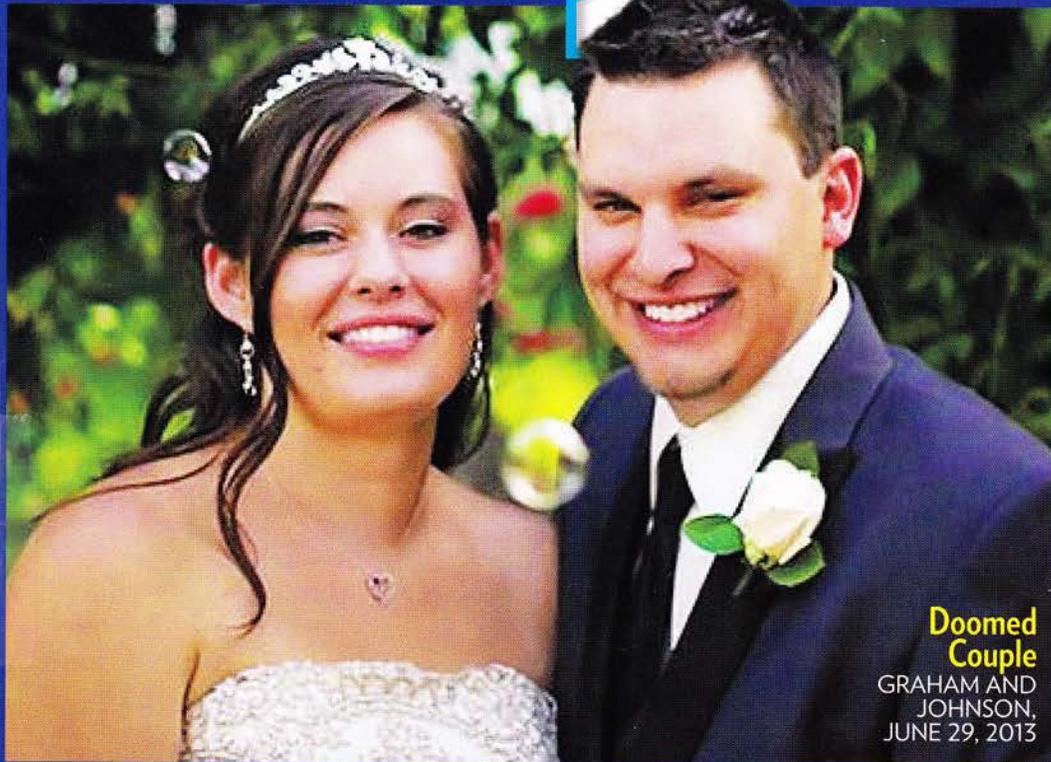


SEPTEMBER 30, 2013

# People



**Doomed Couple**  
GRAHAM AND JOHNSON,  
JUNE 29, 2013

## Bride Pushes Groom Over Cliff

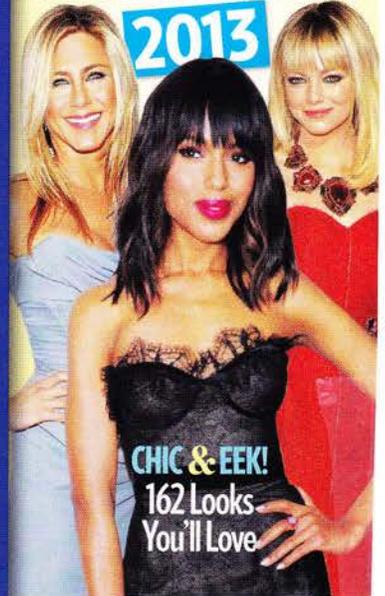
# NEWLYWED MURDER?

**8-DAY MARRIAGE ENDS IN HORROR**

Jordan Graham, 22, says Cody Johnson, 25, fell to his death by accident. Cops disagree. What happened that fatal afternoon?

## BEST & WORST DRESSED!

2013



**CHIC & EEK!**  
162 Looks  
You'll Love



**Paula**

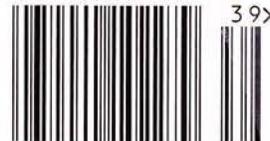
**HER TEARFUL RETURN**

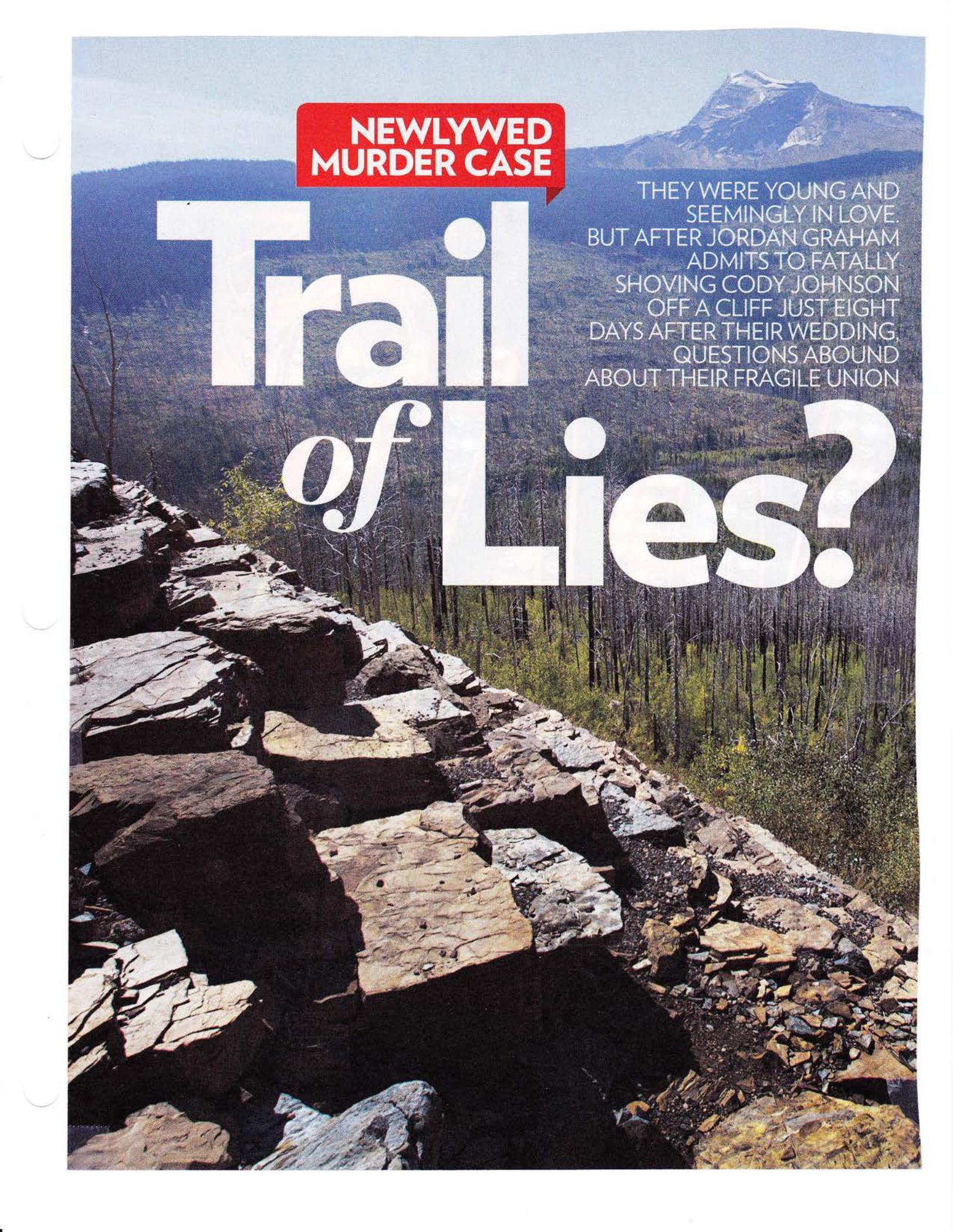


**Kate**

**HER SURPRISING NANNY HIRE**

\$4.99

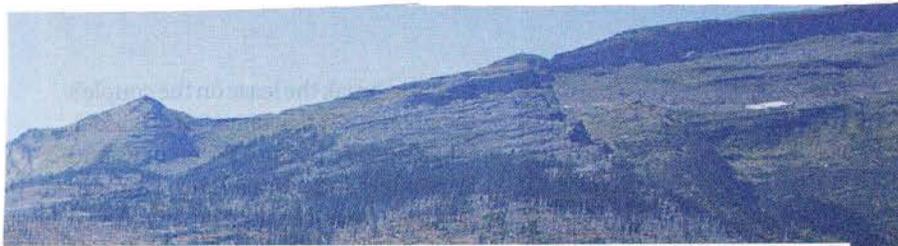




**NEWLYWED  
MURDER CASE**

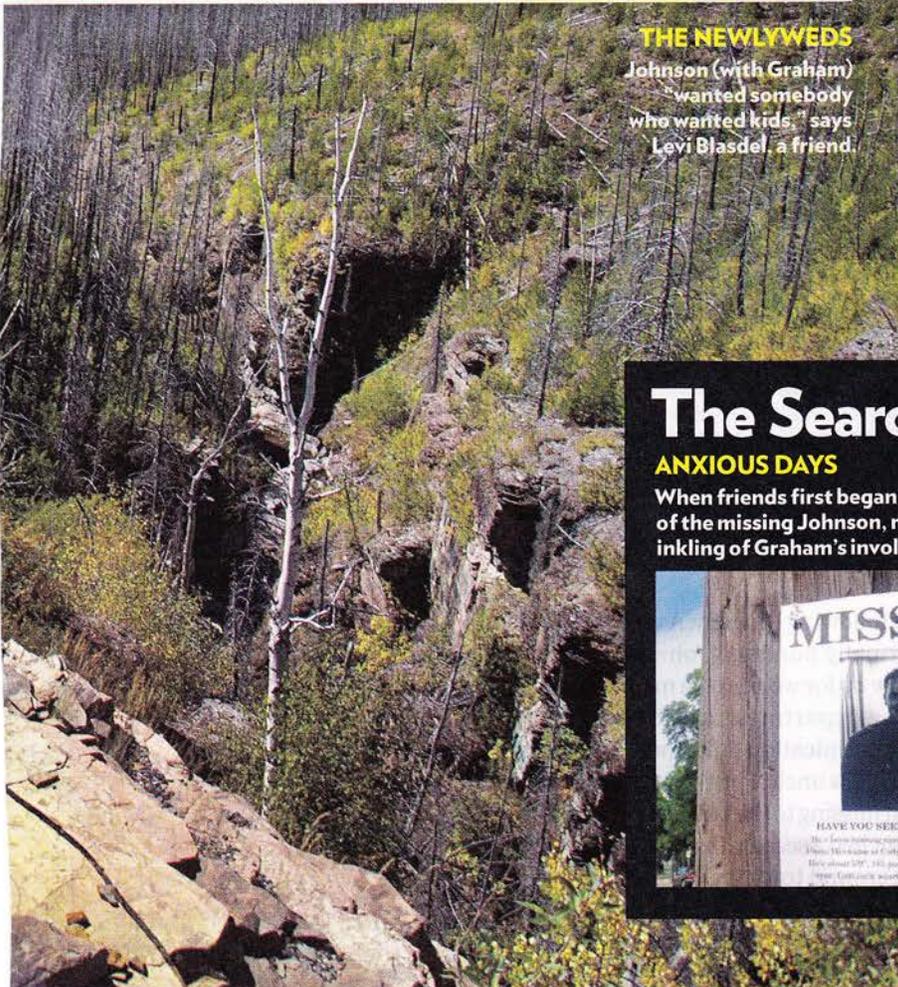
# Trail *of* Lies?

THEY WERE YOUNG AND SEEMINGLY IN LOVE. BUT AFTER JORDAN GRAHAM ADMITS TO FATALLY SHOVING CODY JOHNSON OFF A CLIFF JUST EIGHT DAYS AFTER THEIR WEDDING, QUESTIONS AROUND ABOUT THEIR FRAGILE UNION



### THE NEWLYWEDS

Johnson (with Graham) "wanted somebody who wanted kids," says Levi Blasdel, a friend.



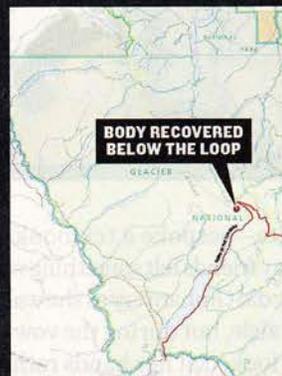
**B**ack in October 2011 Levi Blasdel's close friend Jordan Graham, a day-care worker who played on his church softball team, was saying that all she wanted in life was to settle down and start a family. Blasdel's other pal Cody Johnson, a factory worker who loved rebuilding car engines and driving fast, was saying, "I just want a down-to-earth girl that I can spend the rest of my life with." So to Blasdel, 24, the next step seemed like a no-brainer. "Why are you two not together?" Blasdel recalls thinking. "You have the same moral compass, and you just seem like the perfect fit." He handed each of them the other's phone number, and within weeks they were an item. But by the time Johnson proposed 15 months later, Blasdel had misgivings about the match. "Cody was always striving to give that extra bit of himself," he says. "Jordan always seemed like she gave a solid 50 percent." Other friends of Johnson's similarly pressed him if he was sure about the engagement. Recalls Johnson's boss Cameron Fredrickson, 27: "He was like, 'Look, I know you don't understand, but she makes me happy.'"

At dusk on June 29, friends and relatives turned out in Woodland Park in Kalispell, Mont., to watch Graham, 22, and Johnson, 25, exchange vows. Though the lush garden setting was romantic, and the trappings—five bridesmaids and five groomsmen, a bride resplendent in

## The Search

### ANXIOUS DAYS

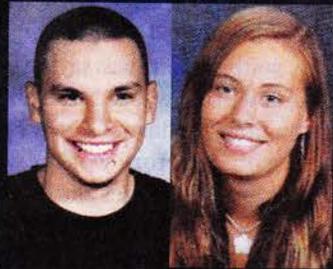
When friends first began posting flyers of the missing Johnson, most had no inkling of Graham's involvement.



### DASHED HOPES

Four days after Johnson went missing, his body was found below the Loop Trail.

# An Uneasy Romance



**BEFORE THEY MET**  
At Flathead High School, Cody Johnson (in '06) and Jordan Graham (in '09) never knew each other.



**GROOM**  
He always made "the best of any situation," says a pal.



**SO IN LOVE**  
Her initial warmth gave way to a cool reserve.

**THE PERFECT COUPLE**  
Always there for his friends, Johnson had a passion for cars—and a greater passion for Graham.



**WEDDING DAY**  
The day seemed joyous to onlookers, including the bridal party that surrounded Graham (who documented her romance on Facebook and Instagram with photos like these).

white—bespoke a textbook wedding, many friends felt something was off. Not only did Graham cry as she walked down the aisle, but during the vow exchange she looked at her hands rather than at Johnson. "Jordan was looking down," says Fredrickson. "I thought it was odd."

Then it got curiously and curiously. No immediate honeymoon planned, the newlyweds returned to their jobs

the following Monday. A week later the normally punctual Johnson failed to show up for work in the materials-handling department at Nomad Global Communication Solutions. Within 24 hours his uncle Tim Manning reported him missing to the police. While friends launched a search, Graham began tooling around town in Johnson's beloved Audi A6, trailed by rumors that she was

trying to break the lease on the couple's townhouse. "At that point," says Blasdel, "red flags are flying." Seven days and multiple fabrications later, Graham told police she'd been lying and offered this confession: On July 7 she'd shoved Johnson during an argument on a cliff in Glacier National Park—causing him to plunge to his death. Now, while Graham is under house arrest at her parents' home, facing a criminal complaint alleging murder, her and her husband's friends are trying to sift fact from fiction, wondering, as Fredrickson puts it, "Is she giving us all the information?"

Graham's mother and stepfather, Lindele and Steven Rutledge, have drawn a tight cordon around Graham, the older of their two children, and refuse to comment. In court her attorney Andrew Nelson argued, "Ms. Graham is presumed innocent," and stressed there was "no evidence of any criminal history whatsoever... nor any violent tendencies, for that matter, not even angry outbursts." What prosecutors do have, according to the testimony of FBI agent Steven Liss, is evidence that in the days prior to Johnson's disappearance Graham exchanged text messages with a friend, saying, "She was having second thoughts about being married.... She, at this point, would be better off dead."

According to a Sept. 9 criminal complaint, Graham claims she tried to walk away during the newlyweds' argument along a steep part of the Loop Trail area. When Johnson grabbed her arm,

## Happily Never After

### OTHER NEWLYWEDS HAVE MET TERRIBLE FATES

- Estrella Carrera, 26, still in her wedding clothes, was found stabbed in her bathtub in suburban Chicago in 2012. Husband Arnoldo Jimenez remains at large.
- Gabe Watson, who went to trial after his wife, Tina, died in 2003 while scuba diving on their honeymoon in Australia, was acquitted in 2012.
- Jesse Crow, 33, hung himself in jail in 2010 after allegedly murdering his new bride, Ryann, 23, whose body washed up in San Francisco Bay.



SEPT. 13



**UNDER HOUSE ARREST**

For Graham, life has turned into a rotation between her parents' home (below right), court visits (above right) and church (left).



SEPT. 15

dad's face than hers," says Blasdel. "It was not the expression of a mourning wife." The next day at work, Graham posted pictures of happy children. "It was almost as if she was relieved she was back to her life," says Blasdel.

None of this matches the teenage Graham remembered by a couple whose daughters were babysat by Graham and her mom. "There was zero aggressiveness in Jordan," says the husband. "She loved playing with our girls." The wife remembers a smart girl, more comfortable with children than adults, and deeply involved with her Baptist church. "I don't necessarily believe that she knew what she wanted," says Fredrickson. "I think she liked the thought of being married, but I don't think necessarily that she wanted to be married."

Johnson did. "He was on cloud nine," says Fredrickson. Thinking back, he recalls Graham's refusal to mix with Johnson's friends and her lack of overt affection for him. Then he recalls how he stopped focusing on those concerns at his buddy's request, determined to live with the discomfort—"as opposed to losing a close friend." Grimly, he adds, "How ironic."

**By Jill Smolowe.** Reported by **Jeff Truesdell, Howard Breuer** and **Anne Lang** in Kalispell

she removed his hand. At that point, Liss wrote in the complaint, "Graham stated she could have just walked away, but due to her anger she pushed Johnson with both hands in the back, and as a result he fell face-first off the cliff." That version of events doesn't sit well with Johnson's friends, who are not happy that a Sept. 12 court order sprang Graham from jail and let her return home prior to the likely convening of a grand jury. "If it was an accident, her actions would have been very clear," says Blasdel. "Why didn't she call 911 immediately?"

Moreover, that account was just one of several floated by Graham in the days after Johnson's disappearance. Initially, she texted Fredrickson on July 8. Saying she hadn't been home the prior evening, she asked if Cody had shown up for work. "They're newlyweds," says Fredrickson. "I thought, Are you kidding me?" A day later, according to

**“**  
**We told her, ‘If you really love Cody, just make sure he knows, but if you have doubts you need to let him know’”**

**—LEVI BLASDEL**

Liss, she told police that her husband had received an upsetting phone call, then later drove off with an out-of-town friend. She also spoke to the police of an e-mail from a mysterious "Tony" traced to her stepfather's computer that claimed Johnson had died in a fall. "She was kind of nonchalant about the whole thing," says Blasdel.

But friends' suspicions didn't harden until the day of Johnson's memorial. "There was more emotion on her step-

LEFT PAGE: CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: ARTHUR MCGUIRE/ISTOCK; COURTESY: CAMERON FREDRICKSON; RIGHT PAGE: CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT: ALICE MILLER/THE MISSOULIAN; ARTHUR MCGUIRE/ISTOCK