



CONFIDENCE  
is  
KEY

BY THE "PROFESSIONALS"

“Fashion is not something that exists in dresses only. Fashion is in the sky, in the street, fashion has to do with ideas, the way we live, what is happening.”

**Coco Chanel**

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# Write a Book in a Day



**THE KIDS'  
CANCER  
PROJECT**  
Science. Solutions. Survival.

## PARAMETERS FORM 2019

### TEAM DETAILS

STATE: VIC .....

DIVISION: Upper School .....

SCHOOL/GROUP: Star of the Sea College (BRIGHTON) .....

TEAM NAME: Star Writers' Collective 1 .....

TEAM ID: 512 .....

### PARAMETERS AND RANDOM WORDS

#### Parameters

Primary character 1 Nurse .....

Primary character 2 Chiropractor .....

Non-human character Rabbit .....

Setting Maze .....

Issue Fashion crisis .....

#### Random words

Community .....

Skipped .....

Magic .....

Canvas .....

Sings .....

# PROLOGUE

It's been a long time since my power was called upon.

But, if I'm being honest, I don't often answer the few calls that do come my way these days.

I remember when magic was something to be revered. When the red rock of my faces were strong and proud, rising towards the sky, impenetrable and glorious. When the great spirit of the dreamtime ran through every person's blood and they would come to me not with petty complaints, but for guidance and counsel.

I remember every request:

"My people are thirsty. Grant me the power to carve the land and make a river for them to drink from."

"My people are sick, grant me knowledge so I can brew the cure to heal them."

*And now look what stands before me. Pathetic.*

"HEY, MAZE MAN. HELP ME!"

He **sings** out for my help, like a whining baby bird cries out for its mother.

I am no mother for young boys to cry to. I am the land, the life-force of this country.

But my power is waning as fewer and fewer people have the dreaming spirit, bestowed upon us by the sky beings, flowing through their veins. The rivers that stream through my crevices are slowly dwindling to trickles, and my rock is crumbling. The once rich, red soil fades and cracks underfoot. It seems this pitiful excuse for a sorcerer is all the creator spirits have left for me.

*What brings you here spellcaster?*

"Uh, I'm... a magician. For children."

The wind around the small man shakes, as I sigh at what our culture has been reduced to.

There is no connection to the old spirits in this boy. His link to his forefathers and homeland is flimsy, and his faith in himself is frail. This boy does not know who he is and does not trust in what he can become.

“Are you listening to me?” his voice wavers, like a child’s.

... *Yes. Go on.*

“Well, the thing is that the children, they don’t like me. I think I must look too threatening, or perhaps too... sombre. So, I need a new outfit.”

*What?*

“Yes. I think that will solve the problem. My magic is good! I can bring things to life with the touch of my hand! I can move the wind below my feet and use it to soar up into the sky! But children find me too upsetting to be around, so these gifts... they go unshared with the world.”

*Can’t you just change your clothes?*

“I don’t know... I have always dressed this way... I wouldn’t know how to make such a huge change without some kind of help.”

I have never felt such fear, such instability in one with the Gift before. It is true, magic resides within him, brighter than what I have felt in years. I must help this boy; he may be all I have left.

And yet his cowardice vexes me...

“Please? It feels like there is a gaping hole within me... I am in despair.”

*You melodramatic and fragile child. It seems I have no choice but to guide you.*

*Yet what you describe sounds like so much more than a fashion emergency.*

*I think you need a professional.*



## CHAPTER 1

The hospital was bright. The hum of machinery and quiet whispers flowed through the halls. Down in the far west ward was the children's corner, framed by abstract images of trees and flowers and rolling hills; all too cheery for Kelly Brown's current mood.

A registered nurse, Kelly wanted to do more than the superficial duties assigned to her. Ladelling soup into bowls and carrying toys to children with broken bones didn't ring true to why she entered this field.

Walking into the ward, Kelly approached one such child, carefully placing the pumpkin soup on the tray in front of him.

“Hey buddy, I have some warm soup for you and...” She pulled out a toy rabbit from the box placed on the floor at the foot of the bed. “Meet Bowie!”

The child, Toby, reached for the toy and pulled it close to him. In his excitement, the bunny’s ear accidentally touched the soup. Toby looked nervously up at Kelly.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to.”

Kelly smiled warmly at him, “It’s not a problem, I’ll just wash him in the sink.”

Kelly turned away and walked into the next room, smiling at Toby before she opened the door. She sighed, dropping her smile as soon as the door closed, turning on the tap and beginning to wipe the soup off Bowie’s ear. She just wished that she was able to do more; help more. Scrubbing soup off a bunny rabbit wouldn’t make any difference to the health of her patients. If only things were different.

A bright light cut through her thoughts. Here one second, gone the next, taking Kelly with it. Nothing was left in the room except the running tap and no one to turn it off.

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Behind the dull white doors on the other side of the hospital was the chiropractors’ ward. Franco’s office was painted with an unfavourable bright orange, much like his hair and the trim of his Skechers. Snowglobes lined the windowsill, reminding him of the life he could have pursued had he stayed in school for a few more years: Paris, New York and London, in a perfect little dome; much more desirable than mundane Melbourne. If only he’d become a doctor instead.

Maybe then, he would have been seen as a proper medical professional.

He straightened his coat, beginning the obligatory speech about the process before he started.

“This won’t hurt, trust me. It’s more of a shock than anything,” he said as he stretched out his long, bony fingers. His patient was lying on his stomach, nervously awaiting the treatment.

He smiled, accustomed to this kind of reaction to having your back manipulated by someone else.

“You won’t feel a thing.”

His patient took a deep breath as Franco reached out.

A bright light seared his eyes. Suddenly, there was just a solitary figure in the room, with no Franco in sight.

“Wow! I really can’t feel it!” the patient exclaimed, unaware of Franco’s disappearance.

# CHAPTER 2

The sound of crickets and the rustling of trees reached the ears of Kelly and Franco as they opened their eyes to a new world. They looked up at the grey sky, and then their gaze settled upon each other. Kelly gasped.

“Who are you? What did you do-”

She screamed as the toy rabbit in her hands jumped to the ground, its ears twitching. It was not a toy anymore, but a live animal, shivering with fear.

Franco stepped back, hands up, his voice shaking. “I didn’t do anything! This must be magic!”

“I am a woman of science. Magic doesn’t exist,” Kelly stuttered, looking around.

Endless red-stone walls extended out from their position. There were sparse eucalyptus trees growing up from the dusty ground, swaying slightly in the wind that blew through the air. Insects of all sorts crawled out of the towering walls, but there was something wrong with them. They seemed to have too many eyes and their colours morphed and glistened in the non-visible sun. Kelly and Franco could hear a slight whistling noise, almost a whisper; it seemed to originate from within the walls of the maze itself.

Bowie was now cowering against the wall, sniffing out the bugs unfortunate enough to crawl into his path.

“Ms Brown, from the children’s ward?” Franco asked.

Kelly nodded. “And you are?”

“I’m a chiropractor.”

“Your name, I mean.”

“Oh. Franco. I, uh, work in the hospital as well. You might have seen me. But, I mean, I have my own office, so you might not have.”

She scoffed as the two began to walk along the broken path.

Seemingly out of thin air, a lone figure appeared. Clad in black clothing that was mismatched with a velvet top hat on his head, the man walked slowly towards the frozen Kelly and Franco.

He raised his hands as a sign of peace and stopped in front of them.

Kelly stepped forward. "Who are you?"

The man smiled shyly, his eyes darting between Kelly and Franco. He wore black eyeliner, creating a look that was meant to fit seamlessly together, but failed at any sense of continuity. Sticking out of his hat were long strands of wild black hair.

"I am Vasili. I'm sorry for any trouble I have caused."

Franco spoke up now, some heat entering his words. "Look, mate, we didn't ask to be whisked to a bloody maze in the middle of nowhere. If you could just show us the exit, that'd be great."

Vasili tried to look apologetic as he replied, "I'm really sorry, but the maze brought you to me for a reason. You see, I have a problem. I have a magic show tomorrow and I need the best outfit ever. However, I don't look good in anything. You're here to help with that," he smiled at the end of his sentence, looking hopefully at the duo.

Kelly frowned, spreading her hands in a helpless gesture.

"I hate to say this, but we can't help you."

# CHAPTER 3

“What do you mean ‘you can’t help me’?” Vasili all but yelled. “This is a maze made specifically to get help for people like me!”

Kelly sighed, a slight irritation tainting her courteous disposition, “I *mean*, we’re medical professionals - well, one of us is - either way, we have no idea how to solve a ‘fashion emergency’ so now could you please-”



“No, no, no! I need help with my clothes! Look at my clothes! They’re ridiculous. No wonder I’m not a proper magician. Obviously I need help! I need to change this.”

A bitter tone slowly grew in Kelly’s voice. “Well, I’m afraid we aren’t able to assist you here. Now if you could kindly return us-”

“Look at my stupid shoes! These aren’t the shoes of a powerful wizard!”

“Actually I don’t mi-” Franco tried to interject.

Vasili cut him off with a low grumble as he started to pace around the pair. Bowie **skipped** in his shadow, now growing fascinated by his new found life. Vasili stopped short with a small huff.

“Fine. I don’t need you. I’ll just... ugh!” Vasili snatched the rabbit up from the ground, hugged it tightly to his chest, and ran off through one of the twisting paths.

Kelly and Franco stood stunned, alone in a maze that sung of its age with creaks and crumbling.

Fraco turned to Kelly. “...So.”

Kelly nodded. “So.”

A soft wind blew throughout the labyrinth.

“I guess we’d better try and find an exit.” Franco walked off to the pathway closest to him. He made it a few metres before he turned and found an irritated Kelly, unmoving.

“What makes you so certain that that’s the right way to go? For all we know this maze could be laced with traps or dangerous animals! Let’s go along this higher path, surely up equals exit.”

“Or impending doom.”

“Oh, please. Clearly, they didn’t teach you common sense in bone-cracking school. We need to be able to see the exit.”

“Oh, yeah? You think you’re so much better than me because you’re a nurse? You’re not even a real doctor, anyway. I doubt you could put on a bandaid!”

“At least I earned these scrubs. Where did you get that doctors coat from, huh?”

Kelly stepped forward and jabbed Franco’s chest, right over an embroidered name:

*‘David’*

“Hey! I found this fair and square!”

“You couldn’t have found something more useful? Like maybe a fashion sense that could have gotten us out of here?”

“Ugh. Whatever! Let’s just get out of this maze before it kills us,” Franco added, under his breath, “or you annoy me to death.”

He stormed off down the lighter exit, grumbling about the unfairness of the situation. Kelly rolled her eyes and followed behind him.

“So what makes you so sure that you’re part of the medical **community**?”

“Community? A community is unified and welcoming. There is *nothing* communal about the medical field.”

“...So nothing makes you part of the medical *field* is what you’re saying?” Kelly’s overly polite delivery somehow enhanced the aggressiveness within her passive question.

“If you must know, the chiropractic art deals with human anatomy. Healing the weak?”

“Yeah, but so do the massage chairs you find at shopping centres, and they aren’t considered doctors, are they?”

“Whatever, old lady.”

Franco lost interest in their bickering as the two stumbled upon an odd-looking dingo lying in the shade. Its coat was richly stained by the dust of the red rock that formed the walls of the maze. It lifted its head lazily towards them at their arrival.

“Woah. That’s a strange-looking dingo. Makes me feel all... creepy,” Franco pulled a face and glanced to Kelly.

“Oh, now! Come on. It’s only a regular dingo. If we move slow enough it’ll leave us alone.”

Kelly prodded Franco’s arm to get him to follow her lead, inching down the path, watching the dingo with cautious glances as it watched as well.

“Regular? Well how come it has glowing eyes?”

“They’re not glowing!” But with another glance back to the dingo she added, “just... luminous or reflective or something.”

As they approached closer, the two were able to see an ancient cave painting of a figure, looking all too much like a dingo for its positioning to be a coincidence.

They made their way through the space directly next to the animal. As they did so, a strange calm filled their minds, entrenching a feeling of fortitude within their souls. The trance was broken as soon as their feet passed the dingo but its eyes still bored into them as they continued on.

As the pair rounded a corner, the dingo seemed to dissolve into the red winds of the maze.

Contemplating the haunting eyes of the strange creature, Franco failed to realise that Kelly had stopped short. He promptly slammed right into her back, sending both of them stumbling.

Upon looking up to see what had caused Kelly to stop, Franco’s eyes met a towering dead end.

“Ugh. *Good one*. Come on, let’s turn back.”

He looked to Kelly who was staring back at the way they had come. The path was now blocked by a similar dead end.

“I don’t know if that’s an option here.”



## CHAPTER 4

Panic and disappointment overwhelmed Kelly as her eyes met the large wall of rock. Franco began to walk in circles, his head bowed, exerting his anger by kicking a rock along the barren ground. With each kick, a resounding echo reverberated through the deep void of tense silence. He kicked the rock again.

“Can you stop that?” Kelly asked, her patience becoming increasingly worn out each time Franco kicked the rock. Franco ignored her, clandestinely satisfied with his ability to annoy Kelly.

“You know, for a nurse, you don’t seem very gentle,” Franco said. “Or considerate,” he added, as he mercilessly booted the rock with more force, breaking it into smaller chunks.

“Are you trying to make this situation worse?” Kelly retaliated.

“Could it *get* any worse? I’ve been transported to an endless maze so I can help a deluded goth magician gain a fashion sense, walk aimlessly with a nurse who won’t listen to reason, be judged for my own profession, and now we’re stuck!”

Franco slid down the wall, his back grazing the jagged edges of the dusty rock. The thought of tearing his clothes caused him to slump with less aggression. With comfort impossible and any hope dissipated, he observed a centipede-like insect making its way inside a crevice along the wall above his head.

He paled at the thought of spending a night with such creatures, the reality of his situation becoming apparent. Cautiously he stuck his hand into a crack, feeling for grip, ignoring his earlier concern of the potential inhabitants of such a deep fissure.

“We should climb it,” he said finally, making unwanted eye contact with Kelly, who lay in a similarly discouraged position on the ground. She glanced skyward and without a word, stood up, sliding her fingers delicately into a gap, settling her foot on a ledge and pulling herself up.

Franco hesitated, but quickly followed suit, making a not-so-subtle attempt to climb quicker than Kelly. Fighting for breath, fatigued from the day’s events, they scaled the rock.

Eventually, Kelly reached up and grasped the top of the wall. She pulled herself up and laid on her back, her chest heaving and her hands raw with the effort of the climb. Franco reached the top a few seconds later, shaking vigorously with the effort. Nausea churned his insides as his vision became obscured with dark spots and his head spun. He raised a shaky hand to his sweat-soaked forehead as the ground contorted beneath him.

He slipped. Time slowed as he clawed the edge of the wall, a guttural, terrified scream erupting from his mouth. His hand seized Kelly’s ankle, causing her to begin the same descent. They fell. Suspended in the air for a few terrifying seconds, Franco felt a strange sense of fear for Kelly’s safety, before hitting the floor of the maze with a thud.

Franco gasped, his breath snatched from his throat. Beside him, Kelly coughed as the dust around them began to gradually subside. A few moments passed before each dislodged stone had completed its descent, producing a brief, slightly mocking symphony of crackling and crumbling, before resuming its quietude.

Franco almost chuckled in disbelief at their survival. Wiping his sticky forehead, he turned to Kelly, bracing to quip back at any criticism, but stopped as she expressed a low groan.

She was bent over, with her greying-blond locks falling into a tousled curtain around her face and one hand pressed to her back. Franco, forgetting his arm, which had sustained a slim cut across the inner side, rushed to her. “Are you okay?” he stammered.

“My back is killing me!” Kelly winced through gritted teeth. Franco acted without hesitation.

“Let me.”

He turned her so she laid down horizontally, taking care not to cause additional strain while entreating that she turn on her stomach.

“I’m alright, I’m alright!” she insisted, reluctantly complying. Franco pressed gently into familiar pressure points. Kelly hissed, but Franco could feel that she was beginning to relax.

“Please just let me help you. I need you if we’re gonna figure out how to make it out of here.”

She stilled, taken aback. Franco worked fastidiously, gladdened as she began to breathe soundly.

“Just think of the patients back at the hospital. We can get through this,” Franco paused, realising he was convincing himself as much as he was her. “For them,”

Kelly suddenly scrambled to stand up.

“My patients! We need to hurry up!”

“Woah! Slow down! It’s fine, we’ll figure something out faster if we’ve got our strength.”

Kelly nodded, sitting up with her legs crossed underneath her.

“You’re right. Let’s just take a breather.”

Franco nodded, crossing his own legs in an awkward manoeuvre, placing himself at her side. He began to trace patterns in the dirt **canvas**, before noticing his soaked sleeve. Kelly saw the red stain, instincts kicking in.

“Franco, your arm!”

He sighed, more because his coat was ruined than anything else. Kelly swiftly felt around her pockets and found a slightly dried, but otherwise clean antiseptic wipe and a small piece of gauze to apply to the wound.

“Thanks,” Franco mumbled.

“Don’t mention it, it’s what I do.” Kelly warmed, knowing she’d been able to put some of her medical skills to use.

A beat elapsed.

“Thanks, as well,” she bobbed her head. “You’re really... rather skilled.”

“It’s nothing,” Franco grinned, “I haven’t quite got your expertise, but I always just try my hardest.”

“That’s a pretty great way to go about... things.” Kelly reciprocated the smile.

A cool breeze drifted through the maze, calling them to continue their journey. The two tentatively rose to their feet but had barely stepped forward when the sound of deep sobs reached their ears.



## CHAPTER 5

As they slowly approached the corner the stifled sobs got louder, with the occasional stuttered gasp for air breaking through. It was clear to both Kelly and Franco that the sounds were coming from just around the next corner.

Hesitant, they slowly made their way forward, the newfound partnership between them evident in their matching strides. Kelly went first, disappearing behind the earthy wall from Franco's sight momentarily before he too, joined her to confront whatever, or whoever, the crying was coming from.

Upon rounding the corner the two were greeted by yet another dead end. It took a few seconds before they noticed the figure tucked into the corner. Folded over and shrouded in shadows he almost faded into the maze itself. If it wasn't for the visible shaking of his shoulders and the flood of suppressed wails, he might have passed unnoticed.

Shuffling forward, Kelly and Franco were soon close enough to the form to make out who it was. Vasili. His knees were pulled tightly to his chest and his extremely oversized hoodie was pulled over his legs.

Exchanging a quick glance, the two communicated silently; '*We should probably go and see what's wrong.*'

However, even with that thought unanimously established, neither of them made the first step towards Vasili until Kelly nudged Franco forward. She had decided it would be less embarrassing for Franco to talk to him, rather than her, a 40-year-old mum.

Reluctantly complying, Franco shuffled forward awkwardly. Sliding his back down the wall, he sat at a comfortable distance from the curled up Vasili. Looking over at him, he now noticed water dripping from his fringe. His head was buried in the equally damp fur of the rabbit perched precariously on his knees, the crumpled top hat lying face up on the ground.

"So...did you fall into a puddle or something?" Franco asked jokingly, attempting to start the conversation off light. "Your clothes are drenched, mate."

To Franco's surprise, Vasili nodded sheepishly. Franco continued quickly, trying to fix his mistake. "Hey, don't sweat it bud, at least you didn't drown!"

Vasili's only response was another onslaught of tears. Panicking slightly, Franco looked up at Kelly for help, with wide eyes pleading her to jump in and take over since he *clearly* wasn't any good at this.

Shaking her head she motioned for him to continue, wrapping her arms around herself and miming being cold. Tilting his head slightly, Franco scrunched up his face at her, not a clue what she was trying to say. Then it hit him: Vasili must be cold.

Franco awkwardly stumbled to his feet, eyes still on Kelly for reassurance. Clumsily he removed the white coat from his shoulders. Kneeling down with his face centimetres from Vasili's, he tossed the coat - *somewhat* gracefully - over the shivering mess, pulling it snug around his thin shoulders. Vasili finally looked up at Franco, an unspoken *thank you* in his timid smile, as he embraced the warmth of the unexpected gift. However, the moment his eyes fell on Franco's clothing, his smile dropped.

Franco was wearing a perfectly coordinated outfit, featuring a recognisable designer t-shirt, jeans tailored to perfection, and an expertly placed over-the-body bag. The daring orange colouring of the bag would have been avoided by Vasili at all costs, but Franco wore the look effortlessly. Vasili's eyes welled up in awe at such a perfect statement piece.

If only he was more like Franco.

"I'm a disappointment. I'm a failure. I'm an embarrassment to the word 'magic' in these clothes. This is my last chance to prove myself, but everything is ruined now. I'm never going to look good in anything; not like you."

"It's not ruined. You haven't ruined anythi-"

"I have! This was my *last* chance. Don't you understand!? This is why I came here in the first place. I came here for help. *Real* help. And what do I get? A failed medical student and an old woman with a rabbit wh-

"-his name is Bowie," Kelly interjected.

"I don't care what his name is! Tomorrow could be my last performance ever. If this fails because of my looks, then my career, my dream... everything will be over. No thanks to you and your lack of fashion advice. I only had one wish: to feel confident in my looks. Yet, here I am..."

Vasili's head dropped. Franco placed a hand under his chin, forcing their eyes to meet.

"Vasili, we're here for you. We've been brought here to help you in any way we can. Kelly and I, well, we might not be the fashion professionals you expected. We're not qualified, certified, or verified. But you and me, we're not so different."

Vasili scanned Franco's outfit, "If only I could dress more like you, maybe then..."

"Vasili, listen to me. I haven't been entirely honest with you. The thing is, Kelly was right, we're just medical professionals. At least, one of us is *slightly* more qualified, but that's beside the point."

Franco shifted closer to Vasili, "I think I might be able to help with this, well, let's call it: *fashion crisis*."

Franco stood suddenly, hand outstretched to Vasili's frozen form.

"Take my hand."

Kelly reappeared by Franco's side, a warm approving smile shining from cheek to cheek. Vasili reached out to clasp Franco's hand.

The rocks began to move. The earth beneath them began to shake. Vasili disappeared into a opening in the wall.

Franco stood frozen in shock while Kelly snapped into action, a clear sign of her years of nursing experience.

"This must be the way out!" Kelly exclaimed. "Quick! Before it closes again!"

Kelly grabbed ahold of Franco's arm, dragging him forward.

The chasm in the wall was sealed again, the rocks moving back into place as though they were alive.

*My work here is done.*

# EPILOGUE

Weeks later, Vasili was invited to perform for the children at the hospital.

“Toby, look! The show is starting!” Kelly whispered excitedly.

Franco grinned to see Kelly so happy and turned his head towards the stage to see Vasili do what he was born to do.

Vasili stood up on the stage, his stage. He looked out into the audience, drawing strength from his close friends. The stage lights were dazzling, seeming almost to radiate from the magician himself.

He was wearing a red cape with a gold vest. His suit, unlike what he started in, was colourful and bright. And his top hat, once crumpled and black, was now a vibrant colour spectrum.

The audience gasped as Vasili raised Bowie above his head, seeming to pull him out of nowhere.

“Observe!” He muttered a few words under his breath.

A hush settled over the crowd. There was a moment of uncertainty as they anticipated what Vasili was going to do. Surely no one held such power? But they were about to be proved wrong, as Vasili had real magic flowing through his veins.

Their doubts were dissolved when the rabbit in his hands disappeared in a flash of light.

Vasili smiled, amused at the audience’s gasps of shock, confident in his own abilities. He pulled his hat off and slowly reached in, almost up to his elbow. His hand emerged with none other than... Bowie! Now wearing a small hat on the top of his little head.

The audience broke into cheers, the children smiling from ear to ear. But that was not all. Placing Bowie on the ground, Vasili began to mutter under his breath again. A burst of light grew so bright that the audience had to close their eyes. When the light faded, Vasili was gone and in his place, a myriad of flowers, lightly coated in red dust.

Kelly and Franco smiled widely, happy that their new friend had finally found the confidence in himself to live his truth.

Later in the day, the Maze gazed upon Vasili as he walked hand in hand with his new friends. It seemed that the magic of the ancestors would continue on for a long time to come.

To the old spirit there was nothing more rewarding than watching the young sorcerer, whose new lease on life was, in turn, bringing new joy to the ancient magic that now graced the modern world once more.



# CONFIDENCE IS KEY

“Could it *get* any worse? I’ve been transported to an endless maze so I can help a deluded goth magician gain a fashion sense, walk aimlessly with a nurse who won’t listen to reason, be judged for my own profession, and now we’re stuck!”

By enlisting the help of two unsuspecting medical professionals; a nurse and a chiropractor, insecure magician, Vasili, begins a journey to learn the most important lesson of all. Confidence is key.

