Between A Rock And A Hard Place

by Lyn

Summary

An undercover assignment goes bad but provides a starting place for Ray and Fraser to admit their feelings for each other.

Ray Kowalski couldn't hold back the pained gasp that forced its way past his clenched jaws as the rigid rubber hose slammed against his already aching ribs. Dropping his head onto his chest, he yearned for oblivion to sweep in and take him away from the torture being visited upon him. Panting through the sharp shards of agony, he watched blearily as drops of blood slowly dripped from his torn lips to his trembling legs.

A shadow fell over him and he forced his head up, blinking away the fuzziness of his vision, looking into his partner's frantic eyes.

"This is getting us nowhere," Fraser ground out, the nerve in his cheek twitching madly with tension. "He's not going to tell us anything. Our best course of action would be to leave him here and get out while we can."

"No way!" Lawrence exclaimed, pushing Fraser aside with a shove of one massive shoulder. "When we leave, we leave behind a corpse. But first, he's going to tell us who sent him and where the weapons are. We've got a shipment out there that we can have for free if he's dead."
"You have my money, sir," Fraser countered and Ray couldn't help a mental shake of his head. Here they were, up to their necks in shit and the Mountie was still being so damned polite. "We should just cut our losses and get out. Back to Canada perhaps."

Lawrence nodded to Collins who whipped a Walther from his jacket pocket and aimed it at Fraser's head. "Just as easy to leave two corpses."

Kowalski's head snapped back as Lawrence's hand lashed out and smashed brutally into his face. He'd thought for one blessed moment that they'd forgotten about him. Spitting blood, choking on spit and mucus, Kowalski dredged up a feral grin for his tormentor. "He's right, you know," he croaked. "You are a fucking idiot. When my supplier finds out what you've done, there won't be anywhere big enough for you to hide."

The hose struck again and he arched up against the agony with a shout, then collapsed in on himself, fighting for air. He watched Fraser's eyes narrow, his jaw tightening and his hands clenching into fists.

Don't! Ray sent the command with his eyes, his voice gone, his body too exhausted to push the word out. He willed his thoughts to his partner. I'm done for, Fraser. You're going to have to get us out of this one.

Fraser's head came up and he took a single step back, his eyes telegraphing regret, shame and sorrow. Finally, with a sigh of relief, Ray let the darkness take him.

~o0o~

Fraser tensed as Ray sagged into unconsciousness. He felt impotent, his desire to keep Ray from further harm more important than anything. It had seemed an easy case just a few days before.

~o0o~

One Day Earlier:

"Why is it that you always get the glamorous part?" Kowalski asked as he and his partner made their way through the corridors of the PD.
"You have to agree, Ray, that this undercover role calls for a certain… style," Fraser replied.

Ray frowned. "Are you saying I don't have style?"

"Not at all, Ray." Fraser laid a friendly hand on Ray's shoulder. "I've seen you dance. I simply mean that you're -"

"A slob?"

Fraser grinned, recognizing the bantering for what it was. "Street-smart," he said. "You'll carry off the part of an arms supplier admirably."

"Thanks… I think."

"You're welcome, Ray."

A moment later, Ray was behind the wheel of his car, gunning the engine. Fraser leaned in at the open window, joined a second later by Diefenbaker. Ray gave the wolf a conciliatory scratch behind the ears. "Have you explained to Dief that he can't be in on this one?"

"I have," Fraser replied, his hand joining Ray's to pat Dief, the touch sending a spark of fire up Ray's arm. Ray shivered and silently ordered his cock to lay down and behave itself. "He didn't take it very well," Fraser continued. Dief howled an agreement.

"We've been working these guys for weeks now. I was beginning to think they'd never take the bait," Ray said. He paused a moment and looked directly into Fraser's blue eyes.

"Be careful, all right?"

"You, too."

Ray tossed him a toothy grin. "I've got the easy part. I'll just lay on my natural street-smarts and I'll
have 'em eating out of my hand in no time. You're the one who's gotta convince them to take your bid for the guns. One slip now…"

"We won't lose them," Fraser said as he straightened and smoothed down his suit jacket.

"I'm more concerned about having to break in a new partner." Ray's voice dropped and his face grew serious as he laid his hand briefly over Fraser's where it rested on the door. "Be careful."

"I shall." Fraser smiled at the genuine concern in his partner's voice. "So, see you at the drop tomorrow afternoon, Mr. Kelly?"

Ray sketched a jaunty salute. "Until then, Mr. Marshall."

~o0o~

Well, they'd certainly made a mess of this one, and no mistake, Fraser thought sourly. Where had they tripped up? He watched Ray's unconscious, battered form sag against the ropes holding him to the chair.

There had been no warning, no inkling of what was to come when Fraser had knocked on the front door of the rundown suburban house earlier that day. Fraser wondered if there had been a leak within the department then immediately dismissed the idea. Only those with a need to know had been in on the operation. Those same people had managed to keep Ray Vecchio's identity and whereabouts a secret until the very end. He trusted them with his, and Ray's, life.

Fraser's hands curled into ineffectual fists as he tried to come up with a way to get Ray out of this and still capture the men responsible. He felt so helpless and it didn't sit right with him. Watching the blood trickle down Ray's cheek, he came to a decision. Now or never. The time had come to act and the consequences be damned. Ray was what was important here and he'd not stand aside any longer and watch his friend be beaten to a bloody pulp.

It was supposed to have been a routine undercover operation. There was a new gang on the streets, coming in from Canada, dealing in black market weapons, not just your everyday assault rifles and hand guns, as if that wasn't bad enough but missiles, rocket launchers, machine guns, state of the art stuff. Kowalski had managed to get inside the group when the word came out they were looking for a new supplier, and they were offering big money.
Ray had been working with the well-trained, disciplined gang for two weeks now, insinuating himself into their favors with lucrative contacts before finally hooking them up with Fraser. Fraser was acting as the go-between, the money-man for an anonymous buyer in the Middle East.

International government contacts made it easy to have Fraser checked out and approved by the gang. After meeting with Huey that morning at a café and getting final instructions from Welsh, Ray set off for the warehouse and collected a couple of sample weapons.

Once they were delivered, it was a simple matter of waiting for the money to change hands and leading the gang to the weapons. Back up would storm the place and they'd be home in time to take Diefenbaker for a walk in the park before heading back to Ray's place to watch the curling on cable.

Since they'd returned from their trip up north, they'd been running nonstop, waiting for the right opportunity to hook the gunrunners and Fraser was as exhausted as the rest of them. Of course, he wouldn't admit to it. The Americans seemed to think Fraser had an inexhaustible supply of energy and he wasn't about to disavow them of that notion, especially if it meant he'd be pulled off the case and replaced. He and Ray were partners now and that's where it ended.

Somehow it all gone to hell in a handbasket. Fraser had felt the first frisson of unease when Darcy, the driver and apparent odd-jobs-man had arrived and taken Lawrence into a corner of the large kitchen, conferring in whispers, throwing the occasional venomous glance in Ray's direction. Exchanging a quick puzzled look with his partner, Fraser gave Ray a surreptitious shrug of his shoulders and indicated they should wait and see what played out.

He balked initially when he was sent to get the cash from his car with Darcy, having suggested Ray accompany him, so they could talk, perhaps set up an alternative plan. Something was wrong with the picture but he just couldn't put a finger on the source of his unease. Lawrence had insisted on Darcy, however and Ray gave him a quick, small nod, indicating that he should play along. That left Lawrence and Collins alone with Ray. Fraser had performed a perfunctory, surreptitious perusal of the grounds, relieved to see that Welsh's men were not close enough to be detected. They'd returned to the house to find Ray bound and bruised from Lawrence's blows, his lip cut and swelling rapidly.

"He's a fucking cop," Lawrence snarled, pacing up and down in front of the semi-conscious man.

Fraser had almost uncharacteristically lost it there and then, only a warning glance from Ray stopping him from taking Lawrence apart with his bare hands.
Back off, Ray was telling him with narrowed, pain-filled eyes. We can still salvage this.

Fraser nodded imperceptibly. He'd back off… for now. Come on, Lieutenant, make a move! he mentally urged. Surely, when they showed no sign of exiting the house, Welsh would give the order to move in.

~o0o~

Fraser tried not to show any emotion as Lawrence threw a jug of cold water over Kowalski and his partner regained consciousness with a gasp. Shivering as he sat in wet, bloody clothes, Ray looked sullen as a photo was tossed onto his lap.

"Who's that you're with?" Lawrence asked.

"Just a friend," Ray muttered. "Old school buddy. Haven't seen him in years."

Again the hose lashed out, this time contacting Ray's leg with a sharp crack and the injured man sobbed, his stamina spent. "I'm telling you the truth! He's an old friend."

"Explain this then." Collins, a thin, weasel-looking man with bad teeth stepped up then and waved a second photo under Ray's nose. "Here's your friend again. Looks to me like he's talking into a radio."

Ray squinted then lifted his head defiantly, flashing a despairing glance at Fraser. "You can't see that. Could be anything."

Collins sneered. “Friends on the street tell me he’s a cop.”

"All right, that's it!" Lawrence turned away and stepped over to the corner of the room. Fraser took a chance in the momentary distraction to cross to the window and peer out. A flicker in the trees near the front gate caught his attention and he allowed himself a measure of relief. Not too much, he still had to get Ray out of here before Lawrence killed him.

Surely by now, Welsh had picked up that there had been a complication. Shaking his head, Fraser grimaced at the poor choice of words for the disastrous turn of events. As he watched, Dewey’s
head appeared from within the cover of the trees and the detective looked directly at him. Fraser nodded then stepped away from the window and back toward Ray. He growled sub-vocally, sounding not unlike Diefenbaker, as he watched Lawrence approach Ray with a lit blowtorch. Back up or not, Fraser decided this was going to end now.

Collins grasped a handful of Ray's hair and wrenched his head back hard, exposing his neck, the corded muscles bulging, sweat dribbling in bloodied rivulets and snaking beneath his wet shirt.

Ray's eyes widened, his resistance spent as Lawrence stepped closer. "Please," he whispered.

It was all Fraser could take. He launched himself at Lawrence's back, barely registering Collins raising his weapon with a shout at the same time as the back door exploded inward.

As police swarmed into the house, Fraser's momentum carried him into Lawrence, the soldering iron spilling from the big man's grasp as he was thrown to the floor. Fraser grabbed a handful of hair and slammed the other man's head brutally against the tiles. Rolling off the dazed man, he pulled Lawrence over and smashed his fist into the hated face, only peripherally aware of frantic shouting and hands that tried to pull him away. He couldn't stop, didn't know how to, didn't want to...every punch eased his pain and guilt even as his fists bled.

One voice filtered through beneath the others, hoarse and barely there. One touch on the arm raised high to move in for the killing blow to the throat and he froze.

"Fraser. No more. It's over."

Fraser sagged, panting, then collapsed back to sit on his rear, his attention completely on his partner who lay amid the ruins of the kitchen chair, still tangled in his bonds.

Reaching out a shaking hand, Fraser gently wiped a ribbon of blood from Ray's cheek. "You look like something the cat dragged in, Ray." His voice broke as he said his partner's name.

Ray shook his head slowly as his eyes slid closed. "Thanks."

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Ray hadn't expected the warm relief that had flooded through him at Fraser's agreement that they were still partners, after Vecchio's reappearance. He had hoped for it, had let the worry about it eat at him until his stomach felt as raw as it used to when he drank a fifth at night after a bad case. He'd never felt so lost before, so adrift, so… hurt, not even after Stella.

And here and now, alone in a hospital room, doped to the gills with painkillers, he could admit to himself that he wanted more than that. He also knew that as sure as his name was Ray Vecchio… Kowalski… Okay, that was a bad analogy but he was damn sure there was no way he would ever let Fraser know his true feelings. Because now he had that upstanding, glorious Mountie at his side, there was no way in hell he was going to fuck it up and lose him. And that was okay with Ray. He was content to hug his secret to himself because having Fraser in his life was way better that not having him at all.

He almost had lost everything this time, Ray knew. This last case had been a bitch from start to finish and even though he was lying here in a hospital bed, his body battered and bruised, Ray knew he wouldn't have wanted it any other way. Deep down inside, he worried that had it been Fraser on the receiving end, Ray would have caved. His love for Fraser would have won out and probably gotten them both killed.

Thank God, the Mountie didn't feel the same way. Okay, Ray knew Fraser had wanted to stop the torture, had wanted to save his partner from the pain, but he'd been able to control himself, at least until the bust had gone down, knowing that if he'd acted too soon, the bastards would have killed them both and gotten away with everything. Ray didn't ever want to see that raw hatred, the sheer fury that had twisted Fraser's beautiful face in that final moment ever again. He remembered Fraser's hands after Huey and Welsh had dragged him off Lawrence. Those big, strong capable hands, bruised and bloodied from beating the shit out of the man who had tortured Ray, suddenly gentle and shaking as he'd lifted Ray up and cradled him against his chest, Fraser's voice, a hoarse, trembling whisper, soothing Ray, making the pain subside to nothing.

Ray shifted in the bed, clamping his jaws together so as not to cry out at the pain the movement caused. Finally more comfortable, he drifted in a netherworld of drugged sleep, dreams of having Fraser in his arms comforting and soothing him.

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Fraser followed Welsh into Ray's hospital room and tried not to frown at the bruises marring his partner's face. Ray opened heavy eyelids as they approached the bed and pasted on a weak smile.

"Good, you're awake, Kowalski." Welsh stopped at the side of the bed and looked down at him, his stern face showing no emotion.
"Just barely," Ray croaked. It still felt weird to have the Lieutenant call him by his real name. He'd been buried in Vecchio's persona for so long, he still had trouble thinking of himself as himself. He sighed. The drugs were fucking up his thinking and he didn't like it, didn't want to risk losing control. "They put something in the IV before."

Ray's face was battered and swollen, his lower lip puffed out and scabbed over. Thick bandages supported cracked ribs and concealed the black bruises that peppered his chest.

He still looked as exhausted as he had when the ambulance had rushed him here. Being tortured would do that to you, Fraser knew. Sucked the soul out of you, replaced hope with helplessness and defeat, and witnessing it, unable to stop it was just as bad, maybe worse.

"You're looking your usual handsome self, Ray," Fraser said as he fixed a strained grin on his face, and tried to force his bruised hands to unclench.

"Feeling it too."

"Doctor seems to think you need to stay off duty for a few days," Welsh said somewhat begrudgingly, picking up the chart from the end of the bed and studying it as though it would contradict the medico's words.

"I don't know about that, sir." Ray winced as he shifted position in the bed. "I might need a bit longer than that, maybe even a week." His eyes telegraphed a plea for Fraser to play along.

"Is that right, Kowalski?" Welsh groused. "And who do you suppose is going to pick up the slack while you're playing the invalid?"


"Ray is due for some time off, sir," Fraser put in.

Welsh flashed him an impatient glare but Fraser saw the faintest twitch of his lips. "Right then. You're off for a week, Kowalski." He strode to the door and pulled it open, then turned back. "Fraser, I'll see you at 7 a.m in the morning."
"But, sir…"

"You think those reports are going to write themselves, Fraser? You might do things differently at the Consulate but I want every i dotted, every t crossed and if Kowalski here isn't up to it, that leaves you."

"Of course, Lieutenant," Fraser conceded. "I assure you I'll be my usual thorough self."

"I gotta get back to the station," Welsh said. "Some of us have work to do." The door closed before Ray could muster a reply.

"See what a beating'll get you?" Ray sighed and shrugged at Fraser's pained glare. "Could do with a drink myself," he muttered as he attempted to find a comfortable spot. "A week. Wonder what I'll do with myself for a week."

"I have a few days' leave accrued myself, Ray," Fraser said, seating himself on the chair at the bedside. "Perhaps we could do something together."

Ray flashed him a wry glance. "No adventures."

Fraser shook his head. "Of course not, not until you're fully recovered. We could go fishing, perhaps rent a cabin for a few days. It would make your recovery much more pleasant."

"You ain't sick of my company yet?"

"Most assuredly not, Ray," Fraser replied. "I enjoy spending time with you." He looked away and stared at the wall. "I know Diefenbaker would enjoy the respite. He's been unaccountably grumpy since I told him he couldn't accompany me on this last case."

"Okay."

Fraser looked back and smiled at Ray and Ray thought his heart would melt at the beautiful sight. The drugs were fucking him up more than he thought. He shifted again and pulled his knees up to
hide the interest his cock had taken in the conversation.

"Good, then," Fraser said, standing. "I'll allow you to get some rest. If you'd like, I could visit again this evening and then when the doctor is satisfied with your recovery, we can make plans for our trip. Turnbull's itching to have a chance at running the Consulate."

"Works for me. How about I come home tomorrow? This ain't so bad." He waved what he hoped was a casual and unshaking hand at his injuries. "Just a few bruises really. If the doc won't agree, I'll sign myself out AMA."

"You know I won't allow you to do that," Fraser lectured, then relented. "We won't enjoy our time away if you're in pain."

The silence dragged between them then Ray spoke again, his voice sounding drowsy and a little slurred. "Thanks, for what you did."

Fraser shrugged and smoothed his hands over the brim of his stetson. "I just wish it had been me… instead of you…"

"No." Ray's voice was firm, despite his growing lassitude. "If it had been me in your place, I would have folded too soon, probably gotten us both killed. You did the right thing. Let yourself off the hook. We collared the bastards, got the guns and the money and we're both alive. The right team won."

"Indeed it did, Ray," Fraser agreed. He reached out and ran a finger down one of the bruises on Ray's face, "but not without a cost."

"It's all superficial," Ray assured him. "A few days from now, you won't even be able to see it."

"I'll know," Fraser whispered.

Ray looked away then, suddenly uncomfortable. "You're tired," he muttered. "Must be or you wouldn't be saying that crap."

"It's a possibility."
"Get out of here," Ray ordered with a wave of his hand. "Go feed Dief and get those reports written so we don't have Welsh on our case."

Fraser smiled. "Yes, sir. I'll see you later tonight, Ray. Sleep well."

~o0o~

Fraser spent yet another sleepless night, prowling his tiny office, pondering the what-if's of his situation. He loved - was in love with Ray Kowalski. That they were both men did not concern him overly much, though he knew that their relationship would undoubtedly need to remain a secret. Police departments were as homophobic as most workplaces and bigotry was something he had no wish to have visited upon Ray. He snorted a little at that, chiding himself for thinking as though he was about to walk right up to Ray and confess his feelings.

Ray had never displayed anything more than friendship toward Fraser, and as far as Fraser knew, Ray was as heterosexual as a person could get. His struggle to get over his relationship with Stella and accept she had moved on was proof of that. He had wondered at times, particularly when they'd taken off on that adventure across the tundra, whether Ray did perhaps feel more deeply for him. There had been certain nuances, a phrase spoken here and there that had given Fraser pause but before he could gather the courage to question Ray more, his partner would change the subject.

A few months ago, Fraser wasn't sure he would have welcomed a confession of love from Ray. He'd had male lovers before. As far as he concerned, it was the being in love that mattered, not the sex of your partner, but until now, while he'd felt love for Ray, he'd mistakenly assumed it to be that one feels for your closest friend, or perhaps until now, that was all it had been.

He'd spent the majority of his free time visiting Ray at the hospital, chatting inconsequentially about the goings on at the Consulate, trying to ease Ray's obvious boredom. Several times, he'd decided to broach the disquieting subject of his feelings and then uncharacteristically had gone silent, the lump in his throat leaving him mute and feeling foolish. He was certain Ray knew something was wrong but perhaps fortunately, the detective still seemed to think it was Fraser's guilt over Ray's injuries that bothered him.

Fraser made tea and sat at his desk, staring into space until Diefenbaker shifted and yawned, whining a grumpy demand for breakfast. The wolf ambled over to him and placed his head on Fraser's knee, looking up soulfully at him. Fraser looked down into the liquid brown eyes of his lupine friend. "You think I'm a fool."
Diefenbaker gave a short, sharp yip in reply and Fraser nodded. "You've always been an excellent judge of character and you're not wrong this time either." He stood and paced back to the window of his office. "But how do I tell him?" He turned and observed the wolf once more. "I had no indication myself of these feelings till now. We spent several months trekking across the snowfields, sleeping together, sharing body warmth and not once did I feel anything more than a deep and abiding friendship for the man."

Deif howled and slunk off to his corner, apparently bored with the conversation. Fraser turned back to the window. "Perhaps it took almost losing him, watching him being tortured without me lifting so much as a finger to stop it, to make me recognize how I truly feel about him."

"You think it's guilt you're feeling and not love?"

Fraser turned and stared at the man before him. "Dad! I hadn't expected to see you again."

Robert Fraser rolled his eyes. "Your mother had other ideas. She's worried about you."

"How is she?"

"Just fine. Now, let's get back to the matter at hand. I haven't had much practice with this apparition thing lately and I don't know how long I can hang around." Fraser Senior seated himself at the desk. "So, you're feeling guilty because you couldn't help the Yank. You think telling the man you love him will assuage your guilt?"

"Not at all," Fraser replied. "I doubt I'll ever forgive myself. It's just... I wonder if it's perhaps best to keep it to myself. I worry that this admission might scare him off. We make a good partnership. I don't want to lose that or his friendship."

Bob shook his head, his body shape wavering slightly. "I never thought I'd see the day my son would be a coward. Go talk to him. I think you might be surprised by what he has to say."

Fraser frowned. "Do you know something I don't know?"

Bob winked and abruptly blinked out of sight. "Now that would be telling," his disembodied voice replied.
"Diefenbaker?" The wolf opened one eye. "Breakfast and then it will be time to pick up Ray."

~o0o~

Fraser unlocked Ray's apartment door and carried the overnight bag through to the bedroom. When he returned, Ray was standing in the middle of the living room, looking somewhat lost. "Are you all right, Ray?" Fraser asked.

"Yeah," Ray replied, looking around, "Just didn't know if I was ever gonna see this place again." He moved over to the fish tank. "Hey, Turtle. Frannie been treating you okay?"

"Feeding him too much," Fraser offered. "But you know Frannie. She wouldn't listen." He glanced around the room, suddenly nervous. "I'll make tea."


"Tea," Fraser insisted. "Much better on your stomach with the pain pills you're taking."

Ray slumped onto the couch. "You're not my mother," he groused.

"But I am your partner, Ray and if I don't look after you, who will?" Fraser moved into the kitchen and put the kettle onto to heat then found the supply of teabags he'd left here a few months before. Standing at the counter, his hands clenched tightly on the top, he listened as Ray spoke quietly to Deifenbaker and made a small gasp of pain as he attempted to find a comfortable position on the couch - and came to a decision.

Their partnership had begun in deception and both men had vowed early on that their friendship would be based on honesty from then on. Fraser knew that simply having Ray at his side as his partner and friend would never be enough for him, now that the seeds of love had been sown. He owed it to Ray to be honest with him, to share his innermost feelings… and if Ray pushed him away, then so be it. He would return to Canada, a small piece of his heart left behind but at peace with himself.

Still nervous despite his epiphany, he went back into the living room and sat beside Ray. "I
wanted to say how very glad I am that you weren't more seriously injured," he began. "And I am sorry I did not step in sooner to stop Lawrence from hurting you."

Ray held up a hand. "We've been through all of that, Frase. Cut yourself a break."

Fraser shook his head. "I've come to care for you very much, Ray… as more than a friend, in fact. I wasn't going to tell you and I understand if what I'm about to confess causes you to want to relinquish our partnership."

"Tell me what?"

"That I… care about you… for you, more perhaps than I should."

"Frase, are you trying to tell me you love me?" Ray asked, his voice little more than a whisper.

"I am."

"More than as a partner?"

"Yes."

"More than as a friend?"

"Certainly."

"It's not a brotherly thing, is it, 'cause I don't think I could handle that. Your family is seriously weird."

"I feel that might be the pot calling the kettle black, Ray," Fraser remarked absently. He looked up and was surprised to find Ray grinning at him. "You're not angry?"
"Hell, no! Seems we've both had something we couldn't say to each other."

"You mean…?"

Ray leaned closer and pressed a soft, barely there kiss on Fraser's mouth. "I love you, Benton Fraser. I'd made up my mind not to tell you. I'm an idiot, I can admit it."

"That's what Diefenbaker called me."

"Yeah? Well, we both know the wolf is pretty clued up when it comes to people."

"Indeed. I must admit I had expected to be shown the door." Fraser pressed his lips to Ray's in relief, savoring the experience. "How long?"

Ray shrugged. "Seems like forever but I couldn't admit it to myself until Vecchio showed up again."

"He and I were never lovers, Ray."

"I know that… now." Ray leaned back and closed his eyes. "At the hospital, after Vecchio got shot, when Frannie told you she liked you."

"I like Francesca very much, Ray, just not that way."

"I know. I've never felt that jealous before though, not even with Stella." He paused a moment. "Okay, maybe with Stella. I realized then that I wanted to be more than your partner."

"I must confess I had no idea and I consider myself to be a good judge of people. Then again, it seems I couldn't see the wood for the trees myself until I thought I was going to lose you."

Ray sighed and scrubbed a hand through his hair. "It's not a guilt thing, is it? I told you, Ben, it wasn't your fault and if you're just sayin' all of this to make us both feel better -"
"I would never toy with your feelings like that, Ray. I care for you too much."

"I thought if I told you, you'd run a mile."

Fraser smiled and pulled Ray forward to rest against him, running a hand through the blond spikes of Ray's hair. "As you can see, I'm not running. We should of course, take this slowly. I wouldn't want to ruin our relationship by rushing things."

"Hell with that!" Ray stood and grabbed Fraser's hand, tugging him up. "Let's go to bed."

"Your injuries…” Fraser protested, allowing Ray to tow him along anyway.

"…Are fine. Besides I've heard that having sex is a good pain reliever."

"I believe you're right, Ray," Fraser said, not arguing as Ray led him to the bed and began to unbutton his serge jacket. "Orgasms release endorphins into the brain, creating a natural analgesic effect."

"There you go then." Ray sat on the bed and pulled Fraser to him, opening his legs and pushing the unresisting Mountie down to kneel between them. He brushed a hand through Fraser's dark hair. "I love you, Fraser. Why don't you let me show you how much?"

Fraser smiled and cupped Ray's face, stroking over the bruises, but no longer seeing anything but the beautiful face of the man he loved. "I'd like that very much, Ray." He looked over his shoulder. "Diefenbaker! Guard the door."

END

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