



Title: **The Mystery of the Falcon's Eye** (لغز عين الصقر)

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Full English translation available



When the discovery of an old family heirloom reveals a cryptic glimpse into his family's past, 17-year-old Palestinian refugee Ziad must embark on a dangerous journey across the impenetrable border that divides him from the buried secrets of a past Palestine, a journey which may hold the key to his future. The everyday details of life for refugees in the West Bank are seamlessly woven together with an oral history of Palestine before the Nakba in this exciting adventure story from one of the leading writers of children's and YA's fiction in Arabic. It is a story to shine a light on the reality of Palestine, while also showing young readers that Palestinian children have many of the same worries and desires as children anywhere else. The charismatic lead Ziad and his resourceful younger sister Najwa will inspire and charm young readers and leave them deeply invested in this compelling tale of a perilous journey into a mysterious forgotten world.

Sample translation

Translated from Arabic by Joseph Devine

At Qalandia checkpoint, Ziad waited on tenterhooks for their return from the hospital. As soon as they arrived, he hugged Salim and gave him a kiss. He gave Najwa an urgent look, his eyes asking her about the outcome of the appointment, but his mother's expression and Najwa's averted glance were all the answer he needed. He got in a taxi with them and, sensing they were all exhausted, asked the driver to take them straight home.

After Salim had gone to sleep, Ziad's mother had to excuse herself as she broke down in tears. "The doctor said Salim's condition is serious, and he needs an operation that's too expensive."

Najwa rubbed her mother's back, gave her a tissue to dry her eyes, and tried to calm her down.

"Don't worry, Mama, I'm sure there's a way for us to help Salim. The doctor has our phone number and he said he'll try his best."



Their great grandmother Sitti suddenly cried out, "Oh my! Mahmoud's in prison and his son's dying!"

"Don't speak like that, Sitti!" Um Ziad shouted. "Salim is not going to die. There's an operation that can save him, and he'll lead a normal life." She paused for a moment and then went on in a hushed voice. "But where will we get the money for it? What a nightmare." She started weeping again.

"Remember, Mama, didn't the doctor say that if we can pay for the tests, he'll try and find a way to pay for the operation?"

"Tell me, Najwa, how will we even pay for the tests? They're expensive, too."

"Simple!" shouted Sitti. "How about we sell my gold? There's ten gold bracelets, twenty-five gold liras, six rings, four gold chains, and..."

"For heaven's sake Sitti!" snapped Um Ziad. "When will we have enough of this story about the gold? You've been going on about it for years. If we had such treasures, then we wouldn't be living this miserable life. We'd have had the best lawyer for Mahmoud, Ziad would be on his way to university by now, and we'd have paid for the tests already. No, please, Sitti. Enough of this gold nonsense, it hurts my head."

Sitti drifted off, and a confused look came over her face, as if she were summoning a memory from the distant past. There was gold... she thought. Then, like a skipping record, she repeated, "Ten gold bracelets, twenty-five gold liras, six rings, four gold chains, and..."

She perked up after a few moments and continued, "I was a new bride, and Ismail was head of the household. Everyone in town respected him and valued his word. One day, he came home and called a meeting. He told us they'd received word that, two days earlier, Zionist militias had attacked the village of Deir Yassin, that they'd killed dozens of people and robbed their homes, and that they were heading our way. He said we'd all have to leave our village for a few days and then come back when the situation got better. Some of the women began wailing and hitting themselves, but Ismail shouted, in a voice that shook the house and made everyone as quiet as mice, and said..."

Suddenly, she went quiet. Then she turned to Ziad and said, "Ismail, tell them what you said!"

Everyone laughed as Ziad grabbed her hand and said, "Sitti, I'm Ziad, your great grandson."

"Oh goodness me, of course!" cried Sitti. "By the way, have I ever mentioned you're his spitting image?"



Um Ziad clapped her hands. "Oh, for heaven's sake, Sitti. What will become of us?"

That night, Ziad couldn't sleep. He couldn't stop thinking about everything Sitti had said. He'd heard the story of the gold dozens of times before, but he'd never paid it much attention, since Sitti was always confusing events and forgetting things. But today, it had made him stop and wonder. Why did Sitti still insist on this story? Why did she repeat such exact amounts of gold? "Ten gold bracelets, twenty-five gold liras, six rings, four gold chains, and..."

No one ever took her story seriously, but...what if it was true? What if all that gold really existed someplace, and Sitti was the only one who knew where? If he could find out where it was and get it back, then they'd be able to pay for Salim's operation, and he could finish school and go to university, and who knows what else...

"You're really clutching at straws here, Ziad," he told himself mockingly. "And even if the gold did exist, how would you find it? Is it even possible? They took over the whole country decades ago, so wherever it was left, surely someone would've found it by now? But then again, what if...?"

He stayed awake, tossing and turning in bed until the light of dawn crept in. That's when he made his decision to talk to Sitti in private, in the hope that she could tell him more.

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The next evening, after dinner, Ziad was able to talk to Sitti alone.

"Sitti, tell me about the gold. What's the story? Did it really exist or not?"

She replied with excitement. "Of course it did! Who says it didn't?"

"But whose gold was it? Tell me."

"It was mine of course," she said. "And it's my will and testament before God and his prophet that this gold should be given to the family of my grandson Mahmoud, oh how he weighs on my mind!" She began to pray, "May God, most capable and generous, accept him and grant him success, relieve him of his worries, and release him from prison."

"Inshallah, Sitti. Can you tell me more?"

Sitti looked around hesitantly, then said, "Okay, I'll tell you. But listen carefully, and don't tell anyone else. This is a secret between you, me, and your Jiddu Ismail."



"Don't worry Sitti, I won't tell."

"So, where was I?" she asked. "Oh, yes. Ismail had just told us about the slaughter at Deir Yassin. We were so scared, we were crying and wailing, because you know, Ziad, Deir Yassin was very close to our village of Lifta. But Ismail—God rest his soul—he was a tough man, and he quickly stopped all the fuss and came up with a plan. 'Enough tears! We must leave our homes and go to a safe place, far from these Zionist gangs. It won't be more than ten days or so before we'll be able to return. We've heard that the Arab armies are on their way to defend us. So don't take anything heavy or unnecessary. It's only for a few days. Do you understand?'"

"I understood, and so did my sisters-in-law: Safiya, Fatima, and Bahiya. We nodded and told him 'Yes!'... See, Ziad, back in those days, we all lived together in a big house for the extended family, and... Where was I?"

Ziad was afraid that she'd get distracted and drift off-topic. "Then what happened, what was Jiddu's plan?"

"Ah, yes!" she continued. "He looked at us, gave us an empty box, and said in a thunderous voice:

"Listen to me, all of you, and listen well. We've heard that these gangs have been looting all the abandoned homes and taking everything of value. So I need all of you to give me your gold. Put it in a bag, I'll write everyone's names on each bag, and we'll put them in this box, which I'll bury somewhere safe. Don't worry, not even the Blue Djinn will find it! Everyone will get their gold back when we return after all this violence. I promise you all, and you know I always keep my word."

"Your Jiddu, may he rest in peace, was famous in the town for being trustworthy, all the merchants said his word was better than any legal document, that he was always kept a promise and gave everyone what they were due. Everyone used to say, 'This free man keeps his word'..."

Ziad began to feel that there might be some truth in Sitti's story after all. He pressed her to keep going. "And what happened next, Sitti?"

"What happened?" she asked. "They stole Palestine and made us all refugees, that's what happened! Enough, Ziad. I'm tired and need to sleep for a while. Get me my blanket."