



## RELUCTANT ADVENTURER

Debra Borchert

**P**ut your right arm through, leave your left arm back, and put your head down. Then push with your toes and wriggle the rest of your body through.”

“My face will be in the water,” I objected.

“For a wee bit,” said Bruce, our adventure guide.

When I’d signed up for this excursion, they didn’t tell me that exiting this cave would require shoving my body through a hole narrower than the width of my shoulders. Had they, I might have taken the time to consider whether or not I was claustrophobic. I scrambled, wriggled, and ended up caught halfway through the opening.

“Just one more push.”

“This has got to be like ‘being born,’” I gasped.

“Right on. We call this the Rebirth Canal.”

“How will the other people fit through?” At 125 pounds, I was one of the smallest in our group.

“I have an excellent eye.”

I have rafted the Urubamba, hiked the Canadian Rockies, and climbed both Machu and Huaynu Picchu—all as a quest to get to know myself better. While biking across the Continental Divide, I learned that arriving last in the group didn’t sit well with my ego. When I came face-to-face with an angry bighorn sheep on the ice-encrusted Bright Angel Trail, I learned that I was not afraid to die. When I lay in an Amazonian thatched hut listening to the screams of a jaguar, I learned that while I didn’t fear death, I was terrified to go as dinner.

Throughout these travels, my longing to share my adventures with a man who longed for the adventure of getting to know *me* deepened. Back in New York City, where I’d worked as a fashion model, my romantic escapades had been limited to choosing among some thirty thousand restaurants for dinner and deciding whether to hail a cab or walk to meet my date. I encountered many men who really weren’t who they presented themselves to be; in between ordering the latest chic martini and discussing the most avant-garde Soho gallery, I’d try to figure out if each new prospective partner was an ax murderer, a stalker, or married.

Tired of this process and of pinstriped, wingtipped, Hermès-tied Wall Streeters in general, I decided I wanted a mountain man—someone who sweated from exertion rather than stress. So I moved to the Pacific Northwest and took to exploring its natural wonders, both scenic and male. I was hiking near Mount Rainier one day, enjoying a snack and the view, when an Alaskan husky came bounding down the trail, headed straight for me. My New Yorker instincts went on automatic: I reached in my knapsack, pulled out my pepper spray, and aimed.