
The GHOST GARDEN

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Emma Carroll

With illustrations by
Kaja Kajfež

Barrington Stoke

# Chapter 1

Fran found the bone in the potato patch. It was lying deep in the soil, as dark as an old tree root. The prong of Fran's garden fork hit it with a grim *thwack*.

"Oh!" Fran said as she leapt back, startled. She crouched down for a better look.

Much to Fran's disappointment, there was no skeleton attached to the bone. No skull baring its teeth. It was just a single bone – so big that it might have once been a creature's leg, Fran guessed. She'd broken it with her fork. A fresh,

jagged line ran right along the length of it as it lay gleaming in the dirt.

Fran sat back on her heels. She felt guilty now, as if she'd hurt some real living thing. She glanced behind her to check her father hadn't noticed what had happened. He was still bent over a row of lettuces, deciding which ones to pull for lunch.





Fran's father was Head Gardener here at Longbarrow House, which was owned by old Mrs Walker. He'd taken the job two years ago, and Fran loved working alongside him during her school holidays. Often she'd find lost objects in the house's vast gardens – clay pipes, bits of china, a pretty hat pin, a shilling piece. But Fran had never found a bone before. And this one was disturbingly human-sized.

Fran shivered despite the heat of the summer morning. Where had the bone come from? Ideas rushed into her head as she wiped her hands on her pinafore and got to her feet: murder, kidnap, a missing person. Fran moved fast to cover the bone over again with soil before anyone else saw it.

"You done digging spuds?" her father called.

Fran pointed to the basket on the ground beside her. "That's got to be enough, hasn't it?" she replied.

The potatoes and the lettuces were for Mrs Walker and her grandchildren. For most of the year, her grandchildren went away to school somewhere strict and expensive. But they came to Longbarrow House for the summer because their parents were always working. Their father – Mrs Walker's son – was an officer in the army. Their mother was a writer who lived in Paris.

At first, everyone had thought Fran would be dying to make friends with the grandchildren: she was an only child, after all. Yet Fran had always preferred her own company or that of adults. Mrs Walker was a kind, clever lady who shared Fran's love of mystery stories. The Walker grandchildren, however, were the noisiest, silliest, *hungriest* children Fran had ever met. She could hardly believe they were related to Mrs Walker.

*



Fran picked up the basket of potatoes and walked briskly towards the house with it on her hip. She enjoyed this part of the day, already thinking about the plate of delicious butter biscuits Millie would have waiting for her. Millie worked in the kitchens and was one of the few people Fran trusted and liked. Millie had a soft Irish voice and smiling eyes, and always gushed over the fine produce Fran's father grew.

Fran heard Mrs Walker's grandchildren before she saw them. They were on the far side of the enormous front lawn. Fran guessed they were playing cricket – from the squeals and the *tock* of a bat hitting a ball. With her head down, she kept walking, hoping they wouldn't spot her.

The Walkers had arrived the last week of June in a motorcar piled high with luggage. Leo, Evan and Jessie were handsome, healthy children with spotless white clothes and neat hair. Last summer, Fran tried to be friendly towards them, after her parents nagged her.

But every attempt to speak to the Walker children left Fran feeling tongue-tied and stupid. Leo, the eldest, wouldn't even look at her. But the twins, Evan and Jessie, mimicked Fran's country accent and laughed at the dirt under her fingernails.

"You can play with us," Jessie had said. "But please don't touch our clothes."

This year Fran had already decided to keep out of their way. If this was what brothers and sisters were like, Fran was glad to have none of her own.

She heard a yell from the other side of the lawn and saw a small figure in white hurtling towards her. Fran walked even faster.

"I say, Frannie!" called Evan. "Hold on there!"

Fran hated that he called her that, but the panic in Evan Walker's voice made her glance



round. He stopped in front of her, his cricket whites smeared with what looked worryingly like blood.

"We need your help," cried Evan. "It's my brother." He waved towards the far end of the lawn, where someone now lay flat on the grass.

Fran hesitated, thinking it might be a joke.

"It's Leo's leg," Evan explained. "Jessie walloped him with the bat."

Fran frowned.

"She didn't mean to hit him so hard," Evan added hastily, "but he was being a bit of a plank. Going on and on about some duke being shot in Europe and how—"

"How bad is it?" Fran interrupted Evan. She didn't have time to hear Leo's thoughts about the world or Evan's explanation of them.

"Something's sticking out of his trouser leg," Evan said. "It looks like bone."

A picture of it flew into Fran's head all too fast: jagged, creamy-white. Fran flinched, remembering hitting the bone she'd found in the potato patch. It took a lot of force to break something like that.

Fran put down the vegetable basket, pretty sure now that Evan wasn't joking. "You'd better show me," she said.

She followed Evan across the grass, determined to be brave. But Leo Walker's leg was worse than she'd expected, and the sight of it made Fran dizzy. Leo's trousers were torn just below the knee. The rip revealed the splintered end of a leg bone. There was blood on the cricket bat, the grass, Jessie's summer dress. Leo was groaning in agony.



Fran felt sick with panic. They needed to get Leo back to the house as fast as they could. Mrs Walker would know what to do next.

"We'll have to lift him together," Fran told the twins.

But they couldn't look at Leo without sobbing. It was useless.



"He's going to die!" Evan cried.

"It's all my fault!" Jessie wailed.

*Yes*, Fran thought as she gritted her teeth. *It* is *your fault, Jessie, you nasty little girl.*

Then Millie and Fran's father came running, and soon Leo was safely inside.

Later that day, as she pondered what had happened, Fran grew unsettled. First, she'd broken a bone with her garden fork, then, minutes later, Jessie smashed her brother's leg. It was silly to think the two things were connected. Yet Fran couldn't shake the feeling that they were.