

## Chapter 1

# The herders

It is a cold morning in May. Ariuna sits on a brown horse. Her father, Orda, and her brother, Tuli, are on horses too. Orda is on a brown and white horse. Tuli's horse is black. In front of them is a flock of sheep.

Orda points to a hill. 'We're going to take the sheep to that hill today,' he says. 'The grass there is good. Ariuna, you ride here, on this side of the flock. And Tuli, you ride there, on that side. I'm going to ride behind them.'

The three riders go to their places. The sheep are between them.

Then Orda shouts, 'Ya! Move!'

'Go! Go! Come on, move!' shout Ariuna and Tuli.

The sheep move. The three riders herd them to the hill.

Ariuna is eleven. Tuli is thirteen. They live in Mongolia. Ariuna and her family are herders. They have ninety sheep. They live in the country near the town of Hatgal. Ariuna likes living in the country. She goes to school in Hatgal. But she likes working with her brother and father. She likes riding horses and herding sheep.

The sheep are eating grass on the hill. Orda says, 'Good work. Now – breakfast.'

Ariuna's family lives in a ger. A ger is a big round tent. Ariuna, Tuli and Orda ride to their ger. The children's mother, Suren, is working there.

'Good, you're here,' Suren says. 'Breakfast is ready.'

Suren gives them sheep's cheese and hot tea. They



always have sheep's cheese for breakfast. They sit and eat.

'Tuli, the Naadam Games are soon,' says Orda. 'Are you going to ride in the horse race again this year?'

'Yes. I ride in it every year. And the black horse is fast.'

Every July, lots of people come to Hatgal for the Naadam Games. Lots of towns in Mongolia have Naadam Games. All the people like watching the horse race. It is a long race across the country. It is thirty kilometres long. And all the riders are children.

'Our black horse is going to win the race,' says Tuli.

'They have a good name for the winner – the First of Ten Thousand Horses,' says Ariuna.

'That's going to be our horse this year,' says Tuli. 'The First of Ten Thousand Horses!'

'And its rider gets a drink of horse's milk,' says Ariuna.

'Yes, and this year it's for me!' says Tuli.

'The Naadam is in July,' says Orda. 'That's two months from now. You have to train the horse. It has to be fast.'

'But the black horse is fast now,' says Tuli.

'It's not ready for a long race,' says Suren. 'You have to train the horse for the race.'

'It is ready,' says Tuli. 'Watch me ride.'

He jumps up, goes out to the horses and rides the black horse across the grass. Orda, Suren and Ariuna watch.

'He is a good rider,' says Ariuna.

But then the horse stops. Tuli falls to the ground.

'Oh, no! Tuli!' shouts Suren.

They run to him.

'Are you all right?' asks Suren.

'My hand is hurt,' says Tuli. He has blood on his hand. Orda goes to the horse and takes its reins. The horse is



not happy.

‘What is it?’ says Ariuna. ‘Is the horse all right?’

‘No. Its foot is hurt,’ says Orda. He holds one of the horse’s feet in his hands. He looks at it. The horse has a stone in its foot. Orda takes it out.

‘This stone is sharp,’ he says. ‘Look. The horse has blood on its foot.’

Ariuna holds the horse’s reins. They take the horse back to the ger. Orda puts a bandage on its foot. The family sits in the ger. Suren puts a bandage on Tuli’s hand.

‘This is not good,’ says Orda. ‘The black horse cannot go in the Naadam race.’

‘What?’ says Tuli.

‘That horse works for us, Tuli. It has to rest and get better. It has to rest for one or two months. Then it can work for us again. It cannot go in the race. And look at your hand, boy. You can’t ride. You have to get better too.’

‘But we always go in the Naadam race!’

‘No, Tuli.’

Tuli is not happy. He doesn’t speak.

Then Ariuna says, ‘I can ride the brown horse in the race.’

‘You?’ says Tuli.

‘Yes.’

‘But the brown horse isn’t fast,’ says Tuli. ‘It can’t win. The black horse is the fast horse.’

‘Yes, but the brown horse is *strong*,’ says Ariuna. She looks at her father and mother. ‘Can I?’

Orda looks at Suren. Suren smiles.

Orda says, ‘Yes, Ariuna. You can go in the Naadam. You can ride the brown horse.’

Ariuna smiles and says, ‘Thank you.’

‘But Ariuna,’ says Orda, ‘you have to train the horse. Ride it every day. The horse has to be strong *and* fast. You have two months.’