

A Door to Nowhere
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Doors

Doors... Doors are interesting things. Have you ever sat and really considered a door – considered what it is, what it does, or even where it leads?

No? Well maybe you should, for doors are *very* interesting things. In fact they're very much like stories. Like all good stories, doors have a beginning, a middle and an end. A beginning where you start your journey; a middle where you're moving through; and an end where you reach your destination.

One thing you must always remember about doors is that they always lead *somewhere*. Just like a door, this story also leads somewhere. Through a door in fact.

You are standing my friends, on one side of a great wooden door. The exciting middle is only just a few steps away. If only you just reach out and turn the handle...

Introducing Viador

You've decided to read on then I see. Yes, good, I knew you would. And you're right to do so, for the tale I have to tell is one of magic, mystery and much mischievousness. But first we need a setting...

A long time ago, in a far off land there is a small city situated at the bottom of a great valley between hills. This city, is the city of Viador.

The city of Viador, as any local will tell you, is a city full of life and bursting with things to see and do. From churches to towers to taverns and shops, the city of Viador truly is one of the most wondrous cities in the realm of men. One of its main

features is its centre, a vast square of land surrounded on all sides by tall buildings enclosing perhaps the greatest market in the realm.

It is here in the centre of the bustling market district that our story begins...

Now the bakery is an important place in our story – not least because it is the source of yummy cakes and treats – but also because it is the location of the most special of doors: the door to nowhere.

Now if you were to exit the bakery (perhaps with your favourite bun in hand) and you were to take a left and then a second left, you would find yourself in an alleyway. Not such a strange thing you might think, except to your left again you would see a door. Just a plain old ordinary front door with a knocker, a door-knob, and a keyhole.

If you had been particularly observant while in the bakery, as young people so often are, you would be given cause for alarm at sight of this door, for inside the baker's at the exact same spot where you might expect to see the door's opposite side, there is not the slightest sign of a door – not even a boarded up door-frame.

“How strange,” I hear you cry as you examine the bakery wall very carefully for sign of this most elusive of doors. “But where can it be?”

“There ain't no door in here my friend,” replies the baker as he overhears you speak. “There is no door to be found save the one you just came through sure as sure.”

“So where,” you now wonder, “can this strangest of doors lead?”

Well may you ask my friends, and we shall find the answer out shortly, but let me tell you this fact even more puzzling than the rest:

If you are really, *really* brave and take a peak through the letterbox to see what's on the other side, do you think you see a baker's shop, a shop full of bread, cakes and other wonderful things?

Oh no my friends, you most certainly do not see that! What you *do* see, I cannot yet reveal, for the wizard may well get cross with me for telling his tale before the time is right. Instead then my friends, I shall take us out of the dark alleyway and introduce our two heroes of this adventure.

If you still have your favourite bun in your hands from your trip inside the bakery, now might be a very good time to take a bite...

Introducing Thomas and Jane

Our heroes for this tale are a young pair: a brother named Thomas and a sister named Jane. If you look up from your bun (if you' haven't eaten it all by now) then you will see them sitting forlornly across the street from the bakery, gazing longingly into the window at all the tempting treats inside.

It's a slightly chilly day outside and Thomas hasn't got a jacket so he shivers in the cold while all Jane can do is hold on to her tummy to try and forget the hunger that is making it rumble so. The reason for their cold, their hunger and indeed also their lack of parents is actually quite important to our tale, so it is right that we pause here outside the bakery and consider our young friends' situation.

There was a time you see when young Thomas and young Jane were not so hungry, nor indeed as cold as they are now and they lived quite happily in a small house near the edge of town with their two parents, who for this story we shall call Mum and Dad. Now Mum and Dad were two especially loving parents and though they often

struggled for money they always worked extra hours at the shop or at the mill to make sure there was always food on the table. They were a loving family Mum, Dad, Thomas, Jane. Though times were hard they got by and at the end of the month if they had saved particularly well, Dad would bring home a small piece of chocolate for them all to share as their little treat.

Jane always looked forward to the end of the month as chocolate was her favourite thing in the whole wide world (after her brother of course!) but at the end of one particularly difficult month Dad came home empty-handed.

“Sorry everyone, but there’s no chocolate this month.”

Jane’s face dropped. “But why Dad? I thought we had enough.”

“We did,” Dad replied, “but all we had saved is going to have to go on taxes. The mill has been shut down and I don’t have a job.”

Everyone gasped. Mum even cried a little, but there was nothing any of them could do. Mum now worked extra, *extra* hard while Dad did his best to get work where he could, but when the time came to pay their taxes they still didn’t quite have enough.

“Oh please mister Sheriff, give us just a few more days,” begged Mum and Dad together when the Sheriff came to collect their debt. “We are so very close to having the money we owe you.”

“Never!” the evil (and it must be said, quite ugly) Sheriff Stinkbottom replied. “If I let off everyone who failed to pay their taxes then I wouldn’t collect any money at all for the town governor, and then where would we be eh?”

Mum and Dad were both crying by this point. Thomas and Jane cowered in the corner.

“To jail with you!” declared the Sheriff. “Guards!”

Four guards marched in and handcuffed the two parents. As much as they both protested, the evil Sheriff Stinkbottom was having none of it.

“Take them away,” he told the guards. He looked at Thomas and Jane. “And you two... make sure I don’t find you getting into any trouble or else you’ll end up joining your parents soon enough you hear.”

With that the evil Sheriff Stinkbottom marched out of their house and poor Thomas and Jane were left alone to fend for themselves.

The evil Sheriff Stinkbottom

And so we find ourselves returning at last to the bakery and our two young friends who find themselves staring longingly in through the window at the treats within. It has been almost a year now since that fateful day when their parents were taken away and they have fended for themselves ever since. It has been a year of hardship; a year of struggle; a year of scavenging for food.

It will perhaps not surprise you then, when you consider that our friends had not eaten for a whole *two* days that Thomas considered the possibility of stealing their next meal.

“You what Thomas? You can’t be serious!” Jane gasped.

“But I am serious,” Thomas replied, “we haven’t eaten in days, we have no money and if I don’t eat something soon I feel as if my stomach might eat itself.”

“But stealing is wrong Thomas. Whatever would Mum and Dad say?”

“They’d say to do what we could to survive. We can always pay it back when we make some money. Just think how hungry you are...”

Jane did think, and despite her conscience telling her otherwise, she was inclined to agree with her brother.

She finally gave in. “Alright, so how do we do it?”

“I don’t know,” said Thomas, the older of the two and the chief plan-former.

“I will have to give it a think.”

He put his head in his hands and started to mumble to himself, but at that moment a familiar figure rode into view.

As fate would have it, that familiar figure was Sheriff Stinkbottom. He rode straight over to the bakery, dismounted and called the baker outside. Clearly the poor baker was struggling with his taxes or something very similar as the Sheriff did not seem very happy to see him...

It is worth taking a pause in the story here my friends to consider the very singular and indeed very sinister Sheriff Stinkbottom in all his disgusting glory. Now not only does the evil Sheriff have perhaps the most unfortunate name in the whole Kingdom but he is also endowed with, on the end of his rather large nose, the biggest, bumpiest, most bulbous wart imaginable. Indeed whenever the Sheriff gets angry (which as it happens, is quite often) his face has a habit of turning as red as a beetroot and his nose even redder still. In his fits of anger he has a rather worrying habit of shaking his nose around quite violently and whenever he does this you have to be careful to duck for cover to avoid his most colossal of facial appendages from knocking you down, or perhaps worse!

It was while the Sheriff raged at the baker that Thomas and Jane decided to take the opportunity that presented itself and dash into the bakery.

“I tell you what baker, if I don’t get your taxes by tomorrow I’ll, I’ll... wait a minute you two – stop!”

The Sheriff paused momentarily in his most rambunctious of rants to spot Thomas and Jane sprinting past him, loaves of freshly-cooked bread clutched in their arms.

“Guards! Guards!”

And this was how the chase began...

The chase

Chases are strange things. Many people think that the secret to a chase is to just run further and faster than the person chasing you, but in fact the *real* secret is to turn as many corners as possible. Fortunately for our two young friends nearly a whole year of living on their own had taught them a great many lessons in the ways of the street and they both knew the streets of Viador like the backs of their hands.

On any other occasion this may well have given them the advantage. Not today.

If one thing can be said for the Sheriff Stinkbottom, it's that he is very good at his job, and chasing villains comes as naturally to him as flying to a bird, swimming to a fish or indeed causing mischief comes to a small child. He is of course helped by one of the largest noses in the Kingdom. A nose which is especially good at sniffing out escaping children and the loaves of freshly-baked bread they happen to be carrying in their arms.

And now back to the chase...

We rejoin Thomas and Jane now some minutes later, the evil Sheriff Stinkbottom having been giving chase for a good while. The two young thieves both panting hard through exhaustion. Thomas has already dropped some of the loaves he was carrying, and Jane too has let one slip from her arms. They now have less than half the bread that they started off with.

“I don’t... know... how much more... I can run...” Jane panted as they shot round another corner, barely avoiding a startled horseman and his cart.

Thomas pulled his sister out of the way. “Come on sis’ we’ve got to keep it up. He’s got to give up at some point!”

Another strange thing about chases that I perhaps forgot to mention in my earlier aside is just how confusing they can be to the people involved. They can be very disorientating.

In the process of this particular chase, our two young friends quite unwittingly managed to double back on themselves. Though they did not yet know it, they were actually now running for their lives back in the direction of the bakery, only this time from the other side.

In all honesty at this moment in time, neither of the pair of course realised this. Indeed all they were aware of was the fact the wicked Sheriff was gaining on them.

“Quickly Jane he’s catching us!”

“I’m going as fast as I can already...” Jane panted.

Then: calamity! As Thomas was looking back to his sister he stumbled on the cobbles and was sent hurtling to the ground. He dropped the remainder of his bread.

“No!” Jane cried. She rushed to help her brother up but could already hear the deep nasal breathing of the Sheriff coming up fast.

Thomas struggled back to his feet.

A voice called out from behind them: “Ah ha I’ve got you now you young scallywags. It’s to the dungeon for you that’s for sure. There’s an especially dark and gruesome dungeon I keep ready for young thieves like you!” The Sheriff cackled as he approached them.

Jane grabbed her brother’s arm. “Come on Thomas, we’ve got to get out of here,” she said, hastily pulling her brother into the alleyway just behind them.

The alleyway

As you will no doubt realise by now the alley that young Jane dragged her brother into at this point was indeed the same alleyway we investigated earlier in our story. An ordinary alleyway in most respects, it is an important alleyway in our tale for two reasons. Firstly, because of the very strange doorway that appears to lead into the bakery (though of course we know already that it doesn’t), and secondly, because it ends with a dead-end. This second point was perhaps the most important at this moment in time, especially as it now meant our two young heroes found themselves trapped by the evil Sheriff Stinkbottom and his extraordinary wartified nose...

“Ah ha I’ve got you now,” said the Sheriff, taking a few slow paces towards the cornered children. “There’s no escape now.”

Thomas and Jane cowered together but said nothing. A glint of recognition came into the Sheriff’s eye.

“Hmm... I’m sure I’ve seen you both somewhere before...”

“I don’t... know... what you mean... Sheriff...” Thomas stammered. “We’ve never... seen you ... before...”

“Hmmm...” the Sheriff frowned. He took another step forward. As he did, he sniffed hard. “Something doesn’t smell right here.”

“It’s probably you, you nasty Sheriff!” Jane suddenly blurted out. “Locking up kind hard-working people for fun. You’re a nasty, nasty man and I hate you!”

Thomas gasped at his sister’s outburst, afraid it might make the Sheriff more angry.

“Ah so now we have it – I recognise you both now. I would tell you how your parents are, but you’ll know soon enough!” He laughed cruelly.

When he had finished laughing to himself he spoke once more, producing as he did so, two pairs of handcuffs, stepping towards the two young siblings with evil intent. “Now,” he said, “it’s time to put these on you...”

He took another step forward and was just about to handcuff Thomas when all of a sudden, in the blink of an eye, Thomas and Jane disappeared.

A lucky escape

I trust by now that you may well have an inkling as to where Thomas and Jane could possibly have disappeared to. If you think it may have something to do with the mysterious door then you’d be right, and can award yourself a pat on the back.

It was you see, just as the Sheriff stepped forward to handcuff our two young friends that young Jane in her fear reached out to grab her brother’s hand. As fate would have it however, young Thomas’s hand was not to be found and in her blind panic Jane’s hand fumbled instead upon a doorknob cold and metallic. What young Jane could perhaps never have known was that this particular doorknob was in fact a magic doorknob, full to the brim with magics of a kind as to allow the owner of the

door (a character we shall meet a little later) to decide just who he let in, and who he kept out. Today it seemed, was Jane's lucky day.

No sooner had she touched the magical knob then WHOOSH the door shot open far faster than the eye could see and sucked Thomas and Jane in before slamming shut in the Sheriff's face.

The Sheriff stopped and stared at the doorway and the spot his two young captives had been standing a moment before. Something didn't smell right – and for once it wasn't his smelly feet.

"Curses!" cursed the Sheriff, cursing vehemently at the door, at the alley, and at anyone who might be listening. "What kind of foul sorcery is this?"

Unfortunately for the Sheriff, there was no one at hand to answer his question and even then, the chances of them being an expert in trans-dimensional magical doorways would have been very slim. Very slim indeed if you consider the fact that there was in fact only *one* person in the whole wide world who knew about this particular trans-dimensional magical doorway and he – as we are about to find out – was not the sort to share his secrets with an evil Sheriff.

The Sheriff stomped his feet and cursed some more. Eventually, after a good deal more stomping and a good deal more cursing his anger subsided and he considered the door with interest.

"Well," he said at last, pacing the alleyway up and down with thought, "You're going to have to come out some time. When you do, I'll be waiting!"

With that the Sheriff sat down and began to wait. He would have to wait a very long time...

The door to nowhere

Like all good stories, doors have a beginning, a middle and an end. A beginning where you're standing in front of the door about to go through it; a middle where you're walking through the door; and an end where you've gone through the door and have come out on the other side. All doors operate on exactly the same principle and the door to nowhere was no exception. The only difference between the door to nowhere and ordinary doors of course was that the door to nowhere ended where you would least expect it.

And so Thomas and Jane found as they travelled for the briefest of moments through the door's middle and came out on the other side in a place they really did not expect to be.

Thomas gasped. Jane gasped.

They had arrived at the door's end and stood now alone in the hallways of a fantastically furnished mansion. And a large mansion at that, they both noted, as they took in the sight of the two oak staircases that descended from separate landings on the upper levels to join where their paths met halfway down their descent to form a singular staircase that made its way to the bottom.

It seemed fitting that the main theme of the décor was that of wood and natural materials. There was no fine stonework or marble here; everything they could see of the mansion interior suggested a taste in elegant, natural design. It was exactly as Jane had always imagined a beautiful mansion would look like.

"It's just all so... lovely! What a beautiful place," she said. "Have you ever seen anything quite like it?"

"I don't think I have..." Thomas said, turning round and looking back at the door they had just passed through. "That sure was a lucky escape," he said. "Do you think the Sheriff will come after us?"

“Well wherever we are, the chances are the Sheriff will find a way to come after us. We better get moving. Come on,” Jane said, beckoning her brother to follow.

“Someone must live here. We’d better find them and tell them we’re here.”

Thomas nodded.

If he thought his day so far had been strange, things were about to get a whole lot stranger...

A series of strange discoveries

And so they went through the strange hallways of the mansion, Jane leading the way past libraries with shelves stacked high with books; past labs full of potions with ingredients in large jars lining the walls; past offices with tables piled high with scrolls and parchments; and even past a long room with what looked like steel archery targets at the far end.

Thomas stopped at this particular room and looked in with some interest. He puzzled to himself out loud.

“Whatever do you think this room could be for?” he wondered.

“I don’t know, but whatever it’s for I don’t like the look of it,” Jane said. “This place gives me the creeps.” She grabbed his arm and pulled him along. “Come on, I think I smell something cooking.”

Thomas turned to follow his sister but as he did so tripped over something blocking his way.

“Ouch,” he exclaimed, picking himself up and dusting himself off. He looked to see what had been the caused of his sudden up-ending. A pile of mud and slime looked up at him, two large, expressive eyes staring back at him.

Jane screamed.

Thomas took a step back.

“What... whatever is it?” Thomas stammered.

“I don’t know, but it seems to like you Thomas. Look, it’s following you.”

As she said this the strange mud creature moved onto Thomas’s feet.

“Go away slime creature – I don’t want you on my feet!” Thomas said sternly.

The creature didn’t move. He raised his voice. “GO AWAY!”

“Maybe it’s because you’re not asking it nicely,” Jane suggested. She now addressed the mud creature that had well and truly rooted Thomas in place. “I’m sorry Mr. Mud but my brother here really does value the use of his legs. I don’t suppose you could perhaps let him go could you? Please...”

The large white pair of eyes looked at Jane now in such a way as to suggest they were considering her words.

“Please...”

With her second “please,” the mud creature reluctantly removed itself from Thomas’s feet.

“Phew that’s a relief,” Thomas sighed. “I didn’t think it would ever get off me!”

“Well it may have removed itself from your feet,” said Jane, “but I think it’s decided it’s going to follow us.”

The pile of mud and slime looked up at them expectantly. Thomas just shrugged.

“Well alright then I’m sure it can follow us if it really wants to, just so long as it doesn’t trip me up again, that would be most lovely.”

Just then the same smell that had filled Jane's nostrils filled his own as well. He took a big whiff of the pleasant aroma. "You know I think you're right about the cooking Jane. It smells wonderful."

"I think it's time we found the source of the smell," said Jane.

Her brother nodded. "Me too."

"Well come on then, I'll lead the way."

The kitchen

Though their noses were neither so large nor indeed so refined as the Sheriff Stinkbottom's most famous of noses in the art of sniffing (or 'sniffery') it was a fairly simple matter to follow their noses in this case, for the aroma of the kitchen was so strong, so enticing, that they were never in any doubt as to which way to go. The overly-friendly mud creature followed them as they went.

"Jane," Thomas nudged his sister, "it's still following us."

"Well if you just ignored it then perhaps it would go away."

Thomas was just about to reply when all of a sudden they turned a final corner and found themselves at last in a kitchen. And not just any old kitchen at that; a very large, well stocked kitchen with a central table stacked high with all manner of foody-delights. The sight of the table alone made Jane's stomach grumble.

"Wow Thomas, will you take a look at that – there's just so much food!"

Thomas looked at his sister. "Do you think we should take some?"

"I don't know. It's only polite to ask first but there doesn't seem to be anyone about. This house is empty except for that," (here she looked at the mud creature), "thing."

“That thing has a name you know,” said a voice suddenly from behind them.
“His name is Norbert.”

Thomas and Jane both jumped in the air in fright. When they landed they turned to see the source of the voice. There, as appeared from nowhere, stood a tall, eccentrically dressed wizard replete in dark blue robes minus the cowl which meant his great mass of somewhat unmanageable white hair was free to do what it will – which was rarely to all go in the same direction at the same time. If this was his hair at its most managed state, Jane dreaded to think what it was like at its least manageable!

As with all wizards of a certain age and eccentricity, the wizard wore a long white beard, though in this case it was longer than most; almost reaching the wizard’s waist. It was so long in fact that the wizard had used lengths of ribbon to tie it together at the bottom.

As Thomas and Jane stared at him and his somewhat wild state of appearance, the reason as to why they were staring suddenly clicked in the wizard’s brain. “Ah yes you much forgive my appearance friends; I’ve had something of an unfortunate accident with a hair growth potion I’ve been working on. A bit too strong I think. I shall have to cut back on the taproot I think. You wouldn’t have guessed I was completely bald before this now would you!”

Jane gasped. “Really?!”

The wizard chuckled. “No my dear I’m only joking. You have to get used to me and my ways you see.” He chuckled to himself as if laughing at some joke he had made that the others were unaware of. “Oh I do apologise I haven’t yet introduced myself, and yet here’s me going on about my hair growth potions!” He extended his hand to Jane in form of introduction. “My name is Ozimandus and this here is my home.”

Jane then introduced herself and her brother.

“So are you saying this strange creature is yours then,” Thomas asked, pointing to the mud creature. “He’s very, erm, strange.”

“Ah yes well I sent Norbert to meet you and bring you here while I finished preparing our meal. We can’t chat on an empty stomach after all!”

Things were happening way too fast for Jane to keep up with. “So you mean to say this is *your* house?” she asked.

The wizard nodded. “Indeed it is my dear, just as the door you came through is *my* door, the kitchen you now stand in is *my* kitchen and the food at that table is *my* food. Well not specifically mine now; in fact it is yours – I made it for you.”

“For us?” Thomas and Jane both said together.

“Oh yes,” said the wizard. “It’s been such a long time since I’ve had any visitors I thought it might be quite nice if we sat down to a good lunch, what do you think?”

The two siblings nodded hungrily.

“Good, then that’s sorted,” the wizard said with a grin. “Norbert, bring the chairs would you.”

The wizard’s banquet

As Norbert the mound of mud brought chairs over the three companions sat down to eat. There wasn’t actually much talking while they ate for Thomas and Jane were so hungry they couldn’t find a spare second to speak between mouthfuls. Fortunately the wizard was a patient wizard (unlike some wizards who are very impatient) and when they were done sat quietly to listen to their amazing story. Like all good story-tellers, they started at the beginning with the imprisonment of their parents and ended at last

with their flight from the evil Sheriff Stinkbottom and their lucky escape through the wizard's door. As the story progressed the wizard's face looked more and more grim. He stroked his beard as he thought.

“Hmmm this is a ding-bat of a dilemma if ever I heard one,” he mused. “I shall have to consider this over a cup of tea I think.” He looked to his two young companions. “Tea?”

They both nodded eagerly.

“Very good,” the wizard said and without so much as standing up to compose himself, he levitated a large kettle over from the stove. “Sugar anyone?” With a flick of his hand three cups flew to the table; one in front of each place. He lifted the kettle out of the air and began to pour. Thomas and Jane accepted their tea gratefully for even though she didn't normally like tea, Jane knew it wasn't every day you got to have tea with a wizard! Before either of them knew it, Ozimandus had summoned a plate of biscuits out of nowhere and placed it in the middle of the table.

The wizard supped at his tea and thought out loud.

“It seems to me,” he said at last, “that you are in need of your parents.”

The children nodded as the wizard spoke.

“And more than your parents, I'd say you'd like to take some revenge on that evil Sheriff who has been locking all these good, hard-working people up in the dungeons.”

At this Thomas and Jane nodded even more vigorously.

Ozimandus grinned and looked at his two young friends mischievously. “You know,” he said, “I think I've got just the plan...”

The wizard's lab

The wizard stood up. “Right if you’d like to follow me,” he said, and with that he disappeared in a puff of smoke, leaving young Thomas and Jane standing alone, speechless. They looked at each other in confusion. Just as Jane was about to suggest they sit down and eat a few more biscuits, the wizard reappeared.

“You must forgive my absent-mindedness my friends – I forgot you don’t know the way! Come, these legs are after all made for walking and I must say mine don’t do much anymore now I’m used to living on my own and having as I do my magic to carry me everywhere. Come now my friends let’s see if these old legs of mine are still up to it. Follow me!”

They did follow, and for a remarkable distance too, through the vast complex that was Ozimandus’s home.

Past more libraries of books they went; past store-rooms stacked high with crates full of the strangest looking items; and even past rooms that looked like classrooms with desks arranged in rows and a large chalkboards against the far walls. They even passed another of the strange long rooms with what looked like steel archery targets at the far end.

“Practice range,” the wizard said in form of explanation. “Don’t worry my friends: – nearly there!”

“Quite some place this wizard has here,” Thomas whispered to Jane under his breath, “Wouldn’t mind having a place like this myself some day.”

“I’m glad you approve friend Thomas,” Ozimandus winked, “Though you should know my senses are far in advance of most wizards my age.”

“Hint taken,” Thomas blushed.

“Ah right here we are,” the wizard said at last, turning into an expansive room full of bubbling potions, shelves of ingredients and stacks of books piled high wherever there was room. “I do apologise for the mess but Albert hasn’t cleared up the mess just yet. He’s a bit erm, indisposed at present.”

“Indisposed?”

“Well you could say he’s in pieces really.”

“In pieces?! Whatever did you do to him?” Jane looked alarmed.

“Oh don’t worry my friend he’s quite alright really – he’s a skeleton you see. I use him to assist me around the house though he had an accident with one of my fire bombs. Made quite a mess of the carpet I must say. I’ve picked up all the pieces now of course but just haven’t got round to putting him back together.”

“You mean to say you have a skeleton butler?!” Thomas was astonished.

Ozimandus looked at Thomas as if he had said something strange. “Oh yes my friend, though butler is not quite the word I’d use. ‘Assistant’ is more like it. I’ve got a number of different beasts and conjurations around the house you know, though you’ll be pleased to know I’ve locked most of them away for now. They tend to frighten the guests you know.”

“I should say!”

“But anyways, enough of my ramblings... gather round my friends and watch as I concoct a potion so mischievous the evil Sheriff Stinkbottom will truly live up to his name!”

On the mischievousness of small boys and the plans of wizards

By the time he had finished chuckling to himself at the sheer brilliance of his plan and the hilarious gaseous effects it would have on the evil Sheriff Stinkbottom,

Ozimandus found he had to lean on a table for a moment to recover his composure. When he did, he started to order Jane and Thomas around the room collecting ingredients together which he took and placed in a large bowl. His two assistants played their part willingly and eagerly set off collecting each and every ingredient the wizard required. They kept quiet for the most part, but all the while Thomas had something of a plan playing on his mind.

As you can no doubt tell by now the wizard Ozimandus was somewhat set upon his cunning plan – indeed every now and then he would whoop with delight or even jump in the air or dance on the spot as he concocted what he liked to call his famous *Stinkbottom* potion. For one young boy in the room however it wasn't quite enough.

Now as much as the wizard's plan was a plan of great genius and of course great consequence for the poor Sheriff, we all know that when it comes to plans of great mischievousness, young boys are the true masters of the art.

As the wizard laughed to himself and danced about (more often than not almost getting his hair in the mixture) a thought came to Thomas's mind. A thought indeed that would nearly send the wizard through the roof with delight.

Thomas could contain his plan no longer.

He tapped the wizard on the shoulder. The wizard stopped his dancing and turned to face him. "I don't suppose you have any more of your hair potion left do you?"

The wizard stopped dead in his tracks and looked at Thomas, his eyebrow raised. "Well yes but I-

Thomas interrupted him. "Is it possible to put it into the *Stinkbottom* potion to make our revenge *extra* sweet?"

Jane looked to her brother. “What and make a *Hairy Stinkbottom*?”

“Precisely!”

The wizard paused a moment and let the plan sink in. When it did he launched himself high into the air in delight, bumping his head on the ceiling in the process.

“Marvellous!” the wizard exclaimed when he finally landed. “Magnificent! Miraculous! Spectacular! Splendiferous! Quite spiffing! What a plan! You know I never even considered such a plan! Pass me that bottle over there would you please Jane; yes the one with the thick purple liquid. I think our plan just got interesting!”

The potion complete

As soon as he poured in his overly powerful hair growth potion and whispered a few magic words the wizard declared the potion complete. He held the bowl so Thomas and Jane could see the results of their fine work. A pink-ish liquid with blobs of blue greeted them.

“I hate to disappoint you Ozimandus but how exactly are we supposed to get the Sheriff to drink *that*?” Jane asked. “It doesn’t look very appetising to me.”

“All in good time, all in good time,” the wizard replied. “Pass me that whisk would you my dear?”

Jane passed him the whisk. The wizard began to whisk away furiously.

“Just got to whisk out the blue bits,” he explained as Thomas and Jane looked on in wonder. His arms were moving faster than their eyes could follow.

“Be a good chap and pour in some of that red colouring would you please Thomas?”

Thomas did as instructed, the wizard stopped whisking and the potion was at last complete. Before them now was a liquid that looked remarkably like red wine. The wizard grinned. “And now for the fun part...”

The door to anywhere

As you will have no doubt gathered by now, doors are very strange things. As I have said many times already throughout this tale, they have a beginning, a middle and an end. A beginning where you are standing in front of the door about to go through; a middle where you are between the start and finish, and an end where you have reached your destination. As we have already learnt, not all doors end where you expect them to end, and if the door in question happens to be a door owned by the great wizard Ozimandus it certainly does *not* end where you might expect.

It may not come as a surprise to you then to learn that of all the doors in Ozimandus’s house, a great many are of the type of the door to nowhere, and open up into any number of different towns, cities and sometimes even castles throughout the Kingdom.

“Why so many doors?” you might ask. Well for one, the wizard liked to travel; for two, he was exceptionally lazy; and for three, well his house really did have a lot of spare doors. It was one door in particular now that the wizard led our two young friends. In fact it was a very special door indeed...

“It’s a door to anywhere,” the wizard told them as they walked, “a special door of my own design that opens wherever I choose.”

“So you mean you can open up a door inside our parents’ prison?” Thomas asked.

“Oh I can do better than that my dear boy – I can open up a door in their very *cell!*”

At this point the wizard stumbled and Jane caught him. “Oh Norbert I do wish you’d stop getting under my feet like that. It’s most frustrating!”

Norbert the mud creature looked up at the wizard with sad, apologetic eyes.

“It’s all well and good you looking at me like that but you never learn do you?”

Just then they came upon the door the wizard was looking for. “Ah yes now here we go, this is the door.”

Jane and Thomas looked at each other in confusion; the door looked just like any other.

“Are you sure this is the right door Ozimandus? It looks to me just like any other.”

“Oh no my dear, can’t you see this one is different? I painted it blue especially.”

“But Ozimandus, they’re *all* blue,” Thomas pointed out. “All the doors in this corridor are blue.”

“Quite,” the wizard nodded, “which is why this is the right one.”

Thomas and Jane both sighed exasperated sighs and waited as the wizard recited some words from a scroll he produced from his pocket. Being the showman that he was, and wanting to impress his two young companions with his skill, he ended his recital with a sudden “ALAKAZAM!” and a flurry of small fireworks which sent Jane shooting into the air, and Thomas shooting to the ground as he tripped over Norbert who had by now reattached himself to Thomas’s feet.

“Wake you up did I?” the wizard grinned mischievously. “I knew you’d like that.” He stepped forward and opened the door. Thomas and Jane both craned forward to peer inside. Sure as sure, true to the wizard’s word the door to anywhere ended in a dark, damp, dingy dungeon.

The wizard hitched up his robes and stepped into the doorway. He turned to Thomas and Jane. “Right you two, follow me.” To Norbert he said: “not you you naughty Norbert. You can stay here.”

Norbert sulked. The wizard ignored him. Together then, the three companions stepped through the door.

The dungeon

Of all the dark, damp, dingy dungeons in the realm of men the dungeon Thomas, Jane and Ozimandus stepped in to was quite possibly one of the darkest, the dampest and no doubt dingiest imaginable. The dungeon was dark, cold, wet and reeked of a smell of the type Thomas and Jane could very easily guess. It did not smell very nice.

“Are you sure this is the right place?” Jane asked as she tentatively took a few steps forward away from the door. “I can barely see a thing.”

Just then a pair of voices emerged from the gloom.

“Hello?”

“Anyone there?”

The wizard muttered a few words of power and in an instant the dungeon was bathed in light. As soon as it was, two figures were revealed huddling in the corner. Though they had lost an awful lot of weight and were covered in dirt, they were instantly recognisable.

“Mum!”

“Dad!”

The two children ran over to their parents.

“Thomas? Jane? Am I dreaming?” Dad looked flabbergasted. Mum was too shocked to speak. “Is it really you?”

“Yes it’s us!” Thomas and Jane replied together. “The wizard Ozimandus brought us here through a magic door. No time to explain just now – come on we’ve got to get out of here!”

Thomas and Jane pulled their parents to their feet and led them to the door. “Oh this is Ozimandus by the way. He’s a wizard don’t you know.”

The wizard bowed graciously at his introduction, his overly-long plaits of hair almost touching the damp dungeon floor. “Pleasure to meet you.”

Dad looked at the wizard and then at the door. “And this man brought you here did he?”

The wizard bowed once more.

Dad reached forward to shake the wizard by the hand but just then all of a sudden the dungeon door creaked open. In stepped the evil Sheriff Stinkbottom.

Jane let out a little yelp of surprise. “It’s... it’s you!”

The Sheriff sneered at her.

“Ah yes it is I indeed. After I waited for what seemed like an age by that cursed door you fled through I thought it best I came back and checked on your parents. Now I find the pair of you already here it seems I’m saved the bother of having to bring you here myself. And you,” the Sheriff turned his nose towards the wizard, “and who pray tell, are you?”

“My name is Ozimandus sir and I am at your service.” The wizard bowed, his beard stopping just short of the particularly icky looking puddle at his feet.

The Sheriff sneered again.

“Well Ozimandus, by the very fact you are here with these young ruffians I am well within my right to lock you up as well! One more prisoner for the dungeon certainly won’t hurt!”

The wizard bristled with outrage.

“How dare you!” he snorted, and before either Thomas or Jane could stop him, produced a wand from his pocket and pointed it directly at the Sheriff’s nose.

“I wouldn’t point that thing at me if I were you,” the Sheriff said through gritted teeth, his nose now quivering with rage. “It will only make me angry.”

Ozimandus laughed, tapping the Sheriff on his bulbous nose. “If I were you Sheriff, I wouldn’t point *that* thing at *me* if I were you – it might just go off!”

The Sheriff went red with rage. Thomas chuckled as the Sheriff drew breath to surely call the guards, but before he got the chance to do so, Ozimandus waved his wand and the Sheriff was frozen solid on the spot.

“Well that will sort him out for a few hours,” the wizard said, returning his wand to his pocket and clapping his hands together. He turned to Mum and Dad. “I think now would be as good a time as any to take our leave. If you would like to follow me...”

Dad looked nervously at the door. “Is it... is it safe?”

“Oh yes it’s very safe,” the wizard replied. “Just treat it as any other door and you’ll be fine.”

Mum and Dad were both about to protest but before they knew it they were pushed through the door to the safety of the wizard’s house.

How the story ends

There is not much left to tell of our story now after Mum and Dad had been saved and given a good long bath to clean off all the grime of the dungeon. Of course the wizard Ozimandus declared a celebratory feast at Mum and Dad's new found freedom and they all ate heartily of the wizard's most splendiferous of splendid feasts. It was so good and so filling indeed that none of the family could move afterwards. They were so full they decided to stay the night.

One night became two.

Two nights became a long weekend.

A long weekend became a week.

A week became... I think you get the picture.

Eventually, after a whole month had passed the wizard decided to invite his new-found friends to stay with him... permanently. Not having any money, or indeed any place to go, Mum, Dad, Thomas and Jane were only too pleased to accept the wizard's offer and took up jobs in the wizard's house helping him in his experiments and so forth till the day Thomas and Jane were both finally old enough to become the wizard's apprentices.

But I'm getting ahead of myself – that's another story!

And like all good stories I am afraid to say this one must now come to an end with Mum, Dad, Thomas and Jane living happily ever after with the now not quite so lonely wizard Ozimandus, the mud creature Norbert and all the other weird and wonderful creatures of the wizard's weird and wonderful household.

But wait... what of the Sheriff? Did Thomas and Jane get their revenge?

Ah yes indeed they did, for you see a week after Mum and Dad's escape from prison the evil Sheriff received something of a gift in the post...

"Hmmm what's this?" the Sheriff wondered as he held the wine bottle in his hand.

"Wine? For me?"

It had been a particularly long, hard week at work (being evil is hard work too you know!) and because of this, the Sheriff decided to allow himself a glass or two.

Or three...

Or four...

Soon enough the Sheriff had consumed the entire bottle of the potion Thomas and Jane had named *Hairy Stinkbottom*. Needless to say the potion worked to perfection. In fact you could say it worked better than even Thomas could have hoped. So well indeed that the horrible effects of the *Hairy Stinkbottom* potion cannot possibly be described here without making me feel quite ill. I shall leave then, the effects of that most splendiferous of potions to your imaginations.

All that remains now then is for me to say goodbye and farewell. Goodbye Mum, Dad, Thomas, Jane. Goodbye Ozimandus. Goodbye Norbert.

And finally, goodbye Sheriff.

"Brrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrp"

The End

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[May this be a lesson to you and all evil people across the land. Never underestimate the plans of wizards, or the mischievousness of small boys!]