Summary

A killer romanticizes each and every victim, leaving behind symbols of his "love"...but who is his intended target?

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Notes

Please forgive the puns; any contextual confusion is not intended or purposefully done. If I go off course, just poke me.

Post "Agua Mala" (With mention of "Rain King", Two Fathers", and "One Son" only for contextual identification).

Disclaimer: All original X File characters, including Mulder and Scully belong to Chris Carter and FOX Productions, as well as TenThirteen Productions. Thanks.
12:30 pm, Tuesday afternoon, near the outskirts of Washington D.C.-
“Easy does it, Mags, one foot after the other,” Melissa Owens guided her extremely still drunk friend up to the door of her duplex. “If you puke on my shoes I will be extremely frustrated with you, girl.”

“Issa, I really have to pee,” Maggie’s slurred words were almost unrecognizable as the English language as she leaned against the porch column while Melissa dug her keys out of her purse.

“Please don’t pee on my porch,” Melissa fumbled in her purse, “I’ve almost got the keys right now, just hold it a little longer.”

“Have I told you today that I love you?” Maggie giggled as she tripped over the toe of one shoe, hiccupping in Melissa’s ear.

“Only about four hundred times on the way home,” Melissa sighed, determining she’d rather off herself than be the designated driver again.

Melissa’s expression was that of a mom taking care of her immature and irresponsible child. She swung Maggie’s arm around her and pulled her towards the door with the keys aimed out. What she knew is that her two other roommates had a party the night before, one that was supposed to be low key; quiet even. She unlocked the door and practically dragged Maggie into the house, leading her to the half bathroom directly in front of her, momentarily glancing at the mess in her apartment, nearly unaware of what was actually to come.

“Do you need me to help you?” She watched as Maggie fumbled to hike up her dress to pee.

“Nope! I got this,” Maggie propped up one arm against the wall, while the other tugged at her underwear, “Man, these things are awfully tight today…”

Maggie closed her eyes briefly and went towards the kitchen, just in time to see the carnage that was left of it. There were at least twelve different bottles of alcohol, all nearly or completely empty, rested on the countertops next to the multicolored mixer cups.

“Jesus, what did they do to my kitchen last night?” She half muttered as she began collected bottle by bottle, discarding them into the nearby glass recycling bin.

She found a full bottle and smiled at it, deciding that it was the parting gift for her disaster of a Monday night and slid it into the mini-fridge next to her mixer set up. She put all of the redeemable mixing glasses, spoons, and shot glasses into the nearby dishwasher and set the water temp to hot before putting the soap into the dispenser, humming softly before acknowledging the obvious silence from the hallway.

“Hey Mags you ok in there?” Melissa started back into the living space next to the half bath, picking up empty cups along the way.

“Si, Chiquita, muy buena,” Mags giggled out the worst Spanish pronunciation that she could in her drunken state followed by a splash. “I just flushed my gum by accident! Should I try to get it?!?”

“Oh don’t do that, that’s disgusting, I’ll give you another piece when you’re done. Please, don’t fall into the toilet…oh dammit…” Melissa winced, as she realized that they had left the door open when they came into the house.

Melissa half ran to the door and reached for the door handle to close it, where one of her
roommates was hiding behind it. She pulled and pushed it shut just as the only testosterone ridden creature that lived in one of the bedrooms upstairs jumped out at her, making the loudest noise possible to scare her.

“Jesus! Don't do that!” Melissa half shouted, backing away. “What if I had something in my hand, Miles, I could’ve killed you with it!”

Miles Canton smiled as he walked past her towards the kitchen, laughing nearly hysterically at her. “Sorry about that. Didn’t know you’d be a bonehead and forget to close the front door…I am an opportunist and I couldn’t pass up that perfect opportunity. I would’ve gladly have been impaled by something sharp and jagged just to see that look on your face.”

“Next time I’ll hurt you,” Melissa caught her breath as Miles did his most offensive imitation of her while she walked over to check on Maggie, who had passed out after pulling herself off of the toilet.

“Girls night out, I see,” Miles chuckled.

“Hey at least you didn’t see her trying to pull down her panties earlier…and honest to God, it wasn’t supposed to turn out quite like this,” Melissa rubbed her eyes, practically tripping on Maggie’s discarded purse. “I didn’t even get to drink last night. Andrea and Elisa are still out in my car, passed out.”

“Well, they never expect this,” Miles whispered, as he picked up a beer bottle and tossed it on the floor. “Rachel had her friends over last night while you were out playing—fairly certain at least five people are still in the house. I couldn’t take hearing anymore bad karaoke versions of “Who let the dogs out?” and “True colors”…went over to Brad’s to get a few things accomplished.”

“Thanks for the Warning?” Melissa half smiled as she slipped a couch pillow under Maggie’s head and pulled a throw over her, making sure she was lying on her side, “You know…when you reach 28 years old, you are supposed to be married and on your way to complete and total success in the business world. Hell, maybe even planning or already raising your first child.”

She brushed aside a section of hair that had fallen down into her face as she addressed the issue of checking all of the rooms for any passed out party goers.

“Expectations are made for dumbasses; don’t ever expect anything from life. Too many curveballs, remember?” Miles smiled as he noticed Maggie waking up. “At least you’re not pushing 40 and still searching for anything meaningful in your life.”

“Miles! What are you doing here?” Maggie smiled up at him, wiping the fresh sweat from her forehead.

“I live here, Mags,” Miles watched her as she started to look very sickly. “Hmmm, I think you’re going to puke.”

Before he could even get her to turn over and towards the toilet, Maggie projectile vomited on the floor. It was that glorious neon green color from the shots of the Mean Green punch, coming back to bite not only her, but the unfortunate, sober friend who was to clean it up. Melissa turned around and heaved a sigh.

“It’s going to be a long day,” Melissa pursed her lips together as she went for a towel and a can of carpet cleaner to clean up the vomit.
“I’ll help you clean this up,” Miles started off toward the kitchen leaving Maggie and Melissa alone.

“Miles, it would be more beneficial if you would take her up to an empty bed so she can get some sleep. Put her on her side, move the trash bin next to the bed along with a plastic cup of water. I want to avoid puke covered bedding if I can. I’ll stay down here and clean up this mess,” Melissa propped Maggie up so she would not be in the way of spraying the stained area.

“You’ve got a point—besides, I can actually lift dead weight,” He moved over to Maggie and gently pulled her up in to a safe carrying position. “Come on, rock star, time for some beauty sleep.”

“Hi, Miles,” Maggie was going in and out of consciousness as she grinned up at him.

“Hey, kiddo, I think it’s bedtime,” Miles winked at Melissa as he carried her up the stairs.

Melissa sighed and scrubbed at the carpeting, watching the green slowly fade away back to the soft bluish gray of the carpet’s normal color. She could hear a slow thud followed by a quicker series of thuds directly above her head.

“Miles, are you ok up there?” Melissa’s voice strained as she shouted, head aimed upward.

“I tripped over a trash bin—Mags is in bed, safe and sound,” Miles sounded winded as he shouted back to her from the top of the stairs.

Melissa took the next forty five minutes cleaning the entryway and living room before taking a lasting look around, heaving a cleansing breath. She put the vacuum cleaner away and admired her work again, content with a sense of normacly as she gathered up the cleaning sprays and carpet cleaner, setting each back under the kitchen sink. The noise of the vacuum was the least of her cares as she heard rustling from above her head again as she finished up the last of the recycling clean up, unapologetically dropping the glass recycling near the sliding door. She glanced back as three of her roommates’ friends came stumbling down the stairs and out the door, eyes half closed from hangovers. Satisfaction achieved, she thought, as the door slammed shut behind the last one. Melissa pulled kitchen cleaners out and set them onto the counter and realized the state of the kitchen was worse than she had first assessed.

“Hey Miles, can you help me with the kitchen?” Melissa tilted her head toward the stairwell, projecting her voice quite well before furrowing her brow as she pulled the full trash bag out and set it near the front door this time, craning her head as she looked up the stairs. “Miles?”

Silence filled the room as she sighed a little, ascending the stairs toward the top, the frustration turning to worry as the hallway became more and more visible to her side. The air went cold, sending chills down her spine, as she reached the top of the stairs. An overwhelming odor of perfume and flowers hit her nostrils sent her reeling as she steadied herself at the top of the stairs, just a few feet from the first bedroom door. It was not that pleasant kind of smell that you get when you have just put out a fresh pot of potpourri or a candle, but that of an intense spray or pile of dead flowers covering up another foul stench under it. The hair on the back of Melissa’s neck stood up on end, her senses hyper aware as she sucked in another short breath. Her hands began to shake as she pushed the door open. It was too quiet.

“Maggie?” She felt almost relieved as she found her friend, covered up to the neck with blankets, head turned toward the window. “You awake, honey?”
Something was not right.

Melissa could feel her heart beating up in her throat as she inched her way to the bed. “Maggie…”

Melissa saw the bluish color of Maggie’s lips as the light caught her face. She panicked inside as she reached for her friend’s shoulder in an attempt to wake her. Melissa’s heart raced, thinking that her best friend had choked to death in the bed until she felt warmth seeping up through the sheets against her palms, the squish of fluid moving back and forth under the pressure of her fingers. Melissa froze as she looked at her hands, the flash of red causing tunnel vision for what felt like ages until she could focus her attention on Maggie again.

“Oh God,” Melissa tore the covers back, revealing the shadow of what was left of Maggie’s upper torso.

The sheets were stained and the blood was still pouring out of her wounds. Maggie’s chest had at least six puncture wounds, one of which looked as though it had been ripped open with a dull edge and finished off with fingers. Something was stuffed in the largest wound, but Melissa didn’t want to, or need to, get a closer look to find out. The fear overcame her as she stumbled backward, toward her bedroom to find a phone. She flung the door open, not caring how much noise she was making, and saw the phone perched on the edge of her night stand. Out of the corner of her eye she could see Miles in the doorway to her bathroom.

“Miles?” Melissa’s voice cracked, tears streaming down her face. “Someone’s in the house. Maggie…she’s…”

“You’ve got to calm down, Mel,” Miles took a few steps forward, his voice calm yet concerned.

“There was blood everywhere, Miles—we’ve got to call for an ambulance,” Melissa took a step toward him, grateful he was there.

“It’s ok, we’ll get this figured out,” Miles brought his hands out towards her, in an attempt to comfort her, his voice shifting from concern to monotone as he realized she was just a few feet from the phone.

Melissa’s tears became silent as she glanced at his hands, fixating on his leather riding gloves as they were not on him before. He nodded at her as she reached for the phone, not immediately noticing that she was watching his every move. Melissa’s hand secured the phone as he brushed past her, getting a smear of blood on her from his wrist.

“GET BACK!” Melissa beaned him with the phone receiver, shoving him backwards.

“Fucking bitch…” Miles grabbed her by the ankle, pulling it out from under her as she tried to leap over him, her face hitting the floor hard in the process, bloodying her nose.

“Let go of me! Somebody help!” Melissa rolled onto her back and kicked Miles hard in the face as he reached for her again. “You’ve lost your mind, Miles!”

Miles tumbled backwards as Melissa crawled toward the stairs but couldn’t outmaneuver his recovery, taking a hard kick to the back that sent her forward down the stairs, tumbling head over feet all the way. Melissa landed awkwardly on the landing, her wrist snapping in the process causing her to let out a high pitched squeak of pain as she attempted to put pressure on to crawl away from him. Melissa reached for the door handle with her uninjured hand in time to get slashed
across the top of her hand with the edge of the blade. Melissa let out another scream as she knocked over anything she could get her hands on to put obstacles in his way.

“You’re only making this harder on yourself, Melissa,” Miles cocked his head to the side as she ducked into the same bathroom that Maggie had thrown up in earlier.

“What is **WRONG** with you?” Melissa pressed her feet against the door as she realized that the door did not have a lock on it, sending her into a mental panic.

“Call it clarity—you should feel flattered, I’ve chosen you,” Miles kicked at the bottom of the door until the wood began to give way beneath his foot.

“Please let this just be a horrible nightmare—I want to wake up now,” Melissa sobbed, her eyes closing as pieces of the door chipped off toward her.

The door gave way completely and came off of its hinges, the flight or fight response working overtime against Melissa as she kicked wildly but to no avail. Miles grabbed a hold of both of her ankles and began to drag her out of the bathroom, her fingers feebly attempting to grip onto the doorway to stall his attack further. Miles tugged one last time as Melissa’s fingers could no longer grip onto the wall, a loud, shrill scream escaping her lips until silence echoed in the duplex.

Three days later

FBI Headquarters (Mulder and Scully's office)

The basement office door flung open and the lights flickered on as Scully’s fingers on her right hand flipped the light switch. She rolled her eyes at the lack of Mulder’s presence in the office. Scully dropped a paper bag on the edge of the desk, the odor of Mulder’s favorite donut wafting out of the top of the bag, masking the musky odor that hovered in the dark, somewhat dank office. Scully put a drink cup holder next to the bag, pulling her own from the cardboard carrier, leaving his.

“Late again?” Scully draped her coat over the back of a chair as she sat down at his desk, shoving away a stack of papers in front of her. “Why am I not surprised?”

Scully flipped through a series of files and focused in on the post-investigation report of Holman Hardt, immediately reading the case file as though it were the newspaper. She smirked at Mulder’s ability to make it seem like there was concrete proof of their investigation into Holman’s supposed ability to control the weather. Her eyes nearly popped out of her head as she read the conclusion statement about Holman’s ability being directly related to his emotional state, determining that his mood would reflect the outcome of weather patterning. Scully’s mind wandered back to her conversation with Sheila Fontaine in the bathroom of the small Kansas town’s high school reunion.

“It seems to me that the best relationships—the ones that last—are frequently the ones that are rooted in friendship. You know, one day you look at the person and you see something more than you did the night before. Like a switch has been flicked somewhere. And the person who was just a friend is…suddenly the only person you can ever imagine yourself with.”

Scully blinked and closed the file, resigning to putting her feelings back into the figurative box as she glanced at her watch. Mulder had never been late more than twenty minutes
three days in a row and this was now the fourth consecutive day, tipping the scale for a full thirty minutes on end. Why are you late? Is she keeping you from your job now? Scully’s brain circled around the unwelcomed addition of Diana Fowley into their lives as Mulder’s attention seemed so fixated on her, a past delicately and irritingly plastered in front of her like writing on the wall. Scully rolled her eyes as she turned in the chair, staring at the photographs on the wall behind her—the five by seven of Samantha, the large, poster sized image reading “I want to believe” and finally settled on a side by side investigatory image from the North Texas bombing fiasco. She pulled the pin out of the top of the photo and brought it closer to her face, looking at it under the desk lamp, immediately noticing the expression on her face.

“Comfortable?” Mulder’s voice sent Scully into a momentary guilt driven panic as she swung around in the chair, nearly crumpling the photo between her fingers.

“Don’t do that…” Scully covered her ass with an annoyed tone as she haphazardly pinned the photo back to the wall.

“Ouch, Scully, really—I didn’t MEAN to be late today,” Mulder let out a whine as she slid out of his chair and leaned against a nearby shelf.

“Ouch what, Mulder? I brought you coffee and something sweet—how is that worthy of an ouch?” Scully practically threw the bag at him, going off half-cocked before sinking into the chair beside the desk.

Mulder didn’t answer her, simply turned toward the tack board, pulling the pin out of the center of his head on the photo she just put back up. Scully pursed her lips together, immediately feeling even guiltier as she realized he was simply poking fun at her. Mulder smirked as he opened the bag, audibly happy with her choice of donut as he pulled out the bear claw, biting off a section, savoring the sweet.

“So what’s up doc?” Mulder noticed she was visibly uncomfortable as he took a sip of his coffee.

“That’s what I was hoping you’d have an answer for…you said you had an interesting development at five thirty this morning,” Scully shrugged her shoulders, taking another drink of her own coffee.

“Oh, that’s right—local case that Skinner wanted me to look into late last night,” Mulder dug through the files on his desk top, pulling a paper thin file from the melee, passing it to her. “Two victims so far; Margaret Sciuilara, 29 years of age, found in an upstairs bedroom of a duplex being rented by Melissa Owens, 28, no signs of struggle, stabbed six times in the chest—Melissa was found at the bottom of the stairs, propped up, thirteen stab wounds, six of which were localized to the chest. She fought back.”

Scully flipped through the crime scene photos, the grisly images of what was left of Melissa’s chest cavity, looking more like a hollowed out vessel than the remnants of a woman in the prime of her life. She set the photos side by side of Maggie and Melissa’s wounds, immediately fixated on just how much more brutal Melissa’s end must have been. Scully focused on both gaping wounds, noticing flecks of metal reflecting light with twists of faded red and green woven in.

“Mulder, what exactly are in these wound tracks? I am seeing bits of metal, red and green sections…what am I looking at?” Scully knew there was more to this story than a double homicide.
“The photos are at the bottom—they almost overlooked them until one of the medical examiners pricked their fingers on the thorns,” Mulder pushed aside the top of the stack, pulling out four photos for her.

“Thorns?”

“Is there an echo in here? Scully, just look at the photos,” Mulder laid them out in front of her, one after the other.

The first photo showed a knotted long stemmed rose, the stem in the shape of a heart, the petals perfectly intact, a wire bow wrapped neatly around the bud. In the second photo, two roses were knotted together in a complicated, intricate shape. They were considerably less neat than the first one but considerably more complicated, the wires weaving in and out of the loops before running through both buds.

“Any signs of sexual assault? Mutilation?” Scully didn’t see any notes on either topic in the file, hoping that a coroner would’ve at least taken a look at the instances.

“I checked with the lead investigator, who did the cursory details on scene saying something that the first one had no signs of sexual abuse while the second was not quite as lucky…” Mulder trailed off, looking surprisingly sick, which was an unusual and rare occurrence.

“Dare I ask the result?” Scully looked sobered as she meekly inquired.

“Lets just say that parts of her went into an evidence bag,” Mulder continued. “I know this isn’t exactly what I typically bring to the table but an X File made it across my desk before we started working together of a 21 year old girl who had died in similar circumstances. I didn’t know that the methodology was even remotely similar at the time but I noticed it this morning that she, too, had a rose stem buried in her chest—a detail that was overlooked by local PD because she had been dead for going on three months at the bottom of a hill in blackberry bushes.”

“What makes you think they’re related?” Scully couldn’t help but invoke her skeptical inquiries as she looked at the old case file side by side with the other. “This is arguably conjecture, Mulder…assumptive at best.”

Mulder unclipped a photo from the back of the file and slapped it down in front of her, the twists of wire around a loop of a long stem missing the bud. “Reasonable conclusion.”

“Touché,” Scully nodded, continuing. “When can I take a look at a body?”

“Never thought you’d ask,” Mulder gathered up the files and got a head start on Scully out of the office.

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Chapter 2 will be up soon—this could likely be long and I want to make sure I’m spacing it out in due course. Please review! I love feedback!
Sirens on a street corner brought Elizabeth Becker to her window in her third floor apartment, both out of a curious response and a necessity to restore a little quiet to her surroundings. She shook her head as she counted four cop cars and an ambulance as they squealed by her complex, disrupting her attempt at doing a little cross stitching during her day off. Her apartment was in a state of disarray, books stacked high on the shelves with little tchotchkes of her varying interests—from the mundane to her chosen field of ballet. Although she was no longer the nearly gauntly thin dancer she was in her 20s, she still had a small figure, standing at five foot nine inches tall; aged gently to 37…her blonde locks had begun to fade in spots to a silvery hue.

Elizabeth sunk back onto the plush sofa and picked up her project from the end table just in time for a knock at the door to bring her to a halt again.

“Really?” Elizabeth was visibly frustrated as she got up and went to the door. “Just a second!”

She lifted the cover to the peep hole, looking at her uninvited guest through the fish-eyed lens and started to laugh before unlocking the latch. Her demeanor changed as she pulled the door open to greet her raven haired guest on the other side.

“BECKY!” Elizabeth yanked her into the apartment, giving her a tight hug before closing the door behind her.

“No, that’s a greeting I can handle,” Rebecca Elm snickered at the exuberant and
energetic welcome from her longtime friend, flashing a toothy grin before continuing. “How’s it going Bethany?”

“I told you not to call me that and if you continue to do so I’ll start using your nickname from high school again,” Elizabeth wrinkled her nose in Rebecca’s direction, latching the chain lock.

“Don’t you dare, Bethany…”

“Ball-bustin-Becca…” The teenager in Elizabeth practically challenged Rebecca as she went for the kitchen. “Do you want something to drink?”

“How about a glass full of, ‘yer a bitch’? Got any of that?” Rebecca followed her, poking her in the ribs.

“I don’t think I have any of that—but I can get you a big ole glass of ‘sit down turbo’,” Elizabeth grinned as she pulled open the fridge door. “Oh, shoot, I’m fresh out of that too…you’ll have to settle for some orange juice.”

“Mmkay fine,” Rebecca sat down on the couch. “So how are you doing, twinkle toes?”

Elizabeth brought out a couple of glasses of orange juice, handing one off to Rebecca. “Same ole, same ole, teaching down at the University for a 100 Level Ballet Course—it’s pretty great even if I’m no prima ballerina. How about you? Still slicing and dicing?”

“If you mean working for the coroner’s office in Fort Lauderdale, then yes…mom went in for surgery just a couple days ago for her gallbladder so I took a couple weeks off to take care of her,” Rebecca chuckled. “She’s sincerely taking advantage of me already, hollering at me from down the hall…”Becky! Come down here and help me pull up my pants!’ makes me wish I was back helping weigh organs from dead people.”

“That sounds riveting, Becks, really, how do you manage?” Elizabeth stuck her tongue out at her, continuing. “You should’ve called, though, I could’ve at least cleaned the place.”

“You’re talking to someone who dreads doing the laundry—your apartment is strangely clean to me,” Rebecca set the cup on the table. “Besides, I can’t hardly call someone who doesn’t have a cell phone or answer their home phone ever.”

“You’ve called? When?” Elizabeth went to her answering machine and saw the warning flashing on the indicator marked ‘inbox full’. “Shit.”

Rebecca laughed at her. “I told you so. There are at least two messages in there where I pretty much start cussing at you so be forewarned.”

“I’m not surprised, Becks—make yourself comfortable, I’ll be right back,” Elizabeth smiled and went into the bathroom, latching it behind her.

“Right…” Rebecca flipped on the TV, immediately surfing channels while shouting toward the bathroom. “How long has it been anyway? Six years?”

“Yeah, right about there, it was after your divorce, we partied in Vegas, remember?” Elizabeth’s voice echoed through the door.

“Oh, no wonder I don’t really remember—I woke up on the bathroom floor in the room at the Four Queens the next day and calling you a ruthless bitch for letting me keep sucking down
those hip length drinks,” Rebecca continued. “Good times.”

“Please, I took two of them away from you after you were running down the street begging random cops to ‘cuff you’. I was afraid you’d get us both arrested so I put you in a headlock and took you upstairs to relax,” Elizabeth was now laughing over the sound of the toilet flushing. “How was I to know you’d end up arguing with the toilet seat all night?”

“That sounds all kinds of pathetic—how did you put up with me?”

“You were going through a divorce, Becks, us girls stick up for each oth—’' the sound of gurgling and a loud thud quieted Rebecca’s laughing as Elizabeth went quiet in the bathroom.

“Beth, are you ok in there?” Rebecca went to the bathroom door, jiggling the handle when she heard what sounded like choking from the other side. “Hey, stop trying to freak me out, Beth! Don’t think I forgot what you did in junior high, everyone thought you were dead until I started to go for mouth to mouth…this isn’t funny.”

Rebecca began banging her fists against the door, kicking it once for good measure before pressing her ear to it, struggling to listen for any signs of life. The sound of dripping water and gurgling made her nearly furious as she kicked the door again.

“I know you’re trying to scare me, Beth, knock it off—I can hear your bathtub dripping water, this isn’t even a little bit inventive,” Rebecca kicked it good and hard once more causing a little bit of the wood to crackle under the pressure of her boot. “Look what you made me do, cow, I’m not paying for it either!”

Rebecca stood incredibly still as she heard the click of the lock being undone and watched the door handle turn, the irritation rising in her belly. Rebecca reached out to grab the handle as the door flung open and the body behind it came out from behind it, a hand covering Rebecca’s mouth while a blade plunged into her midsection, pinning her against the wall behind her. Rebecca’s screams were incredibly loud despite being muffled by the leather glove as the knife went out and in again, over and over until the only noise that came out of her mouth was the sound of the blood bubbling and gurgling up in her throat.

Finally, he let her body slide down the wall onto the hardwood floor, her head tilted toward the bathroom as the life was slowly escaping her body, her eyes fixated on Elizabeth’s hand that dangled on the outside of the tub. Rebecca choked on her blood, spitting it up on the floor as she was able to utter the word “no” softly as she watched the blood drip from Elizabeth’s lifeless hand, knowing it was too late for her too.

Medical examiner’s office

Scully hovered between two examination tables, pulling the sheet back over the face of Melissa Owen’s remains. She pressed the button above her head on the recorder, indicating a stop before taking a deep breath. Mulder peered around the doorway, his head being the only visible part of his body from inside the room, as she pulled off her bloody gloves, discarding them into a bin near the sink.
“Oh, I missed the messy part, didn’t I?” Mulder tried to joke around with her as she pulled off her apron and goggles, letting the rest of his body come into full view.

“The original examiner did a tox screening on Margaret—not only was she drunk but she had perfumes in her system. Her stomach contents were oily and contained processed organics that you’d find in an air diffuser…Whoever did this force fed her a bottle of fragrance or essential oils,” Scully’s voice was low, almost withdrawn.

“Glade’s sales are going to plummet,” Mulder’s need for a quip was ill placed, the words rattling out before he could even possibly regret them.

Scully’s eyes shut, a little, half disgusted sigh escaping her lips, “Mulder…I haven’t seen anything so grisly outside of some cheaply made Wes Craven film. This is almost overkill. The only saving grace for Margaret was the fact that she had already choked on her own vomit by the time the first stab ripped through her.”

Mulder nodded as he watched Scully’s shoulders slump, her face slowly losing the vibrant yet subtle rosiness to her cheeks, the circles under her eyes screaming at him from behind her safety goggles. He pressed a hand to her back, hoping she’d understand that he recognized that something was wrong. Her eyes opened and her head turned, her lips stiffened, only allowing for an audible ‘tsss’ sound to escape before pulling the goggles off, discarding them on the counter behind her.

“…I’m sorry, Mulder,” Scully inhaled and pressed her palm against the table’s edge, white knuckling the cool, rounded metal edge.

Now he was confused as his stance went rigid, brows furrowing in her direction. “Why are you apologizing to me, Scully?”

Scully pressed her index finger and thumb to the bridge of her nose, wincing from the onset of a headache behind her eyes. She looked at him and shrugged both shoulders, the stress welling up in her chest. This was bothering her and not in that “I can shrug it off and you won’t notice” way but in that “I might run to the bathroom and uncharacteristically vomit because this has pushed me completely over my limit” sort of way. She hated that Mulder could decipher the difference between the two…she despised allowing anyone to see when she is vulnerable.

“That was meant to be a thought—not an out loud apology, Mulder,” Scully dodged an intrusive stare with a pensive smile. “I’m just tired, forget I said anything.”

Yeah, I don’t believe that, Scully, not for a moment. Mulder tilted his head a little. “If you say so, Scully…I’m a little tired myself.”

“I’ll be fine. I always am,” Mulder pressed out a file on Meghan and opened it up in front of Scully. “Neighbors are telling police that there was an additional roommate living with Melissa but apparently they were not on the lease, trying to find any details in the additional belongings in the house to lead somewhere but it isn’t looking like they kept any personal belonging in the room they slept in.”
Scully thumbed through the images of the murder scene and read through the ME’s original reports. “This file says Falkner was originally a Jane Doe…Runaway? Prostitute?”

“Both…Meghan had been living on the streets for the better part of 6 years when she was found. She was a runaway from Iowa and turned to prostitution by the time she was 18. Family reported her missing when she was 17 but the local law enforcement did zero out of state follow up—she was listed as a runaway,” Mulder pulled another chart out and showed it to Scully. “That and as you can see when they found Falkner they had some issues identifying her rem—”

Scully read through the report and inhaled sharply, denying her body’s overwhelming want to gag despite her background in medicine. “He mutilated her face?”

“The barbed wire that he wrapped the rose in was also wrapped around her face to the point that by the time she was discovered there was not much left of her face,” Mulder pulled the crime scene photos from under the chart. “He wrapped it around her entire head focusing on her mouth.”

“Like a gag,” Scully scanned the documentation from the medical examiner, rifling through the notes until her eyes lifted, staring Mulder down. “You purposely left this little detail for me to find on my own? You shouldn’t have.”

“Sans that certain kinky element that turns the crank, of course. Nothing gets past you, Scully,” Mulder took a little bit of delight in the moment, waggling his eyebrows at her. “They are not essential oils or perfume but you’re oh, so close …the delightful concoction is rose oil mixed with sandalwood and lavender.”

Scully gave him a “you are not amusing” eye roll followed by the least sincere smile she could force across her lips, oozing her usual wit. “Ahh…how could I miss that?”

“Your sarcasm is duly noted, Scully,” Mulder stood behind her this time and invaded her personal space, mouth next to her ear, chin rested on her shoulder. “But be careful how often you do it—gets my juices flowing.”

“Mulder…” Scully blushed girlishly and turned her head a little to avoid him being able to notice, the heat rising in her face.

Mulder could tell that she was blushing and found a little bit of delight in getting a physical response out of her. He wanted a bit of normalcy back because Scully had been giving him the cold shoulder for days and it wasn’t like her to keep it going even if he had pissed her off beyond a reasonable level even for her tolerance of his usual bullshit. This was different. This was a chill that he did not recognize, at least not from Scully. He knew, though, that it was probably his fault—it usually was.

“Scully, you know you can tell me anything and I’m going to take it seriously, to heart, right?” He stood facing her and mentally prodded, knowing he could completely fuck up their banter.

Scully’s eyes closed, lips pressed tightly together, air escaping her nose as she sighed with a half breath. She allowed her eyes to open first and looked at him, her stance softened as she saw the genuine concern on his face. She nodded and shrugged her shoulders at the same time.

“Use your words, Scully,” He poked her in the ribs, trying to restore the playfulness.

Scully scooted back, half slapping his hand down, forming her little white lie. “Mulder, I
know and I’m fine—it’s just a lack of sleep like I said a few minutes ago. There’s nothing here to worry about, I assure you.”

“Don’t lie to me, though, because I—“

“Because you what, Mulder?” Scully cut him off, an eyebrow lifted, her skepticism butting heads with his attempt at a stern tone.

Mulder’s shoulders slumped, the joking mannerisms and tone stopping immediately. “Because I don’t know if I could handle it if you weren’t telling me the truth. Of everyone in my life, I need at least ONE person not be lying to me. I need that from you.”

The lump was up in Scully’s throat again as she felt the sting of his words hit her to her core, realizing she was doing exactly what he worried she was doing.

“Mulder, I—“ the ringer on his phone cut her off.

“Ah, shit, hang on, Scully,” The frustration oozed out of Mulder as he retrieved the phone from his jacket pocket, answering it. “Mulder…”

Scully sighed, almost relieved that the phone had prevented her from speaking, incriminating herself. You are a moron, Dana Scully, and when you finally grow a set and tell him how you feel he may just tell you to go fuck yourself. Scully gritted her teeth, guilt stinging her gut. She was lying to him and for what? To hide that she’s experiencing a bit of the green eyed monster? To keep it secret that she’s jealous over him clearly having a life outside of the FBI without her? She always encouraged him to get a life away from work and now she was regretting it simply because he took her advice seriously. Why did it have to be Diana? Scully couldn’t get away from her name, couldn’t get it out of her head.

“Uh huh…ok…yes…you’re completely sure it’s the same one? Definitive…ok, absolutely…we’ll be right there…” Mulder hung up the phone and looked at her. “We’ve got two more bodies, Scully.”

Scully picked up her heavier jacket and raised her brow at him. “Lead the way, Mulder, we’ve got work to do.”

----End Chapter 2----

Bear with me on chapter 3 coming –have been super work busy and in a creative slump. Feedback of the constructive variety is ALWAYS welcome.
Somebody Else

Chapter Summary

Romanticizing and brutalizing his victims, a killer leaves behind symbols of love. Who is his intended victim and by what length will he go to capture her attention?

Post Agua Mala

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: All characters from The X Files belong to Chris Carter, TenThirteen Productions, and FOX. All other characters are original and any likeness to any real people are purely coincidental.

Credit to: The 1975 "Somebody Else" for the most haunting addition to a fanfic I could ever have hoped for. Please also note that all puns are for keeping the mood somewhat light.

References made are for contextual richening. Please give feedback. :)

1 hour later

Elizabeth Becker’s residence –

Mulder led the way into the apartment, past the yellow tape, followed closely by Scully, who was already absorbing the surroundings—the light, the sounds, the feel of the floor under her heels—the officers were still documenting the scene, photographing their evidence, covering and briefly uncovering the two bodies to take a few more snaps of the grisly remains underneath each white sheet. Mulder went for the three officers that were standing in the living room to discuss anything that happened prior to their arrival while Scully went for the bathroom.

Scully pushed the door open all of the way until it lightly tapped on the wall behind it. Her eyes briefly scanned the sight in front of her and felt the chill go up her back as the scent of death and floral remnants hit her nose. She took a deep breath and settled into her heels, not expecting to find the bodies in the positions that they were in—the sight, in fact, sent a chill down her spine as she inhaled deeply, taking it all in. Ms. Becker’s body was propped up in front of the toilet, knees pulled up to her chest, arms wrapped and bound with wire to keep her upright, head rested on her knees, eyes toward the door, open. Her blood was half pooled and coagulated around her, a trail down the wound tract. Ms. Elm’s body was posed as though she were in a comfortable, half reclined position, enjoying a nice bubble bath, her hand wrapped precariously around the stem of a small wine glass filled nearly to the brim with reddish fluids. Both women had sections of their chests carved out with red roses placed inside each section. Ms. Becker’s chest had been stapled shut while Ms. Elm’s was still flayed open, the cuts all the way to the bone, revealing the white
sheen beneath. Both bodies were already in full rigor and transport would be tricky for both.

“The killer is evolving—” Mulder’s voice coming up behind her brought her out of the half horrified trance that the scene in front of her had put her in.

“Has this glass been dusted for prints?” Scully became clinical as she turned toward the first responders, inquiring.

“Yes, ma’am…no prints were on the glass but there are sticky smudges around the rim of the glass that we noted in our initial reports, we sent the samples to be tested,” The young officer flipped through his notes. “The liquid in the wine glass is also blood.”

“Take as many photos as you can before having the coroner’s office carefully remove and transport both of them…carefully,” Scully was more focused on handling Elizabeth’s body with extra care because of her position.

“Do you want the coroner to remove the wire?” The officer almost hesitated with the question.

“No, I’ll do that myself when I examine both of them,” Scully glanced at Mulder for a moment, almost as if searching for a response that he hadn’t been giving.

Scully nodded and knelt down, pulling on a pair of rubber gloves. She carefully pulled the top of Ms. Elm’s shirt down until she could see the wound entrance, the rose petals visible through the crudely wired shut wound tracks.

“The escalation that this killer is exhibiting is alarming—he’s becoming more and more inventive with each kill, almost like he’s starting a new chapter with each death,” Scully looked up at Mulder, who was now fixated on Ms. Becker’s face, noticing the smudge of lipstick on her bottom lip. “The smudge on the glass is from her lipstick. He held it up to her mouth as if she were drinking.”

Mulder nodded. “He’s explaining it to us…wants us to see the methodology behind his motivation.”

“All I can see is agony, Mulder, the agony that each of these victims experienced… before and after death,” Scully tilted her head to one side and found a small puncture with a solid streak of half coagulated blood running down. “Post mortem puncture to the jugular is how he filled the glass. It was soon enough after death that she bled long enough to discolor the water. He’s telling more than a story…”

“He wants us to imagine it, to feel it,” Mulder finished her sentence, giving Scully little stomach butterflies as the Mulder that she had not seen in a while flickered from the dark.

“Exactly where I was going with that,” She inhaled sharply and swallowed hard, quelling the girlish impulse to blush.

“This could get a lot worse before it gets better, Scully,” Mulder continued, “He stepped up his timeline drastically—we may only have hours before we get another call.”

“Then I better get to work,” Scully stood upright and walked out into the living space, addressing both officers in the room. “I need both of the bodies taken to the medical examiner’s office for immediate processing. This perpetrator must’ve screwed up on both of them.”

“Absolutely – the FBI has jurisdiction on this one,” the younger of the two officers
nodded in their direction while the other pulled his walkie-talkie up to his ear to listen after hearing a break in squelch.

Mulder continued to speak with the officers while Scully took a mental note of the surrounding items in the apartment, her eyes fixated completely on a stereo in the corner stuck on pause. She squinted and wandered closer, noticing it was paused at about 55 seconds into the song. She zoned out as everything around it became a blur, fully enthralled on the possibilities surrounding why the stereo may have been tampered with. She studied the display for a moment, carefully searching for prints along the buttons and the top of the player, noting only that stack of CDs on the shelf had collected a generous layer of dust on them as well as on top of the player. No one had touched either in quite a while but the player was queued up, ready to be played. She noticed that the only buttons with a slight smudge were the eject, play, and pause buttons.

The skeptic in her wanted to disregard it but the curiosity was overwhelming as she took another close look at the buttons to make sure that they had no visible prints before going ahead and pressing the pay button to resume the disc.

*I don’t want your body*

*But I hate to think about you with somebody else*

*Our love has gone cold*

*You’re intertwining your soul with somebody else*

The lyrics were striking and thought provoking. Sure, it could’ve been purely coincidental that the victim had left a disc on pause but the thought was real that it could have been deliberately set up by the killer. Scully fixated on the words “our love has gone cold” and related it to death contrasting with obsession in “but I hate to think about you with somebody else” as if his victims were somehow his lovers in his own reality. Mulder came close to her, pressing a hand to the small of her back to bring her back to reality.

“Scully?” Mulder came close to her, pressing a hand to the small of her back to bring her back to reality, his voice cut through the reverberations of the melody.

Scully pressed eject on the disc player and used a pair of gloves to pull the ejected disc out, sliding it into a baggie. “Maybe he got lazy and didn’t wear gloves when he put that in?”

“Do you think he put that there?” Mulder could see the wheels turning in his partner’s head but didn’t follow her justification.

“Don’t you? Come on, Mulder…There aren’t any CD holders out of place in this room and the stereo was paused for that exact moment,” Scully half snapped at him, the frustration coming out.

“It’s just not where your mind usually goes, Scully,” Mulder didn’t realize how badly she wanted to punch him at that exact moment.

*If Diana made the suggestion, you’d be all over it as though it were gospel. Message received loud and clear, asshole.* Scully couldn’t help thinking to herself; her body language reverted to being closed off as her arms crossed in front of her body, tucking the dangling compact
disc in front of her in the baggie. She bit down on her lip, shaking her head, both in disbelief and pure frustration.

“I’ll meet you back at the medical examiner’s office—make sure both bodies are sent there,” Scully nearly shoved him to maneuver past him as she headed out of the apartment and into the hallway.

She could hear him say her name from around the corner and mentally noted that he was following her but she didn’t care. She continued down the hallway toward the elevator. She took a deep breath and fought back the urge to turn around to scream at him, but retreated into her own headspace again. She couldn’t help but still feel incredibly betrayed and abandoned even though he had not so much as indicated a relationship between himself and Diana, but how couldn’t there be? He had already done so much to show that there was something between them and that she would be the last person he’d go to as long as his glorified booty call was around.

“Bastard,” Scully stood in the elevator as it squeaked all the way to the lobby, clicking the wall with her nails on her free hand.

The doors finally opened and she went for the door, the frustration was quickly growing and was on the border of anger as she climbed into the driver seat of the car. She set the baggie on the passenger seat before leaving Mulder behind at the apartment building. *He can figure out how to get to the ME’s office on his own.* She knew how childish that seemed but she didn’t care—he had brought all of it on himself. He had pushed his luck one too many times and Scully was completely fed up with all of it.

“He has to do this while we’re in the middle of a case? Fuck,” Scully smacked the steering wheel as she came to a red light. “I knew all of this was a complete mistake—maybe he needs to give her a call and I’ll just go back to Quantico.”

Scully flipped the radio on and the same song from the victim’s apartment was on, already in mid play. The lyrics were oddly fitting and uncomfortably accurate as “you’ve intertwined your soul with somebody else” ripped through her psyche, thoroughly throwing her mind away from the case and strictly to the highly volatile thoughts in regards to Mulder. The problem with how she was feeling is that she wanted him—wanted him in a way that she hadn’t wanted anyone else in a long time. He didn’t belong to her, though, and it killed her slowly every day to see him put forth energy toward Diana. She resigned the thoughts, tucking them away precariously, not realizing that she had completely forgotten to turn off the figurative fuse.

“Get out of my head,” Scully blinked hard and took a deep breath.

Nearly three hours later, across town –

“This isn’t like her not to answer,” Mulder was talking to himself out loud as he dialed Scully’s cell phone for the ninth time in under two hours. “Maybe something happened…”

Her voice on the voicemail message almost fooled him but her perky tone on the recording didn’t match the voice he had been hearing all day. He had tried to give her a little time to cool off, which equated to roughly an hour before trying to call—he didn’t want to utter it out
loud that he was completely lost without her insight this time but he was just that...lost. He hung on each word, the softest of sighs escaping his lips the pre-recorded voice on the other end said “after the beep”. He waited until he heard the unceremonious beep to speak.

“Scully, I’ve been trying to get a hold of you for almost two hours, I hope everything is ok—I’m worried.” He was stuttering almost as he continued to pace while leaving the voicemail. “After you left the crime scene I got a call from Skinner and they found another body. It’s pretty bad, Scully. Call me when you get this.”

He hung up his phone and rubbed his temples, his own frustration showing visibly on his face as he tried to process the scene with Skinner and the local cops.

“She still not answering?” Skinner noticed the expression as Mulder approached the body again.

“She’s probably elbow deep in an autopsy—she’ll call back,” Mulder tried to brush it off as though it weren’t bugging him but Skinner knew both of them better than that. “What do we know so far?”

“Emmalyn Cline is 37 years old, single—last known contact was the local plumbing company to fix a stopped up drain. Plumbing company said that they had sent a guy out this morning but he called in sick two hours late. The relief guy came over to do the work and called the cops when he could see the blood on the floor from the kitchen window,” Skinner closed a folder and looked at the crime scene before them.

The killer had gotten messier but still hadn’t managed to leave as much as a fingerprint or hair of his own. The latest victim had been rigged into an upright position just inside of her apartment door, her arms high above her head, suspended from a support beam. She had another long stemmed rose stapled between the muscle and skin of her chest along with a barbed wire gag, her eyelids slit open and stapled almost to her eyebrows, and a puncture wound in the same spot as one of the previous victims near the jugular. On the wall, written in blood, were the words “I don’t want your body”.

“What do you think that means?” Skinner was perplexed by the words.

“Scully made an observation at the last crime scene earlier about a song that was left on pause – it had that lyric in it. I think the killer is trying to personalize his kills and tell the world that each one meant something to him even if they were completely random,” Mulder continued. “Like a bad breakup.”

“Finish processing the scene and carefully take her down—we need to perform an autopsy on her immediately,” Skinner addressed the other officers, including another FBI agent, before looking over at Mulder. “Go back to the medical examiner’s office and let Scully know about this...all of it.”

Mulder nodded and took another long look at the body before heading for the door, his focus on this inevitable and necessary discussion with Scully. The discomfort was already rising in his belly as he realized that there was something eating at him that he needed to confess.

End chapter 3---
Chapter 4 will be ready much sooner than this one was… I hit a bit of a wall on this one but am now thinking MUCH more freely.

Positive feedback is welcome!!!
Confession

Chapter Summary

A brutal killer romanticizes his victims, leaving behind symbols of love -- but who is his intended target?

Post Agua Mala

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: Mulder, Scully, Skinner, and any other The X Files related characters belong to Chris Charter, TenThirteen Productions, and FOX. Any other characters are original and belong to this brain of mine -- any name likenesses are purely coincidental.

Forgive the puns. I got carried away.

All songs mentioned are modern and are for contextual richness.

Medical Examiner’s office – 1 hour later

_You have a set of testicles, Mulder, act like it. It’s JUST Scully. Ok, that’s a lie…Scully is never JUST Scully, but you have to man up._ Mulder took a deep breath, his guilty conscience as well as his nerves had kicked into high gear as he turned the corner and stood outside of the room where Scully had been performing autopsies on two of the previous victims. He felt like an ass and knew that he probably was, especially in her eyes, but he also desperately wanted her approval, even if it meant having to march his happy ass in front of her and hop on one foot to get it. He knew that he had screwed up by half blowing off her point of view earlier but it went deeper than that this time and he knew it. She had every right to slam a door in his face or worse, leave him to his own devices.

_You can’t do this without her. No one would put up with your bullshit and you know it._ He repeated in his head over and over before reaching for the door handle.

“Mulder?” Her voice came from behind him and half startled him.

He turned around slowly, trying desperately to smile at her, his playful repetition seeming slightly out of place. “What’s up, doc?”

Scully was not amused as she crossed her arms, her blood stained wrap around scrubs and
gloves still on, the white mask brought down, goggles still firmly in place. “What do you want? As you can see, I’ve been busy.”

Mulder fiddled with the pocket of his jacket and stammered. “I came to tell you that we have another body on the way in and to apologize—”

“Mulder, look, I’ve just completed two autopsies and ran that CD through a scanner to double and triple check for prints or any other particulates, if you have another body on the way in for me to examine just say so. I don’t have time for this,” Scully cut him off with a short, curt tone, half slapping him across the face and maneuvered around him, into the examiner’s room across from cold storage.

It was almost a marvelous feat that she could manage to disarm and dismantle him with only a couple of sentences—even more than any woman he had ever known. She had no idea of the amount of power that she held over him in that way.

“I deserve that, Scully, but you missed the second half of that statement,” Mulder followed her and watched her pull off her gloves and white mask, discarding both in the nearby bin.

“Mulder, I didn’t miss anything, I ignored it…maybe you should request a different partner on this case, someone with the same ideals as yours,” Scully slipped off the goggles, untied the back of her scrubs, and slipped out of it, her tighter-than-usual skirt and top underneath it still pristine. “You haven’t seemed to need anything from me for quite some time.”

“Scully, it’s your expertise I need on this,” Mulder put a hand on her shoulder as she turned her back to him. “It’s your insights that matter to me right now.”

“I’ve heard that one before and it seems as though things do change, Mulder,” Scully didn’t bother to turn around as she placed the goggles and wadded up scrubs into a large sink. “And maybe things have run their course for me…permanently.”

Mulder furrowed his brow at her, both confused and frustrated with the implications of her words. “What has gotten into you, Scully? I haven’t seen you this ready to give up since I met you. You’re better than this. You don’t quit. I refuse to hear that.”

“Just stop, Mulder!” Scully slammed her hand down on the counter and turned around, the anger spilling over.

Don’t you even see what you do to me? They were both thinking it in unison, both half shaking from the frustration.

Mulder took a step back and bit down on his bottom lip, resisting the urge to shout back at her or shake her, whichever proved more effective in getting her to listen. He pursed his lips together and exhaled through his nostrils, unknowingly loudly. Scully rolled her eyes and maneuvered around him, pulling her jacket off of a nearby hook. She pulled it on and roughly handed him the case file and her tape recorder from the autopsies. She shook her head as he stared at the two objects in his hands, the dumbfounded expression written on his face. He didn’t know what to say to fix it…or didn’t know how to say it.

“You are unreal,” his silence was almost more annoying than a half assed rebuttal in her eyes and she started for the door, her heels tapping the floor a little heavier than usual.

Mulder put the file folder and tape recorder on the edge of the counter in front of him and
pushed the door shut that Scully had just opened, stopping her from walking out.

“Mulder, let me lea—“

“I said I had something to say and if by the end of that you still want to walk out on me, then by all means, do it, but you’re going to hear me out first,” His tone was rough as he cut her off, determined to be not only heard but understood this time.

She looked up at him and backed up, arms crossing, her bottom lip firmly between her teeth. She nodded at him, almost incapable of saying anything in return.

“You were right earlier—I didn’t consider your viewpoint with enough validity because it shocked me coming from you. That observation was something that I would say, not you. I wanted to apologize that I didn’t let it absorb enough to see that you were right about the song on the stereo. It MEANS something to the killer and you spotted that almost immediately—the crime scene I just left had one of the lyrics written on the wall in blood,” Mulder took a deep breath, the vein in the middle of his forehead almost pulsating with a mixture of adrenaline and frustration as he stood almost over her to speak.

“Oh, okay…I see” Oh, Dana, really? Is that all you can muster? He just poured his heart out for you and all you can say is “oh, okay…I see”? Scully continued to stare up at him, unsure and nearly incapable of saying anything else, suddenly half focused on her knees as she felt them buckle under her.

“I’m also not going to pretend that I don’t know that you’re referencing Diana when you say that I should get another partner, and even though I don’t fully understand or know what is motivating you to direct me toward that end, I don’t want her by my side…If I wanted her here she would be,” Mulder’s voice dropped almost a full octave and came down in volume considerably as he spoke, both of his hands finding her shoulders, almost shaking her. “I need YOU here…I want YOU here. Why can’t you just see that?”

“Mulder, I—“ She desperately wanted to tell him that she was jealous but didn’t need to be rejected or rebuffed again, not by him.

She didn’t need that lesson in futility.

“Scully, I came here tonight to confess …I can’t do this without you. There is no X Files without you here. None of it matters if you walk away now,” Mulder’s eyes dropped to the floor. “I don’t know if I could pick up all of the pieces alone.”

Scully felt a little sting of sadness deep in her chest as Mulder focused his words on the professional aspect of “needing” her there, changing direction of where she thought his words were headed…where she was secretly craving that they were going.

“I’m not going anywhere, Mulder,” Scully choked back a few stray tears, forcing a soft, yet conflicted smile. “You’re blocking the door.”

Mulder closed his eyes and shook his head, relieved that she had cracked a joke to soften the mood. “Yep, with my big ass…”

Scully let out a little laugh, her voice cracking just a little bit. “Yes, your big ass…”

His eyes opened slowly and he nodded at her, pulling her into his arms, hugging her tightly. Scully hesitated for a moment before wrapping her arms around him, returning the embrace, her hands at the small of his back, gripping his jacket. Mulder slowly stroked her hair as
her cheek rested against his clavicle.

“I don’t know what I’d do without your insight, Scully.” Mulder didn’t even realize just how much his words affected her emotionally as he spoke. “No one keeps me on my toes quite like you do and I can’t even begin to explain how much I need that.”

Scully teetered in her heels and inhaled deeply, his cologne striking another chord in her center. He always smelled so perfect and it drove her insane but she didn’t dare let him notice it or tell him that. Mulder kissed the top of her head and rubbed her back with his left hand, the right hand still halfway laced through her hair. She pulled back and looked up at him, half resigning her sadness away as she looked up at his hazel eyes, knowing that this may be all she gets out of anything anymore. It was going to have to be enough for her to have even this much from him.

“We had better go take a look at that crime scene…” She pulled back, letting go of his jacket, and reached for the door handle, her eyes no longer on him.

Mulder stopped her movement and drew her up to her tiptoes by way of her elbow and chin, his mouth finding hers in a soft, fluid action that she neither understood nor was ready for. The motion caught her off guard as she held onto his jacket for balance and invited him closer as his hands pulled her in by the waistline. Her lips were incredibly soft yet had a little flavor of mint from the plumper that she girlishly indulged in when she was getting ready for the day. She felt the minty sheen leave her own lips and transfer to his as he tilted his head, accessing her mouth a little more. Mulder seemed as though he’d been practicing that in his head as he slipped his tongue beyond her lips, testing her boundaries in a careful way. She let him in and returned the sensations, finding that little bit of mint on his lips that had only been on hers just moments before. She liked the feeling. Scully’s eyes finished closing and allowed the sensation to wash over her, the heat rising in her cheeks as his left hand cradled against the small of her back while the other pulled her even closer until she could feel his heart beating against her, realizing it was beating almost as fast as her own.

She reluctantly broke the affectionate lip lock and inhaled sharply, her voice cracking just a little bit, looking up at him with both curiosity and a hint of fear. “Wait, I thought you said this was about the X Files? Professional? Platonic?”

Mulder shook his head slowly, his eyes fixated on her. He said nothing. He didn’t need to. He simply rubbed her flushed cheeks and brought his lips to hers again, tilting into her, breathing her in. He let is arms enfold around her, gently pressing against her until they again could feel each other’s heartbeats. The kiss was raw and passionate as everything fell away from around them, leaving only each other. It felt right to be near each other, to be enveloped in each other’s heat without a regard for their surroundings or whether anyone was watching or not. It was a revelation.

The sound of Mulder’s cell phone ringing in his pocket was the only thing to bring them down from their self-imposed half-ethereal high. They reluctantly let their mouths separate but hovered close, eyes still closed.

“Well, that just happened,” Mulder smiled, letting his eyes open just a little.

“Uh huh,” Scully stammered, her eyes half glazed over as they opened. “Was that actually intentional just now?”

Mulder raised his eyebrows at her and let out a little chuckle at how nervous and awkward she was now acting. “Yeah, just wasn’t necessarily the room I wanted to do that in…but the distinctive odor of formaldehyde really gets the juices flowing, Scully.”
“Mulder…” Scully brought her hand up to her mouth, half smiling, half disgusted by the mere implied image he had just inflicted on her.

“I’m kidding, Scully,” Mulder rubbed her back in a circular pattern and went to retrieve the case file as well as the tape recorder, peeking at the missed call on his cell phone in the process. “I’ve been thinking about doing exactly that for a while, just didn’t know how to bridge the gap until it presented itself. Now, if you don’t mind, we do have another crime scene and Skinner is probably wondering what is taking so long…that was him calling.”

Scully half snorted as she looked over at him, her lipstick still on him. “You might want to wipe that off or I’ll have to make up a J. Edgar comment when Skinner sees it.”

Mulder peeked at his face through one of the glass cabinet doors and saw the distinctly reddish-pink, shimmering hues still clinging to his lips. “I dunno, this could work for me…Has a certain Wild Bill quality to it.”

“Okay, okay, okay, enough with the really bad quips—the mental image that you are inflicting is a little painful and unavoidable,” Scully snagged a moist towelette from one of the cabinets and handed it to him.

Mulder pulled her in by the wrist and stole a quick peck on the lips, giving her bottom lip a little nibble, before wiping the remnants of her lipstick off of his own mouth. “Better?”

“Significantly,” Scully smirked at him and opened the door, gesturing him. “Lead the way.”

Mulder headed out of the room with Scully not far behind him, both completely unaware that they were being watched as they entered the parking garage. The man, slightly smaller in build than Mulder, was fairly imposing and yet, unassuming as he stood in a poorly lit corner, half shielded by a column and a corner wall near the stairwell. He had his hands tucked carefully into his pockets and the hood of his sweatshirt strategically covered up the details of his face. He watched as Mulder opened the passenger side door for Scully and snuck a little touch of the small of her back before shutting the door after she had sat down. The moment, however brief, illuminated a certain level of playful fondness that intrigued the watcher. His hands clenched in front of him as Scully watched Mulder buckle his seatbelt and turn on the car engine. He watched them until the car headlights nearly illuminated him, driving him into a crouched position behind an SUV as the pair drove out of sight.

40 minutes later, Cline residence –

“You two took your sweet time getting here,” Skinner didn’t even wait for them to get completely out of the car to half lay into them, his voice elevated and rough.

Both were slightly blindsided by his frustration and began to speak over the top of each other with Mulder saying traffic while Scully said she was still in the middle of an autopsy.
Skinner raised his eyebrows at them, unamused thoroughly. Neither of them even realized that Skinner was annoyed as both resembled deer in the headlights—swallowing hard in unison.

“So, which is it? Traffic or autopsy?” Skinner rolled his eyes as he ushered them inside.

“Scully was still cleaning up after the autopsies were complete,” Mulder stuttered and held the police tape up for Scully to duck under.

“Both autopsies were pretty painstaking, especially the one still in the fetal position, Sir,” Scully was not thinking about the autopsies at all but instead on what happened when Mulder got there.

“Did the autopsies reveal anything odd this time around?” Skinner inquired as he followed them into the home.

Scully nodded as she spoke. “In both instances, the staples and the wound tract on both chest cavities had traces of copper shavings as well as small traces of lead. I would be willing to assume that the killer is a tradesman or a plumber…or work closely with ductwork.”

“Before I came to pick you up I made the same observation of the wiring that our latest victim was hung by as well as the staples on her eyelids,” Mulder could still see her body in the middle of the room, clearly visible from the side window.

Scully noted the puddle, low velocity drip spatter around it, and the smeared blood trail toward the kitchen. “He attacked her in the kitchen and dragged her in here…used the step ladder in the corner to hoist her up…”

Scully went quiet as she saw what looked like a smudged boot print in blood on the top step of the ladder. It looked a little incomplete but had the general shape down perfectly, minus a few imperfections from crinkled plastic. She took a camera from one of the other agents on the scene and snapped a few photographs of it, using a nearby pencil for reference. She looked over at Mulder as he stepped beside her.

“This is what I mean, insight,” Mulder leaned close, whispering in her ear.

Scully smiled and turned, looking around the room, hoping to find something that showed where the print had originated as she followed it around the corner into the kitchen. In a little puddle of blood she found what could only be the heel print from the perpetrator’s boot and the leg of the ladder, almost as though the killer had a momentary lapse in judgement to attempt concealment of anything that could identify him.

“The step ladder came from here and he likely stepped in her blood before he put on one of those pairs of plastic boot covers. He put the ladder in place and slipped on the plastic on the top step while securing her to the beam, causing the boot cover to slide off of the front half of his boot. We might be able to identify the size, type, and possibly get a list of who might’ve purchased a pair like this in the last year or more,” Scully let the profile build as she channeled the kind of ideas that Mulder typically has.

Skinner jotted everything down and went into the kitchen where a few more officers and two more agents were cleaning up the last of the notable items. Scully handed Skinner the camera on the way into the kitchen to be placed into the gear bag.

“Have I mentioned how much of a turn on it is to hear you talk like this?” Mulder poked her in the ribs and winked at her, being unusually boyishly playful with her.
“Mulder…shhhhh, stop,” Scully was blushing already as she gave Mulder a little bit of a berating glance, indicating Skinner could potentially hear and see their every move.

Mulder shook his head, still thoroughly teasing her. “What, you have a thing for Skinner now? Are you trying to torture me, Scully?”

Scully laughed in spite of herself and accidentally caught Skinner’s attention momentarily as he shot her a disapproving glance. “You are going to get me into trouble, Mulder.”

“You should be used to that by now,” Mulder wagged his eyebrows at her and went to gather up the remaining case files.

Scully smiled and let her focus go back to the writing in blood on the wall as she started to take a closer look at the blood, hoping for prints or marked smudges. She secured her rubber gloves as her eye caught a small strand of black hair in the lower part of the curve of the S. She reached for the tweezers from the evidence collecting kit and carefully secured the hair in a baggie as Skinner walked over to her, his demeanor considerably softened from when they first arrived.

“There was a strand of hair we might be able to run DNA on,” Scully sealed the bag shut and placed it into the box of evidence to be collected and catalogued.

“Good find, Agent Scully,” Skinner glanced over at Mulder, who was speaking to an officer as well as one of the other agents assisting on the case before continuing. “I want to apologize for getting angry at you and Agent Mulder…this case has followed up the chain of command because of how quickly this killer has escalated.”

“Sir, you don’t have to explain anything to me – we have very little time to catch this guy before he does it again, all things considered. Minimalizing the body count is of the utmost importance,” Scully felt half awkward and half sympathetic to his predicament as she noticed his extremely stressed expression.

“Still, you both have shown extreme dedication to the evidence and I want to make sure that you understand that any outburst is purely from a frustration standpoint,” Skinner wiped a little bit of sweat from his brow and continued, “There’s not much more for you and Agent Mulder to do here tonight. We lost daylight and the rest of the crime scene investigation will be mainly for cleanup. I’ll call you both if anything changes. Focus on a profile.”

“Absolutely, sir, we’ll take the case files to see if there is anything we may have missed and put together a profile,” Scully turned the box of evidence over to his care and walked over to Mulder, who had a stack of case files in his arms. “Mulder?”

“I’ll take the case files and the evidence can be catalogued as normal – if we need anything we will contact you,” Mulder reached out to shake the remaining officer’s hand and turned toward Scully. “Where’d you send your delicious stack of man candy off to?”

“Skinner has gone back to the office for the night and gave us the evening off unless something happens in the meantime,” Scully emphasized Skinner’s name, holding back a little bit of a laugh as she helped him with the files and followed him out toward their car.

“It’s almost 7…on a Friday night and the only one expected to burn the candle at both ends tonight is Skinner?” Mulder put the files into an open file box in the back seat of the sedan and looked at Scully. “Was he feeling ok?”

“He’s stressed out, Mulder, and with the timeline getting progressively shorter on how
quickly the victims have been accumulating, Skinner is feeling the pressure from above to solve this before it gets any worse – he even apologized for being pissed off at us earlier,” Scully handed him the files in her hand and let her hand linger over his a little bit longer than necessary.

“There’s not much he can do without the profile completed but I see the situation,” Mulder smiled in her direction and reluctantly pulled his hand from hers to close the backseat door before opening the front seat passenger door for her. “The question I really want answered, though, is…do you have plans tonight, Scully?”

“Good question…” Scully looked around for a moment, her brave side taking over for a moment as she pulled him forward by his tie and gave him a gentle yet quick kiss. “I’ll leave that up to you.”

Scully slid into the car and buckled her seatbelt while Mulder took an extra moment to close her door, and then go around to the driver’s side, getting in with her.

“I may have an idea or two,” Mulder started up the engine and smirked at her, winking just slightly before backing out of the space.

What neither of them were aware of, as they drove off from the crime scene, was that the same peeping tom from the parking structure had followed them and had been watching their every move both inside of and outside the house. In his gloved hands he held a green glass bottle that likely contained either beer or liquor. He stood nearly motionless, exhibiting external signs of rage as the affectionate and familiar behavior between Mulder and Scully caused him to squeeze the bottle until it shattered in his grip, sending glass and liquid in all directions.

He stayed there only for a moment before walking toward a black SUV across the street —where he climbed into the driver’s seat. He banged on the steering wheel before turning the keys in the ignition, where the stereo began to blast “Somebody Else” by The 1975 conveniently at the “you said you’d find someone to take my place” line. The man shouted the line over the top of the radio before speeding off in the same direction that Mulder and Scully had just left in.

--End Chapter 4

Feedback is encouraged!!!
Watched You

Chapter Summary

A brutal killer romanticizes his victims, leaving behind symbols of love.

Post Agua Mala

Chapter Spoiler: This chapter is so much more Mulder & Scully centric. Be prepared for puns and fluff.

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: All characters related to the X Files belong to Chris Carter, TenThirteen Productions, and FOX. All others are original and any likeness to real life people is purely coincidental.

Puns. Always with the puns.

The bar in this chapter was inspired by two local (to where I live) bars that have made their way into my heart -- I hope you see why.

Just over an hour later at a little dive bar near Mulder’s apartment building –

“Ahh, here we are,” Mulder broke the halfway awkward silence as they walked down the sidewalk toward a little hole in the wall bar with a poorly painted front door.

“This is your idea?” Scully wrinkled her nose at him, visibly apprehensive, as Mulder opened the door to the seedy little bar.

“Give it a shot, Scully, not everything is as it appears on the outside,” Mulder smirked, hoping that the door wouldn’t creak obnoxiously and ruin his carefully planned rebuttal. “They have really good food.”

“Pre or post drunk Mulder opinion? Because the distinction is important,” Scully followed him in slowly.

“Both,” Mulder chuckled as he led her around to a booth near a back corner in the dimly lit little joint. “Just sit down and relax while I go grab a couple of menus.”

“Am I going to need a tetanus shot after I leave here, Mulder?” Scully couldn’t help but half joke, not even caring that someone could possibly hear her.
“Live a little, Scully—would I seriously lead you that far astray?” Mulder winked and went toward the bar.

_I could get stabbed here._ She couldn’t help but think as she looked around, her reservation only increasing as she worried about sitting on the booth cushions. She carefully slid onto the seat and was relieved that a cloud of dust or other unmentionable particles didn’t go flying into the air to hover around her and scooted to a comfortable position while Mulder went for a couple of menus from the bar. He seemed different as she watched him interact with the bartender for a moment—a glow in his grin, a hint of boyish energy peeking out from his eyes. She scanned the little hole in the wall and noted that there were little hints of Mulder’s favorite baseball team, the New York Yankees, all over. There were a few posters, a signed baseball bat above the bar area, and the TVs were tuned to ESPN to catch all of the highlights. _So this is why he comes here._ She knew that it wasn’t just because it had cheap booze or good food; it was a sanctuary of sorts for Mulder to get out of his own space as well as his own head. It was a little slice of paraphernalia heaven for him outside of the box of the FBI. Scully fiddled with the coaster in front of her and waited until he returned to the table.

“Mulder, this was not really what I pictured when you said you wanted to go out to dinner,” Scully smiled as he handed her a menu, shocked that it wasn’t sticky. “But I’ll trust your judgement this time.”

“I’ve hidden in here a couple of times when I wanted to get out of my apartment but not be out in the open – the booze is cheap and the food is shockingly good for as rank as this place looks from the outside and inside,” Mulder opened his menu and scanned it, his free hand instinctively finding her thigh, gently squeezing the spot above her knee. “The burgers are good. Messy, but good.”

The blush formed on her cheeks as she glanced at the menu, placing it open on the table top, and put her hand over the top of his, her index and middle finger sliding to the palm, gripping him back. “The mushroom and Swiss burger caught my eye…sweet potato fries.”

The bartender came over to them, a smile on his face, his whiskers desperately in need of a trim. “Ok, Mulder, do you and your pretty lady friend know what you’d like me to put into the kitchen?”

Scully smiled softly at the comment ‘pretty lady friend’ and glanced at Mulder, her eyebrows raised. Mulder nodded at her.

“It’s looking like we need two mushroom and Swiss burgers, sweet potato fries on both,” Mulder handed him the menus.

“Drinks?” The bartender put the menus under his arm, continuing to write down the orders.

“Scully, do you have a drink preference?” Mulder nudged her in the side, giving her a little poke of his thumb in the ribs.

“Surprise me, Mulder,” Scully flashed a big smile at him, her eyes sparkling.

“Two draft porters—don’t have a preference, Frank; just make sure they’re cold,” Mulder continued, “Chilled glasses, por favor.”

“I’m no heathen—glasses are always chilled first,” Frank half laughed as he headed around to the other side of the bar, putting the order for the kitchen in before turning toward the
The silence in the air was awkward and slightly heavy as timidity set in for Scully. She blushed in spite of herself and let her eyes fall on the table top instead of on him. Mulder’s silence was much more in observation of her body language as he watched her fingers shake on her free hand while feeling the hand on top of his do the same. She slowly pulled her hand away and laced her fingers in front of her on the table top, desperately trying to hide the shaking.

Mulder found himself oddly fascinated by her behavior even though it wasn’t an entirely foreign concept for him to see a woman fumbling nervously with herself. It was never her kind of behavior before and never because of him—or even for him. He liked it a lot and craved it, even.

“Are you cold, Scully?” Mulder knew she wasn’t but felt obligated to cut the silence in the air.

“Yeah, a little,” Scully lied and finally looked him in the eye, the pink in her cheeks only intensifying. “I’ll survive.”

Mulder wrapped his hands around the tops of hers and slowly guided them toward his chest, rubbing the palms of his hands over hers until he could feel them start to warm up. She half turned toward him and the nervous expression softened as he caressed her fingers.

“Better?” He continued to rub her hands and fingers, feeling the trembling nearly evaporate within his grip.

Scully nodded and let a small smile curve across her lips. “Mhmmm.”

They both had completely forgotten everything around them and for the first time in a while, neither one of them were particularly preoccupied with the extremely sensitive case they were investigating. The details of a grisly series of murders had next to no bearing on them as they had seemingly decided to spend a few moments as their informal selves. They were simply Dana Scully and Fox Mulder, even though he hated his given name with a near fiery passion and preferred not to be called that under any circumstance. Despite the strong distaste for his own name, he’d let her call him that if she so chose, simply because she meant that much to him. They were nearly complete, whole even, as they allowed a gentleness to bring their walls down. They were simply two people who were experiencing what could only be described as a revelation about each other. Mulder kissed the tips of her fingers before holding her hands near his knee, relaxing just a bit.

“Can I ask you something, Scully?” Mulder noticed out of the corner of his eye that Frank had snuck their beer to the table while they were staring at each other with such intensity and longing.

“Of course, Mulder, anything,” Scully let her lips hang on the word ‘anything’, letting that long forgotten girlishness peek out.

Mulder slid her beer in front of her then moved his own closer. “Earlier you were so ready to walk out on everything and me—how’d it get that far?”

Scully took a deep breath and a big gulp of her beer, swallowing hard, before she could get the words out. “It wasn’t that I was so willing to walk out—it was more that I found that I had lost myself in all of this and didn’t feel as though any of it mattered anymore. I’ve gotten the impression that I was no longer a necessity…to you, or anyone for that matter.”
“How could you think that? You’re all I have wanted by my side for a very long time. I couldn’t do this without you,” Mulder took a drink of his own beer and looked at her, confusion in his eyes.

“You have Diana and I know exactly what it means when she looks at you the way that she does. I didn’t want to be competing with that,” Scully’s voice dropped in volume as she struggled with the want to retreat, eyes in her glass.

“Hmmm…really? I haven’t noticed that at all,” Mulder’s subtlety completely went over her head as he smirked at her from behind his pint glass.

“How could you not?” Scully continued, her matter-of-fact tone was teetering on the edge of jealousy. “If she had the opportunity to do so I’m sure she’d jump you at your desk, with or without an audience.”

“I don’t notice it, Scully, because I’m usually too busy looking at you, Scully, not her,” Mulder found her free hand again, gently squeezing it while involuntarily biting his bottom lip.

Scully swallowed hard again, her cheeks again flushed with heat despite hiding behind her pint glass. “What took you so long?”

Mulder let out a chuckle and leaned in close to her ear, voice dropping to a seductive lull. “I’ve been looking at you ever since ‘I’ve been assigned to work with you’, Scully.”

“You have?” Scully inhaled sharply, her eyes closing as his breath hit her neck and ear lobe. “Why tell me now?”

“I never thought you were looking back until I realized you were waiting till my back was turned to do it—“

“Mulder,” Scully cut him off, half embarrassed, her voice cracking just a touch.

He couldn’t help but crack a smile, knowing fully that his comment was 100% the truth despite the protesting tone. “You know I’m right…the way you talked earlier was enough confirmation. It was the revelation that I needed.”

“Ok, enough necking, you two – couple of teenagers. If I had any other customers on this side of the bar, they’d be telling you to get a room,” Frank’s voice interrupted their intimate moment as he put a couple of plates in front of them, complete with side sauces.

Both of them laughed a little but Mulder was the first to speak. “Actually, you interrupted me from getting there, so…thanks, Frank!”

“Mulder!” Scully’s laugh came from her belly as she reached for her pint glass, taking another fairly large drink of her beer.

“Glad to be of assistance, I’ll be here all night,” Frank continued. “You two need another round? Your food is almost ready.”

“Please,” Scully was still laughing as she spoke, realizing the glass was nearly empty.

Mulder nodded, polishing off his beer, his eyes wandering, peeking at her over the rim of the glass. She smiled as she noticed him, causing him to wink at her. Frank brought two more beers over and took the empties back to the bar with him. For another moment they looked at each other, the unfamiliar territory was thoroughly terrifying for both of them but was also exciting at the very
same time. They both knew that neither one had felt this way openly about anyone was long before
the reaches of the FBI—back when youth was still in their grasps.

“What do we do now, Mulder?” Scully broke the silence, the illumination of her biggest
trepidation about their admission becoming all the more obvious.

Mulder wrinkled his nose, his glass up by his mouth after taking another gulp. “While
the FBI has regulations about fraternization with your fellow agents, you know as well as I do that
it happens more often than we think—“

“But how open can we really be with this? You know Skinner would lose his mind at
even a hint of anything and likely separate us like children who won’t stop fighting,” Scully took a
sip of her beer and noticed that Frank was pulling the plates out of the window.

“Skinner may be a lot of things but naïve is not one of them,” Mulder continued. “I think
he has that ‘I don’t want to know so don’t tell me’ kind of attitude.”

“That could very well be true—he’s never been particularly naïve in regards to anything
involving either one of us,” Scully took a slow, almost thoughtful drink of her beer and watched as
Frank carried the plates of food over.

“Two mushroom and Swiss burgers with sweet potato fries -- sweet ketchup, spicy
ketchup, and ranch sides, anything else you two need?” Frank set each plate in front of them and
left them extra napkins.

“Nah, I think this is good, thanks Frank,” Mulder put his pint glass back on the table top
and watched Scully as she took one of the burger halves and was attempting to take a bite. “You
know, Scully, a lot can be revealed about a woman by how she eats a burger.”

Scully had already bitten down and was chewing on a fairly large piece of the burger, a
slight mess on her face and in front of her on the plate as he spoke. “Hmmm?”

Mulder smirked as she swallowed. “Yeah, it’s pretty illuminating.”

Scully didn’t realize that she had ketchup on either side of her mouth as she spoke, her
fingers also messy with burger drippings. “So what does it say about me?”

“It says that you need a drop cloth when you eat,” Mulder took a napkin and wiped the
corners of her mouth to get the ketchup off.

“Mmmmmmmmm…sure,” Scully put the burger down and wiped both hands. “I think
you just backed out of a comment, personally…chicken.”

“Well, no, you do need a drop cloth, though, Scully,” Mulder pointed at the mess in front
of her, coaxing a little laugh out of her.

“Then what else does it mean other than I need a drop cloth?” Scully dipped a sweet
potato fry in the ranch and nibbled on it, smirking at him.

“Well…” The sound of the phone ringing in Mulder’s pocket stopped him from
continuing his thought as he pulled it out and looked at the caller ID before answering. “Mulder…
No, you’re not interrupting anything, Skinner, what’s up?”

Scully’s eyebrows furrowed while she nibbled at the half of her burger that she had
already started in on. Mulder shrugged his shoulders at her as he took a healthy bite of his burger
while listening to Skinner talk in his ear.

“Do you need us to come out there now?” Mulder had a mouth full of food as he spoke. “Yeah, she’s here as well... We can finish up and head there, what’s the address?”

Scully scooted out of the booth and went to the bar. “Frank, can we get a couple of boxes for the burgers?”

“Duty calls?” Frank turned around from cleaning up a stack of glassware, a towel still in his hands.

“As always—it never ends it seems,” Scully snuck in paying for their meals while Mulder continued to talk on the phone. “Frank, how often does he come here... purely out of curiosity...”

“Usually once a week—this is the kind of bar that you go to when you’re either too stressed to sleep or just don’t want to be alone,” Frank had one of those kind and understanding faces that Scully had always felt were destined for being therapists in another life.

“Or both?” Scully glanced over at Mulder, who was becoming more and more withdrawn by the second.

“Yeah, Mulder is usually both—until tonight, anyway,” Frank put the boxes in front of her, lowering his voice just a bit. “You make sure he’s ok, not many of my patrons have given me advice on keeping my bar safe like Mulder has and I haven’t seen him enthusiastic in a while.”

Scully nodded and took the boxes back to Mulder, who was just hanging up the cell phone with Skinner. “Figured we’d need these.”

“I’ll go pay for dinner—Skinner just informed me that we have another body,” Mulder started to slide out of the seat as Scully put the fries and burgers into their boxes, securing the dipping sauces as well with their lids.

“I already took care of that,” Scully put a hand on his shoulder. “Another body?”

“Sneaky—yeah, it’s only about a mile from here, actually and according to Skinner, it happened under an hour ago,” Mulder stood up and helped her gather the food boxes.

“I have a feeling it is going to be a long night, Mulder, this is victim number 7 and we are no closer to a suspect than we are to tangible leads,” They both started toward the door, putting their FBI faces back on.

“Scully, if we don’t find something soon we’re going to be dealing with one of the worst serial murders in recent history,” Mulder opened the passenger door for her and got around to the driver’s side fairly quickly.

Mulder drove with a greater sense of urgency and practically peeled into the driveway to a small complex of townhomes. There were about 10 total vehicles already on the scene upon their arrival consisting of 3 squad cars, an ambulance, a fire truck (first responder), and 5 unmarked vehicles that likely belonged to the FBI as well as law enforcement. Scully was the first to get out of the car, followed by Mulder, who had two sets of rubber gloves already out. He gave a set to Scully and lifted the caution tape to allow her in, meeting Skinner immediately.

“Victim’s name was Victoria McGrath, 31 years old, roughly 5’6” tall, 130 pounds, same MO as the others,” Skinner gave the starter details as they made their way toward the front door.
“Has anyone touched the body?” Scully broke through the chatter as she came up the steps to the wide open front door of the powder blue townhome.

“This was called in mere minutes before I got here and all medical crews were unable to get a pulse—rather, they couldn’t try,” Skinner was frantic as Mulder and Scully pulled on their gloves and entered the premises.

“Couldn’t or wouldn’t?” Mulder inquired, worried and confused at the same time.

“Couldn’t…take a look for yourself,” Skinner lead them into a back bedroom with a four poster bed in the center.

Scully saw the ropes around the foot bed posts and stopped in her tracks as she saw the blood literally everywhere on the bed. “Oh my God.”

“Jesus Christ—this is the worst one thus far,” Mulder found himself horrified for the first time in a while as the grisly scene unfolded before them.

Skinner started to brief Agent Mulder on what he found outside of the bedroom while Scully started to check the external condition of the body. She noted that the body was still warm, slices of her skin on her shins, forearms, and middle rib area were flayed open, displaying the flesh and some bone beneath. The manner in which the previous victims had been wrapped around the mouth with barbed wire had escalated this time around as she noted that she could see the white sheen of teeth much further than the normal mouth opening would allow. The chest was again flayed open, this time with barbed wire wrapped completely around the torso at least 4 times to hold the half dead roses in place, both of which were precariously placed between the skin layer and the muscle.

“Has everything in here at least been photographed and noted?” Scully went to the hallway to inquire with the medics that had been first responders.

“Yes ma’am,” One of the EMT’s nodded, “Your SAC has everything.”

Scully inhaled deeply and nodded at them before going back into the room. She took a moment to look at the face of the fair haired victim and saw that the eye lids had not been sliced in half and stapled open as the others had. She had also noticed that there were staples on the eyelids and matching holes on her brow line but they were no longer connected. Scully grabbed an evidence bag and a pair of large tweezers, reaching for the closer of the two staples stuck to the eyelid. She carefully got a hold of the first staple and began to turn and pull it from the skin when the body began to half convulse and groan in response to the minimal amount of pressure she was utilizing to remove the staple.

“Jesus…” Scully started to back away and then watched as the victim’s chest was half heaving, pumping more blood out of the open wound, further soaking the sheets underneath. “No, no, no, no…this can’t be…”

Scully stepped closer and saw the victim’s nostrils flaring almost violently, visibly breathing. Scully abandoned the tweezers along with the evidence bag on the floor, ripped off a glove and felt the victim’s neck, immediately finding a pulse.

“I need sheers and a medic in here now!” Scully abandoned procedure and protocol as she leaned onto the side of the bed, trying desperately to remove the ropes from the now struggling victim, who was doing her absolute best attempt to cry out from under her barbed wire gag.

“Victoria, I’m here to help you but I need you to stop struggling so I can free you. You’re safe
Mulder beat the medics into the room and couldn’t believe what he was seeing. “Holy shit…I need wire cutters in here!”

Scully freed Victoria’s left hand from the restraints while Mulder carefully freed both of her feet. She was still groaning and half moving as the medics came into the room with wire cutters and a stretcher ready. Scully took the wire cutters from the first medic and carefully cut the wire from around Victoria’s torso free before handing them back to him.

“Victoria, please try to listen to me right now, I don’t know how badly you were cut open on your face so I have to leave the wire until we can secure you in the back of the ambulance, you’re doing so well…I know it hurts…hold on, we’re taking you to the hospital,” Scully placed her hand on Victoria’s forehead in a well-intentioned attempt to further calm her down.

The firefighters still on scene carefully slid the backboard underneath of Victoria while the EMT’s began putting pressure on the unobstructed wounds, carefully wrapping parts of her with gauze in an attempt to stop the blood from gushing. Scully slid out of the way as they pulled Victoria and the backboard onto a gurney. The chatter of instructional orders began as they began to wheel her out of the bedroom toward the front door between the EMT’s and the firefighters as they all began prepping for what would likely be a rough journey to the hospital. Mulder and Scully followed the gurney out of the house and watched as they secured Victoria in the back of an ambulance.

“I need to know the minute she is in recovery,” Scully stopped the driver from getting in.

He nodded at her. “Yes, ma’am.”

The lights flashed and the sirens began to blare as the driver of the ambulance got into the driver’s seat, speeding off toward the nearest hospital. Mulder turned toward a now blood stained Scully and watched as she crossed her arms while the ambulance disappeared from their immediate line of sight. Their eyes met, fear and shock both all over their faces.

“Are you alright?” Mulder touched her arm, giving her a gentle, reassuring squeeze.

“Her assailant made it nearly impossible to get vitals from her—Mulder, what if I hadn’t tried to take the staples out of her eyelid?” Scully looked up at him, her eyes half filling with tears, vomit already rising in her belly.

“You cannot let yourself think of that, Scully…she’s got a fighting chance because of your quick thinking,” Mulder put his arm around her and half embraced her, soothing the shock away. “If she is strong enough to pull through this we have a great shot at catching this guy…all because of you.”

“Agent Scully, I just double checked with all of the first responders, two of them attempted to check for a pulse and couldn’t find one,” Skinner came from behind them. “They’ve never seen anything like what just happened before.”

“The nearest guess I could make is that he drugged her enough to keep her still during his torture and it made her pulse shallow enough that a simple finger check wouldn’t have registered anything,” Mulder looked over at Skinner and didn’t bother to move from holding onto Scully.

Scully took a deep breath and turned back toward the house. “Wait a second—did anyone check the stereo?”
Skinner shook his head and watched as Scully lead the way back into the house, straight back into the bedroom where she found the stereo powered on, stuck on pause with the repeat set. She took a couple of photos of it with the camera Skinner still had in his possession before pressing the playback.

_Come on baby_

_This ain’t the last time that I’ll see your face_

_Come on baby_

_You said you’d find someone to take my place_

Scully pressed the stop button on the blaring stereo to return the room to near silence and looked over at Mulder, “This is how he managed to torture her without neighbors hearing—this is what he does to make it seem like just an unruly neighbor being loud, no one would ever suspect a thing.”

Skinner half patted Scully on the back, unknowingly bringing her mind away from thinking about the worst scenarios. “Agent Mulder, take Agent Scully home so she can get cleaned up—as soon as I hear back from the hospital on Victoria’s status I will have you both meet me there.”

Mulder nodded his head gently, his eyes locked on hers. “Absolutely.”

“I’ll finish gathering up all of the evidence here,” Skinner took a deep breath and maneuvered around them as they began to exit the bedroom.

“Come on, Scully, lets get you home,” Mulder guided her out of the house toward the street.

Scully stayed silent as they got into the car, her mind fully on capturing the sick son of a bitch that had perpetrated each of these grisly crimes. She waited for Mulder to close his door to speak.

“Mulder, what if Victoria doesn’t make it?” Scully wasn’t the type to be sullen but she was slipping into it now, her eyes fixated on the dashboard.

Mulder left the car in park for an extra moment as he reached over, turning her head toward him with his thumb and index finger against her chin. “Don’t think about that right now—you worry about getting into a set of clean clothes and waiting for Skinner to call. That’s all we can focus on right now.”

“We have to catch this guy, Mulder,” Scully blinked slowly, a softness falling over her that was more familiar to Mulder.

“When he realizes that he wasn’t successful in killing Victoria, he’ll slip up and we’ll be right there to get him,” Mulder turned himself more centered at the wheel, his hands going back to the wheel and shifter.

Scully nodded her head as Mulder started to pull away, both completely unaware that
their unknown suspect had been sitting in a car nearby, watching their every move since they had arrived—and his eyes were fixated on Scully.

End chapter 5 – please be aware that chapter 6 is already in progress and I’ll get more out to all of you soon! Please leave constructive critiques or just show some love! Thank you!
Chapter Summary

A brutal killer romanticizes his victims, leaving behind symbols of love.

Post Agua Mala

Chapter note: Voyeurism...voyeurism...voyeurism...with a side of snark.

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: All characters related to the X Files belong to Chris Carter, TenThirteen Productions, and FOX. All others are original and any likeness to real life people is purely coincidental.

Puns. Little, creepy men.

I was on a Fleetwood Mac binge, please don't hate. I also referenced an obscure film called "The Plumber". It's very creepy.

Scully’s apartment, less than an hour later

Scully stood in the middle of the bathroom, the door barely cracked open and the fan on while the water in the bathtub slowly filled. She looked at herself in the mirror, Victoria’s blood still clinging to her via her layers of clothes, and inhaled deeply in an attempt to shake off the sinking feeling in the pit of her stomach. She exhaled and resigned the fact that it wasn’t going to work that easily, opting to remove her shoes followed by her jacket, discarding both in a heap near the door. She unbuttoned her cotton blend top and pulled it from being carefully tucked into the top of her skirt, exposing the parts of herself that were not stained with blood. She pursed her lips together and unzipped her skirt, letting it fall to the floor with her jacket and shoes. She stood there for a moment, gathering up the remnants of her mental strength and reached for a bottle of bubbles.

Seven.

Seven victims, one still barely clinging to life; and no closer to solving this case than she was after being introduced to it. Scully poured a little of the lavender bubble solution into the water near the faucet head and watched the first set of bubbles form before pulling off her shirt to toss into the growing pile of clothing. Scully positioned her towel and robe within reach of the tub and turned off the overhead lighting, opting for the one above the sink only which was considerably less potent of a light source. She sighed as she slipped out of her panties followed by her bra, then carefully sunk down into the probably hotter than necessary water and bubble combination.

“Ahh…” the sound was unintentional but unavoidable as Scully completely submerged
herself up to her clavicle with the bubbles and hot water, the heat both soothing and shocking her.

Scully waited until the water was as high as it could go without hitting the overflow before she extended her feet to utilize her toes to turn off the hot and cold water, returning the bathroom to a gentle silence minus the hum of the fan high above her head. She let the scent of the lavender invade her nostrils while relaxation washed over her, thoughts finally leaving her immediate stream of consciousness. She needed it.

Outside of the bathroom Mulder took to a comfortable spot on Scully’s couch, knowing that she might want a little time to relax in a hot bath after the day they’d had. He had become fixated on her incredibly out of character actions and verbalized feelings since this case had begun but didn’t know how to reconcile that he was the cause. It wasn’t something that he was used to—being agreed with without so much as a moment of hesitation, being almost outdone in the “weird” department, and left guessing her next move or action. She had always carried herself in a striking, almost enigmatic fashion but this was different and unexplored. Part of him couldn’t help but think maybe she had always been this way but never could express it until now, when she felt as though there was nothing left to lose, or to gain, by stepping off the ledge.

That was normally his position—halfway off the ledge.

The again, this case was significantly more gruesome than anything they had investigated in quite some time – nor were the toe tags so freshly placed on all but one. One survivor. He clung to the notion that Victoria would defy the odds stacked against her, pull through, and give them the missing piece for this killer – a visual identity. Mulder thumbed through the cache file in front of him, rifling through each little bit in hopes of something jumping off the page at him but nothing was looking any different than it had earlier. He closed the file again and closed his eyes, squeezing the spot at the bridge of his nose while he exhaled deeply, loudly.

“Motive…what’s your endgame, you son of a bitch,” Mulder was talking to himself again as he mentally began running through the crime scene imagery.

Mulder was fixated on the lyrics to the song and what they could possibly mean to the killer – maybe someone in his past left him and it drove him to the ultimate level of psychosis in thinking he was somehow justifying his own suffering at her hand. The methodology was striking – melody, careful orchestration of a crime scene, flowers, barbed wire, slicing of the eyelids, staples—all of it meant something. If they could figure out the meaning then the motivation might present itself and unfurl his secret—his identity.

He flicked on the television and flipped through the channels at least twice before settling on a local news program. He muted it after only about 5 minutes of hearing the newscaster speak, crossed his arms, and tilted his head back just slightly, fully enveloping himself in the slight embrace of the couch cushions. He yawned and found that Scully’s couch was far more comfortable than he remembered as it lulled him into a bit of a doze. He blinked hard and fast, peering at his watch only to realize that his momentary doze off was nearly 40 minutes.

She must be wrinkly by now. Mulder thought to himself as he switched off the television and went into the kitchen. He got the to go containers out of the fridge and put them onto a couple of plates, half pilfering Scully’s kitchen like it was his. He half hummed to himself as he put the first plate into the microwave, started it, and went into the living space again to turn on her stereo. She had a stack of CDs sitting next to the stereo that he rifled through while the microwave continued its countdown. He put in a Fleetwood Mac disc and scrolled the list of songs on the back, opting for Little Lies as a start. Mulder nodded as he turned the volume up just enough to be
heard from the kitchen but not be an obnoxious level and pressed the randomize button as well. Mulder finished up the microwaving and carried the plates carefully to the living room coffee table, setting them down.

He spent enough time for the duration of the song to play out as Seven Wonders took over right after Little Lies. Mulder didn’t have any particular attachment to the song but there was something about it that played to the metaphorical side of him all the while bringing him out of the self-imposed funk that he had been in. Mulder instinctively bobbed his head up and down just a little, allowing himself to envelope himself in a little bit of nonsensical joy, even if it may only be for a few moments, regardless of how ridiculous he may appear to anyone else.

“Really, Mulder? Stevie?” Scully’s voice was soft yet loud enough to break through the song on the stereo.

Mulder turned around, wrinkling his nose at her. “There’s something about a woman with a permanent rasp—ahh—oh yeah.”

Scully came around the corner in a light blue t-shirt and silk pajama bottoms, her hair still wet but not enough to drip everywhere. She ran her fingers through the front section, pushing it back, and sat down on the couch, curling one leg up underneath her backside and other thigh. She pivoted her body toward the center of the couch and pressed her shoulder softly against the cushion while her back found the corner where back met the arm rest. She got took another moment more to fully get comfortable as he came around to greet her.

“Feeling any better?” Mulder offered her a plate after she got herself situated and comfortable, the genuine concern bringing a slight smile to her face.

She took the plate and set it down on her lap carefully, nodding in his direction. “Yeah, I just can’t shake that mental image of Victoria managing to breathe…in that state. She had more fight in her than nearly anyone I had ever gotten to witness—I just hope she can pull through this.”

“I certainly hope so—she’s our only true witness and if she doesn’t recover, we’re back at square one,” Mulder took a bite of the fries in front of him, closing the folder on the coffee table.

They fell silent while they took small bites of their leftovers, the awkwardness hanging in the air like fog on the coastline. Neither would make eye contact for quite some time as they stared down at their plates, minds clearly elsewhere. There was a certain level of guilt for the pair as their minds kept returning not to the case but to their earlier interaction in the morgue. They were fixated on it, as if they didn’t know if it had truly occurred or not.

“More awkward than a blind date…” Scully was the first to break her silence as she set her empty plate onto the table in front of her, the smirk forming on her lips.

Mulder nodded, that guilty feeling nagging at him like his mother often did when he was a teenager needing to clean his room. “I have a lot on my mind, Scully.”

“Tell me about it,” She bridged the gap between them, placing both of her hands into his palms, gently squeezing his fingers, her gumption rising in her belly.

*It’s now or never, Scully, and it’s a little too late to try backtracking.*

An uneasy, almost nervous gaze finally met her reassuring stare as he swallowed hard, squeezing her hands back in acknowledgement. “You—it’s always been you.”

*Bingo. There it is.*
“Always?” Scully could feel her heart thudding up in her throat as she burned with curiosity and anxiousness.

“Since the moment I met you…whether you knew it or not, cared or not. You’re a little hard to read or I’m just that terrible at reading your signals.” Mulder swallowed hard and pushed the overwrought feeling in the pit of his stomach a little further down. “You can stop my babbling at any time, Scully—unless you’re fascinated by my lack of dignity.”

“Everything you do fascinates me, Mulder, in some way or another,” Scully propped her cheek against her knuckles and let her expression soften, half smiling at him. “Your passion, dedication, inherently stubborn nature—every little detail.”

“We are teetering dangerously close to a fork in the road, Scully, and all of my defenses are gone,” Mulder tiptoed around the idea of making a definitive statement but all of his trepidations were screaming at him, keeping him from making the leap.

Scully had the most subtle blush forming on her cheeks, while, in the back of her mind, she was desperately trying to quell the instinctive retreating into timidity. “So what do you see as a viable solution, Mulder?”

Mulder leaned in toward her without any sign of hesitation and used the back of her couch to almost prop himself forward, arching toward the inevitability that they had briefly explored earlier. It was a near constant craving as he maintained eye contact with her, wetting his lips as he was within inches of her.

As quickly as it begun, it came to an even swifter end as there was a rapid series of knocks at the door in that all too familiar “shave and a haircut, two-bits” patterning. Mulder sat back, half deflated while Scully bit down on her lower lip and exhaled long as she felt her nerves over firing as they sent a painful jolt through her extremities as a reminder of this epic failure.

This better be really good. She bit down hard on her lip to calm the electric level shock to her body.

“Just a second!” Scully turned her head toward the door and stood up, running her fingers through her damp hair to get it out of her face.

Scully glanced through the peep hole and wrinkled her nose as she stood straight, glancing back at Mulder.

“Who is it?” Mulder was careful not to be loud as he noticed her odd expression.

“The building plumber,” Scully shrugged her shoulders and unlatched the door before opening it to greet them. “Unexpected surprise, Miles, but I didn’t call you out here—did they send you to the wrong unit?”

Miles’s dirty uniform was the first thing that Scully noticed as she opened the door. She was at least relieved to see that he was already wearing a pair of those plastic booties over the top of his dirty work boots as he stood in the doorway with his enormous toolbox in tow. He was unsuspecting and completely unremarkable but was trying desperately to get Scully’s attention as he flashed an overly toothy grin at her, the sheen of sweat already pouring from his skin. He was built similarly to Mulder but far more imposing in his stature despite being shorter. Neither one of them would’ve known about the side of him—at least no one was capable of revealing it about him. He had been watching them for a little while, well, mostly her, and knew that it was only a matter of time before she would begin to fit all of the pieces together and discover exactly who he
was. The thought was thrilling and terrifying at the same time, to witness the lightbulb going off in someone’s head about just how far they had deviated from normalcy.

It was scintillating to even fathom.

“Oh, no, Miss Scully, the building super called us this morning and said that they need us to run a routine check on all units for any leaks or clogs,” He was awkward in front of her as he couldn’t help but stare at her breasts before looking her in the eye as she crossed her arms in front of him. “I’m here to inspect your pipes.”

Scully slid out of his way and closed the door as he stepped into the apartment. “Well, don’t let me stop you, then…you know where everything is.”

“Yes, ma’am,” Miles started forward, still grinning until he spotted Mulder on the couch behind her.

“There are so many comments I could make right now, Scully, but my brain is a little stopped up,” Mulder smirked at her as she sat down in the big fluffy chair in the corner.

Miles pursed his lips together, muttering several profanities under his breath just quiet enough that neither of them had noticed, as he went over to the kitchen sink first, opening the doors to check underneath of it. He was already imagining the ways in which he could put an end to Mulder before addressing the desired target in Scully.

“And just when I think you couldn’t possibly get any more corny you bust out a plumbing pun,” Scully rolled her eyes at him as she sank into the char and crossed her legs.

“You underestimate the level at which my sense of humor will stoop for a good laugh, or even a bad laugh,” Mulder smirked and winked in her direction. “You know me better than that.”

Miles was underneath of Scully’s kitchen sink and purposely banged his channel locks against the metal to stop their witty back and forth banter with a high level of irritating noise. He had become an expert at pretending to actually work by loosening the fittings then tightening them again—and knew that they were paying attention to what he was doing despite acting as though they were not. He couldn’t be above suspicion and certainly didn’t want her to catch on enough to call the company about why he was there, for confirmation.

Not yet, anyway.

“I had to tighten the fittings under there but the sink is good—no leaks lately, right?” Miles made small talk as he closed up the tool box and carried it toward the bathroom.

Scully looked up at him and shook her head. “Not that I’ve noticed.”

“I just have to check the bathroom and I’ll be on my way,” Miles flashed an incredibly fake grin at the both of them before going straight for her bathroom, not even waiting for a verbal confirmation.

“I don’t remember your plumber being this awkward, Scully,” Mulder didn’t want to be heard but Miles was actively listening from the other side of the bathroom door.

“He wasn’t the normal guy until about a six months ago when Max, who was in his 60s never showed up to work and moved to Florida. Miles was his apprentice,” Scully continued, nearly to a whisper. “I used to be ok with Max being alone in the apartment but Miles is still fishy—like he’s trying much harder than necessary to socialize instead of work.”
Miles set his toolbox on the lid to the toilet tank and took out the top layer where two bloodied tools were sticking out like sore thumbs from the rest of his shiny, near new tools. He contemplated the mess in the bottom of the box, savoring the memory of each little bit of pain he had been inflicting before letting life slip away from each victim. It was almost invigorating as he could still hear their labored breaths and the tortured cries beneath whatever scary device he had concocted to keep their mouths open or closed. He bit down on the corner of his lip and forced air out from the space between his lips and teeth, quelling a little bit of his excitement.

*She’s going to look so lovely with barbed wire across those lips.* He was already contemplating the opportunity, shivering with sickening delight. He held onto the larger of the two wrenches and turned toward the shower, immediately taking notice of her towel hanging from a small hook on the wall. He leaned in close and inhaled deeply, catching all of the perfumed notes of her shampoo, conditioner and body wash. It was intoxicating to him as his eyes rolled back in his head while he savored the smell circulating through his nostrils.

She was perfect…always had been.

He turned around and went for her shower stall, opened the door carefully then reached into his breast pocket. He pulled out a small, rounded black object that had a lens on it. He pressed a button on the back of it and looked at the front of it as the lens started to turn inside of the device—it was a camera with an adhesive meant for the inside of a fixture to go down a drain but he had other ideas for it. He hadn’t watched any of the previous girls and wanted this to be special.

“Miles, did you find something wrong with the plumbing in there?” Scully was just outside of the door, sending the message loud and clear that she felt that he’d been in there for just about too long for comfort.

“No ma’am, just checking the last of the visible pipe fittings,” Miles carefully pressed the small camera to the side of the shower head to where you’d have to really look to see it then tapped the water fixtures with the wrench to quell the apprehension in her voice.

He placed the wrench back into the tool kit and stood next to the back of the bathtub, staring toward the shower head. The camera was incredibly hard to spot and if he hadn’t put it there himself, it likely would’ve escaped him entirely. He snapped the lid back down on the tool kit and carried it to the door, swinging it open to the point it startled Scully.

“You’re good to go, Miss Scully,” Miles shook her hand roughly and fought the urge to glare in Mulder’s direction. “I’ll just show myself out.”

“Okay, Miles,” Scully furrowed her eyebrows as he made his way to the front door and closed the door behind himself.

“Are you sure his name isn’t Max?” Mulder made an incredibly obscure reference as Scully re-latched the door and turned around. “Because I was completely waiting for the ‘your pipes are buggered’ line to leave his lips.”

Scully sighed and stifled a laugh with her hand as she walked back over to the couch. “How much useless movie trivia do you have stored in that brain of yours, Mulder?”

“You haven’t even begun to know the reaches of my useless trivia knowledge, Scully,” Mulder patted the spot on the couch next to him.

Scully smirked and picked up the dishes from the coffee table. “Can I put these away first, Mulder?”
Mulder feigned irritation, exaggerating a deflated expression, letting out a loud sigh. “I guess.”

“You guess?” She rolled her eyes and went to the sink, then carefully slid the dishes into the bottom of the basin, before filling the sink with hot water and soap.

“Time is of the essence, Scully, and dishes are not high on my list of essentials,” Mulder had already stood up as he could hear the water going into the sink.

“Well, I’m not a fan of bugs or rats inside of my apartment so I tend to uphold that John Wesley sermon when necessary,” Scully quipped, smirked at her Mulder-esque level reference, and squeezed a sponge into the water to give the dishes a quick clean.

She hadn’t been fully paying attention to Mulder as he carefully snuck up behind her, sliding both of his arms under hers as she washed the dishes, momentarily startling her. She inhaled hard and felt her heart beating a little faster for a moment, causing her to inadvertently jump against the sink.

“I prefer Theodore Roosevelt over John Wesley, Scully,” Mulder’s mouth was nearly touching her earlobe and his breath was just enough to send a chill down her back. “And I am not an oyster. Are you an oyster, Scully?”

Scully’s eyes fluttered shut while still had her hands in hot, soapy water as she felt his fingers playing with the front of her t-shirt, pressing the fabric against her belly button. “So many puns, so little time.”

Mulder nibbled on the spot below her earlobe and felt all of the little hairs stand on end as the sensation sent an electric shock through her. Scully’s hands came out of the water just enough to grip the edge of the sink while his mouth made a zigzag pattern down and up her neck, occasionally letting his teeth put pressure on her skin. Her consciousness was spinning in circles as his right hand found skin as his fingertips slid underneath of her t-shirt, dragging it upwards. His left hand had maneuvered onto the edge of the sink right underneath of her palm and lifted it away, causing her fingers to lace with his and send little droplets of water and soap bubbles all over his hand, arm, and the floor. Scully was half panting as she brought her right hand up to the back of his head, lacing her fingers through his hair, getting soapy water all over both of them in the process. She tilted her head to the left, inviting the contact as his lips continued to alternate between light, tender kisses and nibbling.

“You’re getting soap all over my hair, Scully,” Mulder stopped nibbling on her neck and watched all of the goosebumps form as his breath touched her lightly dewy skin.

“Oh my God, shut up, Mulder,” Scully half groaned as the sensation of his heat mixed with the coolness on her skin made her buckle at the knees and open her eyes.

She made eye contact with him as she turned her head and pulled his head down to her, mouths meeting in a wanton, electric collision that nearly made her legs give out. He held onto her under her shirt just below her breasts and could already feel her heart beating out of her chest with the tips of his fingers. They were enveloped in each other, both swept up in each other, feeling the heat as it radiated and returned in unison, ramping the other up even further. Their tongues played against each other, eyes closed to savor the feel, the taste, the heat. Scully found herself moaning into his mouth as his index finger and thumb teased along the underside curve of her left breast. There was no defense for this and neither of them wanted to…it felt right.

Rrrrrrrrrrrrrring...Rrrrrrrrrrrring...Rrrrrrrrrrrring...
The sound of Scully’s house phone reverberating throughout the apartment was jarring and irritating as they both stopped their fevered groping and kissing. Mulder’s shoulders slumped while Scully came away looking quite frazzled and undone, skin flushed with heat, as they reluctantly let go of each other, losing that delicious heat that they had been creating between one another. Scully regained her footing and looked up at Mulder with such longing mixed with frustration before glaring toward the ringing phone.

“Are you kidding me right now?” Scully was almost refusing to answer it as she took a deep breath.

“Today’s theme is—interruption,” Mulder tried to joke despite the raging erection he was desperately trying to keep from leaping out of his jeans.

This is going to hurt later.

“Scully?” She answered the phone finally, with reluctance, and waited for the reply. “Yes, sir…absolutely…no it’s no trouble…We’ll be on our way shortly…ok, bye.”

“Skinner?” Mulder almost knew the answer before even asking it of her as he resisted the urge to stare at her chest despite how her nipples had gone nearly as hard as he had.

“Victoria’s awake,” Scully knew that this could be the turning point to their case as both of them had to put back on their FBI faces and venture back into the lion’s den.

End chapter 6

I know this took SO LONG, bear with me but chapter 7 will be awesome! Feedback is adored and appreciated!
Coveted

Chapter Summary

A killer romanticizes each and every victim, leaving behind symbols of his "love"...but who is his intended target?

First 5 chapters originally posted to fanfiction.net; post 5th chapters have been posted here first.

Chapter Notes

Please forgive the puns; any contextual confusion is not intended or purposefully done. If I go off course, just poke me.

Post "Agua Mala" (With mention of "Rain King", Two Fathers", and "One Son" only for contextual identification).

Disclaimer: All original X File characters, including Mulder and Scully belong to Chris Carter and FOX Productions, as well as TenThirteen Productions. Any other characters have been original and any likeness to real life individuals is purely coincidental. Thanks.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Nation Dance Club

11:45 PM

A remix of First Cool Hive was blaring from the elaborate sound system while the lights and laser lighting bounced to the beat set the environment. Bodies were already in motion, swaying and gyrating against each other to the beat as the DJ spun at the top of a small booth at the corner of the mainstage. The title of “ballroom” had been given to the building but the interior had been largely converted to a much more hybridized event setting for drink slinging, talent to flock to the stage, and various crowds to become hypnotized by each guest DJ or act that played. The “Grand Re-Invention” posters and banners were still clinging to the walls and across the center of the room since Nation took it over but it had merely been a polishing of the original concept carefully concocted by the previous ownership. It had remained a hot spot for the local alternative scene—whether it was Goth, Industrial, rave, electronica, ska, punk, rock, or the budding gay community seeking a place to drink and dance, it was always packed.

It was always teeming with people searching for comfort—for company.

Diana Willis was at the bar, getting drinks for herself while her friends danced in the middle of the crowd, when he found her. Miles smiled at her, his best ‘you look as awkward here
as I do’ look, and managed to convince her to follow him to a corner of the bar that was less crowded. He was charming to the 27-year-old med student, who was quite a bit out of his league but she didn’t seem to mind as she smiled back at him, shamelessly flirting in return despite the near inability to hear one another.

He had completely singled her out from all of the other girls in the room who might’ve been better looking or an easier conquest than her which was something that not many men were brave enough or focused enough to do, she liked it. She liked the completely unabashed and unprovoked attention.

It was exciting.

“What’s a girl like you doing in a rat trap like this?” He sipped his vodka on the rocks and ran his fingers through his freshly showered hair, trying way too hard to be attractive.

“The girls wanted to go out tonight so I said ‘why not?’ and came along.” She was wearing very little makeup but had on bright red lipstick and a cute cocktail dress that likely still had the tag until she got ready for the outing.

“So why aren’t you dancing with your friends?” Miles gestured to the bartender and tapped on the top of her now empty glass.

“I’m not much for that grinding and dry humping sort of shit.” Her wavy, red locks bounced as her head tilted just slightly as she sipped on her fresh drink. “Why aren’t you out there?”

“I kind of like to know the name of the girl before I grind on them,” Miles pushed the envelope, gently caressing the top of her hand, completely invading her space whether she had invited in him into it or not. “So what’s your name?”

She blushed and hid a smile in the top of her glass as she finished another sip, half shocked by his bravery to be so bold with her. “Diana. Yours?”

“Miles,” He drew circles across the top of her wrist, distracting her just enough from her glass so that he could slip something into her White Russian without being seen by her or anyone else for that matter.

“I like that name—it’s genuine and a little unique but not too unique,” Diana bit the corner of her lip and fidgeted just a little as she knew her face was very red from blushing. “I’m sorry, that completely sounded like I just called your name boring.”

He smiled from behind his glass. “No, no, no…it was a compliment and really, it could be worse—Dawson or Pacey would be worse.”

She half choked on her drink as she giggled while sipping. “Yes, that would definitely be worse—my little sister is obsessed with that show and all I can do is roll my eyes when she subjects me to all that teenaged, sweaty, angsty bullshit.”

“Melodramatic, sappy crap,” Miles admired the curve of her neck and the plumpness of her lips as she spoke, already picturing the barbed wire gag wrapped around her face.

He was already craving the helplessness—being completely in control.

The song changed to a very hard bass remix of Depeche Mode’s “Policy of Truth” and he couldn’t help but smile at the irony of it, since he had just pulled one of the most nefarious acts out
of his pocket on this incredibly naïve, sweet, unsuspecting Diana. She was the perfect victim. He knocked his glass against hers and encouraged her to drink, watching as she half downed the entire drink in a matter of seconds. He set his nearly half full drink onto the counter and tossed a few bills toward the bartender as he watched her glass touch the top of the counter. She swallowed the cold liquids and felt the after burn of the alcohol gently sting the back of her throat, coaxing out a slight wince before she regained eye contact with him. She smiled bigger than necessary, the blush intensifying, flooding to her ears and neck.

He mouthed “dance with me” at her and she nodded gently, obliging his outstretched hand in front of her. He had a look of intensity that intrigued her as he kissed the top of her hand before leading her slowly to a corner section of the dance floor where he held her at the hips, bringing her closer. She obliged the physical closeness and wrapped her arms around his neck and easily swayed to the music with him.

“I never do this!” She half shouted over the music and shrugged her shoulders a little at the indulgence of dancing with a complete stranger.

Miles smiled and let his left hand wander toward her backside, speaking when she didn’t protest against his advances. “Neither do I!”

You had something to hide
Should have hidden it, shouldn’t you

The words struck a chord with Miles as he continued to picture the endless amounts of torture that he could inflict upon her and had planned for her. The suspense of waiting for the drugs to take effect on her was keeping him on edge as he held her a little tighter, digging his fingers just slightly Diana glanced to the right and saw her friends a good 30 feet away, who had spotted her and were giggling as they realized what she was doing. She made eye contact with Miles again, the slight elation still fully buzzing as he was lavishing her with attention and closeness that she hadn’t had in a while. She knew she needed to cut loose here and there—and frankly it had been far too long since her last attempt at fun.

Now you’re not satisfied

As if a dimmer switch had been slowly pulled down, the enjoyment faded away as the effects of the additive that Miles had spilled into her drink finally became apparent. She inhaled sharply and felt the sharp twinging of pain behind her eyes and to the crown of her head, thudding with each passing second, sending her further into the most rapid formed headache she had experienced since junior year midterms. The capacity to think over the sensation of the jackhammer in her head was becoming bleak as her vision blurred just enough to stop her movements.

She blinked hard and made eye contact with him as a second set of sensations hit, figuratively splitting him in two, the blurring almost radiating back and forth in the process. The dizziness tossed her off balance as he held her up and pressed her against the wall, not to cop a feel
but to obtain a solid grip on holding her up. He carefully maneuvered along the wall until he felt the door handle at the side exit. He pushed it open and swung her arm across his shoulder to hold her up better. He could still hear the music inside of the club along with cars on the street as he led her down an alley toward a large parking lot.

She fought back the urge to vomit as her stomach spun, the haziness of the overhead street lamps half blinding her, their halos expanding and contracting like a muscle. It was hard to think let alone walk as Diana looked at the ground, taking note of little potholes that seemed to be changing size as she stared at them.

*Why is this happening to me?*

“What did you do to me? Let go of me!” Diana protested as she tried to slap at him, her words half slurring as the world started to slow down around her.

“The more you struggle, Dee, the more this is going to hurt,” Miles had a weak grip on her, thinking that the drugs had taken a much stronger effect on her by now. “Now, now…stop struggling with me, Dee. You know what happens.”

“Fuck off!” she raked him in the eyes but not hard enough to loosen his grip fully, only anger him.

He throttled her hard against a parked car, rapidly blinked his eyes, and watched her eyes start to slow blink, hands desperately groping for anything to hit him with. He wiped his face and saw his own blood from the deep scratch along his brow line from her fingernails.

“Awfully feisty tonight, Dee,” he snarled at her and wiped his hand on his pant leg, breathing heavily through the gap between his lips.

Miles snatched her by her hair and pulled her toward the trunk of the car where he retrieved a roll of duct tape. She glanced at the object in his hands and focused on it just enough to know what it was. She started to panic and tried to run but both feet failed her, sending her face first against the pavement just a few steps from the car. The sound of her heel breaking along with her elbows hitting the pavement were the only out of the ordinary noises above the distant traffic from the street just out of view until her gentle, incoherent sobbing took over while dread set in.

“Stupid, little bitch, you’re not going to mess this up for me,” Miles watched as she struggled to get her knees up underneath of herself to crawl. "She needs to see what I'm doing for her...what I've always done for her!"

Miles used the toe of his boot against her hip, shoving her onto her back while his fingers rooted into his pocket, pulling out a couple of zip ties. Her face had streaks of crimson from her nose and forehead where the pavement had taken pieces of her in the fall. She was crying almost hysterically, her tears only streaking the blood across her skin as it left each wound. Her red hair was not nearly as brilliantly red as the blood was, leaving him nearly dissatisfied with her overall appearance as every little mark stood out like a sore thumb, completely ruining the fantasy. 

Cheapening the thrill.

“Why?” The single word question was incredibly difficult to enunciate as looked up at him, wincing from the pain and the blood in her eyes.

Miles ripped off a strip of the tape and stuck it over her mouth almost hastily before yanking her to her feet, trapping her against the back of the car with the trunk lid still open. He
already had them fashioned into plastic cuffs as he positioned her arms behind her back and fastened them tightly around her small, delicate wrists. The cries behind the tape became fevered as the plastic was nearly digging into her skin, immediately bruising or ripping the skin open in spots. He closed his eyes and listened to the whimpering, taking delight in the pain he was inflicting on her. The moment passed and he carefully lifted her up just enough to get her feet out from under her, sliding her clumsily into the trunk of the car. She could no longer struggle as the drugs in her system were now in full effect, reducing her to a pile of incapable mush—that could feel and hear everything around her.

He took one last look at her while she blinked slowly, shallowly breathing as her energy dropped from fighting the effects of the drug in her system. He was proud of himself as he slowly closed the trunk lid, leaving her helpless in the trunk, unaware completely of what was to come.

Shortly After 1 AM

George Washington University Hospital

Trauma Center

The sterile smell was the first thing that invaded the senses when entering into the level 1 trauma ward followed by the sound of the plethora of machines—the beeps, the air tapping, the high frequency squelches. The energy always made Mulder’s back stiffen while Scully seemed to be incredibly at ease, comfortable even, as she listened to the doctor talk. Mulder looked through the window to Victoria’s hospital room and watched as two nurses were carefully changing a bandage on Victoria’s face. She was still heavily drugged but conscious, eyes wandering around the room, occasionally meeting the glances of each nurse as they spoke to her and smiled softly in her direction. She was receptive to their words and soaked in their energy, radiance in her eyes despite the little punctures in her eyelids from where the staples once were.

“Her injuries were far more extensive than we had anticipated when she arrived—her ribs were broken in 3 places; she had a punctured lung, punctured pancreas, and had several damaged nerve endings. We won’t know the extent of the nerve damage until the healing begins from the surgical repair. The tissue damage around her mouth may never fully heal but we did a full re-construction…she won’t be able to speak for at least two weeks until the musculature reconnects fully,” the first trauma surgeon, Amy Acklin, caught Mulder’s attention but not enough to make him turn around.

“The mere fact that she is alive right now is absolutely miraculous—she lost a lot of blood and the first rib that her attacker broke narrowly missed her aorta. We would be having a significantly different conversation if that had been hit,” the second surgeon, Jonathan Saito, looked over the charts again and shook Scully’s hand before giving her a business card. “If you both will excuse us, Doctor Acklin and I have to finish up the procedure notes on all 10 of Miss McGrath’s surgeries for our board of directors and advisory staff. If you need to ask us further questions please don’t hesitate to ask.”
“Have all of her vitals been stagnant since she came out of the last surgery?” Scully asked, keeping them from turning away from her.

“Strong and stagnant…she has been in and will continue to be in good hands, Agent Scully,” Doctor Acklin nodded at her, continuing. “She will not be able to speak. Her only mode of communication is through tapping, gestures, or writing. She has a pad of paper and has full use of her right hand, minimal use of the left but she can move her fingers and lift the arm into the air. She does need to rest so keep the stress at a minimal.”

“Thank you, both of you,” Mulder shook their hands and nodded at them as he turned around, finally looking at them face to face.

The exchange was completed with a simple nod as both surgeons went down the hallway, leaving Mulder and Scully alone outside of Victoria’s recovery room. They stood at the door and watched for another moment as the nurses made her comfortable and checked her IV a second time.

“I don’t think I’ve ever been this concerned about interviewing a victim, Mulder,” Scully couldn’t keep her eyes off of Victoria; unable to shake the intense level of empathy she was feeling for this girl.

Mulder’s fingers snaked around hers, giving her hand a gentle squeeze, knowing exactly what she needed to hear. “This is our only available shot to help get her a little justice.”

She inhaled a deep, cleansing breath and nodded slowly as she exhaled. “You’re absolutely right.”

Mulder reached for the door handle and pushed the lever down until it clicked and gave way. He pulled it open for her and allowed her to go in first. They were both tentative in their steps toward her but knew that this could be their only real shot at a substantial lead toward finding a suspect. It was driving them to move forward—to get answers.

“Please try not to stress her out, we’ll be right down the hall if you need us,” the two nurses met them at the doorway.

“That’s not our intention at all—we just want to find out who did this to her,” Scully told them. “Thank you, we will.”

They left the room and allowed them to walk into the room all of the way. Scully kept her eyes on Victoria as she came into the slightly warmer space and made eye contact with her. Victoria seemed a little startled at first but her expression softened as she could see them. The true extent of the damage done to Victoria’s face was illuminated as Scully could see what looked like a face guard around her chin area to keep her from moving her mouth beyond a centimeter or two for jaw adjustments. The slightly stiff, breathable material was strapped across the bandaging that held the staples in place beneath them. Scully noticed that Victoria was already writing as they walked up to her bedside. She tapped on the notepad with the edge of the pen and glanced back and forth between them.

Mulder picked up the notepad first and let out an involuntary chuckle as he read it out loud. “I smelled you coming, Clarice.”

The tension in the room all but faded as Scully’s expression softened and Victoria held up her free thumb, eyes smiling at them. She desperately wanted to laugh at her own joke but found a little bit of joy in knowing that it made the FBI laugh.
“It’s good to know that you have a sense of humor in your condition, Doctor Lecter,” Mulder pulled up a second chair next to the bed for Scully to sit on while Scully helped Victoria write on a clean portion of the paper.

_Are the sisters of the holy cross coming back any time soon?_ The words on the paper were beautifully written despite the nerve damage she had sustained as they both read them.

“No not that I know of, why?” Mulder found her sense of humor to be refreshing and he admired that she was keeping her sense of humor up despite the state of her injuries.

She wrote another lengthy sentence down and showed it to them. _They talk too much—like teenaged girls. I’m pretty sure I know how many times they have or haven’t been laid in the last week. I’m injured not deaf._

Mulder let out an audible laugh as he finished her comment, adjusting his expression to a much more business-serious expression. “As much as I’d love to continue discussing the dirty lives of nurses I need to ask you—Do you remember anything?”

They watched as she wrote the word “everything” on the notepad. Mulder sat down next to Scully and nodded softly.

“For the yes or no questions you can give us a thumbs up or down, Victoria, and if it gets to be too much you just write stop and we will, is that ok?” Scully told her as she positioned the tip of the pen at the start of another blank space.

Victoria held up her thumb then brought her hand back to her lap, gripping the bedding just a little, her hand shaking even after being fully at rest.

“Did you see your attacker’s face?” Mulder asked, hoping he’d only see her thumb move but was immediately disappointed as she started to write again, this time a little feverishly.

_I looked right at him but nothing about him was all that remarkable or memorable other than his name tag._

The words on the paper were the harshest dose of reality in that they were likely part of the reason for him finally snapping, sending him into a downward spiral as he found woman after woman to victimize. Mulder nodded gently and Scully made eye contact with Victoria first.

“Was anything about him striking? His hair? Eyes? Smell?” Scully was trying to be specific as she realized that their disappointment was felt as Victoria had little tears forming on the corners of her eyes.

She closed her eyes for a moment and inhaled deeply through her nostrils before writing again, taking the time to recollect anything that she could. She knew that the key to helping them find the man that did this was giving as much information as she could—but the nervousness of knowing that the words “sole survivor” were going to be her description for a while had her on edge, had her worrying.

_He smelled like funeral flowers and a thurible burning too much incense. It made my nostrils burn when he snuck up behind me to drug me. The name tag said Adam. It was weird because the paperwork said a different name. I should’ve called my sister right when I saw it but I didn’t._

“Funeral flowers and burning incense?” Mulder furrowed his brow and made eye contact with her but before he could ask another question she started writing again.
He kept telling me that he’d been watching me for a while but I’ve never seen him before. Said I ruined him and he was going to make sure that no one else could have me.

The words meant something to the killer even though they couldn’t possibly mean anything to Victoria—Scully and Mulder needed to figure out why it was so important.

“Even though it may not seem like a lot, it is—you are our only witness to these crimes and we don’t think this man plans on stopping anytime soon,” Mulder could tell that she was frustrated with herself as he watched the blood pressure monitor spike just a bit, heart rate picking up as well.

Scully knew one question that she wanted to ask but didn’t know how it would come across as she asked it but she took a deep breath and blurted it. “Did he call you anything other than your own name? Like a pet name or someone else’s name?”

Mulder glanced up at her while Victoria wrote, his mouth gaping open, thoroughly impressed with her leap.

Impressed and more turned on than appropriate at this very moment but she caught him completely with his mental pants down.

*He called me Dee. I don’t know what it meant. I don’t know anyone named Dee.*

Scully re-established eye contact with Mulder and raised her eye brows. “How old was that first case?”

“About 18 months, why?” Mulder furrowed his brows and listened as the timer for Victoria’s pain killers sounded, giving the signal that it was about to send another wave of medication through her veins in just under 60 seconds. “We don’t have much time before she’s going to be reading the backs of her eyelids, Scully.”

“I know, I know…Victoria, don’t fight the meds. Rest,” Scully affectionately touched her upper arm and made eye contact with her.

Victoria slow blinked and gave her a thumbs down before Scully looked back at Mulder.

“That went well,” Mulder admired Victoria’s tenacity; there was something spunky about her that stood out from nearly every victim in cases over the years.

“We might be able to find out girls who fit that description with the first name initial of D and find the original object of affection, therefore leading us to—”

“A suspect.”

“Exactly.”

Victoria swallowed painfully and felt the timed round of painkiller drip into her IV as she fought against it, desperately wanting to stay awake. She did her best to jot another sentence down before the medication won the battle, sending her into a deep, necessary sleep.

Mulder picked up the note pad carefully from under her hand and read it aloud, “He’s coming back to finish it…”

Scully didn’t need to say anything as Mulder stood up and went into the hallway, his phone already up to his ear before the door closed behind him. She stood over Victoria’s bedside
and squeezed her hand, seeing bits of herself in this girl—from countless, uncomfortable to recollect portions of her past. She knew that she had gone to the brink and nearly fallen several times and likely looked similar to this a time or two in spite of herself.

“I promise you that we will keep you safe, Victoria, and we will catch this bastard one way or another,” Scully didn’t know if she could hear her at all and she didn’t need to, the words were still true. “Just like I promised that you would survive—I promise we will keep you alive. Your fight through surgery won’t be for nothing.”

She gave her hand another light squeeze and gently rested it back against the notepad before going into the hallway to meet Mulder, who was still on the phone pacing in the hallway.

“…It is absolutely critical that there are posted guards for Victoria, one in the room and one outside of the room, at all times…yes, immediately…we have not had a survivor thus far and the sooner we have full security around our ONLY survivor, the sooner we can dedicate hours to catching this guy,” Mulder hung up the phone and turned toward Scully, who looked a little pale as she carefully closed Victoria’s hospital room door. “Hey, you look a little peeked…you doing ok?”

She didn’t know if it was the place or the time to admit that she needed his arms around her, enveloping her in his reassurance, his strength, but she did. It was something that always brought her out of the dark. Out of the void of frustration, confusion, sadness, depression—anything that felt like it had no end or solution. He always knew how to fix it with the simplest of physicality. An embrace.

His embrace.

She nodded gently, not looking up at him, lost in her thoughts. “Yeah, just thinking.”

Mulder pulled her into his arms, rubbing her lower back in slow, concentric circles until he could feel her exhale against his chest and soften in his arms. Every time and anytime they ran into the darkness, his arms were always there, to comfort, for solace…for strength. He smiled and gave her a gentle peck on the forehead, tilting her head back until he could look her in the eye, coaxing a gentle smirk from her in return.

“Do I know you or do I know you?” Mulder teased her, caressing the back of her neck with one hand while his other smoothed her hair just a little.

“It’s a good thing that you have modesty on your side, Mulder,” Scully started to pull away as she prodded him back, pursing her lips together. “A passable amount of information is all you have.”

They both couldn’t help but think that their behavior was mildly inappropriate but there was something incredibly tawdry and dangerous about doing exactly what you are not supposed to do or expected to do. The intensity had also been building for so long between them over harboring feelings for one another in secret and what it might’ve meant to the other to be honest and be open about it. The electricity that had been building up between them was palpable and at this point, neither felt like they had much control over it at all.

Neither knew if they wanted to anymore.

Mulder pulled her back into his arms and found her mouth, kissing her with such reverence and wanton that had been slowly building all night. It was like he had always known exactly how to kiss her to make her tingle the most and bring her off kilter the most. He breathed her in and kissed her hard enough that her knees buckled under her, pulling them reluctantly apart.
after only a few intense, glorious moments.

“Mulder, not here—not now,” Scully’s eyes were still closed, her mouth still open, lips still trembling.

“I don’t give a flying fuck who sees, Scully,” He brushed her bottom lip with his own, his voice breathy and warm against her skin.

“We are running point on this investigation—we can’t,” Her neck, ears, and cheeks were on fire from the blood rushing to her extremities as she inhaled deep and brought his forehead down to hers.

“I know—I know,” He sighed and sucked in a deep breath.

He didn’t like her rationality in this situation at all. He wanted her to be wild and go head first off of the cliff with him but he knew that she was one hundred percent correct. They had been running for so long and he was tired of running from it. He was tired of running without knowing if her hand would be in his when the journey could end.

It wasn’t what he wanted anymore.

“Did you get a hold of Skinner?” Scully put a little distance between them, crossing her arms to close up her stance just a bit and keep herself from reaching back out for his comfort.

“Yeah, he said he was—”

“On his way with more bad news,” Skinner’s voice managed to not kill what was left of any sexual tension in the hallway as they both spun around to greet him head on.

“And some much needed assistance,” Diana’s voice was both unexpected and completely unnecessary, unwanted even, as she came around from behind him, a smug grin on her face nearly immediately.

You have got to be kidding me. Mulder and Scully both were thinking, for the exact same reason as they caught glances with her. Scully bit down on her tongue and glanced at Mulder, who looked equally as pissed as she felt. If looks could kill—Diana would have been dead twice by now.

“Because we needed that kind of help? Since when do you have any experience in violent crimes?” Scully snipped at her, holding nothing back, especially since that lovely experience with the decontamination procedures. “Or is this more of your usual manipulation of the situation to slide back into The X Files and rip it apart again?”

“This is an X File and last time I checked I was still an asset to the section that I once ran and helped form long ago,” Diana wasn’t even looking at Scully and instead had her eyes on Mulder. “I have no intention of ruining what I helped build.”

“So, you just expect us to just forget about the time that you had us kicked off of the X Files and tried to ruin both of our lives?” Mulder tried not to raise his voice but he couldn’t help it as he could feel her trying to work her usual trickery on him, manipulating him further. “That sounds like a copout, Diana, a horseshit copout.”

“It was just business and you know it,” Diana’s smug tone was bordering on intolerable to even listen to as Scully resisted the urge to shoot her between the eyes in front of all of them.
“Really? Because it seemed a lot like pure shady bullshit from a shady puppet,” Scully couldn’t help herself as the words rolled off of her tongue, her eyes burning with disgust and hatred for her.

“Enough! All of you,” Skinner stepped between them and watched as Scully’s fingers wrapped around Mulder’s hand and she looked up at him with an affection that he had not seen her openly do in front of him. “I asked Diana to lend her skill at pattern analysis because we have six FILLED boxes of evidence on eight victims including Victoria to sift through.”

“Eight? Sir…” Scully turned toward Skinner this time, taking her focus off of Mulder entirely, the shock written on her face, her fingers still clinging to Mulder’s.

“That was my bad news—there’s been another murder,” Skinner’s eyes shot between them. “We have a lot of work to do.”

Chapter End Notes

Songs Mentioned:
"First Cool Hive" - Moby
"The Policy of Truth" - Depeche Mode (lyrics mentioned in chapter)

Shows and Films mentioned (quotes or reference):
Dawson's Creek
Silence of the Lambs
Chapter Summary

Romanticizing his victims, a brutal murderer leaves behind symbols of love.
Note: Seriousness took over -- very little humor here.
Disclaimer: All original X File characters, including Mulder and Scully belong to Chris Carter and FOX Productions, as well as TenThirteen Productions. All others are original and any resemblance or likeness to any real persons are purely coincidental.

Chapter Notes

Warning: This chapter is significantly more graphic than the previous chapters - if you have trigger warnings for blood or gore, proceed carefully.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Industrial District

Abandoned Warehouse

The block was lit up with the swirling red and blue lights of squad cars and a couple of ambulances, absent of sound other than the chatter of officers and FBI making their way in and out of the in progress crime scene. It was sobering and daunting to even fathom what was hiding just beyond the doors of a building that had been abandoned for so long. Scully looked up at the scattered broken windows of the high warehouse building and pushed her door open after the car came to a complete stop. She shifted her feet out of the car and felt the broken pavement touch her heels; the stuttered tapping of them against each other drew her focus to the ground for a moment. She contemplated the degraded material as she stood and pictured their unknown perpetrator dragging an unconscious woman into the building, imagining the action both via her arms or her legs but couldn’t decide what would have been the chosen mode for him. Her eyes followed the scattered drag patterns up to the doorway, replaying the scenario over and over, each time changing the methodology just enough to account for the unknowns. There were too many variables—too many unanswered questions and the motivation was still so unclear.

It was unnerving and infuriating. She wanted to catch this son of a bitch sooner rather than later.

“Scully—you with me?” Mulder’s voice brought her out of her thoughts as he came up beside her and touched her carefully on the elbow.

Scully made eye contact with him and nodded slowly. “I am…my brain is just going everywhere and nowhere at the same time.”

“It’s not really possible to say confused, Scully,” Mulder leaned close and brought his volume down
so that she would be the only one to hear his words. “Welcome to the club.”

Skinner and Diana had already gotten out of a second car just a moment before them and had gotten almost all of the way into the building but were stopped by the beat cop that first responded to the 911 call from a homeless man. The homeless man was off to the side of the door talking to them as Mulder and Scully approached.

“…I ain’t gonna get in trouble for trespassing on this building, am I?” the man rambled, overstating his arm and hand gestures as he spoke, a plain as day southern drawl coming through his vocal intonations. “I come past here two times a week and it hasn’t been unlocked before—I just wanted to come in to get warm. Didn’t take nothin’. Came in and found her hanging like that.”

“No, Mister Peterman, the owner of the building isn’t pressing charges over you entering the building—the lock was broken,” Officer Mitchell was not the least bit bothered by the man’s disposition as he put a hand on his shoulder and guided him away from the doorway just a smidge, an air of familiarity between them, friendliness even.

“Mister Peterman, did you say that the lock was broken when you came to the door?” Skinner followed them off of the stoop, crossing his arms as he spoke.

“Yeah, looked like someone took a pair of bolt cutters to ‘em, lobbed it right off and took a chunk out of the door in the process,” he pointed at the door where Mulder and Scully were now standing. “Musta been a damn expensive pair of bolt cutters to do that kind of damage to a real good lock like that.”

Mulder leaned down and saw that the metal door did have a fairly large gauge in it from where a pair of bolt cutters had sunk into it and pulled back, ripping a two by two gash in the aluminum façade. He knew it had been done in a hurry with very little observation or care for the surrounding material—and took more than one try as he spotted the deep etching into the surface above and below. Scully glanced over at Mister Peterman, who immediately shot her a little wink, refusing to take his eyes off of her until she smiled in return so he could return his attention to the conversation at hand. Scully shook her head, stifled a little bit of a laugh and shifted her weight from heel to heel.

“What’s got you suppressing an obvious belly laugh in the making, Scully?” Mulder knelt down and took a closer look at the remnants of the broken lock on the dirty stoop below.

Scully kept her voice just above a whisper as she stayed upright, sliding her hands into her pockets. “Our suave witness definitely knows how to work a crowd.”

“Should I be worried?” Mulder elbowed her knee before standing upright.

Scully shrugged her shoulders and made a face at him, half batting her eyelashes at him and glancing upward. “Well, I don’t know, he does have an accent, Mulder.”

“Did you touch anything else other than the door and the broken lock, Mister Peterman?” Diana refused to make eye contact with Scully as she could hear a little bit of their witty little banter and instead smiled at Mulder despite asking a question of a witness.

“I touched that poor lil dead girl’s neck to see if she had a pulse—I used to watch that Rescue 911 shit back in the day, I knew I had to check,” his innocence and honesty was in complete opposition to his exterior ragged appearance—the dirty clothing, the various holes and rips in each layer of fabric, and the little bit of chewing tobacco oozing from the corner of his lip.
Officer Mitchell couldn’t help but smile at the unintentional humor in his appropriate gesture and action. “You did the right thing, Mister Peterman, but what have I told you about abandoned warehouses? They still have owners and those owners aren’t always so willing to look past you sleeping inside their buildings at all hours of the night.”

“A man’s gotta do what a man’s gotta do, Mitchell, and when a man’s testicles are freezing off, a man’s gonna find a little relief,” Mister Peterman shrugged his shoulders as he went into full rant mode.

Diana cringed at the mental image but not so obvious that anyone but Mulder and Scully took notice of her incredibly unneeded reaction to a homeless person. She was a little preoccupied with his odor and didn’t seem to be the taking note of the fact that he had given them a lot more information than simply discovering a body and a broken door lock. He had uncovered a definitive link to an industry—and access to highly specialized tools. Her terribly inconvenient character flaws were precisely why Mulder and Scully didn’t have time to waste acknowledging her actual presence unless she chose to speak rationally for once.

“Can’t say that I wouldn’t do the same—a man’s testicles are sacred, Officer Mitchell,” Mulder quipped before snapping on a set of rubber gloves then pushing the door open enough for Scully to maneuver inside.

“Mack, get Mister Peterman a room for a couple of days so he can get food in his belly and some warmth as a thank you for his good deed,” Officer Mitchell caught the attention of one of the other officers near a squad car before looking back at Mister Peterman. “As for you…we may have to ask you some more questions so you stick around and enjoy some creature comforts for a while.”

“You betcha—I’ll stay off them porno networks just for you since I know this is probably coming outta your own paycheck, Mitchell,” Mister Peterman winked and walked off with Mack toward a car.

Inside, Scully and Mulder had left the remnants of humor outside the warehouse and were witnessing one of the most horrifying crime scenes of their careers. The hollow tapping of their shoes against the dampened cement echoed throughout the gutted building, the remnants of what once was only identified by the almost skeletal remains of equipment running along the walls and built down from the ceiling via pulleys and chain sliding systems. It had once been a dedicated machinist shop of some kind that both repaired and built new parts to be shipped out or installed into heavy equipment, an industry that once had been prominent through the area that had now dwindled down to nearly nothing minus a few franchised operations.

It smelled of old diesel fuel, dust, and newly, death thanks to their perp.

Skinner had requested that nothing be disturbed or touched, minus assessing an estimation of their victim’s time of death prior to autopsy, so that they could take note of everything in case something had perhaps gone amiss so they could find a flaw in their unidentified suspect’s plans and actions—and nothing could fully prepare them for exactly what they were about to face as they looked upon the body, hanging by her wrists from a center propped pulley in the middle of the room, fully on display underneath the stark, incandescent light above from the few remaining hanging fixtures.

“Jesus Christ,” Skinner couldn’t help himself but utter the phrase as the sight of her caught him completely off guard.

He had expected the worst but his worst was not even close to the actuality. Skinner
wasn’t exactly a slouch when it came to violence after the horrors of Vietnam but horror of this level was inching close to something that could easily bring on a major bout of PTSD. This was beyond that reality. Scully, while internally horrified, kept her cool and mentally noted that the killer had used rope to suspend this victim by her wrists, and only left enough slack that her toes were the only part of her that could touch the floor at all. Their victim was barely dressed in a pair of panties and a partially shredded bra and the only way of recognizing the delicate fabric was through the blood soaked sections and around the flayed open sections of flesh—between each mutilated part of her. Scully knew there would be blood and white peaks of bone and musculature peeking between flaps of skin but the killer had taken it a step further by wrapping his victim’s limbs with barbed wire, piercing holes in the flesh that he hadn’t desecrated with a blade.

Scully took note of the absence of the more delicate action that had been executed on Victoria and the previous victims as the barbed wire had sunk considerably deeper into this victim’s flesh than the others and was considerably more tightly wound around each body part. The barbed wire cascaded down from the pulley like vines, wrapped around metal, wood, rope, flesh and bone. It was hard not to imagine the excruciating level of pain that was endured prior to death—it was hard not to feel it rattle to her core as she visually examined the lines and patterns. She followed the curvature of the body down to the floor and noticed the tiny drag pattern from where her toes had managed to touch as she swayed back and forth during her assumingly lengthy torture. There was one element that had her mystified, though, and that was absence of spatter and blood patterning other than that.

Their killer was displaying his manifesto like a trophy he was proud of and there was no denying that his methodology was evolving.

“Some of these stabs and slices look days old, Scully,” Mulder was in front of their victim, just shy of face to face with her but his focus was on her midsection, where a half a dozen stab wounds and just as many sliced open sections of her skin were flayed open, displaying the muscle beneath.

Scully procured a pair of tweezers from one of the evidence collection kits that the team had left out and carefully pressed along one of the longest opening, taking note of the absence of flowers this time. “One of his rituals has been augmented just slightly.”

“No petals in the wound tracks?” Mulder held out a swab for her to test a spot that she was precariously holding open with the tweezers.

“Just the thorns,” She carefully pulled one of the thorns out and placed it into the baggie before swabbing the same area.

Mulder took out a swab, baggie, and collection shield from one of the evidence kits and carefully swabbed a section of the victim’s hair, hoping that maybe the dirt and mud caked to the subtly coppery locks could help them find out where she was prior to the building. He was careful yet steady in his motions as he collected three of them and put them into a baggie, securing them into his jacket pocket.

*He wanted you to suffer.* Scully pontificated as she looked up at the girl’s mangled face, a face that only she and Mulder had taken a moment to look upon—for Scully, it was a necessity for Victoria.

Scully adjusted her gloves before lightly pressing her fingers along the curvature of the dislocated shoulders of the victim. “Has there been a pre-examination time of death from the coroner obtained yet?”
“Less than two hours…not more than an hour,” Skinner thumbed through a small notepad before returning to his notations.

“I can see the smoke signals from here, Scully, what’s your brain working on?” Mulder came up beside her and looked at the strange notching on the shoulders just above Scully’s thumbs.

Scully glanced at him, voice a little grave and almost in disbelief. “Someone tried to lift her into the air post mortem and push her sockets back in but they didn’t re-connect and she dropped back down, breaking the shoulder in a second spot.”

“No spatter,” Mulder pointed at the floor, continuing as he walked a circle around her. “Maybe he lifted her up to remove the drop cloth and she’s too slippery to hold onto? Maybe he had help?”

Scully used her right hand index finger to lift the victim’s head up just slightly, using her left hand to steady the top of her head, so the light could catch it and the extent of her torture became fully illuminated as the whites and irises of her eyes stared back at Scully through slits in the lids that had been stapled to her eyebrows. The trajectory followed downward to her mouth that had been slit from ear to ear as if to pay homage to the Black Dahlia murder but this killer had made a makeshift gag out of barbed wire.

“Is that barbed wire?” Diana’s voice broke Scully’s concentration completely, causing her to furrow her eyebrows and shoot a sideways glance without moving from her stance.

“Yes, brand new barbed wire,” Scully rolled her eyes at Diana’s redundant question as she carefully let their victim’s head come forward again enough to let go of her. “He stuffed something into her mouth that I’ll need to take a closer look at after I examine her—it looks shiny.”

Where is that expert in patterning at? Because I’m pretty sure you’re absolutely useless as a hemorrhoid. Scully couldn’t help but think to herself as she looked around the center of the room.

“Mulder, how long ago do you think these slash patterns were made?” Scully carefully pulled their victim’s knee toward her, exposing the inner thigh to him, being especially careful not to tear the skin further from the barbed wire wrapped around her limbs.

“Couple of days?” Mulder didn’t know if it was a trick question as he saw the clotting on that wound but not on others.

Scully nodded and carefully let the victim’s knees touch again. “This victim has been tortured for at least two days, possibly three…she was definitely taken considerably earlier than Victoria.”

“Three days? That doesn’t fit the timeline,” Skinner continued. “That would make her closer to the—“

“Taken and intended on being the fourth victim, not the eighth,” Mulder made eye contact with Scully again, realizing that there was a distinct, almost definite possibility that the killer was picking women at random to not only torture and kill but some of them were being kept for days prior to their death.

“Are you certain this is the same guy? He hasn’t kept any of his other victims for multiple days has he?” It was as if Diana had not bothered to read any of the case file prior to offering up her assistance as Scully rolled her eyes just out of view of her.
“The very first victim had been tortured for multiple days, on the upwards of five full days—this guy could be simply looking for opportunity and isn’t able to take every victim for lengthy periods of time,” Mulder crossed his arms, the frustration visible on his face. “It’s not a pattern; it’s out of convenience…opportunity.”

“Need,” Scully added, without thinking of her word usage.

“Can you really be that certain?” It was difficult not to take her opposition as purpose and with intent but she sounded like someone who didn’t have a willing bone in her body to even think outside of her comfort zone.

“Agent Fowley, while I am sure you are simply attempting to remain objective, you clearly haven’t been examining enough of the patterns of this case if that is the question you logically lead to,” Scully blinked, desperately gathering her wits. “There are details about this case that the public has no knowledge of that have remained unchanged throughout this case…this isn’t a copycat or a killer operating within a similar set of parameters or aim. This is the same perpetrator. There is no shadow of a doubt of that fact and the evidence in front of you should logically, methodically, and systematically lead to that fact. Do you have any pertinent curiosities to inquire about or are you finished railroading the investigation?”

Diana stood silent and an almost devilish grin appeared on her lips despite being bested in front of Mulder and Skinner. It was clearly digging away at her pride but Scully could not have cared less as she broke eye contact to resume the task at hand.

*Check mate, bitch.* Scully knew she had delivered the left hook.

Scully turned around followed the grid, taking note of a strange wear pattern on the floor in the corner. She knelt down, tilted her head to one side and noticed that there were drag patterns leading to and way from the spot as well as shifting spots in the dust underneath of a section of stairs that lead up to an old foreman’s station. She stood, elongating her stance as she slowly followed the drag marks to the spot slowly toward the stairs, eyes never leaving the drag patterning, her shoes carefully touching toe to heel, minimizing any dust kick up in her wake.

“Did the victim have any identification on her?” Mulder crossed his arms and watched Scully with such fascination of her silent investigatory methodology, addressing Skinner.

“None but her prints are being run through the missing person’s database—hoping to get a match on her since our timeline has been extended,” Skinner shook his head and turned toward the door. “In fact, I’m going to go expedite that database search.”

Diana stayed behind as Skinner went back outside to the mobile command unit where a computer was running through identifier after identifier. Mulder could see him through the door’s opening pointing at the screen then at a group of blue coats, who immediately went toward the coroner’s van. They didn’t have much time to finish, it seemed, as Skinner was readying the coroner’s team for prepping the removal of the body.

“Talk to me, Scully,” Mulder stood about ten feet away and looked upward, eyes examining the interior workings of the pulley system above their heads, taking note of each divot and dive in the mechanism.

“We have a problem, Mulder,” Scully had crouched down somewhat precariously and was hovering next to a spot with a large, makeshift hook hanging from the stairs above.

“What do you mean?” Mulder looked over at her as the crews walked into the space near
Diana and the victim, pushing a gurney into position for transport.

Scully wiped the tip of the hook with her rubber gloves and showed Mulder her now bloody fingertips. “She wasn’t alone.”

“Could’ve been hers,” Mulder indicated the victim hanging but knew that he didn’t even halfway agree with that ideology.

“Mulder, there would be a trail of blood or at least drops of it between here and there, there isn’t anything leading from here to there,” Scully felt along the barbed wire very carefully and her eyes widened. “There is more red hair over here and it isn’t her shade of crimson.”

_Aren’t you just a surprise, Agent Scully?_ Mulder still wasn’t used to listening to words similar to his own slip so effortlessly from Scully’s lips but the venture wasn’t wasted on him in the slightest as he let the words turn over in his mind.

“Starting to sound like a certain basement dwelling crackpot that everyone refers to as Spooky,” Mulder couldn’t help himself as he smiled over at her.

She winked at him. “I must be inhaling way too much of that basement air—rotting away what is left of my sanity.”

The three men from the coroner’s office were already carefully at work lifting the body into the air to unfasten the victim from the unpleasant knot that the killer had carefully constructed for them. It was a mess, and almost a snag of twisted up barbed wire and rope that had very little give left behind it. Mulder retrieved a little baggie and swab for Scully and stopped in his tracks heading back to her as he heard a metallic groaning and shifting of metal against wood above him followed by distinct wooden popping. Both of their eyes darted toward the ceiling, watching in terror as two pulleys shook and lurched while the men attempted to take the body off of the pulley hook as it swayed gently with each little movement.

“Mulder…” Scully’s eyes were locked on the trembling pulley above the victim’s body as she watched a plume of dust billow outward from each mechanism.

“Wait! Stop moving!” Mulder shouted toward the men hoisting up the victim’s body, not knowing exactly what their psychotic perpetrator had rigged up or what the domino effect might be in the resulting reaction.

It was too late for warning.

The men stood perfectly still but the mechanism completely snapped above their heads, sending three pulleys flying toward each other then into outwards directions, all but one toward Scully. Mulder had already been staring at the carefully designed pulleys to know that something was off and even if his theory was wrong, he was not going to risk it.

He was not going to risk her.

Mulder leaped toward Scully in a desperate attempt to shield her, throwing his entire body over hers, hands cradling the back of her head as they both landed awkwardly against the cement flooring, prepping for the impact from above. He could feel his heart up in his throat as the sound above him nearly sent him into a full panic. A large, metal rod spun end over end and went through the makeshift cage where Scully had been crouching, spearing a hole into the wall behind it. A second, significantly larger metal rod was fastened at both ends to a rope and was spinning until it smacked against the stairwell and ricocheted off, narrowly missing Mulder and Scully in a
heap on the floor. The second rod, before nearly coming to a full stoppage of motion, brought down three light fixtures in its wake, sending incandescent shards flying across the floor and over the top of Mulder and Scully. The men, still holding onto their victim, had been more than the expected level of brave as they looked at each other then around the room.

“What the fuck was that?” Mack, the tallest of the three coroner’s employees, muttered as he took a deep breath and started to assess the damage to the body, if any.

“Is everyone alright?” Diana had ducked down behind the gurney, completely isolating herself from the melee as the silence in the room returned minus the gentle squeaks of the lights swinging above.

“Nearly needed to go get myself a new set of drawers,” James, who was only a couple of inches shorter than Mack but weighed 50 or 60 pounds less than him, tried to find the humor in the situation and looked over at Mulder and Scully, who had just started to maneuver around near the stairs. “You two alright over there?!”

Mulder had bits of busted bulb all over his back as he started to push himself up enough to see Scully’s face. “You ok?”

“Yeah, Mulder, I’m ok,” Scully nodded and tilted her head toward the stairs for a moment. “Looks like I almost wasn’t.”

Mack had adjusted his grip on the victim since he was able to elevate the most weight without much effort while James and Allen carefully maneuvered her arms until they could see daylight between her flesh and the hook she had been carefully suspended from. Their end goal was within their grasp as they steadied their stance and bent at the knees to finalize their actions. They lifted her up and forward sending the remnants of the hook to the floor with a loud, resounding thud that shook the cement underneath of their feet followed by the heavy slap of the barbed wire coil as it rolled into itself on the floor as it came down from above. They all looked up at the mechanism and realized that the pulley rigging would’ve freed their victim entirely with this much of a shift in momentum.

“Agent Mulder, Agent Scully…You might want to take a look at this,” Allen was the youngest of the men and most in shape of the three men finally spoke, his voice breaking through the tension and anxiety in the air.

Mulder got to his feet first and helped Scully to hers, both checking each other for remnants of glass or any other debris that had flung down around them. Mulder affectionately ran his fingers through Scully’s hair, wiping away a bit of the dust from her cheek and hairline in the process. Diana scoffed almost audibly as she turned her head just in time to see Mulder tucking a bit of Scully’s hair behind her ear. Her interest in Mulder was still incredibly apparent and her possessive nature was overflowing as she gritted her teeth before half stomping off toward the front door. Mulder and Scully watched as she walked off in a bit of a huff, neither of them concerned over her attitude for similar reasoning. She had no actual claim on Mulder’s affections —she had burned what was left of the bridge to Mulder a while before this case had even begun, despite any conclusion that had been previously drawn by Scully.

Mulder turned his attention to Mack, James, and Allen, and took a couple of steps toward them, with Scully a step or two behind him. “What did you find?”

“I don’t know if this helps the case or not but when we lifted her body up and got the pulley to do what it just did, the moment it sent those two rods flying, it could’ve freed her and she would’ve been able to run quite easily minus her injuries,” Mack told them while Allen snipped the
barbed wire at the victim’s finger tips to fully free her from the start of the snag, leaving the rest in a heap on the floor. “I’m sure that you’d want that in your case file.”

Mulder and Scully watched as James and Allen placed the body carefully into the body bag and pulled the zipper closed, each little click sending a shiver down Mulder’s back. Her death was the definition of torture and both of them knew that the extent of their perpetrator’s monstrous behavior had only tapped the surface.

It was like the start of an oncoming hurricane and the devastation had not even begun to unfold in front of them.

“It helps, thank you—I know this is not exactly the kind of action that you all are usually involved in but understand that this kind of information could be what gives us the edge to solve this case,” Mulder nodded and acknowledged Allen and James, who seemed gently relieved that they might’ve made a discovery that could assist in the investigation.

“We just aren’t usually ok with knowing that we could’ve been part of a crime scene—as in the dead bodies,” Mack continued, crossing his arms. “As long as we’re ok and the information we provided has helped in any way, that’s good enough for our department.”

“Signing up for danger on a daily basis isn’t really what we had in mind when we trained for our jobs,” James placed the secure belt across the top of the body bag as he continued to speak. “It could’ve been worse, though.”

“We do appreciate the hard work and again, completely understand the discomfort that any of this may have caused. In the meantime, go ahead and get the victim transported to the examiner’s office to be fully processed and if you find anything external between now and then, please get that information over to Skinner,” Scully addressed them, her eyes half focusing on the space that the metal rod had nearly annihilated a few moments earlier.

“Absolutely and we will,” James nodded in her direction as he released the wheels on the gurney.

Scully turned her body completely toward that same area again and looked at the spot where she had found the blood and hair on the makeshift hook, immediately taking note that the rod was straight through the center section. Mack, James, and Allen carefully wheeled the gurney out the door toward the coroner’s van, leaving them alone in the space. Scully wasn’t satisfied with the scene as it had unfolded as she knelt down again, carefully pressing her knees against the dust and glass covered ground.

“Scully, what are you doing?” Mulder watched as she started to use her gloved hand to pull what looked like a metallic pin from a section of the barbed wire.

Scully half grunted as she twisted the metal between her fingertips, her grip failing her. “Testing a theory, Mulder.”

Mulder took a few steps toward her until he was almost all of the way against the stairwell while he could hear Scully wrenching on the pin until the sound of metal on metal grinding grated on his ears. Mulder had his eyes on the ceiling but Scully did not as she carefully pulled the final release and watched the barbed wire drop to the floor in a heap like a coiled snake. Scully carefully slid backwards and pulled the barbed wire with her, following the bits of flesh and blood along the sections that had wound around itself as it twisted together around the center mechanism. Her thoughts were already racing over the possibilities surrounding this incredibly elaborate and demented mouse trap—but one kept creeping in and had become the only real
possibility in her mind.

“Oh, my God,” Scully looked up at Mulder from her half crouched position, the vomit rising in her stomach at the thought that had finally manifested into something that reality could grasp.

“Scully?” Mulder could only see part of the barbed wire but knew by the tone in her voice that it was not good as she stood upright.

“This is going to sound crazy and I can’t believe I’m even entertaining the thought but all of this was meticulously designed and fabricated with only one goal in mind for an outcome,” Scully continued, horror written on her face, “The killer made them choose who was going to die first.”

Chapter End Notes

Feedback and kudos are always appreciated and welcomed - this has been a tough chapter to write. :) I truly hope you enjoy.
Chapter Summary

Summary: Romanticizing his victims, a brutal murderer leaves behind symbols of love.

Post “Agua Mala” (Season 6 with mentions of “Rain King”, “Two Fathers”, and “One Son” Briefly and only for context purposes)

Chapter Summary: Exhaustion breeds bravery

Disclaimer: Mulder, Scully, Skinner, and Diana Fowley belong respectively to Chris Carter, FOX Productions, and TenThirteen Productions. All other characters are original and any likeness to real life persons (both by characteristic and name) are purely coincidental as well as unintended.

Chapter Notes

Note: Use of puns and witty comebacks were both necessary and wanted throughout this process – practicing balance between the extremes and humor has given a much-needed lift to the truly dark places that have been explored in the most recent chapters (and those dark places will be continuing for a bit so bear with me). Half gore, half "finally"...you will understand.

This may have a trigger warning for anyone who has ever been watched without consent -- while the mention is BRIEF it is there.

Please enjoy.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Lakeview Drive (Near Lake Barcroft)

Falls Church, Virginia

“Wakey, wakey, Dee,” Miles’s voice was an unwelcomed break in the eerie level of silence in the cold, dimly lit space.

The lights in the room were only in two spots and were reminiscent of old lights from the inside of a barn that hung down and swung occasionally back and forth with the introduction of a wind or breeze into the room. The light over her was occasionally flickering from needing to be replaced and had been auto dimming itself as the filament inside was beginning to die. The only sounds were the gentle hum of electronics and the buzz of the dying filament along with Diana’s gentle, yet labored breathing. In the distance the sounds of lake water branching off into a nearby stream could be heard, but only far into the distance. Miles clapped his hands just a few inches
from Diana’s head and watched as she barely flinched in response. He dragged his foot across one of her open wounds and let out a low, disappointed sigh at her lack of bodily response. He glared hard at her and retrieved a bucket that he had carried down the stairs, the sound of water and ice sloshing back and forth inside of it with every step he took.

“I do not like to be ignored, Dee,” Miles lifted the bucket and poured the ice water over the top of Diana’s head, instantly coaxing a scream from behind the duct tape across her lips.

She struggled against her bindings and gagged as the water went into her nostrils then into her throat, choking her. The air was thin and damp around her as she clamped her eyes shut, refusing to look upon her assailant for as long as she could get away with. He wasn’t the same guy that had approached her at the bar—he was far more sinister and calculating, the reaches of his violent tendencies had only begun to be explored.

He hovered over her and pulled the ropes that had been half coiled and tight tightly around her wrists and down her arms, carefully tightening the intricate trap he had put her in. The ropes twisted around her wrists, arms, and shoulders as he pulled them backwards, putting pressure on her arms until he could hear her shoulders pop back into place against the wooden support beam that he had secured her against. She went rigid, the whimpers between each gag and desperate gasp for air behind the tape were loud but quick, followed by ragged, staggered breaths as she desperately tried to combat against the urge to cry. He watched her eyes roll back into her head as she fought the pain, her nostrils flaring as she took each labored, defenseless breath.

Watching her struggle was thrilling and exciting—he wanted more.

He let go of her and took a step back, watching as her head bobbed to each side and unintentionally put strain on the barbed wire neck harness he had created for her, pushing the barbs into each wound, forcing them open. Her breathing patterns began to even out and her vision returned to normal but the pain remained as she bit down on the inside of her lip from behind the tape. Diana stared at her lap and forced air out of her nose, hoping the water would come up with it but she wasn’t entirely successful as she felt the heaviness settle into her lungs, the coughing desperate behind the tape as some of the water would come up into her mouth with nowhere to go. It hadn’t been long since the drugs had worn off and the nightmare had continued to replay in her head as Diana could still see the other young woman, whom he had been torturing before kidnapping Diana, hanging from the center of the warehouse. It wasn’t supposed to be real.

None of this was supposed to be real but it was painfully so as each one of her cuts and slashes were stinging and dripping with blood in haphazard patterns down her limbs.

“You and that bitch nearly ruined all of my fun—almost got out of the little devices I made just for you,” Miles brushed her wet hair out of her face and yanked her head back by her hair, putting strain on the little gashes that the barbed wire had left along her upper chest and neck, delighting as the blood oozed out from each little wound. “You made me rush all of my plans and I hate being rushed.”

He pulled the tape off of her mouth in a quick rip and watched as she gagged and coughed up as much water as her body would allow followed by the gasp for air as though she had been held under water for longer than necessary. She looked down at the section of flesh above her knees and held back the vomit as she watched her muscles twitch through her open gashes, blood still trickling down the sides with every breath that she took, and every little flinch she made whether it was voluntary or not. She had never prayed for death more in her life more than she was at that very moment as the smell of lake water and blood invaded her senses and made the vomit rise in her belly.
“You’re a fucking monster,” Her voice cracked as she spat water toward him, desperately hoping to get any of it on him in the process, and tried to pull her knees up toward her chest.

Miles smirked at her and stood completely upright; admiring each cut and slash he had made, replaying when he made them over in his head, letting his mind linger on the sounds of muffled screams and picturing the blood spill out of each wound another time to momentarily curb his appetite for torture. He let his eyes linger over her for another moment more before heading to a corner, where a large, early model CD player was set up with a couple of older, beat up speakers attached to it. The basement itself was a large, open space with three support posts that were likely load bearing and hinted at the possibility of an inevitable wall to separate the space in the basement into two individual rooms or more. Miles had positioned himself just far enough away that the 2nd light in the room was just overhead and was cascading down his back, enhancing all of the shadows and making his figure that much more menacing and imposing. He was exactly what she needed to fear, in every sense of the word. He glanced over at her before thumbing through the selection on the player, the buttons clicking under his finger with each passing second. He was demented and took great delight in tormenting her. It wasn’t simply that he had implicit power over her but that he could take away her dignity, her choice in nearly everything.

“Do you like games, Dee?” Miles had one of his hands in his pocket while the other was still pressing through the forward selection on the stereo.

Diana didn’t want to answer him but she knew if she didn’t that making him wait would prove to be more trouble than it was worth as her voice was meek, soft, and tentative as she spoke. “No, I don’t.”

“I love games—strategy, brain, puzzle, all of them,” Miles took his hand off of the player and slipped his hand into his pocket, where he retrieved a pair of tight, almost rubberlike gloves. “Do you want to know what kind of game I’m going to play with you, Dee?”

“Please, just leave me alone—I promise if you let me go now I won’t tell anyone how I got hurt like this or about the other girl. It’ll be our secret,” Diana was grasping at straws, the tears silently falling down her cheeks as she heard the sound of the material rubbing against his skin. “That’s a lovers game, Dee, and we’re not lovers,” Miles tightened the Velcro fasteners around his wrists and wriggled his fingers a few times to test his mobility. “Don’t make me ask you again.”

“Tell me then, what kind of game are you going to play?” Diana was already quietly strategizing any possible escape, even if it meant dislocating more of her bones in order to do so, she wanted out.

“We are going to play a messenger game, Dee, but you have to be quiet until I tell you it’s time for everyone to receive the message or you ruin the game,” Miles had his back to her, the tone of his voice changing as he turned the volume adjuster to the right, elevating the level while the silence hung in the air for another moment.

He pressed the play button and stood motionless as he waited for the sound, sending a shiver down her back as she stared at his back with frightened anticipation. The song was assaulting as it began to play, the melancholy echo of the background music was incredibly loud and sent a vibration throughout the flooring underneath of her. She already knew what the song meant; she’d heard it before and witnessed what he did when he played it. She struggled against her bindings, pulling at her wrists, praying that something would snap apart just enough to create a little give for her fingers to wriggle free.
So I heard you found somebody else
And at first I thought it was a lie
I took all my things that make sounds
The rest I can do without

He was singing along with the lyrics while Diana struggled, her grunts and half
whimpers nearly a non-factor against the loudness of the music and his off key, off beat crooning.
It wasn’t simply that she knew that her death was all but certain but that the continued torture was
more than she could fathom or bear as she pulled hard against the ropes, half choking herself out in
the process, the barbed wires digging further into her neck and clavicle with every tug and shift of
her weight. The sound of her choking muffled nearly entirely by the music. She wanted it to end in
the worst way as the room went fuzzy while she started to slip into unconsciousness.

“No, no, no, no, not like that, Dee,” Miles turned around and removed only the barbed
wire to prevent her from not only choking herself to death but severing an artery to put a stop to his
fun sooner than he had wanted. “You’ll ruin it again!”

He straddled her knees, pressing them together and watched as her exposed thigh muscles
violently twitched from touching the exposed barbed wire he had just taken from Diana’s neck. He
smiled and flashed his teeth at her while the song continued to play. She was in tears but they were
silently falling as she stared through him, desperately trying to imagine being home, being held by
her mother—anything but this.

I’m looking through you while you’re looking through your phone
And then leaving with somebody else
No, I don’t want your body
But I’m picturing your body with somebody else

The words flicked a switch in him as he slid a hunting knife blade along the curvature of
her collarbone, following the hollow of her neck up until it rested against the left side of her jaw.
Diana closed her eyes, clamping them shut with such fervor that she forced out several tears in the
process as the blade finally rested against the space between her lips where the curve met cheek.

“No screaming, Dee, or I’ll have to make sure I take my time with this,” Miles was
grinning like a Cheshire cat as he looked down at her, admiring the sight of the knife’s blade
perched at the corner of her mouth.

The wait was agonizing as she could taste the metallic tip of the blade that was halfway
touching her teeth, narrowly shy of slicing into the side of her tongue. Her nostrils flared again as
she felt his free hand secure her chin, trapping her from moving. She almost wanted him to end it
all and kill her quickly but her hopes were fleeting and meaningless as he held the knife still,
delighting in the agony she was under. He sneered at her again, bearing his teeth and sliding his
tongue along the space between his upper lip and front teeth, before finally giving the partially
serrated blade a generous tug in an outward motion while also pushing it against her flesh, creating
a considerably wider opening on one side of her face, mocking an exaggerated half grin.

She was shockingly silent for the longest of moments as her flesh was separated by the
blade, the sounds of her muscle and skin being sliced open by the sharpened knife blade were the
only sounds that he heard directly following the first cut of the blade. The blood came first as the
spatter went everywhere, including all over the front of his jacket, followed by the loud, ear drum
shattering scream that resonated from deep within Diana’s lungs. Miles slowed his movements
with the blade to a crawl as she refused to stop her screams from behind his violent slicing,
stopping only to switch to the other side of her mouth after the serrated edge pushed against her jaw
hinge, nearly severing it completely. He had promised her that her would not be quick if she made
any noise knowing full well that no one could endure that kind of pain without screaming and fully
intended on making her last breaths on this Earth more horrific than she could have possibly
imagined.

She was made to suffer.

She was made to regret.

She was made for torment.

1:30 AM

Medical Examiner’s Office – Morgue Level

Mulder would never get used to the smell of formaldehyde and rotting flesh, but
something told him that he needed to bear witness to this examination as he watched Scully’s
methodical autopsy from start to finish as though it were a complete blur. He focused on her every
move, the way in which each maneuver, each slice of the scalpel, each whirl of the saw, were all
painstaking, deliberate, and careful. Meaningful. Almost poetic. She spoke into the recorder above
her head after each organ’s careful weight was calculated, notating their color and texture, contents
when necessary. He watched as her eyebrows furrowed and relaxed whenever something out of the
ordinary caught her attention, each time being verbally noted on the recorder. There was something
incredible about watching her unfurl each part of this victim, break everything down to the
minutest of details and put it all back together like the most detailed of puzzles—with precision and
delicate care that was unique to Scully.

Scully addressed the detail that had been nagging at her since seeing a small glimpse of
it peeking out from behind their victim’s lips and the barbed wire gag that the killer had
constructed for her. She carefully clipped each shiny section of barbed wire and peeled it back,
inch by inch, until the skin was finally free of the wiring. Scully slipped each section of barbed
wire into a large evidence bag and placed it with her growing stack of bags to be collected before turning toward her victim again. Scully pulled the victim’s jaw in a downward direction until her teeth created a large enough separation to slide a large pair of tweezers past her perfect teeth to retrieve the object that had been lodged at the back of her throat. Scully gripped the bobble with the tweezers and carefully pulled toward her, the sound of the chain rolling up and out of their victim’s larynx was almost hollow as it created a low pop in shallow succession, causing the throat muscles to involuntarily spasm in response. It was reminisce of gagging and Mulder couldn’t shake the sound as he swallowed hard, hiding the urge to vomit the coffee that he drank earlier.

This was not his forte, nor would it ever be.

“You ok over there, Mulder?” Scully looked at him from behind her plastic goggles as she heard his backside hit a rolling table just enough to make the wheel squeak.

“Spectacular – nothing like a little post mortem gag reflex in the morning,” Mulder was pale but not without his sense of humor as he involuntarily coughed into his jacket, clearing his throat.

Scully took the necklace to the sink to carefully run it under the water, cleaning off the blood and throat contents that had collected on the silver finish of the chain and the almost bronze finish of the locket. “Mulder, you don’t have to hang out in here, I know how you feel about autopsies and the recordings are just as good as the real thing.”

“That statement sounds like the advertisement for a sex toy, Scully,” Mulder came up beside her and poked her gently in the side, peeking at the object in her hands. “What did you find?”

“Remember when I pointed out that she had something metallic in her mouth? This is what she had nearly lodged all of the way at the back of her throat,” Scully used the tip of an unused scalpel to press the gap between the metal apart to open the locket, revealing the image beneath. “Bingo.”

“Interesting little find, Doctor Scully,” Mulder pulled on a pair of gloves and carefully took the locket from her while she went to the body to finish sewing up the wounds on her face.

The image inside of the locket was that of Diana, the unfound victim, and was from happier times as her bright, brilliant smile would easily have captivated any man careful enough to take notice of her. The inscription on the blank interior read “to my sweet Diana, with love, always, Mom”. Mulder and Scully both couldn’t help but conclude that the object of their unknown perpetrator’s affections may have been the phone in this picture. Mulder turned toward Scully as she was finishing the last of the stiches and marveled for the second time since the autopsy had begun as he looked upon the face of a recognizable woman, one that had clearly undergone hellacious torture prior to her death—but had one moment of solace after in being made whole again.

“You’re a miracle worker, Scully,” Mulder couldn’t help but say as he reached up and pressed the stop button on the recorder after she had marked the end with her identification number and name.

“If we can identify her, her family will want to be able to bury her and I couldn’t leave her face like that for a distraught mother to see,” Scully smiled at his compliment while she pulled the white, plastic sheet up and over her, carefully covering her face, concealing her from the world.

It was a consolation at least in death that she was handled with care, Scully wanted to
“Max, that smile better mean you have news we can use,” Scully pulled off her safety goggles and unbuttoned the white medical coat to shift the bodily fluid mess away from her midsection.

Mulder carefully placed the necklace into an evidence bag and removed his gloved as well, turning around just in time to get his hand shook by Max Belle, one of the technical assistants in the FBI’s advanced forensics division. Max was a passionate about science kind of guy, more so than Scully on most days but he lacked her street ability, wearing his lack of field work almost like a badge across his chest, proudly on display. He was skinny and a couple of inches shorter than Mulder to compensate for his thinner build. Mulder didn’t get it but all of these forensics boys had a teenaged level crush on Scully and practically drooled on her every chance that they got but all it earned them was an “atta boy” sort of kudos, a handshake at best, despite their best efforts to flatter her.

She didn’t have eyes for any of them—to the benefit of Mulder.

“I have a list of finds but it looks like you have a present for me?” Max smiled at them both, his freshly whitened teeth almost too perfectly straight for both of their tastes.

“Need this run for particulates, DNA, and facial recognition on the image inside of the locket—we need to find out who the girl is in the photo,” Mulder handed him the evidence bag and marked it down on the clipboard as ‘evidence in and shifted’.

“Excellent,” Max peeked at the bag and gave it a once over from a simple swing of the bag before placing it into his lab coat pocket. “But first, the evidence for you and Agent Scully.”

“You must’ve found something incredible or you wouldn’t be quite this excited, Max,” Scully slipped her white coat off completely and carefully put it into the bin with the other garments to be sent for hazardous material level cleaning.

“Several things, your victims have all had some kind of religious symbolism attached to them in some way whether it be the thurible filled with incense, blessing oils, holy water, or a cross, each item has had religious implications,” Max moved one of the rolling metal stands out of the way and laid out the clip board and files in his hand, carefully sorting everything into sections.

“Are these diagrams color coded, Maximus?” Mulder was mostly poking fun at Max but Max largely didn’t recognize sarcasm to save his life.

“No, I didn’t really have enough time to do that but they are sorted by personage and object type,” Max waved his arms around just a little, his hands unintentionally doing Jazz hands in front of them.

Scully rolled her eyes at Mulder, who was stifling a laugh over Max’s response to his sarcastic remark. She jabbed him in the side and tilted her head, listening attentively to Max.

“So what did you find out for us?” Scully made the mistake of nudging Max’s shoulder just enough to make his cheeks instantly turn a bright shade of pink.
“Oh, um, yeah, that’s right…Your first victim, Meghan Falkner, had a rosary wrapped around her 3rd and 4th ribs essentially crossing her heart. Your second and third victims, Melissa and Maggie, had blessing oils poured into their throats and chest cavities. Elizabeth Becker and Rebecca Elm had oil soaked wooden crosses pushed into their wounds. Emmalyn Cline was actually asphyxiated with holy water prior to her hanging. Victoria specifically mentioned smelling incense burning and had he finished the job, I can almost guarantee that he would’ve put a small thurible into her chest cavity with incense still burning.” Max was thumbing through his charts and photos in the file he had with him, his eyes darting away from Scully, who had completely thrown him off guard.

“What about the Jane Doe?” Mulder looked through the photos as Max handed them to him, eager to find out about the young girl under the cloth while equally amused over the power that a simple nudge from Scully had on this puppy dog of a man.

“Your Jane Doe is no longer a Jane Doe…her name is Angelique Thomas, 27 years old, reported missing by her roommate, Amanda, six days ago after she didn’t show up to a study session for a final they were set to have at the end of next week. She was a med student at George Washington University in her final year prior to residency. She went missing shortly after midnight walking to her car from the library at the university.” Max produced a photo from the bottom of the pile and a missing person’s report from the file and gave it to them, who studied the image carefully. “Her mother is on her way here now to finalize the positive identification.”

“Six days ago?” Mulder was floored by the revelation as he met gazes with Scully.

“She falls into the timeline of being captured prior to the second victim’s death,” Scully knew exactly what he was thinking as the goosebumps formed all the way down her back. “She endured five days of torture.”

“That isn’t even the biggest revelation,” Max continued, the excitement renewing despite the nervousness that Scully had unintentionally inflicted on him. “Prior to the autopsy two paper folds were removed a slit in the soft palate that simply read ‘I don’t want your body’ and ‘Our love has gone cold’. She had been put through a considerable amount of torture but likely caused her own death.”

“We theorized as much,” Mulder nodded at Max. “There was a device set up in the warehouse that looked like the killer had rigged everything to essentially give way if one side became unbalanced. He forced them to choose who would die.”

“The warehouse setup had been in use for at least 4 days, so this was strategic and well thought out,” Max continued. “Her religious symbolism was a barbed wire wrapped cross that had been imbedded in the wire harness against her clavicle.”

The thought was almost overwhelming as Scully pictured Angelique being slowly tortured, the cross pressing into her collarbone with every breath, the screams, the agony. She inhaled deeply and gripped the table’s edge, blinking fast to shake the image from her mind.

“We got a shoe match for a size and a rough make, by the way,” Max held a result sheet out to Mulder, who took it from his hand despite noticing and wanting to focus fully on Scully’s change in demeanor. “Dexter brand steel toed boots—Men’s size 11.”

“So completely generic, average, nothing remarkable or memorable,” Scully found herself repeating back part of Victoria had indicated about the killer to them at the hospital just over 24 hours earlier, her eyes diverting to the sheet.
“Max, please run that facial recognition on that locket—Scully and I are running on little to no sleep for going on 36 hours and that is beginning to wear on both of us,” Mulder could tell that Scully needed a breather and needed it fast. “Relay all of this information to Skinner as well so that he can continue the in-office presence for the investigation. I’m taking Scully home so she can get some rest.”

“Is there anything else that you need me to do before you two head out?” Max gathered up all of the photos, papers, and other items from them, watching as Scully picked up another couple of vials in an evidence bag.

“Max, I almost forgot these—This residue was all over Angelique’s fingers, I need to know what it is,” Scully gave him the bag with the three vials in it and half leaned against the steel countertop, clearly exhausted and emotionally drained despite the appreciative smile on her face.

“Absolutely, you two take care and I’ll personally call you when I get these results back,” Max shook their hands quickly and exited the room, leaving Mulder and Scully in near silent conditions.

“You almost made your puppy dog leap out of his skin for a second, Scully,” Mulder teased her, lightly rubbing her back as he watched her continue to stare at the top of the steel table.

Scully shook her head and rubbed her eyes, sighing softly in resignation. “He is not my puppy dog, Mulder.”

“Certainly has a huge crush on you,” Mulder winked at her, embarrassing her thoroughly.

Scully used his own line on him, giving him a dose of his own medicine. “Hmmm… really? I haven’t noticed that at all.”

Mulder smirked at her cleverness and put an arm around her shoulder, nudging her forward. She glanced up at him, her eyes weary and tired. It was all she needed to know that he could feel her energy dropping, becoming more and more withdrawn by the second. She leaned her head against his chest for a moment, audibly sighing before letting him guide her toward the door.

“Come on, let’s get you home, Scully,” Mulder guided her to the elevator and pressed the up button.

Scully sighed again, this time less audibly. “We haven’t had an investigation take this much from me mentally in a long time, Mulder, and I didn’t realize just how drained I actually am. I didn’t realize how much this case was affecting me.”

“I did…knew it the moment you held onto Victoria when she started breathing again. This was never going to be easy for you,” Mulder was almost carrying Scully as he helped her to the car and opened the door to the passenger side. “You ready?”

Scully nodded and allowed Mulder to guide her into the seat. She buckled herself in as he went around to the driver’s side and watched as he started the car. She craved comfort—a hot bath or even a shower would suffice followed by cold sheets. No resistance, just pure bliss. She could already picture it as the world around her began to turn into a complete blur. It was nearly unavoidable as she felt restlessness nipping at the backs of her eyelids, convincing her that rest was what she wanted...needed.

“If you need to sleep, then sleep...I know the way,” Mulder watched as her eyelids battled with gravity, smiling at how quickly the sleepiness had taken her over.
“No, I’m ok.” She was looking at him with such gentle affection despite her eye lids refusing to stay open.

She dozed off with her delicate fingers precariously clutching Mulder’s jacket, murmuring his name until sleep took her. He occasionally glanced at her as she slept, admiring the sight of her complete peacefulness. He liked hearing her breathe softly even though the car engine was louder—and he loved hearing his name escape her lips in an almost ragged moan. He didn’t want to wake her up from her needed slumber but the ride was fast as he pulled into one of the parking spaces outside of her building. The sound of the key sliding out of the ignition finally woke her up from her much needed sleep with an almost renewed energy, or at least a second wind.

“Hi,” Scully wiped the apparent drool from the side of her mouth and rubbed her eyes as Mulder unbuckled.

“Hey, sleepy,” Mulder wiped her hair out of her face and smiled affectionately at her before sliding out of the car to go help her out.

She had more of her own bearings as she was able to get out of the car on her own and walk up the steps to the door but the dreamy eyed expression remained as she had a soft, almost hidden smile on her lips as they walked in the cool night air. She let them both into the building then toward the hallway to her door where she fought just a moment with the keyhole before it finally gave way. Mulder pushed the door shut and locked it, both at the bolt and the chain, then turned toward her. She smiled at him, increasing the unspoken language between them as Mulder took off his jacket and put it over the back of one of the table’s chairs like he always had, not even noticing that it was where hers already was. Mulder watched her as she took off the little matching jacket that went with the skirt she had been wearing and draped it over the same chair before glancing at him over her shoulder. They were both tired but not so tired that repetition and familiarity wasn’t coursing through their veins like a well administered drug.

“I need to go home, Scully,” Mulder’s wry smile was playing on his lips, the exhaustion still nipping at his consciousness, his mind in overdrive as it forced him to pay close attention to Scully’s movements.

He bit down on his bottom lip as he caught sight of Scully’s own little spark of a grin as she slowly backed up until her thighs rubbed against the back of the couch, where she steadied herself up on the back of it. She carefully perched herself on the back of the couch with her knees pressed together, ankles apart like a teenaged girl sitting on the wide support of a fence near a field where horses were kept. She had a little playfulness about her despite the nagging tiredness surging through her. He found himself drawn in as he came within arm’s length of her and crossed his arms across his chest, staring down at her.

“No, you don’t,” Scully had a hold of his tie and pulled him slowly toward her until his knees were touching hers.

“I need a shower, I stink,” Mulder was protesting verbally but he was certainly not pulling away as Scully slid herself a little closer to him as she maneuvered her knees out just enough to pull him all the way against the back of the couch.

Scully loosened his tie and pulled it all the way off, discarding it on the back of the couch. “So do I, Mulder.”

“We are teetering dangerously close to a point of no return, Scully,” Mulder watched as her tiny fingers tugged at his belt, unhooking it slowly, all while never taking her eyes off of him, his heart already thudding wildly into his throat.
“Am I making you uncomfortable, Mulder?” Scully pulled the belt off of him, loop by loop, then carefully laid it out next to the tie before scooting forward, pushing him back just enough until she could touch her feet to the floor.

“No, that’s not really the adjective I’m looking for here, Scully,” Mulder was at a loss for words as Scully stood upright and tugged on the front of his shirt, leading him down the hallway.

“Oh, what adjective are you looking for then, Mulder?” Scully pushed the bathroom door open and flicked the light above the sink on, filling the room with soft white light, letting go of his shirt in the process.

Mulder watched as she reached into the smallish shower stall and turned the water on, her hand under the water testing the temperature, her eyes looking back on Mulder as he stood awkwardly in the doorway, his back almost pressed against the hinged section. He couldn’t explain why but he was nervous. This was Scully and she never did anything without thinking or on impulse. Why now? What was different about this moment? Scully wasn’t the kind of woman that he took with a grain of salt nor did he want to unintentionally psyche himself out from realizing what he had been missing for so long in her.

“Mulder?” Scully pushed the shower door shut and met his gaze, eyes big and full of so much curiosity.

Mulder swallowed hard, his own curiosity piquing at she crossed the somewhat large bathroom where she started to light a few of her candles that she kept in the space for relaxing in the tub. “Primed. Willing. At fingertips. Anticipating.”

“On the brink,” Scully lit another candle and set it in the window sill, her back now to Mulder, her voice dropping an octave as she spoke. “In position.”

“Okay, yeah, yours are better,” Mulder let out a nervous chuckle as Scully tossed the extinguished matchstick into a small soap dish that had filled with water the last time she had taken a bath.

Scully was exhausted but something in her was awake and alive for the first time in a very long time. Nothing made more sense than when she was with Mulder—and her mind was constantly thinking about the boundaries that they had already been pushing. It had unlocked something within her that desperately needed to emerge.

“Open to,” Scully continued, her heels tapping as she walked back toward him to flick the light above the sink off again. “Ripe.”

“Something tells me that you could do that literally all night and leave me panting on the floor like an overheated dog,” Mulder was impressed by the unabashed and unashamed seduction that she was baiting him with.

“Only if you asked me to,” Scully’s hands gripped his shoulders, lingering there a moment before sliding to his chest, where they slowly undid each button, letting her fingertips slide across his skin with such sensitivity and lightness that they coaxed a trail of goosebumps in their wake.

The steam had been steadily collecting in the bathroom and the dimness of the candlelight had relaxed any remaining tension between them as Mulder’s hands found the front of Scully’s shirt, where his own fingers went to work on unbuttoning each button on her linen shirt.
Their eyes were locked on each other as they carefully peeled away the other’s shirt and discarded it over the edge of the bathtub. Mulder inhaled sharply as he watched her chest heave underneath of the thin, satin and lace fabric of her bra, the goosebumps already forming all over her skin. Mulder drew her in and slipped both of his hands toward her waistline where they probed desperately for the button and zipper for her skirt. She made eye contact with him again and guided his hands to her button and zipper, her lip firmly between her teeth the entire time.

“Yearning,” Mulder’s lips and teeth found the space below her earlobe as he allowed his thumbs to pop the button free. “Ache.”

Scully gasped and shivered under his kisses, craving more of him, her hands feverishly tugging at the button on his slacks. “Mulder, the water is going to get cold.”

“You’re awfully warm, Scully, maybe you need a cold shower to cool you down a bit.” Mulder unzipped her skirt and let it fall to her ankles, leaving her in her bra, panties, thigh high nylons, and heels.

Scully had always been the definition of sexy but nothing had quite prepared him for the vision before him wearing barely anything, candle light dancing on her skin, drawing him in further, craving more of her. She was beautiful, sexy, seductive, everything that he had ever imagined that she would be if he had ever taken the leap and allowed himself to feel—to experience everything that she represented as a woman. The heat between them was palpable, the steam from the shower only adding to the almost pyretic atmosphere that hovered from skin to skin. It was intoxicating.

Scully groaned against his shoulder as she fumbled with his zipper until it finally gave and slid down, allowing his slacks to slide beyond his hips to his knees. “Ah, fuck.”

“Are you having issues with those, Scully?” Mulder looked down at his pants at his knees, letting out a bit of a chuckle while his fingers played against her nearly bare back, drawing circles along the curve of her spine.

“I won’t be in a moment once you slide out of your shoes, Mulder,” Scully ran her fingertips along his jaw and nibbled on his bottom lip, flooding his senses for a deliciously long moment.

Mulder obliged her and pushed both shoes off only to then feel her warmth against the outside of his right thigh as her left heel finished what gravity had refused to do for her, forcing his slacks to the floor. It was as if they had been undressing each other for years as Mulder’s thumb instinctively slid underneath of the top of her nylon and slid them down beyond her knee until she brought her leg a little higher to meet him, allowing him to finish the motion. Scully’s heel finally slipped off and landed on her discarded skirt just as Mulder’s thumbs finished the length of her foot, exposing her skin completely from underneath the nylon. Mulder watched her slowly lower her foot to the floor and illuminate the reaches of their height difference as she instinctively stepped out of the other heel, looking up at him almost wide eyed.

“There’s still time to back out – pretend like all of this was just exhaustion manifesting itself,” Mulder couldn’t tell if the expression was out of a longing or out of fear from the nearly undressed woman before him as his right hand found her cheek and soothed her, rubbing in a subtle up and down motion.

Scully guided his left hand along her right thigh as she slowly slid it up just enough for the motion to force the nylon down her thigh. “Is this clear enough for you or do I need to be even more blatantly obvious, Mulder?”
The question was assertive and bold but the message was clear as Mulder pulled the nylon down a little bit quicker than the other but dragged his fingertips across her skin, making her bite down hard on her lip as she watched him. He licked his lips as he could hear her inhale sharply as the nylon made the curve of her foot before discarding the material with the ever growing pile of clothing on the floor. Mulder stepped on the heap of his slacks at his feet and managed to pull off his socks in the process, then pushed them out of the way of their limbs. They were raw and overstimulated, like naked livewires, as they found their way into each other’s arms again, breathing each other in as they feverishly kissed just outside of the surprisingly hot shower that they had not even made it into yet. Both had been tentative in their actions until now as caution completely went out the window with each passing second. He cradled her head in his hands, drawing her onto her tiptoes to better access her mouth as his tongue begged entry. She let him in and held onto him, little moans and gasps escaping her lips with every breath they took and every time Mulder’s fingers moved along her already tender flesh, inciting another wave of goosebumps.

They had imagined each other like this before but the sensations of being there in the moment is the difference from fantasy—neither one of them wanted to go back now even if they could.

Mulder wiggled out of his boxers while Scully utilized only one of her hands to slide her panties down beyond her hips, allowing her knees and thighs to do the rest of the work as they slid down via friction. They were connected completely as Mulder’s fingers found the clasp at the back of Scully’s bra, unhooking it in one, fluid motion. Mulder found the handle to the shower stall and reluctantly removed his lips from Scully’s, much to her chagrin as she groaned audibly at him, bra barely covering her as it clung to her shoulders flimsily. Mulder pulled the door open and slowly backed into the shower, the cascade of hot water hitting his back first, drawing a low, unmistakable groan out of him as his head tilted back to soak his hair. Scully finally discarded the bra and climbed in with him, pulling the door shut behind her, invading his completely. Not that he seemed to mind in the slightest.

Mulder wiped his eyes and looked down at her as she got some of the water onto her as well, adjusting the angle of the shower head to where they were both getting a fair amount over each other, making a little wisecrack as he watched the water envelope her, soaking her completely. “Whoever had this idea is a genius…”

“Which idea? Showering? Or showering with your partner?” Scully’s fingers were playing with his collarbone, rubbing water droplets back and forth, a smile on her lips.

“A little from column A, a lot from column B,” Mulder drew her onto her tiptoes again and explored her mouth once more, his fingers sliding through her wet hair, tugging on the entwined section just enough to pry a delicate little moan against his mouth from her lips.

Scully’s left hand gripped his back, sliding down from his shoulders, occasionally allowing her fingernails to trail, creating little goosebumps with each movement. Scully’s right hand slid down and gripped Mulder’s arm for leverage while his mouth and hands in her hair completely brought her off balance, thoroughly making her head spin. Their heat had reached a fever pitch as their hearts were beating hard against their chests, moaning into each other’s mouths as each nerve ending surged and pulsed, begging for more. They had unlocked a heightened hunger in each other that hadn’t been explored, only imagined and craved, until now.

Their frenzied lip lock slowed and halted as Mulder maneuvered his mouth to one side and found her neck, immediately nibbling and almost sucking on her wet, warm skin. The new sensation made Scully’s knees buckle, sending an intense jolt through every nerve ending in her
body to the point that a ragged moan escaped her lips and caught them both completely off guard. The sound that she made was almost throaty and only made Mulder continue to neck her in the same fashion much to her surprise.

“You’re going to make me pass out, Mulder,” Scully’s voice cracked as she laced her fingers through his hair, gripping his head in a wild attempt to stay on her feet.

“You can have all of my energy, Scully, I give it all willingly,” Mulder’s voice was raspy against her skin and sent little tingly waves over her, mixing a chill with the warmth.

She was almost certain that he was leaving marks on her but she almost didn’t care as she was nearly drowning in the sensations, eyes rolling back in her head just a little. Mulder snaked his arm around her at the waist, holding onto her at the curve of her backside while his lips followed the curve of her collarbone from one side to the other. The motion was effortless, as if he had been doing this to her for ages and knew her body more than any man had since taking the leap into the world of sexual exploration. Years of pent up sexual tension had given them plenty of unused ammunition to take each other to a place where cases and the FBI were nothing more than a memory, giving them the out to freely feel and know what they had been running from for so long.

They had begun to write the pages of their story that no one else could even think to elucidate upon.

Mulder’s hands slowly massaged the small of her back with one hand while his other rubbed Scully’s neck, creating almost a fountain-like splash over his shoulders. Scully’s almost rippling moans and gasps became more rapid and staggered, drawing Mulder’s mouth back to hers where he quelled both of their hunger for each other’s intimacy, half devouring each other’s mouths. This almost ethereal and sublime moment between them was a long time coming and not from careful planning but simply action in motion. Their secret, intense magnetism that had been carefully guarded and hidden away had materialized.

The only complication in their moment was that neither of them had any realization that their out of the ordinary, long delayed, and secretive moment was being carefully watched by the uninvited—and the rules in his game had just changed.

Chapter End Notes

I am so sorry this took SO long but I wanted it to be special. I truly hope you love it. Feedback is appreciated.

Credit: Somebody Else - the 1975
Et Invitis Spiritus

Chapter Summary

Romanticizing his victims, a brutal murderer leaves behind symbols of love…but who is his true, intended target?

Chapter tagline: "We are being watched"

Post “Agua Mala” (Season 6 with mentions of “Rain King”, “Two Fathers”, and “One Son” Briefly and only for context purposes)

Chapter title roughly translates to "The Uninvited" in Latin

Chapter Notes

Note: Use of puns and witty comebacks were both necessary and wanted throughout this process – practicing balance between the extremes and humor has given a much-needed lift to the truly dark places that have been explored in the most recent chapters (and those dark places will be continuing for a bit so bear with me). Please enjoy.

Disclaimer: Mulder, Scully, Skinner, and Fowley belong respectively to Chris Carter, FOX Productions, and TenThirteen Productions. All other characters are original and any likeness or named similarities to any real-life persons are purely coincidental.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

5:05 AM

Scully’s Apartment

Scully rarely slept with the curtains open or forgot to close a window, especially when the weather started to turn cold, but after stumbling from the bathroom to the bed in nothing more than a towel in the comfort of Mulder’s arms at fifteen past three left the pair of them a little more than careless. The rain had started falling shortly after 3:30 but had remained calm until the wind had picked up, sending it sideways against the window pane. Luckily, the window was only open a few inches, so the rain was not coming into the room quite yet. Late fall was unpredictable in DC but the rain was almost always a certain, daily occurrence until the snow would take its place. The gentle, almost melodic tapping woke Mulder, bringing him out of the much needed, restful sleep that had only lasted a few, short hours.

It was all worth it.
Mulder rolled onto his side and pulled Scully closer, spooning against her and nuzzling the back of her neck. She inhaled slowly and exhaled audibly in the form of a light, sweet moan, stretching her fingers out across the top of the pillow that had gotten turned sideways in the bed. The smell of her body wash on her skin brought it all flooding back as he replayed their intense yet exquisite makeout session that preceded use of Scully’s overtly floral cleansers to rid themselves of the grime that had been building up on their skin. He kissed the nape of her neck and followed the line down to the curve of her shoulder. The notes of lilac, freesia, and passion fruit on her skin and in her hair only deepened the sweet smile of remembrance upon his lips. Last night had left an ache in him and pushed a hunger to the forefront that only re-invigorated in him as he listened to her softly breathing and looked upon the strikingly lovely sight of her tangled up in the sheets. It was terribly domestic of them but at the same time wild and unafraid of consequences – lost in the desperate need for the most limited of moments where they didn’t have to think about the terror that they chased day in and out.

He didn’t want to disturb her as he carefully slid out from under the covers and reached down to a small overnight bag that contained a change of clean clothes, snatching up the boxer briefs immediately. Keeping the bag in his car was a smart decision since their investigations often separated them from home for days at a time and he knew that as long as he had at least one pair of clean clothes to change into that he would be covered in a clutch. He stood as he pulled the soft material on and glanced back at Scully, who stayed peacefully unaware of his movements. Mulder glanced out the window at the nasty weather forming, opting to carefully push the window shut, latching it carefully as to not disturb her slumber.

“Brrrrr,” The chill in the air nipped at the backs of his legs as he opted for his jeans and t-shirt from the bottom of the bag, immediately tugging the jeans on first before putting the t-shirt on over his head.

Scully rolled onto her back in the bed, stirring just enough to catch his attention, and tightened her grip on the covers before settling back down, returning to her quiet slumber. Mulder tiptoed out of the room after taking note of the time on the clock and made his way to the kitchen, where he thumbed through her sparse yet interesting variety of coffee in the bottom shelf of the cupboard. Hazelnut-vanilla crème, Irish cream, and caramel were carefully lined up and barely opened so he reached for the caramel and lifted the top, inhaling the rich, creamy notes. Satisfied with his choice, Mulder closed the cupboard and filled the water reservoir on the coffee pot then prepped a filter for coffee grounds. It was the simplest way to turn the switch between the want to crawl back into bed for more sleep and finding another burst of energy to start a new day…one that had become a necessary evil for quite some time.

Sleeplessness had been part of his routine.

Insomnia had been a plague for Mulder for a long time and sleeping next to Scully was not necessarily a cure for it but it seemed to abate it a bit and make the few hours he slept that much more fulfilling. Her skin against his, hair in his face, even the sound of her random sighing as she switched positions—perfection personified. He inhaled deeply, recalling every delicious and tantalizing moment in vivid detail and bit down hard on his bottom lip, his face already flushed with heat all over again. His twenty year old self would have had a field day with this version of him as he realized that he was getting turned on over recollection of a makeout session and half asleep dry humping since neither of them had enough energy to consummate their brewing sexual energy.

Get a hold of yourself, Mulder. He took a deep breath and rubbed his eyes, letting out a low growl as he exhaled.
“Morning,” Scully’s voice was soft and sleepy, the mid-yawn effect in full swing as she came into the room, pulling him away from his morning recollection session.

His head turned just enough to see her in her fluffy bathrobe, hair still slightly mussed and tousled about. “Good morning, Scully, I’m making coffee…you game?”

“I don’t think I’ll make it through today without it—that was not enough sleep by a long shot,” Scully poked him in the ribs as she noticed his half awkward stance in front of the coffee pot, almost as though he were staring it down. “It isn’t going to run away from you, I can assure you of that.”

Mulder coughed and smiled a little meekly at her, attempting to hide the not so subtle morning wood that he was sporting as he pivoted his hip in a somewhat graceless fashion. “You never know, Scully, you never know.”

“Did you sleep?” Scully knew the right question to ask since it was never about the quality of sleep for Mulder, but simply that he did or did not engage in the activity.

“Mmmhhmmm certainly did until the rain started in,” Mulder’s voice dropped an octave as Scully brushed up against him as she reached for coffee cups and sugar, the goosebumps forming across his skin, sending each little hair standing on end down his arms.

Scully felt him shudder and turned her body toward him, sliding between him and the counter, driving their closeness once again. “It was getting pretty loud out there wasn’t it? It woke me up as well.”

“Damn it, Scully.” Mulder inhaled sharply and bit down on the corner of his lip until he looked down at her playfully grinning up at him, her hands gripping the front of his shirt, willing him forward.

Mulder held onto her hips and pressed against her a little roughly, causing Scully’s backside to knock back against the top drawer, making it rattle the silverware inside. Scully inhaled sharply as she was taken aback by his by his physicality. She swallowed hard and bit the corner of her lip while she steadied herself against the counter with her right hand while her left pulled at Mulder’s shirt until their lips met. There was nothing soft or sweet in their kiss as Scully’s left hand slid around to the back of Mulder’s neck, inviting him in, needing him. He couldn’t get enough of her as his hands slid up from her hips and cupped her face in his hands, fingers sliding through her hair until he had full control of their movement. His tongue begged entry as it slid across her teeth and she let him in almost as if to appease a thirst that desperately needed to be quenched. They were like overly stimulated teenagers all over again as the heat between them manifested in a series of audible, almost sloppy kisses.

The shower had been an incredible manifestation of years of sexual tension but they were both considerably more awake in this moment than they had been when they dove into each other prior to falling asleep in each other’s arms. Mulder allowed one of his hands to travel down and explore her curves over the top of the bathrobe, settling at the small of her back, urging her closer still. The sound of the coffee pot’s end brew signal beep was the only thing to put a gentle stop to their action as both reluctantly allowed their lips to separate and hover silently for a moment as they breathed heavily.

“I’m awake now,” Scully’s eyes were still closed, chest still heaving as she could feel her heart beating up in her throat, thudding with a resonance that made it difficult to think let alone breathe.
Mulder rubbed the space between her hips and her ribs, then kissed her on the forehead, chuckling against her skin. “Glad I could be of assistance…now how about some coffee?”

“I might need my ass off of the counter for that, Mulder,” Scully’s hand was still firmly gripping the edge of the counter, half perched on the edge with her feet dangling down fully off the floor.

“I’ll let you off the counter if you promise me your creamer isn’t any of that non-fat, I’m watching my girlish figure rice milk,” Mulder’s hands slid to her hips again and almost gripped her in such a way that it sent a shiver down her spine.

Scully inhaled sharply and smirked as the flood of sensations seared through her, flushing her skin almost instantly. “Mulder, I have regular creamer.”

“Good,” Mulder assisted her in the endeavor of sliding down off of the counter and went for the fridge to retrieve the bottle of creamer in question.

Scully smirked as she watched the subtle delight all over Mulder’s face in realizing that she was being 100% truthful when she said that she had real creamer and not something meant for a person who had been overly conscious of weight management. He flashed a grin at her as he turned around with the bottle of coffee mate in his hand. Scully retrieved the cups from the bottom shelf along with a spoon and sugar. Mulder usually didn’t muddle up his coffee with anything but there was that rare occasion that his sweet tooth took over—this was certainly one of those occasions. Scully didn’t have a set way in which she made her coffee as she opted for one teaspoon of the sugar along with just enough creamer to discolor the coffee while Mulder went with the tried and true method of “just a little coffee with his creamer” option.

“Is it bad that I’m already wondering when the phone is going to ring and bring both of us back to reality?” Mulder was talking from behind his cup, the steam from the coffee rising around his nostrils just enough to be visible.

Scully shook her head as she sat down at the table. “No, it isn’t bad—but I know that neither of us are exactly prepared for more bad news about this case despite the patterns that are emerging.”

Mulder sat down at the table with her and took another gulp in hopes of gaining a little instant clarity or jolt from the caffeine but he certainly wasn’t holding his breath in the endeavor. Scully reached over with her free hand and gave his left hand a gentle squeeze while she sipped her coffee as though to silently reassure him that he wasn’t alone in this. He glanced over at her from behind the coffee cup and winked, the understated yet reverberating acceptance of her affection clearly conveyed. They had always needed each other’s support in some form or another and had tried feebly to escape that unmistakable fact—until now.

There was no reason to run from it.

“I think I need a refill,” Mulder looked down at his nearly empty cup and reluctantly withdrew his hand from underneath hers before standing up to refill his cup. “How’s your cup?”

“I’m still at an optimist’s level,” Scully cradled the cup and crossed her legs, enveloping more of herself in the oversized bathrobe that her mother had given her for her last birthday. “It is cold in here, isn’t it?”

“Your bedroom window was left open all night last night—I closed it this morning,” Mulder stirred his coffee until it was to his satisfaction and turned back toward her.
Scully wrinkled her nose. “I don’t remember even having it open to begin with…hmmm. Getting forgetful, I suppose.”

“It’s this case—even I’m second guessing nearly everything I do,” Mulder sat down and took another sip. “As if I wasn’t already haphazard and chaotic enough, right?”

“At least you said it,” She grinned at him from behind her cup and took another sip, nearly finishing what was left of her coffee.

“Do you ever wonder what it would be like to have a completely normal existence, Scully? Completely leave all of these uncertain and, at times, gruesome cases behind and start over from scratch?” Mulder was often random but his pontificating was not usually focused on explorations of a life outside of his currently chosen path.

“Already trying to get rid of me, Mulder?” Scully smirked at him, unsure of whether he was being 100% serious or not with his questions.

“I’m being serious, Scully, do you?” Mulder put his cup on the table, his tone a lot more serious and less playful than it had been only a few moments earlier.

Scully took a deep breath and set her cup down, immediately sliding forward until her knees were between his so she could slide her hands within his. “There was a fleeting moment when Melissa was killed that I wondered about what would’ve happened if I had chosen another life. I thought about if it would’ve been easier, if I would’ve been happy, or a better person…and while I’m sure I would’ve had a much simpler life, I would’ve lost out on something very precious to me.”

“What was that?” Mulder wasn’t the kind of man to become truly defeated but she could hear him faltering with each word.

Something wasn’t quite right and she knew that it was likely lack of sleep and this case but she did not know for sure.

She squeezed his hands and captured his attention, locking gazes with him. “I would’ve lost out on you and I don’t think I could handle a life where you weren’t there to keep me on my toes. After all we’ve been through—there’s no one else that I’d want to battle through each second with.”

“You read that off the back of a hallmark card, didn’t you?” Mulder’s humor snapped back like a rubber band and his smile returned as though it had never left, softening the knot that had formed in Scully’s stomach.

Scully rolled her eyes and hid a smile. “You caught me.”

Their sweet, reflective moment was brought to an abrupt end with the sharpest of knocks at the door that made them both sit up just a little straighter.

“Think it’s your plumber again?” Mulder took another drink of his coffee as her glance met his.

“You’re funny,” Scully had a slight grin on her face as she stood up.

Scully didn’t have much hesitation about answering it as she adjusted the loop around her waist to re-secure the bathrobe and unlocked the bolt and chain before pulling the door open. She wasn’t expecting to find both Skinner and Diana waiting as she held the door open only about a
foot or so. Part of her was irritated that he didn’t just call but the majority of the frustration rested
on the fact that he insisted on bringing along his new shadow.

“Sir…” Scully cleared her throat and glanced down at herself to do a once over just to
double check that she was completely decent.

“We didn’t wake you up did we, Agent Scully?” Skinner was quiet as he spoke in the
hallway, visibly as exhausted as she and Mulder had been the night before. “I would’ve called but
there was a bit of urgency in this.”

Diana looked freakishly well-rested and almost robotic in her actions as she stood with a
hand on her hip in the hallway just a foot or two behind and to the left of Skinner. She was
perfectly well composed, pressed, almost too cleverly put together, and smug as she looked at a
still disheveled Scully in her bathrobe. She smiled fakely at Scully and nodded in her direction, not
daring to say a word to her almost as if silence was somehow besting Scully in some way. Scully
raised an eyebrow and ran her hand through her hair before returning her glance toward Skinner.
The stark contrast between them was almost shocking as Skinner looked as though he could use a
full day of nothing but sleep with the stubble from missing his weekly shave and the bags under his
eyes puffy and darker than usual. That lack of sleep was marked by the visible coffee stain on his
shirt—he hadn’t even gotten to change yet.

“No, sir, you didn’t wake me—I’ve been up for a while,” Scully’s fingers gripped the
edge of the door as she spoke. “Is everything ok?”

“We went to get Agent Mulder but he didn’t answer his door, have you heard from him?
We thought it’d be best to make sure both of you knew immediately of the new development in the
case.” Diana couldn’t resist the opportunity to attempt taking a pot shot at Scully but her attempt
looked half-witted and ill-conceived under the circumstance.

Scully pushed the door open nearly all of the way, silently firing back at Diana as she
revealed Mulder sitting at the table with his coffee cup in hand. Mulder nodded in their direction,
coffee cup still up by his mouth, and Scully kept her straight face in full effect while Diana
squirmed silently, teetering back and forth in her heels, biting down on her tongue. Skinner pursed
his lips together as he witnessed the clear pissing match between Scully and Diana, with Mulder
standing at the center of controversy.

“Coffee, anyone?” Mulder’s timing was perfect as he finished his cup and set it in the
sink but a little part of him was glad that he had opted to put some clothes in when he got out of
Scully’s bed this morning as he locked stares with Skinner.

“There’s been another murder,” Skinner cut through the tension and awkwardness, going
straight for the kill, diverting the attention to significantly more pressing matters. “A young woman
went missing just under 36 hours ago. She was abducted from a nightclub and reported missing by
her friends just a few hours after she went missing. Her description was given to local police and
the details of the clothing that she was wearing when she went missing matched the body that was
found just off the interstate in one of the parks in Arlington this morning. We have been unable to
make a full identification.”

“Unable?” Scully crossed her arms and shot a glance at Mulder.

“There were complications—we need to take you both to scene before the media gets
wind of it.” Skinner was a bit agitated and the discomfort was written on his face as he crossed his
arms and breathed a heavy sigh.
“With this weather we have more than the media to be worried about,” Mulder stood and came up behind Scully, pressing a hand to the center of her back.

“We don’t even know how long the scene has slowly been deteriorating since the rain began, either—for all we know this could have been a deliberate attempt to hide sloppiness,” Diana’s mouth opened again and her ‘know-it-all’ tone was jarring as Scully glanced back at Mulder as he stepped barely to one side of her.

Scully nodded and looked over at Mulder, who was already looking for the out to go find his socks and shoes. “I’ll go get dressed. You need your shoes and coat?”

“We’ll be out here while you go get dressed,” Skinner wasn’t in the mood to continue to waste time as he rubbed his temples.

Scully nodded and pushed the door shut, immediately heading for her bedroom to retrieve clothes from the dresser. She pulled off her robe, revealing the delicate material of the satin and lace thigh length nightgown underneath, and tossed it onto the edge of the bed. She set the rest of her clothes on top of the dresser before sliding into a pair of dark, barely worn jeans and pulled them up past her knees, still wearing the nightgown. Mulder wasn’t far behind her, shoes in his hands, and walked into the bedroom just in time to catch a glimpse of her pulling on her jeans underneath her nightgown, eyes slowly moving over her curves until her pants were firmly in place, hugging her perfectly.

“Mulder, I can see you,” Scully had her hands up underneath of the nightgown, prepping to pull it off as she shot him a look though the mirror to her right side.

Mulder smirked as he sat down on the edge of her bed and slid on a sock, taking his eyes off of her. “I was just admiring the view.”

“We need to focus,” Scully tossed the nightgown across the end of the bed and pulled the bra on, snapping it into place.

Scully put simple button-down shirt before running her fingers through her hair again, taking a glimpse of herself in the mirror. The lack of sleep was still obvious but there was a hidden part that glimmered in her eyes that could instantly replay the rush all over again, moment by moment. She inhaled deep and counted backwards in her head to clear away the fog and focus her energy on what was to come. She was fully in work mode despite Mulder’s best efforts at distracting her into keeping her head swimming, but Skinner and Diana were standing outside, waiting impatiently for them to get ready. Making them wait longer than necessary would only decrease the patience level that Skinner was holding onto. Mulder stood up, slid into his shoes, and turned around just as Scully was zipping up her ankle boots.

“You ready?” Mulder asked her as they walked toward the kitchen.

Scully nodded and pulled on her jacket as Mulder zipped up his own. “Ready as I’ll ever be.”
Just under 30 minutes later
Madison Manor Park (Just off Quantico Street)
Arlington, VA

The ride to the crime scene was nearly silent as Mulder and Scully sat in the backseat of Skinner’s car. The only break in chatter was the occasional yes or no question and answer from Skinner toward mainly Diana as he noticed that Mulder and Scully were both staring out the same window, ignoring them unintentionally. Both were consumed with the thought surrounding the downpour that was drenching the pavement as they pulled into the park entrance near a string of houses and watched the police tape sway in the wind. Skinner pulled to the front of the group of official cars and parked at an odd angle, blocking another pathway. Skinner was the first to get out of the car with Mulder and Scully not far behind him. Diana was the last to leave the car with no sense of urgency at all as she seemed more concerned with not ruining her over-priced shoes than the crime scene in front of them. The park itself was serene but the onslaught of rainfall had made it a little eerie and melancholy, foreboding even.

“Agents, we had to install a cover over what’s left of the crime scene, the rainfall has picked up so badly that we are about to lose half of our footing and part of the body.” One of the Virginia State Police officers came up to them, soaked to the bone from the rain.

Skinner zipped the front of his blue FBI coat and nodded in his direction. “Lead the way, the sooner we can process this scene the better.”

The group moved past the baseball diamond and headed toward a small footbridge where the normally small, soothing, and calm creek had swelled to a good four to six feet deep, mimicking the sound of an overflow on a dam being released into the bypass. Scully and Mulder were behind the group and were already fairly soaked already. The scene unfolded through the thick underbrush near the cherry trees, up against the wood and cement walk bridge, like a foggy, unreal dream. The yellow police tape lined sectioned off area was a stark contrast against the green tarp covered space where a group of crime scene investigators, police officers, and FBI were doing their best to collect every shred of evidence before the rain could wash it away.

What lay before them was so much worse than they could’ve imagined.

“Oh, my God,” Scully was the first to see the body as she passed the tape line and immediately knew why they had not made an identification of the body.

Their victim was more heavily tortured than the previous girls had been. What was left of the girl’s dress only hid away part of the wounds as the cuts and slits through the sheath-like material exposed parts of each gauge and mutilated section. He bisected the musculature of her forearm, clearly dividing them into two parts where barbed wire seemed to be almost woven in, holding her together. She was visibly ripped up through the shreds of dress that had been cut away to accommodate access to her skin—flesh and muscle were gleaming through each stretched out section of slashed fabric. Her face was heavily mutilated by barbed wire, eyes nearly popping out of their sockets, lids slit through the center and stapled poorly open so that she was staring straight forward, and the same, large gauge from ear to ear, revealing her teeth beneath. Her arms were stretched out with one wrist tied precariously to a tree next to the water’s edge and the other hooked over the top of the hand railing, water creeping up beyond her waistline. Scully followed the curve of her collarbone toward the hollow spot at her neck and noticed that the sternum had been sliced open at the top and likely popped apart. She couldn’t tell for sure as the dress and more
barbed wire hid it carefully like a poorly wrapped present. The rising water level was certainly well thought out as the killer chose a spot where debris had gotten clogged underneath of the foot bridge and had doubled back, rising further with every hour of rain that had fallen. There wasn’t much time left before there wouldn’t be much left of the evidence as Scully and Mulder could see the blood pooling around her and dissipating as the current drove it downstream.

“We don’t have enough time to mess around with this, get a gurney out here and get the body down, now,” Mulder ducked underneath of the makeshift canopy that had been suspended over the creek bed above the body and was already half furious they had waited this long to address the situation.

“We have to finish with the grid before we can take her down,” Diana was following protocol a little too much as she watched the photographs being taken and small bags of evidence being collected, thoroughly pleased with the way in which they were all following orders to a tee.

“If we don’t get her down now, there won’t be any evidence left to collect,” Scully wasn’t in the mood for any more of Diana’s bullshit as she turned toward Skinner. “Skinner, you need to make the call or we run the risk of losing half of her organs—and I’m certain we don’t want to drag the creek bed for anything that could be potentially pulverized by debris.”

Skinner turned around and shouted toward the crime scene investigators that had brought the transport with them. “Bring the gurney and get her down.”

He knew that they were right and that they didn’t have any more time to argue about the logistics, procedure, or protocol. Skinner went up toward the investigational crew, while Mulder went back toward the gurney to assist in getting it down the hill and Scully went in for a closer look at the water’s edge. Three of the local police officers were wearing hip waders and were already working on getting the body pulled down as she neared their positions. Scully couldn’t help but think of Victoria as she watched the lifeless body sway as the officers struggled to cut away the ropes that suspended her. She knew that she hadn’t been able to save her then she would’ve suffered a fate similar, or worse, to this one. Her eyes traveled up each rope length and took note of the way in which the killer tied each length. Each loop wrapped around itself three times before crossing back through each loop, locking it into place around each object. The loops around the railing were the most secure and hardest to cut. Scully followed the loops to the tree branch where her eyes caught something reflecting light off of it. The object was small and rounded but had a base attached to it, secured to a ‘y’ curve in the branches by four large screws that pushed it into place just enough that even a stiff wind wouldn’t have brought it down. She had an inclination of what it was, but the rain kept pulling branches and leaves in front of it, obstructing it from view.

While Scully squinted at the object in the tree, Diana had crept nearer to the edge along with her and her poor choice in footwear was illuminated as her heels sunk down into the mud. Scully wasn’t paying attention to Diana as her eyes were high above the police officers’ heads, fully focused on making sure that nothing was about to go terribly wrong as they carefully cut each rope.

“Don’t let the body sink further into the water if you can,” Scully noticed that the slack was beginning to bring their victim down a little further, making the water level creep dangerously close to her intestines, which didn’t look like they were being held in by much of anything but fabric and barbed wire.

To Scully’s right, Diana finally lost balance entirely and essentially flopped forward into the water as she compensated her backwards motion by propelling forward far too much. She let out a shout and flailed in the water, her ankles getting caught up quickly in the debris that the
current had begun to carry downstream and almost knocked over one of the investigators in the process. Scully wanted to find a little bit of amusing joy in it but couldn’t as she watched Diana’s arms flailing dangerously close to the body.

“Jesus Christ,” Scully slid into the water beyond knee level and reached out toward her, shouting in frustration. “Reach back and grab my hand before you hit the body!”

Diana was panicking, and it was painfully obvious as she feebly reached back, eyes clamped shut, desperately waving her hand around until Scully was able to get a grip on her and pull her toward the muddy shore. Scully wasn’t exactly gentle as she yanked Diana to a near standing position and pushed her forward until her knees met stable ground. She was thoroughly soaked and now covered in mud as she shot Scully a dirty look even though she essentially just saved her from making an even bigger fool of herself in front of an entire investigational unit. Mulder came down toward them as the gurney was being rolled down to the footbridge and went straight to Scully’s side while the crime scene investigators continued to assist in removal of the body.

“The hell happened?” Mulder noticed Scully’s wet pants and then looked over at a thoroughly soaked Diana, who still hadn’t gotten fully to her feet.

“The mud gave out from underneath of my shoes and I fell in,” Diana scrambled for her words, visibly shaking from the cold as well as frustration with herself.

She was angry, even, as she continued to shoot daggers through Scully, who contemplated how easy it would’ve been to watch her drown instead of helping her.

“She kept flailing like a seal, so I grabbed her before she could inadvertently hit the body and cause more of an issue,” Scully didn’t talk loud enough for Diana to hear but made eye contact with Mulder, who seemed more concerned with her than with Diana’s well-being anyway. “Couldn’t let her drown herself.”

“Agent Scully, do you need a dry blanket?” Skinner came back with a couple of wool blankets from the first responder kits that the police kept in their squad cars.

“No, I’m fine, just check on her,” Scully was cold, but Mulder had already slipped his oversized blue FBI coat around her by the time Skinner had gotten there.

“Had a split second thought of you mud wrestling, Scully, don’t judge me,” Mulder joked and rubbed her shoulders while he had his gaze locked on hers. “You going to be ready for an autopsy soon?”

“Certainly not with her, I’m sure. Yeah, I’ll be fine, just need to empty out the water in my shoes and I’ll be ready,” Scully continued, eyes focused that same small, round object in the tree and realized that it was aimed perfectly at the area in which the body had been hanging. “Mulder…I think he was watching this.”

“How do you know?” Mulder turned his head in the same general direction, his eyes focused on the trees as well, rain in his eyes.

Scully pointed to the bend in the branches where the small lens seemed to be peeking out at them, aimed at the scene below. “Camera lens.”
Outside of Scully’s apartment complex

The rain hadn’t let up as Miles’s van pulled into a parallel parking spot across the street from Scully’s building. Miles fiddled with the radio station, flipping back and forth between stations until it squelched at him.

“The National Weather Service in Washington, DC has issued a severe weather warning for…” the storm warning sounded after the long squelch and Miles didn’t bother to even listen to it all of the way as he turned the radio down and stared out the window for a moment at Scully’s building.

“Storm’s coming, better be quick,” Miles muttered to himself as he flipped the stereo off and slid into the cargo area of the van.

The van was the one originally set up for the plumbing company, but he had affixed a closed-circuit television inside along with a link up to his cameras, in the corner was a modified computer with a circuit board attached to it that had a power feed directly into the van’s battery. It wasn’t particularly expensive as it looked as though it had been constructed over a long period of time with several mismatched parts, some in terrible condition. The set-up, while obviously cheaply constructed, had taken a great time to rig up over the years and only illuminated his ever-growing fascination with voyeurism as it tapped into every video feed that had a readable serial number that could be inputted. The main setup of equipment was all of the plumbing gear but hidden among the normalcy was the ugliness as the barbed wire, implements of torture and sharpened objects were peeking out from the mess. Miles situated himself in the middle of the cargo area and pushed the power button on the television until it turned on.

“Looks like no one is home, hmmm,” He was instantly disappointed when the video feed of Scully’s bathroom popped up on the television screen, only to reveal the half-dimmed bathroom, only natural light streaming in from the window. “I guess we’ll need to see what you were up to last night, then.”

He pushed the tape into the player and clicked the play button. He ran it forward as the feed from the night before was quite inactive and the space darkened as the running time stamp moved forwards both quickly and in real time as he pressed play occasionally, hoping to catch a glimpse of anything at all. The frustration was growing as he ran it forward again until he saw the light come on in the room. He was expecting only to be watching Scully as she walked into her bathroom but his calculations were completely wrong as he witnessed her leading Mulder in with her, lighting the candles, seemingly toying with one another. Miles balled up his fists and practically shook as he watched last night’s events unfold before his eyes.

“No, no, no, not him,” Miles had become instantly enraged over watching them undress each other almost painstakingly, taking their time to seduce each other.

The rage only grew as their connection grew and distance between them decreased with every layer shed. He watched as Scully was enveloped fully in Mulder’s arms, the moment that was meant to be private between them that he was certainly not invited not be a part of. Part of him was relieved that he couldn’t hear the sound associated with his intrusion of personal space with this camera, but his mind was now racing as he began to imagine what he could’ve done to block
this if he had known. If he had only been able to knock at the door randomly or if he had just
loosened one of the bolts to the shower, she wouldn’t have been able to do anything like this with
HIM. The thought seared through him as he pictured slitting Mulder’s throat in front of her,
subjecting her to mental torment, breaking her down until he could break her down physically.

“Keep your hands off of her—she doesn’t belong to you. She just doesn’t know what she
wants, she’s fickle,” Miles seethed, practically spitting all over as he knocked over a stack of VHS
tapes and some other items as he desperately tried to hold back the urge to shout into the air.

He roughly turned off the screen, unwilling to continue to watch what they had done
together, and slid back into the front seat of the van, fists pounding on the steering wheel. He
stared blankly at the road, eyes half twitching from the increase in blood pressure, and almost
became consumed with focusing the blanket of rain as it surged over the windshield, blurring the
roadway in front of him. He inhaled deeply and flipped on the stereo, then rolled the volume up to
one of the loudest settings to the point that the speakers vibrated hard into the air. The hypnotic
quality of the song was almost cathartic and centering as his pulse returned to normal and his eyes
focused on what was in front of him.

I don’t want your body

But I hate to think about you with somebody else

Our love has gone cold

You’re intertwining your soul with somebody else

He gripped the wheel, slowly coiling his fingers around the upper curve and slowly
sneered as the music played loudly. His newfound clarity provided his inner psychotic the
necessary switch flipped into the direction that he needed to continue. The curve of his grin only
increased as he finally knew absolutely what he was going to do and torture wasn’t even going to
cover half of what he had in store for both of them.

“So much more than suffering—you’re going to regret this,” he twitched before starting
up the engine and speeding off down the street, tires squealing along the way.

Chapter End Notes

Lyrics - "Somebody Else" by the 1975

Chapter 11 is already in progress. Thank you so much for bearing with me! Please
leave me feedback or kudos. This has been so fun to write.
Switch

Chapter Summary

Summary: Romanticizing his victims, a brutal murderer leaves behind symbols of love... but who is his true, intended target?
Post “Agua Mala” (Season 6 with mentions of “Rain King”, “Two Fathers”, and “One Son” Briefly and only for context purposes)
This is a 3 part chapter -- It was a bit of an experiment and I truly hope you love it

Chapter Notes

Note: Use of puns and witty comebacks were both necessary and wanted throughout this process – practicing balance between the extremes and humor has given a much-needed lift to the truly dark places that have been explored in the most recent chapters (and those dark places will be continuing for a bit so bear with me). Please enjoy.

While the restaurant is real the characters mentioned are original. No one named worked or works there at any point – the setting was simply convenient.

Disclaimer: Agents Mulder, Scully, Skinner, and Fowley belong respectively to Chris Carter, FOX Productions, and TenThirteen Productions. All other characters are original and any likeness or named similarities to any real-life persons are purely coincidental.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Metro 29 Diner

4711 Lee Highway
Arlington, VA

The Sunday morning breakfast rush had started to wind down in the 50s themed diner with the unmistakable metallic and glass exterior. The entry rug was soaked and gave a subtle hint to the onslaught of rain that each person had tracked into the building and only one little “caution: wet floor” sign sat nearby to warn patrons of a possible slick floor until the wait staff could snatch a mop to get a little of the excess away from the linoleum sections. Inside the dining area there were locals and truckers remaining, finishing the last of their meals while the wait staff cleared the tables from the previous rush of customers as they made their way back into the weather. It was warm and inviting inside the dining room, a far cry from the nasty weather outside as Miles came in through the front door with his hood on, shielding his face from the sideways rainfall. He stood at the front where the “please wait to be seated” sign stood and slid the hood back before wiping down his arms and shoulders.

“Looks like it is getting pretty bad out there,” Jeanette, one of the newer waitresses
dropped her clean up tasks and came over to him, eyes sparkling along with her radiantly red lipped smile. “You look like you need a spot to sit and a coffee?”

Miles smiled at her a little insincerely, but fake enough that no one would suspect it as such, and nodded in her direction, glancing at her nametag for reference. “That sounds really good, Jeanette.”

She blushed and spun around to glance at the dining area again, scanning the space, her long, almost burgundy locks bouncing in the ponytail she wore. “I’ve got this super comfy little booth right over here that might be right up your alley and if you need anything you can just shout my way.”

Miles followed her to the booth intended for 3-4 people and scooted into the seat, never once taking his gaze off of her, putting emphasis on her name again like he was attempting to woo her right there in the restaurant. “I don’t shout at ladies, Miss Jeanette.”

“Well, let me get you that coffee while you take a peek at the menu, then,” Jeanette was very pale so the bright pink color in her cheeks stood out prominently as Miles gave her a little extra attention.

He winked at her as she went off to the counter to pour him a cup of coffee and watched her as she held a hand to her cheek, half embarrassed at how warm her face had become. He watched as the cook gently teased her from behind the window as he put out fresh creamer for her to take back with her. She had a lovely neck, he thought to himself, and her perfectly pale skin stood out in a crowd, along with her little freckles dotted down her clavicle and neck, along the outside of her arms. She was almost perfect, better than the others that had come before her, he knew for certain. She turned and caught him staring, causing the flushed skin to travel to her ears and neck.

She walked back to his booth with a cup hooked on her pinky, carafe in the same hand and a small serving pourer of creamer. “Do I have something on my face? I wouldn’t be shocked if I did…I’m kind of clumsy like that.”

He shook his head as he watched her put the cup down and carefully pour the coffee, setting the creamer next to the cup. “No, you’re just, so lovely—sorry that I keep staring, I just can’t help myself. I’m sure you get that a lot.”

“Oh gosh, well, thank you, but no, I don’t,” Jeanette had a slight stammer as she fumbled with her guest check pad, readying her pen. “Are you ready for breakfast or do you need another minute?”

“What a shame. You should, you have a very beautiful face. Give me a couple to look this menu over,” Miles knew how to flip the switch and become incredibly charismatic at the drop of the hat as he set her off half stuttering and fumbling on herself.

She nodded and went over to work on wiping down a few more tables as well as check in on a couple of the remaining guests who had already been eating their meals, including a couple of truckers, who were nursing their third cup of coffee. She had a brilliant smile as she made small talk, refilling their cups again, illuminating the room with her energy. The other wait staff had cheerful dispositions but hers was unique in that nothing seemed forced or contrived—she had a kind honesty about her and it was effortless. She could charm a room and didn’t even know it…to her it was just being sweet and taking care of everyone else’s needs.

“Jeanette, can you take Mack his small stack and scramble?” Delilah was the oldest of
the waitresses and was knee deep in table clearing as she heard the cook call up his order.

“Yes, ma’am, I got it,” Jeanette pulled the plate down and headed toward Mack, an elderly truck driver who was a regular with them. “Got your usual, Macky Mack, hope you’re hungry!”

“Gotta have my energy—another long run for me after this. Won’t see you for another week or two,” Mack smiled from behind his cup of coffee and nodded as she put the plate down in front him.

Mack was climbing into the 70s in age but was still pretty spry for an old guy. He had a little mustache and a full head of nearly grayed hair. He was one of those well-groomed, old fashioned men, though, and Jeanette knew that it must’ve been for his dearly departed, who had always seemed like the kind of woman that insisted on him keeping the scruff away…stuff like that gets in the way of kissing, after all. She had met the late Mrs. Jones the year before she passed away and knew that part of Mack’s remaining joy in life was coming to the diner after losing her.

“Who is going to read me the funnies on Sunday, then? Delilah doesn’t do the voices, Mack,” Jeanette teased him, setting a container of warmed up syrup and butter on the table top along with a small stack of napkins. “You owe me one giant ass hug when you get back, you hear me?”

“You got yourself a deal,” Mack bit into his pancakes and winked at her. “How’s that sweet little doll doing?”

“Maggie? She’s going to be six this month, can you believe it? The first time you saw her she had just barely turned three…she’s a handful but she’s mine,” Jeanette gushed about her daughter as she squeezed his shoulder and refilled his cup as he set it back down. “Need anything else or are you good for now?”

“The time goes by so quickly—remind me of that birthday so I can bring her a card, ok? If I need anything else I’ll just bug ole big mama D over there if I need anything else,” Mack had been coming to the restaurant since the day that they opened in 1995 and Delilah was his favorite to tease and torment while Jeanette reminded him of his granddaughter.

“You’re gonna make her whoop my butt if you keep giving her a hard time, Mack,” Jeanette let out a giggle that made Mack laugh along with her.

She just had one of those giggles that made everyone in the immediate vicinity break out in fits of laughter as well. Thoroughly infectious.

“Mack, stop trying to corrupt my angel girl—she’s the only one I can still boss around without too much sass back,” Delilah came up behind Jeanette and startled her a little with a bit of a poke in the ribs to bring her back to the subject of Miles. “You better go take that gentleman’s order…I think he’s sweet on you.”

“Oh gosh, I’m so rude,” Jeanette spun around, realizing she had not checked on him yet, only to discover that he had left. “Wait, where did he go?”

Jeanette walked to his booth and found that he had left enough money to more than pay for his coffee. She was secretly hoping he would’ve left behind a note or his business card so his name would’ve been known to her. That girlish side of her would’ve entertained the notion of even calling a perfect stranger for a cup of coffee—even if success was not typically something she experienced with men. Her shoulders slumped and the disappointment replaced that giddy feeling.
She turned back toward Delilah and forced a smile on her face even though she knew that Delilah could read it on her face that she was a bit on the crestfallen side.

“Must’ve just been a quick visit from an out of towner, angel face,” Delilah treated Jeanette like a daughter as she gave her a half hug and swatted her on the top of her backside. “Get your mind off of that with some busy work.”

“Trash pickup is tonight so I might as well go drag what we’ve got now,” Jeanette rolled her eyes, glancing at the ugly weather outside before back at the table where Miles had sat, still a bit chagrined at his hasty, silent exit.

“He wasn’t even attractive enough for you, Netty, I promise you that,” Mack shouted after her after swallowing a bite of his pancakes, being his usual, protective self.

“You hush,” Delilah swatted the back of Mack’s head with a rolled up gazette and refilled his coffee again before going to Miles’s empty booth to clean it up.

Jeanette knew how much she was loved by their bantering as she pulled on her jacket and hood, zipping it up to her chin, she saluted them both and went to the back where she hauled three, large bags filled to the hilt with random kitchen trash that couldn’t be recycled in any fashion. She swung them over her shoulder and shoved the back door open, grunting loudly as the wind and rain nearly knocked the door back into her. The rain had accumulated into pockets of puddles across the back parking lot and made it near impossible to not step in at least one as she weaved her way toward the large dumpsters. She pushed the gate open and set the bags down on the ground, hoisting one up and into the dumpster. She teetered back on her heels as a gust of wind shoved the lid shut as she was lifting the next bag into the air.

“Well, dammit,” She half kicked the outside of the dumpster. “Come on, cooperate.”

The lid finally lifted just enough for Jeanette to shove the bag into the dumpster but just as she was reaching down to pull the final bag of garbage into the air, she had a gloved hand across her mouth and felt the sharp pinch of a syringe needle into her neck. She fought against the very masculine, well applied grip and desperately kicked toward the dumpster to get leverage to shove backwards in hopes of knocking down her assailant. Her attempt was thwarted, however, as he re-applied his grip on her and shoved her forward, pushing the side of her face against the cold, painted steel exterior. Jeanette could feel her lungs pushing a scream out but the sound was muffled against his hand and even more dampened by the rain and wind coming down hard on the pavement.

The effects of the fluid that the assailant had injected her with were rapid as she started to feel her limbs become heavy and almost numb while everything around her went into slow motion. She struggled to keep her eyes open despite how heavy her eyelids had become as the man pulled her backwards toward the gate that kept the dumpsters closed off from the parking area. She couldn’t help but panic mentally as she thought about not being able to pick up her daughter from the sitter’s house if this were to go any further.

This can’t be happening. Her mind was racing.

Her assailant’s hand across her mouth had slid into just the right position that her lips where less than an inch from his skin which gave her a perfect window to bite down incredibly hard on his wrist. He let out a frustrated growl and let go of her accidentally, giving her a small gap to try to run from him. She kneed him in the groin and tried to shove past him but the drug had already slipped into her motor functions, preventing her from gracefully maneuvering away from his reach. He snatched her by the back of her coat, pulling the hood down in the process, and
wrapped the entire length of his arm around her neck, putting her into a choke hold.

“Struggling only makes it worse, Dee,” the feeling of dread set in for her as his lips were against the side of her head, whispering in a low growl against her skin. “Stop fighting it.”

It was in that moment that she knew exactly who he was…she just didn’t know his name.

9:45 AM

Medical Examiner’s Office – Morgue

Scully was still half damp from going in after Diana in the creek from the knees down, her boots were soggy and with each step she took a tiny, wet squeak emitted from the rubber soles. She took off her wet coat and pulled on a blue scrub top to protect herself as well as the body from contaminates before scrubbing her hands. She glanced back at the body on the table as she utilized the sanitizing station and slowly blinked in frustration over the fact that she was half swimming in creek water because of the way in which she was placed into the body bag for transport. Scully finished with her hands and pulled on a pair of rubber gloves, immediately retrieving the tape recorder from above her head to press the record button.

“Sunday, December 13th, 1998, 9:45 AM – Agent Dana Scully conducting autopsy on currently unknown female victim. Approximate time of death based on core temperature – 6:30 AM this morning. Suspected identity of unknown female is Diana Willis, age twenty seven, height five foot six inches tall, last known weight…125 pounds. Unknown female victim matches all approximate and known details of missing person Diana Willis,” Scully took a deep breath and pulled back the flap on the body bag until the bottoms of the victim’s feet were fully exposed, carefully to not splash creek water all over the floor or herself.

The creek water inside of the body bag sloshed back and forth against the victim’s skin, pushing and shoving her hair near the top of the mess inside. It was radiantly red and recently re-colored, Scully figured, as she took note of the fairly intense hues that stuck out from under the water. The color framed her face in such a way that it was hard not to look right at her, squarely in the face. Scully paced to take her eyes off of the victim and put her emotional investment into this case in check for the umpteenth time, refusing to allow this to be her undoing. The frustration was mounting for her as she looked at the victim again, taking in just how badly their perp had tortured her. Part of her was angry that he was able to do this but part of her found resolve in knowing that this girl was incredibly mentally tough as well as physically to endure such torture. She followed the cuts and gashes down from her shoulders to her hands, carefully handling them to examine her palms without doing more damage via barbed wire wrapping. Scully extended each finger and discovered that there looked to be epithelial cell clusters underneath the index and thumb nails on both hands.
“Examiner’s note, extracting four sets of epithelial clusters from right and left index and thumb nails,” Scully carefully slid a swab under each nail and capped them, then slid them into an evidence bag for cataloging.

Scully labeled the evidence bag and placed it onto a table with a “to be processed” marker at the top of it. She looked back over at the girl on the table again, taking a mental note of the amount of cuts and bruises that she had sustained. This girl had fought considerably harder than their previous victims, almost as if she wasn’t willing to make his kill satisfying or easy in the slightest. She pulled the rolling table toward the sink and pulled a screen across the top of the basin before allowing some of the water to roll into it, catching only the true object level debris if there were any. Scattered bits of leaves and twigs fell onto the screen along with little bits of metal that Scully knew would need to be addressed but not right now. She left the debris in the screen and pushed the table back into place, securing the wheels with the heel of her boot.

Scully reached back above her head and pressed the pause on the recorder, realizing she had far more of her external exam left than she had anticipated as she looked down at the tangle of barbed wire and flesh before her. The weather had been beyond an inconvenient hampering on the evidence as she watched the wet sheen begin to fade on the surface of the victim’s skin. A good majority of the surface material had been washed away but some things seem to be enhanced as she could see an almost sticky residue around her mouth and chest cavity beneath the layers of barbed wire. She took a photograph of the substance before taking a swab of the substance from around her mouth. The substance had viscosity but easily rolled onto the cotton tip of the swab as she slid it across the surface to collect the sample, almost like sealant that had started to break down. She pulled the barrier shut on the swab and placed it into another evidence baggie before labeling it carefully with a small note about the texture.

The door at the other end of the room opened and caused Scully to nearly leap out of her skin, flinging the sharpie in the process. “Jesus, Mulder.”

“Swamp autopsy have you a little jumpy, Scully?” Mulder watched the sharpie bounce across the floor as he let the door slide shut, his wit already gearing up as Scully came down out of the rafters like a startled cat.

Scully inhaled sharply and pressed her lips together, boots squeaking as she teetered back and forth. “No, just your impeccable timing as always, Mulder.”

“Well, I thought you could use a hand since I didn’t see anyone actually drain the water out of the body bag but it looks like you beat me to the punch on that one,” Mulder shook his head at seeing that she had done the task all by herself as per usual.

“Instinct,” Scully smirked and picked up a pair of shears from the instrument table, carefully snipping a section of the barbed wire for removal. “Can’t exactly conduct an autopsy with water up to my elbows. Already have a few things to run through evidence.”

Mulder picked up her sealed evidence bags and slid it into the larger carrier he had brought in with him. “She took a piece of the killer with her huh?”

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“Several—must’ve managed to dig into him at some point and he was either too consumed with killing her or had too much adrenaline surging through him to take note of it,” Scully carefully started a pile of barbed wire sections as she carefully separated skin from the metallic bindings.

“This is looking like you’re going to be a while,” Mulder pushed another cart close to the body and pulled on a pair of gloves before carefully maneuvering the barbed wire onto the larger
“I can’t conduct an internal on her until the barbed wire is removed—and there’s enough here to redo a fence,” Scully continued to carefully clip away at the sections of wire, occasionally looking over at Mulder. “By the way, how is Agent Ding-A-Ling fairing?”

“Subtle, Scully, very subtle—Skinner had to send her to get dry gear because she was shivering so badly,” Mulder continued. “Yet, here you stand with wet pants and boots like it isn’t even a little bit of a problem.”

“High maintenance is as high maintenance does—the sooner I can conduct an autopsy, the quicker we can solve this case, and a little creek water isn’t going to slow me down,” Scully raised her eyebrow at him. “I’m sure we’ll manage without her while she’s taking her sweet time to get changed.”

“You woke up feisty today…I certainly hope your recorder is off, Scully,” Mulder tapped on the recording device above her head, chuckling.

“I’m feisty every day, Mulder, it’s just whether or not I choose to air it out—yes, it’s off,” Scully winked at him and let another sizeable length of the barbed wire tap against the surface of the table.

“Why am I getting the distinct impression that you’re a biter, Scully?” Mulder breathed deep, channeling his energy with each calculated second that passed, thankful that she chose not to record this part of the examination despite the delightful turn this conversation had taken.

*Brave topic of discussion while I have a pair of shears in my hand, Mulder.* Scully couldn’t help but think to herself as she looked at Mulder, who had the corner of his lip firmly between his teeth.

“That’s a need to know kind of topic, Mulder, and right now you don’t need to know the answer,” Scully smiled, the brazenly brave peeking out for a moment.

*I’m pushing it. Yep.* Mulder already knew so many little things about her that could be used against her but he didn’t mind letting her have the upper hand of this conversation.

“Scully, why wouldn’t I need to know the answer to that right now?” Mulder scoffed at her, mouth a bit agape as he allowed the sexual tension to re-blossom and manifest while they openly flirted with one another in the middle of the morgue. “Could be useful information.”

“Well, I suppose the answer to both would depend on whether or not you plan on taking me home tonight,” Scully raised her eyebrows at him and shrugged her shoulders, almost daring him to answer.

The words were on his tongue, palpable and ready, and just as his lips parted to utter them, Skinner was walking through the door like a toddler interrupting parents who were just about to embark on scarce alone time. He seemed to have a knack for that as of late, interrupting at the most inopportune time or opportune depending on the audience. Scully blushed as she watched Mulder swallow hard, undoubtedly swallowing away a sentence, and took her time in making eye contact with Skinner.

“How is the autopsy coming along?” Skinner seemed frantic, haphazard even, as he came in and did not even bat an eye at their awkward expressions.

“It’ll go much faster once I get the rest of the barbed wire removed and finish
photographing her wounds,” Scully indicated the growing stack of bloodied steel. “Getting her out of the creek was the quick solution to saving evidence but it didn’t exactly make this part easier.”

“Do you have anything that Agent Mulder or I could run while you’re deconstructing this?” Skinner crossed his arms and rubbed his temples, the lack of patience manifesting in one hellacious headache. “Whatever we have we can get Agent Belle to dig into and maybe find out if he has any new news for us?”

“There’s a few things in that bag in Mulder’s hand that Max can run through DNA,” Scully nodded while carefully sliding a fairly large portion of the barbed wire into a plastic bin. “These could use a thorough once over through full spectrum just to be on the safe side in case the killer left us any trace that the water hasn’t destroyed.”

“What, you don’t want to deliver all of this yourself to your favorite forensics man, Scully?” Mulder purposely poked at her, carefully choosing his words in front of Skinner.

“Are you forgetting that I have a sharp object in my hand, Mulder?” Scully hid a playful smile as she freed their victim’s legs from the remainder of the steel coils and set it aside.

“You wouldn’t cross contaminate evidence, Agent Scully,” Mulder gathered up the bin and the evidence bag, unaware completely that Skinner was inching toward the door while rolling his eyes.

“You’re right, which is why I have a fresh pair right here at my disposal,” Scully glanced at Skinner then back at the task in front of her, shooting Mulder another wink.

“If you two are done bantering—we have work to do,” Skinner’s refusal to read into their witty discussion was not out of denial but out of pure exhaustion as he walked out of the room not bothering to wait for Mulder.

“Go get those to Max then find Skinner either a place to sit quietly or find him more caffeine,” Scully’s concern over Skinner’s restless energy was growing after watching the shell of her boss walk out of the room. “He hasn’t slept, Mulder.”

“If I can’t convince him to leave I’ll get him distracted enough to relax awhile in the lounge, it should help,” Mulder gathered up all of the evidence and propped the door against his knee for a moment longer. “You know where I am if you need to have anything else processed.”

Scully nodded and watched him walk out the door, leaving her alone with the victim again. She exhaled softly and resumed the painstaking task of removing the remainder of the barbed wire as she realized only about a third of it had been dislodged from her flesh. She wanted to leave the worst section for the last, which was the chest cavity where a portion of the sternum looked as though it had been popped out of place but she couldn’t tell beneath the layers of barbs. Scully pressed the record button on the recording device above her as she gently clipped away at each little section.

“Additional pre-autopsy note from examiner, just over one third of the barbed wire has been removed from the victim’s flesh—left arm, neck, back, and upper torso are the only remaining body parts left for clearing. Will leave chest cavity for final removal to fully examine what appears to be a partial or full sternum dislodging. Can see fragments of metallic substance other than the steel of the barbed wire pressed from the inside out against what appears to be a jagged, semi-circular crack in the bone. It is unknown if the crack has caused full or partial dislocation at this time,” Scully pressed the stop button and continued to carefully clip away at the half embedded steel wiring.
She followed the curve of the left arm, pulling each little section away until the only bits of steel that were visible were under her back, across her chest, or around her neck. This woman had struggled for hours against the barbed wire, in certain spots, as she could see punctures in the same harnessed pattern from the bottom layer. Scully put the shears down and went for the camera, taking close ups of each section of the victim, with and without the measuring tool against each larger wound for comparison shots. Scully took a close up shot of the victim’s face and looked through the view finder as she pressed the button down, while the shutter clicked and the flash squealed. She adjusted her stance to the left of the face and took another photo but just as the light bounced off of her, a bit of metal bounced the light back at Scully in the view finder.

What do we have here? Scully squinted through the view finder for a moment as the shimmering object flashed across her field of vision.

Scully put the camera onto the counter behind her and carefully pulled a shielded light into place just above the victim’s mouth where she slowly tilted the jaw open and slid a pair of tweezers into the opening. The air escaping her larynx made a little pop followed by a low gurgle, forcing the object up just a little bit to where it had become half lodged against the roof of the victim’s mouth. Scully pushed down on one end until the shiny, jeweled cross dislodged from the roof of the victim’s mouth, dragging along a long, gold chain with it. The necklace looked familiar to Scully as she took it to the counter to swab it carefully for particulates before delicately rinsing it clean. She placed it into an evidence bag with the protected swab after labeling it and put it on the counter nearest to the door. There was something wrong about the way that this victim was staged and Scully couldn’t quite put her finger on it as she approached her again, slowly resuming the removal of the final section of barbed wire from the victim’s chest and back.

“Why did he torture you so much more than the previous victims? What does this prove?” Scully took a step back from the body and closed her eyes. “I really am losing my mind – I’m over here talking to a dead body as though she’s going to answer me. This is crazy.”

Scully took a deep breath and pressed the shears into the thin steel barbed wire, separating each line in a circular pattern with painstaking and delicate movements. Scully always took great care with each victim as though she had to look upon the faces of their families—even if that may not be the case at all. There was something rewarding about seeing more than the dead and yet, it was quite possibly one of the more torturing parts of an autopsy. No such thing as anonymity despite how many times she ever attempted to say it out loud to delude herself.

It would never be true. It couldn’t.

Scully took another deep breath as she set a section of barbed wire atop the ever growing pile next to her. She could feel her temples throb with anger as she looked down at what was left of this woman, who was likely looking at a bright, healthy future prior to coming into the crosshairs of this insane asshole. As Scully came to the final three sections of steel wiring she could see the sternum almost pushing in an upwards motion from something dislodged or possibly foreign within the chest cavity. Scully picked up a wide edged clamp and used the flat side of it without locking it into place to keep the sternum from shifting further as she clipped the final three lines of barbed wire and slowly moved the thin wires away from the mess that the killer had made, setting them on the pile that was nearly complete. She inhaled sharply and held it while she slowly shifted the clamp’s edge away from the top of the sternum only to hear a sound that no one wants to hear when dealing with any corpse, mutilated or not – a loud, ignition-like click.

“Oh, fuck.”
Lakeview Drive (Near Lake Barcroft)
Falls Church, Virginia

The overwhelming smell of bleach and various other cleaning products brought Jeanette out of the assaulting grip of her drug induced slumber. The cement floor was wet against her face and she could feel the distinct burn of chemicals against her bruised and battered cheek as she rolled onto her back. The pain seared through her cheek and jaw as she squinted up at the light fixture above her. She tried, almost desperately, to pull her arms down toward her sides in attempt to hoist herself to a seated position but neither would move. She tugged again and felt the shackle gripped her half numb flesh and the realization hit – the immobility she was experiencing was being caused by the shackles and the after effects of the drugs still meandering through her system.

*The hell did he drug me with?* Her mind was racing as she feebly pulled at both arms above her head but only felt them fighting each other as the chain slid back and forth against the post like a pulley would. The noise grated on her ears and sent a pulse of pain to the spot behind her eyes. She whimpered for a moment, clamping both eyelids shut in hopes of willing away the pain even for just a moment. She let her eyes open just a little bit as the want to escape overwhelmed the pain she was experiencing—urgency had set in. She looked up at her hands and grunted as she pushed them together, gripping her fingers around the chain for any leverage she could attempt with so little feeling in her limbs. She gritted her teeth as she watched her fingers tighten around the chain and inhaled as she pulled with every fiber of her being just to move even a little bit. Her backside slid across the damp cement and the chain rattled against the post with every tug.

“Come on, muscles, work, please,” Her voice was ragged with distress as each movement was leaving surface abrading on the backs of her legs as they moved along the bleach and water logged floor.

The pain was undeniable but Jeanette refused to focus on it as she powered to a seated position and propped herself up against the post. Her thoughts were on her child and the desire to get home to her in one piece as the pain brewed in her legs and sent electric like shock jolts up her spine as she settled against the metal support post. It was like vertigo had set in for a moment as her head spun just enough to make her stomach knot up and turn until the only thing her body could do was wretch onto the cement. The dizziness passed in the moments after the second round of vomit left her body, leaving her shaking like a leaf against the support post. She knew that this must have been from whatever drug he used on her as she shivered through the last of the spinning of the room while she struggled to focus on anything around her.

Jeanette was alone in the basement but the lighting had been strategically arranged to play tricks on her as she could not tell where anything was other than the painted over sliding glass door to her right. She could feel the draft from the glass door wafting over her skin, creating little goosebumps as it shifted over her. The chain hooked to the shackles around her wrists slightly rattled as it touched the floor while she carefully maneuvered at an angle that she could see exactly how they were affixed to her. She wiggled each wrist and pulled on the thick metal, hoping that one of them would slide past her thumbs but they were both fairly secure. Her entire body ached
from being battered against the dumpster outside of the restaurant along with being tossed into the back of Miles’s van like a sack of potatoes.

It was a feeling of used goods—worthlessness.

The air, underneath all of the cleaning products, was stale and had a distinct twinge of decay hanging in it. She could smell blood and rotting flesh being only partially covered by the heavy lemon scented mopping solution. The masking wasn’t working at all. Jeanette squinted as she scanned the space and saw her heels tossed on top of her rain coat in the furthest corner from her, just under the stairwell. This is what happens in movies, not to normal people. How do I always manage to attract the psychopaths? Jeanette was angry with herself for not only flirting with a stranger in her place of work but giving ample opportunity for said stranger to abduct her shortly thereafter.

“Hello? Is anyone there?” Her voice cracked again but she had to test the water again just to see if anyone would reply.

The silence reverberated back at her and sent a relieving pang down her back as she resumed feverishly tugging at the shackles. She pulled desperately, causing little clangs of metal on metal as the chain bounced off of the support post with each movement. She tugged each one and felt slightly more give with the left wrist than the right as it pressed against the curve of her thumb and started to cut off circulation to her fingers. She inhaled sharp as she felt the police grade steel start to dig into her skin and coax blood to the surface. She continued to pull the shackle downward toward the tips of her fingers in desperate fashion despite ripping a section of skin along the top of her hand that had created enough blood splatter to soak through her skirt, focusing only on the end goal of freeing herself.

“Shit,” Jeanette held in the desire to cry out as she felt and heard the unmistakable popping of her thumb coming out of the socket.

Jeanette’s self-inflicted pain had become a necessary evil as she watched the shackle drop into her lap and roll onto the floor. Tears streamed down her face as she felt elation momentarily quell her pain while the realization of just how close she truly was in getting away from this nightmare. She gently gathered up the chain and crawled toward the sliding glass door, skin on her knees and feet scraping along the harsh cement flooring with every little inch she moved. The effects of the drugs were still in her system as her legs tingled and refused to cooperate with her fully while she reached for the lock on the slider, pulling it toward the floor until she could hear the loud click as it released. Her fingers gripped the handle and pulled it away from her, revealing the harsh, white light and tremendous wind outside along with the torrential downpour in full effect. She made the opening in the door just wide enough that she could just barely squeeze through and the smell of lake water and heavy rain invaded her nostrils as her fingers pressed into the deep blades of under maintained grass. She felt the rain on her and the wind whipping her hair all around as she pushed her knees underneath of her, standing weakly near the bushes that lined the outside of the house.

Freedom.

Jeanette started to sprint toward the fence line not caring whether she was heading for the road or water, half sliding through the mud covered sections of the poorly maintained backyard of the house she didn’t recognize. She glanced back at the house only once and saw no one coming after her. A sense of relief passed over her as she came to the edge of the yard where grass met the sandy shore of the lake. She hesitated for only a moment and sunk her toes in while she shook the numbness away from her mangled left hand. The feeling was heavy as her feet still felt like heavy
blocks despite her ability to maneuver and she was almost certain that there was blood all over the backs of her legs but none of that mattered now.

She resumed her movement toward a small dock that seemed to be attached to the same property the house was on, thoughts on a hope that there was a boat tied up inside of the small shed at the fork in the dock. She climbed onto the wobbly wood material, feet slipping along the well saturated planks with every step, and went to the side with the shed, pulling back the tarp enclosure to reveal a small space with a small 16 foot C-Dory Angler tied to the side. She climbed over the side railing of the boat and felt the sway of the wakes as they passed underneath of the boat from the ongoing storm. She held onto the railing and swallowed hard while her stomach turned from the excess, unneeded extra movement. She looked around before stepping forward toward the swivel chairs underneath the hardtop of the boat and noticed the key was already in the ignition switch, ready for use. The key chain swung back and forth before her, bringing her nearly to the edge of a fit of happy tears as everything was seemingly falling into place—the sooner that she could hold her daughter in her arms, the better, and that moment seemed so very close to her now.

The wind whistling through the shed masked the sounds as Miles was able to slide in through the entry and snatch Jeanette by the hair, sending her into a chain reaction of panic driven flailing and high pitched screams. Miles coiled his hand through her hair and yanked her out of the boat almost haphazardly. She fought hard against his grip but the chain still attached to her right wrist proved to be more of a hindrance to her as Miles was able to grab the length of it and swing it around her up by her neck, choking her. For a moment the only sounds that Jeanette could hear were the heaviest pelting of rain against the tarp cover of the shed and the wind whistling through the trees, through the opening of the shed. Her eyes rolled into the back of her head while she gagged against the chain and made her last ditch effort to back kick toward him, hoping they would connect enough to soften his grip.

“Mother fucker, let me go,” Jeanette was fighting against the chain despite her airways being slowly cut off by the cold steel chain pressing hard against her neck.

Miles throttled the chain and nearly knocked the wind out of her entirely as the futility of her reality had set in. Her fight had settled as she went limp at the knees and softened in his unrelenting grasp. He held onto the chain with fervor until her breathing went shallow and he knew for certain that she wouldn’t be running from him any time soon. He lifted her deftly across his shoulder and used the chain again to wrap it around her waistline, trapping her arm against her body.

“You shouldn’t have done that, Dee.”

Chapter End Notes

Credit: Metro29 Diner - it's a real place, go check it out! No, don't ask for Big Mama D, they will have NO idea who you are talking about.

I so hope you all love it – It was a lot faster than some of the others but was “harder” to write if that makes sense. Feedback is welcomed and adored. I’m already working on the next chapter!
Summary: Romanticizing his victims, a brutal murderer leaves behind symbols of love...but who is his true, intended target and what lengths will he go to get her to notice?

Post “Agua Mala” (Season 6 with mentions of “Rain King”, “Two Fathers”, and “One Son” Briefly and only for context purposes)

Use of puns and witty comebacks were both necessary and wanted throughout this process – practicing balance between the extremes and humor has given a much-needed lift to the truly dark places that have been explored in the most recent chapters (and those dark places will be continuing for a bit so bear with me). Please enjoy.

Metro29 is briefly mentioned again (it is real, the people mentioned are not).

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Medical Examiner’s Office – Morgue

Mulder had convinced Skinner to sit down in a small waiting lounge at the end of the hall where the families of victims would pensively await the moment they’d be asked to identify their loved ones. Skinner was worse for the wear as Scully had pointed out and needed sleep but had refused to leave, adamant on staying to assist further in the investigation. He settled upon the option of finding coffee and a place to sit where he could allow some of the stress to leave him. This case had taken so much of their mental strength and was slowly draining them of the ability to separate their emotions from everything else—the slow kill of objectivity. Skinner sank into one of the high armed chairs and audibly exhaled as he felt the comfort of the cushion absorb him. Mulder placed a cup of fresh coffee, black with sugar, into Skinner’s half shaking hands and made his way up the stairs to Max’s temporary office with the evidence box secured in his hands.

“Maximus, I bring you gifts for your magical touch,” Mulder put the box in front of a busily working Max, who pushed his glasses back as the box touched the top of the desk.

Mulder looked around at the space that Max was using as his office in the medical examiner’s wing and stifled a chuckle as he saw the container of sanitizing wipes sitting next to a mobile chemical analysis unit and a computer station with the FBI’s missing person’s database ready to be searched. Max was anal-retentive about cleanliness and his office in the FBI building...
was far more top notch than this one, but he wasn’t going to sacrifice the hyper sanitary work station at another building. Everything was carefully labeled and put into a specific spot. Everything has a place and each item better be in its place at all times.

“Excellent…I have a few for you in return, Agent Mulder,” Max pulled a file from the top of a stack and thumbed through it. “Facial recognition on the locket that you and Agent Scully had me run came back on missing person Diana Willis which is the possible ID of the victim in the morgue that Agent Scully is examining.”

“Well, that’s more helpful than anticipated and lets us know that Angelique and Diana were definitely held in the same space for at least a portion of time together—what about the residue that Scully found on Angelique’s body? Any luck with figuring out what it was?” Mulder thumbed through the report and noticed the missing person’s report on Diana attached to the documentation on the facial recognition.

“That was the interesting find, actually and when you read it I’m sure you’ll know what I’m referring to,” Max nodded and gathered another file from next to a piece of equipment, giving it to him.

“…Hydrazine and Astrolite?” Mulder read through the index of chemicals, stopping on the two that stood out as out of place among the mundane biological elementals. “Shit…Scully.”

Mulder dropped the documents on Max’s desk and rushed out of the office, his mind swirling around the implications of Hydrazine and Astrolite being on one of their victim’s bodies in any quantity. He nearly took a tumble down the single flight of stairs to the same level as the morgue and threw open the door to the same hallway, nearly busting a hole in the wall in the process. Something wasn’t right and he could already feel the anxious sense of doom rising in his belly. As he came down the hallway the unmistakable sound of glass breaking, walls shaking, and metal banging against metal nearly took the air out of his lungs entirely. He wanted to be wrong about where the sound was coming from, but his gut was turning circles as his sprint became a full-blown run toward the morgue. The sounds were reminiscent of Texas, only on a much smaller, more contained scale as he could hear a few of the ceiling panels crashing to the floor from the hallway. The sounds were distinct and loud enough that Skinner was abruptly coaxed out of his brief moment of contemplation and much needed relaxation, his coffee sent careening to the floor with a thud and a splash. Skinner met Mulder in the hallway and witnessed the moment where the rest of Mulder’s composure fell by the wayside as a plume of dust and smoke from the material that had caused the ignition in the first place billowed out through the broken window of the morgue door. Outside of the morgue, in an almost stream-like pattern across the floor in the hallway, the broken glass caught both of their fields of vision slowing their hasty movements in hopes of hearing movement coming from inside of the room where Scully had been conducting an autopsy.

“Holy shit,” Skinner’s shoes pressed along the glass and clicked loudly on the other side of the hallway as the odor of rotting flesh and explosives hit him like a ton of bricks.

“Scully!” Mulder’s voice was shrill as he looked through the empty space where the frosted glass window once was and saw what could only be described as carnage through a thick haze of dust and smoke.

Blood and body parts had gone nearly everywhere along with the barbed wire and medical equipment. All of the metal exam tables were on their sides or had awkwardly rolled to a different spot in the room while the exam light that was normally propped over the body during an autopsy had been speared by bone fragments and explosives, causing most of the fixture to drop to
the floor in a heap. The body bag was the only recognizable object in the room other than the stacks and rows of storage against the back wall. Mulder’s eyes followed the spatter all over the cold storage, the floor, and the walls of various body parts that were now nearly pulverized beyond recognition and blood until he saw a large pooling of it near the overturned exam table on the floor.

_She’s ok, she has to be ok—I can’t bear it if she isn’t ok._ Mulder’s heart was racing as he watched what was left of the overhead florescent lighting as they rapidly blinked and shoot off little sparks from sections where bone fragments had busted cracks in their exterior.

“Come on, Scully, talk to me!” Mulder pulled the door open, the warped metal scraping along the floor with every inch that it moved.

Skinner knew that there was almost no way that he was going to be able to stop Mulder from continuing to enter the room or pry him away from finding her as he opted to go find help. Mulder could hear the drop ceiling shifting above the morgue along with the settling of metal on the floor. He was beginning to panic over not hearing her at all as he scanned the room, desperately looking for signs of life. He didn’t know what he would do if she were hurt, or worse, but the thought alone was far more than he could bear as he continued to pry his way into the room.

“I’m here, Mulder,” Scully’s voice was meek, unsettlingly rattled, and a bit muffled as Mulder pushed the door the rest of the way open and started maneuvering over some of the debris in the room, desperate to get to her. “My ears won’t stop ringing.”

“Hang tight, Scully, I’m going to get you out of there,” Mulder caught sight of the bottom half of Scully’s legs partially peeking out from underneath of the exam table. “I need to move the table.”

“I can’t really move, Mulder, and even if I could, there’s a business end of a bone saw right next to my head,” Scully still had room for some sarcasm despite the precariousness of her situation.

“Odd time to be a smart ass don’t you think, Scully?” Mulder shook his head at her while his fingers gripped the edge of the table and carefully started pulling it back to its upright position, off of her.

“Better than a dumbass, Mulder…oh, fuck,” Scully let out a low groan and bit down on her bottom lip as the table shifted the pressure across her upper thighs while she became aware of her pain level.

Mulder looked over his shoulder just as some of the panels from the drop ceiling finally fell onto the space just about four feet away from them, filling the space with an even bigger dust cloud than was already present from the explosion. He got the table to a fully upright position and was taken aback by the amount of blood all over her. She smiled up at him in relief as he knelt down toward her, taking her hand in his tenderly, rubbing her palm with a loving reassurance after experiencing what he assumed was on the more harrowing side to experience.

“Please tell me none of this is yours,” Mulder’s heart was beating up into his throat as he looked down at his partner, who had already endured more than her fair share of suffering in the time since taking up his coat of arms, in this state.

Scully slowly shook her head, the ringing in her ears finally coming to a full stop. “No, I ducked down before the explosive device could detonate—but when it did, the table moved faster than I could.”

Another couple of panels from the ceiling started to fall, this time much closer as one
nearly landed on the pair of them. Mulder shielded her as the debris bounced around and waited for the room to go quiet again. Mulder picked up and moved the electric saw away from her along with several other sharp objects that had been flung in her direction during the blast, before noticing the scalpel that had sheared a hole through the instrument tray and was sticking out at them.

“I need to get you out of here,” Mulder slid his hands underneath of her knees and around her back, carefully lifting her into the air.

Scully hands gripped the front of his shirt and could no longer fight it as the shaking set in. She was strong, but no one could anticipate how they would feel once exposed to an explosion like that. She blinked slowly and felt the soreness emanate from her neck down to the tips of her toes, emphasized along the spots where the table had pressed as it landed on her. She was covered in blood and various other internal bits of their victim and now, likely, had deep, large bruises across the tops of her thighs and possibly the space between her shoulders. Mulder adjusted his grip on her, willing her closer to him despite the bodily fluids all over her that had now transferred to his heavy FBI jacket. He carried her out past the wreckage of the morgue and into the hallway where Skinner came back with a small team of FBI investigators and a bomb squad member to assess the morgue just in case.

“Agent Scully, is any of that yours?” Skinner wasn’t gloved but he didn’t care as he touched Scully’s shoulder, his concern almost as great as Mulder’s was.

“No, all of it was the victim’s,” Scully wanted to peel away all of her clothes and stand under scalding hot water until every drop of blood and guts was gone from her skin.

Mulder carried her to a chair and carefully eased her down onto it, allowing the cushions to support her in an upright position. He could hear her inhale sharply, the actuality of the pain she was in conveyed without words as her body responded to being set against a hard surface. He watched as she tensed up and gritted her teeth behind the shell-shocked expression on her face. He could feel it right along with her and found himself wishing he could take all of it away for her. Their focus diverted temporarily as the sound of the sprinklers going off in the morgue followed by frantic bomb squad members running back out of the room to get them turned off made the three of them go completely quiet as they quietly observed the moment of chaos. Water started to creep into the hallway, carrying bits of debris and blood along with it until the sound of active sprinklers running finally stopped, leaving only a gentle drip here and there from the pipeline. It was the capper on the mess that the day had become.

“Scully, I hate to put you through this, but you need to have the clothes that have blood and any of the victim’s organs or intestines on them taken for spectral examination since the autopsy could not be completed,” Skinner looked at Scully with more sympathy than he had expressed in quite some time as he watched her expression slowly drain away as she stared blankly at the floor almost to prevent her mind from replaying the explosion in her head.

“I can take her to get that taken care of, Skinner,” Mulder held out his hand to her, looking at her again. “Are you going to be able to walk?”

“Let me go get you a blanket to wrap up in, Scully,” Skinner went off to the closet at the end of the hallway while Mulder positioned himself in front of Scully to help her stand.

“I think I can manage walking,” Scully looked up at him as she reached for his hand and started to pull herself forward but felt the stiffness in her legs set in as both knees buckled, nearly sending her to the floor as she stood. “Ok, maybe not.”
“Hold on,” Mulder held her at the elbows and locked gazes with her as her legs shook, trying to capture her attention as he could feel her anxiousness radiate off of her like heat, her focus struggling to stay on him. “It’s ok—I’ve got you.”

“I know,” Scully didn’t like helplessness but she knew that her safety was his priority as she felt his hands adjust their grip on the outside of her coat.

“This one should work,” Skinner came back to them with a large microfiber blanket and helped Mulder wrap Scully up in it.

“The FBI showers are open, I could clean up there and use a pair of sweats from the gym to change into,” Scully didn’t know how far her legs would hold as she felt her thighs start to ache more painfully than they were before. “Plus that building is only a couple of blocks away.”

“Good enough—get cleaned up and changed, take any article of clothing with blood or parts of the victim on it to Max for trace analysis,” Skinner nodded at both of them, his mind already three steps ahead of where he was presently. “I’m going to attempt to piece together what happened in there with the bomb squad and salvage what we can.”

“I don’t know if it helps or not but the device had a pressure sensor and only gave me about 20 seconds to move—it made one, loud click and then a hiss-like click until the explosion occurred,” Scully winced and tilted her head to one side until her neck cracked, relieving some of the pressure pain she was experiencing in one spot of her body.

“Like a gas leak?” Mulder furrowed his brow at the hissing descriptive word.

“Nearly identical to that sound,” Scully nodded, glancing between them.

“I’ll relay that to the bomb squad officials—at this point any information we have couldn’t hurt,” Skinner shrugged his shoulders before moving for the door.

“You’re in more pain than you’re saying, aren’t you?” Mulder waited until Skinner was halfway into the morgue before inquiring while rubbing her shoulders with a tenderness that made most of the shaking gently subside.

Scully blinked slowly and teetered back and forth in her boots, her joints screaming at her. “If I think too much about it then it is so much worse…I haven’t felt anything like this in a very long time.”

“Try to walk—if it doesn’t go well, I’m carrying you and you don’t have a choice,” Mulder wrapped his arm around her back and gave her enough support before leading her toward the doors to the garage.

Scully took careful steps along with him but she felt her knees becoming less stable with each passing movement, the pain only increasing as her foot touched the floor with every step. She didn’t make it more than five or six steps before both knees dipped, a trip to the floor almost certainly in her future without Mulder right there with her. Mulder held on tightly as he felt her move and stopped his forward motion long enough to gather her under her legs again, carrying her as promised. She didn’t protest as he secured her in his arms, gathering her closer. She inhaled deeply as she felt the vertebrae in her back pop back into their rightful place, painfully sending a jolt through her. Mulder felt her momentarily tense up and soften again, causing him to shift his arm under her back just enough that it was cradling her at a less awkward spot more toward her lower back instead of center. They turned the corner just in time to meet Max at the end of hallway, standing in front of the doors to the garage, his big, goofy grin instantly fading as they came into
view.

“It really was as bad as Assistant Director Skinner said—are you okay, Agent Scully?” Max stammered with his words, almost caught off guard at just how bad the blood was.

“It looks worse than it actually is—I’m ok,” Scully didn’t even mind that Mulder was holding her like this in front of someone else, she felt safe in his arms.

“Did I forget something in your office or did you need something from us, Maximus?” Mulder went to reach for the door but Max opened it for them and made an exaggerated gesture like a hotel doorman would if he were attempting to please a particularly high priority client.

“Oh, I am your temporary chauffeur per orders of a certain Assistant Director,” Max jingled his keys at them after ushering them through the door toward a line of cars nearest to the exit doors. “He thought it would be a good idea if Agent Scully didn’t do a lot of shifting around and figured that you’d be carrying her at some point. I don’t know how he does it…must be psychic or something.”

Mulder couldn’t help but smirk at the idea as he made eye contact with Scully. “Remind me to give that bald, beautiful man a big wet one next time I see him, Scully.”

“Laughing right now is a little on the painful side, Mulder,” Scully held in a chuckle and felt her ribs aching with each little twinge of a breath.

“Who says I’m joking? That shiny dome…that pensive stare,” Mulder fake groaned as he spoke, doing everything he could to coax a laugh out of her despite the pain it was clearly causing.

“Those big, broad shoulders…the square jaw,” Max couldn’t help the very out of character remark to even come close to a hint of a laugh coming from Scully as he joined in on the gentle joking with Mulder.

“He’s delicious, right?” Mulder was thoroughly pleased with himself and with Max as he could feel Scully’s silent laugh vibrating against his chest, her mouth still shut, the sound refusing to come out.

“You know it,” Max opened the backseat door to the FBI issue SUV and slid out of the way, his cheeks turning pink as he could see Scully’s face contorting just enough that he knew she was tickled despite trying desperately not to be.

Mulder had to awkwardly slide into the seat and adjust his grip on Scully in such a way that they couldn’t avoid a little excessive physical contact. Scully’s hand peeked out from the confines of the microfiber blanket and coiled around the zipper line of his coat, gently gripping as she stayed nearly sitting up on his lap. Mulder wrapped both hands around her and started rubbing small, concentric circles at the small of her back, alternating between soft motions and little index finger drags to work on several knots that were tender to the touch. Scully lacked a poker face and a little bit of self-control as she locked eyes with his and bit down hard on her bottom lip, overwhelmed by the sensation and desperate to keep from making an inappropriate noise in front of Max. Mulder blinked softly, his hands not moving away from the section of microfiber against her back as lessened the intensity of the circular motion. Despite his best effort not to make the hurt worse, an audible pang of pain slipped through her lips and came out like a grunt that pulled Max’s focus for a moment.

“Trying to make this trip quick and painless, Agent Scully, but this weather is a little
hairy,” Max had the wipers on and was driving like an old person but she didn’t seem to mind as she let Mulder continue to silently rub the knots away along the curve of her low back.

“You’re doing just fine, Max, thank you for doing this,” Scully was already imagining how good this would feel if there weren’t several layers of fabric acting as a barrier between Mulder’s fingers and her skin.

‘Don’t stop’ she mouthed at Mulder and coaxed a controlled grin out of him as the SUV made the turn into the parking structure of the FBI headquarters. Max pulled into a parking space on the 2nd level where the gym and lockers were and switched off the ignition much to Scully’s chagrin as Mulder stopped rubbing her back.

“Thanks for the lift, Maximus,” Mulder started to push the door open but Max was already assisting in the endeavor right away, opening their door after shutting his.

“You two don’t like accepting help, do you?” Max smiled as Mulder started to slide out, carrying Scully.

“Didn’t you know? My middle name is Stubborn,” Mulder shrugged his shoulders after adjusting his grip on Scully.

She made a face as he maneuvered around and wrinkled her nose as another surge of pain radiated down her thighs. “I feel like a sack of potatoes…A disgusting, dirty, smashed sack of potatoes.”

“You’re a strong, surviving sack of potatoes, Agent Scully,” Max opened the door for them and found himself a little flushed at his brave compliment of her.

“Truer words have never been spoken, Maximus,” Mulder had his eyes on the pavement but smirked at Scully as they crossed the threshold into the building.

“As corny as that was, Max, I needed to hear that,” Scully knew that Max’s admiration of her was closer to adoration, but she appreciated his unwavering kindness nonetheless. “Truly.”

“Do you have clothes to change into after you get cleaned up?” Max let the door close behind them as he followed the pair toward the women’s locker rooms where the soaking tubs and showers were.

Scully shook her head and realized that she had become one of those agents that never kept a pair of sweats in the building in the event of needing to workout. “I don’t usually keep anything here.”

“You take her there and I’ll go locate something,” Max started to wander off down another hallway.

Mulder waited until he was nearly out of sight before speaking as he continued down the hallway toward the women’s locker room. “The last thing we need is you giving Max a complex over you running around in your skivvies, Scully…he already has issues speaking clearly when you are fully clothed.”

“Kind of like how you were in my bathroom last night?” Scully teased him as they entered the locker room, the sterile yet warmed over odor wafting through her nostrils the moment they walked in.

“I was a pro—I don’t know what you are talking about,” Mulder eyed the line of
bleacher style benches across from the row of shower stalls, a smile across his lips.

The FBI's women’s shower room was one that often went unused especially if it weren’t a weekday and walking into it on a Sunday was quiet and fairly dim as Mulder carefully carried Scully to the first bench across from the showers. Scully was able to sit down on her own and let the microfiber fall off her shoulders to the bench, exposing the mess on her clothes all over again. She looked down, the silence taking over as she felt the explosion going off again while her bones settled—the metal table shoving against her, the smoke in the air, the smell, the blood in her hair, the sides of her face narrowly missing her mouth, everywhere. She hadn’t taken the moment to fully process that she could have died until finding a moment to breath and think. Mulder watched her for a moment as she pulled off her boots and set them aside along with the pair of socks that had gone unscathed. The feeling was unsettling as the cold floor met the bottoms of her feet, sending a chill up her body, enveloping her in goose bumps.

“You okay, Scully?” Mulder rolled up the blanket and tossed it into a containment bag, locking his gaze on her.

“I will be,” Scully put every ounce of her energy into smiling and looked up at him from the bench, limbs and back throbbing with every breath she took.

“Knock, knock, I hope you’re decent because I have a temporary clothing fix,” Max peeked his head in through the door and instantly cut the heavy anxiety in the room with his incredibly perky voice as an audible laugh finally rolled past Scully’s lips.

“You’re a hero, Maximus,” Mulder picked up the clothes from him at the doorway and glanced back at Scully, who still seemed a fair bit tickled by Max’s comment.

“I have to go run a few more tests on some of the evidence from Skinner but when you two are ready I can take you back over to at least get your car or check in with the bomb squad. Anything that Agent Scully got blood or parts of the victim on need to go in the containment bag so I can run them for testing,” Max smiled at them again and spoke in such a way that a parent would to his children to soothe away a problem. “If you need me, I’ll be in my office.”

“Thanks, Max,” Mulder waited for him to walk out the door before pushing the door shut, locking it thereafter.

Scully pulled off the examiner’s coat and handed it to Mulder as he came back to her. He could tell the pain was increasing as her jawline tensed, teeth half clenching. He put the jacket into the bag and hung it on a hook meant for towels, leaving it open for the rest of the clothes that needed to be run through testing. He then reached into the first shower stall and turned the water on, carefully testing the temperature until it was hot enough to not only get the blood off but keep her warm. He pulled the curtain closed to trap in a little bit of the heat and create some of the steam inside of the stall. He turned around as Scully was standing up to pull off her FBI jacket so she could walk to the shower. Mulder helped her FBI coat and put the coat into the bag with the blanket and examiner’s coat. He then removed his own coat, now heavily stained and tossed it into the containment bag before turning his attention back on her. There was nothing particularly sexual or even romantic about the gesture as Mulder continued to help Scully out of her clothing, paying little attention to anything but the look on her face. Scully watched him unbutton each delicate button for her, slide away the fabric from her skin, expose each part of her, and carefully place her shirt and pants into the containment bag.

It was almost purgative.

“Looks like the only salvageable pieces are the obvious ones,” Mulder indicated the bra
and panties she was currently standing in.

“I figured,” Scully glanced down at her thighs and saw the large, oval shaped bruises across them nearly the size of saucers glaring at her. “Oh, my God.”

Mulder sealed up the containment bag and turned toward her, carefully taking in the sight of the bruises. He knelt in front of her and looked up as she stood before him with all of her strength in full glow despite the pain she was in. It was one of the things that he admired and respected about her.

It was one of the things that he loved about her.

“Stop worrying about the bruises, Scully,” Mulder hooked his fingers at the waistline of her panties and guided them down, gaze fully concentrating on hers.

Scully swallowed hard as he rose to a fully standing position with her panties in his hand. “Mulder…”

“Let me fix this, Scully, please?” Mulder slid the shower curtain open for her, letting the steam out just enough that it tickled her back. “You have no idea where my mind went when I heard that bomb go off—and if this helps you even a little bit to feel slightly more comfortable then I need to do that and then some. I don’t know what I would have done if I lost you. I couldn’t bear the thought of what it would’ve been like to find you lifeless under that table.”

“Mulder, I’m here and I’m not going anywhere,” Scully wanted to touch his cheek but her hands were still bloody as she stood there lacking most of her decency as he poured his heart out again. “Help me out of the bra so I can finally get clean and get back to solving this case.”

“Turn around then,” Mulder made a spinning motion with his index finger and waited until she turned around to start unhooking her bra.

“You just wanted to look at my ass again, didn’t you?” Scully cracked another joke as he slid the fabric off of her and put it with the socks and underwear on the bench.

“Let’s just clarify this issue, when do I not want to look at your ass, Scully?” Mulder smirked and helped her get the shower head to aim at the top of her head to carry the remainder of the foreign material and blood off of her.

Scully let out a soft, raspy cry as the hot water cascaded over her and touched the tender spots, reminding her of every little bruise across the surface of her skin that had penetrated into her flesh and musculature. Mulder positioned himself at the entrance of the stall and ran his fingers through her hair, gently guiding the water along the spots that were caked with blood. Mulder glanced down at the bottom of the shower stall as the blood collected then disbursed down the drain, freeing Scully from the last bits of the victim’s flesh and blood. Mulder pressed his hand against the body wash dispenser to get a good palm full of it to use on Scully’s arms. He gently massaged the body wash along her shoulders, pressing his fingers into the spots around the circular bruising near her shoulder blades where her shoulders slammed against the floor. Scully pressed her fingers against the wall of the shower and audibly gasped, this time much louder than the last.

“Do you need me to stop?” Mulder felt her shoulders shaking as the pain was radiating off of her again.

“Unless you want anyone in the building to hear me, yeah, might be a good idea,” Scully was half in pain and half laughing as she looked back at him. “It’s like one of those deep tissue
massages that hurt so good but I’m searching for anything to bury my face in."

“Trying not to take that into left field, Scully,” Mulder smirked and rubbed the last of the body wash in his palms along her arms, focusing on her hands to remove the last of the blood.

Scully had a little bit of the shampoo from the dispenser in her hand and was lightly massaging it into her scalp while he continued to rub her arms and back with the body wash. “I think I’m just about done…I just want to rinse off and get out of here. What did Max bring that I could wear until I have a chance to go home to change?”

Mulder rinsed off his hands and walked over to the little stack of clothes at the bench where her shoes, socks, and undergarments were placed carefully. He picked up the sweats and held them up while Scully was still in the shower stall rinsing off the remaining shampoo and body wash combination.

“Well, you’re apparently wearing men’s sweats and, oh Jesus Christ,” Mulder burst out into laughter as he held up the shirt and aimed it at himself to look at. “Maximus DOES have a full blown sense of humor after all, Scully.”

“What did he do?” Scully turned off the water and slid the towel around her body before carefully stepping out of the shower toward him.

“Take a look,” Mulder turned the shirt around to reveal the shirt with a pipette testing kit and the phrase ‘Just the tip’ on it.

Scully brought a hand to her mouth and held back a laugh as her hair dripped down her shoulders and arms. “Looks more like you two have more in common than you thought, Mulder.”

“Or spending time around me to pine after you has been slowly rotting his brain,” Mulder teased her again, turning toward her as she sat down on the edge of the bench. “How are your legs feeling after the shower?”

“They hurt but the pain is now significantly dulled compared to the stabbing sensations I was feeling earlier,” She slipped into her panties and stood, sliding them the rest of the way up while the towel clung to her around the chest. “Nothing that I can’t handle.”

“So, what you’re saying is that I don’t need to manhandle you anymore?” Mulder was stealing glances of her as she got dressed in the men’s sweats and the novelty t-shirt, finding himself smirking at just how big they were on her.

Scully slid into her boots and put her arms around him, embraced him tenderly and very lovingly before giving him a gentle peck on the chin. “Maybe later? Come on…we need to go find Max and go check in with Skinner before the rest of this day goes to hell in a handbasket.”

Lakeview Drive (Lake Barcroft)
Falls Church, VA
Jeanette’s entire body throbbed with pain as she awoke from another unintended, unwanted slumber. The nearly completed escape plan had backfired terribly after Miles had been apparently watching her from the upstairs deck and only allowed her to have too much false hope that she was home free of his torture. It was all part of his expert gamesmanship, though, as he was able to choke her out and drag her back to the basement level makeshift torture area where he placed her into much tighter, more elaborate restraints. Her neck was held in place by a fairly long chain secured to a large circular bolt that was attached to the floor while her feet were shackled together with only a two-foot length of chain. The material around her neck was thinner than normal but effective as the edges had bruised her skin simply from excess pressure being applied while she was unconscious. Everything felt much tighter than before but not so tight that circulation was cut off—everything either felt normal or surged with pain except for the thumb that she had dislocated in the escape; it was still awkwardly posed and unset. The fear had been largely overwhelming up until this point as she resigned that her death was almost certain—but she wasn’t giving up without a fight and was going to stop at nothing to make him screw up just enough to ruin his own carefully laid plans.

Her fear had become a device, a source of strength in the darkness.

There wasn’t much change in the basement other than the absence of chemical odor or intense wetness on the floor. He had relocated her toward the center of the space and shut off all of the lights in the room minus the one at the top of the stairs that only illuminated the stairwell in a four-foot section and the door itself. He thought that the dark would frighten her but it couldn’t be further from the truth as her mind gathered up each thought and weighed all of the options, settling on extremes. It wasn’t about playing his game—it was about forcing him to play hers. She refused to allow this to consume her entirely as she swallowed hard, only thinking of any way out or a way to force his hand and fool him into prematurely acting.

“I can hear you breathing in the corner, you sick son of a bitch,” Jeanette winced from the pain while she adjusted her position to prevent her limbs from going numb as she could hear his unmistakable mouth breathing from across the room in the dark.

“Awfully bold comment when you know that I can kill you any time I please, Dee,” Miles didn’t move from his chair at the bottom of the stairs, he simply dragged his boot along the cement. “I could put an end to that life of yours and make your sweet little girl an orphan at a moment’s notice.”

She was shaking almost violently, but it wasn’t out of fear, it was from the cold from
being half soaked in the rain when she attempted to escape from him followed by the journey back up to the house from the boatshed. She inhaled deeply and did her best to calm the shaking, desperate to hold onto what was left of her body heat while she listened to his chair move as he tilted it back and forth.

Her voice cracked but had volume to it as she spoke. “You’re too much of a coward to do it quickly – I should have figured you out the moment you walked into the restaurant that you’re just compensating for your short comings. You certainly confirmed it when you attacked me from behind in front of the dumpsters.”

“Is that supposed to make me angry, Dee?” It wasn’t the first time a girl called his manhood into question and it certainly wouldn’t be the last but the comment was headed in the right direction as he raised his voice at her just slightly in an attempt to sound more domineering.

“Maybe you’re just a little boy who doesn’t like being told ‘no’ too many times by a strong willed woman—you like it when we are weak, defenseless, powerless,” Jeanette headed in a different direction, putting emphasis on the words ‘little boy’ as she spoke. “Little boys like to break things. That’s what you are…a LITTLE boy.”

Miles didn’t like being challenged and she was pushing all of the right buttons, sending him into a near fit of rage as he straddled her at the thighs, knife ready to slice open her jugular. “I don’t break or violate any gift, little girl, but I could make an exception with you.”

Jeanette laughed at him, unafraid to look him directly in the eye and continue to provoke him. “I don’t believe you’d be able to get it up long enough to accomplish such a feat, so don’t embarrass yourself.”

“Stupid bitch,” Miles sheathed his knife then backhanded her, busting her lip open in the process before wrenching down on her neck with his hands.

Jeanette choked and coughed as it became increasingly hard to breathe, her full challenge of him continuing to bloom with each passing second. “Do it, little boy…I dare you.”

“I make the rules to this game,” Miles released his grip on her and watched her desperately gasp for air as her airways were no longer obstructed by his grip.

Jeanette made eye contact with him again, her chest heaving as she sucked in as much air as she could. She had discovered a weakness in him; his need for control. She knew exactly how to unfurl his carefully laid plans; push him. She started in with the laughter nearly immediately after regaining a steadiness in her breathing patterns and sent him into another tantrum-like display as he pulled her hair back, awkwardly craning her neck until she was staring straight up at the ceiling. The laughter did not cease even with the extra pressure that the steel was putting on the back of her neck, which put her at an advantage as his threats were, for the moment, unfinished and empty.

“Looks like you don’t, little boy,” Jeanette was playing a very dangerous game as she felt the sheathed knife press against her ribcage, a not so subtle reminder of just how easy it would be to meet her end.

“What happened to the pretty little shy thing at the restaurant? She disappeared pretty fast, didn’t she?” Miles loosened his grip just enough to where she could clearly look him in the eye, his fingers trapping her chin in place. “I made her hot and bothered at the mere thought of a chance…”

“And then you went and let the crazy out, spoiling any chance you had at being anything
more than a little boy,” Jeanette was purposely degrading him, knowing that it was already thoroughly pissing him off beyond his limits.

The anger spilled over again as he unsheathed the knife again and dragged it across her skin, paying careful attention not to break the skin just to keep her guessing on when or where he’d choose to do so. He ripped open the top of her work shirt, exposing the left side of her bra and sliced along the curve of her breast where it sloped toward the fabric of her bra. Jeanette bit down on her lip and gripped the chain, refusing to make a sound as the knife tore open her flesh just enough to make the blood flow like water from the wound. It was unmistakably warm and seared through her like borderline boiling water in her veins as the wound gaped and pulsed with each beat of her heart. Despite the feeling, she wouldn’t grant him the satisfaction of a scream or a cry as she opened her eyes, glaring through him.

“You won’t break me,” Jeanette desperately wanted to pass out as the nerve endings along the wound were firing in rapid succession, sending jolts along her shoulders, down her back, and through her chest.

“We’ll just see about that, won’t we, Dee?”

Chapter End Notes

Please leave feedback! This one was far quicker than anticipated and I hope it wasn't too quick. :P

Credit - lyrics
Battle Cry - Imagine Dragons
Unravel

Chapter Summary

Romanticizing his victims, a brutal murderer leaves behind symbols of love…but who is his true, intended target and what lengths will he go to get her to notice?
Post “Agua Mala” (Season 6 with mentions of “Rain King”, “Two Fathers”, and “One Son” Briefly and only for context purposes)

Disclaimer: Agents Mulder, Scully, Skinner, and Fowley belong respectively to Chris Carter, FOX Productions, and TenThirteen Productions. All other characters are original and any likeness or named similarities to any real-life persons are purely coincidental.

Chapter Notes

Note: Use of puns and witty comebacks were both necessary and wanted throughout this process – practicing balance between the extremes and humor has given a much-needed lift to the truly dark places that have been explored in the most recent chapters (and those dark places will be continuing for a bit so bear with me). Please enjoy.

Zask International is a medical supply and delivery system that does, in fact, deliver to most hospitals in the DC area. I do not know if they do or do not deliver to GWUH (George Washington University Hospital).

Secondary Character note: I have included a bit about Agent Fowley’s life despite the show sharing next to nothing about the woman – I am momentarily biting my tongue to not completely revile her at every turn. This is a departure from my normative but do not dismay, it does not last long.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Shortly after 5:00 PM

George Washington University Hospital

Trauma Center

Victoria’s hospital room had been under heavy guard since the moment that Mulder and Scully had left from questioning her. There was an agent or a police officer posted on the outside of her door at all times with relief posted every 6 hours. She spent most of her time in and out of consciousness, the heavy medications to ease her through recovery doing their job to keep her facial muscles stationery for the large part. She was still heavily bandaged across her face and would be for quite some time as her surgically repaired wounds could heal. The pain was manageable but a reminder of her short time experiencing Miles’s terroristic level torture. Both of
her doctors had requested that the television be muted after a report of the murders nearly sent her into a full blown panic that required sedation. In sleep, her nightmares would take over where her experience left off as she could feel every cut, slice, and incision like they were happening all over again but she couldn’t always wake herself up from a drug induced slumber. Nothing could have prepared her for this much trauma and she knew that the long road was only just beginning.

“Victoria, your next dosage of medication is set to administer in about thirteen minutes, do you need anything before I switch shifts with Alice?” Victoria’s day nurse, Janessa, was around the same age as she was and didn’t irritate her with stupid questions.

Victoria jotted a quick ‘no, thanks I’m good, I’ll see you in the morning’ on her note pad and turned it toward Janessa, who smiled and nodded at her. Janessa went around the room, checking all of her machines one more time before shooting her a quick wink. Janessa was lanky and skinny, standing at just under five foot eleven inches tall with darker hair and similarly dark features coming from a Native American heritage and an overabundance of time in a tanning booth on her off time despite knowing just how bad it was for her skin. Janessa had a knack for making all of her patients feel not only safe but very necessary and Victoria was incredibly grateful that she was able to be awake during the time that she was on shift, even if she couldn’t actually exchange conversation with her. She adjusted her blankets one more time so that she was comfortably warm but not locked under the covers.

“Try to get some rest so she doesn’t talk your ear off?” Janessa smiled and smoothed back her dark hair as she felt some loose strands touching the side of her face as they popped out of the carefully placed bun.

Victoria nodded and glanced at the timer next to her head for the medication cycle as it read only eleven minutes, counting down. She sighed softly and turned her head the other direction, eyes toward the television that was silently flashing on a rerun of Law and Order. It wasn’t really what she wanted to fall asleep to but it was better than the news with all things considered. She pulled the blanket up a little higher as she felt the air conditioner kick on above her, sending a chill down her back that awkwardly made the metallic staples in most of her wounds sizzle with a nearly unbearable twinge of pain. She winced and groaned until the pain passed over her, settling back against the pillow before staring at the ceiling. The door opened and the distinct smell of vanilla and spice flooded her nostrils as the overly talkative Nurse Alice Reese came in for her shift start.

“Doll, you should be sleeping,” Alice had one of those voices that could wake the dead as Victoria turned her head over toward her, rolling her eyes instantly.

Alice was a little on the chubby side but not fat as most of her weight was her hips and bust, her blond locks in a poorly constructed bun that left something to be desired but it did the job by keeping her hair out of her face and out of the way. She was considerably shorter than Janessa and took care of her skin in a much more paranoid way, often lathering on the SPF when it wasn’t even necessary. She was pale and her blond hair stood out like a sore thumb against her lack of pigmentation. Alice smiled at Victoria and checked the timer on the med cycle, reading just over seven minutes, before going over to Victoria’s bedside to check random bandages.

“I see you rolling your eyes, Madame,” Alice shook her head as she checked the bandage across her chest and the one on her weaker arm.

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“I see you rolling your eyes, Madame,” Alice shook her head as she checked the bandage across her chest and the one on her weaker arm.

Victoria wrote ‘I had an eyelash in my eye’ along with a smiley face before resting her head back on the pillow properly after Alice checked the bandaging on her face. Alice smiled and covered her up, almost like a mother would, then jotted down a few things on her chart that hung at
the end of the bed. Victoria hung on for only a moment or two longer before finally allowing sleep to take over, shortly before the medications finalized it as they did their scheduled regime and dripped slowly into the IV with the saline. Alice started doing a check of bandages to get her through the night and realized that she didn’t have enough of the topical ointments for more than one application.

“Well, fiddlesticks,” She knew she sounded like her grandmother but the sentiment was the same as she tapped her fingers along the shelves in frustration.

She turned toward the cabinets in hopes of finding more but to no avail. She looked back at a perfectly resting Victoria and opted to slide the call button under the sheets, right against her index finger on her left hand, leaving her right against the note pad. Alice wrote ‘I’ll be right back, doll – love, A’ on the dry erase board next to the bed and went out of the room, immediately capturing the attention of the police officer on his rotation.

“Officer, I have to go get more supplies for Victoria’s bandages but if for some reason she wakes up in a panic and does not see the message on the board, please get one of the other nurses on duty to calm her down,” Alice had the instincts of a drill sergeant and wasn’t afraid of ordering anyone around, least of all a rookie cop on protection detail.

“Yes, ma’am…my relief is not due for at least another three hours so I’m here for a while,” he had a little bit of a Midwestern accent despite the distinctly southern drawl sliding out of his mouth with the word ‘ma’am’ as he smiled at her and nodded with understanding.

She smiled back before heading off toward the end of the hallway, hips swaying with every step she took. The young, quite obviously rookie officer sat back down in the same chair as Miles came around the hallway from the opposite side wheeling two oxygen tanks wearing a Zask International jacket and cap. He looked completely official as he brazenly came up to the officer guarding the woman that he tried to flay open nearly two days earlier, flashing his falsified name badging on his jacket with the name Stephen Daniels on it as Officer Todd stood immediately, hand hovering over the button on his holster.

“This is a restricted room, sir. You can’t go in there,” Young Officer Todd was stern but didn’t raise his voice, hand in front of Miles to keep him from entering the room as he reached for the door.

“I need to swap out the oxygen tanks, officer, I’ll only be a moment,” Miles handed him a phony work order and started into the room before he could fully acknowledge it as legitimate or not.

Miles wasn’t in the mood to wait for his approval as he dragged both oxygen tanks into the room and positioned himself in such a way that the officer couldn’t see what he was doing near the other set of tanks. Miles had his eyes on Victoria, who was completely unaware of his presence in the room and was resting comfortably thanks to the medications she was on. Miles walked past the end of her bed, the heavy odor of incense and an undertone of rust and blood wafting throughout the room with every step. She stirred as the smell touched her nostrils, invading her recollection, but her body was refusing to cooperate with her heightened sense of smell as flashes of two days earlier started to make her blood pressure monitor trip. Miles pretended to change out both tanks and slid a large envelope underneath of her note pad from beneath his jacket after pretending to check the oxygen line, his fingers lingering over her arm just long enough to inveigle a few tears from her eyes. Luckily, he did not notice her physical response to his unwanted presence in her room.

“Mmmmm…Hello, Dee, did you miss me? I bet you did…I know I missed you,” Miles
was keeping his voice low as he fiddled with two of the oxygen tubes, careful not to draw the
drying eyes of the officer outside the door, who was staring through the window at his every move.

He glanced at his watch and pressed the override button on the medication feed for
Victoria’s IV, pumping the drip with more than necessary medication as he hummed “Somebody
Else” next to her bedside. He knew he didn’t have much time before her nurse would return but he
was tantalized by the idea that she could hear him, sense his presence, and was now re-imagining
the torture she had endured by his hand. He pressed the reset button on her monitors,
simultaneously silencing them in the process, causing all of her indicator lights to go dark and go
into restart mode. It was exactly what he needed to focus on after the provocation from Jeanette.
After all, Victoria was truly the one that got away.

“I see they undid all of my beautiful work, Dee,” Miles wanted to touch all of her wounds
desperately but he bit down hard on his lip, exhilarated at the mere thought of all of her developing
scars. “No matter, I’m not done with you yet. I’ll be back, Dee.”

Miles carefully dragged the very same oxygen tanks that he started with toward the door
and was not surprised that the Rookie Officer was already holding the door open for him. He
smiled at him and took his unsuspicious, well composed paperwork back from the officer, flipped
it to the back page and turned it toward him. It would’ve taken someone with years of document
analysis to know that anything had been falsified and this Young Officer was not well versed on
forgery of documents.

“I need your John Hancock, officer…?” Miles was desperately looking for his name but
his badge was covered up by his pocket fold by accident.

The officer signed and nodded. “It's Officer Todd—James Todd.”

“Ah, yes, Officer Todd, thanks for letting me do my job…I would’ve hated to tell my
boss about any difficulties getting my job done on time,” Miles nodded and started to shove the cart
down toward the end of the hallway, only looking back at him once to make sure that he wasn’t
paying attention.

Just as Miles was completely out of sight, fully into the elevator and away from all eyes
in Victoria’s ward, Alice came running down the opposite hallway with two more nurses in tow.
She looked frantic and bordering on panic as she threw open the door to Victoria’s room, startling
Officer Todd.

“What in the hell is going on?” Officer Todd followed them into the room and watched
as they tore open the covers, knocking the notebook and the envelope to the floor.

“Weren’t you paying attention at all when you were briefed about this post, Officer?
She’s been pushing her call button nonstop for the last 90 seconds straight! Did you NOT see the
light flashing above the doorway? It was on silent for a reason—she is the only surviving victim of
a serial killer still at large!” Alice showed him Victoria’s hand clutching the call button with her
index still pressed against the indicator button, her voice full of anger as she held back the urge to
clock him.

“I couldn’t see the light flashing—wait,” Officer Todd was genuinely confused as she
read him the riot act while the others desperately checked every dial and level, his eyes glancing
across the hall at the still blinking light that Alice was referencing.

“Blood pressure is dropping, heart rate spiking,” one of the other nurses finally got her
monitors working properly and took note at the immediacy of the alarms that were now sounding.

The same nurse at the monitors made her semi-circular trip around Victoria’s bed and unintentionally kicked the notepad and envelope that Miles had left behind underneath of the rolling bars of the bed. They were all in more than a considerable amount of panic as they gathered their wits, desperately trying to stabilize her. Her focus was on finding out how to fix this or at least start to fix it.

“Who did you let in here?” Alice shoved him against the wall while the other two nurses tried to find the source of her sudden down turn in vitals.

“There was a guy changing out oxygen tanks from Zask with paperwork, I signed it myself,” he was almost in a full on panic as he explained himself.

“The drip override was pressed, she just received six times the normal dose of Fentanyl and Benzodiazepine,” the second nurse finally found the release on the override and adjusted it to run only saline through the IV drip.

“We don’t even work with Zask. You better pray and hope we can save her, officer,” Alice turned toward the two nurses. “Go get Doctor Blake, NOW!”

“What happened?” Mulder’s calm yet concerned voice brought Alice down a notch or two after the nurses ran off to get Doctor Blake, his badge already out to show both of them.

Alice turned toward him before going back to Victoria’s bedside to set up another bag of saline. “I left the room for ten minutes to get more topical treatments for her bandage changes, eight minutes into that, the call button that had been specifically set up on silent was being pressed repeatedly like a panic alarm. When I returned she was like this…”

Officer Todd was visibly shaken as he spoke. “I should’ve called it in but his paperwork looked authentic, Agent Mulder.”

“Officer Todd, I need you to get Assistant Director Skinner here immediately with a dusting kit and also run a perimeter check,” Mulder could see that he was panicking while he allowed Alice to do what she could for Victoria, who was still having stat spikes and dips all over the board. “I need you calm because you’re going to be asked detailed questions about the man that came into this room, okay?”

“Uh, ye-yes, right away,” Officer Todd hesitated only for a moment before quickly leaving the room to make the call.

The two nurses returned with Doctor Oliver Blake in tow. Dr. Blake had been keeping a steady watch on all of Victoria’s vitals since coming to recovery after the surgical unit did their miraculous work on her. He was unusually calm but Mulder could tell he was carefully executing, move by move, everything he needed to do in order to save her life all over again. It was something that he had witnessed Scully do on more than one occasion despite how easy it would’ve been to go completely off of the deep end.

“Agent Mulder, I need you to please step outside of the room while I get Victoria stabilized. I cannot have anyone but hospital personnel in here right now,” Doctor Blake’s voice was unintentionally soothing despite his need for stern absolution.

Mulder nodded and watched for only a second longer before backing out of the room, closing the door behind him. He stood there for a moment at the window watching the carefully
orchestrated rescue unfold as Doctor Blake’s energy seemed to rub off on the nurses, who were once a frantic mess prior to his entrance into the room, as they followed his lead in a more restrained, almost refined manner. Mulder turned his head as Agent Fowley came up from the main elevators. She looked considerably less cocky than usual as she had her arms already folded across her chest, almost withdrawing herself from the situation.

“Where’s Agent Scully?” Diana didn’t sound at all contrived with that ordinarily loaded question as she stood within arm’s length of him, staring into the room right along with him.

“Down the hall getting checked for a concussion and broken bones—I heard the alert as another nurse was passing by and came as quickly as I could,” Mulder was surprised at her lack of vitriol but was pleasantly glad at the idea that she would let it be for the time being, under the circumstance. “You ok after that tumble?”

“Physically? Yeah…My pride? Not so much,” Diana couldn’t bring herself to watch anymore as she could hear the sound of the patient monitor alarming every few moments, opting to take a seat in the chair where the officer had been. “Are you sure Agent Scully is ok?”

“Why are you so concerned with her well-being now, Diana?” Mulder crossed his arms and couldn’t help but feel that twinge in his gut that she was simply utilizing her usual manipulative nature on him.

“A trip into the water must’ve softened me up,” The rasp in her voice was a little more intense than usual and the odor of her previously smoked cigarette still lingered on her. “If the roles were reversed I’m sure she’d inquire…plus, an explosion is a little bit different than asking about the everyday health related topics, Fox.”

Hearing his first name from her was beyond his realm of acceptance—he didn’t like it when they were involved and he definitely didn’t want to hear it now. “I think I’m going to go check on her…can you wait here and guard the door until I get back, please?”

She nodded, the silent contemplation in her mannerisms were confusing, to say the least, but Mulder had his mind on too much—adding Diana Fowley’s motivations to that list would quite possibly make his head explode. He quietly turned and walked away from her, heading for a set of exam rooms where Scully was sitting on an exam table in front of one of the on-shift doctors. She was still wearing a backless gown and the pair of sweatpants that Max had graciously let her borrow, a look of discomfort on her face. Scully was not known for being the best or most cooperative patient despite having an extensive background in medical science, especially when it came to emergency rooms. She had a knack for pushing her own well-being to the side to avoid it, in fact. The doctor pulled his stethoscope out of his ears and let it rest along his shoulders just as Scully caught sight of Mulder in the doorway. She looked at him as he walked into the room, a smile creeping across her lips like he was the best news she had received all day—a little ray of sunshine peeking out through the darkest of clouds. He grinned and came up beside her, gently nudging her in the elbow.

“So what’s the prognosis? Is she going to live, Doc?” Mulder teased as the doctor stood and adjusted his glasses on his face.

“It’s looking like it, Agent Mulder,” Doctor Shields nodded and looked at Scully. “You do need to take it easy. No concussion or any broken bones but those bruises were pretty bad. I don’t need to tell you twice that you vastly increase your chances of a broken bone with bruising that bad.”

“So, what you’re saying is that she can’t do any body slams onto a table, right, Doc?”
Mulder winked at Scully despite the fact he was clearly addressing Doctor Shields. “No channeling her inner Randy Savage?”

“Keep the bumps to a minimum, please—I’m going to write a prescription for a mild pain reliever but when you take these I don’t recommend driving,” Doctor Shields didn’t know whether to be amused or annoyed by Mulder’s sarcasm.

“Understood,” Scully wondered if these emergency room doctors even bothered to look at her history to know she was well educated on post medical care procedural.

“I’m going to go get your charts faxed to your regular doctor and bring you back a topical pain reliever as well, okay? I’ll be right back,” Doctor Shields meant well but he was almost condescending with her as he explained things like a play-by-play before walking out the door.

Scully rolled her eyes and let her shoulders slump as she sighed loudly. “I could’ve done without all of that entirely.”

“At least there’s no concussion, Scully,” Mulder retrieved the shirt and bra from the chair, handing it to her carefully. “Condescending Doctor lecturing aside?”

“A concussion would’ve pulled me off of this case entirely in an investigational manner so you’re certainly right about that,” Scully slid off of the exam table and went into the little bathroom stall that was off to one side, immediately turning the faucet on to give her hands a quick scrub.

“Bright side found?” Mulder leaned against the wall near the door, crossing his arms in the process. “When you are done here I need to take you back to see how things are progressing with Victoria.”

“Mmmhhmmm…oh, was that what was going on in the hallway earlier? I heard the nurse’s trying not to shout about a panic alarm going off down in the ICU,” Scully turned the faucet off and pulled the backless gown off, hanging it on the door handle.

“Victoria’s fear came true and the killer came back just like she thought he would—he reset all of her machines and overloaded her medications into the IV. The posted guard let someone into the room without checking with anyone,” Mulder inhaled deep and listened for the pause of silence inside of the bathroom. “Scully?”

“You’ve got to be kidding me,” Scully opened the door wearing the shirt from Max and an unamused expression as well. “How?”

“Posed as someone from Trask delivering oxygen tanks—I sent the officer to get a dusting kit and Skinner down here,” Mulder watched her awkwardly adjust the slightly inappropriate, ill-fitting top clearly meant for a man Max’s size but found something attractive about her draped in it. “His first mistake was not retrieving a copy of the paperwork for himself, proper procedure and protocol.”

“So Victoria was conscious enough to press the call button?” Scully stood in front of him, crossing her arms after fiddling with the waistband of the sweatpants.

“Barely—or at least aware enough,” Mulder nodded and turned as Doctor Shields walked back into the room.

“Here is the prescription for the pain medication and this is the topical I mentioned,” He
handed Scully a small bottle and a piece of paper with the information for her pain med on it. “Try to take it easy?”

Mulder was beginning to understand why this Doctor was wearing thin on what was left of Scully’s patience as his completely non-descript, completely by-the-book regard for her was almost unsettling. She was handling it remarkably well, though, despite being clearly patronized by this gray-haired stick-in-the-mud in a Doctor’s coat. Doctor Shields’s demeanor was making him uncomfortable and he couldn’t imagine just how much it was pushing her buttons.

“I will,” Scully pursed her lips together, holding back the desire to inform Doctor Shields of her extensive medical background.

She had bigger fish to fry as her focus was already shifting back toward the case—to the well-being of their only surviving victim. An attempt to gain access to her was certainly only the beginning of what could turn into something ugly without proper precautionary measures.

“If you need anything you just let my on duty nurse know about it and I’ll be sure to get any information to you that I can,” Doctor Shields shook her hand then Mulder’s before making his hasty getaway, leaving them in an empty, semi quiet room.

“You have that look on your face like you’re able to verbally go off the deep-end, Scully,” Mulder could see her brow furrowing, the stare narrowing toward the doorway.

Scully let her expression soften as she looked over at Mulder. “Only if he walks back in here…”

Mulder let a small chuckle escape his lips as he pressed his hand to her lower back, half urging her forward, half simply wanting to touch her in any way he could. “Easy, killer, we have work to do.”

Scully lead the way despite her lack of proper dress, that “I look a little on the dumpy side” feeling only increasing as she slid the topical and her prescription into the pocket on the sweat pants. The only thing that was making the oversized ensemble half bearable was the “I’ve been staring at you too long and too often” expression on Mulder’s face every time she caught him looking at her. He was caught somewhere between admiring and craving as his teeth captured his bottom lip, holding it there while he contemplated her between gazes as the hallway seemed to narrow between them. She felt like she could be meandering down the hallway in nothing but a burlap sack and still get him stumbling on himself a little. It was that much-needed “I’ve still got it” reminder that had been a little untapped as of late. Their minds, while thoroughly enraptured in each other, still had focus on the matter at hand—solving this heinous case and putting an end to a literal terror spree.

“Agent Scully, do you have good news?” Diana’s voice was almost overly concerned as she yanked them, somewhat unpleasantly, from their budding, quiet moment.

Scully reluctantly let her eyes fall away from his focus and made eye contact with Diana, nodding slowly. “No concussion, no broken bones…just heavy bruising.”

“I’d say that’s good news,” Diana was trying but Scully didn’t quite understand the motivation as it seemed so out of place, even under the circumstance.

Scully glanced at Mulder and half furrowed her eyebrows, fully confused. “It’s definitely good news—how are you feeling?”
“I’m just fine—I wanted to say thank you for doing what you did. I should have said it earlier,” Diana’s sincerity had a touch of saccharin but hid something underneath that felt full of regret rather than insidious as she smiled at Scully and twiddled her thumbs behind her back, making the awkwardness in the air even more obvious.

“It’s nothing you have to say thank you for—I’m sure you would’ve done the same in my situation,” Scully really didn’t know how to respond as she awkwardly smiled at her, eyes glancing at the window into the hospital room.

“Any change to the situation in there?” Mulder tried to refocus the visibly strange situation to the matter at hand as he, too, turned his focus toward the ever changing activity inside of Victoria’s hospital room.

“They were able to get her stabilized a minute or two ago—Skinner went in right away to start a perimeter check and dust for prints on everything in the room,” Diana actually seemed like she had been paying attention this time, which was a far cry from the earlier attitude she was upholding at the warehouse. “Officer Todd is being questioned by the rest of the field team back at HQ. It doesn’t look like he’ll be reprimanded but he has to take a course in procedures and protocols again…It would be the course of action that I would recommend.”

Scully was right up against the door almost, eyes focused on the floor next to the bed where the notepad and the envelope were sticking out from underneath of one of the metal supports axels between the wheels. She squinted and managed to capture Skinner’s attention in the process. Scully pointed toward the spot on the floor where the materials were nearly concealed and nodded her head until Skinner turned his body, adjusting his stance until he could see them barely peeking out from under the bed. Skinner carefully picked both up with his gloved hands and started walking toward the door.

“You don’t miss a beat, Agent Scully,” Skinner walked out into the hallway, carefully closing the door behind him, leaving the other agents and hospital staff to work busily. “Less than an inch of this was sticking out…how did you see that?”

“It stood out,” Scully stood next to him and glanced at the two items in his hands. “One of those is Victoria’s notepad that she uses to communicate with staff…I don’t know about the other but I can make a safe guess.”

“A love note from the killer,” Mulder’s dry wit was perfectly timed as he carefully slipped the notepad into an evidence bag to be checked just in case while Skinner held onto the envelope.

Mulder positioned himself on the other side of Scully while Diana stood closer to Skinner on his free side, her eyes scanning the hallway periodically, taking the request to keep an eye on things halfway seriously for a change. Mulder put on a pair of gloves and handed a pair to Scully, who immediately put them on before both watched as Skinner flipped back the tab on the envelope. Scully had a hunch about the contents of the envelope before it even started to emerge since this perp had become quite good at leaving a trail of oddities—trinkets and even a bomb. She had no doubt that anything in this envelope would prove to be as intense as the previous tidbits of warped information they had been given. Skinner lifted the space in the opening of the envelope and carefully pulled what looked like photographs out, face down. Mulder took away the empty envelope and placed it into the same evidence bag with the notebook then watched with intent as Skinner turned the photographs over.

“For the love of Christ,” Skinner couldn’t help himself as he slowly thumbed through each gruesome photo of each victim.
The surroundings were all different, of course, since his timeline was far from stagnant—
each one posed similarly to the way in they were found. Nothing was left to chance and the extent of his demented nature was on display in each photograph. He was proud of it and wanted them to see everything that he had done.

Scully carefully took each photo and looked closer at it, taking note of something that each photograph shared with the previous one. “Mulder, do you see what I see?”

Mulder thumbed through each photo slowly, paying careful attention to the coloration of each victim then made eye contact with Scully again. “They’re all alive in these photographs—and fairly animated, it seems.”

Diana looked at the first few and furrowed her eyebrows, not taking her eyes off of the photos as she scanned each one. “There’s more than just that…the black Dahlia throwback mouth slicing and the roses or thorns, in some of the victim’s cases, are missing. Those are the final torture elements and possibly post mortem additions. He took these photos at this moment for a reason.”

“He wears them down prior to doing what would potentially be the most painful of the cuts—as though he’s convinced them to give up on fighting to live. The turning point,” Scully made eye contact with Diana, nodding carefully, shocked at her apt assessment based solely on the photographs.

“We have a little bit of a problem, though,” Skinner interjected, holding one of the photos in his hand, eyes locked on the woman’s expression.

“What?” Mulder made eye contact with Skinner, who simply handed him the photo. The sinking feeling set in amongst them collectively as they all looked at the photograph as well, realizing that it was not one of their known victims—she was new. Mulder closed his eyes as Scully carefully took the photograph to look at it, taking note of as many details as she could mentally. The FBI had not been informed of any missing persons in the area but this was the same woman that had been very recently abducted and her nametag clearly read “Jeanette” in black letters. She had red hair, like many of the recent victims, but she had something that the other victims did not—very few wounds and had not been trussed up in barbed wire, thus far. The photograph did not reveal much about her surroundings other than the new shackle around her neck, ankles, and wrists. She didn’t look nearly as frightened as the previous victims did, either. What really stood out to her, though, was the fact that, along with the visible name tag, her clothes were very clearly a uniform of some kind.

“Mulder, does something look different about this victim?” Scully tilted the photograph toward him, her mind already heavily processing what she had seen in the image.

Mulder took the photograph back from her and started to delve deeper into it as she had until his eyes widened. “Either she’s literally fresh out of the gate or he’s hesitating with her—that and she has on a uniform, looks like from a restaurant.”

“She doesn’t look the least bit scared of him, either, Mulder,” Scully pointed out her face, even noticing more about her as she glanced at the photo again. “She’s challenging him. She’s driving him to do what he just did here today—and he’s going to screw up.”

“Agent Scully?” Alice’s voice was quiet but strong as she peeked out of the hospital room and captured their attention.
Scully turned her head toward her, nodding almost instantly. “Yes?”

“She’s asking for you and Agent Mulder,” Alice’s face couldn’t hide the wear from bringing Victoria back from the brink as her voice seemed to falter with each syllable.

“It’s a long shot but I’ll make a call to see if a woman with this name has been reported missing in the last 24 to 48 hours,” Skinner was already outstretching his hands for the photographs to get them into the room quickly.

Scully and Mulder put the photographs back into Skinner’s very capable hands, along with the evidence bag, then walked into the hospital room where an incredibly weak yet awake Victoria was half sat up with a new notepad across her lap. They scanned the room as the two agents gathered the last of the evidence they had collected and left the space, leaving them with Victoria, Alice, and Doctor Blake. Victoria was still sweating across her forehead, the edges of her bandages slightly dampened from the beads that had run down her cheeks. She was hooked up to two more monitors to randomly check her blood levels for the concentration of medication in her system while the other was set to back up the BMP (as a failsafe). The remnants of a quick Naloxone dosing was attached to the IV and it was evident that the sweating was likely from that well known list of side effects for the counter action of the Fentanyl overdosing. Scully could tell that Doctor Blake had not used much on her—just enough to draw it out of her system and soften the intensity of the opioid in her system. Doctor Blake stayed busily looking through the monitor charts along with triple checking every line attached to her IV hookup as Mulder and Scully came to her bedside. She turned her notepad toward Scully, the words “You look like I feel” across the top.

“I’ve had better days, thanks for the vote of confidence,” Scully admired this young woman’s tenacious spunk that just didn’t quit.

“You should’ve seen the other guy,” Mulder smirked and mouthed ‘she kicked his ass’ while nodding exaggeratedly in Victoria’s direction.

Victoria rolled her eyes and wrote “did she take his clothes, too?” on the paper, which made both of them chuckle just a bit. Something about the way she found the ability to be lighthearted gave Scully even more drive and want to find this assailant and put an end to his fear driven blood sport in order to finally restore a semblance of normalcy to Victoria’s life. The atmosphere of a more serious nature returned as she wrote another line before showing it to them, “He said he was coming back—that he wasn’t done. I think it made him mad that they fixed what he did to my face.” The tears had been building up since they had walked into the room but that realization is what finally made them spill over, moistening the top sides of her bandages in the process.

“Of course he’s angry—you were the one that got away, that’s the hardest reality right
now but the good news is that now we know he’s stupid enough to try it and we’ll be ready for
him,” Mulder was closer to the end of her bed but he could see the emotions pouring from Victoria
while Scully’s bond with her only intensified.

Victoria’s eyes fell onto the notepad as she feverishly wrote again while her other hand
pulled what looked like a much smaller envelope out from under it. She turned the notepad again,
sighing softly while they were able to read “this fell out of that big envelope and got stuck in my
bed, I haven’t opened it, I’m scared to” on the page in front of them. Mulder and Scully’s eyes met
for a long moment before he reached out with his gloved hand to retrieve to envelope from
Victoria’s half shaking grip. Victoria’s eyes were searching them both before looking at Scully
with so much appreciation for all that they both had done for her.

“We’ll take care of this,” Scully continued as Mulder maneuvered toward the door to get
one of the evidence bags from Skinner. “See that woman outside with the long, dark hair? I’m
going to personally have her keep watch on your door along with another Agent that I trust. I
promise you, he won’t get back in here.”

Victoria signaled a thumbs up and blinked slowly, allowing the pen in her other hand to
rest against the paper. She sighed again, this time with considerable relief behind it as though a
weight had come off of her. Scully squeezed her hand and carefully moved toward the door,
nodding at Alice along the way. Alice smiled back, the relief written on her face as she watched
Scully quietly exit the room.

“Arlington PD reported a missing woman by the name of Jeanette Morris—she was last
seen at her place of employment at a restaurant called Metro29. Her coworkers were the first to
report that she had gone missing along with her parents, who were watching her six year old
daughter when she never came to pick her up after her shift was over. She’s 28 years old and has
long, red hair matching the woman in the photo,” Skinner was almost excited as he waved around
the cell phone and evidence bag in his hands.

“Scully and I need to take this envelope back to have Max run it for prints along with the
rest of the photos—with any luck he licked the envelope,” Mulder continued, taking the sealed
evidence bag from Skinner. “Sir, you may need to follow up with Arlington about that missing
woman…”

“Agent Fowley, I need a favor from you,” Scully didn’t want to lose her to an interview
session with Skinner and Arlington PD as she pulled her aside. “I promised Victoria that this would
never happen again and I am taking a leap of faith by even asking you to keep watch along with a
couple of other agents instead of police officers because you know the kind of protocol that must
be followed to keep her safe. Will you do that? And please, don’t do it for me or Mulder, do it for
that woman in that bed who nearly lost everything to this sick son of a bitch.”

Diana glanced into the hospital room, her expression glassing, the reminder of regret
passing over in a wave as she sucked back a wave of emotions that had long been hidden away
from everyone. She inhaled and swallowed hard, pushing it back down into the recesses of her
psyche where the rest of the Diana that no one needed to see was carefully guarded and kept
hiding. It was part of her that not even Mulder knew…and it was likely to stay that way.

She took another deep breath before she could make eye contact with Scully again,
putting on a bit of a fake smile. “She reminds me of someone I used to know that I was unable to
be there for when they needed me—absolutely, I’ll stay as long as needed.”

Scully was good at reading people and could tell that Diana was keeping something
heavily suppressed that was now desperately wanting to come to the surface because of this case
but didn’t want to pry into right now. She didn’t know if she had the right to even try to nor was there enough energy left in her to push it from her in this moment; she wanted her to focus fully on devoting attention to watching over Victoria. While a week didn’t seem like much time for a typical case to unfold, in a week’s time, they had reached double digits in potential victims, with one still missing from the fold. It had become messy—dire.

“We need to go see Max, you ready?” Mulder came up behind Scully, catching her attention as she stared almost through the wall to avoid staring directly at Diana.

“Yeah, as I’ll ever be.”

Lakeview Drive (Lake Barcroft)
Falls Church, VA

The cold was worse than the pain. The chill started in the bones and worked its way outward, filling all of the places with the stinging reminder that pain could not only exist but thrive. It was pure agony and was only getting worse as Jeanette stayed wet and cold on the damp floor of the basement. It had been quite for quite some time after Miles nearly killed Jeanette out of pure rage from her refusal to make a noise while he carved a solid line across the top of her chest and down both of her arms, leaving deep gashes of crimson and dulled rust where her once perfectly pristine, porcelain skin once was without a flaw. The blood had started to clot but not fully as little lines of blood dribbled out and down her skin like drying paint on the side of the can. She inhaled and felt her lungs and chest tighten, the wheeze forming as she struggled then coughed hard into the air. The shackle around her neck was just tight enough that as the spasm hit her, the metal pressed against her neck, cutting her airway off even further, encouraging a haphazard, unpleasant gag-like choke mix with her already painful coughing.

“Please…stop…coughing,” She tried to breathe through her nose but could feel the wheezing building again in her lungs like she was drowning.

The coughing kicked in again, each spasm rattling the chain and shackle hard against her flesh, causing each cough to become frantic chokes. The cough was loud enough that she could not hear the door to the main house opening followed by his slow, controlled steps down the stairwell. Her coughs had become more frantic and filled with fluid as she could feel the air refusing to go into her body with each desperate inhale. Nothing was working as she grasped the metal across her neck, trying to create a gap between it and her skin, taking the pressure off of her thyroid cartilage that was now pressing into her vestibular fold, setting off the chain reaction of esophageal suffocation. He watched her for a moment under the harsh incandescent light above her and could see the absence of color to her lips, the bluish tint already setting in around her mouth, the sweat beading along her forehead and down her cheeks. She was running a fever.

The flashes of haze of consciousness failing were passing in front of Jeanette’s field of
vision while Miles approached her and stood above her, watching as her eyes fluttered and mouth twitched along with the feverish shaking that had developed as a result of the fever. He knelt down, carefully unlocking each of her restraints until her limbs were limp against the cold cement, chin tilting back only out of pure reflex to suck in a tiny breath of air above her. He gathered her into his arms, cradling her chilled figure just tight enough to dissuade her from any escape attempt. Not that her lungs would allow, the coughing had nearly made her lose consciousness entirely. He carried her up the stairs and into the main house, the sounds of the storm outside pounding on the windows and on the roofing above in the two-story home. The heat was radiating throughout the house and was making all of her muscles twitch and tingle as the air passed over her. There wasn’t an explanation for this gesture, but Jeanette was nearly unaware of her surroundings as he carried her into a room with fluffy, green, shag carpeting and a large fireplace with a fire already burning. In the corner of the cozy space, an old, brass bed was set up with all of the expectations of normal use along with the out of ordinary items—more chain linked shackles at the head and foot along with small loops on the cross bars in case of a full restraint being necessary. He had worked it all out.

“Can’t…breathe,” The wheezing was almost unbearable as Miles carried Jeanette to the corner, pulling back the blankets with hand while he held her with the other.

One would misconstrue that he had a soft spot for her, but she didn’t have the breath or energy to express it as he secured her in the shackles and wrapped her with the shockingly soft, warm, clean blankets. He pushed two pillows under her head to elevate her and shifted both of her wrist shackles to the bottom support so he could cover her up more effectively. Miles walked away from her and headed into a bathroom just down the hall from the room, listening to her cough become less intense with every passing breath. He retrieved a bottle of clear syrup and a second bottle with small, white pills in it from one of the cabinets above the sink and went back into the room just as the bluish tint around her mouth had already begun to fade.

“Why are you doing this? Why not just leave me downstairs to cough and choke myself to death?” Jeanette’s eyes were only half open, the exhaustion setting in as he sat down on the edge of the bed and opened the bottle of pills first.

“I like games, Dee, and I play to win every game that I play—that isn’t a game I can win, now is it?” Miles picked up a plastic cup of water that he had brought into the room earlier along with two of the white pills and put the pills out toward her. “You have a fever…take them.”

She accepted the pills and drank only the amount of water he’d allow in order to get the pills to go down. Somewhere in her gut she had a tiny bite of fear that the pills weren’t what he indicated but in this state, would he really be stupid enough to risk it by giving her anything that could make the fever worse? She stared at the wall for another second while the coolness of the water went down her sore, ragged esophagus and then made eye contact with him. He looked amused, glad even, that she was sick enough to need his assistance in any way, shape, or form.

“That cough is a good reminder of why we don’t run out into the rain away from me isn’t it, Dee? But I can’t have you coughing like that and hurting yourself in the process.” Miles poured the clear liquid into the small measuring cup that was pressed on the top of the container and started to bring it toward her. “Drink.”

For a moment, Jeanette stared through him, contemplating spitting on him, but opted to accept the syrup. She knew it was a cough suppressant by the taste but knew that it wasn’t an over the counter kind by the coloration. Miles capped the bottle and took the measuring cup away to be rinsed in the nearby kitchen. A thunder clap rattled the bed and the chains but didn’t manage to startle Jeanette as she looked down at the now newly stained sheets wrapped around her.
warmth was necessary but not at all comforting as she felt the chill quelling in small doses. Miles came back into the room and placed a cup of water on a stand next to the bed, knowing full well that she could reach it if she so chose to get it.

“This doesn’t change anything—you’re still nothing more than a little boy who doesn’t like not being in control,” Jeanette refused to allow his kind gesture to lull her to sleep as he adjusted the blankets across her, tucking her in a little better.

Miles couldn’t help but laugh at her before grabbing a fistful of her hair to get her attention fully, breathing down her neck in the process. “You may want to save your strength and listen hard, Dee—this isn’t a kind gesture, think of this as a prelude to what you’re going to experience very soon.”

The pressure from him pulling her hair sent a wave of pain down her spine until he let go and left her alone in the room, door slamming as he made his dramatic exit. Jeanette squinted and rolled onto her side, eyes on the fireplace as the glow was soft in the midst of the weather that loomed outside. She could feel her wounds crying out in pain but the softness of the mattress was acting as an equalizer as she held onto the covers and let a few solitary tears fall down her cheeks. His words were eating at her as she couldn’t help but wonder what he meant by “save your strength” and “listen hard” as she stared above the dancing flames, watching the little puffs of smoke as it went up through the chimney. He spoke in riddles. He liked to make her think about anything and everything even if it meant absolutely nothing in the long run. This time it felt different as she felt the warmth gathering in her bones, in the quiet firelight. His words were striking a chord at the center of her gut and she couldn’t quite place why. It was agonizingly quiet again and only the occasional crackling of the wood in the fireplace could be heard above the sounds of the howling wind and rain outside.

At least those were the only noises she could hear, until she closed her eyes and listened incredibly carefully until she could distinctly hear the soft, half muffled variations of screams for help coming from below her—from the basement.

Chapter End Notes

End chapter 13 – I am so very excited to get started on Chapter 14! Thanks to everyone for following along and patiently waiting as I take you on this sick and twisted little journey.
**Chapter Summary**

Summary: Romanticizing his victims, a brutal murderer leaves behind symbols of love…but who is his true, intended target and what lengths will he go to get her to notice?

Post “Agua Mala” (Season 6 with mentions of “Rain King”, “Two Fathers”, and “One Son” Briefly and only for context purposes)

Note: Use of puns and witty comebacks were both necessary and wanted throughout this process – practicing balance between the extremes and humor has given a much-needed lift to the truly dark places that have been explored in the most recent chapters (and those dark places will be continuing for a bit so bear with me). Please enjoy.

Disclaimer: Mulder, Scully, Skinner, and Fowley belong respectively to Chris Carter, FOX Productions, and TenThirteen Productions. All other characters are original and any likeness or named similarities to any real-life persons are purely coincidental.

**Chapter Notes**

**Trigger Warning** The first portion of this chapter was difficult for me to write let alone read back – please note that there are graphic descriptions of knife cuts and torture scenes. It may be difficult to read, proceed with caution, apologies to anyone who is affected negatively.

**The second half of this is considerably longer and much sweeter…it will reward you for sticking it out on the journey**

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Shortly After Dark

Lakeview Drive (Lake Barcroft)

Falls Church, VA

This was meant to break Jeanette and she knew deep down, in the pit of her stomach, that this was going to be more difficult than any personal suffering she could possibly endure alone. She could hear him yelling at the unknown female followed by what sounded like hollow cries for help, then that godforsaken song, in what felt like, a perpetual loop. That song would give her nightmares for the rest of her life and she knew that no matter what she was doing or where she was, it would be a constant reminder of this—if she managed to survive it. The sad fact was cemented that now someone else would experience the hell that he had inflicted on several others and she had no way of putting a stop to it. She was completely at his mercy, or rather, his discretion, whether she lived or died. Jeanette’s cough had softly subsided from the medicine that
Miles had given to her, the drowsiness acting like a tug-of-war with her need to be aware of the plight of the woman she hadn’t even seen yet. The two actions were not mutually exclusive of each other, as she was harshly discovering—allowing her body to gather the last of its strength and keeping her wits about her enough to be aware of everything. The fire, despite being slightly reduced in size, was still putting out a great deal of radiating heat and flickering light while the weather outside seemed to be worsening.

She could no longer hear the heaviness of the rain falling but, instead, the banging of branches against the siding, wind howling through the older crevices of the house, and the occasional thunder clap. She fully expected a December snow to be developing outside; blizzard-like but still not nearly as terrifying as what she had already experienced within the four walls of the house. The sound outside was nature’s stunning musical performance to clash against the living nightmare inside of the house. She glanced at the ceiling where an old wet spot had been and contemplated it, secretly hoping that the roof would once again fail and send it caving in, crushing her until breath could no longer enter or leave her lips. The thought was morbid but she’d rather die via accident than by anything Miles had concocted for her.

It was the worst mental game if “would you rather” that she could have ever fathomed.

She adjusted her position again, gently moving her ankles across each other, causing a gentle but striking clanging together of the chain like a drum beat under the covers. She moved her arms and the same effect, only with slightly more echo, would happen between the chains and against the bed frame. She couldn’t remember the last time that she had gotten sick this quickly but she could feel it running through her as her muscle groups were sore in ways that weren’t just from the awkward position she had been chained in or the attempt at running away. The chill in the air, the hours in the basement, and the fact that she hadn’t been sleeping well for weeks were a perfect cocktail that could only spell disaster—and loss of blood wasn’t helping her out any. She held the blankets closer to her chest as a chill dotted down her back and settled against her tailbone, reminding her again of the sore spot from being slammed against a wall. She inhaled then exhaled softly and reached for that glass of water that Miles had intentionally left for her, reluctantly indulging in the cold liquid, the guilt of hearing the sound of “Somebody Else” nearly on loop and infrequent, scattered screams festering within her like a brewing plague. It was eating at her last nerve and was chipping away at her soul.

“Dammit,” She nearly spilled the remainder of the water as she slammed the cup back down onto the side table, the frustration teeming as her adrenaline spiked.

Her eyes kept falling back on the firelight as it slowly flickered and moved, spiraling and snaking in an upward motion like a tribal dance without sound, without a drum beat. It was enough to pull her focus and allow the medicine to do its job as she started to fade out, eyes slowly blinking with each breath she took. While her body desperately wanted to give in and allow sleep to take over, her mind wanted nothing more than to realize this had been nothing more than a terrible nightmare. Some things just were not meant to be as the blood drying on her arms and across her chest reminded her as she felt a section of dried blood pinch at her skin just enough to tingle and irritate. Her fingers, toes, and joints were on fire despite the higher level of comfort that she had been placed into, reminding her that not all of her sore spots were simple to ignore or will away. She groaned quietly as she glanced down at her hands long enough to see her cockeyed thumb still awkwardly aimed in the wrong direction, dislocated. She wiggled all of her fingers again and gritted her teeth, focusing on the thumb but it refused to move more than a quarter of an inch and only from a nerve twitch across the top part where her skin had become swollen and bruised. She took a deep breath and let her hands go limp again, inhaling the pain, resisting the distinct want to cry. She wanted her own bed, the dysfunctional comfort of hearing the word “mommy” in rapid succession along with the refusal of that sweet, little face refusing to go to bed for the umpteenth
Anything but this.

The internal battle to stay awake was so intense that Jeanette had not fully taken notice that the song and screams had gone quiet below her, leaving only the sounds of the storm once again in the background. Just as she was starting to drift off to sleep from the fever reducer and cough suppressant in her system, the door was thrown open by a sweaty, dirty, blood-stained Miles. Jeanette’s eyes darted open and she instinctively scooted toward the wall as her eyes caught sight of the blood spatter across his shirt. He looked crazed and distant but determined as he stared her down before approaching, carrying another set of leg and wrist chains. The discomfort in her stomach started to send everything into a knot as he threw off the blankets and switched out the shackles on her wrists and ankles for the set in his hands. The replacement pair was considerably tighter and reminded her of prison transport restraints without the belly lead.

“How have you been listening carefully, Dee?” His voice was different, deeper than it was earlier and carried a resonance that echoed in her ears.

The words would not leave her lips, but he might not have let her say much as he yanked on the chains around her wrists and dragged her toward the door. The motion caught her completely unaware and sent her to the floor, skidding across the carpet via her knees. The burn was immediate as she felt both of her shins blistering, her knee caps instantly bloody, and any grace that she possessed had gone by the wayside. He violently pulled her to her feet and shoved her forward, through the doorway, and took her toward the inevitable end that pointed straight into the basement level. She knew almost immediately what was in store for her and the panic building within her was making it incredibly difficult to gather her wits. He shoved her forward and locked the door from the inside of the basement, that damp and bloody odor hitting her nostrils like a ton of bricks as she teetered at the top of the first step.

The silence within the space was quickly replaced with the sounds of gentle sobbing coming from the very same corner that she had once occupied. Everything had come full circle and she was about to stare terror in the outside—from the helpless bystander’s perspective. Jeanette didn’t want to look down into the corner that rested at the opposite side of the bottom of the stairs, but she couldn’t help but glance there as the light flickered and drew her attention to that space like a moth to an open flame. She could see the messy bun of long, deep red locks atop the woman’s head and the unmistakable yet pale blue of her eyes as she was already staring up in their direction. Jeanette was petrified after the lock on the door was properly secured; the heavy clicking into place of the metal fixtures as they rubbed against each other and stopped suddenly only escalating her nerves. Jeanette’s overwhelming fear was quickly replaced by nausea as Miles firmly pressed himself against her back, his left-hand fingers laced through her hair tightly, lips at her ear, and right-hand locked around her waist, gripping the material of her clothes right along the curve of her belly. His breath was hot against her skin and had sent an involuntary spasm down her back that shot up the goosebumps all over her skin, uncomfortably contorting the cuts down her arms and across her chest, electrifying them. She didn’t want to feel anything but everything he was doing was in direct opposition to quelling a bodily response.

“Move—or I’ll make you move,” He growled into her ear and tugged on her hair a little harder than necessary.

She groped at the stairs with the tips of her toes until she found the edge and carefully stepped down. The motion felt like it had when she was a toddler taking precarious steps down a flight of stairs on her own without the assistance of a parent for the first time, wobbly and cautious at best. She glanced at the girl again, who was now fully aware of her presence just as much as his
as the expression on her face seemed to look even more lost than it had when he first shoved her into the entryway. She was older but not by much and, by the state of her clothing, had put up quite the fight in her transition here. She had rips down the front of her jogging pants and t-shirt, both from slashes and the struggle that resulted in her predicament and a manual rip at her shoulder where Miles had pulled the material apart with his hands, exposing the modest looking sports bra underneath. She was athletically built, considerably more so than Jeanette, and had muscle definition along her biceps and abs—almost like he took a thrill in going after someone who possessed more physical strength than ideal for maintaining any sort of control. She had freckles across the top of her chest, up her neck, and down her arms in a much more concentrated pattern than Jeanette did. Miles had already been brutalizing her as she could see little pinhole marks in a ragged line across the surface of her skin where she struggled with her restraints—likely as a result of being lashed by a section of barbed wire after each struggle. Each little mark had varying puncture wounds; some worse than others, as the blood had barely begun to ooze from them and had already started to scab over. She had multiple cuts along the curve of her collarbone, down the entire length of her left arm like Morse code, and one across her cheek. Jeanette surmised that this was the reason for the screams earlier.

She didn’t want to fathom the exact reason why but the woman who had been in the basement for a maximum of two hours already had considerably more wounds than she did…but she knew nothing good would come of this.

Jeanette already knew the likely purpose of her being brought down into the basement but hoped that that this poor creature had not even begun to fathom the kind of monster that had snatched her from her daily life. Miles had been more careful with this one as she was restrained to the support beam with a ‘v’ shaped lead behind her back instead of in front of her, her ankles shackled together with a two foot lead instead of a three foot length of chain. He had left her neck fully exposed and completely unrestrained, likely for a reason. Miles practically pushed Jeanette down the last two steps and tossed her onto the hard, wooden and metal chair that he had sat on earlier when she was restrained before him like she were on display. The cold metal stung the backs of her legs as he secured the ankle restraint chain underneath of the chair legs. It was bordering on painful as he took her arms above her head and hooked the chain between her restraints to a clevis slip hook with a latch to keep the chain firmly in place. He even wiggled the fitting to make certain that she was not getting out of it before moving on. Miles took a look at both of them for a painfully long moment, the silence in the room had become increasingly severe, nearly deafening, before heading back up the stairs and back out the door.

Jeanette waited only a moment after hearing the door shut to address the woman directly across from her. “Hey, what’s your name hon?”

“Kaya,” The woman’s voice was soft and shaky as she swallowed hard, instinctively pulling on the chains, just hoping that one had been improperly secured.

“Kaya—I’m Jeanette, it’s going to be ok,” Jeanette could feel the tears welling up in her eyes as she blatantly lied to her, doing anything she could to calm her down. “Try not to panic—I know that’s hard but you’ve already been injured.”

“Why is he doing this?” Kaya’s tears were already rolling down her cheeks freely as she was visibly shaking; all of her muscles were over-firing as her body and mind were both fully concentrating on the will and want to run.

“I don’t know,” Jeanette wanted to say more but the door above opened again and Miles’s heavy footsteps immediately stopped her from furthering her comment.
He was whistling his seemingly favorite song again as he took his sweet time coming
down the stairs, following along with the melody with each and every step he took behind each
step to match the one in the song. He was thoroughly pleased with himself as he stopped at
the bottom of the stairs and made eye contact with Jeanette, who couldn’t help herself as she nearly
burned a hole straight through him with a fiery glare. If looks could have killed, they’d be well on
their way to freedom. He sneered at her, the wheels visibly turning within his sick and twisted
mind while he carried his tool box into the space, the instruments inside rattling around just
enough to make Kaya sob just a little louder. Jeanette glanced at Kaya as she started to
hyperventilate, and then looked back in Miles’s direction, continuing to shoot daggers at him, as he
carried his tool box toward Kaya, setting it slowly down about a foot from her, his eyes never once
leaving Jeanette. His silence lent no aid to keeping Kaya from the panic attack that had gone from
mild to near full blown in a matter of seconds as he pulled a serrated blade from the top of the tool
box and maneuvered around behind the support post.

“Kaya, look at me,” Jeanette’s voice was shaky but had volume behind it as she pushed
as much determination into her tone as humanly possible, helplessly watching Kaya’s desperation
unfold as she tried to look behind her to follow Miles while he paced back and forth, in and out of
her field of vision. “Look at me.”

Miles looked toward Jeanette before he swung the blade and clipped Kaya’s elbow just
enough to send a shooting pain up her arm and coax out a fevered cry but Kaya didn’t have the
wear-with-all to focus her energy on looking at Jeanette. Miles sliced her again, this time catching
her across the middle of her back with the tip of the blade, tearing open the thin material of her shirt
and sports bra, slashing the tender flesh open in the process. She was fighting it but the torture she
had already been enduring had left her senses vulnerable, her nerve endings more sensitive. Miles
held her by the hair for leverage and slowly cut a ‘v’ pattern across her mid back, the serration
catching in three spots, causing the skin to rip apart more than intended in those sections. The
blood was overwhelming as it variated between drags, dribbles, and spatter down her back, the
wall, his clothes, and onto the floor; the horror scene had only begun to unfold in front of them at
his hands. Jeanette didn’t even have to experience it to know how much it hurt as the scream that
came from Kaya was delayed by a sharp inhale that nearly knocked the wind out of her. She
screamed again, this time much louder and less restrained.

“Kaya, you have to try, please, look at me!” She almost couldn’t see through the tears as
they were forming like glass over her eyes, welling up until they could no longer teeter on the edge
of her eyelids.

Miles positioned himself fully behind Kaya and adjusted his grip on her hair, yanking her
head back just enough to throttle her while his eyes were in Jeanette’s direction, taunting her
silently. Kaya’s breathing patterns softened just enough that her screaming subsided and her eyes
followed the line of the floor until she finally could see Jeanette looking right at her. She bit down
hard on her lip and inhaled through her nostrils, locking stares with Jeanette, willing herself to
gather the same kind of fevered energy that Jeanette was conveying through the motherly intensity
that shined brightly through her eyes. Kaya had to believe that she was capable of being strong
enough not to give in and fight it. She wanted to. Miles wasn’t satisfied with himself despite seeing
the smallest of change in Jeanette’s rougher exterior as she tried so desperately to save Kaya in any
way that she could. He tossed the serrated blade back into his tool box and started rooting around
through the implements that had all been used on various other victims, Jeanette included.

None of it was enough. None of it was right.

He knelt into the bottom of the standing storage unit that rested at the bottom of the stairs
and pulled a fifteen foot length of chain from one of the bottom boxes. He stood upright and
admired the craftsmanship of it before clicking the end with a clevis slip hook on it against the bottom of the ‘v’ of the chain between Kaya’s wrists. Jeanette had a bad feeling about his next plan of action as she could recall the fairly large, forged eye loop bolt secured into the wood about six feet up the support beam that her own arms were suspended from at one point, that had been used to dead lift her twice via a sliding chain. The sinking feeling was confirmed as she could see Miles pass into the corner of her field of vision as he methodically started sliding the chain through the loop there was slack hanging on the end not attached to the chain hooked to Kaya’s wrists.

“Don’t look at him, Kaya, keep looking straight at me,” Jeanette could feel her tears stinging as she blinked hard and tried to put on a brave face for her, the genuine fear coming out in her voice.

Kaya’s pain tolerance and intestinal fortitude was about to be put to the test as Miles started to pull on the chain, wrenching Kaya’s arms in an upward motion starting from the wrists. Miles was banking on the idea that Kaya was not double jointed as he kept tugging on the chain, giving no pause for her suffering. His suspicion was verified as the motion resulted in her craning forward as far as she could while putting a vast amount of pressure on her back and shoulders. She stared forward at Jeanette, slowly turning a bright shade of red as she seemed to be holding her breath as the pain followed, sending shooting pains down her shoulder blades, through her arms. It wouldn’t be long before something would have to give, however, as Miles pulled another three to six inches of the chain further contorting her shoulders. The sweat formed on Kaya’s forehead and had started to filter down, mixing with her tears along the way, before dripping onto her lap and the floor in front of her. Miles gave the chain another strong pull and the double pop of Kaya’s shoulders dislocating echoed through the room along with the sound of a shrill, ear piercing scream that only lasted a few seconds before she passed out from the pain. Miles let the chain drop and watched as Kaya’s unconscious body slump forward; her arms limp behind her back, shoulders clearly popped out of the sockets.

“Fucking spineless bastard!” Jeanette couldn’t help it anymore as the tears were down her cheeks, the passionate scream leaving her lips like she had been holding it in for weeks.

“Calm down, she’s not dead,” Miles reached down and felt her pulse before re-positioning her restraints to where they were at her sides instead of behind her. “…Not yet, anyway.”

“Why are you doing this?” Her vulnerability was on display, tears in clear, shiny streaks down her face.

Miles gathered up the chain and tool box, setting them into the cabinet at the bottom of the stairs where his other paraphernalia had been stored. He carefully organized them the way he wanted them and turned back toward Jeanette, studying her physicality. He could feel the pure hatred for him radiating off of her as she finally made eye contact with him again, glaring through her tears. Miles couldn’t help but smirk at her, tickled over her rage, and approached her with a slow, tentative pace so he could relish in the purity of her emotional response.

“I thought it was pretty obvious,” Miles coiled his fingers through her hair again and craned her neck back as he pulled on her long, curly tresses until he could look her in the eye. “I’m going to break you, Dee, one way or another…sooner or later.”
The lights had been flickering for just over an hour in the entire FBI building but hadn’t gone completely off in the basement level office, at least not yet, anyway. The torrential downpour of rain had turned into snow shortly after six thirty with no signs of stopping for quite some time. The wind had been steadily building speed and momentum, making the already hairy weather patterns that much worse as the reports poured in of motor vehicle accidents across the entire DC area, over into West Virginia, and up toward Boston. The hurricane force winds combined with the snow had created the perfect conditions for a blizzard to develop, effectively trapping everyone where they were. The weather wasn’t about to stop the investigation from moving forward as time was not their ally, with each passing hour the hope of finding Jeanette alive had grown increasingly slim. The first 48 hours is critical in a missing person’s case and Jeanette had been missing for the over twelve of those precious hours. Hope was all they had left, even if things looked rather grim outside.

Scully was seated somewhat comfortably in Mulder’s chair, her legs crossed and torso slouched forward just enough to be looking over the paperwork in front of her. She had on Mulder’s oversized, black coat to keep her warm over the top of the clothes that she had not gotten to change out of yet, that had been left in the office from days earlier, the pockets still filled with sunflower seeds like emergency rations. Why he felt the need to fill his pockets whenever they left the building was beyond her but she couldn’t help but smile as she felt them rattle around with every move she made. She thumbed through the paperwork in front of her, hand against the folder in front of her open to a list of victims, official causes of death, and the chronological order of their deaths along with a big, still steaming cup of coffee to her right. Across from her in the chair that she usually occupied sat Max, who was busy rifling through a pile of photographs with his tongue sticking out unconsciously for added concentration and focus. His anal retention was on full tilt while he feverishly thumbed through each photo, arranging them by victim as well as chronological date of death. He looked tired but not exhausted like Skinner had been looking earlier when Mulder had to force him to sit down with some coffee. Mulder’s physical presence was missing from the room but his coffee was at the desk with Scully’s and his paperwork was strewn about as usual, evidence of him everywhere.

Scully wrinkled her eyebrows as she glanced at her watch and took a sip of coffee before at the wall mounted clock. “Max, when did Mulder go upstairs to call Skinner?”

Max had his coffee cup up by his mouth when she was talking and put it down while still swirling a little bit in his mouth before swallowing to check his watch. “20 minutes I think…huh, he should’ve been back by now. Want me to go see if I can find him?”

“Mmmmm…yeah, just in case,” Scully looked up at the angled windows above her head to scope out the snowfall but could only see the layer of white power that had long lost all transparency and went fully opaque. “I don’t know if he ended up having to go outside to call or not.”

“On it,” Max took another heavy swig of the coffee to send a warm wave down his throat before standing up, fastening his jacket.
It had been cold in the office, unusually so, but they couldn’t help simply blaming it on the weather. It was chilly enough that a simple jacket and normal attire almost wasn’t enough to keep ones limbs sufficiently warm. They had all been shivering in the basement level office since they arrived and it had been getting progressively worse since the snow started in. Max stuffed his hands into his pockets and started for the door but just as he was about to walk out of the office the ding of the elevator followed by shockingly loud cussing that was most certainly Mulder’s stopped his forward progress. He looked back at Scully, who had uncrossed her legs as she could hear him.

“Jesus Christ! Fuck! Cold! Shit! Damn! Damn! Double damn!” Mulder’s voice increased in volume, the shock building behind his tone, as his boots squeaked against the floor and melting snow began loudly splashing against the linoleum.

It was certainly an interesting listen from inside of the office as Max mouthed “what in the hell?” toward Scully, who simply shrugged her shoulders, a smile curving on her lips. They had all been a little worse for the wear but Mulder’s ever-present knack for raising a few eyebrows certainly hadn’t faded.

“Mulder?” Scully stood and started to walk toward the door just as he came around the corner, snow on top of his head, across his shoulders, and in the front of his coat. “Oh, shit…”

“Do not laugh, Scully, it doesn’t end well,” Mulder shot her a glance, the tip of his nose and across his cheeks and forehead bright red from exposure to the cold temps outside. “I cannot feel my ears or my toes…and I am not entirely sure that I am a properly working male at this point.”

Scully bit down on her lip and as she hid her mouth with her hand, desperately trying to hold in a laugh. “Oh, Mulder, why did you go outside?”

Max leaned against the table in the corner and had a similar pose to Scully’s as Mulder started to shake the snow off of his shoulders and hair. He looked more than just cold; he looked like he was teetering precariously on the border of frost bitten. Scully didn’t want to laugh but it was awkwardly humorous as she watched him shake away the snow on his shoulders before desperately looking for his coffee.

“Signal didn’t want to work in the hallway or the upstairs hallway—I even tried to angle myself in the breezeway. Nothing…till I marched my happy ass outside into Santa’s playground,” Mulder picked up his coffee and held it between his palms and closed his eyes, groaning a little loudly until he heard a hint of a laugh start to leave Scully’s lips. “Don’t start.”

“If she doesn’t, I will—you look ridiculous,” Max couldn’t help himself as he let out a fairly hearty laugh followed by a big smirk. “Don’t forget, this winter, bring your Mulder in from outside…if you’re cold, he’s cold.”

Scully finally let it out and buried her face in her hands, muffling the laugh in the process while Mulder shot Max a visibly wounded look. Max had fallen quite nicely into the enabler label for all of Mulder’s well and not-so-well timed jokes and physically ironic moments—his big brain had a knack for catching on quickly and a little bit of light-heartedness was necessary, if not essential, to surviving in the basement. Part of Mulder was relieved over the reduction in the tension in the air, even if it was at his expense, but he was being very serious about not being able to feel some of his extremities as he started to shift his feet around, knocking the last of the wet snow onto the floor.

“Maximus, you traitor,” Mulder sipped his coffee, feigning the fake butt hurt as he sunk into the chair near the white board next to the desk, rubbing his hands across his knees to generate
some heat. “In other news, Skinner is stuck out at the Arlington Police Department—for the foreseeable future until Jack Frost stops acting like an asshole.”

“That’s going to make working the details of this case pretty hard when half of our team is scattered all over the place,” Max rubbed the bridge of his nose underneath of his glasses and took another drink of his coffee.

“Only if we let it—the snow could help out a lot as well,” Mulder slipped the wet coat off and jimmed it through a file cabinet drawer so it could finish drip drying. “It could slow down the ability for the killer to transport a victim or find new ones…may even slow the current course of action on the one he has now and buy her time if she’s still alive.”

“That’s probably more than valid right now, Mulder,” Scully wiped what looked like tears from the corners of her eyes and looked over at him with her best attempt at an apologetic look. “While you were outside playing in the snow, Max discovered a pretty little pattern you might want to see.”

Mulder turned toward Max, who was already positioning himself next to the white board with the stack of photographs. “Oh, visual aids—Max, you know what I like.”

Max started to tape each photograph of the victims on the white board. He put Melissa, Maggie, Elizabeth, Rebecca, and Emmalyn’s photo on one side of the board with Meghan, Angelique, Diana and Jeanette on the other, Victoria in the middle. He labeled above each photo with an “H” or an “O”, indicating whether they had been killed in their homes or at an outside location. Mulder furrowed his eyebrows as he looked at their faces then back at Max.

“What am I supposed to be seeing with this, professor?” Mulder glanced at Scully then back at Max, who was looking quite proud of his work.

“On the left you have three brunettes and two blonds who were all killed in either their own homes or the home of a friend – they were never removed from the location in which they were originally attacked in. Their timelines are stagnant and immediate—attacked and killed, no delays,” Max continued as he put hair color labels below each photo before sliding to the right side of the white board with his dry erase pen. “Over here is when things get a little strange…you have the women who were abducted, taken to a different location, and killed subsequently sometime thereafter. All of them have varying timelines for their torture and subsequent deaths. That’s of course not counting Jeanette because she is still simply a missing person…and all of them have red hair.”

“You know that I’m weak red-green color blind so a pattern like this wouldn’t necessarily immediately stand out for me, right?” Mulder crossed his arms as glanced back at Scully, who was already smirking at him.

“I already told him that but, even with that in mind, I should’ve recognized this pattern emerging—given the circumstances, while Victoria is our only redheaded anomaly that wasn’t abducted and taken somewhere else…I’m suggesting that she would’ve likely been taken from the home had her screams not been louder than the music being played,” Scully took a moment to take a quick drink of her coffee before continuing. “This might be his motive and helps to establish a profile on him.”

“Scully, do I need to put a protective detail on you 24 hours a day?” Mulder was half joking and half serious as the notion of a serial killer with a fetish for red haired women was making his stomach a little less settled.
“Mulder, I am not exactly in my 20s nor do I resemble these women beyond their hair color—I doubt we need to go there,” Scully rolled her eyes and leaned back in the chair, cup still in her hands.

“Scully,” Mulder raised his eyebrows at her being so easily dismissive of the idea that she resembled these women in any way.

“Mulder,” Scully couldn’t help but cross her arms as she looked at him, her lips pursed together as they both maintained eye contact with each other, unwilling to waver.

“The thing to focus on is that we have a man, who likely has some stature to him, likely around 200 pounds, over 6 feet tall, with a fetish for a fairly petite, blue eyed, red haired, pale skinned female—he does stray from the last two but doesn’t abduct them, simply kills them,” Max felt like he was interrupting a parental argument as he sat back down in the chair across from the desk, immediately reorganizing the duplicates of the photos. “This is a releasable model for law enforcement to deliver a PSA.”

“It’ll help out along with the results of the forensics testing on the letter that Victoria gave us. Now that the weather has slowed down things here I don’t know how long it’ll take to find out if the killer left us anything on it,” Mulder was starting to feel that the frigid change in temp where the snow had penetrated through his clothes, the chill in the air only adding to the lack of warmth against damp. “Did you get to copy that letter before Skinner sent it to the lab?”

Scully went through her file in front of her and pulled it from the stack, giving it to Mulder as she spoke. “I get the distinct impression that he’s not referring to Victoria when he’s using the word ‘Dee’ to address the subject. I think he’s intending on someone else to read that—Victoria is simply the spark to get it addressed.”

“What wording makes it come across that way?” Max had read the letter a few times but his abilities were far less focused on the melodic interpretation of the words and more on the definite, more evidence based proof.

Mulder was reading out loud from the copy paper, his other hand precariously teetering his half full coffee cup, purposely making his voice monotone. “Everything I’ve done, I’ve done for you—but your eyes are closed and you refuse to see. They’ve all been my gifts, my pretty little offerings to you.”

“On the surface it completely looks like it’s aimed at Victoria but she’s been altered by him, she’s one of the so-called gifts he mentions in this manifesto of insanity,” Scully had air quotes around the word ‘gifts’ as she was half fidgeting as she explained it to Max.

The overhead lights flashed again, this time lingering off for more than a couple of seconds that sent a mechanical hum through the room as all of the equipment that had been plugged in essentially went into reset mode. The computer that hadn’t been powered off earlier made a little whir followed by a hollow tick as it shut itself off from the power surge. Mulder had left two VCR’s plugged in underneather of the stand holding the television and both went into power start that sent an echoing clicking sound from the tapes being simultaneously ejected. The air current in the ventilation system finally went silent as the boiler had finally had enough of the power surges, undoubtedly turning itself off in the process. The flicker and the subtle noises that followed caused the room to go quiet for a few agonizing moments as they all became hyper aware of just how isolated this room had become. Mulder glanced up at the light fixture for a moment with his head tilted just enough to where his ear was aimed at the doorway where he heard the elevator dinging multiple times as the electrical surge created a small mechanical issue with it until it settled down again, returning to a dull hum. Mulder got out of his chair and proceeded to stand
on it, utilizing the top of the white board to steady himself as his boots sunk into the cushion just slightly. His hand pressed along the ceiling vent but no air passed over his skin, no heat either.

“If we don’t find someplace else to discuss this case we are going to be stuck here until the snow stops and likely turn into popsicles without any heat,” Mulder got down off of the chair and pulled his jacket on that he had hung from the filing cabinet, the collar and back still damp.

Scully’s eyes widened as she could see him clearly getting ready to venture out into the snow. “Mulder, where are we going to go, realistically? The freeways are probably a mess and the car doesn’t have four wheel drive.”

“The SUV does,” Max interjected, giving both of them a sideways glance as the lights flickered again.

“We gather up a box of what we need to go over, stick it in the SUV and go anywhere with heat, Scully,” Mulder put a couple of files into the box on the floor next to the desk that still had some of the evidence inventory at the bottom. “I’m not turning into a Mulder-pop when the power goes out.”

“Don’t look at me, I’m in the Coral Hills and my complex’s parking area is a deathtrap in clear weather,” Max shrugged his shoulders as Scully looked at him, a smirk relishing the sarcasm.

Scully stood up and zipped up the front of Mulder’s heavy coat before sliding the files in front of her into the box that Mulder had already lifted up off the floor. “I can’t believe that I’m suggesting this but…I have a fireplace and plenty of coffee.”

“You just want to change out of Max’s sweats,” Mulder wiggled his eyebrows at her as he took a file folder out of her hand and slid it into the box.

Max gathered up the work he had been carefully arranging and set them into the box, glancing over at Scully, who had her nose wrinkled at Mulder. “I promise they were clean, Scully.”

The lights blinked again, giving them cause to be a little faster with gathering up their box of case work. They opted to leave the white board alone since they already had additional copies of the photographs in the files and tossed their paper cups into the waste bin. Max pulled on his heavier FBI jacket and zipped it tight before lidding the box of evidence. It was not unusual to take work home just to get out of the office, away from the stagnancy of staring at the same wall in exchange for creature comforts, for any of them but it wasn’t typical that they would be, out of necessity, leaving in the same vehicle, to the same place. Scully took another look above her head at the snow against the basement windows, noticing that the layer closest to the window had fused together, essentially becoming a sheet of ice against the glass.

“Are we ready?” Mulder had the box in his hands, fully prepped for venturing into the cold.

They followed him out, locking the door behind them, before walking to the elevator that all three had reservations about getting into. Nothing says “stuck” like lights that don’t want to fully stay on but they risked it, pressed the garage level on the interior panel and waited for the doors to close. It was incredibly cold, even moreso than the basement office was, and sent a shiver down their spines that raised every hair on their bodies. The short ride felt long as they all watched and waited for each floor change until it lit up against the garage indicator. The doors opened and sent a breeze at them that nearly leveled Mulder, who stood in front of Scully just enough to get the brunt of the cold burst.
“That’ll make a man’s outie become an innie,” Mulder inhaled sharply and shivered before heading out toward the SUV that was parked in one of the closest spaces.

Max even found himself with aching joints and teeth chattering within a few moments as he opened the driver side door to the SUV. “This kind of weather does not favor having testicles, that’s for sure.”

Scully glanced down the ramp at the entrance where at least four inches of snow had accumulated, the black ice half visible underneath a sheet of shimmering powder. “It could be a rough ride all the way to my apartment—black ice at the bottom of the ramp.”

Mulder opened the back of the SUV and slid the box into the empty space before closing it, his eyes looking out at the weather through the slats at chest level. “Looks quiet out there, though, that could be beneficial.”

Scully was already in the backseat as Mulder scooted in next to her while Max was more than comfortable behind the wheel. She didn’t know how she felt about not having a night to decompress after the explosion with only Mulder for even a fleeting few hours but she didn’t feel right about letting Max venture out into this weather on his own, even if he was more than capable of getting home safely. Mulder could tell that she was a little tense as he watched her slide across the leather seats, half gritting her teeth as she reached for the seatbelt. Mulder gave her a quick squeeze on the hand after she secured her seatbelt as Max guided the SUV carefully down the ramp toward the exit. She looked over at him with a little hint of a smile on her lips, appreciative of knowing that he was here.

“I grew up in a town with a lot of snow, so this kind of stuff isn’t difficult for me to navigate through – you just tell me where I need to go and I’ll have us there in no time,” Max turned the heat on just a bit higher and flicked the rear defroster on.

“You know the way to Georgetown, right, Maximus?” Mulder unhooked his seatbelt and slid into the middle, buckling himself there instead.

“Got it, Georgetown,” Max made a right onto the nearly empty roadway and felt the gentle give of the snow as he drove across the fresh powder. “It looks like a ghost town out here…I don’t remember a time that it was this quiet.”

Scully bit down on the corner of her lip as his right hand found hers; initiating contact with her as though he was always meant to be this close to her, fingers wrapped around hers. Mulder rubbed the top of her hand, that boyish grin hiding on his lips like a well-kept secret that only she could see. They may not have had that elusive time alone but they were together and, after the day that they both had, they needed each other in any way they could get.

“The Christmas lights really stick out in this snow,” Scully glanced out the window, catching a glimpse of one of the displays before the freeway entrance.

Mulder looked forward between the front seats, out the windshield, and caught sight of the bright variations of Christmas decorations on homes and at businesses. Washington DC was big on uniformity and he noticed the street lamps with the bells and such, but the snow really did make all of the festive preparations stand out moreso than usual. It was hard not to look at all of it and imagine a simpler life where they didn’t have any bad guys to chase.

“It definitely does stand out quite a bit, doesn’t it?” Mulder wasn’t necessarily big into Christmas as he’d usually avoid anything to do with it unless he was invited somewhere and even then, being alone still seemed like an easier option.
“Max, you’re going to need to take this next exit,” Scully was impressed with his ability to drive through snow like this, even if there were only a handful of cars that along the way. “It’ll be a left at the bottom.”

“Next exit, then left, got it,” Max glanced at them through the rearview before focusing fully on the road. “See? I told you that I’d get you there in no time at all, Scully.”

“Save your boasting for when you park the SUV, macho man—the exits are usually worse than the freeway,” Mulder patted Max on the shoulder, chuckling at him just a little.

Max kept the tires on the fresh white powder instead of the areas that looked as though tires had gone through recently. The movement was effortless as he eased off on the gas and waited until it was the right moment to lightly apply the brakes until he came to a complete stop at the bottom of the exit at a red light. He took a left as the light turned green and the SUV never even made a wiggle as it maneuvered through the heavy snow underneath of the overpass. Mulder knew that the boasting was imminent as Max glanced at him with a smug little grin before continuing down the street.

“It’s about 6 lights down to the right, Max,” Scully knew in that moment what it would be like to have teenaged boys as Mulder’s nose wrinkled at Max from the backseat.

Scully watched as the snow seemed to get a little thicker the closer they got to her apartment building. It was still almost a sideways directional pattern as the sky had opened up and refused to close, the darkness replaced with a sheen of white hazy glow that nearly created a daylight effect when it was nearing eleven. Max pulled up against the sidewalk and hugged the cement tight with the wheels but not so much to scrape them along the abrasive surface then carefully shifted the SUV into park before setting the E brake just in case.

“Now I can boast,” Max smirked as Scully opened the door and slid out into the snow, her boots sinking in to her ankle level almost immediately.

“Nobody likes a big head, Max,” Mulder shifted out of the SUV not far behind Scully and the cold stung again as it was almost coming down in a pelting motion from the wind speed against the back of his neck.

Max got out of the driver’s side and locked the SUV before going to the back to retrieve the box of evidence from the cargo area. He turned around and looked around at the skyline at the unyielding storm as it raged on, the wind swirling and the snow slapping against the side of his face. It was incredible yet foreboding as the thunder in the distance started to roll, echoing against his ears like a heavy bass drum. He hadn’t seen a winter storm quite like this since he was in middle school and it was just as fascinating then as it had become now—only, memories were attached to it, sensations, and feelings. Max hadn’t really gotten to look at any investigation as anything more than a series of scientific calculations and quantifications until he could feel the tension building in the air, the urgency rising, and the pure dread of not knowing what might happen in the next moment. It was almost intoxicating as he felt the sting of each flake against his skin, a reminder of the missing woman in desperate need of their help, who was out there waiting for them. Mulder and Scully were already halfway up the sidewalk to the doorway while he was still standing just outside of the SUV with the box in his hands, wonderment on his face as though it had been years since he had seen weather like this.

“Max, are you coming or are you staying out here?” Scully’s voice brought him back to reality and made him turn his head toward her.

“Oh, yeah, sorry.” Max was quick in making his way up the sidewalk to the steps, the
sound of snow crunching under his feet with every step beckoning him back to his childhood. “That thunder was pretty loud.”

“It was loud earlier, too, but we weren’t outside to actually feel it reverberate through the snow,” Mulder opened the door and held it for both Max and Scully, the wind pressing against it as if protesting their absence from the elements.

They went in, tracking snow into the entry, and half stomped some of it away before heading to Scully’s front door. It was quiet in the building but Scully was immediately grateful that the power was on and the heat appeared to be working fine in the building. She wiped off her shoulders and started to reach into the pockets of the sweat pants to retrieve her keys. Without thinking or hesitation, Mulder slid the spare key to her place that she had given him quite some time ago into the lock and opened the door, catching the upturned eyebrow of Max almost immediately.

“Well, I’ll be damned—maybe I should’ve joined in on that office pool,” Max was completely tickled as he could see the ‘deer-in-the-headlights’ expression immediately plastered on their faces as Mulder pulled back the key and slid it into his own pocket.

Scully and Mulder wrinkled their eyebrows at each other as Max walked into the apartment and slid off his jacket, both questioning, in unison. “Wait a second, what office pool?!?”

“Oh come on, you two can’t seriously think that all of the uber-nerds are strictly talking casework when we are waiting for hours on end for equipment to finish analyzing evidence, right?” Max laughed a little as they both took off their jackets and slid them over the back of the chairs, snow dripping everywhere almost immediately. “Why do you think some of us get awkwardly quiet when you walk into the room?”

“Worse than pre-pubescent teenagers,” Scully muttered as she slid out of her boots and slid them under the chair to finish drying out.

“Some people make pools about sports…the forensics division tends to keep it FBI related,” Max was slightly nonchalant about the ambiguous topic as he took off his own jacket and placed it carefully on the back of the third chair along with his very wet boots. “We all know half of the current field teams are all fucking like jack rabbits so—“

“Maximus, I had no idea you were so…deviant,” Mulder was pretending to be shocked as he was already halfway into Scully’s living room. “It’s like I didn’t know you at all. Impressive.”

“Mulder,” Scully’s eyes had widened after she locked the door and turned toward him as he was already on his knees in front of the fireplace.

Mulder let out a laugh, amusement on his face while he adjusted the kindling and paper into a section in the fireplace. “Scully, it’s just gossip.”

“Agent Scully, the pool about you two is pretty tame, if that’s at all a consolation,” Max had a half smile on his face as he came around the side of the couch, addressing Mulder in an attempt to change the subject as he saw Scully’s look of shock written across her face. “Anything I can do to help?”

“So…go on, what’s the theory, then?” Scully’s curiosity was more than piqued but in her interest she unintentionally set Max back into his off kilter mode again as he sat down in her fluffy chair and began awkwardly fiddling with his thumbs.
“Well…” the words wouldn’t leave Max’s mouth as she made eye contact with him.

Mulder glanced back at Scully and mouthed “you are so mean” at her, but out of Max’s view, as he slid one of those extend burn manufactured logs into the middle of the grate on top of the little pile of kindling and paper before flicking along the inside of the stone barrier he had been kneeling against. It lit up a spark and ignited the edge of the paper as he dotted it along until the kindling started to crackle underneath of the more robust extend burn logs. The log didn’t take long to catch fire and start putting out the light as well as the heat as he stoked it for just a moment more until he was satisfied that it would continue to burn. As he adjusted the cover in front of the fireplace the awkward tension coming from behind him was illuminated as he could hear Max’s nervous exhale finally leave his lips.

“Maximus, come on, you said it wasn’t that bad—out with it,” Mulder sat with his back to the fireplace with his legs crossed as though in meditation, the fire crackling behind him gently.

“It’s two against one…the fairness isn’t in my favor,” Max brought his ankle up to his knee and leaned back, getting comfortable as he glanced between them while Scully took a seat on the center of the couch with her leg tucked underneath of her. “The pool going around about you two is divided into three groups. The first group has bet that you already slept together, kind of a one and done sort of deal. The second says that you haven’t slept together but are heading that way like a long hauler with no brakes on a downward slope. The last one is that you’ve been sleeping together secretly and are regularly doing it…as often as you can.”

Scully sucked her bottom lip into her mouth and held it there, unsure whether to be horrified or amused at the idea that anyone would be discussing, let alone putting bets on whether or not her and Mulder had been having sex. It was a notion that had always been carefully guarded in tight lipped fantasy land until a few short days ago and even in a reveal to Mulder, her stomach still turned at the idea of rejection. Mulder knew exactly where Scully’s mind was wandering off to as he felt some of those same trepidations fluttering around within his stomach. It was their reality that the unknown was now in front of them but even with that uncertainty floating in the air he wanted nothing more than to always be looking at the woman in front of him, with her fingers fumbling on the edge of a tee shirt like a nervous teenager.

“What were you so nervous about, Maximus? That’s tame,” Mulder cut the tension in the room, shrugging his shoulders almost dismissively in the process before peeking over his shoulder to check on the fire again.

“I’m pretty sure that it wasn’t necessarily the subject matter that had me nervous, Mulder, but rather the fact that the tiny redhead over there could easily kick my ass before I knew what was happening,” Max smirked, a touch of nervousness hiding behind the humor as he glanced at Scully, who had stood up while he was speaking.

“I don’t bite, Max—well, I won’t bite you, anyway,” Scully let a smile peek out as she stood there with a hand on her hip before disappearing into her bedroom, leaving both of them with their jaws on the floor.

Mulder chuckled as he made eye contact with Max. “I do believe that was aimed at me, Maximus, and I’m certain that it was supposed to be a threat. Promises, promises.”

“I can hear you, Mulder,” Scully’s slightly amused voice came from the bedroom along with the sound of drawers opening and closing.

“That’s the intention, Scully,” Mulder stoked the fire both literally and figuratively, smirking at Max as he clearly addressed Scully, who was still in her bedroom.
“Why do I feel like I should’ve joined in on the betting?” Max laughed as Mulder pushed the log backwards just a bit on the fireplace grate until it was sending out a little bit more flame and heat at the same time.

Mulder added a smaller log to the fire and put the protective mesh gate back in front of the fireplace. “Speaking of, what would you have picked, Max?”

Max didn’t even hesitate as he stood up from the comfortable chair. “Oh, that’s easy… long hauler.”

Scully walked back out of the bedroom with her hair freshly brushed and a fresh pair of black satin pajama bottoms on that dragged all the way to the floor and a matching black camisole with spaghetti straps. “Why am I not surprised at that answer?”

“In some respects, I am no better than a 12-year-old—this is just my reality,” Max shrugged his shoulders as he spoke very matter-of-factly, nodding gently at her. “By the way, where’s your bathroom, Scully?”

“Just around the corner,” Scully pointed to the door beyond the bedroom and rolled her eyes as she maneuvered past him to stand next to Mulder as he knelt next to the fire, extending her hands forward to feel the heat as it passed through the little vent holes and out the main opening.

Max nodded and went off to the bathroom, the heavy click of the lock shifting into place after shutting the door proceeding his absence from the room, leaving Mulder and Scully alone fully. Mulder looked up at Scully from his crouching position and maneuvered himself to face her rather than the fireplace, gently tugging her by the waist until her belly level was almost squarely aimed at his face. He wrapped his arms around her and pulled her in, half gripping her backside in the process, all the while not taking his eyes off of her. She looked down at him, bottom lip firmly between her teeth, and laced her fingers through his hair, her nails grazing his scalp. He closed his eyes for a moment and reveled in her touch, inhaled a deep breath of her body spray, and slid his hands underneath of Scully’s camisole until his fingers were against skin at the curve of her lower back.

“Mulder?” Scully inhaled sharply as she could feel his fingers tapping the already sore skin of her lower back. “What are you doing?”

“Shhh…Scully, I’ll be quick,” Mulder was still looking up at her but his hands were sliding around to her abdomen, where he exposed the skin close to her belly button to the air where he left a trail of soft, bordering on ticklish kisses.

Scully’s fingers were still in Mulder’s hair as she tensed her grip just enough to tug him, causing his mouth to stutter in an upwards direction, dragging his bottom lip along her skin with enough veracity that he was able to coax an audible gasp from her. “Mulder, we’re going to get caught.”

“I’m listening for the flush, Scully,” Mulder nibbled on her skin and felt her hips shift against him involuntarily while the goosebumps flooded her.

“That’s good because…I’m not,” Scully swallowed hard, the chills moving over her like waves electrified by nothing more than a touch and sweet, little kisses.

Mulder slowly let go of her, his reluctance clear in his motion as he kissed the top of her hand while he ran a hand through his hair. “There it was.”
“Dammit,” Scully inhaled deeply and looked down at him as he settled back onto his backside again, the dull ache returning in her knees and thighs where the bruises started sending a pulse of pain up her legs.

“You have more candles in your bathroom than most churches do, Scully,” Max walked out of the bathroom and sank into the couch cushions this time, holding onto one of Scully’s throw pillows in the process.

“They aren’t always in there, Max—you must not know a lot of women. Women like to take baths by candle light,” Scully could feel the heat from the fireplace against the backs of her legs almost soothing away the soreness from the explosion.

“Ambience, Maximus, ambience,” Mulder got to his feet and started for the kitchen, a smile on his face as he winked at Scully.

“That’s just mean, I haven’t had a date in going on three years—the last thing I’d know about is what girls keep in their bathrooms aside from my mom and she’s hardly the candle lit bath type of woman,” Max was almost embarrassed as he crossed his arms and wrinkled his nose while admitting his lack of intimacy.

“What? Are you saying that none of the forensics boys and girls are knocking boots?” Mulder had pulled a box of hot cocoa down from above the coffee along with a box of microwave popcorn.

“I’m sure there are but that would require me actually hitting on someone—which I’m bad at,” Max crossed his legs and shrugged over the idea.

Max smirked and stretched his legs out awkwardly, both of his feet sliding under the couch in the process. He looked half awake but comfortable in her space, just not fully comfortable as if he were in his own home. He had a lot of respect for both of them and valued that they felt enough trust in him to allow him into what he considered to be a sanctuary, one’s home, and wanted to treat her space as such. Scully walked around the couch and noticed him shuffling awkwardly on the couch, a confused smirk appearing on her lips as she entered her kitchen space with Mulder.

“Max, you know you can stretch out on my couch, right?” Scully pulled a couple of mugs down from the cupboard while Mulder filled her teapot with water for the cocoa.

Max tilted his head just enough to see both of them in the kitchen. “Are you sure? I didn’t want to be rude.”

“Please, make yourself at home—it’s supposed to be comfortable,” Scully set up three mugs while Mulder shifted to the microwave with one of the bags of popcorn.

“That couch will eat you, fair warning, Maximus,” Mulder was warning him of the ease in which he fell asleep earlier on Scully’s couch as he pushed start on the microwave.

Max took the invitation as a sincere gesture and made himself comfortable on the couch, stretching out until he could feel his back, knees, and shoulders pop as they relaxed. He groaned a little and tilted his head back, mouth agape as he looked as though he might fall asleep right there. Scully held back a laugh as she waited for the microwave to finish with the first bag before putting in a second, emptying it into a bowl on the counter in the process. Mulder brushed up against her, sneaking a little kiss on the cheek, his hand against her elbow affectionately.
“Hi,” His words were barely above a whisper as they lingered against her cheek, the vibration of the simplest syllable striking a chord within her that invited the pink to return to her cheeks.

“Hey,” She wanted more of him, but timing was poor as everything seemed to be put on temporary pause.

“Seriously, this is more comfortable than my bed,” Max half laughed as he looked over at the fire, the soft glow of the flames already lulling him like a baby already halfway to a blissful sleep.

“That’s the same thing that I said,” Mulder looked over at the table where Scully’s pain medication and topical ointment sat, his attention turning toward her. “Did you put any of that on yet, Scully?”

“I’m fine, Mulder,” Scully dodged the question, the knot between her shoulders was stiff along with various other parts of her body that ached desperately.

The whistling of the boiling kettle saved her from the scolding as he turned his attention to pouring the cocoa instead of berating her for another moment. Scully took out the second bag of popcorn and distributed it into another bowl before carrying both into the living room, setting both on the coffee table. It was the smallest of gestures, but it was cozy as she pulled her fluffy throw blanket from the empty chair, already wrapping it around herself in the process.

“This feels like home,” Max had one of those childlike grins plastered on his lips as Mulder put a mug of cocoa on the side table next to him and one in front of Scully as she curled up in front of the fire in a big, cozy blanket. “I’ve been away from family for a long time and this is the first time I’ve felt like I’m around the closest thing to family in quite some time.”

“You’re not just the go-to nerd, Maximus, you’re our nerd,” Mulder carefully sat down next to Scully on the floor and brandished the squeeze tube of topical cream, raising his eyebrow at her. “You’ve been bad, Doctor Scully.”

“Mulder,” Scully contemplated sticking her bottom lip out at him, but she had a feeling it wouldn’t work on him even if she attempted it as she protested the foul smelling topical pain reliever.

“I know you need it on the bigger bruises as well but I’m not going to push that issue right now—at least let me rub some of it on your shoulders,” Mulder put his cocoa onto the coffee table and adjusted his seated position to where there was ample room for her between his legs.

“Fine, fine, fine, if you insist,” Scully pulled the blanket away from the back of her and scooted into the spot between his thighs, her back facing him, blanket across her lap like a skirt.

“You two are worse than a married couple,” Max laughed at the exchange while he sipped his cocoa and took a small handful of popcorn from the bowl nearest to him, nibbling on a couple of the still hot kernels.

Scully and Mulder smirked at his reaction as Mulder put a fair amount of the topical pain reliever into his left hand while his right slipped the tiny straps down just enough that he could pull the back of the camisole down to about midback. Scully looked over her shoulder at him and invited his eye contact while he started rubbing in the cool gel against her skin. It was amazing how a single glance could spell out a thousand words as they stayed locked on to each other’s gazes until Mulder’s right hand grazed a tender spot between her shoulders. Scully’s eyes darted
forward and she sucked in a gasp that Mulder could feel reverberate against his fingers.

“Is that too hard?” Mulder didn’t want to hurt her but he wanted the topical to do its job as he slowed the circular motion to a crawl.

Scully gritted her teeth and gripped the blanket, pulling it up by her chin in the process. “No, it’s ok, keep going.”

“The explosion inflicted more after effect pain than you were letting on?” Max was concerned as he was watching Scully’s face turn a bit red from not properly breathing as Mulder rubbed in the heavily menthol scented topical.

She nodded and let the air out of her lungs in an audible, uncomfortable exhale, the involuntary spasm following as it carried down her back. The feeling that waiting so long to apply the pain reliever was considerably more painful than the actual touch from Mulder as he gently rubbed in the ointment. Scully was more than a little stubborn and Mulder knew that understating her pain was going to be her pattern while she was recovering from the explosion. He could feel her tensing up and relaxing under his touch, her overwhelming need for the pain to pass outweighing the sensation of every nerve pulsing heavily throughout her body. Mulder finished rubbing the ointment in and carefully guided her backwards against his chest, pulling the blanket around her in the process.

“Is it any better?” Mulder wiped a bit of sweat from her forehead and carefully moved her straps back into place.

She looked up at him and tugged his hands until they were securely around her, her fingers laced with his, refusing to let go. “This is.”

Mulder adjusted his position just a little bit to where Scully’s head rested perfectly into the crook of his neck. Scully didn’t even hesitate as she felt the warmth of his skin against her cheek as she turned just enough to leave a light, soft kiss against his jaw before settling back against him, breathing a heavy sigh.

“Yep, I should’ve made that bet,” Max made a face as he caught a glimpse of the tenderest of moments unfold before him. “But don’t worry…your secret is safe with me. I meant what I said about considering you both to be like family. Family looks out for each other.”

“Can’t get rid of us now, Maximus, you’re stuck,” Mulder wouldn’t have minded either way if Max had always known and found a bit of solace in the idea that he had their back, even if it was over something like this.

“I hope it doesn’t seem like a secret that is too much to bear, Max,” Scully was soft voiced, somber even, as she thumbed the top of Mulder’s hand over the top of her blanket. “Truly.”

“Not even for a second—everyone deserves a little bit of happiness,” Max continued while yawning audibly. “Even Mulder.”

They smirked at the concept but the reality of allowing Max into their inner sanctum when what was blossoming between them was, in fact, still quite fresh and newborn, was more frightening of an idea than both had planned on embarking on with legs still teetering underneath of them. Scully held a little tighter to Mulder and knew that his strength was going to keep her afloat as she sorted out not only recovering from the explosion but deciding where this was meant to go. She glanced at the firelight and watched as the flames danced in a circle—two souls joining and combining, exploring one another in unison without notions or predisposed movements just
like they had been navigating one another in some sense. For now, Scully felt more than comfortable knowing that in this moment that she was where she felt the safest, the most needed—in his arms.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you SO much for reading and please leave feedback or a lovenote if you'd like! I am so sorry it is so long but the 2nd half was necessary in so many ways. Please love Max just as much as I do. :)

Incursion

Chapter Summary

Summary: Romanticizing his victims, a brutal murderer leaves behind symbols of love…but who is his true, intended target and what lengths will he go to get her to notice?

Post “Agua Mala” (Season 6 with mentions of “Rain King”, “Two Fathers”, and “One Son” Briefly and only for context purposes)

Chapter Notes

Note: ***TRIGGER WARNING*** First part of this chapter describes part of sexual assault (not rape) -- It is fairly quick but it’s still graphic. I apologize if there are any negative effects as a result of reading this part of the chapter. It came from a personal place and is for a reason. Approach with caution OR skip if necessary.

The second part is your relief, but please, pay careful attention to the clues along the way.

Disclaimer: Mulder, Scully, Skinner, and Fowley belong respectively to Chris Carter, FOX Productions, and TenThirteen Productions. All other characters are original and any likeness or named similarities to any real-life persons are purely coincidental.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

2:00 AM

Lakeview Drive (Lake Barcroft)

Falls Church, VA

“Why are you doing this to me?” Miles was in a part of the house that no victim had been in.

The walls were plastered with newspaper clippings detailing his nameless, faceless journey of terror—they had no name for him yet but the headlines were clear that he was a monster without a face. It wasn’t that people hadn’t witnessed his heinous crimes or the kidnappings leading up to the elaborate, brutal killings, it was that no one ever would see the unremarkable man he truly was. He was easy to forget. Amongst the clippings on the wall were surveillance clippings of Mulder and Scully from various places including the two most recent crime scenes where he had placed cameras of his own to watch them as they struggled with Diana’s body. It was satisfying to see how much of an effect his personal choices for revealing a death had on their investigation—but it was even more satisfying to see how much it was bothering her, how much his actions were
personally affecting her. He sat in front of a television screen and a separate computer monitor with the TV on as he re-watched the surveillance tapes from Scully’s bathroom multiple times, focusing on the passionate moment he was never meant to witness, giving him ample frustration within his bones as he half fantasized about being in Mulder’s position while also being the one to slit his throat to end such a moment.

“Ungrateful slut,” He muttered under his breath as he rewound the sequence again, torturing himself all over again.

Outside, the snow had slowed the onslaught but the wind had only amped up as it rattled through the house, rattling windows and loose doors in the drafty, old house. It was fitting that he’d be isolating himself at one of the house after hours of torturing Kaya and Jeanette. Miles had dragged Jeanette back upstairs and secured her back in the same bed in the room with the fireplace after forcing her to watch as he unceremoniously popped both of Kaya’s shoulders back into the sockets simply so that he didn’t have to keep lifting her up from the floor because she couldn’t do it on her own. He kept her chained in the basement level wrapped in warm, wool blankets, the basement wood fire furnace on full blast, heat radiating throughout the ordinarily cold, damp space. He wasn’t going to make the same mistake with Kaya as he had with Jeanette in keeping her in there with no heat whatsoever. He wanted to lull her into a sense of comfort, into thinking he was going to be merciful—it made the end result so much sweeter, more powerful. More of a shock to the system.

He rewound the tape again—pressing a reset button on his already overflowing testosterone as he swallowed hard and let the adrenaline flow through his veins like a fresh saline drip. It was infuriating to watch her like this but the fantasy was stimulating in more ways than one as his head tilted toward the ceiling, the frustrated groan leaving his lips in a long, exasperated note. It was almost worse than prepubescent experimentation as he grappled with wanting to imagine himself with her along with wanting to kill who actually was. The tug of war was nearly unbearable as his testosterone fluttered between edging and on edge, the need outweighing the want as his eyes fixated on a photo of Scully on the wall. The affectations brought on by his obsession were becoming increasingly hard to separate from reality as he pictured her in the room and, in his overwrought state, could already smell her perfume lingering in the air, intoxicating him further.

It was irritating.

Just as he was about to rewind the tape again, the power finally succumbed to the nasty weather outside and went out completely, leaving him in the dark. He sat there for a moment breathing heavily and sweating like a hormonal teenager who had just been caught watching an illegal channel by his parents until he glanced at another of the many photographs of Scully on the wall, circled in red sharpie. He licked his lips and bit down nearly hard enough to break the skin before getting to his feet, his brain reeling with what was left of the fantasy as he struggled to grip on the reality in front of him. He reached into his pocket and flicked on a small flashlight before walking out into the main house, his legs utilizing muscle memory to carry him to the bar that separated the living space from the kitchen, where an oil lamp sat unlit. He lit it carefully and adjusted the wick until it was just bright enough to give him a clear view of the doorway to the room where Jeanette was. He turned his entire body toward the opposite direction and slipped out of the sliding door where the cord of wood that had been carefully stacked against the inlet of the deck under the cover. He turned the flashlight back off and shoved it back into his pocket before gathering up enough firewood to stoke the fire in the room where Jeanette had been left in the bed.

Miles was deliberate in every action as he carried the stack of firewood through the hallway toward the room where Jeanette lay sleeping in the bed. After dragging her back upstairs
he dosed her again with the fever reducer and cough medicine, this time a little heavily, causing her to quite literally pass out within about twenty minutes of taking it. It was the only reason she was still asleep as the door squeaked for the first few seconds after the door handle popped loose from the latch. He pushed it all the way to the wall and waited in the doorway for her protests but all he heard was the softness of her breathing and a low clang of the chain as she turned from her side to her back in her sleep. Part of him found her fascinating in a way that both angered him and drew him in further despite the fact that his aim was strictly to inflict suffering upon her. He carried the stack of firewood to the storage box next to the fireplace and carefully set each piece into the metal bin, leaving only two or three in his hands to be placed into the fire. He glanced back at the bed as he heard the tiniest of metallic shifts from Jeanette moving around in the bed, but her eyes were still closed, breaths still heavy and undisturbed. He returned to the fire, placing each log onto the grate on top of the burning embers until the flames were reaching toward the chimney.

He stood upright and turned toward the bed again, his temperament more than unstable as he moved closer, his adrenaline pumping into overdrive as his eyes traced her outline in the bed. Jeanette was partially propped up on her back, the blankets tucked underneath of her arms up near the cuts along her breasts, the chains on leads from the head rail down. She looked fragile in this state with the bruises forming all over her pale skin, bits of dried blood along the curve of her elbows, down her arms, in the crease of her collarbone, and the dull shimmer of her wounds that had finally stopped bleeding. She may have been pushing his patience beyond limits but she was also his greatest future masterpiece in the making and right now, she looked dangerously like someone else, someone much more to his liking. Miles sat down on the edge of the bed and slipped his fingers under the top edge of the blankets, slowly pulling them away from her torso. Jeanette stirred a little as her fingertips stretched and relaxed, the smallest of audible sighs leaving her lips in the process. The sound struck a chord in the back of his already chaotic mind as the fantasy flashed in front of him again—the unthinkable becoming attainable. He waited until she was completely relaxed again to finish pulling away the blanket until it was down past her knees, just beyond the length of her skirt.

Scully’s face flashed in front of his mind like a bitter reminder of what wasn’t his—her hair, her eyes, her skin, all of it was as plain as day in front of him even though it was Jeanette lying before him in the bed. It was creating another level to his madness as his fingers found the buttons on her shirt and began popping each one open from the bottom up, painstakingly violating what was left of her dignity while she slept, robbing her of the ability to refuse, to fight back. He watched her face as he continued to unbutton her shirt, the cautionary part of him completely absent as he didn’t seem to acknowledge the likelihood of her waking up at any time. He didn’t care anymore; it wasn’t her face he could see as he stared down at her and he wanted more of the fantasy no matter the cost for Jeanette. He promised that he was going to break her, mentally and physically. His fingers popped open the last button and folded open the heavily blood stained material, exposing the black lace of her bra and her bruised ribcage to the air. He watched her chest rise and fall with each breath, the goosebumps forming as the coolness in the air bit at her skin.

Jeanette was starting to stir as Miles did the one thing that he had not done to any other victim, crossing a line that couldn’t be erased as he used his left arm lean across her, pressing his fingers into the mattress mere inches from her skin. He let his eyes linger over her for another interminable moment before leaning forward, dragging his bottom lip across the curve of her ribcage toward the center of her belly while his fingers followed the curve of the lace along the top of her bra.

Her worst nightmare had become a reality as the heavy medication left her drowsy and half powerless as the aggression was now fully awake within him.

Miles could see her head slowly turning from left to right as though battling a nightmare within sleep, half unaware that it was unfolding for her to wake up to. Her eyes were rolling around underneath of her eyelids, fighting the effects of the medication as Miles slid the shoulders of her
already torn shirt down until her arms were completely trapped at her side, tucking the slack underneath of her until there was no give left. He lifted his head again and watched as her eyes opened, rolled back into her head and fought to stay open but inevitably closed again, the panic in her breaths setting in as they began to thread along with involuntary, unpleasant sounding moans as she tried to fight the drowsiness. She was becoming aware of what he was doing as her nostrils flared in a violent fashion while her eyes continued to battle to open long enough to see him clearly. His heavy cologne and the oil based incense that he chose to burn inside of the entire house hit her nostrils as he half straddled her, pushing her skirt up beyond her thighs, one knee pressed between hers almost unskillfully as he lowered his mouth to her neck, licking and nibbling a line from the curve of her shoulder to her earlobe. She was crying for him to stop but only the sounds that could have been misconstrued as pleasurable ones would escape her lungs as Miles feverishly groped her over the top of her bra and nibbled on the left side of her neck, his breath hot against her.

“Please, don’t do this,” Jeanette started to move her arms but the motion was fruitless as she was unable to get her arms to move from the tucked material of her shirt at her elbows, the effectiveness almost better than a chain at restraining her.

The tears were rolling down her cheeks as she became fully aware and conscious, her eyes open fully as Miles had now moved from the left side of her neck to the right, his roaming hands furiously groping from her thighs to her shoulders, setting every nerve on her body into a panic. Jeanette had experienced something similar to this only once in her life and it ended as quickly as it started with her fist intercepting the guy’s jaw after telling him no for the third time. This was not going to have that kind of result for her as she clawed at the bed, hoping to pull her skirt out from underneath of her sides but his weight on top of her made it nearly impossible to even move let alone lift her back above the surface of the mattress. He had complete control of her and for the first time, the genuine fear was running rampant within her and making it even more difficult to fathom any possible way out of this.

“I know you want this—I saw how you look at him, I saw how you look at me,” He wasn’t making any sense to her as he tugged at her bra straps, pulling them off of her shoulders with his index fingers. “He doesn’t know you like I know you, Dee.”

Jeanette had her suspicions that he was impotent but that theory was failing her as his pelvis was rubbing painfully against her, a reminder of what she had already called into question as a problem for him. She felt the vomit rising into her throat as the knee between her thighs was forcing her right leg further from her left, pushing a space between them that was considerably accommodating enough for him to finish his humiliation of her. Jeanette could feel his right hand up in her hair, tugging at the clips that held her hair in the remnants of her loose bun until all of them had snapped apart and fell into pieces against the pillow. His aggression was becoming worse as the struggling from her only increased, her hips making every possible maneuver to writhe away from him, the whimpering becoming pain filled grunts as she rattled the chains with every attempt to free her arms.

“Stop it! Please!” Jeanette’s cries were louder, more demanding as she started to evade his mouth by sliding toward the wall, desperate to get away from him, however futile it was.

She wanted to imagine it away in the way that he was imagining someone else in her place. The torture would’ve been a significantly easier experience to undergo as she blinked hard, desperately wishing she could jump out of her body. Her skirt had become a nuisance as he let out a low, frustrated growl and slid back far enough that his weight was no longer heavy against the top half of her body. She wiggled the shirt somewhat free and scooted quickly against the metal bars of the headboard just to put a little more distance between his body and hers, her chest heaving with every breath. She looked as though she had been running, the redness across her skin from
friction wherever his hands had left their marks of roughness. He was less than pleased with her lack of cooperation as he snatched by the hips and pulled her back toward him before ripping the side of her skirt clear up to her hip, beckoning a loud, almost heart pounding scream from her. She looked up at him and was horrified at the crazed look in his eyes, the sweat all over his brow and down his neck. He was a monster but this version had not been revealed to her until now. His far more barbaric, animalistic side was overwhelming any sense of restraint that he had left as he put his weight onto her again, the dread setting in as she could feel his hands creeping along her back toward her spine where the closure of her bra rested against her skin.

“Don’t fight it, Dee, you’ve been teasing me long enough,” Miles managed to rip the remaining material of her shirt in order to unclasp the bra, his mouth hovering close to her ear while he manhandled her.

*This isn’t real.*

*This isn’t right.*

*This isn’t happening.*

Her mind was running circles as she couldn’t move anything from the waist up, her legs frantically moving in any way that they could, hoping to get him to stop, even for a moment. Just as his fingers slipped under the fabric of her bra to lift it away from her skin Jeanette managed to find just enough room to throttle her knee into his groin with enough force that he lurched backwards and groaned into the air, the sound reminiscent of a wild animal caught in a snare. Miles grabbed his crotch, his mouth agape as the pain seared through him to the point that he could no longer see straight. He backhanded her hard as she started to sit up, bloodying her nose and lip in the process simply out of rage for the now pulsing pain radiating through his genitals. She haphazardly held her bra in place with one hand while the other wiped the blood instinctively from the corner of her lip and nose. He stared at her for a long, hard moment as her long locks cascaded down her shoulders, her soft curls almost shrouding her naked shoulders, as the realization that she was not who he was desperately imagining her to be had set in. The panic was written all over his face as he discerned what he had done, sending him retreating across the foot of the bed, the regret almost radiating off of him.

“It wasn’t supposed to be you—it was supposed to be her,” Miles was on the border of hysterics as Jeanette froze, the confusion written on her face.

She couldn’t tell if there was sincerity in that statement but it was clear that he was losing what little grasp on reality he had left and it could become disastrous for her. Her fingers slid under the pillow beside her and moved it up to her chest, almost using it as a shield as she hugged it close while Miles continued to stare blankly at the floor from the end of the bed, his head shaking and twitching as he was staring off toward the fireplace. She couldn’t hear him but he was mumbling expletives at himself, berating himself for not realizing it was Jeanette he was desperately attempting to force himself on, among other choice words. It was a full on conversation. He was arguing with himself.

She felt wretched, the tears down her face mixing with blood along the side of her mouth and in the curve of her nostril, dribbling onto the pillow in front of her, leaving little splotches of red in their wake.

She felt hollow.

Used and discarded.
Left for dead.

It was as though that last part of her that desperately wanted to live had become smothered. He only offered her an excuse as her comfort, her solace. It wasn’t good enough. It wasn’t worthy of the pain that he had just inflicted on her. It lit a fire in her belly that enveloped the part of her that can only be described as rage driven, hate filled. He might’ve broken the last part of her dignity but her soul still burned hot and she was ready to snap his literal and figurative neck in any way that she could—even if it meant being the wolf dressed so carefully in sheep’s clothing.

“It was supposed to be her,” Miles repeated, blinking his eyes at her before awkwardly resting his head on her lap, the ripped material of her skirt under his cheek, his agony spilling over as he was sobbing on her.

She desperately wanted to take the chain that kept her prisoner on the bed and sling it around his chin, choke him until his life left his body, but she knew the noise would startle him if she even made the highly attractive attempt. The satisfaction that she could gain by taking his life away wouldn’t help her get out nor would it erase everything that he had done to her, or anyone else for that matter. Jeanette was livid but her overwhelming desire to convince him that nothing had affected her far outweighed any desire she felt for vengeance in this current state. She slowly reached out, her hands shaking as she inhaled a deep breath, grasping at the last of her self-control and allowed herself to delicately touch the side of his face. The shred of decency was more than he deserved and almost more than she could handle as she could feel her stomach rolling in a circle, the bile rising into her throat. The effort was weak but necessary as she lightly circled the space between his brow and hairline with her index and middle fingers, the shaking subsiding but not waning completely.

“It wasn’t supposed to be you,” Miles started in on the mumbling again, voice distant and haunting, his eyes staring at the flames.

His voice was far away but the effects of his words were the same on her as she simply swallowed hard as she listened to him continue to mumble on about another woman that most certainly wasn’t her or Kaya. In the back of her mind, in the darkest places that he had awoken with his violation of her lay the only thoughts that were keeping her from screaming. In those thoughts, she was imagining the ways in which she could potentially end him and his terroristic spree without even giving him so much as a chance to fight back or protest, just like he had done to her.

2:50 AM

Scully’s Apartment

“Mulder,” Max’s voice was barely above a whisper, highlighted by a hint of frustration as he repeated Mulder’s name for at least the fifth time in a row.

Mulder awoke to the darkness with only a tiny glow of embers near him in the fireplace, Scully curled up across his chest as he was half propped up in front of the chair within arm’s length of the fire. He had definitely been sleeping hard as he didn’t even care that Scully had wrapped her
legs over him in order to share the blanket, causing him to go numb from the knee down. Other than Max’s voice and Scully’s gentle breathing, the sound of the embers occasionally crackling were the only sounds in the apartment—not even the hum of electronics joined them. Mulder turned his head and was barely a foot from Max’s face as the dull glow of the embers lit up some of his features along the curve of his nose and his eyebrows, startling Mulder just enough to make him blink rapidly. Well, fuck, I’m awake now. Mulder couldn’t help but think as he inhaled sharply and exhaled the sleepiness away.

“The hell—are you making the moves on me, Maximus? Worst sexual fantasy ever, buddy,” Mulder cracked a joke, rubbing the last of the sleep from his eyes, careful not to disturb Scully as he moved. “Unless, are you jonesing for a threesome because, Scully’s asleep, insatiable.”

“You’re pervert brain never shuts off does it? The power went out, Mulder,” Max grimaced, thoroughly unamused by Mulder’s left field remark, and moved to the other side of the chair. “I didn’t want to accidentally wake you up by putting another log on the fire—since it’s starting to get pretty fucking cold in here.”

“Oh, when did the power go out?” Mulder put his arm around Scully as he felt her start to stir, gently rubbing the back of her neck until she went back to her normal sleep pattern against his chest.

Mulder looked down at Scully, her undaunted resilience only overshadowed by the sweet comfort that she sought in his arms. Nothing seemed quite so crazy when he could look down at this woman delicately wrapped around him. Given the chance, he’d go back and do it all over again just to get the shot at another moment like this one with her, even if it only lasted half the time.

It was worth the risk.

She was worth the risk.

“It’s been a while, I think—I woke up to pee and it was dark,” Max warily placed a couple of small pieces of wood onto the fire and gave them a little stoke until the firelight was significantly brighter and warmer. “The cold air really woke me up.”

“Is it the entire neighborhood?” Mulder glanced back at the window as Max half sitting on the arm rest of the chair behind them, his knees facing the fireplace.

“I don’t know, I’ll look,” Max groped his way toward the window, the chill in the air becoming that much more apparent as he got further from the immediate vicinity of the fireplace.

He pulled the slats in the mini blinds apart and peeked out at the street, squinting as the window had a thin layer of condensation built up from the inside. It was cold against the glass in contrast to the warmth that he could feel coming from behind him where the heat from the fireplace was doing its job. Max could barely see windows with candles flickering, some with half lit faces moving about and some without, but no street lamps were lit and all of the visible traffic lights had gone completely dark. The wind had not let up and the heavy snow had softened up to a less intense flurry that seemed to spin a circle, following the pattern of the wind. He made a face and re-adjusted the mini-blinds before fumbling back to the couch where he curled up underneath of the blanket.

“Anything?” Mulder wiggled his toes and brushed a few stray hairs out of Scully’s face as he glanced down at her in the soft glow of the firelight.
“Dark, traffic lights are off, street lamps—all of it,” Max adjusted the blanket around him and continued, trying to keep his voice low. “I’ll stoke the fire in a little bit to keep it warm in here. I just hope that the power comes back on soon—we don’t know if Skinner has tried to call.”

“Scully has a spare battery for her cell and a rotary phone in the kitchen just in case,” Mulder felt her stirring to the point that he glanced down at her and found her sleepily staring toward the firelight. “Well, hi, sleepy.”

She looked up at him and smiled softly before her face contorted, the smile curving into a soft yawn. “Mmmmm…Hey.”

“I’m going to make an attempt to get some of those candles from the cathedral, I mean, the bathroom, Scully, and bring a few out here,” Max was unusually awake for only having slept for around three hours but he attributed it to the cold as he stood up from the couch.

Scully sat up carefully and squinted as she looked around the room, looking up at him for a second. “Yeah, that’s probably a good idea.”

“We slept hard, didn’t even notice the lights were out,” Mulder sat up straight and wiggled his legs, the pins and needles kicking in as the feeling started to return to his knees and calves.

“You’re comfortable, apparently,” Scully wiped the little bit of drool from her lip that had snuck out during her slumber and stretched her arms into the air, popping her back like a zipper sliding into place. “Oh, yeah, that felt good. That’s what I needed BEFORE you put the topical on.”

“Sounded like you needed that,” Mulder leaned over and laid a kiss on her shoulder, letting his lips linger there as he made eye contact with her.

If only this case was over. They both were thinking in unison, craving a moment to sink into one another and leave everything behind.

Scully nodded, the pain down her back and along her thighs considerably less intense than the night before as she smiled in his direction. “Well, yeah, but that isn’t all I need, Mulder…”

“And they call me the incorrigible one, Scully,” Mulder planted another kiss a little higher on her shoulder, in the curve of her neck and shoulder. “You’re worse.”

“All of it is easily explainable and blamable on you, though, Mulder,” Scully smirked and squeezed his knee as Max walked back into the room carrying five candles from the bathroom, his tongue perched between his lips at the corner of his mouth in heavy concentration.

Max sat down on the edge of the couch and set the candles on the coffee table in a line, lighting each one with the one of the matches that he had grabbed from the fireplace. “Let there be light.”

The glow within Scully’s apartment was considerable even with the small amount of light coming off of the candles. It was enough that the battery operated clock sitting on the counter on the kitchen was visible enough for them to see that it was shortly after three. They had barely slept and it was nowhere near enough to soothe their already exhausted minds but their minds were already wandering to the case as they stared at the evidence box on the dining table. It was a reminder that they still had so much left to do, so much to accomplish, and yet, so many questions had glaring holes. Mulder squeezed Scully’s arm and nuzzled the back of her neck, breathing in
that already thriving strength as he pulled together his wits, almost as though he needed the reassurance this time. He slid out from behind her and lifted himself onto the chair while Scully turned toward the fire, stoking the still solid logs that were half smothering the flames.

“Is the elephant in the room irritating anyone else as much as it is irritating me?” Scully set the half hot poker back against the stand and half turned to where she could easily see Mulder and Max, the blanket still across her lap.

Mulder nodded as he spoke, staring toward the candles as their flames danced as the light draft in the apartment moved over them. “Our perpetrator has left behind hair, fingerprints, and DNA…how is he not in any database?”

“Exactly,” Scully crossed her arms, the half quelled frustration manifesting as she inhaled a deep breath and exhaled loudly. “There cannot possibly be a reason that he snapped out of nowhere and he’s never been arrested nor caught for anything else before this.”

“This may seem like a long shot but did we cross reference the database for all juvenile court files with the samples?” Max wrinkled his nose, his thought continuing into words. “Most of those files won’t contain photos every time but they’ll contain names even with redaction—maybe he had a juvenile record?”

“We’ve been looking at this strictly from his adult life and haven’t even contemplated that maybe he was a teenaged dirt bag,” Mulder was at it again with the puns as he stood up and went to the rotary phone on the countertop.

“Mulder, it’s three in the morning, who are you going to call at this hour that could possibly help?” Scully got to her feet followed him into the kitchen.

“This is the kind of thing you wake up bald men for,” Mulder turned after letting each number rotate through, the gentle clicking of the spinning mechanism preceding the hollow ringing as he held the receiver to his ear.

The sound was a little bit on the muffled side as the other end was picked up and rattled around before the voice came through with a little bit of volume and sleepy authority. “What?”

“Sir, I’m sorry to wake you but there’s something that you needed to be informed of that we could use your help on,” Mulder cleared his throat as he could hear Skinner’s less than pleased tone already peeking out.

“Agent Mulder—I’ve been sleeping in a cold, dark police station for the last four hours on a cot too close to the cement floor. You better have a damn good reason for waking my ass up,” Skinner’s voice was gritty through the phone and his volume was so powerful that even Scully could hear him.

Scully’s eyes widened as she turned toward Max and mouthed ‘Skinner is pissed’ in his direction, pursing her lips together after like she had just divulged a secret. She was constantly amazed at Mulder’s knack for bringing out the angriest of bears from Skinner as she leaned against the back of one of the table chairs, her arms crossed, examining Mulder’s every move as he awkwardly fidgeted like a suspect under interrogation. Max eagerly turned, scooting up onto his knees, his elbows resting on the back of Scully’s couch, as Mulder purposely avoided looking at both of them. He didn’t want to start laughing or ramble over the distraction. The former was more likely as both of them looked uncharacteristically like him at that moment as they were doing their best to be distracting.
“Sir, it’s a very good reason—we’ve been going over the details of this case and the prints, hair sample, and skin samples that have been possible matches the perp weren’t pulling any matches in the criminal database,” Mulder leaned against the counter and pointed at Scully, who was making a face at him.

“And your point is…?” Skinner wasn’t the slightest bit amused as he yawned into the phone and consequently into Mulder’s ear.

“Agent Belle had a suggestion about running the same information through the juvenile crimes database for anyone that may have had a rougher past—maybe a kid in the system that had a history of petty crimes as a child?” Mulder bit down on his tongue to keep from laughing as he could see Max smirking like he had just won an award.

Mulder mouthed “stop it” at him as the expression plastered on Max’s face was encouraging Scully to deviate from her ordinarily straight laced nature while Mulder was on the phone. It was half infuriating as he was getting a dose of his own medicine. The smile on Scully’s lips had him seeing the opposite end of the spectrum as he found himself pulled, allured by the way in which her eyelashes moved when her eyes opened and closed, fully tantalized by the way in which her skin flushed just enough as she noticed him looking. It was completely unnerving to him to realize just how easily she had power over him, without saying a word. Furthering the awkwardness of this conversation, as he stood there with his eyebrows raised, the silence on the other end of the phone was deafening as the peanut gallery stared at him like he were a monkey behind glass at a zoo. He hated being stared at, especially when he needed to concentrate.

“Sir?” Mulder pushed, trying not to look Scully directly in the eye.

“Who is this and what have you done with Agent Mulder?” Skinner wasn’t the type to joke but he couldn’t resist the opportunity as he only waited a millisecond to laugh at his own quip.

“Sir…”

“Get your panties out of a wad, Mulder, I’m joking,” Skinner’s voice returned to the typical staunch, less than amused tonal quality as he continued. “I am still stuck in Arlington in the snow but I’ll give the data team a call as soon as it’s close to daylight out and have them run the hair, skin, and fingerprint samples through the juvenile records database.”

“Fantastic,” Mulder couldn’t come up with a better word as he stood in Scully’s kitchen as his eyes caught Scully’s eyebrows wiggling in his field of vision, taking him completely off kilter.

“Speaking of Agent Belle, did he get home safely in this weather? Last time we spoke you three were in your office,” Skinner yawned again, this time much softer.

“Scully’s living room has become the home for wayward FBI agents so he’s here,” Mulder joked and spurred an eye roll and a headshake from Scully.

“Well, there’s nothing more that you three can do until we have daylight hours and electricity,” the sound of the cot squeaking loudly joined Skinner’s voice through the phone.

“We’ll call if we hear anything or if anything changes,” Mulder waited for Skinner to hang up to place the receiver back on the base.

Scully knew they were all still plainly tired but the exhilaration had hit as the realization was clear that they might be embarking on an opportunity for some clarity. “What is the
“We make a truckload of coffee, bust out more of those candles, grab that box of evidence and start going through it to see if we missed anything so that when we get that phone call we’ll be ready to catch this son of a bitch, Scully.”

Three hours later

Six in the morning felt like a slap to the face for Mulder, Scully, and Max as they surrounded the coffee table, the contents of the evidence box strewn about like a chaotic wind had taken it anywhere but where it was intended. The campout coffee pot had been utilized twice over as Scully put her father’s influence to good use and busted out the dusty camping gear that she never, ever used. The wisest of gifts from him before he passed was the percolator that sat atop the two burner stove powered by kerosene. Scully was sentimental about the camping gear despite never using it until now. She held it in her hand, contemplating it as she brought it to the coffee table and poured three more cups for each of them before setting the pot back onto the center of the stove, on top of the now off dual burner. Mulder had found a box of cinnamon apple instant oatmeal in Scully’s modest pantry and made bowls of it for all of them in a Hail Mary for some sustenance. The low maintenance, quick idea had worked as they had been alternating between cups of coffee and bites of hot oatmeal while they rifled through the evidence, to thoroughly run over everything, even if it were the third or fourth time they had been combed through.

They had to be sure—even if it meant ruining what was left of their sanity in the process.

It was light out and the snow had full stopped along with the wind, at least for now. The first pass of the storm had run its course and the plows were now running through the city in an attempt to restore some form of order on a cold Monday morning. They sat listening to the plow as it drove by then a second an hour later going in the other direction. It was surreal for Scully to hear since they didn’t often send the plows to her neighborhood. The power was still out, and Scully had lit several more candles and an upright oil lamp to get it halfway bright in her living room.

“I think I found something,” Max softened up the silence in the room as he pulled a couple of photographs from one of the folders, angling them toward the light just enough. “All of the victims had small traces of the Astrolite on them, but I don’t think any of them, minus Diana and Angélique were actually more than simple transfer of material.”

“So, the Astrolite only ends up on them when he’s moving the body?” Scully sat down near the fireplace, the heat radiating against the tender spots on her back. “The explosives are in the vehicle he’s transporting them in.”

“It would explain why the substance wasn’t obvious in the previous victims’ pathologies,” Mulder sipped his coffee and thumbed through a stack of photographs, the images almost blurring together from being stared at for too long.

“I think I might have something,” Scully had some of the photographs in front of her, the notion of what she was looking at becoming more real. “There are cameras in all of our crime
scenes.”

“All of them?” Mulder scooted close to her as she made the half radical announcement.

Scully started to lay out each photograph copy, leaving the originals inside of the file folder, using a dry erase pen to circle little sections of each photograph, methodically highlighting the truth in her comment. “All of them.”

“How in the hell did you spot that?” Max was seeing the photos upside-down, but he could see each place she was circling and wouldn’t have spotted any of the lenses upon first glance.

“She always notices the details—always,” Mulder was once again enamored with Scully’s ability to capture something before he even had a moment to fully grasp it.

“He’s been watching us. He gets a thrill seeing discovery of the scene to the last bit of evidence being gathered,” Max continued. “But what kind of trade could give him access to this kind of equipment?”

“You can order a lot of these kinds of cameras through catalogues, others are harder to find but are readily available to tradesman like electricians,” Scully was thumbing over the photographs of Diana’s crime scene, the haunting reality of the explosion replaying in her head as she caught sight of the mess of barbed wire in the image.

Mulder noticed that she had gone pale and reached out, touching her shoulder just enough to pull her back the visible zoning out. “Scully, you ok?”

Scully shuddered and blinked, reality sucking her back in with a fervor that cast her off balance for a moment causing her hand to grip the edge of the table. “Yeah, I’m ok.”

“I’ll be right back,” Max set his cup onto the table and stood, adjusting his shirt and jeans before heading toward the bathroom.

The moment he had just given them wasn’t out of a necessity for utilizing the bathroom but more that Max was incredibly adept at reading body language. He knew that something was off about Scully but was even more aware that she wouldn’t likely admit weakness in front of both of them. He felt like he owed the privacy, even if it were simply just to get the words out in the open. Max wasn’t the type to shy away from being there in anyone’s time of need but he was even better at recognizing when his presence could hinder communication. It was one of his more amazing qualities that made Mulder and Scully respect him so much more than he even could know.

Mulder didn’t wait more than a moment after Max disappeared into Scully’s bathroom, the logical, reasonable choice for giving them a moment, to turn toward her and search her face for anything to give an indication—an opening to find his way in. Mulder put his cup on the table and took the cup and photographs from her hands, placing both on the table. Scully’s hands were trembling as Mulder took both of her hands in his, rubbing the top of her palms until she finally made eye contact with him.

“I’m not sure why you think you need to continue to hide it from me, Scully, but I know something is wrong,” Mulder had his knees against hers, the feeling of her trembling passing through her knees, her arms.

She inhaled and held it there for a moment before exhaling hard through her mouth, her
eyes diverting to her lap for a moment as she gathered up her thoughts. “When I close my eyes I’m right back in that morgue...I can hear the ticking, I can see the table coming at me and feel it landing on me. I’ve had moments of feeling completely helpless before but, this seemed to be worse, Mulder, so much worse.”

“No one can expect you to be 100% ok after an event like this, Scully,” Mulder shifted his hands to her arms, rubbing her skin in a gentle circular motion. “I hope you’re not expecting that of yourself because I’m just thrilled you’re even here to do this after what you went through.”

Scully could feel the tears in the corners of her eyes, crossing into her field of vision just enough to blur until they made tiny trails on her cheeks. “I can’t let this wreck my focus—we have to solve this case.”

“Hey,” Mulder wiped her tears and maneuvered onto his knees, pulling her into his arms like he had so many times before. “You have been the reason for so many revelations about this case even after the explosion.”

“I don’t want to be the reason we can’t catch this guy—thinking about it has me second guessing myself,” Scully half buried her face in his chest and played with the bottom of his tee shirt as his arms rubbed the entire length of her back just enough to soften the tension, ease the anxiety.

“If anything, you experiencing what you have will give you the momentum to catch him. Don’t let it stop you,” Mulder had his chin on the top of her head and had gently swayed as he rubbed her back, notching up the rhythm he inspired. “I’ve got you.”

Her arms tangled around his waist and held on as his hands held her a little gingerly along the curve of her lower back. He kissed the top of her head and listened to her sigh into his shirt, melting into him. She half dug in with the tips of her fingers, holding onto him as though if she didn’t, he would evaporate from her grasp and slip away as if he were a dream. She looked up at him, her eyes full of what he could only see as gratitude even though there was no necessity for it and watched the remaining, sneaky tears slide down her cheeks and disappear down her neck. He’d move mountains for her in a heartbeat if she needed it. No task was too cumbersome. No task was too menial as long as he knew all of it was for her. Mulder was her strength, her driving force, her passion personified and Scully was his rock, his beating heart, his reason to continue to fight. They were the missing piece for one another in the vastness of their lives, despite all of the tumultuousness and strife they had lived through, and survived. They hovered there, the cold air like a brace between them, exchanging that same longing, loving hazy gaze for another long moment before meeting in the middle where lips met and held on for dear life, reminding one another that they existed, that they needed this. It was soft, comforting even, as Mulder’s hands found her cheeks, rubbing away the remnants of the tears that had fallen.

“Are you two done making out yet? It’s cold in here,” Max’s voice was slightly echoed as he stood with his back to them from the doorway of the bathroom, the center of his shoulders against the frame.

Their eyes stayed shut for a moment more as their lips separated, the humor immediately taking over as both started to grin and turn a delightful shade of pink in unison. Their eyes opened, both shaking their heads and hiding a laugh as their embrace didn’t end but simply adjusted as Scully’s hands settled at his sides, where they rubbed his ribcage and gripped the fabric of his shirt. He looked down at her and settled another kiss on her forehead before brushing the hair from her cheek, tucking it behind her ear.

“Who needs kids when you have Max?” Mulder chuckled and turned his head toward the
“We’re only supposed to be making out?”

“Mulder,” Scully rolled her eyes and picked up her cup of coffee, sipping it while still face to face with him as Max walked back into the room, shivering like a leaf.

“I see you undressing me with your eyes while you frog-eye that cup, Scully,” Mulder continued, knowing exactly what to say to get Max to quip back. “It’s bad enough I have this one over here doing it…I’m not a piece of meat.”

“Could’ve fooled me, Mulder,” Max had his coffee in his hands already and was cuddling it close to his chest, visibly chilled from standing in Scully’s bathroom. “This weather and lack of electricity isn’t kind to your bathroom, Scully.”

“Well, even though it wasn’t exactly comfortable standing in there for as long as you did, Max…I appreciate it. I don’t always enjoy accepting that something is bothering me in any way, shape, or form,” Scully had a soft smile upon her lips despite the undeniable feeling that the anxiety, while softened, was still circling around in her stomach as she got up to refill her coffee cup.

Max nodded, taking another sip of his own cup of java, allowing the semi-warm liquid to warm him the rest of the way. “It was nothing. You’ve been through hell—you needed to talk and it’s awkward with a third person listening.”

Scully was used to being able to rely on Mulder but knowing that Max was there in a similar capacity, looking out for her best interests, was comforting. There was a time that she relied heavily on her sister’s advice, asked for or not, in a similar capacity and he had instincts like a brother would. Nothing felt more natural than to know that she had a support network such as this to look to in the event of any situation that was out of her grasp, out of her ability to cope with or fight against alone. The rotary phone on the counter began to ring, bringing her out of her contemplation, causing Scully to put her cup down before she could refill it. She picked it up from the base and brought it to her ear.

“Scully,” She crossed her arms, the anxiety rising in her belly for a moment as Skinner rattled off a frantic sentence into her ear, the words not quite making any sense until he came to a pause. “Yes, Sir, I’m listening…”

“Is everything ok?” Mulder got to his feet and came into the kitchen as he saw her expression seem to change back to the one that he had witnessed just a few minutes ago.

She didn’t want it to be real what she was hearing from Skinner but it was all too real as she stared forward and listened to him despite the urge to drop the receiver. This case had become an unimaginable, almost unending nightmare that continued to unfold. It wasn’t enough that they were killing themselves to solve this case—the monster they were looking for had only made things worse by the moment, by the second.

“We’ll be careful and meet you there…Absolutely, Sir,” She waited only a moment to hang up the phone and made eye contact with Mulder, the worry already written on her face.

“So Scully?” Mulder touched her arm in a desperate attempt to help her gather what was left of her wits.

She sighed and diverted her eyes to the floor. “We need to meet Skinner immediately. We have another missing woman…and he’s had her for nearly 12 hours already. We have to find them, Mulder…before it’s too late.”
I really hope you liked this chapter. Please be on the lookout for the next! Feedback is appreciated and loved.

Thank you for not losing hope despite the heavy start. The end result is worth it.
Lie to Her

Chapter Summary

Romanticizing his victims, a brutal murderer leaves behind symbols of love… but who is his true, intended target and what lengths will he go to get her to notice?

Post “Agua Mala” (Season 6 with mentions of “Rain King”, “Two Fathers”, and “One Son” Briefly and only for context purposes)

Chapter Notes

*Trigger Warning: second section has graphic depiction of violent death*

All locations mentioned are real and unfortunately I have not been there so I had to rely heavily on topographic maps as well as trail head maps. Any inaccuracies are not intended.

Disclaimer: Agent Mulder, Scully, Skinner, Fowley, and the Lone Gunmen belong respectively to Chris Carter, FOX Productions, and TenThirteen Productions. All other characters are original and any likeness or named similarities to any real-life persons are purely coincidental (unless, well, you’ve been told, then you should’ve expected such things)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

7:30 AM

Bryan Branch Crossing – Pimmit Run Trail

McLean, VA

This wasn’t at all what they expected to find when they were told that there was another abduction. The park was picturesque, settled into one of those elaborate little series of trails where hikers, bicyclists, and amateur joggers were often seen preparing for marathon after marathon. It was quiet, covered in snow with only random footprints dotted along the trails where devoted runners had continued their training sessions. It was the definition of peaceful and quiet. Nature was fairly serene in the area and the snow had driven the remaining small animals into hiding to ride out the cold, creating an even greater absence of noise in the park. Mulder, Scully, Max, Skinner, and two Arlington police officers had parked at the main entrance of the park and made their way to a small footbridge that lay across an active brook. The water was approaching four feet deep under it and nearly touched the bottom planking of the crossing. The ordinarily steady flow of water had been slowed to a dull lull, the banks of the small brook iced over and thick
sections had begun to create little icebergs that were stopped up against higher sections of rocks. A new shape to the brook had begun to emerge as the ice beckoned its own rhythm, its own energy, against the curvature of the rocks below the surface. The snow hadn’t melted much but had at least stopped for the time being as the city workers actively scrambled to restore power in shifts to the DC area.

“A missing person’s report came in late last night during the storm for Kaya Little, approximately five feet five inches tall, 30 years of age, athletic build…red hair. She went missing after she went on a run in the park. She was reported missing by her boyfriend, who was at their apartment only ten blocks from here,” officer Jackson, a man in the same age range as Skinner, flipped through the notepad in his hand as they came up to the footbridge from the north side. “The boyfriend said that this was her route and she had left the house at 5:45. When she wasn’t home by 9, he called us.”

“Has anyone corroborated his story about her usual running path?” Skinner adjusted the wrist closure on his leather gloves and made eye contact with Jackson.

“She usually would run with a friend named Cheryl, who said she got a phone call shortly after five from Miss Little asking if she wanted to join her on the trail,” Jackson flipped backward to a previous page of his notepad, carefully reading notations of conversations that he had already had with potential witnesses.

The conversation around Mulder and Scully continued on as though it were a blur as they became fixated on the pathway, the scenery. It didn’t make sense that he’d choose this place to snatch a woman; it seemed to be too open, too easily spotted. Mulder adjusted his leather gloves and scanned the surroundings for anything that was out of place. The seclusion just wasn’t there. It wasn’t adding up. He took note that there was a line of trees with heavy underbrush that would’ve been a nearly perfect, little space to hide and wait out an unsuspecting victim as they jogged or walked near that spot. He shifted his weight as he knelt down near the footbridge, his hand pressed against the top railing, leaning over until he saw what looked like blood and a small section of hair sticking out from splintering in the wood on the railing, facing toward the trailhead. He continued the upright down to the dirt near the water and saw the remnants of a Walkman headphones dangling precariously from a cradle of rocks. She had been ambushed fairly easily due, in part, to not being able to hear his footsteps behind her with the headphones on, he mentally surmised, the little drops of blood on the surface of the plastic of the Walkman and on the rocks around it.

“I need someone to collect that,” Mulder pointed at the Walkman and stood up straight, his attention falling on Scully, who had maneuvered to a similar kneeling position near the bushes.

The second officer had on a pair of sterile gloves and gathered up the Walkman along with the hair into a separate bag while Mulder stood next to Scully as she carefully pulled back a section of the bushes and angled her line of vision toward the footbridge. She was quiet and almost contemplative of the scene in front of her, imagining the abduction as it occurred, hoping that any possible way in which she could visualize it would point her into the right direction of where to start. It was almost agonizing to play the abduction out in her mind but she knew that the answers were there, waiting for her to find them. They had precious little time in which to solve this and piecing together what little evidence may or may not have left behind was becoming more urgent, the window for finding it was quickly closing.

“Mulder, I need your height,” Scully looked up at him while Skinner and Max began talking with the two officers about anything else from the scene prior to their arrival. “Kneel down here.”
“What have you got brewing in that enigmatic mind of yours, Agent Scully?” Mulder did as she instructed, kneeling in the bushes as she got up and maneuvered toward the footbridge.

Scully stood next to the railing and looked toward the bushes where she had Mulder kneel, her voice carried just enough as she spoke. “If I were a jogger with headphones on I wouldn’t have noticed a man hiding right where you are—he had a perfect vantage point of watching her from any direction until she stopped right here to stretch or take a drink of water.”

Mulder stood and approached Scully, turning her around toward the center of the footbridge, placing a hand over her mouth while the other slid around her waist. “It wouldn’t have taken much to sneak up behind her and subdue her in this exact manner.”

Scully pulled his fingers away from her mouth but didn’t move out of the grip, fully demonstrating the assault and subsequent abduction with him. “Even if she had attempted to pull away, his leverage and vantage point with this body positioning would’ve given him more than an ample opportunity to shove her head down, knock her unconscious against the railing right here.”

Mulder cradled her at the forehead and half bent her at the waist, pushing her head down until his own hand touched the railing. “That’s right where the first blow would’ve hit…if she struggled, it would explain why the hair and Walkman ended up on the ground.”

Scully stood up straight and half bumped against Mulder’s chest in the process. “Even if she did struggle, she never had the ability to gain the upper hand over him.”

“Mapping a scenario?” Skinner could hear their verbal exchanged and found himself impressed at the notion to essentially re-create a potential scene.

“This area is limited for spots to hide—we know that this perp is calculating and heavily motivated by a certain look. He’d wait a while to obtain exactly what he wanted,” Scully continued, her eyes scanning the trees above the bushes. “He watches places like these and waits for the moment to take advantage of an opportunity.”

“Agent Scully, are you ok?” Max noticed her looking more upwards and moving back toward that first line of brush where they were guessing the killer had been hiding.

“I’m seeing something in the branches, about eight feet up,” Scully turned toward Mulder, gesturing for him to walk over to her. “Will you boost me up?”

Mulder nodded and leaned, extending his gloved hands for her to step into as close to the tree as he could get without bringing her off balance. “What are you seeing up there?”

“I could be wrong, but the light caught my eye again,” Scully used only the toe portion of her boot to step up, balancing preciously with her hands against the tree.

Mulder looked up and couldn’t help but notice the smallest of twitches in her thigh region as her glutes and thigh muscle tightened while she balanced. “Hey Scully, you been workin’ out?”

“Is that you way of telling me that you’re looking at my butt, Mulder?” Scully glanced down at him, rolling her eyes.

“Maybe,” Mulder smirked as the snow on the bottom of her shoe caused her to slide just enough that he had to adjust his position, half dropping one knee down for extra leverage.

Mulder grunted as Scully spent only about 30 seconds in that position until she made a
little ‘a-ha’ sound and came back down with a little grin across her lips. Mulder stood up straight and wiped his gloves on his pants as Scully tilted her head and showed him the object—a camera.

"Is that another camera?" Max walked over to them as Scully held it between two gloved fingers, careful to keep them still so she wouldn’t smear any prints there might be.

Scully nodded and tilted it around to look at the battery setup. “It is. It’s one of those single mechanism, surveillance cameras that are usually attached via satellite hookup after activation. He left it running until the battery went dead.”

“So that unit is completely useless?” Max specialized in analysis not technology driven equipment, so this one was a little foreign to him.

“Not necessarily—if we get a working battery in it and turn it on, there’s a chance we can trace the originating signal since it has to transmit somewhere,” Mulder knew there was a damn good reason that he had listened to the Lone Gunman rattling off information about satellites and traces.

“The FBI has access to satellite lookups but you and I both know that we have someone better equipped to get this done faster,” Scully lowered her voice and looked at Mulder as Max went to retrieve an empty evidence bag to put the camera in.

Mulder’s eyebrows rose as he made eye contact with her, thoroughly stunned at her willingness to break the rules. “I detect a hint of Spooky Mulder rooting around in your brain again, Scully.”

“You know I’m right, Mulder,” Scully glanced over his shoulder as Max was walking back toward them. “Are we paying a visit or not?”

“Scully, you’re trouble, that’s all there is to it,” Mulder winked and nodded just as Max joined them. “Max, we need the keys to the SUV so we can take this little gem to have the communications division start running analytics on this.”

Max handed Mulder the keys to the SUV and noticed Scully’s expression, utilizing air quotes as he spoke. “Communications division.”

“Max, it isn’t what you thi—“

“I trust your judgments, Agent Scully, and I can’t say that I blame you for seeking an outside assist on this one, especially one that might be quicker,” Max cut Scully off before she could finish her sentence, winking at her as he nudged her wrist with the evidence bag. “Just don’t get all of us in trouble with you know who?”

Scully slid the camera into the evidence bag and carefully adjusted her grip on the bag instead of the actual camera just as Skinner was walking over. He knew better than to trust complete silence from Mulder and Scully but knew that they would eventually divulge their methodology, however ridiculous or hair brained, in due time, as always. He had given orders already to the two officers to continue processing the scene where the blood and hairs were found to seek out any additional indicators of their victim or the perpetrator—any clue was better than none at all.

“If you two are going to take that back to have it worked on I’m going to need an assist out here in the field to continue processing the scene and interview the boyfriend,” Skinner’s eyes shifted from Mulder and Scully to Max. “Interested in a little field work, Max?”
Skinner didn’t wait for an answer from Max as he headed toward the two officers again, immediately recapturing their attention in order to reassess the scene while Max stayed another moment with Mulder and Scully. The notion of having Max out in the field was a little on the worrisome side for both of them but Max had proven that he had the mental fortitude to do it—now the real test would be to find out whether his intestines also carried the same sort of spirit.

“Be careful with the bald man,” Mulder patted Max on the back and gave him a playful jostle. “He bites.”

“Max, don’t listen to Mulder—today you are Special Agent Max Belle,” Scully pushed Mulder off balance at the nose and stood in front of Max, giving him a little bit of a pep talk and a boost of confidence. “You are not simply part of the Forensics team…you’re a Field Agent.”

“You already know everything that you have to so the rest is just practical application,” Mulder smirked and tilted his head. “…and winging it.”

“I got it,” Max shook his head and zipped his FBI jacket up just a little to block out the cold air before taking the first steps toward Skinner, flipping the switch from forensics division to trainee field agent, essentially.

Mulder and Scully started toward the main entrance of the park just as the snow started to reappear in the sky again. The dark clouds were reemerging, creating a looming presence of danger in the air as they approached the SUV from the southern side. The snow, while lightly falling, was simply a coverlet, masking where there killer had been hiding in plain sight and showed no signs of stopping until there was so much more suffering in his wake for them to uncover.

8:00 AM
Lakeview Drive (Lake Barcroft)
Falls Church, VA

Jeanette hadn’t closed her eyes since Miles nearly sent the last of her dignity plummeting off the edge of the figurative cliff. There were no longer any tears left to purge from her system as she felt the bitter sting, the burning of the emotions that had already left her corneas sore and bloodshot. It reminded her again of what was seconds from occurring as she could feel his weight on her again and instantly beckoned the vomit into her throat. She held onto the railing next to her and pressed her forehead against the cold, old brass, refusing to let it win. The breaths were staggered but deep as she quelled the urge to expel the last of her strength—it was all she had left to hold onto.

The lack of power in the house had amplified her ability to hear him coming down the hall significantly quicker than when the hum of electronics were running interference with her senses. She blinked slowly and gathered herself, staring at the half dying embers of the fire that the bastard had stopped tending an hour ago. She had refastened the bra after he removed himself from her lap shortly after the first collapse, alternating between calling her “Dee” and “Dana”, neither of
which were her name, all the while continuing to argue louder with himself. Her head was pounding as she tugged the last sections of broken hair clips from her tangle of locks. The last piece pulled had broken skin as it tugged just enough to make her wince from the pain and stare at the blood on the plastic and her fingertips before throwing it across the carpet. She tugged on the chains, gathering them between her fingers as they shook with frustration, hoping to get just enough leverage to dislodge the brass verticals from the main headboard but the welds were clearly stronger than she was.

He had robbed her of everything but her fight as she inhaled and pulled again, the skin around her wrists aching with every second that she held on. She could feel the dislocated thumb rubbing against the chain and the shackle with each breath, painfully reminding her of her own stupidity. She took another deep breathe as she allowed the slack to gather before pulling hard enough that the shackle slipped forward and violently popped her thumb back into place with a resounding snap that sent an electric shock through her entire body. She cried out involuntarily and went limp against the headboard, using the chains as her only means to stay upright, the air refusing to go into or out of her lungs as the room blurred.

“Oh, fuck,” She gagged on the words as her diaphragm jump started her breaths again, staggering them in small, stunted motions.

The vociferation had drawn his attention as she could hear him again.

His heavy boots were heavy but not at all rushed as they grew nearer with every step. She pulled the blanket close to her chest and refused to let go of the brass, the cold was almost comforting as she stared toward the door, waiting for the inevitable. So this is how it ends. She couldn’t help but think to herself as the door handle turned with an agonizing slowness that nearly stopped her heart. She hugged the blanket to her chest as the odor of incense and rust hit her nostrils, the door creeping open, his presence clear. He had morphed into a dark cloud, a looming storm that hadn’t built up all of the energy that was needed to completely annihilate everything in the pathway—but was ready to take her over as she stared at his boots. Somehow, she never pictured the lead in to death being quite this traumatic or soon—let alone by the hand of a stranger.

“Your silence is promising,” His words were hollow and meaningless to her as he tilted her head up by her chin until she could no longer evade his stare.

She made eye contact with him and blinked slowly, the tears bending what little willpower she had left as they slid down her cheeks. He had a way of coaxing the remnants of emotion from her despite all of her efforts to suppress them since they hadn’t served a purpose thus far. She felt more exposed than she had earlier as he seemed to be staring into her, into what was left of the soul that he had tried so desperately to destroy. He let go of her chin and pulled the slack of chain out from under the blanket, exposing her just enough to make her groan uncomfortably. Her mind scrambled, flashes of her earlier horror nearly causing a full blown panic attack as she tried to pull away. The nightmare was never ending in her head. The protest was ignored as he unhooked the shackle and practically threw a tank top at her, nearly covering her bra entirely in the process.

“Put it on,” Miles turned away from her despite the ample opportunity he was giving her to utilize the freeing situation to otherwise injure or kill him with the chain but he knew that she wouldn’t have the way out of her ankle bonds if he were dead.

Jeanette pulled the plain, black tank top over her head and adjusted it until she felt halfway decent. It was snug, almost too snug, as it hugged her in the spots that she didn’t care to draw attention to and made the already nausea driven feeling in the pit of her stomach swirl up into
her throat. She pulled her hair around to one side and covered her cleavage with it, holding it in place like it were part of the top, like it were her protective device. She rubbed the sore spots on her wrists, the deep blue and black coloration of the bruises from struggling against metal becoming more obvious as there was nothing obstructing her view. She was a bundle of nerves and she felt the unraveling of her spirit within her gut despite wanting so desperately not to give in to what certainly felt like death’s preparation of her.

Miles turned around and unhooked her ankles, pulling her toward the edge of the bed until her feet were on the floor. “If you run, I will end you before you make it beyond that door—do you understand me?”

She nodded slowly and tried not to meet his glance despite how close to her face he was as he spoke. The soreness in her legs wouldn’t necessarily carry her even if she had tried to run as she felt all of her muscles in her legs go half stiff and spasm as the carpet rubbed against the bottoms of her feet. It wasn’t comforting in the slightest and reminded her of everything that had gone wrong, everything that didn’t make sense. Words didn’t want to come out of her mouth as she could feel him looking at her with the same expression that he had given her when she questioned his manhood—shortly before choking her. It was that rage and mischief duality that had her completely frightened now as she knew exactly what happened when his subconsciousness began to duel with itself.

Her saving grace was that she was fully aware and conscious this time.

Miles wasn’t the least bit interested in taking away her dignity again, this eclipsing it fully, and deep in her core she could feel the physicality change as he pulled her to a standing position, staring down at her in the delicate state she was in. Her knees shook with a mix of fear and weakness as the pain collided with the chill in the air, sending pins and needles along the backside of her legs. She shook with such intensity that her joints gave out, sending her to the floor with a painful thud. He laughed at her as her knees and elbows landed awkwardly against the carpet, the rug burn almost an instantaneous effect as she pushed herself backwards onto her haunches, gathering her dwindling energy.

“Why are you doing this?” Jeanette rubbed her elbows and looked up at him, the switch flicked as she felt her anger returning to her.

Miles yanked her to her feet by her hair and held her there with just enough grip control that her head could not turn in either direction without his assistance. “I liked it better when you were quiet.”

Jeanette winced and lowered her voice, cutting him deep as she spoke. “I’m sure you liked a lot of things better when I wasn’t protesting.”

The bitter truth of his assault on her was that he had been imagining someone else in her place and had been carrying it out as a fantasy turned reality. Part of him couldn’t separate that it was not only incredibly real but it wasn’t who he wanted it to be—the object of his affections. Jeanette now held power over him as he felt the control crumble as this battered, bruised, and half broken redhead stared at him with fire in her eyes like a viper with prey in striking distance. He held his ground and shoved her toward the door, his carefully devised plans already well in place, ready to be revealed to her. Jeanette’s knees wobbled with each step he forced her to take as the carpet beneath her feet disappeared and was replaced by the old, well maintained hardwoods in the hallway. The echoing of each footstep nearing the basement door reminded her of Kaya as she swallowed hard, the concern returning to her with an immediacy that made her momentarily lose her balance, tripping over her own toes.
“Fucking clumsy bitch,” Miles hooked an arm underneath hers, putting pressure on her center ribs and steadied her, half man handling her in the process while maintaining a solid grip on her hair.

Jeanette winced and let out a small cry as the pressure on her ribs made it hard to breathe and the hand through her hair was now wrenching on her scalp as it tugged her awkwardly, craning her neck backwards. She felt like a mistreated ragdoll as he pushed open the basement door and shoved her against the wall with enough force that it temporarily reduced the vision in her right eye to a dull haze. Behind her she could hear the mechanism of the locks being clicked into place along with the unmistakable extra clicking of a thick, heavy padlock across the top lock. She could already hear Kaya’s gentle sobbing at the bottom of the stairs along with the crackling of the burning wood in the furnace. Miles watched as Jeanette blinked rapidly, the vision slowly returning in her right eye, the bruising already forming down the side of her face. He glanced at his watch and found that timing had become a factor as he jabbed his elbow into the center of Jeanette’s back, willing her forward until she started feebly descending the stairs, both hands clutching the railing in the process.

Something wasn’t right.

Jeanette glanced toward the sliding door and took note of the new locking mechanism that had been recently installed, noticing immediately that it required a key. They were trapped down there even more than they already were. She turned her head toward the space where Kaya was backed against a wall, a thick, wool blanket across her just enough to keep her warm. Kaya’s eyes were bloodshot and the woman behind them had already given up the fight as she looked up at Jeanette. Miles could tell that Jeanette was watching Kaya’s body language as he forced her into a seat just a few feet from her, the distance short enough that all she had to do was reach out and the distance would be eclipsed by nothing more than a breath between them. They were placed like chess pieces in his sick and twisted game—but was this his check mate?

Miles stood directly in front of Jeanette and tilted her head back with the tip of his finger under the curve of her chin, until she was staring up at him and the ceiling simultaneously, his voice coming out in a low, husky growl that reverberated through her. “If you move, she dies.”

He let go and moved behind Jeanette, hands through her hair with an almost affectionate undertone that sent her entire body reeling, the panic flowing through her like a recently administered drug. The bile was up her throat again as she felt his fingers graze her skin, his breath against the back of her neck. He stroked her skin and gathered her hair to one side of her head, then slipped to the back of her neck where he keyed against her spine just enough to make her skin crawl. He touched her as though they were lovers, but the disdain radiated from Jeanette like a blast of pure nitrogen…the chill palpable. Kaya watched, a heightened level of terror brewing in her stomach as she witnessed the pure evil that had been brutalizing her for hours treat Jeanette with the equivalent of affection. His actions were not unintentional as he glanced at Kaya just long enough to see the hatred not just him continuing to bloom but there was a certain level of anger toward Jeanette as well, simply out of confusion. It was all a game to him and Jeanette could see right through him.

“Lie to her,” Miles had his lips so close to her ear that his saliva was nearly transferring to her skin like an unwelcomed, sloppy kiss.

The words were barely loud enough for Jeanette to hear but they weren’t making sense as she looked at him sideways, almost afraid to even ask. “What?”

Miles hated repeating himself, but he thoroughly enjoyed feeling her entire body tense up
as the words left his lips as though he were telling her a secret. “Lie to her.”

She knew exactly what those words meant as her eyes closed, the tears making a pathway down her cheeks as she let the words sink in before she made eye contact with Kaya again. Miles continued to stand behind Jeanette with his hand firmly pressed to the back of her neck to keep her from looking away, not that she could tell herself to do so even if he had allowed her to do it. She couldn’t do it to Kaya, not this time. Kaya was already sobbing before any words could leave Jeanette’s lips—the reality of it had begun to wash over her like a rising tide ready to drown her before pulling her back out to sea.

Jeanette’s voice was shaky as she reached out her hand beyond the edge of her knee. “Kaya, take my hand…please.”

The hesitancy was gone as Kaya reached out and held onto Jeanette’s hand, her entire arm shaking just enough as the sobbing was now mostly silent aside from the sniffling that accompanied them. Neither of these women knew each other until this horrifying incident but in that moment, something was revealed about their nature as Jeanette tried desperately to convey everything through a simple gesture, knowing what she was about to do. Kaya took a deep breath and held onto her with both hands, grateful that she wasn’t alone in this moment—knowing what was to come.

“Everything is going to be ok,” Jeanette was doing her best not to go into hysterics as Miles started to move to one of his toolboxes where he was already rummaging through it as she spoke. “Everything will be fine, Kaya—you’re going to be going home, where you can be warm in your bed, like none of this ever happened.”

Kaya kept her eyes glued to Jeanette this time even though she could hear the distinct clanging together of knife blades. She was internally panicking but she was grateful that Jeanette hadn’t broken physical contact with her. The contact, however small, was the only thing keeping her from leaping out of her skin and having a mental breakdown right there. Jeanette’s energy, while holding on by a thread, was strong and commanding—her motherly instinct lit up like a beacon in the dark. Kaya continued to cry while Jeanette utilized both hands to steady her, the danger lurking as Miles crossed through Jeanette’s peripheral vision to the dark space behind Kaya. Jeanette could see the blade in his hand and took a deep breath as she knew why he wanted her to lie, why he wanted the words to come from her mouth—he wanted her to make it break her down even more than it already was before it all shattered in front of her.

“Kaya, it’ll be like none of this ever happened and it’ll be over, I promise it’ll be over soon,” Jeanette was nearly hyperventilating as she could hear Miles humming “Somebody Else” as he crisscrossed behind Kaya.

She wanted to believe in the lie so badly, but she knew that nothing could be further from the truth as the words were hollow in her heart, refusing to leave an imprint on her soul. Kaya stared into her as the sadness was replaced by giving in…giving up. Her tears came to a near stop as she knew, deep within her, that there wasn’t anything more to cry for. Jeanette squeezed Kaya’s hands and snapped her back to reality, the bitter reminder of where they were. The motherly instinct was not just in how she attempted to comfort Kaya but in the rage that was burning within her as Miles made tentative motions just a foot or two behind Kaya, occasionally brushing the handle of the knife against the back of her neck. The maneuver continued to push the hysteria in the room until Miles finally making that definitive motion forward, covering Kaya’s mouth with his left hand while the right made a fluid motion from left to right across her neck with the blade, slicing her open in a smooth, fluid action.
The lack of humanity was more than Jeanette could take as she felt her chest deflate and the room go quiet as she stared forward at the aftermath. Kaya was nothing more than a sacrificial lamb as the blood spattered onto Jeanette, her eyes never once closing as she watched Kaya instinctively attempt to breathe, choking almost instantly. Jeanette shook, the fear and rage melting together in a singular action as she slid off of the chair and caught Kaya’s ailing body as he let go of her. Jeanette was falling apart as the image of her own daughter flashed into her head as she held Kaya in her arms, covering the wound despite the futility in the action. She was falling into hysteric as she could feel the blood pooling around her knees on the floor and against her body as she held Kaya close.

“No, no, no, no, fuck, this isn’t happening,” Jeanette was losing her grip on controlling her anxiety as she watched Kaya’s eyelids flutter with every attempt she made to take in a breath.

“Just stay with me?” the words came out like a garbled question as Kaya choked through the words, blood coming out with every desperate breath, tears down her cheeks as she looked up at Jeanette.

“Sweetie, I’m not going anywhere. I’m staying right here,” Jeanette could barely see through her tears and the ache in her chest only increased as she struggled to stay calm while she cradled Kaya like she had her daughter so many times before.

Kaya forced a knowing smile, grateful for Jeanette’s mere presence, despite the labored breaths and thick wheezing that emanated from her lungs and throat. The devastation was clear to Jeanette as she could feel what little warmth that was left flowing through Kaya slowly leave her, replaced with a chill like the beginning of a blustering wind in the fall. Kaya’s throat and chest spasms started to come in short, frequent bursts as she weakly pulled Jeanette’s hand away from the gash across her throat, fate left up to the inevitable as her heart continued to weakly pump blood to an open wound. She knew she wasn’t going home but there was a moment of solace in knowing that her last breaths would be held dear by someone who shared her pain, who felt it in equal measures. Her fight was all but over as she grasped Jeanette’s hand, her grip weakening with each passing second as the wick was nearing its end. Jeanette looked down at Kaya’s hand gripping hers and watched as the last of her strength faded along with her final, agonizing gasp. She felt the life leave her body as she continued to almost rock her in her arms like she would her own child. It was almost too much to bear as she bawled against the top of her head, refusing to let go of her hand despite the fact that she was already gone.

“Well, you didn’t lie about one thing,” Miles stood over her, mocking her misery. “It was going to be over soon.”

Jeanette could feel every nerve in her body cry out in unison as his word dug into her like an improperly sharpened knife edge. “You’re nothing more than a spineless bastard and I hope when you’re caught, you fuck up enough for them to pull the trigger…sick son of a bitch.”

Her words were less than well received as he grabbed her by the hair again and pulled her away from Kaya’s body with such disregard for her that he didn’t care how hard her body landed on the cold, hard cement floor. Jeanette struggled this time, wildly flailing both arms in an attempt to reach for her as though it would have brought her back. Miles swung Jeanette around and shoved her face against the wall with enough force that it momentarily made her ears ring and send a pulse of dizziness through her.

“Just leave me here with her—she doesn’t deserve this,” Jeanette’s eyes blinked rapidly while the pulse of pain coursed through her head, the soreness already more than palpable.

“Both of you are just gifts for HER and I’m not having you fucking it all up,” Miles was
already dragging her toward the stairs as he growled into her ear. “So, you’re going to have to wait upstairs until I bring her home.”

9:30 AM
Downtown Washington DC

The drive from the crime scene had been more eventful than intended as Mulder ended up behind a line of traffic that seemingly had no end. The snow had brought out the worst in the DC area drivers as traffic slowed to a dull crawl and turned what was typically no longer than a 15-minute drive into a nearly 90-minute unpleasant adventure. Mulder pulled into a parking spot around the corner, as typically instructed to avoid “being followed” or “being watched” by Big Brother. Scully had gotten used to the quirkiness even if she didn’t always understand the necessity for being quite so focused on needing to wear a tinfoil hat at all times.

It was part of their charm.

“Frohike’s going to think you wore that shirt especially for him, Scully,” Mulder glanced at her top as her FBI jacket fell open, revealing just enough pink kissed cleavage to be more than noticeable.

“Mulder, I could be wearing a burlap bag and Frohike would make a pass at me,” Scully put a hand on her hip, smirking just enough as Mulder started pressing their door intercom buzzer.

“Well, burlap—even I might be a little inclined to Schwing in your general direction,” Mulder’s movie reference was obscure, but Scully knew what he meant as he put emphasis on the word ‘Schwing’.

“Is that all it takes?” Scully raised her eyebrow as she pressed her lips together, half biting the corner of her bottom lip in the process. “Guess I’ll be purchasing some burlap in the very near future.”

“Party on, Scully,” Mulder had a rather large grin plastered on his lips despite his growing impatience as they stood in the cold waiting for the boys to respond as he pressed the buzzer again.

Langly’s voice was the first to come through after the fourth time that Mulder pressed the buzzer. “Solicitation is a violation of privacy, move along—"

Mulder pushed the speaker and leaned in close. “Langly turn the cameras on, Scully and I are out here freezing our asses off. Open the door.”

“Hold on, the electricity going out last night screwed up all of the surveillance and everything is still resetting,” Langly’s voice kept going in and out on the monitor, with Byers and Frohike’s bantering back and forth in the background to go along with it. “No, put that over there and run that sequence or we’ll be sitting here all day.”
“One of these days they’re going to get stuck in there and they’ll have to draw straws on which one they’ll get to cannibalize,” Scully couldn’t help but chuckle as she made eye contact with Mulder.

“I heard that, Scully,” Langly’s voice came through as she didn’t realize that Mulder still had his finger on the intercom button. “Ten seconds and we’ll have the door open.”

“10…9…8…” Mulder rolled his eyes as the concept of only ten seconds drove him insane, but he could hear each lock mechanism popping out until the door finally opened and Byers popped his head through. “Look at that…less than ten.”

Byers always had a knack of looking freshly pressed even in the worst of disasters as he opened the door, his three-piece clean and wrinkle free as he ushered both of them in. “It must be bad if you ventured out in this just to see us.”

Mulder pressed a hand to Scully’s back as they entered the space that could only be described a conspiracy theorists dream—the organized chaos, extensive A/V equipment, the embodiment of the “trust no one” sentiment plastered on the walls with subtle hints of Byers and his extreme sense of cleanliness. It was a mishmash of three men who, at one point, shared no true commonality other than being loners. Underneath the “wayward home for conspiracy nuts” lay an atmosphere of frivolity and a distinct odor of men’s cologne and coffee along with another one of Frohike’s classic forays into the Martha Stewart cookbook. Langly was on the other side of a desk, busily tapping away at the computer and making snarky remarks at several inanimate objects that were clearly not cooperating with him. He gestured for Mulder and Scully to come over to the work space without raising his head from finalizing what looked like code into his computer before letting out a relieved sigh.

“The backup system didn’t actually run an emergency shut down when the power went out last night—when it came back on this morning the security surveillance amongst other things refused to even power up correctly,” Langly started rattling off an explanation as he got up from behind the desk, still wearing a pair of pajamas, hair messier than usual. “What brings you two out here?”

“We need you to work your magic on this and see if you can run a trace on the location that it is transmitting to,” Scully pulled the camera from the evidence bag and gave it to Langly as he came around from behind the desk.

Frohike’s voice came from around the corner with a bit of surprise behind it. “Is that Agent Scully’s melodic voice I’m hearing, and no one told me she was here?”

“She’s here to confess her not-so-secret affection for incredibly short men with crazy bad eyesight, Frohike,” Mulder spun around as Frohike poked his head into the room from the kitchenette, his apron still on.

“Oh Jesus, Mulder,” Scully rubbed her temples and sighed toward the ground.

“All I need is one night,” Frohike wasn’t shy about hitting on Scully as he half shouted from the kitchenette, coaxing a laugh out of her almost immediately despite her best effort to hold it in.

Scully gave Mulder amused look and found his hand within his coat pocket, giving him the gentlest of squeezes to regain his attention even if she didn’t need to. Langly held onto the camera, examining the mechanism carefully, his eyebrows furrowing as his mind refused to not picture Frohike attempting to woo Scully. His careful concentration momentarily broke as his eyes
diverted as he caught sight of the subtle maneuver by Scully, taking note of Mulder’s body language as they seemed to look at each other a little longer than they normally would.

“Hmmm…” The reaction was almost inaudible as he pushed his glasses back up the bridge of his nose and shrugged his shoulders almost in resignation.

Langly knew that if he weren’t focused heavily on the camera in his hands, he might’ve addressed it but his energy was fully engaged on divulging the secrets locked away within the little device in his hands. Byers peeked over Langly’s shoulder at the camera, the curiosity fully piqued while Frohike frantically cleared away anything still on a hot burner, unintentionally knocking over a cast iron skillet in the process. His gift certainly wasn’t grace, that was for sure, but the trio would not be complete without his inherent snark and endless wit to go hand in hand with his superior knowledge in conspiracy theories as well as diverting security systems.

“I’m assuming you have a short window of opportunity,” Byers glanced at both of them as Langly slipped the battery pack off of the camera.

“Our suspect is currently holding two women hostage – he’s already killed eight, nearly killed a ninth,” Mulder was doing his best to be clinical in discussing the situation, but his mind was already on the next part of the equation as he glanced at Scully. “Nearly killed Scully via explosive in a body.”

The concern on their faces as Frohike joined the group with him catching the last part of the conversation was considerable, almost more than she could handle as she awkwardly crossed her arms. “I’m fine—I’m bruised but I’m fine. The important part of this discussion is that this camera was found at the latest abduction site and we need to know where it is transmitting to.”

“Once this battery is replaced and the camera is switched on we can plug it in to geo locate but the results may not be what you want in the time frame that you need,” Byers started setting up one of the audio/visual stations and handed a new battery to Langly for the camera. “If the transmittal receiver is not switched on it will not locate and if the signal is moving it will give us a quarter mile radius until the movement stops to continue the narrowing down of the signal pattern.”

“This guy has had a camera at every crime scene where he’s taken the bodies but this was the first where he had a camera on potential abduction victims,” Mulder leaned against the table. “He has a pattern but strays from the timeline to the point that we have no way of knowing how much time either of these women may have left.”

“Finding out where this signal is going could potentially uncover where he goes—anything to put a damper on his ability to kill again,” Scully crossed her arms and watched the light on the camera come on after the new battery was clicked into place.

Langly was already working on the geo-locate as the humming sound of the equipment operating in unison added an almost vibrato to his voice. “Well, this won’t take long if the other end is switched on.”

“This wouldn’t be that killer that every newspaper is talking about is it? The only detail that they’re releasing is the fact that part of the Black Dahlia case is being emulated,” Byers pulled the previous day’s newspaper from the pile and handed it to Mulder, who glanced at the bottom, center page title printed like an afterthought.

“It’s got the Universities losing their minds enough that all post 5pm classes have been canceled until further notice—security details have been doubled up,” Frohike was behind another
work station, busily going through a gazette release from a web printout. “Must be one sick son of a bitch.”

“A serial killer loose in Washington DC for approaching two weeks will eventually result in mass hysteria—the body count could potentially multiply simply from people becoming crazy avoiding public spaces,” Langly was still typing at the A/V hookup, the lens of the camera going in and out as he typed until it adjusted for proper focus again.

“I can’t say that it isn’t a good idea to minimize this guy’s fishing pool; the woman that survived may never fully heal from her injuries.” Mulder tossed the newspaper onto the table. “It’s taken a lot out of us in the past week.”

“So, did you have to convince Scully to break the rules in disobeying chain of evidence in bringing this one to us?” Langly ran a hand through his hair and leaned back in his seat as he finalized the sequence to run the system on automation.

“Oh, I’m not taking the blame for this—it was all her idea,” Mulder used the curve of his thigh to nudge her and winked at her as she turned her head in his direction.

“Must have been the blast…knocked the sense right out of me,” Scully rolled her eyes and looked over at Langly. “Realistically, you three are our best shot at getting results fast and I’m not exactly in a patient mood.”

The words had slipped from her lips without realizing just how loaded they could be perceived as Mulder nearly gave himself whiplash to look at her, his mind immediately taking her comment straight into left field to wreak havoc. The body language between them conveyed that something had changed but it wasn’t so obvious of a change that would’ve signaled that either of them had been groping at each other like two hormonal teenagers in the back of station wagon with tinted windows. She blushed in spite of herself and cleared her throat as she realized that they had been looking at one another for a moment longer than necessary.

“Eureka! The camera must be on but it’s mobile; as long as the transmission recipient stays on I’ll be able to continue to triangulate a location within the next 5 minutes—less if it stops moving,” Langly watched the monitor as a topographical map started to graph itself and zoom in via green lined layers.

“Hey, Crackpot Wizard, you need to make sure that geo locate is on loop-refresh operation or it won’t automatically detect when it’s no longer moving,” Frohike had his feet up on the desk but could already tell that something was amiss on the setup in front of Langly.

“Need I remind you that my name is Lord Man—“

“Oh, stick a sock in it!”

“Not this again…” Byers stood and felt like he was shifting his attitude to the referee position again while the bantering between Langly and Frohike continued.

Scully rolled her eyes and nudged Mulder, looking at him again, eyes lingering just enough that the childish level arguing between Langly and Frohike didn’t seem to register. Mulder winked at her and nudged her back, thoroughly intrigued by the sly smile that had just crepted across her lips, completely pulling his focus away from the nerd level “I know you are but what am I” exchange before them. They both knew they might be here awhile as they slipped their warming gloves off and slid them into their pockets, stretching their hands back out at their sides as they leaned against the table they were in front of, hands just inches apart. They had been realizing,
even around others, that they were exactly where they needed to be, in this moment, and no one was really paying enough attention to see it bloom as Mulder slid his fingers across the table, carefully drifting his fingertips over hers until they were nearly laced together.

The unforeseen problem in what seemed like a silent, unseen display of affection was that the camera had been placed on the table in such a way that it was aimed directly at Mulder and Scully—and neither one of them were prepared to realize that they were being watched again.

Chapter End Notes

Schwing reference - I couldn't resist making a Wayne's World reference - I truly hope all of you love it and please leave comments. I adore them.
Chapter Summary

Romanticizing his victims, a brutal murderer leaves behind symbols of love…but who is his true, intended target and what lengths will he go to get her to notice?
Post “Agua Mala” (Season 6 with mentions of “Rain King”, “Two Fathers”, and “One Son” Briefly and only for context purposes)

Disclaimer: Agents Mulder, Scully, Skinner, Fowley, and the Lone Gunmen belong respectively to Chris Carter, FOX Productions, and TenThirteen Productions. All other characters are original and any likeness or named similarities to any real-life persons are purely coincidental (unless, well, you’ve been told, then you should’ve expected such things)

Chapter Notes

Note: All locations mentioned are real and unfortunately I have not been there so I had to rely heavily on topographic maps as well as trail head maps. Any inaccuracies are not intended. Third part contains sexually driven subject matter.

Title backstory: An Evening Primrose is a floral type that blooms overnight and only lasts until noon – their flowers create a bright, almost atmospheric nectar pattern that can be seen via ultra-violet light. Their distinctive shape creates an X pattern in its 4 branches. The symbolism? Wait until the end. *wink*

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The Lone Gunmen’s HQ

Downtown Washington DC

The minutes had been ticking away like they were in slow motion as the map continued to triangulate the location of the transmitting location for the camera. It was painstaking, almost agonizing. The arguing had all but stopped as the energy in the room went restless as Mulder began to pace in front of Scully as she gripped the edge of the table as though she’d fall if it weren’t there. Frohike brought them both cups of coffee and assisted in overhauling the equipment in any way that he could to speed along the process. Langly had originally predicted no more than about five to ten minutes of total process time but well over 45 minutes had passed with only the green gridlines indicated a zoom in, merely teasing them with a potential range location. Mulder and Scully had no doubt that this was saving them precious minutes by utilizing the assistance of the Lone Gunmen but the time it was taking wasn’t putting either of them at ease. The tangled web that this killer had constructed was consuming them and had already taken away something precious from all of them in the rush to save their victims—time.
“The signal is narrow enough that I can tell the signal is moving through West Falls Church,” Langly’s voice broke through the growing silence as he compared the screen to a true map behind him.

Mulder looked at the monitor and glanced at the map on the wall, “It’s near Holmes Run but I can’t tell if it’s going close to the water or not.”

“Mulder, Holmes Run is usually flooded out this time of year almost the entire length—including much of the park,” Scully maneuvered around the desk to the map on the wall and traced a line with her finger. “If he is anywhere in this area planning on going anywhere near here, he’d have to park, hike in, and then hike back out.”

“It makes perfect sense he’d gravitate toward this area – he’s making it increasingly more difficult for us to recover a body. He went from keeping them within their homes to a warehouse to very public settings—floating in water, Scully,” Mulder continued, glancing at the monitor again. “It’s part of his game.”

“He’s getting his jollies off over seeing the Big, Bad FBI struggle with his crime scenes,” Frohike added to Mulder’s rant while he looked through the county park listing for the Holmes Run area.

“Exactly, Frohike,” Mulder looked right at Scully and smirked in spite of the situation. “See, it’s like we were communicating telepathically.”

“It’s a ruggedly handsome trait,” Frohike was almost worse than Mulder in saying the most inappropriate things whenever his mind decided to blurt them out.

Scully wasn’t exactly in the ‘I need to be amused’ kind of mood but Mulder, specifically, had a knack for disarming her ability to be completely focused on the task at hand. She pursed her lips together and crossed her arms, hiding the curve of a smile in the process, utilizing her stubbornness to eliminate his ability to prod her further. Nothing had really changed beyond choosing to call it more than a partnership—they refused to allow anything to take them down or cheapen what they had built. It wasn’t something tawdry to pass the time; it meant something. The illumination was not just part of them as people but as investigators as the elephant in the room was no longer blocking what mattered, what made sense. It gave both of them something bigger to fight for.

Scully sipped her coffee and looked over at the map on the screen. “Langly, did it just stop moving?”

“The triangulation is still zooming but the transmittal location is now stagnant,” Langly typed in a few commands and got the zoom to work a little faster as it seemed to be highlighting a spot near the Holmes Run Stream Valley park entrance.

“The signal is likely going to a mobile center like on the inside of a van or an RV—so there would need to be a small satellite on the top of the vehicle at all times for the signal to not only receive but, likewise, activate,” Byers took a few steps back and resumed a pensive stance with his hand against his chin.

“Your perp knows his shit and probably knows you’d find this,” Frohike preferred the simplest of terms and went for the raw truth as he did a half spin in his chair. “He wants you to chase him—this is the kind of sick bastard that likes seeing people fail to capture him.”

“Frohike, you’ve been reading far too much Agatha Christie,” Mulder tilted his head and
looked at Frohike as he perched his feet onto the shelf behind the desk this time.

“Arthur Conan Doyle,” Scully smirked, flashing her teeth just enough to be over the top and fingered the top of Frohike’s desk as Mulder glanced back at her.

“Scully gets it,” Frohike hadn’t realized that he left a copy of Sherlock Holmes out on the right-hand corner of his desk within full view of Scully’s field of vision.

“She cheats, Frohike, it’s on your desk,” Mulder furrowed his eyebrows and turned his entire body toward her. “You’re making it look like I’m losing my touch, Scully.”

Scully was awfully cute when she was playfully boasting and her cuteness level had hit an all-time high as she delivered a little sideways smile and shot him a wink, clearly resisting the slight urge to make a comment that she couldn’t back out of. Mulder stared at her hips as she did a little unintentional wiggle and followed her curvature up to her face where his eyes settled for a moment longer than normal. The digression into being completely consumed and fixated on one another only lasted a few moments but it was enough to keep their sanity intact as they re-focused their energy on the map work. Byers was focused on the computer monitor while Langly was attempting to get a more specific address from the search. He looked pensive as he rattled away that the computer keys until his hand slapped against the desk.

“What just happened?” The motion startled Scully as she stood more rigidly and looked over at Langly, who was shaking his head in frustration.

“The receiving signal just went dark—your perp must know we were watching him,” Langly tilted his glasses up and away from the bridge of his nose, gently rubbing the spot between his eyes before making eye contact with Mulder. “The best I could do on a location is within a quarter mile vicinity of Holmes Run Stream Valley Park – and the location is matching up with the North end of the park.”

“We need to start a search of the area,” Scully knew they were about to get as close to their perp as they could hope to get as Mulder took out his phone and started dialing in front of her.

“Skinner?” Mulder almost didn’t wait for Skinner to answer him as the phone call barely picked up after the first ring.

“You have news already?” Skinner’s voice was shockingly optimistic, the sounds of talking in the background were slowly distancing as Skinner seemed to be removing himself from the busy area.

“We need to search Holmes Run Stream Valley Park – start on the North end, the signal was moving through there before it stopped,” Mulder continued, his voice faster than anticipated. “If we can corral him in the park, we have a chance to save both hostages.”

“Max and I are close to that area – we’ll gather up a search team and meet you both there,” Skinner was already off the phone before Mulder could say anything else.

“We will meet them there,” Mulder put his phone back into his pocket and looked at Scully.

“What can we do?” Byers was always the ‘do-good’ kind of guy, for better or worse in some cases, and he knew that he couldn’t just let them walk out when he could sense the anxiety radiating off of them.

“We’ve got skills that could help,” Frohike added, already standing up from his seat.
“Our abilities are at your disposal,” Langly was nodding, agreeing with both of them without hesitation.

Mulder and Scully both felt a great deal of gratitude for all that they had done for them with almost no questions asked, even to the point of being willing to completely go against their own ideals if they asked them to. Mulder knew that he could always count on The Lone Gunmen no matter the circumstances while Scully knew that they’d be willing to go to any lengths to protect their small circle of people. No one else would do what they have done for Mulder and Scully—aside from Max and Skinner.

“Continue to monitor that camera and alert us if it comes back on,” Mulder told them and glanced at Scully, who seemed to be staring at Frohike’s work station.

“Frohike, will you monitor incoming missing person’s reports focusing on female victims between the age of 20 and 40 to keep the numbers open enough?” Scully had been constantly shocking Mulder with her almost out of character reaches since this case had begun and this was no exception as she addressed Frohike this time.

“You got it, Scully,” Frohike was always a little enchanted with Scully so his amazement over her question was more par for the course than anything.

“If any come in of females matching this guy’s MO, you know what to do,” Scully continued, her thought process making more sense than she could even realize as her thoughts felt jumbled and confusing. “And let us know if there are any reports of warehouse break ins—specifically empty ones.”

Scully had a lump in her throat over any idea that this perp could possibly go snatching another victim but she couldn’t get her brain to soften the thought. It was making her anxious in all of the wrong ways, setting off an active set of silent reactions within her that kept her close to the edge. It wasn’t a safe place for her to be in that moment as she made eye contact with Mulder, the deer in the headlights expression in full display somewhat unapologetically despite the screaming little voice within her telling her to focus. His features brought her back from the edge just enough to soften her expression as she blinked slowly and nodded at him, the gentle reassurance there as a reminder.

“I’ll help with that,” Byers was quick with process and analysis so having the two of them work closely together on a researched based query made the most sense.

“We’ll keep you informed of anything as it comes up,” Langly followed them to the door and unlocked their vast array of manual and mechanically based locks until he could pull the door open. “You’ll catch this guy.”

“One way or another, we will,” Both Mulder and Scully said in unison, clearly on the same wavelength before disappearing out the door to leave the Lone Gunmen to do what they do best—divulge as much hidden information as humanly possible.

1:00 PM

Holmes Run Valley Stream Park

West Falls Church, VA
It had taken far too long to get to the park from Downtown DC as the traffic seemed to only be getting worse with the hint of round two of the snow storm on the horizon. The snow had barely started falling again as the search team made their way through the enormous park starting on the north side. It was quiet, almost overly so, and dim in the thicket of trees in the areas closer to the water. Holmes Run had swelled a full two feet above normal winter range due to the spike in rain and snowfall, dragging debris along the banks, clogging up the narrower sections. There were at least twenty bodies on the ground—a mix of local law enforcement and FBI—all doing their part to search every delicate section of the forest, hoping to find anyone, or anything.

The van’s tracks had been easy to find but they were only in one spot and dug deep where Miles had to spin the tires to get out. No signs of a muddied up van remained in the park, leaving them to treat this as a potential evidence gathering chance or, worse, a recovery mission. The photos were taken of the tracks and impressions were quickly done on what was left of them before the fresh fallen snow ruined the muddy spots where the back tires dug in. Mulder and Scully had come in from the central entrance where a small swing set and jungle gym were perched in a clearing, joining up with Max and Skinner as they made their way through the delicate clearing. They were both focused heavily on the notion that their perp was potentially within their grasp with the right clues—as long as he had left enough behind for them to find him. It was tense in the atmosphere and the silence was expected as they were fully aware of the likelihood of finding a body rather than a survivor.

“We’ve been here for over an hour and have paced through nearly 50% of this entire park and haven’t found anything yet,” Mulder stayed close to Scully as they scanned the tree line and tried to find footprints in front of them as they made their way further south toward the widening of the stream.

“It’s starting to feel like this perp is making us chase not only him, but the victims as well,” Scully continued as she felt the crunching of branches of snow beneath her feet. “Two women—taken some twelve hours apart, one has a significantly greater chance of being killed prior to the other.”

“I have a strong gut feeling that his timeline has changed, though, Scully, because the photos of Jeanette showed a woman who didn’t look the least bit scared,” Mulder was adamant in recollecting her expression of almost challenging their killer. “She looked like she would’ve willingly accepted death if it meant she fought her way to it.”

“That’s becoming a very real possibility with every move this guy makes – such as showing up to Victoria’s hospital room?” the comment came out like a question as they stepped over a downed tree, half straddling it in the process.

“Exactly, Scully,” Mulder nodded and grunted as he nearly ripped his pantleg on one of the branches as he climbed over the fallen tree with her.

“Mulder, something about this place doesn’t feel right,” Scully maneuvered beyond the clearing, into the trees, and glanced back at the search crew as they seemed to dip out of sight through the tree line. “He could be hiding out here right under our noses and we wouldn’t know it.”

“This park connects to another park a little further down and the stream itself continues out beyond the lake,” Mulder wasn’t always the most reliable when it came to a sense of direction but he knew the landscapes of the DC and Virginia waterways fairly well. “He has ample real estate to ruin our day.”
“Cases like these make you question the strength of sanity,” Scully looked visibly uncomfortable above and beyond the cold as she shifted her weight through a small section of shrubbery. “These women couldn’t have been so blind to this man’s dark side that they could be so easily manipulated into being in close proximity to him without knowing. How can one’s demons be this easily concealed? Concealment of mental illness can result in perpetuating the symptomology—even heighten the actual reactions.”

“Diana Willis’s friends indicated that the man that they saw her with was charming and unassuming, under the radar even—there’s a significant chance that this guy has serious identity issues and has it under control enough that by the time it is even hinted there’s anything wrong, it’s too late,” Mulder could see she was mulling over the scenarios in greater detail than she had previously indicated. “If there are multiple personalities present, one could be in more control of his faculties than the others.”

“Mulder, serious, untreated psychological issues aren’t easy to hide and even when treated, there are triggers that often set off the underlying psychosis,” Scully continued, her eyes far away. “I couldn’t see one woman falling for it, let alone 11 of them.”

“Scully, keep in mind what Victoria indicated about this guy—he wasn’t remarkable in the slightest and it wasn’t until after he had already drugged her that his true disorder started to show itself,” Mulder had a strong desire to pull her into his arms until whatever she was experiencing had faded away.

Scully was picturing all of the religious symbolism again, replaying the different subsets of the implications as she found the words rattling around in her head. “Don’t even get me started on his fixation on religion—he seems too into humiliating these victims within an inch of violation but yet, he wraps it with religious symbolism as though we can’t see through him.”

“Jesus, Scully, don’t sugarcoat your viewpoint,” Mulder was a little stunned at the malevolence coming from Scully despite how well placed it was.

“You can’t tell me you think that this man is doing any of this with any sincere religious implication, do you, Mulder?” Scully couldn’t help but roll her eyes a little at the idea.

“I think it is just that – a ploy to be more noticed than he already is,” Mulder made eye contact with her long enough to slow their pace down momentarily. “It’s no different than the way in which he puts them on display. This guy desperately wants to be noticed.”

“WE FOUND SOMETHING!” The voices were distant but close enough to be heard as they echoed through the trees and sent a shiver down their spines.

They hastened their pace with a careful attention to balance as their feet played a dangerous, slippery game of balance over the snow that had iced over in certain spots. The sound of branches snapping preceded the loud, unmistakable splashing of water that nearly stopped Scully in her tracks as she nearly had a flashback to pulling the previous body from the water and what followed. She inhaled sharply and felt her heart beating up into her throat as she felt the dizziness hit her like a wave, sending the anxiety surging through her. This wasn’t normal for her and she felt helpless as her feet refused to move despite how much she was telling herself to move. It was fear—pure and irrational, blossoming in her chest like unwanted dandelions.

Don’t do this now. Scully took a breath through her nose and exhaled through her mouth, eyes closing as she tried to will away the feeling. Her careful breathing patterns were not helping the situation as she continued to internally panic, her hands shaking at her sides.
“Scully? You ok?” Mulder noticed immediately that she had stopped after she was no longer keeping pace with him and stood in front of her, his hands carefully grazing her arms to capture her attention.

Her eyes opened with a snap and she looked at him almost as though she had no idea of where she was exactly. “No, but I can’t just stand here. Can’t stop thinking about the last time.”

“I’m right here,” Mulder squeezed her hand and watched her exhale slowly again, the anxiety slowly melting away just enough to give her a little bit of resolve. “You’re not back there, you’re here.”

“I’m ok, I’m ok,” She was considerably more in control of her faculties as she continued down the pathway in the direction of the shouting and movement.

Mulder hadn’t been genuinely concerned about Scully in a long time and this was reminding him of the aftermath of everything that surrounded what Duane Barry started and the hell that followed. He couldn’t watch her go through that again and this felt shockingly similar, right down to the hidden anxiety attacks that she desperately tried to underplay for him. He didn’t need that from her now, he needed to know that she was safe and felt safe. He continued his pace alongside her through the trees until they came to the narrowing of the creek bed again where the search party had been gathering along the bank and across the wood and steel footbridge. The yellow tape was already wrapped a good 30 feet back from the footbridge to keep anyone from crossing as Mulder and Scully approached the scene. The team of law enforcement continued to tape off the scene behind them as they walked around, the south side of the bridge slowly coming into view.

“Shit,” The air went out of Scully’s lungs as she could already see the bluish arm floating on the water, surrounded by chunks of ice and other debris.

Skinner walked up to both of them, his face pale and withdrawn as though they had all just failed miserably. “Both of you are going to want to see this…the victim is the one that was taken last night from the jogging trail.”

“Skinner, is it that bad?” Scully was still grappling with her anxiety as she took a couple of small, hesitant steps toward him.

“The mutilations are all post mortem and the roses are back—only this time he’s using rose buds instead of full blooms,” Skinner led them a little further forward, the words almost coming out in a jumble until the vision was clear in front of them.

Mulder stood next to Scully and caught her as her knees buckled over the horrific sight that had unfolded before them. The religious implication of each victim had always been more minute and minuscule up to this point—but he had taken it a step further, wrapping Kaya’s head with a crown of barbed wire that had mangled her scalp and forehead in the process. She was posed like a mocking of the crucifixion with her arms extended out, wrapped from shoulder to wrist in barbed wire that had been tugging and ripping at her skin since she was left posed in this position. They could see the enormous slice from ear to ear across the front of her throat that ended her life along with all of the pre-mortem injuries that she suffered during her intense torture. The peeks of pink rose buds were barely sticking out from a section of flayed skin along her collarbone and through the gaps in the wounds on her mouth where the tightly closed rose buds were barely visible. Scully knew there must’ve been more below the surface of the water but she couldn’t tell just by looking at her from the chest up. Scully stood at the edge of the water and spotted something unusual about her positioning as the water was pulling at the front of her shirt with each little movement of the investigational team.
“Mulder,” Scully’s eyes were fixated on the woman’s upper neck area, trying desperately to identify what she was looking at until it finally came into view as she could clearly see the delicate finger prints under the curve of the kill wound and around to the side of her neck, in blood. “They need to get her out of the water.”

Mulder was keenly aware of her body language and followed her line of sight until he was looking at the same prints. He took a deep breath and tore off his jacket, tossing it onto a log behind him to protect anything in his pockets and took a deep breath, contemplating the water in front of him. It was beyond a healthy level of cold and the ice was formidable, but he didn’t care as he took off into the water much to the shock of Scully, who was completely taken aback by the maneuver. His teeth were chattering before the water level even got to his knees, the softness of the current barely pressing against him. This wasn’t how he envisioned his day unfolding.

“What is he doing?” Max was over by her now after assisting Skinner with a quick perimeter check. “He’s going to freeze.”

“Fuck,” Scully slid out of her coat as well, putting it next to Mulder’s, her mind already clear on what she was about to do as she took another step toward the water, glancing back at Max only for a moment.

It was a long enough moment as Max gave her a disapproving look like a parent would have. “Come on, we have a team in snow gear out there, Scully…don’t!”

Scully recognized that tone of voice from Max as something that would’ve ordinarily come out of her own mouth but part of her felt as though the anxiety wouldn’t stay at bay if she weren’t out in this hideously cold water with Mulder. The risk alone was worth it if she could get the incessant feeling of petrifaction from stopping her in her tracks—keeping her from moving forward. She took another deep breath as she felt the water already up to her knees, the chill coursing through the rest of her extremities as she watched Mulder turn around to look at where the splash was coming from.

“Dammit, Scully, go back to the shore,” Mulder half met her in the middle of the run where the water was up beyond her thighs. “We both don’t need to be half frozen.”

“I need to do this, Mulder,” Scully’s teeth were chattering but she was adamant in her stance as she came up beside him and urged him forward. “Let me.”

Mulder nodded and turned toward the bridge, where a recovery team was already assembling the necessary equipment for safe removal of the body from the waterway. “We have a section of prints that we cannot damage up near the jugular on the body. Agent Scully and I are going to lift her until you can get her into the body bag—immediately get her back to the morgue for print scans.”

“Yes, Agent Mulder, right away,” three of the other agents said in unison as they were carefully perched on the edge of the bridge, hanging precariously over the side, desperately pulling at the barbed wire.

Scully was submerged up to her chest as she held onto the steel crossbars underneath of the bridge with her left hand while her right carefully searched under the water for the waistband of Kaya’s jogging pants. Mulder was in a nearly identical position, but his grip was considerably more secure as they lifted Kaya a good foot above the spot she was in, giving the team above them extra slack to maneuver the lift around and not get snarled on barbed wire. Scully’s shoulder rubbed up against Mulder’s as they awkwardly stared their victim in the face. They both found subtle relief in realizing that their killer had skipped the slitting open of the eyelids this time so she
wasn’t staring back at them lifelessly. They did their best not to look at her mouth as the post mortem mutilation was a reminder of just how sick and twisted this killer truly was.

“Scully, this is not exactly how I envisioned getting you wet,” Mulder’s teeth were chattering and his voice was barely above a whisper as he couldn’t help but crack a joke.

Scully grunted as her feet slipped just enough that the water came up above her chest and splashed against her chin, her voice just as shaky, the heat mixing with the cold air like a fog as she spoke. “Well, you did manage to do it without taking any of my clothes off so there’s that.”

“I’m going to have frostbite in places that I didn’t know had places,” Mulder glanced up just as the recovery team had gotten the right side of Kaya’s body safely undone from the steel girders.

Scully inhaled hard and caught a glimpse of Kaya’s chest cavity where the same harness had been set up like it had with Diana’s body. “Mulder, there might be another explosive on this body.”

“I’ve been staring on that exact spot, Scully, it’s why I didn’t want you out here,” Mulder nodded and glanced up at Skinner as he came to the center of the bridge.

“I know that look, what’s wrong?” Skinner was not up for more bad news from them as he crossed his arms, snow falling on his shoulders and the top of his head with every passing second.

“There might be another explosive device,” Mulder tried to keep his voice half low as he spoke, to not promote panic amongst the rookies and police officers who weren’t used to thinking about the idea of a body exploding any second. “Please call out the bomb squad just in case.”

“Identical set ups?” Skinner leaned over to see what was going on, as Mulder nodded toward the chest region that was half bobbing against the water.

“It looks like the same hollowed out section that the previous autopsy resulted in, I can’t tell if there’s an actual explosive in there or not,” Scully looked up at Skinner as he hovered over them from the safety of the bridge. “Air on the side of caution on this…we know what this guy is capable of.”

“Max, go call Tori and tell her to get the guys ready,” Skinner tapped Max on the shoulder and handed him the phone.

“On it,” Max nodded and went over to a quieter area to call the head of their bomb squad investigational unit.

“The moment we get her out of the water—I want both of you to go home, get changed, and get warm,” Skinner had that fatherly tone again as he stared down at the two agents that gave him the most headache despite how intensely devoted they were to their work.

“Sir, I need to conduct the autopsy,” Scully was unreasonably objecting to being told to take care of herself as the numbness was setting in from the hips down.

“Agent Scully, you know as well as I do how long that the Bomb Squad is going to take in an extraction of any potential explosive. After that, all evidence will be collected,” Skinner was stern with his tone, his hands on the railing as he shifted to one side to give the team better access to the body. “When we need to do an internal we will…until then I want you to be safe.”
Scully nodded in spite of herself and watched as the last of the barbed wire was released from the steel. Both of them felt the give of Kaya’s weight go slack as the recovery team gently lifted her out of the water and moved her painstakingly onto the rolling gurney to secure her in a body bag. Mulder held onto the steel girder for another moment as something caught his eye on the vertical, center beam that went into the water below. The words “I don’t want your body, but I’d hate to think about you with somebody else” were scrawled in chalk across the beam in the spot where Kaya’s back had been resting.

“Max, hand me one of the cameras up there,” Mulder caught his attention as he started to cross the bridge to follow the team up to the medical transport after Max had finished the quick phone call to Tori.

Max turned and carefully handed it down to him. “You two need to hurry, I can see blue on both of your lips and it won’t be long until shock sets in.”

Mulder snapped three quick photos of the chalk writing and handed the camera back to Max. “Please tell us who the finger prints on her neck belong to...immediately.”

“I will if you get the fuck out of here,” Max took the camera as he leaned down toward them, very clearly scolding them.

“You’ve been spending too much time with Skinner today, Max,” Mulder couldn’t help but smirk as he started to maneuver backwards, letting go of the girder. “Bossy.”

They only glanced back for the shortest of moments as they teetered on their heels in the frigid water, taking the shortest path from their current position to the shore. Balance was already a problem as the heaviness from their water drenched clothing along with the chills coursing through them only made it worse. The freshly falling snow wasn’t assisting in their endeavors as both could feel the onset of shock readying a blast of considerably more painful chills as they pulled their jackets on and glanced at each other before following two of the officers to a patrol car, where they slid across the backseat to prepared for their short journey back to the SUV. Part of them knew that their little swim could potentially have repercussions but if it got them closer to solving this case—it was worth it. They both looked out the back window at the crime scene as it disappeared behind them.

3:30 PM
Scully’s Apartment

The hallway was nearly as cold as outside was as Scully struggled with her keys in the door until the lock finally gave, sliding out of position. She turned the handle and sent the front door half flying before it thudded against the chair that was pressed against the wall next to the counter, the sound just loud enough to echo through the cozy space. Mulder and Scully were half numb as they came into the apartment and peeled off their partially dry FBI coats. Scully pushed the door shut and locked it tight while Mulder held onto the back of a table chair to remove his boots. They had been fairly quiet aside from the teeth chattering and sharp inhales of pain spikes
that were afflicting both of their joints and it was almost too quiet as the subtle warmth in Scully’s place were just not enough to stop the feeling.

“Mulder, strip,” Scully had her shoes off as she went toward her bedroom to grab a change of dry clothes for both of them.

“Not even going to romance me, Scully?” Mulder’s teeth were still chattering, in fact, they had gotten worse since they left the park as he pulled the wet shirt off and tossed it onto the wood floor in front of the stove.

Scully walked back out and handed him dry clothes, her mind couldn’t have been further from sneaking a peek at him as she started peeling away her own clothes. “Mulder, if we don’t get our body temperature back up soon we both are going to be taking a trip to the hospital to be treated for hypothermic shock.”

Scully seemed to be moving at a much more hurried pace than Mulder as she got into her dry underwear and warm, light blue, cotton pajamas with the long sleeves. She gathered up all of the wet clothes and put them into the wash, immediately prepping to start up a load of it while Mulder finished dressing. It was lucky that he hadn’t run out of clothes as she turned back toward the kitchen to find him in his gray t-shirt and track sweats that she had casually swiped from him a couple of months back. Scully took their boots and set them near one of the upright water heaters where three other pairs of shoes had been placed from previously trapesing through mud or the rain with Mulder on an occasion or six. Mulder was already looking considerably warmer as the blue was nearly gone from his extremities and the smile curved across his lips.

“You stole these from my place, didn’t you?” Mulder pointed at the sweats and raised an eyebrow at her, the accusatory tone in full swing.

Scully maneuvered toward the cabinet and gathered up more cocoa packets to prep. “Maybe I did…maybe I didn’t.”

“One of these days I’m going to end up running around naked from the waist down in my own apartment…and it’ll be your fault,” Mulder shook his head at her while he went over to the thermostat.

“I’m not seeing where that’s a problem, Mulder,” Scully smiled as she could already feel the half icy stare coming from him as he fiddled with the dial.

Mulder adjusted the heat in the apartment up a couple of notches and went back into the living room to start up the fire again. Scully was still in the kitchen, busily putting the kettle on and taking the oversize mugs from the bottom shelf. She glanced at her hands and noticed the shaking again along with the faded, almost purplish blue coloration of her fingertips. She balled up her fists for a moment and then rubbed her hands together, the cold still gripping her like a coiled snake. She waited for the whistle of the kettle and poured the hot water over the emptied cocoa packets in the mugs, glancing back at Mulder for a moment. She stirred the cocoa and carried them into the living room as Mulder put a 2nd log onto the budding flames. He turned his head and saw her shivering, the softest tint of blue still on her lips as she pulled a blanket across her and curled up with it.

“How are you holding up?” Mulder put one more log onto the fire, stoked it once more and put the metal grate in front of it before he moved over toward the couch.

Scully moved the blanket away from one side of her and gave him a more pitiful look, her lips still bluish purple, the color all but gone from her skin. “Come warm me up before body
parts start to fall off and you have to put me back together like a Mrs. Potato Head.”

“Can’t have that,” Mulder crawled under the blanket with her and could feel the cold still coming off of her, more abundantly than with his own body. “Jesus, you’re frozen.”

“Every bruise hurts and the cold is amplified in every spot I injured in the blast,” Scully slid both hands under his shirt and felt him tense up immediately as he inhaled and held it there.

“Think we’ll get a call before midnight from Skinner?” Mulder made sure her feet were covered up as he glanced down toward the floor for a moment.

“I hope not, I don’t think I’ll be warm before spring,” Scully let out a chuckle in spite of herself and rubbed her fingers along the space above his belly button, his warmth already transferring to her.

Mulder pulled her close and rubbed her arm, adjusting the blanket until they were both covered up and comfortable. He had his cheek pressed against her forehead, gently gauging the cold as it began to fade slowly. He reached for a cup of cocoa for her and held it under the blanket for her, the steam rising just enough to tickle her chin in the process. She gathered the cup in her hands and sipped the hot liquids while Mulder gathered up his cup, doing the same as she did. It was quiet in her apartment as they relaxed together, slowly warming up in the dim of the firelight. This had become a reoccurring thing for them, it seemed, to be seeking the comfort of one another in front of the fire. It was a nice change for them to take away from the non-stop, crazy pace that they had to follow on a daily basis.

“I can feel you thawing,” Mulder placed a gentle kiss on the space on her forehead just above her eyebrow as he glanced at her hands to see that they were no longer showing signs of heavy cold.

Scully took another sip of her cocoa and set it aside before cuddling close to him, her head against his chest. “My legs still ache like crazy.”

“You haven’t put any of the topical on the bruises on your legs since the doctor saw you, have you?” Mulder set his nearly empty cup of cocoa on the side table and turned almost all the way toward her.

Scully had that guilty look hidden on her lips as she made eye contact and shook her head. “No, I’ve been a little preoccupied.”

Mulder slid out from under the blanket and went to get the tube of topical cream from the other side of the room where she left it. He turned around and wiggled it at her, the smallest of grins creeping across his lips. Scully pressed her lips together cuddled the blanket closer to her body, almost in protest over what was coming next. She looked up at him as he pushed the coffee table off to one side just a little bit to give him plenty of room to sit on his knees on the floor in front of her. He knelt and set the tube on the couch next to her, closing his eyes softly as he watched her hold the blanket all the way to her neck. It was frustrating yet, again, cute to witness her purposely avoiding something that might help her feel better in this manner.

“That blanket is not going to protect you from this,” Mulder tugged at the quilt until it slid away from her. “You’re in pain.”

“Yeah, I am—and I know, I just hate smelling like a walking Bengay advertisement after this stuff goes on,” Scully frowned and let him take the blanket off of her.
Mulder looked over his shoulder to make sure that the fire was good and stoked before making eye contact again with her, untying the drawstring at her waist to the pajama bottoms that she was wearing. “Scully, lift up your hips.”

She swallowed hard and carefully lifted her hips off of the couch as his fingers found the waistband of her bottoms and carefully tugged them down, his eyes locked onto hers like they had so many times before. He could feel the goosebumps rising where his fingertips touched as he pulled the cotton fabric down beyond her ankles, setting them aside on the couch next to her. Scully had her knees pressed almost awkwardly together as she tugged her pajama top down, covering the front of her underwear even though she had no reason to be concerned over her modesty. Mulder wasn’t necessarily even looking as he squeezed a generous circle of the pain-relieving gel into his palm, glancing only at the enormous bruising across the top of Scully’s thighs that had started to change colors just enough to make them look so much worse than they were. It was the sheer size of them that he was caught off guard by as they extended from just above her knee to where a pair of thigh highs would typically be pulled to.

“Jesus, no wonder your legs hurt so badly,” Mulder rubbed his hands together to spread the gel evenly between both of his palms before slowly rubbing them across the surface of her bruises.

“Fuck,” the sensation caught Scully off guard as the pressure sent a sizzling jolt of pain through her backside and up her back as she gripped the couch and stared down at him as he applied the topical as gently as he could.

“I’m trying to be gentle, Scully, but I think we waited too long to do this,” Mulder could see the pain manifesting through her facial expression as well as the way her muscles were twitching under his touch.

“I know and the longer you do this, the better it will start to feel,” Scully took another deep breath and stared at the ceiling for a moment before meeting gazes with him again.

“You’re going to tell me if it hurts too much?” Mulder was imploring her as he felt the conflicting tense and relaxed movements of her muscles underneath of his fingers.

“I will,” Scully had her lip between her teeth a little too firmly as her heart started beating a little faster.

Mulder put a little bit more of the gel on his palms and rubbed concentric circles with his thumbs as he spread the gel across the bruises, gently dragging downward on the stiff spots. Scully was white knuckled as she dug into the couch cushions but refused to take her gaze off of his, gathering strength from him like a flicker of light forming in a dark place. He was her rock and she knew that his careful attention to her safety, while parental, was one of the more incredible of his qualities. She needed that from him. It kept her going. The painful spikes had started to subside but the heavy breathing had only increased with every subtle movement of his fingers, blurring the line between comfort, pain, and that aching that had been growing for an incredibly long time.

“Scully?” Mulder could feel heat radiating off of her as her breaths became half ragged and audible.

Her chest was heaving, her voice small and a little hoarse as she blinked slowly.

“Mulder…”

The look on her face was familiar from an opportunity they missed, from what seemed so long ago, as he watched her eyes glass over, filling up with tears from the mixture of pain and the
flood of emotions that were now rushing through her. Mulder’s hands had stopped rubbing the bruises and found their way up to her neck, where they gently caressed the space along her jaw, willing her forward. Scully’s bottom lip was already quivering as she matched his action with her right hand, her delicate fingers playing on his skin in such a way that he almost shut his eyes too soon. Their lips had already met before but it had been in short, interrupted bursts that neither of them had been given time to develop or take time to savor, to enjoy...at least not while completely awake and as ready as they were. They were within inches as Scully’s mouth was already inclined for his as her lips parted and welcomed him in, his own lips parted just enough to pass heat between them and enticed both eyes to close as they tasted each other’s mouths. It was a glimpse into the other’s soul, passion, and subsequently, their lust as the kiss bloomed like an evening primrose after a desert storm.

They tilted into each other and found that precious, missing piece of each other that they had thought they’d long since stopped needing as Mulder’s right hand slipped to the curve of her back and gripped her just hard enough that she gasped into his mouth. The sound, in unison with the vibration of her breath colliding with hers, was more than enough to make him go weak at the knees as he felt her tongue slide against his. Scully’s left hand was searching him, gripping his abs, chest, and shoulders like she had never touched him before. It was different as she could feel his muscles contract under her fingers as she found the back of his neck and made the curve through his hair. Both of Mulder’s hands found their way to her backside and pulled her forward again, this time with enough firmness that the gasp that escaped Scully’s lips vibrated through his throat.

Mulder guided Scully’s legs around his waist and slid her forward until her butt was barely on the edge, where his hands took over in gripping her. He sedulously rose from the kneeling position and adjusted his grip on her backside, never once removing his mouth from hers. Scully held onto him, her legs around his waist, the control all in his possession. Mulder started to carry her toward the bedroom with his mouth still enveloping hers, the little moans escaping with every turn of their heads. He found the doorway and intentionally pressed her against the door frame, bucking against her pelvis until the guttural sound that came from her lips interrupted their delicious makeout session.

“Jesus Christ, Mulder,” Scully’s thighs were already twitching as her gaze met his, her voice ragged as the panting was feverishly paced. “Dammit.”

Mulder’s mouth found her neck and he bucked against her again, this time with a gentler yet more drawn out motion. “You don’t even know how long I’ve been waiting to do this, Scully.”

“The hell I don’t, Mulder,” Scully had one hand gripping his shoulder while the other was almost steadying herself against the frame of the door, her head tilted just enough that her moans were directed toward the floor. “Oh, my, God...”

It was all Mulder could do to keep from sliding out of the sweats and into her as the staggered words mixed with the soft, almost subtle moaning was driving him completely crazy. They hadn’t ventured on this path and he didn’t want to go screaming towards the finality with his guns blazing—he wanted to make it worth the wait, worth the agonizing series of teasing they had inflicted upon one another. Every nerve ending in Scully’s body was crying out in unison as he adjusted his grip on her backside and made a circular, upward motion up against her pelvis with such intensity that he left every little part of her throbbing like no one had ever managed to touch her in this way before.

“Mulder, I, oh, God, dammit,” Scully didn’t have the words anymore as the motion in her hips were already meeting his despite the barriers between them, the frustration written on her face as she found his bottom lip with her teeth and dragged him closer.
Mulder’s head was swimming in the sensations as he felt her heat radiating through her remaining layer as well as his. He couldn’t help himself as he thrust again, this time pulling his own ragged, audible breath from his own lips as well as hers as the pressure was just enough to make his thighs shake and one of his hands grasp onto the door frame. Scully’s moans had almost switched to a whimper as the sweat beads were forming on her forehead as she struggled to keep from spilling over the edge and melting onto him like a hot, sticky, mess that she certainly knew she was dangerously close to being. Mulder pulled her forward, away from the doorframe and groped his way toward her bed. His knees touched the edge of the bed followed by the backs of Scully’s legs, both immediately afflicted with a layer of goosebumps as the cool fabric touched their, now overheated, skin. Mulder guided Scully onto the bed and kept her ass on the edge, with her thighs on either side of his hips, angling her just a little bit as her head rested against her fluffy comforter.

“How are those bruises doing, Scully?” Mulder couldn’t help himself as he dragged his fingers down her midsection underneath of her pajama top while his hips teased her again.

Scully was heavily panting as her hips involuntarily came up to meet his despite her best efforts to control her movements as she looked up at him from her nearly horizontal position. “What bruises, Mulder?”

The teasing was becoming overwhelming as Scully desperately reached for him and managed to get a handful of his shirt. It was enough leverage for her to pull it off of him and throw it aside but not enough to get him down onto the bed with her. She let out a low, soft growl as the action only resulted in coming back with his shirt in her hands rather than all of him pressed against her. The sexually confident side of Mulder had taken over before he left the couch as he gripped her hips and gave her another slow buck against her. Scully practically yelped as she moaned, tilting her head back while her fingers coiled around the comforter, pulling it toward her.

“Stop teasing me, Mulder,” Her voice was ragged as her eyes were begging him considerably better than her words were.

He was waiting for that. The little knowing smile creeped across his lips as he pulled her toward him and enveloped her in another kiss while he crawled onto the bed, hovering over her. She arched her back into him as his tongue slipped past her teeth again, the heat wave sending another jolt through her that made all of her senses burn just a little hotter with anticipation. Mulder was meticulous in his reactions as he finally maneuvered toward the head of the bed, allowing her to rest her head against the pillows. He pulled back just far enough to look down at her as the bottoms of her feet touched the bed, knees still around him. She was beyond beautiful as he unbuttoned the front of her pajama top, letting his lips touch her skin as it appeared. Elation passed over his consciousness to realize that she had skipped the bra as he tugged the fabric away, revealing their shape next to his face on either side. Scully’s breasts were not small, by any definition but weren’t out of proportion either. They were the perfect size and shape to be touched, caressed, teased, and kissed by him—the conclusion had long been made. Mulder had always been fascinated with her ass but something about watching her goosebumps form as both nipples went hard was a new intrigue that he almost couldn’t get enough of as he let each fingertip graze over them individually.

Scully’s eyes were fixated on him as he moved his right hand down the curve of her stomach and slid under the waistband of her panties while his teeth teased the space between her breasts. Scully let out a sharp cry as Mulder’s index and middle fingers found her heat and slid along the curve of her lips, coaxing more of her wetness. She was close. It wasn’t even a question of just how close as the involuntary muscle spasm from his touch vibrated against his hand. Mulder carefully removed his hand from her panties and guided her back and shoulders off
of the bed long enough to fully remove the pajama top. She was radiating heat from the neck down as he touched her skin, the pure energy pulsing like a livewire. Mulder slid out of the sweat pants and tossed them onto the floor, leaving only the boxer briefs poorly clinging to him as the obvious erection was uncomfortably pushing them out toward her.

“You're awfully wet, Agent Scully,” Mulder nibbled a trail from her breasts to her earlobe and rubbed her through her panties, coaxing a hoarse moan from her lips in the process.

Scully bit down on her lip and bucked her hips against him, trapping his hand against her and half forcing a little extra pressure against her wetness. The movement caught Mulder off guard for a moment as he looked down at her before wiggling his fingers as though he were playing notes on a piano. The sensation nearly did her in as her eyes rolled back and her entire body started to shake. Mulder carefully slid his hand out from between them and gave her another kiss, this time considerably softer but only to muffle the sound of the imminent moaning from another strong, thrust of the hips against her. Mulder knew it was bordering on mean as he felt her shaking underneath of him enough to force apart their kiss and continue to pant into the air.

Scully gathered her bearings and returned the tease, her lips against his neck, nibbling a trail until she could whisper in his ear, the hunger clear in each syllable she uttered. “And you’re awfully hard, Agent Mulder.”

It wasn’t simply that she said it but how she said the words as his face and ears went flush along with the rest of his body, the heat between them bordering on searing. Their need couldn’t have been clearer as they peeled away the singular remaining articles of clothing that remained between them, haphazardly tossing them off the side of the bed. The wait had truly been a long time coming but neither of them would have known that this was their first time together as their mouths were the first to find each other like flames in the darkness. The collision was hot and rhythmic as Scully’s hands searched Mulder’s back, welcoming his heat with her own, urging him forward until they were standing on the edge, ready to take the leap into one another. Mulder’s hands gravitated naturally to her hips again where he gripped and lifted her backside off of the bed as he guided her legs back around his waist, one after the other, until they fit together like puzzle pieces.

Once he was fully satisfied with the feeling of her legs around him he used the headboard for a little extra height as he slowly filled her. The sensations were intoxicating for both of them as she dug her fingers into his shoulders and moaned into his mouth while he groaned into hers and held onto the last of his self-control as he felt her muscles contract around him. It would’ve been arguable that they were destined to know each other’s bodies as the rhythm gathered momentum, picked up speed and slowed again, the beating of their hearts gathering synchronicity as they held on at the brink, knowing that at any second the other was going to spill over. It was an unreal sensation that neither of them wanted to end, the rolling electricity as each nerve started to fire in unison, over and over. They found that it was easier to let go and orgasm hard in unison without words being spoken as they took another long gaze at one another with a long, slow thrust that left them both, finally, speechless and shaking.

Neither of them could’ve planned for this but it was worth it as the energy seemed to only cool long enough for a breath to be caught—as that same twinge of heat was sparked again urging them for more. It was very much unspoken but it wasn’t just sex or even making love, they had set their passions ablaze within one another. They had become a singular entity through every change of position, with every spark of a kiss that met and ignited, and with each little droplet of sweat that left their bodies and met between them in what seemed like an endless, oncoming onslaught of waves that were crashing on the surf. It was uninhibited and the feeling in their bones was only intensifying with every meeting of a thrust, every heartbeat, every unified moan or sigh—
no one else had existed before this. Nothing else mattered.

Nothing else mattered, but each other.

Chapter End Notes

I truly hope you enjoyed this one - this was tough in a different way because I rarely write sex scenes. Please leave feedback.
Chapter Summary

Romanticizing his victims, a brutal murderer leaves behind symbols of love…but who is his true, intended target and what lengths will he go to get her to notice?

Post “Agua Mala” (Season 6 with mentions of “Rain King”, “Two Fathers”, and “One Son” Briefly and only for context purposes)

Chapter thematic: Everything we do has a price to be paid

Chapter Notes

This is a two part chapter – descriptions of sex as well as violence are mentioned. Significantly lighter trigger warnings apply.

Disclaimer: Agent Mulder, Scully, Skinner, Fowley, Margaret Scully, and the Lone Gunmen belong respectively to Chris Carter, FOX Productions, and TenThirteen Productions. All other characters are original and any likeness or named similarities to any real-life persons are purely coincidental (unless, well, you’ve been told, then you should’ve expected such things)

Thank you so much for bearing with me – I hope this one wasn’t too choppy – it was a little bit emotionally draining JUST to write. I hope you love it!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

4:45 AM

Scully’s Apartment

An involuntary stretching noise from the incredibly beautiful, naked woman next to him brought Mulder out of his unusually deep state of slumber. He had been smack dab in the middle of a dream about the afternoon and subsequent evening before and the quick end left him sucking the air through his lips with an intensity, catching his breath. He turned his head toward the window and could only see a sliver of the white haze of snow still falling, the glow coming from the ground where it had accumulated overnight again. It gave him the chills just thinking about it as he rolled onto his side and spooned against Scully, feeling that warmth radiate from her. They had both expected a phone call from Skinner but the apartment had been quiet since they got there—well, almost quiet.

“Mmmm,” Scully was still most of the way asleep as she groaned and rubbed up against
him, her hand searching for his.

He slid his hand around her at the waist and covered her hand with his own, moving his fingers between hers until they were nearly laced together. She shivered in response to the mix of the cool air wafting over her skin with the heat of his chest up against her back, sending the ripple of an involuntary spasm against him just enough to make him bite down hard on his lip. Mulder hadn’t been the kind of guy to normally allow his morning wood to get the better of him but it hadn’t been pressed against Scully’s ass before this. He leaned in and brushed aside her hair off of the back of her neck, dotting the spot with delicate kisses. She was already half stirring as she leaned into him instinctively, pushing his mouth closer to her earlobe and neck where he set his teeth against her skin just enough coax an audible gasp.

Her eyes were still closed, though, much to his chagrin as he felt her move her hips back, pushing against him. He could not tell if the action was involuntary or not but the sweat was already on his forehead ready to send little droplets down his face as he nearly bit a hole through his bottom lip. She certainly had a way, even in her sleep, of pressing her foot right on the gas and revving everything until it was damn near painful. Mulder had his right hand against the back of her neck while his mouth was hot against her jaw. He had become hyper aware of every little sound or movement she made as her fingers twitched under his and reacted equally to his closeness.

“Scully, are you awake?” Mulder moved her left hip toward him, pulling her thigh onto his own while his knee slid between her already warm thighs.

Scully’s eyes were fluttering open as the gasps had turned into panting and little groans of approval, hanging on his name a little longer than anticipated. “Oh, I am now, Mulder.”

The bed and their skin still smelled like copious amounts of sex from the night before and the sheets had been decimated from the constant tugging underneath and on top of them but it wasn’t stopping the energy building again between them. Scully guided his hand along the curve of her side, up to her left breast where she overlapped his hand as he gave her a gentle squeeze. Mulder couldn’t help smirk at her directing his hand where she wanted it as he nibbled on her earlobe and watched her reaction as his index and middle fingers carefully grazed her nipple. She gasped audibly but arched against his hand while her backside moved just enough to make him inhale against her neck.

“I’m not going to be able to walk straight today, Mulder,” Scully was panting heavily as she could feel him rubbing against her as he was partially teasing her again.

Mulder was swimming in thinking about the night before along with the feel of her against him again as his voice was low near her earlobe. “With a smile plastered on your lips, Scully…I know I will be.”

“What kind of monster did I just unleash in you, Mulder?” Scully’s words were a direct contradiction to the pleading that her body was doing as she moved her hips, hoping he’d take her over the edge again.

She already half knew the answer and knew that it was the same kind of creature that had been lying dormant within her as the craving only seemed to deepen for each other. They had ruined each other for anyone else—if there ever were a necessity for such. They were enveloped in each other to the fullest, despite the implications of taking a leap such as this. Scully tilted into a fevered, wanton kiss from Mulder that acted as a prelude to the slowest of thrusts that had her groaning into his mouth as he filled her again. The kiss didn’t last long as his hips made a circular, upward motion, causing her to almost throw her head back against his neck, demanding more of his closeness, moaning into the air. They were moments away from another cresting of every nerve
ending, every muscle, every extremity that had made contact, and the buildup was an ethereal level high that continued to gather with every stroke, every little bit of friction, and certainly, every osculation.

Mulder held onto Scully a little tighter as he felt her let go and tighten around him. His arms were coiled around her that her movements were restricted to meeting each circular thrust until she could no longer keep up and spilled over, trembling against him like it were the first time with him all over again. The cataclysm that resonated from her was enough that he no longer needed to hold back as he came hard, joining her in a series of breathy moans that started out in long bursts and threaded into short, soft sighs until there was only air moving softly between their lips.

“I don’t want to move,” Scully’s breaths were a little ragged as she opened her eyes and looked back at him, smiling softly.

“Neither do I, but I think both of us need sustenance…” Mulder gave her another soft kiss before slowly withdrawing, the physical ache of her absence felt along every part that her skin had been touching.

The chills passed over both of them as he slid out from under the covers and stood in the half glow of the thin sliver of light coming from the window, his outline just illuminated enough that Scully could see his muscles twitch as he adjusted to the air. She smiled and propped herself up on her elbows, the sheet barely clinging to her as she was halfway onto her back looking at him. He pulled on his boxer briefs and looked over his shoulder at those bedroom eyes and that soft, half exhausted smile on her lips, the sigh almost immediately leaving his lips.

“You keep giving me that look, Scully, and I’m going to just have to say to hell with it—I’ll just starve,” Mulder reluctantly pulled on his jeans and zipped them up, the chill of the morning air a little bitter against his still bare chest as he fought the urge to crawl back into the bed with her.

“I’ll go shower and you can go see if there is anything salvageable in that kitchen of mine to throw together,” Scully slipped out from under the covers and pulled her robe on before she even stood up as the air hit her like a ton of bricks, the ache already setting in from the previous night’s events. “That way, it’ll lessen the temptation to keep going at it like jack rabbits during mating season.”

Mulder groaned and pulled his shirt over his head, adjusting it until it was smoothed out along his abs. “That is probably a good idea. I’ll shower after breakfast…if you can keep your hands off of me.”

“I’ll have to manage,” Scully winked at him and beckoned him in for another, soft kiss, making it obvious that she wasn’t touching him with any part of her body minus her lips, before sliding backwards toward the doorway. “See? No hands.”

*Resist the urge, Dana Scully, you have more than enough time to keep pawing at Mulder.* Scully took a deep breath as she felt that tug at her core again as the taste of him on her lips was more than enough to get her to bite down on her bottom lip.

Mulder chuckled and nearly followed her into the bathroom but settled on calling to her from the hallway. “That was clever, Scully, very clever.”

“I thought so,” Scully’s voice was a little hard to understand above the sound of the shower and the splashes that preceded the closing of the shower door.
She is going to drive me to lose all of my self-control and all it would take is one little look or a sigh. Shit. Mulder was almost thinking out loud as he glanced through the cupboards, searching for anything resembling something breakfast worthy other than the ultra-generic oatmeal that she seemed to have an abundance of. He groaned and wrinkled his nose, the hunger pangs circling through his belly as he resigned to the fact that he was going to have to venture out into the cold to get something to make. He closed the cupboards and went to her little “leave a note!” notepad sitting next to the rotary phone, jotting down a quick note for her. He pulled the top piece of paper off and walked into the bedroom, setting it on her nightstand where he knew she would see it before pulling on a pair of socks and his previously wet boots as he went back into the kitchen. The last piece of clothing to go on was his plain, black jacket that he had worn the same night that they had showered together. Mulder couldn’t help but recall that night as well as the past twelve hours as he pulled each sleeve on, smirking just enough that his ears went hot again.

“Calm down, Mulder,” He said it out loud as he shoved his wallet, badge, ID, and both sets of keys into his pockets.

Mulder unlocked the door and slipped carefully out, locking the door securely behind him, the sound of his steps echoing down the hall until they all but faded as he headed off to the SUV. The apartment, aside from the shower, had returned to that serene level of quiet with a gentle hum of appliances running being the only real sounds that emanated from each room. The bathroom door was open wide and the steam was starting to drift out just enough to create a little bubble of haze. Scully wasn’t the shower singer type but she was the occasional groaning type as the “hmmmmm” noise echoed in the bathroom and out the door just a little bit. The shower was short and to the point as the water shut off less than ten minutes after it started with Scully sliding out of the stall to wrap her over-sized towel tightly around herself and wipe all of the fog off of the mirror. She inhaled and exhaled slowly, taking in the last of the floating steam before meandering out of the bathroom.

“Mulder?” The lack of noise in the apartment caught her off guard as she expected to hear him in the kitchen or at least in the living room flipping through channels for the news but there was nothing.

Scully’s shoulders half slumped at even a moment of thinking he had left without saying goodbye as she walked into her bedroom, hair dripping just enough to make little tapping noises on the hardwood each time one fell against it. She slid into a pair of panties and her jeans first before she noticed the little folded note perched on her nightstand. The smile reappeared on her lips as she picked it up and read it.

“Scully, your kitchen is almost worse than mine. This will not do. Venturing into the drift for any open grocery store. Pray for me, Mulder,” She read aloud and found herself giggling at the dramatics of it.

“That’s my Mulder.

She bit down on her bottom lip and set it on the bed while she finished getting dressed, finishing off her ensemble with a black long sleeved cardigan over the top of her t-shirt top. Her towel drying of her hair was interrupted by a series of knocks at the door. It was approaching six in the morning and Mulder wasn’t that quick at a grocery store. She tossed the towel over the edge of the washer and went straight for the door, peeking through the peep hole only to see Miles in his work uniform standing with a clipboard, wearing his utility belt with only a few key items – wrench, channel locks, and multiple sizes of screw drivers.

“What in the hell…” Scully muttered to herself before she unlocked the door and opened
it carefully. “Miles, it’s six in the morning. What are you doing here?”

Miles was considerably more awkward than normal as he turned his clipboard toward her, the big, toothy grin more fake than the last time. “Oh, hi, Dana, your building super just wants us to check all of the pipes to make sure nothing is in danger of bursting from the freeze and the power outage. Can I come in? I’ll be quick like I always.”

The words were loaded but she obliged, nodding as she moved out of his way and closed the door behind him, foregoing the lock this time. “Yeah, I’m just finishing up getting ready for the day…don’t mind me, or the mess for that matter.”

Miles smiled again, this time with a lot less of his teeth showing as her place looked barely out of place aside from the paperwork in tiny stacks on the coffee table and a few dishes in the sink that hadn’t been addressed yet. Miles’s paperwork was fabricated, as were the dozens of signatures from all of the alleged residents in the building but Scully didn’t take a solid look at the paperwork to even gather that. He knelt in front of the sink and pretended to check a pipe fitting while she shook her head and went to pick up the towel from the top of the dryer. She had been around Miles many times before and, aside from the awkward conversation and fake smiles, he was seemingly harmless to her. This was nothing out of the ordinary other than the time of the day. Scully took the towel and started drying her hair again, this time walking away from him in the kitchen as she stood in the bathroom in front of the mirror.

“Been a nasty couple of nights for this snow, huh, Dana?” Miles was pushing it as he called from the kitchen floor, sliding a pair of thick, leather gloves on.

“Other than the terrible driving conditions and power going out, it’s actually been very amazing anomalous weather,” Scully bent down to shake the towel through her hair, her field of vision momentarily obstructed.

“People definitely act a little strange in the snow,” Miles had already moved the toolbox to the table where he was rummaging through his tool box with one hand while his other hand flicked the cover off of an already filled syringe.

“Brings out the kid in a lot of people,” Scully’s hair was no longer dripping as she put the damp towel across the edge of the bathtub.

As she stood back up she felt a sharp pinch at the back of her neck and felt that sting of fluid passing into her flesh that sent her reeling toward the window in a spinning direction. Her hand went over the spot and came back with a few droplets of the fluid along with some own blood before she looked at Miles standing in the doorway with a spent syringe perched between his fingers. She was already a little sick to her stomach as she felt her eyes roll from the rush of blood from the surge of adrenaline. He looked different, menacing even, as he stood perfectly still while she internally panicked over the implication.

“The hell are you doing, Miles?” Scully could already feel the contents of the syringe taking effect as she stumbled, sitting clumsily on the toilet seat lid.

The change was clear as his tone of voice dropped an octave and the twitches in his hands, neck, and eyes started as stared her down. “I thought this was supposed to be special, Dana, but you went and fucked him didn’t you? Of course you did…I can still smell him on you.”

The drug in her system was making it difficult to even think let alone come up with the words as her plumber was half yelling at her like a crazy person. “Miles, you need help—you don’t know what you’re saying.”
“You’ve seen all of the gifts I made for you. You almost ruined everything…this was supposed to happen last night, and I stood at your door and heard you, with him,” Miles wasn’t looking at her fully but the words were choppy and raspy as he tossed the spent syringe into the sink and lunged at her.

Scully could feel her motor functions slowing down but she wasn’t giving up or in as she delivered a solid right hook to his cheek and sent her knee into his groin as he got within a foot of her. The irritation of being kicked not once, but twice, in the balls was more than he needed in the past couple of days as he muttered “fucking bitch” as he clutched the spot, the air clearly unwilling to enter his lungs. The motion was just enough to take him off balance and give her an opening to maneuver around him. She was barely out of the doorway, within a few feet of her backup service revolver in the bureau drawer when he snagged her by the ankles and pulled her backwards, knocking both of her feet out from under her. Scully was able to get both of her hands under her face as she hit the floor, saving her nose from what would’ve been enough force to bust open her nose and knock her completely unconscious. She rolled onto her back, the dizziness setting in as she struggled to make any motion into a seated, steady position. Miles was unbelievably strong and resilient as he tugged her at the ankles and dragged her close, straddling her lower half.

“Get off of me, crazy mother fucker!” Scully refused to stop moving as she winced from the excess pressure on the bruising on her thighs from his weight against her.

“So fucking feisty today, Dee,” Miles backhanded her hard, bloodying her lip on contact with the amount of force he exerted, bordering on enough to knock her halfway out as he squeezed his fingers around her neck, applying just enough pressure to make it incredibly hard to breathe, choking her. “Midazolam is one of the fastest of the intravenous sedatives—and can take as little as five minutes to make one pliable enough to cut into without them feeling a thing. Won’t that be nice, Dee?”

*It’s him, it’s him, fuck, it’s him.*

The use of the name ‘Dee’ was enough to send Scully careening off of the anxiety ledge as she finally put the pieces together in her head, the reality of exactly who he was finally making sense in the worst way possible. She desperately kicked both legs underneath of him and clawed at his face until her fingernails finally met skin, raking him hard enough that both eyes watered. The action made him weak enough to get a little leverage as she angled herself up and knuckled him across the wind pipe, knocking him backwards. Deep down, he knew that she wasn’t going to be an easy capture as he watched her desperately try to get her feet underneath of her, scurrying closer to the bureau, hoping to get her hands on her secondary gun. It was only a matter of time, however, for her battle to be a losing one as the heavy sedative coursing through veins would be enough to take what was left and wring her out.

*Fuck, this can’t be happening.*

Her mind was racing as she got her fingers on edge of the top drawer and started to pull it toward her. The motion ended nearly as quickly as it began with his arm around her neck, throttling her backwards. Scully screamed this time, shoving both feet against the wall to give herself as much leverage as she could to shove backwards, knocking him against the wall. The back of his head hit a large decorative photograph hanging and brought it tumbling to the floor, where the glass shattered and spread out across a good six feet of the hardwood flooring. She adjusted her stance and rammed both of her elbows into his rib region until his hands went lax, giving her just enough room to slide out of his arms. Her balance was completely wrecked, though, as she lost her balance and came down hard on her hands and knees, little bits of glass cutting the palms of her hand in the process. It was all she could do to keep from crying out as she felt the stinging on the
bottoms of her feet and the palms of her hand as she started to bolt toward the door, leaving smeared hand and footprints across the floor and any piece of furniture she touched along the way. She wrapped her hand around the door handle and started to turn it but his large, intimidating hand spread out across the top of the door and deftly locked the door, stopping any shot she had of escaping.

“You son of a bitch,” Scully was having issues formulating a full sentence as she purposely left her bloody fingerprints all over the door handle before he hooked her by the arm and sent her tumbling backwards onto the table.

The landing was awkward as the middle of her back smacked hard against the edge of the table and nearly knocked it over entirely but his left hand across her neck along with his weight pressed firmly against her midsection kept her awkwardly pinned half onto the table. She gagged behind the heavy hand on her throat, fighting the medication and the inability to breathe. Her instinct was to push his hand away from her neck but she only pushed the bits of glass further into the palms of her hands, sending little shooting pains up her arms like improperly placed acupuncture. She was at an entirely new level of frustration, anger, and fear as she felt the air stinging each little cut on her hands and feet along with the, while the smell of motor oil, rust, and heavy incense burned her nostrils as he leaned across her stomach rummaging through her FBI jacket. Scully hadn’t shed a single tear since feeling the needle pierce into her skin and she had no intention of starting even as her FBI badge, gun, handcuffs, and the handcuff keys were tossed onto the table next to her face. She almost breathed a sigh of relief as his hands left her neck but it was short lived as he grasped both of her wrists and clasped her cuffs around each one, tightening them with no room for wiggle. He left no room for struggle as he slid the keys and her badge into his front pocket before picking up the gun.

“Mulder is coming back any minute, Miles—all of this will be over,” Scully’s words didn’t sound real to her as she looked up at him from the table, the awkward pinching at her mid-back where it was angled oddly against the edge.

Miles considered putting a gun to her head but he liked words so much more. “If he comes back you better hope he’s a damn good shot because I already plan on slitting his throat right in front of your pretty little face, Dee.”

She couldn’t even fathom the idea let alone understand the pure rage coming from him as she swallowed hard and felt the drug taking another turn as everything began to almost go in slow motion; she knew it wouldn’t be long before she wouldn’t be able to move her own head let alone struggle. She couldn’t let it happen like this. She still had quite a bit of her strength left as she shoved both of her forearms against him, pushing him as hard as she could until she could see space between them. The extra space was enough to push her feet against him, knocking him into the kitchen counter while she slid off of the table and retreated into the living room with her hands stilluffed in front of her. She backed up toward the couch and steadied herself against it while slowly moving toward the corner nearest to the window. She had already made up her mind that none of this was going to go like he wanted and there was already a glimmer of fire in her eyes as the mere thought of him putting his hands on Mulder entered her consciousness. Part of her wanted him to end up regretting this path—regret choosing her, of all women in the world to choose.

“You’re just making this worse for yourself, Dee, and I have so many plans for you,” Miles was irritated as he slid Scully’s gun into his coat and started to approach her.

“Do you really think you’re going to get away with this, Miles?” Scully was acutely aware of her failing balance as the room started to get hazy in waves.
Miles was almost tickled by the question, the menacing sneer across his lips as he cracked his knuckles. “I’ve been one step ahead of you right straight along—I always win.”

Scully was half turned, holding onto the top of the couch, her eyes already rolling into the back of her head as she fought the drowsiness, the lull of the waiting chemical dream state. It wasn’t simply that he wanted to see Scully struggle; he wanted to torture her, he wanted her to feel the personal level of pain that he endured watching her with Mulder. He had so many plans for subjecting her to the same kinds of pain that he had inflicted on the previous eleven women and destroying every little piece of her strength. He approached her with a sneer building across his lips and she was barely holding onto the back of the couch with the last of her strength as he was within four feet of him. She put distance between herself and the couch, snatching the crystal vase from the side table before hurling it at him with very little wind up.

He wasn’t expecting it as it hit him between the eyes and broke against the bridge of his nose before falling to the floor where it shattered the rest of the way. The hit was enough to knock him backwards and into the chair near the door in the corner, where he was halfway subdued for a moment. The maneuver by Scully, while brilliant, had taken away much of her energy as she leaned against the wall and held herself up, desperately willing her legs to cooperate as the world started to fade to a dull, fuzzy glow around her. She made a run for the bedroom, hoping that the vase was enough of a deterrent to get him completely removed from the situation, but she couldn’t have been more wrong as she could already hear him behind her, half stomping along the hardwoods. She knocked over everything in her path, breaking nearly everything that had glass on it in the process but it didn’t stop him from delivering one, solid thwack to her back with the wrench. The hit was just hard enough that the wind was knocked out of her before she dropped like a sack of potatoes.

Miles stood over her and was a little surprised that she was still conscious after that hit but could tell that she could no longer fight him, for the moment, as he stepped over her and opened the curtains. All of her combined pain was dulled as the medication was doing its job and the conclusion was met while she watched Miles slide the window all the way open, letting the cold air flood the space. The screen was already missing and the snow outside was still falling—a false sense of serenity. He hovered over her and started to hum “Somebody Else” as he put a strip of duct tape across her mouth before gathering her into his arms, where carefully guided her out the open window and onto the top of his waiting van. He didn’t bother to close the window as he half tossed her over his shoulder to get her down to the ground, where he could slide her into the back of the cluttered van. She lost consciousness as he placed her into the back of the van and closed the doors, uncertainty looming as though she had entered the dark with no light in sight.

20 minutes later

“That was ridiculous,” Mulder didn’t care that he was taking to himself as he Mulder parked the SUV and turned off the ignition, before glancing at the two shopping bags in the passenger seat.

He sighed and gathered up the two shopping bags from the only grocery store he could find open before nine AM as well as during the snow, the look of frustration already turned to
downtrodden over the sheer amount of time it took him to get what he wanted to make breakfast for Scully. He locked the doors and muttered to himself as he shifted the groceries into one arm to have his hand free to open the building door. Despite the borderline obnoxious length of time it took him to get in and out of the grocery store, Mulder’s mind was on Scully. He had a grin almost immediately on his face even contemplating seeing her face after the night that they had just spent together—it sent a little chill down his spine that brought some heat to his cheeks. There was a little extra spring in his step and a bit of a sunny tune leaving his lips in a whistle. It was a remarkable change from the exhaustion that normally followed him like a shadow. The interior of Scully’s complex was a welcomed warmth as he stomped off the excess snow on his shoes and slid the key into the deadbolt. The door felt different, like it had jarred off of the hinge just enough to need an extra push as Mulder turned the handle and pushed it open.

The cold air hit him first as he felt the draft against his skin followed by his field of vision capturing the trails of blood along pieces of furniture, across the floor. The vibrant, almost permanent grin that had been on his face was all but gone as the color faded from his skin as everything was seemingly unraveling before his eyes, like someone had just pulled the rug out from underneath of him. His heart began to thud so loud and fast that he could feel it all the way in his ears. It was all right out of one of their crime scenes as he spotted her smeared handprints on the edge of the table and all over the wall toward the bathroom. He felt gutted as he looked around at the wrecked space that had been so pleasant and inviting less than an hour ago. The bile was already rising into his throat as he glanced at the door handle from the inside, the bloody prints screaming at him. It wasn’t the first time he had seen her apartment like this but something shifted as he felt the air go out of his lungs, the shock setting in.

“Scully?” Mulder desperately wanted to hear her voice return his call but his voice only met silence.

No, no, no, no…this can’t be real.

He could feel the hinges of his world coming apart as both bags of groceries slid from his grip and dropped to the floor. He was already half shaking as he gathered his wits and pulled his cell phone from his coat pocket. There weren’t any words for what he was looking at as he moved carefully toward the living room, only to find more glass on the floor. He shook his head, indignantly, as though this were a bad dream and blinked hard, only to discover it was reality. He stared at his phone for a moment until the metallic hinge of Miles’s clipboard caught the corner of his eye. He glanced down at it and noticed the work order, along with the name of the plumbing company that the complex worked with before the vomit came up into his throat.

He dialed and pressed send, waiting for Skinner to answer. “Come on, pick up!”

“Agent Mulder, nothing has changed since yeste—“

“He’s got Scully, Skinner,” Mulder cut Skinner off in mid-sentence, the worry, anger, and sadness all gathering as his eyes were filling with rarely cried tears.

Skinner was quiet for a moment, almost as if the words were not real before finally responding. “What? What are you talking about, Agent Mulder?”

“There’s blood on the floor, on the walls, and broken glass everywhere, she’s missing,” Mulder’s voice was distant as he shifted his weight and took a step forward toward the table, noticing that the pockets of her FBI coat had been emptied. “He took her badge, cuffs, and her gun.”

“Mulder, don’t touch anything—we have to collect any evidence that he may have left
behind and any that she intentionally caused to help us map everything,” Skinner was talking to Max as well, the sound of the road in the background, the squealing of tires behind the voices. “Max, call it in, Agent Scully has been abducted by unknown subject, unknown injuries, unknown status—give them her address.”

“We have a suspect, Skinner,” Mulder knelt to read the clipboard as he could see that Miles had stupidly left his own name at the top, his blood nearly boiling as he realized how many times this asshole had potentially been inside her home. “It’s Scully’s creepy, mother fucking plumber, Miles Canton – C-A-N-T-O-N.”

“How do you know?” Skinner could hear Mulder’s voice beginning to crack as he did his best to get him to focus. “We are less than 5 minutes away and we have backup on the way.”

“The bastard left his clipboard with his phony paperwork on the floor,” Mulder couldn’t help but picture her struggling with Miles as he looked around the kitchen and peeked around at the hallway, the dread settling into his chest. “I shouldn’t have left her alone.”

“Don’t do anything stupid, Mulder,” Skinner almost raised his voice, the fatherly tone coming out as Mulder uttered that last sentence. “You are no good to her if you can’t stay calm.”

“I can’t stand here and do nothing—the longer I stand here the further from me she is, the closer she gets to the kind of sick and twisted torture he has already inflicted on eleven other women. I can’t just let that happen, Skinner,” Mulder’s breathing patterns were staggering, the emotional overload hitting him like a ton of bricks as the tears were down his cheeks.

“Tell me what you can see from the doorway,” Skinner was stalling and by the sound of Max in the background occasionally letting out a gasp here and there, he was going faster than he should have been.

Mulder blinked and began scanning the room, taking it all into his consciousness in one, bitter breath before closing his eyes for a moment. “Handprints on the door handle, bloody hand and footprints almost everywhere in the kitchen, broken glass all over the floor—some of it is in the hallway and some of it is behind the couch, different textures. I can’t see if he opened a window but it’s cold in here—there’s a breeze. She must’ve struggled more than he wanted.”

The sirens in the distance were a conflicting distraction for Mulder as he looked over his shoulder at the empty doorway as Skinner’s voice went static in his ears. He couldn’t think anymore or fathom what was about to happen as the sirens grew closer with each passing second. He couldn’t stop thinking about Scully and wishing that he could’ve protected her from this, even if his presence may have only made the entire situation so much worse. The static became almost a ringing in his ears as the sirens joined with the flashing lights of the patrol units, firetruck, and medic that had been dispatched to the scene. Skinner was the first to walk into the building with Max barely a pace behind him, both with sobered expressions. They were both saying his name but he couldn’t hear the words until Skinner was right up in his face with a hand to his shoulder.

“Mulder,” Skinner squeezed Mulder’s shoulder and watched his eyes refocus with a blink.

Mulder nodded and hung up the phone that was still in his hand, sliding it into his pocket. “She was alone for less than 40 minutes.”

“Was anyone outside when you left?” Skinner didn’t need an explanation for why they were already together at this time of the morning as he could see that this was wrecking Mulder completely.
“It was quiet when I left for the grocery store—no one parked out front except what is still parked out there,” Mulder took a deep breath as he pictured her face, pictured her screaming for his help, reaching out to him.

The mental image alone was enough for Mulder to throw the figurative pillow over his sadness and concentrate on the emotions that could keep him considerably tougher—for her. Nothing mattered more than finding her, alive and safe. She was already too close to this case and adding her to the victim list was putting more pressure on them to solve this case. Skinner nodded at Mulder as he moved beyond the doorway, the shock not present like it had been for Mulder, almost as though he had prepared himself to see so much worse.

“We need to photograph everything before we allow anyone into the apartment,” Skinner looked over at Max, who already had one of the cameras ready to go.

“I need to go in there,” Mulder was headstrong and his nostrils were flaring at the mere thought of not being able to assist right away, putting more time between him and Scully.

“Mulder, let me walk the grid. I will need your eyes on the scene after I walk the grid,” Max was almost commanding but had an air of gentleness with Mulder, as though he was speaking to a brother who was confiding in him. “We’ll get this son of a bitch, I promise you.”

Mulder blinked hard and nodded at Max, showing the softest amount of gratitude that he could, under the circumstance despite dying a little inside as he felt even more helpless than he did before. Max was contemplative and quiet otherwise as he held the camera to his chest, his fingers halfway shaking with anticipation of what he wasn’t quite ready or prepared for. Max took a deep breath and entered the room, his shoes crunching the edge of the groceries that Mulder had dropped. Skinner and Mulder took a step back and allowed Max to photograph everything, starting with the door. He took a clinical approach to it as he kept telling himself that it was just bodily fluids and not her physical body he was photographing. The singular thought alone is what kept him from losing it as he painstakingly took each little shot of the mess in the kitchen.

*This isn't right. How could we miss the signs?* Max was almost angry at himself.

The living room caught his eye as he found the bloody glass that had hit Miles in the face and shattered further on the floor. He photographed it carefully, taking note of the difference in the coloration, the texture, the pooling pattern…he knew it wasn’t hers. Max had red numerical markers in his pockets from the evidence kits in Skinner’s SUV and placed one next to the pile, photographing it after placing it. Max hadn’t walked a grid in a real crime scene before and walking it in Scully’s was bringing up all of the wrong kind of discomfort as he felt his stomach twisting in knots, the unimaginable thoughts running through his mind no matter how hard he tried to keep them at bay. He continued into the space between the living room and the bedroom, photographing the area where the first set of broken glass originated and photographed her fingerprints on the drawer of the bureau. He adjusted the zoom on the lens to get a detailed image of the print. He turned and went into the bedroom, the curtains open and blowing in the wind, snow half drifting onto the dresser with each small gust that caught it and carried it inside. The photographs were quick in the bedroom, but he took extra ones of the boot print on the dresser before heading for the bathroom.

Max didn’t have to go very far into the bathroom to know that it all started there as he saw the discarded, spent syringe in the sink, the tip covered in blood and the remnants of the medication that had once been inside of it. Max photographed it and as he was about to reach into his pocket to retrieve an evidence bag a thud from inside of the shower stall stopped him in his tracks. He turned around and opened the shower door, only to find that the camera had dislodged
itself from the adhesive and was now on the bottom of the shower. He awkwardly maneuvered the camera with one hand while his other pulled an evidence bag from his pocket to pick it up without compromising it.

“Mulder, you’re going to want to look at this!” Max’s voice had a sense of urgency behind it as he turned it slowly in his hands.

Mulder walked all the way into the apartment, his mind elsewhere as he stepped carefully through each room, avoiding blood and glass along the way. He met Max in the doorway and the camera was immediately staring at him almost as though it were neon in color and flashing. His stomach was in knots thinking about it as Max held it out to him, carefully rolling it into the evidence bag to avoid physical contact with it entirely. Mulder knew that there was only one real possibility of where that camera had been but part of him didn’t want it to be real as he felt the question brewing in his belly, the realization that something Miles might have seen spurred the abduction becoming more real as he looked at the device perched in Max’s hand.

“Where was that camera?” Mulder pointed at it, almost not wanting to look Max in the eye as the possibilities flashed through his mind.

“Shower, it fell from the shower head,” Max started to adjust the seal as though he were going to collect it as evidence and made eye contact with him.

“Max, if that camera has a physical memory—then that means I am on that physical memory bank,” Mulder knew that he couldn’t let the FBI be the one to uncover the borderline pornographic chain of events between himself and Scully, moreso for her sake than his own.

Max made a face, almost shrugging his shoulders like the statement didn’t make a damn bit of sense to him. “Yeah? So am I…taking a leak. So what?”

Mulder lowered his voice, closed his eyes while he internally battled with the realization that Max was entirely too naïve for this, and didn’t want to say the words but knew that Max wasn’t going to hand it over without a reasonable explanation. “Jesus Christ…I wasn’t taking a leak and I wasn’t alone, Max, do you catch my drift yet?”

“You have got to be kidding me right now—when did all of this happen? Wait, no, I don’t want to know,” Max scrambled with his words, stuttering like a sweaty teenager. “What do you expect me to do? Forget that it’s evidence?”

“Max, it will go into the chain of evidence, but I can’t let this case not only cause Scully’s suffering but ruin her life as well,” Mulder knew that analyzing the camera was a priority, but her life would be turned more upside down than it already was.

“They’ll separate you in a heartbeat and won’t even allow you to assist in finding her,” Max’s eyes glassed over as he thought about the harsh truth in knowing that Mulder would be forcibly removed from the case with any truth revealed to a physical relationship between himself and Scully.

Mulder looked at the bloody prints on the wall once more, the pain written on his face as he thought again about the sweetest of moments being destroyed at the hand of one, crazed individual. “Don’t do it to save my ass, do it for Scully—she doesn’t deserve the extra mudslinging because of me. She didn’t ask her crackpot, dumbass partner to fall head over ass for her.”

He hadn’t quite made that illusion of being in love with Scully but reality had slid him carefully into that truth, into the domain that had gone unsaid for so long. It was all meant for her
lips but fate had a fucked up way of turning their lives upside down and shutting the lights off with an expectation they’d easily be able to rearrange it all correctly all over again. Mulder wasn’t looking at rescuing Scully as simply being able find her safe and sound—it was about bringing her back home to finally let her be the one to hear him say it, to know it was real. Everything he had left already belonged to her.

“I’m going with you this time, then, that’s the condition of walking out of here with unmarked evidence in your pocket,” Max was already starting to sound like the weirdest hybrid of Scully and Skinner as he handed Mulder the camera, his brow furrowed far enough down that if he had long eyelashes they would’ve tangled easily.

Mulder took the evidence bag with the camera in it and slid it into his pocket, his mind focused on getting it to The Lone Gunmen as quickly as he could. “We need to get this to my source immediately—the sooner, the better.”

“What kind of excuse are you going to tell Skinner about why we both need to leave?” Max still had the camera in his hand, the energy in the room cold, bewildering.

“You have evidence that has to be taken back to the lab for processing, Max, you do realize that, don’t you?” Mulder tapped on the camera, doing his best to stay completely focused on anything but the haphazard mess that Scully’s apartment had been left in. “You need these to be developed…and processed.”

“Oh shit, yeah, that’s right, I can get the syringe,” Max put the camera in Mulder’s capable hands before sliding his hand into a rubber glove to retrieve the syringe from the bathroom sink. “I forgot to bag it when I heard the camera fall.”

Mulder’s heart sank at the word ‘syringe’ and almost vomited at the sight of it in the bag as Max came back out from the bathroom, holding it carefully to not poke a hole through the not-quite-thick-enough plastic evidence bag. The thoughts running through Mulder’s head were already horrendous and seeing the syringe in an unlabeled bag was only making him picture the moment it happened. He needed to get the camera to the Lone Gunmen sooner rather than later as the horrors of what Scully endured were coming into focus, despite the fact that he hadn’t witnessed a moment of it. He tapped Max on the shoulder and gestured toward the front door, nodding toward it. Their focus on leaving was short lived as the sound of a woman’s half panicked voice carrying in the hallway shouting “this is my daughter’s apartment” pulled them immediately into the hallway. Scully’s mother had a knack for showing up at the most inopportune times—and he had kept her from entering the crime scene once before, simply to prevent her from thinking about the possibilities. Skinner had disappeared outside or he would’ve done the same as Mulder was doing as he stepped into the hallway where she was staring down two officers, who were preventing her from nearing the doorway.

“Mrs. Scully?” Mulder put the camera back into Max’s hands as he came out of the apartment with him, following just a couple of steps behind him.

“Where is she?” Maggie had that same stubborn fire in her eyes that Scully possessed as she shifted her expression from glaring at the officers to looking at him, her expression considerably more lost. “Where is she?”

The déjà vu was almost painful as he could almost hear that same voice on his answering machine all over again screaming for his help. He wanted to puke as the moment was more familiar than he needed it to feel—and he almost lost her, then, in so many more ways than simply her abduction. This was different, though, and in so many ways, it was worse. Duane Barry assisted in the downward spiral but Miles was about to shatter the remnants of the glass that held it all
Mulder inhaled and exhaled in a puff, struggling with the right words to say that wouldn’t send off her immediate panic mechanism. “She’s not here…we are looking for her.”

“Her landlord said they got a call that someone in the building could hear her screaming,” Maggie started to move forward but Mulder blocked her again, this time putting his hands on her shoulders.

“Mrs. Scully, trust me when I say this—even if I could let you go in there right now, you don’t want to,” Mulder could barely make eye contact with her, remembering her abduction all over again.

The police and FBI on scene had started to flood into the apartment, both inside and out, to scour for prints, hints of more than just Scully’s presence, and clues to where Miles would take her. Mulder pressed a hand to Maggie’s shoulder and led her away from the door, toward the door to the courtyard where all of the flashing lights were coming from. She tensed up, the emotions well controlled despite the situation.

“It’s that case you’ve been working on isn’t it?” Maggie wasn’t one to sugar coat anything when she was angry, emotional, or confused and she happened to be all three as she willingly went outside with Mulder.

“There’s a very distinct possibility of that, Mrs. Scully,” Mulder couldn’t lie to her, nor would he have tried to. “She was alone for less than forty minutes when this happened—we are not far behind them. I will find her; I promise I will find her…I have to.”

Max was more than aware of what those words meant as he could hear the inflection in Mulder’s voice as he disappeared around the corner looking for Skinner while Maggie let a solitary tear fall down her cheek. She looked up at the man before her and could see his blood shot eyes, the shiny creases where tears had formed and died along the space where cheek met nose, in the corners of his eyes. Something in him had changed since the last time she witnessed him fight for her like this—something had grown, something had sparked. It was more than a promise as she nodded at him and stared at the snow on the sidewalk.

Maggie knew he was being sincere as she pulled him into a very motherly embrace, the shadow of sadness mutual between them. “I know you mean every word of that. You have always looked out for her. She needs you and you need her.”

*She is the air I breathe.*

He wanted to say it, he wanted to shout it. Part of him felt like maybe, deep down, Maggie Scully already knew that he was in love with her daughter but had chosen to keep it close to the vest but Mulder didn’t think that he was that transparent. Although, he also knew that the Scully women seemed to have an alarmingly amazing skillset for completely disarming him and seeing right through his very nature, into the parts of him that he skillfully kept hidden from just about anyone else…his own mother included. Even Melissa, who spent very little time around him, had him rattled in just under a minute. It was an unnerving personality trait—but it was also, undeniably, part of what drew him toward Scully.

Mulder nodded, his emotions half teetering on the edge of becoming overwhelming as he looked at the mother of the woman he’d held in his arms just over an hour ago. “You’re right; I do need her…more than I could say in words. Just trust me again to bring her home?”
“Agent Mulder, go find my daughter,” Maggie’s words were soft but to the point as she squeezed his hand.

The words were simple and short but struck a nerve deep within Mulder’s psyche as he swallowed hard, staring out into the powder drift like a waiting abyss. He knew what was waiting for him out there as his thoughts centered on finding Scully—and never letting her go again.

Chapter End Notes

I need to deliver a couple of quick thank you's to Jun Mai, Vicky Williams, Megan E Kelly, Monika Michelle Cross, Lee Hughes, and Stephanie Nicole for the endless laughs, tears, and feedback on getting this fic THIS far -- you are all as close to beta readers as I have ever had and I truly appreciate you all.
Chapter Summary

Romanticizing his victims, a brutal murderer leaves behind symbols of love…but who is his true, intended target and what lengths will he go to get her to notice?
Post “Agua Mala” (Season 6 with mentions of “Rain King”, “Two Fathers”, and “One Son” Briefly and only for context purposes)

**** AHHHHHHH Oh MY GOD...The actual final sentences got erased from the end of the chapter; please re-read if you haven't already ****

Chapter Notes

Graphic descriptions of violence – Please don’t hate me for what I have done; Strength and resilience is birthed out of adversity and pain.
It is pivotal and matters.

Disclaimer: Agent Scully, Agent Mulder, Agent Skinner, Agent Fowley, Margaret Scully, and the Lone Gunmen belong respectively to Chris Carter, FOX Productions, and TenThirteen Productions. All other characters are original and any likeness or named similarities to any real-life persons are purely coincidental (unless, well, you’ve been told, then you should’ve expected such things)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

7:30 AM
The Lone Gunmen HQ

The drive was the worst kind of a blur, teetering between wanting to pull over to throw up and shouting at anyone who may have inquired about why he looked like shit, even more to even realize why he felt as bad as he looked. It was one of the more painful feelings to deal with as Mulder glanced down at the snow on the ground, momentarily getting lost in the haze that surrounded his feet. Mulder wasn’t the kind of guy to lose the ability to be controlled enough not to panic but it was a completely different realm when it concerned the health and well-being of Scully. When she wasn’t there with him, part of him was missing to the extreme that nothing felt right, and his ordinarily normal sense was something completely unattainable. He wasn’t himself in the slightest and the nagging restlessness taking shape in his mind was only making it worse as Max had to clear his throat to bring him back to reality. Mulder followed the pathway up to the door and pressed the intercom button, waiting for the words to follow, waiting for the inquisitive questioning about where the pretty little redhead was and who the stiff next to him was. He wasn’t ready for any of it and the answer was bitter in his mouth like a pill that had begun to break down before he could swallow.
“Where’s my girl and why’d you bring an extra set of testicles?” Frohike’s voice was unamused as he came over the intercom with the intent of a Doberman behind the façade of a Chihuahua.

Mulder hid the bloodshot, swollen eyes from the intrusive stare of the camera lens as he impatiently rocked in his boots. “I’m not explaining this from out here, Frohike, let me in.”

*Let me get through this, let me get through this, let me get through this.* Mulder inhaled a deep breath.

The buzzer preceded the release of the door locks as Mulder cranked open the door handle, pushing his way inside. Byers and Langly were at separate work stations, eagerly monitoring the same camera from earlier along with scanning through police frequencies for any hint of a clue they could give to Mulder and Scully’s ongoing casefile. They barely raised their heads from their work while Frohike stayed seated on the maroon couch that Scully had fallen asleep on a time or two, maneuvering through news clippings with a joystick on the monitor in front of him. It was business as usual as Mulder brought the dark cloud with him and Max along for the ride, it seemed. Mulder made eye contact with Frohike first, who stood up from the couch, more concern on his face than he knew what to do with as he saw the sullen, downtrodden expression written all over Mulder’s face.

“You look like shit, what the hell happened?” Frohike was all bark but his familial respect for Mulder ran deep as he walked over toward him, the worry working into his voice.

Mulder hadn’t fully made the connection to the words but he felt it rattle around as he spoke, the hum turned almost hiss-like as the words tasted bitter on the back of his tongue. “I don’t know how else to say this but the suspect broke into Scully’s apartment this morning…he has Scully…I need your help.”

Byers and Langly were on their feet without a second’s hesitation, both taken aback by the words that had left Mulder’s lips like a kick to the gut. This was something they had all experienced with Mulder before, but the intensity had changed; Mulder was distant, like he was replaying what he hadn’t witnessed, to keep from losing his mind. Max could hear the air leave the room as he watched Frohike, Byers, and Langly get caught momentarily in the headlights of that oncoming, figurative semi, ready for the impending wreck to happen. He had to do something, anything, to get them to focus on finding Scully, even if it meant butting his head into their domain without so much as an introduction.

“We found a camera in Agent Scully’s bathroom that might help us locate her or give us a clue about the motivation for her being taken,” Max could hear the air leaving Mulder as he almost had to push the air out.

The break in the silence was more than enough for Frohike to retrieve an Old-Fashioned Rocks glass from their small array of vintage alcohols and subsequent glassware, pouring at least two shots of Old Fitzgerald bourbon into it. It wasn’t something that Mulder indulged in at any time of the day, but it didn’t matter to Frohike, under the circumstance, as he extended his hand toward Mulder with the amber liquid inside of it. Mulder stared at it for a second in contemplation before accepting it, knowing that Frohike wasn’t going to take no for an answer. Something told him that the almost maple syrup and wedding cake flavored fluid was going to be the only thing keeping him from losing it completely.

“Something tells me we’re all going to need one of these—sooner rather than later,”
Frohike could see Mulder’s hand shaking, the untouched liquid still in the glass.

“Thanks, Frohike, probably more than a little bit right about that,” Mulder awkwardly maneuvered the glass into his left hand while he reached into his pocket with the right and pulled the evidence bag containing the camera from it, giving it to Langly as he came around to the front of the work station. “I know that some of these smaller cameras have internal memory devices—I’d like to see what this guy was watching and exactly how long he was sneaking a peek.”

Langly went to an A/V setup and pulled a cord from the back of the monitor on the stand, plugging it into the side of the camera where a port was. “If there’s an internal memory this will pick it up from the minute the camera was activated. It’s also got a low light filter so anything in the dark will appear in automated grayscale.”

“How did it happen, Mulder?” Byers could see that he was falling away to an unhealthy, silent place as he stared forward at the monitor, despite being surrounded by the people that knew him best other than the petite redhead missing from his side.

Mulder swirled the glass and watched the liquid spin before taking a tremendous gulp of it. It wasn’t enough to finish the entire contents of the rocks glass, but it was a considerable amount that burned the back of his throat as he swallowed the room temperature liquid, the flavor barely savored, barely hinted as anything more than a hint of sweet and a tingle of the wheat underneath. His face reflected the tinge of the burn as he winced and inhaled a deep almost necessary breath before looking toward Byers, a haze in front of him as he struggled not to think.

“I don’t know how it happened, but I know that I was gone from the apartment for about forty minutes and in that time, she was forcibly taken—her apartment is a mess. That’s how the camera was discovered, it fell from the shower head,” Mulder knew what would be on that physical memory and his heart and brain, while normally in staunch disagreement, didn’t give a shit about it anymore, he just wanted her back.

“That son of a bitch must’ve been after her for months—just waiting for an opportunity,” Frohike was incensed over the idea of Scully being abducted by some crazed lunatic again.

“That might be the only positive that has come from him stupidly taking Scully—it’s her plumber, Miles Canton,” Mulder balled up his fist, the name building up the rage inside of him as he glanced over at Frohike. “He knew she’d open the door for him…there wasn’t a reason to suspect a fucking thing.”

“Borderline disorders are harder to detect in a person being medicated, Mulder…no one could’ve known that this guy was sick enough to snatch eleven women let alone an FBI Agent from her own home,” Langly was adjusting wires on the camera until the battery finally switched back on, giving him the ability to review the physical memory. “We’re in luck, the memory on this camera can go up to seven full days—and the memory meter isn’t full.”

“It’ll auto start at the moment the camera was switched on and we’ll know how long this guy has been spying on Scully,” Byers was more rigid in his stance than usual as he stood in front of the monitor with his arms crossed, his multicolored, crisscross pattered tie sticking out like a sore thumb against the plain black and white of his shirt and jacket combination. “Plus, I’m sure we’ll know exactly what set him off.”

Mulder already had a pretty solid idea of what set Miles off but the confirmation that he had witnessed it through this highly illegal and intrusive device is what would give him a good idea of how well this had been hidden along with how long. The first few moments of the filmed incidents were illuminating as it showed Miles backing away from the shower head after applying
the camera to the spot of his choice, where he gathered up his toolbox on the floor. Mulder was still holding the remaining Bourbon in his hand, holding the glass with the tips of his fingers along the rim. It was another subtle reminder as he could still taste the bitter aftertaste on his tongue.

“Mulder, are you seeing what I’m seeing?” Max was fixated on the presence of the bloody instruments in the bottom of the toolbox that stuck out like a sore thumb amongst the top layer of pristine, almost new tools.

Mulder nodded as he watched the body language as well. “Yeah, Maximus, I do—he had bloody tools in Scully’s apartment just days ago and I was sitting in her living room when this happened. I took her home to get cleaned up after Victoria was discovered alive.”

“If he had an unhealthy obsession with Scully, it isn’t out of the realm of possibility that seeing you sitting on the couch is the catalyst,” Byers wasn’t looking at the screen anymore as Langly was running through the tape in an accelerated forward motion to get through the sequential faster.

“Yeah, about that—”

“Wait, what in the hell is that—Jesus Christ, Mulder, this might be enough to fry a processor!” Langly had clearly gotten to the significantly less PG portion of the video as he cut Mulder off in mid-sentence, his voice half cracking as he didn’t exactly know how react to what he was seeing on camera.

“The timing could not be more awkward since I was about to give you a heads up about exactly that,” Mulder was blushing despite the seriousness of the situation as he looked upon himself undressing Scully in her bathroom, seeming as though they had been doing this for a long time.

Byers turned his head toward the screen as the resume play was pressed half unintentionally by Langly, the dialogue that had occurred between Mulder and Scully already slightly audible as the camera did have an audio pickup, “This turned into something slightly more pornographic than I was intending on visualizing today.”

“Byers, how are you not a virgin still?” Langly wrinkled his nose at Byers, the clear questioning of his verbiage in regards to Mulder and Scully on display.

Byers shot Langly a dirty look while Mulder contemplated the seduction being played out on a small screen that he had partaken in just a few short days earlier. The recollection was vivid and unrelenting as he could hear her voice echoing through the speakers, ringing in his ears, reminding him that she was waiting for him to come find her. He tilted his head and looked at the screen while his brain shouted at him to finish the drink in his hand as he instinctively swirled it again. The sounds weren’t helping the situation as he continued to turn a delightful shade of pink from his ears to his nose while his friends witnessed the events of that night play out before them. It was necessary despite the way it could’ve embarrassed a lesser man.

“Well, I’ll be damned, you sly dog…you’re sitting here wondering what the catalyst might’ve been but maybe it was witnessing you two fogging up the bathroom mirror like cats in heat,” Frohike hadn’t been fully paying attention until he could hear Scully’s voice coming through the speakers over the sound of the shower water along with Mulder’s. “How long has THAT been going on? Spare no details—I can take it.”

Mulder didn’t know whether to be proud of himself or throw himself out a nearby high rise window as he could hear the little word game playing out over a monitor, hovering over the
words ‘in position’ that left Scully’s lips. “Not that it necessarily is pertinent at all but that was the first time.”

*Mulder, stop talking, stop drinking the bourbon, just stop.* He wasn’t usually so forthcoming with details about anything regarding his professional life so being so free with his mouth over his personal life was unheard of—it had to be the bourbon, it was the only explanation.

“Could’ve fooled me,” Max was the peanut gallery again, the grin almost unreal as he could see Mulder awkwardly shifting in his boots, while the shock in the room was becoming closer to elation for something that they had all seen coming for a long time.

Mulder didn’t even look at him as he muttered from behind his palm, acquiescing to knowing that he might need another glass of Bourbon if this shit kept going. “Maximus, you’re not helping in the slightest.”

“Is this why you two were seducing each other with your eyes yesterday? It was obvious,” Langly wasn’t pressing the forward button much to Mulder’s chagrin as they all looked at him almost judgingly for the answer.

“Not that we don’t approve of this development, because, well, I think I can speak for all of us when I say that we do, but I’m getting the idea that if something hadn’t happened to Scully that this would have remained safely anonymous,” Byers was the ever-rational of the bunch as he turned the moment into a meeting of the minds, pointing out the obvious while carefully concealing his own slightly pink cheeks.

Mulder glanced at the screen just as he had offered her the opportunity to back out, the situation marking the irony as the passionate had become voyeuristic and pornographic in nature—but he couldn’t look away from it. It was still raw, tugging at the spaces of his heart that had been carefully unfolded by her, and was part of the reason he was still upright as he held onto the notion of just how much she meant to him. The visualization was more than a reminder for him as he watched the moment that she guided his hand along her thigh high, the response more visceral as he brought a hand to his mouth, taking notice at just how much synchronicity they had shared, how well they knew one another’s triggers. It was in that moment that he finished the bourbon in his hand and set the glass deftly on the desk in front of him, the liquid courage already affecting the way in which he was able to freely let his lips loosen to speak about it, about her.

“I really can’t answer that, Byers, but Maximus already knew that something was developing with Scully,” Mulder was swirling with the ‘love’ word on the tip of his tongue, her voice staggering his pulse just enough to worry him. “Anonymity may have been completely unattainable—unwanted even.”

“I think you need another, Mulder,” Frohike took the glass from the desk in front of Mulder and went to the liquor. “Any other takers or am I only pouring two?”

The shock was real, the reaction was undeniable, and the figurative crater growing in the middle of the room was enough that everyone in the room nodded in response. Frohike poured the bourbon, one by one, into the thick Old-fashioned rocks glasses and handed them out to each of them. Max didn’t drink, or at least he didn’t drink bourbon, but he took the glass willingly and nodded in Frohike’s direction as though accepting the rite of passage along with them—acceptance of becoming part of what Mulder always thought of as the family that existed after his blood family came crashing down. This was the family that picked up the pieces and the missing part was Scully.

Byers held his glass between his fingers and looked at the expression on Mulder’s face
before taking a light, conservative sip of the bourbon, the redness in his face forming almost immediately after the liquid hit the back of his throat. This couldn’t be reality, they all were thinking it simultaneously, but it was. Langly almost passed over his drink entirely as he looked at it and set it down, his focus almost entirely on helping to uncover anything that they could to continue the investigation. Everything was thoroughly a mess, but they at least had strength and the intestinal fortitude to push forward, despite the graveness of it all.

Frohike almost couldn’t look at Mulder as he watched him cradle the refilled glass in his hands. The drink had become more than simply taking the edge off, more than taking a little bit of the pain away…it had morphed into the most stinging reminder of the brevity that surrounded them on a daily basis. It was enough to weigh so heavily on Frohike’s mind that he took one hell of a swig of his bourbon simply to put it at the back of his mind. This was the sort of situation that would have driven any other person straight off the ledge into full blown alcoholism and he was hanging by mere threads.

“This isn’t placing blame on you, Mulder, but this definitely would explain what made our suspect lose complete grip on reality and even push the timeline up a bit,” Max didn’t realize how they had become completely oblivious to the actual video feed until no one was even looking at the screen other than Mulder but everyone was contemplating the drinks in front of them or within their little grasps.

The camera had gotten a little lost in the haze of steam from the shower but managed to stay fog free as Mulder could hear the door clicking into place, the half bantering between them only continuing. “Run it forward, guys, there are partitioned video stores for this kind of stuff…ones without me or Scully in the leading roles.”

Langly glanced at Mulder as he pressed the forward button to hasten the video along silently. “About how long were you in there?”

Mulder ran a hand through his hair, running back through the timeline in his head. “A little over an hour.”

“Wait, this was the night before you two acted completely taken by surprise over the idea that anyone might think you’re having sex,” Max noticed the time stamp at the bottom of the screen, crossed his arms and gave Mulder look that could only be describe in two words ‘guilt trip’.

Frohike held back a laugh from behind his glass of liquor as Max was seemingly fitting in with their dysfunctional little group better than anyone that Mulder had introduced to them other than Scully. Mulder rolled his eyes, took a generous swig of the bourbon, and started to address Max’s comment but the image of Miles flashing onto the screen at the time stamp of 4:15 AM caught him by surprise.

“Langly, pause it,” Mulder’s blood boiled as Langly quickly pressed the pause function, keeping the screen carefully locked on to where he could clearly see Miles in the shot.

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“Jesus, Mary, and Joseph—Mulder, you were still in the apartment with Scully when this happened, weren’t you?” Frohike was sitting on his desk, his hands barely balancing what was left of the cup of coffee from an hour ago, the horror written on his face in equal measure to the anger flowing through Mulder’s veins.

“This would explain why the window in the bedroom was open when I woke up,” Mulder could feel the vomit up in his throat at the mere idea of Miles standing at the foot of Scully’s bed while they slept, let alone staying in the apartment for any length of time completely unnoticed.
“What was he doing?” Byers noticed that in the video, Miles had his body turned toward the window.

“Giving himself an out,” Mulder sipped the bourbon this time, the sting no longer visually affecting his expression as he watched the monitor over the edge of the glass.

Langly pressed the play button and the haunting chain of events unfolded in front of them as Miles crossed the bathroom to the window, unlocked it slowly to not disturb the incredible quiet inside of Scully’s apartment. He looked like he had a mission to complete as he carefully turned the locks until they slipped from the mechanism, the window giving just enough that it was obvious the window was no longer securely locked. Mulder sucked in a breath as Miles hesitated in the bathroom a bit longer to invade more of Scully’s personal space; playing with the bottles of bath oil, inhaling the fragrance left behind on all of the unlit candles, taking in all of the different odors until the whites of his eyes were clearly visible from the half-high of indulging in smelling each one as though he were sampling in a department store. It was disturbing but it didn’t end there as went to the towel hanging next to the shower and was sniffing it like a proper creep would.

“Run it forward until the moment he attacked her,” Mulder’s heart was beating with such magnitude that his ears were pulsing with each vibration.

The room was tense as Frohike had turned his attention back to the screen while Langly ran the tape forward more. It was almost like the room was in slow motion, the screen almost like static as Mulder stood, watching with bated breath as the minutes shifted to hours, day to night and back again. He knew it was coming they sped through Scully’s post-coital shower that seemed to last forever, almost delaying the inevitable as she disappeared from the space. Langly allowed the sequence of events to play at regular speed again, the anxiety only rising into his chest. He knew what was coming but it wasn’t going to make seeing it any easier as he could see Scully drying her hair with the towel, setting it aside, and coming up from the slightly bent positioning as the syringe met skin with Miles sneaking up behind her, the equalizer applied.

“Mulder, you don’t need to keep watching this—we know what happened,” Max could already see that he was falling apart all over again and worse than he had when he and Skinner arrived at Scully’s apartment.

Mulder held up his free hand toward Max and shook his head, almost in a silencing motion. “I need to see everything that lead to the mess inside of that apartment…”

“God dammit, you’re infuriatingly stubborn,” Max felt helpless as he downed the last of the liquor resting at the bottom of his glass, the burn reminding him of everything that had gone wrong, of everything that hung precariously in the balance.

Mulder’s focus was almost entirely on gathering the last of his wits as he watched Scully retreat against the wall under the window, listening to the tirade from Miles about being able to smell Mulder on her. The message was loud, clear, and definitive. Mulder could hear the staggering in her voice as she was attempting to reason with him, the panic written on her face. Byers, Frohike, Langly, and Max were hearing all of this along with him and could tell that there was truth in the words as Miles continued on with his ranting, emphasizing that he had been listening to them the night before from outside the apartment. It was all too clear that Miles had been scouting Scully out for a long time, that she had been the key to not only what drove him, but his undoing as well. He was losing his patience with her and she was so much stronger than he expected.

“That’s my Scully,” Mulder had tears again as he watched her punch and kick her way out of the bathroom like he had witnessed her do a thousand times over.
Langly knew the video was only going to capture the background noise of the abduction as he pressed the forward button until the camera fell and the screen went dark, sparing Mulder from that bitter little reminder of what happened. It was a means to an end and even Mulder felt relief in not being able to hear her screaming or the glass breaking—he was already half broken on the inside as he set his empty rocks glass on the desk in front of him and caught glances with Byers, who had just downed the last of the bourbon in his own glass, his cheeks bright red from the chemically induced heat flowing through him. Mulder wasn’t good at knowing when to stop, nor was he good at adjusting his methodology once again—to face a demon that had taken something precious away like a thief in the night.

“We are going to run the signal through on the camera itself to see if the remote location comes back on again—we will keep monitoring it,” Langly was already setting up another triangulation device for the second camera while Byers came around to the front of the desk.

Frohike scooted behind his desk and started typing away at the keyboard. “I’m already looking up information on Miles—we’ll catch this son of a bitch, Mulder.”

“Call Skinner, tell him about the timeline, tell him that we are doing everything we can—tell him that he knows where to find us,” Mulder looked over at Max and blinked hard, the tears halfway down his cheeks. “We have to find her.”

“We will, Mulder, we will.”

10:30 AM
Lakeview Drive (Lake Barcroft)
Falls Church, VA

Scully didn’t know how long she had been unconscious, but it had been a while as the fog of the medication still drowsily moving through her veins started to lift. Just about every part of her body hurt whether it be from the shards of glass that punctured through her skin or where she crashed against furniture, floor, and the wall. The nausea followed as the light filtered through her eyelashes, sending another wave of pain from behind her eyes, to the crown of her head, and down her spine. The sensation induced a dull whine from Scully’s lips that was met with resistance as the air pressed against the tape still firmly in place. She wanted to pull it off but she couldn’t quite get her arms to cooperate with her as she couldn’t so much as will them to lift from the cement floor. It was uncomfortable all over, and her mind was already on Mulder knowing that he would be blaming himself for the abduction—that he had likely found the apartment in a heap, evidence of her struggle everywhere.

“Come on, sweetie, wake up,” Jeanette’s voice was a mixture of soothing and frighteningly jarring to Scully as it brought her back to the realization that she was in the wasp’s nest, the last place she wanted to be. “I’m going to pull the tape off—I’m sorry if it hurts.”

Scully’s eye lids bobbed open and closed almost in slow motion as she battled internally with the horrendous reality of where she was along with who she was with. She moved her limbs
and felt the heavy tug of the metal around her wrists and ankles keeping her half in place, giving her only a short indication of movement that she could have. She nodded, not knowing if Jeanette was beside her or behind her, and felt her shaky, delicate fingers gather the edge of the tape before pulling it off in a soft, yet unyielding motion. It stung like crazy but felt liberating to be able to move her lips freely as she winced and pressed her lips together, covering the whimper just enough that sound barely left her mouth. Jeanette wiped Scully’s hair out of her face and lightly touched the fresh forming bruises from the multiple backhands to the face from Miles. The sensation was enough to make Scully let out a low, hollow sounding cry that made Jeanette recoil almost immediately.

“Shit, I’m sorry,” Jeanette felt terrible but she wanted to make sure that Scully’s cheekbone wasn’t fractured considering how badly she was already bruised up.

It was cold in the room despite the fact that she could smell the deep, ashy odor of burning wood from the corner where the furnace was pumping out just enough heat to keep the temperature halfway bearable. The floor was wet in spots where Miles had scrubbed away the remnants of blood from the unapologetic killing of Kaya. The entire room reeked of death and sent an alarming shiver down Scully’s spine as she recalled the vast amounts of torture that all of the previous victims had experienced—realizing that she was there, in the thick of it. Scully could still smell the bleach as she turned her head from left to right, struggling to maneuver away the last of the fuzziness left behind from the liquid that had been injected into her neck.

“Let me lift up your head, you’re going to rub your head raw,” Jeanette was trying to slide her knees underneath of Scully’s head to get her head and shoulder’s off of the floor. “You’ve got a nasty bump back there.”

“How long have I been out?” Scully was weak from the after effects of the medication as she could feel Jeanette’s ripped skirt underneath of the back of her head along with the chill of her skin against the knot on the back of her head.

“Awhile, I don’t have any way of knowing exactly how long you’ve been down here— but long enough,” Jeanette was relieved that Scully was awake. “What’s your name?”

“Scully,” Scully pushed her hands underneath of her, desperately trying to sit up, but only further pushed the glass into her hands, coaxing a loud, painful cry out of her lungs. “Shit!”

“Be careful, you’ve got glass in your palms,” Jeanette helped her to a seated position against the wall and took her by both hands, carefully tilting both hands until her palms were face up. “Don’t tell me that your first name is Scully...because that might be a little much.”

Scully watched as Jeanette pulled each little shard out of her palms with the tips of her fingers, paying careful attention to the smaller pieces. “It’s Dana...Dana Scully.”

Jeanette’s stomach rolled as she looked at the slightly more petite redhead sitting against the wall before her, with her well-fitting, lightly worn jeans and black, long sleeved cardigan already a mess and nearly leaped out of her skin with two syllable name that left Scully’s lips. “Oh no...you’re her...”

“What?” Scully swallowed hard and noticed that Jeanette was almost refusing to make eye contact with her while she pulled glass from her hands.

“You’re her—the woman that he keeps calling me,” Jeanette sucked in a deep breath and looked Scully in the eyes, her hands shaking even more than they were earlier. “I am so sorry.”
“What does that mean?” Scully already had a feeling in the back of her half-rattled mind as the words came out of her mouth and watched Jeanette pull the last of the glass from her palm. “Dammit, that hurts.”

Jeanette could feel every wound on her body simultaneously crying out at once as she looked at Scully’s small, yet strong frame bearing the weight of the shackles around her wrists and ankles. “I think I got all of the pieces from your hands…he did a number on you just to get you here.”

“Jeanette, what do you mean that I’m her?” Scully knew her face from the missing person’s report and the photos that Miles had left in Victoria’s hospital room, the connection already there whether it was wanted or not.

Jeanette was taken aback by Scully using her name since she hadn’t so much as told her yet. “Wait, how did you know my name?”

Scully was in a considerable amount of pain but she knew that the situation was not going to improve before it got worse and Jeanette was already covered in cuts and deep gashes—her body showed all of the telltale signs of torture, right down to the heavy ligature marks from rope, chain, and steel shackles. She was bruised and battered far worse than she had been in the photos that Scully had already seen and the timeline for surviving was growing narrow for her. It wasn’t an option to just pretend that urgency didn’t exist—they didn’t have the time for that and Scully didn’t want to contemplate the kind of torture that Miles already planned for her, let alone anything she might witness for Jeanette.

“Look, I’m not going to sugarcoat it because I don’t know how much time I have till he gets back. I’m a Federal Agent, Jeanette—I’ve been investigating all of the murders as well as your own abduction,” Scully leaned back, pressing her head against the wall behind her, the second wave of dizziness falling over her like a veil.

Jeanette was halfway to tears but her strength was intense as she took a deep, drawn out breath before responding. “Are you telling me that this crazy son of a bitch just abducted a Federal Agent? This shit just went from bad to fucking insane.”

“He already knew—I need you to tell me what you meant, though, by that comment,” Scully started to draw her knees up toward her chest but her feet were still dotted with glass much like her palms were, sending another sizzling jolt of pain up her legs with each little move she made. “Dammit.”

Jeanette slid forward and pulled both of Scully’s legs onto her lap, adjusting her grip on one of Scully’s ankles while she pulled glass again. “That mother fucker keeps calling me Dee and Dana—the only thing that I could possibly gather is that he was obsessed with a woman by that name. I guess I was right, here you are.”

Scully was doing her best to sit still as Jeanette was pulling each little shard of glass from the bottom of her feet, the little bits of already tender flesh becoming rawer with each little tug. Jeanette’s long, curly hair was off to one side, exposing one side of her neck to the semi-dim lighting in the basement just enough that every mark stood out like a sore thumb. Scully knew that some of the marks weren’t from being hit or cut as she noticed the distinct impressions of teeth, the rounding of blistering where pressure was applied and pulled away from her flesh. They were all along the space between her collarbone and her earlobe in a zigzag pattern, purposely avoiding the semi-sliced open flesh from a blade’s cut. The combination of the visible hickey along with the ripped skirt and heavy bruising along her thighs lent undeniable evidence of the change in his patterning was reason for alarm.
“Jeanette, did Miles assault you?” Scully hesitated with the words, even though she knew that the answer was probably exactly as she feared as she looked at the vast resemblance between them despite the length of her hair and height difference.

Jeanette was still removing glass, the word ‘assault’ digging at her like a shovel in dirt despite how much she wanted to forget the whole thing. “He tried…he stopped when he realized that it was me he was on top of after I kicked him.”

“Is that why you’re apologizing to me, Jeanette?” Scully was struggling with her instinctive gag reflex as she thought about the words before they even left her lips. “Whose name was he calling you when he tried?”

Jeanette was already crying, the tears running down her cheeks silently as she thought back on that humiliation, that moment that she was praying for death, almost unwilling to even look at Scully as she sucked air into her lungs to muster up the bravery, her voice meek and broken. “Yours.”

Scully wanted to panic over the change in objective by Miles since he hadn’t made any sort of sexual advances on any of the previous victims until now and something had changed, something had gone completely off his standard course that certainly spelled out disaster for both of them. Scully inhaled a slow breath and took a long, hard look around the room for a strategy—a way out. She knew that Mulder was looking for her but the fear resided in her belly that the pain inflicted might be considerable in the meantime if she couldn’t exploit her surroundings. There were only two ways out—up the stairs and out the sliding glass door. Both shared challenges since they had modifications to the locks but nothing was beyond picking, removal, or completely destroying to break through. The problem that both of them faced with all of this was that they were operating on borrowed time, at the hands of the volatile, the thoroughly unpredictable. Scully wasn’t giving up and she was getting the distinct impression that neither was Jeanette.

“My partner is looking for both of us. He isn’t going to give up on either of us until we are safely away from this and I’m not letting Miles win, not this time,” Scully knew that those words might be easier said than done as she contemplated all of Jeanette’s wounds again, realizing what forty eight hours of torture had done.

“Agent Scully, hours after I was nearly humiliated to the point that all I wanted to do was die, Miles forced me to lie to the last girl that was sitting where you are now. I had to tell her that everything was going to be ok and that she was going to be home, in her bed, comfortable, right before he slit her throat,” Jeanette looked Scully in the eye, the sadness mixing together with the rage buried beneath. “Words don’t mean anything until you are watching a life slip away—knowing that you are next, deep down.”

Scully could feel the emotion radiating off of her and felt the inclination, the impulsion, to reach out her hand, lightly squeezing Jeanette’s forearm to reassure her in any way that she could. “They might just be words but I’m going to fight to get us both out of here—one way or another.”

“I have to ask you, though, who is the guy he keeps talking about that you keep looking at? He kept saying something about a guy while he was being a disgusting prick,” Jeanette was unbelievably sore but she took another deep breath and winced, burying the pain a little deeper.

Scully’s eyes diverted to the floor as she searched for her words, knowing exactly what Miles had already indicated about Mulder earlier and felt the pang of worry hit her subconscious as she allowed the words to materialize. “My partner—Mulder.”
Jeanette wanted to continue to ask questions as she realized the layers of facts that had been undone had actually lead to where she was and even how she was chosen but the heaviness of footsteps above them immediately returned the basement to resonant silence. The maneuvering of keys in the locks from inside the house carried Scully’s attention up the stairwell as far as she could see, the anticipatory pang hitting her like a ton of bricks. She sucked in too much air and nearly choked on it as she saw the light from inside of the main part of the house, followed by his boots as he came into the space. The thin flood of light from inside of the first floor was brief as Miles pulled the door shut, followed by the loud sliding into place of his elaborate locks and mechanisms. Scully had already been thinking of the possible scenarios regarding Miles but nothing quite prepares anyone for until the demon has decided to enter the room.

Be calm. Do not waiver. Scully balled up her fists as she concentrated on breathing gentle, slow paced puffs of air. She blinked slowly as the stairs began to squeak under his heavy, steel toed boots and watched as his entire form began to appear near the middle of the stairwell. He was imposing despite his lack of overall muscle definition—carrying the majority of his weight in his arms, shoulders, chest, and some in his legs. He was on the thinner side but not skinny, less height than Mulder carried. His stare was intense and almost ignored both of their presence as he went to the stereo, where he fiddled with the volume controls and started flipping through the tracks on the disc player until a half cackle left his lips while he pressed the play button.

The introductory notes were enough to send Jeanette into a half panic as she scooted as close to Scully as she could, her entire body shaking with fear over the implications of that song. Even Scully knew what that song meant as she pulled her knees up toward her chest and almost shielded Jeanette despite how futile the attempt might’ve been. Miles stayed near the stereo while the song played, turning just slightly to where he could see both of his hostages huddling together like shaking leafs. He was thoroughly tickled over the concept as he watched Jeanette slide her arm across Scully almost defensively while Scully was maneuvering her knees in such a way that half of Jeanette was fully masked by her. Neither of them could possibly fathom that he had no intention of killing either of them at that moment despite that the song typically indicated as such but he was certainly enjoying the increased level of panic in the room as they immediately started protecting each other, just as he knew they would.

“Dana, Dana, Dana—why’d you have to go and fuck it all up?” He was barely audible above the loudness of the speakers but the words tugged at her like hooks in her skin.

He pulled open the doors to the utility shelf and gathered pulled a box of tools from the bottom shelf, then dragged it to a chair next to a simple, yet effective setup where he could restrain them on the arms of the chair while keeping them firmly affixed at the waist. He had made modifications after Jeanette slid off of the chair the last time he had two people in the basement and wasn’t going to make the same mistake twice. His eyes were on Scully as he opened the box and expanded the top layers up and out, the metal on metal clanging with each little bit of movement it made. She was so much stronger than he considered as she narrowed her eyes at him while doing what she could to maintain a protective stance with Jeanette. She took a deep breath as he pulled a section of barbed wire from the box and held onto Jeanette a little tighter as he approached them, his eyes falling on the significantly more battered of the two.

“You don’t have to do this, Miles, just let her go,” Scully was angry, but the anxious feeling was rising within her belly as Miles gripped Jeanette by the hair and started to pull her.

Jeanette was calm, almost as though she had resigned herself to death as she squeezed Scully’s hand almost with a certain reassurance despite the tears running down her face. “Don’t, Agent Scully…you have to get out of here. Tell my little girl I fought and I never, ever gave up.”
Scully wanted to vomit as she could hear the defeat brewing in Jeanette’s voice. “You’re not going to die.”

“Aww, look, you’ve bonded!” Miles unlocked the length of chain from the clevis hook and dragged Jeanette to the chair, hooking her arms above her head and strapping her down at the waist before leaning in close so Jeanette could hear him. “The barbed wire isn’t for you…not yet, anyway.”

“You son of a bitch!” Jeanette shouted at him, immediately thrashing around, trying desperately to maneuver out of the chair. “Agent Scully, it’s you, not me!”

The music was loud, and set to repeat, as Miles dragged the long, heavy coil of barbed wire toward Scully, letting it unfurl as he neared her, the metallic grating almost a screech above the heavy, breathy melody. Scully almost knew that this was coming since the moment that the syringe went into her skin and sent the world spinning into the wrong direction. Miles was hell bent on destruction with his aim fixated on her, the object of his affection that had shown no appreciation for his vision, his efforts. Scully glanced at the drag trail that the barbed wire was leaving behind and noted that each little barb that scratched along the cement was now sharp and ready to bury itself under layers of skin, degrading any otherwise pristine surfaces in its wake.

“You just had to go and ruin all of my plans for you, didn’t you, Dana? You couldn’t keep your hands off of him—couldn’t keep him out of your bed,” Miles was yelling at her while gathering up a section of the barbed wire that had dragged along the floor, the deepness of his voice only intensifying with every breath he took. “I could’ve given you everything and more if you’d only confess.”

Scully had her back pressed firmly against the wall, the implication of his words laying into her like little precursory stabs, preparing for the brutal blow. “Miles, I don’t know you like that—and you are hoping for a fantasy. It isn’t real.”

He twitched over the word ‘fantasy’ as she was essentially rebuffing him, attempting to make him yield, but he wasn’t having any of it as he gathered a loop of the barbed wire and stood over her, eyes full of rage. “I’ve seen how you look at him—I’ve seen the way you look at me. Why do you deny it? You made all of it happen! Just confess!”

“This is all in your head, Miles, all of it,” Scully could feel the edge of the barbed wire against her ankle as she pulled her knees closer to her chest, desperately cocooning herself further from him. “You created all of it in your head.”

“Stop saying that, Dee! Do you not see what I do for you?” Miles was completely losing his grip on reality as he was mere inches from her face, his hands violently shaking while he held onto the barbed wire. “Just admit it—this thrills you, I thrill you.”

“No, Miles, I’m not indulging in your sick fantasy world, you need help,” Scully was not only stubborn but indignant as she held her breath for a moment, choosing her words carefully, her eyes falling between him and Jeanette as he gathered the slack on the barbed wire. “Just let Jeanette go, Miles, you’ve lost touch with reality and this is not what you think it is.”

It was more than enough to push him completely over the edge as he stood completely straight, took a step back completely let her have it, the brunt of his anger directed into his hand as he fully took a swing with the loop of the wire. Scully wasn’t prepared for the motion it came at her, the whirring of air passing through the gap in the barbed wire until it snagged against her arm and her side, digging into the material of her shirt, creating little puncture gashes along the way. She was incredibly strong, despite the sharp, burning pains that it created as she closed her eyes to
quell some of it away. He pulled it toward his boots, ripping the sleeve of Scully’s cardigan into shreds from the middle of her bicep down to her wrist. She inhaled sharply and felt the palpitating of her heartbeat up in her throat as she looked down at the searing hot, blood red dots oozing all over her arm and along her side. He wailed on her again and this time the jagged little barbs ripped the side of the cardigan away from her form, revealing the tee shirt underneath, skidding little holes along the way. The impact was mainly on her right side as the momentum was carrying the wire in a downward aim, hitting her closer to her ribs, ripping sections of her skin open like she were being attacked by a cat.

Scully held her breath as the third lashing wrapped around to her back just enough to hook into her skin as though she had taken the bait on a line, immediately putting pressure on the spot where the barbs began to drag a long, equally wide, section of her clothes away from her flesh before fully digging into her, this time considerably deeper as she felt the warmth of her blood sliding down her back from the open wounds. She was sweating buckets and shaking almost to the point of convulsing as the sensation nearly made her pass out with her refusal to scream. Scully had anticipated torture but she had not anticipated being flogged by barbed wire to the point of becoming a literal, bloody mess.

“Are you ready to admit everything, Dee?” Miles could see her sweating and shaking, the thrill of her physical response manifesting as he held her chin in place so she’d have to look him in the eye.

“Not even in your wildest fantasies, spineless bastard,” Scully was seething as she half growled through her teeth at him.

Miles almost threw the barbed wire, the sound of the clanging of metal bits hitting each other and the floor bouncing off of the walls along with Scully’s ears. It was loud and a little painful as the jagged edges made a half screeching sound as they bounced and slid simultaneously, taking her focus completely away from him just long enough for her to not anticipate any next move. Miles let out an angry, unintelligible shout in the midst of backhanding Scully for the third time since the sequence of events began. Scully was keenly aware of her cheekbone as the momentum from his hand vibrated through her entire face and sent the back of her head deftly against the wall with just enough emphasis that it made her eyes water and teeth bite down accidentally on her tongue. The taste of blood in her mouth was immediate, tinny and unpleasant mixed with saliva, and it only added to the already clouded feeling swirling around, the pain through her cheek and at the back of her head.

“Is that the best you’ve got?” Scully found herself purposely trying to goad him into his violent bursts as she could see the enormous ring of keys begging to get out of his pants pocket, within reach if she could get him to stop paying attention long enough.

“Don’t fucking play games with me, Dee!” Miles was incensed as he reached into his pocket and pulled a smaller set of keys, “I don’t lose games.”

He wasted no time in unlocking the length of chain that connected her by the wrists from the connection on the floor, then slid the center of the chain through the swivel clevis hook high above her head, locking it in place. The problematic placement of not having use of her hands was worrisome but Scully had a motive for pushing him like this and it was to get him completely off focus enough to knock his keys free or be able reach for them even if it meant pulling the chain through the loop until she was completely off balance. Miles wasn’t even noticing that she was watching his every move as he slid the smaller ring of keys into his pocket along with the rest of the keys, the instant jingling of metal on metal muffled by the denim of his pants under the loudness of the speakers. Scully took a deep breath as Miles turned toward the utility box and
gathered up a blade still in the sheath, his fingers handling it almost delicately as he wielded it toward her, gently pulling it from the heavy, leather cover.

“You’re almost mouthier than that one was—and look at her now,” Miles was almost too expert at the blade as he dragged it along Scully’s cleavage, carefully avoiding any chance of actually breaking the skin. “She’s got so many cuts and exposed muscle…just because she couldn’t, stop, being, such, a bitch.”

“Oh, shit,” Jeanette’s voice wasn’t loud enough for him to hear, or take notice, over the top of the music as she could see Miles cutting the buttons off of what was left of Scully’s cardigan, her hands high above her head, powerless to him. “Son of a bitch, not again.”

Jeanette knew what provocation did to Miles and it was almost too much to witness as she watched Scully continue to push his buttons despite the dangerous game it played. Jeanette was tugging and pulling at only one of her wrists, purposely causing her chair to start tilting toward the left. She knew that the result was going to be painful as was the resulting torture from Miles but she didn’t care—she wanted to distract him from hurting Scully further. One of them needed to get out of here and Scully’s chances were so much higher than hers. She tugged as all four of the chair’s legs pressed against the floor again and felt two lift off of the ground, desperately motioning toward the side that still had planted until gravity finally won and the chair fell to the floor with a resounding thud that caused the side of her face to smack against the cement floor.

The sound did exactly as she intended as Miles stopped his motion with the blade pressed against Scully’s bicep after cutting away the shreds of her cardigan, prepping to slice a section of her skin open. Jeanette’s bold move spared Scully from the blade for the moment as he sheathed it and let go of her, his head turning toward the sideways chair with Jeanette in it on the floor wavering between awake and not. Scully looked defeated as she watched him throw the knife back into the box of tools and lift the chair back into an upright position with a total disregard for Jeanette’s body positioning as she was almost swaying like a ragdoll with the directional patterning. Jeanette’s eyes were not on Miles as her head tilted to one side and rested on her shoulder while she gathered her wits, the left side of her face throbbing from the fall. She almost felt the blow coming before his hand even gathered momentum as he delivered an open handed slap to the right side that left her skin hot and stinging but she knew he wasn’t done as he utilized his less effective hand to backhand the left side of her face, putting so much pressure on her nose and lip that both spilled blood almost immediately.

“Look what you did—got blood all over my sleeves AND my hands,” Miles had a hold of Jeanette by her neck with his less bloody hand, applying enough pressure to make her gag and gasp for air.

Jeanette grinned at him despite the near inability to breathe, blood all over her mouth, her voice breathy and hoarse. “You’re welcome, little boy.”

“Haven’t learned, have you?” Miles let go of her neck and swung again, this time closing his fist enough that he nearly knocked her unconscious.

Jeanette made a low whimpering noise, her head slumping forward along with her shoulders, the blood dripping onto her thighs and ripped skirt in the process. Scully was thoroughly disgusted and concerned as she couldn’t tell if Jeanette was fully conscious anymore, knowing that the idea behind pushing him was simply to gain access to an escape—and Jeanette had done something incredibly stupid that stopped that completely. Miles half growled at both of them, his amusement all but gone, as he turned Jeanette’s chair toward the stairs and pulled another one against the back of hers, before turning his attention to Scully.
“I won’t have both of you making a fool of me any longer,” Miles unlocked the shackles from around Scully’s ankles and wrists, dragging her toward the chair. “You struggle or fight me, and I’ll put a bullet in her head, got it?”

Despite nodding in agreement, she couldn’t help but glance at the keys sticking out of his pocket while he shoved her into the chair and adjusted the restraints in such a way that she had little to no give around her wrists, waist, and ankles. It was his desperation move to keep them restrained in such a way but it also served as a way to remove their ability to know exactly what the other was experiencing—they could only truly hear one another. He smiled again as he instinctively brushed his hand along Scully’s forehead, sliding her hair away from her face. She recoiled, evading his bloody fingertips, and glared up at him before he disappeared out of her field of vision. It wasn’t more than another moment before the stereo was clicked off, silently, and his heavy footsteps were marching up the stairs toward the door. He was unusually silent, the irritation radiating off of him like a heatwave, as he left but Scully only waited until she could hear his steps distancing further from directly above the basement level to speak, hoping that Jeanette was halfway conscious enough to hear her.

“Are you trying to get yourself killed, Jeanette?” Scully was half scolding her, the pain across her face and the little wounds from the barbed wire pulsing with each beat of her heart. Jeanette winced and brought her head up, the dribbles of blood starting to slow from her nose, as she tried to turn just enough to where they weren’t completely pressing the back of their heads against each other, her emotions finally getting the better of her as she started to sob. “No, I was trying to make sure he doesn’t start torturing you to the point that I’m at—I have been here for going on three days, Agent Scully, I’m losing my faith that I’m ever going to get out of here and I’m weak. I’ve had a blade slicing me open, barbed wire wrapped around my body parts, I’ve been punched, kicked, kneed, had a bucket of water poured over my head while I was unconscious, and very nearly raped. I almost got out of here once and I failed—he nearly killed me over that.”

Scully took a deep breath as she could not only hear the sobbing but feel Jeanette’s back vibrating against her own, knowing that there was an end in sight, it just had to be reached. “His keys were sticking out of his pocket—I was trying to distract him long enough to get the keys and get us both out of here. I’ve seen what he does to his victims, Jeanette, and I’m not letting that happen, to either of us.”

“Oh, Christ, I should’ve figured you were doing something like that,” Jeanette breathed a heavy sigh as she wiggled just enough to feel the give on her left side, the optimism suddenly returning to her in a wave after she had only been feeling the darkness arrive. “I don’t think getting those keys is going to be difficult if he comes back down here again.”

“Why? We’re both not exactly mobile,” Scully could feel the wounds on her back and side still bleeding just enough to become painful all over again as the chilly air touched them, reminding her of the pain he was bent on inflicting.

Jeanette let out a little chuckle as she wiggled her entire wrist, the wood of the arm rest bending and flexing with every shift she made. “When I tipped the chair over, the arm rest broke—my left wrist is almost completely free. Scully, I think we’re going to get out of this.”

“You better be ready because this is going to get ugly before it gets easier, Jeanette.”

Chapter End Notes
I’m already working on the next chapter! Thank you so much for being amazing, sticking it out, and giving me a shot by reading this.

**Special thank you to Vicky Williams, Jun Mai, Monika Michelle Cross, Megan Kelly, and Lee Hughes for always being there to here me droll on and on**
Conviction

Chapter Summary

The fight to save Jeanette and Agent Scully continues – but will new details about the killer give just cause for concern for more than just the safety of his two hostages?

Post “Agua Mala” (Season 6 with mentions of “Rain King”, “Two Fathers”, and “One Son” Briefly and only for context purposes)

Disclaimer: Agent Scully, Agent Mulder, Agent Skinner, Agent Fowley, Margaret Scully, and the Lone Gunmen belong respectively to Chris Carter, FOX Productions, and TenThirteen Productions. All other characters are original and any likeness or named similarities to any real-life persons are purely coincidental (unless, well, you’ve been told, then you should’ve expected such things)

Chapter Notes

“Find the place inside where there’s joy, and the joy will burn out the pain”
– Joseph Campbell

See the end of the chapter for more notes

11:30 AM
Lone Gunmen HQ

“Any luck on the name?” Mulder’s voice was ragged but nothing could put a damper on the determination that burned within him as he looked over Frohike’s shoulder at a list of names on a screen.

Frohike was pilfering through a database of every registered voter in the United States trying to narrow it down to anyone with that name and matching age range. “The last name is probably an alias—I am searching the first name in the major DC area as well to see if anyone matches that age range who could be our guy.”

“Max told me about the theory that he might’ve been in the system as a child for juvenile crimes—we’re searching through their system now for kids with heavily redacted files, who were accused of violent crimes,” Langly was at his station with Max sitting next to him, slowly running through a staggering list of kids from 20-25 years prior who could’ve matched their guy.

Byers had been quiet for well over fifteen minutes as he painstakingly flipped through each scanner, listening to each police dispatcher message, hoping for anything. He held up each set of headphones, pressing each one to his ear to listen to each one while half hunching over, concentrating. He was listening for the key words “petite”, “female”, “red hair” but it seemed as
though the airwaves had gone quiet—like the killer knew they were all watching, listening…
waiting. The lines were quiet other than the usual car accidents related to the weather along with a
few downed powerlines two counties away. They had spread out in the entire space, each taking up
a task in a quiet space with their end target in sight, to get an address or two, a place to truly begin.

The reflective silence from Byers came to a not so subtle end as he was monitoring the
police activity, the result coming up fruitless. “The tip lines have all been quiet since Scully went
missing—almost like this guy has gone underground.”

“He took an FBI agent that he had been stalking for months and surveilling for days—he
isn’t going to risk getting caught just hours after claiming his prize,” Frohike scooted forward in
his chair and started typing in a few commands into his computer while giving a sideways glance
toward Byers, looking over the top of the lenses of his glasses.

“Maximus, add keywords to the cases like ‘only son’ or ‘sisters’ to narrow the search,”
Mulder wrinkled his nose and looked over at Max, who was giving him a puzzled look.

“Thinking this psychopath has a bunch of sisters?” Max had on his spectacles, and often
hated to wear them but the computer light mixed with lack of natural light was bringing on a
migraine in the worst way strictly from the need to squint at the words.

“It wouldn’t be the first time that being surrounded in a houseful of sisters negatively
affected one of our suspects; if it leads to finding him, it was all worthwhile,” Mulder had her
image affixed in his consciousness, replaying her little, coy smile like it was the source of the
strength that remained within him, like it was the only thing left keeping him going.

Max nodded and followed along on the screen as Langly was adding in search terms, the
urgency was obvious as his fevered typing was fast paced, his eyes glued to the screen. The names
were populating quickly along with their subsequent files, photographs included. Max was all
about sequential, numerically ordered items with names that stuck out. He was looking for the
name Miles specifically and finally, a file jumped out at him on the page belonging to a Miles
Jonathan Miller. It detailed a boy at 11 years of age with 4 sisters, two older and two younger, who
spent time in a detention center until he was only 19 years old. His file was heavily redacted.

Langly was about to click on the next set of results when Max stopped him. “Wait, click
on that one…”

“Miller?” Langly pulled the file back up and glanced at Max, who was already nodding
before he could really ask.

“Please tell me we can get the redacted stuff back?” Max was already skimming through
the summary page where it listed the particulars of the familial links for the boy in the file.

“Ask…and you shall receive,” Langly started typing away at the file until several more
documents came up with warning labels about privacy and illegally obtaining information without
a court order.

“Are you willingly participating in breaking of multiple federal codes to hack into that
information, Max?” Mulder hadn’t had a solid quip in a while, but he couldn’t pass up the
opportunity to poke a little bit of fun at Max.

“Mulder, my middle name is Danger,” Max rolled his eyes and continued to search
through the pages, picking up on all of the details of the Miller boy.
“You’ve been raiding jokes from the short guy over there, haven’t you?” Langly nodded in Frohike’s direction, indicating him fully in his little dig.

Frohike didn’t even look up from behind his work station, he simply shook his head. “Don’t be jealous of my natural charisma or have half of my charm…you weren’t given the same gifts as I was.”

“Except you’re definitely confusing the word machismo with midget, bucko,” Langly was headed in that direction of starting another bickering session, the snarky remarks rolling off his tongue with little effort.

“Whoa!” Max was taken aback as he scrolled to the actual court proceedings on the Miller child, uncovering the reason behind his time in the juvenile court system. “Miles Jonathan Miller, age eleven, was sentenced to serve time at the District of Columbia juvenile detention center for three counts of assault with a deadly weapon, an additional count of assault, and two separate incidents of abuse on both of his younger sisters…aged six and eight.”

“Miles Miller is in the most advanced stages of bipolar disorder, manic dissociative disorder, and heightened levels of psychosis. He subjected his siblings to the most sadistic of torture, tying them up and hitting them with blunt objects while the others were forced to watch. He broke his 13-year-old sister’s collarbone, two of her ribs, and cut open her bicep,” Langly was reading off the list from where Max had stopped. “I can’t keep going, this reads like a list of injuries caused by a car wreck not the six-hour torture done by an eleven-year-old boy.”

“Eleven?” Mulder got out of his chair and stood behind Max, reading over his shoulder. “You two didn’t read far enough down – he was nine when he started to attack his sisters, claiming they were ‘taunting him’ about having male body parts, dark hair, and being unremarkable. His parents were mentally abusing him from the time that he was four years old.”

“Certainly would explain why he has a hatred for women,” Byers nodded and gathered up the documents off the printer that Langly was printing out as they read through them.

Max sighed softly and rubbed his eyes. “All of his sisters had red hair and blue eyes.”

“Was there a reason he only spent a short eight years of his life in a juvenile detention center and effectively disappeared into society as though he were a normal, standard individual?” Mulder was nauseated again as he thought of Scully being tortured by a man who had spent years honing in his perceived skill of abusing women who matched her general description.

Byers looked up more information on his release, skimming through the documents with his eyebrows slightly furrowed. “Individual was released into the custody and care of adoptive parents Ronnie and Elizabeth Canton, who adopted him via protective services – he was adopted while in juvenile detention.”

A frantic series of knocks at the door brought their focus toward the door, completely taken aback at the loudness and heaviness that it carried. It was like the air went out of the room even though there was a certain level of anticipation in expectation for where they were. Mulder’s heart was half sinking at the idea that the knocks were conveying frantiness because they were bringing more bad news to him. He didn’t know how much he could take. Langly scoped out the security monitor and noticed that it was Skinner waiting at the door, with his hands precariously dangling a labeled evidence bag, the look on his face striking—worried. Frohike was the furthest from the door but he had the clearest shot as he got up from his seat and went straight to the series of locks from the bottom up, clicking each one until they were undone.
“I knew I couldn’t call and tell you about this, so I just came right away,” Skinner held out the evidence bag to Mulder knowing full well that for the second time today they were all violating chain of command for evidence.

“Sir?” Mulder held onto the bag and looked at the labeling with the time marked less than an hour earlier and a location of the FBI building on it.

Skinner wasn’t the type to beat around the bush or sugar coat anything to anyone, but he found himself stammering with words and awkwardly dancing around the issue as he couldn’t quite make eye contact with Mulder. “They’ve already been dusted…Just open it.”

Mulder pulled the manila from the evidence bag with a certain level of anxiety and hesitancy creeping into his chest, the tightness from his nerves flooding all over, dangerously creeping to the edge of his pain threshold. His hands were shaking while his fingers gripped the folded edge, his agitation only increasing with every cautious, tender breath that he took. He gathered the manila over the top of the plastic evidence bag and pulled back the edge of the medium sized envelope until his fingers could slip past the opening to touch what was inside. The contents had slid as far down as they could and it wasn’t until his fingers had slid into the envelope nearly a third of the way that he felt the plastic coating, the squared edges, the revelation of the small stack waiting for him. He pulled them from inside the envelope and nearly doubled over before seeing them as the feel of Polaroid photographs between his fingers spelled nothing short of terror to his senses.

You have to look—you have to look.

Mulder took a deep breath and flipped the Polaroid photos over, revealing his, very stronger-than-one-would-assume, Scully bound with her mouth taped shut, in the back of a van. She was visibly battered and unconscious from the horrendous attack at the apartment—and the photos couldn’t have been taken long after he drove away. Mulder was lost looking at them, one by one, the visible effects of her experience captured through each poorly snapped Polaroid screaming at him through the small 3.5 by 4.25-inch images. He looked through each one, finding relief only in the fact that she looked relatively untouched despite the blood on her hands and feet as well as the side of her face. She still resembled that willful, stubborn woman underneath the unwelcomed change in her scenery. The final two photos sent a shockwave of guilt, anger, disgust, and heartache through him as she was posed in a chair in, what looked like, a hallway in the building that Miles took her. She looked slightly frail with the metallic sheen of the cuffs around her wrists in front of her, limply resting on her lap, her fingers almost locked together as though she had tried to fight the medication for a second time while in her induced slumber. Her hair was tousled and roughly angled across half of her face, head tilted off to the side just enough to know that she had no awareness physically of her surroundings.

“Fucking bastard,” Mulder inhaled another deep breath and looked at Skinner. “Where were these?”

“A man, who carefully concealed his face from all cameras, left them at the metal detectors—along with this,” Skinner held up a VHS tape and handed it over to Frohike, the anger building in equal measure with the guilt of not preparing Mulder for this. “I haven’t watched it, but I have an idea of what is on that tape.”

“Pile it on, Skinner, it couldn’t get much worse,” Max crossed his arms as Mulder set the photos on the desk before sinking into the couch, his fingers against his brow, squeezing away the pain brewing between his eyes.

“Why does it smell like Bourbon in here?” Skinner was caught off guard by the faint yet
solid aroma of the alcohol wafting through the air, his eyes passing over each of them before settling on Frohike.

“It’s always the best-looking guy in the room that gets blamed,” Frohike was at the TV, fiddling with the VCR, as he turned his head in Skinner’s direction just as he received the accusatory stare from him.

Langly shook his head and sighed at Frohike’s ever present need to crack a joke at the most inappropriate times. “We’ve all had a glass—it was necessary to get through what we’ve seen.”

The tape that Frohike had pressed into the VCR automatically started to play and the screen lit up with a terribly out of focus shot of Scully in the same chair as the final two photographs. The collective gasp was audible as the sound of her slightly labored breathing brought Mulder to his feet. It was real all over again as he could hear her breathing but could also hear the heaviness of boots along with her, almost in a back and forth motion as though he were fidgeting while standing above her, aiming the camera at her.

“She doesn’t belong to you, Agent Mulder,” Miles’s voice was deep, almost gravely as he spoke from behind the camera, taunting him through video. “She’ll wake up and realize that all of this is for her—that I did it all for her.”

“I think I need a glass of that Bourbon, Frohike,” Skinner could feel his stomach rolling in circles, both from knowing that Scully was at the mercy of a killer and watching the effect seeing this was having on Mulder as he started to pace while watching it happen.

Frohike didn’t need to be asked twice as he poured a glass of Bourbon for Skinner and handed it to him while the tape continued to paint the portrait of a madman with Scully at his mercy. Skinner didn’t contemplate his glass like the others did as he drank about half of the alcohol in one gulp since he seemed to have a lot more practice on the subject. He furrowed his brow and turned toward Mulder, who was staring at the screen with more pain written on his face than he knew what to do with. This case had taken so much from all of them and left nothing but regret as one of their own was on display like a claimed trophy. It was more than Skinner needed, or wanted, to think about.

“Please tell me that you guys found something useful,” Skinner looked toward Byers and Langly, who were standing next to their computers, shock renewing on their faces.

“Miles was in the system—tried to kill all four of his sisters as a child. Diagnosed with multiple mental disorders,” Byers continued, rubbing the bridge of his nose. “We have three addresses that are worth looking into—one that belonged to the birth parents, one that belongs to his adoptive parents, and a residence that he’s had with a lease for the last eighteen months.”

“I need a printout of the addresses—I can go to one while Max, you and Mulder can go to one of the others,” Skinner took his eyes off of the screen to look over at Max.

The conversation wasn’t enough to pull Mulder from the screen as it flashed like it had been paused and showed the spot in the basement with Scully almost in the fetal position on the floor, shackles around her wrists and ankles, chains held in place along the floor in a singular spot where a large clevis hook was affixed to the floor. Miles didn’t do a great job of hiding Jeanette from the shot as he panned back, shakily showing the other woman, who was desperately trying to keep herself sheltered in the corner from any onslaught of attacks from her victimizer. The mere thought alone kept a little bit of hope swirling around within him as he could see their missing victim as well as Scully alive in this video.
“Skinner, Jeanette is alive—she’s there with Scully,” Mulder’s tone was sobered as he gathered his thoughts. “We can catch this guy before he hurts her more than he already has and rescue our other victim before he can add to the body count.”

“We can go to one of those other addresses—cover all three,” Langly spoke up the moment that they all realized the urgency in knowing that not only was Scully at risk but another victim with precious time left was depending on a rescue.

Mulder took another look at the screen, his heart aching just looking at Scully’s bruised face lying on the floor, wishing he could be there with her and put a stop to the suffering. “Max and I will go to the adoptive parents’ house, Skinner should go to the rental, and you three can see about the birth parents’ house.”

“If anyone sees or hears anything suspicious then we need to call everyone for backup,” Skinner was already two paces toward the door after the addresses were printed out and given out. “All of this evidence needs to be put together in a box.”

“It’ll be safe here till we get done,” Byers was putting on more sensible boots and a heavier coat with the notion of going out into the elements as they all gathered the evidence and put it together.

The television was turned off and the tape placed into an open, empty banker’s box along with the papers, and all other items that they had been working on. It was as though it was all being momentarily paused so they could push it aside and focus on locating them…but to Mulder, it felt like putting one foot that much closer to finding Scully. He had to keep that steadfast ideal in his mind as he placed the polaroid photos in the box, heaving a heavy sigh, readying himself.

Mulder took one last look at Scully’s face in the photograph on the top before placing the lid, pushing it into position, and started to follow Max out the door.

“Mulder, wait,” Langly tugged on Mulder’s sleeve, keeping him last in the entry, the snowfall in the background.

“What is it, Langly?” Mulder’s voice was bordering on meek as he glanced between the snow outside and Langly, the weariness setting in.

“Scully is going to be ok, we’re going to find her and bring her back, you know that, right?” Langly’s voice was tentative, yet each syllable was strong, meaningful as he tried to find the words for his very lost looking friend.

Mulder inhaled and exhaled slow, the words coming across as a question instead of a reassurance as he nodded while he spoke. “I can’t let the last time that I saw her be the last time that I get to see her – I know she’s out there and I know that we’ll find her, bring her home, and put back all of the pieces that this son of a bitch tried to take from her. I’m not missing out on finishing a sentence that should’ve left my mouth a long time ago, Langly…It’s too important and she needs to hear it.”

“If you and Max find him first—call for backup. Don’t go busting through the door, guns blazing, get yourself AND Scully killed in the process, okay?” Langly was rarely one to lecture Mulder, he usually left that up to Byers but the distant, dazed look in Mulder’s eyes was cause for concern.

“Just help me find her.”
Scully’s full attention was on following the noise above her head as it moved from the room with the fireplace all the way to the opposite end of the house, muffling just enough that she could no longer make out the words above the heavy stomping and doors slamming. It was a little surreal hearing her name echo through the room through the poorly insulated house full of exasperation and hatred. She could tell by the change in his timbre that he was yelling at himself in the third person and, much to her horror, was responding back in kind with just as much violence as he could push into a verbal response. She didn’t understand how Jeanette had survived for as long as she had when he was this unbalanced.

“Does he usually spend a lot of time up there screaming at himself like that?” Scully was slightly numb along her backside and hips, the pressure from the waist strap starting to cut off the circulation to her legs as she could feel her toes starting to tingle in the cold air.

Jeanette’s head was still pounding from the fall and the hits to the face as she looked up at the ceiling, tilting her head to one side just a bit. “Only when he’s fixated thoroughly on you… yeah, he does. He pulls that ‘woe is me’, narcissistic, little boy bull crap you’ve begun to witness, tortures a bit and then disappears up there.”

“What is at the other end of the house?” Scully could hear the yelling far more distant than strictly above them as it seemed to be at the other end of the house, in a space not above the basement level.

Jeanette slipped her wrist out from the half-destroyed arm rest, careful not to lose the structural integrity of the design enough so that Miles would never notice. She stretched her fingers and carefully loosened the loop around her waist so it would slide away easily once she slid forward, planning out her assault carefully, methodically detailing out how it would work despite the physical limitations. Scully was far less focused on a plan. She knew she needed him to be close enough that Jeanette could surprise him and swing the chair, hit him with it, snatch the keys and hopefully knock Miles completely unconscious. The fundamental idea was simple in nature but nothing is simple when one is restrained and locked at the wrists, waist, and ankles.

“I don’t know what’s at that end of the house—I only know what’s directly above where we are now,” Jeanette slid her arm back into the cuffed section and pushed her hip against the splintered wood to cover up any traces of it being broken as she could hear him stomping his way back toward the door to the basement.

Scully’s waist restraint made a loud rattling noise every time she struggled against it and she continued to move her hips, purposely rattling it against the chair and against the mechanism itself. She knew that the more noise she made the better chance she had to lure him back into the basement and get him to make that one, critical mistake so they could make a move. It was a very risky maneuver but she knew the more time that Jeanette spent in that basement that the closer to her death she would get—as well as the closer Scully would get to her own untimely end.

She couldn’t risk it again; they needed to find a way out.
Jeanette glanced back at her while she continued to make as much noise as she could, the confusion written on her face, voice low yet determined. “Agent Scully, what are you doing?”

“I need those keys from his pocket so we can get out of this hellhole—if he’s upstairs, we aren’t going anywhere,” Scully winced from the added pressure on her hip area, causing the dried blood along her nose and lip to start cracking with every little move she made. “Do you know what you’re going to do when he comes back down here?”

“I think so,” Jeanette didn’t necessarily have a plan but her mind was swirling around with different methods of knocking Miles unconscious after freeing the keys from his pocket—in any means that she could, even if it meant putting herself back into harm’s way all over again.

Part of Jeanette was terrified at the notion that Scully insisted on provoking Miles into coming back into the basement knowing they could both hear his tirade going on upstairs. She could feel the stinging of salty tears at the corners of her eyes begging to leave, begging to stay, begging to make her feel again, but she refused to let them manifest as she sucked in a breath of air and started moving both of her legs, rattling the chains against the chair legs. It had dawned on her, then, that she was still three quarters trapped if she couldn’t get those keys out of his possession.

Scully’s mental state was far less conflicted as her eyes narrowed to focus on using the pain as a reminder of just how easily bad could become worse if she couldn’t maintain a grip on her own control of reality—she needed the upper hand.

The door swung open and smacked into the wall with a tremendous thud, nearly busting off of the hinges in the process as it bounced back toward Miles as he stood in the doorway, his bundle of psychosis brewing like a tornado back building. His chest was heaving, his blood pressure rising, as he shoved the only way in or out shut again, locking only two of the locks into place. He was thoroughly pissed as he nearly took a tumble down the stairs, bypassing Jeanette entirely as he stood in front of Scully and pushed her backwards by the shoulders, tilting her chair backwards to the point Jeanette’s chair was completely shoved forward, sliding a good foot forward to accommodate the tilt. The jarring movement was enough to beckon an audible screech-like gasp from Scully that vibrated her throat and made her eyes involuntarily make contact with his angry stare.

“Just admit it, Dana! Just admit that you feel it in your bones the pure, unwavering passion that I have for you! Don’t even try to deny you feel the same!” Miles was almost pleading, the rage rearing as he shook her by the shoulders with a violent reverence that her back continuously smacked against the back of the chair.

Scully had been so determined not to let him break through that wall she had carefully constructed for herself but something in his words made the emotions snap into place as she realized that her ardor for another was making it worse. “I don’t, Miles, I don’t feel the same. It’s never going to happen.”

“Why are you lying to me?” Miles had his thumbs situated in such a way that they were putting pressure on her trachea, making it increasingly hard to breathe. “I did all of this for you—every cut, every little thorn, every rose, all of their pretty faces!”

“I can’t breathe, Miles, I can’t,” Scully tried to tilt her head back to alleviate some of the pressure but all it did was cause him to throttle her hard enough that the positioning of his thumbs caused her to choke, nearly gagging in the process. “Stop.”

“Not until you just tell the fucking truth, you heartless bitch!” His voice was transitioning into another, deeper octave, with a low, animalistic growl hidden underneath each click of his tongue. “Do you understand me?”
“I don’t—I’m not in love with you,” Scully was half choking as she desperately pulled at her wrists, wishing both of them were mobile enough to put some distance between his hands and her neck. “I will never be in love with you.”

“No one will ever love you like I do—why can’t you just accept that you belong to me?” Miles didn’t know how to love but he knew how to obsess and his obsession for Scully was completely limitless as he hovered over her, shouting down at her despite her blatantly obvious revulsion toward him.

“I can’t…it isn’t…I can’t breathe,” Scully’s knees were desperately shifting, trying to get any bit of extra leverage to push him completely away from her but her waist was stuck completely, the movement useless.

“Stop it! You’re going to kill her, fucking psychopath!” Jeanette couldn’t fully see Scully’s face but she could more than hear the choking and the labored, choppy words that left her lips.

“Can’t you see that I’m having a private conversation with Dana right now?” Miles was easily flipping the switch in his volume as he diverted his eyes toward Jeanette, his tone closer to that of a possessive lover than a crazed stalker close to killing the person at the center of his fixation.

“Please…let go…stop,” Scully’s eyes were big as she listened to the change in him, the panic kicking into another gear as she felt the air bouncing off the back off of her throat, refusing to go beyond the spot his hands were putting pressure on.

“Say it! Say it! Say it! Say it!” Miles didn’t care about her safety anymore as the words were echoing through her ears, his hands around her neck, tightening with every phonetic unit that left his lips, the rage burning hot.

Jeanette knew that Scully was on the border of passing out and her instinct was to ruin the entire plan, slide her arm from the broken restraint and go after him immediately but she thought against it as she muttered in his direction. “You’re fucking crazy.”

“Just say it, Dana, just say it,” Miles could feel her pulse against his thumbs almost fluttering as her heart was doing everything it could to keep pumping blood through her body. “I could kill you right now over this indecisive bullshit you’re pulling.”

Scully was gasping for air as her lips were beginning to turn a subtle shade of purple while the tears left hot trails down her ice cold cheeks. She could feel everything within her begin breaking down as the words deep in her heart and gut were pushing, soliciting her mercilessly to utter them despite how much her brain was grappling with keeping herself safe along with Jeanette. She needed to be that ever present, rumored Ice Queen that everyone at the FBI used to associate her with so badly just to center the control again and balance out the growing, nagging feeling in the pit of her stomach, but her heart was aching, crying out in desperation like it was beating for the last time.

Her voice was hoarse, tangled up in the choking and the tears as they could no longer be contained, her chest convulsing behind each word sent a shiver down her spine. “I’m…I’m in love with him…I’m in love with Mulder…”

It was as though she had stolen every hope, every little bit of fantasy from him, and had set fire to the discarded pile as he let go of her and recoiled in the same breath. She inhaled deep, coughing away the strain as her lungs filled with air and sent a painful jolt through her like a nail
gun with the trigger stuck. Miles was twitching and muttering under his breath as he grew more incensed with every passing second. He had left the last of his sanity buried as the words “I’m in love with Mulder” replayed over in his head along with the incredibly vivid image of everything he had witnessed. In the eyes of a very mentally disturbed man, he truly felt that Mulder had taken Scully away from him and that she could be swayed in his direction. The thoughts were muddled, however, as his more manic side was moving to the forefront, creating an image of a woman who had been toying with him and now needed to be stamped out…just like the others.

*This cannot be good.* Scully was witnessing a similar situation that Jeanette had already witnessed as Miles argued with himself not two feet from her knees.

Scully never intended on actually allowing those words to leave her lips except to Mulder himself but her heart had beaten her brain—a feat that she often did not allow for personal preservation. There was conviction in the confession, her revelation, which would’ve been a source of great comfort in any situation except for the one she was in. She knew that this was another one of those moments that her words would have consequences, some more severe than others. She could also tell that, in that moment, that the time had come where all of his focus was gone, his control decimated beyond repair, but in equal measure, her safety was now not a guarantee—when he looked at her, he could only see red and wanted nothing more than to see her suffering.

He never spoke as he turned toward her and narrowed his eyes, the seeds of betrayal bearing their fruit as his eyes were nearly burning a hole through her. He sneered at Scully while his head, shoulders, and arms were twitching as the rage finally exploded from his core in a singular motion toward her. He lunged at Scully, arms extended to choke her again, with every intention of choking the life out of her this time, but he couldn’t have anticipated that she was ready for any motion he made toward her frame. She winced in anticipation and waited long enough for Miles to be within moving distance as she used what little range of motion she had to fling her upper body forward, head-butting him with the center of her forehead. He flailed as he tumbled backwards, giving Jeanette her window of opportunity to slide her hand out of the broken restraint and unhook her waist strap the rest of the way. She slid her backside toward the right arm, knowing well enough that she had almost no leverage in her left arm but it didn’t matter to her, she just needed one, good hit. She watched his movements as he staggered from the left to the right and placed himself within her arm’s directionality, before stepping directly into the path of a beautifully placed uppercut that caught him right on the chin.

The motion hurt her nearly as much as it hurt him as she felt all of her knuckles throb in unison, but she wiggled her fingers just long enough to chase away the instant tingle of numbness passing through her hand. Her eyes were already ahead of her hand as they were searching for the oversized set of keys sticking out of his pocket. The light bounced of the metallic key ring and her hand jutted forward, snagging the upper curve with two of her fingers, barely enough to retrieve them before he started to tumble backwards. She wanted to shout for joy but the task wasn’t complete as he was able to correct his stance and start to barrel toward her.

“You fucking bitch, you’re going to pay for that,” Miles couldn’t even recognize the sound of his own voice as he stomped toward her, the gravity of his rage rolling like a mudslide down a hill, consuming everything in its path.

Jeanette corrected her grip on the key ring, coiling her fingers through the center, holding it tight, and took a generous backwards swing at him, hitting him across the face with the considerable set of keys sticking out of his pocket. The light bounced of the metallic key ring and her hand jutted forward, snagging the upper curve with two of her fingers, barely enough to retrieve them before he started to tumble backwards. She wanted to shout for joy but the task wasn’t complete as he was able to correct his stance and start to barrel toward her.

Jeanette corrected her grip on the key ring, coiling her fingers through the center, holding it tight, and took a generous backwards swing at him, hitting him across the face with the considerable set of keys. The metal on skin sliced him open enough that it wounded him, both physically and mentally, as he let out a painful shout followed by a reaching motion that she swatted away with a second blast of the key ring to the other side of his face. He crumbled to the floor and covered his face with his hands, the pain almost unbearable, while Jeanette and Scully
almost stared down at him in disbelief of how easily he went down. Jeanette swallowed hard, the warmth
returning in her belly as she almost took a little bit of joy in seeing him in pain while she pulled her hand
toward her body, his blood dripping off the keys carefully perched within her grip. She sought out the key
that finally opened the restraints around her ankles, followed by the one that opened the one on her wrist, with freedom at her finger length.

“Jeanette, watch out!” Scully shouted at her as Miles was already to his feet with blood running
down his face in little streaks from the open gashes, his teeth brilliantly white in the dim light of the
basement.

Jeanette let the keys slide down her wrist as she held onto the right armrest of the chair and the back of it, using it as a weapon to break it across his shoulders and head. It was enough to knock him unconscious as she nearly lost her balance in the process. She held onto Scully’s chair for a moment and stared at Miles as the relief set in that he wasn’t moving. Both of her legs were shaking as she feverishly started rummaging through the keys, desperately searching for the ones that matched the keyhole on any of Scully’s restraints. She forced one key after another, each one refusing to turn or even slide into the mechanism, slowly killing that positive feeling that had been brewing within her.

“None of them are working,” Jeanette had tears rolling down her cheeks as she was resorting to testing keys for the second and third times, her hands desperately shaking with every attempt.

“I can get them from him,” Jeanette’s entire body was shaking as the gravity of Scully’s words were starting to sink in and burrow around within her. “I need to get you out of here.”

“No, you need to run—you need to get help,” Scully knew that the sobbing was for her but Miles was recovering far too fast for her to let it soften her up any further. “Go.”

“I’m not leaving you here,” Jeanette knew that Miles was waking up just as much as Scully did but she couldn’t bear the thought of leaving her there, knowing that he was so close to ending it all.

“Go, find my partner, go find Agent Mulder, tell him everything,” Scully’s nostrils flared with a gasp as she saw the whites of Miles’s eyes, his consciousness nearly fully returned.

Jeanette nodded and fumbled toward the sliding glass door, haphazardly grappling with the keys until the lock came loose and popped opened, freeing the door from the modification. She pulled the door open, letting a flood of light and icy cold air into the space from the falling snow outside. Remembering the first time she was this close to freedom sent a shockwave of nervousness through her as she desperately wanted to just run but she didn’t want it to end the same way…in destruction and failure. As her eyes felt real light for the first time in two full days, the sensation was almost too much for them to handle as she blinked hard, shielded her eyes, and glanced back at a table behind her, where Scully’s badge was folded open enough to catch the light. She could hear Miles stirring as pieces of the broken chair were falling to the floor along with his grunts of disapproval from the pain, but her body refused to allow her to look back, not again. She gathered up Scully’s badge, slid it into the waistband of her ruined skirt and slid out of the doorway, into the harsh, bright light and onto the intensely cold snow.

“Fuck, oh my God,” Jeanette’s feet were instantly throbbing as she sunk into the powder
and ice, the cold chills sending waves up her legs until she was nearly incapable of walking let alone sprinting, but she continued to push her pace beyond her limits.

“Jeanette, run!” Scully’s voice was echoing behind her as she was getting to the downward slope toward the dock, with about thirty feet between her and the house this time.

The hairs on the back of her neck stood up as she could hear a hollow pop from behind her with the echo reverberating in a circular pattern as it bounced through the trees. He had a gun. Jeanette pushed harder and started to run, half ducking down as she slid over a downed tree near the edge of the water just as another shot rang out, this time whizzing past her ear. She refused to look back as she jumped onto the frozen dock and yanked the tarp down that hid the boat inside of the shed, jumping into it from the curve. She unraveled the ropes that were tied off at the sides and felt the swaying of the current through the bottom of the boat as the snow fell and the wind gently blew against her back. She turned her head and saw that Miles was dumb enough to leave the key in the ignition again, much to her luck and amazement. She reached for it just as the third shot sounded like a thunder clap directly on top of her but she couldn’t have been more wrong as she felt the searing heat through the left side of her back near the bottom of her shoulder blades along with the pressure her ribs as two shifted forward toward her chest.

“Shit,” Jeanette dropped to her knees in the boat and started gagging on the blood but her determination was strong as she reached for the ignition, turning it until the boat was on.

She almost expected to hear another shot but she didn’t as she pushed the throttle forward and turned the wheel to guide the boat away from the dock. She could hear the whirring underneath of her as she coughed into her hand, spitting up blood in the process, the pressure in her back only intensifying as she inhaled. Underneath all of the pain and suffering, Jeanette was a fighter, intent on getting away, intend on finding help to rescue Scully—intent on finding Mulder.

2:30 PM
Canton Home
Mosby neighborhood – West Falls Church, VA

“Agent Mulder, no, this can’t be true—we just saw our boy a week ago and nothing was wrong with him. He’s been in therapy for years and hasn’t had a violent outburst since he started working in therapy,” Elizabeth Canton was already in tears as Mulder sugar coated that they were simply needing to question Miles as a suspect in multiple murders and the kidnapping of a Federal Agent.

“Honey, you have to calm down; Miles was always a troubled boy, we knew that when we adopted him that he came with a lot of baggage, some of which might never be fully resolved,” Ronnie Canton was significantly less emotional but the lines on his face told the story of the struggle of coming into continuing to parent a grown child with severe mental limitations and the horrors that went along with it.

“Ronnie, Miles was not an easy son to choose but we chose him, flaws and all—he came to us needing all of those terrors to be repaired and we failed him,” Elizabeth hadn’t had any
children of her own and the emotional investment in Miles was considerable as she buried her face in her hands, the emptiness was only temporarily filled.

“Mr. and Mrs. Canton, the history we have found on Miles paints a fairly unpleasant picture that neither of you can take responsibility for, nor can you blame yourself for the creature that he has become.” Max was awfully good at this as he leaned in, carefully lowering his voice much like a budding nurturer should, his investigatory wings spreading out with every word uttered. “With that said, we need your help finding out where he might’ve gone, to hide…”

“Do you have a summer home or a winter home nearby? A recently vacated residence that belonged to a family member that passed away?” Mulder could see their confusion as he offered up the suggestion, the anxiety manifesting in his refusal to sit down as he half paced in front of the fireplace mantle.

“The only second property in our family is a house in Oregon and Elizabeth’s mother stays there with her live-in nurse,” Ronnie shook his head and heaved a heavy sigh as his wife was still sobbing beside him.

Mulder was having a tough time feeling any sort of sympathy or even empathy for Mrs. Canton as she sobbed almost uncontrollably in front of them as he knew the kinds of horrors that her adopted son had been committing. It wasn’t typically in his nature to allow the blood in his veins to run cold, but he was thinking about the pain that Scully could be in at the hands of their son. He looked around the room at their very ordinary, unassuming house and at the incredibly normal photos that lined the mantle, his mind fixated on the idea of a psychopath blossoming right under their noses. They were like the Brady’s in so many ways and yet, raised Andrei Chikatilo.

“He hasn’t been staying at his condo? He’s been renting it for a long time, even lets his two cousins stay there with him from time to time,” Ronnie got up and started going through a rolodex next to the kitchen table, pulling an address from the middle of it. “This is the only place we know that he stays…unless he’s been going back to see his sisters again.”

“Wait, he’s been going to see his sisters? How long did that start?” Mulder turned toward Ronnie after Max took the card with the address on it.

“It’s been about a month—Lizzy, when did Miles get the phone call from the girls?” Ronnie acted like it wasn’t a big deal that the sisters that Miles spent years torturing had contacted him after everything he had done.

Elizabeth furrowed her eyebrows and looked toward Mulder, the frustration taking over through her emotional outbursts. “They contacted him about a month ago—said that they wanted to talk to him about what when on when they were kids. I told him it was a bad idea since he had done so well in therapy resolving all of those issues.”

“The older girls don’t want anything to do with Miles, but his younger sisters are the ones that were contacting him—he seemed fine when he came home after spending time with them,” Ronnie could see that the worry was forming on both of their faces. “He actually told us that both of the younger girls don’t remember anything that happened when they were kids other than the older girls teasing him and abusing him like their parents had been.”

Mulder knew it was a load of hooey since all the printouts from the court cases showed photos of the damage that he had done to all four of his sisters, but he didn’t expect the adoptive parents to be privvy to that sort of information. He held his breath and thumbed over the photos, each one more upstanding middle American than the last, with sugary sweet grins on each of their faces. They were posed but didn’t have an air of fakery to them like most staged family photos did...
and part of him became a little unnerved at the idea that the smiling 20-year-old in these photos could become the 36-year-old psychopath intent on killing women that reminded him of his sisters. It was more than enough for him to know the reaches of psychosis as he knew how well hidden a downward spiral could be just from looking at the otherwise loving looking family on display in front of him.

His cell phone started ringing in his pocket, immediately pulling his focus away from the mantle as well as the family as he pulled it free and looked at the number to see Frohike’s number. “Excuse me, I’ll just be a second?”

Max nodded at him along with Ronnie and Elizabeth as Mulder ducked out the front door for the quiet.

“Please tell me you have good news, Frohike?” Mulder stared out at the snow from the middle of the cul de sac, his boots already half soaked from simply standing in the fresh powder.

Frohike knew how to start off the conversation with a bang, the shock in his voice clear. “The two older sisters are the ones living in the home that the crazy ass was raised in. Neither one of them want anything to do with him.”

“Well we already gathered that much from the court cases and interviewing the adoptive family,” Mulder half rolled his eyes, hoping to get better information than the kind that he already knew.

“That’s not even the real juicy part, Mulder, the older sisters just told us that the youngest sister actually snuck into Miles’s bedroom about a week before your first victim, that Falkner girl, was discovered,” Frohike sounded like the cat that had just eaten the canary as he was almost speaking too fast for Mulder’s liking. “How’s that for seriously fucked up?”

“Please don’t tell me that there’s some serious Flowers in the Attic shit going on because that’s more than I can handle today,” Mulder made a face and paced in the snow, the mental image turning his stomach in circles.

“The older sisters are under the impression that the little sister tried, failed, and tried again—it is part of why he relapsed after his years of therapy,” Frohike continued. “She’s got journals that the older girls have found that detail some pretty heinous information about her incredibly deep-rooted obsession with her brother.”

“Fuck, this just gets more and more disgusting by the moment. Do they have any idea of where he’d go? Have they seen him?” Mulder was standing in front of the window that barely peeked in at the living room where Max was still talking to Ronnie and Elizabeth.

“There are three homes that the very established Miller children were given due to various deaths in the family—there are two on Lake Barcroft and one in Stafford that all four girls have access to,” Frohike had gotten a lot more information from the older of the sisters than Mulder originally thought he would, but it was worth it.

The phone unceremoniously beeped in Mulder’s ear, signaling the call waiting on his phone, he peeked at it and recognized Skinner’s number immediately. “Frohike—wait for a phone call from me, I have Skinner trying to call.”

“If we hear anything else, we’ll keep it marked down, be careful,” Frohike hung up before anything else could be said.
Mulder pressed the switch option to go between the lines, connecting to Skinner’s call, the anticipation hitting him like a gust of icy wind. “Mulder?”

“Where are you and Max?” Skinner’s voice was distant and hard to hear over the top of wind in the background.

“Interviewing the adoptive parents—West Falls Church,” Mulder could tell that something had changed as Skinner’s tone was more breathy, like he was sprinting. “Sir?”

“Get to the beach at Lake Barcroft where the east boat landing is—they pulled Jeanette out of a boat, she’s alive,” Skinner slammed the door to his SUV, his voice shaky from the sprinting.

“On the way,” Mulder hung up the phone and ducked his head into the door. “We are so sorry, Mr. and Mrs. Canton but Agent Belle and I have to get to a crime scene—Agent Belle?”

“If you think of anything before we contact you please don’t hesitate to call one of us,” Max slipped one of the cards into Ronnie’s hand before going out the door with Mulder. “What the hell is the rush?”

“Skinner just called—they just found Jeanette and she’s alive,” Mulder got into the driver’s seat and waited for Max to buckle his seat belt before heading off in the direction of Lake Barcroft. “Do me a favor and call Frohike—tell him where we’re going. Tell them to get there as soon as they can.”

The drive was a blur and Mulder was almost unaware of anything going on around him other than the road and traffic associated with it. He hadn’t been thinking completely about the implications of finding another survivor but this link was the strongest one to get him that much closer to saving Scully. It wasn’t peace of mind and it wasn’t solace—it was conviction in knowing that his partner, his better half, was out there, with her heart still beating, waiting for him to be there to find her. It wasn’t about being a white knight in shining armor and it never had been despite how others attempted to make it look whenever she needed to be saved…because he was saving himself by finding her alive. She meant more than that and she wasn’t a damsel in distress. She was Scully and she was his fighter.

“You’re going to need to turn left up here,” Max’s voice broke through the fog like a punch to the chin as Mulder swerved just a little bit.

“I see it,” Mulder pulled into a spot near the flashing lights of the ambulance, alongside multiple police patrol units. “Holy…shit.”

They both slid out of the SUV and the actuality of the world that they had just entered became stark as the small C-Dory Angler had been pulled up onto the snow covered sand, truly illuminating the horror. Inside of the small water craft the blood had spilled all along the bottom and had become streaked and displaced by Jeanette as she lost consciousness. It was nearly everywhere; the railing, the wheel, the controls and revealed more about her ability to fight than it did about the torture she had endured. The medics were still carefully working on her, prepping her to be transferred to George Washington University Hospital but her frantic, urgent screams above the chatter insisting that she calm down, so they could get her moved caught Mulder’s attention. He turned and wrinkled his nose as the high pitched, terrified wailing was clearly his name in heavy repetition.

Mulder sprinted toward the gurney, his heart thumping in his chest as he could hear the terror only increasing with each syllable that left Jeanette’s lips, reaching her side with a certain
level of quickness, his hands instinctively grasping her hand to capture her attention. “Hey, hey, hey…I’m Mulder…calm down for me, okay? Come on…breathe, nice and slow.”

She was horrendously pale aside from the blood that had gone literally everywhere, her tears leaving little streaks down her face as she shook from the shock setting in. Mulder couldn’t help but take note of the extent of her injuries as the still broken section of her poorly re-connected thumb rubbed against his palms, signaling his eyes to soak in the sheer number of cuts and contusions that she had sustained in just over 48 hours. His method of becoming a calming presence seemed to do exactly as it intended as Jeanette’s screaming subsided, her eyes on him, her eyes locked on as though she needed some assurance that he was really there—that he was real. She maneuvered her fingers over his, holding onto his hands with a level of desperation that he hadn’t quite expected, her fingers shaking with every breath she took as the medics were trying desperately to get a solid reading on her vitals and stop the bleeding on the gunshot wound.

Jeanette’s voice was shaking through every tear as she still seemed so far away despite looking at Mulder from the gurney. “You’re Mulder? I tried—I couldn’t—she’s—Scully told me to find you.”

“Jeanette, what did Scully tell you? You’re not making any sense,” Mulder didn’t want to imagine that Scully was enduring the kind of suffering that Jeanette had but his mind couldn’t help but wander to that place as he felt her frail fingers fight to grasp onto him. “It’s ok; you’re safe now…I promise you’re safe.”

Jeanette swallowed hard and felt the blood still pumping around the open wound at her back as she inhaled another yearning to cry out in pain. “Don’t give up on looking for her—she’s alive, she’s fighting, and she just—she did something really brave but REALLY stupid so that I could get out.”

“Agent Mulder, she’s losing a lot of blood, we need to get her to a hospital, now,” one of the female medics was desperately applying pressure to her wounds, the bullet still buried between two of her ribs, creating more pain with every little move she made.

Mulder was nodding toward the medic but Jeanette pulled Scully’s badge from her waistband and put it into his hand, nearly stopping his heart in the process. He held his breath as the little leather fold that held her identification and badge coaxed the most unwilling of tears from him, his need to find her becoming more like a yearning as he could almost see that porcelain and pink kissed face, waiting for him. It was both his strength and his downfall that he could recall her features with only a blink of an eye. She possessed more strength in her pinky than most grown men did in their entire bodies and he knew, somehow, that she was pushing through any and all adversity that she was facing—it was just killing him that she was doing it alone.

“He knows…” Jeanette’s voice brought him out of his state of despondence, pulling at the spaces between his heart and his gut as she was certainly going into shock as her eyes were going in and out, slowly blinking.

“What does he know, Jeanette?” Mulder squeezed her hand, watching her eyes rapidly blink as she pushed the consciousness back to the forefront.

Her voice was small enough that he was the only one that could fully hear her as she looked at him, eyes full of tears, further streaking the blood on her cheeks. “He knows you have the one thing that she refuses to give him—her heart. She told him that she’s in love with you…It’s why I’m afraid he’s going to kill her.”

“I won’t let that happen—you have my word.” Mulder gave her hand another quick,
Mulder stood by, watching as the medics pushed the gurney into the back of the ambulance, maintaining eye contact with Jeanette until the doors were safely secured shut. He wanted to be elated but his heart was swelling with more than fear as he held another breath and felt the ache where Scully’s reassuring grip should be against his palm. She always knew when to reach out, squeeze his hand, and bring him back to the earth with the softest, yet most caring of reminders. Love. She made the illuminating confession to a psychopath under duress and regardless of the consternation that the idea had instilled within him the awareness that it happened only made him that much more filled with conviction to find her.

Chapter End Notes

References Made (in reference to):
Flowers in the Attic - VC Andrews
The Butcher aka Andrei Chikatilo

Special thank you to Vicky Williams, Jun Mai, Monika Michelle Cross, Megan Kelly, and Lee Hughes for always being there to here me droll on and on
The truth is stranger than fiction as more details about the private life of their killer begin to emerge causing the fight to save Scully to become direr.

Post “Agua Mala” (Season 6 with mentions of “Rain King”, “Two Fathers”, and “One Son” Briefly and only for context purposes)

Forgive where it went—it has always been intended, just never expected it to go this far.

“Hope begins in the dark, the stubborn hope that if you just show up and try to do the right thing, the dawn will come. You wait and watch and work: You don’t give up.”
– Anne Lamott

“Find the place inside where there’s joy, and the joy will burn out the pain”
– Joseph Campbell

Chapter Notes

**Mild assault warning – no penetration involved but it’s not comfortable; I apologize in advance for the nausea this will likely inflict**

Disclaimer: Agent Scully, Agent Mulder, Agent Skinner, Agent Fowley, Margaret Scully, and the Lone Gunmen belong respectively to Chris Carter, FOX Productions, and TenThirteen Productions. All other characters are original and any likeness or named similarities to any real-life persons are purely coincidental (unless, well, you’ve been told, then you should’ve expected such things)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

4:00 PM

Lakeview Drive (Lake Barcroft)

Falls Church, VA

Scully had been unconscious since Jeanette had escaped after a perfunctory blow to the head sent everything into a tailspin shortly before the chair tipped backwards with her still strapped to it. The back of her head bounced off the floor, knocking her completely senseless. She could recall only little flashes of what followed in the hours after Jeanette got away—everything from being dragged across the cement, hearing his shouting above her, and the feel of his hands on her
neck, squeezing again. She swallowed hard and felt the reminder of him choking her as her esophagus burned and her larynx felt like she had been retching for hours. The pounding followed as Scully’s head turned, the back of her head rubbing against the wall, putting pressure on the knot that had formed.

It was different, this time, as she awoke to the most haunting of silences, the crackling of wood burning in the furnace along with the whirring of wind through the gaps in the doorframe to the main house. Miles had placed another piece of tape across her mouth in his haste before disappearing upstairs again, where his arguing session continued with thunderous pitch and volume. Scully tugged at her arms, but both had been secured high above her head, with no slack this time to avoid any extra movement. She looked up at the sections of restraints, the gleam of the new padlock catching just enough light to not-so-subtly inform her that she was stuck again. She took a hard look at the fresh bruising along her arms from the edge of her sleeves on up to her wrists, each one increasing with color as their size seemed to grow the closer they got to her head.

The situation was a moment’s notice from panic inducing as she looked around at the room, hoping that Miles had left behind anything that was within reach of her legs as she no longer felt the heavy padlocked shackles around both. Her hopes were dashed as he seemed to have clear out everything, including the remnants of the broken chair that Jeanette had bashed him over the head with. Her body felt like it had taken a tumble down a flight of stairs, each little muscle was stinging with a pain that she couldn’t quite describe. She started to settle her head back against the wall, struggling to be halfway comfortable with her hands halfway numb above her when she knew she was no longer alone. She looked up at the top of the stairs and saw her face peeking through the rails on the bannister, her pale features striking. She was in a nearly knee length baby-doll dress with little accents of pink, lace fringe along the drop sleeves and hemline. Her shoulders were bare and the sleeves only covered a section of her arm from just below the shoulder to her elbow, with frilly edges much like the hemline. It was form fitting from the top to the bottom of her breasts, hugging them close like a push up bra would have. Scully’s nostrils started to flare as she saw the pretty, well maintained, red curls that came to her shoulders and those piercing blue eyes much like her own, her bright red lipstick standing out with a shimmery finish that she wasn’t prepared for.

Scully started to groan against the tape, desperately trying to get the well-put-together woman to come closer and she seemed to be apprehensive yet receptive to the distressing sounds that came from Scully. She tiptoed down each step, her bare feet barely noticeable against the aged wood followed by the cement as she made her way toward a captive Scully. She looked young but not so young that her features weren’t well developed—just wasn’t exactly dressed her age as she looked more like a teenager than a grown adult. She looked around, the visible cautiousness written on her face, before kneeling next to Scully.

“This might hurt, I’ll try to be gentle,” She had a soft, melodic voice as she ran her fingernail along the edge of the tape, waiting for Scully’s affirmation before pulling it off in one, quick motion.

Scully’s voice was raspy as she spoke, the shakiness obvious as she looked closely at the girl. “We need to get out of here—he’s going to kill us both.”

“He took all of the keys, I don’t know where he put the spares,” She reached out and wiped a section of Scully’s hair out of her face, her fingers lingering a little longer than appreciated as Scully looked at her with wide eyes.

Scully nodded toward the shelf near the sliding glass door, her fear blooming again as she felt her stomach roll. “Check that…he had boxes in there.”
The young woman nodded eagerly and got to her feet, moving toward the shelf, rummaging through the contents to the point that she was pulling everything out and almost disassembling it in the process. Scully was a little concerned that she was making too much noise as she half tossed everything aside, but she was grateful that one of them wasn’t shackled to the wall. The air in the basement level was different as the heat was up to an elevated level, keeping Scully from freezing to death. She was a disheveled mess from the blood down her side, on her face, and along her midsection where the bottom of her tee-shirt had been shredded by the barbed wire.

“How long have you been down here?” The girl’s tone was changing, halfway dropping an octave as she looked over at Scully from behind a box as she was up to her elbow digging through it, tossing tools aside left and right.

“Wait, what?” Scully had both of her legs bent, with one tucked under the other just enough to keep her back rigid against the wall.

“You look like you’ve been down here awhile—I was only curious,” The girl held a pair of rescue shears in her right hand as she stood straight and bit down on her lip. “I can’t find anything that can help—but I saw a bunch of keys upstairs that might match if I can just see the type of lock he used.”

Scully nodded her head and caught sight of the shears in her hand, her natural knack of overthinking becoming almost overwhelming as the girl hovered over her. She wiggled the lock and inadvertently put extra pressure on Scully’s arms, pulling a painful yelp from her lips as she tried to lift higher to create slack. The woman slowly knelt and captured Scully’s attention in the process, maintaining eye contact as her bare knees touched the floor. She set the shears on the floor next to Scully’s thigh and pressed her fingers against the cement, moving them just enough to gather up some of that chlorine smell on her skin. She nudged Scully’s legs forward, causing them to stretch out, her toes aiming toward the opposite wall, making her back even more flush with the wall.

“You don’t know who I am, do you, Agent Scully?” the girl’s voice was barely above a whisper as she leaned in, nearly nose to nose with Scully.

“No, I don’t—how do you know my name?” Scully felt like she was having an out of body experience as the girl hovered far closer than she expected for a potential victim of a crime. The smile crept across her lips like a Cheshire cat followed by a little, telling giggle. “You look so confused, Agent Scully. I’ll put it this way, I wouldn’t undo those shackles even if I had the key down here, sweetheart…"

“What are you talking about?” Scully was halfway to the puking point as she looked eye to eye with a woman who was slowly making a turn to a place she had only seen from Miles.

The girl ran her hand along Scully’s cheek and made the curve of her chin, staring at her mouth. “I kept telling him to hurry up, do whatever he planned on doing to you, and then kill you—but he’s got this crazy idea that you’re just playing hard to get…Tsk, tsk…You’re not playing hard to get, are you?”

“Who the fuck are you?” Scully’s timbre was testy at best as she held back the urge to throttle her head against the girl’s forehead, the subtlest of rage building under her fear.

The girl pushed Scully’s head against the wall and slid her hand to the incredibly tender spot against her neck, applying just enough pressure to command complete attention. “You’re
lucky that I’m not nearly as unforgiving as Miles, princess, but I’m significantly less patient at the same time so don’t push me.”

“You know who I am, so, who are you?” Scully was less than patient and her throat didn’t need any more abuse from anyone, even the considerably smaller, less physically intimidating one in front of her now.

“So very pretty and yet, so incredibly rude,” She let her fingers go lax on Scully’s neck and moved the shears from the floor across the top of Scully’s thigh, the smile staying as though it was a permanent fixture on her face. “I suppose, if you must know, my name is Deanna Lynn Miller, but everyone calls me Dee. It rolls nicely off the tongue, doesn’t it?”

Scully had her lips pursed together as Deanna pushed the rounded edge of the rescue shears against her inner thigh and swung her leg over her, straddling Scully’s lap, the distance between them becoming more intrusive. The picture, while heavily muddled, was becoming clearer as Scully could feel the shears pressing against the inner seam of her jeans, giving a tiny, not quite subtle enough mnemonic of who was in control of more than the situation. Scully inhaled sharply as Deanna’s actions were teetering on a very dangerous guessing game, the possibilities of what she could be doing with those shears were nearly endless.

“Please, don’t.” Scully knew, deep down, that rescue shears weren’t necessarily the most capable of creating punctures, but she didn’t know if Deanna was going to try to inflict a little pain regardless of that fact.

“Keep begging if you want but it really won’t help you,” Deanna had her left hand up against the wall next to Scully’s face, leaning forward until Scully instinctively turned her face away from her, evading her. “You know I’m the reason you’re in this position, right?”

“Why are you doing this?” Scully didn’t want to look her in the eye as all her red flags were going off at once, the horror of who this woman was had been clicking into place like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle.

Deanna forced Scully’s face forward, holding her chin in place with her thumb and index finger, her perfectly manicured nails half digging into Scully’s skin as she went unbending within her grip. “Think really hard, Dana, why would my brother develop such an unbelievable hard on for a woman with red hair, blue eyes, and a name that starts with a D? Hmmm…what could it be? Why would I make sure that one of his fantasies stayed at his fingertips? Aren’t you an FBI Agent? You’re really not very good at this.”

“You’re crazier than he is.” The knot on the back of Scully’s head was pressed hard against the wall as the words didn’t want to leave her lips, the aching sending a shock down her spine. “You’re obsessed with him more than he is with killing.”

“He’s not obsessed with killing—he’s obsessed with being in love with an idea of a woman that would kill for him, that would die for him, not realizing that the only woman that has ever given a shit about him and would kill for him, that would die for him, has been under his nose since the beginning,” Deanna’s voice was raising as she tightened her grip on Scully’s chin, the look in her eye intensifying with every note she spoke, “It’s unnerving to keep showing him that none of you love him like I love him.”

“Oh, Jesus Christ Almighty,” Scully couldn’t have imagined, in the worst of nightmares, that Miles not only had a sister, but one that was crazier than he was and bent on being a lot more than his blood.
“I think I get it a little bit with you, though,” Deanna was wildly sexual in nature and it was obvious as she let her fingers slide painstakingly slow down Scully’s neck to the curve of the vee line of her neckline. “You put up the biggest fight and you hide your appeal behind those expressive, haunting eyes…and you respond to everything, physically and verbally.”

“Get it over with, psychopath,” Scully didn’t want to be told about her personal life by Deanna and she certainly didn’t want to be touched by her either.

“Would you stop touching her, Deanna? She’s not yours to touch,” Miles’s voice came from the bottom of the stairs, interrupting his twisted little sister from groping the object of his affection, her hands hovering at the right position to start grabbing Scully’s breasts.

“No, you owe me after I got rid of the neighbor that heard all of your fucking gunshots earlier when you got a little trigger-happy over the other one getting away,” Deanna waved the shears at him, keeping her left hand firmly gripping the front of Scully’s shirt, almost pulling her away from the wall.

“I could’ve handled Mr. Peterson myself, Dee—he thinks I target practice on that tree down by the docks. I don’t need you meddling in it,” Miles was not amused by the recklessness of his little sister as he crossed his arms and gave her that all knowing big brother stare. “Get off of her, now.”

“This one certainly is the prettiest even though she’s got the shortest hair—but she dresses like a frump. Let me guess, she had on a cardigan when you snatched her?” Deanna’s eyes were nearly as expressive as Scully’s as she looked up at him with her poorly constructed halo teetering on the set of horns before looking back at Scully, a devilish little smile curving across her lips. “How did that partner of yours talk you out of your frumpy little cardigans and sensible jeans, princess?”

“You’re worse than he is, by leaps and bounds,” Scully didn’t want to know how Deanna knew about Mulder, but she did, making the situation more unreasonable than uncomfortable.

“He has to take control, doesn’t he? Has to pull your hair, nibble on your neck, maybe trap you in a corner?” Deanna squeezed Scully’s left breast hard enough that her back pressed against the wall and the pressure sent a twinge of pain through her chest that made it hard to take another breath of air.

“Deanna, knock off the bullshit,” Miles was caught somewhere between angry, horrified, and sweaty from the onset of adrenaline that surged through him from witnessing his youngest sister put her hands on Scully, an idea that hadn’t even crossed his sick and twisted mind until he was confronted with seeing it. “Stop.”

Deanna calmly slid the shears into the solitary front pocket of her dress and stood up straight in a smooth, sybaritic motion, her eyes on him like he was her prey. She had her hands behind her back, clasped together like she was nothing more than a child approaching a father figure after getting caught doing something that she wasn’t supposed to. Miles was thoroughly done with the actions of his sister, but he was also not fully in control of the situation as she stood in front of him, her stature significantly smaller than his, and held onto the front of his shirt, playing with the buttons at mid chest level. His eyes weren’t on Deanna but on Scully, who had taken to staring at the floor rather than look at the unhealthy sibling interaction going on beside her.

“Look at me, not her, or I’ll take all the fun out of this and just kill her,” Deanna pulled his shirt, tugging him off balance enough to get him to make eye contact with her instead of Scully.
“Remember, I made sure that you had a private place to go so you could act out all of your aggression—I’ve gotten to hear it all and replay every tape in that little office of yours, but I’m bored now.”

Oh no, she’s seen everything. Scully knew in that exact moment that everything that Miles had invaded of her privacy was on display at Deanna’s disposal and she had been watching it just as eagerly as he had been.

“What do you want?” Miles was incredibly weak when it came to the whims and expectations that his sister liked to throw his way even if nothing she asked for made him particularly pleased.

“I want you to go get that pretty little black dress in the closet and bring it to me,” Deanna turned toward Scully, her eyes on the hem of her pants. “Prudence really needs a little change of wardrobe.”

“Deanna, no,” Miles rarely refused to do something, but he could tell that the way Deanna was looking at Scully was more than his mental capacity could take.

Deanna swung around and pulled the gun from his front pocket, cocked it and aimed it at Scully’s forehead, her voice low and grating, her blood boiling. “You refuse me again and I’ll pull the trigger.”

Miles’s shoulders slumped as he realized that his sister was serious, his feet barely cooperating as he went up the stairs toward the main house door. Scully almost wished that she would just hurry up and do it, avoid the suffering they both intended on inflicting on her. Miles was less than pleased with Deanna, but his weakness for her selfish desires was apparently overwhelming for him as he dutifully did as he was told. Deanna grinned with satisfaction and carefully pushed the mechanism on the gun back before setting it onto a table as far from Scully as it could get. She was meticulous in her movements as she tiptoed back in Scully’s direction, playing with the emergency shears in her front pocket with every little step she took. Scully didn’t want to look at her, but she couldn’t help it as she looked up at her, the panic rising in her chest.

“I hope you understand, Dana, that I always get what I want—and that includes you,” Deanna resumed the same straddled position of Scully but slid her backside a bit higher on her thighs causing Scully to let out a helpless, rejecting groan. “I’m wearing shorts you fucking shrew.”

“Get the hell off of me, crazy bitch,” Scully was holding back the urge to shout as Deanna pressed the shears against the top of her chest, sliding them along the top of her shirt.

The sound of Miles’s heavy boots coming back down the stairs put another thrilled, broad smile across Deanna’s lips as she turned her head to make eye contact with her brother with the dress in his hands. “Don’t look away or you’ll miss all the fun, Miles.”

“You’re a fucking bitch, Dee,” Miles stood there, sweat forming on his forehead as his sister was sliding the shears along Scully’s clothes, taunting her with them.

“And you fucking love me, don’t you, Miles?” Deanna made the first sliding cut of one of Scully’s pantlegs almost all the way to her knee, her eyes watching the involuntary goosebumps form all over Scully’s skin from the cold metal touching her leg.

“Fuck you, little sister,” Miles muttered as Deanna adjusted her seated position and did the same action on the other pantleg, this time looking up at him with her lip between her teeth.
It was enough to make Scully’s skin crawl as the torture had become very carnal as Deanna cut her jeans all the way to her thigh on both sides before pulling on the bottom of Scully’s shirt. She slowly cut the soft, stretchy material of the tee-shirt up beyond Scully’s stomach, her pale skin peeking out from beneath the black fabric. Scully felt truly exposed as Deanna cut the last bit of the front of her shirt, letting the material fall open. She would’ve given anything for Mulder to burst through the glass at that moment and put a premature end to Deanna’s fun, but her hopes were fruitless as she felt the shears against her left shoulder, just over the bra strap, prepping to remove what was left of the shirt.

“Maybe you aren’t a prude after all—just look at that little, black bra with all that lace,” Deanna cut the sleeves open on the shirt and pulled the material away, fully revealing Scully’s vulnerable, ordinarily well-hidden body. “I bet you have on the pretty black panties to match, huh, kitten?”

“Go fuck yourself,” Scully had tears running down her cheeks again despite the indignation growing in her tone.

Deanna held onto the side of Scully’s pants and started to snip away at the denim on one hip until it met the other line she started, popping one of Scully’s legs completely free of her own clothing. She bit down on her lip, holding back another whimper, and felt the shears on the other side of her pants cutting away the last of the material that kept her covered up. Deanna set the shears aside and lifted her hips, creating a gap between her body and Scully’s thighs, before pulling the denim away, in one motion. Deanna was drawn in to the large bruises across the top of Scully’s thighs and knew that the explosion caused them. She purposely put more of her own weight on them and listened to the closed mouth gasping, watched Scully’s nostrils flare with every little flinch of pain she inflicted. Miles was bearing witness to the undressing of Scully and his conflicting impression of it was more than clear as he clenched his fist, bit down on his lip, and continued to sweat bullets, his eyes locked on staring at Scully’s small, strong frame underneath of his sister.

“No wonder your partner couldn’t keep his hands off of you,” Deanna was more interested in pissing off Miles than she was delivering a compliment to Scully as her eyes lingered a little too long over her in nothing more than her bra and panties. “Just look at you in your matched set begging to be seen, pretending you don’t like to be touched…does he really fall for that bullshit?”

“I swear if I get the chance, I’ll kill you myself,” Scully couldn’t hold back the words as she felt Deanna’s fingers invading the outside of her bra, violating what didn’t belong to her, what wasn’t hers to touch.

Deanna was enthralled by the throaty, angry tone coming from Scully as she leaned in, whispering in her ear. “Keep telling yourself that, sweetie.”

Scully hadn’t been this humiliated by a suspect before and she hadn’t fully prepared herself for the possibility of anyone catching her with her guard down long enough to succeed at it. She felt her gag reflex respond as the unwelcomed sensation of Deanna’s teeth dragging down her neck. It was unnerving, and she didn’t have much range of motion left as she tried to push her shoulder forward to break the contact. Deanna half growled at the attempt and pushed Scully’s head back directly underneath of her chin, resuming the same motion closer to the front of her neck, leaving heavy traces of red lipstick all over Scully’s pale skin tone, knowing that she could feel the sticky texture. Scully whimpered in spite of herself and closed her eyes, the tears dragging down her cheeks with every assaulting move that Deanna made. She knew that this was what Jeanette had experienced and that they had now experienced a link that could imprint on a soul for
the rest of their lives—simply from the trauma.

“Give me the dress, Miles,” Deanna looked over at her brother and held out her hand, the determination written on her face, her red lips a little less shimmery as most of the color had rubbed off on Scully’s skin.

Miles approached and made the mistake of making eye contact with Scully, causing his stomach to turn and his heart to sink as he saw the look of pure hatred and disgust written on her face. Deanna pulled the dress from his fingers and undid the back of it as well as the button closures along the thin straps before sliding off of Scully’s legs. Deanna’s hands wandered again, lingering over Scully’s stomach, creeping along the waistband of her panties as though she were purposely taunting Scully with the mere idea of removing them. She pinched the wounds on her side and watched Scully wince with pain as the blood oozed just a little bit from the larger sections. She was truly worse than her brother as she took a little bit of joy in seeing her in pain, the suffering was considerable and continuous. She pulled the dress onto her legs and maneuvered it up toward her hips, almost adjusting her like a living doll she could manipulate in any way she saw fit.

“Lift up your hips,” Scully had heard those words before, but the context was different and heartbreaking as they came from Deanna instead of Mulder.

Scully did as instructed as her fingers grasped the chain above her head to give enough leverage to lift her weak hips into the air while Deanna pulled the dress into the position it was intended to be. The material was thin, almost see through, and was shorter than the dress that Deanna was wearing but not by much. It was loose fitting from the middle of Scully’s ribs down, flowing out and over the top of the satin section underneath. It left little to the imagination as Deanna zipped up the back and affixed the button closures on the thin shoulder straps that barely covered the bra straps. Scully looked down at the dress and felt more naked now than she had before it went on. Deanna must’ve been to the deprived point as she straddled Scully again, feeling her up to adjust the dress while also encouraging more unpleasant expressions and sounds out of Scully, the tears falling more heavily with every exhalation. Scully glanced at Miles and couldn’t help but notice the change in his demeanor as he was breathing heavily and had taken an interest in her appearance, his eyes lingering over the hem of the dress where it mingled close to Deanna’s legs. He was more than a little interested.

“Dee, go check the scanners,” Miles had a huskiness in his voice that sent a ripple of chills down Scully’s back.

Deanna turned her head toward him and glared, the fire burning in her eyes. “I’m not going upstairs, Miles—I like seeing how upset I’m making her. Just look at her tears.”

“Go check the scanners—we lost one and if she made it to the cops I’m not running the risk of them sneaking up on us,” Miles was looking at Scully as her chest heaved, the frustration and anger brewing within her.

Deanna stood up and got his face, the anger brewing in her as she started to shout. “I got you all of your cameras and made sure that you had plenty of meds to keep all of them unconscious during transport! I am not going to sit by—”

Miles cut off her rant, pulling her onto her tiptoes, mouth finding hers like it had been there before countless times, arms enfolding her like a lover would have. The initial shock wore off and she returned the embrace, the kiss, the fervor, searching his back, clutching onto him like he had disappeared and returned to her. It wasn’t right, in as many words, but it was necessary as he was appeasing her—a means to an end despite the implications of knowing what he had given her,
knowing what she was after. He was focused on alleviating part of the fixation, to take back part of the control, even if it meant doing something he didn’t actually want to do. Her eyes were closed but his were not as he was looking beyond her, at Scully, as the ripple effect drove through him like a truck, reminding him of what he was at his core—a monster capable of manipulation.

“Jesus,” Scully didn’t even want to look as she felt the puke in her mouth over the peripheral image of a brother making out with his sister.

Miles pulled away slowly, the remnants of Deanna’s lipstick now on him, his eyes on his little sister with a more narrowed, decisive aim. “Go upstairs…”

“Just one more thing before I go,” Deanna looked drunk as she bit down on the corner of her lip before turning toward Scully, her eyes still on Miles. “Please?”

He nodded and watched as his sexually charged sister knelt next to Scully again, her hands sliding through her hair, directing her head to one side. Deanna was a mess, but she was determined as she looked up at him again and slid her tongue up the side of Scully’s face, lingering next to the edge of her eyebrow. Scully shuddered as the position her head was in gave her no wiggle room as Deanna waited another moment to get to her feet. She stared Miles down again, licked her lips, took the second set of keys from his outstretched hand, and walked up the stairs, disappearing into the main house. Miles shuddered as he could hear the locks being secured from the other side as his eyes fell on Scully, the switch flipped, the monster revealed.

Miles liked the way she looked in the dress, was scintillated by the way the bruises were barely covered on her thighs, and thoroughly enjoyed seeing her looking so much more doll-like and innocent than she had before. He slid out of his heavy jacket with the keys and her gun in it, setting it off to the side before stepping forward toward her. Scully locked her legs together and struggled with the restraints as he put each of his boots on either side of her, trapping her movements just enough to frighten her. His eyes were almost glazed over as he knelt down, straddling her in a similar fashion to the way that Deanna had, causing her to instantly panic under his weight.

“No, no, no, no, don’t do this,” Scully had her eyes clamped shut as she could already feel his hands running down her arms, from the palms down toward her shoulders.

“You know he’ll never be able to make you feel the way that I can make you feel…if you’d just stop teasing me,” Miles was lost in that wave of attempted seduction as his vocal modulation had slipped deeper while his hands made their way across the top of her cleavage.

Scully’s eyes opened and her mouth got the better of her as she let the words slip out even though it was likely to get her in trouble. “I’d call you a mother fucker but we all know it’s more like sister fucker.”

Miles hated being ridiculed by women and she was no exception as the words broke through his exterior and caused him to lose his patience once again. He thought about hitting her like he had earlier but she didn’t seem at all intimidated by him like she had been earlier on when his hands were squeezing the life out of her. She had a deepening glare, fully throwing daggers in his direction, right through him. The irritated frown upon his lips became a devilish grin that gave Scully very little warning as he slid backwards, lifted partially off of her and grabbed her by the hips, lifting her into the air until her arms bent at the elbows involuntarily and aimed forward. His strength was intimidating as he held onto her like she weighed next to nothing and forced himself between her legs, pushing the dress material into an awkward bunch between them. His fingers were almost coiled against her thighs, pushing the dress higher on her thigh until the curve of his palm was pressed hard against her skin, bruising her already wounded legs. She let out a loud,
assertive cry as the pain radiated through her and reality set in, knowing exactly what he was trying
to do to her.

“I’m what, Dana? I couldn’t hear over all of that noise,” Miles pushed himself against
her, fully expecting to coax more loud cries and tears of humiliation from her as he did what he
previously swore he’d never do—attempt to violate her.

“If you really needed a place to go, Alabama is ok with what you two are doing,” Scully
was angry as she could feel everything but refused to allow him to win.

Deep in her core, Scully knew that a second reference to his highly incestuous
relationship with his sister was going to be more than he could take as she watched the vein in his
forehead pop out. The thought sunk in as he battled between knowing he was a half of a second
from taking what he wanted from Scully and replaying kissing Deanna in his head. The conflict
sent him into a tailspin as he slid his less skilled left hand to her neck, pushing his thumb against
her throat, dangerously pressing into her windpipe again while his hips desperately tried to
maintain that unpleasant, uninvited connection. Scully could barely see and now she couldn’t
breathe but the window of opportunity was there to get him at his weakest as his balance was
completely compromized. Scully violently moved her right leg until it slid down toward the floor
where she had just enough leverage to do what she knew would double him over in pain. She kneed
him hard in the groin and let out a guttural groan as his grip on her neck finally stopped. He made
an inhale before any noise left his lips, in an exhaling growl before he stumbled backwards, letting
go of her fully, dropping her.

“Shit,” Scully gasped as both of her knees smacked hard against the cement floor and
sent a spasm of pain up her body.

“You’re going to want to hurry up whatever you’re doing down there, Miles,” Deanna’s
voice was just as unpleasant to hear as he rolled to the corner with his hands cradling his crotch as
he had now been kicked more times than necessary by his standards. “The other girl survived.
They’ve got search crews looking for their missing Agent all over the lake…you don’t have much
time.”

5:15 PM

Waterway Drive Lake House (Lake Barcroft)

Falls Church, VA

Mulder and Max pulled into the driveway of the large home on the 6000 block of
Waterway Drive and looked around at all of the incredibly upscale homes in the neighborhood.
The people that lived in this area were not lower class or even middle class citizens—they were all
the upper tier kinds of people that spent great deals of money for privacy, for luxury. The Lake
Barcroft area wasn’t the “high crime” sort of area; it was a planned community of people that
knew their neighbors from the moment of groundbreaking until they vacated the premises via
moving on or up. It was almost too perfect of a place to hide away in the darkness and create a
seedy underbelly without anyone catching a whiff of it. The sun was dipping behind the skyline to
the west as it was setting, casting the surroundings in shadow and instilling that deep rooted fear in
the pit of Mulder’s stomach over the length of time she had been missing. Nearly twelve hours.
Max could hear and see the flashing lights from the FBI and local police still trolling through the
waters looking for evidence. It was not the largest of lakes but it had a large area to cover and they
didn’t fully know what direction Jeanette had traveled in nor was the boat registered to anyone.

“Which sister is staying here?” Max knew that Mulder had a mental list of the names as
his expression was driven and steady as they pressed the doorbell.

“Drea Miller, the third sister, she’s 33 years old,” Mulder was a bit relieved that the
black top was starting to peek out a little bit through the snow, giving subtle hints that the air was
beginning to warm back up enough to melt some of the accumulation.

The inherited home belonging to the Miller daughters was large, uniquely built with hints
of architecture that rivaled some of the modernist designs done by Frank Lloyd Wright that
remained in the Southwestern area. Mulder rang the doorbell a 2nd time and could hear the eager
footsteps from inside, bare against hardwoods, followed by the muffled, female voice shouting
“hold on, hold on, just a second” before the locks were undone and the porch light turned on,
illuminating the space they were standing in with a bright, white light. The door swung open with a
little bit of enthusiasm and they were met by a braless redhead with shocking blue eyes, with
stronger, more pronounced curves than Deanna. She was in a pair of loose fitting, Navy blue warm
ups and a black tank top, with equally well manicured, shimmering silver nails on both her hands
and feet. She awkwardly crossed her arms, hiding the physical response to the cold but also
inadvertently pushing her chest a little higher into the air, making her clearly visible ‘v’ shaped
scar more pronounced across the curve of her cleavage.

“Can I help you?” She had a higher pitched voice than Deanna but the inflections were
similar as she stood in the doorway, the goosebumps forming on her arms as the chilly wafted over
her skin.

Mulder and Max flashed their badges, with Mulder speaking first. “I’m Agent Fox
Mulder and this is Agent Max Belle with the FBI – we’re actually here because your older sister
Delilah mentioned that you might have some information on your brother, Miles. We just need to
ask you a few questions if you have a moment?”

She didn’t reach out to shake either of their hands as the perky smile weakened; her
stance heavily guarded as though didn’t know which one to make eye contact with. “I should’ve
guessed this was going to come back eventually to haunt all of us—look, Agent Mulder, my
brother is a great manipulator and an even greater liar. He screwed up the dynamics between all of
us girls to the point that Delilah is a chain smoking bitch, Danielle is a recluse that spends most of
her time going to work and going home, and Deanna…well, Deanna has completely lost her
fucking mind.”

“Where does that leave you, then, Drea?” Max found the opportunity to speak up, the
gentlest of tones coming through in his voice as it hung on her name like it was familiar, just to
soften up the bitterness from dredging up her memories.

She blushed and kicked a piece of lint in front of her on the hardwood floor, clearing her
throat as she struggled with the words. “Not that it’s really pertinent but I’ve had a few…issues
with doing not entirely appropriate things in public spaces.”

“Wait, what?” Max didn’t mean to question it out loud but he did, his confusion written
all over his face like he had been stamped with it.

Mulder turned his head and lowered his voice, attempting to only be heard by Max. “Maximus, she’s been arrested for public sex acts.”

“Just the exposure part but we don’t need to get into the technicalities,” Drea’s smile was mischievous and more than Max could necessarily process as he tried not to make direct eye contact with her while Mulder contemplated the laughter resting at the back of his brain.

Max looked like a deer in the headlights again as the words took a minute to fully sink into his brain, his mouth agape for a second until Mulder nudged him in the back. Max made a face and blushed himself as he caught her looking at him, purposely dropping her hands just enough that he could definitely tell how chilly she was. She certainly wasn’t shy and there wasn’t much need to play coy when she knew one of them was stumbling a little off kilter over her bad behavior. Mulder rolled his eyes over how utterly naïve Max was but found it a little amusing that it was that easy to push him out of his comfort zone.

“Miss Miller, that’s not really what we needed to ask you about—we need to know the whereabouts of your bother, not your sisters,” Mulder took back the command of the conversation, restoring the seriousness and severity of the topic as he furrowed his brow at Max.

“Please call me Drea…the only one that likes any fucking formality is Delilah because her name should really rhyme with PUNT and end in Zilla,” Drea rolled her eyes and resumed crossing her arms for warmth this time. “Would you both come in so I can prevent my extremities from becoming blocks of ice? I promise I don’t bite.”

They both nodded and she moved a little faster toward the living space, her feet making that half slap-half tapping noise with every step she took. She shivered visibly as she reached for the sweatshirt off of the back of the couch, pulling it over her head immediately. Mulder stood in the doorway for a second longer and nudged Max in the back again as he caught him unintentionally staring at Drea’s ass while she pulled the sweatshirt on. Mulder was caught somewhere between tickled and annoyed by Max’s inability to put on a poker face as they both entered the home that Drea occupied, trying to pick up on any subtle hints that she may have been concealing part of the truth in her story. Mulder looked around at the sparse, yet intricate design work of the shelves, the media center, and the furniture—all of which were very feminine yet minimalist. It didn’t really have any traces of a messy plumber in the building nor anything resembling something masculine—like she kept that part of her life away from her home life or considered it to be a liability.

“Can I get either of you coffee, tea, water…shots?” Drea slid her hands into the front pouch of the sweatshirt and turned toward them, her hand against the back of a fluffy chair near the door to the deck.

“That won’t be necessary, thank you,” Mulder shook his head and glanced at the photograph of all four girls together on a table next to the kitchen doorway.

Drea pulled one of the chairs out from the table and sat down, crossing her legs while struggling to keep her feet warm under the extra-long warm ups she was wearing, looking directly at Max this time just to watch him squirm. “Seriously, I don’t bite unless you’re into that sort of thing, I swear…have a seat.”

Her wit was unbelievable considering the kind of details that they knew of her childhood but her admission of illegal activities was the part that brought her back to a more human level as they both sat down at the kitchen table. Mulder was finding it difficult to separate the issue as he
couldn’t help but see the shocking similarities between all of the girls and Scully—down to the body type and skin tone. She had the same wry smile but none of the quirks to match the woman that had captivated him so willingly for six years. Scully wasn’t a copy of someone’s sister—she was Scully, right down to her toes, and it was in that moment that he knew Miles hadn’t figured that out yet.

“Agent Mulder, you’re far away—are you going to stop beating around the bush or continue to act like my brother didn’t go and do something terrible again?” Drea had a glass of hot tea in front of her on the table that she had made before they arrived that was still steaming, the lemon floating in the top as she wiggled her spoon in it, making eye contact with him.

“You certainly don’t pull your punches do you, Drea,” Mulder was taken aback by the directness of this woman who had endured so much in her life.

Drea nodded and ran a hand through her long curls, letting them fall a little bit off to one side of her face as she spoke. “When you have spent the better part of your life hearing that you’re a victim and that you’re doomed to be unhappy because you have scars all over your body, you tend to drop all necessity for glittering it up with useless bullshit. I suppose that’s why I’m alone.”

“If you insist on the directness, I can go there—your brother is a suspect in the serial killings of nine different women, two additional attempted murders, and one, at large, abduction a twelfth victim. The missing woman is an FBI agent that has red hair, blue eyes, and is petite in stature, not unlike yourself or your sisters, for that matter,” Mulder rattled it off and watched the horror appear on her face like someone was playing the reel of her life in front of her, only this time it was a poorly done sequel that she had to watch unfold from the outside. “We need to know where he’d go—if you’ve seen him.”

“Unlike Delilah and Danielle, I haven’t really wanted to kill my brother. I’d rather see him societally pay for what he did to all of us but I also can’t say that what happened wasn’t years in the making at the same time. I’ve underwent a lot of counseling and psychiatric sessions just to admit that this was reality, Agent Mulder, but our mother was the true monster,” Drea sipped her tea and held the warm cup between her fingers, staring at the floating lemon while she grappled with it. “She did horrible things to Miles from the time he was barely able to talk—all of us girls grew up knowing what the words ‘mother’s little pet’ meant and we didn’t have any furry little pets running around.”

Mulder swallowed hard at the traumatic, deep seeded revelation of what created the devil that took Scully, the frustration mixing with confusion as he no longer knew how to feel about the situation. He watched as Drea took another deep breath, her eyes glassing over from the emotional tugging at her heartstrings despite doing so much to keep them at bay safely for so long. She forced a smile and looked at both of them, wiping her eyes instinctively as she felt a few stray tears streaking down her cheeks, hiding away the emotion.

“Don’t mistake my emotion for empathy or even sympathy for my brother—I tried, many years ago, to get him help after the Canton’s adopted his monstrous ass but he outright refused. Claimed that the medication was all he needed to stay stable. He was telling them that he was seeing a counselor but in reality, he’s been spending time with Deanna every couple of days,” Drea gathered herself up, set the cup on the table and retrieved a tissue from a box on the countertop. “When I tell you that my little sister has lost her fucking mind, I really wish I were joking.”

“When did she start spending inordinate amounts of time with him, Drea?” Max could see the sadness taking her over in a tug of war between guilt and anger.

“It’s been the better part of the last decade, Agent Belle, around seven years ago. I tried
to play go between and keep them from being alone together but she leaves constantly—and she’s 31, she should know better and I’m not her babysitter,” Drea was itching for a cigarette as she spilled the beans about her fucked up family.

“Do you know where she’d go with him?” Mulder looked at her, noticing the shakiness of her hands almost immediately.

Drea nodded and wrote down the address to the other lake house, handing the piece of paper to him. “Danielle and Delilah won’t go there because it needs so many renovations but it was our grandparents’ house on our father’s side and they passed away about a year ago. They were the ones that raised us after our mom was finally locked up for child abuse not long after Miles went to the juvenile detention center. It was kind of the only place we ever felt safe other than this house. I haven’t seen the keys to the other lake house since Deanna disappeared two weeks ago…”

“Disappeared?” Max was hung up on the word as she took another sip of her tea.

“I told her to stop sneaking him into the house about three weeks ago after I caught them...” She tried not to audibly gag but she couldn’t help it as the thought crossed her mind before the words finished. “I caught them touching each other, sans the clothing. Deanna went ballistic on me, kept calling me jealous amongst other things. I spent four hours scrubbing literally every surface in this house.”

“Not your brand of fetish I take it,” Mulder couldn’t pass up the opportunity as he witnessed Drea’s skin half crawling, the subtle shade of gray forming on her face as she was clearly getting sick to her stomach.

Drea rolled her eyes and crossed her arms. “Agent Mulder, I have a how long can I have sex in public without getting caught issue, not an incest issue—that’s beyond disgusting—oh, wait, you’re just making fun of me. Ass.”

“I can’t take you anywhere,” Max held back the urge to laugh but couldn’t help but notice as Drea’s face was turning pink over Mulder’s ill-conceived yet well-delivered sex joke in regards to one of the earliest of Miles’s victims in his sister.

“Does the missing FBI Agent really resemble me and my sisters?” Drea was a little relieved at the joke even though she was grappling with the idea that her sister could be involved in something like this with Miles.

“A little more than I’d like to admit, actually,” Mulder nodded, his mind already wishing she was in his arms, safe again.

“I think I have something you both need to see. Don’t move,” Drea got up and ran down the hallway, a shocked, concentrating stare on her face as she disappeared around the corner.

“I’m worried about Scully,” Max verbalized what Mulder was feeling in his bones as the quiet returned to the space minus the dull echo of rummaging in a room in the back.

Mulder rubbed the bridge of his nose as the headache returned, sending a dull, aching pang through the space between his eyes, reminding him all over again of the sand falling through the cracks as time slipped away. “I am, too, Max...but this shit, while convoluted and worrying, gets us that much closer to finding her safe.”

“What happens if the youngest sister has been helping him the entire time?” Max spotted another photograph of the girls—each of them with their hair long and in ringlets, dressed up like
they were participants in a wedding.

Mulder made eye contact with Max, the words not wanting to sink in as a possible truth but they held weight and stuck out like a sore thumb amongst a seemingly perfect surface. Denying it was part of that defense mechanism but it wasn’t helping them now. Drea came back into the room carrying a shoe box and set it on the table in front of them, standing between their chairs while she opened it with a certain amount of hesitation.

She breathed another sigh as she took a step back, leaving them to thumb through the box at their own pace. “I found these when I was cleaning out her bedroom after she left—there’s more than just redheads, though, but all of them are labeled like they were rated. I always thought that maybe my little sister Dee was just a closet lesbian but, maybe it was something else?”

“Did you just say Dee?” Mulder hadn’t started looking through the stack of photos but Max was going through them while he looked at Drea with a little bit of terror written on his face.

“Yeah, that’s her nickname since we were babies, why?” Drea couldn’t understand the gravity of the name her sister went by but she could tell it was a problem by the look on Mulder’s face.

“The only surviving victims have been called that name more than once during their torture,” Mulder glanced at his feet, the empathy for this woman rising as he watched the sadness reappear on her face again.

“Torture?” Drea hiked up her sleeve and showed him her arm, the numerous little scars where slashes had been, the tears finally falling like petals off of a wilting flower. “Sort of like how these might’ve been given?”

Mulder nodded and noticed the sheer number of them just on one arm, the aching in his heart increasing as his mind was still on Scully enduring anything similar. “Like that—and worse.”

“Oh son of a bitch…Mulder, look,” Max was livid as he almost dropped the photo in his hand, the anger written on his face as he pushed it across the table toward him.

Mulder didn’t want to look but he had to as he straightened his back and focused on the photograph in front of him on the table. He wanted to vomit as the words were across the bottom in bold “the favorite” along with a numerical one next to it, his eyes not wanting to follow the rest of the photograph as he knew, in his heart, who it was of. The gasp that left Mulder’s lips was bordering on audible as he moved his eyes up the photo and saw the expression on her face. It was one of those “you’re kidding me, right?” expressions that she did so well and so often. He could see image quite clearly, like it was yesterday, of her standing in front of that water logged display in Kroner, Kansas after witnessing sparks quite literally flying for Sheila and Holman. He knew the photograph well because he took the picture and nearly got the taste slapped out of him for the effort since he thoughtlessly, yet purposely replaced “say cheese” with “guess who’s sleeping in your room tonight, Scully?” loud enough that more than a few people could hear him. He didn’t care, though – he liked looking at her that night—he always liked looking at her.

“Oh, Jesus Christ, are you ok?” Drea’s voice brought him back to Earth and he hadn’t realized that he was halfway to tears as he was tracing her face with his index finger.

“I took this photo of her when we were on a case not too long ago—I didn’t think she kept it, though, since she made that face in it and she doesn’t like anyone seeing that face,” Mulder swallowed hard and realized they really had been running from each other for a long time that he didn’t realize the littlest of things that made him wild about her. “It’s one of her best expressions.”
“Mulder, we need to go to the other lake house, it’s the best shot we have,” Max gathered up the photographs and slid them into the box, replacing the lid before making eye contact with Drea. “Can we take these? It has photos of every victim…”

“Take it—I don’t want any part of what they’re doing. I know what that kind of torture is like and I can imagine he’s gotten more skilled since his testicles dropped.” Drea knew that her lack of a filter might’ve been a problem but she didn’t care anymore as they both got to their feet with Max carrying the box of photographs.

“We appreciate everything that you’ve told us even if it wasn’t the easiest of information to divulge about your family members, Drea,” Mulder was walking toward the door, glancing back at them as she followed them with her hands firmly in the pouch of her sweatshirt again.

“I stopped being able to help Dee and Miles a long time ago, Agent Mulder, and I don’t want to see anyone else get hurt…knowing that he’s killed someone makes this so much harder,” Drea pulled her right hand from the pouch and looked out at the snow that had fallen in the last ten minutes as it glowed in the dark like a childhood nightlight. “How do I contact you if I have anything else that could be helpful?”

“Oh, Max, give her one of your cards in case she needs anything,” Mulder winked at Max just out of Drea’s field of vision, witnessing the flushed coloration instantly form on Max’s cheeks all over again as he took the box of photos from him so he’d have free hands to do so.

Drea bit the corner of her lip as she slid her feet into a pair of slippers and walked a few feet into the driveway just as Max was digging through his coat pocket looking for his cards. He looked a little antsy and clumsy with his tongue between his teeth again, sticking out just enough from between his lips as he caught Drea staring at him from less than two feet from him. She wiggled in her slippers up on her toes then back down again, almost in a bouncing motion, making it that much more difficult for his cards to release from his pocket. She wouldn’t have admitted it but there was something awfully sweet about his genuinely clumsy, easy to tease nature—it drew her in and the feeling hadn’t been there for quite a long time.

“If you don’t hurry up and hand me one of those cards I’m going to take this sweatshirt off again, Agent Belle,” Drea knew she was making him nervous as he nearly choked on his tongue and bit down just hard enough on the edge of it to make his eyes water.

He pulled one free, finally, and put his hand out with it perched between his index and middle finger, a bit relieved that he didn’t start stuttering like he’d never spoken to a woman before this moment. “It was stuck.”

Drea purposely let her fingers linger over Max’s as she took the card, her eyes locked onto his like a girl with a crush. “Uh huh…a likely story. So is this your cell number, Agent Belle?”

Max nervously nodded, swallowed hard and spoke but the sound that came out resembled a teenager going through puberty as his tone cracked just slightly. “If you have anything just let me know.”

Mulder was already in the driver’s seat waiting on his clumsy, teenaged oaf that was now practically useless as he fumbled with the door handle before getting into the passenger seat. It was cute but a little pathetic as the urgency momentarily failed while Mulder carefully pulled out of the driveway, glancing over at the still pink cheeked Max sitting in the passenger seat with his seatbelt carefully buckled. Mulder let out a laugh like it was one of the most necessary laughs of his life, catching Max off guard enough that he fidgeted and stared at him with his brow furrowed.
“What is so funny?” Max crossed his arms like an indignant little brother getting interrogated by the older, more experienced brother after witnessing more than he should have.

“I’m going to have to bail you out of jail for sex on a park bench, aren’t I?” Mulder was still cackling, the words almost hard to understand underneath of the laughter as he started driving in the direction of the other lake house.

“I’m going to pretend as though you haven’t just opened your mouth at all – that you’re just stressed out over Scully, kind of like PTSD,” Max was embarrassed and a little flabbergasted even though Mulder was never the type to hold his tongue prior to this so why would it be shocking?

Mulder inhaled, and the laughing slowed to a dull hiss as he held his mouth shut while his diaphragm relaxed. “Maximus, you’ve got a fetish for redheads…just say it.”

“So do you!” Max couldn’t figure out anything else to say as Mulder was following the dark, slightly icy road around in a meandered half circle, following the water’s edge through the middle of the upscale neighborhoods.

“Only one, Maximus, only one,” Mulder shot him a look and tapped on the steering wheel, his eyes on the road. “And she should be sitting in this car right now helping me make fun of you.”

“We’re about six minutes away…I think. Shit, these streets are all winding and convoluted out here,” Max was already turned around backwards even though Mulder seemed to know exactly where he was driving.

“I’ve been here before, but not since the big development went in with all of these million dollar homes—we are about ten minutes out and have to cross over about four other of these winding streets before we get to the block we need,” Mulder shook his head and glanced toward the water, where he could see the flashing lights of the police boats still actively searching. “Do me a favor, call it in…we need Skinner nearby in case of backup.”

“Shit, yeah, that’s a good idea,” Max went through his phone and dialed, holding the phone up to his ear. “Skinner? It’s Max…yeah, we might need backup…spoke to one of the younger sisters and she gave us a viable address on Lakeview Drive, the house belongs to the sisters…Miles might have help from the youngest…Yes…No, he’s ok…Just look for the SUV.”

“Skinner worried about me?” Mulder waited until the phone was back in Max’s lap to speak, the obviousness in the answer.

“No more than the usual—don’t do anything stupid, don’t get yourself killed,” Max didn’t realize how much they had become a bit like a stereotypical family despite the need to stay on that edge of professionalism. “Find the son of a bitch before I do—we’ll bring her home.”

Brilliant, bald bastard. Mulder smiled at the sentiments of his supervisor knowing exactly what he would need to hear even if the words weren’t being spoken directly to him. Skinner had a knack for painting a picture of returning things to normal, even when the situation seemed so dark, depressing, and ominous.

The house peeked out from the edge of street as Mulder turned onto the section of Lakeview Drive where the old, yet sizeable home could be seen from the road, the misgiving rising in his belly as he pulled into the driveway and turned off the headlights. It looked just as he imagined it would be – needing massive renovations with some of the windows boarded up or
blacked out, front door with one of those heavy, modified storm door acting like a shield in front of it. He could see the small windows to the basement level with bars on the outside, all reinforced by cement inlay. He swallowed hard as he slid out of the SUV with his hand on his holster to remind himself that it was there. The situation already felt off as everything was dark around the house, down to the city required lighting at the beginning of driveways especially in planned communities.

“Max, are you armed?” Mulder’s voice was hushed, the cloud of steam rising off of him as heat met cold with every breath.

Max moved the side of his coat away from his holster and nodded. “I really don’t want to have to use it but I will if I have to.”

“Well, personally, I hope you don’t have to but in the off chance, don’t miss,” Mulder flipped the button of his holster off, making his gun easier to readily remove if need be.

Max rolled his eyes as he approached the house next to Mulder. “I did excellent on the range—don’t judge.”

“I need you on that end of the house, watch for my signal in case anything goes… batshit,” Mulder was looking at this as a tactical rescue mission and not an interview as he sent Max toward the end of the house where the office was located.

Max took a slightly elongated path all the way to a section of shrubs, ducking down behind them until he was less than visible, even to Mulder. Mulder was slow in his approach to the front door of the house as he glanced at each part of the house—the exposed windows, the boarded up windows, and the upstairs window that seemed to have a thicker than normal ledge on it meant for planter boxes. His eyes lingered on it as his boots brushed up against the steps, bringing his focus toward the front door. The two steps up to the door were ones that had his head swimming as he aggressively knocked on the exposed metal storm door, the rattle echoing into the night air. He stood there for a moment, listening carefully to the quiet that followed but could hear the distant rustling of objects inside, like someone was purposely trying not to be heard. He knocked again, this time with a little more pep and loudness behind his knuckles. He could hear that same kind of barefoot against hardwood floor sound nearing the door, the feminine voice following behind each step clearly shushing someone else in the house. Each lock was undone from the inside and made a loud click as it was moved until the door finally gave way, then opened far enough for half of her silhouette to be seen from the outside.

“Um, yes, what do you want?” Deanna’s unamused voice was coming out as she looked Mulder up and down through the storm door, her lipstick still a mess around her puffy lips.

She was exactly as he pictured, right down to the baby doll dress that looked as though it had recently gotten dirty near the bottom. “Ma'am, I'm Agent Mulder and we were in the area with local police on a call about gun shots earlier, we’re just doing a quick sweep of the area to make sure no one was hurt and to see if anyone may have seen or heard where they were coming from.”

Her devilish smile appeared again, the little bit of aggression hiding behind her eyes as she fidgeted, playing with the door handle. “Oh, I just figured it was crazy Mr. Peterson again chasing his ugly ass wife with the shot gun—did someone get shot, Agent Mulder?”

“We're just following up with the lead, standard procedure and protocol,” Mulder’s voice carried, his intonation had volume and caused her to instinctively block the door despite how futile that attempt would be.
“What a pity that they make you do this out in the snow, Agent Mulder, it must be absolutely freezing out there,” Deanna was now playing coy, her fingers coiling around one of her ringlets. “Could you use a hot cup of coffee? Tea? Might make the next couple of houses a lot easier?”

“No that won’t be necessary…I’m sorry, I didn’t catch your name, what was it Miss?” Mulder was probing for her to confirm her name, anything to give him that one signal, while his ears were carefully listening as the sound of a chain clanging against itself made him give pause for a moment.

“It’s Deanna Miller, Agent Mulder, but you can call me anything you like,” Deanna was flirting, blatantly, and it made Drea’s comments about her that much more real as she seemed to have no concept of reality.

“So it’s just been you at the residence today, Miss Miller?” Mulder purposely chose her formal name and watched her eye twitch with irritation at the insistence on keeping it businesslike.

“I mean, you can come inside and search the place but it’s just been me all day, Agent Mulder—me and my pretty little kitten, Princess, but she’s been kind of nasty today,” Deanna was referencing Scully right under his nose as she giggled in Mulder’s direction.

“Just stay inside, ma’am, if anything strange happens be sure to contact us,” Mulder nodded in her direction and moved toward the SUV, waiting to hear the door shut before gesturing toward Max, who was hiding behind one of the hedges next to the house.

Max met him at the SUV, keeping his voice at a whisper level, the confusion apparent and visible on his face. “That was a little too quick.”

“Saying that little sister Miller is nuts might not be appropriate, she’s got something rattling around up there that is sending up the red flag—she was far too willing to let me search the house and I could see a pair of utility boots right next to her feet that were definitely meant for a man,” Mulder glanced back at the door to make sure it was still secured shut before continuing his train of thought. “Please tell me you have a toolbox in the back of the SUV?”

“Yeah, why?” Max had a sideways, nervous look on his face as he could see the smoke signals coming off of Mulder as the wheels were turning in his brain.

“I’m going to need a way into that house without getting caught.”

Chapter End Notes

Oh my goodness—please don’t be mad I did another cliffhanger! You’ll see why! 22 is already 3 pages deep and this was 18 pages long! EEK! I love you all for sticking it out and the journey is so worth it. I am fully expecting the vast number of “ew, gross” and “The Lannister twins would be proud” messages from you.

Yes, I made myself uncomfortable.  
No, I’m not proud of myself.  
Okay, that might be a lie but you know what I mean. I’ll get 22 up as fast as I can to erase the mental torture…I need a shower.
Chapter Summary

A weighty decision is made on saving Scully’s life – leading to potentially deadly consequences.

Post “Agua Mala” (Season 6 with mentions of “Rain King”, “Two Fathers”, and “One Son” Briefly and only for context purposes)

Chapter Notes

“It’s you. It has always been you. And it will always be you; yesterday, today, tomorrow.”
– Felicia Anjani

Adsum – Latin for “I’m here”

Description of violent situations – some more graphic than others; light warning

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See the end of the chapter for more notes

Lakeview Drive (Lake Barcroft)

Falls Church, VA

“How long are you going to put up with her kicking you in the balls, Miles?” Deanna was standing at the top of the stairs after hearing her brother shouting obscenities at Scully for the fifth time in under an hour. “Just get it over with and kill her.”

“Why don’t you stop talking about my testicles and tell me what those scanners are saying?” Miles was in considerable pain and had essentially wilted against Scully after she managed to kneel him in the sack again, the sweat all over his forehead.

He looked like shit with his hair a mess from the sweat beads collecting along his hairline, her blood across the skin of his knuckles from a left hook and two punches to the jaw just to get Scully halfway to compliance. She had bested him in her own way despite his eagerness to try again but her will was stronger than his as she locked her knees together while the blood dripped down the side of her lip. The taste in her mouth was slightly metallic all over again mixed
with saliva as she could no longer hold it in, sibilating it on the floor in front of her in a circular spatter. She didn’t want to look down but her instinct was overwhelming as she spotted the sheer volume of blood on the floor, but found a little relief in seeing none of her teeth there after the last hit she took.

Her wrists were aching, raw, and bloodied from excess friction, both from struggling against the chains and from his attempts to depredate her again. She knew her fight wasn’t over as she looked at him from across the room in his disheveled state with his hands cupping his wounded pride like she had broken them. She secretly wished that she had busted them in half and had, by design, made it damn near impossible for him to move or strike her again but she knew that the likelihood of such was slim. Scully’s bruises on her face had become more obvious and conspicuous as the blows to her face seemed to concentrate on the space between her jaw and cheekbone. She winced as the pain flooded her face, the dizziness fighting to return to her.

*I don’t know how much more of this I can take.* Scully’s mind was considerably more focused on her dwindling strength as she weakly inhaled through her nose, nostrils flaring.

“She’s not going to give in to you, Miles, just look at her face,” Deanna was dabbling in logic despite knowing full well it was more about jealousy than rationality as she looked down the stairs at her brother stewing over Scully’s clear incapability of letting him touch her willingly.

“Were you not quite satisfied with yourself earlier or are you going to push me again, little girl?” Miles stood up and stared up at Deanna from the cement floor, a gruffness rising in his tone.

Deanna took a couple of steps down until she was able to lean over the railing toward him, pulling him by his collar until her mouth hovered just inches from his, purposely leaving space between them. “I could help make all of those sore spots feel so much better—I promise I’ll be gentle. You’ll love it.”

Scully held back her urge to throw up as she witnessed Deanna doing everything she could to seduce her brother for the second time. She swallowed hard and tried to bury the turbulence in her stomach by focusing her thoughts on anything but that. Scully had witnessed his emotions run the gamut of disgusted to intrigued in only a few moments, like the wires in his brain had become crossed and he didn’t know which personality wanted to be the dominant one—nor which one was set to take control over his life. Somehow, Scully knew that part of that problem was the little devil in a white dress named Deanna. Miles didn’t seem to be protesting this time as he inhaled a deep breath of her perfume and shot her a look before shaking his head slowly.

“Go back upstairs while I finish this—tell me if anything new comes over the scanner,” He pulled back and gave her that stern look that she secretly adored.

Their relationship was the juxtaposition of when a sociopath and dissociative identity collide together—they catapult, destroy, and enable each other and not always did those things occur in that order. Miles was the manifestation of her trauma while Deanna was his catalyst, his open wound, his disgusting secret that brought back all of the memories inflicted by his mother. She was the target of all of his rage and the source of all his comfort in one thought as he could picture enveloping her in another loving embrace, illuminate her in all of his passion, and then break her into pieces in the next breath. Deanna didn’t think in such black and white terms as she simply saw him as the man that wouldn’t have her despite her best efforts to push the issue. She wanted him to see it, know it, understand and just go with it but he never saw her as a viable lover despite how much he secretly obsessed over the exact topic.

“Go,” Miles poked her in the center of her chest just hard enough to get her attention and
she heaved a heavy sigh as she started back up the stairs, staring down at him like it was her only purpose in life.

She started to speak again as she reached the top of the stairs but the sound of an SUV pulling into the driveway stopped her from moving as she held onto the bannister, her balance on her left foot as the other was pressed against the final step up. “That’s not the neighbors…it’s too loud.”

Miles gestured for her to check but she simply glanced through the gaps in the curtains on the window next to the front door, noticing immediately that it was Mulder pulling into the driveway. In their eyes he was nothing more than an inconvenience in their elaborate, terrorizing plan and his arrival only sped up their timetable in executing it. She shook her head and made a “throat cut” gesture in reference to Scully but he wasn’t receptive to it as he backed slowly toward Scully. Scully had a feeling in the pit of her stomach that something was about to change in her favor whether they were aware of it or not.

“It’s the fucking partner, you’ve got to be kidding me, Miles,” Deanna wasn’t good at whispering as she became almost animated as she moved her hands in an over-exaggerated way as her volume stayed quiet.

“Just open the door—get rid of him,” Miles already had his hand across Scully’s mouth knowing that it was Mulder outside of the door as the knocking started.

Deanna put on her best fake smile and adjusted her dress in such a way that the dirt along her knees was not completely out of place before opening the door. The small talk began almost immediately and Scully could hear Mulder’s voice the second he started to speak. Her eyes filled with tears as she listened to each word, knowing he was so close to her, knowing he was right there if she could only call out to him. She wiggled against Miles’s hand and caused the chains above her to move against each other, making a fairly noticeable clanging noise that only encouraged rage from her captor. He pulled the blade from the sheath and held it to her neck, pressing it just enough to remind her of just how fast he could end her life if she insisted on continuing to be a nuisance.

The feeling in her heart was bordering on misery but she wasn’t done fighting for Mulder to hear her so all of it could come to an end. She continued to listen to the baseless remarks from Mulder and knew that something was off—he wasn’t usually the type to be satisfied with vague answers but Deanna’s answers seemed to trigger something in him that she couldn’t quite identify as she heard the door close. Deanna held her breath as she watched him maneuver to the SUV before going to the stairwell, her eyes big and overly concerned.

“You have two choices on how this goes, Miles, we either kill her quickly so you get your rocks off that way or we move her so you can finish it slowly, I know how much you like to take your time with the kill,” Deanna purposely bit her lip as she spoke the words, nearly ignoring that Scully was even in the room.

“We can’t just leave her down here, she makes too much noise,” Miles waved the knife around at Scully, the blade’s tip aimed, the worry of her slipping through his clutches written on his face.

Deanna glanced at Scully and then made eye contact with Miles again, licking her lips. “Give her a low dose of that same sedative…we’ll move her after we get everything ready. Can’t have this place crawling with FBI before we have a chance to get away, now can we?”

Scully’s eyes widened as he pulled his hand away before getting to his feet. He tended to use a hefty sedative and Scully knew it as he went to the table where his elaborate stereo
equipment was set up, rummaging through a box of vials. Her pulse was fast and the blood loss from the small wounds that she had was considerable but the thing she was most concerned over was the fading vision and stomach churning like she had been hanging upside down—a looming concussion.

“You don’t have to do this, Miles,” Scully didn’t want to cry again but she could feel the pounding of her heart up in her throat as he started to fill an empty syringe with enough in it to soften her up enough to possibly put her to sleep.

“You aren’t fooling me, Dana—and you’re not getting away from me,” Miles flicked the last of the oxygen out of the syringe, sending a little spurt of the liquid into the air in the process. “If you made noise and lured your partner here again, I’d have to kill him…and I’m pretty sure you don’t want that, do you?”

Scully was half way to hyperventilation knowing the ramifications of being sedated with a concussion as Miles knelt down next to her, his words cutting into her like a sharpened blade. “The number of blows to the head that I have sustained in the last twelve hours has been more than enough that I’m likely to be suffering from a concussion. I already have all of the symptomology and if you sedate me, you might kill me.”

Miles truly didn’t know whether she was making that kind of comment as a medical professional or to keep him from putting more sedative in her but he wasn’t risking her make any more noise as he simply pushed the needle into the softest part of her arm. He had no mercy left for her and it was stone cold clear to her that he wasn’t interested in her life but rather being the instrument of her death. She half cried out in pain and frustration as she felt some of the fluid go in but couldn’t tell just how much of it he used as he removed the spent syringe and placed the tip cover back onto it.

“You fucking bastard,” Scully muttered as she felt that familiar stinging again followed by the overwhelming dizziness radiating from the spot where the needle punctured.

“If you die then I guess mutilating you and leaving your body for your partner won’t be nearly as traumatic of an event, huh? It’ll be such a fantastic message to send to him on just how close he came to saving you—how close he was to putting his arms around you,” Miles tilted her head back, tucked her hair behind her ears and planted a kiss on her forehead before making eye contact again. “You’ve lost all that luster—come on, cry for me, Dana, make those eyes sparkle a little.”

“Fuck…you…” Her eyelids were already a little heavy but she bit down on her own tongue to send a surge of pain through her, pushing her eyelashes toward the ceiling with a jolt.

Max purposely grazed her lips with his thumb and made the motion to a standing position before heading toward the stairs. Each step he made squeaked under his boots until he reached the top landing where he flicked two of the three switches, creating near darkness in the basement. It was in that moment that Scully could see just how well he had blacked out the sliding glass door as only tiny slivers of the snowy light peeked through the gaps in the black paint. She choked on her own spit and felt the burn in her throat as she tried to inhale it away, the little droplets of sweat forming on her forehead from gritting her teeth as she focused on the slider, eyes wavering with every passing second. The upturned glow from the snow was brighter than she expected as the light that those gaps created against the opposing wall looked like smudged starlight without the twinkle. The sedative was less potent than what he had used on her earlier but she could feel the sluggishness developing in her limbs as her wrists grew heavier above her head along with her legs from the knee down. She didn’t have enough adrenaline rushing through her
veins to combat the sedative like she had when he attacked her in her home and she could already feel the dizziness mixing with the inability to keep her eyes open.

“Where are you, Mulder?” Scully couldn’t hold in her tears as they ran down her cheeks, stinging the spots where skin had been lashed open just enough to burn with each little trace of salt.

Scully couldn’t have been more correct about the motivation of her partner, the strength of his convictions, and his intuitions…his instinctual thought processes. Mulder had been sitting in the driver’s seat of the SUV with the engine idling for just a few, long moments while the scene unfolded in the basement level. He had been remarkably stoic since Jeanette had been recovered alive and he was running somewhere between fumbling in the dark and autopilot as he was everywhere and nowhere at the same time. He was quietly relieved that Max was with him—or sanity may have been quite lost. He switched it into reverse and maneuvered around to where no one from the house would have been able to see them, pulling into the driveway of the neighbor three houses down. It was nagging at him as he turned off the ignition and slid out of the seat.

“Mulder, what are you doing?” Max was speaking so softly that Mulder could barely hear him as he followed him to the back just as the lift gate was opened.

Mulder pulled the toolbox out, pulling it apart like he was deconstructing the contents simply to do an inventory of everything. “Getting everything ready to go in that house…do you have earpieces?”

“You are standing next one of the biggest nerds in creation—yes, I have earpieces,” Max crossed his arms and made a face at Mulder.

“Are your battery packs charged?” Mulder slid a pair of bolt cutters through his belt loop along with a flathead screwdriver then delivered a sideways stare to Max.

Max pulled a small box out from under a second toolkit and started to flip through each one before nodding. “All but one—six are charged, set, and ready for use.”

“What the hell are you doing on my property?” An elderly gentleman interrupted them with the click of a shotgun, causing both of them to stand with their hands out just enough, putting a careful stop to their quick gear run through.

“Sir, I’m going to reach for my badge—I’m with the FBI, we are running a search on a house and just using your driveway as a staging area,” Mulder carefully reached into his breast pocket and pulled the badge out, showing it to the man, who seemed more than content with it as he took a closer look.

“You can’t just park black SUV’s in driveways with no lights on, Agents—after the gun shots this afternoon, all of us are a little on edge,” he was easily in his 60s and rightfully paranoid as he let the gun go lax in his arms, giving the window for Max to resume setting up the ear pieces and battery packs.

“That’s why we’re here, Sir…we just need everyone to stay inside while we continue to search the area,” Mulder had a way of diffusing the angriest of individuals as the man nodded his head somewhat apprehensively, giving Mulder a proper stare down.

“I’ll keep my phone quiet—and my doors locked, Agent Mulder,” the man half butchered the pronunciation but the thought counted as he headed back toward his house.

Mulder waited to speak until the man was far enough away that he could no longer hear
him. “Max, remind me again to go knock on the door to inform the owner that we’re here before I start looking like a white-collar gangster again.”

“You got it, Vanilla Ice,” Max rolled his eyes and handed him a ‘ready to wear’ ear piece with microphone setup. “Try not to scream or you’ll blow out my eardrum.”

Mulder slid the earpiece into place and hooked the battery pack to the back of his pants, flipping the remote switch into position until everything was up and running. “You’re going to the north side of the house toward the end that you were at before—I’m going around to the back. Keep the line quiet unless you see movement or you’re in trouble, got it?”

“Clear as crystal,” Max set the triangle reflector behind the SUV so that Skinner would see it the moment that he drove up. “I’m leaving the rest of the equipment ready in here just in case—Skinner will see it.”

“Good thinking,” Mulder utilized the leather sheath inside of the toolbox to carry the tools, sliding it over his shoulder for good measure before leading the way toward the house, through the bushes. “Stay close until we are at the last driveway. Good luck.”

Max tapped on his earpiece and gave Mulder a quick thumb up over hearing him through the ear piece as well as through his non wired ear. “Are you hearing through yours just fine?”

“Yes,” Mulder wanted to keep his voice to a minimum as he had that suspicious feeling coursing through him that Scully was close by as the house came back into view.

They were both highly skilled at quiet, unnoticed movements as they made their way through the brush, weaving their way around trees until they neared the property line. Max nodded at Mulder and carefully made his way all the way to the end of the driveway to go all of the way to the opposite side of the house while Mulder stayed to the edge of the property line. They had a goal in mind and it was staying as close to invisible as they could get.

Mulder made his way along the property line, crunching through the thicker, powder snow along the trees and the bushes with his eyes darting between the house and the trail toward the dock. He neared the edge of the hill just to check the sightline and noticed the half destroyed tarp partially attached to the small shed at the center of the dock—confirming that the boat that Jeanette had been found in came from there. Mulder didn’t need to see her to know that she was here and fighting to stay alive, waiting for him to find her, needing to be taken away from this place. He made his way toward the house using the same pathway that Jeanette had escaped through, his eyes falling toward the ground where her blood traces were still pure against the white and followed it all the way to the blacked out sliding glass door to the basement level underneath of the upstairs decking. Necessity for a warrant had gone out a window as probable cause was blaring at him simply from the presence of blood within feet of the home, knowing what might lie beyond the walls.

**Hold on, Scully.** His thoughts were words he wished he could speak as he tugged at the closure on the slider but to no avail as it stayed stagnant, firmly in place by a modified lock on the inside of the door itself. Hopelessness wasn’t an option as he dug his knees into the snow and pulled the flathead from the leather sheath. He loosened the wooden frame that pressed against the siding and the door, gently pulling it away until he could see the mechanism very clearly against the inside of the gap between the frame and the door itself. It was similar to a deadbolt mechanism, but Miles had forgotten to close off the access to the outside, making framework to the door itself the only real barrier from the exterior. Mulder carefully set the large piece of wood off to the side and resumed working on the pins through the small opening, popping them open with a cautious, quiet, careful precision that rivaled any expert lock picker.
Come on, mother fucker. Mulder started to work on the second pin and felt it resist the leverage from the flathead, making him sweat a little as he tugged again, hearing the metal half grind until it made a loud, metallic twang against the interior of the door. He held his breath as the noise created a shudder effect on the glass like wind had blown hard against it. Mulder stayed still for a moment as he heard the gentlest of murmuring, the sound caught somewhere between cries and choking, driving him to pop the final pin with the edge of the flathead. He truly couldn’t hear anything above the sound of his heart thudding into his throat as he pulled the door open with more than a little discretion to keep from alerting anyone inside of his presence.

What was once just slivers of light cast against the wall was now a full flood of illumination that cast a glare over her as her head turned toward the sliding door. Nothing could have prepared him for seeing her like this, but he knew that he had gotten there with moments to spare—barely. Her petite figure was on the border of breakable, beaten down, bloodied, bruised, but all of her strength rested willfully in her eyes as she tilted her head up with a painful slowness that nearly stopped his heart. The paleness of her legs stood out as she had her knees half elevated and pressed together at an odd angle, the strength all but gone from her lower body. She blinked hard and looked at him as though she didn’t know that he was real despite how desperately she needed him to be real.

“Scully?” Mulder didn’t know if she could see him as his voice carried, the involuntary tears already pleading with him for release as he started to maneuver into the room, still doing everything he could to stay quiet.

Hearing him say her name was all it took for her to snap back to reality, her tears down her cheeks as composure finally failed her. “Mulder…”

“I’m here,” Mulder was nearly beside her as he could hear the hiccup coming from her as the tears started to fall, his own grip on emotion barely in check as he was already looking her over for broken bones before even attempting to touch her.

Mulder knew the dress wasn’t Scully’s nor would she ever wear anything quite this provocative, not even to bed, and already had a sizable rip across the side of it, her panties peeking out on the side at her hip level. He instinctively took off his outer coat and slid it over her, concerned with getting her warm as he could feel the chill coming off of her. He had only seen her face similar to this once and even that event paled in comparison to her condition now as he had to decide on the least welted part of her to hold, to pull to safety. She looked up at him; pain notwithstanding along with her decency stripped away, and found that shred of hope that she nearly lost as her gaze met his. He shuddered at the mere thought of how she would’ve looked if the time in captivity had gone anywhere near 24 hours or more.

“Did he?” Mulder was indicating so much more than simple assault as looked her over, the yearning to surround her in an embrace accumulating in his gut.

Scully shook her head and inhaled the scent off of his coat, the warmth soothing away some of the anxiety. “No, I kicked him in the testicles.”

Mulder couldn’t help but smile at the visual of her managing to kick her assailant in this position. “I shouldn’t have even doubted that for a second.”

“I had to channel my inner Agent Mulder…resulted in manifestation of having some serious cojones,” Scully was wincing with pain but her wit was on point as her eyes were still glassy with budding tears.

“What am I going to do with you?” Mulder brought a hand gently to her cheek, caressing
away the tears and the blood with the touch that she already missed so much. “I really need you to hold still so I can get your arms free.”

Scully was reeling at the back of her mind as the chain half tugged at the already raw spots on her wrists; the excess friction was already heavily triggering all of her emotional upheaval as he mind was replaying everything from the past 12 hours in rapid succession, with more vivid detail than she could have anticipated or wanted—carrying back through the mundane, the terrifying, and the strength that she carried. She knew that the sedation was taking effect, however slowly, and wanted him to know everything, she wanted him to understand it was real, that she meant it. She didn’t want to wake up not remembering.

Scully was nodding, the medication and her sheer willpower doing a tug of war internally as she looked up at him with eyes glassed over. “I need to tell you something—”

“Scully, shhhh, save your strength,” Mulder had the bolt cutters pressed against the chain, his eyes glancing up the steps despite how quiet her voice truly was.

Scully shook her head and inhaled, the aching in her skull intensifying as the medications began to dull her senses, her worry only increasing. “Please, Mulder, I can’t—he administered another sedative and I don’t know how much he used this time. I don’t want to forget. The concussion symptoms are already making everything a blur.”

Even though he already knew, the urgency of getting her to safety was blocking his own ability to think beyond this moment as he snapped the chain apart and guided her arms down with a slow, loving, gradual release. “Sedative? Scully, I need to get you out of here sooner rather than later…it can wait.”

“I don’t want to wait anymore,” Scully’s was becoming inconsolable as her breathing patterns started to stagger while she sobbed as she watched him snap apart the shackles on her wrists, finally freeing the aching in more ways than one.

Mulder wiped more of her tears and guided her into his arms, carefully concealing all of her in the coat across her lap and within his arms, where he always felt as though she belonged. It wasn’t about being her hero; it was about filling the empty, dark spaces that no one else seemed fit into quite as perfectly as she did. He needed her, probably more than she needed him. She held onto his shirt and looked up at him, those eyes dismantling all of his defenses once again as he found himself hopeless, hanging on her every syllable—waiting with bated breath to hear anything leave her lips again.

“There was a way out, but I didn’t choose the way out, Mulder,” Scully blinked, her eyelids fighting her again as she knew that the sedative was starting to win. “It’s you—It’s always been you.”

He felt like a moron for a moment as the words sunk in, knowing she was trying to confess what he already knew, what he already felt, what he should have said so long ago. “Are you trying to say you love me, Scully?”

“No, Mulder—I don’t love you, wait, I mean, that’s not right,” Scully felt the rush of nervous energy mix with the unbelievable pain and dizziness already surging through her as she slowly let the air out of her lungs, half stammering as the words were already a struggle. “I’m in love with you and have been for a very long time.”

Mulder wasn’t the usually the kind of guy to cry unless it swung from a few stray tears to the “oh, that’s ugly” and he was dangerously close to the second one as he sucked his bottom lip
into his mouth for a little bit of control over his bearings, gently thumbing her hair out of her face as he looked down at her. “The first moment you stepped into my life, I already belonged to you; all of my fucked-up heart, my incomplete soul, all of me…all you had to do was say it.”

“Ok, lovebirds, I really don’t want to interrupt your mushy gushy discussion, but if you don’t hurry the hell up and get the fuck out of there you’re about to have company,” Max’s voice was in Mulder’s ear just loud enough to pull him back to the reality of their surroundings.

“Shit, Max, where the hell is Skinner and backup?” Mulder pulled Scully forward just enough to slide the heavy coat from her lap to put it around her, trying to get her ready to move. “We need a medic—twenty minutes ago.”

“I can see flashing lights in the distance—I think one of them is an ambulance,” Max’s voice was strained above the low grinding sound of the window being pushed open on the opposite end of the house along with the grunt that followed from him hoisting himself into the space.

“You think? Max, I’m going to need a little better than that,” Mulder wrinkled his nose as he adjusted the coat on Scully a little better, zipping the front up after watching her push her hands through to the bottom and wiggle her fingers at the bottom of the sleeves.

“I have half of my ass hanging out of a window, just get out of the house,” Max grunted while Mulder rolled his eyes.

The idea of Max breaching the perimeter had Mulder feeling a minor case of indigestion as he was not wanting to worry about the safety of someone on the opposite end of the house—one that he couldn’t see. Max was well trained, there was nothing to mistake about that but he was essentially a rookie and a little bit on the reckless side, almost worse than Mulder. He shook his head and looked down at the resilient woman fighting off the effects of an unknown sedative in her system with her eyes barely open, lids doing a losing battle with gravity. He kissed her softly on the forehead, letting the warmth of his lips linger against her chilled skin before securing an arm around her, pushing her right arm over his shoulder in the process. Mulder slid his arm underneath of her legs and cradled her against his midsection, doing his best not to further tear the already ripped, tender flesh against her back and side from the barbed wire. Scully’s grip was weak but she held onto the front of his shirt as he got himself to a fully upright, standing position to get toward the sliding glass door. Mulder adjusted his grip on Scully’s legs, holding her a little closer in the process while turning entirely toward the way out, that cold air nipping at both of them, urging them to move.

The distinctive popping sound of Scully’s service revolver followed by the shattering of glass caused the moment of freedom to slip away as Mulder swung around, carefully pressing his chest and Scully against the wall. He utilized the small gap against the corner to shield Scully from another potential gunshot as Miles was standing near the middle of the stairs with her gun poised in his grip. The sharp, audible inhalation from Scully sent a shiver through her strong enough that Mulder felt it reverberate through his chest. Mulder wasn’t about to lose her again or get them both killed as he moved with a heightened level of swiftness, yet an immense amount of agility, by slowly lowering Scully into the corner, her back against the support post. He maintained eye contact with Miles as he felt the absence of Scully’s weight, knowing she was safely against the post, shifting toward the stairs.

“You couldn’t just stay away,” Miles was fuming as he took a couple of steps down, his stare blazing through Mulder like fire. “You just had to stick your nose into what Dana and I have, didn’t you?”

“That going cold turkey off of anti-psychotics is usually not recommended, Miles,”
Mulder could see the mechanism on Scully’s gun had locked and the shell was stuck in the chamber, making it impossible for another bullet to fire.

Miles glanced at Scully, whose eyes were glued on looking up at Mulder with such incredible affection and devotion as she was almost folded at the knees in the corner, her fingers gripping the corner with every ounce of her remaining energy. He was already shattered mentally, the pieces had started to fall apart before Mulder ever made his way into the house, but this simply shook the rest of the screws loose, making him completely unhinged. The gun was still aimed at Mulder but as his finger pulled the trigger it wouldn’t move beyond the most negligible of distances. He made a low, frustrated growl as he fiddled with the gun, desperately attempting to empty the spent shell that he couldn’t even see, but it wouldn’t stir from the spot. He panicked, trying it again, but it wouldn’t move, and his focus went straight to the gun. Both of his hands were rattling the side of it, his eyes diverted down just enough to pull away his attention from Mulder.

Mulder took the opening and grabbed Miles by the arm, swung him around, knocking him against the stereo equipment. Mulder was caught somewhere between the definitive want to kill him and the professional necessity of taking him in, to let due processes take over. The thoughts were clear as Mulder drove his elbow into the space between Miles’s shoulders, knocking the top layer of the stereo onto the floor. Scully was more than a little worried as Mulder caught a left wrist in his gut, knocking him backwards enough to give an opening for Miles to attempt a run. He didn’t get far as Mulder coiled his hand around Miles’s ankle and pulled his foot out from under him, tossing him completely off balance. Mulder didn’t waste any time in turning Miles so that he was facing him, walloping him hard across the jaw and sending him stumbling onto the bottom steps.

“She can’t possibly be worth all of this struggle to you, of a people, Agent Mulder,” Miles took a swing, attempting to strike Mulder across the face with his right fist but he missed and went stumbling into the upright speakers.

Mulder gathered him up by the back of his shirt and drove him into the wall, keeping his face firmly planted against the drywall. “Oh, she is, and then some, fucking bastard.”

The thought was almost laughable but had Mulder’s blood half boiling as he pulled Miles away from the wall and slammed his head for a second time against the same spot, bloodying his nose on contact. Miles let out a low grunt and shoved his entire bodyweight backwards, causing the center of Mulder’s back to bang into the bottom of the bannister. The sound that left Mulder’s lips was loud and pain filled as he winced, but it didn’t stop him from pushing forward, punching Miles hard in the gut as he attempted to gain the upper hand. Miles was not nearly as skilled at hand to hand as Mulder and it was painfully obvious as he flailed his fists like a crazed combatant with his eyes closed. The next driving strike that Mulder delivered was straight to the chest and sent Miles toppling over the stereo equipment, knocking it the rest of the way to the floor. The action was enough for Miles to put up with as he slipped the knife on his hip from the sheath and held it out from his body with it just out of sight of Mulder’s immediate line of sight.

“Mulder!” Scully could see the light shimmering off of the blade and knew that Miles intended on using it, her voice as loud as she could muster.

Miles took a swipe at him with the knife, the whizzing sound of the blade through the air as he made a cross with his right hand from the right toward the left in a downward motion. The action missed as Mulder hopped backwards, avoiding all contact with the serrated edge. Miles made the reverse motion, swinging the blade again, catching the edge of Mulder’s shirt, slicing it open but never meeting skin. Mulder tilted backwards, averting the remainder of any contact, but didn’t realize that Miles wasn’t intending on hurting him as he made a beeline for the stairs.
Mulder went after him, but Miles had a decent head start up the flight of stairs to the top of the landing where the door was pulling shut and locked tight from the other side.

“Max, where are you?” Mulder contemplating shooting the lock off, but he could hear Scully’s weak gasps at the bottom of the stairs as her backside finally touched the floor.

Max was almost mumbling, but it was more over his volume as his voice came through in Mulder’s ear. “He’s coming my way, I got him, please get Scully outside, now—the medics are under six minutes out.”

“He has a serrated knife—it was easy to conceal, be careful,” Mulder made his way down the steps and saw Scully’s chest half heaving, her eyelids starting to lose the battle fully. “Shit, stay with me, Scully.”

Mulder knelt down next to her and gently tilted her chin, looking into her eyes as her eyelids were reducing the opening to mere slivers. His touch was easily recognized as eyes sprung open again, the smallest of subtle smiles peering across her lips simply out of relief that he was there. That little grin was a little too familiar as he half expected a joke from her but she remained quiet, the sedative still aggressive despite how much she was refusing to let it take over completely. Mulder noticed that the slide down the wall had caused her wounds on her side to re-open almost worse than they already were as the blood was seeping through the outside of his coat that he had put on her. He pulled all of the tools out of the sheath and opened the coat, gently guiding the leather across the bloodied-up spots to wrap her in them for extra pressure.

The basement muffled the sound of Miles doing his best to not make a lot of noise upstairs but his heavy, steel toed boots were formidable against the different flooring surfaces as they could hear him making his way up another set of stairs. Mulder knew that Max had become the obstruction as the crashing sound was loud and sent a shiver down his spine as well as Scully’s. She was barely aware enough to realize but was trying to keep her focus in tune with his, simply to stay awake. The sedative was still pulsing through her but not all of Scully’s senses had gone by the wayside as she could hear the crunching of glass off to the right side near the sliding glass door. The debris field of glass wasn’t huge and a lot of it had gone out into the snow after the bullet did the damage that it had. She blinked hard and tried to focus as the discomfort sent a ripple through her along with another wave of dizziness that manifested in momentary blur across her field of vision.

The sweat was almost pouring off her as she could see the dancing reflecting of light streak across Mulder’s shoulder, synchronizing with the same kind of pressurized fracturing sound of the already shattered glass on the cement. Scully narrowed her eyes, concentrating hard on converging her vision on that space where the shadow was slowly coming into focus—a shadow that was distinctly female. Scully’s breaths were hastening as she could see the knife in her hand and knew, with a certainty, that it was Deanna coming to finish what Miles had started and Mulder wasn’t fully aware with his concentration on Scully.

“Mulder…” Scully could see his gun with the holster flipped open, knowing that Mulder wouldn’t be able to turn fast enough if Deanna were to strike now.

“You just couldn’t stay away from her, could you?” Deanna’s voice brought Mulder’s focus in her direction, the knife less than four feet above his head. “Now, you’re going to die because of her.”

Deanna made the lunging, stabbing action toward the center of Mulder’s back but Scully was ready for it as she drew his gun from the holster and yanked him forward against her. The action was quick, but she held her breathe for only a moment as her index finger made the finishing...
action, pulling the trigger once, and only once. She couldn’t hesitate as she fired the gun, causing the chain reaction of the bang followed quickly by the half-muted muzzle flash. It was comparable to that of a backfiring car in the distance but right against their personal space as the echo made Mulder’s left ear ring nearly instantly despite her best efforts to shield him from it.

The knife dropped with an undignified thud, narrowly missing Mulder on the way down, as a precursor to the sound of gagging, choking...drowning. Deanna staggered backwards, desperately clutching at the spot just above her collarbone, eyes reeling in a loop as the actuality of her mortality was more than real and limited. The balance left in her legs had all but diminished, her grace seeping out like the blood from her wound, and her heart was pumping with a futile purpose, speeding her toward the end. She dropped in a heap against the pile of glass, her labored breaths echoing halfway behind them. Scully was aiming at simply subduing her but the likelihood of the shot being fatal were high as she glanced at the sheer amount of blood coming from the wound that she had just given to one of her assailants. Scully let the gun ease as the ringing in Mulder’s ears began to subside, his fingers relieving her of the weapon.

“Fucking crazy bitch,” Scully couldn’t help but mutter in the direction of Deanna, who was still hopelessly clinging to life despite the near impossibility of such a feat.

“The psychological implications of admitting this must be horrendous, but I’m a little turned on right now, Scully,” Mulder couldn’t help but smirk at the incredible demonstration of strength by this woman as he slid the gun back into his holster, clicking the button back into place before gathering her into his arms.

Scully was already holding onto him, her arm over his shoulder as he held her against him, his hand underneath of her legs before getting her to a standing position. “I don’t know how much longer I can fight the sedative.”

“I know, just hold on, Scully, I’m going to get you into the cold air—the ambulance is almost here,” Mulder only glanced down at Deanna’s eyes as he negotiated with the floor as he made his way into the incredibly cold evening air.

Scully’s teeth were already chattering as the wind was uncomfortably blowing up the bottom of the dress, making her feel even more naked than she already seemed. “Mulder, wait, where’s Max?”

Mulder’s eyes nearly bugged out at the idea of Max’s silence as he made a face while holding a shaking Scully toward the side of the house. “Oh, for fuck’s sake, Max! Max…are you there?”

Max’s voice came through finally and he was unamused, the speed of his words coming out in a spray of verbal vomit. “Shit, fuck, balls...God dammit! He fucking kicked me in the face and I think my nose is either broken or missing. Well, he’s got one wrist cuffed...ONE!”

“Ah, well, dammit that was loud. Scully, be glad you can’t hear any of this—I think Max just about shattered my ear drum,” Mulder knew that Miles must’ve gotten away if Max had been kicked in the face and wasn’t fully cuffed. “Max, are you ok?”

“I’ll be fine, mainly injured my pride. Swear to God that Miles must be half spider monkey, I didn’t even see it coming. He bolted out the window and I think I heard the van speed off,” Max’s tone was less frustration driven as he took a deep breath. “Is Scully ok? Are you outside?”

“Yes, Max, we’re outside—she needs that ambulance, though,” Mulder adjusted his grip
on Scully, lifting her up just enough to get her into a less pinched position as he could see the flashing red and blue lights in the distance, the siren nearing. “Scully, do you remember that little trip to Florida—when we were stuck in the car looking for a storm shelter?”

“You mean that Arthur Dales inspired monster hunt?” Scully wrinkled her nose at him, her hand holding the front of his shirt, her fingers moving back and forth as she struggled to stay conscious. “Yes, I do…why do you ask?”

“I argued with the concept about you saving my life—but you did. I really was circling the drain and you were there, in the back of my mind,” Mulder could see the little hint of a grin forming on her lips despite the situation. “You are very savvy, you keep me from taking that last leap off a cliff, every day—you pull me back, keep me guessing, keep me from making that mistake to walk away.”

“Mulder, you’re supposed to be getting a rise out of me not tossing me off the emotional ledge all over again,” Scully was smiling but she had tears down the corners of her eyes as she looked up at him with such unfettered affection.

Mulder let out a half chuckle and started to almost stomp through the snow toward the driveway, his voice half grunting as he adjusted his grip on her as he felt her backside sliding down. “Maybe me telling you that I can see your underwear would do the trick, then?”

“Dammit, Mulder,” Scully sighed, knowing that he was joking even though the mere thought of that made her clench just enough to coax a wry smile from him. “You’re not right.”

Just as Mulder’s boots met the pavement of the driveway, Skinner, followed closely by the Lone Gunmen, had just barely edged out the ambulance by about two blocks. The SUV Skinner was driving almost had a squealing tire moment as he haphazardly pulled into the drive at an odd angle, his exuberance written on his face like a neon flashing in the distance. Skinner was out of the driver’s side barely after sending the SUV into park, immediately sprinting toward Mulder carrying Scully. He was that doting parent, wrapped in a blanket of concern and irritation with a clenched jaw, as he came up to them, immediately checking Scully’s face.

“Thank God you’re safe,” Skinner looked around while pulling his jacket off, putting it across Scully’s legs and Mulder’s shoulder at the same time. “Where is Max?”

“He’s going to need a medic, he’s in the house, either upstairs or main floor—Miles got away again,” Mulder made eye contact with Skinner, the feeling of guilt swirling in his stomach as he held Scully in his arms.

“That son of a bitch won’t make it far after all of this—oh shit, is he hurt?” Skinner was protective of Mulder and Scully to an almost unhealthy level and it was becoming just as intense of a need to keep watch over Max as he was peering over their shoulder toward the house.

“Yeah, he’s wired into my ear, said he got kicked in the face,” Mulder spoke over the top of the sirens as the ambulance turned the corner on to the street they were on.

“Oh, sure, just shout it from the rooftops, Mulder,” Max’s voice was a little garbled as a thud preceded his voice that could be heard through the air as well as in Mulder’s ear.

Mulder chuckled, shaking his head. “Skinner’s coming to find you, Maximus.”

Langly, Byers, and Frohike’s van had been on within a few car lengths of Skinner for the better part of four miles as the news reached them of Scully’s condition. They hastily parked
behind Skinner’s SUV and half skidded before tracking across the snow to be by Mulder and Scully’s side as Skinner went toward the house, his gun drawn for safety. They were all a little more than a little elated to see Scully, even under the circumstances, she was still heavily battling the medication. Mulder nodded in their direction as of them, Frohike, seemed a little bit overcome by the reunion, his eyes glassy as he inhaled sharp, pretending desperately that he wasn’t about to allow a little bit of the wet stuff leak out of the corners of his eyes. The silent, reflective moment was poignant as they could collectively feel the snow starting to fall again, the first few flakes landing on noses and foreheads. The search had been rough on all of them as Scully’s eyes made the half circle, her silent appreciation written on her face, before settling back on looking up at Mulder. Langly patted Mulder on the back as the ambulance pulled into the driveway and whipped around, backing close to where they were to easily gather her up, transport her quickly.

“Finally,” Mulder watched as the doors to the back of the ambulance opened and two EMT’s popped out, pulling the gurney along with them, meeting them at the back. “She’s had a sedative injected into her within the last 35 minutes—unknown amount, unknown strength, and is showing concussion symptoms. Multiple injuries in addition to that.”

“We need to get her administered with a low dose of Naloxone, immediately,” the female EMT wasted no time in assisting Mulder in putting her onto the gurney, intentionally stepping in front of him to check her vision with the pin light. “You’re a fighter, Agent Scully.”

“She’s more than a fighter,” Mulder couldn’t help himself as he felt cold without her in his arms, her absence only highlighted by the traces of her blood on his shirt, all over his jacket.

The second EMT, the tall, fairly muscular male, already had Scully hooked up to an IV before she could even blink, gathering her up on every little monitoring device he could, calling out the numbers. “130 over 80—elevation marked. Heart rate is below normal at 40 beats per minute. Two syringe marks, one on the back of the neck, one on the mid bicep. Bruising on both.”

“Don’t worry, Agent Scully, you’re in good hands, we’re already working on the Naloxone and have you on a saline drip, you’re dehydrated and your wounds along your side are having some issues clotting,” the female was a lot less clinical than the male but she was still not nearly as gentle as Scully was hoping for as she draped the wool across her, keeping her warm.

“Mulder,” Scully reached out her hand as the medics started to guide her into the back of the ambulance, clearly not wanting to go alone.

Mulder glanced back just as Skinner was guiding a wounded, yet upright, Max toward the ambulance as a second unit pulled in beside them, into the grass and snow just enough. Max had blood all the way down to the middle of his chest in a streak that looked like someone had attempted to bleed him out, his hands up at his face, holding his nose while Skinner half guided him as though he couldn’t quite see. Mulder cringed at the already bluish spots poking out across the bridge of his nose as Max’s face came into full focus. Mulder caught glances with Skinner, who urged him to go with Scully as he mouthed “I’ll take care of him, just go” before Mulder turned back toward Scully being secured in the back of the ambulance. He inhaled sharply as he saw the look on her face of pure panic, his energy manifesting with shaking knees and hands.

“Agent Mulder, we normally don’t transport unless it is a family member but—I have a feeling she’s going to fight us if we don’t,” the female EMT tilted her head and made a gesture to him.

Mulder nodded and climbed into the back of the ambulance with Scully, his hand sliding around hers immediately, leaning to kiss the top of her hand. “That’s probably wise since she tends to bite, flail, and kick.”
“I would have if you weren’t in here right now—you know, you might have a problem on your hands for a while,” Scully’s voice was meek, distant even, as she locked gazes with his while the female medic started removing the sheath just enough to make her wince. “Ow.”

“What kind of problem is that?” Mulder’s voice was thoroughly distracting her from the prodding as the medic meticulously, and quickly, cut the fabric away from the wounds on her side, immediately cleaning and prepping them for a temporary bandage.

Scully sucked in a breath and held it, her face turning a little red for a moment before allowing the air to leave her lungs, the pain inflicted by the medic clear on her face. “I don’t know if being alone is in my realm of possibilities for a while.”

Mulder rubbed the top of her hand and kissed her knuckles, his eyes never once leaving her gaze as the ambulance swayed en route to the hospital. “Are you saying you might be a stage three clinger for a while because I think I can handle that, Scully…”

“BP is sliding into normal ranges, Agent Scully, and we’re not far from the hospital,” the female medic checked all of her readings again, hoping that the dose of Naloxone had been enough to do the trick. “You must not have had a large amount of sedative injected…everything is starting to level off fairly quickly.”

“I’m so tired, Mulder,“ Scully’s eyelids were like lead weights as she forced them open, her hand still within his as she felt that unyielding safety of being in his presence breaking that wall down again, her anxiety softening just enough.

Mulder rubbed her forehead with his free hand and kissed the spot above her brow line, letting his own skin rest there for just a moment. “I know, Scully, but you’ve got to stay awake for just a little while longer—at least until we get you to the hospital.”

Scully wiggled her fingers within his palm and rested her head against the gurney pad, the spasm of pain connecting through the back of her head to deliver that unpalatable reminder of her injuries, as if she needed it. She turned her head toward him, encouraging his cheek to the space on her forehead that aimed more toward the right side, seeking his shelter. He leaned in, letting his lips touch that spot again almost to give her that admonition that he was there, that he wasn’t going anywhere, and settled his cheek back against the right side of her forehead. She listened to him breathe and pulled her hand up, guiding his own in the same direction until it was against his chest, where she could feel his heart beating. They were both siphoning energy off the other and managing to create more of it as it hovered between them like a circuit had been completed.

“No more running?” Scully’s words were loaded but pivotal—and carried significance as she caused him to pull his head back enough to look at her.

Mulder pressed his lips together and slowly shook his head, his voice low and gentle in the face of this beloved woman. “Not unless it’s side by side.”

“Even if it’s into the darkness?” Scully knew that the avowal of what he meant to her was, in itself, more than enough of a confirmation but the insecure side of her had gotten the better of her as she felt the first bag of saline empty into her veins.

Mulder wanted to kiss her on the lips with an unceasing level of passion but he didn’t want to aggravate the already tender, bruised flesh as he opted to let his lips graze her fingertips again with a painstaking slowness that had her wishing she could bite down on her lip. He knew her better than she knew herself, especially in moments like these.
“Even if it’s into the fire…you’re mine, I’m yours.”

Chapter End Notes

See? You can’t hate me now – back on the good side – I truly hope that you love this chapter; it took a bit with some health stuff jumping in the way but it was worth it.

Extra thank you to Monika Michelle Cross, Vicky Williams, Jun Mai, Megan Kelly, and Lee Hughes as always for the little tidbits that you are so gracious in giving a read to or indulging in – we’re almost there! (More to come)
Sanare

Chapter Summary

With their killer at large, assurances are made to guarantee the safety of victims, current and past. Post “Agua Mala” (Season 6 with mentions of “Rain King”, “Two Fathers”, and “One Son” Briefly and only for context purposes)

“Sanare” is “To Heal” in Latin

Chapter Notes

*Warning: Mention of an extremely necessary, yet invasive procedure – extensive research was done prior to mentioning it. Life experience made it important not to overlook. Also, April is Sexual Assault Awareness and Prevention Month – if you, or anyone that you know has experienced the horror of sexual assault and need someone to talk to free of judgment, please call the National Sexual Assault Hotline at (800) 656-HOPE. While this fic did not get to that point, it has explored the unpleasant aftermath if an attempt at such.*

“I fell in love with her courage, her sincerity and her flaming self-respect. And it’s these things I’d believe in, even if the whole world indulged in the wild suspicions that she wasn’t all she should be. I love her and that is the beginning of everything.” – F. Scott Fitzgerald

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See the end of the chapter for more notes

7:45 PM

George Washington University Hospital

Trauma Center

Scully already felt less exposed even in a backless gown as she was guided into a bed for the fourth time since the ambulance had arrived, the remnants of unpleasant tingling nipping at her insides from a highly unnecessary rape kit that a nurse insisted she do. The request wasn’t made simply out of worry but, instead, out of that unlikely fear that liberties were taken while she was unconscious. It was in that “chance” realm that left her more than a little sick to her stomach as the options were weighed and the decision left entirely up to her to make. The clinical side her couldn’t
argue the validity in it but the emotionally unstable portion side was screaming out, wishing that this was all just a dream. She had been teetering on that edge of an outright refusal, which was within her election to do so, until Mulder’s words coursed through her like a fierce drink of liquor that burned in the best way—“If you can’t do this alone I’ll be right here for every second and no matter what, I’ll always be right here”.

She wasn’t ready for this. She knew that it wasn’t a possibility but as the doubt was introduced, so, too, came all of her anxiety surrounding the subject. She feared the notion that anything had been left to chance—that there was even a seed of doubt that could be planted for something like this to be necessary or pivotal. She held her breath and dug deep as each little test was conducted; swabs, test collection tubes, and test strips. Her main source of strength lay in the man who allowed her to white knuckle his palm through every moment, even to the point of pressing his forehead to hers so the tears wouldn’t come. It wasn’t luck anymore that he was there—it was love and it was strong.

“I’ll be back to check on you in about 30 minutes, Agent Scully,” Janessa, the nurse who had been keeping a close eye on Victoria, brought her out of the uncomfortable trance that recollection had sucked her into.

“That you, Janessa,” Scully nodded at her as Janessa was walking toward the door with the kit placed carefully into the necessary evidence collection on a tray with a confidentiality covering over the top of it.

“You’re far away, Scully,” Mulder was on the edge of the chair, his fingers tracing lines between each of her knuckles, his eyes glancing between her bandages on her wrists and the look on her face.

Scully had been holding in the need to let her soul ache as she let the tears flow, her breaths staggering as the trauma finally revealed itself. “Oh, Mulder, I’m sorry.”

“Scoot over a little,” Mulder nudged her hip until there was enough room next to her to place his ass and gather her into his arms, carefully avoiding her IV on her right hand. “You have nothing to be sorry for, Scully.”

She was a touch muffled against him, her bruises rubbing against the material of his shirt just enough to provide that mental note of what she’d been through all over again. “I can’t concentrate and everything is a complete mess in my head other than what I just went through…the only thing that I can mentally recall in vivid detail is the last 12 hours, which is the last thing I want to be able to recount play by play.”

“You know as well as I do that concussions are messy and unpredictable. This doesn’t make you less, it makes you more because of how you’re still standing despite it,” Mulder wiped her tears and made a side to side motion with his palm between her shoulder blades, rubbing the skin that peeked out through the opening of her gown. “Now, there’s this very eager woman who graciously pushed you out the birth canal some years ago who is desperate to see you—that I told I’d go get as soon as you were all cleaned up.”

Scully felt the laugh in her belly before the sound left her lips as she wiped some over her own tears, almost not wanting her mother to see her like this but the look on Mulder’s face was more than enough to bury that worry. “If you don’t get her she’ll just barge in eventually.”

Scully didn’t have to look in a mirror to know that she was a terrible mess and the bandages across her rib region, her arms, and wrists weren’t giving her much of a break in the mental delineation as she felt every scrape and scratch on her body. The bruises, though, were
exceedingly worse and in greater numbers as she had grip marks across her neck and thick, more
circular oriented marks along her cheeks and jaw, her bottom lip swollen and cut from impact
against her own teeth. The thought crossed her mind, though, that she escaped this with no broken
bones aside from a couple of bruised ribs and a strain in her throat from the excess pressure—
nothing that Victoria or Jeanette would be living with for the rest of their lives. She couldn’t
wallow in the self-pity no matter how easy it would be to fall right into that abyss.

“Dana,” Maggie’s voice was shaky as her own set of tears were falling before she could
even enter the room.

That voice was that trigger that Scully desperately needed as she looked at the doorway,
unaware completely that Mulder had slid off the bed to let her in. “…Mom.”

Maggie’s presence was the breath of life despite how close she was to going over the
edge of sanity as she wrapped her arms around Scully, providing that warmth that only her mother
could provide. Maggie was gentle, but the hug was far from ineffective as she cried against
Scully’s shoulder, that familiar, comfortable fragrance taking over her nostrils with every breath.

*How do mothers always manage to take you back to the exact mental moment that you’re no
longer an adult?* Scully couldn’t help but think as she felt the wetness of her own tears streaming
down her cheeks.

The silence was killing Scully as she couldn’t help but start in with everything that
swirled around in her concussion addled mind. “I didn’t want you to see me like this, Mom…
everything happened so fast.”

Maggie lifted her head away from Scully and gestured for Mulder, putting her hand out
toward him until he was close enough to slip his hand around Scully’s. “When I showed up to your
apartment I feared the worst, but you had someone already losing his mind over looking for you…
and he made me a vow that I knew he’d keep.”

“Hi, I am the mindless,” Mulder squeezed Scully’s fingers just enough to bring her
attention up to him where a soft smile replaced her unraveled emotions.

The problematic had wormed its way back into the room as Maggie was caught
somewhere between cautious and curious along with relieved and pained over the state of her
daughter and what she had endured. Something had changed but hadn’t quite broken as she
couldn’t help but look at the heightened attention between her daughter and Mulder. Scully could
see the sideways stare from the corner of her peripheral and knew that her mother was about to
burrow her way into her personal life again despite how inappropriate the timing was. Part of her
was ok with it, but not the part that still felt the jagged pang of cloudiness whirling around in her
brain as the concussion continued.

“Mom, your stare is burning a hole through the center of my face—stop worrying, I’m
fine,” Scully’s timing with words was bordering on more perfect than Mulder’s as she pressed her
lips together and exhaled slowly through her nose.

Mulder’s eyes nearly popped out of his head as he heard those two words that had been
so token, almost a crutch, for her so many times to avoid just about everything. “Scully.”

“Mulder, that’s not fair,” She didn’t want to look him in the eye as hearing her own name
was all it took for her to know that he was calling her bluff as she diverted her attention to her lap,
the grime heavy on her skin. “I feel more than a little disgusting and I really don’t want to sit here
having a love-in about my feelings—it isn’t the right time to talk about it.”
“Why didn’t you just say so?” Mulder maneuvered to the bathroom, pushing the door open and flipping the light on.

“I didn’t want the nursing staff touching me when they brought me in—I really just want a bath or a shower, something, anything, but I’m, not really wanting to be touched,” Scully made eye contact with her highly confused mother as she could hear Mulder opening a shower curtain in the bathroom.

“Dana, if you need to bathe—you know I can help you get in and out just fine,” Maggie smiled at the embarrassment written on Scully’s face. “It isn’t like I haven’t had to bathe you when you were little.”

“Oh Scully, there’s one of those old people tubs with the door in here!” Mulder’s voice echoed inside the confines of the inordinately large bathroom for a hospital space.

Scully let out a laugh despite herself at what could only be described as excitement from Mulder as he was already gathering towels and setting up a space for her to comfortably bathe in. “Mom, as much as I appreciate that offer…I would prefer Mulder’s help in that endeavor.”

The lightbulb went off in Maggie’s head as she realized that it was no longer a partnership or a friendship between her daughter and Mulder as the question left her lips with more sarcasm laced throughout than she had necessarily intended. “So, what you’re saying is that you’re not comfortable with your mother seeing you naked but you’re ok with Mulder seeing you naked?”

Scully was caught halfway between mortified and lucid as the desire to forget, to heal, to be the woman that she had been the night before. She held back a smirk as her mother delivered the patented stare of a parent that had just caught a teenager in the act of necking with the lights off. Years of practice had made Maggie Scully practically a professional at the act of silent interrogation—a skill that both mystified and irritated Scully.

Mulder poked only his head out from the bathroom, a broad, Cheshire cat smile across his lips as though he had truly eaten the canary, his stare right at Scully as she had sat all the way up in the bed. “This is the part where you go, you know we’re way past that part.”

“Mulder, shut up,” Scully hid that knowing smile with her hand as she covered her mouth, the attention of her incredibly nosy mother, who already had a smirk perched on her lips.

Mulder came back out of the quiet bathroom, his arms crossed just enough as he neared the side of the bed, tilting his head at Scully as though they were alone. Scully nearly rolled her eyes as he acted as though he was going to lean in for a kiss, but he diverted his attention entirely to the controls on the side of her mattress, sliding his fingers under the white plastic to lift it up and away from her. He angled the control to where she could fully see his motions as his index pressed the call nurse button, mouthing “whoops” at her. Scully knew exactly what he was doing and the only way he was getting her into that tub was if the nurse removed the IV and her mother left the room—one thing to spur another.

“You’re lucky I’m not armed, Mulder,” Scully pursed her lips together, gathering the blankets in the middle of her lap.

Janessa peeked into the room, her smile peeking across her lips as she answered the call button. “Your button was pushed, Agent Scully?”

“I’m going to attempt a bath, but I’ll need my line pulled, Janessa,” Scully held up her hand with the elaborate IV setup on it, the blush forming on her cheeks as she slid both feet out
from under the covers toward the floor.

Janessa nodded and gathered up a pair of gloves, smiling in Mulder and Maggie’s directions before addressing Scully’s IV, glancing at her every few seconds. “Have your mother carefully remove the dressing on your ribs, wrists, and your arm as well before you submerge – the moment you are done press the call button and one of us can re-dress anything that hasn’t fully closed. I have to leave the catheter in your vein, so we can get you back on fluids easily so don’t get that wet.”

“Okay,” Scully got another sideways glance from her mother as Mulder stayed in front of her and Janessa finished up with the disconnecting of the IV line.

“If you need anything please press the call button again—I’ve got a few more things to go over on your tests that we ran earlier but I’ll come check on you soon,” Janessa pulled the gloves off, tossed them into the bio-trash and tucked a strand of hair behind her ear before heading toward the door, quietly slipping back into the hallway.

Scully was determined to get up on her own as usual as she slid her feet onto the floor, her lightly bandaged heels touching the linoleum. She winced as she stood and watched as Mulder slid into that space again, his hand against her elbows to provide that extra strength she needed. He guided her forward, maneuvering around her until he was behind her and held the back of her gown shut, inadvertently sending a cool breeze along the backs of her legs in the process.

“Don’t want your black panties hanging out for everyone to see,” Mulder couldn’t help himself as he noticed her giving him a peripheral stare, hesitation in her steps.

“It’s only you and mom—and I didn’t hear any complaining last night about my panties,” Scully bit back, completely disregarding that her mother could hear every word that carelessly left her lips.

“Only complaint was that they were in the way,” Mulder lowered his voice, his lips next to her earlobe.

“Okayyyy…that’s my signal to go find some coffee and call your brother,” Mulder had been quiet but not quiet enough as Maggie’s eyes widened, and her voice went up a notch, the flustered coloration forming on her cheeks.

“I’ll have Mulder come get you when I’ve gotten back into bed, Mom,” Scully looked over at Maggie as she neared the bathroom door, the smile on her face almost undeniable despite the actual pain she was in.

Maggie feigned rejection in an incredibly mocking manner as she waved her hands at them. “I’ll be elbow deep in some caffeine—I’m only your mother.”

It had felt like an eternity as Mulder guided Scully into the bathroom, but they were alone again as he pushed the door closed. She glanced back at Mulder and held her breath as Mulder turned toward her, that boyish expression peeking across his lips. The trauma had been real but so was the flesh and blood man standing next to her with his eyes fixed on her every whim, her every last need. Mulder was vigilant in his attention to her body language, but he couldn’t quite verbalize that, deep down, he didn’t know what she needed from him as he moved closer to her, guiding each wrist into his palms. He carefully removed each bandage from the delicate, bruised, blistered skin around her wrists and tossed them into the trash. She had a resilience that almost glowed as the bandage on her forearm was removed with a gentle care, his eyes on hers.
Mulder knelt in front of her and lightly tapped the skin on her calf, “I’m going to need each of those little feet of yours, Agent Scully…”

Scully had her hand against the top of his head as she lifted one foot into his hand, the singular gauze pad taped in place carefully removed. Mulder guided her foot back to the floor and watched her face as she placed weight onto it, the cold of the sterile linoleum floor stinging just enough on the fairly fresh cuts on her feet. Scully bit down on the inside of her cheek as Mulder did the same motion on the other side and brought her another moment closer to feeling human again, to feeling that long, slow motion moment of that normalcy she was craving. Mulder made a tender, measured upward advance with both of his hands underneath of the hospital garment until his index fingers and thumbs were under the delicate material of her underwear. She knew that they had already been taken down for the kit but this seemed more like catharsis—like she was shedding that skin that had begun to build to protect her. She could forget terror and trauma as Mulder slid her panties down beyond her knees toward her ankles. Scully swallowed hard and instinctively ran her fingers through Mulder’s hair, grateful for this moment of girlish recollection as the warmth of his skin against her flesh provided that twinge of energy that you couldn’t get out of a pharmaceutical remedy for a traumatic experience. She held her breath again as he set the black material into a little bin marked “evidence collection” and made the agile action to a fully upright position.

“You can breathe now, Scully,” Mulder knew exactly what she was concerned with, especially with everything that she had gone through. “Even if they weren’t damn near pristine – I’d still help you out of them.”

Scully was blushing as she looked up at him, the cool air wafting against the skin exposed from the nape of her neck all the way to her ankles. “I just know those have to go into evidence now—I just have a lot of trepidations about it.”

“Scully, you’re never going to want that pair on your body again, I can assure you of that,” Mulder pulled the loop out of the top of the back of the hospital gown and slid one side down just enough to get Scully’s arm out of it, encouraging a smirk out of her in the process.

“That was a little too easy for you to do, Mulder,” Scully held the gown against her chest as he was carefully undoing the largest of the bandages across her side, the ties at the middle of her back still firmly in place.

Mulder took his gaze off of hers as he was pulling the paper tape away from her skin on the last section surrounding her wounds, the large piece of gauze and protective covering coming off in one sheet. “One of these days you’ll realize that undressing you with my eyes has become an art form, Scully.”

“I’m almost afraid to ask how long you’ve been doing that, Mulder,” Scully was laughing as Mulder poured a solution of what looked like lavender milk bath into the bottom of the tub basin, enough to more than saturate the entire tub once filled.

“The answer would incriminate me,” Mulder winked at her and instinctively bit down on his bottom lip at the corner, a move that he usually did without a conscious effort despite how much it drove her nuts.

She turned a delightful shade of pink at the idea and watched him reach across to the tub itself, pushing the door in until there was sufficient room for her to walk in. Her toes rubbed against the gritty material of the milk bath solution as she stepped inside while Mulder adjusted the hot and cold water faucet handles until it was hot enough to be effective without being scalding. There was a little bit of temporization in Scully’s body language as she felt the hot water collecting in the
bottom of the tub basin, the irritation on the bottoms of her feet becoming heightened then soothing as the solution started to dissolve. This was harder than she had expected—harder than she had wanted. The only thing keeping her vertical was the core of strength she was desperately holding onto as she stared forward with her jaw clenched. She could feel her knees knocking together as the mere idea of revealing every little mark to him became shockingly frightening. Unfathomable.

“If this is too hard for you to do with me in here I can wait outside until you’re ready to get out, Scully,” Mulder’s voice brought her back from the ledge as he noticed her shaking and hanging on the edge of crying all over again.

She shook her head with an emphasis and held him in place as he stood upright, realizing that being alone in her thoughts was so much worse. “Please, stay.”

Scully looked down at the water level as it was about to mid shin, the milky water completely hiding her feet in the process. She wiggled her toes and inhaled a breath of bravery, exhaling gumption as she reached behind her back, pulling the loop free from the gown. She was still holding onto the thin, shapeless material like a shield but slid the other arm free from the sleeve, the bruising on her arms dark and heavy in the fluorescent white light above their heads. She looked up at Mulder to gather the last of her bravery despite the fact he had already seen her naked before and not only during the night before but this was shades different as all of the cuts, scrapes, and bruises on her body simultaneously screamed out, demanding her attention. She felt like a walking demonstration for abuse underneath of that hospital gown and her heart was pounding over the possible reactions that her ravaged, battered form could inspire within the man she had confessed to love with such an unrelenting intensity. She swallowed hard, the world moving in slow motion as she pushed the fabric away and into his hands, her arm doing a terribly ineffective job at covering herself in its absence.

“How in the hell did I get so lucky?” Mulder didn’t have to look her over to know the level of pain that she had experienced, it was written all over her face, through her eyes.

Scully had a heightened familiarity with her exposure but his words were warm over her skin as she felt the weight of each implosive that left his lips. “I should be asking that question—as I’m standing here looking like a Rorschach test, shaking like a leaf, hiding from the one person that I’d give anything and everything to if he asked for it. Why can’t it just feel normal?”

“Sit down, Scully,” Mulder indicated the built in seat in the tub as he noticed that the water level had increased a considerable amount and was almost to her knees.

Scully nodded, suppressing the tears that were ready to fall, and allowed him to guide her down until her backside finally touched the low lying seat. The tub was set up so that the water level would be high once filled to the overflow and Scully was not exactly of average height as the milky, steamy water came up over her hips as she sat. The subtlest of gasps left her as the hot water touched some of the scratches, holes in her side, and the bruises that had begun welting over. It was the worst and the best feeling in the world in a single blast of a second as she exhaled another sigh and slowly blinked. Mulder wasn’t the least bit surprised that she stayed in a self-embrace with her arms crossed in front of her in a collapsed ‘X’ pattern, carefully keeping her IV catheter above water, as it provided the most amount of shelter even though she didn’t need it from him. This was going to be a long road to get her through but he knew that, as long as she wanted it, he was ready to do whatever it took to get her through every step of it.

She stretched her feet out and felt both of her knees pop, giving her that first release of tension while Mulder soaked a cloth behind her. Scully tilted her head and made eye contact with Mulder as he glided the wet cloth along the center of her back, wetting her skin just enough to
invite an audible sigh from her lips. She shuddered under his touch from the mixing of pain, warmth, and cold, welcoming a wave of goosebumps as the chills took over. Mulder re-soaked the cloth and dragged it along her shoulders, squeezing the material of the cloth just enough to leave hot, wet, milk water trails down the center of Scully’s back and along her sides. They were opposition illuminated as she could only see each mark as a highlight of her suffering, of weakness, while he only saw her strength, her integrity as the woman that could hush a room with a single glance. The water level was almost to a point that she could comfortably lean all the way back and only have her head sticking out as she stretched out her arm, resting her palm against the side to keep it above water.

“This is exactly what I needed—I already feel considerably better,” Scully sank backwards, practically disappearing in the cloudy water with a heavy but not overpowering odor of honey and lavender.

“You have a thing for baths,” Mulder teased as he turned the water off before it started to seep into the overflow, smiling at the arm, partial collarbone, and extremely relaxed head of Scully sticking out of the water, her figure completely lost under the water. “If I had known that solution was going to hide you completely, I wouldn’t have dumped it in.”

Scully had a lazy grin on her lips as she brought her toes out of the water, wiggling them just enough to see that they were no longer stained with blood and the marks had already began to soften up. “You can have those, Mulder.”

“Don’t tease me—I’d like the rest,” Mulder moved the cloth to her right foot and gathered the material over her skin, gently rubbing away the last of the dirt along her ankle, his eyes on hers.

“The rest? You mean the feet? The legs?” Scully couldn’t erase the playful perk on her lips as she watched him switch from the right foot to the left foot, her eyes on him completely.

Mulder had already worked his way up to her knees with the cloth, his bottom lip firmly between his teeth. “If you don’t knock it off I’m going to end up in that tub with you, Scully, and I’m pretty sure that the hospital staff is not going to appreciate extra-curricular activity in one of their soaking tubs.”

“I don’t know, Mulder, the mental image of you soaked from top of your head to the tips of your toes with or without all of your clothes on is kind of making me hope you end up in here,” Scully exhaled a long breath as she allowed herself to feel the care he was lavishing her with as the action was half tuning her, striking a melodic, necessary chord she had been carefully suppressing.

Mulder lifted an eyebrow at the quiet yet obvious moan that had passed through her lips despite her best efforts to not let it out, the slight scratch from the center of her throat coming out in a short burst before bouncing off an inhaled gasp. The sound that had sprung from her throat met a burst of electricity as she half shook, her left hand instinctively holding his hand firmly in place against the curve of her thigh despite the proximity it was to bruises and wounds. She needed him still as another wave of compelling, stirring energy surged through her, completely undeterred by the caution that she wanted to throw to the wind. The sensation, like an intoxicant, was delicate and delicious as it caused a second whimper to pass through her teeth this time, her nostrils flaring as she held her mouth shut, her critical need to soften the sound that much more obvious as she stared up at him while her hips tilted in such a way that her left hip elevated just enough to pop up out of the water. Her mind was racing at the thought of the noise that would’ve left her if she had let him continue—and the pile of mush she would’ve become as a result.

“Jesus,” Mulder watched her struggle to realign her breathing patterns, the pink in her
cheeks intensifying as she nodded in spite of herself with her right hand’s fingers white knuckled on the edge of the tub. “You know that you’re going to make the nursing staff think I’m hurting you, Scully.”

“I know I shouldn’t—I know it’s not necessarily the healthiest thing to want right now, but dammit, the idea is really attractive to just keep going,” Scully wiped a bead of sweat from her forehead with her left hand and studied him with those dreamy, bedroom eyes.

“Here I was thinking I was being too rough with the rubbing and touching—apparently it just was just barely enough,” Mulder was nearly as good at teasing as she was only he was so much more cerebral about it as he merely spoke of the topic, inciting goosebumps all over her again.

Mulder shook his head and rolled up his sleeves, adjusting his position to where his chest was against the side of the tub, giving him ample access to guide her forward toward the faucet just enough to lead her hair into the water. She assisted in the endeavor as she used her left elbow to hold herself up while the right stayed slightly propped against the edge almost aimed out and up. She tilted her head back as his left hand found the back of her neck, supporting some of her weight, while his right hand coaxed some of the milky water against her hair, toward her scalp. She beamed at him as he glided his fingers through her hair, rinsing and stroking away the remnants of blood, dirt, and debris that had collected in the past twelve hours. Mulder continued to hold onto her with his left hand while he reached for a bottle of what he hoped was shampoo from the collection of sterile looking bottles, gave it a quick read and a sniff before squeezing a small amount onto Scully’s hair. She almost chuckled as she watched him maneuver through the wide array of serums, salves, soaps, and other bottled items as he put it back.

“This is not exactly how I pictured 24 hours later, Mulder,” Scully slow blinked as he used both hands to massage in the shampoo, the mild odor pleasant on her nostrils as she brought her head up a little higher for him, her hair completely out of the water.

Mulder liked the visual of bliss taking her over as the tips of his fingers worked the shampoo through her hair, over her scalp, taking great care in being gentle against the back of her head as he felt the knot amass in a section. “Maybe not in this exact setting but I think it would’ve been similar—only I’d be in there with you instead of on my knees in a hospital bathroom.”

“There’s still time,” Scully’s voice dipped into a different register as Mulder’s fingers made little swirling motions along the crown of her head, carrying her further into that place where she could find a little bit of solace underneath of the shadows.

Mulder guided her head back just enough to rinse away the shampoo, watching the fingers on her right hand twitch as she kept it out of the water as instructed by the nurse. Her eyes conveyed the onslaught of exhaustion that was co-mingling with the rush of energy that was still pulsing through her—a truly conflicting feeling as she wanted to pull him in, entwine him, and fall asleep in the same breath. Mulder glanced at the bottles again, searching for conditioner, and reached over at the one that had been perched next to the shampoo. He squeezed a small amount into his palm and rubbed both together before running his fingers through her hair again, restoring that softness to her tresses. She didn’t want this to end but she could feel the heat in the water beginning to dissipate along with a weakening in the muscles in her legs—it would not be long before they refused to hold her up. He gave her one, final rinse of her hair, gliding his fingers to coax the residue free before smoothing her hair back, wringing it just slightly.

_God, she’s beautiful._ Mulder couldn’t help but think as she was almost all the way sat up in the tub, her right hand finding his face, tracing lines across his jaw before pulling him forward with her left hand, soaking the front of his shirt in her palm. She laid a kiss on his bottom lip while
partially rising out of the water to meet him, her chest rubbing against his, her right arm holding	hon to his shoulder simply for leverage, balance. Mulder could feel her soaking the front of his shirt
and held back a chuckle as her mouth opened just enough for her tongue to tease his lip. He
groaned, letting her control everything as he accepted the elemental foray into roughness despite
the fresh stitches on one side of her mouth. They both knew better than to be pushing that injury
right now that but he wasn’t going to protest the drenched, naked woman clutching onto him as he
felt her pull back just enough to breathe a hot, sigh against his open mouth.

The physical connection had become imperative as Mulder’s fingertips found her spine,
smoothly inching in a descending pattern, leaving a pathway of horripilation in their wake. Scully
made eye contact with Mulder, their mouths hovering while her left hand found his hair, lacing
through sections of it until it was damp and tussled like he had been caught in the rain. She nudged
the tip of his nose with her own and tilted her head, dragging her bottom lip across his as his hand
in the water met the small of her back. They were playing with fire as the melodic pang of each
other’s heart beats only urged them forward, pushing them back into another sweet meeting of the
lips in a considerably more prolonged, thorough development. They were enamored of each other
as the meticulous groping of one another had become nonelective and emblazed a fire within them
that neither wanted to put out. Mulder finally grasped her backside and inadvertently drew her up a
little higher, inducing another tangled moan that went into his own mouth and nearly made his
eyes roll back into his head.

The door to the bathroom opened with a silent skill as the noise they had been making
was more than enough to capture the attention of Maggie Scully as she poked her head into the
space. “I heard noises in here…are you—oh, for crying out loud, Dana Katherine!”

The intrusion by Maggie was enough to break the lip lock but not necessarily the
embrace as Scully half froze against Mulder, peeking over his shoulder at her mother. “Mom,
you’ve got to be kidding me…”

Words had escaped Mulder entirely as he knew the front of his pants were wet and the
front of his shirt was soaked clean through, his hair a mess from Scully’s drenched hand. He didn’t
know if he should turn to look as he awkwardly removed his hand from Scully’s ass and heard the
most unsettling of squeaks from her lips followed the deer in the headlights look that mirrored his
own as their eyes locked for a moment. They were mortified despite the remaining tingle that kept
their chests heaving, mouths slightly agape.

Maggie couldn’t help herself as a half snicker left her lips as she raised a hand to her
mouth, standing in the doorway with a certain unwillingness to look away, almost as though she
were reveling in the broadcast of intimacy between them. “Well, then, it is certainly all making
perfect sense exactly why my assistance might not have been preferred. I thought you might like to
know though that you have people that are waiting to see you when you’re…finished doing what
you’re doing.”

Scully was almost exasperated as she saw the comfortable stance her mother was taking
in the doorway. “Oh my God, Mom, get out.”

There was subtle joy in the awkwardness and not simply for catching her daughter in a
bit of a sticky situation but rather that trauma had not left her so scarred that she would be left
hollow, unfeeling. She remembered what it was like seeing her struggle after Duane Barry and
there weren’t memories with a certain level of immediacy during that time. Maggie simply smirked
and pulled the door shut, leaving them alone again. Mulder reached into the water and carefully
pulled the plug from the drain, his gaze carefully meeting hers. He had a grin perched upon his lips
and only met an eye roll from her in return.
“Ah, come on, Scully…you have to admit we brought this on ourselves,” Mulder reluctantly withdrew from their embrace and got to a standing position, reaching for the towels. “There’s humor in this—I have an imprint on my chest of your chest, there’s water on my pants, and I’m pretty sure that your mother is going to hold this over my head until I’m dead.”

“I don’t have any panties, Mulder,” Scully slid her backside back onto the seat in the tub, arms crossed in front of her just enough to half cover her breasts, more out of warmth than modesty as she glanced up at him, blushing.

Mulder gathered a towel around her shoulders and guided her to a standing position, noticing immediately that the towel did very little to hide her backside as he peeked at her curves. “Well, that certainly is an issue…guess I’m holding your gown shut till you get all the way back in your bed.”

“My hero,” Scully was half sarcastic as Mulder was gently patting her down with the second towel while she wrapped the other around her middle, covering the dry places just enough to keep in the warmth.

“How’s your pain level?” Mulder changed the subject as the water drained out, drying her all the way to her ankles before checking the little marks on the bottoms of her feet that looked like they had closed up a fair amount.

“Just the minor stabbing pain in my head and side for now—everything else is dull,” Scully slid her arms back into the sleeves of the backless gown and turned just enough so he could tie each closure shut with a small loop, the chill of the air already tickling her overly warm, clean skin.

Mulder helped her out of the tub and placed his hand at her back, holding the gown shut as he promised, carefully checking to make sure her butt was not invidiously hanging out for all to see before taking in a deep breath. “I haven’t had to do the walk of shame for an awfully long time, Scully.”

“Worried?” Scully took a few steps forward, the chill of the floor almost soothing on the bottoms of her feet.

“Not this time—it’s all for you.”

10:00 PM
Waterway Drive Lake House (Lake Barcroft)
Falls Church, VA

Drea Miller pulled her car into the driveway, slid the keys out of the ignition and glanced back at the unmarked squad car as it parked at the edge of the curb, facing away from her driveway. She inhaled a deep breath and glanced at the mirror in the visor, wiping away the last of the tears that had fallen over hearing the finality of her little sister’s death. It had worn on her—it had worn on all of them. She grabbed the large, paper sack next to her on the passenger seat along with her purse before sliding out of the car. She maneuvered around to the front of the blue sedan
after locking the doors and watched as the passenger in the squad car got out, in full blues. He looked like a boy scout with his carefully pressed police uniform looking more like a costume than a tested signifier of his position.

“Miss Miller, I’m Officer Lindell and my partner is Officer Kyle—we’re the second shift assigned to keep an eye on things here,” he had a distinctly southeastern accent as he tilted his head toward her, his ken doll-like physique only affirming her belief in his lack of skill.

Drea swallowed hard, held the groceries off to one side so she could shake his hand, doing her best not to crumble back to an emotional heap all over again. “I appreciate what all of you are doing…it means a lot that the FBI wants to make sure that I’m safe until my brother is apprehended.”

Officer Lindell nodded, his overly coifed blond hair not even moving an inch as he held his hands behind his back in a rigid stance. “I just need to do a quick perimeter check and a walk through…if you are ok with that?”

“The last crew did the same—expected nothing less,” Drea was a far cry from the energetic, flirtatious creature that Mulder and Max had met just hours earlier as Officer Lindell went off in the direction of the backside of the house to begin a sweep of the perimeter of the property.

Drea fidgeted in the middle of the driveway, tilting her head back and forth until her neck finally popped, giving her just enough relief to send a shiver down her spine. She exhaled slow and leaned against the passenger side of the car, examining her fingernails while she waited. She almost regretted staying at this house as the silence around her seemed to only grow, the enormity of her house staring her in the face like a gun ready to go off. She hadn’t felt this kind of anxiety since she was a child with the assistance of years of therapy—and all of it was unraveling like a poorly sewn hem of a skirt. Drea stood, arms crossed, looking at the front door of her house like it was the entrance to a federal penitentiary where armed guards literally kept an eye on her every move. The idea would normally be attractive but not now, not tonight.

This is what is going to happen every time I have to leave my house until they find him, isn’t it? Drea couldn’t help but think as she saw Officer Lindell pop out from the other side of the house, snow collecting on his heavy work boots. He gave them a good stomp or two to clear them as he neared the sedan while she stood straight, extending her keys to him.

“After you,” Drea wanted to throw up as she followed him toward the front door of the house, anxiety rising in her belly.

“Am I going to be setting off an alarm when I unlock the door?” Officer Lindell couldn’t help notice the indicator flag in the middle of the flower bed for ADT as he neared the door handle.

“No, I didn’t arm it earlier,” Drea switched the bag from one side to the other, impatiently fidgeting with the bag she should’ve divided into two at checkout.

Officer Lindell unlocked the door and utilized his flashlight to illuminate a pathway into the house, absent the three light switches on a single face plate almost immediately to his left. He got about five feet into the house before Drea rolled her eyes and flicked two of three switches up, turning the lights on, creating a flood of white light into the entry, the living room, and the kitchen. Officer Lindell winced for a moment and turned his head toward her, only to see her smartass smirk plastered across her face as she pointed at the cream colored fixture before pushing the door shut. It was to the point that she considered that she might’ve given him too much credit as he was
passing into the slightly more infantile level instead of purely green as he turned the flashlight off and shoved it back into his utility belt.

“I’ll just check all of the rooms and doors then I’ll be out of your hair,” Officer Lindell smiled, half stammering as he made his way through the back of the house first while Drea flipped the dead bolt into the lock position and carefully set the bag of groceries on the counter.

Her grandparents had been extremely classy and liked showing off the status that they had even if it wasn’t the grandest around. The house had floor to ceiling windows aiming out to the deck, shaded only by the most minute of tree branches from three Japanese cherry trees that had been planted along the deck. There was one, enormous pine that rose up through the curve of the edge of the deck off to the furthest side of the house that seemed out of place amongst the rest of the far smaller, herbaceous perennials that had already gone mostly naked for the winter. The snow had collected along the uncovered sections of the deck space and only had one section where snow refused to collect—over the top of the hot tub she kept continuously running on standby heat. She crossed the hardwood floor to the meticulously maintained taupe carpeting that lined the entirety of her living room and slid out of her shoes, wiggling her toes in the still fluffy material under her feet.

“Why can’t I have a normal, boring family?” Drea muttered to herself as she glanced at the photo of her sisters perched on the table next to her elaborate media station, picking it up to thumb over each of their faces.

Officer Lindell’s throat clearing brought her out of a self-induced fog as she turned toward him behind the couch. “The back of house is clear, garage entry is clear and locked. I just have to check the deck door and I’ll be on my way.”

“Could you and Officer Kyle use a couple cups of coffee? It’s supposed to drop to into the 20s tonight—it can’t possibly be warm in the car,” Drea had that ‘I am trying desperately not to cry so I will pretend to be a caretaker of a B&B instead’ expression plastered on her face. “It wouldn’t take me long to brew a big batch. I doubt I’m going to be sleeping anytime soon.”

“You really don’t need to do that,” Officer Lindell had not expected any token of appreciation nor concern from her as he checked the door toward the deck, taking note that it was locked at the handle and the bolt.

Drea moved into the kitchen and shook a fairly large container of un-brewed grounds in his direction, a genuine smile on her face. “Come on, you can’t tell me that a cup of hot, steaming, chocolate macadamia nut medium roast wouldn’t be super right about now…”

“When you put it like that—that does sound really awesome,” Officer Lindell was half shaking his head as he continued to speak, moving toward the front door this time. “I can come back up here in an hour to get the coffee if you need. I have to do a perimeter check again about that time.”

“Don’t be silly, I can bring it to you two when it’s done,” Drea was already busy filling up the water reservoir for the coffee maker after putting in a filter, reading a brew for them.

“I’ll show myself out, you’ll need to bolt the door,” Officer Lindell rolled his eyes and continued out the front door, the clicking of the pin catching echoing in the entry.

Drea’s shoulders slumped as the silence echoing through the house became almost too much for her as she instinctively pressed the button down on the coffee grinder simply to make noise even though it was completely empty. She sucked back a breath as the coffee started to brew, the tapping and almost cooing noise keeping her from settling into the abyss of thought. She
reached for the rod on the mini-blinds in the kitchen and closed them, her hands shaking just enough to frustrate her. She glanced at the scarring on her arm and yanked her sleeve back down, the irritation elevating as she felt her knees shake with recollection. She hadn’t thought about the torture in years and it was tumbling back into her consciousness like an avalanche as she held onto the counter, desperate for air as the panic took over.

“It isn’t real anymore—it’s all cosmetic, you’re in fucking control of what happens to you, Drea, Jesus mother fucking Christ,” there were tears in her eyes as she made a fist, her head resting on the counter top, the wheezing from every emotion colliding at once hitting her like a ton of bricks.

Her self-assuring mantra came to an abrupt end with the ringing of her house phone, causing her to jolt forward, banging her forehead on the shelf in the process. She winced, rubbing her forehead and mouthing the word “ow” as she reached back for the phone on the bar top. She felt astoundingly graceless for a woman who was a skilled ballroom dancer but she figured that nothing was running quite right today so she could let it slide this time. It rang a second time despite her hope that it was simply a first ring wrong call but her hopes were dashed as the annoying jingle filled the room with that hideous, high pitched sound. Part of her wanted to say “the hell with it” and ignore it but she didn’t want anyone hanging up and calling back over worry.

“Hello?” Drea answered it and rubbed her forehead, wrinkling her eyebrows at what would most certainly be a knot on the center of her hairline.

The voice on the other end was rough and scratchy but still distinctly feminine but lacked heart with every syllable she uttered. “I’m assuming you already heard the news.”

“I didn’t expect to hear from you, Delilah, and yes—I heard. It’s why there are two police officers at the end of my driveway,” Drea was a little shocked to hear from her older sister even after knowing that the FBI had failed to capture Miles but killed Deanna in their rescue of Agent Scully. “I haven’t heard from you in a really long time and I really hope this isn’t one of those ‘I told you so’ calls. I don’t need it from you.”

“Drea, believe it or not I called because I do care but there was always that sad truth that one of us was going to end up like Mom,” Delilah had clearly been crying as Drea could hear the ragged inflections worse than her usual smoker’s voice.

Drea pulled a large thermos from the shelf and slowly blinked at the comment, resting her back against the counter for a moment, the silent tears already down her cheeks realizing the implications of her sister’s comment. “You just always thought it was going to be me because I got the worst of it from him, didn’t you?”

“You were the one he wanted to hurt the most and to this day, I don’t know why. I just hope they catch the son of a bitch so I can pee without worrying if a cop is going to be sitting outside of the bathroom window,” Delilah tried to change the subject as the audible sob could be heard through the phone from Drea as she thought about the lengthy hospital stay, missing the trial, all of it.

“Is Ellie okay?” Drea wiped her tears and started to prep cream and sugar at the bottom of the larger-than-she-realized thermos enough for easily five full cups of coffee.

Delilah coughed for a moment before answering. “She’s better than usual. I hate to say it but I think losing Deanna might’ve helped her come out of some of the self-imposed fog she has been in.”
“Maybe once Miles is captured and put to justice she’ll rejoin life,” Drea poured the coffee into the thermos and watched the brew create a muddled mixture of cream, sugar, and coffee as it filled to the top. “I do love you both…you know that right?”

“Yeah, I know you do…sorry we grew up with Norma and Norman Bates—he was supposed to be damn near an only child not have 4 sisters,” Delilah raised her voice a little, managing to pass a laugh through the phone. “What are you doing since you can’t really go anywhere?”

Drea screwed the lid down on the thermos and popped the cup top back into place before grabbing two mugs from the shelf. “About to take coffee to the Officers sitting in their patrol car keeping guard on the place. It’s supposed to get pretty cold tonight.”

“Still trying to take care of everyone even if they didn’t ask for it, huh?” Delilah was a little judgmental but it was more of an endearing quality in her older age and disposition.

“Don’t judge me—I’ll call you back, okay?” Drea readied her finger over the end call button, rolling her eyes over her sister’s inability to see more than the end of her own nose.

“Sure, bye stupid,” Delilah half laughed and hung up her end while Drea ended the call before replacing the receiver on the charger.

She gathered her keys around her index while she slipped into a pair of fuzzy slippers before handling the thermos and mugs, playing a precarious balancing game as she walked toward the door. She undid the handle lock and replaced the mechanism to take hold as she went into the cold night air. She was already chilly as the breeze carrying snow whirled around her while she pulled the door closed behind her. She knew that Officer Lindell must’ve called her bluff as he looked a little dumbfounded to see her carrying a massive thermos and two mugs precariously down the snow covered drive.

His window came down, laughter coming from inside the vehicle. “I really thought you were joking when you said you were coming out here.”

“I never joke about coffee,” Drea handed him the mugs first and leaned down to get a better look at Officer Kyle sitting in the driver’s seat. “You must be Officer Kyle.”

He was older by at least fifteen years, had a little bit of a belly underneath of all that uniform, the fine lines and wrinkles from the laughter in equal measure with stress, along with a little bit of salt and pepper sprinkled into his full head of hair. She figured he was likely in his mid to late forties and earned that driver’s seat. His uniform, while nearly pristine, showed the signs of aging much like the rest of him, giving her a little bit of comfort to know that at least one of them had hit puberty despite how incredibly nice Lindell had been thus far. She didn’t need nice right now; she needed to feel safe with them outside of her home to keep guard.

“You’re stuck with us for an eight hour run, Miss,” Officer Kyle’s voice was deeper than she expected, with a deep drawl on certain letter combinations as he did his best to soften up his clear Southern accent. “We appreciate the hot coffee, though. That’ll get us through the night.”

“It’s really no trouble—the least I could do knowing that you’re both out here keeping an eye on things,” Drea had a sinking feeling in her stomach as she handed the thermos to Lindell and remained in that leaning position for another moment longer.

“That’s our job, Miss Miller—you should get back inside before you catch your death,” Lindell’s greenness didn’t overwhelm his sense of nobility and doing what is right as he nodded at
her, holding the thermos in his hands while Officer Kyle held the mugs.

Drea was undeniably cold as she crossed her arms across her chest and stood a little straighter, glancing at the front door for a moment. “If you need a refill just knock.”

They were grateful to her kindness—it was already in the freezing temperatures as Drea made her way back up to the door in her sweats and sweater, her slippers caked with snow. It was an odd feeling to be withdrawing herself entirely from her normally active social life. She felt that pang of nervous energy again, swirling around like a swarm of bees in her belly as she glanced at the squad car, her keys dangling from her fingers. She was shaking as she slid the key into the lock, turning it until she could hear the pin release. She didn’t want to be here even though it felt like an untraversable fortress. She pushed the door open and felt the warmth of her home coming back to her like a gentle wave, but it wasn’t enough as she pushed the door closed again, locking each lock with a bit of haste.

What do I do now? She looked around at the living room and caught that smidgen of fear as she stood before the enormous wall of windows. She slid out of her slippers and crossed the room, her heart beating up into her throat as she neared the set of windows overlooking the deck. She flicked on the light to the outside, illuminating the entirety of the space almost expecting to see Miles staring back at her but all she saw was pristine snow and wood planking. She flipped the light back off and pulled the curtains closed, making sure that every nook and cranny was blocked out, no one could see out or in. It was paranoid but she didn’t care as she walked to the hallway and pulled the spare room door shut before gathering a couple of pillows and blankets from her own bedroom to drag to the living room where she proceeded to move the coffee table out of the way to create a big cushion of blankets on the floor. She felt like an eight-year-old all over again as the vomit started to rise in her throat.

“Shit,” Drea went into the kitchen and pulled the perishables from the bag on the counter and put them into the fridge, keeping out the container of cottage cheese.

Life couldn’t stop but the mental pictures just kept coming as she felt every one of her wounds slicing opening again simultaneously, each little section of skin searing with fire. The worst of it was the vee across her chest as she pulled the sweatshirt off and tossed it onto a chair, her hands shaking as she touched the scarring, to assure herself the feeling wasn’t real. This can’t be happening. She tried to breathe through it as she could hear her much younger self whimpering and sobbing, the torture only intensifying. The only thing that could’ve made this worse for her is if the sound of Miles’s voice talking her through every cut had been clear, in focus.

She blinked rapidly and found the strength to unclench her jaw then open the container of cottage cheese. She knew the shaking would be the last to go as she spooned some of it into a plastic bowl and put the container into the fridge. She carried the little bowl of cottage cheese and a box of crackers into the living room and curled up on her bed of blankets. She started flipping through channels and popped a cracker into her mouth just as the phone started to ring.

“Ugh, seriously?” She chewed the remnants of the cracker and reached for the phone on the end table, clicking it on as she raised it to her ear. “Delilah, I told you I’d call you back later.”

“Aw, sweet little baby sister Drea, all alone in that big, cold house,” Miles’s voice was cold, unfeeling in her ear as he spoke.

Drea dropped the remote and was on her feet in under 30 seconds as the sound sent a shiver down her spine. “Hello psychopath.”

“That isn’t any way to greet your brother now is it?” Miles had a truly menacing laugh as
Drea was caught somewhere between anger and panic as she contemplated going outside to get the officers. “You just couldn’t keep that dirty, whore mouth shut could you, Drea? You just had to tell the FBI where to find me and now our little sister is dead—and it’s all on you, little girl.”

“You’ve killed people, Miles, and kidnapped a federal agent—and you did that with the assistance of a love struck idiot that I, sadly, called sister,” Drea paced behind the couch, inadvertently knocking over a framed photo of all four girls together. “She was just as crazy as you are.”

“Little girl, you might want to be cautious with that mouth of yours—remember what happened the last time you sassed back?” Miles knew what would get to her as he purposely brought up their childhood, rubbing the lit cigarette further into her skin.

“Are you really threatening me over the phone, Miles? I’m over this shit—I’m not eight-years-old anymore and I’m certainly not lusting after you like a certain fucked up sister was. You want to threaten me? Then find your testicles, show up, and do it in person! I’m tired of your fucking childish games…fucking momma’s boy,” Drea was livid as the challenge was issued before she could even think completely.

“It is going to be so satisfying slitting your pretty little throat and mutilating what’s left of your corpse, Drea—you’re such a bitch and you’ve always been one, right to your rotten core,” Miles was hanging on the edge of angry as her words were starting to get to him but the barrier of being over the phone gave him a little bit of rigidity as he held his volume at a moderate level.

“Blah, blah, blah, blah, you must enjoy the sound of your own voice so much to actually think that shit is going to scare me, Miles,” Drea grabbed her keys and went for the door, unlocking each of the latches before pulling the door open. “I think what you’re really mad about is that you know that you know, deep down, you enjoyed everything that made you finally lose your mind or you wouldn’t have actually allowed Deanna to start seducing you…We ALL know she was EXACTLY like her.”

“Fuck you, Drea,” That was the trigger as she went straight for the kill shot bringing up their mother and Deanna’s personality resemblance to her.

Drea was gesturing at Lindell and Kyle in a wild attempt to get their attention from the porch, her bare toes touching a section of snow as she tilted onto the balls of her feet. “Aww did I strike a nerve, Miles? Are you mad that the little sister you nearly killed won’t stop bringing up your Oedipal complex? Mom was certainly no saint—but we all know she was definitely a Jocasta.”

“Shut your fucking mouth,” Miles was seething, his voice booming through the phone as the officers finally made their way up the sidewalk to the porch where she stood.

“I’m not finished, Miles,” Drea’s eyes widened as they started to open their mouths, but held back the words when she said his name out loud so that they’d know what she was dealing with. “You can’t blame all of it on everyone else—you kept it going, you perpetuated it. You killed innocent people and you willingly invited and involved Deanna in all of it. You’re a psychopath.”

“Dispatch, I need a trace on Drea Miller’s home phone, the currently incoming call—yes, NOW,” Officer Kyle stepped away just far enough that his voice didn’t carry as he was on his cell running a trace while Lindell carefully listened to Drea.

“You’re finished, little girl, you just don’t know it—you’ll know it when I have a handful of your hair and the blade is right against your jugular, when you can feel your heart
pumping your blood right to that spot, when you’ll have to beg for me to stop,” Miles’s voice was ragged in her ear and it was unclear if it was vexation or ardor brewing in his voice.

Drea closed her eyes for a moment, almost wondering if she should continue but she had to keep him on the phone as she let the words leave her lips, half regretting the consequences that could develop from them. “You don’t have the guts to make it fast—you like the torture, you like knowing that you’ve got all of the control because no one would ever give it to you willingly otherwise, isn’t that right?”

“Twenty more seconds, Drea, hold on…” Officer Kyle knew that she was starting to waiver as he could see the discomfort rising in her face, as her hands started to shake from the nerves and not the cold of the air outside.

“You’re not fooling me, little girl, I know you have those officers running a trace on this call but it won’t matter by the time that they locate an origination…I won’t be here,” Miles was laughing a little at her, the gravel in his voice grating on her ears. “You think you’re smarter than I am but you forget, I’ve been playing this game for a very long time and I always win.”

“Three seconds,” Officer Kyle held up three fingers while he spoke and watched her as she fidgeted uncomfortably on the snow covered cement.

“You won’t win—not this time, Miles,” Drea didn’t wait for a reply; she hung up the phone on him and held the receiver to her chest, gathering her emotions in an attempt to hold back the tears that were waiting and demanding to fall.

Officer Lindell was blown away by her strength in the face of something as dangerous as prodding a killer like Miles. “I know that wasn’t easy but you did so good Miss Miller, you really did.”

“Please tell me that got a location out of all that time because I’d like to go throw up now,” the color had drained from Drea’s face as she almost couldn’t look either of them in the eye, the dizziness and sick feeling filling her.

Officer Kyle was still on the phone but he angled the mouthpiece away from his lips as he spoke to her. “They got a location—it came from a gas station on the western edge of Alexandria, son of a bitch is trying to get into the hills. They’re sending over a team to check the location.”

“I, uh, need to go sit down,” Drea could feel the stinging of salt in her eyes as the corners of her eyes filled with tears as everything became a little bit foggy.

She didn’t hear them as they assured her that she would be safe, her back slowly turning away from them as she nodded blindly before walking into the house. She carefully pushed the door shut, locking it again with a greater care for the mechanism, almost worried that if she wasn’t completely conscientious of the methodology that it wouldn’t work. She swallowed hard and staggered forward, still clutching the clunky phone in her hand to the point that her knuckles were white. She eyed the rather impressive collection of barely opened, vintage bottles of alcohol that her grandfather had stockpiled in the decorative storage case in the dining room and settled upon the idea of sipping a Balvenie single malt on the rocks despite how it always managed to bring out the unpleasant looking tears from her. She tossed the phone onto the couch and stared forward, debating mentally if she wanted to go straight for the oblivion or just warm it up a bit.

“Fuck it,” Drea wiped her eyes and went to the cabinet, pulling a rocks glass from the middle shelf before getting two sizable cubes of ice from the freezer.
She stood there for a moment, letting the chill waft over her face with the glass in her hand as it dried up the moisture on her face before maneuvering to the bottles of liquor. She knelt toward the bottom set of shelves and found an already opened bottle of Balvenie PortWood single malt scotch with a layer of dust on it with a date of 1989. She couldn’t help but smile at the realization of finding one of two remaining bottles of her grandfather’s favorite scotch just sitting there, one still sealed and the other barely touched. She wiped the dust off and closed the cabinet, pouring enough for two, almost three shots into the glass and set the bottle onto the dining table as though she planned to revisit it. She took the first sip of the amber liquid and felt the first blow as the sweet mixed with heat at the back of her throat and the roof of her mouth, reminding her of days when pops would sneak a sip to her when grams wasn’t looking. She licked her lips and let a small amount of the scotch simmer against her tongue before swallowing again, the heat less intense the second time. The sigh that followed was loud and bordered on pathetic as she gathered her wits and went back to the spot on the floor in the living room where she had left her partially nibbled snacks.

Then he crossed her mind like an unexpected thought that had her concerned over the drink in her hand as she withdrew the glass from her lips and let the flavor linger there a moment longer, burning a trail along the spots she usually bit out of habit. It was a great distraction but a little mortifying for her to be contemplating anyone for more than a few seconds—and she had been allowing the girlishness to peek into her soul and create even more havoc than she was already experiencing. This wasn’t supposed to be how anyone could start to touch or creep into the dark places of her soul, but it was happening like an oncoming storm, ready to leave disaster in its wake. She glanced at the phone as she reached into the pocket of her sweats, clumsily pulling the card out and flinging it forward in the process. She caught it in mid-air and blushed despite the lack of an audience to witness the blunder but it was still embarrassing for her as she felt the rush of energy flush her cheeks even further than they already were.

She wanted to tell herself not to do what she was dangerously close to doing, to call one of the older sisters and bribe them into coming to stay with her, but something was pulling her a magnet, complete with the energy built behind it as she felt the static building in her chest. A switch had been flipped, the control was gone, and she felt genuinely helpless for the first time since she was a child. This wasn’t supposed to be how anyone could start to touch or creep into the dark places of her soul, but it was happening like an oncoming storm, ready to leave disaster in its wake. She closed her eyes, grabbed the phone and counted to five mentally, all the while holding a breath in, before looking down at the card in her hand. She dialed the number and hesitated, the shakiness in her fingers making their presence felt as she hovered over the call button for a painfully long moment before finally pressing it down.

The phone only rang twice before Max’s voice was in her ear, softer than she remembered but still carried that same energy, that twinge of gentle naiveté that had her smirking earlier. “Hello…this is Agent Belle?”

“Agent Belle, it’s Drea Miller—I am incredibly sorry to bother you but I felt that you were probably the first person I should call after what just happened,” Drea was doing everything she could keep from stuttering as she tried to sound calm and not ridiculously excited under the circumstance. “You and Agent Mulder anyway...”

“Is everything okay, Miss Miller? You sound a little frazzled,” Max seemed pleasantly surprised to hear from her but the concern was there as he went headlong into getting her to open up, without hesitating.

She took a sip of the scotch and made a face as she swallowed too fast, the burning hitting her in the uvula enough to nearly make her cough. “Uhh…Miles called me a few minutes
ago and it has me a little more rattled than I wanted to admit.”

“Oh, Jesus, did the officers watching the house run a trace for you?” She didn’t want to admit it but the audible consternation in his voice had her ears hot and her cheeks searing.

She was staring at the blinking standby light on the stereo, fixated fully on the slow, lulling movement. “Yes—they’re looking into it but that’s not why I’m calling.”

“Go on,” Max’s curiosity was fully piqued as he held onto the words a little longer than necessary.

“Just the sound of his voice had my brain right back to those days as a child. I didn’t think it would affect me this badly, but it has, and I really don’t want to be here alone in this house, with my thoughts, tonight. It sounds really stupid and I shouldn’t feel like I’m not safe here with two armed guards outside, but I don’t feel safe—not even a little bit,” Drea knew that she was bordering on mumbling as she took another sip of the scotch and tapped her ring and pinky finger against the side of the glass.

“I can see if my supervisory team can get another agent there to stay inside? Someone that I would trust to do the same for me,” Max hadn’t quite gotten the roundabout, subtler than she would normally be request as she could only blush a little more intensely.

Drea almost considered hanging up the phone right then as she realized she was making an ass of herself completely to a practical stranger. “Agent Belle, I felt safe when you were here earlier—and I know this is really not a request that I really should be making but, would you, just so I’m not alone, please?”

There was an innocence in her voice as he hesitated to answer, the words teetering between nervous and unsure as he realized that interaction with her was like pouring gasoline onto an open flame. “I don’t know if protocol really allows for that sort of thing Miss Miller—”

“Please just come over—I swear, on my higher than you’d expect salary, that I am the perfect model of chastity today,” Drea knew that her proclivities were, perhaps, scaring off a slightly less-than-educated man in Max as she tried to make a joke out of her own history.

“Only today, Drea?” The way he said her name had her biting down on her bottom lip as he purposely called her out on her wording and the use of the word “today” contextually.

She was rosy and warm as she laughed nervously and played with a section of curls that had dropped in front of her face. “I was subtly hoping that you’d pass over that part…ok, so maybe it’s more like 48 hours I can guarantee of my absolute best behavior. Will that be acceptable?”

“I think I could manage that—I’m over at the hospital right now checking on things with Agent Scully and getting a couple of stitches myself but,” Max paused, the shake easy to hear in his vocal inflections. “Give me 40 minutes?”

“Stitches? Do you need a nurse, Agent Belle?” Drea was mixing tones as she was both intrigued and concerned at the same time, a slight curve in her voice clear as she spoke.

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“Didn’t you just say you were going to behave yourself?” Max was only half teasing her as he could hear the slight drop in octave, knowing he was putting a smile on her face. “Your brother booted me in the nose and nearly broke it—had to have a few stitches across the bridge, nothing crazy.”

“I’m sorry that you got hurt—I’m sorry that anyone got hurt but I’m glad that the
missing Agent is safe,” Drea still felt the sentimentality coursing through her as she glanced at the contents of her glass. “Drive safely getting here and I’ll see you in 40 minutes then. Thank you, Agent Belle.”

“If I must call you Drea, you need to start calling me Max,” He was natural at comforting a person even if the words were more of a gentle prodding to get her to be a little less formal with him.

“Okay, Max, I will—bye, Max,” Drea kept the receiver to her ear until she heard him say goodbye on his end before hanging it up on the charging station.

The feeling of unease was still high, but it had joined together with an anticipatory feeling that hadn’t quite been founded before, one that left her chewing on whether what was in her glass was going to be enough to get her through this night. She took another sip of the scotch and pulled her grandmother’s quilt over her lap, caressing the material as her mind placed her at a crossroads of sorts—and the options left her with a choice to go into the unknown, stay within the comforts of denial, become wrought with guilt, or look backwards at nothing but pain.

Chapter End Notes

Oedipus and Jocasta - if you do not know who they are, you need to look them up

I love all of you for continuing this journey. It is CLOSE to an end. Notice how I didn't say THE END?

Extra thank you to Monika Michelle Cross, Vicky Williams, Jun Mai, Megan Kelly, and Lee Hughes as always for the little tidbits that you are so gracious in giving a read to or indulging in – we’re almost there! (More to come)
Sooner or Later

Chapter Summary

The recovery begins…but with their killer still on the loose, will he be laying in wait, ready to strike when it is least expected?

Post “Agua Mala” (Season 6 with mentions of “Rain King”, “Two Fathers”, and “One Son” Briefly and only for context purposes)

Chapter Notes

“You’ll be safe from dangers tonight, wait for an oasis to arrive, hold on, don’t stray, sooner or later, those scars will fade” – Adrian Lux

Lines are from “Flight of the Navigator” and “House on Haunted Hill” respectively – if you’ve never seen them, I encourage you to look them up.

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See the end of the chapter for more notes

10:30 PM

George Washington University Hospital

Trauma Center

There were probably dozens of warning signs associated with allowing one’s self to become open and attached to a victim but the rationality surrounding that line of thinking had gone quiet, useless even, as Max listened to the soft voice on the other end of the line. He was bold yet resolute in his actions as he held the cell phone close to his ear, drawn ever closer to a line of unfamiliarity that left him with a feeling of overwhelming jitters in the pit of his stomach. He drew in a breath at the sound of his name, the purity of it, the stunning innocence built behind a voice that had drawn him in and held him captive without restraint. The sudden, undeniable understanding of exactly why Mulder had taken so many risks for Scully had slapped him across the face as he was seeing himself willing to step out into traffic for someone he barely knew, someone that managed to strike a piece of him that no one had in years. It was beguiling but natural—a mesmerizing advance by a woman he knew nearly nothing about.
“Bye Drea…” Max hadn’t even noticed that he was being stared at by the entire gallery of people in Scully’s hospital room despite moving all the way to the window to avoid his voice carrying entirely.

Mulder was the first to tilt his head to one side, eyebrow raised as Max turned around. “Maximus, remember what I said earlier—about bailing you out of jail? I really, really don’t want to have to go do that and you know that you will not survive in a prison cell…you are way too pretty.”

“Wait, is Drea another one of the sisters?” Scully was slightly propped up in her bed with entirely too many pillows behind her, her fingers wound around Mulder’s, a yawn battling with her as her level of interest in the conversation at hand climbed.

“She certainly is and she’s got a very interesting criminal record to go along with the relationship to Miles—and it’s not the violent kind of criminal record I might add,” Frohike was smirking, the pure delight of getting to initiate Max fully via gentle ribbing.

“That sounds a little loaded,” Scully rolled her eyes as the teasing had already commenced and the teenager-level hazing was in full swing.

Mulder looked at Scully, the reality of the information that he had gotten because of the information that he obtained by interviewing Drea Miller lead to finding her had all but clicked into place as he rubbed the tips of her fingers. “If it hadn’t been for her I don’t think I would’ve found you when I did.”

“Miles called her—and it has her more than a little bit shaken up. She has armed guards outside like we set up already, but she asked me if I would go sit with her, so she can fall asleep,” Max’s consciousness was already halfway there as he slid his phone back into his coat pocket, eyes a little glassed over. “I know that we normally dispatch another agent to do something like this but when a person tells you that you make them feel safe, it’s a little more than an obligation.”

The group within the room had dwindled to the Lone Gunmen and Skinner along with Mulder and Max after Maggie went to pick up Bill Scully from the airport. The mood in the room was soft, unlike an unfolding scene from the brink of capturing a killer after rescuing one of their own. They were all a little out of their element as Scully hadn’t been in a hospital bed like this in quite a long time—and certainly hadn’t been quite in this bad of condition. She was unusually fidgety and overly ready to get back out there to catch Miles, but she knew that no one was letting her leave the room any time soon, nor would she have blamed them under the circumstance. She still hated the feeling of not being able to fix everything and make it right again.

“Knowing what she’s gone through in her lifetime, that might not be a terrible idea—and she seemed to have a pretty solid connection with you when we interviewed her,” Mulder looked over at Max, a look of understanding passing over him as he realized that it had become much more serious than he could’ve guessed.

“Sounds like all of you have a lot of things to tell me about?” Scully was more than a little concerned after the image she had gotten over one of the sisters was that of a highly in control, sadist of a woman like her brother not a shrinking violet like Mulder and Max were intimating with Drea.

Mulder made eye contact with Scully and nodded, almost afraid to tell her about the actual details of their suspect’s history. “That might be a touch on the understating side, Scully.”

Max had a small section of his nose bandaged covering up his stitches, the bruising
around the wound peeking out above, below, and beside it in a larger section. He was worse for the wear but a deepened resolve had hit him as he felt that nagging feeling in the core of his stomach, knowing that someone wanted his help, needed it even. He was not the type to exaggerate nor was he the kind to take unnecessary risks if he could help it. He was almost pacing as he was wrapping his brain around the scenario of that phone call, knowing the kind of damage it could be doing to her psyche. He glanced at his watch and made that worried look as he stood at the end of the hospital bed, his seldom illuminated apprehension capturing the attention of Scully almost immediately. She knew that look particularly well from experience and could feel the tension rising like someone had flipped the temperature from cool to heat.

“Max, go,” Scully didn’t need to say more than two words as she saw the look in his eyes of someone willing to put themselves on the line for another, not unlike what Mulder did for her on a daily basis.

Max nodded and quickly made his way out the door, nearly running into the door frame in the process. Scully let out a low, almost satisfied sigh as she let the air audibly escape her lips before looking at Mulder again. She would’ve preferred that they were alone again but was grateful to have their energy in the room with her. She was more able to focus on the situation after her mother was kind enough to retrieve a pair of fresh panties for her prior to the guys showing up—a feeling that Mulder couldn’t pass up a joke or three in the presence of her already overly-exuberant mother. She was never going to live it down much like the still damp front of his shirt that she had soaked with bath water. Scully was in less, sharp pain, but all her receptors were heightened as the littlest twinge was bringing her to the brink of frustration. She could tell that the last of the sedative had been counteracted in her system, replaced with a headache as the concussion was now blowing through her like a brakeless semi.

The Gunmen were unusually quiet and reserved, leaving a feeling that was less than agreeable in her stomach. Even Skinner was unusually quiet and reserved. She was used to him being a little on the pensive side, but he hadn’t really even made eye contact with her since he walked through the door. It was almost as though the reminder was too painful, too real. Scully detested being treated like she was breakable and fragile—and she abhorred it from the people she respected the most. It made her feel weak. She was grateful for Mulder next to her as his warmth kept her from screaming at them to get out if they were going to start acting different toward her—but her self-control, while hanging slightly dangerously in place, kept her calm while she realized that the bruising had likely been keeping them from being their usual, jovial and argumentative selves.

They all had realized how close they had come to losing her.

“The quiet is becoming awkward, guys…and I know that you didn’t come here to stare at me,” Scully glanced around the room at each of them, feeling more and more like a zoo exhibit with every passing second.

“Except Frohike,” Mulder smiled, moving his line of vision from her to the rest of them.

Frohike had his hands behind his back and had been unusually quiet, the relief written on his face despite the lack of general emotion. “We’re just glad you’re okay, Scully…today was rough and we’re all struggling to find the right words to say to you right now.”

“I can see it on all of your faces that you’re struggling but I’m here and I’m not going to break or wilt, but I will start taking hostages if you can’t snap out of it—I’d actually prefer a little normalcy. Don’t subject me to the silent, egg shell treatment,” Scully was letting her irritation peek out on the form of subtle berating as she gave each of them a longer than normal glance.
Byers spoke up after adjusting his tie, his usually pristine, three piece suit a little worse for the wear as the top button had popped free. “I’m actually curious about the conversation that Mulder and Max had with Drea Miller before you were found—what was said that lead to finding you.”

Skinner’s cell phone rang and brought his attention to the screen. He made a face toward the group before mouthing “I’ll be right back” while moving toward the door. Scully had an idea of what it was about and she was a little relieved that he decided not to answer it in the room where she could hear on the off chance it was not good news. She couldn’t handle any more bad news, not tonight...and not likely for a long time. She looked back at Mulder, who had moved the chair he was sitting on in a more comfortable position, his hand never once leaving hers.

“Miles spent time in the juvenile system for four counts of attempted murder, assault, and a myriad of other things—he tortured all four of his sisters including the one that ended up helping him,” Mulder rubbed the top of her knuckles and took a deep breath, hoping desperately that the information didn’t backtrack all of her progress. “When the first victim, Meghan Falkner, went missing, Deanna had pushed herself back into Miles’s life. It may have been what spurred his tendencies and incited the violence to spill out like it did.”

“So the woman that I shot, who made it painfully clear that she was 100% devoted to her brother to the point of her attempting to jump him right there in front of me, was at one point his victim?” Scully felt the vomit in her throat at the recollection of the red lipstick across her neck and face from Deanna’s sadistic form of torture. “Where did that leave the rest of the sisters?”

“Deanna Miller was the one that sustained the least amount of injuries from the actual reports on the case, Scully,” Langly interjected, finally taking a seat near her feet on the same side of the bed as Mulder. “We pulled up the redacted files on his juvenile case and found an alarming number of details revolving around his past.”

“All of the Miller daughters spent years in therapy—the two older sisters essentially became reclusive, Deanna has been in and out of institutions, and Drea has a couple of public indecency charges but she’s likely the most stable of all of them,” Byers leaned against the chair he had been sitting in and rubbed his temples, the lack of caffeine beginning to show as he winced just a little. “There was a heavy mention of abuse from the parents—but the majority of the abuse was started by the mother.”

“They only abused Miles, I’m assuming?” Scully didn’t want to feel bad for the man who tried to kill her and his history didn’t change what he deserved.

Mulder lightly squeezed her fingers as he felt her starting to tremble all over again. “Yes. Something that we found out was that Deanna may have been pushing him into a lot of it—she had been sneaking Miles into the home that they had been staying at. She caught them experimenting with each other in a not so familial sort of way and kicked him out, delivering an ultimatum to Deanna that resulted in her leaving an otherwise stable home with her sister.”

“I witnessed some of that experimentation—and it is certainly burned onto my retinas,” Scully shivered, her entire spine shaking from the base of her neck down, as she tried not to picture it all over again and instinctively changed the subject. “So what else have you got?”

“We feared the worst after we saw the surveillance that Miles had collected from your apartment, Scully,” Byers really wasn’t thinking about the consequences of the can of worms he just opened as Scully’s eyes nearly popped out of her head at the comment.

“Way to go, dillhole, you’re just a model of discretion, aren’t you?” Frohike swatted
Byers on the back of the head and rubbed the bridge of his own nose, purposely avoiding the stare from Scully as she looked around at everyone with more than just confusion plainly conveyed on her face.

“What surveillance?” Scully looked at Mulder, who had turned a bright shade of pink and was having a slightly more difficult time making eye contact with her. “Mulder…”

“Miles hooked up one of those bite sized cameras that works in the dark from remote hookups in your bathroom a couple of days ago. He had been watching everything that had gone on from the time he activated it until it fell after he took you,” Mulder trapped his bottom lip between his teeth as he caught the immediate rosiness in her cheeks as she couldn’t take her eyes away out of embarrassment rather than a want. “Three nights ago, Scully.”

“Oh, my God—are you telling me that ALL of you fucking watched it?” Scully didn’t know whether to start throwing fists, burst into tears, or go into a fit of laughter as the realization of what exactly was on that tape hit her as he said ‘three nights ago’.

“No one was going to just spring it on you like this and Mulder did have us run it forward to protect your privacy, Scully,” Langly couldn’t tell if she was more concerned with the subject of the nudity or that they had seen the relationship take a turn before their very eyes despite it being one of the more private of moments.

“But Byers went and pulled a Melvin and opened his mouth prematurely, without thinking,” Mulder rolled his eyes and shot Byers a look of mild disdain and discomfort, mutually gathered.

“Hey! I was a good boy and kept my eyes shut the whole time it was on,” Frohike immediately caught sideways glances from all of them, Scully included, as he made the least true comment he could ever make regarding the video tape. “Ok, a mostly good boy…”

“You’re not fooling anyone, midget man,” Langly rolled his eyes and looked back in Scully’s direction. “We were more concerned with finding out the exact moment that he took you and how…not about your activities in the shower.”

“Guys, it wasn’t exactly what you might be thinking it was,” Scully was so red that her ears had begun to burn and pulse to match her beating heart as she remembered each little detail of the mutual seduction that had gone on in her bathroom three nights prior.

Mulder couldn’t help but smirk as she tried desperately to put on the rational Scully face as he, essentially, proceeded to shoot her right out of the sky with his words. “Scully, there was sound on the video.”

“Oh, well, son of a bitch,” Scully fidgeted, clenching her backside just enough to be painfully obvious as Mulder held in a chuckle. “Please tell me that Skinner didn’t see.”

“Not that it would matter if he did, Scully, I think he knows—a LOT more than we think he knows,” Mulder stood and nudged her knee over, sliding his backside onto the bed with her so he could look her in the eye, face to face, pivoting his body toward her.

Byers nodded his head and crossed his arms, the rare yet refreshing, more aggressive tone in his voice coming out. “And they call me naïve? Really, you two…Skinner knows.”

“The video was inconsequential and meaningless next to the reality of just how much I had to fight to find you. I knew that I was going to stop at nothing to find you, knock down every
door if I had to—and when I finally heard your voice and saw your face in that dark basement in
the state that you were in, every moment of pretense seemed so pointless, Scully,” Mulder carefully
avoided the IV catheter as he held both of her hands within his, tenderly rubbing each little curve
on her palms with his thumbs. “I know that I’m rambling and probably make very little sense, but I
don’t care anymore. Every little word that you’ve heard me speak to you since I brought this
nightmare of a case into our lives has been what I have always wanted to say—but didn’t think I
could and I don’t want to lose out on that chance again to make sure you know it.”

“Oh shit, he’s going to drop the ‘L’ word,” Mulder had almost forgotten that the guys
were still there until Frohike opened his mouth, his volume higher than he expected.

“Lesbian?” Langly couldn’t help but be a smartass as they were clearly interrupting
Mulder’s highly romantic, emotionally charged rantings.

“Did you say ‘Long-haired, Loser Langly’? Because that’s what it sounded like to me…”
Frohike’s middle finger was itching as he stared in the direction of the incredibly proud of himself
Langly.

“Here we go again,” Byers crossed his arms over the impending argument between them.

“He already has—in a very Mulder sort of way,” Scully had tears in her eyes all over
again at the incredibly pivotal communique that he had just made, in front of an audience, no less.
“I can’t and wouldn’t blame anything on a concussion because I’ve said all of it before the
unpleasant hit to the head today hundreds of times. I’ve said all of those words in silence or waited
until you were out of the room to be compelled, brave enough to let them leave my mouth. Today
was the first time I said it loud enough for anyone to actually hear it—and the first time I said it
was to a complete stranger, in the face of what could’ve been my last breaths, because I couldn’t
keep it away from you anymore. I don’t want to.”

Byers nudged Frohike, clearly wanting to give them a little privacy while they were
making declarative statements toward one another. “We should go find some coffee—we’ll be
back in a while.”

There was something understated in the fairly overstated overture of mutual wordiness as
they realized that neither one was particularly good at promulgations of love nor were they exactly
well versed, as of late, at gestures of romance. Their long, incredibly verbose affirmations toward
one another did, indeed, carry a certain weight as they made them in front of people that they cared
for and cared for them in return. It was real, for the first time since they had begun confessing their
feelings toward one another, and there was no yearning or desire to turn back as they looked at
each other with such tenderness.

“Yeah, I could go for something super sweet and caffeinated right about now,” Langy
nodded and scooted to the edge of his seat before elevating to a standing position.

Mulder smirked as he turned toward them, readying his quip like a spitball on the end of
a slingshot. “Don’t let Frohike near any of the candy striper—we don’t need him getting
blacklisted from the hospital again for chasing skirt.”

“You better watch yourself, I’ll wink at yours and get that pitter patter to tilt my way,
Mulder,” Frohike wiggled his finger at Mulder with a little bit of a parental sort of warning before
shooting a smile at both of them.

Scully was touched, moved even, by the discernment that Frohike, Langly, and Byers
were so loyal to Mulder and her that they had all put a little bit of themselves into the assurances
surrounding their well-being, almost to a fault. Trust wasn’t an easy thing to place into the care of anyone as of late and the notion that they were there, implicitly, was everything. Things could’ve been painfully different without all of them—and not necessarily in the best of ways, either. She felt the smallest of smiles form on her lips as her eyes fell on Mulder, as all of the pain left plaguing her body felt and seemed terribly insignificant, miniscule even. The exhaustion was nipping at the backs of her eyelids but she still had that glimmer of animated energy budding underneath as she felt the veil lift away, the fears begin to be smothered by hope. Sooner or later all of this would be nothing more than a memory, even the scars would be hard to identify.

Mulder pulled her into a gentle embrace, his hands in her hair and his lips against her cheek. “I am sorry I didn’t tell you about the video sooner—but I didn’t think you’d appreciate the timing of me telling you that Frohike saw you naked on a surveillance tape while you were still chained to a wall. That might’ve been a bit on the awkward side.”

“You could’ve divulged it when I was in the soaking tub, Mulder,” Scully couldn’t help but smirk as she continued. “It wasn’t like I was the only naked one, I suppose.”

“Yeah, I seem to remember my naked ass climbing in first,” Mulder cocked his head to the side, grinning. “I had other things on my mind when you were in the soaking tub, Scully.”

She blushed again.

He did have a way of making things a little less severe, though, as she sighed against him and pulled him closer via the front of his shirt. “Make it up to me later with Chinese takeout and one of those shoulder rubs that you never actually ask permission to give.”

“Oh one condition,” Mulder pulled his head back so he could look her in the eye, sliding his fingers along the side of her head, his index fingers against the space behind her ears. His voice sent a shiver down her spine that only doubled with the feel of his fingers against her skin, the corner of her lip just slightly between her teeth. “Yes?”

“Never let me go grocery shopping without you attached to my hip ever again,” Mulder wanted to remember every little curve on her face, every little line that developed when she smiled, and wanted to remember how it felt when he held her close.

“That sounds so domestic,” Scully pressed her forehead to his, her delicate fingers along the underside curve of his Adam’s apple. “I think I can do that.”

Their incredibly brief moment was brought to an abrupt close by a knock at the door followed closely by a gap in the closure. Scully lightly craned forward and Mulder half spun around to catch a glimpse of the front of the wheelchair as the little hospital booties poking out from under blanketed legs caught both of their attention. Scully followed the gentle, curve of the blanket up the small, but not too small, frame of the feminine creature weakly perched in the chair, knees pressed together with her hands in her lap, a brace around the hand with the recently dislocated thumb. She had bandages nearly everywhere, absent her face, where only the residue of medicated stiches shimmered in the light along her brow, hairline, and lip. She was only a little bit slouched but reasonably so, given the amount of white gauze pads that littered her skin in sections along her neck, arms, and the invisible areas that her hospital gown kept carefully hidden.

It was Jeanette.

“Someone woke up from surgery and was insisting, no, demanding, that she see you,” Janessa was less like a nurse and more like a juggler as she held the door open and wheeled the
chair into the doorway along with an upright IV bag stand, her hip pushed against the door.

Scully didn’t know what words to say as she held her hands to her face, overcome with emotions all over again as she looked at the woman that was so close to losing the fight right in front of her. “You may not feel it or see it right now—but you, look like the definition of a warrior woman.”

Janessa pushed the wheelchair close to the bed, the weak smile building on Jeanette’s face as she reached for Scully’s outstretched hand, giving her the softest off squeezes out of weakened grip. “I feel like I’ve been speared through the back, hung upside down, and smacked on the ass for good measure.”

“Sounds like something a person might do on a kinky Saturday night to me,” Mulder had a smirk on his face despite being just as taken aback at how well Jeanette looked given the circumstances as he could see the light fidgeting, the pain visible on her face.

Jeanette held back a laugh and winced as she felt her ribs shift just enough to send a shooting pain through her. “Except they’re supposed to take you down from hanging when you blurt out the safe word, Agent Mulder…I know how this stuff works, truckers are mouthy and informative.”

“Oh, Jesus, really, you two,” Scully found her laugh again, the smallest of bursts coming through as she tried, with some futility, to hold it in.

“Scully, don’t act like you didn’t know,” Mulder winked at her, thankful for the sound that left her lips.

“When I heard the shots going off I feared the worst,” Scully squeezed her hand as she looked at the woman that she would now hold a permanent link to, whether it was wanted or not. “I had every hope that you made it safely out—I knew you were strong enough to do it if you got out.”

Jeanette took a deep breath, a few solitary tears sliding down her cheeks as she openly struggled to think, to recollect her two days in hell without regard to what effect it might have on her long term. “I remember you telling me to run. I barely remember getting to the boat but I remember the bullet. I remember talking to Agent Mulder and telling him what you needed me to tell him. I remember waking up after surgery—but parts of the last three days are a blur.”

“Maybe that’s a blessing to only remember parts of it in vivid detail. It will make it easier to cope and recover,” Scully could see the heavier patchwork design of a bandage peeking out at mid-shoulder level on Jeanette’s back where the opening of her gown didn’t hide anything as she awkwardly turned her body while fidgeting.

“There are things I’d like to forget, and I know that while she’s happy to have mom back now, my daughter isn’t going to understand why mom is screaming for help in the middle of the night—and that thought absolutely terrifies me to no end. What do you tell a child when you’ve woken her up with screams in the middle of the night? I don’t want to traumatize her more than I’m already there,” It was then that the tears were flowing without restraint as Jeanette wanted nothing more than to forget it all.

Scully was more than understanding of what she was going through as the same kinds of thoughts were swirling around in her own head. It was an impulse, a waiting, ticking time bomb and she knew it, deep in her soul, which it was waiting and willing to destroy anything that resembled progress, happiness, recovery. She held onto that notion of seeing every bit of her
innermost weaknesses illuminated and clearly defined for whoever was within her comfort zone of witnessing it. It was terrifying. She feared the moment that a nightmare would wake her with a blood curdling scream—and would she be alone in the struggle to come back down from it or would Mulder be there to soothe it away? It was paralyzing for her in either scenario. Scully was determined, however, to see light at the end as she squeezed Jeanette’s hand and covered the grip with her other hand. One never knows their own strength until they are faced with the Devil himself and both of these women had faced him…and survived to tell about it.

“I’d give you a hug but I’m mildly stuck and you just had a bullet removed from your back—but you have to know that you’re not alone. There are three of us that have to stick together in this and one of us is in worse shape than the rest,” Scully’s mind was on Victoria as she looked at Jeanette, conveying all of the understanding that she could in one expression. “Nine women didn’t make it—but three can continue to. He doesn’t get to win this time. I’m not going to let him if you won’t let him.”

Jeanette nodded before wiping her tears with her other hand, the reflexive action almost unintentional as she glanced at her blistered wrists, contemplating the struggle that had inflicted each little mark. “He’s never going to beat me, and he never will. I know that I haven’t met her or anything, but I’d like to—if there’s a way to do that. I really want her to know that she’s not alone.”

“I think we can get that message to her and get some time with her set up,” Mulder was ever present and mindful of the situation as Jeanette and Scully were deep in a reflective moment, their feet barely on the ground as the room was almost spinning out of control.

Janessa had grown attached to all three of these women in some capacity even though her time with two of them had been more than a little short—and her way of distracting away the glassy eyes was to check all of Scully’s timers, monitors, and lines. She was deeply intuitive and highly skilled at her job, mastering the professional as well as the personal in the same breath. She had already gotten to know Victoria to the point that she had already felt that jolt of anxiety over the mere thought of her coding again. She had witnessed all of these women at their most vulnerable, in varying states of battling for survival but the only thing she saw was strength, beauty, and radiant women overcoming the seemingly impossible. It made everything else seem so insignificant by comparison.

“Janessa, you already checked that chart twice—are you ok?” Scully forced her to make eye contact with a gentle, prodding question.

Janessa turned her head and let her shoulders slump just enough to tattle on the false smile on her lips. “I get attached to my patients too quickly and I really think that Victoria would want to know that she has people that care other than her blood relatives—people who went through this like she did. I’ve had to witness her struggling in her sleep and nearly rip open her stitches from trying to scream. She needs both of you, more than you can even begin to know.”

“Mulder?” Scully touched his back, her voice receding to that meek, almost reflective state as her volume dropped considerably.

“I think that a little venture to the extended stay level might be a good idea, Scully—plus, if any of this has gotten back to her I’m sure she’s been thinking of you,” Mulder found her knee through the blankets and gave her a gentle squeeze before looking back at her, his eyes smiling more than his mouth.

“I’d like you there with me. You’re part of my healing process—a pivotal part,” Scully snaked her fingers across his and pulled his hand to her lap, her stare meeting his. “If you’re ok with that?”
“Every step of the way, without hesitation,” Mulder could feel her hands shaking as she rubbed the top of his hand with both of hers.

As he looked her in the eyes, he knew that the journey for Scully was going to be more than a little tumultuous but he wasn’t letting her do this alone—it wasn’t like before. She could have, without question, done all of this alone but she didn’t want to. Not again. His strength was part of her now and her health meant more than he could possibly say in words. He couldn’t look back on these moments as ones that he let the last true part of his life walk out because of fear of losing or fear of failing. She was worth so much more than that.

She meant everything.
needed her. She had no one left that truly loved her enough to stay.

Snap out of it. She heaved a heavy sigh after she had changed clothes for the third time since the FBI had appeared in her life.

She had abandoned the big, baggy sweats and sweatshirt, opting for a pair of pajama bottoms and a camisole tank, both in black. She did opt to pull on a zip up hoodie as she looked at herself in the mirror and saw her nipples aiming at the mirror like two barrels of guns ready to fire. The frustration was mounting as she knew that this wasn’t a western nor was she advertising her body temp. She blamed it on the intensely cold air floating through the house as though it had a pulse and flipped the switch to the gas lit fireplace, then stood in front of it for a long, glorious moment until her backside was no longer half numb. She looked at the clock across from her and saw the time for the seventh time since she hung up the phone. She knew that it was going to be a hard drive to her but the nerves were still singing to her as she felt her stomach jump at the mere thought that he decided not to show up. It was weakness that she hadn’t ordinarily allowed to manifest but it was also deeply profound to feel again, to want to feel again.

“Wow, Drea, you’re a moron, get a hold of yourself,” She played with her hair, letting each curly section of hair wrap across three of her fingers until they were nearly tangled in a knot.

She glanced at the glass of Scotch on the table next to her haphazard, little campout spot on the floor and contemplated the amount she had already consumed. It was shockingly full as she stared at the liquid, realizing that her lack of bravery was directly related to her soberness. The fairness of such a conundrum was less than satisfying as she picked up the glass and inhaled a whiff of the liquid before taking a smaller than anticipated sip, letting the heat waft over her tongue before swallowing. She wasn’t good at nervousness and sentimentality since the grandparents had passed away and both sets of emotions were hanging on her like weights around her limbs as she felt every part of her ache just a little with the resistance.

It was exhausting her already.

“Be normal.” Drea closed her eyes and rested the back of her head on the mantle before glancing at the television screen as it danced a muted image across it.

She couldn’t remember what she had started but she remembered distinctly pressing mute before she got up to change and call Delilah. Her brain was almost addled like an ADD child as she tilted forward and spotted the image of Julie Andrews running through the courtyard of a Nunnery. She didn’t know whether to laugh or roll her eyes over managing to pick and start “The Sound of Music” when her mind could not handle anything joyous under the circumstance. She blew a raspberry and thumbed through the considerable collection of VHS, pulling “Mary Poppins” from the fold, ejecting the tape currently in play. It was all so childish but she was beyond the point of caring as she replaced the tape and stood with the glass of Scotch between her fingers, swirling it around in contemplation.

The knock at the door sent a shiver down the backs of her legs and nearly toppled her, the sound startling her just enough to make both of her knees buckle, sending her stumbling forward with the glass still in her hand. She managed to save it from certain doom all over the floor and set it gently onto the table, backing away from it as though it might jump at her and spill itself all over the place. She took a deep breath and spun around, tripping over both of her own feet, tumbling forward again with even less grace than she did with a glass in her hand and all the while mumbling expletives as her knees nearly banged into the edge of the side table. Walking wasn’t new to her but maneuvering while anxious was damn near impossible as she slid across the carpet on the way toward the front door.
“Just a second!” Drea stopped short of the door and fluffed her hair, checked herself for anything out of place before pulling the door open just in time to see Max’s awkward grin on the other side of the door. “…Hi.”

“Hey,” Max was teetering in his boots, the snow collecting on his shoulders and on top of his head, the chill comfortable across the covered portion of his nose. “The guys were mentioning that you made them coffee and it’s been the only reason they haven’t froze to death yet.”

“Oh, that, it’s nothing, I knew that coffee solves the majority of life’s simpler problems and even some of the more complex ones,” Drea could feel the blush burning across her cheeks, her chest, her ears, and it was already driving her nuts as she angled herself and gestured toward the living room. “Come in before you catch your death.”

Aside from the visible swelling and bruising across Max’s nose, he was otherwise upright and unscathed, with his lip just slightly caught between his front teeth as her cheeky expression caught him a little bit unaware. She had been acutely keen to his height when he was in her home before but it wasn’t blatant until he was standing nearly face to face within her doorway. She was sweating from the sloppy acrobatics in the living room and it was painfully obvious as he was no more than a foot from her as he wiped his feet just inside of the doorway.

“What did you do? Are you sweating?” Max reached out and ran the palm of his hand across her cheek where a droplet of sweat had started to slide down her slightly freckled skin, the pink only intensifying under his touch.

“I, uh…” She froze as she looked up at him, the strangest of sensations building as she could feel the heat in her face colliding with the cold blowing in from the still open door.

She coughed and reluctantly sidestepped him, pushing the door shut, gathering those same locks again before turning around to face him. Max had clearly been watching the typical behavior from Mulder a little more than he should have been, or normally would—and was an awfully fast learner as he gave her a sideways glance with his head tilted just enough that his eyes burned through her, the same kind of stare that nearly made her jump out of her skin, leaving nothing but a puddle on the floor. She sucked a breath into her nostrils and held it there before exhaling audibly.

Breathe, stupid, breathe. She told herself as she could momentarily hear her own heart beating in her ears.

“I moved a couple of things around earlier, must’ve gotten a little warm in the process,” Drea’s voice cracked like a pubescent teenager still in the clutches of the change as she went for her glass of Scotch and took another gulp for bravery’s sake before turning back toward him. “I have an awfully old bottle of Balvenie PortWood Scotch…if you’re interested?”

Max slid out of his snow covered coat and placed it carefully onto one of the hooks behind the door, avoiding the carpeting as he watched the first droplet of water hit the floor, glancing back at her with a curiosity. “I’ve been offered an awful lot of alcohol today—but I’ll take you up on that.”

“It isn’t a decent finish to a day without a glass of Scotch or so I’ve heard,” Drea went into the kitchen with her own, nearly empty glass and a clean one to put a couple of cubes of ice in them. “I really appreciate you doing this. It could’ve sounded a little indecent and you didn’t have to.”
Max pulled his boots off as he noticed he was tracking snow onto the edge of the carpets, glancing at her as she carried the ice filled glasses to the table where the bottle of Scotch sat, eyes falling over every curve of her in the process. “I’ve never been much of a drinker but after a day like today it seemed like the thing to do to get your mind off of it.”

“I usually switch back and forth between Scotch and wine depending on the kind of day that I’ve had. The stronger the drink, the worse the day had been,” Drea poured a generous double into both glasses and gathered both in her hands before turning toward him, extending one glass in his direction.

It took a moment for him to notice she was already looking at him and she was more than a little aware he had been looking at her while her back was turned, but didn’t seem to mind. He averted his full stare and took the glass from her hand before smelling the contents. It wasn’t anything like the Bourbon from Frohike but he knew it wasn’t going to be gentle on his taste buds or his throat as he took the gentlest of sips. The flavors were heavy but not intoxicating and lasted a long time before that signature after burn ran through him as he swallowed. He made eye contact with her after the first sip and nodded as he realized that she was waiting for a confirmation or dismissal of if it was good.

“Are you really watching Mary Poppins?” Max turned his attention toward the TV as he saw the imagery of Julie Andrews across the screen, half mocking her, half impressed by the trusting vision of the classics.

Drea carried her glass into the center of her living room and sat down on the pile of blankets on the floor, smirking in his direction. “Don’t hate on the whims of a thirty-something who still adores her some classic Disney.”

“Oh, no, I’m not hating on it, but are you going to subject me to a sing-a-long because I’m really not prepared for that,” Max tilted his elbows onto the back of the couch and leaned forward, taking another drink of the Scotch.

Drea pulled one of the fluffier of the blankets across her lap and placed her glass on the carpet, carefully away from her body while she looked over at him, eyebrows raised. “You know you can come sit over here…I promise that I’m not going to bite or otherwise injure you further than you already are.”

“You sure about that?” Max moved around to the front of the couch and handed her his glass before sitting down on the floor with her, putting a fair amount of distance between them as he heard a little giggle leave her lips. “Luring a man to the floor and taking advantage of him because he can’t get up as quickly seems like a thing.”

She smirked and handed him his glass after he was comfortable, winking at him just a little as she felt some of the anxiety begin to melt away. “I highly doubt you’d protest—or you’d pretend to protest out of spite. I said I’d be good and I keep my word.”

Max wasn’t the most street wise when it came to women but he had a natural charisma that spurred from his attention to detail, his careful precision in listening to the subtleties. It was part of his job and it helped blossom friendships as a result but this was different. Drea was radiantly beautiful and yet, hid a sweet insecurity that most wouldn’t recognize upon first glance. Max noticed the little red marks on her wrist from a rubber band continuously flinging against it, he clearly saw the carefully manicured nails that likely kept her from biting them to the quick, and he was more than a bit aware of her nearly constant hair twirling to keep her fingers busy. She was not nearly as outgoing and reckless as she would like everyone to think she was but Max liked seeing her flaws. They were what made her uniquely her.
“So, I have to ask and it’s completely ok if you refuse to answer since it isn’t really either of our business but…” Drea took a sip of her Scotch and positioned her arm against the couch to where she was fully tilted in his direct, smiling like a gossipy teenager. “Agent Mulder is seeing the woman in that photograph isn’t he? The other Agent? He knows that no one buys that strictly professional bullshit, right?”

The questions were actually bordering on adorable as she almost seemed overly interested in knowing a few intimate details about something moderately scandalous as he had the glass up to his lips. “Straight in for the kill with your first round of questions, huh? Well, I mean, isn’t everyone seeing each other these days, though?”

“Dodging the questions…shouldn’t that be beneath you, Max?” Drea had a knowing smile perched on her lips as she took another drink, glancing over at Max as the glass came down from her mouth. “I’ll let it slide this one time.”

“I’ll consider myself lucky,” Max chuckled and put his glass on the table next to him, the musical on the television providing a moment of distraction. “Was I the only weird kid that cried hysterically over ‘Feed the Birds’?”

Drea laughed a little and nearly choked on the Scotch as she took another drink, glancing over at Max as the glass came down from her mouth. “You did not…you’re teasing.”

“No, I did. It was full on, embarrassing level tears that almost had my mother questioning whether or not she was going to end up with a heterosexual son or not…it apparently made her wonder,” Max was effortless in self-deprecation for the benefit of others as he recollected an embarrassing, albeit true, story from his childhood.

She was enthralled by his genuinely sweet attitude as she wiped her mouth and brought her knees up, angling both arms across them in a stretch. “I bet you were that boy that girls passed over unintentionally but heard about from the random, adventurous girl who couldn’t stop talking about exactly what you can do.”

“Awkward, skinny, nerdy, but I could recite every word from Flight of the Navigator,” Max laughed and stretched out his legs, wiggling his toes until he felt them pop inside of his socks.

The giggle that came from her was half muffled as she let her face sink between her arms as her forearms were still across her knees, hands together around the glass. “You crashed while looking at FLOWERS?”

“Hey, blimpo…too many Twinkies,” Max was bordering on a little turned on as she busted out an actual line from one of his favorite childhood movies in the middle of a giggle.

“I do not leak, you leak!” Drea looked over at Max as she brought her head back up, smirking.

Max shook his head and stared at the ceiling for a moment, realizing that there was a lot more to Drea than he gave her credit for. “Did I just gather that you were the adventurous girl who took the risk on the nerdy guy with that display of 80s movie trivia?”

Drea bit down on her lip and took a deep breath, fingers gathering in her hair again as she stared at the floor for a moment. “Nope…I was the nerdy girl that hid from that kind of attention. It was easier to pretend like it didn’t exist.”

Her tone had changed and another layer of her soul peeked out at him like a diamond in a
deep cavern. She had been waiting too long to shine—to be that woman that she had hid away for so long as a safety mechanism. Max was drawn to her with a certain level of impulsiveness as he couldn’t help but stare at her and want to know more about the pieces that she hid away from the world. She didn’t know just how attractive she was, radiating from the inside out, and he could tell she wasn’t used to more than the usual pickup line. It was certainly a crush but was far from typical.

“Sounds like there’s a lot more to that statement than simply not wanting to be seen,” Max probed further and watched her shudder as she straightened her back and took another, generous drink of her Scotch.

She didn’t seem like the shy type but she held her breath and averted her field of vision to her own feet, wiggling her toes almost as though she were gathering herself. “I was in the sixth grade when four girls found out about what happened when I was a kid…they told a bunch of the boys that I had scars all over my body and that I was deformed. It got so bad that they tried to strip me naked in the locker and shove me into the gym so everyone could see. It was hard enough actually having scars—it became something I got made fun of over. School counselors had a real bitch of a time with me after that.”

Max reached across and pulled the glass from her weakened grip, capturing her attention nearly instantly as her eyes were big, her face pale as the timidity set in. He set the glass next to his own and gathered her left arm between his palms, tracing along her visible scars from the curve of her forearm to her wrists. It was a bold move for him but none of her marks scared him—in fact, they were what made her unique in his eyes as he followed each delicate slash mark with the tips of his fingers. In ordinary circumstances, touching her scars in this way would’ve been invasive but he was taking great care in discovering them to the point that a shiver passed over her, leaving trails of goosebumps all over her body.

“I look at scars like the smaller pieces of a puzzle that helped to define parts of a person—where they’ve been, what they’ve gone through, the things they’ve experienced. You just happen to have more than most people and that doesn’t make you deformed or anything, it just makes it more interesting to look at your skin,” Max wasn’t typically the suave type, but the words rolled off his tongue like he had memorized them and prepped them for days as he switched from the left arm to the right arm, repeating the same action on skin covered in goosebumps.

Drea swallowed hard and audibly gasped, her eyes closing for an incredibly long moment as all of the heat gathered on the surface of her skin and turned a lovely shade of pink. “Wow, you certainly know how to make a girl go completely weak in the knees—where did you learn that?”

“Hmmmm…I even left off the parts about finding all the scars hidden under clothes,” Max had a coy grin as he carefully placed the glass of Scotch back into the palm of her hand and took a sip of his own, peeking at her over the glass.

“How do you expect me to behave myself when you’re saying things like this, Max?” Drea’s eyes were the size of golf balls as she took another sip of her drink and could already see the bottom of her glass as the liquid was almost to the bottom.

Max could feel a fair amount of heat swimming through his own veins and the majority of it was not related to the drink, but his cool and collected exterior didn’t betray him as he looked at her. “Well, I’m sure that challenge is difficult, but you never said anything about me behaving myself…”

Drea could feel the warmth of his stare and scooted to her feet, jingling empty glass with fairly large cubes still in the bottom, nervously giggling. “I could use another one of these; do you
need a little more? By more I mean a drink…in your glass.”

“What could possibly go wrong by accepting a refill from you?” Max handed her his glass and started glancing through her collection of movies as she went over to the dining table to refill both glasses.

“It depends on how long you keep dropping the seductive comments, unintended or not, they’ve been carrying a certain amount of keenness and consequence,” Drea glanced at him as she poured his first, trying not to catch herself returning that same level of seduction he was tossing in her direction.

If the pheromones in the air had glowed, they would’ve been a neon cloud hovering between and surrounding them. It was thick, not unlike the tension, as Max was shifting his field of vision between the collection of videos and Drea behind the couch. She was trying not to light up the spotlight on her own anxiousness as she barely made eye contact with him while pushing the lid back into place on the bottle of Scotch. She was more than a little reserved as she felt that pang of her heartbeat in her throat again as she caught him staring at her again. This time he didn’t pretend to be doing it and simply winked at her as she came around to the front of the couch.

“What have you got there?” Drea watched as Max pulled a VHS from the shelf and pressed the eject button on her VCR, holding both of their glasses in each hand as she slid back into a comfortable position on the floor.

“You have a copy of ‘House on Haunted Hill’—I don’t know about you but I’m a sucker for Vincent Price and I hope you don’t mind,” Max slid the tape into the player and scooted backwards, moving his backside a little closer to her this time as he took his glass from her left hand as she angled it toward him.

“If I were gonna haunt somebody, this would certainly be the house I’d do it in,” Drea was quickly becoming more intriguing than any other woman he’d met in his life as she dropped yet another line from a movie without so much as a prompt.

“They’re coming for me now…” Max took a long sip and licked his lips before continuing. “And then they’ll come for you.”

“Why does that always sound incredibly sexual literally every time it is spoken?” Drea smirked as she took a drink, letting her fingers graze his right thigh just enough to make him jump.

Max gulped air and knew exactly what it felt like to have the table flipped on him as her hand stayed close enough to be physically felt but not completely invade his space. “I thought you were going to behave yourself tonight?”

“That was certainly before you started dropping lines with the words ‘coming for you’ in them and being more than a little seductive than I’m sure you’re normally willing to push yourself,” Drea forced the nerves to the backburner and felt the confidence swell as she watched him get genuinely antsy as she spoke. “And there’s no need to hide it. It wouldn’t be the first time I unintentionally awoke a sleeping beast within a person before. It just doesn’t have to go there, Max…I assure you.”

He couldn’t tell if she was trying to shut him down or out as she practically intimated that his come-ons were only brought about as a result of her history and not by his own volition. “You tend to blame yourself for when things get out of control don’t you?”

“Are you profiling me, Max?” Drea raised an eyebrow at him as she sipped her Scotch
and let the glass teeter in her hands.

Max shook his head and set his glass down on the table again, his bravery burning as he made eye contact with her, voice dropping. “I make far too many observations and they just kind of pop out when I don’t want them to sometimes…but the observation still stands.”

Her own glass went to the table as she reached over him, inadvertently brushing up against him for longer than she should have as she found herself second guessing every hesitation she had been experiencing. They were both well acquainted with the meaning of loneliness, but it had manifested differently for both of them—internally and externally. Drea hovered there for a moment, his deep green, bordering on hazel eyes burning through her as she swallowed hard and felt her heart beating faster again. The nerves were real and unexpected in every sense as she instinctively ran her hand over his chest, gathering her hand against the material of his shirt.

“I rarely like anyone, Max, at least not in any capacity other than skin deep but I have found myself slipping into something with you that I can only describe as like, in the simplest of terms—you make me see something that I don’t think I’ve ever seen in myself.” Drea nearly crumbled as his hand folded over the top of hers, giving it a gentle squeeze. “I don’t want to ruin a shot at something better than I ever thought I deserved…I don’t want to spoil it.”

“Then, the easiest solution is…don’t,” Max had a certain flutter to his voice as his free hand angled across her chin, tilting it down just a little to get a better look at her.

“Oh, you’re helpful, Max Belle,” Drea wrinkled her eyebrows at him, the pout starting to appear across her lips as the bottom lip poked out just enough.

“Yeah, I can be,” Max didn’t care if the comment was loaded, he intended it to be open for interpretation as he slid his thumb along the curve of her chin just below her lip. “When I want to be.”

She inhaled a gasp as his thumb pushed her lip down a little further, creating a little gap between her lips. Max’s touch was galvanizing as he felt the wave of energy move through her as he adjusted his grip to the back of her neck, sliding into her hair against her scalp. Drea’s gaze was unyielding as she was steadied in his sights, his mind swirling around the beautiful, strong, and yet, incredibly nerve stricken woman with the long, red hair lingering above him. A smile curved along his mouth as he leaned toward her, allowing the space between them to disappear to nearly nothing.

As though fate’s evil twin had intervened, the phone rang and stopped them at the edge of reason, at the edge of desire’s manifestation. Drea sighed and muttered a couple of choice cuss words into his chest before reaching for the phone as it went through the second ring in a long, irritating melody. Max laughed and watched as she pushed her hair out of her face and brought the receiver up to her ear, her cheeks flush and neck slightly pink from blushing.

“This had better be good,” Drea winked at him as she answered, running her fingers through her hair and scooting backwards onto her knees.

“It is always so fascinating watching the complete disappointment unfold on the face of a man that has been prevented from sliding into 1st base,” Miles’s voice brought her out of the sweet, near ethereal high and made everything come to a screeching halt.

“Mother fucker, you never learn, do you?” Drea’s heart was in her throat while her stomach rolled as she kept her eyes on Max, who immediately sat up as he could tell that this phone call was not a pleasant one.
“You would’ve let him slide around to 3rd or home if I hadn’t interrupted, wouldn’t you? Little sister, you don’t know who could be watching your every move—watching you throw yourself at the FBI like some cheap, 5 dollar hooker,” Miles was taunting her, his voice grating on her ears like nails down a chalk board as she moved to her feet and did a full turn in her living room.

She pressed the speaker phone button and held the receiver away from her face, looking at shelves for a sign, for anything that was out of place. “Oh, you mean like fucked up older brothers with mommy issues? Clearly, I underestimated you.”

Max was on his feet along with her only his attention was on the viewpoints around the room. Discovering a camera inside of Scully’s apartment along with the crime scenes had already made him acutely aware of the possibility of finding one inside of Drea’s home but he didn’t know where Miles would hide one. She was already exhibiting signs of more bravery than he was expecting as her jaw clenched and her fists were white knuckling with every passing breath—something that was not only expected, but understood, given the circumstances.

Miles started to laugh a little under his breath as his voice stopped both of their movements. “Your little FBI man-toy’s schnoz is looking a little rough. I bet my steel toed boot didn’t feel good knocking him senseless when he tried to handcuff me.”

“At least he’s a man, Miles, which is something that you certainly do not share in common,” Drea followed Max toward the front door, where he was already capturing the attention of Officer Lindell and Kyle to run another trace on the call. “You know you’re essentially a child with weapons, right?”

“Ohhh, you really do like him, don’t you?” Miles could hear the anger in her voice as he picked up his volume, the amusement only building as he continued. “Congratulations, Agent Belle, looks like you got my pretty little sister’s panties all moist—I’m sure she’d do just about anything you wanted at this point and it wouldn’t be the first time she was someone’s whore.”

“Fuck you, cretin,” Drea fidgeted, trying desperately not to hang up on him as Max made eye contact with her, the pervasiveness of the conversation becoming more bothersome.

Max decided to pull her from the ledge as he could hear the change in tone in Mile’s voice as he made the comment in his direction. “Since that comment was aimed at me and I’m sure you didn’t intend on it, but that comment sounded more jealous than congratulatory, Miles...Am I right? Are you jealous?”

Drea’s eyes nearly popped out of her head at the comment but she knew the effect that they were going to have on Miles as she could hear the growl through the phone. She squeezed Max’s arm and stood in front of him for a moment, gazing up at him, searching out his strength.

“What is it with you FBI Agents and having larger testicles than brains? Agent Mulder tried to act tough over Dana with me and she was mine, not his,” Miles exhaled audibly, the clear anger building in his voice. “The difference here, Agent Belle, is that Drea is my blood and you’re just dick...I’m sure you understand.”

Drea bit down hard on her lip, holding in the urge to scream at him but spoke quietly and halfway calmly, pushing all of the right buttons. “Miles, in your fucked up little mind the attention that you got from Deanna was always coming from the wrong sister—you’ve always had a sick, twisted, disgusting fascination with me and I have spent almost all of my life blocking every second of it out. No woman in their RIGHT mind wants to look back and realize that their own brother was STALKING them.”
Max could see the tears already welling up in her eyes as Officer Lindell and Kyle were standing just outside of the doorway, waiting on the phone for trace to finish. Max held her free hand and glanced at Officer Kyle as he held up 2 fingers at him. He squeezed Drea’s hand and mouthed “2 minutes, just hold on” at her as she seemed to be faltering, her knees shaking as she was forced to listen and respond to the psychopath that ruined her childhood. She didn’t want to revisit this part of her life—it was something that caused more than enough heartache and nightmares to last her a lifetime.

“Drea, Drea, Drea...you always had to be treated like you were so fragile. Everyone loved little Drea, everyone doted on little Drea, everyone wanted to hold perfect little Drea...you were the child that just stared up at me with those big, beautiful blue eyes like I was the devil incarnate from the time you were a baby,” Miles was creating an incredibly vivid picture as to why he singled her out, why she was treated the worst. “I hated your perfection—you caused every second of this and set all of it into motion. That was you.”

“Is that how you justify all of this? You were mad at a baby? You were angry that a BABY was getting attention?” Drea had finally had enough as she was practically yelling into the phone. “You’re so full of shit, Miles. You didn’t want to deal with the reality that no one ever laid a HAND on me and I was the ONLY CHILD that NEVER treated you like dog crap. You hated that I wasn’t a vile, disgusting creature like you. You destroyed every bit of goodness that I had and turned it into something marred by regret and shame.”

Max couldn’t help himself as he tilted her chin up, his voice soft and soothing like a cool breeze in the middle of a summer heatwave. “He didn’t destroy all of your goodness, Drea.”

Miles mimicked a puking sound and laughed. “The cheese that just left your lips, Agent Belle, wow, fucking pathetic...you’ve got it bad for a girl who has no feelings and never has. She wouldn’t know love if it came up and bit her on the ass. None of the Miller girls know what love or devotion is...not even Deanna.”

Drea turned her head as one of the female characters in the movie was screaming wildly on the television, the low volume barely capturing her attention. She stared at the woman’s face while she shifted her weight from one foot to the other, contemplating her incredibly detailed, yet softened features as she gathered her emotional bearings and became captivated by the small, shiny object teetering not six inches above, set carefully between two books. She approached as though in slow motion and saw the center of the object move in and out again as it was quite obviously focusing on her. She wrapped her fingers around it and pulled it away from its perch, staring down at it while she held the phone in her hand.

“Enjoying your view, sick son of a bitch?” Drea took the phone off of speaker phone and held the receiver to her ear.

Miles almost cackled as her voice was low, almost a growl in his ear. “I was wondering how long it would take you to find it—but I shouldn’t have figured it would be long considering how quick I had to be. Smile for the camera, sis.”

“Hang it up, we got a location,” Officer Lindell told Max as dispatch screamed in his ear.

Drea hung up the phone, dropped it onto the couch and yanked the battery out of the back of the camera, tears down her face within an instant. “He’s been in my house. I think this is the only one he left—he didn’t do a great job of hiding it.”

Max took the camera from her and put it into the outstretched evidence bag from Officer Lindell. “I need you both to take a sweep of every room, look for objects like these. Where did that
location pop up at?"

“We’ve got a problem,” Lindell was pale as he held his cell phone to his ear still, swallowing hard as he made eye contact with Max. “The cell signal is coming from George Washington University Hospital’s parking garage.”

Chapter End Notes

There’s only a few more chapters left! Yes, I am letting you dangle on the edge of that cliffhanger AGAIN.

I love you, don’t hate me.

Extra thank you to Monika Michelle Cross, Vicky Williams, Jun Mai, Megan Kelly, and Lee Hughes as always for the little tidbits that you are so gracious in giving a read to or indulging in – this is beyond living on a prayer, though. I'm the worst kind of sadomasochist.
Chapter Summary

A revelation is discovered about the underlying motivations of their killer while the FBI takes first strike to find him.

Post “Agua Mala” (Season 6 with mentions of “Rain King”, “Two Fathers”, and “One Son” Briefly and only for context purposes)

Chapter Notes

“Humility and suffering free a man from all sin; for the first cuts out spiritual passions, and the latter bodily.”
– Maximus the Confessor

“I’m exhausted…from the nightmares when I’m asleep…and the nightmare when I’m awake.”
– Ranata Suzuki

Title references the song “Indestructible” by Robyn – I encourage you to give it a listen.

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See the end of the chapter for more notes

Waterway Drive Lake house (Lake Barcroft)
Falls Church, VA

“We’ve got a problem,” Lindell was pale as he held his cell phone to his hear still, swallowing hard as he made eye contact with Max. “The cell signal is coming from George Washington University Hospital’s parking garage.”

The words didn’t sound real to Max or Drea as Max went to his coat and pulled the cell phone from the right hand pocket. They had been having one too many of those “this can’t be happening” moments since this nightmare of a case unfolded and it seemed as though it was only getting worse as he could hear the chatter over Lindell and Kyle’s walkie-talkies as well as Lindell’s cell. Lindell was steadied at the door, keeping a posted eye on the exterior while Officer Kyle was sweeping the house for more camera devices. Kyle was carrying a small flashlight,
examining each room’s careful corners and shelving to painstakingly take care of every little square inch before shouting “clear” after each room had been completed.

“They have to lock down the hospital and do a sweep, we can’t let him get near any of the survivors and all of them are there,” Max was in the doorway, looking at Lindell with a certain level of panic written across his forehead.

Lindell nodded, with his phone still to his ear. “Dispatch is already running that information to police in the area and are silent alarm setting it up to keep the place quiet—plain clothes only.”

“Please tell me you’re going to call Agent Mulder and tell him what just happened,” Drea had her hand around Max’s forearm, gripping the space just above his wrist until he made eye contact with her all over again.

Max was already readying his phone to dial Mulder’s number as he nodded at her. “I can’t not tell him—after everything he went through tonight getting Scully out, I couldn’t do that to him.”

Drea sighed softly and wiped the remnants of tears from her eyes, immediately turning her attention toward Lindell, who was covered in snow across his shoulders as it fell from above. “Are you okay?”

He nodded at her, listening carefully to the dispatch chatter in his ear, the smallest of smiles appearing across his lips. She didn’t know what to do with herself as she went back into the living room while Max waited for Mulder to answer the line and gathered up the perishables from the floor. She carried them past him, putting them away while he dialed and stood in a spot where he wasn’t in Officer Kyle’s way as he finished the sweep of the bedrooms.

“Mulder, it’s Max—we have a situation that started to unfold out here,” Max could hear the fridge shutting as he stared toward the television where the camera had been sitting. “Miles called Drea again and the signal is coming from the parking garage.”

“I have Scully out of her room with Jeanette and Victoria, all of us are in one room, are they locking us down?” Mulder’s voice was unusually calm as the words left Max’s lips.

“Yes, the notification has been sent and they are doing plain clothes, stealth lockdown—are you both safe?” Max could see Drea pacing in her kitchen and took a couple of steps forward, entering the space with her.

“We’re fine but I’m not putting anyone at risk again, not with the idea he could have been here since before you left,” Mulder paused for a moment as Scully’s voice was in the background. “Scully wants to know if you two are safe and is Drea okay?”

Max held out his hand to her and laced his fingers with hers, coaxing a tentative, tight lipped smile from her. “Yeah, we’re ok and she’s more than a little brave—knows how to get Miles from 0 to 60 in about 2.3 seconds.”

“Sounds like another redhead we know—yes, I’m talking about you, Scully,” Mulder managed to chuckle as he could hear her muffled voice through the phone. “Did anything else happen? Is he delivering any specific threats or is it more of the same, veiled bullshit that he’s been utilizing since day one?”

“Same, veiled threats mixed with some nonchalant, unpleasant reminders of things that
have already occurred—it’s like he’s more focused on threatening everyone via memory,” Max was rubbing her palm with his thumb until he could see her eyes glassing over again, filling with tears. “He was watching her through another one of those single channel cameras like from Scully’s bathroom. I’m having one of the officers sweep the entire house for more of them just in case.”

Max’s lightbulb went off in his head over the line of questions from Mulder as he realized that they were textbook profile information gatherers. He knew that Mulder was up to something, but he didn’t know what yet. They already knew who their killer was but his next move was certainly the unknown. The questions seemed more about predicting the next move—anticipatory actions.

“Stay put, we’ll keep you updated from here—Skinner just came in here and he’s about to go with the task force to do a full sweep, floor by floor. I’m not leaving this room. Not making that mistake again,” Mulder’s tone had slipped into a little bit of worry as he continued. “This mother fucker isn’t going to get very far if he was stupid enough to stick around.”

“You have that tone in your voice again, Mulder…what are you going to do?” Max was almost using Drea as strength as she seemed natural standing in front of him, eyes looking up at him like she had known him for his entire life.

“Nothing…but,” Mulder was precise and knew how to word things in a careful way to not raise an alarm. “I’ll call you if anything changes. Be careful, Max.”

“I will,” Max was hesitant to hang up but he heard the click on the other end and put away his own phone before looking down at the brightest of blue eyes as they were practically looking into him. “Are you okay?”

Drea was almost holding her breath as she started to nod in response, the shakiness gently subsiding in her stomach and chest. “I’ve had worse nights than this one, I suppose.”

Max brought his hands up to her shoulders, massaging them in a circular pattern along the curve of her collarbone as her eyes struck him down to his core. “You can tell me that you’re not ok…you’ll never have to worry about being judged by me.”

Drea’s eyes fell on his chest as she sought comfort in him, wrapping her arms around his waist until her hands clasped together and she could cry softly into his shirt. “I don’t know how long I can keep doing this. The wound is open and festering. I don’t want this nightmare to start all over again—I was barely strong enough to get through it when I was little. This is different, this is almost worse. He’s hurting and brutally murdering perfect strangers because of me, Max. How am I supposed to live with that?”

“None of this is your fault and you can’t keep telling yourself that it is,” Max could barely understand her but the words were monumental as he rubbed her back and through her hair, encouraging that emotional release. “You aren’t alone and you don’t need to be—if you don’t want to be.”

“I don’t want to do this alone,” Drea gripped the back of his shirt and eclipsed the remaining distance between them, taking in the remainder of the warmth that he was offering her. “Thank you for all of this.”

“Agent Belle,” Officer Kyle caught his attention, the matter-of-factness in his voice coming out in a quick, precise sentence. “I swept the entire house and there are no other cameras on the premises. I also did a sweep for recording devices of any form such as a remote microphone
and found nothing. The house is clear.”

Max made no move away from Drea and didn’t even bat an eyelash at comforting her in front of either officer as Lindell stepped inside of the house for the briefest moment. “If anything changes or if Miles is, by some miracle, captured please inform me immediately.”

“Dispatch has a full scale sweep in play—they’ve called in SWAT for this. We’ll keep you up to date and safe,” Lindell nodded as he put away his cell phone for the first time since Max alerted them.

The two officers stepped back out into the cold night air as Max reluctantly pulled away from embracing Drea to lock the door after it had been shut. He clicked both locks back into place and turned around to see her wiping away the last of her tears, her hair cascading around her face like some Celtic Princess after a battle had been earnestly fought. She shrugged her shoulders and gathered her locks around to one shoulder, playing with the ends like she did in times of stress. The movement caused her scars to stand out and shimmer against the bright, overhead lighting of her carefully designed entryway interior.

“You’d think I’d be used to seeing these every day but sometimes the light hits them just right and I wonder what life would be like without them,” Drea glanced at her arms, at the varying degrees of scarring and made eye contact with him as he took a few steps in her direction. “What?”

“I think we should make a snack, pour another drink, and put in something disgustingly fluffy that might make us both cry, then plop back on that comfy spot on the floor until the sun rises,” Max moved her hair away from her grip and took both of her hands within his, rubbing along her fingers like they were meant to fit there.

Drea sucked her bottom lip into her mouth and nodded at the welcomed distraction, purposely only mentioning the snacks that wouldn’t need more than a plate to serve. “I have lots of cheese and crackers…and mixed berries. Does that sound like something you could sink your teeth into?”

Max stammered at her obviously loaded question, resisting the urge to send it into left field as he rolled his eyes. “I’ll pour the drinks; you get those on a plate, shortstack.”

“Shortstack? Coming up with nicknames for me now, Max?” Drea was already in the kitchen gathering up the fruit and cheese from the fridge, her eyebrow elevated as she peeked at him from behind the counter. “What should yours be, then?”

“My Mother and Agent Mulder, ironically, call me Maximus,” He shrugged, the realization that Mulder did, indeed, treat him like a brother in conjunction with colleague. “It’s actually kind of funny because the nickname used to irritate more than any other nickname anyone has ever used on me, but it doesn’t anymore.”

“Maximus, you know, in Latin that means “greatest”…one of the more notable men of such a name was Maximus the Confessor,” Drea hadn’t made eye contact with him as she flexed her intellectual muscle while setting up a fruit and cheese plate. “Humility and suffering free a man from all sin; for the first cuts out spiritual passions, and the latter bodily.”

Max had just barely poured the first Scotch and looked over his shoulder at her, thoroughly floored by the natural, effortless remark regarding something as obscure as Byzantine Christianity. “Do you have a thing for inflating egos or a thing for obscure religious symbolism?”

Drea chuckled, nearly snorting in the process as the air puffed straight out of her nose in
The realization hit Max like a ton of bricks that Drea had more ties to the motives of Miles than anyone would’ve liked as all of the religious symbolism was never meant for Scully or even Deanna—they were meant for her. He swallowed hard and pushed a smile forward knowing in his gut that he needed to keep that quiet, she was panicked and guilt stricken enough as it was, he didn’t need to inflict more of it on her. She was the most unwilling of muses and her lack of passion for her brother had manifested in one, egomaniacal display of horror that doubled as a proclamation of love in the sickest of ways. It was the kind of thing that only translated to a lifetime of ruination to go along with the already intense amount of pain that had been suffered.

“Maximus,” Drea’s voice brought him out of the fog with a gentle tug as she was already in the middle of the living room with the plate of crackers, cheese, and mixed berries. “You ok over there? You’ve been staring at that label for a solid minute like it’s written in Sanskrit.”

Max set the bottle onto the table top and picked up both glasses, turning toward her with a little smile curving on his lips. “In what context are you using that nickname, hmmm?”

“Wouldn’t you like to know?” Drea carefully placed the plate on the carpet away from the fluffy blankets and pillows, then scooted past him to shut off the lights in the dining room and kitchen. “I have to keep a few things somewhat close to the vest.”

“Don’t make it too dark—I have a subtle case of Nyctophobia,” Max was only half lying as he smirked at her and started rummaging through the movies again, looking for anything that resembled ‘fluff’.

Drea purposely flipped most of the lights in the living room to the dim setting, creating an almost haze-like glow that was only a birthday candle blow from darkness. “You were saying?”

“Hey, I needed some of those,” Max didn’t fully anticipate her running with the comment but she did as he was half blind trying to look through her movies. “I can’t see shit over here.”

“You don’t need to see anything, grab the pink VHS with the white lettering and just go with it,” Drea came around beside him and pointed at a section of brightly colored tapes before pressing eject on the VCR.

Max pulled the VHS out and started laughing, almost louder than he anticipated. “Clueless? Really? After all of that intelligence you just rattled off in the kitchen we’re watching this?”

“You said something disgustingly fluffy not something I have to use my brain to watch,” Drea smiled and pulled the tape out of the sleeve, replacing *House on Haunted Hill* with it. “You can’t tell me you don’t enjoy a little bit of mindless entertainment like *Clueless*.”

She had him by the balls with that one and he couldn’t lie in saying he hadn’t watched and found himself rooting subtly for the protagonists the entire time but he had, multiple times. “Alright, have it your way.”

“It’s usually a good idea to just let me win because I’m relentless and I won’t hesitate in finding and exploiting ALL of your ticklish spots until you let me win,” Drea guided her glass out of his right hand and left him standing at the television with his mouth gaping while she lowered
herself onto the blankets and settled against the pillows.

Max put the box on top of the VCR and sat down on the blankets next to her, sliding into her comfort zone just enough to send a shiver up her arm. “What if I like to be tickled, shortstack?”

Drea held onto her glass and crossed her legs, nearly rubbing her knee against his pants as she put her arm on the couch behind him and began leaning in all over again, as though she were picking up where they had left off earlier. She had a seductive gaze on her face and her mouth was opened just enough to be intriguing while her fingers found the spot on his neck to gently pull him in. She bit down on her bottom lip and angled her chin forward then down, gesturing for him to come closer in the most subtle way. The move was sly and clearly violated her “I’ll behave myself” comment from the start of the night but he was bringing it on himself as they both left little space between them, breaths hot in collision.

The maneuver was precise and a little devious, though, as Drea pulled her glass to her lips and grinned from behind the glass as she took a sip, winking at him as the ice clanked against each other. His mouth went agape and the groan instinctively left his lips without control as his head dropped back, his chest heaving with slight embarrassment. She giggled as she swallowed the Scotch and settled her back against the pillows, almost ashamed of herself for the mildly cruel little stunt.

The keyword there was almost.

“You are so…fucking mean,” Max took a fairly large gulp of his Scotch and gave her a sideways glance as he resumed tilting his head back, his skin turning a ripe shade of red as the heat entered his cheeks.

Drea was still in a full chuckle as she laid her head on his shoulder and wrapped her left arm around his right, lightly dragging her fingernails across his skin until she felt him shudder. “I’m not the one that just said they liked to be tickled—that was all you, Maximus. I’m just the, slightly shy woman that’s just trying to have a sip of her drink.”

“Shy? That’s hysterical. I’m gonna have to remember that joke for later,” Max laughed as he set his glass down on the table barely within arm’s reach of him. “Wanna hear a funny joke? Drea is shy…oh, and I’m the Pope.”

“Religious puns? Ahhh…interesting development,” Drea tilted her glass to her lips, allowing only a small amount to pass onto her tongue before swallowing. “It has been a while since I went to confession.”

While teasing him had been a cruel trick, it was also plain to him that she held reservations as he watched her slip a little piece of cheddar into her mouth as she sat up briefly, almost avoiding his stare like she was in trouble. He was completely fascinated by her, but it was not on any professional level as the profiling of her became more about discovering what it would take to know her beyond what she allowed others to see. Crush wasn’t the right word for it as he thought on it while studying her actions. He was enamored with her and at the same time, admired her. She yawned gently and took another light sip of her drink before setting it off to the side.

“You know you can sleep if you’re tired, I won’t get offended,” Max picked up a cracker and a piece of cheese as she seemed to be more than a little exhausted but was fighting the feeling as her eyes popped back open as he spoke. “You’ve had a pretty insane turn of events today.”

She had her hand underneath of her cheek as she looked over at him, giving him a gentle smile as she picked up a couple of berries from the plate. “You’ve been awfully good at reading
me and finagling a few interesting tidbits out of me—I’d like to know more about you. Hobbies, favorite books, embarrassing stories, anything that most people wouldn’t know.”

Max picked up the plate from near their knees and put it onto the couch so he could stretch out his legs, making a long, audible sigh in the process. “I don’t know, I was a pretty boring kid.”

“Anyone who has as much insight into the human psyche as you do couldn’t possibly be boring—even the seemingly mundane can be profound to someone who doesn’t know a life like yours,” Drea’s words were almost poetic and carried a certain amount of illumination as he realized that her experiences vastly differentiated from his own.

“I don’t think I’ve heard anyone ever put anything like that before,” Max’s cheeks were still a little pink as he glanced at her, the blue in her eyes catching the glow off of the television like little glints of sapphire within that softer, steel color.

Drea sipped her Scotch again and rubbed her lips together as she glanced forward, staring at the Byzantine cross above the mantle. “I guess I am just fascinated by the typically deemed boring and lackluster…everything has a chance to shine when given an ounce of care and elbow grease. It’s like art that has been left alone for too long…it takes time to uncover what it was supposed to look like.”

Max smiled and sipped his Scotch again before crossing his legs at the ankles, fully going into comfort mode with his fingers laced together in his lap after setting his glass aside. “Well, I was kind of the oddball in the family now that I think about it. I used to listen to a lot of 80s pop and rock instead of classical music. My mom used to worry that I was going to rot out my brain over it but it was almost pushing me to do more.”

“You liked classical as well, though, right?” Drea finished her Scotch and put the glass on the side table, munching on another cracker while she pulled one of the blankets over her feet and legs, getting warm.

The cheese was surprisingly good combined with the flavor of the Scotch as Max nodded, chewing a piece of aged gruyere on top of a wheat thin. “I like all kinds of music. Rhythm, design, architecture, all of it is connected in some form or another by composition. It fascinates me.”

“The ultimate comparison, it’s why I usually paint with a pair of headphones on,” Drea smiled lazily and held onto the edge of her blanket, glancing at the iconography on the wall above the fireplace. “It takes you to a place as well as a time that one can only imagine going.”

Max wasn’t fully looking at her as he was staring at a little stack of crackers in his hand, contemplating the words as he opened up one of his own wounds to think about it. “Music keeps you honest as well and helps get you through some of the rougher times—like the loss of a loved one or the breaking of your heart. I still have songs that are hard to listen to because they carry some of the bitterest of reminders about what once made me sublimely happy and now leave a bitter taste in my mouth while other songs can reduce me to tears just like that. You can stop my rambling at any time shortsta—”

Max was still fully in the diatribe of his sentence as he turned his head toward her only to discover that she was already peacefully asleep. She had turned onto her side, facing him, with the blanket half draped along her waistline, hands up by her pillow underneath her cheek. Her breaths were soft and gentle as she had found that serenity she was desperately in need of. He couldn’t think of anything more beautiful of a sight as he ever so delicately pulled the blanket up and over
her shoulders, covering her more sufficiently so that she would be warm and comfortable. Max leaned down and placed a gentle kiss against her brow line before gathering the plate of cheese and fruit to put away in the kitchen.

He started to slide backwards only to hear her voice like a gentle wave of melody against his eardrums, beckoning him back to her. “Stay with me, please.”

“I’ll be right back… I don’t want these to go bad sitting out,” Max couldn’t help but smile at her sleepy face, her eyes barely open, as he held the plate with one hand and gently touched her cheek with the other. “I’m not going anywhere.”

She nodded at him and slowly blinked, wanting to stay awake until he returned to her. She looked cozy and comfortable, without restraint, as he tucked her hair behind her ear, letting his fingers linger against her skin for another moment longer. She liked his gentleness, his careful attention to the details, and his warmth. It was as though his soul manifested through his touch. Max maneuvered to his feet and carried the plate into the kitchen, slid the remaining cheese and fruit into a lidded container that Drea already kept on the counter and put it in the fridge. The movie’s volume was barely above a whisper but it was enough that he could listen to the dialogue for a minute before walking back into the living room. She looked up at him with her bedroom eyes, the smallest of grins hiding on the corners of her lips until he got back into the spot beside her. Drea’s figure looked even smaller underneath of the blanket as she swung half of it over the top of him as he got comfortable again, her arm sliding across him. He gathered her into the space between his chest and his arm, pulling her close until the pieces fit together.

“Are you sure this is ok?” Max could feel his heart beating like a nervous rabbit up in his throat despite the gentle warmth between them as his hands rubbed the space between her shoulders.

“Mmmhmmmm,” Drea’s eyes were already closed as she moved her arm around him, gripping the center of his back as she nestled her head against his collarbone. “I’m exhausted… from the nightmares when I’m asleep…”

“And the nightmare when I’m awake,” Max finished her quotation, gently rubbing her back until sleep took them both with a swiftness that neither anticipated to speed forward toward daylight.

Daylight; where even without sleep the nightmare still loomed outside the door, waiting, watching, willing, and ready.
Mulder was standing at the door listening to the last part of Max’s words, watching as Skinner finished talking to Agent Fowley then moving with a purpose toward the end of the hall. The sweep of the building was in motion as a small team was already starting to assemble, starting with Skinner and three other Agents, one of which was stationed at Victoria’s door until Agent Fowley returned. The op was small to start but Mulder knew the numbers were going to grow as he turned around and put his back to the door. He was already contemplating any number of tactical plans that involved centrally eliminating the threat, floor by floor, along with the same methodology in the garage—until there was no place left for Miles to run.

No place left to hide.

“Be careful, Max,” Mulder echoed the sentiments before he hung up the phone and met gazes with the force of a woman in a wheelchair in front of him, her bruised face looking up at him with more concern than he wanted at this moment. “You’ve got that look again, Scully.”

Scully’s voice was shaky as she kept her voice low enough that only he could hear her. “Where is he, Mulder?”

Mulder glanced over her shoulder at Victoria in the bed, her heavily bandaged face looking over in their direction with Jeanette by her side in another wheelchair. They were both in slightly different stages of their recovery but Victoria’s would prove to be far harder than Jeanette’s and Scully’s recovery, combined, simply based on her injuries. The last thing on his mind was instilling more panic in the minds of the three surviving women before him even as he felt the rage building through his veins like waiting backdraft inside of a structure fire waiting desperately for the reintroduction of oxygen. He held a breath in and felt Scully’s intrusive stare upon him, wheedling away at his defenses again. She was good at it—in the most frustrating way.

“Mulder?” Scully gripped his hand and tugged, doing her best to maintain control of her anxiety since she could only hear part of his conversation with Max.

Mulder exhaled loudly, a half growl leaving his lips as he leaned down to make eye contact with her, voice equally soft as he spoke. “Skinner just went to join a taskforce going through the entire building—the cell phone signal that just called Drea’s house is coming from the parking garage.”

It was a nightmare that wouldn’t end as Scully could already tell that there was more to it than simply that. Miles was unpredictable, at best, and he had already proven that he was ballsy enough to show up to harm one of them once already—what was to stop him from trying again? Who was to say that he wasn’t fully intending on going after her all over again? She didn’t want to see this become his final stand and watch the body count climb. There was too much at stake now, there was far too much that could go wrong by having a loose cannon literally imposing his will on them in a place with more than enough equipment to do ample damage in minimal time. The loss was already too great to simply pour it on and add to the mounting pile that lay before them.

“Mulder, what are you not telling me?” Scully squeezed his fingers, paying close attention to her volume to not raise alarm for Victoria or Jeanette as Janessa talked to them, keeping them fully distracted.

Mulder closed his eyes as he gathered the control, resisting that inner need to envelope her in a loving kiss and leave with Skinner to sweep the building. “Drea gets him angry—similarly to the level that you did, perhaps even worse. I didn’t bring it up on the phone because Max doesn’t need to be bringing this up to Drea right now but I have a bad feeling that all of this relates back to a need to harm her mentally as well as physically.”
“What better way to inflict mental suffering on someone that already knows the physical aspect of it...forcing her to feel closer to helplessness,” Scully glanced at the floor, her eyes studying the little grooves in the tile as she grappled with the words. “Mulder, what if he’s just toying with us again and he’s not here at all?”

“That’s precisely why I haven’t left this room to do the sweep with Skinner...I have a suspicion that he knew he was being traced and already put a plan into motion to throw everyone off his scent,” Mulder kissed her forehead and let his lips linger for a moment longer. “That and I don’t know that I am necessarily the most eager to run off without you by my side again.”

“I’m not eager for that either but the idea of him escaping again has me more than a little on edge,” Scully was torn between wanting to send him Mulder chasing shadows and be glued to her hip as she felt that nagging anxiety in her belly.

“There’s no one I trust more than Skinner to be out there looking for Miles...plus, I just got you back, I need to be right here for a while,” Mulder was not usually the type to be content with allowing others to make the save but more was at risk than simply catching a killer as he felt her shaking just a little. “Speaking of trust, your Mother and Brother are probably with the fellas by now.”

“With the weather the way it is...I’m a little shocked that Bill’s flight has even touched down. If she is back, she’s probably in the lobby or...” Scully gasped, the realization of timing being everything as she looked up at him. “The parking garage.”

“Don’t think like that, Scully,” Mulder ran his hand along her hair and almost squatted in front of her to look up at her, his eyes soothing her almost instantly. “I’d pity the fool that even attempted to hurt your Mother in front of Bill—and I think you would agree with that statement.”

“Right now my brain is grappling with all of the possible negatives that could happen, Mulder, and I don’t know that I can stop it after everything that has happened,” Scully ran her fingers along his cheek, grateful for his tenderness and rationality in this moment.

Scully wasn’t easy to rattle like this and Mulder could feel that frustration teetering on the edge of anger as he knew that Miles needed to be stopped but instinct was winning the knee jerk reactions, for once, as he took another deep breath. He was doing this for her, in so many ways, and the memory of pushing the door open to finding her apartment in shambles was enough to set him back for a long time—perhaps even worse than witnessing the abduction of Samantha all those years ago. Scully had been the hinge to his life for far too long and he wasn’t going to let her slip through his fingers after finally pulling her from the dark.

The trick was now to keep her from sliding right back into the depths.

“Is everything okay?” Janessa notice the tenseness in their body language as she came over toward them, half hovering like a mom. “I’m not seeing any of the nursing or other hospital staff walking the halls—should I be concerned?”

“There’s a situation that the FBI and police alike are taking care of but as long as we are in here we’re accounted for and safe,” Mulder stood straight and crossed his arms. “I’d close the blinds on the observation windows, though...only leave one open so Agent Fowley and her relief can see in.”

Janessa nodded and went, with an immediacy, to close the blinds on the gallery style windows that lead into the room. Mulder exhaled a long breath and looked at Scully, who was already tense enough to go white knuckled on the arm rests of the chair. It wasn’t supposed to be
like this. She was supposed to be resting comfortably and recovering while they addressed the issue of Miles without stressing her out further. The intention was noble but unrealistic, though, as he guided the chair toward the bed where Victoria was already writing on her notepad. She aimed it in their direction and gave him that same stare that Scully had just given him while he glanced at the paper to read “he’s coming back, isn’t he?” scrawled across the top.

“Stop worrying about it—leave the worrying to the men out in the hallway and to me,” Mulder couldn’t help but notice the identical, wide eyed glances from the three of them and under normal circumstances, it would be mildly entertaining, but it wasn’t this time. “All three of you… just trust me?”

It was as though he were looking at women who could’ve been related by blood in some form or another, as he nearly expected the collective eye roll from them but only got it from Victoria. She jotted down another sentence and flipped the paper around to him with it reading “aren’t those famous last words of every victim in every horror flick? Don’t panic? Trust me?” in Victoria’s elegant penmanship. Mulder wrinkled his nose at her and sat down in the only stationary chair in the room, crossing his arms as he got halfway comfortable.

“Followed closely by ‘I’ll be right back’ but pop culture references are supposed to be my job, Victoria,” Mulder was almost hugging himself as he felt the yawn creeping in, the exhaustion imminent as he continued. “While the threat is obviously real, Miles has deviated so far from what he was doing before that it is painfully clear that he is unraveling at an alarming rate. He is going to screw up…it’s only a matter of time.”

Jeanette was bundled in two hospital blankets and looked as though she could’ve slept at any time if given the opportunity as she scooted down in her wheelchair, glancing at all of them before settling on Mulder as she spoke. “Is he really threatening his sister? I heard one of the nurses gossiping earlier that the woman that was killed while you were rescuing Agent Scully was his sister—but she was helping him do what he was doing to all of us in some form or another.”

“Miles had four sisters—Deanna was only one of the four,” Mulder reached for Scully’s hand as he noticed her shaking a little over hearing Deanna’s name. “He did some pretty terrible things to all of them at one point.”

“The one that we are concerned over isn’t the one that died and we’re disclosing this to both of you because you went through it just like I did,” Scully had to find her strength as she spoke up, knowing that the enemy wasn’t Drea. “Miles has been calling his younger sister, Drea, since I was rescued and the conversations haven’t been good.”

“I don’t even care if he tries to come after me again, Agent Scully—just let him try,” Jeanette was rigid, the fear had all but left her as she sat up straight in the wheelchair and made eye contact with each of them, staying on Victoria last. “Your strength is important, Victoria, and the fact that you are here after everything that you went through speaks to the kind of woman that you are.”

Victoria had already been writing on her notepad, her fingers busily gliding the pen along the page after crossing out the previously written words. She turned it toward them and nearly knocked Mulder over with the idea as it stated “We’re here because we’re all strong, he chose us because he wanted to shatter what makes us who we are…we can show him that we’re meant to be alive right now and stronger than he is by leaps” like a newly revealed moniker that he hadn’t even thought of. He didn’t know why he hadn’t thought of it as the motive became clearer in his mind for their unhinged psychopath.

It was the figurative spotlight into the dark hallway.
Miles wanted to destroy goodness in kind with intelligence, effortless ability, and strength—attributes that each of his victims possessed in abundance. The root of what he sought was to end everything that he was jealous of and it all started with Drea, the one that seemed to have the most going for her despite the level of punishment he had bestowed upon her. She was the combination of everything that he wanted to destroy and everything he sought out after the fact. This was the missing piece of the puzzle and the part of what joined each victim, even if they didn’t necessarily look alike right straight through—they shared the same kind of personalities.

Driven, goal-oriented, strong, capable of standing on their own two feet without assistance. It was everything that Miles was not.

“I don’t know why it wasn’t painfully obvious before this,” Mulder was bordering on mumbling as he was staring at his own feet, eyes rattling back and forth like he had developed a twitch along the way.

“Mulder?” Scully touched his arm and unknowingly startled him into reality.

“We’ve been working on this profile all wrong, Scully,” Mulder’s stare met hers, the determination burning in his eyes as she was half taken aback by the words that left his lips. “Miles is doing this because of the personality types. He had time to follow, watch, examine, know every little move that each of you made to know EXACTLY what you brought to the table.”

“Break it down for the concussed addled brain, Mulder, you’ve completely lost me,” Scully didn’t want to admit that she knew exactly where he was going with this as she felt her own bile rising into her throat.

“He said it himself to me that he was going to break me—soul, spirit, whatever,” Jeanette jumped in, the gumption clear as day. “He went after us because we represent everything he can’t be whether it is simply exhibiting strength, an unwillingness to allow anyone to break us down…he always seemed particularly satisfied when a moment of weakness was realized, when our vulnerability was most obvious. I can’t say that I’m the kind of woman to easily allow anyone to rule me.”

“We’re a threat to his self-constructed lie,” Scully was looking at the blurry reflection of herself in the metal façade on the edge of an instrument table, the marks on her face standing out a little more than she had realized. “The lie that it isn’t his fault he acted upon the shitty things he has experienced.”

“We can’t put that in a field report, Scully,” Mulder could see her eyes filling with tears but her expression remained stoic, strong, stiff.

“I think we just finished the profile, Mulder,” Scully finally looked at him and let two teardrops fall on the hospital gown. “He has a lot of weaknesses and we’ve already started to tap into two of them.”

“When I sit here and think about all of the striking similarities between every victim and even the differences, the differences are miniscule compared to the similarities. Every single one of you have a connection by how you operate on a daily basis,” Mulder held Scully’s hand, knowing that the words were going to be incredibly hard to say. “He had lengthy access to you—and let you see the least frightening scenario, almost to a point that he became invisible.”

“An invisible manipulator,” Jeanette was recalling the morning of the abduction in the restaurant. “He came off as charming when he walked into the restaurant…I never would have guessed what he hid underneath of that smile.”
“No one could have,” Mulder knew that Victoria’s scenario was similar but she chose not to write as she simply nodded and stared at the notepad in front of her.

They spoke about Miles as though he were some mythological creature that had shapeshifted from a human to a demon—like some Wendigo or a creature straight out of a Roman and Greek Mythology textbook, capable of beguiling and seducing women into believing hidden innocence where none existed. Mulder didn’t see him as anything other than a child who had developed a taste for death and bloodlust. He wasn’t otherworldly or capable of eluding them for much longer. Games could only be played for so long before they’ll catch up to a person, eventually. Miles was due for reality to bite him on the ass.

“Fox?” Diana’s voice cut through the silence like a dull knife through stale bread, the circles under her eyes visible and dark as she peeked her head into the room while remaining on full alert.

Diana had been largely on the outside looking in since this entire fiasco had taken a turn and since she took a swim at a crime scene. She had been quiet, almost too quiet, and her interruption had provided that strange balancing act back into the real world as both Scully and Mulder looked toward her general direction. She looked as though she hadn’t slept and her ordinarily heavily pressed exterior was replaced with that of a considerably more frazzled, frizzy individual that had been sucking down cups of coffee like there had been a shortage. Mulder hesitated to go alone but he knew that she had on an ear bud and likely had some information about the sweep that could potentially alleviate some of the panic. Scully pressed a hand to Mulder’s thigh and nodded in his general direction, letting him off the hook to go check things out.

“I’ll be fine—go,” Scully smiled, the absence of jealousy was refreshing as she no longer saw the woman outside the door as a threat but as an arm’s length ally, even if it was in a guarded sense of the word.

Mulder leaned over and kissed her forehead then snuck a tiny peck from her lips before standing up straight, the cautiousness unavoidable as he gave her fingers another light squeeze. “I’ll be right back.”

He turned toward the doorway, where Diana’s profile was still in full view and the passing feeling came over him as he saw a vision of a version of her that he had never met before. As he approached the door the image came into focus and the realization was clear—this was no longer the woman that he had dated, nor was it the woman that had nearly destroyed the life he built, but a third version of her. This was a version of herself that likely hadn’t been seen since the teenage years despite the heaviness of dark circles, absence of happiness, and general exhaustion that seemed to be plaguing her. The strength was still clinging to her frame despite the incredible need for at least a full day of sleep. She turned her head and forced a tight-lipped smile as he opened the door before carefully slipping into the hallway.

“What’s going on?” Mulder was quiet as he had his back against the door, glancing down each hallway like protocol would dictate.

Diana glanced over his shoulder at the women in the room before making eye contact with him. “I’m still waiting on the confirmation but they just finished the top floor sweep and the roof as well…all clear on both. They have a 15 Agent team split into smaller subgroups and an additional 5 police officers doing a sweep, everything is plain clothes except for two people who were already on duty when the call came in.”

“When was that update?” Mulder had his arms loosely crossed as he maintained eye contact with her.
Diana took a sip of the coffee that she kept setting in a chair next to the door, the plastic lid dotted with her taupe-nude lipstick color. “About 90 seconds before I called you out here. The chatter is staying fairly quiet until a floor clears.”

“Only have another, what, seven floors plus the entire parking garage?” Mulder glanced back into the room again, half captivated by the sight of Scully talking to Jeanette and Victoria, their collective energy bold and strong despite the terror that was so fresh.

“Yes, with any luck it won’t take long to capture this guy…if he’s still here,” Diana set the cup back down and glanced down both hallways again, her attention on the situation heightened, more real than ever.

“That’s a pretty big word,” Mulder could feel the uneasiness building in the pit of his stomach as he continued. “If.”

“Fo—Mulder…” Diana stopped herself as she saw Mulder’s eyes wince at the sound of his first name coming out of her mouth again. “Is Scully going to be ok? I caught a glimpse of her medical report and saw what was ordered—”

“Procedural because of the time she spent unconscious and her physical state when recovered,” Mulder gulped as he was finding himself in a state of catharsis even discussing this, under the circumstances. “I don’t know if she’s going to be ok but I’ll die trying to get her there.”

Diana nodded and her eyebrows went up for a moment as she inhaled a full breath of air before exhaling slow. “Has she divulged any of what has happened to her? An experience like that can leave irreparable damage that could keep her out of the field for days, weeks, or even months if she is not deemed psychologically fit for duty.”

The comment came off as a slightly contrived, forced, and much more like the Diana that had nearly destroyed the X Files and almost chased Scully right out of his life. “She’s been through hell and back today, Diana, and the last thing Scully needs to even think about is whether or not a psychologist would clear her for duty. I’d trust that you’d refrain from bringing it up again.”

“Why are you so bent on protecting her at every turn?” Diana’s voice dipped back into the same woman that Scully wanted to upper-cut on more than one occasion as she snipped at him without raising her voice. “It isn’t like she’s ever truly supported your cause like I have.”

Mulder shook his head at the realization that Diana was the only one that hadn’t witnessed any of what went on since Scully’s rescue. “Just when I think you couldn’t possibly get any more ruthless you attempt to use her beliefs as a mode of making me look at her as though she were less than what she is. She terrifies you, doesn’t she?”

“Why exactly would Scully terrify me?” Diana furrowed her eyebrows at him, almost amused by the idea even though he had a point. “Try not to make it amusing, because I have work to do and the last thing I need to have distracting me is the ridiculousness that is the never-ending battle of Agent Scully’s constant skepticism.”

Mulder’s psyche was skidding straight to the fine line between wanting to laugh and wanting to yell as he lowered his voice, choosing to deliver the words in a far less confrontational way despite the message they conveyed. “And yet, here you are—once again trying to cast a shadow on a woman who has gone through hell and back, who has lost more than you can even fathom. You will never have the level of trust with me that Scully has and you never did. That kills you, doesn’t it?”
He wasn’t in the mood to fight with her and arguing over Diana’s insecurities was the last thing on his mind. He was away from Scully’s side for one reason, and one reason alone, and that was to get a status update on the sweep of the building. His eyes drifted along the edge of the window in the door to Victoria’s ICU room until he was looking straight at the profile of Scully. He couldn’t help but marvel a little at her as she already had the returning smile, the evidence of strength in her eyes, and a renewed hope as she didn’t seem at all afraid of the marks on her face. It was as though she had known that he was watching and felt the most gentle, caring presence even from outside the door as she turned her head and met gazes with him. Her smile was small but radiant as she was careful not to look too aloof in the middle of her conversation. He winked at her through the glass, wishing he was next to her now.

“Oh…Wow, so that’s how it is…Well, was it fucking worth it?” The notion was striking and the words were almost coming out like quiet vomit as she realized that there was something going on beyond the surface that she no longer had control over. “Two more floors have been cleared.”

“Two? That’s good news. I’d appreciate knowing if they find anything,” Mulder reached for the door handle and gave Diana a sideways glance, acknowledging her snarky remark that she didn’t intend to make out loud. “To answer your question, yes, it’s still worth it.”

Diana was far from digging her nails into him as she crossed her arms and gave him that intrusive stare that she was oh, so good at. “Well, that would certainly illuminate more than a few reasons why Agent Scully has been acting more like a jealous, possessive cat desperate for your complete and utter attention than a mature woman.”

“Are you sure you’re not describing yourself right now?” Mulder didn’t even wait to quip back, his patience wearing more than a little thin as Scully wasn’t even present to defend herself. “Choose your next words wisely—or I’d be more than happy to see if she’d like to hear this conversation for herself since you’re insisting on pushing the issue.”

“Another floor has been cleared,” Diana wasn’t entirely sure if he was serious or not but his expression was far from amused as she refused to look at him completely. “I’ll pass on that, as riveting as it would be.”

It hadn’t taken long for Diana Fowley’s former self to make an appearance at Scully’s expense but Mulder wasn’t having any of it. His frustration over the complete disregard for another’s trauma had only elevated as he watched her body language convey that of someone disinterested in even caring, let alone actively engaging in the world around her. She was completely void of conscious feelings beyond that of a highly jealous, volatile child that Mulder had, sadly, only seen on the rarest of occasions. He rolled his eyes and opened the door, opting to give her the impression that she had the last word without the satisfaction of hearing his.

“Mulder, is something wrong?” Scully’s voice brought him out of the heavy cloud of aggravation brought on by Diana’s constant need to intervene in his life.

Scully certainly had a way of softening the blow as his eyes fixed on a studied glance from her, the worry just barely there. He would tell her about the ridiculousness from Diana but not here, not in front of everyone. She didn’t need the embarrassment right now of hearing about any of it until they were alone. He shook his head and walked over to her after securing the door, fingers wrapping carefully around hers like he hadn’t held her hand in weeks.

“The sweep is well under way – four floors have been fully cleared. Five more remain plus the parking garage,” Mulder could feel the stare at his back from the angry, rejected woman on the other side of the door but he didn’t care.
Scully knew that something was up but she wasn’t going to push him into talking about it as she felt the warmth of his palm surrounding her fingers. “Uh huh…sure…”

“I’ll tell you about it later,” Mulder shook his head at her reaction and pulled the chair next to her again, kissing the tips of her fingers. “The point right now is that everyone is safe and the building is being carefully searched…by all of our colleagues.”

“Do you think he actually stayed in the building, Agent Mulder, or is he just screwing with everyone’s head again?” Jeanette was exhausted as she settled her back against the wheelchair’s backing, the gentle give of the material cool against the gap in her gown.

“In some ways, I’m hoping the latter and not the former—with the latter then he’ll be easier to catch doing something stupid,” Mulder nodded and glanced at Jeanette as her eyes fell over Victoria in her bed.

Victoria’s nightly dosing had already more than kicked in as the pen finally went limp in her hand as she gave into sleep. Jeanette didn’t want to leave her side and felt that sisterly connection that had been increasingly more apparent as time went on. Miles may have taken away something from all of these women but what he unleashed was an undeniable, unbroken spirit that all of them possessed in some form or another. Jeanette almost felt that Victoria’s spirit was the most radiant of all of them as she could see the facial markings peeking out from underneath her dressings almost from the corner of her jaw forward. The curious part of her wanted to see how bad the marks were going to be but the empathy ran deep as she simply moved her chair forward enough to hold onto her hand.

Even though the devil lay outside the door, the will to survive and recover had become an indestructible, undeniable force that no one could reckon with—and Mulder knew in his heart that Scully wasn’t giving up.

Forty-Five Minutes Later

George Washington University Hospital
Parking Garage

“That was the longest hour and a half of my life,” Bill Scully Jr. had a knack for immediately going for his Mother’s jugular, especially when he was inconvenienced, and this was no exception as Maggie Scully parked her SUV next to a large, utility van.

The trip back from the airport had been less than pleasant for both of them but Maggie was still her bubbly, energetic self without fail. Things could’ve been worse, she had mentally concluded, and this was a wellness visit instead of a recovery visit to identify a body. She came close to losing her only surviving daughter and the fleeting happiness was being able to put her arms around her again, knowing that death had stayed away this time. The snow had been coming in spurts and the elevation and dips in temperature only added to the heavy ice layer on the blacktop, making the already slow traffic that much slower. It was treacherous and each street carried a level of tentativeness with each wobble of the tires.
Mother Nature was reminding her that she was in control of this night.

In some ways, Maggie was glad that Bill had left Tara and Matthew at home despite how close to the holidays they were drifting. This visit was going to be beyond difficult and her mind was on her daughter not needing the entire family there—Bill Jr. was more than enough to test everyone’s patience level plus Maggie hadn’t gotten to fully witness the extent of her daughter’s anxiety since the rescue. She almost didn’t know how to cross the jagged line and breech the subject of healing time and recovery with her very stubborn daughter but the reality was there that sooner or later, it was going to be staring her squarely in the face. It was harsh and Maggie knew that the topic was going to start an argument but there was a part of her that had to be able to help in any way that she could.

Maggie turned off the ignition and looked over at Bill Jr. before he could completely undo his seatbelt, her voice teetering on that best effort of stern, finger waggling at him. “Your sister has been through more than enough today. She doesn’t need your lectures and doesn’t need you berating her choice of company right now. Understand?”

“That Mulder guy has been a permanent fixture by her side this entire time, hasn’t he?” Bill Jr. was rolling his eyes as he let go of the seatbelt and gathered his jacket across his lap, the disdain for Mulder obvious as he spoke.

“With her absolute insistence—and mine as well,” Maggie nodded as her hand went for the door handle while the other juggled the keys. “He went through quite an ordeal to save her today so I am not stepping between them…and neither are you.”

“Jeez, Mom, you act like Dana is suddenly dating Agent Mulder or something,” Bill Jr. was almost waiting for her instant denial but instead he only got her door slamming in his face as she slid out of the SUV before him. “Mom?”

“It’s cold out here, let’s go,” Maggie was more than aware she was dodging him as he was quick to get out of the SUV and join her, his invading stare readied like an aimed gun.

“Mom, you’re not really going to dodge what I just said, are you? You know that doesn’t work on me,” Bill Jr. was not amused as he saw the smirk on his Mother’s face as she buttoned her coat and tied the waist a little more securely.

Maggie made a face as she spun around, a foul odor catching her nose as the wind wafted through the garage from behind her. “What your sister does is her business—and besides, what does it matter exactly?”

“What is that smell?” Maggie stood at the back of the van, noting that the odor was only increasing as she neared the partially open back door of the cargo area.

Bill Jr. was losing his patience as he turned around and crossed his arms as Maggie was almost reaching for the gap in the opening. “Dammit, Mom, don’t touch that! Someone could be sleeping or getting high in there!”

“Well, with you shouting they wouldn’t be sleeping anymore, that’s for sure,” Maggie wrinkled her eyebrows at him, her fingers edging around the painted metal frame of the door. “It’s
open and the smell coming from in there is rotten like when you and your Dad went on fishing trips and left your boots out, sopping wet I might add, for too long.”

Maggie knew that her daughter would be scolding her as well for touching anything where a smell like this was emanating but she couldn’t help it. The turn of events from the entire day had left her a little worse for the wear when it came to worry and curiosity after having Mulder stop her from entering her own child’s home. This was worse. This was the stench of death staring her in the face and she wasn’t going to risk it, not this time.

“You know you can just say that it smells like the dead, Mom,” Bill Jr. walked over to her, the irritation clear in his voice as he reached for her arm, intending on pulling her away. “It’s no wonder that Dana is always getting into trouble—she dropped out of your uterus.”

“William Scully,” Maggie put emphasis on his name with a certain level of sternness and swatted his hand away. “If someone needs help I’d rather have been able to help than not at all…”

“And there could be a crack addict dead from an overdose in there,” Bill Jr. was the ever constant pessimist as he stood with his arms crossed while Maggie continued to push the issue, pulling at the squeaky back door of the van. “Mom, just let me go find someone inside to do that.”

Light along the opening of the door was more than a concern as it danced in a feathered pattern, like static across her skin. It was brighter than the overhead lights as she pulled the door open a little further, the jarring squeak and rubbing of a rusted out hinge grating on both of their ears as the opening became increasingly wider. Maggie was not afraid or bashful about what could possibly be inside as she could already see the little droplets of blood spattered on the inside of the door as her eyes scanned it. She could still see it running down the tinted glass and framework, shiny and fresh in streaks from the heavier spattering. The smell was heavier as the opening was wide enough to access the second door hinge—but it was also somewhat new as she figured whatever had been or was inside, hadn’t been there long.

“Oh no,” Maggie’s shock was bordering on pure horror as she pulled the second door open and the full scope of the van’s interior was fully in play.

Bill Jr. hadn’t been paying full attention to the actions of his Mother but as he turned, the vomit already up in his throat as the incredibly visceral sight caught him completely off guard. “What in the hell is that?”

Maggie was regretting the decision to open the door as she realized that she had just discovered a dead body of a male with multiple lacerations. She was taken aback by the sheer number of wounds across his chest, down his arms, his hands from attempting to defend the onslaught of attacks, and across his throat from the final slice that inevitably took his life. He was crumpled in the spot along the floor in the center, his jacket open and flashing the very empty holster at his side. He had been armed. Maggie glanced up at the spaces where seats ordinarily would’ve been and watched the white noise flickering across two, small screens that were strapped to the poorly designed bench across one side. The elaborate set up was certainly the one that had once housed all of Miles’s equipment as she saw the bare spots where glints of silver were popping out in ragged drag lines.

“Freeze!” The voice from at least twenty feet behind them was familiar but stern, authority driven and was joined by the distinct sound of a gun cocking. “Put your hands on your head and slowly turn around!”

Maggie did as instructed while Bill Jr. seemed a little less apt to follow along with the hands above his head since he could not see who was ordering him around. Maggie maneuvered
with a slow, careful purpose while Bill Jr. was less interested in the routine of it all, frustrating the person giving the orders along with his Mother next to him. Maggie inhaled a deep breath as the sound of at least four more guns being precisely cocked joined the first, each one just a few feet apart, depth slightly unknown.

“I said put your hands on your head!” The voice behind Maggie carried familiarity but she was having an issue placing them without a face as the heavy, stern notes echoed through the garage and sent an equal pang through her eardrums, leaving a ringing behind.

“Do what he says, Bill, don’t be stubborn at a time like this,” Maggie instructed, looking over at her bullheaded son, wishing she had put his attitude in check considerably earlier on than this.

“Mom, what if the guy that did that to the man in the van is the one telling us to put our hands on our head?” Bill Jr. sounded more paranoid than intelligent as he was officially pushing the issue, his hands dangerously nearing his sides.

“Your sister is investigating a serial killer and you’re worried about whether or not someone telling us to put our hands on our head is a proper authority figure or not? Bill, stop talking and listen to the man before you get us both in trouble,” Maggie could already see the movement in her peripheral as the man behind them, his gun raised and aimed at them, was taking slow, methodical steps toward their vicinity.

Bill Jr.’s movement was enough for the man and his small group of plainly dressed individuals with their guns drawn to become agitated and concerned that he was a potential threat to the safety of each other as well as hospital occupants. It was just as Maggie Scully had feared when she realized that the investigation had flooded into the garage for a seemingly unknown reason, despite the discovery of the dead body in the back of the van. Something had gone terribly wrong since she left to go to the airport, she just didn’t know exactly what yet.

“I said freeze now put your hands behind your back!” The man in the front gathered Bill Jr. by the collar, knocking him forward onto Maggie’s rented SUV, his voice booming into Scully’s older brother’s ears.

“You better have a damn good reason why you are manhandling me!” Bill Jr. was in an awfully precarious position even though he was mouthing off to the man with a gun aimed at the center of his back.

The man put a little extra force on the back of Bill Jr.’s head and caused his cheek to thud against the back of the SUV as he spoke, replacing the aimed gun with a set of handcuffs to further subdue Bill. “I told you to freeze and now you’re resisting arrest by a Federal Agent…I’d stop talking right about now.”

“Walter?” Maggie turned to look, her fingers laced together on the top of her head in the proper stance as requested as she realized who the Agent manhandling her son was.

“Mrs. Scully?” Skinner still had a pretty firm grasp of Bill Jr.’s collar, but his grip went lax on the handcuffs as he slipped them back into his pocket, looking over at her. “What on EARTH…You should have just called out who you were.”

“Well, I don’t know about you but I tend to follow directions when I hear the words ‘freeze, put your hands on your head’ coming from behind me after the sound of a gun cocking,” Maggie lowered her arms and softened her stance when the familiar face and voice of Skinner really sunk in, creating a little bit of a comfort amongst the renewed tension in the air.
“Are you going to let go of me already?” Bill Jr. really didn’t give a damn which FBI Agent was half-assaulting him, he wanted to stand fully upright and address the soreness in his cheekbone without further delay.

“Settle down—you’re lucky I hadn’t cuffed your ass yet, Bill,” Skinner vaguely remembered Bill Jr. but what he did remember of him was more than enough to know that his stubbornness overwhelmed the intellect at times.

“I don’t know, you could probably handcuff him and teach him a lesson or three,” Maggie crossed her arms, gave her son an accusatory look and smiled in Skinner’s direction.

Skinner half smirked, the genuine playfulness popping out as he still had a calculated grip on Bill Jr.’s left arm and shirt, still pinned to the SUV. “I could…rough him up a little.”

“I heard that,” Bill Jr. yanked his left arm free and pushed himself to an upright position, shooting Skinner a nasty glare that visually alternated between the halfway irritated FBI Assistant Director and his own Mother. “You know that you almost broken my cheekbone.”

“The keyword there is almost,” Skinner dusted off his hands and made sure his gun was secured in the holster with the tab in place, his cuffs back in his pocket as he looked over at Maggie, his soft spot clear as day for Scully’s Mother as his tone changed considerably. “Are you okay? I didn’t scare you too much, did I?”

“No, I’m fine…More concerned about what is going on here. What did I just walk back into, Walter? Is Dana okay?” Maggie had a strong preference for first names and had gotten to know Skinner during Scully’s illness, so the propensity to slip back into familiarity was normal, comfortable even.

Skinner hadn’t taken a full look at the man in the back of the van but he already had his suspicions as his team had gone completely pale upon the sight. “The man that abducted Dana earlier is still at large and was calling from the hospital garage—the hospital has been completely swept. We were finishing up the remnants of the garage when we found you out here.”

“He killed the man in the van, didn’t he?” Maggie’s voice was meek as she gestured toward the open space, the grisly sight more than enough to take her breath away all over again as the overhead lights caught the arterial spatter along the doors and down the front of the man.

“One of the local officers was in the garage prior to a search party joining him—this is that officer,” Skinner nodded, gesturing for his crew to signal the all clear on their level and call in the death. “He likely came up on the guy and got in over his head. No warning shot.”

One of the other Agents tapped Skinner on the shoulder as he holstered his weapon, the silence filling the garage level as he nodded in his direction. The remaining guns were holstered and the unpleasant turn of events had becoming vividly clear as the team gathered around the back of the van. They were clinical despite the obviousness of having to process one of their own. Skinner knew that Scully would likely murder him if he kept her Mother and brother in the crossfire so he gave the order to the remaining Agents for finishing up the investigation before moving toward Maggie.

“I think I better get you both inside before a very capable redhead decides to kick my ass for keeping you out here for too long,” Skinner wasn’t necessarily exaggerating about getting walloped by Scully as he could see their breaths forming that thick, white cloud of steam as it touched the chill.
Bill Jr. and Maggie followed Skinner toward the sliding doors into the hospital at the 3rd floor level. Bill was already considerably less interested in being there after his Mother put the idea into his head about his sister and Agent Mulder’s new closeness. It was a thought he didn’t appreciate, nor did he want to continue to think about in any environment, let alone a sterile environment such as this. Maggie rubbed her fingers together as the mild interior warmth of the hallway provided that extra balance that her body was craving, the ache in her joints subsiding with each passing moment. The activity was beginning to return to the typically busy hospital after each floor had been told that they were safe to resume normalcy.

“Assistant Director Skinner,” One of the many other Agents roaming the hallways came up to him, stopping him in his tracks. “All floors are clear, all levels of the garage are clear minus level three where you just came from. No sign of the suspect. Agent Mulder has taken Agent Scully back to her recovery room.”

“Get the remaining units to the level three parking area to sift through the van—Officer Moreau will need to be taken back for a thorough examination. His family will need to be notified,” Skinner knew the young officer’s name and recognized him from two other search parties as recent as earlier in the day when they were looking for Kaya.

“Yes, Sir, right away,” The young Agent was fidgety and rightfully so as he nodded, then sped off toward the doors, his heels tapping with every step.

“Another fine demonstration by the FBI and their complete ineptitude,” Bill Jr. muttered as they rounded the corner.

“Hush,” Maggie barely waited for his words to finish leaving his mouth before her elbow intercepted his ribs, pushing a grunt out of him and nearly throwing him off balance.

“I wouldn’t call it ineptitude, Bill, when the FBI was able to put together a viable profile in less than a week as well as rescue multiple victims from what most certainly would have been a violent death,” Skinner had a mental flash of the state that Scully was in when she was found and his stomach rolled at the idea of not finding her in time. “A profile that your sister not only spearheaded with Mulder but was rescued as a result of.”

“A profile she wouldn’t have need to construct if it weren’t for her constant need to be stubborn and do the exact opposite of what everyone else says and thinks is right…But I’m sure that’s none of my business,” Bill Jr. had nothing but contempt for Scully’s career path even after six years of her thriving at it.

Bill’s words were headed right down that path for getting punched in the jaw but Skinner bit his tongue and knew that the minute that they opened the door to Scully’s recovery room, he’d get more than an eye full of karma. The corridor to Scully’s recovery room was long and a little dark with only overhead lighting above in a solid line. It was quiet in the hallway as they passed several doctors and nurses busily working. It was almost “business as usual” as they got to the door to the recovery room. Skinner knocked a couple of times and waited until Janessa opened the door for them.

“Oh, hey, Mister Skinner,” Janessa looked like she had been doing last minute checks before shift end and had a hand full of paperwork against her chest, her hair a little messy, as she slid out of the way to let them in.

Scully had insisted on Mulder being up on the bed next to her, the incline high enough that they were most of the way sitting up with pillows stuffed behind them. Scully was angled partially on her side, arm wrapped around him, the bandaged portion of her rib region aimed
upward, covered only by her backless gown and the blankets over the top of her. She was halfway somewhere between a state of awake and sleep while Mulder was still fairly aware. Maggie was almost delighted by the sight of her daughter in a state of comfort with Mulder but Bill Jr. was a little less than pleased as his eyes nearly rolled right out of his head.

“T...
cloistered a laugh. “Obviously it wasn’t hard enough of a ball shot or he’d be bleeding from the
testicle region until he died of blood loss.”

“I didn’t have shoes on AND not a lot of leverage, Bill,” Scully rolled her eyes at their
banter but was glad that there was no exchanging of fists considering she wasn’t planning on
moving and had no intention of letting him move. “Cut me some slack.”

Bill Jr. hadn’t fully made eye contact with Mulder but when he did the story was plain as
day as he was looking at the man that had once incensed him beyond the average boiling point for
any human being. The hatred couldn’t be there tonight and the truth was that, even while he
completely disapproved of the way his sister chose to change her life, he saw a strength emerge
that seemed to bloom next to Mulder. It was frustrating for him but he knew that he couldn’t fight
with her about it—not this time. He knew he’d never have a halfway decent conversation with his
Mother or sister again if he went at her like a bull in a china shop. Her happiness meant something
after all of the heartache she had experienced, even if it meant losing more than a few arguments
along the way.

“So, Mulder, think you could get off of my sister for just a bit? I have something I’d like to
discuss with you privately,” Bill Jr. knew that the words sounded significantly harsher than they
were intended but he also liked seeing the instant discomfort plaster across their faces as the words
came out.

Mulder nodded with a certain level of hesitancy as he prepared to hear more than an earful
from Scully’s brother in the hallway, a task that even she wished that he didn’t have to do alone.

Chapter End Notes

We are so close to the end and yes, this is another cliffhanger – I swear I am not this
mean all of the time. The return of Diana the bitch must have made your ass itch—it’s
ok, it made mine itch, too.

Extra thank you to Monika Michelle Cross, Vicky Williams, Jun Mai, Megan Kelly,
and Lee Hughes as always for the little tidbits that you are so gracious in giving a read
to or indulging in – this is beyond living on a prayer, though. I’m the worst kind of
sadomasochist.
Compulsion

Chapter Summary

Summary: Everything comes full circle and a truth is made known that leaves everyone reeling as well as second guessing what to do next to find their killer.

Post “Agua Mala” (Season 6 with mentions of “Rain King”, “Two Fathers”, and “One Son” Briefly and only for context purposes)

Chapter Notes

Note: Compulsion is an irresistible urge to behave in a certain way, especially against one’s conscious wishes (bordering on obsession).

“The Act of Love is a Confession” – Albert Camus

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See the end of the chapter for more notes

Such a single-minded lust
To be there once is not enough
You change your point of view once stung
And this is where I want to be
No anxiety or fear
A quiet moment in your arms
“Compulsion” - Royksopp

George Washington University Hospital
Trauma Center
Mulder felt a light squeeze on his wrist as he hesitated and slid forward, his eyes on her as he knew that she didn’t necessarily want to let go. Bill Jr. hated Mulder and Scully knew it as her eyes were fixated on the man that had been agonizing to protect her. They were in a variation of hell and now she was worrying over what her brother could possibly have to discuss with Mulder alone. It wasn’t something she wanted to think about but she also knew that Mulder would be ok—at least she hoped he would be. Even when she was in the most serious of her past relationships she had never been the possessive type by labeling the other half as “hers” but with Mulder it felt different as there wasn’t a hesitation that he was, in fact, hers.

She didn’t want anything to mess it up, not this time.

Mulder kissed the top of her hand as he gathered himself and stood, watching her for another moment longer, admiring the strength, the beauty, and yet, deciding between the gentle tremble behind her grip and the assurance in her eyes. It was entirely too poetic, he had determined, that she would be the source of his strength at this very moment before following Bill Jr. into the hallway to prepare for whatever earful Scully’s brother had prepared for him to consume, however unwillingly. The atmosphere was already tense in the hallway as Bill Jr. didn’t immediately make eye contact with Mulder, dragging out the silence like it was a form of torture that he had spent years perfecting.

He really was unbelievably good at it if that’s what he was aiming at.

“So, should I be shielding my face from your fists or are you planning on going straight for the throat with a single blow to the jugular?” Mulder didn’t like the extended awkward silences that Bill Scully seemed to be proficient at as he left a little breadth between them.

Bill Jr. rolled his eyes, crossed his arms and finally made eye contact with him. “It’s really best that you just stay quiet and utilize your ability to listen, for once, before I change my mind entirely.”

“What is it, then? Your long silences aren’t going to weaken me long enough for you to sucker punch me—even in a verbal sense,” Mulder realized how badly he needed to change his clothes as he glanced at his sleeves where Scully’s blood was in small, brown patches and streaks along his wrists up to his elbows.

“If I wanted to sucker punch you, do you really think I’d remove the audience, Agent Mulder?” Bill Jr. knew that the frustration was validated from Mulder but he was just as antagonized as he shot him a fairly displeased look. “Giving you a shot to the chin in front of everyone is a little more effective.”

“Subtle,” Mulder crossed his arms. “Seriously, stop playing games, Bill…what did you want to discuss?”

It was a pretense and Bill Jr. wasn’t eager to notice the stains as he couldn’t help but look at Mulder’s obvious, irritated twitching was becoming more than a little distracting for him. Pleasantries were not a possibility as everyone seemed to be forgetting that Scully had narrowly escaped being sliced open in sixty different ways and left for dead. Mulder didn’t really understand the necessity for all of this when they could be in the room with her, planning for a recovery that wasn’t going to be easy for her. The revelation of the change between Mulder and Scully was more than enough of a distraction for everyone that seemed to consume the focus and not necessarily in the most positive of ways. Bill Jr. was a little less than informed about the circumstances surrounding the treatment of his sister during her captivity and part of him was afraid to ask, afraid
to know, and certainly more than a little afraid to be aware of just how close she had come to being destroyed in more ways than one.

“I don’t know that I am ready to hear about what happened out there to her but I need to know something after the hell we went through with her cancer—are you just here to cause chaos and leave her broken all over again or are you prepared to be there for everything?” Bill Jr.’s voice was shaky and abnormally emotional as he looked at Mulder, his fists balling up, knuckles white.

“Maybe you should know what happened to her out there so you’ll get a clue as to the small level of hell she just went through.” Mulder could feel his blood pressure spiking, the aggravation elevating along with it. “Prepared? Are you really fucking asking me that?”

“Don’t get it twisted, Mulder, I have every right to be concerned with the well-being of my sister since she seems more than bent on keeping you stapled to her side.” Bill Jr. was ready to throttle him but knew that the emotional outburst was equivalent to his own.

Bill Jr. was not the greatest at showing that he was moved or affected in any capacity—he was too much like Scully’s father in that way. The eternal soldier in him had put up well placed walls to block it out but losing Melissa bulldozed a section of the protection around his heart that let the flood of sadness in. He was completely stoic during his wedding, despite how beautiful Tara was on that day, and barely shed a single tear over the birth of his son, Matthew, despite how perfect that boy was at birth. He waited to show such intensity when no one was looking and often clouded the strongest emotions with the less intense ones such as pride. Family had kept him from completely feeling the effects of that sorrow but realizing that he was that close to losing his second sister had put him closer to the final blow that would’ve left his heart fully exposed to the loss, to the uncontrolled wracking of emotions. He didn’t want it. He couldn’t allow himself to be pulled in and drowned by worrying over her again.

“I have been at her side through everything; in the darkness, for every last breath that she spent battling those demons and these demons are just are real, maybe even worse than when she battled through the cancer…only this time, I’m not only doing the unspoken, fumbling in the dark to keep her safe,” Mulder knew the consequences of taking the next step, the leap, with Scully and this was one of them as he looked at Bill Jr., the words contrite and assured. “I made a decision a long time ago that I’d be there for her in any capacity that she would allow me to be—and I meant every word of that.”

Mulder’s heartfelt words were falling a little on deaf ears as Bill Jr. stared at the man that he didn’t approve of, that he wanted to hate with every fiber of his being and the words that angrily passed through his vocal cords almost weren’t his own as he nearly failed to keep his volume down. “Why did this have to come out this way? You’re sneaking around with my sister—looking every bit as though you’re ashamed of it or scared it’ll ruin your precious little search for little green men.”

“Are you fucking kidding me right now? What do you expect either one of us to do? You’ve made it abundantly clear that you don’t approve of me and when have you ever known her to shout ANYTHING from the rooftops unless it was to prove a point?” Mulder was frustrated but rightfully so as he had his fist balled, attempting to keep his volume down as he read Bill Jr. the riot act. “You tell me where the logic rests in you getting even a little pissed off about not knowing about us because I am just not seeing it.”

Bill Jr. didn’t know whether he should punch him or congratulate him for finally making a bold statement enough to show that he actually knew how to use his testicles. Mulder’s stance had been clearly defined for a long time but his words had not quite taken that natural, definitive
shape until now and it was in front of the one man that judged him the most harshly. Irony certainly was rearing her ugly head today and Mulder was standing squarely in front of her aim, ready to take the brunt of the hailstorm that was prepped for the bullseye at his chest.

“Don’t act like you haven’t been a colossal fuckup right straight along—it wouldn’t be the first time that your motives needed to be questioned when it concerns the only sister that I have left,” Bill Jr. was narrow minded at best and he hadn’t even stopped to think about the effect on anyone other than the family. “I’m not going to lose her, too.”

“Your self-righteous bullshit is unreal. You really think that you’re the only one that understands loss?” Mulder’s eyes nearly popped out of his head over the inclination that Bill Jr. could possibly think that no one else was suffering or could suffer the absence of Scully if something were to happen to her. “You really haven’t got a clue how many lives have been touched by your sister—and how much it would kill each and every one of us inside to even think of losing her, do you?”

“Blood is a lot thicker than water, Mulder,” Bill Jr. had the gall to utter the words that delivered a powerful punch to Mulder’s gut.

“For a man who is so devoted to the military life you have no idea that that quote has nothing to do with family—it actually has to do soldiers in battle having stronger bonds than simple genetics but bravvo for invalidating your own comment,” Mulder continued, a stray tear running down his cheek. “Everything I lack, she has in spades—and every struggle she encounters, I will meet head on right along with her, without question. I’d battle every demon just to prove that I have her back regardless of the consequences.”

Bill Jr. clenched his jaw at the correction, realizing that his own words had left him backed into a corner. “I had to watch her go through that battle and I can’t do it again…not when you’re out fucking it up worse. She deserves better than that.”

“You weren’t the only one that watched her suffer and you weren’t the only one that felt every second of that pain,” Mulder was battling tears as he remembered crying at her bedside in the middle of the night, followed by the elation when her cancer went into remission. “The only thing I’d change is I would’ve told her that I love her so much sooner than I—"

“Mulder…” Scully’s voice coming from behind him sent a jolt down his spine and cut him off in mid-sentence but lured him in as he turned around slowly and saw her standing in the doorway with her fingers coiled around her IV stand, her other hand gripping the doorframe. She looked stunned and relieved all at the same time like she had waited to hear his words for so long despite the poor timing of it all.

How does she always manage to have the most impeccable timing? Mulder couldn’t help himself as her voice left him defenseless all over again.

“Scully, what are you doing out of bed? You need to rest,” Mulder’s tone softened with an immediacy as he took a few steps in her direction but was met by her little, slightly wobbly frame as she dragged the squeaky wheeled stand toward him.

Scully shook her head, gathering her fingers around the hem of his shirt, using him for both balance and warmth as she let go of the stand and looked up at him. “What is it with you and me and this ridiculousness of telling everyone but each other that little, three-word phrase? Are we that scared of what it’ll sound like if we know that the person really heard it?”

“Hey, at least I didn’t say it in front of a serial killer…I’m just sayin’,” Mulder tried to
tease her a little bit as he leaned in, giving her a light, loving kiss on the center of her forehead before resting his chin on the top of her head, wrapping his arms around her. “I’ve been waiting for a right moment but I don’t know that there’s such a thing as the perfect moment other than the moment that the words leave your mouth.”

Scully pulled her head back and looked up at him, gliding her fingers along his chin, completely ignoring her brother’s presence in the hallway. “So, what in the hell are you waiting for?”

This wasn’t exactly how Mulder pictured professing those three little words to Scully but the look on her face was more than enough as he could feel her heart beating close to his own. He could already feel her shaking but attributed the large majority of it to the breezeiness at her backside that was most certainly hanging out for all to see. He gathered his hands along the gap in material, pulling it up and shut, coaxing a pretty shade of pink from her cheeks. Despite the visible embarrassment written in her coloration, she was beaming like a fourteen-year-old girl after her first kiss.

There was never going to be a more perfect time to say it and he knew it in his soul.

“What in the hell are you waiting for? I’ve been waiting to say this to you has been one of the least well thought out things I’ve ever done in my entire life but I couldn’t be more certain as I look at you that I love you with every beat of my heart and I will spend waking moment showing you exactly how much,” Mulder’s lips hung on the three most important words, his heart thudding into his throat as the nerves managed to take him with an intensity that he couldn’t quite describe.

“You have no idea how long I’ve waited to hear you say that and even in the physical state that I’m in, with everything happening around us, and the uncertainty surrounding this case—I couldn’t be more exultant to hear you say it,” Scully’s balance was less than perfect as she teetered against her heels and brought both of her hands to his cheeks, rubbing her fingers along the space between his lips and his jaw despite the slight ache in her arm where the IV tugged just a little. “I love you more than I can even put into words, Mulder.”

“Try,” Mulder pressed his nose to hers, surrendering his heat to her as he felt the littlest of chills against her little nose.

“I will spend every waking moment marveling at the notion that I’m not still sleeping—that I didn’t just create this moment in a dream,” Scully knew that Bill Jr. was on the border of making obvious gagging sounds as they reveled in each other’s affection.

Mulder smiled and continued to hold her gown closed, more besotted with her than he could’ve imagined he’d be. “I’m just be glad I’m an insomniac so I can be awake before you and know that you’re mine…Each and every day, with every dawn, I get that reminder.”

Nothing else needed to exist in the world as they gazed into one another for the umpteenth time, perfectly ok with the fact that neither of them were exactly good at romantic gestures, and more than ok with the ways in which they found to get there. They wanted each other’s comfort almost more than they wanted air. It was in that moment that both of them remembered being in a similar position just over a year earlier after Mulder had found the journal that Scully had been keeping while she had been battling the worst of the cancer, when he thought he was about to lose her for good. It had been the biggest moment, of which, he knew he wanted nothing more than to fight for her…even before actually knowing that she wanted to do the same for him. It was the last, real moment that both of them had really craved that deviation from the course—and failed miserably to leap at one another, into one another.
It was the last time that it didn’t matter who was watching them embrace.

“Do you think you can go get in bed, now, so I can let go of the back of your gown?” Mulder’s fingers were occasionally dotting along her bare skin, sending little waves of chills along her skin.

Neither of them were very smart or good at love but the combination of each other’s strengths to come mingle with each of their weaknesses seemed to be the equalizer—the balancing act that they desperately needed. Mulder moved his right hand forward, slipping his fingers along the curve of her jaw, tilting her mouth up to meet his, lavishing her with a kiss that had been waiting to manifest. They were oblivious to the incredibly uncomfortable, overly masculine man off to one side with his arms crossed as they held on, lips warm and ready with cautious attention to the bruising left by the attack. This is what Scully had been waiting for and she needed Mulder’s affection again, to be that delicious spark that sent more of her uneasiness into the wind, away from them.

“Well, I just vomited in my mouth a little,” Bill Jr. had hoped that his words would put a stop to the mini-makeout session between his sister and Mulder but it wasn’t quite having that effect as he continued to talk. “You can take your tongue out of my sister’s mouth at any time, Mulder…really, I think I’ve seen more than enough.”

Scully had half a mind to flip him off but she simply allowed the smallest of gaps to form, barely enough to get words out. “No one is forcing you to watch, Bill.”

“Come on, I don’t need to see that,” Bill Jr. was already at a high level of irk as the distance between Mulder and Scully eclipsed again, the tonal quality of his voice going a smidgen higher as he made a face, wrinkling his nose. “Seriously, stop…I’m going to vomit all over the floor.”

They both had their eyes closed as Mulder kept his voice low enough that only Scully could realistically hear him. “If I sock him in the nose just hard enough to piss him off do you think he’ll walk away?”

“Mulder,” Scully smirked and looked up at him, shaking her head just enough to get the point across. “You know that won’t work.”

“I really need you to get back into bed and rest, though, Scully,” Mulder didn’t want to say how much he adored this moment but he could feel her shaking a little more heavily and could see it in her eyes how exhausted she was. “We have all of the time in the world.”

“You know how badly I needed to hear that after the day I’ve had?” Scully felt the twinge of tears nipping at her eyelids as she turned her body toward the door all the while allowing him to be the shield against her back as he instinctively pushed the IV stand toward the doorway.

“As if you needed to ask,” Mulder had one hand on the back of her gown, holding it shut, and the other on the IV stand, following her lead back into the room.

There was something glorious about being unapologetic about allowing others to know exactly where they stood with one another as Scully made eye contact with her very proud Mother as she re-entered the room. The pride rested in witnessing her daughter being cared for so limitlessly by someone other than herself—other than family. It was a necessary turn in the midst of such terror and strife that a light, state of merriment was present and powerful. There wasn’t anything that needed to be said as Scully neared the edge of the hospital bed and felt Mulder’s warmth at her back as Maggie pulled back the covers for her, assisting just enough to refrain from
hovering over her.

“Is everything okay?” Maggie’s question was a little snide in the way she overlooked Bill Jr.’s presence entirely, eyes passing between Mulder and Scully as each syllable left her mouth with a certain level of irony.

Scully gathered up the front of the IV tubing, maneuvering the slack as she turned her body to climb back into the bed with the assistance of Mulder. “Yeah, Mom, everything’s fine.”

“How are the wounds on your feet doing, Scully?” Skinner had been quiet but his timing was everything as he watched Bill Jr.’s mouth start to move as though he were about to say something ill placed in front of everyone. “I notice you’re not limping nearly as bad as you were earlier.”

Skinner, who ordinarily was the hard-liner for the rules about consummate professionalism, had an air of dilution to his attitude as he regarded them with a considerably sheltering eye. He was like an absentee father for both of them in many ways even if he never asked for that cross to bear. He had witnessed exactly what it had done to Mulder during her abduction and the cancer that followed—watched the deterioration of her health before the resurgence like an awakening that couldn’t have been foreseen. He witnessed all of it and even practiced restraint on himself as well as Agent Mulder during that time for the emotional upheaval that it had caused.

This may not have been the cancer but it was a shock to the system as he was witnessing the transformation of his team as they found that solace that no one else could possibly give—or understand that they needed.

“They just feel like tiny pinpricks now—the worst of it is my side and my face. The pain in my throat is even starting to dull a bit,” Scully adjusted the blankets across her legs and felt the masses of bruises twitch in unison, reminding her of their presence. “The worst of the injuries are the bruises…deeper than I expected.”

Skinner was terrible at small talk but his lack of gentle conversation was finally looking at Scully’s face, realizing just how widespread her bruising was underneath the little gashes. “I don’t think Miles anticipated the can of worms that he was letting loose when he set his sights on you, Scully…and I mean that with the deepest of respect.”

“Way to kill everyone else’s compliment in the room, Skinman…where’d that come from?” Mulder was half-joking as well as taken aback as the words seemed tentative while incredibly sincere at the same time.

Skinner was not easy to embarrass but the hints of red coursed through every capillary in his cheeks, searing little bits of his skin until his cheekbones became highlighted with color. “The compliment isn’t just hers, you idiot. It’s about all of this—the support system we’ve built and, for all intents and purposes, the family that has become, at times painfully, obvious to everyone that encounters this ridiculous little freak show.”

“This sappy, lovey-dovey crap is starting to make my indigestion act up,” Bill Jr. truly had it out for Mulder and his own sister in this situation as he popped off a comment like a bitter pill that had been left in his cheek for too long.

Skinner was the first to speak, his tone even less amused than he actually intended, putting Bill Jr. properly in his place. “You could shut the hell up or leave the room if it bothers you that much? Do you not even understand exactly what has happened here today? I think you could
put your usual, pompous attitude in check for a little while so we can all absorb some of the 
rightful happiness that has come from the seriously fucked up turn of events that all of us have 
had.”

Bill Jr. was feeling quite picked on but the sentiment couldn’t have been further from 
actuality—it was more of a plea for understanding, to see, to feel something other than disdain and 
disgust.

“Bill, can’t you just try to see this as exactly what it is?” Scully had been pretty 
reflective, quiet even, and yet, proud of the men around her as they stood up to her slight bully of a 
brother.

“I can be happy you’re here but I don’t have to be happy for the circumstances 
surrounding all of this,” Bill Jr. still didn’t get it as he approached her bedside while she adjusted 
her position, sliding another pillow behind her back.

Scully held back the urge to scream at him as he was refusing to see the reality of the 
situation as she finally let some of it out, unloading the baggage whether he wanted to hear it or 
not. “I don’t know if you’re ready to hear this but you’re going to because you need to open your 
eyes and visualize reality. I almost died today. The hospital ran an assault—“

“Dana, stop it,” Bill Jr. didn’t want to let the emotions show but his eyes were glassing 
over, the little red lines dotting across both sclera as he blinked heavily, putting the emphasis on the 
word ‘stop’ as he refused to make eye contact.

“—Kit on me because I was unconscious long enough and wasn’t wearing the same 
clothes from when I was taken to start with. I am in one piece because of the diligence of my team 
and the man that you have spent so long blindly putting your hatred toward. I wouldn’t be here 
without him and I know that much is very certain,” Scully shook her head, refusing to back down 
from the fight as she squeezed Mulder’s hand, reminding herself of her own strength. “Was it 
worth it?”

Bill Jr. was motionless for what seemed like an eternity and everyone was, rightfully, 
staring at him as though he were the biggest ass in the room. He didn’t want to look at her but he 
knew if he didn’t the diatribe that came from her would only continue and likely get worse. Scully 
was good at the guilt trips almost as much as Maggie. He turned his head and gave in, but realized 
that her words were a direct result of the struggle as he allowed her state to be manifested. The guilt 
hit him right between the eyes like a direct headshot as the bruising along her arms, neck, and the 
sides of her face told the story and shined a bright light on the struggle still looming ahead. She 
was still his little sister at the end of the day and her fingers were white knuckled around the one 
man that seemed to be holding the pieces of her fragile state of mind together.

Mulder.

“I’m sure that you’d be more than content with hearing that I’m fine alone right now but 
it couldn’t be further from the truth and I’m not going to run the risk of falling beyond normalcy, 
into a dark place that no one should venture to without someone to pull them back,” Scully’s 
strength was glowing as she stared her brother down, eyes burning with certainty and undeniable 
fierceness.

Maggie, Skinner, and even Mulder knew that interrupting her right now would not be the 
wisest of decisions and, given all consideration to the expression on her face, she needed to let it 
out and make Bill Jr. see exactly what was at stake. Scully didn’t want to leave anything to chance 
anymore, even if it meant putting him through some discomfort – he could handle it and he knew
“Stand down, Dana Katherine, I relent,” Bill Jr. couldn’t just simply state he had given in like a normal human being as he utilized the ever present military speech and crossed his arms, giving in. “You can stop with the interrogative posturing—we all know the Scully women excel at the majority of standard torture tactics.”

“Dad would be awfully proud of that reference, Bill…and yes, we’re very good at them,” Scully’s grin was apparent as she watched his shoulders slump down, humility setting into his psyche with a swiftness.

Janessa had stepped out of the room and peeked back in, a tired look on her face as she checked the monitors again and made eye contact with Scully. “I hate to be a Debbie Downer, here, but you really need to get some rest, Agent Scully.”

“Mom and I will go get some coffee while you get a little rest,” Bill Jr. leaned over, giving Scully his best effort of an embrace. “I won’t pretend to like it, but I get it now.”

“It’s a start, Bill,” Scully nodded and leaned against her pillow, glancing at Mulder, who had carefully adjusted his seated position to where he was almost all of the way on the bed with her. “Mulder, you can go get some coffee as well, if you need to.”

“I’m right where I want to be, Scully.”

7:15 AM

Waterway Drive Lake House (Lake Barcroft)
Falls Church, VA

The sunlight streamed through the three, uniquely shaped skylights on the East end of the living room ceiling, facing toward the lake, casting a bright, almost stark light across Max’s face as he slumbered in the middle of the living room floor. It wasn’t significantly bright in the room but the misshapen light from the skylights did the trick to illuminate small sections of the room and give subtle hinting to the fresh, morning sunlight. He was comfortable and had been drooling, the little bits of moisture collecting against the curve of the corner of his mouth, waiting to harden and his eyes were a little watery from the fresh, morning light that made his instinctive reflex of squinting kick in, tangling his lashes together. He stirred, toes wiggling inside of his socks as he stretched his limbs outward, filling the space like a starfish, cracking his back in a wave of vertebral aligning motions, the groan louder than he had anticipated. It was a satisfying sound, nonetheless.

He hadn’t slept this good since the case had begun.

He rolled onto his side, taking the blanket with him in a heap that had weaved through his legs, and squinted before rubbing his eyes, his ears taking note of the absence of the TV sound
that had been replaced with the gentle rustling of newspaper, and the tapping and tinkering of glass and plastics. It reminded him of the sounds he used to hear from his Mother’s crafting room from behind a closed door. He glanced behind him and only found Drea’s pillow but it was absent of her warmth as he ran his hand along the center as he sat up. The room smelled like coffee and warm vanilla, the heat finally apparent as the crackle of burning wood brought his attention to the fire for the briefest of moments.

“Good morning, audible stretcher,” Drea’s voice came from the dining table as he started to climb to his feet, her face not fully visible to him yet.

Max knew his hair was likely a full on criminal offense and his breath would’ve been the equivalent to a kiss of death if anyone inhaled a breath that left his lips as he made his way toward the dining table. “Clearly, I slept so hard that I didn’t even feel you get up.”

“I’m notoriously quiet when I get up. I woke up shortly before dawn when a nightmare wouldn’t let me go back to sleep so I got up and made some coffee—started working on this,” Drea took a sip of her coffee and indicated the massive setup in front of her.

The table was barely visible underneath what could only be described as organized chaos. Drea was busy working with little coils of brass ribbons and had decorated an ornate candle stand in different strands of golds, silvers, and brass, with sections of black lace. It could hold at least nine, smaller pillar candles, each one with a section of glass at least 5 inches high that had been dusted in gold etching in a decorative, medieval sort of pattern. The newspapers were strewn about, some to the pages of some of the reports where she had hoped to find their names but had no such luck in doing so. The amount of work she had already put in was symbolic of having been awake for hours not just over an hour. It could not have been more apparent that she was good at hiding sorrow and frustration with busywork—and associated all of it with guilt in the same string of thoughts.

“What is this exactly?” Max had a feeling about what it was but he almost wanted to hear it from her lips as he went around to the interior of the kitchen to pour himself a cup of coffee.

Drea had a streak of metallic etching powder across her chin as she kept her eyes down, still busily paying attention to the details in front of her, following the curve of the glass on the fifth candle holder. “I wanted to do something for them—I started looking for their names but I couldn’t find them. I just feel helpless and lost, like I should’ve known or seen this coming… should’ve protected them somehow.”

Max had a fairly large cup of coffee in his hands as he approached the table from behind her, glancing over her shoulder at the meticulous, beautiful work that she had been painstakingly working on out of a guilt-driven compulsion. “There was nothing you could’ve done that anyone would’ve been able to do anything about, Drea, and I know that it’s hard to separate what has been done from what you have lived through but he’s not even the same creature he was when you were children. We’re beyond that now.”

The words In Memoriam were boldly scrawled across the black metal stand in an Aphrodite style calligraphy, in bronze etching dust, each letter carefully drawn on with a slightly thick calligraphy brush, standing out above the black like a light in the dark. There was no denying that she had been preoccupied with the idea that any of it could be any part of her fault and Max felt his heart sinking at the inclination as he stood behind her. He placed his cup down on the table, gathering his hands along her sweater sleeves while his chin rested on the top of her head. She sighed softly as his warmth provided that softening of her posture while she allowed the container of bronzing dust to touch the table top with a gentleness.
Why couldn’t I have met you a year ago? Both of them were thinking it in unison, like lost wanderers that had just felt that pang of belonging…a yearning to be part of another’s life in a pivotal role.

“I wish I could tell their families that I’d give anything to fix this—anything to bring them back. I really hope that they don’t blame me because I’m doing enough blaming of myself without anyone else’s help,” Drea felt the dull ache throughout her scarring, reminding her of the pain all over again as she sighed softly, scattering some of the luster into the air like dust in the wind. “Maybe if he had finished the job back then, they’d all be here today.”

Max closed his eyes and stood straight, exhaling through his nose as he sat down in the chair next to her. “Meghan Falkner, Melissa Owens, Maggie Sciulara, Elizabeth Becker, Rebecca Elm, Emmalyn Cline, Angelique Thomas, Diana Willis, Kaya Little…those were their names. If he had finished the job, I wouldn’t have gotten to meet you; that has to mean something, right?”

Drea had tears in her eyes as she set her brush aside and jotted each name down on a blank piece of paper, each one more powerful than the last until she placed the pen back on top of the table and looked over at Max, gently nodding at him. “It’s easy for me to rest on my laurels and pretend like I’m ok but I’m not—Nine families lost a piece of their hearts and yet, I’m still here, breathing, living, and I wouldn’t blame any of them if they think I’m the devil incarnate simply over my lineage.”

Max was already proficient at reading the typical signals of others but Drea’s stood above others as she almost had a hazy, crystalline glow about her with edges of soft blues and pinks. The chameleonic nature of auras, hers specifically, was striking and he was exceedingly grateful to the briefest of forays into chakras during year one of college with the influence of a very pretty, deeply spiritually connected individual who went by Sapphire. She was something else. Sapphire used to speak of healers having a clearer glow, like crystal around them. He wanted to blame it on dust but he found himself realizing it was part of her in some form as he made eye contact with her and saw the same soft glow in the center of her irises. Drea didn’t quite know the depths at which he was studying her but it was enough to turn her cheeks nearly as red as her hair.

“What?” Drea pressed her lips together and bit down on her bottom lip just enough, her internal nervousness eating at her with every breath.

Max shook his head and tucked a stray tendril of her hair behind her ear, letting his fingertips linger just enough to send a chill down her neck and spine. “You really don’t know, do you?”

“Maximus, you’re making me nervous—almost to the point I’ve nearly leaped out of my skin twice in the last few moments alone,” Drea wrinkled her eyebrows at him, the tone of her voice climbing into the higher registers as she felt the butterflies creeping back in. “You have an effect on women whether you see that or not…and if you’re doing it unintentionally, well, damn.”

They were a little clumsy in the endeavor but the rush was evident as Max allowed the less restrained part of himself emerge, leaning into her personal space with an intention that had a little bit of drive behind it. The only issue with catching Drea slightly off guard is that she was being pretty realistic when she said he was making her nervous as her elbow collided with a container of luster dust, knocking it onto her sleeve, down across her lap, and into the remaining distance between them. It was an instant cloud of silver shimmer as the light danced off each little speck, making the reality of just how much was in that container that much more obvious. Max’s shirt was covered and when both of their eyes opened, their arms were splattered with sections like a little shimmer bomb had gone off literally between their bodies. The entire situation was topped
off with a rather impressive sneeze from Drea that sent the rest of the luster dust forward, dotting Max all along his midsection and down his pants.

Max stared down at his crotch with a little bit of humility setting in and looked up at Drea, who had silver dust all over her face from a poor attempt at covering said sneeze. “Well, fuck me running.”

“Oh, shit,” Drea was laughing at the sight in front of her, half oblivious to the state of her own body as Max stayed semi still, unsure of whether or not he should move.

Max wiggled his fingers and winced, the clear taste of metal in his mouth as he made eye contact with her. “Would you think less of me if I told you that this doesn’t taste at all appetizing and it’s completely making my gag reflex kick in?”

“But, you’re so, sparkly…and shimmering in all of the right spots,” Drea glanced at his crotch with a certain level of instinctiveness despite the incredibly joking tone she had adopted.

“Stop objectifying me while I’m…shiny,” Max furrowed his eyebrows, doing his best not to lick his lips as he realized that she definitely glanced at his pants to make that joke.

Drea gathered up the wet rag she kept for stray spots of glue and pressed her knees between his, scooting herself forward just enough to access his face a little easier, a giggle still creeping free from her lips. “Try not to move your mouth too much; I’ll clean this up as much as I can.”

Max grunted from behind the cool, wet cloth as she dragged it down and across the surface of his cheeks and lips, revealing the skin beneath. She was clever and gentle with the cloth, occasionally making eye contact with him as he looked at her with his more examining stare. Drea may have been more skilled at the game but she wasn’t prepared for anyone quite like Max, who seemed to carefully toe the line between inexperienced and well trained. She wanted to be astute at being at least a half a step ahead of him but his gaze kept her well-grounded and nearly immobile in many ways. Drea took a look at his face, satisfied with the apparent lack of shimmer as she continued the motion onto his neck, making small circles with the damp rag to keep the luster dust from pooling and running down his skin even further.

“You’re awfully good at that, short stack,” Max watched her meticulously wipe the surface of his skin and fold the rag into sections, avoiding the heavily saturated sections of it in the process.

“I’ve spilled more glitter, paint, and glue than I’d care to recollect,” Drea laughed and watched more of the luster dust rattle off of both of them with such similarity to Tinkerbell’s ass in Peter Pan with less smack. “I get a little clumsy and messes are unavoidable when I suddenly cannot maneuver my hands or feet worth a damn.”

“At least this stuff comes off fairly easily,” Max smiled as she gathered the rag, setting it back onto the table so she could pull her sweater up and over her head, discarding it next to the pile of luster dust on the floor.

Drea wiped her own face with the rag after getting rid of the heavily saturated sweater, nearly inhaling what was left of the shimmery powder in the air. “Yeah, about that…”

“Please do not tell me I’m stuck with a sparkly crotch because I don’t think I can handle that kind of terrible news right now,” Max angled his head as Drea avoided his stare by carefully sliding her chair back to shake her warm ups until the loose shimmer was in a pile between them on
Drea stammered, staring at the floor for both a strategic method of avoiding his glance and to make sure she wasn’t making the pile bigger by dragging her toes through it. “Luster dust tends to stick to denim because of the significantly tighter stitching—it will eventually come off but it takes washing or a lot of friction to get it off, sometimes both.”

The look on Max’s face was priceless at the conclusion that the solution lead to and where his brain immediately took it as he uncomfortably shifted his weight from one ass cheek to the other. He stared up at her as she used her foot to drag the wet rag along the floor, clearing away the luster dust from the floor, studying her rather amused expression with a slight level of irritation. Drea knew exactly where his brain went even though her meaning had several available options to choose from—and she was mildly tickled at the immediate recognition that he went straight into left field with little assistance. He was intrigued and stricken with nerves at the same time as he white knuckled the edge of his chair, lap full of silver shimmer.

“I’m not taking off my pants, Drea,” Max waited until her back was turned to make the comment, his voice cracking just enough to cause the littlest of giggles to leave her lips as she carefully gathered the soiled rag and the glittery sweater from the floor.

“What? Did you decide not to wear underwear, Max?” Drea went to the sink and started running the hot water to rinse both items in, carefully setting them into the empty basin as she gave him a look from over the counter. “I’m not asking you to take off your pants or telling you to—but I’m not going to pat down your crotch with a duster or a wet rag for you, either. You have to wipe them off, stupid, and you can’t be wimpy about it…Friction.”

“So my options are take off my pants, wipe them off like a guy that just whizzed himself, or do a combination of column ‘A’ and ‘B’? This doesn’t sound like a complete cluster fuck at all,” Max was bright pink as the thought crossed his mind to just strip down to his skivvies but part of him was grappling to control what was most certainly the onset of a future stamped hard on with her name written all over it.

“Or you can sit there looking like you’ve been banging Tinkerbell…you have options, Maximus,” Drea was digging through a utility drawer until she pulled a lint roller from the middle drawer. “Either way, I’m highly amused.”

Max groaned and looked over at her. “Well, fuck.”

“That was not one of your options, babe,” Drea walked around the counter with the lint roller perched between her fingers, waving it at him almost tauntingly. “You will probably need this for your shirt, though…minimize the damage.”

Max started to move his legs while he reached for the lint roller and inadvertently knocked into Drea’s knees just hard enough that she started to tumble backwards. Max was quick enough, just not the most graceful in his movements, as he managed to snag her by her wrists, pulling her forward just enough to keep her from going all of the way backwards. They had set off a chain reaction of directional ineptitude as Drea stumbled again, dropping the lint roller as she tumbled forward and half straddled him in the process. It was the least attractive thing that they could’ve experienced despite the bodily position that they ended up in. The mutual grunt as she landed in his lap was loud and both were less than prepared to collide with such maladroitness.

“Oh, you did that on purpose, Mister ‘I don’t want to take my pants off’, ” Drea’s eyes were wide, her fingers wrapped carefully around his belt loops after dragging them down his shimmer covered shirt while also beckoning another cloud of silver luster dust into the air by way
of her ass smacking against his jeans.

Max’s hands had slid to her mid-thigh area and were gripping her just enough that the palms of his hands were now covered in shimmer again and the position looked even more awkward than it had before when he noticed that his own reflexes drove her further up his lap. “I did not do it on purpose, Drea, but um…your thumbs are not in the right spot.”

Her lip was between her teeth before she could fully grasp the actuality of the positioning of her fingers, her thumbs precariously pressed against the denim over the top of his zipper, just below the button. “Could we be any more ridiculous looking?”

Drea moved her hands away from his belt loops and heard the grunt as her thumbs left the space below his fly button, making her eyes nearly pop out of her head. She had meant what she said when she told him she didn’t want to screw it up but here she was, straddling him even if it were accidental. It was her bad habit, making a mess of everything, and the last thing on her mind was making him yet another casualty of her lack of self-control. Inhibitions were sometimes a necessity and she was resting uncomfortably on the ledge of yet another bad decision.

“Stop thinking so hard, I can see the smoke signals,” Drea hadn’t even noticed that Max’s fingers had found hers and the tenor in his voice was just enough that she snapped back to reality with a rapid blink of her eyes.

“Let me go get another wet rag to get rid of this mess,” Drea’s driven need to keep it friendly had been overwhelming as she lowered her eyes and started to stand up, the guilt in her belly rising as she felt like her proclivities were going to cause nothing more than a disaster again.

Max didn’t live with those kinds of regrets but he also rarely went after anything without so much as a thought—and he was doing exactly that as he held on, refusing to allow her to stand. Her backside met his lap again, sending another silvery cloud into the air between them. They made eye contact and the electricity was real, unmistakable even, as Drea could feel her heart beating up in her throat as Max incited the reduction of the distance between them, inviting the physical contact. It was intoxicating, he was enthralling, as she could see his fingerprint traces along her arms leading up to her shoulders in silver, each little mark merely a reminder of a spark, generating heat in their wake.

Max’s mouth was no more than an inch from Drea’s when his cell phone started to ring, bringing the most severe of halts to what should have been an elated moment for both of them. Drea sighed softly and had a moment of panic pass over where running to drown herself in the lake seemed like a great option before standing fully upright. Max looked up at her as the incessant, annoying ringtone chimed again, a little smirk perched on his lips despite the completely inappropriate timing of it all. Max stood up and tiptoed across the floor, leaving little pockets of silver luster dust across the floor in the process and snatched the phone out of his coat pocket, answering it without looking at the caller ID.

“This is Max,” Max was standing next to the chair in the dining area, his eye glancing back at the trail of silver powder all over the floor.

“Geez, Maximus, don’t sound so thrilled to talk to me,” Mulder was entirely too cheerful for Max’s liking as the sound of his voice incited an immediate rolling of the eyes.

Max sighed softly and had the desire to hang up on him right there but he resisted as he channeled his energy into a less irritated voice. “I haven’t been awake all that long, sorry, Mulder…is everything ok?”
Drea shook off the nervous energy as she felt her cheeks flushed with heat, the obvious redness developing across her neck and toward her ears. She went back into the kitchen and slipped out of the warm ups, revealing a pair of jogging shorts underneath of it. She tossed the fully saturated pair of pants into the sink with the other clothes and gathered a fresh rag to mop up the rest of the mess on the floor before maneuvering around Max in the dining area. She was quiet and he barely even realized she was in there as the conversation with Mulder was continuing.

“I meant to call after the sweep finished but everyone here was more than a little bit exhausted so we opted to get some rest and start fresh,” Mulder was talking over the top of Maggie and Skinner in the background, who were chatting away about breakfast food. “They didn’t find Miles but he killed one of our Agents during the sweep so he was here for part of it. We are so close to getting this mother fucker.”

Max turned his head and Drea’s entire body registered in his brain as he noticed the absence of her pants, seeing bare legs as she was cleaning up some of her crafting mess. “Damn, well, what are…where are your pants?”

Drea jerked her head up from paying more attention to the crafting material than she was to him, her eyes widening along with a grin that she had been holding in all morning. “Did you just say that out loud? Classic.”

“Max, we had this talk about going over there last night and you assured me that best behavior was going to be had on both sides of this little coin—do we need to have an intervention?” Mulder chuckled as Max’s voice was quite literally bordering on a full stutter.

“I’m wearing shorts, Maximus, get a grip,” Drea smirked and said it just loud enough that Mulder certainly would be able to hear her as she continued to busily put away the loose powders to avoid any more messes.

“Did she just call you Maximus? It must’ve been a very good night, you sly puppy dog,” Mulder was in full torture mode as he poked the bear on purpose, much to the chagrin of Max, who was awkwardly fidgeting in the middle of the dining room.

“Oh, you’re not fucking right in the head, Mulder, was there something else you needed or did you just call to let me know about last night?” Max shook his head and wished he could flip Mulder off through the phone but that kind of technology wasn’t around to utilize, much to his dismay.

Mulder knew he was about to really shove Max a little further toward a breaking point as he started to speak again. “Wait, wait, wait! Put me on speaker, that’s not an option…”

“That just seems like a really dangerous idea and I don’t think I like it,” Max’s interaction with Mulder had a way of teetering into sibling quibbling rather than professional conversations as he did his best to maintain a level of composure in front of Drea as she had her hands on her hips.

“Have some faith in me, Max, I won’t embarrass you…that much,” Mulder was full on laughing and his voice went half muffled for a second as he was talking to Scully. “I’m not being mean to Maximums.”

“Yes you are, Mulder…and having faith in you not embarrassing me is like straining with an enflamed hemorrhoid, just not a good idea,” Max could feel the shimmer dust on his hands as he did his best not to touch his own face, desperate to rub the spot between his eyes.
“Maximus, what does Agent Mulder want?” Drea rolled her eyes as she heard only one side of the banter, neatly gathering the last bits of lids after sliding the incomplete memorial piece onto the top of a section of newspaper.

Max looked over at her, his hand across the bottom of the receiver in a rough attempt to muffle the sound from going through. “He wants me to put him on speaker.”

“It isn’t like it could possibly do any more harm than I already have,” Drea had a little peek of a smile curving on her lips as she pulled the band out of her hair and let all of her curls cascade down in a massive mess that desperately needed to be brushed.

Max pressed the speaker phone button and held the phone out in front of him, the worry written on his face plainly as he made eye contact with the very precocious woman in front of him. “I reluctantly have you on speaker phone since another, somewhat feisty redhead seems to have it in her head that it won’t hurt anything—leading me to the logical conclusion that all redheads are officially into peer pressure.”

“Should I put YOU on speaker so you can repeat that last part for the other redhead that usually carries a gun?” Mulder was clearly joking but he loved hearing Max scramble audibly, the gasp real. “Has he been behaving himself, Drea?”

“Other than looking like he’s been molesting a fairy, yes—we both got into a fight with a container of luster dust and most of it is on Max’s pants,” Drea was incredibly matter-of-fact about the topic as she beamed up at Max, who simply shook his head in response.

“I’m pretty sure that he didn’t need to know that little bit of information,” Max sighed, the phone teetering in his hand just a little bit as he stared down at Drea, who was more than a little amused. “You don’t need to be involving Scully in this—I already am considerably outnumbered, as per usual.”

“Oh, but it compliments your eyes so well,” Drea winked at him and watched his bottom lip go straight between his teeth in response.

Mulder was laughing almost too loudly before Max could even respond. “The level of sarcasm in this conversation is ripe and I couldn’t be more, fucking, pleased.”

“Are you done?” Max was embarrassed but the feeling was moot as Drea gathered the phone out of his hand and ushered him into a chair, setting the phone on the table top next to him. “I know you’ve been probably dying to give me a decent shellacking since I left last night.”

“Wouldn’t flick copious amounts of shit at you, Maximus, if I didn’t care about your nerd ass,” Mulder took a breath and continued. “Scully just made the suggestion that you should both come down here—she’d like to meet Drea.”

Drea was nodding but was more focused on the state of Max’s clothes as she reached across his midsection and, rather clinically, pulled the hem of his shirt up, effectively disrobing the top half of him in a fraction of a second. The action left Max with his mouth hanging open staring at her as she stood a couple of feet from him and shook his shirt until it left a pile of luster dust all over the floor, inciting the silly faces along with it as it went up into her field of vision.

“Um…I lost my train of thought…what did you just say, Mulder?” Max realized that Drea hadn’t actually done anything lasciviously by pulling off his shirt but all of his musculature was reacting, twitching at the mere introduction to the air.
“Try to listen carefully this time—Scully would like you both to come down here. She wants to meet Drea, if she’s up for that,” Mulder’s audible sigh was evident as the distraction from Drea was enough to fully take Max off kilter as his masculinity was completely at stake in front of her. “Got it this time?”

“Hey, can you give that back, please?” Max was looking at Drea this time as he reached for the shirt she was rolling the lint brush over. “Yes, I heard you this time—and as long as it didn’t snow a bunch overnight, I don’t think that will be an issue.”

“Damn, you’re impatient—Agent Mulder is he always impatient? Trying to get rid of the shiny shit off of his shirt and he’s getting all antsy like a six year old,” Drea bumped his hands away with her hip and backside, knocking him against the back of the chair in the process.

“Drea, here’s the thing about our Maximus, he’s a delicate little flower and he’s very modest so if there’s nudity involved regarding himself, or anyone else for that matter, he’s probably getting a little shy and wants to hide,” Mulder was worse than a mean older brother as he tapped into part of Max’s actual insecurities while Drea’s eyes went from the lint roller to the incredibly chiseled, yet pale features of Max’s midsection.

“Oh, both of you can just eat me,” Max was too sheepish to realize that she was actually gawking at him a little bit, admiring his features. “Mulder, you know I’m never going to forget this and just when you think I couldn’t possibly get any snider—I’m going to rise to the occasion.”

“Just finish whatever you are doing, we’ll see you in a bit,” Mulder wasn’t the least bit intimidated by Max’s threat of a game of wits since he was pretty good at his own.

Max took the phone off of the speaker setting, his still very bare chest gathering goosebumps as he raised the phone to his ear. “Ok—I’ll let you know if the terrain is bad but we’ll be there. Bye.”

Drea turned around from the table with Max’s clean shirt and a dust brush in the other hand as he hung up the phone. “I almost don’t want to give this back to you…”

“I can’t really drive in the snow without my shirt, Drea, it’s very cold,” Max stood, putting emphasis on the last three words as he was close enough to her that his pectorals purposely twitched against her shoulder as he leaned into her to retrieve his shirt from her hand.

She willingly let go of the shirt as the seductive little maneuver caught her completely off guard enough that she nearly forgot to hand him the brush. “You’ll need this for the pants…I should, um, go get dressed…”

Drea half stumbled around him after he took the brush from her hand, watching her clumsily leave the room like a slightly incapable child, nearly taking a tumble over her own feet in the process before disappearing into her bedroom. Max shook his head, smiling at the mere inclination of such an idea of enchanting a woman like her. It was unreal but stranger things had happened as he gathered himself up, readying what would undoubtedly be one of the more trying parts of Drea’s life outside of her childhood. The fear of taking a leap into something unknown with any woman, especially one who had a complicated story, was high but Max saw something in Drea that felt real and right in a world filled with so many unknowns. She was bold, strong, and honest—and she struck a nerve within him that made him feel more alive than he had in his entire life. He was drawn in, like a moth to a flame, and wanted to fight for her.

It was a thought that was both thrilling and frightening for someone like Max who never liked to open his heart so willingly, so quickly, to a nearly perfect stranger.
One day I’m going to hurt you.

I promise.

-Unknown

Everyone looking for him had essentially driven Miles into a corner, like a rat that had spotted the poison and was wise to it—armed with the dead FBI Agent’s side arm and his walkie that he could peruse through the channels whenever he pleased, just in case. Miles stunk of motor oil, heavy sandalwood from the oils that had spilled all over the back of the van prior to abandoning it in the hospital garage, and copious amounts of blood. He was, by in large, in desperate need of a shower and a change of clothes as he found a cracked mirror in a bathroom marked “EMPLOYEES ONLY” across the squeaky door. He had stains down the front of his clothes and his face was worse for the wear after multiple fights in the past 24 hours had left his nose a little crooked and one of his bottom, front teeth missing. The hit to the chin from the back of Scully’s head was the one that likely started it and the multiple punches from Mulder finished the job, leaving him looking like a wrecked boxer after a fight.

“Mother fucker,” Miles splashed himself in the face with cool water from the faucet and wiped away his own blood as best he could without re-ripping open the sliced open section of his lip that was still incredibly tender. “Bitch is going to pay for this.”

Miles pondered the man in the mirror as he undid the coveralls all the way to his waist and pulled his arms free of the sleeves, the clanging of the cuffs freely banging against the side of the sink as he lowered his naked arms back down to his sides. He sneered at the wrist that Max managed to cuff, the deeply red ring around it where he had been yanking at it for hours without avail pulsing with every flinch of his body. One way or another, it was coming off. Miles was discontent with his surroundings as he angrily pressed the powdered soap dispenser at least six times until his palms were filled with pinkish powder that stunk of Borax despite being “unscented”. He stared at his pale, dirty figure hiding beneath a blood stained wife beater that he used for an undershirt, before gathering the dampened, gritty Borax powder along his arms.

He had no interest in the cleansing of sins or any such religious implications as he was contesting the image of which woman he had the desire to strangle more in his head, Scully or Drea, and which of them had been pushing his buttons the most. He had a nearly equivalent abhorrence for both of them and for similar reasoning as he was now picturing Drea getting correspondingly as physical with Max as Scully had with Mulder. To further his rage against her, his recollection of a child version of his sister was more than enough to enrage him beyond reason as he remembered, with a strange vividness, her hysterically sobbing for him to stop after he made the first slice of her pretty, pristine skin.

“Little sister, little sister, little sister…I’m going to put an end to that sweet, angelic grin,
little sister,” Miles was scrubbing so hard that the flesh on his arms were becoming irritated and red, his epidermis sloughing away with each rough pass of the water and soap.

The wrath that Scully had pulled from Miles was rooted in his bitterness over her refusal of his advances—even when her life was at stake. His reality was that she fought him the hardest and made it blatant that she would not be willingly allowing him anywhere near her. Miles wanted the conquest of Scully and to take something that didn’t belong to him, make another feel the kind of pain that he had always felt was inflicted upon him in his warped sensibilities. He had watched her for so long and for what, exactly? A sore set of testicles, a missing tooth, and a sour taste in his mouth from knowing rejection’s full extent. She was going to know what suffering felt like and he had every intention of making Mulder watch every last second of it.

“Cry for me, Dana…Make those pretty eyes sparkle for me again, Dana…Tell me you’re so very sorry, Dana,” Miles was making a terrible mess of the floor as he gathered the now scalding water across his arms to rinse away the Borax, barely wincing over the little wounds he had made in the curve of his elbow from rubbing the grit too hard across his skin.

Miles adjusted the water once his skin was cleared of the residue from the Borax soap, gathering some of the colder water into his hands to wet his face again, clearing away the last of the blood. He needed more than a haphazard, poor excuse for a wipe down in an abandoned bathroom but the soap left the most soiled parts of his skin cleaner than he had felt in the past two days. He turned off the water and gathered the dirty sleeves back around his shoulders, awkwardly positioning the coveralls back on with the front undone and open. He took another long, hard look at himself in the mirror and smirked, refusing to show the new gap between his bottom teeth, then flicked the light above the sink off. He had to plan it all out and this was a perfect place to do all of that perfect planning in. He paced the narrow, poorly lit hallway, evading what was left of the windows, peering into each little room until he knew that he was completely alone in the warehouse space.

There would be time to think.

There would be time to contemplate every little action and reaction for a reprisal. He already knew how he was going to subdue and restrain them, watch the horror over knowing that this was their end and no one was going to be able to stop it this time. Miles was formidable and he would have so much more to contemplate about the staying power of keeping them docile without utilizing drugs since he wanted them to feel everything. Perhaps a slow, painstaking bleed like a tap of a muscle just below the back of the knee. He knew how he wanted to flay each little section of skin from the center down and outward like a butterfly then watch each muscle twitch involuntarily. The screams would be unbearable but worth it just to see the undeniable infliction of pain that he was destined to create—to bestow on them. It wasn’t simply a need for him, it was a compulsory action. An obsession.

Miles inhaled a deep breath, almost cleansing breath to hold back the groan from deep in his belly as he pictured every moment in detail while the walkie started to squelch in his pocket. He gathered it with a swiftness, hearing the repetition as he twisted the volume a little higher while he set it on a ledge and backed up against the wall.

“…10-59 Edward Tom Adam 20 Minutes. 10-59 Edward Tom Adam 20 Minutes. Dispatch. Confirm Destination. 10-59 Edward Tom Adam 20 Minutes…” The squelch followed a distinctly male voice that preceded a set of tones for the DC Metro police division.

dispatcher’s more feminine voice came through, confirming the message that preceded her set of tones.

Miles almost couldn’t hold in the insane level of laughter, nearly drowning out the dispatch’s confirmation call as he realized what they were doing. His timetable, while suddenly shorter, was within his reach and attainable. His mind had taken a trip completely off of the deep end and, whether he knew it or not, he was dipping into a place that even he had not ventured—a place where only the darkest of nightmares dwelled.

It was a place where terror lived, thrived, and made hosts of the weak minded and easily corrupted—and he was already halfway there.

Chapter End Notes

I apologize for the lengthiness in getting this one out, I have been experiencing a few health issues and it has been a little bit difficult to overcome. Thank you for your patience in this endeavor.

Notes for the references below:

Peter Pan – don’t be mad at me for desecrating Tinkerbell – she likes it
10-59 – Police Escort
Edward Tom Adam – ETA
10-36 – Confidential Message/Do Not Repeat
George William Union Henry – GWUH – Hospital’s Call Sign

Extra thank you as usual to Monika Michelle Cross, Vicky Williams, Jun Mai, Megan Kelly, and Lee Hughes as always for the little tidbits that you are so gracious in giving a read to or indulging in…
Recollection

Chapter Summary

Our survivors, past and present, are confronted by the existence of each other and the notion that they are not wholly separated by much more than simply being the only ones to outlast evil. Post “Agua Mala” (Season 6 with mentions of “Rain King”, “Two Fathers”, and “One Son” Briefly and only for context purposes)

Chapter Notes

**Trigger Warning: Descriptions of childhood abuse**

“Memory is never pure. And recollection is always coloured by the life lived since.”
– Josephine Hart

“A scar simply means that I was stronger than what had tried to hurt me.”
– Anais Nin

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See the end of the chapter for more notes

Courage is resistance to fear,

Mastery of fear,

Not absence of fear.

-Mark Twain

9:00 AM

George Washington University Hospital

Trauma Center
A front and rear escort followed Max’s SUV from Drea’s home to the hospital, with a careful, almost slow entourage that had a very soft presidential feel to her as they turned down every street with lights on to keep cars far enough back for comfort. It wasn’t necessarily comfortable but it was a safety thing and deep down, she was appreciative of it, knowing the extra measures that they were taking to push for a guarantee of safety for her. This was a part of her life that she remembered, somewhat vividly, despite wishing that she could forget it all since they had to do something similar even when Max was young—and even when he was released from the juvenile system. She spent more time with police following her home than she did being tucked in by family.

It wasn’t a life that any child should have to experience, but it was part of her all the same.

Drea was visibly nervous as Max pulled into the parking space on the second level in the parking garage near the elevator, her hands shaking almost violently as she did her best to fold them in her lap. Max turned the ignition off and slid his hand across the arm rest, gathering both of her hands within his fingers. The timing couldn’t have been better, she had decided, as she was already feeling all of her muscles tense in unison. She had been lost in a sea of worry, sadness, inescapable fear, and dread over facing three of her brother’s victims—and the guilt was consuming her from the inside out as she looked down at the gentle, pale hand across hers before finally making eye contact with him. She was undeniably strong but she couldn’t hold the floodgates any longer as the tears spilled out like a tumbling over basin.

“Hey…don’t do that…you start crying and then I’ll start crying and it’ll be a big, ugly crying mess in front of all of these police officers that are standing outside waiting for us to get out. Keep in mind, I’m an ugly crier, so not only will it be unpleasant for me, it’ll look awful for everyone else that has to witness it.” Max was mostly teasing her but was also attempting to soften the tears as he gathered her in a gentle embrace, rubbing her back as she sobbed into his shirt.

Drea took a deep breath and held onto his shirt, waiting until her tears slowed to a dull crawl before looking up at him. “I thought that I was stronger than this—I haven’t done anything to warrant their kindness and walking in there scares the hell out of me.”

Max wiped her cheeks and rubbed the spot behind her neck, maintaining that steadfast gaze with her as he could feel her heart beating fast against his chest. “You have nothing to worry about from anyone in that hospital—and frankly, the only person that Agent Scully would ever bite is Agent Mulder.”

“That is certainly a noble attempt at coaxing a laugh out of me,” Drea beamed up at him, eyes still shimmering from the tears, almost relieved for even a second of relief.

Max smiled, his nearly ear to ear kind as he put just a little space between them so he could fully look at her and instinctively gather a section of her long, curly locks around her shoulders. “I was really only aiming for a smile so more than mission accomplished.”

Drea’s hands had found the curve of his neck and was rubbing her fingertips along his collarbone, an impulsive and girlish gesture that provided just enough of an impulse to keep her from falling. Max winked at her, pulling away with slowness before reaching for the door handle. Drea took a long, deep breath and did the same, sliding out of the SUV, the instant chill nipping at the exposed skin of her hands and face as she gathered her front closing zipper of her coat. It was cold and Max was right, they had an audience of cops who were uninterested in being looky-loos over a moment between them. Max came around to meet her, wrapping an arm around her shoulder, giving her a gentle squeeze. The height difference came into focus as her block heels barely added...
two full inches to her height and fit her somewhere near his armpit.

“You’re about to make a crack about my height again, aren’t you?” Drea couldn’t help but notice him smiling extra wide as her arm naturally wrapped around his back, under his coat where it was the warmest.

Max laughed as they walked to the elevator just inside of the actual entrance to the building, his arm still around her, the warmth of her against him as he reached for the up button. “No, I know better when you’re close enough to pinch, punch, or bite any of my extremities… safety first.”

“Wise answer,” Drea watched the little indicator light lit up and listened to each little mechanism inside of the closed doors of the elevator as it slid around with a certain precision. “I don’t think I’ve ever paid attention to the sound that an elevator makes until now…”

“You mean like all of the little gears moving, cables going taut, the mechanical arms allowing each counter weight to maneuver into the right direction?” Max always noticed the littlest of details, since it involved careful implementation of industrial mechanics.

“The hum of the electronics, each little beep from each floor’s built in timing,” Drea watched the doors slide open and walked in first, making eye contact as he came in. “It’s those little things that you notice when you allow your mind and body to slow down and take a breath—absorb it all.”

The hum was minimal but apparent as Max’s hand slipped to the small of Drea’s back, where it settled like he had touched her there a million times. She looked up at him and nodded, a smile peeking at the corner of her lips just enough to know it was there while she did her best to hold back all of that looming anxiety for the second time. His mere presence was helping to soften the underlying uncertainty about what was going to happen when the doors re-opened but a part of her was petrified at the notion of allowing her heart to open for someone again, especially someone who she only knew for a short time.

Something was telling her that it was supposed to be like that—this time.

The doors opened as the dinging of the elevator’s arrival mechanism clicked into place, signaling that they had gotten to the right floor of the hospital wing and were nearly there. Max heard the audible gasp as it left her lips and moved the hand from her back to her waiting hand, giving it the lightest of reassuring squeezes. She softened with an immediacy as his skin made contact with hers, swallowing as much of her apprehension as she could before allowing him to lead her out of the elevator toward the corridor where Scully’s room was. Max could feel her fingers shaking but glanced to his left at the vision of strength in a small, somewhat delicate looking package. She was different today and the color in her cheeks was all but gone as her long hair framed her face almost to the point she could’ve hidden behind it.

“You doing okay?” Max heard an audible sigh after another loud swallow before Drea pulled the zipper of her jacket down, fanning herself for a moment.

She nodded and gathered her hair to one side, playing with it with her free hand simply out of a nervous impulse. “Doing everything I can not to just say ‘fuck it’, go hide in a closet and hope you’ll just go with me…”

“I’m all limbs and I haven’t gotten to brush my teeth or put on fresh deodorant today so the last thing you want is to be stuck in a closet with me,” Max knew she was grasping at straws but he couldn’t help smirk at her idea of avoidance.
“Try me,” Drea looked over at him, her voice dropping an octave as she spoke, just enough to catch him completely unaware, making him trip over his own two feet, earning an immediate chuckle from her. “Try not to fall on your face, Maximus.”

“Don’t do that,” Max had let go of her hand for a moment as both arms flailed forward, desperate to keep upright in order to not fall, his voice coming out in a half grunt as he glanced at her while he fixed his sleeves. “Gonna make me bust open my lip.”

“Then don’t say silly things like bad breath and lack of deodorant would make you less interesting to get locked in a closet with,” Drea elbowed him in the ribs and glanced up at him as they came around the corner to the last set of doors before Scully’s hospital room.

Max put his body between her and the door handle with a little bit of deliberate intent, the flirtier inflections in his voice as he bit down on his lip for a second, pushing the handle down with his palms, maintaining eye contact with her. “Mmmm…maybe later, Little Miss Avoider.”

“Don’t tease,” Drea rolled her eyes as the gap in the opening widened while he stayed in front of her, licking her lips out of a reflex.

“I’m not,” Max pushed the door all of the way opened and lifted a brow at her before turning away from her, leaving her jaw hanging open just enough.

“You’re worse than I am, Mister,” She poked him at the center of his back and slid around to the side of him before nervously making eye contact with the first person to be aware of her in the room other than Max.

Scully’s expression was welcoming, warm, and undeniably kind despite the marks that Miles had left from his brutality and it hadn’t been that long since the cuts along her lip and forehead had been cleaned as the salve flexed with each little syllable that left her lips. “You must be Drea…I feel like I already know you.”

Drea’s back stiffened but she smiled as she took a few steps into the room, glancing at Mulder then back at Scully’s face, doing her best not to stare at the bruising down her neck. “I hope nothing too incredibly terrible—I can be a real pain in the ass.”

Scully was taken aback by her features but not to the point that it made her uneasy—she had qualities that Deanna did but none of the vices and her body language was that of someone who was very much scared of being there. She was absent that unabashed confidence and sexual prowess that Deanna oozed without much effort despite the laundry list of vices that Drea certainly had in her history. Scully could see the scars peeking out from the edge of her shirt as she started to wrap into herself, arms crossing high at her chest. She was holding on but only by a thread as her eyes were dropping toward the floor, staring at the line in the linoleum break.

“You don’t have to be nervous around me, Drea, Mulder told me that the information that you gave him helped him find me and I wanted to meet you,” Scully brought Drea’s field of vision back to her, knowing that the words were likely what she needed to hear.

Drea took a deep breath and chewed on her lip for an extra moment while she gathered her thoughts, grappling with the emotions as they started to build. “I only did what any decent person would’ve done—I would’ve given anything to put Miles away for a lot longer than what the courts decided but it wasn’t up to the kid he nearly killed.”

“I know that words can often seem hollow but I can tell you, without hesitation, that what you have said and done to help has been more impactful than you even realize…please, sit,” Scully
indicated the chair next to the bed after pressing the adjustments forward, giving herself a little less recline behind her, fully sitting up.

Mulder had been quiet next to Scully and their body language was that of two people who had been taking the fleeting opportunity to sleep in the comfort of each other’s arms without an audience for the first time since this began. Mulder slid out of the bed and peeked out at the falling snow as Drea slid into the seat next to the bed, her little frame shivering just enough to be noticeable. Max had kept a small, but comfortable distance to gauge her bodily response as Scully reached out her hand to Drea. The gesture was small but powerful as Drea’s eyes went from burning a hole through her own kneecaps to following the lines on the blanket until she could make eye contact with Scully.

She reached out, gently squeezing the unobstructed hand of Scully’s, returning that same, knowing and understanding look. “The mere fact that you don’t detest me speaks volumes of the kind of woman that you are, Agent Scully…I wish I had known sooner about all of this and could’ve done more to stop it.”

“What could you have done, Drea, other than what you already did as a child?” Mulder turned around at the window and leaned against the window sill, almost sitting against the soft, cushioned portion of the seat after opening the curtains just a bit.

Drea let her hand slide back into her lap while her back sank against the back of the chair, gently gliding her knee over the other. “None of my sisters wanted to re-testify against Miles when he was about to come of age and essentially leave the system by default. I was the only one that tried to. Looking back on my testimony, I left out the sheer number of attempts at suicide as a direct result of his abuse, I left out the actual number of times he attacked me. The two days of torture wasn’t the only time that he inflicted pain on me…”

Max’s posture changed immediately with the revelation, like a slap to the face and his eyes nearly popped out of his head just as much as his heart sank. She could feel the energy change from him as she spoke and the guilt was unreal as she turned her head with a slow, almost worried pace until she could see him looking down at her. She expected frustration but what she saw was far from it as he looked like he wanted to scoop her up, tell her everything was going to be ok, and no one was ever going to hurt her like that again. It was foreign to her to feel anything like that as she could see the tears building in the corners of his eyes, in front of Mulder and Scully, and he didn’t seem to mind.

“Was there a reason that you didn’t disclose it in the original case? You testified about the two days of torture and even that your sisters chastised Miles but there’s no mention of Miles actually hurting you or your sisters prior to those two days,” Scully watched Max’s body language changing, the agitation and emotional turbulence battling with every passing second.

Drea’s back went rigid as she realized she had to recollect it, not just for herself but to help catch him as she inhaled a deep breath and kept her eyes on Max, almost for strength. “Abuse was a normal concept in our house. Miles was the target from the time that he could walk and he, in turn, did similarly to me out of anger—I, uh, remember waking up in the middle of the night at barely three years old with his knees across my chest, choking the life out of me.”

“Wait, when you were three?” Mulder was horrified; there was no other way of describing it as he walked away from the window, sitting on the edge of the bed near Scully’s feet, his voice an octave higher as he looked over at her.

“I wish I could say that it was the worst of it but it wasn’t,” Drea nodded and broke eye contact with Max as she looked over in Mulder’s direction, doing her best not to cry. “I have had an
affinity for religious symbolism, mainly the artistic elements, since I was little and Miles used to steal various items from my modest collection…”

“I have a bad feeling on where this is going and I’m a little apprehensive to ask,” Scully could see the hurt developing as remembering the details was causing a little more harm than good as Drea glanced at the ceiling, hands wringing desperately.

Drea inhaled sharply, sucking the air in as though she had been suffocating and glanced at Max as she shed her coat. “Will you hold my hair above my head—I don’t have enough hands for this. Please?”

The apprehension was only buried in Max’s chest but he didn’t hesitate to assist her in the endeavor as he gathered her hair between his fingers, wrapping it into a loose, poorly constructed bun. Drea looked up at him only once while her hands shook, clumsily undoing the buttons on her cardigan until she could slide her arms free. Max could already see the scarring peeking out from the top of the back of her camisole as she pulled the black, cotton and microfiber cardigan free and set it on top of her jacket. Scully knew what they were before she could fully see them and her tears were already primed to fall as Drea pulled the back of her camisole down just enough to reveal the true nature of only part of her torture.

Her burn scars.

“Are those?” Mulder came to the other side of the bed simply to take a closer look, both curious and shocked at her absolute strength.

“St. James Cross. Jerusalem Cross. Celtic Cross. Papal Cross. Templar Cross. Order of Christ Cross. The Ankh,” Drea listed them off in perfect sequence as they appeared in a semi-downward left to right directional pattern on her back, each one bearing a little less detailing from becoming slightly elongated as she got older and grew. “I was four when he did the first—the last was given two days before he lost his shit and attacked all four of us.”

Drea stood with her back essentially exposed fully, at least half of her back covered in the scars, the air in the room giving her that chill as it passed, welcoming the goosebumps all over. Scully knew, in that moment, where the obsession with the religious adornments had come from and she was more concerned over Drea’s safety than she had originally anticipated as she looked at the extent of the scarring on her back. Each one told a story—and each one was delivered to a child, with an incredibly hateful hand by a child just two years older. The thought was nauseating.

“How did your parents not find out about these?” Scully noticed the bubbling on the earliest of the burns and knew that they would’ve, at some point, bled extensively, and may have needed multiple cleanings. “You would’ve needed medical attention…at the very least, you would’ve needed to be heavily bandaged.”

Drea pulled the camisole back into place and slid her arms back into the cardigan, glancing over her shoulder at Scully just enough to see her. “Miles was incredibly gifted at staging things to make it look like I had fallen on things—and he threatened to put the hot poker into my eye if I said anything to disagree with him. I was only four when it started and he already tried to kill me more than once.”

“This puts a lot of his more ritualistic patterns into perspective but it really doesn’t explain the lyrics…that still has me completely baffled,” Mulder hadn’t been paying attention to anyone in the room as he paced for a moment, deeply contemplating the thought.

“What do you mean, lyrics?” Drea furrowed her brow at him as Max let go of her hair so
she could run her own fingers through it, fixing the mess that it had become.

“Miles keeps repeating lyrics in the crime scenes and played the song on loop during the worst of the torture of our victims—corroborated by me and the other two survivors,” Scully inhaled and audibly sighing, knowing that she’d never be able to hear that song again.

Drea was already picturing her younger self, strapped face down on a metal frame, tears down her face and the tangle of red hair on either side like a shield that prevented her from seeing him coming. She could smell it—she could smell the incense burning to cover up the smell of the equipment along with the smell of flesh burning, melting, searing apart. She could hear the music, the melody loud and yet, soft above her own cries like a hypocritical plea for her to stop making so much noise. She could still hear him humming along as though it were an everyday, normal thing to press a hot brand to your kid sister’s back until her screams become nothing more than muffled, muddled groans between bursts of consciousness. Drea could still feel the piss poor attempt at care when the three-gallon jug of water came down, drenching the back of her head.

She remembered all of it like it was yesterday—and it had been out of her mind for a very long time by choice.

Drea closed her eyes and the last of her energy almost dropped off as her shoulders slumped at the thought before she could make eye contact with Max, who seemed a little more than concerned at her change in demeanor. “I was hoping that the one detail about Miles that had changed was the OCD habit of drowning out the screams and cries with music. He ruined one of my favorite songs…I don’t suppose it’s the same song.”

“He’s using a modern song—I’ve never heard it until now,” Max broke his silence as he felt her fingers across the top of his hand, almost reminding him that the comment was more for him than anything else.

“I know the toughest thing to do is recall it but, what was the song, Drea?” Mulder’s curiosity was more than a little piqued as he tilted his head, glancing toward her, the consternation building in his chest.

Drea didn’t really want to say it but the lyrics left her lips as the teardrops were already halfway down her face, the realization that delving this deep into her past was taking her to a place she wasn’t ready to go. “When the night has come, and the land is dark, and the moon is the only light we’ll see…no I won’t be afraid, no I won’t be afraid…just as long as you stand…stand by me.”

“Drea, look at me,” Max squeezed her fingers and tilted her at the chin until her eyes popped open with a little bit of astonishment purely at the realization that he was there. “You’re ok and you don’t have to do this.”

The color had all but drained from Drea’s face, a sickly paleness replaced the softer porcelain hues of her skin as she held back the immediate urge to wretch with an immediacy as she glanced back at Scully. “Will you excuse me for a moment?”

The action was fast as she barely waited for an acknowledgement from anyone before half sprinting for the door, her hand over her mouth. She didn’t want to make eye contact with Max despite feeling the tips of his fingers brushing against her arm as she moved past, his need to capture her attention completely failing to register as she purposely tuned him out, forcing her walls back up. The door handle felt like a beginning of finding a safe existence as she went into the hallway. Max reeled and spun around just as the door was closing, the sick feeling passing through him nearly as intensely as it had for her for an entirely different reason.
Scully was about to speak but Max cut her off as her mouth opened. “I’m going to go check on her…I’ll be right back.”

Scully waited for Max to get out of the room to furrow her eyebrows in Mulder’s direction. He was already feeling bad over the words that had come off with very little feeling and rightfully so as she flipped the top of her plastic cup open. Scully reached into her plastic cup and drew an ice chip from the top layer, palming it before throwing it directly at Mulder. It hit him in the ribs and landed in his lap, immediately sending a cold chill up his arms, down his spine, and across his fingers as he caught the little nugget between his palms. Mulder turned his head toward Scully and jutted out his bottom lip just in time to catch another chip of ice with his Adam’s apple, this time with enough of a thump behind it that it actually stung a little.

“Ok, that one hurt, Scully, what the hell?” Mulder feigned injury and rubbed his neck while he gave her the most pitiful look ever.

“Keep it up, Mulder, the rest is going in your shorts,” Scully was a little irritated at his lack of foresight after sending Max out of the room, sending another two pieces of ice flying at him. “You can’t just push recklessly like that—every action has a reaction, Mulder, especially now. You’re more observant than that.”

“I’m going to take that cup away from you, Scully, and so help me, every single one of those ice chips are going to play a game of disappear somewhere uncomfortable,” Mulder’s threat was halfway sexual and Scully knew it as his hands gripped the edge of her side table, pulling it away from her with the cup on it. “I didn’t think about my words before they came slipping out of my mouth and I will apologize if I get an opportunity to do so.”

Scully raised her eyebrows and snatched him at the wrist, pulling him toward her, biting his bottom lip with a little bit of aggressiveness that she had been hiding away, keeping close to the vest. “If you think that’s a threat…you have another thing coming, Mulder.”

“When I can take you home, you’re in more trouble than you even know,” They were playful and it was necessary as Mulder left a kiss on her lips, lingering there with his hands behind her head against the pillows. “I keep asking myself what I’m going to do with you?”

“I have a few suggestions…”

“I’m sure that you do.”

The sweet, frisky interaction between Mulder and Scully was starkly contrasted by the emptiness that had invaded the hallway as Max watched the door to the women’s restroom close with a slam. Drea was caught between the darkness and the light as she stared at the lock, the dizziness swallowing her up before she hugged the toilet, vomiting up every little bit of the heartache, the hurt, the fear, and finally, the last of her fortitude. She could hear Max knocking at the door, his voice filled with concern as the tears flooded her senses while she shook against the cold enamel surface. The words weren’t making sense as each little part of her shook, sadness and fear taking over all of her remaining energy. Drea had never intended on showing him her scars like this but now that he had seen them and heard the story, she didn’t want to see his face—she didn’t want to see the pity written all over him.

“Please, just go away…don’t you get it?” Drea gathered a section of toilet paper and wiped her face, discarding it into the toilet. “I’m the definition of baggage and I don’t want or need anyone’s fucking pity…you’re better off, Max.”

Max’s voice was a little muted but he knew she could still hear every word, his forehead
against the iconography of the women’s restroom with his hands down by the door handle. “You’ve already forgotten something that I said to you about scars. They are the smaller pieces of a puzzle that help to define the parts of a person—where they’ve been, what they’ve gone through, the things they’ve experienced. Yours just happen to make you more interesting to look at…more interesting to learn about.”

“Max, stop making this harder than it already is,” Drea flushed the toilet but stayed perched on her knees next to the singular toilet with her right hand gripping the handicap rail for any remaining stability. “I can’t do this…I’m afraid.”

“Fear doesn’t mean that life is over, Drea, it means that you’ve got something worth fighting for and I’m not going anywhere,” Max was incontrovertibly amazing with words but it was the truth as he continued to speak. “What are you so afraid of?”

Drea stared at the wall and felt her tears stinging her cheeks as the silence took over, the wave of almost paralyzing fear running through her as she couldn’t stop thinking about the lyrics to ‘Stand by Me’ in repetition. “I’m the sister of a psychopath…the only people that have ever truly loved me died and left me a pile of memories in my enormous tomb. Whoever you think I am, I’m not her.”

“I don’t ordinarily just barge into the women’s bathroom but you gave me no alternative,” Max was uncompromising in his actions but his tone was far from it as his voice came from behind her with little warning, his hands gathering her hair safely away from tumbling into the toilet. “I have never met anyone quite like you and I could play it off as a rush of blood to the head but that could not be further from the truth. The truth of it is that you—”

“Max, I am a plague and I ruin everything, please don’t let me ruin you,” Drea was almost backing away from him, further toward the sink, into the corner, her last hope to put distance between him as she could feel inevitability crushing her again.

Max heaved a heavy sigh but followed her movement, holding her at her chin, tilting her head up until she had no other option but to look him in the eye or close hers. “The truth of it is that you have been so much more than a passing glance. I kept thinking of all the worthwhile risks a person should take in their life and when I think about going headlong into the dark to pull you from it, however many times I have to, that’s the kind of risk I want in my life. I don’t know where it goes but let me decide if it means my undoing. That’s my choice to make.”

Drea swallowed hard at his profound and emotionally charged statement as her tears had become nothing more than light streams down her cheeks as she could no longer take her eyes off of him. “You certainly are the most unexpected of surprises Max Belle.”

“I’m just a guy looking at a woman who doesn’t know just how special she is,” Max had a smile perched upon his lips, hiding at the corners.

Drea sighed and had the urge to roll her eyes but she blinked instead. “What you are is corny…certifiably.”

“Put your arms around my neck,” Max was close enough that his whisper carried warmth across her skin and sent a chill down her back.

The entreaty was met with compliance as she moved her fingers along the soft fabric of his shirt, putting just enough pressure to feel the curvature of his muscles beneath. It had been put mildly that she wasn’t prepared for him but she was drawn in with more magnetism than she knew exactly what to do with as she slid her fingers to the neckline of his shirt and watched his neck
twitch as her fingertips met skin while they made the journey to the back to lace together. It was the simplest of acts and it was more than enough to sweep what was left of her feet right out from under her as he nudged her nose up with the tip of his own, encouraging her head back.

“Max, come on, no, I just heaved,” Drea bit down on the corner of her lip as she saw his lips parting and encroaching on her diminishing private space.

Max rolled his eyes and managed to graze her lips with the rougher edges of his own. “Yeah, and I haven’t brushed my teeth so I suppose we’re even…”

She couldn’t help but let out a giggle but still turned her head just enough to evade his mouth again. “Max, seriously, we’re on a bathroom floor in a hospital, you’re ridiculous.”

He groaned and closed his eyes for a second only to have her slide a hand across his cheek with a subtle reminder that time was something that they had. He didn’t need to rush—and she didn’t want to. He opened his eyes and smiled before sliding to his feet, helping her to her own in the process. She looked at herself in the mirror and saw the streaky remnants of tears, immediately wondering why Max would want to kiss what she was seeing looking back at her. She splashed herself a couple of times with cool water as Max was making a face at the sink, his hands in his pockets.

“What is that face for?” Drea looked up at him from leaning over the sink, the water still dripping from her face.

Max laughed and shook the side of his coat, the distinctly tinny tapping against the inside of his coat. “Two guesses as to what this is and one of them is wrong…”

Drea let some of the water dribble out of her mouth and down the sink before she wiped her face with a paper towel, discarding it in the waste basket. She raised a single eyebrow at Max and slid her hand into the pocket with his, spending more time wiggling her fingers between his than paying attention to the rectangular tin against his palm. Max couldn’t help but chuckle as her index finger slipped into the space between his thumb and index finger, motioning in a circle just enough to take him completely off kilter. There was something surprising and unknown in it as Drea was doing an incredibly good job at invading his personal space, breathing on the curve of his neck while she wrapped her free arm around him, squeezing his musculature over the top of his shirt, beneath his jacket. He swallowed hard while her nose dotted along his Adam’s apple, breathing just hard enough to be felt.

It was enough that he found himself craving it.

“Oh, there’s something in there alright,” Drea looked up at him, winked and finally slid the tin from between his hand and the wall of his pocket.

Max grunted as she withdrew her hand while he brought a hand to his mouth, the semi-anxious part of him losing the last of his shit as he looked down at her with the little tin in her hand. “I only wanted give you a little kiss not rev you up like a fast car, pervert.”

“Somehow, I’m doubting that you were only after a kiss, deep down,” Drea shook her head as she opened the tin and found the little, white circular mints inside, taking her eyes off of Max as she slipped two of them into her mouth and snapped the lid shut. “These are fate intervening, Maximus.”

A crisp, irritating knock at the door in a series of frustrated filled, heavy handed raps took both of their attentions straight to the door as the sound was followed by the door handle turning,
the door opening. “Is anyone in…oh…I’m sorry, it was unlocked.”

“And that was karma for me not locking it when I came in here,” Max whispered just toward Drea before putting on a bubbly smile toward the sheepish woman at the door.

“We were just leaving, ma’am,” Drea knew that Max wasn’t nearly as used to getting caught in awkward situations but she was as she tossed a piece of a paper towel into the waste basket and maneuvered carefully into the hallway.

Drea tried to pull him free of the situation but he was caught, like a deer in the headlights, half defenseless to the woman’s icy stare. She was easily in her mid-sixties and preoccupied with the pretense that they were subject to her full appraisal as she half blocked Max from even walking out of the bathroom, half forcing him to receive the full power of her mean spirited stare over her displeasure with their implied “bathroom activities”. Drea didn’t make eye contact with her but he was unable to avoid the vortex-like pull of a judgmental, old biddy that likely was worse when she was their age. Drea glanced back and watched him inch his way past the door jam, trying her best not to let out an audible laugh as she watched the woman mouth “disgusting” at him before disappearing into the bathroom alone.

The door slam that followed was jarring and caught the attention of every onlooker within the vicinity before they quickly went back to their business.

“Hey, short stack,” Max called to her with just enough volume to get her full attention as he pulled her around, coiling her fingers around his as he brought her back to his chest.

He had been interrupted twice and this was far from another opportunity for the cosmic balance to shift as he tilted to meet her, gathering his arms around her, pulling her up to her tiptoes. She wasn’t expecting it and it was part of what made it worth it for him as he could feel her heart racing against his chest, her hands grasping onto him simply out of compensating for her balance teetering. It was the same kind of rush that one would get if running a red light, speeding through that intersection without a hint of whether or not you’re risking impact—and the elation of making it to the other side unscathed, alive, teeming with that surge of adrenaline that followed like a fresh high. Max was skilled, almost artfully so, and completely unlike anyone that Drea had collided with previously as she felt all of her sensations go numb and burst in the same split second, followed by a rush of heat to her extremities.

It was like he knew every little part of her mouth—and knew exactly how she needed to be kissed as her eyes fluttered shut and her hands gripped his back, pulling him closer. It was a high and it was better than getting caught, she had decided, as the distinct thudding of Max’s heart beating against her despite his rather skillful use of a thumb to drag her bottom lip down, keenly slipping his own lip into the space. Neither of them had actually taken the time to really allow themselves to envelope anyone in a kiss in a long time despite how easily they fit the part and into each other’s non-existent personal bubbles.

Drea’s eyes were still closed as she forced space between them, her heels high off of the floor as she held onto him, “Congratulations, Maximus—you just became a stage one exhibitionist.”

“There are people out here?” Max was smirking with his eyes still shut, his mouth still hovering close to hers. “I hadn’t…noticed.”

“Sure you didn’t,” Drea swallowed hard, her chest heaving against him as her eyes refused to open as she let the wave wash over her. “You’re significantly better at this than I anticipated. You’re aggressive.”
“Is that a problem?” Max’s voice dropped a little and his teeth grazed her bottom lip, craning her neck a little further back until his stance was considerably more dominant than hers.

Drea mumbled into Max’s mouth as he gave her no real opportunity to neither confirm nor deny whether she took issue with the duality. She simply held on and beckoned him in, tasting that hunger that he had been carefully holstering. It made her head swim a little as sensation mixed with saliva, mint, and found that heat that had been brewing since the moment he had laid eyes on her. She knew it; she could feel it radiating from her core in an equivalency that had her frightened. He was right about her and it was all about taking risks with her heart that had her frightened.

“Well, that looks oddly familiar doesn’t it, Scully?” Mulder was standing in the doorway to Scully’s hospital room, shaking his head and rolling his eyes simultaneously.

Mulder’s voice wasn’t loud enough to actually interrupt the scene in the hallway but it was enough to finish bringing Scully out of her bed and to the doorway, her hand at her back to hold the gown shut as best she could. She clumsily maneuvered up beside him and slid her head around to where she was halfway in front of him. Scully wouldn’t have necessarily said it out loud but it was more than a little familiar witnessing Max and Drea in their incredibly touching, highly private moment that was on display in the middle of the hallway. The time spent with them had rubbed off and she had hoped that Max was doing this for the right reasons, not the foolish ones.

“Well, it didn’t take them six years, Mulder,” Scully teased and glanced up at him, purposely pinching him in the ribs while she licked her bottom lip.

Mulder’s jaw dropped, the sheer level of torment that the comment actually entailed despite the truth of it. “You woke up mean today and I don’t know if I like it—I don’t know if I like it at all. You can’t blame that all on me…it takes two to tackle tongues, Miss.”

“So eloquent, Mulder, tackle tongues…if you had talked like that on the first day that I walked into the FBI, my, my, my,” Scully’s sarcasm was dry but the part that was so desperately in love with him actually meant every word.

“My, my, my what, Scully?” Mulder wiggled his eyebrows at her again, the tenor in his voice considerably deeper than it was earlier. “Would my desk have become messier than it already was?”

“Mmmmm…no, but that’s only because everything would’ve ended up on the floor,” Scully sighed, making a little pout as she looked up at him, hiding her smile. “But, sadly…you kept all of those phrases hidden away for so long.”

Mulder had managed to catch the attention of Max and Drea by this point but he was more concerned with one upping Scully at this point as the retort was just itching to clap back. “Word games, Scully, I’m VERY good at word games—especially if they are dirty words. You just tell me when, where, and I’ll start up like I’m reading a dictionary.”

“Oh, for the love of God…we can hear you,” Max was dealing with the less than ear pleasing information from Mulder and Scully along with the giggling from Drea against his chest. “Stop…I might stab a pen through both of my ears.”

Drea ran a hand through her hair as gathered herself all over again and pushed Max’s hand down that had casually copped a rather generous feel of a breast while he was intent on causing subtle hallucinations from kissing her. “I should’ve put my hair up today—it’s insanely hot in here, are you warm? I’m really warm…Shit.”
“You’re red all over, short stack,” Max was purposely teasing her as he tucked her hair behind her ears and watched her bite down fairly hard on the corner of her lip.

“I think I swallowed one of my mints,” Drea nervously fidgeted and glanced over at the very parental Mulder and Scully, who seemed more than a little amused over what they had just witnessed.

Max halfway shielded his face from Mulder and Scully, popping his tongue out of his mouth just enough to show the circular bit of white from the mint that had been unintentionally slipped into his own mouth via the mingling of mouths and tongues. Drea smirked and rolled her eyes, elbowing him in the abs before moving past him, finally facing Mulder and Scully. She knew that the blush across her face was considerable and the heat had traveled along her collarbone, up her neck and had been creeping along her earlobes. Embarrassment wasn’t exactly a new thing for her but she was pleasantly happy over having all of her clothes on for this one…and they weren’t slapping a pair of hand cuffs on her.

“Drea, I know that it wasn’t easy to unload all of those details like you did and I wanted to apologize if I pushed too hard with the questions—catching Miles is just becoming a very dire situation,” Mulder was more than a little sincere as the tone of the situation changed with the mention of her brother, creating a seriousness that she had tried not to revisit just yet.

Her eyes diverted to the floor for a long moment while the words started to leave as though she were in confessional. “I have spent a long time with all of those memories carefully locked behind a closet door—but I can’t keep hiding them away. Resolution will never come if I keep pretending that it never happened when it did, Agent Mulder. In a lot of ways, pushing me to reveal it made it real enough that I couldn’t keep thinking it wasn’t.”

“You don’t have to do this alone anymore, you know that, right?” Scully’s words held weight and reiterated the exact sentiments that Max had conveyed as they all stood in the hallway.

“The imposition of loneliness in my little world has been a mixture of being driven away by what’s left of family and the intentional avoidance of allowing anyone else in—for the first time I find myself open to letting someone in,” Drea had an incredible succinctness in the way she answered Scully’s question and managed to sound like Mulder in as many words.

Mulder knew that kind of life and that kind of struggle of keeping every person at arm’s length, letting them get just close enough for comfort as Drea’s eyes found Max again. “Well, I can tell you that I have been down that road and it’s not the kind of road that anyone would want to be on—especially when it’s not meant to be traveled alone. You need at least one person on your side, even if you don’t think you do, they know exactly what to do to fill in the gaps at a moment’s notice.”

Scully slipped her fingers around his, carefully avoiding the IV catheter as she could hear the gentlest of cracks in his voice from expressing something that he often left unsaid. Mulder was often described, by others, as emotional but he wasn’t exactly an open and emotional person—those two words were not usually in the same sentence for him. He had been reflective lately, though, as he took a look back on his life chasing off into the dark and realized that the darkness had been a lot less bleak with someone running out in it with him. She was that connective tissue that kept his legs from collapsing altogether in many ways, whether he wanted to admit it or not.

“It’s a little overwhelming to have this much of a support system without even an eyelash being batted at the kind of life that I have had,” Drea felt Max’s presence behind her as he slipped his hands beyond her ringlets until his fingers were against the small of her back.
Mulder smirked and started to turn around as he was speaking, chuckling just a little bit at the same time. “Well, you were just heavily smooching our innocent little Maximus so judging you for much else would be a little far-fetched at this point.”

“Smooching? Either you’re channeling your inner seven year old or your Grandpa, neither of which are all that awesome, Mulder,” Max furrowed his brows at Mulder, wiping the remnants of Drea’s gloss away when he realized that it must have been shimmering like a damn beacon in the light, focusing his attention on her for a moment. “I hope that it wasn’t traumatizing.”

Scully shook her head at Mulder and Max in kind, gathering the back of her gown as she maneuvered back toward the bed while Max and Drea lingered just outside the door for a long, careful moment. Max laid a soft peck along the curve of her forehead and massaged the back of her neck as he felt the last of her apprehension start to melt away.

“Are you absolutely sure that you are okay?” Max’s voice was low, soft against her skin as they both were watching the very loving body language between Mulder and Scully as he was assisting her into the bed, admiring the luck of their draw at last.

Drea gathered his fingers between hers, lacing into the gaps as though they had been practicing. “Okay is kind of an objective ideal, Max, but yeah—I’m good. I’m a little fascinated by them.”

“Why is that?” Max could feel the subtle change in her body language as she half tilted her head against his chest, resting against the curve of his chin and neck.

“You can tell exactly how deeply they care for the other without a word being spoken and barely a touch…that’s rare, especially in a world surrounded with so much sadness and darkness,” Drea’s index finger circled the top of Max’s hand while her thumb found his palm, seeking that warmth. “Just look at how her eyes follow his until she has to move. Tells me everything I’d ever need to know about them.”

“Has anyone told you that your intuition is limitless and downright astounding?” Max had his chin on the top of her head again as both hands casually snaked around her shoulders, giving her a warm, comforting squeeze.

Drea blinked slowly and allowed that smile to reappear on her lips as she lavished in the effortless affection, her fingers gathering along his arms, caressing the little hairs along his skin while she mocked her own Grandmother’s voice. “Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, Drea Emmaline Miller…quit talking so much about what those people are doing and go help Pop with the groceries…oh wait, that’s normally what I’d hear.”

“Are you going to up to meeting with Jeanette and Victoria? I know that this has been a little bit rough as is,” Max remembered the actuality of the reason for their entire visit.

Drea nodded, half wishing that they could spread out this kind of activity over a few days not just a late morning to early afternoon type endeavor. “Absolutely. They know I am coming right?”

“Yeah, I made sure to give their nurses a head’s up about it this morning,” Scully could hear her as she asked the question, nodding at her.

“I feel like I need to ask this since someone has to be the responsible adult,” Mulder wasn’t fooling anyone when the words ‘responsible’ and ‘adult’ were mingled so closely together in reference to himself. “Drea, what are your intentions with our Maximus and should we be
concerned?"

“Well, I have seen what’s under the shirt so, I figure, why stop there?” Her sense of humor was quicker than Mulder had expected as the words came out of her mouth as though she had been rehearsing them.

Scully smirked and held back a laugh as she watched Mulder stumble over his own feet, impressed with how easily Drea was able to make that comeback. “You walked right into that one, Mulder…and your coordination shows how little you expected it.”

“Don’t let her around Frohike, it’ll be like a pissing contest for who can make the dirtiest joke,” Mulder was looking at Max as he maneuvered into the room from around Drea, who was still standing with her arms crossed in the doorway.

“That’s not exactly a fair fight, anyway.” Max laughed and made eye contact with Mulder. “Doesn’t Frohike get tongue tied at the first sight of cleavage?”

Mulder started to answer just as the lights began to flicker in the room, enough to where the emergency lights nearly came all of the way on. The entire mood changed as they looked at each other as though a chill had passed through the space, filling the once comfortable room with an anxiousness. Mulder glanced at Scully as she glanced at the window, where she could see that the elements had started to become a little less gentle but couldn’t tell if they would affect the electrical work of the building. It was unbelievable how quickly the atmosphere could change as they all grew somewhat overly focused on what could possibly laying in wait in the dark.

“This hospital has a backup system, right?” Mulder noticed Scully’s expression as her eyes made the journey from the window to the monitoring system where her levels had previously been taken a few hours ago.

“Yes—but that wasn’t at all normal. The backup shouldn’t even hesitate,” Scully’s eyes were on the little circular lights that surrounded the emergency switch in sections just over an inch across.

Max went to the curtains and angled one open a little better until he could see all the way down to the ground level, where it looked like a road crew was working on some of the utilities in the heavily accumulating snow. “It looks like there might be a little problem going on with the electricity to begin with—I can’t tell if there was a downed tree or what but it looks like something might’ve fallen across a pole.”

The three of them hadn’t been fully paying attention to Drea, who had gotten a little more than a light chill from the flickering of the lights as her focus was pulling toward the hallway. She rubbed the back of her neck as the hairs stood on end and she felt every scar pinch almost painfully with every little breath. Something wasn’t right as she turned her head after feeling her hair blow from left to right, the skin against the back of her neck touched just enough to know that it was the distinct texture of fingernails grazing against that section of skin. She inhaled as she squinted in the direction of the bend in the end of the hallway and saw the orderly in the white coat cross awkwardly in an almost diagonal pattern with a clipboard in his hands. The lights flickered again and he stood still, staring in her general direction with his head cocked to the side, grinning from ear to ear, his features exaggerated and almost cartoonish.

She knew that face. She knew it more than any other face as it existed in her nightmares more than anyone else. She gasped and blinked as the flicker of the lights pulled her focus to the ceiling for only a moment, long enough to inspire doubt, long enough to make her question her vision as she looked into that same spot only to find that he had vanished like a shadow. Drea spun
around, utilizing the doorway as almost a safety net for herself and everyone inside the room. The mechanism turning within her was real and she could feel it in her stomach as her eyes fluttered along the corridor, knowing that either she had lost her mind or he had come back—and one of them was the target all over again, in some form or another.

“Drea?” Max’s voice brought her attention only half back into the room, her subtle paleness becoming more intense with every passing second. “What’s wrong?”

She was glancing back, eyeing the hallway as the doctors and orderly staff were making rounds along with random visitors despite the randomness of the flashing lights, catching glimpses within glimpses that made her immediately question her own sanity. There was something wrong with this and it was only making the feeling inside of the pit of her stomach grow with each passing moment. There were only two options in the scenario and neither were good…with the first being that her genetics had finally caught up to her and she was, indeed, losing the last of her marbles or she was seeing fleeting images of her psychotic brother as he toyed with her in the hallway. The choice, the reality, it wasn’t a pleasant finality and she was unprepared in either case.

“Max, I need you to promise me something, no matter what, please? It’s important,” Drea was cryptic and it captured the attention of more than just Max as he turned toward her, the lights flickering with a little more intensity.

Max took a couple of steps toward her, the worry in his eyes as he watched her anxiousness only intensifying, her eyes darting between him and the hall. “Promise you what? You’re freaking me out, Drea.”

Her voice was trembling as she felt her hair swaying with a little more motion again in the rhythm of the absence of light, her eyes darting over her shoulder as she tried to look behind her for a sign. “Promise that you won’t let him cut me open again.”

“Of course, I promise—but where in the hell did that come from?” Max was watching her lips tremble as she halfway made eye contact with him again.

Scully had a significantly better angle of the doorway as Drea’s hips aligned in an awkward, half trembling pose as her left hand extended outward in any grasping motion, grabbing for the frame as the lights went out again, this time for a significant amount of time. The emergency backup system was nearly immediate but the lighting was weak and barely illuminated the space, giving Scully only enough of a glow to see the absolute dread across Drea’s face along with the shadow that enveloped her across the collarbone. The deep, heavy metal clicking sent a chill down Scully’s spine and raised her warning flag as she knew, in her soul, that something had gone terribly wrong.

“Max, pull Drea in and close the door,” Scully was wishing that she had on her clothes and a gun in her hand as she felt the bile rising with every roll of her stomach as the steam engine of her anxiety was back, sans brakes.

“I wouldn’t do that if I were you or I might pull this little trigger and bang, there’s going to be an awfully big mess—all over the wall and the ceiling.” The voice grated on their ears as Drea’s tiny whimper blended seamlessly into most of his words.

Knowing exactly who it was nearly brought Scully to the floor in a heap of frantic, unhinged screams but she held her own as Mulder was beside her within just a few feet while Max stood carefully between them and the doorway, grappling with his anger. Drea’s fear had quickly become an unsettling onset of emotionlessness as the barrel of the gun was pressed eagerly against her chin, painfully pushing into her jaw. Her eyes were on Max as the emergency backups were
slowly brightening, ramping up the already intense nature of this incredibly uneven, yet fruitless standoff. He felt helpless as he realized that any move he made would result in her death and they’d be back at square one all over again.

“Hey,” Max had tears clouding in his eyes as he tried not to blink as they gathered, making it harder to focus on her.

Drea bit down on her lip as Miles jostled the gun a little further against her skin, giving her a not-so-subtle hint that he could end her if he so pleased but she was focused on trying not to break as she stared forward at Max. “Hey…”

Mulder was keeping perfectly still even though his gun was itching in the holster and the pure rage was beginning to boil as he glanced over at Scully just as her face conveyed anything but a calm, collected individual. She was a restrained but panic-stricken woman and he was more than willing to squeeze Miles’s neck until his head popped like a pimple but, once again, fate had intervened and the sharp object had been carefully replaced with the woman that had already felt the effects of his wrath. They could hear the chatter, the nervous shouting in the hallway, and watched the lack of a physical response from their murderer in the doorway with his finger on the trigger, restraining Drea as he had so many times before.

“Pretty little Drea, you shouldn’t ask your little FBI boyfriend to make promises that he won’t be able to keep,” Miles kissed the top of Drea’s head and almost rocked back and forth with her in his arms as though he were rocking her like an infant. “Just ask the one over by the window what a broken promise is and then look at the little redhead in the bed again…I’m sure she’d agree that promises are bullshit.”

“Won’t be able to keep?” Drea knew they were all angry but Miles had spent years perfecting the use of manipulation through words and his use of ‘won’t’ was making her throat close up.

“Surprise!” Miles was quick with his hands as he swung the barrel out, aimed it with marksman precision and fired.

The sound of Drea’s screams were deafening above the loud, popping discharge of the gun. Her cries continued as Miles gathered the gun again, pressing it to her neck despite her visible struggles, the loud wailing from her lips, and her useless attempt to get away from him. The action had set off a chain reaction of screams in the hallway along with shouting from every nurse and doctor in sight but it paled in comparison to the drop that followed, the realization of what had just occurred as Mulder scrambled to catch Max before he hit the floor. Scully’s hand was already coiled around the control bar and was pressing the nurse’s call button while chaos unfolded around them.

That’s when the lights came back on.

Chapter End Notes

I know! Please don’t hate me. There will be more and I’m sorry this took SO long to finish.

Credit song:
"Stand by Me" by Ben E King
Extra thank you as usual to Monika Michelle Cross (especially since you essentially previewed the entire ending and didn't want to stab me in the neck), Vicky Williams, Jun Mai, Megan Kelly, and Lee Hughes as always for the little tidbits that you are so gracious in giving a read to or indulging in…
Converge

Chapter Summary

Where clarity meets chaos – innocence meets evil – light meets dark. A choice has to be made. Fate is changed.

Post “Agua Mala” (Season 6 with mentions of “Rain King”, “Two Fathers”, and “One Son” Briefly and only for context purposes)

Chapter Notes

“The truth is all around you, plain to behold. The night is dark and full of terrors, the day bright and beautiful and full of hope. One is black, the other white. There is ice and there is fire. Hate and love. Bitter and sweet. Male and female. Pain and pleasure. Winter and summer. Evil and good. Death and life. Everywhere, opposites.”
- George R.R. Martin

*Warning: Description of bones being reset – I was as accurate as I could be, I used personal experience and descriptions by actual medical personnel on how certain kinds of procedures are conducted and how they do, in fact, feel.

Slight Trigger Warning: Gun Violence for proximity*

Disclaimer: Agent Scully, Agent Mulder, Agent Skinner, Agent Fowley, Margaret Scully, and the Lone Gunmen belong respectively to Chris Carter, FOX Productions, and TenThirteen Productions. All other characters are original and any likeness or named similarities to any real-life persons are purely coincidental (unless, well, you’ve been told, then you should’ve expected such things and shouldn’t get upset over anything that happens to them, respectively)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It is often in the darkest

Skies that we see the

Brightest stars

-Richard Evans

George Washington University Hospital
The hollow, thunderous pop followed by the ringing in Max’s ears barely preceded the
distinct throttling in his upper chest as the fabric of his coat and shirt burned away before his flesh
was ripped apart by the powerful little object that sprang from the barrel of the gun. The sound was
similar to the noise that his nose made when Miles kicked him only amplified by ten, concentrated,
and drawn out as it sunk into him like a missile, pulling apart muscle, bone, flesh. Everything it
touched was searing with a heat from the destructive little object that shot through him and from
the aftermath of the intensely beating, overcompensating heart that wanted nothing more than to
close the wound. The air left his lungs as his pain receptors over-responded and sent his organs
into panic mode as he reached out, desperately grasping in the direction of Drea’s ever distancing
screams.

Everything was moving in slow motion as the beating of his heart was up in his throat,
flooding toward his ears like an undulating, merciless ringing that he couldn’t escape with every
blink.

He could hear the loud wailing of his name from Drea’s lips. He could hear the shouting
that followed but nothing was distinct aside from the words “oh my God, he’s got a gun” from
every person within 50 feet like a movie reel losing momentum, drawing out in a dulled crawl,
snarling at him. He could see Mulder’s face as he caught him in mid-collapse, but none of it felt
real until the blood started to pool along his chest after he felt the cold floor underneath of him.

Everything that could possibly go wrong was headed in that direction.

“Mulder, you’ve got to talk to me—I’m completely useless over here and your silence
isn’t helping,” Scully was close to ripping out the entire needle and catheter hub from her hand and
going right back to working diligently but the mild contact bruising was already irritating her as she
pulled out the tubing long enough to pull on a 2nd backless gown from back to front, tying it off in
the front.

This wasn’t how it was going to go, not this time. It couldn’t. She wasn’t going to watch
Max slip away simply over being stuck in this position.

Mulder secured Max on his back, hand across the wound like a reflex with his other
feeling for an exit wound. “Through and through—I can’t tell if it went through his breast bone and
he’s not fucking breathing. Come on, Max, you’ve got to breathe.”

“If there’s an exit wound, I doubt it went through the breast bone, it wouldn’t have gone
all of the way through in that situation,” Scully had her hand on her own forehead, her hands
shaking with every passing second. “Where the fuck is the nursing staff?”

Max’s lips had gone blue along the space where they touched in a thin line, webbing out
just a little bit, and his eyes were staring straight up at the ceiling, his pupils in full dilation as the
oxygen was busily pumping blood out of his entrance and exit wounds, saturating his clothes and
the floor in unison. It was a mess as Mulder held the flow of blood back with pressure and checked
Max’s airways for any obstruction.

They were clear, open, and ready for air.

Mulder was dumbfounded as he glanced at Scully but she had an inkling of the actual
damage as her eyes were already looking over the surface of Max’s skin, at every line, divot, and
bulge—knowing that something was wrong. Scully dragged her IV stand to the end of the bed where the blood pool had already begun to grow to a considerable size and knelt next to Max’s head, her knees against the curve of his arm. She was weak but more focused than Mulder was as she leaned across Max just opposite of Mulder and pushed down on his chest, until the broken collarbone pushed back up and sent a pang of dormant, but vibrant, energy and pain reverberating through him. He seized for a moment but only long enough for every little nerve in his body to send an electric shock through him and inflate his unwilling lungs.

He was hurting but he was breathing and that was the main concern.

“Shit, Scully,” Mulder knew that the pain that Scully had just inflicted on Max was going to be considerable despite having just saved his life as the wounded gasps underneath of his hands became more frantic and audible.

“Max, I need you to stay still, you’ve been shot and I don’t know what the bullet hit on the way through,” Scully was doing her best to block out the sounds of utter disorder outside the room as Max’s breathing patterns were labored, confused, and staggered.

“Scully, put pressure on that, I need to go find...anyone,” Mulder’s hands were covered in blood and his face was beyond the point of distress as he nodded in her direction, motioning for her to slide her hand where his was.

Max was blinking rapidly and the complete bewilderment written across his face was clear as his hand went over the top of Scully’s near her wrist, smearing his own blood in the process as he made eye contact with her. “Where…is…she?”

Scully shook her head, hiding that visible shakiness as his concern over Drea’s safety was more important to him than the state of his own health. “I don’t know but right now that has to wait, Max. Try to stay calm. I don’t know the extent of the damage that the bullet did.”

“I have…to go…I promised,” Max was already trying to push back and Scully’s lack of upper body strength under the circumstances was starting to break through the situation as her arms started to shake while she tried her best to restrict his movements, pushing him down.

“What in the hell happened?” Skinner’s voice came from the doorway, the haphazard rush already apparent as his chest was heaving from the sprint down the hall. “I heard the shot from the visitor’s lounge with your Mom and brother—I had the Gunmen stay with them.”

“He was here, Skinner, he was right here and there was nothing we could do. He shot Max and he took her. He gave no alternative and he knew we couldn’t leave him like this—we wouldn’t,” Scully was almost shaking as Skinner had his coat off and behind Max’s head like a brace before she could even blink.

“Calm down, Scully…and you stay still, dammit,” Skinner was already helping her stabilize Max as he was clearly trying to get up from his horizontal position, encouraging the wound to purge more of his blood in the process. “Where’s Mulder? And who did Miles take?”

“He went to find anyone to help with Max,” Scully’s eyes were plastered to the gaps between her fingers, where the blood had started to push through as Max’s breaths were more labored. “Miles went after Drea—his younger sister. Max brought her here. He must’ve been watching all of us.”

“Scully…please…I have to go…I made a promise,” Max’s voice dipped in and out as the recently forced re-set clavicle was awkwardly putting pressure against his wounds, making it
increasingly hard for him to move much to his chagrin.

“A promise you’re not going to be able to keep if you manage to bleed out and die, now stop moving,” Scully glanced at her IV catheter and tubing as she did her best to stabilize Max’s head while putting pressure on the wound.

Skinner pulled his walkie from his belt and pressed down on the button to send through a talk signal, the squelch momentarily blasting into the room before he spoke. “This is Assistant Director Skinner…I have an Officer down…single GSW to the chest…assailant whereabouts unknown…backup requested…Trauma Level…”

“Backup En Route…” the dispatcher’s voice almost blended directly into the beep as he placed the walkie back against his hip.

“I had a feeling you’d find your way back in here,” Mulder’s voice came from the doorway as the hospital seemed to be erupting into complete chaos and the only person that he managed to find to help was Nurse Janessa.

Janessa immediately went to the basin, washing her hands while she was looking over her shoulder at the unfolding mess behind her. Max was pale and the blood loss was considerable. She didn’t have time to get anyone to do this and the people within this room had experience with trauma under pressure—there wasn’t any time to think about it. Max didn’t have that kind of time for her to go find a surgeon or a resident to perform what was necessary for this kind of procedural call. She had to stop the blood loss.

“I know that sound and I knew the general directionality, knew you two tend to get into trouble—logical,” Skinner was holding Max’s arms down and listening to the scanner for anything. “What in the hell are we facing here? I already called for backup to get here for him—no ETA, as usual.”

“Full lockdown, no exceptions, no is going in or out…so good luck with that backup, they won’t be getting inside the building anytime soon. You’re stuck with me,” Janessa had a bag of instruments and gauze in her hands as she knelt down and took Scully’s position from her, ripping the saturated material of his shirt away from the wound. “Fuck.”

“What is that ‘fuck’ for?” Max was starting to become more lucid and less cooperative as Janessa’s presence was causing him more irritation than he wanted when he realized that she was likely going to be making the pain so much worse for him.

Max inhaled sharply as Janessa was already slightly turning him onto his side to pop the rib back into place, putting a great amount of pressure on the already half pulverized wound track. “Well, fuck…I get it…ahh…dammit…that hurts!”

The decision to give him no alternative was the quick, safe option since he had no resistance to just how much force she actually needed to alleviate his long term pain. The sound of
his bones moving back into place was horrible but the groan that came from deep within Max’s lungs nearly sucked the air out of the room. Janessa was skilled and quick at the maneuver as the 2nd rib made a relieved crack and pop at the same time, sliding back into the proper positioning within his body. Her fingers were swift at the job as she gathered a bottle of cleaning solution, gauze and ointment at the exit wound. The hydrogen peroxide left a white, almost garish foam and sizzled as Max flinched and gasped for air, desperate to get it over with. It was at that point that Mulder had to hold onto both of his knees as the cry that left Max’s mouth was muffled only by Skinner’s wadded up coat on the floor.

“All units, male suspect seen in going Northbound on 23rd Street with female hostage in a blue, late model sedan, obscured plates. Suspect is considered armed and dangerous. Approach suspect with extreme caution. Do not attempt to arrest without backup, I repeat, do not attempt to arrest without backup,” Skinner’s walkie had been largely silent but the voice came through was male and fast pace, nearly stopping the heart of Mulder and Scully as they held onto Max.

Max held his breath as he, too, could hear the words over the walkie, the notion that Miles was getting away again with Drea as his hostage was putting his anxiety through the roof as he tried to listen carefully. Janessa was the only one that had to pay attention to something other than the dispatcher as she was gathering a section of gauze and tape across the exit wound, carefully sealing off as much as she could before guiding Max onto his back. The action came with risks as his entrance wound was spilling blood at a higher rate than the exit had been. Janessa gathered her wits and spent half a bottle of saline on one of the bigger gauze pads to clear away some of the excess blood before doing a gentle pack of the wound.

“Jesus…Christ!” Max was hyper aware of the size of the hole in his collarbone as he could feel Janessa trying her best to be fast paced yet accurate with the gauze.

Janessa blinked hard as she gathered the needle and thread, knowing that all of this was about to be done sans anesthetic. Scully was expeditious and even more skilled than Janessa with the betadine and wipes, gathering them along the wound, coaxing another inescapable, yet significantly quieter bellow from Max as it mixed into the ripped open flesh over the top of gauze plug. The first insertion of the needle was the worst as it nearly left him breathless and sent the little flashes of white stars in front of his field of vision in little pops of light. Mulder held Max’s legs down while Scully allowed him to squeeze the blood flow to a near stop on her forearm as she held him down. Skinner’s positioning was even more important as he acted as Janessa’s bracing to keep the wound perfectly still while the rudimentary stitching was completed.

“I’m almost done,” Janessa finished the stitching and taped a gauze pad along the wound, immediately reaching for an ace wrap to stabilize his entire shoulder column.

Max was thoroughly exhausted but he was watching her as she guided him to a nearly seated position to wrap him, pulling the remnants of his destroyed shirt and coat off in the process. “What are you doing?”

“You have a broken rib and a broken collarbone, you need something to hold you together and keep your stitches from ripping open,” Janessa did her best to wrap him in a crisscross pattern across his chest and his back, sliding her no longer pristinely white scrubs across the mess of blood on the floor on the process. “The cleaners are going to be pissed at me for this one, Max.”

“All units—suspect visual Northbound 23rd – approaching Pennsylvania Ave – I repeat, all units – suspect visual, Northbound 23rd – approaching Pennsylvania Ave. Blue, late model sedan, high rate of speed,” The walkie went off at Skinner’s hip again as Janessa was determined to keep Max within the confines of the room as his eyes nearly rolled back into his head.
“I’m going to go be eyes for this one, keep him from doing anything stupid,” Skinner checked the pockets of his pants as he stood up and looked over at Mulder while he made sure he had his badge, cell, and gun secured. “I’ll go make sure this road block is actually successful and get this motherfucker.”

“It’s a little refreshing that you’re asking me to keep someone else from being a dumbass,” Mulder knew the situation was tense but the joke was perfectly timed as he stopped Skinner in the doorway.

Skinner shook his head and glanced back at the mess that the room had become, even at the developing stains down the front of his own pants, “You’re the least injured at the current moment so, for once, you get the responsibility. I’ll call once the roadblock is in place and we have him in custody. We’ll catch this son of a bitch.”

The energy from Skinner was as close to certain as any person could get, the little vein in his forehead pulsating just enough to be fully visible underneath the lights. They were, in his ideal, safe there even with the consideration of Max’s injuries and Scully’s delicate physical state. The combination of pure strength that he left within the confines of that hospital room was a force to be reckoned with and he knew that anything that decided to enter the room with ill intent might end up getting more than they bargained for. Their guards were now on high alert and, as long as their heads were on a swivel, they were going to be more than a little paranoid.

Mulder watched as Scully leaned against the end of the bed and held onto Max as he half collapsed in the process. “We have to move him.”

“I know, but this has to come out of my hand before I can do that,” Scully had her clear hand on Max’s forehead and the other in the air, flashing her roughly bruised hand at him where the IV was barely hanging on. “It nearly ripped out during his stitches.”

“Scully, let me get that out,” Janessa turned around and ran a quick saline flush through the line before disassembling the pieces of the tubing and cleared off the valve before gathering a bandage in case of a bleed through. “Only a second more…got it.”

The square of gauze taped to the top of her hand did nothing to cover up the vast amount of half self-inflicted bruising from the jostling of the catheter but she was exceedingly elated to no longer have a needle wiggling around underneath of her skin. Max was somewhere between unconsciousness and bitterly awake, the haze of Scully’s hair passing into his field of vision like a blaze of fire. He had a flutter of his lashes, those green hues standing out more and more despite the lack of color to his face. Max squinted as he caught sight of movement at the door, the fuzzy, almost shapeless figure was moving in a slightly graceless direction toward them, avoiding the blood on the floor. It was Mulder.

Mulder was checking Max’s pupils but was half figuring on moving him into a less destroyed room, without a puddle of blood on the floor the size of a child. “Hey Maximus…now that your gunshot wound cherry is officially broken, can we try getting you upright and out of your own blood?”

“We need to go find her—I made a promise and I can’t let him hurt her again,” Max’s voice was stronger, less spread out in abnormal intervals as he put space between him and Scully, allowing Mulder to guide him upward.

“Please tell me there’s somewhere else we can move him, to at least figure out the next move,” Scully looked at Janessa as the weight lifted from her pelvis and sent a jolt through her that was a welcomed, half painful relief.
Janessa nodded and went to the door, glancing into the hallway at the ghost town that it had become. “There’s no one in the next room and it has a clean bed, clean everything. We can start there.”

Mulder had Max’s unaffected arm delicately swung around him simply as an anchor point for balance as the reality of his size became a factor along with a lack of balance. “How are those legs doing, buddy? Keep talking to me, Max.”

Scully looked down at the mess that had become of the two hospital gowns she was utilizing along with her own skin and gathered only her identification and badge along with the coat Mulder had taken off earlier, her eyes befalling on Janessa as she neared the door. “Please tell me you have something I can change into.”

Janessa gave Scully an exasperated look, sighing heavily, as they both followed Mulder and Max into the empty hallway, guiding him into the next room. “You are going to get me into trouble, but yeah—I have to sneak into the nurse’s lounge to get them. I always bring extra scrubs just in case and I’ll find something for Max.”

The reality of wearing something other than the hospital gown was that Scully was one step closer to getting the hell out of there and being back to her usual self despite the rigid pain level that she was still, clearly, experiencing. The room next to hers was easier to maneuver around in as Mulder already had Max half propped on the adjustable bed, inclining it as far up as he could strictly to keep Max from putting too much pressure on the wound. Scully glanced out the window at the massive police presence still in effect and went back to the doorway where she could see that the silent alarm was being run, which is why Janessa’s hesitancy was still operating at a high level. Janessa checked all of the bandages on Max and glanced at Mulder then back at Scully, who had gotten the worst of the aftermath of Max’s blood loss.

“Is the lockdown reason that you’re worrying?” Scully couldn’t hear anything but the humming of medical equipment in the hallway and the distant murmur of mixed voices behind locked doors of various lounges and hospital rooms.

Janessa stood in front of her and nodded, the volume of her voice barely carrying while maintaining eye contact with Scully. “Nurses are given pretty strict instructions about lockdowns—and going anywhere can violate procedurals. I put my job at risk.”

“You’re doing it for law enforcement…refer anyone back to me if you get caught,” Mulder was watching the color returning to Max’s skin and paying attention to the dulling in the stutter of his breathing patterns.

Janessa nodded and moved down the hallway, leaving Scully and Mulder with Max, who was certainly worse for the wear. They were used to taking care of each other but a third party was a little bit of an endeavor, especially one nearly as stubborn as they were. Max had outright refused to lie down and Scully had agreed that being horizontal might actually inflict more pain on him when he had not been administered any kind of fluids or pain medication to assist in the battle. The heightened level of concern for him kept her mind off of her own pain as she gathered a warm, damp rag and wiped off the blood from her limbs while she watched Mulder tend to the bullheaded fool on the bed.

“I need to be out there helping to find her,” Max was starting to become testy as he came close to swatting Mulder’s hand away from his forehead. “Why are we just sitting around when we could be helping Skinner look?”

Scully was still clearing away the last of the blood from around her shins, her backside
resting against the cushion of the visitor’s chair, the needling of pain coursing through her side like pins. “Max, you are no good to her barely able to stand on your own. You could get yourself or her killed and we’re back at square one, unraveling another loss. You’re stubborn, more than you let on, and more than I wish you were…but we have to work together, for her sake.”

The words bit into him a little more than he wanted to admit that they had but Max knew she was right as he could hear each syllable shake just enough to know that the emotions were there, that they were real. “Four days ago…this was just a routine investigation and I was running my normal, average, sitting behind a desk kind of life. I didn’t expect this. I didn’t expect to have family and be looking down a very dark passage at knowing that, at any moment, I’d give my life to save that incredible presence that I held in my arms for a fleeting moment.”

“We’re going to find her and bring her back,” Mulder gripped his uninjured shoulder and glanced over at Scully, who felt him looking at her almost immediately, meeting that gaze with an intent. “This is the one problem with developing an unwavering, deep devotion to a person like that is that when their life is at stake you can’t always see past the end of your own nose. Listen to the guy who does it all of the time.”

“Mulder,” Scully couldn’t help but crack a hint of a smirk as she put the soiled rags into a nearby bin and stood up just as Janessa walked back in carrying a handful of scrubs, looking like she had seen a ghost. “You ok?”

Janessa handed her the top set of scrubs and set a stack of others on the end of the bed, glancing back for only a moment before speaking. “Someone caught wind of the scanners for the FBI blockade for your missing woman and there are at least three different vehicles they are now pursuing. They don’t know which one they’re looking for.”

“Are the three goofy looking guys we were with earlier with Scully’s Mother and brother?” Mulder couldn’t help himself as he indicated the Gunmen, hoping that their ears in a different part of the hospital might lend and aid to the situation.

Janessa rolled her eyes as she helped Max into a scrub top, looking at Mulder for a moment while she adjusted her grip on Max’s midback. “I may have let the short one separate from the group to fiddle with a scanner he took off one of your other Agents.”

“Frohike’s fast fingers and sweet-talking strikes again,” Scully teased as she stepped behind the bathroom door to put on the scrubs, relieved to have pants on for a change the moment that the elastic met her waist. “If I know him well enough I’d say he’s trying to listen in and get anything to get back to us that could locate them—put a stop to this fucking nightmare.”

“You discussing Frohike’s fingers while you’re taking off your gown is making my ass itch, Scully,” Mulder peeked into the bathroom just as she was pulling the scrub top on. “Looks like I missed the show.”

“Really? At a time like this?” Scully raised her eyebrow at him and jabbed him in the ribs as she moved past him.

“No time like an inappropriate time to want to sneak a peek,” Mulder was certainly great at lifting the energy just enough to assist in getting Scully to maneuver safely from point A to B without thinking about a consequence, even for only a moment.

“What happens now?” Janessa secured the men’s fit scrub top on Max and turned around, a look of concern more than a little visible across her face. “Getting out of here isn’t exactly going to be a feat easy to accomplish.”
Max swung his legs off of the bed, dangling them down until his shoes touched the floor, creating a soft tap and scratch with the toes of his tread. “Being cut off from communication like this gives Miles too much of a head start to put more distance between him and us—and he’s made it inexhaustibly clear that he’s not going to let her live this time.”

Mulder peeked at the time on his watch and moved to the doorway, the wheels turning with every passing second. “He already has just shy of thirty minutes on us, which is already more than enough time to be a problem. I have a couple of ideas but I’m going to need your help all over again, Janessa, and we have to get a message back to all three of the Gunmen…not just the two in the waiting room.”

“I don’t really think there’s a choice in any of this so just tell me what I need to do.”

Just over an hour later

The wind was already howling through the gaps in the door just under twenty feet away between the mild rattling of the hinges as the right directionality caught the drift and pushed it forward, then backward. The snow was thick in spots where the janitorial staff hadn’t recently shoveled it, keeping the ventilation and heating systems clear of the risk of a freeze. It was undeniably cold and the open air was half stinging against Drea’s skin as she flinched just enough, squeezing her eyes shut as the falling snowflakes along her arms, shoulders, lap, head and legs had begun to cover her in a powder coat that drained her of the remaining color of her already pale skin. The light filtered through her lashes and pulsed through her brain, reminding her of the struggle that led to this place in little flashes of dizzying horror.

The gun to her chin, the open threats, and the shot that made its way through her soul like a chainsaw, ripping apart the last of her hope as she watched the muzzle flash before Max started to fall. The panic and the guilt replaced the central want to run as she had no other choice but watch Mulder catch Max after the bullet entered his body. Miles was quick with the grab and drag after the havoc became real, pulling Drea toward the emergency exit and the cement steps. She put up a considerable fight and paid dearly for it after the first set of stairs with a not-so-gentle slamming of her cheekbone against the railing to subdue the screaming. She had gotten a considerable handful of his skin in that exchange, ripping her index, middle, and ring fingernails across his jaw until he bled.

That was probably a mistake.

He promised to make it slow, painful, and more agonizing than anything she ever remembered about their childhood and the idea only encouraged a guttural response, bringing up what was left of the contents of her stomach as she vomited in the stairwell. It was at that moment that she knew that the boy who toyed with the idea of killing her had become a man intent on finishing the deed. Her mind wasn’t on the end of her own life but on the man that made what was left of her gilded, half shattered heart feel somewhat whole again—and on the idea that his pulse lay hanging in the balance because of her. She mumbled Max’s name and felt another cold sting of metal against her forehead, with driving force to ring her bell nearly entirely.
Her eyes fluttered shut.

Her weight shifted like lead over Miles’s shoulder as the ascent was in flashes of unrecognizable blurs and ringing in her ears followed by a dead drop onto a layer of snow and ice. Drea’s vision was doing a poor job of assisting her in identifying their general location as her head tilted to one side. She grappled with the dizziness and the intensifying of her lack of focus as it only became worse as it went in and out, her eyes naturally falling toward the snow in front of her. The haze momentarily faded as she could plainly see that the white had developed a pretty, circular pattern of red directly in front of her face that seemed to get darker with each passing second.

It was coming from her forehead.

The passage of time was unknown to her but the seasickness of jostling movement from being unpleasantly moved into a seated position, propped against a cold, metal surface, arms secured tightly behind her back was more than enough to renew the motion sickness. Her long, curly locks had been gone lifeless along the curve of her cheek, down the edge of her jaw, hanging along her shoulders with flecks of shimmering white crystals matted in sections where it had started to melt and reform into a shapeless yet solid form. She turned her head, the blistering pain moving through her face like a hot poker as she straightened her neck and adjusted her immediate field of vision in a forward direction, looking straight at the expanse of the space that she had been introduced to. She tried to vocalize but felt the resistance against her lips, tugging them and pushing them together in the same breath.

Duct tape.

“Little sister, little sister, little sister, are we learning anything yet or do you still think all of this is a game?” Miles was even more menacing than Drea had remembered him being as she could barely see him hovering in a corner.

Drea was beyond a point to listen to the question or even fathom the implication of it as she tugged at her wrists, the clanging of metal behind her head with every little flinch of her body. Miles was the worst kind of abuser and the saddest part of it all was that he knew exactly how to let it linger just enough to drive a person to the border of madness before pushing them over the ledge. She was teetering right at the edge as she angled forward, head tilted awkwardly onto her own shoulder, her wrists rubbed together behind her back, the metal of the cuffs digging into her skin. The pain may have been tolerable if not for the cold on top of it as she pulled her knees up, awkwardly situating her body into the smallest shape that she could get as Miles turned circles in front of her. This was where his unpredictability was something not to be toyed with as she glanced at the icy layer breaking away from her gooseflesh, becoming more open and unprotected to the elements as the wind encouraged the little bumps further outward, toward the sky. She held her breath as the air made her body even sorer than it already was, highlighting the spots where she had bumped up against immovable objects—in each spot where there was now obvious, fresh bruising beneath her clothes.

Miles spun around and knelt in front of her, encroaching on what was left of her bubble, his breath hot in her face, pressing the barrel of the gun to her chin all over again. “You’re thinking about him, aren’t you? Wondering how long it took him to bleed out? If he suffered for very long? If they’ll find you before you need a toe tag? If you can be in the morgue side by side? Fucking romantic.”

Drea clamped her eyes shut and turned her head, consciously evading his stare, his touch, and his aim with the gun he had already discharged once. She wanted him to be wrong but her thoughts were completely on Max and hopelessly wishing that she could be wherever he was,
holding onto him in spite of any condition he might’ve been in. The tears ached as they fell, stinging hot against her chilled flesh. Agony didn’t even put it into perspective as she refused to open her eyes, her nostrils flaring as the anxiety gathered in her chest, restricting her airflow even further. This was almost worse than any of the torture she had endured as she pictured the gun going off all over again.

Please, Max, don’t let that be the last moment. Please. Her heart was racing with such intensity that the ringing in her ears was almost drowning out the sound of his voice.

Miles grabbed a thick section of her snow laden hair and throttled her against the framework of the air conditioner he secured her to, rattling her just enough that her eyes opened and the tears were rolling down her face without restraint. “Having the stench of your little FBI boytoy on you has made you weak, Drea, and your pretty little tears are betraying those words you kept trying to use on the phone with me. It’s almost not worth the waste of my energy to even slice a blade into you—you’re only crying for him.”

He didn’t even take his time with the duct tape, ripping it off in one motion, leaving her breathless as the stinging took a moment to take effect. “Unbelievable. He was right—you really are jealous.”

“Not even a full twenty seconds without tape off of your mouth and you’re already testing my fucking patience, you little bitch,” Miles slid the gun back into his waistband and went in for his seemingly favorite method of intimidation via backhand, knocking her almost completely onto her side, bloodying her lip.

Drea inhaled a big breath and exhaled in the form of a low chuckle as she made eye contact with him again, the blood dribbling down her chin just a little while she adjusted her spinal rigidity, pulling herself up by the wrists. “You’re a psychotic, low life, cretin with a vendetta against his own flesh and blood…but not because of hatred. No, your sickness comes from the fact that you’ve wanted something that you will never have and it kills you.”

“I will slit your Goddamn throat, Drea, so be very careful with the next sentence that leaves your lips,” Miles already had his fingers around her neck but hadn’t applied pressure as the expression that met him was defiant, challenging him.

“I’m just getting started, Miles,” Drea was caught somewhere between living without regret and having nothing left to live for as she continued. “Deanna was so convinced that she was going to be the one to seduce your psychotic ass—if only she’d lived long enough to realize you were trying to blow your wad on the one that you’ve spent the most time torturing. You’re jealous of Max because I will never look at you the way I look at him. You will never be that kind of man.”

Miles squeezed her neck and felt her heart thudding behind his grip, anger brewing in his eyes. “I only wish I could’ve watched the life leave his body after I watched how much you seemed to enjoy that unrealistic thought of ‘happily ever after’ with the little FBI nerd. Just like every man in your life, Drea, they fuck you, then leave you—all of them except me.”

“You just torture, stalk, pine, and torture some more—then capture, degrade, and grossly mutilate a dozen women, most of whom were given no option but death, all the while pretending that you’re not harboring an incredibly sick, twisted, and deep seeded obsession for me. Transparency, Miles, you need to learn the definition of that word so badly because I see right through all of your bullshit,” Drea was gasping for air but her spunk hadn’t left her spirit as she struggled with the words, scooting her backside in a retreating motion, searching for space to move her legs.
“I should’ve killed you a long time ago just to save time and energy,” Miles was turning red as he watched the color already leaving her lips, her eyes fluttering with every frantic breath.

“You don’t have the balls,” Drea shoved her knees forward after getting her butt all the way against the air unit, knocking him backwards just enough to fully loosen his grip in the process. “You’re a broken record and I’ve heard all of this horse shit on repeat, sick son of a bitch.”

“I have had years to imagine the ways of killing you, especially after you tried to put me back in jail,” Miles gathered his wits, pacing in front of her like a wounded animal hoping to capture his prey, his voice booming as he made eye contact with her. “You were the reason this started and you’re going to be how it ends, you understand me?”

Drea was chuckling under her breath, the soreness in her chest setting in as she struggled to regain the ability to breathe again, her fingers gliding along the snow behind her, sliding into the powder layer. “I bet most of those ways of killing me involved a few sick fantasies since we all know it’s been on your mind since you developed this unhealthy fascination with me.”

He was almost twitching at the provocation, falling directly into her carefully set trap of phrases, knowing that he was losing more of his grip on control with every little word that left her lips. “Where was this abundance of confidence last night, little girl? Did you secretly let your little FBI boytoy into your panties after you found out where I hid that camera? You did, didn’t you?”

“Little boy behavior and little boy actions—your jealousy is rotting out what is left of your already demented, heavily reduced brain,” Drea was pushing every button and watching all of his personalities battle internally as his eyes were dilating and focusing rapidly, shoulders shaking. “You want to know so badly, don’t you? It’s eating at you. Desperation does funny things to you, doesn’t it, Miles?”

“Say it, just fucking say it, you gave it up, willingly, easily, fucked him, with cops right outside the door, like a cheap, two dollar hooker…and didn’t even give it a second thought, say it, admit it,” Miles was almost convinced that the refusal to outright deny or admit it was a mea culpa of sorts as his voice bordered on shouting. “I will get the answer out of you one way or another, little girl!”

It was in that moment that Drea could feel the bravery surging through her like she had sustained a significant blow to the head just enough to knock sense in to or out of her as she glared hard at her stunned brother. Miles gathered his wits and lunged at her only to get kicked again, this time directly in the testicles. He tumbled backwards and hit the back of his head on the edge of one of the larger heating units. The thud was considerable as he awkwardly landed, the aluminum façade of the heating unit reverberating from his weight banging against it. It was enough to piss him off, render him fairly off kilter, but not enough to knock him unconscious. The window of opportunity that the maneuver gave was the spark in which Drea found herself with hope running through her veins as she dug deep, imagining a scenario that Max had survived that gunshot and was looking for her.

“Somebody, help! Please! Fucking help me! I’m up here! Anyone! Please!” Drea didn’t recognize the sound of her own voice but she was calling out to anyone that could hear her, above the wind, in spite of any repercussions.

Miles had experienced his breaking point and Drea knew it was about to get ugly as his stance went fully unyielding in her direction, hand at his waistline. She couldn’t see it coming but she felt the heavy, obdurate hit to her jaw that left her reeling and on the border of cognizance as she struggled to look up. He had pistol whipped her with enough force to bust open her cheek from the inside as it sliced against her teeth. She was lucky that he didn’t break any of her bones as her
head naturally slumped against her shoulder, blood dripping down the side of her face simply from the lack of control. He slid the gun back into his waistband and searched for that control again as he stared down at her with a colder precision, maneuvering around her with a calculating aim.

“I warned you,” He sounded like their Father this time as he her shoulders went limp and fingers gave out, the last of her energy in the blurred stare up at him.

He had flipped the switch again from one aspect of himself to another, more clinical side, as he checked her restraints, double checking that each little section was secure while he listened to the shallow, labored breathing patterns from his sister. She was barely conscious as her eyes rolled back, lashes fluttering open and closed as he tilted her head back and watched the blood dribble down both sides of her mouth. Tape was no longer going to stick to her skin, he had determined, as he gathered a section of the bottom of her cardigan and ripped it away in a long strip. She stirred just enough as an instinctive mechanism to force more blood out of her own mouth but not to bring consciousness back as he wrapped the fabric around her mouth, tying it at the back of her head just enough to keep her from being able to vocalize.

Miles knelt beside her and laid a kiss on her forehead, whispering in her ear, knowing that she could definitely hear every word. “Don’t think you’ve gotten away from what is coming to you just yet, little girl...there’s someone that should be right here with you for this and she’s just as guilty as you are, in all of this, for the death of our little sister.”

She made a singular, protesting groan before succumbing to the dizzying, unconsciousness that had enveloped her like a warm blanket as he stared at her, as though he wanted to wait for the last moment of her giving in. The destination was a slight unknown as Miles stood, watching as the snow already started to collect against her posed body, her breaths cloudy as they left her nostrils. He was driven, to say the least, as he turned toward the door at the opposite end of the roof and gathered the keys that he had swiped from one of the lead maintenance men earlier, unlocking it carefully to re-enter the main stairwell to the building. There was energy going through him as he pulled the heavy, unavoidably squeaky door closed behind him while the warmth of the main hospital wafted against the hairs on the back of his neck. He moved like a viper, soundless through a thicket of trees as he descended the stairs toward the trauma level, discarding his wet and bloody jacket in the process, ambition on wrapping his dirty fingers around Scully’s neck again, picturing it vividly down to the sound of her inability to properly take in a breath.

He licked his lips at the prospect of such an endeavor as he wiggled his cold digits until they were no longer beet red from the circulation returning too quickly to them. He was already a step ahead in the mental process as he stood at the bottom of the stairs on the cement landing, contemplating his proximity to her, the readiness at which he was to end her, finally. He inhaled a deep breath and peered into the deserted hallway, delighting at the wonderful mess he had made of it all. He could hear the paranoid chatter from closed hospital rooms, the obviousness of the remaining frightened patients and hospital staff contemplating their demises was almost amusing as he went straight for a nearby resident closet, pulling a white lab coat from a hook without thinking twice.

He slipped the pristine fabric onto his arms as the low volume, slightly muffled walkie squelch in his waistband signaled that the FBI pursuit had been nothing more than fabricated, false leads, that both informants had lead nowhere. He had created the havoc. The leads came from his own, modified voice through the informant hotline. He made it all look so easy. Miles smirked at the aftermath of the figurative bomb he had set off knowing that everything would be going to hell without a second glance. It started with the gunshot. The ricochet of sound was more than enough to be a perfect fuse leading throughout the funnel until the blast had run its course through the
entire building, reverberating throughout. It wasn’t about actual physical damage but the vast mental havoc that had been inflicted by his sheer presence.


He reached into the hip pocket of the lab coat and pulled a stethoscope from the deep material, further driving the curve of his lips higher, enhancing that grin that had already been plastered on his face. He was proud of himself as he discarded it in the empty hallway and glanced into the first open door that he came across, hoping to happen upon them with an immediacy but only found the remnants of the bloodied-up floor where he had shot Max. Satisfaction swelled in his veins as his eyes caught a full glimpse of the sheer size of the blood pooling, the mess on the floor and up onto the bed where Scully had been recovering. He gazed at the locale, leaving his fingerprints carelessly all over the frame of the door as he eyeballed the room and soaked in all of the handprints, knee smudges, and smears along the outer edges of the center of the blood pool. It was a bold, almost cocky move and he knew it but didn’t seem to care as the magnetic pull to further the damage was nipping at his already over indulged, heavily disturbed psyche.

It was almost as though the need was driven by a lust to own it, to consume it. An endless, lunacy driven attraction to sink his teeth into the desolation.

“If that message over the scanners was falsified then we have been in the dark for over 80 minutes, Frohike,” Mulder’s voice was the first to crest above the near silence in the emptiness from another room, the volume just under normal conversation.

Frohike’s voice was a little quieter but the half heavy metallic pang from the tinkering of a rigged, scanning walkie stopped Miles in his tracks for a moment as he listened. “He may have those 80 minutes but it means that the bastard never left—think about it, Mulder.”

Both of their voices were heavily muffled and the entrance to the room had a massive blind spot to both those going into and out of the room, giving Miles little to no hint of who was standing nearest to the door. It was exhilarating to wonder who would be most caught by surprise as he inched his way forward, managing to move with a noiseless grace that was nearly phantomlike. Miles inhaled a short, yet cleansing breath to control desire to act quickly as he caught a glimpse of Mulder’s profile standing nearest to the door. He couldn’t rush this and ruin everything, not this time, not when the opportunity to finish them both was within his grasp.

“Or he got evacuated in this complete shit show of a lockdown,” Max’s voice was still fairly labored and renewed that devil grin on Miles’s face, encouraging a line of saliva on the tip of his tongue ready to slip against his lips.

Miles already knew the risks involved as he already had the gun cocked as he came up behind Mulder and pressed the barrel against the space below his ear while his free hand relieved him of his own weapon. “Or he just couldn’t wait to see the look on all of your faces when he decided to make his grand re-entrance since that’s what a destructive, maniacal genius who is always one fucking step ahead of all of you would do.”

Scully was the hardest affected as she stood nearly motionless, her heart sinking into her stomach as she instinctively gripped the edge of the window sill to maintain the shred of balance left in her. “…Mulder.”

“Don’t tell me you didn’t see this coming,” Miles barely had to exert an ounce of strength in the exchange as he slid Mulder’s gun into the lab coat and barely gave a sideways glance in Scully’s direction. “Miss me?”
“Where is she?” Max was dangerously close to elevating from the seated position as he stared forward, anger rising in his belly.

Miles had a wry little smile on the lips as he gave a similarly dirty glare in Max’s general direction, almost as though he was shocked at the fact he was alive. “I was almost certain that I had shot you directly in the center of your chest, right through that bleeding heart—you must be a cat, FBI boytoy.”

“You’re not that lucky to kill me with one shot, asshole,” Max gripped the sheets, the pain taking a backseat to the pure rage that he was feeling as Miles stood brazenly with a gun to Mulder’s head.

“Provocation of the guy with a gun in his hand is usually not a good idea and I’m not exactly shy about pulling the trigger,” Miles was toying with Max but decided to scrutinize Mulder, winking as he spoke. “Especially not when it concerns you, you’re long overdue to eat a bullet.”

“Don’t, just don’t, please,” Scully was already beyond the limit with Miles but watching the barrel push into Mulder’s skin was more than she could bear as she bit down on her lip. Mulder was watching her and could already see her mentally spinning in a circle, reeling as the consequences for every scenario played out to the fullest, knowing damn well he wouldn’t be ok with it. “Scully, it’s ok…stay right there.”

Miles was done negotiating as he staggered his grip on the gun and pushed open the bathroom door next to Mulder’s shoulder, tilting his head toward it while shoving Mulder awkwardly against the wall. “Short one first, then the wounded boytoy…no fucking funny stuff or I pull the God damn trigger. Go on, I don’t need an audience, except for Dana and she knows damn well why.”

Frohike was incensed but he knew that he was the one that Miles was referring to as “short” as he started to back into the bathroom, staring directly in Scully’s direction. Miles hadn’t been completely paying attention to the actions of Frohike as he was able to slide the modified walkie’s backing through the edge of his pocket, letting it hang with the volume off so that the squelch wouldn’t accidentally be heard. It was there as a last resort but he didn’t want to risk jumpy movements as he did exactly as instructed, moving into the bathroom. There was a level of reluctance in his actions but didn’t want to be the reason for Mulder’s demise as Miles made a point to jab the gun against his chin, reminding him. Max stood and gathered his strength, shakily maneuvering toward the bathroom, glancing at Scully before making eye contact with Mulder.

“Hey, boytoy,” Miles knew he was picking at him at that point and waited until he was standing in the bathroom doorway to speak. “Was the sex that amazing that you’re willing to die for my little sister or are you just that much of a lovesick little pup that you are desperate for a chance at her? Think she’s worth all of this trouble? Is she worth all of that pain?”

Scully swallowed hard and held her breath as she watched Max’s head turn, the contents of her stomach rolling in circles as Mulder’s life hung precariously in the balance over someone else’s actions, or rather their inaction. Max held it in and remained stoic, pushing that well placed rage to the back of his consciousness as he could see the genuine worry building on Mulder’s face through his peripheral and continued into the small bathroom space next to an equally enraged Frohike. Scully resisted the desire to cry as she witnessed his strength and highly controlled response to a catalyst, pushing herself toward her own unemotional state, almost to a sobering level.

It was a direct necessity to their situation as she looked directly into Mulder’s eyes,
knowing that he was losing faith in their position amongst the grandest of schemes.

“Shut the door and back away from it, no shouting for help or I will end both of them before I finish both of you,” Miles could see Scully’s stance out of the corner of his eye and was half shocked she hadn’t moved thus far.

The action was somewhere between unnerving and ritualistic as Max pushed the door shut, the clicking of the pin action locking into place echoing followed by the light tapping of footsteps retreating. Scully felt defeated and used, hollow and yet, impulsive, as she gathered her remaining inner calm as she looked at Mulder. He was sweating bullets but the moment he regained eye contact with her, his energy changed and his breathing patterns centered all over again. It was as though she was the elastic springing back, pulling him from the ledge at the last moment.

Miles hadn’t won.

“Neither of you can stop eye fucking each other for two fucking seconds, can you?” Miles aggressively pulled Mulder forward from the wall by the collar of his shirt, holding the gun to his chin.

“Son of a bitch,” Mulder grunted as the gun popped against his Adam’s apple a little hard in the jostling while Scully white knuckled the window sill. “I mean, wouldn’t you?”

“Mulder, don’t,” Scully usually appreciated Mulder’s sense of humor but not right now, not while witnessing a man that she knew was a loose cannon with a gun pressed to his chin.

“Put your hands behind your head and lace your fingers together,” Miles tapped the gun against the back of Mulder’s head and looked over at Scully, his confidence soaring. “I’ve always wanted to say that.”

Mulder locked his fingers together as he slid them to the spot behind his head, maintaining eye contact with Scully as she struggled for balance in the window. No one was coming for them and the bathroom, as instructed, had stayed secured in a closed position. Miles contemplated pistol whipping Mulder but he simply smirked, chuckling at how amused he had become with his seemingly limitless sadism, and kicked the back of Mulder’s knees, knocking the joint completely forward, bringing him to the floor. Mulder groaned as his knees crashed against the tile flooring and nearly came forward in a heap. Scully jumped and held her breath, the entire action startling her completely. Miles pushed the gun against Mulder’s nose, shoving his head back until he was staring almost at the ceiling. Scully already felt like she was on the border of losing Mulder as the range of the affliction that Miles was willing to put upon them was more than flagrant.

He didn’t want this for Scully but he had a feeling that this troublesome positioning meant more than either of them had bargained for as he felt his spine stiffen and his knees start to ache.

Miles wasn’t looking at Scully but his words were aimed at her as he pulled the second gun from the lab coat, turning it on her. “Dana, kneel in front of Mister Wonderful…make sure that you’re looking into those big eyes that you can’t seem to stop looking at. Don’t make me say it twice.”

Mulder was losing his composure over the sound of the second gun cocking but he couldn’t do anything about it but look at Scully as she carefully slid to her knees within a few feet of Mulder. She wanted to reach out, pull him into her arms, shelter him, and run, but the last thing
to do was that as she felt the shadow of the gun on her. Listening to his orders was a careful objective as she kept a strong gaze locked onto Mulder’s in spite of the tears welling up behind her eyelids, at her tear ducts. It wasn’t right as she was holding her own, elevated only enough that her toes and knees where the only part of her touching the floor, her entire body shaking with more than a little bit of panic rolling through her.

Mulder managed to slide one of his hands forward and down to meet hers, gripping her slender fingers just enough as they made eye contact, that unwavering, loving, steadfast gaze that no one else could possibly touch in this world. It was in that moment that both hand silent, rolling tears sliding down their visibly shaken faces as they were lost within each other’s eyes all over again. They’d go to the end’s of the earth for one another and no challenge was too great that they wouldn’t seek it out in order to protect the other.

Mulder squeezed her hand and the words came out without a second thought, like a bolt of lightning. “Scully, you know I love you, right?”

The words had consequences despite the passion that they carried as Miles disregarded all control and pushed the gun into Mulder’s mouth, followed immediately by the distinct sound of the safety unclicking ringing in Scully’s ears.

Chapter End Notes

This was a painful ending to write and I totally hope that I have not angered readers with it—there is a purpose to it. I’m already writing Chapter 29 so please, don’t hate me. There will be more and I’m sorry this took SO long to finish.

Extra thank you as usual to Monika Michelle Cross (you walked me through the ending of the hardest ending I’ve ever written and I thank you, from the bottom of my heart), Vicky Williams, Jun Mai, Megan Kelly, and Lee Hughes as always for the little tidbits that you are so gracious in giving a read to or indulging in…
Chapter Summary

A solution in the form of a mistake – a resolution through tears. An end in sight.

Post “Agua Mala” (Season 6 with mentions of “Rain King”, “Two Fathers”, and “One Son” Briefly and only for context purposes)

Chapter Notes

*Warning: Mild trigger warning for mild assault*

There are some really fantastic “Easter Egg” references for all of you die hard X Files fans. They are subtle but evident. No need to list them but they should get you going “ah-ha” throughout this chapter.

Disclaimer: Agent Scully, Agent Mulder, Agent Skinner, Agent Fowley, Margaret Scully, and the Lone Gunmen belong respectively to Chris Carter, FOX Productions, and TenThirteen Productions. All other characters are original and any likeness or named similarities to any real-life persons are purely coincidental (unless, well, you’ve been told, then you should’ve expected such things and shouldn’t get upset over anything that happens to them, respectively)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

If you’re ready, heart is open

I’ll be waiting

Come find me

If you’re searching for forever

I’ll be waiting

Come find me

-Sigma “Find Me”

Mulder squeezed her hand and the words came out without a second thought, like a bolt of lightning. “Scully, you know I love you, right?”

The heartbeat up in her throat was in slow motion and thudded as the words were less of a declaration and more of an ending as she witnessed the unraveling of her spirit in the form of the gun going right into Mulder’s mouth. She couldn’t breathe and the tears that had been silent no longer were as the sobbing was now audible, mixed with her gasps for air. There was a stinging of anger buried underneath of the hurt as she glanced up at Miles for only a split second before resuming her longing of the man who had resigned his fate in order to save her. She didn’t want to lose him to be saved.

Not like this, not like this, not like this, not like this.

Scully’s thoughts weren’t making sense and they were rash, at best, as she refused to let go of his hand and felt that internal jerk of every emotion colliding like a storm in the middle of a desert. She held her breath as the safety mechanism clicked free and the hammer pulled back, knowing that she didn’t have time to decide or back out. Mulder didn’t have time for second guesses, not even for a split second, and she didn’t want to run the risk of overthinking it for another moment.

“Nobody needs to die right now…you know what you came here for and it wasn’t to spend a bullet,” Scully’s bravery was beyond question but so was the knee-jerk reaction that she had put forth as she could feel every bone in her body shake as she slid forward and pulled the barrel free from Mulder’s lips, inadvertently aiming it at herself in the process.

Mulder inhaled a hard breath, his eyes nearly popping out of his head at her as the tears were still running down his cheeks. “Scully, what are you doing?”

Scully didn’t care that Miles was practically convulsing from her boldness as she wiped the tears from Mulder’s cheeks, guiding her forehead to his as the tremor moved through her. “Saving you, please just let me. I can’t lose you, not after finally knowing exactly where I stand.”

“Why do you have to contradict everything that I say and do?” Mulder knew the answer as he had both hands gripping her shoulders, desperately wishing she’d take it back and just let him take the bullet.

“Haven’t you already figured that out?” Scully caressed his cheek and looked into his eyes, wanting to go back to three days ago when she was in his arms instead of in this moment. “I love you…so much.”

“Such sappy bullshit, Dana, but what a noble little move to save your perfect Mister Wonderful,” Miles was less than interested in hearing them profess their love for each other as he grabbed a handful of Scully’s hair and pulled her to a near standing position, keeping the gun trained on Mulder. “Look at all of those tears you’re shedding for each other—and I’m just getting started.”

“Don’t hurt him, you know what you came here for and it wasn’t to shoot him.” Scully winced as Miles tugged her backwards, throwing her completely off balance in the process.

“God dammit, Scully, don’t let him take you again, you know what he’ll do to you this time. Don’t give him the chance, you know what it means,” Mulder was truly helpless as he was looking up at her, his hazel eyes shining like beacons as she felt herself consumed by that wrath that had her by the hair.

Scully closed her eyes, the little tears falling down her cheeks before regaining eye contact again, voice strained from the emotional buildup in her chest. “I’ll be waiting…that’s what it means…”
“The more I have to hear you two rattle on and on incessantly about your tragic little romance, the more my trigger finger is going to get tired of waiting on killing one, or both, of you.” Miles manhandled Scully, wrapping his left arm across her neck to secure her from even attempting to run, choking her in the process.

“I swear that if you harm one hair on her head, I will not hesitate to kill you.” Mulder growled as he kept his hands against the floor, knees aching as he glowered up at Miles as kept Scully trapped in front of him.

Miles wasn’t taking the threat from Mulder with more than a grain of salt as he smelled Scully’s hair so closely that his nose was sliding through her hair to the point that she squirmed with every little move he made. “There are so many things that I could do to her that you’d have no choice in the matter but say still, watch, or know it was happening…without putting yourself or her at risk all over again if you decided to play the hero.”

“Bastard,” Scully raked her nails across the same spot on Miles’s face that she had already gotten to once before, earning a palpable groan from him in the process.

Miles kept the gun trained perfectly on Mulder but adjusted his grip with a heavier push, surely choking Scully more readily as his arm covered the space below her chin significantly better. “Still putting up a fight, are we? Agent Mulder, you really need to put a collar on your woman and teach her some fucking manners when her actions are about to cost lives, including her own.”

“Be very glad she’s not armed, you sick son of a bitch.” Mulder wanted to lunge at him and rip out his throat with his bare hands if he needed to, dispatch him and reassure Scully all over again that everything would be whole again.

“You should be glad that I’m feeling generous enough to not let her smart mouth wear on me,” Miles gestured with the gun toward the wall near a closed linen closet, his voice oozing with sarcasm despite the instructional nature of his tone. “Move nice and slow over there, Agent Mulder, keep your hands where I can see them.”

Miles followed Mulder toward the closet and dragged Scully along the tile as she gasped for air with every push of his skin against her throat. The entire series of steps was nauseating as the movement was pushing against her in the most uncomfortable and awkward way possible. Her inability to move was raising the red flag with the rest of her senses as she could hear and feel a distinct, metal heaviness sliding around in his pocket, against her backside. She knew that he was strategically moving Mulder to a spot where the object concealed in his pocket would be necessary and she shuddered when she realized exactly what they were.

Handcuffs.

Mulder could hear her breathing patterns becoming anxiously staggered as he moved but he didn’t want to make the situation worse by checking on her, opting to move until he could no longer slide forward. Miles smirked at the subdued, almost submissive pose that Mulder had taken and decided to push the envelope, spinning Scully around, shoving her against the wall with a little bit of an intention. The sound that left her lips was harsh and more than captivated Mulder’s attention as he grappled with an inability to go rushing forward, headlong, to protect her again.

Not this time.

“Mother fucking son of a bitch,” Mulder met the gun at his forehead as Miles forced Scully’s thighs apart with his knee and braced against her, uncomfortably pinning her against the
Miles couldn’t have denied that the thought of how close he had come to taking everything from her before was more than enough to illicit ample amusement and plenty of excitement but now, he was forcing Mulder to witness a similar violation, knowing how much it was killing him. Knowing how much he’d want to end the suffering for the woman he loved without a second thought. He gathered his hand through her hair first, carefully watching Mulder in his peripheral, slipping his thumb along her cheek before sliding his hand down toward her clavicle. The scrub top was just loose enough that it did little to nothing to guard her from uninvited, grasping fingers. Mulder was balling up his fists to the point that his fingernails were digging into the palms of his hands, forced to watch.

“Stop,” Scully didn’t want to live through this nightmare all over again as his fingertips were lingering closer to the neckline of the scrubs than she wanted, dotting along the expanse of her skin, purposely pushing her to the brink of another outcry.

Miles smiled wickedly at her, leering at her lips as they trembled, and admired all of the marks on her face. He was proud of the damage he had already done to her as the swollen bottom lip poked out just a little further than normal, inviting considerably more than the normal level of attention from a man of his proclivities. Scully groaned and turned her face away from him, staring down at Mulder as if utilizing his face to forget where she was. It was physically painful for him to see her like this and having her within arm’s length, with no way of saving her. It was the worst kind of torture.

Miles could feel more than just his ego swelling as he withdrew his hand from her flesh, drawing the pair of handcuffs from the front pocket of his pants. He was quick in the action as he turned his hip into her, driving it against her while he slapped the steel around Mulder’s left wrist and dragged the other end around the door handle to the closet. His coordination was sound as the right-handed grip on the gun was still aimed soundly at Mulder’s head as he took a step back and looked at the visibly heated man now trapped with his hand on a closet door. The sound of the steel loops sliding around was making hope look so long gone as Scully realized that Mulder wasn’t going to be able to follow her while Miles pulled her back into his strong, inescapable grip with her back pressed against his chest.

The mistake had already been made and they were both undeniably trapped.

“This is going to be really loud,” Miles put his mouth right up against Scully’s ear as he turned her awkwardly toward the door.

“Oh my God,” Scully was almost certain that Miles was going to unload the gun on Mulder as he gathered his grip around her neck, her voice shrill and the pitch behind it high.

Miles knew how to keep her in suspense as her vision was obstructed just enough to not see exactly where his hand was directed while he aimed the gun, pulling the trigger back until the sound filled the room. It was deafening as the sparks flew, the metal on metal grating sound introducing the ringing in Scully’s ears. It was hard to hear anything above that horrendous, bordering on ear-bleeding sound that seemed to last forever. She froze as her tormentor gave no indication of what or whom he had shot as he simply pressed the still hot barrel to the back of her neck, burning her skin just enough to pull a muffled whimper from her lips as he dragged her backwards. She couldn’t hear the steel banging against the closet. There were no groans of pain. No gurgling of an imminent death.

It did nothing to relieve the tension of not being able to hear Mulder’s voice.
“Mulder!” Scully was already in the doorway, her hands grasping at anything to keep herself there for another moment. “Say something! Please!”

“I’ll find you,” Mulder’s voice broke through the ringing in her ears just enough to incite the adrenaline in her veins as Miles had to forcefully pull her into the hallway, dragging her toward the turn just out of sight.

The fight in her was considerable as Miles had to pocket the gun and utilize both hands to fully wrangle her as he turned the corner toward the end of the hallway. She was doing everything short of screaming as the pressure on her ribs was enough to make it just difficult enough to breathe, let alone start shouting for anyone nearby to hear her. Miles suspected that her little stunt in the hospital room had gained more than enough attention from anyone who recognized her voice, or anyone who had the means to do anything about it, to start ruining the timeline of his carefully laid plans. He pushed the door open to the stairwell and nearly had her stuck as her fingers wrapped around the push bar, her grip stronger than he’d imagined at this point.

“You’re only making this worse for yourself by struggling—the angrier I get, the uglier I’m going to be when we get there,” Miles finally yanked her fingers free and pulled her onto the stairs, starting the climb with a purpose.

Scully’s voice was low but the words had intent as she held onto the railing and pushed herself backwards, stopping him halfway between floors. “You’re not going to win this and when you realize you’re going to lose, I’m going to be there ready to put the cuffs on you myself, you sick fuck.”

Miles dug his fingers into her wrist and pulled her hand back, nearly tumbling against the wall, holding her to the point her toes barely touched the floor. “Who is going to stop me, exactly? Your Mister Wonderful is cuffed to a door and I just shot the door handle off of the bathroom where I sent the expendables—you underestimate how fast I can kill you.”

“You won’t make it quick. You said it yourself that you’re going to make me suffer,” Scully could see that they were nearing the landing toward the roof as her heels and toes kept hitting the steps, awkwardly rubbing the bottom of the hospital slippers. “You wouldn’t have made the exchange to drag me up here if you were simply going to make it an efficient death.”

“What in the fuck did I ever see in you, exactly?” Miles had his lips against her ear again, his tongue dangerously close to her skin, breath hot against her.

“Your sister,” Scully didn’t even hesitate with the words as she cringed over his passive aggressive methodology with her, gritting her teeth.

Miles was seething as he shoved her against the railing, hands against either side of her hips, pushing her forward until she was precariously angled forward, looking down at the landing three floors down. “I should put an end to your mouth right now and throw you from the railing. Watch you land on the cement. You might survive, you might not. Either way, solves hearing your bitchy little comments.”

“What? Did I ruin your fantasy? No shared DNA, Miles, just the look and you can’t seem to hide the obvious,” Scully swallowed her pride as she held onto the railing with her fingertips, breathing through the shock of the scrubs doing little to protect her from his bodily invasion.

He hadn’t exactly figured out that she was simply stalling him as he took one hell of an intrusion in the process as he drove himself forward, both to intimidate and clue her in on the
display of masculinity that she was encouraging. It was uninvited and unpleasant as the smell of sweat, motor oil, and the singed hairs on his skin hit her nostrils, mixing with the unyielding heat and rigidity of his form against her. There was no doubt in her mind that he was close to pushing the limitations again and attempt a violation with his hips pushed too close to her backside, but she blinked hard and pushed it to the back of her mind all over again. She just needed a little more time as she thought of only Mulder as Miles dragged his right hand across her throat and pulled her upright, angling her head back until he could almost look down into her eyes.

“You’re just trying to stall the inevitable so Agent Mulder can come find you before I finish what I started earlier, aren’t you?” Miles knew that the pose she was in was putting pressure on her wounds as she winced from the pain and fidgeted a little more. “You’re awfully confident that he’ll save you before the rest of your integrity is compromised.”

Scully still had a firm grasp on the railing, the ire growing within her as she could feel his eyes drifting over her further than her face. “I will fight you with every last breath in my body—and will get nothing from me.”

Miles had his nose sliding along her hair again, breathing in the subtlety of her sweat through her scalp, and allowed his eyes to momentarily roll into the back of his head. Scully wanted to writhe into the opposite direction and drive her knee into his groin again but there was no going back from this grip as the pressure on the bones in her neck had her struggling to stay flat footed. Miles purposely bucked against her and felt the full body rejective shudder from her along with a gasp that she refused to allow a vocalizing utterance from. It was, however, enough for him to gain a confident, cursory satisfaction from. Miles pulled her back from the railing and dragged her the final half of a floor to the door, pushing it open to the chill of the air outside.

Scully’s thin scrubs were doing little to keep her warm but she was more focused on her surroundings as she looked at the vast opening of the roof and noticed that the helipad was on the opposite side but had become barely visible. No one had bothered to check the roof and likely via the assistance of Miles. He shoved the door shut and locked it with the keys, gathering Scully in a painful embrace as he dragged her toward the line of air conditioners and heat units. It was insanely cold up there and the snow had accumulated pretty heavily in spots, creating a slick layer of snow and ice mix where the building’s natural warmth had been melting the underlayer just enough to create an icy bubble in spots.

“Oh my God, Drea,” Scully struggled with Miles, kicking her feet and pulling at his arms as she spotted her snow covered, discolored body still cuffed to an air unit as they walked around a corner. “Fuck, let go of me—I have nowhere to run and you may have killed her.”

Miles pulled one of the guns and held it to her temple until she stopped struggling. “If you so much as scream for help I will make sure that a bullet goes right through the back of your head and I will deliver your pretty little body to Agent Mulder.”

Scully nodded with apprehension building within her breast but was far more concerned with the physical condition of Drea as she could barely see the little puff of fog leaving her nostrils to indicate breaths. Miles pushed her forward, half dropping her into the snow in front of his ailing sister and stood with the gun perched in a careful aim in her direction. She ignored the obviousness of his intent to incite fear from her as she tilted Drea’s head upright while feeling for a pulse. Her skin was chilled to the touch and the pulse, while weak, was there, giving Scully hope as she wiped the snow from her arms and legs. Drea was largely unresponsive to Scully’s gentle approach as she reached a hand behind her head to untie the rudimentary gag, pulling it free of her mouth with a delicate hand. It was the pain that brought her out of the fog as she made eye contact with Scully, her breaths speeding forward with fevered bursts.
“Hey, hey…it’s ok…breathe slowly, Drea,” Scully didn’t want her going into shock as she saw the first warning signs of her blood flow returning to her extremities too quickly.

Drea was shaking, her eyes involuntarily watering as she struggled to focus on Scully, her lips moving until Scully leaned closer to hear her. “Cold…I’m cold. Help.”

“Is this today’s brand of torture, Miles? Roughing her up a little bit and freezing her to death?” Scully was furious as Drea’s head went limp against her, leaning against Scully’s dwindling warmth.

“He doesn’t care—this shit gives him a raging hard on, Scully. Why do you think you’re still here?” Drea’s voice was raspy and low against Scully’s shoulder as she struggled for air, the pressure on her arms considerable as her fingers were tingling behind her. “You’re a conduit for his sick little games and he doesn’t plan on leaving survivors.”

“Oh, look, the little princess does, in fact, live,” Miles wasn’t even looking at Drea as he eyed Scully’s physique again, admiring the bruises again as the skin on her back started to peek out, showing the bruises on her side as the scrub top hiked up. “Starting to look a little worse for the wear there, Dana.”

Scully ignored his smartass comment and adjusted her grip on Drea as she made eye contact with her. “Just hold on a little longer, he won’t be able to get away with this and they’re coming for us, I promise you.”

“Max? Did he make it?” Drea had little bits of snow clinging to her eye lashes as she lowered her voice, the emotion quaking as she felt the tears bitterly stinging her eyelids.

Scully nodded, wiping the little bits of snow away from her face. “He is more desperate to find you with every second than you are to find him…”

“He’s ok? Really?” Drea was overcome by knowing, in her heart, that the strength of holding onto that passion was what had kept her alive. “Why didn’t you run when you had the chance to? You could’ve saved yourself…”

“There was never a choice, Drea,” Scully felt that same rush of adrenaline flowing through her, knowing that Mulder was never going to give up on her.

“Look at the sweet display of hope over this sick ideal of love and sappiness. Makes me sick to my fucking stomach just imagining your God damn happy fucking ending,” Miles pulled Scully backwards away from Drea, aggressively shoving her to a small clearing of snow, leaving a drag trail from her feet and knees. “Do you know where happy endings exist? Fairy tails and Thai massage parlors not for slutty little sisters who destroy everything that they touch.”

“Didn’t Oscar Wilde teach you anything yet, Miles, you are your own devil and you’ve made your own hell—you did it all on your own,” Drea pushed her feet into the snow and pushed herself to a more rigid position, the blood on her face all but frozen to her skin as she glared in her brother’s direction. “I chose a long time ago not to let it all consume me. You are the destroyer and always have been.”

Miles stood over Scully and jabbed the barrel of the gun against her side, undoubtedly pushing the wounds open again as she let out a low, distinctive cry as she dug her fingers into the snow. “Dana has you to thank for every moment of pain inflicted on her from here on out, little girl, and the more you keep trying to be tough with your words, the more I’m going to hurt her.”
“You can blame her all you want but it won’t ever make it true,” Scully gritted her teeth and pressed her hand to her side, feeling the blood as it seeped through the bandages and the scrubs. “You’re a psychopath, Miles, and you couldn’t beat her. You won’t beat me.”

Drea had that wave of disgust pass over her as she knew, deep down, what the threat really meant as witnessing Scully being injured further meant so much more than simple torture. She recognized that maneuver of Miles subduing a victim by any means necessary to strip away the last of their available defenses so that nothing stood between him and getting what he wanted. She held her breath one last time as she realized that she had been in Scully’s shoes but had been able to thwart Miles every time he tried—and nearly became a statistic for familial sexual assault more times than she cared to admit. She gritted her teeth as it all came flooding back like a collapsing levy behind flood water, triggering every moment of why he burned her, why he suffocated her, and why he tried to kill her.

He failed to take away the rest of her innocence.

“Scully, fight him, please, fucking fight him!” Drea was desperately pulling at the cuffs behind her as she realized that Miles already had Scully’s hand’s pinned above her head, prodding his fingers against her wounds until she was crying out but barely able to move. “You bastard, get off of her!”

Scully’s voice was halfway between a scream and a cry as she pulled at her arms, kicking her legs wildly, inadvertently making it easier for the wounds to open up. “I can’t breathe…”

The bitter, stinging mark of reality for Scully was that provocation had been a utilization since the moment this began and she could feel everything pressing against her as Miles squeezed his thighs together around her already incredibly sore waistline. She could barely breathe and had no upper body strength left in her to speak of as she felt him sliding his entire pelvis down with the intention of forcing her knees apart. Ruination of Scully’s dignity served so many purposes in his eyes as he was tugging away at the last of Drea’s hope, breaking away the part of Scully that she had been guarding so well, and intruding on something that had been, essentially, given to another man. He had been so careful with everyone else, everyone but the ones that so closely resembled Drea—and acted just as stubbornly.

It was that insidiousness that burrowed beneath the skin, into the soul, into each part of the heart until nothing was left but a shell.

“I can see why Agent Mulder took his time with you. You’re worse than that one over there. Pretending like you’re not into it but it’s all you think about, isn’t it?” Miles was watching the color of Scully’s face bounce between red and purple as the struggle for air was colliding with the rush of blood from fighting him tooth and nail. “You’re not an Ice Queen. You’re worse… you’re just a tease.”

Scully’s refusal to speak was not from a lack of words but from the heat that had flooded her face as she felt the rage building under the weight of her assailant. He had said the wrong combination of words thinking they’d simply hurt her and instead, lit the match and set a fire to her already troubled soul as she glared up at him. He hadn’t completely noticed her change in demeanor as he had a fist fill of the heavily soiled scrub top and managed to rip it as he used it for leverage to push against her. She pushed back with her knees and nearly won the battle but weakened her own stance, giving him just enough room to push her left knee to one side. She wasn’t going to let him win as she held her own in spite of the incredible pain rushing through her left leg as he put all of his weight onto it, simply to keep it still. He had her nearly immobile and trapped, her arms pinned above her head, legs awkwardly angled where all of Scully’s vulnerability
was poorly concealed between a thin layer of scrubs and underwear.

It was like she was back in the basement all over again and this time, Miles had won the battle of strength and she wasn’t able to knee him in the groin.

The pain filled cry that left Scully’s lips sent a shockwave through Drea, surging her own remaining adrenaline as she pulled at the cuffs behind her with just enough force to find a weakened spot in the metalwork she was affixed to. She could feel the give in the metalwork as it warped from the excess pressure from leaning forward. She was determined to free herself from the duct work to get Scully away from Miles and her strength was something that she was driven to exert with all of her body. The snap was loud and sent a cold chill through her as the steel touched her back. Everything within her had nearly come undone, the shaking in her limbs had set in as she was having an incredibly difficult time gathering full bearings as she swung her legs forward and tilted until she felt the only remaining tug was between her wrists. Everything ached as she pulled herself up and found her center of gravity, awkwardly adjusting her knees until she felt halfway balanced. She gritted her teeth and almost tumbled forward as she swung her legs forward and tilted until she felt the only remaining tug was between her wrists. Everything ached as she pulled herself up and found her center of gravity, awkwardly adjusting her knees until she felt halfway balanced. She gritted her teeth and almost tumbled forward as she rushed at the still unfolding assault, fixated on stopping everything. In some ways, the pitch of Scully’s scream helped her go unnoticed until she was right there, ready to strike, and catch him completely unaware.

“Mother fucking son of a bitch! I said get off of her!” Drea drove her foot into his shoulders and kicked him in the chest when he attempted to reach for her.

“You’re going to regret that,” Miles was scrambling to gather himself as Drea’s shin met his nose and bloodied it on contact, the frustration rising. “You two bitches are on my last God damn nerve.”

“You must’ve forgotten that most women hold 65 percent of all of their strength in their lower body not their upper body which means that you made a huge mistake by not making damn sure that I couldn’t utilize my legs at some point,” Drea stood between Scully, staggering her stance despite an inability to use her arms as the steel dug into her wrists with every move she made. “Scully, you ok?”

“I will be,” Scully was understating the actuality of the wound as the blood was dark against her ribs, fanning out in a circular pattern from where Miles had been repeatedly pushing his fingers and his knee.

There was an equalizer in the action that both women had created and both had forgotten that Miles had both guns with him and both were easily accessible. He had abandoned the want to salvage a true torture scenario as he pulled Mulder’s gun from the lab coat and aimed it at Drea, giving no second thought as he pulled the trigger. His trigger finger, while fast, wasn’t nearly as solid as Scully’s reflexes as she knocked Drea’s ankle out from under her, bringing her backwards just fast enough to evade the first bullet. The sound of the ricochet was insanely loud as both women stared at each other from their horizontal positions for an excruciatingly long moment before Scully crawled toward Drea, who couldn’t get up on her own.

“Fuck!” Miles’s voice boomed above the echo of aluminum and metal from a bullet ricocheting off the air units behind Drea.

Scully hooked her arms around Drea’s elbows and pulled her backwards, getting her to a seated position so that she could get her feet back underneath of herself, taking cover between the wall and the air conditioners. “We have to move.”

“The bastard has the keys to the door,” Drea was almost squatted down, teetering just enough that she could easily stand fully if need be, listening carefully to Miles’s heavy boots in the
snow. “Where the hell are your shoes?”

“What shoes? Hospital issue rubber gripped soles—I can’t feel my toes,” Scully was dizzy as she held a hand to her side, carefully stuffing handfuls of snow into the second layer of her gauze wrap, intending on freezing out her blood flow.

“I guess that’s better than not being able to move your arms?” Drea was reminding Scully of Mulder with the hint of sarcasm in the most awkward of moments as she shrugged both shoulders, her hands undeniably sore as the cuffs dug into her wrists a little more.

“I can hear you both shaking like little leaves in the wind…just come out before you make it worse,” Miles was bluffing as his footsteps were clearly choosing the wrong set of machinery to stalk as his prey slowly slid backwards, avoiding the noise of snow crunching beneath their feet. “Come out, come out…”

Scully held up her index finger to her mouth as they both carefully maneuvered to the opposite end and slid around to one end of the row of duct work and aluminum machine covers, the hum of air units masking the noise their light steps made. Miles was several steps behind as he peered over the top of the furthest row of heaters, purposely banging on the duct work with the gun to make his presence known as if they needed a reminder. Scully pressed a hand to Drea’s mouth as she nearly vocalized from the sound, her eyes widening at the precariousness of their situation. A heating duct on the far side kicked on and caused Miles to unload another bullet into the duct work, sending both women into a half panic internally as they both moved toward the fire escape next to the helipad.

The landing to the less-than-inviting fire escape was within their grasp, with Scully guiding Drea forward, holding onto the cold, iron railing in the process. The third shot echoed and Drea hesitated before teetering in her shoes, her eye contact with Scully unavering. Her pupils dilated and Scully didn’t want to look down, didn’t want to see the reality that something had unraveled. The smell of singed clothes and skin wafted up and hit Scully’s nostrils before her eyes drifted to Drea’s side, where the three inch skid peeked open like an arrow pointing at her. Scully reached out to catch her, pulling her away from the ledge and pressed her hand along the wound.

“It grazed, it grazed, pull me over…I can make it,” Drea was pleading with her as they both could hear Miles coming up behind them.

Scully inhaled sharply and closed her eyes as the snow went silent, the lightest of clicking behind her head stopping all forward and backward movement. “I can’t, Drea.”

Miles leaned in close to Scully’s ear while snaking a hand through Drea’s hair, gun readied. “And you were both so close.”

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The loneliest moment in someone’s life is

When they are watching their whole world
The gunshot caught Mulder unaware but the echo that followed left him partially deaf for a few moments of hell as he struggled to hear anything above the reverberating squelch zipping from one ear to the other. It wasn’t enough that he was confined to the thick closet door handle by a set of police grade handcuffs by one wrist but now he couldn’t hear. He glanced from left to right and saw the twisted remains of the bathroom door handle on the floor along with a singed section of the trashcan that it had knocked over in the process. He could no longer hear Miles, he could no longer hear Scully, he could only see the rigid, slow moving form that was most certainly enveloping the woman he loved in an unabating grip.

“Mulder!” Scully’s voice severed the cloud of silence, sending a chill down his spine as he could hear the aching behind her tone, desperate for his return. “Say something! Please!”

“I’ll find you,” Mulder blanched, the moment of hearing impairment replaced by a dull ringing that sent a pulse through his skull and nearly sent him off balance.

Mulder only caught a glimpse of Scully’s face as Miles dragged her into the hallway and the dread set in as he felt solely responsible for letting her slip through his fingers all over again. He had to watch the most meaningful part of his life be literally pried from the door without an absolution of fixing it, of saving her quickly. Mulder yanked at the steel around his wrist and set off a chain reaction of rattling against the handle and door in unison, reddening his skin almost instantly as he put an incredible amount of pressure on his own flesh in the hope of freeing himself. He stopped as his fingers started to throb, the sensation of the circulation starting to cut off from his wrist overwhelming as his shoulders slumped in resignation.

“Son of a bitch!” Mulder shouted at his own hand and glanced at the ceiling, doing all that he could to keep from losing the last of his sanity. “Please, Scully, hold on.”

He wanted to call it karma but Scully was paying the price for his choices in life and he knew that it wasn’t how any of that worked. It certainly felt like a punishment, though, to finally face every second of a future with her and to be slapped with knowing that there was someone who would stop at nothing to keep him from her. Mulder couldn’t help it as the sacrifice that she just made was more than he wanted to think about and more than he wanted to bear—a choice she never should have had to make. Mulder heaved a heavy sigh as he kept seeing her say “I’ll be waiting” over and over, the entire sequence repeating like a film in review.

He couldn’t protect her and it was making everything ache.

“Mulder, are you injured?” Frohike’s voice was a little muffled but just loud enough to pull Mulder from his wallowing in self-pity after a gentle thud against the bathroom door.

Mulder exhaled slow and angled his body toward the door, shifting his weight to where he was considerably closer. “No, the mother fucker handcuffed me to the closet door…Scully sacrificed herself and I have no idea how the fuck to get out of the cuffs.”

“Well, the short-sighted son of a bitch didn’t notice that I still had the walkie,” Frohike’s revelation was welcomed, necessary, and sent a series of chills through Mulder’s back. “There’s
“Frohike, Morse code—Skinner knows Morse code and if it goes through, he’ll know it’s us,” Mulder’s eyes were glassy as he flashed that mental image of Scully with tears in her eyes, refusing to lose him to a bullet, realizing what she meant. “I can’t let what she just did for me be the last moment…I didn’t even think about it.”

“It’s because you’re both too stubborn to think about it,” Max’s voice was calm but laced with stress as he continued. “Wisdom is easier to give than to take.”

The bang from the bathroom was considerable and Frohike’s voice followed, a little louder than before as he knocked over an entire utility shelf of medical supplies. “Max, stop crowding me, this bathroom isn’t big enough for the both of us and I don’t need you sitting on my lap.”

“I’m not even touching you, Frohike, quit bitching and start sending the Morse code so we can get to Drea and Scully before Miles decides that his dangling the cheese in front of the mice is no longer fun,” Max didn’t have the strength or patience to put up with the claustrophobic version of Frohike as he tried to push himself a little further against the toilet seat.

Mulder closed his eyes and leaned his head against the closet, tapping it gently in frustration. “Max, do me a favor…”

“I don’t know that I have much of a choice in here, Mulder,” Max chuckled for a moment, the pain still high as the wound throbbed with every move he made. “What is it?”

Mulder squeezed his fingers into a fist and released as he felt numbness setting in, forcing a smile on his lips. “If I don’t get out of here before you and Frohike do, I need you to find her, don’t let her put her life at risk again for another fruitless, hallow cause of mine. I can’t seem to learn my lesson and every time I put her at risk.”

“She’s never seemed to need any help running into the storm with you, Mulder, and she definitely wouldn’t like knowing that you think that little of her that she couldn’t make the decision on her own.” Frohike had just finished a full phrase in Morse and purposely rammed his boot against the door, rattling it enough to make Mulder jump. “Snap out of it!”

Max sighed and elbowed Frohike, the words coming out like they had been waiting to be said, as if he had been holding them back. “What the less than eloquent is trying to say on top of all of that is that she has been right there with you for too long to be doubted now. Her strength is beyond reproach and you owe it to her to pull up your jock and be the first person to pull her from the abyss all over again. Why do you think I usually grab all of your evidence to work on? I admire you as a team and see how tough you both are.”

The Morse code between Max’s emotion and fact driven speech was almost poetic as Mulder felt like an ass for the umpteenth time. They both were right and he felt a little miserable even contemplating that he nearly resigned to a fate that didn’t involve lifting her into his arms and assuring her that he was going to make everything alright again. It was a considerable vice and yet, one of the reasons that always brought her back to him in the most endearing of ways. She was the missing puzzle piece and his actions always made her notice that he changed when she wasn’t present. Mulder could hear the return beeps that sounded too far off to be from Frohike’s walkie and his ears perked, listening intently to the noise in any way that he could.

“Frohike, am I hearing feedback or a return?” Mulder squinted, listening for the breaks in the noise, the similar structural Morse-like tap in the sound.
The pause was long, almost too long, as Frohike held his breath until he knew for certain how to answer the question. “It is the return and the message is from Skinner—he’s in the building and coming for us.”

“I’m going stir-crazy and I’ve barely been cuffed here for a few minutes,” Mulder tugged at the steel again, the noise was considerable as a squeak joined from the inner workings of the door hinge.

Max’s voice was shaky with a rasp underneath as he adjusted his seated position again. “I’ve been thinking about the possibility of finding a body up wherever he took them—despite how hard I want to believe that she’s strong enough to fight this. The selfish part of me hopes that she knows how much her giving up would affect me.”

“Neither of you are any good to either of them if you can’t dig deep and find some heart—buck up and stop acting like you have no ability to stand,” Frohike wasn’t always the philosophical but when he did, it was usually the more profound. “Here I am, risking my life, because it’s about saving more lives than my own. It’s important. It’s to save more than one life.”

“Somebody had two servings of Wheaties today,” Mulder leaned his head back and chuckled, smiling toward the ceiling. “You’re right, Frohike…I’m not going to pretend like this is easy, though. I had her safe just a few hours ago and now that’s all in jeopardy again.”

“Safe isn’t a place, it’s a state of mind that comes from battling every corner of the Earth and not knowing from one moment to the next if you’ll have that moment of peace for a day or a breath—it’s simply knowing that you had that person near,” Max had been contemplating words like that for a long time and hearing Mulder’s voice sway the way it had been made him know he needed to hear it. “You don’t even know how much others envy the kind of levity and care you both have developed, even if you don’t see it.”

“That last part sounds a little like through the Maximus lens because we shovel through constant ca-ca that would make most people’s head spin,” Mulder inadvertently turned his shoulders and wracked his wrist a little hard, sending a painful jolt down his entire arm into his back. “I suppose I should thank my lucky stars she’s willing to put on her hip waiters and elbow length rubbers for me, though.”

“You’re the squeamish one, though, Mulder, so why play?” Frohike was still sending a line of words through in Morse after receiving code in return, cackling at his own comment just a little.

“Jesus Christ, do you even know how to keep yourself out of trouble?” Skinner’s voice was stern and brought his more austere attitude into the already disquietude filled room, making the air even thicker, heavier.

Mulder’s head was on a swivel as he turned to see Skinner already making his way to the cuffs, digging into his pockets for a set of keys in hopes that they’d unlock the pair. “Oh, you know me, I like the rough stuff.”

“Full of jokes—be glad that Vietnam taught me a great deal about Morse code, even though Frohike laces his messages with profanity in the middle of other words,” Skinner shoved the key into the release and gave a dirty look to his insubordinate who was dangling with his wrist slightly elevated. “How did it happen and don’t glitter it up with your usual philosophical nonsense, I’m not in the mood…”

“Miles showed back up here and surprised us…gun to my head. He had it all planned out
to make her watch it and she sacrificed herself again, let him take her,” Mulder tried not to picture it all over it again, cursing the photographic memory with every breath he took. “He left me handcuffed here and shot the handle off of the door to make sure we couldn’t follow immediately.”

“When the handle popped off, the pin wouldn’t move and the handle in here is essentially useless,” Max was guiding himself to a near standing position, utilizing the sink to lean up against.

Skinner popped open the cuffs, thankful that the key worked on the pair that Miles had used on Mulder and shoved them into his pocket, assisting Mulder to his feet. “I don’t know where Miles would’ve taken her but I gather you all know that the car chase was a complete waste of time?”

“News travels fast but at least we found out now, before we went out into the street to find them,” Mulder nodded and turned toward the bathroom door. “Fellas, this is going to be an awkward moment for both of you but…get in the shower stall.”

“Oh, for the love of…Frohike, you don’t have to stand face-to-face with me!” Max’s exasperated groan was restoring a little balance to the situation as Mulder shook his head while he took a couple of steps back.

“You tell blondie and Byers about this and I’ll make sure that you get shot on the other side, gangly one,” Frohike’s boots were squeaky as he did a spin in the shower stall, half scolding Max in the process despite the fact that he was the reason for the outburst to begin with.

“It almost makes you want to leave them in there doesn’t it?” Skinner looked over at Mulder as they stood side-by-side, both cracking their necks at the same time.

“As humorous as that would be, I have a feeling that leaving them in there would be more trouble than what we’re about to go searching for,” Mulder raised his eyebrows and looked at the door. “One good kick, don’t hold back…”

“Do I ever?” Skinner smirked and tilted his head a little, knowing that this could potentially go wrong.

Mulder and Skinner didn’t hesitate, didn’t make a countdown or some ritualistic symbolism, as they both forward kicked the space below the door handle, forcing the door open with a single, hefty shift of their boots. The door flung open and hit the wall on the other side, punching a little dent into the drywall that echoed through the small space. Max was literally backed into the corner of the shower stall, his head just barely above the top of Frohike’s as he stood up straight. Skinner shook his head as it took a moment for the shock to wear off of Frohike’s face before he moved from standing in front of Max, stepping back into the space.

Skinner watched as Max followed Frohike out of the room, noticing the obvious weak stance as he moved. “Are you going to be ok enough to go anywhere?”

“Not that any of you have a choice but I’ll be fine—it just feels like I’ve got a rod spearing me through the wound,” Max was used to a certain level of agility and it was all but gone as he pushed against the spot on his upper chest, wishing he had ducked.

Mulder was already in the doorway to the hall, an expression crossing over him that could only be described as deeply reminiscent as he looked over at Max. “Be glad that you never have to remember a short, incredibly gifted with aim red head doing the shooting.”
Skinner was standing in the neutral ground between Max and Mulder, his left eyebrow perched a little higher than usual as he gave Mulder a somewhat incredulous look. “The comparison of that mercy wound and what just happened to Max is baseless and you know it—don’t make me kick your ass and explain to Scully why you’re limping like you just rode a horse.”

“I’d pay to see that,” Frohike wasn’t shy as they were all out in the hallway, headed toward the doors toward the garage exit.

Mulder started to open his mouth as they turned a corner but found the words cut off abruptly by the sound of gunshots from above, clear as day, against metal. They were close to the end of the hall and the noise had not returned to the recovery ward, giving the sound ample space to freely echo and travel to them, only increasing with each little second that passed. There was a fleeting moment of pure panic that passed over the group as a hush fell and they stopped moving entirely, looking upward as though they could see where it was coming from.

“I have a bad feeling about where that could have come from and why,” Mulder saw the stairwell sign, eyeing the possibilities of ascending the stairs even if it meant not knowing.

“Frohike, go find Langly and Byers, get a message out to the FBI posted outside, they need to post a 360 exterior perimeter, now and they need to do it fast,” Skinner was adamant as he made eye contact with Frohike.

Frohike nodded before taking a long look at Mulder, the visible concern plastered on his face. “Don’t do anything stupid and get her back safely—come back in one piece.”

Mulder knew that everything had begun to build up for all of them and they were close, they could feel it, as Frohike made his way back toward the hall where most of the visitors had been carefully hiding away. Mulder was less than hesitant as his hand pushed the release on the door to the stairwell, the cold air colliding with his skin immediately. His eyes lingered over the door handle, the smallish handprints just below where he had pushed the door open and knew that they were from Scully. He knew that she had held on and pushed her hands against the cold, metallic portion of the door to guarantee that he’d see her fingerprints.

He just hoped he wasn’t too late by the sound of that gunfire.

“We’re going the right way,” Mulder didn’t wait for an affirmative from either Max or Skinner as he started up the stairwell, wishing he could draw his gun as he reached for an empty holster out of instinct.

Agitated was putting the trek up the stairs mildly as Mulder could feel his heart beating into his throat with every step he took. The wind was howling through the gaps in the door, carrying the sound toward them in a spiral that only made each moment a little longer. Mulder held onto the railing and stared at the door handle as he grew nearer to the landing. His stomach was rolling as the uncertainty of what lay on the other side continued to be a mystery, eating away at a part of him as he wanted to hold on to the ideal that she was ok. Max was holding his own as he was gripping the railing with a certain level of wretchedness, the ache flooding through his entire chest and down through his back as he stopped just a few steps below to gather his breaths.

“Everyone stop moving…” Mulder stopped suddenly and aimed his hand backwards, hushing them while his head stayed focused on the door.

Mulder’s eyes widened as the sound of Drea’s muffled cries were hard to understand at first but he could distinctly hear the words ‘Scully, please wake up’ from her multiple times after a horrendously loud thud. Mulder didn’t even want to think about the possibilities as he rushed at the
door, putting all of his body weight against it, twisting the handle with every ounce of his energy but it refused to move. Skinner followed, assisting in ramming his shoulder into the door right alongside him, the silence only catapulted by the sound of Drea and Miles arguing on the other side of the door. Max was damn near helpless as he stood just a few steps below them and listened to the intermittent sounds of shouts mixed with screams, the condition of both Drea and Scully completely unknown to them.

“Mulder, move,” Skinner half shoved him out of the way and used the butt end of his revolver to slam down on the edge of the handle, knocking it free in the process.

The lack of a door handle made it easier for the lock to slide free on from their side as a final shove was able to swing open the door. Nothing was expected or promised as Mulder’s feet touched the snow and his eyes started to scan the entire roof for signs of life. The snow had made things difficult and the wind had picked up considerably since they had arrived in an ambulance but his certainty and drive left him pushing forward, angling his field of vision as he craned his neck in either direction. His stomach nearly dropped as they turned toward the side of roof where the fire escape’s railing peeked out above the stone lip of the roof.

Mulder wasn’t prepared to see Miles standing on the ledge—and even less to see a gun pressed to Drea’s forehead, her toes against the edge of the very same ledge.

“Jesus Christ,” Mulder didn’t want to move as his eyes kept searching the same space, looking for Scully.

Miles half angled around, nearly slipping with Drea in his arms, his rage squarely in his eyes as he made full contact visually with Mulder. “Resilient little mother fuckers—why won’t you just die?”

“What is Scully?” Mulder was calm despite the rabbit level heart rate he was currently experiencing as he couldn’t see the love of his life.

Drea inhaled, tears drying on her face as she still had the cuffs squarely behind her back. “Mulder, she’s against the air conditioning panels. She isn’t moving…I’ve been calling her name.”

“Drea, stay calm, please stay calm,” Max was watching where her feet was as he could clearly see that she was more than a little close to an edge, the blood from her graze oozing down her side in a streak soaking through her clothes almost to her knee.

The mere sound of Max’s voice brought Drea to a place of comfort despite the helplessness she was experiencing. She could see the reflection of her own plight in his eyes as she took a long, almost painful breath, her wrists oddly angled behind her back while Miles kept his arm firmly against her chin. Her height made the unbalanced nature of teetering on the ledge that much more evident as the snow and ice was unforgiving under both of their feet, giving Drea more than a little bit of an internal panic attack as she could see the sidewalk below, the crowd growing as they could see the scene above unfolding.

“Tou took one sister away from me already but you can’t have this one, she’s always been mine and she always will be,” Miles was mainly aiming the comment at Max even though it was Scully that had shot Deanna, the words burning through him like underbrush set ablaze.

“Miles, it’s over…let her go before you give us no other option but to take you out the hard way,” Skinner was half glad that Mulder wasn’t armed as he could see him inching forward, trying to find any visuals of Scully.
The sirens were growing nearer, joining the mass of flashing light that surrounded the building and it hid the sounds of snow crunching as a slowly regaining consciousness Scully was weakly moving below the standoff above her. She could hear the talking but none of the words were making full sense as the dull throbbing at the back of her head was encouraging the vomit up into her throat all over again. She had barely quelled the more intense concussion symptomology and had officially complicated matters by hitting her head once again. Clumsiness wasn’t exactly in her nature but an inability to have foresight for a landing was as she felt the spot for blood. There could not have been enough words to describe the level of hatred she felt as she could hear Miles talking but her conscience was aching as her vision came into focus and saw the fear in Drea’s eyes.

Scully couldn’t just make any reckless move to knock over the dominos—she had to pull the pieces free so very carefully in order to make one move to put an end to all of their terror.

“I’ll fucking let her go! It’ll be right over this ledge!” Miles shook Drea and coaxed an involuntary whimper from her as he essentially held her entire body sans her feet over the edge, face first. “See what your new friends are willing to do to you, little sister? They want you to land right down there, in a pretty little mess all over the pavement…”

Max, Mulder, and Skinner took the unaware moment from Miles to take more than a few steps forward, with Max nearest to them, his line of sight the least obstructed as his eyes were filling with tears as he watched Drea’s eyes clamp shut. She was truly horrified as Miles shook her repeatedly, the gun at her temple, his own legs shaky with the frustration of being pursued to an end that he couldn’t possibly win. Drea was trying not to lose what was left of her balance as she pushed down on her toes, desperately gripping the tread against the snow and stone. This wasn’t the way that she pictured her death but as she felt the wind swirling against her and the slipperiness underneath of her toes the reality of such a fate was beginning to seem that much closer. It was anticipatory and frightening, not entirely distant.

“Miles, why can’t you see that you’re the one that’s doing this and that this isn’t love, it is just your psychosis? Always has been, always will be,” Drea almost felt like she was sealing her fate as she said it out loud, her voice shaking as the tears were falling. “Love isn’t torture, it isn’t holding someone over a ledge threatening to let go of them.”

“It’s coming over when they need you, without asking why, it’s letting them put on a really cheesy movie, it’s letting them spill an entire container of luster dust on you, putting them on speaker phone knowing that they have a potentially not safe for speaker phone mouth.” Max could hear the weakness in her voice as he chose to be the opposing catalyst as he watched Miles pulling her back from the edge, at least holding onto her with a more solid grip.

Drea knew what he was doing and, as boneheaded as it was, she felt it to her core as she cried a little harder realizing he was only a few feet from her now. “Barging into a ladies restroom to hold her hair back from the toilet…”

“Yeah, that too…” Max had to keep her calm without losing his own patience for the cretin holding a gun to her head.

Miles was accustomed to being the center of focus and brought the hammer back, immediately capturing the attention of all faces on the roof other than the woman he was threatening. “See, Max, you don’t understand one thing about this little relationship you think you have with my sister—she uses, abuses, and discards men. She isn’t much for long term or interesting. You’re not her type. You’re not even an interesting lay in her eyes and that says a lot because she’s not exactly choosy…so why don’t you be the good boy that I know you are and just
pretend that this didn’t happen and let me finish what I should have finished years ago?”

The diatribe was enough for Scully to hear and she didn’t need to give him warning as she reached up, grabbing him by the ankle with both hands until his foot slipped pulling him backwards. She had a nearly perfect prediction of his angle of descent but could never have foreseen that he would decide to shove his other leg forward, adding just enough pressure to the back of Drea’s knees that her balance completely went lax. The moment was unreal and frightening as Drea was teetering at the edge, her arms unable to flail, shoes slipping as she tried with every ounce of her being to hold on with her legs, her muscles aching as she bit down on her lip. The world had almost stopped turning as the wind was pulling at her, being her nemesis, rather than her ally as the aim toward the ground below started to seem closer than imagined.

The reality of what lay below was so close that she didn’t even realize that complete melee had started to unfold behind her as she stared down at the sidewalk while the air stung at her face, evoking the panic.

Max had no time to think as he ran for her, his adrenaline being the only thing fueling him as he slid over the duct work, his backside squeaking along the half melting snow as he sunk his fingers into the mixture. He wasn’t aware of the wound for a moment as Drea’s figure was already leaning dangerously far forward, his fingertips finding every bit of his coordination, sliding around the extremely cold steel of the cuffs between her wrists, coiling until he could tighten his grip and prevent the full culmination of a fall. He heard the heavy popping of a bone coming out of its joint and couldn’t tell which of them it came from but it was loud, considerable, and was followed by a lift of excess momentum that had them both in considerable amount of pain. Drea cried out while Max groaned, steadied his legs before gathering the cuffs with both hands, pulling her backwards. He inhaled a long, cleansing breath as he finally could feel her skin between his fingers while he gathered her clumsily and tumbled into the snow, pulling her back to him simply so she knew he was there.

For a moment they stayed there in silence, shaking as a chill rocked through both of them, followed by the tears that couldn’t be contained while the world went silent.

The strange, utter silence that Drea and Max had drifted into was deeply and contrastingly opposed to the moment that Mulder could see the smallest of flashes of Scully’s hair pop up from behind the air conditioner. Her movement set off a chain reaction of shouts from Skinner instructing Mulder to immediately disarm Miles, a string of words that had settled into his soul like a punch to the gut. Mulder acted on impulse and without a weapon, knowing that at any moment, the gun in the very able hand of Miles could be discharged and someone could be hurt within a few mere seconds. He had to take the chance to prevent such an occurrence. He couldn’t let anyone else become a victim and he couldn’t allow Miles to rob Scully of one more, precious moment.

Mulder’s physicality was impressive and agile as he dove on top of Miles, wrapping his hands around the wrist that held the gun. Miles attempt to pull his arm up, the hammer still pulled back, but Mulder’s strength and leverage was considerable as he jammed his wrist backwards, trapping the trigger and hammer completely. Mulder repeatedly battered Miles’s hand against the snow until all of his fingers released the gun that was haphazardly posed between his index and middle fingers, unable to gather enough dexterity to pull the trigger as it nearly swung toward Mulder. The shudder of the gun hitting the snow and stone didn’t stop the interface as Miles got one, solid left hook across Mulder’s chin.

That was the chain reaction—the moment Mulder knew that Miles wasn’t going to stop.
“Come on, Mulder, I know you’re trying to look like a hero in front of Dana but you’re not measuring up when she’s had a bigger set of testicles than you since she volunteered to take your place,” Miles was purposely agitating Mulder, adding more than a little emphasis with another angled punch to the chin that nearly tossed him backwards.

“Mother fucking son of a bitch,” Mulder snapped, the foment was doing exactly as it intended as Mulder’s self-control went lurching over the ledge with reckless abandon as his fist met Miles’s left cheek.

The first thump was so heavy that Scully jumped from the sound of the impact, her eyes glazing over as she couldn’t believe what she was seeing. Mulder had only become this enraged a select few times in the years that she had known him—and each time, he came awfully close to killing his target. She could tell that this wasn’t an exception as Mulder’s hands had become directive weapons rather than extensions of his own body. The second blow was just as hard but certainly broke the cheekbone as he sent blood spatter flinging in an arc across the snow. Mulder could no longer hear anything other than the sound of pressure grunts, groans, and blood leaving Miles’s lips as he managed to spit up copious amounts from the freshly gashed lip on the interior. Mulder only saw red and the sound of Skinner calling for him to stop wasn’t registering—the words weren’t making sense. The rush of energy was cathartic and yet, chaotic, as he was replaying the moment that he found Scully battered and bruised over and over with every blow, knowing that Miles more than deserved to die for his actions. He wanted him to feel that same sort of pain he had inflicted on others, multiplied in spades.

“Mulder, stop! You’re killing him!” Scully’s voice was his reason, his resolve, and his control coming back to his body as he felt her wrist around his bicep, squeezing it gently. “Not like this.”

Miles was trying to mutter something under his breath, half choking on his own blood and a tooth or two, as Skinner slapped a pair of cuffs around his wrists while Mulder slid backwards, his knuckles throbbing and pattered in smears of blood. Skinner exhaled as he yanked Miles to his feet, securing his arm around his elbows to gather him up while he glanced back at Max and Drea, who had barely moved, before turning his field of vision toward Mulder and Scully, who were finally finding one another. He jerked Miles a couple of times as backup finally arrived—better late than never.

It felt over. It felt real.

Mulder wiggled his fingers as his knuckles throbbed, the smeared blood half dripping down from his skin, adrenaline finally wearing off as his eyes searched Scully’s for that one semblance of knowing that she was truly there. She had tears in her eyes and conveyed every bit of what she had been through without speaking as her hands, arms, shoulders, and jaw trembled with every little breath she took. She didn’t even hold the scrub top shut, the ripped section clinging to the blood at her side, the curve of her bra barely hiding behind what was left. Mulder slid forward on his knees and guided his arms around her, rubbing her back while she sobbed into his shirt. It was in that moment that all of her strength poured out into a singular motion as she held onto him, lacing her fingers together at his mid-back, pulling him close until there was no space left between them.

Mulder kissed the top of her head, breathing her in, craving that solace that only having her in his arms could offer. “Don’t you ever do that to me again, Scully…I couldn’t bear the thought of losing you all over again.”

“I would’ve died for you and I’m not sorry about saying that, Mulder,” Scully looked up
at him, tears still sliding down the expanse of her cheeks as the snow dotted along her eyelashes. “Being willing to make that sacrifice was worth it knowing that exactly how much I love you and that you love me back.”

“You’re beyond the point of being in trouble simply for being stuck with me, Scully, and now, you’ve stolen my line—two more demerits to add to your little ice fight,” Mulder teased her as he half choked on his own tears and kissed her forehead, letting his lips linger as he felt her fingers gripping his shirt a little higher up.

“Sounds like I’m in for quite the experience once I’m discharged,” Scully had the smallest of smiles peeking out as she looked up at him again. “We should probably go check on Drea and Max since neither of them have made a sound…”

The sigh of resignation and disinclination came from Mulder’s lips despite the nodding as he helped her to a standing position, guiding her in that direction. “I could’ve stayed like that just to hear you breathing—know that you’re real.”

“I’m real and I’m right here; there will be time for that, I promise,” Scully squeezed his arm as she held onto him and spotted Drea and Max, both spooned together with their eyes closed. “Max? Drea? Are you ok?”

Drea was the first to open her eyes, the smallest of groans leaving her lips as she tilted her head into the snow, her fingers gently moving behind her back. “I think I broke something.”

Max grunted as Drea’s hands awkwardly rubbed against his jeans, likely unable to feel anything that she was doing as his eyes opened with a swiftness. “I know; I felt it when I pulled you back—but, Drea, just for the sake of dignity, stop moving your hands.”

“I can’t feel anything,” Drea was craning her neck slightly uncomfortably, trying to peek behind her, her cheek brushing against Max’s still bandaged nose in the process.

Max groaned again and nearly caught a laugh from Scully as the situation was quite clear from her perspective. “Drea, I can, that’s the problem…your hands are groping me.”

Mulder’s eyes widened and he turned toward the opened door toward the stairwell where Skinner was returning with three Agents in tow to do a sweep of the rooftop. “Skinner, we need a handcuff key and a medic, or three!”

“Anyone else notice the subtle irony in the fact that I’m in a set of handcuffs?” Drea was heavily saturated with blood from the gunshot graze but her sense of humor hadn’t taken a hit as she rolled forward, onto her stomach, face angled toward Max, voice low enough that only he could hear her. “I guess all I can give you today is a verbal thank you…”

Max smirked and choked on his spit as he let both shoulders go lax against the snow, his eyes lingering on her as he let out a nervous laugh. “Oh, Jesus Christ…maybe we should just leave those on you, then? Safer that way.”

The banter was light and exactly what they needed as Drea’s gentle laugh encouraged more of the same along with a series of eye-rolls from everyone within earshot of their conversation. They all knew in that moment, in the smallest of windows, that recovery had begun and, while the shadows still loomed, they were all no longer alone in the fight. They now had a luster within one another to be the searchlight to shine on what was otherwise shrouded in complete darkness.
One more chapter – wrapping up the loose ends (the rescue happened, but there’s more) and an Epilogue to follow. You’ve all been amazing on this journey. Thank you for your ever-lasting patience with me. You don’t know what it means to me.

Sigma – Find Me (look up this song, you won’t regret it)
Quote by F. Scott Fitzgerald
“We are each our own devil, and we make this world our hell.” - Oscar Wilde

Extra thank you to Monika Michelle Cross (even though we have been mutually torturing each other with tidbits of fics) for assisting in reading a lot of this one to see if it flowed well – this one was an experiment. To Vicky, Jun, Megan, Lee, Laurice, and Penny for always being there for me when things get crazy. To the fantastic, amazing, lovely (and I mean, incredible-ooh-la-la) fam-bam on twitter that have been listening to me gripe incessantly…you are part of why I keep doing this. I put so much effort into these fics because of the amazing support from all of you (and because I like to torture myself).
Chapter Summary

(Roughly translates to “From the darkness into light”) – It’s finally time to go home, where recovery begins and the healing starts on Christmas Eve.

“You are my anchor when the waves come crashing down” - unknown

Post “Agua Mala” (Season 6 with mentions of “Rain King”, “Two Fathers”, and “One Son” Briefly and only for context purposes)

Chapter Notes

****THERE BE FLUFFINESS HERE****

Disclaimer: Agent Scully, Agent Mulder, and Assistant Director Skinner belong respectively to Chris Carter, FOX Productions, and TenThirteen Productions. All other characters are original and any likeness or named similarities to any real-life persons are purely coincidental (unless, well, you’ve been told, then you should’ve expected such things and shouldn’t get upset over anything that happens to them, respectively)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

She was powerful,

Not because she wasn’t scared

But because she went on so strongly,

Despite the fear.

Atticus

Thursday, December 24th, 4:45 PM

George Washington University Hospital

Recovery Ward

The nightmares had already started the moment that Scully was no longer running from the vile and the crazy, in the most heart pounding, terror inducing of ways that left her paralyzed in
her slumber until something gave. She had woke up to the sound of Mulder’s voice calming her
down above her own screams every night. Medical school prepares you, on a certain level, for
traumatic experiences in regards to the life of another but rarely for your own. She stood in the
mirror of the small bathroom and stared at the remnants of the marks on her face, the little, now
yellow bruising with little, red marks in the center were all that remained of her experiences. Her
lip had returned to a normal size aside from the slight discoloration from where it had split open
multiple times—and still needed to heal. These were her reminders, her markers for the physical
manifestations of what caused the terrors that robbed her of so much sleep.

Eight nights of nightmares. Eight nights of not knowing whether she was going to be
clawing at the sheets, screaming, or waking up crying in the hospital bed. Eight nights of
wondering how long it would take to recover from this. Eight different moments that Mulder could
have called it quits, opted to run for the hills, but he hadn’t. Eight different sunrises of hearing
“you got more sleep tonight than last night” from the steadfast man who didn’t seem to mind
getting hit in the face with a wrist, a pillow, or any other object that she managed to clutch onto in
the middle of the night.

She pulled the blue, cotton shirt down over her little, more modest bandages on her sides
that could now be cared for in the comfort of her own home if she was so inclined, smiling at the
feel of real clothing for the first time in over a week. The internal trepidations still plaguing her
were finally minuscule compared to the desire to smell anything but a sterile hospital and consume
anything other than Jell-O and ice chips. The only positive of being confined to a hospital bed is
that Mulder’s hand was never far from the tips of her own fingers—ready at a moment’s notice.

“Looks like I missed the show again,” Mulder’s voice came up from behind her and his
reflection was in the mirror with her own, a disappointed pout on his lips.

Scully ran her fingers through her hair, raised an eyebrow, and turned to thumb his
protruding bottom lip. “Maybe you shouldn’t wait until the last minute to start discharge
paperwork, Mulder…I even left the door open.”

Mulder snaked both arms around her waist, pulling her into a loving, needed embrace,
snuggling her close. “I noticed but you never know what kind of perverted freak might’ve come in
here and spied on you in your underwear.”

“Frohike already went home, I’m perfectly safe,” Scully elevated to her tiptoes and
kissed his bottom lip, sliding her hands around his neck. “So…are you taking me home, Mulder?”

Mulder had grown attached to being close to her nearly every moment of the day,
holding onto her and hearing the sound of her breathing as he nodded and gave her a little,
reassuring smirk. “We will after we go say hi to the resident invalid since he doesn’t get discharged
for a while.”

“We all got a little lucky, didn’t we?” Mulder stood in the doorway and pressed his lips
together, his jacket tossed over his shoulder, the younger version of him peeking out. “Still want to
go forward, even if the flashlight runs out of batteries?”

Scully tilted her head to the side, crossed her arms and came up to meet him, embracing
him all over again. “As long as you remember to pack the sleeping bag this time you’ve got me for

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him all over again. “As long as you remember to pack the sleeping bag this time you’ve got me for
the long haul…if you’ll have me?"

“Just one?” Mulder had the corner of his lip in his mouth as they were setting a leisurely pace down the hallway toward Max’s recovery room.

Scully had her arm around his back, lightly running her fingers across his skin under his shirt, reveling in his warmth. “Isn’t that the best way to get lucky?”

Mulder swallowed hard and coughed a little bit as they came around the corner, the door to Max’s room already opened. “You’re going to make me choke on my own tongue before we get a chance to leave, Scully.”

“There are so many things I could say to that,” Scully had a soft pink developing in her cheeks as her teeth found her bottom lip and chewed it just enough to be fully distracting, nearly causing Mulder to walk right into the door frame.

Mulder shot her a semi-serious look, widening his eyes and lowering his forehead almost all the way to hers. “You have spent entirely too much time with me and I don’t know how to feel about it…”

“I might have a few suggestions about that,” Scully grinned, looking up at him with those entirely too perfectly blue eyes, driving him just a little closer to madness.

“God dammit, Scully,” Mulder wrinkled his nose and turned back toward the interior of the room, doing his best to ignore the blooming erection that she had already started imposing, from simply being herself. “Hey Maximus, Shortstack…hope we didn’t wake you?”

Max was half propped in his bed, clad in a backless gown this time much to his own chagrin, the IV set up to the far side of the bed after the little procedure that he needed on his chest from the damage that the bullet did going through his collarbone. His little stunt saving Drea ripped apart the stitches in his back and nearly caused him more damage than intended, but the gauze packing saved his life. Drea was a lot more mobile but had a wraparound sling across her left shoulder, holding her arm fairly square against her body as she maneuvered around in her seat, the recovery scrubs hiding away the bandages across her side where the bullet grazed. They both looked stronger, healthier, significantly less incumbered by fear, than they had days ago despite the significant battery that both of them had experienced. They may not have intended on finding a version of forever but they had found exactly that by proxy from an experience such as theirs. It united them and, for the first time, neither one of them were particularly afraid of the prospects of allowing another to see the insecurity underneath.

“We’ve actually been sitting here watching Christmas Vacation and eating the contraband that Janessa snuck in here for us earlier,” Max slid another pillow behind his back and nodded toward the television that had the volume on low, mounted in a corner near the door.

Drea uncrossed her legs and stood, immediately gathering herself to a standing position, meeting Scully in the middle of the room to give her the best hug she could do with one arm. “Merry Christmas, Agent Scully…getting out of here, finally?”

“Merry Christmas, Drea,” Scully rubbed her back and took a half step back to look her in the eye. “How are you feeling?”

“I could be better but everything is healing well and I’m not by myself—we both get released in a few days,” Drea glanced back at Max and then looked over at Mulder before regaining eye contact with Scully. “I made a few calls to make sure that Jeanette and Victoria have
family here for Christmas along with a few other things just to make a difference. It was the least
that I could do, under the circumstance.”

“Don’t feel like you needed to out of guilt,” Mulder caught her attention, pressing a hand
to Scully’s back as he came into the center of the room and gave a reassuring nod in Max’s
direction.

Max laughed a little and cocked his head to the side just a little as he stared right into her
despite her not looking at him. “It isn’t guilt this time—she’s got more on her mind this time than
guilt.”

She turned her head just a little and gave that returned gaze that could’ve berthed a
thousand ships at port and shattered just as many hearts knowing exactly how purposeful that aim
was. “Just because you’ve managed to get me teetering in my heels once doesn’t mean I’m going
to stay like that Max Belle.”

“Oh, I like her,” Scully couldn’t help herself as Drea’s bold sensibility was both
refreshing and demanding in a room full of so much masculinity.

“Short, sarcastic, a little mean, and knows how to pick on Maximus…of course you like
her,” Mulder purposely leaned down, angling his chin against the curve of her shoulder, giving her
a firm squeeze from behind.

“I see you two are feeling better,” Max had a glass of water in his hands, angling a straw
into his mouth while he did his best not to have his eyes roll all the way back into his head over
their display. “Discharged in time for Christmas? Lucky.”

“If I don’t get her out of this hospital she’s going to start climbing the walls or taking
hostages,” Mulder had a sneaky grin still plastered on his face as he gave a quick hug to Drea and
shook Max’s unaffected hand, giving him a quick squeeze on that same shoulder.

“Mulder, I’m literally standing right here and you’re exaggerating,” Scully hugged Drea
again, rolling her eyes as she swatted Mulder on the hip. “You cannot blame a woman for wanting
her own clothes every day or a shower that doesn’t involve hearing a nurse calling out to see if you
need anything.”

Max snorted as Scully gave him a soft, careful hug. “I’d kill for my sweatpants right
about now so I know the feeling.”

“After we’re all discharged I’d like to have a late Christmas dinner—and I’d like to have
everyone there if they’d like to be,” Drea spoke up as Mulder and Scully started to turn toward the
door. “I know it’s been one of those Holiday seasons from hell but…it could help everyone turn
the page on all of this mess.”

“That’s a great idea and you just name the day and time, we’ll be there,” Mulder nodded,
his hand against Scully’s back. “Merry Christmas, both of you.”

“Merry Christmas,” Max and Drea weren’t quite synchronized but it was close enough as
Drea slid back down in the chair next to Max’s bed, lifting her sling onto the bed to take pressure
off of it for a bit.

Mulder and Scully took another glance together at Max and Drea as they were drawn
back into each other’s sphere, the developing gaze soft and calming. Max reached out, sliding his
fingers and thumb along her cheek before tucking her hair behind her ear, coaxing a smile that
alleviated the little surge of pain in his new stitches. Her eyes blinked slow and her right hand gathered his fingers within her palm, guiding them to her lips. They were the vision of hope as they were safe within each other’s affections without knowing the extent of the damage that had been done—or the cost of being attached to one another. None of it seemed to mean much anymore as they were more than content to watch a Christmas movie in a hospital room, knowing they weren’t alone.

“Are you ready to go home?” Mulder slid his hand underneath of her palm and laced his fingers with hers, holding onto her hand opposite the coat across his arm. “Feels good to be able to ask you that.”

Scully sighed softly, the feeling of uncertainty brewing in her chest of the word ‘home’ as she glanced up at him. “It feels good to know I’m not going alone.”

“Well, you’re not going back to your place…and I hope you weren’t thinking I was going to take you back there just yet,” Mulder squeezed her hand as they went out the sliding doors to the garage level where an SUV was parked that Skinner had prepped for their use. “I had your Mom pick up a big bag of clothes for you so you’ll have plenty at my place.”

“Aren’t you thoughtful?” Scully found herself a little nervous as Mulder reached for the passenger door handle for her, pulling it open in a lightly chivalrous gesture. “Mulder…you’re making me anxious.”

Mulder didn’t let her get fully slid into the seat before he found her mouth, nipping at her bottom lip until he could slip his tongue along her already tender flesh. Her breath was warm against her own as he held onto her jaw just enough to part her lips just a little more, enveloping her mouth with his own, breathing in a gasp as he felt her shudder just a little under his touch. Despite the shock of it, she held onto the front of his shirt, pulling him closer until she could tilt her head a little better, surrendering to him fully. It was a fast, well-orchestrated kiss that had her panting and adjusting her body position to the point that she had her knees positioned carefully against either side of his hips, her backside on the edge of the seat, as she opened her eyes and allowed their mouths to separate.

“Still anxious?” Mulder placed a light kiss on the tip of her nose and slid backwards, earning a yelp of frustration from Scully’s still open mouth.

Scully licked her lips and maintained eye contact with him as she moved back into the seat properly, her chest heaving just enough to be a full indication of just how much her blood pressure had spiked. “Oh…no…I’m good now.”

Mulder came around to the driver’s side, a look of satisfaction over taking her completely off kilter as he opened the door and got in. It was like they had been stuck in a limbo since Scully had been rescued and the fog hadn’t lifted, until now. Mulder was comfortable being behind the wheel with her petite, yet formidable figure just a few feet away, within a fingertip’s grasp away. He pulled out of the space and looked over at her, winking as she felt his eyes on her. She smirked and tilted her head in his direction, laying her head against her own shoulder for a moment as the relaxation passed over her like a wave, pulling a little yawn from her lips. They were finally well on the way home and the hint of sleepiness joined the rest of her emotional upheaval as she looked over at him, smile developing on the corners of her mouth.

She was glad that it was him behind the wheel as she felt her bones settling in, the comfort readying. Scully reached across the center console and squeezed his thigh as she looked out the window at the falling snow, the lack of traffic almost haunting as DC rarely looked like such a ghost town, even this close to Christmas. The thoughts were processing again on that word
‘home’ as she took in a long, cleansing breath and held it before exhaling. She was almost curious about the state of her own home but didn’t want to go there just yet.

Not even with Mulder at her side and that was saying a lot.

“You’re awfully quite over there,” Mulder noticed her lost in thought staring out the window, fogging up the glass as she was almost leaning all of the way against it.

Scully turned a little bit, looking over at him, putting forth her best effort at a smile under the circumstance and licked her bottom lip as she searched for the words. “I’ve just been thinking a little bit—probably more than I should be.”

“Scully, it’s ok to be lost in thought about everything that has happened. You’ve been through a small version of hell and, while it probably feels like it should be easy to just pick up the pieces and be ok again, that’s not always what it’s going to be,” Mulder took the Alexandria exit, heading in the general direction of his apartment building as the last of the sunlight dipped behind the horizon. “You do what feels right, tonight and every night going forward.”

Scully blushed at the well-placed use of psychology, the entire thought process more than a little real as she felt it rushing through her heart, making both hands shake. “Someone’s certainly putting their degree to good use today.”

Mulder laughed and brought her hand to his lips, kissing her knuckles as they came to a red light. “Are you trying to say that I’m smart, Agent Scully? I’ll be damned…”

Scully swatted at his ear as they stayed at the red light waiting for the green, a reluctant giggle sneaking out at his fantastically sarcastic retort. “Shut up, Mulder.”

Mulder’s apartment building wasn’t more than a few blocks away and his entire street was heavily decorated in Christmas decorations, with lights and holly hanging from every street lamp and tree in sight. It was beautiful and captured that complete girlish, more childlike side of Scully as she scanned both sides of the street with a little bit of wonderment. Mulder was used to this area at Christmas time but never really cared for it since he always spent most of it alone—but seeing her reaction was more than enough to pull him in as he pulled into a parking space and turned off the ignition. For a moment they stayed in the cabin of the SUV and watched the snow falling on the wind shield, even listened to the distant, but apparent sound of laughter and conversation of families nearby who were making their last minute destination changes before Christmas could come.

It was worth it just to see the light reflecting in her eyes.

He slid out of the driver’s side and went around to help her onto the sidewalk even though she didn’t need it at all, holding her at the waist for just a little longer, giving her a small kiss on the forehead as she tilted her head up to look into his eyes. He pushed the door closed with one hand, eyes on her, and smiled at the little flakes of snow as they landed on the tip of her nose. She had already developed a bright, pretty pink blush along her cheeks and along the bridge of her nose as the cold took over immediately. She was beautiful as the little cloud of foggy breath came out with every exhale, passing through her nostrils as she allowed her breaths to move more slowly, softer. Mulder rubbed her skin and closed his eyes for a moment before angling his arm around her, guiding her toward the entrance to his apartment building.

“You’re already chilly, Scully, lets get you inside,” Mulder rubbed her arm as he opened the door to the building and let her inside, the wafting warmth from inside more than welcoming them in.
Scully groaned as the heat made her get the chills for a moment as she stepped inside. “I should’ve zipped up the jacket before I got out of the car.”

They got to the elevator and waited for the doors to open, stepping into the modest space where Mulder could press the floor he wanted and wrap his own coat around Scully. She couldn’t help but let out a laugh as they stood face-to-face, her arms well hidden in his coat as he held it closed and pulled her toward him, wrapping his arms around her. It was comfortable and sweet, neither one caring who saw as the doors opened and the ding sounded. Mulder was almost disappointed at how quickly the elevator ascended but moved slowly into the hallway, the tapping of their shoes on the floor guiding their way toward his apartment.

Mulder swallowed hard as the “42” came into view, the smallest of hints of the jitters coming over him as he sunk his hand into his pocket to retrieve his keys. He smiled at her a little awkwardly and pulled the keys free before sliding the apartment key into the lock, turning it until he heard that telltale little click of the pin sliding out of the door. He looked over at the lovely creature wrapped in his coat and let out a laugh without even thinking as he saw the sleeves hanging down, her hands and fingers completely concealed in the actual length of his sleeves.

“What?” Scully looked at him, her eyebrow arching just a little bit as the break in the silence caught her a little off guard.

Mulder placed himself between her and the door, tilting her chin up just a little to give her the lightest of kisses. “I never really noticed just how big that coat is…until you’re in it.”

“You're stalling, Mulder,” Scully noticed that his hand was resting on the door handle but it wasn’t moving. “What are you hiding in there? I’ve already seen all of your porn so it couldn’t possibly be that.”

“Before we go in, I spent a little time during the nights you actually slept being sneaky and by being sneaky I mean that I reached out to your very wonderful, caring, always there Mother. I’d give anything to erase the nightmares and if any of this helps even a little bit, it’s worth it,” Mulder pushed the door open, the enveloping darkness coming at both of them like any other day.

“Now I’m confused, Mulder,” Scully walked inside and slid out of the coat, draping it over a chair as Mulder pushed the door shut. “It’s dark in here.”

Scully could barely finish the rest of her remark as Mulder reached for the light switch, flipping it on with ease, full detail of what he had been up to since Miles had been apprehended finally clear to her. Scully was completely taken aback by a well decorated Christmas tree on top of Mulder’s desk where the printer normally sat, with a little, shimmering, red tree skirt around the base to hide the water tray. Everything on his desk had been rearranged to accommodate a tree but it was well put together as her eyes followed the multi-colored lights around, to the pretty pattern through the window and around the room as well in downward swoops. It wasn’t something Mulder typically would do but the mood was clearly set for her. It was unexpected in the best ways as she slipped out of her shoes and stood in the door-frame that separated his living room from the dining and kitchen area, smiling at the sight.

“You certainly have been busy,” Scully was impressed that the tree even had little ornaments hanging from the branches and a star on top, clad in more glitter than she ever imagined Mulder allowing into his apartment.

Mulder smirked and took off his own shoes, sliding them next to Scully’s. “Well, like I said, I needed a lot of help since I never left the hospital—your Mom, brother, and the Gunmen were kind of essential to getting this off of the ground. Speaking of the Gunmen, don’t look too
closely at the ornaments, Scully, I don’t know what kind of ridiculousness Frohike might’ve put on there.”

“I don’t think it took much convincing to get my Mom to help you with this. I don’t think I’ve ever seen her face light up more than when it concerned knowing about us,” Scully took a few steps toward the couch and looked down at the floor, finally noticing that the coffee table had been pushed all the way toward the TV stand, thick sleeping bags unfurled across the rug. “Sleeping bags, really, Mulder?”

“You’re the one that made the ‘lucky’ utterance, I did no such claim,” Mulder tossed the pillows on the floor with the sleeping bags and yanked off his socks, immediately wiggling his toes while he peeked at his watch. “Should have a knock at the door in about five minutes…”

“Five minutes, you say?” Scully had stepped on the toes of her own socks, slipping her feet free as she smiled crookedly at Mulder, clasping her hands behind her back. “That’s not a lot of time, Mulder.”

Mulder couldn’t help but notice the very girlish yet devilish expression perched upon her lips as she arched up on her tiptoes, beckoning him to her without words or gestures, lips already parting in anticipation. They had already lost so much time as they collided, breaths hot within each other’s mouths as Mulder’s hands slid around her waist, gathering her fingers within his own, guiding them around his neck. He wanted her closer, she needed him closer. Their eyes drifted closed before their lips had even fully eclipsed but they didn’t need to see as they simply felt their way, by heart, and enveloped one another in the softest, yet more passion driven kisses, lips entwined, tongues gliding past perfectly parted teeth and lips, gathering heat, pushing closer to the brink. Soft breaths threaded and became audible panting with synchronicity as they stood in the middle of Mulder’s living room with the multi-colored glow of Christmas lights lighting one side of them in singularity.

“I don’t know that five minutes is going to be long enough,” Mulder’s mouth didn’t want to end the contact but he hovered there, eyes closed, hands in her hair.

Scully nibbled on his bottom lip, the groan audible as she refused to open her eyes along with him. “Are you sure?”

The question posed was loaded and entirely more sexually charged than Mulder was necessarily prepared for as Mulder brought Scully back to his mouth, gathering his hands at her backside, lifting her off of the ground. The surprised yelp was mostly muffled into Mulder’s mouth as she held on at the back of his neck, her fingernails lightly encouraging a line of goosebumps down his back as she made little circles from his scalp down. Mulder guided both of her thighs around his own as he used the archway surround for anything but what it was intended for, pushing her against it just enough to have a little leverage. Scully couldn’t help but moan into his mouth as she pulled him closer, wrapping her arms around him to his shoulder blades, gripping his musculature as his thighs were carefully angled against her. He would’ve liked to have said he planned on taking his time but the rush was beyond expectation as the pure electricity between them went up like an exploding transformer.

“Seriously, I can hear you two from out here—can you give it a rest for just a couple of minutes?” The knocks at the door were overlapped by the sound of Skinner’s voice, his lack of amusement shining through the closed door.

Both of them turned their heads in unison, eyes open, and did their best not to continue the equally heavy breathing that went along with the look of surprise on their faces. They hadn’t been caught red-handed but they felt as though they might as well have been as the teenage
smirking took over, embarrassment written on their faces. Mulder was expecting someone but he wasn’t expecting Skinner as he let Scully’s feet touch the floor. She ran a hand through her hair and pulled her shirt back down that had begun to ride up during their heated grope against the wall, grinning at the floor as Mulder adjusted his jeans, the discomfort obvious as he bared his teeth at thin air.

“How about a second!” Mulder called out and looked at her. “Your Mother was supposed to be dropping by—not Skinner.”

“As if my Mom showing up would be any better right now, Mulder,” Scully bit down on her bottom lip and pointed at Mulder’s pants. “You can’t answer the door like that.”

Mulder wasn’t shy but he didn’t need to make the situation worse as he slid both hands around Scully’s shoulders, moving her carefully in front of him. “Try not to get cute and go wiggling anything unnecessarily, Scully…or you’re just going to make it worse.”

Scully looked over her shoulder as she reached for the door handle, giving him a knowing smile. “Telling me not to only gives me that little inkling to do exactly the opposite, Mulder, you know how I am.”

Mulder reached over her and pulled the door open, revealing their less than patient boss standing outside the door with a non-descript, paper to-go bag in his right hand, his suit and tie gone, exchanged wisely for a comfortable pair of jeans, comfortable hoodie, and hiking boots. He looked comfortable despite the look on his face. He rolled his eyes over their obvious attempt to stage a careful cover up like a couple of overly handsy teenagers caught by an angry parent. Skinner may have possessed that Fatherly quality with the delinquents that stood before him but he was far from an actual parent as he maneuvered past them, setting the paper bag on the table.

“Scully, you have one, precocious Mother that is awfully hard to say ‘no’ to,” Skinner had his back to both of them as he pulled the contents of the bag out, assembling everything. “She needed to finish up a couple of last minute details for tomorrow’s dinner, apparently, and requested my assistance in getting you two something more substantial than what Mulder usually keeps in his cupboards since I’ve was explicitly told it involved expired milk and stale crackers.”

“Your Mom peeked in the fridge—I told her that wasn’t a good idea,” Mulder looked at Scully and shook his head, “She obviously didn’t listen.”

“She rarely does,” Scully walked over to the table and the fabulous Chinese food odor caught both of her nostrils almost immediately as he stood next to Skinner. “That smells, amazing. You really didn’t need to do that.”

“And risk the disappointed look from Maggie Scully? I don’t think so,” Skinner shook his head adamantly at Scully before looking over at Mulder. “After I had Bill ready for a set of cuffs, I think I owe her one, anyway.”

Scully scoped the actual amount of food and realized there was enough food for the two of them for at least 3 meals, immediately feeling a pang of guilt over the kind gesture from Skinner as she nudged him on the elbow. “Stay and eat some of this with us—if you’re not meant to be eating anywhere else tonight?”

“Seriously, did you think we were bordering on starving, because, holy Toledo that’s a lot of food,” Mulder was already pulling plates out of the cupboard, checking each one for dust just to be on the safe side.
Skinner’s eyebrows betrayed his words, wiggling so much behind his glasses that they were visible far above the rims. “You two need some…alone time…and besides, it’s not like your Mom didn’t just invite me to Christmas dinner tomorrow night.”

“I didn’t even know if we had plans,” Scully looked over at Mulder, who had gone abnormally quiet in front of the sink as he washed a couple of forks. “Mulder, what did you do?”

Mulder feigned innocence, setting the plates and forks down in front of Scully before taking both hands, holding them delicately between his as he gazed at her, hiding a little smile. “Your Mother wasn’t entirely one sided in helping to make my place, as well as yours, Christmas ready…I promised that tomorrow night we’d make an appearance at the Scully family dinner. Don’t be mad.”

Scully’s face contorted for a moment as she realized that Mulder would be subjected to Bill and Tara plus the horde of little people from the random wayward Scully babies that would show up as she slow blinked, sighing loudly. “You don’t even know what kind of torture you just signed us both up for—and our boss gets to witness all of it. Wait, what did you do to my apartment?”

“You didn’t tell her the best part?” Skinner shoved Mulder off balance and tossed the empty bag into the nearby trash bin.

Mulder wasn’t the best at being flashy but he could see the curiosity blooming behind those steel blue eyes as she locked gazes with him. “The cleaning crew took care of the normal things after the sweep but I wanted to make sure that, if you were ready to go back there, that you had what you have here. Everyone put up a tree, decorations, lights…made it as much like you’d want it, for when you see it.”

“It was a general consensus that you deserved some semblance of light and life after everything happened,” Skinner was already halfway to the door, the smile on his face more than genuine as he turned around. “Scully, don’t believe a word of it if he tries to convince you that it was anyone’s idea other than his own…he came up with all of this for you.”

“Merry Christmas, Skinman,” Mulder rolled his eyes as he stood next to the door, opening it for him. “See you tomorrow night?”

“I wouldn’t miss it.” Skinner raised his eyebrows in Scully’s direction as she came up beside Mulder and snaked an arm around his. “Merry Christmas, Scully.”

“Merry Christmas, Sir…see you tomorrow night, then,” Scully smiled and reveled in the warmth of the thoughtful man standing next to her as they said their goodbyes to Skinner, closing the door, locking it with little hesitation.

Mulder angled his arm up and around Scully, pulling her close as the palm of his hand glided down her back, settling at curve at her waistline. She was waiting for him, ready for his advances, as both of her arms curled around his waist, fingers splayed out as they aimed upward toward his shoulder blades. The ache was undeniable as Scully had her bottom lip firmly between her teeth while Mulder’s right hand found the still tender spots on her neck. She kept her eyes on his, the tug-of-war clear as she swallowed hard and gasped involuntarily, setting off an entirely new, not necessarily pleasant set of feelings as her nostrils flared.

This was exactly what she was afraid of.

“I’m sorry,” Scully retreated, her ass bumping into the back of a chair, choking a fit of
tears back as she felt the flood of emotions biting at the backs of her eyelids, beckoning the tears.

Mulder shook his head and opted not to move toward her, knowing that the tender spots had essentially become a trigger, his voice soft and understanding. “Scully, don’t apologize—we both knew the potential for a moment like this. Breathe. We don’t have to rush.”

Scully reached for his hand, squeezing his fingers as she pulled him close enough to put her head against his chest, breathing against him. “I knew this was going to be tough but I didn’t imagine that it would come out of nowhere and stop me from functioning…are you sure you want to go through with this? You can still gracefully bow out and I will understand completely, Mulder.”

Mulder tilted her head up with his index finger and kissed her forehead, letting his fingers linger along her jawline until he could tell that the tears had been temporarily tempered. “You can’t get rid of me that easily and you know it—now let’s get some of this food before it gets cold and put on a movie, camp out on the sleeping bags under the tree and just be us for a while.”

Scully nodded and gathered a plate for him, handing it to him carefully as she sucked back a deep, cleansing breath while she opened one of the Styrofoam containers and the little metal handled carriers full of rice. She was slightly deep in thought while they both were making up little plates of food for themselves before Mulder stepped away from the table to put the leftovers into the fridge. It had gotten too quiet as he looked over at her, watching her every move as a stray tendril of hair slipped down and across her field of vision. She was thinking about the attack again and he knew it, but all he saw was her beauty shining from underneath the despair, the darkness. She caught him gazing out of the corner of her eye as she tucked the hair behind her ear, the blush instantly forming across her cheeks and nose.

“Mulder,” Scully rolled her eyes as he winked at her from next to the fridge. “Scully, you can’t be upset over me staring at you,” Mulder opened the fridge again and did a subtle, very internal victory dance when he spied two bottles of beer that hadn’t gone bad sitting in the door. “I’ve been sneaking a peek at you since day one and no one else captured my attention quite like you. Getting uncomfortable over it now might be considered a moot point.”

Scully carried her plate into the living room and felt the sleeping bag under her toes as she got comfortable, sitting with her legs Indian style, plate in front of her. “Are you really trying to tell me that you’ve never really had strong, real interest in anyone other than me since the moment that you met me, Mulder? You really expect me to buy into that?”

Mulder was carefully balancing his plate and the two bottles in his hand as he came into the living room, taking a similar position on the sleeping bags next to her. “What’s not to believe, Scully, I haven’t had any real interest in anyone other than me since the moment that you met me, Mulder? You really expect me to buy into that?”

“Phoebe Green?” Scully took one of the bottles of beer from Mulder as he held it out to her, watching his face scrunch up in contemplation.

“An astral-misalignment-mistake and you damn well know it,” Mulder popped the top off of his own bottle and gave her a squinty look. “I distinctly remember someone reeking of
cigarette smoke that night.”

“We’re talking about you and the opposite sex, here, Mulder,” Scully snorted into the bottle as she brought it to her mouth. “Bambi.”

“Preferred men of the geriatric variety,” Mulder took a generous swig of his beer and glanced at the label of the beer. “Damn, when did I pick this shit out?”

“Mulder, he was older but I’m pretty sure you just generalized a little more than you needed to considering that Ivanov was also in a wheelchair…from what I remember,” Scully was giggling as she bit down on an eggroll and tried not to choke as she chewed. “Geriatric.”

Mulder snickered and took a bite of the orange chicken, pleasantly amused by Scully’s comment. “Well, at least if that relationship went somewhere, she can always be on top at all times. Daisy Duke Suffragette.”

“Mulder!” Scully swatted his arm and pulled herself together as she knew she was about to push his buttons for the final female burning on her brain, that never seemed to leave her subconscious completely. “Diana Fowley…”

Mulder put the bottle between the couch cushions behind them and set his plate next to Scully’s, propping his elbow against the edge of the couch as he made eye contact with her, his eyes burning a hole through her without actual intention of doing so. “She once had a much more significant spot in my life but something along the way changed that I never quite expected.”

Scully swallowed hard, taking her eyes off of him as she felt a pang of regret and guilt over even bringing Diana up to begin with. “Mulder, you don’t have to explain yourself, I shouldn’t have brought her up—"

“I met a person along the way who actually made me look into myself and see beyond simple belief in an ideal. Yeah, it’s nice to have a shared, common vision and not have to argue a point of view but for every agreement I had with Diana, there was an equal number of times I had to question every motivation,” Mulder’s index finger instinctively tilted Scully’s chin back to him until she had no other choice but to look him in the eye again. “There’s something profound in knowing that, while the journey hasn’t been one that this other person necessarily believed in—she believed in me enough to push me.”

“When do I get to meet this other woman, Mulder?” Scully sipped her beer, blinking slowly at him from behind the bottle.

Mulder rolled his eyes and took a drink of his beer, gathering her left hand in his, caressing her fingertips. “Want me to go find a mirror…that might be your only shot at such a feat?”

“How about you put a movie on and break up the awkward silence in this room?” Scully speared a piece of her orange chicken and nibbled on it as she spotted a small stack of videos underneath of Mulder’s television stand. “Preferably not from your hidden stash—It might be a touch too early for porn.”

Mulder slid his plate out of the way and angled himself forward, sneaking a little kiss on her cheek before rifling through the little stack of tapes. “Now if I had known you’d be ok with one of those after midnight I would’ve tried to find one with a Christmas theme, Scully…”

“You’re going to make me choke on this fried rice, Mulder, and then there will be
nothing left but a corpse under the tree that has expired via asphyxiation,” Scully had her fork in mid-air, a smile on her lips that only increased with every word.

Mulder groaned as he shoved a tape into the VCR, not quite looking at her, his ass slightly elevated as he operated the mechanics to start the movie up. “Have I mentioned that I really love it when you talk dirty, Scully?”

Scully wasn’t the least bit shy about glancing at Mulder’s ass as she took another bite of her rice and orange chicken mixture, contemplating how well his jeans fit. She smirked just a little and followed the curve of his back, the snowy haze from the television glow lighting up the side of his face as she leaned back for a moment, watching him intensely. He turned his head as the movie started, flashing a little smile at her as he settled back against the sleeping bags, immediately reaching for his plate. Mulder had a thing for black and white films and this was no exception as Miracle on 34th Street began to play. Mulder slid some of the pillows behind Scully’s back and let his fingers linger there for a moment longer, coaxing a trail of goosebumps up her back as she chewed on her egg roll a little more, her eyes settling on him with a glazed, fevered glint of warmth that conveyed more than a simple need.

“What’s that above your head under the tree, Scully?” Mulder’s eye caught the not so little, carefully wrapped boxes as he was returning the seductive, sexually charged gaze, completely ruining the moment.

“I just assumed you got a little more ambitious than I thought you were and got everything wrapped?” Scully put down her fork and handed Mulder her beer, reaching up for the boxes.

“No, Maggie found what you got me hidden in your closet and I told her where I had your gift stashed—those gifts are under your tree at your place,” Mulder held both bottles of beer as Scully set the three boxes onto the sleeping bags, eyebrows raised. “I have no idea who these are from.”

“She’s pretty good at discovering where I hide all of my gifts for people. You know, Mulder, I have an idea of what these gifts might be for and who from,” Scully tilted the first one at him marked ‘from Mom’ but it didn’t say to whom. “You can probably put those down…”

Mulder obliged her and assisted in opening the first box that was most definitely from Maggie Scully as it was least encumbered with extra tape and had a pretty bow affixed to the top. They ripped the paper down the side and found a non-descript box inside, taped moderately shut to avoid it coming open by accident. They glanced at each other, a hint of mystery and allure on their faces as Mulder popped the tape open and tilted the box open, revealing an ornate shadowbox with a bronzed anchor that had two blue ribbons delicately wrapped around it, reading you are my anchor when the waves come crashing down in gold lettering divided into two pieces to fit on the two pieces. Scully held her breath, a hand to her mouth as the gesture was both sweet and reminiscent of her father in the same thought.

“Some things never change,” Scully had tears in her eyes as she thumbed over the gift, knowing exactly what her Mother was trying to say. “I’d like this to be kept here, Mulder, if that’s ok?”

“Are you sure? This isn’t meant for you?” Mulder wanted to play dumb even though he knew that Maggie Scully’s knack for gift giving was buried in symbolism, and anchors with two ribbons was certainly a euphemism for so much more than a simple two line poem. “She really is such a Mom isn’t she with this cutesy—“
“She believes in us and I think has since before we did, Mulder…this gift is letting you and I know that she not only supports the word ‘us’ but loves that we found each other,” Scully slid the shadow box into his palms and captured his full attention, a couple of stray tears finally streaking down her cheeks as she looked up. “She’s telling us that we weather each other’s storm—and any other storm that has hit us.”

Mulder got up from the floor, carrying the shadow box with him to the shelf above the fish tank where he put it with a careful hand, displaying it proudly. “Always the wise, intuitive, ever watching Mom, that Maggie Scully…she’s not wrong, though.”

Scully looked up at him and kept her gaze fixed on his eyes as he knelt down in front of her, both knees spread apart on either side of her lap as she sat with the other two boxes in her hands. “Which one should we open next, Agent Mulder?”

Mulder encroached on her remaining personal space, peering at the haphazard labeling, realizing it was gifts from The Gunmen and Skinner, respectively, and the boxes were relatively the same size and weight. “Go with the one from the Skinman…leave the least safe for last in case we have to drop it and run.”

“Do you really think that the boys would be mean enough to give us something that might not be safe enough to open?” Scully already had the first part of the paper ripped open on the gift from Skinner while Mulder was busy teasing her as he moved her hair to the side to nibble on her earlobe.

Mulder almost didn’t care what was in the box as he could hear and feel the shudder from Scully as her breaths started to hasten, followed by the goosebumps that formed down the back of her neck. “Never trust nerds that never….ever…have sex or haven’t in years.”

Scully inhaled sharply as Mulder’s teeth grazed the space below her earlobe while she struggled with the paper, her eyes closing for a moment to gather her bearings, the nervous laugh following. “Is that advice from experience as victim of a sexless nerd or were you the sexless nerd, Mulder?”

Mulder was smirking as he watched her fingers coil around the wrapping paper, ripping it into smaller sections in the process, his lips entirely too close to her skin as he nibbled her jawline with a careful precision. “I don’t know, Scully, which one do you think I might have been once upon a time?”

“I don’t know, Mulder,” Scully squeaked as Mulder avoided her mouth entirely and went to the other earlobe to tease her further. “Fuck…well, you know, you are trying to seduce me while Maureen O’Hara is gracing her presence on the television…shit…oh…dammit…what’s in this box?”

Mulder was more than a little amused by how quickly he had her completely off kilter as he glanced at her face, noticing immediately that her eyes were fluttering open and closed, bottom lip trembling with every breath. “Hmmm…here I was thinking I was simply unwrapping my present underneath the Christmas tree…my bad, Scully.”

Scully was doing her best to be fully in control of all of her faculties as she held in a breath for a moment and bit down on her bottom lip while she stared down at the paper between her fingers. “At the rate that you’re operating, we won’t even get to open these gifts…come on, help me find out what Skinner gave us.”

Mulder reluctantly withdrew his lips from her neck and earlobe, groaning softly against
her skin as he set his chin against her shoulder and watched her pull back the remaining paper, uncovering the box. “Do you think that Skinner’s choice in gifts is a tear jerker or more up the alley of my typical nonsense?”

“You have about as much patience as a toddler hopped up on sugar…you’re going to get along great with all of the littles tomorrow,” Scully elbowed him in the ribs and opened the box, pulling back a thin line of tissue paper to reveal a note against the second layer. “Well, he’s making us work for it.”

Mulder read the poorly written note out loud, gathering the paper between his fingers. “Don’t try to blame all of this on your Mother, Scully…the presents were actually all Max’s idea even though he’s in the hospital. Each of these gifts are something that Drea helped come up with since there are no creative bones in my body. I hope you both will see where the thought process was going. Merry Christmas, Walter. PS: Do not shake it, it will break.”

“Oh, my God…Mulder,” Scully pulled the tissue paper back and revealed a roughly five by seven inch shadow box of an abstract night sky in glass etching.

It wasn’t something that either of them were exactly expecting as the little pieces shimmered, almost like little bits of sand in an hourglass being tipped over. Off to the right hand side, two of the small stars were brighter than the others, larger even, and caught both of their focus. Scully tilted it backwards and watched the stars spin in unison, glimmering with the light from the Christmas decorations. Mulder smiled and lifted the piece, looking at it along with her as though he never quite expected something from Skinner, but the man was known to surprise them before. Scully almost wasn’t sure how to feel, knowing the immense amount of thought that went into a gift like that—and even more to wonder when he had the time to find someone to construct it. It was uniquely beautiful and at the same time, so very them.

“If all of these gifts are related then the one from the boys is probably equally profound,” Mulder was grateful that this shadow box had a little stand attached to it as he put it next to the television in an empty space, the little stars spinning as he set it against a level surface.

Scully set the discarded paper onto the sleeping bag and stared at the heavily taped, wrapped box in her hand, the thoughts running through her conflicting heavily as all of her emotions were spinning, each one coming up from the background to meet her consciousness. “I knew that they all cared but please don’t tell me that they are doing this because of what happened…I couldn’t live with that.”

Mulder sat more comfortably and started opening the gift with her, his arm rubbing against hers as he tore at the paper. “I don’t know if it’s necessarily that—the moment that they knew something was wrong they were there because my world had fallen apart. I didn’t know what I would have done if I had truly lost you and they were there when I came close to losing the last semblance of hope. You make this mess of my life make sense and all of them know that I don’t work without you.”

“The missing piece,” Scully put the paper on top of the small pile and pulled the lid off of the top of the box, smiling immediately as she pulled the tissue paper back from the object inside. “They most certainly enlisted the help of Drea for this one—but knew exactly what to say to get this reference.”

Mulder wrinkled his eyebrows as he looked over her shoulder at the delicate, less restricted object with purple and pink petals, stretching outward in a beautiful pattern. It was a glass lotus blossom with a soft, ribbon clad pad attached to it, words written in Hindi across a small section in front. The level of creativity involved in such a gift was profound and so out of the realm
of typical thought for Frohike, Langly, and Byers but both of them knew that it came from a place of love since the lotus typically represented divine beauty and purity in Hindu culture—along with purity of the body, speech and mind amongst the chaos that birthed it.

“I think that having Drea come into our lives might’ve been a little touch of destiny?” Mulder carefully gathered the delicate object and placed it next to the gift from Skinner before sitting next to Scully, glancing at the television only to realize they had missed so much of the movie. “I have a better idea for a movie, Scully.”

Scully slid backward and grabbed both plates that had been nearly emptied, standing up as Mulder got all the way to the TV stand to change movies, setting them on the kitchen counter. “Mulder, you’ve been holding out on me…”

“I can’t pretend to be innocent if I’m unsure of what you’re taking about,” Mulder turned his head as she came around the corner, carrying a small bottle of Old Fitzgerald with her that had been opened already. “I don’t know if I can explain that away, Scully, because I know exactly how that got here and I’m pretty certain I already drank out of that bottle.”

Scully raised an eyebrow, carrying the bottle across the room, handing it to him as she knelt back down on the spot she had been in before, settling her back against the pillows. “I thought you didn’t drink?”

“This is Frohike’s bourbon of choice, Scully, and he poured everyone a glass the morning you went missing—to ease the suffering,” Mulder angled the bottle at her and relaxed his back against the pillows next to her. “I’m pretty sure that this was left as a reminder or a peace offering…knowing everything we went through that day.”

“So…maybe we should indulge in a glass?” Scully noticed the movie beginning was a distinctive Julie Andrews lesser known works in *Victor/Victoria*. “Unless you’re afraid it’ll get too handsy?”

Mulder wasn’t the kind of man to shy away from an obvious challenge as he got up from the sleeping bags, carrying the bottle with him to the kitchen where he pulled two small glasses from the cupboard. “Being afraid of getting handsy seems like something that shouldn’t be even mentioned in a question aimed at me, Scully.”

Scully had her legs curled into an Indian style position as Mulder came back in with two moderately filled glasses of the bourbon, his eyebrow elevated at her. “Holy shit, I didn’t mean pour drinks with an intent to get me tipsy, Mulder.”

Mulder handed her a glass and sat down next to her, allowing his glass to clink against hers before he raised it to his lips, glancing at the TV for only a moment as he took a sip of the regretfully stinging familiar liquid. “If you don’t finish it, you don’t finish it…tonight is comfort and sleeping bags in the middle of my living room, Scully. No pressure, no worrying, no thinking. Just you, me, the Christmas tree, and Julie Andrews.”

“In multiple layers of drag, no less,” Scully smiled from behind her glass, taking a light drink of the bourbon, the instant burn of the maple hitting her as she swallowed. “Wow, yep, that’s definitely a Frohike choice…dammit.”

Her face contorted for a long moment and invited the heat in its place as she turned red along her neck and cheeks, the alcohol doing exactly as it intended to do on someone who hadn’t drank anything quite this potent in a while. Mulder was watching as she refused to allow that sip to be the defining taste as she raised the glass to her lips and let the liquid in again, swallowing in
smaller, more controlled maneuvers. It was fascinating to Mulder as he continued to watch her as she ran her thumb along her bottom lip, wiping away the remnants of the amber liquid. It was a shift in her mannerisms that had him breathing just a little heavier as he took a risk and reached out, gathering her fingers within his own, pulling them down and away from her mouth.

She let out a little, audible gasp as their eyes locked, the air between them thick as Mulder’s thumbs glided along the top of her hand. He had been contemplating her for hours and the moment was palpable as Mulder angled his mouth, sucking her bottom lip into his mouth, encouraging her chin upward to a better angle as they both precariously gripped their bourbon in the air. She was tentative but there was a hunger buried within her as she brought her left knee up, sliding it over his until she was nearly straddling him. Mulder slid his free hand from around her fingers and gripped her thigh, pulling her closer as she slipped her right knee around him to fully control her own position, almost above him.

Mulder groaned into her mouth and reluctantly separated his mouth from hers, coaxing a fairly loud moan from her lips as they hovered mere inches apart. “As much as I would like to keep dangling this glass in my hand, we might want to decide whether or not these are going to go sit on the edge of the TV stand or be consumed before they end up all over the sleeping bags…”

“Oh, fuck, I didn’t finish it with the last drink I took?” Scully was heavily flushed and still panting as she glanced at her glass with at least a double shot still shifting around in the bottom, her mind on the hand gripping a little too high on her thigh. “Ummm…Jesus…”

“That’s not really an answer, Scully,” Mulder nipped at her jaw, tilting her head back as he utilized his bottom lip to drag down toward, toward her neck. “Tick-tock, tick-tock…I don’t know how long before you won’t be able to properly talk.”

“Ummmmm…I think we’re already to that point,” The intonation in her voice dipped just enough to send a reverberation through her throat as she brought her own glass up to her lips, knocking it back without giving it a second thought. “Christ, that’s either going to be a great decision or a shit one here shortly. Your turn.”

Mulder made eye contact with her as he carefully drank the remaining bourbon, pushing his thumb against her inner thigh just a little as he tilted the glass back, smirking at the perfect vocalization she made with her lip between her teeth. “Every little sound you make drives me crazy, Scully, do you know that? Every moan. Every sigh.”

Scully took the empty glass from him and slid it onto the space beside the VCR before wrapping her arms around his neck, tasting the remnants of the bourbon on his lips as she used her bottom lip to force his mouth open just enough to slide her tongue across his teeth. The trepidations of remembering the terror she had experienced was at the back of her mind but the patient, loving arms wrapped around her soothed away more than a little bit of the tenderness as she felt his fingers sliding beneath the fabric of her shirt. She was straightforward in her actions, her lips taking in his heat, tongue finding his, moans colliding with fevered breaths all the while gripping the back of his head, sliding her fingers through his hair in desperation.

She knew how close they had come to losing each other, she could feel it in her bones.

Scully didn’t want to stop kissing him but she pulled away, gazing into him while her lips trembled with every breath, chest heaving against his as she rubbed the back of his neck. “Help me remember ten days ago, Mulder, please…From the moment we kissed to the moment before I got up to shower. Nothing else matters but the way it felt to feel every second that we spent together.”
He could see the tears gathering near her tear ducts as his hands gathered the hem of her shirt, pulling it up and over her head, discarding it behind him. He couldn’t help but look at her, admiring the resilient strength that manifested beyond the remnants of bruises across the curves of her sides, hidden beneath the still bandaged ribs. She was beautiful despite the world of pain she had been in as he ran his knuckles along her arm, watching the gooseflesh gather down her arms and across her chest. Mulder guessed that Maggie hadn’t been entirely paying attention when she was gathering clothes for Scully as he glanced at the bra that did little to conceal the breasts that it supported, the semi-translucent black lace and satiny material barely opaque over the top of her nipples. This was the kind of underwear that Scully rarely wore and when she did, it was under a dress——so he could tell it hadn’t been long since the tag had been removed. He appreciated the oversight as his thumbs slipped the lace and satin straps down, his eyes just as hazy as hers, gaze caught in hers, tethered there invisibly.

“You are…so fucking beautiful,” Mulder’s voice dropped an octave as he ran the rougher edges of his fingers down her arms, visually drinking her in as the typically pale skin had developed a subtle blush with every little touch.

Scully was already half trembling from the overstimulation as she pulled at the bottom of Mulder’s shirt, her delicate fingers meeting his skin with a heated touch as she dragged her fingers in an upward motion, palm up. “You make me go weak in the knees and all of my thoughts start to jumble up—do you know how long you’ve done that to me, Mulder?”

Mulder found her mouth again, resisting the disrobing of his shirt until he absolutely had to lift his arms into the air, obliging her want for his skin to be exposed to her touch more fully, more openly. “Judging by the sound of your voice…a long time.”

“A very, very, very long time,” Scully tossed his shirt in the general direction of where hers was and bit down on her lip as she went for his belt, pulling it loose. “You have to admit the self-control that I’ve exhibited all this time has been impressive, Mulder.”

Mulder slid his hands to her thighs again and gripped her with a heavier, more authoritative hand, his fingertips lifting her ass just enough to pull her forward, breeching the remaining distance between them, mouths hovering. He was silent and agile with his movements as eclipsed the air left hovering, slipping his thumb across her bottom lip before replacing it with his own mouth, his tongue immediately slipping into the space his thumb had created. She practically melted into him as she gripped his shoulder with her left hand while the right blindly popped open the button on his jeans and slid the zipper down with ease. The friction was already half unbearable as her own wrist was pressing against her own, growing heat as she tugged at his pants and moaned into his mouth, her eyes completely shut.

He knew exactly what he was doing to send her to another level as he gripped her ass so hard that it put extra pressure on the wrist still pushed between them, pulling a raspy moan from her that vibrated through him. Mulder adjusted his grip a little more and guided her backwards, onto the pillows, freeing her hand from between them and separating the kiss in the process. Mulder watched her chest heave as she rested her head against the pile of pillows, looking up at him with swollen lips and tousled hair, craving more of him. He smiled softly and slid out of his jeans since she had done most of the work in undoing them, leaving the boxers on, then reached for her thighs, pulling her all the way toward him.

“Jesus…Fuck,” Scully gasped as her ass slid across the sleeping bags and pressed against Mulder’s knees.

Mulder leaned forward, propping himself up with only one of his arms, unbuttoning and
unzipping her jeans while invading that personal space again, stealing a kiss as he slid his fingertips between the denim and her shockingly matching panties. “Mmmm…that’s kind of what I was aiming for, Scully.”

Scully arched her back and sunk her fingers against his wrist, moaning into the air as the sensation sent her half reeling to the point that her eyes rolled back. “Mulder, please, don’t tease me…please.”

He kissed her again, fully enveloping her mouth as he pressed his fingers fully against the pure, wet heat that had been swirling through her since they had arrived. The ragged whimper that left her mouth and went into his nearly rattled his fillings loose as she held onto his wrist, this time encouraging him further, rotating her pelvis against his hand. The sensations were overwhelming and had her tugging the line between pain and pleasure as she felt every muscle cry out and tighten at the same time. She was closer than Mulder had realized as he slowly withdrew his hand and pulled his mouth away from hers only to admire the aching mess that she had become. She was trembling as he dragged his fingers up her middle and across the top of her bra, purposely avoiding her nipples despite how much they were begging to be touched. Each little move he made encouraged another soft moan to pop free from her mouth as she did everything she could to stay quiet.

“Why are you trying to be quiet? I don’t care if my neighbors hear you moaning, Scully,” Mulder allowed his index finger to graze the fabric of the bra just over the top of her nipple, purposely dragging a long groan from her in the process.

“It isn’t the moaning I’m trying to avoid—I just want to start moaning fuck me until you just do it without looking too needy,” Scully was almost talking too fast as she looked down at him, eyes full of a lust she hadn’t quite had before this.

Mulder smirked and let out a chuckle as he angled his body to where he could slide her pants down all the way off, nearly freeing her of the remainder of her clothes. “You’re awfully cute when you’re worked up, Scully.”

Scully moved her legs across the top of his thighs, propping herself up just enough to wrap her free arm around his shoulder to pull him down on top of her, licking the corner of his mouth. “Mulder, you keep teasing me and all I want to do is give all of myself to you…if you’re ready for me.”

Mulder had simply been waiting for the right words to come from her lips as he stroked the milky white flesh of her right thigh, bringing it a little higher against his hip as he slowly bucked against her pelvis. He was already half bursting from his boxers as the thin fabric of both of their underwear did little to guard against the exponentially growing heat between them. Mulder’s left hand snaked around to her back, gathering the clasp of Scully’s bra between his fingers while he nipped at her bottom lip, continuing to tease her lips as the panting became more intense and audible, the moans breathy. Scully loved the feel of his skin against hers as every little bit of friction ignited a path that lead straight to every sensitive spot, making her twitch uncontrollably as he touched her.

That’s when the moaning started as she tilted her head back and parted her lips, the sound escaping into the air as Mulder slipped the lace and satin free from her breasts, lowering his head between her soft, newly warmed skin. He kissed a trail between her breasts, sliding his slightly rough stubble along the top of her ribcage as her hands slid through his hair, wanting more of his touch, his lips, his everything. Mulder looked up at Scully as she settled back down, her bottom lip between her teeth as she tilted her head to see him better with sweat gathering on her
brow as that craving became almost agonizing. Mulder gathered his fingers along the elastic of Scully’s panties and scooted back just enough to push her knees together, sliding them down until her nakedness was exposed completely as if she had just bloomed before his eyes.

“Jesus Christ...you’re so, incredible,” Mulder watched her instinctively gather her fingers over her breasts and slightly bend her knees together, the only out of place part of her was the bandages that were clinging to her side in a 4 inch square, held in place with medical grade tape.

Mulder was almost on his knees as Scully came up to meet him and wrapped her arms around his neck, rubbing her thumbs along his jaw as she searched his eyes, passion written all over her face. “Make love to me, Mulder, right here, under the Christmas tree.”

They had been waiting a long time to feel that same, undeniable spark again as Mulder didn’t wait to pull off his boxers and find his way between her legs, guiding her back onto the sleeping bags with a little bit of pliancy. He was gentle despite the deep, physical longing between them, knowing that the wounds hadn’t healed, that her marks spoke of a greater, more extensive vein of pain that had to be explored, understood. Scully wanted to forget, for the moment, about the pain, about the secretive part of her that hadn’t even been tapped into as she wrapped her legs around Mulder and found a certain kind of profoundness as he filled her up. She gripped his shoulders, fully immersed in the intoxicating feeling of his body against her, of the bucking of his hips against her, of the rock hard cock sliding into the part of her that certainly belonged to him now. There was nothing left to regret as she dug her fingers into his back and moaned his name into his mouth as the first set of thrusts nearly sent her reeling.

Mulder slowed his movements to a near crawl, feeling every inch of her body tremble as she was inching close to spilling over. They both had that fully inebriated expression as their mouths separated, the electricity between them almost overwhelming as they gazed into each other, seeking that moment of refuge, needing to know that it wasn’t going to end. Scully was on the edge of becoming completely overwhelmed by every set of nerves in her body as she moaned through her teeth, pressing her fingers into Mulder’s shoulders as she slid her hands down toward the center of his back. She couldn’t get him close enough. Mulder bit down on his lip as he bucked his hips into her again, this time with a little more speed to encourage a considerably louder moan from her. Scully maintained eye contact with him as she grabbed his ass and bit down on her bottom lip, arching her back against him as he thrust into her again, pulling a long, loud groan from in the process. She was urging him on, to move faster, even if it meant burning that candle faster than intended, as she shook with the makings of a waiting, necessary orgasm.

“Are you that close?” Mulder didn’t realize how raspy his own voice would be as the words came out significantly breathier than anticipated.

Scully nodded eagerly and dragged her fingernails up his back until they were up at his shoulder blades, reveling in the closeness. “Mmmhmmm...so close...so very close.”

The casting light from the Christmas lights had begun to sway in time to each thrust, to the shock of both of them as they could see the light dancing on the ceiling, the walls, and in each other’s eyes. It was another realization of just how much their passion had become a speeding freight train that had been over stoked, steam billowing beyond the stacks as it approached the impending destination. Mulder felt every drop of sweat between them, every little jolt of a muscle, and every twitch of her already throbbing sex. She could no longer hold it back and neither could he as the words “I’m coming” were vocalized into the air with a raspy, long cry that set him off just as quickly, like a missile during the 4th of July. Each wave hit almost harder than the previous until the room felt as though it started to spin—their hearts beating in time and the stars aligning for
even the most fleeting of moments as they started to come down from the ethereal high.

Mulder reached for the blanket, his breathing patterns still staggered, pulling it over both of them as he rolled onto his side, gently maneuvering into a comfortable position with her leg across his hip, arm still around him. “I wasn’t aiming for that to be this quick, Scully but, damn… that was…holy shit.”

“Well, why don’t you scoot over to the TV, restart the movie and we can actually watch it for a while?” Scully gave him a loving kiss, sweat dripping down her forehead, her legs still trembling just a little bit as she came down from the remnants of her orgasm. “We have all the time in the world to make it up for the hell we’ve been through and I’m not worried about how quick or long it takes us to get there.”

“That we do, Scully…that we do.”

******

Chapter End Notes

Oh, my GOD! Thank you so much for following me on the journey – please remember, this is the end of THIS book and there will be an EPILOGUE to follow to introduce the sequel. Love you all. Thank you again.

Credit to:
Beginning quote by Atticus
Unknown Sailor’s quote - “You are my anchor when the waves come crashing down”

Extra thank you to Monika Michelle Cross (even though we have been mutually torturing each other with tidbits of fics) for constantly reading portions of this because I, quite literally, almost gave up twice. To Vicky, Jun, Megan, Lee, Laurice, Elaine, and Penny for always being there for me when things get crazy. To the fantastic, amazing, lovely (and I mean, incredible) fam-bam on twitter that have been listening to me gripe incessantly (you know who you are, you will get told via tweets) …you are part of why I keep doing this. I put so much effort into these fics because of the amazing support from all of you (and because I like to torture myself).
EPILOGUE

Chapter Summary

: Six months after the capture of Miles, after the horror that left 9 dead and multiple others with permanent scarring (mental and physical), on a stormy, summer night in July...a shadow emerges from the flickering within the dark.

Chapter Notes

“She wore a smile like a loaded gun.”
– Atticus

***This epilogue is VERY Mulder and Scully light but it’s that way for a reason, introducing a new character who is key to the sequel***

Disclaimer: Agent Mulder, Agent Scully, and Assistant Director Skinner belong respectively to Chris Carter, FOX Productions, and TenThirteen Productions. All other characters are original and any likeness or named similarities to any real-life persons are purely coincidental (unless, well, you’ve been told, then you should’ve expected such things and shouldn’t get upset over anything that happens to them, respectively)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Baby loves to dance in the dark

Cause when he’s lookin’ she falls apart

Baby loves to dance in the dark

-Lady Gaga

Six Months Later

Belle Haven, VA

July 7th 1999, 11:30 PM
Every window was open in the small, two stories high, cottage-style, Depression Era home shrouded by trees on either side, hidden in the darkness just off the beaten pathway. The furniture, much like the house, was vintage and in excellent condition, with random bursts of modern design from the current occupant that had inherited it and everything within the walls. The television was on and the news on with the volume low while Trevor Something’s “Your Sex is a Dream” gently echoed through the entire first floor via the 1980s stereo equipment in the corner of the converted sitting room, the bass beat humming against the floorboards. The lights were dimmed while the lightning outside reflected in a mirror, filling the room with a bright, escapable light for a brief moment along with a hum of electricity. She sat at the vanity in her thin, silken robe with the tie barely fastened, fully unaffected by the heat lightning and brewing thunder outside as she pulled the eyeliner across her left eyelid, emphasizing the cat eye to match the other.

“Mmmm…I’m in love with this song. Makes me want to do bad things even more than I already do,” She muttered with a certain lack of emotion, staring at the mirror with her hollow, a little dead behind the eyes expression as she put the eyeliner back into the case, letting her well-manicured, red tipped fingernails drag across the top of the lacquer.

She was inexplicably cool in her actions as she swung around to pick up the remote to the stereo while reaching for the cigarette resting on the edge of the ashtray, her long, statuesque leg extending and exposing the length of her thigh-high fishnets clipped in place by a garter belt. She took a quick puff and redirected the exhale out her nostrils as she licked her upper lip, aiming the remote toward the stereo, turning it up just enough to make the lyrics more audible and the bass beat more pronounced. She rolled her eyes and took another drag off the cigarette before stomping it out in the ashtray after barely getting a quarter of it burned down. She had a certain air of seduction about her as she leaned down, giving her red lips a quick pout-check before tucking the perfectly coifed blond, chin length, curly locks behind her ears, her ample cleavage nearly leaping out of what little she was wearing.

“Tonight, you will just have to do whether he likes it or not, huh?” The deep, emerald green of her eyes stood out behind the makeup as her eyelashes fanned up and out in an over-exaggerated fluff meant for the movies as she flashed a fake smile at herself, looking more like a Marilyn than any plain little Jane.

“The trial of the century continues with further testimony from survivors and the FBI as Miles Jonathan Miller, the seemingly unremarkable man turned psychopath that terrorized the Washington DC area just six short months ago…finally ending in a frightening standoff on the roof of the George Washington University Hospital…We continue our updates tonight inside the court room as Agents…”

The reporter’s voice perked her ears as she picked up her perfume, spritzing her chest as she opened the top of her robe, revealing an elaborate, fully boned in steel, black corset that extended all the way beyond her natural hips. She sprayed the space below her earlobe on both sides and then her wrists before sliding to her feet, the actuality of her height becoming a reality as she was almost awkwardly leggy and busty to boot, towering just over six feet tall with her modest four inch heels on. Her interest wasn’t in simply listening to the report as she muted the stereo and leaned against the chair facing the television, turning the volume up so she could hear every, scandalous detail of the murder trial of a serial killer. It was riveting from the moment that the word “psychopath” fell from the reporter’s mouth, giving her a reason to devote her attention.

“Oh, look, it’s the FBI…Forever Being Inept…” Her voice hung on every syllable like she was having a private discussion with a lover as she crossed her legs, biting down on her bottom lip. “Almost worse than Washington DC’s finest police officers.”
She stood and tossed the robe off as the recap of some of the hearing flashed across the screen with the names of witnesses, their family members, and other key witnesses. Her interest waned as the voice of the reporter was half monotone in her ears, hitting the dullest of notes as she adjusted her breasts in the top of the corset and pulled her laces a bit tighter, pushing her boobs further up and together in the process. She smiled as the pressure pushed against her ribs, making each little breath a little bit labored, delighting in the pain as she slid into her heels, gathering a set of pearls from the edge of the vanity. She was almost pensive as she stared at the television, watching the witnesses and investigative team alike photographed and filmed as if they were celebrities, her tongue curved at the corner of her mouth as she fastened the pearls around her delicate neck.

The blending of lines between public and private, light and dark, intrusive and invited—were games of intrigue that she enjoyed with a the utmost level, almost above anything else.

“What do we fucking have here?” Her voice dropped an octave as she caught sight of Mulder and Scully on the television, dressed in their work suits, absent of any previous attacks from their murderer on trial, looking every bit as close as one would expect in this situation. “My, my, my, aren’t you two just…fucking delicious? That short, little skirt…that body language…you must be fucking.”

 “…The only comment that the FBI has to offer on this case is that there is no shadow of a doubt that Miles committed these crimes without remorse and with full knowledge of all consequences if he were caught. An insanity plea is robbing survivors of justice...”

Mulder’s voice had her engrossed in an instant, her eyes watching the subtle body language as he was clearly in a protective pose next to the petite redhead that reporters had already attempted to mob once. She was beyond captivated by them but for all of the wrong reasons as she watched their hand gestures, the nervous body language, the absence of personal space, and the familiarity between them. She half expected to see some grand, public display of affection but these two people seemed to carefully conceal their affections, from just about every prying eye. Their eyes betrayed them, however. Her curiosity was thoroughly piqued as she straddled the armrest of the chair, pushing her palms into the space between her legs on the plush armrest, looking every bit the overstimulated sex kitten that she was aiming for. They were certainly close, she concluded, as she slid forward, kneeling carefully in front of the television as though in prayer.

“…The current line of questions cannot be addressed until after the jurors go into deliberation and after testimony is given. I am here today under the representation of support, witness, and FBI Agent that ran lead on the profile of this case. Direct further questions to Assistant Director Walter Skinner…”

“You certainly are pretty aren’t you, Agent Scully…and that Agent Mulder can’t seem to keep his eyes or hands off of you.” Her eyes narrowed, lips pressed together as she stared at them, eyes refusing to blink for fear of missing a moment of their moment captured via intruding, prying reporting camera lenses.

She continued watching them, the pure excitement that they were arousing within her building while she bit down on her bottom lip barely quelling the suggestive little yearning that imagining the lengths at which the touches and caresses had gone when the cameras were no longer watching. Her eyes followed the figures as the camera panned out where Max and Drea had joined Mulder and Scully on camera, their body language equally as close and just as tantalizing to her eye as she held in a breath, studying them with a meticulous level of attention. She smirked and rolled her fingers across the top of her chest, fingertips lingering across the warmest portion of her cleavage. Max and Drea were less discreet with their affection but kept it strictly PG with an arm
around one another, an extended look, and a kiss to the forehead from Max to the significantly shorter Drea.

The laugh that left her mouth was loud as she reached for her pearl trimmed cigarette case, pulling one free from the inside, waving it around as she stood up, to retrieve a lighter. “What has happened to the FBI? Has it become the place to go when you need a certain kind of itch to scratch? All of these attractive little creatures unnecessarily touching each other whenever they get an opportunity to do so—not even realizing that we can all see their public displays of fucking bad little behavior. Scandalous.”

She lit the cigarette between her fingers and sucked the nicotine and tobacco through the filter, staining the spot with her lipstick as she pressed down just a little too hard. The smoke filled her lungs, swirled around within the expanse of her chest and gave her that rush before she forced the air out through her nostrils in a slow billowing plume. She was still heavily enamored with the gruesome, barely censored details of the criminal proceedings as the late night special report was dedicated to the prosecution of Miles, sending her further into the rabbit hole of thought as she took another drag of her cigarette. Her musings weren’t focused entirely on the FBI as she looked at the vacant, shell shocked expression on Miles’s face in his mugshot that was now plastered on the screen as she snuffed out the cigarette and leaned against the back of the chair, elbows against the soft, velvety cushion.

“You were just too sloppy and that’s why you got caught—you wanted everyone to know it was you, secretly, deep down. You didn’t know how to be discreet and all of that attention was your Achilles heel,” Her voice was different all over again, clinical almost, as she checked each fingernail with a careful eye, glancing at his face on the TV between each nail. “The second mistake was not realizing that they are beneath you and none of them love you nor would they ever love you. I could’ve done so much better with so much less and the result would’ve been pure poetry without ever needing to know my name.”

She raised an eyebrow and rubbed her lips together, re-distributing her lipstick in an even gloss before standing up straight, the corset barely shifting as she made a more rigid stance with her arms crossed in front of her. She was almost incensed at the carelessness that a perfect stranger had exhibited in his pathology and systematic torture of thirteen different women, nine of which did not survive their injuries. It was bordering on incredulous to her as she clenched her jaw and flipped the switch on the television, the sound of thunder apparent as the window panes shook while she stood in the dim space of the 1920s guest space. The surge of energy going through her was almost too much to bear and she needed to get it out, sooner rather than later.

“Can’t go developing attachments and no falling in love, he should’ve known better,” Her lips hung on the words as she looked at herself in the full length mirror, not recognizing the woman looking back at her to her own delight. “We know better.”

Another thunder clap brought her attention to the hallway off to her right as she tossed the vintage cigarette case onto the table, reaching for the pull switch on the lamp to shut it off. It was nearly dark in the little sitting room as she picked up her robe and off the remaining lights, the lightning irradiating a stark, almost blue light against her skin as she straightened out her garters. Her eyes were intense, with a darkened halo around the iris as she followed the narrow hallway, flashes of light coming in through the windows at random intervals from the storming brewing outside. She turned the corner, heels tapping against the hardwood with every step before coming to the stairwell to the second level.

The sound of the water shutting off brought all of her attention up toward the top of the stairs at the balcony style landing. She kept her eyes aimed in an upward direction as she started up
the stairs, the thunder continuing outside, serving as a calming effect rather than a stimulant as she licked her lips and exhaled slowly. The ascent was mostly quiet, absent the subtlest of tapping of the toes of her heels as she made her way all the way to the top where she tossed her robe across the bannister. A sliver of light came from inside the master bedroom along with the sound of a gentle, masculine groan along with the not so subtle wafting of far too much steam for her liking.

“Baby, that shower head is dangerous, I almost passed out twice in there,” The voice was rugged and deep from the partially closed bathroom door, the steam emitting through the cracks in the door as she came into the room and wrapped her fingers around the high post on the bed.

She slowly blinked and pressed the play button on the stereo, starting the low, melodic music that sent a vibration through the floor, completely disregarding his comment about the shower. “Maybe you should put that wedding ring back on…The pretense is a little beneath you at this point, don’t you think? I don’t think your wife would like knowing you took it off…again.”

He made a shocked little noise, almost brushing her off as the music was almost too loud, as he walked out of the bathroom with a towel around his waist. “I already told you…not married, I’m free as a bird, baby.”

Her eyes started at his feet and moved upward with a slow, almost examining gaze, her eyelashes heavy and her mouth opening just enough to be more than a little inviting as a little grin peeked out. “Now, now, now Mr. Lennox…there’s certainly no need to lie to me after what we did in your car…after I’ve already taken you home. You’re a little too vulnerable in your current state for such, silliness. Tell the truth.”

“I asked you at the bar and on the way here twice, to call me Adam…I’d still like to call you something other than baby,” Adam was still wrapping a towel around his waist in the bathroom but he made the opening significantly wider so that she could see all of his ass for a split second as he made the final adjustment.

She tilted her head as she watched him, hand wrapped around the post at the end of her bed. “I prefer Mr. Lennox, if you don’t mind…and you can keep calling me Baby. It’s suitable.”

Adam knew he was good looking with his dark eyes and hair, and more olive skin tone with chiseled features, but he was breathlessly taken in by the heavily done up, leggy, mysterious woman standing before him in practically nothing, her pale, yet striking features highlighted beneath the well-put-together makeup and fake eyelashes. She had the control and the power in this situation as she wiggled her finger at him, beckoning him closer. He was more than happy to oblige her, meeting her at the foot of her large, four poster bed that had been neatly made with red and black bedding. He hadn’t bothered to get dressed and was still half dripping in places as he stood just a few inches in front of her, the heat of the shower still radiating off of him as the breeze caught his skin.

“Baby, is this little outfit adjustment just for me or was the dress just too much?” Adam started to move forward, mouth open with an expectant kiss but met the palm of her hand as she stopped him, making him grunt from the denial.

“Answer the question, first, Mr. Lennox,” She was firm as she raised her eyebrows and elevated her chin at him, sliding her index finger along his jawline. “Where’s your wedding ring and why aren’t you wearing it?”

Adam swallowed hard, the deep feeling of trepidation mixing with the onslaught of salivation as he felt his body heat sharply rise from the instant turn on she was inflicting. “It’s in the pocket of my pants—I don’t wear it if I want to guarantee I’ll find someone to do what she
won’t and hasn’t since we got married.”

He thought he was off the hook as her features softened, lips parted, giving him that signal for an opening as he moved in for a kiss for the second time but she cleared her throat, turning her face completely away from him. “Go put it on, now. I won’t tell you twice, Mr. Lennox.”

“Strange little fetish, don’t you think? Got a thing for married guys, baby?” Adam had a wry smile plastered on his lips, droplets of water down his brow as he went for his pants draped over the edge of her vanity bench, digging his wedding ring from the pocket.

She slid her hands along the cool wood of the footboard as another thunderclap washed over her, vibrating through her like a sonic blast. “You could say that…when you’re done, come over here and keep your hands at your sides, no touching.”

The towel was barely clinging to him as he straightened his back, the tucked section sliding just a little from the friction. He did as he was asked as he slipped the gold ring back onto his finger, contemplating the little design on it for just a moment as he spun it into place. He made eye contact with her and approached, hands at his sides, hair wet and starting to curl at the ends just a bit as he tilted his head just a bit, doing his best to look suave in front of her. She didn’t particularly need the gesture of manhood as she simply used the tips of her fingers to angle his chin down, dragging her fingernails down his exposed flesh from the edge of his jaw all the way to his belly button. His eyes nearly rolled back into his head and the groan went through his teeth as he bit down on his tongue while the goosebumps sent a chill across the entire surface area of his body.

She was leaving marks and he only wanted more as he maintained eye contact with her while she dug her fingernails into his skin, raking across his abs as they twitched and flexed with every ragged breath.

“Like the rough stuff, baby?” Adam couldn’t tell by the look in her eyes that she was fully in control as his voice dipped down another octave and became a little breathier as she continued the scratching motion toward his back, pressing herself against him. “Oh, fuck.”

“It would be apparent that you certainly do, Mr. Lennox,” She had seduction down to a science as she bit down on his bottom lip, dragging her tongue along the flesh between her teeth, half teasing the rest of his very open mouth in the process.

He teetered on his heels as her rather articulate tongue shifted, teeth released and lips adjusted to the shape of his mouth, pulling him into a readied, wet, hot kiss that he had nothing to anchor to. She raked her fingers down his muscular shoulder blades, knowing exactly where the level of intoxication was headed as she felt every muscle beneath her touch start to writhe with every little movement she made. He was already aching for her in the worst way, almost as though he hadn’t been touched in any sort of passionate way in quite some time. She opened her eyes as she bit down on his bottom lip again and allowed her hands to take a sharp detour to his ass, grabbing a handful with a certain level of sharpness that he let out a loud vocalization, pulling away from her mouth in an instant.

She knew she had all of the dominance as she smiled and admired the red lipstick across his mouth, bleeding out just a little bit onto his chin and high on his upper lip as she leaned forward, whispering in his ear. “Are you ready for me, Mr. Lennox?”

“Mmmmmhhmmm, oh yeah,” His voice cracked, chest heaving as she removed her hands from his backside, making sure that the towel stayed in place.
“Get on the bed and keep that towel on—I decide when it comes off,” She glanced down at the obvious hard on trying to peek around the well placed towel as he tried to give her a boyish grin, licking her lips just enough to coax a low groan out of him. “Well, what are you waiting for?”

The towel wanted to come off and Adam wanted it off in equal measure as he made his way to the side of the bed, climbing onto the center as instructed. She didn’t wait for him to fully get comfortable to slide his left wrist through a loop affixed to the left bedpost, pulling it tight until he couldn’t move that arm. The look of surprise he gave her was short lived as she leaned across his chest, pushing against him as she slipped her tongue in his mouth. Adam groaned into her mouth as she utilized her cleverness to pull his right hand into a similar loop around the right bedpost, trapping the top half of him from being able to move.

“Are you absolutely sure you want more of me? I can’t promise I’ll play nice like I did in your car, Mr. Lennox,” She pulled her lips from his and stood a little straighter, licking her lips while her fingers played with the top of her panties, sliding her fingers past the waistband.

“Baby, you can do whatever you want to me…I’m all yours tonight,” Adam’s voice cracked as he watched her teasing him, knowing full well that he was giving up all of the control and playing for keeps.

It was more than apparent that they had already been into each other’s sphere in the backseat once but this was on a different level as she slid out of her panties, leaving the corset, thigh highs, and garter on, along with her heels. Adam couldn’t help but stare at her, his anticipatory reflexes taking over as his pectorals twitched and he licked his lips, waiting for her to make a move. She was almost leisurely in her movements as she angled her chest toward him and maneuvered her entire body onto the bed, straddling his midsection, the towel underneath her very bare backside. He groaned as his already painful hard on pressed against her through the towel, twitching uncomfortably as she purposely circled her hips while she dug her nails into his chest.

“You want to know something that I’ve always wondered about men like you, Mr. Lennox?” She reached back and pulled the towel away, roughly exposing all of his nakedness to the air, lifting her hips up just enough to slide onto him without much warning, revoking him of any choice in anticipation.

Adam let out a low, almost desperate groan as his pain level was almost higher than the pleasure as she essentially speared herself on him and dug her nails into his abs as she filled herself to the hilt. “No, what, baby…fuck…holy shit…Oh my God…you really mean business, don’t you?”

She didn’t seem to give much of a care for his visible discomfort as she circled her hips and braced herself on the wall, quite literally riding him. She had her fingers spread out, almost massaging the paint on the wall, as she gathered momentum on top of him, watching his face contort and listening to the loud moans that would typically be coming from her own mouth in such a state but she felt next to nothing aside from the friction fueling the part of her that she was channeling as she looked down at him. This was nothing more than a game to her and he was losing despite the vice grip bringing him to the brink. There was nothing slow or polite about the way she was fucking him, she was quick, rough, and wanted him to know that no one was going to get him there quite as well as she could. Adam was on the edge and she knew it as she came down one more time, even harder, until she lowered her head at the last downward movement, staring at him as he started sweating bullets, the muffled moan through his teeth.

“Why do men like you cheat on your wives, Mr. Lennox? Am I the first? Do you do this all of the time or is this something you’ve been waiting to experiment with?” Her tone of voice had
changed as she blankly stared into his eyes, the frustration brewing.

Adam’s eyes were half rolling into his head as he struggled to even think of an answer, looking up at her while his pain receptors went crazy and adrenaline kicked in. “Baby, just forget about my wife tonight—she doesn’t do anything like this, it’s just you and me.”

She had a coy smile as she straightened her back, allowing him to come down a little bit from the high she had created, her slender fingers caressing his abs as she made the smallest of motions to remind him who was on top, who had control. He vocalized again, tilting his head back as her heels rubbed against his legs and her fingers gripped his muscles. Adam didn’t know what to think as he felt the bed shuddering from the extra friction, his entire world had started to spin as the sexual creature on top of him was doing everything to ruin him and in spite of the gold band on his finger, he was letting her and only wanted more.

“Adam, I want to know one more thing so you’re going to need to think really hard about this one,” She used his name, enunciating it carefully as she had him on the edge of climax, his hands balled up in fists as he struggled, desperately wanting to hold onto her hips.

He made eye contact with her as she started to lean down, sliding her hands away from his body, a smile on his face and a hoarse, breathy voice responding to her. “Yes, baby, what is it?”

She kissed his cheek, leaving a heavy, red print as she kept her eyes locked on his, her voice matter-of-fact as a devil’s grin started to form on her lips, sliding her left hand underneath of the pillow his head was resting on. “Do you know how much blood you can lose before you completely pass out?”

“That’s a weird question to ask when I’m buried to the hilt inside of you, baby,” Adam’s laugh was scratchy and hoarse as he looked up at her, the uneasiness overwhelmed by the impending orgasm he was aching for.

“Well,” She smirked and pushed her left hand against the curve of his collarbone, his complete look of shock meeting her near emotionless expression as she pressed a thin, sharp blade into his flesh, ripping into the section above bone. “You’re about to find out…”

Chapter End Notes

Please make sure to leave comments! I so hope all of you loved the epilogue and yes, there IS A SEQUEL and I’m looking forward to writing it. I am so glad you have all been there to experience this. This has been one of the most incredible journeys and yes, this will become an original work with original characters that you will, one day, see published. All of your feedback has been essential in getting to a point that I can reveal why it was so long, why the extra characters were included, and why I put SO MUCH effort into it.

Credit to:
Beginning quotes by
Atticus
Lady Gaga

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Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!