



OUT OF THE PICTURE

TRACY GARDNER

“LOVELY GIRL,” ELEANOR MURMURED, SIPPING her wine. The laptop was closed now, her notebook on top of it with a short list of book titles scrawled across the paper.

“Caroline.” Savanna leaned forward in her chair, unable to hide her concern. “I hope you don’t mind me asking, but why do you have a doctor checking on you? What transmitter? Is there something wrong?”

“No, no.” Caroline waved a dismissive hand. “I was having a few flutters, some little thing with my heart, and he’s making me wear a monitor for a while. I’m sure everything is fine.”

Her fears completely unappeased, Savanna rose, leaving her claret untouched alongside Caroline’s. She went to the enormous picture window, looking out into the darkness over the dunes and lake. In spite of appearances, some things had changed. Caroline wasn’t invincible. And now she had a doctor making house calls to check on her heart.

Caroline surprised Savanna, joining her at the window. She linked an arm through Savanna’s. “Savanna. I don’t want you to worry. This is just routine, I promise. And Dr. Gallager

is excellent. He worked in the cardiothoracic department at New York Presbyterian before coming to Carson. If there is anything wrong, he'll find it and fix it."

The woman was a mind reader. Savanna put an arm around Caroline in a light hug. "Okay. If you aren't worried, I'm not worried. I hope this doctor is as good as you say he is."

"Even better." The deep voice came from behind Savanna, making her jump.

She whipped around, shocked to see the tall stranger from Caroline's porch yesterday. His frame filled the doorway to the parlor. This was Caroline's doctor? But he was too young. Somehow, Savanna had imagined an older, grayer, country-doctor type, the kind who carried a little black bag and wore wire spectacles...how was this thirty-something guy qualified to keep Caroline's heart running like clockwork?

"Savanna, this is Dr. Aidan Gallagher. Dr. Gallagher, meet my Savanna." Caroline moved back to her chair. "Would you like to join us in an evening claret?"

Aidan shook his head. "No, thank you. Nice to see you again, Savanna."

She smiled widely at him before she could stop herself. "We met yesterday, when I brought your poodles back," Savanna told Caroline.

"Oh, how nice! Is everything all right now with that box upstairs? I've got all the little wires on, I promise."

Dr Gallagher nodded. "I reset the transmitter and changed the frequency. It wasn't connecting at the other end."

"Thank you for taking care of that. See?" Caroline nudged Savanna. "I told you I'm in good hands."

Movement caught Savanna's eye. She turned to watch Eleanor's empty glass slide out of her hand, hit the floor, and shatter. Eleanor was slumping to one side. Savanna sucked in

a breath. She moved to help the woman, as did Caroline, but the doctor made it to her chair first, kneeling beside her, one hand on her wrist.

Aidan gently eased her onto the floor, grabbing a pillow and placing it under her legs, his stethoscope at Eleanor's chest while he pulled a small flashlight from his breast pocket.

He looked up at Savanna. "Call an ambulance."

Savanna's phone was already in hand.

Everything that happened next was a blur.