

A Readers Theater adaptation of Janet Schulman's *Pale Male*.

by Dorcas Hand, January, 2009

©*Pale Male: Citizen Hawk of New York City* by Janet Schulman, Knopf, 2008.

Characters

Narrator 1

Narrator 2

Narrator 3

Narrator 4

Narrator 5

Narrator 1: One crisp autumn day in 1991, a red-tailed hawk flew across the Hudson River from New Jersey. He flew over smokestacks, skyscrapers, and ant-like traffic to a rectangular oasis smack in the center of New York City.

Narrator 2: The hawk soared above Central Park. He surveyed the trees, the small lakes, the tall buildings on all four sides. And with his keen hawk vision, he spotted lunch – so many plump pigeons and rats and squirrels.

Narrator 3: Red tailed hawks often stop for a few days and sometimes spend the winter in Central Park, but they are shy birds and eventually fly away to quiet farmlands or wooded mountains.

Narrator 4: This bird was different. He liked what he saw and he stayed.

Narrator 5: Birdwatchers in Central Park liked what they saw, too. A spectacular red-tailed hawk! He loomed large in the sky with a wingspan of four feet.

Narrator 3: And his unusual coloring – beige rather than dark brown, with breast and belly feathers nearly pure white – made him easy to track.

Narrator 2: The birdwatchers named him Pale Male and kept notes on him daily. Pale Male hung around the PARK THE WAY A TEENAGER HANGS OUT AT THE MALL. He dive bombed tasty pigeons and rats at their litter can snack bars.

Narrator 4: He chased after ducks and was spotted terrorizing squirrels, seemingly just for the fun of it. As red-tailed hawks go, he *was* a teenager. His brown tail feathers gave it away. These hawks don't get their distinctive reddish brown tail feathers until they are mature, about two years old.

Narrator 1: Pale Male thrived in his new home. And the birders were thrilled when he began courting another redtail. Day after day they performed an aerial ballet of circling and swooping in unison over the park until, young as he was, Pale Male won her as his mate.

Narrator 3: In March, the two hawks began building a nest in a tree near a baseball diamond on the Great Lawn. This was the first time that hawks had nested in the park since it opened in 1858.

Narrator 5: But Pale Male and his mate were inexperienced builders. Their nest fell apart a month later.

Narrator 1: Undaunted, the two hawks immediately began building another nest in a tree near East 70th Street. This time it was not poor construction but location that did them in. The tree they chose had housed a crows' nest the year before. Crows are the natural enemies of hawks, and the crows of Central Park responded with unusual ferocity when they saw hawks nesting in "their" tree.

Narrator 2: Flocks of screaming black birds harassed the two hawks every time they left their nest. Finally, Pale Male's Mate became so disoriented that she slammed into a high-rise at East 73rd Street. Witnesses called the Audubon Society. Her wing was badly broken, and she was taken to a hawk rescue center in New Jersey.

Narrator 3: The birdwatchers wondered what would happen to Pale Male now. They waited and watched, and the following winter Pale Male, now sporting a flashy red tail, found a new mate. In March, they began building a nest.

Narrator 4: This nest would be different. This time Pale Male moved his residence to a ledge above a top-floor window at 927 Fifth Avenue, one of New York City's most exclusive apartment buildings.

Narrator 5: Bird experts had never heard of a red-tailed hawk with its nest on a building in the center of a bustling city. Maybe Pale Male wasn't too smart.

Narrator 4: But soon they saw that this bird was actually very smart. Metal spikes had been embedded in the ledge above the window to keep pigeons away. By forcing sticks and branches between these spikes, the hawks made a nest that could withstand hurricane winds.

Narrator 3: An ornate cornice hanging over the ledge provided protection from the elements. The building was just across the street from some of Pale Male's favorite hunting grounds. And the view of the park from the twelfth floor was spectacular.

Narrator 2: New Yorkers couldn't ask for a better address. Neither could Pale Male.

Narrator 1: Do Pale Male and his mate manage to raise fledglings? Read *Pale Male, Citizen Hawk of New York City* and you will find the answer to this question.