

BEHIND THE FRAME

TRACY GARDNER

SAVANNA PULLED UP IN FRONT of Fancy Tails, and Sydney slid into the passenger seat.

“Are you nervous about going to see Yvonne alone? Did they figure out who pushed her down the stairs?” Sydney fiddled with the radio stations as she spoke.

“She’s still in the hospital with a police officer outside her door. But she told me about a file I need to grab from her house. I kind of didn’t want to go alone.”

Sydney turned in her seat, and Savanna could feel her stare. “So Yvonne doesn’t know you’re going to take the file from her house.”

She shrugged. “It’s not technically in her house, it’s in her car. She wouldn’t mind!” She looked at her sister. “I’m positive. The morning she was shoved down her basement stairs, she was going to be taking some information of John’s on the Better Living deal and giving it to Roger Greenwood. She says she assumed the mayor asked her about it because he was starting to agree with the councilman that it was a bad plan.”

“I really doubt that’s why the mayor wanted those documents.”

“You and me both. I think Janice left her job with the mayor just in time and didn’t know enough. I think Yvonne, unfortunately, knew more than she realized about the Better Living proposal, plus she still

has what's left of the councilman's files. If John had proof—”

Sydney interrupted her. “Of the mayor using the proposal for his own agenda, like if he was a shareholder...”

“John's killer would need to get ahold of that information before anyone else did,” Savanna finished. She made a left turn onto the long, winding road that led out to Yvonne's woodsy location a few miles outside of town.

“You rolled right through that stop sign,” Sydney accused.

“Really, that's your biggest concern? No one does a full stop at that corner,” Savanna justified. She'd meant to come to a full stop, but her brakes felt a little soft; she'd have to get them checked tomorrow. She eyed her GPS screen, seeing she had three miles to go before she reached Yvonne's dirt road, Blue Heron Way, and picked up speed.

Sydney giggled, looking down at her phone. She held the phone up in front of her face, snapping a selfie and then tapping the screen. “Oh! He's so funny,” she said, turning the phone briefly to face Savanna.

She caught a brief glimpse of the photo Finn sent back, of his own goofy, cross-eyed selfie. “I like him, Syd. He was very sweet with Mollie the other night, when Aidan had to fly out.”

Syd leaned back against the seat, rolling her head to look at Savanna and smiling. “I'm glad. I really like him. A lot.”

She shot a sideways look at her. “A lot?”

“Yeah.” Sydney's voice was soft and breathy. “Sav-

vy. He's so different. Fun. Exciting. I can't imagine ever being bored around him."

Savanna smiled at her, easing off the gas and putting her turn signal on as she approached Blue Heron Way. "I'm happy you guys have hit it off so well." She tapped her brake, coming up on the red light. Nothing happened.

Sydney put a hand on the dashboard. "Hey. Slow down."

Savanna pressed her foot hard on the brake pedal, and still nothing happened. The pedal went all the way to the floor, and her car barreled forward toward the intersection. She gripped the steering wheel, hazarding a quick glance at Sydney. "I'm trying—I can't stop!"

"What?" Sydney whipped her head from side to side, trying to see out into the intersection as Savanna did the same thing.

A semi-truck barreled straight toward them from the cross road, his traffic light green. "No!" Savanna heard herself shriek and cut the wheel hard to the right onto the dirt road, narrowly missing a car as it swerved around her. The sound of the driver's horn blared in her ears as it passed her, too fast.

The sharp turn at thirty-plus miles an hour sent the back of her car into a fishtail, and she wrestled with the wheel, stomping on the brake to no avail. "What do I do, what do I do?"

"I don't know!" Sydney screamed. She had one hand braced on the dashboard and the other tightly gripping the cotton blend of Savanna's cargo pants at her thigh.

Savanna saw the semi in her rearview mirror but had no time for relief when it crossed the median line

and sped past her. She steered toward the shoulder, hoping the grassy ditch would slow them down, and the nose of her car tipped down faster than she'd anticipated, knocking her hands off the wheel. Green rushed by the windows as she grappled for control, and then everything came to an abrupt, crunching halt.