

# *A Pink Djinn in Paradise*

*Jocelyn Smith*

## **Synopsis**

Jim's existence was the sort of thing most people dream of from time to time – a desert island, uninhabited but for him. Warm sunny days, cool nights, and an abundant supply of food. Not a care in the world. And then he finds the bottle in the sea, complete with resident Genie.....

## **Biog**

Jocelyn Smith is an IT Consultant with a passion for flying. An avid sci-fi and fantasy reader, occasional watercolourist, and interested in all things inexplicable, he recently turned his hand to writing. A long fantasy novel emerged and while it was maturing he decided to attempt a short story. This is it!

' Just another day for me and me in paradise...'

Jim warbled untunefully as he ambled along the beach, his fishing pole over his shoulder. Then he frowned. The joke was stale now, after four months of solitude, even though the location was indeed paradise. He looked down the wide, gently sloping beach - miles of fine white sand bordered by shady palms, curved into a large bay, with a rocky promontory about three miles down. Beyond this, he knew, was another beach, almost as good as this. Behind the palms were other trees - jackfruit, banana, papaya, guava, mango - which supplied him with a healthy diet of fruit. Occasional clearings, in one of which he had built a shelter to keep off the sun during the day and the wind at night. Towards the centre was a steep hill, an extinct volcano, with a lake at the top. In the woods were all manner of feathered game, which provided him with an occasional meal of meat. And there were always fish, ready to give themselves up for almost any bait. There were small pigs too, but his skill with bow and arrow did not extend that far. His attempts at snares failed as well. But, he survived, quite well really, and was not unhappy with his lot. It could have been a lot worse. Four months now, since his Cessna had been blown off course by an unexpected tropical storm, and since his cross-wind landing on the beach had been ruined by a violent gust. The Cessna was still 'parked' where it had finished up - six foot off the ground between two close-growing palms, sans wings. These had provided him with the starting point for his shelter, after they had been ripped off in the 'landing'.

Four months! He had, of course, done everything a marooned person was expected to do: Built a bonfire with green wood and leaves on top to provide smoke, laid stones on the beach spelling SOS - that had taken a whole day - and found some reflective aluminium foil in the Cessna to use as a mirror. But in spite of numerous vigils, some all night, he had seen nothing: not a ship or sail, not an aircraft, not even a contrail in the deep blue sky above. He must have been blown well off the shipping and air lanes. The bonfire was renewed regularly, the sand brushed off the SOS, and the mirror used regularly to sweep a beam across the horizon in the hope that someone beyond the horizon would see it. He had even climbed to the top of the volcano, and built a second bonfire on the rim, but even from this vantage point - about six hundred feet above sea level - he saw nothing except the green of the sea meeting the blue-grey of the sky in every direction. Not so much as a smudge of smoke below or the glint of a wheeling aircraft above.

After the first couple of weeks of anticipation of rescue he had sunk into a depression. Two weeks later he had snapped out of it, after he realised that he had lost weight and was beginning to look ill, and that if he was to be rescued at all his first priority was to survive. Things improved rapidly after that. He had made his bow and arrows and enjoyed his first meat meal in a month, a jungle fowl, then made a fishing rod from a stem of cane, using nylon retrieved from the Cessna's fuselage as line and a hook fashioned from a piece of steel wire, also courtesy of the Cessna, and caught his first fish. He learnt to tempt crab and lobster into his cooking pot as well. His razor blade had blunted long ago, so he let his beard grow. Shirt and cut-down jeans were his normal apparel now, and bare feet. He only wore his canvas shoes on his infrequent ascents up the volcano, and when he went fishing on the rocks. He gradually began to love his environment, and stopped pining for his earlier

life. He still missed Kate, of course, and it was only thoughts of her that occasionally dragged him back to civilisation.

So, here he was, footloose and fancy-free, wandering along the beach an hour after sunrise, without a care in the world. He didn't even scan the horizon as he once did, but looked along the beach for shells and pebbles, bits of flotsam and jetsam which might be useful or decorative. His eye caught something dark, bobbing in the waves at the water's edge, drifting in, then out again. Dropping his pole above the waterline, he waded into the surf. As he got closer he saw that the object was a bottle with a long stem. He grabbed at it, and let go immediately with an expression of pain as something sharp pricked his palm. More gingerly this time, he reached out and grasped the bottom of the stem, then turned and waded out of the sea. He looked at the object as he walked: a bottle of deep blue glass, no moulded maker's imprint, with a long stem the top of which was encrusted with what looked like coral. It was rough with razor-sharp edges, and this had pricked his hand, fortunately without drawing blood. Walking up the shore he came to the fringe of the palms lining the beach, and sat on a convenient log above the high-water mark. He turned the find over in his hand, wondering at its contents.

' Perhaps it contains a message, from someone else marooned on a desert island' he speculated. ' I bet its a gorgeous blonde' he thought ' and she's probably a thousand miles away, too, not that it makes any difference since I'm stuck here. Maybe there's a treasure map inside, and the bottle's been trapped in a wreck for a hundred years or so. Not much good to me either' . Then a thought struck him which made him grin. ' Perhaps it's half full of a good brandy! Now that would be great. I haven't had a drink for four months.'

He searched the ground around him and then picked up a sturdy piece of shell, and tried to whittle and chip the coral off the neck of the bottle. After a few frustrating minutes he discarded the shell and hunted around again. A large broken pebble with a sharp edge caught his attention. Picking it up, he grasped it like a prehistoric flint axe, and brought the sharp edge down on the coral, along the length of the bottle neck. A small groove appeared in the hard white mass. Again! And again! He was definitely making an impression. Four, five, six! Chips of white coral flew off the bottle. Eight, nine ten, eleven, twelve! More chips flew, but the groove was still not very deep. Thirteen! The coral split lengthwise and the two halves fell onto the beach, the inner surfaces a perfect mould of the bottle-neck. He examined the stopper. About a half-inch proud of the mouth of the bottle, made of glass or ceramic of some sort. Gripping the base of the bottle in his left hand, he tried to turn the stopper with his right. It didn't budge. He tried turning it the other way, with no result. For the next five minutes he twisted and turned with all his might until he felt the sweat forming on his body. One more determined twist, accompanied with a grunt, and the stopper was free, his right hand flying outwards with the sudden release. A gurgling and hissing came from the bottle, which he turned so that he could peer inside it, and then a rush of something acrid-smelling gushed from the mouth, covering his face and lower body. He dropped the bottle and rushed seawards, then knelt in the surf and bathed his face and body, splashing water over himself with his hands.

' What the hell was that?' he thought in panic ' It smells bloody awful. Christ! I hope it wasn't some chemical dumped in the sea. Something from a CBW lab.' He continued splashing water over himself and then gingerly opened his eyes. There

was nothing obviously wrong with his skin where the substance had splashed on him. His eyes did not smart. 'Thank God' he thought reverently, really meaning it this time.

He stood, turned, and walked back up the shore. The bottle lay where he had dropped it, on its side, a wisp of smoke rising from the mouth. Above the bottle was a large cloud of blue-green smoke, scintillating with pink flashes. It rose to about ten feet, swirling, larger at the top than the bottom. And there it stopped. There was no breeze, but the cloud did not rise any higher, or appear to dissipate. It just swirled and glimmered.

'What the hell is that?' he said again, gazing at the strange cloud. As he looked at it, it appeared to solidify, and he got the impression of a pair of eyes looking out at him from the top of the column. While he stared the cloud firmed up some more, and he could swear that it now resembled a human shape. Then, suddenly, it was there. A tall, swarthy man, in brilliant pink silk shirt and pantaloons straight out of Ali Baba, complete with jewel-studded turban and curled-up pointed shoes. Hands folded across his stomach and legs akimbo, the apparition gazed steadily at Jim who stood there with his mouth open and his eyes popping in disbelief.

'Hello' said the Djinn 'Who are you?'

'Er... Hi' gulped Jim 'I..I.' m Jim. 'Who are you, I mean, what are you? If you don't mind my asking.'

'You couldn't pronounce my name if I told you' said the Djinn 'and as for what I am, well surely you must know that. You saw me come out of the bottle, didn't you?'

'Well, no, actually. I was too busy washing my face. I thought the stuff that came out of the bottle was some kind of nasty chemical. I suppose you must be a Genie or something.' Jim stuttered out.

'I prefer to be called a Djinn, actually, but if you are more comfortable with Genie, that's ok. I suppose you're marooned on this island. People who find us Djinn's usually are. How long have you been here?'

'Four months, Genie. How long have you been in that bottle, then?' Jim was surprised at his own boldness.

'Well, actually' said the Djinn, who had a sort of Oxbridge accent, very posh, 'that would be very difficult to explain. It's not a matter of time, you know, it's place. You've heard of the space-time continuum, haven't you. Well, let's just say it's been an infinite space-time. Do you understand?'

'Not really, no' said Jim 'I'm a stockbroker, not a scientist. And the stories I've read about Genies always said that the Genies had been in their bottles for a long time, and were ever-so-grateful when they were released, and always granted their rescuers three wishes, and gave them gold and castles and beautiful women, and.....'

Jim's voice trailed to a halt as the Djinn threw his head back and roared with laughter. He rocked forward and back and guffawed, wiping his tear-filled eyes every now and then. Finally, still wiping his eyes and face with the end of his silk turban, he managed to say through his laughter 'How those stories get around. And people always believe them. Three wishes indeed! No, young Jim, we do not *grant* wishes - we *sell* them.'

'*What?* I don't believe it! The stories can't all be wrong. Not that I ever believed them at all, anyway. Not until now, that is' he spluttered incredulously. '*Sell* them? For what? You Genies have everything, so what on earth could you want in exchange?' he continued vehemently.

' Well, there may have been one or two incidents way back, where one of us was feeling generous and handed out a freebie, but those were exceptional cases. Sort of loss-leaders, you know. Helped future sales, bit of PR and all that' replied the Djinn  
' And as for what I want in exchange, well, we' ll talk about that later. So, Jim, what would you like me to do for you?'

' Can I think about this for a while' said Jim ' It' s not exactly something that I had planned, even in my wildest fantasies. Trying to decide on three wishes isn' t exactly easy.'

' Hang on a minute, Jim' the Djinn interrupted ' ~~More~~ wishes. Just *one*, that' s all you can have.'

'What?' spluttered Jim ' It' s always been three, in the stories at least. First you tell me that they aren' t free, and then you limit it to one measly wish. What kind of a Genie are you, anyway.'

' Sorry, Jim' the Djinn really did look sorry ' but since the reorganisation lots of things have changed. We were running out of stuff like gold and jewels and things, and castles - well, they' re like gold-dust now. Even the ruins have been bought up by Americans who want the titles that go with them. And our economy has been hit by the population explosion over the last couple of centuries or so. Luckily, we' ve had an influx of your Organisation & Methods people, and Management Consultants. They' ve restructured our work methods and distribution. Everything is now on a just-in-time basis. Before we' d go back in time and create something that would come into the future, but we can' t do that now. It results in too many changes to history, because of the number of people there are who would be different if we made changes in the past, or who might not even exist. Plays hell with our censuses and records and so on. Do you know how hard it is just to give you, say, a million pounds? Well, first we have to find something valuable, say diamonds, there are still some that haven' t been discovered yet. *Then* we have to mine them - ourselves, Jim, we just can' t use local labour for reasons you' ll understand in a minute. *Then* we have to sell the diamonds, black market, to avoid questions. These days you have to have a license to sell diamonds, not like the old days when nobody asked questions. *Then* we have to launder the money, for the same reason. *Then* we have to organise a new identity for you, and set up a bank account, off-shore of course, into which we put the money. And there' s a lot more. Get the picture?'

' Yeah, I guess so' said Jim, not very happily ' I can' t say I' m pleased though. But one wish is better than nothing. I expect money' s the best. With enough money you can get all the other things. But what were you saying just now about an influx of consultants? From where?'

The Djinn looked a bit disconcerted at the question. ' Don' t worry about that, Jim, it' s an internal problem of ours. Just get on with deciding on your wish.'

' You said *our* consultants. How do *our* people get to *your* place? Where *is* your place, anyway? What' s it called?' Jim persisted.

' It would be too difficult to explain, Jim, honest. And you could never pronounce the name, let alone remember it. Just forget it, ok, and tell me what you would like from me. Just one simple wish, remember, not a complex one like a castle full of beautiful women and a million in the bank. That counts as three wishes. C' mon now Jim, we don' t have all day, you know' the Djinn rushed on ' I have to get back to my place soon. All time and motion these days, and time-sheets to fill in, project reports to be made, and all that.'

' OK' said Jim ' but first I' d like to know what it' s going to cost. No point in wasting time if I can' t afford it. I' m also curious to know what I have that you can' t get from anywhere else.'

' Now don' t you worry about that, Jim, it' s trivial really. And anyway, you wont have to pay for a long time, decades maybe. A sort of buy now, pay later scheme. With zero percent interest too. And it' s well within your reach - you wont even miss it, really' the Djinn beamed at Jim, in a really friendly used-car-salesman manner. ' And you can wish for anything, anything at all - within certain limits, of course.'

' There comes the caveat' Jim said cynically, looking sidewise at the Djinn ' what limits?'

' Well, it' s no good asking for a zillion pounds. There isn' t that much money in the world. Even a billion would be stretching it - it would take ten years or so to launder that much. Or to live forever. You can have anything reasonable and sensible' the Djinn still smiled affably.

' But I' m only allowed one wish, right?' Jim continued, as the Djinn nodded an affirmative ' So, what' s the use of wishing for money, even a billion pounds? I can' t use it here, and it' s no good to me if it' s in my bank account somewhere else, is it? The same goes for anything of value in civilisation. I guess I could wish to be back home, but I' ve got to like it here. I could wish for Kate to be here with me, but she might not like it and I would not be able to send her back. I' m going to have to think about this' Jim finished, and sat on the sand, his head in his hands.

' There' s a small formality to be observed, just sign this form' the Djinn pulled a rolled-up parchment from within his voluminous clothes ' I' ll just prick your finger to get a drop of blood - it won' t hurt, honest - then just sign here.'

' What? Sign in my own blood? Before I' ve even told you what I want? What' s this all about?' Jim erupted.

' It' s traditional, Jim. After all, I' m giving you your dearest wish' the Djinn still smiled at Jim pleasantly.

' Here! Let me take a look at that' Jim stood up and snatched the parchment from the Djinn and began to read it. ' MySoul?' he gasped incredulously ' You can' t be serious! I think I' m beginning to understand all this at last.' Jim looked suspiciously at the Djinn ' This place you come from, where you' ve recently had an influx of consultants and such, it wouldn' t be called Hell, would it?'

' Hell, shmell, what' s a name? It' s had a pretty bad press, I know, ~~but~~ know what the media are like. Always looking for something to knock. It' s not a bad place, really. And if you think about it, what are you losing? Can you show me your soul? Can you give it to anybody else? You can' t even see it. It' s just a concept to you, and no earthly - sorry, no pun intended - use to you at all. I' m giving you the opportunity to get something for it, instead of just hanging on to it because you feel you' re expected to do so. And, as I said before, it could be decades before you actually part with. You could even live to be a hundred. Think about it.' The Djinn looked ever-so reasonably at Jim.

' Ohyeah? And when I die, what happens. My soul goes straight to Hell, for eternity. That' s quite a long time, isn' t it? Thanks, but I' d rather go to the other place' said Jim, scowling at the Djinn ' You' ve been trying to con me, haven' t you?'

' Do you mean Heaven?' The Djinn looked at Jim with amusement. ' You haven' t a hope in Hell, Jim, not with your record. You' re going to Hell anyway, so why not enjoy life by taking advantage of my offer?'

' Hell? *Me?* Don' t be stupid. I' ve done nothing that bad. In fact, I' ve been pretty good, as a person, I mean. Why should I go to Hell?' he asked the Djinn.

' Good? You have a very short memory, Jim. What about that little business with your next-door neighbour' s wife, eh? Adultery is a mortal sin, one of the ten commandments, you know. Seducing someone' s wife gets you the fast lane to my place' the Djinn looked directly at Jim, a faint smile hovering on his lips.

' Seducing?' stormed Jim, now really angry was the one who was seduced. What would you call it when a beautiful woman comes to your back door at night to borrow a cup of sugar, wearing a short negligee which could have made cling-film look opaque? What was I supposed to do - throw her a couple of sugar lumps through the cat flap? I doubt if they' ll hold that against me up there.'

' You may have a small point there' admitted the Djinn ' but what about that deal you did with your friend' s relations? Getting them to buy stock in their names and then putting part of the proceeds into your Swiss account. Insider dealing, isn' t that what it' s called? Also dishonesty, stealing in fact. Another commandment well and truly bust. And the guy who jumped off the top of his office when he lost everything - you did advise him to buy those shares, didn' t you? You knew they were a gamble, but you didn' t tell him that, did you?'

' It wasn' t insider dealing at all' denied Jim ' but I knew it would look like that so I took the precaution of buying them through someone else, and you know it. And as for that suicide, the money he lost on the stock market was a very small part of his losses. He' d been embezzling the company for years, and he was going to be found out. That' s why he jumped off the roof.' Jim stopped to draw breath, and considered, ' Why am I explaining all this to you, anyway? I' ve had enough. I' m not interested in your offer. I' ll take my chances with the guy at the gate. Now why don' t you just crawl back into your bottle and leave me alone. You are *not* going to have my soul, and that' s final.'

' Ok' said the Djinn amicably ' you don' t want to go to Hell. You want to go to Heaven. What do you know about Heaven, that makes it so desirable? Tell me.'

' Well' Jim was a trifle non-plussed ' It' s cooler there for a start, isn' t it?' the Djinn nodded ' and the people there are nicer, not murderers or crooks, and everything is friendly, and then of course, there are the angels. I think I' d like it there' he finished lamely.

' In a nutshell, dead boring' said the Djinn ' boring, boring, boring! Nothing but boring people saying boring things all day long. Not a single naughty word, not even ' damn' - except where old Nick is concerned. Everything censored. And those angels singing ' Alleluia' all day long, and playing those bloody harps until the sound drives you nuts. No guitars, no saxes, no pianos - just bloody harps. And the food - cucumber sandwiches and tea, salads, fruit, nuts - its worse than a bloody health farm. You fancy a steak? Forget it. Tandoori chicken. Not a chance - after a while you start dreaming of barbecuing an angel, then you' re out on your butt, down the fast elevator to my place. We' ve had quite a few of those. As for *sex* - at the faintest glimmer in your eye you' re out. Trouble is, you don' t stop remembering what it was like. Another fast-track downwards. Entertainment - not even cards, that' s gambling. Choir practice, sure, and harp lessons. That' s it! You really want to go there?'

' How come you know so much about Heaven' said Jim, genuinely curious ' You couldn' t possibly have been there yourself.'

' I have, actually. Not as an accepted resident, mind you. I had to escort someone up there from our place. He was a wife murderer, but spent the whole time weeping and being penitent. He got so boring eventually, that we did a deal with them upstairs, and took two blokes who'd been trying to chat-up the angels in exchange. But our guy didn't want to go upstairs, kept saying he didn't deserve it. Well we certainly didn't deserve the hassle he was giving us, so upstairs he went, on the slow escalator with me as escort. They know me pretty well at the gates, so I was able to talk them into giving me a twenty-four hour visa to look around the place' the Djinn reminisced.

' Twenty four hours?' Jim was scathing. ' That' s not long enough to come up with all those arguments against Heaven.'

' Well, it' s a big place, and I sort of got lost. It was about ten years before they realised that I hadn't returned, then they came looking for me. I was doing quite nicely with this bootleg still I had set up. Boy, were they mad! Nick was really pleased, though, and didn't give me too hard a time for going AWOL. But, take my word for it Jim, Heaven' s nothing to look forward to. And in Hell you' ll have great company. It' s really not so bad, you know.'

Jim thought about it. ' I don' t care' he said ' I have only your word for it that Heaven is boring. I' m not prepared to sell my soul on the strength of that. You' re conning me again. Forget it. Bugger off, I' ve had enough of this.'

The Djinn also thought about it for a while. The he sat down on the sand and looked up at Jim. ' Jim' he said ' we' re both businessmen, aren' t we. Conflict is bad business. We want a situation where we are both happy, don' t we? A win-win situation. I have something you want, you have something I want. Let' s discuss it like businessmen, ok? Sit down, and lets have a drink and a chat. What would you like to drink. Champagne? How about a Bollinger 73?'

' The 68' s a much better year' scowled Jim, but sat down again opposite the Djinn.

' No problem. Here you are' said the Djinn pouring Bollinger into two champagne flutes, and passing one to Jim ' Cheers.'

' Cheers' replied Jim, still not looking at the Djinn, and sipping his champagne. It was wonderful after four non-alcoholic months. Cool and fresh, with condensation forming on the sides of the glass. Three or four sips later, and the champagne had started going to his head, leaving him feeling light-headed and happy. He drained the glass and held it out to the Djinn, who promptly refilled it to the brim, the froth running over the sides onto Jim' s fingers. ' Ok' said Jim ' what' s in it for you?'

' I' m a salesman. I have a quota. I can' t go back to my place until I' ve filled it. I' ve been away for around ten thousand years and I' m getting homesick.'

' Not a very successful salesman' sneered Jim ' ten thousand years without a single sale? Didn' t they give you any training?' There was no reply. Jim pondered. Finally he said to the Djinn ' Sorry. I' ve decided that I don' t trust you enough to do business with you. I' ll take my chances here. If I' m rescued, great, if not - well, I' ve lived in worse places. And the rent here is pretty good. You' ll have to try your luck elsewhere, Genie.'

' Fair enough. I' ve done my best. It' s always the same story. You get kicked out into the field after a pep talk with no real training in sales technique or in closing a sale. Training is always the last thing on the budget, then they give you a hard time for not performing. It' s the same everywhere these days.'

' I' m sorry, Genie' said Jim ' but good luck with your next client. And thanks for the conversation and the champers. Goodbye.' and Jim held out his hand.

The Djinn did not take Jim's hand, but stood there looking expectantly at Jim.  
'What's up, Genie?' Jim inquired.

'Well, you're supposed to release me. All you have to say is 'I release you', that's all. Then I can get back into my bottle. It's just another formality, but they insist on us sticking to the rule book' the Djinn looked definitely sheepish.

'And if I don't, what then?' Jim's curiosity was definitely aroused.

'Well, nothing. I just stay here.'

'You mean you can't get back into your bottle? And you just hang around indefinitely?' Jim looked closely at the Genie, and came to the conclusion that something didn't gel. 'There's something else, isn't there?' he inquired and was met by silence 'There's something that you're holding back. Come on Genie, out with it.'

There was no response so Jim shrugged his shoulders 'Have it your own way then. I've got things to do before sunset. Fish to catch, fruit to gather, fires to build - all the usual chores. Goodbye Genie.' Jim turned away and continued with the walk he had started at sunrise. The sun was now quite high, and the heat was getting worse. He had to catch his fish before they went to the bottom, away from the heat. He had gone barely a dozen paces when the Genie called out to him. He stopped, and turned around 'I'm in a hurry Genie, so make it brief, will you.'

'Jim. You must release me. Please' the Djinn begged.

Surprised, Jim asked 'What's the sweat. You said it was only a formality. What happens if I don't release you?'

'Once I've started a deal I have to finish it. Then I either get released and go back into my bottle, or I go back to Hell with or without a soul. If I go back *without* a soul.....' the Djinn's voice trailed into silence.

'Yes' Jim prompted.

'Well, it won't be very nice for me. Nick can be a real bitch sometimes. And those imps, snapping at my heels, and demons who are jealous that I get to travel, they'll just love prodding me with those forks. Give me a break Jim, after all I've done you no harm, have I' he pleaded.

'No harm?' Jim shouted 'No harm? No, but through no generosity on your part. You tried to con me out of my soul with promises, then you got me drunk and tried again, and you expect me to feel benevolent towards you? Why can't you just stay here, or magic yourself to some other place and take your bottle with you?'

'I can' said the Djinn 'but when you die, eventually, the result is the same. I go back without your soul, and then all Hell breaks loose. I'll wind up as fuel for Nick's ovens, for a thousand years at least, and I can't even die. Please Jim, just release me and let me go. A ship's bound to pick you up sometime. Eh, Jim?'

Jim thought once more. His cut and thrust deals in the City came back into his immediate memory, a reflex action. Finally he smiled, the same smile as the Djinn had worn originally, very genial. 'I'll tell you what' said Jim 'let's do a deal. You grant my wishes and I'll release you. Then we're both happy. A win-win situation you called it. Well?'

'Just one wish, Jim. I really can't give you more. It's not within my power. One wish, and we have a deal, ok?'

'We've been through that already, Genie. The only wish that I can choose is to return to my former home, and on its own that's not enough.'

' I can' t help that. There is nothing I can do. Choose something else, but hurry. I only have till sunset to conclude the deal' the Djinn sounded panicky, as he noted the position of the sun.

Jim sat down again and thought. Deeply. Just one wish. The Djinn fidgeted nearby, hopping from one leg to another, like an outsize flamingo with an itchy foot. Then he had it!

' Ok Genie. One wish. Anything?' Jim looked positively triumphant.

' Y..e..s' the Djinn said uncertainly ' but within the limits I mentioned earlier.'

' Sure. It' s a very simple wish, no diamonds, no money laundering, no changing history for you. Agreed?'

' If it' s as you say, Jim, then yes. Agreed.' The Djinn looked puzzled, but relieved too.

' This is it. I wish for the power to grant all my own wishes' Jim's triumphant now.

'What?'' howled the Djinn ' Not possible. Nick will flay me alive if I grant that to you. You' ll wreck our economy. And break all the rules. Only Djinn's can grant wishes. Forget it. No way.'

' You agreed, remember. You can' t welsh on a deal. That' s part of the ethics of your trade, isn' t it' Jim pressed his advantage.

The Djinn put his head in his hands and wept. Jim felt a little sorry for him, but remembered the earlier negotiations led by the Djinn, and held firm. Finally the Djinn raised his head. Jim saw a strange glint in his eyes, and wondered what the Djinn was planning. The Djinn spoke ' I must keep to my agreement, as you rightly surmise, Jim. Ok. You' ve got it. Now release me.'

' Just a moment Genie. It' s not that I don' t trust you, but business is business. I' d like to check the quality of the goods first, if that' s ok with you. Or even if it isn' t.'

' Go ahead Jim' replied the Djinn, a small smile still lingering at the corners of his mouth.

Jim looked at his empty glass. It filled with cool champagne. He looked at the bay. An elegant yacht appeared. Jim looked at the rocky promontory. A perfect place for a house. A house winked into existence, low, balconied, beautiful. He smiled.

' Thanks Genie. Nice doing business with you. I release you.' Jim looked at the Djinn, expecting him to disappear, but the Djinn still stood there smiling. The Djinn

looked at Jim' s glass. It was suddenly empty again. The yacht vanished. He looked at the house. That too disappeared. ' What' s going on' yelled Jim ' I thought we had an

agreement.'

' I' ve kept my part of the bargain, Jim. Your wish is granted. But until you die I must undo everything you do. I cannot go back to Hell as long as you have this power. It will destabilise our economy, and reduce our negotiating power. And Nick will have my guts for garters, literally, with me still attached to them. Not nice. So I' m staying. Until you die, and that wont take long now.'

' What do you mean? You yourself said that I could live for decades' Jim demanded.

' Not any more. I want to get back to my place as soon as possible. I should be there now since we' ve struck a bargain. But now I can' t , until you die. I can' t kill you directly, but I can make sure you don' t eat, don' t sleep, have no shade to lie in, no water to drink. I can make this island a desert, and keep it that way faster than you can wish it back. I' ve had more experience at handling this power than you. I can

bring you back from wherever you wish yourself, and negate every wish you make. You think you' re smart, but you can' t outsmart me.' It was the Djinn' s turn to smirk. ' That' s not fair, Genie. After all, you tried to trick me into giving you my soul. You' re just annoyed because you' ve been outsmarted, aren' t you?' Jim was not very happy.

' Tough' said the Djinn ' I was just doing my job.'

This was definitely Jim' s day for thinking, an activity which had lapsed quite severely in the last few months. His brain hurt with the effort. Eventually he had the answer. ' Genie' he said.

' Yes, Jim' calmly, sure of his victory.

' Genie, try and negate this.' The Genies eyes narrowed at Jim' s expression. ' I wish that you were back in Hell'

The Djinn vanished, but his scream of anguish lingered on.

Jim refilled his glass. The yacht and house were back. Perfect. He picked up the blue glass bottle in one hand. This would look good on the mantlepiece. He wandered along the beach towards the house, head down. Paradise. If only Kate were here to share it with him. He caught the involuntary thought and laughed, and ran up the beach to where a very confused young woman was staring around her in utter disbelief.

A long way off another reunion was taking place. A Djinn suddenly materialised in a cavern, deep underground, lit red by glowing lava. Screams and wails filled the sulphurous air. At the other end of the cavern a tall shape appeared and headed towards him, tail swishing, horned head held menacingly low. The Djinn saw the figure approaching ' Listen, boss, he tricked me. Just get me back there please, and I' ll get him for you, really, boss. Please boss. No boss. Not the ovens again, boss, please.....please....'

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