



Ray groaned as he twisted, turned and straightened himself out in the vintage convertible's backseat. The fact that he should have had a broken neck wasn't lost on him as he finally managed to get himself sitting upright. He looked up at the rafters he had been hanging from five minutes earlier. They were easily thirty or more feet off the damn floor.

Broken neck? He should be fucking dead. And as much as he might have liked to, he couldn't lay this most recent and potentially catastrophic mess at Fraser's feet. Nope, he'd managed to get into this one all by his lonesome, without any help at all from his freakish, whacked-out sort-of partner. Fraser had told him he couldn't leave the Canadian consulate. Hell, Turnbull told him he couldn't leave the consulate and Ray, in typical fashion, did the exact opposite of what he was told. Of course, whenever Ray disobeyed he did it on a grand scale, which is how he ended up literally hanging by the seat of his, no, Turnbull's, pants from the ceiling of an abandoned warehouse in the armpit of downtown Chicago, wearing the world's itchiest wool and listening to one of Fraser's "what the hell is the point of this" stories.

Actually, hearing about the invisible mending of the nuns of Fort Macleod had helped take his mind off the fact that a baker's dozen or so of Chicago's finest were sweeping through the place looking for him. He really did have to give it to Fraser for that one. The Mountie's sonar-like bat ears had picked up the sound of the cruisers early enough to give them time to get untied

and to hide before Kilrea and crew showed up. If it hadn't been for Fraser, Ray would be handcuffed in the back of a police car and on his way to Central Booking instead of sitting in a classic, soft-top convertible Cadillac and nursing the beginnings of one hell of a headache.

He looked over to where Fraser was finishing his decidedly-more-graceful-than-Ray's descent from the ceiling. Watching him reverse scale the wooden support beams, Ray thought of the mountain lion Fraser mentioned in the sewing-nuns story. In a lot of ways, Fraser reminded Ray of one of the big cats. The lion, maybe, although the panther was probably more fitting if for no other reason than the fact that Fraser's thick-looking, coffee-colored hair was more like a panther's pelt than a lion's. Either way, he moved through almost every bit of space Ray had ever seen him in like he owned it.

Confident. Commanding. Bad-ass, in his own weird, Mountie way. It really wasn't all that hard for Ray to see why Turnbull worshipped him. Of course, he would lay good money on the possibility that Turnbull's thinking of Fraser as Mountie royalty had as much to do with the fact that Fraser looked like he looked as it had to do with the fact that he was so damned good at the job. Then again, when Ray was being honest with himself, he could admit that his own ... appreciation for Fraser owed no small debt to how the man looked. He'd made peace with the fact that he thought Fraser was hot about thirty seconds after Fraser admitted to finding him

attractive. It didn't matter to Ray that the next thing Fraser had said was that he wasn't really qualified to judge. The actual answer to the question that was asked was all that counted.

He wondered if Fraser thought he looked as good in a Mountie uniform as he thought Fraser did. Yeah, the pants itched like a mother-fucker and Ray would never stop thinking the way they puffed out looked silly, but the red was attention-getting, and the belt and boots were exceedingly cool. As Fraser walked towards him, Ray flashed on an image of his partner from earlier that day, all slinky grace and ease as he stripped away the uniform layers and accessories. The memory made his fingers itch and his skin tingle.

There was a perfectly innocent reason for Fraser making like a classier version of a Chippendale's dancer. But for one wild and desperate moment as it was happening Ray imagined more, wondered how things could go if Turnbull wasn't standing there and if Fraser hadn't stopped with the outer layer.

He had shaken himself out of it when Fraser handed him his files. The silent reminder that there was a case to work made it easy for Ray to forget that Fraser had been undressing in front of him, looking him in the eye the whole damn time, almost acting like he was enjoying it. That idea was even wilder than Fraser shedding his clothes like a snake losing its skin because Ray spent a goodly part of his down time thinking about what it would be like to get naked with Fraser and wondering if his partner ever had the same thoughts about him.

Sure, there were times when it seemed like Fraser was looking at him with something other than that curiously disinterested expression he used with everything and everyone else. Once, on a stake-out, Ray turned to ask a question and caught Fraser staring at him. Staring so hard that it took him a couple of seconds to figure out that Ray was staring back. Fraser

blinked a few times and then it was back to that almost-blank face Ray hated, the one that said 'I can't be touched so don't even bother to try.' The shift from what Fraser looked like when he wasn't wearing that face to what he looked like when he was happened fast. It happened so fast that Ray thought he had imagined what he saw in Fraser's eyes when he first turned his head. For those few, unguarded seconds, Ray thought Fraser looked ... hungry, and not for food. It surprised him enough that he forgot what he had wanted to say.

Fraser looked the same way this morning as he pulled off his uniform jacket, shimmied out of his suspenders and dropped his pants, his eyes never leaving Ray's face. And yeah, it made Ray wonder. He was still reflecting on it when Fraser said his name so sharply that it felt like a slap, yanking his attention back from that stake-out and from Thatcher's office before plopping it down in the warehouse again. Fraser must have been saying his name for a while.

"What?" He thought he sounded too snappish and he could tell from the slight narrowing of Fraser's eyes that the other man probably agreed. And it was a little unfair of him. Just because he was daydreaming about Fraser stripping didn't mean his inattention was exactly Fraser's fault. The next time he tried, he sounded calmer. "What?"

"I asked if you were all right." Fraser looked and sounded concerned, and Ray felt strangely, suddenly warm.

"Yeah ... yeah, Fraser, I'm fine. I just ... I ... my neck's gonna be sore the next couple of days, but I'll live." He smiled, hoping the show of good humor would keep Fraser from worrying over him like some Mountie Mother Hen.

"You're sure?"

"Yeah. I'm sure." To prove it, Ray stood up in the back seat and then, with his hand on the car door, he gave a lunge he knew was graceful and swung his legs over the side, landing with both feet on the floor. He

tugged on the borrowed uniform jacket to straighten it, then adjusted the Stetson on his head. "I'm good to go."

Fraser nodded. He still looked kind of skeptical, but Ray didn't figure that to be his problem. He felt something wet on his fingers and glanced down to find Diefenbaker licking him. He had no idea what had gotten into the wolf all of a sudden, but a part of him wished it would rub off on Fraser.

"Ray, may I ask what you thought you were doing?"

There it was. The Tone. The slightly pissy, borderline arrogant, 'why can't you just do what I say' tone Fraser used when he just knew that he was right and Ray was wrong about something. Ray hated it as much as he hated the 'don't touch me' mask. This time he actually thought that maybe he deserved it, but he also thought Fraser would wait until they were back at the consulate before using it. At least it didn't catch him as off-guard as it usually did because he was expecting it.

"Working the case," he said, as he started walking to the door. He didn't look to see if Fraser was following him or not.

"I thought I had explained rather clearly why you couldn't leave the consulate." Fraser was right next to him then, completely in step with him and clearly not about to let it go.

"You did. I just don't agree." It was chilly outside and the sun was going down. The warehouse faced a busy street front and Ray stepped out to the curb to hail a cab.

"Well, perhaps the events of the last twenty-five minutes have demonstrated the fallacy of your position."

That was just about enough. It was easy, so easy for Fraser to act superior, to get his 'I told you so' swerve on because it wasn't his ass in the proverbial sling, and Ray thought now was as good a time as any to hip him to that fact. He whirled to face Fraser just as a cab pulled up alongside them. This time his snappishness was intentional.

"You know what, Fraser? I don't really care that you think I'm bein' stupid. You're not the one who's been framed for murder. You're not the one who's got a pit-bull State's Attorney wantin' your head on a stick so he can get more votes, and you're not the one whose whole career could be over just like that," Ray snapped his fingers once, "because you took the wrong meet at the wrong time. I know you're worried about Vecchio's cover, but I'm the one lookin' at jail time. So do us both a favor and spare me the Fraser Knows Best routine, okay? I'm in no mood for it and it isn't gonna help us figure out who whacked Volpe."

It was fascinating to Ray to watch the change in Fraser's expression. Smugness gave way to surprise, which flickered briefly then shifted to something more hard-edged, something that looked a lot like anger. Before Ray could study it closely enough to be sure that's what it was, another shift happened and the edge softened, then deepened into something he instantly recognized as sadness.

This last got Ray on some level way down inside, on some plane in his emotional architecture he hadn't even known existed until that moment. What he saw in Fraser's eyes seemed old and ageless all at once, like it had been there all along and would always be there. Ray was suddenly very sure that this ... pain he saw was, in some way, where Fraser lived and breathed.

"Are you guys gettin' in or what?" The cab driver looked irritated and bored and Ray took advantage of his impatience to open the door and climb in. It was a welcome diversion from that sad blue gaze and gave him a few moments to think. Yeah, Fraser was being a know-it-all pain-in-the-ass, but then again, Ray had come to him for help in the first place. It wasn't fair to get mad at Fraser when Ray had nobody but himself to blame for the two of them getting snatched by Herndorf.

Fraser didn't say anything to Ray as he got into the cab behind Diefenbaker. He just took off his hat and told the driver to take them to the consulate. He made a point of acting really interested in the scenery on his side of the street. The fact that he still hadn't fired off some smart-assed retort told Ray that he'd really struck a nerve with his mini-tirade. He pulled Turnbull's Stetson off and set it on his knee. He wasn't even sure what he wanted to say, but he knew he had to say something, so he was surprised when Fraser beat him to it.

"Is that really what you think, Ray? That the only reason I'm helping you is to protect Ray Vecchio's cover?" Fraser sounded tired. He stared out the window until he finished speaking, then turned to peer at Ray over the top of Dief's head.

Ray shrugged. He knew it was an inadequate answer, but it was also true. He didn't know what to think. He'd watched Fraser play fast and loose with the rules to cover Vecchio's ass in the Rankin case. This situation wasn't all that different. Sure, Ray was now the murder suspect instead of Vecchio, but if Internal Affairs at the Chicago PD got involved then it would come out that he wasn't really Ray Vecchio, and the real Ray Vecchio would be in jeopardy. Ray knew that as whip-smart as Fraser was, this fact wasn't lost on him. He shrugged again, and spoke, just in case Fraser decided to play clueless.

"I don't know. Maybe. You can't tell me you haven't thought about the fact that this could cause problems for Vecchio if we can't figure it out before Cahill and the CPD find a way to get me out of the consulate." Ray stroked Dief's head as he spoke. He found he didn't want to look into those sad, steady eyes again.

"No, I can't tell you that I haven't ... calculated the potential risk to Ray Vecchio if we are unable to determine who killed Mr. Volpe before the Deputy State's Attorney is able to convince a judge to sign an extradition order. But I can tell you that that isn't the reason I'm helping you."

Ray lifted his head to meet Fraser's eyes and there it was again. The look from the stake-out, from Thatcher's office. This time, there was no mistaking or imagining what it was. It was hunger. Need. Want. Ray glanced away quickly, forcing himself not to stare at the incredible look on his partner's face. He didn't want to give Fraser any kind of signal that he looked human and hungry and beautiful.

And like he could be touched.

Ray couldn't stop himself then. His partner had opened the door and he was going to walk through it. He focused on Fraser's lanyard before speaking, afraid that eye contact would wipe that naked, open expression right off the other man's face. "Then what is the reason, Fraser? If it isn't to watch Vecchio's back?"

He had always been good at this, was always able to suss out an emotional chink during an argument and turn it to his advantage, use it to make a point, or to get down to the truth of the situation. Stella had hated that he was better at it than she was, especially when they were fighting. Ray saw his chance to use it on Fraser and he wasn't going to waste it. He wanted to get down to the truth of that look, to the truth of Fraser's ... hunger.

"Ray, I can't believe you feel that you even have to ask."

"Well, I do. Why, Fraser?"

"You really have no idea?"

"If I knew, do you think I'd be askin'?"

Ray wanted at least a partial answer before they got back to the consulate. There was no telling what Turnbull had gotten into while he and Fraser were hanging from the ceiling, and once they got back, Fraser could use all kinds of excuses to avoid continuing the conversation. "Why?"

When Fraser spoke, the hunger was still in his eyes and on his face, but the sadness had joined it. "Because you asked me to, Ray."

Because you asked me to. Technically, that was true, but ... there was more to it than that; at least Ray felt like there was. He

felt like Fraser was trying to tell him that it went further than the request implied in Ray falling to his knees in the middle of the consulate and shouting his partner's name. He opened his mouth to ask a follow-up question when the cab stopped in front of the consulate. Fraser wasted no time squaring the tab with the driver and letting himself and Dief out. Ray almost broke into a run to trying to keep up with the two of them.

It was after hours and the front door was locked. Turnbull had apparently closed up shop and gone home. As Fraser dug the key out of the cartridge case on his belt, Ray debated the best way to keep him talking. Fraser pretty much defined willfulness and when he got it in his head to be stubborn, he made brick walls seem pliable. Fortunately, Ray knew that one of his weaknesses was the direct question. He couldn't stop himself from answering one if his life depended on it.

"So, you're telling me that all of this – the extradition crap with Huey and Dewey, you squarin' off with Cahill – all of it is just about me, and you wantin' to help me, and it's got nothin' to do with Vecchio?"

"Ray ...," Fraser dragged the fingers of his left hand over his eyebrow, a move Ray recognized as one of his few nervous tics. "I ... I ... don't know what it is you want me to say. You were in trouble. You needed my help. I couldn't ... wouldn't have said 'no' to you."

Ray mulled that for a few moments. "Because Vecchio's cover depends on keeping Cahill and the CPD out of it?"

Fraser sighed. He stroked his eyebrow again and it seemed to Ray that he was forming his answer as they stood there, trying it out in his head before saying it out loud. "It would be ... disingenuous of me to deny that the ramifications of this situation for Ray Vecchio hadn't crossed my mind. They have. But in all honesty, during everything I've done since your arrival here this morning, I believe ... I'm fairly certain ... I have been thinking only of you."

Ray felt himself nodding. Thinking only of you. He kind of liked that. He wasn't sure if he believed it, but it ... sounded good. Then again, Fraser was an expert at listening to what people said to him and telling them, if not exactly what they wanted to hear, then something that at least satisfied them. Ray still didn't think he knew Fraser well enough to know if, and when, the Mountie was doing that with him. He opened his mouth to say something, then closed it because he didn't know what he wanted to say. For several awkward seconds he and Fraser simply stared at each other. Then the phone rang, and Ray used that as his cue to retreat to the guest room next to Thatcher's office.

He heard Fraser say Turnbull's name, and assumed from Fraser's scattered 'aha'-s and 'I see'-s that Turnbull was telling him what happened while they were out. He tugged at the belt *the Sam Browne* around his waist and, when he couldn't get it unfastened, found himself wishing he had paid more attention as Turnbull got him dressed. He couldn't get out of the jacket *tunic* until he unhooked the belt because the lawn dart *no ... uh ... lanyard* was somehow looped into the belt, and he'd strangle himself trying to take off the jacket while still wearing the lanyard.

Ray was so busy being frustrated with not being able to undress himself that he didn't hear Fraser hang up the phone or go down the hall to his office. So it surprised him to feel Fraser standing right next to him as he tugged uselessly at his buckle.

"It might be easier if you let me help you." As he spoke, Fraser set a pair of jeans and one of his flannel shirts down on the dresser. "The first time I ever tried to get out of this by myself it took me half an hour." The smile he gave Ray was small but it lit his eyes.

"Uh ... yeah ... sure. I'm clearly not gettin' anywhere with it." Ray was suddenly aware that Fraser was very much in his personal space. They were basically the

same height and when Fraser exhaled, Ray could feel the tickle of the other man's breath on the skin of his cheek. It occurred to him then that Fraser always seemed to stand very close to him. When they walked places together, they were often shoulder to shoulder. Being a demonstrative person himself, Ray never really gave it much thought, except in those moments, like right now, when he realized that Fraser never got that physically close to anyone else.

He was still thinking about that when he felt the gentle brush of Fraser's knuckles against his side. The Mountie was unfastening the belt and to do it, he had to reach between the belt and the jacket to disconnect the strap that went across the shoulder from the one that went around the waist. It was the subtlest of touches, but damn if Ray didn't feel it *everywhere* when the fact that Fraser was undressing him settled in his head, cozy as you please. The parts of him exposed to the air – his face and hands – grew tingly and very, very warm.

He had thought about this many times. Fraser getting him undressed. Him getting Fraser undressed and then the two of them doing all sorts of things that are the most fun to do when you're as naked as the day you were born. All of a sudden, it felt like the air had been sucked out of the room. His sense of oxygen deprivation wasn't helped at all by the vivid image, rising unbidden in his mind, of Fraser's hot and slippery tongue gliding over his stomach. Talking seemed like a really good idea.

"What's with the clothes?" He was genuinely impressed that he sounded normal.

"Oh, Turnbull reminded me that the clothes you were wearing earlier are possibly evidence and should therefore ... be preserved as such, at least ... at least until the identity of Mr. Volpe's true killer is ascertained." Fraser finished unhooking the belt and set it on the dresser. "He placed them in a plastic bag and suggested that I ... I lend you something in the interim."

The pauses in Fraser's answer got Ray's attention, pulled him away from the erotic reverie rapidly unspooling in his mind. He turned his head to follow the hand that was now reaching for his shoulder. It was shaking slightly, and Ray knew then that Fraser was just as nervous as he was. The \$64,000 question was whether they were nervous for the same reason.

Ray watched as Fraser unbuttoned first one, then the other, epaulette and slipped the lanyard free. It joined the Sam Browne on the dresser. The Mountie's long, thick fingers went to the jacket's collar next and Ray was sure that he'd never before thought the sound of Velcro opening was as sexy as he did at this moment. Fraser kept his eyes on his hands as he started working on the buttons and Ray decided that the only way to get the answer to the question was to just ask.

"Betcha never figured undressing me was included in the partnership deal, huh?"



He tried for a tone that was light and playful, but didn't anticipate the half-octave drop in his vocal register. The huskiness of his voice caught him off-guard. He could only imagine what it did to Fraser.

The hands at the second button on the tunic stopped as Fraser looked him in the eyes then quickly glanced back down. His fingers moved again and the second button opened. "Ah ... no, Ray, I ... I ... didn't, b ..." Fraser cleared his throat as he finished

with the third button and moved on to the fourth.

"But ... what?" Ray knew Fraser had started to say something else. He wanted to know what that something else was.

"What?"

"What were you gonna say?"

"Nothing, Ray."

"I thought you never lied."

Fraser's eyes snapped to Ray's face. "I don't."

"Then what were you gonna say?" Ray hoped he was wearing what passed for a challenging expression. Fraser wasn't the only one who could be stubborn.

It was hard, so hard staying focused on getting an answer to his questions when Fraser's tongue – pink and thick – slipped out and over his lower lip, wetting it. Another of his nervous tics, Ray knew, but that didn't stop it from being sexy as hell. Every time he did it, it made Ray want to climb right down his throat. "What were you going to say, Fraser?"

"I was going to say that ... I ... I don't mind." The fifth and final button was undone and Fraser slid the jacket down Ray's arms and off, using the excuse of folding it and setting it on the dresser to back out of Ray's space a bit.

"Really? You don't mind?" Ray stepped forward, into Fraser's space, backing him against the dresser.

"No, Ray, I don't."

"Does that mean you've thought about it? Undressing me, I mean?" They were eye to eye, close enough that Ray could see the flecks of grey in Fraser's irises. He'd never noticed them before, but they made the blue seem even bluer. And Fraser's lashes were so long and thick they looked like smudges on his cheeks whenever he glanced down, like he was doing now.

"Your ... the ... boots. The boots have to come off before ..."

"Have you thought about it, Fraser? Gettin' me out of my clothes?" Ray kept his voice low and kind of rough.

"Yes, Ray. Yes ... I ... I have."

Ray thought that if there had been a mirror in the room, his reflection in it would be downright predatory. He took another step closer to Fraser, knowing full well his partner would have to step sideways before he could move away. Fraser stayed where he was. When Ray spoke again his voice was little more than a whisper but it still seemed to him that it echoed off every wall in the room.

"Then what are you waitin' for? Permission?" He didn't give Fraser a chance to answer. Just took a final step that redefined the boundaries of personal space for both of them in a way the thinking part of his brain understood to be significant.

A heartbeat later and his mouth pressed against Fraser's, easy and slow at first. Fraser's lips were smooth and soft and the fuller, suckable lower one was still moist from where he'd licked it earlier. Ray's tongue slid out to trace the same path and Fraser made a low, grunting sound deep in his throat. And just ... like ... that ... Ray felt his lips part, then Fraser's tongue, more slippery than Ray imagined and much, much too clever for either his or Fraser's good, followed Ray's back into his mouth. It tested the sharpness of his teeth, skimmed over, then under his tongue, and finally, stroked the indentation of the roof in delicate, maddening caresses that might as well have been to Ray's dick, given how quickly and attentively it jerked to life in response.

Ray moved even closer, which should have been impossible, but there was still a layer of air between them, and used his thigh to wedge Fraser's legs apart. It was awkward – his knee pressed uncomfortably against the dresser – but he had to know and yes, there, right *there*, Fraser (for whom the word "solid" seemed to have been invented) was hard. Right where it counted. Right where it mattered. And right where Ray could touch. So he did, lifting his thigh, rocking it as much as the dresser would allow and he moaned around the tongue in his mouth, felt Fraser shudder in reply and

if it felt this good while they were still dressed, naked would drive him straight out of his fucking mind.

Those broad, strong hands cupped his ass, pulling him even closer and he was riding Fraser's thigh which made him think, somewhat incoherently, that borrowing Turnbull's uniform might have been a good idea after all. Soon, too soon, Fraser's tongue was gone. Ray was ready to lodge a formal protest at its loss until he realized that Fraser had to take it back so that he could slide down to the floor, which was where the boots were and yeah, he had said something about them needing to come off.

Ray curled his fingers into fists and wrapped his arms around himself to keep from grabbing Fraser's head. Good-fucking-God but he had imagined this—or at least part of this—more times than he could actually count. Fraser on his knees, that pretty, butter-wouldn't-melt-in-it mouth closed around his cock, sucking like there was no tomorrow. Ray knew the boots didn't have to come off for them to do that, but hey, if Fraser wanted to be naked, who the hell was he to argue?

Fraser worked with even more than his usual efficiency, undoing the laces with movements Ray didn't try to follow. Step up, then out, and now, to the other one. Fraser's fingers were thicker than his, but they had their own grace. More languid than his own staccato movements, but just as good at doing any job. Like getting Turnbull's boots out of the goddamn way. Those busy fingers untied the laces at Ray's ankles and the pressure along his calves from the riding pants suddenly eased.

In the amount of time it took him to blink he and Fraser were eye-to-eye again. This time it was Fraser who moved in for the kill, cupping one hand behind Ray's head and pulling him in for a kiss while the other hand slipped the suspenders off Ray's shoulders. Still using one hand, Fraser unfastened the pants. Ray helped him pushed them down while their tongues kept

right on tangoing, and then it occurred to him that there was a bed in the room.

Without letting go of Fraser or Fraser's mouth, Ray walked them towards the bed as carefully as he could with his pants part-way down. It was almost like dancing and it wasn't lost on him how easily Fraser took his lead. When he felt the mattress against the back of his knees he just let himself fall, bringing Fraser with him, and if you're gonna die being crushed by something, well, this was the way to fucking go.

They both wriggled and writhed until Turnbull's pants were finally, mercifully on the floor instead of on Ray. Another tonsil-checking kiss and this time, Ray put his hands in Fraser's hair, something he'd wanted to do since that day in the crypt, and yeah, it was as soft and thick as it looked. One of Fraser's hands was at the back of Ray's neck, the other between their bodies and Ray almost rocketed right out of his skin when those warm, callused fingers reached inside his boxers and closed around his cock.

Pulling, stroking, *twisting*, for fuck's sake. It didn't even matter to Ray that Fraser's riding pants were itching the hell out of his bare thigh because that was Fraser's hand on his dick like it belonged there, liked it owned the damn thing, like it knew exactly what it was doing. He wanted to return the favor and slid one hand down, out of Fraser's hair and over his cheek, pausing long enough to stroke the clean line of the bone with his thumb, then moved down, down, down. He surprised himself when his hand collided with Fraser's and his own cock, and a sweet little shudder went through both of them at that.

The chuckle that followed was a good excuse to catch their breaths before the kissing started again. It was slower this time, somehow even deeper than before and for a few moments, they just kissed. Ray's fingers rested on the buttons of Fraser's pants and Fraser's hand cradled Ray's cock, not moving, just holding it. The lack of

movement didn't stop it from twitching and to Ray, it seemed as though he could feel it throbbing in his ears, steady and sure and strong and....

That wasn't his cock. It was a door. More precisely, it was someone knocking on a door. One of the many doors at the consulate. As the fog from the hottest foreplay he'd experienced since he and Stella first started sleeping together began to clear from behind his eyes, Ray realized it was the front door of the consulate. Which meant that it was someone who wanted inside. Fraser had made that intuitive leap several seconds before Ray and was already on his feet, adjusting himself, making sure nothing was out of place before he went to answer it.

He cracked his neck once – yet another tic – before speaking. Ray took some comfort from the fact that Fraser looked as disappointed as he felt.

"You ... you might want to get dressed." Simple, matter-of-fact. Back to business and sometimes Ray envied Fraser's ability to turn his "duty" self on and off like that. Ray could do it, too, just not with the speed and ... ruthlessness that Fraser did.

He nodded, thinking to himself that really, he could just lock the door and finish by himself what they'd started while Fraser tended to ... whatever the fuck it was that needed tending to. It wouldn't be enough, though, and he knew it. Not with Fraser right down the hall. Not when he could come back any minute and go back to fondling Ray like he'd been doing it for months, and doing it well. No, when you're this close to something that feels that good, you wait for it. And Ray could wait. That was pretty much what his little visit to Canada had consisted of anyway. Waiting for Fraser.

He stood and walked over to the clothes Fraser had left for him on the dresser. Jeans and a shirt. The jeans, being Fraser's, would be baggy on him, which was good because his unruly cock still hadn't figured out that the fooling around had

been interrupted. He put them on carefully, easing them over his erection while simultaneously trying to will the damn thing to soften. He realized too late that picking up Fraser's shirt and putting it to his nose wasn't going to make his dick cooperate. But that didn't stop him from deeply inhaling the strangely intoxicating mix of smells he'd come to recognize as his partner's scent. Soap, spice, a dash of leather, a hint of cedar, and something just evergreen enough that Ray guessed it to be whatever Fraser used to shave. Whenever Fraser acted like he had no concept of the term "personal space," these were the scents that drifted over and around Ray like a breeze. He'd know them in his sleep and he knew that the combination of them meant Fraser was nearby.

He was losing himself in Fraser's smell when he stepped out into the hall. His partner had been gone too long and he thought he'd heard someone else's voice after he heard the front door close. Fraser called to him from one of the other rooms.

"Ray? Would you care to join us?"

Us. So somebody else was there now. This was no doubt about the case, and that dull, creeping ache in the pit of his stomach, the one that had been there since he bolted out of the alley that morning, was back. He'd been able to forget about it, especially in the last half-hour, because of Fraser, but it was back in spades. Thinking about what he and Fraser had just been doing softened the ache some, but Ray knew he needed to focus. Still, he couldn't make himself give up the memory just yet, and he kept Fraser's shirt draped backwards around him as he walked down the hall.

Lt. Welsh, his usual gruffness softened by something Ray wanted to believe was concern, had come in person with the news that the Deputy State's Attorney had gotten his extradition order. Which meant that Ray's impromptu Canadian vacation would be over bright and early tomorrow morning unless he and Fraser could determine who killed Andreas Volpe. Even as he told Welsh

that he'd had nothing to do with it, Ray felt the ache again. It seized inside him, like some phantom spasm, and he actually had to swallow a few times to make it still.

He knew exactly what it was, and it sickened him. It was the tiny, irrational part of his mind that kept saying ... maybe. Maybe he had something to do with Volpe's death. The events in the alley were a blurry haze, images and sensation running together in a rush: he'd been fucking around with Volpe at the start of the meet, easy to do and oh, so much fun; Volpe was breathing Attitude and Ray, of course, gave as good as he got, using an ostensible pat-down to cop a feel; Volpe's heavy fingers moving too comfortably high on his thigh, pressing too comfortably firm on his balls; sharp, hot crack of pain in his head and down his spine, and the last thing he remembered before everything went black was the sight of Volpe dropping to his knees.

Ray didn't know. He just didn't. And the sick little ache in the pit of his stomach was the knowledge that the "anything is possible" part of the Volpe murder equation included the variable of him pulling the trigger.

Not wanting to think about it, Ray focused his attention back on Fraser. The Mountie was saying something about Tibbit, the cop who sent Ray scurrying out of the alley. Somebody needed to talk to her, and since Ray couldn't leave, that meant Fraser would be the one to go. They both walked Welsh to the door. He turned to Ray before stepping out.

"Hang in there, Detective." Four little words, but they eased something in Ray and he nodded. He liked Welsh. It felt good to know the Lieu believed in him. Welsh nodded back and then he was gone.

For several long, too-quiet seconds Ray and Fraser stood in the hall, just looking at each other. To Ray, it felt like everything – the air, the time, his breathing – had gone completely still. He wanted nothing more than to be back in the guestroom, back on

the bed with his tongue in Fraser's mouth and Fraser's hand on his dick. It had felt so right and so good and he wanted, badly, to be in that place again. But Fraser had to leave and Ray had to wait and Volpe was still fucking dead.

"How are you gonna find Tibbit?" The cop part of his brain switched to auto-pilot and shifted the Ray part of him to stand-by. Right now, thinking about Fraser's tongue wasn't a smart thing to be doing.

"I'll start by reviewing the duty roster for today and go from there."

"What are you expectin' her to say, Fraser?" Ray wasn't hopeful that Tibbit would have anything to add to what they already knew or anything to say that would lessen the fluttering ache that was now a constant, almost-living thing inside him.

"I have no idea, Ray, but I think talking to her is essential. She may have seen something that would provide some clues as to the identity of the real killer."

Even though he still refused to allow himself to trust it, Ray liked the ... certainty with which Fraser said the words "the real killer." It was if the only way he'd believe Ray had anything to do with the murder would be if someone showed up with a videotape of Ray pulling the trigger, and even then he might not be convinced. That certainty felt like a gift, one Ray was happy he'd been given, but couldn't stop feeling like it was meant for someone else.

"What if she didn't see anything? We're back to square one, right? Volpe dead and my hand on the gun." Ray hated it that his voice was so shaky and that Fraser had to notice, even if he pretended like he didn't.

"Ray ...," and Fraser's voice had a slight edge to it, the one that told Ray his partner was getting impatient but trying hard to hide it. He was all set to give attitude right back until he felt Fraser's hand on his cheek, thumb lightly stroking the bone. Without hesitation, on sheer instinct, Ray leaned into that touch and it was all he could do not to purr. He wanted to go in several directions at once. Out the front door, or down the hall

to his room. As far away from Fraser as he could be, or right into the other man's arms. Contradictory and confusing impulses and Ray knew, he just knew that waiting for Fraser to come back from tracking down Tibbit would be torture. He'd never been good at waiting, and Fraser was going to leave him alone with his thoughts and his guilt and his arousal, and they'd both be lucky if he managed to punch only one of the consulate's many, many walls.

"We'll figure it out, Ray." The edge was gone and Fraser's voice was warm and smooth. Soothing, even, and in spite of his mood Ray let his lips curve into a smile. Fraser looked at him for a few more seconds before slowly pulling his hand away and turning to walk back to his office.

Ray stayed put, guessing that Fraser was going to put his uniform jacket back on and collect Dief. He was tempted to ask if the wolf could stay with him, just for the company, but decided that would be stupid because it wasn't like Dief could talk to him or anything. And the way things were going, Dief would probably spend the time looking at him like he was the Krispy Kreme donut-of-the-day instead of doing that licking thing that had the weird effect of making Ray feel appreciated. And that thought made Ray wonder when he'd gotten so hooked on his partner that the idea of being liked by Fraser's dog *wolf* made him go all soft and blurry inside.

"I trust I don't have to tell you that it would unwise to leave," Fraser said as he walked to the door.

"Aside from the fact you just did, no, you don't." Ray gave him a deliberately false smile, in case Fraser missed or tried to ignore the sarcasm.

Fraser gave him a small half-smile, which Ray knew was the silent equivalent of "understood." He half-smiled back. He wanted to ask for another kiss, another caress, another something before Fraser left. Something that he could dwell on, think about, savor, while Fraser was gone. Anything to keep his mind off Volpe, that

alley, and Welsh's heads-up on his impending extradition. But he waited too late and too long. Fraser signaled to Diefenbaker and then ... he was gone.

It occurred to Ray after he left that Fraser actually trusted him to stay there by himself. That fact was the only thing keeping him from trying to leave again. The waiting was, as it had been all day, the hardest part. He was too hyper to watch television and too distracted to read, not that there was anything in the consulate to read. Leave it to Thatcher to not be the type to stash romance novels somewhere for those slow days. They would have been good for a laugh or two.

Despite the almost aching curiosity to do it, Ray couldn't bring himself to go through Fraser's office, even though he figured doing so would make the two of them even. He smiled a little at the memory of how he'd been both angry and turned-on after learning that Fraser managed to get into his apartment without so much as an invitation and without him even being there. They had only known one another for three weeks at the time, but the idea of Fraser in his ... space ... had terrified and pleased Ray, and he tried hard, very hard, as the weeks turned into months, not to think about why.

Standing in the far-too-quiet main hallway of the Canadian consulate, he still wasn't ready to think about it, not with everything else that was going on in his head. He could think about liking Fraser's touch, he could even think about wanting it, but the "why" of it was just too much. Too damn much on top of the rest of it, and Ray suddenly wished Turnbull hadn't gone ... wherever Turnbull went when he left the consulate. At least if Turnbull were there, Ray wouldn't have to be alone with his thoughts of a career in tatters, a life in prison and the idea of Fraser looking at him with something that approached shame.

Fraser.

He kept coming back to his partner, which kind of made sense given what they

were doing before Welsh made his house call, but it went beyond that and Ray knew it. He turned to look in the direction of Fraser's office, then shook his head, telling himself to just forget about it. The way to stop thinking about why Fraser made him feel the way he did was not by hanging out in the man's office/bedroom while he wasn't there.

He was hungry again, and even though he'd had pizza earlier, he called in another order because it was fast and good. Plus there was a real possibility that Sandor had heard something else on the street since that morning. Of course, Ray would have to wait for the pizza, and waiting meant thinking, which he still wasn't ready to do.

Dancing. That was it. He could dance. Whenever Ray wanted to just be, he danced. Turned the music as loud as he could without the neighbors freaking out, and simply moved. Knowing the words was nice, but they were essentially irrelevant in the face of snaking grooves, coiling rhythms and a sweet, insinuating bass line glide.

There was a radio in the main conference room. While Ray knew it was pointless to expect to find anything bearing even a passing resemblance to dance music in the consulate itself, he listened to the radio enough to know that he could find at least one or two stations shifting into "house party" mode. That was good, too, because the thought of slow dancing alone seemed dangerous to him somehow. Stella leaving was still too recent a memory for him to be able to do it and not wish she was in his arms. And he had a feeling it would be entirely too easy to imagine slow dancing with Fraser.

Naturally, given the way the day had gone so far, the first song was a re-mix of "Missing" by Everything But the Girl. Fucking perfect way to get his mind off both Stella and Fraser, because no matter how hard he tried, no matter how well the sleekly syncopated beat teased his arms and

legs into movement, he couldn't get away from the words,

And I miss you, like the deserts miss the rain.

Missed her, missing him and it confused Ray that he was thinking about them at the same time and in sort of the same way, and it frustrated him that he wasn't getting anywhere on the whole not dwelling thing. He danced over to the radio and flipped stations, practically praying the other one was heavy on the instrumentals. He was certain that anything with words would somehow make him think of Stella or Fraser or both of them, and that just wasn't going to cut it. Some higher power took pity on him because for the next twenty-five minutes he got nothing but great bass and mercifully few words. He could feel the sweat beading at his temples, over his lower lip and on the bridge of his nose, and it felt good. There was nothing but the rhythm and the melody and his own supplication to it, and it was so easy because he didn't have to think to be able to do it.

Ray was deep into the persuasive percussion of a hopping mix that managed to sample "Jungle Boogie," "Family Affair," and "Atomic Dog," when a slinky hip-swivel turned him 180 degrees and put him face-to-face with Fraser. The Mountie stood just inside the doorway, perfectly still, blue eyes wide and mouth slightly open, looking a little stunned, a little turned on, and a little ... envious. This last made Ray smile to himself as he stutter-stepped to the radio to turn it off.

"You didn't ... you didn't have to stop, Ray." Fraser hadn't moved from the doorway and hadn't taken his eyes off Ray.

"I know. It was just kind of ... how long were you standin' there?"

"Long enough to know that you're an excellent dancer even when you're dancing by yourself."

Ray felt his cheeks get warm and hoped like hell that he wasn't blushing. So much for not thinking about the "why" of wanting



his partner. He was all set to start internally listing the reasons it was a good idea when the part of his brain that hadn't taken a holiday from practical matters whispered something about the dead crime lord in the alley. He decided to listen.

"So, what'd you find out from Tibbit?"

Fraser blinked once, twice, and Ray watched, fascinated, as he seemed to mentally shake himself back to something resembling attention to the case. Ray felt a twinge of self-satisfaction at just how far he'd apparently distracted the man.

"Someone told her to be in the alley this morning." Just like that, Duty Fraser was back.

"Did she say who?" Ray followed Fraser to Inspector Thatcher's office.

"Not exactly. She indicated that the individual she spoke with was an associate of Damon Cahill's."

"An associate? You mean, like worked for Cahill?"

"Or with him. Officer Tibbit said she'd met the man before, but never managed to catch his name." Fraser hooked one of the phone lines into the fax machine behind Thatcher's desk.

Ray processed what Fraser had just said and thought back over the day's events. "How much you wanna bet it was Kilrea? You said he was hot to get my files at the station today, and he's the person Herndorf called to turn us in."

"Oh, I never wager, as you know, Ray. However, if I were a betting man, I don't think I'd put any money against your supposition."

"You couldn't just say, 'You're probably right, Ray'? Wouldn't put any money 'against my supposition.'" Ray snorted. "Is it some kind of RCMP requirement that you can never just say 'yes' or 'no' and that you haveta include at least one twenty dollar word whenever you answer a question?"

Fraser looked up from playing with the fax machine, all innocence and sincerity. "Not that I'm aware of, Ray. Although, as I explained to Mr. Fillian earlier, the

Academy does place an emphasis on language and communication skills as part of standard Mountie training." The corners of his mouth turned up almost imperceptibly. Almost.

That earned an outright laugh from Ray. "It would. 'Cause it's important to know words like 'supposition' when you're arrestin' someone for, you know, bein' rude or somethin'." Before Fraser could respond, Ray nodded in the direction of the fax machine. "What are you doin', Fraser?"

"On the way back from my meeting with Officer Tibbit, I stopped at the station to obtain a copy of the attendance roster at the shooting range. Your suggestion about trying to determine if Detective Kilrea had been there today or not made sense. Officer McMurray said she would fax a copy once she located the original." Fraser paused for a moment, then continued. "Officer Tibbit said something else that I found interesting."

"What?" Ray tried to keep the impatience out of his voice, but Fraser's love of extended exposition really wore him out sometimes.

"Well, it would appear your assessment of her as being somewhat 'on edge' is not unfounded. She apparently shot someone in the line of duty."

"That's worth checkin' out. You say McMurray's on duty?" Fraser nodded. "Good. She likes me. She might know somethin' about it, or be able to hook us up with someone who does." Ray picked up the phone.

His instincts told him that Kilrea was the person who called Tibbitt, but he couldn't see the connection yet. He had a feeling that Kilrea's involvement was about more than doing the job of finding Volpe's killer. The words "clean up man" occasionally flashed on and off in his head. He was reflecting on it while explaining the purpose of the call to Officer McMurray when someone knocked on the front door.

"Pizza's here," he said, putting McMurray on hold and starting down the

hall before Fraser could tell him that answering the door was 'unwise.' Sure enough, Sandor was waiting on the front step.

"We got a little problem," Mike started, looking back over his shoulder to where Huey and Dewey were still camped out. "They've confiscated the pizza."

"But you've got it in your hands."

"Well, yeah, 'cause Tony's policy is that we give it to the person who ordered it, but they said I'm supposed to give it to them, but you'll pay for it," Sandor said as they walked back to Thatcher's office.

"Oh, bullshit. I'm not payin' for their pizza. It's my pizza, anyway." Ray opened the box as McMurray put him on hold. No freakin' pineapple. Why was that such a hard thing to get right? His bad mood, which had improved thanks to Fraser and the dancing, was back full force. "I'm not payin' for their pizza. That's theivery and there's no pineapple."

"Look, nobody tells Tony how to make pizza. He left Russia to be free."

Ray rolled his eyes. The last thing he felt like dealing with was Sandor making like Lech Walesa, but before he could respond to that, Fraser, who had helped himself to a slice despite the dispute over ownership, piped up with,

"I think it's quite tasty."

Ray couldn't resist. "Right, like your favorite toppings aren't blubber and lichen."

Fraser acted like he hadn't heard that as he looked at the fax that had just come through. After skimming it, he said, "Detective Kilrea was at the shooting range today, but this is interesting. He didn't need to be because he qualified yesterday."

McMurray picked just that moment to get back on the line to tell Ray that Tibbit had shot a fourteen year-old boy in the line of duty because she thought the video game he had in his hand was a gun. The only reason she was still on the force was because she agreed to undergo counseling and the kid didn't die.

He told Fraser and Sandor. For some reason Ray didn't quite get, the information sparked Sandor to remember that he'd run into an undercover officer who bragged that Gus Fillian had brought him in on a very hush-hush job Fillian was working on.

Ray glanced at Fraser to see if the Mountie was connecting the same set of dots he was. Undercover cop working for Fillian. When Herndorf turned them in, he had called Kilrea, an undercover cop. And Tibbit was tipped off something was going to happen in the alley by someone who worked for Damon Cahill. Kilrea worked for Cahill. Ray said his thought out loud.

"Herndorf, Fillian, Cahill, Kilrea." Ray didn't know why, but that combination was weirdly amusing. He heard his own nervousness in his chuckle, and tried to cover it up. "We've got the makings of a bonspiel." Something lurched in his stomach. He knew there was no hope of him getting out of this mess if the four of them were working together and had decided to pin it on him. Puking all over the Ice Queen's desk suddenly seemed like a very real possibility, and he couldn't even think clearly enough to catch the whimper that slipped through his lips.

He felt, rather than saw, Fraser look at him. "What's wrong?," he asked, and Ray found he just ... couldn't ... handle the concern in that deep, mellow voice. He had to get out of the room for a minute, catch his breath. Just fucking think.

"I just made a curling reference," he answered. While that fact was appalling to him in some way he was happy Turnbull wasn't around to see, it came in a distant second to his very real belief that his whole life would come crashing down around him if he didn't get out of the consulate. Fraser or no Fraser, he simply couldn't be there any more. "I'm going to go lie down."

Before Fraser could tell him that it just meant he'd paid more attention to the matches than he realized, Ray left the room. Fortunately, his room was right next to Thatcher's office, which made getting his

jacket and coat without Fraser seeing him very easy. Huey and Dewey were staked out front, so he had to take either the side or back entrance to get outside. By the time Fraser figured it out, Ray would be long gone.

Unfortunately for him, Diefenbaker had other ideas.

The wolf was camped right where Ray needed to pass to get to either of the exits he could use to leave. When Ray started to step over him, Dief leapt up, snapping into what Ray assumed was “guard dog” position. It caught him by surprise. He knew Dief was basically wild, but he had never seen the wolf act quite so ... wolf-like before. Dief’s lips curled back, a low rumble came from somewhere in his mid-section and, no mistake about it, Ray thought, that was a snarl. And it was directed at him. It was as if Dief was telling him to just forget about trying to go anywhere.

First Fraser, now the wolf, and Ray wondered – again – if there wasn’t something to that whole voodoo idea of animal familiars. He hadn’t been in the mood for Fraser getting all Mountie Knows Best on him, and he’d be damned if he was going to take attitude from a dog. He took another step forward, which only made Dief snarl louder, like he really meant it. Like he really would bite if Ray tried to get past him.

“Stupid dog, stupid dog! Get outta the way. Get outta the way.” Ray was so pissed that he knew one more thing, just one more thing and he’d lose it enough to cry. It amazed him that he could even hear Fraser over the roaring in his own head.

“Where are you going, Ray?” Voice all smooth and even, Fraser actually sounded curious instead of snotty and that was the only thing that made Ray decide to turn around and look at him instead of taking his chances with Diefenbaker.

“Look, I can’t just sit here and wait for Cahill and his goons to arrest me. I gotta do somethin’.” And if Fraser didn’t understand

that, Ray wasn’t sure they really should be partners.

“Do what, Ray? And where? Everyone in town on both sides of the law is looking for you.” Fraser sounded so ... calm, and Ray was torn between wanting to hit him and wanting to ... kiss him. He hadn’t given any thought to what he’d do once he got outside, and of course, somehow, Fraser not only knew that but had the nerve to call him on it.

“I don’t know, but I gotta do somethin’.”

“Yes, you do, Ray. You have to trust me.” Fraser looked serious and sincere and Ray again felt like this ... faith, this belief, belonged to someone else, not him, and he couldn’t quite bring himself to just *take* it.

“Trust you, Fraser? I don’t even trust me. I mean, I don’t think I whacked Volpe, but it’s all fuzzy. I can’t remember details.”

There. He’d said it out loud. Put his cards, such as they were, on the table. I think I could be a stone-cold killer, Fraser. You sure you want to be believing in me?

Fraser shook his head. His eyes were so clear and bright and blue, and they never left Ray’s face as he solemnly said,

“You didn’t shoot that man.”

Certain, he was so very, very certain and Ray desperately wanted to believe. In Fraser. In himself.

“How do you know? How do you know? How can you be so sure?” Ray asked the question with more anger than he felt, and held his breath while Fraser answered.

“Because I know you. Because you’re my partner,” and Fraser cocked his head a little to the right, like he was sizing Ray up or something, then continued, “and you’re my friend.”

My partner and my friend. The words were so rock-solid they might as well have been marble. No doubt. No hesitation. Just pure, clean truth. The way Fraser said those words made Ray feel warm and just a little bit giddy. My partner and my friend. You, Stanley Raymond Kowalski. And not because of who you’re supposed to be.

Because of who you are. It hit Ray then, that this was what Fraser had been trying to tell him before. That while yes, this had something to do with Vecchio, it also had nothing to do with Vecchio at all. He, Ray Kowalski, had needed help. And because he was Fraser's partner and his friend, Fraser would give it to him. No matter what.

Ray understood now. But he still wanted to be absolutely sure that's what Fraser meant. Somehow managing to find his Challenging Tone of Voice, he asked, "Was that hard to say?"

The world's tiniest smile flicked the corners of his partner's lips up. "Not in the least."

That was good enough. Movement to his right made Ray look at Dief. "You gonna call off your dog?" Because it wasn't real partner-like to sic your wolf on me, Fraser.

"I'm afraid I can't do that, Ray." Fraser smiled for real this time. Easy and so, so sweet. "Come on. Let's go watch some curling."

He turned and headed back to Thatcher's office. Ray stayed where he was for a couple of seconds. He still had no idea what was going to happen in the morning, but he didn't feel like he was going to be sick any more. Fraser was a lot of things, but stupid wasn't one of them. If he believed in Ray's innocence, then it seemed to Ray that continuing to believe in his own guilt was kind of dumb. With a final glance at Dief, he followed Fraser back down the hall.

They got the pizza situation squared away by paying Sandor, but only giving half of the pizza to Huey and Dewey. Fraser set Ray up in the conference room, then disappeared. There was beyond nothing on television, and the thought of putting out an eye was more appealing to Ray than watching another minute of curling. He wandered down the hall to Fraser's office. The door was open and he started to ask Fraser what he did when he was here alone and bored, but didn't get any further than opening his mouth.

Fraser was getting undressed, and, at the precise moment Ray stepped into his office, was busy pulling off his henley. A single, fluid tug up, and then over, his head, and Ray was suddenly confronted with lots and lots of bare, broad, creamy pale, well-muscled Mountie back. He watched, kind of spell-bound, as Fraser tossed the henley into the hamper while contemplating an assortment of long-sleeved plaid shirts hanging in the closet. He brought his hands up over his head and ... stretched, the muscles in his back moving in what could only be called a ripple, and it occurred to Ray that while he should probably say something, he just wanted to watch.

Fraser's hands came down and locked behind his neck. He leaned his head back against the cradle they created, then rolled it from side to side, working out whatever little kinks he'd gotten in his neck that day. Ray felt himself smiling. He'd never thought it was possible for anyone to stay as ... rigid as Fraser did all day without everything tightening up, and now, he had the proof that he was right. It was neat to see that when he was alone, Fraser let himself loosen up.

Ray forced himself to stand as still as possible. He knew Fraser would hear the slightest movement, and he was enjoying the view too much to tip his partner off that he was being watched. The Mountie was in his own world at the moment, and Ray wasn't ready to intrude.

Only Fraser could look that sexy while wearing those incredibly silly pants, his boots and nothing else. He was still staring at his cajillion flannel shirts, apparently trying to decide which was the best one for watching curling, when one of his hands slid down from his neck and over his chest, then moved lower. As Ray watched, he rubbed it back and forth across his stomach, and let out a low, soft sigh, the movement and sound so unconsciously sensual Ray had to bite the inside of his cheek to keep from whimpering.

He had it bad, Ray knew this. There was no denying it any more when just the sight of Fraser, half-dressed and touching himself, made him feel like coming in his pants. His dick was getting itself ready to oblige him, too, lengthening and hardening as he stood there, and damn, but wouldn't Fraser pick just that moment to turn his head far enough to the right to see Ray standing there, no doubt looking at him like he was dinner and Ray hadn't eaten in weeks.

"Ray? Is there something wrong?"

Ray blinked once, twice. He would never understand how Fraser could be as smart as he was yet have no fucking clue that there were times when he was the sexiest thing on two legs. Like right now, facing Ray fully, inches and inches of smooth skin almost ... glowing ... in the lamplight. Ray had to gulp down a mouthful of air when he realized that the buttons on Fraser's riding pants were undone. If he had spent a few more minutes channel surfing before coming to the office to see what Fraser was doing, he might have found his partner wearing nothing but his underwear, and just thinking that made his hard-on complete.

Fraser was still looking at him, head cocked slightly to the right, one dark, perfect eyebrow arching, and so help both of them, he was wearing something that looked dangerously like a smirk. Ray could only think 'he's laughing at me,' and that was all it took to make him bold.

"Nothin's wrong, Fraser. I just don't wanna watch curling." He took a few steps into the room and stopped.

"Well, we could always watch something else." Fraser's right hand was on his hip, the left one spread out over his stomach casually, and Ray noticed that he didn't seem too interested in putting anything that looked like a shirt back on.

"Yeah, but see, I don't really wanna watch TV, either." Fine, if Fraser wanted to play stupid, Ray could play right along with him. He could spell it out if Fraser was

going to act like he couldn't read between the lines.

"I'm afraid there isn't much else left to do, then, Ray. Unless you'd like something to read." Ray congratulated himself for not actually snorting at that statement.

"No, Fraser, I already got my book-of-the-month points this week, thanks."

Why had he never noticed that the line of flesh where Fraser's neck flowed into his shoulder was so lickable? He took a few more steps and then he was close enough so that all he'd have to do was reach out a little and he could trace that line with his fingers.

"Ah." And Fraser smiled at him before looking down at the floor. He wet his lower lip with his tongue as he glanced up, gazing at Ray through a fringe of velvety lashes and asked,

"What would you like to do?"

The question sat between them comfortably, more comfortably than it should have, probably, and Ray knew it wasn't his imagination that he was being teased.

"I kinda liked the ... chat ... we were havin' earlier, you know ... before Welsh showed up." He was completely in Fraser's space again, and just like before, his partner didn't move away.

"It was ... a ... nice conversation."

Ray did snort at that. Nice? Nice? You jerk me like you were born to do it, and you call it ... 'nice?' Mountie, I'll show you 'nice.'

"Yeah, well, I'm always gettin' told I talk too much," he said, and he could feel himself grinning like a cat in cream, "but, we're partners, Fraser, and talking's good for us." He slid three fingers inside the waistband of Fraser's pants. Gave a tug, felt his smile widen when Fraser let himself be pulled closer.

"Even talking like this, Ray?" Fraser sounded nervous. Looked it, too. Ray slid his thigh between the other man's legs. Felt an unmistakably hard length. No nervousness there.

“Especially talking like this.” He leaned in the rest of the way, covering Fraser’s mouth with his own. His tongue slid out, stroked over Fraser’s mouth once and the Mountie opened right on up. Ray touched the tip of his tongue to the tip of Fraser’s, felt his partner shudder and just ... give ... in.

His arms went around Fraser and his hands smoothed over skin that felt like warm satin. The kiss got deep and Ray suddenly knew what it felt like to have someone try to climb down your throat. As if that wasn’t enough to make him dizzy – Fraser going on a diving expedition in his mouth – then, *then* Fraser just took hold. Clamped his hands on Ray’s hips and pulled him in close.

“Mmmm ... you feel good,” Ray murmured against Fraser’s cheek when the kiss broke. Fraser breathed a soft chuckle into the skin of his neck and it tickled.

“Mmmm-hmmm,” Fraser responded right before his tongue swiped at a spot below Ray’s ear. “So do you.” Another swipe of tongue, this one followed by the light scrape of teeth and Ray decided it was time to settle in for the night.

He kissed Fraser full on the mouth again before tugging his hips forward. “C’mon, Fraser.”

“Come on where?”

“To my room.” When Fraser asked a question by arching his brows, Ray just shook his head. “You can’t honestly think we’re gonna be able to do anything on that I-bet-Patton-slept-on-it cot of yours, do ya?” It was hard not to laugh as he spoke.

“Actually, Ray, field tests of this particular model demonstrated that it could comfortably support the weight of two grown men.”

“Yeah, Fraser, two grown men stayin’ totally still. I don’t know about you, but I don’t plan on stayin’ still.”

The wry smile Fraser gave him in response to that made Ray want to get them to his room and his bed as quickly as fucking possible and why couldn’t Fraser

just cooperate? Holding on to his partner, Ray started walking backwards, bringing Fraser with him and somehow, they managed to make it into the hall without tripping, stumbling or falling down.

Fraser looked over his shoulder and issued an order to Dief to stay where he was and that was all Ray needed to know they were on the same wavelength. He kissed Fraser again while still walking-dancing-guiding them to his room and for the second time that night he was impressed by how easily Fraser followed his lead.

His room, finally, and Ray pushed Fraser back and down onto the bed and settled right in on top of him, straddling his hips. Fraser sat up to help Ray get his shoulder holster and both shirts off and out of the way, then started licking along the line of his collarbone. This time, Ray didn’t even try to hold back the purr and he rocked against Fraser, felt hardness that matched his own through two, no four, layers of clothes and damn, why couldn’t he have gone commando today?

“Pants off, Fraser. It’ll make doin’ this a lot more fun.”

Teeth on his shoulder and Fraser was sucking and biting at the same time, and he nodded instead of letting go of what he had in his mouth. Ray had to smile. He never would have thought sex could make Fraser speechless, but they say you learn something new every day. Busy fingers started working Ray’s fly, unbuttoning, unzipping, reaching inside, finding his cock and ... stroking.

Ray moaned his pleasure in Fraser’s ear, got a hip thrust upward as his reward. With the tip of his tongue, he traced the ridge of Fraser’s ear, then stuck it inside. His partner shuddered against him and the sucking on his shoulder went hard and stinging. Marking, Fraser was *marking* him and that thought made his cock twitch hard in Fraser’s hands. They had to get their pants off. Now.

With his hands on Fraser’s shoulders Ray pushed a little. Fraser let himself be

pushed down, pulled Ray with him and finally let go of the flesh in his mouth. He soothed the spot with his tongue, then rubbed his nose back and forth against Ray's neck, inhaling deeply, and something about the way he did it made Ray stop moving. Fraser was inhaling him, taking in his scent, and Ray wished there was a way he could look at Fraser while he was doing it without breaking the contact. He imagined that the other man's eyes were closed and he could practically see the line of concentration between the eyebrows, the determined set of that pretty mouth as Fraser ... memorized him.

Suddenly Fraser was looking at him, eyes wide, jet black pupils eclipsing the blue, breath coming in shallow little pants and gazing back, Ray felt the smugness in his own smile. Fraser wanted him as badly as he wanted Fraser and Ray couldn't deny that knowing that felt good.

He pushed himself back up to a straddle, trailing his fingers down the other man's chest, then got off the bed and skimmed out of his boots and the rest of his clothes. Fraser pushed up on his elbows and Ray liked the idea that he was angling for a better view.

"You really are beautiful, Ray. Just ... beautiful." If it had been anybody but Fraser, Ray would have chuckled and said, "whatever." But this was Fraser and all Ray could do was duck his head, smile self-consciously and hope the blush didn't spread too fast.

He distracted himself from the compliment by dropping to his knees between Fraser's spread feet and going to work on undoing the Boots. Cursed himself again for not paying better attention earlier to either Turnbull or Fraser during his adventures with the Uniform. The laces were harder to figure out than they looked, and it didn't help matters at all that Fraser wasn't ... keeping still.

His fantasies had never suggested to him that a horny, but-not-yet-getting-laid Fraser could be playful, but it turned out

that was exactly what he was. As Ray fumbled with undoing the right boot, the left one – and the leg inside it – started rubbing against his side, back and forth. Up and down. Warm, smooth leather against his heated, sensitive skin and when he looked up at Fraser, the Mountie was giving him that sweet-sexy almost-smirk, the lopsided one that made the dimple in his right cheek easy to see. Ray's hand slid right off the other boot.

"Look, Fraser, just stop, or you're gonna get laid *in* the boots."

Outright laughter. Rich, throaty, happy, and sexy as sheer, utter hell. "I'm sorry, Ray. I don't seem to be ... helping to accomplish your goal."

That capacity of his for understatement still knocked Ray out. "Glad you noticed. Untie these. Now." He made no effort whatsoever to keep it from sounding like anything less than a command.

Fraser sat all the way up and leaned all the way down in one fluid motion, the fingers of one hand undoing the laces on his left boot, while the fingers of the other hand snaked through Ray's hair and down his back, holding him in place, holding him still. Ray pressed his face into the curve of Fraser's shoulder, stroked the skin there with his tongue and the other man growled. Ray lifted his head in time to get licked on the mouth, the nose, the line of an eyebrow, and he felt his cock quiver at each silky wet caress. Fraser let go of him long enough to switch hands to get the other boot undone, and Ray smiled at his new-found appreciation for his partner's ability to multi-task.

Once the boots were out of the way, Ray engaged in some multi-tasking of his own, simultaneously untying the riding pants while tasting the hollow of Fraser's throat. Fraser kissed his forehead, moved his hands in lazy circles over Ray's back, rubbed one of Ray's thighs with a now-bare foot and Ray knew it wouldn't be long before his ability to think clearly deserted him completely.

He climbed Fraser's body, pushed him back on the bed and with nimble but shaking fingers, unzipped the other man's pants and impatiently started pulling them down. Fraser helped, and soon enough, they were both completely naked. Brief glimpses here and there on trips to the bathroom had clued Ray in that Fraser was solidly built everywhere, but this was the first time he'd ever gotten a good look.

His partner's cock was long, thick, uncut and, at the moment, a dark, rosy pink. Glistening and slick and Ray didn't even think, just leaned down and dragged his tongue over the length of it. A little salty, a little bitter and very, very good. Another long lick and Fraser shuddered.

"Ray."

Broken, raw, almost two syllables, and oh, but Ray wanted to hear it that way again. His tongue flicked out, this time swirling over the tip, then down the underside of the shaft. Fraser let loose a low, rough moan, and while it wasn't his name, Ray thought it was almost as good. He gave the head one last lick and proceeded to work his way up Fraser's body, moving over the other man on all fours. He slid his tongue into the thatch of dark curls, then kissed Fraser's stomach, just below the navel, before moving on to his chest. He stopped along the way to nibble, then suck, a nipple and was pleased to hear Fraser purring.

Heavy hands settled on either side of his head and Ray let himself be pulled eye level to his partner. Fraser kissed him, long and wet and deep, and it made Ray even harder to think the other man was tasting himself in the kiss. The kiss broke several minutes later, and Ray couldn't stop himself from teasing.

"You're noisy, Fraser. Really noisy. You aren't like that when you're alone, are ya?"

The blush started somewhere in the middle of Fraser's chest, but, true to form, he was a good sport about it. "Probably, but the walls are quite thick."

Ray chuckled and started to say something in response, but was stopped before he could even open his mouth by Fraser's tongue lapping over his palm. Slippery little circles and it was as if the feeling in his hand was hard-wired straight to his dick. He had to shake his head to clear it before he could talk.

"What are you doin', Fraser?" It was purely, completely rhetorical, but he knew he'd get an answer anyway.

Hot, wet glide of tongue in the center of his palm, and Fraser paused long enough to say,

"You indicated earlier that you were covered in blowback from your small arms certification test. I'm merely trying to get you cleaned up a bit."

And that lively, lovely tongue slid up the length of Ray's index finger, swirled over the tip, then back down to the callus at the base. Fraser licked the sensitive web of flesh between index and middle, then repeated the wet caresses on the second finger. What was left of Ray's mind rapidly started to flee.

Fraser rolled them once so that Ray was now on his back before moving on to the ring finger. Long, lapping stroke up, all the way to the tip. Swirl, suck, kiss, then long, lapping stroke back down. Ray twitched, panted softly, wriggled closer. Fraser's cock rode his hip, drooling and hot, but Ray was too caught up in getting licked six ways from Sunday to do anything about it.

Not that Fraser seemed to mind. He was too busy sliding his tongue over that space between Ray's wrist and the crook of his arm, and okay, yeah, so Ray had worn long sleeves to the firing range but what was the point of quibbling over a detail like that when Fraser was treating him like evidence to be tasted and studied and understood? There was no point, not when that amazing wetness slithered around and then in his ears, or over the lines of his cheekbones, or across the point of his chin. Ray realized his eyes were closed when Fraser teased at a nipple, tongue tip pushing

at the hardness before his mouth closed around it. Sharp little sting and of course Fraser liked to use his teeth.

Ray opened his eyes and what he saw made him moan. Fraser, but unlike any version of him Ray had ever seen. Dark chocolate hair mussed and a little bit damp. Long, strong body glistening and flushed, crouched over him like a panther with its prey. Blue eyes half-closed and glittering and Ray wondered suddenly if this was what Fraser would look like while getting fucked.

Of their own accord his hips bucked up and Fraser didn't even stop sucking while his hands fastened onto Ray and held him right where he was. He tongued a trail over to the other nipple and gave it the same careful attention he used on its twin, and no matter how hard his hands pressed down, Ray simply could not stay still.

It felt too right, too good, the idea that he had somehow stripped Fraser down to this rough, raw, sexy creature who seemed intent on eating him alive if Ray let him. Yeah, Fraser licking him everywhere felt great and he knew Fraser sucking him off would feel even better, but all Ray could think, with the few brain cells that hadn't been shorted out thanks to his partner's tongue, was that he wanted to know what Fraser looked like and felt like when he came.

Curling his fingers around Fraser's head, he gave a tug, pulling the Mountie back up his body, shivering as that unbelievable tongue retraced its path. He felt it stroking over his lips and he opened immediately. Fraser went slack as he relaxed into the kiss and Ray took his own advantage, pushing and rolling at the same time so they ended up with him on top.

He reached between them, pressed their cocks together and sometimes it was good to have long hands. Wicked flip of the pad of his thumb over the head of his, then Fraser's dick, and he knew he had his partner's undivided attention. Still stroking both of them, he braced himself by putting

his free hand on the pillow beside Fraser's head. He started to rock into Fraser, still keeping them aligned with his hand, hoping Fraser could figure it out without them having to use words.

"Ray ..."

"Shh ... Fraser. Don't talk. Just ... just ... feel."

And it was enough. Fraser's legs spread seemingly on their own, and Ray settled into the cradle of his hips. He let go of their slick cocks, put his other hand on the other side of Fraser's head and, never taking his eyes off his partner's face, started to really ... move.

Fraser's eyes were wide, the pupils so big there was almost no blue left. His mouth was open, breath coming in a mix of shallow pants and deep, throaty moans. His eyes closed as he arched his neck, and he trapped that pouty lower lip between his teeth as a wave of pleasure rolled through him to Ray. His eyes snapped open and he said Ray's name twice in that breaking, broken way and Ray had to grip handfuls of pillow to keep himself steady.

He shifted his hips to keep their cocks rubbing together, and Fraser moved against him in perfect counterpoint. Ray promised himself that if he didn't end up in jail he would take the other man dancing some day. Those big hands, hot now, skimmed over his back to cup his ass, pulling him closer and this time, when Fraser said his name, it came wrapped up in something that could only be called a growl. Ray's thrusting got harder, and Fraser matched him every step of the way.

So much, there was so much going on in Fraser's face. Pleasure and joy and something that looked like affection seemed etched across those gorgeous features and Ray knew, *knew* this was the very first time he'd ever seen Fraser so open, and that fact shook him on every level he had.

"Oh ... Ray ... Ray." It was all there in his voice, too. Honest and pure and real, and Ray practically slammed against him the second time Fraser said his name and

that did it. Fraser arched wildly, hands clamping down on Ray so hard there was no way he wouldn't leave bruises. He came in a thick, creamy rush, moaning and trembling, his face shining and shockingly naked. He called to Ray once more, and pulled them both right over the edge.

Later, when his head stopped spinning and the room stopped moving, Ray felt damp warmth on his stomach. He opened his eyes to find Fraser cleaning him, washcloth moving in vaguely circular patterns over his belly and chest. The other man looked ... amazing, lips red and swollen, hair falling over his forehead, eyes twinkling and bright. He looked into Ray's face and his smile was slow, sweet and very, very sure.

"Hi."

And that seemed to Ray so not something an after-sex Fraser would say that he had to work hard to keep from laughing.

"Hi yourself," he said, when he was sure he wouldn't crack up.

Fraser finished wiping him down, then got up to put the washcloth in the hamper. Ray's arms and legs felt like rubber, so he didn't try to move. Just stayed where he was and enjoyed the view of Fraser, naked, walking back across the room. He did move when Fraser started tugging on the covers and it dawned on him that they'd never even bothered to unmake the bed. Fraser slid beneath the covers, then pulled them up.

Ray didn't know what he expected to happen, but getting hauled in close to six or so feet of solid, naked Fraser struck him as a good thing, a very good thing indeed. He went right for the curve of the other man's shoulder and nestled in, because being in bed with Fraser made pillows seem irrelevant. One of Fraser's hands stroked lightly up and down his back. He wasn't quite ready for sleep yet, but the gentle petting would get him there soon enough.

"Fraser?"

"Hmmm?" And they were pressed so close that Ray felt the syllable rumble through him all the way down to his toes.

"I know you have a plan for tomorrow. Mind tellin' me what it is?"

"May I tell you tomorrow?"

"Only if you can promise me everything's gonna be okay."

"Everything's going to be all right, Ray."

That certainty again and this time Ray knew it was all for him. No one else. Him.

"You mean that?"

"Yes, Ray. I mean it."

Ray just nodded. It would be okay. Somehow. Because Fraser said so, and he never lied, at least not about the really important stuff. Ray closed his eyes and flashed once more on how Fraser looked when he came. The last thing he thought before finally falling asleep was that if Fraser was right, and everything did turn out okay, he'd have to find a way to get covered in blowback again very, very soon.

End

