



"Fraser...?"

Though it was just his name, there was a question in it that told him exactly what Ray wanted. Still, he shouldn't just assume.

"Yes, Ray?" he prompted.

"I'm cold."

It wasn't, quite, a whine. Ray didn't whine. This Ray, anyway. Fraser sighed. "Very well then, come on, over here." He unzipped his bag, with a long-suffering air, trying not to smile.

Ray eyed him askance for a moment, then rolled, bag and all, over to where Fraser lay. He eyed Ben narrowly, then touched icy fingertips to Ben's face, and shook his head.

"You're warm. Even your face. How do you do that?"

"I have additional fat reserves, Ray," Fraser said patiently. "If you recall, I did advise you to eat more heartily. Come on, hurry up before I lose stored heat."

"Okay, okay, hold your horses...."

In the faint green phosphorescence of a fading lightstick that was the only source of illumination within the tent, Fraser watched as Ray struggled with the zipper on his bag, which was now spiraled around him in a way that made it nearly impossible to open.

Fraser smiled a little, shaking his head. "Just crawl out and come share mine. We'll both fit."

Ray wrestled the zipper for a moment longer, then sighed. "Okay, fine. Now you know why I wear button-fly jeans," he said with a grin. "Zippers are not my thing." He wiggled out of his sleeping-bag like a molting snake, and slid into Ben's bag with lithe grace. Ben reached around him to

refasten the closure, the zipper moving up smoothly.

"Better," Ray sighed in contentment, unmistakably snuggling.

He would have to be a snuggler, Ben thought, closing his eyes and gritting his teeth as Ray burrowed closer into his warmth, glad of the chill radiating off Ray's slender body. Normally he could keep his sensual inclinations under control, but having Ray so close often made that a difficult task. In the past few days his mettle had been tried enough for any ten men. He wondered if perhaps he had a streak of masochism, one that led him to suggest things like sharing a single sleeping bag, when even not-sharing two was a test of will almost past bearing. He drew in a breath, let it out slowly, and meditated for a moment. There. All nicely sublimated once more.

"I don't see why you didn't just let me zip our bags together to begin with, Ray," Ben said, lecturing a little. He couldn't help it. It was just his nature. "Wouldn't it have been more practical for us to start out this way rather than waiting until you got cold?"

There was a short silence, and Ray tensed a little. "Well, 'cause...you know w."

"I do?"

"Yeah. I mean, someone might think ...." his voice trailed off uncertainly.

"Think what, Ray?" Fraser spoke quietly, just centimeters away from the back of Ray's neck, so close he could see the swirl pattern in the way his hair grew, could almost see those hairs stir slightly as his breath passed across them.

Ray shivered. "C'mon Fraser. You know what."

Oh yes. He knew. And he was getting very, very tired of pretending otherwise. Some reckless imp within him pushed a little, and before he could stop himself he was speaking. "You mean someone might think we were sharing more than just a sleeping bag, Ray? That perhaps I was holding you, like this," his arms tightened around Ray's midriff, pulling him closer. That imp appeared to have taken complete control of his mind. He slid a hand down that taut, flat belly, fingers edging beneath the elastic waist of Ray's thermal underwear to stroke lightly at the sleek skin at his hip. "Or that I was touching you, so?"

Ray had gone utterly still in his arms. He was also deathly silent. Fraser closed his eyes, trying to focus his whole being in those fingers against Ray's bare flesh. It was the only touch he would ever have like this, he wanted to enjoy it. Before Ray hit him. Skin like silk. No, silk was a poor metaphor for the beautifully resilient warmth beneath his hand. Ah, god, he wanted to taste that, to learn it. The urge was so strong he bent his head and let his tongue steal out to touch the skin of Ray's neck, sighing a little in delight as he finally discovered the complex, fascinating flavor of the man who was his partner. Or had been. Until now.

"Fraser?"

Ray's voice sounded odd. Not surprising. He was probably just about ready to rip his way out of the sleeping bag by main force. Fraser tried to tell himself this was wrong. He had no business doing this. Ray had not invited him to touch him in a sexual manner, this was little better than harassment, but oh, the scent of him, clean sweat, and sunscreen, and woodsmoke, and wind. He sucked a little on the vulnerable-looking spot behind one small ear.

"Fraser!" There was a hint of breathlessness to the voice now.

Reluctantly he lifted his mouth. "What, Ray?"

"You drunk?"

"No." *No, I have no excuse, save that I want to touch you, to hold you, to consume you.*

"Oh." There was a moment of silence. "You asleep?"

"No."

"Oh. Magic mushrooms, weed, pills, blow?"

"No."

"Oh."

There was another moment of silence. It began to dawn on Ben that Ray was not struggling. Did not, in fact, seem angry. Puzzling.

"So, you're saying you know what you're doing?"

"Yes." He was fully aware. And would probably regret it intensely in a few moments. His jaw ached already, in anticipation.

"Good." Ray said, sounding almost gleeful, and his hand came down to cover Ben's, pushing it lower. "It's about damn time!"

For a moment Fraser could not comprehend. It was so far from what he had expected that the words simply had no meaning. Then the springy softness of pubic curls beneath his fingers seemed to explode through his senses, and he understood with his body, if not his mind. It would take his mind some time to catch up. He spread his fingers wide, combing through the tangle of coarse silk between Ray's thighs.

Ray arched against his palm, and instinctively Ben cupped the hardening shaft there as he would his own, giving just a little resistance to that thrust. Just as instinctively he rocked against Ray, and found himself cupped as well, not by an exploring hand, but by the warm, shallow groove between hard buttocks, bare flesh shielded from his own fever-hot skin only by two thin layers of fabric. He moaned, and pushed there again. Ah, God, this was more than he'd dared to dream of....

Ray pushed back against him, as if inviting Ben to nestle closer. Fraser tucked his thighs close behind Ray's and settled his mouth against the side of his throat, licking

and sucking a path along the prominent tendon there. Ray tipped his head to expose more of his throat, and reached back, fingers stroking through Ben's hair, gripping, but not painfully tight.

"Oh, Ben...God!" Ray's voice was breathy, broken, quiet.

Fraser's fingers tightened, not just cupping now, but curling around, taking the measure of the man, feeling the power and need in the hard length of muscle he held. Feeling the startling differences between this man and himself. The startling samenesses. Pulses raced in counterpoint, one in his wrist, one in the prominent vein that ran the length of the shaft in his hand. His own heartbeat was the slower one, and he found himself breathing harder, seeking to match those rhythms, trying to push closer and closer to the man he held. Couldn't get close enough, not with clothes on.

"Ray!" he moaned, frustrated.

"I know, Fraser, I know, just a sec ...."

There was a moment of squirming, a shimmy, a twist, all deliriously sensual, trapped so close together as they were. Then there were hands on his flannels, long fingers working the buttons deftly, if a trifle clumsily, since Ray was having to reach behind himself to do it. Then they were open, and a hand slipped into that wide gap.

"Oh, yeah, babe, beautiful," Ray whispered, stroking softly, if awkwardly, because of the way they lay. "Just like Ma Nature intended. Come on, back where you belong." He shifted position a little, and let go.

Searching for those fingers again, Ben instead regained the welcoming gap between Ray's legs, closer now, nothing separating them but molecules of air, if that. He could feel the surprisingly soft, smooth skin of Ray's inner thighs close around his aching cock, and arched into that sweat-damp clasp with a groan.

"Ssssh, softer. No, not there, there's fine," Ray said reassuringly as Ben started to

draw back. "Just meant your voice. Gotta be quiet, or everybody will be want in on this. Now, do it."

Fraser's hand was back on Ray's cock before conscious thought could possibly have taken it there. Instinct ruled him now. He started to stroke, the way he would himself. Ray bucked against his hand.

"Harder, Ben."

Ben stroked harder, obedience was programmed into him. Ray began to pant, and the shaft in Ben's hand seemed to swell and lengthen a little. Ben rocked into the clasp of Ray's thighs, searching for the same stimulus.

"Wait, Ben. Don't come with me. Just wait."

Denial was second nature to Ben, and he stopped moving his hips, somehow, though his hand never faltered. Ray put one hand over his, and showed him the rhythm he needed. Ben followed it, astonished by how erotic he found the touch of Ray's hand on his own. Daring, he managed to work his other hand upward from where it lay beneath Ray's side, up to that hard chest to find a taut nipple and roll it between thumb and forefinger. Ray arched, gasped, and then his cock was jerking and pulsing, and their cupped hands were filled with liquid heat. A moan rumbled, held-back, in Ray's chest.

After a moment Ray shivered, and sighed. His hand shifted, cupping over Ben's, transferring the hot, silky fluid into Ben's hand, then his slippery fingers were guiding Ben's hand backward, showing him where to put it. Ben understood instantly, and stiffened, some inner core of rationality fighting to the fore.

"Ray?" he whispered uncertainly.

"Do it, Ben."

"But, Ray, this isn't ...."

"Just do it. It'll be okay. Believe me. I've practiced, for this, for you."

Practiced? Ben was momentarily distracted, how did one practice this?

"For you Ben, just for you," Ray whispered. "Dreamed of you. Wanted you."

Ben's distraction was overwhelmed by need. Even in his wildest fantasies he'd never dared imagine this intimacy, this trust. Perhaps he was lacking in imagination. Or perhaps he had simply underestimated his partner, his...lover. He did as Ray asked, soothing that hot slickness into place with gentle fingers, stroking, trying to ease the way. Ray shivered as his fingers dipped deeper, but didn't protest, instead he seemed to...welcome the caress with a languid thrust of his hips.

"Now, Ben."

The naked wanting in Ray's voice was irresistible. Ben shifted his hips back a little, used a hand to cover himself with his own slickness, and some of Ray's, then began to ease forward. He meant to go slow, to be careful, but Ray was not having that. As he pushed forward, Ray pushed back, hard. He went in fast, and deeper than he'd thought he could. Sweet heat and sweeter closeness. Two groans filled the silence. Close by, a wolf began to sing its haunting, distinctive song, and suddenly Ray began to shake. Aghast, Ben tried to pull away.

"Ray, I'm sorry!"

Ray slapped a hand over his hip and held him in place, hard enough that the imprint of four fingers and a thumb would probably be outlined there for hours.

"No! Don't stop! Dief's covering for us!"

With a sense of wonder, Ben realized then that what he'd thought was a shudder of pain was laughter instead. Ray was laughing. He was also moving, rocking slowly back and forth, using Ben as the axis, doing for Ben what he feared to do for himself.

"You feel so good, Ben. Don't stop now, I want to feel you come, I *need* to feel you come."

The voice, the heat, the friction, the forbidden joy all combined then. With a shudder Ben let go of his fears, and his control. He moved, deep, and felt Ray arch, heard him moan, in unmistakable pleasure. Again, again, driving hard, he heard himself making sounds that were raw, and rough,

and wordless. He buried his face in the curve of Ray's shoulder filling his mouth with smooth, hot skin to muzzle himself as his world came apart at the seams in an explosion of fire and delight.

Quiet. Calm. Sweat trickled down his face, dripped off, mingling with sweat on Ray's skin. His breathing, their breathing, had slowed, finally. The night was still, save for a distant, eerie descant to Diefenbaker's earlier song. After a little while Ben worked his left hand out from beneath Ray's relaxed form, and stroked his hair softly, then put his lips against Ray's ear.

"I never knew you were a tease, Ray."

Ray chuckled, not even pretending he didn't understand. "Sorry, but you were just being too dense."

"Why didn't you just ask?"

That earned a snort. "Right. 'Hey, Fraser, would you have sex with me, thank you kindly?' I don't think so. Never would've worked. I knew that. Had to be like this. Only way. Had to get past the brain to the body."

"You don't find this a trifle, ah, dangerous, considering that we are surrounded by other tents, and my superior officer is sleeping only a few yards away?"

"Hey, adds that little bit of spice to the mix, right?"

Ben licked Ray's throat, savoring his flavor. "I don't think we need any additional seasoning."

Ray sighed. "God, that is so true. I knew it would be good, between us. Everything else is."

"Yes, it is," Ben echoed. He tightened his arm around Ray, drawing him closer.

"Ray, do you believe in love at first sight?"

"Well, duh," Ray answered, sounding amused.

"I thought you believed young love didn't last."

"It doesn't. But you notice, Fraser, that we're not young."

"Ah. Right you are."

"Course I am. I'm always right. 'Cept when you are."

Ben smiled. "Thank you for that."

"Well, I'm an honest kind of guy."

Ben closed his eyes. Oh yes. Honest. To the core. He shifted his weight, rolling onto his back, putting Ray on top of him. Ray squirmed in the sleeping bag until they were face to face, and then settled in again, his head against Ben's shoulder, his body molded along Ben's, surprisingly comfortably. Both of them were quiet, thoughtful for a time. Finally Fraser couldn't stand it any longer.

"You *practiced*?" he asked, his tone clearly conveying his incredulity.

Ray laughed, a clear, delighted peal. "Oh yeah. Wanted to make sure it would be right the first time. How'd I do?"

Fraser shook his head. "Ray, there are no words," he said, hoping his voice conveyed the depth of what he felt.

He could see the flash of teeth in the faint light of the glowstick as Ray smiled. "Like you always said, 'proper preparation prevents poor performance.'"

"It might have been nice to be a little better prepared, myself," Fraser said a little petulantly.

"Oh no. You were perfect, as always." Ray waited a moment, then put a hand against Ben's face. "Thought so," he said smugly.

"Thought what?"

"You're blushing."

"I'm just overly warm."

"Liar."

"Am not."

"Are too."

"Well ...."

"Ha!"

"Ray?"

"What, Ben?"

"Were you ever actually cold?"

"I was a total popsicle. Left the damned sleeping bag open for twenty minutes just to make sure. I mean, what kind of person would lie to their...um ...." Ray stopped suddenly, clearly at a loss for quite what word to use.

"Friend?" Ben suggested. "Lover?"

"Mmmm, like that one. But I think maybe the best one's still 'partner.'"

Ben nodded. "Yes. I think so as well. Partner. So many meanings."

"For one little word. Oh yeah. I get that. I really do. Ben?"

"Yes, Ray?"

"Would you...I mean, if it's...well, you said I should just ask, and so, I'm asking...."

Asking what, Ben wondered for a moment, surely not to make love again so soon? Then suddenly, without being told, he knew. It shocked him for a moment that they had shared such complete intimacy, without this. He lifted his hand to trace the deeply-carved smile line beside Ray's mouth, to stroke his thumb across that sensual lower lip, then he slipped his hand around behind Ray's head, turning it slightly, and their lips met. Clung. Held. A little rough from the constant cold, but mostly soft, moist, and yielding. Delightful. Completely, utterly delightful. Charming, and hot, sweet, and fractious. Perfectly Ray. Perfectly perfect. The answer to a question he hadn't even known he was asking. Everything he wanted, everything he needed, all right here. The kiss deepened, but softly, without the hard edge of need.

Finally it ended, on a sigh. They were quiet for awhile, but Ben could tell Ray was still awake too. It was an oddly comfortable silence, all things considered. He had thought that there would be awkwardness, but there was none. Just contentment. Peace.

"Ray?"

"Mmm?" A sleepy sound, but coherent.

"I believe that I am in love with you."

Ray nodded against his chest. "Yeah. Me too. I mean, with you, not me. Don't love me. I mean, I do but not the same...oh hell. You know what I mean."

Ben nodded, smiling. Oh he knew. He always knew what Ray meant, sometimes even before Ray did. Just as Ray understood him in an equally deep and instinctive manner. As if there were somehow no boundaries between them, simply shared lives, intersecting, intertwined. A soft whine

at the tent-flap drew his attention as a white muzzle was thrust inquisitively into the tent. Ben smiled, feeling unusually magnanimous.

"Yes, Diefenbaker, you may use Ray's sleeping bag, since he's not. And thank you, for your timely assistance earlier."

A whuf of wolf-breath answered him as Dief settled down on the mounded shape of Ray's bag.

"Pushover," Ray said, amused. "We really gotta be up at oh-dark-thirty tomorrow?"

"Yes, Ray. We do. We have criminals to catch. And actually, I believe it would be more accurate to say 'today.'"

"That late, hunh? Oh well. After we catch 'em, we can go back to bed, right?"

"Perhaps not immediately, but within a reasonable amount of time, yes."

"Mmm. Good."

Ray yawned, and burrowed closer. Ben smiled into the darkness and closed his eyes, feeling sleep rising to claim him. He too was looking forward to spending time in bed. And for the first time in a long, long time, not alone. Finally not alone.

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