



"Fraser, shut up!" Ray brought his right hand down for emphasis, making a loud clunk as the plaster-encased limb struck the steering wheel of the GTO. The detective winced and muttered a rude word under his breath.

"As you wish," Fraser answered mildly, foregoing to comment on the foul language. He was sure Ray hadn't meant him to hear it. Ben closed his mouth and faced forward once more, letting his gaze rest on the flow of Chicago evening traffic.

Ray certainly was volatile today. The broken-hand anecdotes were failing miserably to improve his mood. In fact, they seemed to be worsening it. Ben was starting to become — concerned. He'd tried to be gracious about his injured partner's irritability for days now, but quite frankly, it was becoming difficult to maintain anything resembling sympathy. Ray had always been able to provoke his temper, and after a week of snapping and snarling from the wiry detective, Ben's fantasies of throwing Ray up against a wall and pounding some manners into him were becoming more appealing by the moment.

Cast or no cast.

Ben closed his eyes. Stop. Deep breath. He refused the urge to succumb to violence with Ray. Ray was his friend. His very dear friend, and he would do nothing to hurt him. Ben let out his breath slowly, releasing the anger at the same time. Better. He opened his eyes.

Perhaps if he explored the cause of Ray's foul temper, he might be able to provide a solution. That would help Ray

and himself both, which would be a very good thing. Because even Mounties had limits to their patience.

"Ray? May I ask you a question?"

Ray chomped his toothpick and glared at the car ahead of them. "Does it have anything to do with moose, Inuit legends, or your distant relatives?"

"No, I don't believe so."

"Good."

"Ah." Presumably that was a yes. Ben mustered his thoughts. "Well, it's just that I've been wondering — since you broke your hand last week, you've become increasingly...well, moody. Are the pain pills not working?"

Instantly Ray hunched in his seat. Perhaps he felt it would go against his 'style' to admit to pain. "They work okay, Fraser," Ray answered at last. "I only use 'em at night, anyway. Aspirin's okay for when I'm on duty."

"Then perhaps your cast is bothering you? Does it itch? I know of several Inuit preparations--"

Ray's temper skyrocketed at the mere mention of Inuit custom. "It's not the cast! Not the cast!" Ray shouted. Ben winced. "Look, Fraser, why don't you just sit over there and mind your own business?"

Fraser stared at Ray for a measured second. He'd only been trying to help. "All right."

Silence settled over the car.

At last Ray sighed. "I'm sorry, Frase. Didn't mean to go off on you like that.

You're right, I have been kinda moody lately. It's just..." Ray drifted off.



Ben shifted in his seat, his irritation with his partner evaporating like smoke. If something was truly upsetting Ray, he wanted to know. "You can tell me, Ray. I won't mind."

Ray shot him a sidelong glance, squirmed in his seat, and ducked his head to watch the red light they'd stopped at. Another glance, then Ray made a right turn, slipping the GTO smoothly into traffic despite his hampered limb.

"My hand doesn't itch, Fraser. And it doesn't hurt much, unless I bang it on somethin'. It's just...there's some things I can't do with my hand in a cast, and it's starting to bug me."

Was that all? "Well, Ray, given your dislike of paperwork, I don't see how your inability to type could be much of a bother to you, and you never could play the piano..."

Once again, his attempt at levity entirely missed the mark. Ray snarled at him. "Not those things, Fraser! Things! Y'know, things that every guy does with his right hand?"

"Hmm. Ah...oh. *Oh!*" Oh, dear. Fraser felt his face heating.

Ray smirked humorlessly. "Yeah, those things."

"Actually, Ray, I've heard that some people prefer to use their left." Good lord, whatever had possessed him to say that? Ray seemed as surprised as he was, as well as infuriated.

"Fraser, I don't want to hear from you about how other guys do it! I can't, and I'm dyin' of frustration, and I don't wanna hear about it!"

Silence again.

Ben bit his lip. Now it was his turn to look at Ray out of the corner of his eye. He really shouldn't say anything, and under normal circumstances he would never have dared, but Ray was being so...so...*Chicago*. Ben had found the source of Ray's discomfort. And there was quite an obvious solution.

"If you'd like some help, I'd be happy to oblige."

"Help?" Ray's voice squeaked a half octave higher than normal, his eyes widening before narrowing to a suspicious squint. "What's that supposed to mean?"

"Exactly what it meant, Ray. If you're having difficulty, I'd be glad to give you assistance." Ben covered his own embarrassment with a matter-of-fact tone, and strictly forbade himself from blushing. They were both grown men, here. It was a perfectly natural activity.

Of course, it was also the perfect opportunity to fulfill one of his most secret fantasies, one which also involved slamming Ray up against a wall, but with far more pleasurable results. Not the most honorable thing, perhaps, to indulge his own erotic gratification under the guise of helping Ray, but at the moment he just couldn't seem to work up the appropriate level of guilt.

Ray continued to eye him skeptically. "Assistance? Riiight. Sure, Fraser! We'll just swing around to my apartment and you can help me jerk off!"

"Right you are then, Ray." Fraser settled himself back in his seat, satisfied.

Ray goggled at him a moment. "Are you serious?"

Ben turned his best innocent gaze on the other man. "Weren't you?"

"No! I was not serious, Fraser! Guys don't do that!"

"Do what? Masturbate?"

"I do not believe that word just came outta your mouth, Fraser. And yeah, guys do it, but they don't *help* each other do it!"

Fraser ducked his head, smoothing his fingertips along his brow. Ray Vecchio, the real Ray Vecchio, would be screeching at the top of his lungs about now. Ray Kowalski's voice was less versatile, but it got into his head and *itched* in a way that was entirely too disconcerting. Fraser considered counting to ten. Backwards. In Inuktitut. Then Mandarin. And French. Instead he chose to argue.

"What about that group of gentlemen we arrested last week? They seemed to be helping each other quite satisfactorily."

"Fraser! They were drunk as hell and having a circle jerk in a parking lot!"

"I never proposed that we break public decency laws, Ray. I merely asked if I could help you with something you obviously feel is a problem. If you don't want my help, simply say so. I won't be offended."

"Jeez. All right! What the hell, it's the weekend." Ray threw up his hands, and winced as he bumped his cast yet again. "Sure! Sure, I'd like y'ta help." Ray's voice quieted and he slid Fraser a cautious glance. "As long as you're sure you want to."

Yes. Oh, yes. That and so much more. But Ben could never say that to Ray, so he opened his mouth and let his forebrain take over, while the rest of him fought to damp down the warm heat that had settled low in his belly. "Of course, Ray. It's a perfectly natural bodily function. Necessary, even, to relieve tension in times of stress —"

"Enough." Ray waved his cast at him. "You don't have to convince me, Fraser. I-I just don't want you to do anything you'll be ashamed of later."

Ben met his eyes directly. "I could never be ashamed of helping a friend."

"Yeah, yer Mountie code probably forbids it." Ray's expression was strange, at odds with his cynical tone.

Fraser rubbed his eyebrow again and looked out the window.

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"Right. Uh, here we are. Home again, home again."

The remainder of the car ride to Ray's apartment had been relaxed enough, but now Fraser could see Ray was clearly nervous. A nervousness he would admit to feeling himself. Once hats and coats had been dealt with the two of them stood awkwardly in the middle of Ray's living room, neither one quite able to meet the other's eyes. The fact that Ben had chosen

this course of action didn't seem to help one whit.

The silence became too much.

"Do you want to—"

"You hungry?"

They both spoke at the same time, stopped, and looked at each other.

"Mounties first."

"Go ahead."

This time Ray laughed, and Ben had to join him. Once he recovered, he found it a little easier to look at Ray. Ray asked, "So, are you hungry?"

"Ah. No, Ray. I'm not."

"Me neither. So..."

"So." Silence fell again. The tension that had been dissipated by their laughter threatened to return in force, but this time Ray broke it.

"So...you still wanna...wanna help?"

Ben nodded. "Yes, Ray."

"Okay. Um." Ray took a step backward, gesturing over his shoulder toward the bathroom. "I'm...uh...I'm gonna go take a shower first."

"All right." Ben shuffled his feet.

"Where...er, where...?" He couldn't quite ask the question, but Ray seemed to understand anyway. He looked at the couch for a second and Ben desperately hoped Ray wouldn't want to do it there. If they used the couch, he would never be able sit comfortably there with Ray again.

Thankfully, Ray must have come to the same conclusion. He hooked his chin toward the bedroom door. "You can, uh, wait by the bed if you want," he said.

"That would be fine." Relieved, Fraser followed his partner's suggestion, while Ray disappeared into the bathroom. He hesitated in the doorway, hearing an odd noise from that direction. Duct tape? He canted his head to listen. Duct tape and — ah. Plastic wrap. Ray was wrapping his cast.

After a minute, the sound of the shower began. Ben flipped on the bedroom light and looked around. The clutter in Ray's bedroom was at a low ebb this week. The pile of laundry lurking by the closet seemed

to be clean, if hopelessly wrinkled. What dirty clothes there were had been draped in interesting places, as if Ray had disrobed in a tornado. A large sweat-shirt lay balled up on the night-stand, nearly smothering the alarm clock. A pair of trousers hung by one leg from a chair. The article of clothing dangling from the lampshade appeared at first glance to be a T-shirt...but no, it was a set of boxer shorts. The T-shirt was on the bed, peeping out from beneath a rumpled sheet.

Fraser couldn't help himself. He disentangled the T-shirt and set it on the chair with Ray's trousers, then set about carefully straightening Ray's bed. At least the bedding was relatively fresh, though he could still detect a trace of male scent, uniquely Ray.

With his hands in Ray's tangled sheets, Fraser could not help but imagine how Ray might have gotten them in that condition. He looked to have been wrestling in them, or perhaps...the image sprang to his mind's eye, fully formed: Ray, sprawled utterly naked across the wrinkled cotton, his manhood wrapped in a tight knot of fist, his angular face softened with arousal, lashes resting on flushed cheeks...

Ben cleared his throat hastily, his own cheeks heating. That was his imagination running wild, of course. The tangled sheets were no doubt from Ray's frustrated tossing and turning. Ray had told him he'd been unable to masturbate.

'Jerking off', Ray had called it. And he was going to help Ray do it, tonight.

Oh, dear.

Ben cleared his throat again, fighting down the flaming of his face, as well as a very disconcerting stirring in his boxers. He was going to be in serious difficulty tonight if he couldn't control his body's response to Ray. Ray might accept some 'assistance' from him, but he'd never allow Ben to touch him if he had an erection tenting his trousers. He would just have to distance himself, not become too involved. Later, in

his cot tonight, he could indulge himself in memories of the evening.

Taking a deep breath, Fraser calmed himself in the only way that worked, through sheer force of will. Images of blizzards or icebergs weren't very effective for him, as he'd always found the cold invigorating. These days imagining frigid climates simply left him homesick as well as aroused.

From the bathroom the sound of the water shut off, distracting Fraser from his bleak turn of thought. Muttered curses and much rustling of plastic spoke of Ray peeling the duct tape from his arm. A few moments later his partner appeared in the doorway to the bedroom, his wet hair spiked in all directions, a bath towel tucked loosely about his waist.

Distracting.

Yes.

It wasn't that Fraser had never seen so much of Ray's skin before, but he'd never seen it in quite this way. Still dripping and damp, flushed from the warmth of the shower, Ray looked positively edible. It was like a blow to the stomach. Fraser had no idea why women did not seem to find Ray attractive. The lean, whipcord lines of him, the play of muscle, the strength apparent in his long limbs, all of it was appealing. The only jarring note was the white plaster cast on Ray's right arm, which stood out starkly against his rose and gold skin.

A droplet of water trickled from beneath the hem of Ray's towel, down his leg to his ankle, and finally dripped to the floor. The urge to lick Ray suddenly overcame Ben, to retrace the path of that drop of water with his tongue. Up Ray's calf, along the inside of his thigh, and into the hidden territory beyond.

"Fraser. Fraser. Fraser!"

Ben started. Ray had caught him staring. "Hi, Ray."

"Yeah, hi." Ray frowned slightly. "Are you gonna stay like that?"

"Like what?"

"Like that. Dressed for th' circus. I got this towel, and you got — that." Ray gestured at Fraser's uniform, taking in the brightly colored tunic, complete with brass buttons, lanyard, and Sam Browne belt. "You're makin' me nervous like that. Take off your clothes."

Fraser raised his eyebrows. "All of them?"

Ray nodded.

"Oh, dear." Ben's neck felt stiff, suddenly. He tilted his head; bones popped. "Er...I...w-wouldn't you be more comfortable if I, uh, kept my trousers?"

"No, I would not," Ray said seriously. "Look, you're already gonna see me in my altogether. And then you're gonna...y'know." Ray flushed slightly. "It's not...it's not fair." He made a balancing gesture with his hands.

Ben raised his eyebrows. That was certainly a unique interpretation of the rules of fair play, yet it made an odd sort of sense. Ray would be placing himself in a very vulnerable position tonight. By taking off his clothes, Ben would make himself similarly vulnerable. Leveling the field, so to speak. But he had hoped to conceal his body's reaction underneath the layers of his uniform. How would he ever manage in the nude?

He scratched at one ear, then rubbed his eyebrow. "Ray, I — I really don't think...I mean, would it be entirely appropriate for me to be, ah...to be nude?"

Ray's frown deepened, thinking Fraser's dismay stemmed from a different source. "You don't have to do this, y'know. Gettin' undressed, or...or any of it. I know you said you would, but I'm not holdin' you to it."

"No, I —" Ben stopped himself from saying 'I want to'. "I don't mind helping you, Ray. Truly. If it will make you more comfortable, I'd be glad to disrobe."

Ray nodded hesitantly. "Yeah, it will. You don't have to go all the way, though. You could...y'know, keep your shorts on, if that'd help."

"I'd prefer it." The thin cotton of his boxer shorts would provide woefully little concealment, but it was better than nothing.

"Okay."

That was it, then. Ben began to strip off his uniform, quickly but neatly. Once he got down to his trousers he turned his back to Ray, not so much out of a sense of modesty, but to gain a few more seconds to get himself under control. Thoughts of blizzards wouldn't do, but perhaps ice would. Yes, a wall of ice between he and Ray, transparent but impenetrable. Yes, that might work.

Breathing a bit easier, Fraser shed his trousers and turned to face Ray in only his underwear. A wayward breeze crossed his chest, making his nipples tighten. His partner's eyes flickered down his body, but apparently they found no fault with the drape of his boxers. Thank heavens.

"Uh, I guess I don't need this anymore." Ray said, coming closer to the bed. He pulled his towel away and tossed it onto the dresser.

"Ah." Fraser nearly flinched from the first sight of Ray's anatomy, but then he gave himself permission to look. After all, in a few minutes he would be doing much more than looking. His heart thumped off-kilter for a second. Ice. Distance.

Ray was soft, but even so, his member was of a pleasing length and girth. Ben wouldn't have cared if Ray had the anatomy of a gnat, but it was good to have his expectations, from glimpses in lavatories and men's locker rooms, confirmed. Ray's pubic hair was a deep golden brown thatch, thinning to blond fuzz over his testicles. The two orbs hung low in their sac from the heat, and the skin looked to be soft and delicate to the touch.

Ray took another step closer to him and Ben dragged his eyes up to Ray's face. Ray...wriggled when he walked. "So what do we do now, Frase?"

Ray was asking *him*? Ben swallowed hard. "I — er, what do you normally do?"

An eloquent shrug met his question. "I just jack it, Fraser. Nothin' special about it." Ray sank down on the bed, and Ben joined him. Ray shot him an unrepentant grin, despite the fact that his ears were pink. "Quick and messy, that's for me."

"Ah."

"What's that mean, that 'ah'?"

"It means — well, it seems almost a disservice, to treat yourself so...perfunctorily."

Ray's smile quirked up at one corner. "You like it nice and slow, huh?"

"Usually, yes." Ben flushed. How had the conversation gotten onto his masturbatory habits? He flicked his tongue over his lower lip. Quick and messy might well describe what was going to happen when he got back to the consulate tonight. Later. Much later, because right now he had to pay attention to Ray and not think of such things.

"Slow's okay," Ray said. "I can do slow." He leaned back against the headboard and stretched his legs, then ran his left hand up his thigh to his groin.

Fraser stared, completely unable to help himself, as Ray took hold of his member, squeezing and massaging gently. Ben swallowed. His imagined wall of ice was not doing its job particularly well. His face felt hot.

Ray stopped the motion of his hand. "You, uh...you wanna touch me now?"

"If I may." Ray nodded permission. Mustering equal amounts of courage and self-control, Ben extended a hand toward Ray's lap, fingers that shook slightly. Ray's penis was warm, the skin very soft and a bit damp. He murmured a little as Fraser touched it. Ben looked up.

"Is that all right?"

"Yeah." Ray sounded a bit breathless. Ben moved his hand tentatively and he could feel the erectile tissue of Ray's shaft begin a slow pulse and swell.

The heat of it threatened to melt Fraser's safe wall entirely. He mimicked Ray's massaging action, trying very hard

not to think too closely about what he was doing, or of the warmth collecting in his own groin. He could feel his penis lengthening, growing heavier with arousal, and tried desperately to forbid the stiffening. His boxer shorts began to feel a bit tight.

Fraser kept his eyes pinned to Ray's crotch, so as not to have to meet his friend's gaze. Ray hardened quickly under his touch. Ben kept up the massage until Ray was fully erect and the heat of the shaft had sunk into his palm. After a few minutes Ray groaned under his breath and his hips canted upward.

Fraser looked up again. Ray had his eyes closed. His face had slackened into lines of obvious arousal, his mouth gone soft, nostrils flared to accommodate his heavier breathing. Oh, yes, Ray was beautiful. But something was amiss; a small crease between his brows.

"Are you all right?" Ben asked.

"Yeah," Ray answered, now panting slightly. "Just...stroke it now, Frase. Okay?" His hips bucked up again in mute plea.

"Of course, Ray." Oh, dear. He should have known Ray would be impatient. Ben suited actions to words and began to move his hand faster, stroking up and down the hardened shaft. He could smell the musk rising off Ray, warm and heady, but he'd been enjoying it without considering the implications. Ben remonstrated with himself. His own distraction was no excuse for making his friend suffer.

It was more difficult than it first appeared. The angle was different, and it made his movements awkward. Ben changed his technique slightly, and then again, using Ray as his guide. He found places that made Ray arch in pleasure, but quickly lost them again when Ray's hips moved. Finally he stumbled on a clumsy, stuttering rhythm, but even he knew it was woefully inadequate.

Fraser's stomach twisted in misery. He wanted so much to give Ray pleasure, but he was turning out to be completely inept at

it. Still he kept at it, trying to find the right pace. It shouldn't be so difficult; he knew very well how to bring himself to orgasm, surely he could do the same for Ray. Therein lay the problem. Every time he thought of Ray in the throes of orgasm Ben tensed up, needing to fight off another surge of arousal.

Eventually Ray opened his eyes and sat up a little. "Uh...Frase...I hate to say this but you're..."

Ben stilled his hand on Ray's organ. "I'm not getting it right, am I?"

"No, not quite. Sorry."

"I'm the one who should apologize, Ray." Fraser dropped his head for a moment. "Do you want to stop?"

Ray shook his head and started to wipe at his face with his right hand, saw the cast, and switched to his left. "No. I've gotta come, Frase. Somehow. I'm gettin' desperate here, y'know?"

"Possibly if we tried it with you...ah, leaning against me. That way the angle would be more...um." With his hand still on Ray's penis, he couldn't bring himself to talk about it.

"More like doin' yourself?"

Ben nodded, face burning. "Yes, Ray."

"Okay, we'll try that, then."

The two men changed positions, Fraser taking Ray's place against the headboard. The residual warmth from where Ray had lain made him shiver. Ben parted his legs and helped Ray lean back against him, careful not to jar his friend's broken hand.

The instant Ray settled against his skin, Fraser's wall of ice steamed away, entirely forgotten. He lost the battle with his erection in the same moment. He was hard within seconds, straining against his boxers, aching. Oh, no. Ben squeezed his eyes shut, every muscle in his body tense. Some small, unrepentant part of himself resolved to savor the feel of Ray's skin against him for as long as it lasted, while the remainder simply waited for the explosion.

"Frase, you're, uh, pokin' me in the back, there."

No explosion. Ray sounded...uneasy, perhaps. Did he not realize that Ben's condition was caused by attraction? Perhaps Ray thought it was an involuntary response of some kind.

"I'm sorry, Ray. It's just — it's just —" Fraser floundered to a halt. Any way he could finish that sentence would either be grossly inaccurate, or far too close to the truth.

"It's okay, Frase. Just point it to the side or somethin', so it's not digging me in the spine."

Ray sounded amazingly calm, his voice pitched to soothe Ben's mortification. Ben slid a hand between them and adjusted himself through his underwear. "Is that better?"

"Yeah."

Fraser began to stroke Ray's penis again, and the angle was easier, this way. But he still couldn't find any sort of rhythm; the weight of Ray's body against his own was simply too distracting. He felt a very strong and visceral desire to arch his pelvis and rub his erection along the small of Ray's back. The very thought alone was enough to make him throb. Ben shivered, his hand faltering on Ray's shaft. Ray made a small, frustrated noise and thrust his hips restlessly. The feel of Ray's body moving against his trapped organ caught Ben's breath in his throat, and he had to force himself to breathe evenly. There was a dampness between them now, easing the slide of cotton and skin. His own pre-ejaculate, Fraser realized. Oh, dear. His entire body went rigid with the effort of not moving anything other than his right hand.

"C'mon, Fraser," Ray complained. "I know you can do this. Just relax and do me like you do yourself."

Like he did himself. Surely he could do that. Ray needed him to do that. "I'm trying, Ray." His voice sounded tight and flat to his ears.

Ray shifted a little, making him dizzy, and then a warm hand came down to rest on his thigh. "Relax, Frase," Ray whispered.

Right. Relax. He could do that. Ben took a deep breath, and let the iron out of his spine. He dropped his right hand down to cup Ray's balls, drawing a half-frustrated, half-pleased moan from his friend's lips. With his other hand he stroked down Ray's side, over his pectorals and down Ray's ribs, his thumb catching on a wonderfully taut nipple. Ray moaned again, arching into him.

Relax.

Ben squeezed Ray's balls gently, then wrapped his fingers around the base of his shaft and pulled upward. This time his hands moved easily, falling into the rhythm they both needed. Ray groaned and bucked into the motion.

"Oh," Ray gasped. "Yeah, that's it, Frase. That's good. Harder. No, like that. C'mon...yeah..."

Ben ducked his head into the curve of Ray's shoulder, doing his best to follow Ray's incoherently whispered commands. He barely had the presence of mind not to drop a kiss on Ray's throat. Between his legs, he could feel Ray's buttocks clenching, flexing over and over again as he thrust up into his hand. Every motion rocked Ray's hips into Ben, sending waves of warmth rolling through his groin. The fabric of his boxer shorts provided additional, maddening friction. Fraser sucked in a breath, tasting Ray's scent, and moved his hand faster on Ray's shaft. He let his other hand roam Ray's body, seeking out places that made Ray moan or twitch or whimper. Ray thumped him lightly with the cast on one side, the fingers of his other hand digging into his thigh.

"Yeah, Frase...yeah...god, yeah...don't stop..." Ray's litany continued, growing louder and higher in pitch, his body coiling like a watch-spring. His head dropped back, soft spikes brushing Fraser's shoulder, the muscles of his neck cording. Ray was close. Ray was going to come soon.

A rush of heat at that realization, and on its heels came cold alarm. Ben snapped his head up and opened eyes he didn't remember closing, gulping in a lung-full of

un-Ray-scented air. Ray was close, but he was closer. If he came when Ray did, there was no way it could be mistaken for anything other than what it was. In less than a second Ben had disengaged from Ray and scrambled off the bed.

Ray let out an enraged growl at his abandonment, reaching for him with outstretched hands. Fraser backed away and Ray's good hand clenched into a fist. "Fraser! What the hell are you doin'!? I was *this* close!"

"I know," Ben said miserably, bowing his head. His boxer shorts tented sharply over his groin, the damp patch at the front accentuating his traitorous anatomy. Which throbbed, mindless and needy. "I'm sorry, Ray. I can't...I can't do this. I thought I could keep it distant, somehow, just a friend helping a friend. But I can't. I...I've gone too far. I..."

"Goddamnit, Fraser, if you knew you couldn't go through with it, why'n hell didja offer in th' first place! Fuck!!"

The shouted exclamation echoed around the room, carrying Ray's frustration and anger to every corner. Ben swallowed against the sudden lump in his throat. "I'm sorry, Ray. I should — I'll go." He turned to find the rest of his clothes.

"Jesus." Ray's voice was tired, aggrieved. "Don't leave, Fraser. We gotta...talk. Fix this, somehow. Or we might as well just chuck the partners thing. Never mind the buddies thing."

Ben stopped with his henley in hand. Ray was right. As matters stood now, their entire relationship lay in ruins. He sat on the very corner of Ray's bed, his erection still poking stubbornly up from his lap. The arousal singing through his veins turned his stomach. It had cost him Ray's friendship. Ben ran a thumbnail over his brow. "I don't know what to say, Ray, except that I'm sorry."

"Why'd you stop? I thought you were...gettin' into it."

"I was."

"That a problem for you?"



"N-no," Ben said quickly. "I thought...I thought..." He dared a glance. Ray had his knees drawn up to his chest, arms wrapped around them. He didn't seem especially angry, or offended. Just...unhappy. "Doesn't it..." Ben cleared his throat. "Doesn't it bother you?"

Ray shook his head. "If it did, you wouldn't be sitting half-naked on my bed, Fraser."

"I see."

Ray squinted at him. "Do you?"

The implications of that quick question were staggering. Ben swallowed several times, trying to get his bearings.

"I...ah...Ray? Are you...? I mean — aren't you...?"

Ray cocked his head. "Aren't I what, Fraser? I'm not a mind-reader."

"Aren't you heterosexual?"

Ray grinned at him, of all things. "Nah, you're the straight one here, Fraser."

Oh, dear. "Actually, Ray, I consider myself bisexual."

Ray's eyebrows shot to his hairline, then his blue eyes pinned Fraser with a look. "That mean you want me?"

"Er..." Why did Ray always have to cut to the heart of the matter?

"Yes or no, Fraser. Do you want me?" Ray rocked forward, almost belligerent now.

"Yes." The only answer he could give, whether it cost him Ray's friendship or not. "Yes, Ray. I want — mmph!" Suddenly Fraser had one hundred and fifty-some pounds of Chicago detective in his lap, bearing him to the mattress in a slow-motion tackle. He was sitting so close to the edge they nearly fell off. His shirt dropped to the floor, forgotten.

There wasn't time for disbelief. Ray's mouth sought his, hot and wet and sweet. Ben opened eagerly, accepting Ray's tongue, stroking it with his own. It was silky soft, and very agile. Farther down he could feel Ray's erection poking his hip, half-hard but rapidly stiffening. Ray wanted him. Ray wanted *him*.

Ben pulled Ray into a bear hug and arched his hips up, rubbing himself along Ray's body just as he'd wanted to earlier, friction sending chills up and down his spine. Even with his underwear in the way it felt delightful, more than delightful, but there was something else. Something else he wanted...

Ray broke the kiss to pant in his ear, "If we're done playin' twenty questions now, could you *please* move your Canadian butt to the middle of the bed so I can suck you?"

Oh, yes. Yes. That was what he wanted.

Fraser heaved his body up and wrestled Ray to the mattress, just barely careful enough not to hurt his injured hand.

"Hey!" Ray protested. "You're the one s'posed to be down here, not me!"

Ben silenced him with a kiss. He needed Ray's permission to do this, he really did, but he couldn't take the time to ask. He didn't dare take the time, because any more questions could bring the whole situation down like a house of cards. And he *needed* this.

Ben released Ray's lips and shifted to one side, moving his mouth down Ray's body. He moved fast in order to keep the momentum going, but still paused to lick and suck at various points of interest along the way. He closed his teeth over one peaked nipple, and heard Ray gasp. Sensitive nipples. Filing away the information for future reference, he bathed the small nub once with his tongue and moved on. Ray tasted of soap and sweat, the rich sweat of arousal, not the tang of fear or anxiety. A good sign.

Ray's navel was ticklishly sensitive, the surrounding belly soft with a thin layer of fat, just about the only place Ray had any padding at all. Beneath the fat, his stomach muscles were iron-hard and taut. Ben licked his way along the trail of soft hairs leading downward from Ray's navel, finally arriving at his destination: Ray's penis. Soft skin, but hard, hot flesh, just as his fingers had told him. Ben's hand could not supply the taste of Ray, the arousal so much

stronger here, the essential maleness. At the first touch of his lips to the head Ray sucked in a wailing gasp, his spine curving upward, thrusting his erection into Ben's mouth. Ben allowed the entry, opening his jaw wide to take Ray deep, and began to suck.

The noise that Ray made defied description, but it was certainly one of pleasure. Ben settled into a quick rhythm, bobbing his head up and down, exploring with his tongue. He used every technique he'd ever heard or read about, and improvised new ones. From the sounds issuing from Ray's throat, lack of experience wasn't hampering him in this arena, at least.

Suddenly a hand found Ben's waist, infiltrated his boxer shorts, and moved down to grasp his penis. Ray did no more than stroke lightly, but the sensation was so shocking Ben nearly choked. Gratifying as it was that Ray wanted to give pleasure in return, he didn't dare let Ray touch him; if he did, he'd lose his mind entirely.

Fraser pulled away and slid off the bed to his knees, never letting go of Ray's erection for a second. Instead he dragged the other man with him until Ray's legs hung over the edge of the bed. Safe from distraction for the moment, Ben devoted himself to his task.

Ray's climax approached with gratifying swiftness, his thigh muscles tightening, the tension coiling inside him as it had before. This time Ben had no intention of stopping, not even when Ray clouted him fairly hard across the ear with his cast, a few seconds before his orgasm. He wanted this. He needed this, as much as Ray did. The hunger had been a dull ache, before. Now he couldn't get enough. Above him, Ray howled. The shaft filling his mouth swelled and jerked, and Fraser swallowed the bitter fluid that flooded over his tongue, relishing the groans and cries as Ray shuddered beneath him, the noises slowly tapering off into quiet whimpers. After a few minutes of increasingly gentle suckling Ben released Ray's softened organ

and climbed onto the bed with him, rubbing at his sore ear.

Ray lay utterly limp on the bed, eyes closed. Only his heaving chest indicated he was still awake. Ben was no less out of breath. Air, which had previously seemed a primary requirement for living, had been demoted to second place for a time. He rested beside Ray, ignoring the ache in his groin in favor of studying Ray's face. Post-orgasm, Ray looked tired and peaceful, perhaps even happy. Ben hadn't known the lines of his face could arrange themselves into something so...sweet. Eventually Ray flopped his head over and opened his eyes to meet Ben's gaze.

"Hi."

"Hi." Fraser swallowed. He couldn't measure Ray's reaction.

"I kinda want to thank you, but it seems...I dunno, tacky or something."

"You're welcome anyway." Ray smiled a little at that, and Ben felt his heart unclench a bit.

"Fraser, why didn't you let me...?" Ray gestured to the bulge at his groin.

"It was too...too much. I wanted...I didn't...I was afraid I'd bite down, Ray."

"Oh. Yeah. That would've been bad."

"Yes."

Ray rolled up on his side to face Fraser, pillowing his head on his cast. "So, is there anything stopping me now? Aside from these," Ray added, plucking at his boxer shorts. His left hand found its way under the waistband, pushing it down to Ben's thighs.

Fraser shivered at the first caress of air on his freed erection, then threw his head back when fingers curled around the shaft. Ray stroked him and Ben gasped, feeling Ray's hand on him like a bolt of electricity. He hadn't realized the extent of his own arousal. After everything that had happened this evening he didn't know why that should surprise him, but it did.

"Oh, my...Ray!" Ray's fingers squeezed him clumsily and Ben jerked. Ray didn't need to be ambidextrous, just the fact that it

was Ray touching him would be enough. Ben gulped and shuddered into his friend's hand.

"So do you, uh, want me to return the favor?" Ray asked. He licked his lips and grinned, wide and wicked.

"Oh, lord," Ben groaned, his heart pounding in his chest. He was much too close to the edge to be hearing such things, not with Ray's hand still moving on him. "Ray, wait..." He tried to pry his partner's fingers away before he came all over them.

"That it, Frase? You want me to suck you?" Ray's voice purred in his ear, the vibrations reaching all the way down to his testicles. He bucked hard, once, and nearly exploded into Ray's hand.

"Ray, stop! You have to stop now or I'll...oh god, *Ray!*" And then it was too late, he couldn't hold back any longer. The wave of pleasure rolled down his spine and struck with devastating force, turning him inside out, dissolving every sense but touch.

When it was over Ben sagged on the bed, heartily embarrassed. He realized that Ray had stayed with him through it all, easing him through the spasms, gentling him. And that he *had* come all over Ray's fingers. His belly as well. His own chest. *And* the bed. A sudden, veering thought struck him and Ben abruptly convulsed with laughter.

"What? What?" Ray leaned over him, confused and not a little concerned. Of course, Ray had never seen him laugh like this. Ben himself couldn't remember the last time he'd broken up so completely. Ray probably thought he'd gone insane.

"Q-Quick and messy, Ray," Fraser gasped, reining himself in just a bit before dissolving into chuckles again. He heard Ray begin to snicker, and then laugh softly.

At last they wound to a stop, and Ben lay quietly with Ray in his arms, strangely content. Somehow, all of the questions and fears he'd been feeling earlier had evaporated. No, that wasn't strictly true. They were all still there, but just at the moment he couldn't bring himself to care.

Thoughts of consequences, reactions, the future, all could take care of themselves later. Right now was just fine as it was, thank you kindly. Fraser closed his eyes and let himself drift.

"Hey, Ben?" Ray, murmuring in his ear.

"Hmm?" In his daze, he barely noticed the use of his given name.

"Do you want me to suck you?"

Ben twitched. There was tension in the body lying against his. It spoke volumes that Ray's casually intimate voice did not. Well. Perhaps some of his questions had found answers sooner, rather than later. Speaking of which...

"Perhaps...perhaps later."

Ray relaxed and planted a quick kiss on the side of his mouth. "Okay, Frase. You gonna take off all your clothes next time?"

"I...think I can manage that."

"Good. I hope you don't mind giving me a hand again, afterwards. 'Cause I'm probably gonna need it."

Ben felt a smile curving his lips. "Not in the least, Ray. Not in the least."

**\*\*End\*\***

*The following artwork was graciously provided by Sandy Steiner, also.*

