

# *Torrid Teasers*

*Volume 8*

Do You Only Want To Dance?  
I Like It Like That

*By Kate Lang*

**Whiskey Creek Press**

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Torrid Teasers Volume 8  
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Dedication

For my husband who believes even when I don't.  
And for Jenn who helped me find the gems.

## DO YOU ONLY WANT TO DANCE?

by

Kate Lang

Cameron Slade slammed his Jeep door closed. Chunks of dried mud fell from the dented body. He couldn't remember the last time he had washed his four-by-four, couldn't even rightfully remember what color the thing was. He'd probably have to do that before Dee's wedding.

Damn, it was hard to believe that his little sister was getting married. Well, maybe not. Some women liked that kind of thing. Stability, order and routine. In his experience most women really got off on that. Which is why he never got serious with them.

He liked women. Hell, he loved women and their bodies, especially after being in the back country for a few months with only fat, city slicking men to shoot the shit with. He loved how women smelled so good, felt so soft, and sounded so incredible when he was buried balls deep inside them.

Yes, Cam thought as he ran a hand over his shaggy beard, *women definitely had their redeeming qualities.*

Unfortunately, they also expected a man to stick around and commit. Which was a fitting way to think about it because he'd have to be fucking nuts to let himself be chained to a fickle woman.

Luckily for Dee, Craig, her fiancé, didn't share Cam's aversion to 'til death do us part.' Good thing, too, or he'd have to blow the motherfucker apart with his hunting rifle.

Cam slung his pack over his shoulder and stomped up the walk, leaving clumps of dirt on the walk behind him. Pretty ordered flowers lined the sidewalk, handiwork of his sister, he was sure. Which just went to prove his previous thoughts about women. Hadn't met one who couldn't leave well enough alone and leave things as they were. To be fair, the flowers were kind of nice but they couldn't compare to the wild disorder of the roses, fireweed and heartleaf that surrounded his base camp. He wasn't a real sensitive sort but when he was looking out over the upper valley at dawn, and it was just him, the mountains and a cup of coffee, he got an ache right in the vicinity of his heart.

He looked up and over his childhood home. The mountains surrounded the small town of Kootenay Pass. He'd only come down from the mountains for a few hours and already he was missing them. Well, nothing he could do about it, he thought, as he climbed the porch steps to his front door. He could only pray that the next three days would pass quickly and he wouldn't have to wear a tie.

The house was musty, attesting to the fact that he hadn't been there in over a month. He let his pack drop, kicked off his boots and proceeded to open all the windows. He was in his bedroom when a knock sounded on his door. Not in town for more than ten minutes and already people were bugging him. Civilization was damned annoying.



He opened the door to find his sister on the other side of the threshold.

"Oh, my God! You're not ready!"

"Hi to you too, Dee."

She grabbed his arm and started marching him to the bathroom.

"You need to take a shower and shave."

"Hang on. What's lit a fire under your ass?"

"Did you forget? Of course you forgot. Dancing lessons, Cam. The whole wedding party is taking dancing lessons."

Cam stopped, ignoring his sister's pulls and tugs. "I never said I would take dance lessons."

Dee planted her hands on her hips and craned her neck to give him a killing look. "Yes, you did. Last time you were in town I called and told you."

She very well could have. He had started to zone out when Dee started talking wedding. Colors, flowers, menus ... they just didn't seem like a big deal to Cam, but dance lessons?

"I don't dance."

"It's my wedding, Cam. You're the only family I have left." Her eyes got suspiciously moist. "Daddy's not here to dance with me for the bride's dance with her father ... I thought we could dance instead."

Shit. Emotional blackmail. Why did women always resort to that kind of thing? Why didn't they just wind up and kick a man in the balls when they were pissed? Instead, they cried ... or they just plain up and left. Cam pushed away that last thought.

He sighed, knowing he was as good as dead. "When do we have to be there for these dance lessons?"

Dee took a quick look at her wristwatch and flashed him a triumphant smile. "Fifteen minutes at the Legion Hall."

\* \* \* \*

Annalise Sanchez waited to burst into flames. When she had left Kootenay Pass a decade earlier she said she would burn in Hell before she returned. Her volatile adolescent mission statement hadn't come true yet, but then the day was still young.

"Thank you, Lise."

Lise returned Dee's hug. How could she not come back for Dee's wedding? For all of the hardships that Lise had experienced in this godforsaken town, Dee had won over her heart. Lise knew that, of the two of them, Dee was the better friend. Dee was the one to call and send presents on birthdays. Dee was the one to send her telegrams the night of a big competition, wishing her luck. Dee was the one who had flown to England to watch her compete with Diego. She swore that Dee had cried harder than her parents when she and Diego had won and become ballroom world champions. Dee was the one who had sent her champagne and roses when she and Diego opened their own dance studio in Vancouver. So attending Dee's wedding and making sure her wedding party didn't look clumsy on the dance floor was the least that she could do.

Even if it meant seeing Cameron again.

"I wouldn't have missed your wedding for the world."

"Let me introduce you to the wedding party, or I guess I should say reintroduce."

"Sure." Lise pasted a smile on her face.

"Of course, you know Craig, my fiancé."

"Hi, Craig, nice to see you again." Craig, of course, barely remembered her but for Dee's sake, he acted as if he did. She shook the hand that he offered.

"Thanks for coming, Lise."

Lise decided that he was a good guy and she let her smile become more genuine.

Dee went on to introduce the rest of the wedding party. Lise kept her smile firmly in place and graciously shook hands with the best man, Joe, and the maid of honor, Rochelle.

The double doors squealing open grabbed everyone's attention.

"There you are, Cam." Dee made a tscking sound. "You didn't shave."

"I didn't want to be late." His deep voice ran like a current through Lise's body.

"Come and meet Lise."

Cameron Slade, Dee's brother. While she only vaguely recalled the other members of the wedding party, she had vivid memories of Cameron. She turned around slowly, trying to give herself time to compose herself.

He was Grizzly Adams come to life.

She should have been repulsed by his appearance. The men that she dated and associated with were all well-acquainted with their razors, but his unkempt appearance only made him seem sexier.

"Cameron, do you remember Lise?"

Would he remember her now?

"Lise?"

There was her answer. The inflection he used on her name wasn't a "wow, it's been so long" kind of inflection, rather it was a "who the hell are you" kind. Which made her feel more the fool for remembering Cameron for so long, but really, what girl didn't remember her first kiss and then some? Had she expected him to remember her a decade later when he had forgotten about her only weeks after feeling her up?

"Hello, Cameron."

She stuck out her hand and congratulated herself on the steadiness of her voice.

"Hey." His palm, when it rubbed against hers, was rough. She ignored the tingling of her fingers when she shook his hand.

"Well, I guess now that we're all here, we can start," Dee said, looking at Lise expectantly.

She started as she would with any beginner class. She lined up the women and men behind her in groups and then taught them the basic steps to both the waltz and the fox trot. There was no mirror in front of her so she kept looking over her shoulders to see how everyone was doing. The women seemed to pick up the steps quicker than the men. Well, most of the men. Cameron didn't seem to have as many problems as the other two men.

"You're making us look bad, you damn twinkle toes."

Cameron smiled at Joe. "Well you know what they say about men who can dance, don't you?"

"Screw you."

"No, that's not what they say but you're on the right track."

Cameron's eyes caught hers. Those blue eyes crinkled at the corners and shot through her like the hottest flame. He was still moving and she couldn't help but let her eyes slide down to his hips. Yes, he certainly had a way of moving that put a woman's mind to sex. Her eyes traveled up his muscular torso, back to his face. He smiled at her, a sexy knowing smile. She quickly turned her head before he could see her blush. Damn him. After what he had done to her, she should be immune to him and his charms.

"Okay, are we ready to try a basic step with partners?"

Best to keep her mind off Cam and his hips. Except that when Dee started pairing everyone off, she ended up with Cam. She held her arms out, holding her frame firm. He stepped into her arms. His muscular shoulder caused her palm to grow clammy and she resisted the urge to rub it against his soft t-shirt. His other hand slid down her side, resting at the dent of her waist. She moved his arm up to the proper position just under her shoulder blade.

"I liked the other spot better."

His blue eyes twinkled with bad boy mischief. Her heart tripped in her chest.

"It's not proper form." She angled her head to the side and tilted her chin up.

"Sometimes, improper form is more fun."

She tensed as his breath caressed her jaw line. Her body hummed at his nearness and his teasing. When Cameron

Slade flirted, he was impossible to resist, as she well knew. However, she was older now, more experienced and not that lonely, outcast girl who had believed every single disingenuous thing that had come out of his mouth.

"Alright, I'm going to count off the beat. Ready?" Everyone was looking her way, including Cameron. She could feel his eyes skimming the features of her face. She hoped he couldn't see her pulse hammering in her neck.

"And ... one, two, three ... Slide, two, three ... Turn, two, three..."

They were all trying. She would give them that.

"Craig, look at your bride, not your feet."

The groom looked up and promptly stepped on Dee's feet. Lise winced in sympathy.

"Joe, it's a waltz, not a funeral march."

The best man tried to make his steps lighter but he still stomped more than glided.

"Rochelle, you need to let Joe lead."

"Well, I would if he knew where the hell he was going."

The maid of honor forcefully led the best man into a turn.

"Oh, my goodness," Lise whispered to no one in particular.

"Any words of wisdom for me?" Cameron slid her smoothly into a turn.

"You're doing fine, but your hand isn't in proper position."

Instead of moving his hand up, he moved it lower down so that it was riding just above her ass.

"From my standpoint, this definitely is the most proper position."

She gritted her teeth and forcibly returned his hand underneath her shoulder blade.

"I think that you would be more serious since Dee's your sister, but I guess some things never change."

She felt his body tense. "What's that supposed to mean?"

She wished she would have kept her bitterness under wraps, but she hadn't expected to have all these unresolved emotions come to the surface. "Nothing."

"Bullshit. What do you mean some things never change?"

Lise wished she could let him have everything that was coming to him. How many times had she fantasized about giving Cam a what for? Here was her opportunity—except that she couldn't indulge. She was here for Dee and she wouldn't ruin her friend's wedding, but the bigger thing stopping her was cowardice. She was scared to reveal her hurt. She was angry that she actually still felt hurt. Damn Cameron for still having the power to intimidate her. She gathered her pride around her and stepped out of Cam's embrace.

She looked him in the eye. His hands were braced on his hips and his eyes were hard.

"It means nothing," she said and prayed for the statement to come true. Before he could question her further, she called out to Dee. "Do you want to practice with your brother?"

\* \* \* \*

"Why don't you come out for dinner, Lise?" Dee asked. They were all standing in the parking lot of the Legion Hall.

Lise opened up the door of her rental car. "Thanks, but I want to get settled in the motel."

"Oh, you were able to get a room? Thank God."

Lise felt the bottom drop out of her stomach. "Well, actually, I haven't got a reservation. I just assumed that there would be room."

Dee and Craig exchanged a look.

"Oh, I'm so sorry, Lise. I should have let you know beforehand. Craig's family has kind of taken over the motel and they're using it as Ferguson headquarters."

Lise could have kicked herself. Why hadn't she taken care of accommodations beforehand? "I guess I could always drive to Palliser Falls and get a room."

"But that's over an hour away." Dee sounded devastated.

"She can stay with me." Cameron strolled up to them.

Lise's fingers gripped the top of the car window. She looked at Cam with shock. The look in his eyes was challenging and determined.

"Oh, that's perfect!" Dee beamed.

"No." There was no way she could stay with Cameron.

"I insist."

She shook her head. "No, I wouldn't want to put you out that way."

"Don't be ridiculous, Lise. Cam lives alone. He has more than enough room." Dee hugged her brother. "Thank you."

"Anything for you, sis." Cam looked directly at Lise. She knew this was in retribution for her accusation that he didn't care about his sister.



"Good, it's settled. Lise, you can drop off your car at Cam's and you two can come to dinner together."

Dee's smile of expectation encompassed them all. It would take a cruel person to burst the bride's bubble of happiness, and Lise wasn't cruel.

She followed Cam's jacked-up Jeep through the streets of Kootenay Pass. They reached his house in less than five minutes. He lived at the end of a street, in a cottage-like bungalow. At his direction, she pulled her car onto the gravel drive alongside the house.

She dreaded having to get out of her car, but she couldn't very well sit in it all night. She took a deep bracing breath and opened the door.

Cam held out a hand to help her out. Without thinking, she put her hand in his. Too late, she realized her mistake. He pulled her out, slammed the door shut and imprisoned her against the car door with his body. His arms on either side of her kept her from escaping.

"Now, exactly what did you mean when you said some things never change?"

She turned her face away from his penetrating gaze.

"Nothing."

He grasped her chin and turned her head to face him. "Not good enough."

Her heart raced in her chest. His face was fierce and hard even with the beard covering his jaw. She swallowed around the lump in her throat.

"I just seem to remember you as someone concerned with the pursuit of your own happiness."

He frowned. She had tried to give him an answer that was somewhat truthful and yet not specific to her. She held her breath waiting for his reply.

"I love my sister. Her happiness means more than anything to me."

"Sentiment noted." Lise put her hands on his rock-hard chest trying to put some distance between their bodies.

Cam retaliated by taking some of the weight off his arm and sinking deeper onto her.

"You know the pursuit of happiness isn't necessarily a bad thing."

She wanted to turn her face away but couldn't because he still had a firm grip on her chin. Her heart hammered when his gaze caressed her lips. Unable to stop herself, she licked her lips nervously. He groaned and lowered his head.

She whimpered, half in fear, half with anticipation.

His lips captured hers as he tilted her head for maximum contact. The heat of his lips sent tremors through her and she curled her fingers into his t-shirt to stay grounded. He drugged her with his tantalizing sips and sucks causing her eyelids to become sensually weighted. The sensation of being kissed by Cameron exceeded all her memories. The last time their lips had met, she had been inexperienced and he had been a boy barely over the threshold of adulthood. Now they both brought what they had learned to the kiss and the sweetness and intensity of it was greater than anything Lise had ever experienced.

His beard tickled her already sensitized skin. She could just imagine what those whiskers would feel like on other

parts of her body. Heated want pulsed through her body making her breasts feel full and heavy and her nipples bead into aching points. The thought of Cam's whiskers on those sensitive parts caused a throb to take up residence between the moist lips of her pussy.

Cam's fingers loosed their grip on her chin and slid sensuously down her neck, over her shoulder, down her arm, and rested at her waist before continuing the journey to her hip. His touch sparked an instinctive press of her groin into his. He groaned and deepened his assault on her lips. His tongue swept into her mouth, teasing and tempting. His hips imitated his tongue by undulating back and forth. Her hands slid down his chest and rested on his hips, her fingers hooking into his belt loops.

One of his hands gripped the globe of her ass. She lifted her leg and hooked it around his thigh, pulling him into her. Slipping underneath her knee-length skirt, his large hand caressed her raised thigh. The return caress gathered the wispy material about his wrist. He palmed her ass again, his fingers stealing underneath the elasticized leg of her panties.

Her inner walls clenched, crying drops of cream at the need to be penetrated. Her arousal heightened and she ravaged his lips. God, she had missed him, wanted him, needed him. Every man she had ever been with had been unknowingly compared to Cam and had come up short. She had never gotten him out of her system.

Cam's fingers used her panties as a guide and followed them to her core. She couldn't control the visceral shudders that shook her body.

"Oh man," he groaned and brushed her plump nether lips. She sucked in her breath at the electrifying touch.

He looked at her, his need making his blue eyes glow.

"We're going out for dinner." He slid his fingers through her slickness, then brought them up to his lips. Slowly, while holding her gaze, he opened his mouth and sensuously licked her juices off. Her eyes widened at the eroticism of the act. Her pussy throbbed madly. "And then we're coming back here for dessert."

\* \* \* \*

Dinner was fucking torture. His hard-on was thick and raging. Lise would send him a look from beneath those thick black eyelashes and he was tempted to grab her and fuck her in the restroom. But he didn't because he wanted to hear her scream his name when he finally impaled her.

He ate his food saying as little as possible. He didn't have time to talk; he had more important things to do. He made short work of his steak and baked potato. Lise, on the other hand, ate her salad like she had all the time in the world. He almost growled at her when she ordered another glass of wine.

Didn't she know that he was dying here?

"So is the city great, Lise?" Rochelle asked. As usual, she dressed for the occasion in a pair of faded overalls. Cam couldn't remember when Chelle had ever worn a dress.

"It can be."

"God, you're so lucky you blew this popsicle stand. I wish I could leave." Furrows knitted Rochelle's brow.

"But who would run *Sprigg's Hardware*?" The question came from Joe.

"I'd sell it."

Joe dropped his fork with a loud clatter and his mouth opened and closed like a guppy. "You couldn't do that. *Sprigg's Hardware* is an institution in this town."

"Yeah, and I'm the lone inmate."

Dee tried to redirect the conversation. "So what's Patrick Swayze really like?"

Cam watched Lise take another damn slow sip of wine. She smiled at his sister's question. Christ, she was sweet! Her full red lips turned up temptingly at the corners. She had a mouth made for sin.

"He's short."

"But does he move as sexy as he did in *Dirty Dancing*?"

Lise smiled knowingly. "Better."

"Oh. Wow." Dee fanned herself with her napkin.

"Hey!" Craig looked wounded.

"Oh, baby. You know I love the way you move."

"That is too much fucking information," Cam growled, pointing his finger at Dee. He was pleased when Craig's face paled.

"Give me a break, Cam." Dee returned to grilling Lise. "So how do you dance like that with someone and not tear their clothes off afterward?"

Lise laughed and the sexy sound went straight to his dick.

"Self-restraint. Plus Patrick is very happily married."

"Yeah, but Diego isn't."

That made Cam sit up straight. "Who's Diego?"

Dee answered for Lise. "Diego Ruiz. Lise's gorgeous dance partner."

Cam looked at Lise. She just shrugged and took another sip of wine.

"You can't tell me you and Diego never ... you know." Dee wiggled her eyebrows up and down.

"I'm not telling one way or the other."

"I think you did." Dee leaned forward. "The way he moves? You *must* have."

Cam gritted his teeth. He didn't want to think about Lise with another man. In fact, the thought burned and pissed him off. No, not just pissed ... but jealous. What the fuck? He didn't do jealous. Not over a woman. Until now. Cam stood up suddenly.

"Think what you want. I'm not telling," Lise said coyly, still toying with her wine glass.

Cam grabbed Lise's glass and plunked it down on the table. *Fuck this*. He wasn't going to stand here and listen to Lise talk about a man she might or might not have screwed. He felt his anger mount. There was only one way to deal with these annoying ... feelings. Take Lise back to his place, rip off her clothes and bury himself balls deep. "It's time for dessert."

Lise looked up at him with surprise and a bit of fear. Yeah, she better be scared because when he was done with her, she wouldn't remember her own fucking name, much less Diego's, the fucker.

"I'll get a dessert menu," Dee said.

"No need. I already know what I want."

\* \* \* \*

There were no words between Lise and Cam on the mad dash back to his house. She knew what was going to happen. She didn't want to stop it. She tried not to think about the shocked look that had appeared on Dee's face when Cam wrenched back her chair and tugged her out of the restaurant. There could be no doubt about what dessert was going to consist of. A shiver of anticipation stole through her.

She could say no. Cam might be a lot of things but he would never force a woman. She probably should say no. That would be the smart thing to do. However, when it came to Cameron Slade, she wasn't smart.

She tried to rationalize what she was going to do. Unlike last time, she held the upper hand now. She was going into this situation aware of who and what Cameron was. Maybe this is what she needed to finally get him out of her system. Meet him as an equal, and then she would be the one to walk away.

She would leave behind her regrets and her childish dreams. She would leave Kootenay Pass with her past firmly behind her, never having to wonder "what if" again.

Cam's big, capable hands steered the Jeep down his street. She wanted those hands on her. Unlike last time, this encounter would be all physical with no childish fantasies coloring her perception.

He guided the Jeep to a screeching halt in front of his house. Almost before the engine stopped rumbling, he was opening her door. As he had done earlier, he held out his

hand. This time she knew exactly what she was doing when she put her hand in his.

\* \* \* \*

Cam had never felt such urgency before. He didn't want to be inside Lise—he *needed* to be inside her.

*How the mighty have fallen.*

Unable to stop himself from acting like a desperate horn dog, he grabbed Lise's hand and practically ran up the walk. The sound of her high heels tapping behind him only made his cock throb harder. Pulling open the front door, he urged her inside and slammed the door shut behind him. He then plastered Lise against it and didn't hesitate to get his hands underneath her dress.

"I'll bet the only thing sexier than you in this is dress, is you out of it," he growled before he slipped his fingers under her panties.

"Wait."

"There are only two words I want you to use, Lise, and wait ain't one of them."

She grabbed his wrists and he let her pull them away from her underwear.

"What are the two words I can use?"

"Yes," he pressed himself into her, letting her feel his enormous erection, "and now."

She smiled like a sex kitten. Without a word, she turned around and swept her hair over her shoulder. The smooth expanse of her gorgeous back beckoned to him. He placed a tender kiss underneath the tie of her halter. She sent him a



knowing smile over her shoulder. With a finger, she tapped the tie keeping her dress up.

"You want me to untie that?"

"Yes. Now."

He chuckled. "Smart ass."

"Yes."

His fingers shook with want and nerves. Christ, he wanted to please her. The need to satisfy her superseded his own desire. Before, he wanted to please the woman he was with, but her pleasure was never his main concern. With Lise, her satisfaction was paramount, her desires the most important thing in the world to him.

*Shit.* When had he turned into such a goddamn wuss?

He undid the knot and brushed the material over her shoulders. Lise turned, holding her dress up with one hand against her chest.

"Let go, baby."

"Yes." She removed her hand and her top slithered down. Cam held his breath as the red halter caught on the tips of her breasts. Then the material gave up its final hold and fell away to reveal the most incredible set of breasts he had ever seen.

They weren't the largest but they were the most perfectly formed. Perfect globes with coral nipples. He started salivating at the sight.

"Mmmmm, my first helping of dessert." He took a distended nipple in his mouth and laved it lovingly. She tasted as sexy as hell. Hot and sweet. He trailed connecting kisses to the other breast and licked and suckled her other nipple. The

sight of Lise with her eyes closed and her back arched toward his mouth gave him more pleasure than all the mindless fucking of his past.

He pressed heated kisses down her flat stomach.

"This dress needs to come off."

"Now." She looked at him with eyes the color of chocolate-covered sin.

With more urgency than finesse, he tugged down her dress. All she had on was a pair of black panties and black heels. She was a Latin temptress from fantasies he hadn't even thought to dream yet.

He ran his hands up her legs, loving their smooth texture and their tanned color. He spread his hands wide on her thighs and let his thumbs race for the prize at the apex of her legs. He stopped just short of the finish line and looked up at Lise.

She opened her legs. "Yes."

He burrowed his thumbs inside her underwear and was rewarded by a moan from above. Her eyes were closed again and her hands were splayed wide on the door behind her. Cam brushed her labia with his thumbs, loving how smooth and devoid of hair they were.

"You do that Brazilian thing, don't you?"

"Yes."

"I gotta see."

He hooked his fingers under the thin elastic that held the front and back of her panties together. Slowly, torturing them both, he drew the wisps of silk down, revealing the heart of her. Damn, she was gorgeous!

A neatly-trimmed strip of hair rode above the plump, slick lips of her pussy. He pressed a reverent kiss just above her black pubic hair before drawing her underwear down the remaining length of her sexy-as-hell dancer legs. With two dainty steps, she extricated herself from her panties. The movement allowed him a tempting glimpse of pretty pink folds and the sight drove him to forget any plans for a slow, long seduction. He wouldn't be able to last.

He grabbed her ankle, placing it next to his head. Her heel notched perfectly over his shoulder. *God bless high heels.* He nibbled his way up her inner thigh before zeroing in on the ultimate goal. He licked her plump lips and the taste of her was a liquid shot of heat. She was sweet and musky and so damn good, he wanted to settle down for a feast.

He spread her open with his fingers and swiped her again with his tongue. A long, deep moan filled the air. Was it her? Was it him? Maybe both?

He lapped up her juices and buried his nose in her pubic hair. Her essence stole over all of his senses. Touch, taste, smell, sound. Every bit of her was amazing.

His fingers joined his exploration. Coating them in her cream, he circled her sweet opening. Lise's hips started a sultry bump and grind. Damn, he loved how she moved, so sexy and so fucking hot. His body throbbed to her intoxicating rhythm.

Using his thumbs to part her labia, he found her clit with his tongue. Around and around he licked.

"Now!" Her hands fisting in his hair accompanied Lise's growled directive. How could he deny her when she was being so sweet?

He wrapped his lips around the tiny nubbin of nerves and started a rhythmic suckling. Lise's hips started bucking but he didn't break the suction. Taking two fingers, he found her and slipped them inside.

Goddamn! Her pussy clamped down on his digits like a vise.

"Yes! Yes! Yes! Now!"

Lise coming was fucking beautiful. Her whole body shook and vibrated with pleasure, and Cam felt like he was a conqueror.

\* \* \* \*

Lise felt like she had just been put through the spin cycle. She was limp, weak and sated. And she thought she was supposed to be able to forget Cam. She had a sinking feeling that her plan had some flaws inherent in its design, namely her inability to give her body without giving her heart. Why hadn't she thought of that before? Because when it came to Cameron Slade, she was stupid, an established fact that had been proven without a shadow of a doubt.

Again.

Cam gathered her up in his arms and she burrowed into him. His beard tickled her nose and his scent enveloped her heart. He smelled like the forest and the wild. Untamed, unfettered. Unattainable.

Cam sat her down on his bed, kneeled at her feet and slipped off her shoes. She couldn't move. All she could do was watch him with the pain of her heart in her eyes. He began undressing and revealed all of her dreams.

His shoulders were broad, his chest lightly furred with an arrow of brown hair disappearing into his jeans. His blunt fingers pulled open the button fly of his faded jeans. One by one the steel discs released, and he peeled off the denim.

Underneath, he was magnificently showcased in tight cotton boxers. His erection, outlined in tight gray cotton weave, made her mouth water. He hooked his thumbs in the waistband and pulled down the soft material. His erection sprang free and stood up straight and proud. He walked toward her, his groin level with her mouth.

How could she not?

She encircled him with a hand and guided him to her lips. He hissed as she enveloped him. He tasted wild and salty. She laved him with her eyes closed trying to imprint the sensations irrevocably in her memory.

"Lise, baby, stop."

Regretfully, she let him slip from her lips.

"I need to be inside you."

She nodded and said, "Yes."

She lay down and drew her knees up. Her heels were braced on the end of the bed. Cam settled himself between her thighs. With a deep thrust, he seated himself inside her.

She didn't have to wonder anymore. He fit her. Perfectly.

Lise hooked her heels underneath his buttocks and urged him further into her. The head of his penis brushed her

womb. Her pussy enveloped him while her arms hugged him. She wanted to surround him, draw him into her heart and her soul.

"Fuck, Lise. I need a condom."

She wanted to scream "No!" She didn't want a damn barrier, no matter how thin, between their bodies. She wanted to take his seed and nurture it, but like everything else about them, it was impossible. So instead, she whispered, "Yes."

He slipped out of her body and she hated the emptiness he left behind. She could hear him rooting around in an end table. Soon he returned and poised at her entrance.

"Now," she urged.

He held her gaze with his own. She felt the coolness of the condom when he filled her again and hated the necessity. She saw his pleasure reflected in the blue depths of his eyes. Knowing that he liked how she felt helped her put her dislike of the condom on the back burner. Her desire sparked and caught fire. Soon they were moving in a thrilling rhythm. Every plunge of his hips seemed deeper, stronger, more irresistible.

"Lise, I'm going to come. Are you close?"

"Yes."

He plunged deep and swiveled his hips.

"Now?"

"Now."

Cam started a fast pistoning. Every pump drove her higher. When Cam bellowed her name, she flew into the waves of the most powerful orgasm of her life.

\* \* \* \*

Cam awoke to someone banging on his front door like a lunatic. Shit, what time was it? He peeled his eyes open a slit. Six o-fucking-clock. He threw off the covers and stomped bare-assed naked to his bedroom door. Hang on, something wasn't right. He turned back to look at his bed. It was empty. Empty?

His insides twisted. Not again. Not fucking again. Where was Lise?

He poked his head into the bathroom and grabbed a towel while he was there. He wrapped the terry cloth around his hips and stalked to the kitchen. His anger grew with every step. How could she have left? Why did she leave? What had he done wrong this time?

The kitchen was empty, as was the living room.

The damned banging continued and only managed to annoy him to volcanic proportions.

He wrenched the door open. "What?"

"What did you do to Lise?" His sister barged in looking as mad as he felt.

"You've seen her?" He locked his knees when they went weak with relief.

"No. She left this in my mailbox." She handed him a folded piece of paper. "Care to explain?" Dee crossed her arms and drilled him with an accusatory look.

Cam read the contents of the note. Every word spiked his ire.

"What does she mean about not being able to stay with you?"

"I don't know."

"Well, you must know something because she didn't feel this way before you dragged her here after dinner. Damn it, Cam. Couldn't you have found some mindless bimbo to boff? Why did you feel the need to go after my friend?"

"I didn't go after her." He hated how Dee made him sound so mercenary. Lise had wanted him as badly as he had wanted her. Hadn't she?

"Then why did she leave?"

"I don't know, but I'm going to damn well find out."

\* \* \* \*

Cam had a few preparations to make before he could make good on his promise. He could only assume that Lise had fled to Palliser Falls because she had promised Dee in her note that she would be at the church for Dee's wedding tomorrow morning, which meant that she needed to be close by. He had gone into every motel and hotel with a story about having an urgent message for Annalise Sanchez. He hadn't been lying. He had an urgent message for her consisting of the words "What the fuck?"

He finally found her at a bed and breakfast run by an old lady who was charmed enough by his smile to ignore the predatory gleam in his eye. She pointed outside and he saw Lise sitting on the terrace. He almost howled in triumph. She wouldn't get away this time.



He told the helpful woman that Lise wouldn't be needing her room and paid her for her trouble. After taking care of the details, he cornered his prey.

"Were you just going to show up for the wedding and act like nothing happened?"

She gasped and turned around.

"How did you find me?"

"I'm a resourceful guy. So were going to act like nothing happened between us?"

She stood and crossed her arms defensively. "Would it matter?"

"What's that supposed to mean? Of course it would have fucking mattered."

"It never did before."

He frowned. "Before? Before when?"

She sighed. "Nevermind. It doesn't matter."

"That is where you are wrong. It does matter. At least it matters to me." The words echoed in his head. *It matters to me*. No relationship with a woman had meant anything to him. Not since his mother had left without any warning.

Her chin came up defiantly. "Well, it doesn't matter to me."

He stalked her and grasped her by the arms before she could scurry away. She wasn't going to walk away, at least not without him understanding why. He wasn't going to fucking wonder. Not with Lise. "Of course it matters to you. If it didn't, we'd still be back at my place fucking with no thought about tomorrow. Obviously, something sparked this reaction and I'm gonna find out what it is."

He started dragging her around the two-story house.

"Where are you taking me?"

"Somewhere you can't get away."

"But my stuff—"

"Is already in the Jeep."

\* \* \* \*

Another silent Jeep ride filled with anticipation, but this anticipation was born out of fear. Where was Cam taking her? He downshifted and the Jeep climbed a logging road leading to god knows where. Pine trees the size of small skyscrapers arrowed into the blinding blue sky on either side of the narrow dirt road. Another hairpin turn and she would lose what little she had in her stomach.

Finally Cam pulled into a meadow. A small group of cabins clustered around an opening with a bonfire pit in the middle. He turned off the Jeep and the silence was deafening. Cam got out and rounded the hood. He opened her door and she warily stepped out of the vehicle. She looked around her while Cam retrieved their bags.

"Follow me." He didn't wait for her reply. She rushed to keep up with him. He shouldered his pack and her suitcase with ease. He led her to a cabin that was a little bigger than the others and shouldered open the door.

"My home away from home."

Rustic would be the nicest way to describe the interior of the cabin. While the inside was clean and tidy, there wasn't much in the way of luxury. The floor was knotted pine planks,

the furniture, sturdy wood and the bed was covered with a thick plaid flannel comforter.

"What is this place?" Lise crossed her arms over her stomach trying to keep her butterflies at bay.

"My base camp." Cam pulled up the window blinds in the kitchen. A bright shaft of sunlight burst in illuminating the dust motes in the air. He turned around and leaned against the counter. "So are we going to have this conversation inside or outside?"

She could act dumb, but to be truthful, she just didn't have the energy or the inclination. Wasn't it time to exorcise the past once and for all? If she laid out all of her humiliation and raked Cam over the coals of her anger, would she finally be free? Nothing else had worked, so she didn't think she had much to lose either way.

"Outside," she said.

He opened the door for her. She exited and perched herself on the railing of the porch. Cam arranged himself in an Adirondack chair. "So are you going to tell me why you left?"

"Do you remember the party that Dee threw the week after she graduated from high school?"

Cam frowned. "What does this have to do with—"

She put up a hand to forestall him. "Do you remember that party?"

He ran an agitated hand through his hair. "Yeah. I guess. Was that the one where the Dickerson twins streaked down Main Street?"

"Yes." Lise absently rubbed her chest trying to ease the hurt inside her heart. He remembered two retards running naked through town but he didn't remember making out with her. She knew she measured low on the totem pole of Cam's memories but to be so far down was hard to acknowledge. Especially since Cam had been in her thoughts so often since she had left Kootenay Pass. "What else do you remember about the party, Cam?"

"It was loud and the house was packed."

"Do you remember any of the girls who were there?"

He leaned forward and rested his elbows on his knees. He narrowed his eyes when he looked at her. "There were lots of girls there. I remember the girl's volleyball team. I remember Chelle doing a beer bong in the back yard."

"Anything else? Do you remember kissing anyone?"

"I think I remember making out with one of Dee's friends."

Lise's heart beat hard. "And what do you remember about her, Cam?"

"Um, not much. She had long hair. She was a little bit chubby. She didn't know how to kiss."

To hear herself described with so little recognition, so little significance, sparked her anger.

"Did you know that I was a little pudgy in high school?"

Cam's eyes widened. He cleared his throat. "No. No I didn't."

"I was. Even though my mom drove me into Palliser Falls three times a week for dance lessons, I just couldn't seem to get rid of my baby fat."

"That was you?" Finally, her existence in his past was acknowledged.

"Yes, Cam, that was me."

"And that's why you're mad? Because I didn't recognize you?" Cam stood up suddenly and took two angry strides across the porch so that he was beside her. His denim-clad thigh bumped into her bare knee. "Christ, Lise! That was ten years ago."

"Yes, it was." Lise looked away from his burning blue eyes. She looked out over the picturesque scenery of his camp. The mountains surrounded them, monumental and uncompromising like her memories. "Did you know I worked at the diner part-time that summer?"

"No. What the hell—"

"Did you know? Can you remember?" she asked him, her anger making her voice hard and implacable.

"No, alright? No."

"You were the first man to ever see me naked. In fact, you were the first man to ever kiss me, feel my breasts, suck my nipples, have his hands on me, give me an orgasm." She faced him again and was pleased to note that he was starting to understand the gravity of what she was telling him. "I thought what we had shared was amazing, earth-shattering ... unforgettable."

"I'm sorry, Lise."

"I'm not done yet, Cam."

His Adam's apple bobbed when he swallowed. *Did he actually look nervous? Good.*

"I couldn't wait to see you again. Dee told me you left on a camping trip. So I bided my time, picking up as many hours as I could at work, hoping one day, you would come in and ask me out." She rubbed her arms. "And then one day you did walk in. With another girl."

"Lise—" Cam interrupted.

"No! Let me finish. I've waited a long time for this."

He relented, looking resigned. "You're right. Go on."

"You sat in my section. So I went over, heart in my eyes, and you barely looked at me. You didn't recognize me, Cam. Not even a tiny flicker. You didn't notice me when I dropped off your dessert because you were too busy kissing the blonde you were with. You didn't notice when I ran to the kitchen. You didn't notice my red eyes and the fact that I left your stinking tip on the table." She finished her recitation, breathing hard, trying to contain the rush of memories and emotions.

"Shit, Lise." He buried his face in his hands. He turned his back to her. "I'm so fucking sorry." He sat down on the porch steps. "You know, for the longest time, I let my mom's leaving color every single relationship I had with women. I used them, one and all." He stared down at his boots. "I was a real fucking asshole. I made sure I was always the one to leave first, you know. No commitments, no messy emotion." He turned his head and his blue gaze captured hers. Hurt and regret made them the color of sorrow. "I'm paying for that now. I didn't think I would ever meet anyone that would tempt me to put my heart on the line." He stood and walked

toward her. He put his hands on her waist and dropped to his knees. "But you do, Lise. You make me want more."

She hadn't counted on this. Cam looked humbled and full of self-recrimination.

He pressed his face into her belly. "Forgive me, Lise. Forgive me for being a stupid boy who didn't understand the gift he held in his hands."

Lise tilted her head back and let it rest against the porch support. *God!* She wasn't prepared for this assault on her heart. She was raw from her admission and now Cam was begging for forgiveness. His hands kneaded her waist.

Slowly, she raised her hands and let them rest above his head before she tunneled her fingers in his thick golden hair.

"Forgive me," he mumbled into her stomach.

She sighed. Was she going to hang on to all her bitterness? Who would that hurt more? She knew the answer. Forgiveness wasn't something you gave someone else; it was something you gave yourself.

"It's okay, Cam." And incredibly, it was. "It's okay," she repeated.

She felt him shudder against her. He looked up at her. "I'm going to do it right this time."

He let go of her and bolted up the stairs of the porch. He was a whirlwind picking her up and taking her into the cabin. He shut the door with a well-placed kick and then laid her down on the bed. He undressed her slowly, worshipping every inch of skin he revealed with kisses. He shucked off his clothes with more urgency than care.

"You just ripped your shirt."

"Doesn't matter."

His ravenous mouth captured hers. He overwhelmed her with his hungry lips. She could barely breathe but she couldn't bring herself to care about the lack of oxygen. All that she wanted to focus on was Cam.

He used his beard to his best advantage. He rubbed the thick hair over her nipples, around her belly button, on the inside of her thighs. He tortured her until she was squirming wildly on the bed.

"Cam!"

He lifted his head from between her legs.

"Now!"

He slid up her body. "Now?"

"Yes."

He smiled as he filled her.

"Perfect," she purred.

"That's not one of the words," he chided.

"I know."

Cam started a smooth rhythm. "Well, we can add it to the list along with one other word."

"What's that?"

"Unforgettable."



## I LIKE IT LIKE THAT

by

Kate Lang

Rochelle pushed back her goalie mask. The cool air of the arena on her sweaty face was a welcome relief.

"Hey, Chelle, that last save was amazing." Cameron Slade, her best friend since forever, thumped her goalie pads with his hockey stick.

"Thanks." Chelle squeezed her water bottle and doused her face. "Is it everything you wanted for your bachelor celebration?"

"We won, didn't we?" Cam grinned.

Chelle laughed. Tonight's game had been a tough one, but games against their archrivals, the Palliser Falls Pride, always were. She had thrown herself into the action tonight to remind herself who she was. Rochelle Sprigg, tomboy, goalie, hardware store owner. She wasn't beautiful or sophisticated.

Certainly not worldly enough for the likes of Diego Ruiz. They not only inhabited different cities, they inhabited different worlds. Maybe in a sappy romance novel, they would end up together, but this was real life and beautiful, suave men like Diego didn't belong with unexciting, bland women like her.

"You need a ride to the party?"

Cam's bachelor party had been in the works for weeks now, but he wasn't having your typical stripper-infested affair. He and his bride-to-be were having a joint party, with the women starting a little bit earlier.

"Naw, I'm just gonna walk. It's only a couple of blocks."

Cam stopped and looked at her with narrowed eyes.

"You're going, right?"

She sighed. "Yes, I'm going, you worrywart."

Annalise, Dee and the other women were already at the bar. She had been invited as well, but then who would have tended goal? Joe? She shuddered at the thought. There was no way that he would have made that save in the last few minutes of the third. Her leg muscles still ached from the lunge she had made across the crease. No, this is where she belonged. Where she had always belonged. One of the guys.

They shook hands with the other team and then headed off the ice. Rochelle walked with the rest of her team to the dressing rooms, exchanging ribald comments the whole way. At the end of the tunnel, she separated from her teammates and headed for the women's locker room.

"Hello, *querida*."

His voice shot through her like a shot of espresso. Every nerve ending vibrated, her tired body revitalized. "What are you doing here?" she asked.

"I'm here for Cam and Lise's wedding." Diego leaned against the concrete wall looking way too good in dark blue jeans, an ice-blue button down shirt and a black leather jacket. A scarf, the same color as his shirt, was tucked under the collar. The length of soft-looking material reminded her of

the silk scarf he had sent her. She was fascinated by the color and texture of the scarf but hadn't worn it yet. Where would she wear it? To the hardware store? Somehow, she thought it would clash with her overalls. Besides, she really didn't need the reminder of the man who gave it to her. Didn't she have enough insecurity issues as it was? Diego, on the other hand, wore his scarf with confidence. No other man of her acquaintance would wear a scarf for decoration and not have his sexuality called into question, but he carried it off with flair and still looked supremely masculine.

How could a man so incredible be interested in her?

Oh lord! She was still in her hockey gear. The pads covering her body seemed to grow heavier and more obtrusive. She knew she must look a sight with her face flushed and her body obscenely bulky. Sticking her big goalie stick underneath her arm, she used her free hand to take her mask off the top of her head. Awkwardly, she bent her head and fluffed the hair that must be plastered to her skull.

He straightened and walked toward her with smooth, fluid strides. He did everything so gracefully. Her heart beat hard like she was in sudden-death overtime. He strode to her, supremely confident in his skin. How could he always be so sure of himself? And why did that make her feel even worse about herself? Because she wanted him and that scared her. She backed up and lost her footing on her damn skates. He saved her from falling on her ass and pressed her into the wall. Mortification burned hot in her cheeks. "I mean, what are you doing here? At the arena?"

"I came to see you."

She had never felt uncomfortable around anyone in her gear before but being next to Diego made her feel horribly inadequate.

"I missed you, Rochelle." He caressed her cheek.

*God!* The way he said her name combined with his touch made her muscles liquefy. "Please don't." She tilted her head away from his fingers. Damn it, she hated feeling so vulnerable and exposed. Usually when she had her padding on she felt impervious and confident, but standing next to Diego stripped those illusions and made her painfully aware of her shortcomings as a woman.

"You're not getting away from me this time." His lips brushed her cheek. "I'll be waiting for you out front." He disappeared leaving the scent of his cologne lingering in the air. The way he moved, the way he talked, the way he smelled. He tempted her with what she desperately wanted but had no chance of holding on to.

\* \* \* \*

Diego sat on the hood of his car waiting for Chelle to come out of the arena. The entire team had exited, complimented him on his car and left. He had stayed, determined to wait as long as he needed to until she emerged. The doors squealed and Rochelle emerged carrying a huge duffel bag. He strode toward her. "Let me take that."

"I got it." Her fingers tightened around the nylon handles.

"Letting me help you doesn't mean that you're weak." Divesting her of the bag full of her equipment, he turned and walked to his car.

"I've always taken care of myself." She sounded disgruntled.

"I know, *querida*. Maybe it's time you let someone else share the burden with you."

Her silence made him turn around. The naked longing in her eyes punched a hole through his intention of waiting, of being patient. He dropped the heavy bag on the ground, strode to her, and took her face in his hands. Rochelle's eyes widened but he didn't give her the chance to object. He leaned down and melded their lips together. *Dios! So sweet.* She tasted so damn sweet! How could she question this? Or the way they fit together? He swallowed the little whimper of dismay that escaped her. His tongue ran along the seam of her lips begging for entry. "Let me in, damn it. Let me in." Her hands clutched his shoulders and then amazingly, thankfully, she softened and leaned toward him. Did she have any idea of the power she could wield over him, how grateful he was for the morsels she tossed his way? He savored his small victory by kissing her again. Softly, sweetly, thankfully. Her lips yielded a bit more and he slipped his tongue inside the warm cavern of her mouth. Cupping the back of her head, he angled her for his pleasure. The first tentative stroke of her tongue against his almost brought him to his knees. The kiss became as essential as breath. *Dios!* How many nights had he fallen asleep rock-hard and aching for her touch? The memory of her lips had tortured him, distracted him, obsessed him. For six months, their one kiss had sustained him. He vowed he would never wait that long for her again. *Oh, querida, this time we'll finish what we started.*

He hadn't expected to become so enamored with Lise's friend, but when he had met her in Vancouver six months ago, he had been intrigued. She was strong, capable and beautiful, though she didn't see herself as such. As the week had progressed, he saw in her the same loneliness and need he had within himself. For all their differences outwardly, they were a perfect match of the heart. When he caught her looking at him in unguarded moments, the look in her eyes revealed her craving for him. But mixed in with desire was fear. She was unsure and scared to act on her attraction. He had thought that once he was able to corner her and kiss her, she would recognize him as he had her. On her last day in Vancouver, he had managed to get her alone. *Dios!* She had been so shy and sweet. Her lips had trembled under his, just as they did now, but her trepidation drove her from his arms.

The months in between had been filled with planning and wanting. How best to coax the shy beauty from her shell? Though he wanted to follow her immediately, he knew that she was too skittish to be pursued so aggressively.

He had started his seduction slowly, sending her gifts. A beautiful amethyst scarf that would set off her green eyes to perfection, a pair of sexy black heels, a CD of hot Latin music that made him think of getting her naked and moving to the beat with her.

She ripped her lips from his. Deprived of their soft cushion, his lips rained kisses on her jaw and neck. His arms tightened anticipating her escape. "Diego. Stop. I can't."

"Can't, or won't?"

"Does it make a difference?" The fear in her eyes broke his heart. "We've got to meet Cam and Lise at *The Box*."

"I'll take you there."

"No. It's not far. I was just going to walk."

"I'm not letting you walk in the dark."

"I've always done it before."

The thought of her walking alone in the dark angered him. She deserved to be cherished and protected. Loved and adored. Not because she wasn't capable of taking care of herself—she had proven she didn't need anyone—but everyone deserved comfort and companionship.

"Don't argue. I'm driving you."

\* \* \* \*

They pulled up to *The Penalty Box* in Diego's 1966 Alfa Romeo Spider. His car deserved a starlet in the passenger seat, complete with scarf tied around her platinum blonde curls and rhinestone studded sunglasses. Instead she sat beside him, with her short hair, dressed in a sweatshirt and jeans. Why couldn't he get that they didn't belong together?

She got out of the car before he could open the door for her. The hockey bag half sticking out of the trunk looked ridiculous. The bag was as incongruous as a discount tag sticking out the back of a designer sweater. She reached for the duffel.

"Leave it."

"But—"

"Leave it. I'm coming inside with you and I'll drive you home when you're ready."

She pressed her lips together and frowned at him. Arguing with him was proving fruitless. "Fine." She stalked to the entrance only to find that he had beaten her there. He opened the door for her and she stepped inside without saying thank you. The party was in full swing.

"Diego! Rochelle!"

Annalise and Cam motioned them over. Diego guided her through the tables with a hand on her back. The warmth of his palm sank through her sweatshirt and branded her skin. She would love to feel worthy of his touch but she wasn't.

"Thanks for pulling out all the stops for Cam, Chelle."  
Annalise smiled at her.

Rochelle smiled back. She really liked Lise. When the former ballroom dance champion had come back to town a year and a half ago, she would never have thought that Lise and Cam would get together. They were almost as unlikely a couple as she and Diego, but they were genuinely happy and in love. Not that she expected the same to happen to her and Diego. Lightning only struck once.

"You're welcome," she said.

Diego held out a chair for her. She hated when he did things like that. His chivalry left her all flustered. She was used to men treating her like one of the boys. No allowances had ever been made for her femininity. Her father had raised her alone and he hadn't known what to do with his daughter. So he showed his love the best way he could by taking her to hockey games and letting her help him in the hardware store. The cancer that had taken him had been swift and unexpected. She missed him something awful, and still found



herself looking for him in the stands when she played hockey. He never missed a game and after, they would always come to this bar.

*The Box* wasn't known for its sophistication. Sticks, posters and pennants were plastered to the wall as if a hockey team's equipment room had vomited its contents all over the walls. More than once, a stick had fallen and knocked someone for a loop. Phil, the owner, insisted that it added to the ambiance. But to combat the problem of plummeting gear, and possible lawsuits, the tables had been moved away from the walls.

The decorating committee for Cam and Lise's combined bachelor and bachelorette parties, which, thankfully, she had been exempt from, had done their best to spruce the joint up, but the balloons and streamers only added to the absurdity. Which went to prove that you couldn't hide the true nature of a building anymore than you could a person.

Diego pushed a frosty mug of beer in front of her. She had always thought that she would find a man like her father, someone simple who would make allowances for her lack of womanliness. Diego wasn't that man. Far from it. He was urbane and sophisticated and very ... touchy. Even now, he ran his fingers over her knuckles and edged his chair closer, like he was trying to rub away her defenses to see what was underneath. She wished she was immune to him, but she wasn't. He scared her but he also tempted her.

She peeked at him. His fierce Latin focus centered solely on her. The look on his face was the same one he got just before he kissed her. He made her feel like she was the most unique, beautiful woman in the world. The funny thing was

she wanted to believe those things, even though she knew how ridiculous it was. Had she learned nothing when she had gone to Vancouver?

For years, she had dreamed of leaving Kootenay Pass. She had stupidly thought that if she left, she would be someone different. That she could reinvent herself. Dumb. Being in the big city hadn't made her someone else; if anything, it had only confirmed who she was as a person. Rochelle Sprigg, tomboy, hardware store owner, unsophisticated, small town hick.

In the spring, she had accepted an invitation from Cam and Lise to go to the city. She had been brimming with excitement—until she got there. Nothing like a city full of beautiful women to put someone in their place. She had already been feeling insecure when she had met Diego but that hadn't stopped her from being bowled over by his beauty. Inexplicably, he had paid attention to her, treated her like a lady, acted like she was a woman worth his time. Chelle was sure he had been putting on an act. How could he genuinely be interested in her? Especially when the female students in his dance studio looked like freaking cover models. Did ugly girls not dance? If they didn't, it wasn't at Diego's place.

And yet he had paid tons of attention to her. He actually went out of his way to draw her into conversations. She thought she had him all figured out. Friends. He wanted to be friends and she, being the original "one of the guys" kind of girl, kind of just slipped into the routine and she even tried to convince herself that she wasn't disappointed by that. To

make matters worse, or better—hell, she didn't know—she had found that she really liked Diego. He was a great guy. A terrific guy. A guy that she was dangerously attracted to. But she could have dealt with that if he hadn't done the one thing that she hadn't been expecting. He had kissed her.

"Do you need help with that?"

She had been trying to open a bottle of wine in the kitchen. "Yeah. You would think with my penchant for power tools, this," she held up the corkscrew giving her grief, "would be a cinch."

"It's all in the wrist."

"You don't say."

"Let me show you."

He had sidled up behind her, put his arms around her, guided her hands with his. And she, level-headed Rochelle, had gotten dizzy. "Like this ... See? Twist."

With his hands on hers, they twisted that damn cork around and around. With every circle of their wrists, Rochelle had been drawn deeper and deeper into Diego's spell. Really, how could she stand a chance against him? He smelled so good and his voice urged her on, coaxed her. Like the rube she was, Rochelle couldn't help but turn her head, look up at him. She knew she must have looked stupid and stunned but what was she supposed to do? And then, amazingly, Diego had leaned down and kissed the bejeebers out of her. Hot lips, hot tongue. The wine bottle had been forgotten and his hands roamed her body. Over her breasts, down to her waist. Magic moves, Diego had them aplenty. Lifting and turning

her, he perched her ass on the counter. Her legs were lifting to his waist when Cam's voice shocked her out of her stupor.

"Is everything okay in there?"

Cam's voice had broken the spell. That's when she felt the wetness. *Klutz!* She had knocked over the bottle and she was sitting in a puddle of wine. As her face burned with mortification, she had looked up at Diego. He'd smiled at her. Was he laughing at her? Was he amused by her? Or worse, did he pity her?

"God, I'm sorry. I'm so sorry."

And then she had run like a chicken shit.

Now he was here and still looking at her like he wanted to devour her. And she was as frightened as ever.

"Cam, how about a game of three-oh-one?" she asked rather desperately.

\* \* \* \*

Diego watched Rochelle throw her darts.

"Any progress?" Lise asked.

He shook his head. "No. Suggestions?"

"Well, dancing worked for Cam and me." Lise looked at her fiancé. Her face went all soft and dreamy.

What he wouldn't give for Rochelle to look at him the same way.

"In order to dance with her, she needs to be within touching distance." At that moment, Rochelle looked back at him. Need sparked between them. The whole bar seemed to fade and all that existed was the desire coursing between him and Rochelle.

He heard Lise chuckle. "I'll get the music started but after that, you're on your own."

With the first beat of music, Diego walked over to Chelle.

"I don't dance," she said before he could ask her.

"That's what I said to Lise," Cam interjected.

"Not helping." Rochelle sent a killing look his way. Diego ignored the byplay. He held out a hand, daring her to take it.

"You're not going to let him stand like that all night, are you, Chelle?" Cam asked. She aimed another wicked look at the groom. Cam winked at Diego. He kept his hand out hoping that Rochelle would take it and not leave him standing there looking like a fool. She seemed to take forever to put her hand in his but once her fingers touched his, he tightened his grip. Relief coursed through him. No escape.

He pulled her onto the dance floor.

"I really can't dance. Just ask Lise. She tried to teach me. Sometimes I still wake up in a cold sweat from the nightmares."

He spun her into his arms. "Rochelle?"

"Yes?"

"Shut up."

A sultry Latin beat pumped out of the sound system. "This is a cha-cha. Listen to the beat. Slow, slow, slow, quick, quick." He placed her hand on his heart and tapped out the beat on the back of her hand. "Now move with me." He started out with a basic movement. She bent her head and concentrated on their feet. He could tell she had mastered the steps because she started to lead.

"Rochelle—" He stopped moving. "The man always leads."

She jerked and tried to pull out of his arms. "I told you I was a crummy dancer." An embarrassed flush colored her creamy skin.

He held her firmly. "You were doing fine but you need to trust me to lead." She stepped reluctantly back into his arms. "Trust me," he entreated. He counted their steps, "One, two, three, four and one." He started to move. She followed his lead. Her brow furrowed, her body moving woodenly. He brushed a hand over her eyes. "Close them. Listen to the beat. One, two, three, four and one." With every cycle of beats, her body relaxed fractionally. He pulled her closer and kept counting softly to her. The rhythm surrounded them, released their nerves and inhibitions. The fluidity of the beat seeped into their bodies. They moved as one entity.

He bent his head. "A man always leads, *querida*, not because he wants to be in control, but because he wants to show off the prize in his arms."

\* \* \* \*

Her insides melted. If Diego was trying to seduce her, it was working. She let him pull her close. He smelled as sinful as he moved. His scent was sultry and warm, like the beat of the music they were dancing to. His hips swiveled and for the first time, she knew what it was like to really dance. The music invaded her blood and hypnotized her body. She gave up her control and let Diego lead her through the steps.

He threw in a turn and the move didn't faze her. She was the clay and he molded her to his liking. Turning her again,

he pressed himself against her back. Their hips moved in perfect synchronicity.

One, two, three, four and one.

His hand snuck beneath her sweatshirt and rested on her bare abdomen. Slender fingers brushed her skin, encircling her belly button. The music coaxed her to press her backside into his groin. Her action was met with a hiss of breath at her ear and a hand pulling her more firmly into his frame.

One, two, three, four and one.

His hands gripped her hips and guided them into a deep swivel. His erection nestled into her bottom. A pulse deep in her core kept time with the music. The seam of her jeans rubbed against her swollen clit. Every swivel drove her higher. She reached up and entwined her hands behind his neck. He traced the curves of her body while they continued to cha-cha. Her nipples ached, needing release from the bonds of her tight sports bra.

Diego tangled his fingers with hers and turned her quickly, never breaking the beat of the movements. She moaned at the sensation of full frontal contact.

"You can tell the way a man feels about a woman by the way he dances with her." His voice flowed around her drawing her deeper into his sexual spell. "How he holds her. Close." His arms tightened around her. "Like he would die without her in his arms."

His black eyes drew her like the darkest temptation.

"Are you ready to go?"

Her body hummed and her blood pounded to the beat, keeping time, even though the music stopped. Was she ready

to go? When would she ever have another opportunity to be with a man like Diego? Never. He was out of her league, a Latin fantasy who would leave at the end of the weekend. She knew that if she turned him down, she would always regret the decision. She didn't want any more regrets in her life.

"Yes."

\* \* \* \*

Chelle unlocked the door to her apartment. A lone streetlight from the parking lot behind *Sprigg's Hardware* illuminated the wooden staircase that led to the apartment above the store. Her place was nothing like Diego's swank condo on the water in Vancouver.

*No.* She wouldn't focus on their differences right now.

Diego stepped in after her and locked the door. His black eyes smoldered with heat and promise. *My god!* No man had ever looked at her that way. She had faced down power forwards during playoff shoot-outs, huge hockey players with determination glowing from their eyes. They were nothing compared to the way Diego was looking at her now. She didn't have the skills to handle what Diego made her feel and want. She stood in the middle of the living room, wringing her hands together.

Diego advanced on her. He took her face in his hands and lowered his head. With lips soft and hot, he kissed her. Everything inside her turned soft. He coaxed her slowly but firmly, opening her lips with strokes of his tongue. In a sultry seduction, he entered her mouth and then retreated. The



rhythm he set was impossible to resist. Like a dance, he led her expertly, so that her body wasn't her own.

He trailed his hands slowly up and down her body. Never hurried, always worshipful. He took the time to explore, to appreciate. He went slowly, letting the heat and pleasure build between them. Arousal and desire surrounded them like the hypnotic beat of the cha-cha. Slowly and leisurely, he touched her, caressed her, guided her. Their hips met and melded, his erection pressing against her belly. Caught up in the magic, she met the slow bump and grind of his hips with swivels and undulations.

His lips left hers to capture her earlobe. Warm, moist breath tickled the whorl of her ear. Shivers made her grab onto his shoulders.

"Your bedroom, *querida*. Where is it?"

She pointed to a hallway. He picked her up and cradled her in his arms. She hadn't been carried since she had been bowled over in a net a few years ago and needed medical attention for a concussion. This was different. This was romantic. She had always thought that being swept off her feet was a euphemism, but now she knew it was real. Diego held her as if she were precious and fragile. Carrying her over the threshold, he looked fierce and tender all at the same time. Who would have ever thought she would have a man like him in her bedroom? Bending effortlessly, he placed her gently on her bed, but instead of following her down, he left her to turn on the bedside lamp. Rochelle swallowed hard, nerves attacking like a breakaway rush. "Couldn't we just leave that off?"

"No." He took off his jacket and let it fall on a chair in the corner. His nimble fingers started undoing buttons. One by one the nubs released and a smooth expanse of chest was revealed. "I want to see you, *querida*. Every single beautiful bit of you."

Her heart beat so hard, she thought it was going to explode. Making love had never been a priority with her. In fact, she didn't think she had ever really "made love." She'd had sex. The experiences had been more mechanical than anything, like an itch that needed scratching. This wasn't like that at all. Diego was immersing her in ambience, surrounding her in magic. This was seduction and romance. She was so out of her element.

He tugged his shirt from his pants and peeled the garment away from his body. The soft lamplight illuminated his torso. He was sleek and beautiful, muscled and lean. He had no hair on his chest to detract from the perfection of his pectorals. Her mouth watered and then went bone dry. He thumbed open the button on his pants, drew down the zipper, hooked his thumbs in the waistband and let them fall like a puddle around his ankles. He stepped out of them and then moved closer to her. Her palms itched with the need to touch him, to slide her hands down that gorgeous body and hold his cock in her hands.

"Come here, Rochelle."

She kneeled uncertainly on the bed. He grabbed two handfuls of her sweatshirt and drew it up her body. Cool air caressed her belly, her breasts, her shoulders. When she was released from the tangle of thick material, she felt exposed

and nervous. Diego's eyes fired with black heat. His jaw clenched and his nostrils flared. With his fingers, he trailed a path from the small of her neck to the point between her breasts. Flattening his palms against her breasts, he rubbed her nipples encased in tight cotton. She never wore anything but sports bras. The tight cotton weave kept her contained and were practical for work and play. Now she wished that she had worn something sexier ... more feminine.

The pressure on her aching nipples made her arch her back. God, she itched to feel his hands on her body. Taking the initiative, she reached behind her and tugged her sports bra over her head. When the material loosened, her breasts swelled and tingled. Diego skimmed his hands over her shoulders sending the garment to the bed. His eyes trailed over her breasts like black velvet. Her nipples tightened, aching for a touch. He didn't disappoint.

Pinching the nubbins between his thumb and index finger, he pulled a groan from her. His devilish fingers pulled lightly at the peaks making her ache. Not able to stand the torture, she moaned his name.

"*Novia*," he murmured before replacing his fingers with his hot lips. She gasped when he suckled first one nipple and then the other. As with every bit of his lovemaking, he took his time, tasting her thoroughly and completely. Tears burned in the corner of her eyes. No one had ever taken such care with her, treated her like the most precious spun glass.

Diego popped open the button on her jeans. The faded denim offered no resistance as he pulled the material on either side of the fly and the zipper parted. He tugged the

material over her hips and down to her knees. He helped her lie down with a hand cupping the back of her head. Placing her down gently, he kissed his way down her body. Revisiting her nipples, he swirled his tongue around the stiff peaks. She squirmed at the heat building between her legs. Hot, wet kisses coated her stomach. Moving lower, he placed a slow, reverent kiss on her pussy through the plain white cotton of her underwear. A deep pulse sent cream between her thighs, making the panties under his lips turn moist with her musk.

He growled and looked up at her. Shining black eyes, like those of a jungle cat, promised things she wasn't capable of imagining. Pressing his nose between her legs, he drew her scent deep into his lungs. Her inner walls spasmed at the raw sexuality of the sight. He nibbled his way down her thighs and pulled the jeans and socks from her limbs. He rose above her, surveying her like a conquest. She didn't resist when he hooked his fingers in her panties and drew them off her body. Spreading her legs, he licked his lips. The hunger in his eyes made her nervous. She covered herself with her hands.

"Don't hide yourself from me, *querida*." Settling his body between her legs, he kissed the fingers covering her femininity. His tongue stole through her digits and caressed the lips of her pussy. Every swipe sent a spear of hot need to her core. He continued his leisurely nibbling, leading her, tempting her with the promise of his talented tongue. His licks convinced her to remove her hands and she grabbed the covers instead, fisting them fiercely as his mouth worked her into a lather. The hot lick of his tongue had her thighs and stomach quivering with want. God, she was going to combust,

just disintegrate right here on her covers. She lifted her hips to meet his marauding tongue. She forgot about her shyness and let the spell Diego cast dictate her actions.

His wicked mouth latched onto her clit. She wasn't expecting the zing of heat that consumed her. She gasped and tremors shook her body. He drew that little bundle of nerves into the hot cavern of his mouth, suckling gently, making her head thrash from the supreme, thrilling, agonizing pleasure. When she was sure she was going to die, he stopped. She cried at the loss of his lips.

"I need to be in you, Rochelle. To feel you come apart when I'm deep inside you."

His words were enough to have her pussy clenching in anticipation. All she could do was nod. "Hurry," she urged. He kneeled and peeled down his tight boxers. Freed from its confines, his erection sprang free. He was too gorgeous to resist. Rochelle sat up and let her fingers trail over his cock, spreading the pre-cum glistening on the head around the purple crown. Diego hissed and flexed his hips. He was magnificent. Strong, proud, confident and masculine.

She gave herself over to the moment. Lying back down, she spread her legs invitingly. She thrilled at the heat that ignited in his eyes. Power. That's what she felt. Feminine power. She reveled in the feeling, loved the heady sensation of being able to tempt and entice a man like Diego.

"Don't move." He kept his eyes on her the entire time he left the bed, rooted around in the pocket of his jacket and pulled out a box of condoms. He tore the box open urgently, ripped open a foil packet and rolled a condom over his

erection. He stalked toward the bed and positioned himself at her entrance. He eased himself inside her, filling her, completing her.

*"Mi corazon es tuyo."*

His smooth Latin words and moves were so different from anything she had ever experienced. Wrapping her legs around his hips, she drew him deeper into her body. His cock reached deep inside her stretching all her boundaries. Slowly and easily, Diego established a masterful rhythm. Unlike her other sexual experiences, he didn't rush toward the final goal. Instead, he drew out every movement, savored every plunge and retreat, heightening their pleasure.

He looked deeply into her eyes and let her see his need and pleasure. This was no casual encounter or convenient fucking. Every ounce of his concentration focused on her. She felt like the center of his world. A niggling fear ate away at the edge of her desire. *Don't think, don't think ... just feel.* Consequences would arise whether she wanted them to or not. Now she was going to pour herself into making love to Diego. She was going to feel like a woman, even if it only lasted for tonight.

\* \* \* \*

Diego thrust into Rochelle's beautiful body. He thanked God for the stupidity of other men. How could they not see her for the desirable, gorgeous woman she was? Her legs tightened around his waist and she rose to meet his next thrust. *Dios!* She was so sweet, so incredibly soft and strong. He could spend the rest of his natural life exploring her lithe

body and never grow tired. She was an amazing mix of opposites. Shy and confident, athletic and soft, strong and weak. He was like her in so many ways. Misunderstood, searching and lonely.

He held her still for his kiss, poured his heart into the soul-melding meeting of lips. Her slim arms wrapped around his neck and her mouth opened to his assault. She drew him in and enchanted him. Pistoning his hips faster, he could feel his orgasm building, bearing down on him. Reaching between their bodies, he rubbed Rochelle's clit, wanting her to come as hard as he was going to. She gasped her pleasure and he swallowed the sound.

Her hips started bucking and her pussy clamped down on his cock. Diego threw his head back and buried himself deeply in her body.

"*Dios!*" He came swiftly and the power of his orgasm took away his breath. His heart pounded so hard, he was sure that it would explode from his chest. Never had he felt so overcome with physical pleasure and emotional release. The power of love washed over him and he gathered Rochelle close. He pressed a kiss to her hair. "You're everything I could have hoped for and more," he told her.

She stiffened in his arms and his heart sank. Surely she wasn't going to deny what had just happened between them. "Please don't say things that aren't true."

Anger washed over him, obliterating the momentary sense of belonging and peace that had filled him. "Don't deny what we are to each other, Rochelle. I won't have it."

"What are we to each other, Diego? We hardly know each other."

"Damn it, that's not true. My heart recognized yours the moment I met you."

"Stuff like that doesn't happen." She tried to pull out of his arms.

"Yes, it does. You know it does." He saw fear fill her eyes. "You told me about your father. How much he loved your mother from the moment they met." She turned her head to the side. He would have none of that. Gently but firmly, he forced her to look at him. He cradled her face between his hands. "It was the same with my parents. Opposites drawn together. Two halves making a whole."

Tears filled her eyes, making them shine like wet emeralds. "You're right. He did love her, always loved her. I don't remember her but I know that her death took a part of him with her. There was always a piece of him missing, Diego. And though I tried, I could never fill that void."

"*Querida*—"

"No, please don't say anything. Just give me tonight, okay? No promises, no tomorrow, just you and me tonight."

He wanted to push her. Wanted to convince her that she would always be enough for him but the pleading in her eyes stopped him. "Alright." He kissed her softly. "Alright. Just tonight."

He was hard again. Making quick work of discarding one condom for another, he returned to the bed and rolled to his back. He would let Rochelle control the pace and take what she needed from him. Maybe in doing so, she would see that



there was nothing to fear. Rochelle straddled him, positioning his rigid length at the apex of her thighs. Sinking onto him slowly, she absorbed him into her body making them one. Rising above him, she was magnificent. She pleased herself and in doing so, gave him more satisfaction than he dreamed possible. *And she was afraid she wasn't enough?* She was everything he wanted and more. If only he could convince her of the same.

\* \* \* \*

Cam and Lise's wedding day dawned clear and bright. Rochelle was thankful for the hectic pace of the day hoping all the activity would act as a distraction. At least that was her hope, but she found that her mind wandered back, with alarming frequency, to Diego and the night they had shared. She had awakened in his arms, all snug and warm, feeling satisfied and wanted and ... *enough*. For the first time, she had felt like she had been enough, that she hadn't been found wanting. But how could that be? She was still the small town girl and Diego was still the urbane city slicker. They didn't belong together. Couldn't belong together.

Could they?

"So you think I look okay?"

She turned to face Cam. He was shifting nervously on his feet. His usual getup of jeans and t-shirt had been replaced by a tux. Rochelle blinked—he had even shaved off his beard. Cameron had grown his full facial hair at seventeen and she had never seen his face without it since.

"You look ... different."

"Different good? Different bad?"

Rochelle reached out a hand and felt his smooth jaw. "I forgot what your face looked like without this. Why'd you shave it off?"

"I don't know. I started trimming the beard and it just got shorter and shorter. Finally, I decided to shave the thing off. You think Lise will like it?"

"I think you could show up wearing a lumberjack outfit and she wouldn't care. She loves you despite your packaging."

Cam grinned. "You're right." Then his face grew serious. "You okay, Rochelle?"

She pasted a smile on her face. "Of course, I'm okay. Why wouldn't I be?"

"You've seemed sort of distracted today."

"It's nothing. Just got something on my mind."

"Diego?"

She swallowed and turned to look out the window. The wedding guests were starting to arrive. The parking lot of the church was filling and she heard people milling about as they entered the pews on the other side of the door. She tugged on the sleeves of her jacket. "Yeah, Diego. He makes me want to be something I'm not sure I can be."

Cam's hands came down on her shoulders. "What do you want to be?"

"A woman."

Cam turned her. "Rochelle, you've always been a woman and a beautiful one at that."

"You're crazy." His words made her uncomfortable. "I've always been one of the guys."

"No, you've always acted like one of the guys—  
underneath, there has always been a woman."

She was silent for a moment before voicing her innermost fear. "What if that woman isn't enough, Cam?"

"You know, I don't think you've given Diego enough credit."

"What do you mean?"

"He doesn't strike me as someone who cares about the packaging either." He walked toward the door and rested a hand on the doorknob. "The only one here who seems to care about it is you."

\* \* \* \*

Cam's words echoed in her head throughout the entire wedding ceremony. She handed Cam the rings and watched as her best friend married the woman he loved. She had felt Diego's gaze all during the ceremony. Finally she looked at him, and couldn't deny the emotion that shone from the obsidian depths.

All this time when she had been acting like one of the guys, she had been camouflaging herself. Hiding away the woman underneath. The woman who was scared and shy and insecure. When she was one of the guys, she could pretend she was strong and brave and happy. Be the son her father never had and forget about trying to be the girl she didn't know how to be. And yet somehow, despite all her denial, she had become a woman. Had always been a woman, with a woman's needs, and wants, and desires. All this time she thought she had fooled everyone but she had only been

kidding herself. Cam had seen through her guise and so had Diego. Yet they were both here, patient and accepting of all that she was. Wasn't it time she accepted herself?

When the ceremony ended, she pulled Cam and Lise aside. Like the incredible friends they were, they understood why she wouldn't be at the reception. Strengthened by their support, she went home, walked into her bedroom and headed unerringly to her closet. From the top shelf, she grabbed some boxes and decided to embrace her other half.

\* \* \* \*

She waited for Diego to show up. Finally she heard an engine outside and feet pounding up the staircase to her apartment.

"Rochelle?" His worried voice called out to her.

She sat still while her heart pounded hard. The door to her apartment opened and he stepped in. Trying to appear nonchalant, she leaned back against the cushions of the sofa and crossed her legs. She fiddled with the ends of the amethyst scarf and made sure that all her important bits were covered. When his black eyes alighted on her, they grew wide with surprise and then narrowed with heat.

The only sound that filled the space between them was the music from the stereo system. A slow, sexy beat flowed out of the speakers, the music he had bought for her—the music that reminded her of him, captivating and seductive.

She flicked the ends of the scarf. "I wasn't sure how to wear this. I tried tying it; I tried tucking it underneath the collar of my jacket, like you wore yours, but it just didn't look

right. I thought maybe I would go with the less is more theory."

She spread the ends apart to allow a small glimpse of nipple. Diego leaned against the door to close it and then purposefully turned the lock.

"I think you've got a natural gift for fashion, *querida*."

She held out a foot and circled her ankle, showing off the spiky heel. "But I think the shoes really make the outfit. Don't you?"

Her slim leg rose higher and Diego moved closer. "Definitely."

"I'd give you a little fashion show, but I can't seem to walk in the damn things. I guess I'll have to work on that."

He was right in front of her now. Kneeling down, he said, "You don't have to work on anything, *novia*. You're perfect just the way you are."

"No, I'm not."

His face grew fierce. To soothe him, she spread her legs and looped the scarf around his neck, using the length to pull him close. "But I don't have to be perfect." She leaned forward and kissed him. "I just have to be perfect for you."

"You are, *querida*. You are. *Mi corazon es tuyo*."

"What does that mean?"

"My heart is yours."

And he went on to show her how two imperfect halves could come together to form a perfect whole.

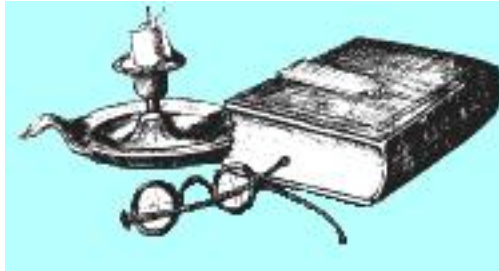
*ABOUT THE AUTHOR*

Kate Lang knew she was going to be a writer the day she had to read a descriptive passage in English class. After finishing her short scene, Tony, the quarterback proclaimed, "Are you going to be some sort of romance writer, or what?" Well, let's just say it's romance AND "what." Kate loves to write about ordinary women who experience extraordinary romance.

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