**Incrementum**

by lepusarcticus

Summary

They’re just worked up from the case, he tells himself. They’re just blowing off steam. Just this once.

** on indefinite hiatus **
They’re in Bellefleur, Oregon, and they’re making a mistake.

Rain crashes into the window, the motel mattress groans. Skin on skin, illuminated in restless candlelight, a rush of pulsing shadows passing over them, between them, betwixt. Fucking her feels primal, ancient, vital. He can almost hear the Beltane drums.

She’s hot and slick under the slow sway of his hips, cheeks cherry-wine, fingernails thrusting tiny crescent moons into his ass. Her rain-ruined hair unfurls on the pillow like ink in water. Her kisses are voluptuous, hedonistic, her soft tongue, her lazy lips. They lock eyes and can’t seem to break away.

Don’t trust her, he tells himself, but she’s so tender and proud and something within him aches with profound excitement when he looks at her. They’re just worked up from the case, he tells himself. They’re just blowing off steam. Just this once.

(He can’t afford the distraction. He doesn’t deserve to be touched. She has a boyfriend, he thinks. And anyway, she’s not his type.)

Her orgasm is heartbreakingly earnest. She gasps and laughs in surprise and spasms around his cock and calls him Fox. He’s too wired to come, but after they’re showered and dressed and after they’ve made their sheepish vows not to let it or anything like it happen again, he does something far more intimate.

He tells her the truth.
For a year and a half, they keep their promises.

Quarantine. Midnight. A Capote paperback loosely tented on the side table. The low hum of machinery, the lingering brimstone reek of volcanic ash. Spores and madness. The things we do for love.

She is spectral in the shifting dark, unearthly, but her body is solid and coma-soft under his palms.

He pushes her flimsy cotton bra over her head and mouths her breasts, and they’re heavier than before, her nipples darker, more firmly peaked. He doesn’t want to know what that means - he thinks of the abduction lore, the thousands of hypothetical violations visited upon her, and grips her fiercely to his chest.

“I thought I’d lost you,” he confesses into the crook of her neck, wretched, teeth bared. “I thought…” He works his hand under the waistband of her white scrubs, encountering damp fur and steam, swollen folds drenched with her ambrosial heat. He groans and kisses her roughly. He is so hard that it hurts.

“Thank you for not giving up on me.” She whispers into his lips, wetting his cheek with a single, stoic tear. She sucks the air from his mouth as two fingers slip lightly over her clitoris.

He slides his lips along hers, fucks her urgently, licks her all over like a guilty dog. He is overwrought, raw and brimming with tender anguish for this woman, and doesn’t last long.

He feels that penultimate pressure, clumsily pulls out, and spurts onto her belly with a wordless sob. She spreads her fingers through his come, brings them back into her mouth. They kiss forever, they cling to one another, they sleep.

Later, blushing, they agree that it was the boredom. The isolation.

And to never let it happen again.
Three

Minneapolis, a finger on ice, a corpse twisted in the grave.

Stiff motel mattress, his shirt draped over the lampshade. She is curled tight underneath his chest in the amber light, her knees tucked against his shoulders, her miraculous hands cupping the heath of his jaw. Her face pains him, the rough scab on her sylphy chin, a bruise on her brow. She is impossibly small, and he covers her like a starving animal, viciously territorial. He’s hilt-deep, flush to her pubis, grinding slow. The heartbeat pulse of her musculature grasps rhythmically at his cock.

Being inside of her feels like touching the hem of eternity. It has never been like this, not with anyone. Sometimes he has a faint suspicion that the universe only exists because she is in it.

“Harder,” she breathes, a sharp azoic glint in the black crater of her pupil. He hesitates, faintly troubled, but begins to press into her a little more seriously.

It’s not enough.

“All over you. All over you,” she pants, and he hates that he loves this desperation. “Harder. Make me forget.”

He stifles a pang, gathers his resolve, draws back, slams into her. Her guttural howl vibrates in his bones. He brackets her face between his elbows, trapping the tensile knot of her body, and smashes into her fiercely until she yelps and comes with a surge of hot liquid, soaking his stomach and the sheets.

“Holy shit. Holy fucking shit.”

He’d always assumed it was a myth.

He’s roaring and smiling and wildly thrusting, proud of himself and more turned on than he’s ever been in his life. Oh god, he’s gonna lose it. Should he come in her? Would she be mad? Is she on anything? But then Scully comes down and her noises turn bitter, and before he understands what’s happening, she’s sobbing beneath him.

His heart shatters, and he stills immediately. Rolling them away from the wet spot, he gathers her close, lets her pummel her fists into his chest, lets her curse and wail and tremble. He rubs wide circles over her back, still inside of her, muttering stream-of-consciousness nonsense and kissing her hair. “I’m here,” he tells her. “You’re safe. It’s me. It’s just me, baby.”

They hold hands on the flight back to DC. They never speak of it again.
Blood on the tile in West Virginia, a stained threshold in Annapolis.

Scully removes a subcutaneous microchip from the nape of her neck. She attends his father’s funeral. He dreams in the desert, reaches through space to the bowl of her mind.

Scully buries a bullet in his shoulder, an act of love.

His car is a dark sanctum in the hospital parking garage. The opioid whiff of gasoline and antiseptic, a concrete chill, the tang of sex. Somewhere above them, Melissa is cold, but his own Scully woman is warm, straddling his lap in the driver’s seat.

Her trousers in a soft rumple on the dashboard, the crotch of her cotton panties nudged aside, a foxfawn rag of her hair swinging around her beautiful face. He grips her narrow hipbones as she forces herself down, wincing in pain and determination. She rides him until her body catches up, coating his cock in slip.

Echoes of their last encounter scratch at Mulder’s brain - *makemeforget* - and he suspects that she’s using him. *So use me,* he thinks. *Use me up. I’m yours.*

He’s locked in their habitual mythy vortex gaze. She has the silty, glacial eyes of a storm witch, a woman made of hurricane.

“I am done being a victim,” she hisses, her hands ripping at his hair. He burns with rage and love, grips her with bruising strength, yanks her roughly back down on his cock. She bites at his mouth, fierce and brilliant.

Helplessly grunting, wracked with shame, he rams her to his hips. *This is all my fault,* he thinks.

Urgency builds in his sacrum. He tries to lift her off of him, tries to warn her in desperate, half-coherent gasps, but she racks him between her thighs like a bullrider.

In a rush of relief and dread, he spills into her, giving her everything. “*M’sorry, m’sorry,*” he pants, but he’s not. The ooze of his come leaking out of her around his dick is mind-melting. *Scully is full of his come.*

He should know better by now, but suggests his apartment anyway. She climbs off of him, dripping, and fixes him with a look that twists like a knife in his gut.

She doesn’t answer his calls all weekend. On Monday, she’s wearing black.
Metal and sweat, hospital blue, the dank miasma of fear. Modell pushes into his thoughts, a deep and astonishing violation.

Even with his mind in the fist of this desperate man, Scully is as clear and bright as holy water.

Her apartment smells like her, like vetiver candles and stale popcorn. Mulder loves the Scully-nest, her couch an overstuffed sleeping buffalo, the sprig of eucalyptus lashed to the showerhead. He loves her dark female world, this periodic crime scene that she refuses to abandon. It bodes well for him.

“Mulder,” she says, and kisses him like it’s the first time - sure, solemn, sweet, her cool knuckles bumping along his hipbone under the hem of his t-shirt. “Mulder,” his name like a plum in her mouth. He wraps his arms around her, bending like a heavy summer branch. Her breath is warm on his temple. He startles, flashing on the spinning chamber, on Modell’s cold eyes.

“Scully... fuck, I could have... I almost...” he whispers, trembling and furious.

“I know, Mulder, but you didn’t.” She kisses him lavishly, tugs his shirt over his head. “You didn’t,” she repeats, swiping her tongue along his bottom lip for emphasis. He can feel waves of love pouring off of her and over him. He feels as though he is a leper at a healing spring.

He lifts her suddenly, and her legs twine around his waist, the heat between her thighs pressing against his bare stomach. Walking them slowly to the bedroom, Navy-brat tidy, he lays her down, and they undress each other with building need.

He’s about to slide his cock past his fingers and into her hot little body when she stops him with a hand on his chest. “Condom,” she says evenly, and twists back to unearth one from her side table drawer.

(White. Berenbaum. Surely she doesn’t think...)

“Scully, I... I didn’t...” he starts, but she ignores him, tearing the foil open with her teeth. “Put it on.”

Finally slipping into her is still sweeter than anything - she is wet and warm and fragrant, strong and soft, compact. He takes his time, playing supplicant, writing hymns into her skin with his tongue and teeth and lips. He moans deliriously at the sight of her coming beneath him, that exquisite curl of her lip, the helpless arc of her eyebrow. “Baby,” he can’t help but call her. “God, baby, you’re so beautiful when you come for me.”

They fall asleep entwined. He leaves in the morning. Like Orpheus, he knows he must not look behind him. Like Orpheus, he does. Her window is dark, no sign of her within.
Six

Black oil, old mud, a geologist’s shiv. Waxed canvas in the dead leaves, Krycek’s wet Slavic fricatives. There’s a quasi-erotic satisfaction in possessing a worthy adversary, especially one who’s as pretty as a girl. He thinks of old sea captains, tiny oil portraits of their rivals slung in lockets around their necks.

Mulder claws his way to St. Petersburg, then on to D.C., wearing a suit and tie from an airport boutique. He descends on the committee, relishing the operatic scope of it all. Scully under trial is a bright sword in the shadows, as noble as Vesta’s flame.

Their flight to Boca Raton leaves in twenty minutes. At the airport, he wrestles a quarter into the men’s room vending machine, extracts a condom. Presses her up against the metal stall wall, yanks her soaked panties down. They’re both desperate, giddy, gasping in relief when he pushes into her. Gathering a fistful of her bronzy Celtic hair, he pulls her head back to his shoulder, and slides his free fingers around her and over the glossy hood of her clit.

“Such a good fucking girl,” he growls, dizzy with lust, grinning against her neck. “So wet for me. So fucking good. Contempt of congress, fuck, Scully -” She whimpers and writhes against his fingers, bucking herself back onto every thrust.

“Oh my god,” she seethes, “Yes, god - fuck me, Mulder -” and he loses it at the sound of his name, pinning her against the wall as he comes, hard, mashing his face against her cheek. He holds her, chest heaving, and lands sloppy, fevered kisses wherever he can reach.

“You escaped a gulag. With a shiv,” she breathes against the metal, laughing.

“Yeah, well, I couldn’t bear the thought of never getting to fuck that sweet little snatch of yours again,” he mumbles into her ear, sliding out of her and slapping her ass. She shimmies back into her trousers as he ties the condom off, shoving it in his pocket for later disposal. He’s breaking the rules, vocalizing this thing between them, but he’s so high on adrenaline and sex that he can’t bring himself to care. Scully rewards him with a naughty smirk, turning and reaching on her tiptoes to lick the crease of his chin as she smooths her jacket. He palms her hair, possessive.

“Let me make you come.”

“No time, Solo, we’re gonna miss our flight.”

He gets her off with his fingers under a thin blue blanket in economy seating. She runs into the flames for him, stares down the Senator, sharpens herself against the whetstone of truth.

She is magnificent, and he is beginning to suspect that she loves him back.
Samantha. It always comes back to Samantha.

Mulder dreams of murdered girls, time-hollowed skulls resting in the cold earth. He slices a 1956 edition of Alice in Wonderland from the discarded camper shell of a white El Camino. The book is stiff, dry, yellow with lignen. Between pages, fleecy sleeper hearts are tucked like pressed wildflowers.

Kaitlyn counts to 19, and Mulder commits his fourth murder.

In the early hours, he drives to Annapolis, needing to be loved. He lets himself in, toes his shoes off at the threshold, wary of Melissa’s ghost. Scully doesn’t startle when he sheds his rumpled suit and slides between the linen sheets. Her sleep-warm body faithfully drapes around his chilled one, like she’s been waiting for him. She doesn’t say a word, but kisses him loosely, tasting of toothpaste and merlot, sighing as he unbuttons her chaste pajamas and licks at a soft nipple.

She rolls sleepily away from him to get a condom, and he stills her with a hand on the hill of her hip. “Scully,” he whispers. She blinks slowly up, eyes dark with love. “I’m clean. And we’ve had... without... and I can, um, pull out, if that’s...” She shakes her head in sympathy, procures a foil square, presses it to his thigh.

This time, he’s slow. Even through latex, he feels her primordial tide sloshing around him, as if he is the moon and she is the sea, yoked together, tied by gravity and the whirl of the cosmos. Time crawls until it’s forever, and he spends whole centuries inside of her, their movements glacial, tectonic, rewriting the world.

In the haze of afterglow, it breaks over him like a storm. He weeps until he’s spent, big heaving sobs for Samantha, for Melissa, for Laura and Addie and Karen-Ann, for the last nameless heart, for all the little girls he’s failed. Scully holds him close, stroking his back, silently absorbing his pain.

“Oh, Mulder,” she murmurs into his hair, nuzzling his scalp. “Fox...”

A flare of panic rings in his belly. FOX, Samantha screams in his mind, FOX! FOX!

“Fox, maybe it’s time to stop looking for her.” FOX! FOX!

He stills, pulling back, fighting the sour twist of horror.

“It’s not healthy,” Scully continues, oblivious, reaching to press her thumb to a stray tear near his mole. “This... this compulsion of yours, to find Samantha... it impairs your ability to act rationally. It puts your life in danger, and it endangers the lives of others, of, of children.”

“Scully.” There’s a warning in his voice, and he sits up and away from her touch, the night air cool on his sweat-damp chest.

“I know how important she is to you.” Scully sits up to face him, gathering handfuls of sheet to cover her breasts. He hates the pity in her voice, recoils when she reaches for him again. “But it’s not your fault Samantha was taken. And it’s not your responsibility to save her.”
His heart is pumping furiously now, blood roaring in his ears.

“You are so much more than Samantha’s brother. You’ve got to stop using her as an excuse to punish yourself.”

It feels like betrayal. He realizes with a small shock that he wants to hurt her like he’s been hurt. He wants her to understand. “That’s not an option, Scully. You know that.” His voice is shaky, and he swings his legs over the side of the bed, roots around for his pants on the floor.

“Fox -” FOX! FOX!

“DON’T call me that. I told you not to call me that,” he hisses, and she looks stung. A thrill of satisfaction urges him on. “This is my life we’re talking about. Just because you occasionally deign to fuck me when you feel like getting laid doesn’t give you the right - you’re not my fucking wife, you have no... you can’t - god, Scully, this thing is an international - I, I thought finding the truth was important to you. Especially after all that’s happened.” He is seething, working himself into fury, half-dressed by now and fumbling with his shirt.

Her hair is sex-mussed, her lips are swollen and pink, her eyes huge. She looks too much like those doomed girls, too young, too small, too vulnerable. He wants her sharp edges back, wants her intensity, wants her pain.

“You may have given up on justice for your sister,” he spits, “but I refuse to give up on justice for mine.”

The air sparks between them, a tempest in Scully’s eyes.

“Get out,” she says, quiet and pale.

And he goes.
In Philadelphia, it storms.

A stranger’s apartment, the bitter wash of nicotine and bourbon on his lips. A bruise blooming on her wrist.

Scully marks the moment. This swell of desire, this eternal return, an ouroboros in rye. Kundalini buzzing in a muscular curve, the mandala of alchemy, Kekulé’s dream.

He is so, so different than Mulder. Mulder is dark, temperate forest, Cernunnos made flesh, fertile and esoteric. Mulder is the earthy smell of burnt coffee and pencil shavings, gravedirt in the rain, basketball leather. Mulder is long, warm fingers, rough cheeks, a heavy, scarred cock, a wicked tongue. Mulder is the thief in the night.

Ed is sinew and flame, and he burns her clean.
Chapter Summary

A/N: This installment contains potentially triggering content.

He loves her. This much he knows. Scully is the sea, all salt and moonlight, and she says his name like she’s luring him to the rocks. She leaves a dry, dusty curl of petal on his desk, like one last kiss from Phthinoporon.

This work is his life, not theirs, and it’s a lonely road to Graceland.

The office is quiet that morning. Coffee going cold, the diligent scritch of Scully’s Waterman. They shed their suit jackets, Mulder loosens his tie. The hush of rain on the skylight, files and books spread on the desk, research for Arlington. The office is quiet that morning. And then it isn’t.

“The condoms,” Mulder says, leaning against the filing cabinet with his arms crossed, studying a scuff mark on his shoe. “You’ve been… this is why.” There’s a hot flood rolling in his belly.

He glances up, and her beryl eyes scorch him. She gingerly sets her pen down. “Bambi Berenbaum,” she says, slowly, as if he’s stupid. “Detective White. Don’t be juvenile, Mulder.”

“Scul-”

“I’m not your wife. Right? Isn’t that how you put it? I can sleep with whomever I choose. You certainly exercise the same freedom.”

Mulder sees red.

In one swift, clattering movement, he lunges, and she leaps to her feet. He jabs a finger at her. “Get your goddamned story straight before you go hurling accusations.” That infuriating sneer of hers, a scatter of scrapes on her brow. She abandoned him. She betrayed him.

“The only time I ever fucked anyone else was when they took you,” he continues, and Scully blinks unevenly, cracks forming in the marble. “I wore your cross,” Mulder purrs, low now. “She touched it. She put it in her mouth. I fucked her, wearing that -” he gestures to the glint on her breastbone, “and then I went with your mother to pick up your tombstone.”

Her hand flies in his periphery, but he’s Quantico-trained and sharp with ire. He catches her wrist, reinforcing Jerse’s bruise, yanking her body to his. A small, sharp gasp of pain, soft skin, fine bones, a flash of terror in her eyes. He’s filled with sudden rage at her vulnerability, at how small she really is, at how easy it would be to force himself on her. She tilts her chin up at him defiantly, and something dark takes over.

Twisting her wrist behind her back, he wrenches her around, shoving her face-first into the desk. She cries out, and the worklamp crashes to the floor. Easy, too easy. Adrenaline thrums in his blood, a feral pulse.
He holds her in place, drags a hand up the muscled column of her thigh, over the hoarse texture of hose, up past the hem of her skirt. She squirms deliciously against him, struggling, and his cock swells against the tight curve of her ass.

“Tell me you don’t want me,” he demands, jaw clenched. Don’t let me do this to you, Scully. He wrestles her skirt over her hips, one-handed. Her tattoo peeks in a curve over the waistband of her pantyhose, a landscape of bruises washed beige under the rasp of nylon. Good god, Jerse beat the shit out of her. The snake is bright and pagan in the lurid jungle of her battered skin, and he despises the beauty of it all, this evidence of Scully’s private wilderness, her mythical underworld.

Pain and lust surge through him, and he folds over on top of her, releasing her wrist to grab a fistful of hair. “Tell Me.” he grits through his teeth, working his cock out of his pants with his free hand. She responds with a whimper and a salacious roll of her hips, reaches her arms forward like a cat.

In a frenzy, he scrapples her pantyhose and underwear down, fighting a pang of nausea at the true, deep colours Jerse left. He shoves his fingers between her thighs. She’s hot and slippery, thick with want.

She likes this.

He slides his fingers over her hard little clit and pinches it, cruelly, earning a yelp.

His hands find her hips, and in one brutal, ferocious thrust, he fills her. No condom, just searing velvet friction, flesh on flesh, her shrill, surprised yowl. He palms the serpent, and Scully tries to twist beneath him, hands scrabbling, but he’s got her pinned. So, so easy. He fucks her like he hates her, and it feels so damn good.

“Tell me to stop,” the last decent part of him begs her. Sharp, deep thrusts, and she’s moaning into the creaking desk, smudging lipstick all over the report she’d been reviewing. Her wordlessness unnerves him. He leans harder, crushing her against the wood.

“Did he fuck you like I can?” he growls, bitter, into her ear. “Was it good for you?” He feels a fresh rush of wetness around him. Shit. She is soaking. “Did you get off on screwing a killer? I’ve killed too, baby. Did he make you come like I do?” Scully pants and wets her lips with her tongue, eyes crumpled shut.

“What did he call you?” She quivers underneath him. “Hmm? Did he call you Dana, Dana?”

And that’s what does it. She comes hard, jerking and wailing and squeezing him so tightly that it hurts. He rips himself out of her and erupts onto her tattoo, smearing his come into the serpent with the head of his cock, marking his territory.

Scully gets her slap in, after all, and a juicy “Fuck you,” too.

“You just did,” Mulder reminds her, and helps her with her coat at 5.
Ten

In the morning, he’ll be a dead man.

Scully sways above him, anchored to his body and moving in an undulating drift. She has lancet cheekbones, curved ribs, the pallor of cancer. His hands float over her thin arms, her breasts, the subtle flare of her hips.

He hasn’t touched her like this in months. Not even after Van Blundht.

There’s a man in his apartment, blood and brain matter haloing a ruined skull. His fifth murder. *A lie to find the truth.*

He lays a palm over Scully’s high, shallow navel, rolling his hips to meet her, and she threads her cool little hand over his. Her stomach is taut and empty, and Mulder suddenly finds himself desperate to fill her up, with love and mu shu pork and babies.

He doesn’t know how long he’s harboured the quiet assumption that she’d one day carry his children. Instead, he carried hers, a vial of gamete uberscullies nested in the inside pocket of his leather jacket.

He wraps his arms around her, pulling her down, soft breasts against his hot chest, and curls into the warm huff of her breath, the dusky, animal smell of sex around them. *“I’m so sorry, Scully. For everything,”* he whispers into her hair, fresh tears trailing icy-hot into his ears.  *“All I’ve ever done is hurt you.”*

“Don’t,” she says, lifting her face, still rocking against him. A single tear rolls off her chin and lands on the corner of his lip. The brine of it is dark and rich. “Don’t.”

In the morning, he’ll be a dead man. And Scully will still be dying. But tonight, at least, they’re alive.

He kisses her, sure that it’s his last chance.
The Smoking Man offers Mulder a deal.

One of the Samanthas, distraught and shrill, her crooked pixie face lit up in diner-glow red. The sink of déjá vu, the sticky honeycomb ribs of an alien hoax, a microchip in deionized water.

A victory at the hearing, a condemnation, as empty and satisfying as a midnight cigarette.

In her hospital bed, Scully sits like the Kumari Devi against a mountain of pillows, bloodless and sacred, a strange energy around her, something heavy, something ultimate. “Mulder,” she says, and it’s all he can do not to fling himself at her feet.

He tosses his jacket and tie into a corner chair and eases himself onto the edge of her mattress. Their hands find each other; her cold small fingers knit into his large warm ones, her paper hospital bracelet hushing against the thin bones of her wrist.

“Scully,” he says, searching her face for the girl she’d been in Bellefleur. Baby fat and frizzy hair, freckles tossed haphazardly over the bridge of her nose. She’d been the one to kiss him, and he can still conjure the tack of her chapstick on his lips.

This rare woman, who loved him with her actions, who’d shoot him, lie for him, follow him into the darkest night. This woman, who’d begged him to let her carry his sins to her grave.

How unfathomable, that something as prosaic as cancer would dare to touch her.

“How unfathomable, that something as prosaic as cancer would dare to touch her.

“Mulder,” she says, and he releases her hand to cup her cheek. She nuzzles into him, blinking slowly in that lopsided way he adores. He pulls her into his arms, surrounding her frail body, bile in his throat. “Mulder,” she sighs into his shoulder.

After a moment, Scully pulls back, and her sublime, sallow face tears him to shreds. “I, um. Got the results from my last scan.”

He brings her hands up to kiss her knuckles, one by one, trying to free the desperate thing that’s thrashing in his ribcage. He can’t bear to look at her, not with the news he knows is coming. His lips touch the mound at the base of her thumb, the line of fate, the labyrinthine whorls of her fingerpads.

“I… I can’t begin to comprehend… nevermind explain … you’re the first one I’ve…” she’s breathy, and the hitch in her voice forces his eyes open, back to hers. They’re glassy and wide, and something begins to dawn on him.

“Mulder… I’m in complete remission. The cancer is gone.”

He stares, the breath sucked from his lungs. And then she breaks into a smile, her tears spilling over, and he’s weightless with a sudden, electric joy. Without thought or reason, he crashes his face to hers, kissing her with everything he has, sloppy and frantic. Laughing against each other’s mouths, his arms tight around her waist. She’s tugging him down on top of her, fumbling at his shirt buttons - “-hem.”

Maggie and Bill at the door, the fluorescent hallway light spilling across the tile. Mulder untangles
himself immediately, sitting up, and Bill’s eyes flick wildly from him to Scully and back again.

“Dana?” Bill says, and the hope in his voice makes him sound like a small boy. Scully just nods, the colour high in her cheeks, her goofy, tear-soaked laugh like an answered prayer.

Maggie rushes to the bedside, dropping her purse in a clatter on the floor, drawing Scully into her arms, gasping her name. Bill follows, staring down at Mulder, an uneasy camaraderie written between them.

Mulder slips from the bed, squeezing the lump of Scully’s foot under the blanket. “I’ll, uh, give you some time with your family,” he mumbles, euphoria still humming in his chest.

He’s almost at the door when a hand grips his elbow. Maggie sinks against him, burrowing her cheek into his chest, just as strong and small and sweet as her daughter. A fresh wave of relief seeps through him, and they stand there, embracing, for a long time. She pulls back, reaching to hold his face in her hands, those untamed oceanic eyes so like Scully’s. “Fox, son, you are family.”

Later, in the hallway, Mulder clutches a bloody, glass-flecked photograph, taken in 1972. He allows himself to grieve. The Smoking Man is dead, and along with him, his best chance of finding the truth about Samantha.

But Scully… Scully is alive. And he’s going to do this thing right.
The roaring of a burning barn, the lash of hot orange against the sky. Pollidori's mad, audacious genius, a people spawned with warped threads of beastly DNA, their pitchforks lofted in the frenzy of battle. Women gassed in their homes with acrid pucks of farm-grade anesthetic, breeding stock, their heirlooms scratched, their peanut butter jars licked clean.

Mulder is reminded of man's capacity for evil in the name of progress, in the name of love.

The find the mutant in the hay. As with all lost and lonely things, Mulder feels an immediate and existential kinship with this shambling, articulate creature. His sense of justice reels.

With Cher in the tapedeck and the shaved, moonlit wheat fields rushing by, he looks over at Scully's refined profile, backlit by the dash, and allows himself a fantasy - one dance in some gauzy Memphis bar, the mutant with his idol, everything right in the world. Instead, it's paperwork, a jail cell, a promise to write.

But in the roadside motel parking lot, Mulder rewinds the tape, plays it over again. He rolls down the windows, and pulls a reluctant Scully from the passenger seat and into the cool November midnight, fuchsia neon from the signage glowing around her hair. The stars a mess above them, her body swaying against his, sheepish smiles. A perfect moment, one he'll remember forever.

"Who knew you were such a romantic, Mulder?" Scully teases, trying to seem uncharmed, but there's a telltale flush across her cheeks and she can't stop chewing her lip. He kisses her then, a real kiss, pressing her up against the car door, rudely shoving his tongue against hers and copper a feel over her blazer. The motel's aged proprietor grins unnoticed behind the office glass, misty-eyed, remembering his late wife.

They don't even bother bringing the luggage inside.

He's camped between her thighs on the crinkly floral bedspread, and he can't believe he's never done this, because under his mouth she is revelatory, intoxicating, completely essential.

She tastes better than anything, better than salt, better than a sun-warmed peach. The springy wet tucks of her flesh, the hard bud of her clitoris sliding between his teeth, the flush and throb of her swelling against his lips. His face is soaked, tongue aching, but he could spend hours here, a zealot, utterly humbled by cunt.

"I need you inside of me," she gasps, and as much as it pains him to resurface, his cock jumps and strains at the invitation. He licks his way up, dragging saliva and nectar across her belly, briefly suckling one hard nipple. They meet eyes, a silent conversation, a question, an answer. "It's okay," she says, a grain of melancholy at the edge of her voice.

He pushes into her, slow and bare, welcomed with slick, stretching muscle. "You're perfect," he groans, nearly overwhelmed. "Feel that? We're fucking perfect together." They roll and wrestle for hours, teasing, laughing, until they're soaked in sweat and come. He'd almost forgotten that sex could be fun.

Afterwards, with Scully's russet head tucked under his chin, Mulder's thoughts drift.
"Think we've got a chance at a happy ending, Scully?" he whispers into her hairline. She shifts, peering up at him from under her eyelashes. "You sap," she says, but the gentle way she smiles, the way her gaze lingers, tells him everything he needs to know.

For years, he writes to the Great Mutato, long, rambling tracts on existence and humanity and truth, and about the beautiful Dana, his companion, his rock, his faithful partner through all things strange and wondrous.
Those two, with their shadowed basement office, that subterranean den, that shifting gallery of clippings and all those strange visitors. Their indecipherable expense reports, their call logs and car requisitions, novel-length personnel files, black trenchcoats billowing through the halls. They’ve got silver screen looks and brilliant, wasted minds, and they traipse around the Hoover kicking up clouds of scorn and lust and conjecture.

And god, the way they look at one another. No one has ever looked at Holly like that. Like they wanted to eat her whole.

Alright, so maybe that Modell guy had. She still burns with humiliation when she thinks of it - the bite of pepper spray in the air, her toe smashing into AD Skinner’s small intestine. But the resulting proximity to the Spookies had fueled Holly’s imagination for months.

Dana’s surprising warmth, the honey of her voice. The low, coarse simmer of sex pouring off of Agent Mulder. She still can’t decide who she’d rather find in her bed. Sometimes it’s both of them, together, and she’s just watching.

Holly is late going home that night, dazed with fatigue, her carpal tunnel sparking pain through the meat of her hands. Some crisis in Violent Crimes, Agent Sinclair running her off of her damn feet, pulling records and references and dusty old files. You’d think it’d kill the guy to say please.

The parking garage is almost empty. Exhausted, Holly slumps into the driver’s seat of her junky old Taurus, rolling down the windows to air out the stale milky stink of this morning’s spilled latte. She toes off her pumps, digs a thumb into her palm. There’s an echo of a door swinging closed, a flicker of movement in her rearview mirror.

And it’s them.

They’re walking slow from the stairwell, Agent Mulder’s hand brushing the small of Dana’s back, the click of her heels slightly delayed. A snatch of soft laughter, the flash of a smile. Holly sinks further down into her seat, following them with her eyes. God, they’re both so ridiculously beautiful.

They’ve stopped now, at what appears to be Dana’s car - she’s got keys in her hand, the silver disc of a keychain dangling between her fingers. Mulder’s looming over her, too close, a possessive leer that makes Holly’s pulse flutter. A stolen fragment of their quiet conversation floats through the window. “...na miss you - ... - mom I say hi -”

He runs his hands down her arms, shoulder to elbow. Holly’s clit twitches, the heat rising in her cheeks. She shouldn’t be watching this clearly private moment, but god, they look so good together, and she’s thought about them so often, and they’re so mysterious, and -

Mulder lifts his head, does a quick scan of the parking garage. Holly stills, but she’s shorter than the headrest anyway, and he can’t see her. Quickly, softly, he tucks a knuckle under Dana’s chin and tilts her face up to his, bending to kiss her lightly on the lips.

It’s not a passionate kiss. It’s barely a peck. But there is something so rich and pure in Dana’s face when he pulls back that Holly finds herself a little choked up.

Mulder holds the car door open, waves goodbye as Dana pulls out, and ambles back to the stairwell, hands shoved in his pockets, grinning down at his shoes like a lovesick teenager.
The stairwell door clangs shut. Holly releases a dreamy sigh, melts into her seat.

Everyone knows they’re sleeping together, of course. But that night, Holly suddenly finds herself with the scarce information that the Spookies are deeply, truly, rebelliously in love.
Fourteen

Chapter Summary

A/N: This installment contains potentially triggering content.

It’s Christmas in San Diego.

Tara, pregnant, is abundantly, extravagantly feminine, breasty and tiger-striped with purplish striae, smelling of milk and cotton. In her presence, Scully feels brittle and ornery, cronelike, spare.

She remembers the night Bill proposed. It was before her abduction, and she was at Mulder’s, going over a case. Files spread out on his coffee table, crowded with takeout pho and Shiner Bock, her mother on the phone. “Did you know,” Mulder had said, “that Tara’s the name of the female Bodhisattva? Your brother’s bagged himself the Moon of Primordial Awareness, Scully. The Supreme Mother. The Lotus of the Night.” He’d been a little drunk that night, handsy, and she’d giggled nervously and set her feet upon his knees on the couch. “She’s a Republican, Mulder, I doubt she’s the lotus of anything.”

But here she is; Tara, the Carrier of the World, of that one tenacious blastocyst, a real human being called forth from the aether. Scully lays her hand over Tara’s quaking belly, and finds herself acutely aware that she’ll never know what it is to have two heartbeats.

She is wreathed in gunmetal and cadaver flesh, rot and catastrophe, dipping her latexed fingers into the river Styx. It’s no wonder Life wants nothing to do with her - she’s Death’s best girl. And sometimes, like this Christmas, he even brings her a gift.

Melissa’s ghost rasps over the phone line, and suddenly, Dana has a daughter.

- 

Emily. Her strange, sober child, that Irish candor, the gravitas of the seriously ill. Big for her age, like Bill was. Like she imagines Mulder’s children would be. Of course, Emily was immediately enamoured of him - with his romantic, craggy features and his nebulous, intelligent aura, he’d been charming the Scully women for years. Something dangerous yearned within her at the sight of them together. How wonderful a father he would be, if he was not who he was.

Are you two the parents?

Emily, with her cinnamon-sugar hair and her serious gaze, her life of fear and pain. She should be collecting milky fistfuls of dandelions. She should be swimming in the ocean, eating August strawberries from the bush, going to science camp, hitting softballs in the park. She should be listening to Scully’s old punk records, hogging the phone line, falling in love. She should be sneaking out of the house, developing a taste for dark beer, bickering with a graying Mulder at the dinner table over whether she should attend Oxford or Yale.

But her child is a science experiment, a test subject, a lab rat.
Seventeen days after Scully first sets eyes on her daughter, she holds her in a hospital bed as her life slips away. Brushing the sweat-soaked hair away from Emily’s cold little forehead, Scully, dry-eyed and outraged, tells her child about the beautiful life they deserved to have together.

They take Emily’s body away from her. Tara gives birth twenty minutes later and two floors up. Scully hyperventilates alone in the hospital bathroom, and sits down to find the crotch of her panties soaked in useless blood.

At the funeral, Mulder brings flowers. A habit of his, undoubtedly some remnant of his genteel breeding. Lilies after her sister is murdered. Roses after he forces himself on her, infects her tattoo with his come. Cornerstore carnations in the oncology ward. Baby’s breath for her dead daughter. He brings her flowers, and bends over her with his soft eyes, and she forgives him everything.

When she opens Emily’s coffin, craving Death’s familiar, comforting face, she finds sand and burlap, and a single scrap of gold.

Bill’s house, Navy issue. She can’t sleep. Matthew’s heartrending squalls, Tara’s muffled cooing, a brooding, unwelcome guest on the couch downstairs. Scully shifts out of bed, and makes a pit stop in the bathroom to remove her tampon, avoiding her reflection in the mirror.

He’s awake, of course. The stairs creak under her slight weight, and he meets her eyes from the couch. He’s been crying. A ray of fury dazzles through her - how dare he? He already has a little girl to cry for. Emily is hers.

Are you two the parents?

Silently, Scully goes to him, stepping out of her panties under the stolen, oversized Knicks tee she’s wearing as pajamas. She straddles him, settles into his warm lap. Mulder hesitates, his dark eyes sorrow and pine, and then settles his hands lightly on her thighs.

“Scully, this isn’t what you want.” His voice is thick and low, like molasses, like tar. Matthew screams upstairs. She is actively bleeding, staining his sweats, staining Tara’s floral couch. She reaches down between them, under his clothes, grasping his limp penis. He flinches uncomfortably.

“You should have told me,” she whispers sharply, holding the words between her teeth like a dagger. “You should have told me they took my ova. It’s my body. I deserved to know.”

“I didn’t want… you were sick -” he reaches up to her face, but she swats him away with her free hand.

“- Shut up.” She extends her fingers to cup his balls, relishing the swell of his cock under her palm. “I had to find out what was done to me in front of a judge, Mulder. A stranger.” She removes her hand to lick her fingers, gathering saliva, a reflex made wholly unnecessary by the wet, bloody massacre between her thighs.

Are you two the parents?

Mulder gently tugs her hand away from her mouth. “Stop it, Dana.”
But still, he lets her anoint the head of his half-hard cock, lets her center herself, lets her shove herself uncomfortably onto him. She digs her nails into his heather-gray shoulders, streaking her dark blood onto his t-shirt. He circles each of her wrists with a broad hand.

“What else are you keeping from me?” she says, voice shaking, the pained skew of his face urging her on. “In what other ways can I expect to be humiliated by you?” She wants him to hurt her, hit her, wants him to take her like he did after Jerse, wants him to make her forget. Her belly clenches, a familiar female ache.

He’s softening inside of her. Disgust roils in her throat, and she dashes her fist once into his chest, wrenches herself off of him, collects her panties from the floor, storms back upstairs.

Matthew’s muscular shrieking nearly shakes the walls. She thinks she hears Tara crying too now, the exhausted, hopeless weeping of a new mother. Bill’s muffled, frustrated tenor. How can mom sleep through this? What the fuck is she taking?

She reaches her room, and closing the door behind her, curls pathetically into the bed, the tears coming at last. After a moment or two, she hears the door click open again. The small bed sinks under Mulder’s weight as he slides in next to her, shielding her in his arms, surrounding her parched, scraped-out body as she silently weeps.

She hates that she loves him so desperately, hates that she ever kissed him in Bellefleur. He is a Midas, and sooner or later, everything he touches is beautiful and dead.
Fifteen

Scully feels the pull deep in her blood, the way monarchs know to return to the oyamels. The water. She must get back to the water.

It feels more honest, somehow, to mourn her daughter by the ocean, to wash her grief in the ancient, embryonic broth of the Atlantic. She's always felt that this is where the real God lives; in the unbroken horizon, in the foam of the tide, in the salt and the sky. She has a crumble of coffin sand in her jacket pocket, a crunchy sprig of baby's breath. Her cell phone is locked in the trunk.

She meant to walk into the surf, to cast these relics of her daughter's stolen soul over the water, back to the seat of her ancestors, back with Ahab. But she's got the stink of Fox Mulder on her now, and trouble sniffs her out.

It's not her own Melissa, and it's not her own child, but she saves them all the same.

On her last night, she wades into the sea under a blackout sky, the brackish heart of her father crashing against her ribs. Wind lifts her hair around her face, God’s playful fingers, or maybe Melissa’s. The water is ice cold, rough and clarifying, and Scully decides that after these Mulder years are over, these years of mutants and highways and dire, consuming love, she’ll be a doctor after all. She can’t give life. But she can preserve it.

Back in Washington, her lover is ravenous.

Underneath him on the island of her bed, Scully is loose-limbed, weak with devotion. Mulder is enormous above her, golden and vivid, barely restrained. He scrapes his nails lightly down the back of her arms, over her sensitive stomach, sending voltaic tremors through her body. His thick cock pitching into her, his tongue dominating her mouth, him, him, him, crowding into her with every thrust.

Being with him is like experiencing possession, her body a vessel for his body, her soul a vessel for his soul. A sweet and dangerous surrender. She knows she is marked forever by this love, owned, and it’s gorgeous and humiliating, illicit, transcendent.

He rips his mouth down to the straining tendon of her neck, biting her in his greed, reaching down to grip the back of her thigh and press her knee to her shoulder. He groans at the new angle, her name on his lips. Scully cries out in pleasure, in hopeless submission, and palms the big, shifting muscles of his back.

“I never got an answer,” he says, voice gravelly on her skin. Dazed, Scully searches her mind for his meaning. Mulder slows and lifts that haunted head to hers, forehead to forehead, the burning focus of his gaze sending her into fresh rapture. He brings his hand up, brushes a thread of damp hair from her cheek. She pants nervously.

“Marry me,” he says, pulling back, grinding in slow, nudging her cervix, heavy balls hot against her ass.

Ice floods her veins. Mulder pauses, sensing it, and kisses her lightly, smoothing his boxy, curvesome lips onto hers. She forgets to kiss him back. “Wait,” he says, and shifts out of her, off of her, reaching for his trousers on the floor.
He returns, settling back beside her with something wedged onto the tip of his thumb. A demure braid of little diamonds, set in tarnished rose gold. It looks old, cherished.

“Mulder-” she warns, propping herself up on an elbow, but he interrupts.

“No, listen-” his face is the face he wears at a crime scene. He reaches for one of her hands, clasps it hard. “I know this isn't the life you imagined for yourself. I - I - I know how much you've sacrificed. But I need you here with me. And I want to try to give you whatever... degree of normalcy I can.”

“Muld-”

He looks down at the ring, twists it around his thumbnail. “You'll probably have to have it resized, it was my great-grandmother's, and uh, we can live here, or at my place, or we could get a townhouse in the city-” His voice is low and unfocused. Cold fear in her chest.

“No.”

“...Scully?”

“No. I… marriage isn’t some sort of... consolation prize.” He fidgets uncomfortably, reaches to place the ring on her bedside table. It lands with a hollow click.

His smile is tragic, abashed. “I… uh. Pictured that going differently.”

“Mulder, I... I appreciate the gesture. I do.” She sits up, placing a hand on his cheek, forcing him to look at her. She searches his face, the abrupt jag of his nose, those sad eyes, and realizes he’s never told her that he loves her.

She falls asleep in his arms. When she wakes up, he's gone, his side of the bed deserted, the sheets cool. The ring is still on her bedside table, and it glints with the byzantine light of the sunrise.
Sixteen

As fate would have it, Dana Scully is beginning to believe.

Hers is a mysticism born of deep loss and deep love, of visions and visitations, spirits and shadows. The colonists sucking Cassandra Spender back up to their craft in a strip of light, the four-faced angel returning for his earthborn girls. Her daughter stumbling into the fire of heaven. She’s seen these things, felt the truth of them in her bones.

When she was twelve years old, and Melissa fourteen, her mother took them out whale-watching at the coast. The day was bleak, but all three of them were warm in Ahab’s scratchy, cabled crewnecks. Scully remembers feeling the presence of the humpbacks before she saw them, their great shadows passing underneath the cluster of fishing boats, souls rising from the dark. One by one, they rolled over the surface, close enough to touch, the slick black rubber of their hides lifting through the water. One drifted directly beneath their keel. Breathless with that powerful cetacean magic and white-knuckling the rail at the stern, Scully looked down into the water, and straight into one soulful, otherworldly eye.

These days, it’s a familiar feeling.

- Mulder doesn’t believe her. He writes off her reignited faith and her newfound belief as weakness, her visions as ‘personal issues’. It’s been weeks since they’ve been together, weeks since they’ve even kissed, not that kissing was ever something they did in the first place. His grandmother’s ring collects dust on her bedside table.

Worst of all, he’s been lying to her, chipping slowly away at the thing he claims to value most. Her trust.

She follows him to a crappy motel, almost hoping she’ll find him with another woman instead of an informant. The manager quizzes her, delighting in the scandal of it all - “Are you the wife?”

The pit of her stomach churns. “Not even close.”

- She waits for him in his apartment, anxiously rubbing her knuckles against the buttery leather of his couch. A terrorist cell, a flesh-melting biotoxin. Of all the dangerous, ridiculous things. God, Mulder.

The scrape of a key in the door, and he stumbles in, his silhouette blurred with the incandescent glow of the hall. She’s craving a fight, but when she sees the gnarl of his broken finger, her rage melts to a simmer.

“They still need something from me,” he says as she presses ice to his hand, sitting across from him on the coffee table. “And I’m sensing there’s someone Haley trusts even less - the man giving him his orders. Someone I haven’t met yet. A guy named August Bremer.”

She cracks his bones back into order and binds them straight, crouching between his knees, taking grim pleasure in the set of his teeth, his grinding wince.
“Damn you, Mulder, be careful,” she says, her voice edging towards a break. He gazes down at her, eyes full of meaning, and she can’t help but drift her fingers through his dirty hair. This brave, reckless warrior. A thick throb of love rises through her. She misses him terribly.

“I... couldn’t bear-”, she chokes, and he silences her by gripping the base of her skull and pulling her to his mouth. She thaws into him, relieved, the rough swipe of his tongue chasing all rational thought from her mind. Fever pools between her thighs.

Somehow they end up on the floor, half-dressed and crazed with reunion. His t-shirt is sweat-soaked, rumpled, his bottom lip crushed between his teeth. She’s riding him hard, gasping with the effort, her trousers tangled around one calf. “Scu-fuck,” he growls, and then surges upward, locking her in his arms, flipping them in one haphazard, violent twist.

Scully’s head hits the floor with a heavy crack, but she doesn’t care, because he’s fucking her stupid, splitting her apart. His hands at the collar of her shirt, fumbling, then ripping, buttons spraying against the floor. He tears her bra down with his teeth, biting at her nipple, suckling, slamming into her so painfully that she knows she’ll feel it for days. He wedges his good hand between them to press his fingers into her aching clit, letting the ricochet of her body do the work.

It’s as if there are ten of him, all licking and sucking and biting and pressing and fucking, and her sudden orgasm is so opulent that it hurts. As she’s coming, shuddering against him, his fingers drag down and thrust into her with his cock. She almost wails at the sensation, the unbearable fullness, clenching hard around him, shaking with the raw chaos of it all. He yells and begins to spurt hotly into her, hauls his wet fingers out of her cunt to clutch ruthlessly at her one exposed breast, his eyes closed. Heat, wet, a stinging soreness, heart hammering.

He collapses on top of her, damp and heaving, wordless. She holds him with heavy arms, catching her breath, tears leaking from the corners of her eyes. His cock softens and slips out of her, an obscene gush of semen spilling onto the carpet after him.

“I’ve gotta go, baby,” he apologizes, licking her neck, kissing her jaw.

She remembers the shadows beneath the rippling surface of the water, the cold sea air, the eye.

“I know,” she says. “I know.”
Gibson Praise is small for twelve. He has poor eyesight and a juiced up God module, the jaded fatigue of those burdened with a gift. This listless little boy, a sublime specimen at the fringe of human understanding. This child without a childhood.

Scully wants to take a Stryker to his brainpan, harvest a slice of that magnificent temporal lobe. She wants to take him to get soft serve at the beach, let him throw pebbles at the seagulls. She wants to murder anyone who would attempt to harm him.

And just to complicate things further, Mulder's magnanimous warmth with this boy, with any child, really, sets her bones to singing that artless old song.

Are you two the parents?

Diana Fowley slinks up from the mire, with her soft voice and doleful eyes, her belief and her wonder, the red slash of her slanted mouth. Despite Mulder's oblique avoidance, Scully senses there is something old and true between them. Something with scar tissue. She spies them in a sentimental moment, their hands clasped, smiling like lovers, and an unexpected jolt of pain sends her running.

What else has he kept from her? His closet might as well be an ossuary.

Diana bleeds out onto the hard motel carpet, and the boy is stolen away. The powers that be at the Justice Department, thoroughly pissed, put through an order for reassignment. And the basement office burns.

Mulder is still unresponsive by the time she gets him back to his apartment. He sinks into the couch, head in his hands, his breathing ragged and shallow. Scully squeezes his shoulder and feeds the mollies, watching their gaping, translucent mouths lip at the mosaic surface of the tankwater.

Struck by her own uselessness, she makes coffee in his sparse little bachelor's kitchen, meditating on his unused Japanese knives, his wooden spoons. The breakfast nook is obscured by scraps of newsprint, scrawled notes, a water-warped back issue of Fortean Times. The percolator babbles. She fishes out two dirty mugs from the hoard in the sink and rinses them clean.

Mulder doesn't move when she sets a steaming cup for him on the coffee table. She eases herself down beside him, as cautious as she'd be approaching an injured moose. Her thigh against his thigh, her palm flat along his vertebrae. At her touch, he finally begins to thaw, and she leans into him, resting her head on his shoulder, inhaling campfire and burning plastic, bitter coffee, warm male.

"If she dies..." he says, a small, furious sob interrupting him. Scully nuzzles her nose into the crook of his neck, somehow unable to find any words of comfort. "She was there when I discovered the X-Files."


Mulder sucks in a breath, lets it drift back out. "I owe... so much to her, Scully. She was instrumental in their reopening. She was the first person to believe in the work, to fight alongside me. We were partners."
A stone drops in Scully's stomach. Part of her had always assumed that before her, Mulder had been solitary in his quest - that she'd been his only witness, his only ally. That this magical, horrific world was theirs alone.

"We were married."

She stiffens, mind blazing with the image of the ring on her bedside table. Mulder pulls back, the hint of a smile on his lips. He looks awful. "She left me."

Has he ever bent Diana over his desk? Did she edit his case reports? Bring him bottled iced tea on stakeouts? Did he ever wake her at 2:30 in the morning with questions about quasars? Before she can stop herself, she imagines him caressing Diana's face, tucking an untidy lock of sable hair behind her ear, rubbing a thumb along her cheekbone.

So Diana chose him. Diana chose the X-Files. And she was merely assigned. A spy.

Mulder leans his forehead against hers, his eyes fluttering closed. "But you won't leave me," he says. "You'd never leave me." Anger sparks. How would you know what I'm capable of, Mulder? He's sliding a dry hand underneath the hem of her sweater, his fingers lingering over where he knows her tattoo is, the spot on her lower back that he's touched thousands of times, in anger, in passion, in protection, in affection, in familiarity.

Where did he love to touch Diana? Was it the same place?

And then he's pushing her back, pushing her down, his tongue pushing into her mouth. He's half hard, pressing into her hip. How did he fuck Diana on their wedding night?

Did Diana ever touch that ring?

Scully pulls back in a fresh swell of outrage. Mulder's expression is momentarily one of terror and guilt, and then of desperation. He grips her hard, blinks slowly.

"I... think I just need some time," she manages to choke out. He looks at her for a long moment, that one outlandish pupil of his widening.

"Stay with me, Scully," he whispers. "Please." And despite everything, she finds she can't deny him.

The couch is small, and Mulder is large and hot and clings like a sloth. But she manages to doze in his arms, burnt out from the roil of emotions within her. In the morning, she slips out from under him, swallows a mouthful of the cold, untouched coffee on the table, and leaves before she changes her mind.

Her phone rings in the hall.

"Hi, this is Janet calling from Dr. Parenti's office, I'm looking for Dana?"

"... This is she." Scully crushes the cold metal teeth of her keys into her palm, punches the down button on the elevator panel with knuckle. She can't seem to breathe.

"Great - Dana, we have the results back for the specimens you submitted for testing. It's good news, so don't you worry! But we'd like you to come in as soon as you're available to discuss your options.
and how you'd like to proceed. We have an opening tomorrow at 9:30, will that work for you?"

The elevator door opens. Scully can't move.

"... Dana?"

She swallows several times, forces herself to speak. "Um. Yes. Yes, tomorrow is fine. Thank you."

She rides the elevator down in a trance, walks across the frost-crisp lawn to her car. The morning sky is the colour of a robin's egg.
The first thing Scully registers is his face. He’s blurred, his features fluid. He moves his mouth and no sound comes out, and something is wrong, so deeply, terribly wrong. And then the cold hits her, the bone-deep bite of freezing air, a thick invasion in her throat. She tastes bile and river slime, a faint chemical sapor.

Oh, God, what’s happening?

The memories spill back into her in a kaleidoscopic torrent - prisms of shattered glass on the asphalt, chunks of concrete rubble. The air warped with billowing flame. A whirlwind of flights and trials, a sticky, edematous corpse in cold storage. Mulder, whiskey-soaked at her door. Black helicopters in the hot night, a buzzing swarm, the parchment brush of cornstalk against her cheek. His voice a homing beacon, rising bright over the mayhem.

Hegel Place. *You kept me honest. You made me a whole person.*

Surely this is it for them, this massive, dark tangle of glowing green pods, the structure shaking and groaning like some great beast. She fades in and out of consciousness, weak and stiff, flooded with the giddiness of the doomed. She blacks out again, and wakes retching on the grate of the floor. He’s so damn beautiful leaning over her in the tumult that she wants to laugh. How could she have ever doubted his devotion?

“I had you big time,” she croaks, just to see his dopey smile one last time before they die.

A mad scramble through tunnels and ice. Her lungs burn, her muscles almost fail her, but they manage to claw through to the sunlight. Something rises beneath her in a vast heave, and there’s a brief and sickening weightlessness as she falls. The ground slams into her, and she can’t move, but oh, God, there he is, *alive.* She struggles to breathe. There’s a shimmer, a shadow, and Mulder’s lifting his eyes to the sky, saying something she doesn’t hear.

She gathers the last of her strength, and rolls over to hold him, lightheaded with awe.

- Things blend into one another after that. She’s not sure where they are, or how they got there; some research facility, maybe, like the one in Icy Cape. Strangers scrounge up clothing for her - an oversized men’s flannel, thermal leggings that sag from her knees. Strength returns like the tide.

There are radio calls, questions. Bottled water greedily sucked, saltines choked down. A medic prods her and argues fitfully under his breath with Mulder, who won’t stop touching her, won’t leave her side, not even for a moment. He’s sore, she can tell, moving with difficulty, wincing when he puts too much weight on his right foot, periodically gripping a shoulder and rotating it from the socket. She’s frostbitten and bruised, and her throat is sore, but miraculously, everything else seems to be fine. It’s hours upon hours of this, and then, finally, they’re alone.

- The dormitory is small and dark, the walls covered with pin-ups and research notes. Lakers memorabilia, much to Mulder’s derision. He helps her into the cramped shower, insists on staying
with her in case she blacks out again. His big hands, slippery on her skin, send waves of endorphins galloping through her. He washes the stiffened goop out of her hair with soap, holds her close as the hot spray pounds heat back into her skin.

“You sure you’re okay?” he murmurs quietly, dipping his face down to hers as if someone might overhear. His hands slide over her shoulders, down her arms. The worry etched into his expression makes her heart swell. “Are you warm enough? Is there anything you didn’t tell the medic?”

“I feel fine, Mulder,” she protests, and she really does. She feels better every moment, safe here with him. Water sluices over the planes of his face, his hair plastered to his skull. There’s a wound near his temple she somehow hadn’t noticed, and with a small, horrified gasp, she reaches up to try to investigate. Mulder jerks back with an annoyed little grin.

“It’s nothing, leave it.”

“No, let me see -”

“- Scully -” he gently restrains her, chuckling, capturing her hands and bringing them around his waist, and then his lips are on hers, sweet and restrained, and he’s wrapping her up, kissing her softly, with so much obvious love and adoration that it bowls her over. Skin slides deliciously against skin, steam rises in the cool air, and she kisses him back.

They huddle naked beside each other in the twin bed, face to face, preserving heat, an unspoken quip about sleeping bags hanging between them.

“There’s a pilot coming for us tomorrow, courtesy of the three stooges,” Mulder says, nuzzling her nose with his. She feels a wash of affection for the Gunmen, those ragtag geeks, those strange, loyal birds. How full her life seems in this moment, her knees tucked up against Mulder’s thighs at the bottom of the earth.

How long had it been since that night in the hall? Days? Weeks? It seems like an age ago. She traces her fingers over Mulder’s jaw, remembering her decision to leave, the heavy secret of her viable ova. This life is no life for a mother, she’d convinced herself. They were right to keep Emily from me. And he’s got Diana back now, his true believer, his better partner. She’d taken the council’s decision to split them up as fate, the timing too perfect to ignore. It all seems like insanity now, that she could fathom a life without him, without this.

“Mulder,” she asks, growing serious. “What happened to me?” He looks into her eyes and draws her in, thumbing the line of her brow. Whispers a word against her mouth. “Later.”

Time fades. It feels good to be kissing him so slowly, so thoroughly, the low coil of need slurring through her tired body. At some point, she shifts closer, hooking a knee over his lithe hipbone, trailing her hand down his belly, finding his cock hard and pulsing and hot between them. She wraps her fingers around it, squeezing lightly, wriggling her hips to a better angle.

His breath hitches, his grip tightening ever so slightly on her thigh. “Scully, no, you’ve just been… I, I don’t want to hurt you,” but still, he’s thrusting subtly into her palm, furrowing his brow. “I’m fine,” she says, pressing the head of his cock against her clit. “I promise, I’m fine.” He exhares a shaking breath, and she slides against him until she’s slick and swollen, finally angling him at her entrance. “Please,” she says, and he shivers and pushes into her, agonizingly slow. They both sigh in relief, rocking together in a sweet, lazy rhythm.
“You,” she breathes, locked into his eyes. “You,” he says. It feels like a vow.

Diana might have had him first, his heart, his work. But here he is, inside of her, here with the wild ice and the midnight sun. He defies all logic, this overgrown miscreant of hers. He carries within him all of the mysteries of the world, he is infinite and earthly, celestial, the constellation she navigates by. He crawls into the minds of killers, smiles at babies, takes three sugars in his coffee. He’s always trespassing. There are two stopwatches in his travel bag. He feels like home.

He moves like a song inside of her, and a dangerous, beautiful, impossible thought begins to take root.

What if. What if.
Autumn is unrelenting.

Mind-numbing days in the bullpen, their once dramatic syllabus of midnight autopsies and lycanthrope-hunting traded in for piles of shit and sugar beets. Unfertilized ova in a fridge. A man’s head explodes in California.

Scully thinks of Diana in the basement office, fiddling with her surviving lab equipment, refilling the cabinets, completely butchering the convoluted filing system she and Mulder had finally settled on after years of mutual nitpicking and compromise.

A shambled ghost ship languishing in the Bermuda Triangle is almost a welcome distraction, if not for the sickening glut of terror Scully feels when they find Mulder face-down in the water. She learns later, in the hospital back in DC, that she cracked one of his ribs administering CPR.

He’s high as hell on painkillers, amorous, chattering like a giddy squirrel. A furtive scan of his chart reveals that they’ve given him far too high of a dosage for his body weight, and Scully threatens the nurses until they release him into her care, ignoring Langley’s enthusiastic “go girl!” from the corner.

Byers gives them a ride. Mulder free-associates assorted esoterica from the Ganzfield Experiments to the Curse of the Bambino all the way to her apartment, shooting down Frohike’s arguments with stoned gumption, and Scully wonders if this is what it’s like to be inside of his head.

He’s stripped to his boxers and propped up on a mound of pillows against her headboard, and she’s washing her face in her pajamas, listening to him maunter on about globsters and the Effingham Carcass. The ring still glints on her bedside table, forgotten for now, unnoticed by both, a part of the landscape of her bedroom. Mulder talks and talks.

“Settle down, Mulder, Jesus,” she says as she emerges from the bathroom, and he pauses, smiling crookedly and reaching out a hand. She goes to him and pushes her fingers through his soft, staticky hair, checking his head again, just in case. “And there’s no such thing as a cadborosaurus - almost all of the alleged specimens have been identified as pipefish or basking sharks, so -”

“Yes, but, think about the incomprehensible vastness of the ocean, Scully, doesn’t it stand to reason that there are beings we just don’t know about in there? What lives in the Marianas Trench? And besides, there are still specimens that haven’t yet been identified to the satisfaction of researchers. Seventeen witnesses, Scully, in 1895. Seventeen, and there’s mythological precedence for such a creature as well, the Sechelt call it T’chain-ko,” he continues, running his knuckles down the curve of her waist, looking up at her with mischief in his eyes.

“Mulder, shut up.” He chuckles, and she suppresses the urge to nip him on the nose.

“You gonna stay with me, doc?” He hooks his finger through the gap between buttons near her belly, tugging. “Yeah,” she says, disentangling his hand so she can crawl over his legs into her side of the bed. “Gotta check on you every two hours. You’ve got a concussion, remember?” He catches her mid-crawl and rolls to trap her in his arms, so that she’s curled into his side. She huffs in frustration, but there’s not much more a girl can reasonably do when she’s confronted with Fox
Mulder’s beautiful pectorals than lay her cheek down and settle in.

“They had quite the radio on that ship, Scully,” he says into her hair. “In the captain’s quarters, model NT1, I think, single tube. Never seen one in such good condition. Gorgeous. I mean, whadda piece of history. Your dad probably woulda loved it. Hey, you should tell Bill about it. Course, I’d tell him myself, but the guy hates me, and besides, I don’t even have his phone number.

“Mulder.”

“Tara doesn’t hate me, though. And your mom loves me. She called me on my birthday and told me so, did you know that? I love her, too. She’s so you.”

“Mul-”

“How come you never wear red anymore? There was that one little plaid number that you wore to the Smithsonian when we met that ethnobiologist, when was that, 1993? After the jersey devil case -”

“Mulder, you’re colourblind! You don’t even know -”

“Oh, but I know when you’re wearing red. I can sense it. You come alive. Call me crazy, but it’s true.” He leans down, murmuring against her hairline. “You should wear red more often. In ‘39, you were in this incredible little red dress with your hair all done up, and you were dancing, and everyone in that ballroom was looking at you. And your tits looked fantastic, by the way,” he pops her top button one-handed and dips a finger into her cleavage for emphasis. “I’d love to take you out and show you off in a little red dress. What’s your size?”

“Mulder -” he slides himself down further, the friction sending a bloom of heat through her body. His lips graze her ear. “Careful, remember your rib -”

“You were quite impressive. Such a little scrapper. You had those Nazis quaking in their stiefel.” He mangles the pronunciation, and Scully can’t help but snort. “You saved the world, did I tell you that? The worlds, really, plural, ours and theirs and who knows how many others… and you punched me, too. Kitty’s got claws. But I know that better’n anyone, now, don’t I.”

“Mulder!” And she’s laughing, because he’s full on groping one of her breasts now, kneading it over the silk, plucking at her nipple, clearly frustrated that he can’t get a grip on it. He gives up, and inches his hand down towards the waistband of her pajamas, the muscles of her stomach rippling in anticipation. “Mulder, no. No exerting yourself.” He slips his hand into her panties.

“You’re so fucking beautiful, you know that?” His voice is sweet and dark, like bitter chocolate, like espresso. “Of course you do. How could you not know? The way everyone looks at you…” Soft, light strokes, and she growls, splaying her knees. “I love seeing the way people look at you, Scully. The thought of Mulder fantasizing about her at work, at the gym, in traffic weakens her, and she involuntarily exhales a puff of air. She’s formulating a response, but then he eases her onto her back and starts combing through the tuft of her hair, lower and lower, teasing, and it’s all over.

His fingers are on either side of where her labia meet, stroking, encouraging. She can feel herself swelling up, fattening under his fingers, the curious ridge of her clit already aching for attention.

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Men, women. I love knowing that I’m the one who gets to do what they’re all wishing they could. Because you’re my girl. Isn’t that right?’

God, she’s already so wet. Already so desperate for him to touch her. She rubs up against his hand, and he rewards her with another little nip on the ear. “Tell me I’m right.” She draws her bottom lip between her teeth, nods pathetically. Fuck, he is. Damn him. “Use your words,” he coaxes, and the crack of defiant anger through her spine only makes her hotter. She needs to come. She needs to. She can kill him later. “That’s right,” she whispers shakily. “I’m your girl.”

He hums in satisfaction, and dips two fingers between her labia, into the pool of heat there. Scully sucks air between her teeth, grips the sheets in her toes. “So eager,” he teases, and glides his fingers up to circle her clit with featherlight pressure. Her whole being throbs with need. “That’s another thing I love about you, Scully. You’re such a go-getter.”

“Muller, please… juss…”

“Just what?” She can only pant in response. “Is this what you want?” And he pushes his fingers smoothly into her, no resistance, until he’s two knuckles deep and curling up against that perfect spot, smiling like a drunken incubus. She gasps and rolls her hips, clutching at his wrist. So sweet. So good. He draws back slowly, kissing her temple, and oh, good lord, she can feel his ring finger sliding down, over her perineum, coated in wetness. He pushes in again, and his extended finger slides over her asshole, igniting the nerves there, making her gush and clench. Oh, fuck yes. “You like that?” he whispers, gentle and completely in control. “That okay?”

“Yesss…” she whines, and he rumbles in approval, shifts up on his elbow so he can look down into her face. His eyes are narrow, gleaming, pleased.

Back again, fingers inside of her, finger sliding over her, thumb on her clit. “That’s right,” he begins. “You’re gonna come for me. And I’m gonna watch you.” he’s pressing harder against her asshole now as he works, his other fingers rubbing against the exact right spot inside of her, so sweet, so persistent. His eyes bore into hers, his rough voice guiding her through it. “You’re so good, Scully, fuck. Don’t close your eyes. Look at me. Look. At. Me. Only me. I fucking love that sweet… pretty… tight little cunt of yours. I love fucking you… I love tasting you… you’re all mine. Come for me. Show me. I wanna see it. C’mon Scully. Come.”

And she does, gloriously, shaking and whimpering and utterly under his control. She fights to obey him, to keep her eyes open and on his. He groans as she writhes on his hand, glaring down at her, his mouth open. After what seems like forever, her quaking subsides, and he slips his fingers out of her and slides them up into her mouth. She tastes herself, rich and wild as ocean salt, and dutifully sucks him clean. “That’s my good girl,” he purrs, freeing her with a self-satisfied grin.

“Your good girl?” Scully manages to ask in a weak laugh, still catching her breath.

“I stand by my assessment.” He flops down onto his back, forgetting his rib and wincing on impact. Scully twists to set the alarm for 1:30, and turns back to drape herself across him, her cheek on his chest again, her knee knocking against his neglected hard-on. She reaches down to give it a conciliatory squeeze. He runs a hand through her hair, kisses her forehead.

“I meant what I said earlier.”

“That I’m a good girl?” she says saucily, biting at one of his nipples. “Hey-” he scolds, wrenching. “-Or that I had the Nazis shaking in their stiefel?”

He lifts her chin so that she’s looking at him, and waits until she’s serious, combing stray hairs
behind her ear. “I love you. So much.”

She’s known it forever, she realizes, but still it’s nice to hear. She reaches up and kisses him, fighting the burn of tears behind her eyes. “I love you too. I’m sorry if I was snide at the hospital.”

“S’okay. I’m used to it.” He smiles, and she clicks her teeth at him, sinking back down to his chest, lulled by the thump of his heart. Ask him, a little voice says, now, right now, but she rationalizes it away, because he’s high, and she’s tired, and there’s something more urgent creeping back into her mind.

“Mulder?”

“Hmm.”

“When you were missing… I was down in the basement office, alone, and the phone rang. I answered it.” She pauses and swallows. “It was the Cancer Man. He… he thought I was Diana.” She can feel him stiffen underneath her, but she forges on. “Why is he calling her? Why are they interacting at all?”

“Scully -”

“I just don’t have a good feeling -”

“You don’t have to worry about her, okay? She’s on our side. Listen, I know her. She’s a good person, and you’d see that, if you’d just…” he sighs, pinching the bridge of his nose. “Let’s talk about this later, okay? I don’t even want to think about Diana right now. I just want you, and me, and this, at least for a little while. Just some peace.” He rubs a palm over her shoulder, nuzzling her head. “Okay?”

“…Okay.”

“See ya in two, doc.”

“Night.”
The larkspur rises in spikes from the garden, blooming rich and blue as twilight.

Missy, in all of her half-baked witchy wisdom, used to say the flowers provided protection from evil spirits, that they symbolized true love. Rich, considering that larkspurs were a deadly poison, carrying highly toxic alkaloids that killed gourmandizing free-range cattle by the paddock every spring. 1501 Larkspur Lane was aptly named. A place for spirits, a rancid core of death wrapped up in a pretty story about eternal love.

She can’t help but think that Mulder dragged her out there on Christmas Eve to distract her from thoughts of Emily. She loathed to imagine that he felt sorry for her, that he’d plot a night of cheap thrills for her benefit, as if she were some wilting rose, incapable of living with the weight of her grief.

Then again, maybe it hadn’t been a distraction after all. Maybe there really was a part of Mulder that wanted to bind his soul to hers forever - he was a romantic at heart, and she could see how the tragic lyricism of a murder-suicide would appeal to him.

If only he knew the options.

If only he knew how often the question had rested in her mouth, squatting on the flat of her tongue like a toad. This is how we do eternity, Mulder. We create life. The most permanent of intimacies, the two of us unified in chromosomes, stitched together in strands of DNA.

Scully sighs and turns over in bed, resigning herself to sleeplessness. The leftover buzz of fear bristles through her veins, and she thinks of blood, of betrayal, of the fireplace still warm. Maurice and Lyda, trapped in that house… but it was all in her head. It had to be. A mutual hallucination, maybe brought on by some unknown environmental contaminant, mold in the walls, or perhaps by her compromised emotional state…

She heaves another weary breath into her chest, glancing at the clock. 4 AM. Screw it. It’s Christmas, damn it, and on Christmas, you should be with the one you love.

Mulder is happy to see her.

- They trade sheepish apologies and hungry looks, packages in festive paper. Beside him on the couch, she rips into hers with abandon - Mulder’s rare gifts are always puzzling, always a challenge, more of an experience than a thing in itself. They’re extensions of him and all of his complexity, like little pieces of his soul.

She pops the plastic lid off of the cardboard tube, and shakes out a tightly-packed roll of newsprint, flicking her eyes up at Mulder in the process. He’s watching her, his own gift half-unwrapped in his hands. She digs through the nest of paper, flirting - “Hmm… let me guess, a replica of an ancient ritualistic phallus?”-“ and then she finds it, and the breath is stolen from her lungs.

A spyglass, very old, but in beautiful condition. Scully blinks slowly and runs her fingers along the smooth brassy curve of it, transfixed by the craftsmanship, the history. Holding it aloft, she extends
the draw and examines the maker’s mark, smelling the sweet scent of old metal. Her thoughts wheel, trying to eke out the deeper meaning, but she stops herself. She’d rather savour the challenge, turn it over in her mind for days, extract the message slowly, like fine oil.

“It’s wonderful,” she breathes, and he beams down at her in relief. “You like it?” he asks, and she brings one of her hands up to his jaw, thumbing at the corner of his canted smile. He presses his lips to her knuckle. “I love it. Now open yours.”

He finishes shredding the wrapping paper, uncovering a worn VHS tape, the cover faded. His head juts forward, jaw agape.

“How did you find -”

“- Oh, you know, Langley knew a guy who knew a guy…”

He sets the tape on the coffee table and cups his palms around her cheeks, kissing an eyebrow, the bridge of her nose. “You little…” he says through gritted teeth, and pulls her into a long and elaborate kiss. His hot breath is in her mouth, his fingers locking into the hair at the back of her neck. She flickers her tongue against his ripe bottom lip, panting, giddy with exhaustion and leftover adrenaline.

It swiftly becomes absolutely essential that he be inside of her. She breaks from him, gets up clumsily and stands between his legs, shrugging her coat down her arms and tossing it over to the chair. Mulder gets savvy, grinning, shifting his hips and unhooking his belt as she shimmies out of her trousers and unbuttons her shirt. He wrestles his cock out of his jeans, and she bends to swirl her tongue around the head of it before slinging her knees around his hips. “God, yes,” he growls, clutching at her hipbones, pulling her down.

The stretching fullness of him is crucial, life-affirming, and Scully remembers how a close encounter with death is often their most powerful aphrodisiac. She sinks all the way down onto him, squeezing her muscles, leaning her mouth to his and chasing his tongue. They ride out the urgency of it in a slow, symbiotic grind.

After a few long and delicious minutes, they begin to lose steam. Scully rests her head against Mulder’s chest, listening to the thud of his heart. He strokes the length of her thigh. “We can finish this later, hey?” he mumbles. “I think we’re both a bit tired.”

“Mmm.”

“You, uh, gonna be at your mom’s all day?”

“Yeah,” she says, nuzzling her nose into the neck of his t-shirt, suddenly unable to imagine the day without him. “…Come with me.” He smooths his hands over her back, silent, and her stomach pitches.

“I don’t wanna ruin your family Christmas, Scully. Bill hates me.” She considers this, pressing her lips sulkily against his Adam’s apple. “C’mon, Mulder. You shouldn’t be alone on Christmas. Mom won’t mind. And if you can break out of a gulag with a homemade shiv, you can handle Bill.” He runs his nails down her bare ass, scratching her lightly.
"Mmmm. You really liked that, didn’t you. Remember how… you pulled me into that airport bathroom…? Horny little thing.” He grabs her hips and tugs them forward, pressing himself up against the sweet spot inside of her as she nibbles at the rough of his stubble. “Alright, G-woman, stop biting me. I’ll come. Just let me grab a quick shower.”

She gets herself back into her clothes and finger-combs her hair, flipping through one of his old National Geographics. There’s a good article on the Capuchin catacombs in Palermo, and she’s studying the mandible of a mummified friar when the phone rings. The machine picks up, and then a soft, smoky, familiar voice fills the room.

“Hello, Fox. It’s me.” Heat creeps up her neck, and she snaps her head around and stares at the phone. “I guess you’re not up yet. You mentioned the last time we spoke that you didn’t have any plans for Christmas… I just… wanted to say that you’re welcome to come over if you’ve got nowhere to be today. Or I could come to your place. We could get Chinese, watch Plan 9. Like the old days. Just… let me know. You know where to reach me.”

There’s a dizzying blaze of hatred within her, and even though she knows she shouldn’t, even though it’s childish and jealous and petty, Scully leans over, presses number 7, and deletes the message.

Mulder emerges from the bedroom, his hair wet and spiky, tugging down a handsome knit green sweater over his t-shirt. Scully throws the magazine onto the coffee table, collects her spyglass, and walks over to him with purpose. She kisses him hard, the kiss of a woman who knows what’s hers. When she pulls back, his eyes are questioning, amused. “Is it the sweater?” he chuckles. “Hey, who was on the phone?”

“Wrong number,” she says mildly. “C’mon, Mulder. We’re going to be late.”
In the cramped cabin of the biplane, Scully shuts her eyes and seizes Mulder’s fingers, weak in the chokehold of fear. Her heart palpitates in her throat, images of freefall and fire streaking through her mind; rogue winds, engine failure, burned corpses in the dirt.

Up in the wide and treacherous sky, he rubs his thumb along the back of her hand, steady and solid as old oak.

Kroner, Kansas. A fraudulent meteorokinetic with a spray tan and a wooden leg. A mini-twister hurls a heifer through the motel roof, and then Mulder’s in her bed, all hands, all tongue, his late-night scruff brutalizing the sensitive skin of her neck.

Tonight. It’s going to be tonight. She should have asked him in Nevada…

He’s pressed flush against her back, curved around her, one arm threaded under her neck and bracing her opposite shoulder, trapping her mercilessly against him. His other hand vibrates between her thighs. The heat of him is everywhere, outside and inside of her, invading her, absorbing her, so that they’re one living thing, one creature, contained.

His teeth graze the corner of her jaw, his hips rolling into her over and over, adorations muttered harsh and sweet against her skin. He’s going too slow, riling her up, bringing her back down when he senses she’s getting close, seeing how distraught he can make her. “I can never get enough of you,” he seethes, almost cruelly, and she’s so worked up and desperate for mercy that she’d offer him her flesh to eat if he asked.

“Oh, God, lemme… please… just…,” she sobs, “I can never get enough of you,” he grins, squeezing the back of her thigh. He slides out of her and rolls from the bed, padding naked into the bathroom. Scully takes the opportunity to admire his fine runner’s ass as he wets a washcloth in the sink, and tries to stifle the urgent drone of her nerves. This is it. She’s gonna do it. There’s nowhere to run in this godforsaken town.

He returns to gently clean her up. The cloth is warm and rough against her, like a tongue, and she squirms, overstimulated. He kisses her knee and flops over, tossing the towel to the floor.
“…Mulder,” she begins after a long moment, her voice tight with anticipation. “There’s something I’ve been meaning to talk to you about.”

He looks up at her with great interest, and then apprehension, sitting up and furrowing his brow. “…You okay?” She sits up as well, covering herself with the comforter, licking her lips nervously. “Oh, fuck,” he says. “Oh, God, Dana, no -”

“Mulder, calm down. I’m fine. It’s not the cancer.” He expels a breath, brings his shaking hand over his eyes. “In fact, I’m the healthiest I’ve ever been, really.” Just do it, just ask -

And before she can, he’s up off the bed, pacing dangerously. “Is this about Diana? Because I’ve got to be honest with you, Scully, I’m getting really fucking tired of -”

“- No!” A jolt of distress, and then a vicious rage courses through her. Fucking Diana. Again.

“Because, you know, I wasn’t going to bring this up, but the last time I saw her, she mentioned that she left a message for me on Christmas morning.” He’s expecting a confession, an apology, but all she can do is gape at him. “You wouldn’t happen to know anything about that, would you?”

“The last time you saw her? Mulder, that woman is - why are you -”

He slams a palm into the dresser, startling her, shaking the mirror. “What is your problem with her?”

They stare at each other for an uncomfortable beat.

“…Does she know about us?” She hates herself as she says it, hates how pathetic the words sound in her mouth. Mulder looks at her blankly.

“Us? Scully nobody knows about us. You won’t even admit it to your mother, and she’s seen me with my tongue down your throat. Hell, sometimes it feels like you won’t even admit it to yourself.”

He stalks away from her and back to the bathroom, splashes his face with water, steps into his boxers. When he returns, he sinks into the edge of the bed, his head in his hands. She has the almost insurmountable urge to crawl over and run her fingers down the muscles of his back, over the dip of his spine. It wasn’t supposed to go like this.

Diana, fucking Wonder Woman, with that Amazonian dignity and that apocryphal softness and the way she scuffed back into Mulder’s life, threatening everything that Scully’s built her world around. She has to know what she’s up against. She has to know.

“…Why did she leave you?”

“Why does it matter?” He says to the floor.

“Because she wants you back.” How can he not see it?

“Scully, please, for the love of -” he sighs and turns to look at her over his shoulder, fixing her with his mournful gaze. “Alright. You wanna know why she left me?” He shifts and turns towards her, worrying his bottom lip with his tongue. Scully’s belly roils. “Everything was fine until we got pregnant.”

Her world reels. She feels faint. Diana carried his child.

“We, um. We lost… the baby. At 21 weeks.” Oh, Jesus. Five fingers on each hand, a small, purple face. “A boy. Our son. And then she just… shut herself off. Wouldn’t look at me, or talk to me… and I lost myself in my work, in finding Samantha, in finding the truth. And… we became
strangers.”

“Oh, Mulder.” She reaches for his hand. Every hateful punch of her heart sends shame and jealousy into her fingertips, and she’s almost worried that he’ll be able to feel it. She wishes she could say she was sorry. She’s disgusted with herself that she’s not.

“Scully, Diana and I were never like how we are. You and I are rooted in so much more than just… I mean, this is the first time since Christmas we’ve been together, right? We’re more than that. You’re everything to me. You’re my best friend, my partner… even if we spent years apart, you’d never feel like a stranger to me. You don’t need to feel threatened.”

“I’m not threatened by her, Mulder,” she lies. “I just don’t trust her.”

“Then trust me.” And for the first time ever, she realizes she’s not sure if she does.
Cassandra Spender is returned.

Clandestine meetings, decontamination showers. Scully at the full muster of her power, all venom and storm, bared teeth and suspicion.

Mulder tries to make sense of it all; alien-human hybrids, black oil, rebel forces, the flourish of cigarette smoke in the air. He was wrong. It’s all over, colonization is imminent, and there’s nothing he can do to stop it.

Diana knew. This whole time, she knew.

She is so, so different than Scully. Scully is war and wildness, the rich fume of the ocean, the Persephone of his own private underworld. Scully is lipstick and gunpowder, dark wool, black coffee. Scully is sharp, searching fingers, soft skin, sinful lips, the most unnerving and fundamental love he’s ever known.

Diana is orphic, untouchable, distant as starlight. He remembers her long feline bones, his child dead and unnamed in her womb. Silence that stretches for years.

When she kisses him, he almost forgets to pull away.
Fireplace crackling, wine in her blood. She swirls the cabernet, tilting the glass, watching the jeweled liquid struggle to reconcile itself with the forces of gravity and momentum. *This is Mulder,* she reminds herself, waiting for his shadow under the door. *This is just Mulder.*

Be forthright and honest. Give him an out.

The grate of his key in the lock jars her, and in the looming immediacy of his presence, her heart begins to stutter. She downs the rest of the wine in one swish, and sets the glass on the coffee table. Shit, she should bring it to the sink, he shouldn’t know she’s been drinking -

Mulder opens the door. He’s rumpled and unshaven, in work wear, his necktie loose. “Hey, Scully,” he says, gentle, almost hesitant, eyeing her as he shrugs off his snow-dusted coat and drapes it over a chair. Jacket next. She tries to absorb him, taking him in, repeating the mantra. *This is just Mulder.*

“Hi. Um. Why don’t you sit down?” He purses his lips and walks around to the couch, easing himself down so that he’s angled towards her. A warm hand on her knee, a cacophony in her mind.

“No, let me talk.” Her hands tremble in her lap, and she makes an effort to still them, rubbing her palms into her skirt.

“I need to get something out first,” he says. Oh, God.

He looks at her squarely. “You were right. About Diana.” His gray eyes are ardent with guilt, and Scully feels her stomach drop. “She was on the project this whole time. But only because she believed it was the right thing to do, that it was the only real choice available to her…”

Scully sighs, grinds her teeth in exasperation, thinking of Diana jetting around the world, keeping tabs on women like her. Abductees. Women who’d been violated, experimented upon, medically raped. Diana making notes, reporting back. How many children like Emily out there in the world? How could he possibly defend that? “Mulder-”

“You were right about something else, too.” He chews the inside of his cheek, working his jaw. And then he casts his eyes downward, and she knows.

“You didn’t,” she whispers, horrified. “Please say you didn’t,” but the slump of his shoulders tells her everything. A gale builds inside of her, a torrent, and she loses all control. Before she realizes what she’s doing, she’s yelling at him wordlessly, pounding her fists into his chest.

He catches her wrists, pulling her flush to him as she struggles. “Scully,” he pleads, “stop, I stopped it, I stopped her before we actually…, we didn’t, I swear, I promise -”

She thrashes until she’s free, but he swiftly wraps his arms around her, so that she can’t do anything but squirm, crushed against his chest. She curses her own powerlessness, her own physical inadequacy, how easily he can overcome her. “I’m sorry,” he repeats, voice thick with emotion, clutching her possessively. He says it again into the crook of her neck, and she struggles despondently against him, hot, angry tears spilling over, throat constricting. Humiliation after humiliation…
“God, I’m so sorry.” His lips drag down her neck and over her collarbone, and he releases her briefly to fumble at the buttons of her shirt. Arms freed, she fists his hair, watching him undress her, nearly bloodthirsty. He breathes into her ribcage. “I’m so… so…”, and he’s licking her everywhere he can reach, sending ripples of wrathful lust over her skin.

She yanks at his scalp, forcing him to look at her. His lips slick and swollen, his eyes sorrowful. Leaning back into the cushions, she pushes him down, down, until his hands are shoving her skirt up over her stockings, over her hips. His sudden breath is hot against the crotch of her panties, and he’s inhaling her like an addict, nuzzling, kneading her thighs. “I love you,” he mumbles piteously, mashing his mouth against her. “You have to forgive me -”

“Shut up.”

The flat of his tongue against soaked cotton, the ridge of his teeth. She grips his hair harder, hoping that it hurts. “You are mine,” she demands, grinding herself into his nose. He groans, works his muscular tongue underneath the edge of the fabric, dipping into her. “Then marry me,” he sighs into her cunt, looking up under his eyebrows. He pushes her panties aside with his nose to suck her clit into his mouth, humming.

“No,” Scully gasps. “No, never. Not when she’s had you first.” He makes a sound of deep unhappiness, and labours in penance, rolling his tongue against her, sucking, nibbling. She’s almost there, almost, a lilt of rough, kindling heat thriving in her empty womb - and then, in a burst of self-control, she jerks him away.

No more of this. It’s time.

She kicks him away and gets up on shaking legs, pushing his chasing, frantic hands from her hips. She doesn’t get far - in a clamour of movement, Mulder’s behind her, turning her by the waist, backing her against the wall. Her ear in his teeth, a bruising grip on her hipbones, and he’s grinding the granite length of himself against her belly. “Don’t make me beg,” he rasps, and his tortured voice makes her weak as water. She tries to push him away, but he seizes her hands and pins them on either side of her head, driving his tongue into her mouth.

“Stop,” she mutters against his lips, and he grunts, continuing to kiss her rabidly. God, he has to stop, this has to be over. She can’t live like this. “My ova,” she says, as he dips his face to lick at the hollow of her throat.

He slows, pulls back warily, looking into her eyes. “…What?”

“My ova.” He releases her wrists, and she swallows as she lets her arms fall, trying to compose herself. “I… had the ova you recovered.. tested by a different specialist.” He stares at her in wonder, and steps backwards, the air between them suddenly leaden. “And there are… an adequate number of viable specimens for one round of in vitro fertilization.”

He lodges his hands on his hips and exhales, looking away, astonished.

“I’m sorry that I haven’t brought this up, but it never felt like the right time, and then that fucker Ritter shot me… and I was so worried, but then my doctor… everything is fine, everything is healed. I’m fully recovered…” she trails off.

“Are you… asking me to…?” She closes her eyes and leans her head back against the wall, unable to look at him. “Oh, Scully.”

He walks away, and she can hear him turning on the tap, slurping from the stream. She blinks back a
few more tears - *why can’t she stop fucking crying?* - and follows him in, hugging her elbows, suddenly self-conscious of her open shirt. He’s leaning against the counter, fingers over his pensive mouth, eyes on the floor.

“I know it’s a lot to ask,” she ventures.

He flicks his eyes up to hers. “But what *are* you asking of me? Is it just… a donation?” She wrings her hands, lets them fall to her side.

“Mulder, the fact is, I’ve put a lot of thought into this, and, and, I’m not even sure that I want to pursue this unless you’re a part of it. A part of it all.” *Fuck,* she was supposed to give him an out. Gracefully. With control.

He seems to consider this a few moments, pressing his lips together. “What are the chances of success?” he asks quietly.

“About forty percent.”

He nods slowly, studies his feet. “Scully… I, I, I don’t know if I can go through that again. The hope, the fear… and even if you do conceive, there’s always the chance… one in five pregnancies… I certainly can’t see you go through what Diana went through. I can’t watch you lose another child, not after Emily.” She releases a breath, trying to keep herself together, aching. “You’re too important to me to lose.”

“You won’t lose me, Mulder.”

“And our work… we’re so close to something here, Scully. So close to the truth. I need you out there with me, not… not at home, with a child. A child who’d be in danger, just by consequence of their parentage. Look at everything you’ve already been put through, everything your family’s been put through…”

“I don’t care,” she says, hopelessly, blinking up at the ceiling, willing herself to gain control. “I want this. And I want it with you.” Her own vulnerability shocks her. She’s never allowed herself to be this raw, this open.

“You won’t marry me, but you want to have a child together?” The barest insinuation of a smile on his lips.

“I have one… last chance…” and her voice finally shatters into a sob.

Mulder reaches over, pulls her into a long embrace, pressing his cheek into her hair. Minutes of heavy silence. “I want you to have everything you want,” he says quietly. “Everything in the world. But I need some time to think about what you’re asking of me. Will you give me that?” She pulls back and looks into his eyes.

Mulder, black-cloaked, all whimsy and murk. She’d forgive him anything.

She nods, and he kisses her again, slowly, until the need becomes too much to bear. Taking his hand, she leads him to the bedroom.

Afterwards, as he pretends to sleep beside her, Scully turns over, and for the first time in months, allows herself to acknowledge the ring on her bedside table. She reaches for it, turns the cool metal band around in her fingers, studying the faded diamonds.
And all she can see is Diana. She slides open the top drawer, and drops the ring inside.
All through the week, they work in soft, careworn silence to reclaim the office, sorting rescued files, restocking the fridge, filling out order forms for new lab equipment. Scully tries to ignore the patch of carpet scoured half a shade lighter than the rest of it, tries not to imagine the hot seep of Jeffrey Spender’s life leaking out of his ears.

Mulder takes down Clinton and tacks up Bigfoot, throwing her long, contemplative looks over his shoulder as she reorganizes the books he’s shoved slapdash onto the shelves.

He touches her lightly as he passes; they’re careful not to linger.

- Sunday night, and she’s three glasses deep into a bottle of cheap, bitter syrah. Mulder calls to let her know he’s on his way over, his tone indecipherable, and she paces while she waits for the faint, familiar rumble of his car echoing up from the street below. This is it, she tells herself, it’s almost over.

His awkward, uncharacteristic knock startles her into action. “Hi,” she manages, pulling open the door. He looks older in the ocherous light, his hair bristly, and Scully breathes through a singe of ill-timed tenderness. “Uh, come on in.”

“Thanks,” he replies, trailing off. Clearly, neither of them know how to proceed, how to breach the matter at hand, and Scully pounces on the impending silence with the first thing she can think of to say.

“Can I take your coat?” Jesus.

“No,” he says, smiling bashfully. “I can’t stay – I, I’ve gotta get back to the office for a while.”

The space between them is heavy, charged with gravity.

*Grace. Control. Get it over with, Dana.* “Obviously you’ve had some time to think about my request…”

“Um. It’s… it’s not something I get asked to do every day,” he says, and her belly pitches dangerously, because she knows, God damn it all, she knows his answer already. “Um,” he continues, “but I’m… absolutely flattered.” She must not be hiding herself very well, because he immediately launches into protest – “No, honestly!”

“Look, i-if you’re trying to politely say no, it’s okay – I, I’ve gotta get back to the office for a while.”

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“Look, i-if you’re trying to politely say no, it’s okay – I, I, I understand.”

“…See, as weird as… this sounds, and this… it sounds really weird, I know, but I, I just wouldn’t want… this to come between us…”


“But…,” he murmurs, reaching for her. “The… the answer is yes.”
It doesn’t hit her for what feels like a century. And then she’s above herself, watching herself break into a smile and melt into his arms, eyes shining and contained. She lets him go, returning to her body, dizzy with incredulous joy. Oh, God, she thinks, oh, thank you, God. “Um. Well, I’ll call Dr. Parenti, and, um, I assume that he’ll wanna meet you and, and go through the, uh, the donor procedures.”

“Oh,” Mulder says mildly. “At that part I’m a pro.” He smiles and backs away from her, out into the hall, and before she can process his absence, he’s gone.

Scully lets her back fall against the door in his wake, the tears coming hot and wild now, a laugh bubbling up in her throat, the small traces of shame at the edge of her consciousness only sweetening the moment, sharpening it, making it real.

“Scully…” His voice comes muffled through the wood.

She turns and opens the door again, pulling herself together. “Hey,” Mulder says, quiet and serious. “Um. In case it wasn’t implied… I’m all in.” He brings his hand to her face, ghosts the pad of his thumb against her cheek, and discretion and neighbours and self-preservation be damned, she vaults up on her toes and crushes her lips against his.

He laughs against her mouth and drags her close, so that her neck is craned uncomfortably, so that she’s crumpled against him, bent backwards, breathless. Her body responds in a deluge of heat, her heartbeat opposite his, tongues and hands and time disappearing, the softness of his cock swelling slightly against her hipbone.

She pulls back. He lets her. “Stay,” she sighs, blinking slowly up at him, slipping her fingers under his collar.

His grin, half-formed, is apologetic. “As much as I’d love to, I – I’ve really gotta get back to the office, Scully. I’ve gotta finish up some things, Arthur Dales left me a message earlier, and I’ve got some paperwork to push through so we can get down to Florida as soon as possible.

“Do you need help?” she offers, thinking of all of the very unprofessional ways in which they might complete their salvaging of the basement.

“No, honey, you rest,” he says. “We’re huntin’ sea monsters in the morning.”
The pungent bite of gunpowder in the air, thick and sulfuric, coating the roof of Scully’s mouth. A hysterical bomber in a frayed army jacket, hot blood steaming and spreading on cold marble, a girl’s life offered in exchange for Mulder’s on the boot-scuffed floor of the 8th Street Cradock Marine.

Her love has prophetic knowledge, enemies everywhere, and a fading row of sucked spots across his neck. He has a trepanned cranium and a scar crowning his temple. He has an appointment with Dr. Parenti for Wednesday afternoon.

Scully kneels beside the dying girl, bearing witness, and finds she does not have the adequate words to thank her.

- She’s zoning out to the dull drone of NPR in her kitchen, hands submerged in a citrus froth of dishwater, when she hears Mulder let himself in.

He’s struggling with an improbable quantity of blush-coloured roses, a pandemonium of blooms exploding from the crook of his elbow. “Mulder,” she admonishes from the sink, feeling vaguely ashamed. She turns off the faucet and dries her puckered hands on a dishtowel. The hormones they’ve got her on have been making her moody, practically lecherous, and she pauses for a moment to appreciate the sight of him in Levi’s and leather.

Death’s most evasive quarry, ichor in his veins. She’s aware of a dim, pulsing instinct to sink her teeth into his forearm. Despite the roses, he looks good enough to eat.

“You shouldn’t have,” she says flatly, meaning it.

Mulder shucks his coat from his free arm, tossing his keys on the table. “I didn’t. They’re, ah… they’re from Sonny.”

Scully frowns at him and relieves him of the burden, trying not to choke on a cloud of overwhelming, powdery sweetness. There’s easily fifty roses, maybe even sixty, a ridiculous, embarrassing number. She fingers a velvety petal and fixes him with a suspicious glare. “Who the hell is Sonny?”

“C’mon, Scully!” he says, toeing off his boots. “… Sonny?”

She shakes her head.

“The, uh. The Great Mutato. Sonny. His name is Sonny.”

Scully stares, and then her eyes roll back when she realizes he’s serious. “Oh, for heaven’s sake, Mulder…”

“We correspond. You know that.”

“I didn’t, actually. Isn’t he in prison?” He follows her to the kitchen, where she deposits the rustling mass onto the counter, roots around a drawer for her kitchen scissors, and sets to snipping down stems. “Do me a favour and get that vase down from the top shelf.” She points to it with her chin.
“Yeah, I, uh. Take care of his commissary,” he offers, retrieving the vase and giving her a nice view of his hipbones sloping into the waistband of his jeans. “Send him books. You know.” He’s not wearing a belt, and something about that is delightfully lewd.

She waves a clipped rose under his nose, which he swats away. “You’ve got yourself a prison boyfriend, Mulder. How are the conjugal visits?”

“He’s very misunderstood,” Mulder objects, visibly wounded. “Just read the card, okay?” He digs into his pocket and passes her a handwritten note on flimsy stationary, slightly crumpled, warm from being so close to his body. He fills the vase at the sink while she reads it.

_Dear Dana,_

_I wish you every happiness in the world; may love carry you aloft as you pass into the blessed country of motherhood._

_Yours in eternal friendship,_

_Sonny_

_Jesus Christ._

“Mulder,” she says, exasperated, “the Great Mutato…? Really?”

He shrugs, grinning, setting the vase down beside her. “Well, I couldn’t exactly tell my mom. Not yet, anyway. And can you imagine how much shit we’re gonna get from Larry, Curly, and Moe?” His hand brushes against her waist, his voice low. “I just… wanted to tell someone. This feels… I dunno. Pivotal.”

Unexpectedly, Scully feels her chest swell, the armour of her heart cracking open, her throat constricting. She turns back to the roses, ignoring how thick and heavy her tongue feels in her mouth. “Well, it’s an unbelievable violation of privacy. And you obviously paid for these. And it’s far too much. I don’t even think they’ll fit in the vase. But,” she concedes after a breath, “… the note is very sweet.”

He closes in behind her, his chest warm against her shoulderblades, hands creeping around her belly. “Hey,” he murmurs into her hair. “I want to apologize for my, uh. My initial hesitance.” Scully sighs and leans back against him, setting down the scissors, letting his damp breath glide over her neck. “It’s just… your illness, and then… losing Emily… and Diana showing up again and stirring up all that shit I thought I’d gotten over.”

He must feel her stiffen at the name, must feel the tide of her temper rile up within her, because he tongues behind her ear, his habitual guilty lave.

“Yes, but what shit is that, exactly? She wants to ask him. _Grief? Or Love?_

Instead, she closes her eyes, and wills her blood to cool. “… Everything go okay at the appointment?”

“Yeah,” he says softly. “It was, uh… it was good. I mean, it was fine. Everything went fine.” Scully nods, and they stay there, quietly rocking, the sunset casting the room in a liquid, molten peach. He pulls her closer, his lips soft as a shadow against the crest of her ear. “You know… I think I always knew we’d have a child together.”

Scully remains silent, working to quiet the flurry between her ribs. “I know you’re gonna say I’m crazy, but even if I… even if I didn’t want to believe it was possible, I knew. I knew it was going to happen.”
“It hasn’t happened, Mulder. We - ”

“- It will.”

“We can’t know… the rate of success is less than -”

“- I’ve got a feeling, Scully. It’s going to happen. Trust me.”

“Mulder, stop,” she snaps, frustrated. But there’s a thought singing out from the back of her mind – *he knew about the bomber in the bank, Dana. He knew about the bomber in the bank. He knew about the bomber –*

He presses against her, solid, salted, scarred, brimming with life, an oracle from Alexandria. She cannot bear to think of what it would mean to lose him.

He dips his head to graze his lips over the sensitive skin at the nexus of neck and shoulder, sending a waterfall of sensation down through her hips, down to her toes. His hands travel over her ribs, brushing against the undersides of her breasts, spanning her and stealing her breath. Defeated, conquered, she hums a note of encouragement and rolls her ass into his crotch.

“C’mon,” he says, and then in a burst of acton, he’s turning her around, hauling her up by the thighs, heaving her over his shoulder. Scully shrieks with horrified, instinctive laughter, struggling against him as a hand comes down hard on her ass, watching the whirl of her apartment pass as he carries her off to the bedroom, roses abandoned.

She yelps as her back hits the mattress, and then erupts into giggles. “That’s quite the expectation to be putting on your refractory period,” she smiles breathlessly as he climbs over her.

“You know,” he says, kissing his way up her body, “the kama sutra… dictates that the female partner… should experience five orgasms…” before the male partner… gets his.”

“Well then, Agent, you’ve got some catching up to d– ohhhhh…”

- He’s hard again, subtly humping the mattress, groaning against her as he guides her down from orgasm number two with light, lingering passes of his tongue. His face when he emerges from between her thighs is slick and shining, slack with pleasure.

Scully pulls him up, panting with the anticipation of his fat cock stretching her out, filling her up. He skims his lips against hers, sloppy, and the taste of herself sends her neurons scattering. The head of his dick bumps against her opening, and he pushes it through the folds of her labia, fucking her overstimulated clit. She jerks and writhes, catches the glow of pride in his eyes.

Something elemental rises within her.

She locks him between her legs, rolling him over and sinking down onto his cock in one movement. Oh, fuck. This cock *belongs* to her. He squeaks, laughs deliriously, and she bends over his chest, so wet that she’s already seeping around him, soaking the scrub of rough hair at his base. He is hers. He is all hers. He tries to grab her hips, but she captures his hands, slams them back down on either side of his face.

She will not be his second choice. She will not be his second chance. He is all hers. “All in?” she
breathes, pinning him with her eyes. His gaze softens, and he nods, licks his lips. “Yeah, baby. All in.”

She lets go of one of his hands. He knows enough to keep it where it is. Clever boy. Her fingers trail over his cheek, over his pretty, pretty lips, over the dip in his chin. She watches him watching her.

She grips him by the neck.

Right under his jaw, so he can’t turn his head.

Thumb over one carotid artery, four fingers on the other. His pulse under her hand. Fear in his eyes – or is that excitement? She doesn’t care. She squeezes. Hard. Because he belongs to her. His dick, his heart, his sperm, his breath. She owns it all.

She begins to move.

“Then you will never -” she seethes into his face, rocking her hips against his, fucking him hard. “Ever, put that woman before me again.” He nods slightly, the best he can, his lashes fluttering, his face flushing. He could flip her over in an instant, he’s got 70 pounds on her, but he’s letting her have this. She knows that this is is a willful surrender. His hips rise to meet her rhythm, urging her on.

A surge of heat bleeds through her. “Do you understand? She’s gone. It’s over. You’re mine.” She squeezes him harder, then releases his neck to grab his cheeks, and to drive the point home, she slaps him hard across the face before he can draw a breath. Underneath her, Mulder heaves air into his lungs, and comes, and comes, and comes.
These are the secrets of her body. A serpent looped in her lumbar curve, a cancer-curing microchip wedged up against the base of her skull, and two fertilized embryos, splitting trophoblasts, struggling for purchase on the wall of her womb.

In her dreams, Scully can see them, sweet and clear as the morning.

At every age, they take after Mulder, his robust Germanic genes, the quixotic light contained within his eyes. All of his tragedy and all of his warmth rapidly fermenting inside of her, bits of his soul harvested and leavening in two precious bundles of cells. They take after Mulder, but sometimes they have her sister's stare, blue as the Irish Sea.

In the wet and gridlocked traffic on the way back from the appointment, he delves into a one-sided discourse on genetic memory. He’s trying to fill the silence, she senses, his hand heavy and hopeful on her knee.

The idea of it is horrifying. She sees Mona Scully in her shawls, flinging herself from the crags. She sees Samuel Kuipers at gunpoint, *sonderkommando*, hauling the bodies of his kinsmen from the gas chambers at Belżec. She sees Tooms and Barry and Pfaster, Samantha and Melissa and Emily, generations of loss and terror forever alive inside of her, inherited and accumulating. She fans her fingers over her belly in a silent apology.

She knows she shouldn’t allow herself to think of the embryos like this. As their children, as their babies, manufactured, deposited. No rumpled sheets or tender words to usher them into existence, no spark of life galvanized by an act of love. But this is the way it is. This is the way it has to be.

Life begins in a petri dish.

Mr. and Mrs. Petrie, two sick jokes in a polo shirt and a sweater set. The air conditioner rattles against the flat Arcadian heat. She wears a fake diamond, a fake smile, and tries to imagine what life would be like: if this is how he was with Diana, if he was this saccharine, this handsy.

“C’mon, Scully,” he purrs when she tells him to cut it out. “When do I ever get to touch you in public? And besides, Rob's wild for Laura. Reduced to an animal. Driven mad with the knowledge that she could be carrying his young. It's really too bad she's on pelvic rest...” He proves incapable of behaving himself, and he's banished to the couch by the second night.

She doesn't want Rob or Laura, doesn't want this life, this white kitchen, the clean neighbours, the dolphin-safe tuna, the lawns cut on the diagonal. Give her dark nights in Alexandria, Mulder typing at his desk by the light of the tank. Give her his books on every surface.

She is cocooned in his arms, washed by his tears, filled and moving with his body. She feels so raw that the air itself burns and bites at her skin. She feels weary, and threadbare, and worst of all, relieved. There is no baby. One less mystery to solve. One less thing to love.

She's glad she didn't tell her mother – facing her now would be impossible.
Cheek to cheek, bound by night and kismet. She wraps her calves around his hips, pulls him in tight, breathes against his sideburn. He shudders, says her first name in a trembling gasp, giving her back to herself, making her real again.

*Never give up on a miracle,* he'd said, but he is the only miracle she needs.

She goes to mass on Sunday, so that God might look her in the face.
Twenty Seven

There is a dog woman with lupus in California, and a man walking through walls in Mississippi. There is a browbeaten silence between them, an uneasy sense of epilogue, and an empty space beside her in bed. There are two bodies, hearts stolen, cold on her slab.

For days, Scully drifts, pulled and pushed by some unseen, hazy force, her thoughts invaded, her instincts overthrown, strange compulsions as urgent and clear as a voice in her ear. A milagro charm, bronzed and burning, heavy in her hand. Padgett’s bony thigh against hers in the gloaming dim of Apartment 41. Bullet holes in the drywall, incorporeal fingers scraping and digging, her wasted heart nearly ripped from within her ribs.

But there is Mulder, always. She wakes in a flash of panic, flat on her back on the floor, and he’s there. When two green and smirking officers from the Alexandria PD grill her on his couch, he’s there. When she watches them ferry Padgett’s body, black-bagged, from the building, he’s there, his arms tight around her at the window. When she watches the blood from her body, watching it swirl around her feet in the shower, he’s there, waiting with a towel and a cup of weak, steaming tea. Even if she can’t give him children, even if she can’t bring herself to wear that goddamned ring, even if she can’t quite let herself believe, he’s still there.

She’s belly-down on his expensive sheets, covered by his body, pressed forward into the welcoming palm of the earth. His bed is new and firm and unchristened, and smells faintly of factory chemicals. A cirrus of damp hair curls across her forehead. Beside her nose, her fingers are trapped in his, knotted together, and his mouth is hot and wet on her neck.

“His book,” Mulder groans from deep in his chest, slowly driving his hips flush to her ass. *Fuck,* she feels so full with him, overstuffed, drunk on the ever-rare feeling of his skin against hers. “*God, Scully... the thought of you with anyone else...*”

*Yes, Mulder. This is how it feels.*

“*Never,*” she promises, breath escaping in a frenzied pant. She angles her hips, pushes her rump up as far as she can, trying to get him *deeper, deeper, please* -- but he won’t let her up, won’t let her move. He forces her legs closer together with his knees, and gives her a shallow, experimental thrust, grunting into her ear.

“*He didn’t know you, Scully.*” God, so fucking full... she works her muscles, bearing down around him madly, needing more. “*Nobody could ever know you the way I know you...*”

Nobody could ever know him the way she knows him. Nobody could guess at the long night inside of him, the dark and glimmering firmament of his mind. He is creation contained, more life inside than he knows what to do with, pain and beauty and paradox.

“*Yesss,*” she hisses, near tears, “*nobody --*” He hums, and she thrashes her head, takes his wrist between her teeth. He shifts with her, tonguing the corner of her mouth, pulsing his hips in a slow and tortuous meter.

*He still loves me,* she thinks, *oh, thank God, he still loves me.*
Her throat is arced towards the moon in the crisp April night, crickets singing, laughter bright and tart as cherries in her mouth. The grinding of her boot heels into the shale, wind bristling through the trees, the clang of the chain link fence as Mulder backs her into it, his lips chasing hers.

The boy shagging balls is long gone, the floodlights powered down. Mulder is raunchy-stupid-sexy in that jock getup, flashing his jaunty overbite, and Scully can’t help but feel like the star Mathketeer on a date with the homecoming king.

But oh, what a gift, to feel young again, like the world is one big possibility.

His fingers are chilled as they work up under her shirt, but she’s so overheated that it feels wonderful, like liquid silver, like water. She skims her hands through his waxy hair, tugging, her nipples puckering and scraping against the thin satin of her bra. Making out with him is almost as much of a thrill as fucking him, which is almost as much of a thrill as a good, long argument.

“Damn it, Mulder,” she murmurs into his kiss, smiling.

He chuckles in self-defense, pulls back, smooths her hair from her face. “Whad I do?” Cocky, beautiful bastard.

“I didn’t stand a chance, did I?” She says, stepping on his toe, thinking of Bellefleur.

He gets her drift immediately, tilts his head and blinks dreamily at her, something profoundly happy in his gaze. “I hope not.”

Scully fists his jersey in both hands, yanks him back in, rides him joyously in the back seat of his car. They’ve made it to the edge of the woods, to the end of the winter, nothing but the long, green days of summer ahead.
She’s pursuing her graduate degree in neuroscience when the men from Quantico come knocking. *You’ll make a real difference this way, Ms. Fowley,* they promise her. *Don’t waste your life in a lab.*

*Oh, why the hell not,* she thinks. She’s 30, and she’s got nobody to answer to, nothing to lose.

She meets him in a course on informant relations. She’s heard tales of Spooky Mulder and his spooky monograph, but the rumours do nothing to prepare her for the real thing.

Fox has a gaze that is greener than the earth, and it creeps up around her heart, choking like a vine. He drags her out to dinner, drives her out to Powhatan to look at the stars. He is 23, and unafraid of her, and she thrills at the sting of new love.

Her weakness for the unusual and unexplained begins to slip through into their conversations, and he takes her seriously, matches her point for point. He reads through her previous research, dense unpublished papers on parapsychology and the nature of consciousness. The discovery of a like mind is preposterous and intoxicating, and they talk through countless nights, order takeout, kiss chastely on her couch. He makes her laugh. She makes him wait, and to her delight, finds that he is a patient, persistent man.

The first time they’re together, he’s so excited and so earnest that it breaks something open inside of her, something she didn’t even realize had grown closed and hard and cold.

He moves his things into her apartment, and they both begin at the Bureau. And for four years, despite his insomnia, despite his mystifying panic attacks, despite the wretched, unreachable places he retreats to when he’s profiling, they’re something resembling happy.

While pursuing some obscure line of investigation, he exhumes a stash of abandoned, unusual files. He schleps them home, box by box, and their nights are lost forever. She tries to involve herself as much as possible, her own thirst for intrigue pricking at the back of her throat. But Fox begins to disappear without telling her where he’s going, or when he’ll be back. Their bed becomes lonely.

One early, snowed-in morning, almost a year after the first box appeared on her kitchen table, he breaks down.

“I had a sister,” he confesses, and it feels like a sword to the stomach. She begins to wonder whether she knows him at all.
The regressions seem to help, seem to inject some life into him, but for some reason, he won’t let her call him by his name anymore. It feels strange and perverse to call him Mulder, so she stops calling him anything at all. The sex becomes coarse and revealing, serious, so frequent that she almost comes to dread it. But she’s got skin in the game now, his mother’s ring on a chain around her neck.

They file the paperwork and Walter Skinner approves it, moved by Fox’s passionate proposal, his brilliant reputation, and, she suspects, the fact that he’s been meeting with Senator Matheson. Despite her reservations, she begins to foster the crazy notion that they might actually change the world together.

Shortly after they begin, Blevins pulls her into his office.

They make it abundantly clear that she has no choice.

They’re dancing in the cherry grove, the hem of her dress hushing against the crisp new grass. The distant drone of conversation, the strain of music feeble on the air. He kisses her with restless greed, runs bold hands over her waist, her bare back. “Hey there, Mrs. Mulder,” he says under his breath, even though she’s keeping her name.

He looks moonstruck and summer-sweet, and very, very young.

“You happy, Di?” he whispers against her cheek, pulling her hips flush to his. She holds him close, sick with her secrets.

“Of course I’m happy. Of course I am.”

Over his shoulder, she watches as the smoker, uninvited, leans down and lights Teena’s cigarette.

It’s important work, she tells herself. He would do the same. When the time comes to tell him, he’ll understand.

In her mind, the hierarchy is clear. What is this small and shallow life of hers compared to the survival of the human race?

“Let’s have a baby,” he says one bitter February night, tracing his fingers down to her navel, kissing the weighted curve of her breast.

“… I really don’t think -”

“No, just - just listen, Di. You’d be such an amazing mother. You’re - you’re intelligent, you’re compassionate, you’ve got amazing instincts, and I think we’d… I think we’d be great. I want a family with you. Let’s have a family.”

She softens and sighs. If only he knew. “We’ve talked about this.”

“So let’s talk about it again.”
He crawls up and kisses her with such purpose and purity that she can’t help but dissolve, can’t help but tuck away her doubts, her fears, the sweeping significance of all that she’s seen.

The tiny gray fetus is breathtaking, heavy in her hands. Proof of life beyond earth, proof that what she’s doing is right. The bizarre, pinched face, dolphin-gray skin stretched over that magnificent, toothless skull. The Project isn’t necessarily ethical, but progress rarely is. And this creature, this miraculous being, the fact that she’s been chosen to help with this work… it’s incredible.

It’s an honour.

Despite her careful measures, it turns out to be morning sickness, after all. He crumbles with joy when he learns the news.

I’ll tell him when the baby comes. We’ll find a way out. God, we have to. We must.

Their son, as if sensing her betrayal, dies in her womb. At the hospital, Fox is clinging, distraught, but all she can seem to feel is disgust. She refuses to look at the fetus, that sickly, wrinkled, mundane thing, but Fox insists on holding it, touching it.

She’s lied to him, failed him, and she’s going to keep failing him, again and again. The life she’s chosen has no room for love.

He’s snoring fitfully, folded into the cracked visitor futon in the corner of the room. She studies his face, tortured even in sleep. He already has so many demons at his door. No point in telling him now.

She goes to the smoker, and he grants her a new beginning.

The distance is easy to create. Fox responds just as she hoped he would, folding in on himself like a unwatered houseplant. He makes it easy on her, spending more and more time at work, obsessing over his sister.

She can’t bear to tell him that Samantha Mulder is nothing more than genetic material in a drawer in a lab. That Samantha Mulder is dead, and that a hundred clones wear her face.

Six months after the miscarriage, she tucks his mother’s ring into a manila folder with the divorce papers, leaves it on his desk, and boards a plane to Berlin.

She attends MUFON meetings undercover, a microphone tucked into her bra, and learns very quickly not to grow attached. If only these women could comprehend their role in the history of mankind. If only they understood their vast and glorious legacy. They should be proud, damn it.

It’s important work, she tells herself, as they die in droves, like flies.
She falls in love in Tunisia in 1998. Ahmed is 22 and brilliant, and he’s going to help her escape.

But she arrives at her apartment one evening to find him propped against her headboard, his fine, high forehead cracked like an eggshell, a chaos of gore slithering down to his shoulders. Alex calls her the next week.

“You know how it has to be, Diana,” he says. “Nothing personal. I was just following orders. But uh. You might not wanna tell your boyfriends about your job in the future.”

- 

*It’s important work, it’s important work, it’s important work, it’s important work,*
There's a boy, they tell her, with abilities that shouldn't exist. They want him, and her history makes her uniquely qualified for the task. Diana leaves everything behind, and returns home, memories of Fox warming the pit of her stomach.

If anyone could absolve her of the guilt she carries, if anyone could purify her soul, if anyone could wash away the blood on her hands, it would be him.

-God, but he wears the years well.

Despite everything she’s read about what he’s been through, what he’s done, he's still so good, good to his core. Incorruptible, more powerful in his convictions than ever. He fills the room with his heat and intensity, like a wildfire, like sunlight. His capacity for forgiveness staggers her, his open, affectionate touches, his familiar, intimate gaze. She almost wishes he was angry, almost wishes she had to work harder for it. Foxes shouldn't be this easy to trap.

That new partner of his is a little she-wolf too, all scowl and shadow, and Diana thinks she'd like her in a different, better life.

-She thinks of him at night, fingers working furiously -- his precise tongue, his pounding chest, his beautiful cock. The walls of her D.C. bedroom all know his first name.

-Gibson Praise leads her to the window, hatred simmering in his eyes. Her survival instinct kicks in several seconds after her maternal one, and when she realizes what he's tricked her into, she has the curious urge to laugh. Of course the boy knows everything. Of course he knows who she really is, what she's really here for. He's the real goddamned deal, she thinks, bizarrely serene, as the assassin's bullet burrows between her ribs.

-The smoker offers her the X-Files while she's recovering. It's almost time, he says. I'm counting on you to bring him on board.

She's grateful to him, this enigmatic man. He seems to be the only one who follows through on his promises. He's given her freedom, provided her with protection. And Ahmed was her fault, really. The smoker was only doing what he had to do to safeguard the Project. Alex was just doing his job. She was foolish to try to run then, and she was foolish to think that Fox could save her now.

It's important work, she tells herself. One day, soon, Fox will understand.

-She wins his trust back carefully, like courting a street mutt. Leaves him morsels of information, a
They strike up a tentative friendship, go out for a drink now and then. He might, on occasion, slide a warm hand over hers in a tucked-away corner of the bar, but he never kisses her, never smooths a lock of hair behind her ear. And he never speaks about that partner of his, even when she prods.

Time ticks and ticks towards the inevitable. She calls him on Christmas, when she can't stop the memories from flashing behind her eyes, but he never calls her back.

Poor old Cassandra Spender in hysterics, causing more trouble than she's worth. The showers at Fort Marlene; Scully testing her patience, yapping at her like a rabid ginger dog. She's got sharp teeth, that one.

Valiant little Dana, glorified livestock. A chip nestled against the crest of her spine, waiting to call her away.

Two nights later, she finds a familiar presence waiting for her in her apartment. Fox always did have a nearly supernatural sense of timing, and, thank heavens, he’s in, he’s in, he understands, it’s over, it’s time.

As she listens to him speak of fate and betrayal, she can’t help but shiver with something she might be inclined to call pride. *This is our destiny*, she thinks. They’ve lost the war, but they’ll be among the few survivors, among the elite. The last of humanity, safe and storied and kept like pets.

She sinks herself into his aura, and he warms her like bathwater as she presses her lips against his. There’s a moment of sweet, promising hesitation, but he breaks the kiss and slides past her, pulling her into a loose and tentative embrace.

“Diana…” his voice is wet against her ear, and an old heat spreads between her thighs. “We have to get Scully. I won’t go without her.”

In the coming weeks, it all seems like a fever dream, distant and ludicrous. The hangar, the lights, the flames, the Syndicate meetings reduced to a party of two.

On a Thursday night she waits at the bar, sucking down cigarette after cigarette. Fox is thirty minutes late to meet her, then forty-five. She slings the rest of the Glenlivet down her smoke-sore throat, and drives home half-drunk, almost running over a street cat.

There’s no voice waiting on her machine, no note slipped under her door, nothing but spam and coupons in her email inbox, but she’s a clever woman. She gets the message loud and clear.
A call from Alex, a frantic dash to the university. Fox curled in the back seat of her sedan, moaning in pain, his mind cracking open and the light flooding in.

Diana brings him home and strips him bare in the golden dusk of his bedroom, his warm body as pliant as wedged clay, his pulse wild under her fingers, his eyes unfocused. He’s bulkier than he used to be, and there’s a puckered scar under his clavicle that she doesn’t remember from before.

As she lies to the smoker over the phone, she can hear Fox groan from under the sheets. A stab of excitement slices through her. God, all she’s wanted for so many weeks is just to be close to him, to feel alive and known and loved again. She wants to rub up on him like a cat, to steal a bit of his goodness and wear it like a scent. She wants him to come inside of her, wants him to purify her from within.

He’s in no shape right now, she thinks, pulling off her shirt and smoothing the static from her hair. Stop, she thinks, as she unbuttons her fly and shimmies out of her trousers. He’s not in his right mind, she thinks, reaching behind herself to unclasp her bra.

She slides under the covers and into his nest of heat, easing a calf between his legs, leaning over him on one elbow. He’s sweating, and as she breathes him in the rich spice of his musk fills her throat with longing. Her nails drag lightly around his mysterious scar – a bullet wound, she realizes – and down to his navel, to the base of his soft penis.

“Fox,” she says in her smokiest voice, cupping him gently. He opens his eyes and regards her dazedly.

“Oh, Fox, I’m going to make you feel so much better…,” she breathes, dipping down to kiss him. He jerks his head away and weakly shoves her back.

His voice is hoarse, rough, filled with spite. “Where’s Scully?”

“Honey, you just spoke with her on the phone, don’t you remember?”


“My… no. No, you’re… no. Where is she? Where’s Scully?” he croaks, more urgently now.

Diana can see it pass over his face a split-second before it’s upon him, and then he’s suddenly choking back air, clutching his forehead, his mouth slack with agony.

“Fox!”

“You’re… you’re – you – did you hurt her!?” he spits through clenched teeth, panting, struggling out of the comforter. “Where’s Scully? I need to see SCULLY –”

She tries to grab his wrist, tries to calm him, but he’s scrambling away from her, stumbling out of bed and slamming heavily into the wall. He roars, his voice breaking, and slides to the floor, head cradled between his elbows. Diana leaps from the bed and finds the phone in the dining room. Calls 911, and then the smoker too, for good measure. Something crashes and clatters in his bedroom, the lamp maybe, or his cell phone, orplease god, not his gun.
When she returns, he lifts his head from the floor and stares, and she realizes that he knows everything. He knows the truth. He knows it all.

- 

Screaming and seizures, Scully seeing right through her lies.

Diana’s in and out of the hospital, stealing moments with him, trying to make him understand, with her words, with her thoughts. *It’s important work, Fox, and we can do it together. Once you’re safe. Once you’re healed.*

On the third night she goes home and pours herself three shaking fingers of scotch. Carries it to the bathroom, starts up the shower.

*It’s important work,* she reminds herself, staring at her naked reflection in the mirror. *It’s important work. A mantra. A psalm. It’s important work it’s important work it’s important work it’s important work it’s important work it’s impor–*

Her face shatters into a burst of silvery daggers as she hurls her drink as hard as she can, gilded liquid sloshing against the wall, a shriek echoing through the steam.

- 

“I just want you to think,” Scully says, her voice tremulous with wrath. “Think of Mulder when you met him. Think of the promise and the life in front of him. Think of him now. And then try to stand there in front of me, look me in the eye, and tell me Mulder wouldn’t bust his ass trying to save you.”

Diana’s ribs ache with guilt. “I’m thinking, Agent Scully. I’m always thinking.”

She doesn’t say *I sent you the book.* She doesn’t say *I love him too.*

- 

The smoker’s papery, nicotine-stained hand over hers, Fox dreaming on the table, the tight whorls of his magnificent brain exposed to the air. She balks and flees from the lab, suddenly more sure of this than she’s ever been about anything.

*No more fucking around,* she thinks, slipping her access card under Scully’s apartment door. *Hurry, Dana. Please.*

- 

Damp hair, her face scrubbed clean. Her finest black silk robe gliding cool as snow against her skin. Single malt straight from the bottle. She leans against the window frame, watching the city lights glint below, drinking and waiting.

She doesn’t even move at the sound of the lock clicking open, at the door creaking wide. At the snip when he shuts it behind himself.

Diana picks a pair of taillights to follow with her eyes through the streets. “Is he…?”
“She got to him in time. He’s alive.”

Diana nods, relief washing over her in a sweet and heavy riptide. He comes to stand beside her, brushing his remaining fingers against the small of her back. “Alex…,” she whispers, “Was it all a waste? What we do? What we’ve done?”

“The sole meaning of life is to serve humanity,” he says mildly.

She can’t help a small smile. “Tolstoy? Eto tak po russkiy.” Alex grins and shrugs, long eyelashes fluttering low.

He moves her hair back with his gloved hand, leans in to kiss her on the cheek. She sinks into his touch, trembling, glad for this last bit of contact. She can smell the gamey leather of his jacket. “It’s time, Diana.”

“I know.” she says quietly. “I know.”

He moves slowly, carefully, until he’s behind her, and there’s a metallic click as he draws his gun from the holster. She can see his reflection in the window, and he nods at her kindly, respectfully. “Proshay, my friend.”

Diana closes her eyes.

She and Fox laying on the roof of his car, midnight in Powhatan, the indifferent stars blazing above. He rolls his head towards her and smiles softly, and in his dark and astonishing eyes she finds peace, and love, and more goodness than she’s ever deserved.
Thirty Two

A swarm of voices rippling through his frontal lobe, a polychromatic tangle of light and sound, indescribable, unendurable agony.

The veil flutters, and behind it, Mulder sees secrets, histories, the future, the truth. Diana lighting the Smoking Man’s cigarette. Tunguska, Roswell, black oil, Thutmose gaping at the sky. Quonochontaug in June, a boy in the sand. Scully in Africa, transcribing the word of the gods into a coil notebook, a sun-flushed, freckled prophetess, breasts radiant with sweat.

Time folds, and she’s there, really there, leaning over his hospital bed, the marvels of her mind stripped and laid bare for him to see.

- 

He’s dreaming, he thinks...

A dream leftover from another time, when he was another man. A dream of forgetting, a dream of peace and absolution. A dream of healthy children, of a safe and smiling Samantha, of a simple, lukewarm love.

He grasps at the last threads of reality -- a son who died without a name, a daughter bleeding green, a child, hoped for, wished for, who would never come to be. A sister suspended in limbo, at once dead and alive, at once a girl and a woman. A life of horror and wonder, of stale coffee in paper cups. A love that devastates and elevates, a love that makes him whole.

A love that breaks through, and pulls him back from the brink.

- 

Diana is dead, but the Diana he thought he knew died long ago. Her unassuming brilliance twisted, her heart corrupted, her spirit pared down. He’d broken into her head, seen the truth of her, and was ashamed.

She did love him once. In her own way. He knows that. She did believe that what she was doing was right, almost until the very end. And she gave her life in exchange for his.

In his hallway, Scully crushes her lips to his forehead. And behind closed eyes, her warmth all around him, he can see their future.

Their impossible child, dusted with sand and tousled by the sea air, skeptical, pouty, imbued with the otherworld. Mulder doesn’t know how, or when. But after 26 years of searching, he knows a thing or two about not giving up on a miracle.

- 

“Hey,” she says, coaxing him out of a doze, stroking his cheek. He mumbles, blinks slowly, turns his head to lip lazily at her palm. She’s sitting on the edge of the bed near his hip, medikit at the ready. Stern and pretty, still pink from the sun. “I let myself in... let’s get those bandages changed, hm?”
He heaves himself up, grumbling but compliant. “Mmm. What time is it?”

“It’s almost eight. I came right from work. C’mere.”

There are still moments when he receives impressions of her inner life -- their little mind-melding adventure with the spores compounded by his recent brush with omniscience makes for one hell of a merger. He basks in the halo of her unspoken tenderness as she unwraps his head.

There’s a release of pressure, and she brushes her thumb along the edge of the shaved patch surrounding his latest battle scar. “I hate that they cut your hair so short,” she pouts, and he suppresses a retort about her own newly-cropped coif. Not that she was capable of looking anything short of seraphic.

“You hungry?” she asks, finishing up and repacking her kit. “I brought you a meatball sub from that place you like on Seventh. It’s in the fridge, I can --”

“-- Mm, it’s okay. We’ll have it for breakfast.”

She pulls a face. “Your eating habits are truly horrific, Mulder. I don’t know why I enable you.”

“Stay with me,” he says.

- 

He wakes with sudden awareness in the middle of the night, her small body curled against his, her arm flung across his ribs. She’s awake and peering up at him, her cheek on his chest, lapis eyes shadowy with adoration.

“Hey,” he whispers, smiling, running a hand over her back. “That’s not creepy at all.” She snuffles a small, self-conscious laugh, and he pulls her close, savouring the comforting smell of her hair, her heat, her skin. Overcome, he gathers her up and into a kiss. She sighs in approval, pushes the cold tip of her regal nose against his cheek, and lets him love her.

He opens his mouth slightly, draws back, lets his lips linger and brush sweetly over hers. The taste of her wet breath is poetry, liquor, and he chases it with his tongue. She cants her pelvis into his hip, luring blood into his cock. Moves to lick his neck. Her little teeth at his earlobe, then a small, purposeful kiss on his jaw, a breath of a whisper -- “We shouldn’t. You’re still recovering.”

“Scully,” he begs into her shoulder, rolling his stubble against her skin, letting his hands roam.

“Mulder,” she counters.

“Just wanna be close to you,” he mumbles, and she pulls back to gaze at him, her eyes half-lidded. He can see the cogs turning, and his dick twitches with interest.

“Well,” she says, after a moment of contemplation, “maybe there’s something I can do for you instead. If -- you can promise to relax. I don’t want you... overextending yourself.”

He nods stupidly, swallowing, clearing his throat. Jesus Christ. “Yeah,” he manages. “Yeah, I can do that.”

She unspools a trail of kisses down his bare torso, skimming her fingers over the swelling ridge
tenting his thin pajama pants, sending chills over his entire body. Holy fucking hell. It’s not as though this is an unsung note in their sexual repertoire, but it’s certainly never been the main event.

“Didn’t think you were that kind of girl,” he grunts, threading fingers through her hair.

“Oh, have I not mentioned that I’m Catholic?” she deadpans.

Fuck, he adores her.

She settles in between his legs, propped up on her elbows, a living, breathing Waterhouse in a ratty, thieved Knicks tee. His cock throbs with anticipation, practically jumping up to meet her when she lowers her head to nuzzle it. The pure and unmistakable love in her eyes makes his chest contract.

She eases his waistband down and pets him gently, takes him in hand, holds him against the smooth plane of her cheek. Her hair is a mess, and she is unutterably gorgeous, beyond comprehension. He releases a quavering breath, thrusts helplessly against her cheekbone. “Relax,” she purrs, as if that were an option.

She kisses him fondly along the ledge of his corona, up to the peak of his head. Lays his stiff cock flat to his belly, stroking him, kneading his thigh, his hip, his oblique with her free hand. And then she settles lower, and his balls tighten against the animal of her breath. She weighs them in one hand, brings them to her mouth, places a demure kiss on each.

And then that hot, wet tongue emerges, and she licks him slow and rough from root to tip. A beam of fire shoots through his groin, and he gasps, his grip tightening in her hair.

He’s gonna fucking explode. He’s gonna fucking lose it before it even begins.

She bites her bottom lip and nuzzles him again, holding him up against her face. “I need you to try to keep your heart rate down, Mulder. Just relax, okay?” She sounds amused, proud of herself, and he briefly weighs the logistics of hauling her up, flipping her over, and fucking her until she can’t walk.

But then she swirls her tongue around him and takes him between those sublime lips, and any semblance of cognitive function is lost. She sucks him down, millimeter by millimeter, until he’s half-buried, nudging the back of her throat, and holy shit, the hot, tight cave of her mouth is the most exquisite softness he’s ever known, god, almost as sweet as that incredible pussy of hers, fuck --

He forces himself to take a deep breath, gazing down at her, and she looks both solemn and playful, delightfully slutty. He tucks her hair behind her ear as she moves back up his shaft, and it’s obscene, seeing her like this, almost struggling with him, her lips stretched around his cock. “Fuck, Scully,” he practically whimpers, and she sucks him down again, further this time, just as slow, turning his bones to mush.

He clips into her mind for a brief moment, and is humbled anew when he finds her awash with devotion, infatuation, desire. Labouring eagerly to bring him pleasure. His woman. His love, who would encounter the key to all life on earth, and still only concern herself with saving his.

She’s gearing up to something, he can tell. She slows, breathes through her nose, and then, all things holy, she slides the head of his cock into her throat. The base of his spine ignites, his brain short-circuits. She gags and sputters, but immediately regains composure and releases him with a slick pop, panting. “Guess I’m more out of practice than I thought I was.”
“Scully,” he says faintly, “as much of an asshole as this is gonna make me out to be, there is nothing quite like having a brilliant, beautiful, completely badass woman choke on your dick.”

She laughs and grips him hard at his base, takes him back into her mouth, and before long he’s spurting into her with a strangled cry while she hums in satisfaction, sucking it all down, swallowing, holy fuck, smiling up at him with naughty schoolgirl pride.

“Shit...” he wheezes, as she crawls her way back up. “That was… fuck… that was mind-blowing. Extraterrestrial artefacts ain’t got nothing on D.K.S.” Scully wrinkles her nose in wry amusement, nips at his chin. Lets him taste himself, salty on her tongue, then settles back into his arms, wriggling pleasantly. He holds her close, tears pricking the back of his eyes in a flood of post-orgasmic dopamine.

He’ll never jeopardize this again. This is what’s important. Diana had it all wrong. This is what’s worth fighting for.

He kisses the part in Scully’s hair, and they drift off to sleep, sharing dreams of the ocean, of a spacecraft made from sand.
His bedroom smells euphoric, a cocktail of perspiration and stale spunk; hard, observable evidence of a heretofore rarely-acknowledged phenomenon. Covert encounters in elevators, in parking garages, his fingers in her mouth in the basement office. There's a brain-munching monster in California, and Mulder scrapes up enough curiosity to open a file.

A Super 8 in Orange County, faux sandstone under a citrus sun. Some new, deviant version of his partner, her suitcase filled with tight, candy-coloured camisoles, her lips painted a cruel shade of late-summer cherry.

“You tryna kill me?” he husks into her ear, dragging her by the arm into his room. He swipes the door closed behind them and backs her up against it, breathing hard, encouraged by the bratty thrust of her chin. God, she knows exactly what she’s doing to him. This shit’s on purpose.

He runs his hands freely over her breasts, yanks down the thin layers of cotton and lace so he can devour a pert, rosy nipple. She gasps, her fingers in his hair.

“I've got an investigation to conduct, Agent Scully,” he says, tonguing around one puckered areola, the valley between her tits aromatic with heat. She tastes like melting ice cream, fuck, how is that even possible? “And you have... the absolute gall... to be walking around... looking like that...” he viciously thumbs at her lipstick, leaving a dark smear across her cheek.

She nips at him without making contact and scrabbles hungrily at his belt and fly, freeing the erection he's been fighting for hours. A hard-on in a burger joint, that's gotta be a first. Lucky Boy indeed.

“S'this the proboscis you were talking about?” she teases throatily, slurring her words like a pill-drunk starlet. He fumbles with her zipper, rips her pants down her thighs. Hoists her up by the ass and pins her to the door, delighting in her heat against him, her provocative size, her surprised little mewl. He nudges her panties aside with the head of his cock, and drives himself greedily home.

“You're right,” she says, flat on her back on the motel carpet, catching her breath. He's sprawled two feet away, equally winded.

“Oo, I'm gonna need that recorded in an official statement.” She kicks at him without looking, her toe prodding his calf. He grabs for it, squeezes her smooth, tiny foot in his hand. “Of course I'm right, but what specifically are you referring to?”

“Maybe we should make a rule. No sex on a case. It's distracting.”

The look he gives her must be one of his better ones, because she bursts into a chuckly, inelegant laugh. “Yeah, okay,” she concedes, shaking herself free of him, rolling over and hauling herself up to the bathroom. “Let the record state that I tried.”

Her bed in Annapolis, laundered sheets, two coffee cups on coasters on her bedside table. Murder number six on replay in his mind.
“You had no choice,” she says, stroking his bare shoulder absentmindedly, walking her fingers over the scattered stepping stones of his moles. “He was coming after you. It was suicide by proxy.”

“Yes, but... Scully, he was... there's so much we never had the opportunity to discover – wouldn't you have loved to examine him? Interview him? Are there more of him out there, or was he the only one? Was it a genetic condition, or something else? Was he born? Created? What was his life’s story? Why fight so hard against his instincts?”

“Well, of course the scientist within me mourns the loss of such a unique, remarkable being, but Mulder, he wanted to die. His previous lifestyle choices reflect a desire to... to remain under the radar, don’t you think? He didn’t want... to become a monster to be gawped at, a test subject, a tabloid headline. He saw that he was cornered, saw the empty thing his life would become, and made the choice to end it instead. I must confess I do understand his reasoning.”

A twinge of latent distress pinches at his heart, and he clasps her wandering hand, bringing it to his lips.

“You did right by Rob Roberts,” she promises, and it soothes his weary soul.
Rings of salt and goat’s blood, suicides and empty graves, an evangelical necromancer with his eyes on Armageddon. The aimless, endless hunger of the awakened undead, a chunk of flesh torn like raw steak from his arm. Scully and her SIG save his ass for the umpteeth time.

Christmas without her had been a boring, dismal affair, save for one distracted phone call from San Diego, which was soon interrupted by a wine-drunk Maggie, with whom he’d spent twenty minutes in pleasant, circuitous conversation. After the time apart, Seeing Scully’s face above him in the graveyard had been an epiphany.

At the dawn of the millenium, he kisses her in a hospital hallway, a promise that this thing of theirs is real, that it doesn’t only exist behind closed doors. That he doesn’t only love her in the shadows.

*I am He that liveth…*

She’s straddling him in his bed, clamped tight around his cock, rotating her hips in a lazy, maddening circuit. Fucking him slow, taking care not to jostle his bad arm.

“So, my little zombie-slayer,” he says, “What’s your New Year’s resolution?” He knuckles her clit, brushing the bristle of auburn stubble on her labia with the backs of his fingers.

“Mm, keep doing that.” She leans back to brace herself, hand on his knee, giving him better access. Scratches mar the sleek pillar of her neck, resembling the gills of some elusive sea creature. The illusion feeds his fear that one day she’ll slip into her sealskin and return to the deep, leaving him parched and lost on dry land.

Under her oscillating hips, he watches the last inch of himself disappear, reemerge, disappear…

“The concept of resolutions is fundamentally unproductive,” she says. “One’s… mmm… one’s commitment to improving one’s behaviour or circumstances shouldn’t rely on a sense of obligation born from some arbitrary feel-good social tradition… ah…”

“C’mon, G-woman. Humour me.”

She smirks, digging her nails into his thigh. “Never.”

He grins and picks up the pace at her clit, capturing her gaze, threatening with his eyes all the ways he’s gonna fuck that sass right out of her when he regains agency over both of his arms.

Within minutes, she’s squeezing and pulsing around him, arching her back in a gentle, shuddering orgasm, her belly like a beam of moonlight in the night. He watches the rise and fall of her ribs with the appropriate reverence.

Sweet Christ, she is beautiful.

“Mmmmm.” Her hands find his chest as she returns to earth. “Alright, then,” she sighs, resuming a slow, sinuous grind. “What’s yours? New millennium, new Mulder?”

“Easy.” He reaches up and hooks a finger through the chain of her necklace, tugging her down to nibble at an earlobe. “I’m gonna convince you to marry me.”
The Windy City beckons. Pissed-off mobsters, a glass eye in a hamper of steamed laundry, a meek superintendent with an overabundance of good fortune. A chain of slapstick tragedies furnishes a sick kid with a few felicitous pints of B-Neg.

And as luck would have it, they’ve still got 18 hours to kill.

- 

Silvery fish dart through the wall of water like a shoal of kitchen knives, shining bodies trapped in a communal throttle of instinct. The Grecian vault of the aquarium is crowded and dim, and Mulder feels blissfully anonymous in the bedlam of messy families, sticky children, teens on dates.

Scully in all of her studiousness beside him, her shoulder leaning into his.

The rubbery disk of a stingray soars peacefully past, and he glances down to watch her face trace its path, appraising the blue cast of the tank on her fine cheekbone, the slight part of her plush and attentive lips. She's disarmingly casual in a black cardigan and jeans that cling to her ass, and he tries not to leer.

They rove companionably through a collection of seadragons and garden eels, bumping into each other more frequently than could be construed as accidental. She pauses to skim the info plaque in front of the sharks.

Sandbar sharks are obligate ram ventilators, he remembers, watching a trio of smooth gray entities float over the top of Scully's head. They have to keep swimming, to keep moving, in order to harvest scraps of oxygen from the water and fan them into their gills. Mulder wonders if he’s the same way, ever moving forward, vitally propelled, incapable of rest.

He sidles up next to her, pretending to read over her shoulder, and lifts his hand to cradle her elbow. She stiffens a little, but doesn’t move away, and he slides down her slim forearm at a glacial pace, heartbeat flickering, giving her ample opportunity to anticipate him and remove herself. When he touches the curve of her palm, she twines her fingers in his and lets their arms fall lightly between them, stubbornly avoiding his eyes.

You’re 38 goddamned years old, he reminds himself, trying to contain the unexpected thrill of holding Dana Scully’s hand in public.

A Pacific octopus, her grapefruit-hued tentacles writhing in a muscular ripple, grasps at the glass with rows of pale suckers. Her elegant domed mantle lifts towards the light, as though she’s noticed Scully watching.

“Oh, she's magnificent.” Scully remarks dreamily, tightening her grip on his hand. “You know, octopuses have three hearts and essentially nine brains. Each arm houses its own system of neurons…”

He stoops to her ear, wary of the pack of kids milling around them. “You familiar with The Dream of the Fisherman's Wife? Hokusai, 1814… a pretty shell diver finds herself in an amorous tussle with a pair of these guys, who incidentally can speak Japanese… ‘Ah, look! The inside has swollen, moistened by the warm waters of lust...’”

“You're 38 goddamned years old, he reminds himself, trying to contain the unexpected thrill of holding Dana Scully’s hand in public.
“Art history,” he says with dignity.

They watch a swarm of ghostly jellyfish kneading the water, their frilled and snarled tails like clouds of ectoplasm, illuminated against the rainbow shift of colour. A throng around them, children with palms flat against the glass, mothers with strollers gossiping noisily at their back. Teenagers chasing each other in a smog of hormones, making a ruckus. Two normal people in a sea of normal people, happy just to bear witness to the contained wonders of creation.

He releases her hand and tugs her close with an arm around her shoulders. She lets her temple fall against his chest, lifting her chin, her gaze sharp with hesitation, like resigned and cornered prey.

The world is reduced to a quiet glow as he cups her jaw and kisses her gently, in front of her God and his demons, an audience of scyphozoa, a school group of sixth graders, two mildly scandalized nannies, and anyone else who cares to watch.

Let them do their worst.
He likes to think he doesn't believe in evil. At least, not in the same way Scully does. That would be reductive, too easy; he chooses instead to believe in selfishness and stupidity, in perversion and greed, in miswirings of the brain. He believes in cycles of trauma and abuse, in ambition and fear. He believes in primate instinct, in the Golem effect, in past lives and genetic memory.

He doesn't want to believe in evil, but then his memory leaks images of John Lee Roche crushing mint under his loafers, of Modell urging him to shoot the little spy. Of the good ol’ paterfamilias, fingers yellowed with nicotine. Of Donnie Pfaster wielding a pair of garden shears.

He doesn't want to believe in evil, but he suspects that evil doesn’t care either way. Evil persists, pervades, keeps fingers in his freezer.

Evil is real. Glory, amen.

They are bound by some irreversible quantum entanglement, of this he’s sure. A lingering gift from artefacts, spores, and a steady stream of orgasm-induced oxytocin. His cells mirroring her cells. From a city away, Mulder feels the bleeding scorch of her panic, her mounting dread, and when she doesn’t answer her phone, he knows, he knows, he knows.

She looks like a boy scout, like she’s twelve, pajamas too long for her legs, one of her stockings soaked with spit and knotted like a camp bandana around her neck. Blood streaming from her nostril, a sight that wrings his guts.

The light shatters, her eyes widen, and Scully commits her third murder. She stays at his apartment for a week, but he’s the one who is plagued with nightmares.

The candlelight blushes on the mint tile of her bathroom. His knees rise like mountains from the bathwater, her body a pale, limp stretch of foothills between them. Arms around her, chin on her shoulder, the steam hanging low, thick enough to taste.

In his imagination, this is the inner sanctum of the cult of Scully, where narrow-boned priestesses anoint themselves with perfumed oil, where they submerge themselves in elixirs of salt and herbs, where they cleanse themselves of the filth of other people’s sins. It’s holy ground. She has so few luxuries in her life, and he's for damn sure not going to let Pfaster desecrate this one.

Exposure therapy, he'd called it. His idea.

She weeps silently, her breathing slow and controlled. Tears roll calmly down her cheeks and fall onto her breasts, seeking return to the water. Her quiet vulnerability torments him. He will not let anyone touch her, not ever again.

“I'm here,” he reminds her softly, his nose tracing the arc of her ear. “It's just me, baby. I've got you.”

His hands slide over her stomach in what he hopes is a soothing gesture. He thinks of hippie women
giving birth in inflatable pools, and flashes on an image of Scully ripe and lush with child before ruthlessly banishing the thought. No more of that, he reminds himself for the thousandth time.

Scully sucks in air and grabs one of his wrists, and he murmurs a half-formed apology before he realizes that she's guiding his hand between her thighs.

“Scully…”

“Please, Mulder. Make me forget.”

He kisses her temple, lifts one wet hand to her breast, nipple trapped and hardening in the v of his fingers. His lips on her neck, on her shoulder, his other hand skimming over the subtle mound of her mons, then lower, dipping into her without hesitation. She’s hotter than candle wax, as ornately petaled as an orchid.

“It's me,” he repeats when she comes undone, floating into the blessed oblivion of orgasm. “I've got you. It's me.”

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