making a last-minute



inspection and shouting orders. Jalair was pleased to note that Kaban's caravan seemed to be the most orderly of them all.

In another caravan, two stubborn camels abruptly sat down and refused to move, though their tenders prodded them vigorously. The watching crowd started to laugh, and