

## **BISHTE BROOR**

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“I meowed, and she yelled at me. What disrespect?!” said *Dulmut*, a stout, fluffy grey cat. He was used to surveying the village during post-lunch or dinner times in search of food. Sometimes he would be lucky enough to get something satisfactory and delicious as the remains of someone’s celebratory feast. Other times he would have to eat *hukh bate* or pieces of *girda*, which he felt derogatory. He called himself the direct descendant of *Bishte Broor*, a royal cat. In the community of cats, *Bishte* was considered no less than a godly figure due to the many legends of his trickery and clever mind. Many cats looked upon him, and *Dulmut* used his popularity to declare himself as the king of the cat community.

*Dulmut* turned to his side as he lay under the shade of a walnut tree. He stretched and said, “I must teach that lady a lesson. She dares disrespect me! Her audacity!”

*Tameezdar*, his apprentice, a young black cat, replied, “Master, we should let it be. She did not know you were a respected figure. If she did, she would have shown you respect.”

But *Dulmut* was adamant about avenging himself. He planned to sneak into the lady’s house and create havoc, but *Tameezdar* was strictly against invading human territory.

Rumours had been that a human killed the Great *Bishte Broor* after he tried to enter the human’s house. From there on, entering the human house was considered a dangerous and deadly mission that only the bravest took and brought stories of the unseen and unheard.

Cats were strictly advised not to enter the house in the presence of The Lady. The Lady, or as the humans would refer to as *Ded*, was an old lady, the matriarch of the house, who would spend most of her time working in the kitchen or the kitchen garden. It was said that once someone entered her home, she would raise her broom to scare the cat. She would growl and say some sort of spell that drove the cat out of the house. But it was also noted that not all would treat the cats like this. If, as a cat, you had done a good deed, the Great *Bishte Broor* would bless you, and you could find a house where The Lady would give you leftovers and milk.

Nevertheless, entering the human house was forbidden. *Dulmut*, however, took pride in himself and was not scared of entering the lady’s house. If his ancestor,

*Bishte Broor*, could enter the human territory, he too could. He was ready to face the broom and the spell, which interestingly had the word *Bishte* in it. He got up and sat gallantly. He looked beyond the sky and said, “*Tameezdar*, today is the day that I end the tyranny of The Lady!”

*Tameezdar* gulped in fear. He was scared and stuttered in his response, “But.....but master, it is too dangerous. Barely anyone survives The Lady.”

*Dulmut* looked at him suspiciously, “Do you not believe in me?”

“I.....I do. I do, master.” *Tameezdar*, however, did not believe. He was also scared, for he knew he would have to go with his master on the perilous journey from where he would not return. He had never faced a human and relied on stories from other cats to know about them. He suggested they took two or three more cats to keep himself safe, and *Dulmut* vehemently agreed.

So, the news of *Dulmut*'s plan to rebel against The Lady spread like wildfire in the cat community. All cats gathered near the walnut tree to discuss the information and consider various scenarios.

“He will die. He sure will die. Oh, poor *Dulmut*! He will be remembered!” said one cat to his friend.

*Dulmut* settled into his place while the cats whispered, and then he began speaking. His speech was seen as his last words of valour. The community had concluded that he would die in such peril and didn't even have an heir. It was bad news because that would mean *Bishte Broor*'s lineage would end if *Dulmut*'s speculations were to go by.

“My Dear brothers and sisters. I have decided to rebel against the tyranny of The Lady. It is known to all what we suffered through because of The Lady, and she killed our great lord *Bishte Broor*, my ancestor. I have decided to take revenge on her for all of us and our respect. But I shall not be alone to fight. *Tameezdar*, too, shall join me in this journey.”

The cats began whispering again, “Poor *Tameezdar*! He is too young to die.” “I had considered marrying him to my daughter *Sharmdar*.” “*Dulmut* is leading him to death!”

“Hush. Let me say more. If any of you who are as brave as me want to join, please do. It is a fight for all of us and not just me.”

There was silence. *Tameezdar* crossed his tail in the hope that someone would volunteer. And his hopes came true. Three cats, two grey and one orange, came forward after a moment of silence to volunteer. The rest hooted for their bravery.

“Thank you for joining us. Your bravery shall be awarded.”

And so, the team was wished luck and given blessings. They decided to plan and leave for the house the day after tomorrow. Before the day of the invasion, two of the cats surveyed the house to see possible points to sneak in. There they saw that

many humans had gathered. Many of them were ladies, much younger than The Lady. Some sort of celebration was taking place. The house was decorated, and the ladies were singing *wanawun*.

“It must be marriage,” one of the cats suggested.

The other nodded in agreement. It was a marriage function. The Lady’s daughter was to get married. By the calculation of the cats, the actual ceremony would take place on the day of their invasion. That was a huge problem. Many humans would gather, and the house would be crowded, meaning the five cats would have no chance of surviving.

Despite the day of the invasion being a dangerous day, the team went ahead with their plan. At the stroke of dawn, they began the preparations. The rest of the community came to see them off. As they began marching through the paddy fields to enter the village, the cats behind chanted blessings and wishes. The word had spread, and all the domestic and stray animals came to see the cats off to march on a journey of valour. *Dulmut*, *Tameezdar* and the other three would now go down oral narrations and legends as cats who rebelled against The Lady. They would become an example of bravery and valour.

As they arrived at the house, they saw cars parked outside and guests entering. The main door of the house that would usually be closed was open. So, the cats could easily sneak in from there. The house was surrounded by high-raised brick walls with sharp objects at the top to stop burglars from entering.

Children were running around in *kurta*, *jaamas* and other casual dresses. They were playing while the adults were doing the preparations and attending to guests. One of the children saw *Tameezdar* and yelled, “*Bhiste!*”

*Tameezdar* quickly hid behind a car. “They have taught the children this spell too. What devilry are they brewing?!”

The team assembled under a white car, and *Dulmut* spoke, “We shall enter in with the influx of guests so no one notices us, and then we will first attack the *waza* and his men. Then we will enter the house and attack The Lady.”

*Tameezdar* asked in response, “Who is *Waza*?”

*Dulmut* answered, “You will know, my apprentice, you will know. He is a man as hard and tyrannical as The Lady. He works in alliance with her. Occasionally you can get lucky that he won’t hurt you, but most times, he uses the spell.”

So, the cats preyed upon their moment to enter the territory. While the other four were excited and ready, *Tameezdar* was sweating out of fear. He had never invaded the humans’ houses and would only eat from trash or catch unexpected mice. The crowd of humans present there was overwhelming for him.

When chance arrived, they pounced, wasting no time. They entered behind the crowd of guests swarming the house and made their way under the shadow of one of the *shamianah*.

“The *waza* must be in the back of the house. I can smell it,” *Dulmut* said.

The others meowed in agreement. They crept across the tents following the smell of the *wazwan*. While the other four bravely made their way, *Tameezdar* hesitated with every step as they closed in on the *waza*. Eventually, *Tameezdar* felt he could not go on anymore and ran away from the other four. Others didn't notice that he had fled.

As *Tameezdar* was running, he found himself caught among many humans. Scared as they began saying the spell on him, he jumped from a window into the house.

While this was happening, *Dulmut* and the other three reached the *waza*. He prepared to jump on the *waza* to bite him in the neck. But he missed his aim and landed on the *wur'r*. He escaped with minor burns, “They have put traps for us!”

While this was happening, *Tameezdar* had landed himself in the room where the bride was getting ready. The room was filled with young ladies and some older women. They were startled by the unexpected guest. He was horrified and froze at that instance.

However, to his surprise, the women calmly tried to lead him out of the room instead of saying the spell, assuming he had accidentally brought himself in. Those who did say the spell said it in a soft tone.

“Do give him something to eat.” *Tameezdar* heard the bride say.

The war was not yet lost for *Dulmut*, as he planned to charge again. He growled at the *waza* and went for his leg. There he got caught in the legs of men only to get nearly crushed by *takebtaa te goshtperr*. He retreated to take a breath as the other three motivated him.

Then one of the cats urgently whispered, “The Lady is here. We are dead!”

*Dulmut* sat upright and licked his paws to show he was not scared of The Lady or *Waza*.

The Lady calmly approached the *waza*. She told them something the cats could not overhear, and when she left, the cats followed her.

They stopped as more older women approached the Lady, and she told them, “Make sure the cats are fed. It is an auspicious day for my daughter. It will not be right to disrespect these creatures. The smell of the dishes probably drove them in. They may feed themselves at other times. Let us feed them today.”

And right after, the cats were led near a corner and given a bit of every dish that is part of *wazwan*. Once they were content, they finally met *Tameezdar*, and he

told them his account, “And to think I was going to die. They led me out peacefully and gave me a nice meal!”

At last, when the occasion ended, the Lady called at the cats, “*Bhiste! Bhiste!*”

The cats left without any feeling of hostility. They had brought a story different from the ones told before—a story of respect and care rather than disrespect and abuse.

*Dulmut* was now more aware of his shortcomings, and as he sat under the walnut tree talking to *Tameezdar*, he said, “I have been very blind to my surroundings. I have taken too much pride in myself, denying my identity. *Tameezdar*, remember, we are cats with sharp claws and teeth. It is not they but we who disrespect ourselves. We can feed ourselves but choose to depend on them.”

*Tameezdar* replied, “Yes, master. I understand.”

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## GLOSSARY

***Bishte:*** In Kashmiri, it is a word used to drive away the cat. The word has presumably originated from the legend of *Mahadev Bisht* who was a thief also known as the Robinhood of Kashmir. It was his clever style of burglary and mimicking of cat mew to confuse the people that gave him the nickname *Bishta*.

***Broor:*** Cat

***Ded:*** An affectionate way of referring to an elder lady. The word traces back to *Lal Ded* a 14<sup>th</sup> century Kashmiri mystic and poet.

***Dulmut:*** Someone who is not in their senses or who is deviated

***Girda:*** A circular bread made in traditional oven

***Goshtperr:*** Wooden hammer used for mincing mutton.

***Hukh Bate:*** It literally means cooked dry rice, where *hukh* means dry and *bate* means cooked rice.

***Jaama:*** A round dress

***Kurtas:*** A type of long shirt

***Shamianah:*** It is a ceremonial tent used in South Asia for social functions.

***Sharmdar:*** Someone who is shy and prudent

***Takhtaa:*** It is a log of wood used as a cutting board

***Te:*** and

***Tameezdar:*** Someone who has good values and habits

***Wanawun:*** Women singing in chorus at functions such as marriages.

***Waza:*** The master chef for cooking Kashmiri cuisines

***Wazwan:*** It is a multi-course meal with basic seven dishes which include *kabab, tabak maaz, aab gosh, rogan josh, yakebni, rista* and *goshtaba*.

**Wur'r:** A space chosen where bricks and stones are kept in a row lit with fire wood and used to cook various dishes simultaneously.