Metamorphosis (1/2)

by Mort [archived by thebasement_archivist]

Notes

Note from alice ttlg, the archivist: this story was originally archived at The Basement, which moved to the AO3 to ensure the stories are always available and so that authors may have complete control of their own works. To preserve the archive, I began manually importing its works to the AO3 as an Open Doors-approved project in June 2017. I e-mailed all creators about the move and posted announcements, but may not have reached everyone. If you are (or know) this creator, please contact me using the e-mail address on The Basement’s collection profile.

Metamorphosis by Morticia

WARNING!!
NC-17
Children, get out of here right now!!!!

This X-files story contains scenes of m/m sex (Skinner/Mulder & Mulder/Krycek), graphic violence, non-consensual BDSM, sick sex games, abuse, rape and mental and physical torture.

Please do not proceed if this will offend you.

Should you decide to ignore this warning, then please enter and enjoy.

Metamorphosis by Morticia

http://morts-lair.com

Obligatory warning and disclaimer:
The characters are not mine, I am making no money from this, and I am far too poor to sue. This work contains characters and situations of the television series "The X-Files," which are the creations
and intellectual property of Chris Carter, Ten-Thirteen Productions, and FOX Broadcasting Co. The author makes no claim to ownership over these elements, and this work should be distributed only in a free manner without promoting monetary gain.

If you have found this story, you have already ignored a warning that it is graphic, violent and sick - so don't bother complaining if it offends you. Flames will be either ignored or laughed over.

Author's Notes

This is a bitter story, investigating the very darkest side of human nature. It is not one of those comfortable tales where there is a clear distinction between the 'heroes' and the 'villains'.

Neither is it a story where someone goes through a shattering experience but then mysteriously manages to just put it behind them and move on, as though nothing ever happened.

Pain, suffering and mental torture CHANGE a person. No matter how brave or strong they are, they will carry scars forever. You can't fuck with peoples minds and then expect them to be unaffected. Although this story has a "good" resolution, don't read it if you are looking for a fairy-tale ending. It ain't gonna happen!

None of the characters are particularly likeable in this story. Mulder is definitely the victim, yet he is defeated more by the manipulation of his own weaknesses than by the actual actions of the other characters.

The character of Skinner in this story will possibly offend you. He is not a 'nice guy', neither on the other hand, is he an evil person. I have deliberately chosen to portray the ruthless side of his character and he does a number of things that may sicken and/or disgust you.

He is, however, the hero of this story. An anti-hero, to be more precise, and his metamorphosis during the events that unfold, is a more subtle than Mulder's but perhaps more significant.

As for the frequent, non-consensual BDSM games played by various characters in this story...I would emphasise, that the very fact that it is non-con, makes the 'BDSM' description inappropriate.

Many people have and enjoy a lively and mutually satisfying D/s lifestyle. A good and responsible Dom does not abuse their sub, they simply fulfill an almost symbiotic need.

This is not a story about the D/s lifestyle, except in the way that it is a description of how the D/s lifestyle could be corrupted into an excuse to victimize someone. Victimization is NOT a good thing!!

Furthermore, Rape is Rape. End of story. There is no justification in the world that can excuse it. Just because I write that a character found that they 'enjoyed' the experience, is not a suggestion that it meant the rape was 'okay'. It simply means the character who was raped is fucked up in the head!!

Similarly, a number of the sex-games described are sick, painful and downright dangerous. I enjoy reading these things, I love writing these things, I do not, however DO these things, and I truly hope that you don't either!!!!

And if you do....well, do me a favor, and don't tell me about it!!

Morticia.

Part One
Walter Skinner put down the handset with a shaking hand and reached blindly for the bottle of scotch at his elbow. He could barely see himself filling the glass through his sudden tears.

Goddamn it, he thought, his numb fingers struggling to hold the heavy bottle, as the amber liquid poured into his glass.

It shouldn't have ended like this. After all that they had survived, all they had done together to escape that hell-hole, the idea of Rhodes's brains splattered over the wall of his study was obscene, a waste, a violation of the pact they had made.

He hadn't wanted to believe the first phone call, had rung Ginny himself, and heard her broken voice confirm the sordid details.

Numb with shock, her voice slurring with some prescription sedative, she had described hearing the shot, running to the study, finding her husband's body, his life cut short by a bullet that had left only a tiny hole in his temple but had removed the back of his skull with its exit.

The drugs had slurred her words as she had described the scene in horrific, microscopic detail. Shock talking perhaps, or maybe spite. She had found the book, found John's memoirs, had read everything. She had confronted him and minutes later he had taken his life.

"The book," Skinner had demanded in panic, and her detached, maddened laugh had made his spine shudder.

"I burnt it," she had cackled, "for the children, you bastard, only for the children."

He believed her, thank god. Ginny, even in her mad grief, would have protected her children from their father's crime. From discovering the monster who was their father. The creature that had worn soft slippers and owlish glasses like a benign schoolteacher, no outward appearance betraying the darkness of his soul, the blackness of his guilty past.

And in burning the book, Ginny had saved him too. He, Walter Sergei Skinner, was safe, his own crime concealed by the flames. He could breathe, could relax, for the first time in months, since the day John Rhodes had confessed that he had begun the memoirs.

Yet, instead of relief, all he felt was a crushing despair. Rhodes's guilt had driven him to eat a bullet; where could Skinner escape to except into this glass, this bottle, and this oblivion that only bought a brief respite from the memories.

It was war, he told himself, war with all its cruelty and hatred. A war that had made animals of them all, that had stripped their veneers of civility and exposed the beasts that lurked underneath.

It had been dog eat dog, kill or be killed. He had left 'Nam behind, had regained his life, regained his sanity and his respectability and had never once looked back, had never faced the memories. He had put it all away in a box, locked it tight and buried it.

Until Rhodes had called. Cancer, he had said. Rhodes had cancer. It was eating him alive like a voracious hungry beast. And with the knowledge of his mortality, Rhodes had faced his own demons of guilt, and in so doing, had forced open the floodgates of Skinner's own sordid secrets.

Skinner had actually forgotten the existence of the man, had unbelievably forgotten that there was still a living witness to his shame. With his whole platoon dead, with his failure to save any of them from the trap, he had actually forgotten that Rhodes, the civilian reporter, had survived the incident.

Of course, Rhodes's own part in what had happened had kept his mouth sealed. He had never once
made contact with Skinner, had never reminded Skinner of his existence until that fateful telephone call.

Walter had actually pleaded with him, had reminded him of their pact. He had asked Rhodes to consider his own wife and children, to think of Skinner's own career. Rhodes had promised that the memoirs were only for his own eyes, just fulfilling his own need for forgiveness, for confession. However, Skinner hadn't believed him.

He had spent the last few weeks waiting for a knock on the door or the shrill accusation of a phone call, for the skeletons to tumble out of his closet. Now, when the call had come, it had brought not condemnation, but reprieve.

Yet, as he gulped the fiery liquid and it burnt its way past his throat, he only felt the ghosts of his own memories threatening to spiral him into the madness that Rhodes had escaped.

As though a floodgate had opened, the images of torture and death haunted him without respite, without mercy.

"I did what had to be done," he told himself repeatedly, as he worked his way down the bottle. "I was too late, but the information could have saved the platoon, could have saved us all. I did what I had to do. It was war and he was the enemy!"

However, the words were no comfort, since what he had done had never been the source of his guilt. No, what he had never been able to face, what he had found so terrifying, what he had never once allowed himself to remember, was that he had enjoyed it.

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The cell door opened with a loud clang and Mulder pulled himself groggily off the bunk where he had been curled up, feigning sleep. As the hours had passed, he had decided that the only way he could hope to escape the smell of stale piss and the drunken moans of his hobo cell mate was to try and get some sleep.

Unfortunately, the mattress of the narrow bunk seemed to be the main source of the smell, and then the drunk had vomited in the corner of the narrow cell and then had begun to sing a raucous, cackling love song at him.

So he had retreated to the bed and tried to tune the noise out, positive that the sheriff was deliberately prolonging his captivity, just to emphasise how pissed off he was.

Shit, it hadn't been his fault that the killer had been Sheriff Blaine's own brother-in-law! So maybe Mulder had been a little over-zealous, pretending to agree with Dana's decision that the deaths were bizarre accidents and then sneaking back alone to catch Murphy in the act of hot-wiring a fuse-box to burn his next victim's house.

The occupants had already been injected with a quickly dispersing, non-traceable sedative and Murphy would again have been just 'fortunate' enough to be the main beneficiary of their will.

Murphy had been disbarred as a lawyer, several years earlier, for 'unprofessional conduct' and now ran the local library. He also moonlighted as a will-writer.

It hadn't taken long for Mulder to realise the thread that all of the 'accidental' deaths had in common was that Murphy was a beneficiary in every will.

Unfortunately, his theory had been undermined by the fact that all of the town people had named
Murphy to some extent or other, in lieu of payment for the drawing of the will.

AD Skinner, who had been acting even more tight assed than usual for weeks, in Mulder's opinion, had accepted Dana's decision that it wasn't an FBI case. He had ordered both of them back to DC. Mulder had returned, quickly filed a leave of absence with personnel, and had snuck back to Hortsville in time to catch Murphy in the act.

He hadn't expected Sheriff Blaine to be happy, and to be fair, the Sheriff hadn't hesitated to arrest Murphy on the spot. However, he had also arrested Mulder for acting without jurisdiction, breaking and entering, and carrying a firearm.

Mulder knew that a couple of phone calls would sort the problem out, but the way Skinner had been acting lately, he had absolutely no doubt that the AD was going to kick his butt, big time.

"You're booked on the first flight to Washington," Blaine told him, as he entered the cell.

Mulder wiped his bleary eyes and regarded Blaine's smug smile with trepidation. Blaine's satisfied grin spoke volumes of exactly how much shit Mulder was in.

"Get up, Mulder. It's a 30 minute drive to the airport and your plane leaves in 50."

"I have a hire-car," Mulder muttered. He would rather drive back to DC. It would give him time to think up a good excuse. A flight would get him back to Washington before midnight and he needed time to think.

"Believe me, boy, you are in enough hot water as it is, don't piss anyone off anymore," Blaine replied nastily.

Mulder shrugged and followed him sullenly to the police car.

"You do realise that your will was in Murphy's favour too?" he remarked to the furious Sheriff as they proceeded to the airport.

Blaine's hands tightened on the steering wheel, his knuckles going noticeably white even in the darkened interior of the car.

"Believe me, that's the only reason you are going home, Mulder," he finally admitted.

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Skinner slammed down the phone for the second time that night and hurled his now empty bottle at the kitchen wall. The shattering glass cascaded down into the sink. He closed his eyes in pain as the crash sent echoes of a similar splintering sound, that of knuckles crushed under a grinding boot.

I had to do it, he told himself. The whole platoon were heading into a trap, I had to discover the location of the enemy. But the boy's screams resounded in his memories and his cock twitched in betrayal, reminding him of his most effective torture. The act that had finally won him the needed intelligence. But too late, too fucking late.

FUCK! He staggered to his feet, and swayed as the change of altitude sent the alcohol rushing through his veins.

He had taught the boy a lesson, that was all. The stupid fuck had played with the big boys and had come unstuck. Skinner hadn't killed the boy, after all. That had been Rhodes, not him. So it wasn't his fault, wasn't HIS guilt.
The kid had been stupid, reckless and had gotten himself killed. Someone should have kicked his ass, put him in line, taught him some discipline before the enemy had turned him, used him and left him to die.

Like someone should kick Fox Fucking Mulder's ass!

What the hell had Mulder been thinking? He had gone alone, again. Without backup, again, to arrest the brother-in-law of the fucking Sheriff, in some backwoods town where the whole fucking population were so inter-bred that it was surprising the kids didn't all have two-heads.

He was going to ream him. He was going to make the stupid bastard sorry he had ever heard of Walter Skinner. He was going to fuck his ass so - SHIT! What the fuck's wrong with me? He asked himself desperately.

For a moment, Mulder's face had blended into the nightmare of his flashbacks. It had been Mulder's hand he had crushed with his foot, Mulder's back he had flayed, and Mulder's ass he had ripped open with the brutal weapon of his cock.

"You're drunk," he told himself. "Too drunk to deal with this shit. Go to bed, Walter. Go to bed, sleep, sober up, and put this behind you. Rhodes is dead, the boy is dead, and the past is dead. The war is over."

"I'll suspend him, that's all. I won't touch him. Of course, I won't touch him. I'd never hurt him. I'd never hurt Fox. My little wild untamable fox."

He staggered towards the door of his bedroom, swaying in the doorway, his befuddled brain assaulted by a harsh ringing. He tried to ignore the noise, unable to decipher it, hearing instead the alarm sirens of the army camp, the screaming of missiles.

A loud banging made him throw himself to the floor and roll.

"Incoming," he screamed to ghostly figures, seeing them explode, their guts ripping, their limbs scattering, their body parts raining down on him and he screamed as memory overcame him.

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Mulder's cold sweat had been replaced by artificial bravado by the time the plane landed. He had accepted a stiff drink from the courtesy hostess trolley, and the unfamiliar burn of the alcohol had sloshed so pathetically in his empty stomach that he had decided it was lonely and had steadily added enough companions for a veritable party.

It was just after midnight by the time he had staggered out to find a cab and then he had discovered that the sheriff, in some bizarre sense of humor, had emptied his wallet.

He didn't even have his ATM card; he had left it tucked in the visor of the hire car.

It was too cold to walk, he decided, and tried to get one of the cabbies to take him on a promise. Most of them took one look at his disheveled drunken appearance and refused to even wind down their windows.

He tried waving his ID at them, but they just laughed and ignored him, assuming it was one of those fake id's from a joke shop. He was just wondering whether he dared ring Dana reverse-charges when one of them finally took pity on him.

"I'm going home. I'll give you a ride into town," the cabbie offered gruffly.
It was against company regulations, but as long as he didn't log the journey, no-one would ever
know. He had a son about Mulder's age. He didn't like to think of anyone else's son being left on a
cold pavement in this state, particularly a young man as good-looking as this one. He had no illusions
about the kind of people who prowled the airport in the early hours, looking for vulnerable people.

Mulder climbed in gratefully. "I lost my money," he explained.

The cabbie just nodded, assuming Mulder meant at some bar. His passenger had the faint,
unmistakable odor of flophouse on him. He wondered whether the lad actually had anywhere to go.

"Where to?" he asked.

Mulder took so long to answer that the cabbie began to think he was right. The truth was that the
cold air had cleared Mulder's head enough to remind him he was in serious shit with Skinner, but
hadn't sobered him enough for common sense to take over.

He decided it would be a good idea to go to Skinner straight away, confess his sins and get reamed
out in private rather than wait for the morning and a public dressing-down, or even god-forbid, yet
another suspension. He knew he was on rocky ground at the bureau already. How many times could
he be suspended before he was out on his ass?

Nevertheless, he HAD solved the case, dammit. Skinner didn't have to tell anyone he had gone
without back up. If he could only get Skinner to calm down before he filed a report, he might get
away with it.

"Crystal City," he finally told the cabbie.

"You live there?" the cabbie asked dubiously.

"Nah, a friend, well he's not a friend, really. Actually, he's going to kick my ass," Mulder mumbled.

The cabbie nodded and decided he probably didn't want to hear the details. He dropped Mulder off,
waited until he walked into the lobby and then drove home.

Mulder was already ringing Skinner's doorbell when the madness of his actions struck him. He had
an insane urge to turn and run back to the elevator before Skinner answered the door. What moments
before had seemed like a good idea, suddenly struck him as monumentally stupid. Skinner would
have his ass for waking him at this time of the morning, he decided.

Then he saw the security camera that blinked from the top of Skinner's door. He had no way of
knowing that the film hadn't been changed for a couple of days and had stopped recording. All he
saw was the red, winking eye and he realised that it was too late to turn back.

He decided that the bell was possibly broken, and banged on the wooden door instead. The sound
reverberated in the corridor and he winced from the noise. He stopped his knocking and listened for
movement within.

A piercing scream broke the silence from behind the door. It was a howl of such terror that Mulder
didn't hesitate. He unholstered his gun and crashed his shoulder into the door. He yelped as his
shoulder collided bruisingly with the unyielding wood. He took a couple of steps back and charged
again.

This time the doorframe rattled under his assault, but still the locks and hasp held. Mulder changed
his gun into his left hand, holding it with difficulty because the impact had numbed his whole left
arm, and he charged again, aiming his right shoulder at the door this time.
The door swung open before he connected and he crashed into Skinner's living room, tripping over a low coffee table and sprawling onto the floor, his gun spinning away across the veneer floor and disappearing under the sideboard.

"WHAT THE FUCK ARE YOU PLAYING AT, MULDER?"

Mulder shook his head in confusion as Skinner's thunderous voice roared through the apartment. He scrambled to his feet in embarrassment and turned to face his boss.

Skinner's face was almost purple with outrage, his furious eyes almost black. Mulder blinked uncertainly, confused by Skinner's half-dressed state, red-rimmed eyes and the potent smell of alcohol that wafted off him.

Shit, Skinner was drunk. And obviously pissed as hell, he realised.

"I heard a scream," he said desperately. "I thought, I thought -" his voice trailed off as Skinner's face contorted into deeper rage.

"You didn't fucking think. You never do!" Skinner spat back.

Mulder blinked at Skinner's profanity. He had never seen the cold controlled AD lose his temper before. He hadn't even realised that Skinner knew how to swear.

"I'm sorry," Mulder replied, "I mean about Hortsville, and coming here and breaking in, and hell, I'm just sorry about everything," he offered.

"You don't know the meaning of the word sorry, you sad little fuck, but I am sure as hell going to teach you," Skinner replied, advancing on Mulder like an outraged bear.

Mulder gulped and took a step backwards. He didn't know who the hell was in the room with him, but it certainly wasn't AD Skinner. He saw this stranger with Skinner's face clench his fists and step forward and his nerve broke.

"I'm out of here," he gasped and spun towards the door. He had barely taken two steps before a hand caught the back of his collar.

He panicked, turned and lashed out at the bigger man. His fist connected with Skinner's stomach with a satisfying crunch. Mulder realised he had probably just kissed his job goodbye, but his instincts told him that his job was the least of his worries at the moment.

Skinner doubled over in pain as Mulder's fist struck his gut, but instead of letting Mulder's collar go, he dropped into a crouch, swung his right leg in an arc, and swept Mulder's feet out from under him.

Mulder, not expecting the commando move, fell backwards onto the hardwood floor and the impact knocked so much breath out of his lungs that he floundered, gasping, as he struggled for oxygen.

Skinner's heel crashed down on his outstretched left hand and ground into his knuckles and Mulder felt his bones crushing against the wooden floor. The agony made him howl and spring upwards only for Skinner's fist to connect with his jaw and sent him spinning into unconsciousness.

As the darkness claimed him, he heard Skinner snarling, "Where's the trap, you bastard?"

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Skinner came back to himself in horror. It was Mulder whimpering on the floor, Mulder he had
punched and kicked, Mulder whose hand he had smashed. He could see the broken knuckles already
darkening and swelling as the agent groaned and stirred.

What the hell had he done? He had just knocked the crap out of one of his own agents just for
coming to his apartment.

Not that the little bastard had had any right to come here, he reminded himself. Mulder stunk of
booze.

So do you, he reminded himself.

Shit. He would offer Mulder a deal. If he didn't mention tonight, he wouldn't suspend him over the
Hortsville stunt. Yeah, that would work, he told himself desperately. After all, Mulder had had no
business coming here in the middle of the night. He had been dreaming, still stuck in a nightmare, it
wasn't his fault, dammit!

Mulder had looked so damned young when he was unconscious, he realised. Without the infuriating,
defiant expression that Skinner was used to, Mulder's face had an almost innocent quality. Damn, he
was a good-looking man, Skinner mused.

He shook his head, realising that he was still drunker than he realised. What the fuck difference did it
make whether Mulder was good-looking? He sounded like a fucking queer!

"Wake up!" he growled at Mulder, transferring his own embarrassment into anger at the agent for
creating this situation.

Mulder's eyes opened and he flinched with definite fear, his hazel eyes darting in panic towards the
door.

Skinner's groin twitched in response to Mulder's panic, and he stiffened in horror at his body's
response. Fuck, what the hell was wrong with him?

"I'm sorry Agent Mulder," he offered, his voice shaking slightly.

Mulder's eyes widened incredulously.

"You're sorry? You broke my hand you bastard!" Mulder yelled, his face distorted with fresh agony
as his attempt to flex his fingers sent spikes of pain up his left arm.

"You woke me up. I thought you were a burglar," Skinner lied desperately, wishing he could sober
up enough to sound convincing.

"Bullshit. You called me by name, you drunken bastard. You did it on purpose. I'm going to report
you. I'll have your fucking job for this, SIR," Mulder replied, his pain and outrage fuelling his
drunken bravado.

Skinner grabbed him by the lapels and shook him furiously.

"You little punk. How many times have I put my ass on the line to save your butt? You dare to sit
here in my own home and threaten me?" he roared. He felt the room spinning as he panicked, as
Mulder's face spun before his eyes. He could hear the distant sound of gunfire, the screams of his
falling comrades.

Mulder screamed as Skinner shook him, making his agonised hand bang against the cold floor.
"FUCK YOU," he howled in defiance.

Skinner's eyes went blank, his face oddly still, as Mulder's words reverberated around his head. Fuck you, fuck you, fuck you, fuck you. He heard the ghosts whisper around him, the whirling overhead fan becoming the chopping sound of 'copter blades, Mulder's yelps becoming the screams of his colleagues.

He had to save them, he had to make the spy talk, he had to punish him for his treachery, he had to use the only weapon he had left to batter the bastard into submission. He knew what he had to do, what he wanted to do, what his body screamed at him to do.

He wrestled the spy over onto his front and began to rip at his combat fatigues, using his knee to pin the struggling captive down as he ripped the fabric away to reveal the bastard's traitorous ass.

The spy writhed and bucked beneath him, desperate to escape, but Skinner knew that this act would finally break him, would achieve what the earlier torture had failed to do.

In one brutal thrust he rammed into the spy, feeling his flesh rip through the bastard's ass, hearing the agonised howls of humiliation and disbelief beneath him. He bludgeoned the traitor's insides with his angry cock, feeling the blood that escaped the breached ass as it slid down his own thighs.

This wasn't sex; this was the worst violation he could do to another man. He pounded into his victim, battering, thrusting as though his cock was the sword of vengeance.

"Tell me!" he screamed, "Tell me where the trap is!"

It was his dream, his nightmare, the moment he had lived over and over for weeks, the memory that Rhodes had awoken, the shame that had haunted him so much that he had hidden it away from even his own mind until Rhodes had woken the ghost.

He knew how it ended, he knew the spy would break, would scream out the location as his insides were ripped and punctured by Skinner's cock.

But instead, the deja vu faltered, the Spy didn't give in this time, he just kept screaming, howling, begging, until Skinner felt his victim buck beneath him and then a new sensation, one he had never dreamt before. The spy bucked, his ass clenched, Skinner felt a series of contractions ripple up his cock, and he erupted inside the spy's ass.

Skinner's brain overloaded. No this didn't happen, he screamed at himself. It wasn't sex, I never came, he told himself desperately and ripped himself out and away, regarding his dripping cock with disgust.

"You whore! You fucking slut!" he screamed at the spy, realising that he had been milked, had been raped by his own victim.

He jumped to his feet and began to kick violently at the bastard who had dared turn his act of torture against him, who had dared to find some sick slut pleasure in being raped.

Mulder just curled into a whimpering ball against the assault of Skinner's feet. The rape itself, the pain and degradation of Skinner pinning him down and forcing himself inside his ass, had been so horrifying that he couldn't even begin to deal with it. However, when he had felt his own cock harden mid-assault and then erupt as Skinner had continued to bludgeon his insides, his own self-disgust had nearly made his mind snap.

He wasn't capable of rational thought, wasn't able to remember that any man's cock could respond
involuntarily to rape. All he knew was his own violation and a sense of shame that maddened him. Another man had overpowered him, had held him down, had raped him, and had violated him in the most brutal way. And he had cum.

Skinner had called him a whore, a slut, and in his dazed agony, he could only sob and believe that it was true.

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Part Two

When a noise finally woke Skinner, his head was thumping as though something was trying to sledgehammer its way out of his skull. His knuckles were sore, his stomach felt bruised, his dick ached as though someone had kneed him in the balls and he had a definite feeling that he had done something terrible, but he couldn't even begin to imagine what it was.

Squinting his eyes against the first pale light of dawn, which his brain interpreted as being as blinding as the full glare of the noon-sun, he carefully looked around himself, trying to work out why he had slept on the living room floor.

There was a dark anomalous stain on the hardwood floor. A puddle of dark, gelatinous fluid. He ran his fingers through the stain disbelievingly and raised them to his nose. His nostrils were assailed by the unmistakable, faintly metallic, smell of blood. He felt his stomach heave, yet still his brain refused to engage, to fill in the holes in his memory.

"I fell over," he muttered to himself. "That's it. I was drunk, maybe I hit my head. Lots of blood from a head wound." Yet the only pain in his head was internal, and his eyes tracked across the room, focusing finally on the smears that evidenced a victim crawling, dragging themselves perhaps, from the pool of blood, across the room and towards the door.

Again the sound that had awoken him, a rattle, a muffled bang, a tortured gasp of breath.

Skinner staggered upwards, trying to ignore the stabbing pain in his temples, the pulse of needles into his eyes, and the lurching of his stomach. It was not until he was on his feet that he could see over the leather sofa to the front door, and then he swayed in disbelief.

A battered, naked man was huddled on the floor by his door. His upper body was discolored by a multitude of bruises, his buttocks and thighs smeared with the brown stain of dried blood. One of his hands was smashed so badly that it had ballooned up to almost three times its natural size, and from his ragged, panting breaths, it seemed that the black and purple bruises covered at least one broken rib.

The man was trying desperately to draw back the heavy bolt that pinned the door to its frame.

Instinctively, Skinner stepped forward to help, only to be stopped by a yelp of pure terror as the injured man skittered backwards on his haunches, pulled his knees to his chest and wrapped his arms protectively around himself.

"I won't hurt you, boy," Skinner soothed as though gentling a wild animal.

It was only as the battered man raised his head in angry disbelief, his hazel eyes flashing in his swollen, bruised face, and in a voice raw with pain croaked, "That's hard to believe under the circumstances," that Skinner recognised him.

And with recognition came memory, and with memory came guilt, horror and fear.
"Mulder, oh my God, Mulder. I didn't - I wasn't - Oh shit, I'm so sorry!"

Mulder's haunted eyes flashed with hatred, but his voice emerged surprisingly steadily, as though calming a rabid dog.

"Just unlock the door, Sir. Please just let me go."

"You need a doctor," Skinner replied, desperately trying to process the unbelievable but unavoidable fact that he had raped and battered the other man. "Let me help you, please. Oh shit, Mulder, please. I'm so sorry."

He took a step towards the cowering man. His movement made Mulder yelp and tremble in fear.

"I just need to leave. Please unlock the door," Mulder gasped in a ragged, high-pitched voice, his eyes searching the room desperately, as though he was seeking something to use as a weapon.

Skinner opened his arms, trying to look as open and harmless as possible. He couldn't bear to see the terror on Mulder's face. He felt sick at the evidence of his own mad violence. Yet he also understood, at the most instinctive level, that he couldn't possibly let Mulder leave until they had resolved this.

"Your hand, your ribs, you need to see a doctor. Let me call someone to take care of you," he said soothingly. There might even be internal bleeding, Skinner reasoned, although the stains on Mulder's thighs seemed several hours old.

"Like you care," Mulder hissed.

Skinner's face darkened. He was trying to help, dammit, and still Mulder was defying him, still Mulder thought he knew better. Suddenly his panic and guilt took a back step to overwhelming anger. After all the weeks of uncertainty and fear over Rhodes's memoirs, and then the unexpected reprieve of Rhodes's suicide, he should have been waking this morning to a new chance, a new start. A life finally unblighted by his secret guilt.

Instead, he was facing ruin and possible imprisonment. It was intolerable. He had to start the damage limitation here and now.

"Come here, I'll help you, take you to someone who can help," he told Mulder firmly.

"Who won't tell you mean," Mulder accused.

Skinner shrugged guiltily.

"That too,"

"You don't want to help me, you just want to protect yourself," Mulder accused self-righteously.

"Fuck it, Mulder. I said I was sorry. I am sorry. What more do you want? Do you *want* to destroy me? It won't look good for you either, you know. Do you really want people to know what happened to you? Can you cope with people knowing that you let another man fuck you?"

"You didn't fuck me, you raped me. I'll tell the whole fucking world if I have to. The only way you can keep me quiet is by killing me. So go ahead, if you have the balls, and if not then just open the fucking door."

"Please, Fox. I am sorry. I was drunk. I was wrong. I did a terrible thing, God help me. But it's done, I can't take it back, I can't turn back the clock. What the hell do you want from me? My resignation?"
Skinner begged desperately, seeing his whole life going up in smoke because of one mistake. Admittedly a terrible one, but nothing that Mulder couldn't get over, dammit!

"Your resignation? I don't give a fuck about your job, Skinner. I want your fucking rapist ass in jail where it belongs. I don't care if you are sorry. Tell it to the judge, I don't want to hear it."

Skinner felt himself grow strangely calm. Mulder would do it, he realised. He had begged, pleaded, fucking crawled, and still Mulder was going to try to destroy him. And with that knowledge, he suddenly understood that it wasn't going to happen. He wouldn't let it happen. He wouldn't allow his whole life be sacrificed on the alter of Mulder's sniveling, vengeful pride.

"You mean when I tell the judge how you came when I fucked you?" he asked Mulder with a cruel grin and he saw the color drain out of the little bastard's face.

"Maybe we should call the medics now, Mulder. Get a DNA sample from your ass, and while they are at it, they can scrape a sample of your own spunk off your stomach."

"You raped me!" Mulder screamed, his eyes filling with tears of shame.

"Prove it!" Skinner countered coldly, and saw Mulder's face crumple.

"No one will believe you, Mulder. If I say you consented, that you just like rough sex, they will believe me," Skinner said, reasoning that Mulder would rather keep quiet than risk being branded a masochistic slut.

The fresh tears of despair that began to trickle down Mulder's cheeks as Skinner's threat sank in, gave Skinner an unexpected feeling of power. For a moment he actually reveled in Mulder's look of complete defeat.

Then the hazel eyes sparked with renewed intelligence and a sly satisfied expression replaced Mulder's previous distress.

"Yeah? How long do you think you'll keep your job, though? There's not much future in the bureau for a gay AD," Mulder hissed, and his mocking smile widened as Skinner's face went pale.

"I'm not gay!" Skinner howled.

"Prove it," Mulder countered.

And that's when Skinner realised that it didn't matter whether he managed to prove himself innocent of rape or not. He would still appear to be gay. He couldn't possibly explain his flashback. He could hardly admit that he had attacked Mulder because he had confused him with what had happened in Vietnam, without admitting what he had done to the traitor. Either way, the stigma of being a homosexual would haunt him for the rest of his life.

"I'm not a fucking queer!" He roared at Mulder.

Mulder shrugged, "Yeah, well, like I said, save it for the judge."

Looking at Mulder's face, seeing the relentless fire of vengeance in those hazel eyes, Skinner finally understood that short of a bullet through his head, nothing would make the self-destructive Mulder change his mind.

The very fact that he even dared to sit battered and naked in the home of his rapist and calmly swear that he would bring him to justice, proved to Skinner beyond doubt that nothing he could do or say
would ever quench Mulder's desire for revenge.

Mulder had no pity. He never gave up, never backed down, never chose the sensible option. Mulder didn't even have the sense to pretend to co-operate with him.

"You're a stupid, idealistic fool, Mulder," Skinner finally told him.

"Let me go," Mulder demanded again.

Skinner couldn't help but laugh at Mulder's spirit.

"I don't think so, Fox," he replied so softly that Mulder flinched with uncertainty.

"So you're going to kill me?" Mulder asked, with surprising quietness.

Skinner wondered whether Mulder actually hoped he would. Had the shame and humiliation been so great that Mulder just wanted to goad him into ending his life?

Well, tough. It wasn't going to happen. He wasn't a murderer. He had no intention of hurting Mulder any more. He just needed to get him to calm down, re-consider, see things more clearly.

"We're going to take a little trip, I think. A few days in the country will give you time to think it over and decide that it isn't something worth destroying both our lives over."

Mulder laughed a little hysterically.

"If you think I'm going anywhere with you, you are crazy. Besides, it's a waste of time. There's nothing you can say that will make me change my mind. A couple of days isn't going to make any difference to how I feel."

Skinner looked at him pityingly. The boy just didn't get it. He never had been able to see the wider picture.

"No, but it will be long enough to ensure that I can remove any physical evidence that I touched you. You see, I really am sorry Mulder. But I am not going to let you destroy my whole life because of one mistake.

"Come on, let me help you get dressed. We can sort this out. Once the physical evidence has been washed away, you will have absolutely no way of ever connecting me with what happened. No one will believe you. You're Spooky Mulder, the man who sees aliens lurking behind every closed door. They'll just laugh at you, just as they always laugh at you. You may as well accept that and get over it. Give it up, Mulder. It never happened."

Skinner saw the tears rolling down Mulder's cheeks as he finally accepted the hopelessness of his situation. He felt sick and ashamed of himself, but he had too much to lose. He hadn't done Mulder any permanent harm, after all. There was no reason why he should lose his job, his reputation, perhaps even his liberty, just because of Mulder's wounded pride.

He'd make it up to him, he reasoned. Once they were back at work he would give Mulder more leeway, let him chase his aliens, give him more autonomy with the x-files. That's all the little creep wanted anyway. It wasn't as if Mulder was a normal person, who would be traumatised by the rape. Hell, rumor was that Mulder hadn't been laid in ten years.

He would reward him so well for being reasonable that Mulder would end up thanking him for what had happened.
"Help me up?" Mulder asked weakly, offering his arms beseechingly.

Skinner was so convinced by Mulder's capitulation that he reached down, took a firm but gentle grip on Mulder's forearms and was caught completely by surprise when Mulder surged up from the floor, using his skull to batter Skinner under the chin.

The unexpected blow snapped Skinner's mouth shut and his teeth ripped into his own tongue. His head spun as his mouth filled with the coppery taste of blood. He felt Mulder's right hand connect with his already bruised stomach, and his knee came up instinctively into Mulder's naked groin.

As Mulder screamed and staggered, Skinner caught Mulder's fist, wrenched his fingers open and then snapped them backwards. He heard the splintering of bone, a howl of complete agony, and then Mulder collapsed in a dead faint at his feet.

"You stupid little fucker," Skinner gasped at the unconscious man, as sanity returned and he realised that he had now broken both of Mulder's hands.

"Why did you have to do that, you idiot? I didn't want to hurt you! I never wanted to hurt you."

It finally hit him then, what he had done. The fear of Rhodes's memoirs and the delayed post-traumatic shock of his memories, on top of a relentlessly stressful job, had tipped him over the edge. He was out of control. Mulder was right. He belonged in a jail cell and Mulder needed a hospital. He walked in a daze to his telephone, suddenly feeling old, guilty and lost. He would call the medics and then turn himself in.

But before his fingers hit the dial, his telephone rang in his hand.

"Skinner," he snapped into the handset.

"Um, sorry Mr. Skinner, it's Jenkins, the janitor."

"What do you want?"

"Um, there's been some complaints about noise. Your television, Mr. Skinner. It's 6.30am, Sir."

The janitor's voice snapped Skinner back into the reality of his precarious situation. Like a cornered wolf, the call reawoke all of his self-protective instincts. His brain swung into gear.

"Oh, sorry, I was watching a war-movie. I guess it was a little loud."

"Yeah, your neighbours said that it sounded like you were killing someone, but of course, you being FBI and all, it's obviously your TV," Jenkins said with a nervous laugh.

"Obviously. Sorry Jenkins, I'll turn it down."

"Thank you, Mr. Skinner."

So instead of ringing 911, he called Kim, apologised for getting her out of bed so early, and told her that he was unexpectedly taking some time off due to a close friend's bereavement. He also advised her that he had yet again bailed Mulder out of a jail cell the night before and that if, or when, the agent turned up again, he was to be informed that he was on suspension, pending an investigative hearing.

He wrapped Mulder in a blanket, carried him to the elevator and into the basement car park. He locked his unconscious body in the trunk, returned to his apartment and cleaned up all evidence that
Mulder had ever been there.

He put a video of a violent war movie in his machine, fast-forwarded it to a particularly bloodthirsty scene and stopped the player, leaving it as though he had stopped it there after Jenkins's phone call.

By 9 am, he was 30 miles out of DC, heading for the remote cabin near Chesapeake Beach, which the bureau had bought as a potential safe-house, but had never used. He needed somewhere private to convince Mulder to accept defeat.

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"Look, Skinner. You can't get away with this, people are going to come looking for me." Mulder said, making his voice sound as reasonable as he could manage considering the pain and embarrassment of his position.

He had woken to find himself still naked, but now in what he assumed was a wooden beach house, from the rough construction of the walls and the external noises of surf and gull cries. His wrists were handcuffed and cruelly looped over a low-hanging wooden beam. His feet barely touched the floor and the resultant pressure on his broken hands was agonising. His wrists were rapidly swelling and the cold metal of the cuffs was biting into his skin. To his considerable surprise, though, a tight bandage had been wrapped around his chest, supporting his broken rib.

"You're on leave, Mulder, pending possible disciplinary proceedings. As far as anyone is concerned, you have just dropped out of contact, as usual. No one, including Scully, will even start looking for you for weeks, and no one will find you by accident either. There are no neighbours for several kilometers, the house is set several hundred yards off the road, and at this time of year, the chances of passers-by is so remote that it isn't worthy of consideration," Skinner said dismissively, having had a long drive to think things through.

Mulder shuddered at the implication of Skinner's quiet confident words.

"Please, Sir. Think about what you are doing. You're throwing away you career, your life, for what?"

"As you took great pleasure in pointing out, I threw it away last night, Mulder. It's too late now," Skinner replied bitterly, hating Mulder for having let the situation develop this far.

"Look, I'm sorry. I won't tell anyone. I mean, like you said, no one would believe me anyway. Just let me go, Sir, please. It was my fault, I understand that, so just let me go and we can pretend it never happened," Mulder said, trying to force a smile over his face.

"Your fault?" Skinner asked, running his hands over his eyes in confusion. He couldn't believe this was happening. Events had happened so fast and he had panicked. If only he could turn back the clock, but he couldn't. His life, his job and his freedom were on the line and he hated Mulder for having set in motion the events that could destroy him. Yes, Mulder was right for once. It was his fault.

"Yeah, I disobeyed you as usual, then instead of facing the consequences, I came to your apartment uninvited in the middle of the night. I was drunk, I hit you first," Mulder soothed. "What, what you did then, well you were drunk and we were both crazy. It's okay. Honest, Sir. Just let me go and we can both put it behind us."

The words nearly choked Mulder. He was trying to make his rapist feel better about raping him, and that was so sick that it hurt; yet he couldn't think of any other way to get out of the handcuffs. He
believed that Skinner had the power to hide him in this deserted cabin for weeks. And then what? A watery grave would be the most probable outcome. Skinner would never dare let him go if this went on any longer.

He needed to give Skinner an out, a reason to stop this madness before it went any further. All he had to do was somehow convince Skinner that he wouldn't press charges. He tried desperately to profile this stranger wearing Skinner's face. A good man, he knew that, really. Skinner wasn't evil, but he had successfully hidden a terrifyingly dark soul.

He knew that Skinner had been in some form of fugue state the night before, probably some flashback to his Vietnam experiences. Thinking back, Skinner had been on edge for weeks, maybe even on the brink of a nervous breakdown. He certainly had been out of character, even his language had been alien. So Skinner had been out of control then and drunk to boot, but surely in the cold light of day he could be reasoned with.

Or maybe not. Maybe he had just never seen the real Skinner before. He could understand Skinner attacking him. But what the hell had caused the violence to turn into rape? Skinner had raped him and no matter how many times Skinner said he was sorry, Mulder was damned sure that Skinner had enjoyed doing it. Why else would he have brought him here and chained him up still naked?

Drunk or not, crazy with anger or not, Skinner had tapped some darkness in his own soul and now that it had been unleashed, he was still a very dangerous man. Nausea churned in his stomach as he forced himself to say his next words, the lies that he thought could save his life.

"I've always found you attractive, Walter. You didn't have to force me. I would have agreed."

Mulder thought that by identifying himself with Skinner's obvious latent homosexual urges, the other man would find it easier to believe Mulder would forgive him the assault. He was completely astounded by the rage his words created.

"You FAGGOT," Skinner screamed, smashing Mulder across the face with an open palm. "You think I wanted to touch your dirty, queer ass?"

Mulder reeled against the pain in his cheek, and then howled as Skinner brought a knee up sharply into his already bruised groin.

Skinner was incensed. He wasn't a fucking queer. He had thought it was a dream, He had thought he was fucking the traitor. How dare the bastard say he was GAY? And then he remembered. Mulder had cum, the fucking slut had cum and then had the nerve to call him a rapist?

"You liked it?" he growled, "You enjoyed me fucking you, you little pervert?"

"No," Mulder gasped, realising he had made a terrible error.

"Don't lie to me," Skinner screamed and punched him in the gut. Mulder gagged and threw up, his arms almost dislocated as he heaved against the restraints.

"You're a fucking queer. No wonder you're so damned spooky," Skinner snarled. "How many times have I put myself on the line for you? How many times have I saved your little faggot ass? And all the time, you were just some fucking pervert?"

"I should have guessed it, you're too fucking good-looking to be single. No wonder you live alone, you creep. How many guys have stuck it up your ass, huh? Did you do it on purpose? Is that why you came to my house? To destroy me?" he screamed with such fury that he was literally spitting in
Mulder's face.

"I'm not gay," Mulder gasped as Skinner's spittle ran down his cheeks.

"You came! You fucking enjoyed it!" Skinner accused, as memory came back, and with it his feelings of disgust.

"No, it was the most terrible, painful thing that ever happened to me," Mulder gasped.

Skinner began undoing his belt.

"So, you just like it rough, huh? That what you trying to say, boy?"

"No, no, please, Sir," Mulder cried as he saw Skinner wrapping the buckle end of the leather belt around his fist and he suddenly understood the threat of the action.

"I'm going to show you *exactly* what I think of your dirty little ass, Mulder," Skinner snarled and swung the belt.

Mulder heard it snap through the air and then it struck his buttocks with a savage bite that made the air in his lungs expel violently. The pain was as sharp as a knife and then a fiery burn spread through his ass and flamed into a wave of heat. Before he could draw breath, another blow joined the first.

Mulder tried to clench his teeth against the pain, but as the blows rained down incessantly, he lost his self-control and began to scream in earnest. His howls only seemed to spur Skinner's anger. Skinner cracked the belt repeatedly, until the raised welts began to tear and bleed down Mulder's thighs.

Mulder was dangling in the handcuffs, barely able to breathe for the continuous screams forced from his dry throat. He finally passed out from shock, only to be woken by the thrust of Skinner's cock into his ass.

The excruciating agony of Skinner's hips grinding against his torn flesh was almost negated by the stabbing pain in his insides as Skinner rammed his dick into his ass in one brutal thrust.

"You like this, boy?" Skinner mocked as he pulled out and then roughly rammed back in to the hilt.

Mulder's wail of pure agony only inspired Skinner to more brutality.

"This turn you on, does it? You little cock-sucking fairy?" He snarled as he rearranged Mulder's insides with his vicious thrusts.

"No, NO. Stop, please, stop, it HURTS!" Mulder howled.

"I'm doing you a favour, boy, I'm going to cure you of this perversion once and for all," Skinner hissed.

"You're mad. You're a fucking psycho," Mulder screamed, as Skinner pounded into him. Blood was pouring from his wrists where he writhed against the cold steel of the handcuffs and he could feel the squelch as his insides tore against the assault of Skinner's brutal cock.

And to his horror, as the agony increased, Mulder felt his own cock stirring to hungry life again.

"NO," he whimpered as his body responded of its own accord to the pain/pleasure of Skinner's internal pounding, and his own cock began to weep in excitement.

Mulder was a psychologist; he knew that it was normal for a man to respond sexually to being raped.
He had spent several hours curled up in agony on Skinner's floor, desperately reminding himself of that fact, refuting Skinner's accusation that he was a slut and a whore.

Yet, the knowledge did nothing to ease his own humiliation when, as Skinner's semen erupted inside him, so his own cock spurted in harmony and his orgasmic trembles made his anal muscles spasm and milk Skinner's cock.

As Mulder's, hot tight passage kneaded his cock, Skinner grunted with unexpected pleasure. Mulder's ass was almost painfully tight and the rippling internal muscles massaged him until he was forced to withdraw his now over-sensitized cock.

He stumbled back, almost collapsing from his own exertions and he saw his cum sliding out of Mulder's ass in a pinkish stream.

He felt oddly exhilarated. His body zinged with the power of having taught Mulder a lesson. Then he noticed the cum dripping down Mulder's stomach.

"Liked that, did you?" Skinner mocked, grabbing Mulder's sweat-drenched hair and pulling his tear-stained face up. Mulder's eyes were squeezed shut.

Skinner ran a finger around Mulder's chest, smearing the cum in a lazy circle.

"Slut," he whispered, "that's all you are, Mulder. A fucking little homo slut!"

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Skinner parked the car in the mall, rested his head on the steering wheel and tried to stop his body trembling.

//What the fuck am I doing? // he asked himself desperately. //I'm not queer! //

Yet, instead of feeling shame at his second rape of the agent, the memory of Mulder's bleeding ass just made his dick jump with renewed excitement.

It was a way out, that was all, he decided finally. Mulder was a faggot. Shit, he had come all over the place both times he had raped him.

So it hadn't been rape at all. Mulder *had* encouraged him. It wasn't a lie. Shit, he had probably come to his apartment just to sell his ass in exchange for his job. Blackmail, maybe, only it had backfired in Mulder's face. Mulder wouldn't dare report him now that he knew the truth. Skinner could just cut him loose now and let the little queer slink off to lick his wounds. Hell, Mulder wouldn't dare even look him in the eye again, let alone disobey orders.

So he didn't *have* to do this. He didn't have to take this any further. The threat was gone, the damage had been contained. He was safe. He could let Mulder go and just walk away now.

Only he didn't want to.

He moaned in confusion.

He couldn't do it. He couldn't let the little Fox out of the snare. Something had snapped in him this morning as he had swung that belt against Mulder's ass and heard the pathetic wails of agony.

Instead of feeling sick and ashamed, he felt powerful, virile, in control.

For the first time in years, he finally had Mulder cowed and it wasn't until he heard Mulder's first
howl that he had realised that he had *always* wanted to wipe that smug, arrogant grin off Mulder's face.

Power, that's all it was. Nothing sexual after all. Just to finally be able to dominate the one man he had never been able to subdue.

Taming the Fox.

The thought made his cock stir again.

Hell, all Mulder had ever needed was discipline and he finally had the chance to give it. As long as he kept it sexual, Mulder would never dare report him. He had maybe four weeks to break the Fox before anyone started to seriously search for him, and now he knew that Mulder was just a fucking pansy, he knew he could do it.

He would simply fuck the little slut into submission. That didn't make him queer anymore than fucking that stupid informant kid in 'nam had made him queer.

He had fucked that little slanty-eyed bastard until the boy had screamed the names of his associates. Skinner's cock had broken the kid, and it would break Mulder too.

Power, that's all it was. Those who had it and knew how to use it, and losers like Mulder who just learnt to take it up the ass.

Skinner's eyes grew cold as he returned back to that long, long night in Vietnam. Oh, yeah, he knew exactly what he could do to win control.

He got out of the car and walked towards the store, his mouth curled into a sneer.

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"I've been shopping," Skinner announced happily, dumping two huge brown paper sacs on the table.

Mulder didn't even bother to try and respond. He just dangled lifelessly against the restraints. He had lost all feeling in his smashed hands and torn wrists, and his toes were numb with cold as his weight pressed them against the tiled floor.

Skinner walked over and unlocked the cuffs.

Mulder's feeling of relief, as his arms dropped to his sides, was almost immediately drowned by agony as his nerve endings came back to life and blood surged through his frozen limbs. He crashed heavily to the floor, as his legs refused to accept his weight, and he screamed as his knees hit the unyielding floor.

Skinner turned away in apparent disinterest.

Mulder was only a few feet from the door and Skinner was now across the room, peering into his bags. He could make it, Mulder decided. He had heard the unmistakable sound of a bolt and hasp when Skinner had left earlier. If he could just get out of the door, he could lock Skinner inside. He started to crawl forwards, on his elbows and knees, and the pain in his buttocks made him sway dizzily.

Come on, he told himself, move, MOVE.

He inched forward another foot before he had to stop to let the rushing blood in his head subside.
He lost awareness of time, of Skinner, of everything but pain and the need to move.

Inch by torturous inch he dragged himself forwards, his teeth clenching, his breath coming in short, frantic gasps. It wasn't until his forehead finally touched the door that Skinner's voice spoke casually from the back of the room.

"It's locked."

For a long time Mulder just rested his head against the door and felt the bitter wave of defeat and humiliation overwhelm him, and then he shook his head like a dog and turned his head towards Skinner.

The man was sat casually at the table, a smirk playing on his face, his legs stretched out in front of him in a posture of complete relaxation. His eyes were so cold and dark, however, that Mulder's immediate urge to scream abuse was quelled.

He didn't know this man, this monster with Skinner's face. For an insane moment, he wondered whether it was an alien in the room, who just looked like the AD. There was certainly nothing human in that cold, smirking face.

"Please," Mulder heard himself croak, and flushed at the pathetic tone of his own voice. "Let me go, Sir. I'm sorry, please, I'm sorry."

"You sound thirsty," Skinner replied conversationally. "Here, have a drink," and his foot pushed against an object on the floor.

To Mulder's horror, it was a dog bowl.

"Fuck you," he croaked.

"Now, remember what happened *last* time you said that," Skinner growled and was satisfied by Mulder's flinch of fear. "Come here and drink."

He watched Mulder hesitate, need warring with pride, and then thirst won and Mulder began to crawl painfully towards the bowl. Skinner was just enjoying the sight of Mulder crawling naked towards him when something made the younger man slither to a halt and drag his protesting body to a kneeling position.

"No way, no fucking way, I'd rather die," Mulder gasped.

In large black letters, the dog bowl had been inscribed, "Fox."

"Not thirsty, after all?" Skinner said mildly and reached down to upend the bowl. He watched Mulder's despairing eyes as the water slid between the cracks in the broken tiles and Mulder's tongue licked desperately at his cracked lips.

"Let's see, what else have we got here? Hummn." He rummaged in the bag and withdrew a thick mahogany leather dog collar.

Mulder began to scramble backwards in terror, his pain almost forgotten in his panic to escape. Skinner moved with the speed of a cobra, jumping to his feet, racing to Mulder and striking a blow to the middle of Mulder's back that punched him to the floor. Then Skinner squatted over him and deliberately sat down on Mulder's swollen ass.

Mulder screamed and writhed in pain but was unable to break free of Skinner's weight. Skinner
waited until his thrashing ceased in a sigh of bitter surrender, then reached forward, and fastened the collar around Mulder's neck.

"That colour really suits you, Fox," he murmured conversationally.

Then he casually rose back to his feet and returned to his chair, leaving Mulder to haul himself slowly to his knees. He watched with amusement as Mulder attempted to wrestle with the stiff leather with his useless, broken fingers.

Next he produced a set of handcuffs, these ones broad black leather and softly padded on the inside. He was concerned about Mulder's festering wrists, but knew he needed to set the bones of Mulder's fingers and he couldn't imagine Mulder letting him touch his swollen hands without the restraints.

He found the antibiotic ointment, slathered it on the padding, and then approached Mulder. Again, Mulder tried to scramble away.

"You got the first one for free, because you didn't know the rules, Fox." Skinner snarled, "Resist me again and I promise you that you will regret it."

"Don't call me Fox," Mulder hissed back, defiantly.

Skinner kicked him viciously in the ribs.

"Rule no 1, don't ever fucking tell me what to do. Rule no two, if you ever try to stop me doing something to you, I will beat the shit out of you. Now, sit up and put your hands out."

"Screw you," Mulder snarled.

Skinner kicked him in the balls. Mulder screamed and curled into a fetal ball, instinctively clutching his hands his agonised testicles. The additional pain from his fingers engulfed him in a wave and he passed out.

When he woke, he was draped over the width of the table, his wrists and ankles handcuffed together between the table legs. Skinner had taken the opportunity of his unconsciousness to splint his fingers, and pulses of pain gnawed incessantly up his arms.

Skinner waited until Mulder's wakening groan before slicing the paddle down on his ass. Mulder yelped as the slap reopened his scabbed welts. As Skinner continued, careful to vary his rhythm and strike a different place with each blow, he spoke.

"For swearing at me, you get twenty. The twenty starts when you begin to count. If you pass out or stop counting, the twenty starts again, and then you will thank me." It took a moment for the words to sink into Mulder's head and at first he refused to reply, but as the blows continued, and he realised Skinner would never stop, he finally gave in.

"One," he hissed, "two,"

He threw up at eight, his empty belly heaving furiously. Skinner waited for the retching to cease and then he swung the paddle again.

"One," he announced.

Mulder nearly screamed at Skinner's sadism but found himself instead tearfully agreeing "two" as the next blow landed.
At twenty, Skinner loudly dropped the paddle on the table and then waited.

Mulder just lay sobbing on the table, his swollen burning ass driving all reason from his head.

"Don't you have something to say, Fox?" Skinner demanded.

//Shit, no way, no fucking way,// Mulder thought, but as he saw Skinner reach for the paddle again, Mulder's remaining pride snapped.

"Thank you," he gasped.

"Properly," Skinner growled, slapping the paddle against his hand warningly.

The sound drove Mulder's last vestiges of resistance from his head.

"Thank you, Sir," he groaned.

Skinner was silent, putting the paddle down again with a disappointed sigh. He had expected Mulder to be far more resistant. Then again, the heat emanating from Mulder's ass was breath taking. He had to be in agony. He ran his hands experimentally over the blazing cheeks and Mulder squirmed and whimpered.

The welts were weeping dangerously, so Skinner took a large handful of the antibiotic ointment and began rubbing it gently over the abused skin. Mulder couldn't help himself from whimpering with relief as the cold lineament eased the burn.

Fascinated by Mulder's ecstatic, grateful writhing, Skinner wondered whether the heat and damage extended inside.

He took a latex glove from his bag, covered it with ointment and began to push his middle finger into Mulder's ass. Either the earlier fucking or the paddling had completely overwhelmed Mulder's internal muscles and Skinner found himself easily pushing a couple of fingers into Mulder's hole.

The fevered heat nearly burnt his fingers and excitement overtook him. He decided that his cock could spread the ointment just as easily, so using it as lubrication; he covered himself with the cream and dove into Mulder's ass.

This time he took a leisurely pace, enjoying Mulder's helpless whimpers as his hips slapped the burning butt. He ground his hips, deliberately aiming each gentle thrust at Mulder's prostate until the younger man was yelping in confusion, no longer sure whether this was a punishment or a reward.

After the agony, this gentle fucking, even into his torn ass, was almost blissful. Mulder howled and came and again Skinner found himself milked dry by Mulder's orgasmic threshing. He slid out and pulled his trousers back up, then slipped under the table and unfastened Mulder's ankles and wrists.

Then, before Mulder could find the strength to move, Skinner rose back up, took Mulder's limp arms, drew them back and handcuffed them together behind his back. He attached a tight chain between the cuffs and the collar and then stepped away and returned to his chair.

It was nearly twenty minutes before Mulder found the strength to take his weight in his legs and stand. He tried a tentative step, but the shooting pain from his ass stopped him in his tracks. The idea of walking even a step was too agonising to contemplate.

Skinner was flicking through a magazine and ignoring him. At his feet, the dog bowl had been refilled with water.
Part Three

Mulder squirmed helplessly on the bare mattress, his mind skittering nervously as he imagined all manner of bugs and spiders creeping over his naked skin in the unending darkness.

The room seemed almost to breathe around him, like a black womb, heaving menacingly with the faint sounds of slithering movement. The tapping of tiny nails on the stone tiled floor, the low drone of buzzing insects, the faint breezes that stirred the air as they chased the tiny chinks of light that crept through the boarded windows.

His eyes had adjusted to the pitch black, he could now make out dim shadows in the room, the hulking shape of Skinner's table, the faint outline of his own hands as he raised them to his face, yet straining to see through the gloom only fueled his fear. The shadows seemed to move with the wailing accompaniment of the wind that was battering the cabin from the nearby shore.

Shapes moved through the dark shadows, flickered at the corners of his vision, yet when he turned his face there was nothing there. Just utter blackness.

Even without the restraining chain, which Skinner had locked between the bedpost and his collar, he would have been unable to move. His whole body was a fiery burn of agony, from his broken fingers to his whipped and torn ass.

Yet, the restraint and the pain were almost insignificant next to the mind-numbing fear of the absolute darkness of his prison.

Although his mind remembered the wooden walls of the cabin, he couldn't escape the growing belief that the shadows hid the dank, stone walls of a crypt.

Skinner, if the man even was Skinner, which Mulder was finding it increasingly impossible to believe, had seemed hardly aware of his presence that morning. He had ignored his captive, instead concentrating on securing the cabin, either against Mulder's escape or perhaps simply the interest of any passers by. He had carried out his task with the almost mindless precision of a soldier, barely paying attention to the reason for his endeavors.

Mulder, in turn, had just lain on the bed, desperately trying to stifle his moans of pain, cold and distress, lest Skinner's black eyes should turn their emotionless gaze back to him.

All thoughts of trying to reason with the older man had fled as soon as he woke in agony and found himself chained tightly to the bed. Like a wounded animal, Mulder's only instinct was to curl his body protectively around his battered soul, and hope stupidly that Skinner would simply go away.

Skinner had spent the dawn hours outside, methodically securing heavy planks over the windows of the cabin. One by one, the wooden slats had stolen the daylight, until Mulder was trapped alone in the dusty cabin, only the open door casting any light into the now shadowy room.

He had lain on the bed, terrified of the moment that Skinner would re-enter the cabin and hurt him again. His body was ablaze with pain already, and the way that Skinner had chained him to the bed still naked had convinced him that the other man had every intention of raping him again as soon as he had finished boarding up the windows.

To his bewilderment, however, Skinner had returned to the room mid-morning, staying only long enough to fill the dog bowl with water and place it on the mattress, next to the footrest. Then without a word he had put on his jacket and left.
As soon as he closed and locked the door behind him, the room was plunged into complete darkness.

As time passed and Skinner failed to return, Mulder's immediate feeling of relief was slowly eroded as the cabin seemed to come to life around him.

Empty for many years, the cabin had become the home of a myriad of tiny creatures and the darkness seemed to lure them out of their hiding places. Between the torturous wheezes of his own breath around his broken rib, Mulder could hear the scuttling of roaches and spiders, mice, perhaps even rats. His vivid imagination chewed and worried on his fears, letting a claustrophobic panic replace his true fear.

The fear that he would never see daylight again.

That this cabin would become his crypt. His lonely, cold, dark grave.

Skinner was insane. There was no other explanation that Mulder could come up with. The seemingly respectable AD had raped him three times, had smashed his fingers, had whipped him bloody and had now left him alone here in this deserted cabin, chained like a dog.

Perhaps Skinner was never coming back. Perhaps he would simply leave Mulder to starve to death, to be eaten by the wilderness creatures that had made their home in the deserted cabin.

Part of him longed for that oblivion, the cessation of the pain that coursed in waves through his battered body. Even though the pain might fade in time, the memory of the last 24-hours was more than he thought he could bear to live with anyway, he decided. The knowledge that he had been so easily and brutally overpowered by the other man was shattering. He felt as though his whole persona had splintered into shards so tiny and sharp that any attempt to make sense of Skinner's behaviour sent needles of pain into his head.

He was an FBI Agent, trained in unarmed combat. He had carried that image of himself like armour against the world. In less than a day, Skinner had peeled away Mulder's delusion of strength and had left him floundering, floating like driftwood on a sea of shattered illusions.

As much as he had fitful daydreams of vengeance, fantasies of escaping and killing his abuser, so also did he wonder whether he would ever be able to face ANY man with confidence again. Would it be evident? Would this experience have left and invisible but nevertheless obvious mark on his face proclaiming that he was now less than a man? That he was easy prey?

He was a victim now, one of the nameless many. Another man had raped him, and in doing so had fractured that indefinable thing that made him a man. Skinner had not only debased his body, but also his soul.

Another man had overpowered him and used him like a piece of meat, and he had been helpless to prevent it.

Mulder had interviewed many victims of rape, most female, a few male, and he had tried to empathize with them, had tried to help them bring their attackers to justice. Sometimes their inability to deal with what had happened to them, their refusal to press charges against their abusers, had frustrated and even angered him. He had been unable to imagine how a person could let their rapist escape justice, just to avoid making a statement.

He had been so unwittingly arrogant, he realised. He finally understood. He would rather die than be forced to face Skinner again, even on a witness stand.

The only way for anyone to mentally survive such trauma was to pretend that it had never happened.
He understood that now. He just wanted to go home. He wanted to hide, and heal, and learn a way to pretend that he was still Fox Mulder, FBI Agent.

Skinner could have driven him home today and just walked away, safe in the knowledge that Mulder would rather die than ever have to articulate what had happened to him. He couldn't ever tell a soul, he couldn't bear the thought of seeing the pity and disgust in their eyes if he revealed his shame. The thought of seeing himself through their eyes made him feel physically sick.

Which was all very well and good, except that Skinner hadn't. His rapist hadn't released him. He had left him chained in this cold, dark, lonely place. Perhaps simply to die.

Suddenly the idea was seductive. Dying seemed a good option. He would never have to face himself in a mirror and discover what a man looked like after he had been stripped of his soul.

Hours passed as he tossed and turned feverishly on the small bed, the chill of the air on his naked skin almost welcome against the swollen heat of his wounds. His throat was so dry and raw that he actually began to contemplate the dog bowl that Skinner had placed on the end of the bed before turning off the light and leaving him alone.

With his splinted, broken hands, the only way to drink the liquid would be to lap at it like a beast, and since he wanted to die, it seemed ludicrous to accept the humiliation. Yet, pride seemed equally bizarre, considering that his only possible witness was a God that, if he even existed, had obviously turned his face away from him.

So his raging thirst finally overwhelmed his pride, and he shuffled towards the end of the bed, only to then discover that the chain caught tight before he reached the water.

"You bastard," he croaked. "You fucking sadistic bastard."

His head flooded with images of Skinner's mocking smirk, of his cruel laughter. Yeah, Skinner was probably sitting in his office right now, imagining the look on Mulder's face when he finally tried to drink and discovered that the water bowl had been left as a cruel tease.

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Mulder felt sick with terror when his restless dozing was finally interrupted by the unmistakable sound of the front door being unpadlocked. Yet he couldn't deny that there was a tiny amount of relief mixed in with the fear.

As much as he dreaded Skinner's return, he had begun to honestly believe that he wouldn't, and it was one thing to want the oblivion of death, quite another to lie in the darkness and feel his life slowing ebbing away as hunger and thirst gnawed at his already agonised body.

He curled up on the bed to try and cover his nakedness before Skinner turned on the light. It wasn't so much embarrassment that made him want to hide from the other man's gaze, as the very real terror that his vulnerable groin would inspire the other man to a repeat of his earlier abuse.

He didn't realise that Skinner found the sight of him curled in a terrified fetal ball more attractive than any wanton display of nakedness.

Skinner licked his suddenly dry lips as he flicked on the light and saw Mulder quivering on the bed in obvious terror.

He had called into the office to check that his request for sympathetic leave had been accepted without question. Kim had advised him sorrowfully that Mulder seemed to be lying low. Enquiries
had confirmed that he had arrived back in DC, but none of the airport taxis had a record of carrying him home, and his apartment was empty.

To Skinner's relief, even Dana had been more concerned about covering Mulder's ass to the AD, than worrying about where he had disappeared to. The general consensus of the office was that Mulder, realising he would be suspended anyway, had simply taken the opportunity to disappear off on another crazy hunt for alien abductors.

Deciding to put his desk in order before leaving, Skinner had managed to get through a couple of hours at the office with his usual aplomb, then had spent the afternoon anonymously surfing the net at an internet cafe, before visiting a number of back street shops that he had located through his research.

It had been a productive day, all things considered, but the drive back to the safe house had been torturous. Guilt and fear began to gnaw at his mind as he drove down the deserted road to Chesapeake. He had visions of Mulder escaping, of the cabin being filled with cops, all waiting guns drawn, to take him into custody for his kidnap of the agent.

The building tension had been unbelievable, as the fear of discovery put a new edge on what was already a bizarre fantasy come to a nightmare existence. His veins buzzed with a vitality that he hadn't experienced since Vietnam. He had crossed the line, stepped out of his respectable life and into a war zone, where only the strongest and smartest would survive.

Yet, not once had he even considered releasing his prize.

He bolted the door firmly, knowing that Mulder hadn't the strength to overpower him and escape, but ensuring that the door was impossible for Mulder to open with his shattered fingers regardless. In making such an obvious show of drawing the bolts, he hoped to stop Mulder from even attempting an escape.

He didn't want to physically discipline Mulder again for a few days. The younger man was in bad shape already. For Skinner's plan to work, Mulder needed to heal a little. He didn't intend to batter Mulder into submission. Pain would have its place and purpose here, but the most important work would have to take place with Mulder's mind.

He walked over to the bed, watching the younger man carefully. Despite Mulder's obvious terror, his eyes met Skinner's and blazed with proud fury. Skinner was sure that only Mulder's dry, chapped mouth prevented a string of obscenities being thrown at him.

He ignored Mulder's impertinent glare and simply unlocked the chain from Mulder's collar, returned to his chair and began to flick through one of the magazines he had picked up earlier in the evening.

He couldn't believe the cess-pool of depravity that he had stumbled on in his research. The photographs in the magazine were so bizarre that he was half-convinced that they were computer graphics. He had led a relatively sheltered sex life himself. Sharon had never been an uninhibited sexual partner, and Skinner's odd short-lived affairs had always been with women who preferred, what appeared to be called, vanilla sex.

He chuckled at the phrase, beginning to feel intrigued by the possibilities of experimentation. It was Mulder's totally unexpected sexual deviance that had set him down this line of research. Although he wasn't gay himself, obviously, Skinner saw no difference between what he intended and prison sex. In prison, the strongest inmates used the weakest ones for sexual release. It wasn't about sexual attraction, it was about power.
Skinner liked power. He was particularly intrigued, however, by Mulder's peculiar reaction to having been beaten. Unbelievably, he now understood, there were people, sad little fucks, who actually got turned on by pain, and Skinner was beginning to be sure that Mulder was one of them.

The idea of the arrogant little prick learning to crawl at his feet and actually beg to be beaten and fucked, was so bizarrely wonderful that it made Skinner heady with the sense of divine justice. Never again would he have to sit in his office and listen to the little bastard's pathetic excuses for his behaviour. By the time he had finished with Mulder, the agent wouldn't dare even fart without his permission.

God was smiling on him, he decided. After all these years of Mulder's defiance, he had been handed the key to Mulder's personality.

Suddenly all of his previous interactions with the agent took on a new, more intriguing slant. Perhaps Mulder had always been pushing him to this moment with his outrageous behaviour. Subconsciously, the part of Mulder that longed to be dominated had pushed at Skinner, sensing in him a man who could finally give him what he really wanted.

Yes, that was it, he decided. Mulder wanted this. He wanted Skinner to take charge and prove that he was the alpha male. He had purposefully driven Skinner over the edge.

Mulder wanted this. All that remained now, was for Skinner to prove it to him.

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For a long time Mulder just sat on the bed, either too scared or sore to move, and then he slowly dragged himself to his feet. His eyes watched Skinner warily as he began to hobble slowly towards the bathroom.

Skinner ignored him, instead continuing to read his magazine. He had already removed the lock and hasp from the bathroom door so there was nothing that Mulder could do in there except the obvious.

It was only when twenty minutes passed without Mulder's return that he began to get irritated and concerned. He padded over to the bathroom and threw the door open with a bang. Mulder was seated on the toilet, his face and neck soaked, obviously from drinking from the tap. Mulder's face was screwed up in pain, his cheeks flushed as he strained over the toilet bowl.

Having spent a fair amount of his afternoon on the net, researching his new 'interest', Skinner knew that the act of defecation would be agonising for Mulder given his raw abraded anal passage.

He reached into his jacket pocket and retrieved a small envelope, then delved into it until he found the pill he had secreted there earlier.

Mulder just looked suspiciously at the proffered tablet.

"It's a laxative," Skinner said coldly. He wasn't going to force the issue. If Mulder was too stupid to accept it then on his head, or ass, be it.

Mulder swallowed bitterly, knowing it could just as likely be a narcotic, but understanding that he was hardly in a position to fight the larger man, he opened his mouth to accept the pill and choked it down dry.

"It won't work for a few hours," Skinner advised him.

Mulder nodded in reluctant understanding.
"Come with me," Skinner ordered.

Mulder shook his head defiantly.

"Fuck off and die," he croaked bravely, his throat still too inflamed for his voice to emerge with any strength.

Skinner simply reached into his other pocket and produced a dog lead. Mulder blanched as Skinner dangled it in front of his face.

"Walk or be dragged, boy. Well?" Skinner demanded.

Mulder's face screwed up in hatred, but he knew his body couldn't take another beating yet. Skinner held all the cards and knew it. The only way he was ever going to get out of here was if he had time to heal before Skinner beat the shit out of him again. So he stumbled unsteadily to his feet and slowly staggered after Skinner's retreating back.

Skinner led him towards the table, ignoring Mulder's low moan of distress as he remembered his experience there the previous night, and seated himself, pointing imperiously to the floor at his feet.

For a moment, Mulder just swayed angrily, his face full of defiance. Skinner raised an eyebrow and gave a sardonic smile, his eyes giving an obvious and humiliating appraisal of Mulder's nakedness.

Mulder flushed under the gaze, reminded forcefully of exactly how vulnerable he was at that moment. Suddenly the idea of kneeling at Skinner's feet was far less humiliating than the alternative scenarios that raced through his head, so he carefully sank to his knees, accepting that any further show of defiance at this juncture was useless posturing.

'I hate you,' he whispered silently in his head, 'I'm going to kill you for this, you mad bastard.'

As though he had spoken the words out loud, Skinner looked at him and spoke to him in a tone of injured hurt.

"I must say I am disappointed with you, Fox. Not surprised, but definitely disappointed."

Mulder's hate-filled face flickered with confusion. He had fallen into some Twilight Zone. Skinnier words, tone and even expression were a mirror of countless previous conversations between himself and his boss. Except from the obvious difference that he was buck naked and kneeling on the floor in front of a man who had beaten and raped him, Mulder could almost imagine that he was in Skinner's office, being quietly reamed out for his usual transgressions.

He gaped at Skinner in disbelief. There was no trace now of monster Skinner. The older man's eyes were no longer blank, alien orbs. It was AD Skinner who sat now in this room, and somehow, the re-emergence of that familiar persona, in such a bizarre and humiliating situation, was more terrifying than anything that had already happened.

He had told himself that this was an impersonator, or that Skinner was having a breakdown, or was insane. Yet, faced with this suddenly normal Skinner, while his own situation stayed the same, Mulder could feel the earth swaying around him, as all his preconceptions and hopes collapsed.

"You don't seem very grateful to me," Skinner continued, as he watched Mulder's struggle to keep his self-control.

Mulder gave him a look of absolute disbelief.
"What the fuck should I be grateful for, exactly?" he spat.

"I came back, Fox," Skinner explained patiently.

Mulder rolled his eyes in disbelief. Did the psychotic bastard really expect gratitude for returning to continue his sick torture?

Skinner sighed theatrically.

"Hasn't it occurred to you that no-one ever bothered to come back for you before?" he asked. "I mean your sister left you, your father couldn't wait to see the back of you. Your mother never calls you. Your colleagues have a party every time you leave town. You should have heard the jokes in the office today. Most of them are hoping that your aliens exist and have finally abducted YOU. Every relationship you have ever had has ended with the other person just upping and leaving you, like the discarded rubbish that you are."

Mulder screwed up his eyes to blink back a sudden urge to cry. Between the pain of his tired, shattered body and the nightmare of the last 24 hours, he was unable to find the necessary defenses against Skinner's cruel words. His distress was obvious to the older man and he decided to ram the point home.

"You know why they all leave you, Fox? Do you know why no one gives a damn about you?" Skinner continued. "Because, to be frank, you are about the most unlovable person I have ever had the misfortune to meet. You are arrogant, conceited, undisciplined and self-centered. You put the backs up of every law-enforcement officer you meet. You fly off after every hair-brained nonsensical idea that catches your far too active imagination and you invariably leave a shit-load of crap for your partner and I to clear up."

"I'm good at my job," Mulder growled back defensively, clinging to that one truth like a shield against Skinner's accusations.

"I never said you weren't," Skinner replied with a shrug. "I just pointed out that everyone that has ever met you has hated you."

Mulder knew that Skinner was just trying to psyche him out. He shook his head furiously to refute the cruel words. Yet, there was too much truth woven into Skinner's lies for Mulder's exhausted, traumatised brain to come up with a suitable rejoinder. So he just tried to tune Skinner out, tried to distance himself from Skinner's viciousness.

"So that's why I thought you'd be glad to see me tonight," Skinner commented finally.

"I wouldn't piss on you if you were on fire," Mulder spat back, too hurt for caution. Despite his understanding that Skinner had only said the words to wound him, his own self-doubts were beginning to gnaw at him. The ultimate truth of Skinner's words was something that Mulder couldn't deny, that no-one was looking for him, no-one was coming to rescue him, and the understanding of his helplessness sparked fury rather than fear.

"See what I mean?" Skinner answered. "You are incapable of gratitude. I could have just left you. No one else would have bothered to come here tonight to see that you were alright, brought you medicine, food."

Despite himself, Mulder's head jerked at the mention of food and his stomach gave a long, rumbling growl. Skinner smirked at the sound and fumbled in his bag.

Mulder's hopeful eyes widened in horror as Skinner retrieved a second dog bowl and proceeded to
fill it with a can of Alpo. He put the dog food on the floor at Mulder's feet.

"You sadistic fucker," Mulder hissed in complete disbelief.

Skinner surged to his feet, his face dark with fury. Mulder tried to scramble to his own feet, but Skinner easily caught him and taking a firm hold of Mulder's collar, dragged him back to the bed.

Mulder fought all the way, his bare feet scrabbling for purchase on the floor tiles, ignoring the pain of his lacerated skin but his splinted fingers and broken rib let him down. The larger man swung him easily onto the mattress and pinned him there. Breathless and agonised, Mulder could only lie there helplessly as Skinner re-attached the chain.

"If you can't be bothered to be polite to me, you don't deserve my company," Skinner announced, picking up his bag and heading for the door.

Mulder watched in disbelief, as instead of giving him the expected beating, Skinner simply turned the light off, locked the door behind him and left. He lay there for a long time, barely able to breath for fear that this was an elaborate trick, but as the minutes ticked past, his racing heart began to calm as he realised that Skinner had truly gone. Then the darkness closed in on him once more and he fell into a fitful sleep as the sounds of the night creatures filled the room.

He was awoken several hours later by a painful cramping in his abdomen. The new pain, on top of the existing ones, was just too much. His whole insides were contracting as though some alien creature had grown inside him and was now hammering for release.

It was only then, that he remembered the laxative.

"Oh no, oh god no," he told himself, fighting the cramps, desperately denying the churning in his bowels.

But it was a hopeless battle, with a sickening stench his insides seemed to suddenly liquefy and gush out onto the mattress until he was lying on his side in a pool of filth. The excrement burned against the raw welts on his buttocks and the new pain and humiliation flooded him with the despair of a wounded animal.

The chain was too tight for him to escape the mess he had made, but he crawled as far up the bed as possible, curled up in misery, and for the first time in years, he gave in to the tears of lonely despair that overwhelmed him.

Mulder lost track of time. In the unending darkness, the passage of the hours had no meaning. Only a deepening gnawing in his stomach, and fierce raging thirst in his mouth, told him that time was passing and still Skinner failed to return.

Perhaps he had truly gone for good. Mulder hoped so. He knew that his body was too damaged to cope for more than a few days without water. He would sink into a coma and never reawaken. The idea was more attractive than frightening.

For two days he tossed and turned, delirious with pain and thirst, slipping in and out of consciousness. He was always vaguely disappointed each time he awoke, praying for that last, final sleep to overcome him.

Until the third day, when the flies came, and his fever-dream became a nightmare.

The cabin was filled with the buzzing of flies, a maddening hum that made Mulder's skin crawl as the smell of rotten dog food assailed his nostrils, its sweetly pungent aroma overpowering even the
acrid smell of his own waste soiled and urine soaked mattress.

He shuffled onto his side again, to ease his healing buttocks, imagining the dog bowl crawling with white maggots. The image of their fat, squirming bodies made his empty stomach heave and his throat burn as a wash of bile surged from his stomach, flooding his mouth with its bitter acrid taste.

He wished he had eaten the food now. Not only would it have eased the cramping pain of his shrunken stomach, but also, denied its festering presence, the flies wouldn't have come to madden him with their droning.

He flinched in disgust as he felt one land on his hip and he battered it away, dimly registering that his hands were healing finally.

He giggled. The sound frightened him more than the thought of death. He was going mad, he realised. The darkness, the insects, the hunger and thirst were making him light-headed and delirious.

But more than that, it was the filth that distressed him. The knowledge that he was lying in his own shit and piss, that the flies that feasted on his excrement would soon be feasting on his flesh.

Perhaps they already were. Perhaps they had laid their eggs in the broken skin of his ass cheeks. Maybe they were already crawling around in his flesh, eating him alive.

He rocked onto his back, grinding his sore buttocks against the wet mattress, rubbing the abraded skin until pain forced him to cease. And then, as the welts began to weep from his rubbing, his mind interpreted the slow trickle of fresh blood to be the crawling of a thousand maggots down his flesh and he began to scream in earnest.

Each time his exhausted head dropped back to the mattress, another fly would land on him, jerking him awake in panic. Death no longer seemed sweet oblivion. He knew that before long he would lose the strength to even move, and then the flies would land on him, their filthy bodies crawling into his broken flesh, laying their eggs. He would be eaten alive by their crawling young.

In the all pervading darkness he imagined millions of them, heaving expectantly like a massed blanket of heaving hungry mouths. He knew that if he so much as closed his eyes the blanket would descend and smother him, crawling up his nostrils, into his ears, laying their maggot eggs into his skin.

So when he heard the heavy bolt of the front door being drawn back some hours later, he suddenly didn't care whether it was Skinner, a rescue party or the devil himself. All he knew was that the light would be turned on, chasing away the demonic flies of his imagination, and he began to whimper and gibber in relief.

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The smell hit him first, the unmistakable stench of sewers and rotten meat. For a moment, terror struck Skinner's soul as he imagined that the rotten smell was the decomposing of Mulder's corpse. Had he gone too far? Had Mulder been internally injured? Had the three days been enough for Mulder to bleed or starve to death?

He was almost too frightened to turn on the light. It was only when he heard a pathetic keening from the direction of the bed, that his trembling fingers managed to press the switch.

He was doubly shocked by the sight of Mulder curled in a protective ball, his eyes screwed tight against the suddenly blinding glare, his painfully thin body stained with smears of his own excrement.
Mulder's face was pasty white, yet the welts on his back and buttocks still glowed a vivid scarlet, and huge black bruises mottled his body. He hadn't remembered hurting Mulder so badly. The realisation sickened him almost as much as the stench.

He finally identified that the most terrible smell was that of the rotten food in the dog bowl. It was almost liquefied and covered with tiny white fly eggs.

Stomach churning, he disposed of the putrid meat before returning to the cabin and putting on a pair of latex gloves. He approached Mulder, whose eyes were now open but glazed with shock, their maddened hazel depths swirling with a mixture of fear and relief.

Unlocking the chain from Mulder's collar, he hauled the weak man to his feet and towed him to the bathroom, careful not to let Mulder's filthy body touch his own. He shoved the younger man into the shower stall and turned the water on.

Mulder yelped as the freezing spray hit his body, but then instinct took over and he dove his head under the spurring water, opening his mouth and desperately gulping at the liquid. Skinner merely watched Mulder gasping and choking in his attempt to slake his raging thirst and then realised that Mulder would be unable to wash himself properly with the splints on his hands.

He shrugged off his own clothes and turned the water temperature from freezing to a pleasant warmth before grabbing the soap and climbing into the stall himself.

Lulled by the light that had chased his nightmares away, his frozen body slowly thawing under the warmth of the water, Mulder was barely aware of the other man's presence. Mulder was only shocked into panic when Skinner's naked body slipped into the shower next to him. He began to fight, clawing at the other man in an effort to escape. Skinner dealt him a sharp blow across the right cheekbone, causing Mulder to slip on the wet floor and crash against the tiled walls.

The fresh pain stunned him, so that he froze and allowed Skinner to wash the accumulated filth from his body. Each touch of Skinner's hands made his flesh crawl and shiver, yet still, despite the fear, he craved the sensation of warmth and touch and light, after his days of cold dark loneliness.

Wordlessly, Skinner massaged his muscles, his strong hands remarkably gentle, so that Mulder closed his eyes and tried to pretend that the hands that were caressing him were not the same hands that had brought his body to this shattered state.

Even so, his mind registered no surprise when Skinner's attentions dipped to his ass and moved from cleaning his buttocks, to inserting a well-soaped finger and beginning to cleanse him internally.

Skinner reached up, unhooked the shower head and brought it down so that he could direct the spray directly into Mulder's ass. The needle sharp spray tickled and tormented Mulder's sphincter but most of the water just ran down the back of Mulder's thighs.

Skinner grunted in dissatisfaction, but decided that Mulder was probably clean enough inside anyway, given his three day fast. He soaped his own dick thoroughly and then poked his cock-head at Mulder's entrance.

As though waking from a dream, Mulder seemed to suddenly come to his senses. He began to struggle in Skinner's grasp as he realised that Skinner was obviously about to rape him again.

Skinner grabbed Mulder's left arm, pulled it behind his back and then forced it upwards until Mulder was bent almost double to escape the pressure of his bone crushing grip, thus leaving his ass open and exposed.
Skinner entered in one fast, hard thrust, released Mulder's arm once he was securely buried, and then grasped Mulder's waist, his large hands effectively trapping the younger man in place as he maintained a slow, steady rhythm of deep but gentle thrusts. Despite Mulder's attempt to stop him, Skinner knew that Mulder would be unable to stop himself responding to the stimulation.

Mulder was too exhausted to stop his body reacting naturally to an act that evidently turned him on. Skinner intended for Mulder to associate the sex with the warmth, light and cleanliness. Mulder would be brought to understand that pleasing Skinner brought good things, displeasing him brought pain, darkness, loneliness and fear.

For the dynamic to work, Skinner had to distance the sex from the punishment, using it instead as a reward, tapping into Mulder's obviously twisted psyche and forcing Mulder's own self-doubts to defeat his resistance.

Unable to escape the sensation, Mulder was simply forced to endure, aware only of the pouring water over their heads and the fact that after the initial pain of penetration, the burning sensation inside his ass was replaced by a deep internal stroking that was undeniably pleasurable.

Skinner began to lengthen his strokes, pulling almost out before re-entering with leisurely control. Then he began to accompany his entries with a slight twist of his hips so that his cock slapped against Mulder's prostate as it embedded itself.

Mulder was beginning to gasp and moan, his own cock suddenly stiff with engorgement. He whimpered in humiliation as Skinner's long slow fucking drove him almost out of his head. He forgot to fight, forgot that this was his rapist, his captor, perhaps even his executioner. The blood drained from his head to his dick and all he was aware of was the waves of pure pleasure that seemed to explode from inside him each time Skinner's cock thrust inside.

Oh god, I AM gay, Mulder realised. There was no other explanation for the fact that he could find such ecstasy in the other man's abuse. Yet the understanding of his own body's betrayal in the face of this monster, Walter Skinner, made him sob with humiliation, even as he groaned helplessly as sensation flooded him.

This IS still rape, he reminded himself desperately. Even if I enjoy it, even if I have to admit that the way he makes me feel is wonderful, it is STILL rape. I am his prisoner. I have no choice in this. He has beaten me and battered me, and kept me chained without food or water or light, made me lie in my own filth for days. I hate him. I want to kill him.

But as Skinner gave a final, deep thrust and came explosively inside Mulder's ass, and Mulder felt Skinner's warm cum filling him, his own cock gushed in sympathy, and when Skinner withdrew and stepped back, Mulder had to clutch at the walls, his sore hands forced to stop his body collapsing to the floor of the shower stall as his own orgasm shook him.

Skinner left him in the shower and, toweling himself quickly dry, he dressed and then returned to the main room to drag the filthy mattress off the bed and haul it outside.

He hosed it down until the worst of the filth was removed, and then left it propped up against the side of the cabin, hoping that it would dry the next morning, when the sun fell on that side of the cabin for the longest part of the day.

He should have chained Mulder on the floor, he realised belatedly. Now he had nowhere to sleep himself tonight, except the chair, and he had really wanted to spend some quality time with Mulder before he returned home.
Mulder was still in the shower when he returned inside, frantically scrubbing at his ass, although Skinner's cum had long since dribbled out and down the drain.

He flinched and cowered at Skinner's return, but turned eyes bright with hate on the older man, blaming him for his new feelings of self-disgust. He felt dirtier now than he had lying in his own shit. At least that had been an honest filth. His own undeniable pleasure in Skinner's latest rape made him feel as though he would never be clean again.

Skinner stopped Mulder's frantic scrubbing, by simply turning off the water.

"Get out, and follow me," he ordered tersely.

"Fuck you," Mulder hissed defiantly.

Skinner simply grabbed the younger man by the hair, and dragged him out of the shower stall, into the main room and over to his chair. He slammed Mulder down onto his knees, enjoying Mulder's yelp as his kneecaps connected with the hard floor, and then released him.

"Bastard," Mulder hissed.

Skinner settled himself in his chair before replying to the younger man, who was now beginning to shiver as the cold of the floor tiles crept through his wet, naked body.

"You are disappointing me again, Fox," he said softly.

Mulder's head snapped up worriedly and he looked at the older man in disbelief.

"Disappointing you?" Mulder demanded, with a strangled laugh. "You've been a bit of a fucking disappointment to ME, Sir. You turning out to be a fucking psycho, I mean!"

Skinner sighed theatrically.

"I really thought you would have learned something in these last few days, Fox. But I see that you haven't learnt your lesson yet. I'll come back in a few more days and see how you are feeling then."

Skinner started to rise, his hand reaching for the padlock that had attached the chain to Mulder's collar. His movement made Mulder's heart nearly stop. He couldn't do it, he realised. He couldn't cope with another three days chained in the dark.

Fuck pride, he decided. Another three days without food and he would be too weak to escape even if the opportunity arose. He needed to eat, to heal. THEN he'd kill the bastard. Until then, he needed to start using his head and keeping his thoughts to himself.

"I'm sorry," he blurted. "Don't go."

Skinner pretended to hesitate thoughtfully. He could read Mulder like a book. He knew that Mulder was only pretending to give in, yet it was still the first step in the right direction. Soon, Mulder would forget that his compliance was an act. After all, Mulder's reaction to being raped in the shower had been no act.

The truth was, whether Mulder liked it or not, that Skinner knew exactly the right sexual buttons to press where the little pervert was concerned. Mulder was a slut. All it took was a cock up his ass and all of his arrogance collapsed. All Skinner had to do was get Mulder to admit that out loud.

"So, you don't want me to leave, after all?" he drawled.
Mulder flinched in humiliation, dropping his eyes furtively before answering.

"No, Sir," he whispered.

"So you missed me while I was gone?" Skinner asked slyly.

Mulder opened his mouth to deny the absurd comment, then bit his lip nervously. If he said no, Skinner would probably leave again. On the other hand, if he said yes, it would be as though he accepted Skinner's treatment of him.

"I hated being left alone in the dark," he finally muttered.

"So that's why you paid me so well for returning," Skinner replied.

Mulder looked confused.

"I meant the way you offered your ass so nicely," Skinner explained.

Mulder's head shot up and his eyes blazed.

"I didn't," he spat angrily. "You raped me."

"Is that right?" Skinner said with a sarcastic grin. "It certainly didn't seem like that to me. You gave a little 'token' struggle, I admit, but then you bent over and begged for it."

Mulder flushed furiously.

"I didn't. It was rape. I hated it. I hate you."

"Bullshit," Skinner replied conversationally. "You enjoyed it like the little slut you are, Fox. I would lay a bet that it wouldn't matter whose cock went up your ass, you would still get off on it. Why don't you tell me why you like getting fucked by another man?"

"I don't," Mulder hissed desperately.

Skinner rose to his feet again, his face suddenly cold and harsh.

"The only thing I despise more than little cock-sucking pansies like you, are liars, Fox. I'm going to leave now."

Panic filled Mulder's face as Skinner reached out, snagged his collar and began to drag him back to the bed.

"Don't, don't, please," Mulder gasped, but Skinner ignored him, snapping the chain onto the collar and this time leaving Mulder on the floor next to the bed, realising that the bare bed frame would rip into Mulder's flesh.

Mulder shivered uncontrollably on the stone floor, and Skinner realised that he would get hypothermia without some protection, so he rummaged through a cupboard before finding a couple of thread-bare blankets and tossing them on Mulder's lap.

The blankets stunk of mothballs and damp, but Mulder was too grateful to complain. He wrapped his trembling body in the thin fabric and watched Skinner packing to leave.

Skinner reached the door before Mulder's last vestiges of pride broke.
"Please, Sir," he begged.

Skinner stopped and turned his head.

"What?" he demanded.

Mulder ducked his eyes, "I'm hungry," he confessed piteously.

Skinner was relieved. He really hadn't wanted to leave Mulder unfed but wouldn't have made the offer himself. Mulder needed food to heal, but he also had to appreciate that anything that Skinner gave him was a bonus, not a right.

"I don't know, Fox. You wasted the last food I left you," he said sternly.

Mulder's chin trembled. "I know, I'm sorry. I won't waste it this time."

He couldn't believe he was really going to eat dog food, and be grateful for it, but at this stage, his stomach was screaming so piteously that he could happily chew his own blankets. Without food he would just get weaker, and then he would never escape.

So when Skinner happily produced his bowls, he bent his head into the disgusting mess and began to gulp like a starving hound. It wasn't too vile, after all, he decided. Just kind of like stew without the vegetables. When he had finished, his stomach was painfully distended but he could already feel a heat spreading from inside, as his body surged to break down the food.

Skinner smiled happily, patted him absently on the head as though he were indeed a well-behaved dog, and then headed for the door once more.

"Please, Sir," Mulder asked again.

"What now?" Skinner snapped impatiently.

"Would you leave the light on?" Mulder begged.

"No," Skinner snapped, and plunging the room back into darkness, he stepped out into the sunlight and locked the door behind him. He paused to examine the mattress, accepted that he would have to buy a replacement after all, and headed back to his car.

Inside the cabin, Mulder curled up on the hard floor, shivering helplessly as the cold bit through the thin blankets. As soon as the light had gone, his fear had returned. He worried endlessly whether Skinner would return again, and if so, how long would he be gone, and more importantly, what would he do when he did?

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Skinner chuckled. He had gone shopping for a mattress, and had instead found a much more interesting purchase. He couldn't believe that people designed contraptions like these, let alone sold them. It had taken him a couple of hours to secure the fixtures into the roof joists, but the effort had been worthwhile, if only because of the look of complete bewildered anxiety on Mulder's face as he watched Skinner's impromptu DIY.

To be honest, Skinner's biggest concern had been how on earth to get Mulder into the sling without knocking him out. Then he had realised that if he fixed it at just the right height, he could lay Mulder on the table, fix the webbing around him and then move the table away, leaving Mulder suspended at the perfect angle for Skinner's penetration.
The trick had been in fixing the roof fittings at the right width, so that he could be sure that Mulder's limbs could be opened and stretched in any physically possible angle. The possibilities of the sling were endless.

Skinner wasn't completely sure he liked the idea of the bondage. In the sling, Mulder would be completely helpless, unable to even put up a token resistance to Skinner's attentions. This was both a good thing and a bad one, as far as Skinner was concerned. After all, it wasn't Mulder's ass he was after, even though he wasn't so self-delusional as to pretend that Mulder's hole wasn't a pleasurable place to bury his cock. What Skinner wanted though, was Mulder to beg him to fuck him.

He wasn't sure that he had enough understanding of Mulder to be able to drive him to the mindless 'sub-space' that his magazines described. His reading suggested that in that frame of mind, Mulder would become a helpless slave of his own body, completely losing the ability to deny his own needs. Skinner's inexperience might cause him to instead simply drive the younger man mad with pain.

Still, it was worth a try, he decided with a grin.

There had been no denying the look of definite relief on Mulder's face when he had returned that evening. Even though Mulder had quickly covered his expression with a glare of hatred, Skinner knew that the isolation and darkness was quickly breaking down Mulder's resistance.

He had an advantage of course. He knew what made Mulder tick. He had worked with him long enough to know that as much as Mulder was a loner by nature, still he had a fear of isolation. Furthermore, Mulder was never still for even a moment by choice. The days of forced inactivity and sensory deprivation, were probably making Mulder's brilliant mind skitter like a caged animal.

Skinner was ensuring that he was Mulder's only stimulation. Only in his presence could Mulder see. The advantage of the sling was that if he left him in that, Mulder would be unable to move, and the ear-plugs that he had brought would effectively restrict Mulder's ability to hear also.

Mulder would lie bound and trapped for hours, knowing that only Skinner's return could restore his senses. Only Skinner's touch would break his isolation, only Skinner's cock would bring any pleasure into his severely restricted world.

Dependant on him for everything, Mulder would soon begin to break.

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Skinner cranked the sling until Mulder's legs were opened so widely that Mulder could feel the muscles of his inner thighs threatening to rip.

"Oh, God, no more, please," he begged desperately.

He had virtually been living in the sling for nearly two weeks now. Skinner alternated between suspending him face up and face down, to relieve the pressure sores that the webbing caused on his skin, and despite his nakedness, at least his new 'bed' was far warmer than the stone floor.

Yet the endless hours of dangling, blind and deaf, unable to move more than the tiniest fraction, was driving him literally insane. He lost all ability to reason. All he was aware of was the whispering darkness. In the black deserted cabin, his helpless body would be visited by the ghosts of all his past transgressions.

Shadow voices mocked him, their bitter vengeful voices battering his rapidly splintering mind. His conscience gnawed at him incessantly as he tried desperately to make sense of why anyone could do such a terrible thing to him, and unable to comprehend, but unable to cope without a reason for his
torture, he began to believe that he truly must have done a terrible thing for which he deserved to be
punished.

For hours he would thresh and scream as waking nightmares broke down his ability to think beyond
his fear and loneliness. He found himself longing for Skinner's return, actually relieved when Skinner
would announce his arrival with the blinding glare of the lights, and the immediate penetration of his
cock.

Deprived of all senses except the occassional bite of drifting cold air, and the pressure of the webbing
on his skin, his chilled body almost screamed with relief when Skinner would slide his warm slick
shaft into his bowels. The deep internal stroking, after the hours of complete numb deprivation,
causing his nerve ends to explode, sending waves of sensation through his whole frame. Lacking any
other stimulation, his skin quickened under Skinner's touch and his body learned to crave Skinner's
skillful ministrations.

His mind lost the ability to differentiate between pain and pleasure. All he understood was that there
was either the maddening lonely darkness or Skinner. Skinner was the light, his arrival thrust away
the demons of the dark, he replaced cold with warmth, numbness with sensation, hunger with food,
thirst with water.

No matter what games the sadistic bastard played with him during his visit, still Mulder would be fed
and watered, allowed to shower and use the bathroom, and Skinner's 'playtime' would always end
with him fucking Mulder's brains out again.

As much as he vocally denied any pleasure to the other man, Mulder had hung for too many hours
with only his own mind for company, to be able to deny that Skinner's skillful ability to drive him to
orgasm had become the only high-point of his miserable existence.

No matter how much pain and humiliation Mulder felt, those few minutes of complete mindless bliss,
as his body pulsed and his cock erupted from Skinner's attentions, were his only escape from the
nightmare that his life had become.

He understood that it was a measure of the depths to which he had been forced by his incarceration,
that he had lost all hope of rescue and escape and could only cling to whatever small bone of
happiness that Skinner deigned to throw him. Yet, at the same time, as the stakes of the game kept
increasing, and Skinner found new and more inventive ways to bring him to orgasm, Mulder had to
face that he was beginning to look forward to Skinner's return.

Unable to cope with the constant fear as he dangled in the darkness, he chose to only remember the
better parts of each game, choosing to look forward to the next moment of climax rather than the
painful route that Skinner always took to get there.

Of course, reality always bit home viciously, when Skinner started his games. Like now, when
Mulder was sure that his legs would dislocate under the pressure, and he screamed for a mercy that
experience had taught him would not be forthcoming.

Skinner ignored him as always, adjusting the angle slightly so that Mulder's legs were raised up
several more inches, still in an almost full split. Mulder gave a strangled scream at the new position,
his head threshing wildly as the backs of his thighs now joined in the loud protest of his abused
muscles.

He could feel the chilled air biting at his exposed groin and ass, but his head was now too low for
him to see Skinner moving between his legs. He could only tremble in the restraints and try not to
imagine what Skinner was planning to do to him in this position.
He had never felt so helpless in his life.

Skinner, whose inventiveness was being fueled by a very interesting video that he had picked up earlier, took a coke bottle out of the cooler he had brought, rubbed a handful of lubrication over its chilled glass from the cap to half-way down its body and then gave it a furious shake. He positioned himself between Mulder's legs, snapped the cap off and thrust it quickly into Mulder's ass before the liquid gushed.

Mulder gasped in shock as the freezing bottle penetrated him and then his bowels were filled with an explosion of carbonated liquid. The sensation rocked him, the bubbly liquid sending thousands of tiny shocks through his insides as the icy coke fizzed and surged inside him.

Skinner waited until Mulder stopped bucking wildly under the freezing sensation and carefully withdrew the bottle, stepping back quickly to avoid the backwash of coke as it poured out, and then checked Mulder's reaction. He was pleased to see that Mulder's cock had responded favorably to his surprise.

He reached for the butt plug that he had placed in the bucket of hot water, checked that the rubber was only lukewarm, and then plunged it into Mulder's entrance.

Mulder howled at the sudden contrast of temperature. The rubber felt as hot as fire in comparison to the ice cold of the chilled glass.

Skinner grinned with satisfaction, well aware that he was fucking with Mulder's mind as much as he was fucking his ass.

He removed the plug, returned it to the warm water and picked an ice cube out of the cooler and slipped it inside Mulder's pucker.

Mulder screamed. His confused mind now interpreted the ice as being hot. He shuddered in reaction, his cock beginning to weep and dribble in excitement.

The ice melted and Mulder shivered in sudden realisation that he was actually cold.

Skinner replaced the ice with the warm plug a second time and Mulder's cock gave up its struggle for control, releasing a fountain of cum.

Skinner grinned in satisfaction as he watched Mulder thrash in orgasm, his cries a mingle of relief and pain as he twisted against the unnatural position of his legs.

He released a little of the pressure by slightly closing Mulder's legs and lifting them high in the air, so that Mulder's ass cheeks were fully exposed. Only then did he reach for the leather paddle and he applied even strokes until Mulder's butt was a glorious deep red.

By the time he had finished, Mulder was a groaning, quivering, boneless jelly in the straps. The only part of his body that hadn't been turned to complete mush with the paddling was his cock, which had returned to a fully aroused state again.

It never failed to amaze Skinner that Mulder had such a sexual reaction to pain.

He lowered the sling until Mulder's glowing ass was level with his groin, then he sank into the welcoming hole. As soon as his cock-head breached the rim, Mulder's internal muscles began to work, almost sucking the rest of his shaft in with their rolling undulations.

Once Mulder had reached this state of mindlessness, his body took over, understanding its own
needs and seemingly acting independently of Mulder's conscious desires. He bucked in the restraints, moaning and gasping in ecstasy as Skinner fucked him with slow, deliberate thrusts, then stopped, grasped Mulder's legs and using the sling as a fulcrum, began to swing Mulder on and off his cock, making Mulder's ass fuck him.

Mulder reached his climax first, howling deliriously, his ass muscles clamping down on their thick invader and demanding Skinner's own orgasm. He responded by thrusting deeply and pumping Mulder full of his cum, before collapsing against Mulder's groin, his body weight causing the straps beneath the younger man to bite viciously.

It was Mulder's resultant whimpers that aroused Skinner. He rubbed his sweat-drenched forehead and gazed fondly at Mulder's boneless body. Mulder's skin was flushed pink with exertion, his chest liberally splashed with the evidence of his own pleasure.

Skinner was proud of himself, Mulder's reaction to his attentions had been even more dramatic than that of the actor in the porn flick he had watched earlier in the day. Of course, the actor HAD thanked his 'top' most profusely afterwards. Not for the first time, Mulder's stubborn refusal to acknowledge his own pleasure made Skinner seethe.

"Aren't you going to thank me," he demanded.

"Sure," Mulder gasped with his usual sarcasm. "Thanks for the rape, Sir."

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Skinner was pissed off. How the hell could Mulder scream in ecstasy like that and then dare to still call him a rapist?

The little bastard practically creamed the moment Skinner put his fingers on him now, Mulder's ass nearly ripped his cock off with its hungry pumping, yet still he pretended that he hated Skinner to touch him.

But if THAT was the game that Mulder wanted to play, he was going to be in for a really nasty little surprise. So Mulder didn't want to cum? Fine, then Skinner would help him control his errant body.

Skinner rummaged in his bag for the item he had bought on a whim a couple of days earlier. To be honest, he had been a little reluctant to use it. His own cock squirmed uneasily at just the thought of it.

But Mulder had asked for it. It served him right.

He returned to the sling, where Mulder was still suspended, and met the younger man's bitter accusing glare as his fingers rubbed at Mulder's sticky stomach.

"You seemed to enjoy our little game," Skinner said quietly.

"It was an involuntary response," Mulder snapped back defensively, his cheeks flushing with embarrassment.

"So you keep saying," Skinner replied, producing his surprise and dangling it in Mulder's face.

Mulder looked at the item with obvious confusion, unable to comprehend what purpose it was meant to serve.

"It's a cock cage, Fox. I'm going to do you a favor, boy. From now on, you won't be able to have
any more "involuntary responses". You see, with this on, you CAN'T come."

A look of fear flashed over Mulder's face, quickly replaced by a sneer. "Good," he hissed defiantly.

He didn't feel so brave when Skinner wrapped a tight strap around his balls, separating and spreading them, then grasped his dick and began to fasten a series of tight leather bands from his root to just under the head. The very act of putting the contraption on, was enough to make his cock begin to swell, and immediately he felt the biting restriction of the leather.

"It doesn't come off again until you beg me for the key."

"Never," Mulder snapped proudly, but he was beginning to hate himself for his own useless pride. All he was doing with this defiance was ensuring that he lost his own momentary escape from his captivity. What was the point of him even trying to pretend that he wasn't turned on by Skinner's attentions? He was only fooling himself, not the other man.

But admitting his pleasure in the sex would be like agreeing to his captivity, and it wasn't the same thing at all. He had learned to accept and enjoy whatever food Skinner chose to give him, and it wasn't always Alpo, thank God, but it didn't mean that he wouldn't rather be free to choose his own meals.

In the same way, Skinner had taught him that the reason he had never found sexual gratification before, was that he needed the added stimulus of pain to enhance his pleasure, but that didn't mean that Mulder wanted Skinner's psycho dick up his ass, he wanted to chose his sexual partner, and he certainly wouldn't pick a psychotic, kidnapping rapist.

But Mulder didn't stand a chance against the cock-cage. He soon discovered that the only thing that could possibly be worse than being forced to respond to his own rape, was to be denied his own release. It took only one short 'game' in the sling before he begged Skinner to remove the cage, and with his plea, something inside him broke, never to be mended.

His capitulation came too late, however. Skinner had quickly realised that the cock-cage took their relationship to a new level. Mulder could be kept at fever-pitch for hours, until only the fear of the younger man actually having a heart-attack, would make him give in to Mulder's pleas for relief.

Mulder would be so shattered at the end of their sessions, that Skinner took to releasing him out of the sling and letting him kneel at his feet for a couple of hours while he read his magazines and planned his next 'experiment.' Mulder would just kneel quietly, leaning into the heat of Skinner's leg like a faithful hound, luxuriating in the removal of the webbing from his sore body, blissfully rubbing himself against Skinner's pant legs just so that he could feel the touch of another person against his skin.

Yet never did he articulate his need. Not once did he verbally admit that Skinner's touch was the lifeline by which he was desperately clinging to sanity. His continued defiance, despite his own body's obvious betrayal, began to rangle on the older man. He decided that it was time for Mulder to learn that he had to earn the privilege.

Mulder couldn't believe the bastard was serious. Skinner actually now expected him to not only kneel at his feet like a fucking dog but also to lick his smelly feet.

Skinner saw his mulish expression, gave a shrug and began to rise. "I'll just go home now then, since you obviously don't want me to stay," he said mildly.
Mulder shuddered in terror, his defiance shattered completely by Skinner's threat. If Skinner left, he would put him in the sling again. Frantically he reached for Skinner's shoes and began to remove them. Then he rolled down each of Skinner's black socks and his face screwed with disgust, but silently he bent and began to lick half-heartedly at the exposed toes.

Skinner could almost see the waves of furious resentment rising from Mulder's stiff back, yet at least Mulder was beginning to physically obey him. It had been three weeks, and except for Mulder's sexual capitulation, he seemed no closer to mentally breaking him.

In a way, he realised that Mulder's enjoyment of pain was working against him. There was little point in continually beating the crap out of the little shit, since he actually enjoyed it. The sensory deprivation had worked wonders, of course. The moment he arrived in the cabin and walked between Mulder's thighs, he would actually see Mulder's pucker visibly winking in desperate need as the younger man whimpered for any sensation to break the solitude of his cruel bondage.

It was Mulder's terror of the sling that was making him currently lick Skinner's feet. To be honest, even a week ago, Skinner wouldn't have let Mulder's teeth near any part of his body.

Even now, although he had many fantasies of making Mulder give him a blow job, he didn't quite dare. Despite his appearance of submission, Mulder was still far from tamed, and Skinner was running out of time.

He noticed that Mulder had stopped his ministrations.

"You want to go back in the sling already?" he purred.

Mulder flashed him a terrified look of hatred, but then dipped his head and began to frantically lick his feet again.

Yes, Skinner decided, it was definitely time to up the stakes once more.

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Part Four

Mulder's first indication that something had changed was when Skinner returned to the cabin the next evening. Instead of the sudden blinding light heralding Skinner's immediate approach, and usual greeting of a firm cock sliding into Mulder's ass, he heard Skinner, his breath so heavy with obvious exertion that it penetrated past Mulder's ear plugs, and then he heard a loud hammering.

Because he was suspended, face down, away from the doorway, he had no idea of what the other man was doing. The unfamiliar noises filled him with dread, he couldn't imagine Skinner planning anything that didn't bode ill news for himself. His over-active mind began to race as he tried to imagine what new sick torture the older man was planning now. His buttocks clenched nervously around the fat butt plug that Skinner was now leaving in him constantly, presumably to ensure that he had instant access.

The plug no longer frightened him, if anything he found it comforting. During the long hours when he was alone, without any other stimulation, deprived of sight and sound, he would play with it constantly, his buttocks clenching and releasing the invader, desperate for whatever sensation he could create in his sensory deprived body.

Then Skinner would arrive and replace it with his cock, turning the mild stimulation into a mind-blowing explosion of sensation that would chase away his lonely fear in one violent act of fucking.
Yet, to his surprise, when Skinner finally approached, he only smacked him resoundingly on the buttocks in welcome. Then he felt the back of the sling being lowered until he was stood, still bound, but upright on the floor. Skinner grasped his shoulders and turned him to face the other side of the room and the sight made Mulder sway in bewilderment.

A mattress had been lain in the far corner, next to the bathroom. A heavy ring bolt had been fixed to the wall with an attached chain which was long enough to loop like a snake on the floor. He saw his bowls on the floor next to the mattress, and he trembled, hardly daring to believe the message that they sent him.

He turned nervously towards Skinner, his eyes huge as he bit his lower lip uncertainly, hardly daring to believe the evidence of his own eyes.

"For me?" he finally begged desperately, even as his own question made him flush with embarrassment. So much for his pretended defiance. All it took was the promise of being chained on the floor rather than in the sling, and he was practically ready to hug his captor in gratitude.


Mulder trembled and ducked his head submissively, eager to comply with whatever Skinner demanded. He could surmise from the length of chain that he would be able to traverse almost half the cabin, use the bathroom at will, even exercise his frozen limbs. He decided he would do just about anything to earn the new freedom. His definition of captivity had changed with the bondage of the sling. Now the idea of living the rest of his life on that chain seemed blissful in comparison.

Skinner could see the longing on Mulder's face and smiled to himself. Desperate for the reward of the comfort and comparative freedom of the mattress, he was sure that Mulder would begin to develop a more co-operative attitude. Only, as the old saying went, be careful what you wish for in case you get it. As much as Mulder protested his treatment, he also plainly enjoyed it. It would be interesting to see what happened if he withdrew his attention, now that Mulder had grown to expect it.

Then to add his final touch of bribery, Skinner walked over to the door and picked up the box that held his real surprise. Mulder's eyes followed him worriedly as he carried the parcel to the table and began to unwrap it, obviously expecting some instrument of torture.

Instead, Skinner's hands reached into the box and withdrew a small table lamp. He heard Mulder's choking gasp of hopeful surprise and turned to face him.

"You don't like being left in the dark, do you, Fox?" he purred.

Mulder shook his head frantically, his haunted eyes evidence of exactly how terrified he felt every time Skinner left the cabin.

"I thought you might like this," Skinner said quietly. "Your own little light for when I'm not here. You can keep it next to your bed. There's a power socket in that corner."

Mulder licked his suddenly dry lips, desperate for the lamp, but beginning to truly dread whatever price he was going to have to pay. He had no illusions that Skinner had suddenly grown a heart.

"What do you want?" he mumbled bitterly, deciding to cut to the chase.

Instead of replying, Skinner left the lamp on the table and walked over to his sullen captive. Mulder flinched in expectation of a blow that never came. Confused, he could only stand in shock as Skinner released him from the sling and then walked silently to his chair.
Seating himself, Skinner looked coldly at Mulder and pointed to the floor at his feet.

"Heel," he said firmly.

Impotent fury blazed in Mulder's eyes at the sarcastic command, but still he found his legs obeying. He tottered over to Skinner, his legs weak from his strict bondage, and sank slowly to his knees, only the rigid set of his shoulders revealing his mental defiance.

"Since we have already established that you are a slut, Fox. I thought it was only fair to give you a chance to earn some rewards. Quite simply, if you do as you are told from now on, your life is going to improve dramatically. On the other hand, if you continue to defy me, your privileges will be revoked again," Skinner said cheerfully.

"I'm not a slut," Mulder hissed, his cheeks flaming.

"Of course you are, Fox. Stop fighting me. All you have to do is please me tonight and you can have all of this," and he gestured to the lamp and the mattress.

Mulder shuddered helplessly. He wanted to tell Skinner to go to hell, but he couldn't resist Skinner's offer. What difference would it make really, after all? If he refused, Skinner would still beat him and fuck him, but afterwards he would be back in the sling, in the darkness.

Swallowing the remaining tatters of his pride, he nodded his agreement, only a bitter tear that escaped the corner of his right eye revealing his deep distress at his own weakness.

Skinner watched him thoughtfully for a few more moments before gathering up his own nerve for the next step. He rose out of his chair, removed his trousers and briefs, and then sat down again, pushing his shirt-tails away from his groin, so that his flaccid cock was clearly revealed.

It was a measure of his own nervousness, that his cock seemed so unwilling to take part in the proceedings, he decided.

"Well, what are you waiting for?" he demanded.

Mulder blinked uncertainly, and then shame flooded his face as he finally understood the price Skinner expected him to pay.

"Oh, God, you bastard," he moaned at the older man.

Skinner ignored Mulder's words, more interested in the tone of total defeat in which they were uttered. His cock began to twitch excitedly on his lap as he realised that Mulder was actually going to go along with it.

Mulder shuffled forwards between Skinner's open thighs, until his face was in front of Skinner's thick cock, and then he squeezed his eyes shut tightly before gingerly reaching out a tentative tongue and licking at Skinner's shaft.

Skinner was fascinated at first, Mulder's face was screwed up in distaste, exactly the same as it had been when he had been forced to lick Skinner's feet. Oddly, Mulder's obvious loathing of the task he was being forced to perform, was even more satisfying than any amount of enthusiasm. It just proved his power over the other man, that Mulder would be so reluctant, and yet would still do it.

Still, he became tired of Mulder's tentative licks.

"Swallow it," he demanded.
Mulder shuddered but opened his mouth and let Skinner's cock-head slide into his mouth before his reflex gagging forced him to withdraw and gasp for breath.

Skinner sighed, it was obviously going to be a long night.

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Mulder lay in a ball on the mattress, his arms hugging his knees to his chest as he gazed for hours at the tiny lamp. It hypnotised him, its unwavering glare keeping the various other occupants of the room at bay. Without the ear plugs he could hear the far off crash of the waves, the cries of the circling gulls and the steady drip of the cistern in the bathroom.

After Skinner had left, he had investigated his new freedom, even daring to draw himself a bath and luxuriate in the delicious warmth of the water. He had feasted on the Alpo that Skinner had left him, so accustomed to its taste that he actually enjoyed it now, only the bland sameness of his diet making him lurch with excitement when Skinner produced some other form of nourishment.

Although his left hand was now healed enough to have been released from the splints, it never even occurred to him to use his fingers to eat. Weeks of eating directly from the bowl had immured him from his previous horror of eating doggy-style.

And now he lay on the soft mattress, his stomach comfortably full, his bowels pleasantly refilled with his fat butt plug, his body clean, and he realised that he was happy.

At another level, there was a voice that screamed at him to pull himself together, to understand that the return of basic rights wasn't enough for him to accept the rest of Skinner's treatment. It was the same voice that had howled in anguish as Skinner had painstakingly taught him the art of performing a satisfactory blow job the night before.

But he had ignored the voice then, and now its wailing discontent was even fainter. He chose not to hear it, chose to instead concentrate on the light, the wonderful light, and the blissful absence of pain.

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For two more days, Mulder managed to maintain his newfound illusion of happiness. His heart would lurch with dread when Skinner returned each evening, in case he should do something to anger the older man and find his new freedom curtailed.

But Skinner only stayed long enough to replenish Mulder's food bowls and check that he was wearing the plug, then he would leave and Mulder would be alone again with the peace and safety of his light.

Not once in those two days did Skinner raise either his voice or hands to the younger man. Neither did he take him sexually. He just waited for the dam to break.

He wasn't disappointed. The pressure that was slowly building up behind Mulder's illusion of calm, exploded like a volcano on the third day.

Skinner noticed a nervous jitteriness in the younger man as soon as he entered the cabin. Instead of lying in his normal fetal ball of dreamy contemplation, Mulder was sitting in the very corner of the mattress, his arms hugging his knees as he rocked with obvious need.

He flinched when Skinner bent to unlock the padlock, and then only Skinner's own swift movement stopped Mulder's flashing teeth from sinking into his arm. He cuffed Mulder across the face, hard enough to smash his head into the wall, and Mulder yelped, shaking his head dazedly from the
double impact.

The hazel eyes were dilated and desperate. Skinner looked down and saw that Mulder's cock was swollen and straining against the cage for the first time in two days.

He grinned. So Mulder couldn't cope without the pain, he realised. After a month of being conditioned to expect the constant release of several quick-fire orgasms a night, just two days without Skinner's attention had made him crave the violence once more.

He doubted that Mulder understood his own motivations. He probably just thought he was ready to fight again. But Skinner understood him too well to be fooled. Unable to face the humiliation of begging Skinner to touch him, Mulder was instead determined to force his hand, so that he could just claim it was rape.

As much as the thought of taking Mulder was tempting, Skinner wasn't going to allow Mulder the safety of his own self-delusion. If Mulder needed to be fucked, he was going to damn well have to beg for it.

So he simply walked to his chair, sat down, and snapped "Heel," as usual.

He saw Mulder struggling with his own hate and fear, before finally crawling towards him, his whole body stiff with barely repressed violence. Skinner waited until Mulder settled on his knees before him, his expressive face twisted with anger and confusion, and then began to speak in a low authoritative voice.

Only the occasional twitching of Mulder's eyes betrayed the fact that he was listening.

"I am tired, Fox. Tired of pandering to you. I have have wasted nearly four weeks of my life trying to give you what you want, what you need, and still you are fighting me.

"It's no wonder everyone else in your life just gave up on you. You're too high maintenance. I have exhausted myself this past month, driving back and forth from DC every night, trying to satisfy you, giving you the beatings you crave and trying to fulfill your incessant sexual demands.

"All the time you have taken from me, and never given anything back. You have forced me to chain you up, just so that you could maintain an illusion that you didn't want me to touch you. You have called me a rapist over and over, when it is clear now that you are such a slut that two days of sexual denial makes you nearly mad with need."

Mulder's face twisted with disbelief at Skinner's words. Skinner was twisting everything, making it sound as though he had been a willing player in this game, rather than a victim.

"It's not true," he blurted angrily. "None of it's true. I hate you touching me."

"Obviously," Skinner laughed sarcastically, his foot reaching out to tap Mulder's straining erection.

Mulder looked down and flushed in despair, seemingly bewildered by his own body's betrayal. He looked up at Skinner, his face almost pleading.

"Its not me, it's you," he gasped. "You did this to me," he accused bitterly.

"Only because you asked me to," Skinner replied with a shrug.

"I didn't - I never - I HATE YOU!" Mulder screamed desperately.
"Of course you did, Fox. For years you have butted heads with me, secretly hoping that I would finally decide to take you in hand. Then you came to my apartment and threw yourself at me. You took advantage of me when I was drunk and depressed."

"No, no, no, no, NO!" Mulder spat, his head shaking desperately. He couldn't quite remember, it seemed so long ago now, a different lifetime, lived by a different man, but still he knew, he just KNEW that Skinner was lying. He buried his confused face in his hands, rubbing his suddenly watering eyes.

"Why on earth would I have done this, if you hadn't asked me to?" Skinner asked reasonably.

Mulder looked up in confusion, his mind splintering under Skinner's absolutely calm statement.

"You like hurting me," he whispered.

"Oh grow up, Fox. Do you really think that I would have gone to all this effort out of hate? I could have just fired you. That would have more than satisfied any feelings of anger or resentment. Instead I took you in hand. I have spent more time and attention on you in the last four weeks than you have received from anyone in your whole life. Who else has ever taken time for you? Who else has ever cared enough about your sorry ass to try and give you exactly what you need?"

Mulder moaned and swayed, battered by Skinner's words, and all too aware of the burning pressure in his groin, the undeniable desire to be beaten by Skinner's hands rather than his voice.

In acknowledging his raging need to be taken by the other man, he felt incapable of separating the lies from the truth in Skinner's words. He felt so out of control, and Skinner seemed so confident, so RIGHT.

"I - I - I didn't want this," he gasped desperately.

"Yes you did. You maybe didn't know it, but you did, Fox. You needed it." Skinner chided gently.

"NO," Mulder wailed.

Skinner stood up abruptly.

"We'll continue this discussion tomorrow, I think, when you have had time to think more rationally about exactly what you do or don't want and need," he proclaimed, beginning to haul Mulder back to his corner.

Mulder tried to fight him, but as usual, Skinner's strength overwhelmed him and so he simply gave up and sank helplessly to the mattress. He watched with dull eyes as Skinner padlocked the chain to his collar and then unplugged and removed the lamp.

"Please," he begged in a small voice.

Skinner just glared at him coldly.

"Don't even imagine that this is going to be your only punishment for trying to bite me," he snapped. "You will be beaten for that," he added, and had to hide a grin as he saw Mulder's cock jerk and leak at his promise.

Then he turned off the main lights, ignoring Mulder's snifflle of terror, and left the cabin.

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Walter Skinner unlocked the heavy padlock to the front door and entered the dark room wordlessly, removing his jacket and shirt to reveal a tight white t-shirt that hugged his muscular physique and displayed his taut biceps.

He stepped confidently through the gloom and flicked the switch on the electrical box. Immediately the cabin was filled with light. Only then did he turn to Mulder's corner and narrowed his eyes thoughtfully at the unexpected vision that greeted him.

The younger man was blinking and rubbing his eyes against the sudden brightness as usual. The obvious difference, however, was that instead of being curled up in the familiar protective ball, Mulder was kneeling in position. His shoulders back, knees wide and head ducked bashfully. Skinner was, for the first time, greeted with a vision of absolute submissiveness.

Skinner wondered what Mulder was up to now. Suspecting that it was a ruse, he moved cautiously as he walked over to unlock the chain from Mulder's collar, expecting the younger man to explode in violence again as soon as he was freed.

Yet, as his fingers released Mulder from his captivity, the other man's head turned, not to bite, but to rest his cheek briefly on Skinner's hand, like a dog demanding a caress.

For a brief moment, excitement surged through Skinner. Could it be real? He wondered. Had Mulder finally given in to him? Had he won?

No, this was too sudden, too easy, he decided. It was a trick, a clever deception. So he stepped away from his captive and walked slowly to his chair, wondering when Mulder would give himself away. The younger man could only fake submission for so long, then something would trigger his old defiance and Skinner would catch him out.

That decided, he relaxed in his chair and barked out "Heel."

Mulder scrambled to his hands and knees and scurried over the floor until he was at Skinner's feet. Again, he assumed position, his face placid and eyes surprisingly soft. He waited for Skinner to stretch out his legs and then began to unlace Skinner's shoes without the usual look of scornful defiance on his face.

There was definitely something different about Mulder, Skinner realised. The tension had left his shoulders. He was moving with a grace that Skinner had almost forgotten that the younger man possessed as he bent over Skinner's feet, removed his shoes and began to bathe Skinner's hot, tired feet with his tongue.

The usual waves of resentment that radiated off Mulder's back seemed absent tonight. Skinner could almost believe that Mulder's ministrations were sincere. He looked thoughtfully at the bent head, enjoying the almost worshipful way that Mulder sucked at each of his toes.

Against his better judgement, Skinner began to relax into the bathing massage of Mulder's tongue. Either Mulder's heart was genuinely in the job tonight, or he deserved an Oscar, Skinner decided. Intrigued, he waited until Mulder had completed his task and had sat back in position.

Despite a flush in Mulder's cheeks as Skinner gave Mulder's body its usual slow inspection, there was again no trace of the familiar resentment in the set of Mulder's jaw and shoulders.

The only familiar vision was that of Mulder's arousal. Mulder's cock was straining angrily at its cage, the flesh purple and swollen painfully against the tight bands.

"Touch yourself," Skinner purred softly, waiting for the usual flare of embarrassment in Mulder's
face at the humiliation of his own body's betrayal.

Instead, almost dreamily, Mulder's right hand crept to his crotch and began to stroke, his face still placid. Skinner felt his own cock jump as he came to the unbelievable realisation that Mulder was no longer pretending that he didn't physically enjoy being "in position".

Mulder's left hand moved to his chest and he began to play with his nipples, squeezing and rubbing them until they were hard nubs. He gave a low moan of need and his eyes pleaded silently.

"You may remove the cage and come," Skinner said experimentally.

Mulder's eyes met his and instead of humiliation, a look of excited relief transformed his face. He eagerly ripped of the restraint, closed his eyes, threw his head back so that his throat was revealed and he began to pump his erection with obvious eagerness.

It only took a few moments before he gave a strangled scream and his semen spattered the floor at Skinner's feet. Skinner watched, fascinated, as the heaving of Mulder's chest slowed to a normal heart rate, and then Mulder wordlessly bent down and licked up his own cum, before sitting back on his haunches with a shy, nervous smile playing at his lips.

"You seem at peace with yourself and the situation, suddenly," Skinner commented suspiciously.

Mulder bit his lip uncertainly, searching Skinner's face with a worried expression. He had hoped that Skinner would like his new attitude, but wasn't confident that Skinner really wanted his capitulation. There was always the chance that Skinner enjoyed punishing him so much that Mulder's decision to give in would actually disappoint him.

"Do you think that this little display will prevent me punishing you for trying to bite me?" Skinner asked wryly.

Mulder's head snapped up in surprise. Sometimes he really wondered whether Skinner could read his mind.

"No, Sir. I know what I did was wrong and that you have to punish me," he told the older man with calm acceptance.

"And I shall," Skinner growled.

Mulder shivered at the dark tone, yet a light of undeniable excitement flashed in his eyes, and his limp cock jerked on his lap.

"However, since you HAVE pleased me so far tonight, I am going to give you a choice of punishments, Fox. Five with the strap, ten with the paddle or twenty with my hand," Skinner said, testing Mulder's reaction.

He saw the various scenarios race over Mulder's face in a myriad of expressions.

"Your hand, Sir," Mulder said finally.

Skinner contemplated Mulder's answer. Although Mulder's decision seemed, on the surface, to be the easier option, both he and Mulder knew exactly how painful twenty blows with the flat of his powerful palm would be. He wondered why Mulder had chosen that option. Usually, Mulder would have requested the quickly finished pain of the strap.

"Why my hand?" he demanded.
Mulder was silent for so long that Skinner was on the verge of losing his temper, but then Mulder's quiet words rocked him to his core.

"Because I want you to touch me, Sir," Mulder confessed, his head ducking bashfully.

Skinner was stunned by Mulder's words. Not the content, of course. Since the first day of Mulder's incarceration, it had been obvious that Mulder responded physically to his touch. The amazing thing was that Mulder was finally admitting it aloud.

"I don't want to fight you any more," Mulder muttered.

The excitement flared in Skinner's heart once more, making him almost light headed with triumph. Yet still, a voice in the back of his head cautioned him that Mulder could simply be acting.

"I've told you before that I punish you because you need it and deserve it, not because you fight me," Skinner said, watching Mulder's face for any betraying spark of resentment. Yet, the flush that spread over the other man's face at his words seemed to be just a genuine shame.

"I know I deserve it," Mulder whispered with apparent sincerity. "I'm sorry for what I tried to do, Sir."

"I appreciate your apology, Fox. However, you will still be punished," Skinner replied firmly.

"Then punish me," Mulder said quietly. "I just don't want to fight you any more."

"Tell me why," Skinner demanded, interested despite himself.

Mulder bit his lip uncertainly; a hot embarrassed flush spreading across his cheeks until his ears burned red against his hair. He didn't know how to put his feelings into words, couldn't understand his own emotions, let alone try to articulate them.

He had lain for hours in the dark, unable to escape Skinner's words as the rolled around and around his head. Despite Skinner's self-justifying lies, there were also truths that Mulder simply couldn't deny any longer, even to himself.

Skinner had been right. For all the protesting that Mulder had done, he already missed the other man's touch. Just the thought of his hands on his body made Mulder quiver with need. It wasn't until Skinner had so abruptly withdrawn the sex that Mulder had realised how dependant he was on it.

For weeks he had fooled himself into believing that he only enjoyed Skinner's return to the cabin because it heralded his escape from the terrifying darkness of his incarceration. Yet Skinner had given him his own lamp, had removed that fear. And so Mulder was forced to accept the bitter truth that it wasn't the dark he truly feared, but the loneliness.

Then, after two days of no physical abuse, he had come to the sickening, but undeniable realisation, that he missed it. Needed it, even.

Skinner had been right. He hadn't tried to bite him out of defiance, he had wanted to force the other man to lose control and rape him.

And that surely meant that it wouldn't have been rape after all.

Maybe it had never been rape.

Maybe he HAD always wanted Skinner to do this to him subconsciously. How could he judge his
own motivations when his own body was suddenly so alien to him? Skinner obviously knew him better than he knew himself. Perhaps he really had given Skinner permission for all of this.

Had he always really known that Skinner could unleash this wild sexuality in him that took away all reason, all self-control? Had he sub-consciously known that Skinner would be the answer to a prayer that he hadn't even known that he was praying?

He didn't know. He couldn't be sure anymore, and in the face of Skinner's confidence, his own protestations of innocence seemed weak and inadequate.

All he really was sure of was that having had this beast woken inside him, there was no way to turn back again. The Fox Mulder of four weeks ago didn't exist any more. There was only here and now, and his pain and loneliness, and Skinner.

"Tell me," Skinner growled impatiently, clenching his fists with frustration.

Fear flashed through Mulder's eyes as he saw Skinner's biceps flex and his knuckles whiten.

"I'm tired of pretending that I don't want this, need this," Mulder finally admitted.

"The sex, you mean," Skinner challenged.

Mulder flushed but nodded.

"And the punishment?" Skinner demanded.

"It hurts," Mulder began, so quietly that Skinner had to strain to make out the words, "but I need it too, I understand that now. It feels good. Better than anything I've experienced before," he admitted in a whisper.

"Better how?" Skinner asked, hardly daring to believe his own ears.

"I can't explain. It's like there is nothing at that moment except you and I and the pain. I feel safe."

"Safe?" Skinner demanded incredulously. It was the last word that he could have imagined emerging from Mulder's mouth under the circumstances.

"Yeah, safe," Mulder repeated with a rueful chuckle, well aware of the bizarreness of his own observation. "It gives me peace. All the uncertainty, the fear, the doubts are gone. Nothing else seems to matter. It's like, at that moment, everything about me that I hate, all the guilt, it's gone. I feel cleansed."

"Absolution," Skinner said gruffly.

Mulder's head shot up in excitement.

"That's it. That's it exactly. I deserve it. I know that I do. It seems so clear. You give me absolution."

"I give you pain," Skinner pointed out.

Mulder shrugged. "I like it," he finally admitted.

"You like the pain, or you like the way the pain makes you feel?" Skinner asked.

"Both," Mulder confessed. "When it hurts, it feels right, feels good. Then sometimes the pain is worse and I can't take it, so I escape it. I go somewhere else in my head, somewhere safe. And then
"That feels good."

"Why do you think I am doing this to you, Fox?" Skinner asked softly.

Mulder dropped his eyes nervously.

"At first I hated you. I thought you were mad, that you had brought me here to kill me, to shut me up. And when you tied me up and beat me, I thought you hated me. But even then, even when I hated what you were doing, I liked it too. And I was more scared of the way I reacted to you, than of you."

"And now?"

"Now I understand that its something I've always needed. You just identified something that was always in me. You were right about me being unlovable. That's why I never managed to have a proper relationship, why I have always been alone. I needed this, I needed you."

"So now how do you feel about me now?"

"I - I think I love you," Mulder whispered fearfully, unable to meet the other man's eyes in case he saw derision on the older man's face.

Skinner almost laughed out loud. After years of being helpless in the face of Mulder's wild defiance, it had taken a mere four weeks of one on one interaction for the younger man to acknowledge Skinner as his master. How the mighty Mulder had fallen. Who would have suspected that such a wild personality hid such a subservient soul.

He had been right. The key to the taming of Mulder had been his sexual deviance. Skinner looked down at the younger man with barely concealed contempt, not once acknowledging to himself that Mulder's desires were simply the mirror image of his own.

Instead of realising that both he and Mulder were mutual symbionts who could nurture their newfound understanding of each other's deepest needs, he was instead simply filled with the realisation of a kind of power over the other man that both stunned and invigorated him.

He had to test the boundaries of Mulder's self-admission.

"Come here," he growled, patting his lap.

Mulder rose smoothly to his feet, and then carefully draped himself over Skinner's thighs. Skinner opened his legs slightly so that Mulder's cock and balls could dangle between his knees, and he ran his fingers over Mulder's firm buttocks. Mulder's skin shivered and twitched under his touch.

Skinner removed the plug, reached around for the lube he had left on the table, coated his index finger and then pressed the slick digit against Mulder's loose pucker. Mulder moaned in surprise and spread his legs slightly to allow Skinner access, consciously relaxing his sphincter so that Skinner's blunt finger could slide inside.

Skinner played with him for a moment, enjoying the way Mulder's ass muscles tried to suck him inside. Completely gone was any token protest at his attentions. Mulder was relaxed and open on his lap, as though in accepting his own needs he had handed the responsibility for his reactions to the older man.

Then he withdrew his finger and swung his palm down on Mulder's cheeks with enough force to make the other man yelp.
He wormed his finger back into Mulder's ass and twisted it so that his knuckle ground against Mulder's passage. Mulder sobbed and bucked. Skinner withdrew the finger again and applied the next blow.

By the tenth slap, Skinner had three fingers inside an increasingly enthusiastic Mulder. The younger man was writhing and moaning shamelessly as Skinner deliberately scraped his prostate with the nail of his middle finger.

Mulder was almost insensate, the juxtaposition of teasing pleasure and then the sharp blazing pain, driving him to the brink of madness. His cock was weeping pre-cum between Skinner's legs and he had completely lost himself in the intense stimulation of his flesh.

On the fifteenth blow onto Mulder's flaming ass, Mulder lost all bodily control and came explosively, then sobbed in terror. Yet, Skinner ignored Mulder's transgression, realising that he should have remembered to replace the cage. Besides, he was after Mulder's compliance now, and fear at this point would only undo the atmosphere of complete sexual submission that he was striving for with this "punishment".

"I haven't yet told you NOT to come," he whispered to the terrified man, and was rewarded, as he had hoped, by a deep groan of relief and the further relaxation of Mulder's ass.

This time, he managed to get four fingers into Mulder, and although the younger man writhed and shuddered under his assault, Mulder's groan of dismay when he withdrew was definitely more related to the removal of his hand, than his fear of the next blow.

With that realisation, Skinner applied four stinging slaps in succession this time, finishing the punishment so that he could concentrate on the next step. He sat for a moment and admired his handiwork. Mulder's cheeks were burning hot and mottled with red handprints.

Skinner reached for the lubrication again and this time slathered it all over the raised marks. Mulder hissed as the cold gel touched his hot skin and then sighed as Skinner began to massage it gently over the abused flesh. When Skinner's hand was slick from the gel, he pressed again at Mulder's hole.

This time he tucked his thumb against his palm and pushed until all but his third knuckles were embedded.

Mulder was moaning, but his cock had stiffened again between Skinner's knees, and as Skinner twisted his wrist around, he began to whimper with need.

Skinner removed his fingers and Mulder sobbed in dismay.

"What do you want, Fox?" he demanded.

"I want you to fuck me, Sir," Mulder groaned.

The desperate honesty of his reply was impossible to refuse. Skinner pulled him to his feet, bent his unresisting body over the table, and unzipping his fly to release his cock, he entered Mulder in one brutal thrust.

Mulder cried out in pain/pleasure as Skinner rammed into him, fast and furiously, his thighs pounding viciously against Mulder's bruised ass. Mulder braced his hands against the table and met each of Skinner's thrusts with cries of pained ecstasy, and as Skinner emptied his load into his ass, Mulder came for the third time, before collapsing in a dead faint on the table.
"You said you love me, but do you trust me, boy?" Skinner growled huskily, when Mulder had finally recovered enough to pull himself off the table and resume position at Skinner's feet.

"Y-yes Sir," Mulder replied quietly, his eyes searching the other man's face anxiously.

Skinner's eyes narrowed suspiciously. He so wanted to believe that Mulder was sincere, but still he knew that this could be an elaborate trick.

"Show me then," he challenged. "Prove your love and trust."

Mulder looked up at his words, his teeth chewing nervously on his lower lip, but his eyes still dark with arousal.

"What do you want me to do, Sir?" he finally asked.

"Get in the sling," Skinner ordered, catching Mulder's eyes until Mulder froze like a rabbit under the spotlights of his glare.

Mulder winced at the thought of anything increasing the burning in his ass. As always, in the aftermath of the excitement, the throbbing after effects of the pain had sobered his previous enthusiasm. Yet, his newfound desire to please Skinner was greater than his fear, and unbelievably his cock was jerking to life again for the fourth time since Skinner had returned 'home'.

So slowly, Mulder nodded, and then he gracefully rose to his feet, ignoring the throbbing pain between his legs and padding over to the steps, for the first time he voluntarily climbed into the bondage.

Skinner fastened the webbing straps around him carefully, awed by the look of complete acceptance on Mulder's face.

He opened Mulder's legs wide, pulled them up, and clear until he had unhindered access to Mulder's reddened ass.

"You've been well-prepared tonight. I think you are ready for this finally, Fox. It's time for you to finally accept my whole fist," Skinner stated with apparent calmness.

To be honest, Skinner was highly nervous. The suddenness of Mulder's capitulation had caught him wrong-footed. He had begun to despair of ever breaking Mulder. As much as he had dreamt of this moment, of being able to do safely to the other man, the act by which Rhodes had killed the traitor, all of the literature he had read suggested that only the complete acceptance of the 'bottom' to the act could possibly make his secret fantasy safe.

It was more than just an act of total domination, for Skinner. It was also a healing process. In a way, should Mulder submit willingly to his fist and survive the incident unharmed, then it would prove to Skinner that the traitor had not died through the act itself, but rather from his refusal to submit.

Why that made all the difference to his feelings of guilt, was a mystery even to himself. All he knew, was that this act, safely performed, would be his own mental absolution.

Not to mention the fact that Mulder's submission would have to be so total, that he would never be able to pretend again that he had failed to accept Skinner willingly.

For a moment, terror danced over Mulder's features, and then, like a mask slipping into place, a dreamy expression slowly descended over his face and his eyes went dark and vacant as he considered Skinner's words.
"Oh yes, Sir," he breathed. "I'm ready for that now."

A feeling of complete calm descended the older man. From what he had read, not only would his preparation of Mulder have to be slow and careful, but he also had to maintain the younger man's current state of 'sub-space' lest Mulder panic and suddenly struggle in the restraints.

He had been working towards this moment for weeks, teaching Mulder's sphincter muscles to stretch and relax against larger and larger invaders. He began to explain this as he liberally applied the thick, creamy lubrication over his right hand, wrist and lower arm, and then pressed the valve of the tube deeply inside Mulder's ass and squeezed its entire contents inside of his passage.

"The plug that you have worn for the last few nights has been only a fraction smaller than the thickest part of my hand, Fox," he murmured to Mulder, his eyes locking on the younger man's.

A thin beading of sweat glistened on Mulder's forehead as Skinner stroked him gently inside his hot entrance, yet his eyes were dark and almost opaque as he floated on the edge of a dreamy acceptance of Skinner's words.

"The sphincter is a muscle, Fox. Like all muscles it can be torn," Skinner explained.

Mulder flinched at the word "torn" and a flash of panic shot over his features, but as Skinner's soft voice continued, he relaxed again into an almost hypnotic state of acceptance.

"Your muscle has learnt to stretch, Fox. It won't tear. This won't damage you in any way. A few hours from now it will be tight again, better and stronger for the workout we will give it."

"Do you trust me, Fox?" he whispered, pushing his fingers into the well-greased entrance and carefully rubbing against Mulder's prostate.

It was Mulder's state of instant arousal at his stimulation that reassured him more than the mumbled "Yes, Sir."

He could feel Mulder's ass clenching against his invasion, as need for more sensation overwhelmed Mulder's senses, and he saw Mulder's balls begin to draw up.

"Don't come," he warned and Mulder bit his lower lip in distress but nodded his compliance.

Over and over he pushed his finger's into the younger man, rubbing until Mulder was bucking in his restraints and begging for more, before withdrawing, leaving Mulder sobbing in frustration.

"Do you want me," Skinner demanded, moving his hand to caress Mulder's tight scrotum.

"Oh God, yes," Mulder gasped, as Skinner rolled his balls in his thick fingers.

"Who do you belong to, Fox?" Skinner growled, moving his left hand to lightly grasp and tease Mulder's engorged cock, while his right hand returned to Mulder's entrance and pushed until his thumb and fingers were buried in the loosened hole.

The two simultaneous sensations made Fox howl with need.

"You, Sir. I belong to you," Mulder gasped, as Skinner's left hand played up and down his shaft.

"What do you need, Fox?" Skinner asked as Mulder whimpered.

"More, I need more, Sir, please," Mulder replied, tossing his head feverishly. "I need to come, Sir. Please let me come."
"Soon, Fox, but first you have to give ME more," Skinner replied. "Let me in Fox. Relax and let me in."

He pushed a little harder against Mulder's ass.

"I can't," Mulder sobbed, as the pressure on his ass increased.

Skinner squeezed Mulder's cock tightly, diverting Mulder's attention from his ass to the new pain in his groin.

"Relax, Fox. You are mine, your ass is mine. Stop denying me what is mine," Skinner purred.

Tears of mingled pain and frustration poured down Mulder's cheeks. He wanted to accept Skinner, wanted to comply; yet, his skin betrayed him, refusing to stretch, to allow Skinner full access.

Skinner abruptly removed his hands. Mulder sobbed with frustration.

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm trying," he began to gasp as Skinner moved away to the table and returned with the paddle, cock cage and nipple clamps.

"Relax, boy. This isn't punishment," Skinner soothed. "You need to relax more, get into the mood, I think."

Startled understanding flashed in Mulder's eyes. Skinner had to struggle to fit the tight cage over Mulder's straining cock. Then he walked up to his side and leant over, grasping his left nipple between his lips and sucking it to a hard point. The sharp teeth of the clamp then sent an almost nauseous wave of pain through Mulder's body before settling to a dull throb. Skinner repeated the procedure with the other nipple and then linked them with a tight chain to keep a steady pressure.

Mulder's eyes were screwed up against the pain, but when Skinner glanced down at his erection, it was still straining eagerly against the cock-cage. He bent and licked his tongue over Mulder's slit, tasting his weeping pre-cum. Mulder's hips jerked and he gave a choking gasp, that turned into a bitter sob as Skinner withdrew his mouth.

Then Skinner picked up the paddle and began to apply the softest of blows against Mulder's already abused ass. Somehow, the very lightness of the taps was more terrible than the deep burn that Mulder had anticipated. Each soft slap on his raw nerves sent waves of sensation up through his taught groin and through his shuddering torso, so that the bite of the nipple clamps intensified. As each wave of pain receded and his body began to relax, Skinner sent another wave in its wake.

Mulder was screaming deliriously, his head threshing wildly against the multiple sensations, until his throat felt as raw as his ass and he was floating, riding on the waves of pain until his mind lost the ability to distinguish pain from pleasure and his whole body felt like one quivering nerve end.

Finally, Skinner stopped his attentions and ran his finger's lightly along Mulder's thighs, feeling with satisfaction the almost boneless consistency of Mulder's muscles. Then he returned to Mulder's ass.

This time his fingers slipped with ease into the slack opening. His knuckles caught again but the resistance was definitely less.

"Let me in, baby," he purred softly.

As thought the endearment was the last key to Mulder's soul, the younger man gave a sigh of complete submission and the walls of his sphincter seemed to collapse, letting Skinner's whole hand slip inside.
Skinner's heart pounded so fiercely that it hurt his chest. He nearly forgot to breathe as a feeling of sweet triumph flooded him. He looked down to where his hand had disappeared, and saw only white lube surrounding his snugly buried wrist. There was no blood, no tearing, and no damage. Mulder had truly submitted to his entrance.

Slowly he twisted his hand, loving the sensation of power as Mulder writhed helplessly, gasping in undisputable pleasure at the feeling of being so absolutely taken and filled. Skinner slowly clenched his hand inside its cage of flesh.

Mulder gasped and gave a cry of surprise, as Skinner's hand seemed to grow inside him. There was no pain now inside his ass, only an unbelievable pressure, but his cock was burning.

"Oh god, let me come," he suddenly screamed. "Please, Sir. I can't bear it. Please."

Skinner could see the genuine distress on Mulder's face, and in the light of his own pleasure, couldn't find it in himself to deny the other man his relief.

He leant forward and used his left hand to release the cock-cage.

Freed, Mulder's engorged cock lay almost flat on his stomach, its veins so prominent that they seemed to pulse along its length.

Then Skinner slowly pulled his right hand back, and then punched forward carefully until he connected with Mulder's prostrate with an almost bruising force. Mulder let loose a scream that could have raised the dead, his cock fountained a stream of cum all over his sweat-drenched chest and his eyes rolled back in his head as he lost consciousness.

As quickly as he judged it safe to do so, Skinner carefully withdrew his hand and worriedly checked Mulder's pulse. To his relief, Mulder's breathing was slow and steady.

He went to the bathroom, cleaned his hands and then ran a deep, warm bath. Then he returned to Mulder, unfastened the webbing, carefully released the still-unconscious man and carried him to the bathroom, amazed at his own feelings of tenderness towards the younger man.

At some level, he understood that Mulder's trust in him was a gift that he didn't deserve. Yet, a louder voice in his head just insisted that all he had done was claim a prize that he had earned through his weeks of hard labor and his clever tongue.

And because the latter opinion was more comfortable for him to accept, he clung to that feeling of triumph, yet still he couldn't help himself from lowering Mulder carefully into the bath and sitting there protectively until the warm water revived the shocked man into a semblance of consciousness.

Then for a long time Skinner just stared at the younger man, taking in the glazed eyes and tentative look on Mulder's face. He looked like a puppy, Skinner decided, desperately hoping for a word of approval.

"You pleased me tonight," he admitted gruffly, and was oddly satisfied by the resultant sparkle in Mulder's eyes.

"That was, that was," Mulder fumbled for words, his brain still overloaded by the excess of sensation.

"That was what?" Skinner demanded.

Mulder shook his head helplessly, unable to think of a suitable word in the cotton wool that had
become his brain. Finally, he settled on the only words that he could manage to utter.

"Thank you," he whispered, and then his exhausted body shut down and he simply fell asleep, leaving Skinner stunned.

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When Mulder finally woke, he was aware of two things. Firstly, his ass felt like it had been assaulted by a battering ram. Secondly, there was an unfamiliar feeling of brightness against his eyelids.

Tentatively he opened his eyes, only to gasp in bewildered surprise. He was lying on the mattress, unchained, and the boards had been removed from the windows, so that daylight was streaming through the dirty windowpanes.

He blinked uncertainly and looked around the room. All trace of Skinner had been removed, even the sling had gone. The only items left in the room were a small pile of clothes on the bare wooden table.

Moving cautiously, aware of the throbbing pain in his ass, Mulder hobbled over to the table. A pair of loose jeans, sneakers, t-shirt and jacket, all in his size lay in a neat pile, next to a handful of small change, his key ring, and his collar.

It was only when he saw the collar on the table that he became aware of the nakedness of his neck. Instead of relief, the absence of the familiar leather made him sway uncertainly, his heart racing in panic. Then suddenly his mind snapped into gear.

He was free, he was actually free. He raced to the door and fumbled with the bolt, and nearly collapsed with relief when it swung open, revealing his first site of the outside world in over a month.

He was free. He could go home, he realised.

Then his heart lurched.

Home. Home to his lonely apartment. To his lonely life, the lone gunmen, his fish, and his long nights in front of the video with cold pizza and beer.

Suddenly the image felt hateful to him.

Alone. Always alone.

He sobbed. Skinner didn't want him. This had all been just a game to the older man, after all. He had had what he wanted, Mulder's admission of love, and now he was tired of the game and had abandoned him.

It was too much. It was too cruel. Skinner had woken a need in him and had then discarded him like a broken toy. He collapsed to his knees and sobbed his heart out, his body wracked with misery.

Finally, when the cold morning breeze turned his shudders into the trembling of chilled flesh, he slowly made his way back to the table and began to dress. The clothes felt as strange on his skin now, as his nakedness had felt mere weeks before.

It was only as he picked up the change and keys that he dared to look again at the collar. In sudden temper he reached for the leather, to fling it across the room, and only then saw a tiny note left underneath it.
In small, precise letters, Skinner had written, "This is YOUR collar, Fox. Leave it or wear it. Your choice."

The words burned into Mulder's brain, and understanding hit him.

Skinner hadn't abandoned him. He was giving him the choice to accept the collar or not.

It was a test. Yesterday, he had shown Skinner by his actions that he finally accepted that his role in life was to be Skinner's slut. Now Skinner was pushing the situation a step further. Letting Mulder go was his way of removing Mulder's last remaining safety net.

If he returned to DC and put on the collar, he would be proving, beyond doubt, that it wasn't fear or captivity that motivated his submission to the older man.

He would be giving up all his excuses for his behaviour. He would have to face his own needs and desires and accept responsibility for his own decision to place himself in Skinner's hands once more.

He couldn't do it.

As much as he wanted Skinner's love, the price was too high. He couldn't give up that much pride. As long as he had been Skinner's captive, he had been able to blame his own feelings on the older man. He didn't think he could live in the real world, with the knowledge that the pain and humiliation was something that he had learned to crave.

He would return home, and put this behind him. The one thing he couldn't avoid was that he DID trust Skinner. Skinner was offering him his freedom and Mulder had no doubt that the offer was sincere. After all, Skinner had taken a huge risk in letting him go. Just as Skinner obviously knew that Mulder would never tell anyone about the weeks he had spent as Skinner's "guest", so Mulder knew that the AD would accept Mulder's choice to end their "relationship".

It was over. It had been a whirlwind of pain, and sex. Of intense fear and wonderful bliss. Something that had changed him forever, but something that had to end here and now, before he was sucked into the maelstrom of emotional chaos that beckoned him so seductively.

It was over.

That decided, Mulder shrugged on the jacket and headed for the door, starting the long walk back to DC.

He wasn't even aware of picking up the collar and tucking it carefully into his pocket.

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Part Five

Mulder's hand trembled as he pushed the key into the door of his apartment. He had expected to feel blessed relief at finally reaching home, after his nightmare journey of hobbling, and occasionally managing to hitch lifts, aware only of the pain in his body and a strange gaping hole in his soul. Instead, he felt like an intruder at this once familiar place.

It was as though the Fox Mulder who had last stepped through this doorway was no more, and he himself was a pale imitation, a doppelganger that wore Mulder's face but had nothing of his spirit anymore. He was like one of those aliens in the old b-movies, who took over and possessed a human's body but couldn't capture the nuances of behaviour and emotion to convincingly pull off the deception.
The old Mulder would have laughed at his own imagery, would have delighted in the odd analogy, but he felt too numb, too disassociated, to be objective.

As he stepped through the door, he noticed the tidy pile of post stacked on his telephone table. He registered the fact that Skinner must have used the keys to visit his empty apartment, and instead of feeling distressed at this further evidence of Skinner's invasion into his life, his only thought was that Skinner had hopefully remembered to feed his fish.

A thin layer of dust covered the room, swirling up at his entrance and floating visibly in the beams of late afternoon sunlight that poured through the lounge window.

Zombie-like, Mulder shuffled painfully over to the tank. He found his eyes welling suddenly at the sight of the healthy fish, that swam gracefully in the slightly brackish-looking water. They needed cleaning, for sure, but they were still alive.

"Hi, guys," Mulder whispered, sinking slowly to his knees, resting his cheek against the cold glass, and closing his eyes.

The low rumble of the aerator throbbed through his cheekbone, like a mechanical heartbeat, and he finally let himself realise that he was home.

"I guess you wondered where I was, huh?" he mumbled, chin on chest. "I've been in the twilight zone, I think. It was a package deal, vacation in hell, courtesy of AD Walter Skinner. Yeah, that's right, guys, the very same man who has been feeding you, I guess. Only, only, " his voice hitched a little, "only I guess he treated you lot better than me."

Mulder turned his head slightly, so that his forehead rested on the tank, and opened his eyes so that he could see through the algae crusted glass to the elegant bodies flashing through the water, their eyes cold and impervious to his pain.

"I guess you need to be cleaned up a little," he muttered. "Then you'll be good as new. It's just cosmetic. Like me. I'll be okay too."

And with those words, a dam inside him broke and weeks of pain and misery poured out, flooding him in waves of lonely tears.

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"Dammit, Mulder! You look like hell!" Scully snapped by way of greeting when her errant partner walked into the basement the next morning, his pale, underweight body dwarfed by an impeccably pressed suit.

After four weeks of suffering the snide comments of her colleagues and the constant sniping of AD Skinner, because of her constant defense of a partner who hadn't even bothered to contact her ONCE, she was so tired of trying to cover Mulder's butt that her first inclination had been to beat the hell out of him.

Yet, he looked so vulnerable, defenseless and awkward as he shuffled into the room that a lot of her justified anger fizzled and died into both personal and professional concern. He really DID look like hell. 

"Hiya," Mulder mumbled, sliding past her to sit gingerly at his overflowing desk, his eyes unable to meet her searching glance.

"Where the hell have you been?" Scully demanded furiously, still trying to hold onto her indignation
but faltering in the face of his obvious distress.

Mulder visibly winced at her sharp tone, shuffling nervously in his chair and apparently unable to look at her. He looked like a naughty schoolboy, she decided. His suit looked two sizes too big for him, adding to the effect of a boy playing dress-up, and his shirt cuffs poked so far out of his jacket sleeves that they nearly concealed the minute trembling of his hands.

Her sharp eyes focused on his shaking fingers. Both hands looked somehow wrong to her sharp glare. There was something particularly misshapen about his left hand, as though the bones had been severely broken and then had been re-set badly.

"Did you have an accident?" Scully demanded, her voice softened by obvious concern.

Finally, Mulder raised haunted eyes to meet hers, and she caught her breath. The skin beneath his eyes was so dark, it looked bruised.

"Yeah," Mulder muttered, "you could say that," and he laughed quietly.

The sound, more a bitter cackle than humor, sent a shiver down Dana's spine.

"Are you okay? Do you need a hospital? What happened?" she asked, her voice deliberately gentle and inviting.

"I'm fine," Mulder mumbled unconvincingly.

"I want to know what happened to you," Scully insisted, her fury renewed as he refused to confide in her. As if it wasn't bad enough that he had simply disappeared for a month, he had returned, obviously the worse for wear, and still he was refusing to give her the explanation that she deserved.

They were partners, dammit. That should mean something, shouldn't it? They were supposed to rely on each other, support each other, and confide in each other. Instead, yet again, Mulder was shutting her out. It hurt, and re-kindled her aggression.

"Tell me," she demanded, her voice harsher than she had intended, and to her horror, she saw Mulder flinch away from her as though he was actually scared of her tiny presence.

*What the hell had happened to him?* she wondered helplessly.

"I - I can't - I won't - I can't talk about it. Please Dana, don't ask," Mulder begged, his voice so uncharacteristically hesitant and hurt, that she realised that she needed to back off a little.

"Okay," she said, and saw Mulder almost collapse with relief.

She did not intend to leave it alone. Mulder had been missing for a month, had returned looking like an extra for "The Night of the Living Dead", had obviously been physically injured, and apparently was mentally traumatised by whatever had happened.

Yet, she cared too much for Mulder to push him when he was obviously fragile and barely clinging on to a semblance of normality. God only knew what Skinner would have to say about it.

The thought of Skinner vitalized her. She was sure that the grapevine would already have informed the AD of Mulder's return to the bureau. It wouldn't be many more minutes before Skinner summoned Mulder and gave him a well-deserved reaming for his unexplained disappearance.

As a doctor, let alone Mulder's friend, Scully didn't think that Mulder was up to anyone's abuse at the
moment, let alone the wrath of the AD. So leaving Mulder, she rushed up the stairs to Skinner's office and requested to see him.

Kim's mouth quirked at her request and she gave a small nod, an acknowledgement of the public awareness of Mulder's return, as much as of Scully's question.

"He says he has five minutes," she told the waiting agent.

Scully threw back her shoulders, put on her most professional expression and strode into Skinner's office, ignoring the voice in the back of her head that berated her as usual for putting herself on the line for her errant partner.

"Agent Scully," Skinner acknowledged, pushing his chair back slightly from his desk so that he could appear more relaxed and comfortable.

He was slightly wary of this confrontation, uncertain whether he had misjudged Mulder. Yet there seemed no confrontation or accusation in Scully's eyes, just the normal, somewhat embarrassed urge to smooth ruffled feathers.

Scully in protective mother-hen role, he decided, with a flicker of amusement in his eyes.

Scully was too busy rehearsing her speech to notice.

"I came about Agent Mulder, Sir," she started.

"Oh?" Skinner replied coolly. "Can't he climb stairs any more, or is he just hoping that if he hides in the basement long enough, I might believe that he has been lurking there all along?"

"He's not well, Sir," Dana pronounced.

Skinner raised a mocking eyebrow.

"I have been of that opinion for a long time, Agent Scully. Agent Mulder's sanity is definitely on the fine-line between genius and madness," he said snidely.

Dana's cheeks coloured in a combination of embarrassment and outrage.

"I was referring to his medical condition, Sir," she snapped.

"Oh, and are you speaking as a Doctor then?" Skinner challenged. "Have you examined him, personally?"

"No," Dana admitted.

Skinner hid his sigh of relief. Mulder's body still bore too many traces of his captivity for any Doctor to be allowed to see it. The sling alone had left a myriad of friction burns and bedsores all over Mulder's body, not to mention the fact that his ass must still bear evidence of Skinner's fist.

"But, he has lost at least 15 kilos and he appears to have been in an accident," Dana continued.

"What kind of accident?" Skinner asked, narrowing his eyes worriedly.

"I didn't get a close look at it, but I am positive that his left hand has been severely broken and incorrectly set. The knuckles on his right hand also are slightly misshapen." Dana said with almost clinical detachment.
"Where has he been then, and what happened to him?" Skinner demanded.

Dana's shoulders slumped.

"I don't know, he won't tell me, but he looks," she searched for a word, "looks 'haunted'," she finished weakly.

"Thank you for your medical opinion, Agent Scully." Skinner mocked slightly, then seeing her flare with professional insult, he decided it was time to play the game more cleverly.

"So you are here to ask me not to give him a hard time about his absence?" he asked quietly.

Dana flushed but nodded.

"I can't just let an FBI agent think he can disappear without trace, and pay no consequences, Agent Scully. It isn't the first time, after all."

"I know, Sir, but he WAS suspended, after all," she said defensively.

"That is the only reason he hasn't been dismissed already," Skinner replied coldly.

"Already?" Dana queried.

"There are already a number of people who expect me to fire him, Agent Scully. Now you are asking me to let him off the hook without any discipline because he 'isn't well'."

Dana swallowed and bit her lip before replying.

"I'm not saying he shouldn't be disciplined, Sir. I'm just asking you to be lenient with him, at least until we get to the bottom of WHY he disappeared. Couldn't you just confine him to the bureau for a time? He really doesn't look capable of field work, anyway. Although I haven't had the opportunity to examine them closely, I doubt his hands are capable of firing his weapon. SOP in this case would be to remove him from field work, and he hates office work, so he will see it as punishment enough."

Skinner pretended to consider her words. The truth was that he wanted Mulder right under his eyes for the foreseeable future and wouldn't have even dreamt of sending him out of town. Letting Scully think it was her own idea, though, meant that Skinner wouldn't have to worry about her own nosy interference.

"What about you, Agent Scully? Are you asking for a new field partner or will you be content to be office bound too?" he asked.

Dana realised that Skinner was seriously considering her proposal, and thought quickly.

"I have been invited to run a course in forensics at the Academy, Sir. I have been putting it off because of my work here, but I would really like the opportunity."

"How long is the course?" Skinner asked, chewing his bottom lip thoughtfully.

"Six months, Sir," Dana replied, waiting for the AD to erupt at her request for a half-year absence, but quite apart from her concern for Mulder, the opportunity truly fascinated her and she genuinely wanted to go. She wouldn't have dreamt of asking for the transfer if Mulder had needed her, but the way things were looking, the X-files would be better off on hold than dying with Mulder's dismissal.

Besides, it was clear from Mulder's refusal to confide in her that she wasn't as necessary to him as she had hoped. As usual, her attempts to breach Mulder's walls of self-imposed loneliness had been
rejected.

The truth was, she was obviously the last person that Mulder wanted to turn to in a crisis. The knowledge hurt her on so deep a level, that the depth of her feeling of rejection surprised her.

"I will be sorry to see you go, Dana," Skinner replied quietly, his words breaking into her sudden self-pity.

Dana relaxed at his use of her first name. He actually seemed to be accepting her proposal.

"But, I think the new recruits would benefit from your expertise, and it will give Agent Mulder a chance to get his feet back on the ground," Skinner continued thoughtfully.

"So you aren't going to fire him?" Dana asked hopefully.

"I will give him ANOTHER chance, Agent Scully. He is a brilliant profiler, one of our best, but he needs to learn self-discipline. I'll give him the six-months of your absence to pull himself together and then review his situation when you are ready to return," Skinner offered.

Dana gave him a brilliant smile of thanks and turned to leave.

"Tell Agent Mulder that I wish to see him now," Skinner told her quietly, and she left his office, deciding that Mulder was fortunate to have such a surprisingly nice and understanding boss, after all.

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Mulder turned as white as the proverbial ghost when Scully informed him that the AD had summoned him, but she put his evident terror down to guilt and worry about his disappearance. She made one more attempt to convince Mulder to talk to her, but he just turned his face away from her and mumbled incoherently.

So, she gave up and started looking for the long-neglected invitation to the Academy, her concern over her partner greatly reduced in view of Skinner's surprising leniency. Hopefully, the AD would find the underlying cause of the mystery, and at least Mulder was safe from repercussions until such time as he pulled himself together.

Still hurt at Mulder's failure to trust her, she allowed herself to give in to the wave of excitement at her own unexpected good fortune. The idea of spending six months at the Academy as a resident expert, being treated with respect rather than the sympathetic disdain she received daily from her colleagues since she had become 'spooky' Mulder's partner, was rather attractive, she admitted to herself.

She spared a smile of support for Mulder when he finally rose out of his chair, but once she was satisfied that Mulder was going to answer Skinner's summons, her concentration returned to the invitation that she had never thought she could accept. She barely noticed his slow reluctant hobble out of the door, too immersed in her need to arrange her transfer to register Mulder's discomfiture.

Mulder himself felt sick.

He had obviously understood that by donning his suit and coming to work this morning, he was going to have to face his former captor. Nevertheless, a large part of himself had believed that Skinner would be no more eager to face him in the light of day, than he himself was.

On the other hand, the fact that no police had arrived on Skinner's doorstep had no doubt proven that Mulder had not reported the kidnapping, so by his silence alone, Mulder had let the other man know
just how cowed he was by the whole experience.

Besides which, how could he look Skinner in the face now? How could he possibly stand in Skinner's office and, in front of that cold face, not vividly remember that less than 48 hours previously he had confessed to having fallen in love with his captor and that he had then willingly let him sink his fist into his ass, in the most painfully erotic experience of his life?

He knew that his experiences had indelibly marked him. The looks of strange pity and faint disgust that had shadowed the faces of those few kind strangers that had helped him back to DC yesterday with lifts in their cars, had been echoed in the faces of everyone in the Hoover building this morning.

Even Scully had done a double take on seeing him, her face filling with angry concern and distaste, as though she could see the taint of shame on his features.

After a restless night, finding not comfort in his old apartment, but rather almost a sense of agoraphobia at his sudden, unexpected freedom, he had taken painstaking care to dress that morning. He had tried to hide his broken, scarred body behind the shield of an expensive suit, but it had hung in ridiculous folds over his body. Only carving an extra hole in his belt had enabled him to hold his trousers up.

His already lean frame had become almost emaciated during his captivity. He had barely noticed the fact of his weight loss, given his constant state of nudity. It wasn't until he put on one of his old suits that he realised that he looked like an over-dressed scarecrow.

With that thought, he had realised he was hungry and had raided his kitchen, praying to find something, anything, that would satisfy the sudden raw gnawing of his stomach. He had absently noticed with gratitude that Skinner had obviously replenished his fridge for him, discarding whatever moldering remnants had remained of Mulder's life pre-Skinner, with a large can.

He had opened the tin ravenously, and was looking around in confusion for a bowl, before it had even registered that it was a can of Alpo. Then, despite his realisation, he had still hungrily upended the contents into a cereal bowl and had wolfed the food down, almost happy at the familiar taste in this suddenly unfamiliar world that he had returned to.

He had even felt grateful for Skinner's consideration. It had only been after his belly had distended happily with its new contents that he realised what he had done. Shit, he hadn't even looked for cutlery. Like a well-trained lab animal, he had simply ducked his face in the bowl and slobbered the food down.

In just four weeks, Skinner had turned his life on its head, had programmed him to do and accept things that were unthinkable in the real world.

Instead of grasping his newfound freedom, he was just automatically continuing the behaviour patterns that had been so painfully and intensively drilled into him.

He was fucked, he knew that. Completely and absolutely, fucked in the head.

It was with this thought in his mind, that he entered Skinner's office like a death-row prisoner facing his executioner.

Skinner watched Mulder's slow hesitant entrance. The younger man's eyes were firmly fixed on the carpet as he approached, his chin on his chest, as he either refused or simply found himself unable to even look up at him.

Skinner had never felt anything as invigorating as the feeling of complete satisfaction that flooded
him at Mulder's total humility and fear. No matter how cowed Mulder had been at the safe house, Skinner had always had the nagging doubt that Mulder would revert instantly to his previous headstrong cockiness when released.

Yet, despite Mulder's clothes, his entire demeanor was as subjugated as it had been in the cabin. He saw Mulder come to a hesitant stop before his desk and begin to automatically sink to his knees before he seemed to shake himself back to awareness and stiffen again, his face still averted, but obviously flaming with embarrassment.

"Agent Mulder," Skinner began, his voice as cool and emotionless, as any listening bugs would expect.

"You have been absent without leave for four weeks and I require an explanation," he barked.

Mulder's head finally shot up and he looked at Skinner in complete disbelief. There was nothing in the AD's face to suggest he was joking, or even mocking. The room swayed around him as he did a quick reality check. This was his kidnapper, his abuser, his rapist, and yet nothing in the other man's face gave away even the slightest hint of what had happened between them.

For a moment, Mulder actually doubted his own memory. Was it possible that someone who only LOOKED like AD Skinner had abducted him?

Terror flashed over Mulder's thin, pale face, quickly chased by an almost comical confusion.

"Well?" Skinner snapped. "What explanation do you have, Agent?"

Mulder's face twisted uncertainly. He wrung his damaged hands together nervously, finding himself struggling to even form coherent words.

"You, you know I - I was ab-abducted, Sir," he whispered finally.

"By aliens, no doubt! Or was it Government Officials? The Consortium this time? Or maybe I did it, huh?" Skinner scoffed derisively. "Don't you think you are already considered strange enough around here without spouting ridiculous tales of abduction?"

Suddenly, Mulder understood. Skinner was just testing him, he decided, and no doubt warning him not to even consider trying to tell people about what Skinner had done to him.

"I was suspended, I went away," Mulder muttered, his head lowered in defeat. "I didn't think anyone would miss me."

Skinner relaxed. He had swept the office twice for bugs, yet he was still aware of the remote possibility of listening devices. He needed to ensure that Mulder wouldn't blurt something out that would incriminate him and that even if he did, his words would be discredited.

"You will be confined to the office until further notice, Agent Mulder," Skinner pronounced. "I want to keep a close eye on your performance from now on."

A spark of rebellion finally flared in Mulder. His heavily laden desk had called to him, trying to remind him of who he truly was, what was really important to him. It had been like a lifeline flung to a drowning man, and now Skinner was brutally pulling it out of his reach.

"I am a field operative, Sir," Mulder protested, his eyes carefully averted but his voice surprisingly steady.
"A field operative has to be able to fire a handgun, Agent Mulder. I doubt you will pass a competency test. You appear to have suffered some trauma to your hands," Skinner said smoothly.

Mulder's head jerked up at Skinner's taunting words, then memory of how his hands had been crushed made him flail a little before Skinner's cold glare, and the familiar fear of the other man churned in his belly.

"I can fire my weapon, Sir," he insisted, praying that it was true.

"I don't appreciate you arguing with me, Agent Mulder. I thought you had learnt that by now," Skinner drawled, his voice dripping with barely restrained anger.

Mulder fought his sudden panic, feeling his balls drawing up protectively as the other man seemed to grow and darken into a figure of menace. Suddenly he didn't care about the weapon, the x-files, anything. All he wanted was for the fear to recede.

Skinner watched Mulder visibly wilting before him and had to bite his lips to stop a bark of laughter emerging. He couldn't believe how effective his lessons had been. Mulder looked like he wanted to find a hole in the floor and burrow into it for safety.

"Let's go," he said, surging to his feet so quickly that Mulder automatically scuttled back several paces in terror.

"Go?" Mulder squeaked weakly, his eyes wary as Skinner's huge frame bore down on him.

"To the firing range, Agent Mulder. Let's see which one of us is right," Skinner said, a glint of cruel humor sparking in his otherwise expressionless face.

Mulder's knees trembled. He knew he couldn't hold a gun properly. Hell, he had barely managed to hold his electric razor this morning.

"I'm sorry," he muttered, "you're right. I can't."

Skinner ignored him, determined to make Mulder pay for his tiny rebellion. A public demonstration of Mulder's incapacity would not only ratify his decision to keep Mulder office bound, but the humiliation would teach the little bastard to keep his mouth shut from now on.

Mulder seemed to understand his decision without the need for further words. His hazel eyes were drowned by a combination of panic and hurt, his shoulders slumped and he began to shuffle towards the door, like a broken marionette.

Skinner followed him with silent menace into the crowded lift, and then leant into him until his hot breath assaulted the back of Mulder's neck. The lift slowly emptied, until only they were left after the ground floor, then mid-way between that floor and the basement, Skinner snapped out his hand and pressed the emergency stop button.

Mulder's already trembling body staggered in fear and surprise as the lift ground to an unexpected halt. For a long time he just froze in place, feeling Skinner's hot eyes boring into him. The older man said nothing, just stared at him until Mulder wanted to scream to release the tension that was knotting his guts.

"What?" he finally whispered, unable to bear the pressure of Skinner's silent appraisal.

A smile quirked the edges of Skinner's mouth.
"Before we go any further, Agent Mulder, there's something I would like to check," Skinner purred.

As Mulder looked at him in confusion, he shot his right hand out and snagged Mulder's tie, wrenching him forward. Mulder moaned in fear, but simply collapsed against him, his limbs incapable of raising themselves in defense against the man who had so brutally taught his body compliance.

Wordlessly, Skinner pulled down the knot of Mulder's tie, opened the top button of Mulder's shirt and then a deep guffaw escaped him.

He thrust Mulder away, turned his back contemptuously and pressed the button that would take them to the basement.

Mulder stared in humiliated misery at Skinner's back, bewildered by Skinner's failure to make any comment, and then he sagged in acceptance of his inability to understand ANYTHING about Skinner's moods.

The lift opened and Skinner strode off into the car park, leaving Mulder to hobble in his wake. Mulder's trembling fingers were still struggling to refasten his shirt and tie when he sank into Skinner's passenger seat.

The car journey was short and silent, Mulder shuffling uncomfortably to try to ignore the road vibrations that were so painful on his sore ass that his cock became embarrassing engorged behind the thankfully loose material of his pants.

Not once, during the journey, did Skinner even mention the leather collar that Mulder was wearing.

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Mulder sat on the floor of his apartment, his arms hugging his knees to his chest in a vain attempt at self-comfort. The damning piece of paper had long since fluttered out of his trembling fingers and now lay on the dusty floor.

It didn't matter. The words were etched in his brain, their cruel letters branded into him, a scathing damnation.

He was grounded. He had failed. Publicly he had proven that he was no longer capable of doing the only thing that had ever given his life purpose.

Hit a target? That was a joke. He couldn't have hit a charging rhino. Skinner had made such an issue of his incapacity that he had stopped all the other Agents on the range and warned them to step well back away from Mulder's trembling, useless fingers.

So, aware of his now avid audience, Mulder had found his already useless aim transformed into an inability to even hold the heavy weapon in his hands.

He had dropped it. Had fucking dropped the gun on the floor and it had gone off and nearly taken his feet off.

Only Skinner's lightning reflexes, as the big man had grabbed Mulder by the scruff of the neck and hauled him out of the box, had stopped the ricocheting bullet from hitting Mulder's legs.

He had been so dazed with humiliation and grief that he had barely heard the instructor telling him that he was no longer cleared for fieldwork. His gun had been confiscated in full view of two dozen witnesses and then Skinner had silently driven him, not back to the office, but home.
Mulder had climbed out of the car, closed the door and had waited for Skinner to follow, only for Skinner's car to simply pull away, leaving him bewildered and abandoned on the sidewalk.

He hated him. Hated Skinner with an emotion so dark and strong that it almost took his breath away.

It was his fault, dammit. Skinner had broken his hands. Skinner had been the one who had failed to re-set them properly.

He had looked so fucking smug when Mulder had failed and all he had said, as Mulder's life fell apart, was, "I trust you have learned not to argue with me, Agent Mulder."

Moreover, not once, all day, had he even mentioned Mulder's decision.

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The days passed without Skinner summoning him, calling him or even sparing him a glance should they happen to pass in the corridor.

Mulder ran a gamut of emotions from rejection, relief, dread and confusion.

At some level, he understood that Skinner was playing a different, but essentially identical, power game with him.

Having made Mulder confess, by wearing the collar, that he wanted to continue the relationship, he was obviously gaining some manner of sadistic satisfaction from making Mulder twist in the wind.

Mulder found it nearly impossible to sleep, his body no longer relaxed without his familiar restraints, his groin aching with the deprivation of Skinner's touch. He would fruitlessly try to bring himself to relief only to find that without the spur of pain, or the mocking eyes of Skinner on his body, that his cock refused to release its growing pressure.

Mulder could barely think around the constant ache in his cock, the feeling of emptiness in his ass, and the ever-growing pit of despair in his soul as Skinner continued to ignore him.

The gnawing of his frustrated sexual needs was only over-shadowed by the realisation that he had run out of food and he hadn't got a dime in his pocket.

His ATM card was presumably still in the hire car in Hortsville and his wallet and checkbook had mysteriously vanished.

The irony nearly made him laugh. His four weeks in the safe house had trained him to expect regular food and sex. Now, in his so-called freedom, he was incapable of providing his body with either requirement.

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"I have banked with you for years," Mulder argued. "You know me, I have ID."

He thrust his FBI warrant card under the bank teller's disinterested nose.

"I am sorry, Mr Mulder, but as I have already explained, without a checking book or card, I cannot release your funds."

"I lost my card. My wallet and check book are missing," Mulder repeated for the fourth time.

"You have to apply for replacements, Sir," she replied mechanically.
"I HAVE," Mulder spat in despair. "They haven't arrived. My salary is paid directly into this bank. I have NO MONEY!"

"I understand that, Sir. However, I cannot release your funds without a checking book or card."

Mulder sagged against the counter. He was so light-headed from hunger that he could barely hold a coherent conversation, let alone sustain an argument. It had been seven days since his return to DC, his kitchen was empty, he had found and used every last scrap of change to feed himself while waiting for his replacement ATM card and Checkbook, and still they hadn't arrived.

Dana had left town, Skinner had become the invisible man, refusing to answer his increasingly pathetic requests to see him, and Mulder hadn't even got the means to buy a sandwich.

He turned away in defeat, almost laughing hysterically at the teller's automatic, "Have a nice day."

His expense account had been frozen as soon as he had been pulled off field-work, the woman in personnel had sniffed in distain at his request for a 'sub' and the bank were being unbelievably dense about sorting the problem out.

He hadn't received the posted replacements. Come to think of it, he hadn't received any post at all.

His mind sharpened and he scurried back to his office. It took three hours, and the weight of his FBI connection, before he established that all of his post was being diverted to Skinner's apartment.

After seven days of neglect, hunger and helplessness, this evidence of Skinner's further cruelty sparked so much despairing anger that Mulder's fear of the other man receded behind a wave of righteous anger.

How dare he? How fucking dare he?

He stormed to Skinner's office, refused to listen to Kim when she said, as always, that Skinner wasn't in, and barged into his office, only to deflate at the empty black leather chair.

"Satisfied?" Kim snapped angrily, only to soften as she saw the look of complete, frightened defeat in Mulder's eyes. She didn't know what was going on in the Agent's head at the moment, but the rumor mill had it that he was suffering some kind of nervous breakdown.

"He is working from home, Agent Mulder. If it is really important, maybe I could call him for you?" she offered hesitantly.

"Please," Mulder said brokenly. The fuel of his anger extinguished, he was swaying in confusion, as directionless as a rudderless ship.

Kim disappeared into her own office and returned several minutes later.

"He said for you to go home. He will visit you later," Kim told him, "He said you knew what you had to do?" she added, confused herself by the mysterious command.

Mulder shuddered and nodded, but a look of definite relief crept over his features and he managed a shy smile at the secretary.

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The sound of a key turning in his lock confused Mulder for a moment, then he realised that Skinner must have cut himself a spare. Of course. Skinner wasn't the type of man who would wait patiently
on the doorstep to be invited in.

Skinner entered the living room and then paused in satisfaction. Mulder had evidently understood his cryptic message. He was kneeling on the carpet, legs apart, head bowed submissively, his cock bound and displayed for Skinner's delight.

He strode over and cuffed Mulder sharply across the face.

Mulder yelped, more in surprise than pain, and he cowered, bewildered by Skinner's anger.

"How dare you burst into my office and then DEMAND to see me," Skinner snarled.

Skinner's unexpected violence forced Mulder's resentment to bubble to the surface once more. He dared to raise his head in disbelief.

"You've stolen my post, my money," he accused bitterly. "You've ignored me, refused to see me. What was I supposed to do?"

"Stolen?" Skinner snapped, reaching forward, grabbing Mulder's collar and shaking him viciously. "You seem to have forgotten something, Fox. You are wearing MY collar. That means you are MINE, and that means everything you own is mine too!"

Mulder's eyes went huge as Skinner's words sank in.

"But I'm HUNGRY!" he finally wailed.

Skinner hid his smirk. He had expected Mulder to snap earlier, had thought that Mulder's need for abuse would be the breaking point. Mulder's decision to wear the collar immediately had proved how much he had learned to crave Skinner's touch.

"That's your own fault, Fox," he replied, enjoying the confusion in the hazel eyes.

"Why?"

"I saw you in the cafeteria, Fox. Eating with Agent Scully."

Mulder's mind cast back. Dana had bought him lunch as a kind of farewell dinner, six days ago. It had been his last proper meal.

He looked at Skinner in bewilderment. Why was he being punished for eating with Dana?

"You are MINE, Fox. I decide what you eat, when you eat and how you eat," Skinner said firmly.

Understanding dawned in Mulder's eyes. This he understood. Skinner had been jealous, had seen his meal with Dana as being some form of betrayal.

"I'm sorry, Sir," he muttered, nuzzling his head against Skinner's legs in apology.

Skinner rubbed his hair, pleased that Mulder was catching on so quickly. Reaching into the bag he had brought he produced Mulder's bowl and a can of chicken Alpo.

He chuckled with satisfaction at the way Mulder began to hungrily lick his lips as though he was being offered a feast. He relaxed on the sofa and let Mulder wolf the food down. He had brought milk, fruit and cheese for Mulder too, aware that he needed a more substantial diet than dog food to reverse his worrying weight loss. However, he was currently just making a point, testing Mulder's complete submissiveness.
"So," he said when Mulder had finally licked the bowl clean and settled back on his haunches. "You like the collar I chose for you?"

Mulder flushed and dipped his eyes. "I like YOU," he muttered.

Skinner understood Mulder's comment. Mulder had chosen to accept the collar only because he understood that it was the only relationship that Skinner would offer him.

"Are you pleased to be home, Fox?" he asked, gesturing around the apartment.

Mulder's eyes met his in confusion.

"Yes. No. I don't know," Mulder said quietly. "I- I miss you, Sir."

"Miss me, or miss what I do to you?" Skinner asked.

Mulder blushed furiously.

"I miss the games we played," Mulder finally answered, his gaze far-off and dreamy.

Skinner was bemused by Mulder's choice of words. It was almost as though Mulder had forgotten that he had been an unwilling participant in the "games". His cock was certainly purple and swollen against the cock ring now, suggesting that just memory was enough to rekindle his body's desires.

"Do you want to play with me now, Fox?" Skinner asked quietly.

Mulder's face shot up, an expression of hope infusing his features, and his cock head began to glisten with pre-cum.

Skinner handed him the other carrier bag.

"Chose a game then," he purred.

Mulder delved into the bag hungrily, his eager fingers finally grasping a crop and retrieving it. He offered it to Skinner, his cock now dripping in excitement.

"That's part of a set, Fox," Skinner warned him with a smirk, reaching into the bag and fetching out a gag harness with trailing reins.

Mulder looked at the harness in confusion.

"Only a pony-boy can play with the crop, Fox," Skinner explained. "Do you want to be my pony?"

Mulder gave a shuddering gulp before nodding. "Please," he croaked.

Skinner fixed the harness in place first, sliding the thick rubber bit-gag between Mulder's teeth and fixing the straps tightly around Mulder's head to hold the gag in place.

When he was certain that Mulder was incapable of making anything but incoherent groans, he told him to kneel on his hands and feet, and holding him firmly by the reins, began to apply the crop to Mulder's butt.

As Mulder writhed and moaned under the assault, Skinner took the time to congratulate himself on his growing expertise. He managed to turn both of Mulder's cheeks into a fiery hot, red glow without once breaking the skin.
Mulder's arms had given way under the assault, and his head had collapsed to the floor, leaving only his butt suspended in the air to receive the kiss of the riding crop. Mulder's body was dripping with sweat, the muscles of his back twitching spasmodically in sympathy to the swats on his swollen backside.

When Skinner finally judged that the colour of Mulder's ass was perfect, he leant forward, removed the butt plug that Mulder had so obediently inserted in himself before his arrival, and unzipped his pants to allow his own cock to emerge.

There was nothing as satisfying, he decided, sinking his dick into Mulder's depths with one brutal thrust, as being fully clothed as he reamed Mulder's naked ass. The slap of his pant legs against Mulder's swollen buttocks only emphasised his control.

By failing to even bother to undress, he was intentionally emphasising that Mulder wasn't his "lover", he was just his slut.

He gathered the reins tightly, forcing Mulder's head up and off the floor, and then proceeded to ride him viciously, spurring his pony with frequent snaps of the crop up into Mulder's groin.

Mulder's eyes were rolling, he looked a perfect picture of a maddened rodeo mustang, Skinner decided, as he pounded inside him, whipping a frenzy onto Mulder's bound, straining cock while Mulder screamed and howled silently behind the thick gag.

It was only after Skinner had emptied himself triumphantly into Mulder's quivering body that he thought about Mulder's own unsatisfied erection.

He considered the option of leaving Mulder frustrated, but decided that Mulder's relief, at this point, would better serve his control.

He climbed off, dropping the reins, and headed for the bathroom to clean himself, only pausing a moment to say,

"You may come, boy."

He left Mulder desperately scrabbling with the cock ring and closed the bathroom door behind him.

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Skinner sprawled back on the sofa and watched Mulder through lazy, half-closed eyes. Mulder had removed the harness, with his permission, and was now kneeling back in position, his body occasionally trembling with cold as his sweat-streaked body began to chill in the unheated apartment.

It reminded Skinner that there were still rules that needed to be explained.

"You have noticed, obviously, that the gas has been switched off in your apartment," he began. "Since only your cooker and heating system use gas, I have decided that it is an unnecessary expenditure."

Mulder's eyes sparked resentment.

"If you are cold, I can warm you up some more," Skinner offered with an evil grin.

Mulder quickly decided that the burning of his butt cheeks was more than enough heat for one evening and his shoulders sagged in acceptance.
"Your post is coming to me, as you know. Tomorrow you will sign a form giving me access to your checking account. I will pay all of the bills that I consider necessary, but no more. Your cable has been cancelled, as has your telephone. You have a mobile, there is no need for a land line," Skinner stated, enjoying Mulder's attempt not to voice his dismay.

"If you have a problem with this, you may remove your collar now and I will leave," he said firmly. "This is MY game, MY rules. I will not be argued with, I will not compromise. Either you accept this on my terms or I leave and never come back."

He could see Mulder's fists clenching as he chewed his lower lip desperately to keep silent.

Good, he thought. Mulder was beginning to understand the price of being Skinner's property, but still seemed willing to keep "playing". On the other hand, maybe he was just unable to stop.

Skinner withdrew his wallet and extracted a ten-dollar note and then a handful of change from his pocket.

"This is for your pocket money, Fox. The change is for drinks at work, the note is for emergencies only. I will want to see a receipt if you spend it. You will NOT buy food with it, or you will be punished severely, do you understand?"

Mulder's face screwed up in misery but he nodded his sullen agreement. He couldn't think beyond the fear of Skinner leaving him, walking out the door never to return.

"Good boy," Skinner murmured and retrieving the first carrier bag from the floor, he produced a bag of fruit and offered a large apple to Mulder.

Mulder's eyes went wide with excitement and he almost snatched the gift from Skinner, tearing into the flesh with ravenous teeth.

"I will provide you with everything you NEED, Fox," Skinner said as Mulder tore into the fruit.

Completely overwhelmed by Skinner's unexpected gift, Fox nodded in complete agreement. Skinner's price was complete control. He understood that now. He didn't like it, hell, he hated it. However, unless he complied, Skinner wouldn't come back.

He needed him. He couldn't pretend even to himself that it wasn't true. The seven days of Skinner's absence from his life had gnawed at him even more viciously than his hunger. Seven days of need, loneliness and confusion had taught him that he would agree to anything just to have Skinner's attention again.

The first stroke of the crop on his ass had overwhelmed any thoughts of resistance. The pain had swept away his doubts and fears. All his petty resentments had been banished as Skinner had stoked the fiery blaze of his groin. When Skinner had filled his ass, he had been instantly transported to a place of such animalistic bliss that all of his misery, hunger and fear had been forgotten.

He crept forwards hesitantly, sank his head on Skinner's knee and turned adoring eyes on the man who had freed him from an existence that he now realised had just been full of loneliness and doubt.

Skinner was a rock of self-confidence. A man who wielded power with impunity, who viciously took whatever he wanted in life and bore no conscience or guilt about how he achieved his ends.

And what he evidently wanted was Fox Mulder.

Mulder sighed with happiness and relaxed, closing his eyes and letting himself doze on Skinner's
powerful thigh, feeling actually wanted, for the first time in his life.

They quickly settled into a surprisingly easy routine. At the office, Skinner virtually ignored Mulder, never overstepping the boundary between employee and boss. Mulder would go home, eat whatever food Skinner had deigned to leave him on his previous visit, and then would sit anxiously waiting for a phone call.

Skinner would never speak. He would simply ring and hang up. His name flashing on the display of the Mobile would be enough to galvanize Mulder into preparations for his arrival.

Sometimes they "played", other times, particularly in the week, Skinner would arrive too exhausted from his day to enthusiastically chastise his toy. Instead, he would simply relax back in the sofa, watching a video, while Mulder knelt between his legs and worshipped him with his lips and tongue.

Skinner found it comfortable, relaxing and worryingly habit forming. Before long, instead of phoning, he simply took it for granted that Mulder would be ready and waiting for him, and he unfailingly was.

Then, as much as Mulder accepted and even begged for his abuse, Skinner realised that he was beginning to look forward more to the quiet evenings, and that gave him pause to reconsider the whole 'relationship'.

So, to maintain his feelings of dominance, he started to take Mulder to the cabin at the weekends. With 48 hours of freedom and relaxation, he had the leisure to beat and fuck Mulder into oblivion, ending each weekend session with the highly satisfying sinking of his fist into Mulder's eager asshole.

It balanced him, allowed him to let himself be more lenient with Mulder in the week without fearing that he was appearing weak and out of control. The resultant contrast of wild fuck-fests and gentle lovemaking, completely turned Mulder's emotional control to mush.

He was flying, high-as-a-kite, in that dangerous borderline between obsession and love. He both feared and adored Skinner with a passion that completely overwhelmed his life.

He couldn't think, function or even breathe without worrying whether his actions would please or displease the other man. His obsession took over his life. All his working hours were dedicated to solving cases, presenting perfect paperwork, finding 'satisfactory' explanations rather than the ones that would previously have made his imagination soar.

He would present his conclusions, in the humble, begging stance of a dog that has obediently retrieved a ball, and wait, sick with dread and anticipation, for Skinner to throw him the tiny bone of a smile or even just a curt nod of approval.

For two months, the Hoover building buzzed with the realisation that Fox Mulder had finally been tamed. While no one understood the reason for Mulder's new humble obedience, the rumbles of approval reached even the ears of the Director, and Skinner basked in the glory of his achievement.

Yet, as in all things, the novelty paled, the adrenaline buzz of success faded, and Skinner began to be bored. What Mulder saw as obedience, Skinner began to interpret as liberties taken. Mulder no longer trembled in his presence, no longer showed any physical or mental fear of him. Mulder was as complacent and happy as a fat cat who had found a lap to curl up on, and it was beginning to piss the hell out of Skinner.
This wasn't meant to be a 'relationship' godammit; it was supposed to be about power and control. Somehow, he had let himself be manipulated into becoming what Mulder wanted, rather than molding Mulder to his own desires.

Wary, anyway, of the way he was finding it so comfortably domestic to spend his evenings in Mulder's apartment, being served hand and foot by a far too happy and servile companion, Skinner began to deliberately stay away unless he was in the mood for serious "play". He no longer arrived simply to enjoy the companionship of the younger man.

Like the pricking of a bubble, Mulder's carefully constructed fantasy world collapsed.

Overnight, the comfort and security of Skinner's constant presence disappeared and he was left floundering, desperately certain that he had done something to anger the older man, every time that Skinner failed to arrive.

His subsequent efforts to prove his obedience with a slavish adoration drove Skinner to distraction. He couldn't even satisfy himself by beating Mulder, given how much the younger man enjoyed the pain.

Therefore, Skinner found himself attacking Mulder at his most vulnerable spot, his confidence. He decided it was time to strip Mulder of his remaining support structures and make him totally dependant on him for everything. That would soon eradicate Mulder's complacency and restore him to a knife-edge of uncertainty.

He didn't want a complacent, happy Mulder, he decided. He wanted a Mulder who obeyed him out of fear.

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Part Six

As the rain poured from the heavens in a merciless torrent, Mulder became so cold that he could barely feel his limbs. He had thrust his hands deeply into his pockets for warmth, but the material of the jacket was so sodden that he could feel the lining squelching against his chilled fingers.

His hair was soaking wet, the rain dripping down the nape of his neck and causing the leather of his collar to chafe against his skin. He would have paused to loosen his tie, but that meant exposing his fingers to the bitter wind that seemed to unfailingly drive the rain in his face, no matter how many corners he turned and directions he changed.

Walking 20 blocks hadn't seemed an unreasonable prospect earlier in the day, when the sun was hot and the sky was clear. Counting the scant change in his pocket, he had weighed the walk home against the temporary comfort of an illicit chocolate bar, and the chocolate had won.

He didn't even particularly like chocolate, but it had winked at him from the vending machine, its slick packaging shining with the promise of a temporary relief from the gnawing preoccupation with food, that had become his constant companion.

As he had promised him in the beginning, Skinner gave Mulder whatever he considered he 'needed' but no more. So in addition to the bland, humiliating diet of dog food, Skinner would throw him the odd surprise in the form of bread, cheese, fruit, maybe even the scraps of his own dinner. Yet, despite the fact that Mulder's stomach was being filled, he was never 'satisfied', and he was still noticeably losing weight.

Deprived of choice in his meals, food had become an obsession with Mulder. In his rare moments of
inactivity at work, he would burrow his head in his drawer, and gaze at pictures of food in a magazine that he had filched from the reception area. It was one of those mags aimed at housewives, full of recipes, vivid illustrations and advertisements for tastes that had become nothing but a memory to his palate.

That wasn't to say that he regretted his choice to become Skinner's property. He had never felt so wanted before in his life. A part of him actually thrived on Skinner's complete dominance of his life. The fact that a man as powerful and sexual as Skinner, had chosen him over all others and felt the need to actually OWN him, still gave Mulder a vicarious thrill.

Mulder had come to understand that Skinner needed to be in control of every aspect of his life, right down to the food that Mulder ate. Only, he didn't understand why Skinner had to be so damned MEAN about it. Just because he was hungry enough to eat anything, and too scared of displeasing Skinner to protest, surely there was absolutely no reason for Skinner to make him eat fucking dog food all the time?

Then today, the unbelievable had happened. Mulder had found himself in a completely deserted corridor next to the vending machine. He had checked and double-checked for witnesses, his body trembling and heart racing out of control as the constant temptation to disobey Skinner's stupid, sadistic rule finally found a safe opportunity to assert itself.

He had found himself frozen in place, his heartbeat thudding so loudly that it had seemed to echo in the corridor, and his fingers had been slick with sweat as he fumbled into his pants pocket for his bus fare.

As the change had clattered hollowly down the chute, he had trembled in terror, positive that someone would walk around the corner before the claws released his booty. The sound of the chocolate finally hitting the tray had caused him to flinch. It was far too similar to the sound of Skinner's strap on his bare ass, for comfort.

Guiltily snatching his prize, he had stuffed it into his pocket and almost run to the men's room. Locking himself into one of the stalls, he had retrieved the chocolate bar and had flushed the toilet as he unwrapped it, terrified that someone might hear the rustling paper and identify his crime.

He could still feel the velvet taste on his tongue now, hours later, but its sweetness had soured with a growing fear of discovery.

Somehow, Skinner would know. Mulder was sure of that, increasingly so as the afternoon had progressed. Somehow, he knew his guilt was etched on his face. He had repeatedly found himself rubbing his mouth, just in case a tiny crumb of chocolate stained his lips. Then he had worried about his breath. Would Skinner smell it?

For the first time, Mulder was pleased at Skinner's continual refusal to kiss him. At least he wouldn't TASTE it.

The worry vanished as Mulder finally saw his apartment building up ahead. He had made it, he realised, with an overwhelming feeling of relief and triumph. Now he was home, he could hide his dripping clothes in the closet, dry his hair, wash his face, and brush his teeth. By the time Skinner arrived, there would be no evidence that he had walked home, let alone broken such a cardinal rule.

Suddenly he felt elated. He had broken one of Skinner's rules and had gotten away with it. Skinner WASN'T an omniscient being, after all.
Mulder was so cheered by the thought, that he barely noticed the soreness of his red, chilled fingers as he fumbled with the lock and stumbled through his front door with a sigh of both relief and triumph.

"You're very wet, Fox," a deep voice purred from across the room.

Mulder froze, only his wildly darting eyes evidence that he was even still breathing. Skinner was here. Skinner COULDN'T be here. It was only 7 o'clock. Skinner NEVER came to his apartment before 9pm.

"WHY are you so wet, Fox?" Skinner asked in a deceptively quiet voice.

"It's - It's raining," Mulder mumbled helplessly.

"The bus stop is 100 meters from this building, Fox. Did you SWIM that 100 meters, or has the city put an open-top bus on the route?" Skinner asked, with the smile of a predatory wolf.

"I - I walked," Mulder blurted, understanding that there was no point trying to deny it since the water was literally dribbling down his sodden pant legs and pooling on the carpet beneath his feet.

"Why?" Skinner demanded.

"I - I - um - I lost my bus fare," Mulder lied desperately.

"Hmmmm," Skinner replied, his eagle eyes raking over the younger man's body, taking in the cowing posture and the trembling lower lip. Mulder couldn't have looked guiltier if a neon sign had been flashing over his forehead, pronouncing him a liar.

"Your suit is ruined," was all he commented, however.

"Yeah? Well maybe it will shrink and fit me," Mulder muttered under his breath.

Skinner grinned. His intention to beat the truth out of Mulder flew out of the window, as a far more satisfying punishment occurred to him.

"You look frozen, Fox," he said solicitously. "Why don't you go take those soaking clothes off and have a warm shower, while I go run an errand?"

Relief flooded Mulder's face. Skinner actually seemed more concerned about him catching a chill, than punishing him for 'losing' his bus fare. However, it wasn't until Skinner had actually left the apartment, that he let himself relax.

He had gotten away with it.

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Skinner returned two hours later and dumped several carrier bags on the living room floor.

Mulder was kneeling quietly in position, his skin flushed pink from the hot shower, giving his usually pasty complexion an illusion of glowing health. Skinner allowed his eyes to roam hungrily over Mulder's lean frame, feeling his palms tingle at the thought of turning Mulder's flanks a deeper shade of pink. Nevertheless, he restrained his urge to physically abuse him. It was Mulder's spirit that required the spanking tonight, after all.

Skinner opened one of his bags, retrieved a roll of black bin liners and offered it to the younger man. Mulder frowned in confusion.
"As you pointed out earlier, Fox. None of your clothes fit you properly anymore. It's time we sorted out your wardrobe and threw some stuff away. Follow me," Skinner said, with quiet firmness.

Mulder rose and followed him, chewing nervously on his lower lip. He KNEW that his clothes didn't fit him anymore, but had hoped that fact would inspire Skinner to feed him up, not change his clothes.

Skinner threw open the closet door and began removing his suits one-by-one, throwing them carelessly onto the floor.

Mulder tried to keep quiet, but when his Armani Tuxedo hit the ever-growing pile of crushed garments, he couldn't bite his tongue any longer.


"So?" Skinner replied coldly. "It doesn't fit, does it? Start filling the bags."

"But - but -"

"I gave you an order, Fox. Do you need me to remind you of what happens if you disobey me?" Skinner asked, giving a smile of such menace that Mulder immediately dropped to his knees and started shovelling the clothes into the sacks.

Shirts joined the suits, swiftly followed by slacks, jackets and several jumpers. By the time Skinner had finished, the wardrobe was almost empty.

Mulder was crying quietly, completely defeated, finally understanding that Skinner WAS omniscient after all. It was the only explanation for the brutal rape of his closet.

"I'm sorry," he sniffled miserably.

"Sorry isn't good enough, Fox," Skinner replied. "Sorry doesn't cut it. You aren't sorry for what you did, you are only sorry that you were caught."

Reaching out and grabbing Mulder by the chin with bruising force, Skinner twisted Mulder's head so that he could look into the miserable, defeated eyes as he spoke.

"Understand this, Fox. Whatever you do, wherever or whenever you do it, I will KNOW!"

Skinner enjoyed the expression of complete belief in Mulder's face. The truth was, he had no idea what Mulder had done with his bus fare, although he could make a pretty good guess. It didn't matter. Demanding an explanation would have given Mulder the opportunity to lie to him. This way, Mulder would think that Skinner had eyes everywhere.

He couldn't afford to let Mulder think he could get away with anything. There were too many hours, when Mulder was out of his sight, to allow Mulder to think that he was ever out of his control.

He picked up a pair of shorts and a t-shirt that had survived the massacre of the closet, and threw them in Mulder's lap.

"Get dressed," he snapped. "Then take that garbage to the incinerator."

Mulder's face contorted with additional dismay. He had only imagined that Skinner was temporarily taking his clothes away. The realisation that Skinner actually intended to burn them was beyond his comprehension.
"I can't go to work in a t-shirt and jeans," he protested weakly, gesturing at the bags that contained every one of his suits and shirts.

"Of course not," Skinner agreed. "I told you, didn't I, that I would provide everything you need? I went shopping tonight and bought you clothes that will fit you."

Mulder blinked uncertainly, unsure now whether this was the punishment that he had perceived, or actually just another case of Skinner tackling a situation with the thoughtless destruction of a wild bull.

If Mulder had had access to his own money, he would have bought himself a new suit already. Since Skinner had his checkbook, it made sense that he had done the shopping. But, why the hell hadn't Skinner explained that BEFORE throwing his clothes in a heap and telling him to burn them?

It took Mulder several trips before all of the bags were piled in the basement. Skinner accompanied him on the last trip and then waited, watching carefully as Mulder put the bags into the furnace to ensure that no bag was 'accidentally' forgotten.

Then he led the subdued Mulder back to his apartment and handed him the carrier bags.

"You had better hang these up before they crease any more," he instructed.

Mulder carried the bags into the bedroom and threw them on the bed. It was only then that the name on the plastic registered.

"No way, no fucking way," he hissed, all of his months of subservience seeming to disappear in the face of a humiliation that was more than even he had dreamt of.

He upended the first bag and shuddered as the contents sprawled out.

"You don't like it?" Skinner asked innocently.

Mulder turned on him in fury.

"I'm not going to work in a suit from fucking K-Mart!" he yelled.

Skinner's face went dangerously still.

"I buy you a gift and this is the gratitude I get?" he demanded.

"I bet you used MY money," Mulder argued tearfully.

Skinner struck him violently across the cheekbone, driving him to his knees.

"You have no money, Fox. You have NOTHING. You own nothing. You are mine. Your money is mine. Do you understand?"

"It's not FAIR!" Mulder yelled back, like a petulant child.

Skinner stiffened.

"Fine. You don't think it's fair. Well, let me tell you what I don't think is fair. You complain that your suits are too large, and when I take the time to go out of my way and buy you a suit that fits, you decide it isn't good enough for you. You are a pretentious, ungrateful little bastard, Fox."

Mulder blinked uncertainly. Suddenly he DID seem ungrateful. Skinner had obviously meant it to be
a kind gesture. Maybe he just had fuck-all taste in clothes. Then again, Skinner's own suit was pure Saville Row.

"You don't wear K-Mart suits," Mulder pointed out mulishly, flinching in case Skinner struck him again.

"That's because I don't have to buy my suits at 8pm off the shelf of the only store in town still open," Skinner snapped back.

He watched Mulder absorb and seemingly accept his nonsensical comment. Instead of pointing out that they could have waited until the morning to buy a decent suit, Mulder's befuddled brain accepted Skinner's words at face value and Skinner saw him begin to tremble guiltily for his earlier outburst.

"I'm sorry, Sir," he whispered, dropping his chastened eyes to the floor.

Instead of acknowledging the apology, Skinner strode out of the bedroom, snatched his keys off the telephone table and started to unbolt the front door.

Mulder scrambled after him in a panic.

"Where are you going?" he cried desperately.

Skinner gave him a look of pure disgust.

"I have wasted enough time on you, Agent Mulder. I am going home."

His use of Mulder's title hurt far more than any physical blow.

"Don't go," Mulder wailed. "I'm sorry, really I am."

Skinner took a step back into the room and Mulder's shoulders began to sag with relief, but then Skinner's left hand grabbed his t-shirt and yanked him forward, while the right hand swiftly unbuckled Mulder's collar.

"Since you obviously don't care for my taste in clothes, I am sure you won't want to wear this any longer, either," Skinner growled, shoving Mulder violently away from him.

Mulder's thin legs staggered to support him and by the time Mulder regained his balance, Skinner had left. Mulder ran down the corridor in panic, only to witness the lift doors closing over Skinner's face.

Mulder raced for the stairs, and tore down them as quickly as the sliding of his bare feet would allow, yet by the time he reached the basement, the only sign of the other man was the mocking wink of his tail-lights as his car left the garage.

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"Shall I send him away again, Sir?" Kim asked resignedly.

Having spent the best part of three days now fending off an increasingly desperate Agent Mulder, she was almost immune to his pleading eyes and quivering lower lip.

Still, she didn't have to exaggerate her sigh of relief when AD Skinner looked up from his desk, rubbed his forehead in a gesture of resignation and said, "No, send him in."

"Thank you, Sir," she said gratefully. She started to walk to the door and then paused hesitantly.
"Yes?" Skinner said, his voice inviting confidence.

"Do you think he IS having some kind of breakdown, Sir?" she asked.

"Possibly," Skinner replied. "Just between you and me, Kim, I think he has lost touch with reality. You remember his disappearance?"

"Of course, Sir," Kim replied.

"Well, obviously, this is confidential, but he told me that he had been abducted."

"By his aliens?" she gasped.

Skinner nodded sorrowfully, his expressive brown eyes filled with obvious concern for his subordinate.

"What do you think really happened to him, Sir? I mean his weight loss, and his hands, and he's taking the BUS to and from work now and what about those god-awful suits he's suddenly started wearing? I mean it just isn't HIM any more," Kim said.

"I don't know, but obviously I share the general concern. I suspect he had some form of car-accident, which would explain why he isn't using his car anymore. Perhaps he suffered concussion and wandered off in a fugue state."

"Amnesia, you mean?" Kim asked with fascination. The idea made such sense now that she thought about it.

"Well, I'm not a Doctor, but it would make sense," Skinner confirmed.

"Yes," Kim replied. "Don't you think it's time that he DID see a Doctor, Sir?"

"You mean a psychiatrist?" Skinner asked.

"Well, I was talking with some of the guys in the cafeteria, and they were all wondering why you hadn't sent him for a psyche assessment," she confessed.

"I admit that I have rarely seen eye-to-eye with Agent Mulder, Kim, but even I admit that he has occasional flashes of brilliance that make the rest of his peculiarities worth-while. A psyche evaluation would effectively finish his career. He already bears enough stigma from his work with the X-files," Skinner said.

"So, you ARE protecting him. We all thought as much," Kim accused bluntly.

"His current work is good, if somewhat uninspired, Kim. As long as he continues to turn in his reports, I see no need to escalate this situation any further. I am keeping a close eye on him. I have even called round his apartment some evenings to check that he is okay.

"Unfortunately he has become a little dependant on me, as a result, hence his incessant requests for appointments to see me during work hours too. I hoped to wean him off his dependence by refusing to see him, but it hasn't worked. He doesn't have any friends, after all, and Agent Scully's transfer to the Academy has come at a bad time for him emotionally, I think," Skinner suggested.

Kim nodded sagely.

"We all think it was pretty heartless of her to take the transfer when her partner is obviously going through a rough patch," she bitched.

"Not you, Sir," Kim said loyally. "I mean look at you now. This could all blow up in your face, if you aren't careful. You protecting Agent Mulder is really nice, but maybe it isn't the smartest thing to do."

Skinner gave her a self-depreciating shrug.

"I know that I should do the sensible thing and just suspend him, Kim, but I would like to give him a chance to pull himself together first," he said softly.

"I'm glad, Sir. He's a nice guy really, under all the weirdness," she said.

As though the thought had just occurred to him, Skinner leaned forward hopefully.

"Actually, you could help, if you were willing to, I mean," he said.

"Help how?" Kim asked, her eyes sparkling with eagerness.

"Well, as you said, you get to hear a lot of the gossip in the building. Perhaps you could get it to tone down a little. Spread the word that he IS seeing a psychiatrist already but that I am keeping it low key to protect him."

"Is he? Are you?" Kim asked in confusion.

Skinner shrugged.

"Well I can't actually answer that, can I?"

Understanding dawned on Kim's face and she beamed happily at her boss. It was just like him to do something like this, she decided. Hell, he was probably paying for a private shrink out of his own pocket, just as he had personally sorted out that rather embarrassing speeding ticket fiasco she had found herself in, a few months back.

It was the kind of protective, caring thing that she had learnt to expect from her surprisingly gentle bear of a boss.

"Sure thing, Sir. I'll make sure that everyone shuts up about it. The last thing either of you need, right now, is any gossip reaching the 'wrong' ears."

"Thank you, Kim," Skinner said, noticeably relaxing his powerful body. "Perhaps you would send him in now, and ensure that we are not disturbed under ANY circumstances."

"Of course, Sir," she replied, giving him another beaming smile and exiting.

"He'll see you now," she told Agent Mulder sweetly, trying to ignore the fact that he was rifling through her copy of "Good Housekeeping" with apparent fascination.

He dropped the magazine guiltily and spun around, such a look of pure relief infusing his features that for a moment Kim managed to ignore the deep circles under his eyes and the way his skin was so painfully stretched over razor sharp cheekbones. The poignancy of his eager puppy-dog eyes, reminded her sadly of the irreverent Agent that he had once been, and her heart lurched with sadness for something wild and unique, that seemed to have been shattered irreparably.

As he shuffled towards Skinner's office, the cheap thin material of his jacket so wrinkled and creased so much that it almost managed to obscure his now prominent shoulder blades, Kim felt her eyes drawn to the
magazine he had dropped and she bit her lip in confusion.

How odd that a man who seemed to be starving himself to death, had been so obviously fixated by a page of recipes. It reminded her uncomfortably of herself on a diet. Depriving herself of high-calorific foods, she would torture herself with images of what she couldn't have, and then congratulate herself on her will power.

It was a pointless ritual of self-torture that her girlfriends had confided that they also shared.

Hell, maybe Mulder was simply anorexic, she decided.

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"Well, what do you want, Agent Mulder?" Skinner asked bluntly, his eyes icy cold behind his glasses.

Mulder's shoulders slumped in the face of Skinner's continued hostility and his eyes found a fascinating spot on the carpet as he began to tease at the pile with his right toe.

He had rehearsed numerous impassioned pleas and apologies in the three days since Skinner had stormed out of his apartment, and apparently out of his life. Yet, instead of an eloquent request for forgiveness, what emerged from his mouth was a broken and pathetic plea.

"I - I want my collar back, Sir. Please," he whispered to the floor.

"Really," Skinner replied, his voice bored and disinterested.

Mulder peered up through his eyelashes, visibly wincing at Skinner's tone.

"I know I was rude and ungrateful, Sir. I'm sorry," Mulder mumbled.

"Fine. If you have quite finished, Agent Mulder, I have work to do," Skinner replied coldly. He picked up a file and opened it, in a definite gesture of dismissal.

Mulder shuffled awkwardly, absently wringing his hands together in misery. He had expected Skinner to yell at him, hit him, and promise him some god-awful punishment for his rebellion. His cock stiffened just at the thought of Skinner's meaty hands exacting their revenge on his bare ass. He wanted Skinner's punishment. Hell, he NEEDED it. Ever since his return from Chesapeake, he could barely think beyond his body's desires.

"Please, Sir. I know I was wrong, I understand that I should be punished. I want you to punish me, Sir," Mulder begged desperately, the cheap material of his pants failing to disguise his obvious state of arousal.

Skinner had to fight to keep the expression of boredom on his face. Jesus, it was a sweet moment. The little slut was practically creaming on his carpet at the thought of being disciplined by him. The last three days without food or attention had no doubt added to his aura of befuddled misery, Skinner realised with satisfaction. Mulder was probably so light-headed that he was incapable of thinking beyond the basic, animalistic needs that Skinner had awoken in him.

He looked up from the desk, narrowing his eyes in apparent deliberation of Mulder's words. Mulder noticed the wavering in Skinner's face and acted on it instinctively, scooting forward and around Skinner's desk and sinking to his knees at the other man's feet.

Skinner felt Mulder's fingers clawing desperately at his shoelaces and paused to secretly tap the
button that would engage his door's privacy lock, before relaxing in his chair and allowing Mulder to remove his shoes and socks. It was only when Mulder bent forward to kiss his feet, that Skinner ducked with the speed of a striking cobra and cuffed Mulder viciously across his right ear.

Mulder yelped and cowered, uncertain whether the blow was simply an expression of Skinner's general dissatisfaction with him or an indication of a more explicit transgression.

Skinner waited patiently for Mulder's mind to slowly work it out.

He was finally rewarded by Mulder's deep flush; the color first rising in Mulder's cheeks and then flooding his face, neck and ears.

"What if someone walks in?" Mulder whispered, his voice quaking in terror.

Instead of telling Mulder about his secret electronic lock, Skinner shrugged.

"Either you do this properly, or you leave," he said, and Mulder's flinch of fear proved that he had managed to adequately convey the fact that Mulder's leaving would effectively end any chance of him ever regaining his collar.

So, shuddering with terror of discovery, Mulder began to remove his clothes and place them in a neat pile inside the deep bottom draw that Skinner silently opened.

When he was finally naked, wearing only the cock-cage that both habit and hope had inspired him to don for the last three mornings, Mulder looked up at Skinner with shining, hopeful eyes.

"May I wear my collar now, Sir?" he asked eagerly.

Skinner's returning smile was pure malice.

"I gave you that collar once, Fox. This time you will have to earn the right to wear it. Twice you have proven to me that you have no respect for gifts. From now on, nothing will be free. The only way you will get to wear my collar again is if you pay the price for your disobedience," he said firmly.

Mulder swallowed miserably as Skinner's words sank in. Yet, it never occurred to him to refuse to pay whatever price Skinner demanded. Skinner was offering him a second chance, and he understood that it was more than he deserved.

"Please, Sir. Let me earn it," he said humbly and dropped his head unbidden to begin a worshipful tonguing of Skinner's feet.

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At 1.30pm, when Kim had returned from her lunch, Skinner called her into his office and told her to summon the department heads for an overdue budget review.

"Is Agent Mulder alright now?" she asked, realising that Mulder had obviously left during her lunch break.

"I hope that he is beginning to see things more clearly now," Skinner replied. "I have assigned him to a special duty this afternoon. If he performs it adequately, I will be far more confident of his eventual return to his usual duties."

Kim smiled with relief and left to arrange Skinner's meeting.
It was gone seven when the last Department Head collected his reports and left. Skinner sighed with satisfaction, called Kim to tell her she could go home now, and then waited until he was sure that she had left, before letting his attention drop to the head suckling greedily in his lap.

He let loose a bellow of laughter. For five hours he had sat in a room full of so-called FBI agents, and not one of them had realised that he had spent the whole time with a naked Fox Mulder kneeling under his desk, sucking and licking his cock and balls.

Skinner had felt almost drunk on the power and thrill of it. Adrenaline had buzzed through his veins all afternoon, fuelled constantly by Mulder's obvious terror of discovery.

The only frustration had been that he had been unable to risk coming. Even had he been sure that he could have controlled his own physical reactions, he had been too concerned that the smell of his ejaculation would finally give the game away.

On the other hand, his visitors had been so intent on their own petty haggling over his proposed budget cuts that he could possibly have come with a roar and they wouldn't have registered the fact.

He felt his balls tighten and draw up in anticipation, as Mulder's talented lips closed again over his now over-sensitive cock-head and he prepared to finally erupt into Mulder's hot mouth.

He came explosively, five hours of released frustration shooting his hot juices into the back of Mulder's throat, while the younger man sucked and swallowed convulsively.

"Don't you DARE spill a drop," Skinner warned, as he heard Mulder beginning to gag.

"No, Sir," Mulder mumbled around his cock.

Skinner used one of his bare feet to slap Mulder's own painfully engorged dick.

"Don't speak with your mouth full," he chided and then relaxed back in his chair with a smirk, as Mulder licked him clean.

"I don't understand," Mulder moaned, as confused by the paper that Skinner had thrust into his hands, as he would have been if it were written in Sanskrit.

When Skinner had finally allowed him to crawl out from under his desk and had handed him the typewritten sheets with a terse command to read and sign, he had automatically assumed that it was something related to Skinner's meeting. Yet, as soon as he had begun to read the first paragraph of the formal document, he had found his eyes blurring and the words began to merge into each other as though the black letters were bleeding.

He looked hopelessly at Skinner, praying that it was some sick joke, but there was no hint of even cruel humor in Skinner's dispassionate eyes.

Skinner shrugged carelessly. "If you don't want to sign it, then don't," he snapped, reaching his hand out for the unsigned document.

Mulder clung on to the sheets of paper, his eyes searching Skinner's face carefully.

"If I don't sign, what happens?" he asked quietly.

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"If I don't sign, what happens?" he asked quietly.
"Nothing happens, Agent Mulder. If you don't sign the contract, you don't get your collar back," Skinner replied.

His words made Mulder's face contort with grief and hurt. He didn't understand why Skinner was doing this. Surely, the older man understood that Mulder loved him? There was no need for this 'contract', no need for him to be humiliated in this way. Surely, he had proven that this afternoon. Unless this was because he had somehow failed to satisfy Skinner with his attentions.

"What did I do now?" Mulder asked bitterly.

Skinner regarded him with surprise.

"You obviously are laboring under a misapprehension here, Fox. This isn't part of your punishment. This merely decides whether or not I come to your apartment tonight and administer it."

"But it says here that I am your SLAVE!" Mulder spat, his face burning with humiliation.

"I know that I didn't have the benefit of your English education, Mulder, but I am confident that the terminology is correct. What OTHER word would you prefer to describe being my property?" Skinner snapped sarcastically.

Your lover, Mulder whispered to himself sadly.

"You don't have to do this to make me stay. I WANT to belong to you. I want to wear the collar," he sniffed.

"You misunderstand the reason for the contract, Mulder. This isn't a legal document. This is an agreement between us. Anytime that you find that your collar feels too tight, we will simply tear the contract up, and it will be over."

"Then what's the point of it?" Mulder asked miserably.

"I am tired of you complaining about the way I treat you. You either agree here and now that I am in charge, or it is over between us," Skinner said, his voice as cold and emotionless as his face.

More than the 'contract', which would declare that he had no more right to protest Skinner's treatment of him than a dog would, what really hurt Mulder was the knowledge that Skinner really was capable of simply walking away from him, without even a backwards glance.

His heart constricted painfully, as yet again he was forcibly reminded that the only person who had anything to lose here was him. If Skinner even had a heart, it was titanium plated and inaccessible.

Yet, he knew that he would sign the contract, would sign it in blood if necessary, just to keep Skinner in his life.

"Where do I sign?" he whispered and tried to ignore Skinner's contemptuous gloating.

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Two days after Mulder had finally regained the right to wear Skinner's collar, and he was finally able to sit down at work without a groan of agony, he nearly lost it again.

He had waited patiently for Skinner until nearly 10.30pm, then the growing chill of the evening on his naked skin, and the cramping of his legs, had finally forced him to give up his lonely vigil, wrap himself in his bathrobe, release his now aching cock from its restraint, and curl up on the sofa in front
of the TV.

He had spent about an hour idly flicking through the channels, unable to find anything to catch his attention and thereby drive away the nauseous feeling of worry that always accompanied Skinner's failure to arrive. He missed his cable channels, he decided petulantly. It was just another grievance to add to his list of Skinner's pointless, petty cruelties.

He was so lost in his feelings of miserable, self-pity that he never heard the front door open, let alone Skinner's light footsteps as he crept across the room.

His first realisation that Skinner had arrived was the hand that grabbed the back of his neck and dragged him to the floor. He hit the thin carpet with a bump and a squeal of fright.

Skinner's face was contorted with fury.

"Is this how I expect to be greeted when I arrive?" he demanded angrily.

"No, Sir. I'm sorry, Sir," Mulder gasped, tearing the robe off his body and scrambling into position, his legs automatically opening wide to display his bound cock, before he remembered that he had removed the cage.

Skinner stared at his unfettered penis with obvious disgust, then turned away, walked to the television and pronounced, "Obviously this is a bad influence on you, Fox. It will have to go."

"NO," Mulder moaned.

After he had swapped the contract for his collar, Skinner had visited him to administer his punishment. Glaringly aware that Mulder had gained as much pleasure as pain out of the beating that he received, Skinner had also confiscated his computer, stereo and books from the apartment.

The television, as limited as it was without the cable connection, was therefore Mulder's last link to the outside world, and the only source of sound in his lonely apartment.

"NO?" Skinner roared.

Mulder quivered under Skinner's rage, but after his weeks of sensory deprivation in the cabin, the idea of losing the comforting voices from the TV was unbearable.

"Please, I'm sorry. PLEASE!" he begged tearfully.

Skinner raised an eyebrow and sneered.

"If you prefer the television to your collar, Fox, feel free to say so," he purred nastily.

Mulder's eyes went huge as the implication of Skinner's words hit him.

"Don't do this, Sir. Please don't do this to me," he pleaded.

Skinner merely shrugged disinterestedly.

"It's your choice, Fox. Which is it going to be?"

Mulder moaned and swayed miserably, praying that Skinner would back down on his ultimatum. Instead, the older man stepped forward and thrust his hand out, palm upwards, in a commanding gesture.
Mulder found his hands jumping to his throat protectively, denying the leather collar to the other man. Sick to his stomach, he understood that Skinner meant it. He would take the collar, leave and never come back.

Skinner's presence was only guaranteed by Mulder's absolute subservience.

Mulder's body sagged; tears of defeat beginning to roll slowly down his cheeks. He closed his eyes so that he wouldn't witness the explosion of glass and sparks as Skinner's boot connected with the TV screen.

Skinner turned to regard Mulder's quivering misery and grinned. He was so pleased that Mulder had fallen into his deliberate trap, that he was almost tender as he picked up Mulder's slight, malnourished body and carried him to the bedroom to 'reward' him for his capitulation.

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Mulder shuddered at the look of fury on Skinner's face. He huddled in the passenger seat, desperately trying to look as small and insignificant as possible. Maybe if he was quiet enough, Skinner would forget he was there, would calm down enough to just throw him out of the car at his apartment.

For a moment, he actually thought he had achieved the impossible. Skinner pulled up outside his building and didn't switch off the car engine. His hopes were quickly dashed by Skinner's words.

"Get out, get upstairs and prepare yourself, Fox, while I find a parking space."

Mulder wasn't fooled by the innocuous sounding words. He knew that he had cocked-up big time tonight, and Skinner wasn't a man who would miss the opportunity to discipline him severely.

He had a feeling that he was going to be having one of his 'migraines' tomorrow. When Skinner was this pissed off, he would be lucky to be able to get out of bed tomorrow, let alone walk. He had suffered over a dozen 'migraines' in the six weeks since he had signed the contract to become Skinner's slave.

Tears stung his eyes as he rushed up the stairwell. He had tried so hard tonight but his mind just hadn't been on the game. He had made several stupid mistakes, and the deepening cloud of anger over Skinner's head as Mulder had incorrectly bid, had just made him more nervous, more likely to fail.

He could have sworn that Skinner had indicated that he should bid two no-trumps. He clearly remembered seeing the signal. But his memory was obviously faulty, because as soon as he had uttered the words, he had seen Skinner's face go still and cold.

He had nearly wet himself in terror, and from then on the game had gone from bad to worse.

More than the terror of reprisals, what really hurt Mulder was the knowledge that Skinner would probably never take him to the club again. He had been so happy at the invitation, thinking that Skinner was finally beginning to understand that their relationship should be more than just fucking and violence. Yet, his first opportunity to prove himself to be more than a sex-toy, and Mulder had fucked up.

He just didn't understand why he had done it. Shit, he understood Bridge, was good at the game, more than good. How the hell had he misunderstood all the signals that his partner had been giving him?
He had played all the logical responses to the bids that Skinner had made, yet each time, Skinner had given a dramatic sigh at his decision and had rolled his eyes in despair, until finally Skinner had simply gone cold and furious, his almost black eyes sparkling with promised revenge for Mulder's embarrassing performance.

If Mulder hadn't known better, he would have suspected that Skinner had been deliberately misleading him, causing him to make his mistakes.

Yet, he knew that Skinner took his Bridge seriously and hated to lose, so why the hell would he have publicly let his game be shown up? Mulder decided he was just clutching at straws with his suspicion. The truth was, he had been an embarrassment to the older man and deserved whatever punishment he was about to suffer.

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Mulder sobbed as he woke to total darkness. The bedside light, which usually glowed all night to comfort him and chase away his nightmares, was not only off, but refused his frantic efforts to turn it on. He hadn't believed that Skinner was truly serious about canceling his electricity. He had been sure that it was just an idle threat.

Skinner knew how terrified Mulder was of the dark. Despite the brutal way Skinner had punished him physically that evening, Mulder hadn't honestly believed him capable of such mental cruelty, just because of a fucking game of cards.

Dragging his battered body off the bed, he slipped to the floor and began to drag himself on his hands and knees, knowing from bitter experience that trying to walk after one of Skinner's serious 'punishments' was an exercise in futility that would only result in him falling down and adding more bruises to his already discolored body.

He crawled blindly into the living room, relieved that the glow of the city through the windowpanes allowed the darkness of the room to be shaded with grey shadows.

He crawled around the dark hulk of the couch, which was the only item of furniture now left in the living room. The easy chairs, coffee table, desk and bookcases had followed the TV's sad fate. Sacrifices on the alter of Skinner's temper. He eventually found his mobile on the floor, near the door. The green display winked at him comfortingly as he frantically dialed Skinner's number.

On the third ring, Skinner's gruff voice snapped "WHAT?".

"Please, Sir. I'm sorry," Mulder begged, letting all of his despair flow down the phone line.

"Too late," Skinner snapped back and severed the connection.

Mulder hit the repeat button in a panic, only to receive an engaged signal in response. He pressed it repeatedly until he finally realised that Skinner had deliberately disabled his own phone.

Dropping the mobile with a sob, Mulder hugged himself and rocked in misery, the alien silence of his apartment like an oppressive blanket choking the air out of his lungs, as he waited in the darkness for the flies to escape from his nightmares and descend.

The usual sounds, so familiar that he never heard them, became deafening by their absence. The low hum of the fridge, the rumble of the aerator, the click of the thermostat, all were screamingly silent.

And that was when he realised.
The fucking fish.

With a howl, Mulder scrambled towards the tank and plunged his hand into the water. Instead of the normal blood temperature, his fingers met icy coldness, and then he gave gasp of relief as slimy bodies began to bump against his hand, drawn to the warmth of his fingers.

He had no idea how long he had been unconscious, but it had probably been hours, given the intensity of Skinner's beating. Hours in which his fish had started to freeze and choke to death, deprived of the heat and oxygen that they relied on.

He crawled back to his phone, trying Skinner's number again. This time, instead of the engaged signal, he got the ringing tone.

"Come on, you bastard. Pick it up!" he begged.

The sound of Skinner's voice galvanized him into a frantic babble of desperate pleas before his brain finally registered that he was talking to Skinner's answer phone.

He threw the phone across the room in disgust, momentarily satisfied by the sound of it smashing against the wall, before he realised that he had just killed any chance of calling anyone else.

Then again, who else could he call?

He dragged himself painfully to his feet and staggered into the kitchen. He turned on the tap and discovered that the immersion tank was still lukewarm.

He spent a fruitless 30 minutes scrabbling through the cardboard boxes in the pitch black hall closet, for the tablets that would nullify the fluoride and chlorine in the tap water, before giving up. Deciding that the warmth of the water outweighed the risk of using it, he filled a saucepan from the tap, picked up an empty one, and limped slowly to the fish tank.

He scooped a pan full of the tank water out, checked it desperately with his fingers in case he had inadvertently caught one of the fish in the dark, and then poured the full pan into the tank. He hobbled back to the kitchen, emptied the dirty water down the sink and repeated the exercise.

By his fifth painful trip, he realised that each time he ran the tap, the immersion tank refilled with cold water and the water was consequently cooling more rapidly than he could stagger back and forth.

Yet, the cooling water was still warmer than the icy tank, he decided, and kept going, stumbling now with pain and exhaustion, but too desperate to do anything else.

If he could just keep them alive until morning, he could knock on his neighbours doors maybe, beg them for warmer water, perhaps even get one of them to agree to take the tank off his hands and plug it in their own electrical sockets.

By the time the dawn broke, Mulder was tripping over his own feet, barely able to think, knowing only that his fish were dying because of him, because he had cocked-up, because Skinner was punishing him.

He was almost incoherent with grief and guilt by the time the morning light told him he could finally dare to bang on his neighbor's door for help. He pounded on her door, until she reluctantly slid back the bolt and then she simply gaped at him in disbelief.
"Please help me," he begged, brandishing his saucepan.

It wasn't until she simply slammed the door in his face with an hysterically horrified expression, that he realised that he was still naked except for his dog collar; his body liberally covered in bruises and welts.

He staggered back to his apartment, dressed as rapidly as he could manage, absently realising that the activity had at least stopped him from his normal stiffness after a beating, and then he tried the neighbor on the other side.

A heavy-set man, in his fifties, eventually opened the door.

"Who is it?" a woman's voice screeched from behind the man.

"It's that weirdo from next door, the one who screams a lot," her husband replied, regarding Mulder as though he was a particularly vile form of bacteria.

"Please," Mulder begged, "I need hot water."

He thrust his pan beseechingly in the man's face.

"Buy a kettle," the man replied, and slammed the door.

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It was 9pm when Skinner arrived at Mulder's apartment building. He parked his car in the basement garage, let himself into the Janitor's office with a skeleton key and, realising that his tampering of the previous evening had not been investigated, he replaced the main fuse on Mulder's electrical box with one that actually worked.

It amused him no end that Mulder obviously hadn't even realised that it was impossible to cut an electricity supply off in the middle of the night. He had told Mulder he had done it, and it had obviously never once occurred to the younger man to ask the janitor to check for a fault on his supply.

It wasn't that Skinner had a problem with actually canceling the electric, but that he did not intend to have to stumble around in the dark himself.

So he was whistling to himself happily as he ascended to Mulder's apartment. No doubt, he would find the chastened Mulder more than eager to make up for last night's 'mistakes'. It had been dark again for two hours now, and the thought of spending another night in the darkness that he had learned to fear, would undoubtedly help to add a gratifying desperation to Mulder's attitude.

The bridge game had been so amusing. Poor Fox had been like a fly trapped in a spider's snare, hopelessly trying to unravel the web of confusion that Skinner had thrown over him with his misleading bids.

Of course, he hadn't thrown the game to intentionally torture Mulder. The purpose of the lesson had been far more important. Despite his increasing strictness with the younger man, and his deliberate removal of Mulder's possessions, Mulder still had this sick idea that he was Skinner's lover rather than his slave.

In the last few weeks, Mulder's obedience had been tainted by a definite, though subtle, peevishness about the fact that Skinner continued an active social life that didn't involve him. Therefore, tired of having to repeatedly beat home the message that Mulder received only as much or little of his time as
he chose, he had decided to teach Mulder his lesson a different way.

Between the humiliation of thinking he had let Skinner down, the savage whipping and a night without the bedside light that has become a lifeline since his time at the cabin, it would be a cold day in hell before Mulder would have the nerve to ask to go out with him again.

Skinner's was so positive of the success of his lesson that he actually blinked in complete bewilderment when he stepped into Mulder's living room and failed to find Mulder kneeling submissively in his normal place.

His eyes quickly scanned the almost bare room until they lighted on Mulder's body. He was curled up, fully dressed, next to his fish tank, his cheek against the glass, his eyes riveted on the water within.

"FOX!" Skinner snapped, incensed that Mulder hadn't even acknowledged his arrival.

A shiver rippled the back of Mulder's t-shirt, evidencing that he heard Skinner's voice, but he failed to even turn his head in acknowledgement.

Mystified by Mulder's failure to scramble towards him like an apologetic puppy, Skinner found himself more curious than angry at Mulder's behaviour. He stepped forward, trying to understand what could possibly be more important to Mulder than the threat of his wrath, and as he approached the tank, his eyes narrowed.

For a moment, he thought the tank was empty. Instead of the multi-coloured fish that usually blazed lightning fast through the water, the tank was motionless. Then, as he approached closer, he saw the bleached bodies floating like flotsam on the surface.

A wave of guilty grief caught him unawares. He had never had pets, never had understood the need for them. In his opinion, only sad ineffectual people like Mulder kept the things to replace their inability to form proper relationships with people.

Yet, even so, during the weeks when he had kept Mulder at the safe house, it had never occurred to him not to feed them and check that they were okay.

He hadn't deliberately killed them. Shit, he might have systematically removed all of Mulder's other possessions but it had never even crossed his mind to take away the fish. He simply had forgotten that they needed electricity too.

"I'm sorry, Fox," he said quietly, too ashamed to even pretend that he had done it on purpose.

His words were so unexpected that they managed to break through Mulder's grief. He turned his head to look at Skinner, through eyes that were as blankly accusing as those of the dead fish.

His misery was so palpable that Skinner found himself stepping forward to offer him a comforting hug. In that moment, all Skinner was aware of was his own unintentional cruelty and the need to erase that lost helplessness from Mulder's eyes. This wasn't one of their power games, this was a god-honest mistake.

Yet, the moment his hands touched Mulder's shoulders, the younger man jerked out of his embrace and shot to his feet.

"I HATE YOU!" Mulder screamed, and launched a flurry of blows into Skinner's face and chest.

Although there was too little strength in Mulder's body to give his punches any power, his words
were like a heavy slap against Skinner's soul.

He had said he was sorry, had been sorry, had even intended to apologise further, hell, maybe even go buy some replacement fish, but when Mulder's agonised wail registered, it swept away all of his guilt in a wave of fury.

How dare the little bastard talk to him like that, let alone think he would let him strike him? They were just fucking FISH!

He hit Mulder so savagely across the face that he actually heard his jaw break. Mulder gave a howl of agony and then abruptly went quiet, his eyes going completely dilated with shock. He didn't even flinch as Skinner reached forward to inspect the damage he had just done.

Skinner felt sick. He hadn't lost his temper like that since the night he had smashed Mulder's hands. He had blamed the alcohol for his violence that night, but he didn't have that excuse tonight. He wondered whether it was actually the common denominator of guilt, which had made him lash out so thoughtlessly.

Mulder was completely passive and non-responsive as Skinner led him to his car, put him in the passenger seat, removed his collar and then drove him to an ER to get a brace fitted. Fortunately, his FBI warrant card meant that the doctors didn't query his explanation for the injury, and Mulder's silence was interpreted as being a result of his broken jaw, rather than his state of shock.

By the time they pulled up outside Mulder's apartment building, it was past midnight and Skinner didn't have time to come in. He was due at Quantico for a meeting, and needed to set off at 6am.

"Are you alright?" Skinner asked, his stomach still churning with confusion over the events of the evening.

"Yes, Sir," Mulder mumbled painfully. His eyes had finally lost their introspective gaze, but he was shivering with exhausted misery.

"Take tomorrow off," Skinner told him quietly. "I'll be out of town, so you'll have to go buy yourself some food."

He put a twenty-dollar bill on Mulder's lap. Mulder looked down on it, his eyes dull and disinterested. He didn't even react when Skinner gruffly told him he could buy anything he liked with the money.

For a few minutes, they sat in silence, Skinner's foot tapping impatiently as Mulder failed to get out of the car.

Jesus, what the hell did he want? Another fucking apology? Skinner wondered, feeling increasingly uncomfortable with the silence, but determined not to make any more concessions.

It was only then that he noticed the way that Mulder's right hand was fluttering nervously at his neck. Relief flooded the older man. Whatever had happened, no matter how miserable Mulder felt, even if he really DID hate him, still there was no mistaking the gesture.

He reached into the glove compartment and retrieved Mulder's collar. He had only removed it to prevent any questions at the ER. Mulder had obviously been uncertain whether he was getting it back.

He dropped the soft leather on Mulder's lap, next to the money, and was gratified by a sigh of relief
that hissed through Mulder's braced teeth.

"Get out," Skinner said quietly.

Mulder turned to look at him and the expression in those big hazel eyes cut Skinner to the quick. Mulder's eyes were dull with shame as he picked up the collar and money, and climbed slowly out of the car.

Skinner watched him shuffle off to the foyer, his head bowed in such obvious self-hatred and defeat, that Skinner wondered why Mulder hadn't just finally told him to go to hell.

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Part Seven

Skinner was experiencing a totally unfamiliar emotion, best described as 'crisis of conscience' and it was pissing the hell out of him.

It had started at the moment that he had realised his mistake in turning off Mulder's electricity. It had been fuelled by his second mistake of breaking Mulder's jaw, and then his third mistake had nearly floored him.

He was a man who needed to be in control. He didn't make mistakes, and certainly not three serious ones within 24 hours.

He was beginning to wonder whether he had bitten off more than he could chew.

His long drive to Quantico and back had given him plenty of time to think things through. He had inadvertently pushed Mulder too far, and only Mulder's own inability to face life alone now had redeemed the situation.

Although, to an onlooker, his treatment of Mulder from day one had been barbaric and cruel, he had understood from the moment that Mulder had cum in the Safe-house while being whipped and raped, that he could manipulate the younger man into whatever behaviour he wanted.

The truth was, that Mulder actually liked the physical side of their encounters. No matter how degrading or physically abusive he was, not only would Mulder accept it, but also he would beg for more of the same.

Despite his many cruelties, not once had Skinner lost control of his own emotions after that first day. He may have appeared angry, might even have portrayed wrath to Mulder, but he had always been completely detached from his actions, always aware of the larger picture and knowing exactly what emotion to portray in order to further manipulate Mulder's increasingly confused mind.

Therefore, his failure to fully consider the ramifications of his decision to cut the electric worried him. It had been merely his intention to remind Mulder that he had the power to plunge him back into the darkness that still haunted Mulder's nightmares. Then, when Mulder had screamed, "I hate you," and attacked him like an outraged tomcat, he had retaliated, not out of fury, but out of fear.

It hurt to admit it to himself, but it was true. He had feared that he had pushed Mulder too far and had inadvertently snapped the leash that tied the younger man to him. He had panicked and lashed out, and had broken Mulder's jaw so badly that the Doctors had had to wire his teeth together in a metal brace in an attempt to put Mulder's face back together.

The damage to Mulder sickened Skinner. It wasn't the pain he had inflicted that bothered him. Hell,
he had whipped the skin off Mulder's ass enough times to know that Mulder had no problem with pain.

No, what really bothered him was the fact that he had caused real and potentially permanent damage. Shit, if he had hit him just slightly higher, he would have driven Mulder's cheekbone into his brain with the force of his blow.

Just as he had never truly intended to destroy Mulder's hands, so he had never wanted to disfigure his face. Unlike Mulder's fingers, however, the shattered jaw had terrified him. He hadn't hesitated to take Mulder to the hospital. The idea of Mulder's face being disfigured was more than his stomach could handle.

Since he was still ardently denying any sexual attraction to the younger man, he didn't dwell too much on WHY it bothered him that Mulder's good looks might have been ruined, just on the worrying fact that he had been so emotionally out of control at the thought that Mulder might end their contract.

That was the bottom line, of course. As much as he enjoyed taunting Mulder by pretending to be completely indifferent, Skinner didn't even want to imagine life now without Mulder's presence.

Sure, he constantly threatened to leave Mulder, but only because he knew that it was an effective form of discipline, not because he actually wanted to go.

So, when Mulder had erupted in hatred, Skinner had feared that he had truly gone too far, and instead of apologizing properly, he had broken Mulder's jaw.

Then he had made his third mistake.

Hell, he just hadn't been thinking clearly. To be honest, under other circumstances he might have done the same thing deliberately, but that night, all he had wanted to do was give enough rope to Mulder for him to voluntarily stick his head back in the noose.

He had genuinely meant well with the twenty bucks and the instruction that Mulder could buy anything he wanted to eat with it. He had even stopped a block away from Mulder's apartment and picked up a pizza when he had returned from Quantico.

He had entered the room with a breezy smile, determined to re-capture (for just that one evening, of course) the easy rapport of their pre-contract relationship. He had even contemplated picking up some fish on route, only to instead decide that it would probably go down better if he took Mulder with him to purchase them.

Mulder was kneeling in position, his jaw as swollen and black as his prominent rib cage still was from the beating two days previously. His bound cock was dangling limply between his spread thighs, for the first time in Skinner's memory, and the fish tank had gone.

Unsettled by the vacant space on Mulder's wall, not to mention Mulder's obedient but sexually disinterested stance, Skinner ignored him for the moment and walked into the kitchen to dish the pizza up.

On the kitchen table, he found a receipt, change and a dozen tins of chicken Alpo. Frowning, he checked the garbage pail. There were two empty tins inside, and Mulder's bowl had been washed up and was lying on the drainer.

"Fox, come here," he ordered quietly.
Mulder pulled himself to his feet and padded in slowly, his bare feet slapping against the tiled floor. He kept his gaze carefully averted from both Skinner and the tantalizing smell of fresh pizza that wafted from the table.

"What's this?" Skinner asked in genuine bemusement, gesturing at the cans.

Mulder started to tremble, despite the quiet tone of Skinner's voice. He knew he shouldn't have eaten two cans, but he had been so hungry.

"You said I could," he mumbled defensively, his words barely legible through his swollen mouth.

Skinner nodded, not querying the quantity, just the choice.

"I said you could buy anything, Fox," he said. "Why did you choose this?"

Mulder looked at him fearfully and blushed.

"I don't like the beef," he finally admitted, "I like the chicken, and - and - besides, the beef chunks are too big."

It wasn't until Skinner had finally interpreted Mulder's painfully mumbled words that he realised his third mistake.

Shit, he had told Mulder he could eat anything he wanted, had even brought him a pizza, completely forgetting that Mulder's teeth were wired shut with barely a 2 cm gap between them. No wonder Mulder had simply opted for the dog food with the smallest chunks.

He probably thought that Skinner had been mocking him with his offer, anyway.

Angry at his own thoughtlessness, Skinner ripped the pizza in half and put Mulder's share on a plate, rather than in his bowl. Mulder accepted the plate with a look of both bewildered longing and a flash of pain at what he interpreted as just yet another example of Skinner's cruelty.

"Use your fingers," Skinner told him gruffly. "I realise you can't eat the base, but you should be able to manage the topping."

Mulder's eyes lit up and he tried to smile, but it was just a grotesque parody on his bruised and swollen face.

Skinner seated himself on the sofa, allowing Mulder to curl at his feet, and watched the painful process of Mulder tearing tiny chunks of melted cheese with his fingers and trying to force them through the gap of his brace.

He was suddenly glad he hadn't been here to witness Mulder trying to suck two tins of chicken Alpo out of his bowl. He abandoned his own pizza, suddenly finding that he had completely lost his appetite.

When Mulder had finally finished his excruciatingly slow meal, Skinner gathered him up in his arms like a child, carried him carefully to the bedroom and proceeded to give him the slowest, most careful fuck of his life.

It wasn't until the dawn light broke that he realised that he had stayed the whole night, with Mulder carefully nestled in his arms.

Since it was Saturday, and there was no need to go to work, Skinner decided to take Mulder home to
his own condo. For some indefinable reason, he couldn't bring himself to leave Mulder alone and he
did not intend to spend the weekend in Mulder's almost bare apartment.

For the next two days, Skinner found himself still treating the traumatised Mulder with kid gloves.
He seemed shattered, as though the last part of his soul had died with his fish. He trailed silently
around Skinner's apartment at Skinner's heels, seemingly unable to let the older man out of his sight.

They spent the majority of both days just watching TV together. Skinner in his favourite chair and
Mulder wrapped around his feet like a faithful hound, leaning his naked body against Skinner's legs
for comfort and warmth. Skinner actually enjoyed the calm interlude, although he convinced himself
that he was only taking care of his regrettably injured property, so they could get back to their old
relationship all the sooner.

Mulder said very little, mainly because his jaw was too swollen for speech, but also because he didn't
want to break the spell. His grief for his fish was so real that it hurt a part of him that he hadn't even
realised still existed. Yet, at the same time, the experience seemed to have broken down one of
Skinner's previously impenetrable walls of armor.

He basked in the care of this previously unseen side of the man he adored. This was the Skinner that
he had only dreamed existed; solicitous, quiet and gentle. Lying here, in Skinner's apartment, with
the older man's fingers running an absent caress through his hair, Mulder experienced a bliss that he
had never dreamed possible. He would do anything to maintain this new status quo.

Of course, he understood that it was just a temporary interlude, that sooner or later Skinner would get
around to punishing him for the way he had attacked him, but still, the thought of Skinner's hands
turning his ass scarlet wasn't exactly a bad thing.

Come to think of it, it was the only thing missing from this perfect scenario.

With his jaw wired shut, Mulder couldn't manage to show Skinner the depth of his worship with his
mouth, and despite the undisputed pleasure of Skinner's languorous love making the last two nights,
Mulder's own cock was weeping with frustrated need.

He squirmed up Skinner's leg and draped himself over his lap, wriggling his butt cheeks enticingly,
his mouth too swollen to do the begging for him.

So Skinner found himself unexpectedly facing his crisis of conscience. There was no mistaking the
message of Mulder's ass and he actually raised his hand obediently to spank before two facts thudded
into his brain.

Firstly, he didn't actually want to do it. It wasn't that he didn't EVER want to spank Mulder again. It
was just that at that precise moment he was far more interested in watching the rest of the football
match, with Mulder at his feet, and enjoying the calm that had descended between them that
weekend.

Secondly, if this was a power game, then who exactly was wielding the power if he gave in to
Mulder's request? Was Mulder's urge to be spanked motivated by a desire to please him, or simply a
demonstration of his own need? Because if it was the latter, and Skinner gave in to his request, then
it would be Mulder running this show, not him.

The events of the last five days crashed down on him, suddenly. He felt out of control again, and he
didn't like the feeling one iota.

He shoved Mulder off his lap, wincing a little at the crack of Mulder' knees on the floor, but
schooling his face into its usual mask of icy indifference.

Mulder's eyes brimmed as he gave Skinner a beseeching look. He had obviously upset Skinner with his actions and had inadvertently awoken whatever demon lurked beneath his quiet exterior.

"Please," he mumbled with difficulty, the sound struggling to escape his swollen mouth.

"Go," Skinner snapped. "Get the fuck out of my house."

Mulder tried to lean against his legs, frantic to convey the apology that his swollen lips wouldn't let him utter, but Skinner stormed to his feet.

The weekend had been ruined, he had an insane urge to beat the crap out of Mulder for ruining it, and an almost hysterical realisation that if he gave into the urge, he would be doing exactly what Mulder wanted anyway.

What the hell was wrong with the little bastard anyway? His whole body was already black and blue. His ass was barely scabbed over from the last whipping and his jaw had been shattered in seven places, yet he still wanted more abuse.

The whole thing suddenly seemed sick to Skinner. He remembered an old saying, never start a fire that you can't extinguish, and he groaned.

He had done this, he realised. Painstakingly and with deliberation he had turned Mulder into a pain-slut, and yet suddenly he couldn't stomach the result of his own endeavors.

"Get up, get dressed and get the fuck out of here, Mulder," he snarled.

Mulder gasped in pain at Skinner's use of his preferred name. The only time that Skinner called him anything but Fox, unless they were at work, was when Skinner was calling the whole thing off.

He grabbed at his collar, his eyes begging Skinner for clarification. Skinner understood the gesture, with the almost telepathic understanding that had developed between them.

"If you want to keep that, you had better get the fuck out of here and stay the hell out of my sight," he snarled.

Mulder moved like lightning, still only half-dressed when he disappeared out of Skinner's front door with a bang.

Skinner dropped back in his seat in relief. He needed time and space to think, he decided, before he faced the questions that Mulder had accidentally raised by his act.

Had he realised exactly how long it would be before he saw Mulder again, he wouldn't have been so relieved.

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It was warm.

That was something at least, Mulder decided, as he gave the truck driver a thumbs up and watched him pull away.

It had been a nightmare journey, 22 hours in the cab, only punctuated by two coffee stops and a four-hour sleep break for the driver. Mulder suspected that he had been breaking some kind of road-rule, driving 27 hours with only 5 hours of stopping time, but his broken jaw prevented him asking, and
besides it was hardly any of his business.

The driver, Hal, had been a friendly, overweight guy who had picked him up just outside the DC city limits and had seemed totally unfazed by Mulder's battered appearance and obvious lack of luggage or money.

He had even bought him a quart of milk and a straw at the first stop-over and soup at the second. When he had asked Mulder what flavour he wanted, Mulder had automatically replied chicken, and had discovered that chicken soup actually tasted a hell of a lot worse than fucking Alpo.

Mulder felt guilty. He had slept most of the trip, and even awake he had been incapable of conversation, so poor Hal hadn't received the companionship he had obviously hoped for when he had picked up his hitch-hiker.

But he hadn't complained. In fact he had been almost fatherly towards Mulder, saying nothing about his injuries, emaciated frame and cheap clothes, but making numerous general comments, that people who beat on other people should have their asses whupped.

Mulder had almost managed to smile at the thought of the burly truck driver going head-to-head with Skinner, only the thought of Skinner reminded him of how badly he had fucked up and he had instead spent the rest of the trip alternately crying quietly or dozing when the road was smooth enough not to rattle his bruised body.

When the truck had finally reached Miami, Hal had reached into his wallet, pulled out several ten dollar bills and had thrust them in Mulder's top pocket.

"Just to tide you over," he had said, gruffly. "Now fuck off out of my cab, I gotta load to deliver."

So now, Mulder was walking down the side walk, with nothing but the clothes he was wearing and Hal's generous gift. He had no id, no plans and no destination in mind, just a bone-weary tiredness in his body and a hole where his heart used to be.

"Stay the hell out of my sight," Skinner had said, and in his panic, Mulder had taken the instruction literally and had just started walking.

Three hours later, Hal's truck had pulled up, and simply because Hal was going to Florida, that is where Mulder ended up.

He had a vague awareness that he should be at work, but then that would hardly have been out of Skinner's sight, and the burning fear of Skinner removing his collar was too great to ignore.

Somehow, as long as he stayed away, it didn't matter that he wasn't WITH Skinner, it was enough to know that he still belonged to him. If he went back, then Skinner might tear up their contract. If Skinner couldn't find him, then he couldn't take back the collar.

The old Fox Mulder would have laughed at his own reasoning, would have identified it as an attempt by a shattered mind to make some sense out of a situation that had spiraled into insanity.

But this wasn't the old Fox Mulder, FBI Agent. That man had died in a lonely cabin at Chesapeake Beach, and what was left bore barely a physical resemblance, let alone a mental one.

He wandered through the outskirts of the city, his feet instinctively following a path through the winding streets until he left the tourist-friendly veneer of Miami and entered the edges of the real city beneath, where streets were lined by dilapidated houses and cars propped up on bricks.
It was in one of those streets that he found a haven. A flea-pit with a broken neon sign advertising rooms for $15. He entered humbly, silently paying for three nights in advance and slipping the remaining $5 of Hal's money into his pocket for food.

He was handed a thin pillow, a clean sheet and made his way to his tiny room. He made up the hard cot and collapsed into it, to escape the nagging voice in the back of his head that pointed out that he would be homeless again by Friday.

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Unable to eat anyway, Mulder contemplated spending the five dollars on milk, then gave in to the overwhelming urge for alcohol instead.

It was early Wednesday evening. He had slept right through Tuesday night and well into the following afternoon before the empty churning of his belly forced him to leave the sanctuary of his room.

Five dollars was hardly going to get him drunk, but it was enough, especially on an empty stomach, to give him some feeling of detachment, he decided. He had forgotten how underweight and ill he was, however, and the first beer alone made his head begin to swim.

It was one of those particularly seedy bars, where unsuccessful sales reps tried to pull equally unsuccessful hookers. Mulder sipped from his bottle with a straw and tried to ignore the speculative glances thrown his way.

Before long, however, he was convinced he had "cock-sucking loser" tattooed on his forehead. He began to be glad of the brace. Peeling back his lips to reveal the metal was the easiest way to silently turn down propositions without getting his face smashed in.

The irony of being saved from a punch in the jaw because he had already had a punch in the jaw, struck him as unbelievably funny and he chortled into his straw.

He felt, rather than heard, a body slide into the bar stool next to him, and he turned his head, baring his teeth to save any further explanations.

The handsome stranger simply grinned, his own teeth flashing whitely, in a face almost as dark as his black leather jacket.

"Your master know you're here, drinking?" he asked slyly, his knowing eyes catching the part of Mulder's collar that was revealed behind his t-shirt.

Mulder mumbled incoherently and dropped his eyes to the bar, instinctively ducking from the gaze of this obvious Dom. Before Skinner, he wouldn't have even noticed the guy's aura, but experience had taught him to be wary of such an obviously alpha male.

Leather Jacket signaled the barman and ordered them both a drink. Mulder contemplated refusing the beer that arrived in front of him, decided beggars couldn't be choosers, and slurping the last dregs out of his bottle, he transferred his straw to the new one.

"Your master do that to you?" his companion asked.

"Hmmm," Mulder grunted.

"You run away?" the man persisted.
"Yeah, no, kind of, not really," Mulder mumbled sheepishly.

The man in the leather jacket laughed delightedly at the incoherent nonsense of Mulder's reply. He had enough experience to understand that Mulder wasn't being deliberately evasive. The battered stranger both intrigued him and kindled his anger. He hated to see a sub as badly damaged as this one. It made a mockery of the lifestyle he lived.

Sure pain was good, but senseless damage pissed the hell out of him. This guy's Dom needed his own ass kicked and this sub needed to learn some self-respect.

Then again, maybe that was what this minor rebellion was about.

"You trying to teach him a lesson, huh?" he queried with amusement.

"Huh?" Mulder asked.

"This running away and getting drunk."

"I fucked up," Mulder confessed, suddenly glad to have someone to talk to who understood, even if it was a complete stranger with god-knows what intentions towards him.

"So did you run to stop him beating the crap out of you, or what?" Leather Jacket asked, narrowing his eyes. As much as he disapproved of Doms knocking the shit out of their subs, there was still a principle involved here. If this guy was a slave, he sure as hell had no business running around town without his master.

Mulder started to cry quietly, silent tears rolling down his thin face.

"I did something wrong, and I wanted him to punish me, but he got mad instead, threw me out, said to get out of his face or he'd take my collar away," Mulder mumbled with difficulty, although oddly enough he found that his speech was more legible for the beer.

"So you ran because he WOULDN'T beat the crap out of you?" Leather Jacket asked with renewed interest.

Mulder nodded, his eyes huge with confusion as he finally looked his new companion in the face.

"It hurts," he said, searching the black face for understanding.

"Doing wrong and not being punished for it?" Leather Jacket asked knowingly.

"Yeah," Mulder said, sighing with relief that the stranger could look into his soul and offer understanding rather than derision.

Leather Jacket looked at the battered sub for a long time. It was difficult to equate the man's visible injuries with his assertion that his Dom wouldn't discipline him, but then again, maybe his Dom was the kind of novice who had gone too far and frightened himself. Maybe the Dom had understood his transgression and had then refused to put things right by re-establishing the correct relationship.

There was certainly no doubting the look of lustful need in the man's eyes.

"What's your name, little one?" he asked softly.

"Fox," Mulder said eagerly, wondering whether this stranger was going to offer him what he craved so badly.
"Listen to me, Fox. I can't help you. I have a sub who is perfect in a lot of ways, but I haven't quite quelled the jealousy problem, yet," Leather Jacket grinned, with a fond smile for his errant sub.

"But if you really need something, and I suspect you do, go here," he produced a battered looking business card and pressed it into Mulder's suddenly nerveless fingers.

"It's a respectable club, so you will struggle a bit, given the fact that you already look like crap. But there is a back room, you know?"

Mulder gazed at him uncomprehendingly. The stranger sighed.

"They have a rack. Some people are willing to pay for the privilege of tanning a pretty butt. You could get your needs fulfilled AND earn some rent money. Think about it."

He rose, dropped a $20 bill on the bar in front of Mulder and turned to leave.

"Oh, don't drink it all, honey. You really need to do something about your weight."

Mulder watched him disappear and stared at the card. It blazed at him, a promise of relief and yet it spoke of a sordid world that he couldn't bear to even imagine. He shuddered, thrust the card in his pocket and proceeded to drink until the $20 ran dry. There were calories in beer, he figured.

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Leather Jacket closed himself into the phone booth, quickly unscrewed the handset and attached a scrambling device before dialing the number he knew by heart.

"Your subby is here, like your informant said," he confirmed. "He's pretty fucked up but alive."

There was a long silence on the end of the phone before a raspy voice finally replied.

"Keep him under observation, and spread the word that I won't tolerate any 'permanent' damage to him."

Leather Jacket huffed in annoyance.

"Maybe you should tell that to his Dom. From the look of 'Fox' his Dom is one stupid, mean motherfucker," he spat.

"He is also a particularly powerful 'motherfucker'. It suits me that he is pursuing this potentially damaging relationship," the other man chortled.

"So, the Fox is actually just a sacrificial lamb?" Leather Jacket asked sadly. He had rather liked the look of the sub himself. Cleaned up and properly fed, he thought that he would truly be a 'Fox'.

"Oh, no. Fox is, well, Fox is rather special to me," the other man confessed, with an affection in his voice that amazed his listener.

"I gave him the card for the club," Leather Jacket confessed, suddenly nervous about his decision.

The other man laughed.

"I will make sure that certain people know he will be visiting. A number of our mutual acquaintances will probably be interested in the thought of Fox on the rack," he replied and severed the connection.

Leather Jacket shuddered. He would never understand that cigarette smoking bastard, he decided.
It was late afternoon Thursday before Mulder managed to pull himself together enough to crawl out of bed. The alcohol had at least given him another uninterrupted night of sleep, but it had exacted its price when he woke. His head thudded, his eyes refused to open into the daylight glare and his stomach roiled nauseously.

So he just stayed in bed, hugging his sore, empty belly, cursing himself for not having had the sense to save at least some of the stranger's money. He didn't even have enough change to purchase a cup of coffee, and when thirst made him finally drag himself to the filthy, communal bathroom, he found that the water that chugged reluctantly from the tap was slightly discolored and tasted faintly of rust.

Still, running his head under the water and giving himself a makeshift shampoo with the hard coal-tar soap, made him feel vaguely human again. Except for the gnawing in his stomach, of course. He regarded himself in the cracked mirror that was bolted to the wall over the sink and sighed.

The swelling of his jaw had finally receded, but the skin was still vividly discolored from just above his left cheekbone down to the top of his collar.

He ran his fingers over the soft leather as he stared into his own reflection. A stranger's face stared back, with eyes so dark and sunken that he felt himself drowning in his own haunted stare. He rested his forehead on the cool surface of the mirror, closed his eyes and took several deep breaths to try and steady himself.

He had seen many terrifying sights in his life, had faced visions of hell that most people would be incapable of even imagining, but nothing had ever frightened him as much as realising that he didn't even know who he was anymore.

The face in the mirror was so unfamiliar, that for a moment, the world shifted and lurched around him. Suddenly even his name seemed beyond his mind's capacity to remember.

Who are you? He mumbled at the wild eyed stranger, and flinched when the reflection seemed to echo his question mockingly.

He traced his fingers wonderingly over the alien features, touching his own cheeks and jaw, watching the stranger copy his tentative actions.

A movement behind him startled him out of his dreaming. Another face joined the stranger's in the mirror, and Mulder turned blindly to face him.

"Who am I?" he begged.

The soup settling in his abused stomach, its nutritious heat creeping through his body, cleared his head somewhat.

Mulder gazed at his companion in gratitude, as the clouds of confusion that had smothered him earlier began to drift away.

"I'm Fox," he mumbled, his bruised face contorting into a shy smile of relief.

Digger grunted, too busy dipping bread into his soup to pay much attention. Besides, he hadn't dragged Mulder to the soup kitchen out of the kindness of his heart.
He had taken one look at the battered younger man, had seen the wicked looking brace, as Mulder had spoken, and had quickly realised that taking the younger man to the shelter with him would ensure him a larger portion of food.

Even if Mulder had been capable of understanding what was going on, as the old drunk gleefully swiped everything off Mulder's plate except his mug of soup, he wouldn't have complained anyway. He was well used to watching Skinner eating a hearty meal in front of him. He had learnt to be grateful for whatever little he was given.

And the soup did help him to think a little more clearly.

Remembering his name was a start. Then bits and pieces gathered in the edges of his brain, fell slowly into some semblance of order, and the salient facts of his immediate needs came clear.

He needed money or he would be turned out of the flop-house tomorrow.

He almost regretted the limited return of his faculties. The haze he had descended into earlier had been the same dream-like state of 'otherness' that he had often experienced in the cabin, when as he hung for hours, suspended alone with his pain and fear, he had escaped to a place inside his head where he simply existed, nameless, thoughtless and safe.

He burrowed into his pocket and retrieved the business card that had seemed so frightening the night before. Now, it seemed to morph in his hands, transforming into something that offered him a return to the oblivion he sought.

"Bizarre" the card pronounced, in gilt letters across a black background, and Mulder found himself laughing at the name, earning himself numerous suspicious, worried or pitying glances from the homeless men who were huddled in the charity shelter, eating their free dinner.

"Bizarre", Mulder mumbled to himself, trying to remember the meaning of the word, but only managing to understand that in some fashion it meant him.

"I'm Bizarre," he announced to his companion triumphantly.

"You sure are, buddy," the drunk chortled.

~~~

It was 10.30pm when Mulder finally arrived at the club. The doorman took one look at his bruised face and cheap dirty clothes and was preparing to give him the bum steer, when someone emerged from the club and whispered in his ear.

The doorman's eyes went large with surprise, but then a grin twitched at the corner of his mouth before he nodded and stepped forward to where Mulder was shuffling nervously on the sidewalk.

"Back door," he said firmly, grasping Mulder's thin shoulders and turning him to face the alley that ran down the side of the building.

Nodding obediently, Mulder walked down the alleyway, past the overflowing waste containers, towards the rear of the club.

A metal door clanged open, making him start with fright, and then a woman emerged, her heavily painted face and long black hair, vampirically grotesque in the orange glow of the street lights.

She beckoned to Mulder with a talon-like finger, and he obediently approached, his eyes flickering to
the deep cleavage of her dress. The material was cut so low that he could see the heavy gold ring that pierced her belly-button.

"What do you want?" She asked huskily, raking him with the slitted eyes of a predatory cat.

Mulder fumbled in his pocket and then thrust the battered card at her as though it was a magical talisman.

"I want - I need - I -," his voice trailed off as he found it impossible to articulate his reason for coming.

"Ah," she replied with a hungry smile. "You want the rack," she pronounced knowingly.

Mulder ducked his head, unable to answer even as he quivered in excitement. He flinched as she stepped forward suddenly and caught his groin between the long nails of her right hand.

He winced as she closed her claws, their sharp points easily piercing the thin material of his cotton pants.

Obviously satisfied by the way his cock lurched and swelled excitedly in response to the unexpected pain, she gave a sly smile.

"Come in," she said, opening the door widely and gesturing that he should enter.

She led him down a long corridor to what was obviously an office. Mulder looked in bewilderment at the leather chairs, large imposing desk and the bookcase lined walls.

"Wait here," she instructed and left.

Mulder hadn't known what to expect, but an office had been the furthest thing from his mind. The room seemed so damn "respectable" he decided, and it threw him into complete confusion.

He waited for an agonising 15 minutes or so, before the door opened and a man entered. He was dressed in a $1000 suit, wore pince-nez glasses like a schoolteacher and regarded Mulder from a face so innocuously jovial that an advertising agency could have used him to sell children's books.

"Sit, sit," he said with a friendly smile, gesturing to one of the chairs and indicating that Mulder should drop his nervous frame into it.

Mulder collapsed into the chair, his mind whirring with confusion.

"Tsk, tsk," the stranger tutted, settling himself on the edge of the desk and regarding Mulder's bruised face. "You HAVE been a naughty boy, haven't you?"

"Yes, Sir," Mulder muttered, dropping his eyes to the deep carpet.

"You understand that I can't let you into the club. Quite the wrong image, my dear," the man continued.

Mulder looked up in despair, his eyes welling with tears of frustration.

The man chuckled gently, giving Mulder's knee a kindly pat.

"Don't worry little Fox. There are certain 'clientele' who prefer 'rough-trade'. I will arrange a private deal for you in one of the back rooms. I have to tell you that you aren't a particularly 'valuable' specimen in your current state. I doubt I can get more than $100 for you. Unless you are offering sex
Mulder shook his head frantically. As much as his ass had started to spasm hungrily at the mention of sex, he didn't dare. He was Skinner's slut. He instinctively knew that Skinner would never forgive him if another man used the fuck-hole that was Skinner's personal property.

"I thought as much," the man replied. "No matter, perhaps someone will be satisfied just to turn your ass a pretty shade of pink."

Mulder's cock stiffened and he groaned, his eyes dilating with need.

"Wait here, I'll see what I can do for you," the man said, patting Mulder's head fondly as he walked past.

"Thank you," Mulder whispered gratefully to his disappearing back.

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"Five hundred," Curtis said with a feral smirk. There was no trace now of the "kindly uncle" on his face. "For that you can beat the shit out of him, but you can't fuck him, and you aren't to break the skin OR his bones."

Mallik's face screwed with disappointment. He didn't mind the money, hell he had paid more than that for his flight down here, but he had been looking forward to leaving a permanent mark on Mulder's flesh.

"Shit, he's already scarred," Mallik argued, looking at Mulder through the two-way mirror. "What difference will it make?"

"HE won't like it," Curtis said, and Mallik knew he wasn't referring to Mulder.

He shuddered and nodded his reluctant agreement.

"I don't see why I can't fuck him though," he muttered angrily.

"Because he already belongs to someone else," Curtis explained. "HE doesn't want Mulder to panic and run again, which he might if he breaks his contract with his Dom, so no sex."

Mallik wasn't happy, but he wasn't stupid either. The satisfaction of his revenge on Agent Mulder wasn't worth facing the wrath of the consortium.

Besides, it was amazing what you could do with a paddle if you knew how to wield it properly, and Mallik was a master. It was a good job that the club knew a discrete taxi firm. Mulder certainly wouldn't be walking home.

His only regret was that Mulder was blindfolded and so would never know who had beaten him.

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Jack Palmer, respectable MD, and sometime Dom, entered the seedy bar and looked around hopefully. To his relief, Mulder was sitting on the same bar stool as before, although he was tilting at a precarious angle that suggested he had been here for several hours.

Since it was only 6pm, that fact alone worried him. He obviously should have looked the sub up before today, he decided. Yet, the description Curtis had given him of Mallik's beating had made him reasonably certain that Mulder would, of necessity, lie low for several days.
Despite the fact that it was four days since Mulder's dramatic debut at "Bizarre", it surprised Palmer that Mulder could sit at all on the hard bar stool. Then again, the amount of empty beer bottles on the bar in front of Mulder suggested that he was past the point of feeling anything.

"Hi, Fox," he purred, slinking into the stool next to the drunken sub.

Mulder looked up blearily, trying to focus on the figure, with eyes that wouldn't quite track. Yet the handsome black features and leather jacket finally registered.

"Hi, yourself," he slurred, trying to smile but the expression slipped uneasily on his pallid, underweight face.

Palmer bit his lip. Despite the fact that the bruises on Mulder's face had paled to a mere ghost, hardly noticeable under his pronounced 5 o'clock shadow, Mulder looked, if anything, actually worse than he had the week before.

"When did you last eat?" Palmer demanded.

Mulder blinked, his eyes losing their focus again as he tried to think. He wanted to respond to the quiet authority of the other man's voice, but simply couldn't remember the answer to his question. He eventually gave an apologetic shrug, which nearly toppled him off the stool.

"Can't eat," he mumbled, his lips baring to reveal the tight brace.

He flinched when Palmer's right hand came up and took hold of his jaw, but the touch was gentle, almost impersonally professional.

Palmer made a decision.

"You're lucky," he told the confused drunk. "You obviously heal easily. A break like this can take months to set, but I can tell that it's already knitting together. Come with me and I'll release the brace a little so that you can eat, at least."

Mulder eyed him suspiciously, wary of going anywhere with anyone, let alone someone who wanted to mess with his mouth, but then drunken bravado took over.

"You wanna play doctor?" he giggled.

"Yeah, something like that," Palmer replied gently, taking Mulder by the arm and helping him to his feet.

Mulder half walked, half staggered, out of the bar at his side. It was only when the warm evening air flooded his lungs that the alcohol he had guzzled finally overcame him. His head eyes rolled up and he fainted. Palmer barely managed to prevent his headlong crash to the unyielding sidewalk, before swinging his unresponsive body up in his muscular arms and carrying him to his waiting car.

~~~

When Mulder woke it was morning. He was lying, not in his hard cot at the flop-house, but in a luxurious four-poster bed.

For the first time in days, his head didn't punish him with a resounding drum roll for moving it off the pillow, and he blinked in surprise to find a drip inserted in his arm.

"It's glucose," a deep voice said, as Palmer noticed Mulder's waking and rose out of the easy chair in
the window bay to approach his 'guest'.

"Don't move," he admonished as Mulder began to fidget nervously at his approach. He was pleased to see that the hydration and the anti-biotic injection had restored a little color to Mulder's wan face and the dark skin under Mulder's eyes was less pronounced.

Mulder stilled, only his eyes continuing the nervous dance. He was too bewildered by his opulent surroundings and the incongruous drip to say anything, so instead just huddled under the warm quilt and waited for this fantasy to erupt into inevitable violence as a huge black hand reached towards his face.

He closed his eyes in anticipation of a blow. Instead, Palmer merely touched his forehead and sighed with relief. The fever he had still half-expected to find had thankfully receded.

"I'll go fetch breakfast," he said, and wandered off, leaving Mulder to slowly decide that he must be dreaming this, after all.

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Palmer narrowed his eyes at the plate that Danny practically threw on the table.

"I told you to cut it into 'tiny' pieces," he said quietly.

Danny pouted, his eyes narrowing to cat-like slits.

"He's got a knife and fork, hasn't he?" he grumbled.

Palmer sighed. He thought that he had dealt with this after arriving home with Mulder the night before, but obviously Danny still hadn't learnt his lesson.

"Present ass," he snapped.

Danny flinched and cowered, biting his lip nervously, but he immediately complied, leaning over the kitchen table and displaying his firm buttocks. They were still inflamed from last night, and he whimpered as Palmer ran a loving hand over them.

Palmer heard the whimper, felt the quiver of fear, and his face softened. Then he gave a resounding slap down on the pink skin.

Danny yelped, but made no attempt to evade the blows, even when his skin turned a deep rose color and each descent of Palmer's hand made him squeal in pain.

When Palmer finally decided that Danny had been sufficiently disciplined, he drew him up in his arms and gave him a fierce bear-hug, allowing the boy to sink his head into his chest and sob.

He waited until Danny had calmed, kissed the top of his head and then waited.

"I'm sorry," Danny whispered.

"Do you understand WHY I punished you?" Palmer asked.

"Because I was jealous," Danny replied.

"I brought Fox home because he is ill, not because I am intending to accept him as my slave," Palmer explained. "BUT, if I want to have a DOZEN slaves, then I can."
"I know," Danny answered, his face twisting in misery at the thought.

Palmer sighed. Danny was slowly learning to be a perfect companion in so many ways, but no matter how many times Palmer spanked him, he still couldn't cope with the idea of sharing his master with another slave.

Still, since Palmer didn't actually intend to HAVE another slave, he had been lax in driving the point home, so he was as much to blame as Danny. By allowing his sub to get away with the jealousy in the past, he was just as responsible for Danny's failure, so he wasn't really angry with him.

"Go to work, Danny," he said mildly.

Danny worked in one of the beach-front arcades, sitting in a booth to give change to the punters. Palmer was sure that the thought of spending eight hours sitting on his sore butt would give the sub plenty of time to amend his thinking.

Or maybe not, since Danny's next words were a tearful, "Is he gonna stay?"

Palmer contemplated punishing him again, then sighed and gave his errant sub a comforting hug instead. Sometimes the art of being a strong Dom was knowing when to let an inexperienced sub slip the leash a little.

"No, little one. He isn't staying," Palmer replied regretfully.

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Mulder tucked into the now cold, but nevertheless tasty breakfast with gusto. He couldn't chew, but the brace had been adjusted so that he had some limited movement in his jaws and sufficient gap between his teeth to allow him to shovel in the finely chopped bacon, sausage and scrambled eggs.

The toast nearly defeated him. No matter how small he cut the pieces, they still caught in his craw as he swallowed, until he learnt to hold the toast in his mouth, letting the butter melt into his tongue, until his saliva softened the toast into mush.

By the time he had finished, his belly was distended like a budda's and he burped happily.

Palmer smiled with amused tolerance.

"I have to go to work now," he told Mulder. "You can stay here today, have a bath, get some more sleep, but tonight you have to leave. Do you understand?"

Mulder's eyes dulled but he nodded. He hadn't really expected to be allowed to stay at all. The thought of a real bath, and some more time in the comfortable bed, was so much more than his expectations that he tried not to show his disappointment.

After all, he didn't deserve this kindness and if he stayed, this strange kindly Dom might soon realise what a fuck-up he was and would regret helping him.

"Be careful not to disconnect the drip," Palmer warned, as he helped Mulder to the bathroom.

He waited until he was sure that Fox could manage to keep his head above the water, then hurriedly left the house, late for his surgery.

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"I'll give you a lift home," Palmer said, standing up.
Mulder nodded miserably, understanding the tone of dismissal, and finding himself ridiculously close
to tears.

He had expected to be thrown out as soon as Palmer returned home but had instead been allowed to
spend the evening curled at Palmer's feet, trying to concentrate on the game on TV and thereby
ignore the glowering looks from Palmer's slave, Danny.

Any half-baked notions that Palmer might actually decide to keep him had been dashed when Danny
had returned home. The golden-haired youth, with the physique of a surfer, had stunned Mulder. He
felt like a mongrel stray compared to Danny's glowing health and obvious air of 'belonging'.

Yet, despite Mulder's humble acknowledgement of Danny's obvious place in the pecking order,
Danny had snapped and sniped at him all evening, whenever his Master was out of earshot, and as
Mulder dragged himself to his feet to leave, Danny had to drop his face to hide his smirk of triumph.

Mulder waited until he was in Palmer's car before hesitantly asking whether he could be dropped at
the club instead.

"You need money?" Palmer asked, although he knew the answer already, hence his decision to look
Mulder up the previous evening. Curtis had told him that Mulder had been paid $100, and Palmer
knew that Mulder would have already spent it on rent and beer.

"Yeah," Mulder muttered, looking down at his lap to avoid Palmer's stare.

Palmer almost reached for his wallet, but then common sense reasserted itself. He had already gone
out on a limb for Mulder. He had given him 24 hours to lick his wounds and sober up.

No matter how sorry he felt for Fox, he wasn't prepared to risk Spender's wrath. So he merely did a
u-turn and deposited Mulder a short walk from "Bizarre."

"You don't know me," he told Mulder, his eyes drilling into Mulder's meaningfully. "I never took
you home."

"I don't know you," Mulder agreed sadly, and got out of the car.

He watched Palmer's tail-lights disappear into the distance and choked back a sob.

Alone, abandoned, he turned like a whipped cur and stumbled towards the back-door of the club,
suddenly desperate for more than the promise of money.

He wanted to lose himself in the pain, find that place in his head where time stopped and thinking
became impossible, and he would forget, at least for a short time, that nobody wanted him.

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Part Eight

It was so ludicrous, it was almost funny, Skinner decided, staring out of his office window and
clenching his fists to prevent himself acting on the insane urge to put them through the glass.

He was the Assistant Director of the FBI, and after three weeks, he was still no nearer to finding just
one missing man.

Of course, the fact that he was desperately trying to cover up Mulder's absence didn't exactly allow
him to use the resources of his office to help the search.
It was fortunate that he had taken Mulder to the ER. The x-rays of Mulder's shattered jaw and the prognosis of between 2 to 4 months before the brace could be removed, had given Skinner adequate ammunition to get Mulder a medical leave 'in absentia'.

No one had questioned his story that some mysterious assailant had attacked the Agent. Mulder had a record of pissing people off and paying a physical price, after all. So, his medical evidence had been sufficient to cover Mulder's ass.

Unable to resist reading Mulder's personnel record, as he inserted his 'evidence', Skinner was disconcerted by exactly how many times Mulder HAD been beaten senseless during the course of his investigations.

It finally occurred to him that Mulder's behaviour could be interpreted as having always been aimed at purposefully aggravating people into physical violence towards him, as though sub-consciously, at least, he had always been aware of his buried streak of masochism.

Despite his own participation in Mulder's 'awakening', Skinner, for the first time, began to doubt his own power over the other man. His actions at the Safe House hadn't turned Mulder into a masochist, he realised. All he had done was trigger something that had already lurked inside the younger man.

It was a dark, predatory monster built of grief, guilt, shame and self-hatred that had hungrily torn into the wound Skinner had opened and had burrowed deeply inside, its sharp ravenous teeth ruthlessly shredding Mulder's illusion of normality.

Perhaps Mulder's incessant search for proof of aliens and monsters had always been a red-herring. Driven by whatever terrors lurked in his own sub-conscious, had Mulder's true motivation been the necessity to prove to himself that monsters DIDN'T exist, after all?

It bothered him that he had never seen Mulder's behaviour for what it was, and he began to wonder about Mulder's childhood, wondering what could possibly motivate a man, as intelligent as Mulder undoubtedly was, to need pain.

Had the 'abduction' of Samantha been sufficient trauma to have set Mulder on this quest for personal absolution, or were there other reasons for Mulder's self-destructive streak? What other personal demons had he unleashed by leaving Mulder alone in the dark?

Even as he acted in the interest of his own self-preservation, these questions haunted him. With no money, no friends and no discernable sense of self-respect anymore, he wondered whether Mulder was even capable of surviving alone.

Not privy to Skinner's own knowledge, however, everyone else was so relieved that Mulder had managed to wrangle himself a medical absence, rather than the psychiatric one that had been rapidly looming on the horizon for the hapless Agent, that Skinner had found it remarkably easy to cover up the whole affair.

On the other hand, since Mulder was officially on sick-leave, Skinner couldn't exactly use the FBI resources to track his runaway slave down.

He hadn't even been sure he wanted to, at first.

His immediate damage-limitation had been more aimed at his own self-protection than a desire to save Mulder's ass. Mulder missing, Mulder fired, Mulder dead even, had seemed to be the answer to all his problems.

After the initial shock of realising that Mulder had disappeared, for a subsequent few days, he had
actually reveled in the surprising freedom of not having to think about him. He hadn't realised how much his 'power-games' had exhausted him, until they were abruptly brought to a close by Mulder's disappearance.

So his first feelings had actually been relief.

The madness that had started with Rhodes' phone call was finally over and he could get on with his life.

Or, at least, he had tried to.

Yet, like a vengeful ghost, Mulder wouldn't leave him alone. Skinner had repeatedly found himself losing track of a particular thought, or line of conversation, and instead dwelling on Mulder. Dissatisfied with merely haunting his dreams, memories of Mulder began to creep insidiously into his waking hours too.

He was aware of a feeling of emptiness, so unfamiliar that it took nearly two weeks to identify it, and when he finally did, he was stunned by the realisation.

He was lonely.

He actually missed the stupid, aggravating, little bastard. And it wasn't the 'games' that he missed, although the constant hard ache of his neglected cock seemingly belied that fact. What he truly missed were those quiet times when he had relaxed with Mulder curled at his feet, at the end of a stressful day, his hands finding comfort for his soul, as his fingers played with Mulder's silky hair.

He found his temper spiraling out of control at the smallest infraction of his subordinates. Without the pressure valve of Mulder to balance him, Skinner steamed and boiled with an ever growing volcanic fury. Surly and unapproachable, he stalked the Hoover building every evening until late into the night, haunting the empty corridors with his brooding misery. He was unable to go home, he finally understood, because he had nothing to go home to anymore.

The third week, no longer able to pretend, even to himself, that he didn't care what had happened to his runaway, he began to make discrete enquiries. He checked endless airline manifolds, checked the greyhound bus terminals, and visited numerous roadside cafes to speak to truck drivers who might have picked up a battered hitch-hiker the night of Mulder's disappearance.

He checked the hospitals, the homeless shelters and finally the morgues.

He visited Mulder's mother and the 'lone gunmen', keeping his enquiries light and jovial, implying that Mulder had taken the opportunity of his sick-leave to chase werewolves and UFO's, and, oh by the way, have you seen him?

The knot of tension got tighter as he repeatedly drew a blank. Mulder had apparently disappeared off the face of the earth.

And Skinner finally accepted that he wanted him, maybe even needed him, back.

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