



"Home again, home again, jiggety-jig," I said as I parked in front of the consulate.

Ben made this tiny sighing noise, which I wouldn't have even heard if I hadn't been listening so close, and opened his eyes. It looked like the passenger seat was the only thing holding him up. "I'll be ready in a moment, Ray."

If Ben were really Super Mountie like he tried to be, he'd do heroic, impossible deeds all day long, never getting hurt, never getting tired. Saving lives, righting wrongs, answering all cries of gratitude with a modest and heartfelt "It's all in a day's work" before going off to the Mountie Mobile to travel to his next hero

gig. Of course, the Mountie Mobile would be bright red, and he'd drive as slowly and carefully as that mythical old lady the car salesmen talk about, the one who only ever drives the car to go to church on Sunday.

Instead, he's got my GTO and me.

And instead of being completely tireless and inhuman, he's leaning back against the seat trying to find the strength to walk into the consulate.

I hated the way Ben always pushed himself until he hit a wall, then, in some cases, tried to push himself through the wall. He could be pig-headed and reckless. Yeah, reckless, though he'd fight me to the death if he heard me saying that. For all his planning and logic, if you gave him an open window, he'd almost always leap out of it. Freak.

"This is inexcusable," he said, sounding almost heartbroken. Okay, the untrained ear wouldn't hear it, but I'd studied Ben-speak. I had the nuances down.

"Maybe it would be if you were some kinda robot instead of a real, live boy." I gripped his arm. "I'm real fond of the real, live boy."

He nodded and smiled a little. "I'm ready now, Ray." He got up out of the car and stood straight, all fatigue buried under the mask. He had his spine starched, and the rod shoved securely up his ass.

Ben had to look good for Thatcher and Turnbull, you see. Ben explained that Thatcher couldn't see any sign of weakness because she was his boss and Turnbull couldn't because it would "worry him unduly." Sometimes I couldn't help thinking that Ben and Ren had some kind of private joke going that the rest of the world just didn't get.

It made me feel jealous sometimes.

We walked into the consulate and made it through without meeting anybody. But Ben still kept the Stoic Mountie routine going until I closed his office door behind us. Then he sagged against me. If I hadn't been ready for it, his sudden weight would have taken me right down. Man's *solid*.

I put his Stetson on the desk, sat him down on the chair, and settled myself down at his feet. The first time we did this, I tried to sit him down on the cot to undress him, which immediately turned into a Three Stooges routine. When Thatcher came in to investigate, the nosy bitch, she found us on the floor in a tangle of arms, legs, and cot. It really wasn't any of her business, but Ben—too tired to even talk much, wonder of all wonders—looked to me to give her an explanation, so I told her that it had turned on us, like cots tended to do.

She gave us this look that didn't have any right to be on her face. Ben said that her being

his boss gave her the right to walk in on him at any time and pass judgment. Gave her the "right" to harass him and treat him like shit was more like it. I carefully kept all my revenge fantasies to myself.

I patted Dief hello, then started to undo Ben's boots. Damn, I loved these, the leather scent, the way they fit his calves like a second skin and made his legs look even better than they were. Fetish gear. I even liked all the laces, though I cursed them out during those times when I was in a hurry to get Ben's boots and pants off. No hurry now, so I let the repetitive unlacing put me into a trance state. Meditative like.

"You don't have to do this, Ray," Ben said softly, like he always did when he ran himself into the ground and I undressed him for bed.

"I like doing this. If I could find a way to get paid to do it, I'd undress and dress you all day long." I rubbed my face against his knee. "I love you, ya know."

He beamed. It's a criminal shame that he didn't smile more, so I kept doing my best to right that wrong. "Then by all means, carry on."

Doing this for him always reminded me of the first day we met, when I was interrogating Motherwell. Ben had taken my coat, jacket, and holster and held them for me like he was my valet. If I hadn't been so busy intimidating the hell out of our suspect, I would have smiled. I mean, at that point Ben didn't even know me, but he folded my stuff neat and careful over his arm for me like a servant, taking more care with them than I ever did.

I mentioned that to him once, and he said that I always took good care of his hat. I answered that the Stetson was sacred; besides, it was *his*. He got that bland face on that meant he was going to tease me and said that the uniform actually belonged to Canada, just like he did. I spent the next few hours musing him up completely to make sure he knew that he belonged to me too. Canada didn't seem to mind.

"I appreciate this," Ben said, then leaned forward and rested his forehead against the top of my head. I had to close my eyes for a

moment so I could fully feel the warmth of him and the tickle of his breath against my skin. How he could make me feel so loved with the strangest gestures, I just didn't know.

Once I took off the boots, I gently pushed myself up, bringing his head up with me. It made me feel like a prairie dog popping up out of a burrow. I sat on his lap and started on the Velcro, buckles, and buttons on his tunic. Mounties were vacuum-sealed for your protection. Shoot, I meant "to retain freshness," locking in all that Mountie goodness. Oh hell, I liked the protection image too. Undressed Mounties bursting out all over were dangerous, you know.

Though Ben bursts out nicely.

I always did the lanyard, cross strap, and utility belt first. By now, I knew my way around his uniform well enough that I could dress him in the morning, and he'd still be a credit to the Queen.

Looking loose and utterly relaxed, Ben sat back and let me do it all. Once you wore him down and bullied him, he took really well to being babied a bit. Especially if he knew you weren't going to take no for an answer.

Having him like this always brought out Dark Ray, who loved the thought of playing with him like a big toy while he was too tired to protest. If my sense of fair play didn't stop me, I only had to think that he might fall asleep on me while we were getting it on—or, actually, while I was getting it on him, since he wasn't up for much—and that was a good bucket of cold water right there. I showed all the strength of a saint when I undid his pants and didn't mess around with him at all.

Well, not much. He's too good a handful to pass up. Oh hell, it wasn't like I was ever going to get my angel wings, and I didn't think Ben minded.

Everything I took off, I hung up carefully. Sure, his clothing always seemed to be as Scotchguarded as he was, but you had to show respect to the uniform.

Soon enough I had him in his long johns. I should let him just go to sleep, but I had to keep sitting on his lap for a while, just being with him. I loved how solid he felt, loved the way he had the muscles of a guy who earned them by working hard. Yeah, lifting weights in

a gym wasn't easy either, but a lot of those guys were more wrapped up in how their muscles looked than in what they did. Ben didn't care about looking cut; he knew he could carry a caribou or run a criminal down all the way across the Yukon Territories, and that was exactly the way he wanted it.

I didn't want to leave him here. He spent a lot of the week at my apartment, but when he ran himself out this badly he always wanted to stay alone at the consulate. It hurt a little, even if I did understand that sometimes a guy needed a little distance, some alone time, to keep face. He probably didn't want me to see him dragging himself out of bed the next morning; he had a rep to maintain. Trying to be Super Mountie was important to him, so I would just back off and try not to be so clingy.

But then he leaned forward a little, pretty much falling onto my lips, so he could kiss me, and everything just flew out the window. I was only human. He felt so good, and I wanted him so bad, but not so bad that I would get into what would just about be necrophilia with him in his current condition.

"I should have asked you if I could stay at your apartment," Ben said against my mouth.

It took me a moment to process that, then the slow boil started. After he....After all this....And I wanted...."Fraser!" Son of a....

"I'm sorry, Ray. I should have said something earlier; I wasn't thinking."

"Damned right you weren't—"

Ben stopped me with a kiss. "Next time, you can take me home with you."

"Next time? I don't wanna hear about 'the next time' you do this to yerself. There's not gonna be a next time, because I'm gonna make sure you take better care of— Wait a minute, you'll come home with me?"

"Yes, Ray."

"Oh. That's good." I gave him a stern look. "But there's not gonna be a next time!"

"Understood."

"I could tuck in on the floor." The cot didn't work with the two of us in it. We'd tried it and nearly killed ourselves. More than once. He wasn't the only pig-headed one here.

"Never, Ray. I could take the floor—"

He would too. I saw where this was going and knew I couldn't win. "Nah, I couldn't sleep with you being on the floor. I'll go home and see ya in the morning."

Ben was trying not to yawn in my face, so I got up and led him to the cot, then tucked him in. He smiled when I told Dief not to let him get into any more heroics tonight.

"I love you, Ray."

I answered, Ben-style, with a heartfelt "And I you." I managed to give him a long kiss without falling onto the cot. As I left for the night, I asked, "And Ben?"

"Yes?"

"Next time, save some energy for me."

End

