

## Achim's Pocket

At the edge of a vineyard Achim scratched his ear gazing at a scarecrow Unfortunately for the owner, his scarecrow wasn't doing well at all. Exchanging his torn and ragged vest for the scarecrow's jacket seemed like a very fair trade to Achim. He placed his hands in the pockets of his new jacket. In the left one were several pistachios, and a dried, rather old-looking fig of suspect origin. In the right-hand pocket was a rather worn medium sized pomegranate. "Ah, this will make a splendid lunch seeing as I have nothing else. He continued walking as he began to eat his prizes. Reaching the middle of the pomegranate, he almost broke several teeth. Removing the offending things pretending to be pomegranate seeds he examined them closely. "If I didn't know any better, I'd think these were rubies." Finishing the fruit with much more care, he had in his hand six medium sized sparkling rubies. Wrapping his hand around them he placed it in his left pocket. "I'm rich!" he said to himself. "Perhaps I'll buy a house or a carpet shop." He imagined himself sitting in his shop haggling with customers and weavers alike growing fat and contented. The thought even crossed his mind to buy an inn where merchants from everywhere would stay with their caravans of mules or camels. These dreams were suddenly interrupted by a loud, gravelly voice. "That seems to be a very fine jacket you're wearing." At this Achim became afraid and letting go of the rubies he raised both hands in the air. "All I have are a few pomegranate seeds." This he said as he hastily shoved his right hand into its pocket and pulled out the seeds of the fruit extending his open palm towards the robber. Seeing that the poor man held only pomegranate seeds, the thief batted the hand away sending the seeds to the ground. "On your way beggar." Achim wasted no time walking swiftly but awkwardly down the road.

When he was out of sight, he remembered the rubies and thrusting his hand in his pocket began to panic finding a hole in one corner and nothing else. He searched his right pocket and finding it empty with its own hole, he was almost in despair. sitting down on a nearby rock he scratched his head. "Where could they be?" Bending down he removed his left shoe and to his surprise there were all six of his treasures. "I thought there was a reason for my limp," Achim said. His face lit up like a sunbeam after a rain, his mood completely changed. He walked to the edge of the vineyard and plucking a handful of grape leaves he lined his pockets. Carefully wrapping the rubies in a leaf, Achim placed them in his newly repaired pocket. His walk much improved he continued toward a village or town where he might find a willing buyer. Near evening he came to a small home with a small garden and several goats nibbling grass nearby. An old man stood by the front door. "Good sir, would you be willing to help a passing stranger in need?" "By the looks of your handsome jacket I fail to understand how you could be in need." At this Achim explained how he had come by his jacket and that indeed he had already eaten what little food he'd had that day. The old man closed one eye looking at Achim suspiciously. "Do you have anything of value to exchange for a meal and a bed?" Thinking hard how to answer this question without revealing the pockets contents, Achim replied, "Well...I suppose I could gather firewood for your oven." The old man considered for a moment and said slyly, "Why not lay your coat here?" pointing to a chair by the front door. "Well if it's all the same I'm still a little chilly so perhaps I should keep it nearby." Achim walked to a nearby grove of trees and taking off his jacket hung it carefully on a low branch. He gathered an armload of wood placing it by the front door. After repeating this several more times he felt the pile was quite respectable. Back at the trees the goats were nibbling the grape leaves drooping from his pockets. "Shoo!" he yelled at the goats. He put on the jacket believing he had only just rescued the rubies

from ending up in a place he couldn't imagine! That night his meal was only a few apricots, a cupful of rice with water to drink. Deciding to keep everything safe he wore his jacket to bed.

Rising early in the morning he stuck his hands in his pockets only to discover that the leaf full of rubies had disappeared. At first, he suspected the old man. Then remembering the nibbled grape leaves, began to suspect the goats. "Here nanny, nice nanny," Achim soothed as he walked towards the goats. When he was within reach of the first one, he quickly grasped the animal and pried its mouth open. "Ha!" he shouted. Sparkling in the morning sun were six red specks studding the teeth of the now squirming goat. Straddling the goat, he attempted to remove the rubies from its mouth and after he retrieving all but one, he put the rest safely back in the leaf lined pocket, the old man appeared looking very angry. "Here now, what are you doing to my poor goat?" "I'm only retrieving what's mine!" replied Achim. "Well it's time you move on, and good riddance to you!" Achim continued his journey lamenting the missing ruby. "Well, I should have enough to buy a carpet shop perhaps." The sun began to warm him and he decided to stop to cool his feet in a nearby stream. Unnoticed by Achim a caterpillar had dropped into his pocket while the jacket had hung near the trees at the old man's home. This one had eaten most of the leaves that lined his pocket. Gazing at his feet dangling in the cool water he noticed a large fish swimming nearby moving lazily toward his feet. At just that moment something red dropped from his pocket into the water. The fish, seeing a flash of red swallowed it, and darted away as Achim watched in horror. Quickly he stuck his hand in the pocket and pulled out only four stones this time. His face fell. With only four rubies he could only afford a small tea shop and an old one with chipped tea glasses at that. He emptied his pocket of the half-eaten leaves and its caterpillar occupant and replaced them with the leaves from the other pocket after carefully inspecting them for caterpillars. Putting on his worn shoes he moved down the road pondering

how he could protect his dwindling dream from complete extinction. "If I carry two of them in my mouth and the others in my pocket, I'll be less likely to lose all of them at once!" He placed two of the red stones between his teeth and cheek and continued on. Before long he saw signs of a village. Nearing the edge of it he saw his old friend Salim walking his way. "Well if it isn't my old friend Achim!" Achim's eyes bulged and his face turned red after a slap on the back.

"You've made me swallow my rubies!" Achim shouted when he could finally speak. Salim looked sideways at him and replied, "What rubies would those be?" Achim explained his story and pulled the two remaining stones from his pocket to show them to his friend. Salim's eyes went wide seeing his friend's good fortune. Achim's dream was now diminished to perhaps a small home and a few apricot trees in the yard. "I know a man who buys precious stones at a good price. Perhaps you should go see him. Salim led him to the shop of the jewel seller to see what his treasures might bring. A shrewd looking merchant squinted at the medium sized red stones for some time in the bright light from the window behind him. Turning to Achim's expectant face he said, "Humph, only glass." Achim's face went from expectant to despondent in the twinkle of an eye. "Are you sure?" Achim asked with a tiny glimmer of hope in his voice. The merchant gave him a withering glance without a word. Achim turned, walking slowly to the door where his friend waited outside. "Well?" Salim asked. Achim replied, "Glass". Salim put his arm through the arm of his friend and said, "Don't worry; I have a small house at the end of the village with a few apricot trees in the yard and an extra room where you can stay. Achim looked at Salim and with tears of gratitude in his eyes replied, "Thank you my friend, your friendship is worth more than rubies anyway." The two friends walked arm in arm in the fading light.