

## The Other World

Lily Brogden (2022)

The water from the floods had started to subside. Everyone was cleaning up the destruction—millions of kids were stranded, homeless because of the mouth of water that had swallowed up their parents. Mud tracked everywhere. The people had lost their spirit. There was no escaping it. This flood had taken everything away.

Ada still hadn't found a single sign of her parents or relatives. It had been a month since they were separated. She tried to remember her parents' faces, but all she could recall was the grief and terror they'd shown upon seeing her float downstream.

Since that day forward, and after she washed up, she'd travelled all over with hopes of finding her hometown and the people who were the most important to her.

Ada stopped dead in her tracks. Without a compass, she'd become lost. The towering trees closed in above her, blocking out any source of light. The path was rocky and overgrown. The place had an eerie feeling about it. A shiver ran up and down her spine. Before the floods she might have thought the place was beautiful. Like an enchanted forest. But now all such positive and happy thoughts rushed out of her. She knew she was lucky to have survived this long.

Above her the trees, started overlapping. She was sure she'd been walking for at least an hour. There was no sign of what lay ahead. She kept walking. There was something weird about the pathway in front of her now. In ten steps the path had gone from an overgrown, rocky path to a glowing-gold, shining pebble track.

Close to where the path ended there were two trees. These trees stood right in the middle of where the path was meant to be a. But these trees were joined by a glowing gold mist—the same colour the pebbles had been. Her body shook. And then she lost control. She was moving forward. Uncontrollably her body ran towards the two trees with the mist. 'Stop!' she shouted, a scared look on her face. She was just inches away from the mist. She tried to dig her feet into the ground but failed as she was pulled forward into the mist.

The earth seemed to have disappeared beneath her feet. She was falling. The air around her turned metallic blue. She thought she'd been falling for at least half an hour. And then she felt herself being slammed against something. Her mouth was open and full of dirt and grass. She was dizzy. She'd hit the ground so hard she felt like she needed to throw up.

All she saw when she finally opened her eyes was a tall building, like the ones in her old town before the floods. But this one was crooked. Bent. Sort of like as if a giant had sat on it. She sat up and got to her feet. All around her was a desolate field. The crooked building was the only thing that wasn't a patch of short green grass.

No one was walking around or anywhere to see. The population must have been zero, and she made one. She walked over to the building. It looked a lot like an old schoolhouse apart from being tall and crooked—of course. She opened the wooden door. Her hand felt the uneven doorhandle. She walked through the doorway and into a very lit hallway. The walls were filled with pictures of old people in fancy clothing.

She peered at the pictures hanging up in wooden frames. One lady had an extra eye where her mouth was meant to be. Another man had only one ear and an arm where the other ear was should have been. These pictures had to be illusions. They couldn't be real. That's not even possible to have an extra arm or eye. Ada had seen enough. Crooked buildings, and illusory faces. She needed to find someone and go home. She walked down the hallway and saw a girl. This girl was shorter than her but had to be her age— she looked about ten. Although she couldn't see the girl's mouth, Ada knew she was scared.

'Leave now,' the girl hissed.

'Who are you?' Ada asked.

'I said leave!'

'Well, I can't.'

'Why not?'

'I was walking and then my body was controlled by someone else and got pulled into gold mist.'

'Did you just say controlled by someone else?'

'Yes, I tried to stop it, but I was pulled here altogether. Wait here,' the girl said, looking concerned.

The girl disappeared into a door and Ada could here muffled voices. Then after five minutes the girl came back.

'My name is Mala.' The girl extended a hand.

'Hi Mala,' Ada said taking her hand and shaking it, 'I'm Ada.'

'I know. Come with me.'

Mala started walking along the hallway, back towards the front door and Ada followed.

'How do you know my name? Can you read minds?'

Mala laughed. 'Oh, that. Well, no. It was on your hat.'

‘It was too.’ And this time Ada laughed as well. ‘Where are we going?’

‘Okay, I better explain everything. Sit.’

Ada and Mala sat on a patch of grass shaded under a fig tree.

‘Well, you know how your body was uncontrollably walking towards the gold mist?’

‘Yeah,’ said Ada.

‘Well, that was because Agra the evil witch is ruling Shady town. And she doesn’t let anyone escape her.’

‘Wait a minute, my mother’s called Agra?’

‘Was she from a town that had been flooded?’

‘Yes. And that’s why I was walking in the first place.’

‘Okay.’

‘And all I want is to go home.’

‘Well,’ started Mala, ‘if we win over Agra and convince her you’re her daughter then you could save not just yourself, but us too!’

‘So where is this Agra?’ Ada asked.

‘That’s the second hardest thing after getting her to think you’re her daughter—reaching her.’

‘But you know where?’

‘It’s the ice cave and it’s just terrible to get into. You see, she has millions of guards and if you are touched you turn into ice.’

‘And how will doing this help your town?’ Ada said.

‘Our town is under a curse. You know how I was wearing a mask? Well, that’s because of the curse—it’s a disease that’s deadly and as one of the few that are left that aren’t affected, I have to help nursing the others.’

‘That’s a big responsibility.’

‘Yep. We better get going.’

They stood up and walked in the direction of the setting sun. After several kilometres, a forest came into view. The forest was decked with flying foxes heading out to eat. Mala entered the forest and Ada cautiously walked behind her.

‘Watch your step,’ Mala said.

A wolf howled in the distance.

‘We better keep moving. If we’re quick, then we’ll be able to make it through the forests by morning.’

They were entering deeper into the forests now and Ada grew worried. ‘Should we be worried about that wolf howl?’

‘Please, I’ve been in this forest plenty of times. It’ll take a little more than a wolf howl to scare me.’

‘Sorry, it’s just I’m so used to being cautious these past months—I’ve been on my own for quite a while now.’

‘On your own? I’m so sorry. I can’t even imagine what that must feel like,’ Mala said.

They walked all night. In the morning, when the sun began to rise, they saw a clear field ahead.

‘We made it!’ Ada cried flinging herself onto the ground.

Mala sat down too.

‘Get up!’ a voice shouted.

‘Oh no,’ whispered Mala.

A man emerged from behind a tree. He was tall and bald, wearing long black robes that looked like they were made from leather.

‘This is the queen’s territory,’ he barked. ‘What are you rats doing here?’

‘This is the towns land not the so-called queen’s, Aka Witch!’ Mala shot back at the guard.

‘Mala,’ I warned her.

She ignored me.

‘The witch can’t even come to our village. She had to curse us from her stupid snow castle.’

‘Watch yourself missy,’ the guard said.

‘What are you going to do? Freeze me?’

The guard reached out his arm and touched Mala. Her body froze into a perfectly sculpted statue.

‘When I bring you to the queen, she will do the same to you.’

He clipped her hands together with a chain and pulled me into his car. They sped past town and town until they reached a cave.

He knocked once, then said, ‘Freeze this girl.’

She felt numbness slip over her and looked up bravely as the ice crept over her face.

‘Goodbye, world!’ she said, and then she was gone.