

Chapter 1

GABE

Atherton Lake lay far below them in all its scenic glory. But Gabe Fox had no interest in the view. What mattered to him was whether the fall would kill his wife, Angie. Never comfortable with heights, he turned his back to the toy-like picnic tables below. "Great view, huh, Babe?"

"Hang on..." Unlike Gabe, who jogged several times a week, Angie was out of breath from the hike up to the overlook. She bent at the waist, hands on knees. With her back to him, Gabe had a good look at his wife's spandex-covered ass. Ugh. Some wives aged like fine wine. Angie aged like milk. Eventually, the pile of blubber straightened. She puffed a wisp of auburn hair from her eyes and took in the landscape.

"You were right," she said grudgingly. "The view really is gorgeous."

"Go on, take some pictures."

Having recently maxed out the Visa card to buy herself a shiny-new Pentax, Angie jumped at the idea. She unzipped her camera bag and beamed as she took out her new baby.

Geez, kiss it, why don't you? Gabe forced a smile. "Take all the shots you want," he told her. "We've got lots of time."

Of course, Gabe had wanted Angie dead for months, but if he'd learned anything in his twenty years of policework, it was that impatience got a man caught. His wife would be out of his life soon enough, so why not let her snap a few pictures first?

"Let's get one of you, now," she told him. "Move over there." Angie pointed at the same knee-high bench-slash-barrier he intended to push her off.

"Sure." Thankful the thing was a good three-feet wide, he sat down. "How's this?"

"Boring. The picture would be so much cooler if you got up there."

"What? You know I've got acrophobia."

"Bla bla. Hop up there, you big crybaby."

"No way."

"Then rest your foot on the bench. Or is that too scary?"

"No, no. I can manage that." The bitch doesn't know what scary is, Gabe thought. But she's gonna real soon. Smiling through gritted teeth, he followed Angie's instructions. "Like this?"

“Yeah, but relax. Hiking up here was your idea, remember?”

Damned right it was. He adjusted his Yankees cap and—with the heart-pounding drop just inches behind him—managed to hold a stiff but toothy grin as his soon-to-be-dead wife snapped away.

“Okay, your turn.” Angie passed him the camera. “So, where do you want me?”

How about dead and bleeding all over those rocks down there?

But he couldn’t say that, so Gabe went with, “You’re the brave one. Why don’t you stand on the bench?”

Always eager to show Gabe up, Angie trotted over and with a superior smirk, hoisted herself up onto the bench and struck a relaxed pose, unconcerned by the perilous drop behind her.

Was he really going to do this? Once done, it couldn’t be undone. His step kids, Kylie and Robby, would be devastated. He snapped three pictures. then, lowered the camera as Angie bounced on her toes, her arms outstretched. “See? No big deal.”

Oh, what the hell. The kids would get over it.

“No, no, no!” Gabe dashed to stop her from hopping down. “I just got the best idea ever. Come on, baby, one more picture.”

“What are you talking about?”

His entire being told him to throw her off the cliff, right then and there. Instead, he stuck with his plan and coaxed her, ever so gently, back into position. “Remember that motel room in Langston?” he began, pleased by his light, reminiscent tone. “It was right after we got married. Kylie had just turned seven, so Robby was only four. You took pictures of them jumping from one bed to the other, remember?”

“You want me to jump off the cliff?”

He chuckled. Actually, yeah, but since he couldn't say that either, went with, “No, Sweetie. I just want you to stand on the bench and jump up. You know, so I can snap a picture of you in midair.”

Angie looked over her shoulder at the open sky behind her. “I don't know...”

“Oh, so you're scared of heights, now? That bench is three feet wide. I mean I sure couldn't do it, but you...”

“Oh, all right, but if the lodge serves lobster, I'm getting it.”

“Sure, sure.” Gabe grinned, knowing that was one tab he would never have to pay. “Dessert too.” Temples pounding, he positioned himself for the shot. “Okay, now, when I count to three, you jump as high as you can.”

With a nod, Angie did a little half-squat, prompting a nervous giggle from Gabe.

“What’s so funny?”

“Nothing,” Gabe said, even though she looked like a fat toad ready to hop. His face flooded with heat as he adjusted the camera’s focus. “One...two...three.”

Angie sprang up, arms and legs forming a big X. Surprised by her agility, Gabe almost didn’t click the button.

But he did.

“Okay, let’s see what we’ve got.” With surprisingly-steady hands, he brought up the image. “Hey, what’s that?” He frowned up at Angie. “I hadn’t noticed before, but there’s something in your hair.” A lie. Eyes on the top of her head, he moved in. “I think it’s bird poop.”

“Gross. Get it out.” She pulled a tissue from her fanny pack, and as she passed it over, a dog barked somewhere down the path.

Somebody was coming.

“Okay, lower your head.” Amazed Angie hadn’t commented on the tension in his voice, he swabbed the imaginary mess with now-shaky fingers.

“Didn’t think you liked fooling with hair so much,” she teased. “Maybe you should go to beauty school.”

“Funny,” he croaked. It was time. Angie was right where he wanted her, in fact, her ass was literally hanging over the edge.

He’d never get a better chance.

She raised her fat face to him. “Oh, come on, Gabe. I wanna go.”

“And I want you gone.” He pressed his palm to her forehead.

“Hey! What—?”

Gabe pushed.

Eyes like golf balls, a scream burst from Angie as good as any horror movie actress could produce. Arms and legs flailing, she fell.

There. He did it.

Legs suddenly boneless, Gabe slumped down on the bench as Angie half-bounced, half-slid down a steep rock wall, then caught some air for a few seconds before mashing down some baby pine trees. The last twenty or thirty feet was all freefall.

The breath he'd been holding whooshed out when Angie hit bottom. Nausea, either from guilt but more likely, the vertigo, tore him away. No, this definitely couldn't be undone.