

# **GULBAKAAVLI: A FOLK TALE**

**TRANSLATED BY MARIETTA TARALRUD MADDRELL**

## CHAPTER 1: THE FLAW

Once upon a time, in a land far away to the East, there lived a king named Jait ul-Maluk. He was brave and warlike in defence of his people, yet carefree and kind. His four sons looked likely to surpass even their father in good qualities. Some time later, the king was blessed with another son, who was born on the night of the full moon.

The king celebrated with great joy and summoned the astrologer to prepare the child's birth horoscope. Carefully observing the stars and the planets, he named the child Taaz ul-Maluk. After pondering deeply, he declared that this child would be prosperous, generous, kind to the poor and extremely brave.

'However...' the astrologer hesitated. 'There is one flaw in this good fortune, O King. If you set eyes on this boy – if you see him – you will be struck blind.'

When he heard this, the joy in the king's heart became tinged with fear. He rewarded the astrologer generously and sent him away. Then he gave orders to his ministers to keep the boy and his mother in a far, distant palace; the king was careful never to go near it.

The years went by until Taaz ul-Maluk's princely education was complete and he had grown up, full of wisdom. One day, he went hunting and set his horse galloping in pursuit of a deer. It so happened that his father, the king, had gone hunting in the same forest. As soon as the king caught sight of the prince, the light of his eyes failed and he was struck blind.

'What happened?' asked his retinue, aghast.

The king replied, 'It is usual for the eyes of a father to light up at the sight of his son. Just the reverse has happened to me – what kind of dark magic is this?'

And the king gave orders to banish his son from the kingdom and for Taaz ul-Maluk's mother to be demoted to a servant. The king returned to his palace and the prince was exiled from the country.

King Jait ul-Maluk summoned the most distinguished eye specialists. They all agreed that there was only one possible cure.

'O King! If you can obtain the Bakaavli Flower, your eyesight will instantly be restored. This remedy cures even those blind from birth.'

'Send heralds and drummers all over the country!' commanded the king. 'Let them proclaim this message far and wide: Whoever brings me the Bakaavli Flower will be richly rewarded.'

The king lived in darkness and depression. Eager searchers went off; all returned empty-handed. There was not the least rumour of the Bakaavli Flower.

One day, the four sons of the king came respectfully before him and said, 'Royal Father, a good son is one who serves his mother and father and obeys their orders, becoming renowned in this world and in others. This being so, with your permission, we will set out together to find the Bakaavli Flower.'

'Losing my sight was one calamity,' said the king. 'Losing my sons would be another.'

The four princes pressed him politely until at last he gave way, allowed them to go, and ordered his minister to make preparations. The minister assembled

elephants, horses, chariots, an armed escort and all the necessary equipment. The four young men took leave of the king, set out and made their way to a distant land, where Taaz ul-Maluk, their banished younger brother, saw them. He asked a passer-by who they were and where they were going.

‘The king of Turqistan, their father, has become blind and they are searching for the only cure – the Bakaavli Flower,’ said the man.

Taaz ul-Maluk thought to himself, ‘Well, I too will try my luck. I will search for the Bakaavli Flower like my brothers and try to deliver my father from his misery.’

No sooner had he made this resolution than a rich gentleman appeared and greeted him courteously. Taaz ul-Maluk’s face glowed like a sunbeam and his figure was as striking as the moon sailing among monsoon clouds. Impressed, the gentleman asked, ‘Who are you and where have you come from?’

‘I am a poor wanderer, Sir,’ said Taaz ul-Maluk politely. ‘I have no friends or anyone to help me.’ The gentleman compassionately took the young man into his service and treated him well.

## CHAPTER 2: THE COURTESAN

The four princes travelled on and came one afternoon to the city of Firdoz. They sat down wearily by the riverside and decided to stay in the city for a few days. When the sun set and the moon rose, the four princes began to explore the city on horseback. A splendid mansion came into sight, with gold-embroidered curtains at the windows. A local man told them, 'This is the house of Dilawar the Courtesan.'

The four princes were very impressed. 'Even kings cannot live in such style! What a palace!'

When the local man added, 'This courtesan is famous for her beauty, which would put both the sun and the moon to shame,' the excitement of the four princes knew no bounds.

There was a kettledrum at the entrance to the mansion. 'Anyone who beats this drum will be greeted by the Lady Dilawar and invited in,' said the man. 'There is a saying hereabouts: *Who enters here will be powdered as fine / As grain between two grindstones.*'

But his words of warning were muffled by drumbeats as the four princes, dazzled by her wealth and the promise of her beauty, clamoured boldly for admission to the house of Dilawar the Courtesan.

When the courtesan heard the drum, she was very pleased and thanked God for sending her a guest. 'I hope he is rich and foolish,' she thought, putting on fine clothes, paints, powders and perfume. 'Very rich and foolish,' she mused as she put on her diamonds and rubies and other glittering gems. Then, as night fell, she

greeted the four princes and seated them on golden chairs. She sent for wine and drank with them.

‘A game of dice, with your permission, my lords?’ she suggested at midnight. The princes agreed.

This crafty lady placed a lamp on the head of her cat, staked a hundred thousand rupees and began to play. When day dawned and the moon set, the game came to an end and the four princes departed to their own lodgings, five million rupees poorer.

At sunset, the four princes came swaggering once more to the courtesan’s mansion and took their seats on the golden chairs. Maidservants set fifty-five different dishes of delicious food before them, served on platters of gold and silver. After the feast the four princes began gambling again, with an opening stake of a million rupees. In the flickering lamplight, the dice rattled and fell, rattled and fell, until the princes had lost all their wealth, chariots, horses, elephants and all.

‘What else do you have to stake?’ asked the courtesan, halting the game. ‘Show me, or go home.’

‘Either we will win back all the fortune we have lost,’ proposed the princes, ‘or, if we lose, we will become your slaves.’

When this had been agreed upon, the wily woman very soon won again. All their wealth was stored away in her treasury and the four princes were loaded with chains and shackles and locked up in her dungeon. As soon as they heard what had happened to their masters, the armed escort of the princes melted away.

## CHAPTER 3: GRANDMOTHER

Taaz ul-Maluk learned the fate of his brothers and resolved to do whatever he could to free them. Taking leave of his kind master, he went to the city of Firdoz. There he found the home of another rich gentleman and said to the servants at the gate, 'I am a stranger here. I have heard the good reputation of your master and hope he will take me into his service.'

The gatekeeper informed his master, who said, 'Bring him to me.'

When Taaz ul-Maluk stood before him, the rich man was charmed by his courtly demeanour and good looks. 'The glow on this stranger's face is brighter than the rays of the sun,' he thought in astonishment and took the young man into his service.

Taaz ul-Maluk served his new master well for several months and saved up his wages, until one day he asked, 'Sir, with your permission, I would like some free time in the afternoons to visit my friends.'

'Certainly, you may go,' said his master.

So every day Taaz ul-Maluk went to the gambling dens to learn the craft. When he felt that he had understood how to play well, he resolved to challenge the wily courtesan to a game and trust in God's protection. As he approached the courtesan's gateway, he noticed an old lady coming out and asked who she was.

'Ah, she is the power behind the throne,' said a man, smiling. 'That courtesan does nothing without consulting her.'

'Now is the time for a spot of playacting,' thought Taaz ul-Maluk. 'Maybe she will be of some help in my task.'

He went home and came again another day at the same time. When the old lady came out, he greeted her politely, then crouched down near her and began to cry.

'Who are you?' asked the old lady. 'And why are you sobbing like a mourner at a funeral?'

*'A wanderer am I, in this world of woe. / No friends, no family, nowhere to go,'* Taaz ul-Maluk quoted an old song, raising his beautiful tear-stained face to the old lady. 'I am a foreigner. There is no one but God to help me. My home is far away to the East. I had a dear grandmother there, who died. She looked just like you. If you take pity on my distress, I will serve you well, as if you were my dear granny.'

He softened her heart with these lying words until she said, 'Well, young man, I too have nobody in the world. From now on, you can be my grandson and I will be your granny.'

'I have to serve my master as well,' Taaz ul-Maluk explained, 'so I will not be able to come and see you every day.'

'Never mind,' said the old lady. 'Come whenever you can.'

Although he had warned her that he would not be able to visit her every day, Taaz ul-Maluk still made a point of coming every afternoon in his free time and doing all he could to take care of her. One day, as part of his plan, the prince brought some money and said, 'Grandmother, keep this money and if you need anything, spend it.'



'Bless you, my boy!' she exclaimed. 'What would I do with your money? By the grace of God I have everything I need in my home. I do not need anything at all. If you should need anything, dear grandson, then all that I have is yours to spend as you wish.'

Then Taaz ul-Maluk knew she felt very kindly towards him.

Another day, he said casually, 'You know that courtesan gambles and nobody else ever wins. Why is this, Granny?'

'It's a secret, my boy,' she replied. 'Don't tell anybody. If the secret gets out, I will have no place to stay.'

'You need not worry about that, Granny. Would I hit my own foot with a hammer on purpose?'

'Come closer, my boy,' said the old lady in a low voice. 'Dilawar has a pet cat and a pet mouse. She has trained them to help her. The cat balances a lamp on its head and the mouse hides in the shadows. When the dice are not in her favour, the cat shakes the lamp. In the flickering light, the mouse darts out and turns over the dice so that she wins again. That is how everyone else loses. So far nobody has ever noticed the trick and they all go away shamefaced.'

## CHAPTER 4: TO THE RESCUE

Acting on this information, Taaz ul-Maluk went to the bazaar and bought a baby mongoose. He trained it to jump out of his pocket when he snapped his fingers. When the mongoose was well trained, Taaz ul-Maluk went to the old lady one day with a discontented expression on his handsome face.

‘What is the matter, dear boy?’ she asked.

‘I am tired of my job, Granny,’ he lied. ‘I don’t enjoy it any more. If you will give me a thousand rupees I will start my own business.’

The old lady willingly unlocked the chest where she kept her money. ‘It is all yours. Take as much as you like.’

So the prince took a thousand rupees and went to his master.

‘My Lord,’ he began courteously. ‘One of my friends is getting married. If I had some good clothes, I could sit in style among my friends.’ His master gave him a fine suit of clothes and offered, ‘Take any horse you like from the stables.’

Taaz ul-Maluk chose a steed and rode to the mansion of Dilawar the Courtesan. The courtesan was thrilled by his splendid appearance and hastened to welcome him.

‘My Lady, you are well known for the hardship you cause to strangers to this city,’ Taaz ul-Maluk began, tempering his words with a dazzling smile. ‘We have not met before. I am in the service of the Lord of Firdoz. *Now I too have come to see / What gift of grief you have for me!*’

The courtesan gave him a golden seat and sat down beside him. When the sun set and the moon rose, the prince mentioned casually, 'I have heard that you are a very skilful gambler, My Lady. Come on, let us have a game.'

At first, she demurred, then, calling for the dice, she put down a stake of a hundred thousand rupees, as was her custom, and began to play. The prince deliberately lost the first round. She won with the help of the cat and the mouse.

When the dice rolled again, the cat shook its head and the mouse darted out to turn them over to the courtesan's advantage. Then Taaz ul-Maluk snapped his fingers and the little mongoose popped out of his pocket. At the sight of it, the mouse ran away and hid; the cat, also alarmed, put down the lamp and disappeared.

'Don't you have a lampstand?' asked the prince.

Embarrassed, Dilawar placed the lamp on a jewelled stand and continued the game. Taaz ul-Maluk won seventy million rupees that night.

When day dawned, the prince took his leave. 'Now I must go and serve my master.' He left all his winnings for the following night's game.

When his day's work was over, Taaz ul-Maluk arrived in the evening on a horse swift as the wind. The courtesan gave him a jewel-studded seat. When they had finished their meal, she laid a stake of ten million rupees and began to play. By midnight, this experienced gambler had lost about a thousand million rupees.

'What on earth is happening?' she wondered, astounded. 'Has my luck run out at last? I have lost so much... And what is even more curious - I am enjoying the sensation of yielding to this handsome stranger.'

‘Now you have nothing left,’ said Taaz ul-Maluk, ‘and the night is only half over. Just to pass the time, why not stake those princes of the East and West whom you have locked up? If you win, I will give you money. If I win, I will take all the princes.’

The stake was agreed to, and in no time Taaz ul-Maluk had won again.

The courtesan said to the prince, ‘This time, here is my stake: if I win, I get back everything I have lost. If I lose, I will become your slave.’ The prince’s luck was shining like a lamp and he won this stake as well.

Then Dilawar the Courtesan rose to her feet and said with quiet dignity, ‘By the will of God, I am now merely one of your slaves – I, for whom so many princes have lost their wits, their liberty and all their possessions, yet I never yielded to any of them. It is your good fortune that this house is now yours. Live here and be happy.’

## CHAPTER 5: QUEST

'No, I cannot stay here now,' said Taaz ul-Maluk. 'I am on an important and difficult quest. If it is the will of God, we will meet again after that task is accomplished. This is what you have to do: you must obey me for twelve years, abandon your courtesan ways and lead an honest, God-fearing life.'

'You are young and great sufferings are ahead of you,' she said. 'You are not ready to go yet. Tell me what you have to do. Take me with you. This house will feel like a prison without you now.'

And she pestered him to reveal his quest until at last the prince said, 'My name is Taaz ul-Maluk. I am the son of Jait ul-Maluk, king of Turqistan. By the will of God, my father has been struck blind. Doctors can do nothing to help him – they all say there is only one cure: the Bakaavli Flower. My four brothers – who are now languishing in your dungeons – set out to find the Bakaavli Flower. And so did I. They were ensnared in your wiles, but I managed to defeat you by hundreds of lies. Now I must go on to find the Bakaavli Flower or perish in the attempt.'

'O Prince! What have you set your heart on? Nobody can reach that place. Listen: the king of the Bakaavli Pari has a daughter, Gulbakaavli. This flower is in her garden, so secluded that not even the sun can look in over the boundary walls. It is guarded by thousands of magical creatures. There is not a single being that has the power to get in without permission. Numberless Pari hover in the breeze above the garden, so not even a bird can get in. Snakes and scorpions patrol the ground, so nobody can get in by tunnelling. O Prince! You had better not try. Don't put your hand in the fire. You can only die once, but don't jump into the python's mouth.'

'True,' agreed Taaz ul-Maluk. 'May God protect me from these dangers. I trust in the love of God. *With the blessing of God / None can afflict me, / All treat me as a friend, / No evil can befall me...* My body may be slight but brain is better than brawn. Have you heard the story of the Brahmin and the Lion?'

*A Brahmin was walking in the jungle and what did he see but a lion, tied up with stout ropes and locked in a cage. 'O Sir!' said the lion. 'If you set me free from this prison I will do all I can to help you.' The foolish Brahmin took pity on the lion, not realising how dangerous it was or that its words should not be trusted. He opened the door of the cage and unbound the lion's four legs quite easily. The lion came out, seized the Brahmin and carried him away on its back. 'Hey, lion!' protested the Brahmin. 'Is this the reward for my kindness to you? I set you free – you captured me! I did you good and you repay me with evil.'*

*'The coin of good has evil on its reverse,' said the lion. 'If you do not believe me, let's ask somebody else.'*

*'Yes, let's do that,' agreed the Brahmin.*

*They went on and came to a banyan tree in the forest. They stopped under its shade and the lion asked the banyan tree, 'Do a good deed and in return, the one you helped will do you harm. This is a law of nature, isn't it, banyan tree?'*

*'Quite true,' said the banyan tree promptly. 'Evil repays good. Look, here I stand, just a step away from the track, giving shade and rest to all passers-by. But when they leave, they are sure to break off one of my branches for a walking stick! Isn't that repaying good with evil?'*

*'Well, Brahmin,' said the lion, 'now what do you say?'*

*'Let's ask somebody else,' replied the Brahmin.*

*The lion went on a little further and asked the path, 'Do a good deed and in return, the one you helped will do you harm. Is that so, path?'*

*'Quite true,' said the path. 'Look, when travellers lose their way they are very upset, but when they find me again, they walk along quite unconcerned and throw all kinds of rubbish and filth on me.'*

*'Well, Brahmin?'*

*'Let's ask somebody else.'*

*They went on a little further and a jackal came into sight. The jackal ran away when it saw the lion.*

*'Don't be afraid!' called the lion. 'We want to ask you a question.'*

*'If you have anything to say, say it from a distance,' replied the jackal. 'I feel quite faint at the sight of you.'*

*'Do a good deed and in return, the one you helped will do you harm. This Brahmin did me a good turn and I want to do him harm. What do you say, jackal?'*

*'This is a very big question, too hard for me,' said the jackal. 'How could a mere man have the strength to do a good turn to someone as huge as you? I couldn't believe it unless I saw it with my own eyes.'*

*'We'll show you,' said the lion.*

*With the Brahmin in front and the jackal behind, it retraced its steps and was soon back at the cage.*

*'The lion was tied up inside the cage,' the Brahmin explained. 'I opened it. Now what do you say?'*

*'How could such a huge body fit into this cage?' said the jackal. 'Put the lion inside again and tie him up just as before, so I can see it and make up my mind.'*

*The lion went into the cage. The Brahmin tied up its legs.*

*'If anything is at all different from the way it was before, I can't give you an answer.'*

*Heeding the jackal's words, the Brahmin tied the lion up very tightly, locked the cage door and said, 'Look, brother jackal, it was tied up just like this!'*

*'You must have feathers instead of brains in your head to be kind to a brute like this,' said the jackal. 'You certainly hit your own foot with the hammer. Whatever came over you to set your enemy free from the cage? Now, off you go!'*

*The Brahmin went away, leaving the lion back in the cage as before.*

Taaz ul-Maluk smiled at Dilawar.

'Brain is better than brawn,' he repeated. 'And another thing – you will have to set the Princes of the East and West free from your prison, and God will save you from the sufferings of hell. But do not release them yet. Wait till I come back. Now I must leave and fulfil my quest.'

Dilawar wept.



'Remember everything I have told you,' she said. 'You are a prince and you wish to help your father regain his sight. But the world is deceitful. Tread warily as you go about your quest.'

## CHAPTER 6: DJINN

Taaz ul-Maluk disguised himself as a fakir, a wandering mendicant, and went on his way, with firm faith in God. After some time he reached a land where everyone was blind, so there was no difference between day and night.

'O God,' Taaz ul-Maluk prayed, 'help me through this land of suffering with a peaceful heart. May all come out according to your will.' Then, feeling stronger, he thought, 'How can the pearl-diver get any pearls if he fears the crocodile?'

So, on he went into a wilderness where thorns pierced him at every step. Flinching, miserable, he sighed, 'O God, what will become of me? This forest is full of jackals and pythons with mouths agape from hunger and thirst.'

As the prince wandered here and there he was scratched from head to foot by thorns. He escaped from the tangle-wood with the greatest difficulty and gave fervent thanks to God.

A mountain appeared ahead of him. When Taaz ul-Maluk came nearer, he saw that it was not a mountain but a huge djinn, whose body stretched from earth to sky.

'Thanks be to God,' boomed the djinn in a voice of thunder, 'who sends food even to those who sit and wait for it!' Then he added mockingly to the prince, 'Hey, you! Was your life in the city so terrible that you are throwing your youth into the jaws of death?'

Taaz ul-Maluk, pale and trembling in fear of him, replied, 'O Djinn, what can I say? How long must I endure on this earth? If my life was dear to me, why would I be

trapped in the cage of death? Now life is so full of suffering that each moment seems as long as a year. If you kill me I will escape this suffering.'

The djinn was touched to the heart. 'May Solomon be my witness,' he swore. 'I will not do you any harm, human. Instead I will help you as much as I can.'

As they went on together, the djinn asked Taaz ul-Maluk, 'What sort of food do you eat?'

'Humans eat butter, sugar and flour,' the prince began, and listed more foodstuffs.

As soon as he heard this, the djinn conjured up a camel, laden with butter, sugar, flour and other things. 'Here you are, eat!'

So now Taaz ul-Maluk could cook good meals every day.

One day, the prince took a large quantity of dry fruit, mixed it with butter and sugar and ground the mixture thoroughly with his hands and feet on a rock. Then he made a fire of dry sticks and cooked *puranpuri* – sweet stuffed chapattis.

'Why are you giving yourself so much trouble?' asked the djinn.

'You have given all these provisions,' said Taaz ul-Maluk. 'Please eat a little too.'

The djinn cautiously tasted human food.

'I have never, ever, eaten anything so delicious!' he exclaimed, jumped for joy and began to eat heartily.

'O human, you have given me food such as no djinn has ever eaten before. I will be in your debt all my life.'

Seeing how pleased the djinn was, the prince cooked new dishes for him every day. One day, the contented djinn declared, 'My whole body is forever in your debt, but so far I have done nothing to help you. If you have anything special in mind, I will do it for you.'

'Excuse me saying so,' Taaz ul-Maluk replied politely, 'but I have heard that djinn are all liars whose word cannot be relied on. If you will swear by Solomon, I will tell you.'

The djinn hesitated. 'I am afraid I may not be able to do what you want me to...' But at last he took the oath and asked, 'What is it?'

'I have been searching for the Bakaavli Flower for a long time. Please take me to it.'

On hearing this, the djinn groaned, beat his brow and fainted away. When he revived, he sighed, lamented and swelled to an enormous size.

'O human! God forbid that I should be an instrument of your death! Let me rather meet death at your hands. Listen: the King of the Pari has a daughter, Gulbakaavli. The Bakaavli Flower is in her garden. At least eighteen thousand supernatural beings are in her service. They all guard her, surrounding the palace so no one can come anywhere near it. Pari hover above so that not even a bird can fly into the garden. Underground the King of the Mice keeps his vast army on the alert. Snakes and scorpions are so vigilant that no one can tunnel in. So how can I take you there? It is beyond my powers...' The djinn became silent, deep in

thought, then he said, 'At least I will try. It may possibly work out. Cook me one of your splendid meals today.'

The prince made haste to prepare a feast. When all the dishes were ready, he said, 'Your meal is served.'

Then the djinn gave a loud thundering shout and another djinn appeared. They greeted each other and sat down. Then the second djinn noticed Taaz ul-Maluk. The prince also greeted him. Returning his greeting, the newcomer looked most surprised and said to the other djinn, 'Well, well, brother, this is an amazing sight – a djinn and a human keeping company! I have never, ever, seen or heard of both sitting together like this. What is this all about?'

'This human has made me very happy. I couldn't possibly do him any harm. I called you so that you too can share the benefit of his skill and hard work and be happy,' said his host.

Then the feast was set before the newcomer, who enjoyed it all so much that he began to dance. When the meal was over, the contented guest enquired, 'Do you have anything special to do for this human?'

'Yes, I do,' replied the host djinn. 'He has asked me to do something very difficult, in fact, quite beyond my powers. If you help me, it may possibly be managed.'

'What is this terribly hard task that even you are not able to do, my friend?'

'He wants to go to the Land of the Bakaavli Flower. I swore by Solomon to help him in his quest. If you can give me any help you will save my life. Otherwise I will not be able to fulfil my vow and I will lose my life. Please do something!'

'I have a sister called Parvata,' his guest replied. 'She has eighteen thousand spirits at her command and her companion is a djinn who guards the Bakaavli Flower. I will certainly write her a letter, explaining that I have a problem which can't be solved without her aid. I will say that this human has been like a son to me for some time, and I am sending him as I can't leave my house empty to go on this mission.'

He wrote the letter, concluding, 'Please take care that not the least trouble befalls him'. He gave the letter to a messenger djinn and gestured to Taaz ul-Maluk. 'Go with him. I have done all I can to send you in the right direction. Now, if your luck holds, the task will surely be accomplished.'

He lifted Taaz ul-Maluk onto the shoulder of the messenger djinn, who raised his right hand to shade the prince. Off they went, and the giant strides of the djinn easily brought them into sight of Parvata's home. The djinn hailed Parvata from afar.

The huge woman was delighted to see the prince and the messenger, saying, 'If my brother had sent me some rare and costly medicine or the jewellery of the gods, I would not be as pleased as I am at your coming.'

She opened and read the letter and wrote in reply, 'One day I went to the city. There I found a human princess. I named her Mahmuda and brought her up as my own daughter. She is fourteen years old. The Lord surely sent this human to be married to her. Now I can fulfil that responsibility.'

She gave the letter to the messenger and bade him farewell. Then she arranged the marriage ceremony of Mahmuda and Taaz ul-Maluk.

## CHAPTER 7: DESIRE

Taaz ul-Maluk lived with Mahmuda for many days but the secret quest locked in his heart kept him from fully enjoying her company.

One evening as night fell, Mahmuda said to her husband, 'It is the nature of man to sleep with his wife, not to stay apart and wake up every morning just as before.'

'Quite true, this is indeed the nature and pleasure of man,' agreed Taaz ul-Maluk, 'but worldly pleasures have no attraction for me at present. I am under a vow to abstain from them and not become close to anyone until my quest is completed.'

'What is it?' Mahmuda was eager to know.

The prince's voice betrayed agitation as he replied, 'I want to go to the Land of the Bakaavli Flower.'

'Set your mind at rest,' said Mahmuda calmly. 'If it be the will of God, I shall untie this knotty problem tomorrow, and set you on the way to the Land of the Bakaavli Flower.'

When the moon had set and morning light flooded their bedroom, Parvata called the young couple outside and, seating them on her massive knees, began to pet them affectionately.

'Mother,' Mahmuda began very respectfully, 'there is something I want to tell you, if I may.'

'Speak freely,' said Parvata, smiling.

‘The prince of my heart wishes to go to the Land of the Bakaavli Flower,’ said Mahmuda. ‘Please do all you can to help him get there.’

Parvata’s smile faded. She gave all sorts of excuses until at last she realised that, whatever the dangers and difficulties, Taaz ul-Maluk’s heart was firmly set on going.

‘I will get you there,’ she said, giving in.

Parvata sent for the King of the Mice and commanded, ‘Just this once, make a tunnel through to the Bakaavli Flower Garden and take this prince there on your back. But be most careful and don’t let him down from your back.’

The King of the Mice obeyed. At the end of a long dark tunnel, they stopped. The mouse would not let Taaz ul-Maluk dismount and wanted to turn round and go straight back.

‘If you don’t let me into the garden, it will be the worse for you,’ Taaz ul-Maluk threatened. ‘I will certainly kill you in one way or another.’

The King of the Mice was terrified. ‘If he dies, Parvata will put me to death.’ But at last he yielded and let the prince go.

Taaz ul-Maluk emerged from the dark tunnel into a garden enclosed in four walls encrusted all over with pearls, diamonds, rubies and other gems. The ground was paved with gold. A tracery of turquoise-lined canals brought sparkling water to the flowers. Dazzled by the celestial scene, Taaz ul-Maluk exclaimed inwardly, ‘What an exquisite garden, praise be to God! The brightness and rich colours of the flowers put the sun himself in the shade.’



There were archways festooned with elegant bunches of grapes made of precious stones, brilliant as the moon among planets, tinkling melodiously in the breeze.

'If a single petal from these flowers should drop into the sea,' mused the prince, 'all the fish would become rose-scented.' Intoxicated with delight, Taaz ul-Maluk wandered towards a little pavilion beyond a broad terrace. In the middle of the terrace was a pool, lined with precious jewels and filled with rosewater. In the centre was an extremely beautiful and fragrant flower.

Taaz ul-Maluk's pure and honest mind realised that this must be the Bakaavli Flower he had sought for so long. He stripped, plunged swiftly into the pool and plucked the flower. As he dressed again, he secured the flower carefully inside his waistband.

Then his attention was drawn to the pavilion, draped all round with brocade curtains. He approached softly and drew back a curtain to peep inside. What should he see but the delicate form of a Pari, lying asleep on a bed. Taaz ul-Maluk held his breath. Her hair dishevelled, her bodice askew, her robe rucked up, the tassel of her cummerbund dangling, she slept in sweet disarray, beautiful beyond description.

At the sight of that superlative form, that loveliness brighter than the moon, Taaz ul-Maluk swooned away. When he came to his senses, he crept close to her pillow and gazed in awestruck silence. At last, he reflected that he should leave some token of his coming, so he very gently slipped a ring off her finger and replaced it with his own.

## CHAPTER 8: LOSS

Sorrowing, Taaz ul-Maluk withdrew and made his way out of the enchanting garden. Riding on the King of the Mice, he was soon safely back at the house. Parvata, who had been deeply distressed during his absence, was overjoyed to see him again, and when night came, Mahmuda and Taaz ul-Maluk lay in one another's arms and spent the whole night in joy.

Several days passed by in happiness until, as Taaz ul-Maluk and Mahmuda lay talking far into the night, he said suddenly, 'O my love, this place is full of joy, with no shadow of sadness at all, and we have all we could wish for, yet...'

'Yet?'

'Yet I am far away from my home and friends. I am beginning to miss them. We must find a way to go to my home and meet my people.'

'Set your mind at rest,' said Mahmuda calmly. 'Leave it to me. We will be on our way in the morning.'

At the first rays of the sun, Parvata came with heaped trays of dry fruits and called them out for their breakfast. She seated Mahmuda and Taaz ul-Maluk most affectionately on her massive knees. When she had tenderly fed them, she said, 'Well, my dear daughter and son-in-law, if you have anything on your minds, tell me. If you ask for the stars in the sky, I will pluck them for you!'

'By your kindness,' began Mahmuda very respectfully, 'we have everything we wish, and where would we be without you? You are our all in all, but... what can I say? My heart is seared. My friends are far away, my body feels drained of blood

with longing. If you permit, I will go for some days to see them, when my heart's fire is quenched I will happily stay here again.'

'Did I bring you up for this,' said Parvata, 'that I should have dry eyes?' She sighed deeply and went on, 'Clearly the prince is the cause of our separation. If I had known, I would never have married you to him.'

In the end, she gave in and summoned two djinn to take them wherever they wished to go.

'Take great care of them,' she warned, 'and bring me back a note to say they have arrived. Then you will be free.' Parvata pulled out two hairs from her head, gave one to Taaz ul-Maluk and the other to Mahmuda, and said, 'When you are in trouble, throw this hair into a fire and you will see me arrive with a thousand djinn.' Then she left Mahmuda in the care of Taaz ul-Maluk.

The djinn came running, as quick and bright as lightning. One said, 'We will take you wherever you command.'

'Take us to the garden of Dilawar the Courtesan in Firdoz City,' said the prince.

Soon they alighted in the garden and one djinn asked for the note.

'Wait a minute,' said Taaz ul-Maluk. 'I will write it for you.'

At the sound of Taaz ul-Maluk's voice, Dilawar came running out and fell at his feet, thanking God.

'O Prince!' she exclaimed. 'What a great task you have accomplished!'

The prince took pen and ink, wrote a note to say they had arrived and dismissed the djinn. Then he told Dilawar the whole story of his marriage to Mahmuda and how the Bakaavli Flower came into his hands.

Then Dilawar arose and received Mahmuda with great honour. The prince stayed with them for some days, then the desire to return to his country and complete his quest overcame him.

'My father must be in great misery. I should go quickly and cure his eyesight.'

While servants were making preparations for his journey, the jail-keeper came and respectfully enquired what was to be done with the Princes of East and West. Taaz ul-Maluk, looking at Dilawar, replied, 'My brothers must also be released, but do not let them go until they have been branded on the bottom with your seal.'

When the wretched prisoners were brought forth, Taaz ul-Maluk said, 'These four must be released just like the other Princes of East and West. In this way your good name will be established. Say this to them: Unless you submit to being branded on the bottom with my seal, I will never, ever, let you go.'

The four princes could see no other way out of their predicament, so at last they agreed, and were duly branded on the bottom with the seal of the courtesan. Then Taaz ul-Maluk gave each of them a generous sum of money for their travelling expenses and dismissed them. The four miserable princes went into the town, equipped themselves with servants and bodyguards and set off for home.

Taaz ul-Maluk saw Dilawar and Mahmuda off with their retinue and luggage to wait for him in Falani City, and himself set off by a different route. Disguising

himself as a fakir, he followed after his brothers to test them. When Taaz ul-Maluk found their encampment, he sat down, hidden but within earshot. He listened to them boasting and bragging, came boldly out into the midst of them and said, 'What lies you are telling! I myself have the Bakaavli Flower.' He took the flower out of his waistband and showed it to them. The four princes disbelieved him.

'We must try it out. If it does not work, we will punish you. If it works, we will give it back.'

'Truth knows no fear,' agreed Taaz ul-Maluk. So they sent for a blind man and applied the flower to his eyes. At once he could see and looked joyfully all around him.

Then the four brothers seized the Bakaavli Flower, beat Taaz ul-Maluk up and set off cheerfully in the direction of their home. Some days later, they reached the frontier of their homeland and sent a servant ahead to announce their arrival to the king. The blind king travelled a long way to welcome his sons, press them to his heart and kiss them fervently. Then the princes gave him the Bakaavli Flower. As soon as he laid it on his eyes he could see again.

'My eyes have been opened by the Bakaavli Flower!' exclaimed the king. 'And my heart has been opened by the return of my sons.' Then the king arranged for grand ceremonies of thanksgiving and proclaimed that all the citizens must be happy and want for nothing.

## CHAPTER 9: PRINCESS GULBAKAAVLI

When Gulbakaavli woke up, she straightened her clothing, tied back her dishevelled hair, threw a light shawl around her shoulders and went out to walk in her garden, as dainty as a deer. When she came to the pool she sprinkled her face with rosewater and glanced around. As her gaze rested on the place where the Bakaavli Flower grew, she could not see it. Her head spun and she thought, 'Am I asleep or awake? If I am asleep, this is only an illusory dream.' So she clapped her hands to test whether she was awake. Then she thought, 'This cannot be the deed of a human, for what man would have the courage to challenge eighteen thousand supernatural beings and succeed in taking my flower?'

She felt such anguish at the loss of her flower that she fainted away. When she revived she entered her jewelled palace and summoned all her Pari, intending to punish them. She had not yet realised that when the arrow of destiny is fired, there is no shield.

'If you want to escape with your lives, you must bring the thief to me,' she told her attendants angrily. At this threat, seven hundred Pari flew off in all directions but could find no clue. How indeed to find a man who leaves no trace? No trace but the arrow of desire to find her thief, which had pierced Gulbakaavli's heart.

So, abandoning all reticence, she set out herself. Nowhere could she find any sign of the thief, as she travelled further and further east. When she came to Taaz ul-Maluk's land, everything looked very splendid, with music and festivity in every town and village.

Gulbakaavli assumed the appearance of a boy of sixteen and asked a citizen, 'What is the reason for all this rejoicing?'

'By the will of God, the lord of our land became blind. His four sons brought the Bakaavli Flower with great difficulty. The king applied it to his eyes and he could see again! So he gave orders for us all to celebrate for two years.'

Gulbakaavli was pleased, thinking, 'Thank God, I have succeeded in my quest. This is the land of the thief.' Satisfied, she went to the shore of a lake, washed and rested. Then, assuming the appearance of a handsome, well-dressed gentleman, she sauntered to the king's palace.

Approaching the gate, she slowed down. Everyone who set eyes on her sighed with admiration. After strolling all around the city, Gulbakaavli returned towards the palace. The king had heard of the handsome stranger's arrival and sent for him. A servant ushered him into the royal presence.

'Where are you from and what is your name?' asked the king. 'What brings you here?'

The stranger gave a courteous answer, 'If it please your majesty, my home is in the land of Chanha and my name is Faroukh. I have come here to seek service in the royal household.'

The king took the stranger into his service. Some time went by. One day the four princes came to visit their father the king. The king greeted them all very affectionately.

'Who are they?' Gulbakaavli asked a retainer.

'They are the princes.'

Gulbakaavli tested them with her magic insight as carefully as a goldsmith tests gold, and found them all to be false. Then she felt disturbed and asked, 'Has the king any other son who set out with them to get the Bakaavli Flower?'

'No, none,' replied the courtier. Then Gulbakaavli felt afraid. 'Who can it be who has broken the glass of my heart and pierced me with the arrow of desire? I have searched so hard, but not a trace have I found.' In her heart of hearts Gulbakaavli felt, 'The king must surely have another son. What a topsy-turvy world this is – what I want the most I seem furthest from getting.'



## CHAPTER 10: THE FIFTH PRINCE

When the four brothers had robbed Taaz ul-Maluk of the Bakaavli Flower, he felt dazed and bewildered. The proverb, 'They came to pick spinach and only found cotton,' ran through his mind. Discouraged and empty-handed, he went towards his homeland as fast as his bruised body would allow. He stopped in a forest not far from his father's capital city. Here he coaxed fire from a flint and threw the hair that Parvata had given him into the flame. Before one quarter of the hair was burnt, Parvata arrived with her eighteen thousand minions.

Seeing Taaz ul-Maluk alone, in his fakir disguise, she cried out, 'O Prince, what have you done with my daughter? What are you doing in this state?'

'By your kindness, all is well, but I need one task to be done and I can't do it myself.'

'Out with it, quickly!' said Parvata. 'What is this task?'

'A house must be built in this forest, exactly like Gulbakaavli's house.'

'That is easy enough,' Parvata replied. 'But I have never seen her house or garden. How am I to design it properly without having seen the original?'

'Just do exactly as I tell you,' Taaz ul-Maluk reassured her.

Parvata sent hundreds of spirits off in all directions to gather pearls, diamonds and other gems. Within three days they brought heaps of jewels. Then they all began work according to Taaz ul-Maluk's instructions. First, they dug the earth and laid the foundations. Then they began building a palace of gold and pearls. Within a few days both the buildings and the garden were complete, with a jewel-

encrusted main entrance and a pool in the centre filled with rosewater, all exactly like Gulbakaavli's home. The jewels left over after the building expenses were gathered safely into a treasure-house.

When all was completed to Taaz ul-Maluk's satisfaction, Parvata said, 'Look, I have done a lot of work for you. May no sadness ever befall my daughter.' So saying, she took her leave.

Then Taaz ul-Maluk set out for the place where Mahmuda and Dilawar were staying. He travelled in grand style, seated in a jewelled howdah on an elephant. Retainers with lances rode ahead on horses, with shouts of victory. He escorted the ladies back to his palace, where they all lived happily together.

## CHAPTER 11: THE RIVAL CITY

One day a retainer of Taaz ul-Maluk's was walking in the forest. Suddenly he came upon some woodcutters carrying their loads of timber.

'Who are you and where are you taking that wood?' he asked.

'We are woodcutters from the capital. Our trade is there. This is how we earn a living for our families,' they replied.

'Today, please bring your wood to my master's house,' the retainer invited them. 'It is nearby. He has established a city here. You will be paid and well fed too.'

'We have lived here all our lives but never seen any settlement in this forest.' The woodcutters were doubtful.

'Come and see,' persuaded the retainer, so they all walked on together until a brilliant light dazzled their eyes. The woodcutters screamed with terror.

'What's this, brother? Have you brought us to be thrown into an oven? Never mind giving us a meal, let's escape with our lives!'

'It is not a fire, it's the glitter of jewels,' Taaz ul-Maluk's man reassured them. 'Don't be afraid, come with me.'

So they went nearer and saw that the earth was covered with gold. 'It's true!' they exclaimed in wonder.

The woodcutters were brought before the prince. Taaz ul-Maluk gave them handfuls of pearls and invited them to come and live there. After their meal, the woodcutters felt very contented and decided to move to Taaz ul-Maluk's city.

In this way, everyone who found their way to the new city settled there. Every day the Governor of the capital city remarked to the king's Chief Minister that all the good citizens were leaving. One day he reported to the Minister, 'A thousand homes stand empty now.'

'Where have all the people gone?' asked the Minister.

'I have heard that somebody has laid a golden pavement in the forest and established a city there, with a palace and a jewel-studded park. There is nothing like it in the whole world.'

The Minister could not believe it.

'Who could do that? It is beyond the power of man!'

The Governor replied politely, 'Reports keep coming in. Incredible things do happen, by the will of God. If God can turn a man into a woman and a woman into a man, we should not be surprised at anything. Have you not heard the story of the man and woman who exchanged gender with each other?'

'However did that happen?' asked the Minister.

The Governor began:

*Once upon a time there was a king who had a harem of a hundred queens but no son. At last one queen became pregnant. After nine months she gave birth to a*

*daughter. Her second and third children were both girls too. When she became pregnant for the fourth time, the king said, 'If you have a daughter again this time, I will kill both of you.'*

*By the will of God the fourth child was a girl too, but she was very beautiful. For fear of death, her mother gave out that a son was born and commanded the astrologers to tell the king that he should not see the child until he was ten years old. The king believed the astrologers.*

*When the little girl was nearly ten years of age and old enough to understand, her mother explained to her, 'You must dress as a boy and go and see the king. This will save both our lives.'*

*So the girl sometimes went to see the king but quickly returned to her mother. When she became of marriageable age, a match was arranged with the daughter of another king. Some days before the wedding, the king organised the groom's escort in grand style and dressed his son in splendid clothes. The king joyfully seated the disguised girl at his side in a golden howdah and they set out. The girl felt sometimes like crying and sometimes like laughing.*

*One night, they had to camp in a forest. The girl felt desperate. Suicide seemed the only way out. With this in mind, she went into the forest, hoping some wild animal would eat her. As she walked along she came under a tree which was the abode of a spirit. The spirit was attracted by her beauty and, assuming the form of a man, asked why she had come there. The girl poured out the whole story.*

*'If you wish,' offered the spirit, 'I can exchange my male body for your female one. We will be able to change back again, but only on the condition that we both remain celibate.'*

*The girl at once agreed, so they exchanged gender and she returned to the camp in a male body. A few days later the groom and his retinue arrived at the bride's palace and the marriage took place. The king returned to his own country but the false prince stayed with his bride. After a son was born to them, he wished to go back to his own country and left for home. When he arrived in the same forest and found the same tree, he saw the spirit sitting in the branches in the form of a woman.*

*'Hail, Spirit!' the prince greeted him. 'My heart's desire has been fulfilled. Now you may take back your own body and give mine back to me.'*

*'Now I am unable to do so,' the spirit replied. 'Our fates have been sealed.'*

*'Why is that?' asked the prince.*

*'I was waiting for you to come back,' explained the spirit, 'when one day a male spirit came along. We were passionately attracted to each other and as a result I became pregnant. If I now become a man again, I will die when the child is born. And another thing – now I have experienced that a woman feels the fire of desire more strongly than a man. So off you go to your home. I have given you my male body permanently.'*

*'Well, this is all the will of God,' the prince replied, 'but why do humans wish for things beyond the power of man to achieve? Have you ever heard the story of the Bird and the Fakir?'*

*In the kingdom of Solomon a pair of birds was pecking at seeds. Seeing a fakir approaching from far off, the hen bird said to the cock, 'Look out, an enemy is coming. Take care so he won't catch us.'*

*'He is a devotee of Love. Don't be afraid of him,' replied her mate. 'One who treads the path of the Lord and meditates upon him will not do us any harm.'*

*As they were talking, the fakir came nearer and fired an arrow which broke the cock's wing. The bird ran as fast as he could to the court of King Solomon, paid his respects and said, 'That fakir broke my wing for no reason at all.'*

*The king commanded the fakir to be brought before him. The fakir protested, 'What if I did hit the bird? What is wrong with that? A bird is food for humans.'*

*At that, the bird retorted, 'I may be only a little bird but I know this: you were an enemy in the guise of a friend. By your appearance, I mistook you for a devotee of God, who would not do harm to anybody, but now I know it was a false disguise. You should no longer dress like this, so others will not be deceived as I was.'*

*King Solomon agreed with the bird, upbraided the false fakir and banished him. Some days later, the bird was again pecking seeds when the fakir caught him and locked him up in a cage. 'This is surely the end of me,' thought the bird, but he bravely lifted up his head and called out, 'Hey, listen, human! You can get some benefit from what I have to tell you, but no benefit at all from eating me. I know several things you would be interested to hear. Set me free and I will tell you.'*

*The fakir agreed, then the bird said, 'Listen, at his will God can make a mustard seed into a mountain or a mountain into a mustard seed, but it is quite another thing to pay any attention to the words of a man. Secondly, whatever comes into your hands, you should accept without question. Now let me go.'*

*The fakir opened the cage and stood aside. The bird flew out and perched on the branch of a tree, then said, 'Well, Fakir! You are a big fool to let such a prey go. There is a ruby in my stomach. If you had eaten me, you would have got that too.'*

*Disappointed, the fakir said, 'What is done is done. Now tell me more.'*

*'Your mind is as useless as a water-pot turned upside down,' the bird went on. 'My words won't do you any good at all. What is the use of talking to you? As the proverb goes: Crying in front of a blind man hurts only your own eyes. O you fool – why ever would I swallow a ruby?'*

*With this parting shot, the bird flew away and the false fakir slunk off home.*

'What this story shows,' the Governor summed up, 'is that everything is possible for God, but we men should investigate everything properly. Look before you leap, you know. I think I had better have a look at this place myself.'



## CHAPTER 12: FLAMES IN THE FOREST

The Governor set out for Taaz ul-Maluk's city. After a while he began to hear rumours that there was a fire in the forest, flames reaching the sky. A little further on he saw the ground all shining gold and the glitter of a jewelled palace.

As soon as Taaz ul-Maluk heard that the Governor had arrived from the capital, he commanded his servants to fill the pool with fresh rosewater and spray perfume all around. The Governor was conducted to a jewelled guesthouse. He sat down and looked in all directions, so dazzled by the gleaming jewels that he had to close his eyes. When Taaz ul-Maluk came to see him, the Governor greeted him with great respect.

'Sir, the King of Turqistan heard of the new city growing up in his land and sent me to find out about it. If it is the kingdom you want and your intention is to fight, that can quickly be settled. Two swords cannot fit in one scabbard, nor two kings in one kingdom.'

'I have built a palace of beauty and sanctity, not a fort,' replied Taaz ul-Maluk. 'I have no wish for a kingdom.'

The Governor took his leave, returned to the city and reported to the Chief Minister. The Minister duly reported the matter to the king and caused a stir at the court. Some of the Council believed the report, others were sceptical. Gulbakaavli, who was present among the king's retainers, thought, 'By the grace of God, it seems that at last my search has a chance of success.'

The king listened carefully, then sat for some time in silence. 'If this is the way things are, one city or the other will surely be ruined,' he commented.

The Minister said, 'According to the sages of old, the adversary who will not go away should be met and treated with. Now we should make friends with him.'

'That is the only thing we can do,' agreed the king.

Therefore the Minister set out in grand style. A day later Taaz ul-Maluk heard news of his approach and gave orders for a jewelled pavilion to be cleaned and furnished with costly seating, carpets and drapes. Fresh rosewater brimmed in the pool. When the Minister arrived and took his seat, Taaz ul-Maluk soon came to see him and sat down on a jewelled throne.

The Minister greeted him respectfully and said, 'Sir, another of our king's officers came to see you before and reported everything to the king. So the king himself is very eager to meet you.'

'That is exactly what I wished, and now the king also wishes it!' said Taaz ul-Maluk.

'The king will come very soon,' said the Minister.

Then Taaz ul-Maluk served the Minister with all kinds of delicious food on gold and silver salvers and took his own meal in his guest's company. When the meal was over, Taaz ul-Maluk gave orders for all the gold and silver dishes to be washed and presented to the Minister's retinue. The Minister took leave of Taaz ul-Maluk and returned to the capital. He told all his experiences to the king.

Meanwhile the prince asked Mahmuda for the hair her mother had given her and threw it into the fire. At once Parvata and eighteen thousand spirits appeared before him. Taaz ul-Maluk greeted Parvata with great respect and affection. In response to her enquiry he said, 'Everything is fine with us, but the King of

Turqistan is coming here as a guest tomorrow. I would like the whole route from here to his city to be lined with seats covered in velvet. Pavilions should be pitched at regular intervals along the way so that all may rest in comfort – and set gold and silver tables as well.’

Parvata gave orders to her minions and all preparations were completed overnight. Then they went home.

When the next day dawned, the king instructed the Minister to organise the mounted escort. Then the king set out for Taaz ul-Maluk’s city in a howdah and Gulbakaavli, still disguised as a gentleman, put on fine clothes and accompanied him. The four princes, each mounted on an elephant, joined the cavalcade. As the riders reached the road to Taaz ul-Maluk’s city, they caught sight of the seats, pavilions and tables all shining like the rays of the sun.

‘Is this the way?’ asked the king.

‘It was not like this yesterday, Sire,’ replied the Minister. ‘There has been a magic transformation overnight. It was nothing but dense forest before. The city is still far ahead.’

As the king and his Minister discussed the wonder, one of Taaz ul-Maluk’s servants, sent to escort them, said, ‘It was our master’s orders.’

The king’s cavalcade rode on to a place where all refreshments were ready for the hungry or thirsty, with pavilions to rest in. At short intervals the same arrangements were provided, such as no king had ever received before. Taaz ul-Maluk came some distance to welcome the king, greet him with reverence and escort him to a palace shimmering with gems and draped with costly brocades, where fragrant breezes wafted in from the rose-scented pool.

## CHAPTER 13: FACE TO FACE

The king was deeply impressed as he took it all in. Gulbakaavli, at the sight of Taaz ul-Maluk, was charmed, maddened and swooned away. When she came to her senses, she looked here and there and thought, 'This is surely my home. Some magician has picked it up and set it down in this forest.' Then she consulted a Pari who was in attendance on her, invisibly.

'It is indeed exactly like your home,' she said after closely observing every detail, 'but this is a new building. It is so cleverly made that there is no difference between the original and the replica.'

When Gulbakaavli heard this she was delighted and thought, 'Now I have caught my thief.' She kept tight control on herself to conceal her feelings.

Then many kinds of food were served on salvers of gold and silver, dishes whose equal were never before seen or tasted. The king was extremely pleased with the skill of his host's servants and ate with relish, in the company of his four sons and the Minister, while dancing girls entertained them and all was joy and delight.

Then the king and Taaz ul-Maluk began to talk.

'Do you have any sons?' asked Taaz ul-Maluk.

Presenting the four princes, the king said, 'These are all my sons. I had one more son. I became blind on seeing him. By the grace of God I am now better and happy again. That son went off somewhere or other when I became blind.'

'Is that the reason why he went away?' asked Taaz ul-Maluk. 'Would anyone in this assembly be able to recognise him?'

King Jait ul-Maluk narrated the whole story from the unfortunate son's birth horoscope up to his blindness. Indicating a prosperous man in his entourage, he added, 'He is the only one who set eyes on him.'

'Does anyone present here resemble that son?' Taaz ul-Maluk asked the gentleman, who looked attentively at everyone in turn and said, 'There is nobody else who looks like him, but both your voice and your face are like his.'

At this, Taaz ul-Maluk fell at his father's feet. 'I am your unworthy son. It is my great good fortune to have this opportunity to fall at your feet.'

King Jait ul-Maluk joyfully pressed Taaz ul-Maluk to his heart and said, 'We knew from your horoscope that riches and land would be yours. Are you also married?'

'I have two wives,' replied the prince. 'If you wish, I will introduce them to you.'

'Please do so,' said the king, so Taaz ul-Maluk went to fetch Dilawar and Mahmuda. When they came near the building where the king sat, they hesitated, trembling.

'Why are they not coming in?' asked the king.

'They are too embarrassed to come in,' explained Taaz ul-Maluk, 'because my four brothers are branded on the bottom like criminals with their seal. If you find this hard to believe, you can look.'

At these words, the four princes went pale and slunk away in shame.

Then the two ladies came forward and paid their respects to the king. When Taaz ul-Maluk was out of the room, the king asked Mahmuda and Dilawar what had

happened. They told the story of how the four princes had come to be branded, how Parvata's beloved daughter had married Taaz ul-Maluk, how he obtained the Bakaavli Flower, how it was stolen by his brothers, and of the building of the replica of the Bakaavli Garden and the growth of the new city around it.

Then the king remembered Taaz ul-Maluk's mother and said to his son, 'It was you who restored my eyesight with the Bakaavli Flower! Now I must let your mother know the wonderful news and quench her thirst for you with the sherbet of joy.'

The king returned home and told the whole story to Taaz ul-Maluk's mother, who was overjoyed.

## CHAPTER 14: LOVE LETTERS

Gulbakaavli asked to be released from the king's service and went home to her Flower Garden. There she wrote a letter to Taaz ul-Maluk. She gave the letter and the prince's ring to Samanru, the Pari who had been her invisible attendant at Taaz ul-Maluk's home, saying, 'Go. When you find the prince alone, give him the ring and the letter. Bring his reply to me at once.'

In a moment, the Pari reached Taaz ul-Maluk's palace and waited until he retired to a solitary place to dream of Gulbakaavli. Then Samanru gave him the ring and the letter, which he opened and read:

*As the marks cannot be separated from the moon,  
So are my heart and devotion to you inseparable.  
Your face glows bright and beautiful as fire;  
Sun and moon grow pale at sight of you.*

When he had read the letter, which quivered with passion in every word, Taaz ul-Maluk was deeply moved and took pen and paper to reply:

*The Creator gave you glowing cheeks  
And eyes so lovely that the doe  
Abandons pride in hers.  
Your slender waist beyond compare –*

Then, abandoning verse, Taaz ul-Maluk went on, 'You shine brighter than the sun, unsurpassable, beyond description, how can I express how I feel for you? I think of you day and night. Not a single day goes by without you throbbing in my heart. Love for you made me indifferent to life or death. The fire of my desire has

kindled your heart. By my good fortune and the mercy of God, my longing has had this result.'

He folded the letter tenderly into an envelope and gave it to Samanru, after repeating the contents out loud to her to be doubly sure, and sent her away.

The Pari flew swiftly back to Gulbakaavli, handed her the letter and recited faultlessly all that Taaz ul-Maluk had said to her. When Gulbakaavli saw that Taaz ul-Maluk's love surpassed even hers, she asked Samanru to fetch Parvata at once.

She flew off and arrived at Parvata's home in a moment. Seeing her breathless haste, Parvata asked with concern, 'Is all well with Gulbakaavli?'

'All is well,' replied the Pari. 'She suddenly felt a longing to see you. Please come at once.'

Parvata was not reassured. She trembled as she arose, wondering, 'O Lord, why has she sent for me?' Soon she arrived and found Gulbakaavli sitting with a faraway look in her eyes, dreaming of her distant lover.

With a loving embrace, Parvata exclaimed, 'Why are you so sad? Why have you been crying? I will do all I can to help you. Speak out!'

'O deceitful one, you know very well,' said Gulbakaavli. 'You kindled this fire – on purpose or innocently – and you must quench it. Your son-in-law is responsible for all this. You had him brought here, and he saw me fast asleep in disordered dress. If you know what is good for you, bring him here at once.'



'Are you flustered and pouting over such a little thing?' said Parvata, laughing. 'Now, up you get, wash your hands and face, hurry up! It will be the work of a moment to bring him here to you.'

Then she was off in the direction of Turqistan and in no time arrived in front of Taaz ul-Maluk. Seeing the faraway look in his eyes, Parvata laughed again, 'Wake up! A moth has remembered your flame!'

The prince sat upon Parvata's shoulder and they were off to the Land of Bakaavli.

## CHAPTER 15: THE ANGRY QUEEN

'Your daughter is in love. They say she is attracted to some human being.'

This unwelcome news reached the ears of Queen Jameela Khatoon that very day. She went to see Gulbakaavli and find out whether it was true. Seeing her daughter's agitated state, the queen became angry and demanded, 'Who are you infatuated with? Who have you lost your heart to? You have disgraced the good name of the Pari and lowered the dignity of our race.'

Gulbakaavli put her hands over her ears and protested, 'I have never heard of love! Who told you this? Tell the truth or I will die.'

Her mother calmed her down but spoke severely, 'Be quiet! Don't be so upset, don't cry.'

Just then Parvata arrived with Taaz ul-Maluk. Samanru informed her mistress by gestures and Gulbakaavli signalled to her to hide him in a guest pavilion.

Gulbakaavli and Queen Jameela Khatoon talked far into the night. When at last the queen went to bed, Gulbakaavli made sure she was asleep and then cautiously, anxiously, sped to the prince's room. As soon as he saw her, he fell down in a swoon. She ran to him and cradled his head in her lap. The attar of rose perfume on her breath soon revived him and he sat up. Then the two of them made passionate love to each other and quenched the fire of their desires.

When the night had passed, Queen Jameela Khatoon suddenly woke up and looked out of the window. The garden looked so charming in the early light that she went outside to stroll around. And that was how she came upon the sleeping lovers. In a rage she seized Taaz ul-Maluk and threw him far away. Then she

slapped Gulbakaavli till her face was red. She told Gulbakaavli's father, Firoz Shah. She commanded the Pari attendants to make Gulbakaavli see reason and abandon her human lover.

The Pari tried their best but none of their words touched Gulbakaavli's heart. The fire of love burned steadily day after day. The days went by in idle conversation but all night she stayed awake remembering her lover. When the Pari saw that her love had not abated at all, they reported to Firoz Shah, 'We have tried to obey your orders and change her feelings but she takes no notice. Now there is nothing more we can do.'

Firoz Shah realised his daughter was beyond his control. He threw her into prison and fastened iron shackles on her delicate ankles.

## CHAPTER 16: WEIRD MAGIC

When Queen Jameela Khatoon threw Taaz ul-Maluk out, the wind bore him to a broad river. He fell in and was swept along, bobbing up and down in the waves until at last he was cast upon a bank, half-dead. As his body dried out in the sun, he recovered enough strength to move about and saw he was on an island, covered in trees. The prince wandered here and there and came upon an orchard, where the fruit on the trees was like human heads. When they caught sight of Taaz ul-Maluk, they burst into raucous laughter, then all fell to the ground together. Soon, more heads appeared on the branches.

Amazed and unnerved by this weird magic, Taaz ul-Maluk quickly went on and came to a grove of pomegranate trees. He picked a pomegranate and tiny, exquisite birds hatched out of it and flew away. Taaz ul-Maluk was further amazed and unnerved and wondered how to escape this disquieting magic. He gathered wood and made a raft, crossed over to the riverbank and found himself in a thick forest.

For fear of jungle animals, the prince climbed up into a tree when night fell. A python came slithering down a hill and stopped under the tree. Taaz ul-Maluk was terrified by the sight of the snake and clung tightly to the branch he sat on. After an hour a black snake issued from the python's mouth. The new snake spat a jewel out of its mouth. The gem shone so brightly that it lit up the whole forest. A great number of birds and animals came close, attracted by the light. Both snakes feasted on this prey. When they were sated, the black snake swallowed the jewel. The python swallowed the black snake and slithered back up the hill.

Taaz ul-Maluk spent the night planning how to get hold of that jewel. In the morning he fetched a big lump of mud from the riverbank, heaved it up into the tree and waited for nightfall. At dusk the python came just as before and the

prince watched from his branch with bated breath. When he got the chance, he threw the lump of mud exactly onto the jewel, plunging the forest into darkness. The python and the black snake beat their heads on the ground until they died. When day dawned, Taaz ul-Maluk climbed down from the tree, took the jewel from under the mud and off he went.

One evening, he rested under a tree in which a mynah bird had made her nest. She was telling her chicks their bedtime story. That night the chicks begged, 'Mother, tell us a story about this forest.'

'Well, children, this forest of ours is a great treasure house,' the mother bird began. 'And what's more, on the shore of a lake south of here, there is a huge tree. It has a name: Shirazul. If anyone makes a hat from its bark and puts it on, he becomes invisible. He can see everything, but nobody can see him. Nobody can get near that tree because a big snake guards it day and night. Arrows, swords and other weapons have no effect on that snake at all.'

'Is there any way to get through to that tree, though, Mother?' asked the chicks.

'Only a very brave person, who is not afraid and has the courage to confront the snake, can get there. First he must jump into the lake. As soon as he jumps into the water he will change into a crow, but he will not mind at all. He will fly up to sit on the most westerly branch of the tree. There are lots of red and green fruits on it. If some red fruits are picked and eaten, the original body comes back. If some green fruits are kept on the head, he can fly on the wind. The leaves have special qualities too: if they are placed on a wound it will heal at once. And the wood of this tree has a virtue: if something is locked up, even with a big strong lock, a piece of Shirazul twig will open it, just like that!'

Taaz ul-Maluk listened to all this and longed to see the Shirazul tree. In the morning he followed the direction the mynah had indicated and found the tree. When the snake hissed and struck at him, he dodged lightly and jumped into the lake. Then, in the form of a crow, he flew up and perched on the most westerly branch. Eating some red fruit he regained his own form. Then he picked some green fruit and stowed them away in his waistband, with some bark, leaves and twigs. With green fruit tied on his hat, the prince floated on the wind to the edge of the forest, where he saw a village. He cut his thigh, hid the jewel in the wound and healed it with a shirazul leaf.

One day Taaz ul-Maluk arrived at a lake surrounded by a shore of white pebbles, bordered with wild flowers. He lingered, enjoying the scene, until he fell asleep in the cool shade. When he awoke, he left his magic hat and twigs under a tree and went to bathe in the lake. He ducked his head under the water and when he came up again he found himself changed into a woman, dressed in the style of a nearby town. Shocked and embarrassed, he sat there and wept.

A man came along. Seeing a pretty young woman crying, he could not resist coming up to her and saying, 'Well, my dear, whatever has happened? Why are you sitting here all alone and crying?'

'My father was travelling on business,' said Taaz ul-Maluk in a woman's voice. 'He was kidnapped and his assistant ran away to save his life. I was left here all alone.'

'If you will marry me, my dear, I will take you home with me and we will live as man and wife.'

He was an attractive man so Taaz ul-Maluk agreed, went with him and took him as a husband. Taaz ul-Maluk sometimes laughed and sometimes cried at how his

life had changed. Taaz ul-Maluk soon became pregnant and after nine months a son was born. When the child was forty days old, Taaz ul-Maluk went to a lake near the house and dipped completely under the water.

When he came up, he saw that he was in a quite different place and his body was now that of a hulking great ugly man. Taaz ul-Maluk fervently thanked God that at least he now had his male gender again, even though not his own original body. He was still dizzy with relief when a woman came along. She was dark-complexioned. Her upper lip touched her nose and her lower lip hung to her chin. One earlobe dangled to her breast, the other to her hip. Her head was bare, her tongue lolled out of that wide mouth and, worst of all, she marched right up to Taaz ul-Maluk and grabbed him by the sleeve, shrieking, 'You villain! I've been looking everywhere for you! The kids have been starving for three days. Get a move on! Cut a couple of loads of firewood, sell them and get the kids something to eat!'

Keeping a firm hold on his sleeve, she dragged Taaz ul-Maluk to her house. When they got there, Taaz ul-Maluk was surrounded by children, clamouring, 'What have you brought us, Dad?'

Taaz ul-Maluk stood silent, looking intently into each face. The harridan thrust an axe into his hand, saying, 'Off you go! Get the wood!' He went off into the forest, thinking, 'That second dip under water has brought a horrible change. Now I should dip again and see what happens.'

So, on he went until he reached a pool and eagerly plunged in. Then he found that he had his real body back again and he was once more in the place where he had lost it. Giving grateful thanks to God, he resolved not to go jumping into strange lakes any more. Taking his magic hat and Shirazul twigs, he went on.

## CHAPTER 17: THE CASTLE OF THE BLACK DJINN

Hoping to escape from these nightmare transformations, Taaz ul-Maluk left off walking on the ground and took to flying on the breeze, by the power of the green fruits. One day, as he drifted on the breeze, he came to a mountain, which was so high that the others around it looked like molehills. A stone castle came into sight on the mountain. It seemed to be deserted. As he wandered around inside the castle, suddenly he came upon a lady lying on a sumptuous bed and crying her heart out. Her ankles were bound in great iron shackles.

Taaz ul-Maluk went closer and said gently, 'Dear lady, what is this sorrow that is blighting your young life? Why are you suffering here, alone and friendless?'

The lady drew her gossamer shawl modestly over her head and whispered, 'Who are you? Go away from here or you will die!'

'However fearsome your enemy may be, I am not afraid. Please tell me how you come to be in this situation.'

'I am a Pari,' she began. 'My name is Ruhaafaza. I am the daughter of Muzaffar Shah. One day I was going to visit Gulbakaavli, my uncle's daughter, who was ill. On the way to her Flower Garden, a black djinn suddenly appeared, seized me and brought me here. I keep refusing his advances, so he gives me new punishments every day.'

'What illness is your uncle's daughter suffering from?'

'She is in love with some human being. She has not seen him for a long time. She has become quite crazed with longing and careless of her life. There seems to be no cure. So my uncle put her in prison, hoping to bring her to her senses.'



At this news Taaz ul-Maluk went pale and sighed piteously, tears coursing down his cheeks.

Ruhaafaza looked at him curiously. 'What is the matter? Are you overcome by the heat? Why do you sigh so?'

'I am the man your cousin is separated from,' said Taaz ul-Maluk. 'She is suffering so much, and this is how I suffer too. She frets in prison and I lament here.' Then he told Ruhaafaza the whole story.

She listened in astonishment and growing sympathy for the lovers. 'If only I can escape the clutches of the Black Djinn, I will do all I can to quench the fires of your desires.'

'Well, who is stopping you from leaving?' asked the prince.

Ruhaafaza showed her shackles. A touch of a Shirazul twig and she was free.

'Now you can go wherever you please,' said Taaz ul-Maluk. 'If you are afraid of the Black Djinn, I will come with you and defend you. The only problem is, I have no weapon.'

Ruhaafaza told him where to find the djinn's armoury and the prince selected a sharp sword. Then they set out at once for the kingdom of Muzaffar Shah. They had not gone far when they heard a thunderous roar behind them.

'Watch out, prince!' said Ruhaafaza. 'The Black Djinn is after us!'

Taaz ul-Maluk clapped the hat of invisibility on her head just in time before the djinn looked before him.

'Look out!' Taaz ul-Maluk challenged. 'Not a step forward or I will strike you dead with one blow!'

In response, the djinn gnashed his teeth like thunder and roared, 'What's this? Who ever heard of an ant challenging an elephant to a duel? I'd be ashamed to soil my hands with the blood of an insect. Give back my woman and go your way. As a moth burns in a lamp, so I burn for her.'

'You rogue!' taunted the prince. 'You are not worthy of her! Your tongue should be torn out for mentioning her!'

At this, the djinn heaved a whole mountain at him. The prince used the power of the Shirazul fruit to soar up on the wind. He struck the djinn such a blow with a Shirazul twig that the monster quaked and roared, 'Go away! I spared you this time or you would be dead by now!'

Then the Black Djinn bellowed very loudly and hundreds of djinn appeared and surrounded him. The prince fought valiantly with sword and Shirazul stick until all the djinn lay dead.

Exhausted by the struggle, Taaz ul-Maluk fell unconscious. Ruhaafaza came running and cradled his head to her breast, fanning him with her hand. When he came to, she took off the hat of invisibility and put it on Taaz ul-Maluk's head. Then they set out once more for her home. When they neared the city, she left Taaz ul-Maluk in a pleasure garden which bore her own name, Ruhaafaza, and went to her parents' home.

## CHAPTER 18: REUNITED

Ruhaafaza's mother and father were so happy and relieved to see her that they kissed her forehead and eyes again and again. Then they wanted to know the whole story. Ruhaafaza told them, emphasizing the courage of Taaz ul-Maluk, but did not say that he was Gulbakaavli's lover.

Muzaffar Shah went straight to the pleasure garden, thanked the prince profusely, appointed several Pari to attend on him and returned home. Then Muzaffar Shah sent a letter to his brother Firoz Shah, with the good news of Ruhaafaza's safe return. Firoz Shah was overjoyed and suggested that Jameela Khatoon should go at once and see her niece with her own eyes. When Gulbakaavli heard where her mother was going, she sent a message: 'I would like to go with you to see my cousin.'

Queen Jameela Khatoon was pleased, thinking that her daughter would be distracted from her obsession. The shackles were cut off her legs and she went with her mother to her cousin's home.

When Muzaffar Shah heard that Jameela Khatoon and Gulbakaavli were on their way, he sent Ruhaafaza to welcome them. She greeted her aunt, falling respectfully at her feet. Jameela Khatoon raised her up, embraced and comforted her.

Then the two cousins met and Ruhaafaza whispered mischievously in Gulbakaavli's ear, 'You are going to see the doctor for your nerves – he who was the cause of your illness and whose medicine you crave.'

When she heard this, Gulbakaavli kept silent in her mother's presence, could not utter a word and kept her thoughts to herself. Ruhaafaza led them into the house

to meet Muzaffar Shah and Queen Husnaara. They stayed overnight, then Jameela Khatoon wished to go home.

Ruhaafaza begged Gulbakaavli to stay longer and said to Jameela Khatoon, 'It will do her good to stay with me.'

'Yes, of course it will. You may stay for two weeks, Gulbakaavli,' agreed her mother.

Ruhaafaza sat down with Gulbakaavli for an intimate chat. She brought up the subject of love and mentioned Taaz ul-Maluk. Then Gulbakaavli became embarrassed and said petulantly, 'I don't like this teasing, cousin. Say no more, or I swear by Solomon that I'll go straight home and never visit you again. What relationship can there be between a Pari and a human?'

Ruhaafaza saw that this approach had failed, so she said quickly, 'I'm not saying that you care for anyone or sigh for anyone. I only meant that you are a flame and a moth may burn itself...'

With such soothing words she calmed Gulbakaavli's anger and, taking her by the hand, led her in the direction of the house where Taaz ul-Maluk was staying. As they strolled around near the building, Gulbakaavli suddenly heard Taaz ul-Maluk speaking to an attendant.

'Whose voice was that?' she asked.

'Oh, it's a prey I caught, let me show you,' replied Ruhaafaza casually, and so she tricked her cousin into the presence of Taaz ul-Maluk.

At the sight of Gulbakaavli, Taaz ul-Maluk rushed to embrace her, Gulbakaavli hugged him tightly, abandoning all false modesty, while both shed tears of joy.

Seeing them in this state, Ruhaafaza laughed and said, 'What was that you said, cousin, about having no taste for worldly things? And no man in your heart? Why are you hugging this fellow and crying, then? Why are you making him cry too?' Then, imitating her aunt Jameela Khatoon's tone, she added, 'You have disgraced my uncle's name and blemished our race.'

'What kind of nurse are you?' Gulbakaavli retorted. 'You put balm on my wound and plunge a knife in too! Don't go adding poison to the sherbet you mixed for me to drink!'

## CHAPTER 19: WOMEN'S WILES

For several days the two lovers were in bliss, drinking deeply of the nectar of love, quenching the fires of their desires. On the day Gulbakaavli was to leave, Taaz ul-Maluk was downcast again.

Gulbakaavli was all for abandoning secrecy and disclosing their love, but Ruhaafaza said, 'Dear cousin, just wait a few days and you will be happy again. Go home and behave like a good daughter. With God's blessing you will get exactly what you want in a short time.'

Gulbakaavli was cheered and went home to live peaceably with her parents.

After Gulbakaavli had left, Ruhaafaza took her mother into her confidence and told her all about the love and affection between Gulbakaavli and Taaz ul-Maluk.

Husnaara listened attentively and sat for a while in thought.

'An alliance between a Pari and a human is fraught with difficulties,' she said at last, 'but this man is a hero who rescued you, my beloved daughter. I, too, would like to rescue him from the bonds of an unfulfilled love.'

Then she sent for a portrait painter, who painted a miniature of Taaz ul-Maluk in all his radiant beauty. Husnaara took the portrait and went to visit Jameela Khatoon for a few days. As they chatted one day, she brought up the subject of Gulbakaavli.

'You know, sister, if someone has a pearl of great price, what is the use of removing it from a necklace and locking it up where no one can admire it? Why is

your lovely Gulbakaavli still unmarried? It would be better to arrange her marriage.'

'Oh, Husnaara,' sighed Jameela Khatoon, 'you must have heard that she is crazy about a human being. She is quite besotted with him and does not care for anyone of her own kind. Marriage must be within our own race. Never have any of us married an outsider. How could I dream of a marriage between a Pari and a human?'

'That is true, my dear,' Husnaara agreed. 'However, if you considered the good qualities and intelligence of human beings, you would feel less averse to the idea. After all, God has given humans remarkable powers.'

With such soothing words, Husnaara gradually calmed Jameela Khatoon's agitation, until she conceded, 'Maybe humans are as you say. Don't mention that wretch though. I would never marry my daughter to him and make a thief my son-in-law.'

Then Husnaara showed the portrait of the prince to Jameela Khatoon.

'This is a portrait of the Prince of Turqistan. Look, there could not be a more handsome bridegroom in the world. He would be a fitting match for your beautiful Gulbakaavli.'

Impressed by the picture, Jameela Khatoon asked, 'But, sister, where is this prince to be found? And how could a match be arranged?'

'Leave it to me,' said Husnaara. 'You get everything ready for the wedding. I will come back in a few days with the groom and his retinue.'

Husnaara then took her leave and was home in an instant. She told Taaz ul-Maluk the good news and made all arrangements for the groom and his retinue.

Meanwhile, Jameela Khatoon showed Taaz ul-Maluk's portrait to Firoz Shah and recounted her conversation with Husnaara. He sent the picture to Gulbakaavli with the message, 'This is a portrait of the Prince of Turqistan, whose equal in looks could not be found in all the world. You are fond of human beings. If you wish, we will arrange your marriage to him.'

A Pari messenger faithfully reported her father's words to Gulbakaavli and showed her the miniature.

'This must be Ruhaafaza's trickery,' thought Gulbakaavli and her heart leapt up. She could hardly keep a straight face as she asked the Pari, 'Are you quite sure that this picture is a likeness of that prince?'

'It is indeed,' affirmed the Pari.

'Bless you for this heaven-sent message! Be happy!' Inwardly jumping for joy, Gulbakaavli went to see her father.

'Children should respect the wishes of their father. I accept the husband you have chosen for me,' she said demurely.



## CHAPTER 20: A PARI WEDDING

Firoz Shah was delighted and began to organise wedding preparations. He gave orders that the city market area should be rebuilt and decorated, fine carpets should be spread for the guests and troupes of dancers summoned. Pari crowded into the city from all directions and food and drink were lavishly provided.

While Firoz Shah made all necessary preparations from his side, his brother Muzaffar Shah was busy with arrangements for Taaz ul-Maluk. When all was ready, the prince had a ritual bath and was arrayed in his wedding finery and jewellery.

Muzaffar Shah, Taaz ul-Maluk and a large escort proceeded in grand style to the wedding. As they drew near, Gulbakaavli's ladies-in-waiting broke into traditional songs for this joyous occasion, uttering praises and melodious blessings for the two noble families to be united in joy.

In the evening, when the groom's party arrived, Firoz Shah sent his minister and other dignitaries to meet them and escort them ceremonially to their seats among his courtiers. Queen Jameela Khatoon received Queen Husnaara and the ladies. There was dancing and festivity. Then the marriage ceremony was performed between that delicate-limbed Pari and the Prince. Cheers resounded on all sides, sherbet drinks were served with delicious savouries and sweets, flasks of perfume and jewel necklaces were bestowed on the guests.

When all the ceremonies and rites were completed, the retinue of the groom took their leave and the curtains of the bridal chamber were drawn behind the bride and groom. And again they spent the night in close embrace.

When day dawned, Taaz ul-Maluk arose and went out to take a bath. Ruhaafaza came in and found Gulbakaavli in deep sleep after being awake all night. Broken garlands were strewn around, her eye-shadow was smudged, there were love-bites on her face and breast.

Seeing her cousin in such a state, Ruhaafaza quickly woke her up and said, laughing, 'Didn't I say, cousin, that you were burning with divine desire? Looks like your fire has been well and truly slaked now!'

'Well, is your mouth watering now, cousin?' Gulbakaavli shot back. 'If that is what you want, you try a night with him! Let's see how you'll look afterwards!'

They joked like this with each other, then Ruhaafaza went home with her mother and father, and the prince stayed with his Pari princess.

Taaz ul-Maluk and Gulbakaavli lived there contentedly for some time, then took their leave from Firoz Shah and Queen Jameela Khatoon to return to Taaz ul-Maluk's homeland. Gulbakaavli's parents gave their blessings and a large retinue of Pari servants. As for the dowry: it would take another whole volume to describe it!

When Taaz ul-Maluk arrived home in grand style with his new bride, Dilawar's and Mahmuda's spirits soared and they felt blissfully happy. At the sight of Gulbakaavli, their astonishment gave way to admiration for her ethereal beauty.

She came up to them, hugged them affectionately and said, 'Please don't feel uneasy on my account. There will be no tension among us three wives.'

So they all lived happily together and Prince Taaz ul-Maluk stayed at home in peace, until the next cycle of adventures began.