

Twelfth Night

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Twelfth Night

by [dashakay](#)

Summary

It was only a kiss.

Notes

Thank you so much to icedteainthebag for beta reading and detailed floorplans of Scully's bathroom.

Chapter 1

First:

It was only a kiss.

They walk down the labyrinthine hallways to the hospital's parking ramp, his good arm around her.

"Can you drive me to my car?" he asks. The corridors seem endless and the signs aren't helpful at all. They keep running into dead ends.

She tilts her head at him, baring the scratches on her neck. Scully looks like she's been attacked by a pack of particularly enthusiastic wolverines.

"You're in no shape to drive, Mulder. The doctor gave you Tylenol 3." The tone of her voice states "and that means that" to him, loud and clear.

"What about the car?"

"We can pick it up tomorrow." She purses her lips. Schoolmarm Scully, a look that annoys and arouses him at the same time.

They finally find the proper entrance to parking. The ramp is almost empty at this hour, at the dawn of the new millennium. She unlocks the passenger door and opens it for him.

"Tomorrow is today and it's New Year's Day," he reminds her, awkwardly easing his banged-up body into the car.

"So?"

He waits until she settles herself in the driver's seat and tidily fastens her seatbelt. "Don't you have anything planned for the day?"

"No," she says. "I thought I'd relax, enjoy the day off."

She doesn't have many friends. Neither do I, he thinks. Except for her.

Second:

They rocket down the quiet Maryland highways in the late afternoon. On the radio, soft voices inform them that the world didn't end the night before. They describe lavish fireworks over Sydney Harbour and spontaneous kissing breaking out in the streets of Lisbon.

That could be my excuse, he thinks, his head resting on the car window. I got caught up in the madness of New Year's Eve. Plus, I was drugged.

Scully stares straight ahead at the road. She can drive like she's retired from NASCAR sometimes, but she's as precise as a watchmaker when she's behind the wheel.

"Are you feeling all right?" she asks, unconsciously touching the scabbing wounds on her neck.

He shrugs with his good left shoulder. "I've been better, I've been worse. At least I wasn't shot this time. And they left my brain alone."

"Nothing beats a good attitude, Mulder." She's almost smiling.

His lips had pressed against hers for only seven seconds. Seven seconds under the romantic lights of the hospital waiting room. He sure knows how to pick his moments.

They find his car still park outside Johnson's enclave. The tall, chain-link fences are now draped with yellow crime scene tape, which seems almost festive on this cold New Year's Day.

Scully puts the car in park, unbuckles her seatbelt. "Are you sure you'll be able to drive home?" She gestures towards his sling.

"I'm painkiller-free and the car has standard transmission. I'll be fine."

She smiles. "That's my line, Mulder." She ruffles his hair. "Just in case, I'll follow you home."

"You can follow me home any old time, Scully."

She laughs and it feels like old times, the lighthearted banter when they didn't know each other very well, before real emotion got in the way and inhibited them.

He wants to kiss her again, right now when her eyes are alive with unusual merriment. She beats him to it, surprises him by leaning over to kiss him softly, with a closed mouth.

Eight seconds, maybe nine, he thinks. The kiss was as chaste and harmless as last night's, but he'll count it as progress.

"Happy New Year's, Mulder," she says, her cheeks faintly stained with pink.

On the way home, every time he glances in the rear view mirror he can see her car, loyally tailing him.

Third:

On Monday, Scully seems to be in an uncharacteristically good mood. She's not exactly known for her morning cheer. She even brings him coffee, a large cup of Costa Rican, no cream, no sugar. Her own coffee is some horrible soy milk concoction because she read a medical study on the miraculous qualities of soy. And he's the one pegged as the believer in every crazy theory.

"You seem cheerful," he remarks, watching her take off her coat. She's wearing her black three-button suit, the one with the skirt that's maybe a half inch too short for true professionalism. He loves that suit, especially when she pairs it with those wicked black pumps.

"It's a new year. Time to start things fresh," she says.

"Make any resolutions?"

She licks a bit of soy foam off her lower lip. Jesus, did she do that on purpose?

"Not yet," she says. "And you?"

He pretends to be fascinated by the contents of a folder on his desk. "I never make them."

Scully walks over to a file cabinet and opens it. "Well, maybe you should..."

What could she possibly mean by that?

He walks her to her car in the parking garage at the end of the day. Scully is armed, she's dangerous, she's probably a better shot than he is, but it never hurts to be chivalrous.

He stands back and watches her bend over to tuck her briefcase in the backseat of her car. That's a view he'll never tire of.

She stands by the car, clears her throat. "Well, have a good night, Mulder."

It feels as awkward as a first date. A seven year-long first date.

Fuck it, he thinks. There's no one around at almost eight in the evening. In an instant, he has her against the car door, his hand at the back of her neck, pressing her face to his. Her mouth opens under his, her tongue venturing out to touch his.

This time, he loses count of the seconds. In fact, he's missing time. The next thing he knows, he's sitting in his own car, one level up in the garage. He could almost believe he made the whole thing up if his lips didn't taste like her lipstick.

Fourth:

His cell phone rings as he's driving in to work.

Her voice is shaky. "Mulder, I won't be coming in to work today. I'm sick."

Immediately, his pulse quickens. Scully almost never calls in sick. Even when she was so ill with cancer, she still managed to totter in every day, too thin, too pale, but perfectly pressed and with her makeup flawlessly applied.

"Are you okay? What's wrong?" He hits the brakes to avoid colliding with the furniture delivery truck in front of him.

"Supermarket sushi," she says. "At least, that's the prime suspect. I can't keep anything down."

"Do you want me to come over? Take you to the doctor?"

He can almost hear her shaking her head. "No, no, I'll be fine. Just go to work. I'll call you if I need anything."

Bullshit, he thinks, after he's ended the call. He starts looking for the nearest supermarket.

She answers the door, wrapped in a faded blue bathrobe. Her face is paper white, a sheen of sweat on her forehead. "I thought I told you I was fine," she says, but she looks faintly relieved at the same time.

He pushes past her into the apartment. "You should know better than to eat sushi from the supermarket," he says. "You're a doctor, for God's sake."

She follows him into the kitchen and watches him unpack the plastic bags. "Gatorade--orange, fruit punch, and the traditional green kind. I'm not entirely sure what flavor green is supposed to represent. Ginger ale. Water. Saltines and chicken broth. My mother was never known for her nurturing qualities but she swore by chicken broth when we had the flu."

Scully shakes her head. "You didn't have to do this, Mulder."

He rolls his eyes. "Shut up."

She bolts off to the bathroom, slamming the door in her wake. He pretends not to hear her retching; pours some ginger ale in a glass and gives it a shake so it'll get flat faster.

She emerges some minutes later, after the sounds of splashing water and gargling. "I found some Compazine in the medicine cabinet from when..." She doesn't need to finish the sentence. "It should help."

"Are you sure you don't need a doctor?" he asks.

"I am a..."

"Doctor," he says, finishing the sentence for her. He's heard that one at least two dozen times.

"Get in bed," he orders. He almost likes Scully being sick. He can get away with bossing her around.

She obediently crawls into her bed, the bed that has starred in so many of his late-night picture shows. She's shivering and he pulls the covers over her.

"You're beautiful," he finds himself saying. And she is, even after hours of vomiting, even pale as snow, even trembling with the chills. He could spend an entire day just marveling over the intricacy of her lips, the bridge of her nose, the line that forms between her brows when she's cross or confused.

She flashes him her patented "Mulder, you're nuts" look.

"You are and you're just going to have to accept it." He bends down to kiss her fever-warm forehead. "Get some sleep. I'll be out in the living room if you need me."

The Compazine must be kicking in already because she smiles woozily. She mutters something under her breath.

"What did you say?" he asks.

"Nothing," Scully says. "It wasn't anything important..."

He swears he heard it, the words he's wanted to hear for years and years, but for her benefit he keeps his mouth shut. Maybe she'll say it again some time.

Fifth:

When he checks on her early the next morning, she looks much better, some color in her face. She hasn't vomited since yesterday afternoon.

She seems vaguely embarrassed to have him see her in bed, in her pajamas. "You stayed all night?"

"Your couch is surprisingly comfortable."

"You would know about couches..."

She's definitely feeling better. She sits up, a determined expression on her face. "Give me a half hour and then we can go into work together."

"Nope." He shakes his head. "You need another day to rest."

"We're supposed to meet with Skinner this morning."

"Skinner can wait," he says. "You can catch up with Montel Williams and Maury Povich instead."

Scully sighs and gives him a dirty look.

He raises a warning finger. "If I catch you out of this apartment today, you're in serious trouble." It's definitely fun to boss her around.

He returns to her place after work, armed with a fresh bag of supplies and draft of his report on their personal Night of the Living Dead. Scully is on the couch, wearing a fresh pair of pajamas. A mostly-empty bowl of chicken broth is on the coffee table.

"How are Montel and friends?" he asks, kissing her on the cheek.

"I'm watching 'NewsHour,'" she says.

He sits down next to her. "You're no fun, Scully. Jim Lehrer instead of Montel Williams?"

"'NewsHour' is fun."

He takes the remote from her and flips channels until he finds a rerun of "MacGuyver." "Now this is fun."

Scully snatches the remote out of his hand. The TV lands on "Friends."

"You can't possibly enjoy this show," he groans.

"I like Chandler Bing," she says, deadpan.

"Monica's not bad..." he offers.

Her eyebrows rise. "You know their names, so don't get high and mighty with me. You watch it, too."

"I admit nothing," he says.

Her face is so full of delight, of mischief, that he can't help kissing her. She tastes salty, like chicken soup and Gatorade.

She moans into his mouth, her arms wrap around his neck. He pulls her onto his lap; she's so light. They kiss for long, long minutes, through several comic misunderstandings and two commercial breaks. Her breasts are brushing his chest through her thin pajama top. He's hard as a marble statue and he wonders if she can feel it, feel how much he wants her.

Finally, as the end credits flash to that annoyingly catchy theme song, she pulls away from his lips, touches his cheek. "Things are changing, aren't they?"

"That's an understatement if I ever heard one."

"I suppose it's about time," she says, smiling. He adores that smile, more stunning for its rarity.

"Understatement of the year," he mutters, pausing to kiss the softness of her neck, careful to avoid the zombie scabs. "Possibly of the millennium."

He kisses her again because they have a lot of time to make up for. Seven years' worth. They'll have to do a lot of kissing to catch up.

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

It was only a kiss.

Sixth:

Skinner's white dress shirt is the most impressively starched thing Mulder has ever seen in his life, pristine even towards the close of the work day. It could probably stand on its own and growl at him for countermanding orders.

"Hrmph," Skinner says under his breath, flipping the pages of their preliminary report.

Scully is perched at the edge of her chair, legs crossed at the knee. Today she's wearing another suit with a skirt, this one navy wool with a slit at the back of the skirt. He tries not to stare as she uncrosses and crosses her legs. He definitely tries not to imagine what sort of underwear she's wearing. It doesn't do to get an erection in the Assistant Director's office.

"Zombies," Skinner says, adjusting his glasses. "You're saying that the four former agents were zombies."

"Yes, sir," says Mulder.

"And what's your opinion, Agent Scully? Were they zombies?"

"Sir, I hate to characterize what we saw as 'zombies,' but I have no other reasonable explanation at this time."

He can smell Scully's perfume from where he's sitting and it's beginning to drive him nuts with the desire to bury his snout in her neck.

Skinner raises his hand in dismissal. "That will be all, Agents."

"That was relatively painless," Scully says in the elevator.

"I don't think anything can shock him anymore. He's almost blase about stuff like zombies."

The elevator reaches the basement level with an audible thud. He steps out into the narrow corridor, Scully at his heels. One of the fluorescent bulbs needs to be changed again. It flickers on and off, giving the hallway more of a David Lynch vibe than usual.

Just before they reach their office door, Scully tugs on his arm and pulls him into the little room that houses a long-defunct copier and some blue recycling bins.

"What are you--"

She shoves him against the copier with surprising force. Scully stands on her tiptoes to kiss him urgently, messily. He can feel her lipstick slide from her lips to his face.

He pulls away from her vampire mouth. "Who are you and what have you done with Dana Scully?" Has she been replaced by some sort of succubus?

She wipes her lips with a tissue from her jacket pocket and offers it to him. "Sorry," she says, but she doesn't look sorry at all. "I know we can't...not at work, but I wanted to, just once."

So, he's not the only one who's had fantasies set in the Hoover Building. He wonders if she's had the one starring Skinner's desk.

He crumples up the tissue, now stained burgundy, and tosses it in the garbage. How will they ever get through the rest of the day?

For that matter, how will they ever get through any other day in their working lives? Now he truly understands why the Bureau discourages agents in the same section from becoming romantically involved. It's terribly distracting to be hunting down leads while being plagued with thoughts about one's partner's full lips and the soft curves of her breasts.

Then again, he's been plagued by those thoughts for years and it's never been too much of a problem before.

He straightens his tie and follows her to their office.

They need a new case. Something to keep their idle minds, and mouths, occupied. For the next hour he daydreams about werewolves and bloody corpses in the snow, staining the white crimson.

Seventh:

He arrives at precisely quarter to eight. He even managed to find parking nearby, a rare commodity in Georgetown.

Tonight he's detailed to within an inch of his life. He got a haircut and shave after work. He's showered and smelling Irish Spring fresh. His red tie is new and his shoes are shined to a high gloss any Marine would approve of.

As he walks up the sidewalk to her building, his stomach rolls with nerves and he wonders why. He and Scully have had dinner together hundreds of times. Not to mention breakfast, lunch, and all manner of snacks. They've had grilled cheese and tomato soup in Nebraska, Vietnamese spring rolls in Minneapolis, and Dungeness crab in San Francisco. Once they shared a bag of trail mix in a helicopter on the way to McMurdo Station in Antarctica.

This is different. This is a Date, with a capital D. Possession with intent to sell.

She answers the door with a stiff smile on her face. She's wearing a thin green sweater and a black skirt that flares over her knees.

Scully takes his hand in hers, a trifle formally, as if they'd just seen each other's profiles on Match.com earlier in the week. She pulls him in closer and kisses him on the cheek. That's better. She smells like violets, a new scent to add to the database.

He helps her on with her coat. "Where are we going?" she asks.

"Some new place called Heritage," he says, straightening the collar of her coat. His fingers linger for a moment on the softness of her neck. "It's about three blocks away. Some food web site said it's a 'chef-driven, seasonal celebration of American cuisine.'"

Scully raises an eyebrow. "Wow. Are you sure I'm dressed up enough for a seasonal celebration of American cuisine?"

"You look gorgeous," he says, and kisses the top of her head.

All the way to the restaurant, he wants to take her hand in his, but it feels wrong, somehow.

They're awarded a window table, looking out at the Friday night crowds on the Georgetown sidewalk. The lighting at Heritage is low, punctuated by votive candles at each table. The walls are painted blood orange and butter yellow. It smells like garlic and herbs.

The waiter uncorks a bottle of Argentine Malbec and hands Mulder the cork. He's never known what to do with this. Sniff it? Admire the fine cork craftsmanship? The waiter pours a bit of wine in Mulder's glass and stands back on his heels, waiting for approval. Mulder takes a sip. It's fine, it tastes like red wine. What else is there to say? He nods imperiously at the waiter.

After the waiter has poured their wine and departed, Scully says, "That was awfully sexist, don't you think?" He notices that she's wearing a darker shade of lipstick than usual and eyeliner, too. "What if I'm actually an internationally known wine expert?"

"I suggest you report him to the National Organization of Women. You could organize a protest march on the Mall."

Scully rolls her blue eyes.

Almost every table in the restaurant is populated by couples. Happy, laughing couples holding hands on the tables, covertly kissing, feeding each other oysters and shrimp. One man gets out of his seat and sinks to his knees before a pretty blonde woman, presents her with a small black box. The blonde bursts into tears after she opens the box to see a diamond solitaire and the entire room bursts into applause.

Mulder shifts uncomfortably in his seat.

Over sea bass braised with artichokes and white beans (hers) and beef short ribs with gremolata (his), they talk about rising rents in the area, who has the most frequent flyer miles and Scully's ideas for recovering her sofa. There are long silences, the only sound between them the scraping of silverware on plates.

Have we run out of things to talk about, he thinks. Is seven years too late? When most couples start dating, they share their stories--the funny, tragic, memorable personal stories of their lives. Mulder and Scully know most of each other's stories. Perhaps they're shared out.

Or should they reminisce? Hey Scully, remember the time you shot me? Mulder, wasn't that funny when I was dying of cancer and you made a deal with the Smoking Man to find a new chip for my neck? Yeah, good times.

Scully wipes her lips with her napkin. "This is weird, Mulder."

"What's weird?"

"The two of us." She waves her hand. "Out for dinner."

He knows exactly what she's talking about but he decides to play dumb. "We have dinner together all the time."

She shakes her head. "That's different. That's work. This is a date. It feels strange."

Even though he feels the same way, Mulder's heart sinks. "Are we making a mistake?" he asks, waiting for the inevitable blow. He knew it was too good to be true.

"No," she says, so softly he almost can't hear her over the noise of the room. "No, I don't think so. It's going to take some time to adjust, though. Switching gears after so many years is pretty big."

He lifts his wineglass. "Here's to switching gears."

They clink glasses.

It's colder when they step outside the restaurant. Their breath comes out in frosty clouds.

If our enemies saw us, or someone from the Bureau, he thinks, as they start down the sidewalk. He decides he doesn't really give a shit. He takes her gloved hand in his and gives it a squeeze. Scully squeezes back and they walk to her place hand-in-hand.

They stop outside her front door. "Well, thank you for a lovely dinner," she says, looking up at him with a smile.

"Can I come up for coffee?" he asks, moving closer to her.

"Hmm...I don't think so. Not on the first date. I'm a good Catholic girl." She blinks innocently at him.

He makes a disappointed noise in his throat. He'd had some big plans that involved peeling that green sweater off her.

"Can I kiss you on the first date?" he asks.

"I think that's permissible," she says.

She tilts her face up to his and he meets her halfway. The street noise fades and he doesn't notice the cold anymore as their lips touch, mouths open to each other. He tastes red wine and the flourless chocolate cake they'd shared for dessert. He tastes Scully and, as usual, she's delicious, just as he'd always imagined.

"We have to stop," she gasps. "We have to stop or we're going to get in serious trouble."

"We're always in serious trouble, Scully. How would this be anything new?"

She fumbles in her coat pocket for her keys and unlocks the front door. "Good night, Mulder."

He wishes her a good night in return and kisses the top of her head. He knows better than to argue with her.

As he walks down the street to his car, he finds himself whistling. He never whistles.

Eighth:

Saturday night and college basketball is on TV. He likes pro basketball better than college, but he enjoys the sound of the game on in the background as he putters around, doing the dishes, folding laundry, scanning various alien abduction Internet message boards. The sound of basketball on television reminds him of happier childhood times, when his father would sprawl on the sofa to watch the game while he and Samantha played Chinese Checkers on the floor.

There's a knock at the door and Mulder hopes it isn't Mrs. Gornick from next door, come to tell him to turn the TV down. She has the hearing of a bat.

It's Scully, the casual version he never sees, wearing jeans and a University of Maryland sweatshirt. She's carrying a grocery bag.

"Is something wrong?" he asks automatically. She never drops by unless something is very, very wrong.

She shoots him a withering look. "I heard that the Terrapins are playing North Carolina State tonight and I thought you might want to watch the game with me."

In the kitchen, she produces a six pack of Sam Adams beer, a bag of Doritos, a package of hot dogs and some buns.

"Doritos and hot dogs?" he says, ready to laugh. "You don't eat that stuff."

"I eat more than tofu and brown rice," she protests. "It just depends on my mood. And my mood told me to have some hot dogs. They are turkey hot dogs, though."

He opens two beers for them. She looks like she's about eighteen tonight, in her college sweatshirt and wearing no makeup.

She opens the fridge. "Do you have ketchup and mustard?"

"Ketchup on hot dogs is sacrilege," he says, but he finds the bottle of Heinz for her anyhow.

On his couch with Scully, hot dogs, tortilla chips, beer and basketball. It's a personal fantasy come to life. She kicks off her shoes and rests her stockinged feet on the coffee table. He can die now a happy man. Almost.

She proves to be fairly knowledgeable about basketball, even going so far as to yell at the TV when the referee makes a questionable call against Maryland.

"You've been holding out on me," he says, fishing in the bag for more chips. "I didn't know you were a basketball fan."

"Fan is too strong a word, Mulder. I rarely watch anymore but when I was in college I went to Terrapin games."

"I'll bet you were adorable in college, all sweet and innocent..."

"I wasn't that innocent," she says, smirking.

"Oh, really? Do tell."

"That is none of your business," she says, but she's grinning. In the past seven days, he's seen her smile more than in the whole of the previous seven years.

He knows that more horrible things lie waiting in the wings for them, but it's wonderful to be able to make her happy in the present.

For years, he's imagined kissing her on this very couch, this creaky leather couch where he once slept every night. Now it's reality as their mouths meet. They ignore the remainder of the game. The Terrapins lose to the Wolfpack and Scully doesn't even seem to notice as she applies hot kisses to his neck, his forehead, behind his ears.

Mulder slides his hand up the back of her sweatshirt and finds, to his delight, that she's not wearing a bra. "You're naughty," he says.

"No, I just need to do some laundry." She kisses him again. He wonders who taught her to kiss and if he could send that guy a thank you note.

He tugs her off the couch and leads her by the hand to the bedroom. "We don't have to do anything you don't want to do," he says. "But at least we can be comfortable here."

She flops down on the bed and looks up at him with trusting eyes. "Whatever happens tonight is right," she says.

He loses all pretense of control then, crouching over her body to kiss her madly and wrestle her sweatshirt off like a teenaged boy at the drive-in. He's rewarded with the first real sight of her breasts; the time in Antarctica didn't count. They're small but round and firm, with lovely peaches and cream nipples. He's afraid his tongue must be hanging out of his mouth like a panting Golden Retriever.

"Gorgeous," he mutters, first kissing one and then the other.

"No fair," she says, and starts pulling his tee shirt off.

"Ah, so you want an egalitarian relationship?"

"Always, Mulder. Always."

For the first time, his bare skin touches hers. He imagines their bodies eliciting sparks in the dim room, so electric is the sensation of his naked chest touching hers. He wonders if he might pass out from the lack of blood in his head as all reserves start heading south.

Finally, he thinks, taking a hard nipple in his mouth. She groans at the sensation. He tries the other one on for size and Scully seems to like it equally well. In fact, she starts unbuttoning his jeans with practiced doctor's fingers. She pushes his jeans down and he somehow manages to kick them off. Now he's just in his boxers, his erection absurdly tenting the cotton.

"Oh my," she breathes, reaching to touch him.

"This is all your fault," he says. "90% of the time it's your fault."

"Only 90%?"

"Sometimes Lucy Liu shows up," he says and she laughs.

She wiggles out of her own jeans and she's wearing pale pink cotton panties, hardly the black lace of his imagination, but these will do nicely, too.

This is not happening, this is not happening, this is not happening...

But it is, and he almost loses his mind when her hand snakes its way in the fly of his boxers to grasp him at the root of his cock. He just about loses the power of conscious thought when her soft hand begins stroking the length of him.

He bends down to kiss her again, to touch those ridiculously soft breasts of hers, to...

The phone shrills, cutting through the silence of the bedroom.

Motherfuckingcocksuckingsonofabitch.

"Don't answer," she gasps.

"I have to," he says, reaching for the telephone.

It's Skinner. Who else would call on a Saturday night besides Scully? And she's here.

"Agent Mulder. You and Agent Scully need to get down here for a briefing right away. We have four female college students missing in Madison, Wisconsin. Witnesses reported mysterious phenomena at the time of the disappearances, along the lines of your area of specialty."

"Right away?" he asks. His erection dies a sad death.

"Yes. I tried to call Agent Scully, but there was no answer, either on her home phone or her cell phone. Can you try tracking her down?"

Actually, sir, Agent Scully is currently lying on her back in my bed, dressed in nothing but her pink underpants. I'm fairly certain she was going to take those panties off any minute now, but we'll be right there.

"I'll do my best to find her, sir. I think I know where she might be."

Mulder hangs up the phone and this time he swears out loud.

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

It was only a kiss.

Ninth:

She pushes away the remains of her chicken Caesar salad.

"Scully, I don't get it. You asked Detective Bailey where to find the best burger in Madison and then you order a salad."

"I reserve the right to change my mind," she says, but she steals a handful of his fries.

The restaurant has one of the oddest names he's encountered on his travels, Dotty Dumpling's Dowry, but he'll admit that the Southwest Burger is one of the best he's ever had. How can you go wrong with cheddar, bacon, and barbeque sauce? The protein goes straight to his bloodstream. It's a welcome rush after a day that has included two planes, three airports, a thorough search of the Kappa Beta fraternity house--the site of the disappearances, countless interviews of frat boys and sorority girls, and no discernable clues.

Photos of the missing girls are spread out on the table. Blondes, all of them, looking so alike they could be related. Ashley Craig, age 21. Katie Dawkins, age 20. Amber West, age 21. Sarah Swenson, age 22. The pictures are obviously sorority composite photos. Each girl is wearing pearls and a demure black velvet drape over her shoulders. They are all sisters in the Gamma Alpha Rho sorority.

"Do you really think this could be an alien abduction?" Scully asks, stealing more fries. He swats her hand away. "Don't you think that they could have just taken off from the party?"

It had been a New Year's Eve party at the Kappa Beta house. There were about fifty guests, all invited, security at the front door. Just after midnight, a bright white light had flooded the house and then the power went out, the entire house going black. The four girls had been in the kitchen, drinking and talking with two Kappa Beta brothers. The young men had reported hearing one piercing scream after the lights went out, then nothing. In the confusion following the power outage, no one noticed the four young women missing for at least an hour. Alarm bells didn't truly go off until late the next day, when none of the four had returned home to the Gamma Alpha Rho sorority house.

Nothing was missing, besides the girls. Two had cars and they were still parked in their spots. All their belongings were still in their rooms, and there has been no credit card activity at all. No telltale clues in the fraternity house. No disgruntled ex-boyfriends and, barring polygraphs, the brothers of Kappa Beta seemed truly mystified and upset about the

disappearances of their friends. The four young women had vanished into the proverbial thin air.

"From all accounts, they're good girls, responsible. The kind who call their mothers every day. They don't seem like they would have run off somewhere." He takes his last bite of hamburger.

"Perhaps they were abducted by garden-variety human beings."

"It's possible," he admits. "But it seems improbable that an abductor, or abductors, could take four of them at once without any commotion."

"There was a lot of commotion when the lights went out." She's eyeing his fries and he pulls the basket out of her reach.

Does she have any inkling how much it turns him on to merely discuss the facts of the case with her? Especially now that they've come so very, very close. And he loves her tremendously intelligent mind, so analytical, so ready to challenge him at every turn.

"Did Detective Bailey tell you what the power company said about the outage?"

"Nothing obvious from Madison Gas and Electric. The transformer didn't blow. The power didn't go out anywhere else on the block but the Kappa Beta house. They didn't even seem to blow a fuse. The power just went out."

He shakes his head. They have nothing.

They walk down the hushed hotel corridor to Scully's room. When they reach 423, Scully stops and turns to him, lips pursed.

"Good night, Mulder," she says. "I'll see you in the morning."

No, he thinks, not so fast. He's been tortured with paralyzing lust the entire day. Not twenty-four hours ago, she was practically naked in his bed, her hand wrapped around his cock. Today he spent hours sitting next to her on planes, being tormented by the tickle of her perfume, the brush of her arm against his. He had to follow her through the Kappa Beta house, listening to the cool, scientific babble flow from her lips as they searched for evidence. Hell no, the night's not ending outside her door.

"What's your current view on fraternization on duty?" he asks, moving two steps closer to her.

"Regulations are regulations," she says, fumbling for her key card.

"We've broken every other rule in the book. Why not this one?"

"Mulder, no. It's been a long day. Tomorrow should be even longer."

He loves to argue with her, loves the good agent/bad agent roles they play from time to time. He wants to be a very, very bad agent tonight.

"Please? There's a Starbucks just down the Square. I'll buy you coffee and a scone in the morning." He's grasping at something, anything that will grant him access to her room.

She lets out a tiny sigh of resignation. "Venti soy latte, no foam," she says. The door unlocks with a click. "That's not negotiable."

The Inn on the Park is a slightly nicer class of lodging than their usual threadbare motels. The Madison Police Department had found them a good federal rate. Scully's room is decorated in restful beiges and taupes. There's not a single water stain on the ceiling or a cigarette burn to found. It's sad how a Best Western can feel like the Plaza.

She takes off her coat and hangs it in the closet, motions for his coat. "I need a shower. I'm wearing the dirt of three airports."

"You know, conserving water is an important part of saving the environment," he offers.

She tosses him the remote. "No pay-per-view porn," she says, stalking off to the bathroom with her overnight bag.

It was worth a shot, anyway. He kicks off his shoes and sits on the edge of the king-size bed to watch CNN. George W. Bush is mumbling something about his presidential hopes. If he's elected, Mulder's moving to Canada and taking Scully with him. They can become Mounties.

Scully is in the bathroom a long time. What arcane mysteries do women get up to in there? He feels fidgety. He hasn't had sex with another person since the first Clinton administration. Is it possible to forget how to have sex? What if he can't get it up? What if he's become really, really bad in bed? What if he was never good in the first place? His mind is racing.

Stop, he tells himself. This is Scully and this is you. It'll be fine. He takes a deep breath.

Scully finally emerges from the bathroom, wearing a thin cotton bathrobe that's clinging to her damp body. Her hair is wet and slicked back, her face pink from the heat.

She stops in front of him, eyes downcast. She's as nervous as I am, he thinks. He finds that thought reassuring.

He pulls her to him, so that she tumbles across his lap. "Hi," he says.

"Hi, yourself." Her voice is husky.

"It's just me," he says. "Nothing to be afraid of."

"Who says I'm afraid?" She lifts her chin.

"I'm speaking more for my own benefit. I'm scared." He guides her hand to his chest so that she can feel his rapid heartbeat.

"It's just me," she says and smiles.

"I know. That's why I'm scared."

She kisses him with a toothpaste mouth, her tongue twining with his. So much for his worries that he wouldn't be able to get it up. It may never come down again. She moans as he presses his erection into her bottom.

He manages to pull the comforter and blanket off the majority of the bed and they fall back on the crisp sheets. He unknots the sash of Scully's bathrobe, letting the folds of cotton fall open. Her body, her perfect little body. Full breasts, flaring hips, and a lovely thatch of reddish-brown hair between her legs. He hardly knows where to begin, although kissing her again seems like a good place to start.

"You still have your suit on," she mutters. Why yes, she's totally naked and he's dressed, complete with his jacket and a gray and white striped tie. Scully deftly unknots the tie and flings it to the floor, starts unbuttoning his dress shirt.

He struggles out of his trousers and they join their friends on the carpet below. He's glad he made the effort to find a decent pair of boxers when he dressed in the morning, a subdued navy and green plaid. She hooks her fingers around the elastic and tugs them down.

"You're bad," he whispers.

"Above all else, I value parity." She chuckles.

He turns her onto her back so he can trail kisses from her neck to her navel. He wonders if she can possibly know how much he adores every inch of her, even the bullet scar on her belly, even the tattoo on her back that symbolizes the night she spent with another man. It's the whole package.

For long minutes he alternates kissing her on the mouth with licking and sucking her nipples. Her fingers weave in his hair. This has to be the best time he's had in decades, listening to her breathing quicken in response. He reaches between her legs and yes, she's soft and slick under his fingers.

"Mmm, yes," she exhales.

This is Scully's pussy, he thinks, startled for one second. It's real and I'm touching it and I'm not going to wake up alone in my bed. One finger, then two in her, gently exploring at first, then harder as she moves her hips to meet his thrusts.

What the hell, he's going to go for gold. He creeps down the bed until he's between her thighs, his breath stirring her curls. "Please," she gasps.

"My pleasure," he says. His tongue takes a long, sweeping taste of her and goosebumps form all over his body. He's wanted to do this for so long, to taste her, to feel her clit swelling under his tongue. This is better than Christmas, his birthday, and finding definitive proof of extraterrestrial life combined.

He can hear her panting as he licks her, as his fingers slide in and out. He wishes he could see her face right now. Are her eyes open or closed? Her fingers grasp his shoulders, guiding him, first slower, then faster.

And then she babbles, "Don't stop, don't stop, whatever you do don't you dare stop Mulder..." She presses herself into his face, nearly smothering him, but that's fine. It would be a noble way to die, in service to Scully.

She gasps, muscles stiffening, and then goes limp.

Did she just come? He'd like to think so, but since he's never experienced this sort of glory with her before, he's not entirely sure. Isn't there some sort of universal code women could use to signify the fact? It would be so helpful.

She tugs at him so he clammers back up to her. Her cheeks are flushed and her eyes look a bit unfocused. Gorgeous. She's still panting, her hair flaring out over the pillow.

"Where did you learn to do that?" she asks.

"Oxford. They had tutors for oral sex."

She laughs and he kisses her in reward for the laughter.

"Did you...?" he asks.

"Did I? Oh God, yes, I did." Her hand starts trailing its way down his chest, lower and lower.

"This is fun," she says. "Why haven't we been doing this all along?" Her fingers begin working their secret doctor magic on him, stroking and squeezing in a way he'd never begin to replicate if he tried. And he thought he knew all the tricks in that particular book.

"Because...because we're chickens?" Not the most erudite answer, but his brain seems to have packed off on vacation to Jamaica as she continues her devilish ministrations.

He wants to tell her to stop, or at least slow down, because he's so, so close it's making his teeth hurt. But his speech function has fled with his brain and the only thing he can manage to do is to kiss her.

Scully tips her head back and laughs, a full-bodied chortle from deep in her throat. That's it, thoughts of baseball and putrefying bodies can do nothing at this point because...

...fucking hell, he's coming, coming so hard, and oh no, it's much too soon...

What kind of pitiful man comes just because the love of his life laughs in bed?

Apparently his kind, because he did come, all over his stomach. This was not part of his plans. Not at all. He shuts his eyes and stifles a horrified moan.

She laughs again.

"That's not helping," he mutters. Is there a rewind button he can press?

"I was laughing with you, not at you," she says and kisses his forehead.

"I'm sorry." He's afraid to open his eyes and see her face. "It's been a long time."

"Mulder, shut up. You think we'd get it perfectly, right off the bat? Have you been reading romance novels or something?"

"I wanted to be your Fabio," he says and she snickers.

He opens his eyes to see her hop off the bed and walk to the bathroom. She returns with something wadded in her hand and offers it to him. It's a damp washcloth.

He sponges away the humiliating evidence. Scully turns off the bedside lamp and pulls the covers up over them. She settles on her side, her forehead touching his.

She touches his cheek. "That was the most fun I've had in years. Maybe ever."

"But we--"

"We'll get to it eventually," she interrupts. "It might take another seven years, but we will."

That's an appalling scenario to contemplate. "The night is still young, Scully."

"It's past midnight," she says, her voice slowing. "I'm not eighteen and neither are you."

He breathes in the scent of her skin and hair. "You're supposed to be at your sexual peak right now."

"Oh, I am. Believe me. But now I want to sleep." She pecks him on the lips and rolls over, her back curving into his chest.

The weight of exhaustion begins to press onto his body. He's always wanted to sleep with Scully, not just for the sex, but to feel her relaxed and pliant in his arms. To have her trust him with her slumber.

Her breathing slows as he strokes her damp hair. Eventually his eyes close, too.

Tenth:

He knows he's in a hotel or motel room before he even opens his eyes. He smells strange laundry detergent on the sheets and that particular dusty drape scent. But there's a new smell, too, one he can't quite place. Sweet and soapy, a slight whiff of sweat. The scent of sex.

The scent of sex? His eyes open and blink in the faint light leaking in through the closed drapes. He sees a spill of red hair on the pillow next to his, a hint of a bare white shoulder. Scully. In bed with him.

It all comes back to him, the pleasure and the humiliation. The bittersweet taste of her on his tongue, her melting kisses, her fingers sliding along the length of him, his coming much too soon, uselessly spattering all over himself. He grimaces at the thought.

It's just past seven in the morning. He climbs out of bed as quietly as he can and pads to the bathroom to pee and swish out his mouth with a dab of Scully's toothpaste. In the bathroom he stares at himself in the mirror, all wild hair and baggy eyes, vowing to do better next time.

Back in the room, he sees that Scully has rolled onto her back. The covers have slipped off her body, baring her breasts. He stands at the foot of the bed, wondering if he should dress and return to his unused room or get back in bed with her. The bed wins. The other option never stood a chance.

She stirs at his weight shifting the mattress and her eyes flutter open. She turns her head towards him and her eyes widen at the sight of him. Without makeup, the mole above her upper lip standing out in sharp relief, she looks so young, so fresh and untouched by everything that's happened to her since she met him.

"I wondered if I dreamt all that," she says.

"It wasn't a dream," he says, kissing the tip of her nose.

She stretches, arching her back like a cat. That's a sight he could never tire of. "What time is it?"

He glances at the clock radio. "7:12."

"We should get up. Didn't we tell Detective Bailey we'd meet him first thing in the morning?"

"He can wait..." Surely Detective Bailey would understand that Mulder hasn't been properly laid in almost five years and now he has a gorgeous naked woman in bed and a raging hard-on. Any man would understand that.

He swoops in to kiss her and she turns her head away, making a face. "Morning breath, Mulder."

"I like your morning breath."

She rolls out of his clutches and totters off to the bathroom. When she returns she's smiling, but her smile seems artificial. She pulls her robe off the floor and slips it on, sits at the edge of the bed.

He sits up and touches her shoulder. "What's wrong?"

She shakes her head. "Nothing. I'm fine. We should get dressed and go."

"Don't even try that business with me. I've heard it too many times from you."

Scully flops onto her back. "It just hit me, really hit me, what we're doing."

"Is that a bad thing?" The breath catches in his throat.

She shakes her head, copper against the white sheets. "It's just a little overwhelming. We've been together for so long, but not like this." Scully closes her eyes.

"Scully," he says. "Open your eyes. Look at me."

Blue eyes open and fix on his face.

"You need to know something."

"What's that?" she says.

He takes a deep breath. "It's scary to move to this level. I told you that last night. We've danced around this for years, the both of us afraid that if we did this we could ruin what we've built, our partnership. Am I right?"

She nods.

He touches the wavy tangle of her hair. "But we're here and this is where we're supposed to be. I don't need to say this, because it's obvious, but..."

She smiles, as if she knows what's coming. "But what?"

His heart is racing. "I'm in love with you."

There. He said it and it wasn't that difficult.

She smiles, tears welling in her eyes. "Oh, Mulder," she sighs.

This wasn't exactly the response he was hoping for. "Oh, Mulder?"

"You didn't let me finish. Sometimes you talk too much," she says.

"True enough."

A single tear is suspended on her cheek. "Surely you know I feel the same."

He kisses away the tear, salt on his lips.

"Scully, can you say it?" He needs to hear the words in full. If he could, he'd make her sign an affidavit to that effect, frame it and hang it on the wall of his bedroom.

She laughs and sits up, touches his face with her cool palm. "Mulder, I love you. If I've ever given you reason to believe otherwise, I'm sorry."

Something blooms deep inside his chest. She loves him.

They kiss. It's a pact, a promise. They love each other. Why did it seem so complicated before?

The plangent ring of her cell phone punctures the bubble.

"Don't answer it," he says, wanting to spend more time exploring the complexities of her lower lip.

"I have to," she answers.

Deja vu, and it's not the good kind.

She reaches for her phone. "Scully," she says crisply.

The call is short, Scully responding to her caller with yeses and nos. She closes her phone and sets it down on the mattress. "That was Detective Bailey. They found the girls early this morning."

"Alive or dead?" Those young, untouched faces.

"They're dead," she says softly. "He wants to meet us at the ME's office. I'm going to assist with the post-mortems."

"Shit," he says.

"Tell me about it. You'd better get dressed and get me that coffee."

They roll their bags through Dulles Airport. It's almost midnight. Snow in Chicago delayed their connecting flight more than three hours, which they spent holed up at a fake brewpub, nursing beers and bad nachos.

The cause of death for all four girls was blunt force trauma caused by a car accident. Police had found the students off Highway 39, near Westfield, Wisconsin. Amber West, the driver, had lost control of the car and rolled it into a ravine. Heavy snow on New Year's Day had concealed the accident.

"Amber's blood alcohol was twice the legal limit. The other girls had been drunk, too," Scully had said, emerging from the autopsies in blood-stained scrubs.

"I don't get it," Mulder said. "Where did they get the car? Bailey had said that all their cars were accounted for."

"The car was registered to Ashley Craig's cousin, who had lent it to her for the vacation. She'd been in Costa Rica with her family, so the police hadn't contacted her and she hadn't heard the news. She just got back last night."

"So, nothing paranormal about it." He was almost disappointed.

Scully shook her head. "I theorize that the power went out at the party, so the girls took off and decided to go for a joyride."

"Nothing unusual in the autopsies?"

"Nothing but the fact that four young women died long before they should have." She sighed.
"It's time to go home."

The line at the cab stand is long and full of disgruntled passengers fresh off delayed flights.
Scully yawns.

"Are you tired?" he asks.

"Like I could sleep for a week."

"You should take tomorrow off," he says.

"I might just do that. So should you."

He steps closer to her. "Have you thought about where you'd like to spend the night tonight?"
he says softly, so as not to be overheard by anyone else.

"In my bed," she says, with another yawn.

"Care for some company?" He longs to touch her but they're in public.

"Mulder, I need a bath. And sleep. Alone." The furrow between her brows appears.

He tries to not look disappointed. Or to take it personally.

They reach the head of the line. The dispatcher asks, "Where to?"

"Georgetown," Scully answers.

"Alexandria," Mulder says in resignation.

"Alexandra, number 127 to the left," the dispatcher says. "Georgetown, 224, the last cab on
your right."

Scully stops in front of him, looking small in her long winter coat. "Come here," she says.

He leans down to her.

"I love you," she whispers in his ear. "And I'll see you tomorrow night at eight. My place. We
have unfinished business."

He squeezes her arm and starts off to his taxi. He might just be whistling again.

Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

It was only a kiss.

Eleventh:

Shrimp sate with peanut sauce, green papaya salad, tom kha gai soup, chicken larb, pad thai, red curry with tofu. He's ordered too much but one thing he knows for certain is the way to Scully's heart is with Thai food.

She opens her door, wearing low-slung, faded jeans and a black v-neck pullover. She's barefoot.

"I thought you might come to the door wrapped in cellophane with a rose between your teeth," he says.

"And hello to you, too, Mulder." She eyes the brown paper bags he's carrying. "What do you have there?"

"Something edible."

"In that case, I'll let you in." She ushers him through the door and leads him to the kitchen.

He starts unpacking the various little boxes. "Thai food, courtesy of Siam Kitchen."

"Mmm, Thai food," she says, pulling plates out of the cabinet. "Love it."

"I know, more than anything."

She leans against the countertop. "Well, not more than anything."

"True. You also love the immortal works of Jane Austen, cutting into dead bodies, heels that make you taller, conspiracy theories about nutrition, obscure foreign films with subtitles, stealing my fries when you think I'm not looking and..."

She clamps her hand around his forearm to shut him up. "And you, of course."

"Of course. I'm an eminently loveable guy." He bats his eyelashes at her.

She ignores him. It's what she does.

In the living room, he opens a bottle of wine and watches as she fusses around, banking the fire, changing the CD on the stereo. He pours Riesling into two wine glasses.

"I don't know, Scully. This scene seems awfully familiar. A fire, mood music, a bottle of wine. Are you sure I'm really myself?"

She has the good grace to laugh. "The difference is that the wine is white this time. It goes better with Asian food." She settles next to him on the couch.

He offers her a pair of the chopsticks that came with the order.

Scully shakes her head. "The Thais don't commonly use chopsticks, except when eating noodles, which they consider Chinese food. Most use a fork to push food into a spoon, and some use their fingers." She picks up a fork.

Her brain is a wondrous place, its attic crammed with obscure facts and figures. They should get into the bar trivia racket. They'd probably make a fortune in prize money

"Then why do Thai places always give out chopsticks?" he asks.

"Because they think that we don't know any better." She makes a disdainful face.

Watching her eat, really eat, not just pick at a salad without dressing or sip some inexplicable beige organic smoothie, is an incredible turn-on. He remembers the Scully of years ago, chomping on barbecued ribs. But he also understands the health kick she's on these days. Her life is precious and she'll do what it takes, short of quitting her perilous job, to preserve it.

Peanut sauce dribbles down her chin and he wipes it away with his fingers, licks them. Her eyes widen and he notices a flush blooming on her upper chest. MSG or arousal?

She sets her plate down. "I think I'm full," she announces.

"You should be. You ate eighty percent of the food." He scrapes the last of the incendiary red curry from his plate with the side of his fork.

Scully clears the dishes to the kitchen and reappears in the living room, looking shy and roguish at the same time. "I'm all sticky. I have curry and peanut sauce up to my elbows. I think I'll take a quick shower."

He settles back on the couch. "Take your time, Scully. The fire is entertainment enough for me."

"I've been thinking about what you said the other night, Mulder. It's important that we start caring about the environment." The blush on her chest deepens.

He's off the couch like he's been shot out of a cannon.

Scully lights a few votive candles and sets them on the sink and turns off the overhead light. She starts the shower and turns to him. He gathers her in his arms, kissing the top of her head

like he sometimes did when everything between them was undefined, up for grabs, easily misinterpreted.

"I didn't think I could be happy," he murmurs.

She lifts her face to him. "I know."

He thinks, I hope this grace period can last a while.

He presses her against the windowsill, sinking into her kisses. Her fingers find the fly of his jeans and before long, he feels them sliding to his feet.

"Naked, now," he hears himself saying. When did he get so bossy?

She fluidly removes her top and drapes it on wood bureau she uses for bathroom storage, her jeans the next to go. Her bra is black and lacy, just as he'd dreamed in the past. With one hand, he unhooks it, a trick he learned his senior year in high school after hours of practice with Stacy Evans in her parents' basement. Scully laughs as he dangles the bra on one finger and gives it a jaunty twirl before allowing it to land on the pile of clothes on the bureau. He slides off her panties, their lace matching her bra, and he feels her shiver.

They step into the shower, the hot water raining down on them. She tilts her head back and lets the spray catch her face and hair. He stands back and watches. Naked, wet Scully, wearing nothing but her cross necklace and the mole above her lip. Dreams do come true, once in a while. "I never thought I'd get to see this," he says.

"But you have. Remember the decontamination shower?" Something unreadable passes on her face.

"That was different." It feels like a century ago.

"You were peeking, Mulder." She sneaks around him to give him access to the water.

"Of course I was. I'm only human. But I didn't get to see much. This is much better." He flicks water at her.

She squeezes herbal-scented shower gel in her hands and works up lather. "Yes, it is." She rubs the suds all over his body. His chest, his back, his buttocks, his thighs. He kisses her, hard and long.

His foot suddenly gives way on the bottom of the tub and he has to grab the shower rod to keep from falling.

"Be careful. It's a slippery tub," she says.

Her fingers are slippery, too, as they work their soapy way around his cock and perform the same maddening dance he'd been introduced to the other night in the hotel room.

"You have to stop that," he gasps. "I can't guarantee..."

"Shut up," she says with a smile.

He attempts to distract himself by applying his attention to her breasts, those lovely, wet breasts, the nipples stiffening under his fingers and between his lips. But it's not helpful when she moans, a low moan that sends sparks down his spine. He's heard her moan in pain, in terror, in grief, but her moan of delight is something still new and astonishing to behold.

Abruptly, she removes her hand from him and he stifles a dismayed sound. She reaches around the shower curtain and her hand returns with a bath towel. She folds it and places it on the bottom of the bathtub.

He squints in confusion. What is she doing? Realization dawns on him as she sinks to her knees on the towel.

"My knees aren't what they used to be," she says, blinking innocently.

Oh, God, she's really going to do it, right here in the shower. Scully is much, much naughtier than he ever gave her credit for. In his fantasies, she is often a slightly reluctant partner, shy and having to be coaxed a bit into participating in certain acts.

So much for his fantasies. Reality is infinitely better, he thinks, as she takes him into the warmth of her mouth, her tongue lazily tracing the length of him.

He looks down at her and their eyes meet, blue and hazel. Electric. He almost loses his balance again, his knees turned to jelly. He grips her slippery shoulders to keep steady.

The suction of her mouth, her soft lips wrapped around him, her tongue swirling around the head of his cock, it's all too much. Oh, Scully, I never knew you at all, he thinks. I seriously underestimated you. You're more woman than I could ever have imagined.

When he comes, it's not in shame or in horror, but in utter joy. He grips her shoulders so hard he's probably leaving fingertip bruises.

She rests her head for a moment on his thigh and then lifts it to smile at him. He helps her up from the towel.

He feels light-headed, drained, gone, but he also feels like he's alive for the first time in years.

He kisses her. "I don't know how to thank you."

"Jewelry is always an appropriate thank-you gift. Emeralds go nicely with my hair."

He laughs.

"I feel sufficiently clean," she says. "Perhaps we should find a more comfortable place. My bed, say?"

"You're always thinking, Scully," he says.

She climbs out of the tub and through the gap in the curtain he watches her towel off. He squeezes out the wet towel from the bottom of the tub and hands it to her.

"Are you planning to get out any time soon?" she says, her hands on her hips.

"Just a second. I want to rinse this soap off."

He turns to face the showerhead, sugarplums dancing in his head. He doesn't notice when his foot slips on the porcelain, not until he finds himself falling towards the shower.

This will not end well, he thinks.

His face crashes into the faucet and he comes down hard on one knee. He screams loud enough to be heard in Baltimore.

The shower curtain rings screech across the metal rod. "Mulder, what happened?" he hears her say.

His hands are covering his face. He takes them away only to see them covered with his blood. "I think I fell," he gasps. Fucking hell, it hurts. His forehead, his nose, his knee.

Scully snaps into doctor mode. "Can you get up if I give you a hand?"

He's not sure but he just wants to get the hell out of this tub.

"Carefully," she says, offering her hand. Somehow he manages to climb out with her support and he hobbles to the toilet seat.

Scully carefully dabs at his forehead and nose with a damp washcloth. "You've got a pretty big gash near your hairline," she says. She touches his nose and he yelps. "And you might have broken your nose."

That's all his schnozz needs--a fracture to give it even more character.

She hands him a wad of tissues to catch the blood from his nose and presses the washcloth to his forehead to staunch the bleeding. "I think you're going to need stitches."

He's had enough stitches in his head this year, thank you very much. And no more emergency rooms. It hasn't even been two weeks since his last visit. "Can't you stitch me up?" he asks.

"Mulder, you want me to suture you with my sewing needle?"

"It beats the ER." His nose is throbbing in time to his heartbeat.

"I don't even have a sewing needle, even if I would do such a thing, which I wouldn't. Do you think you can walk?"

He extends his leg. The knee is sore but it doesn't seem like anything serious. He nods.

"Good. Then let's try to get you dressed."

Date night at the Georgetown University Hospital emergency room. He should get one of those punch cards--ten visits to the ER and your eleventh is free.

By the time he hobbles back into the waiting room, an ice pack pressed to his nose, it's past two in the morning. Scully is curled up in a chair, dozing. He hates to wake her, but she's his ride home. He touches her shoulder and she starts awake.

"Mulder. How are you?" She yawns.

He touches the gauze on his forehead. "The bad news is six stitches. The good news is my nose isn't broken and the knee seems fine, just bruised. My basketball career isn't over yet."

She sighs. "I'm so sorry." She's been apologizing all night.

"It's not your fault. Now we know better than to..."

She stands up. There are dark circles under her eyes. "Let's get you home."

By the time they reach his apartment, he's woozy with exhaustion and some Percocet Scully produced from her purse, leftovers from a root canal. The doctor only gave him ibuprofen, which did nothing for the pain. His nose is numb from the ice and he has to breathe through his mouth.

She has to lead him like a stumble drunk up the sidewalk to his building, into the elevator, and down the hallway. He never realized how long that hall was before this, but it's endless.

In his bedroom, she helps him out of his jeans and into bed. His bed, so soft and accommodating. Why does he ever leave it?

"Will you stay with me tonight?" he says, slurring his words.

"Of course." Scully finds one of his t-shirts in his dresser and slips it on, climbs in bed next to him. She turns the lamp off and he's grateful for her warm presence in the dark.

"Ice pack," she reminds him, and places it on his nose. "Are you still in a lot of pain?"

"Not really. I...I feel like I did about a dozen bong hits. We should put some Grateful Dead on."

She laughs, snuggling up to him and stroking his hair. "I hate the Grateful Dead."

"Yeah, you would." He shuts his eyes, imagining multicolored dancing bears.

"Hey, Scully?" he asks.

"Yes?"

"Tell me a bedtime story?"

He hears a soft laugh. "A bedtime story? What kind?"

"Anything. Just a story." He wants to hear the sound of her voice.

She kisses his cheek. Her soft voice floats in the darkness of the room. "Once upon a time, there was a man who believed in aliens. He lived in a dungeon far beneath the earth. One day, a woman came to the dungeon. He thought she was there to debunk his work and betray him to the evil king, but she was really there to rescue him..."

He's asleep before she finishes the sentence.

Twelfth:

He looks like he's been in a bar fight. There's the gauze bandage taped to his forehead and the livid bruises surrounding it. His nose has swollen to Karl Malden proportions. Worse yet, he feels like he's been in a bar fight and the other guy won.

It's impressive what a bathtub spigot can do to a face. Even Alex Krycek has never managed to beat him up this badly.

He limps to the kitchen on his sore knee. He'll need a lot of coffee to be able to dress and drive to the office. He finds that Scully has thoughtfully left him a half a pot of coffee. A yellow Post-It note is stuck to the top of the Mr. Coffee. It reads: "Don't even think about it, Mulder."

He finds his cell phone in the living room. She answers on the third ring, her greeting crisp and professional.

"Don't even think about what?" he asks, all innocence.

"Coming to work."

"I've shown up in much worse shape, Scully."

"Yes, and you were completely useless. So stay home for a day and heal."

He sighs. Does she think that all of a sudden he's turned into a delicate flower? "But--"

"But nothing. This time I'll write the report and swing by tonight for you to take a look at it before we submit it to Skinner."

"Fine, you win."

"I always do." She hangs up the phone as punctuation. He's sure that on the other end, she's smirking in triumph.

It's probably for the best. He can't breathe out of one nostril and his knee is shouting in pain. He pops several Percocet and washes them down with Folger's and toast.

He'll spend the day on the couch. His comfy, trusted couch. He can catch up on his reading. He hasn't read the last few issues of "The Journal of Paranormal Research." The day won't be wasted after all.

Before he has a chance to open the first issue, he's fast asleep.

He dreams that he's walking down the corridors of the Bureau with Scully. They're on their way to meet with Skinner. He notices that for some reason she's wearing a blue bikini with white polka dots, but she doesn't seem to find anything amiss. The top of the bikini has come untied and he worries that the entire top might fall off her body. He wants to tie it the strings for her, but he's afraid she'll get angry at him if he does that. They're partners, friends, but he knows better than to cross the line.

With a start, he wakes to the sound of his front door opening. Where's his gun? He'll shoot the bastard breaking in. He relaxes when he hears high heels on the wood floor. It's Scully.

The sky has gone dark outside the living room window. He must have slept all day. He feels dizzy, sweaty, achy, hungry and cotton-mouthed all at the same time. What an attractive sight he must be.

Scully clicks her way into the living room, wearing a severe gray pantsuit and black heels. Her face softens from its official business mask when she spots him lying on the couch.

"Are you all right?" she asks, bending to kiss him on the top of his head. "I tried calling you a few times but you didn't pick up."

"I think I was sleeping."

"If you're not sure, you must have taken more Percocet. How many did you take?"

"Three, I think."

Her eyebrows arch. "On an empty stomach? No wonder you slept all day."

"I had some toast," he offers.

"I brought dinner," she says. She helps him off the couch.

A pee, a tooth-brushing, and a glass of water later and he's as almost good as new. Actually, he still feels like hammered shit, but at least the hammered shit feels a bit fresher.

Scully's setting out takeout containers on the coffee table. "I got some stuff at Whole Foods," she says.

He sits down, trying not to wince at the stiffness in his knee. "I'm not much of a fan of Whole Foods. I don't like my food to be any more than half."

"There's a red velvet cupcake for you if you're a good boy," she says, offering him a plate with a stuffed chicken breast, roasted potatoes and glazed carrots.

He bites back a ribald comment. With Scully, he has to use such comments sparingly to avoid the dreaded eye-roll.

After they eat, she peels back the bandage on his forehead to peer at his stitches. "Looks good," she comments. "No sign of infection. I'm going to remove this, but don't get the sutures wet."

"But I want to take a shower," he protests. He's actively aware that he smells like he's been stewing in his own juices.

"I would think you'd want to avoid showers for a while." She grins. Scully looks slightly goofy when she shows her teeth while smiling. He loves that.

"I stink, Scully," he says.

"Then take a bath."

"Don't you think baths are kind of girlie?"

"What are you, thirteen? Insecure in your burgeoning masculinity? I'll run a bath for you." She clears the dishes off the table.

Some minutes later, she leads him to the bathroom. It's rainforest steamy from the hot water in the tub.

She kisses him gently, careful to not bump his puffy nose.

"You'd better get out of here," he says. "Danger lurks for us in bathrooms."

"I think we'll be fine. Just watch your feet." She helps him out of his t-shirt.

He steps in the tub with the utmost caution, holding her hand as he sinks into the water.

"Perfect. Now, don't drown," she warns, turning to leave the bathroom.

"Hey, Scully, don't you want to save the Earth again?"

She spins on her heel and eyes the rather small tub. "I believe the probability of further injury would rise exponentially if I got in there with you."

He groans in disappointment.

"But I'll wash your back if you'd like," she offers.

He leans back into the hot water, which soothes his sore muscles. His legs are too long to comfortably fit in the tub, but it still feels good. Scully removes her suit jacket and rolls her blouse up to the elbows.

"What would you do if I splashed you?" he asks.

"Make you pay the dry cleaning bill."

"It's a small price to pay." He splashes her, just a little bit, the water hitting the sleeve of her blouse.

"Mulder, do you want to be washed or not?" She kicks off her pumps and kneels on the bathmat.

He closes his eyes and lets her rub Irish Springs bubbles all over his skin. These are the hands that have shot a gun and cut into the dead. Once, they even caught a baby as it emerged into the world. With him her hands are still strong, but they're tender. They fit perfectly on his body.

Her lips brush his and he opens her mouth to her, to accept her long, slow kisses. When he opens his eyes, she's looking at him and smiling shyly.

If only he could see her smile more often.

Hard times are ahead. He can feel it in his bones like the ache of the ankle he broke as a teenager when it's about to rain. But he doesn't want to dwell on those dark thoughts. Not now. Better they grab some sweetness while they can.

"I think I'm sufficiently clean," he says. "Do you have a Hoyer lift handy get me out of this tub?"

Scully the literalist shakes her head and offers her hand instead. It's enough.

She dries him off and wraps the towel around his waist, fastening it with a neat tuck.

"I don't know what I'd do without you," he says.

"I wonder that myself, Mulder."

She helps him shamble his way to the bedroom, where he crumples on the bed, the towel coming off his body. He watches through half-mast eyes as she unbuttons her blouse and slides it from her body. She wiggles out of her trousers and joins him on the bed, clad only in her white bra and panties.

Her hot breath is on his cheek. "Mulder, do you think...?" Her voice trails off and her eyes shut.

"Do I think what?"

"If we're careful, I mean really careful not to hurt you, do you think we could...?" She takes a deep breath, trailing her fingernails on his arm.

"Make love?" he asks, nerves sparking alive with something other than aches and pains.

Her eyes open and there's mischief in them. "Yes." She kisses him on the cheek with warm lips.

"We can try," he says. "But I'm kind of scared. Bad things seem to happen every time we try. Skinner calls, I come too soon, I become intimately involved with your bathtub faucet..."

Scully laughs. "Or I get stung by a bee. Hell, if we actually do manage to have sex, it'll probably cause colonization."

"There's no one I'd rather be in an alien reeducation camp with than you, Scully."

She straddles his body. "I think that the worst that can happen is we break the bed." She unfastens her bra and lets it fall to the sheets.

"We can only hope," he says, his fingers reacquainting themselves with the curves of her breasts. "Besides, I've been thinking about getting a new bed."

Time shatters into brilliant fragments as they kiss. The faint cinnamon taste of her lipstick. The silk of her breasts against his chest. His cock stiffening in her hand. The curve of her hips under his fingers. He can feel no pain whatsoever.

His fingers make their way to her panties and find her clit under the silky material. She moans in pleasure as he carefully circles it. "Get those damned things off," he mutters.

"They're history," she says, removing them unceremoniously.

There now. Skin to skin. Nothing between them. His heart beats faster.

With a lazy, almost nonchalant motion, she lifts her hips and he feels himself sliding into her, guided by her hand.

Oh.

For perhaps the first time in his life, he's speechless.

She smiles at him. This is it. They're here, finally. It's too much. He shuts his eyes, afraid that if he looks at her, he'll come. He wants this to last forever, this joining with her.

"Squeeze my arm if you get too close," she whispers in his ear. He almost laughs. That's Scully, always with a plan.

Slowly, she begins to move. Fuck coming too soon, he has to see this, the beauty of her face and body as she rocks on him, moving his cock in and out of her depths. Her eyes are half-shut, red-gold lashes fanned. She's biting her lower lip as if she's concentrating on a particularly perplexing piece of evidence.

He gives her arm a squeeze. Scully giggles, a real-life, genuine giggle in bed. He'd gladly endure another six stitches in his forehead to hear that again.

"I just need a second," he gasps.

She kisses him, her hands cupping his face tenderly. "I'm so damn happy," she whispers. He has to grasp the sheets in his sweaty hands to keep himself in check.

Okay, deep breath, he thinks. You can do this, you can maintain your control. Be a Zen monk. Practice the art of detachment from worldly things.

But she's started up again and she's doing some kind of roll and twitch of her hips that might just drive him to the madhouse for a lifetime of snug white jackets and regular doses of Thorazine. All he can do is wrap his arms around her and hang on as she rides him hard. It's not up to him anymore.

"Oh, Mulder," she groans. The cross on her necklace tickles his chest, along with the ends of her hair.

Surely he's dreaming this. Because, really, what has he done to deserve this bliss?

"Oh, Mulder," he hears her say again. Her voice is low and scratchy. "I'm...I'm..." She suddenly stops and her entire body shudders, her muscles tightening around his cock. He can't take his eyes off her; he's afraid to blink and miss a second of this singular experience, watching Scully come.

She takes his hand and places it on her sticky chest. He feels the rapid fluttering of her heartbeat. "This is what you do to me, Mulder," she says.

She raises her hips until only the very tip of him is inside her. She pauses and grins down at him. Tease.

"More," he manages to wheeze.

"So impatient," she says.

And then he's inside her again, buried to the hilt. His brain screams to his nerves: all systems are GO!

He's coming, he's coming inside Scully, and he might actually be seeing the cliched fireworks, brilliantly colored explosions behind his closed eyelids. He hears himself babbling some primal language, nonsense syllables straight from the brainstem.

Scully collapses on him and her forehead collides with his nose.

"Fuck!" he yelps, his hands flying up to protect his nose.

"Oh God, I forgot," she says. "Sorry."

"It's a small price to pay." What's a little nasal pain when it's preceded by mind-bending lovemaking?

She rolls off him, his cock slipping from her in the process. Already he misses being inside her. Now that he's visited that glorious place, he wants to return again and again. Buy a season's pass.

Scully curves into his body, warm skin melting into his. They kiss, the first kiss they've shared since all barriers between them were finally shattered.

"Can you believe it?" she whispers.

He tucks some errant strands of damp hair behind her ear. "Took us long enough," he says.

"The first time we met, if we'd known then what we know now..."

He laughs, remembering her eager young face and forthright handshake. "Admit it, Scully, you were hot for me then."

She shakes her head. "Not quite. I'll admit that I found you attractive but you were too good-looking. You were the kind of handsome I was better off avoiding, not to mention my partner."

"So, what changed?" His fingers draw languid circles on her back.

"I don't know. I can't really explain it." Her eyes squeeze shut as if she's trying to dredge up a specific memory. "Gradually I realized that I was in love with you and it was irrevocable. No matter how I tried to rationalize my way out of it, I kept coming to the same conclusion. I loved you and there was nothing I could do about it."

"You make it sound like a bad thing, Scully."

"No, not a bad thing." She kisses him as if trying to reassure him. "Just something that was inevitable. I don't believe in soul mates, or any of that, but something feels predestined about this. Perhaps the hand of God..."

"Perhaps." He doesn't believe in God, at least not in the same way Scully does, but he understands what she means and some part of him agrees with her.

She rests her head against his chest. He takes a deep whiff of the sweetness of her skin and hair.

"I want this to work," he says. "My search for the truth, for my sister, has always been the most important thing in my life. But there's also you, and I..." He doesn't quite know how to fully express what he wants to say. "I want it to be different. Or at least try."

"I know, Mulder. But you know that I want the same things as you."

"I can't give you some of what you want so badly," he says. He pictures a house in the country with a garden. A laughing child with her smile.

"Mulder," she sighs. "What I want is right here. I wouldn't be here if this wasn't what I truly wanted."

He nods.

"Let me put this in terms you might understand." She smiles. "To quote the Rolling Stones, 'You can't always get what you want but if you try hard, you might just get what you need.'"

"You quoted it wrong," he says.

"Whatever. You're the Stones fan, not me."

They both laugh. He'll have to take the classic rock questions in bar trivia.

He finds himself growing sleepy, but unwilling to close his eyes and let slumber take him. This moment is too real, too special to let it fade away so soon.

He remembers their first kiss, tentative under the harsh hospital lights as the world celebrated the new millennium. Sweet, hopeful, with a hint of promise.

It was only a kiss, but this is so much more.

END

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