

Tales of Minz

A
Gardener's
Tale

BY ALEX BROWN

TALES OF MINZ

A Cobbler's Tale
A Lamplighter's Tale
A Librarian's Tale
A Gardener's Tale

THE TALE OF ROSE & ED

A House Named Haven
The Storytellers
The Knight Who Remembered

COLLECTED SHORT STORIES

Can Evil Wizards Make Balloon Animals?

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Gardener's
Tale

Alex Brown

This is a work of fiction. All of the characters, organizations, and events portrayed in this book are either products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously.

A GARDENER'S TALE

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*For Terry—who understood how people are like plants
and did everything he could to help them flourish and grow.*

*And for Percy—without whom Terry would have gone
on his many adventures alone.*

~ EDITOR'S PREFACE ~

Dear Reader, I'll admit, when Vern handed me the manuscript for this tale, I was rather taken aback—and also secretly relieved. The stack of pages was *considerably* slimmer than the one he gave me for *A Librarian's Tale*. (That story could serve as a doorstop and took nearly half a year to edit. This one took far less time and effort.) I almost asked Vern if he hadn't finished the story yet and had decided to give it to me in sections while he wrote it in order to streamline the editing process.

Vern must have noticed my confused expression because he smiled and explained his rationale for the story you now hold in your hands. No, he wasn't giving me the story in sections. *It was done*. Why was it so short?

Vern wanted a break from writing lengthy stories.

The three books to date in the *Tales of Minz* have each been longer than the last. (The first, of course, was the foundational benchmark for the other two books.) Vern had no desire to repeat that trend with this fourth book. And so, he made the conscious decision to write a much *shorter* story.

I can understand that. After all, I'm his editor. However, as I read through the manuscript, I began to wonder about the importance of length in the stories

we tell and read. People often judge stories based on multiple factors, including their length. *But does that really matter?* Does it really matter how brief or how extensive a story is—or does only the content of the story itself matter?

After all, it's no secret—the many stories we tell and read are varied. They come in all sorts of shapes, sizes, and subject matters.

No two stories are alike. As you likely know, Dear Reader, these *Tales of Minz* are no different.* In my humble opinion, their varied subject matter is part of these books' appeal. There is something for everyone within this sprawling series. If not in a story now, then certainly later as more books are published. Even if you don't care for a particular tale, you can lose—and *find*—yourself in another story just as easily. Not just because of the unique characters they revolve around, but also because of the wide-ranging emotions they evoke.

You can read about courageous cobblers who dream of becoming valiant heroes, brave lamplighters who believe in defending the world from frightful monsters, kind librarians who find precious worth where others do not think to look . . . and you can read this beautiful story, brief though it may be—the fourth to be told in the *Tales of Minz*.

* * *

* After he read through my preface, Vern urged me to include this footnote to allay any fears you might have, Dear Reader: The *shape* of the *Tales of Minz* books will stay the same throughout the series. (Unless, of course, we would do reprints, special editions, or offer multiple formats. Then the shape of the books would undoubtedly change.) Regardless, we don't want you concerned that the books on your shelf will not look good side-by-side. While this footnote might not be *entirely* necessary, I felt it was necessary because my dear friend and storyteller, Vern, thought it was. These *Tales of Minz* books are a partnership between us—and I'm thankful to be part of the journey.

Anger, interest, fear, disgust, shame, joy, sadness, and surprise, just to name a few—these emotions are all present and interwoven through these pages. To discover them and be delighted by a story unlike any other, you must read on.

Dear Reader, it is my humble honor to welcome you back to the world of Minz.

Enjoy.

Respectfully,

Barnabas E. Wooldridge

Barnabas E. Wooldridge
Editor in Chief of the *Tales of Minz*

~ FOREWORD ~

In the spirit of full transparency, Dear Reader, I'll admit: I may not have been entirely forthright with my good friend and editor when I told him why this book in the *Tales of Minz* series is considerably shorter than the last three.

All right, I *wasn't*. My apologies, Barnabas.

It is *somewhat* true—this book is shorter because after writing, rewriting, and editing the literary *behemoth* that is *A Librarian's Tale*, I had no desire to repeat that experience with an even longer story.

And yes, I am aware that certain storytellers wouldn't even blink at the page or word count for such a tale—especially those who write in this particular genre. Such storytellers tend to churn out books that take up half a shelf all by themselves. Rather inconsiderate of other stories wanting shelf space next to them, don't you think?

Regardless, I have to remind myself that those storytellers have undoubtedly been at their craft for many years, possibly even centuries. *I'm just starting out.*

Who knows? Maybe I'll get to the point in my writing career where I can consistently be writing books *four times* the length of *A Librarian's Tale* every year

and remain unbothered by the toll such a mental feat requires.*

But probably not.

No, this book is shorter for the simple reason that it's a different sort of story than the three *Tales of Minz* books that came before it. It can't be longer (or shorter for that matter) because that isn't the sort of story it is.

If that sounds confusing, please let me explain. As Barnabas mentioned in his Preface, stories come in all sorts of shapes, sizes, and subject matters. It's my belief that the *subject matter* dictates the shape and size of the story.

Oh, sure, you can make the case that editors and designers have a hand in deciding the wording and the trim size and layout of the *printed books themselves*, and you'd be right. But I'm talking about something else besides the physical shape and size of stories.

I'm talking about something deeper, more intrinsic by nature. I'm talking about a story's *heart*—what it truly is when you take away the beautiful cover art and the fancy pages and are left with nothing but the words themselves. *They* dictate the shape and size of the story—how it is best told.

This particular tale, for the most part, is best told in *short stories*—eight of them, to be exact. And they're each told from a different perspective—a different voice and point of view. *Why?* Well, we'll get to the stories and you'll see for yourself soon enough.

* * *

* Vern, as Editor in Chief of the *Tales of Minz*, I sincerely hope that we keep these books *relatively* brief—especially if we intend on publishing one book each year. You and I can only do so much in that limited window of time. Besides, it wouldn't be good to burn the candle at both ends by overworking ourselves.

But first, another brief paragraph or two on the subject matter for this story in the *Tales of Minz*. (This is the Foreword, after all.)

Whether you've been with Barnabas and me since the very beginning of this strange, storytelling adventure with *A Cobbler's Tale*, or this is the very first book you've picked up, our promise is that the story you now hold in your hands is the only one you need to read to enjoy this series.* To be sure, reading the other books will undoubtedly give you a greater appreciation for the story you're currently reading, but you can still enjoy it regardless.

That being said, allow me to make a suggestion: If you have not read *A Librarian's Tale*, you might be interested in doing so *before* reading this particular story. I assure you, the reason for that recommendation is not because I'm trying an underhanded marketing scheme to get you to purchase another one of my books. Rather, several of the characters in this book can be prominently found in that tale as well. If you enjoyed reading about them there, you'll likely enjoy reading more about them here.

I didn't plan on telling this story immediately after *A Librarian's Tale*. But I spent so much time researching those characters that I wasn't quite ready to say goodbye to them, even though that particular story was all said and done. Perhaps that's another small reason that this present tale exists.

I'll admit, *A Gardener's Tale* is—perhaps—*somewhat* of a misnomer because our protagonist isn't a gardener

* * *

* That's correct, Dear Reader. Vern and I want you to be able to enjoy these *Tales of Minz* without being overwhelmed by the number of books in the series. Of course, at the time of writing this, there are only *four* books in the series, but our hope is that if you're reading this book years after its publication date, there will be many more titles added to its number.

by trade. It was more of an interesting pastime than anything else. It certainly wasn't something he could build a career out of. Granted, from early on, our protagonist wanted nothing more than to go into the humble profession of gardening (or perhaps some other area of horticulture if there weren't enough gardening jobs in demand), but he somehow found himself in another vocation instead.

He became a knight.

Despite being a knight, our protagonist possessed the gentle love and patient care often found in those who garden—whether as a profession or a pastime. I've generally found that to be true of such folk (at least, the ones who are any good at gardening). They tend to be patient and kind and careful and gentle.

Why? Plants don't grow well when treated harshly—whether with too much water or too little. They don't grow quickly unless the seeds are magic or some spell or potion is used upon them. (In my opinion, that's not gardening, that's *cheating the system* and causing a whole host of problems for the agricultural and farming industries.) Plants need love and care. They respond well to those things. They take time to flourish and grow. And when they do . . . ah. *They're simply beautiful in their own unique ways.*

How similar people are to plants—and not just because we need oxygen, water, and some sunlight every now and then.

Dear Reader, if you have already realized and appreciated the similarities between plants and people, then I'd imagine that you'd get along rather well with the protagonist of our tale. You see, our gardening knight desired to see both plants and people flourish and grow in life.

That desire was partially why he roamed the wide world of Minz, moving from place to place, helping

people here and there. (He had other reasons too, but those don't really come up all that much in this particular tale.)

No, as I said, this is a story about other things. This isn't *A Knight's Tale*. Our story has *nothing* to do with our protagonist's chosen profession and *everything* to do with his chosen pastime. After all, we are more than what we do for a living. Jobs are such a small part of our identities—they don't make up all of who we are. Look past the trade; look deeper still.

Discover this story's heart—and our protagonist's heart—in *A Gardener's Tale*.

~ ABOUT THE AUTHOR ~

Alex Brown is the son of two teachers who impressed upon him from a young age a love for reading books of many different sizes, shapes, and genres. Along with that love came the love of telling stories and writing about fantastical lands and people.

He lives in Wisconsin with his lovely family and is most likely writing various works of fiction and drinking lots of coffee right now. *Lots.*

You can keep up-to-date on his writing projects by visiting his website: **alexbrown.blog**. There, you'll also find free short stories, whimsical blog posts, and more.

~ TALES OF MINZ ~

Often irreverent, nonsensical, and uproariously funny, the *Tales of Minz* series is set in a magical and mysterious world where anything can happen (and usually does).

The stories, which can be read in any order, are told by a young, rather overconfident storyteller named Vern. He is joined in this strange narration by an old, experienced storyteller named Barnabas E.

Wooldridge, who sees what the series could become and agrees to serve as an editor for the *Tales of Minz*. However, Vern doesn't take all of Barnabas' suggestions to improve his writing . . . as such, helpful and humorous footnotes are provided by the editor where needed.

Scan the QR Code to view all of the books!

