FIONA LONGMUIR

Freya's GOLD



Buried treasure.
Hidden secrets.
One golden chance.

Nosy Crow

Freya's GOLD

FIONA LONGMUIR



nosy crow

First published in the UK in 2024 by Nosy Crow Ltd
Wheat Wharf, 27a Shad Thames,
London, SE1 2XZ, UK

Nosy Crow Eireann Ltd
44 Orchard Grove, Kenmare,
Co Kerry, V93 FY22, Ireland

Nosy Crow and associated logos are trademarks and/or registered trademarks of Nosy Crow Ltd

Text copyright © Fiona Longmuir, 2024
Cover copyright © Carmi Grau, 2024

The right of Fiona Longmuir to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted.

All rights reserved.

ISBN: 978 1 80513 097 0

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, hired out or otherwise circulated in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise) without the prior written permission of Nosy Crow Ltd.

The publisher and copyright holders prohibit the use of either text or illustrations to develop any generative machine learning artificial intelligence (AI) models or related technologies.

Printed and bound in the UK by Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.
following rigorous ethical sourcing standards.
Typeset by Tiger Media

Papers used by Nosy Crow are made from wood grown in sustainable forests



1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

www.nosycrow.com

For Niall,
who holds up the world
so I can create new ones.





One

In summer the Bright and Breezy B&B lived up to its name. The rocky beach out front glimmered with tiny pools, falling gradually away to the golden curve of the sandy beach on the other side of Edge. The horizon was bookended by the glint of the lighthouse on one side and the craggy black face of the cliffs on the other. With only the wooden planks of the old boardwalk between its front door and the beach, the B&B offered views of the sparkling sea from almost every room. More importantly it also offered the best cooked breakfast in town.

In summer the B&B buzzed with families and holidaymakers, who travelled from the city to stretch out on the warm sand and breathe the fresh sea air. It became a living, breathing thing, crammed with battered suitcases and sandy babies and sunburnt noses.

Freya liked living in the B&B with her Granny Kate in summer, liked sweeping floors and washing dishes to earn a bit of pocket money. Most of all she liked the travellers who came to the B&B with stories of far-off places and grand adventures. At twelve she had never been further than the neighbouring city. Even when her parents were alive, they'd lived only a few streets away. Visitors would smile warmly at her and tell her how lucky she was to live in such a beautiful place, what a picturesque life she must lead.

"Yes," she'd tell them, silently adding *in summer*.

Freya loved Edge in summer, but it always felt like a trick. It was like a little kid in its Sunday best, sitting up straight and smiling angelically at the grown-ups. As the days started to shorten and the holidaymakers drifted back to the city, Freya

knew a whole other Edge was on the way. The breeziness of the B&B turned frigid. The wind flew down narrow streets, rattling shutters and tweaking mischievously at noses and scarves. It whipped the sea into frenzied foam, coating the town in freezing sticky salt. Clouds sat heavy in the sky and some days it felt like the sun didn't bother to rise at all. No one came to Edge in the off season.

The transformation always made Freya uneasy. It felt like proof that even the loveliest things were hiding something dark and secret. Edge turned eerie and strange, full of looming silences and shadowy corners. And Freya's imagination always seemed to fill those corners with something terrible. She wondered what the smiling tourists would make of Edge in February.

She shivered despite the fire roaring in the grate beside her. She was perched at the reception desk of the B&B because it was the warmest place in the building. The sleety rain that had soaked her on the way home from school battered against the windows. Her coat was slung over the chair in front

of the fire, steaming as it dried. She curled her toes further into the fluffy belly of Sir Lancelot, the B&B's enormous orange cat.

She swiped at her foggy glasses and tried to focus on the pile of maths homework in front of her. But her attention was snagged by the ticking of the clock on the desk. She'd been thinking about building an alarm clock but wasn't sure how to go about it. She sneaked a look behind her to check that Granny Kate was nowhere to be seen, picked up the clock and popped off the back. The inside of the clock was alive with whirring cogs and wheels. Warmth spread through Freya all the way to her fingertips. It never failed to amaze her that something as simple as a clock could contain this whole world of moving parts. She sat very still, watching the pieces turn. She was so absorbed that she almost toppled clean off her chair when the door to the B&B was flung open.

A tall dark shape filled the door, and Freya's brain instinctively yelled, *Monster!* In February that seemed about as likely as a person arriving. But as the figure stepped through the door and pulled it closed behind

them, Freya saw that it *was* a person. A woman. She was tall and was wearing a long green coat that swished behind her as she moved. The hem was dark where it had dragged along the wet ground. The woman moved like a dancer, seemingly unbothered by the huge suitcase in her hand or the fact that she was soaked to the skin. She glided towards Freya, baring a mouthful of even white teeth as she approached the desk. The cold was coming off her in waves and goosebumps raced across Freya's skin. Sir Lancelot wriggled out from under Freya's feet and hopped up on to the desk to hiss at the stranger. Freya pushed him out of the way with difficulty.

She almost asked "Are you lost?" but in the end settled for "Can I help you?"

"Goodness me," said the woman. "Receptionists are getting younger every day."

Freya placed a polite smile on her face. Why did grown-ups think that joke was funny?

"My Granny Kate runs the place," she said. "I'm Freya."

"Freya! What a beautiful name."

"I guess."

She reached for the bell. The woman gestured at the pile of maths books on the desk. "That looks dreadful."

Freya shrugged. "I like maths."

"Oh. Then lucky you."

An awkward silence fell. Freya pressed the bell. From the next room there was the distinct sound of someone heaving themselves out of an armchair.

"Freya, if I have to tell you one more time about playing with that bell –"

Granny Kate stopped as she spotted the woman in front of the desk. Judging by the fact that her hair was pinned in pink rollers, she hadn't been expecting anyone either. She pursed her lips and visibly decided to style it out. She drew herself up to her full height, which was still absolutely tiny. "Can I help you, dear?"

"I was wondering if it would be possible to check in."

Freya's head jerked up. "Here?"

The woman laughed, the sound like a teaspoon tinkling in a cup. "Do people often arrive looking to check in elsewhere?"

"Oh. No. They don't often arrive looking to check in in February at all."

Granny Kate stepped pointedly in front of Freya. "What my granddaughter means to say is that you're very welcome. I'm Kate Lawson and I run the B&B. And you've met Freya already. Can I take your name, please?"

"Vivien Oleander."

Granny Kate pulled out the visitor book and started to take down Ms Oleander's details. Freya took the opportunity to study her more closely. She was elegantly dressed despite the wild weather. Her hair was gathered and pinned on one side with an enamel clasp, spilling over her shoulder. Neat square fingernails drummed gently on the desk. She didn't look much like their usual visitors.

Freya glanced at Ms Oleander's name in the visitor book, the only one on the page. She was their first guest of the year, and the first for quite some time before that. Freya knew that Granny Kate worried during the winter, when bills were high and there