



KELLY NGAI & MIKKI LISH

# The Spellbound Tree

A HOARDER HILL  
Adventure

Chicken  
House

2 PALMER STREET,  
FROME, SOMERSET  
BA11 1DS

Text © Mikki Lish & Kelly Ngai 2022  
Cover illustration © Maxine Lee 2022

First published in Great Britain in 2022  
Chicken House  
2 Palmer Street  
Frome, Somerset BA11 1DS  
United Kingdom  
[www.chickenhousebooks.com](http://www.chickenhousebooks.com)

Chicken House/Scholastic Ireland, 89E Lagan Road, Dublin Industrial Estate,  
Glasnevin, Dublin D11 HP5F, Republic of Ireland

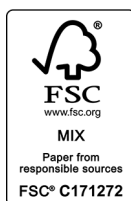
Mikki Lish & Kelly Ngai have asserted their right under the Copyright, Designs  
and Patents Act 1988 to be identified as the authors of this work.

All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted or utilized in  
any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying or  
otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher.

Cover and interior design by Steve Wells  
Cover and interior illustration by Maxine Lee

Typeset by Dorchester Typesetting Group Ltd  
Printed and bound in Great Britain by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon CR0 4YY



1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

British Library Cataloguing in Publication data available.

PB ISBN 978-1-913322-57-1  
eISBN 978-1-913696-79-5

*To Doug Ngai – the original bear, brother  
and friend who introduced us.*

*To Mikki, for all the wild ideas and belief in us.  
And to my parents, Juliana and Michael Ngai,  
for everything they do, great and small – K. N.*

*For changing the course of my life:  
The Holland family for their support,  
friendship and amazing talents.  
Mitch Rose for making THE introduction.  
And especially Kelly Ngai for being ‘Superman’ to my  
Clark Kent. I am forever thankful – M. L.*



## CHAPTER 1

### THEY ARE NOT THEMSELVES

**H**edy van Beer looked up from her book. The garage doors had exploded open and what looked like a huge cloud billowed out in a puff. There was no way her brother, Spencer, had planned whatever had just happened.

Fearing the worst, Hedy tucked her book into her waistband. A knotted rope hung from the sycamore tree where she had been reading, letting her scrunch and stretch her way to the ground like a cross between a monkey and a caterpillar.

‘Spencer?’ she yelled, sprinting for the garage.

Spencer and their cousins, Jelly and Max, stumbled out through the ballooning cloud into the garden. They were all a little damp, as though they'd walked through mist.

‘What happened?’ Hedy asked. Spencer was trying out a device that he'd been given by their friend, Mrs Pal. It was an artefact from Iceland called a *skyskepnur*, roughly translated as ‘sky creature’. It was supposed to create massive cloud shapes.

‘It was going all right,’ said Spencer, ‘until Jelly tried to make a woolly mammoth the actual size of a woolly mammoth.’

Jelly rolled her eyes. ‘What’s the point of making a woolly mammoth if it’s not *mammoth*?’ She added to Hedy, ‘Mine grew bigger than a hippo. The biggest any of the boys’ cloud animals got was our cat.’

‘You can’t say Spencer’s cat cloud failed since it was cat-sized,’ said Max. He pulled his make-believe goggles from his head. They were fashioned from toilet rolls and a yellow elastic band and had left two distinct indentations around his eyes.

‘Yeah, but a cat-sized cat isn’t going to carry us very far,’ said Jelly.

‘An exploding mammoth won’t get you much

further,' Hedy said.

'What do you care?' said Spencer, exasperated. 'You don't want to go anywhere or do anything these days.'

'That's not true,' she burst out. But the look the others gave her told a different story, that she was the wettest of wet blankets these days.

Spencer backed away from the cloud that was still puffing from the garage. 'So how did you do it, Jelly? Did Grandpa John tell you something when you had your secret meeting with him?'

'I keep telling you, it wasn't that secret,' Jelly insisted. 'It was something for school. Ask my mum, she was there.'

'What does Grandpa John have to do with your school though?' Hedy asked.

Jelly began dancing around the driveway to break up the mist. 'It's just a sort of recommendation thing.'

The explanation didn't add up. Jelly and her mum, Toni, had been chatting with Grandpa John too long for it to be a simple recommendation. It nagged at Hedy for a reason she couldn't put her finger on.

'Look, I know he's *your* grandad,' Jelly added. 'You don't have to be jealous that I'm trying to steal him away from you or anything.'

‘We’re not jealous,’ said Hedy, but she knew she sounded defensive and whiney. Despite Jelly’s off-handed way of saying almost everything that came into her head, she could be very perceptive at times.

‘Oh no,’ grumbled Max. ‘The elastic on my magic goggles broke.’

‘Here.’ Hedy held out her hand to inspect them. ‘Easy-peasy. A couple of staples, it’ll be fine.’

‘Can you fix it for me, Hedy?’

‘What do they do again?’

‘Well . . .’ Max bit his lip, thinking on the spot. ‘They’re my Shadow of Magic goggles. They show the magic all around you.’

Hedy brought the goggles to her eyes, playing along. There was nothing to see but the garden of course. ‘I guess these do need fixing cos I can’t see anything. It’ll cost you.’

‘I can pay you five grotesque poops.’

Hedy made a gagging face. ‘I’ll do it for free then.’

When the cloud cleared, the four of them went back into the garage.

In days gone by, the skyskepnur had created steeds for riders through the sky. It was not in perfect working order though, so Mrs Pal had tasked Spencer with

fixing it. She knew that Spencer wanted to become a maker like her, someone who could craft objects with special enchanted powers, and she was subtly starting his informal apprenticeship.

Spencer picked up the skyskepnur, which looked like a cross between a fishing rod and a butterfly-catcher. There was a net at the top of a long rod, and halfway down the rod was a leather bulb for water and a small handle. Unfortunately, the bulb had a couple of punctures from which water leaked at random moments, and nothing Spencer had used to fix the holes had stuck.

He began waving it through the air whilst winding the handle and muttering to himself.

‘Your shoes are going to get wet,’ Hedy noted as water dribbled from the bulb.

Spencer ignored her. Soon, a small mist formed in the net. When he quickly swiped the net downwards the mist detached and became a tiny cloud in the shape of a rhinoceros.

‘That’s even smaller than before!’ Max complained.

Spencer sighed. ‘I know. I’m sure I fixed the handle, but there’s still something wrong with the bulb. It won’t stop leaking.’



The perfectly formed rhinoceros began to gallop in the air, looping around Hedy. As it moved, it began to change shape just as real clouds did, and a minute later it had re-formed as a pig. But soon after that, the trotting pig cloud began to slow down and then disintegrate, becoming shapeless and then disappearing altogether.

‘I can’t work out how to make the clouds bigger and stay for longer,’ said Spencer. ‘How could anyone ride them if they disappear so fast?’ He held the rod out to Hedy. ‘Want to try?’

‘No thanks,’ she said.

‘Why not?’ demanded Max. He refused to accept that anyone would pass up a chance to use magical artefacts. ‘It’s only *clouds*. You couldn’t kill anyone with a cloud, they’re harmless.’

‘Don’t be such an insensitive twerp, Max,’ Jelly hissed. ‘Uncle John only got out of hospital a month ago.’

A couple of months back, Grandpa John had taken ill in the woods. Or rather, he’d tried to use magic while in the woods with Hedy and Spencer, to cure the illness he already knew he had. The magic hadn’t worked though. It had backfired and his illness had taken a sudden, terrible turn for the worse, right there

among the trees. Hedy's frightened run back to the house for help, the ambulance taking him away – they were things she didn't think she would ever forget.

She turned on her heels and marched out. 'Don't forget,' she said over her shoulder, 'if the clouds are big enough to ride, they're big enough to fall off.'

She wasn't in the mood to talk now, but they followed her out of the garage anyway. Before long, little round grey stones dropped on to their heads. They looked up. It was one of the grotesques, the gargoyle. She was one of the more fearsome stone statues from the roof: her wings spanned nearly a metre, her haunches were muscled, and below the horns on her head were sharp eyes that missed very little.

Max dropped to the ground, eagerly gathering the pebbles.

'Really, Tempest?' said Hedy. 'You know, you can just say *hi* instead of dropping your poop on us.'

'You cannot deny that you pay more attention to us this way,' said Tempest in her raspy voice, swooping to the ground. 'What were you doing?'

They told the gargoyle about their feeble attempts to use the skyskepnur.

She sniffed and flared her wings. 'I am not much

surprised that it is not working as you expect. There is something I must show you. Come, meet me on the roof.'

At the top of Grandpa John's house was the belvedere, an open-sided tower with an excellent view of the area. Tempest, of course, could simply fly up to the roof from the garden, so by the time the children had climbed three flights of stairs and come out through the attic, she was bobbing her head impatiently.

'Look at that,' she said with disgust, jutting her chin at her fellow grotesques. They were clustered in twos and threes murmuring quietly between themselves. All of them ignored the couple of squirrels that scampered across the slate tiles, and birds were swooping freely around the roof. The gryphon grotesque even had a sparrow sitting on its shoulder.

'What's happening?' Hedy asked.

'They're not guarding!' Tempest exclaimed. 'They should be shooin' all these intruders away! Who knows who those squirrels are working for, or what secrets that sparrow is trying to find out with its wittering?'

Jelly leant closer, grinning. 'Why? What have the squirrels said that makes you suspicious?'

Tempest didn't realize she was being made fun of. 'Well nothing, because ordinarily I move them on without delay. Their persistence in returning alarms me. The real problem, however, is that the other grotesques are not suspicious at all! It is in our very nature to be wary and to . . . to *guard*. That is the purpose given to us. But lately, they are changed. They are not themselves. This is no better than a tea party!'

*That's the problem*, Hedy realized. Except for Tempest, the grotesques weren't the vigilant, growling creatures that had chased her from the roof a few years ago.

She scanned the roof until her eyes fell upon the small statue of a raven at the far edge. 'I haven't seen the raven in a while. Has she changed?'

'Indeed, Hedy, she has changed because she has *not*. She has not transformed into her feathered form for some time. It is as though she is nothing more than a plain carving, but we all know that is not true.'

'What are you saying?' Spencer asked. 'Are the grotesques and the raven sick?'

Tempest scowled. 'There is something going wrong with magic.'