

A BRUSH WITH FATE



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PARAMETERS AND RANDOM WORDS

Parameters

Primary character 1	Artist
Primary character 2	Chauffeur
Non-human character	Garden gnome
Setting	Daycare centre
Issue	Learning to fly

Random words

Whistle
Light
Gold
Hungry
Bubbly

DEDICATION:

This book is dedicated to the people who want to be inspired, to the people who are willing to reflect on their mistakes, and to the creatives and the believers out there.

We thank you immensely for picking up our book and we hope we made it worthwhile.

This book is also dedicated to the teachers who are keeping us motivated during these unprecedented times and letting us skip work to write and illustrate this book. We thank you for your hard work, dedication and patience.

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Further Acknowledgements:

Thank you to Ms McQueen and Ms Pearson for informing us of this wonderful opportunity.

And finally, thank you to our amazing illustrators who manage to surprise us with the most amazing artwork, time and time again.

chapter one

Andy sets down her brush beside the splattered paint buckets and stretches her arms, willing the inspiration to come. She hears a yawn from across the room and seethes silently, very, very tempted to slap the boy lazing in the corner.

“You could help, you know?” Andy says, staring at the blank wall in frustration. Blank, like her mind, a plain devoid of innovation or ideas.

“You hired me to *drive*. So, I drove, I do apologise if her ladyship wanted more from her dutiful errand boy,” Gavin calls back, tipping his chauffeur cap (which he swore he wore for Andy’s benefit and not his own, or so he claims) and bowing his head mockingly.

Andy scoffs. “Geez, excuse me for assuming you were a half-decent friend, my bad.”

“Well, you’re the possessor of the artistic talent, right? I would help you, *really*, I would, but I think a Philistine such as myself would be better suited to moral support. And maybe a nap.” He drops onto the floor, practically unconscious and with every intention of staying that way.

Unwilling to waste any more time on the likes of him, Andy turns her mind back to the mural. That damned mural, the mural she was being *paid* to create. Real money, like a real artist. The blank wall stares at her, a canvas filled with limitless possibilities. Limitless but...child friendly. Looking around the derelict construction site, it was difficult to picture it brimming with life and small, shrieking children, but of course, she would need to apply her imagination there. *A daycare centre, what would look good in a daycare centre?* Idea after idea surges through her mind, but she can’t quite grasp them. She needs a plan, she needs to harness that playful, cheerful atmosphere and let it guide her brush.

“Need any help there?”

Gavin appears beside her and Andy takes a second to huff, regaining her energy and striding away.

“What happened to sleeping on the job?”

“What happened to wanting my help, hm?”

Gavin steals her brush away, flicking it through the air dramatically. Andy rolls her eyes as she jumps on the balls of her feet, attempting to snatch it back despite the considerable height difference between them. He doesn’t even spare her a glance as he effortlessly maneuvers away from her clawing hands.

“Well, you surely weren’t this enthusiastic before, Mr. ‘I’m A Chauffeur, I Don’t Pai-’”

“Gnome.”

“What?”

Andy hears a crack under her feet as the gnome rolls under her foot, and the next thing she knows she's flat on the ground. She groans at her aching legs, unappreciative of Gavin's laughter coming from above her. Until he stops, abruptly. And then he screams.

Her eyes shoot up, hackles raised, heart pumping... only to be met with the piercing eyes of a very small, very angry, very *animated* gnome. She stares for a few seconds, unable to process the situation. That is, until it opens its mouth.

"What are you looking at?!"

And then she screams.



chapter two

She must've hit her head. She must've suffered some terrible injury that loosened her grip on reality because what just happened *can't* have just happened. But her struggle to understand the situation didn't stop the angry voice from floating out, piercing the silence and changing... well, everything.

"You!" The voice is harsh and grated. "You know this hat was very expensive, right? One of the top designs at the time, and now you've gone and broken it. Congratulations, day ruined, got anything else on your agenda?"

Andy has nothing to do but gawk at the diminutive gnome berating her. Gawk and think to herself, *well, he's an interesting character*. She takes in his haggard appearance, an overcoat of chipped and peeling paint illustrating his furious facial features. His terracotta overalls are a dusty, faded, green, his glossy finish wears years of accumulated grime and dirt, and his red, pointed hat is missing a significant chunk of its top.

And that's my fault, Andy thinks, before remembering the far more pressing thought that *holy hell this gnome is talking, it's talking to me, the gnome is talking to me and mother of-*

"What on earth are you ogling at?" he squawks. Andy's face is frozen in a dopey, *what the actual hell is going on* sort of expression. "It's rude to stare. I'm starting to think that you weren't raised with very good manners."

"You're... just, I... how?" Andy babbles, her voice coming out a full octave higher than usual. The gnome narrows his blue eyes, examining her in such a fashion that shot a shiver straight down her spine. He looks her up and down, taking in her paint splattered overalls and her unkempt, tousled hair. Feeling a flush spread across her cheeks, she shuffles frantically towards the wall, distancing herself as much as possible from the curious garden ornament.

"Oh, come on! You can't possibly think that I'm going to hurt you right?" the gnome grumbles, "I could barely move until you stepped on me, *rather rudely* might I add?"

A muffled noise escapes from Gavin, the situation dawning on him slowly and then all at once. He looks like a deer in headlights, his chest rising and falling as he mumbles incoherently.

"You're a... he's a gn—how can is, just, um, *who are you?!'*" Gavin gasps, suddenly wide awake although still not quite sure if he's still dreaming.

The gnome scoffs, as if affronted. "Clearly you two have issues with managing your manners, would it kill you to add a few pleasantries?"

Andy and Gavin exchange a look of fear and incredulity and utter disbelief all at once. Andy slowly makes her way onto her feet; unsure her legs would support her weight with all the nerves coursing through them. She takes a tentative step towards the tiny figure.

"I'm... I'm Andy," she says, crouching next to him awkwardly, "and that's my friend --"



“Indentured servant--” Gavin quips.

“*Friend--*” Andy reiterates, shooting him a look.

“Gavin, his name is Gavin.”

She points half-heartedly towards her companion. The gnome peers at him with great scrutiny, labelling him as ‘underwhelming’ and leaving it there.

“Well then,” he sniffs, “My name is Frekmic, the former guardian of the Vitis Kingdom. I am soon to return, but up until you placed your large feet on me, I had been sitting here for the past 200 years, wallowing away at my misfortune.” He purses his lips and averts his eyes melodramatically.

“Misfortune? What do you mean by that?” Andy asks slowly, careful not to do anything that might spark another lecture about courtesy. “Not to be rude or anything, but what are you doing... well, here?” She gestures towards their surroundings. The half-finished ceiling covered with an aging tarp, the overgrown weeds creeping up the walls and curling round the rusted gates, a few toys scattered around belonging to children long gone. It made for a derelict scenery, that was certain. “Surely it’s not a fitting place for a kingdom.”

“Well, it was 200 years ago,” Frekmic recounts, his eyes turning misty, “but the kingdom needed to leave. Your kind saw to that. Because who needs plants and greenery when you could have vacant concrete lots? No one whose needs are worth considering, right?”

“So where are they now? Why did you stick around?” Andy questions, her mind twisting to accommodate the reality she had thought only existed in storybooks.

“The Vitiscan people flew to a better place,” Frekmic continues, barely giving Andy any time to register that *apparently gnomes can fly?* “They sought a new paradise where they needn’t worry about human interference. *Not* that it’s any of your business.” He turns up his ceramic nose in contempt. Gavin watches the exchange disbelievingly, turning his head from Frekmic to Andy and back and forth as he absorbs the scene playing out in front of him. It feels surreal, Andy folding her tiny body and hugging her knees as she settles next to a small, pompous, uppity gnome. And he can see them, he *knows* he can see the two of them, just sitting there as if everything was completely fine, but he can’t shake the feeling that this is all a very vivid hallucination.

“I’m dreaming, right? Andy, come here and pinch me awake, because we cannot possibly be talking to a jumped-up garden ornament, right?” Gavin starts, rubbing his eyes furiously as if to wake himself.

“How dare you! Garden ornament? I’m not some tacky plastic flamingo made for the ostentatious adornment of poorly kept lawns,” Frekmic snarls. Gavin raises his hand in mock surrender.

“My apologies,” he says in a snobbish imitation, “it’s not a common occurrence for me to converse with a condescending piece of ceramic.”

“Nor is it common for me to come across a pair of rude, dimwitted children who’ve taken it upon themselves to occupy my land.” Frekmic retorts, taking in their offended reactions with satisfaction.

“I don’t have to put up with this.” Andy stands and strides back toward her paints. Picking up a roller, she glances back at Frekmic over her shoulder, and to her surprise, his eyes widen and his face softens.

“You’re an artist?” he questions, genuinely interested. Andy nods slowly, distrustful of his sudden curiosity.

“I was hired to paint a mural for this wall, but I’ll be honest, I’m a little lost on ideas,” Andy admits, shifting uncomfortably. Frekmic’s interest piques, his eyes **light** up, tilting his head towards the mural in fascination. He studies it enthusiastically and locks eyes with Andy, who hesitantly returns his gaze.

“Fantastic!” he cries, his voice an enthusiastic **whistle** piercing through the quiet. “I’ve always thought artists have a certain magic to what they do. Artists can create worlds, weave stories, restore long-lost places that previously lived only in memory. And believe me,” Frekmic sighs, his pompous persona quickly fading, leaving a childlike sense of wonder cloaked with an aged weariness. “I know what it’s like to live in memory. So maybe... if you felt so inclined, you might *consider*...”

She can’t believe it, but Andy can feel her heart clench a little. She feels pity. *Pity*, for a piece of clay. Strange times indeed.

“Why don’t you paint my home? Why not paint Vitis, for a new world to remember the beauty of the old?”

Andy lips quirks in a soft smile. “Well, either the paint fumes have finally taken their toll on my sanity, or...” Her eyes seem to twinkle, just a little. “That sounds like a pretty good idea.”

“Splendid!” Frekmic exclaims, moving excitedly to the best of his limited mobility. “Where to begin?”

Chapter three

Frekmic starts his tale, describing his home, careful to spare no detail, to leave no stone unturned or undescribed.

“Once upon a time, there lived a very wise and very, *very* handsome garden gnome.”

Andy and Gavin roll their eyes.

“He lived a simple but happy life. His home was a beautiful place, more beautiful than anything you could imagine. The grass, so soft and green, and the way the blades would sparkle with the **light** of the sun- oh! There’s nothing else like it. And the flowers, their richness and vibrance, I cannot do them justice. The Desert Flame, how it would bring a blaze of colour with its golden yellow flowers and silvery grey foliage. The tricoloured Kangaroo Paws, the beauty of seeing their stems in full bloom is a feeling beyond any other. The petite, mauve flowers of the Aussie Box formed the loveliest lining hedges. And when spring arrived, we’d hear the bird’s dulcet melodies as they drank the nectar of the vibrant red Bottlebrush.”

Andy could feel his words painting images in her mind, and she grabs the closest brush and immediately sets off.

Andy gets lost in the blush Kangaroo Paws, the vibrant Desert Flames, and small, dainty Westringas. The brush strokes seem therapeutic, gliding smoothly against the plaster wall as it illustrates the details of the honeysuckles. She forgets her surroundings, blissfully ignoring her reality until she hits the end of the wall. It was as if no time had passed.

Satisfied, she steps back and admires her progress.

She had painted as far as she could reach, pretty flowers and luscious plants embellishing and overtaking the surface. She envisions a vividly painted sky to accompany the greenery, fluffy clouds framing a blazing, **gold** sun that shed rays of light onto the scene. She envisions reaching the top as she details hidden stars in the crimson sky. Cursing her own insufficient build, she begrudgingly hands her tools to a smirking Gavin.

“Paint exactly as I describe it, mind you, it’s my job on the line,” Andy teases. “I expect perfection, or you *will* face my wrath.”

“Yes Ma’am!” he says, hands raised in a mock salute and eyes glinting as he just misses a slap. Andy sits on an upturned bucket, running her wrist across her brow and shooing Gavin off to do her bidding. Frekmic clears his throat, his signature frown plastered on his tiny face and a small, ruby flower in hand as he sits on a stray pebble.



"I do appreciate the effort, I really do." He looks down at his hands and sighs. "It's beautiful, it's just not quite... there, yet."

Andy giggles as she hoists the gnome up onto the table, Frekmic startling as he felt himself leave the ground. "Could you at least wait until the sky is finished? Maybe you'll feel something then."

"And how long will that take?"

Andy glances to check on Gavin's progress, the boy seemingly lost in his thoughts and conducting his work painfully slowly. She reigns in her growing disappointment as she turns back to face the gnome.

"It might take a bit of time. Can you tell us more about your land? Or yourself? It could pass the time."

The gnome sucks the nectar from the flower like smoke from a pipe, and

he looks up towards the half-finished ceiling, seeing a world that's not there.

"The flora that surrounded us, it was more than just a pretty backdrop for my people. We were linked, our power, our energy, our life stemmed from them. The connection between the gnomes and the plants was an ancient and beautiful one. When they thrived, we thrived. And when they died... well, we died too."

Frekmic dives back into his story, and Andy listens on with rapt fascination.

"As your kind developed and innovated, the plants were cleared away. We began to lose our power, we grew more sapped and sallow with each passing day. Until the time came when we knew we couldn't wait. We needed to leave, for if we stayed a moment longer, we would no longer have the ability to do so."

"And what did you do?"

"I stayed on. A guardian of Vitis never leaves his homeland."

Frekmic smiles fondly, shaking his head and wrapping himself in his arms, the embrace of his people long gone.

Gavin watches the strange interaction for a few seconds before he heads over, paint roller dripping a trail. "Is it just me, or can he move more than before?"

Frekmic blinks. Waits a moment, then gapes at Gavin, confusion morphing into disbelief. He touches his face tentatively. Slowly moves his legs and begins to walk across the room.

He turns back to face the pair, a genuine smile spreading across his painted lips.

"My powers... they're returning!"

chapter four

Andy and Gavin look at each other. They look at Frekmic. All three of them look at the mural, astonishment plastered on their faces. It is rather impressive, in retrospect. A gorgeous mixture of vibrant colours, breathing life into and seeming to leap out of the painting, culminating into scenery that did Frekmic's passionate words justice.

And nothing could have surprised Andy more than watching a tear slip from Frekmic's porcelain eyes, a tentative hand reaching out to touch the painting.

"Your art... it's bringing the land to life. It's restoring my powers!" Frekmic exclaims, his face contorting into various indescribable expressions. Andy looks on, cheeks turning pink at his compliments.

"I'm starting to feel like my old self again," Frekmic turns toward them, his grin taking residence over more than half his tiny face. And then as quickly as it came, his smile disappeared, replaced by a furrowed brow and narrowed eyes as he ruminates on an unknown problem.

"Whoa, hold up, little man. Care to share what's going on in that head of yours?" Gavin asks playfully. Frekmic turns to him with utter seriousness.

"I've been sitting here for over 200 years. That's a mighty long time for you to identify every little mistake you've made, every conflict plays out endlessly, it's a long time for you to finally realise your regrets. Tell me, Gavin, do you have any regrets?" Frekmic asks solemnly.

"Oh, plenty. I regret that time I turned vegan for two weeks. Worst mistake ever, I was so **hungry** all the time. Did you know that you can't even have ice cream? That's an insult to humanity!" Gavin exclaims, pent-up emotions from his unfortunate experiment in veganism returning in full force. Frekmic glances over, his painted eyebrows knitting together in disapproval.

"You consider that a real problem?" Frekmic asks, his old temper returning, "I thought I was doing the right thing by my people, staying back to protect the land that protected us for so long. But the years... they take their toll. And I realise now my pride blinded me to pragmatism. I thought I'd be trapped here forever, set to sit, immobile, and watch the centuries pass. A fate with a stubbornness that rivals my own. I'd never dreamed I'd be able to move again, so I... resigned myself to this solitary reality. But everything's changed now!"

His eyes are set in stone and his voice is slick with resolve.

"I need to find my people. I need to go back home."

"How will you manage that?" Andy wonders, before an epiphany dawns on her. "Wait, you can fly! Gnomes can fly, right?"

Gavin tilts his head quizzically, "I'm sorry, gnomes can what now?"

Ignoring Gavin completely, Frekmic continues, "I haven't flown in ages, and I certainly don't have the strength to do so now. But..."

"But what?" Gavin asks eagerly. Andy flashed him a look that said *well, look who's getting invested.*

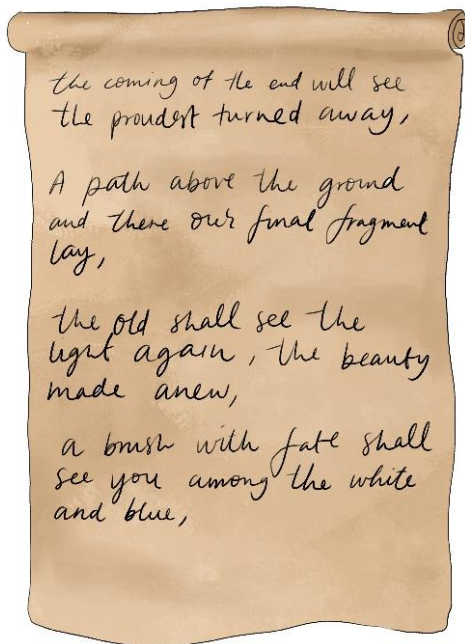
“When the Vitiscans left, they mentioned something. A riddle. So, should I have a change of heart, I might find them.”

“Wait. A riddle?”

The gnome nods solemnly as he reaches into his pocket to reveal a delicate, golden scroll. Gavin carefully unfurls it and is met with a slew of foreign lettering.

“Um... translation?”

Andy hands Frekmic a piece of blank paper, who proceeds to scrawl down his thoughts in slender, spidery writing. Gavin squints his eyes, struggling to make out the inscription. Andy watches him as he fills in the blanks, her curiosity burning as he considers the text, eventually losing her patience and snatching it for herself. Her brows quirk in confusion as she reads.



"The coming of the end will see the proudest turned away,

A path above the ground and there our final fragment lay,

The old shall see the light again, the beauty made anew,

A brush with fate shall see you back among the white and blue."

Andy recites it under her breath, hoping that if she repeated it enough, she'll somehow find the answer. Her focus is interrupted as Gavin cries, “Wait! I got it! It's obvious, isn't it?”

Andy and Frekmic exchange an uncertain glance.

“Man, you guys are *sloooooow*,” he drawls.

Andy manages to grab the gnome before he launches himself at Gavin. Frekmic's face is as red as his hat, and he kicks his legs into the air as he wrestles against Andy's grip, beard swinging, spitting out torrents of foreign words that Gavin guesses were less than savoury.

“You *dare* mock me child? You dare poke fun at my misfortune? What, pray tell, makes you laugh so?” Frekmic asks, his words lacing with unspoken threats.

Gavin spins his pencil with a flourish.

“Look, Frekmic mate, you're going about this the wrong way. This isn't a riddle. It's a prophecy.”

“And what difference does it make?” Frekmic sniffs. Gavin chuckles at his indignance.

“Oh, how the turns have tabled. Wait a moment and I'll tell you.”

“It's how the tables have turne-” Andy begins, silenced by the finger Gavin places on her lips.

“Hush now child, the grown-ups are speaking. Anyways, so the whole ‘proudest turned away’ thing? The Vitiscans were turned away from their homeland, plus a nice nod to Frekmic's huge ego.” He winks coyly.

“Watch it...” Frekmic growls. Gavin flashes him a sly smile and moved on.

"The 'final fragment,' that's you! And a 'brush of fate'? Correct me if I'm wrong, but there is a certain someone here who's pretty handy with a paintbrush. We were *meant* to be here; we were always supposed to help you home!"

Frekmic raises a brow cynically. "Very good, young one. But you're missing something. We still don't know *where* my people fled. You can harp on about fate all you like, without a location every conclusion you've arrived at thus far is useless."

Gavin grins, undeterred. "*Patience*, grasshopper. A 'path above.' The 'white and blue.'" He flicks a glance upwards. "Remind you of anything?"

"The sky..." Andy mutters.

Gavin points an energetic finger towards her. "Correct! It's elementary, dear Andy. So, if our talented artist here can finish her mural, she can make the beauty anew. The old will see the light, don't you understand? And Gnomeo over here," he says, patting the tip of Frekmic's hat condescendingly, "can learn to fly again and be 'back among' his mates. Geddit?"

Frekmic and Andy stare at him, speechless.

"Chauffeur's smarter than he looks, huh?" Gavin quips, smirking with satisfaction as he hands the scroll back to Frekmic.

"So... I'm going home?"

Gavin grins as he locks eyes with the gnome.

"You're going home, mate!"

chapter five

There was a lot of bickering involved. A lot of lectures, a lot of mishaps, and a good deal of colourful language thrown around, but somehow, *somehow*, the unlikely trio found themselves examining an honest to God, fully-fledged mural.

The vibrance of the colours, the precision of the brushstrokes, the life that ebbed and flowed in the scenery... it truly was a memory brought to life.

“So...” Andy begins, eyeing Frekmic expectantly.

“It’s everything I could have asked for,” he declares.

Andy squeals, scooping the gnome into her arms, despite the cries of protest, for a hug. Gavin rushes in to join them, but before he can he finds himself jumping back in surprise.

“Hey, Frekmic, are you *glowing*?”

Andy quickly relinquishes her grip, letting Frekmic plummet towards the ground and *oh god he’s going to break-*

But she never hears the crash.

Frekmic is beaming as he levitates, sparks flying from his compact body and skin glowing with a warm, vibrant light.

“Andy, Gavin... what you’ve done for me today, I... I feel... I just wanted to say-”

“You’re welcome,” Andy says.

Frekmic nods at her fervently, appreciation filling his eyes.

Gavin gives a small salute. “Good luck, little man.”



The pair wave weakly as Frekmic floats higher, higher, higher... until he's gone. And it's ineffable, it's impossible to say how but they knew.

Frekmic was home.

They gape at the sky a few moments longer, chests churning with disbelief as they turn to face each other.

"Did that...just happen?"

"I think it... did?"

Gavin pinches Andy's arm and then his own, somewhat surprised when Andy flashes him a look of indignation.

"Hey! What was that for?"

"So, it *wasn't* the paint fumes."

Refusing to entertain Gavin's shenanigans, Andy walks away and begins to pack up her equipment.

"He got his happy ending," she mused, looking toward the sky in wonder. "He finally went home."

"He got his gnomecoming," Gavin whispers.

A glare is all Andy needs to silence him.

"Ok, Chuckles, why don't you help me load some of this stuff in the car? Oh, and leave the bad puns on the curb, please, or I will drive myself home."

Knowing her proficiency (or rather, lack thereof) in that area, he settles for a goofy grin and begins to grab some of the paints.

Andy slams the door behind her, leaving Gavin alone. A peculiar film played out in his head, recounting the series of strange, strange events they'd just witnessed, incredulity still etched onto his mind.

And he came to a decision. Yes, he knew it. For sure.

This most definitely wasn't real.

epilogue

The building still smells new, Andy thinks to herself. She and Gavin stand towards the back of the room, listening to the **bubbly** laughter of too many small, shrieking children and watching them dart around this way and that. But they can't stop their eyes from flitting towards the mural. The intricate plants, the detailed sky... and of course, the smiling gnome featured prominently in the centre.

"So Frekmic *is* real. We agreed on that, right?"

Gavin's eyes are trained on the gnome as Andy responds.

"Took you a little while to accept, huh?"

"How dare you mock me, child!" Gavin teases, a fitting impression of their friend.

"But seriously. A flying gnome armed with a riddle and a temper that could curdle milk. Not something you see every day," he says.

"It's not exactly commonplace, no, but I think, if given the choice, it's better to believe," she replies, smiling gently at a passing toddler.

Gavin examines the mural, snickering softly.

"So, you're glad our gnomey bud made it back?"

"What are you talking about? Of course I am," Andy laughs.

Gavin makes a vague gesture towards the gnome's painted features, the trademark glint of mirth settling in his eyes.

"Nothing, you're absolutely right. After all, there's no place like gnome."

And finally, Andy slaps him.

Right. Across. His. Face.

When inspiration fails to appear for her first ever commission and all hope seems lost, Andy, an artist fresh out of school, and her friend Gavin stumble into a mystical new world, haunted by a past that drove all the gnomes out of the Kingdom of Vitis. That is, all but one.

A story about creativity, inspiration, mistakes, belief, wonder (also gnome puns), A Brush With Fate is magic right under your nose. With snarky humour and lighthearted content, this piece enjoyable for anyone looking for a light, fun read.

Age Recommendation: 12-14

