

ELLORA'S CAVE PRESENTS

ELLORA'S CAVE
Quickies
Naughty Nuptials

Best Man

Shelley Munro

An Ellora's Cave Romantica Publication



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Best Man

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BEST MAN

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All Blacks: New Zealand Rugby Football Union (Incorporated), The

Chapter One

"You have the photos and info I asked for?"

Grayson Lynford paused in the shadows cast by the droopy green strands of a rimu tree. Gut instinct told him to duck beneath the trailing foliage and hide. Something about the voice, the furtive and sly tone, shot apprehension up Grayson's spine. The mumbled reply gave no clue as to the identity. He couldn't even tell the speaker's gender, but it had to be someone invited to the wedding, a guest invited to stay overnight. He frowned in concentration. Security was damned tight for the nuptials of his friend All Black Nolan Dion to Cassie, society babe and daughter of New Zealand entrepreneur Maxwell Pendergrast. No one entered the Pendergrasts' secluded country estate near Clevedon in South Auckland where the wedding would take place without a formal invitation. The entire bridal party had already arrived for tomorrow's wedding along with quite a few of the guests.

"Yes. What about the money?"

A second voice and once again unrecognizable.

"More photos? Do you have them? I'll take what I can get."

Grayson waited in the secluded spot while they concluded business and wondered how to handle the situation. Shots of Nolan and Cassie together were worth good money and in high demand by the tabloids. He cursed under his breath when he realized he couldn't get any closer without discovery. Bloody hell. Both Nolan and Cassie hated the way the press chased them. Sure there were the normal photos that couldn't be avoided but nothing scandalous had appeared in the papers to date. Nolan and Cassie wanted to keep it that way, and Grayson could hardly blame them. He had his own secrets he wouldn't like broadcast to all and sundry.

A couple of minutes later a man emerged from behind the bushes not far from where Grayson loitered. When he saw the man's face, acute disappointment seared his gut. Jesse Peters. Nolan's other groomsman and the man Grayson had a huge crush on. Not the done thing for a big, bad rugby forward to fall for a teammate so the attraction remained hidden, a fascination Grayson tried to shove to the back of his mind and ignore. He didn't know the man really well because Grayson had transferred to the Auckland rugby club they all played for, though Nolan also played for the All Blacks, only two months ago. Jesse and Nolan had gone to school together and were best friends while he'd met Nolan at Mt. Maunganui where both their families used to spend the summer holidays. Their common love of swimming, surfing and the water had meant they'd both ended up at the surf club as trainee life guards. Grayson shook his head, doubtful Jesse would betray Nolan this way. The man had integrity, which was part of the attraction. Nah, he couldn't believe it despite the circumstantial evidence. Hell, what the fuck should he do? He didn't want to spoil Nolan's big day by telling him his best friend intended to sell him out. As he sifted through his limited options, a woman came into view.

Serena Pendergrast, Cassie's younger sister.

Well, hell. Now he had two suspects. His eyes narrowed while he watched her hurry past. Perhaps if he shook the bushes he'd find more candidates for the crime. He continued to watch the petite woman. She followed Jesse with a purposeful stride, running a few steps to catch up. Serena called out and Grayson caught Jesse's scowl when he turned to speak to her. Frostiness dripped from him and echoed in his taut stance. He didn't appear happy to see her. Guilt maybe? Grayson decided his best option was to keep a close eye on both Serena and Jesse for the rest of the day and before the ceremony took place at four tomorrow afternoon. He and Jesse were sharing a guest bungalow. At least now he'd have something else to ponder instead of his wayward cock and the way it jolted to life every time he went near Jesse.

Grayson waited until Jesse and Serena walked from sight. Two more men walked past without noticing him and Grayson took note of their faces for future reference. He'd watch for them at dinner and find out who they were. Until he learned the truth, everyone in the vicinity remained on his list of suspects. Nolan was not only a good friend but he knew his secret, having met Grayson's ex-partner when they'd met up at Mt. Maunganui the previous year. The man hadn't judged him and had remained a true friend, treating him no differently than before. Grayson intended to return the loyalty and watch his friend's back.

* * * * *

Jesse Peters scowled at Serena Pendergrast when she hailed him. The bloody woman was a menace, always touching and pushing for more than he wanted to give. He'd gone out with her once—a casual date to the movies. A mistake he lived to regret.

"What do you want?" he asked, his voice containing a growl that would have warned anyone else off. Not Serena. The petite blonde sashayed straight up to him and attempted to kiss him. Jesse grasped her upper arms firmly and pushed her away, holding her at arm's length when she tried to move closer. "I'm not interested, Serena. Go test your wiles out on someone else."

"I'm very good in bed. I could make you very happy." She swiped her tongue over her full bottom lip until it gleamed with shiny moisture.

Hell, she obviously believed in direct marketing. He wished she'd do her advertising elsewhere. "There's someone else, Serena," Jesse snapped. "I've told you before."

"Who? I haven't seen you with another woman."

Because he preferred men. "I like my privacy."

Serena's brown eyes narrowed. "She must be married."

Jesse shrugged. "I've got to go." He released her and walked away without another word. The woman was a problem he didn't need, especially this weekend. Bad enough

he had to spend time with his teammate Grayson Lynford but he had to share a room with him as well. He'd gone for a walk, hoping the fresh air would help him settle. It hadn't. Grayson still figured large in his fantasies, the other man constantly on his mind. A few days ago he'd woken up from a spectacular dream, his cock engorged and aching for release, Grayson's name on his lips. The dream had been so real he'd felt the other man's mouth wrapped around his cock, felt the silkiness of his dark brown hair as he'd gripped the man's head. What would happen if he gave himself away this weekend? Grayson was going out with Cindy Malcolm or at least he had been. Grayson had loads of girlfriends. Difficult to keep up with the latest play when it came to women and Grayson. Somehow he remained friends with all of them. Jesse dragged a hand through his hair and cursed. Hell, he needed a drink. He headed for the house. Maybe he could entice Nolan into a game of pool and a few beers—anything to stop thoughts of Grayson and ideas of what he wanted to do to the sexy male.

He found Nolan skulking at the bottom of the stairs. "What's up?"

"Me," Nolan said dryly. "Cassie should be here soon. We're gonna snatch a few hours together before her mother thinks up another wedding chore for us."

"Sex, huh? Good luck on that. I'm dodging Serena," Jesse said.

"Cassie told her to stop hounding you."

"She didn't listen. Hell, my butt is blue from the pinches she snuck in at the rehearsal dinner last night."

Nolan sniggered. "I thought a winger could sprint. You should have been able to outrun her. She's only a wee bit of a thing."

"Yeah, well, on the rugby field I can let go and tackle or shove the opposition out of the way. I didn't think that would go down well at the rehearsal dinner."

"I owe you, mate." Nolan grinned without an ounce of sympathy.

"Damn straight. I'm going to the billiard room for a few beers. Gonna barricade myself in for a few hours of peace. Have fun with Cassie."

"Intend to. Hell, tomorrow night can't come quick enough. I might respect her parents' wishes about separate rooms but it doesn't mean I have to like it." Nolan clapped him over the back and grinned suddenly. "Cass. Ready to go?"

The intimate timbre of his voice brought forth envy in Jesse. It wasn't because of Cassie. It was the whole relationship deal, having another person to share the highs and commiserate on the downs of life. Someone to fill the cracks of loneliness.

"See ya later," he said, and with a wave at Cassie, Jesse headed for the billiard room. Unfortunately several of the other men had sought refuge and the table was in use. Jesse grabbed a beer and flopped into a leather easy chair at the far end of the masculine room. Might as well brood in company.

One beer led to another. He actually played a couple of games but most of the time kicked back and brooded, nursing one frosty can after another. Two hours later he lurched from the billiard room to head for the guest bungalows out the back of the main house. The pungent scent from the sweet peas that crawled over wooden frames caught in the back of his throat. It made him cough and laugh at the same time. Damn. Too many beers. Hell, Cass would kill him if he turned up for the wedding with a hangover. Better go and sleep it off.

Jesse staggered down the cobblestone path. He'd eat in the bungalow instead of joining the others at the casual buffet starting in an hour in the ballroom. The door opened at his touch and he stumbled inside. The wind caught the door, slamming it shut before he'd crossed the small lounge-cum-kitchenette to the separate bedroom. A drunken chuckle escaped. It was like a confirmation he'd drunk too much. Inside the bedroom, Jesse kicked off his sandals, whipped his T-shirt over his head and unfastened his jeans, balancing awkwardly like a one-legged stilt trying to remove them. His briefs came down with his jeans but he left them to flop naked onto one of the two beds in the room. His chest moved in a bellow of laughter. Hell, he'd drunk more than he'd realized but didn't give a fuck. Tomorrow might be a different story—if a hangover emerged. Jesse flopped on his back, the scent of the pillow making him realize

he'd dropped onto Grayson's bed instead of his own. Damn. He was too comfortable to move. Jesse had no idea how he'd cope during the next couple of nights. Each night this week had been full of dreams of Grayson. Hell, he'd even started to daydream about the sexy man—his dark hair and bright brown eyes, broad shoulders and muscular build and tight butt. Pure poetry when he ran down the rugby field with the ball clutched in his hands.

Unbidden his hands dropped to stroke his erection. It felt damned good so he repeated the move and a shiver of pleasure shot through him at each leisurely pull from base to tip. Closing his eyes, he increased the friction, squeezed his cock tightly and groaned when visions of Grayson and his hot bod flickered through his mind. His hips strained upward, his fisted hand gliding easily now that pre-cum spilled from his slit. He imagined the lap of Grayson's tongue and his sexy mouth engulfing the swollen head of his cock. He imagined warm, wet suction. Jesse shivered while heat and pressure rampaged through him.

"Is this a private party or can anyone join?"

Jesse lifted weighted eyes. Fire and chills warred within his body while shock held him still. "Grayson?"

"Yep."

Jesse closed his eyes again since he found it so difficult to keep them open, and after thinking about it, decided his dream was simply very realistic. The man wasn't really here. Grayson, if he had any brains, would spend time with one of his many girlfriends. There was bound to be one here already. He palmed his cock, sighing at the buzz, the sparks of hot sensation that danced across his skin.

A hoarsely voiced curse gave him pause. Seconds later, the mattress depressed at his side.

"Grayson?" Jesse stared through blurry eyes, open the merest fraction.

"Yeah, it's me. I told you before."

A hand drifted across his belly, the touch searing to his befuddled senses. He gasped and attempted to focus on Grayson's swarthy face. "What are ya doing?"

"Probably making the worst mistake of my life," Grayson muttered.

As Jesse watched, he stood and strode from the bedroom. Jesse heard the distinct snick of a lock then Grayson returned. The man stripped while he gawked. Yeah, he'd seen Grayson in the buff before in the changing rooms but after one quick glimpse—enough to sear his retinas for life—he'd kept his eyes front and out of trouble. Some men were a bit touchy when it came to other males ogling them. Grayson looked solid, his muscles sculpted from hours of training. A tattoo, Maori inspired, curled around his right biceps. Jesse's gaze drifted downward, noting his teammate had kept in shape despite the Christmas break. Before he could take in every detail, Grayson moved. He sank onto the bed beside Jesse and stretched full out. Their bodies barely touched but the charge of sparks frayed every one of Jesse's nerve endings. His loud groan filled the air, throbbing between them.

"Yeah," Grayson murmured. "My feelings exactly."

Before Jesse had a chance to reply, Grayson rolled and loomed over him. His face held not a trace of his normal good humor. Instead dark brows furrowed together in a frown, his face strong and rigid with tension. Jesse scowled, confused about what was happening here. Hell, perhaps he'd killed off a few brain cells with the alcohol he'd just consumed. Then Grayson ducked his head and kissed him, shoving aside Jesse's confusion and replacing it with raw lust. Lips. Fuck, the man's lips were so soft, kissing him slowly with practiced confidence. The man knew how to kiss. He sucked at Jesse's lips, tasted them. Nipped. With a soft moan of surrender, Jesse opened his mouth to let Grayson do as he willed. Their tongues danced together in mutual exploration. Hell, if this were a dream, he didn't want to wake. Grayson's chest brushed his. Then the man moved again and their cocks brushed together with exquisite friction. Jesse gripped Grayson's broad shoulders and held on tight. He didn't care about dreams, mistakes or

anything in between because the graze of the man's muscular body against his own frayed what little self-protection he had left. Magic. Pure magic.

Grayson pulled out of the kiss and Jesse thought his brown eyes held a trace of concern, the same worry at the back of his mind. But it disappeared in an instant, either that or it was a trick of the light. Grayson moved down the bed, bent his head and took Jesse's engorged ejection deep into his mouth. Jesse's heart drummed against his ribs, racing out of control while his stomach did a sympathetic flip. He gripped the quilt cover with his hands in an attempt at controlling the pleas cramming his throat. Much better than he'd imagined. So much better. Grayson licked across the flared head of his cock and cleaned off the drops of pre-cum.

"Grayson," Jesse whispered. The alcohol-induced haze had cleared the moment the other man had taken Jesse's cock into his mouth. Giving in to temptation, he cupped Grayson's head, savoring the slide of the man's silky strands of hair. Grayson sucked and laved, drawing cries of pleasure, driving him higher and higher. Talent, Jesse thought hazily. The man had it by the bucketloads. On the rugby field and it seemed in the bedroom.

Grayson's head bobbed and Jesse couldn't help the automatic lift of his hips. He rocked his pelvis forward. One moment he felt pleasure and the next, the electric surge of orgasm raced up his spine. Jesse tensed and bit his bottom lip to stem the moan of pleasure. He shot into Grayson's mouth with an explosive force that had never felt so good. Gradually he drifted back. The first thing he saw on opening his eyes was Grayson's dark brown eyes studying him closely, his face expressionless. Jesse swallowed when Grayson gave his deflated cock another lick and let it slip from his mouth. They stared at each other, and for once Jesse couldn't think what to say. He swallowed for a second time and cleared his throat for good measure.

"Ah, guess that wasn't a dream, huh?"

Grayson reminded him of a coiled spring. "No."

"I...ah..." Shit, Jesse didn't know what to say or how to get past the discomfort. It wasn't disgust he felt toward the man, that was for sure, not when he felt this good, had wanted Grayson for so long. No, the emotion covered the gamut from shock to exhilaration. Surprise.

"You're not gonna hit me?" Grayson asked.

"Hit you?" The upward rise of his teammate's dark brows jerked Jesse back from flabbergasted territory. "Why the fuck would I hit you?"

"Most men don't enjoy having their dick sucked by another man," Grayson said carefully.

Jesse moved and noticed the way the big man flinched. "I'm not gonna hit you. I'm surprised is all. I didn't know...ah...I had no idea..." He trailed off, words failing him. Hell, this was awkward. And it didn't bloody help with his cock busily exerting an opinion about a repeat performance.

"That I'm gay?"

"Gay?"

"Fuck, stop with the bloody parrot stuff," Grayson snapped. "Yeah, I'm gay. It's not something I shout about. Playing rugby is my life and I don't want to make my teammates uncomfortable."

Jesse nodded, the beginnings of a grin tugging at the corners of his mouth. Suddenly his head wasn't so befuddled with alcohol, his mind crystal clear with what he needed to do. "That's pretty much why I don't broadcast my sexual preferences."

Grayson went so still, Jesse wondered if he were still breathing. "You're gay?"

"Yeah. Since I was a teenager, although I keep it quiet," Jesse said, his smile broad with a combination of relief and excitement. "Great. Since we're both on the same page, wanna fool around some more?"

Chapter Two

Grayson's heart thumped so fast he worried it might pound from his chest. Fuck, he'd really done it this time. He'd admitted he was gay then gone one better and proved it by sucking cock. His teammate didn't seem to be taking it too badly. He cast the man a cautious look. Dark brown, almost black hair curled close to his scalp while sexy blue eyes twinkled back at him. Jesse stood slightly taller than him and appeared much prettier with muscular good looks that made the women look twice. Grayson knew because he'd watched them cast flirtatious looks at his teammate. Now he knew why the sexy man didn't return the attention. Grayson had assumed Jesse had a girlfriend he didn't talk about or else he'd been hurt and wasn't looking. He'd asked Nolan but his friend had merely shrugged with unconcern.

"Grayson? You okay?"

Hell no! "Surprised. Stunned."

"Hard," Jesse said with a chuckle and a glance at his groin.

Grayson shifted a fraction to cover his erection. Difficult when his dick jerked under Jesse's attention. Finally Grayson gave up and grinned back, albeit a little hesitantly. "Yeah, that too." Hell, he didn't think he'd ever felt so unsure. He'd had discreet relationships with other men but Jesse was the first he'd ached for. Despite his attraction, Grayson hadn't let himself think about more than a casual friendship. *Until now*. What if his actions fucked everything up? What if loving Jesse had been a big mistake? Too late to take back his impulsive actions now.

Jesse pushed up to sit on the edge of the bed beside him. He leaned close and kissed him on the lips. Shock held Grayson impassive. The kiss remained gentle and careful with Jesse treading easy, as if he were frightened he'd scare him.

When they pulled apart long minutes later, they both breathed hard.

"Are you sure this is a good idea?"

Jesse smiled. "It's true I've been drinking but the first time I saw you I wanted you." His grin faded, the echo in his blue eyes fading to serious. "The feeling hasn't gone away. I can't look at you without getting a hard-on."

Grayson scrutinized his teammate's face, searching for truth. He didn't take things at face value, not anymore. Sean, his very first lover, had cured him of blind trust, but with Jesse he badly wanted to take a chance. When he'd come into the bedroom, he hadn't thought, he'd merely reacted. If things went wrong between them, it might screw up his chances of making the All Blacks. He knew Jesse had the same dream. A relationship between them might wreck both their chances.

"Gray, I would never do anything to embarrass you or to hurt your rugby career. I know how much representing New Zealand means to you because I want the same thing." Jesse rubbed his shoulder in a gesture of comfort. "I'm not experimenting with the lifestyle. I know what I want." He turned his blue eyes on Grayson and they blazed with sincerity. "I'm not pretending it will be easy if things went wrong between us, but we both want the same thing. I'd like to think we could work it out."

Grayson snorted suddenly. "You know if one of us were a female, we wouldn't discuss this. We'd already be fucking."

"True. You prefer to top or bottom? I don't mind." Jesse stood and waggled his ass. "I'm easy."

Decision time. Grayson scanned Jesse's muscular torso, his gaze dropping to the obvious thick erection between his friend's legs. Hell, he didn't think he could turn his back and walk away. Not now that he knew his secret and definitely not since he'd touched the other man. Grayson stood and gave in to the impulse to touch, smoothing his hand down one biceps. "I'll top."

"Damn." Emotion shone in Jesse's eyes. He pulled away and stooped to rifle through his bag. When he stood, he slapped a bottle of lube and several condoms on the

wooden dresser between the two beds in the room. That done, he sauntered over to Grayson and stepped straight into his arms.

The honesty in his teammate humbled Grayson. And in truth, he didn't want to talk, to think anymore. He wanted to fuck.

Their mouths slammed together. Grayson jerked away with a curse and fingered his bottom lip.

Jesse laughed. "I thought forwards were big and tough. Don't be such a pansy. Come here and let me kiss it better."

Grayson put on a grouchy face and stepped close again. Inside, he smiled, feeling happiness and a sense of freedom he hadn't experienced for ages. This time their kiss was smoother. Their lips slid together, bodies brushed, and he smelled the fresh scent of Jesse's citrus aftershave. He grasped Jesse's shoulders and let his hands drift over the other man's back before they came to rest on his tight butt. Grayson squeezed the firm flesh, hardly daring to believe he could touch Jesse in such a personal manner without the other man punching him out for taking liberties.

"On the bed," he ordered.

Jesse grinned and obeyed, flopping onto the navy blue covers. Grayson loved the grin and realized the other man hadn't smiled or joked around much lately. Until now. The knowledge gave him confidence and reinforced his decision to go ahead. His gut told him the future wouldn't be easy but Jesse would make it fun.

"How do you want to do this?"

"Face-to-face and fast," Jesse said without hesitation. "I'm horny as hell."

Grayson eyed Jesse's long, thick cock and smirked. "No kidding?" He grabbed a condom and the lube then dropped onto the bed, spread Jesse's legs and moved between them. "Can't have that." A fine sheen of sweat coated his friend's chest and when he pressed a kiss to his abs, the man's muscles flexed and rippled. "Fast, huh?" Grayson double-checked with Jesse, heart pounding. God, he wanted fast too. He hadn't had sex with another man for ages. Hadn't found one he wanted to take the risk

with until today. He grabbed a foil packet and ripped it open, rolling the latex onto his cock with quick, deft moves. Grayson paused to drop a kiss on the inside of Jesse's thigh and took a sly nip when he noticed Jesse's eyes had closed. "Don't go to sleep, mate."

"Well hurry up," Jesse snapped.

"I don't want to hurt you."

"You won't. Alcohol relaxes me."

Grayson eyed the other man's dick. "You don't look relaxed to me."

Jesse opened his eyes to glare. "Gray, I'm dying here. Stop talking. I want you now." He raised his knees, silently offering easy access.

Deciding to take him at his word, Grayson picked up the bottle of lube and squeezed a dollop onto his fingers. The gel was cool and an evil grin formed. This would shut Jesse up for a while. He smeared the gel over his entrance, surprising a yelp out of the other man. "Don't be a baby," he said with more than a trace of smugness. "I thought even pretty-boy wingers were tougher than that."

"Cold," Jesse muttered.

"Hmmm." Grayson brushed his fingers back and forth across the puckered rosette. He leaned over and pressed kisses to his taut belly, his inner thigh and everywhere else he could reach before pushing a finger inside Jesse. His lover groaned, his hips strained upward.

"More, dammit, Gray. Put your cock inside me now."

Grayson figured Jesse knew what he could take. Who was he to argue? He spread a little lube along his length, repositioned himself and lined up his cock, determined to take it slow initially, despite Jesse's demands. He wasn't a small man and didn't think a lot of pain contributed to great sex. He pushed inside, clenching his jaw at the heat, the tight squeeze of muscles.

"Gray," Jesse whispered, totally at ease. "That feels great."

Grayson withdrew a fraction and thrust a little harder, past the ring of resistant muscle. One more withdrawal, another thrust and he glided in to the root, the tight, hot feel of Jesse, the way his tight body clutched at his cock almost ripped away the last vestiges of his control. "You okay?"

"Hell yeah," Jesse said with a lazy grin.

One glance told him Jesse spoke the truth. He withdrew and set up a faster pace, rocking his pelvis forward, varying the angle to really get his lover going. Grayson gasped at the spear of pleasure arcing through him. He wasn't going to last long at this rate. Jesse gripped his shoulders, muscles flexing when they moved together. The man's straining cock brushed his flat stomach, the flared head gleaming with pre-cum. Grayson grasped it with one hand and squeezed tightly while continuing to thrust. He writhed, his balls high and tight against his body while he basked in the velvet heat of his lover. His strokes became hard and jerky as need spiraled out of control. One thrust came hard on the heels of the other. Jesse let out a shout, his cock jerking beneath Grayson's hand, and an instant later, his own orgasm thundered through him, strong and powerful. They came down slowly, sweaty bodies plastered together, arms wrapped around each other.

Finally, Jesse pushed at his chest. "Dammit, Gray. You weigh a ton."

Grayson groaned but withdrew from his lover's body. He sat up to deal with the condom before standing to grab a damp cloth so they could both clean up. He wandered back from the en suite and tossed the flannel at a frowning Jesse. He froze when trepidation hit. Damn, the sex had been incredible. He wanted another go-round. Surely Jesse felt the same? "Regrets?"

"Yeah." His teammate glared at him and fear and anxiety churned Grayson's stomach until it felt like a concrete mixer set on high speed. Even pre-game nerves weren't this bad. "I wish we'd done this sooner," Jesse said.

The fear melted away and he grinned at Jesse's aggrieved tone. "Don't worry. I'm sure we'll make up for lost time." His grin faded when he recalled the suspicions that

had brought him to the room in his search for Jesse. The shock of seeing Jesse naked and masturbating had driven all thoughts from his head. "I went for a walk in the bush earlier."

"Did you? I walked the circuit as well. I didn't see you."

"Because I was hiding," Grayson said. "I overheard someone talking about photos they wanted to sell. I think one of the guests or someone in the wedding party intends to take photos of Nolan and Cassie and sell them. No, wait. They said they already had photos."

"You suspected me?" Jesse asked at a low bellow.

"No, not really. Four people walked past me after I heard the discussion. You. Two men I didn't know and Cassie's sister Serena. I wasn't close enough to work out if the people talking about the photos were male or female, which leaves me with three suspects."

"Four, if you count me," Jesse snapped, bounding off the bed to stalk the length of the bedroom.

"I don't suspect you," Grayson said. His lips twitched when his lover turned and paced toward him. "Pacing doesn't look dignified when you're naked, ya know." He gestured at Jesse's erection.

"Fuck you," Jesse muttered.

Grayson's eyes narrowed at the thought. Although he preferred to top, the idea of Jesse thrusting into his body sounded full of promise. Yeah, he quite liked the scenario. "That could be arranged. I think you're the best man for the job."

"Be serious. Nolan and Cassie will be pissed if the newspapers and magazines get hold of intimate pictures. I presume that's what they're after?"

"That would be my guess."

Jesse checked his watch before turning back to him. "Why don't we go and see Nolan and Cassie? Tell them what you heard so at least they're warned."

"I saw Nolan earlier. The two of them intended to sneak off and spend some time alone. I don't know if they'll be back yet."

"I'm sure they won't stay out too late, not with the wedding tomorrow. Let's grab a shower before we go find them." Jesse turned toward the en suite and paused to snatch up a condom plus the bottle of lube. "Might as well multitask." He grinned over his shoulder, the cheeky expression making Grayson's pulse rate shift up a gear like it did during a full-on rugby match. Hard to believe this was happening.

"Great idea." Damn, Grayson liked the way this man thought.

Jesse flipped on the shower and stepped under the water even though it still ran cold. He grabbed Grayson's hand and dragged him beneath the spray. "Just as well the shower isn't enclosed in a stall," he said. "You take up a lot of room."

"Humph," Grayson muttered, the cold water a shock when it hit his heated skin. "You're not exactly a mouse."

Jesse smirked and crowded Grayson. He urged him face first toward the tiled wall. Before he could move, Jesse trapped him with his body and forced his hands against the wall. Grayson felt the nudge of Jesse's cock between his buttocks. He could have fought but the position interested him. The thought of Jesse stroking inside him brought a surge of need. His dick reared into prominence and he leaned back, purposely wagging his ass and creating friction. Jesse's cock slid along the crease between his butt cheeks, the man's hiss of pleasure audible above the splatter of water. Grayson grinned. He hadn't enjoyed sex so much for ages. Not so much the sex but being with a man, one he genuinely liked and had a lot in common with, made the encounter even more special.

Jesse's hand snaked around his hips to grasp his dick and pumped hard. His cock pulsed and thickened beneath the calloused hand. Grayson relaxed, palms pressed against the tiles while the water poured over them.

"Spread your legs for me, mate."

Grayson obeyed and shifted his legs so his stance widened. He felt Jesse's fingers rub back and forth against his entrance, the enriched nerves twitching beneath his

lover's calloused touch. Then a finger probed inside, the touch bringing a burn plus a bolt of pleasure. Hell, it had been so long since he'd been with a man in this way. Jesse stroked him again and Grayson attempted to relax against the intrusion.

"That's good, Gray. Hell, you feel so hot. My cock is gonna burn inside you." Jesse pressed a kiss to his shoulder and surprised him with a nip on the fleshy part where neck and shoulder met. Grayson jumped before he could control the move and Jesse's soft laugh brought a flush of heat to his face.

Jesse kept the pace slow, sometimes with shallow strokes and at other times pushing deep enough to graze across his gland. Grayson shivered, tension yanked tight inside. Another finger pushed into him as Jesse carefully stretched him.

"I can't wait to push inside you. You're almost ready for me. Do you want me, Gray? Do you want me to fuck you?" Jesse's husky voice made him breathless with impatience, with desire.

"Yes," he said.

"That is the right answer." Jesse withdrew his fingers and released Grayson's cock. Instantly, sweet anticipation thrummed through him, the crinkle of the foil wrapping when it tore loud, even above the spill of the water from overhead. Jesse's big body blocked the flow of water. Grayson quivered, the tension ratcheting sharply upward, his body a mass of nerves and desire. Part of him cried out for Jesse's possession while the rest of him—the sane part—worried about the discomfort. He trusted Jesse but there was always the unknown factor.

When he felt the cool gel at his entrance, he couldn't prevent a jolt of surprise but he didn't make the mistake of complaining. Grayson knew his friend would take delight in hurling his words back at him but they'd be along the lines of wimpy rugby players—the ones who played in the forward position and thought they were so big and strong. Everyone knew the speedy wingers were the ones who scored tries and won games.

Jesse slipped two fingers inside him again, the lube allowing the digits to slide with ease. Another finger stretched him. Grayson groaned at the streak of pleasure that shot

the length of his cock. Jesse removed the fingers and he felt the thick head of a cock probe him. With slow, careful moves Jesse worked his cock into Grayson, thrusting and withdrawing in easy strokes.

"God, Gray. Damn that feels so good. You're tight. I love the way your ass grips me. Are you okay? Does it feel good to you?"

Grayson grunted. He couldn't do more with the wealth of sensations surging through him. Who knew the man he'd lusted after for so long had such a great way with seductive talk? Just the sound of Jesse's smoky voice made his dick jerk.

Jesse withdrew and glided back inside, balls deep. Grayson groaned. Now that he'd relaxed, each slow thrust lit up nerves inside. His cock leaked freely, so tight and swollen, he thought he might burst. He needed to jerk off. Now. Grayson peeled one palm off the tiled wall but Jesse leaned over his back and forced his hand back.

"Let me," he whispered in his seductive voice. "I can give you pleasure."

Without another word Grayson relaxed, trusting the other man to keep his word and ceding responsibility. True to his promise, Jesse reached around Grayson's body. He rubbed a finger back and forth across a flat nipple until it stiffened as much as his cock. Jesse pinched it, the twinge of pain darting across nerve endings and wringing a hiss from Grayson. One of Jesse's hands finally curled around his cock. He closed his eyes and concentrated on every sensation, the rough hand that gripped and pumped his erection, the cock that thrust into him. Jesse quickened his strokes, wringing another hiss from Grayson.

"Damn, that feels great."

"It's meant to bring pleasure," Jesse whispered before kissing his neck.

It did. If the sensations crowding through his body became any more intense, Grayson thought his knees would buckle. And that would never do. He couldn't afford to show vulnerability with Jesse. He'd never hear the end of the teasing. Jesse increased his pace, slamming into him, gripping his cock hard and pumping him rapidly.

"Jesse," Grayson cried out, the sound of his lover's name raw and guttural. His cock jerked with explosive contractions and dense streams of cum spurted over Jesse's hand and the wall.

"Ah hell." Jesse released him to grip his shoulders instead. He thrust once. Twice. Then he stilled, leaning his weight on Grayson. A harsh sound of animal enjoyment ripped from deep inside his chest. For an instant they both leaned against the wall in silence, breathing deeply while they recovered. When Jesse moved away, a sense of loss hit him but the feeling eased when his lover touched him again. After dealing with the condom, Jesse grabbed the bar of soap, turned Grayson to face him and rubbed it over his chest. "The sex between us is friggin' amazing."

"Yeah." Grayson knew it wasn't much in the way of replies but that was all he could force out right now.

"I didn't think you'd let me top." Jesse brushed a lock of hair from Grayson's eyes.

"You let me do it to you," Grayson muttered. Something in Jesse's face made him cautious. He didn't know what the man wanted to say and wished he'd spit it out. Mind reading wasn't high on his list of skills.

"You said you preferred to top."

"So?"

"I wanted to know if you trusted me."

Grayson snorted. The shower was a weird place to have a conversation like this. "You know my secrets. I trust you."

"You let me take your body. You're not used to it but you still let me. You trusted me."

"Is this about the photos and my suspicions?" Grayson didn't need to pretend confusion.

"I didn't do it. You're welcome to search my bags. I don't own a camera and I've got more important things to do than follow Nolan and Cassie around."

"I know."

Jesse glanced away then looked back as if he'd come to a decision. "I want more than a quick, dirty weekend. I know it won't be easy but I want you. Have done so for a while but I wanted to know you trusted me. There's nothing more important in a relationship than trust."

Grayson nodded. Trust was important to him as well, and it became vitally important with the All Black selections coming up. They both needed to concentrate on their games and match fitness. The next few months would be a test and neither of them could afford to split their attention between personal and rugby business. He tugged Jesse's head down and kissed him, letting the slow movement of his lips soothe the agitation in his lover. True trust took time. He pulled away. "I might pound you on the rugby field. That's business. But everything else between us is private and personal. I would never do anything to impact on business."

"My last boyfriend threatened to spread rumors about me," Jesse said. "He didn't in the end, but I've had to be careful. Cautious."

"We can go as slow as you want. It's not my preference but I understand," Grayson said. He slapped Jesse's butt with the flat of his hand. "How about moving that sweet ass of yours? We need to catch up with Nolan and warn him."

"Yeah. Okay." Jesse washed his body briskly and let the spray of the water take away the soap residue.

Grayson did the same and grabbed two towels, handing one to Jesse after the other man flipped off the water. He eyed his lover's body, a frisson of pleasure snapping down his spine when he recalled the urgent thrusts and the warm, wet suction of the man's mouth at his neck. "This won't take too long, will it?"

"Why?" Jesse paused in the act of blotting the droplets of water from his body. A gleam lightened his blue eyes without warning. "Good thinking," he said in that husky voice of his. His gaze dropped to Grayson's groin. "We can fool around a bit more before we go to sleep."

"Just a bit?"

"I'm frightened of Cassie's mother," Jesse said. "Don't say I said, but I think Nolan is too."

"Hell, you're right," Grayson said, picturing the tiny, determined whirlwind who was Cassie's mother. "We'd better not turn up for the wedding photos with sags under our eyes. I don't want to get on the bad side of Cassie's mother."

Both dressed in casual jeans and T-shirts, they left their room together.

"Where do we check first?" Grayson asked.

"The room where they set up dinner and go from there."

They walked side by side, their shoulders brushing. In the past Grayson wouldn't have thought a thing of the casual contact. On the rugby field exuberant hugs were common after they dotted the ball down on the opposition's try line. No one thought a thing of it, of the images broadcast to millions of viewers across the world. Now Grayson shivered inwardly at the touch. He knew the pleasure Jesse's touch fired—heck, it just felt different now.

Things had changed and there was no going back.

Chapter Three

Jesse scanned the rose gardens near the kidney-shaped swimming pool but couldn't see either Nolan or Cassie. They weren't in the huge ballroom or with the group of men who hid out in the billiard room.

"There's Michelle. She might know where they are," Grayson said, pointing at Cassie's best friend and his partner in the bridal party.

Jesse nodded, quashing the sliver of jealousy that hit him when Grayson mentioned Michelle. He'd watched the two chatting earlier in the day, the easy familiarity between them. It had brought a flash of anger and he'd wished things had been different.

"There's nothing between us," Grayson said, after a quick glance at Jesse. "She has a serious boyfriend."

"I didn't say a word." Hell, he'd have to work on his poker face.

"Yeah, right," Grayson muttered. "Come on." He grasped Jesse's arm and dragged him in Michelle's direction. "Hey, Michelle. Can we have a word in private?" He glanced at the two young women with her and smiled at them. "It's bridal party stuff. I hope you don't mind."

The two girls giggled and one fluttered her lashes at Grayson. Jesse opened his mouth to ask if she had something in her eye before he snapped it closed. Bloody hell. *Control, man*. If he started snaps and snarls, people would talk. Gossip was the last thing they wanted or needed.

"Is there a problem?" Michelle asked, a frown marring her smooth brow.

Grayson smiled in reassurance. "We need to find Nolan. Do you know where he is? It's important."

Michelle glanced left and right before she leaned closer to them. "Nolan and Cassie are in her room. Cassie's mother thinks she's retired for an early night."

"It really is important," Jesse said.

"All right. I'll show you the way to Cassie's room."

Five minutes later, after climbing to the third floor and passing numerous *objet d'art*, they stood outside the room. Jesse tapped on the door. When there was no reply, he thumped on the white wood.

"Just a minute," Cassie called.

"I wonder what they're up to?" Grayson's brows rose and he exchanged a knowing glance with Michelle.

The door opened a few inches, wide enough for them to see Cassie's flushed face. It looked as if she'd thrown on a robe before answering the door. Her blonde hair wasn't in its normal smooth style.

"Let us in," Grayson said.

"Can't it wait?" a masculine voice demanded.

Grayson and Jesse shared an amused glance.

"I'll leave you to it," Michelle said. "I'm trying to run interference to make sure Cassie's mother doesn't head this way." She hurried away, leaving them to face Nolan's irritation at the untimely interruption.

The door flew fully open. "What do you want?" Nolan's face held clear impatience while Cassie stood in front of him, delightfully flushed in appearance.

Grayson shouldered his way inside in the way of a forward and pushed Cassie gently out of the way. Jesse grinned inwardly. Once a forward, always a forward, driving to move his team toward the scoreline. He followed Grayson into the feminine bedroom and shut the door after him before he crossed the Oriental rug to stand at his side, their shoulders just touching. The touch brought a sense of comfort and the tension he'd felt since thinking about Grayson and Michelle faded.

Nolan's eyes narrowed without warning, his bare chest rising when he sucked in a deep breath. He cocked his head and studied them so closely Jesse started to feel like a player of the match put in the spotlight by the local television station. A wide grin spread across Nolan's face and he turned to Cassie. "Babe, you owe me a hundred dollars."

"No!" Cassie's head whipped around to stare at Grayson and Jesse. "No way. They haven't."

"Haven't what?" Jesse demanded.

"Look at how they're standing," Nolan said. "And there—exhibit A." He pointed at Grayson's neck.

Jesse sprang away from Grayson and shot a panicked glance at his neck. Holy shit. *A hickey*. He vaguely remembered kissing Grayson on the neck while they were in the shower. Color flooded his face. He remembered doing quite a few things while they were in the shower. "It wasn't me," he blurted.

"Give it up, Jesse." Grayson shrugged with unconcern. "Nolan knows I'm gay."

But he didn't know about him. Jesse's heart pounded and he silently cursed. The fewer people who knew about his sexual orientation the better. Dammit, he didn't want to endanger either of their chances at making the All Blacks. He didn't want notoriety. He wanted to keep his head down and play rugby. Nolan didn't know he was gay. Jesse's attention speared to Nolan.

Fuck, he did know.

Cassie punched Nolan's bare chest. "That's not fair. You had inside information."

"It's about time the two of you got together," Nolan said. "And, babe, you had the same info I did. My gut told me things were about to change before our wedding, given the right circumstances, that's all."

"We didn't come here to talk about us," Jesse snapped.

"Why? You ashamed of me?" Grayson demanded, folding beefy arms across his chest.

"No I'm not ashamed of you. You're my friend, dammit," Jesse snarled.

"You're also my lover," Grayson said bluntly.

A pregnant silence filled the room while Grayson and Jesse stared at each other. Jesse heard a soft chuckle and turned his glare on Nolan and Cassie. "What?"

"Oh you two are perfect for each other," Cassie said with a wide grin. "You look so hot together."

"Hey, remember me? The man you're gonna marry tomorrow?" Nolan grabbed Cassie and squeezed her gently against his side.

"The New Zealand public might not think the same way. Rugby players are tough he-men. They aren't gay," Jesse said. "And believe it or not, some people think sexual orientation is contagious. Both Gray and I have a shot at the All Blacks this year. If the public finds out we're a couple, we'll end up with publicity for all the wrong reasons."

"Jump down off your high horse, Jesse. Neither of us will tell." Nolan tugged Cassie over to the double bed in the center of the room and sat on the cream cover. "Since you guys look like you want to stay, do you want some whiskey? You'll have to share a glass."

"It's true," Cassie said. "Nolan and I are good at secrets. Besides, your shirt and collar will hide the hickey tomorrow. We only saw it because you're wearing a T-shirt."

Grayson slung his arm across Jesse's shoulders, hugged him briefly before sinking to the floor and propping his back against the pink, green-and-cream-striped wallpaper. Jesse remained standing, tense with a tight knot cramping his gut. He inhaled and exhaled slowly. The damage was done. They'd made love and it was too late to go back now. Besides, he realized, he didn't really think he wanted to. Slowly he dropped onto the rug, close to Grayson but not touching. "Yeah, whiskey sounds good."

Nolan poured the liquor into two glasses and handed one to Jesse since he sat closest and kept the other one for Cassie to share with him. "As much as I love you two guys, I was happy alone with Cassie. I'm still waiting to hear why you barged in here."

"To see your naked chest," Grayson said.

Jesse guffawed and handed the glass of whiskey to Grayson. He winked at Cassie. "It's true. We wanted to compare it with ours. There must be some reason you're marrying the larrikin."

"Because I'm hot," Nolan said.

Cassie nodded. "That's true, and I like to watch his ass when he runs down the rugby field."

"Everyone likes to watch his ass," Grayson said dryly. "That's why he came out top try scorer last season and made the All Blacks. That's why he'll make the All Blacks again this season."

Jesse nodded. "Yeah, if he isn't careful, he'll end up headhunted by one of those underwear companies wanting him to model their goods."

"That would be ass-hunted," Cassie shot back.

"Okay. Enough," Nolan said. "Leave my ass out of this conversation."

"We could talk about Jesse's." Distinct impish humor shone on Cassie's face.

"No, we couldn't," Nolan said firmly. "Let's talk about the real reason they're here."

"I overheard two people talking about photos of the two of you," Grayson said. "One selling and the other a buyer. I couldn't get close enough to see them and didn't recognize the voices, but whoever they are, they're staying here since it was on the grounds."

"Hell," Nolan cursed. "I wish they'd leave us alone. I don't suppose the two of you would like to make a statement? Take the pressure off us."

"Fuck off," Jesse said.

Grayson nodded and took a sip of whiskey. "What he said."

Cassie sighed. "I hope they didn't get any photos of us this afternoon."

"When I heard the people talking, I hid. Four people passed me. Jesse, two men I didn't know and your sister Serena," Grayson said.

"It wasn't me and Serena would hardly sell photos," Jesse said. "She's your sister."

"I don't know about Serena. She's acted a bit weird recently," Cassie said. "She's so moody. Anything is possible."

"I wish she'd keep her hands to herself," Jesse muttered with real feeling. "She might be your sister but if she pinches my butt again, I won't be responsible for my actions."

Nolan started to chuckle. "Maybe it's something in the air. Everyone seems to have ass fixations around here."

Cassie rolled her eyes but a grin twitched at her mouth.

"Did you do something this afternoon that you wouldn't want photographed?" Grayson asked.

"None of your business," Cassie said, her voice tart.

"In other words, they did," Jesse said.

Grayson shifted to find a more comfortable spot and ended up closer to Jesse. "Did you see anyone following you?"

Jesse tensed when Grayson put a hand on his leg. He winged a quick glance at Nolan and Cassie and only relaxed when they did nothing more than smile. Too worried about appearances, he'd never allowed himself to think of a future with a partner, what that could mean. Everything was happening so quickly. Heck, it terrified him yet he felt a sense of exhilaration at the same time. After a deep breath, he moved a bit closer and leaned into Grayson, savoring his scent and the sense of comfort the other man's touch brought him.

"No, but we weren't expecting anyone to follow us while we're on family property either," Nolan replied.

"What will we do?" Cassie asked. "It's such a violation of privacy and it pisses me off knowing someone is making money from our images."

"We can search for the two men Grayson saw in the morning," Nolan said. "No doubt your mother will have plans for tomorrow that won't include me. It will keep me busy. You didn't see them tonight at dinner?"

"Gray and I didn't go to dinner." Memories flickered through Jesse's mind, fast and furious like rugby replays on television.

"We didn't either," Cassie said with a smirk.

"What will we do when we find them?" Grayson asked.

Nolan snorted out loud. "We're big, bad rugby players. I'm sure we can think of something."

"We'd better go," Jesse said. "It's late." He stood, holding out his hand to haul Grayson to his feet.

A soft tap at the door brought a frown to all their faces.

"Cassie dear. Are you still awake?"

Cassie scowled at the door. "Bother. It's my mother."

"Should we hide?" Grayson asked.

"Where?" Nolan demanded with an impatient glance around the feminine room.

Jesse snorted. "Yeah, rugby players take up a lot of room."

"Stay there and keep quiet. Maybe I can get rid of her." Cassie stood and tightened the belt of her silky robe before marching across to the door. She cracked it open a fraction. "Mum, I was about to go to bed. I wanted to have an early night."

"I won't stay long, dear. I just wanted to discuss a few final details for the ceremony tomorrow."

Cassie glanced over her shoulder and shrugged. She stood back to let her mother inside. Mrs. Pendergrast bowled into the bedroom but came to an abrupt halt when she saw the three men.

"Cassie!" she shrieked in horror. "You promised me you wouldn't sneak off with Nolan before the wedding."

"Don't worry, Mrs. Pendergrast." Jesse aimed for soothing and just a little flirtatious. "Grayson and I came along as chaperones to make sure nothing untoward happened." Jesse smiled winningly and ignored the soft groan he heard from behind. "In fact, we were all about to leave Cassie to her beauty sleep."

"Yes, young man. You certainly are. Out with all of you, right now! And Nolan, you stay away from Cassie until the ceremony tomorrow. She'll be very busy in the morning and doesn't need the distractions." Her gaze skimmed his bare chest for an instant.

Jesse suppressed a smirk on seeing Nolan's unhappy face. But he didn't laugh too hard since he didn't want to direct Mrs. Pendergrast's ire in his direction.

"Yes, ma'am," Nolan said, grabbing his shirt off a chair in the corner of the room. He yanked it on before he strode to Cassie and kissed her slowly, despite her mother's frown. "I'll see you tomorrow at the wedding."

"Night," Cassie said.

They filed from the room without another word. Once the door closed behind them, they grinned at each other.

Grayson shot a quick glance at Nolan and winked at Jesse. "You know if you want to determine how your bride will turn out you should look at the mother."

"Don't scare me," Nolan said, fastening the buttons of his shirt. "You want a beer before you head back to your room?"

"Not tonight," Grayson said, speaking for both of them. His steady gaze bore into Jesse with silent expectation. Excitement zapped through Jesse and he nodded in agreement.

"Okay," Nolan said. "I'm pleased for you both."

"Thanks," Jesse said.

"I'll meet you tomorrow morning for breakfast. Don't be late or I'll come and find you." He lowered his voice. "I shock easily."

Grayson let out a derisive snort. "Yeah, right. You're a narrow-minded son of a bitch. That's why we love you so much."

"That's why you're my best men," Nolan said, his grin fading. "Friends are there for each other no matter what."

"Thanks, man." Jesse clapped his friend on the back. "We'll see you in the morning."

"At breakfast," Nolan reminded them. On the ground floor, he waved and strode down a corridor.

Jesse and Grayson walked outside side by side until the width of the path made it impossible to walk two abreast. Small solar lamps lit the cobblestone path leading around the back of the main house to the guest bungalows behind. The sweet scent of flowers filled the air and it was quiet, with not a single person in sight. When they passed an open window, the sultry strains of a Norah Jones ballad floated through.

Grayson stopped in the dark shadows cast by the brick wall of the building. Before Jesse knew what was happening, Grayson had him in a firm embrace and their lips pressed together. Jesse groaned, the raw sensuality in the other man's touch firing his own desire.

A loud laugh broke them apart. Jesse's chest heaved and the rasp of Grayson's breathing sounded loud, as if he'd sprinted the length of a rugby field.

"Hell, sorry," Grayson said. "I wasn't thinking."

And he hadn't been much better. They had so much to lose should their relationship become public knowledge. Jesse glanced over his shoulder. No one there. "No harm done, but we'd better not try that again unless we're sure of our privacy."

"Agreed. Let's go find privacy. I want you."

Jesse grunted. He couldn't have said it better himself.

They strode to their bungalow, flung open the door and hurried inside.

Grayson slammed the door shut and flicked the lock. It made a sharp click when it engaged. "Right," he said. "How about taking up right where we left off?"

Jesse didn't have a problem with that.

Their mouths slammed together, arms clasping each other tight. Hands yanked at T-shirts and slid beneath to smooth across muscular torsos and midriffs. Their groins rubbed together, jeans-clad erections brushing with exquisite friction.

Clothes faded away, drifting to the ground unwanted. By the time they finished, a trail littered the oatmeal-colored carpet all the way to the separate bedroom. They fell onto the nearest bed, muscles flexing when they slid together. Jesse plucked at a masculine nipple, highly satisfied with the groan he wrung from his lover.

"Condom," Grayson muttered.

Jesse leaned over to grab a foil pack and packets of lube from the side pocket of his bag. He slapped them into Grayson's hand and experienced a shiver of pure and desperate need. Grayson rolled on the condom with quick, deft moves then opened a packet of lube, warming the gel in his hands this time before smoothing it across Jesse's entrance and along his own swollen length.

"Lie back," he ordered.

Jesse reclined on the mattress, legs spread while he held Grayson's gaze.

"Perfect." Grayson leaned over and licked a slow path from the base to the tip of his cock. He teased Jesse's tight balls, rolling them between his fingers.

A groan squeezed past Jesse's lips and he stirred restlessly, his cock and balls painfully tight. It had happened so quickly, the blaze of fire that ripped through his body. Luckily Grayson seemed to understand he wanted it quick and fast again.

After minimal stretching, Grayson pushed inside, fueling the slow burn that was both pleasure and pain. Jesse bucked, forcing his lover deeper. He thrust in and out, nailing Jesse's prostate. Jesse's hips jerked, a cry of pleasure filling the air. The next thrust did the trick, propelling him into a fiery climax. spurts of cum hit his stomach, the pleasure so intense it was almost painful. He gasped, nerves still twitching when Grayson thrust sharply then stilled, his face etched in harsh lines.

Grayson pulled slowly from his body and dealt with the condom before he turned back to hug him.

"I'm all sticky," Jesse said.

"Don't care," Grayson said. "Just want to touch you." He pulled Jesse close and shut his eyes.

Jesse smiled and pressed a kiss against his lover's cheek. He felt the rapid thud of his heart and couldn't believe he'd scored so well.

Chapter Four

Jesse found the photo pushed under the door when he woke the next morning. The accompanying note said the photo would appear in the Sunday paper.

"Fuck." The four-letter word didn't do justice to his feelings so he said it again. "Fuck!"

"What's wrong?" Grayson said, appearing from the en suite with a white towel wrapped around his hips.

Jesse thrust the photo and note at him, his heart thudding and blood roaring through his head. One bloody kiss. Just one, and it was going to be the downfall of both of them. "They were pushed under the door. Someone saw us."

Grayson studied the note then the photo. He grunted. "The picture's grainy. Our faces aren't clear. Don't worry. The photo is dark and taken from so far away it's difficult for anyone to say it's us for sure."

"They still have a photo," Jesse snapped, his chest heaving hard while anger and fear swirled around inside. He clenched his hands to fists and released them when he realized he wanted to hit something.

"I'm sorry, mate. I didn't think last night. I just wanted to touch you." Grayson placed a hand on his shoulder, the heavy weight a comfort even though regret filled Jesse too. It was easy to blame Grayson for this but deep inside he knew the responsibility belonged to him as well. He could have said no.

"What are we going to do?"

"There's only one thing to do. We laugh and deny everything," Grayson said.

"Or we could tell the truth," Jesse said, a wave of nausea tap-dancing through his stomach at the thought.

Grayson shot a sharp look at him. "No. As much as I hate hiding, I'm not keen on issuing the press with a statement either. The press won't leave us alone if we come clean. All I want to do is concentrate on rugby and get through the Super Fourteen tournament without injury. I want to put my hand up for the All Blacks. Can't do that with the press in our faces."

"Do we tell Nolan and Cassie?"

"Nolan, at any rate. We're meeting him for breakfast." Grayson glanced at his watch before grinning at him. "Better hurry in the shower or else he'll turn up here." He grabbed Jesse and kissed him hard on the lips, his skin warm after the shower. "Don't worry. It will turn out all right."

Jesse sighed, his throat tight with tension. Grayson didn't really believe that. He could see it in his lover's eyes. No matter which way he looked at the problem, they were screwed.

* * * * *

"About time," Nolan said. "I thought I'd have to kick your asses out of bed."

Grayson and Jesse joined him at one of the tables set up in the ballroom to cope with the large number of guests.

"Problem?" Nolan asked after a swift look at their set faces.

Grayson glanced at Jesse and received an imperceptible nod. He pulled the letter and photo from his jeans pocket and handed the crumpled items to their friend.

Nolan took one look and cursed. "I received the same letter with a different photo under my bedroom door this morning. Our photo is a lot clearer. There's no doubt as to the identities of the people in the photo."

"Cassie's mother is gonna be pissed." Jesse clutched at the one thing Grayson knew would lighten the tense mood.

"Understatement, mate," Nolan said. "Her father won't be happy either. I don't suppose you see either of the two men you saw yesterday. They're our only suspects?"

Grayson scanned the faces in the room and shook his head. "I haven't seen them again."

Nolan scowled. "They have to be guests. With the tight security the Pendergrasts have this weekend, there's no other way they could have entered the grounds. Both photos were taken on the premises."

"So what do we do?" Jesse asked.

"As much as I hate it, we're going to need to tell Cassie's father."

Grayson nodded. He'd expected that since Pendergrast would want to ask questions of his security force. "I wish I could find— Well, hell," he drawled softly. "There's one of the men. He's grabbing a cup of coffee."

"The tall, skinny guy in the blue shirt?" Nolan asked.

"Yeah. That's the one."

"Neal. Cassie's cousin," Nolan said. "Funnily enough, the other night he told me about his passion for photography. He wants to become a professional."

Grayson caught the flash of fire in Jesse's eyes and placed a hand on his arm. "Jesse, let Pendergrast deal with this. He'll be able to quash it better than we can."

The tension leached from Jesse's body and he stood. "Fancy a coffee, Gray?" A feral grin twisted his lips. "Don't worry. I'll control myself. I just want a closer look at the weasel."

"Black coffee," Grayson said, leaning back on his chair. Outwardly he knew he'd appear at ease, but inside his gut roiled with worry. Jesse was an adult, responsible for his own actions. He trusted him to do the right thing, or at least he prayed Jesse would hold his temper and not punch the guy out. They weren't even sure this man had taken the photos although his passion for photography combined with his presence near the bush indicated complicity in the crime.

Another man walked into the ballroom and strode over to Cassie's cousin Neal. Grayson recognized him as the second man he'd seen. With cups of coffee in hand, they

walked over to an empty table near the doors that opened into the gardens and sat down. They knew each other well. Interesting.

Jesse arrived back at the table and placed a cup of coffee in front of Grayson. "They did it. I could tell by the gleeful expressions on their faces when they saw me. They have dollar signs in front of their eyes. Bastards."

"We'll work something out," Nolan said in a hard voice. "Cassie's father won't be impressed. He hates intrusion into his private life as much as we do."

"We could put the fear of God into them," Grayson said, cocking his head toward the two men at the other table. "We're big and en masse we're scary. I've changed my mind. Why don't we confiscate their photos, if it's not too late, and escort them from the premises?"

"It might make things worse," Nolan said.

"The photos have probably already gone to the papers." Jesse narrowed his eyes on the two men. "But it would make me feel better if we took some sort of action."

The three men looked at each other.

"Let's do it," Grayson said.

They stood and prowled over to the two men, surrounding the table. The three of them together blocked the early morning sun and stopped the bright stream of rays coming through the open doors.

Neal glanced up, his face blanching when he saw their determined faces. "Wh-what do you want?"

"We want the photos you took of us," Nolan said in a hard voice.

Oh yeah, Grayson thought. The expressions on their faces shouted of guilt. Neither man would meet his gaze.

"It wasn't our idea," Neal said. "Don't hurt us."

"You're too late. We've already sold them," the other man said with a sneer. "You're a pair of powder puffs."

"That's Mr. Powder Puff to you." Jesse's hand snaked out to grab the man's collar, his blue eyes flashing anger.

Jesse's words surprised Grayson but he felt a sense of pride too. He knew how much his lover valued his privacy plus his dream of making the All Blacks. Grayson snorted inwardly at the way the man's eyes widened in alarm and a tic kicked to life in his jaw, the way his sneer faded abruptly to panic.

"Whose idea was it?" Nolan asked in lethal tone.

"Serena's. It was Serena's idea. She wanted us to take compromising photos of him and her together, but you brushed her off and she couldn't get you alone," Neal babbled.

"Serena?" Jesse asked. "This was all about Serena?" He released the man's collar with a sound of disgust.

"Yes. Yes, it was all her idea," Neal said. "She wants you badly."

"So why did you take photos of me?" Nolan demanded. "Serena isn't pissed at me."

"I have bills."

Nolan cursed. "How much did they pay you? How much?" he repeated when neither man answered.

"Ten thousand," Neal blurted.

"The Starship Hospital will welcome the donation." Jesse loomed over the man in a threatening manner.

"No! That's my money."

"Fine. We'll turn you over to Cassie's father," Nolan said. "You guys wait here. I'll go and get him." He strode off and disappeared into the interior of the house.

"You can't do this," the unnamed man said.

"We can and we will," Jesse gritted out.

"You'll be sorry, powder puff."

Jesse moved so quickly Grayson blinked. He shoved the man's chair and seconds later Neal's friend sprawled on the ground. Neal let out an alarmed squawk and sprang out of range, his wild-eyed expression bearing distinct alarm, as if he thought he might be next in line for Jesse's brand of retribution.

"That was clever." Grayson's glance around the dining room confirmed they were the center of attention.

Jesse snarled. "I told him before it's Mr. Powder Puff. The man has no respect."

A snigger escaped Grayson as he noted the twitch of Jesse's mouth. He was glad Jesse was taking it so well.

Nolan returned with Cassie's father and two security guards. His brows rose when he saw the man on the ground.

"He fell off his chair," Jesse said.

"I'll take care of this, boys. I'm sorry they've caused a problem." Under his direction, the two security guards escorted them from the room.

"Right," Nolan said. "Who's hungry?"

* * * * *

The Wedding

Jesse stood beside Grayson and Nolan beneath a flower-bedecked pagoda. The marriage celebrant smiled with bright reassurance while they waited for Cassie to arrive. A low buzz of chatter came from the assembled family and guests seated in the chairs behind them. It sounded as if everyone were enjoying the sunny afternoon.

Soft romantic music started, announcing the bride's arrival, and the chatter faded away.

"Nervous?" Jesse asked.

Nolan shook his head. "No, I can't wait. Besides, I can sleep in Cassie's room without having to sneak around. I'm too damn old for those shenanigans."

A small flower girl threw rose petals while she walked toward them. The two bridesmaids followed and then Cassie appeared on her father's arm.

"Cassie looks beautiful," Grayson said.

"Yeah, she does," Nolan murmured.

Jesse smiled at the awe in his friend's voice. Cassie was good for Nolan. A moment of despair touched him when he glanced at Grayson's handsome face. They would never have the same acceptance of their relationship but that didn't mean they couldn't work things out.

The music ended with a flourish when Cassie reached Nolan's side. Grinning, he planted a chaste kiss on her lips, causing a chorus of laughter from everyone present. A sullen Serena moved into place. Jesse intended to act civilly toward her but that didn't mean he had to enjoy her company. He grinned at the small flower girl who hadn't finished throwing all her petals. She'd come to a stop near him and looked a little confused. He stooped to whisper in her ear and earned himself a gap-toothed grin. When he stood, she pushed between Grayson and him so she could watch the proceedings.

The marriage celebrant smiled at them all, her face serene and full of happiness. "Dearly beloved, we are gathered here today to celebrate the marriage of two wonderful people..."

Jesse smiled while he listened to the words, enjoying the presence of Grayson at his side. He tried not to laugh at the fidgety flower girl who still stood between them.

"...I now pronounce you man and wife. You may kiss the bride," the celebrant said.

"He's already done that," someone shouted from behind.

Nolan's mouth curved into a wicked grin seconds before he kissed his wife.

"Can I throw the roses now?" the flower girl asked.

"Yes." Jesse chuckled when the small girl gleefully pelted Cassie and Nolan with the last of her rose petals.

The photos seemed endless but gradually they moved into the ballroom-cum-dining room. Speeches and toasts followed, a mood of fun and laughter filling the room. The sun crept below the horizon and darkness fell. Tables were cleared and moved and musicians set up, ready for dancing.

Jesse knew everyone expected him to dance with Serena. At least once. He didn't want to but decided it would give him an opportunity to speak with her. Grayson asked his partner to dance and Jesse stood.

"Serena, would you like to dance?"

"No," she spat.

Jesse grinned and sat again. "Scared I'll bite," he said. "Or are you sulking because I wouldn't?"

"You're gay," she spat. "You're half a man."

"No, I'm not gay," Jesse lied, an amused smile on his lips. "You can insult me all you like. I don't care. You know, if you lifted the chip off your shoulder and stopped your childish behavior, people might like you more." He stood before she had a chance to reply and made his way over to Cassie's mother. "Would you like to dance, Mrs. Pendergrast?"

Cassie's mother stood. "I'd love to."

"Oh dang," the elderly woman sitting beside her said. "I thought he was going to ask me."

"Hush, Mother," Cassie's mother said. "I'm sure he'll let you have the next dance."

Jesse laughed aloud, the acceptance of the Pendergrast family making him humble. "It would be my pleasure."

Jesse lost count of the number of women he danced with. He no sooner finished one dance than someone else whisked him off for the next. Gradually the family members and guests started to depart. He walked across the dance floor to where Nolan, Cassie and Grayson stood chatting.

"I thought the bride and groom were meant to leave first?" Jesse winked at Grayson.

Nolan took Cassie's hand and placed a kiss on the back of it. "We only have to walk upstairs tonight. We figured we'd celebrate to the last."

The band announced the final dance – the last waltz.

Cassie gave a mischievous grin. "I dare you and Grayson to dance together."

"That's not a good idea," Nolan said with a furtive glance around him to see who remained in the ballroom.

"Course it is," Grayson said. "We'll act like it's a joke. It will give credence to our just-friends-fooling-around story. Besides, Jesse has danced with just about everyone else tonight. I'm feeling a bit left out."

"Aw, Grayson. I'm sorry, mate. Would you like this dance?" Jesse's heart pounded at the idea of touching Grayson again and the thought of doing it in public made it even more special. His lover looked striking in his dark suit and dazzling white shirt. Hot, even though clothes covered his sexy body.

"Why, Jesse, I'm so glad you asked. I'll lead."

"No," Jesse said firmly. "I'll lead."

Cassie giggled and the four moved onto the dance floor.

The male singer sang the last waltz. Jesse grinned at his lover while they spun around the floor.

Grayson smirked back. "I love to touch you, but I like it better when you're naked."

Jesse's cock reared at the words. Afraid of creating a scene, he purposely stood on Grayson's foot.

"Ow, watch it!" Grayson howled.

Jesse sniggered and came to a stop on the edge of the dance floor near the main exit. "You shouldn't make suggestive comments like that. It mucked up my concentration."

"You like suggestive remarks."

"True, but not in places where I can't respond."

Cassie and Nolan joined them. "Are you leaving?" Cassie asked just as the final notes of the song played.

"Yeah, I think so." Jesse's brows arched in silent query when he checked for Grayson's reaction.

"Good, we'll walk out with you," Nolan said.

Grayson's entire body trembled with need and the cooler air outside the ballroom did nothing to quell the urgent heat. He'd spent all night watching Jesse on the dance floor. The man moved well and dressed in the dark suit, he looked hot. Hell yeah, they were heading for their room. If Jesse suggested stopping for a drink on the way, he'd hit him. Among other things.

"We'll see you in the morning," Cassie said.

"You gonna tell us where you're going for a honeymoon?" Jesse asked.

"Not likely," Nolan muttered.

A snort escaped Grayson. "At least you know we wouldn't blab to the press."

"True, but I'm still not telling you."

"Cassie, good night." Jesse bent to kiss her cheek. "If Nolan doesn't look after you, come and tell me. I'll sort him out."

Nolan said a rude word and made them all laugh.

Grayson kissed her too. "Same goes. Jesse and I can take care of Nolan."

Nolan said another rude word and clapped Grayson over the head.

They parted ways and to Grayson's relief, Jesse headed straight to the bungalow without stops on the way. Grayson unlocked the door and stepped inside, relocking it before he turned to his lover.

"Are you worried about the photo appearing in the paper tomorrow?"

"A bit," Jesse conceded. "I thought about it a lot tonight before I decided I couldn't do much. Besides, the photo is very grainy. I intend to lie through my teeth and deny everything."

"That's pretty much my feeling although I thought when you told Neal's friend to call you Mr. Powder Puff it might cause red flags."

"Look. We're rugby players. We've never done anything wrong to attract public attention. All we need to do is play out of our skins to make the All Blacks and keep our heads down."

Fear kicked Grayson in the gut. "Are you saying we shouldn't see each other again? Shouldn't be together?"

"Hell no. We just need to act discreetly and watch our behavior in public. I want you, Gray. Make no mistake about that."

Grayson let out a breath he hadn't realized he'd been holding. "Good. Yeah, I agree. This is one case where denial is the best way to go, even though it goes against gut instinct to lie. Nolan and Cassie will stand by us."

"The Pendergrasts too. Cassie's father shouted at Serena," Jesse said. "Cassie's grandmother told me so just before she pinched my ass. Damn, she was quick. I couldn't move fast enough."

Grayson walked toward him, his lips twitching while he surveyed Jesse closely. "Maybe you should let a few forwards tackle you on the rugby field then you wouldn't look quite so pretty. A kink in that nose might help." He reached past Jesse to switch on the radio, his smile turning to a full-out smirk when he heard his lover's curse. He fiddled with the dial until a slow Rod Stewart song poured through the speakers. "Ya wanna dance?"

"Dance?"

"Think of it as foreplay," Grayson whispered.

Jesse's eyes darkened with interest. "Oh well, in that case."

"I'm leading." Grayson thought he'd get that in first.

A shrug lifted Jesse's shoulders. "As long as you eventually lead to the nearest bed, you can do what you want."

"Done deal." Grayson wrapped his arms around his lover. Their bodies moved together, brushing with each step. It was slow. Sexy. Arousing. Yet he didn't push the pace, content to let their desire build. Their groins brushed, the sensation electrifying, and it sent hunger writhing through him. Bugger slow. That wasn't a good idea after all. Time to move this seduction along. His head dipped a fraction to kiss Jesse. Their lips met in a soft kiss that gradually deepened in intensity. Tongues explored and licked while lips mated with warm, wet suction.

Jesse pulled away breathing hard. "Is it hot in here or is it just me?"

Grayson chuckled. "I can help with your heat problem." Slowly, he stripped the black jacket away from broad shoulders and tossed it aside. He unfastened the black bow tie and threw it on top of the jacket. Jesse's chest rose in a deep inhalation. Grayson decided his own clothes stood in the way of progress. He toed off his shoes and tugged off his socks before rapidly removing the rest of his clothing.

"I thought we were at foreplay."

"Fuck foreplay."

Jesse stared at Grayson's erection for an instant before nodding. "Okay." He started to remove his clothes but Grayson stopped him with a snarl. He had to control the touching at the moment or else he'd self-combust.

"I'll do that."

"Huh?"

"Mine," Grayson said softly.

Their gazes caught and held.

"Yeah," Jesse said finally. "I am yours."

Damn straight. They might have only come together this weekend but Grayson had every intention of making things work between them. He was already halfway in love with the other man. "No matter what the future brings."

Jesse paused again. "Yeah."

"A man of many words," Grayson mocked.

"Hell, you're yapping enough for both of us. How about some action?"

Grayson nodded and took Jesse's hand to lead him into the bedroom. There were condoms on the wooden bedside cabinet and the lube was probably still in the en suite. Better grab that now. He returned to find Jesse still stood where he'd left him but saw he'd removed his shoes and socks. Good thinking. After setting the lube down beside the condoms, Grayson prowled up to his lover and kissed him again, holding the other man's head to control the depth and intensity of the kiss. Jesse wrapped his arms around Grayson's naked back and gave a little shimmy of his hips. The air hissed past Grayson's lips and he had to break off the kiss to breathe. He glared at Jesse.

"What?" The innocence in his tone told Grayson he'd meant to tease.

Two could play at that game. He skimmed his hand across Jesse's erection with the merest trace of stimulation, enough to wring a groan from his lover.

"Hurry up," Jesse gritted out.

Grayson wanted to go slow yet contrarily he wanted instant gratification. "Damn." He unfastened the pearl buttons on the crisp white shirt, bending his head to lave a flat nipple. Jesse cupped his head, entwining fingers in his hair and held him close. The faint taste of salt danced across his taste buds while the citrus tang of Jesse's aftershave filled his lungs. Grayson dragged the shirt down his lover's arms and managed to tangle Jesse instead of releasing him.

"What are ya doing?" Jesse attempted to free his arms. "Undo the cufflinks."

"I knew they were a bad idea when I had to fasten them earlier." Grayson struggled with the onyx links and let out a grunt of satisfaction when the shirt finally slid free. He

trailed his hand over Jesse's flat stomach and flipped open the clip fastening his fly. The zipper whispered when he maneuvered it down. Grayson tugged both briefs and trousers down, savoring Jesse's gasp when his cock slid free. He knelt in front of Jesse, the other man using Grayson's shoulder for balance when he stepped free of his clothing.

Grayson cupped his lover's ass and leaned forward to breathe in his scent. He licked a path along his dick before nuzzling tight balls. Under Grayson's ministrations they tightened and his cock thickened. He ran his fingers over Jesse's tight butt, drawing one finger down the crack between. Without being asked, Jesse widened his stance to allow Grayson easier access. He ran his finger back and forward across his puckered entrance until Jesse quivered.

Even though he wanted to take Jesse's cock in his mouth, he stood and led his lover over to the closest bed.

"Lube. Now," Jesse said in a firm, no-nonsense voice.

Grayson had thought about playing for a bit longer but Jesse's order brought relief. With an inward smile, he picked up the lube and squeezed a dollop into the palm of his hand, warming it a fraction after setting the bottle aside.

Jesse crawled up the bed and pressed up until he was on hands and knees, his ass pointing in Grayson's direction. "From behind. Hard. I need it hard, Gray."

Grayson dragged in an unsteady breath, inhaling the scent of aroused male. A slight tremor racked his body when he moved behind Jesse. Part of him found the idea of being with Jesse in this way hard to believe and he took a few seconds to admire the scenery. The tight butt, slim hips and muscular legs were all slimmer than his own more bulky physique. He took pleasure in the warmth of Jesse's skin before applying the lube, reassuring himself this was really happening. Grayson smoothed his hand over Jesse's ass and dipped between the smooth globes to circle the puckered hole with his finger. He pushed a fingertip inside, withdrew and surged into Jesse again.

"Oh yeah. Just like that," Jesse said in a strained voice. "But more."

"Damn, I'm running this play," Grayson protested with a half laugh. "I know what I'm doing." He pushed his finger deeper, angling it to massage across Jesse's gland. Jesse's entire body jerked and Grayson couldn't help a broad grin. "How's that?"

"Better." Jesse pushed back to ride Grayson's finger.

"Told you I knew what I was doing." Although his own cock ached, the pleasure he received from Jesse's unrestrained reactions made up for the delay in gratification. "I'm the best man for the job."

"Humph."

Out of Jesse's sight, Grayson grinned hugely while he added another finger and teased his prostate. Jesse pressed back to impale himself and jerked each time Grayson stroked across his gland. Damn, he liked this man. He'd liked him as a friend and now as a lover. He pulled away from Jesse to grab a condom. After rolling it on and adding more lube, he lined up and pushed slowly inside.

"Harder, dammit," Jesse muttered. "I won't break."

"I might," Grayson retorted. "You're so tight." He gritted his teeth and paused fully seated when Jesse pulsed around his cock. Grayson reached for his lover's cock and wrapped his fist around it. He pumped slowly, the ooze of pre-cum easing the slide of his hand. A rough growl vibrated in Jesse's chest when Grayson thrust into his tight sheath. Somehow he managed to set up a rhythm that pleased them both. Difficult when the pleasure threatened to drive every thought from his head. Heat punched through him. Grayson sucked in a breath and released it on a long moan when the prickle of orgasm started. He wanted to delay, to hold on to the sensation, to wait for the pleasure but Jesse groaned suddenly. Hot semen spilled over his hand and the tight, pulsing sensation on his dick shoved him into climax. Pleasure, hot and wild, swamped Grayson and he leaned over Jesse to press against his sweaty back. He ran his lips over his lover's shoulder, savoring the salty tang.

Finally he pulled out of Jesse. He dealt with the condom and chucked it in the bin. "You wanna clean up?"

"Just a sec. I don't want to move yet."

Grayson smirked. "Did I wear you out?"

"Made me feel good." Jesse rolled over, his blue eyes still full of sleepy pleasure. "You made me feel very good."

Yeah. Grayson knew the feeling. His body still pulsed with remembered enjoyment. "I told you I was the man."

Jesse snorted but a lazy grin curled across his sexy lips. "The very best man," he agreed. "The best man for me."

About the Author

Shelley lives in Auckland, New Zealand, with her husband and a small, bossy dog named Scotty.

Typical New Zealanders, Shelley and her husband left home for their big OE soon after they married (translation of New Zealand-speak: big overseas experience). A year-long adventure lengthened to six years of roaming the world. Enduring memories include being almost sat on by a mountain gorilla in Rwanda, lazing on white sandy beaches in India, whale watching in Alaska, searching for leprechauns in Ireland, and dealing with ghosts in an English pub.

While travel is still a big attraction, these days Shelley is most likely found in front of her computer following another love—that of writing stories of romance and adventure. Other interests include watching rugby and rugby league (strictly for research purposes *grin*), being walked by the dog, and curling up with a good book.

Shelley welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her author bio page at www.ellorascave.com.

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