
The Tailor and the Nimble Thimble.

'Like it my dear?' said the Begum Sahiba rolling into the court and sitting down on a large velvet cushion.

'Beautiful!' said the Badmash Badshah. 'Absolutely stunning! Fabulous! What' he said in an urgent whisper to the Boy 'am I talking about?'

'The Begum Sahiba's new gown' said the Boy.

'Thank you' said the Badmash Badshah gratefully 'I was about to compliment her on her haircut.' He shuddered 'A narrow escape. Amazing my dear!' he said ' absolutely breath taking! Where did you find such a good tailor?'

'My chief Seamstress surpassed herself' said the Begum, preening ' It's a perfect fit.'

'You're lucky ' said the Badmash Badshah. 'I had a tailor in here who promised me a wonderful pair of pyjamas... why that's him!' he cried, spotting the prisoner who had been hauled up from the dungeon for the night. The prisoner shook so much that two guards had to hold him up.

'You're the man who ruined my aligarhi pyjamas.' Said the Badmash Badshah gnashing his teeth.

'Y-y-yes' said the Tailor, shaking so much that the guards could scarcely hold onto him.

'Hah!' said the Badmash Badshah bitterly ' I'll make you the *best* pyjamas you've ever had your Highness! I'll give you a *fit* like a *dream* your Highness ! Don't worry your Highness your pyjamas will be the *envy* of all who see them. And what happened?!' the Prisoner shivered and shook and begged for mercy and permission to tell his story.

'You had better have a good excuse' said the Badmash Badshah darkly.

'I do! I do!' cried the prisoner, hastily embarking on his story. 'I was born the son of a tailor, and my father was not just any ordinary tailor, but the best known in the city. He could stitch miracles with needle and thread. Everybody who was anybody in the city flocked to him. He could make fat women look thin and thin women look fat. He could make men with no shoulders fit their sherwanis like they were body builders. He could cut a sleeve so that even if a great grandmother wore it you would think it draped the arm of the most delicate damsel of sixteen. He could disguise knobbly knees, skinny shins, bow legs and hunch backs. He could make women look as demure as nuns, or as seductive as seven houris rolled into one. He was busy night and day with flashing needle and sharp scissors. I on the other hand never even learnt how to thread a needle. I was the only child of the old age of my parents, and my mother never allowed me into my fathers shop - there were needles there that could prick me, scissors that could cut me, sewing machines on which I could dirty my clothes. Her beloved son, my mother declared, would never do a stitch of work in his life. I was also not allowed to go to school in case the boys bullied me, to cross the road in case a camel ran me over, or step outside in case I was kidnapped. I played in the courtyard where my mother could keep an eye on me, and longed with all my heart to be dirty, filthy and kidnapped. Instead of which I got terribly spoilt. I spent my days in idleness, eating and drinking with my friends, and wondering what life was like at the opposite end of the street. My father tried to argue with my mother many times, but she wouldn't listen. My mother died unexpectedly earlier this year and my father followed her a scarce month later.

I buried my father, came home, shut the door and wondered what I was going to do. No doubt I was rich. No doubt I could exactly as my heart pleased for the rest of my life. No doubt I could finally cross the road on my own. I might even get to the other end of town. The thought dazzled me. I might even one day make it all the way to Lucknow to see the dancing girls I'd heard so much about. But at the moment I had a

more pressing problem. I had no idea how to get out of my clothes. As I struggled, there was a knock on the door, and there stood my Uncle, my mother's brother.

'Uncle!' I cried ' How do you unbutton buttons?'

He stood on the doorstep and intoned in a mournful voice 'Let the boy learn I said or he'll be spoiled. Teach him a trade I said or he'll be a good for nothing. Let him do some hard work or what will he do when you're gone. Did they listen to me? No. I come my boy' he said, unbuttoning disdainfully ' Bearing your father's will.'

'Come on in then' I said 'What does it say? Am I simply rich, or filthy rich?'

'A little less levity' he said 'would be a little more becoming.'

He cleared his throat, set his spectacles straight and began reading. ' To my beloved and only son I leave my blessings, the best of my wishes, all the love that I could wish to give him, much joy, all the very best in life, his mothers blessings, the protection of his ancestors ...

'Yes yes - and?' I cried

'and' He said glowering at me ' Teach him manners I said. Teach him how to talk to his elders I said..'

'*And?*' I shouted in his ear.

'And the one thing that I hold most precious in this world'

'What? What?' I almost danced on his beard in my impatience.

'This' said my uncle, holding up a little red purse and producing from it a battered and worn silver thimble.

'A thimble? Is that all? Are you sure?' I snatched the purse from him and turned it inside out, but there was nothing else there. Nothing but one tarnished little silver thimble.

'I haven't finished ' said my Uncle, and I sat down impatiently to listen.

'It is much to my sorrow that I realise now that your mother and I have spoilt you terribly. You are, my son, good-for-nothing.' My uncle nodded with gloomy satisfaction ' We fear that you will continue to be so unless you learn to earn your own way in the world. It is a lesson well worth learning, even if you are starting late. So, I am leaving all my money to a school for Fallen Seamstresses, and to you my son I am leaving my thimble. I am sure you will soon learn how it can aid you to fame and fortune.' My uncle finished and began rolling up the scroll.

'There must be more!' I said ' He can't have left me with only this'.

'He has' said my Uncle 'and it is time you began to fend for yourself.'

'But where will I begin' I sobbed ' I know nothing. How could he leave me with nothing?'

' He has left you with a flourishing business and a good reputation. You might begin with the work your father left unfinished' he said ' I am sure there are many sewing orders still to be delivered.' He left, only pausing on the doorstep to sigh lugubriously and say ' I told them so.'

'Come back!' I cried ' How do you light a stove?' he didn't come back, so I had to go without dinner.

Sitting alone and hungry, I thought about his advice. It sounded like a good idea, and even if I knew nothing about sewing, I was sure there was nothing to it and I could learn. I set to work immediately, pausing only to fling the thimble in the darkest corner I could find. There was the Mallika's kameez to be done, the Police Chief's new uniform to be finished, the Kazi's white kurta for the Friday sermon.... I lit a couple of more lamps and went to work with a will. I delivered

all the clothes in the morning and returned home well pleased with my work.

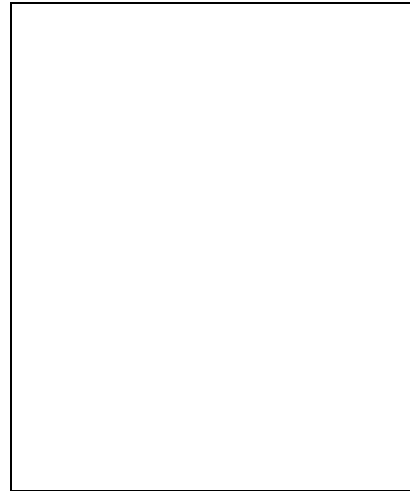
Well nobody else was. You never heard such shouting in your life! The first to arrive in the shop was the Mallika, panting and wheezing and the most peculiar shade of purple you had ever seen. It had taken three maids and one eunuch to squeeze her into the Kameez and now nobody could get her out again. She didn't even have breath enough to shout, but when I cut her out of it, she recovered pretty fast. You should have heard her! I hadn't recovered when the Maulvi came through the door, shaking his fists and trembling. He had scarcely bent to begin the namaz when his churidar had ripped apart with a sound like the Angel Gabriel sounding the trump of doom. Being a man of god, he could not abandon the prayers mid way, and had had to continue to the bitter end. After him came the Police Chief. He had been facing a rioting mob outside the bazaar and just as he yelled 'Charge!' all his buttons had popped with a sound like pistols firing. It had taken three men to convince him to get out from under his horse, and his reputation was ruined! Ruined! After him came the butcher, the baker, the candle stick maker.... until I could take it no more. My head was aching and thirty seven curses I'd never heard before were ringing in my ears. I locked the door and hid in the smallest darkest room I could find.

I sat in the dark because I daren't light a lamp, and wondered what on earth to do. Here was a fine pickle. I had not a single sou and half the town was after me. The Police Chief had threatened to throw me in prison, the Mallika to leave me to the tender mercies of her chief eunuch, the Maulvi.. At the thought of the Maulvi I couldn't help laughing again. Many an afternoon I had suffered his sermons as he tried to knock sense into the heads of all the boys of the area. Nobody would ever be able to look at him again without giggling. I rolled on the floor, chuckling and snorting. To my surprise, another tiny voice joined in, with many shrill chuckles of delight.

'Who's that?' I said suspiciously trying to peer through the dark

'Me!' said a voice

'Me who?' I said lighting the tiniest lamp I could find. And when it was lit, there on a reel of thread, as saucy as you please stood the Thimble my father had left me.



'Me' said the Thimble striking a pose 'Nimble Thimble himself. Don't all clap at the same time.'

Well! You could have knocked me down with a needle!

'You might close your mouth and stop staring' he said, turning three neat somersaults and landing on his head 'Reel Bad manners'.

'I've never seen a thimble that could talk' I said, hastily shutting my mouth and gathering my wits.

'Isn't another one like me in the world. I'm a cut above the rest.' He tap danced his way across the blade of the scissors 'Sew, what can I do for you? Heart to be patched up? Hole in the head? Broken friendship to be mended? I can fix them all so that they never need to be mended again. A stitch in time saves using a sewing machine.'

'Can you do clothes?' I said

'Pooh' said the thimble 'Booring booring. Of course I can. It's a snip. Been doing nothing else for dozens of years - blouses and skirts and pants and petticoats and vests and lehngas and waistcoats and suits..'

'Well,' I said sighing heavily 'then we can continue the family business and make shalwars, and kameeze's and sherwanis

and dogris and kurtas and pyjamas and dhoti's ..' With each word my heart got heavier and heavier

'And vests and suits and uniforms and shirts ' said the Thimble sighing till a little breeze whistled through all the holes in him.

'Not to forget chaddis' I added.

We both sat gloomily in the dark.

'You know' said the Thimble 'I'm sick of tailoring. It's the chaddis that depress me the most.'

I said nothing. The chaddis depressed me too.

'And the socks' added the Thimble.

When I thought about it, socks were pretty depressing too.

'Do you *want* to be a tailor?' said the thimble ' and measure your life out in stitches?'

'No No! A thousand times no.' I said shuddering at the thought.

'Then what are we waiting for' said the thimble 'Let's run away immediately and make our fame and fortune'. He whispered enticingly in my ear. 'Romance, adventure! The whole wide world to roam. I've always wanted to see the world.'

'But I've never crossed the road on my own' I said.

'Pooh!' said the Thimble 'Crossing the road is as easy as falling off a camel.'

'I've never fallen off a camel either. Never been on one. Mother wouldn't allow me.'

The Thimble eyed me with sympathy 'Don't you think it's time you went out and *lived*? Excitement! Adventure! Life!'

'Yes but is it safe?' I asked doubtfully

The Thimble sighed and leaned against my ear 'Leave it to me kid. I'll look after you. They don't call me Nimble Thimble for nothing. Nobody's ever caught me napping yet.'

'But..' I said, looking around the house and suddenly feeling very reluctant to leave it.

'Thrills! Chills! Sp...um Splendid Adventure!' trilled the Thimble in my ear.

'Um..' I said looking longingly at my bed.

'Treasure! Gold! Diamonds! ' crooned the Thimble

'Uh..' I said, weakening, and thinking of all the dozens of day dreams I had woven over the years.

'Wine! Women! Song!' said the Thimble leaning close and whispering dulcetly in my ear.

'Dancing girls as good as the ones in Lucknow?' I asked

'*Dozens*' said the Thimble.

And before I knew what I was doing, I had gathered together a few clothes and some food and the two of us were whistling our way down the road to adventure.

And we found it. Not very much further down the road either. I had only been down the road as far as where the caravans dipped out of sight. Beyond that I discovered lay vast amounts of camel droppings, and a desert that stretched as far as the eye could see. Checking to see my waterskin was stoppered tight I set off, the thimble dancing on my shoulder and singing gaily. We had scarcely gone very far when a shadow fell across our path. A huge shadow. A humungous shadow. A shadow shaped very much like a Desert Djinn.

'Excuse me' said the Desert Djinn most politely 'I fear I must inconvenience you by eating you.'

I begged and pleaded. I fell on my knees. I invented mothers waiting hopefully for me at home and aging invalid fathers. And all the time I looked around desperately for Thimble. He had disappeared at the first sight of trouble. The more I pleaded, the more embarrassed the Djinn looked. He stood on one foot and apologized profusely. He was a very shy effacing fellow and confessed that he would much rather be in a line of work that didn't involve eating people. But Djinns didn't get too many career options.

'Me and my brothers have been brought up to eat.. er... humans.' He said 'Terribly inconvenient for humans and most unthoughtful of us, but there it is. I am most truly sorry. If you had continued down the road you would have met my elder brother. And further down the road lives my eldest brother of all. Since I am the youngest and the most shy, I get first chance on travelers passing this way. If you would be so kind' he said, scooping me up in one large hairy green fist 'I must now carry you off to my den and stoke the fire. It is almost supper time you know.'

His den was a large cave under a sand dune, most neatly swept and laid out, with a large scroll in cross stitch on one wall that read 'Love me love my cave'. As he made preparations to cook me, he chatted in a most amiable manner. 'I hope you won't think me too audacious. I've scarcely begun to be a Djinn you see. I'm only five hundred years old. My brothers call me Junior. Junior Djinn. ' He hummed as he put on his apron and laid out several large bowls.

He paused at the bubbling pot to consider me. 'What kind of person would you say you were? Someone who would go with a light piquant sauce, or with something heavier with a hint of oregano and the most delicate nuance of mint?'

I sat with my head in my hands and offered no opinion, so he decided to go with the mint and was soon chopping away

happily and telling me tales of all his family. And what a voracious bunch of eaters they were!

'My Uncle the Deplorable Djinn ate an entire army at one sitting. Of course it threw a spanner in the works of the war that was on, and the two kingdoms would have sued for peace except that uncle kept eating the bearers of peace messages. My great Cousin thrice removed was known as the Genial Genie, and you never met a better natured Djinn. He laughed at every joke he was told, and it was the death of him. He choked to death on a Court Jester who made him giggle while he was swallowing. And my Grandfather the Grand Genius had a fine reputation for being able to hold his men. Nobody could eat him under the table. Mind you' said the Junior Djinn shaking a ladle 'None of them knew a thing about the art of eating. 'Up and at it' was about the sum of their motto. And 'Hit it on the head if it's still moving'. I on the other hand have spent a long time studying the art of cooking.' He blushed shyly 'I would say that not anyone can do a human to as rare a turn as I can. Of course, having a philosophy helps. I think you can know a man immediately if you can find out if he is a medium rare or well doner. I don't believe in garlic for example, and I do think only a man of extreme restraint should attempt to understand ginger...'

In the middle of a complicated story about his Uncle the Terrible Curse of the Mountain who believed the only good human was a well done one, the Nimble Thimble climbed out of my navel.

'There you are' I hissed furiously 'A fine fellow you are, disappearing like that. Who was it who got us into this mess in the first place? Romance! Adventure! Did you say one word about being a Djinn's dinner?'

'We're not dinner yet, and I've cooked up a little idea of my own'

'I don't care about your ideas. Take me home. I want to go home.'

'Stop being a namby pamby Mama's boy, and offer to make him a pair of pyjamas.'

'What?!'

'Oh ye of little faith' sighed Thimble doing a head stand on my ear 'Just do it'

'Excuse me' I said 'I'm a tailor.'

'Oh are you?' said the Djinn, not at all upset at being interrupted 'Pleased to meet you, even if it is in these circumstances. Awfully sorry and all that you know.'

'Oh not at all not at all' I said waving an airy hand ' I hope I make a satisfactory meal'

'I do hope' said the Djinn anxiously 'You aren't upset?'

'No no' I said ' And to prove that I owe you no ill will I would like to make you a little gift. A little farewell present as it were.'

'Oh really' said the Djinn standing on one foot and mumbling inarticulately ' Awfully good of you... no need really..'

'I would like to make you a pair of pyjamas' I said, bowing with a flourish.

'No!' cried the Djinn blushing a deep shade of green with pleasure 'Pyjamas! Just what I always wanted! Er.. will they have stripes on them?'

'As many as you like' I said pulling some cloth out of my little bundle and setting to work immediately. Thimble giggled and chuckled as he zipped up and down through the cloth but not one hint would he give me about how he proposed to get us out of this mess. When those pyjamas were finished, they were the most beautiful pair you had ever seen. They were purple with orange and heliotrope stripes, and the Djinn was

so delighted when I presented them to him, he could think of nothing to say.

'Erm' he said ' Arm... ' and turned away to hide a tear of emotion. 'EYAAHOO!' he cried finally, leaping with both feet into the pyjamas. There was a resounding crash and everything shook as he fell.

'Er Djinn?' I called cautiously ' Junior?'

'Out for the count' said Thimble hopping down and striking a pose on his chest. 'Ole!'

'What did you do?' I asked

'Stitched the bottom of the pyjamas' said Thimble.

The Djinn showed no signs of coming around, so we explored the cave, and there at the back of it were large jars filled to the brim with gold. I filled my knapsack until it was bulging and left the Djinn a polite note apologising for giving him a headache. We set off down the road again, Thimble whistling victory songs and marching round and round the brim of my hat until I had a headache too.

We hadn't gone very far when a Shadow fell across the road. A large shadow, a humongous shadow. A Djinn shaped shadow. Only this one was larger than the one we left behind.

'GRAAAABUMFLUBBBL!' said the Djinn.

'Oh no' I said. Thimble said nothing. He had disappeared.

It was the Junior Djinn's elder brother and he grabbed me in a rough hand and carried me away to his cave. And a nasty foul smelling place it was, with large heaps of bones in the corners. I hastily and surreptitiously searched in several orifices, but I could find no trace of Thimble. For the second time I heartily regretted setting out to find adventure, and thought longingly of home.

This Djinn didn't waste time. Flinging me in a corner, he went to work, stoking the fire and chopping onions with an enormous knife, and grunting in a way that didn't encourage conversation. I tried my best to fill the gaps while waiting for Thimble to reappear.

'Do you?' I said 'have a philosophy of food?'

'Gaargleblumf' said the Djinn

'Would you say you fell in the camp of the medium, rare or well doners?'

'AAaooogllllllph' said the Djinn.

'You don't have to be shy because you stutter' I said encouragingly.

The Djinn seized me and brandished a chopper in front of my eyes'D-D-D-did you say something about my st -st-st-stutter?' he said

'N-N-N-No' I said

'G-G-G-Good' he said, going back to chopping and stirring with such a ferocious look on his face, it's a wonder the milk didn't curdle. I made one last effort.

'I'm a tailor' I said.

'Hgggrmmph' said the Djinn chopping furiously at some garlic

'Just to show that I have no ill will when you eat me, I'd like to make you a present'

'Ggrrrrarrfh' said the Djinn reducing an onion to tears.

'A nice pair of pyjamas'

'AAARGHMMMMPH' said the Djinn beheading three carrots with one blow

'Idiot!' said Thimble, appearing on my shoulder and kicking me in the nose. 'We can't play the same trick twice .' He disappeared into my ear with a squeak as the Djinn bore down on us and lifted me by one leg. As I dangled upside down he poked and prodded me.

'What are you doing?' I yelled alarmed

'Hmmm' said the Djinn 'tough'

'Oh awfully tough' I cried 'All bones. You don't want to have anything to do with old boot leather like me.'

'H-h-hang' said the Djinn briefly, as if he was dictating a recipe 't-t-t-till t-t-t-ender'. He let go of my leg and I fell to the ground with a crash. As I lay there winded I noticed that there were rows of sacks hanging from the ceiling. And horror of horrors, some of them were wriggling! The Djinn was busy searching for a sack. From inside my ear Thimble said 'Hmm. We are in a soup.'

'Not yet but we will be' I said ' Romance! Adventure! HAH! Thimble *do* something'

The Djinn found a large sack and came back and lifted me by my left ankle and began lowering me into the sack.

'Help! Help!' I shouted

'Stop yelling and tell him the sack isn't empty' said Thimble

' It isn't' I said 'It's going to be full of me'

'Stop arguing and do it' said Thimble sliding out of my ear and leaping into the sack.

'Here Djinn' I said ' You can't put me in this sack. Somebody's already in it.'

'Eh?' said the Djinn 'I-i-i-isn't too'.

'Is too' I said

'I-I-I-I-isn't'

'Is too' I said, getting a little tired of this

'I-I-I-'

'Is too' said a voice from the sack ' and I wish you wouldn't lower nasty old boot leather on top of me.'

'EH?' said the Djinn peering inside the sack. 'Wh- who - who?'

'Arch' said the voice from the sack

'A-A-Arch who?' said the Djinn

'God bless you' said Thimble cheerfully

The Djinn didn't find the joke funny. He dropped me on my head and said 'AARGHHMMMFLGUNBLIFFF' thrusting his entire head into the sack to have a look. Quick as flash, the Nimble Thimble nipped out and sewed his head into the sack. The Djinn was so angry he quite forgot to stutter.

'MWANNNNGGG! PPPHFSST! OOOOGH! I'll get you!' he roared 'Just you wait till I get this off my head! Ugh! ARRRGH! MMMMmgwamph! oogh! I'll chop you into little bits. I'll stomp you to pieces. I'll grind your bones to make my bread.'

We ignored him as we were already busy searching the cave.

'Treasure!' cried Nimble nipping into a sack and bathing in showers of diamonds ' Quick fill your cap.'

We filled my cap and set off at a trot. Behind us the enraged howls of the Djinn faded into the distance.

'I don't think I could bear to see another Djinn before lunch time' I said as we huffed and puffed as fast as we could.

'Too late' said Thimble, disappearing with a squeak

There was a shadow across the road. A large shadow. A humongous shadow. A Djinn shaped shadow.

'Here we go again' I said wearily, thinking that adventure wasn't all that it was knocked up to be.

'Ahoy me heartie!' cried the Djinn, bounding up and grabbing me around the neck. 'Avast ye land lubbers. Thousand of blue blistering barnacles. Stand to prisoner.'

When he had dumped me on the floor of his house and I could talk again I pointed out that we were in the desert and not at sea.

'I know me heartie' said the Djinn raising his eyepatch to wink at me 'But when I was a little fellow not knee high to a troll, I wanted to run away to sea and be a pirate. Still do.' He produced a large cauldron whistling cheery sea shanties. 'If by four bells you haven't got your sea legs, you won't have them at all. Legs that is.' He roared with laughter.

'That joke is in very bad taste' I said coldly

'Hope you aren't, me little sea biscuit' the Djinn said, laughing even louder.

I sat there as he flung odds and ends into the pot and waited for Thimble to make his usual delayed appearance which he eventually did, crawling out from under my collar.

'There you are' I said ' You might have appeared a little earlier and spared me the nasty cracks.'

'Not easy to think up tricks to deprive Djinns of their Djinner you know' he said. 'Tell him his fly is open.'

'Your fly is open' I said to the Djinn

'Whoops' he said ' I seem to have a couple of buttons missing.'

'I'll sew them on for you' I offered ' I'm a tailor.'

'What good luck!' he said ' I hope you aren't full of pins and needles'.

I ignored his laughter and set to work while he wrapped himself in his bath towel which was large enough for a bedsheet for three people.

Nimble laughed so hard while he stitched that he made himself sick.

'What are you upto?' I asked, but he wouldn't tell. 'All right' I said huffily ' Have your little joke.'

The Djinn put on his trousers and thanked us . 'Shiver me timbers!' he said 'Excuse me my lad. I have to go around the corner.' He disappeared whistling but was back almost immediately a little red in the face. 'Er' he said 'I can't seem to get these buttons undone.'

Thimble appeared on my knee and took a bow 'When I stitch something, it stays stitched' he said.

'B-bu-but dear fellow' said the Djinn ' I need to - er- um - er you know - *go*'

Thimble and I were busy rolling on the floor laughing. You would have laughed too if you could have seen the faces he made.

'You can't *do* this me laddies' said the Djinn anxiously ' When a Djinn's gotta go he's gotta go.'

And he tried his best to. He attempted to cut off the buttons with the chopper. He tried to singe them off in front of the fire. He tugged and struggled and hopped around. He begged and implored. He stood on one foot and made little pleading

noises. He said pretty please with butter and cheese. Thimble and I laughed ourselves sick. Then we searched the cave, and there, buried in a large chest were jewels of every sort and description. I had no where to put them so I stuffed them in my shoes. We left the Djinn all bent over and looking agonized as we strolled off into the sunset.

'Come back' he shouted ' I can't *stand* it. And stop *whistling!!!*'

As we walked, I jingled the gold and jewels we had collected and Thimble skipped along in time to the sound of the jingling. 'We're rich!' he cried 'Rich! Money Money Money! No more slaving over clothes. No more bundis, no more socks to darn. No more Chaddis. I told you Romance and adventure were where it was at.'

'Yes' I said 'But the question is where are we at?' Thimble stopped skipping and looked around. As far as the eye could see we were surrounded by the rolling desert sands.

'Er...lost?' he offered not very helpfully.

'So now what do we do?' I said.

'How do I know?' said Thimble 'I'm a Thimble, not a compass.'

'Yes but you're supposed to find us a way out of here.'

'Look here' said Thimble drawing himself up to his full height 'Who thought of stitching the bottom of the trousers of the first Djinn?'

'You did' I said

'And who thought of sewing the second Djinn into a sack?'

'er.. you did' I said

'And who thought of sewing up the buttons on the third Djinns trousers?'

'All right all right. *You* did.' I said

'Well, then you find us a way out of here.'

'But I don't know how' I wailed ' I wish I had just stayed at home. It's all your fault. Romance! Hah! Adventure! What's romantic about starving to death in a desert?'

'Namby pamby mama's boy' said Thimble 'Stay at home next time. All you ever want to do is run home to mother.'

'If this is adventure you can have it' I said hotly ' Give me home and a comfortable bed anytime.'

'Oh really?' said the Thimble 'You gutless little homebody you.'

'And you son of a soup strainer you' I retorted, not to be outdone.

'Soupstrainer?' said Thimble icily, drawing himself up to his full height.

'Teastrainer actually' I said, adding insult to injury

'I see' said Thimble getting more and more dignified by the minute 'I take it you are no longer interested in adventure?'

'I'm interested in a drink of water and a soft bed' I said scanning the desert sands with a hopeless eye. 'I wouldn't want adventure if it came wrapped up in ribbons and carried by a hundred houris in seven veils.'

'Very well' said Thimble, looking all stiff and starchy. And after that he didn't say a word.

We wandered many days in the desert and it was simply awful. We had no food, no water, and Thimble was not talking to me. I was soon too weak to carry the treasure we had collected. I flung it with regret into the sand. Just when we thought that the end was near, we saw the spires of your city.

Thimble spoke for the first time in days ' If that is not a mirage' he said 'Then that is where you and I part ways. I shall go out into the wonderful wide world and you' he said with a curl of his lip 'Can go home.'

At the gate the guards stopped us and brought us before your Highness. And as you know I offered to stitch your Highness a pyjama as proof that I was nothing but a simple tailor.'

'Nothing less than the best pyjama I had ever had' said the Badmash Badshah. 'Hah! The Chief of the Wardrobe fell into such fits of giggles when he saw me in it, there was no cure but to cut his head off.'

'Forgive me your Highness ' cried the Prisoner beating his head on the stone step. 'Forgive me.'

'Not much good this magic thimble of yours what?' said the Badmash Badshah.

' Not there' said the Prisoner ' Gone gone *gone*.'

'Where?' said the Badmash Badshah.

'I wish I knew' said Ali ' While your guards were busy arresting me, he suddenly gave a low whistle and said ' Now isn't that the prettiest bobbin you've ever seen!' and was off. And' added Ali bitterly ' He's most probably off having the most fantastic adventures while I've languished in a dungeon. You don't know what a dungeon is like your Highness. It's dark. It's smelly. It's damp. It has spiders. I would give anything to be back with Thimble. Anything.'

'That should be easy to arrange' said the Boy

'What do you mean?' said the Badmash Badshah.

'Your Direst Distress, all one has to do to locate the thimble is find the best dressed person in the city.'

'Brilliant!' said the Badmash Badshah 'Stroke of Genius'

'And that you can do without leaving the palace' said the boy 'In the Begum Sahiba's clothes I detect the touch of no ordinary seamstress.'

The Badmash Badshah inspected the Begum 'By Yamraj you're right' he said 'Wearing a new dress are you?'

'BADMASH.. ' the Begum said taking a deep breath.

'Just joking just joking!' said the Badmash Badshah hastily 'Fetch the Chief Seamstress at once.'

The Seamstress arrived clutching on to her head for dear life 'I am innocent!' we could hear her yelling from down the corridor 'Whatever it was, I didn't do it! Don't cut off my head!'

'No one's going to cut your head off my good woman' said the Badmash Badshah 'all we're looking for is a thimble.'

'A Thimble?' said the Seamstress not letting go of her head

'Yes yes' said the Badmash Badshah ' A little old thimble. Tell us where it is immediately or I shall cut off - erm arm.. oops!'

It took three soldiers and a bottle of smelling salts to revive the seamstress, and even then she trembled terribly and was so scared she got the hiccups.

'A lit-hic-tle battered hic silver one?' she said weakly

'Yes Yes' cried Ali 'That's Nimble'

'When the -hic- Begum Sahicba was kind enough to give me a gold thimble for my good work I hic - I hic -'

'Yes yes???' said the Badmash Badshah.

'threw the old hic one into a hic well.'

'Threw him in a well! He'll sink! He's full of holes! He'll drown!' cried Ali

'Empty the well! Employ scuba divers! Thave the simble!' cried the Badmash Badshah while everyone rushed around bumping into each other in their haste to obey. The seamstress quietly crept off, still holding onto her head and hiccuping.

You could hear the Thimble coming from a long way off when they fished him out of the well. His sneezes reverberated through the palace. A soldier was carrying him on a cushion, and he placed him tenderly before the Badshah. The Thimble made a sulky sort of bow to the Badmash Badshah and went back to sneezing.

'Nimble!' cried Ali

'Hmphf' said Nimble. He was still sulking.

'What happened? Where did you go?' cried Ali

'Women!' said the Thimble in a bitter voice. 'I spent all night slaving over a dress just to be close to that little bobbin. Embroidered fancy ideas about settling down with little bobbins playing at my knee. Thought about a reel home of my own in a nice sewing box. And when the sun came up what did she do ? Ran away with the new pair of scissors, because he cut a fancy dash. And the next thing I knew I was in deep water. Hah!' said the Thimble bitterly. *'Women!'*

'Nimble!' cried Ali snatching him up and weeping fat tears that splashed through him.

'Careful' said the Thimble 'I'm a thimble not a tea strainer, whatever *some* people might say. And I already have a cold thank you.'

'I'm sorry! I take it back' said Ali 'Aren't you happy to see me?'

'Depends' said the Thimble 'Where are we going from here?'

'Anywhere!' cried Ali ' Out in the wilderness. Giants! Demons! Trolls! Death Despair Suffering! Anything rather than dungeons'

'Oh Joy! Oh Bliss' cried the Thimble turning cartwheels till he was dizzy. 'I've had as much as I can take of civilization. What are we waiting for?'

'Permission' said Ali bowing humbly before the Badmash Badshah.

'Of course' said the Badmash Badshah 'Carry on! Carry on! Watch out for the Djinns'

'Wait a minute' said the Thimble, hanging from Ali's ear and looking him searchingly in the left eye. 'You won't midway want to go home?'

'Home?' cried Ali 'Home is where I hang my hookah'

'You won't want a bed to sleep on?'

'Pooh! Bed schmed' said Ali 'I want the wind in my hair. A road in front of me. Djinns and journeys!'

'Ro-hachoo mance!' cried the thimble 'Adtishooventure!'

He leapt onto Ali's shoulder and the two of them made their way singing out of the palace. The singing was punctuated with large sneezes. Even the Badmash Badshah had a tear in his eye at such a happy ending. In fact he didn't remember about his Aligarhi pyjamas until after the two of them were gone far far away and in the middle of their next adventure.