Birdsong
by chekcough

Summary

Crossover AU: Silence of the Lambs & The X-Files
The plot of SOTL, with Dana Scully replacing Clarice Starling, and a younger Agent Mulder, working in the B.S.U, assigned to help her. It is not at all necessary to have seen/read 'The Silence of the Lambs' to enjoy this fic.
Chapter 1

She brushed a low-hanging, spindly branch out of her line of vision as she ran through the forest, trying to keep her breath even in the cold October air. The crack of the branch snapping back made her turn her head, eyes wide. Under her feet the ground was hard, but at least now she was running downhill instead of up. Today the same grey sky, like the cheek of a sick old man, a layer of dampness from the rains that would soon turn to snow. Birds cried in outrage and flew, disgruntled, from the trees as she continued down the path, treading carefully on areas covered in dead leaves, smearing her arm over her forehead to wipe sweat from her brow. Now a blue fog as she ran deeper into the forest. Nobody else was on the course this early, but she needed to get her time down by twenty seconds before the next week’s assessment. She sniffed, wiping her runny nose as she ran, the peppering of gunshots from the range echoing off the trees.

Two more months to go before graduation. She had a pretty good idea of the marks she was receiving, and knew she was in no danger of failing, but it was still nerve-wracking all the same. At the monthly physical assessments the Academy not only expected consistency, they also anticipated improvement. She was a near-perfect shot at the range, but her size made the course harder to finish, her endurance always wearing thin in the last two miles. She checked her watch, then sped up.

The obstacles were manageable, and she had just grappled up and down the other side of the netting that stood blocking the last clearing that looked down over the Academy, when she heard her name. She was still getting used to hearing it like that, just ‘Scully’.

She turned at the voice, finally seeing an instructor walk up into the clearing. It was Beaumont, one of the gunning instructors. He’d known she would be here -she’d been leaving early every morning for two weeks to get one run in before class started, and it was getting easier.

“Scully!” he called again, flagging her down. She stopped, bracing her hands on her thighs and leaning over, breathing.

“Crawford wants to see you in his office.” His tone gave nothing away. Was she in trouble? Jack Crawford? She’d never even spoken to the man. He’d given a lecture to her class midway through training, but other than that he pretty much kept to himself, holed up in the Behavioral Science Unit. She raised her eyebrows but nodded, looking at Beaumont.

“Thank you, sir.”

She checked her watch before jogging down to the Academy. Almost all the way through, this time seven seconds ahead from yesterday. She was getting stronger. Down the grassy slope from the forest to the flat, clean terrain again. She watched a car chase and arrest take place in front of the post office in Hogan’s Alley, the mock-town used in training. Whoever was driving the car and had managed to swerve into place at the last minute deserved extra points.

She crossed the breezeway from the lecture building to the lab and administrative building, steadying her breath and brushing stubborn hair off her forehead, smoothing it back into her ponytail. She’d cut her hair just after she’d been accepted, thinking it would be easier to deal with off her neck, but the way the layered strands managed to slip out when she wore it up was driving her crazy. A lab was just letting out on the ground floor, and she caught the eyes of her roommate.

“Dana!”

She stopped in front of a water fountain and bent down to drink. Marion leaned against the wall. “I
thought you were doing the course this morning.”

Dana nodded, wiping her mouth with the back of her hand. “I got right to the end and then Beaumont pulled me off. Crawford asked to see me.”

Marion frowned in confusion. “Why?”

Dana shrugged, excited but nervous. “No idea. Wish me luck.”

Marion patted her arm. “Luck! See you later.”

She headed to the elevator, squeezing in right before the doors closed. Around her, a group of six men, all seeming to tower over her, not paying her any attention as they went up four floors, then got out, the silver doors closing behind them. Now she was alone, one floor to go. She squinted at her reflection off the metal doors. Sweat around the neckline of her crew neck sweatshirt, some peeking from under her arms. She managed a split-second ponytail reparation and vowed to keep her arms close to her sides. Oh, God, what if she smelled bad? Not exactly the first impression she wanted to make, and she couldn’t let go of the suspicion that she was in trouble for something. But what had she done?

The elevator beeped as it reached the fifth floor and doors opened to reveal an area she’d never set foot in. It was all tightly packed, a confusion of cubicles and larger offices, all vomiting filing cabinets. A quick scan revealed no other women in the vicinity, and most of the men had draped their suit jackets over their chair, or on a counter behind which more files and cabinets were placed. Shirts rolled up and bunched at the elbows, ties loosened, the smell of cigarettes in the air. A few heads looked over at her, and as she passed an office with an open door she hesitated, peeking inside to see if it was Crawford’s.

Two men were conversing quietly, both holding files, one man sitting on his own desk. They stopped talking when they saw her. “You looking for Crawford?” he asked, and she nodded, feeling like a little kid getting called to the principal's office.

“Why don’t you go and wait for him in his office.”

She nodded again. “Where is-”

“Just turn the corner,” he said. “Second door on the left.”

“Thank you.” She followed the man’s directions and found herself in a large, sprawling office. Nothing like the meticulous organization of the forensics lab where she was spending increasing amounts of her time, where everything properly catalogued and noted. There, they couldn’t afford mistakes. In this unit they could work more organically, she rationalized. The thought process of a profiler was half science and textbooks, forty percent intuition, and ten percent luck. They were constantly reworking ideas, coming up with new ones. Most of the time, in forensic medicine, there was a definitive answer. John Doe died from a gunshot wound to the head. Here’s the proof.

Crawford had heavily-handled textbooks and psychology journals on bookshelves behind his desk, which was littered with notes, and pens. Two file cabinets stood like brown pawns, one top drawer open. His diplomas hung on the wall, an impressive array of medals and awards shoved on the lower shelf of one bookcase to make space for more urgent materials. Against one wall was a small sofa, and she bet it pulled out to offer a cramped twin-sized bed from the way the cushions were mashed together and a blue blanket lay folded over an arm. The room smelled vaguely of licorice. She turned around to look at the other side of Crawford’s office and stopped short.
On a bulletin board fifty or so polaroids were tacked up, some overlapping, clearly taken at the same crime scene. A headline and accompanying article had been cut from The National Inquisitor and pinned up -Bill Skins Fifth, it proclaimed. Her medical eye was drawn to the post-mortem photographs. She stayed where she was, arms crossed, but raised her eyes, squinting at the slain bodies, how the skin had been removed from the arm of one victim, the thigh of another, but the rest of the body had been left untouched. These photographs, because of their graphic nature, wouldn’t be made public, but they showed the true horror of the killer the F.B.I -the very men she’d just seen sitting in their cubicles- was trying desperately to find.

“Scully,” came a voice from the door. She jumped. Crawford, who seemed more approachable than he had behind that podium four months ago, was watching her take it in the grisly photographs. She wondered how long he’d been standing there. He circled to his desk. “Dana Katherine.”

He looked up to confirm, and she nodded. “Good morning.”

“Good morning, Mr. Crawford.” He didn’t hold his hand out to shake, and she didn’t offer hers, keeping her arms by her sides to hide the sweat stains as best she could.

“Sorry to pull you off the course at such short notice,” he said, shedding his jacket and putting it on the back of his chair. “Your instructors tell me you’re doing well. Top quarter of your class.”

A surge of pride rose in her. She felt her serious, professional expression break for just a moment into a smile, then back again. “I hope so. We haven’t seen our grades yet.”

He was past pleasantries. “A job’s come up and I thought about you,” he said, moving to sit behind his desk, and gesturing for her to take the chair in front. “Not a job, really. More of an interesting errand.”

She sat down, her hands crossed over her lap, and watched as he opened a thin manilla folder.

“Let’s see, undergrad in physics from the University of Maryland...” He scanned the paper in front of him. “Went to Stanford Medical School. It says here we snatched you right out of med school. How’d that happen?”

“The attending forensic pathologist at the time was doing consults here at the Academy. As an exercise she gave us the case notes an incomplete autopsy report on a victim and we were asked to come up with a probable cause of death. I solved the case. She mentioned my name at the forensics lab here.”

Crawford didn’t congratulate her, as her father had when she’d called home, jumpy with pride and a feeling of possibility. He just looked at her contemplatively for a moment. “So, why the F.B.I?”

She cleared her throat. “I see it as a place where I can distinguish myself.” The corners of Crawford’s mouth twitched. She’d recited the same answer to her parents a year ago, when she’d been recruited, before her training had begun, and received a much different reaction. “My parents see it as an act of rebellion.”

Crawford chuckled. “We’re interviewing all the serial killers now in custody for a psycho-behavioral profile,” he said, all business. “It could be a real help in unsolved cases. Most of them have been happy to talk to us.” He looked at her for a moment. “Do you spook easily, Scully?”

She considered this. “Not yet, sir.”

“See, the one we want most refuses to cooperate. I want you to go after him again today in the asylum.” He said it like she’d already said yes.
Why me? she wanted to ask, but kept her mouth shut. Anyone in her class would kill for an opportunity to work in the F.B.I’s most recently-formed and mysterious department. “Who’s the subject?” she asked instead.

“The psychiatrist, Hannibal Lecter.”

She uncrossed her hands. “Hannibal the Cannibal.” He’d been apprehended only ten years ago on a count of nine murders, but had probably committed more, cooking up his favorite bits and serving them on fancy china. Meals. A shiver ran up her spine. Maybe she did spook easily.

She wondered if he had detected her grain of worry. “I’m going to put another agent with you on this one. He’ll brief you about the patient, the stuff that didn’t make it into the newspapers, and help you out if Lecter gives you a hard time. He’s a solid agent.”

“Who is he?” she asked.

Crawford closed her file. “His name is Fox Mulder. He works with us in Behavioral Science.”

She recognized the name. “Fox Mulder. He helped catch Monty Props in 1988.”

“That’s right. And I’d stick with ‘Mulder’, if I were you. He doesn’t answer well to his first name,” Crawford advised. “Go get changed, then come back up here. He’ll have everything ready for you. And I'd like a report from you by 0800 Wednesday, all right?”

She nodded, and when she stood he did as well. “Good luck, Dana.”

She smiled a little nervously, then went back to the elevator, pushing the button for the ground floor. This time she rode the elevator alone, and, once the doors closed, she smiled a wide smile, a little victory jump that made her stomach summersault as gravity worked with her. A real assignment! She didn’t know why Crawford had chosen her, he knew she was headed toward the forensics department once she graduated, but she was grateful for the opportunity. She couldn’t wait to tell Marion.

She hurried back from her room to the administrative building, again taking the elevator to the fifth floor, and stepped out, smoothing her hair. She’d taken the quickest shower of her life, blow-dried her hair straight, put in the pearl earrings she’d gotten from her father, and applied light makeup. The suit was too big. It had fit when she’d worn it to her interview before attending the Academy, but with training she’d lost weight, and now the jacket hung droopily from her shoulders. Maybe it was the faintest odor of the perfume she’d rubbed on her wrists that did it, but this time more than a few heads looked up when she arrived, some eyes running over her body like she was some fetching thing in her ill-fitting suit and simple makeup.

She stood up straight and headed to Crawford’s office again, but stopped at the sound of her own name before she turned the corner.

“She’s a strong student,” Crawford was saying. “She’s eager to learn, and this could be an opportunity for you to learn a little about working together with someone.”

“She’s the youngest one in her class, who had no intention to join the F.B.I before being recruited,” another male voice, younger, chimed in, sounding annoyed. “There are dozens of psychology majors who are better qualified for this assignment. This is babysitting!”

“Mulder, Patterson is not happy with your work ethic. You’re not a team player, and you act on instinct more than reason. It’s one assignment,” Crawford said, sounding tired, as if the conversation
had been going on for more than a few minutes. “Get the profile from Lecter with her, bring it back, then maybe we’ll talk about you choosing your own cases.”

The noise of a scoff. “What’s taking her so long, anyway? We’re going to an insane asylum, not walking a red carpet.”

She steeled herself and turned the corner, walking to Crawford’s office with determination and more than a little carefully concealed anger. Holding her empty briefcase in her left hand, she offered her right and the tall, lanky man shook it, his grip loose, hers firm.

She looked up at the younger agent. “Nice to meet you, Agent Mulder.”

“Dana Scully,” he said, his tone significantly more polite than it had been when he’d been talking behind her back, but a smugness was still there. When she looked back at Crawford he seemed amused.

“Should we get going, then?” she asked. Agent Mulder nodded, grabbed his jacket and coat from the back of one of Crawford’s chairs.

“Good luck,” Crawford said to her for the second time that day, and leaned back in his chair as they turned and left.

The elevator ride down was uncomfortable. She focused on her reflection, looking anywhere but at him. He shifted his weight back and forth a little, breathed out a sigh of annoyance, or maybe he was embarrassed, she couldn’t decide. She wondered if he really thought she hadn’t heard the things he’d said moments before meeting her.

“Car’s around back,” he mumbled, his hand in the pocket of his coat jingling a set of keys. She followed him, walking quickly to keep up with his easy, long stride. *Don’t judge a book by its cover*, the saying went. She’d imagined him humble about his success, courteous, wanting to help her learn from this assignment. Instead she’d met the cocky, dissatisfied, spoiled gem of the B.S.U. She’d been told he could write profiles in hours, that he was brilliant, yet the man walking beside her hadn’t even introduced himself.

Once she’d buckled herself into the passenger seat he handed her his briefcase. She made a noise of surprise. What, did he expect her to double as a shelf for his belongings? She knew there was a system of ranking, but she wasn’t going to be reduced to the role of sherpa.

“Inside there’s the dossier on Lecter and a special I.D for you,” he said. She opened the briefcase and took out the file, then the F.B.I badge. Before she could moon over it, he started the car and put it in reverse, pulling out of the spot quickly, just like they’d been taught. His briefcase tumbled to the floor, and she spent a moment tidying it up and closing it properly, the file and badge on her lap, snuggling the briefcase by her legs. She looked over at him.

“Agent Mulder, you’re not wearing your seatbelt.”

He shrugged, flicking the turn signal on to turn out of the Academy.

“Put on your seatbelt, please,” she said.

He pulled it over his shoulder and snapped it into place, then looked at her. “Happy?”

She nodded.
“Do I have permission to make a left hand turn, Miss Scully?” he asked.

She bit her tongue. He made the turn. She opened the file and skimmed it quickly, then began to read more closely. They drove in silence, the wavy, tree-lined roads soon giving way to the monotonous interstate. When, after twenty minutes of poring over it, she closed the file and looked at his profile, he seemed concentrated.

“Does this have anything to do with Buffalo Bill?” she asked.

“Why do you ask that?” His tone had calmed significantly and although he didn’t look at her, he seemed to genuinely expect a reply.

“Well, interviewing Lecter now, after he’s been locked up for so many years seems a little urgent. Does Crawford think these interviews will help us find Bill more quickly?”

Mulder shrugged. “Crawford put me on this about ten minutes before you showed up. We’ve been interviewing various prisoners for months. If it had something to do with Buffalo Bill, he’d have said something.” He looked at her quickly. “I don’t think Lecter will even talk today.”

“Why?”

“It’s like him to not cooperate just for the sake of being uncooperative. That’s what gets him off. The last bit of control he has left in this life.” He dribbled his thumbs on the wheel.

“So, if we get all the way there and he refuses to talk, we just come straight back?” she asked. It seemed like a waste of time.

Agent Mulder shook his head. “If he refuses to cooperate with you, just do some straight reporting. How’s he look, how’s his cell look...Is he sketching, or drawing...If he is, what’s he sketching? And Dana,” he said.

“Yes?”

“Be very careful with Dr. Lecter.” His tone was deadly serious. “Dr. Chilton at the asylum will go over all the physical procedures used with him. Don’t deviate from them for any reason whatsoever.” He checked her face quickly for signs of fear, but she wasn’t wearing any. “And don’t tell him anything personal. You don’t want Hannibal Lecter inside your head.”

“How do you know all this?” she asked, feeling naïve, but he seemed to have a unique insight into this particular case.

He cleared his throat. “I’ve, uh, interviewed him before.”

She cocked her head. “I’m assuming from your tone that he was uncooperative.”

“No, it wasn’t that,” Agent Mulder clarified. “He was happy to talk, but Lecter’s a psychiatrist, and a good one. He can read you like a book. That’s why I’m telling you to be careful today. Never forget what he is.” He glanced at her. “Can you handle this, Scully?”

She nodded, opening the file on her lap again, re-reading.

As they pulled into the parking lot beside the Baltimore State Asylum her heart skipped a beat and began to race. The asylum itself had begun as a rather gothic building, all height and unwelcoming angles, but had clearly experienced several rounds of additions and renovations, so that now there
were separate wings coming off the sides and another low building constructed against the back. When she closed the car door behind her a few crows cawed a greeting from where they perched on the dark stone sign out in front. The gravel hissed under their feet, and again she struggled to keep up with him in her low heels, the black shoes becoming grey around the edges from the tiny stones.

“Special Agent Mulder,” the head of the asylum, Dr. Chilton, stood from his desk to shake Agent Mulder’s hand when they arrived, but his voice suggested that the two of them weren’t particularly welcome. “Back again, are you?”

“Hello, Dr. Chilton,” Agent Mulder replied. “Did Crawford call ahead?”

Dr. Chilton nodded, then looked at her, his eyes running up and down like the boys on the fifth floor. She quirked her eyebrow, then felt Agent Mulder’s hand, gentle on her back. He wanted her to introduce herself.

“My name is Dana Scully,” she said, and the hand immediately left her back. Chilton shook her hand with the same loose grip as Agent Mulder’s. “I’ll be speaking with Dr. Lecter today.”

Chilton looked at her, derisively amused. “And you think he’ll talk to you, after he’s refused interviews for the last two years?” He didn’t give her time to answer. “Crawford’s rather clever, sending you along, wouldn’t you agree, Mulder?”

“What do you mean?” she asked, following Chilton as he moved past them and indicated they should follow.

“A pretty, young woman to turn him on.” She kept her eyes ahead as they walked. “I don’t think Lecter’s even seen a woman in eight years, and boy, are you ever his taste.” She flushed, then looked up at Agent Mulder beside her. He met her eyes, but didn’t confirm or deny what Chilton was insinuating. Chilton chuckled. “So to speak.”

“I turned down Yale to go to Stanford, Dr. Chilton,” she said, “It’s not a charm school.”

Chilton sped up his pace and led them down a flight of stairs. “Good, then you should be able to remember the rules.”

She felt Agent Mulder’s hand quickly tap her elbow, and turned to look up at him as they reached a landing on the staircase. He looked pleased with her response. She ducked her head and continued down to the prison ward.

After the stairs came a series of winding hallways with periodic gates, guards standing by. It was cold down here, the pervasive, low-dwelling feeling of lives left stagnant behind bars. “Do not touch the glass,” Chilton said, walking briskly in front of them. “Do not approach the glass. You pass him nothing but soft paper. No pencils or pens. No staples or paper clips on his paper. Use the sliding food carrier, no exceptions. If he attempts to pass you anything, do not accept it. Do you understand me?”

“Yes, sir,” she said, keeping her voice steady.

He turned to them before descending yet another flight of stairs leading to a hallway where red light shone through, into the very bowels of the institution. She could hear groans and complaints from patients even from here. “I’m going to show you why we insist on such precautions,” Chilton continued. “On the afternoon of July 8th, 1981, he complained of chest pains and was taken to the dispensary. His mouthpiece and restraints were removed for an EKG. When the nurse leaned over him, he did this to her.” Chilton handed her a small photograph. She could see thumbprints across its
surface -apparently Chilton performed this same intimidating monologue for everyone coming to pay Lecter a visit.

What remained of the human face captured on the photograph was indiscriminate, so torn and mutilated that most features were unrecognizable. The flash of the camera had captured one of the nurse’s eyes, wide with fear. A little wind faded out of Chilton’s sails when she didn’t react in the way the others had, her forensic and medical eye taking the image in before her emotions could.

“The doctors managed to reset her jaw, more or less...save one of her eyes...” Chilton said as the gate behind him slid open with a loud buzz. “His pulse never got above eighty-five. Even when he ate her tongue.”

She handed the photograph back to Chilton. He pocketed it. “I keep him in here -”

“Dr. Chilton,” Agent Mulder said, and the smaller man looked up. “Maybe it would be better if she just talked to him by herself, considering Lecter isn’t exactly on friendly terms with either of us. I can show her the rest of the way.”

A sliver of panic cut through her. Crawford hadn’t mentioned that she’d be interviewing Lecter alone. In fact, she’d thought perhaps they’d have conducted it in a sort of interrogation room, not down by his cell. What if she said something wrong, or made a mistake during the interview explaining the questionnaire? Wasn’t that why Agent Mulder was here? To help her through?

Chilton was clearly annoyed, but, surprisingly, acquiesced. “When she’s finished, bring her back up.” He turned and left as quickly as he’d come.

“Let’s go,” Agent Mulder said, pointing right once they entered the white-cement hallway. Two doors down they were met with an orderly sitting down at a desk, the plaque beside the room designating it as the visitor’s entrance. He was watching several security cameras, eating a sandwich. Clearly, any other guards stationed to this room had decided to take their break somewhere else. She knew it was lunchtime, but she couldn’t imagine eating anything right now.

The orderly, a sturdy-looking man in his late twenties, put down his food, wiped his hands on a paper napkin, and stood up. “Agent Mulder,” he greeted, then held out his hand to her.

“I’m Barney.”

“Dana Scully,” she introduced herself. “Nice to meet you.”

“Nice to meet you, too, Dana. I can hang up your coat for you,” he offered.

“Thank you,” she said, shrugging out of the heavy wool coat to reveal her unflattering suit. Barney hung it up on the wall behind her and Mulder followed to hang his own up as well. Beside the coats and around the small room she saw restraints, mouthpieces, Mace, tranquilizer guns...

“He told you, don’t go near the glass?”

She nodded. “Yes, he went over the safety procedures on the way down.”

“Okay. You both going in?” Barney asked as he opened the heavy gate that led to the cells. Agent Mulder handed her his briefcase.

“No, just Agent Scully,” he said. She looked at him, feeling a little abandoned as she stepped into the hallway, the gate buzzing closed behind her. When it locked into place the sound ricocheted off the walls, and she jumped.
“Dana,” Agent Mulder said, approaching the bars. She clutched the briefcase, feeling small and not at all as confident as she had upstairs. “He’s past the others- the last cell. We’ll be watching back here. You’ll do fine.”

She nodded. His voice was calm, and it put her at ease. “Okay.”

“If it gets ugly, just get up and leave. There’s a red button by his cell. You can ring that, and I’ll come get you.” His face was neutral, but she detected a hint of protectiveness, like that of an older brother. She took a breath and turned around, starting to walk down the row of patients, her footsteps echoing.

These were the high risk, criminally insane ones, people who had killed. The argument was never definitive -if a genetic abnormality accounted for homicidal tendencies, and we can’t stop it from coming to the surface, or if people could be induced to kill. The age old question -nature or nurture?

High to the right were security cameras aimed at each cell. Some were padded, with narrow observation slits, others were normal, barred. Shadowy occupants paced, some muttering, crying. Suddenly, a dark figure in the next-to-last cell hurtled toward her, his face mashing grotesquely against his bars as he hissed, “I c-can s-smell your cunt!” He cackled at the look on her face.

She kept walking, slowing as she reached the last cell. It was like the others in decoration. A small bed, a toilet, a sink mounted on the wall, no window this deep underground. Only instead of bars shutting him in there was a pane of thick glass. No fingerprints or marks on it from the inside or out. And there, standing upright, looking calm and expectant in his blue asylum-issued uniform, was Dr. Hannibal Lecter. His face, so long out of the sun, seemed bleached.

“Good morning,” he said, in a voice unlike any she’d heard before. Like a mixture between Katherine Hepburn and Cary Grant. She stopped in front of the cell. The patient who’d spoken to her from the next cell was prattling on about something. Lecter didn’t move an inch. He just looked at her, perfectly polite, his eyes not scanning her like everyone else’s had today. To her horror, she felt less uncomfortable, even welcome.

“Dr. Lecter, my name is Dana Scully. May I speak with you?” she asked and, to her surprise, she sounded normal, unafraid. He nodded.

“Doctor, we’re doing some research into psychobehavioral profiling. I’d like to ask your help with a questionnaire. It’s-”

“You’re one of Crawford’s, aren’t you?” he asked.

She nodded. “I am, yes, sir.”

He quirked an eyebrow. “May I see your credentials?”

She didn’t see the harm in that, and set down the briefcase on a chair provided for her in front of the cell. She reached into her pocket, fumbling a little, and brought out the badge, holding it up at shoulder-level.

“Closer, please,” he asked, and she stretched her arm out straight, her hand now a foot from the glass. He clicked his tongue. “Closer.”

The first rule. Do not approach the glass. She did it anyway, taking one step forward. He moved forward, too, so that they were probably two feet apart with only the bulletproof glass separating them. He stared at the badge.
“That expires in one week,” he said. “You’re not real F.B.I, are you?”

She closed the badge. She hadn’t even noticed it expired in one week. “I’m still in training at the Academy.”

“Jack Crawford sent a trainee to me?” he asked in quiet disbelief.

She nodded. “Yes, sir. I’m a student. I’m here to learn from you. Maybe -”

“Crawford wouldn’t have sent a trainee alone,” Lecter said, amusement in his eyes. “Who’d he send along with you to supervise? Or is he here himself at the end of the hallway?”

“I-”

“Don’t lie, Agent Scully, it doesn’t suit you. So, who is it, then? McGill, with his whole battery of questions I already read in papers in the 1970s? Sanders, who confessed to me that he’d been sleeping with his secretary? You just nod when I say the right name, Agent Scully, because I know them all. The Bureau and I are well acquainted with each other.”

She didn’t react other than to look at him, patiently waiting to ask her own questions.

“Duff and Doyle, with their silly good-cop, bad-cop routine? Meyers, who barely opened his mouth? Or, don’t tell me, it’s that new one -Mulder.” He smiled in delight even when she didn’t nod, knowing he was right.

“Oh, Mulder was one of my personal favorites,” he said. “Really knows his stuff, but isn’t afraid to deviate if necessary. One of the most creative agents I’ve ever spoken with, too,” Lecter said, almost wistfully. “Such a shame about his sister.”

He must have seen something in her eyes. “Oh, didn’t he tell you? The poor young man’s little sister disappeared when he was only twelve years old. Tragic story. He was the only one at home when it happened, but he couldn’t save her.”

Something clenched painfully inside of her chest. She was embarrassed to suddenly be privy to his private life after knowing him for approximately two hours. “But I’ve saved the best for last, Dana Scully. Do you know why Mulder couldn’t save his sister?”

“It’s really none of my business, Doctor.”

Lecter smiled. “Ask him about it, won’t you? I’ll try to imagine the expression on your face when he finally tells you.”

She’d had enough, and he could tell. “Sit, please,” he invited, like this was his house and she’d come at his invitation. She moved the briefcase and sat.

“Now, then. Tell me,” Lecter said, remaining standing, absolutely upright. “What did Miggs say to you?”

She wrinkled her brow.

“‘Multiple Miggs’, in the next cell. He hissed at you,” Lecter said. “What did he say?”

She didn’t flinch. “He said, ‘I can smell your cunt’.”

“I see,” he said, delighted that she was telling the truth, but cleverly trying to hide it. “I myself cannot.” He leaned up to where cut-out holes lined the top of the floor to ceiling glass, inhaling. She
swallowed, uncomfortable.

“You use lavender shampoo,” he observed, “and today you put on Chanel No.5.” He looked at her a bit sadly. “But it isn’t yours. Chanel isn’t your style. Those are pearl earrings, aren’t they?”

She nodded once.

“They’re much better than your shoes.”

She cleared her throat. “Maybe they’ll catch up.”

“I have no doubt of it.”

She crossed her legs and sat up straight, beginning to tire of his game. She looked away from him at the walls of his cell. Several intricate charcoal drawings hung there, stuck on with tack or tape. Architectural drawings. She recognized one.

“Is that the Duomo?”

He looked surprised, then nodded. “Seen from the Belvedere. You know Florence?”

“Drawn from memory?”

He sighed. “Memory, Agent Scully, is what I have instead of a view.”

She opened the briefcase and took out the questionnaire. “Well, maybe you’d care to lend us your view on this questionnaire, sir. It’s-”

His mouth twitched into a patronizing smile. “Oh, what a ham-handed segue! You were doing fine. You know, I think your Agent Mulder will be disappointed with you, thinking you’ve blown your chance.” She flushed, and wanted to look down the hall to see if Lecter was right, but she stood her ground.

“I’m only asking you to look at it, Doctor. Either you will or you won’t.”

He nodded. “Jack Crawford must be very busy indeed if he’s recruiting help from the student body. Busy hunting that new one, Buffalo Bill -what a naughty boy he is! Did Crawford send you to ask for my advice?” He looked at her.

“No. I came because we need-”

He cut her off. “How many women has he killed now, our Bill?”

“Five...so far,” she said.

“All flayed?”

She bit her lip. “Partially, yes. But that’s an active case. I’m not involved.”

He could tell she was frustrated. “Do you know why he’s called ‘Buffalo’ Bill? Please, tell me. The newspapers won’t say.”

“I’ll tell you if you look at this form,” she bargained. He hesitated, then gave her a curt nod.

“Well, it started as a bad joke in Kansas City Homicide. They said, ‘This one likes to skin his humps.’”
“Why do you think he removes their skins, Agent Scully?” he asked, continuing to toy with her.

*Don’t tell him anything personal.* To tell him what she thought would be her own opinion. She thought back to the file she’d had on her lap an hour ago, and recited the profile notes. “It excites him. Most serial killers keep some sort of trophies from their victims.”

Lecter’s mouth twitched. “I didn’t.”

*Never forget what he is.* “No,” she said, “you ate yours.”

It had been a risk, and Lecter looked a little sour at the response. She thought perhaps she’d lost him as he turned his head away, but then he said, “You send that through now.”

Again, she almost looked down the hall for Agent Mulder, wondering if he was feeling as victorious as she was. Even if Lecter didn’t answer the questionnaire, at least she’d spoken with him, gotten this far, filing notes away for later. She stood, put the papers in the sliding food carrier like she’d been told, and sent it through. Lecter sat down on the only chair in his cell, picked the papers up, and began to flip through them, his expression revealing nothing.

She sat quietly, looking at the drawings again during the time he took to read. Finally, he chuckled, and tossed the papers back into the food carrier.

“Oh, Agent Scully, you think you can dissect me with this blunt little tool?” he sneered.

This was where her training came in. She had to push without seeming to push, convince without giving her motive away, and remain calm throughout. “No,” she said. “I thought that your knowledge would-”

Suddenly, he whipped the tray back at her with a metallic clang that made her start.

“You’re so ambitious, aren’t you?” he said, sizing her up, looking at her a little sadly. “You think you’re going to get me to talk, when I wouldn’t talk to any of the others. Now they’re getting desperate, aren’t they? Sending a schoolgirl to come interview me.” His voice remained a pleasant purr.

“You know what you look like to me in that awful suit and your pearl earrings? You look like a little girl playing dress up in her mother’s closet. You’re twenty-six years old but don’t look a day over nineteen,” he drawled. She bit the inside of her cheek. “You’ve been sticking up for yourself your whole life, haven’t you?”

Flashbacks to Bill bullying her, telling her she was a bad shot. Fighting hard not to be overlooked in medical school, where the male to female ratio had been four to one. His every word struck her like a tiny, precise dart. Lecter smiled a little. He’d caught her.

“You’re smart, Agent Scully, but naïve, too. I can smell it under that Chanel No. 5. You crave approval and loathe disappointing others. You think you can do anything you set your mind to. Let me tell you something, Dana Scully - life isn’t that simple. And if you think you’ve accomplished something today by getting me to talk, you’re mistaken. All I’ve done is keep you busy for a half hour, another thirty minutes wasted when you could be helping Crawford hunt old Billy. You think Agent Mulder will be impressed with your little performance, acting like you knew what you were doing when all the while you’ve been nervously tapping your left foot on the ground.”

She stared at him, her eyes hard, while his were still merry. She stopped tapping her foot and stood up, smoothing her skirt down. “You see a lot, Doctor,” she said. “But are you strong enough to point that high-powered perception at yourself?” She crossed her arms in front of her. “Why don’t you
look at yourself and write down what you see?” She bent and slammed the tray back at him. He looked directly into her eyes. “Or maybe you’re afraid to.”

“You’re a tough one, aren’t you?” he drawled.

“Reasonably so, yes.”

“Please, excuse me,” he said. “Have a good day.”

Lecter pushed the food carrier and it zoomed back to her side of the glass, making her blink involuntarily. She picked the questionnaire up. When she stood, he was right near the glass, inches from her.

“A census-taker once tried to test me,” he said. “I ate his liver with some fava beans, and a nice Chianti.” The words were as cool and clear as water, pronounced with no hint of remorse or even pleasure. Pure fact. Her legs felt weak as she held the sheets to her chest, looking at him. Then he made a noise, like a rattlesnake stalking its prey, hissing at her. She didn’t say goodbye, just turned and started walking, her ankles like jelly, sweat on her neck. Every step seemed to take longer than the last, and she didn’t know if he was watching her go, she didn’t care.

“I b-bit my wrist so I could d-die,” Miggs moaned from his cell. She glanced at him, now naked and pressed against the bars. “Look at the blood!” He screamed, and flung his hand at her through a gap. She was splattered on the cheek and neck not with blood, but with the pale slime of his semen. She recoiled, holding a hand up, as mayhem broke loose. Prisoners screamed and laughed along the hall. She heard the gate at the visitor’s entrance buzz open.

“Agent Scully! Come back! ” Lecter cried, and she hesitated, seeing Agent Mulder and two other guards appear behind the gate. “Agent Scully!” he cried again, and she turned back, rushing to his cell.

“I would not have had that happen to you,” he said, rushed. “Discourtesy is unspeakably ugly to me.”

“Then do this test for me!” she pleaded, her voice caught in her throat.

“No,” he said, “but I will make you and Agent Mulder happy. I’ll give you a chance for what you love most.”

She could smell the semen in her hair. “And what is that?”

“Advancement, of course,” he said, his face inches away from hers. “Listen carefully -look deep within yourself, Dana Scully. Go seek out Miss Mofet, an old patient of mine. M-O-F-E-T!” he said, his voice racing. Chaos was still breaking out behind her. “I don’t think Miggs could manage again, even if he is crazy. Go now!” he cried, and she ran.

She ran down the hall with voices leering at her, and dashed toward Agent Mulder, who stood there, his eyes locked on her. The second she passed the gate it closed behind her and she dropped the briefcase and the questionnaire, her hands shaking. Mulder had one of Barney’s paper napkins in his hand and immediately wiped at the semen on her cheekbone and temple while she stared at her hands and willed them to stop trembling like autumn leaves, clinging desperately to the branch.

“I’m sorry,” she said, feeling like she was blubbery. “I got near the glass, and I let him inside my head, I’m-”

Mulder picked up the briefcase and tossed the questionnaire into a nearby trashcan, draped her coat
over the same arm, and took one of her hands, squeezing it. “You did great. I’ll go finish up with Chilton, you can go to the car if you want.”

She nodded, and walked beside him as they made their way back. This time she wasn’t scurrying behind him, he was walking to fit her pace. “I’d like to clean up first,” she admitted.

“Of course,” he said. “Let’s find a bathroom.”

In the bathroom, with its out of date wallpaper and chipped tile floor, she braced herself on the edge of the sink and stared at her pale face in the mirror. How, after barely revealing anything about herself, had he managed to see that far inside her head? Her biggest insecurity - disappointing people. Today she had disappointed herself, Agent Mulder, and Crawford, who’d given her only one job to do. She dabbed at her eyes and smoothed her hair back into place, then washed her hands. When she opened the door, she saw her coat draped on a stairway bannister opposite. Agent Mulder was finishing up with Chilton. She put on her coat and took a deep breath, listening to their voices as she went to the front door of the building. She felt like a butterfly under a bell jar, flitting around, desperate for escape, only to encounter glass walls that were indistinguishable from the air she’d known so well.

Agent Mulder came out of Chilton’s office and closed the door behind him, then gestured for her to open the front door. They exited together, the bell jar lifted, and she took a second to breathe in the fresh air. It smelled slightly mossy, and filtered through her lungs, cleansing them. Part of her didn’t care that she had failed in her assignment, she was just glad to be out of that building, away from the moans and screams. Luckily, her specialty was working with the dead. She followed Agent Mulder to the car.

Inside, he buckled up but didn’t turn the key in the ignition. She looked at him, hoping he couldn’t see that she’d been crying.

“I’m sorry,” she breathed.

“You were good,” he said firmly.

“What? But I didn’t get him to fill in the questionnaire!”

He shrugged. “I told you, I didn’t think he’d even talk to you. You lasted over twenty minutes, Scully.” He smiled a little. “You should be proud.”

The corners of her mouth twitched, but worry quickly replaced relief. “What do I tell Crawford?”

He started the car, turning on the heat after he saw her shiver. “Tell him what happened. He’ll want a report on Wednesday morning. I’ll be submitting one, too. If he has any questions, he’ll let us know.”

She debated asking, then decided it was important for her to know. “Is that why Crawford chose me? Because I’m a woman? They thought Lecter would speak to a woman more easily than a man?”

Agent Mulder dribbled his thumbs on the steering wheel for a moment, then exhaled. He looked at her. “Crawford’s a good guy, and he was confident in his decision when he picked you. But I can’t say with any certainty that he chose you without taking the fact that you’re a woman into account.”

On the drive back he gnawed at his bottom lip. She was exhausted, but knew she wouldn’t sleep tonight. Whereas before he had seemed calm, now he seemed wired. “Agent Mulder, what is it?”
“When Lecter said ‘yourself’ the intonation was strange. Your-self. Two words.” He didn’t look at her, a little lost in the wheels turning inside his head.

She shrugged. “So? Technically, it is two words. What, you think he did it on purpose?” She took his silence as an affirmative answer. “Why does it matter?”

“I think he knows something more, something…”

She looked at him, almost laughing it was so absurd. “You don’t think Lecter has any connection to Buffalo Bill? How could he? He’s been in prison for years!”

He looked at her and shrugged. “Stranger things have happened.”

“I highly doubt the slightly different intonation on the word ‘yourself’ from the mouth of a serial killer who’s been behind bars for almost a decade is going to lead us to Buffalo Bill, Agent Mulder.”

His eyes danced.

“What?” she asked, thinking he was making fun of her.

He laughed. “I’m just not used to having someone disagree with me.”

He probably had a point. His reputation spoke for itself. If Agent Mulder was as good at writing profiles and solving cases as everyone said, she imagined that he wasn’t often met with resistance. He’d been working for Crawford and Patterson for a few years, and he knew his stuff. Crawford had assigned Mulder to help her in the role of a mentor, and she should probably respect that boundary. But his obsession over one word (or two, as he insisted) was laughable as a probable clue.

“I didn’t disagree with you, Agent Mulder,” she clarified. “I challenged the validity of your theory.”

“Ah, is that what they’re calling it these days?” he quipped.
Chapter 2

After leaving Agent Mulder and rushing back to her room to deposit her notes on the visit and change into her Academy-issued trousers and polo shirt she made her way to the firing range, checking out a Sig, the same gun she’d be issued after graduation. Andrew, a former biochemistry major, waved at her when she took a place next to him, gesturing to her eyes and lips, teasing her about the makeup she hadn’t bothered removing. She rolled her eyes and smiled, pulling down the ear muffs and focusing on the target far off in front of her. When the drill was called, she fired six rounds without blinking behind her protective eyewear, then exhaled while the target zoomed toward her.

“How’d you do?” Andrew asked, removing his ear muffs and tearing off his paper target, scanning it.

She looked at her own. It was a mess. If this had been an assessment, she wouldn’t have been close to passing, even with a second chance. “Not too good. You?”

“Come on, Dana, you’re the best shot in the class,” he teased, and they exchanged targets. He was strong, too, and had shot well. He looked up from her target. “You okay? You look a little spooked.”

She nodded, reassuring him as well as herself. “Yeah, I’m fine. Hey, I missed the counterterrorism lecture this morning, can you catch me up?”

As soon as she finished dinner she was in the library, sitting at one of the microfilm monitors, flipping through all the information she’d found on Lecter. Classmates studied at tables behind her for the upcoming exam, reviewing index cards and quizzing each other, while she scribbled notes onto a yellow pad. The next article - *New Horrors In 'Cannibal Trial' -* dated 1980, had been published in the Baltimore Dispatch. Under the bolded headline:

*The Doctor of Death Cooked his Victims for Gourmet Meals Then Served Them to His Friends. Michael Ronboz of City Council Among Those at Dinner Table.*

A tap on her shoulder made her startle.

“Hey, it’s just me,” Marion said, putting her hands up in mock-surrender. “You’ve got a phone call.”

“Thanks, Marion,” she said, distracted, and stood up, leaving her chair pulled out as she moved toward the door. Marion followed beside her.

“You missed Fourth Amendment law. Unlawful seizure, real juicy stuff,” she said, keeping her voice low. “Where were you all morning?”

“Pleading with a crazy man, with come all over my face,” she answered, wishing it wasn’t true.

Marion snorted. “Damn, I wish I had time for a social life.” She pointed to the phone hanging off the cradle at the checkout desk.

Dana grinned, then picked up the phone while Marion went back to one of the library tables to consult her notes.
“Hello?” she answered, speaking quietly.

“Scully?”

“Agent Mulder,” she said, surprised.

“Yeah. Remember that name at the end, Miss Mofet?”

She nodded. “Yes.”

“Listen,” he said, “I’ve been on the mainframe for a couple hours. Lecter altered or destroyed most of his patient’s histories prior to capture, so there’s no record of anyone named Mofet. But I figured out the ‘your self’ reference. Where would you hide yourself if you were about to be captured? What’s the most banal, obvious option?”

“I’m not sure I’m following,” she said, leaning against the counter.

He chuckled slightly. “I tracked it down to a library’s catalogue of national yellow pages. It’s a mini-storage facility outside Baltimore, where Lecter had his practice.”

She blinked. “Well, why aren’t you there now?”

“Go put on your sleuth shoes. I’ll meet you on the ground floor in fifteen minutes.”

She panicked slightly. “Wait, that’s a field job. It’s outside the scope of my assignment. And I’ve got a test tomorrow on-”

“What were Crawford’s instructions to you, Scully?” he asked.

“To complete and file my report by 0800 on Wednesday, but-”

“Then you should do exactly that,” he said.

She picked up on something, an urgency she wasn’t sure was necessary. “Agent Mulder, what is it? There’s something you’re not telling me.”

A beat. “Miggs is dead.”

She was speechless for a moment. “Dead? How?”

Agent Mulder sighed on the other end. “The orderly heard Lecter whispering to him all afternoon, and Miggs crying. They found him at bed check. He’d swallowed his own tongue. Chilton is scared the family will file a civil rights lawsuit, and he’s trying to blame it on you. I told the prick your conduct was flawless. Scully?”

“I’m here,” she said softly. “I just...don’t know how to feel about this.”

“You don’t have to feel any way about it. Lecter did it to amuse himself. Why not? What can they do? Take away his books for awhile, and no jello...Listen,” he sighed again, “I know it got ugly today. But this is your report, Scully. You should follow it as far as you can. On your own time, outside of class.”

She took it all in for a moment.

“So, how about it? Ground floor in ten?” he asked, and she smiled, looking over at her notepad sitting next to the microfilm monitor.
“Do I have any say in this?”

“It’s fine if you want to stay in and study. But when the missing person’s bulletin goes out for a certain Special Agent Fox Mulder, Wonderboy of the B.S.U, and they find my rotting body locked inside of some storage unit two months later, you might feel a little guilty for not being there to make sure the door stays open.”

She chuckled, and two classmates looked over at her. “Okay. I’ll be there.”

The phone clicked as he hung up.

Agent Mulder was waiting for her just outside the elevator, so that when she arrived and stepped out she almost walked into him. He tossed his car keys in the air and caught them again.

“Car’s out back,” he said for the second time that day, and she followed him out into the cold darkness, shoving her bare hands into the pockets of her coat. “I called the owner. A Mr. Glauber. His English is a little rusty, and my German’s non-existent, but from the sound of it, he’s not thrilled at the idea of us checking out the facility.”

She looked at his profile. “Well, I assume you got a warrant.”

He shook his head. “But I do know that he has a unit rented to a Miss Hester Mofet.”

She opened her mouth. “Agent Mulder, we can’t pursue this lead without a search warrant!”

They were at the car. He unlocked it and opened his door. “Crawford will cover us. Patterson might not be happy, but Crawford will cover us, especially if we find what I’m hoping we’ll find.”

“Which is what? Agent Mulder, I’m only a trainee,” she protested even while he got in and started the car. “I can’t jeopardize my career over a blind lead.”

“Get in, Scully,” he said, sighing.

She got in and he handed her a slip of paper. “What’s this?”

On it he’d written HESTER MOFET. Below that there were a series of scribblings, all crossed out. Then, at the bottom of the paper, he’d written THE REST OF ME. She looked at him in amazement.

“It was an anagram.”

He nodded. “Buckle up and close that door, you’re letting the cold in,” he grumbled, turning the key in the ignition. The car sputtered to life, and she did as he said.

“How’d you figure it out?” she asked as he pulled out of the spot and began to navigate his way out of the Academy.

“Hunch,” he shrugged. “Hey, check in the glove compartment.”

“Hell of a hunch,” she muttered, then opened the glove compartment. “You want the map or the seeds?”

“Seeds,” he said, and she passed him the small bag of sunflower seeds. He took it and picked out a seed, putting it between his teeth before offering her one as well. She pursed her lips and shook her head. Her entire career and future at the F.B.I was at risk by going out on this assignment, but he was a proper agent, the man Crawford had put on the case with her, and so she tried to force herself to
rationalize this as follow-through, and not a wild goose chase.

It was nearing nine when they finally pulled up in front of Your Self Mini-Storage. A neon orange sign, streaked with rain, identified the location. It loomed over a hurricane fence topped with barbed wire. One side of the large gate was open, and as they pulled into the lot the car’s headlights revealed row after row of storage units, their doors shining with rain. A black car was parked near the entrance, and out of it came an elderly man, small and fragile looking, who shuffled over to them. Agent Mulder got out went to shake the man’s hand while she opened her door and closed it, watching their interaction. From the get-go, things weren’t looking promising.

Agent Mulder had his badge up, calmly explaining their intentions.

“Privacy is a great concern to my customers!” Mr. Glauber insisted. “I cannot allow you to intrude without the proper ausourizachion!” His English was heavily accented. “I must contekt ze customer!”

“Yes, I understand, Mr. Glauber,” Agent Mulder said. “You see, we believe that the person who rented this storage unit is currently imprisoned.”

Glauber squinted his eyes. “Impossible.”

“Why is it impossible?” Agent Mulder asked.

Glauber made a shooing motion. “You heff no proper ausourizachion, you Agent Mulder!”

She cleared her throat and squinted a little against the mist of rain coming down, but moved forward, hand outstretched. “Guten Abend, Herr Glauber,” she greeted, pronouncing his last name properly in German.

He looked slightly confused, having not seen her get out of the car with Agent Mulder, but shook her hand. “Guten Abend,” he echoed, searching her face.

“Ich bin Dana Scully,” she introduced herself, “Ich arbeite mit Agent Mulder.” She waited a beat, and then saw him smile, lines disappearing from his brow. They spoke for a few minutes, leaving Agent Mulder out of the conversation, before Glauber waved her over to his car. She stood by the driver’s door while he reached to the passenger side for a thick binder. When prompted, she helped him hold the binder while he searched through it, then consulted a piece of paper. After a few more minutes of discussion he produced a key off a huge ring and put it into her cold palm.

She stood, thanked him, then returned to where Agent Mulder was standing. He looked at her, eyebrows raised.

“We’ve got thirty minutes,” she said, walking past him toward the storage units. It took a moment for her to realize he wasn’t with her, but then she heard the slam of the car trunk and his footsteps as he caught up.

“Flashlights,” he said, handing her one and tucking the other under his arm. “You didn’t tell me you spoke German, Scully.”

She smirked. “We met this morning, Agent Mulder. I’m sure there are a lot of things we don’t know about each other.”

They reached unit 31 quickly, and she went for the lock, fitting the key in. “He told me the unit was leased for ten years. That it had been prepaid in full,” she said, trying to turn the key while Agent Mulder shone light on the lock. The mixture of the damp air and her cold fingers wasn’t making
things easier.

“Let me try,” he said, and she exchanged him the key for the flashlight. After a moment the door opened, and she lit his way as he pulled the sliding garage door up off the ground about a foot before it seemed to stick. He tried again, pulling harder, but the door wasn’t budging from the outside. He looked at her, then at the gap at the bottom of the door. “You think you could fit under and open it from the inside?”

She looked at the small gap, then nodded. He shone light on the ground as she crouched down, trying to pull the door up even a few more inches, but it wasn’t budging. She passed her own flashlight beam under the door and sought an area with no obstacles. The unit looked to be full of furniture. Halfway into sliding under the door, she felt the rusty, frayed edge of it scrape her ankle, and she inhaled sharply.

“Scully? You okay?”

“I’m fine,” she reassured him, then slid under the rest of the way, picking her flashlight up and standing carefully, shining the light around to get a new perspective on her surroundings. Agent Mulder’s voice, muffled, came from the other side of the door.

“What do you see?”

The narrow beam of her flashlight caught spiderwebs, everywhere...High stacks of cardboard boxes, several dusty pieces of furniture, and a big car, oddly long and tall, covered with a tarp. The smell, like damp books. And occasional rustling sounds, like those of small rodents.

“Well, it looks like a storage unit,” she said with a shrug he couldn’t see, then squeezed along the back of a desk to the left side of the door, near where the beam of his flashlight illuminated the wet pavement. The crank from inside was caught on the edge of an old, intricately carved upright piano. The ivory keys, left uncovered, had yellowed, and were covered in a thick layer of dust and cobwebs. She leaned her weight against it as best she could and pushed, inhaling a mouthful of dust and coughing as she did so. When she had moved it a few inches back, she reached for the crank and brought the door up a good couple of feet. Agent Mulder ducked underneath and appeared inside with her, seeming very alive and vibrant in color compared to his surroundings.

Lighting his way as he went, Agent Mulder stepped around the boxes, leaning down to look at labels on some of them. He drew something on the dusty surface of a black end table, examined a glass lamp, and studied a taxidermied falcon for a long moment.

“What is it?” she asked, focusing on the falcon.

“He’s got good taste,” he concluded, standing up straight.

A scurrying of musical notes, loud, echoing in the contained space, made her drop her flashlight. She bent to pick it up and stood again, shining light on the ancient piano. He shone a light on the floor and she saw them -mouse droppings- and felt embarrassed.

“Let’s check out the car,” he proposed, making his way through the rest of Lecter’s possessions to the large, tarp-covered vehicle. Right when she caught up to him he folded the tarp up, and the resulting clouds of dust made him cough and her sneeze. He took a step back to admire the car.

It was an antique beauty, a 1931 Packard, still dusty, despite the tarp. A strange, shadowy feeling came over her. Nobody had been in here since 1980. Ten years ago. It was like stepping back into someone else’s life without being asked. It felt wrong, it scared her, but it was exhilarating.
Curtains closed off the back passenger compartment, but there was a narrow gap in them when she approached and cleared the glass with a wipe of her coat sleeve. More mousy rustlings.

Agent Mulder was walking to the other side of the car, pulling the tarp off more completely. She shone her light carefully through the small gap. The beam was narrow, and she had to squint to see, but she could clearly make out a broad back seat. An open album of lacy, old-fashioned valentines, a crumpled lamp rug on the floor. Then a pair of women’s shiny, high-heeled pumps...above them the hem of a satin gown, and a pair of pale, stockinged legs -Miss Mofet?

She gasped, recoiling from the window and stepping back, then steadied herself.

“What?” Agent Mulder called.

Carefully, she reached out a hand to try the handle, but it wouldn’t budge. “Can you try the front door?” she called back. “Does it open?”

She heard the dull pull of the driver’s side door, then the back seat on the other side. “No.”

“Wait a minute.” Shining her light around, she found a box of bric-a-brac, a tangle of coathangers perched inside. With a little difficulty, she pulled one of them out, her ankle stinging where she’d scraped it and where dust was now settling. She sniffed as she worked, sensing a runny nose brought on by the cold. After straightening the hanger and bending the tip into a small hook, she jammed the tool inside the join at the top of the back passenger window. “Agent Mulder, can you shine your light here?” she asked, and looked up as he walked around the front of the car.

“Where?”

“Just on the car, so I don’t have to hold my flashlight,” she said, and handed him her light in addition to his. She concentrated, feeling a little bit like she was performing laparoscopic surgery, and fished around until she could snag the inside door latch, pulling up. A satisfying -CLICK!

She grabbed her flashlight again, muttering a quick “thanks” to Agent Mulder, and opened the passenger door, where it hit some stacks of boxes, not opening very far. Leaning very carefully inside, she swept her flashlight around, revealing more of the satin gown...a pair of hands in white, elbow-length gloves, one resting on the lap, the other atop a large, beaded, drawstring evening bag beside her. Thick strands of costume pearls over the breasts, and finally the white neck stub of a female mannequin. No face, no head.

She sighed with relief, feeling silly.

“What do you see?” he asked. “Damn it, I should’ve brought the camera.”

Setting the flashlight on the dark-pink velvet of the generous back seat, where it shone up on the velvety ceiling and cast a rosy glow, she carefully shifted the valentine album to the floor on the left, then eased herself inside the car. One gloved hand slid off the mannequin’s lap with the change in weight, nudging her thigh on the way down, and she jumped a little.

“I don’t know,” she called out, keeping the door open with her hand. “I don’t know what to look for!”

“Hold on, I'll come around the other side,” his voice came through muffled, and within thirty seconds he had come around the car, now holding the door open with his hand so she could slide fully inside. He leaned down, peering in, whistling slightly.

“Guy sure doesn’t skimp,” he remarked. “What's that pop-up book?”
“Just some old valentine cards,” she replied, following the beam of his flashlight as he took it in for himself. She felt funny, sitting next to the headless woman in her own dust-covered clothes, breathing air that hadn’t been inhaled in ten years.

“What’s in her bag?” he asked curiously. She wrinkled her eyebrows, then caught sight of the sequined evening bag beside the woman.

“Open it up,” Agent Mulder suggested in that same curious tone.

She reached over and gently eased her hand under the plastic one, loosening the ties to the bag. She gasped again, her hand startling back a little, but couldn’t help but stare. In a laboratory specimen jar, bobbing gently in a pool of alcohol, was a severed head. It was a man’s head, but grotesquely transformed, by the addition of heavy makeup, earrings, and a sodden wig, into a woman’s face. Over the years the makeup had smeared badly, and the pupils had gone almost milky white. The perfectly elegant, decapitated woman sitting in her chariot, holding a head in her purse.

“Jackpot,” he whispered.

They hurried back to the car, Agent Mulder cradling the sequined bag with the head while she went to politely return the key to unit 31, stalling Glauber for a minute while Agent Mulder carefully placed the jar in the back of the car. He turned on the ignition, signaling to her that he was ready to leave, and she quickly said a last thank you before returning, sliding into the passenger seat, closing the door, and buckling up.

“What happens now?” she asked, a thrill running through her. He shook some rain from his hair, looking like he hadn’t been this exhilarated in a long time, and some droplets landed on her face. She laughed, giddy and frightened by their discovery.

“First, we talk to Lecter - you talk to Lecter,” he said, turning out from the mini-storage facility and speeding up down the road.

“When?” she asked. He had an annoying habit of not responding when he had an affirmative answer. “You don’t mean tonight.”

Again, he didn’t respond. “We can’t do that! It’ll be almost eleven before we get to the asylum!”

“It’s important to act while we can, before we lose the small details,” he said.

As a scientist, she didn’t agree. She believed in careful, sometimes tedious, thorough work before coming to a conclusion, before investigating further. But he had been assigned to help teach her. Talking to Lecter again would not only prove difficult, it would also be important to ask and receive answers to specific questions.

“Miggs is dead,” she said, remembering.

“That’s not your fault,” he reminded her. “That’s on Lecter.”

She nodded, and wiped a hand over her face. “Do you by any chance have a dictaphone?”

He shook his head. “Sorry.”

“Okay,” she said, taking that in stride, “I’ll need a notepad and pencil. What questions do you want me to ask him?”
Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading!
A loud clap of thunder followed by a flash of lightning illuminated the eerie towers and barred windows of the asylum as they pulled up beside it, visible only when the windshield wipers brushed the torrential rain off the glass.

“Umbrella?” she asked hopefully, looking at the sheets of rain pouring down outside.

Agent Mulder shook his head and opened the door. She followed him, holding her coat up over her head, where it didn’t do much good, and ran over the gravel up to the entrance, where Barney was standing, holding the door to the asylum open for them. Agent Mulder had called ahead.

“Dana,” he greeted, “Agent Mulder.”

Once inside, she started shivering in her heavy, sodden coat, but thought she would be too cold without it. She wanted to ask where Doctor Chilton was, but didn’t. Their shoes made squelching sounds as they followed Barney down, down, down the half-lit hallways, past alarmed doors, until they reached the visitor’s entrance. When Barney helped her take her coat off she noticed her teeth chattering. The notepad, clutched to her chest, was damp around the edges. She looked up at Agent Mulder.

“Your lips are a little blue,” she said.

“Yours, too,” he chuckled, and wrapped his arm around her, rubbing her right arm briskly to warm her up. After a moment, she pulled away, readying herself for Lecter, and tucked wet hair behind her ears.

“His lights are off, but he’s awake,” Barney said, closing the gate behind her after she walked into the cement-lined hallway.

“Okay,” she whispered, nodding.

Walking down the row of cells, she couldn’t be sure if the other prisoners were sleeping, or if they simply didn’t care that she was here. Miggs’ cell was empty, and she swallowed nervously when she saw that the bars were open. The iron smell of blood and chemicals -a crime cleanup crew must have come by earlier that evening.

Staying back from the glass, she squinted into the blackness of Lecter’s cell, but couldn’t make him out. She sat down on the floor about four feet away, legs crossed.

“It was anagram, wasn’t it, Doctor Lecter?” she asked. Receiving no response or hint of movement, she tried again. “Hester Mofet…’the rest of me’. Miss The-Rest-Of-Me. Meaning you rented that garage.”

The glowing images off a silent TV on a wheeled cart behind hr flickered over the glass in oranges and greens. On it, an evangelist ranted, waving his arms. Behind him a swaying choir in gaudy robes, the set positioned so that Lecter could not avoid seeing it.

“You put those things in there,” she said. “Paid for it in advance ten years ago. Why, Doctor?”
The food carrier suddenly shot out at her, making her eyes go wide. She peered carefully inside and saw a simple, unused white hand towel, folded neatly. *If he attempts to pass you anything, do not accept it.* She hesitated, then took it.

“Thank you.” She used it to blot her face, noticing some mascara coming off onto the white surface.

“Your bleeding has stopped,” he said, his hauntingly lyrical voice finally coming through.

She looked at the tear in her pant leg where the garage door had scraped her. “How did y-?” She stopped herself. “It’s just a scratch.”

“Why don’t you ask me about Buffalo Bill?” Lecter asked in the dark.

Surprised, she set the towel in her lap, surreptitiously taking her notepad and pencil at the same time. “Why? Do you know something about him?”

“I might if I saw the case file,” he said smoothly. “You could get that for me. Just ask Agent Mulder. I’m sure you have him wrapped around your finger by now.”

She pursed her lips. “Why don’t you tell me about ‘Miss Mofet’,” she pressed. “You wanted me to find him. Or do I have to wait for the lab?”

She heard Lecter sigh. “His name is Benjamin Raspail -a former patient of mine, whose romantic attachments ran to, shall we say, the exotic. I didn’t kill him, I assure you, merely tucked him away, very much as I’d found him, in that ridiculous car, after he’d missed three appointments.”

She nodded, noting the name, reminding herself to check Missing Persons. “If you didn’t kill him, then who did, sir?”

“Who can say? Best thing for him, really. His therapy was going nowhere,” Lecter drawled. Then, softer, “How did you feel when you saw him, Dana?”

“Scared at first,” she admitted, “then...exhilarated.”

“Why?” he asked.

She reflected before answering. Agent Mulder had been right about Lecter leaving her a clue, whereas she had dismissed it as nonsense. “Because...you weren’t wasting my time.”

“Jack Crawford is helping your career, pairing you with Agent Mulder,” Lecter said suddenly. “Apparently, he likes you, and you like Agent Mulder, or you wouldn’t have been back tonight.”

“I never thought about it,” she said, holding her ground.

“I told you not to lie, it doesn’t suit you,” he said, getting inside her head again. “Tell me -do you think Crawford wants you, sexually? True, he is much older, but do you think he visualizes scenarios...exchanges...Fucking you?”

She narrowed her eyebrows, slightly upset. “That doesn’t interest me, Doctor. It’s the sort of thing that Miggs would say.”

“Not anymore.”

She looked at her lap.

“Surely the odd coincidence of events hasn’t escaped you, Dana,” he continued, and she began to
feel a little sick. If only they could get back to the case and stop talking about her, always about her, when other people were just down the hall, listening to every word. “Crawford and Agent Mulder dangle you before me. Then I give you a bit of help. Do you think it’s because I like to look at you, like they do, and imagine what you would taste like?”

That was it, she was going to throw up, right there. She held a hand to her stomach. “I don’t know. Is it?”

“Doesn’t this all begin to suggest to you a kind of...negotiation?”

The lights turned on in his cell with a flash, and she shielded her eyes for a moment. “Thank you, Barney,” Lecter said calmly. As she looked around, she saw that the cell had been stripped bare. Gone were the books, drawings, even the mattress. There he was, sitting not three feet back from the glass. How had she not made him out?

“What happened to your drawings?” she asked.

“Punishment, you see, for Miggs, just like that gospel program,” he said, his eyes on her. “When you leave, they’ll turn the volume way up. Chilton does enjoy his petty torments.”

“Who decapitated your patient, Doctor?” she pressed, sensing that her time was almost up now that the lights were on.”

Lecter stood, turning away from her to the naked stone wall. “I’ve been in this room for eight years, Dana. I know they will never, ever let me out while I’m alive. What I want is a view. I want a window where I can see a tree, or even water. I want to be in a federal institution, far away from Chilton.”

“Who killed Raspail, Doctor Lecter?” she insisted in a whisper, still too sick to her stomach to stand.

He turned to her and smiled. “Oh, a very naughty boy. Someone Crawford and your Agent Mulder are most anxious to meet.”

“Buffalo Bill?” she asked, incredulous. “Bill killed him, all those years ago? That’s impossible!”

He smiled. “I’m offering you a psychological profile on Buffalo Bill, based on the case evidence.”

She stared at him.

“I’ll help you catch him, Dana.”

She used one hand to help her rise up to standing, not taking her eyes off him, hating him with so much intensity it scared her. “You know who he is, don’t you?” How he could let those women die, all the while knowing who was murdering them, was disgusting. “Tell me his name, Doctor. Tell me who killed Raspail.”

“All good things to those who wait,” he said with a tilt of his head. “I’ve waited, Dana Scully, but how long can you, Jackie-boy, and that unstable Agent Mulder wait? Our little Billy must already be searching for that next special lady…”

Clamping her jaw, she turned and left, walking angrily back to rejoin Agent Mulder and Barney.

“Good job!” Agent Mulder congratulated her, putting a hand on her shoulder, but she shrugged him off and went for her heavy, wet coat hanging on the hook by the door.
“Come on, let’s go,” she bit out, pushing her way between the two men and hurrying back through the corridors and up the stairs, hearing Agent Mulder at her heels.

“Dana?” he asked, worried, but she kept on walking. It wasn’t raining anymore, but the night air chilled her damp clothing as they left the asylum and started toward the car. “What’s wrong?” he persisted.

“I don’t want to talk to you,” she said, slamming the door once she was inside the car, she didn’t care if it was unprofessional. He got in and closed his door.

“Was it something he said? Is that why you’re upset?” he asked, starting the car. It was late, after midnight, and all she wanted was to be back in her bed. She wanted to study for her test tomorrow and forget all of this had ever happened. He didn’t deserve an answer. She sat there, stoic and staring out the window as they drove back to Quantico, her jaw clenched, the severed head rolling occasionally in the back seat.

When they pulled back into the spot at the Academy she handed him the notepad and got out of the car, walking quickly toward the dorm. It was raining again, and terribly cold.

“Why are you giving me this?” It had every note she’d taken so far on the case.

“Keep it,” she called over her shoulder. “Do the report yourself. I’m out.”

He caught up to her. “What are you talking about, Scully?”

She kept walking, almost to the lawn, and he grabbed her arm, turning her around. “Will you tell me what’s going on?” They had to raise their voices to hear each other over the rain.

“You’re hurting me!” she gasped, surprised at the strength of his grip.

“I’m sorry,” he said, releasing her instantly. She massaged her arm, then looked up at him, tears in her eyes.

“That is why Crawford picked me, isn’t it?” she asked, her hair plastered to her head. “Because I’m a woman. He wanted to dangle me in front of Lecter so he’d be more likely to give out information.”

Agent Mulder tried to butt in, but she plowed ahead. “And you, you’re even worse! You knew, you knew this whole time. I trusted you!”

He shook his head. “Scully, you-”

She thought back, suddenly, to Daniel, the married man she’d slept with in med school. He’d let her get even higher marks than she usually had, probably just because he was sleeping with her. When they’d gone through a rough patch, her work had suffered. Men using women, women using men.

“I thought I was making a difference,” she confessed. “I thought I was doing something good, helping you interview him, going to that storage unit with you. You couldn’t have gone without me, because if you found something, you’d have to interview him again, and you couldn’t have done that without me. You used me.”

“I-”

“Just…” She shrugged. “Just leave me alone.” And then she turned and left, exhausted, defeated, and feeling foolish.
When she got back to the dorm most everyone’s door was closed, and if they were open no music was coming out. Her classmates were studying, which is what she should have been doing all evening. She opened the door to her room and saw Marion’s desk light had been left on, although her roommate had crawled to bed with two textbooks and was now asleep, *The United States Penal System* sliding off her stomach.

Trying to make as little noise as possible, Dana draped her coat over her desk chair and grabbed her robe where it lay on her bed. She undressed quickly in the half-light and wrapped herself in the robe, then grabbed her caddy and a towel, heading for the shower down the hall.

She closed her eyes under the warm spray and thought back to how excited she’d been, hours earlier, when she’d gotten into the car with Agent Mulder to go to the mini-storage facility. Everything that had happened today, from the first interview with Lecter to the moment she’d run away from his cell was tattooed on her brain. She couldn’t get it out of her head. He knew who was killing those poor women. He knew, and he would never tell anyone else. But he’d tell her. She opened her eyes and shook her head, not willing to be toyed with.

She’d go to the asylum again. She’d dress to impress, and let Lecter insult her, if that’s what it took for him to give up the name. She’d dangle herself in front of him while Crawford sat, content in his office, and Agent Mulder stood on the safe side of the bars, if that’s what it took. She’d get the name, but this time, she’d do it knowing exactly why she had to be the one sitting in front of that glass, eye to eye with a murderer. Running the course that morning with the sun coming up, hoping to get her time down, seemed like another life.

When she came back to her room with her hair wrapped in a towel, her shoulders slumped with both physical and mental exhaustion, she opened the door and found Marion sitting cross-legged on her bed, her dark hair tangled from her own shower. She looked up as Dana walked in.

“Dana, what’s going on?” Marion asked, her voice scratchy from sleep.

“Nothing,” she sighed, setting her caddy back down and pulling out underwear, a pair of leggings, and a clean shirt out of her dresser.

Marion ran a hand through her hair, then grabbed a comb from her bedside table, working out the tangles. “It’s after one in the morning,” she said while Dana got dressed. “You disappear practically all day, when I finally see you you’re not even studying for the exam, then you disappear again. Spill!”

Dana took the towel off her head and sat down on her bed opposite Marion’s, leaning back against the wall and slouching. “Crawford put me on this case collecting questionnaires from criminals. He wanted me to go after Hannibal Lecter at the asylum up in Baltimore this morning.”

Marion swallowed. “Hannibal the Cannibal?”

She nodded.

“What was he like?” Marion asked, fascinated. She had a master’s degree in abnormal psychology. Dana almost wished Crawford had picked Marion instead, then decided her roommate would probably have been more hurt than she was over the way it had all been handled.

“Terrifying,” she admitted. “But strangely...unintimidating at the same time. I mean, he’s the one behind bars. But Agent Mulder was right. You don’t want him inside your head.”

“Agent Mulder, the Behavioral Science nerd?”
Dana looked up. “Yeah,” she said. “Crawford assigned him to supervise me, or something. Turns out they’re just a couple of creeps with an agenda.” She ran her fingers through her hair, and Marion tossed her the comb she’d finished with.

“What do you mean?”

She sighed. “They’d already tried to get Lecter to fill out the questionnaire, and they’d interviewed him before, only now he’s refusing to speak to anyone. So, Crawford tried sending me.”

Marion frowned, then yawned. “Why you? You’re not even -I mean, you’re not all that interested in behavioral science, are you?”

Dana shrugged. “It’s fascinating, but I’m more interested in working with dead people.” She set down the comb. “I’m almost certain that Crawford sent me because to him I’m just a pretty girl.”

“You got Lecter to talk,” Marion deduced.

“I mean, he didn’t do the questionnaire, but he talked. He knows who Buffalo Bill is,” she revealed.

Marion scoffed. “Bullshit! He was too busy serving people up as meatballs to have any contact with Buffalo Bill. He’s playing a game.”

Dana shook her head. “I don’t think so, Marion. Not from the way he was talking about it. I think he knows exactly the man we’re looking for.”

“Listen, this guy was a serial killer, but he was also a brilliant psychologist,” Marion argued. “Damn it, I even had to read some of his papers in school, Dana. He’s a genius. If anyone could play you, it’s Hannibal Lecter. Don’t let him.”

Dana scooted off her bed and went to pick up turn on the lamp on her desk, taking some notebooks and index cards out of her backpack. “Yeah, whatever the case, I’m done with it,” she said, waving her hand. “I’ll give Crawford my report on Wednesday morning, and that’s it. If he wants to send me back to talk to Lecter, fine, but the whole time I’ll know exactly what he thinks of me.”

Marion wrinkled her nose. “What about that Agent Mulder? He was the one who called tonight, wasn’t he?”

Dana sighed. “Agent Mulder is just as bad as Crawford,” she said. “He’s only after what he wants, and he’s prepared to get it, no matter what.”

Marion paused for a minute. “I’m sorry, Dana.”

“It’s fine,” she said. “I’m just going to study for this test.”

“Okay,” Marion said, sounding sympathetic. “Well, I’m gonna crash. You know me, I’ll sleep through a tornado. So if you want to have a good cry, don’t worry, I won’t hear you.”

She chuckled, sitting down at the desk. “Thanks. I’ll remember that.”

Chapter End Notes

Dialogue from The Silence of the Lambs doesn't belong to me!
At 7:32 AM her report, neatly typed and thorough, right down to the napkin used on her face, was stapled and put into Crawford’s mailbox down at the reception area of the administrative building. She hurried back across the breezeway for her eight o’clock Forensic Evidence lab, and found a spot next to Marion, perched on a wooden stool in front of one of four black counters. Each student took a microscope and listened attentively to the instructor.

A blurry image was projected onto a large video screen in the front of the room, gradually sharpening and resolving into two separate pieces of fabric. She narrowed her eyes.

“Electron microscopy reveals fiber ‘signatures’ that are nearly as distinct as fingerprints,” the instructor began. “Now, both of these blouses were worn by victims of Buffalo Bill. They were found in two separate states, and four months apart. He always slits them up the back, like a funeral suit.”

Although tired, the trainees sat up straighter, excited at the relevance of the material they were examining. On the screen now were closer views of the cut fabric edges, until individual threads were discernible, big as tree limbs in front of them. The cuts matched.

“The bunching you see -this compression,” the instructor continued, indicating with her finger, “is characteristic of scissor cuts, rather than a single blade. And, as you see, Bill always uses the same pair.”

The door opened, and everyone turned to the left to see Beaumont, the gunning instructor, duck in.

“Dana Scully, are you in here?”

She looked at Marion, then bent down, picked up her bag, and went to follow Beaumont, leaving the lab behind. No doubt Crawford wanted to see her about the report. Damn him. They walked briskly down the hall, Beaumont holding a small canvas bag.

“Get your field gear. Pack for overnight. You’re going with Agent Mulder,” he explained quickly. “Looks like a Buffalo Bill type situation. Been in the water about a week, and Jack needs somebody who can print a floater. Think you can handle it?”

She thought quickly. “I’ll need the big fingerprinting kit...and the one-to-one Polaroid, the CU-5, with film packs and batteries.”

Beaumont drove her himself to the landing pad in his Jeep Cherokee, passing hangars, parked planes, and an airstrip. On her lap she held the fingerprinting kit and a weekend bag.

“Jack’s pretty tough on you, isn’t he?” he joked, glancing at her determined face. He’d been the one to grab her off the course as well, she remembered.
“I guess so,” she replied.

“He’s got a lot on his mind,” Beaumont said. “Mulder’s not giving you any trouble, is he?”

She looked out the window. “No, sir.”

They pulled up in front of an ancient, rather dilapidated Beechcraft. Its door was open, and the twin propellers and beacons were already turning. Beaumont turned to her, holding out his small canvas bag.

“You’re going in the field, so you’ve gotta have the whole kit. Take this,” he said. “It’s mine.”

She opened the bag, staring at the black gun nestled in its shoulder holster. She looked up at him, touched.

“Wear it,” Beaumont continued, “don’t ever leave it in your purse. Dry fire it whenever you get the chance. And do your exercises.”

“I will,” she said, “I promise.”

Beaumont smiled a little sadly. “Listen, I hope you never need a thing I’ve taught you. But you’ve got something, Scully. I saw it the first time you shot that moving target in the head dead center. If you ever need to, you can shoot.”

She nodded, then climbed out. She looked back at him when she closed the door. They were both, she knew, moved by this small rite of passage, and also a little embarrassed. A voice came from the helicopter.

“Scully?”

It was Agent Mulder, his jacket whipping back against the wind brought from the blades. She hitched her bags up a little, then hurried to join him, stepping in a shallow puddle on the way that splashed onto the cuff of her black trousers.

When he gestured to where she should sit, she sat. When he indicated that they were taking off, she nodded. When he tried to talk to her over the din of the propellers and the static of the pilot’s radio, she shook her head and pretended it was too difficult to hear. Outside the window she saw the same grey sky over a quilt of fields. They flew through wisps of clouds. Moodily, she opened the thick Buffalo Bill casefile in her lap and looked down.

There were autopsy reports, histamine analyses, grainy enlargements of bullet slugs, showing matching grooves, and then a stack of victim photos. The first one she saw, taken from a long distance away, showed a nude female body face down on a pebbly riverbank, surrounded by bits of litter. She studied each one of about fifty pictures and close-up enlargements, giving each one the respect and attention it deserved. Each victim’s autopsy report was meticulously pored over, and she wasn’t happy with a few of them, which seemed rushed, coming too quickly to their conclusions.

“He keeps them alive for three days,” Agent Mulder said loudly, balanced with one hand against the chopper, standing next to her. When she looked at him, slightly swaying with the motions of the helicopter as it moved, she shifted to the right, making space enough on the small bench for him to sit beside her. Once seated, he looked at her gratefully.

“Why, we don’t know…,” he continued. “There’s no evidence of rape or physical abuse prior to death. All the mutilation you see there is post-mortem.”
She nodded to show that she was listening.

“So, three days. Then he shoots them, skins them, and dumps them. Each body in a different river, in a different state, downstream from an interstate highway. The water leaves us no fingerprints, fibers, DNA fluids - no trace evidence at all. That’s Frederica Bimmel, the first one,” he said as she flipped to one paper-clipped section of documents pertaining to the girl.

Frederica had been a pretty, plump-cheeked brunette, smiling in her graduation cap and gown. There she was, brimming with touching optimism.

“A big girl, like all the rest,” Agent Mulder continued, while she looked at the girl’s picture. “Weighed about one-sixty. Her corpse was the only one he took the trouble to weight down, so actually, she was the third girl found. After her, he got lazy.”

After standing again and going near the cockpit, Agent Mulder returned, opening a large map of central and eastern U.S with widely spaced, hand-drawn markings. She closed the casefile, and he handed her the map.

“Big blue square for Belvedere, Ohio, where the Bimmel girl was abducted. Blue triangle for where her body was found - down here in Missouri,” he pointed with a long finger. “Same marks for the other four girls, in different colors. This new one - today - washed up here. Elk River, in West Virginia, about six miles below U.S 79. Real boonies.”

She looked from the map to his face. “There’s no correlation at all between where they were kidnapped and where they’re found?” She had to speak loudly over the din.

He shook his head.

“What if,” she pressed, “what if you trace the heaviest traffic routes backwards from the dump sites? Do they converge at all?”

He grinned briefly. “Good idea, but he thought of it, too. We’ve run simulations, using different vectors and the best dates we can assign. You put it all in the computer, and smoke comes out. No, this one is different.” He looked at the map, determined. “This guy saw us coming.”

A rental car was waiting for them when they arrived after only a couple of hours. Agent Mulder drove, following a highway patrol car along winding mountain roads. Again, she had the Buffalo Bill file open on her lap, although she wasn’t really looking at it, she was just trying to avoid talking to him.

“Talk about him, Scully,” Agent Mulder encouraged. “Tell me what you see.”

She chose her words carefully. “Well, he’s a white male. Serial killers tend to hunt within their own ethnic group,” she said, briefly looking at him. “And he’s not a drifter, he’s got his own house somewhere. And not an apartment.”

“Why?” he asked, curious.

“What he does with them takes privacy,” she said. “Time, tools. He’s in his thirties or forties, he’s got real physical strength, but combined with an older man’s self control. He’s cautious, precise, never impulsive. And he won’t stop.”

“Why not?”
She closed the file. “He’s got a real taste for it now, and he’s getting better at his work.” Then she looked at the window and watched the woods go by.

A beat, then, “Maybe you’ve got a knack for this. I guess we’re about to find out.”

“Like I’ve got a ‘knack’ for Dr. Lecter?” she asked evenly.

She could sense him looking at her, measuring her anger. “Okay, Scully, let’s have it.”

“You haven’t said a word today about what we found in that garage. That was my work, too,” she started.

“What should I say?” he asked, not angry. “You did fine work. We’re waiting on the lab.” She was glad to hear that, at least.

“Crawford knew. He knew from the start that Lecter held the key to this,” she said. “But you weren’t up front with me. You sent me in to Lecter blind, even after I asked you if it had anything to do with Bill.”

A pause. “Are you finished?”

“He starts this...buzzing in me,” she tried to explain to the window, “in my head. He makes me feel violated. You used me, Agent Mulder.” She looked back at him in time to see a shadow of regret pass over his face.

“Number one:” he said, “maybe there is a connection, maybe not. Lying and breathing are the same thing to Lecter. Number two: if I’d sent you in there with something to hide from him, he’d have known it, instantly. He’d never have trusted you.”

She started to answer him, then stopped herself. He was right.

By now the car was entering a tidy little town. Tree-lined streets, wooden houses, one-story shops, mountains in the background. They slowed, then turned into the lot at Grieg’s Funeral Home.

“Number three: Crawford didn’t send you along today just because apparently you can do first-rate forensics,” he admitted. “If Lecter is becoming part of this case, you’ve got the most current read on him. And number four-” He hesitated, pulling into a spot, then put the car in park, finally looking at her full-on. “You don’t have to like Crawford, or like me, or the way I do things. But you do have to keep a cool head, especially now…” He paused again, considering. “Because from here on out, you’ll know everything I do. Okay?”

She nodded. She supposed it was as close to an apology as she was going to get, and she was taking his olive branch, which she wasn’t entirely sure Crawford would approve of.

“You think about him long enough, you get a feel for him...Then, if you’re lucky, out of all the stuff you know, one little part tugs at you, tries to get your attention. You let me know when that happens, Scully,” he said. “Live right behind your eyes, today. Don’t try to impose any patterns on this guy. Just stay open and let him show you.”

One of the troopers, impassive in his glasses and hat, peered in through Agent Mulder’s window. Agent Mulder nodded to him, then turned back to her, giving her an encouraging smile.

“School’s out, Scully.”
As they approached the funeral home from the front, hearing organ music, she saw people of all ages, dressed in their somber best, filing in for a service. Several of the mourners looked at her curiously, and she flushed, mortified, carrying the fingerprinting kit and walking in beside them behind the troopers. A soft guiding hand on her back from Agent Mulder, and she continued in, trying not to think about the fact that they were interrupting someone’s funeral. They should have gone in through the back, straight to the mortuary.

There wasn’t much space to move between the guests and the police force, and she got stuck in a traffic jam of mourners. She looked to the side and saw the open casket, not a long way down the viewing room, where people were lining up, carrying flowers, or finding seats. It was small, too small for an adult. A dead child in the other room. Tears pricked at her eyes.

“You okay, Scully?” Agent Mulder asked when she slowed.

She nodded. “I’m fine.”

A young deputy, several state troopers, and a sheriff were all waiting as they entered the single door into the back. The dim, cluttered corridor doubled as a storage space -a treadle sewing machine, a soft-drink machine, a tricycle...The music seemed closer here.

“Sheriff Mason?” Agent Mulder asked, holding out his hand, then shaking the older man’s. “Agent Mulder, F.B.I, and this is Agent Scully. We appreciate you calling us.”

The sheriff was grim and unsociable, when he said, “I didn’t call you. That was somebody from the state attorney’s office. ‘For you do a thing else, I’m gonna find out if the girl’s local. Floatin’ in the river...Could be someone’s daughter, someone’s wife.”

“Well, sir, that’s where we can help,” Agent Mulder said, gesturing to her, and she shifted the fingerprinting kit in her arms.

The sheriff cast a doubtful, unhappy glance her way. “I don’t even know you, Mister. Now, we’ll extend you every courtesy, just as soon as we can, but for right now we’re waiting for Dr. Newell to come and pronounce her. He’s on a busy schedule, and-”

“Uh, Sheriff?” the deputy said, coming between them. “Well, this type of crime has some bits we’d better discuss with just the doctor. You know, private-like.” His eyes moved to meet her eyes, seeming apologetic. She quickly scanned the hall -no other women. The sheriff began to nod, and she opened her mouth.

“Actually, we don’t have to wait for Dr. Newell,” she said. “I can pronounce her.”

She drew herself up to her full height and handed Agent Mulder the heavy fingerprinting kit without much warning. “Well, as it happens, I am a doctor. Now, I think we shouldn’t waste any more time, do you?” she asked, fire in her veins, although her voice was bright. “Sheriff, I’ll need you in there for a moment since this falls under your jurisdiction.”

He nodded, a little embarrassed. “Right this way, Doctor,” he guided, using her new title. “Lamar, he’s the mortician, he’ll come help you out once he’s done playing that music.”

Down the hall, through the sea of men all taller than her, she saw a door marked Mortuary, and set off. The men, looking bashful, reluctantly stepped out of her way while the sheriff and Agent Mulder followed behind. She opened the door and held it as the two men walked in, Agent Mulder with the
kit. She exhaled her anger and took in the room.

A dark green body bag, tightly zipped, was laying on porcelain embalming table. It was almost the only modern object in the Victorian room, with its glass-paned cabinets and faded wallpaper, decorated with cabbage roses.

“I’ll take that, now,” she said, walking to Agent Mulder, who gave her back the fingerprinting kit. She set it up on one of the wide counters while they waited for the mortician, who arrived a few minutes later. In the interim, Agent Mulder explained some of the process to Sheriff Mason, who, chastened by her earlier announcement, had become a more willing listener.

The door opened again and a man in his early sixties, whisky-reddened and nervous from being outranked by a woman half his age, came inside. “Lamar,” he said, introducing himself.

“Agent Mulder,” Agent Mulder said, pointing to himself, and, gesturing to her with a new degree of respect, “Doctor Scully.” Perhaps things were less complicated this way.

“Fine,” Lamar said politely, and took a small jar of Vicks VapoRub from a drawer, putting some beneath his nose, then tossing it to the sheriff, then Agent Mulder, who tossed it to her. Not bothering, she gave the jar back to the mortician with a small smile.

She turned to get the camera and heard the body bag being slowly opened behind her. Once she had loaded the film, she turned back to see them pulling the bag back. Agent Mulder immediately covered his nose and mouth. The sheriff looked like he was going to be sick.

“Bill,” she said quietly. She steadied herself by raising the camera, then took a flash photo.

Lamar, wearing gloves, gently shifted one the dead girl’s arms, then clicked his tongue. Dana pronounced the girl dead.

“Star-shaped contact entrance wound over the sternum. Wrongful death,” she finished, willing her voice not to shake. As soon as that step was over, the sheriff left the room. She’d worked her ass off for four years to get here, thinking she was some big shot pathologist by not needing the Vicks. In med school she’d practiced on cadavers, assisted in surgery, then performed autopsies in her final year. But nothing, not even all that time spent in cold morgues, had prepared her for the day when she’d see true evil right in front of her. “Can you document for me?” she asked quietly.

“Sure,” Agent Mulder said, taking the large camera while she went for gloves. She snapped one on after the other. “What do you see, Scully?”

She leaned down, examining the girl more closely. The body was bloated from the water, but she could still detect a smooth, young face framed by tangled, black hair. “Well, she’s not local. Her ears are pierced three times, and she’s wearing glitter nail polish. Looks like town to me.” She looked up at Agent Mulder. “Get a photo of her hand, please.”

Lamar went to find a heavy, dark blue apron, and brought it back for her, his hands now bare. Politely, he tied it for her while she stood still and Agent Mulder took more photos.

“Hey, Scully,” Agent Mulder said, “two of the fingernails on the left hand are broken off, and there’s dirt or grit under the others. It looks like she tried to claw her way through something.” The flash and hiss of the camera.

“I’ll scrape out samples after I’ve printed her,” she assured him. “There’s more film in my bag.”

He went to reload the camera. “Let’s get pictures of her teeth,” he suggested. “We can fax them
through Missing Persons.”

“That attachment is in the side pocket.”

When he returned she helped gently retract the girl’s mouth while he took pictures, using the Polaroid’s special attachments. Each time the camera flashed, the inside of the girl’s cheeks glowed amber. Agent Mulder took the pictures to the counter where they slowly developed.

“She’s got something in her throat, Scully,” he announced, bringing over the photo so she and Lamar could take a look.

“When a body comes out of the water, lots of times there’s like, leaves and things in the mouth,” Lamar offered.

She nodded. “Let’s just be sure. Do you have a pair of forceps, sir?” she asked, mindful that this wasn’t her space alone.

“Yes, ma’am,” Lamar said, coming back with the instrument, gloved again. He replaced her hands with his own, holding the girl’s mouth open while she took the forceps in her right hand.

Carefully, very slowly, she lowered the instrument down, working over the tongue until she felt the opening to the throat. Something was caught, but she couldn’t quite grasp it. Concentrating intently, reminding herself that she wasn’t hurting the body on the table, she spread the girl’s mouth wider, tilting her head back a little, and finally felt the forceps close over something. As she removed whatever it was, her head bent over the girl’s, she thought she heard a final release of air, like the true end of the victim’s life, escape her throat. She pulled the hidden treasure out.

It was a brown, cylindrical object. She turned it in the air, and they all stared.

“What is that?” Agent Mulder asked. “Some kind of seedpod?”

Lamar shook his head. “No, sir. That’s a bug cocoon.” He wrinkled his brow. “There’s no way that could get way down in there like that.”

She agreed. “Not unless somebody shoved it in there.”

“Agent Mulder, could you get a specimen jar from that corner cabinet and the bottle of alcohol?” Lamar asked.

When he returned she dropped the cocoon into the small jar and watched him poor alcohol inside so that it floated. He capped the jar, then set it aside. She looked back to the body, handing the forceps back.

“She’ll be easier to print when we turn her over,” she said. “Sir, will you help me?”

“Yes, ma’am, I will,” Lamar said, and went to the other side of the porcelain table. With a grunt, they turned the large body over to reveal Bill’s handiwork. The victim’s skin was removed, this time in two large, diamond-shaped sections above the buttocks. The exit wound was visible, in between the second and third thoracic vertebrae, about six inches from the right shoulder blade.

“Hey, Scully,” Agent Mulder said, coming over to take more photos. “What do you make of these?”

She tilted her head. “I don’t know. I didn’t see those configurations on any of the other girls…Let’s get some close-ups.” She stood back while the camera flashed.
When she finally finished the exam and done some internal work, she made her way outside and breathed in the cool, chemical-free late afternoon air. Agent Mulder was leaning against the car, casually surveying the sleepy road and nearby houses.

“Okay, I’m done,” she said, stretching her hands out. He stood up straight and looked at her.

“Yeah? You up for pizza or something?” he asked, sounding hopeful.

She smiled. “Honestly? I’d love a shower.”

He nodded understandingly. “Let’s find a motel, then.” He opened the door and got in, the fingerprinting kit already in the back. She got in the passenger side and sighed, tired from being on her feet, but realizing she was going to have to get used to it.

“Now, I asked one of the troopers about accommodations,” he said. “By the sound of it, it’s not going to be the Ritz.”

She closed her eyes for a moment. “All that’s on my mind right now is a shower. I’m not picky.”

He chuckled and pulled out of the lot. She set all her notes, plus a tape recorder, down by her feet.

“You know, when Crawford told me you’d been recruited out of med school, I thought he meant you never finished med school,” Agent Mulder said.

She shook her head. “Well, I did. And that badge doesn’t expire in one week.”

“Forensic pathology, huh?”

“You sound surprised,” she said.

He shrugged. “I don’t know. Maybe I am. I could have seen you as a pediatrician, or, I don’t know, some sort of surgeon. Never would have gone for pathologist.”

“I told you already, Agent Mulder. There’s a lot we don’t know about each other.”

“I know you weren’t afraid to pull the doctor card at all,” he continued, amused. “You should have seen some of their faces.”

She scoffed. “Oh, I did see some of their faces! Shocked at the idea that a woman could be a doctor.”

“You’re in a tiny town in the middle of nowhere in West Virginia, Scully,” he said. “Not a good high school graduation rate, low income. I’d be surprised if more than ten people here had a washing machine. Maybe you storming in there taught them something.” Her mouth twitched at the word ‘storming’. “Think of it that way.”

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for all the feedback! Look out for some deviation from the original SOTL plotline in the next chapter.
Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

She’d said she wasn’t picky, and it was clear that Agent Mulder wasn’t either. He pulled into the first motel he saw, about thirty minutes out of town, along the highway, and paid for two rooms. She opened the door to room twenty-two with low expectations, but found it wasn’t so bad. One double bed with clean sheets and pillows, towels in the bathroom, which had a tub and shower instead of the stand-up shower common with motels. Only a faint smell of lemon-scented cleaner lingered in the air, and she left the door open after laying her bag on the bed. Agent Mulder ducked his head in.

“You up for dinner after your shower?” he asked. “I haven’t had anything except some soda crackers this morning.”

She nodded. “Sure.”

“We don’t have to go out, if you don’t want,” he said, and she widened her eyes. He smiled reassuringly. “I meant I could go out and get a pizza or something.”

She hesitated, but the idea of showering, then going out again seemed tiring. She also hadn’t eaten since breakfast this morning. “Okay. I could do pizza.”

He clicked his tongue. “I can’t promise anything, but I’ll have a good look around. Pepperoni?”

She nodded. “Can you add mushrooms?”

He wrinkled his nose. “I’ll get mushrooms on half. See you later.” He closed her door behind him, and after a moment she went to lock it. She grabbed her toiletries from her bag and headed to the bathroom, hearing him start the car again and pull out of the spot in front of his room.

Because it was slightly chilly in the room, she dried her hair, but pulled it up into a ponytail. Her clothes from the day smelled like chemicals and rotting flesh -she’d stuffed them into a plastic bag to keep the odor away from her other belongings. She dressed in the bathroom, wishing she’d brought different pajamas -black leggings, an oversized shirt, and her crewneck from the Academy. From the other room she heard the sound of the television, the mumbling of a British voice, it sounded like a nature documentary. She took her key and left her room, locking the door behind her, and knocked on his door.

“It’s open!” he called, and she turned the knob. He was sitting on the bed, and there was no pizza in sight. She looked at the plastic bags on the small table beside the door, by the window. “Uh, I couldn’t find pizza. I found a gas station, though.”

“Oh-huh…”

Agent Mulder waved her inside, and she closed the door behind her. “So, I got a little of everything. There’s soda, juice, trail mix, Pringles, beef jerky, cereal, milk, a can of SPAM.” He got up and peered into one of the bags. “Oreos, Skittles…I even scored two oranges.”

She winced as he turned the bags upside down and everything tumbled out onto the bed, the roll of Pringles falling to the ground on top of the Oreos. He looked at her apologetically.
“Um, everything around here closes pretty early. There’s a diner about an hour away, the guy said,” he offered. “I could still take you out, if you want.”

The thought of eating junk food for dinner wasn’t that appealing, especially when she’d been looking forward to pizza so much she thought she could smell it in the shower, but she didn’t want to go out now. It was late October, and night was falling earlier and earlier. “No, this is fine,” she said.

“Well, take whatever you want,” he offered, standing up. “I didn’t know what kind of foods you eat.”

She picked out the milk and cereal, an orange, and waited for him to open the Pringles. “Did you happen to pick up a spoon?”

Agent Mulder froze. “Uh, no. Can you just...drink it?”

She laughed, nodded, and took her food with her to one of the chairs, opening the small bowl-like container of Cheerios and pouring some milk inside. He grabbed the trail mix, popped the tab on a can of iced tea and went to sit on the other chair, setting the can on the small table.

“I know some guys who work at the Smithsonian,” she said after the first mouthful of Cheerios. “Entomologists. I want to take that cocoon to them and see if they can identify it. Maybe it’s got some limited range, or it only breeds at certain times of the year…”

He nodded, chewing on some cashews. “Good plan.” He thought for a moment, looking reflective.

“What?”

He looked at her suddenly. “I wonder if he’s done it before -placed a cocoon, or an insect. It would be easy to miss in an autopsy, right? Especially if the victim is pulled from water.”

She nodded. “Very. Actually, I’m not too happy with the other autopsy reports. They don’t seem thorough enough for a murder victim.”

“Exhumations are painful for the families, especially after a murder,” Agent Mulder said, a pile of raisins forming on the table as he bypassed them in favor of the nuts. “I’ll ask for one if you want, but -”

“We should have the lab check Raspail’s head,” she interrupted, excited. “Have them probe his soft-palate tissues. They’ll find another cocoon.”

“You seem pretty sure of that.”

She set down the empty bowl of cereal, still hungry. “Raspail was killed by the same man who’s killing these girls,” she insisted. “And Lecter knows him, maybe even treated him. You think so, too, don’t you? Or you wouldn’t have sent me back after we’d found the head.”

Agent Mulder got up, reached for the Pringles, opened the roll, and handed it to her. She took some out, then passed it to him. “Before he was caught, Lecter had a big psychiatric practice in Baltimore. But he travelled all over the country -teaching, consulting...He even testified in murder trials. Who knows how many potential psychos he turned loose, just for fun?”

She drew her feet up into the chair, so that her knees were up by her chest, and sighed a little, biting a chip. “It’s all about fun for him. I can see it in his eyes.”

He nodded. “That’s why you’ve got to be careful with him,” he reminded. “Everything’s a game to
him, especially your personal life.”

She decimated the small pile of chips, then began to peel the orange, introducing a citrus aroma to the room. Agent Mulder had stopped eating, occasionally sipping his iced tea.

“So, are you going to ask me?”

She looked up from her work, her fingers sticky. “Ask you what?”

“About what Lecter said. The story about my sister,” he said, a bit amused. “Come on, you’ve got to be curious.”

“It’s not my story to tell,” she said gently, looking back at her orange as she took the rest of the peel off, beginning to divide the sections.

“Fair enough,” he said, glancing at her, his tone warm. Then, with a tired sigh, he loosened his tie, and she looked over, alarmed. “Sorry,” he apologized, only having loosened it to be more comfortable. She was in her pajamas, and he’d been wearing the same clothes since early this morning.

“Maybe I should go,” she said, standing up, setting the orange down in its bed of peelings.

“Woah, Scully,” he said, watching her, confused by her sudden change in demeanor. “What’s up?”

“Nothing,” she explained quickly, taking the pack of Oreos from the floor and standing up. “I’m gonna go to bed.”

He stood as well when she got to the door. “Okay, I’ll...see you in the morning, I guess.”

“Yeah, see you,” she said, opening the door and bracing herself against the cold.

“Hey, you forgot your orange!” he called, but she had already closed the door behind her, fumbling for her key and letting herself into her own thin-walled room. She locked the door behind her and leaned her back against it, cold even through her sweatshirt and shirt.

A time she didn’t want to remember. Conversations alone after hours, just talking at first, before she’d realized Daniel had wanted more, and she had, too. How the more became too much, how she’d started spiraling down a wormhole of lies from her colleagues, Daniel’s family -keeping it all from hers. Her parents, who thought she could do no wrong. That’s just how it had started before. Daniel loosening his tie, helping her unbutton her blouse -never again.

A gentle knock on her door, right between her shoulder blades. She ran a hand over her face.

“Scully?”

He waited, then knocked again. “Dana, will you open the door?”

She exhaled, then turned, unlocked the door, and opened it, leaning against the edge. It was very cold, and she shivered.

“Rule number five,” he said, his breath coming out like smoke, “no more secrets.”

She searched his face.

“Now, you’re probably still pissed off because of what Crawford did, and how I acted, taking you back to see Lecter.” He looked at her. “You’ve got every right to be pissed off. But I meant what I
said today in the car. You’ll know everything I know. We’re on the same page from now on.”

She glanced down at his loosened tie, and he sighed a little, tightening it. “I’m not part of any agenda, Scully. You’ve got to trust me. That’s what partners do. You’ll learn that later.” He was staring at her with big, gently pleading eyes.

“I trust you, Agent Mulder,” she said softly. “You just reminded me of something…” He looked at her curiously. “Something I’m not proud of.”

He nodded in understanding, and she realized in that instant that somehow, without her having to say anything else, he knew what she was alluding to. Like she had about his sister, however, he didn’t press for details. That was her story to tell, or not.

“Well, sleep tight,” he said. “We’ve got to be up early if you want a real breakfast and not Skittles. Seven-thirty sound good?”

She nodded, feeling a huge weight lift from her shoulders. “Yeah.”

“Okay,” he said. A beat. “And you can drop the ‘Agent Mulder’ing. It’s just ‘Mulder’ now.”

She smiled. “Good night.”

He took her hand and placed the peeled orange back in her palm. “‘Night, Scully.”

“Dana, you better come see this!” Marion said, pulling her away from her textbooks at dawn on Friday and down the hall into the rec room, where early-bird trainees were studying, stretching, or watching the TV. “Hey, turn that up!” Marion called, and one of the boys increased the volume. On the screen was the image of a round-faced, rosy young girl, their age. The anchor’s voice came through loud and clear behind the picture.

“...was listed first simply as a missing person, but is now believed to have been kidnapped by the serial killer known only as ‘Buffalo Bill’.”

The photo disappeared, revealing the TV anchor himself, wearing too much panstick. “Memphis Police sources indicate that the missing girl’s blouse has been identified, sliced up the back, in what has now become a grim calling card. Young Catherine Martin, as we’ve said, is the only daughter of U.S Senator Ruth Martin-”

Dana looked at Marion, surprised. Other trainees drifted into the rec room, their attention immediately drawn to the television. A few glanced in their direction, some whispering.

“...the Republican junior senator from Tennessee. And while her kidnapping is not at this point considered to be politically motivated, nevertheless, it has stirred the government to its highest levels, the president himself is said to be, and I quote, ‘intensely concerned’. Just moments ago, Senator Martin made this dramatic personal plea.”

The image cut to a slim woman in her early fifties with high cheekbones speaking to a jostling mass of reporters on the steps of her Georgetown home. She was tall, but grief had made her shrink in on herself, so that she looked small and frail.

“I’m speaking now to the person who is holding my daughter. Her name is Catherine,” Senator Martin said, her voice round and with a slight southern drawl. “You have the power to let Catherine go, unharmed. She’s very gentle and kind.” The woman looked as if she was about to crack. “Talk to her, and you’ll see. Her name is Catherine.”
Marion was nodding beside her. “Christ, that’s smart.”

“Why does she keep repeating the name?” Dana asked.

Marion didn’t take her eyes off the screen. “Somebody’s coaching her. They’re trying to make him see Catherine as a person, not an object. If he sees her as a person she’ll be harder to cut up.”

Now, childhood photographs of the senator’s daughter, small home movies accompanied her voice. “You have a chance to show the whole world that you can be merciful, as well as strong. Please -I beg you, release my Catherine.”

New footage came onscreen, another anchor reporting live, standing away from a taped off area in front of an attractive apartment complex. Technicians, with instruments, were bending down and working behind him.

“Meanwhile, in Memphis, the investigation continued throughout the night, as state and local authorities were joined at the kidnap scene by agents of the F.B.I.”

The camera panned to show Jack Crawford striding onto the scene, tall and serious, talking with the local police. She narrowed her eyes and caught a brief glimpse of Mulder, wearing a black jacket with F.B.I emblazoned across the back, ducking under the yellow tape, before Crawford waved the camera back.

The trainees cheered a bit ironically at the sight of Crawford and mention of the F.B.I. Marion put a hand on Dana’s arm sympathetically, and Andrew wove back through the trainees to join them.

“I don’t know whether to say ‘I’m sorry’, or ‘Congratulations’,” he said, whistling. “But you just went primetime.”

She nodded, troubled, and Andrew gave her an encouraging look. “You know, we’re all rooting for you.”

Dana looked up, slightly surprised, but touched. “Thanks.”

Marion patted her on the back. “Come on, let’s get some breakfast. I guess it won’t be long before they call you back out, huh?”

The Museum of Natural History was closing as they walked up the stairs, Mulder behind her, parting a tide of school children and tourist families. One of the museum guards held up his hand to stop them.

“Sorry, nobody gets in after seven,” he said. “We open up at nine tomorrow morning.”

“Actually, I’m here to see Dr. Pilcher and Mr. Roden in the Entomology wing,” she said, producing a letter they’d faxed over that afternoon. “I -we- have an appointment.” She handed the guard the letter, which he read quickly.

“Let me call to check, Dr. Scully,” he said, stepping away.

Mulder made a noise next to her, and she looked up, puzzled.

“That doctor card really gets you in anywhere,” he remarked. “You don’t even study bugs.”

“Sometimes I find maggots if the body’s in a state of decomposition,” she argued, and that shut him up.
The guard returned and gave back the paper. “Go on in, Dr. Scully. Ground floor to the left, then
down the stairs for the research area.”

“Thank you,” she said, and Mulder trailed her inside. She followed the guard’s directions, and they
walked through an eerie landscape of dinosaur bones -crouching skeletons with blank eye sockets
and gaping fangs. As she went down the staircase she heard familiar voices and held out a hand to
stop Mulder, looking down at the two men sitting on stools on opposite ends of a chessboard set up
at a lab table.

A live, enormous rhinoceros beetle was weaving its clumsy away among the men on the chessboard
before finally stepping off a ledge and onto a lettuce leaf.

“Time, Pilch! My move,” one of the men with a prematurely receding hairline said.

“No fair! You lured him with produce!” the other complained.

“Tough noogies, it’s still my move.”

She looked at Mulder and smiled, then looked back down. “If the beetle moves one of your men,
does that count?” she asked playfully.

They both looked up, delighted by the sight of her.

“Of course it counts,” Roden said. “How do you play?”

“Welcome back, Doctor Scully,” Dr. Pilcher said, standing up and taking a gracious half-bow. She
chuckled, and they descended the rest of the staircase.

“Stop that, Pilch. Just because I went to med school and didn’t stick with you nerds doesn’t mean I
forgot my humble roots.”

“You certainly have a gift for showing up with surprises. First you send a bug from the boonies, now
you’re inviting in outsiders,” Roden said, shaking Mulder’s hand.

“Boys, this is Agent Mulder,” she explained. “He’s helping me with something Bureau-related.
Agent Mulder, this is Dr. James Pilcher and Nick Roden, my former college roommates.”

He opened his mouth in surprise, and she tried to contain her delight.

Pilch nodded at Mulder’s expression. “We rented an apartment together junior and senior year. I was
Julie, and he was Nora, and we were mysteriously never at home when Dana’s parents came to
visit.”

“I was home once,” Roden offered. “Remember, Dana? I had to sneak out of the bathroom wearing
your bathrobe and hide in Pilch’s room for two hours. Hey, are you wearing a gun?”

She nodded.

“Cool! Can I see?” He hadn’t lost an ounce of his childish wonder.

“Boys…”

“Just ignore him, he’s not a Ph.D,” Pilch said, looking at Mulder hopelessly.

“Right,” Roden said, “what’ve you got?”
She reached in the briefcase for the specimen jar, then handed it to him. He made a funny face. “Where the hell did this one come from? It’s practically mush!”

“You really don’t want to know,” she said.

Pilch pushed in his stool and waved them down a cramped research library and down a hall lined with mounted insects, in all shapes and sizes. “Your West Virginia specimen gave us quite a bit of trouble,” he called, “but I managed to narrow his species down through Chaetotaxy -studying the skin.”

“I’m the one who found his perforating proboscis!” Roden butted in, and she gave him an indulgent smile.

They reached a small laboratory, where the two entomologists each took a seat by large microscopes. She stood near Roden as he prepared to examine the cocoon she’d brought with her today, the one found in Raspail’s head earlier that morning. Agent Mulder followed Pilch, whose specimen was in much better condition - a big, brown creature, its wings outspread on towel paper.

She watched Roden slide the prepared cocoon under the microscope and peer at it through the glasses, picking up a pair of tweezers and a dental probe.

“The whole trick is to remove the chrysalis without destroying it,” he said quietly, focused.

“The wings are just like wet tissue paper.”

Across from them, Pilch was explaining Chaetotaxy to Mulder while Roden concentrated.

“Positive match!” he exclaimed after a few minutes. “Eureka!”

“You’re sure?” she asked, and he nodded, moving the slide out from the microscope and onto the table for her to see more clearly, keeping it in place with the dental probe. “Doctor Scully, Agent Mulder, meet Mister Acherontia styx.”

Mulder and Pilch came to join them, all looking down intently.

Roden turned it slightly until the wide, furry, brown back of the moth was visible. And there, right between the wing bases, wonderful and terrible to see, was nature’s perfect reproduction of a ghostly human skull.

“Better known to his friends as the Death’s Head Moth.”

“The Latin name comes from the two rivers in hell,” Pilch added. “Your man, that Buffalo Bill, he drops these girls in rivers, right? Every time? I must have read that.”

She shot a look to Mulder, who met her eyes.

“Hey, is this a clue, like in a real murder mystery?” Roden asked, excited, then sobered. “It’s Buffalo Bill, isn’t it?”

“I’m afraid I can’t tell you any more about that,” she said, a bit regretful. Mulder nodded at her that she was right to keep the information to herself, although the boys were onto them now.

“And there’s no way -no natural way- these could have wound up in the bodies?” Mulder asked.

Pilch shook his head firmly. “They live in Malaysia. In this country, they’d have to be specially raised, from imported eggs.”
“Oh, somebody grew this guy,” Roden said, looking back at the moth. “Fed him honey and nightshade, kept him warm...somebody loved him.”

“We could trace how he buys the bugs, starting with U.S Customs,” Mulder said as they left through one of the employee exits and turned onto Constitution Avenue to find the car. “But for Catherine Martin, it all comes down to you and Lecter. You’re the one he talks to.”

A flock of police cars and a screaming ambulance zoomed through the street, and she couldn’t help watching them go. It felt as if she was constantly on high alert. She had rushed through piles of schoolwork the past two days to catch up, feeling like she was in med school all over again, while Mulder had been away with Crawford down in Memphis. Even as distracted as she was, she’d managed to run the course two days in a row. Only five seconds away from her goal now.

“He’s already offered to help,” she reminded him. “What would happen if we just showed our cards? Asked him for Bill?”

Mulder shook his head, and his hand hovered by her back as the rushed across a crosswalk while the light changed. “He offered to help, Scully, not snitch. That wouldn’t give him enough of a chance to show off. Remember, Lecter looks mainly for fun. Never forget fun.”

“But if he knew we had so little time-”

He opened the door and got in, then reached over to unlock hers. She slid into the passenger seat and shut her door.

“If we act too anxious, he’ll make us wait. He’ll let the Senator keep hoping, day after day, until Catherine finally washes up,” he explained grimly. “That’d be the most fun of all.”

She bit her lip for a moment, thinking. “I think he means it, this time,” she said. “I think he’d deal.”

“What would it take?” he asked, starting the car.

“Transfer to a new prison,” she explained. “With a view of trees, he said, or water, remember? Could we swing that?”

He shook his head, looking uncertain. “State to federal jurisdiction...We can do it, but it would take time, time we don’t have. You need lots of different clearances. Wasn’t that on your test on Monday?”

“Right, I forgot,” she said, then looked at him, surprised. “How did you know that?”

He pointed at his head. “Keep your friends close, and your enemies closer.”

She chuckled. “Am I your friend or your enemy, then?”

“You’re my friend,” he assured her, “but that first day I wasn’t sure. Do you think you could convince Lecter a deal was already in place?”

She thought about it. “He’s too smart. Could Crawford back me up with some paperwork? Wouldn’t this have more weight coming from the Senator herself?”

Mulder raised his eyebrows. “She doesn’t know what we’re up to. And we can’t afford to let her find out.”

She looked at him, surprised. “Why not?”
“She’s the mother, Scully. She can’t possibly comprehend what Lecter is. She’d make the mistake of pleading with him. Begging him.” He shook his head. “He’d feast on her pain till the last second of that girl’s life.” He looked at her seriously for a moment. “We can’t trust Chilton, either. He’s greedy and ambitious. If he knew about Lecter’s link to Bill, he’d go straight to the newspapers. Remember what I said about keeping a cool head?”

She nodded. “I remember.”

Chapter End Notes

Comments are candy!
Dr. Chilton, as they’d predicted, was furious to see them again.

“What you’re doing, Agent Mulder, is coming to my hospital to conduct an interview and refusing to share information with me! For the third time!” he spat, trailing them as they started toward the stairs.

“I told you, sir,” Mulder placated, “this is just a routine follow-up on Agent Scully’s assignment.”

Chilton scoffed. “That’s funny - I never received a call from Crawford about any follow-up interview.”

Mulder made a noise of surprise. “He’s pretty busy at the moment, but at least I’m here to supervise. We shouldn’t be long.”

“You can’t do this!” Chilton exclaimed, but she just kept hurrying down through the halls in front of them like Mulder had told her to, determined to get to Lecter with or without Chilton’s express approval.

“Actually, we can,” she heard Mulder say, and a pause.

“Don’t badge me, Agent Mulder. I am not just some turnkey! He’s my patient!”

They had almost reached the visitor’s entrance in the bowels of the asylum, and she finally turned around, producing a business card and offering it to him. A vein in his forehead was throbbing with anger. “I’m acting on instruction, Dr. Chilton. This is the number of the U.S Attorney’s office. Now, please, either discuss this with him, or let me finish my assignment.”

She turned right down the last hall with Mulder behind her, leaving Chilton speechless with frustration.

“Hi, Barney,” she greeted with confidence, and he smiled.

“Back again?” he asked, still friendly, and held his hand out for her coat. She shivered, as always, when the cold of the basement prison facility filtered through her clothes. This time she was dressed in a better-fitting skirt and jacket she’d borrowed from another trainee, and a silk blouse that had been hanging in her closet in anticipation of graduation. She wasn’t overdressed, but she had thought more than she usually did about what to wear. It seemed ridiculous, spending time thinking about what to wear to visit a prisoner, but now she knew part of her role - the pretty girl - and she was ready to play it.

“Remember, try to be nonchalant. He doesn’t have to accept the offer - just like the questionnaire. Just try to get him to talk;” Mulder coached. “Use what you’ve learned in class.”

She nodded, then pulled a lip balm out of her jacket pocket and swept it across her lips. He chuckled.

“What?” she asked, a smile threatening to change her mouth.

“Nothing,” he assured her. “You just looked like you were putting on warpaint.”

“Ah.”
“Ready, Dana?” Barney asked.

She picked up the briefcase and nodded. Barney buzzed open the door and she walked inside, not jumping when it closed loudly behind her, heading straight to Lecter’s cell.

This time, he was sitting at his table, languidly sketching with charcoal on butcher paper. He used his own hand and forearm as a model. His other drawings, books, and bed had been restored to him. She stood in front of the cell, about a foot and a half back from the glass, with her briefcase held across her middle. The eyes of a murderer, secretly pleased, met hers.

“For a United States Senator, you’re an odd sort of messenger,” Lecter remarked.

She tipped her head, opened the briefcase, and fished for the paperwork Crawford had scrambled together for her last night.

“I was your choice, Doctor. You chose to speak to me;” she reminded him. “Would you prefer someone else now?”

“That is both impertinent and untrue,” he drawled. “My, my, Mulder has done a fine job with you, hasn’t he?”

She ignored the remark.

“Tell me,” Lecter continued, “how did you feel when you viewed our Billy’s latest effort?” His eyes twinkled. “Or, should I say, next-to-latest?”

“By the book, he’s a sadist.” She set the briefcase on the ground, standing with the papers in hand. He chuckled. “Life’s too slippery for books, Agent Scully. Typhoid and swans came from the same God.”

She looked up at the expression.

“Tell me,” he continued, “Miss West Virginia, was she a large girl?”

“Yes.”

“Big through the hips? Roomy?”

“They all were.”

He put down his charcoal and flexed his hand. “Hmm...What else?”

“She had an object deliberately inserted in her throat,” she revealed. “That hasn’t been made public yet. We don’t know what it means.”

“Who found it?” he asked.

“Agent Mulder.”

Lecter sighed. “Were you jealous, Dana, that he found it before you?”

“No. Now-”

“Was it a butterfly?” he asked, looking into her eyes. She blinked.
“A moth.” She stared at him, amazed. “How did you know that?”

“I’m waiting for your offer, Dana,” he said, looking away from her to the food carrier. “Enchant me.”

She looked down at her papers, taking a moment to collect her thoughts, then back at him.

“If you help us find Buffalo Bill in time to save Catherine Martin, the Senator promises you a transfer to the V.A hospital at Oneida Park, New York, with a view of the woods nearby. Maximum security still applies, but you’d have reasonable access to books…” She tried not to sell it too hard.

Bending down, she put the papers in his tray, save one, even as his face remained impassive.

“Best of all, though, one week a year you’d get to leave the hospital and go here.” She pointed to a spot on the last piece of paper, a printed map. “Plum Island. Every day of that week you may walk on the beach or swim in the ocean for up to one hour. Under SWAT team surveillance, of course.”

She watched his eyes change, then put the last paper in the tray. “Copy of the Buffalo Bill case file, copy of Senator Martin’s terms...Her offer is non-negotiable and final. If Catherine dies,” she slid the tray through, “you get nothing.”

He rose smoothly from his chair and crossed the room, looking down at the papers in the tray without touching them

“‘Plum Island Animal Disease Research Center’. Sounds charming.”

“That’s only part of the island,” she reasoned, trying not to sound too desperate. “It has a very nice beach. Terns nest there-”

“Terms?” He raised an eyebrow, then looked at her. She was confused by the sudden change. “If I help you, Agent Scully, it will be ‘turns’ with us, too. Quid pro quo. I tell you things, you tell me things.” She opened her mouth but he cut her off. “Not about this case, though. Things about yourself. Yes, or no?”

She felt a tingle at the base of her neck and knew Mulder was looking at her. He’d tell her to back away, wouldn’t he? It seemed Lecter had done such a number on him that he didn’t even want to be near the man. He’d warned her not to let him get inside her head. But what would he do...Would Mulder follow his own advice?

“Yes, or no, Dana? Tick-tock, tick-tock…”

She had to save Catherine. She was strong enough.

“Go, Doctor.”

He smiled and went to sit on the bed. She remained standing -they hadn’t come with enough warning for Barney to place a chair. Anyway, she was better remaining solidly on her feet. No more nervous tapping.

“What is your worst memory of childhood?” he asked suddenly. She tried to collect her thoughts. “Quicker than that. I’m not interested in your worst invention.”

“Moving away from my grandparents,” she said, her voice quiet.

He clicked his tongue. “I told you not to lie, didn’t I? It’s unbecoming on you, much like that Chanel
“I’m not wearing that today.”

He smiled. “I noticed.”

She crossed her arms in front of her.

“Try again,” Lecter coaxed.

“The times my father was at sea.”

“A Navy man?” Lecter asked, sounding surprised.

She nodded once.

“Third time’s a charm, Agent Scully. The truth, this time. Who will I tell? Miggs has already been taken care of.”

She bit her lip and clenched her hands, hidden under her arms, into fists. “The death of my sister.”

His eyes lit up. “Ah. Do you think it pure coincidence, or perhaps some intangible, outside force that brought you and Agent Mulder together?”

“Pure coincidence,” she said firmly. She’d been shocked to find out he’d lost a sister as well.

“And was she also abducted...by aliens?” Lecter asked with a smirk.

“What are you talking about?” Her throat, already tight with emotion, made her speech scratchy.

“That’s what he believes, anyway,” Lecter said in that same awful purr. “How did your sister die?”

“Why does it matter?”

“You tell me things, I tell you things,” he reminded her.

“She died in her sleep.”

“Cot death?” he confirmed, using the older term. “How old was she?”

“Six months,” she said, her voice even. “I woke up one morning and she was dead. I was five years old.” She felt her eyes burning at the edges when she looked back up at him. “Quid pro quo, Doctor.”

“The significance of the moth is change,” Lecter said easily. “Caterpillar into cocoon...into beauty. Billy wants to change, too. But there’s the problem of his size, you see. Even if he was a woman he’d have to be a large one, and he doesn’t want that.”

She was puzzled. “Dr. Lecter, there’s no correlation in the literature between transsexualism and violence.”

“Clever girl,” he remarked, and she wiped her left eye quickly. “You’re so close to the way you’re going to catch him -do you realize that?”

“No,” she bit out. “Tell me why.”

“What happened after you found your sister, Dana?”
“I cried, I-”

“I mean later,” he interrupted. “Were you a troubled child?”

“I was quieter than most, but not troubled, no.”

“Even in adolescence? Did you act out? Rebel against your parents?”

She shook her head. “No, I was studious and well-behaved.”

“And in college? Still the smart, studious girl? Still well-behaved?”

She may as well give him what he wanted. “I was in a relationship with a married man.”

His eyes lit up. “Yes!” he breathed. “Did he fuck you in the same bed he shared with his wife?”

“No,” she replied truthfully.

Lecter raised an eyebrow. “Did you want him to?”

“No!” she insisted. “Quid pro quo, Doctor!”

He looked away from her. “Billy is not really transgender. He thinks he is -he tries to be. He’s tried to be a lot of things, I expect.”

“You said I was very close to the way I’d catch him. What did you mean by that, Doctor?” she pushed.

“There are three major centers for sex reassignment surgery -Johns Hopkins, the University of Minnesota, and Columbus Medical Center. I wouldn’t be surprised if Billy had applied to all of them, and been rejected.”

“Oh what basis would they reject him?” she asked, feeling cold.

Lecter shrugged, like it was obvious. “The personality inventories would trip him up. Rorschach, Wechsler, House-Tree-Person...He wouldn’t test correctly to fit the pathology.”

“How would he test?”

She waited.

“When you found your sister dead, when you were crying, did you think it was your fault?”

She closed her eyes, thinking she’d escaped his questions, then opened them and looked up. “No, it wasn’t my fault,” she said quietly but firmly.

“You know that now, but what did five year old Dana Scully think that morning?”

“I can’t remember. I was too small.”

Lecter raised his eyes and smiled at her. “You’ll remember for me next time, Dana. I’m sure Agent Mulder is eager to bond over your tragic losses. Shall I summarize?”

“Yes,” she whispered.

“You should try to obtain a list of males rejected from all three gender reassignment centers. Check first for the ones rejected for lying about criminal records. Then among those who tried to conceal
their past. Look for severe childhood disturbances associated with violence. Then go to their personality tests, their drawings especially. Billy’s house drawings will show no happy future...No pets, no toys, no flowers, no sun. His females will be more crudely sketched than his males, but he’ll compensate by adding exaggerated adornments -jewelry, big breasts. And his tree drawings...oh, his trees will be frightful.”

She knew that Mulder had been taking notes -she was barely listening now, the words running into each other in her head like roaches scattering in the sun. All she could think of was that March morning -early, still dark- and the cold baby in her crib, the silence in the room, the birds chirping outside.

“Billy hates his own identity, Agent Scully,” Lecter continued. “He always has, and he thinks that makes him transgender. But his pathology is a thousand times more savage. He wants to be reborn, Agent Scully. He will be reborn. Tick-tock, tick-tock. Run along, now.”

She picked up the briefcase, turned, and began to walk, feeling as if her bones couldn’t carry her weight. She wrapped her arms tightly around herself, like she was holding in her own organs from falling out and splattering on the ground. She looked up at the sound of the gate buzzing open, and saw that it was far off, even though she felt as if she’d been walking for an endless amount of time, and that she’d never get out of the asylum.

A tall figure came through the gate and down the hall and reached for her hand. She let him take it and walked back with him, past the barred door, which buzzed shut behind them.

“I can’t...see,” she said, confusing herself, because she could see, only everything seemed to be moving in slow motion, blurred at the edges.

“It’s okay,” Mulder was saying as he helped her limp arms into her coat sleeves. He was saying other things, too, in a calm voice, but she wasn’t listening. His arm around her waist guiding her through the hellish halls and up staircases, all the way to the car, where he finally stopped. She heard him say, “Scully, can you answer me?” and looked up into his worried eyes. Hers filled with tears before she was violently, horribly sick all over his shoes.

Bracing her hands on her knees, she closed her eyes and just breathed, raggedly, in and out. He had a hand splayed on her back, perhaps concerned she would fall over, but as she carefully moved to stand, it left her. Her head felt swampy but the terrible pressure that had built inside of it during the conversation with Lecter had washed out through the vomit. She wiped her mouth with the sleeve of her coat and ignored her stinging eyes, streaming after the strain of being sick.

“Better?” he asked, bending a little to her height to look in her eyes. She nodded, squaring her shoulders and taking one more steadying breath.

“Yes,” she said in a hoarse voice, sounding a bit unsure. She noticed him wiping his shoes off in damp grass.

She rubbed her throat and wanted a cloth or tissue for her face, which felt clammy.

“Do you think you can stand a car ride?” he asked.

She gingerly pressed on her stomach, then nodded.

“All right,” he said. “I’ve gotta show you something.”

They didn’t speak much in the car except the occasional question from Mulder to make sure she was
all right. She gave a little noise of assent and kept her hands folded in her lap, looking out the
window, her coat with its messy sleeve laying across the back seat. The grungy city of Baltimore
reared its head as he drove in the opposite direction of the Academy. A white sky overhead
threatened snow for the first time since February, and winter light glinted off the windows of tall
buildings. Then, nearing the residential area, Mulder made a couple of turns until they pulled into a
mostly empty parking lot. She looked away from the window when he took the keys from the
ignition.

A once-garish sign advertised Romero’s Bowling Alley, with faded illustrations of children and
bowling balls behind the words.

“Why are we here?” she asked, confused.

“We’re here to win, Scully,” he explained, getting out and going around to her side, opening her
door and watching as she reluctantly took off her seat belt and stood from the car. He took her cold
hand in his warm one and shut her door, leading her inside.

The smell of pizza and nachos greeted them as they walked in. She looked around unenthusiastically
at the pinball machines, arcade games, horrible carpet, and the older couple using one bowling lane.
Bad music played overhead while Mulder spoke with a pimply teenager behind the counter.

“Hey, Scully, give me your shoes,” Mulder said, nudging her elbow. She looked at him in confusion,
then at the kid who was handing him a pair of bowling shoes. She slipped off her pumps, lost three
inches, and was given a pair of size seven bowling shoes in yellow, red, and green.

“Mulder, why are we bowling?” she asked as he led her down to lane ten, five lanes over from the
older couple. Strange -noon on a Saturday and not a single child in the place. He abandoned her for a
moment and grabbed two balls.

“Just go with it, Scully,” he said as the pins were placed, focusing ahead of him. “Where’s your
sense of adventure?”

“I think I left it in an insane asylum,” she replied moodily, taking the red ball he offered and checking
the weight with her fingers. He’d gotten the right size on the first try. Mulder smirked at her reply
and moved forward, letting his own ball go. She watched it rush smoothly down the center of the
lane and hit the pins dead center. He scored a split.

Mulder turned around, arms spread out. “Impressive, or what?”

She shrugged, sitting down at a small formica table while they waited for the ball to come back and
the pins to reset. He knocked all the pins down this time.

“Your turn,” he prompted after his ball was back.

“Mulder, this is ridiculous,” she said, looking up at him.

He patted her arm. “Come on, try it out.”

She stood and walked in front of the lane, concentrating, then moved forward and let the ball go. It
fell ungracefully from her fingers and meandered down the lane, finally dropping off into the gutter.
She rolled her eyes, facing away from him.

“That’s okay,” he called. “One more left!”

She went back for her ball and went to the lane again, this time moving forward, using her weight
and momentum. The ball slipped from her fingers and went down a little to the right, knocking down five pins. A childish feeling of pride sparked inside her.

“How do you feel?” he asked when she walked back. She rolled her shoulders.

“Out of practice,” she admitted.

“Good thing we’re not keeping score, then,” he said, standing up for his second turn.

After a few turns she wasn’t thinking about Lecter; she was thinking about knocking down pins, or getting the ball to go in a straight line. There was something cathartic about holding a heavy ball, aiming it, and letting all the weight go from your shoulder down to your fingertips, watching intently as it zoomed down the lane, hoping you’d knock down all ten pins.

After five turns he went to the bathroom and she waited, swinging her legs a little in time to an 80s hit and watching the older couple play. When he came back he had a paper plate of nachos and two soft drinks on a tray.

“What’s in the cups?” she asked warily.

“Sprite,” he said, like it was obvious. “We’re at a bowling alley. It’s the law.”

She chuckled, then sipped the soda as he took his turn. When he came back, he gave her a small smile.

“Batter up!” he said, and she put down the drink, standing and unbuttoning her suit jacket, draping it over the back of her chair so she was more comfortable in the silk blouse tucked into the skirt.

“Come on, Scully!” he called when she took her ball and went to take her turn. She smiled a little, then bowled a strike.

“Yes!” she exclaimed, turning to him in disbelief, her hands in the air, and he gave her a high five when she came back for the ball, confidently hurrying back out to take the second turn.

They finished the whole game in under an hour, Mulder winning by a landslide, and wiped their hands of nacho grease.

“I’m going to go wash up,” she said, and he pointed her toward the bathroom.

“Ohkay, I’m gonna call Crawford.”

She turned back. “What are you going to tell him?”

He unrolled his sleeves. “I’m going to tell him what Lecter said about Columbus Medical Center and the University of Minnesota.”

She thought back. “And Johns Hopkins?”

“That’s where we’re headed,” he explained, and her eyes widened. “Might be a good time to pull the doctor card again.”

“I’ll...wash my hands,” she said, turning, and he went for the phone.

In the bathroom she studied her face while she washed her hands, actually humming the ABCs out loud instead of in her head like usual. She looked pale, but her eyes weren’t red, and she felt energized, although her right shoulder was beginning to feel sore. Bowling wasn’t something her family had done. The occasional birthday party, one time in college...Mulder had managed, by
giving her a pair of shoes and a heavy ball, to make her forget all about being verbally abused by Lecter. For some dumb reason, she’d been too focussed on knocking down the pins to care enough to dwell on what had made her spill her guts out. She rinsed her hands, dried them, and went back out to find Mulder.

He was out in the lobby area, holding her suit jacket over one arm and speaking into a pay phone, his back turned to her. She exchanged her shoes and overheard him speaking.

“Yeah, it was her call, sir,” he was saying. “I was there.” A pause while he listened. “Yeah, she’s fine,” he looked up at the sound of her heels on the floor. “You know what, she’s right here, do you want me to put her on?” He listened, then nodded and held out the phone for her. She took it.

“Hello, Mr. Crawford?”

“Dana,” he said, his voice a bit gravelly. “I heard Lecter gave you a hard time today. How are you doing?”

“I’m fine, sir,” she said.

He made a noise of assent. “Well, you’ve done good work, Dana. We’re going to follow those leads at Minnesota and Columbus. You okay to go with Agent Mulder to Johns Hopkins?”

She nodded. “Yes, sir.”

A cough from the other end. “We’re in your debt over here, Dana. I’m proud of you. After today you’ll be back in your classes and we won’t bother you again.”

She looked surprised. “Am I being pulled off the case, sir?” It was much bolder than she’d normally talk to an instructor.

“Technically, you shouldn’t even be on the case. That was my mistake, and I’m sorry.”

“Mr. Crawford, I’m the one Lecter talks to.” She took a breath. “I never asked to go to him, sir. But now...you can’t do this without me.”

Mulder looked away, down at his watch.

Crawford sighed. “Listen, I’ve got to make another call now. Just...stick with Agent Mulder, and once we go over results from all the medical centers. If we need your help again with Lecter, I’ll come with you instead, so you won’t be alone.”

“Agent Mulder is always there with me, sir,” she interjected.

“But he didn’t pull you out fast enough today, and he should have.”

She looked at Mulder, who was now fiddling with the band of his watch, avoiding her gaze. “No, he waited until I needed him.” She looked away, now uncomfortable. “We’ll be fine, sir.”

“I’ll take your word, Dana.”

He hung up.

Mulder handed her her jacket and she slipped it on neatly, then cleared her throat. “We should get going.”

Mulder nodded. “Yeah, let’s go.”
“Hey, Mulder?” she said.

“Yeah?”

“I’m sorry about your shoes.”

He chuckled at her wilted expression. “Ah, keeps me humble.”

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading!
They followed another maze of hallways with light blue walls, these ones lined by patient rooms, doctors and nurses going in and out, families carrying a bouquet of flowers as they came to visit a loved one. When, after going through two wings and crossing one breezeway, they finally reached Johns Hopkins’ Gender Identity Clinic, Mulder approached the half-moon reception desk and held up his badge.

A young woman with bleached hair looked up warily at the sight of it. “Can I help you?”

“Yeah, I’m Agent Mulder and this is Agent Scully,” he said. “We’re from the F.B.I and would like to request access to your medical records.”

She shook her head. “I’m sorry, we can’t release any patient information, even to the F.B.I.”

“We’re looking the name of one man,” Mulder clarified. “He would have never been a patient here. He would have applied, but not been accepted.”

Another woman, older, was on the phone, but looked in their direction. “Can you hold, please?” she asked into the receiver, then put the phone back in its cradle. “You should go talk to legal on the second floor. We can’t help you with those types of questions.”

Mulder looked at the filing system behind them, then at the wall with the names of all the doctors in the clinic. “Can I speak to Dr. Rennick, then?”

Dana scanned the board of names. Dr. Rennick was the head of the clinic. Without even looking at a schedule, the older woman shook her head.

“He’s booked full today. You’ll have to make an appointment if you want to see him,” she said, “but I’m telling you now, you’re not getting access to patient records. Even legal won’t let you see them.”

She picked up the phone again.

A severe looking man in his early 50’s came through a pair of double doors holding a clipboard and a file and handed them to the younger woman. “Can you put these with the records under Q-85, please?”

“Yes, Doctor,” she said, taking the file and papers and standing from her chair.

Mulder turned quickly. “Excuse me, Doctor,” he said, “we’re from the F.B.I -I’m Agent Mulder and this is Agent Scully. We’re looking for a man that would have applied for sex reassignment surgery and been rejected within the last ten years.”

The doctor, identified as Dr. Pierson, shook Mulder’s hand but looked suspicious. “What’s the F.B.I looking for here?”

The older woman watched the interaction from the desk with a hawklike gaze, and Mulder steered the doctor away to the side.

“Dr...Pierson, the man we’re looking for was never a patient here,” he insisted. “It would be someone you refused because he tried to conceal a record of criminal violence. Please, Doctor, time is eating us up. Just show us the ones you turned away.”
The doctor looked from Dana to Mulder. “I’m not having a witch hunt here, Mr. Mulder. Our patients are decent, non-violent people with a real problem.”

“He was never a patient here, that’s the point I’m trying to make,” Mulder said, and she sensed him getting more frustrated.

The doctor shook his head, straightening his white coat. “I’m sorry, but the answer is no. You can ask down at legal, but they’ll tell you the same thing.” He moved away from them and walked back through the doors.

“Come on,” Mulder said to her, and pushed forward. Hesitating slightly, she soon caught up with him. She understood the rush, of course, but felt she would, at one point in her life, have sided with the doctor over a government agent.

Dr. Pierson entered a cramped, stainless steel nurse’s gallery and poured himself a cup of coffee before turning around to see them again. Some nurses looked up curiously.

“Examination and interview materials are confidential. We’ve never violated an applicant’s trust, and we never will,” he said adamantly.

Mulder sighed in frustration. “You want to see a violation?” He grabbed the Buffalo Bill case file he’d insisted she bring from under her arm and rifled through the pages, taking out a photo and slamming it on the counter. “This is a violation!” It was one of the more gruesome images that had been taken on Wednesday.

“Her name is Kimberly Jane Emberg, she was just ID’d,” he said. “We met her on a slab in West Virginia. And tomorrow, or tomorrow night, he’s going to do the same thing to Catherine Martin.”

Dr. Pierson set down his coffee. “That’s a childish, bullying stunt, Mr. Mulder. I was a battlefield surgeon, so you can put away your picture.”

Mulder ran a hand through his hair, quickly looking at her, then back at Pierson. “Listen...search your own records, if you prefer. You can do it a lot faster than us, anyway. If we find Buffalo Bill through your information, we’ll suppress it. Nobody has to know this hospital cooperated.”

Pierson looked up at the name of the killer, and seemed a bit tense, but recovered. “I doubt very much that the F.B.I or any other government agency can keep a secret, Agent Mulder. Truth will out... And then what? Will you give Johns Hopkins a new identity? Put a big pair of sunglasses on this building, and a funny nose?” He chuckled at his own joke. Mulder, so calm and easy only an hour ago when they’d been bowling, looked like he might hit the man, so she opened her mouth to say something before he could.

“Doctor Pierson, I understand your-”

But Mulder wasn’t having it. “That’s clever, Doctor. Very funny,” he snapped. “You like the truth? Try this!” He got close to the man’s face and raised his voice, his hands in fists at his sides. “He kidnaps young women, kills them, and rips their skin off! We don’t want him to do that anymore! If you don’t help me as fast as you can, then the Justice Department is going to ask publicly for a court order. We’ll ask twice a day, just in time for the morning and evening news. And each one of our press conferences will focus on Dr. Pierson over at Johns Hopkins, and how we’re still hoping for his cooperation! And every time there’s any news on the case -when Catherine Martin floats, and the next one, we’ll just issue a new press release about Dr. Pierson, complete with all his humorous fucking remarks!”
The doctor swallowed, his face a bit pale. The nurses had left the room. She felt anger rolling off of Mulder in waves.

“I could maybe...I could confer with my colleagues on this,” Pierson said stiffly, “and get back to you.”

“Would you, Doctor?” she said, grabbing Mulder’s sleeve to bring him back. “That would be very helpful.” She pulled Mulder out of the room, and he ran a hand over his face. “Well, I’m pretty sure that could have been handled more delicately,” she remarked dryly.

He looked down at her. “Unfortunately, we don’t have time to be delicate. I need to call Crawford,” he said. “Can you wait here and give them all the fax information?”

“Sure,” she said, still a little concerned about his sudden shift in behavior, the flush in his face.

“Mulder, are you okay?”

He shrugged off her hand going to touch his brow. “I’m fine, Scully. Meet you at the car?”

She nodded, watching him go out through the doors and walk down the hall. She went out to wait by the front desk, avoiding the disapproving glare from the older woman.

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Mulder was already waiting in the car when she got out of the hospital, his hands on the wheel, looking moody. It was freezing cold without her coat, her feet felt numb just from walking across the parking lot. When she opened the door and got inside, though, he had the heater on, and it warmed her cheeks instantly.

“They wouldn’t give me any names on site, which was odd, but they’re faxing over any relevant paperwork now,” she said, slipping off her shoes.

“Good. I couldn’t get in touch with Crawford.” He sounded distracted. “The whole department is running on fumes right now. We’ll head up there once we get back to Quantico.” They pulled out of their parking spot and he steered out of the parking lot. The drive back was quiet. She watched the minutes pass like mile markers, each one indicating they had less and less time to get to Catherine.

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When they reached the fifth floor, the elevator doors opened to chaos. Agents were talking over each other on the phone, the place smelled like old sandwiches and sweat, and the air was stale with smoke and bad coffee. This didn’t seem to surprise Mulder, who just headed in the direction of Crawford’s office. Some agents looked up, focussing on her instead of him, knowing she was an invaluable link in the case. They looked like they hadn’t slept on proper beds for awhile.

“Mulder,” a man with a face and hands that labelled him as a heavy smoker said, grabbing his attention as they walked. “How’s it coming?”

Mulder shrugged. “Anything new on your end?”

“Zip. Better go and see Crawford.”

Mulder nodded, then checked to make sure she was still beside him. She met his eyes briefly as they walked down the hall. When Mulder knocked twice on the open door to announce their presence Crawford looked up, his eyes red from lack of sleep. He saw Mulder, then her, and wiped a hand across his face.

“Sir,” they said at the same time.
“Just got off the phone with Minnesota,” he said. “Sounds like they’re willing to cooperate. Columbus, not so much, but we’ll keep pushing.” Crawford stood up, stretching out his neck, nodding to them, his eyes lingering on her. “Good work, Agents. Mulder.”

“CRAWFORD!” a voice she didn’t recognize yelled, rounding the corner, holding some papers. His cheeks were red, his brow sweaty. When he saw them standing within view of the door he huffed out a breath. “There you are, Mulder!”

Ah, she realized, this was Patterson. He was an intimidating figure, although not by height or build. There was something in his face, a rage. He had chubby hands that had probably swung a few punches. She braced herself a little for a chewing-out, but Patterson headed straight for Crawford.

“Hannibal Lecter is being transferred to Memphis with Chilton’s go-ahead!” he spat.

“Transferred?” Mulder and Crawford said at the same time. She opened her mouth, then shut it, trying her best to remain invisible.

Patterson narrowed his eyes at Crawford. “Did you have a trainee make some sort of phony offer in Senator Martin’s name?”

Crawford’s eyes darted to her for a split-second. “Yeah, I rolled the dice, I had to,” he admitted.

“Well, she’s mad as hell, Jack!” He spun to look at Mulder. “This another of your ideas, Spooky? Because it’s going too far. If we lose the senator’s daughter because of you, it’s not gonna help you out any.”

“It.”

Mulder shifted his posture to block her before she could admit to it being her idea. “Won’t happen again, sir.”

“Paul Krendler’s over there from Justice,” Patterson continued, turning back to Crawford. Mulder straightened up. “The senator wants him to take over in Memphis, but you’re still in command of the task force, Crawford. Lecter’s plane can still be ordered back. It’s your call, Jack, but I need it now.”

Mulder started to say something, but Jack brushed it away with his hand. He looked taut and frustrated, but mostly exhausted. “Let him land.”

Patterson exhaled a puff of air, clearly unhappy, and plowed out without another word, slamming the door behind him.

“Chilton’s killed her, hasn’t he?” Dana asked, furious but trying to contain it. “We were so close with Lecter, and now her last chance is gone!”

“That slimy little bastard,” Mulder muttered.

Crawford took a deep breath, then held two hands out to silence them. He looked at her.

“Dana, go wait outside for a minute. Mulder, I want a word.”

“Yes, sir.” She nodded to Crawford, looked up at Mulder briefly, and left the room. That was it - Crawford was bumping her off the case for good and potentially taking Mulder off as well, although she couldn’t see how he’d continue without him. Crawford looked dead on his feet, even sick.

She waited by the file cabinets down the hall, concentrating on her feet, feeling a bit ill herself after
the vomiting from earlier, although the soda had helped. She couldn’t hear any angry noises from
down the hall, which she took as either a good sign or a very bad one, she really couldn’t read
Crawford.

Finally, the door opened and Mulder appeared, shrugging into his coat. She stood up, taking a
breath. “My turn?”

He shook his head. “No. Come with me.”

She cocked her head in confusion, but followed him into the elevator and stood quietly as it
descended to the ground floor, coughing once into her palm. She looked down at his shoes -no traces
of her vomit. “Where are we going?”

“On a walk,” he said, and she looked back at the elevator doors. There was something in his voice,
an emotion she couldn’t quite put her finger on. When the elevator opened he led her outside where a
light snow was falling. Trainees were practicing down at the range, the peppering of shots, which is
where she would be if not for all this, oblivious to the dire time constraints the B.S.U was under.

He led her over to the course, of all places. It was the flat, gravel trail that semi-circled around a
frosted pond lined with marshy grass and continued up into the woods, tucked away from the rest of
the training grounds. The trees, save the pines, were all but leafless. Although she wore her wool
coat, all she had to cover her legs were a pair of nylons, and it was freezing outside. Her teeth
chattered, but she clamped her jaw and stuffed her hands in her pockets. The cold didn’t seem to
affect him.

“Is Crawford in trouble over this?” she asked. “Can Senator Martin do something to him?”

He shook his head. “He’s fifty-three, Scully. Even if she could, he’s only two years away from
retirement.”

“You, then?” she asked worriedly.

He shook his head. “Scully, you’ve done enough,” he said gently. “If Crawford keeps you out of
school any longer, you’ll be recycled. That would cost you six months, at least. He can guarantee
you readmission here, but that’s about it.”

She considered this, looking at the fogged surface of the water as they walked at a leisurely pace.
Finally, Mulder looked over at her, and she stopped, swallowing nervously, her lips numb.

“Now’s your chance, Scully,” he said softly. “Go back to class. Leave Buffalo Bill to us.”

She frowned. “If you didn’t want me chasing him, you shouldn't have taken me to that funeral home.
You promised we’d be on the same page -you can’t just drop me at the plot twist.”

He watched her steadily, then nodded. They walked on.

“Lecter is still the key,” she said confidently. “I know he is. Whatever he told me about Bill is as
good now as it was before.”

“Or just as worthless,” Mulder countered, and she frowned again, offended, although he’d made a
valid point.

“Crawford wants you in Memphis, close to Lecter,” he said, and she stopped, looking at him,
confused. “Maybe when he gets tired of toying with Senator Martin he’ll talk to you again. There’s a
plane for you now waiting at the airstrip.”
She ducked her head a little, then smiled up at him. Crawford had known she’d never quit. Mulder smiled back at her warmly, proud.

“I lied to Lecter,” she remembered. “I’ll need some kind of peace offering. Can I get some of the drawings from his cell?”

He nodded. “Good idea. I’ll courier them over. Meanwhile, try to get a feel for Catherine Martin. Her apartment, her friends...how he might have stalked her.”

“What will you be?”

“I’m going to Columbus, Ohio.” He glanced up at the white, thick sky, snowflakes in his hair. Breath like smoke. He looked back at her. “Now’s the hardest part, Scully. Use your anger, but don’t let it keep you from thinking. Just keep your eyes on Catherine. We’ve got less than thirty hours.”

They turned and started on the way back, walking with a little more purpose now that she had her assignment.

“Do you think those cops down in Memphis can handle Lecter?” she asked warily.

He cocked his head, taking her point. “They’ll use their best men, but they better be paying attention.” He must have seen her shivering, because he jumped a little. “Jesus, your lips look blue again.”

“I’m fine,” she insisted.

He chuckled. “You say that a lot.”

She nodded, smiling a little before her teeth started chattering again. They kept walking, and soon the Academy reappeared. She needed to get going.

“Now, hurry and pack for one night just in case,” he said. “And I want you to eat something once you land. Soup, a sandwich. You can’t run around and work on an empty stomach.”

“Okay,” she said. Soup sounded pretty damn good.

“Still got your weapon?”

She moved aside her coat for him to see it safe in the shoulder holster, looking odd against her silk blouse. Then she tugged the coat around her again.

“Mulder?” she said just before they reached the cement path back to the Academy, still relatively out of sight.

“Yeah?” he asked casually.

“Thank you.” She looked into his eyes, meaning it more than she ever had. “I wouldn’t have made it this far without you.”

He smiled a little grimly and shook his head. “That should be our line. We owe it all to you, Scully, and you owe us nothing.”

She shrugged, feeling a little stranded, like she should at least shake his hand if this was where their story ended, but she stepped forward to embrace him instead. She felt a hand pat her back a little awkwardly, and then he tugged gently on the ponytail she’d crafted during their bowling game.
“Hey!” she cried, stepping away with a grin, fixing her hair.

“Go on, before I get all sappy,” he joked, and she nodded, turning and hurrying back to the Academy, feeling his eyes linger a bit on her as she walked away.
Chapter 8

She grabbed a sad turkey club at a deli after taking a cab from the airport into downtown Memphis and practically inhaled it, parked at a table in a flimsy plastic chair. Getting through airport security had been interesting, but she supposed she’d get used to presenting her weapon and flashing her badge. She’d seen the surprise on some of the boarding passengers’ faces—*what’s that girl doing with a gun?* And who knew if she’d even end up graduating in January with the rest of her class and getting assigned her own weapon? She was in so deep now that it almost seemed preferable to do the six months over again. If they didn’t catch Buffalo Bill, if Catherine Martin died, she simply couldn’t carry on with the case. She’d be recycled, and that was it.

After a late lunch she headed to Catherine’s apartment, a fifteen minute cab ride away. The building was nicer than what the average twenty-four year old could afford, but she supposed being the daughter of a senator must have its perks. Two plain police cars were parked out front, recognizable to her from the radar on the dashboards. She paid her driver and went into the lobby, where a policeman held up a hand.

“Woah, who are you?”

She held up her badge. “Agent Scully, from the F.B.I,” she said, thinking it wasn’t exactly true.

He nodded. “Okay, then. Fifth floor.”

She thought perhaps the security was a little light—lobby door didn’t have a code, no security guard, she hadn’t seen cameras. Anyone off the street could have easily slipped in as an unremarkable tenant. Everyone looked unremarkable, until you had an idea of who they were inside. She could have been a criminal, but with a badge and a cool demeanor she’d gotten past a policeman without even saying hello.

The elevator was new and clean, with shiny buttons and a phone for emergencies. She tucked her hair behind her ears when it came to a stop and looked around when the doors opened. Apartment 7B, 7B...Just down the hall and to the left—the door was even propped open with a yellow wet-floor sign. Catherine hadn’t even been kidnapped in her apartment, it had apparently happened in the parking area behind the building, where Crawford and Mulder had appeared on television, ducking under yellow crime scene tape.

She walked through the open door and down a short hallway that, to the left, opened to a living room. To the right, the kitchen. Sitting on the small sofa in the carpeted living room was a young state trooper, who set down his newspaper to look at her.

“Hi,” she said quietly, holding up her badge. He smiled a little, then relaxed, going back to his paper. A box of latex gloves sat on the low coffee table, and she bent to take two, slipping them on and walking carefully around the room, absorbing it all.

On a mantle above a fake fireplace there was a collection of framed photographs—pretty, blonde Catherine with her friends, her parents, a picture of a man her age, potentially a boyfriend. She picked up a silver, woven frame and studied the picture inside. It was the only one with recent fingerprints to mar the almost indiscernible covering of dust on the glass. There stood the senator, her arm around her daughter at a graduation—from George Mason. She put the picture back and moved across the hall to the kitchen, again glancing around, trying to get a feel for Catherine.

Inside the refrigerator among various staples she saw a row of Diet Cokes, a plastic box of squishy
strawberries, and a paper carton of milk that, when she picked it up, was half-empty. That’s what
Catherine had been doing before she was abducted -she’d just gotten back from grocery shopping.
She shut the door. A big reel-to-reel tape recorder had been set up on the breakfast counter, attached
to Catherine’s phone. Two new red phones were hooked up as well.

The bathroom yielded nothing of interest. She put down the toilet seat, wrinkling her nose slightly at
the fact that the policemen were casually helping themselves to the girl’s bathroom while she was
being held captive somewhere. In the medicine cabinet above the sink she found a packet of
Ibuprofen, various lotions, Q-Tips, a bottle of Elizabeth Arden’s Sunflowers.

She went through to the bedroom -the bed with its flowery duvet and blue sheets still unmade,
slippers on the floor by the bedside table. Catherine had been reading a romance novel. On top of the
low dresser, in front of a mirror, was an open, multi-tiered jewelry box. With her gloved fingers, she
picked through various earrings and bright bracelets. She turned the key on the side of the box and a
tinking refrain of some ballet she couldn’t remember came out.

She was just turning to open the closet when the bedroom door swung open wider and a tall,
imimidating woman walked in. Under a façade of well-applied makeup and an elegant French twist,
her eyes were red-rimmed.

“Who are you, please?” Senator Martin asked. “I thought the police were finished looking through
her things.”

“I’m Dana Scully, Senator,” she explained, “from the F.B.I.”

“Dana Scully,” the woman breathed, as if the name was familiar to her. “Paul? Would you come in
here, please?”

After a moment, during which she slipped off her gloves and stuffed them into the pocket of her coat,
Paul Krendler, from the Justice department, came through. She recognized him from a picture on the
wall at the Academy.

“Miss Scully, you may know the Deputy Attorney General, Mr. Krendler,” the senator continued.
“Paul, this is the trainee that Jack Crawford sent to Lecter. She lied to him, pretending to have my
authority, and thus jeopardized this entire investigation.” Senator Martin’s eyes were cold and
unforgiving. “Now she has the further gall to invade my daughter’s privacy, again without
permission. If her little games have killed my baby…”

Overcome, she hurried out of the room, a hand over her mouth. Krendler shut the door behind her,
pointing sternly at Dana.

His jaw tightened. “You’re out of line, Scully, and you’re off this case. Get back to Quantico.”

“Sir, Mr. Crawford instructed me to-”

Krendler shook his head. “Your instructions are what I’m giving you now. Jack Crawford answers
to the Director, and the Director answers to me. My God, Crawford’s losing it!” he exclaimed. “He
shouldn’t even be on this, with his -Oh, never mind. How the hell did you get in here, anyway? He
gave you some kind of ID? Hand it over.”

“I need the ID to fly with my gun,” she said stubbornly. “The gun belongs in Quantico.”

He closed his eyes for a moment. “A gun. Jesus. Turn the ID in as soon as you get back. The gun,
too. Be on the next plane, Scully -there’s one in ninety minutes.”
Burning with frustration, she started for the door, walking past him, then turned before her hand touched the doorknob. Krendler turned, looking down at her.

“Mr. Krendler, Dr. Lecter trusts me. Or at least, he used to. If I could just—”

He held a hand up to stop her. “Lecter has already named Buffalo Bill.”

Her mouth dropped open. Krendler took a folded piece of paper from his pocket and passed it to her. She took it and began to skim.


“He gave us a perfectly good description, and we’re on it now, so we won’t be needing your little novelty act any longer,” Krendler said. “Or his, either. He’s under close guard at the courthouse, pending a prison transfer. Get on the next plane, Scully.”

She looked up from the paper. “Sir, doesn’t this ‘Louis Friend’ strike you as a little, I don’t know, phony? Vague?”

Krendler moved in close to her, pale with anger, and snatched the paper back. “Do you need a police escort, Scully? Or do you think you can find the airport by yourself?”

“I can find it by myself, sir,” she said firmly.

She took another cab to a rental car agency, rented a Pinto, then drove to the F.B.I Memphis field office to pick up the drawings hopefully sent by Mulder. If she was lucky, she could see Lecter before the end of the day. When she arrived, however, the drawings weren’t waiting for her.

“Could I please use a phone?” she asked the secretary, a middle aged woman who looked good-natured for a government employee.

“All yours, honey. Just sit behind the desk while I run to the ladies’ room.”

She sat down and dialed Crawford’s number, praying he’d pick up, and thanking God when he did.

“Mr. Crawford, sir,” she began, “I just ran into Mr. Krendler at Catherine Martin’s apartment. He kicked me off the case and wants me to come back to Quantico.”

He coughed. “Yeah, that was bound to happen.”

“Sir, there’s still time for me to see Lecter if I hurry. Agent Mulder was supposed to send me some of Lecter’s drawings, but—”

“Scully, calm down,” Crawford said, and, oddly enough, she was able to. “Columbus faxed us their records and we’re cross-checking right now. I sent Agent Mulder down to Memphis. His plane should land in about an hour.”

“Why is he coming to Memphis?” she asked.

“You’re not going to like this,” Crawford said, “but he didn’t want you to have to deal with Lecter without backup, and I agreed. He’s bringing the drawings with him. You got a car?”

She nodded. “Yes, sir.”

“Go and wait for him at the airport, then head over to Lecter. It’s probably our last shot, Scully.”
She took a deep breath. “I won’t let you down, sir.”

He chuckled. “You couldn’t let us down. I’ve got to go. Good luck.”

“Thanks,” she said. She’d need it.

At the arrivals gate she fiddled with her pen and small notepad, jotting down notes and listening to periodic overhead announcements, sometimes checking her watch.

*Louis Friend*

*Iron...*

*Define...*

*Foul...*

*Fiend...*

*Lone...*

*Foil...*

*Soul...*

*Self...*

*Sulfide...*

“Arrivals from Washington-D.C, flight 1013, at gate seven,” a woman’s clipped voice announced, and Dana looked up at the gate she was standing in front of, then moved down two, still looking at her notepad, continuing to decode. Suddenly, looked down at the paper. It was right in front of her.

*Iron Sulfide.*

“Scully,” Mulder’s voice carried over, and she looked up.

“Did you bring the drawings?” she asked, thrilled with her discovery but anxious to put it to use.

He chuckled. “Missed you, too.” He handed her a rolled collection of butcher paper and charcoal sketches. In his other hand he had a small overnight bag.

“Lecter’s at the courthouse downtown,” she explained, leading him out of the airport and to the car. “If Kendler sees me, or if he’s called over in advance, it’s over.”

“Don’t get too excited, Scully. You’re a trainee. I doubt they’re going to put up a Wanted poster not even two hours after Kendler kicked you out,” he teased.

She walked around to the driver’s side as he put his bag in the back. She handed him the drawings once they were both inside and pulled out of the spot quickly and efficiently, glancing at the sky, which was darkening.

“We don’t have much time,” she said, “and I don’t know when the courthouse closes.”

As it turned out, they had to park two blocks away, there was so much excitement and security. The
courthouse was a massive Gothic stronghold. An armada of police cruisers were parked at the curb, red and blue light dancing over any windows. To the right she made out Dr. Chilton in front of a sea of interviewers and cameras, preening. She ducked her head, although she doubted it would ever be a good tactic for disappearing -her red hair made it hard to hide in plain sight.

“Okay,” Mulder said, “your doctor card isn’t gonna mean a damn thing to these guys. Time to play F.B.I.”

They walked up to the foot of the steps and were immediately blocked off by police.

“Where do you think you’re going?” This officer had a very sturdy, intimidating build, and knew it. His thumbs were hanging in his belt loops, near his gun. He looked at them both.

“F.B.I.” Mulder said, raising his badge, and she raised hers at the same time.

The officer narrowed his eyes at her. “Both of ya?”

Mulder nodded. “We appreciate all the extra security you’re providing. You guys are really first rate here in Memphis.”

Well, she never thought they’d be sweet-talking themselves into a courthouse to meet with a serial killer.

The police officer nodded, flattered, and waved them through. She smiled at him, and caught him blushing.

Inside, they approached a desk. More police flanked the ground floor, the static buzz of radio communication echoed periodically. A man identified as a Sergeant Tate looked up from his chair behind the command desk as they entered.

“’help you?” he asked.

“We’re here to talk to Lecter,” Mulder explained. Tate looked them over suspiciously.

“Identification?”

Mulder handed over his badge, and she followed his lead a little anxiously. Tate handed Mulder back his badge and looked up from hers to match the photo with the face, looking somewhat doubtful. After a moment, though, he seemed to reconcile himself to the fact that they were there.

“Are you with Mr. Krendler’s people?” he asked.

“We just left him,” she supplied. A half-truth.

Tate chewed on a piece of gum. “Access to Lecter is strictly limited. We’ve been getting death threats.”

They stood in front of him, unfazed. He sighed. “Log in and check your weapons.”

As Mulder was logging in, she looked around the lobby. It looked like an armed fort. Cops with shotguns guarded the front door, both ends of the hall, the foot of the stairs, the single elevator. More of them were coming and going.

“Scully,” Mulder prompted, and she took the pen and signed in on the sheet, then reached inside her coat and through her jacket to carefully take Beaumont’s gun from its holster and set it on the desk beside his.
“Officer Murray? Take these two up to Lecter,” Tate said, and a young officer walked over, waving them to the elevator.

“Sounds like we’re going to be served up on a platter,” Mulder joked in her ear. She only clutched the drawings, trying not to bend them, as her stomach kept flipping and her heart quickened.

“Don’t say that,” she said quietly, and he put a hand on her back as they went into the elevator with Officer Murray.

“I’m right here,” he said quickly. “You say the word, I’ll get you out of there.”

The elevator was a metal-caged and old-fashioned, and it creaked as it crawled up five floors. Murray looked at them. “Shoot, we haven’t had this kinda security since the President came through town,” he said.

She was too nervous to talk, so she just raised her eyebrows, trying to look impressed.

“Every cop in Tennessee wants a look at this guy,” Murray continued. “‘sit true, what they’re saying? That he’s some kinda vampire?”

Mulder hesitated a moment before answering. “I don’t have a name for what he is.”

Another man, introducing himself as Officer Pembry, sat behind another desk. He examined Lecter’s drawings skeptically, then looked up at them.

“You wanna let me know why this creep is getting visitors at almost seven at night who are bringin’ him some old drawings?”

“Please, sir, it’s imperative that I speak with Lecter,” she insisted. “Tonight.”

He raised an eyebrow. “You know the rules, then, ma’am?”

She nodded. “Yes, Officer Pembry. I’ve questioned him before.”

“You goin’ in with her?” Pembry asked Mulder.

“Yeah, standard procedure,” he bluffed.

She took the roll of drawings from the desk and held them in her hands like a dear book, close to her chest.

Pembry waved them through an open door into a large, sparse, octagonal room. To the left, slouched in a chair, was another man, who nodded at them and stood to leave and join Pembry, giving them privacy.

A massive, temporary iron cage was installed in the middle of the room, bars wider apart than she would have liked. Inside the cage there was a cot and a small table, each bolted to the floor, and a flimsy paper screen hid a toilet. Dr. Lecter was sitting with his back to her at the desk, studying the Buffalo Bill case file, still wearing his uniform from the asylum, even paler under the bright light.

The room was so open, there was really nowhere for Mulder to conceal himself, or stay back without being noticed.

“Good evening, Dana,” Lecter purred suddenly at the sound of her heels, turning, his eyes lighting up at the sight of both of them. Two in one. “And Agent Mulder, how rude of me. No gate to hide
behind now, is there?”

Mulder didn’t say anything, but she felt him tense behind her. It wasn’t from fear—he was angry. She didn’t know if she could deal with a psychopath behind bars and Mulder’s fury in the same room, but neither one could leave.

“I thought you might like your drawings back,” she said, bravely walking across the parquet floor, hesitating for an instant before leaning over the barrier to slip his drawings through one of the bars. “Just until you get your view.”

“How very thoughtful,” Lecter said sarcastically. “Or did Crawford send you here for one last wheedle—before you’re all booted off the case?”

She shook her head. “No, I came because I wanted to.”

He clicked his tongue. “Agent Mulder isn’t here because he wants to be,” he said, looking behind her. “He’s here for you.” A beat. “Pity you tried to trick me, isn’t it? Pity for poor Catherine...tick-tock...tick-tock.”

She sighed. “Your anagrams are showing, Doctor. Louis Friend? Iron sulfide? Also known as ‘Fool’s Gold’?”

“Did you figure that out yourself, Dana?” he asked.

She nodded once.

“Mulder, you’ve done fine work,” Lecter remarked, glancing over at him. “Maybe she’ll inherit a photographic memory from her teacher as well.” He spun in his chair playfully.

She began to walk along the cage until she was more or less across from him, trying to keep his face in sight, hoping Mulder was still nearby.

“You were telling me the truth back in Baltimore, sir,” she pressed. “Please, continue.”

“Well, I’ve read the case file. Have you? Everything you need to find him is right in those pages.”

She bit her lip. “Then tell me how.”

“First principles, Dana. Simplicity,” his S’s sounded snakelike. “Of each particular thing ask: what is it in itself? What is its nature? What does he do, this man you seek?”

She scrambled her thoughts in her head and grabbed the first one she could see clearly. “He kills women,” she whispered.

“No!” he cried, and she flinched. “That is incidental,” he said, calmer.

She tried to search again, miserable.

“What is the first and principle thing he does? What needs does he serve by killing?” He looked past her shoulder. “Oh, Mulder, don’t tell me you really don’t see what’s right in front of her eyes.”

She looked up. “Anger,” she tried. “Social acceptance. Sexual frustra—”

“No!” he cried again, but she held her ground. “He covets. That’s his nature. And how do we begin to covet, Dana Scully? Do we seek out things to covet? Make an effort to answer, now.”
She looked at him. “No. We just-”

“No. Precisely,” he said, and she felt her stomach jump. “We begin by coveting what we see every
day. Don’t you feel eyes moving over your body, Dana? I hardly see how you couldn’t. And don’t
your eyes move over the things you seek?”

She crossed her arms. “All right. Yes. Now tell me how, please.”

“No,” he said, smiling. “It is your turn to tell me, Dana. You don’t have any more vacations to sell
on Plum Island. How did you feel that morning, Dana, when you were five years old?”

She sighed, stalling, feeling a ripple of fear in her belly. “Doctor, we don’t have enough time for any
of this now.”

“But we don’t reckon time the same way, do we, Dana? This is all the time you’ll ever have.”

She heard some radio static from outside and suddenly thought of Krendler. Had he found her? She
looked quickly to the door, then met Mulder’s eyes.

“No doubt Agent Mulder has warned you about divulging personal details to me,” Lecter said, while
she looked at Mulder. “But sometimes it takes time to find a good psychiatrist. Some people aren’t
made for each other.”

She scoffed, looking back. “And you think you and I are?”

He cocked his head. “Everyone needs someone to listen to them. And I have a feeling no one’s
listened to your particular story in some time, or perhaps ever at all.”

She bit the inside of her cheek. He was right, and he knew it.

“You woke up one morning and found your sister dead. Something must have woken you, Dana.
Death doesn’t always announce itself. What was it?”

She looked down, then back up at him. “Birds. It was dawn.”

“You heard the early spring birdsong and woke up. And…?” His eyes were on her now, unblinking,
like some reptile.

“And she wasn’t moving in her crib,” she bit out.

Lecter clicked his tongue. “How did you know, Dana? At five years old, the difference between
death and sleep is hardly noticeable…”

*She stretched in her bed, rubbing her eyes with her fists. Her toes were cold. It was March, but she
was still wearing the winter nightgown with the embroidered strawberries. Some sort of bird was
outside, chirping, whistling. She sat up and yawned, climbing down from the small bed that used to
be Melissa’s before she got her own room and wandering to the window between the changing table
and the baby’s crib.*

“She just looked so still,” she said softly. “I went to get my mother.”

Lecter sighed, impatient. “You’re skipping steps.”

*She walked to the window and dragged the small step stool by the changing table over, pulled the
light blue curtains apart, peeking out, pausing to draw with her finger using the condensation on the
chilled pane. A smiley face. A heart. A sun. A sailboat. Two stick figures, holding hands. Birds were*
perched on the still-spindly, bare branches of the cherry tree next to the house and, as the sun peeked through the clouds in a rose-hued, some of them chirped. She smiled.

“I went to the window, and looked outside. The sky was beautiful. There were birds in the trees.” She wrinkled her brow, remembering. “Larks, Robins. I didn’t know they nested where we lived.”

“Yes...what happened next?”

She felt her face twist with the effort to contain her emotions.

Sometimes, early in the morning, she could smile at the baby and hold her before she started to fuss and her mother came in to feed or change her. She hopped off the tiny step stool onto the carpet and picked the stool up again, walking to the crib and repositioning it, climbing up the two steps to look down.

“Maggie,” she whispered, stroking a finger over the baby’s soft cheek. When that didn’t wake her up, she tickled the palm of her tiny hand. Sometimes her sister would grasp onto a finger and wake up that way.

“I went to the crib, we slept in the same room…” The pain was coiled around her heart like a snake squeezing the last ounce of life from its prey. “I tried to wake her up, but she wouldn’t…”

“Wake up, Baby,” she said, shaking her sister’s hand a little. There was drool coming out of her little rosebud mouth, and Dana wiped it with the edge of the small blanket in the crib. Her sister’s lips looked purple. She hurried down from the stool and to the light switch on the wall by the door, stretching up to flip it on, then dashed back to the crib. In her rush she tripped on the stool and caught her mouth on the straight edge of one of the beams, blood filled her mouth and she cried out.

“How did you try to wake her, Dana?”

“I touched her cheek…” Her eyes filled with tears. “I tried to hold her hand.”

Climbing back up the stool, she kept one hand over her stinging mouth and reached the other down, grabbing the baby’s hand, then recoiling, realizing that it was ice cold. The baby’s skin was tinged blue. And then she started screaming.

“She was so cold.” She felt the memory like a gunshot through her chest. “And I started screaming.”

Her mother running in, first bending to Dana, tipping her chin up to see why she was bleeding. “No!” she sobbed, still holding her baby sister’s hand and shaking it insistently.

Her mother pushed her away to grab the baby. Then a sequence of events that passed in a blur in front of her five year old eyes. Her mother screaming for Melissa, her older brother wiping his face as he came in, trailed by Charlie. Her mother screaming for her brother to call the doctor. Her mother crying, Melissa picking up Charlie, and Dana standing with her cold feet in her blood-stained winter nightgown, frozen by the window. Soon the noise from inside the house was drowned out, and all she could hear was birdsong, just on the other side of the pane.

“You thought it was your fault, didn’t you?” Lecter pushed, a thrill in his eyes.

She looked directly at him, her eyes burning, full of tears, but she kept still. “Yes. But there was an autopsy. It wasn’t my fault!” she insisted stubbornly

Sleepless nights where she sobbed in her bed, all alone in the room now, and her mother or father
came in to comfort her, crying themselves, assuring her that it was no one’s fault.

“I read up on you, Dana Katherine Scully, M.D.” Lecter said. “That’s why you became a forensic pathologist, isn’t it, Dr. Scully?”

She sniffed, but didn’t answer him.

“You still wake up, sometimes, don’t you?” he asked. “You still wake up in the dark and hear the birds singing?”

She looked at him, gathering herself. “Yes.”

“And you think if you can discover the cause of death for everyone else, that will make it go away? And you think if Catherine lives, you won’t wake up in the dark ever again to that haunting, beautiful birdsong around the silence?”

“I don’t know,” she whispered, her voice cracking. “I don’t know.”

He leaned back. “Thank you, Dana,” he said softly, like she’d given him a gift. “Thank you.”

The gunshot of pain was spreading through her, tearing her apart. “Tell me his name, Doctor!” she cried, her voice louder in desperation.

He seemed to consider it, taking a deep breath, and she heard footfalls in the back. Maybe Mulder, maybe Pembry. God, let it be Mulder.

“Dr. Chilton, I presume?” Lecter said cooly.

She jumped and turned just as Chilton was walking inside, flanked by three officers, one carrying her coat and weapon.

“I think you know each other.”

“Okay,” Chilton said, like he owned the place, “let’s go, Agent Scully, Agent Mulder. This certainly isn’t follow up.”

She rushed toward the cage. “It’s your turn, Doctor,” she insisted. “Tell me his name!”

“Out!” Chilton cried, grabbing her arm. She heard a noise of outrage from Mulder, and one of the officers next to her.

“Sorry, ma’am, you’re banned from Lecter from now on.”

She struggled against them, and Mulder rushed forward, rattling the bars on Lecter’s cage and pointing a shaking hand at him.

“You’re a monster,” he hissed, followed by a soft laugh from Lecter.

“Oh, Agent Mulder, your problem is you need to get more fun out of life!”

Mulder started walking after her as Chilton dragged her off.

“Brave Agent Scully,” Lecter said, “you will let me know when those birds stop singing?”

“Tell me his name, Doctor!” she pleaded, but Chilton’s grip tightened.
“Dana!”

She widened her eyes at Lecter, standing in his cage.

“Your case file,” he drawled.

She made a break for it, almost crashing into Mulder on her way, who blocked Chilton while she ran back to Lecter, holding out the file for her, his face teasing. She threw out her hand and grabbed the file.

“Goodbye, Dana,” he whispered, and his index finger stroked along hers. She tore the file from his hand and turned, not looking back as she hurried willingly out of the room, Mulder’s strong arm around her shoulders all the way back to the car.
Mulder didn’t say a word as they walked back to the car, and pulled out of the spot downtown, heading for the highway. She stared out the window, the blackness and occasional blur of light from a roadside gas station running outside as they made it further out of town.

“You brought an overnight bag?” Mulder asked, and she nodded. “Okay, let’s stop and get some sleep.”

“Okay,” she said softly, because she needed sleep. She didn’t think she could stay awake another moment. She tried to close her eyes as he drove, but she soon became nauseous and had to open them again.

After about fifteen minutes he turned right into a motel -she didn’t pay attention to the name- and left the car idling in a space with her in it while he went to go get two rooms. She just fiddled with her fingers, checking for nonexistent hangnails until he came back, opening the back door and grabbing his bag, then hers. She opened her door, got out, and held out her hand for her bag.

The light in the small motel bathroom flickered sporadically as she stood under the spray of the shower head. Despite her fatigue, she had gone straight for the allure of a shower, and now was scrubbing her face and hair compulsively, feeling unable to get clean.

Baby Maggie, cold in her crib.

She spit water out of her mouth and wrapped her arms around herself as the temperature dropped. The light flickered again, then the bulb blew entirely and she opened her eyes, surprised. With the light from the room coming in under the door she turned off the water and stepped out of the tub, drying herself off with a too-small towel and wrapping herself in the burgundy robe she’d brought along. She opened the bathroom door and watched the steam float out.

You thought it was your fault, didn’t you?

She attacked her hair with the brush and walked to her bag, taking out a clean pair of underwear and some pajamas, looking up at the sound of the phone ringing in Mulder’s room. She had just started buttoning her shirt when someone started pounding on her door.

“Scully!”

She scrambled to finish the buttons, then went to unlock and open the door.

“Mulder? What’s wrong?”

He moved to come into her room, then hesitated. “Can I come in?”

“Of course,” she said, stepping aside. “What is it?”

“Lecter’s escaped,” he said, and she closed the door and spun around.

“What?!”

Mulder nodded. “I didn’t get all the details, but apparently he killed Pembry and somehow managed to fake his identity and escape via ambulance. It was found in the parking garage at Memphis airport.
The whole crew was dead. He killed a tourist, too. Got his clothes, cash...By now he could be anywhere."

She looked up at him -he was taller without her shoes, and shook her head, reading his mind. “No. He won’t come after me.”

Mulder scoffed impatiently, and she gave him a sharp look. “Why not?”

“I can’t explain it,” she said. “He would consider that...rude. And he wouldn’t get to ask any more questions.” She went to sit in one of the chairs by the window, and after a moment he joined her. She stared at nothing in particular, disappointed in herself, and chewed on her thumbnail.

“You did the best anybody could for Catherine Martin,” Mulder said. “You didn’t give up, you got your butt kicked for her, and you tried your hardest. It’s not your fault it ended this way.”

She looked over at him. “The worst part -the thing that’s making me crazy- is that Bill is right in front of us, only I can’t see him.” She tapped her finger on the thick case file on the table between them. “Lecter said that everything we need to catch him is right here in these pages.”

“Hannibal Lecter said a lot of things,” Mulder reminded her.

She shook her head. “He’s here, Mulder.”

He sighed, then reached across the table for the file, opening it up again. She stood and stretched a little, rubbed her eyes, then braced an arm on the table, leaning over to focus on the papers again. Mulder cleared his throat and she looked at him, confused, before he waved a finger in the general direction of her chest. She looked down to see that a good portion of her breast had been left exposed in her hurry to finish buttoning her shirt. With an annoyed sigh, too exhausted to be self conscious or embarrassed, she stepped back and fixed the buttons, then pulled her chair around to sit again so they could both read.

An hour later they had meticulously gone over each case, putting all relevant papers into several piles. She went over the autopsies again, reading them aloud as she paced, while Mulder read over his profile, looking for possible gaps. He pored over a map.

“Hey, come here a minute,” he said suddenly, and she looked up, set the papers down on a pile on the bed and squatted next to where he sat on the ground. “Is this Lecter’s handwriting?”

She brought the map closer and studied the precise, elegant writing. “Dana, doesn’t this random scattering of sites seem overdone to you? Doesn’t it seem desperately random -like the elaborations of a bad liar. Ta, Hannibal Lecter.” She looked up at Mulder.

“Desperately random”? What does he mean?” she wondered aloud.

“Not random at all, maybe. Like there’s some pattern here,” he said, gently taking the map back, studying the color-coded body markers. She sat down beside him, shaking her head.

“Yeah, but there is no pattern or the computers would've nailed it. You said so yourself. They’re even found in random order.”

“Well, except for the one girl,” he mumbled, thinking out loud.

She was exhausted. “What girl?”

“The one he weighted down. Where is she? Fred…”
She stood again and went to search the piles, picking up the graduation photo. “Frederica Bimmel. From Belvedere, Ohio. First girl taken, third body found.” She stared in front of her. “Why?”

“Because he weighted her down,” he said, but she waved it away.

“I know, I know. But why? He didn’t weight the others.”

Mulder set down the map and stood, a sudden realization coming over him as he watched her pace. “The first—what the hell did he say about ‘first principles’?”

She froze and looked at him. “Simplicity.”

He stared at the ground, then up at her. “What does this guy do? He covets. How do start to covet? We covet what we see—”

“- every day,” she finished on a breath. Watched his eyes change from concentrated to elated. “Holy shit.” She stood up.

Mulder smiled quickly at the expletive. “He knew her.”

All tiredness was gone and she was suddenly filled with adrenaline. “Maybe he lives in this, this Belvedere, Ohio, too! Maybe he saw her every day, and killed her sort of spontaneously. Maybe he just meant to...give her a soda, or something, but then -We’ve gotta call Crawford!”

He nodded. “But not tonight. They’re all too wrapped up with catching Lecter. Better to wait till morning.”

She deflated a little. “And then we have to go to Belvedere.”

He nodded again and started going around the room, picking up papers, packing the file up again. She tucked her hair, which had dried wavy, behind her ears. “I’ll never be able to sleep tonight.”

Mulder chuckled. “Well, you have to. It’s already late, and you’ve had a tough day.” He set the papers back on the small table. She nodded in concession and sat down on the edge of the bed, her elbows on her knees and her chin in her hands. He hesitated awkwardly, then cleared his throat. “Scully?”

She looked over at him curiously.

“I’m sorry about your sister,” he said finally, and she closed her eyes for a moment, then opened them again.

“Thank you,” she said quietly.

“I’ll...” he moved to the door, “let you get some sleep—”

“Mulder?”

“Yeah?”

She looked at him curiously. “You never told me how your sister died.”

“She didn’t die!” he interjected sharply, and she blinked in surprise.

“I’m sorry,” she said quickly, trying not to appear confused. “You don’t have to talk about it.”
Realizing his tone might have offended her, he relaxed. “If I tell you, you’ll think I’m crazy.”

“How do you know that?” she asked.

She supposed he couldn’t come up with an answer, but he took a seat on the floor by her bed, leaning against it, and she scooted back into the bed, propping herself up on an elbow, ready to listen.

“How do you know that?” he asked, and she chuckled at the look on his face.

“Of course. I’m sorry.”

She heard the uneven rhythm of rain outside, and once Mulder leaned back against the bed, she reminded herself to stay awake at all costs.

“I was twelve when it happened,” he began, not looking at her. “My sister was eight. She just disappeared out of her bed one night. Just gone. Vanished.” He turned his head and saw her wrinkled brow, ready to answer her questions before she could ask them. “No note, no phone calls, no evidence of anything.”

“You never found her,” she deduced quietly.

“It tore the family apart. No one would talk about it.” He leaned his head back on the bed. “There were no facts to confront. Nothing to offer any hope.” He chanced another look at her.

“What did you do?”

He shrugged. “Eventually, I went off to school in England. I came back, got recruited for the Bureau...Seems I had a natural aptitude for applying behavioral models to criminal cases.”

“I’ll say,” she said, and he chuckled, taking her point.

“My success allowed me a certain freedom to pursue my own interests. Then I came across the X-Files, over at the Hoover.”

“The X-Files?”

“Unsolved cases,” he explained. “At first it looked like a garbage dump for U.F.O sightings, alien abduction reports...The kind of stuff most people laugh about as being ridiculous. You heard Patterson call me ‘Spooky’?”

She nodded.

“Well, I was fascinated. I’ve read hundreds of cases in my spare time. I’ve read everything I can about paranormal phenomenon, about the Occult, and...” He turned away from her.

A chill went up her spine, but she leaned forward. “What?”

Mulder looked to be conflicted about something, then turned back to her, putting an elbow on the bed near her feet. “There’s classified government information I’ve been trying to access, but someone has been blocking my attempts to get at it.”

“Who?” She wrinkled her eyebrows and sat up, hugging a knee near her chest. “I don’t understand.”

“Someone at a higher level of power,” he explained. “The only reason I’ve been allowed to look into this stuff is because I’ve proven myself as a pretty stable agent in the B.S.U. I’ve made some
connections in Congress, too. But the B.S.U doesn’t know about that,” he continued. “Patterson
would throw me out -hell, the Bureau would throw me out if they knew I was doing anything more
than glancing at a couple of cold cases down in that Hoover basement in between profiles.”

“Mulder, what does any of this have to do with your sister?” she asked.

He took a breath. “In my research I’ve worked closely with a man named Dr. Heinz Werber. He’s
taken me through deep regression hypnosis. I’ve been able to go into my own repressed memories to
the night my sister disappeared.”

Alarm bells went off in her head, but she didn’t interrupt him to argue the validity of regression
hypnosis.

“I can recall a bright light outside, and a presence in the room.” He was on his knees now, his arms
on the bed. Her eyes widened at his words. “I was paralyzed -unable to respond to my sister’s calls
for help.” Suddenly, he grabbed her free hand. “Listen to me, Scully. This thing exists.”

She wasn’t afraid of him, just curious, and a little wary about what he was implying. “But how do
you know?”

“The government knows about it,” he insisted, “and I’ve got to know what they’re protecting.
Nothing else matters to me.”

She darted her eyes to the closed file on the desk by the window, and he let her arm go, sighing a
little.

“This matters, too,” he assured her. “Of course it matters. But finding my sister...finding out what
happened to her, who was behind it...that’s everything to me.”

She woke up with a jolt, shaking the birdsong out of her head for the first time in months, her heart
pounding. It was dark and cold in her room -when had she fallen asleep? She felt her hip and found
that a soft grey blanket had been draped over her and that she hadn’t even made it under the covers.
A strange thought crossed her head, and she turned over just to confirm that she was alone before
burrowing underneath the covers and closing her eyes again.

It wasn’t long, however, before a quiet knock came on her door. She got up, wrapped herself in the
grey blanket, and went to open the door, squinting against the light and the cold. Mulder was
standing there, fully dressed, with two covered cups in his hands and a paper bag between his teeth.

She ushered him in, shut the door behind him, then shuffled back to the warmth of her bed, drawing
the covers up over her knees and wiping a hand over her eyes.

“What time is it?” she yawned, flipping the lamp on.

“Five-thirty,” he said, handing her a cup and setting the bag down on the table. She sniffed the strong
coffee and took the lid off, blowing on it carefully before taking a sip. Some steam drifted up from
the surface of the drink and she tried to inhale the caffeine, calculating that she’d probably gotten a
grand total of three hours of sleep. He set his cup down and opened the bag.

“Chocolate frosted or powdered?” he asked, taking out two doughnuts.

“Chocolate,” she said with a tired voice, and he put the pastry on a napkin next to her on the bed.

“Did you call Crawford?” she asked.
He shook his head. “After I eat this.”

“Is he okay?” she asked carefully. “He seems so tired.”

Mulder turned serious. “His wife’s very ill. She doesn’t have much time.”

She took a sip of coffee and a bite of her doughnut, immediately feeling more awake—they hadn’t even thought about dinner last night. Now they ate in comfortable silence. There was a crick in her neck and she tried to roll it out. Mulder finished quickly.

“Why don’t you get ready,” he suggested. “I’ll call Crawford.”

She nodded, standing up and shuffling again to her bag on the other bed, taking out a pair of dark trousers and a navy blue sweater. As he was leaving, she called back.

“Mulder, can I use your bathroom? The bulb blew in mine last night.”

“I’ll leave the door open.” He left and she got undressed, shivering, hearing him begin to talk on the phone through the thin wall between their rooms. Once dressed, she brushed her teeth, then gathered her things, locking the door behind her.

She walked past Mulder, sitting on bed with the phone, looking like he was on the precipice of saying something, and found the bathroom. She tamed her hair, and was applying the smallest bit of makeup when she heard Mulder’s voice rising from the room. She ducked her head out curiously, and he waved her over. She sat next to him, and he moved the phone so she could hear.

“The market in Lector hints is way down today, okay?” It was Krendler, not Crawford. “I’ve got two good men dead in Memphis, and three civilians. I’ve got—”

“And whose fault is—”

“-a U.S Senator who’s half out of her head because her daughter’s going to be murdered today! And all because of your fucking mind games with Lecter!”

“If you hadn’t interfered, he’d still be in custody in Baltimore!” Mulder countered.

“Jack sent in a green recruit with a phony goddamn offer—”

“You’re just trying to cover your ass for letting him escape!”

“That’s enough!” a third voice shouted, and she quirked her brows at Mulder.

“Now, Krendler, I want you in Memphis on damage control. Agent Mulder, you will have Agent Scully back to Quantico by two in the afternoon or there’ll be hell to pay. I’ve got to call her now.”

Mulder nodded to her, and she cleared her throat. “I—I’m here, sir,” she said, not knowing who she was addressing.

“Dana Scully?” he confirmed.

“Yes, sir.”

Mulder handed her the phone, and she held it to her ear with two hands.

“This is Director Burke,” the man said, and her mouth dropped. She was sitting in a motel room talking to the director of the F.B.I.
“Hello.”

“Miss Scully, I’m afraid I have no choice. You’re suspended from the Academy.” His tone was very reluctant, and accompanying the initial shock, she wondered if perhaps Krendler had more to do with his decision than the Director himself. “This is pending a reevaluation of your fitness for the service. I promise you’ll get a fair hearing.”

She nodded, feeling very small. “Yes, sir. Thank you.”

“Is Agent Mulder still there?” he asked gently.

“Yes.”

“Put him back on, please.”

She did as he asked, her eyes stinging for only a second, then got up to return to the bathroom, zipping up her toiletry bag and walking back out, placing it carefully in her overnight bag just as Mulder was hanging up the phone.

“What else did he say?” she asked evenly.

He looked at her. “Crawford’s been ordered to take compassionate leave. He’ll be spending the rest of the day briefing Patterson, who’ll take over as official task force leader at 1800.”

She considered this, then walked back to him. “I need to make a phone call.”

“Mr. Crawford, it’s Dana Scully,” she said, and heard his sigh on the other end.

“Dana, I’m sorry about all this, I-”

“Sir, please, listen to me,” she said, clutching the phone, sitting next to Mulder. “All Bill’s victims are women. His obsession is women, he lives to hunt women. But not one woman is hunting him, except me. I can walk in a woman’s room and know three times as much about her as a man would.”

She took a breath. “Let me go to Belvedere, sir.”

He cleared his throat. “I don’t have that authority anymore.”

“You do until six p.m,” she said firmly. Mulder widened his eyes next to her.

“Ohio is cold ground. Picked over ten months ago. Our people worked it, and so did the locals.”

She shook her head stubbornly. “But not from this angle. Not thinking he knew her. You’ve got to send me!”

A cough from the other end. “I’ve been in the Bureau for twenty-eight years, Scully. I won’t disobey orders, not even now.”

One chance lost, but she took her second one, sitting up straighter. “But I just became a private citizen. I can go anywhere I want to.”

He chuckled. “With an ID and gun? Impersonating a federal agent is a felony.”

She glanced at Mulder, and he nodded. “Agent Mulder will be with me, sir.” She paused for a moment. “Bill is going to kill her, Mr. Crawford. This morning, or maybe at noon, but today, and Belvedere’s our last chance. I’m going to fly there, right now, unless you or Agent Mulder stop me.”
A long pause, so long she wondered if he’d hung up. Then, “Is Mulder there? Put him on.”

She handed Mulder the phone and he held it close to his ear, turning slightly so she couldn’t hear. She heard some mumbled words, then Mulder said, “I won’t, sir. I promise.”
Chapter 10

She climbed stiffly out of the rental car and closed the passenger side door with her hip, stretching a little and taking in her surroundings. She’d slept through their flight and dozed in the car, so that Mulder had had to nudge her awake moments before they pulled up to the curb in Belvedere, Ohio. His door closed behind her as she consulted the address, then scanned the house in front of her. An old, three-story wooden house in a row of similarly shabby homes, all backing onto a narrow river that sounded like very quiet traffic in the residential stillness. A path of boards, laid over mud and snow, led back along the house toward the brown water, through a sloping, large backyard. She looked up as Mulder joined her, the sound of hammering chimed in an uneven rhythm from behind the house.

Carefully, they followed the rickety path down into the yard. A huddle of pigeon coops sprawled by the brackish water. The birds cooing mixed with the hammering. With each new thud, the indignant startle of feathers. To the right was a tall, gaunt man in a knit cap obsessively pounding nails into a new coop.

Mulder took the lead in approaching him, and she followed his long stride. The man lowered his hammer to look at them. His watery, blue eyes were red-rimmed either from cold or the ever-present grief of a childless father. His face was deeply seamed.

“Mr. Bimmel?” Mulder asked.

He stared at them warily. She gave him a small smile, which ironed out some of the lines on his face.

“You’re here about Frederica, aren’t you?”

Mulder nodded.

They went in the house from the back. Inside, they took off their shoes at Mr. Bimmel’s request by the back door, then followed him into a simple living room. An old upright piano sat to one side, a black cat curled into a ball on its bench.

“I don’t know nothin’ new to tell ya,” Mr. Bimmel said. “The police been back here so many times already...Frederica went into Colombus on the bus to see about a job. She left the interview fine,” he recited, then looked up. “She got the job, too.” Then his eyes returned to their murky blue, all brightness gone. “She never come home,” he finished.

The black cat slithered down from the piano bench, revealing white paws, and walked gracefully through the room, cutting a wide circle around the men and bumping into her ankles, twirling its tail around her legs. Mr. Bimmel sniffed.

“That’s Socks. He always was a ladies’ man,” he said. She looked down at the cat, whose green eyes glinted up at her in a sort of feline smile. Evidently, this cat had been friendly to Mr. Bimmel’s daughter, but not to him. “Her room’s just how she left it. First on the right. Just shut the door when you’re done.”

The banister sagged a bit as they walked up the worn steps, Mulder still ahead of her, the cat at her heels. Along the wall and at the landing were pictures of Frederica as a young girl, toddler, infant, plump and hopeful at each age. Then the now familiar graduation portrait, this one framed.

“Scully,” Mulder prompted, and she continued up the stairs to join him as he opened the door to Frederica’s bedroom. He moved to the left of the room while she took in the right side. Flowery
chintz curtains, posters of Madonna and Blondie, a twin bed with worn stuffed animals on the pillow. There was a big sewing machine across from the foot of the bed. The cat meowed quietly, and she bent down to pick him up, scratching behind his ears as she absorbed nuances. There was a loneliness here, an echo of desperation under the steeply pitched ceiling. She moved to the sewing machine and the closet to the left of it, opening the door and revealing a long mirror. She took in her reflection, the cat quirking its head. She put him down and watched as he weaved over to the bed, hopping up onto the comforter and curling into a black ball, his socks hidden again.

Mulder was kneeling by an old Decca record player, flipping through LPs and singles. He lifted one out and held it up for her inspection, gesturing around the room. Madonna’s *Material Girl*. She indulged him with a sad smile, although she didn’t find it funny. Looking further into the closet, she pulled a string to light it up.

“Pretty extensive wardrobe,” she remarked, surprised, sifting through dresses with her fingers, standing on her tiptoes. Mulder stood and came to join her. A shelf above the groaning rod of clothes was stacked high with sewing supplies in clear plastic boxes. She continued flipping through the hanging clothes, pulled out one dress on its hanger for a closer look, handing it to Mulder and standing back at her normal height.

The dress was very big, to fit Frederica, looking like a tent when he held it beside her for comparison, then pulling it back against himself.

“Wait a minute,” she said, her fingers trailing up some unfinished seams. “Turn it around.”

“What is it?” Mulder asked, flipping the hanger around. A blue dressmaker’s pattern was still pinned to the back.

Something nagged in the back of her mind, but she shook her head and took the dress back, hanging it up and leaving the door to the closet ajar.

Mulder pulled out the chair in front of the sewing machine and sat at it, running a palm over the cool metal. “I’ve always wondered how these things work,” he said, endearingly serious.

*Billy wants to change, too,* Lecter’s voice echoed in her head, *But there’s the problem of his size, you see.*

She suddenly opened the door to the closet again, fishing through for the dress, then looking at it intently. On the printed pattern, down at the lower back of the outlined dress were two bold black elongated diamond shapes. She gasped, seeing their West Virginia floater’s back flash before her eyes, then turned back to Mulder, trembling.

“What, Scully? What is it?” He put a hand on her shoulder.

*Even if he were a woman, he’d have to be a big one…*

She looked at him. *Sewing darts. Oh, thank God for home-ec.*

He shook his head a little, confused.

“He’s making himself a ‘woman suit’, Mulder,” she explained, “out of real women.” She watched his face shift from confusion to horrified realization. “And he can sew, this guy. He’s really skilled -a tailor, dressmaker.”

“That’s why they’re all so big,” Mulder said, taking his hand off her shoulder and standing from the sewing chair. “Because he needs a lot of skin. He keeps them alive so he can starve them for awhile,
so he can loosen their skin!” She nodded emphatically.

They hurriedly put Frederica’s room back in order, and she scooped the cat off the bed, closing the door behind them as they hurried back downstairs. Mulder helped himself to the phone in the hall without asking as they heard the continued hammering from outside, holding the receiver between their heads again so they could both hear.

“Patch me through to Crawford,” he said to whoever picked up.

“Who is-”

“It’s Mulder, I need to talk to Crawford!” he insisted.

After a pause, Crawford answered, his voice bright. Mulder launched into their explanation.

“Calm down, Mulder, calm down,” Crawford said. “We know who he is, and where he is. We’re on our way now!” There was a droning in the background, and she assumed he was taking the call in the air.

“Where?” Mulder pressed.

“Calumet City, edge of Chicago. I’ll be on the ground in forty-five minutes with the Hostage Rescue Team,” he said. “I’m back in charge, Mulder. He’s mine.”

Her happiness for Crawford was suddenly tinged with disappointment at so suddenly being out of the hunt.

“Sir, that’s great news, but-”

“Johns Hopkins finally came up with a list of names for us. We fed them into Known Offenders, and he lit up like a Christmas tree,” Crawford chuckled. “Suspect’s name is Jamie Gumb, AKA ‘John Grant’. Lecter’s description was accurate, he just lied about the name. This Gumb’s a real beauty. Slaughtered both his grandparents when he was twelve, and did nine years in juvenile psychiatric. Where, Mulder, he took vocational rehab, and learned a useful trade.”

“Sewing,” she said under her breath, scarcely believing their luck.

“Take a bow,” Crawford continued. “Customs had some paper on his alias. They stopped a carton two years ago at LAX -live caterpillars from Surinam. The addressee was a ‘John Grant’. Calumet Power & Light’s given us two possible residences under that alias. We’re hitting one, Chicago SWAT’s taking the other. Is Scully there with you?”

“She is, sir,” Mulder said, wincing.

“Well, technically you should have her back at Quantico in three hours, but I have a feeling you two are nowhere near there, so there probably isn’t any use trying. Am I correct in that assumption?”

Mulder smiled. “Yes, sir.”

“Let me talk to her.”

She held the receiver and spoke into it eagerly. “Chicago’s only about four hundred miles from here. We could be there in-”

“No, Scully, there isn’t time,” Crawford said. “And you’ve still got crucial work to do in Ohio. We want him for murder, not kidnapping. I’m counting on you two to link him to the Bimmel girl, before
she’s indicted.”

She tried hard to swallow her disappointment.

“Yes, sir. We’ll do our best.”

A pause during which she only heard the drone of the aircraft, then, “Scully, you’ve earned back your place in the Academy,” he said. “We never would have found him without you, and nobody’s ever gonna forget that. Least of all me.”

“Yes, sir,” she said quietly, looking at Mulder. “Thank you, sir.”

She hung up the phone and the quiet of the now anticlimactic house fell over them again. “Well, we better link him to the Bimmel girl,” she said, and Mulder followed her to put on their shoes by the back porch. They walked out the door and down the porch stairs, back to the yard, both taking in this new information. It was over, they had won. Once on solid ground she looked up at Mulder and smiled, jumping into his arms with a happy Yes! He chuckled, then set her down. She followed his eyes to see Mr. Bimmel looking at them, confused. He was now sitting by the coops, smoking a pipe. Somewhat embarrassed, she followed Mulder, taking a notepad out of her bag.

“Mr. Bimmel,” Mulder began, “did Frederica ever mention a man named Jamie Gumb, from Calumet City? Or John Grant?”

Mr. Bimmel shook his head.

“Did she know any men that sew?” she tried.

“She sewed for everybody,” Mr. Bimmel said, shrugging his shoulders. “Stores, ladies, whatever. I don’t know about men.”

“Who was her best friend, Mr. Bimmel? Who’d she hang out with?”

He thought for a moment. “Stacy Boyd,” he said finally. “She was workin’ at the diner downtown. About ten miles west, you can’t miss it. Don’t know if she’s still there, though.”

They thanked him, then went back to the car.

When they found the diner and asked for Stacy they were met by a perky, frizzy-haired brunette in her early twenties who was thrilled to get an unexpected break midway through her shift. She brought them coffee and narrowed her eyes at them for a moment.

“Wait, this isn’t about Michael, is it?”

Dana shook her head next to her, smiling. “Why, is there something we should know about him?”

Stacy snapped her gum, relieved. “Oh, no. Just wonderin’.”

“Stacy, we’re here about Frederica Bimmel. Her father said you two were friends,” Mulder said, sitting across from them.

She nodded. “Oh yeah, best friends.” She shuddered visibly. “Freaked me out. Get your skin peeled off. Is that a bummer, or what?” She looked at her chipped nail polish. “They said she was just rags...like somebody’d-”

“Stacy, did Frederica ever mention a man named Jamie Gumb, or John Grant?” Mulder asked.
She squinted, trying to remember, and shook her head.

“Do you think she could’ve had a friend you didn’t know about?” Dana asked.

Stacy scoffed, smiling. “No way! If she had a guy, I’d a known, believe me. Sewing was her life, and
she was really great at it. Poor Freddie.”

“Did you ever work with her?” Mulder asked.

Stacy nodded. “Oh sure. Me’n Pam Malavesi used to help her do alterations for old Mrs. Lippman.”
Dana jotted down the two names. “Lots of people worked for her. She had the business from all
these retail stores, you know, and even Capaccio Textiles on the other side of town. But she was
like, totally old. It was more than she could handle.”

“Where does Mrs. Lippman live?” Dana asked. “I’d like to talk to her.”

“Oh, she died. She went to Florida to retire like two years ago. She died down there, Mom said.”
A beat, then Stacy looked from her to Mulder shyly. “Is that a pretty cool job, then? F.B.I agent?”
Mulder nodded. “I think so.”

“You get to travel around a lot?” Stacy asked Dana, then smiled. “I mean, better places than this?”
She shrugged. “Sometimes you do.”

For the first time, Stacy looked very sad. “Freddie was so happy for me when I got this job. I mean,
this. She thought it was really hot shit. Big dummy.” Her eyes filled with tears, and she leaned into
Dana, who embraced her gently while Mulder went to pay the bill.

On the way back to the car, Mulder yawned. “We should have gotten something to eat in there.”

“I told you to get a slice of the apple pie,” she said, putting a hand up to cover her yawn.

“I was going to until Stacy started talking about rags.”

She chuckled. “So, now what? The textile place?”

He nodded. “I’ll go to the factory, but I’m pretty sure Mrs. Lippman’s address is right next door, only
a couple miles away. What if we divide and conquer? You can do some digging to see if she left
around any records or contact information, and I’ll see what I can find at the factory.”

She nodded. “Sounds good. Any plan if both of those end up being dry leads?”

He opened his door and hesitated. “We’ll have to go looking for some wet ones.”

She wrinkled her nose and opened her door, climbing back in the car.

Mulder dropped her off on the curb of a street similar to the Bimmel one, only the yards were larger,
the houses more spread apart and set back from the one-lane road. The grass, even with the moisture
of snow, was dull, the leaves dead on the trees, even the bushes in front yards looked a little sad. The
curtains were drawn on both floors of the old Lippman house, and no light seemed to be coming out
from the windows, but the lawn was neat and a package rested on the doorstep. Clearly, someone
lived there.
“Want me to wait to make sure you get in?”

She shook her head. “If there’s no one home I’ll do a door-to-door. Come back in thirty minutes?”

He nodded. “Good luck.”

She got out of the car and swung her bag over her left shoulder, feeling like a real agent as she felt the weight of Beaumont’s gun in its holster against her. When she shut the door behind her she heard Mulder drive off, and set down the cement path to the former Lippman house.

She rang twice, waiting thirty seconds between each ring, and was just about to give up and move on when she heard noise from inside the house. The door opened and she was met by a tall, unassuming man wearing jeans, a faded shirt, and no shoes.

“Good afternoon,” she said, “I wonder if you could help me. I’m looking for Mrs. Lippman’s family.”

He looked down at her feet and, puzzled, she followed his gaze until she realized it was the package. He leaned down and picked it up, then looked at her, frowning.

“They don’t live here anymore.”

He started to close the door, only to have her push back gently against it, politely but firmly. She held up her ID.

“Excuse me, but I really do need to speak with you,” she pressed. “This was Mrs. Lippman’s house. Did you know her?”

He shrugged. “Just briefly. What’s the problem, Officer?”

“Well, we’re investigating the death of Frederica Bimmel. Who are you, please?”

“Jack Gordon,” he said.

She took out her notepad. “Mr. Gordon, did you know Frederica when she worked for Mrs. Lippman?”

He shook his head, then stroked his chin, smiling a little. “Oh, wait. Was she a big, fat person?”

She nodded, tight-lipped. “Yes, she was a big girl, sir.”

Mr. Gordon glanced briefly over his shoulder, toward his kitchen, then turned back to her with a friendly smile.

“Mrs. Lippman had a son. Maybe he could help you,” he said. “I have his card somewhere. Do you want to step inside while I look for it?”

She nodded. “Thanks.”

He held the door open for her and closed it once she’d stepped inside, then went to a desk down the hall, taking out a small book of addresses and flipping through.

“That was a horrible business,” he said, “I shiver every time I think about it.”

She glanced around the musty room to the left. Overstuffed furniture, porcelain figurines on the mantle, newspapers on the table. One archway went off onto the front hall, another onto a dining
room, and through there a kitchen.

“Are they close to catching somebody, do you think?”

“I think we may be,” she said with a decided nod, looking back to him. He set the small book down and reached into a desk cubby for a Rolodex, and she moved further inside, still taking in her surroundings.

“Mr. Gordon, did you take over this place after Mrs. Lippman died?”

He nodded. “Yeah, I bought the house from her two years ago.”

“Did she leave any records here?” she asked. “Tax or business? Maybe a list of employees?”

He continued rummaging, turning his back to her. “No, not at all. Has the F.B.I. learned something? Because the police around here don’t seem to have the first clue.”

She watched curiously as a brown smudge crawled out from under his shirt, making its way up the man’s back. A moth. It fluttered its wings. Unsurprising, given the muggy heating inside the house.

“Do you have a description yet, or fingerprints?” Mr. Gordon continued, oblivious.

She opened her mouth to give him the standard answer -that she couldn’t divulge case specific evidence- then froze. Her mouth went dry as the moth continued to crawl up and, even ten feet away, revealed the white of a skull on its back -a Death’s Head moth. Struggling tremendously to keep her voice even, she answered,

“No. No, we don’t.”

Very carefully, while his back was still half turned, she dropped the notepad back into her bag and lowered it to the floor. With her fingertips she brushed back the edge of her coat, loosening its drape. Suddenly, Mr. Gordon turned back to her, cheerfully holding out a business card.

“Here’s that number!”

She didn’t move, painfully aware that she was completely alone with no backup. She smiled tightly. “Very good, Mr. Gordon. May I use your phone, please?”

With a flutter, the moth flew up from behind him and went to the lamp, climbing under the shade. Mr. Gordon looked at his dear moth, back at her, then smiled again. “Sure, you can use my phone. It’s in the kitchen,” he said. “I’ll show you.”

The instant before he turned around, she whipped out the gun, gripping it in both shaking hands.

“Freeze!”
With a flutter, the moth flew up from behind him and went to the lamp, climbing under the shade. Mr. Gordon looked at his dear moth, back at her, then smiled again. “Sure, you can use my phone. It’s in the kitchen,” he said. “I’ll show you.”

The instant before he turned around, she whipped out the gun, gripping it in both shaking hands.

“Freeze!”

Mr. Gordon slowly tilted his head to one side, smiling at her.

She tried to force more authority into her voice. “Okay...Okay, Mr. Gordon, you’re under arrest. Down on the floor, hands and legs spread. Move it!”

Mr. Gordon turned suddenly, and before “Free-” could come out of her mouth again, he was gone, disappearing into the dining alcove, then the kitchen. She hesitated for a split second, deciding whether or not to shoot him in the back, and then it was too late.

“Shit!” she cursed, frustrated, hurrying into the kitchen, keeping low to the ground, swivelling her gun.

The kitchen was empty. To one side, a door was still shuddering on its hinges, opening to semi-darkness and a descending staircase to the right. She rushed to it, paused, then elbowed the door aside, aiming her gun down the empty stairwell, brightly lit, leading to a cellar. Two doors opened at each side on the lower landing. There was no sign of Mr. Gordon - he could be anywhere. Adrenaline raced through her like a high speed train, laced with pure fear. Which door? Left or right? Either one could be a trap. Suddenly, a scratchy desperate scream echoed up from somewhere below.

She shrugged out of her coat in seconds, rushed through the doorway, and down the stairs. More screams seemed to be coming from the right door. She moved that way, entering a brick-walled passage with pipes overhead, naked bulbs. The lighting, though dim, was incandescent.

She came to a T-shaped intersection and stopped, swallowing. Another scream came, again to her right, followed by what sounded like a dog’s bark. She followed her gun around a corner, looking left. An empty passageway, but doors leading off it - he could be lurking behind any of them. Quickly, she looked right and saw an opening into some kind of chamber. The noises were louder, coming from inside. She moved cautiously toward it.

She crept through the door and immediately glued herself to the wall, swivelling her gun in both directions, not wanting to blink. In every exercise at the Academy she’d been partnered, she’d had backup. Even in the preparatory exercises in case of no backup she’d done fine, but this was no carefully constructed mock-town or choreographed exercise. This was hell, and not a soul knew she was here except Buffalo Bill.

In front of her was the open top of what looked like an enormous well, a circle of bricks and darkness below. Across from her were two other doorways leading out of the room. Jesus, he could come through either one, or from behind her. She moved forward carefully, always scanning, and
glanced down into the well. It was a deep pit, and at the bottom she saw a girl on a filthy mattress - Catherine Martin, clutching a dog. She began to scream hysterically, and the dog started yapping.

Dana kneeled quickly, scraping her knees a little through the fabric, constantly staring at one door after another. She couldn’t cover them all -she was totally exposed. And what was a dog doing there?

“F.B.I, Catherine,” she called, her voice cracking with the fear of discovery, “you’re safe!”

“Safe SHIT -he’s got a gun!” Catherine yelled, her voice hoarse. “Get me out! Get me outta here!”

“Y-you’re all right,” she called again. “Where is he?”

“How the hell should I know? Get me out!” the girl screamed. “This guy’s fucking crazy!”

“I’ll get you out,” she promised. “Just be quiet so I can hear. And shut that dog up!” She was still swivelling, her heart pounding. “Is there a ladder? Is there a rope?”

“I don’t know! Get me out!” Catherine yelled.

She looked down, not able to stop herself from recoiling a little at the smell that rose from the pit. “Oh, my God,” she whispered. “Catherine, listen to me,” she said, “I am going to get you out of there, but I have to leave this room, just for a minute.”

“NO!” Catherine screamed. “Don’t you leave me here, you fucking bitch! Don’t you leave me here!”

“Catherine, be quiet!”

“NO! Don’t leave me!” Catherine yelled, louder than before.

“Shut up!” she bit out, her eyes burning from fear and frustration -she could barely think except to hope that Mulder would come back. “The other officers will be here soon,” she called down, hoping she was telling the truth. “You’re perfectly safe.”

Ignoring Catherine, whose shouts turned to sobs, she backed away, turned, picked one of the doorways, and moved into it quickly. She broke for a moment, letting out a dry sob of her own, then wiped a sweaty hand over her eyes. There wasn’t time to be emotional.

Moving down this passageway toward a new room, pausing at the doorway, she strained to hear anything above the sound of Catherine’s sobs. There was another sound, she discovered, her eyes widening, before she realized it was her own rapid breathing. A hand came off her gun to cover her mouth, but she soon returned it -she could barely hold the gun in one hand it was shaking so badly. She crouched down, bursting forward through the door frame, and sidestepping with her back toward the wall. Weaving back and forth, half crouched, with her gun out. She saw a sewing machine, a swivel chair, an old Victrola. A humming sound as big moths frolicked on the lightbulbs overhead -they were everywhere. She kept moving.

Suddenly, from behind her, a click and hum, and she spun around, almost shooting, before she saw that it was only a small refrigerator, its thermostat just switching on. She gasped for breath, her chest heaving, fighting for calm. Turning again, she batted a hand at the moths as she went through yet another doorway and into a gaudily-decorated room. She moved past mannequins, all of them naked, then quickly past a huge Chinese armoire, ready to shoot into it. Its doors yawned open, but it was empty except for several padded hangers, one of which was moving slightly, like a playground swing on a breezy day. She moved ever onward, past a large sink with a dripping faucet. The
counter beside it, with gleaming knives, rows of chemical jars. She gulped and tried to stop panting, breathing through her nose. If she wasn’t careful, it would give her away instantly. She ducked her head under a tangle of pipes, exposed by the ceiling near the sink.

A closed door was ahead of her, and she started to open it, then hesitated. Looking around, she seized a wooden chair, wedging it under the door, now sealing off this section of the cellar. With her back defended, she turned, softly retracing her own steps. She paused, seeing a half-closed door which she had previously skirted. She crossed to the door, listening, and, hearing no sound from inside, took a deep breath, twisting the knob. As it turned, she shoved her way inside, following her gun in one quick move.

It was an old-fashioned bathroom -tiled floor, sink, toilet- and a big, free-standing bathtub. An opaque shower curtain, suspended from an oval ring, hid whatever might be inside.

She centered her gun on the curtain at chest height, then yanked it aside with her left hand. No one was standing there, but something lower caught her eye. She leaned in, not understanding at first, then saw a female hand and wrist sticking up from the tub, which was filled with a hard, red-purple plaster. The hand was dark and shriveled, with pink nail polish and a delicate wrist watch. As she stepped back in horror, all the lights went out with a crack.

She cried out, then clapped her left hand over her own mouth. Where was Mulder? God, why wasn’t he here? She’d gladly deal with Lecter on her own for a month rather than be in this killing maze alone. She turned blindly, reaching for the door, but couldn’t find it. It was pitch black. Not a speck of light. She would have seen better blindfolded in daylight, but she still kept her eyes wide open. She grasped at the darkness, desperate to touch something, to ground herself, but terrified of what she might encounter. The sound of Catherine, keening again in the distance, reminded her why she was here.

She stepped forward but tripped, tumbling to her knees, then swept an arm out in a wide half-circle. Her wrist slammed into something unforgivingly hard -the doorframe! She ignored the sharp pain and held on, bringing her entire body up to lean against it. After several breaths, she stepped out from the bathroom, trying to remember the landscape as best she could. She was in some sort of workroom -the sink, the knives...back and to her right, weren’t they? Well, she certainly didn’t want to encounter those in the dark. She stopped to listen. In the raw-nerved darkness every sound was unnaturally magnified. The hum of the refrigerator, the trickle of water, her own terrified breathing even as she tried to be quiet, and Catherine’s echoing sobs.

Muffled, from far above, she heard her name being called. She couldn’t even be sure if it was real, or just her sky-high adrenaline making her lose her fierce grip on what was left of her sanity in this hell.

“Scully?” The voice pushed through the oppressive quiet, and she bit her lip and stood absolutely still, trying to hear movement. Would Bill run from certain capture? Would he take out Mulder, then find and kill her? And where the hell was he, anyway?

Please, Mulder, don’t talk. Don’t move. Don’t come down here.

Moths smacked against her face and arms. She moved a little to the left, then stopped again. This process repeated itself, taking one step forward, sweeping with her hands on the gun, then with the gun in her right and a bare hand searching. She sniffed the air, which smelled of leather and wet wood and candle wax, nothing that would give anyone away. She heard movement, but it was far away, maybe on the staircase. But was it Mulder, or Bill? She was swimming in ink.

Another silent step forward, more swivelling and sweeping, blind searching with her hand.
She knew that sound. She spun to the right and turned around, seeing the spark already leaping from her own gun as she fired at the target across from her, and it fired back. *One-two-three-four-five-six!* She fired quickly, her hands holding the gun in a death grip, her target invisible. She heard two shots from the other weapon, and felt the distinct breath of a bullet rocketing past her cheek, before her legs gave out and she hit the ground, the side of her face slamming against the floor, splattered and wet with blood - she could smell it, taste it, but she ignored the pain, the ringing in her ears, and whipped her speedloader from her jacket pocket, locking it blindly onto her gun’s cylinder, reloading as a heavy weight fell somewhere in front of her with a groan.

She gasped, spitting Buffalo Bill’s warm, iron blood out of her mouth and blinking her dazzled eyes, straining to locate him in the darkness. Then, as the echoes of their gunshots faded, she heard a tortured, sucking whistle from perhaps a yard away. She crawled forward on her elbows, following her gun, until it bumped against something soft and malleable in the coal-dark. Still gasping in shock, she pushed the muzzle of her gun into what felt like flesh, training it upward until she found what was surely a neck, following up toward the head. No movement, another shot wasn’t needed.

After a moment’s hesitation, she took one hand away from her gun to attempt to locate a pulse, then heard another wet, spitting groan, which made her jump back a little in fear, until it faded away, guttering out. He was dead.

Only then did she allow herself to roll over onto her back, let the gun slip out of her hands, and begin to sob, covering her blind eyes with one hand. It was over, *it was all over*, and through her own sounds she heard Catherine’s in the distance, and Mulder’s puncturing through.

“Scully! SCULLY!”

She lay there, a hand on her stomach, trying to calm herself, until she finally gathered enough mental and physical strength to stand, to begin to find the light. That she could do, now. She moved to stand.

“Mulder! In the base-!”

A dull thud as her skull came into contact with a low pipe, a searing pain shocking through her like electricity. Her black world faded to white before she collapsed again.

A muffled, foggy sound made her brain twitch to life again, and she was dimly aware of movement around her. The drone of noise sharpened into distinct tones, which she realized were human voices. She felt the ground vibrate with footsteps, and then a sudden, heavy noise next to her. She’d wince if she could move. God, everything was so loud, and she felt so sick, and someone was asking her to wake up. She couldn’t hear the words, but she recognized the sentiment - worry.

A hand feathering over her face, a voice, her name.

“Scully, come on, wake up,” it insisted, and she tried to shake her head. “Sc- Dana?” it tried.

“Ma’am, can you open your eyes for me?”

She tried to shake her head, but her body wasn’t cooperating.

“She’s not moving. What does that mean?” A trembling hand cupped her cheek.

“She’s breathing, and vital signs are good,” the unfamiliar voice said, near to her, fingers on her
“We need to get her to a hospital.”

“She’s opening h- she’s opening her eyes!” Mulder exclaimed, brushing hair off her face, sticky with blood.

“Hi,” she managed to eke out, not sure if she’d actually said anything, or if it was just wishful thinking. She still couldn’t see anything, just a sliver of light. She heard the snap of Polaroid cameras around her, surely documenting the scene.

“Hi!” Mulder gasped, elated. Two quick, dry kisses on her cheekbone and temple. She smiled, but it was painful, and she didn’t know if it reached her mouth. “You did it, Scully,” he was saying. “You got him. You saved Catherine.”

She opened her eyes more and saw his blurred face staring down at her, a moth on his shoulder, his eyes wide. She tried to reach a hand up but only her fingers moved toward him. He picked her up a little, and her head drooped noodle-like from her neck toward the floor.

“Are you insane? She could have a spinal injury!” the paramedic hissed, and she winced at a penlight shining in her eyes. The man sighed. “Pupils look a little dilated. Might have a concussion.”

That sounded about right. She tried to focus up on Mulder, but as he eased her back down to the ground she felt her stomach rebel and, even though it made her see stars, her body jerked to the side and was sick on his knees. She curled in against the pain, closing her eyes. Around her the cameras were still clicking, the paramedic was speaking through this radio, and Mulder kept a careful hand on her arm, not moving.

The beeping woke her first, pulling her out of a deep sleep. The room was dark, and the eggplant sky behind the curtain told her it was nighttime. Light came from the lamp beside her bed, and from under the closed door. She turned her head a little, away from the light, and saw a dark shape draped over the side of her bed. Mulder, sat in a chair, was slouched forward onto her sheets, his head resting in the crossed cradle of his arms. She moved her legs as she turned, and that woke him up. His eyes quickly scanned her, then lit up when he saw her face.

“You’re awake,” he remarked.

“I’m thirsty,” she croaked. It was hard to string long sentences together.

Mulder stood up, walked around to the other side of the bed, and poured some water into a small cup with a straw, handing it to her. She sat up a little in the already upright bed to take a few sips, then sunk back into the pillows.

“What time ‘sit?” she asked.

He checked his watch. “After one. You slept for five hours this time.”
“This time?” she asked, alarmed.

He nodded, then held up two fingers.

“Two.”

“What’s your name?”

“Dana Scully.”

“Favorite color?”

“Blu-what?”

“Whose life did you save earlier today?”

She lifted an eyebrow hopefully. “Catherine Martin’s?”

He nodded. “They told me to ask you easy questions every time you woke up. Do you remember coming to the hospital?”

She shook her head, although it hurt. “How long have I been here?”

He went back to the other side of the bed and sat in the chair again. “I got to the house around three, paramedics and police were there in fifteen minutes. You’ve been here since about four this afternoon.”

“Okay.”

“You’ve got a mild concussion. The neurologist ran all the tests and says you should just rest up and you’ll be as good as new. Might be a little bruised, though.”

She smiled, then touched her cheek, which stung a little.

“And a nice powder burn to show off at graduation,” he teased.

She couldn’t see him very well in the dark, and the last thing she wanted to do was turn on another light, but he seemed uncomfortable.

“Mulder, what’s wrong?” she asked, summoning enough strength to move her hand in his direction over the sheets.

He met her eyes. “The police, the Bureau…they’re gonna have questions for you when you’re feeling up to it, and I…”

She patted the bed, prompting him to continue.

“I shouldn’t have let you go alone. I don’t know what happened down there,” he said, “only you know that. But I can’t…I can’t imagine doing what you had to do alone.”

She blinked, sleepy. “You know what I was thinking the whole time I was down there?”

He shook his head.

“That despite all that training, and all our preparation, I didn’t have a single idea what I was doing.” She swallowed, her throat sore again. “And I kept having to break rules I’d memorized just to
“survive.”

He quirked his head, perhaps confused. Her head was still a bit foggy, but she tried to clarify her point.

“It was like the first time we went to see Lecter. I broke all the rules Chilton had laid out for me, and you were there, but you didn’t stop me.”

“I’m sor-,” he said.

“Let me finish,” she said gently. “And then, when it was really too much, you pulled me out of there, just like you said you would. You knew when it was okay to break the rules, and when it was too much.” She smiled. “And even though one of the first things I thought was ‘Where the hell is Mulder?’, I think you taught me that I could go it alone if I needed to.”

The next time she woke up it was because she had to use the bathroom. In the early hours of the morning, a nurse helped her to the bathroom in her private hospital room and back into bed, where she was told there were people waiting to speak to her. Stauning herself for the questions she’d be expected to answer, as well as potentially angry department heads she’d be speaking with, she took a fortifying sip of water and told the nurse she was ready to see them.

Crawford was one of the first in the door, with two local policemen and another man in an F.B.I jacket behind him. Mulder wasn’t among them.

“Dana, it’s good to see you,” he said, shaking her hand. “How are you feeling?”

“Just glad it’s all over, Mr. Crawford,” she answered.

“Well, it’s almost over. You’ve still got to provide a statement, and we need to go over yesterday’s events,” he explained. “Are you up to that?”

She nodded, knowing it had to be done. Crawford pulled up a chair on one side, took out a tape recorder, and the policemen fished notepads out of their pockets, pens poised.

“No, Agent Mulder’s already given us his version of events, so why don’t you start from yesterday morning,” Crawford suggested.

After recounting all that she could remember of the previous day, she finally looked at Crawford a little hopelessly. “But, like I said, I couldn’t see anything down there. And all I remember afterward is waking up...Mulder was there, maybe a paramedic. I saw a moth...a moth on Mulder’s shoulder.” She frowned. “But after that, nothing until the hospital.”

The second F.B.I agent, who identified himself as one of the first on the scene after Mulder had called for backup, presented her with a plastic bag of Polaroids from the crime scene.

“We thought you might want to take a look at these,” he said, and she looked at Crawford before opening the bag and reaching her uninjured hand -the other wrist swollen from its blind encounter with the door frame- inside, the photos tumbling into her lap.

They had ended up not far from the sink, some photos showed the sharp skinning knives resting on the counter. In a spreading puddle of Buffalo Bill’s blood they lay heads not far apart, bodies pointing in different directions in macabre symmetry. He wore a set of infrared goggles, which had allowed him to easily locate her in the dark, moving quietly as she bumped into obstacles and breathed like an exhausted runner, easily covering any noise. She’d managed to shoot him once in
the chest, once in the shoulder, and once in the throat, which explained the guttering gurgle just before death.

Her own face, tranquil while unconscious, was bright red with splattered blood. Beaumont’s gun cradled in her hand, while Bill’s Colt Python rested not far from him. The worst part on this first image, however, the part that almost made her look away, was Bill’s body. He wore the half-completed woman suit she had predicted he was working on only hours before the picture was taken. A grotesque imitation of the female form, with only one breast and no arms - it was practically drooping off of him. His rebirth, his transformation, had been half realised. Taking in this horror, she was suddenly glad of the darkness that had hid him from her throughout those agonizing minutes in the basement. She honestly didn’t know if she would have reacted as quickly as she had if met with this image. A second’s hesitation, and she could be the dead one - another to add to his collection. Crawford watched her face for a reaction.

Then came a series of closeups, mostly of Bill’s injuries, then her own gunpowder burn and bruised wrist. Several photos of poor Catherine Martin, dirty and terrified, clutching the dog she’d had with her down in the pit. The photographer, documenting the room, had captured some of the rescue team arriving on scene. A paramedic with an open kit beside him wiping blood off her face in the corner of one photo, Mulder’s face as he leaned over her, a careful palm on her shoulder, another holding her limp hand. She must have been unconscious again by that point, but she lingered on this particular photo, studying Mulder’s face, an unguarded expression she hadn’t seen him make before. Crawford cleared his throat and she flushed, remembering where she was, and gathered the Polaroids up and slid them into the plastic bag again.

“Thank you,” she said to the agent, who nodded.

“Where is Agent Mulder, sir?” she asked Crawford, confused by his absence.

Crawford stood. “I told him to go take a shower. I think you have another visitor, though,” he said.

Oh, no. “My parents?”

He shook his head. “No, no, apparently Mulder called him, and he wanted to visit. It’s Mr. Bimmel,” Crawford said, seeming perplexed. “Frederica Bimmel’s father. Do you want me to call your parents?”

“No!” she said, a bit too quickly. “I should definitely be the one to tell them.” Although they probably knew, if it had already made headlines. “But I’ll see Mr. Bimmel.”

A few minutes later there was a timid knock on the door.

“Come in,” she called, and the door opened to reveal Mr. Bimmel, wearing the same knit cap from yesterday, looking woodsy and out of place in the antiseptic hospital room, carrying a bouquet of flowers. There was more light in his eyes, and he nodded in greeting.

“Miss Scully,” he said, coming to stand by her bed, setting the bouquet on the table beside her.

“Hello, Mr. Bimmel.”

He looked at her a little sadly. “Not too beat up, are ya?”

She chuckled. “No, I’ll be fine.”

He smiled, reassured. “That friend of yours, he called yesterday to tell me that you got the guy ‘did
this to Frederica.”

She bit her lip. “Well, Mr. Bimmel, there’s no conclusive evidence yet. Did Agent Mulder tell you that?”

He nodded. “But I’m sure it’s him, miss. I mean, he was right here in Belvedere where she was. It had to be him.”

She smiled politely. “Well, thank you for coming to see me, and for the flowers.”

“Even if it wasn’t him ‘did that to Frederica, I’m just glad he’s caught so no other parents have to go through what I did.” He sighed. “The police came back so many times, and not one brought good news.” He dug in the pockets of his heavy jacket, then brought out a folded photograph, holding it out to her. “That’s for you, miss. Frederica’d have wanted you to have it.”

She reached to take the photograph and unfolded it. A pretty picture of Frederica sitting on a wicker, cushioned porch swing, and the black ball that she knew to be Socks curled contentedly next to her. Her eyes filled with tears. She smiled up at Mr. Bimmel.

“Thank you,” she said, touched.

He just nodded his own thanks again. “Well, God bless you.” And then he was gone. She smoothed a thumb over the photo and set it down beside the flowers.

Emotionally drained, she was almost ready to curl up and sleep again when the door opened, this time not accompanied by a knock, and Mulder came inside. She smiled, glad to see him.

“Where were you? I just spent an hour going over the crime scene with Crawford and the Belvedere police.”

“How are you feeling?” He took off his jacket and draped it over a chair, taking a seat and noticing the flowers. “You got an admirer I don’t know about, Scully?”

She chuckled. “I’m fine. Those are from Mr. Bimmel, who just came by to thank me for finding his daughter’s killer. He said you called him.”

He nodded. “I did. I called him last night.”

She grew serious. “Mulder, you’re not supposed to tell civilians things like that without the proof.”

He scoffed lightly. “Tell me what more proof we needed, Scully. The skinning knives, the suit, the cut blouses he kept as trophies?” He looked at her. “I gave him closure. Otherwise we’re just another set of cops looking for answers with none to give him.”

She was a bit taken aback by his tone, which came across as annoyed. “Mulder-”

“I’m sorry,” he said, looking in the general direction of her bed, but not meeting her eyes. He cleared his throat. “Did you, uh, did you see the photographs?”

She nodded. “Yes.” Instantly, the one of him holding her, looking at her tenderly, flashed before her eyes.

“I hope you know how much I-” He looked up at her. “How proud I am. We all are.”

She nodded again, her throat suddenly dry. He picked up the photo of Frederica and traced the edge
with his fingertip. “Anyway, I’m leaving the B.S.U,” he announced without preamble.

“Wh-where are you going?” she asked, thrown by this news.

He met her eyes just for a moment, the corners of his mouth twitching in a smile. “Don’t tell me you’ve started to get attached.”

She smirked, grateful for the lapse in tension. “I mean, why leave the B.S.U? You already have a good career here.”

He nodded in concession. “I’m going to take over the X-Files division in Washington.”

She raised her eyebrows. “You volunteered?”

He nodded again.

“Couldn’t that get boring -unsolved cases?” she asked, trying to be delicate.

He tilted his head in consideration. “I don’t think so.”

She placed her hands on her lap and smiled at him. “Well, good luck, then.”

“Yeah.” He stood carefully, reaching for his jacket. “I should go. I’ll let you get some rest.”

“I told you, I feel fine,” she said, chuckling.

He shook his head. “No, I need to go, Scully, because otherwise I might do something we’d both regret.” He cleared his throat, looked at her quickly, and started to put on his jacket again.

“It’s okay,” she said softly. She met his eyes. They both knew. “You can.”

He stared at her, giving her time. “Yeah?”

She nodded, suddenly shy.

“You’re sure?”

She laughed a little, and then he was sitting on the edge of her bed, her uninjured cheek in his palm, and nothing was funny because she leaned up and then he was kissing her. His lips were warm against hers. Funny, she’d never felt this way about a kiss -like she was a rosebud blossoming. They took their time, and it was as chaste as a kiss could be with all her nerve endings reaching out like magnetically charged cables, searching for their meeting point. She wanted to deepen the kiss, but when he didn’t make any move to she held back. It was long and careful, and when they broke apart she looked into his sad eyes and rested her forehead against his, even as it made her see white for a moment.

“It’s okay,” she said softly, a hand on his arm, sensing that he felt the same way she did. Like a dishrag being wrung out in one direction, then the other.

This was it. He would leave and go to the Hoover building in D.C, and she would return to Quantico with two months to go before graduation. They probably wouldn’t cross paths again, depending on what she ended up doing after graduating. And maybe she was romanticizing the kiss. After all, they were both exhausted, and she had a concussion.

He smoothed a thumb over her cheekbone, then stood from the bed, slipping his jacket on. She watched him quietly, hoping her face wasn’t flushed. Just before he went to the door he smiled at
her.

“...take care, Scully.”

“You're out, right?” she joked.

He put his hand on the doorknob and opened it, smiling back at her ruefully. “Not yet, it isn’t.”

As the door closed behind him and she sunk back into the pillows she did a mental calculation. They had known each other for approximately five days.

Chapter End Notes

Mulder and Scully having a kiss five days after meeting each other is ROCKET SPEED for them. Story's not over!
Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

As soon as she’d left the hospital with Crawford they’d been swarmed by reporters from every paper and television channel she could think of, but Crawford had already promised a press conference in D.C, so he’d waved them off and taken her to the airport, where they’d caught a late afternoon flight and landed in Washington in the early hours of the morning.

The impact Buffalo Bill’s capture had on Washington by the time the city woke up was enormous. Crawford hadn’t wanted her to attend the press conference, lest reporters pick apart the fact that the agent who had apprehended the vicious killer hadn’t yet graduated from the F.B.I’s Academy. Her name was in the papers, though, and in several a small photograph, but she’d only really seen them on a newsstand while waiting for her parents to pick her up in front of the hotel she’d stayed in overnight. Her father had been justified in his anger at the F.B.I for sending a trainee in pursuit of a serial killer, and it was only after several long explanations that she’d been able to convince him that she was partially to blame. Her mother was weepy at first, hugging her youngest daughter for a full minute before they’d even made it to the car. Then, at home, she busied herself with assembling lunch and reining in her husband before he used too many choice words to describe Dana’s decision to join the F.B.I. Lunch was a bit tense, and Dana’s head still hurt, but things had simmered down by dinnertime.

Her younger brother Charlie had even graced them with his presence, carting a stack of different publications all singing the praises of the F.B.I and the young agent who’d managed to put a stop to Buffalo Bill for good. The whole family tried to avoid the subject of her actually killing another human being, and she even felt uncomfortable with the knowledge once it began to sink in.

After two days of rest back at Quantico during which she obsessively read through Marion’s class notes and tried to catch up on the course material she’d missed over the week, Dana was back at the firing range with only a small bandage over her cheekbone reminding the others that she’d been to hell and back.

Beaumont looked at her proudly as she signed in, was issued a weapon, and went to her place for the drill. She pulled on her ear and eye protection, then assumed the textbook stance. Beaumont called the drill, and a chorus of one, two, three, four, five, six, went off as the weapons were fired. The trainees relaxed and removed their ear muffs as the targets zoomed back to them. She tore hers off and smiled to herself -four kill shots to the chest and two shots to the shoulder.

Two hours later she pushed in a door and trained her weapon on the young man in front of her, hands unwavering on her gun. Two hostages were huddled against the walls, hands tied behind their back and ropes around their ankles. In the semi-darkness it was difficult to distinguish faces.

“F.B.I! Hands up! Don’t move!” Andrew commanded next to her, his own weapon pointed at the suspect, his voice strong and confident.

The suspect backed away from the hostages, slowly raising his hands into the air.

“Turn around!” she said. “Hands behind your back! Thumbs up!”

The suspect turned slowly, and she holstered her gun, knowing Andrew still had control. She
reached into her pocket for the pair of handcuffs, unclicked them, then dropped her shoulders at the hollow pull of the trigger beside her head.

“You’re dead, Scully,” a middle-aged man said. “Somebody get the lights.”

As the lights went up the mock-hostage situation revealed itself. The ‘suspect’ started helping the ‘hostages’ take off their fake restraints. Students sitting behind a net on observation bleachers stood up to stretch, a new team of five preparing for a similar rehearsed exercise.

“Johnson, good job,” the instructor said to Andrew, bringing down the exercise-gun. “Good entry, good commands.” Andrew nodded.

“Scully, where’s your danger area?” the instructor asked.

“In the corner, sir,” she answered, pointing behind her.

“Did you check the corner?”

She shook her head. “No, sir.”

“That’s the reason you’re dead,” he explained. “And I want less chatter from the hostages in the future, kids. Okay, team two, let’s go!”

Marion moved to stand and joined Dana as the team filed out the door to trade places. “Are you still gonna be holed up studying tonight, or do you want to get pizza and watch Jaws in the rec room?”

She exhaled. “I’ve got to keep up. Plus, there’s the physical tomorrow. I was hoping to run the course at least once this afternoon.”

“You could probably get out of the assessment. I mean, you’ve been in the hospital,” Marion pointed out.

“Yeah, but I feel fine, and I just want to get back into the swing of things as soon as I can,” she explained. They turned the corner and walked into the observation area while the new team set up, picking up notepads and squeezing in among their classmates.

“Your call. I’ll run with you, though,” Marion said. “Hey, Andrew, ask Paulson if he has any gum left.”

Sticks of gum were passed down the row, and Dana took out her notepad as the next team got into their positions on the other side of the net. She remembered the Friday before she’d been put on the Buffalo Bill case. That cold afternoon behind the Academy field house she’d shivered in a single-file line with her classmates waiting to get blasted with oleoresin capsicum, more commonly known as pepper spray.

When it was her turn, she’d shut her eyes and waited. There was no count to three or warning noise. An instant later, and her face was burning. To pass the test, she had to open at least one eye, attack a punching bag, and defend herself from an assailant trying to take her gun out of its holster. Amidst the chaos, she’d managed to subdue her subject, and the excruciating exercise was over. It was one of the many tests and exercises they’d been put through, and taking down Buffalo Bill wouldn’t give her a leg up over any other trainee as they pushed through the next two months until their time at the Academy was over. Taking down Bill hadn’t made her cocky. In her eyes, she’d been extremely lucky to have made it out alive. It had all boiled down to a mixture of training and dumb luck.

After running the course once with Marion late in the afternoon, she went with the rest of her
classmates to the physical assessment the following morning. Her time was down by five seconds. Not what she’d been hoping for, but an improvement nonetheless.

Two months passed, jam-packed with classes, homework, tests, final exams, more physical training, and then two days of waiting for grades and packing up rooms. On the last night they spent hours in the rec room, everyone in their pajamas eating pizza, playing ping-pong, and telling funny stories about how far they’d come. Six months ago they’d been enthusiastic and terrified to be starting their training at the Academy. Now that they’d passed all the tests and jumped through all the hoops, they felt like they at least knew their way around, only now it was ending, and another beginning was approaching. They’d be partnered, or sent to their new assignments, and have to start the learning process all over again.

The class teased Tom, the only trainee younger than Dana, who’d started off as a shy, scrawny kid and barely passed the physical entrance exam, but who had a heart of gold. Now he was confident and friends with everyone, possessing a hidden talent for imitating their criminology instructor - a brusque, burly man in his late fifties.

Andrew was currently juggling four ping-pong balls and carrying on a conversation with a brunette named Ellen whose father and three brothers were policemen. She’d one-upped them and was about to become F.B.I. After a couple hours of celebrating the end of their training, Dana went back to her room and took out the white silk blouse, navy skirt, and matching jacket she’d be wearing as she walked across that stage tomorrow to receive her shiny new badge, complete with the photo she’d posed for last week.

Laying the clothes on the bed, she took a critical look at them and then picked some dust off the jacket sleeve. She thought of her father’s face when she’d graduated from Stanford. The pride in his eyes that day. The shouting that had accompanied her decision to join the F.B.I, the betrayal in his eyes. How would he look tomorrow?

The next morning she gathered with her classmates in a reserved section of the large auditorium, all of them looking a mixture of relieved and anxious in their conservative suits. Family and friends began to filter in as they waited for the ceremony to begin, sitting in the rows behind them, but most of the trainees were too wired to look back and check for people they knew. Chairs on the stage began to fill with important men and one important woman among the F.B.I ranks, although for the time being they couldn’t place names to faces, save one - the Assistant Director, who’d addressed them on their first day at the Academy.

This time it was the Director, whom she’d spoken with on the phone in a motel room, who stood at the podium. His opening speech was brief and well-rehearsed, and soon the class was told to stand, raise their right hands, and repeat the oath they’d recited on their first day. The words felt heavier in her mouth this time.

“I, Dana Scully, do solemnly swear that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; and that I will well and faithfully discharge the duties of the office on which I am about to enter. So help me God.”

The graduates filed out of the auditorium and around to the hall at the side, standing single file in alphabetical order, so that she ended up near the back. Then came the calling of names, moving more quickly than she’d anticipated, so that she barely had time to watch new Special Agent Rogers before her own name was being called and she was crossing the stage. She shook the Director’s
hand before he handed her a badge, which she then held up as a photo was taken and applause sounded from the audience, as well as a few whistles and obnoxious cheers from her classmates. As the flash cleared she saw a silhouette at the back raise his hand in a small wave -Crawford?

“Good work, Scully,” the Director said quietly, and she nodded, then crossed to the other side of the stage and down the stairs to rejoin the new agents. Once at her seat she opened the badge, running her fingers over it, thinking perhaps she could live up to the serious look in her own eyes staring back at her from the picture. There was her clean Catholic school handwriting spelling out her own name. After mooning at it for a few more seconds, she tucked the shiny new badge in her jacket and applauded as the last few trainees came through to receive their own. And then it was over. A closing statement from the Director, more applause from everyone in the room, and an invitation to a reception held afterward. With a collective sigh of relief, the new agents began to make their way out of the auditorium with everyone else, looking forward to champagne and cheese at ten in the morning.

At the reception she scanned the crowd of family and friends for her father, but instead found her mother’s gentle face, flanked by two redheads.

“Dana!” her older sister called. Melissa looked the same as always, like an elegant misfit in her vintage dress and hoop earrings among a bunch of Calvin Klein and Banana Republic. Her younger brother Charlie, still in college, had spruced up a bit for the occasion, wearing a button down shirt with his jeans instead of a t-shirt, and her mother was in her Sunday best. Melissa scooped her up in a hug first, smelling of incense and lavender.

“I’m so proud of you!” she said, her voice incredibly sincere. Charlie hugged her next, still string-bean and freckle awkward going into his fifth semester at college. And then her mother, who held her the longest. Dana wanted to cry, and her mother knew it.

“Your father sends his best wishes,” she said simply. Then they parted, and she cupped her youngest daughter’s cheek. “He’d like you to come for dinner with us this evening, if you don’t have other plans.”

She smiled a little sadly. “I don’t have other plans, Mom.”

“Hey, Dana, this must be your family,” Marion said, coming up beside her roommate. Her family hadn’t made it out from Oregon for the ceremony, but she had a flight to see them the next day.

She nodded. “Yeah. Mom, Melissa, Charlie, this is Marion Adams. She roomed with me during training.” They all exchanged handshakes.

“I came over to say you’ve got a phone call in the hallway,” Marion said quickly, gesturing over her shoulder.

“Oh,” she said, surprised, hoping it was her father. “I’ll be back in a minute.”

Halfway past the table filled with crackers, raw vegetables, and various dips, someone nudged her elbow.

“Special Agent Scully,” he said, and she stopped to smile, looking up as Mulder caught up with her. So, it had been him at the back of the auditorium.

“Special Agent Mulder.”

He handed her a small glass of champagne. “I’m not much good at this sort of thing, so I’ll probably
duck out, but I wanted to stop by and see you hold that real badge. School’s out, huh?”

Her mouth twitched in a smile as she took a sip of the bubbly drink. “Not yet.”

He looked surprised.

“I’m doing my first two years here at the Academy,” she explained. “Teaching forensics.”

He nodded, it made sense. There was no real awkwardness between them, but after the way he’d left her in that hospital room she was quite surprised to see him at graduation at all. It seemed too grand a gesture for him.

“Couldn’t that get boring?” he asked, a twinkle in his eye, echoing her own question from two months ago.

A beat during which she didn’t take hers eyes off his. “I don’t think so.”

He smiled, appreciating her wit.

“How are the X-Files?” she asked.

He smiled a little ruefully now. “Boring doesn’t seem to fit into that division of the F.B.I. You should give it a try sometime.”

She pretended to consider this. “Maybe I will.”

He looked at her, his eyes softening, and opened his mouth to say something else. She flushed. Then, seeming to suddenly remember where they were, he closed it again, and she handed the plastic glass of champagne back to him.

“I have a phone call waiting,” she explained.

He nodded. “See ya, Scully.”

She didn’t look back, heading further out to the hall and picking the phone off the receiver.

“Scully,” she answered, liking the sound of it coming from her own lips like that.

“Well, Dana, have the birds stopped singing?” The familiar purr sent fear slithering up her spine. She whirled around in time to see Mulder picking at something from one of the food tables, his back turned.

“Dr. Lecter?” she breathed, frozen, clutching the receiver to her ear with both hands.

“Don’t bother with a trace,” he said, “I won’t be on long enough.”

She watched as Mulder took a sip from her champagne glass, near the almost-invisible stain her lipstick had left on the rim.

“Where are you, Dr. Lecter?” she asked.

A soft chuckle. “Where I have a view, Agent Scully.”

She didn’t respond, confused. “Your birds are quiet for now, Dana, but not forever...You’ll have to earn it again and again, this blessed silence.”
She clenched her jaw but continued to listen, paralyzed. “Because it’s the plight that drives you, and the plight will never end.”

“Dr. Lecter-”

“I have no plans to call on you, Dana,” he assured her. “The world is more interesting with you in it. Be sure to extend me the same courtesy.”

“You know I can’t make that promise,” she said, thinking about the oath she’d taken not thirty minutes ago.

“Goodbye, Dana,” he said, and she could hear the smile. And then, very softly, the phone clicked.

She turned to the wall, clutching the phone even more tightly. “Dr. Lecter?” she asked in a desperate whisper, the sounds of the party continuing behind her. “Dr. Lecter?” she repeated, her voice cracking. “Dr. Lecter?”

When she finally hung up the phone and looked back out at the fresh agents and their families, Mulder was nowhere in sight.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter is an epilogue! Thanks so much for reading! I didn't think there would be an audience for this, but I was pleasantly surprised that so many people were enthusiastic about it. Give yourselves a pat on the back. I probably would have abandoned the idea if not for all your nice encouragement.
Epilogue

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Two Years Later

She walked quietly down a dimly-lit hall. Its bare walls gave the place a forlorn and forgotten feeling, and shelves stood to one side piled with unmarked boxes, like she was in some stock room. The lighting was so poor that the hallway seemed almost to come to a dead end, where more boxes were stacked, but then she saw a door to the left, slightly ajar. She knocked lightly four times.

“Sorry, nobody here but the F.B.I’s most unwanted,” Mulder's voice called from inside, slathered with sarcasm.

The corners of her mouth twitched as she walked in. The basement office, its walls adorned with posters, photographs, and clippings from news articles, reminded her of the board in Crawford’s office mapping out the Buffalo Bill case, trying to make sense of it. She couldn't make sense out of anything on these walls. Then she saw Mulder, who seemed almost to blend into his surroundings. He was leaning over his desk examining some slides.

“I’d rather be unwanted than wanted for murder,” she said, and he turned, trying to contain how delighted he was to see her. He was wearing glasses, but other than that he hadn't changed.

“Touché,” he said, smiling, and leaned back in his chair. “Then again, we’re pretty good at catching murderers, aren’t we, Special Agent Scully?”

“If I remember correctly, Special Agent Mulder.”

He looked her up and down, a little surprised. “Look at you. You grew up.”

She nodded. “I did.”

He stood and went to shake her hand. It was strangely awkward, and she smiled. “You once told me you didn’t think this department would be boring. I hope you haven’t changed your mind.”

He quirked his eyebrow. “Why do you say that?”

“Because I’ve been assigned to work with you,” she said. He smiled a little sadly.

“So, who’d you tick off to get stuck with this detail, Scully?” he asked playfully, although there was a hint of bitterness in his tone. “Skinner said he was giving me a partner—he neglected to mention that it was you.”

She frowned. “Blevins said he was assigning me because he’d heard we worked well together. I hope this isn’t a problem for you.”

“No,” he said, touching her arm to reassure her, “no, it’s not a problem. I just don’t think...well, this isn’t the B.S.U, Scully. This is cold cases. And what about your teaching at the Academy?”

“I joined the F.B.I, Mulder,” she reminded him. “I’ve been teaching since graduation. This will be an interesting change. I’ve been asked to write up field reports on the cases.”

He smirked. “You’ve been asked to spy on me.”
She frowned again. “Mulder, I’m not part of any agenda.”

He looked at her, and she ducked her head to smile a little, remembering that night at the hotel. “Don’t you trust me?”

He chuckled, then nodded. “Always.”

She moved closer and gave him a little half hug, keeping one arm around his waist and looking up. “That night you told me ‘that’s what partners do’,” she said, reminiscing. “They trust each other, and you said I’d learn that one day. I think I already did, though, two years ago.”

He wrapped an arm around her waist and squeezed her a little, then they let each other go. “Well, hit the lights and put on your white coat, Doctor Scully,” he said, going to the projector. “I need your medical opinion on something.”

Chapter End Notes

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