

# BEHIND THE FRAME

TRACY GARDNER

AIDAN'S FORMER EMPLOYER IN New York had tapped him a few months ago and begged him to lend them some time, as the hospital had just lost their chief of cardiothoracic surgery unexpectedly. Aidan had declined an offer to step into the position full-time, not wanting to uproot his seven-year-old daughter, but he'd agreed to help out while they looked for a replacement.

He'd explained to Savanna, over a delicious candlelight dinner at Giuseppe's in town two months ago, that the hospital, and his mentor and boss specifically, had done a lot for him. He couldn't let them down. Aidan's in-laws were more than happy to care for Mollie the two or three days each week he was in New York.

Between Aidan's absences, his family commitments, lengthened clinic hours when he was home, and Savanna's own schedule, they'd had limited time to really get to know each other. Savanna cherished the friendship they'd struck up working together to save the town matriarch, Caroline Carson. And she was in no rush to fall into a new relationship, less than a year after Rob had left her to "find himself."

Savanna missed Aidan. She sensed he missed her too...he'd sounded disappointed on the phone yesterday.

“Guys,” she said, noting both her sisters’ faces painted with sympathy. “It’s okay. Things will work out, or they won’t. I’m sure we’ll eventually get some time to catch up.”

Sydney’s expression registered surprise. “That’s very chill of you, Savvy.”

She laughed. “Maybe you’re rubbing off on me. I’ve got to go,” she said, halfway through the door now. “I’ll see you both tonight!”

Savanna tried to push Aidan from her mind as she walked the three blocks to the park. She was still a few minutes early. Her friend Britt Nash, a colleague from Savanna’s former life as an art authenticator, would likely be the first person to arrive, but she couldn’t see anyone yet in the large, inviting community park that sat at the end of Main Street.

The park was lush and green now in June, with a decent stand of mature trees at the far end, a gazebo near the town statue at the other, and plenty of room to picnic, play on swings, or toss a ball in the middle. Savanna had always loved relaxing here. On quiet days, it was even possible to hear the waves of Lake Michigan through the trees. The beach was only a short walk down a sandy trail past the park.

As she approached, Savanna noticed something seemed off with the view, but she was still a block away. Her mind ran through her to-do list. She pulled a rough sketch of the park from her folder. The meeting this morning would involve herself, Britt, city councilman John Bellamy, and a liaison from the Art in the Park state committee that had awarded the event to Carson after Savanna’s months of campaigning. She’d been surprised at how much competition she’d been

up against, and even more surprised when Carson had finally won.

Today, the four of them were tasked with assessing the space to come up with the best layout for each of the Art in the Park facets: artwork display tents, concessions, live music stage, judges table, and more. Savanna wanted to firm up her rough sketch by the time the planning banquet kicked off tonight. Art submissions from all over the state had been coming into Carson's parks and recreation department, which was really just an extension of Councilman Bellamy's office. Savanna and John Bellamy had been meeting every Thursday to review submissions, and she'd recently enlisted Britt to help. There were so many aspiring artists in Michigan! The first place winner of Art in the Park would be awarded a nice monetary prize and a handsome scholarship to the prestigious Michigan Art Conservatory, as well as a round of a high-visibility interviews at local and state media outlets.

Now Savanna saw what was wrong with the view. As she walked around the gazebo into the park, she stared up the twelve-foot-tall statue of Jessamina Carson on her pedestal. Jessamina wasn't quite twelve feet tall any longer. Savanna gasped, covering her mouth in shock.

Jessamina Carson's head was missing.