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**2<sup>nd</sup> prize in the 2007 Imaginary Journeys story  
competition for under 12s**

**The Vial**

**by**

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There was once a beautiful village nestled in a forest. The birdsong would be like a chorus of angels in the morning. Children played in the fields and the harvests were full, with ripe juicy plums and wheat and apples. The townsfolk were sent hampers full of food. The markets had fresh bread and cookies, chickens and pig and all kinds of food beyond imagination. There was a small shop on the corner, which would have jars full with sweets of every kind and the baker and the candlestick maker would make bread and wax for the village.

On the edge of this village, there was a family exiled by the mayor because they could not afford to pay their taxes. They were unemployed and poor. They lived in a small, mouldy, damp, dark and rickety hut on the edge of a derelict forest. There were two parents and one child called Thomas. He was out gathering scraps of wood in the forest. He had a rusty blunt axe that he had found on the ground near the water well and he put down an old wicker basket full with old logs. Suddenly a scratching noise came from a bush nearby. Thomas spun around and saw a wolf staring at him. He yelped and ran leaving behind everything. He ran until he stopped at an old wooden hut.

The hut was made out of wooden strips that were decaying and full with splinters. The only window was grimy and small but from there Thomas could see a flickering. There was a thin wooden door which looked as if it would fall at the slightest touch and the roof was thatched with a brown straw which needed replacing. He warily knocked on the door and then withdrew his hand, just if it had suddenly been hurt. He

stepped away. Just as he was going to return and brave the wolf, the door creaked open and there stood an old woman

She was an old lady with long grey hair that stretched to the floor. She wore long tattered robes that were a sinister black and her shoes were worn out and badly made. The jewellery she wore was smeared with dirt and ash.

"Yes" she hissed . Her cracked voice made his flesh creep.

"Sorry I'm stranded in this forest and a wolf was after me. I need to hide".

"Alright come in" she said, a wide smile pinned on her face showing a set of yellow teeth.

She stepped aside so that Thomas could come in from the cold and closed the door slowly. The space was small but a sudden sense of warmth drifted over him. A small candle illuminating a hut. The walls were hidden behind various wooden shelves which were very rickety and on these shelves were glass jars full with green water. In these jars, grotesque things were suspended.

In the centre of the hut was a table cloaked in black cloth. There was a small bed in the corner.

"You say a wolf" said the woman busying her with fetching dusty, dirty glasses from a dusty shelf.

"Yes it was a huge black one with red eyes".

"Yes I know that one. Hunter I call him, very evil" The lady turned her head round from the shelf.

"I'm sorry to impose" Thomas said as politely as he could, sitting down weary from his efforts and running a hand through his untidy brown hair.

"No it's alright I need some company. The only company I have is Zelden." She gestured with her free hand to a raven hanging from an old perch.

She set the glasses down on the table and scooped a thick looking mixture into the glasses from a battered black cauldron. She handed one to Thomas with a gnarled hand. The glasses were putrid tankards with dirty bottoms the mixture that she had scooped from the cauldron was brown and had bits in. She took a swig of it and banged it down on the table with a great big sigh.

"Well drink up! Good for the shock and good for the cold!" Her green eyes set upon the full tankard as she observed the skinny boy.

Thomas reluctantly sipped from the glass with his eyes closed preparing for the worst. But he suddenly felt warm and dreams danced into his head. A banquet with fruit meat bread fish and more held in his honour. Other children fighting to be his friend. His mum and dad being King and Queen and riches beyond compare.

"It's nice isn't it" she said as his face lit up.

"Yes it is" said Thomas setting his glass down and leaning back.

"You know I think it's meant for you" said the lady standing up from her chair and walking towards a wall.

"What is?" questioned Thomas looking around as the old lady hobbled towards a shelf.

The lady didn't answer. She took a dusty box from the shelf and set it down on the table. Then she took a big long key hooked upon a long chain from around her neck and unlocked the box. In the box was nothing except a magnificent vial with a small amount of gold liquid.

"This is a very rare substance. It is wish potion used through the ages. There is just enough for three wishes. A very hard substance to make but extremely powerful, Use it to make yourself happy".

After he had finished his drink he headed home. The lady had given him some wood so that they were able to light a fire. In the morning Thomas carried the vial up a grassy hill and sat on a smooth rock. He thought of his first wish and then took the vial from his pocket and closed his eyes.

"I wish that my family was rich" he whispered

A small droplet came out and as soon as the liquid hit the ground a gold cloud of sweet smelling smoke that felt like silk. When it cleared he was standing on a flat courtyard surrounded by white marble walls. Huge trees waved in the brisk wind. Millions of servants gardeners and chefs were busying themselves. He spent the day playing with his friends and eating meals. The next day he found a secluded garden area with a small marble bench he took out the vial and whispered, "I wish a huge banquet"

In a huge hall, he found a wooden table full to the brim with millions of platters. Beef, pork, turkey, chicken, carrots, broccoli, swede... The puddings were chocolate ice cream, trifle, jam, sweets, sprinkles with cookies and cream. His parents were sitting very far away, at the far end of a very long table. With a shock, Thomas suddenly realised that this could not bring him happiness. The next day after breakfast he rushed to a hill that was shrouded behind a huge oak and he drew out the vial. Opening it, he whispered, "I wish that everything was how it was before"

He smashed the vial and a cloud of smoke enveloped him. The ground around him was becoming harsher and steeper. His clothes become itchy and ragged. The cloud vanished to reveal a small hut standing where the huge hall had been. The walls of the palace vanished and the servants became animals and fled to the forest.

Thomas lived his life in peace. He knew now that objects, fame, riches and money will never bring happiness.