Written with MustangSally, who doesn't yet have an archive account. The horrific saga begun in Iolokus (new spelling!) continues in the barren landscape of Texas. Mulder and Scully delve deeper into the genetic experiments done by the Project on the Mulder family. When the innocent, and not-so-innocent, legacies of the experiment are murdered because of who and what they are, Mulder and Scully are forced to face terrible reflections in a mirror broken into ten distinct pieces.

Quotes come from Walt Whitman.

Chapter 1 And these tend inward to me, and I tend outward to them
And such that it is to be these more or less than I am
And of these one and all I weave the song of myself

Imagine my joy when Zippy was waiting for us back in DC.

I walked into the office and he was sitting in my chair, feet up on my desk, looking up at Scully. She was standing a few feet away from him, not quite as close as she stands to me but overall the picture was enough to make me want to bite his throat out. Couldn't he smell that this was all my territory? I'd drawn the line at actually urinating in the corners since it would only irritate Scully more than some of my other bad habits.

"What are you doing here?"

"Hello to you too, Spooky. Sorry to hear about your ulcer, is that why you were such an asshole in
"Texas?" he cocked his head and smiled one of his halogen smiles at me to show that this was all in
good fun, but I just wanted to break his teeth.

Supposedly the cauterization had solved my immediate problems but I was obviously going to revisit
gastrointestinal hell in the near future. And the reason was grinning at me from behind my desk with
its hideous Tom McCann shoes on my blotter.

"I repeat: what are you doing here?"

"Agent Zipprelli wants us to consult on a case," Scully answered for him. "It's an investigation into
the disappearances of a number of young women down in Texas."

The part of me that is always screaming struggled to the forefront of my
consciousness. No, no, no,
not again.

"It's right up your alley, Spook. Hot chicks missing without a fucking clue. That's what you're into,
right? Who knows you might even get lucky and find yourself the Klingon of your dreams."

"Fuck off," I said and gestured to him to get the hell out of the way so I could sit at my own damn
desk. He, of course, moved not an inch.

"The disappearances are centered around Austin," Scully said and, though Zippy would not have
been able to catch the slight emphasis on the last word, I did. I realized that I'd never asked what
other information Marita had given her. Roush had a large amount of property in Austin.

They looked at me expectantly. Scully seemed to think that I'd accept turning X Files leadership over
to her without going through any of the annoying paperwork to make her AIC, and though I'd said
that I could do that when we were in Arizona, things seemed very different if her first executive
decision was going to be to follow Zippy back to his stomping grounds. Maybe my presence would
be superfluous anyway.

"Do you really want to do this?" I appealed to Scully. She just raised her eyebrow, which that
morning apparently meant, Mulder, you fuck, get with the program.

Zippy watched the two of us, amused by the silent communication. When he could tell that I'd caved,
he decided it was safe to chime in. "What's your damage, Spooky, anyway?"

"I could tell you, but then I'd have to kill you."

Scully gave me the dog-poop-on-her-shoe look, and I whined, "Oh, come on, Scully. You have no
idea how many years I've waited to say that to him."

She crossed her arms and Zippy smirked. Another long-held fantasy shot to hell once realized. I
should have learned better when Samantha was returned, but I'm not that trainable.

I sighed. "Get out of my chair, grab a stool, and give us what you've got."

He didn't move.

"This is the deal," Zippy started, flipping open a case file, "after the shit from the Roosevelt Center
died down I started going through the old case files to see if anything we'd picked up lately could
relate back to Abrams. Turns out that one of his co-workers from the Phone Company took a powder
about nine months ago. This is the killer, he had been dating the woman, I figured that this was the
external stressor that started his trip down insanity lane."
How easy it was to forget that Zippy had been in ISU until he started talking like a profiler and stopped talking like a hick cop. I hated to admit it, but he had actually had an awful lot of promise in ISU, from a strictly analytical perspective – he never lived the cases the way an inspired profiler did. Cases left him without a stain, just like his teeth. Lucky bastard.

"Then I got to thinking that he had been talking about people manufacturing babies. Nine months. I talked to a buddy down at the Austin PD and another one in San Antonio. Turns out that between the two cities, no less than twenty-four young women between the ages of eighteen and thirty went missing about nine months ago. Given the fact that both Austin and San Antonio have a fairly large population of transient workers in the tourist trade, waitresses and the like, not much was made of it at the time since people come and go at will. But four women missing at about the same time without as much as a body found anywhere is suspicious."

"Think they got picked up by the Mothership, Spooky?"

"You're doing waaay too much peyote, Zip."

"I've seen you go off on a wild E.T. hunt for less."

"Do you want to countersign the request to consult before I take it up to Skinner?" Scully asked, her face and voice like liquid paper.

I scrawled my name on the dotted line and let her go.

"What the fuck is with you?" I demanded, the moment her footclicks were swallowed by the elevator, "you X-File happy all of a sudden?"

"Fuck you, Spook, I'm doin' my job. Somethin' you never took seriously."

"This is from the guy who'll wave his dick at anything with tits?"

"Hey man," he was out of my chair and snarling down at me where I sat, his eyes glowing like neon, his spit hot on my face, "you can sit here in your fucking burrow and pick and choose what bullshit cases you want while the rest of us are out on the fireline every day. We're working cases you think you're too good for. We're putting the bad guys in jail while you're chasing after lights in the sky."

He grabbed his briefcase from my desk, sending a flurry of case files to the ground.

"I've got three seats on the nine o'clock to Austin tomorrow. Be on that plane with your full attention or I'm going to leak to the press that the X-Files are a vanity project and a waste of taxpayers' money."

I had his arm before he made it to the door and I spun him around until his solid back slammed into the hollow door. Strong as a bulldog, he shoved at me and forced me back half a pace.

"You do not come into my office, turn my partner against me and then threaten me *fuckhead*."""

"Do your fucking job, Fox. Get your head out of your ass and work for a change."

The door bounced shut behind him.

I kicked the trashcan across the office but it only made my foot hurt.

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Zippy caught up with me on the second floor landing. When I heard his footsteps I turned, reaching
for my gun, just in case, but I relaxed when I identified him. Even if he was an enemy, his plans didn't involve assault in the concrete embrace of the Hoover building.

He shook his head and smiled at me. "You know how you can have a history with a person, and everyone who sees the two of you together for the first time wonders what could possibly be the problem and why you overreact to every word the other person says? And you know you're overreacting, but it's not the one sentence, it's the whole history, every interaction you've ever had." He cocked his head and blinked, his dark eyes and Maybelline eyelashes flirting with me in the dimness of the stairwell.

"I think I know a little about that," I replied and he smiled widely.

"I know it's not all Spooky's fault, but he...well. Pushes buttons, you know?"

I nodded and began climbing again.

"Should I come see the AD with you first or just come back later?"

"I'll handle this, he can be...brusque...to people he doesn't know and I don't want any more male posturing clouding the issues." He nodded contritely, face falling like a pancake. His pout was nowhere near as exaggerated as Mulder's; his face flattened and his eyes widened but his lips stayed pretty much in place.

"I'm gonna go buy some snow globes with the Washington monument in them for my kids," he said and shrugged.

"You have children?"

"I don't. The Artist formerly known as Mrs. Zipprelli and her new husband do," he shrugged, "didn't work out."

Oh, hell. "You should try some pretty rocks from the Natural History Museum, I sent them to my brother Charlie's kids last year and he said that went over well."

He nodded. "Should I meet you back at Mulder's office? Or is yours easier to find?"

I winced. He really had an instinct for weak spots and I'm sure it served him well.

"Come to the basement around five, we'll talk. I'm sure you've got friends in the building you can visit with until then."

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During the lunch hour I picked up a pack of Trojans to go with the Rolaids. I didn't think about it until I was back in Casa Hoover.

Did I want Scully to get pregnant? Did I want that not to happen?

We'd never used condoms before; the chances of either of us dying from HIV were minimal. So because I knew she was infertile I hadn't paid any attention to "protection," as it's called these days. As if anything could protect me from sex with Scully.

If she got pregnant she'd have to leave me. Leaving me could keep her safe, but leaving me this way would make her more vulnerable than ever. Let's be honest, she could have Zippy's child, hell she could have Cancerman's child (would that make me a brother? a first cousin once removed?), and a
threat to it would still bring me to my knees.

So no, I didn't want her to get pregnant. And maybe I didn't trust her to go back on the Pill now that pregnancy was a possibility. She'd used it before; she was never ashamed of it and took it with lunch every day, which is why I know it was her method of choice. But she wouldn't start up again without a full checkup first, not my methodical calculating darling, and she might not return to it at all.

Now that she'd been a mother, for a few short days, she'd want that again, not right now but eventually, and when that happened I'd have to figure out how to dissuade her. I couldn't prevent her from going out and finding some idiot in a bar to be daddy or even from using a sperm bank. I could try to spend every waking minute with her, and that way she'd kill one of us well before nine months was out.

Maybe if I was lucky I could use her sex drive to combat her reproductive drive. I know this isn't true of my other sexual partners, but I am, without serious competition, the best lover Scully has ever had. None of the others' lives or mental stability depended on pleasing her in every cell, and none of them, I'm sure, studied her every move, in bed or out, to ensure total attention to her needs. She thinks that she doesn't need me, and in a way it's true. Scully's will is strong enough to let her leave me behind without ever looking back. But I don't think she's aware of what it would cost her. She could do it, but she will never be indifferent to me, because I've bypassed that judgmental, convoluted cerebellum of hers and trained her body and her reptile brain what to crave.

As a strategy, it would definitely have its benefits.

Then there was one question that hung in the air like a bad smell – what if she wasn't interested in having sex with me anymore?

What would I do to make her stay?

2

*You villain touch! What are you doing? My breath is tight in its throat. Unclench your floodgates. You are too much for me.*

Mulder wasn't in *his* office at five; I'd forgotten that he had a checkup for his stomach, an appointment I'd scheduled for him. He'd come back when he was done, but I didn't know if I wanted to be waiting there for him.

Zippy had a filing cabinet open and was paging through a thick casefile.

I got closer and saw that it was my own. The first one, as Mulder wouldn't hesitate to remind me. The one now supplemented with the latest revelations concerning my cancer and my child.

"Find what you're looking for?" I asked sharply, and he spun on his heel and had the courage to look unashamed.

"I've heard rumors," he admitted, "but I didn't really understand. It's..."

"Unbelievable?"

His grin was as loud as a gunshot in the dim office and I thought about the fact that the teeth are the only visible bones of a healthy body. "Hard to believe, maybe. Harder to understand. Why would anyone do this?"

I shrugged. "Why do people go to Star Trek conventions?" This comment earned me a more serious
smile. "So," I continued, "Mulder's at the doctor's, he'll be a while."

"So you want to get something to eat?"

Haven't we done this before, I thought, but what came out of my mouth was, "Sure."

I think the last time Mulder bought me dinner was tomato soup and grilled cheese sandwiches at a truck stop in Iowa where the jukebox was playing both country and western music. But Zippy and I went to the Ebbett's Grill where the atmosphere was as mellow as the dark wood paneling and the waitstaff were both attentive and discreet. There were real fabric napkins too. We ordered drinks and waited for dinner to come.

"So what's your deal with Spooky?" he asked, over the civilized tablecloth.

I looked at him. "Deal?"

"I mean, are you two an exclusive thing?"

The substance of the question rattled in my head for a moment. Exclusive? Technically, there was no one else left alive with whom I'd had sexual relations in the past five years. I think Mulder could say the same. Did that count? Why was Zippy thinking that-

"I don't know what you're talking about."

Zippy sipped at his beer and sat back in the booth.

"Ah, come on, Dana, I see the way he looks at you. The boy's got it bad."

"You know, there are people in the world other than Fox Mulder," I said, feeling the vodka sting in my bloodstream, my body, so unused to alcohol, was reacting like a college student at her first dorm party.

In the dim light, Zippy was actually attractive since the shine from his teeth as muted and he wasn't shouting down Mulder. His foot brushed my calf underneath the table and it may have a genuine accident. He looked at me with his deep walnut eyes and ran his fingers up and down the sweaty sides of his glass. "So tell me about Dana Scully then," he said in an affable tone.

I chased an ice cube around the glass with my swizzle stick.

"Not much to tell, went to college, went to med school, went into the FBI," I drank the remainder of the vodka and tonic, enjoying the cold trail it ran to my stomach.

"Was abducted, had cancer, had a child that died. Isn't that a story?" he pressed, and it surfaced where in my mind that he had trained in ISU with Mulder and that he had, in fact, been a profiler.

Hard to believe that either of them had been when they carried on like children on a playground. But Zippy's tone was too light and frothy for reality.

Was I being questioned?

"Doesn't that change you somehow?" he pressed.

"It changes your perspective."

"And what's your perspective now?"
"Very distant," I said and offered him the most barely polite smile.

"I can take a hint," he said and shook his head," so what subjects are open for conversation?"

"How 'bout them Redskins?"

"Now you see, that's one of my forbidden subjects, I'm a Dallas fan."

Maybe the joke was funny or maybe it was the vodka but I did laugh. The waiter came and brought our dinners and for a half an hour we talked of normal things - department gossip who was sleeping with who and if anyone at all was sleeping with Skinner. We talked about budget cuts, the impossibility of getting good cannoli below the Mason Dixon line and the general decrepitude of the entire Lariat rental car fleet. He told me about his divorce, about how Anne Marie had finally run out of patience with the insane schedules, the last minute trips and the black moods from seeing one too many dead bodies. His sons and ex-wife were now living a normal life with her new husband who was a vet and only got called out of bed at night for emergency calf-births. The best thing about the late night bovine midwifery was that cows don't try to shoot the vet.

I lost track of how much I drank, but when we walked through the cool cavern of the parking garage and Zippy put his arm around me I didn't protest. The kiss was pleasant, and it was nice to kiss a man without getting a cramp in my neck, but pleasant was as far as it got. He failed to ignite any passion in me whatsoever, as compared to Mulder who could almost make me come with one blatant look.

My lack of interest must have been obvious.

"No good, huh?" he asked with a sad little smile.

"Zippy-"

"Yeah, I know, I know 'my heart belongs to Spooky', right?" he unlocked the car door and held it open for me, "But if he does you wrong even once, let me know and I'll kick his ass."

In a way, it was terribly charming.

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"Take me home."

If my head snapped up any faster I was going to find out the hard way if our heath care package stretched to chiropractors or not. She had broken a rule, no talk in our oft-bugged office.

"I had too much to drink," she admitted and walked carefully to the chair and sat with equal care.

"Zipprelli ply you with alcohol and make an assault on your virtue?" I sighed and began gathering papers into their original case files, more or less.

She snorted something like a laugh and tossed her hair back; the liquor was making her slow and languorous, and making me nervous.

"Something like that," she pulled her key chain out of her pocket and tossed it on the desk, the brass of the Apollo emblem glowing gold in the light, "and I'm not about to further endanger my career by picking up a DUI."

"Might be a nice change from speeding tickets."

I have been asked why I rarely let Scully drive in the field and the answer is simple, my deliberate
little darling has a size six shoe and a lead foot. To avoid the hassle of dealing with local highway patrols, I drive. The speeding should have been a clue to me all those years ago that something demonic lay under her carefully groomed exterior.

"Come on, you little lush, the drunk bus is leaving,"

Sitting in the passenger seat of her own car, Scully watched the lights of Washington go past, past the usual diplomatic tags proving that foreigners really shouldn't be permitted to drive on US soil, past the stretch limos, past the river and into Virginia. From her statement in the office doorway, I wasn't sure if she wanted to go to her home or my home, and since my apartment was closer the decision was simple. I was also gripped with a serious hunger for her skin.

Parking in Old Town Alexandria sucks, as a rule, and tonight was no different. All the slots for my apartment building were full and we had to walk three blocks in the night. Passing by the coffee cafe where I used to pick up my morning caffeine fix before getting to the Metro station, back when I could drink coffee, a small, strong hand caught mine and fingers entwined with mine. I could have died happy right then and there, except for the nagging fear that the affection was alcohol-induced.

Scully plunked her briefcase next to mine on the coffee table and wandered into the bedroom with a boneless walk that could have made me hard if I'd let it. I went through the usual routines as though she wasn't there, checking my e-mail, getting the scores from ESPN while I sorted through my paper mail. The only good thing was a letter of confirmation from my brokers (the thought that I had stockbrokers still made me want to laugh) that they had, in fact, sold all my Roush stock as per my request. They had re-invested the money in a variety of computer companies that allegedly gave about the same yield. At least I could look at myself in the mirror in the morning when I shaved.

I also now owed Danny a hundred bucks on the last Yankees game.

When I finally went into the bedroom, it was after midnight and I almost stepped on the puddle of Scully's clothes on the floor. From the light coming through the drapes that never quite shut tight, I could see that she was already in bed, sprawled over more than her fair share wearing one of my old dress shirts. She was also breathing so loudly that it was a borderline snore.

I took off my clothes and got in next to her. She snuffled into the pillow when I touched her, but she went soft again and leaned up against me.

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Mornings are dangerous times in my world. Waking up Scully is like sticking your hand in a bear trap, only worse. This time I was prepared. I had coffee.

"Hey, " I said and poked at her hip.

She made an unattractive grunting noise and burrowed deeper into the pillow.

"Go 'way."

"Wake up sleepyhead, it's time for school."

Rolling over, she looked up at me and I watched the play of the last night's events run through her eyes. Yes, Scully, we did share a bed last night and didn't have sex. Mark that down on your calendar, it has to be an event. I can take care of you and still let you make the rules, an arrangement that you've never made available to me.

Naturally I said none of this.
She sat up and rubbed at her face.

"What time is it?" she asked.

"Just after seven," I said and handed her the covered cup that I had brought her from Starbucks.

Taking the coffee, she pushed hair out of her face and I could see her struggle to form rational thought.

"When are we supposed to get the plane to Austin?"

"Nine, that gives you enough time to go home and pack."

"Right," she muttered and started drinking the coffee.

"Be back in a minute," I said and went back into the living room to finish setting up my laptop to get my e-mail on the road. I was fighting with the codes when someone started knocking at the door.

"You know, that damn partner of yours has a hell of a nerve," Zippy complained as he marched in, "I don't know where the fuck she is. I called her apartment this morning and all I got was the answering machine."

"Good morning Agent Zipprelli, and how are you today."

"She shot me down again last night."

"Maybe you should quit asking her out. The lady is not interested."

"Fucking genius."

"I know I am. So what did you try to call Scully about?" I asked, straightening my tie.

"The flight was moved to ten."

"So you should have more time to get a coherent report together that I can review on the plane," Scully said, coming out of the bedroom and tucking her blouse into the top of her pants, "as opposed to that incoherent drivel you tried to pass off yesterday."

She handed me her empty coffee cup and shrugged into her jacket.

"I'll see you two at the airport at nine thirty, then."

Picking up her briefcase, she left, leaving Zippy with his mouth open and me with an empty paper coffee cup in my hand.

"You are so whipped," Zippy said once her footsteps had been swallowed by the sound of the elevator.

"Fuck you," I said and threw the paper cup at the trashcan in the kitchen. It bounced off the rim and rolled across the floor.

"Didja' ever stop to think exactly how big of a shitload of trouble you can get in for sleeping with your partner?" he asked and flopped down on my sofa.

"Repeatedly."
"And?"

"What's your point, Pin-head?"

"I think it might be worth a pair of those Redskins tickets you're always giving Danny for me to forget about it," he gave me one of his ultrabrite smiles, "and extortion is such an ugly word."

This was farcical, just a routine round of sniffing and growling, the flash of canine teeth. I knew the only thing he was serious about was the fact that he wanted the tickets. If it hadn't been the threat of exposing Scully and me, he would have found another way to weasel the tickets out of me. Was it really going to be that easy? Were we just kidding ourselves and the rest of the world that this was a clandestine affair? Or did people honestly not give a damn?

One thing was certain. Short of my being abducted by aliens and having my brain sucked out with a straw, I couldn't give her up. If exposure threatened, she'd have to be the one to take action.

If I were analyzing myself, I'd wonder what kept me following her around. On the surface, she was getting the milk for free, which was sorely depressing the market for cows. Love as cow, I thought--what a moo-ving metaphor. But Zippy wouldn't get the joke.

In any event, as always with us, surface appearances were deceiving. I had excellent reasons to nurture this strange attraction. With Scully, I could open up--because I knew she'd never admit to noticing my most painful revelations. I could follow words that came out flecked in my heart's blood with a sly innuendo, and she'd treat both statements the same way: she'd give me a blank, almost disapproving stare and change the subject. If she ever tried to draw me out, I'd pull back, and I could count on her to do the same.

"There's a Starbucks down the street," I said. "You buy me some tea, we'll figure out what you're going to tell Scully. There will be a test later, this I can guarantee."

"Tea?" Zippy shook his head and grabbed my bag. "You are a lunatic."

"On the contrary, the phases of the moon have nothing to do with it. I am mad but North by Northwest. I can tell a hawk from a handsaw when the wind is Southerly."

"I wouldn't quote too much Hamlet were I you, man. Think too much about the parallels and you'll end up on somebody's floor bleeding from multiple puncture wounds."

He had a point.

Zippy's request for our help was not altogether implausible, though it would have made more sense if I'd had coffee instead. Twenty-four women gone, all young and probably fertile, high-risk victims whose disappearances should have been noticed. Abductions tended to target young healthy women, whereas run-of-the-mill serial killers, particularly the savvy ones, stuck to people whose absence would not be particularly surprising. Unfortunately if you're running an illicit breeding program a subject's heroin addiction really cramps your experimental options, which might be the only good thing about shooting smack.

Zippy had actually made a rather brilliant deduction, though I didn't say that because he'd just insult me for patronizing him. He'd worked out the girls' menstrual cycles through interviewing friends and family--he was aided by the fact that fifteen of them lived in dorm situations, and women living together often find their cycles synchronizing, it's something to do with pheromones that Scully probably even understands. In any event, the girls were all taken a few days before their peak fertility periods, just enough time to get them transported, cataloged and drugged into oblivion
before...whatever.

Of course, Zippy thought our target was a lone psycho who wanted to impregnate as many victims as possible. Real men don't believe in conspiracies, they like things that can be shot, fucked, or trampled, not necessarily in that order. I didn't debate the point with him.

However, I would have given my left nut to see Zippy questioning college girls about their menstrual cycles. I bet he left all of those dorms with a pocketful of phone numbers.

The loud clanging of a metal milk pitcher made me look up at the girls behind the counter. Three of the fresh-faced college students that I vaguely recognized from my frequent flyer program were clustered around the blonde who was blushing redder than a cranberry. Zippy also looked up, looked at the blonde and smiled.

The hormones in the air were thicker than steamed milk.

Zippy and the girls - doing the mating dance of the eyes.

I felt very old and very tired.

3

And there will be any more inception that there is now Nor any more youth no age than there is now. And there will never be any more perfection than there is now. Nor any more heaven or hell than there is now

"I can't believe that son of a bitch rates a window," Mulder said, looking out the architectural marvel that was Zippy's.

"Well they're not going to hide Top Gun in the basement, right?"

"I chose that office, good privacy."

"Obviously it wasn't for proximity to the women's room."

"We've got a lead!"

I was going over the stack of Missing Persons reports piled up on Zippy's desk when the man himself came into the office waving a fax sheet like it was an Olympic Gold Medal.

"Holly Keene was spotted by a Good Samaritan over in the warehouse district. They called into the local TV station when they ran the missing person report last night."

"Let's go," Mulder said and I shrugged, it looked like we were just going to do grunt work, and not of the kind that Skinner would condemn. Now *there* was some grunt work I wouldn't mind starting again, I thought, and almost forgot to follow Zippy before he lost us in the maze of corridors that led to the elevator.

The cops were holding back pending our arrival, tightening around the target warehouse like a noose. Anyone with about a day's work in security would have been able to spot their presence for all their attempts at subtlety. This was Texas, I reminded myself, and subtlety was not really a premium.

Zippy had respect here though; they hadn't made a move until he arrived. "Spook," he said, casually throwing an arm around Mulder's shoulders just to make him flinch, "whaddaya think? Guns blazing
"It's a tough call," he said, looking at me and seeing the Eleanor Roosevelt Daycare Center, where blazing hadn't made a whit of difference. "I doubt our target is a lone man with a lot of women in chains."

"You think he's got an accomplice?"

Mulder sighed and looked away. I recognized the signs of compromise in him and was mildly displeased with them, though I should have been joyous. Mulder was trying to color within the lines so that they wouldn't treat him like Cassandra; technically we were just consulting and Zippy was in charge of the case. "I think he's not alone and might attempt to resist an armed penetration."

Zippy eyed Mulder the way I look at food I find in Mulder's refrigerator. "Man, if you're going to start bullshitting me now, you can just go home."

Mulder's upper lip twitched in a snarl. "All right, hotspot. I think these women are being used for experiments by someone or something who's being systematic about it. However you go in there will be gunfire and people will die. If you're lucky most of the deaths will be goons and some of the girls. If not both sides are going to be hit hard. Go in as a UPS delivery truck first; they'll at least check it out instead of just opening fire."

"Yeah," Zippy said and looked up at the flat blue sky, "I guess FedEx would be too obvious."

"And those brown UPS uniforms are pretty flattering." Mulder gave me a grin that was like a child's drawing of his normal smile.

On him, it was. Mulder has beautiful legs, perfectly proportioned with well-defined calves and quads, even his big feet look good at the ends of those legs. He wouldn't wear a vest because it looked too strange underneath the short-sleeved rayon of the uniform. But he had to add a brown baseball cap and a pair of sunglasses to complete the disguise. I was surprised he didn't go for a rubber nose and a false mustache as well.

UPS had been very cooperative, even lending us a DIAD (one of their high-tech pads that could record signatures electronically), along with real packages with real tracking numbers. Zippy, whose attention to detail I was beginning to appreciate, had the packages labeled with the return address of the company that supplied the security system for the warehouse, whose identity he'd picked up by using binoculars to read the little sticker stuck on the window.

I began to suspect a Mulder-plot when I was informed that there were no uniforms in my size—it was difficult for small women to meet the lift-and-carry requirements of the delivery job. I was reduced to waiting with Zippy's colleagues inside the truck, our Trojan horse in case things got hairy. At least this required Mulder to go in with Zippy, so he couldn't just gloat about it.

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I felt flop sweat in every crevice of my body and wondered how many undercover operations had been blown by nervousness on the part of the officer.

Zippy had a friend in Research who was almost as good as Danny. As we were suiting up, he told me that the warehouse was owned, indirectly, by a big pharmaceutical company. Three guesses as to the name, and the first two don't count.

We couldn't pull the shirts out of the shorts to cover up our guns because that looked too strange and there was obviously no use in trying an ankle holster with the shorts unless we wanted to look like we
had matching deformities. Instead we ripped open two of the small, flat boxes we'd gotten from UPS--they were stuffed with balled-up paper for verisimilitude--and put our weapons inside. If we kept them tilted just the right way the guards at the doors wouldn't be able to see that the boxes were open.

"What are we waiting for?" Zippy asked and I shrugged and hopped into the truck. The drive took about a minute and a half. We were a little early for the real UPS delivery truck, but not so much that alarms would immediately go off. Zippy had the radio tuned to some horrible top forty station and the guards at the warehouse must have heard us before we rounded the corner.

I get knocked down But I get up again You're never going to keep me down I get knocked down But I get up again You're never going to keep me down

The guard standing stiffly at the gate waved us through. "What kind of warehouse has guards around its gate in the middle of a city?" Zippy asked over the music.

I shrugged. "Maybe they're shy."

The building was as grey and solid as a nightmare. The few windows were frosted glass. I wished again that there had been a better excuse to keep Scully out of the TAC team, but she'd had more field experience than half of the regular team members and they'd all been really impressed when she recounted the story of our raid on the white supremacists last year. That's my girl. Brains, beauty, balls, and bravado.

The guard at the door looked us over more carefully. He didn't recognize us and that made him nervous. Zippy hopped out of the truck and swaggered over to him, carrying his package underneath the thick electronic clipboard. I followed, blessing my unresponsive face; I had no trouble looking uninterested.

"I'm going to need a supervisor's signature on this," Zippy was saying as I arrived next to him.

The guard frowned. "That never happened before," he said.

"Yeah, well, I guess this stuff is pretty expensive," Zippy replied, pulling his clipboard to one side so he could pretend to look at the label. "I guess Security Systems Limited just likes to make sure everything goes where it's supposed to. Or maybe there's been a 'wastage' problem recently, you know what I mean?"

The frown was now a snarl. "Look," I said, "we've got a whole route left to run. If you want we can say 'delivery refused' and you can send the supervisor down to our office to pick it up during business hours, or we can return these to the sender."

The guard paused, considering the ass-chewing he'd get if they really needed this package and his boss had to leave work to wait as UPS rummaged through its dead-letter pile. "You come inside," he ordered me, "and bring both the packages." He ran his card key through the door. He wasn't very good at hiding his code; I saw Zippy's eyes track and hoped that the electronics specialists in the truck could fake the card key better than Frohike had been able to do.

Zippy carefully put the package and clipboard on top of my own box. His eyes were flashing like stoplights, but he knew it was futile. I could almost hear Scully screaming at me to refuse, make up some excuse, come back later.

I get knocked down But I get up again You're never going to keep me down I get knocked down But I get up again You're never going to keep me down
The guard held the door for me and I stepped inside, bringing the boxes close to my waist so that he wouldn't see the guns in the open boxes as I passed. I could smell myself; maybe I needed a new deodorant.

"This way," he pointed down a small dark hallway framed by corrugated metal. "The supervisor's office is at the end of the hall."

****

"We're losing him," the agent manning the electronics said, with the thin pinched look of a person watching a disaster unfold. "They must be jamming to protect the building."

Zippy opened the back of the truck and pushed past the fake boxes. I was in his face immediately.

"Give me the warrant," I said.

"We already agreed we couldn't take that chance. Mulder insisted--"

"Does anyone *hear* Agent Mulder's opinion of the situation right now?" My voice was irritatingly high, I needed authority and not hysteria. "Give me the warrant."

"What are you going to do if I don't, Dana, draw down on me?" His voice was soothing, like the tone you'd use with an abused pet, and that made the dark interior of the van blaze red to my eyes. I noted that my hand was straying perilously close to my weapon and that the other agents were shifting nervously, readying for a confrontation.

"No," I pushed past him, knocking empty cardboard to the ground as I jumped down. The guard's eyes widened and he held up a hand to stop me.

"Federal agent," I said as if that would explain everything and showed him my badge and my gun, in that order. I felt Zippy behind me, waving the warrant and shouting, but the world had slowed down and his voice didn't make any sense.

The guard had time to raise his gun and squeeze off two poorly aimed bullets before I shot him.

For a moment the world began to run at the proper speed again. I heard another agent shouting into a cellphone, saying that it was going down all wrong and that I'd gone crazy. Zippy was kneeling at the downed guard's side, feeling for a pulse and then rifling through the dead man's pockets.

There was a terrible cracking noise from inside the building, the sound of something large falling apart, and Zippy was at the door fumbling with the guard's card key and we were in.

I get knocked down But I get up again You're never going to keep me down I get knocked down But I get up again You're never going to keep me down

The music continued to thump from the truck radio, covering the sounds of the TAC squad deploying.

4

*Has anyone supposed it lucky to be born? I hasten to inform him or her it is just as lucky to die, and I know it.*

I ignored the room at the end of the hall and looked around for other exits. There was a stairwell to my right, an industrial-sized door that could have let in all sorts of complicated medical machinery.
There were drag marks in front of it, the floor was discolored and worn as it wasn't down the rest of the hallway.

I reached for the door and it swung open easily, on well-maintained hinges.

The main part of the warehouse was just one big room, several stories tall and filled with rows and rows of wooden crates. In a firefight it would be a maze of killing corridors. Up at the top and off to the side I could see a balcony. The lights were dim and indirect but I could see the slow steady pulse of monitors, red and green lights winking peacefully.

There was a metal staircase running from the warehouse floor up to the balcony, I couldn't quite see where it came down through all the boxes so I headed in the general direction.

It was like a topiary maze in there. I was considering whether the confusion was the result of actual planning when I heard the door, several twists and turns behind me now, clang open, and a voice shouted, "Where are you?" The sound of safeties being clicked off carried well.

I glanced up again at the balcony and noted that the lights at one side were now all red and yellow, the green washed away. The guns came free of the boxes easily and I shoved the empty containers into a crack between two crates. I began to run through the narrow artificial corridors, turning each time the direction that was closer to the stairway.

The footsteps behind me sped up. As soon as I got above ground level they'd be able to see me, I'd be a perfect target.

With the thought I heard the crack of a shot and a chunk of wood exploded off a crate behind me. I pressed myself into the crate opposite the one that had gotten attacked and looked around its corner--someone had come to the railing of the balcony and he was firing at me. From above it would be like shooting foxes in a barrel.

"Hold your fire, I'm a federal agent," I yelled with more optimism than confidence and the crate I was braced against shuddered as it took a bullet for me. I snuck around the corner, scraping against the rough wood and acquiring a truly nasty splinter, and fired just to keep him on edge. Hunching my back, I darted around the next corner, less than twenty feet from the staircase. The closer I got, the less cover the crates would give me. It was simple geometry, angle of incidence and angle of reflection.

It sucked.

I spun around as a burly blond man appeared from the way I'd come. He had his gun raised but he wasn't too well-trained, I had a bullet in him before he could aim properly and his shot went wild, flaring off into another crate. I panted relief when I realized that he had been a person and so his blood wouldn't blind me.

Moving again, adrenaline flowing in my veins instead of blood, I could hear the hiss and scuff of the man's shoes as he shifted on the balcony, looking for a good shot.

Death rained down from above once more and this time the crate beside me shook and rattled like pit bulls were fighting inside. I felt heat and dropped and rolled away just before the sides burst in perfect cartoon fashion, popping open in four perfectly distinct directions. The heavy wood fell on me like a slap from a giant's hand. I heard, above the hiss of the fire, the pop of glass bursting and louder sounds that I couldn't quite identify. Flames were chewing at my flammable protection and I squirmed, trying to get my guns above my head so that I could come out shooting.
The concrete floor was still chilled from the air conditioning, cold enough to make me shiver even as I felt the first blister-precursors rising on my forearms.

The fire was spreading rapidly when I pulled myself out; the maze of crates had turned into a wilderness of firelines, and I was standing on stained concrete trapped between flames. The fallen crate was behind me; there was no way to go but forward. Channeling Indiana Jones, I muttered, "Fire, why does it always have to be fire?"

At least the man on the catwalk wasn't shooting at me any more, if he could even see me through the leaping flames. Some of them were the seductive orange-yellow of candleflame but others were chemical blue and green, probably poisonous. The short-sleeved shirt and shorts, while designed to make UPS workers charmingly sexy, did little to shield me from the heat and the living grasp of the fire, whose thick fingers seemed to reach out for me, coming closer on each pass. The hair was melting off my legs.

I could feel myself begin to hyperventilate, no doubt worsening whatever damage the toxic smoke was going to do. The fire had faces, faces with large eyes and sharp little chins.

I wanted to curl up into a ball until Scully came and saved me. Only the thought of the crates breaking apart and tumbling into the narrow corridors on the warehouse floor kept me moving.

Three more turns and I was there, the thick peeling black paint on the first step as inviting as a luxury hotel. I leaped for the step, the metal railing blistering my hand, as the building shook under the assault of the fire.

If Scully had arrived with the cavalry, I couldn't hear it. Two, three steps at a time I rose out of the flames like a phoenix, borne up on the waves of hot air now hitting me with solid fists.

My mind told me that going *up* in a burning building was a very bad idea, yet there were still those orgiastic lights winking at me, now uniformly as red as my eyes in the morning.

A figure appeared at the top of the stairs and I almost took its head off before I registered exactly whose head it was.

A Kurt.

He barreled down, heedless of my gun, panting and sputtering.

"It's all over," he yammered, "we've got to get out of here!"

I caught his arm, crushing a gun against him hard enough to bruise. "What's going on?"

He looked at me funny. "The building is on fire."

Only sheer terror kept me from rolling my eyes.

No shit, Crawford.

"Do you know a way out?"

He gestured underneath the stairs, where the flames hadn't yet spread. "Back door."

I kept a firm grip on him as we descended into Hell, still not convinced that he hadn't been shooting at me earlier. Or, maybe, shooting at the crates so that he could start the conflagration himself.

Nonetheless he did know a way out, including the access code that opened the door onto chokingly
bright cool air. My eyes burned as uniformed SWAT officers buzzed around us, grabbing the Kurt and spitting questions at me like nails.

A small familiar hand was at my back, checking me over for burns and other damage. Scully felt me all over in a way that would have prompted me to say something snide if we hadn't been surrounded by men who'd take it the wrong way. One thing I'd learned over the years, most male cops would either harass Scully themselves or they'd get in my face and tell me to pick on someone my own size.

I zoned back in, Scully's inspection complete, as they were cuffing the clone. He had the wide-eyed lunatic look that I'd too often seen in my morning mirror. His sweaty hair was clumped together in spikes and the cops weren't being too careful of his comfort as they searched him for weapons.

"Don't break the skin," Scully ordered. "He has...a rare condition, it could be dangerous for you."

She was learning, I had to admit, skepticism had been tempered with the tonic of wild speculation in the past few months.

She stalked past him and headed toward the pops that might have been gunfire or plain old combustion. I would have followed her but the Kurt's mutterings caught my attention.

"Had to die," he was chanting," had to, had HAD had *had* to had to *die*.. Yes, they had to finally die. All dead, had to die. Dead because they had to be."

I stepped up to him. His breath stank just like a person's. The two cops, responding to my nonverbal signals, held him towards me like waiters bringing today's special.

"Who had to die?" Speaking slowly, calmly, the way they always wanted me to do during my residency, the one time my affectless drone has been praised rather than mocked.

The Kurt looked up at me and shuddered. "You said you wouldn't anymore," he whimpered.

"I won't," I reassured him. "I just need to know who had to die, and why."

He essayed a smile. I've seen more accurate representations from emoticons on a screen. Then he jerked against the cuffs and nodded his head. "I know," he burbled, shifting from sad to happy in the wonderful way of psychotics. .. "They-had-to-die-because-they-were-bad-girls. They-were-sluts-and- I-made- them-clean?"

No, that didn't sound rehearsed or anything. Jesus, I'd heard parrots that sounded more genuine. I wanted to pat him on the shoulder and tell him that he'd undoubtedly do better on opening night, they always say that a bad dress rehearsal makes for a good show, but I thought it might be perceived by my colleagues as inappropriate.

"Who are those men firing at the officers inside?"

He blinked. No one thought to explain that to him, I guess. "They're...mine."

"Did you hire them?" We could do this slowly if necessary. The cops were shifting impatiently, anxious to get into the shooting gallery like the good Texans they were. I ignored them.

"Yes?"

I didn't tell him that was the right answer as he'd hoped; instead I rubbed my temples with my left hand, trying to suppress the urge to grab him and shake him until he told me who'd fed him this cockamamie story.
"Agent Mulder?" The question had the careful tone of someone soothing a lion with a thorn in its paw.

"What?"

"I think you'd better take a look...upstairs."

The sprinklers had belatedly kicked in and firefighters were busily foaming the remaining flames to ashes, the chemicals had burned hot and quickly and there wasn’t much left on the floor. The metal staircase had sagged in a few places and burned my feet through my shoes--another superb pair ruined, damn it--but it was still stable and I mounted it with minimal trouble. At the top the steps were slippery with thick liquid as if the fire had melted the paint. Then I got a better look and I knew what had really happened.

It was an abattoir.

Literally, ankle-deep in blood, I walked through the second level of the warehouse, its side open and exposed to the smoke and gun-muzzle flashes coming from below. Downstairs the TAC team was cleaning up whatever resistance the goons were offering. I could hear Zippy screaming at his men. I lost sight of Scully in the mess upstairs, her hair hidden under the baseball cap, and I was glad. I didn't want to see her face when she saw this. I'm not that strong.

Two dozen women, on hospital cots, lying in neat rows in tidy beds with IV bags running into their arms, and their abdomens opened like paper bags with the contents spilling out. The contents were near-term infants. Blood leaked along the uneven floor in thick rivulets. It hadn't happened all that long ago, my higher brain told my lower, the blood hadn't coagulated yet.

My lower brain moaned and curled up into a ball.

"Jesus Christ," one of the agents hissed next to me.

"Julius Caesar, to be correct," Scully's voice came from one of the farther pallets, her tiny flashlight searching face by face, touching each woman to check for signs of life, "the legend has it that he was delivered from his dead mother by cutting through the abdominal wall and removed. The story is most likely apocryphal but it has given us the term Caesarian section. Although this is hardly the correct manner, the general--"

A thin sound, like that of a kitten whose tail has been stepped on, cut through the darkness.

Holy fuck, one of them was alive.

You have to give the men credit, they moved fast, moved from bed to bed, examining big and little corpses to find the source of the sound. As I made my search, I caught a glimpse of the agent at the next bed over, a man of about fifty with a face that would stop a rampaging elephant. There were tears on his face as he touched a lifeless little body.

"Over here!"

Moving fast, Scully raced over to the man who was holding a bloody baby. The baby was moving. She stripped off her flak jacket and her blazer underneath, wrapping the baby in it. I have to admit that I cringed since the jacket was one of the hideously expensive ones I'd paid for in Arizona. Oh well. . . . With the baby wrapped in the jacket, Scully began examining the infant for any signs of harm from its ordeal. The infant made a pair of fists and let out a louder wail. It seemed that all systems were working.
"It's a girl," Scully told me, as if it mattered.

Nodding, I went downstairs to find Zippy, listening to my own pulse drum a dance beat in my head.

****

My hands were shaking when I pulled the infant out of the dead woman. I'd autopsied a pregnant woman once and after I was finished, I spent the rest of the afternoon in the ladies' room at Quantico until I was vomiting thin traces of bile.

Macduff had been ripped from his mother's womb. No child born of woman could undo the evil that Macbeth and his wife had wrought upon Scotland, they had broken the natural chain of being, the connection that ran from God to the stones in the ground and they had to be punished by a preternatural being..

This baby didn't seem as much preternatural as pathetic. Still covered with blood and fluid from her untimely delivery in the room filled with death, she kicked her feet and wailed in a weak little voice. Other than her extremities being colder than I would have liked, she seemed un-traumatized by her harsh entrance to the world. There wasn't a speck of green anywhere on her body, just wrinkly red infant skin and an accumulation of crusty drying blood. I wrapped her in my jacket and headed back down to the entrance where the EMT's were waiting for larger victims.

How was it that I had been able to stand and set fire to what would have been my own children while this one was making me shake and sweat as if I'd contracted malaria? Probably a natural reaction caused by the hormones running freely in my body once again. Men like to chalk up a woman's emotional response to anything to hormones. This isn't entirely true as they are just as ruled by the chemical cocktail coursing through their bodies as we are. I had a pre-med instructor who claimed that men had their own cranky calendar, only it ran on a cycle of three hours rather than twenty-eight days and was linked to their feeding habits.

Feeding.

Somebody was going to have to feed the baby.

My lungs hurt for a minute as I breathed in the memory of smoke, of fire, of toxic fumes coming from a small body.

Feeling absurd with the infant cocooned in DKNY, I pushed past the men crowding the stairway and went out the now-broken front door. The EMT's took one look at the baby and myself and went pale seafoam with shock. Pretty much the same color that Mulder had gone.

I didn't want to think about that too closely right then.

****

Outside the warehouse the assorted local cops and robbers were swarming in and out, county coroner vans were pulling up and the local law enforcement was having a hard time keeping the news vans at bay. Zippy handed me a scribbled sheet of notes on what they had found inside and went off to smoke. Scully, I knew, had gone to the hospital with the baby she had found, a score of tiny handprints in blood over her white blouse.

A black sedan pulled into the thick of it all, darkened windows giving nothing away. There was, I noticed, a Roush Corporate parking sticker on the window. The singed hairs on the back of my neck snapped to attention. In my lovely UPS uniform, I wasn't exactly making an impressive fashion statement, but at least I felt prepared. I knocked on the back window on the passenger side.
The black glass rolled down, exchanging one reflection of my face for another.

"Jason Lindsay, I presume?"

You had to give the guy credit, he didn't flinch much when I thrust my uglier version of his face into the back of the sedan and showed him the mug shot on my ID.

"Fox Mulder, FBI, I want to ask you a few questions about your company's ownership of this property."

His/my mouth opened for a moment and then shut again.

"I'd be glad to answer any of your questions, " he said in a warm, hospitable tone that didn't make it up past his perfect nose to his/my hazel eyes.

It was one thing to see someone with something very like your own face on a computer monitor and on videotape but in person, to have him looking back at you and the smell of his aftershave in your big ugly nose was downright -- spooky.

Hopefully he found me equally unnerving, although that wouldn't be a new experience for me.

"Did you know that several men with identification from your company had any connection with this facility?"

"No, I didn't."

"Let me paint you a very broad picture here, Mister Lindsay. Twenty-four women have been missing in this general area over the course of the last year. Fortunately, Holly Keene was spotted in this area a few days ago. Agent Zipprelli managed to track down her movements to the warehouse. When the Bureau raided the warehouse earlier this morning we found, amazingly enough, twenty-four women who had been murdered by having full-term fetuses cut from their abdomens."

Lindsay winced.

"I assure you, Agent Mulder, that other than clinical trials under FDA approved conditions, Roush does not test human subjects."

I leaned down until our noses were practically touching.

"There was a Kurt Crawford clone in there with them."

He blinked, and I watched the lie form. Was I that transparent? I hoped not.

"Who?" he asked in a voice that was more artificial than Anna Nicole Smith's boobs.

"There are things that we have to talk about, Mister Lindsay."

He actually smiled and it looked better on him.

"Including the obvious?"

"Including the obvious."

He extended his hand, and I noted French cuffs on his shirt and gold cufflinks in the shape of Roush's corporate logo. He handed me his engraved and embossed business card.
"When you're free from this . . . tragedy, come to my office tomorrow and we can discuss this in a more civilized atmosphere."

"Sounds like fun," I deadpanned.

"One other thing," from the plush interior of the sedan he produced a videotape, "you might want to take a look at this. It came from one of our facilities in Arizona."

****

The women's bodies showed signs of long-term sedation. I was angry for them, the usual anger I feel for the victims increased exponentially by the ruthless uselessness of it all. Didn't They (the ubiquitous, invisible them) know that sedation would damage the fetuses? What kind of Nazi science were they practicing, that they couldn't figure this out? Maybe Emily would have had a better chance if they'd used a healthy, premenopausal woman's body to produce her rather than a vessel that had to be drugged into readiness with a warlock's brew of powerful hormones.

God only knew what damage had been done to the miracle child. Most people think that the story is over when the rescue ends, but doctors know better. The rescue is where the story begins.

I felt like I was running in place. Cataloging the bodies, filling out forms and doing my job like a good little Fibbie. Mulder had hared off somewhere and I wasn't sure that I wanted to follow.

No, wait, I'd hared off. To the hospital. Mulder was still at the warehouse, any journey he was taking was in the privacy of his own mind. I called just to check, and he was there with the drone of TV cameras and sirens in the background. He sounded distracted and curt, situation normal, all fucked up.

Mulder said he'd meet me back at Zippy's office. I didn't have anything better to do, so I went.

5

_Hurrah for positive science! Long live exact demonstration! Fetch stonecrop mixed with cedar and branches of lilac, This is the lexicographer, this the chemist, this makes a grammar of old cartouches, These mariners put the ship through unknown seas, This is the geologist, this works with the scalpel, and this is a mathematician._

"I think I'm getting sick of seeing you among all these dead children," Zippy said.

"Jesus, you asshole!" I nearly screamed at him, but it was too late. The words had cut her like flying glass and I saw the blood begin to flow from her eyes, like tears but more final.

She shook her head. "He's right, Mulder. I'm the kiddie angel of death. You've seen," reminding me of Arizona, of the images in the grainy surveillance video—what would Zippy think of that? She wafted from the room and I knew she was returning to the hospital, to sit by the heated glass chamber encasing that little girl-baby.

Zippy stared at her dissolving back. I looked at the blood on my shoes and realized that it had dribbled onto my suit when I'd gotten back into my own clothes. Another perfectly good suit shot to hell.

"You know, Spooky," he remarked, as if continuing a conversation, "I thought you were lucky to have found her, you were so miserable in ISU. But is it worth it? Is what you're looking for worth all the struggle?"
"Bite me," I said.

I didn't want to think much about what I had seen on the videotape Jason had given me, Scully breaking the sides of the glass vats with a fire axe, Scully pouring gasoline. The lab going up in flames, Marita burning, and Scully watching it all before I ran in like the moron I am and dragged her out. Time had put a thin layer of scar tissue over those images for me, but watching the tape made my face burn with the remembered heat of the fire.

"Yo Zip."

"Yeah?"

"Gonna need some beers to put these flames out."

"Right on Fox-man."

****

The baby was doing as well as one might expect a premature baby to do under such circumstances, which is to say there was some respiratorial distress, uneven hearbeat, lack of oxygenation in the extremities. Nothing life-threatening now that she was wrapped in the mechanical arms of the preemie ward, sealed away from human contact.

I ran the PCS myself this time, because I had to know. Mulder hadn't questioned the need for a drop of his blood and, though my nose was no longer a blood faucet, I had plenty of my own available.

The girl, the one they were calling Miranda because she was a little miracle, a shining star amidst the ugliness of her emergence--she was mine. The same telltale markers that had identified Emily as my daughter blazed in the test results.

Meet the new baby, same as the old baby.

Is it mine, or is it Memorex?

And, more incredibly, she seemed to be Mulder's.

No, not that incredibly after all. Mulder's bedtime story about multiple Mulders was beginning to seem increasingly plausible, Mulder had never mentioned giving sperm samples to anyone and his paranoia made it unlikely. If his narrative about Jason Lindsay was right we were probably looking at Jason's child. Which raised the interesting question: Did it matter? Miranda was as related to Mulder as to Jason or any other genetically identical father; she was indistinguishable from his child. From an evolutionary perspective, he should be just as devoted to her as if he'd sired her on me directly.

This, Mulder didn't need to know. Another advantage to running the PCS myself was the ability to make the results go up in a puff of blue gas flame.

It wasn't an irreversible decision. I could always tell him later. (Like he told you about your eggs? a dissenting voice complained, but I cut its throat and no one else dared speak up.) We did *not* need a discussion of unplanned parenthood. We weren't capable of taking responsibility for ourselves, much less a child.

****

With Scully gone back to stand vigil at the hospital, Zippy and I did the manly thing -- we went out
"Why?" he asked, tracing shapes in the beer puddle on the tabletop.

"That's the eternal existential why, right?" I asked, hating every mouthful of club soda that I was pouring into my sore stomach.

"No, that's the very pertinent 'Why would the freak of the week gather up all those women, impregnate them and then lose his testicular fortitude at the last minute and open them all up like microwave dinners? Why.' I just don't get it. Freaks fuck women and kill them or they fuck children and kill them, they don't fuck women to get children and then kill both," he groaned and rubbed at the pointy spikes of his hair.

"This is making my brain hurt," he admitted, "the only psycho-dude from hell scenario I can come up with is that our freak du jour was thinking that he was going to create some kind of master race in his own image. But why keep them unconscious or whatever they were? Why hire a little army, you'd think that one of them would have freaked out and called in the cavalry no matter how well they were being paid. It seems like lots of high-tech trouble when he could have just taken the girls to a ranch out in the desert and kept them corralled there - like horses. We've got some weird-ass cult shit going on out in the badlands, new age bullshit and the stuff that goes on out there. . . Lots of drugs and sweat lodges for people looking for quick answers."

"There are no quick answers, to life or to whatever this guy has been up to," I said, knowing that I was giving a rationalization for not telling him anything.

He looked up at me, and for a moment I saw Krycek's face.

"I know you know what the fuck's going on and you're not telling me," his face toughened up, "I don't like being kept in the dark. You got Reggie Pardue killed, Krycek went apeshit, I've heard stories about other agents whose stars are on the wall because of your conspiracy theories, I don't want to mention what happened to Bill Patterson, and you've almost killed Scully a couple of times. If my ass is on the line here, I want to know."

"Take the position that your ass is on the line as a fact. The rest is bullshit," I waved at the waitress who undulated over and I told her I wanted beer after all, "I could sit here and tell you everything, which you would not believe and you'd only get pissed off at me."

God I was looking forward to the alcohol, the uneasy thought of AA meetings in my future notwithstanding. Scully wasn't watching and Zippy had never heard the doctors' lectures, he wasn't going to tell on me. Supposedly when the sutures healed I'd be cleared to drink alcohol again, there was no solid clinical evidence that alcohol created ulcers even though it did aggravate them once they'd appeared.

"More pissed than usual?"

"Yeah, more than usual. Let's just boil it down to the fact that there are some really bad guys out there, Zippy, who think nothing of taking women, stealing their ova, and then using the ova for some really fucked up experiments, okay?"

"Stealing ova?" one of his eyebrows reached for the sky, "how the fuck do you do that? Come after them with a vacuum cleaner or something?"

"Beats the shit out of me. Some super-ovulation and laproscopy procedure.. Scully can explain it."

The beer, when it came, tasted like the nectar of Olympus and the coldness of it numbed my
stomach. Maybe if I just quit drinking hard liquor and stayed with beer. After all, beer was mostly water, and the dark lagers like this one were high in protein. I lost myself in the Guinness for a moment.

"Scully knows all about it, doesn't she? She knows something else besides, which is why she's hovering over that incubator like a hen with an only chick," he looked down at his glass before continuing to speak, "does this have anything to do with the kid that she lost? Was that kid yours?"

"Fuck no." I wouldn't let it be. There was no remaining evidence and so it could not be. Why had she insisted on drawing my blood before going to the hospital this time? That train of thought was derailed by its head-on crash with another: What the fuck was Scully doing talking to Zippy about this when she could barely say Emily's name to me? While sexual congress with the divine Miss S. was pleasant, I'd stick to my tapes for the next five years in return for one honest conversation about this whole mess. And Zippy seemed to have gotten the story for the price of a Bud.

Good to know where you stand, isn't it?

Zippy brightened as he watched the storm form on my face. "You gonna tell me what happened?"

"Fuck no."

"I'll figure it out, eventually. I may not have gone to Oxford but I'm not a moron."

"Okay bright guy, you buy the next round."

****

I had only been back at the hotel for about twenty minutes, just long enough to wash my face and crawl into a nightgown, when the connecting door opened. I looked up from my laptop where I was finishing up my expurgated report on the day's activities to see Mulder leaning against the closed door with a peculiar look on his face.

"I met Jason today."

As a conversation starter it was a motherfucker.

"What?"

"He came to the warehouse in the corporate sedan with a driver. He claimed not to know anything and invited me to his office for a meeting tomorrow."

Despite the weight and import of the words, Mulder was as casual as if he were discussing his shoes. Maybe not. Mulder's shoes are greatly important to him.

"You think he's involved with this?"

"He's Roush, isn't he?"

"Offering no explanation for your resemblance to one another?"

"It wasn't exactly the time or the place."

After saving my report file, I closed down my laptop and put it on the bedside table. Mulder reminded at his position leaning against the door, watching me like a dog who is seeing his dinner made -- wistful and hungry at the same time.
"I like the glasses with the lingerie. It's a look."

The lingerie was one of the spoils of our trip through Scottsdale, a jade green slip sheath with straps as tiny as an afterthought and a hem that barely covered my ass. I can't handle bustier and garterbelts -- I'm so short that it makes me look like an under age porn star. Which would probably thrill Mulder to no end, but he can wear the damn itchy things next time.

Men don't make passes at girls who wear --

I folded up my glasses and put them in the case.

"So I take it that you're going to go see Jason tomorrow?"

"Naturally. It's a fucking shame that the disk we took from his office in Bethel wasn't anything more than a Power Point presentation about marketing projects for the next quarter."

His suit was wrinkled to rags and his hair matched in terms of wear and tear. And there was blood on his tie.

"Where were you?" I asked.

"Out. Where were you?"

"Out."

Sighing, he looked down at his scuffed and bloodstained shoes for a moment.

"Why don't you love me?"

"Oh Mulder," I groaned.

"No, do I smell or something? I just don't get it, to borrow one of Zippy's phrases. We work well together, we've actually had fun a couple of times, we trust one another, and the sex is nothing to sneeze at. Why not?" he finally gave up the door and ambled over to the bed, his movements were unusually graceful and careful.

I smelled a rat. Actually the closer he came the more I smelled a bar. With the way my cancer had destroyed the odor-receptors in half my nose he must have reeked for me to be able to smell him. I hoped he hadn't driven. Damn Zippy.

"You're drunk."

"Zippy plied me with drinks and made a pass at me."

"And you fought him off?"

" Barely."

The mattress dipped underneath his weight and in the yellow light I could see where my hairdresser had almost matched the original color of his hair to cover the darker Jason tone. The thought of him meeting with Jason in the morning made my stomach squirm. I had no reason, other than the fact that he worked for Roush, to dislike a man I had never met. But, as my father used to say, I didn't much care for the cut of his jib.

Mulder dragged his fingertip up my arm from wrist to shoulder and my skin danced underneath, sending a glassine shiver between my legs and making my nipples tighten. I wanted him. I needed
him. I needed him to wipe the thought of the baby Miranda in the incubator out of my head, to erase the tell-tale bars of amino acids from my mind, telling the story of two sets of DNA combining to make another one. I needed him to wipe out the memory of the cold little baby feet against my hands in the ambulance, the women split open like insect egg cases, and the sandbag-filled coffin in San Diego.

The finger continued over my shoulder to my thoracic notch, paused, and proceeded to push the loose straps away from my shoulders, so the fabric clung of its own free will to my breasts.

"What happened to your cross?" he asked.

Naturally it had taken him no less than a month to notice that it was missing.

"I lost it."

The tip of his index finger was rough against my lips and when I drew the finger into my mouth he tasted salty. With my teeth eased back from his finger, I sucked on it like it was his cock. He murmured something under his breath and shut his eyes.

"What?" I asked around his fingertip.

"You distract me."

I distracted him? That was the pot calling the kettle purple considering the fact that he had his hand half up my leg and was stroking the skin on my inner thigh with fingers that felt like they were covered in suede. My entire body felt like it had been rubbed with sandpaper and the buttons on his shirt were digging hard and fast into the skin of my breasts. It had been weeks since we'd had sex and I was starving for the feeling of his body in and against mine. Long thin fingers circumvented the microscopic panties that went with the nightgown and headed for home deep inside me.

"You talk to Zippy," he breathed into my ear and sent a shudder through my bones.

"So?"

"You talk to him and you keep secrets from me."

His thumb pressed hard against the alert nerve endings of my clitoris and I jumped as the jagged pleasure/pain flashed through me. His canines grazed the back of my neck, where the scar was. I felt like gelatin with a loose framework of overcooked pasta. Hot gelatin, hot pasta. Grabbing at the dark fabric of his shoulders was the only way that I could stay upright. The heavy dark sweet smell of lust washed over me like oiled water in a bathtub. The stubble on his hard cheeks scraped against my forehead.

"Don't do it," he said in a voice of coal.

I started to protest again, but he thrust three fingers into my mouth and the other three went to ground between my legs. Skewered above and below, I writhed like a lip-pierced fish while uneven jerks of hot light pulsed along my bones. Oh God, how long had it been since-

All the fingers withdrew and I sagged back into the mattress, in a puddle of my own mind. Mulder reached around and started fumbling with something from his pocket.

An inquisitive sound escaped my chest.

"Let's be modern about this, shall we?" he quipped and threw the condom wrapper onto the floor.
I didn't complain. It was a small price to pay.

My panties joined the condom wrapper a moment later. There on the hotel bed, he on his knees before me, me with my legs wrapped around his bony hips while the silk of his tie danced along my breasts, I dug my fingers into the dark fabric of his jacket and moaned when he pierced me.

The connection was as invigorating as a blood transfusion but I couldn't hold myself still enough against his thrusts, braced only against the bed, and so we crabwalked backwards, me pulling and him pushing and the bedspread snarling around us, until I had my back against the headboard. Each thrust made my head connect with the solid wood behind me. I wanted to keep him inside me forever. I sucked at his throat; heedless of the marks I was making. It felt like his cock was banging at the top of my skull -- he was so deep.

He pinned my wrists to the wall. I could feel how close he was from the swelling of the veins in his neck, why did he have to be so fucking polite, it wasn't politeness but just another form of dominance--and I screamed, screamed louder than when Duane Barry took me, threw my head back, howled and fell apart like a shattered windshield.

This hour I tell things in confidence, I might not tell everybody but I will tell you.

I really needed to get another job. The basement office in the Hoover Hen House was a slum compared to the Roush corporate building. Something like eight glass-fronted floors of corporate rabbit hutches rising into the brilliant blue sky of Austin. At least I had a good suit on for a change. You always have to go visiting family in your Sabbath best. I got into the glass elevator along with a very pretty little blonde who gave me a winsome Western smile and asked for the third floor when I pushed the button for the top floor. I smiled back at her, and up we went.

Best Sabbath clothes.

I remember being taken to my great-aunt Sophie's funeral when I was nine, which meant Samantha would have been about four or so. I had my hair wet-combed to my head and I was trussed up in this amazingly ugly blue suit with a striped tie that only came out for weddings, funerals, and the infrequent occasions we went to Temple. (If you think your life is hard, try being a Jew in New England.) Samantha kicked me in the shins the whole ride there. Naturally, I started screaming at her, I told her that I wished she were dead. Then I pulled the head off her Barbie doll and that finally shut her up.

Yisborach, v'yistabach, v'yispoar, v'yisroman, v'yisnaseh, v'yishador, v'yishalleh, v'yishallol, sh'meh d'kudsho, b'rich hu--

Someday I really have to forgive myself for that.

The reception area was nice, lots of dark wood, crystal and gold awards, and fresh flowers. It looked like a high-tech funeral home more than anything else. The woman sitting behind the desk with the big Roush R carved in gold behind her was so perfect and smooth that she could have been generated by her computer. I smiled and handed her my card. She must have been briefed since the smile she gave in return had no reaction to my resemblance to her lord and master.

"Just a moment," she crooned and pressed a button.

While I waited, I looked out the window at the city around me. The glass was so clean that I started to feel the pull of vertigo. It would have been so easy to think that I could just step outside and walk
over to the building across the street. Chances were that I'd only break something rather than being killed by the fall. It would be so easy.

"Pretty impressive, huh?"

Jason's voice was only remotely like mine. It was the voice that I had imitated the day that Scully burned the monster-children and Marita. Jason had a smooth and wonderfully inflected voice under a barbecue honey Texas drawl. He also was wearing a suit that would have cost me six months' pay to buy -- I could have done it, though, if I were willing to live off of the additional cash I got from my investments in his company.

"Nice view," I commented, trying to sound as blasé as possible, even though my heart was bounding like a bass line in an Abba song.

"I'm sure you get to look at the Washington Monument all day."

If I was a gopher and tunneled around the Metro line, under the street; past all the CIA underground surveillance and didn't get stomped on by a Park Ranger in a bad mood, maybe. Please, ma'am, don't pet the gopher, they can bite. Gophers are more dangerous than Congressmen are, as they have no partisan alliance and don't give a fuck if they bite a Democrat, Republican, or Civil Libertarian.

Foxes bite, too.

"What do you intend to do with the videotape?"

He blinked as though I had made a socially unacceptable digestive noise.

"Nothing."

"Nothing? I'll save you the trouble of looking up the information. The Assistant Director I work under is Walter "Boom-Boom" Skinner and you can send him the videotape at --"

"I'm not going to send it to the FBI. I think we can keep this between ourselves. There's no need to let the world know that your partner destroyed a multi-million dollar research facility."

"Is that what you call it?" I wanted to grab him by his custom-tailored shirtfront and shake him until his teeth fell out. But I didn't want to touch him. I had a sneaking suspicion that my hands would go through him like a hologram or else I'd plunge my hands through silvered glass.

"Let's go into the conference room. All right?"

The Conference Room had a dark wood table big enough to play full-court basketball on, all polished to a sheen that reflected four of me back up from the glassy surface. Jason showed me a seat with a neat stack of classification folders piled on the table before it. I was reminded of the exams at Oxford. All that was missing was the exercise books and the smell of fearsweat from the students.

"You must have noticed our resemblance," he began.

"I like the nose job."

"From what I've been able to find out from the archived files that the company has kept since Roush was started in 1806, the company has been working closely with the government on many health-related projects." He began in a smooth presentational mode that must have been like cream to the fat cat captains of investment and the starving dogs of the media.
"Like biological warfare?"

"Like vaccination programs and aid to victims of natural health disasters such as outbreaks of yellow fever, influenza and typhoid."

"How altruistic."

"We've also been involved in the study of human genetics since the early nineteen-forties."

"Purity Control."

I really enjoyed the surprise that flitted across his face.

"I know about the Project. I know about Purity Control, I know about the biological experimentation to produce human/alien hybrids. I have seen the Bee Girls, I have seen the Kurt Crawford clones, the Samanthas, and the others. I have seen the Bounty Hunters and I have been injected with the black cancer while in Siberia," my words came out in a bitter rush, as though I was once again vomiting coffee, "and all I got was this fucking T-shirt, so what I want to know is what the fuck were you doing in Bethel."

"It doesn't matter. That project was run by another division that has been shut down. I was thinking of another project that started in 1960. You and me. We aren't the last two of our kind, Fox, there are more."

"More?" I echoed, sounding like Oliver Twist.

"Eight more. Of us."

"Why the fuck would anyone want to make more?"

"They didn't expect all to live to adulthood," the woman said as she shut the door behind her.

She smiled.

"Fox."

I stood with my mouth open while my sister hugged me.

I wouldn't have known Samantha. I could have walked past her on the street or picked her up in a bar and fucked myself silly (Scully would have killed me but that's another problem). She had changed so much since I had seen her last, since Scully had lain dying in the hospital and I'd agreed to let the bastard she called her father metaphorically fuck me up the ass. My little sister with her wilderness of brown curls and her flowing skirts was now a prim high-tech sophisticate with a charcoal trouser suit, hair clipped razor-close to her head and the color of anthracite. Her earrings, spinning silver spirals, fell almost to her shoulders. Samantha was so cold, hard, and bright that she made Scully look like Scarlett O'Hara.

"What are you doing here?" I asked, feeling myself go rigid as a storefront mannequin.

"I work here. I'm head of the genetic research division."

Too fucking convenient for words.

Okay, there was a possibility that she wasn't my Samantha, but rather one of theirs. But then was I my me or theirs too? It was giving me a headache.
"Explain."
"You know about the experiments?"
"Human DNA and alien combined, I read the back of the videocassette."
"There are eight others like you and Jason. The company has been trying to keep tabs on them for years, ever since Jason was appointed head of PR."

My evil twin gave me an orthodontist's tuition bill smile.
"He found the case files and, naturally, took an interest. We had a record of the social security numbers the boy-infants were issued when they were farmed out to their adopted families."

"Was I adopted?"
"No, you stayed with our parents as the control group while the others were adopted. Normally it wouldn't be scientifically sound to attempt to make contact with the others but--"
"They're being killed." Jason interrupted.

"What?" my voice came out as a falsetto squeak.

"We think," Samantha began, drawing me closer to the table, her hand with short silver fingernails sparkling on the dark cloth of my jacket, "that in your professional capacity that you can make contact with the others and bring them to us where they will be safe."

"The Federal Badge does have some clout, you know," Jason added.

It doesn't do shit when you have overdue tapes at Blockbuster.

"All the information we have is here," Samantha made a graceful gesture at the table, "you need to review the information and make it clear to these men that their lives may be in danger."

"Who would --" I started.
"We don't know, that's why we need you."

Jason thumbed a button on the telephone.

"Alice, can you bring Mr. Mulder a cup of coffee? What do you take in it, Fox?"

"Nothing. And don't call me Fox."

I opened the first file and looked down, the words on the page began to dance and fade. I didn't realize what was wrong until Jason took his glasses out of the case and handed them to me. As the words shot into focus, I felt myself step through the silver mirror into the other side of the Looking Glass.

"Samantha?"

She looked at me, her eyes like polished stone.

"What was great-aunt Sophie's number?" I asked.

The numbers she recited were not the phone number that Great Aunt Sophie had when she died, she
recited the numbers tattooed on Great Aunt Sophie's arm. I knew, with a sick feeling, that this was Samantha.

"I'll take the files and get back to you," I heard my own voice come out of my mouth, surprising me with the composure.

The open casket showed the dried apricot that had been Aunt Sophie in her favorite aqua dress. Samantha wouldn't look at the body, she screamed and ran away. I found her in the bushes outside the Temple, digging in the ground with her fingernails.

"They put you in the ground when you're dead," she told me with the authority that only a four year old could muster.

"So?"

"You're going to die before I will, you're bigger than me."

With stiff formality, she put her shiksa blond Barbie in the hole she had carved out of the ground with her fingernails and began to pat dirt over the plastic body.

The folders were scattered all over my hotel room, reminding me of the stock certificates and the afternoon we had hurt one another so badly. Scully, incongruous in another one of her nightgowns, was sitting on the floor next to the bed, her glasses slid down on her nose, looking at one of the files. Stepping on the papers, I padded to the honor bar and got the bottle of Scotch that I wasn't allowed to drink any more. I put the bottle and glasses on the floor and poured a healthy slug into each. Give her credit, Scully didn't sing the care of an ulcer aria when she reached for her glass.

As she finished one file, she handed it to me. Or maybe it was the other way around. Either way it was an education, a ten-ply biography.

We were an anti-Semite's wet dream.

Doctor, lawyer, Indian chief we were not.

Our cast of characters (no points off if you can't tell them apart; there will be captions for those of you who are a bit nearsighted):

Arlen Petrovsky, who'd been caught and incarcerated at the child molesting/pyromaniac stage, before he graduated to killing his victims.


Christopher Farber, the small-time pimp and suspected murderer from Schenectady.

Darien Klein, his occupation was listed as "consultant" and he had an address in the better part of Los Angeles. God alone knew what he really did, but other than a few speeding tickets there was
nothing worthwhile in his folder.

Emerson Goldberg, a virtual recluse living in a high-tech compound in the woods of Montana. He made a killing in Internet software and it was rumored that no one had seen him in years. What was his story? No information available.. There wasn't a photo of him on record, and he'd never held a driver's license in any state.

Fox the G-man, of whom the less said the better.

George Naxos, the serial murderer.

Hal Rothman, the coordinator for most of the major drug deals in the Northeast corridor. He brought the Colombians together with the Chinese and it's rumored that "heroin chic" was his idea.

Ian Dubler, the man of a thousand cuts, whose extreme bipolar disorder had not responded well to meds. From his history, Scully explained to me, it was obvious that he'd been misdiagnosed at first with depression, and it turns out that giving the new antidepressants to a bipolar patient is a *major* no-no. After the initial fits of self-destructiveness, things had deteriorated until he was on twenty-four hour restraints, tranquilizers, and a liquid diet, and even then he managed to think of new ways to hurt himself. Ian lived at the bottom of a dark sea, and he saw things crawl by him whose horror only Lovecraft could have conveyed. Jason Lindsay. Jason had the benefit of oil-money breeding and a nose job for his eighteenth birthday. And here I'd thought only nice Jewish girls did that. Jason, therefore, was the only one of us who actually looked pretty much like his own man. Funny, that, because he was also the one who had a clue to what was going on.

Oh, and, did I mention? Arlen and Christopher were dead, both in the last two weeks. Arlen had been stabbed in a lunchroom altercation; the shiv used had yet to be found. Christopher's body was discovered stuffed into a dumpster behind the Chinese restaurant he patronized, when his whores went looking for him to give him the night's take.

And then there were eight.

Eight *is* enough.

Sitting there, I felt my brain bleed into the carpet. Naturally I didn't want word one of it to be true, who would? But there it was, in laser print and photocopy for the world to see.

****

He shouldn't have been drinking the Scotch, but considering what was laid out in front of us, I suppose we were both lucky he wasn't drinking Drano.

"How could this happen?" I heard my own voice ask, as thin and pitiful as the voice of Miranda wailing as she lay in the abdomen of her birth mother.

Mulder looked up, blasted and lifeless as the rocky deserts outside the city limits.

"Technologically, I mean. Creating multiple fetuses from a single oocyte wasn't possible in the early sixties."

"Alien technology," he said with something like a normal smirk.

I took off my glasses and rubbed the sore places on either side of my nose. Alien technology, my ass. More like those bastards at Roush had started their work earlier than anyone had thought. The fact still remained that these -- twins, brothers, whatever--of Mulder's and Jason's were walking around
out there in the United States, and it was beginning to look like someone was killing them off. Strange, wasn't it? Most of the people who know Mulder routinely thank God that there is only one of him and more than one is inflicting entirely too much misery on the world.

Skinner, for example, was likely to give birth to a large and healthy Holstein when he found out that there was more than one Fox Mulder.

"Scully?"

Needy. He was needy in the extreme. Not that I blamed him, but I had issues (issue, I believe is the correct term) of my own currently sleeping in an incubator in a hospital miles away. Was it too much to ask that someday, if I have my own child, the old-fashioned way, that Plexiglas not separate the child and me? Is that too much to ask?

But right then the only needy one I could touch was Mulder. As much as I would have liked to fall apart in his arms as I had in that hotel room in Arizona, it seemed as though it was my turn (again) to nurture.

I crawled across the files to him and the skin on his face was hot and dry as the winds outside.

"Tell me that I'm not like that. Tell me that I'm not like them," he pleaded.

I continued to smooth the hair away from his face, away from the tiny, circular scars scoring his hairline.

"I'd be lying if I said you were a saint," I said.

His skin was so soft when he wept, fragile as tissue paper underneath my fingertips. Fragile, no wonder They'd felt the need for backup copies. The past few months had made me forget all my carefully-hoarded knowledge of the care and feeding of Fox Mulder. I'd skimped on the regular maintenance and this was the result, the carburetor was falling out and the engine was missing strokes.

I tilted my forehead to rest against his and with my palms at his cheeks it was almost like holding myself. "If you were a saint you'd have to try to redeem me, I'm hardly pure, and you know how I hate a superior attitude." Like sunlight through rain, the smile flitted over his wet face. "You made yourself, Mulder. You save lives and you live for the truth. You're the only one I trust--no matter how many strangers borrow your face."

I pushed him over and onto the bed; he went without protest. Then I undressed him, enjoying the build-up of tension in my body and the way he lolled underneath my hands. He chuffed softly as I loosened the tie, scraping my knuckles against the cartilage of his throat. He relaxed and I watched the unhappy wrinkles on his forehead hide themselves.

The jacket and shirt would need to be cleaned if not thrown out so I just tossed them onto the floor. His undershirt was soft combed cotton, thick with his scent. I always imagined that smell was olive green in color, like his eyes in low light. I bent my head to breathe him in before I stripped the shirt from him, and he sighed happily as I nuzzled his armpit. His hand flopped up to stroke my back and then fell away as I rose to bare his chest. Carefully, cradling his head with my free hand so he wouldn't bounce his head against the headboard, I pulled the shirt over his head and tossed it back over my shoulder.

I touched the sick rose of the bullet scar I gave him. That pallid cicatrice is like a whiplash on my own skin every time I uncover it. It was abnormally smooth under my fingers, dry even as I saw the
sweat growing across the span of his throat and shoulders because the scarring had destroyed the
pores.

The guilt was familiar enough that it didn't affect the arousal. I dipped my head to trace his
collarbones with my tongue, then followed the centerline of his body down between his pectorals
and over the finely cut ridges of the top of his abdomen. God or man, whoever thought up this body
was at least an artist, if perhaps also a criminal.

The thin leather belt was next, then pants and boxers together as I grew impatient, pausing only to
make sure I didn't unman him. I had plans for that manhood. He moved slowly underneath me,
undulating like a cat stretching, his cock wobbling up and down with every hitching breath and his
hands thrown up around his head. My centerfold, my prisoner, my albatross.

I opened the condom packet with more haste than dignity. He made a sweet surprised sound when I
raised the gown and lowered myself onto him. His hands slid over the satin, going in all directions
and sending frissons through my body like lightning strikes. The hot-through-cool feeling of his
fingers tugging at me through the thin fabric made me shudder.

I rode him into oblivion.

When I woke up the next morning I wasn't surprised to see that he had gone, and taken all the files
with him.

Typical, I thought and swore under my breath as I called the airport to book the next flight to
Massachusetts. I used his credit card, mine wouldn't stand the eight hundred dollar charge.

He'd also cleaned the remainder of the cash out of my wallet -- which he had never done before. I
supposed sleeping together had given me the job of human MAC machine. Why be surprised, I'd
been running errands for him for years. This was beginning to seem like marriage, except without
the tax penalties.

While I had the airport on the phone I found out that Mulder had booked his own flight at six that
morning. Which meant that he was two hours closer towards his goal. I was throwing my clothes
into my suitcase when there was a demure rap at the door. Not caring that I had an advanced state of
bed-head and that I was wearing Mulder's shirt from the night before (complete with tie) I yanked the
door open. In the brilliant Texas sunlight stood Zippy with a paper cup of coffee in each hand. The
hotel room must have reeked of sex, the fermenting odors of body fluids and shed skin cells. With
my permanently damaged sense of smell, I never would have noticed, but Zippy was sniffing the air
like a hunting dog hot on the trail of a rabbit. He blinked at me.

"What the hell do you want?" I asked, embarrassed.

"Spooky left me a voice mail message at the office that I was to bring you coffee and if I touched
you he'd break all my fingers."

"Thanks for the coffee," I said and noticed that he was staring at my bare legs, which were covered
with bruises from bumping into the crates during the warehouse raid.

"They're from the raid, " I said.

"What the fuck is going on?"

I gave him the Cliff's notes briefing (aliens and clones and twins, oh my!) while I threw the rest of
my clothes in my suitcase. He made no comment, merely shoveled my folders and my laptop into my
briefcase and averted his eyes while I struggled into a pair of jeans.
"The practical upshot of all this is that he has taken all the files and information that Jason has given him and left."

"Where did he go?"

"To see his mother. It's his standard MO. I have to follow him -- that's my MO."

Bless his moussed little head, Zippy merely nodded and handed me my least-wrinkled suit jacket.

"I'll drive you to the airport."

Zippy's own car was a truck, and I sat with my suitcase and my briefcase between my feet as we bumped along. Do car companies always skimp on the suspension on pickups? It was probably part and parcel of the great conspiracy. I had a brief, ironic fantasy of investigating the Ford motor company where the assembly line was manned by somnambulistic Kurt Crawford clones and Mulder screaming in the boardroom about how the company was in cahoots with the HealthCare system to promote bad backs among the American public and waving his gun around like an armed Michael Moore.

"What's the status on the suspect?" I asked.

Zippy stopped at a light and looked at me through his Ray Bans.

"Dead. Or at least we think so. It's hard to verify that a person is dead when all you have for forensics is a puddle of green goo. I don't suppose you care to explain."

I didn't care to but I did anyway, and Zippy merely shook his head at the insanity of it all. I guess he wouldn't have believed word one if he hadn't seen the debris left by the clone's passing with his own eyes.

"What are you going to do?" he asked as we pulled into the parking lot of the airport.

"The first order of business is to find Mulder and prevent him from doing anything stupid. Then I suppose we'll start trying to track down what happened to the other twins."

Naturally that was what Mulder would want to do, provided that he wasn't in Massachusetts trying to suck bullets out of his own gun. I didn't even want to think about it.

"What can I do to help?" he offered.

"Just stonewall Skinner until I get the chance to tell him myself."

Zippy made a face. He knew the AD well enough to be assured that stonewalling Skinner was one of the hardest things he would ever do in his life.

"Take care. Call me and let me know what's going on."

I let him kiss me on the cheek, and for a moment it was nice, nice and normal. But just for a moment. I grabbed my bag and my case and started hotfooting it through the airport.

Twenty minutes into the flight I realized that I was still wearing Mulder's shirt and tie. Underneath, my torso was naked. The clothes still smelled like him. The businessman next to me gave me a strange look whenever I sniffed the shirt.
Chapter 2

That I could forget the mockers and insults! That I could forget the trickling tears and blows of the bludgeons and hammers! That I could look with a separate look on my own crucifixion and crowning.

Mulder's mother met me at the door of her tastefully understated home. "Fox is waiting for you. I've spoken with Jason, and we agreed that I should explain some things to the two of you."

"How do you know Jason?"

"In good time, dear. Oh, by the way, you wouldn't happen to have any pictures of my granddaughter...would you?"

The world greyed alarmingly with my rage. I don't hit women who only assault with words. But I considered it.

And wasn't Mulder going to love that? His own mother was apparently closer to Jason than to him, willing to share all the well-kept family secrets with the man who Mulder almost was.

She led me into the damask-coated living room and I sat down in a stiffly padded chair which quickly made me remember why New Englanders always looked so unhappy. Mulder was glowering at the end of an eggshell-white couch. We waited, carefully not speaking, for over five minutes as she pattered around in the kitchen, making enough noise so that we were sure she hadn't had another stroke. I had no doubt that she was delaying for effect. The woman should be in charge of running interrogations. She could have extracted confessions from the most innocent of men by cranking up the tension like this.

And Mulder and I weren't very innocent. As a matter of fact there were a couple of things I could tell her about her son that would probably send her into another stroke.

When she finally sat down, I almost wept from the sheer relief of it. Her teacup and saucer rested on the elegant coffee table in front of the couch as she crossed her hands in her lap and began to speak.

"I always knew that I wanted to work for a greater cause than my own advancement."

Mulder's face twitched. I'd seen firsthand that it wasn't a good idea to mouth off to his mother, and I think only the memory of her slap and the fact that she'd finally agreed to talk kept him from saying any of the three nasty things he'd automatically thought up.

"It certainly didn't hurt to be a young, attractive woman at the time when so many serious, patriotic men were looking for a way to make America strong for the troubles we all could see were ahead."

"You have to understand, the German doctors were obsessed with their twin studies. Like many great scientific discoveries, our success at twinning and cloning was serendipitous, a result of their difficulty obtaining a suitable number of twins." Tina Mulder took a sip of her rapidly cooling tea.

Obtaining. I almost got up and left right then, but the raw hurt in Mulder's eyes stopped me. I couldn't make him do this alone.

Tina shifted her body towards me and sniffed audibly. "Don't turn up your nose at me, Miss Scully. I knew what they were and I didn't like it any better than you do. Their eyes crawling over my body like slugs, and behind my back I could hear them whispering, Jewess. Juden," she said, her voice
deepening, the foreign word cutting like a lash. "I know that's what they thought of me. But it was my children who would grow to rule the world, in the end."

"Besides," she added with a little smile, "I was wide awake during every indignity that they subjected me to. I remember every moment."

My face was burnt by her scorn. What the hell did she know about it? She, at least, had raised one child when all was said and done, and what tender care she had given him! A grown man who can't sleep in his own bed alone because he fears the Boogey-Man.

"Bill was so proud that we were chosen. When Fox was born and then tested, he was so disappointed." *He* was?, I thought and gave her a look that should have stopped the motion of the atoms in her cells. Lady, you delivered this man to me in more pieces than a jigsaw puzzle.

"The fertilization was in vitro, of course," she continued, looking out the window as if the answers were written in invisible ink on the glass. "Complete ectogenesis was not yet possible--that's the complete development of a fetus outside the womb, Fox," she said to Mulder's blank look.

In the midst of all this, he'd forgotten that his parents had met when his mother was running part of the research project for Operation Paperclip. In retrospect the office references should have called it Operation Ditto.

"When the blastula reached the four-cell stage it was split. This created four identical organisms which again began division. When they reached the blastula stage they were split again, which made sixteen."

I knew what was coming, but I don't think that Mulder had figured it out yet. "At that point we stopped, because we were worried about the consequences of repeated splitting and because of a shortage of suitable hosts. Of sixteen implanted blastocysts, we achieved twelve successful pregnancies. Even today, that's a remarkable rate. When the babies were delivered, they were injected with what I was told was alien DNA, in viral form. I knew, from the previous experiments, that this would cause...alterations, but we thought that we had them under control, and we were right. Only two of the infants died."

That explained why only the first ten letters of the alphabet had been used. I watched Mulder add six more deaths to his conscience. I always knew he had more lives than a cat, but I had no idea how right I was.

"Oddly enough," Tina continued, "there were some variations in pigmentation and hair coloring--your mole, Fox, I could always pick you out when I came to get you." Mulder flinched. "Five left-handed and five right, which simply means that you were all double recessives in terms of handedness. Your experience suggests that something in the cell division process itself may affect the expression of handedness among recessives. I've always regretted not being able to write that up for publication. The recessive handedness itself isn't that surprising, because it's associated with intelligence, creativity, and emotional instability."

She finished her tea and set the cup down. It rattled against the thin porcelain saucer. I noticed that the pink roses on the sides of the cup were beginning to flake off, revealing the white below.

"When none of you tested with more than minimal sensitivity to the Greys, we went back to the drawing board. Jonathan--we were lovers by then. When Fox and the others tested so poorly, hearing the Greys but unable to talk back to them, Bill became bitter and withdrawn. He felt a failure as a man, and he thought I was a failure as a woman. Jonathan made me feel--he respected me as a scientist, and that can be a very attractive thing." Why did that feel like another jab in the side?
Mulder continued to sit silently on the sofa, his fingers pressing into the flesh around his eyes until the skin turned white underneath.

"In a way, when he got the approval to use his sperm for the new version, it was an act of courtship, one of the most tender gestures he ever made. And this time we were confident enough to inject the virus at the same time as the blastocyst was implanted in vivo. More of the DNA was absorbed. There was an enhanced rate of fetal loss as a result, and in fact Samantha was the only baby delivered live. The one I carried was stillborn at eight and a half months," her voice shook slightly, even after all this time, "but Jonathan and I still had some clout and I got Samantha to raise."

Jonathan, I watched Mulder's mind chew the name.

"Samantha tested quite well and soon after she reached the age when she could understand commands of moderate complexity she was taken. The older-appearing Samanthas you met were true clones, fast-grown from nuclei implanted into donor eggs that had been stripped of their own nuclei. The clones have toxic blood and are fragile in a variety of situations, and the Greys dislike them intensely, which has caused its share of trouble. You've also met some younger clones, and those are the next generation, without the modifications necessary to make them grow to adulthood in under three years."

"So instead you take the long route through which you can mold your test subject through an alarmingly complex series of behaviors until they're catatonic, paranoid, masochists, pimps, drug dealers of the legal and illegal kind, or God forbid, government employees." Mulder's voice cracked in the middle of his statement and he gave his mother a hard little smile.

"Did you love us at all, mom? Or were Sam and I just another Science Fair project?"

She should have said something, but she didn't.

Standing, he crossed over to where the grand piano filled the area in front of the lace-curtained windows.

"You knew all along what happened to Samantha and you humored me. My whole life has been nothing but a lie. You were upset because They took Samantha, your successful experiment and left you with me, the reject. And you punished me every day since then. All this time I thought Dad was to blame, and it was you from the beginning," he was shouting, in that oddly flat way of his, loud enough for the entire street to hear.

"Fox --"

"Well I'm sorry, Mom. I'm sorry I was such a fucking disappointment to you."

The house jumped when the door slammed shut behind him. I sat there on the chair with my hands folded in my lap because it was the only way I could keep from grabbing Tina Mulder by the back of the head and pounding her face into the wall until she bled.

She finished her drink and put the cup down on the table just a little too hard. "Fox will be back," she pointed out, "but before then I think we should talk. I hope you'll listen and try not to judge me so harshly, though forgiveness hardly seems to be your strong point."

Great, the Wicked Witch of the Northeast was knocking off personality points from my score. So I wouldn't win the fucking Miss America contest, I wasn't trying to charm her.

"What exactly do you wish to discuss with me?"
"I made a mistake with Samantha. I became over-invested. Please understand, I had two children before I heard the words 'women's liberation.' I hadn't thought through the consequences of participating in the Project. With Bill and Jonathan it was just sperm, it proved their virility. But even the children I didn't physically bear made me a mother in their eyes, made me someone who was a subject rather than a controller. From the most exciting work I could ever imagine, I was suddenly stuck in an enormous house that seemed to get dirtier by the hour with one babbling infant and then another, not long after the first learned how to read. I'd supervised fifty technicians, fifty men with doctorates, and then like that" she snapped her fingers "the only one I was supervising was the maid.

"I was ill, there's no denying. I consumed my weight in pills every month, I drank, it's amazing I didn't accidentally overdose."

I wished she had.

"And I thought that Samantha would be my future. When they took her and left the one they didn't care about in my charge--it got much worse.

"You must suspect that Jonathan had a healer attend to me when I had my stroke."

I blinked, revealing my surprise. I'd thought her recovery amazing, truly on the upper edge of the bell curve, but I hadn't in fact made the connection between her lucidity and the Man of a Thousand Faces.

She smiled her razor grin again. "He did me more of a favor than he knew. I don't pretend to understand the mechanism, but if you can repair myelin sheaths it's no great deed to purge twenty-five years of habituation from a patient's system. And that's what happened to me. When I'd thought through the implications of my miraculous recovery I decided to underplay my acuity for a while, but I did track Jason down--I wouldn't let my boys out into the world without *some* way to look after them, would I?"

I was beginning to think some fairly ugly thoughts, compared to my previous distaste for Tina. "About how long ago did you contact Jason Lindsay?"

She shrugged gracefully. "Approximately nine months ago. And yes, Miss Scully, that does correspond with the timing of the Austin group. I'm sorry that so many promising avenues of investigation were terminated, but that's what makes R & D so much of a gamble. Jason, unlike Fox, always knows when to cut his losses."

The bile rose in my throat. "When this is over," I said, "I think I'll come back and hurt you."

The crepey flesh around her jaw trembled slightly. "It's a good thing for me that this will never end, then."

I went to look for Mulder.

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Scully was trotting out the door as I came back from the car, I pushed past her none too gently and headed back into the living room. Mom was still sitting in her chair like Queen Victoria at Albert's deathbed.

"I think you ought to look at these. You need to see what a stellar success your precious project really was. It's a cavalcade of the dregs of humanity. You should be very proud of your project," I dropped the files in her lap and went outside, pushing past Scully who was standing like a rock in the doorway.
Give her credit, Scully let me cool down for ten minutes before she came out. By that time my vision had slowed and the world was no longer shimmering through a red haze of fury. But I was shaking while I was taking off my sidearm and putting it in the trunk of the rental car.

"What are you doing?" she asked in an even tone as though I were making a chain out of rubber bands.

"Just saving another life or two. I can't trust myself," I unhooked the ankle holster and dropped it into the trunk, gun and all, and locked the trunk.

My fingers trembled when I handed Scully the keys, but I felt astonishingly clear-headed despite the crap that Madre Mio had just laid on me. I should have guessed. It should have made sense, why not? It explained so much, it explained why I had always felt like I was pretending to be someone else, fooling everyone. Fooling myself. No wonder Michael Valentine Smith had been my idol. I was a Martian, a stranger in the strange land of my own life.

"Mulder?" she asked with the old edge to her voice, the edge she has when I've filled her ears with the latest round of insanity that passes for my logic.

"I'm fine, Scully."

The sun went through the death throes of an overcast New England autumn and the lights went on up and down the residential street while we stood there, not talking, not touching, leaning against the car, watching nothing happen.

The front door opened and my mother poked her head out.

"I'm making dinner. Will spaghetti be all right with you two?" she asked.

"That's great, Mom," I said and Scully followed me back into the house, looking at Mom and I as though we belonged in the zoo.

No wonder she didn't understand, she'd had a normal family, not mine.

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After Mulder's mother went to bed, we sat up in his old bedroom in what could laughingly be called pajamas. He in ratty sweatpants and an old T-shirt underneath a flannel bathrobe and me in leggings and an oversized Navy sweatshirt Bill had given me for Christmas. Despite the funeral air of the house and the subject matter, the whole proceeding had a certain shabbily comfortable collegiate feeling.

"Mulder," I said. "I think I've figured something out." I'll admit, I was terribly proud of myself. I had a gift for him.

He stumbled over to the ramshackle desk I was using in his childhood room, the one he'd suggested I sleep in rather than the guestroom. I'd spread ten pictures out, including the picture I'd cajoled the MIT alumni office into e-mailing me.

"Look," I said.

For a moment he didn't see it. I'd missed it the first few times, too, tending to group the men into the quick and the dead. It had only been a whim that had made me put them in alphabetic order.

Mulder drew in a deep breath. Slowly, as carefully as if he were undressing me, he moved the sets of
pictures closer together. Arlen and Baylor, Christopher and Darien, Emerson and Fox, George and Hal, and Ian and Jason.. Matched pairs, mirror images. Emerson's mole was even on the opposite side of his face.

I think Mulder's mother helped me figure this out, with her offhanded (no pun intended) reference to the handedness and its potential relationship to the cell division process. Jason's information on the twins was fairly complete from a medical perspective, though lacking in biographical detail. Of course Roush had access to the records of the many tests the twins had undergone in their callow youth. The conclusion was inevitable: Each of the pairs contained one right-handed and one left-handed twin.

Is biology destiny? I didn't want that to be the case, it made the success of the Consortium seem more likely, but poor Mulder didn't seem to have good prospects even if environment was crucial. We're taught in medical school that environment interacts with genetics in ways both simple and complex--with the best nutrition in the world, I couldn't make it much past five feet, but I could have been four foot seven if I'd been significantly malnourished.

I do not know what it is that makes a man. I learned in church that the soul is incorporeal, that we are more than meat and electrical impulses. I learned that we had free will, despite the many constraints concrete history can clamp upon us. But so many of our cases defied this simple platitude. All around us there were men who seemed to have no choice at all in what they'd done and other men who appeared to command those results, free of any guiding demand of God or conscience.

The supposedly carbon copies had all turned out differently, despite the depressing trend. Surely there was room for variation within the limits set by biology and environment. Mulder had chosen time and again to turn back to the light and the quest. Hadn't he?

Now there was Emerson, the unknown quantity--if he was Mulder's true twin, he could make or break the argument. Was Emerson going to be a good twin or an evil twin? He was, I realized, the integer X and we had to solve for X.

I looked again at the picture. The face wearing a pair of Ray Bans and a supercilious smile could have been Mulder's circa 1983. '80's hair with fluffy bangs, hair dripping down to the collar of his Hawaiian shirt, and a skinny tie, he could have been Mulder. Except for the fact that Mulder had dyed black hair, torn sweatshirts and two studs in his ear at that point -- the Oxford Intellectual look. The skinny tie was the killer. I almost snickered. The skinny tie dated the picture as much as a beehive had dated his parents' (and they were his parents after all) wedding picture.

"Well, look at it this way, at least you know that Bill Mulder was your father."

The look he gave me could have eaten a hole in cement.

"I'm so relieved," he said, crossing over to the window and looking out at the quiet streets with their bleeding foliage, "we haven't had any cannibals yet, we really need a cannibal--or a necrophiliac to round out the freak show."

I began shuffling the photographs into the folders again, looking at the tightness of his robe between his shoulder blades, knowing that he had retreated into wherever it was that he went to think. It was a place I wasn't allowed. A stab of anger made my eyes swim for a moment. Why was it that he accused me of being emotionally distant when he habitually did the same thing? I knew it was just a matter of time before his inner furies built a fire under his feet and I would wake up one morning alone, again, and have to haul his ass out of whatever trouble he had sought out. Again.

Sharing works both ways, Mulder.
I shut my briefcase with more force than was necessary and sat on the bed, the old mattress springs squeaking underneath my weight. He continued to look out the window and I looked around the room that had been his as a teenager. I hadn't imagined that it had been much different that Bill and Charlie's shared room in base housing. Actually, either one of them would have killed the other for a little privacy. But Mulder had his room all to himself, and I could picture him here with his books and his music loud to drown out whatever the adults were doing downstairs.

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Scully looked around my child's bedroom, forever frozen in 1973, one of the punishments I'd invented for myself when Mom and Dad couldn't be bothered. Mom moved to this house and I packed everything up and put it perfectly in place, just like it was when Sam was taken. It all looked smaller than I remembered, the bed narrow and sagging and the spots on the walls where the posters had been removed.

"Baseball was your sport?" Scully asked, fingering the one trophy that had survived Mom's housecleaning. I'm not sure why she kept that one, junior year was no better than the others, and I hadn't been captain of the team that year. Maybe she just picked at random, figuring each was as good as any other.

"One of them," I said, "I did track and basketball too." God, Mulder, she's not some cheerleader you can impress with your varsity letters. I turned away and looked at the dust-covered rows of books. Isaac Asimov, Frederik Pohl, A.E. Van Vogt...optimists all, thinking that humanity was likely to make it into the next century.

The bed creaked as Scully settled her slight weight down on it. I fleetingly wondered whether it would fall apart if we used it. The thought caused an immediate response in my autonomic nervous system.

"My mother takes enough pills to sleep that she wouldn't hear a firefight," I said.

Her face twitched and I wondered, not for the first time, what Mom had said to her before she'd come running onto the streets to find me. "What are you asking, Mulder?" The little vixen was going to make me say it out loud. Her cool marble face suggested that she was going to slap me down when I did try. But she was going to slap me around anyway, I might as well enjoy it.

I sat next to her.

"Did I just strike out?"

She put her hand on my knee. "Not yet. But with enough balls you can walk me home."

"First base?"

That earned me a tiger's grin, Scully is capable of imitating the larger cats when it suits her mood. "You're not very ambitious, are you, sport?"

I was quickly losing my ability to banter as the blood left my head for my cock, so I wrapped my arms around her and eased her down onto the bed. She was perfectly sized for it; her feet barely brushed the pillow even though her head was well clear of the baseboard.

I'd had my first wet dreams in this bed. It was about time that the goddamn thing saw some duo action.

Around my torso, her arms were hard and muscular while her stomach was agreeably soft against the
promontory of my rapidly hardening cock. There was something to be said for having such a willing wench while your mother was out cold in the next room. I had some ghosts that I wanted to exorcise. She moved underneath me in that yielding but determined way that she has. My heart began a jackhammer beat. Like any of Hal's customers, I was a junkie and I knew it.

Against my lips, her collarbones were hard as driftwood and as strong as rebar. Her hands moved hard and fast under my shirt, thumbs running down each of my vertebrae as if she were counting them. Her legs were around my hips and her feet in her silly thick violet socks were rubbing up and down the insides of my thighs. With the bulk of our clothes between the two of us, all I could do was grind against her like a teenager at a high school dance. Groaning, she adjusted her pelvis for maximum contact, the junction between her legs hot as a teakettle.

Outside the katydids sang slower and slower as the night closed in around them. Their short season was over and they were dying.

With a snort of frustration, she rolled out from underneath me, sitting upright and flicking her hair back from her face. Impatiently, she pulled her sweatshirt up over her head, her stomach and ribcage lengthening like a stretching cat's as her coral-tipped breasts sprang free of the fabric..

Can I just say here that it is an illustration of Scully's separation of intellect and emotion that she could find out that I had been part of the eugenics project that has ruined her life and she still wants to fuck me? She's either the sanest or the most insane person that I know. But there she was, wriggling out of her long leggings and panties while I was fighting the same battle with my own clothes, undressing one another is romantic but time-consuming.

Finally we were both naked and twined on the faded quilt.

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Mulder's hands were hot and hard over me in the thin chill of the boy-child's bedroom. Fingers knotted in my hair and pulled my head back so he could gnaw at my throat like a feeding vampire. Some of the most famous vampire case files he had made me read had taken place not far from this room. His free hand squeezed my breasts and pinched at my nipples until I sliced my fingernails into his shoulders at the sheer bliss of it all. His cock branded my thighs. Moving down my body he sucked my breasts, sending a direct line from the blood-rich tissues of my nipples to the hot and swollen tissue of my clitoris. He suckled me like a baby.

I had a baby, another baby under glass in a hospital in Texas. My baby, his baby and I--

The hard insistence of his finger inside me snapped my brain from the place where thoughts are made of words to where being is nothing but sensation. He raised his head so that he could see my face, his eyes inches away from mine as if he'd fall into my skull if he could. He always likes to watch, more even than he likes to touch.

"Please," I hissed into his open mouth.

"Now?"

"Oh yes."

My feet still clad in purple socks, on his shoulders. He grabbed at his sweatpants, still sharing the bed with us, and thin foil ripped. He fumbled for a few moments down at his cock and then plunged into me harder and deeper than ever before. I was tight around him and he rubbed back and forth against me with heavenly purpose. Shivers of neon silver danced across my vision. I moaned, I tossed, I
kissed his mouth, his eyes, and his forearms on either side of my head. The tired old bedstead gave off a squeak with every thrust.

The light from the street lamps outside made his eyes black as he stared down at me, his mouth hard with lust, and the tendons like harp strings in his throat.

"MinenooneelsesNosubstitutionsNochanges," I hissed. And saw why Mulder always watched. His pupils were rainbow oilslicks rimmed by a razor's edge of deep brown. I expanded in his gaze, my heart growing three sizes like the Grinch at Christmas.

Mine. No deposit, no return.

My eyes were open when the first climax hit me like a nightstick across the back of the head.

I will go to the bank by the wood and become undisguised and naked, I am mad for it to be in contact with me.

The next morning brought news via Scully's e-mail. The bloodwork on Christopher Farber's autopsy had returned, and it contained an interesting nugget of information that Scully pointed out to me with her accusing fingers. The pimp had been Schenectady's Typhoid Mary; he had enough HIV in his bloodstream to kill a ballroom of debutantes foolish enough to trust their dates, but he wasn't immunosuppressed in the slightest.

Superman had been turning teenagers out on the streets of a backwater town, and probably infecting them as he addicted them.

I had to hand it to the designers—they weren't doing too well on personality, but they seemed to have created a fine machine.

It seemed that we had agreed to begin looking into the fates of my varied kin without discussing it at all. What else could we do? At the airport, I faxed the entire contents of Jason's folders to Skinner back in DC along with a short cover letter to the effect that he would have to understand that Scully and I were going to look into this. I would have given my life to see the look on his face when he realized that this particular thorn in his side was one of many. This amused me to no end and Scully gave me a look while I was snickering into my copy of Omni while we waited for the flight. The way this was shaping up we were going to have enough frequent flyer miles to go to the Big Island before the case was closed. Scully on the beach in a bikini was an intoxicating thought.

We had been sitting in the airport lounge drinking bad coffee for over an hour when the inevitable phone call came. My cellphone shrieked in the pocket of my badly-wrinkled suit and I knew who was calling before I even answered the phone.

"Do you want to explain this fax I found on my desk this morning?" Skinner growled, large and scary as life on the scratchy connection.

I looked at my watch. At least he had enough time to have his morning coffee before he called.

"I thought my cover letter was pretty much to the point."

"Excuse me if I find the fact that there is more than one Fox Mulder roaming the face of the planet somewhat disturbing."

"Well, the majority of my kin seem to be involved in the receiving end of law enforcement rather than upholding Justice. Kind of makes me look good, doesn't it."
He snorted like a bull staring down a newbie matador at his first bullfight.

"And what do you expect me to do?"

"Let's have Danny run the information through his usual computer voodoo and see what he comes up with."

"All right," he agreed and I heard him thinking about his next words before he spoke, "Agent Mulder, keep this professional. Do not let this situation turn into another one of your personal crusades."

"It's a little late for that, sir."

"Try harder, Agent Mulder," he warned and disconnected.

Scully eyed me over the top of her coffee cup.

"How did he take it?" she asked.

"Pretty well, considering. Do you think he's medicated?"

Massachusetts to L.A. is a grueling flight. I do not like Logan, the concessionaires all sell Pepsi instead of Coke and the airport is flat and nasal like a Bostonian accent. Logan reminds me of too many Michaelmas terms, coming home to a house that would have been less empty had Mom simply ran away from it. Too many rides in cabs when all the other kids my age deplaning had gaggles of family waiting to embrace them.

LAX was better, glittering and round as a five-carat diamond on a starlet's finger. The sun was stuck in the middle of the sky when we met the agents Skinner had sent to meet us.

They wore black, probably because Will Smith and Tommy Lee Jones had made it hip. Their names were Jordan Marsh and Jeanne Redmond. Redmond did all the talking. "We've located this Darien Klein of yours. He works from home and we've had two cars on him for the last twenty-four hours. He's had two visitors, each of whom stayed for a few hours and then left."

Scully was her usual businesslike self. "Do we know what kind of consulting he does?"

Redmond sniggered. "The kind without clothes, LAPD says. He's a rent-a-date. You'd be surprised at how many people in this town who could get laid for free prefer to pay for it."

"At least that way they know exactly what currency they're paying in," I suggested, earning dubious looks from the women.

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We found Darien beside his pool, greased to a thick sheen to get the minimum necessary tan. I went first; we were going to bring Mulder to meet him once I'd made the initial contact in order to decrease the freak-out factor.

I looked him over as I approached. Standard deviation: minus scars, plus extra bulk at the shoulders. New variation, sun-streaked hair with a symmetry never found in nature, the kind that came at a high price at a good salon. Mulder's facial features require some attention before they cohere into attractiveness, and in some angles, when you can't see his eyes, the sum total is downright goofy-looking, but there is absolutely nothing to be said against his body. Looking at it, or a reasonable facsimile thereof, was distracting.
I pulled out my badge and strode forward. "Darien Klein?"

He tossed his head towards me and pulled down his sunglasses. "Tell me you're my three o'clock."

I could feel the blush spread like port wine over my face and neck. "Special Agent Dana Scully, FBI."

He pouted and licked his lips. "Is there a problem?"

Yes there was, but I was going to hold out for the version with the bullet scars; retraining takes so much time. "Sir, we believe you may be in danger because of your relationship to a...group of men. I'd like to ask you to come with me so that you can be placed in protective custody."

Darien sat up from his lounger and looked me over more carefully, draping his arms artistically over his thighs and making it perfectly apparent why he was in enough demand to afford this place. "I get it," he said. "Jorje sent you, right? Tell him he's got a great instinct for my tastes. So, what happens, you handcuff me and then I get to see you out of uniform?"

It was a good thing I was already as red as I was going to get. "I'm afraid it's no joke, sir." I shifted my jacket so that he could see the bulge of the holster at my hip. "Have you ever heard the name Jason Lindsay?" He shook his head and I could see him begin to register the seriousness of the situation. "Arlen Petrovsky? Christopher Farber?" Each question produced another headshake.

"If I haven't heard of these guys, why do I have to go into custody?"

I raised my hand and signaled for Mulder to come out from where he was hidden in the shadow cast by Darien's lovely house.

Darien's eyes widened as he took in the physical resemblance. "Who are you?"

"Your long-lost brother, apparently."

"I was raised in the Valley! I don't have any brothers!"

"Surprise," Mulder said, drawing the word out until it snapped.

Marsh and Redmond stood guard outside while we supervised Darien as he overstuffed two suitcases with clothes that didn't deserve the rough treatment. Darien favored Versace and Dolce & Gabbana over Mulder's Armani, I could see the two of them trading dismissive glances at each other's favored wardrobe.

Darien was not allowed to bring his cellphone, which was the first thing that really seemed to upset him. I wasn't sure if he was used to weird things like this happening to him, this being L.A., or whether his sociopathic heritage was simply expressed in his extreme lack of affect. Of course, he was Mulder's twin... The telephone dependency might have been genetic.

As we headed out to the car that would take him to the safe house—a location that not even Mulder or I would know, to give him more protection—he turned to Mulder, who was lugging the larger suitcase, and asked, "By the way, who the hell are you?"

"Fox Mulder."

A look of understanding suffused Darien's features. "What is it?" Mulder asked sharply.

"That's a name I have heard."
"From whom?" I rattled out, milliseconds before Mulder asked the same question.

Now Darien lowered his head, and that familiar unruly chunk of hair (or one very like it) brushed his forehead. I'd never thought that Mulder made the gesture as a calculated tactic, but I'd have to reconsider that judgement. He looked bashfully up through the brown-gold strands. "I assume you guys know what I do."

Mulder made a small strangled sound and I could tell he'd made a connection that I'd missed.

"We have reports, yes," I said, trying to sound as robotic as possible.

"A couple of years back, there was one man..." he smiled, remembering. "He spotted me in a bar and spent the evening watching me. I can always tell, you know. Finally he sent over a drink, and we had a little talk. I explained that I wasn't free that night, well I'm never free but I had other business, and he agreed to meet me the next night. Fox was the name he called out...at the time, I thought it was a rather endearing compliment."

"What was this man's name?" Mulder shook his head to warn me off, but the question was already there.

Darien let his shoulders ripple artistically in what might have been loosely deemed a shrug. "I had the feeling he was lying, but he called himself Alex."

Yet another item on the list of things I was discovering that I Did Not Want To Know.

We put Darien in the car and then stood looking at each other like idiots. "Now what?"

"Emerson won't take my calls and he's guarded by a small army, I say we go see Baylor, on paper he looks like a nice enough guy."

Just then Mulder's cellphone rang. He listened for a few minutes, and then hung up.

"Scratch that," he said. "That was Danny. When he looked up Hal Rothman's name in the database, he pinged a big DEA trace. The DEA demanded to know his authorization for the search, he gave them Skinner's name, and now our ever-loyal AD traded us in for a matched set of drug-sniffing German Shepherds."

"What?"

"We're going in to run a sting. It seems that another Hal Rothman was the only thing the DEA needed to finish the scavenger hunt and beat all the other agencies."

The atmosphere here is not a perfume, it has no taste of distillation, it is odorless. It is for my mouth forever, I am in love with it.

Mulder walked into the room and five mouths dropped open. One of the agents even knocked over his coffee; another reached for her gun.

One of them, obviously in command, rose and came over to us. "Agent Martinez," he informed us. He shook Mulder's hand, then mine, looking me over like he was trying to guess my dress size. "You'll do real well," he said, "but we're going to need some new clothes. Agent Yarrow--Ines--will help you. You," he said, turning back to Mulder, "are just right."

That had to be the most validation Mulder had received in the last year.
Ines took me into another room as the remaining agents began to give Mulder his backstory. The other room contained more clothes than the average Gap and Ines rooted around for something in my size as she explained that Hal Rothman had been under investigation for a long time and Mulder was their first real key to his life. Rothman was slick; his phone had been tapped for over a year, they'd put a camera into the foyer three months ago, and there was still nothing on him. The agent in charge of the investigation had heard Skinner's crazy explanation and homed in on the relevant fact: Mulder was a perfect body double for Hal; they knew that Hal had a big meeting that night; all they had to do was keep Hal away, let Mulder do the recording, and then any grand jury in the nation would return an indictment.

My job? Apparently Hal never went anywhere without window dressing.

Ines put a body wire on me before pulling out a pile of what looked like rags. Instead it was an orange sateen camisole that would have been small on me at age 12 and a cropped thermal undershirt. At least I got to layer them though a bra was out of the question; the texture of the undershirt disguised the wire while still making me look like I'd been sewn into the outfit. For my lower half we had unspeakably trendy Calvin Klein (no relation to Darien) undies and baggy designer jeans that hung off my hips. My tattoo was visible along with the crack of my ass. Ines congratulated me on the way it looked. She had some suggestions for making me look dewy-eyed and underage.

I was beginning to sense that the corporate culture of the DEA was slightly different than that of the FBI.

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Martinez gave me the rundown on this iteration of myself. It was essentially an expanded version of what Jason had already given me. He didn't ask any questions until he was finished outlining his plan and shoving a Reader's Digest condensed version of the drug hierarchy on the eastern seaboard down my throat. It was oddly invigorating to meet someone whose conspiracy story barely intersected mine at all, except for the near-accident of involving one of my homicidal twins.

His first question was, however, a doozy.

"How long have you known that Hal Rothman was your brother?"

Scully saved me, swooping down on the conversation like Athena bursting from Zeus' head. "I'm afraid that information relates to a pending investigation. We can't say anything more about it at this time."

I spared her a grateful look, and then another that was pure double-take. My eyes skittered over her body and caught on the white plastic bird-shaped barettes holding back the wings of her hair. She was wearing pearlescent blue eyeshadow right off the cover of Seventeen, her lips were shining like peach nectar, and her nails were as orange as her under, er, outerwear. A stickler for detail as always, she'd somehow managed to create the impression of broken veins at the inside of one elbow. The fading finger-mark bruises on her hip were real, I'd put them there.

She looked about sixteen and I realized that part of it was the shoes, huge Starsky & Hutch Adidas sneakers instead of the heels she'd left with. I could only see the toes peeking out from the puddle of jeans on the ground.

If this was Hal's type I was in deeper shit than I'd thought.

The plan was, as such plans go, simple, which was good because we didn't have much time to
rehearse. Derail Hal's limo with a convenient "accident," jam his cellphone, and have me go to Hal's meeting. With my voice on the tape, Hal would, quite literally, look like the one who'd sung. The DEA hoped that appearances would split him from his confederates, prompting him to attain protected witness status in exchange for testimony. Maybe he too could escape the nose. Or we could give him the identity of one of the dead Mulders, offering him the choice of Arlen or Chris. That would actually be pretty funny.

In return, the DEA agreed to watch out for Hal's safety--a fair deal, because they needed him to live too in order to testify. I don't think they believed that he had a slew of other brothers who were being knocked off, but they played along nicely. Maybe Skinner had promised them invitations to the annual office party.

We were driven to the meeting in a pimpmobile.

The small man who met us at the door of the suite gave Scully only the most cursory of glances as he beckoned us in. We were led to a well-appointed conference area. I took the couch so that I had Scully next to me, my hand resting far up on the inside of her thigh. She looked away as if it didn't matter to her and that hurt much more than a glare would have.

>From the inner sanctum, two men emerged, one white and one Asian.

I flipped through the pictures in my brain, searching for a match. Fuck, I should have paid more attention to Martinez's little lecture, these fellows had no idea that they were just a subplot and they'd kill me just as thoroughly as any shapeshifting bounty hunter.

I found them: John Kim and Mark 'Tiger' Timmins. I was the money man, sort of like a Hollywood agent-slash-producer; I'd set them up originally by finding the financing for their first deal and they still worked with me..

By all accounts Hal was another self-centered son of a bitch so I didn't get up, just raised my hand from Scully's leg in greeting.

Sharp nods. Scully stared vacantly at them, somehow managing not to blink..

They sat and we got down to business. They had a cash-flow problem related to the new hundred dollar bills, which were just now getting wide play abroad. The DEA had coached me on the appropriate solution, which I relayed to them in due course.

The phone rang and John Kim glared at it, then looked at me apologetically. "They wouldn't have buzzed it through if it wasn't important." I nodded magisterially, giving permission.

He picked it up, said "Yes?" and listened for a minute. Then he carefully put the receiver down on the glass-topped table and turned back to me. "It's for you."

I had to suppress the automatic look at Scully for her opinion. Drug-dipped whores don't have opinions.

As carefully as if I were picking up a snake, I reached for the phone.

"Hello?"

"Who is this?" The voice was nasal and scratchy, familiar in a strange way but I couldn't give it a name.

"Who is *this*?"
"Cut the crap, this is Hal Rothman and I want to speak to John again."

"Where are you calling from?"

"A public phone, my cell won't work and my car broke down and I couldn't make the meeting, who the fuck are you?"

"I'm Hal Rothman," I said, keenly aware of Scully's even breathing on the seat next to me, "and I don't think this is very funny." John gave a little nod at my reaction.

"Listen, I don't know what kind of game you're playing, but I warn you--you tell John--you need me. Don't try and cut me out."

"I don't know what you're talking about," I said and hung up. John and Tiger were watching me for a reaction. "Fucking DEA head games. They get more desperate every day."

My companions nodded as if I'd just read from the Torah scroll.

Once again, I was swimming in my own sweat and my brain was stuttering like Howard Stern's sidekick. Undercover ops more elaborate than a phone call have never been my forte and I made a terrible happy tooth in my third grade play. Shit, I have a hard enough time acting like myself most days.

Scully shifted on the couch next to me and sighed.

"This is so lame," she muttered.

John and Tiger smirked.

"Go ahead with the hundred dollar solution for the time being. By the time the fucking Feds change all the currency no one will know what the fuck is going on," I stood up and Scully slouched to her feet next to me.

They stood and we went through an elaborately cool handshaking ritual that they must have learned from watching the Godfather movies. Assholes. Pretentious assholes. They were no better than the dealers hawking crack on street corners, they just had marginally better wardrobes.

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Outside, Mulder ducked around the corner of the building to wait for the DEA's seized limo to pick us up. He looked pinched and shaky under the blue glare of the neon above the door.

"Fuck," he hissed and jammed his hands in the pockets of the long black leather coat he was wearing.

"The phone call?" I prodded and waddled into whispering distance.

"That was him. Almost blew the whole thing right then and there. Fucking Martinez doesn't know his asshole from a hole in the ground."

"It's a pity the IQ requirement for the DEA is so low," a familiar-unfamiliar voice drawled and I heard the unmistakable sound of a pistol having the safety snapped off, "but I'm sure you two know that first hand. Please step away from the building."

Most of the alley next to the office building was as dark as it gets, and the man with the gun was a moving center of darkness in the random pools of darkness.
"Please switch off your wires," he continued in the same strangely polite tone, "I know you're not armed, Tiger and John never would have let you in if you were carrying. That was one of the few things you actually got right."

I reached in the waistband of my jeans and pulled the microphone wire loose from the main unit while Mulder stared at Rothman as though he was a deer staring at an oncoming 18-wheeler.

"Step into the light please," Rothman suggested.

Mulder did so and I watched his pupils contract as the light slammed into them. Rothman approached him and they both stood in the cold light of the streetlight like actors on-stage. It was surreal in the extreme, the matching coats, the black pants, the loose silk shirts. Rothman even brushed his hair back the way Mulder did.

"I hope you got a nice bonus for the plastic surgery."

"It's not plastic surgery. I'm your brother."


"There are people who are trying to kill all of us."

"All?"

I tried to explain.

"There were ten twins born as the result of a genetic experiment and-"

"Shut up, bitch," Rothman snapped and his gun hand lashed out and caught me across the jaw.

The pavement was cold and dirty when I hit it.

"Scully?"

"I'm fine, Mulder," I sat up and rubbed at the numb flesh, shedding bits of gravel embedded along the side of my arm.

Mulder talked quickly, trying to get through despite the fact that Rothman was about as receptive to him as the average congressional committee. "My name is Fox Mulder I'm with the FBI you should check up on it we were all raised separately --" He stopped when Rothman poked him in the cheek with the gun.

"You tell Martinez that he's full of shit, and if I ever see your fake fucking face again, I'm going to blow it off. Understand?"

Mulder's face hardened into something I hadn't seen before.

"Listen to me you ignorant prick, you're going to wind up dead and it's not going to be from your jackass crack head dealers either," his arm shot up and he grabbed Rothman's wrist - the one holding the gun.

"I'll fuckin' shoot you, man."

Despite his tough-guy act, Rothman was genuinely surprised when Mulder snapped his arm out of the way and kneecapped him with the hard toe of one fashionable workboot. With a roar of pain, Rothman swung at Mulder with his gun hand and hit his twin with the handle. Mulder spit blood and
rammed his shoulder into his twin's chest. They both bounced off the brick wall of the alley in a flurry of leather coats, flapping hair and the gleam of gunmetal. Through the sounds of fists on flesh, I could hear my partner's voice.

The gun went flying and clattered to the ground a yard away from me.

"Don't you want to live? They're going to kill you, you dumb fuck."

"Fuck you man, DEA bullshit. You got nothing on me."

Even as I grabbed Rothman's gun I realized there was no way I could tell them apart in the gritty light. Damnit! Even if I rushed at one of them I had a fifty-fifty chance of getting it wrong. Mole, mole, who's got the mole. Finally, they stumbled to a halt, one twin pinning the other against the wall.

"Mulder!" I shouted.

And wouldn't you know that both of them looked at me. Shit.

"Mulder if he wants to take his chances, let him go. You might be doing the world a favor."

I got a dual dirty look for that.

"Let him go!" I ordered, "step away from the twin and raise your hands -- both of you!"

The twin, whichever one it was, stepped back from the other, both put their hands in the air.

"They'll kill you and you'll wind up in a fucking plastic garbage bag like the piece of trash that you are," the one on the right hissed.

Okay, that was Mulder, the one with the bleeding gash on his lip. I covered Rothman with his own gun.

"They can try," Rothman gave Mulder an ugly smirk and the finger.

Turning his back on us, he slid off into the darkness where he came from.

Mulder closed his eyes and swayed slightly on his feet. I reached out with my scraped hand and tugged on his jacket.

"It's funny," he said, looking into the darkness where Rothman had vanished, "I spent so long looking for a sibling and now that I've found out that my family gives new meaning to the word 'extended,' none of them wants to talk to me."

He turned his back on me. I waited in the dark and the cold, while he regained what was left of his composure. He'd need it after giving Rothman his real name; Martinez was going to be apoplectic. I stuck Rothman's gun into one of the pockets on my jeans--with any luck ballistics would be able to match it to an unsolved crime or two--and waited for the Calvary to arrive.

We got into the limo to drive back from the 'meeting', listening to the cross-talk among the agents monitoring Rothman's building. The driver was the best proof of Rothman's claim about the DEA I'd seen yet, he got lost twice in a four-block radius. How hard is it to find New York City? It's like fucking Rome, all roads lead there, and yet this jerkoff managed to drive us practically to Pennsylvania before figuring out how to get back..

Mulder didn't seem too worried; doubtless he wasn't looking forward to explaining to Martinez just
what exactly Rothman had said to him. The last thing we needed was an OPR investigation into Mulder's lifestyle of luxury because they suspected him of drug connections.

"He's in the building," I heard through the snap, crackle, pop of the radio. We were on the George Washington Bridge, crawling slowly towards the city.

Ten minutes later, "He's leaving...catching a cab. Should we follow?"

I recognized Martinez's voice answering in the affirmative. In a minute, he came on the air again. "Wait a second...Yarrow, you said he entered the building while you were watching?"

"Yep."

"Why did Johnson tell me the same thing just before your shift started?"

Mulder swore and grabbed the driver's shoulder with one hand while reaching for the radio with the other. "We've got to get back to his building," he said. "Something's wrong."

"Martinez?"

"Don't use my name, Mulder, do you have any idea how many people could be listening? Haven't you ever seen Hard Copy?"

"We'll all be on it tomorrow unless you get in that apartment now, I'm telling you, there's something very wrong."

Another voice broke in. "Sir? The doorman at the building is calling for an ambulance."

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The exquisite fourteen-year-old girl who had been Hal's real waif of the week was sobbing noisily as police officers flowed around her, a rhapsody in blue.

"He din't use," she insisted, wet eyes as bloodshot as the veins on her arms were broken. When she opened her mouth the illusion of Kate Moss porcelain perfection was broken, but it's not like Hal wanted her for her conversational skills.

The sight of my face had sent her into hysterics.

After Scully had pulled a sedative out of her infinite bag of doctor tricks, the girl had calmed down somewhat. Huddled on Hal's Chinese brocade couch, getting her CKOne stink on it which I bet he'd never have let her do if he were around to protest, she looked much smaller than her full five feet. Youth Services was allegedly on its way to take her into custody, but in NYC this was not any guarantee of rapid action. And when they arrived, likely as not they'd just find some well-connected pimp for her foster-care placement.

None of my concern, anyway. I was just trying to find out what she knew about Hal's meteoric fall into vomiting and convulsions from his apparent heroin OD.

"He never used," she repeated, wiping some snot away from her upper lip with the back of her hand.

"Maybe you just never saw him," I suggested.

She shook her head rapidly, like a wet dog. "Naw, he made fun of it. Said he didn't need it, what was wrong with his life? Nothin', no reason to use."
"Who was his visitor just now, just before he--"

More sniffles, wiped on an arm that looked like it had been stitched back together after a bad accident.

"I don' know. He said it was an appointment, he told me to get lost and South Park was on..."

I patted her on the shoulder, awkwardly, as she began keening again. She was just about Juliet's age, she was probably considering committing suicide to follow the great love of her life into the belly of the white dragon. Considering her other prospects, I couldn't say I blamed her.

The agents swarming over Hal's apartment like fire ants weren't having much luck. No doubt Rothman kept secret accounts with information he could use to save his ass if necessary, but if he was living up to the family legacy it would be beyond the abilities of drug-sniffing dogs to discover.

Martinez appeared just as we were about to leave. He had my business card in a clear evidence bag. "We found this on Rothman's body. Want to try again on how long you've known about your family values?"

Scully growled at him, if she were a cat her ears would have been flattened to her head, and he moved back, mumbling something about getting the real story from Skinner. Smart guy.

To top it off, we hadn't gotten three steps out the door before my cellphone rang. Hurrying to the elevator to get away from the still-swirling mass of cops, I flipped it open.

"Mulder."

Skinner's voice shot out of the phone loud enough for Scully to follow it. "Darien Klein was just discovered giving Agent Fallon a blow job."

"Did he make Fallon pay?"

Scully glared at me reproachfully, but I could tell she was amused.

Skinner continued. "He wanted to get to a phone. He said he had to call and cancel a 'date,' or the client would never speak to him again."

"For the price of a quarter, that's ten thousand times less that it would normally cost."

"When is this...prostitute...going to be protected enough to get him out of our safe house and away from my agents?"

"I wish I could give you good news on that, but I'm standing outside of Hal Rothman's apartment. And it looks like another funeral for me, unless we just wait and use a mass grave."

Skinner grunted. "Watch your back, Mulder. I don't know these other men, but I don't intend to lose a valuable agent to whatever force is behind these murders."

I wished Skinner's will were enough to prevent that, but it struck me as unlikely.

While Scully toddled off to her autopsy, I played a hunch and asked to see the last few days' worth of tapes from Hal's vestibule.

Sure enough, the day before his death a familiar figure had visited. The resolution wasn't good enough to get the face exactly right; the DEA hadn't really had many good options for placing the camera where it wouldn't be seen.
They weren't going to like this one bit, though I could probably remember my whereabouts at that time, I was pretty sure that I'd been five minutes away from coming into Scully with a spasm and a groan. Excellent alibi, no? The Office of Professional Responsibility would love that.

I wondered how he'd gotten my card, and how many sets of my fingerprints there would be on it.

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I've never done an autopsy on Mulder before, despite all his deaths.

The resemblance wasn't complete. Hal had never taken a gunshot wound, though it was rumored that he'd acted as his own assassin several times. He liked high-powered rifles, weapons that a man outside the law could use where real cops had to give the bad guy a chance to surrender and live. He took care of himself; his upper arms were better developed than Mulder's, which was consistent with the home gym and all the shiny silver free weights I'd seen in our brief official sojourn chez Rothman. And photos of the corpse next to the Nordic Trac were not going to help sales of home gym equipment. His last meal had involved expensive goat cheese, walnuts, and radicchio.

There were no needle punctures, not even in any well-hidden places. None of the signs of use I'd expect from a man with an intimate relationship with opiates. As high up in the hierarchy he was, he'd still have used heroin cut with something else at some point. Talcum powder is popular; it stays in the lungs forever, and Hal's alveoli were pink and untouched. Quinine is used too, but it's rough on the heart; there were no abscesses, no signs of endocarditis. Other than the small problem that he was not breathing, Hal was in excellent health.

The NYPD and the DEA wanted this to be an accidental overdose, because drug rivals usually just shot each other if they were miffed; it would be convenient for everyone if Rothman had just snorted too much China White. But it didn't fly, most "accidental" overdoses involve unhappy people who half-decide not to pay enough attention to the amount they're mainlining. Hal had been on top of the world; the DEA agents admitted that without Mulder's doppelganger act they'd probably still be trying to get enough evidence for an indictment when the *next* millenium came.

And Mulder's business card was not something Rothman would have been carrying around. Ironically, Rothman's associates would have been just as upset as OPR to learn of the genetic ties between the two brothers, only their idea of an "interrogation" to figure things out wouldn't involve a hot room and nothing to drink but knives and lit cigarettes in flesh.

Then there was the matter of the duplicate entry into Rothman's apartment building. Double entry was for bookkeeping, not for people.

The clock was running down. I needed to pay more attention to my own personal Mulder, remember that he was, in someone's eyes, just one of many.

My face still hurt from where Rothman had hit me with his gun. I have seldom enjoyed an autopsy more.

I finished the stitches that put Rothman's cold well-formed chest back together and looked up.

Straight into Mulder's eyes, only I could also see *through* them to the clock on the far wall.

It was 10:13.

I almost brought my hand to my mouth to cover the moan before I realized that I was still wearing gloves and I didn't want to suck down Hal's blood and stomach contents even if he was healthy.
Another revenant, I thought and it stared at me, stared and stared as if I were the see-through one.

Once is an anomaly, two times a curiosity. By now even I had to admit that I had a little problem with the unquiet spirits of the dead. "Wh...what do you want?" I asked. "Who are you?" The hair color wasn't easy to divine, being almost transparent, but I couldn't see the mole and even in death Mulder would have been more snide.

His mouth moved.

Don't trust him, I think it said, and then disappeared as the door swung open and Mulder stepped into the space vacated by his haunt.

"Next stop, Philadelphia. Baylor Francis has agreed to talk to us."

11

What is commonest, cheapest, nearest, easier, is Me. Me going in for my chances, spending for vast returns, Adorning myself to bestow myself on the first that will take me, Not asking the sky to come down to my good will, Scattering it freely forever.

I don't like Bruce Springsteen. Well, shall we just say that I have a soft spot for "Hungry Heart" but that's only because I associate it with one incredible week in Glasgow with Phoebe and there was a jukebox in the pub where we would play snooker, get drunk and then go back to what passed for a hotel and have sex until neither of us could walk. But there I was again in another dingy hotel, this time in the City of Brotherly Love, with a woman more capable of handing out passion and heartbreak than Phoebe ever was. In that hotel room while Scully cleaned the scrape on her face in the bathroom, I sat on the bed and looked out at the dark city with an echo of a song bouncing around in the dried gourd where I used to keep my brain.

The night has fallen, I'm lyin' awake I can feel myself fading away So receive me brother with your faithless kiss Or will we leave each other alone like this On the streets of Philadelphia

So the movie had been about AIDS, which made me think about brother Christopher and his unpleasant habit of sharing with his stable of girl and boy whores. Not to mention Darien's occupational hazard. But the elements that I carried in my blood, bone, skin, and every other cell in my body were no less lethal and dangerous than the HIV virus. The genes.

God, we were all awful in some way shape or form. Dealers in sin, pain, death, and weakness. I quote the Rolling Stones: "Every cop is a criminal, and all the sinners saints." Had I ended up as a profiler because of this genetic taint? Was my carefully controlled world going to fall apart around me and I'd wake up one morning with Scully next to me, her torso opened like a gutted bass and her blood on my hands? I'd been close to hurting her on several occasions in the not-too-distant past and I wanted to know what was finally going to short-circuit the tiny bit of control that I had.

If I hadn't let Hal go he might still be alive.

I could flagellate myself all night but it would only make Scully hover over me the way she did the baby back in Austin. What the hell was the deal with that anyway? She was calling the hospital on an almost daily basis to find out how the thing was doing and she thought I hadn't noticed. We were getting entirely too good at figuring out the other one's tricks. For example, she would walk out of that bathroom at any moment, fuss all over the cut on my lip and then proceed to rip my clothes off and fuck herself stupid to wipe out the sordid memories of Hal's world.

I thought we were past that, I thought her hard resolve not to care about me was finally breaking
down, that she was warming up to me to a certain degree.

When Scully came out of the bathroom, she had put a bandage over the scrape on her face but the blue eyeshadow reigned triumphant.

"I double dog dare you to walk into Skinner's office like that."

"Bite me, Mulder."

"Anywhere you want."

She had antiseptic and those darling little butterfly bandages and we proceeded to do the Dance of the Beaten Man, the one where I say no and she says yes and no one takes any bets on the winner.

Those things pull at my skin in a really annoying way.

Scully, by contrast, pulls at my skin in a purely enticing way. She had no sooner put away her doctor tools than she began unbuttoning her blouse.

Let's see, I could resist and we could fight and then later she'd probably come back, or she wouldn't, and either way I'd be miserable.

I stood and walked over to her, finishing the job and sliding the silk over her shoulders. There were still traces of adhesive on her stomach from where the wire had been taped on and I bent to lick at them, the roughness and sour taste an interesting contrast to her peach-down skin. Taking her at her word, I nibbled, trying to clean her off with my teeth, and she groaned.

"I know you like no one else does," I whispered as I eased her skirt and panties down to the floor and pressed my face into her stomach. She murmured something that sounded like agreement and I squeezed her close to me, my hands on her hips sleeking down her thighs and calves.

Straightening, I picked her up and carried her the few steps to the bed--any farther and it would have been time for a chiropractor, but I saw something real peering out of her eyes and the strain on my back was worth it to get her full attention.

"Turn over," I ordered her and she blinked those blue topaz eyes at me, then complied. She was on her hands and knees, trembling a little with lust and uncertainty, and the worm on her back was turning circles inside my head. Scully's like an amusement park, the wait can be a hassle and the price is high, but the ride makes it all worthwhile.

I stripped and joined her on the bed, spreading her legs further with one hand as I moved my cock into position. A false start made her jerk as if shocked and then I was inside her.

The back of her neck was salty--autopsies make her work up quite a sweat. My thumbs caressed her nipples and she sighed happily.

"Scully?" I moved one hand down to finger her clitoris, gently.

"Ah?"

"Why is it that we always have the best sex when the rest of our relationship is at its worst?" She didn't say anything, but I felt her lose our joint rhythm. "You remember, Scully," moving my fingers a little faster, "that time right before you ran off to Arizona without me. That was good, wasn't it?"

She grunted.
"So what's going on, Scully, I really want to know your interpretation here." I stopped moving entirely and put both hands on her hips, stilling her. She tried to push against me and then tried to pull away, but I held her in place, feeling her tighten further around me like a fist.

After a thirty-second eternity she bowed her head, letting the hair fall in a shower over her eyes so that she couldn't see the outside world. "I can't need you like that," she said. "Not all at once."

Oddly enough the enormous gouge in my chest didn't affect my erection at all, I suppose because the blood was already trapped there.

"All right," I said, only squeaking a little. "All right." She shuddered when I started moving again, shaking like a wooden roller coaster as I tugged at her breasts and gnawed at her shoulder.

She called out my name when she came.

****

Just off Head House square, we found Baylor's bookstore, Our Bookshelf. It was a nice place, its subject matter identified by a rustic pink triangle hanging in the window. Robert Rodi was the featured author of the week. I was surprised by how un-campy it was. Lots of pale pine bookshelves, plants, Bach playing on the stereo, comfy chairs for casual reading, and two coffee pots labeled "Leaded" and "Unleaded" with a stack of paper hot cups for patrons to use. I could easily imagine my brother Bill wandering in by accident, and then going into cardiac arrest. Mulder headed for the shelves in back and let me deal with his doppelganger at the front desk. But Baylor was on the telephone and I picked up a coffee table book called "Boys on the Beach" and watched Baylor over the tops of the pages of beautiful men frolicking in naked splendor on tropic sands. Idly, I wondered if I could write the book off on my expense report.

Somehow, Baylor managed to look younger than the rest of the brothers, even though his name indicated that he had been one of the earlier issues. His face was rounder and he seemed smaller altogether, despite the neat goatee and cropped George Clooney haircut. He was also about as camp as his store -- which is to say, hardly at all. Dressed in chinos and a gray Henley shirt, he fiddled with the earrings in his right ear and listened to the caller.

"Yeah, I know that, but out of print means out of print . . . I understand. No, I called the publisher and they told me that no one was buying it so they stopped the print run. Yeah? Well you can't make people buy things, right? I still have four copies left, do you want them or not?"

He tapped heavy silver rings on the countertop and leaned over the glass with the familiar languid grace I saw every day.

"You could try a vanity press . . . " he winced and shut his eyes, "well be an egomaniac and see if I care. Right. Tomorrow, okay? See you later, Carl."

He hung up the phone with a restrained click and glared at it.

"Bitch," he muttered.

Becoming aware of the fact that I was staring at him, Baylor looked up at me. Seeing Mulder's face on someone else was still making my stomach flip no matter how many times it had happened lately. This time my stomach did a flip and a half gainer. Baylor's eyes were green, brilliant feline green. My heart finally started again when I realized he was wearing contact lenses.

"Can I help you?" he asked.
I put down the book and took out my badge.

"Special Agent Dana Scully, FBI."

He smiled.

"Are you arresting me?"

"No. It's not that at all. We believe you may be in danger because of your relationship to a...group of men. I'd like to ask you to come with me so that you can be placed in protective custody."

If anything, his smile got wider and he leaned his elbows on the countertop and laced his fingers together with their silver bands flaring in the sunlight.

"You know, it's not illegal to have relationships with men, honey."

Damn those Mulders! They were just like Pomeranians: smart, perceptive, yappy, and determined to make me look stupid.

"I'm talking about a genetic relationship. Members of your family -- your genetic family as opposed to your adoptive family -- are systematically being killed and the Bureau would like to take you to a safe house where you can be protected."

"You mean the Bureau would like me not to finish organizing the march on City Hall next month," he gave me a patronizing smile. "so who came up with this bullshit story? More of the new Right Wing Conservative Mafia? Does Senator Helms sign your paycheck, Miss Fed?"

"Mister Francis--"

"You're going to have to try harder than that," he added.

The smile dropped from his face when Mulder blocked the sunlight from the window.

Baylor blinked and then threw up his hands in resignation.

"Okay, okay. Talk to me."

After flipping the sign on the door over to 'Closed', Baylor led us into the back of the store. In the office/storeroom, Mulder explained the situation while Baylor paced and smoked. When Mulder was done, Baylor looked at both of us with a tide of frustration swamping his photocopy features.

"That's Science Fiction. It's not possible."

"Don't I wish."

"Even if it were true, I can't just pack up and run. I have a life. My store. I have an author coming in next week for a book signing. I have a lover who I don't want to leave. I have twenty thousand handbills I have to get printed for the march next month," he laughed a bitter little Mulder chuckle, "I have ten cats that live in the alley that I feed."

"They're going to try to kill you. Hal Rothman is dead, Arlen Petrovsky is dead, Christopher Farber is dead, and you could be next," I pointed out.

"Agent Scully, half my friends are dead and you expect me to care about strangers?"

"Care about yourself," I suggested.
"No, sorry, I appreciate you coming here to warn me, but I can't leave. I have too many obligations."

"We can arrest you," Mulder said in a very quiet voice.

Baylor laughed and put his hand on Mulder's shoulder.

"You can try, but I have a fucking fantastic lawyer. Really, thank you for warning me, but I'll have to take my chances. All right?"

"Did you see his wrists?" Mulder asked me when we stopped at a charming little coffeehouse a block from Baylor's store.

Sitting outside, watching normal people go along the charming re-created Federalist street, I could believe that the story of the twins was as false as the Amish man wearing Reeboks making funnel cakes across the street.

"Hm?" I asked and sipped at the heavenly brew.

"Marked, here and here," Mulder pointed just above and below the joint "binding marks, from leather cuffs."

"Why do I not want to know how you know this?"

He gave me one of his graveside smiles, a flash of white stone in a dark night.

"And in the racks at the back of the store? Coffee table book called Prometheus Bound. Tasteful, arty, Mapplethorpe derivative, two hundred glossy photos of my brother Baylor with cigarette burns, flog marks, ball-gags, spreader bars, dildoes, and nipple clips -- a veritable plethora of masochistic ingenuity. I suppose you didn't know that his penis is pierced either."

"We weren't introduced."

"So," he stretched his legs out under the table and leaned back in his chair, "you going to show me where you got your tattoo?"

If he'd poured steaming coffee in my lap it would have hurt less.

"Maybe I should get 'M' tattooed on my forehead so you won't confuse me with any of the others."

"Why don't you just get your penis pierced?"

He smirked.

"Want to do it for me?"

"Don't tempt me."

Back at the hotel as he packed up for the next leg of the Magical Mystery Mulder Twin Tour, I took my cell phone into the bathroom and called the hospital in Texas to see how the baby -- my baby -- was doing. When I came out, Mulder was sitting on the bed wearing the expression of a dog who has overheard the word "vet" in conversation.

"What do you say we forget the whole thing, quit our jobs and move to Key West and open a hamburger stand?" he asked in a staccato combination of jest and desperation.

""When do we leave?" I joked back at him.
"As soon as you finish packing."

I knew he wasn't serious, so I continued to pack. He sighed and flopped back on the bed.

His cellphone rang.

Baylor Francis was dead.

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All things considering, the Philadelphia police weren't all that bad, once they stopped doing double takes and whispering amongst themselves. Scully paused to check with the detective in charge while I pushed past the forensics teams with my badge as my passport. Baylor had lived above his store and the apartment was pretty nice -- lots of books and the requisite Manteegna Saint Sebastian over the bed where Baylor's body lay. Like the Renaissance painting overhead, Baylor was nude, his body shining silver in the light from the forensic photographer's lights.

My twin was lying on his back, his wrists and ankles in leather shackles that hooked to the cast iron bedstead. There were score marks on his chest, the blood dried and caked on his skin. The black leather gag cut deeply into his face, and over the band his face was the usual swollen blue mess of one who had been strangled. A contact had fallen from one eye and the dead, glazed orbs that stared back at me were mismatched emerald and dull hazel.

Underneath the smeary blood I could see his scars. I'd told Scully about the cigarette burns but not about their extent, the old ones that had lightened and spread like ringworm over his pectorals when he grew up and then the newer ones. The patterns they made, fresh on ancient, were like raindrops on a pond when a storm is just beginning. In black and white on glossy paper they had been gorgeous. Now they were just background, lost against his corpse's flesh.

Even in death, his shaved pubic hair made his cock look bigger than mine.

I tried. I really had. Maybe I should have cuffed him and hauled him off to the safe house myself -- but I had been afraid that he'd see it as a form of foreplay. I should have done something, rather than leaving him like this -- I may as well have tightened the strap around his throat myself.

Yisborach, v'yistabach, v'yispoar, v'yisroman, v'yisnaseh, v'yishador, v'yishalleh, v'yishallol, sh'meh d'kudsho, b'rich hu--

Sorry, man.

A gleam of aqua caught my eye and I crouched down next to the bed and picked it up with latex fingers. Trojan wrappers. Two of them. The condom of champions and the official condom of the Mulder family. At least he had been practicing safe sex -- although it hadn't been safe enough, apparently.

Someone else was going to have to organize the protest march.

I handed the wrappers to the forensic tech with the evidence bags and rendezvoused back with Scully in the kitchen. The detective in charge, by the name of Bradley, was pleasantly deferential to us Feds, unlike his Big Apple brethren.

"We're twins," I said before he could ask.

"Right," Bradley didn't skip a beat, "at about five this afternoon we got a cliched anonymous call that your brother was dead from a pay phone in the Independence National Park down the street. Seven
zillion fingerprints on that telephone if we even bothered to dust it. We got up here, found your brother as you see him, and your business card was on his refrigerator under a magnet. We called you since an FBI agent's business card is not de rigeur in a homosexual S&M killing."


"Is that what you think it is?" Scully asked.

"It happens. On occasion, you get a couple who aren't well educated in the safety protocols of this particular form of recreation and people get hurt, people get dead. Then we get an uproar in the community that law enforcement doesn't care because the victim is gay or because the victim has an exotic sexual need."

Bradley shrugged.

"Now with this one, because of his activities and frankly he was a real pain in the ass with the Aids Awareness Action Squad, they're going to cry murder."

"They'd be right." I said and pointed back at the bedroom, "I found condom wrappers in the bedroom, did your people find condoms anywhere?"

"No."

"And you won't. Our killer is smarter than to leave such useful genetic material around," Scully offered.

"Or he's collecting semen."

Bradley looked at me as though I had suggested that eating children with a bernaise sauce was a good idea.

"We just haven't found them yet, that's all."

"Keep up the good work. Call me if you find anything. You have my number."

It seemed like someone else did as well. Ten numbers. The question, as always, was who.

12I am given up by traitors. I talk wildly, I have lost my wits, I and nobody else am the greatest traitor. I went myself first to the headland, my own hands carried me there.

Ian Dubler was committed to a hospital up in Scarsdale. It's a good thing New York is a big state; otherwise they all might have bumped into one another. Ian had supposedly signed the commitment papers voluntarily, probably the way putting your hands behind your head and spreading your legs is voluntary when the cop tells you to do it.

Mulder read through five years' worth of psych evaluations, flipping through them with scanner-like efficiency. I stuck with what I knew best, reviewing the equally thick files describing the physical manifestations of Ian's self-destructiveness. The hospital administrator and the hospital's lawyer hovered over us nervously.

"What are those scars?" I asked the hospital administrator, pointing to the white lines in the pictures of Ian's skin. Thin white lines on the back of the neck, the front of the chest, below the ear, in the soft flesh of the upper arm, below the buttocks, and at least five other places.
"Ian has been attempting to kill himself for many years," she said. "We haven't always been as watchful as we should have been, he's a very bright man, especially when it comes to new ways to cut himself."

"He tried to commit suicide by cutting himself on the back of the neck?" I asked skeptically. "That incision doesn't seem very long or deep. Are you sure he did it to himself?"

"Who else would have done it?"

Ah yes, she lived in a world without conspiracy, I'd forgotten. Naturally there were no X-rays and thus no evidence of implants.

The case worker pointed out that seeing Mulder would probably upset Ian and undo whatever small progress that had been made recently. From what I could see reflected in Mulder's face they were deluding themselves, progress for Ian would involve a spade and a closed coffin, but I wasn't here to piss people off.

So I faced Ian alone, the one-way mirror behind me so Ian could only see one reflection of himself rather than two. When the attendant brought Ian in I saw the terrible reality of what Mulder always had the potential to become: a pajama-clad mental patient bloated and puffy from too many starchy foods and sporting an institutional pallor. Ian settled his bathrobe around his chest with an aristocratic shrug of his shoulders, a talent he must have learned from long familiarity with the restraints, and assumed the chair across from me. Mad or not, the intelligence hummed behind the hazel eyes.

"I think I dreamed about you the other night," he said.

My skin crept.

"Really?"

"You're quite lovely, pity about the tattoo though, it doesn't suit you," he smiled and leaned back in the chair, crossing his long legs in an appallingly Mulderlike gesture, "You know I've never actually had sex. I've been locked up since I was twelve and the dating possibilities have much to be desired. In Texas they were very careful, I was never molested by anyone who didn't have authorization to do it, but here I fear my long-held virginity may disappear one night if some janitor gets horny."

He looked up at the mirror over my shoulder while I tried to kill the mothbeating of fear in my stomach. How the fuck did he know about my tattoo? It wasn't as though that was common knowledge or mentioned on any file of an official nature. Unlike Roche, Ian had no access to the Internet or to the outside world other than the television.

"He's here, isn't he?" Ian asked.

"Yes."

"Which one?"

I had to think about that for a moment.

"Mine. We just want to ask you some questions about your--illness." "You won't hurt me?" he gave me a flash of distrust that, coming from Mulder's face, made my chest hurt.

"I'll try not to. Do you know anything about the Project?"

I caught the almost imperceptible cringe, lush black lashes dropping to cover the fear in his eyes.
was important to remember that this man was not Mulder. I could not do this interrogation if I kept mistaking Ian for Mulder.

I leaned forward and put my hand out across the tiny table and was able to brush against his lower arm with my fingertips.

"Careful," he said, "don't you know that madness is contagious? That's why we're not allowed outside."

"The Project?"

"But hasn't Jason told you? Jason does all my public relations, I am one of Roush's assets after all--or was until the drugs depressed my libido too much."

"Tell me what they did to you." I kept my voice even, letting a tinge of warmth creep into it.

"Everything," he said. "The implants are all gone and now I don't hear the Greys any more. I have heard the aliens singing, each to each. I do not think they will sing for me."

"You were used for communication purposes?" I remained agnostic on the existence of technologically superior aliens, but I wanted to coax Ian into becoming less cryptic.

He shook his head. "I was a radio receiver but I burned out, burned out five years ago, too much static you know. And it's no good if you can't choose the station, Dr. Mann tried so hard but she could never find the right knob. I think my knobs were broken off, if you know what I mean." He leered at me.

I frowned, which appeared to amuse him. "If you want me to tell you that Roush used my body and my man-juices for an extended period of years, until neither mind nor body would take any more abuse, I could say that. But what do you think you'll learn from me? That your Lindsay is the lucky one?" I didn't understand for a moment, and then realized: of course from his perspective they wouldn't be "Mulders." It was all how you looked at it.

Ian's hands fluttered against their restraints like birds with broken wings. "If you want to believe in fairy tales of safety, go ahead. All I know is that I feel the other lights going out and I don't know why I wasn't allowed to be the first. I suspect Jason is up to his old tricks, the big bully. As flies to wanton boys are we to the Greys, they kill us for their sport."

I looked helplessly into the mirror, wanting some clue. Mulder would be able to get through to him, wouldn't he? "I'm trying to save lives," I finally settled on, "and I'm trying to prevent what happened to you from happening to other children, other men and women."

He cackled. "Too fucking late, dear! Jason would never have given you my name if it didn't advance his purposes, and I can guarantee that his purposes aren't yours." He leaned forward conspiratorially. "We're blood brothers you know. The bees are almost ready to be released. But to be the Queen's consort, Jason has to get rid of all the other drones. He's acting on his own in this, that's your one hope, the Lindsay line suffers from almost complete azoospermia and no one but Jason has any interest in decreasing the potential supply still further."

He looked at me more closely, and I was drawn into those eyes, which were at that moment the exact shade of mahogany that Mulder's had been when he'd been zoned out on the ketamine and we'd first had sex. "I wouldn't worry much about the condoms if I were you," he said, and grimaced a parody of Mulder's seductive pout. "If I get out of here, do you wanna go out sometime?"

Then he lunged forward and would have managed to split his head open on the table if it hadn't been
that soft scratchy plastic that children's furniture is made from. Instead he just bounced back up, looking disappointed but not surprised, and grinned at me again.

"We're liars all. Believe none of us!"

And then the orderlies were back in the room, picking him up despite his clever use of passive resistance techniques, and they dragged him out into the hallway and there was nothing but whiteness and canvas-padded walls. He began to sing. "Seven little Indian boys chopping up sticks, one chopped himself in halves and then there were six."

I followed them out into the hallway, just in time to see Mulder step out of the observation room. Ian spotted him immediately and began to laugh. He laughed as the orderlies took him away, the sound bouncing off the scuffed white walls. The look that Mulder gave me afterwards was one of acidic pain.

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Scully gave me the poor-baby look that is usually the preface to her version of comfort sex. The motel was the first we'd found on the way back from the hospital. The weakness of our selection principle was evident as soon as I got a look at the 'seventies decor, lots of orangey mandalas on the carpet and bedspread, and smelled the ingrained cigarette smoke from the heavy drapes.

Even in this setting, the thought of comfort sex was not unappealing. Better than Cheetos, in any event, which was the best thing in the vending machine.

I think I was rooted like a tree in the middle of the floor for a long time before I felt her arms insinuate themselves around my waist, her shoulders and cheek and torso press up against my back.

Sometimes Scully mothers me, if I understand the term in its conventional sense and not the sense with which I am most intimately familiar. She does the other too, but this time it felt more like a Campbell's soup commercial than a Mulder family drama.

This is not inherently a bad thing. If I were truly Scully's lover we would have many more roles for one another. I am her chauffeur, her goad, her inflatable sex toy and now her sugar daddy. I would like to be by turns her servant and her master, her confidant, her playmate, her helpmeet. I want to be her pantheon and her congregation, cook, thief, wife, and lover. We make so many boxes and rules for people, but surely a man like me, a man with the madness of ten men, could overflow all such artificial boundaries for her. It is the ability to play more than one role and not the content of the roles on particular nights that matters, and I suppose that as always I hoped that tonight, just once, I would get it right.

Yes, I am describing infinite need but in some lights I think Scully goes on forever.

I turned in her arms and gathered her in to me like a bouquet.

Tonight's theme was skin. She didn't resist when I slid my hands under her shirt and lifted it away from her body. For a while petting her while she hummed low in her throat was enough. My hands felt enormous against her doll's frame as I covered every inch of her, trying to read her Braille messages with my fingers and failing. We were still standing as she stepped out of the jeans and panties and pressed herself close to me. Her skin burned like magnesium as I palmed her shoulders, her elbows, down her waist and around the miraculous tightness of her ass.

She's too short for anything but groping when we're both vertical, so I chose a bed at random and led her to it. Soft kitty-like sounds, the thrum of an animal engine, vibrated in her throat.
Maybe I needed a mammalian pet, fish were obviously not doing the stress-reduction job.

She was with me in flashes, in between the scratchy image of Ian distressing her as I watched helplessly through the one-way glass. Stroking, rolling, reaching and holding. Her hands tugging ineffectually at my pants, her mouth dampening my shirt so that I could feel it wet and heavy like her kiss against my shoulder.

I wanted to stretch her on a rack so that there would be more of her, enough of her to surround me the way I surrounded her. I wanted to turn her into a Klein bottle, the kind that only has one continuous surface that is both inside and outside, so that I could touch everything that constitutes Scully.

When I pulled away for the inevitable prophylactic the pain of losing contact was almost enough to destroy my arousal, but then her cinnamon sugar breasts brushed over my lips again and I was lost. I came too quickly, both of us wanted to get through the act with a minimum of fuss, but I needed more from her and she wasn't unwilling.

My tongue surrounded her. I traveled from clavicle to belly button to ankle, and held tight as she jerked against my mouth when I traced the tendons in her feet. She came again, groaning, when I took her toes into my mouth and I was very proud; I hadn't gotten that sort of reaction from her in a while.

I had my head between her legs, tasting her, before the contractions stopped.

I left Scully draped across the bed like the pelt of a wildcat and returned to the mental hospital. I still had the fake Jason ID, and Jason was next of kin; that and a bunch of dead presidents got the night orderly to let me into Ian's room. The man I'd bribed was nervous enough to stay around to make sure that Ian didn't go all Hannibal Lecter on me and bite my face off, but he held himself far enough back that he couldn't overhear our conversation.

"Hello, beautiful," Ian said as soon as I turned on the lights. He was strapped into his bed and I could see from the dilation of his eyes that he was floating like a supertanker on a sea of antipsychotics, but he was reasonably lucid for all that. Maybe it was habituation.

"How long have you known about the twins?"

He bit his lip and it began to bleed. I suppressed the urge to mirror the action. God, all this whiteness could make anyone go insane, and I was at least able to pace.

"That's a nice way to greet your long-lost brother...what's your name, by the way?"

"Mulder," I said.

He frowned. "They never got to M, I thought?"

Now we were getting somewhere. "Who didn't?"

"Them...the ubiquitous, invisible Them." He laughed, bright and childlike, when I shuddered. "Oh come on, that's practically screaming from your mind."

I approached the bed and knelt so that we were merely inches apart. Up close, he didn't look exactly like the man I saw in rearview mirrors; the cheeks were puffier and the hair dirty. It must be difficult to wash him in full restraints and I could tell that the staff wouldn't always remember to try. "Can you read my mind?"
Another gout of laughter exploded from him; warm spittle sprayed my face and I blinked, feeling once again the credulous fool everyone else assumed me to be. I'd thought Ian at least would respect that openness about me, but as usual I was wrong.

"My mind, your mind, who can tell? Do you know your own mind, M--you must be *Fox*, that's right, the Fibbie."

"Who told you that?" Wear them down with compassion and incessant questions, that's the approved strategy. I only wished that I knew whether this was interrogation or self-analysis I was undergoing.

Ian licked the blood from his lip contemplatively. I followed the pink gleam of his tongue. He was smart enough to be dead, if that's what he wanted. Why wasn't he dead? How had the staff here kept him alive for so long?

He turned his head as far away from me as he could and sniffled. I could see that he had a mole about an inch below his ear, and I reached up to feel the spot on my own neck. The skin was smooth, but it also *wasn't*, in the same dreamlike way that the light in John Lee Roche's dreams had been there and not-there.

"I told your little friend that the drugs ex'ed out my libido a long time ago," he said as if in answer to my question. "But I didn't mention that the harvesting continued for a while thereafter. Have you ever heard of electroejaculation? Used on cattle, and sometimes on men who are brain-dead or newly dead. I wouldn't recommend it as one of the greater sexual pleasures. Well, not for the subject, anyway. Jason..."

I put my hand to his chin and tilted it back towards me, almost bouncing on the balls of my feet in my excitement. His paper-dry skin crinkled underneath my fingertips, and I jerked as if goosed myself. We weren't exactly matter and antimatter, there was no need for a containment field, but nonetheless touching him was distressing. I felt ghostly worms along my own jaw and shook my head, but I didn't let my brother go.

"Tell me about Jason," I directed.

He moaned like the wind at the top of a skyscraper. An image came to me: Jason, placing his/my hand over my/his hand on my/his cock, urging me to give in to him, give it to him, the world black and white as it is in the cameras whose lenses I can always see tracking us. The little red lights flashing when the cameras pan around the room provide the only color in the world. I love you Ian and his breath hot on the side of my neck. And it doesn't matter that they like to watch, maybe they don't *like* to watch, watching is what they do. It's inevitable so just relax and enjoy it, Ian, I'm your brother and I love you, his hand so knowledgeable and swift and the contrast between this overt pleasure and everything else in the world so stark that there's no reason to deny him. I love you Ian. I will take care of you. For this gift, all he asks is my duty and my salvation and my love, someone's got to make it out of here and it's obvious it can't be you, it should be me he says, so why don't you just give it up? I'm your brother and I love you. I will take care of you. Forever.

And the orderly was picking me up off the floor as I struggled away from him, unable to be touched by someone who was not me. I realized that if I had not been nearly forty and freshly fucked I would have another hard-on and simultaneously that Ian was seizing.

I raised myself up like a drunk and hurled myself on Ian. Underneath me, his bloated body felt like a waterbed. I prayed that he was still tuned to the same channel as before. Dimly, I felt something stir in my head. I clicked on my mental file folder and opened it.

Scully asleep, her hair burning the pillow, smiling at me in Alaska, her legs in sheer stockings,
bending over a filing cabinet in our office months after we'd met and me hard as a rock refusing to
get up from my desk, her cool fingers touching my forehead that horrible week in Rhode Island, her
stone frozen face in San Diego, the curve of her spine, the elegant tilt of her head, that "get a grip
Mulder" look she patented, the way she felt around me, her smell, and taste, and the way that her
breath hitched in my ear the moment before she came, and the way that she looks up at me from her
laptop in a thousand hotels, the small smiles, the ketchup on her cheek, and that derisive snort I've
heard more times than there are numbers for . . .

Hands grabbed me and pulled me away.

I staggered out into the hall as the orderly busied himself covering his ass, calling for help and
pushing me toward the exit.

I walked for a long while before I was ready to flag down a cab. I thought I understood a little bit
about what Ian was trying to tell me in that flood-of-consciousness delivery. My current theory was
that, unlike the others of us, Ian and Jason had been raised together, just to see what would happen.

And sure enough there was a cannibalistic twin, only he didn't eat flesh, he didn't reabsorb parts of
the other twin into his body. Regardless of what you thought about Melissa Ephesian's worldview, I
suspected that Bill and Tina Mulder's child did not have enough of a soul to be spread out among ten
copies, and Jason had eaten whatever part-soul lived in Ian's head in order to survive.

He had also had a sexual relationship with Ian, never mind whether Ian's claims to purity, which I
could even accept, were technically true.

Was that incest or masturbation?

He ain't heavy, he's my brother.

Call the cannibalism a metaphor, but I was willing to bet that Jason had overborne Ian enough to free
himself to rise in the Roush hierarchy. With an alter ego in the basement that was perfectly open to
whatever horrible experiment was proposed, Jason was free to look after his own interests.. Weren't
his interests also Ian's, weren't they the same person?

Ergo, I was the same person.

No. Not even close.

13 The hiss of the surgeon's knife, the gnawing teeth of his saw, Wheeze, chick, swash of falling
blood, short wild scream, and tinge, dull, tapering groan. These so, these irretrievable.

George Naxos. I hadn't heard of him, which was a little surprising since Canada doesn't have that
many card-carrying serial killers. Five or six in the last twenty years, about the number you'd expect
for Ohio. Serial killing is an almost uniquely American phenomenon, like baseball and apple pie. So
when they do catch one outside our borders, ISU tends to hear about it; we're often consulted during
the hunt. Or the officers who worked the case call us afterwards, trying to find explanation or
expiation or whatever it is you need after you witness the work of a man who has a compelling urge
to reenact a Bosch nightmare on human canvases. And ISU cc's most of that to me, at first because
Patterson thought he could guilt me into coming back and then later because no one ever thought to
rescind the order.

I suspected, looking at the picture, that someone had interrupted the transmission of this particular
report to ISU. I suspect John Douglas, as the son of a bitch had never liked me. He probably had a
good old laugh when he saw the photo.
I was really beginning to dislike that nose. It bred true, along with the firestarting, bedwetting, and animal mutilation. George had brown hair just a shade lighter than mine. In the prison picture his eyes looked muddy brown, but mine did too in the right light.

George had made his name in Ontario. He liked nurses a lot. He'd wait in hospital parking lots, outside of old folks' homes, near health clinics.

I'd read the file and tried to keep Scully from reading it herself by summarizing. "He raped them anally and then stabbed them in the abdomen, waited for them to die, then dressed them back up in their nice white outfits and left them to rot in graveyards, draped over the headstones of girls who'd died young, usually about eight or nine years old."

She shuddered, her eyes rounded like Little Orphan Annie's. Not much freaks Scully out, but sisters will still do it.

"But wait, that's not the spooky part. It's true that the woman who raised him--I'd prefer not to call her 'mother' just to keep an open mind about this--was a nurse, and that she may have abused him. I wonder if they looked for that in the adoptive parents, or if it was just a side benefit of using the kind of people who'd participate in the Project? Anyway, the spooky part is this--George didn't have an eight-year-old sister who died or disappeared at a crucial point in his psychosexual development."

Scully didn't need reminding that she knew someone else who matched that description. She blinked, and I almost heard her swallow. "That doesn't mean that he was...picking up signals from you or anything like that, Mulder."

"I'm sorry, your Ph.D. is in what? That may work for Dr. Schlesinger on the radio, when the callers can't tell a physiotherapist from a psychologist, but I can assure you that there should be an eight-year-old sister involved. Or at least a neighbor child, but that's not true either, according to all the interviews in his hometown. When he was twelve he just fell into a deep depression, nearly catatonic, and then one day he woke up and everything was fine, except for a slight shortage of neighborhood pets."

"And your theory is that the two of you were somehow connected because of your genetic relationship?"

I suppose that it's a major step forward that Scully wasn't contesting the likelihood of said genetic relationship, but that didn't manage to decrease her overall skepticism level.

"You know all the twin studies. Separated at birth and they end up in the same jobs, married to women with the same names, driving the same cars. And how could you forget the Eves? *They* knew what the others were doing all the way across the country, and they may well have come from the same lab I was assembled in."

I could see the synapses clicking over in her head. Scully always had the most trouble with people who had strange powers. Full-fledged physical mutations, even the man who was cancer, didn't bother her nearly as much. She didn't like the combination of apparent normality with exceptionality; maybe it reminded her too much of her own condition.

"I can't deny that you might feel some kind of connection to him...but without understanding the mechanism we can't rule out coincidence, or even deliberate replication of your trauma by the men behind this experiment. Just because the neighbors didn't know doesn't mean that there weren't visitors in the middle of the night, tormenting this child for their own power-crazed agendas."

Wow, Scully *was* beginning to sound a lot like me, at least me five years ago when my theories
were beginning to get wild.

"But why," she continued, looking at me, "would they want to replicate the trauma? Why would they, as you suggested, choose parents likely to be abusive?" And what did Bill and Tina do to you in the middle of the night, her eyes asked, the compassion as unwanted as it was ill-timed. I would have explained that Bill and Tina, upper-class assimilated tightasses that they were, never needed to use their hands on me. Both of them were brilliant, after all, and words were more than enough. Never touched me at all after age four, as far as I can remember. I even put my own band-aids on.

But enough about you, Agent Mulder. "Childhood trauma, especially that extended over a period of time, is known to produce dissociative states in many survivors. But I can't really explain why anyone would go to the trouble of creating all these children and then attempt to guarantee that they'd be trembling on the ragged edge of insanity all their lives. I think it's more plausible that whatever psychic connection exists, exists as a side effect only, perhaps an unwanted one."

The guards marched George in, forcing his shackled legs to move by kicking him when he wouldn't shuffle his feet. They dumped him in the chair and left, sparing only a few seconds to gawp at me.

George kept his eyes on the floor until the door closed, and then immediately turned to look at Scully, probably because he could smell her.

"Hello," he smiled at Scully. She took her standard position by the door, arms crossed like cannon, staring down at the seated man for the psychological advantage.

"She's not your type," I said bluntly and swung the chair around so I could straddle it, like the Marlboro man would have done. "She's got her M.D.. and you like the R.N.s."

"Doctors'll do in a pinch," he said and finally looked at me. Then he flinched. "Who the fuck are you?"

"That's no way to greet family," I said and grinned, feeling another shred of sanity pull loose and drift to the floor like dandruff. In person, the resemblance was almost complete. If he hadn't had the tattoo circling his throat, a barbed wire collar with one artfully done drop of blood, he could have made it past the desk at the Hoover building. And maybe even then, they all knew I was crazy and maybe the tattoo would seem in character. "Has anyone ever asked you about the Project?"

"I made a vase in pottery class the other day," he offered, and I reminded myself that the asinine intelligence had followed the nose as well.

Scully took over, and she did me proud. "Have you ever discovered strange scars on your body for whose origin you cannot account? Have you ever experienced 'missing time'? Do you have any memories of being 'contacted' by strange visitors? Heard voices in your head?"

He just laughed. "Is this another test? Honey, you're welcome to examine my body, I've got plenty to show you."

I reached out and grabbed his chin, forcing him to watch me. "You couldn't get it up with the ones who were live and willing, George, your bravado does not impress me. Your cock would shrivel to the size of an ant's if you actually got a chance with a real woman. Now answer the questions."

George tried to laugh again but it was working about as well as his other social skills. "Fuck, I don't know. I've always been crazy. Sure I see things, I guess, I hear things and the doctors here, their faces keep changing, sometimes while I watch. But no one else sees it. Anyway what does it matter? Nuts or not, I'll be here 'til I die."
We left with renewed exhortations to his jailers to watch him carefully. This was Canada, home of the Mounties, surely the corruption wouldn't extend this far. I almost hoped that it did; to have George survive the thinning of the Mulder herd would be the grossest of insults.

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My phone rang just after we got through the door. Mulder had already dropped his shoes and tie in roughly the same place on the floor.

I kicked my own shoes off as I hit the connect button. "Scully."

"It's Zippy, Dana."

"What is it?"

"Your friend Ian Dubler killed himself. Somehow he got free of his restraints after the two of you left. He grabbed a guard's gun and blew his face away."

"Are you sure it was voluntary?"

"Look, I believe that someone is out to get these guys, but from what the hospital told me about Ian's record, he was only following up on a long-held ambition. I'd guess that if there was any outside interference it was just helping him get free long enough to kill himself."

That made sense to me. "Anything else?"

"No ma'am," he said, sounding offended. I'd gotten too used to stripped-down communication with Mulder, I wasn't paying enough attention to the niceties of conversation.

"Thank you for calling us," I said, trying to sound appreciative and interested. "We had a...rough conversation with George Naxos. We're still a little shaky."

I could hear Zippy's choked laugh above the static. "Spooky's always a little shaky. I'm surprised you let anything get to you."

"Sometimes it's not a matter of letting, Zippy."

"Yeah," he said and then there was nothing but an open line.

"Who's dead now?" Mulder asked as soon as I put the phone down.

"Ian Dubler," I reported.

Mulder had that posture that never failed to terrify and annoy me simultaneously. He was hunched over, his arms wrapped around himself, self-comforting. I walked over to the bed and put my hand on his shoulder.

He shuddered away. "Don't you have something better to do than watch me fall apart?"

"I don't want you to fall apart."

Mulder laughed once, a bark as bitter as his semen.

I guess I deserved that. I'd hurt him badly, in a number of interrelated ways. The familiar resentment surged through my veins, how dare he rely on me like that. I wanted to tell him that I'd never encouraged him to love me.
But as soon as I thought that, as always, the pitiless instructor in me, the one who did autopsies for demonstration purposes, refused to accept it. Didn't you? it asked. What did you expect would happen when you stood by him and it was obvious that he's never believed in anyone before?

"I'm sorry," I said and thought I could hear Mulder's voice saying the same words, apologizing for anything and everything, apologizing to the stars and the sea and the wind.

"I'm going to take a shower now," he said, and I took it as my signal to leave. This wasn't over, but I just couldn't face him, not right then.

****

The shower that I took was long and hot, hot enough to make my cock burn and forget about other kinds of wet heat for awhile. Other men may take cold showers to cool their ardor, but I always preferred burning it out of myself. In the steamy bathroom mirror I considered my reflection. The shadows under my eyes had been darker and/or lighter, but my cheekbones still had that sharply unhealthy look. I swallowed a couple aspirin, a couple Tagamet, and an Ambien to get me through the night.

If I lasted the night. I dredged up the next verse of Ian's little ditty. "Six little Indian boys playing with a hive/A bumblebee stung one and then there were five." I was vaguely grateful that the murders were not in fact tracking the rhyme; that would just be too baroque. And if it's not baroque, don't fix it.

Whoa. I wasn't just flying, I was in low earth orbit.

I slithered between the rough hotel sheets and flicked on the television. The pain in my gut was slowly tapering off to a grinding ache. That I could deal with. While the pain ground, I surfed through the cable channels. A few minutes of surfing came up with paydirt -- one of the cable channels was playing a James Bond movie. I would have lied if I told you I knew the name of that particular movie, but it was the one with Plenty O'Toole in it. That was the girl's name at any rate. I never forget a face.

Before Plenty ended up floating in a Las Vegas pool like an inflatable doll after one of Hefner's backyard parties, I was snoozing on my back and lost the thread of Bond's plot. The television clicking off roused me from my semi-conscious state in time to enjoy feeling her body wriggle onto the lumpish hotel mattress next to me.

And it wasn't Plenty O'Toole.

Warm hands reached for me in the darkness and I gave myself up to be consumed.

Her fingers traced over the skin of my chest and I breathed the way I had on those occasions I'd had a tracheotomy tube removed. Her nose was cool as a puppy's against my collarbone and her tongue as hot. Truth to be told, I would have been just as content to stay intertwined like that until morning, but milady was not terribly enamored of the sleeping-together-without-sex option, having tried it and found it wanting.

I flailed out and managed to find the lamp on the bedside table. Between the drugs and the damsel it took me another two tries to actually flick it on, and then I could see as I dug around through my toiletries kit for the condoms. I guess I knew all along that she was coming, so to speak, or I would have left it in the bathroom.

Scully took the condom from my hand and gently smoothed it on, like she was bandaging me from
I left the light on as she rode me. There's nothing more erotic than watching Scully's breasts change shape as she slides up and down above me. The way they sway and stretch, moving with animal innocence as she breathes, the skin soft as goosedown contrasting with the crinkled cellophane of her nipples.

When I came it was like something in a dream.

****

He'd taken something, I realized, feeling the narcotic softness of his muscles under my body. Mulder's sleep disorder is such common knowledge that it practically has its own website. I'd encouraged him to take the Ambien that the latest doctor had proscribed. Now I was cuddling a rapidly snoozing Mulder when all I wanted to do was break past the barriers of my mind and become a creature of body only. I wanted sex and he wanted to sleep. Typical of him to turn the gender cliche inside out.

He's got wonderful skin, like the belly of a frog, so smooth and practically feminine. He even smells good when he's clean. All in all Mulder is really not that poor of an example of the North American Male when you can divorce the Jungian nightmare inside his head from his body. I didn't climb into his bed to talk either.

Under the stiff hotel sheets, I smoothed my hand down the carefully maintained slope of his abdomen and reached for his cock and found it half-hard and stirring restlessly under my touch. He buried his face in my hair and sighed, one hand caressing my breast in an abstracted way. So the brain was starting to shut down but the lower centers were still operating. I slipped my body on top of his and kissed him, nipping at his lower lip and feeling his hands polish my back in French curves. He murmured pointless endearments into my throat, clinging to me as though I was buoyant wreckage that would somehow keep him from being pulled under into a dark sea. He had that much wrong, I was the dark sea.

I took the condom from him, desperate not to think about it, and flowed over him, swallowing him in my liquid depths. I began to rock with an oceanic rhythm. Poor Mulder gets so seasick that he'll never know the helpless passion of riding an unquiet sea outside of my bed. I tossed between swells, bracing my arms on either side of his head while he looked up at me in dilated amazement, helpless. The whitecaps of ecstasy finally broke over both our heads and sent us spiraling down to the bottom. He clung to me and pulled me under with him. The water filled my lungs and wiped my brain clean and I surrendered.

****

George Naxos disappeared from his cell that night, while Scully and I were playing hide-the-gun. There were a few drops of his blood on his bunk, nothing else, and the man who shared his cell had been choked to death.

Jason insisted that we return to his compound. "You haven't done as well as I'd hoped protecting the others," he said which had to be the understatement of the year. "The least we can do is watch each other's back."

Scully's reaction was predictable.

"Mulder, that's nuts!"
The fact that she was sitting in bed with the sheet barely covering her breasts reduced her authority somewhat. My morning peace offering of hotel cafe coffee in her hand, she glared at me from across the orange monstrosity of a bedspread.

"And on what logical deduction do you base your professional opinion, Dr. Scully?"

I sat on the edge of the bed, beyond striking range, the sweat from my morning run cooling on my skin in the air conditioned room.

"Obviously I'm stupid, enlighten me."

"Doesn't it strike you as being the least bit duplicitous that Jason is in contact with your mother? Jason and not Samantha? You'd think Samantha would have at least told Jason to tell your mother that she was all right. Then he gives you all the information on your twin brothers. Why not before? Years before. How long has he been in charge of PR at Roush? Why didn't he round them up or make contact with them himself? A well-placed bribe opens more doors than your ID. Why didn't he use his innumerable connections to make contact himself?"

She was getting agitated; flushing straight down to her cleavage which made concentrating difficult. I took the coffee cup away from her before she spilled it and put it on the bedside table.

"My God, Mulder, They took Samantha, They created Emily and the clones, and They created Miranda," she stopped and took a deep breath," and he sends you to do his fetch and carry like a good little minion. He's Roush. He's Them. And you won't see it!"

These things had been floating in my head for days, like ink spilled in water, swirling around and darkening everything. I hadn't told her about my late night visit to Ian, but in that uncanny way that she had, Scully had managed to dig a claw into an exposed nerve.

"Q.E.D." I said.

"Q.E.D. my ass. You don't want it to be true so you can't even accept the possibility that you're being a patsy. You want to believe so badly that you'll blindly follow any bullshit breadcrumb trail even if it leads to a cliff."

Short of stuffing my fingers in my ears, I was sorely limited in strategies to cut Scully off in mid-rant. I hitched myself closer to her on the bed and tried to focus whatever seductive charm I could muster and beam it into the furiously sparking blue eyes across from me.

"Stop that," she growled, and I looked for a furiously slashing feline tail.

"Stop what?" I said in my most ingenious tone and put my hand on the warm column of her thigh under the bed sheet.

Muscles jumped underneath my fingers.

"We're going to see Jason and Samantha. End statement."

I am the free companion, I bivouac by invading watchfires I turn the bridegroom out of bed and stay with the bride myself; I tighten her all night to my thighs and lips.

In Xanadu did Kubla Kahn. . .

I really needed to watch the rest of Citizen Kane one day.
The house was Southfork all over again. The Lindsays had run Roush for generations and every penny of ill-gotten wealth went into the enormous house with the manicured carpet of water-thirsty grass surrounding it. The driver of the Town Car that Jason had sent to the airport for us dropped us off at the front door and Jason emerged, dressed like the lord of the manor Texas style, black turtleneck, jeans and cowboy boots. I had never seen him in the flesh before and the contrast between this confident Ralph Lauren creature with his sculpted nose and expensive haircut compared to my rumpled and weary partner made my throat hurt. Was this what Mulder had the potential to be had Tina and Bill not done such an amazingly good job of fucking up his head? I had to wonder.

There was a woman with him, all points and angles in a skimpy black miniskirt and a tight silk blouse. I assumed this was Samantha and I felt a momentary twinge of envy for her hard little body and brightly intelligent eyes. This was the woman Mulder had sought all his life, and she was about as warm and sisterly as a raven pulling at carrion. Maybe it was my female jealousy rearing its hairsprayed head. After all, she was his sister, not an old flame.

Then again the resemblance to Phoebe was less reassuring than I might have hoped.

Jason took me to his stables; he was a horse-breeder in his spare time. I wasn't terribly interested in horseflesh but I welcomed the chance to observe the man without his distracting reflection.

The stables smelled of damp hay and horsesweat, with hints of ammonia and manure underneath. Everything was darker and more enclosed than I'd expected. Could horses really prosper in this hot small space?

Jason didn't try to touch me as we walked through the stables to a larger pen. "You might be interested in this," he commented as we came upon a man leading a lovely chestnut mare into the pen. "I've been working on a means to induce estrus in the mares on demand, so that we don't have to depend on nature's own schedule."

The man produced a large syringe, uncapped it, and squirted a little of the clear liquid inside in order to get rid of any air bubbles. The mare shimmied and sidestepped, but he had her firmly under control and she didn't get far. She whinnied and tossed her head in anger as he injected her.

He hitched the mare to the side of the pen and left. Jason looked on with approval while the mare shuddered as if she'd suddenly been dumped in the Arctic. Eyes rolling, nostrils flaring, she flounced, her mane snapping around her like a fretful teenager's.

The man returned with an equally impressive stallion. His color was slightly darker than hers, the color of the tan M&Ms that aren't made anymore, and I could imagine the needlelike stiffness of his hair as the man patted his side to steady him. The mare sniffed the air again and pawed the ground with her front hooves. They watched each other warily as the man released the mare from her bindings.

He covered her instantly, eight hundred pounds of muscle and bone crashing down into her. Snorting and chuffing as if he were doing something really impressive, he arched his neck like a flag in a high wind. Anything that got in his way had better be prepared to do battle, because getting laid was at stake. I thought of the drugs coursing through the mare's body, causing the release of hormones scheduled for later delivery, filling her reproductive organs with blood and readying her for his invasion.

Jason smiled at me when I turned away. "Her colt will be worth every penny I spent on this formula. Clients like it when you can guarantee delivery at the right time."

"And if she's late giving birth there's always ways to hurry it up," I commented.
He blinked disingenuously. "Of course." Every time I looked at him I did a mental stutter. I expected the nose to have its familiar dented look, not this toned, sharpened profile perfect enough to open doors and legs worldwide.

I decided that I didn't want the rest of the tour. I told Jason this and he smiled charmingly and pointed out that it was dinnertime.

****

Dinner was quite a scene, the four of us in Jason's enormous dining room, with enough silver and crystal on the table to finance the overthrow of a small country.

I watched Jason eat; he was polite and economical and he used his left hand, all very different from me, and I was grateful enough for the difference that I would have said the grace over meals if asked.

Apparently nobody in my family was very religious, though. Why would they be? The Maker of the fruit of the vine had nothing on the maker of the fruit of Christina Mulder's loins.

Scully watched Sam with the careful gaze of a cougar contemplating an eagle.

"Mulder says you're head of genetic research at Roush, what exactly does that constitute?"

Jason grinned proprietarily as Sam sniffed and preened. "It's complicated," my sister said.

"I'm patient," my lovely little liar replied, her face as still as a pond on a windless night.

"I supervise our various avenues of research, ranging from modified retroviruses to attack various forms of disease--including cancer--to more elaborate manipulations that attempt to eliminate imperfections from genetic structure."

"*Whose* genetic structure?"

Sam smiled. "Most of the work is carried out on specially bred hairless rats, I've patented three kinds in my own name, but we're also using rhesus monkeys for some of the work that's near completion."

"So you still insist that Roush has no connection to experiments on human beings?"

"Of course we use humans in the very end stages, the FDA requires it. All our testing is done on volunteers, though, following the standard protocols for informed consent."

Scully clamped down on her knife, then released it. "I don't believe you. I don't think the women in the warehouse were volunteers."

Jason broke in. "Agent Scully, I believe I've already conveyed to you our shock and disappointment to find that this man--Crawford?--had misused his position with us in such a horrible and destructive manner. Falsifying records, hiding his activities from us--that warehouse was never meant for anything but storage, which is why he got away with his--well, his madness--for so long. We deeply regret Roush's tangential involvement in the matter, and I assure you that we will do everything in our power to assist the bereaved families of these women."

"And the hired guards? Had he corrupted them too?"

Jason toyed with his fork. "I believe that the guards had no idea what was going on inside that warehouse. If they did they would of course have reported it to the proper authorities. He told them not to look inside and they didn't."
"Just following orders?" I suggested and he raised an eyebrow.

"Fox, I don't think you should be so flippant. Good men, men who'd worked for this company for decades, died in that firefight. They died because they were loyal and they believed in Roush. As I do, as you should. I'm told you've sold your stock?"

"I have very aggressive brokers," I took another drink of the wine to give myself some time. "You know, your story would sound a lot better if I hadn't seen what happened in Bethel."

He shrugged. "It will sound fine to the rest of the world. Unless of course you want to go public with the tape." Scully stiffened like a starched shirt. "I don't think people *like* women who kill their children all that much, what's your opinion?"

"I think," I said carefully, "that any more conversation and I'll lose my appetite."

La Familia Mulder was starting to make the Borgias look like the Waltons.

****

After dinner, Jason disappeared, saying that he had to go a fancy party where he could charm the mayor or something like that. I could tell that Mulder wanted me out of the way, he had a family reunion to attend and I wasn't a blood relation.

Little did he know.

I scurried upstairs to hide until the urge to confess passed. I found my bags, tiny dots on the floor of the space-station-sized guest room.

You would have thought with all his ill-gotten wealth Jason would have been able to afford better air conditioning. I lifted my hair off the back of my neck and went over to the bedroom window. Through the darkness I could see the lights on the pond outside and the two dark figures walking alongside the water, I could have thought that it was a pair of lovers had it not been for the fact that I knew it was Mulder and Samantha. She had her hand on his arm and he was turning away from her with an impatience that I knew entirely too well. Whatever she was saying he didn't want to accept and by turning his back on her he was turning his back on whatever she was saying.

I knew how it felt to be talking to the tight line of his spine.

The window was one of the expensive ones that are not intended to be opened. To have that particular model of faux-Georgian window, you had to have air conditioning and didn't need air. I ran my hand over my collarbones and was surprised to have it come away wet. I was sweating like one of Jason's horses. Like the mare that had been covered by the stallion that afternoon in the stable. My brain flashed back to the hot stable, the harmony of muscle and movement, the primal toss of the mare's head, the flash of a brown eye. More heat.

I pulled the curtains shut on Mulder and Samantha, turned back into the bedroom and stood idly, looking around. Jason's interior decorator's taste was exquisite. My bedroom looked like it had been stolen lock stock and silver hairbrush from the Bombay Company, only I had a feeling that these were the genuine items rather than reproductions.

Genuine. Reproductions. The Mulder Twins were genuine, clones were reproductions. Real and fakes. My life was spinning around a series of events caused by men with the genetic equivalent of Xerox machines. Was I even me or was there a dozen Dana Scullies out here somewhere? Seven brides for seven brothers? Snow White and the Seven Dwarves? What was the song that Mordred sings in Camelot? The Seven Deadly Virtues?
The toss of the mare's head.

I gathered up one of the nighties from our spree at Victoria's Secret and went into the bathroom. I wanted to wash the heat and the sweat off my body. I knew that Mulder would come back from his tete a tete with Samantha wounded and needy. He would want to fuck. Wait, he would want to make love. I had to start thinking of it that way. I was trying, I really was.. He loved me and I wasn't sure what mask love wore in my mind.

The bathroom was tastefully appointed with thick towels and no doubt genuine gold-plated fixtures with a shower stall large enough to play basketball in. I started the water and stripped off my clothes. The interior room quickly filled with steam that loosened my chest and made me somewhat woozy. I had too much wine with dinner. Not again, first too much beer with Zippy and now too much wine. I would end up an alcoholic before this was over.

The water was deliciously hot, loosening the tight muscles in my neck--

The arch of the stallion's neck.

And I opened the bottle of shower gel on the shelf. Freesia. Heavy, sensual freesia full of green and earth and purple and languid afternoons. The smell filled my head and I took my time soaping my body, enjoying the feel of the gel turning to foam between the skin of my hands and the skin of my body. How was I going to smell when Mulder finally arrived? Was I going to lie in bed and pretend to be asleep to give him the illusion of surprising me or should I just meet him in the doorway wearing nothing but a garter belt and hose with a rose between my teeth?

I was rather drunk, my head leaning against the tile wall, my hand stroking the skin between my thighs like a lover's. Drunk and horny besides.

I chuckled to myself until the light went out.

Utter blackness.

"Mulder?" I called over the sound of the shower.

When the shower door opened and a shape darker than the blackness entered, I reached out for him.

"You could have warned me," I teased and my soapy hands touched the dry skin on his chest, "what if my partner came along?"

He jerked for a second and his hand clamped around my jaw, pulling my head up for a kiss. He tasted of brandy as he ravaged my mouth. My hands slipped across his chest, now wet with water from the shower, and traveled lower where his cock was standing up to be noticed. I slipped soapy fingers around him and drew my fingers up and down in the rhythm that I knew he preferred. The hot water scored my back as his hands roved over my breasts which felt hot and heavy against his chest.

"Mulder," I murmured into his lips, "make love to me."

He tasted of brandy and something sweet, chocolate or candy, his tongue probing my mouth like an explorer in an underground cave.

Making a low noise in his throat, he pressed me up against the cold tile wall, squeezing my breasts with insistent hands. "I can't give you everything you want," I babbled into his shoulder, "but I'm here, I'll be here until this is all over."
The tile was cold and hard against my back, and his body was hotter than the water.

"I'll see it through to the end with you."

I ran like melted sugar against him, boneless and pliant. Pulling me away from the wall, he spun me around until my face was pointed into the spray and my blind hands reached out for the wall, to keep my balance in a slowly reeling world. His hands roved down my spine, over my tattoo, tracing the circle of the serpents. I moaned and pressed back against him, the shaft of his cock resting right above my buttocks, his hands roving over my breasts again, pinching my nipples through the thick suds of the gel. His hands on my hips, pressing me forward, pushing me down. I went willingly, my fingers sliding down the tiles, catching on the joins between each of them until I was grasping the shower knobs for support. More gel on my back, and his hand rubbed it into my wet skin over my ribcage, my waist, my buttocks, between my thighs and into the crease of my ass. The pain almost rocked me out of the daze as he ripped into my anus.

I screamed and it wasn't with pleasure.

My fingernails broke on the cold tile as he slammed into me again and again, tearing at me, filling me with broken glass and needles. Finally, he withdrew, spun me around again and soothed me with his hands on my body and his lips on mine until my breathing slowed. I was still shaking in shock when he shoved me back against the wall and parted my legs with his hands.

Only with my foot braced up against the bath tap was I able to remain moderately upright when he impaled me.

I gasped.

I was stuck to the wall like a butterfly on a pin, his cock hard and stinging with soap inside me. I moaned with a combination of wine and hurt as he drove into me without any consideration whatsoever.

I could feel my heart beating against the tile wall behind me.

The water sprayed down into my face, my mouth, burning my eyes and choking me. The muscles in my legs were tearing, and the pain was spreading through my entire pelvis. He was groaning into my shoulder, teeth closing on my skin, hands bracing me up against the wall underneath my arms.

Finally, he dug his fingers into my waist and gave a last series of heaves and shot hot and sticky into me.

I slid to the floor of the shower, whimpering with horror and coughing water. Mulder crouched next to me and pushed wet hair out of my face to kiss my forehead. I wrapped my arms around his neck and shuddered. After a moment, he disentangled himself and reached over to where the taps were, a few seconds of fumbling later, and I felt a hot, high-powered spray of water thrummed over my breasts and belly. God, it was one of those water massage head things.

He had his hand over my mouth when I started screaming again.

When I figured out that it would be a lot easier to see if I opened my eyes, he was gone. The water was still running as hot as ever, Jason apparently imported his water from out of state. The light bleeding from the bedroom was enough for me to turn the shower off. When I stood up, water sluiced out of me and coursed down my legs like a woman about to go into labor. I had to hold onto the sink while I drained. I stumbled over to the thick terry bathrobe waiting for me.

I still felt woozy. As a matter of fact, I felt worse. The perfumed silky gown I'd picked out seemed
absurd now and I left it in the bathroom. Zigging and zagging, I made my way to the bed in the center of the room. It was a good thing the bed could have doubled as an aircraft carrier, I needed the target to be that large. I dropped the bathrobe to the floor, assuming that some housekeeper with a false green card would take care of it in the morning.

The sheets were heavy and soft and I had to throw off the light blanket because I was still so hot. Covered only by a thin layer of cotton, my body was as restless as trees in wind. Damn him. What was that, some kind of loyalty test to see if I really meant what I said? Did he want to know if I'd submit to anything he asked? And I would have, but not like that. Not so brutally, but maybe the savage brutality was the point of the test. How much was I willing to put up with? Maybe that's what love meant to him, it would make sense of a lot of things.

I drifted, feeling the bed spin beneath me like a psychedelic magic carpet.

When the door opened and closed, I came half-awake again.

He was naked by the time he reached the bed, as cool as ice cream against my skin. I was beginning to wonder if I had a fever. His hands cupped my breasts and I shuddered.

****

Jason had ploied us with brandy earlier but I needed more to face Samantha. She got us two bottles of a Texas microbrew out of the huge stainless steel refrigerator and opened them; I noted that she knew exactly where the bottle opener was out of the thousand drawers in Jason's gourmet kitchen.

We went outside into Jason's oasis to look at the moon and talk.

The water was trickling over the rocks in the pond, glittering like tinsel in the moonlight, like the silver rings on Sam's fingers. I had to think of her as Sam, as this full-grown woman who smelled like my baby sister.

She put her hand on my forearm and I turned away. I didn't want her to ruin this and I had the strong suspicion that any conversation would make this reunion even less pleasant. For a while I wanted to imagine that everything was perfect, Sam at my side and Scully waiting for me. I could talk to her, I had to, but I needed a few minutes of delusion first.

We must have made five circuits of the pond before either of us said a word.

"I know it wasn't easy for you to be the one left behind," she said solicitously and every alarm went off.

"I don't want to talk about it."

"Well, what do you want to talk about?" She sounded like an indulgent big sister when the baby brother's had a bad hair day. I didn't like it from her any more than I liked it from Scully.

"I'd always imagined telling you what's been going on these past twenty-six years, but since it turns out that you've known all along all my imaginary conversations are moot."

"You've always been good at making things up on the fly," she stopped walking and turned to me.

"Which of your investigators told you that?"

A hawk's smile; I was now certain that I preferred Scully's fur and claws to Sam's feathers, ruffled or un. "Paranoid much, Fox?"
I guess I couldn't tell her not to use the name. "No, but someone listening to us might be."

She handed me her bottle. "Finish this for me." The beer was still cold enough to ease the ache in my throat. Texas made contemplative noises around us; there were creatures moving quickly and quietly through the ground cover.

I sat on a rock that had been carefully designed to make a good seat. She remained standing. "Why didn't you ever come to me? You knew how much I was hurting. You knew"--my voice broke--"how Mom and Dad were when you were gone."

She sighed. "I was eight, Fox. I didn't know anything about that, and when I met the Greys...it's indescribable, overwhelming. Suffice it to say that the problems of a few humans didn't seem very important when I could spend days at a time just listening...they had to give me sleeping pills to get me away from the interface.

"And then, later, when I began to mature and wonder what had happened to my family...Jason was there. *He* was my big brother, he teased me and played with me and protected me when there were factions that didn't have my best interests at heart. I thought he was you, Fox, and you know what? I was right."

"He's not me, no matter what his genes say. We're not interchangeable like computer components, you can fiddle around with genes in a lab all day, but once that person you had a hand in creating goes out into the real world, there are influences and experiences that mold them. All of us are different. All ten of us. We're monsters, but each of us is – was his own variety of monster," the reflection of the moon in the pool wobbled with my voice.

"You're not a monster, Fox."

The feather-tips of her fingers touched the side of my face, slow, deliberate, and without sisterly intent.

*I'm your brother and I love you.*

Oh God.

If I could blank out one hour of my life to add to the various amnesias from which I have suffered, it would be this one. Scully, save me, I thought even as my dick twitched. When I went to mandatory counseling after the Roche incident, the shrink suggested that I had unresolved sexual issues around my eight-year-old sister. I considered the idea, truly I did, but concluded that those issues were no more than the standard Freudian family drama, sublimated and transformed into an adult sexuality that, if not conventionally healthy, was neither incestuous nor pedophilic. Scully's age and size made her a plausible sister-figure, but only in the way that lots of men marry their mothers--she shared characteristics, not an identity.

All this careful reasoning was crumbling against the onslaught of my growing hard-on.

"You and Jason are the apex of the results. You're beautiful, you have genius IQ's, and rising to the top of your respective professions. You're perfect."

Her finger was under my chin, at the hollow of my throat, feeling the beating of my heart. Silver rings bruising my throat as she loosened my tie and undid the top button of my shirt. Her breasts under the silk of her shirt right in front of my eyes. And her tongue sliding between my teeth and my upper lip tasted like beer, like clouds and like the grass. She was cool and airy in my hands, the sharp points of her earrings scalpeltcut into my palms. The brain that used to be mine was full of September
breeze and moonlight from the fingernail sliver of white light above. She breathed mist into my lungs, touched sliver across my chest and forearms. Everything was underwater, humming like the distant sound of a pool filter vibrating across the captured aqua chlorinated waters. Metal-tipped fingers drew down the tight seam through the center of my pants and the sightless worm stirred underneath her touch.

No better than the rest of them.

The far corner of the pond was shaded with an outcropping of rocks and heavy with rosesmell over the money-lush grass. She was pushing me to my knees in the grass with her hands on my curiously distant ass and her hard little breasts tight against the cage of my chest while she was exploring my mouth with her tongue. The flat feathers of her hair stuck to my sweating, burning hands.

The thin black tights ended below the edge of her black skirt and underneath she was bare, literally bare. She had been shaved back to childhood but it wasn't a child's moan that came from the stretched length of her throat when I touched her with my lips, the silver ring gleaming where it ran through the flesh of her labia.

Sister.

*I'm your brother and I--*  
Sister.  
Orestes, Electra.

An image flashed across the silver screen in my head, Sam triumphant, taking my semen and dropping it into a petri dish to create God only knows what.

"No," I whispered, rising to unsteady feet and knocking over the empty beer bottles, "no thank you."

The ground was uneven with alcohol as I stumbled back to the gleaming house.

Samantha had fucked my head up pretty badly and I hauled my sore psyche and my erection upstairs to the guestrooms. I didn't even bother looking in mine, I headed straight for Scully's. The room was dark save for the reflected light of the pond shimmering against the ceiling. I had to hold onto the bedpost to keep me steady while I looked down at Scully. The sheets were painted over her body as she lay on her side facing the window; her hair was drying in the waves that she took so much care to blow-dry out of her hair.

Oh please, save me from myself --

Manalive, I had too much to drink. My stomach felt like several serving forks had been stuck into it, ripping at the sutures. At the same time, I was electrified, my blood bubbling honey in my veins. I was vile, decadent, no better than George or the rest of them. It felt good. Good like way too much crank at Oxford, screaming down the motorway with my head out of Trevor's car, howling like wolves at the moon.

What was I going to tell her? Should I at all? God, Scully I had the strangest -- And I wasn't sure if it was real.

Am I even real for that matter?

Scully didn't move as I stripped and advanced on her. I thought she was asleep until I put my hand on her, and for once she felt cool under my fingertips, it had to have been a trick of the air.
conditioning.

Her breasts are perfect. I never knew what my hands had been made for before I held her breasts. They are the perfect size and shape for me to hold, and this I trust was not by any design but solely the dictate of fate, that Scully's breasts should have been made for me. Guns and steering wheels and my own idiot cock, all of these things are distractions drawing me away from what I should be holding on to.

I should never have touched Sam.

With my hands around her breasts, pulling her close from behind, I could give voice to the incoherent sorrow that gripped me as I fled from Samantha. "I didn't want it to be like this."

She trembled, then leaned into me. Her voice was like a thin silver brook running through a parched land. "I know this may not be the best time to say this, but I'm here. We'll do this together. I promise."

I was overcome with wonder, with the feel of her body in front of me and the power of the words, which from Scully were more binding than a wedding vow. I was too befuddled with guilt and alcohol, and I knew I couldn't quite appreciate the full import right now.

So I moaned her name, first into the uncaring air and then against her sweaty skin, still almost cold to my touch, and I covered her with my tears and with wet kisses, imagining that the saliva trail glowed in the darkness. She was balky, despite the words, and I was confused but enthusiastic enough to ignore the discrepancy.

Just the way she likes it, I promised myself. I owe this to her. If she never wants to speak to me again, I want her to remember this. With shaking arms, I held her firmly against the bed, so she could push against me and not get anywhere. I ran my tongue from the nape of her neck to the small bone knobs at the base of her spine, breathing wet and moist so that she could feel it on her skin but barely touching. I traced the serpent on her back.

She squirmed and made a noise, maybe she'd just wanted to be coaxed so that she could be sure I'd heard her right.

Just enough constraint and distance, this is the trick to making Scully come when she's in this mood. I turned her over and pinned her thighs open with my knees. She said my name like a purr as I puffed warm air against her thighs. She doesn't shave around her pubic area and I teased the sparse hairs on the soft curves of her inner thighs with my tongue. She smelled of something flowery but I couldn't taste soap on her skin, she was being considerate. Anyway I prefer the thick salty scent of Scully, the one she keeps only for me.

I touched her lightly, stealthily with my tongue and she jerked as though high-voltage current was running through her small body. Surprised, I almost stopped. Either my technique was reaching unnatural proportions or she was wound tighter than a Swiss watch. Her hair hissed across the pillow as she tossed her head while I continued, her legs swirling restlessly around me, her hands caressing the phrenologist's nightmare of my skull. Tossing, moaning, rocking underneath my touches while I semi-consciously rubbed the stupidly engorged mass of my own cock against the sheets that were not as soft as her skin. It was my name that she was chanting under her breath like she was saying the rosary. I drank her climax and it was better than any brandy ever bottled.

I couldn't stand it any longer, I raised myself up onto my knees, opened her with my numb fingers and slid into her where she was hot and liquid as melted wax. I had my hands braced under her arms and looked down at her sex-dazed face underneath me. Her eyes were big enough to swallow me
whole. Her lips moved, saying words that were only clear to me later when I dozed against the arch of her shoulder after I'd come inside her no less than three times (not bad for a man of my age and inebriation).

Don't hurt me, she had said.

****

In the morning, though my head was pounding and my vision blurry, I was able to confront certain questions whose importance had eluded me the night before.

Why did Mulder come to me first in darkness? Why did he first ignore what I'd said to him, and then later melt into my arms like a sugar cube in hot tea? Why didn't he do any of the little tricks that he knew worked for me, instead relying as he never had before on mechanical assistance? Why did he fuck me in the shower without benefit of condoms? Why did he *violate* me?

I was very much afraid I knew the answer.

And I became more agitated when I consulted my calendar. If everything was working right, and I thought it probably was, there was a fair chance that I could be pregnant.

I could tell myself that Mulder had an equal chance of being the father. But that shower jet would have pushed the sperm right up into my cervix, assisting the little Jason-spawn in their blind procreative purpose. And paternity tests would be almost uniquely inefficacious in this situation.

There had to be a Planned Parenthood in the area. They'd give me a morning-after pill and a lecture about contraceptive responsibility. It would be farcical, but I'd survived worse. I'd have to skim over certain areas of my medical history for them to agree to give me the pills, but I knew the right things to say to make myself into a perfect candidate. My degree is helpful once in a while, believe it or not.

My hands were shaking as I stuffed the sanitary napkin in my panties to soak up the tiny flecks of blood that were still issuing from my rectum.

Jason whistled as he came into the breakfast room. He poured himself a glass of fresh-squeezed orange juice from a crystal carafe and then topped off my glass, though I hadn't asked him to do so.

I looked up at him mistrustfully. I might have been wrong. How do you ask someone if he raped you?

He saved me the trouble. "Sleep well?" Like Mulder, his face hides less than he thinks it does. Jason's face was a glutted tiger's. I knew this wasn't even about violating me. If he'd wanted that he probably could have done it during my abduction, for all I knew he was just comparing notes on the last time he'd had me. This was about hurting Mulder, owning Mulder.. Having me in a way that Mulder obviously hadn't. He'd plundered the last vestige of virginity I had anywhere, and I hated him for it.

I remembered the drugged languor of Mulder's fingers and tongue sliding over me in the darkened bedroom. Mulder hadn't even stirred when I'd come downstairs for breakfast, which was unusual. He was uniformly awake before I was in the morning; mostly he'd go out and run before daring to disturb my rest. Jason apparently wasn't reluctant to add drugs to darkness and false certainty in order to gain his objectives.

"What did you give me?"

He shrugged. "Is that what you want to blame it on? The man who runs my stables thought that that
the Keraflex might have similar effects on people, but he wasn't sure, seeing as how human women
don't go into estrus. He was pretty sure it wasn't poisonous, so don't get your panties in a twist."

"Panties in a twist?" my voice came out as sharp as the orange juice, "don't denigrate what is
commonly referred to as rape."

I had to flatten my hands against the table to keep them from shaking. Naturally, the bastard smiled.

"What's rape compared to breaking and entering, destruction of property, arson and let's not forget
murder? Multiple murder including the blonde."

"The blonde claimed that you were the father of her child."

"I get that a lot." Cruel, even teeth flashed at me. "Might get that from you next month."

Son of a bitch.

Just then Mulder stumbled in and I grabbed for the Austin-American Statesman on the table in front
of me.

****

Shit, I'd overslept and let the bastard have some time alone with Scully. She tried to pretend she was
reading the newspaper but I could see that her eyes weren't scanning.

For once my head was screaming louder than my stomach as I thudded into the Louis XV chair
opposite from Scully and reached for one of the flaky croissants piled on a silver platter. There were
little rosettes of butter and pots of jam glistening next to the pastry and I helped myself.

"Has anyone ever told you why Dana here was integrated into the program?"

Her eyes fluttered up from the front page and a smart bomb went off in my stomach.

"Of course she was taken to distract you, Mulder, everyone knows that, but that objective was hardly
furthered by making Emily Sim. To this day no one really knows how you found her, Dana, but I
suspect we were hoist on our own petard." He stared at me, eyes like drillbits digging into my skull.
"Her much-denied sensitivity to the World Beyond is the kind of thing we're always looking for.
And it's so much better when it's possessed by a woman with a hellraising IQ and mongrel stamina
instead of your average trailer trash."

"Mulder," she said calmly, as if Jason weren't even there, "I think we should go to Montana."

"Emerson won't return any of my messages, direct and through his lawyers."

"At worst, his bodyguards will stop us at the gate of his little militia hideout, and if they get a good
look at you there's a good chance we'll get in."

"I don't think that's a good idea," Jason interjected. "I've had him checked out, you know he's pretty
deep into high technology research. Computer chips and all that. Very...specialized electronics."

"Is it worse to build microchips for implantation into people's necks than to make the drugs that
destroy their memories and steal their fertility?" I suppose part of me was curious to see if he had a
preference.

Jason put his hand on my shoulder, his thumb caressing the tendon in my neck. I dropped the
croissant I'd been tearing apart. "Remember, I came to you, Mulder," he said. "I want to survive this.
Emerson has his own agenda; he might even be responsible for this series of events, which would explain why he won't talk to you, or to me either."

"Or he could just have good taste. Being here makes us like you and I would rather be dead," Scully said and jumped up. "I'm leaving. Come to the airport if you want, Mulder."

At least she was offering me the choice. "Can I shower and get dressed?"

"Half an hour," she said. "I'll call the cab."

Jason didn't bother to offer to have us driven.

Chapter 3

15

All truths wait in all things. They either hasten their own delivery no resist it. They do not need the obstetric forceps of the surgeon. The insignificant is as big to me as any.

I looked in the mirror as I shaved, shaving six faces at once, ten, sixteen, what did it matter? And, as I did every morning for the past several years, I asked myself the big question. The shapeshifter had asked me in the Arctic and it had become my mantra. He'd probably forgotten about it by now, which would be fitting, but I remembered.

Can you die now?

My hand shook, the razor shook, and my faces shook through the tears that threatened. I bit down on my lip, hard, to make the worse pain go away. Fucking Ian, I could never follow him. I would not let myself be an imitator even if I were an imitation.

Phoebe had taken a theory class at one point which had made her babble endlessly about Baudrillard and simulacra and how we are all copies now, re-productions in an age in which there is nothing new to say, only rearrangements of what has already been done.

She had no clue how right she was.

And, as I'd done almost every morning, I answered the question. No, not today.

Scully was in the cab already when I went downstairs. Jason was waiting by the front door to shake my hand as I left. "I know this has all been rather stressful for you," he drawled, "but I hope you understand I only want what's best for all of us. Don't let Emerson confuse you--and watch your back."

His voice continued in my head if not my ears. I'm your brother and I love you. I dropped his hand like a burning brand and left.

Scully was more uncommunicative than usual on the trip, which meant that she didn't even vocalize her answers to my questions. She was fine, of course. And I'm from the government and I'm here to help you. There was an experiment we were shown tapes of while I was in college: you take a bunch of rats and shock them or reward them at random. Sometimes pressing a lever gets a shock and other times a treat; sometimes not pressing the lever gets a shock or a treat. Eventually the rats stop reacting at all, they just huddle in a corner of their cage, blinking, learned helplessness it's called and the theory has been applied to battered women and children. Scully's eyes were like those rats'. She was
still moving, but I think that was mainly inertia. Some internal barrier had been breached and parts of
her were draining into each other, mixing and corroding and setting her up for the final implosion.

Maybe I could hit her over the head and drag her by the hair to a therapist when things calmed down
a bit. She'd talked to Zippy, and when I wasn't being selfish I knew that was a good sign.

She'd been willing to reserve judgement on Jason last night. I think she might have been impressed
by the horses. The stables might have reminded her of an infatuation with the beasts brought on by
her burgeoning sexuality when she was just a girl. It's hard to think that Scully was ever a child, but
I'm pretty sure she was. This morning all her reservations were gone and she radiated hatred--not just
distrust--for Jason.

Scully doesn't hate all that easily, though Mom also seemed to have accomplished it.

If both Scully and I were in the throes of an instinctive revulsion to Jason, that was a datum worth
knowing. I'd never yet been disappointed by a decision to mistrust.

Had I liked any of my brother-selves? No, not yet, not even Baylor whose tolerance for pain was
more awe-inspiring than reassuring. Not the one whose body I inhabited. Maybe we were all
disgusting and I'd just overdosed on us.

How the hell did she put up with me?

****

Mulder twitched on the in the seat beside me. I really appreciated the switch to first-class travel, it
was relaxing and we didn't have to behave normally for any civilian seatmates.

My mind stuttered, running the same course over and over again like a hamster in a Habitrail.

The flight was an opium dream, distant and at the same time incredibly clear. I spent the entire time
reliving the night before, the darkness and the incredible waterlogged feeling of my lungs after I
turned off the shower. The hurt between my legs that I'd thought assuaged when Mulder made his
amends to me.

I didn't blame myself, much. Not even as much as I had with Eddie, with whom, at least, I'd had an
extended conversation. Still, I ended up grabbing the armrests so that I wouldn't shake myself to
pieces; Mulder looked concerned but wrote it off as my terror of flying. Honestly I didn't notice
when we left the ground. I had the sense that I'd lost a few pints of blood, that if I moved too much
I'd dissolve into sparkles of light and dust.

Was this post-traumatic stress syndrome? Karen Kossoff had made vague noises of that sort before.
But it couldn't be, there was nothing "post" about it. Mid-trauma stress, was that a legitimate
diagnosis? Just like me to find something that wasn't available in the DSM-IV.

I had tried so hard to let Mulder back in, really I did, and it wasn't his fault that someone else had
come through that door. But it was so fucking hard, the hospital had left another message that baby
Miranda would be ready for release in a week and would I be there? I should call my mother to come
stay with Miranda, I knew, but the way I was feeling I'd probably just go so cold on her that she'd
disown me. Even without the rapist with my lover's face it was too much.

16

Clear and sweet is my soul, and clear and sweet is all that is not my soul.

The road wasn't much better than a wide path between the trees and the truck jarred along hard
enough to make me clench my teeth and grab at the 'oh shit' bar in the door. Mulder was glaring at the muddy track as though he could make it smooth and level by will alone.

As far as cabins were concerned, this was about as much of a cabin as the White House is a single-family dwelling. Sure it was faced with logs but it looked as though Frank Lloyd Wright had gone native. It was also about the size of my apartment building. Emerson had good taste in architects. Mulder stared for a moment and slipped out of the truck onto the crushed stone driveway we had encountered half an acre back. Fortunately, we didn't have to go to the front door and produce our badges, because the door opened and Emerson came out, followed by a petite African-American woman who looked, to my burning eyes, about six months pregnant. Emerson was the clearest carbon-copy of my partner that we had seen yet, only he wore his hair in a loose mass of waves that fell to his shoulders and a pair of horn-rimmed glasses of such gauche style that Mulder would have died rather than have them grace his face. Emerson stalked up to Mulder and stared at him with brilliant curiosity in his hazel eyes, finally reaching out to tilt Mulder's head to the side and examine the telltale mole. Then he reached out and pinched the tip of Mulder's much-hated nose and grinned.

"It's good to know I'm not the only one to be cursed with that absurd schnozz," the woman said.

It took me a moment to realize what was happening, Emerson's hands were moving and his mouth was not. He was speaking in sign language and the woman was translating. Mulder stepped back as though he had been cattle-prodded and looked from one to the other with shock.

"My husband can't talk. He had an -- injury -- when he was a child and he doesn't speak. I translate for him. I'm Aileen Goldberg. Why don't you come inside?"

Emerson pulled on Mulder's coat sleeve and his hands flew faster than I could follow.

"Damn, I can't believe this! I don't even know where to start! Where did you grow up? What do you do? Shit! I have a million questions!" he nudged Mulder again, as if reassuring himself that his twin was real.

Naturally, they had a black leather sofa. I sat on the sofa next to Mulder while Emerson held court in a matching leather chair and Aileen reclined on a pile of pillows in front of the fireplace. Over Emerson's shoulders I could see the woods turning their pyrotechnic colors like a painting that stretched the length of the wall of glass. Aileen had brought a carafe of coffee and mugs out to the coffee table as though it were an ordinary family visit rather that what it was -- whatever it was. Mulder simply stared as though he was afraid that Emerson was going to sprout horns or admit that he killed and ate babies for breakfast. Emerson was bubbling with enthusiasm for his lost sibling and his face was animated in a way that Mulder's almost never becomes.

"I suspected about Jason Lindsay when I saw him on television about two years ago. I mean it isn't every day that you see your own face on the idiot box. I thought it was just one of those separated at birth Oprah things, but I did a little research and decided not to contact him after all." Emerson signed.

"You know about the Project?" Mulder asked.

Frowning, Emerson continued, Aileen his voice.

"Not in any great detail. Just bits and pieces that I was able to dig up over the Internet. You know that the Internet was originally created so scientists could communicate with one another from hidden underground bases in the event of a nuclear holocaust, right? The data banks that were set up are still in existence in backwaters of servers. You just have to know where to look, and know all the right hackers."
Thinking of Frohike, I almost smiled.

"The strange thing is that I have no natural parents. None on any paperwork anywhere," Emerson made a face, "that was discovered when my parents adopted me away from the foster parents I had been assigned to. A blank spot on the adoption papers held everything up for close to a year. You know what tight-asses bureaucrats are."

"You have no idea," Mulder agreed.

"Extrapolating from the data that I was able to obtain, I surmised that there had been an experiment of a genetic nature and during the 1960's a series of twins had been made. Ten lived through infancy and were farmed out to foster-families throughout the country. I lost track of most of them, there's one in prison, and there's Jason. Can you fill me in on the details?"

Taking a deep breath, Mulder began his narrative of the Brothers Mulder. While he spoke, I watched Emerson's expressive face move through a variety of emotions that would have made a Shakespearean actor jealous. At the end, Mulder tried to explain George Naxos and his lack of adolescent trauma, which was unusual for a sex-murderer. While Mulder compared his loss of Samantha with the symptoms that George suffered as a result, Emerson looked away, his eyes finding the face of his wife.

He signed directly to her, then got up and left the room. Aileen sighed and rubbed thoughtfully at her belly through the loose denim dress she wore.

"You have to excuse him, he can't talk about what happened to him. It makes him very upset. But he wants me to tell you."

"One of the reasons Emerson was so interested in finding his birth parents was because of his foster parents. I'm afraid it was a bit of a nightmare, the usual assortment of mental and physical abuse," next to me, Mulder winced, "topped off by sheer neglect. When he was eight, Emerson was left with a neighbor's child to play while his foster parents, their name was Trapper, went out. The older kids, the teenagers from the trailer park all went to the Trapper trailer to drink their beer and get high. They began to tease Emerson. He's never had a forgiving nature, and he gave the oldest a black eye. The oldest kid, who was in his late-teens, took Emerson into the bedroom and raped him. Repeatedly. A few of the other teen-aged kids took turns with him and when that wasn't fun anymore they used household items as well. Finally, the kids realized that Emerson was probably going to tell someone about what they had done to him, and they decided to silence him by cutting out his tongue."

Serious ass-pucker factor.

Mulder had gone poker-straight on the cushions next to me. I was having a hard time breathing. I realized that my hand was hurting so much because he was struggling to pulverize it with his own.

"The Department of Youth and Family Services Judge determined that his foster parents were guilty of neglect and had him removed. Fortunately, they sent him to the Goldberg family who already had three children, and they adopted him. The Goldberg are great. They were up here for Chanukah and painted the baby's room, brought tons of toys, and all the furniture. Typical first grandchild syndrome."

"But--" I started, "he could have had speech therapy, surgery to correct the problem."

"Emerson can speak, he just hates the way that he sounds. He thinks he sounds stupid," she smiled, "besides, if he had spoken I never would have met him, I was his translator all through MIT."
Movement caught my eye and I saw Emerson poking his head around the doorway he had left through. He rolled his eyes at Aileen.

"Did I mention that I gave up a promising career developing Artificial Intelligence models based on Turing so I could take care of this slack-jawed nutcase of a husband?" she asked.

The gesture Emerson gave her needed no translation.

"We'd like you to stay for dinner so the boys can have a chance to talk."

I realized that Aileen had addressed me as though I were Mulder's spouse rather than his partner. I wasn't sure how to react. That had never happened before.

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As far as I was concerned each of my brothers were awful in a unique direction. Well, Baylor would have been fine if not for his serious commitment to inflicting pain on himself. In fact, if I could have silenced my demons by marking my body instead of my psyche, if I could have suffered stigmata and protected Scully, it would be a more-than-fair trade.

I hadn't ever considered how many dimensions of personality flaws there were; it was like each of these jokers had taken an ugly part of me and brought it to perfection. Bill Scully was looking better and better in terms of brothers. I wasn't entirely sure what Mr. Hyde face Emerson was hiding. So far he seemed all but saintly, and that made me more nervous.

We had another flight to catch and because Montana is not exactly a hub we had a connection to make, but we could afford to stay to dinner if we took a morning flight out of Chicago. (The routes that forced us to fly to Illinois to get back to Texas deserved an X File of their own.) Aileen excused herself to go tell the cook that there would be company. Scully had her hand on my knee as I stared at my long-lost twin.

I explained, as best I could, that there had been a sudden decrease in our ranks. At least five dead, pending determination of what happened to George. Emerson put his head between his hands and stared down. I didn't even know that my face could twist that way.

Adoptees often have a strong desire to learn about their real parents--what's called "genealogical uncertainty" by the kind of people who have to name things to make them real. Emerson's had led him to investigate his past and he'd found something more bizarre than the standard fantasy of being the lost king's son. Maybe, with the impending birth of his child, he'd been hoping for some sort of closure on his past.

I'm sure this wasn't what he was hoping for.

Aileen came back and they exchanged a rapid-fire series of hand motions.

"So what's Jason's angle--why did he decide to tell you this?" I was quickly getting used to having Emerson's voice come out of Aileen's mouth. She was good, I could tell when he was talking because the cadence was subtly different.

"Maybe he didn't want us to get killed?" Okay, I admit it was lame but I could always hope there was some good in him.

"He hasn't tried to contact *me*, and don't give me any crap about the power of the great big wings of Uncle Sam, I know I can take care of myself and probably you too."
"What would he gain by having some of the others killed but warning Mulder? And letting Mulder warn the ones who are still alive?" Scully wasn't buying it and she had a point.

My brain felt like a bowl of Rice Krispies with the milk just poured in. Or maybe that was the maggots eating their way out. I remembered Sam in the garden, tempting me with the apple...

The woman gave it to me and I ate.

But I didn't swallow.

"Maybe someone wants monopoly control over the genotype," I mused. "Jason might have an interest in that."

"But especially then he wouldn't have told you..." Emerson was frowning too.

"What if he didn't want someone else to know about his involvement? What we have here is a classic conflict of interest," Scully said in her precise way. "Roush's interest is in having a wide array of examples of...Mulder, so that they have greater flexibility in potential future...ah, uses. So when Mulder forced the issue at the warehouse in Austin, Jason had to meet with him, and then in order to remain credible with her, he had to give Mulder the files."

"Her?"

Scully glared at me as if I were the one who'd made the all-too-appropriate Freudian slip.

"She's right," I told Aileen and Emerson. "He could be trying to hide his involvement in the deaths from Samantha."

"This is obscene," Aileen snapped and heaved herself up from the sofa to begin to pace back and forth in front of the picture window where the sunset had deepened to twilight, "there are enough other things in the world to corrupt before you even begin to play God with genes."

The gesture Emerson made was an eloquent representation of disgust.

"This is making my brain swell," she said for him, "come on, Fox, and I'll give you the tour."

With Jason flashing back in my head, I stood up and noticed that Scully had gone ivory against the blackness of the couch. "You okay?"

"I'm fine, Mulder," she said through her teeth, "just tired."

I followed Emerson to the main entrance.

"How are—" I started and he smiled, holding up a steno book and a marker.

"Low tech," he scrawled.

Outside, Emerson owned a magic kingdom. The stark green, brown, black of an evergreen forest surrounded us, rich and comforting. I think I saw a flash of a deer's tail as we hiked.

He held up the pad. "Any thoughts on why so many of the others are psychos?"

I appreciated the 'others' part.

"Each one seems like a different shade of psycho," I said, "but I have to say I'm leaning towards the idea of genetic influence. If not determinism, let's call it a strong predisposing factor. Add in the fact
that adopted and foster children have higher-than-average numbers of adjustment and dissociative disorders, and you've got a recipe for disaster. I mean, compared to George and Arlen, Jason and I are perfect examples of upstanding citizens."

He frowned and scribbled, his letters becoming spikier and crawling down the page. "But there's a difference between a genetic predisposition and a heritable condition, isn't there?" 'Heritable' was underlined twice.

"Are you asking me if your kid's going to be okay?"

He shrugged, a bit lamely. There, I found a disadvantage to being so expressive, I could tell that he really did care.

"I can't make promises..." I didn't even know what to call him, Mr. Goldberg seemed a bit detached. "Emerson, look, God only knows what happened to our genes. The people who made us were just poking at us to see what would happen, Mom all but admitted that, and there are no guarantees. I'm sorry."

He turned so that I lost his features against the dying sun.

"You should talk to Scully," I suggested. "She'll tell you that science doesn't yet understand how to alter germ cells, only somatic cells, so you've got nothing to worry about."

He rubbed his eyes with his free hand, flipped the page, and scrawled again. "And she'll be able to explain what you just said?"

I laughed. I'd finally found a more unscientific me. "She explains everything, even the things she doesn't understand. It's one of her best features." Or maybe I said "worst." Either way I got a measuring look from Emerson, the kind that makes me want to check my face for leftover food or sudden deformity.

"Did you ever have a philosophy class?" he scrawled.

"Yes."

"Remember the question when they ask you if you would go back in time to kill Hitler as a baby? To prevent every atrocity that he committed? That's how I feel."

He cocked an eyebrow at me in a way that reminded me of Scully rather than myself.

"I want this baby, but I don't want a monster."

"I can't promise anything."

Dinner was a polar opposite from Jason's lordly table. We were knee to knee at a round table with a view of the mountains. Emerson had the social advantage of being able to talk with his mouth full, and he almost kept Aileen from eating at all while he expounded his theories on global education via the Internet. His standpoint was that given the access to the facts, anyone was capable of self-education and the ability to make informed decisions about life and the current political climate. He also explained how he and Aileen had moved their entire software company to this remote location after a particularly nasty hit by Mr. Gates' industrial spies. Their suit against Microsoft was still in the initial stages and Emerson practically sparked with glee at the idea of taking on the software Goliath.

Next to me, her thigh pressed against mine, Scully moved her food around on her plate and ate little, speaking even less.
I was so tired that staying the night at the hotel attached to O'Hare was a relief. A cryptic voice mail from Zippy had indicated that things "were going down" in Austin and we were headed back there the next day.

Mulder got us two rooms for the record but brought both our bags into the one on the left. I postponed the issue by taking a long shower. The water pressure was low enough that I wasn't reminded of Jason's guest suite, much.

They were two different people. Different in every molecule, different as two cookies from the same cutter, where it was the decorations that counted. Mulder still loved me with his quiet desperation and he didn't want to hurt me.

I put on one of his T-shirts and opened the bathroom door. He was propped up against the headboard of the bed, reading the information Emerson had printed out for him. His hair stood up in clumps and he was still wearing his undershirt along with his boxer-briefs; Bruce Weber would have loved to put him on a billboard in Times Square. He peered up over the tops of his reading glasses at me and smiled the smile that usually worked like a lit match deep inside me.

Five steps took me to the edge of the bed. I held out my hand as I crawled forward. "Give me what you've looked at already."

He blinked and obeyed. Maybe we'd read until we were tired out and then just get a few hours of shut-eye before the flight.

As if.

Maybe if I got stinking drunk again he'd chivalrously let me off the hook, so to speak.

The file was cold and smooth in my hand. I got my glasses and took the file over to the standard tiny hotel table, hunching over in a way that would have me in knots in minutes. I knew that my posture was terrible but I couldn't uncurl, like a person burned in a fire so that the tendons shortened.

Emerson's files filled in some of the early details on the Mulder clan; Jason had been more concerned with present whereabouts and had skimmed on the case histories. Aside from Ian, Jason, and Mulder, it seemed that most of them had been placed by private adoption agencies, carefully spaced around the country. Information on Ian and Jason was all but nonexistent, though Emerson's hacking revealed that Jason had gone from Andover to Yale. Ian did not seem to have had any formal education whatsoever.

The other seven did not get the benefit of the silver spoon. I guess that was harder to replicate than the twins themselves. In those days you could pretty much buy a baby if you had the money and psychological fitness screening was not required, but these babies had particularly bad, or well-planned, luck. Aileen hadn't mentioned that Emerson's original adoptive parents had sent him to the hospital on a regular basis before being turned into jam in the car crash that had left him to the tender mercies of the Trappers.

And I'd pitied Mulder.

It was too much hardship. I closed the folder and turned out the desk lamp. Mulder had finished reading and was channel-surfing. I scuttled over to the bed and pulled the covers down on my side, sliding in like a bullet. I felt him shift but I turned my back to him so I couldn't see his inquisitive abused-puppy look.
He sighed and I heard the TV go off. Many nights on the road he'd gone back to his room after the sex so that he could watch the tube for a while, and then he'd sneak back into my room when he was sated and wrap himself around me like a silk cocoon. Tonight he would need the comfort too much to leave; at least I was sure that he'd choose me over the idiot box.

He killed the light over the nightstand, leaving only the bathroom light and the glow from behind the drapes, which weren't doing enough to cut off the outside world. I felt the air being sucked out of my lungs. Covers rustled until he found the right layer and then he was sliding his arm around me, tugging me onto my back.

I closed my eyes and I was back in the lightless bathroom. Everything shut down; my arms and legs jerked as if I were a plastic action figure and Mulder pulled away, confused.

I had to get used to the idea of being violated. When I was first returned three years ago, I hadn't been able to masturbate for several months; I could barely stand to look at my newly unfamiliar, bloated body in the shower.

That passed.

But if it took another five months this time, Mulder was going to want an explanation.

Even now he was hovering over me, dismayed and rapidly growing impatient.

I grabbed his forearms and pushed, flipping him onto his back. He went readily, leering up at me; he thought he knew the game now.

"Listen to me. I am only going to say this once," I said and underneath me his entire body went into danger mode.

"What?"

I had my hands on either side of his body and my knees between his legs, if he was going to go anywhere, he would do so with me stuck to him like a leech.

"Jason impersonated you. He raped me. He sodomized me. While you were talking to Samantha. I'm pretty sure he drugged us both to do it."

In the green light of the hotel, his mouth opened and shut like a fish floating helplessly in an oil slick. I watched him start into the lake of self-loathing that always lies underneath the carefully cultivated ice layer he skates upon.

"I need some time," I added, not liking the passing blank look on his oft-duplicated features.

"Take all the time you need," he said in a voice that was a shadow of a shadow.

I couldn't accurately gage the truth level in his words; I was too tired to catalog every nuance on his face and body. But I did, however, slide off him and let him gather me close to his chest in yet another dreary hotel room after another drearily horrible revelation.

"I don't want you to feel guilty," I told his chest, "and I don't want an endless round of explanations and recriminations. Shit happens."

I could feel his muscles twitch but he didn't reply. Eventually I slept, though I don't believe he did.
I was going to kill Jason, it was that simple.

Then I was going to get twenty-first century on his ass. I would find his cache of alien technology, bring him back to life, and kill him again. Then I would clone him and torture him until he begged for mercy. I would keep him around for target practice. Cut off his dick and feed it to him in bite-size pieces. Then I'd kill him and start all over again.

If I hadn't given in to my petty desires those many months ago on my awful stinking couch, she would have been safe. She would have slapped him and sent him away.

If I hadn't been petting and necking with my baby sister he wouldn't have had his opportunity. What a fucking freak, her and me both, Mom's genes were deadly no matter whose sperm supplied the other half of the recombinatorial portfolio. I remembered Sam's cool lips like fishscales through water, thought about Scully in the bedroom above us, wrenched apart by his cock. I imagined her pain, thinking that it was because of me and still submitting, her soft satin voice asking me not to hurt her, not to hurt her again and me bludgeoning her. For a moment I wished us both dead, it might give us some suacease.

Get your name tattooed on your forehead so that she'd know it's you, pretty fucking funny, Fox.

I almost liked the idea that I'd been drugged, it made my part of that night easier to forgive. He'd - they – Them – whatever – had obviously had a plan. Me outside fucking my own sister (who, no doubt, was at the most fertile part of her reproductive cycle) while he was upstairs impregnating Scully. The thought made the airline coffee curdle in my stomach. But the plan had gone mildly wrong. I'd managed to escape Sam and make it upstairs to screw Scully without the benefit of latex. The only shred of hope was that should Scully be pregnant, there was a possibility I had done the deed. With any luck my sperm had learned the butterfly crawl from their owner.

But, and here was where I was in deep water, should a child result from said union(s) would the child not have the same genetic make-up regardless of who had shot the wad that caused the fertilization? I wasn't as well-versed in genetics as my bitch of a mother or bitch of a sister, but I was pretty sure that identical twins would have the exact same genetic make-up. So, we'd never know who the father of the infant was.

My eyes were burning but I was willing myself not to cry.

She was letting me hold her, was that for her benefit or mine? Scully compartmentalizes better than an ocean liner, maybe she could even accept that I wasn't Jason, that my body wasn't the threat (except it was, my body was his key). Despite her strength, she'd hit so many icebergs in the last few weeks that she was going to end up on the bottom of the ocean in short order.

Time, she wanted time. I wanted time *travel*, I would go back to any of a hundred decision points and kill myself to keep her out of harm's way. I would go back to the beginning of Dr. Frankenmulder's charming little experiment and set the lab on fire, what the hell it worked for Scully.

Jason had true style, I had to concede that. He'd taken away the one tie I could count on, my carefully acquired knowledge of the way to rock Dana Scully's world. Now there was nothing to keep her, and every time she looked at me she'd have reason to remember what he'd done.

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I could tell by the keening of the phone that it was mine, not Mulder's. He groaned and pulled the pillow over his head as I leaned over the backlit landscape of his back to snag the annoying device off of the nightstand.
Skinner's voice sent a quick rush of adrenaline through my body, as if he were watching us loll in blatant disregard for regulations. I automatically pulled the sheet away from Mulder to cover myself up. "Agent Scully, Emerson Goldberg and his wife Aileen were just reported missing by their security service, which had instructions to contact me if this were to happen--instructions they say they received only yesterday, after your visit."

"Is there any sign that they were...hurt...when they were taken?"

Mulder stiffened into ice and opened his eyes.

"No sign of forced entry. Security was compromised without a trace, not even a dog barked according to the man in charge. I've met him before, he says they should have detected an unauthorized penetration and they didn't."

Mulder threw off the corner of the sheet he had left and began to throw on yesterday's clothes. "We'll look into it," I promised.

"The Goldbergs are gone," I said unnecessarily.

"It's Jason," he replied.

"Why take them, why not just kill them like the others?"

He shook his head like a whipped dog. "Not sure. I'd guess it has something to do with wanting to have some genetic material on tap, so he doesn't have to wear himself out in the bathroom every day. And Aileen's fetus is near enough to birth to be viable, maybe he wants to know what the next generation looks like."

Back to Austin it was.

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Zippy was waiting for us at the local office. The entire floor was hopping with agents trying to find out what was going on and how they could get a piece of it. Coffee cups were strewn over every flat surface and some surfaces that weren't too flat.

We stepped into the relative calmness of his office, warmed by the sun through the enormous plate glass windows, and I was surprised by his angry scowl. He reminded me of myself, much earlier in my life, when I knew Mulder was hiding his sources from me.

"You need to hear this," Zippy pressed play and the reels of the small recorder he'd picked up when he saw us began to turn.

"I saw that report on the news, about Holly Keene? I've seen her, a couple of nights ago. A couple of men were...taking her into a building. I thought she was real drunk and they were holding her up, but now I guess...It was a warehouse, the one on the north side of Ridgewood, the second one in from Howe Street."

Tinny and compressed, the voice was still familiar. Zippy's own voice was considerably clearer, and furious. "I had a voice analysis done, and despite the shitty drawl, it comes out ninety-eight percent likely to be the voice of one Fox Mulder. You wanna explain that?"

"Or Jason Lindsay," I said and Mulder nodded, comprehending.
"He wanted the raid to happen," Mulder said, thinking out loud. "Maybe the women in the warehouse were somebody else's project, a threat to his power, so he called it in. He had to have been lying about Holly Keene; she was catatonic and nine months pregnant at the time. The whole thing was designed to get us to Austin."

"And he was the man in Hal Rothberg's vestibule," I said.

"Now just a fucking minute—"

"Well you explain it, hotshot."

Zippy looked as though he was trying to decide if he was going to throw the file at Mulder or into the garbage. Mulder stared him down.

"There's something I have to tell you guys," Zippy began, "The Roush compound, just outside town – there's been some interesting equipment going into there over the past few months."

Zippy's phone rang, which may have been what kept Mulder from throttling him. Zippy listened for a moment, grunted a monosyllable or two and hung up, the lines deepening around his too-bright eyes.

"Darien Klein is missing, your boss is coming here, and we're supposed to get ready for a big ol' Texas blowout."

"Holy Waco, Batman," Mulder deadpanned.

17

I fall on the weeds and stones, The riders spur their unwilling horses, haul close, Taunt my dizzy ears and beat me violently over the head with whipstocks.

By the time Skinner got to Texas things had only gotten worse. The local police had taken a call from someone claiming to be trapped in Roush's research facility. She said she'd been drugged and had awakened and escaped her bonds, but she couldn't leave because of the guards, so she was using an abandoned office to call. Then there'd been a clamor and she'd been cut off.

I smelled a relative.

Operative theory: Jason had ratted out Sam's little project in the warehouse, forcing an early shutdown. Sam was now playing tit-for-tat. As far as reproduction is concerned, men are penises with legs, and that's not a bad description of us in general; Sam didn't need Jason anywhere as much as he needed her. He was getting greedy and she was cutting her losses—which made her attempted seduction easier to understand. Maybe she was imagining another morgantic dynasty. Unlike Jason, I would be wracked by guilt and uninterested in competing with her for control of Roush.

Zippy handed Skinner a red folder. "Sir, this is the report I've put together on Roush's activities in the past few months. You'll note I've traced numerous illicit arms purchases back to the Austin facility; in addition, their Social Security withholding forms indicate that they've hired over fifty men as 'security' in the past three months alone, only losing three to regular attrition. In brief, sir, there's a fucking arsenal in there."

Skinner looked at Zippy as though he had spit out an armadillo.

"Why hasn't anyone done anything about this?" he growled.

The fur around his neck bristling, Zippy glared at the AD.
"You tell me. I cc'd my Division head and the ATF and no one seemed to give a fuck, sir."

"You ever see anything like this again, come straight to me."

Zippy looked as though the head of the wolfpack had tossed him a particularly juicy part of a deer.

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By the time we arrived the enterprising local reporters had caught mention of the problem on the police radio frequency, and so we struggled through a layer of the fourth estate before reaching the real perimeter.

Zippy wanted to go in shooting. Fortunately Skinner was in agreement with Zippy's immediate superior that firing first was a piss-poor idea, and wouldn't play well on TV either.

There was no activity visible in the compound. It could have been deserted if not for the multiple bodies showing on the infrared scanners.

Skinner borrowed a bullhorn and stepped towards the closest building. "Attention, Roush employees," he boomed. "We have received reports that people are being held against their will inside. Please come out with your hands raised and no one has to get hurt."

That was when the top window of the building exploded outwards and a shotgun blast almost moved me up the chain of command. Skinner, his Marine instincts as sharp as ever, dived just in time to avoid being hit.

He cursed and the local AD, obviously infected with Texas bravado, gave the order to return fire. I heard the slow beat of our tactical helicopters powering up. They wouldn't be reducing the compound to powder, not with potential hostages inside, but they'd shoot anything that moved.

Meanwhile men in flak jackets were popping up on both sides, shooting so wildly that Mulder and I retreated behind a Bucar to regroup.

I surveyed the disaster unfolding before us. Even if our colleagues managed to overrun the building, there wouldn't be enough left of Emerson, Aileen and Baby Goldberg to put in a doggie bag.

"We need a chopper," Mulder said, for once making perfect sense.

I glanced over at the slew of grounded news copters, brought down by threats and growls from our side. "Which one?"

He pointed. "Isn't it obvious?"

Put that way, it was.

Mulder took off and I followed, checking to make sure that no one noticed our mad dash into enemy territory. Reporters began to head toward us like iron filings to a magnet, but Mulder shouldered his way to Rupert Murdoch's local affiliate.

"Look at it this way," he tossed over his shoulder as he banged on the door of the bird, "I'll be the only one of us wearing a nametag."

The door popped open and a blonde stuck her head out. "Can I help you...Agents?" appending our titles once she figured them out.

"I have four words for you: Bernard Shaw. Pulitzer. Network."
"Come on up," she said.

The pilot, what I could see of him under the Boba Fett gear he was wearing, looked like he'd been fried in hot fat at some point in the past. His face was a welt of scar tissue, his mouth white and lipless. Vietnam, I guessed. Somehow it always was. The cameraman helped me into the chopper and as soon as Mulder had one foot inside we were lifting off.

"There's a lot of gunfire," the blonde reporter said into her microphone, "and I don't know how much you can see from this angle--Peter, turn the camera so we can see the feds. It looks like there are at least five--no, six--FBI agents down. I can see ambulance lights on the road off the other side."

"Are we just going to do the traffic report or are we going into the compound?"

She made a face that would probably look like a smile to the people watching the video feed. "Charlie, let's go in."

"This is Sheryl Ann Reardon, reporting for KTBC." She had the conspiratorial whisper down perfectly, though she should lose the accent if she really wanted to go national. "We're approaching the source of the gunfire now..."

The helicopter jerked like a yo-yo on a string and I was lifted into the air. I'd missed the seatbelt somehow, and Mulder grabbed me as I came back down and held his arms around my waist, pulling me up into his lap. I'd suspect that he orchestrated it but there hadn't been time.

The chopper wheeled in the hot air over the complex, diving and sweeping around and past the other choppers and the tracer bullets like something out of a George Lucas movie. I wanted to shut my eyes, but I was afraid not to. If we were going to get shot out of the sky, I wanted to know.

"There are several dozen private troops scattered around the perimeter of the Roush compound," the blonde continued into her microphone, "and we have to wonder how a private company was able to build such a force of private militia without the authorities knowing."

The authorities knew, they just didn't do anything.

Charlie, the pilot, yelled something at the nearest chopper and made an obscene gesture, acting, for all the world, like a New York cabdriver. I left my stomach somewhere when the helicopter wheeled around and dropped like a cable-cut elevator. I could feel Mulder's heart beating like an engine against my back, but my heart didn't seem to be beating at all.

The skids of the chopper hit ground with a thump from hell and the blonde hauled the door open, while she grabbed a small camcorder from a case on the floor.

"This is our stop," Mulder bawled in my ear over the cacophony of the rotors.

We fell out of the chopper and onto the dusty ground, Sheryl Ann following suit with her camera.

"You can't come in here!" I yelled at her.

"First Amendment rights, babe!" she yelled back at me and the red light on the camera winked on, "Smile for mister and missus America."

Mulder grabbed my arm and began scuttling for the nearest building while the KTBC chopper took off again. Sheryl Ann raced after us. The guards were thinner on the ground inside the compound, but the one that popped out of the doorway went down in a flood of human blood when I shot him in the gut. Overhead the sky went orange and the explosion sent us all to our knees as one of the
helicopters exploded. Small bits of blackened black metal showered down around us while we watched in stunned horror as the insectoid bulk of the machine smashed like a comet into the building across the compound. I grabbed Mulder's arm and began running, he hauled the reporter to her feet and the three of us made it into the building a microsecond before the fireball swept across where we had fallen.

The hallways were unfinished wallboard with spackle still showing around the paper joins and the lights were unshaded fluorescent fixtures overhead. In the echoing grayness, we could still hear the rumble and crump of the firefight outside. Mulder hurried along, his gun at the alert, like an animal hot on the scent in fallen leaves. I followed, flicking glances here and there for ambushes. Stopping at a metal door he flung it open and rushed into the darkness of a stairwell.

Down into hell, where the air was cooler and full of dust from the shaking building.

I didn't bother to ask him how he was homing in on Jason and the others. He was following himself and, in a way, it was the easiest hunt for a suspect he had ever done. As ever, I followed, and Sheryl Ann filmed as we went.

Another disposable goon stuck his face around the corner and got it blown off for his trouble. This wasn't unlike the countless training exercises I'd run at Quantico when I was young and green, bad guys popping up on wires—only sometimes they had hostages and you had to be careful who you shot.

I wasn't careful.

We were approaching the end of our chosen hallway. The door at the end had been blown back by an explosion; it was lying black and charred on the ground, and I could see muzzle flashes refracted through the clouds of smoke pushing out towards us.

I squeezed off a shot for cover and Mulder darted through the open door, diving and rolling. I couldn't see into the darkened hallway but I didn't hear him cry out.

As I prepared to follow him, I heard a noise from Sheryl Ann. I turned and drew a bead on Samantha (Mann) Mulder.

Mulder would kill me, he'd rip the skeleton from my pulsing flesh and crack the bones apart to get at the marrow, if I killed his little sister.

What would he think about wounding? I pointed the gun at a neutral angle, somewhere between her and the heavens where God was laughing at us.

She approached, the Mulder certainty that no harm could befall her as strong in her as in her brother. "I don't think you plan on killing me. Why don't you put the gun away?"

"Why don't you stop moving, turn around and put your hands against the wall?"

She pouted, the effect somewhat spoiled by her razorblade earrings and mercury eyes.

Still, I wasn't expecting her to rush me.

I got off one round before she was on me, and her weight and momentum knocked me over. An earring stabbed into the fleshy bottom of my palm and she slammed my gun hand against the floor, jarring the bone painfully and making me lose my grip. She jabbed at my throat and scratched at my eyes and I thought, well, America's viewers are going to love this, too bad we're not naked and covered in chocolate pudding. "Jason said you were a lousy lay, apparently you're a lousy shot as
well, are you good for anything?” Her arm was tight around my throat as she dragged me to a standing position, I suppose to emphasize her height advantage.

It was a mistake. I drove my elbow into her stomach and hunkered down as I flipped her. She gasped in shock as her entire spine crashed into the ground.

Try to tell me that size matters, you bitch.

Punch-drunk, she rolled to her feet and came at me again. She had a switchblade, like some strange refugee from West Side Story. I should have known that she wouldn't like killing from a distance. Slashing out, she used her longer reach to open a burning line across my chest and the top of my right arm. I ducked and weaved, trying to get back to my gun.

I faked down towards my weapon and she bent her knees for better access to my throat as I sprang on her. This time her nose broke with a satisfying crunch when I slammed my fist into her face. No wonder men like fistfights, it's unbeatable for instant satisfaction when you're winning. Gasping and bleeding, she went down again. I brought my boot down on her knife hand and heard bones break. While she gurgled, I kicked the knife away, not minding whether it cut her on the way out. Then I sat on her wiggly bony body and cuffed both her hands through a still-exposed steel rebar in the wall.

"You go, girl!" Sheryl Ann urged, dropping her journalistic perspective like an old pair of shoes.

I had lost Mulder.

While Samantha continued to bitch and screech, I went after her brothers.

18

*I am the hounded slave I wince at the bite of the dogs. Hell and despair are upon me, crack and again crack the marksmen, I clutch at the rails of the fence, my gore dribs, thinn’d with the ooze of my skin.*

Girl reporter in tow, I searched the first floor of the building systematically, barrelling through hallways and kicking open flimsy temporary doors like it was going out of style. My Spidey sense wasn't working too well: I found Darien and Emerson instead. I knew it was them because I recognized Darien's streaked hair and Emerson's shaggy 'do, along with his arm guarding Aileen. They were all in leg chains bolted to bars through the floor. I wondered what the architect had thought about the plans for the building. Maybe there was a particular firm you'd go to if you wanted to build your own dungeon in Austin.

No time for sappy reunions. "Hang on," I said, went for the fire ax at the end of the hall, and returned to hack them free. Darien went as stiff as a stuffed deer but Aileen and Emerson were eerily calm and trusting. I suspected shock which couldn't be doing the baby much good. Two down, three to go; George had to be around here somewhere.

The perimeter was well-guarded. George had gone from jail to hostage and, hopefully, right smack into the open arms of an FBI agent or a Texas Ranger. Mulder, on the other hand, was capable of getting into plenty of trouble right here in this building.

I sent the resilient Sheryl Ann to lead the freed captives out. She took one look at Aileen and sensed great human interest--a pregnant woman and two identical twins for good measure, so she didn't protest when I headed back in without her. I think she might have seen enough fighting to satisfy her need for blood. There was a door I hadn't gone through, a white wooden hole in a white wooden wall with warning signs plastered all over it.
I didn't have my hard hat but I kicked it open anyway.

I could smell them through the fresh paint and the gunpowder.

The building had opened up into one huge room. Strange equipment littered the sides, some of it working and some hulking inert metal. There were surgical tables and high-wattage lamps, cabinets for holding machinists' tools and wheeled trays for instruments I didn't want to think about. Extension cords draped like nests of snakes everywhere.

Where were they?

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Scully's a big girl, she can take care of herself. I reminded myself as I ran through the corridors of Jason's fortress. What about with Jason, dumbass, was she taking care of herself then?

The corridor ended at a door festooned with warning signs; biohazard, hard hat area only, authorized personnel only, and suchlike. This was the smell of blood to me and I went through the door.

A cavern of walkways and steel staircases, reminiscent of the warehouse in Austin where the Crawford clone had kept his cache of gestating women. I was standing on a walkway about halfway between the floor and roof. A bilious green light shone overhead and looked directly up into what looked like a half-dozen enormous tanks of the now-familiar green liquid, the amniotic fluid of unnatural birth. I looked down, and more tanks filled levels below my feet. So it appeared that my lovely brother was going to start heavy-duty production of -- something -- in fairly short order. After seeing the mutated and malformed fetuses on the floor at Bethel, I wasn't sure that another batch of "new and improved" humans was a good thing.

"You're late," a voice that was mine and not mine drawled from my left.

"The traffic is bad."

The .357 Magnum in Jason's hand made me feel a little bit better, amateurs think that guns are like penises -- bigger is better. Dirty Harry's gun of choice was intimidating but only effective if the gunman could hit the broad side of a barn. Nevertheless those high-caliber guns made big holes.

It was a good thing he had the gun, I might have felt slightly guilty shooting an unarmed man. And I was going to shoot him, I was going to kill him, that wasn't in question. I just needed to know a few things before I blew his fucking evil brains all over the metal flooring.

"Why?" I asked.

The bastard was going to make the GQ issue of "evil psychopaths" that year in his expensive shirt and dark pants. He moved closer to me, the gun held in his hand like a prop in a photo shoot.

"If you think I'm going to tell you all the intricate details of my plan including the easiest way to defeat me, like the villain in a James Bond movie, you're sadly mistaken. Did you ever wonder why they did that, Fox? Sean Connery would be strapped to a table and Blofeld would obligingly show him the button that turned the entire compound into a smoking hole in the ground." He shrugged and wandered a little bit closer. "You'll just have to die wondering."

"Wrong answer, you're going to die." He made such a classy target standing there at the end of my gunsight.

"She really wasn't all that good, you know. I can't understand the attraction."
If I clenched my teeth any tighter, I was going to spit out fillings.

"You should have sampled the charms of our sister, she's quite talented. But then again, she always had a natural inclination for carnality, even at a very young age -- ten, I seem to remember."

Deep breaths, buddy, I reminded myself. I wanted my hands steady when I shot him. The general plan was as follows -- right kneecap, left kneecap, right shoulder, left shoulder, then in the gut. I wanted to watch his face turn white as he bled to death in front of me.

Jason moved even closer, until we were barely ten feet from one another on the catwalk. The smile he gave me had been edited for television.

"The only problem with Sam is that she likes to make herself feel important by running her own projects."

"Let me guess. Bethel was yours, the Crawford plant was hers, and she called this little installation in to the Feds because you did something that put her in a snit. Ugly infighting. Very Roman, you know, along with the rest of your sins. You killed the rest of our brothers, didn't you?"

"Just two. Hal and Baylor." He smiled again. "The rest were Sam's doing. Between the two of us we were each trying to make our own collection of DNA to start the new product line. Hal was a worthless waste of genetic material, and Baylor . . . I almost felt bad about him. I've never met anyone with such a deliciously yielding nature before. You see he thought I was just like you - and we're all a little narcissistic, aren't we? Must run in the family."

"And you want to make more? Get real. The Project was a failure. It produced ten sick and warped men who cause nothing but pain to anyone they come in contact with."

"Increased resistance to disease, superior intellect, near-empathic abilities have been the hallmark of our line, combined with DNA like that of your Dana, it's a wonderful combination. When the Old Order releases whatever biological monstrosity they've created, I will rise out of the ashes and rule the survivors."

God, it was no surprise that the genesis of the project had been with the Nazis. This spiel of genetic superiority was as old as the Babylonians thinking that they were better than the other tribes further down the Euphrates River. And my mother had been involved in it up to her pearl earrings.

"You know, before you go any further with your little meglomaniacal soliloquy here, let me update you a little on the background of the Mulder Dynasty. Our dear mother might have neglected to mention the fact that our family is Jewish. Mom's Aunt Sophie managed to live through Dachau. Dad's family hid in Amsterdam, pretending to be Christian, and only a few managed to survive. So you think long and hard about your master race shit, we've been there and done that, got the tattoos."

"Is that what you're going to tell your daughter?"

"My daughter?" I squeaked.

"Yes, your baby. The one I made for you with your partner's ova. There weren't many left after Bethel, but Mom has always been a belt-and-suspenders kind of lady."

Miranda.

I could barely hear Jason's voice through the rushing of blood through my brain. I think he might have been surprised when I leapt at him.
His gun went off.

****

A gunshot, like the crack of Doom, drew my attention upwards, to a side of the building where at least ten enormous tanks of green liquid glowed radioactively against the murk. There was a temporary wooden ladder leading up to that part of the building, where a wall would have been later on, and I ran towards it.

Whatever I might have seen had I stayed in place was lost as I got closer and couldn't see up, but I heard Mulder's voice, twice, and I knew I'd found him.

Hand over hand I climbed the ladder, cursing my too-short legs that prevented me from skipping rungs.

I had just stuck my head over the edge when the two fighting men slammed into one of the tanks. I ducked and felt a glass fragment slash my cheek open, and I was spattered with something thick and salty as semen. It was slimy enough to make my hands slippery on the ladder and, blind, I reached out for solid ground. The metal framework of the unfinished floor provided handholds and I pulled myself up.

I should have known that it would come to this.

The green goo, almost opaque now that it wasn't backlit in its glass fishtank, coated them both, plastering their hair to their skulls and destroying anything that made them distinguishable. Two pairs of hazel eyes blazed hatred. One knocked the other to the walkway, clanging against the metal and sending spatters of goo down several stories.

The one on the bottom saw me as he struggled to keep the one on top from choking him. He screamed something, my ears were ringing from the gunfire and the helicopter but I thought I could lipread.

Kill us both, he said.

I raised my gun and aimed carefully. I didn't intend to shoot Jason in the shoulder.

I didn't even feel the blow. Only the sudden realization that I was horizontal and that my gun was spinning across the walkway, bouncing and catching on the metal grid, told me that I'd been hit.

The static in my head was growing. I rolled onto my back, feeling the bruises soon to come, and looked up again into Mulder's face.

I blinked and fought the pain and the face swelled and softened. It became Ian's, poor crazed Ian, not so dead after all but only hiding until the last act. I want to say that I made that deduction because I'd seen it all before, but it would be more honest to admit that I just knew.

He spared me a glance and then stooped to pick up my gun. I lurched to my hands and knees. He didn't know, how would he get it right? Mulder and Jason were still rolling around and I'd lost whatever certainty I'd thought I had.

I stood and reached out to pull at his arm but he pushed me away casually. I couldn't see his face and I was still deaf, but I know what he said:

I'm your brother and I love you.
I felt the vibration of the gunshot, felt the walkway shake as a man collapsed, half his face spread across the other man's head and shoulders, green and red mixing like some bizarre Christmas cookie frosting.

He blinked and spat as the body collapsed, its hands trailing down his sodden chest, still fighting even in death. There were fireworks going off behind my eyes in the space where my brain used to be.

The wounded one fell to the walkway, bubbling screams coming from where his mouth had been.

Movement, all around me, like snakes rustling through grass. More of them. Three more. Long hair, Emerson, his tongueless mouth opening, echoing the scream of his brother, streaked hair, Darrien, screaming as well, short hair, George, screaming from his tattooed throat. Ian moving past me, to where the screaming and fallen one lay, Ian screamed as well. The one remaining alive on the walkway staggered back, away from his brothers. Whatever hot metal insanity linked them closed the chain and he shrieked as well.

Like wolves over the broken body of an antelope run to ground on the plain, they converged, hands reaching, stretching to the fallen one, the howl moving beyond my ears and into my body. Fingers reached out to the brother on the floor. Reaching, pulling, tearing, rending. I saw blood. More blood, and, as they fell upon him, his screams rose higher in a castrato glissando over the inhuman song of the brothers Mulder. Gobbets of bloody flesh fell onto the walkway and dripped onto the next level. Bloodied fingers daubed at one another like children playing in a mud puddle.

One lovely hazel eye bounced off the metal flooring a few inches from my face, I put my head on the cold metal and shut my eyes, the sob in my throat dying unborn. A moment, a heartbeat, an eternity and the noise was gone. Nothing left of the fallen brother but a bouquet of bones with a crimson bloom of blood and crumpled, shredded tissue around. The three latecomers were gone as though they had never been there, just the live one on the walkway with the corpse of his brother and Ian, standing over me where I cowered on the ground. There was blood on Ian's hands.

There was blood on his face, surrounding his mouth.

Already he had the gun at his temple, and I was transfixed by the image, one I'd often imagined when Mulder sounded too lonely and distant on the phone. Ian looked all the way to the bottom of me, and I don't think he liked what he saw. "Take care of my daughter," he said and pulled the trigger for the second time. The burning heat of his blood covered me.

More blood.

I was drowning in it. Only two-thirds of the Mulders in the vicinity were dead. There was still work to do before I succumbed to shock, despair, or even full-fledged insanity, all of which were options I fully intended to consider in depth -- some day.

The spasming of Ian's muscles enabled him to keep the gun in his grip even as I pried it away. The gore-spattered man ten feet from me was still looking unsteadily at the dead man at his feet when I retrieved my weapon and pointed it at him.

"Wipe your face," I commanded, sounding absurdly like the mother of a toddler.

He hesitated.

"Do it now!" My voice rose and I swayed. If he moved forward I'd have to shoot, I was in no shape for a fight.
He raised one soaked arm to his cheek and rubbed. The first pass didn't do much, just rearranged the blood and other liquid into a diarrhea-like brown. He swiped again, using his forearm like a cat cleaning itself, faster and faster as if he could peel off his face if he only tried hard enough and start over as a new person.

When he raised his head his face was still stained, but it was evident that his nose lacked symmetry.

I stepped forward and had another thought. What if Mulder had broken Jason's nose in the fight? The light wasn't the best, nor was my perception. And obviously I was incapable of telling the difference at fairly crucial junctures.

"Scully..." he said and raised his hands to me, palms up, pleading for absolution.

After all the surveillance we'd undergone I didn't know what to ask him to verify his identity.

"Show me your cheek," I ordered and, when he didn't make an asinine crack, or drop his pants, I revised downwards my estimate of the chance that it was really my Mulder. My finger trembled on the trigger, less than six ounces away from firing pressure.

He shrugged and wiped his right hand on the railing, leaving a stain of bloody slime, and then attacked his face again, scratching at the thick, tacky residue there.

I have never loved Mulder's mole as much as I did for the few seconds after it appeared and before I collapsed.

****

Scully brought the baby with her when she was released from the hospital. I should have guessed. I would have paid a lot of money to be warned of her impending arrival so that I could have watched her stalk through the entire floor, kid held to her chest like a Congressional Medal of Honor.

Instead I had to settle for gawping along with Zippy when the two of them entered his office.

I rediscovered my voice, which along with my heart had fallen several stories at the sight of her with her hands, literal and metaphorical, full.

"Are you planning to tell me about this at any time before this kid reaches voting age?"

She looked up and the baby promptly turned its head and began to drool on her blouse. "I think you can probably guess what the PCS showed about her relationship to me."

I nodded. She looked quickly at Zippy, then away.

"Do you want to know what I found when I tested your blood?"

"Where they buried Jimmy Hoffa?"

Not even a twitch, either of amusement or exasperation.

"What?" I said, and my voice cracked.

"There's...according to standard genetic testing protocols, she's your child."

My circulation stopped. I swear not a molecule of blood moved through my body. I wanted Jason to have been lying to me. Trust the son of a bitch (and weren't we all) to have been telling me the truth about the one thing that I wanted to be a lie.
I love my delusions, wouldn't leave home without them.

Scully sighed with resignation.

"She's got your genes, but that doesn't make her your daughter. Do you really think they'd use your sperm when Jason and Ian were so much more accessible?"

I'd been punched by large men with less effect. I thought I could feel the still-healing sutures in my stomach burst.

You had to give Zippy credit, he continued to fill out papers as though there weren't thermonuclear strikes going off all around him.

"Mulder?" she prompted. "Do you have any thoughts you're willing to share?"

I looked everywhere but at the little bundle of joy in her arms.

"What the hell am I supposed to do about it? It's not like I impregnated you. For God's sake, I have been doing everything possible to avoid just that. You can't just dump this on me. As you're so happy to point out, I can barely take care of myself, let alone a child."

The door behind her face slammed shut, leaving me outside. I found myself looking down the barrel of the gun in her eyes.

"Well, if that's the way you feel about it --" she said in a voice as bright and brittle as Jason's Waterford Crystal.

"That's not -- shit. You've got to give me some time to think about this." I turned and stared at the brick wall outside beyond Zippy's window. "I'm not exactly thrilled that my fucked up gene pool is continuing."

"Whatever."

The scalpel on her tongue cut me to the spine.

"I'm taking Miranda and going to my mother's. The court has granted me temporary custody pending an adoption hearing. I've cleared the parental leave with Skinner. If you have any questions about my involvement with the case against Roush, you can call me or reach me via e-mail."

The door clicked shut with a noise more final than a slam.

Zippy picked up his head.

"You are such an asshole."

"Fuck you, fuck you to death," I snapped and genuinely meant it.

****

I had never realized exactly how many things that babies required for daily maintenance until I found myself struggling onto the plane at the Austin airport with Miranda, a diaper bag, a seat sling, my briefcase (with laptop weighing it down), and my suitcase. The business travelers stared at me as though I had a virulent form of leprosy rather than a human being smaller than most of their carry-on bags. I knew how they felt. I'd always had the same reaction when I had seen women with children getting on planes. The babies always cried and the mothers seemed to be both embarrassed and frustrated by a perfectly natural reaction. And the other passengers had gotten mad enough to kill.
The bruises that I’d gotten at the hands of the various Mulders were making my entire right side stiff and sore as though I had been through a particularly rough workout at the gym – with me as the punching bag. After I settled into the seat, I nestled Miranda against my right arm and let her hot little body work as a natural heating pad. She grunted like a piglet and tried to nurse my arm. I popped the bottle's nipple in her mouth and sighed.

The phone call I had made to my mother had been utterly surreal.

Hi mom, I have a baby.

That's nice dear, where did you get it?

Even after I had explained that the baby was both mine and Mulder's due to a perverse experiment and that I had some reservations about my ability to do my job with a baby/toddler/child/teenager to worry about, she continued to ask me when and where I was going to have the baby christened. I shouldn't have been surprised, but I was hoping that she could be a little more constructive than that. At any rate, I headed home with my not-yet fully adopted baby and wondered what kind of havoc an eight pound creature could possibly wreak in my life.

Answer: a lot of havoc.

Halfway home, Miranda began to wail and I found myself changing her diaper in the microscopic airplane bathroom while she screamed as though I was burning her with a hot curling iron. Back at the seat, she sobbed into my chest for awhile (which was a tip-off that she had the Mulder bloodline for sure) before falling asleep. I dozed as well and the flight attendant had to wake me up when we arrived back at BWI.

Then it took twice as long as I'd expected to get off the plane as I held everyone else up by dragging all the bags, bottles, wadded-up tissues, and God knew what else with me, taking Miranda almost as an afterthought. It took three times as long as I'd expected to get a cab; walking with my mule-load of paraphernalia was exhausting and no one stopped to help me. I missed Mulder. My aching neck and spasming back and twisted calves missed Mulder.

Our slow progress to the awkward buses that shuttle passengers from the gates to the main terminal made us late; I'd given Mom an ETA based on pre-baby experience. By the time we arrived she was about ready to file a missing persons report.

My first hour at her house was spent making the guestroom baby-ready. She had a crib for little grand-visitors, but it needed to be set up; it was still sealed in plastic awaiting Bill's first visit. So she rocked Miranda as I scuttled about on the floor, doing terrible things to my back, and jammed Tab A into Slot B according to the Korean instructions, trying not to curse or cry and mostly succeeding.

We finally got Miranda safely in her crib and I excused myself to wash up. The clothes were irretrievably mommy clothes as a result of the trip and my face had the pinched Kabuki look I remembered from my cancer days.

Miranda, though, was only going to get bigger, even if we put another chip in my neck.

I took the rubber band out of my hair, wincing as it ripped strands out, and went out to face the wrath of Mom.

She was standing in front of the crib, looking down at Miranda like my chemistry instructors had looked at some of my less successful experiments.

"How are you going to take care of this baby?" she asked, looking up, and I noticed how tired her
face was. The tragedies of the past five years had put permanent shadows under her eyes and the flesh under her jaw was sagging.

"I don't really know," I admitted. "I hadn't realized what an undertaking all this is...I didn't get any time to prepare. I'm afraid...no one can tell whether there's been any long-term damage from her unusual birth experience, and certainly no one can predict the effects of the genetic experimentation to which she and her parents were subjected. She's not obviously dying, but what if...?"

Mom held out her hand and I stepped forward so that we were both looking down. In sleep Miranda's face was as soft and plastic as Play-Doh. I had a momentary terror that she wasn't breathing, but then I caught the subtle rise and fall of her soft-boned chest.

"I don't think you're ever ready for what a child does to your life. You do know I was pregnant with Bill Jr. when Bill and I got married?"

My face flamed. "Mom!" Many years ago, at one of their anniversaries, I'd done the math and I assumed my siblings had as well, but we'd never discussed it.

"You can do whatever you have to do," Mom said. "Your father was not exactly the stay-at-home type and I raised four of you, pretty well I think, without him most of the time. And I imagine Fox will help out, at least financially."

"It's probably not even his child."

"It?"

My mouth opened and closed. "When I found out that my ova had been taken, I was angry to have the choice taken away from me. Then they created monsters with my genes and that was worse. I know Miranda's not a monster but she terrifies me. Mulder doesn't want a child at all. I feel so alone."

And, Mom, I don't know whether it runs in the genes but I think Jason died because he put too many of himself in one room; like radio waves interfering they came together and canceled him out. Somehow the twins knew where he was and what he wanted to do to them. Even dangerous George and useless Darien had converged through whatever group or singular consciousness they shared and protected themselves, attacking the one who'd turned on them like blood cells responding to an autoimmune disorder. What was worst was that I couldn't remember if Mulder's hands and mouth had been only spattered from being near to the gunshot or if he'd -- touched -- his downed brother. This was Miranda's legacy. I was reminded of Hamlet's warning about Ophelia: conception is a blessing, but not as your daughter may conceive.

"It's all so, complex," I said and knew that was only the barest shadow of what I could say.

My mother's hand rubbed my back, settling down on my shoulder. "You're very strong, Dana. You'll be all right even if your relationship with Fox doesn't survive this challenge."

I must have looked surprised.

"I'm your mother," she explained. "You stopped talking about him."

My face burned; I hated that I had been that obvious.

"He's not exactly the kind of man I would have hoped you'd find, particularly now. He needs a full-time caretaker of his own. It's harder for a woman with a child but you're still young, Dana, if you took a job that had regular hours you might even meet some nice men from the real world."
Now I goggled at her. She'd been so polite to Mulder in the past, I think I always assumed she saw him as son-in-law material. But I had to get that coldness from somewhere, didn't I, and she was right that parenting was a very different job from being a lover or a partner.

"Come downstairs and have something to eat. I have a catalogue of christening dresses..."

I followed, with the increasing sense that I was trapped in a mad director's Dadaist movie.

"What if I can't cope, Mom?" I asked her descending back.

She didn't turn around. "Children change a lot of things, Dana. Some things you don't want to change, and then one day you look up and discover that you're perfectly happy with the person you've become."

I've had so many transformations in the past few years I don't even remember the person who used to live in my body. If I couldn't deal with who I was, how could I become someone new?

19

_Less the reminders of properties told my words, And more the reminders that they of life untold, and of freedom and extrication, And make short account of neuters and geldings, and favor men and women fully equipt. And beat the gong of revolt, and stop with fugitives and them that plot and conspire._

Given a choice between going before a Senate Subcommittee meeting and being raped by Jason again, I'll take Jason any day of the week. Even if he came back as a zombie to do the deed. Poor Mulder, standing there taking his oath in his best suit looking suspiciously like Jimmy Stewart in Mr. Smith Goes to Washington while I sat in the gallery with Emerson on one side and Skinner on the other, Miranda cooing in my lap. I hadn't wanted to take her but whatever gene that had given Jason the gift of gab rose its ugly head in both Mulder and Emerson and they agreed that the "coo-factor" would weigh in well in our favor. After all there I was with Mulder and Emerson, the twins, and a child that was mine that I hadn't given birth to. I had signed affidavits from my gynecologist and the team that had attempted to harvest my ova prior to the chemotherapy stating that I was barren as the face of the moon at the time.

The current report from my gynecologist was a contrast in the extreme. Fortunately, Jason's attempt had been fruitless, pardon the pun, and I wasn't pregnant but that was more due to luck than anything else.

I needed to know if Ian's speech about the barrenness of the twins was true. I'm a scientist, let's keep that in mind. And these days if anyone but Mulder told me that the sun rose in the east I'd go outside and check just to make sure that a conspiracy hadn't reoriented the cardinal directions.

In retrospect, hauling Mulder off to a fertility clinic was probably the worst thing to do under the circumstances, but just scraping the surface of his sofa wasn't going to give a fresh sample, now was it? He balked, he bitched, he whined, he went. He also spent fifteen minutes perusing their videotape collection before he found something to his connoisseur's taste.

Well, in a nutshell, Ian was wrong. After all he was mad, and possibly the myth of his own virility as compared to that of his brothers was one of the few things that kept him from total catatonic schizophrenia. Mulder was as fertile as a field well stocked with manure.

The clinic was the first time I'd seen him since I'd left him in Austin.

Irrefutable proof, Miranda, Emerson, Mulder, and somewhere in the back of the gallery, Darien who
hadn't wanted to sit with us. I guess he thought the taint of insanity was passed through the air like a virus. If so, this was a virus that prophylactics would avail him little against. When I'd tried to ask him what had happened in that warehouse, whether he'd really been there on the walkway, he denied it as vehemently as a politician denying that donations would ever affect his vote. When I asked Emerson, by contrast, he made hand motions that Aileen refused to translate; she said he'd never left her side during their escape from captivity, and in a way I wanted to believe that. He seemed like such a good family man.

In this case perhaps family loyalty had been best served by ripping Jason apart like Osiris, Osiris whose lover had been his mother and his sister both by some accounts. I hadn't asked Mulder what he'd seen and/or done, because that would have required real conversation. And it would force me to evaluate exactly how I should react to the unspeakable thing I'd seen that day.

Miranda gurgled and drooled on the lapel of my suit. She rooted against me, her body hot and heavy as a sack of sugar. Aileen had already offered to take her while I testified which would, with my luck, coincide with her next feeding. But the Senators had to finish crucifying Mulder first.

Then it was my turn.

I don't remember much about giving testimony, Aileen tells me that I looked and sounded wonderful, strong and believable spouting out information about gametes, blastocysts, twinning, and cloning with baby drool on my suit. I do remember meeting Mulder out in the cold marble hallway afterwards, where the press was not allowed; I was waiting for him with Skinner, who had Miranda over one shoulder and an astonishing amount of curdled formula sticking to his tie.

"What the hell are we going to do?" Mulder asked.

"Get better dry cleaners."

"That's not what I meant."

"I know what you meant and this is really not the time or place to start this discussion," I said in the most even tone that I could manage.

"You let me know when you want to talk about it," he said in a hard, tight voice and Miranda let out a thin wail. Mulder took one look at the AD's tie and blinked.

I was just about ready to snatch her away from Skinner when the doors to the chamber opened and Emerson and Aileen came out.

"They've gone onto the government funds that Roush misused during the course of the experiments. Despite all your efforts, it's becoming clear that the committee is more interested in the financial rather than the ethical problems the research has caused," Aileen sighed.

Emerson's hands flew in short, choppy strokes.

"Fucking government bean-counters, they'll be the first ones up against the wall when the revolution comes. It doesn't matter to them what Roush has done to human beings; they're just interested in the money. Bastards."

Miranda had calmed down by then and was leaving a thin trail of drool down the back of Skinner's jacket. I decided he could hold her for another few moments, or until he noticed, whatever came first.

"When you think about all the lives that they ruined. The people that they killed, the potential lives that they destroyed during the course of this, a slap on the wrist for punishment is a joke. It's an
"insult," Emerson continued.

I thought about a burning laboratory in Arizona and my legs felt like rubber bands, who was I to pass judgement on them? I'd done the same thing. I wanted to throw up but Miranda had pretty much taken the franchise on that for the time being.

Emerson's surprised outrage didn't resonate with me. On a scale of zero to Mulder, my paranoia level was at least 1.2 Mulders. I hadn't expected anything but a whitewash, given that there was certainly a PAC out there dedicated to promoting the agenda of the powerful, hidden men who'd ruled my life for so long. Roush and its successors had an advantage over other interest groups who often complained that no one in Washington stays bought--renege on a deal with them and you could end up with a terminal case of death.

"What are you going to do now?" Skinner asked Mulder.

I could see the search engine running in Mulder's head, searching for a field code to match up with the question.

"No fucking idea," he admitted. "They never found George Naxos's body, I was thinking I'd look into that."

"Agent Zipprelli has requested lead authority on Roush and the related investigations. Agent Scully is taking the three month family leave. Why don't you take four weeks off and make a decision at your leisure."

"Agent Scully has a bad habit of not including me in her vacation plans."

"I'm sorry?"

Skinner wasn't anywhere near as sorry as the rest of us.

Mulder sighed and rubbed the back of his neck. He must not have been sleeping well--again--and his back and shoulders were giving him trouble--again.

"We're not a matched set," he said quietly, and the noise of the hallway fell away. I felt a burning in my sinuses. "We're not like salt and pepper shakers, it's not unthinkable to have one without the other. There's work that needs to be done."

I took my baby away from my boss and breathed in her fresh bread smell.

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Scully was gone but I had things to do before I could figure out what that meant to me. The first was to deal with some of the more trivial detritus thrown up by this latest sordid adventure.

Ian's voice echoed in my head, finishing up his song.

One little Indian boy left all alone, He went and hanged himself and then there were none.

But I wasn't alone, not really. There was Emerson and Darien. Scully and Miranda.

Miranda my daughter, Jason's daughter, whose child is this?

The woman greeting patrons at Galileo had a skintight black dress slit up to bare one thigh, very fashionable.
"Will you be eating alone tonight, sir?" she asked.

"No, I'll be undergoing mitosis after the soup course," I replied and she frowned prettily. I sighed at her and smiled enough to appease her, so that confusion wouldn't turn to anger. "Table for two, please."

I hadn't lied; I'd just finished my pasta e fagioli when Darien arrived.

He flounced into the seat, scanning the restaurant for Names and Faces, but it was a bit too early for fashionable dining. Lots of K Street lawyers, though.

"Thinking of staying out here?"

Darien shuddered dramatically. "Are you kidding? Whoever said that power was the ultimate aphrodisiac had not gotten a very good look at the bodies of these people. My ticket takes me home tomorrow." He really spoke like that; there was a lot of emphasis so that the listener didn't get confused about the important words.

"You think you'll be able to continue in your...profession...now that the whole nation's seen you on TV?"

"Please, Mr. Mulder, C-Span is hardly television. Anyway," he said, raising a careful hand to signal a waiter over, "the whole thing's likely to get me cast as you when they make the movie."

"Movie?"

"There's always a movie." He ordered a martini and the agnolotti stuffed with beets and the waiter disappeared. "You know, you don't need to speak about my business with such contempt. I graduated summa from Harvard with a degree in Social Studies."

I should have known--you can always tell a Harvard man, but you can't tell him much. "What's Social Studies?"

He smiled blithely. "That's the problem, isn't it? I could be asking customers 'do you want fries with that?' or I could be drifting from cattle call to cattle call looking for my big break. Instead I spend my days exactly the way I want to; I read, I eat, I swim and I fuck. It's not a bad life, and I made enough money in the stock market over the last decade that even when the stars and starlets turn to next year's model I'll be comfortable. It's all consensual, so what's wrong with that?"

I put my hand to my temple as if I had a headache. The funny thing was, it did sound like a pretty good life. Maybe Scully should go off with Darien, have all of the sex and none of the trauma of being with me. I wondered if Darien needed a partner, I bet there were plenty of people who'd pay more than double for twins. Maybe he could take us both on, start a little performing troupe.

My risotto and Darien's agnolotti arrived and we ate. I tore myself away from the ecstasy-inducing meal to finish our business. "I asked you here for a few reasons. I wanted to make sure you felt safe, now that Roush has pretty much been shut down. There's still a good chance that the men behind Roush will still want a crack at the family gene pool."

Darien was eating his agnolotti in small, precise bites, taking a circle out of the pillow-shaped pasta each time he lifted one to his mouth. It was stomach-turningly erotic, especially since he kept his eyes on mine as he bit and chewed. He rested the fork down for a minute. "I had a vasectomy years ago, when I first came to L.A."

I relaxed a little. I'd suspected as much. He was Californian and therefore not truly of Earth but there
was no indication that he was stupid.

Darien put his hand over mine. He was warm and strong and his wide hazel eyes invited me to trust him. "I don't live in your world and I don't want to. I'm sorry, but I'm glad it's you and not me who's been forced to face all this. My parents are the people who raised me, the ones I send money to every month. When I go back, I don't want to hear from you again, okay? We'll just pretend we each live in parallel universes, and everything will be fine."

I nodded mutely.

Now, the last question, the one whose answer I could hardly bear to hear. "Tell me what you remember about what happened in Texas."

He didn't need me to draw him a picture. His hand withdrew. Long lashes hid the reflecting pools of his eyes. "I know we were drugged, I have the injection marks. It's all so blurry...I don't remember much until the cameras were shoved in my face. That sobered me up pretty quick. I guess--Emerson--he led us out after your partner got us free. The other one didn't want to follow us but I was in no shape to make my own decisions."

I knew he was lying, but what could I do? Recount my own Lovecraftian memory of rending flesh and limbs writhing like tentacles, of funhouse reflections in bloody cracked mirrors? I couldn't swear that I knew what had happened. That it hadn't been my hands even if they'd looked like Darien's.

We spent the rest of the meal in silence as the restaurant filled up. We got a number of assessing looks, not just because of the resemblance but, I'm sure, because inside the Beltway C-Span really does count as television.

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Before he and Mulder left to return to Austin, Zippy took me to lunch. He let me eat half of my sandwich before he started in on me. He made an implausible matchmaker and confidante. Then again compared to everything else he was fairly plausible.

He reached over the thick dark table and took my hand as he talked. "Dana, you need to think about what you're doing with Mulder. Don't make this into a contest over who's suffered more. I wouldn't be sure you'd win."

I stared into my drink. "Has he told you--?"

"Mulder doesn't talk about his own problems, much less yours. It's apparent you've both been beaten up pretty badly by life, or by Roush if you want to get specific, in the past few months. You need to give him time. I mean, I'm still not totally down with the fact that I'm a father, and I'm pretty sure that the kids are mine and nobody used their genes to knit themselves a new kind of person with."

My face was a porcelain mask as I stared at him. "I didn't get any time and everyone expects me to deal with it."

"I think maybe you're imagining that the rest of the world is as harsh a judge of you as you are of yourself. There's nothing wrong with needing time to deal with this. You can't pretend that everything is cool--it's not like the stork just brought you a baby. There are problems you have to deal with. Don't buy in to the sexist bullshit that says this should all come naturally to you. Even if there were anything natural about what happened to you it would still be difficult."

I gripped the edge of the table so that he couldn't see me shaking. I could tell that his advice was good but I wasn't sure I could take it.
"When I found out about Emily, and she was dying, I felt bad, but not heartbreakingly bad. I hadn't bonded with her. She was just a child who happened to have my genes. By the time I was used to the idea that she was my daughter and I should take care of her, she was gone," I pushed the remainder of my sandwich around on my plate with my finger.

"And when she died, I was relieved. I don't remember crying. I felt numb. I still do. When I hold Miranda, I feel as though I should have some warm outpouring of maternal adoration. I don't have it. Holding her feels no differently from holding anyone else's baby, or holding the dog I had."

"And how does it make you feel?"

"Overwhelmed," I admitted and felt my mouth twist in a self-deprecating smirk.

"That's pretty much par for the course with babies," he smiled a softer version of his usual neon grin, "eight pounds of terror."

Zippy was a nice guy, I thought randomly, it really was a pity.

"Dana?"

I looked up and he was halfway to a smile. "Do you want me to make an honest woman of you?"

I laughed and felt the strain in unfamiliar muscles. "It's a little too late for that. You can pay for lunch, though."

And he did.

The past and present wilt - I have fill'd them, emptied them And proceed to fill my next fold of the future. Listener up there! What have you to confide to me? Look in my face while I snuff the sidle of evening, (talk honestly no one else hears you and I stay only a minute longer.) Do I contradict myself? Very well then I contradict myself, I am large, I contain multitudes.

Two months passed. Two months of endless administrative bullshit tracking down the whys and wherefores of the Roush case. You don't total a multi-million dollar company and walk away without doing your weight in paperwork. I did paperwork and interviews of Roush employees during the day and at night Zippy and I did damage to our livers in the Blues bars dotting the city. Scully kept in touch by e-mail and the occasional businesslike phone call. I died cell by cell. She gave me no indication as to how the baby was doing, and I assumed that all was well. I had a suspicion that she was talking to Zippy since I found a big pink elephant in the trunk of his car one afternoon. Yes, she was talking to Zippy and not to me again. This probably hurt more than anything.

To make matters worse, my mother kept calling and leaving me messages to call home.

I didn't.

Once again, Samantha was gone, vanished without leaving as much as a fingerprint or a hair suitable for DNA testing. I couldn't even be sure that Dr. Mann really had been my sister after all or just a faded photocopy like myself.

I know a clinical depression when I see one and I can go into full-blown denial when I'm in one.

Zippy insisted I come stay with him and I was rather easily led by that point. He put me in the room
his kids used when they visited. I suspect a covert tactic on his part to get me to think about babies and the beauty of reproduction. Little did he know that I could think of nothing else.

I read Pooh stories and watched a lot of television, drunk and sober, watched the whole fiasco hashed and rehashed on CNN and the networks. I watched Sheryl Ann Reardon end up as the star correspondent for one of the national networks, covering the whole story and losing her middle name and her accent for national distribution. It was nice to see that someone had benefited from all this bullshit.

Nights I lay alone on the narrow child's bed with a glass of room-temperature single-malt propped on my chest and watched thirtysomething re-runs on the estrogen channel, letting myself be brainwashed. It was just as well; my brain was pretty much gone by that point. I cried when Gary died.. He reminded me of myself, prickly woman and a baby he hadn't planned on. I resolved to be more careful with my driving.

When I didn't drink enough I could dream, and that was worse than anything. Zippy never mentioned anything about me screaming out loud, so I guess I didn't.

I woke many nights with my fist stuffed into my mouth, bleeding where I'd scraped the knuckles raw with my teeth, fleeing from dreams in which it was me in that cavernous bathroom, me holding Scully in place as she screamed and her tears and blood mixed with the hot torrential water. Or it was Sam and I remembered what it was like to fuck her, her meager body folding underneath me like a paper parasol, closing around me and she was tight and hot as a water pipe. She was living metal in my dreams. When I woke with the sheets sticky and wet I could not tell which perversion it was that had made me come.

Jason was dead but I was still dreaming his dreams.

Maybe Jason was only mostly dead. Am I my brother's keeper? I thought about digging in through my eyeballs to get at my brain and pull out the part of me that was him. But I couldn't be sure that I'd get him and not me, and what if he was left alone in this incarnation of my body?

Xeno's paradox points out that before you can reach a given point you have to get halfway there, and then you have to cover half of the remaining distance, and on and on to infinity...and if you keep going halfway you'll never really get there. I felt like that: I was approaching the asymptote of my endurance; every time I thought I was ready to swallow my gun there was something else to do first.

When we finally buried Roush's desiccated corpse, I called Aileen and accepted her offer. The shock and pity in her eyes when I stumbled off the plane, unshaven and reeking, infuriated me as much as it saddened me.

That first night Emerson came to my room. I was wary; I'd shared a little too much of Ian's world to be comfortable with a twin of mine in an enclosed space.

One of the things that's likeable about Emerson is that he's not afraid to take advantage of his muteness to get what he wants. Silence is unnerving if done right and though he hadn't ever taken a psych class I think he must have known what to do intuitively; either that or he just picked it up from me.

It took less than five minutes for the first cracks to appear. I asked him if I should get Aileen to translate, and he shook his head. I asked him what he wanted and he shook his head. I asked him if he thought he knew me just because we looked alike, just because we came from the same gamete that had split too many times before.
He shook his head. It was like beating my head against a wall, only more frustrating because with a wall eventually there's visible progress.

He was sitting on a corner of my yacht-sized bed, one leg dangling off of the edge and the other crossed nonchalantly onto his knee. He looked perfectly comfortable, at peace with himself and his world despite the turmoil I'd brought into it.

"How can you be so calm?" I asked him. "Is it drugs? Can I share them?" He smiled and shrugged. "If this is about Scully and Miranda, I don't know what you want me to say." Another shrug, as if to say, don't say anything you don't want to.

"I mean, it's not like I've ever had a chance to have a family...it's not like Scully's going to let me be a father. She doesn't trust me with herself, much less a baby who doesn't have any of Scully's defenses. It's like if she let me help her it would make her suffering meaningless, she has to hold onto it all alone to be strong and it doesn't matter that she leaves me all alone too--"

And then I was crying, huge unmanly sobs and he scooted over on the bed to hold me by the shoulders. His arms went around me and I could feel the total and utter sexlessness of it which was a blessing because I would have grabbed for the gun on the nightstand and killed us both had it been any other way. Instead I wet his shoulder thoroughly with my tears as I called Scully every nasty name in the book, words I'd never used to describe any woman, even Phoebe. That fucking cunt, I was reduced to saying over and over, in a tone so choked with snot and salt that Emerson probably could have said it more intelligibly.

I love her so much and she doesn't love me, I hate her because she won't love me, I didn't want this baby but here it is and she won't let me love it either.

He rocked me and crooned a wordless lullaby, practicing for his son maybe, and I felt his compassion, the way he shared my pain without trying to diminish it. His love was not unconditional. He didn't and couldn't love our dead brothers, but he loved me and that was far better than unconditional love.

We stayed like that as twilight turned to darkness, bound together like Romulus and Remus, nurtured on bitter wolf bitch's milk but strong enough to found our own city. Though I went to sleep alone I slept well.

After that he and Aileen started teaching me ASL to pass the time instead of drinking. It was a lot more of a challenge. When I got the chance to talk to him alone I asked him what had happened in Texas, figuring that he'd have the decency to tell me what he thought was true.

Unfortunately the truth was as elusive as it ever was in my family.

We had hiked through the snow to Emerson's favorite lookout spot, where the ground dropped away into a heart-shatteringly beautiful vista of trees, rocks and snow. The sky overhead was the color, I realized, of Scully's eyes, which made my mouth feel metallic in the cold air. I missed her so much that it made the ulcer pain feel like a hangnail.

"What do you remember about Texas? How Jason died?" I signed, the air cold on my bare hands.

"Aileen says I was with her the whole time. And I remember it that way. I remember tearing my shirt as we went through the window."

That didn't sound too bad. As usual I'd jumped the gun.

"But I also remember something different. Something," his hands stilled, "in the building. I never
hurt anything before. Not even when they wanted me to be angry when I was in therapy. I was supposed to learn how to box to deal with my suppressed anger, but I said no. I'm a vegetarian, Fox. But in the other memory, all I wanted was to make him stop. I can still taste his blood when I sleep."

I dry-washed my face with my hands, remembering the stickiness of Jason’s blood on my own skin. "I'm sorry."

He nodded, accepting. Though it was reassuring that he was as forgiving as Ghandi, I felt somewhat inferior by comparison.

We watched a hawk circle above the tree line of the gorge, looking for prey.

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Emerson and Aileen insisted that Miranda and I stay at their compound for the last month of my leave. I didn't realize until the limo from the airport had departed that they'd enticed Mulder there as well. He would have taken parental leave too, I think, if not for the seizure that OPR would have thrown upon seeing the forms.

I'd come to think of the question of his connection to Miranda as involving the Heisenberg paternity principle: he both was and was not the genetic father. Absent time travel there was no way to tell for certain; even if we did ever recover some records from the mess that had been Roush's palace their veracity would be forever questionable.

I had believed that his indifference to Miranda was the final knife that would allow me to cut the cords binding us, the ones that were slowly strangling us to death as they tightened. But when he'd taken my decision so casually and turned to Zippy to find the next wide-eyed truth-seeker, the pain informed me that my clever plan to leave him behind had not succeeded.

I told myself that I owed him the phone calls and the messages, though I knew all along that I was only injecting anticoagulant into the wound, like old-time physicians with their leeches, bleeding and bleeding in the vain delusion that it somehow promoted healing. The first time I called Zippy in the middle of the night and heard the dry desperation in my own voice as I asked about Mulder, how was he really, I knew that I'd once again fucked things up in grand style.

It's not my fault; I wanted to tell him. I was trying so hard. But life tried harder.

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We were eating yet another gourmet meal, this one in the conservatory full of plants while the snow fell outside, when Aileen made her suggestion.

"I want to talk to you about Miranda," she began.

Scully and I traded glances.

"Yes," Scully said tensely, her shields flaring.

"Emerson and I would like to offer to take care of her. Before you say anything," she held up a hand and Scully's mouth clanged shut, "hear us out. We'll be taking care of Samuel too," she rubbed her stomach proudly, "and we'll have the best help in the world. We can protect both of them, as well as anyone can. You know...she's Emerson's child as much as she's Mulder's."

"What about me?" Scully whispered, her voice flayed and bleeding.
"Dana," Aileen took her hand and waited until Scully looked her in the eye, "I wouldn't suggest this if you were certain about becoming a full-time parent. Make no mistake; this baby girl will need someone there around the clock. You can't chase aliens and make midnight feedings. I know you feel like too many choices have been made for you. This is your choice. Either way, you can always come to us, I promise."

Dessert had been out of the question; Scully evaporated to Miranda's room and the rest of us sat and vegetated, not even trying to talk about anything important. Aileen was reading over Emerson's latest code and Emerson and I talked politics, though I was still getting the tenses all wrong because my memory wasn't very useful for spatial relations.

I was pitifully grateful that Scully would snap my head off like a praying mantis if I dared give her advice on this. I had no idea what to tell her, except that I wanted her for myself. (Notwithstanding that Miranda was, as everyone was at pains to point out, genetically my child, and that Scully had no more carried her than I had, everyone assumed that as quasi-father I'd naturally have less interest in the baby than Scully. I considered this assumption sexist and demeaning, but there was no doubt that the strong likelihood that Miranda was a twin's child and not directly my own had some influence.)

Problems aplenty remained, even if Scully did agree to give Miranda to the Goldbergs. She still hadn't evinced any interest in discussing Jason's claims about her selection for the Project's ova harvesting. When a vast super-governmental conspiracy decides that your psychic powers make you worth breeding, their judgment deserves a little respect. Scully rebuilt walls of denial faster than Washingtonians lopped the heads off of new parking meters.

Finally my resolve broke and I went to go check on my fractured family. Scully was dozing on her bed and Miranda was gurgling quietly in her crib. She'd just discovered her toes, a few weeks after figuring out that she had hands, and was having a marvelous time staring at these amazing, incredible protrusions.

I reached down and picked her up. She was much bigger than she'd begun, and had a fine head of hair, blonde-brown that would probably darken as she grew. Her eyes were a compromise green. They'd be her most striking feature and she'd despise the inevitable glasses.

She smiled at me and I at her. One little hand reached for my chin, tugging at the five-o'clock shadow; I chuckled and took her hand in mine, raising it to my lips. Such tiny fingernails, clean and perfect and smelling of baby powder and sour strawberries. She grabbed at my lower lip with her drool-cooled fingers and her tiny claws scraped my skin.

I'd never comprehended how people can hurt their children, even though I was never really surprised when it happened. Now I had so many more reasons to make the world clean and safe and true, gurgling and shifting against me in the fading winter light.

I raised her up in my arms so that she could look down on me and she giggled. In a few months she'd be babbling, and then there'd be words and crawling...then homework and dates and college applications, just like that. I considered the likelihood that I'd be around through all this and she moaned as if reading my mind.

So I bounced her up and down a little, playing catch-the-baby with myself, and she liked that much better. "I bet you'll be a basketball player just like your old man," I said. "Look at you--already twenty-two inches long if you're a foot, you're going to be a string bean."

"Twenty-four," Scully said dryly and I turned back to the bed. Her expression, if I read it correctly, contained annoyance covering up for a twinge of jealousy--for whom I didn't dare speculate--and a resigned sort of affection.
"Yeah, that's me, Scully, the idiot whose mischief you just get used to after a while."

"The trick is to hold the ball with your fingertips, not your palm. You get better control that way."

"She's got half my genes too, you know," Scully broke in, "which means that she's not going to be six foot tall."

"Skill is more important than height in WNBA," I told Miranda.

Miranda began to wiggle unhappily in my arms and Scully stretched herself over the bed to take my burden from me. Cradling Miranda in her arms like a Madonna, she looked back up at me. "Do you want to get our hosts to baby-sit so that we can talk?"

"Is that what you want?" This was pathetic, I was pathetic. "I'd...I think that would be a good idea."

She nodded and rose. "I'll be back soon."

I wandered around the room, fingering the tiny baby booties, bottles, toys, and other baby things scattered over every flat surface. Babies were not low maintenance, they didn't travel well, and they spit up a lot. Not unlike certain FBI agents I could name. The elephant Zippy had sent was in the crib, along with a battered teddy that had to have been Scully's own bear and a crazed-looking Thumper. I wondered where that had come from.

By the time she came back I was sitting on the bed, examining the stuffed rabbit. She leaned against the doorframe with her arms crossed over her chest the way I had seen her in a million police stations across the lower forty-eight. Only this time she was wearing a faded Johns Hopkins blue jays sweatshirt with telltale formula stains on the shoulder. The anaconda around my heart tightened its embrace.

"What do you think?" she asked.

"I think she could probably pull off the eyes and inhale them."

I got the eyebrow for that crack.

"Have you formulated any kind of a plan yet?" I asked, "How old does she have to be before she can date? When can she get her ears pierced? Public or private school, and are you going to be the only Girl Scout leader whose troop gets a badge for correctly processing crime scene evidence?"

"I thought I'd take them to the morgue and show them what a Stryker saw does," she said with a rare smile.

I turned the bunny around to face her and worked its arms like a puppet.

"I'm sorry," the bunny said in a squeaky voice.

"I didn't give you much of a chance," she replied, the corners of her mouth still tending upwards. My God, a mutual apology, or something close. Call Guinness, this was a record-breaking event.

"The genetic relationship...it's too complicated for me to figure out. My brain just stops when I try to think about it, saying Here There Be Tygers like old maps of the world. But I know I want to be there for Miranda, because she's a part of you."

"I guess it's better than collecting my discarded hair and fingernails."

I winced and she carefully sat down on the bed. I could feel the mattress pull down beneath me and I
leaned toward her gravitational tug. "Tell me what to do, Scully."

The bed shimmied and suddenly she was in my arms. "Hold me," she mouthed against my throat, and I did.

"I've thought about it, you know," she said into my shirt. The cotton muffled the words, but then Scully's elocution isn't always the best, and with my years of experience I could puzzle it out fine. "Having a baby is supposed to be a process, you know. Usually a woman chooses to have a child, and even if she didn't plan on it and the pregnancy is accidental she gets some time to get used to the idea. Time to make the connection. I didn't have that. I didn't even have the certainty that a voluntary egg donor has that she wants to create new life. What does a genetic relationship mean when it's neither chosen nor physically manifested? I feel...I know Miranda is my child. But I don't know what the consequences of that will be. There are things that I still need to do," and I smiled bitterly at the far wall to hear the echo of what she'd said upon telling me about her cancer.

It would be nice to tell her that I'd help her be ubermom. Sure, I'd had the fantasy too. Imagining a little house down Rockville Pike, were you, Scully my love? Maybe a dog, a sport utility vehicle and the Sunday comics section of the paper delivered on Saturday?

Right.

The closest we'd get to that would be to watch reruns of Father Knows Best on Nickelodeon.

On the other hand, Frohike had mentioned in the past that he had a good friend looking for a nanny job (doing the whole 'mild-mannered housekeeper by day, hacker by night' thing), it wouldn't be any stretch to pay a couple hundred a month along with room, board, and a T1 line. Especially since I'd be going a little easier on my suits if I took a desk job.

The irony of it is, I'd been completely cured of my desire to hunt little grey men. I'd seen what they'd done to Sam. It wasn't wonderful, and it wasn't safe, and it wasn't over.

But someone else had to take up the hunt now. Zippy had already begun the maneuvers to get himself transferred to the X Files, using his newly fledged contacts on Capitol Hill--he hadn't testified, but he'd worked closely with the offices of several Senators preparing for the Roush hearings. I'm not exactly sure why he followed me over the edge of plausibility to hunt bug-eyed monsters. I think maybe Roush offended his fundamental humanity.

My priorities were much more limited. As secure as Emerson and Aileen could make their home, it was obvious that it could still be penetrated. I wanted Miranda where I could watch over her, where I could if necessary trade myself for her safety. In fact making a home with her would be a step towards guaranteeing her safety, because it would be a public declaration that I wouldn't just go running off towards the latest lights in the sky, at least not without arranging for a babysitter. There's no reason to hold a hostage against someone who's not a threat.

Even more than that, I wanted to make something in my life come out right for once. I'd lost so much at the hands of the Project, almost forty years of manipulation, destruction, and bad manners. I wanted to know that I could carve out a space for myself, for Scully and her child.

I held her until night turned to grey winter dawn. She dozed some and I might have drifted a little too. Suspended in amber, refusing to worry about the future, I was happy for a few hours.

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The next day the snow was over my knees and I had to slog hard to keep up with Mulder in the
woods. I wished for snowshoes or at least two more inches on my legs – then again I've been wishing for that for most of my adult life.

In Shakespeare's plays leaving the court or the city to go to the country and experience the pastoral is supposed to bring peace and enlightenment – a refreshed perspective on life. But after a few short days with Aileen, Emerson, and Mulder I was more confused than ever. The facts still remained that I now had a child to care for and Jason had raped me. It was going to take more than a walk in the woods to make me feel better about either of those things.

But Mulder continued on, in Emerson's borrowed blanket coat, managing to look like an outdoor ad campaign for J. Crew. Aileen's feet were bigger than mine and my feet were swimming in her boots even with the two extra pair of socks.

"I want to show you something," he urged after nearly half an hour of stamping through the close trees and stumbling over rocks.

"If this is a crashed alien spacecraft you are in deep shit," I pointed out.

"No alien spacecraft, I promise. Emerson took me up here my second day and I wanted to share it with you."

"It's a little off the beaten track for a Hooters."

"Very funny. We're almost there."

Past the next stand of trees the ground went smooth and flat and I realized why. Ahead of us lay a gorge, bony with rocks and thick with trees. Above, the sky shone like an opal in the cold winter light. The vista went on forever, glittering and sparkling like a frosted Christmas card. The cold air stopped in my throat.

"Pretty cool, huh?" he asked and gave me one of his puppy wants to be petted smiles.

"It's beautiful," I agreed.

"Gives you a bit of perspective, doesn't it?"

"A bit."

He sat on a rock and patted his thighs.

"C'mere a minute."

His whitened breath was warm against the side of my face. This was how it all had started that night after Rhode Island, and it seemed that things had come back to the beginning. I sat on his lap like an oversized child giving her demands to Santa.

"Look, I know you're conflicted right now about Miranda and everything."

My nose burned with tears.

"But I've been thinking that there's no point in continuing what I started on the X-Files. I've found Samantha and, quite frankly, I wish I hadn't. Roush is gone and with it the threat of the Project. Most of my brothers are dead, and I may as well hang up my obsession and try to get on with what's left of my life."

He may as well have begun singing vesti la guibba in fine tenor voice and I wouldn't have believed
my ears for that either. I poked him in the nose.

"Who are you and what have you done with the real Fox Mulder?" I asked.

"That's not funny, Scully."

"Sorry."

"Anyway, what I'm trying to say here is that the past is so fucked up and I feel compelled to try to salvage the future. If you feel like you can't handle Miranda, let me have her. I can even quit the Bureau and write novels or something. I can afford a housekeeper and a real house. There's no need for you to re-arrange your whole life because you feel like you have to. I can handle it."

"Mulder, you can't take care of yourself!" I blurted.

"Well maybe with someone helpless who needs me, I can rise to the challenge."

As opposed to myself who is neither helpless nor needs him. My head was starting to hurt and I was afraid that I was going to start crying there in the cold wind and my tears would freeze to my face. How could Mulder be ready for this when I wasn't? Every time I looked at Aileen and her casual superiority at holding Miranda, bathing Miranda, dressing Miranda, I felt more and more like a little girl dressed in Mom's clothes and not fitting them very well.

"We'll figure something out," he said and put both arms around my waist.

In the cold air, his hair smelled like vanilla when I put my cheek against his head. There with the gorge spreading out in front of us like a three-dimensional illustration of the perfection which comes from geological hardship, it seemed possible. Anything seemed possible.

****

Zippy was waiting for me once again, but this time I felt much better about it. He'd even figured out my filing system; I always knew the boy had a brain, it's just that his mouth is so large it's often hard to tell. I insisted that Zippy follow me on a slew of paranormal cases. I wanted to go out in a burst of glory, or at least of incomprehensibility, so we looked into all the random phenomena I'd never touched before. I had another motive for my case choice as well: I wanted to make him understand that the X Files were about all the mysteries of being, the imponderable unknowable things that lurk in the mists of consciousness as well as in the spaces between the stars. He didn't take to it too well, but I was still the AIC and I wasn't going to do anything to change that until Zippy knew his place.

I boxed up all my tapes and magazines when I got home, on the theory that Miranda's inquiring young mind would be warped if I kept them readily available, she'd be asking for breast implants before she turned ten. Mommy, what's that lady doing in between those two men? Why is she crying? I opened the Post with new zeal each morning, because I wanted to find a nice townhouse before Scully got back, as a welcome-home gift.

She came back during one of my disputes with Zippy, but then she pretty much would have had to, unless she caught one of us asleep.

"What are you saying then? Vampires?"

"Exsanguination. What they did with the blood afterwards is something that we have to find out."

The door opened as I finished the sentence and Scully walked in, looking pale and cool in a dark suit. Her eyes barely skimmed me as she walked to where Zippy was sprawling over my desk.
"You better go upstairs and see Skinner, you're not needed here anymore," she said and watched his mouth open and shut like a guppy's.

Mine was doing about the same thing.

"What--" I started.

"I've come back to work," she said in a bony voice and put her briefcase down on her table.

"Who's watching--" I couldn't even say the name.

"Aileen and Emerson," she said and opened her laptop.

"Scully --"

"What was that about exsanguination?" she asked.

I lost my mind.

Laptops explode if you throw them with enough force against a flat surface, like a wall, for example. For a long moment there was no sound in the room except for the sound of keys and microchips raining to the floor, that and my heart banging against my eardrums.

"You selfish bitch."

Her gaze remained on the desktop where her computer had been, as if she could re-create it with her sick little mind. I stood there and shook like Ian in one of his seizures. I felt closer to him than I had when he'd forced his mind in mine. Vaguely I was aware of Zippy scuttling near the door, no doubt waiting to see if I was going to pull my weapon or not. Part of me really wanted to turn her brilliant brain into a Jackson Pollock painting on the far wall, and I clung onto the sharp edge of sanity with both hands. At least she had the decency not to raise her eyes when I started to rant. I can't remember what I actually said but I do know that the words I used to characterize her made Zippy's olive face turn the color of copy paper.

When the rage finally cleared, I wasn't even in the building anymore. The tired winter wind cut through my old gray Hugo Boss suit while I headed away from the building where yet another lying, treacherous bitch had fucked me over. If one believes in karma, I must have been Don Juan in a former life. Maybe Alistair Crowley.

The Hoover Building grew smaller and smaller as I walked, and gradually I could breathe without a pain in my lungs, although my heart hurt for emotional rather than physiological reasons. It had never occurred to me that she would have given Miranda up. Maybe I was suffering under the delusion that she was wrapped around Miranda's pudgy digits the way I was. Then again, I've always been a sucker for women with hard-luck stories and big eyes. Maybe I'd been mistaken and Scully simply was incapable of love, at least now. That would explain a lot of things.

What the hell was I going to do?

I never have a backup plan but this time was the glowing exception. Things could proceed as planned, without Scully. I could handle it. I would get in touch with Frohike's hacker friend; I would go to Skinner and request a transfer to a desk job. Hell, I didn't want to ever see Scully again so leaving the X-Files was no sacrifice. I would cope. I would find a bigger place to live and buy a lot of childcare books. Miranda would never be ignored. I would give her all the love and support that my brothers and I never had. I could do this. I would go to PTA meetings and pick her up after basketball practice. She would be normal, well adjusted, and would not be allowed to date until she
was at least thirty. I would help her with her homework and walk her down the aisle when she found a man or woman that she wanted to spend the rest of her life with. Miranda would never have to feel alone or unwanted.

The Mulder Family curse was going to stop. I was going to stop it.

I flagged down a cab and headed for the airport. My daughter was waiting for me in Montana.

End.

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