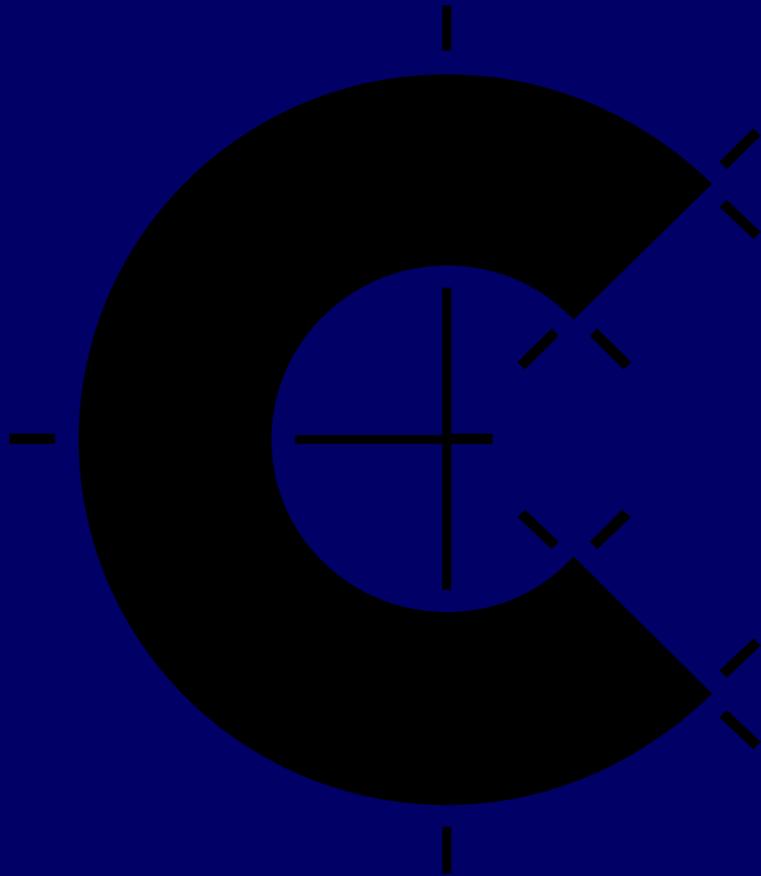


Pæan to Priapus VII a multi-media slash anthology



ircumference
by M. Fae Glasgow

COMING CLEAN

This is an old story, written in...yikes, 1996, I believe. What's fascinating to me now is the difference in Fraser, who grew and changed so much over the seasons— one of the things I like best about *Due South*, actually, is that the characters aren't static. This story was originally written to deal with one tiny bit of unexplained canon: we saw a scene with Ray Vecchio in an apartment that wasn't his house, and didn't look like somewhere he'd decorated himself. So what was this place, why was RayV in it, and why did it look like that?



IT WAS, HE

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decided, the peculiarity of the situation that threw him so badly off-balance. Certain things remained the same: Ray, himself, Dief, arguing over what to get on their pizzas. On the surface certain things remained the same. But even their familiar trio was changed, their interactions shifted, subtly, by this new situation.

Ray's apartment.

Brand new—to Ray, although the building was at least 45 years old—and just the perfect distance from Ray's family: as Ray had said, close, but not *too* close to his Ma.

Ray's apartment. Small, neat, tidy, as yet unstamped with Ray's personality, although Fraser doubted it would long remain that way. Already, Ray had gone around and undone all of his mother's housewarming fussing; the antimacassars stowed in the hall closet, the floral dishtowels folded into kitchen drawers, the hand-crocheted pillows dumped unceremoniously on the floor of the bedroom closet.

Of course, as Ray also said, it would take under five minutes to get all the fussing back in place should Mrs. Vecchio choose to

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visit her son. In the meantime, the frou-frou was gone and what Ray claimed were 'simple,' 'plain,' and 'basic' furnishings remained. The relatives, well warned about the perils of dropping by unannounced, had departed. So here they were, truly alone, surrounded by comforts, sensuous, warm comforts, such a very far cry from Fraser's own place.

He liked it here. He liked it a lot. Too much, his grandmother would say.

Fiddlesticks, he told her, going so far as to lean against the back of the sofa, how could he possibly like it too much?

Well, there was *that*.

If Fraser were comfortable, and he confessed he was, then Ray had achieved a positively...Californian level of comfort, and relaxation, and...ease.

Fraser had dressed down for the occasion of Ray leaving home yet again: Fraser was wearing his oldest jeans, a plaid shirt Ray had threatened to use as a dishrag, well-worn work boots, garments as comfortable as his skin. But Ray had already abandoned the nearly tatty clothes that had been worn to move furniture and clothes this afternoon. Ray had abandoned them into the trash,

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and walked through the apartment to, in his words, christen the shower.

Yes. Fraser ran the thought through his head again. Ray had abandoned his clothes and walked through his new apartment.

Naked.

Stark naked. Warm, slightly tanned skin, a scattering of hair on his chest, more dark hair...down there. Way down there.

No. He really shouldn't be thinking such things: he could like it too much.

"Hey, you gonna lie there all night or are you gonna try this new thing we have in America, it's called a shower, gets you clean and smelling sweet and best of all, Benny, you don't have to fight off amorous mooses to get some of that snow you melt and call hot water up there."

There were so many things he should say to that, so many things that Ray would *expect* him to say to that but—

He mumbled—mumbled! Grandmother would have his hide for that—and stumbled off towards the bathroom, nearly colliding with a wall, he was so busy averting his eyes.

Ray, you see, was still naked.

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And damp. Naked, and damp, with a tiny misting of water clinging to his chest hair and his cross. And to his hair...lower. His lower hair. And his...virility. Ray had droplets of water clinging to his...manhood.

Oh dear.

Hand trailing in hot water as he adjusted the shower temperature, Fraser thought rather fondly of snow, and cold baths, and what they could do to a man. Down there.

Instead...He was bathed in heat and moisture and the soap he picked up was Ray's, smelled of him—or rather, Ray smelled of it—and now he, in his turn, would smell just like Ray. Every move he made, every breath he took, would smell of Ray.

The thought was...invigorating. Stirring, even.

He skimmed the soap over his own skin, thinking about the browner skin it had just skimmed over. Thinking about the chest hair this soap had lathered, about the other hair, hair on legs, arms, underarms. Down there.

Circumcised.

He tried to stop the word, but it lingered, and he said it aloud, caressing it. Circumcised. Ray was circumcised, naked and bare

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and well formed. Virile. Very virile. Large, long, circumcised, with dark hair clustering all around, dark hair scattered on the scrotum.

How very clinical a choice of words. How very much like a Sunday morning biology lesson.

Not how he wanted to think of Ray at all.

But how he *ought* to think of Ray.

Instead... Fraser ran the soap round his own flanks, to the curve of his own buttocks, thinking of smaller, more slender buttocks, of delicate skin, of the way Ray's muscles had moved, clenched, flexed, relaxed, as Ray had walked. He imagined Ray bending over—

The soap skittered guiltily from his hand as the bathroom door opened, and he nearly drowned in shock and horror as he turned too quickly, trying to make sure his condemning silhouette wasn't visible through the translucent shower curtain, but there was the soap, under his feet, and there was the wall coming closer and there—

—was Ray. Pulling the shower curtain back, grabbing him, helping him, Ray's hands so wet and slick on Fraser's skin, his

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bare, naked skin, and Ray's bare, naked hands, touching him, holding him, and Ray's voice pouring over him warmer than the water and—

Fraser moaned. He admitted it; it was a moan, pathetic, childish, shameful. But better than what he wanted to do.

He curled in on himself, right there in the bottom of the bath tub, the water sluicing over him, splashing out onto Ray's nice new bath rug, and all Fraser could do was hide, hide and hide and hide and hope Ray would just go away—

No. Hope Ray would keep on holding him, and love him, and take care of everything, the way Ray always did, with the difficult things.

But this time...

Ray's voice, soft and tender, telling him that it was all right, he hadn't meant to intrude, don't pay any no mind to him, just keep right on doin' what a man does—

And the sound of the shower curtain rings clattering across the pole, hiding Fraser away, and the sound of the door being closed. Quietly. Gently. Firmly.

"Come back," Fraser whispered, longing and loneliness piercing

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him so sharp and so deep that surely, if he looked down, he would see the blood pulsing from him.

“Come back, please...”

But Ray was his friend, Ray was the best friend a man could ever have. Ray had left him, all discretion and respect, left Fraser to do what a man does. Alone.

Always, alone.

Alone, most of all, with Victoria, although he hadn't seen that at the time. Ray had, of course. And Ray had stood by him, ready to catch him; Ray had saved him and forgiven him, and Ray...

Ray had touched him.

In the hospital, while the bullet still burned fresh and new, while the pain medicine left him too groggy to open his eyes and Ray had thought him asleep, Ray had touched him.

Small touches, to his hand, or his cheek. That time, when the nurses and doctors had talked so quietly and gloomily around his bed in the dark hours right before dawn, when Ray had come, and held his hand, and pressed a kiss there, right there, at an odd angle on his forehead, the only place Ray could reach thanks to tubing and respirators and all the other equipment.

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Chaste. It had been so very chaste, but Fraser could admit it now.

His own reactions hadn't been chaste. At the time, yes, he couldn't muster a raised eyebrow never mind anything else, but later, so much later... This warm shower was simply a repeat of something he'd done so many times before.

The difference: this time Ray had seen him, Ray had known, and Ray had turned away. No, not turned away: retired politely. Gone out and shut the door, leaving Fraser to do what a man does.

But Ray had touched him first. Ray's hands had lingered, surely, as they helped. Lingered, as they'd stroked Fraser's back while Ray checked he was all right?

Yes. Ray had lingered.

But made no move.

And who can blame him, Benton Fraser?

Fraser startled, looked around in horror: bad enough his father, but he simply refused to deal with his grandmother. Especially when he was in the bathroom, naked.

But the thought had cut to the core of it. Who could blame Ray?

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There were times when Benton Fraser seriously, deeply regretted the image he'd so carefully cultivated. Regretted it enough to listen to Ray's urging to loosen up, to feel, to—

Oh.

Dear God, how he wished Ray would simply walk in through that door, climb into the shower with him, pick up that soap and...

Make it easy for him. Take all the risks, take all the chances, be the brave one. Again.

Benton Fraser...

No. He didn't need to hear his grandmother's voice for this.

Fraser got carefully to his feet, turned the water off. Ran a towel briskly over himself, towel-dried his hair. Spent a few moments staring unhappily at his reflection, smoothing his hair this way, that, finally admitting defeat, as always. There was nothing to be done about it: he didn't have hair, he had a pelt. And he simply didn't have Ray's exquisite bone structure to carry off seal-slick hair hugging the skull.

Well. He was used to making do. So he made do with making sure there were no cowlicks sticking out at funny angles, that he

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had nothing stuck between his teeth, that the towel round his waist didn't emphasize the...excessiveness...of his rear.

A deep breath. Another.

Shivering, purely from the difference in ambient temperature, of course, the hallway so much more chill than the steamed-up bathroom. He followed the sound of Ray's voice, paying attention to every detail, hanging on to the reassurance of the way Ray's voice caught and hesitated when Ray turned and saw him.

"Uh, one hand-tossed, extra pepperoni, one deep-dish, sausage, pepperoni and ground beef. Two small dinner salads, one order twisty bread."

A pause, the familiar routine of having everything confirmed, the unfamiliar experience of standing here in his towel while Ray stood there in nothing but that silk bathrobe, the one that clung so perfectly like a lingering hint of dampness on Ray's skin.

One other thing, a familiar ritual, simply one unrecognized till this moment: Ray looking at him, swallowing, looking away, glancing back again like a starving man trying to avoid looking into the bake-shop window.

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Fraser watched as Ray hung up, started speaking before either Ray found a distraction or Fraser lost his nerve.

“I’m sorry I failed to lock the bathroom door.”

Ray looked away, tying his robe belt more tightly. “It wasn’t your fault, the lock’s busted, I need to fix it...”

“Ray...”

Ray sitting down on the couch, crossing his legs so casually, even as his glance strayed, addicted, to Fraser standing there so very nearly naked.

They were both so very nearly naked. In this place that was Ray, and home, and comfort.

“Ray, when you came into the bathroom, what did you see?”

Ray fumbled for an answer.

Making Ray do all the difficult parts again, Benton Fraser? he asked himself, entirely disgusted with himself. “I’m sorry, that’s not fair of me. Ray, when you came into the bathroom, considering the angle of the light, the translucency of the shower curtain and the position in which I was standing, it must have been obvious that I was...that my body had...that my manhood had ...quickenened.”

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And bless him: Ray of course was leaping right in there, saying all the right things again, smoothing the way, smoothing right over it until—

—until Ray had made it so easy on Fraser that the opportunity would once more have been lost.

“Ray—”

“Benny?”

“It was obvious the condition I was in.” Deep breath, remind himself not to fidget or shuffle. Stand tall and proud and say what he needed to say before he lost his nerve. Again. “What was not obvious, Ray, is what caused that condition.”

“Hey, Benny, you’re the boy scout here,” Ray smiling, hands waving a dismissal of Fraser’s discomfiture. “I know exactly what caused your little condition.”

“What?”

“What what?”

Refusing to allow himself so much as another second’s worth of cowardice, meeting Ray’s eyes, facing him with honesty. “What caused my condition?”

Amazing, to see Ray Vecchio completely at a loss for words.

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"I said, Ray, what caused my condition?"

Ray, not meeting his eyes. "I guess...you were thinking."

"Yes." Simple truth. Complicating question. "About whom?"

"Benny...."

"You said you knew exactly what had caused my condition. About whom was I thinking, Ray?"

"How the hell am I supposed to know that? It's none of my business, Benny, if you were thinking about Victoria or Elaine or the Dragon Lady—"

"I wasn't."

"You weren't? Then—" Curiosity overcoming scruples, Ray's eyes focusing for once on Fraser's face. "Ms. St. Laurent? Dief?"

"You."

Silence. Squeak. Ray clearing his throat. "Me?"

"Yes. I hope you're not offended."

"Offended? Oh, I think you can say that doesn't even begin to describe how I'm feeling right now, Benny. Me? Are you sure?"

"Oh, yes, Ray, quite sure."

"Me? But...why? Why me, Benny—"

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“Well,” Fraser said, moving to stand in front of Ray, “there is the way you smile at me. The way your eyes seem to change shade with your mood. The jokes you tell me, the way you care about so many people and do so much for them without them even realizing what you’ve done. The way your cheekbones catch the sunlight and emphasize the largeness of your eyes. The sweep of your collarbone, the sinewy musculature of your forearms...”

Those large eyes were even larger, and very, very, very clearly turning green while the pupils dilated.

Fraser gazed into those eyes, and licked his lips, heard the huskiness in his own voice as he continued saying things he never thought he’d ever dare say. “The way your clothes drape from your broad shoulders, giving only the most tantalizing hints of what the fabric hides. The way you handle your car, the way you make things so easy for me, the way you rub your hands across your scalp, the way you smile at me, the way your buttocks clench and relax when you walk, and when you bend down—oh, Ray, thinking of you bending down was what caused me to be in the condition in which you found me.”

Ray couldn’t even muster a ‘wow!’ for all that.

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“If you have no objections,” and Fraser had to lick his lips, his mouth gone suddenly dry with embarrassment, “if you don’t mind, I’d really prefer... I’d really appreciate... If it’s not too forward of me, nor too presumptuous—”

Into the silence, Ray’s voice, very low, very husky, desire given voice. “Ask me, Benny. You can ask me, anything you wanna try, you can ask me. Benny?”

Fraser’s favorite smile, the one that made his heart race as Ray’s face lit up.

“Ask me, Benny. How could I say no?”

“Ray—would you—the bedroom, you, me, there—”

“What do you want, Benny?”

The truth, bald and hungry. “Everything. I want you, everything we can do, everything we can have. If you want that, Ray.”

Ray, rising gracefully to his feet, taking Fraser by the hand, leading him towards the bedroom, making it easy again.

“Let’s go to bed, Benny,” Ray was saying, one hand still holding Benny, the other opening doors, dealing with lights.

Mere seconds later, they were standing facing each other over the expanse of forest green quilt. Fraser thought of all the things

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they were going to do here in this bed, naked, Ray circumcised and virile and— He swallowed, loudly.

“We don’t have to do anything, Benny,” Ray was saying, turning the lights out now. “We can just hold each other for a while, we got plenty of time for the rest of it...”

And what did it cost Ray to make that generous, if misguided, offer?

Fraser followed round behind Ray, turning the lights back on. “I want to see you, Ray,” he said, grateful that he hadn’t actually blushed at his own boldness. “I want to see that it’s *you*.”

“Yeah, but Benny, I’m not that great to look at—”

“Ray, Ray, Ray, Ray! Weren’t you listening to a word I said? Beauty lies in the eye of the beholder, Ray, and I behold you as beautiful, from your skin to your smile, to your walk to your wit, to your buttocks to your hands to—”

“Yeah?”

Small, smoldering smile. “Oh yes.”

And before Ray could make it easy on him again, Fraser reached out, and this time, it was he who took Ray’s hand. And it was he who moved in closer and brought his left hand up to slide

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under the whispering silk, and it was he who, finally, brought his mouth and Ray's mouth together in a kiss. Chaste—no, this was not. This was not the hospital with its hordes of people; this was Ray's apartment, with Dief lying in wait at the door for the hapless pizza delivery guy, and Ray here, in his arms, in his mouth, Ray's tongue so moist and supple as it probed him.

Anyone would think they'd been lovers for years, the way they meshed together, the way their hands knew how and where to touch. The way they simply...fit. Perfectly.

It didn't take long for any hint of reserve to be destroyed by the heat of passion and the joy of Ray's body being revealed to him. Fraser murmured his delight at seeing Ray exposed, Ray's flesh firming rapidly in Fraser's hand, Fraser's own interrupted pleasure threatening to peak all too soon.

So he left Ray's mouth, and traveled lower, down to where he wanted most to be. He permitted his hand to continue its pleasure, even indulged in the weight and balance of Ray's testes, but there was another place that lured Fraser far more. He closed his eyes for a moment, recreating the image of Ray bending over. Oh, yes, that was what Fraser wanted. Ray heart-warmingly

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trusted Fraser enough to go where Fraser urged him, climbing up onto the bed, rolling over onto his belly without hesitation even though Fraser knew what Ray must be expecting, in that position. Eventually, maybe, if Fraser ever tired of making love to Ray's lithe body, or feeling Ray's long manhood deep inside. Oh, those were things Fraser was so hungry for, starving for, but there was one thing he wanted more than anything else.

Ray, bending over, naked, exposing...

The heart and the heat of his body, to Fraser's hungry stare.

That, that was what Fraser wanted. He had no idea why, no real reason why the thought of this one act excited him above all others: it simply was the way he was, and what he wanted, and Ray was willing, judging by the way Ray was amenably raising himself up on all fours.

Fraser settled himself comfortably between Ray's spread legs, taking his weight on his elbows so his hands were free to sample the pleasures of fondling Ray's virility, while his mouth...

Oh, heaven. His mouth was open on Ray's bottom, tasting the skin there, tasting the faint residue of familiar soap, and the taste of Ray, and the hint of musk. Tongue swathing across the sensitivity

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there, Ray making small sounds, of pleasure, of need, of approval.

Well, Fraser thought happily, if you approve of that...

And he pressed his tongue tip to the hole, felt the muscle twitch and yield, heard Ray react to this, felt Ray react to this, Ray's cock growing that much harder in his hand. Fraser tongued Ray more, thrust his tongue in deeper, twisting it around and around the moist satin that was Ray's innermost core.

It was wonderful. Fraser's own arousal was in a race to becoming a thing of the past, his own manhood very hard now, the pulse definite and rapid, his testicles drawn up tight around the base. It didn't even occur to him to spare a hand for himself; why, when there would be no need? What more could he need, this first time, than the sound and the feel of Ray's arousal, of Ray's pleasure, of Ray's approval? Fraser stroked Ray more firmly, pressed harder inside, withdrew his tongue and then thrust it back inside, well aware of what he was mimicking, loving that he could do this for Ray and that Ray would let him.

Ray was saying his name, again and again and again, with instructions, most of them half words breathed out on a sigh or a

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groan. Ray's voice grew louder as the words made less sense, until all there was left was Ray shouting Benny's name, and Benny's tongue deep inside Ray, and Ray so hard in Benny's hand.

The muscle clamped down around Fraser's tongue holding him in, even as Ray's seed spilled out, so slick and wet and hot against Fraser's hand, Ray's shout so wonderfully loud. It didn't take long for Ray to recover after his climax, Ray moving reluctantly away from Benny's tongue, and it took even less time, for Benny to climax, Ray's mouth hot and wet and welcome around him, sucking him dry.

The two of them lay sprawled, limbs entwined, on Ray's bed.

"Wow," Ray said, in a tone of complete awe.

"Yes," Fraser said, stirring enough to wrap himself around Ray.

"'Wow' indeed."

Odd, now that they'd taken this step, to know that it was Ray who needed to be reassured, Ray's voice soft and sleepy against him. "Was it okay?"

"Nothing so mediocre, Ray."

"I guess with the noise I made, you don't need to ask me..."

A small sound that could have been Fraser giggling. "I had

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imagined you vocal, Ray. I had imagined you speaking Italian, or talking dirty to me, or whispering how much..."

Some words were harder to confess than others.

"How much I, you know..."

Some words were proving impossible to say without sinking into the sappiness Ray avoided.

"How much I feel...*that*. For you."

"Yes."

"It's a lot, you know that, don't you, Benny?"

"Yes. And you know—"

"Yeah. Yeah, I know. Have to know, after what you did..."

Silence, for a brief time, and then a scramble to gather some sort of decent covering: the doorbell being rung again impatiently, Fraser was aware of how strained his smile was as he answered the door in nothing but a crumpled towel and a very satisfied expression. Ray handed over the money, Fraser took the pizzas, and they settled themselves at the kitchen table, Dief at their feet working on his own pizza.

The familiar routine, their usual situation.

But so different now—Ray, nearly shy, looking at him, saying,

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“So, you’ve been looking at me and liking what you see, Benny?”—everything changed forever.

Because tonight, after this pizza was history, it wouldn’t be Ray going home and Fraser lying in bed alone.

It would be the two of them going to bed, and Fraser was going to spend hours showing Ray just what else he’d been thinking about.

And for the first time in his memory, Benton Fraser would not be alone.

