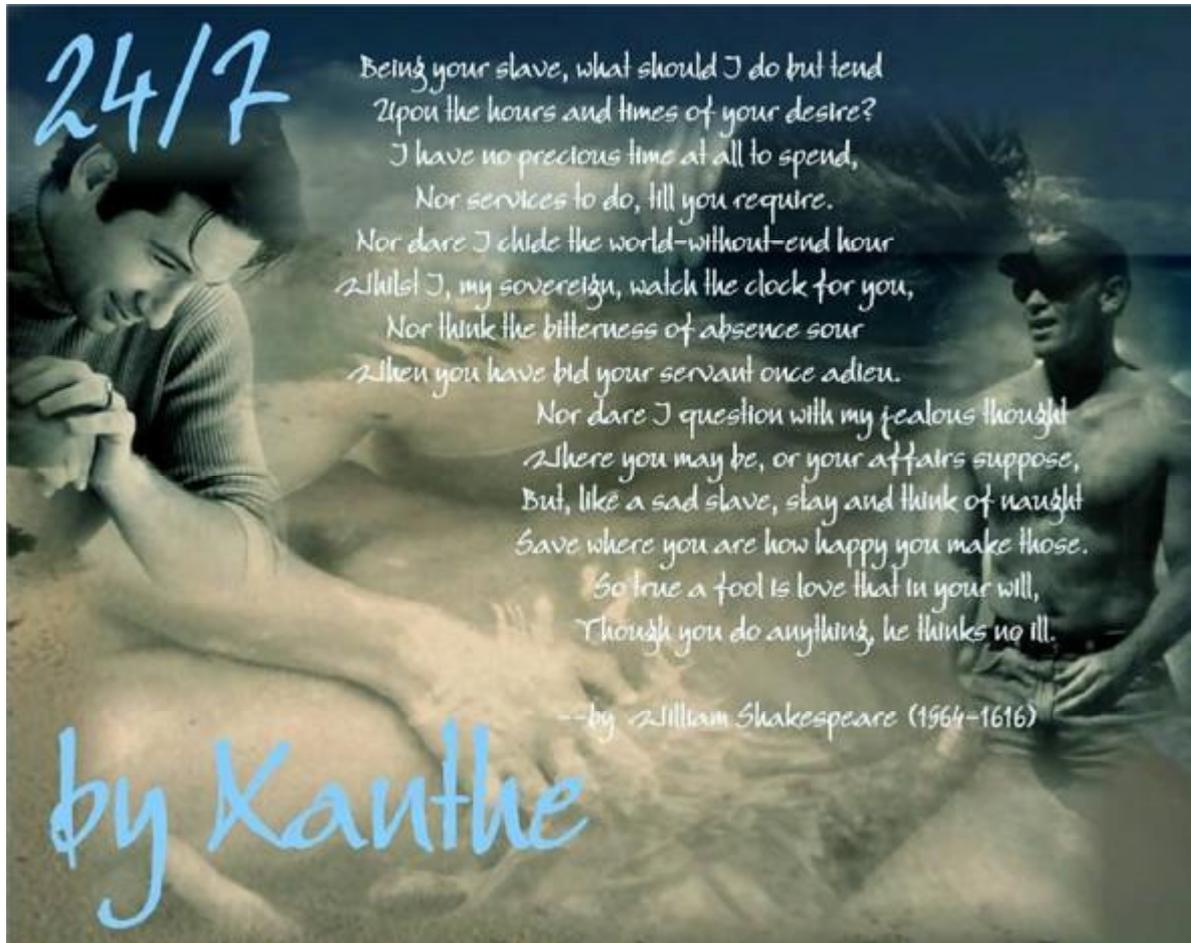


24/7  
by Xanthe



**Story Notes:**

*"He felt as if was spinning out of control, seeking ever more dangerous risks, more intense thrills...and this...this was the ultimate risk, the ultimate trip into the unknown, the ultimate thrill. If he signed this piece of paper, **anything** could happen to him. During a sex game he wouldn't have any control, or the buffer zone of a safe-word. He'd be totally, completely, at the mercy of his Master. Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week..."*

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Awards: Winner of the 1999 Purple Heart for Best Mulder/Skinner story.  
The most popular of all my stories.

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## Awards

Winner of Best Mulder/Skinner story in the 1999 *MTA Purple Heart Awards*

*Wirerims* award winner in the following categories:

Outstanding Series  
Outstanding Skinner/Mulder slash story  
Outstanding BDSM story  
Best use of props for all the toys

Runner Up in the 2000 Spookys in the Outstanding Skinner/Mulder slash category

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1. **The Contract** by Xanthe
2. **Five Gold Rings** by Xanthe
3. **A Room With A View** by Xanthe
4. **A Marked Man** by Xanthe
5. **A Cat Called Wanda** by Xanthe
6. **The Piercing** by Xanthe
7. **I Must Always Be Honest With My Master** by Xanthe
8. **It's My Party and I'll Cry If I Want To** by Xanthe

9. **Suits You, Sir** by Xanthe
10. **Master's Day** by Xanthe
11. **Ring, Master?** by Xanthe
12. **Dog Days** by Xanthe
13. **Remote Control** by Xanthe
14. **Release** by Xanthe
15. **Unchained Melody** by Xanthe
16. **P.E.T.S** by Xanthe
17. **Slaveless in Seattle** by Xanthe
18. **Contractual Obligations** by Xanthe
19. **Restitution** by Xanthe
20. **Dungeons and Dragons** by Xanthe
21. **His Master's Voice** by Xanthe
22. **The Collaring** by Xanthe
23. **Lord of Misrule** by Xanthe
24. **Guardian of the House** by Xanthe
25. **The Branding** by Xanthe
26. **The Branding Part Two** by Xanthe
27. **Here, There and Everywhere** by Xanthe
28. **Here, There and Everywhere Part Two** by Xanthe

## The Contract by Xanthe

### Author's Notes:

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After a long search, Mulder finally finds someone who'll give him the extreme thrills he seeks - but there's a price.

Posted 21st September, 1999

My intention is to post short snippets of this whenever that good ol' BDSM mood washes over me :-). There's lots of great BDSM stuff around now, and it's always tricky coming up with a new angle. Hopefully I've succeeded here. You'll have to trust me on where it's going. And submit of course...

Many thanks to Emma, who told me a very intriguing tale that sparked this story off, as well as providing invaluable technical assistance, and some rather interesting ideas...

Thanks to Alex for the quotation.

German translation of this story available [here](#).

24/7 is an erotic fantasy and NOT a BDSM resource guide. The truth is sometimes exaggerated, or played with, for dramatic effect. For more information, please visit the [24/7 BDSM Glossary](#).

Mulder sat at the dark, oak table, his casual, relaxed posture belying his sensation of nervous anticipation. He wanted to appear calm, collected, in control of himself - in other words, an attractive proposition, not a wimpy basket-case.

The room was tastefully furnished - just a table, and 6 chairs. No easy chairs, just the dining variety. There were some prints on the wall - nothing erotic - all so very sophisticated, and impeccably stylish. It was what he'd come to expect. He straightened in his chair, and flicked at his tie. An enormous mirror obscured the whole of one wall. He wasn't stupid - he knew that he was being spied on through it. Spied on, evaluated, judged. Mulder couldn't help himself - he began to fidget. This was a big moment - he really didn't want to fuck it up.

Six years. Six years he'd been playing this game, and he was good at it. Damn good. They wouldn't find anyone better. **He** wouldn't find anyone better. If He was looking for the best sub in DC to play with, He need look no further. Mulder was here, and Mulder **was** that sub. No false pride - he was good, and he knew it.

"Mr. Mulder." The voice rang out - sounding tinny over the microphone. Deep, dark, chillingly sensual. Mulder swallowed, and tried not to appear gauche by looking startled. He was a player, and a good one. He had every right to be here, in one of the most exclusive private clubs in DC, attending a meeting set up for him by the best players in the city. A meeting where he finally got a chance to present his case to **Him**.

"You've gone to a great deal of trouble to track me down, Mr. Mulder. I'd like to know why." The voice was smooth, but the inquiry hid a hint of steel behind the polite façade.

"Thank you for agreeing to see me, sir," he said, his tone carefully respectful.

There was a pause.

"Mr. Mulder, you've been pursuing me for over a year. In the end, it just seemed easier to see you in person than to keep evading you."

"You've been evading me...? Why, sir?" Mulder frowned.

"Etiquette, Mr. Mulder. I've been aware of your presence on the scene - who could fail to be? You've played with every top in the city."

"There haven't been any complaints, have there?" Mulder asked, his voice holding a hint of challenge.

"No. None. Except for the short-lived nature of your devotion...you have a tendency to **consume** your tops, and then move onto the next, Mr. Mulder." The voice sounded almost amused.

"I didn't find any of them...interesting enough to stay with." Mulder shrugged.

"And what makes you think that **I'll** live up to your exacting standards?" The voice snapped.

Mulder hesitated. This wasn't going the way he'd planned.

"I don't have exacting standards...I just..." He hesitated. How could he explain it? He'd been playing in this city for years, progressing from eager-eyed newbie, to experienced old hand, and the thrill was so transitory. "I need more," he whispered. "After each session I get the high, but it's becoming harder to reach, harder to sustain. I'm well trained - you'll find me exciting to play with."

"The excitement isn't in question. The training is," the voice answered dryly. Mulder stared directly into the mirror, wishing he could see the man behind it. "Explain to me why I should bother with you?"

"You're legendary. Everyone knows of your existence, but hardly anyone knows who you are. You're the best player there is..."

"And you think that you deserve only the best?" The voice challenged.

"Yes. No! I just meant...that I need something." Mulder's voice faded. He couldn't begin to put his needs into words, to explain the vast, gaping chasm he needed to fill.

"You speak a lot about yourself, and your needs," the voice mused.

"I'd address myself to you and your needs if you took me on," Mulder said hastily. "I'm a player, sir. I know how to please. If you accept me as your sub, sir, I'd do my best to please you, and I'd make you happy. Very happy." He glanced into the mirror with just a slight inclination of his head - a challenge, a promise, a hint of what could follow if this man would just say "yes." He didn't.

"No, Mr. Mulder. You'd do your best to please **yourself**, and insofar as that pleased me, I'm sure I'd be very satisfied. Beyond that, I'd be left, as you clearly are, with a feeling of emptiness. Your offer is...unacceptable."

Mulder sat down, feeling as if he'd been punched in the gut. "Please, sir...give me a chance," he whispered.

"No." The voice was surprisingly kind. "You shouldn't have come here, Mr. Mulder. If I'd been interested in you, I'd have selected you myself, and you could have spared yourself this...humiliation."

"Oh, haven't you heard? I'm a masochist. I thrive on humiliation," Mulder spat bitterly. There was a sound of a dry laugh from the microphone.

"Masochism," the voice said. "Would you like the dictionary definition?" There was a pause - Mulder assumed it was a rhetorical question. "**Masochism**. Noun. **1. *Psychiatry***, an abnormal condition in which pleasure, especially sexual pleasure, is derived from pain or from humiliation, domination etc, by another person."

Mulder closed his eyes, and saw himself hanging from a set of manacles, his body criss-crossed with the lines of his last master's whip. He re-lived the pain, the humiliation, the sheer breath-taking pleasure of both, and his cock responded by hardening almost immediately.

"Does that describe you, Mr. Mulder? Do you view yourself as abnormal?" The voice asked, in an almost gentle tone.

"No." Mulder snapped abruptly. "I know what I am, and I've come to terms with that."

"Really? Shall I continue? **2. *Psychoanalysis***. The directing towards oneself of any destructive tendencies." Like coming here today, perhaps?" the voice commented, in a dry tone. "Is that what you do in your everyday life, Mr. Mulder? Do you court death and pain? Do you embrace your own suffering all too readily?"

Mulder opened his mouth, and saw himself in a hundred different scenarios - jumping from trains, escaping bomb blasts, chasing after his lost sister - finding her - being rejected by her. He closed his mouth, and nodded, burying his face in his hands.

"3. A tendency to take pleasure from one's own suffering - which, I think, is what you're doing right now," the voice laughed. "Mr. Mulder, let's start again from the beginning. Tell me your experiences, honestly. Tell me what led you from your first sado-masochistic experience to my door, and then I'll tell you whether I'm prepared to change my mind."

Mulder sat up, his whole body shaking. He felt known - he felt as if this man knew and understood him, and it scared him. It reminded him of...

"Phoebe," he whispered. "An old girlfriend - I met her when I was 18. She used to tie me up...and she was cruel to me. I found it...arousing."

"Good. Continue," the voice ordered.

"She did some great head fucks. She'd flirt with other guys to make me jealous - sometimes she liked watching me fight them, physically. I always won...except once." He broke off, stared into space.

"What happened?"

"She went off with the other guy. Spent the night with him - slept with him." Mulder clenched his fists. "The message went home loud and clear. I had to be the best, the strongest, to keep her. She was the prize, the top, and I was nothing. I existed just to serve her."

"Did you find that arousing?"

Mulder sighed. "Yeah. Oh god, yeah. I hated it though. I couldn't handle the insecurity. We broke up. I had some regular girlfriends for a while, and then I started working in DC. I...I couldn't forget Phoebe, so I found the BDSM scene. I only played with women at first...and then one day, the woman I was with gave me to this guy - made me suck his dick. It was supposed to be the ultimate humiliation...but I found myself enjoying it. Men are harder, stronger...the domination is so much more...total. I need to give myself up to that. I'm a strong person. I need to be owned by someone stronger," Mulder whispered. "After that, I sought out men. I've never viewed myself as homosexual, but I like being dominated by men."

"I see." The voice was thoughtful.

"I feel...out of control," Mulder continued. "That's what the appeal of this is to me. I can't control myself, or my life. There are things that have happened to me that are...well let's just say that I've dived with death for the sheer thrill of it on more than one occasion. I haven't decided whether I want to live. Every day I wake up wondering whether today's the day I'll die. It's an ongoing decision. I haven't chosen life. It's just what's happened. By default. Death might come the same way. With sex...with BDSM sex, someone else takes that decision away from me. They control me...and for a few hours I have some respite from that decision. I can't make it. I'm not free to. I belong to them." Mulder stood up, and glanced at the mirror, bitterly. "Well thanks for seeing me. Even if the favor wasn't returned," he said, "and for making me spill my guts. I hope it amused you."

"It was...fascinating," the voice intoned. "You interest me enough to make me reconsider."

Mulder stopped on his way to the door, and stiffened, then turned back, his heart beating too quickly inside his chest. "You'll have me? You'll take me as your sub?" He asked.

"No," the voice said in a low, quiet tone. Mulder's whole body slumped. "I wouldn't consider taking you as a sub, Mr. Mulder. That wouldn't suit me, and it's hardly worked for you so far - as is evident. I will consider taking you as my slave though."

"What?" Mulder strode over to the mirror.

"You know what I mean, Mr. Mulder. You've been on the scene for several years," the voice chided softly. "I don't want to have you as a twice a week fuck. That wouldn't interest me, and it won't do you any good either. If you sincerely wish to play with me, then it would have to be a more...permanent arrangement - 24 hours a day, 7 days a week."

"What about my work?" Mulder asked incredulously.

"I don't have a problem with you continuing to work - as long as you keep me briefed on everything you do. You would live with me though - I have special slave quarters - and you'd have a pager. I expect you to be available to me whenever I wish to make use of you - and in whatever way I wish to make use of you, from presenting your ass for a whipping, to fetching the groceries."

"That might interfere with my job," Mulder murmured, wishing that his cock wasn't rock hard inside his pants.

"You would have to ensure it didn't." The voice sounded unconcerned. "I prefer my slaves to have something interesting to talk about at the end of the day. I require my slave to be presentable, well groomed, polite, intelligent, educated, charming, and amusing. It's not an easy lifestyle, Mr. Mulder. There's no question of my slave sitting back and waiting for **me** to do all the hard work. I expect to be kept entertained, sexually satisfied, and generally looked after. You'll be my valet, chef and housekeeper - all on an unpaid basis - in addition to keeping my bed warmed."

"Sounds like a tough job," Mulder commented.

There was a dry laugh. "It has its compensations. You should think carefully about it before submitting yourself to any such agreement though. Sit down at the table, Mr. Mulder. I'll have my terms brought in, and then you can decide whether or not they're acceptable to you."

Mulder did as he was told, wordlessly, his mouth dry. He was stunned by this turn of events. He thought he had known, when he first came here, what he was letting himself in for. He would charm this top top, this super-dom, and then he'd get what he needed, **when** he needed it - on his terms. Not anybody else's. He didn't like the way this was going at all...and yet...and yet his body was quivering with arousal at the thought of being so comprehensively owned. It was the kind of relationship he'd had with Phoebe, only without either of them ever specifying as much.

The door opened, and a servant walked in. He was holding a piece of paper, which he placed in front of Mulder. Then he brought over a silver pen and an inkstand, together with a blotter, and placed them by Mulder's right hand. He left the room without speaking.

Mulder looked down on the neatly typed parchment, and read:

**Slave Contract.**

1. The slave agrees to obey and submit completely to his Master in all ways. There are no boundaries of place, time, or situation in which the slave may willfully refuse to obey the directive of his Master.
2. The slave also agrees that, once entered into the Slavery Contract, his body belongs to his Master, to be used as seen fit.
3. All of the slave's possessions likewise belong to his Master, including all assets, finances, and material goods, to do with as He sees fit.
4. The slave agrees to please his Master to the best of his ability, in that he now exists solely for the pleasure of his Master.
5. The slave understands that all that he has, and all that he does, shall now move from right to privilege, granted only as He wishes, and only to the extent that He finds useful.

I have read and fully understand this Slavery Contract in its entirety. I agree to give everything I own to my Master, and further accept His claim of ownership over my physical body, heart, soul, and mind. I understand that I will be commanded and trained and punished as a slave, and I promise to be true and to fulfil the pleasures and desires of my Master, and serve Him to the best of my abilities. I understand that I cannot withdraw from this Slavery Contract.

Signed:

"Absolutely not." Mulder put down the pen, got up, and walked furiously over to the mirror. "You must be insane. I don't even know you - I haven't even met you. This is ridiculous."

"Fair enough," the voice said smoothly. "It's been interesting meeting you, Mr. Mulder. Please close the door on your way out."

"Fuck you." Mulder kicked the wall angrily. "My possessions? My heart, my soul...?" he floundered breathlessly.

"I suspect that neither your heart, nor your soul, are areas that disturb you very much, Mr. Mulder. The part that caused you anxiety was, I suspect, your 'mind'."

"It doesn't matter. You can't really own another person. It's crazy." Mulder thumped his head against the mirror, and stood there for a moment in anguish, leaning his head and forearms on that brightly polished surface. He needed this. He **really** needed this. Only he, and, he suspected, the man behind the mirror, knew just how much that contract turned him on. It was the ultimate thrill - to live in a state of constant submission. He knew his own nature all too well - he only ever feigned his submission during sex play, in order to get off on it. He wouldn't be able to do that under the conditions laid out in the contract. This was the Real Thing. It scared him. It excited him. A claustrophobic part of himself was already chafing under the idea of the restriction, even as his cock throbbed in anticipation of such ownership. Mulder looked up, into his own eyes, into the eyes of the man behind the mirror.

"What about you?" He whispered at last, hardly believing that he was seriously continuing this conversation. "I see a lot in this contract about my obligations - what about yours?" He waved his arm at the piece of paper.

"Good question." The voice sounded as if it were smiling.

The door opened, and the servant came back in. He laid another sheet of paper on the table, and stepped quietly away again. Mulder returned to the table cautiously, curiously, hating himself for being so interested in this whole process. He had no intention of signing. He couldn't. And yet...

### **Master Contract.**

1. I accept this slave into my loving care and protection as his Master.
2. I will provide the physical and emotional necessities of life for my slave, and he will know my love as I choose for him to know it.
3. I will use my slave's body as I wish, such usage to be limited only by my responsibility not to damage either his physical or mental being.
4. I shall establish a clearly understood set of rules for my slave, and I shall enforce them in a firm but responsible manner. These rules will be for his protection as well as his discipline, and will - to the best of my ability - foresee every eventuality and control the most minute aspect of his behavior.
5. Within the self-imposed limitations above, I undertake to train and discipline my slave in a manner calculated to guide him toward a perfection of obedient submission that I know he can never achieve. In doing so, it will be my goal to reward his efforts by dispensing the punishment he requires and deserves.
6. I shall endeavor to provide for my slave's necessities of life, even in the event that I should die or otherwise be rendered incapable of caring for him.

I have read and fully understand this Master Contract in its entirety. I agree to accept this slave as my property, body and possessions, and to care for him to the best of my ability. I shall provide for his security and well-being and command him, train him, and punish him as a slave. I understand the responsibility implicit in this arrangement, and agree that no harm shall come to the slave as long as he is mine. I further understand that I can withdraw from this Contract at any time.

Signed:

Mulder closed his eyes and leaned his head back, then opened them, and gazed at the plain, white ceiling, but he found no answers there. This Contract spoke to some need, deep inside him. The Master's contract spoke of caring, of punishing... of protecting him. The use of the word security echoed in his mind. He didn't feel secure, or loved, or cared for. He felt adrift. He wanted peace - would this contract give him that?

"I see you get to end the contract whenever you like, but I don't," he commented bitterly.

"There will be times you might be tempted to act in haste - and repent at leisure," the voice replied.

"That's a saying usually used about marriage, not slave contracts," Mulder murmured ironically.

More dry laughter. "If you're wondering whether there's a difference, trust me, there is. A significant one. However..." The voice was thoughtful. "I have no wish to keep an unwilling slave. If you wished to break our Contract, I'd listen to your arguments and treat them seriously - although I'd probably refuse your request. I have no legally binding hold over you - the laws of this land would uphold your freedom, except in regard to your property of course, which would be signed over to me. I might return it to you at my own discretion, if I terminated our contract. It is doubtful that I would do so if you chose to leave. In addition - if you decide to leave without my permission, then I wouldn't accept you back. I also suspect that you'd have to find a new playground. Nobody in this city would play with another man's property without his permission - and it's unlikely that I'd give such permission."

"Dammit this is absurd! Surely you can see that!" Mulder pounded his fist on the table. "This is about sex, not everyday life. I cannot...I will not...give myself up to this."

"No. I'm sorry. You won't ever find what you're looking for, Mr. Mulder, precisely because of that fact."

"I'm not looking to become someone's slave!" Mulder protested.

"No. I agree. However, in so doing, you might discover what you are looking for." The voice had a tone to it that implied a shrug.

"Don't I even get to see what I'm letting myself in for?" Mulder questioned. " **You've** had a chance to inspect the goods - what about me?"

"I think not. If you choose not to sign the contract, then I'd prefer for my identity to remain a secret. You came looking for me, remember. I don't have any obligation towards you."

"What about negotiation?" Mulder asked despairingly. He always negotiated prior to playing. He and his prospective partner would talk about what sexual practices they enjoyed, and how far the top could go. He was so adept at them that he could talk easily on subjects some people might find highly embarrassing. It was standard safe practice on the scene - for good reason.

"There is no negotiation. There's just the Contract," came the reply. "If you're my slave, I own you. There's no discussion about it. You have to learn to trust...and submit."

"So, safe-words wouldn't be an option then?" Mulder asked, making a face.

"That's right, Mr. Mulder. They wouldn't," the voice replied dryly.

Mulder paced around the room, thinking furiously. Shit, this man could be anyone - hell, it could even be that cigarette smoking bastard. Not that it would matter if he were. Mulder would just walk out, and not come back, if that were the case. So what if he couldn't play in this city again - at least he'd keep his integrity. And what, truthfully, was the point of playing here again? He'd been through every top, and yes, he'd **consumed** them, as this man had so accurately pointed out. He felt as if was spinning out of control, seeking ever more dangerous risks, more intense thrills...and this...this was the ultimate risk, the ultimate trip into the unknown, the ultimate thrill. If he signed this piece of paper, **anything** could happen to him. During a sex game he wouldn't have any control, or the buffer zone of a safe-word. He'd be totally, completely, at the mercy of his Master. Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week... Shit,

but this man reminded him of Phoebe. He seemed to have gotten into his head - he knew exactly the way to scare him and excite him, at one and the same time.

"Yes," he whispered. There was a silence. "I said, the answer is yes, damn you!" He roared.

"The pen is on the table," the voice replied implacably, clearly unimpressed by this display of temper.

Mulder went over to the table, and sat down. He picked up the pen, and closed his eyes. He saw Scully's face in his mind's eye. She was frowning at him, yelling at him, asking him how the hell he could do something this stupid. He saw Skinner, standing over him, shouting at him - asking him why he'd risk his career over something so crazy. He opened his eyes again, trying to shut out their faces, their voices, their concern. How could he ever explain this to them? All he could hope was that this man he was giving his life over to was benign, and that somehow he'd keep him back from the brink of the dark abyss he walked.

Mulder placed the tip of the pen to the paper - and signed his life away.

**End of Part One.**

## Five Gold Rings by Xanthe

### **Author's Notes:**

Posted 22nd September, 1999.

Quotation courtesy of my sweet Alex. This is the chapter where the pic gets all relevant. This one also has a Christmassy feel to it - NOT!

**WARNING:** This chapter is fairly harmless but I feel I should post this warning of my future intentions so that it doesn't come as a shock to anyone further down the road: This series will contain scenes of graphic, consensual BDSM sex within a Master/Slave scenario, so don't read on if such scenes squick you badly.

Many thanks to Emma, who told me a very intriguing tale that sparked this story off, as well as providing invaluable technical assistance, and some rather interesting ideas...None of this is beta'd. It's far too much fun to take seriously.

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*"A truth, still apparent, though disregarded, that things move violently to their place, but calmly in their place. To put it another way, everything has its right home, the region that suits it, and, unless forcibly restrained, will move thither by a kind of homing instinct."*

**J. Winterson**  
**"Art and Lies"**

Mulder paced the room, anxiously chewing on a set of fingernails already bitten to the quick. It had been a week since he last stood here, a week during which he had done everything he had been instructed to do. He had complained that a week was too short a time to put his affairs in order, and arrange for his personal finances to be transferred into his Master's numbered accounts as he had been instructed, but his new owner had been adamant.

"You should also view it as a cooling off period," his Master had said, his voice echoing around the room, and straight into Mulder's soul, sounding tinny, and distorted through the microphone. "When you come back here next week, if you've done everything as instructed, and if you still wish to proceed, then, and only then, I'll sign the Master contract. In your presence. After that - there's no going back."

Mulder leaned against the wall, and tried to keep still. "No going back...no going back..." the words reverberated around his skull. He wished, profoundly, that this was all over. That his Master had claimed him, tied him up, dragged him back to his lair, and then at least he'd **know** whether he'd done a Good Thing, or a Very Bad Thing. All this waiting was making him insane. He'd been like a cat on a hot tin roof all week, driving Scully crazy, alternately fidgeting and sitting in a state of slumped lethargy. He hadn't been able to write up the two reports sitting on his desk - he'd just stared into space instead, rolling his new status around in his head. Fox Mulder - slave. Possession. Owned. Even Skinner had noticed his strange behavior and had asked him if something was wrong. Looking into his boss's concerned dark eyes, he'd wished for a moment that he **did** have someone he could confide in, someone who could save him from the consequences of his actions. He was paying the price for not trusting easily. In the end he'd brushed Skinner's inquiry off brusquely, and Scully hadn't even dared broach the subject of what was up with him. He was glad for that much at least. Soon it would all be over.

He knew he was being a fool, but all the same he couldn't stop his head-long plunge into this unknown realm. He didn't own much, so he didn't care about the money. His father had left everything to his mother in his will, despite their divorce - maybe as some kind of recompense, maybe to punish his only son - Mulder didn't know. He had never understood his father. When his mother died, Mulder assumed he might end up a relatively wealthy man, but he wasn't at this moment in time. All he was giving up to his Master was a few thousand dollars. It didn't seem too high a price to pay for...for what? Peace? Mulder leaned his head back against the wall, and bounced it there - once, twice, three times, hating himself for the need, and berating himself for his stupid hope that he would find what he sought in this arrangement. That didn't stop him hoping all the same. He wondered idly what his owner looked like. It didn't matter, but he was still curious. He wasn't looking for love - he was looking to be saved from himself.

"Mr. Mulder. I'm sorry to have kept you waiting." The voice rang out, breaking into his reverie, surprising him. Mulder jumped. He'd forgotten how deep and seductive that voice was, how it made his cock jump to know he was being addressed by his Master.

"Do you apologize to all your slaves?" Mulder asked, raising an ironic eyebrow.

That dry laugh rang out. "You're not. Yet. When I sign my part of the contract it will be a done deal. Until then..."

"I'd like to get it over with," Mulder interrupted, his nerves frayed, and jangling.

"I take it you haven't changed your mind then?" His Master inquired.

"No." Mulder took a deep breath. "You got into my head and found some part of me I didn't even know existed. I've been walking around with a hard-on all week because of you," he said accusingly, his tone almost bitter.

"My apologies for knowing my trade so well," the voice said softly, almost in commiseration. "Is the paperwork done?"

"Yes." Mulder laid his briefcase on the table, opened it, withdrew a file and held it up. "Here it is. The sum total of my life - for what it's worth. And here's where you reveal this was all just a giant set-up to fleece me, and you take the money and run." Mulder tensed, almost expecting that to happen.

"Don't be stupid," the voice chided. "You arranged this meeting through James Eckhart and J.M. Lucas, both high profile players with good reputations. Do you doubt their integrity?"

"No. Maybe they might want to teach the pushy sub a lesson though," Mulder commented wryly.

"There are other ways to do that," the voice reminded him. "And you won't be any kind of sub for much longer."

The door opened and Mulder held his breath - but it was only the servant, who retrieved the file from him, and exited again.

"Your personal possessions?" His Master asked.

"In my car." Mulder shrugged.

"The lease on your apartment?"

"Put in the name of the company you gave me. Your company?" Mulder inquired, curious, wondering what line of work this man was in. He was ignored.

"The keys?"

"Right here." Mulder held them up, then, with a deep inhalation of breath, he put them on the table and backed away again.

"This seems to be in order. Go back over to the table." Mulder felt himself chafing at the peremptory command, then caught himself and shook his head. *Better get used to it...*

The servant had left a big white envelope on the table, with one word on it : **Fox**. Mulder suppressed a grimace.

"Is there a problem?" His Master asked.

"My name." Mulder shrugged. "I don't like it."

"That's a shame. I've decided that will be your slave name," his Master told him, in an amused tone.

"What?" Mulder turned and glared at the mirror.

"A slave must have a slave name - bestowed upon him by his Master. Yours will be Fox." His Master said in a tone that brooked no contradiction.

Mulder tried anyway. "Why Fox? That's my real name!" He protested.

"Exactly," the voice replied. "Open the envelope while I check through these documents you've provided."

Mulder stood there, quivering, hating being this much at a disadvantage, but finding it arousing at the same time. Finally, he slipped a finger under the flap of the envelope, and tipped the contents onto the table. Five gold rings, of varying sizes, slid out.

The largest was a collar - wrought from real gold, thin and light, with his name inscribed on it in beautiful lettering, together with a tiny, perfect engraving of a fox.

"It's thin enough to be worn under a shirt and tie. I expect you to wear it at all times - day and night," his Master said softly.

Mulder swallowed, and ran his fingers over the smooth, cool metal. "It's beautiful," he whispered, a lump rising in his throat. Considerable care and attention had gone into making this collar - and he knew, without fastening it around his neck, that it would fit him perfectly. His long fingers moved over the other rings. One was mid-sized, but the other three were much smaller - two of them were identical. The third was slightly bigger, and much thicker.

"If you're thinking it looks like a wedding ring, that's because it is," his Master chuckled softly. "Like the collar, you'll wear it constantly. You'll be punished if I ever see you without either of these symbols of my ownership."

"I understand, Master," Mulder replied, bowing his head towards the mirror, thinking that he wouldn't **want** to be seen without them. They were both so exquisite. The wedding ring was simple, plain gold - shiny and new. Inside, his name was engraved again. F-O-X. Never had his own name looked so beautiful. "Thank you, Master," he whispered.

"Society has its own way of recognizing commitment. It's important that nobody should think that you're available. You aren't," the voice said firmly.

"No, Master." Mulder inclined his head again. "And this?" He held up the mid-sized ring, with a questioning, faintly amused eyebrow.

"You don't need me to tell you what that's for," his Master chided.

"And do I have to wear this all the time too?" Mulder asked.

"Unless I remove it myself, or give you permission to do so, yes," his Master replied. Mulder fingered the cock ring.

"I've never seen one in pure gold before." He shook his head. The cock ring was also engraved with his name, in the same ornate lettering. "And these?" Mulder played with smallest rings.

"I like my slaves to be decorated," his Master said, his tone smooth, like honey. "Are you pierced anywhere?"

Mulder swallowed hard. Nipple rings. "No, Master." He felt his cock hardening even more inside his pants.

"We'll soon remedy that," his Master chuckled. "If I think it suits you, then I might consider other methods of decorating you - tattooing, maybe branding."

"Branding?" Mulder echoed faintly.

"If it pleases me, yes. These rings are all symbols of my ownership," his Master said, his voice almost caressing him. Mulder nodded - wondering how the hell he was going to explain the wedding ring to Scully. "In a moment I'm going to put the wedding ring, and the collar on you. Nobody but me can take them off you," his Master told him firmly. "If **you** remove them, then I'll punish you - harshly. The day **I** remove those symbols of my possession, is the day you are free to leave my service. Do you understand that?"

"Yes, Master." Mulder bowed his head in awe.

"Good. I'll put my cock ring on you later - in the privacy of your new home. Have you thought about this carefully, Fox? This is your last chance. Withdraw now, and I won't speak of this to anyone. You'll be free to go. If you proceed, then you'll belong to me - body and soul. There's no turning back after that."

"I understand. I want...I want to belong to you, Master," Mulder said, fingering the collar, and the little picture of the fox.

A deep sigh echoed through the microphone, and reverberated around the room. Mulder looked up in alarm.

"Very well," his Master said in a low tone. "Lie face down on the floor, Fox, and close your eyes. I'll come and join you - then you can kiss my feet, and offer yourself up to me for collaring."

Mulder did as he was told. He was wearing a tee shirt and jeans, so it would be easy enough for his Master to fasten the collar around his neck. Mulder shivered in anticipation, his whole body quivering with the need, the desire, to be this man's property, and to accept the tokens of his ownership. He laid his face against the carpet, and closed his eyes, stretching his body out, offering himself up.

It took all Mulder's willpower not to look up as the door opened. He felt his stomach churn and clench, and he bit down on his bottom lip to stop it from trembling. His cock throbbed so much that it hurt. This was better than any game. Better and worse. Certainly more intense. Mulder held his breath as he heard footsteps, and they stopped next to his head. A boot nudged at his hand, and he shuffled forward, and pressed his lips against the shiny surface. He opened his eyes, and slowly raised them - seeing a pair of long, black boots. His eyes continued their slow scrutiny - up a pair of long, long legs, encased in black moleskin pants, over a thick black belt, with a classic, understated, shiny silver buckle, over a pair of slim hips, and a neat trim waist. His gaze lingered on the promising bulge in the pants, then moved on up over a broad expanse of chest, encased in a smooth, silky black shirt, up to a wide neck, and a firm jaw, over the contours of a handsome face, a pair of glasses, and behind them a set of dark, fathomless eyes...

"Oh, fuck." Mulder put his head down on the carpet, and banged it. His whole body felt limp and useless, and his entire past flashed before his eyes. "You set me up," he croaked.

Skinner didn't move.

"No. You did that all by yourself," he replied.

"Eckhart and Lucas. They contacted you. They told you I was heading for a fall. You just went along with it - to see how far I'd go. Oh, fuck. Is my career over? Is that what all this is about? An FBI agent entering into a contract of slavery with an unknown man. How fucking stupid is that?"

"Very, I'd have said. I could have been anyone. You're in a very compromising position," Skinner mused. His boot nudged Mulder's chin, forcing Mulder to look up into those stern, dark eyes.

"I know. I've been an idiot. You caught me. What can I say? Don't ask me **why** though. You know why. I told you why..." Mulder's voice trailed off, his heart beating so fast that he thought it would explode. How had this happened? To be caught, seen, exposed in this way? At the exact moment when he thought he'd found something, some **one** who'd force him back from the edge of the abyss, he found instead that he'd been tipped headlong into the dark. Mulder could have wept.

"Yes. I know why." Skinner shrugged.

Mulder lay there, still prostrate at Skinner's feet. He couldn't move - he felt as if his entire body had been turned to jelly.

"You went to such a lot of trouble to expose me for the fool I am." Mulder looked up at his boss through long, dark eyelashes. "The five gold rings were a nice touch." He glanced over at them regretfully. "Of course, I feel kind of cheated about the calling birds, french hens, and turtle doves, to say nothing of the partridge and pear tree, but I suppose that's too much for a guy to expect from his new Master, huh?"

A small smile played around the edge of Skinner's lips, and he leaned over, put a big hand in Mulder's hair, and pulled his head back. Mulder gulped, as he found himself looking straight into those dark eyes.

"Fox - what makes you think this isn't for real?" Skinner asked him.

"Are you kidding? Uh...ow..." Mulder felt as if his hair was going to be pulled out by the roots. "The fact that you're my boss? That we work together? I mean, this has to be a set-up...right?"

"Wrong." Skinner smiled.

Mulder stared at him fascinated by the sight. He realised that he'd never seen his boss smile before - if this man **was** his boss. In these clothes, smiling, he exuded a completely different air - as if he was someone else. His teeth were straight, and white... *all the better to eat me with...* Mulder started to shake.

"I'm sorry, all this has been a shock," he whispered.

"I'm sure it has. I did try to spare you. As I said last week - I've evaded you for as long as I could, but you started to get too close. You've always been an excellent investigator, and it was only a matter of time before you found me. In the end, I thought it might be easier to try and dissuade you, without revealing my identity."

"It's for real?" Mulder gaped. "You really are **Him**?" He asked, stunned.

"Oh yes." Skinner shook him slightly. "And you really are persistent," he said.

"So why this?" Mulder gestured around the room wildly, taking in the rings, and the contracts lying on the table. "Why the charade? Why the whole ownership deal? The contracts? What the hell did you want with my money? Were you trying to teach me a lesson?"

"No." Skinner looked down on him. "I listened to your story, and I evaluated you very carefully, as I would any prospective slave. The deal still stands. You're mine. Signed and sealed." Skinner held up the Slave Contract Mulder had signed the previous week. "I told you if you wanted to pull out of it you could, but you kept pushing on. Now it's too late." Skinner let go of Mulder's hair, and strode over to the table. He picked up the Master's contract, and with a flourish of his hand, he signed it. Then he returned to where Mulder lay, boneless on the floor, and dropped the piece of paper on Mulder's head.

Mulder gazed at the piece of paper as it wafted under his nose. He read it, and remembered why he had wanted it, then looked up at Skinner again. His boss, his **owner**, was holding the beautiful gold collar between his large fingers.

"On your knees," Skinner ordered.

"I think...I might have changed my mind," Mulder muttered, trying desperately to obey, wishing his muscles would do as he told them.

"Why? Because it's me? I'm still offering everything I offered before," Skinner said firmly.

"But we can't... I mean what about work?"

"You'll be my slave - at work, at home, everywhere. Subject to my command, under my direct ownership. Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Nothing has changed." Skinner told him.

"But what about...?" Mulder flushed. He had a sudden vision of Skinner's big arms closing around his naked body, of the other man thrusting into him, overpowering, devouring...and he let out an involuntary moan.

"Sex?" Skinner gave another of those truly wicked grins. "I told you - you're mine, boy. I'll use you when and where I like, as often as I like, or as little. **You**," he ran a finger down Mulder's forehead, over his nose, and then rested it lightly on Mulder's lips, "belong to me. Body, heart, mind and soul." He slipped the finger inside Mulder's mouth, and Mulder couldn't stop himself sucking on it. Skinner laughed. "I rest my case," he said, withdrawing the finger.

Mulder finally managed to make it to a kneeling position. He bowed his head, a thousand thoughts running through his mind, but at the end of the day nothing changed any of it. He still wanted this -

maybe, deep inside, he wanted it even more now. Skinner was everything he'd ever had wet dreams about. He didn't know how it could work at the FBI, but he knew he had gone too far to stop it. This rollercoaster that he had set in motion wouldn't let him off until the ride was over. And somehow, Mulder had the feeling that the ride was a long, long way from being over.

Mulder placed his hands behind his back, and pulled his trembling limbs into some semblance of a submissive pose.

"Okay," he said quietly. "You're right. I'm yours." He looked up into Skinner's calm eyes. The big man nodded, and opened up the hinge on the collar, then slid it around Mulder's throat. Mulder felt the cold metal caress him, gently warming itself on his flesh. It felt familiar - as if it had always been there. As if it **belonged** there. Skinner's eyes never left his as those big fingers adjusted the collar, and then snapped it shut. Done. A look passed between them, of ownership, of submission, of an understanding that went deep into their souls.

"Your hand," Skinner ordered.

Mulder presented his left hand, and Skinner took it. He caressed his thumb down Mulder's ring finger, then firmly slid the wedding ring into place.

"Til death us do..." Mulder muttered. Skinner put a finger over his mouth, to shut him up.

Mulder hung there, limply, his hand still held in one of Skinner's big paws. The moment stretched into an eternity. Brown eyes and hazel ones were locked as the commitment was made between them, and the contract sealed.

Then Skinner laughed out loud, ending the moment. "Get up, slave," he ordered.

"Yes, Master." Mulder scrambled to his feet quickly. All the blood raced to his head, and he swayed for a moment, wondering what the hell had just happened.

Skinner walked briskly over to the door. He called the servant back in, and handed him the two contracts. "See that these are witnessed, and a copy placed in the vault, and then return them to me," he commanded. The servant nodded, and hurried to do his bidding. Mulder could understand the hurry. The Skinner he knew at work had always commanded his respect, and, occasionally, even his fear. However, this Skinner, this Master Skinner, was even more impressive. He lived this role utterly and completely. His body exuded a fierce grace, moving with the tightly controlled, muscled beauty of the panther. Mulder wondered how he had never seen it before. This was a man he could worship, and kneel before. This was a Master he could truly serve.

Skinner turned back to him. "Take the other rings - and keep them safe. I won't be very tolerant if they get lost. Go to your car, and drive to the Viva Tower. Here's a garage permit. It's in your name." Skinner handed Mulder the card. "Wait for me there," Skinner instructed.

"Yes, sir." Mulder did as he was told, collecting his briefcase, and scurrying from the room.

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Mulder glanced at all his worldly goods in the back of his car. His computer, a couple of suitcases full of his clothing, several boxes of books. He would never, in a million years, have predicted that they'd all of them be moving in with Skinner.

He drove slowly through the city, his body still shivering slightly from the shock of the recent events. What kind of a Master would Skinner be, he wondered? Kind? Cruel? Strict? Loving? What would he require of Mulder? And would it be more than Mulder could give?

Mulder stopped the car, and considered turning around and heading to Alexandria, to the safety of his own apartment, and his old life, then remembered that it was too late for that. He couldn't, even if he wanted to. Skinner had the keys, he owned the lease - hell, he could even have sublet it by now.

Mulder laid his head on the steering wheel, feeling trapped, scared, and aroused at one and the same time. Skinner...He thought of how good the other man had looked in his dark clothes, the shiny boots. He remembered that broad chest, the muscular arms, and the sheer power in the big man's body. Power that he would use to subdue Mulder. Skinner now had the right to whip him, fuck him, and do whatever he wanted to him, whenever he wanted to do it. Mulder glanced despairingly at the bright lights, shining in the dark city.

He put his hand up to his neck, and traced the feel of the collar, light but implacable, against his flesh. It would always be there, reminding him of who and what he was, and who he belonged to. As he put his hand back down, he was startled by the flash of the gold ring in the dark.

"How come, Mulder - how come that the very thing you want to run away from, is the exact same thing you want to run to?" He asked himself. Then he laughed out loud. "No choice," he muttered, shaking his head. "You don't have any more choices. You don't belong to you any more. You belong to him."

Mulder started the car again, and resumed his journey into the unknown.

## **End of Part Two**

### **Chapter End Notes:**

**Check out the *\*perfect\** graphics Sergeeva made for me. They're entitled *Worshipful* - for obvious reasons...**

## A Room With A View by Xanthe

### Author's Notes:

Yummy graphic courtesy of **Sergeeva**.

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Posted 24th September, 1999

**WARNING, WARNING, WARNING! Okay, it's hotting up, so be warned. Nothing too bad yet, but definitely getting there... Remember this is a BDSM slash page, and this is a story about consensual slavery. Run now if this might all be too much for you. I know everyone has their own personal squick level, so bail out if you're reaching it.**

You'll have to trust me on where all this is going, and especially on Skinner's personality in this series. The big guy knows what he's doing, believe me :-)

Many thanks to Emma, who told me a very intriguing tale that sparked this story off, as well as providing invaluable technical assistance, and some rather interesting ideas...

Quotation courtesy of my sweet Alex. None of this is beta'd. It's far too much fun to take seriously.

**24/7** is an erotic fantasy and NOT a BDSM resource guide. The truth is sometimes exaggerated, or played with, for dramatic effect. For more information, please visit the **24/7 BDSM Glossary**.

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*"A truth, still apparent, though disregarded, that things move violently to their place, but calmly in their place. To put it another way, everything has its right home, the region that suits it, and, unless forcibly restrained, will move thither by a kind of homing instinct."*

*J. Winterson  
"Art and Lies"*

Mulder's new Master kept him waiting in the parking garage beneath the Viva Tower in Crystal City for over an hour. At first, Mulder sat in the car, his legs jiggling up and down, in nervous anticipation. Was Skinner going to take him straight up to his apartment and fuck him senseless? Maybe he would dive straight into a "scene." Or was he going to take a crop to Mulder's butt and try and instill some obedience in him from the outset? Mulder shivered, his cock in a more or less permanent state of arousal. In fact, his nerves were screaming from the sensory overload. He wanted this. He wanted this so badly it scared him. Finally Mulder got out of the car and did a few laps of the garage, trying to distract himself. By the time Skinner drew up in a sleek, black saloon, his erstwhile slave was a wreck.

Skinner shot him a cool glance, and it was only through sheer effort of will that Mulder's knees didn't give way.

"Follow me." Skinner beckoned with his head, and Mulder hesitated. Skinner turned, one eyebrow raised. "This is one of the first orders I've given you since taking you as my property - are you intending to disobey me already?" He inquired. Mulder shook his head, and hurried to catch up with the big man.

"I was just wondering about my stuff, that's all, sir," Mulder said, waving his hand at the packed contents of his car.

"Leave it. First I'll show you around, then you can get settled in," Skinner told him tersely. Mulder nodded, his throat dry. Signing those contracts had changed something fundamental between him and his boss. He didn't feel like he was with Assistant Director Walter Skinner of the FBI - he felt like a slave, trailing along behind his new and utterly formidable Master.

Skinner stepped into the elevator and Mulder followed him. When the doors had closed behind them, Skinner handed Mulder a smart card.

"This is a special key - it takes the elevator up to the 18th floor."

"The 18th? But your apartment is on the 17th floor, sir," Mulder said, surprised.

"Yes, it is, but your slave quarters are on the 18th floor. Nobody else has an elevator pass to that level except me, the apartment block's security, and now you."

"Right." Mulder swallowed. "I, uh, didn't know."

"There's a lot you don't know about me." Skinner treated him to another of those wildly sexual grins.

"That's becoming evident. **Master**," Mulder observed dryly, rolling his tongue around the word 'master', his normally flippant personality struggling to re-assert itself. Skinner threw out a big fist, and thumped the stop button on the elevator. Mulder jumped. Suddenly his new Master was looming over him, his large body forcing Mulder back against the wall.

"Let's get one thing clear," Skinner told his slave. "This is a completely different arrangement to that which existed between us before. What was acceptable to me as your colleague, and supervisor, is not acceptable to me as your Master. Your behavior towards me, both here, and in the office, will change, as of now."

"Change?" Mulder echoed faintly, wanting desperately to reach out and hold onto the big man for support, to be folded into a pair of strong arms, and reassured. He despised himself for his weakness.

"That's right. Now, you already know me, and have a certain way of dealing with me, so you're going to have to unlearn those bad habits." Skinner smiled, and then did something completely unexpected. He took Mulder's left hand in his own, and raised it to his lips, caressing the wedding ring with his fingers. "It might be painful - initially at least - but in the long term you'll feel much better for it," Skinner told his slave. He kissed Mulder's ring finger, his dark eyes never leaving his slave's face. "You belong to me now," he said in a low, throaty undertone that made Mulder's hard cock scream for release, "and I don't want you to ever forget it. Every minute, of every day, I want you to know that you're mine. You're not free, Fox, you belong to someone outside yourself. It's a new way of thinking, and it'll take you a while to get used to it, but we'll get there. Eventually. With perseverance."

Mulder looked at him for several minutes, drinking in the authority and dark power of those brown eyes, and the seductive promise of Skinner's words, then he nodded. "Yes, sir," he managed to croak.

"Good." Skinner stepped back, and pressed the button on the elevator again.

The elevator doors swished open a few minutes later, and Mulder found himself on the threshold of a large, comfortable living room. It was impeccably decorated and furnished. There was a wooden floor in golden honey hues, and cream walls, with subtly tasteful lighting on the walls. Two couches and several armchairs took up the center of the room, and a large fireplace with a soft rug in front of it dominated one wall. Skinner put a hand on Mulder's shoulder, and ushered him out of the elevator.

"This way." His Master walked down a corridor, and opened the door to a small, tidy room, containing a narrow single bed, a desk, and a closet. "This is your room. You can arrange your possessions however you like." Skinner shrugged. "I don't care how you keep your room but I do care how you keep the rest of this apartment - and the one beneath it."

"Yes, sir." Mulder nodded, thinking it looked like a monk's cell.

"The bell..." Skinner pointed with his head to a box in the corner of the ceiling, "is to summon you. Whenever you hear it, you'll come downstairs to address yourself to whatever I need."

"Yes, Master." Mulder murmured, wondering what it would be like to be on call 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, to have to rush to his Master's every summons.

"Follow me." Skinner showed him an en-suite bathroom - equipped with a shower, and toilet. "The shower has a special nozzle." Skinner pointed to it. "Use it," he told Mulder, with a firm nod of his head. Mulder flushed slightly, and nodded back. He knew what the nozzle was for - although he'd never used one. "I like my slaves to be clean for me. If you show yourself incapable of keeping yourself that way, then I'm sure a few weeks of enforced enemas will help you learn." Skinner turned on his heel, and left the bathroom. Mulder stood there for a moment, taking several deep breaths and counting to ten to distract himself, before following the big man.

Skinner walked further down the corridor, then paused outside a large, oak-paneled door. He removed a key from his pocket, placed it in the lock, turned it, and opened the door, ushering Mulder inside in front

of him. Mulder paused... they were standing on the threshold of a huge room, with massive windows forming two of the outside walls.

"It's like being at the top of the Empire State Building," Mulder breathed, going over to one of the huge windows, and looking down onto the street.

"It's hardly that high," Skinner snorted. "I own the entire 18th floor, Fox. There's nobody above this level, and nobody overlooks this room."

"It's like...flying." Mulder gazed, awe-struck, at the city spread around him, its twinkling lights reflected from all sides. The dark night outside pressed in, surrounding them with both blackness and starlight. The windows were so clear that it was as if he was standing outside, utterly enveloped by the night. He felt the warmth of Skinner's body, standing behind him, and the whisper of Skinner's breath on the back of his neck, making his hair stand on end.

"It's beautiful," Mulder whispered.

"Look up," Skinner suggested.

Mulder did so, and took a sharp intake of breath: the central section of the ceiling was made of thick glass too, and there, framed perfectly in one of the windows, was a fragile crescent moon.

They looked at it in silence for a moment, then Skinner turned, strode over to the other side of the room, and snapped the lights on.

"Welcome to my Playroom, slave," he murmured.

Mulder looked around in stunned silence. There was a sumptuous red carpet covering half the floor - the other half was in more functional linoleum, but he barely noticed the décor. The entire room was a fetishist's dream come true. There were spanking horses, sets of chains, interesting pulleys and ropes hanging from the wall and ceiling, and a padded upright whipping post in the shape of a cross. One entire wall was made up of cupboards.

"May I?" Mulder placed a hand on one of the cupboard doors.

"Go ahead." Skinner shrugged, a wide, amused smile on his lips.

Mulder opened the door, and his heart skipped several beats: the cupboard was neatly arranged, scrupulously clean - and it contained several thousand dollars worth of the most exquisite bondage and discipline equipment that Mulder had ever seen. There was a row of leather crops, in varying sizes. Several floggers hung from a rack, ranging from the light suede variety, which Mulder knew barely hurt, and could reduce a man to sheer sensory bliss in the hands of a skilled top, to the heavy rubber variety which would have you whimpering in pain within seconds, and caused heavy bruising that lasted for days.

There were paddles, canes, straps, long whips, short whips, bullwhips, and every single instrument of discipline you could think of. Mulder pulled open a drawer and discovered nipple clamps, cock rings, sets of fur-lined manacles, butt plugs, ball gags...so many instruments of torture, of pleasure, that it was

like a kid being let loose in a candy store. Mulder found it impossible to resist the urge to reach out, and touch the beautiful array.

"Ow!" He jumped, more in surprise than pain, as his hand was slapped firmly away.

"You can look, but you must never, **ever**, touch without my permission," Skinner told him. "It'll be your responsibility to clean the toys after a session, under my supervision of course. You will not be given a key to this room. You will only come in here in my presence, or at my command. Understood?"

"Yes, sir." Mulder whispered, still awe-struck. "Jeez...what's that?" He pointed to what looked like a set of loosely tied twigs.

"A birch." Skinner reached out a big hand and massaged the back of Mulder's neck, proprietarily. "Do you like the idea of being birched, Fox?" He asked, his voice low and deep in Mulder's ear. "It's an interesting sensation - and very safe. You can use the birch over most parts of the body. It's light, and scratches, like several tiny, biting little stings. It's nothing like the heavier instruments. It has its own completely unique sensation." Skinner spoke like a true connoisseur, and Mulder would have been happy for his Master to rip his clothes off and treat him to a demonstration there and then. Skinner laughed out loud, as if guessing Mulder's thoughts.

Mulder continued his examination of the cupboards. He saw a set of satin blindfolds, and a sumptuous silk shirt out of the corner of his eye, and was intrigued. Skinner's taste seemed to range from the purely functional, to the deeply erotic and sensual. Further inspection revealed another cupboard filled completely with costumes, boots, and other accessories. It was like finding Aladdin's cave, Mulder thought to himself.

"I think I could spend all day in here, just looking," he told his Master with a deeply satisfied sigh.

Skinner grinned. "You'll be spending several of your days in here, and your nights, don't worry," he replied. "You'll come to be grateful - when you're lying naked, and suspended in mid-air for hour after hour, that there are so many windows. It gives the sensation of floating," Skinner observed. "You're at the top of the world, surrounded by sky, and nobody can see your bare, tormented flesh but you, and your Master." Skinner's lean, powerful, muscular body was framed by one dark window, and the subtle lighting in the Playroom bathed and caressed his bald head. For a brief moment, Mulder was sure he'd died and gone to heaven.

"You have to earn your playtime though," Skinner told him. "This place is designed for fun - although I won't balk at using its facilities for punishment sessions as well, which I'm sure, knowing you as I do, that you'll require."

Mulder made a face, which Skinner ignored as he opened a door leading to a massive en-suite bathroom, containing the largest bath Mulder had ever seen in his life. A cursory look around revealed large quantities of lotions and oils, and a sizeable stash of condoms and lubricant. Skinner took a tube of lubricant and a handful of condoms and placed them in his pocket, ignoring Mulder's look of wide-eyed, hopeful curiosity. Then they both stepped back out into the Playroom.

"All this...here, all this time, and I never knew," Mulder whispered. "How long have you been in the Lifestyle, sir?"

"Personal questions won't be permitted at this early stage in your slavery," Skinner snapped, as he ushered Mulder out of the Playroom, and locked the door behind him. "In time, maybe, you'll earn the right to know, but for now, you have a lot to learn and focus on, and my past is irrelevant."

Mulder begged to differ, although he didn't say as much. It seemed incredible to him that Skinner had been living in this place, with all this amazing equipment, and he had never known it - but then again, why should he? Skinner's stern, brisk demeanor at work, could be passed off as purely a necessity of his job. His boss had always been more than a one dimensional bureaucrat though. Mulder had always sensed there was far more than that to the big man - but he would never have guessed about **this**. On the other hand, who would have guessed about his own alternate lifestyle? Mulder's profiling mind longed to understand his new Master, to know him and understand him - to get a handle on him so that he could start to...control him? To manipulate him in order to get what he wanted? Mulder clenched his fists tightly - Skinner had already pointed out to him that he had an unfortunate tendency to consume his tops. Was he trying to do the same here? Was he trying to reduce his own fear at being under someone else's control by familiarizing himself with them and their methods? Wouldn't that lead straight to the contempt and emptiness that he had felt so often before? Didn't he in fact **need** the fear in order to get the high?

Mulder found Skinner had stopped in the corridor and was waiting for him, his dark eyes seeming to see straight to the heart of Mulder's internal struggle. Mulder managed a wan smile, and Skinner turned and continued down the corridor. At the end, there was a set of stairs.

"This is the back way down to my apartment. You can either use the elevator and knock on my door, like any other guest, or you can use the stairs. You have free run of both apartments, but the key to only one." Skinner said, jogging down the two flights of stairs, Mulder at his heels. The top level of the 17th floor apartment contained two large bedrooms, one with an en-suite bathroom, containing another huge bath. Another flight of stairs took them down into the living area of the apartment that Mulder had visited before.

"This will be an important room for you." Skinner opened a door and Mulder surveyed the laundry room with a sinking heart. "You'll keep all my clothes laundered. You'll arrange for anything requiring specialist cleaning to receive it." Skinner gave his slave a firm look, as if doubting Mulder's capabilities in these areas. "You'll iron all my shirts." Mulder's heart sank even further as he remembered Skinner's taste for the most crisply ironed apparel. His usual rush job with the iron was clearly not going to be adequate.

"You want me to spend my entire life ironing?" He grouched, reasoning that would be all he'd have time for each evening after work.

Skinner fixed him with a dark stare. "Did I not make myself clear when I outlined the terms for your slavery?" He asked. "I seem to remember telling you that you would be my valet, and housekeeper. Maybe you're misunderstanding something here, Fox. You're my **slave**. You'll address yourself to my needs and my pleasures, to making my life run as smoothly as possible. The sooner you get your head around that concept, the easier it'll be for you - and the more rewarding trips to the Playroom we'll make. Understood?"

Mulder swallowed down his resentment and nodded.

"Good. Now, I suspect you're a disaster in the kitchen, yes?" Skinner raised an eyebrow.

Mulder sighed. "Cooking isn't exactly my strong point," he agreed

"Fine. There's a list of my favorite restaurants by the phone. Most of them do take-out." Skinner walked briskly back to the kitchen, and showed Mulder where everything was. "Eat whenever you're hungry - and make sure that we don't run out of basics, like bread and milk. There's cash for groceries in this pot. I expect you to take good care of yourself," Skinner looked at Mulder intently. "You swim and run?"

"Yes." Mulder nodded.

"Good. You'll continue to do that. I might arrange some special training for you," Skinner mused. "Now - I want you to get your stuff from the car, and settle yourself into your room. Later on, I'll inspect what you brought with you."

"Inspect?" Mulder echoed, with a frown.

"Your taste in ties is frankly atrocious. I'm sure we can dispose with most of them. I'll take you shopping and buy you the sort of clothes it would please me to see my slave wearing," Skinner informed him.

Mulder closed his eyes, and leaned back against the wall, seeing every little part of himself being chipped away, piece by piece. He opened them again, to find Skinner standing close to him. "At first, it will be hard," Skinner whispered, his voice caressing Mulder's ear. "I'll make allowances for that. You're not trained as a slave - and you need a firm hand." Mulder's hard cock twitched at those words, and he longed to give it some release. Skinner seemed to guess his thoughts. His hand brushed against the front of Mulder's pants.

"Another thing," Skinner whispered in Mulder's ear. "This..." he touched Mulder's cock lightly through his jeans, "...is mine. It belongs to me. You can only come when I give you permission from now on - so no jerking off in your bedroom, or the bathroom. I'll know. Trust me, I always know."

Mulder felt as if he was no longer breathing - this turned him on more than anything in his life had ever done before. "Yes, Master," he managed to gasp.

Skinner smiled. "I've found," he said, his fingers still lightly caressing Mulder's bulging cock, "that the hardest lesson for a new slave to learn is that his own pleasure is irrelevant. For that reason - **this**," he squeezed Mulder's cock hard, "won't be getting any release for quite some time. Pleasure is earned, and trust me, the rewards are worthwhile." Skinner's lips were so close to Mulder's face that he could feel them brushing against his skin and thought that, permission or not, he'd come then and there.

"However, for now, you'll address yourself to my pleasure - and I'll make sure you're well used," Skinner said in that deep, sibilant, tone.

"Yes, Master." Mulder moved his face, wanting to find those lips with his own, but Skinner caught his shoulders, and pressed him back against the wall.

"You want to be kissed?" He put a finger on Mulder's lips. Mulder nodded, his eyes wide. "Well, those have to be earned too," Skinner told him. He caressed Mulder's bottom lip with his index finger, wet his skin with Mulder's saliva, then wiped the moisture off down the side of Mulder's cheek. Mulder

swallowed, mesmerized. "Go and retrieve the contents of your car," Skinner told him, drawing back and getting down to business again. "Then shower, and come back down here for me to do a proper inspection."

Mulder scurried to obey. He couldn't remember ever being so turned on his life. Everything Skinner said, everything Skinner did, spoke to some deep need inside him. He felt as if his very soul was being petted and caressed, and his body was so aroused it made him want to scream.

Mulder sorted out his meager possessions, realizing as he did so that none of them belonged to him any more - they were merely granted to him by his Master. Now he understood why Skinner was spoken of in hushed whispers on the scene in DC. No wonder the man was legendary. He played this game better, with more sophistication, than any other player Mulder had ever known. Somehow he seemed to see inside Mulder, and to know that keeping him permanently on the brink like this, denying him his freedom, filling his life with tasks of menial devotion, dangling that fantasy room in front of him like a carrot...all of it worked. All of it made Mulder hotter than he'd even been in his life. He glanced down at his poor, stiff cock, so tightly confined in his jeans, wondering when it would ever get its release.

Mulder took his shower, carefully avoiding his cock as he soaped himself. He examined the nozzle attachment on the shower head, and inserted it cautiously into his rectum. The sensation was curiously pleasing, as the warm water filled him then flooded out again. Mulder repeated the process several times, making sure that he was clean for his master. His whole body shivered in anticipation at the thought of Skinner taking him, bending him over, fucking him. His fantasies were those of domination - he was used to that, although it had taken him a long time to come to terms with that side of himself. Skinner...he could still barely get over the shock of discovering who his owner was. Could this bizarre arrangement ever work? He wondered what the week ahead would bring. He had booked himself a week's vacation from work on his Master's instruction, and he guessed that Skinner had done the same. What would happen to him in that time? What would Skinner do to him? Could Mulder ever truly accept the mastery of another man? And just how painful would it be finding out? He stood for a long time under that warm water, soothing himself after the momentous events of the day, then he dried himself, dressed, and walked down the stairs to where Skinner was seated in his living room.

"Good. I was beginning to wonder where you were. Another five minutes and I'd have summoned you with the bell." Skinner held out a leg. Mulder looked at it questioningly for a moment, before realizing that he was supposed to pull Skinner's boots off for him. He knelt down in front of his master, and pressed his lips against the shiny surface of the boots, his hands caressing Skinner's long, lean legs through the leather. He removed the footwear, and then knelt beside his master again, awaiting further instruction.

"I think it's time..." Skinner cleared his throat, and looked down into his slave's willing, hazel eyes, "...to examine my property, don't you?"

"If it pleases you, Master." Mulder nodded, his stomach doing a wild flip.

"It does please me. Stand up, and get undressed."

Skinner leaned back on the couch, and watched the other man thoughtfully as Mulder pulled his tee shirt over his head. He sucked his stomach in, wanting to impress, and Skinner shook his head.

"Fox - you're lean enough," he murmured. "Now your pants."

Mulder took a deep breath, and shucked them off. He wasn't wearing any underwear, and his hard cock immediately stood to attention. Skinner didn't say anything. He just surveyed his new slave, looking him over, from top to bottom, up and down, then down and up, with excruciating slowness until Mulder was thoroughly unnerved. Didn't his Master like what he was seeing? Mulder couldn't believe that this was happening, that he was standing here, in the middle of this room, having his naked body inspected by his boss. He would never, in a million years, have predicted that such a scenario would happen, and yet, now that it had...it felt so **right**.

"All right. Turn around." Skinner waved his hand in a circular motion, and Mulder did as he was told, presenting his ass to his Master, and clutching his buttocks together tightly, as the tension got to him. "Relax." Mulder heard Skinner get up, and then his bottom was grasped firmly in a pair of big hands. "Hmmm..." Skinner mused, kneading the flesh. Mulder's cock begged him for permission to come, and his mind firmly refused it. He wondered if this was a prelude to his Master having sex with him, and started to shake.

"What's this about?" Skinner's warm body pressed even closer behind him. "My slave is trembling - is he scared of me?"

"No, Master," Mulder replied. Skinner crossed his arms over Mulder's chest, and pulled him back against his smooth, sleek moleskin pants, and cool silk shirt.

"The truth. You'll never be punished for being honest," Skinner whispered in Mulder's ear.

Mulder took a deep breath. "I'm...scared of this, of us. How will this work? What about my job? Your job? The X Files. I can't give those up. I can't get my head around all this. Me, standing here as your fucking slave of all things, and, you, you being what you are, what I least expected you to be...and seeing me like this, exposed. I don't know what you're thinking, I don't know who you are...I thought I knew, but I don't any more..."

"Ssh." Skinner's lips nuzzled against Mulder's ear. "I told you when I took you as my slave that I wouldn't make you give up your job. On the contrary. It makes you more interesting to me. As to who I am - I'm your Master. That's all you need to know." Mulder felt himself melting back into that warm, strong body, surrendering himself to Skinner's embrace. The heat of Skinner's body stilled his trembling, and he felt calmer. "You mustn't worry about things you have no control over. You made your decision, and now that moment has past. Your choice has been made. There's only one thing you need to worry about from now on. Do you know what that is?"

Mulder swallowed, and nodded. "Pleasing you, Master."

"That's right. Now, I'll ask you again - are you afraid of me?" Those arms held him tight, too tight to evade the question.

"Yes." Mulder bit on his lip. "I don't know what you'll want of me, Master, and I don't know what you'll do to me. I'm worried that I won't please you, or that you'll harm me."

"Good." Skinner's teeth nipped at Mulder's earlobe. "That's good, slave. I think a healthy dose of fear is good for a slave, but you know I won't harm you. I might occasionally **hurt** you, but that's what you want anyway." He gave a low chuckle. "I won't ever **harm** you though. You'll have to trust me to know the difference. Better now?" Mulder realized that he had stopped shaking, and nodded, then wished he hadn't as Skinner released him. He wanted to stay in that warm, safe embrace forever.

Skinner turned him around again, and traced his hands over Mulder's chest. One finger lazily caressed a nipple, and Mulder moaned, and glanced up at the ceiling. His cock was leaking badly. Skinner ran his hand down over Mulder's flat stomach, and then over his long, hard cock. Mulder bit down on his lip, concentrating for all his worth on not coming. Skinner's hand grasped his balls, firmly, and held them, joggling them with his thumb.

"Am I... acceptable to you, Master?" Mulder asked.

"You're a bit skinny, and you need more definition in places, but you'll do." Skinner laughed, and gave Mulder's rump a resounding slap. He sat down on the couch again, and patted his knee. "Come here, Fox. Over my knee," he instructed. Mulder eyed him warily, wondering if he was about to experience his first spanking.

"Why, Master? What are you going to do?" He blurted, then immediately regretted the question. Skinner's expression darkened, and he pointed insistently at his lap.

"It's not a dialogue, slave, just do it," he ordered. Mulder nodded, and knelt down cautiously beside his Master, and then laid awkwardly over his knee. Skinner adjusted his position, and then ran his hands lovingly over Mulder's butt. "Relax." Skinner instructed. He continued the rubbing motion for several minutes, until Mulder started to loosen up, his body losing its tension. Then the caress stopped, and Mulder felt his buttocks pried apart. He looked around in alarm, and saw Skinner lubing up his fingers. "I need to see how tight you are," Skinner told him, and Mulder immediately tensed up. "I said, relax." Skinner gave his buttocks a sharp slap, and Mulder had to consciously open up his anus to his Master's probing fingers. "You're tighter than I would have thought. You've had anal sex haven't you?" Skinner asked.

"Yes, Master...but..." Mulder hesitated.

"Go on." Skinner's finger pushed deeper inside him, and Mulder gasped, enjoying the sensation despite himself.

"I found it too uncomfortable, Master, so I didn't request this kind of attention very often...although..." Mulder trailed off, flushing bright red.

"Although the idea of it really turns you on, and you **love** the way it makes you feel dominated," Skinner finished for him.

"Yes, Master." Mulder agreed, gasping again, as another finger entered his ass.

"Well, it was uncomfortable because you're tight, you're tight because you won't relax, and you won't relax because you never really submit, do you, Fox? You've never really given in, have you?" Skinner stroked Mulder's buttocks with his free hand, and Mulder nodded, feeling wretched. "We'll work on

that," Skinner said cheerfully. "I'm skilled in using plugs, and you'll be pleased to know that I can keep an erection for a long time without much stimulation. In fact, we'll start work on stretching you tonight," he told his slave in a matter-of-fact tone, as if discussing the weather. "Okay." He slapped Mulder's butt again. "You can stand up." Mulder slid off Skinner's lap and back into a kneeling position, and Skinner handed him the lube and condoms he had picked up earlier.

"Keeping yourself lubed up is your responsibility," he told his slave. "I won't do it in future. And remember that you must make yourself available for my use at any time, and in any place. I suggest you make sure you're always lubricated if you want to avoid the discomfort of a dry fuck." Mulder nodded, and took the lube. "Ditto condoms - your responsibility." Skinner gazed at his slave's still hard cock. "Hmm, what does it take to dampen that down?" He asked.

Mulder gave a cheeky grin. "I usually find ejaculation works, Master," he suggested.

"Good try." Skinner laughed. "But don't plan on coming any time in the next few days, Fox. I told you - your own pleasure has to be earned. However, I do want to put my cock ring on you, and I can't do that while you're standing to attention like this...I have an idea." He took hold of Mulder by the shoulder, marched him to the bathroom, turned on the shower, adjusted the temperature to cold, and thrust Mulder underneath it.

"Ow, ow, ow!!!" Mulder hopped around under the freezing spray.

"Stand still." Skinner commanded, and Mulder did as he was told, shivering dramatically to make his point. Skinner ignored him. After several minutes, Mulder's cock was still managing to hover at half-mast. Skinner glanced at his watch. "I'm impressed," he commented. Mulder gave a weak, apologetic smile. After several more minutes, the offending penis finally shriveled up and was pointing back towards the ground. Skinner turned the shower off, and handed Mulder a towel. "I'm going to retrieve an accessory that might come in useful. Run me my bath while you're in here. Then come back downstairs so I can put your ring on you." He glanced meaningfully at Mulder's cock, and Mulder shivered and nodded.

He dried himself, then smeared lube on his fingers, and inserted them into his anus - Skinner's command on **that** subject echoing resoundingly through his mind. He resolved to lube himself whenever he used the bathroom. Mulder stared dreamily into space as his fingers caressed deep inside his body. He loved the feeling of being fucked, but the pain was usually too intense for him to bear. Skinner was right - Mulder only paid lip service to his submission. He was never truly open, he never truly accepted a top into his body, without resistance. Now he belonged to someone who intended to break down that resistance. It scared him - and aroused him. He wondered what time it was - late he thought, certainly well after midnight. He was exhausted after the day's events, yet still on a high. He wondered whether Skinner would fuck him tonight. A part of him wanted to get it over with, but another part was just so tired, he wasn't sure he could cope with it. Living on the edge, with the strain of constantly wondering when **it** would happen, was unnerving him.

Mulder returned to the living room, fished the cock ring out of his jeans pocket, and went to kneel before his Master. Skinner slid the ring over first one testicle, then the other, before taking Mulder's cock in his hand. It immediately started to stiffen. Skinner raised his eyebrows despairingly, and Mulder shrugged helplessly.

"Is it my fault if my Master is so damn hot?" He asked.

"Flattery - it sometimes works." Skinner grinned, then brought the back of his hand down with a firm slap on Mulder's hardening member. Mulder yelped. "And sometimes not," Skinner said, taking advantage of the moment to slide his slave's cock firmly into place inside the ring. Mulder's cock started to harden again, and was painfully constricted by the metal. "That's better," Skinner commented approvingly. He picked up a smooth butt plug, that was lying on the coffee table. Mulder guessed that this was the object his Master had gone to retrieve.

"Over my knee again." Skinner pointed, and Mulder obeyed swiftly this time. Skinner held Mulder's buttocks open with one hand, and Mulder felt the cool, hard edge of the butt plug as the tip was inserted inside him. He tensed up immediately. Skinner sighed. "You're really going to have to learn to open yourself up to me," he admonished.

"I'm trying, Master," Mulder muttered.

"Not hard enough. This is tiny - my cock is much bigger, trust me." Skinner stroked his hapless slave until Mulder relaxed, and then he swiftly rammed the butt plug home. "You'll have to grip it with your muscles or it'll slide out," Skinner instructed, "and that's unacceptable. You'll wear it until I remove it."

"Just like everything else," Mulder muttered. Skinner laughed, and slapped his upturned buttocks.

"Careful, slave. Smart remarks might get you into trouble," he warned, returning Mulder to the floor. Mulder got up, feeling the butt plug inside him. It was a strange sensation, but the plug was slender, and not more than vaguely uncomfortable.

"Is my bath ready?" Skinner asked.

"I would think so, Master."

Skinner got up, and Mulder hesitated. "Master..." He bit on his lip.

"Well?" Skinner asked.

"Um...the other rings...?" Mulder quaked.

"Ah, you're worried about the piercing." Skinner reached out a gentle hand, and caressed Mulder's damp neck. "Don't be. It'll be a beautiful ceremony. I'll make sure it's an experience you remember for a very long time indeed." He gently kissed Mulder's eyelashes, then his nose. "I can't wait to decorate these beauties." He tweaked Mulder's nipples firmly, squeezing them between thumb and forefinger, and Mulder gasped, his cock biting into the unfamiliar, cool metal of the ring as it hardened again. "But it will have to wait. We have other things to do first...and there are other ways to mark you." Skinner gave a mysterious smile, and, with one last tweak of Mulder's nipples, strode upstairs to the bathroom. Mulder picked up his clothes and followed him, uncomfortably aware of the butt plug inside him. He had to clench his buttocks tightly around it to keep it in place.

"Don't get dressed," Skinner instructed. "I like seeing my slave's naked body, and as for the bath - it needs oil in it, and it's too hot," he said after putting a finger in to test it. Mulder nodded, and turned on the cold water, then dropped some scented oil from a bottle into the water.

"Now, undress me," Skinner commanded.

Mulder's heart thudded, as he approached his Master. He couldn't wait to touch that body, and worship his new owner. He had always been a good sub, but he had never felt like this before. The desire to please his Master was overwhelming. He stepped forward, and with shaking fingers undid the buttons on Skinner's shirt, then smoothed it carefully open. His fingers tangled in Skinner's chest hair, and lingered on the big man's nipples. Skinner smiled down at him indulgently. Thus encouraged, Mulder pressed his face against Skinner's chest, and licked him, and Skinner's hand came up and caressed his slave's thick hair. Mulder undid the solid silver buckle on Skinner's belt, and pulled it out of the other man's pants, then he moved on to the buttons, and finally he smoothed the soft, moleskin fabric down Skinner's long legs. He ended up kneeling at his Master's feet, where he helped him step out from the pants, and then removed his Master's socks. He finished by kissing each toe on those perfect golden feet. Skinner laughed.

"You know some pretty tricks, but it'll take more than that," he said.

Mulder nodded. "I know. I can give more."

"Not more - you have to give me it all. Give me everything," Skinner whispered, running his hands over his slave's face. Mulder nodded, enraptured by the words.

"I will. I can. I'll learn. I want to...so much," he whispered, knowing it was true. He reached out almost reverentially, and placed his thumbs under the waistband of Skinner's black silk boxer shorts, lowering them carefully over the other man's semi-erect cock, and easing them down to his ankles. Skinner stepped out of them, and Mulder sat back on his heels and worshipped wordlessly at his Master's shrine. Skinner's cock was beautiful. There was no other word to describe it. Thick, full, long, powerful, clean honey-toned flesh...Mulder couldn't resist burying his face in the other man's groin, and gently tonguing that resplendent cock, taking it into his warm mouth. Skinner sighed, and stroked Mulder's hair softly, then withdrew.

"You're doing very well, slave," the big man murmured, and Mulder felt a curious sense of joy at the praise. "Kneel down in the corner of the room, and await further instruction."

Mulder did as he was told, and watched as his Master stepped into the bath, his magnificent body settling into the warm water with a sigh. Skinner closed his eyes, and was still. Minutes passed, and Mulder feasted his eyes on his Master, devouring him with his gaze. Skinner's strength, even while resting, was so appealing. Mulder's gaze lingered on the other man's broad chest and hard pecs, the wiry chest hair, and firm, no-nonsense jawline.

Mulder longed to have further proof of the man's ownership, to feel the condition of his slavery even more intensely than at this moment, kneeling here, waiting. He longed to be used, to have Skinner take him, make love to him, overwhelm him with his energy, his power, and his hard muscled body. Mulder couldn't believe that he was kneeling here, butt naked, in this agony of anticipation, waiting for his Master to notice him. It would have made a pretty hot scene, but it was **real**. This was his life from now

on. He tried to get his head around that fact, but the throbbing in his captive cock tormented and distracted him. He had a mental image of himself, kneeling here, wearing three of his Master's rings. He glanced down at them - the collar, the wedding ring, the cock ring, and closed his eyes, imagining what the piercing would feel like, and loving the idea of wearing the final two symbols of slavery that his Master had given to him. Here at last was the escape, the release from everyday life that he had sought for so long, but would it, could it, last? Could he give up everything to Skinner as he had promised, and would his Master love him, and protect him, in the way Mulder craved?

After about twenty minutes of silent devotion on Mulder's part, Skinner sat up.

"Wash me," he commanded.

Mulder scurried to obey. He picked up the soap, and ran it lovingly over his Master's body, delighting in being able to touch the other man. Then he used a washcloth to firmly remove the soap, stealing little kisses along Skinner's shoulders as he worked. His Master smiled tolerantly, amused by his slave's devotion. Finally Skinner stood up, and Mulder dried him down, and then wrapped him in his robe.

"Next time, see that it's warmed," Skinner instructed.

"Yes, Master," Mulder bowed his head, and followed as Skinner went to his bedroom.

"Come here." Skinner pointed to the floor, seating himself on the bed. Mulder scurried over and knelt between his Master's legs. "You've done very well this evening. I know all this is new to you - but you'll learn," Skinner told him, caressing his face softly. "I think you've earned your kiss." He dipped his head down, and claimed Mulder with his mouth, his hard lips opening Mulder's, his tongue thrusting into Mulder's open mouth, tasting him. Mulder surrendered to the embrace, hanging helplessly between his Master's legs, holding onto his knees as the world spun around him. Skinner's kiss was an embrace, a promise, a caress and an act of domination, all rolled into one. Finally, after a thorough exploration of his slave's mouth, Skinner released him.

"Thank you, Master," Mulder gasped.

"You're welcome." Skinner ruffled Mulder's hair. "Now, let me outline a few more rules, Fox. I expect to be woken every weekday morning at 6 am, and every weekend morning at 9 am, with a cup of coffee, my newspaper, and a blow job."

Mulder's eyes widened, then he grinned, and nodded. "I think I can manage that, Master," he said cheerfully.

"I'm sure you can," Skinner commented dryly. "After coffee, I'll apply a little discipline - as much or little as I think you need to remind you of your status in this household." Mulder's cock rocketed into the air at that news. "We have a week to get you settled in. By the time we return to work, hopefully you'll be halfway trained. I expect there will be new trials and tribulations to face then, but we'll deal with them as they arise. That's all you need to know for now," Skinner said. He sat back and gazed at Mulder speculatively. "Now, I think want to feel my new slave's talented mouth again. Open my robe, and suck me."

Mulder did as he was told, eagerly swallowing Skinner's hardening dick. It felt magnificent in his mouth - his master's cock, hard and strong, tasting of Him, smelling of Him.

"Hands behind your back," Skinner instructed, leaning back with a contented sigh. "I want you to devote yourself to your task using only your mouth." Mulder did as instructed, enjoying the semi-bondage of holding his hands behind his back. He gave himself up to his devotion with his usual single-minded attention to detail, devouring Skinner's cock with his experienced tongue. He felt when Skinner was on the verge of coming, and looked up at his Master for further orders. Skinner made a small gesture with his eyes, and Mulder continued his enjoyable task to its conclusion, swallowing his Master's come gratefully. "Good, very good." Skinner stroked Mulder's hair as Mulder cleaned up his spent cock with gentle laps of his tongue. "Now, it's been a long day. I think it's time you were in bed."

Mulder got up eagerly, and started to climb onto the bed, but Skinner laughed, and shook his head. "**Your** bed, slave. You have to earn the right to sleep with me."

Mulder's heart sank. "Doesn't Master want to...?"

"Make use of you? No," Skinner said firmly. "I'll decide when and where. Until then, you'll just have to wait, slave-boy." Skinner stood up, and clicked his fingers at the door. "Remember, the cock ring stays in place - as does the butt plug. All night." Skinner told him, a fierce look in his dark eyes. Mulder swallowed, and nodded. "Fox - I'll expect my wake up call at 9 am," his Master reminded him, his expression softening, and a smile creasing out the severity from his features. Mulder basked in the warmth of that smile for a moment, and then fled.

It felt strange going to bed in his new room. Mulder lay on his back, thinking over the day's events. As a player, he knew that he had finally met his match. Skinner's refusal to sleep with him filled him with awe. The man was playing him like a musical instrument, denying him his pleasure, keeping him always on the edge. Nothing could have turned Mulder on more than being told "no" at this point. By being refused his Master's bed, he now wanted nothing more than to sleep in it. Whereas he had been apprehensive about anal sex, now he longed to welcome Skinner's beautiful cock into his body. The waiting, the wrong-footing, kept him permanently aroused. Mulder couldn't ignore his poor, aching cock any more. The cock ring kept him almost permanently erect, and he wasn't used to the feel of it digging into his flesh. Right now, he just wanted to come - as soon as possible. The fact that his Master had forbidden him to remove the ring was like a red rag to a bull; Mulder thrived on such rebellions. He went into the bathroom, and wrapped a cold wash cloth around his cock, until it was flaccid, then he took off the ring, and within seconds he was fully erect. He lay on his bed, jerking himself off, wriggling to maximise the sensation of the butt plug inside him, poor substitute though it was for his Master's cock. He soon tasted his sweet release, coming harder than he could ever remember in his life before, then he cleaned himself up, and put the cock ring back on. Skinner wouldn't know. How could he?

Mulder returned to bed, smiling to himself. He would use this situation to get what he wanted, but still retain his own control. Skinner couldn't stop him doing what he liked in the privacy of his own bedroom. Mulder had no intention of submitting beyond the level that gave him his own pleasure - maybe his new Master had met his match too.

Feeling pleased with himself, he closed his eyes, and thought longingly of the contents of that Playroom, with its vast, wide windows looking out onto a world that couldn't look back in. Soon...soon...soon...

**End of Part 3**

## A Marked Man by Xanthe

### Author's Notes:

Yummy graphic courtesy of **Sergeeva**.

Posted 28th September, 1999

**WARNING: Okay, I've been easing you in slowly, but if you've got this far you know the story set-up, and can't be surprised by any of the content. This chapter explores some ideas, images, and concepts of BDSM erotica. It's all loving, and consensual, but you have to have a liking for the genre, and an understanding of the dynamics, to enjoy it. Please don't read on if you know these things squick you. Spanking alert!**

You'll have to trust me on where all this is going, and especially on Skinner's personality in this series. The big guy knows what he's doing, believe me :-)

Many thanks to Emma, who told me a very intriguing tale that sparked this story off, as well as providing invaluable technical assistance, and some rather interesting ideas...

Quotation courtesy of my sweet Alex. None of this is beta'd. It's far too much fun to take seriously.

**24/7** is an erotic fantasy and NOT a BDSM resource guide. The truth is sometimes exaggerated, or played with, for dramatic effect. For more information, please visit the **24/7 BDSM Glossary**.

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"A truth, still apparent, though disregarded, that things move violently to their place, but calmly in their place. To put it another way, everything has its right home, the region that suits it, and, unless forcibly restrained, will move thither by a kind of homing instinct."

J. Winterson

"Art and Lies"

Mulder heard the alarm clock beep, and rolled over, ignoring it. The beeping didn't go away, so, with a sigh, he turned back, and opened his eyes...then sat up straight, suddenly remembering where he was, and, more importantly, **what** he was, and to **whom**.

The clock told him it was 8.30, and Mulder was amazed that he had slept so well. Usually his nights were trials of insomnia, which was partly why he slept on the couch - at least that way he could flick through the TV when he couldn't get back to sleep. Of course, his unusually long slumber could probably be explained by the fact that he had been exhausted by the events of the previous day. Mulder felt a thrill deep in his stomach as he remembered everything that had happened to him over the past 24 hours. The gold rings, nearly passing out on finding that Skinner was his new owner, being brought here, that fantasy Playroom down the corridor, kneeling naked before his Master, being caressed by him, fondled by him...**kissed** by him. Mulder didn't usually kiss his tops, nor did he expect them to kiss him. This was different though - this was someone who had known him for years, unlike the usual ships that pass in the night scenario that had been the more usual pattern of his sexual relationships. This was...this was more like it had been with Phoebe. Mulder bit down on his lip. That had ended badly - would the same problems occur this time, in this...could he honestly call it a relationship?

Mulder got up, and noticed that the butt plug had fallen out in the middle of the night. He retrieved it and washed it, then took a shower, making sure he cleaned himself thoroughly, inside and out, wondering whether Skinner would put him out of his misery today, and use him in the way he wanted to be used. Afterwards he lubed himself up, and carefully inserted the plug again. Skinner wouldn't know, and anyway, how could Mulder be expected to keep the damn thing in when he was asleep?

He glanced at the clock again. 8:50. Mulder scrambled into his sweatpants and a tee-shirt, and ran downstairs, barefoot, trying not to make too much noise. Skinner's newspaper was sitting outside the door. He retrieved it, made a cup of coffee for himself, and drank it, flicking through the newspaper. Then he made a coffee for Skinner, and took it up to his Master's bedroom. It was 9:05, but Mulder reasoned that a few minutes here or there wouldn't make much difference. Skinner was asleep, his large, muscled arms splayed out on the bed. Mulder put the coffee and paper on the nightstand, and looked down on his sleeping Master for a long moment. Without his glasses, lying fast asleep, unguarded, Skinner seemed strangely different - somehow innocent, and much younger. Mulder gazed at him curiously, suddenly appreciating how much of Skinner's power lay not in his magnificent physique, but in the depths of those dark eyes, and the power of that rich, deep voice, that could send shivers up his spine. Mulder tingled all over in anticipation.

He quickly removed his clothing, and slid under the bedclothes. It was warm and dark underneath, and smelled of his Master - it was a good smell; musky, and masculine, but inviting and arousing too. Mulder's cock was hard before he even located Skinner's. He got comfortable, curled up beside Skinner's groin, then gently flicked a tongue over his Master's sleeping cock, reasoning that Skinner would probably wake with a shriek of surprise if he went straight in for some deep-throating without any foreplay first. He heard Skinner shift, and mumble something, then the big man's hand appeared by Mulder's head and stroked his hair softly, and he heard little murmured words of encouragement. Duly encouraged, Mulder took the rapidly hardening cock in his mouth and swallowed it. He was good at oral sex - as a sub, it had been one of the main ways he had served his various tops, as he had rarely allowed them to penetrate him anally, after a couple of painful experiences.

Mulder sucked Skinner's cock gently, then squeezed the tip between his tongue, and the roof of his mouth. Skinner's hand increased its stroking motion on Mulder's hair so he guessed the big man was enjoying this move. Mulder took even more of the cock in his mouth - Skinner was so big that he hoped he could bring him off quickly, or he'd have a sore jaw all day. Luckily, Skinner was happy to oblige, and a few minutes of hard, but entirely pleasurable work on Mulder's part, brought the desired result. Mulder swallowed Skinner's come, then cleaned the other man up, before wriggling up the bed, and poking his head out of the top of the sheets.

"Good morning, Master." He grinned. "I trust it **is** a good morning." He licked his lips pointedly, tasting Skinner's come on them.

Skinner shook his head, and gave a deep laugh. "Yes, slave - a **very** good morning. Thank you." He sat up, picked up his coffee, sipped it, and glanced at the clock. "However, when I say 9, I mean 9. Not 8:58, or 9:05. Understood?" He asked.

Mulder pouted. "Sorry, Master," he muttered, privately thinking Skinner was making a big fuss about nothing.

"And next time - wear slippers, or socks when you're running around first thing in the morning. Your feet are freezing."

"Yes, Master," Mulder murmured, feeling somewhat crushed.

"And as for this newspaper." Skinner held it up with a frown. "It isn't ironed."

"What?" Mulder gasped.

Skinner grinned. "Just kidding. Your wake up call wasn't bad for a first attempt." Skinner tousled his hair affectionately. "One of your problems is bending the rules, Fox, just a little bit here and there, thinking it doesn't matter - but it does. I expect to be obeyed to the letter. The sooner you understand that, the easier it'll be for you."

"Yes, Master." Mulder made a face. "Being a slave isn't easy, Master," he muttered mournfully.

Skinner laughed, and reached out a big arm to pull Mulder close against his naked chest. "I know," Skinner told his slave with a theatrical sigh.

"You do?" Mulder looked up in surprise.

"Of course." Skinner's eyes looked different without his glasses - closer, naked, more intense. "Everybody is owned by someone - we're all slaves to something."

Mulder's mouth opened in surprise. "Who owns you?" He asked. *Who would dare...?* He thought.

"I have a very demanding, very beautiful mistress," Skinner replied.

A woman? Skinner had a woman? Of course he did. Why did Mulder think that **he** would be attractive to a man like Skinner? To someone this big, strong, attractive, and self-assured. No, Skinner had just taken

him as a slave to amuse himself and get all that damn ironing of his done. He didn't feel anything more for him than that. Mulder felt a stabbing wave of the most intense jealousy deep in his gut. He was appalled by himself - how had he gotten to feel this strongly in less than 24 hours? There was such a vulnerability for him in this situation. If it hadn't been Skinner, someone he already knew, and, if he was honest, liked and respected, then maybe he wouldn't be feeling like this. Mulder sat up, unable to control his emotions, knowing they were splayed across his face as obvious as if he had said them out loud. He had felt like this with Phoebe, and he could see the whole thing happening again. He was right never to get involved, never to have more than a few one night stands and safe, twice a week visits with a series of faceless tops. It hurt too much to be devoted to someone, and have that devotion thrown back in your face.

Skinner was gazing at him intently.

"Who is she? Where does she live? How often do you see her?" Mulder demanded.

"She's called Wanda, and I see her every day," Skinner replied calmly, unfazed by the interrogation and the tone it was delivered in. "She has big green eyes, and long, elegant limbs. She's the most beautiful creature in the world, and she lives here. In fact, I believe you're sitting next to her right now."

"What?" Mulder frowned. Skinner pulled up the sheet, and Mulder found himself looking down into a pair of sparkling emerald eyes.

"Wanda." Skinner patted his thigh, and an exquisite cat emerged from under the bedclothes. She treated Mulder to a disdainful look, then padded onto Skinner's lap, and settled there with a contented purr. Mulder hated her on sight. Skinner rubbed her behind her ears, and Mulder glared. *You will not be jealous of a cat...you will not be jealous of a cat...* he repeated to himself, trying to get a grip. Skinner sighed, and pulled Mulder's head onto his chest, then rubbed **him** behind the ears too.

"So, the little green eyed devil plays with your heart," he whispered.

Mulder nodded, wretchedly, and arched his back, leaning into Skinner's caress. "I'm sorry, Master," he whispered.

"Don't ever be ashamed of your feelings - just be **honest** about them," Skinner told him firmly. "I want to know how you're feeling. I'm not a mind reader - I need to know what goes on inside your convoluted brain, slave."

Mulder moved his head, and gazed at the cat. She **was** very beautiful, with soft, creamy-colored short fur. "Is she a special breed, Master?" He asked.

"Yes - she's a Burmese." Skinner carried on rubbing both his pets.

"Wanda - that's a pretty name."

"I named her after the character in *Venus in Furs*. I am Severin to her capricious majesty." Skinner gave a rumbling laugh. Mulder glanced up at him, a question in his eyes. "Haven't you read that book?" Skinner asked in surprise. Mulder shook his head. "Well then you must!" Skinner said firmly. "I'll give it to you to

take to your room and I expect you to read it. How about *The Story of O*, and *The Torture Garden*? They're all classics of the genre, Fox."

"I've heard of them, but haven't read them. I suppose I'm not very well read on these matters, Master." Mulder made a face, privately thinking that he'd learned all he needed to know from the top shelf of the video store.

"Your education has been woefully lacking," Skinner lamented. "You will read all of them, and I want you to tell me how you felt after each one. Which aroused you, and why. What in particular worked for you, and what scenes raised strong emotions."

"Yes, Master," Mulder agreed. It didn't exactly sound like a chore. "I did flick through something by the Marquis de Sade, once." He heard Skinner make a grunting sound, and looked up. "He wasn't on your list, Master."

"Read him, if you want." Skinner shrugged.

"You don't like his writing? I'm surprised." Mulder's eyes were alight with curiosity. "In many ways I suppose I view myself as a masochist..." Mulder began hesitantly. "Does Master not view himself as a sadist?"

"No. Oh no." Skinner smiled, and traced a finger lovingly down his slave's face, and over his lips. "Not a sadist, no - I'm a sensualist, Fox." He said the word **sensualist** in such a deep, sexy tone that Mulder's cock leapt in response. He gazed at his Master thoughtfully, then settled his head back on Skinner's chest. "There are many great erotic poems, and novels." Skinner continued to play with Mulder's ears as he talked. "I'll introduce you to some of them, Fox. I expect my slave to be interested in more than flying saucers, and chasing after monsters. It's very easy to become totally focused on one area of your life, and neglect the many other sides of your personality. It happened to me once, and cost me dear. I won't allow it to happen again."

Mulder's ears pricked up at that. "What happened, Master?" He asked, holding his breath.

Skinner smiled and shook his head. "I told you yesterday - personal questions are not permitted at this stage of your slavery."

Mulder fought down a wave of curiosity and irritation. He wanted to know what kind of man his new Master was, damn it! He wanted to reconcile the strict, no-nonsense bureaucrat he had always known Skinner to be, with the relaxed, inventive, and devastatingly attractive sensualist he had already found his Master to be.

Mulder watched out of the corner of his eye as Skinner read his paper, and finished his coffee. The agent's cock hardened even more as he remembered what had been promised after coffee. Finally, Skinner put the paper to one side, and glanced down on his slave. "I see that you remember what I told you last night about our morning routine." He looked pointedly at Mulder's cock which was straining prettily within its gold ring.

"Yes, sir." Mulder held his breath. He liked being spanked - but he had always decided when, where, what implement, and how many strokes before. There had been negotiation, and safe words - Mulder

had, basically, always been in **control**. This was different. This time, his Master would decide, and Mulder would have no choice but to submit, to fully relinquish all control. The idea of it excited him, even as much as he feared it.

"Kneel beside the bed," Skinner commanded, and Mulder scrambled to do his bidding, dislodging the sleeping Wanda in his haste. She shot him a look of utter disgust, and left the bedroom with her tail held high in the air in jaunty protest. "Every morning, you'll present yourself to me for discipline," Skinner informed his slave. "When you do you'll be humble, and contrite - or I'll certainly make you so during your punishment. I would therefore advise you to present yourself **without** attitude."

"Yes, Master." Mulder muttered, his whole body tingling in anticipation.

"Shoulders straight," Skinner ordered. "Hands behind your back, head down." Mulder did as commanded. "Knees wider - that's right, display your pretty cock for me. Good. This is the pose I'll expect to you to assume prior to punishment, or whenever you're being scolded."

"Yes, Master." Mulder nodded, wide-eyed.

Skinner continued. "Sometimes I'll punish you for misdeeds and disobedience the previous day, but even if your behavior has been exemplary, you will be spanked every morning. This is to enforce in your mind the knowledge that you are subject to my will, that your position in this household is one of slave, and that you may be punished solely for my pleasure - for no other reason than that it pleases me to tan my slave's naked ass. I find it's a very successful method for focusing a slave's mind on his duties for the rest of the day, and most particularly on his status."

"Yes, Master." Mulder bit down on his lip, seriously aroused by the idea.

"On this occasion though, we have some real issues to address, don't we?" Skinner placed a finger under Mulder's chin and lifted it up, so that the younger man was gazing at him. Mulder's eyes widened.

"M...master?" he stammered. "I've tried to do everything you asked, I..."

"You've disobeyed a direct order," Skinner said firmly.

Mulder racked his brains. "I don't remember, Master."

"Then let me refresh your memory," Skinner told him curtly. "Last night, I told you not to remove your cock ring, and gave you strict instructions not to come without my permission. You disobeyed me."

Mulder sat back on his heels, his open mouth in surprise. How could Skinner have known **what** Mulder got up to in the privacy of his bedroom? "I didn't!" He blurted.

Skinner looked at him steadily for a long time, until Mulder began to blush, and couldn't hold that stare any more. "The punishment for lying is considerably more than for disobedience," Skinner told him.

"Now, I'll ask you again - did you jerk off last night?"

Mulder considered bluffing it out, then gave in with a sigh. "Yes, Master." He flushed bright red, and dropped his gaze, unable to meet Skinner's eyes.

"And you removed your cock ring, which I specifically told you was to stay in place until such time as I chose to remove it." Skinner continued the interrogation in a cool, thorough manner.

"Yes, Master." Mulder bowed his head, feeling a sense of awed anticipation. His first taste of discipline at his new Master's hands, and he was guilty of so many offenses! His butt ached already.

"Do you have anything else to confess?" Skinner asked.

"No, Master." Mulder shook his head, his stomach turning to jelly. Wasn't this bad enough as it was?

"Wrong answer." Skinner gripped his chin firmly, and raised his head again so that Mulder was looking into those strong, merciless dark eyes once more. "That's two lies," Skinner said.

Mulder remembered the butt plug, too late. "The plug fell out, Master. Please, I didn't do that on purpose," he said desperately.

Skinner shook his head. "The first thing you should have done was tell me what had happened. I would have been lenient with you if you had done **that**. Instead, you've just made things worse."

Much to his surprise, Mulder found that he was shaking. "How did you know, Master?" He whispered.

"It's virtually impossible to hold that particular butt plug in place while you sleep - it's too slender and not the right shape." Skinner shrugged, giving a wry, wicked grin. "I wanted to see how honest you are - I can see that's another area we're going to have to work on. Tonight, I'll see that the plug is chained in place."

"Yes, Master." Mulder looked at Skinner miserably, waiting to hear his sentence.

Skinner gazed at him speculatively for a moment. "I **was** going to just use my hand, to get to know the feel of my new slave, and observe his reactions, but I see we have some serious work to do here, so I'm clearly going to have to be more severe than I intended. I will **not** allow disobedience or deceit to go unpunished - that's a lesson that you might as well learn early in your slavery, to save yourself considerable discomfort later on. I want you to go up to your bedroom, and bring me your hairbrush," Skinner ordered.

Mulder bit on his lip, his stomach quaking. His hairbrush had a flat, tortoiseshell back, and he was sure it would pack a deadly smack. He got up, and walked towards the door.

"Fox." Skinner called him back. "Take your clothing with you." The big man gestured at the sweatpants and tee shirt strewn on the floor. "For this next week, whenever we are alone together at home, you will be naked," Skinner said firmly. "I enjoy looking at my naked slave, and your lack of clothing will also help you to focus your mind on what you have become. I want there to be no doubt in your mind that you are owned, subject to your Master's will and whim. When this lesson is learned, you'll be allowed to wear clothing more often, at my discretion of course."

"Yes, Master." Mulder picked up the clothes, and carried them back up to his bedroom. He was surprised to find that he was still shaking. This was getting serious. Every nerve-ending in his body screamed his arousal at the same time as making him tremble in worry about his own helpless lack of

control. He was now scared stiff about the spanking, and berated himself every step of the way for trying to lie his way out of his predicament.

Mulder dumped the clothes on his bed, and picked up the hairbrush, already hating the innocuous object. How the hell had Skinner known? Did he have eyes in the back of that bald skull of his? And how the hell was Mulder going to manipulate his Master if he was always going to be one step ahead? He had a sudden idea, and glanced up at the ceiling. He saw the box housing the bell in one corner, and got on the chair, and fiddled around with it, checking it for a hidden camera. He couldn't see anything, but it was the only explanation for Skinner's prescience that he could think of. He was busily examining it when it let out a loud chime that sent Mulder falling off the chair and onto the carpet in surprise. He realized that his Master was sitting awaiting his return, and cursed himself once again for knowing how to unerringly get into trouble. He grabbed the brush and ran back down to Skinner's bedroom, jumping the steps two at a time.

The big man glared at him. "What did you do? Go out and buy a less painful one?" He demanded. "When I send you on an errand, I expect you to come straight back, not dawdle."

"Sorry, Master," Mulder gulped, still none the wiser on whether Skinner had just guessed about him jerking off, or really did have a camera installed in his bedroom. He handed Skinner the hairbrush, noticing as he did so that his Master had placed several pillows on his lap.

"Present it properly!" Skinner ordered, and Mulder knelt down, assumed the kneeling position he had been taught earlier, head down, shoulders back, and held the hairbrush out. There was a long pause during which Mulder was dying to look up, but he restrained himself. Finally, the hairbrush was taken out of his hands, and he immediately placed them behind his back as he had been instructed.

"This will do very well I think." Skinner slapped the hairbrush against his hand a couple of times, making a resounding smacking sound. Mulder closed his eyes, feeling giddy. "All right - over my lap." Skinner pointed, and Mulder arranged his long body on top of the pillows. Skinner pulled him into place. "I'd make sure you're comfortable if I were you," Skinner commented dryly. "You're going to be there for quite some time." Mulder wriggled into a position where he could breathe easily. His butt was pushed up as if it were an offering - he felt as if it were sky high, with all those pillows under his thighs. Finally, he was still - feeling cushioned and warm, lying face down on the bed, across his Master's legs. He felt Skinner's hand on his butt, and tensed, but no blows were forthcoming. Instead, Skinner stroked his buttocks, kneading them, and occasionally pinching them. Mulder started to relax. Skinner took hold of the end of the butt plug, and pulled it out, placing it on the nightstand. Mulder relaxed even more without the need to keep the object clenched so tightly between his butt cheeks.

"I'm going to save the hairbrush for after I've given you a good hand spanking," Skinner told him, in a low, sexy growl. "I enjoy feeling a slave squirm under my hand - I wouldn't want to deprive myself of that pleasure. Open your legs." Mulder obeyed, feeling exposed, his hole open and gaping. "Wider." Skinner's fingers dipped into his lubed opening, and Mulder gasped. "Relax." Skinner stroked him, soothing him, and finally Mulder gave in, allowing the probing. Then, with two fingers still inside his slave, Skinner gave Mulder's buttocks a light tap with his other hand, then another. He continued with the taps, covering Mulder's whole bottom, until it began to glow a light pink. "Good...this is a good color for you," he observed. Mulder made a face into the pillow he was resting on. His bottom felt deliciously warm, and he was all too aware of those two fingers still inside him. The taps morphed into harder,

heavier slaps, and Mulder started to wriggle - increasing the stimulation of those two fingers probing his anus. The slaps picked up in pace and with them went Mulder's squirming body.

"Master..." he panted, wanting some relief from the endless slaps, twisting against those fingers, every lunge from him causing them to thrust deeper inside him.

"Yes, slave?"

"Please...Master..." he begged. He didn't really want it to stop, but at the same time, he was both aroused and worried by the fact that he couldn't stop it if he **had** wanted to. The slaps were harder and faster now, and Mulder's cock was straining for release. He started to move his hips, to rub his cock against the pillows.

"Remember, slave - you're forbidden to come," Skinner told him.

"Yes, Master..." Mulder gasped, as the smacks got harder, making him howl and wriggle so much that he almost fell off the pillows he was rested on.

"Keep still," Skinner commanded. He withdrew his fingers and pressed down on Mulder's waist to keep him very firmly in place. Now his hand covered every inch of Mulder's flaming bottom, hitting home with a series of resounding loud slaps until Mulder was crying out loud, sure that he couldn't bear the intensity any more. Then, suddenly, without warning, it stopped.

"Now for the brush," Skinner informed him.

Mulder tensed up, expecting a stinging slap from the hated object, but instead, Skinner ran the cold, smooth, tortoiseshell surface over his burning buttocks, cooling them. Then he began to tap, just as he had before, working into a rhythm that was light, and comfortable. Mulder's muscles turned to jelly as he lay there, accepting the caressing strokes. Then suddenly, without warning, the rhythm changed, and a powerful slap reigned down on his reddened flesh.

"OW!" He cried out. This was far worse than anything that had gone before - this was **real** punishment.

"This..." Skinner brought the brush down hard on his lower buttocks, drawing another anguished sob from his hapless slave, "is for disobeying me by removing the cock ring." He slapped down two hard strokes in succession, making Mulder squeal and squirm fruitlessly under his big hand. It was no use - Mulder was like a butterfly pinned to a board, his body pressed into the pillows by Skinner's superior strength. "And this..." Two more viciously stinging blows descended on Mulder's quivering, unprotected flesh. "Is for lying to me about jerking off." The slaps for lying came fast and furious, making that point very clear. Mulder was surprised to find tears running down his cheeks.

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry..." he gasped. "Ow! I won't lie again."

"Good. These are for the other lie - about the butt plug." Skinner delivered several more stinging blows until Mulder felt as if his whole butt was on fire. He gave up his incessant squirming, and just lay there, moaning and sobbing into his pillow. "These..." Skinner brought the hairbrush down smartly on the top of Mulder's thighs, and Mulder almost jumped out of his skin, "Are for jerking off."

"You just punished me for jerking off!" Mulder protested. His protest was met by swats of even more force.

"No, I punished you for lying about it. This is for the disobedience," Skinner told him, raining several more blows down on the tops of Mulder's thighs in swift succession. Mulder's sobbing started in earnest as the spanking continued. His tortured butt felt as if it had been blistered from waist to knee.

"Please, please, please..." he moaned incoherently, the tears streaming down his cheeks. Then he was aware that the slaps were softer, dissipating into little taps, and finally they stopped altogether. Skinner wound down by repeating the warm up, his probing fingers entered between Mulder's twin globes of reddened flesh, his other hand gently slapping and tapping the tortured buttocks, finally ending by stroking them softly. Then Skinner dipped his head, and licked the hot skin, teasing it with his teeth, giving a series of gentle bites, before finishing with that part of Mulder's anatomy, and withdrawing his fingers.

Mulder lay there, stunned. He had never been so comprehensively, and yet so lovingly, erotically, punished in his entire life. It had been hard to bear, but paradoxically he was glad that Skinner had made him bear it. He was dimly coming to understand what Skinner meant when he called himself a sensualist.

"Lie there for a moment," Skinner told him, in a low, intense tone. His fingers continued to lightly stroke Mulder's hot flesh as Mulder sobbed his heart out. Skinner moved one hand to Mulder's sweaty hair, and stroked that as well as his butt.

"Hush, it's all over," he soothed. "Hush, hush, little slave. You've been well punished, and your Master is very pleased with you for taking it so bravely. It was a hard lesson, but I'm sure you've learned it well. Hush." He continued to talk in that low, soothing tone, until Mulder's sobs finally dissipated, and then the slave turned his head to gaze at his punished bottom over his shoulder.

"Is it blistered?" He asked tremulously.

Skinner shook his head, and laughed. "It just feels that way. It's certainly a nice color though," he winked.

Mulder winced as he caught sight of his bright red cheeks - but Skinner was right. The flesh was burning hot but entirely unmarked by lines. He was amazed. It felt so much worse than it looked!

"I like the way you look when you've been punished," Skinner mused. "I like seeing signs of my ownership imprinted on your flesh. I think that a permanent mark will be necessary eventually."

"B...branding?" Mulder asked fearfully, remembering what Skinner had mentioned previously.

"Hmmm." Skinner considered the matter thoughtfully. "I think branding would work. Maybe a tattoo as well. Two marks." He gently tickled Mulder's balls through his open legs. "Not yet though. Such a mark would be a sign of great commitment. I could only go ahead with it as part of a deeper level of understanding between us. It's far too early to think of such a marking."

Mulder's heart sank at that news. He didn't like the idea of experiencing the pain of a branding, but the idea of being permanently marked as his Master's property was curiously appealing. He wanted to be worthy of the brand, and worried that he wouldn't be able to convince Skinner that he was.

"I do like the idea of marking you as mine though - and also of forcing you to remember, in these early stages when you're still very prone to forgetting, that you are a slave," Skinner mused, his fingers resting lightly on Mulder's warm cheeks. "I think that I'll keep you marked for a while to help teach you **that** little lesson."

"Marked, Master?" Mulder asked, tremulously.

"With a crop - or a switch," Skinner said. Mulder's stomach flipped. Both those instruments hurt - big time. "A couple of welts should help you keep your condition in mind, don't you think?" Skinner asked.

"I don't know," Mulder replied, somewhat acerbically.

Skinner laughed out loud. "I do," he said, slapping Mulder's butt heartily. Mulder yelped.

Skinner picked up his paper again, and began reading it. Mulder gazed at him for a moment, then wriggled off the pillows, and slid up the bed, putting his head under the paper, and laying it on his Master's warm, furry chest. Skinner smiled, and looked down on his slave, then kissed his forehead gently. He put his arms around Mulder, and held him. Mulder lay there for a long time, still hiccuping occasionally, his butt throbbing. It felt so good to be held, and comforted. That had so often been lacking in his previous encounters with tops - not because they had not been willing, but because he had never let them. The endorphins kicked in, taking Mulder to some other plane. He was aware, dreamily, of his beating heart, of Skinner's beating heart, of the big man's chest hair scratching the side of his cheek, of the warmth of his Master's flesh, and the pleasing ache in his own buttocks. He sighed contentedly, and nestled closer. Out of the corner of his eye he saw Skinner pick up the hairbrush again, and he gave a little whimper, and held on to his Master's chest more tightly.

Skinner shook his head. "It's okay, little one. I'm just going to do this..." He placed the hairbrush gently against the side of Mulder's head and began to stroke it through his hair, smoothing it. It was such a beautiful sensation, that Mulder began to bliss out.

"Tell me..." Skinner murmured, his low tone not breaking the mood. "Who was the first person to spank you?"

"My mom." Mulder sighed. "She just used to smack the backs of my legs though, when I was small - nothing more than any other kid receives, and she never spanked me on my butt. It didn't scar me for life or anything. My father never disciplined me like that. He was never there for a start, and when he was... well let's just say that he had his own special ways of making his disapproval felt," Mulder trailed off. "I can't blame them for me being like this - corporal punishment really wasn't a big feature of our household. Hell, I think I was just born this way," he said, with a big grin. "Not that I think there's anything wrong with it, everyone's got their own fetish after all, just that it's a pain in the butt sometimes - literally." He grinned again.

"And as an adult? Who was the first person to spank you then?" Skinner asked.

"Phoebe. Only she..." Mulder hesitated. "It didn't feel safe. The first time she did it, I thought I'd die from the pain. I'd fantasized about it for years, but the reality was different - it hurt. In my jerk-off fantasies, it didn't - I just had the concept of pain, not the reality."

"Hmm, yes. The first time can be a shock - it doesn't sound as if your girlfriend handled it very sensitively," Skinner mused.

"She told me I was a wimp for crying, but it just brought up all these **feelings**. I wanted to be..." Mulder stopped, and buried his head in Skinner's chest, but that gentle stroking on his hair continued.

"Go on," Skinner's voice was soft, but insistent. "I told you - I want you to be honest."

Mulder nodded. "Loved," he whispered. "She made me feel weak, and useless. I came to believe her too - all the things she said about me not being strong enough to take it, and not being good enough to be with someone like **her**. It was kind of the way my dad used to make me feel. That whole sense of being a giant disappointment to everyone." Mulder glanced up, and caught Skinner in an unguarded moment. The expression on the other man's face took him by surprise. There was something akin to fury reflected in those dark eyes. "I'm sorry, you don't want to hear all this crap," Mulder apologized.

"On the contrary," Skinner replied, his expression quickly being replaced by the inscrutable mask he usually presented to his slave. "Continue," he commanded.

Mulder nodded. "After we split up, I just sought out the pain - there didn't seem any point wanting anything more. I suppose I pursued the pain - I **craved** it, and then I skipped out as soon as I received it. The catharsis was reached, and I was cut loose, adrift. It wasn't the fault of my partners though..." Mulder looked up into Skinner's dark eyes. "It was me. I didn't want to get close, to be obligated, or known, but this..." He hesitated again, and Skinner's big arms squeezed him encouragingly, "this is different," he mumbled into Skinner's chest, feeling a lump forming in his throat, and tears squeezing from his eyes. He knew the tears were partly the aftermath of such a thorough and skilled spanking, but he was angry with himself. Usually he could get out before this mood hit him, but this situation didn't allow him to do that. He was forced to stay, forced to accept the comfort he had so long told himself he didn't require, because with it came obligation, and affection, and with that he was soon disappointing the very people he most wanted to love him. He tried to rub the tears away surreptitiously, but Skinner reached out two gentle fingers and wiped them away for him.

"Forget everybody else. You belong to **me** now," Skinner told him, his tone so strict that Mulder looked up in surprise. "And I'm an exacting Master, Fox. I'll train you well, but it's a hard path."

"I know, Master." Mulder nodded. "I want it, Master," he added.

"Good. I'm starving - let's get breakfast."

Skinner sent Mulder on ahead, while he took a shower and got dressed. Mulder mooched around in the kitchen, finding some cereal and laying two bowls on the kitchen table. Skinner appeared a few minutes later, dressed in a pair of tight denim jeans that showed off his long legs, and a tight white tee shirt, that did the same for his chest. He smelled of soap and toothpaste, and Mulder's cock showed its appreciation - something that Skinner signally failed to notice.

"Does Master want me to feed the cat as well?" Mulder asked, glancing at Wanda who was winding her way around Skinner's legs in a none-too-subtle fashion.

"Absolutely not." Skinner looked shocked. He picked up the elegant cat, and lovingly kissed her behind the ears. "I will serve Wanda, just as you serve me. We all know our place in this world." He bestowed another kiss on Wanda's delicate little nose and Mulder sighed, suspecting he'd always come second to the damn cat.

"Of all the Masters, in all the world, I have to be owned by the one who goes gooey over a stupid cat," he muttered under his breath. He was immediately rewarded by a firm slap on his already sore butt.

"Ow!" he squealed.

"Then don't push me." Skinner frowned. "Now sit down, and eat." He took a seat himself, and watched as Mulder eased himself gingerly into his chair, wincing slightly as he did so.

"I've never eaten naked and collared before," Mulder said, glancing down ruefully at his ringed cock.

"Get used to it," Skinner told him, grinning.

After breakfast, Skinner piled a mound of shirts into Mulder's arms and commanded him to get ironing. He was under strict instructions to present the first results of his labors to his Master for his approval. Mulder slaved over that shirt for fully thirty minutes, doing his best with it, but his efforts were met by a raised eyebrow from his Master.

"Using steam might help," Skinner observed.

"Steam?" Mulder repeated blankly.

Skinner got up, took hold of his slave's ear, walked him back into the laundry room, and showed him how to add water to the iron.

"Steam." Skinner repeated firmly.

Mulder wondered at the miracles of the modern steam iron as he made a much more passable attempt at the shirt on his second go. Skinner still sent him back to put some extra effort into the collar but finally, after an hour, he had managed to iron one whole shirt to his Master's satisfaction. Skinner left him there for the remainder of the morning, and Mulder stared dreamily into space as he ironed on automatic pilot. He ran through that spanking again, his buttocks still throbbing pleasantly from the memory. Occasionally he picked up the shirt he was working on, and pressed it to his nose. He could just smell the faint scent of his Master, clinging to the fabric even after washing. Mulder inhaled - it was a clean, musky smell. He idled away a few minutes fantasizing about it being bottled in some way, for him to smell whenever he needed his fix. He was so spaced out that he barely noticed when Skinner returned to the laundry room.

"Fox." Skinner waved at him. "Hello? What were you thinking?" He asked, when Mulder finally looked at him.

"Oh, I was just wondering how the hell I came to be standing here, butt naked, next to an extremely hot object," Mulder said with a heartfelt sigh.

"Tell me that you're referring to me, and not the iron, and I might just let you out of here," Skinner said with a gleam in his eye.

"Oh, definitely you, Master," Mulder replied with a grin.

"Okay, get moving then. I think it's time I showed you some of the other facilities in this building." He held the door open, and Mulder sidled past him - but he wasn't quick enough to evade the slap that descended on his naked butt.

"That's for the lie you just told," Skinner grinned

"Aren't you ever going to let me get away with anything?" Mulder whined.

"No." Skinner handed Mulder his sweats, tee shirt, and sneakers, and then beckoned him to follow.

"Where are we going, Master?" Mulder asked, as Skinner pressed the button for the basement.

"There's a pool, and a gym in this apartment building. The 18th floor elevator card I gave you grants you access," Skinner said, as they got out of the elevator. He showed Mulder to a small pool, and a well-equipped gym.

"You'll swim every morning before waking me. 5:15 to 5.45, Skinner told his slave.

Mulder pouted. "That's very early, Master," he pointed out neutrally, not wanting to earn himself another swat.

"That's all right - you'll be having a lot of early nights so you'll be getting more than enough sleep." Skinner grinned. Mulder's heart sank. "We'll use the gym together on various occasions after work. You can spot me, and I'll make sure you're put through your paces - I want to work on building up some definition in your arms and legs - not much, just toning. For today though..." Skinner glanced at the empty pool. "It looks like we have the place to ourselves. Get undressed, and start swimming," he commanded.

Mulder stared at him. "I don't have my speedos, Master," he protested.

"I don't want you to wear them." Skinner grinned. "I want to see your red butt doing lengths in that pool. Now!" He snapped. Mulder jumped, and began to strip off his clothing. Skinner removed the cock ring, then beckoned with his head for Mulder to dive in.

Mulder gasped as the cold water made contact with his still warm backside, the chlorine stinging his sensitive flesh. He was desperately worried that someone would come in and see him, red ass up, but also enjoyed the sheer sensory delight of swimming naked, his cock hanging down, the water caressing his skin. Skinner watched him swim for half an hour, then beckoned Mulder out of the pool. They returned to the apartment, where Mulder was set about doing various menial tasks for the rest of the

day, before Skinner called for take-out, and instructed Mulder to assume his submissive position for feeding.

"Whilst in this position you'll speak only when spoken to," Skinner told him. "Other than that you'll remain silent. Understood?"

Mulder nodded.

"Good. I'm going to outline some of the activities I have planned for the rest of this week, so that you can become accustomed to the idea of them in advance," Skinner informed him, as he spooned some food into Mulder's waiting mouth, then took a forkful himself and chewed it thoughtfully before continuing. "Training a completely obedient and submissive slave, who is also charming, intelligent, witty, cultured, thoughtful and can show initiative, is a long, hard process. I don't expect to complete it in a week - but I do expect to cover the basics. You should make the most of this week, Fox. It's unlikely that you'll receive this much time and attention once we return to work."

Mulder nodded, keeping his eyes low, waiting to be fed again. The food was delicious - Skinner clearly had great taste in restaurants.

"I have a small, private party planned for next Friday evening," Skinner informed him. Mulder looked up in surprise, then lowered his eyes again, as he had been commanded. "I will be inviting close personal friends - and will take the opportunity to show off my new slave. By then, I'll expect you to be walking to the leash, to entertain, and serve, and to submit publicly to whatever attention I wish to bestow upon you."

Mulder looked up again. "Publicly...?" he blurted, then bit down on his lip, aware that he wasn't allowed to speak.

"Publicly," Skinner repeated, allowing the transgression to pass with nothing more than a glare. "I should make one thing clear - you'll be displayed naked at the party. While I expect my friends to bring their subs, I'll specify that they should be clothed. You will be the only one without clothing. The whole point of the party is to show you off, after all," he grinned. Mulder felt a flush start at his neck, and flood up his face. "You're embarrassed by the idea?" Skinner asked.

Mulder nodded. "Yes, Master," he whispered. "Please don't make me do it."

"It's my wish," Skinner said firmly. "You'll obey."

"Yes, Master." Mulder bit down on his lip again.

"If you're not naked, how can I display the signs of my ownership?" Skinner told him. "On Friday, the only things you'll be wearing are my rings - all five of them."

Mulder looked up, the panic showing in his eyes.

"Don't worry." Skinner smiled, and caressed his slave's hair gently. "I'll pierce you towards the middle of the week. Probably on Wednesday or Thursday. It will be an important experience for you. Trust me."

"Will...does Master intend to do the piercing himself then?" Mulder faltered, surprised and aroused by that thought.

"Of course." Skinner nodded. "I'm fully proficient so you needn't worry. I wouldn't bring anyone else in - I don't want you to speak to anyone else between now and your return to work, even at the party. That way you can learn to focus entirely on me, and my demands, and it will reinforce the fact that your sole aim in life is to think of ways of pleasing me."

"Yes, Master," Mulder whispered, thinking of X Files, and bureaucratic procedure, and how very unlikely it was that when they returned to work he would be half as obedient as he was kneeling here, enjoying himself in this extended sex game. He had a feeling that he wasn't likely to please Skinner any more in their professional lives than he had before he had signed that slavery contract.

"Good. Next Saturday I'll take you out shopping," Skinner continued with the timetable, "to buy you clothes. Sunday will be spent preparing for our return to work, and discussing what will be expected of you. After that - we'll take it as it comes. Do you have any questions, Fox?" He lifted Mulder's chin so that Mulder was looking into his eyes.

"Only one, Master," Mulder said softly. "When will you fuck me?"

Skinner was silent for a long moment, looking down on his slave, and Mulder wondered whether he should have asked that question, but it had been preying on his mind. Skinner was keeping him in an almost permanent state of arousal, and not only was he refused his own release, but Skinner was also refusing to take any pleasure from using Mulder himself. Skinner studied him intently, then leaned forward, and drew Mulder's head close.

"Is that what you want, slave?" He hissed into Mulder's ear.

Mulder moaned, his cock hardening unbearably. "Yes, Master," he replied.

"It'll happen," Skinner stated, "when **I'm** good and ready, slave."

"Yes, Master...please, Master...will Master allow me to come?" Mulder requested.

"Now?" Skinner raised an eyebrow.

"Sometime soon," Mulder begged weakly.

"No, slave. It's another hard lesson for you to learn, but I've told you before - your own pleasure has to be earned. What's important is serving your Master." Skinner's gentle, continuous fondling belied his stern words. "Now, if you hadn't disobeyed me on this matter last night, I might have been more lenient on the subject today. As it is - I want to make very sure you don't have the opportunity to repeat last night's mistake. You clearly can't be trusted when left to your own devices." Skinner stood up. "I think it's time to reinforce a few of the lessons you've learned today. Follow me."

Mulder followed his Master upstairs, his heart beating as he realized they were going to the 18th floor apartment, and quickening even more when Skinner took the key from around his neck, opened the door to the Playroom, ushered him inside, and locked the door again behind them. He turned the lights

on low, and the room was bathed in a warm, red glow. Skinner went over to one of the cupboards and pulled out a complicated leather contraption, then he went and sat down in a large, throne like chair, and beckoned Mulder over. Mulder was grasped between his Master's legs, and pulled close, then Skinner took hold of his cock and balls, and began fastening the contraption around them.

"This, in case you haven't figured it out, is a male chastity device. It'll prevent you from becoming erect - and you won't be able to touch your cock either, as it'll be encased in leather. There's a small opening here," Skinner demonstrated, "so you'll be able to use the bathroom, but I'm attaching this," he held up a tiny padlock, "to ensure that you can't get access to your cock."

"That's...**cruel**, Master," Mulder spluttered.

"You only have yourself to blame. If you'd kept your hands by your sides, and your mind on pleasing me, and not yourself, then this wouldn't be necessary. Hands behind your back - NOW!" Skinner ordered, as Mulder's fingers feebly protested the strapping on of the leather device. Mulder gave the other man a hard look, then, reluctantly, did as he was told. Skinner also fastened a thick leather bag over Mulder's balls. "For protection," he told Mulder, slapping them lightly.

"Protection from what?" Mulder asked in alarm.

"From my switch. It's time to mark you," Skinner informed him, his legs tightening around Mulder's body as the agent's knees started to fail him, toppling him forwards. "I'll raise a couple of welts on your backside. That should give you something else to think about apart from your cock while you're in bed tonight."

"Master." Mulder found himself sinking to his knees, and resting his chin in a gesture of supplication on Skinner's thigh. "Please don't punish me, Master," he whispered.

"It's not a punishment, little one." Skinner kissed Mulder's forehead gently. "It'll hurt a great deal - but by experiencing my switch marking your body as mine, and welcoming everything I choose to do to you, you'll come to truly understand the nature of your devotion." His lips trailed down, and covered those of his slave, and Mulder opened up his mouth, welcoming his Master's tongue inside him, relishing the taste of him, and the power of his kiss. When it was over, Skinner gently fondled his face again. "Do you understand, Fox?" he murmured softly. "This isn't to punish or correct you, merely to mark you as mine. It's purpose is less to make you endure pain, than to enforce your understanding of your slavery."

"Yes, Master." Mulder nodded. He felt his cock fighting a desperate battle with the leather that encased it - a battle it couldn't win. "I...I'm your slave Master," he said, finally giving in, and kissing his Master's knee. "Do whatever pleases you. I'm yours."

Skinner smiled down on him approvingly. "That's good - very good, Fox. I'll take very good care of you," he promised. Mulder nodded, and followed his Master over to the cupboard, watching from his kneeling, submissive position, while Skinner found the switch he wanted to use, and sliced it through the air a few times. Mulder's stomach clenched in fear and anticipation. Switches hurt, but the idea of bearing his Master's marks on his skin aroused him. He was once again torn between his fear and desire. Finally, Skinner was satisfied. He nodded Mulder to the spanking horse and bent him over it, but didn't tie him down.

"Knees wider, that's right." Skinner tapped his slave's knee with the switch, until Mulder was fully stretched and open. Now he understood why Skinner had protected his testicles - he could feel them exposed to the air between his open legs. "Push that ass up, so I can get a nice clean target. All right - as this is the first time, I'll just give you three strokes," Skinner said. "The marks will take 2 or 3 days to fade completely. I think though, that an ass like yours..." he fondled Mulder's exposed buttocks, "should be kept permanently marked. It's up to you to keep an eye on them. When they're gone, I want you to remind me that it's time to mark you again. Understood?"

"Yes, Master." Mulder agreed, staring face down at the floor.

"If you fail to inform me, and the marks fade, then I'll punish you. It's unlikely that I won't notice them this week, when you'll be mostly naked, but in a few weeks time, when you're out chasing after UFO's again and I'm busy with my own job, it's entirely likely that I might not notice. The penalty for not refreshing my memory will be severe. Is that clear?"

"Yes, Master," Mulder repeated, his buttocks twitching as Skinner sliced the switch through the air experimentally again.

"Just because I might not always see them every day, and they are invisible to anybody else, doesn't mean that they aren't important. The crucial thing is that **you** will be aware of them constantly, wherever you are. Marking is more for your instruction, and to focus your mind on your slavery, than for my enjoyment - although I'm sure I'll enjoy them too!"

Mulder shivered in anticipation, as Skinner took up position behind him, and rested the switch lightly on his backside. Mulder began to say a little prayer, moaning softly to himself. The switch was lifted, and there was a whoosh of cool air, before a line of pure fire was painted across his buttocks. Mulder let out a howl, and hopped up and down, holding onto the horse with both arms. "Again," Skinner said firmly, pressing his slave back down, and Mulder calmed himself, trying to prepare mentally for the next stroke. Another streak of lightning cut into his flesh and he wailed. "You're doing well, Fox. One more. You can stand it, little one. For me." Skinner's hand stroked Mulder's sweaty back, soothing him, and Mulder closed his eyes, awaiting the final stroke. It was as hard as the others, imprinting itself deep into his waiting, exposed bottom. Mulder gave a heartfelt whimper but he was secretly pleased by his ability to take the strokes. Skinner helped him to stand, and then his Master escorted him over to the cupboard and opened a door to reveal a full length mirror. Skinner put his arms around his slave, holding him tight against his chest, and turned Mulder's head so that he could look over his shoulder at his newly marked backside. Mulder surveyed the three distinct red welts with a sense of pride.

"I haven't broken the skin," Skinner informed him, his arms tight around Mulder's shoulders. "You look beautiful with my marks on your flesh," he breathed, his fingers spidering down Mulder's back to lightly touch the welts. Mulder smiled at his reflection, then up at his Master, and buried his face in the other man's shoulder.

"Thank you, Master," he whispered. Skinner smiled down on him tenderly, and held him for a few moments, then he disengaged, and walked Mulder over to the window. That side of the room wasn't lit, and for a disoriented moment, Mulder thought they were going to walk right out into the darkness. Instead, Skinner stopped him and placed his nose against the window.

"Stand there and think about being marked as my property, and what that means. Just reflect on those marks, think of nothing but them," Skinner said in a low, intense voice that made Mulder shiver. Skinner's fingers touched the welts again, more firmly this time, and Mulder winced. "I'll be right here, enjoying the view." Skinner gave a throaty little laugh, and Mulder heard him move away.

Mulder stood looking out onto the city beneath him, with its bright lights. This was the tallest apartment block around, and nobody overlooked the 18th floor, but even so, he felt exposed, standing naked in front of the window. It was impossible not to do as he had been instructed. His backside throbbed constantly, and it was all he could think about. He heard Skinner moving around the room, and he wondered at how comprehensively Skinner had outmaneuvered him during the course of this day. His Master had effectively provided him with a wonderland of sadomasochistic eroticism, as if he had seen into Mulder's secret soul, and dragged out even those fantasies he hadn't admitted to himself. A part of Mulder still wanted to fight, to manipulate, to force the pace, but another part of him just wanted to give in, and accept whatever new game Skinner came up with next. Mulder's cock ached inside its casing, throbbing in time to the ache in his sore backside. He fantasized about Skinner taking him, about Skinner piercing him, displaying him naked to his friends, branding him. He still feared it, but he was surprised by how much he **wanted** it all too.

Mulder was dimly aware of time passing, of the soreness in his buttocks subsiding, of a feeling of calm washing over him, as he stood there, presenting his naked, marked ass to the room. Finally Skinner came over to him again, and kissed the back of his neck.

"You're tired," his Master said, and Mulder was surprised to find that it was true. "We've just got one more thing to do, and then you'll go to bed." Skinner's hands ran up and down the outside of Mulder's arms, and his voice was seductive, and full of promise. He led Mulder back over to the large chair again, and sat down. Walking behind his Master reminded Mulder of something the big man had mentioned earlier.

"You said...that you'd train me to walk to the leash, Master," he began. Skinner nodded, beckoning his slave forward. "When will that be?" Mulder asked tentatively.

"When you're pierced." Skinner smiled. "The leash will be fastened to these." His fingers tweaked Mulder's nipples. Mulder opened his mouth wordlessly. "Ah, you assumed it would be attached to your collar." Skinner shook his head wryly. "No, Fox, my slave will be trained to walk to a leash attached to a much more intimate part of the anatomy. I find it helps focus a slave's mind minutely on his Master's slightest command if the pull is to this delicate little area." He rubbed Mulder's nipples again, and Mulder moaned, seeing himself in his mind's eye - naked, pierced, marked... His cock made another desperate bid for freedom, and was again constricted by the leather chastity device. Mulder whimpered in frustration, convinced that being constantly on the edge of arousal would drive him crazy.

"Here. Over my knee." Skinner patted his knee, and held up a butt plug. It was slightly larger than the one Mulder had worn the previous night. Mulder swallowed, and arranged himself over his Master's lap. Skinner stroked his back for a moment, then gently blew on his welted backside, dipping his head to lick the marks. This sent a wild heat through Mulder's body, and he let out a little cry. He felt Skinner's fingers push inside him, and tried to relax and open up.

"That's good. You've already improved on this," Skinner told him approvingly. "Keep open, there..." His fingers brushed Mulder's prostate, and Mulder writhed, a wave of ecstasy flooding through him. "Does

that feel good?" Skinner asked. Mulder nodded, his throat dry. "Good. Now stay open for me." He removed his fingers, and Mulder felt the blunt nose of the butt plug gently inserted into his anus. It slid smoothly along the lubed passage, until it was fully inserted, wedging his butt cheeks apart. It wasn't painful - merely intrusive. Skinner set Mulder back on his feet, and attached a series of chains from the plug to the chastity device, securing it firmly in place.

"That won't fall out," Skinner told his slave approvingly. "Now, bed."

Mulder looked at him questioningly. "Doesn't Master want any personal attention." He knelt between Skinner's open legs, and gestured to his fly.

"Not tonight. You've had a busy day. Save that talented mouth of yours for my wake-up call." Skinner grinned, fondling Mulder's hair. "I'm delighted that you're thinking of ways to please me though." He bent to kiss his slave again, and Mulder opened up his mouth, savoring his reward. Then Skinner stood up. "Bed," he said firmly, delivering a light slap to Mulder's backside that made his slave yelp and scurry for the door.

Mulder lay face down on his bed, his mind and body both reeling from the day's events. He felt tired, and drained, and yet curiously happy. Suddenly he remembered his earlier worry about the camera that might be hidden in his room, and sat up, then yelped as his buttocks protested at being sat on. He got up cautiously, and searched the room, but found nothing. Mulder threw himself back on the bed, exhausted.

"I'll play along for now," he told nobody in particular, "but only because I'm enjoying myself. Well, maybe not the ironing, but the rest of it. I'll just figure out what game you're playing, then I'll start to manipulate things. I won't be this obedient forever," he muttered, his eyes closing.

Half asleep, he was almost sure that he heard a deep, rich laugh mocking his words.

#### **Chapter End Notes:**

## A Cat Called Wanda by Xanthe

### Author's Notes:

Title pic courtesy of Wheatgrass

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Posted 4th October, 1999

**WARNING: Okay, I'm not sure if anyone is taking \*any\* notice of these warnings, or in fact, whether they rather like them as they think they presage Very Naughty Things Indeed. Well, this one most definitely DOES. There is an explicit scene of bondage and sexual domination in this story. Read on at your peril.**

Actually I suspect the only thing that might squick you hardy lot is the idea of poetry being recited during sex, but it's a great poem, and \*all\* the best tops have poetic souls. It's a well known fact.

Did I say these would be short? I lied.

Wanda seems to have developed her own fanclub, so I've named this chapter in her honor, and not just because my Wanda inspiration is pinning me to the word processor with a very demanding look in her eye. Thanks to Danni, whose drabbles about Mulder and cats clearly made a big impact on my subconscious, and a big nod to John Cleese for ripping off his film title.

Many thanks to Emma, who told me a very intriguing tale that sparked this story off, as well as providing invaluable technical assistance, and some rather interesting ideas...

Quotation and poem courtesy of my sweet Alex. None of this is beta'd. It's far too much fun to take seriously.

I've posted an amazing, hot pic illustrating a scene from this story at the end of it. It was created by **SERGEEVA**. Email her and tell her how wonderful she is.

**24/7** is an erotic fantasy and NOT a BDSM resource guide. The truth is sometimes exaggerated, or played with, for dramatic effect. For more information, please visit the **24/7 BDSM Glossary**.

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*"A truth, still apparent, though disregarded, that things move violently to their place, but calmly in their place. To put it another way, everything has its right home, the region that suits it, and, unless forcibly restrained, will move thither by a kind of homing instinct."*

**J. Winterson**  
**"Art and Lies"**

Mulder woke up the following day to find his usual morning wood fighting against its leather prison. The prison won. Mulder sighed, and rolled over, only to yelp in surprise as his welted buttocks reminded them of their presence. For all that Skinner had avowed himself a sensualist, Mulder was of the opinion, at this moment in time, that his Master had some very definite sadistic tendencies as well. His fingers itched to touch his cock - if this went on much longer he'd have a bad case of blue balls. He glanced at his clock: 8:00. Yesterday Skinner had told him he was to complete his morning swim before waking his Master, but he couldn't very well go swimming wearing this leather chastity device - not unless he wanted to ruin it and somehow he thought Skinner wouldn't be very pleased if he did that. Of course, Skinner had said 5.15 to 5.45, which implied he only wanted Mulder to swim on a weekday before work, not at the weekend, or during vacations.

Mulder procrastinated for several minutes, then almost laughed out loud. *You're a grown man worrying about whether to go for a swim*, he chided, getting up and deciding to use the time to flick through Skinner's paper before waking his Master. Damn! He couldn't even take a shower, wearing this stupid device. Mulder used the bathroom and brushed his teeth. He was aware of the butt plug pressing deep inside his body, but he was becoming used to the sensation of having his body invaded in this way. Of course the one thing he really **wanted** to have inside him was his Master's delicious cock, but he was beginning to despair of Skinner ever bending him over and taking him. Mulder sighed - he wasn't sure what kind of a game his Master was playing with him, but he knew it was driving him crazy. Mulder paused and took a look in the mirror - his stomach did a flip as he studied the 3 welts on his bottom. It had hurt like hell receiving them, but he loved what they stood for, marking him as they did as his Master's property. Mulder fingered them carefully, closing his eyes and drinking in the sensation of being able to feel the slightly raised flesh, without seeing it. Even in the dark, he was marked as Skinner's slave. If his Master was so minded to reach for him at night, he would find his marks imprinted on Mulder's flesh, like Braille, signaling who this slave belonged to. The idea excited him, which was no good at all in his current caged condition.

Mulder wandered downstairs and retrieved the paper, then made himself a cup of coffee, and lay on Skinner's couch reading the sport's section. He kept a careful eye on the clock - he was determined that Skinner wouldn't find fault with his time-keeping this morning. Dead on the dot of 9 a.m., he opened the door to his Master's bedroom, coffee in one hand, newspaper clutched under his arm. He deposited both on the night-stand, then turned his attention to the bed. Skinner was still asleep, and for a moment Mulder felt a pang of regret at the huge empty space next to his Master. Damn, his Master's cock wasn't the only thing he wanted. He also wanted to sleep curled up in the big man's arms, to know that he was there all night, beside him. Instead...instead Skinner shared his bed with **her**.

Mulder glared at the emerald eyed cat who was fixing him with a look of pure hatred, defying him to disturb her cozy love nest with HIS Master. Mulder returned her look with one of such malice he was sure Skinner would have blistered his backside all morning if he'd been awake to see it. Mulder crept noiselessly over to the bed, plucked the sleepy Wanda from her circle of comfort, and threw her out of the bedroom door, ignoring her squawk of protest. He shut the door firmly behind her, and rubbed his hands together, smiling to himself. Then he disappeared under the sheets, and located his Master's beautiful drowsy cock, soon bringing it to a state of full wakefulness.

"How did you sleep?" Skinner asked, when Mulder emerged triumphantly several minutes later.

"Not bad." Mulder shrugged. Actually he'd slept like a log all night, but he wasn't going to tell Skinner that. "Considering I'm all trussed up with what feels like a stick of dynamite up my ass."

"Complaints?" Skinner raised an eyebrow.

Mulder looked into those stern dark eyes for a moment, then sighed, and laid his head on Skinner's chest. "No, Master," he mumbled.

"Good. Get up, and get your butt over my knee," Skinner told him. Mulder looked up in surprise - Skinner hadn't finished his coffee yet - in fact he'd barely taken a sip. "I want to examine you," Skinner explained, "and I want a surface to rest my newspaper on as well - the Sunday sections are so big aren't they?"

Mulder gave him a cool look, but just the idea of being "examined" was enough to make his cock ache, so he gave in, picked up a couple of pillows, and arranged himself over Skinner's lap. He felt his Master's hand gently caress his welted buttocks, and wriggled.

"Still!" Skinner ordered. Mulder bit on his lip, and did as he was told, submitting to his Master's thorough attention. Skinner didn't stop until he'd felt every single inch of those welts with his finger - or at least that was what it felt like to Mulder. Then his Master ordered him up, and undid the padlock on his chastity belt, before unbuckling the contraption and removing it. Mulder's cock immediately skyrocketed .

"Oh god," Mulder moaned, leaning his head forward and resting it on Skinner's shoulder. "You've got to let me come soon, Master."

"No, I don't have to let you come at all." Skinner grinned pushing him off. "Over my lap again, and I'll remove the butt plug." Mulder did as ordered, his heart sinking at his Master's comments about not letting him come at all. He had to! And soon - or Mulder would start climbing the walls. Skinner stripped Mulder of the plug quickly and efficiently, leaving him naked except for his rings. "Stay there." Skinner picked up his paper, and propped it up on Mulder's exposed backside. There was silence for a long time, then Skinner turned a page. Mulder lay there, seething inside. Here he was, stretched out, naked, like an offering, bearing his Master's marks, and all Skinner could do was **read** for god's sake! He started to fidget and was rewarded by a hard slap on his sore, welted buttocks.

"Ow!" He glanced up.

"Then stay still. You're going to be like that for an hour or more, so get used to it," Skinner told him.

Mulder glared at him. "I am not some kind of newspaper prop!" He snapped.

"No, you're my slave - and if one of the uses I want to put you to is propping up my newspaper, that's what I'll do. If I were you, I'd give some serious thought about whether you want to come any time at all in the next year," Skinner warned ominously. "There's a direct correlation between service and reward in this household, Fox, and the sooner you understand that the better." So saying, he straightened out his paper, and continued reading. Mulder buried his face in the pillow and tried to caress his straining penis by a process of telekinesis. He had whole files on the technique, and was convinced that if he could just think hard enough, he could milk himself to orgasm before Skinner knew what was going on.

He was so sunk in this reverie that he jumped in surprise when Skinner broke into it an hour or so later.

"Where's Wanda?" He asked.

"Um, she went out as I came in." Mulder grinned into his pillow. One up to the slave, one down to the uppity cat.

"That's not like Wanda. What time did you get up?" Skinner asked conversationally.

"8. There's one thing I meant to ask you, Master." Mulder turned his head, and propped one hand under his chin. "Um, you told me I had to swim in the morning, but I couldn't wearing the, uh, **thing**." He pointed his head in the direction of the leather cage. "I decided you wouldn't want me to wake you to ask you what to do," he said, feeling sure he'd get some brownie points for that.

"Of course not. I intended you to start the swimming when we go back to work - and you don't have to do it on weekends," Skinner told him, taking a sip of coffee. "So - what did you do between 8 and 9?"

"Read the paper." Mulder shrugged.

"All right." Skinner folded the newspaper, and glanced at his slave. "Fox - I know that you're new to your condition, but I did hope that marking you last night might help focus your mind on your status. I have told you time and again since you arrived, that you'll be rewarded for addressing yourself to my needs, haven't I?"

"Yes, Master." Mulder looked confused. "Did I do something wrong?"

Skinner flicked his fingers at the floor beside the bed. "In position. Now!" He barked.

Mulder scrambled off the bed quickly, still wondering what he'd done. He swiftly got into position, knees open, arms behind his back, shoulders straight, head down.

"This morning, you were unsure whether to swim or not. That's fair enough - I didn't make myself clear, and you were right not to wake me. However, didn't you think how pleased I might be if you'd had the initiative to spend your free time ironing my shirts, for example? Or cooking breakfast?"

"No, Master. I'm sorry. I didn't think," Mulder muttered, cursing himself for his stupidity.

"I said I'd show leniency with you to begin with, but while I might not punish you, I'm hardly likely to reward you for continuing to be so preoccupied with your own needs," Skinner admonished.

"Does this mean...that I won't get to come today, Master?" Mulder whispered.

Skinner sighed. "Is your own pleasure all you think about?" He asked.

Mulder bit on his lip, aware that he'd made another mistake.

Skinner reached out and grasped his slave's chin. "Sometimes I think you don't even try," he said.

"I'm really sorry, Master. I'll do better in future, I promise," Mulder said contritely.

"Very well. Let's see if you do," Skinner told him firmly. "Now, into the shower - I think we'll apply your discipline wet, today."

Mulder scurried for the shower, his cock perking up at the very mention of "discipline." Skinner joined him, and turned on the water, then he handed Mulder a bar of soap.

"Wash me," he ordered.

Mulder jumped to the task eagerly. One of the things that had taken him by surprise in this scenario was how much he enjoyed both looking at, and touching, his Master's beautiful body. In the past, he hadn't given the physical appearance of his tops much thought - they existed merely to serve him, one way or another, mainly by administering the discipline he wanted them to deliver. He was used to sucking other men's cocks, and kneeling at their feet - he enjoyed the completely submissive feeling of being dominated by another man, but he didn't remember actually lusting after one as he did after Skinner. He suspected that his attraction to the big man had always been latent - he remembered many occasions when he had longed to feel Skinner's large arms around him, restraining him. Hell, he'd even engineered that very scenario at work on a couple of occasions, even if he hadn't been honest with himself about his motivation. Of course he'd always kept his other tops at arm's length, and that was impossible in this scenario. Mulder was shocked by how much he was falling under Skinner's spell, and a part of him was shouting to get out, before it was too late. Too late for what though, Mulder had no idea...

Mulder felt he more than made up for his earlier thoughtlessness in his attention to his Master's body during that shower. He soaped him thoroughly, delivered loving kisses to Skinner's collar bones, licked the water out of the dipping cleft where they joined, then gently circled each of his Master's nipples with the soap, and washed it off carefully with the spray. Skinner sighed, and leaned against the wall, as Mulder tenderly soaped his genitals, combing his Master's body hair through his fingers, then knelt to soap his legs, kissing his kneecaps, and inner thighs. Skinner's body was pleasing - there was no doubt about it. Mulder had never thought about what constituted an attractive male body before, but he had always been dimly aware that his own long limbs and tall stature attracted a few glances from both men and women. Skinner was a more typically masculine-looking man - his muscles were more clearly defined, and he was heavier, more thickset. Mulder loved the strength in those muscled limbs, and the feel of that smooth honey-toned flesh under his fingers. The trouble was, it was all too **easy** to worship a Master such as this. It took no effort at all. He finished his task, and was rewarded when Skinner pulled his naked body close and kissed him hard, the water streaming down their faces.

"Soap yourself." Skinner ordered, leaning back against the tiled wall, and watching as Mulder quickly and efficiently washed his own body, then turned back to his Master obediently, to await further instructions. "Put your hands against the wall," Skinner told him. "Butt out...more...that's good." Mulder did as instructed, feeling sure that he'd slip over as Skinner kicked his legs apart even further, opening his body up. He watched out of the corner of his eye, as Skinner picked up the soap, then he felt it being dipped into the crease between his buttocks, soaping him there. Skinner's finger slipped easily into his anus, and began moving in and out, over and over again. Mulder gasped, putting his head back, the water dripping continuously from the ends of his wet hair. His cock strained against the cock ring, but he knew it was useless asking for permission to come. Skinner's one finger was joined by another, and Mulder opened up beneath the relentless caress, welcoming them into his body. He pressed his ass back even further, opening himself as wide as he'd ever been, hoping to encourage his Master to take him. Skinner grabbed his hips, and pressed his cock against Mulder's buttocks. It felt hard, rampant, large...big enough to claim him, fill him completely...Mulder groaned, wanting that, wanting **Him**.

"Do you think you're ready to receive me?" Skinner asked in a low, throaty whisper.

"Yes, oh god, YES!" Mulder cried.

"Not yet." Skinner entered three fingers into Mulder's anus, caressing his prostate in a way that made the slave's cock leap. He finger-fucked Mulder comprehensively for several minutes. All Mulder could think about was those big, strong fingers, consuming him from the inside, making love to his body, claiming him. His mind felt as if it were filled with a blinding white light, and even without being able to come, his body was consumed by wave after wave of nerve-tingling pleasure. Finally, Skinner withdrew his fingers.

"Like that?" he growled.

"Y...yes, Master," Mulder panted.

"Good. Stay there. I think it's time to see to that discipline, don't you?" Skinner's hand rubbed over Mulder's bottom, gently. "Keep your hands against the wall - don't move them," his Master warned. "The penalty for moving them is severe - trust me."

"Yes, Master," Mulder moaned, keeping his palms flat on the surface of the tiles. Skinner continued to caress his ass, then without warning dropped a hard slap onto the side of his butt, swiftly followed by another. He avoided the welts, slapping between them, beneath them, or to the side of them, and Mulder's bottom got warmer and warmer. Then Skinner worked down lower, onto his thighs, slapping them soundly. Mulder hated being spanked there, and he half stood up with a yelp, then remembered, and stopped, one hand nearly in the air.

"Move it another inch and your ass is toast," Skinner warned, and Mulder placed the offending hand back down flat again, presenting his thighs once more as an easy target to his Master's insistent hand. It hurt, but it was a **good** hurt, Mulder thought to himself, as the endorphins ran amok through his body, taking him to a blissed-out plane of existence. Skinner's hand was harder now, cracking against his flesh, and Mulder started to sob, the water cascading down the side of his face, mingling with the few tears that were running down his cheeks. Now Skinner's hand slapped lightly against Mulder's welts, sending a sting of pain through Mulder's body that made him shiver, and his cock harden. He struggled to keep

his hands on the tiles - he wanted to wriggle and scream and all he could do was hop from foot to foot, moaning incoherently.

"Oh god, Master...hurts, hurts...please..." he wept.

"Why are you being spanked, slave?" Skinner growled over the sound of the running water.

"For...for...not being more thoughtful of your pleasure, Master," Mulder whimpered. "Oh shit...please...oh god...."

"And will you resolve to do better in future?"

"Yes, Master! Ow! I promise! I promise!" Mulder cried, as Skinner's hand smacked down harder and harder on his red buttocks.

"And why else are you being disciplined?" Skinner asked.

"For..." Mulder wracked his brains, and then remembered. "Because it pleases you, Master! No other reason..." He panted.

"Good." Skinner chuckled. "It does please me, slave, to see your butt turn bright red, and to feel you squirm and wriggle under my hand, to hear you beg and to see how hard you try to obey me by standing in position. Now hold still - let's finish this off properly shall we?" So saying he applied a dozen of the hardest slaps to Mulder's punished backside, and it was all Mulder could do to keep his hands on the wall as those blistering blows rained down on his wet, glowing bottom.

Then the slaps grew softer, until they stopped altogether, and Skinner directed a spray of lukewarm water over Mulder's hot butt - if the water had been any colder Mulder was sure that his skin would have sizzled on contact. He leaned his forehead against the tiled wall, then felt Skinner stand close behind him, taking those warmed buttocks between his hands and kneading them softly. Mulder groaned, and gasped but kept in position as ordered. Skinner's fingers dipped casually into his anus as he kneaded, staying for a moment, then withdrawing. Mulder was so used to these intrusions now that he didn't tense up - in fact he pressed back, trying to force his Master's fingers onto that delicious spot inside him that Skinner had found earlier, and which caused him such pleasure. Skinner didn't oblige, the fingers entering and leaving too quickly, like the briefest kiss, leaving Mulder wanting more. His Master kissed the back of his neck as he kneaded, and Mulder could feel the other man's hard cock pressed against his sore buttocks. He wondered whether Skinner would part the warm flesh and enter swiftly inside him, pinning him to the shower wall, but after several minutes of petting, his Master stepped away and told him he could stand up.

Mulder's first action was simply to kneel, prostrate at his Master's feet, and kiss them over and over again, while muttering incoherent thanks. Skinner laughed, and allowed him his devotion, then pulled Mulder up, wiped his wet hair back from his face, and kissed his forehead. Mulder leaned limply against his Master's shoulder for a while, caressing the big man's taut, naked buttocks, and then he felt himself being pushed away, and the shower was finally snapped off.

"I'm sure we're clean enough by now," Skinner remarked dryly.

Mulder eagerly opened the cubicle, and plucked a large towel from the rail, holding it out for his Master as he emerged. He wrapped it around Skinner, and set to work drying him off. "Good. Very good." Skinner smiled. He caught hold of Mulder's face between his hands, and kissed the tip of his nose. "That's the sort of thinking that will earn you rewards, little one," he murmured. Mulder's heart jumped in his chest. There were so many rewards on offer here that he wasn't sure which he wanted most. He wanted to be able to come, to play in that fantasy Playroom, to be used by his Master, and welcome his cock into his body, to sleep in his Master's bed, and then there was also his Master's deep kisses, claiming his mouth with his tongue...the list was endless.

"Yes, Master," he whispered, feeling in that moment more a slave than he had done at any point before. He **wanted** to serve this man, he **wanted** to wash him, and dry him, and adore him. That was the easy part.

"Your attention puts me in mind of something else." Skinner grinned at him. "Dry yourself - then follow me."

Mulder did as instructed, and Skinner put on a bathrobe, and walked upstairs to the Playroom. Mulder felt a leap of anticipation as he saw where they were headed - then something occurred to him.

"Master, I, uh, haven't had a chance to...use the lube this morning," he murmured.

"That's all right, slave." Skinner smiled. "I won't be touching you. Just the opposite in fact." He grinned at Mulder's puzzlement, opened the door, and ushered Mulder into the room in front of him. He took his slave over to a large massage table, and brought out a box of oils from underneath. "I'm feeling stiff this morning - do you have any massage skills?" Skinner asked Mulder, who shook his head wordlessly. "Well, just improvise - we'll see how you get on."

Mulder nodded, feeling all too eager to begin smoothing those oils over his Master's naked flesh. While Skinner lay down on the black leather table, Mulder began to warm the oil in his hands, then he placed them tentatively on Skinner's shoulders.

"Harder," Skinner ordered, and Mulder set to work, his long fingers swiftly eating up the newly oiled skin beneath them. He probed into areas that felt tight beneath his fingers, doing his best to smooth out any kinks he found, and he was soon completely absorbed in his task. Skinner lay unmoving, and didn't protest when Mulder naughtily slipped his fingers between his Master's butt cheeks.

"Would you like to serve me there?" Skinner asked suddenly, making Mulder jump.

"Yes, Master," he answered, truthfully.

"With your cock?" Skinner demanded.

Mulder thought about it. "Yes, Master," he admitted, swallowing hard.

Skinner laughed. "Something else to put on your list of rewards to be earned then," he said.

"Yes, Master."

"Have you ever served a top by giving anal sex, Fox?" Skinner asked.

"No, Master." Mulder kissed the back of his Master's knees.

"Well, we'll have to correct that - one day," Skinner mused. "For now - you have my permission to worship me there - with your tongue."

Mulder had never rimmed anyone, but he had been ordered to, so he gently parted his Master's butt cheeks, and slipped his tongue tentatively inside. Skinner was clean, and smelled of soap and oil, and he soon responded to Mulder's attention by wriggling his butt in a most satisfying way. Mulder relaxed and started to enjoy himself, as he teased that puckered opening with his lips and tongue, pushing inside then pulling back, making his Master sigh. He worshipped his Master in this way for several minutes, enjoying the sensation of bringing such pleasure to the big man, to say nothing of the enjoyment of having those tautly muscled buttocks nestled against his cheeks. Finally Skinner let out a groan, and sat up quickly.

"I think," Skinner said, his huge erection pointing sky high, "that I require your urgent services, Fox." Mulder knelt obediently in front of him, and Skinner guided his cock into his slave's waiting mouth, thrusting in and out for only a couple of minutes before coming, his fingers fondling his slave's hair as he sucked.

"That's twice before breakfast." Skinner grinned.

"I'm very lucky, Master," Mulder replied.

Skinner gave a delighted laugh, and caressed the side of his slave's face. "You're doing wonderfully well, Fox. I'm very pleased with you," he said. "If you keep this up, then this afternoon I'll show you some of the delights of the Playroom." Mulder couldn't stop the grin splitting his face in two. "Go and look in the cupboards." Skinner pulled his robe back on. "And bring me the item you'd most like to play with."

Mulder scampered over and surveyed the contents of the cupboard like a kid eyeing candy. There was so much, he could hardly decide which to choose!

"Having problems, slave?" Skinner came up behind him.

"Yes, Master." Mulder bit on his lip. "I was intrigued by the birch you showed me when we first came here, but I'm not sure...I've already been spanked once today," he sighed.

"Fox, I can use the birch as punishment, or pleasure. Believe me - if you chose that, I'd make sure it gave you nothing more than the most deliciously nipping kisses," Skinner told him. "What else fascinates you, sweetheart?" He sounded like an indulgent lover, and Mulder looked up at him, with a beaming smile, relishing the moment. "The harness," he said. "I've been tied up before, but I've never been suspended in mid-air. I've always liked the idea of that."

"Then that's what you'll have." Skinner kissed him fondly. "Now, I think it's time for brunch. After that, you can spend a few hours doing the laundry. If you finish it all to my satisfaction then we'll play later - and I'll allow you to come." He brushed his fingers over Mulder's cock with a wry smile. Mulder felt a giddy sense of triumph at his Master's words, but they were dashed by his next sentence. "Here - this is

a card for someone who'll give you massage tuition." Skinner handed him a piece of paper. "Phone him tomorrow and arrange it please, Fox. I expect you to become fully proficient."

Mulder took the card wordlessly. Hadn't his Master enjoyed his massage? Weren't his efforts good enough?

"And just in case the temptation is too much for you..." Skinner pulled another chastity device from the cupboard, and Mulder sighed. This one was smaller, but just as efficient, and Skinner didn't forget the padlock either. Feeling slightly deflated, Mulder returned to his room and left the massage tutor's card on his night-stand, before jogging down the stairs to the kitchen to eat.

After a large brunch, Skinner instructed Mulder to clear away, and finish doing the laundry he had begun the previous day.

"I'm going out for a couple of hours. Do not succumb to the temptation to go nosing around the apartment," he told his slave in a severe tone. Mulder nodded, feeling faintly aggrieved.

"Of course not, Master. I wouldn't dream of it," he answered. Skinner raised an eyebrow, and Mulder flushed. "Well, I won't now you've told me not to," he amended hastily.

Skinner grinned, and tousled his hair. "Good. If all that ironing is done by the time I get back, then we'll play," he promised.

Mulder nodded, and set about clearing away the brunch dishes with uncharacteristic enthusiasm. Soon Skinner would tie him up with that amazing equipment, do exotic and exquisitely pleasurable things to his naked, helpless body, and allow him to come! Mulder's cock twitched gratefully inside its casing, like a dog panting to be let off the leash. He did wonder where Skinner had gone, but he was too preoccupied to care much. He finished tidying up, and then turned, having the distinct feeling that he was being watched. There, sitting on top of the fridge staring at him, was Wanda.

"Cats..." Mulder told her, sweeping her down from her perch and depositing her on the floor, "are not allowed to sit on refrigerators. Nor..." he jumped into action as Wanda leapt on top of the kitchen work surface, "...are they allowed on any surface in the kitchen except the floor." He placed her back down by his feet again firmly. "Some of us know a cat's place, madam, and it isn't ruling the roost, like old toppy-toes seems to think. There's a new regime around here, Wanda baby, so you'd better get used to it." He glared at her to ram the point home, and then wandered off to the laundry room, ignoring the baleful look Wanda made at his retreating back.

Mulder tackled the laundry with a zeal bordering on the obsessive. He poured every ounce of his energy and sexual frustration into the chore, until he was as steamed up as the iron. Finally, he surveyed the array of smartly pressed shirts with satisfaction.

"I'm gonna come!" he proclaimed to nobody in particular, doing a little dance around the room, without a second thought for how bizarre a sight he must look, frolicking naked save for his chastity device, clutching an iron in one hand, and sporting a still glowing red bottom.

Mulder hung up some of the shirts, and then ran out of hangers. He laid the rest of the shirts carefully on all the available surfaces, and trotted upstairs to Skinner's bedroom to retrieve some more hangers, then ran back down again, whistling cheerfully to himself as he went. He sauntered into the laundry, and

then stopped, his mouth open in dismay. The shirts - those shirts he had laid out, those newly ironed, crisp white shirts were covered in...pawprints.

A fleeing blur of cream and gold zoomed past his ankles, and he let out a cry of incoherent rage.

"Wanda! I'll damn well kill you!" he roared, torn between chasing after the cat and repairing the damage to the shirts. A cursory inspection revealed that the shirts were beyond help. Each one of them was decorated liberally with Wanda's dainty, delicate pawmarks. They would have to be washed and ironed again. Mulder could have wept. He stood there for a long time, feeling a wave of despairing anger. Every ounce of sexual frustration at being so permanently aroused, and yet denied any release, welled up inside him. He threw the shirts onto the floor and ran up the stairs to his room, pulled out his case, and threw his clothes into it. Then he realized that he didn't have any money, and worse than that, he was still fastened into his chastity belt. He had no choice but to wait until Skinner returned home before leaving. Fine. So be it. Mulder eased his legs into a pair of jeans, pulled on a tee shirt, and then walked back downstairs to sit in the front room, awaiting his Master's, no, make that ~~ex~~-Master's return.

Mulder's mood worsened while he waited. He felt almost limp with the agony of his disappointment and a sensation of total and abject lethargy descended on him. What the hell had possessed him to sign that stupid contract in the first place? He was a grown man, of 37, being treated like nothing more than a...*slave* - his mind supplied the word for him dryly. Which of course, was exactly what he'd wanted.

Mulder buried his face in his hands, struggling with this side of his personality. Just what exactly had driven him to this? He could survive without it, couldn't he? Maybe he could re-negotiate with Skinner, ask his boss to consider taking him as his sub - a nice, easy, twice a week arrangement, that Mulder could end whenever he wanted. No obligation, no restriction, no effort. Just 2 nights a week spent in that fantasy wonderland upstairs.

Mulder jumped, startled out of his reverie by the sound of the front door closing, and Skinner walked into the room. His boss was wearing black jeans, a black tee shirt, and a plain black leather jacket. Mulder wished his throat hadn't dried up at the sight of him.

"What's this?" Skinner threw his keys down on the table, and glanced at Mulder's clothed body pointedly. "And this?" He nudged the case with his foot.

"I'm leaving. I've had enough. This is stupid, we can never make it work. It's crazy to think that you can be my Master, or me your slave. I'm a free man, not some unpaid maid!" Mulder exploded.

Skinner looked at him thoughtfully. "Go on," he said, shrugging the jacket off, and hanging it on the back of a chair. Mulder noticed that he had a parcel under one arm.

"I don't want to be subject to your every damn whim! I'm used to making my own decisions - hell, I'm a free spirit, Skinner, you know that. I don't respond well to restrictions like these. Damn it! I'm just not very good at following orders! I can't follow them at work - why the hell should it be any different here?" Mulder yelled.

"What brought all this on?" Skinner asked calmly, placing the parcel on the table, and pouring himself a glass of water.

"It doesn't matter! Don't you hear what I'm telling you? You don't own me, you don't possess me, you can't fucking well decide things for me," Mulder ranted desperately. "This whole situation is absurd. I know it was partly my fault for agreeing to it, and I know I signed that stupid contract, but it's over. You can't keep me here. I don't want to be kept. I need to get out...I need...oh fuck, I don't know what the hell I need!"

Skinner finished his water, and waited until Mulder had finished, his face impassive.

"Come with me," was all Skinner said, when the tirade was over. Mulder hesitated, hopping from foot to foot nervously, and biting on his lip. Skinner picked up the parcel, and began walking, then stopped, and turned back to Mulder. "It's a request, not an order," Skinner said softly. Mulder swallowed hard, then nodded, and followed the other man along the corridor and into a room he'd never been in before.

The room was a small study, with a big desk, and a couple of chairs. There were shelves all around the wall covered in books.

"Take a seat." Skinner gestured, placing the package on the desk, and seating himself in the big chair behind it. Mulder felt himself relaxing slightly. This set up - the desks, and chairs, reminded him of their more familiar surroundings at the Hoover building. He could cope with this. He noticed a pile of files on the desk, and nodded at them, braving a more civilized comment to show the other man that his hysteria had calmed.

"Bringing your work home, sir. That's dedication."

"It is homework, but it isn't anything to do with my job," Skinner waved a hand at the files. "Fox, you've asked my permission to be released from your contract. I'm refusing you that permission," he stated firmly. Mulder looked up, surprised to find that he was feeling simultaneously angry and relieved.

"You can't keep me here against my will," he replied mutinously.

"No, I can't, but someone else might have done just that," Skinner told him.

Mulder frowned. "What do you mean?" He demanded.

"I mean that you contracted to sell yourself into sexual slavery to someone you'd never even met. You didn't know it would be me, Fox. You could have been sold to someone who beat you senseless, fucked you, and kept you tied to the bed day and night with no thought for your well being. You arranged a week off work - you didn't know where you would be going, and I'll just bet that you didn't tell anyone else what you were planning on doing. **Anything** could have happened to you, Fox." Skinner's disapproval was clear, and Mulder shivered. He glanced down at his hands.

"This guy, I mean, you, he - you - had a reputation. I felt I'd be safe..." he whispered.

"Fox, you're on a mission to self-destruct. You have been since the day I first met you, and you will be until someone pulls you back from the edge. I intend to be that someone." Mulder looked up, surprised. "You're mine, Fox, whether you like it or not," Skinner told him firmly. "That's non-negotiable. I made that very clear to you before you signed that contract - there's no way out for you. However, I want a devoted slave, not a miserable one. If you have any problems with the way I treat you, you can tell me

at any time. You have my express permission to do so - in fact, it's an order. I promise I will always listen to what you have to say - and if I don't agree with you I will tell you why. I told you before - your honesty is important to me. Now, I knew we'd have to have this conversation at some point. I'm a little surprised it's so soon, but not unduly concerned. Tell me what's bothering you." He leaned back in his chair, silent, and still, except for one finger that rubbed insistently against his thumb, in an almost hypnotic motion.

Mulder hesitated. All his anger and frustration seemed so petty and meaningless when pitted against this calm, eminently reasonable man. All his fury dissipated into nothing, and he felt his body lose its stiffness, and settle into a boneless mass of self loathing.

"I don't know where I stand with you," he said in a small voice. "I'm not used to this scenario. I thought you'd fuck me, but you haven't. I don't know what you want from me."

"This is all because I haven't stuck my cock up your ass?" Skinner asked in disbelief. "We've done just about every other sexual act, Fox."

"I know." Mulder shrugged, feeling two inches small.

"Fox. Look at me," Skinner said softly. Mulder raised his head slowly, afraid to meet the other man's eyes, but when he did he found them warm and compelling. "What else?" Skinner asked.

"You won't let me come!" Mulder knew it sounded stupid, even to his own ears, but Skinner's expression didn't change. He didn't snort in disbelief, or get up angrily. "I can't stand being constantly on the edge the whole time," he finished lamely.

"Is there anything else?" Skinner asked. Mulder bit on his lip, but he'd started, so he might as well go on making things worse.

"The massage. I thought you enjoyed it, but then you gave me that card and told me to learn how to do it properly. I wanted to please you," he faltered. "I have tried to please you, but I don't think I can. I'm just going to disappoint you like I did with the massage...oh fuck this!" He yelled, getting up angrily. "Why the hell am I apologizing? Let me just leave and we'll pretend it never happened. I don't need **this**. I can turn my back on it, bury myself in my work..."

"Until the next time." Skinner interrupted softly.

"What the hell is that supposed to mean?" Mulder paced the study in a frenzy of emotion.

"That you can't bury this side of yourself forever. You try, and you fail. This situation will keep coming back," Skinner told him.

"What the hell do you know about it? You're just some fucking sadist. You don't know me, Skinner, and you sure as hell don't **own** me," Mulder yelled, wondering even as he did so, why he was losing it like this.

"Sit down." Skinner told him in a firm tone. Mulder clenched his fists at his side, and waged a silent battle with himself, until he remembered that Skinner had the key to the damn chastity device so unless

he wanted to hack around his nether regions with a sharp knife, he had to co-operate. Mulder took a deep breath, and obeyed.

"All right." Skinner said softly, leaning back in his chair. "I wasn't going to tell you this, but I will. Fox, these files here, they aren't work, they're you."

"What?" Mulder looked at the assembled files in astonishment. "You've been spying on me?" He gasped, his usual knee jerk reaction after years of paranoia on the X Files.

"Hear me out." Skinner held up a hand. "I didn't want to take you on, Fox. When you started looking for me a year ago, I did everything I could to avoid you. I knew how difficult it would be at work, and apart from anything else, you do have a reputation on the scene. Let me finish." He glared at the other man as he opened his mouth to protest. "People all said that you were an attractive player, and a good one, you knew what you wanted, and you stated it clearly. There weren't any misunderstandings, and you didn't seem to be carrying around a lot of emotional baggage - although some of the people I spoke to weren't entirely sure on that last point. Everybody spoke of your tendency to want something more than they could offer. They all felt that they'd subtly disappointed you in some way, and the more perceptive ones told me that they thought you were spinning silently, and desperately, out of control. I worried that you would seek ever more extreme thrills, until you got yourself killed in the process. When I spoke to you last week, you confirmed that for me. I went into that first meeting expecting to tell you "no", to get you off my back once and for all without you finding out who I was, but you said something that changed all that for me. I knew I couldn't turn my back on you. I had to help you." Skinner paused, and leaned forward, resting his arms on his desk. "Fox, these files contain interviews with the people you've played with recently. As soon as I took you as my slave, I spoke to all of them, to find out what your fantasies are, and how you respond to various stimuli. From there, I worked out a plan for your training."

Mulder sat there with his mouth open, completely stunned. "I can see..." he observed finally, when he'd pulled himself together, "that you are as meticulous in your pleasure as you are in your work."

Skinner gave a wry laugh. "You could say that. Fox - why do you think I took you on? What do you think the appeal is to me in this situation?"

"Well..." Mulder thought about it. "I don't know. I assume you just like the power trip, the control, the available sexual services..." he trailed off.

"I do enjoy it, yes," Skinner mused, "but that wasn't why I got into all this. I'm not sharing all the details of the whys and wherefors at this point in time, but let me tell you this: a good top gets off on bringing pleasure to his sub, or slave, or whoever he's playing with. Not on inflicting pain, per se, or being a control freak, but on making his sub squirm, and tingle, and beg for it to stop, while all the time desperately wanting more. A good top is also **safe**," he emphasized the word. "Something you don't seem to care about, as you were prepared to sell yourself to a stranger. "

"It's not that." Mulder buried his head in his hands. "It's the thrill, sir. I need to be taken away from myself, and the danger of the unknown was so appealing," he sighed.

"So, I'm a disappointment." Skinner stated flatly.

Mulder's head jerked up. "No, sir. Hardly that. A revelation might be more accurate." He smiled weakly. "You're way out of the league, sir. I've never played with anyone like you. It's been..." he hesitated, then smiled again, "fantastic," he finished.

"And yet you want to leave?" Skinner pressed.

Mulder hesitated. "It's brought up some old fears," he admitted. "You can tell me to go any time you like, but I can't reject you." He bit on his lip, realizing he'd said the one word that gave his motivation away.

"Ah." Skinner smiled. "And you see my refusal to fuck you as a rejection too, don't you?" he said softly. Mulder nodded, gazing at his feet. "Fox, you've only been here for 2 days," Skinner pointed out.

"I know. I'm an idiot. You must hate me." Mulder shrugged. "I'm a huge disappointment. No staying power, huh?" He looked up, trying to smile.

"That's not true." Skinner shook his head. "Although I think you need someone to make sure you stay, which is why I've insisted on your slavery. I will fuck you though - didn't it ever occur to you that I was preparing you for that? Your previous experiences of anal sex have been painful. I'm not small - if I'd just plunged straight in, you'd have been hurt. Now, it still might be a little uncomfortable, but there's some pain you enjoy, and some that's just too much for you. You told me you didn't ask for anal sex from previous tops because it fell into the latter category."

Mulder leaned back, and ran a hand over his eyes. "The butt plugs...they weren't just a kind of humiliation, ownership thing," he murmured, hating himself for having been so dense.

"No." Skinner smiled fondly. "It was preparation."

"Damn, I'm an idiot." Mulder sighed.

"Yes, but you're **my** idiot." Skinner laughed.

Mulder looked up. "You'll keep me?" His heart was in his mouth as he realized just how much he wanted to stay.

"Of course," Skinner said firmly. "There's a lot to be done, Fox. Firstly, I'm going to take you all the way down with me. Think of it as diving. I'm going to take you right to the bottom of yourself - your heart, mind and soul, and we'll find out what's there. I'll be holding you all the way, but all the same it might hurt, and it will probably scare you. You'll have moments when you freak out, and want to run, but I won't let you. We'll face you together, then we'll swim back up together, so that you can breathe freely in the air again, liberated from the darkness, and constant pressure. You've given over your life to me - but you haven't yet learned to give up the control. Once you do, you'll find the journey easier. It's not a journey you can escape from though. You're committed to it. I won't let you go until we're done, and that won't be any time soon. Tell me what you think, Fox - tell me, honestly, what do you want?"

Skinner's dark eyed gaze transfixed Mulder where he sat.

"I..." he closed his eyes, and opened them again, to find Skinner still sitting there, waiting, his gaze never wavering. "I want to stay...Master," he whispered.

"Good." Skinner opened up the package on his desk, took out two picture frames, and placed them on his desk. They contained the contracts they had signed. Mulder's eyes flickered over both their signatures. He was so used to seeing them in the same place, on his work reports, but not like this; this was personal, and it felt good. It felt **right**.

"Let's view this as a reaffirmation of our vows." Skinner smiled. "I want you to keep both these on your night-stand. I want them to be the first thing you look at in the morning, and the last thing you look at when you go to bed. The way ahead is hard, but you can trust me to be by your side every step of the way."

"Yes, Master." Mulder nodded.

"And as for the issue about the massage - Fox I would have told you if I hadn't enjoyed your efforts. Wasn't my reaction evidence enough that I liked what you'd done?" Mulder shrugged, unwilling to cede the point. "Fox - you can't know everything without tuition. Clark Hammond - the man whose card I gave you - taught **me** massage! It's an important skill. I want you know all about the different oils, and how they can be used to treat different ailments. Your massage this morning was delicious - and Clark will teach you how to be even more skilled."

"Oh." Mulder bit on his lip, feeling stupid. It was all so reasonable that he didn't know why he had ever doubted his Master. He hated himself for so nearly screwing up the first thing in his life that had taken him outside himself, and given him some escape. He glanced up at Skinner.

"I screwed up," he admitted.

His Master shook his head. "Everyone makes mistakes, my slave," he murmured. "I might make a few myself during the course of your slavery. Please feel free to point them out to me if I do."

Mulder smiled, wondering if he'd dare. "Um, there's one thing I wanted to know, Master, while you're being so revealing," he said cautiously. "Do you have a camera in my bedroom?"

Skinner looked at him with a curious expression on his face. "A camera? Oh, I see!" he laughed out loud. "You're wondering how I knew about the cock ring and you jerking off!" He got up, went over to where his slave was seated, and put a finger under his chin, looking down on his property. "Do you think I need to spy on you?" He asked, in a deep, throaty voice, "when I know you so well?"

Mulder's eyes widened. "You guessed?" He asked. "How?"

"Fox, I'm not going to give away all my Master secrets to you," Skinner chided, tapping his slave firmly on the nose, "but as this is the first serious discussion we've had since your arrival, I'll give you this one for free. Don't expect any more in future. Before you went to bed I put the idea into your head - by denying you your pleasure, I made sure it was the only thing you could think about. You were new to your slavery - I didn't seriously suspect you to obey me at that point, and I made an educated guess that you wouldn't. In time you'll obey me because you want to, and because wanting to please me is the only

thing on your mind. You won't wake up deciding whether to live or die any more, little one. Have you even thought about that since I brought you here?"

"No, Master." Mulder admitted, a slight lump welling up in his throat.

"Good." Skinner dipped his head and lightly kissed Mulder on the lips. "Now," he stood up straight, his eyes stern, and his demeanor brisk. "We have some issues to deal with."

"You're going to punish me for the way I spoke to you earlier." Mulder guessed, feeling his stomach churn anxiously.

"Yes, I am. If you'd come to me and talked about your concerns quietly, there would be no question of punishment, but I won't be ranted to. Did you do the tasks I set you earlier?"

Mulder's heart sank as he remembered **that** particular fiasco. "Yes, Master, I did," he murmured, "but then the **cat**," he spat that last word venomously, "decided to ruin all my hard work."

Skinner gazed at him curiously. "Show me," he commanded. Mulder led the way to the laundry room with a heavy heart. Skinner took one look at the ruined washing and shook his head, a smile tugging at his lips.

"Dear Wanda," he murmured. "You know, Fox, I don't think she likes you very much." He turned to Mulder, and frowned. "You're overdressed, slave," he commented.

"Yes, Master." Mulder scrambled to rid himself of his jeans and tee shirt, then knelt down in front of the other man, his body quivering slightly as he settled himself into the submissive position, wondering what was coming next.

"Is this what set off your mood?" Skinner asked. "Do you think I'm so unreasonable that I wouldn't recognize a **catastrophe** when I see it?" He smirked slightly at his pun, and Mulder sighed. *Of all the Masters, in all the world, I have to be owned by one with a warped sense of humor...*

"I'm sorry, Master. I just kept thinking about the Playroom, and what you'd promised," he explained. "I wanted it so much." Damn, but that sounded so lame.

"All right. Let me outline what's going to happen next," Skinner told him sternly. "In a minute, you are going to put these clothes back in the wash, then dry and iron them."

Mulder looked up, biting back his anger at being reduced once more to live-in maid. "Yes, Master," he managed to squeeze out from between gritted teeth.

Skinner smiled and shook his head, recognizing the effort that had gone into that little display of obedience. "After that, I'm going to take you up to the Playroom," he said.

Mulder's face creased into a smile. "Thank you, Master," he whispered, leaning forward to kiss Skinner's shoes, feeling guilty for his earlier petulance.

"However," Skinner continued. Mulder's heart did a flip. "This won't be all fun and games. I **will** use the harness, as you requested, but you're on probation - and I'll only allow you to come if I think you've been good enough. Understood?"

"Yes, Master." Mulder nodded, resolving that the other man wouldn't find any fault with him.

"In addition, I will use the item you requested for your pleasure, to administer punishment instead. I'll enjoy the irony." Skinner grinned.

"Master will birch me?" Mulder felt his cock hardening, as he gazed at the ground.

"Yes, Fox, Master will birch you - very hard indeed," Skinner told him in a cool, stern tone.

Mulder swallowed hard but he knew he deserved the punishment - even if he was shaking inside at the thought of it.

The first thing Mulder did upon being left on his own in the laundry room was to get down on his hands and knees, and check behind the washing machine. He found what he was looking for, dragged her out by the scruff of her neck, and held her up.

"All right, missy. You just bought me a whipping," he told Wanda, looking into her baleful green eyes. "So from now on - and watch my lips because I don't want there to be any doubts on the subject - this is war. Understood?" Wanda's tail twitched angrily, and Mulder nodded. "Yeah, you think he belongs to you, but he's mine, lady, so watch out." He opened the laundry door and deposited her on the floor outside, shutting it again with a flourish

Mulder spent the afternoon in an agony of anticipation. He longed to experience the joys of the Playroom, but he was growing more and more apprehensive about the birching. It didn't help that he'd never had any experience of **that** particular mode of punishment before. He didn't know what to expect. He finished his laundry tasks late in the afternoon, and then reported back to Skinner who was sitting at the kitchen table doing some paperwork, with Wanda wrapped around his shoulders, her plush fur enveloping the back of his bald head, like a ruff. Mulder stood there for a moment, examining the pair of them. It couldn't be comfortable for his Master, but Wanda was clearly enjoying herself as her purring could be heard from the other side of the room, and Skinner was gently stroking her tail as he worked, taking care not to dislodge her. Mulder shot his enemy a malicious smile, as he claimed her doting servant's attention away from her.

Mulder held his breath as Skinner examined his work, desperately hoping it wouldn't be found wanting. His Master seemed satisfied though, and told him to take a bath, and relax, before reporting to the Playroom. Skinner unlocked the padlock on the chastity device, and pulled it away from Mulder's cock, and then, before his almost inevitable erection could develop, Skinner whisked the gold ring away too. Mulder's cock sprang into immediate life once released from its bonds. "Careful." Skinner slapped it gently. "You don't have my permission to come yet - that has to be earned," he told his slave. Mulder inhaled deeply, a worried frown creasing his forehead. "I said relax!" Skinner laughed, kissing his forehead. "Pleasure and pain - you'll taste both, Fox, but not more than you can handle of each."

Mulder nodded and scooted for the bathroom, his body starting to tingle in anticipation. When he'd finished, he climbed the stairs to the upper apartment, his stomach flipping inside.

The door was ajar when he got there, and he knocked on it. Skinner opened it a few seconds later, and Mulder stood still, transfixed. Skinner had changed into a pair of tight leather pants, and was bare-chested. He looked divine, with his powerful shoulders, and tautly muscled chest. Mulder couldn't wait to kneel at his feet. Skinner ushered him into the playroom, and Mulder noted that the harness was already set up, hanging from several pulleys in the center of the room, directly under the glass ceiling panels.

"I thought I told you to relax." Skinner frowned.

"I am, Master," Mulder lied, and received a swat on his butt for his deception.

"Then why are you shaking?" Skinner wrapped a big arm around Mulder's neck, and drew him close, stilling his trembling with the sheer warmth and reassurance of his body. Finally, Mulder's tremors faded, and Skinner drew back, his expression stern. "Hold our your hands," he ordered. Mulder did as instructed, and Skinner fastened a pair of furry cuffs onto his wrists, repeating the process with his ankles. Then he tied a wide, soft belt around Mulder's midriff.

"This will support your back," Skinner told his slave, as he worked. Mulder nodded - the belt was extremely comfortable, as were the cuffs. "Now - go to the cupboard and bring me the birch," Skinner commanded. Mulder swallowed hard, and did as he was told, picking up the instrument of punishment almost reverently, and carrying it back to where his Master stood, adjusting the hoist for the harness. Mulder kneeled at Skinner's feet in the submissive pose, eyes down, hands holding out the birch, his whole body a mass of wildly conflicting emotions. Anticipation warred with fear, which in turn threatened to be swamped by excitement, and arousal.

When Skinner was satisfied with his work, he turned back to his slave, but instead of taking the birch from him, he put a finger under Mulder's chin and pulled his face up to look him in the eye. Mulder shivered - Skinner's expression was stern, and determined.

"This will be a proper punishment birching, Fox," he told his kneeling slave.

Mulder swallowed, and nodded. "Yes, Master, I understand," he managed to croak.

"Punishment should teach a lesson - I want you to think about the lesson you should learn from this birching," Skinner informed him. "When I punish you, I want the reason for your suffering to be uppermost in your mind."

"Yes, Master," Mulder said, starting to tremble again.

Skinner stroked his hair, softly, soothing him. "It will be hard, little one, but you'll survive."

Mulder closed his eyes, and nodded, pinpricks of sweat breaking out on his body. Skinner took the birch from his hands, and laid it on a table to one side. "On your feet," he ordered, and Mulder scrambled to obey.

Skinner fastened Mulder's cuffs and belt onto the harness, and tested each link firmly, to make sure they were secure. When he was satisfied, he paused to give his slave a brief kiss of reassurance, before swinging a startled Mulder into mid-air. Mulder gave a squawk of surprise, then surrendered to the

sensation. It was actually very comfortable - his body was supported, and he felt as if he were flying. He was suspended on his front, at waist height.

"I won't ever leave the room while you're in bondage," Skinner told him. "If you feel any distress, tell me. Immediately. It's important. Understood?"

Mulder nodded quickly, then held his breath as Skinner picked up the birch. Mulder tensed, but all Skinner did was run the bound twigs over his back, then through Mulder's open thighs, and over his cock and balls, before continuing down his legs. Mulder lost sight of his Master briefly, then he reappeared, brushing the birch twigs along the side of Mulder's torso. It was a light, scratchy feeling, but it didn't hurt. Skinner stopped in front of the bound man, and looked down on him.

"I think you should watch yourself being punished," he said, propping up a large, gilt-edged mirror on the 'throne' opposite Mulder's hanging body. Mulder looked at himself, soaring through the air like a bird, suspended on the harness. There was a curious kind of beauty in his bondage, Mulder thought. It gave him a chill of arousal to see himself trussed up like this, immobilized, at the mercy of his stern owner. He saw himself as Skinner saw him: a bound, naked man awaiting his Master's attention.

Skinner returned to his side, and continued brushing the birch along Mulder's naked limbs, scratching it lightly under his chest, and over his nipples, making Mulder gasp. Then the stroking stopped, and the birch connected lightly with his bottom. It didn't hurt - in fact it created a delicious nipping sensation over his skin. Mulder sighed. The birch connected again, up and down his buttocks and thighs, over his shoulders, and down to his feet. Mulder could see now why Skinner had told him that he could make the birch an instrument of pleasure. This light tickling was sensuous and erotic.

Without warning the pressure of the licks got harder. Now the twigs descended with greater speed and force on his naked flesh, making him gasp and cry out. Skinner ignored his wriggling, and continued to swing the birch down, confining his attention mainly to Mulder's exposed bottom, but occasionally applying it elsewhere, keeping Mulder on edge, not knowing where it would land next. The combined force of the twigs as they striped his bare backside made Mulder suddenly appreciate Skinner's warning that this was a punishment.

"It stings, Master!" He gasped.

"Yes, slave, it does." Skinner replied, applying the birch with more force. Mulder began to sob now, moving his body in the harness, desperate to escape the instrument of torture that he was sure was flailing the skin from his bones.

"Please, Master...it hurts...ow!...it hurts..." he whimpered desperately.

"It's a punishment, Fox - it will hurt even more before I'm through," Skinner informed him tersely. "Now, have you thought about the lesson you're being taught here?"

"No! Yes...I...ow!" Mulder panted.

"Well?" Skinner pressed.

"It's difficult to talk, Master, when you're...oh fuck!" Mulder yelled as the birch landed on his shoulders, and then again on his thighs, before returning to his already sore buttocks.

"I'm waiting." Skinner delivered another hard stripe on Mulder's bottom, wringing a sob from the helpless man. "What lesson will you learn from your punishment?" Skinner insisted, in a calm, inexorable tone.

Mulder knew the torture wouldn't stop until he came up with a satisfactory answer. "To...not to try and leave!" He gasped.

"No." Skinner slapped down a particularly hard stroke. "That's not what you're being taught here. Try again."

Mulder wracked his brain, trying desperately to think of the right answer. He watched himself being punished in the mirror, his tall, strong, ruthlessly efficient Master reducing him to a quivering, helpless morass of sensation. He felt his cock harden at the raw, sweaty beauty of the scene.

"Lesson...I'm thinking...ow! I said I'm thinking!" Mulder yelled as the birch bit into his flesh with a savage caress.

"Think faster," Skinner instructed. "It's not a very hard lesson, Fox, although I have a feeling it'll take more than this one punishment to drum it home."

Mulder thought back over the day's events and they all kaleidoscoped together in his mind, creating a series of jumbled images. He saw himself ironing, saw Wanda glowering at him from the fridge, saw himself seated in his jeans and tee shirt on the couch, mouthing off at his Master.

"I mustn't be disrespectful to you!" He gasped, pleased with himself. "I won't swear at you again, or throw a tantrum like I did today...I promise...aarrggghhh!" He screamed as the birch descended once more, with full force on his upturned, waiting buttocks.

"It would be nice if you could manage that," Skinner chuckled, "but I'm not exactly going to hold my breath. It's also not the lesson I want you to learn from this birching. Try again."

"I can't...Master, please!" Mulder begged, feeling sure he'd reached his limit, wanting only for the punishment to stop for just one second so that he could think but the birch continued its vicious work, unrelenting, and unyielding. Mulder remembered sitting in Skinner's small study, and hearing his Master talk about diving, or something...he felt like he was diving now, suspended here like this. Then Skinner had told him that...

"I have to talk to you, Master! I have to tell you what I'm thinking and feeling, especially when I'm upset. I have to be honest with you!" he cried out.

The nightmare stopped, and Mulder hung in mid-air, the sweat pouring off his body. Then Skinner was cradling his face between his hands, looking deep into Mulder's eyes.

"Good, well done, Fox," Skinner told him, kissing his forehead, then his lips, before softly nuzzling his hair. "You did well. I'm so proud of you, little one."

He continued whispering praise and endearments, until Mulder stopped panting, and became bathed in a glow of warmth. The endorphin high hit him, and he felt the dual joys of being made to endure hard physical punishment while being suspended like this in mid-air. It made the dreamy sensation of floating away that he always got from the endorphin rush all the more real and satisfying.

"Thank you, Master...thank you..." he babbled incoherently.

"For what?" Skinner asked, in an amused tone.

"For making me...go further than I thought I could..." Mulder sighed.

Skinner grinned, and smoothed Mulder's hair. "I'll take you further yet, little one," he promised in a deep, sexy growl. Mulder closed his eyes and savored the words, the intent going straight to his cock.

Skinner disappeared out of his field of vision, then returned a few seconds later with a cold, damp washcloth. He ran it gently over Mulder's hot skin, cooling the fevered flesh, pausing to lick at the light marks created by the birch, which were already fading.

"Now - I'm going to play with you," Skinner promised. "I'm going to take my pleasure from you slowly, little one, and you are going to submit to everything I want to do to you. At the end, if I'm satisfied, you can come - but not before. Come before I tell you, and I'll get my crop out of the cupboard and add to those welts that I gave you yesterday. Understand?"

Mulder nodded weakly, willing his rampant cock to calm down, and wait until it had permission to explode. Skinner adjusted Mulder's position, turning him onto his back, and reattaching him, checking the links to make sure his slave was secure.

"Comfortable?" he asked.

"Yes, Master." Mulder nodded, throwing his head back and gazing out of the window above him. It was starting to get dark, and the sky was a deep blue color. A flock of birds flew into his field of vision, turned, en masse, and disappeared again. This felt...so damn good!

Skinner brought over a small box of objects which Mulder craned his head to try and get a good look at. Skinner tapped his nose reprovably.

"You'll soon become intimately acquainted with them, believe me," he chuckled.

He fastened Mulder's legs so that they were open wide, then stood between his outstretched thighs. Without warning, he entered one lubed finger into Mulder's ass. Mulder gasped, taken by surprise, then gasped again, as Skinner's hand stroked his thigh, feeling something soft, warm, soothing - fur. A glance down confirmed that Skinner was wearing a glove. His Master stroked him with that smooth, furry hand, while he continued to probe inside his prone slave's body with his finger, adding another, then a third, finding Mulder's prostate, making the captive man writhe in pleasure from both sensations.

"Ah, you like being stroked...like a cat..." Skinner murmured, running the glove up Mulder's chest, and down the side of his neck. Mulder moaned, and nuzzled into the embrace. Skinner continued with these dual caresses for several minutes, until Mulder thought he'd end up purring like a cat too. Then he

jumped, startled, as a hot object landed on his thigh. He glanced down and saw the dildo resting on his skin.

"It's filled with warm water," Skinner told him, parting the captive man's buttocks and sliding the slender dildo between his open cheeks. Mulder tensed, but it was a curiously comforting sensation, warming him inside. He relaxed, and Skinner moved the dildo within his body, sliding it back and forth up the lubed passage. Then he removed it, and Mulder let out a startled yelp as a cold object was placed on his thigh.

"Ice-water." Skinner grinned evilly.

"No..." Mulder twisted, but Skinner parted his buttocks and smoothly pushed the cold, lubed object into Mulder's waiting body. "Fuck!" Mulder wriggled, and squirmed but couldn't dislodge the freezing intruder. It wasn't big, and it didn't hurt, it was just so damn **cold**.

Skinner stoked his thigh again, fondling him until he quieted, then he teased the dildo in and out, making Mulder gasp with every cold lunge. The cold dildo was replaced once more by the warm one, and he relaxed again. Skinner alternated the two dildos for several long minutes, making Mulder alternately writhe, and bliss out. The bound man was aware of his cock growing harder and he groaned, wanting desperately to come. Skinner removed the cold dildo one final time, and took the tip of Mulder's cock between his thumb and forefinger, pinching firmly.

"Not yet," he ordered.

Mulder sighed. "Soon, Master, please..." he begged.

"Maybe," Skinner smiled, and began running his hands over Mulder's prone body. "It feels good having you here, helpless, at my mercy," he whispered, bending his head, and taking one of Mulder's nipples in his mouth. It was the first time Skinner had sucked him there, and Mulder nearly shot through the roof, as his nerve endings, sensitized by the birching and anal play, jangled and screeched in arousal.

"Hmmm, someone likes being sucked here." Skinner disengaged with a grin. "That's good - I'm glad these are such erogenous zones for you, slave, it'll make it doubly satisfying to pierce them." He pinched both nipples at the same time, jack-knifing Mulder's body into the air.

"Yes, Master." Mulder panted, trying desperately to stop himself coming.

"Time for a change of scenery, I think." Skinner flipped Mulder onto his front again, and arranged him into a kneeling position, tightening parts of the harness in places, so that Mulder's butt was completely exposed, his legs fastened wide apart, stretching his anus open, and displaying his most secret body parts to the world. "Look between your legs," Skinner commanded, and Mulder did as he was told, to see himself reflected back, the image in the mirror dominated by his ass, which was just about the only part of himself he could see from this position. He was completely exposed, and without dignity, just a butt floating in mid-air.

A movement distracted his attention, and he looked up to see Skinner unbuttoning his leather pants in front of him. He watched transfixed, as Skinner slid the leather down his long limbs, to reveal that he

wasn't wearing any underwear. His large cock immediately stood up straight, thick and arousing. Mulder made a small whimpering sound as he surveyed the lean, powerful body of his nude Master.

Skinner stood in front of him, lifted Mulder's head to his chest and directed him to suck his nipples. Mulder enjoyed having the big man's arms enfolded around him as he worked, tickling the small nubs of flesh with his tongue, and scraping them gently with his teeth. He must have done something right, as his Master sighed, and leaned into the embrace, enjoying himself for several minutes, before he pushed Mulder away, moved down to his slave's buttocks, grasped them in his big hands, and rubbed his erect cock against them.

"Please, Master..." Mulder pushed back onto that cock, wanting to feel it inside him, to be taken in this most helpless and submissive of positions, overwhelmed, and completely dominated by the other man. Skinner just teased him, rubbing himself along Mulder's crease, but not entering.

"Do you want me, slave?" Skinner asked.

"Yes, Master...please, please..." Mulder begged.

"Not yet!" Skinner laughed, slapping his butt. Mulder felt his whole body go limp in despair at the constant wanting, and being denied. "I **will** take you, slave," Skinner continued in a low, sexy tone, "and I'll use you hard, and fast, but first I want you to think about how you can serve me. I'm going to leave you hanging here, your ass in the air, with this little beauty..." his finger circled Mulder's opening, "exposed and waiting. I want you to focus all your thoughts here, knowing that the only way you can serve me while you're in bondage, is with this..." His finger thrust into Mulder's body, sending a wave of pleasure through the prone man's body. "When I come back, I'll use you well. Until then, I want you to think of me entering you, of how it'll feel to serve me with this part of yourself, and of how you're going to welcome me and worship me here."

Skinner withdrew his finger, and Mulder heard him walk away. He relaxed into his bonds, and tried to do as he'd been instructed. It wasn't hard. His backside was so exposed that it was all he could think about - that and the fact that Skinner was going to put him out of his misery and take him. It made his cock ache with desire.

He wasn't sure how much time passed with him hanging there in that agony of longing, but finally he heard Skinner return. The big man trailed a line of kisses up Mulder's body, finally ending up at Mulder's head.

"I have a little task for you, Fox," Skinner said, nuzzling his erect cock against the side of Mulder's cheek. "I want you to put the condom on for me."

"How, Master?" Mulder blinked, looking at the unwrapped condom Skinner was holding, and his own tied, outstretched arms.

"With your lips, Fox, how else?" Skinner grinned, opening his slave's mouth with his finger, and placing the condom on his tongue. Mulder did his best, but the condom ended up as a soggy heap on the floor. "Hmm, try again." Skinner opened another one, and placed that in his slave's waiting mouth. Mulder tried once more to apply it to his Master's magnificent, erect cock. He did a little better this time, and Skinner helped him by guiding the condom into place with his fingers. "I can see that you're going to

have to practice this. I want you to become fully proficient," Skinner ordered. "I'm going to give you a dildo and pack of condoms to take to your room - you can practice it until you can do it blindfolded - which you're very likely to be asked to do at some point," he chuckled.

He returned to Mulder's buttocks, patting them, and kneading the sore flesh with his hands, sending dizzy waves of pleasure/pain straight into Mulder's cock. Mulder felt Skinner's tongue on his spine, then lower, lapping at his buttocks, before they were parted and he felt the tip of his Master's cock nestle into his anus.

"Do you want more?" Skinner asked, and Mulder nodded, and tried to thrust back. "Slowly, I want to fill you inch, by slow inch, to claim you, and possess you, to make you mine," his Master told him in a low, silky voice. Mulder shivered, and tried not to tense up, as Skinner continued pushing steadily forward. Now he dimly appreciated why his Master had taken such trouble to prepare him. He felt stretched almost to capacity, his body trembling with the strain of taking his Master's large cock within the small ring of anal muscle. Skinner's slow progress was a kind of infinite agony, pushing him open, claiming him with that hard thickness, plunging deeper and deeper as if aiming for Mulder's very soul. Finally, it stopped, and Mulder could feel the warmth of his Master's body against his buttocks. He blinked several times, trying to adjust to the intrusion, to relax his aching muscles around it.

"How does that feel?" Skinner asked, and Mulder felt the other man's hands soothing his back.

"Good..." Mulder panted, "hurts a bit...but good."

"Your body will soon learn to accommodate me," Skinner murmured, stroking Mulder gently, not moving inside him. "I'll use you like this frequently - probably at least once a day, so the sooner you become accustomed to the feel of me inside you, the better." He adjusted his position, and Mulder grunted, gasping slightly as his body made sense of the new sensation. "You feel good, warm and tight - like a glove," Skinner said, continuing to stroke Mulder's buttocks and back softly. "I won't always take such care to arouse you though, slave. At times I'll expect you to serve me without any expectation of pleasure in return. I want you to think of a word..." Skinner moved slowly, steadily, back, the pressure inside Mulder's body decreasing as his Master's large cock withdrew to the tip, then slowly surged back in again. Skinner rocked against Mulder's helpless body, stretching him with his sheer size, and Mulder hung there, his eyes closed, consumed by the moment. "You can choose any word you like," Skinner continued, easing himself in and out again. "When I say that word, wherever we are, I want you to stop what you're doing, take down your pants, and without argument, or protest, either bend over the nearest surface, or get on your hands and knees, and present yourself for my use. There won't be any foreplay..." Mulder moaned, as his Master played skillfully with the erotic possibilities of his submission, creating a scenario in his mind's eye, of surrendering his will to his owner. "I'll use you, like the slave you are, and it'll be a hard, rough fuck." Skinner illustrated the point by thrusting his hips forward, pushing deep into Mulder's body, making him cry out, his body protesting the pain and welcoming the pleasure at one and the same time.

Mulder felt that slick cock pick up rhythm inside him, thrusting in and out, getting faster, sliding into what felt like the very depths of his bowels, and then back out again. He was lost in sea of eroticism. Skinner's voice, outlining his ultimate submissive fantasy was arousing his mind, while his body was being aroused by his Master's skilful hands stroking him, and that hard cock deep inside him, filling him, and brushing against his prostate, sending waves of pleasure/pain coursing through his body. Mulder

loved the fact that Skinner was standing while he used him, that Mulder was situated at just the right height to devour his Master's cock deep inside his body. Mulder's own cock was leaking badly, hopelessly aroused by his plight. Skinner's voice seemed to seep into his soul, connecting with his darkest submissive fantasies, and igniting them.

"You're my property, mine to possess, and take, whenever I like...don't forget that," Skinner stated, thrusting hard and fast.

"I won't, Master..." Mulder moaned, arching his back. Skinner leaned forward, and Mulder felt himself covered by the big man's warm body, as it plunged back and forth into him.

"You feel so good, my dear, sweet, little slaveboy," Skinner growled, his teeth nipping Mulder's skin, his hands solid and reassuring as they petted him. "What's your word, Fox? Tell me the word to say whenever I wish to use you, to remind you what you are, and who you belong to." Skinner's thrusting reached a crescendo, and Mulder felt as if he'd blank out in a haze of sensation.

"Can I choose any word, Master?" He asked, the sweat dripping into his eyes, blinding him.

"Yes - whatever word you want."

Picking a word was the last thing on Mulder's mind, but he screamed the first thing that came into his head: "Wanda!"

He felt Skinner shudder to orgasm inside him, his body convulsing within Mulder's willing, waiting, wilting flesh. There was silence for a long moment, as Skinner lay panting against Mulder's back, his climax over. Mulder enjoyed the sensation of his Master softening inside him, holding him close, connected. After several silent minutes, the other man pulled out, and Mulder's anal muscles contracted gratefully. He felt sore, but utterly satisfied.

He watched Skinner dispose of the used condom, then his Master returned, and flipped him over onto his back.

"Wanda?" Skinner raised an eyebrow.

"Sorry, Master. It was the first thing that sprang to mind," Mulder replied with a cheeky grin. It was revenge, of sorts.

"Hmmm." Skinner eyed him suspiciously.

"Well, you did say I could have **any** word," Mulder added with a butter wouldn't melt expression.

Skinner gave a gruff laugh, and patted his slave's body affectionately. "Yes, Fox, I did, and you can. Wanda it is. Remember your choice - when I use it, I expect your response to be immediate, or I can promise you a long, hard retribution."

"Have I been good, Master?" Mulder asked him hopefully, painfully aware of his hard cock.

"Yes, little one, you've been more than good. You've been excellent." Skinner kissed him lovingly. "And for that - I'll let you come. Just wait a bit longer, until I give the word." He slathered his hand in lube, then grasped Mulder's cock firmly in his hand. Mulder let out a cry, and would have jumped six feet in the air if he had been able to. "Close your eyes," Skinner whispered, and Mulder did as commanded. He felt Skinner blowing softly onto his bare, sensitized skin, and shivered, thinking he would expire soon from an overdose of sensation.

"Do you like poetry, Fox?" Skinner asked, continuing to blow on his slave's naked body.

"What?" Mulder's opened his eyes in surprise.

"Close them." Skinner said, with a chuckle. "As you haven't read the classic novels, I'm also going to assume that you haven't read much erotic poetry either. I'm going to recite one of my favorites to you - close your eyes, and let yourself go. Let me bring you to climax, then wait until I say you can come. When you do, it'll be a moment you remember for the rest of your life."

Mulder opened his mouth to say something, but Skinner closed it with his index finger.

"*Not a word!*" He recited softly.

*"The eyes speak in rivers,*

*the fingers in trees.*

*The body has a language all its own :The body has a language all its own:*

*this time we will send the interpreter home. "this time we will send the interpreter home."*

Mulder closed his eyes, wondering whether this could get any more surreal. First that exotic, masterfully delivered punishment, then the hot and cold play, before being fucked by his Master, in that slow, pounding way, his mind being made love to along with his body, and now poetry! Shit, Skinner wasn't just in another league, he was on a different planet. *All that time spent looking for extra terrestrials and there was one right under my nose... Typical!*

*"I will open you*

*petal by petal*

*taking all the time in the world."*

Mulder felt Skinner's warm, wet mouth descend on his nipples, and circle each one lazily. It felt almost comical, to be lying here suspended in space, while his Master recited poetry to him, and yet he didn't feel like giggling. His body was being caressed by an expert, and that rich, dark voice both soothed and aroused him - one more erotic weapon in the wide-ranging sensual armory his Master possessed.

*"I will build with you a slow fire*

*stick by stick*

*and watch the color of your sunrise."*

Skinner took Mulder's hard cock in his lubed hand, and milked it in a slick caress. Mulder teetered on the brink, holding on by the skin of his teeth.

*"I will play with the wind of you,*

*cover your body with smiles and games,*

*promises and fantasies that disappear*

*without a trace."*

Skinner's warm breath tickled his inner thigh, blowing across his balls, down to his feet, and back up again.

*"I will stir your secret core,*

*witch's brew of potions and incantations,*

*and fell you simmering, rolling,*

*floating in my hand."*

Mulder writhed, as Skinner's caress on his cock became harder and more insistent. He **was** floating, both literally and figuratively, suspended in mid-air, and drifting away on a haze of endorphins and sensation, which he had never experienced before in his entire life.

*"I will fill you slowly up,*

*every crevice and curve,*

*watch feel hear smell taste you*

*growing full."*

Skinner nibbled along Mulder's navel, and up his neck, sucking his nipples again, making Mulder scream out loud.

*"And when every part of you is one,*

*when you are saturated, suspended,*

*water trembling over the brim,*

*I will ride with you over the falls*

*drown with you*  
*disappear all boundaries*  
*tumble over and over*  
*and over and over*  
*until there is only the spinning dizzy*  
*dance beyond dancing*  
*and the great wave crashing to bits*  
*everything, leaving us*  
*strewn with the seaweed*  
*in the sand and the sun*  
*to dry."*

Skinner finished the poem, his slick hand reaching a crescendo as it pumped Mulder's cock.

"Any time you want, Fox," he whispered, his mouth descending on Mulder's, opening his lips and claiming a deep, powerful kiss. Mulder surrendered, his body giving in as he came in wave after wave of explosive orgasm. The sexual frustration of the past few days was swept aside as he came harder than he had ever done in his life before. He was dimly aware that it had been worth the wait, before a blinding white light flashed through his mind, overwhelming him, and causing him to black out for a second. When he came to, Skinner was washing him down with a damp cloth.

"That was impressive," his Master said, gesturing to the cloth. "All right, little one?" His tone was kind and concerned. Mulder managed a weak nod in reply. "Good, I'm going to untie you. Hold on." Skinner gently lowered him, then knelt down beside him and undid his cuffs. When he'd finished, Mulder slumped onto the floor, utterly and completely exhausted. Skinner chuckled, swung his slave up into his arms, and carried him over to the cushions that were piled up on the carpeted side of the room. He deposited the sated man on them, then sat down beside him, and gathered his slave up in his arms. Mulder lay with his head on his Master's lap, completely unable to move. His whole body seemed to have turned into liquid.

"Thank you, Master," he croaked, the sound of his own voice surprising him.

"You're welcome, slave." Skinner ran his large, blunt fingers through Mulder's damp hair.

Mulder studied his Master, committing to memory the face of the man who could reduce him to this boneless heap, taking in the dark eyes, and the sweep of wide jaw, the broad expanse of naked scalp, and the strong neck and shoulders.

"Permission to fall in love with you, Master," he murmured.

Skinner smiled, and smoothed Mulder's dark hair away from his eyes. "Permission granted, Fox," he said softly.

## End of Part 5

### Chapter End Notes:

PS. The poem is entitled *To Whom It May Concern*, by David Steinberg, for those of you who want to know :-)

### Wanda



The pic below was manipulated by **Sergeeva**, to help your visualisation of the Playroom scene ! Email her with slavish thanks for bringing this fantasy to life so tastefully and erotically!

## The Piercing by Xanthe

**Author's Notes:**

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**Posted 10th October, 1999.**

**WARNING: The title says it all really. It's all here, graphically rendered in \*loving\* detail.**

Many thanks to Emma, who told me a very intriguing tale that sparked this story off, as well as providing invaluable technical assistance, and some rather interesting ideas...

Quotation courtesy of my sweet Alex. None of this is beta'd. It's far too much fun to take seriously.

Beautiful title pic courtesy of **Sergeeva**.

**24/7** is an erotic fantasy and NOT a BDSM resource guide. The truth is sometimes exaggerated, or played with, for dramatic effect. For more information, please visit the **24/7 BDSM Glossary**.

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*"A truth, still apparent, though disregarded, that things move violently to their place, but calmly in their place. To put it another way, everything has its right home, the region that suits it, and, unless forcibly restrained, will move thither by a kind of homing instinct."*

**J. Winterson**  
**"Art and Lies"**

Mulder lay in the bed next to Skinner, trying to pretend that he'd been there all night. He hadn't. After that mind blowing sex the previous day, both men had taken a long time to wind down. Skinner had helped his stricken slave into the bath, then they had eaten together in companionable silence, after which Skinner had sent him off to bed. It had been early, but Mulder was too wrung out to argue. He had fallen asleep almost immediately, his entire body in a state of sated exhaustion. Neither of them had mentioned the 'L' word again but Mulder knew that his feelings had undergone a profound transformation. It was too soon for him to know what the implications of that were. He just knew that when he opened his eyes the following morning, and saw Skinner's signature scrawled across the Master contract on his nightstand, his heart leapt. He lay there just looking at it, feeling warm and safe.

After staring at both contracts for a few minutes, he got up and made Skinner his coffee, then some devil in him prompted him to take it up ten minutes early. He tiptoed into the bedroom, and put the coffee and paper on the nightstand, then crept silently into the bed, and snuggled up beside his sleeping Master. Now he was busy convincing himself that he'd slept the night in Skinner's arms. It was a nice fantasy, and it wasn't even spoiled by Wanda's furry presence tickling his toes.

Mulder's whole body felt tingling, and alive, and overnight he had become a great believer in the restorative powers of explosive orgasms. He wasn't really sure what was going on in his heart or mind. He'd started off trying to play Skinner, but somewhere along the way the rules seemed to have been changed, and he wasn't sure how, or why, or even what to do about it. For now, he decided to do nothing, and just give himself up to the moment. Resistance was not only futile, it wasn't even possible in the face of such an overwhelming opponent. Besides, Mulder wasn't even sure that he wanted to resist. For now at least. A nagging voice in the back of his head worried about how he was going to cope with these new emotions when he and Skinner returned to work. Mulder wasn't an idiot - he knew that his passion for his work had only been temporarily dampened during this week spent enjoying **other** passions. What would happen when his duties as a slave conflicted with his duty to his quest? Mulder resolved that he would answer those questions when they arose. For now, he had this week, this one week, with all the joys and terrors that it both threatened and promised to bring.

Mulder mulled over the events that Skinner had outlined to him. Firstly, the piercing. Mulder shivered. Skinner had said that would be Wednesday or Thursday. Mulder ran his fingers over his nipples, wondering how they would look, pierced with his Master's rings. He longed to finally be wearing all five of the tokens his Master had given to him upon taking him as his slave, but his stomach churned at the thought of the piercing. He didn't have so much as a pierced ear, and he wasn't sure how he would cope when that needle pricked through one of his primary erogenous zones. Of course it could be worse...Mulder's cock went into a scared spasm at **that** thought. He continued playing with his now hard nipples. Phoebe had whipped them once, but she had been contemptuous about his inability to cope with as much pain as she wanted to deliver, ruining the scene for both of them. Skinner was right - his nipples were huge erogenous zones for him. He enjoyed having them sucked, and while the idea of being decorated in this way at his Master's hand was a turn on, he was worried that he wouldn't be able to stand the pain.

Mulder glanced at the clock as these thoughts churned through his head, watching as it ticked over: 8:57, 8:58, 8:59...9:00. Then he disappeared under the sheets...and found himself face to face with Wanda.

"Go," he hissed, disturbed by the idea of performing in front of that green-eyed audience. She blinked at him, and didn't budge. Mulder licked his lips - he could see his Master's cock, and longed to show the other man some small gratitude for that mind-blowing session in the Playroom the previous day. Ignoring the cat, Mulder nudged forward and gently started his wake-up call.

Mulder enjoyed this part of the day best. Being able to serve his Master, bringing him to climax, and then having a few minutes nestled on Skinner's shoulder, or draped over his chest afterwards. The big man didn't seem to mind Mulder's need to get close to him while he drank his coffee, and read his paper. In fact he appeared to like it, and amused himself stroking Mulder's body absently while he read, as if his slave were a cat. Skinner's fingers idly played with Mulder's nipples, as the slave lay watching his Master drink.

"Master..." he began.

"Hmmm?" Skinner carried on reading.

"About the piercing..." Mulder hesitated.

Skinner looked down on him, and squeezed the nipple he was playing with encouragingly. "Yes."

"Um, you have done it before haven't you?" Mulder asked.

Skinner laughed. "Yes, Fox. I've done it before."

Mulder sat and considered that information, thinking of Skinner sitting in all those meetings with him for all those years, while secretly having this particular skill. It was scary - and his cock made it quite clear that he found it a turn-on too. All that time spent searching for this uber-top, and he had been sitting within arm's reach, one step ahead the entire time.

"Do you, is there...I mean, do you swab the, um, area, with local anaesthetic?" He asked hopefully.

Skinner folded up his paper, and turned his attention to his slave. "No, Fox," he said gently. "I'll certainly disinfect the nipple, but even if you had it done by a professional they don't usually anaesthetize first."

"Oh." Mulder shivered. "It's going to hurt then?" he ventured. Skinner's fingers continued to brush over his nipples, playing with them. Mulder moaned, leaning into the embrace.

"Fox, it will hurt, yes," Skinner told his slave honestly, looking down into his eyes. "I know these are particularly sensitive areas of your body, but trust me, they'll look beautiful. As for the pain - it's intense, but the worst of it is over with very quickly. There's some throbbing afterwards, and they'll take several days to heal completely. I'll limit playing with them while they're healing - although I will train you to the leash during that time. I find the vulnerable sensation of newly pierced nipples gives a considerable incentive towards the training. Do you have any more questions?" he asked encouragingly.

"Supposing I can't stand the pain? What if I pass out?" Mulder hated himself for being such a wimp, but he was terrified by the thought of disappointing his Master. He had never cared this much about pleasing a top since Phoebe. After she had ripped his chest open and pulled his heart out, he had never allowed himself to get close to another top. He used them, and he didn't care what they got from it or what they thought of him. This was different though. This was Skinner - his **Master**.

"Sometimes people **do** pass out." Skinner shrugged. "As for the pain - you'll stand it, little one, because I'll make you. It's not a choice." He lifted Mulder's chin, and kissed him sweetly on the lips. "Your body is mine to decorate as I wish," he reminded his slave.

"Yes, Master," Mulder muttered, trembling slightly. He loved the words, he just wasn't sure about the reality. Knowing that he didn't have any choice was a relief though. It was out of his hands. He had no say in the matter. Mulder relaxed, enjoying the way his Master was playing with the nipples in question, and arching into the caress. He didn't have to worry about it any more. It wasn't going to happen for a couple of days anyway..."Master?" He ventured.

Skinner sighed. "Slave," he replied, pinching a nipple playfully.

"You said Wednesday, or Thursday? Which day will it be? I'd like to, um, prepare. In my head."

Skinner looked down on him steadily for a moment. "I will give you all the preparation you need," he stated forcefully. "And I think, Fox, that if I told you which day, you wouldn't use the time to prepare - you'd use it to fret."

Skinner considered it for a moment, his expression thoughtful. Mulder looked up into his Master's dark eyes, whimpering as the other man's fingers rubbed his nipples to hard points, making his cock follow suit, straining against the cock ring that Skinner insisted he wore at all times - turning every arousal into an erection of some duration. Sometimes he felt like he had a permanent hard-on which might have been gratifying for his Master but was damn painful for the slave, especially as he wasn't allowed to come.

"You know... I see no reason to delay," Skinner said, unexpectedly. "I'm a flexible man, Fox. I was going to concentrate on the wider aspects of your training for the next few days, but I think, as you're so anxious about this particular event, that I'll move it forward and pierce you today instead. That way you won't have time to worry yourself into a frenzy."

"What?" Mulder sat up, startled.

"Yes." Skinner nodded firmly. "Today."

"Please, Master, I didn't mean..." Mulder floundered, flying into a panic. Today?! "That is, hell, you don't have to do this for me! I can wait a couple of days. No problem!"

"Hush." Skinner kissed him into silence, then flicked his fingers at the floor by the bed. Mulder immediately scrambled down and got into position, knees open, shoulders straight, head down. "All right - listen to me," Skinner said in that low, throaty voice that his slave found so arousing. "For the rest of the day, I want you to be in a state of deep submission. I'll expect you to be able to enter this state at will by the end of our week together, but you'll spend the next few days learning how to reach it. By Friday, I expect you to be fairly proficient - you'll spend the entire party in a deeply submissive mind-set and you won't come out of that until I give you permission."

"Yes, Master." Mulder said, not looking up.

"Good." Skinner patted his head. "The first rule is that you will only speak when spoken to. You will not speak at any other time, unless it is to draw my attention to something important. Failure to follow this rule will result in punishment, which is likely to be several hard strokes of the crop, or cane. Understood?"

"Yes, Master." Mulder could have cursed his treacherous cock for showing Skinner how much this scenario turned him on.

"Good. Secondly - when you are not working on a task I have given to you, you will kneel in this position beside me **at all times**." Skinner emphasized those last words, sternly. "That's important. I want you next to my knee, so I can touch you, or use you if I wish, without inconvenience."

"Yes, Master," Mulder whispered, tingling at the thought of being 'used'.

Skinner placed a finger under his slave's chin, making Mulder look up at him. "Do not just play lip service to this, Fox," he warned. "Use the time to enter into a head-space where you fully embrace your slavery, and accept your Master's will totally. That means no smart comments, no answering back, and no making faces when I ask you to do something."

Mulder swallowed. "Yes, Master," he said.

"Give yourself up to your submission, and you'll do fine." Skinner smoothed Mulder's hair affectionately. "I won't ask you to exist in this submissive head-space permanently. I've told you before - I want a smart, witty, intelligent slave, who is able to act on his own initiative. When I've finished your training, you'll be able to enter into this most submissive state at the click of my fingers, without argument, or resentment. That won't happen overnight though. We have a lot of work to do to help you get there."

"I understand, Master." Mulder could feel himself start to tremble, as he always did when Skinner spoke to him in this serious way. His Master's expression didn't soften, but his voice caressed Mulder lightly as he continued.

"Fox - don't fight it. Today, of all days, it's important that you follow my instruction to the letter. If you do, then you'll find your Piercing to be an experience of profound submissive satisfaction. If you don't, then it'll just be painful."

Mulder's throat had gone dry, and he couldn't even begin to speak. He just nodded.

"I've given you a lot of leeway in the past couple of days," Skinner told him, cradling Mulder's face gently in his hand, stroking the slave's cheek with his thumb. "I wanted to win your trust, and show you some of the treats that were on offer. Now, as it's Monday, I think it's time to get down to some proper work if I'm going to get you ready by the end of the week. I won't ever be harsh, little one," he said softly, "but you will find me very strict. Unless I tell you otherwise, you can assume that you're in deep submission mode all week. Tomorrow, when you bring me my coffee, you'll perform your wake-up duty, and then kneel beside the bed in position until it's time for your morning discipline. That is the morning ritual you will follow this week. If you do well, then you'll be allowed to stay in the bed while I drink my coffee next weekend."

Mulder's heart sank. No more fondling, no more lying with his head on his Master's chest until next Saturday? How would he be able to get through five whole days without **that** little treat.

"Fox," Skinner said warningly. "I've been settling you in gently, but I have very high and exacting standards for my slave. You can expect some severe restrictions during your training."

"Yes, Master." Mulder croaked faintly.

"When I'm satisfied with you, and I think you've learned how to be completely submissive, then I'll allow you more freedom," Skinner said. "I want you to be a credit to me, Fox, and I'm sure you will be."

"I want that too, Master," Mulder said quietly.

"Good. Then we both have the same goal in mind. Fox," Skinner's hand smoothed Mulder's hair away from his face. "There are rewards for learning your lessons well," he said. "If you try hard this week, and make me proud of you at the party, then I'll grant you a treat. What would you like for your reward? A session in the Playroom? A special fantasy played out? Tell me."

Mulder didn't even need to think about it. "I'd like to spend a whole night in your bed, sleeping in your arms, Master," he said, flushing furiously, knowing his fantasy revealed too much, but wanting it too badly to stop himself asking. Skinner's dark eyes looked at him gravely for what seemed like an eternity, but his hand never stopped caressing Mulder's hair. Mulder held his breath, scared that Skinner would refuse him. Instead of it being a simple request, easily granted, he was suddenly aware that he had asked for something of considerable magnitude, and he almost backtracked, annoyed with himself.

"All right." Skinner said, with a nod. Mulder's heart did a somersault. "Pay attention to what I have to teach you, do your best to learn, and obey, and I'll take you to my bed after the Party. However, Fox..." Skinner's eyes held a warning in them. "This has to be earned," he stated seriously. "It's not a foregone conclusion."

"No, Master. I understand. I promise I'll try hard." Mulder said, surprising himself with his earnest reply.

"Good." Skinner pointed to his lap. "Over my knee," he ordered.

Mulder swiftly got into position, arranging pillows under his thighs to lift his ass up for Skinner's attention. His Master didn't immediately dispense the morning discipline though. Instead he examined Mulder's body minutely. "Do you hurt anywhere after yesterday?" he asked, one hand stroking Mulder's buttocks, the other working its way into his slave's lubed anus.

"No, Master."

"What about here - sore?" Skinner's fingers worked harder, opening Mulder up beneath their insistent caress.

"A little, Master," Mulder admitted, with a wriggle that earned him a hard slap on his rump. "Fox, you're mine. You'll allow me to touch any part of my property without squirming, or making a fuss," Skinner told him firmly. "Now, turn around, I want to examine you properly."

Mulder knelt in place as ordered, head facing towards Skinner's knees, butt raised in mid-air. He flushed bright red as Skinner pried his buttocks open, and checked him over thoroughly. His Master's fingers dipped in and out of his anus, cool and probing.

"Fine." Skinner slapped Mulder's butt lightly. "Get back in place. You've been nicely stretched, but there's no tearing," he told his slave. "That's good - it means I'll be able to use you again later today - after piercing you. You might find it sore after yesterday, but as I said, you should get accustomed to being used, and the sooner the better. It'll be an almost daily occurrence from now on. I think a combination of that, and daily discipline, should serve to remind you who you belong to, as well as reinforcing the lesson that you are a slave, and subject to your Master's will."

Mulder felt a thrill running through his body at Skinner's words. He had always enjoyed the extreme submissive kick that he got from the idea of receiving anal sex from a top, but Skinner was the first one

he had trusted to give him that without causing him damage. The idea of being on the receiving end of his Master's attention on a daily basis, struck a nerve deep inside him, and made his cock, that barometer of his mind's arousal, go instantly hard.

Mulder heard Skinner open a drawer in his night-stand. Looking over his shoulder, he saw his Master retrieve a small, hard, functional black leather paddle from the drawer. Skinner looked back at him, and frowned.

"Fox - when you've been placed in deep submission, you'll keep your eyes down at all times," he informed him tersely. Mulder bit on his lip, and rested his head on his arms. Nobody had ever required him to do anything other than pretend at submission before. He was sure he'd wouldn't be able to get away with doing that with his new Master. Apart from anything else, Skinner had told him the piercing would be all the more painful if he didn't try and get himself in the right mind-set. That was incentive enough.

That morning's spanking was hard and fast. Skinner didn't caress him, or lead him in slowly with a warm-up - instead he swung the paddle down on Mulder's ass with a reverberating smack.

"Shit!" Mulder cried, and he was rewarded by a hard smack to the top of his thighs.

"I'm not cruel enough to make you keep quiet during spanking but I don't want to hear anything coherent from you," Skinner informed him, continuing with the spanking at breakneck speed. "What are you, Fox?" He demanded, one hand parting Mulder's butt cheeks down the cleft in the middle and pushing up, squeezing the right buttock into a tightly compressed, isolated, roll of flesh. Thereafter every single slap was delivered to Mulder's right cheek.

"I'm your slave, Master." Mulder answered, trying hard not to wriggle.

"What is your status in this household?" Skinner asked, continuing to concentrate on that one red buttock until Mulder wasn't sure he could stand it any more.

"That of, ow! slave, Master! Owww!" Mulder replied.

"What are your duties?" The paddle peppered Mulder's right buttock with a series of blistering blows.

"To address myself, argh! you and your needs, Master!" Mulder tried hard not to wriggle under the onslaught, but it was difficult. The paddle stopped for a moment, and Mulder felt Skinner's hand move, pulling his left buttock down, close towards the big man's body. Now, his Master concentrated on his left buttock, every blow being delivered with the precision and concentration to detail that Mulder had come to expect from his Master.

"Remind me what you are again," Skinner said.

"Your slave, Master." Mulder sobbed, burying his head in the pillow.

"Your duties?"

"To serve you! Ow!" The tears were flowing freely now. That paddle was vicious.

"And your status?"

"I have none, Master. I'm only a slave," Mulder wriggled under that relentless paddle. "Please, Master, not in the same place all the time...please," Mulder begged, as his left butt cheek felt as if it would burst into flame.

"Does the slave accept the right of his Master to punish him where he wishes?" Skinner asked ominously.

"Yes, Master," Mulder panted.

"I think that in the past when you've been punished, you've viewed it merely as a means to your own pleasure. Not any more, Fox," Skinner stated grimly. "From now on, spankings, whether for your instruction or your enjoyment, are delivered purely at my own discretion. What you want is irrelevant." To punctuate this statement, Skinner stepped up the pace, using the paddle like a maestro, his aim always landing true. Mulder gasped, the pain mingling with Skinner's words and impacting on him in the most profound way. "Stay still, Fox and take the discipline. It's a hard lesson, but one we'll be returning to over and over again until it's learned. Now you've earned yourself some extra attention on this spot." Skinner repeated the hard slaps to the center of Mulder's left buttock until Mulder felt he would have done anything, said anything at that moment in time, just to feel the paddle on some other part of his body. Anywhere but his aching, burning left butt cheek. He dissolved into a helpless mass of completely submissive slave, trying to switch off from the pain in that blistered buttock, to find a way with coping with it.

He thought back to what Skinner had told him about being in a state of deep submission, reliving the words and concept. He was Skinner's slave, and his Master could punish him in whatever way he liked...he couldn't stop him, or plead with him; his Master would continue to his own satisfaction. Mulder was merely a slave, and had to accept whatever was done to his body, which was didn't belong to him anymore. It belonged instead to his Master. Mulder was his Master's property, to be used in any way his Master wished...

Suddenly it stopped, and Mulder realized that he had barely felt the last few slaps as he had concentrated on the implications of his slavery.

"Well done. I think you learned something this morning," Skinner commented softly.

"Yes, Master." Mulder whispered, subdued by the quiet power of his own mental voice. He felt as if he had entered another realm, and he wasn't sure he wanted to leave it. Skinner seemed to recognize this, and spoke in a low, steady tone, not breaking the mood.

"All right - I like this shade of red." Skinner slapped his sore buttocks, making Mulder jump. "Go and stand in the corner of the room so that I can see that red butt on display," he ordered.

Mulder slid off the bed, and did as he was told. He stood quite still, facing the wall, his face almost as red as his bottom. He was used to being naked, but there was something particularly humiliating about the idea of his sore butt being on display. He felt as if waves of heat were rolling off his ass, warming the entire room. About a quarter of an hour passed and then he heard Skinner get up, and come to stand

behind him. His Master grabbed his buttocks, and fondled them with hard strokes of his thumbs on the painful flesh as he gave Mulder his orders:

"In a minute, I want you to go and start my shower for me and set my towel warming. Then you can come back in here and lay my clothes out - sweats and a white tee shirt. When you've finished you can stand waiting for me to finish in the shower, and dry and dress me. Then you can kneel beside me, and wait on me while I eat. When I've finished, and you've cleared away my dishes, you can help yourself to your own breakfast. After that you will kneel beside me again, and wait until I require your further services. Fox - one thing." Skinner's voice was firm and silky whispering in his ear. "I would prefer you not to fidget while you're kneeling. However, you're only human. If at any point you start to ache, or get cramp, just stand up and stretch, or change your position. I don't expect you to ask permission to do that. If you can't stay kneeling, it's acceptable for you to sit for short periods to relieve any aches. You don't need to ask my permission to use the bathroom either - just go quietly when you need to, and return to my side when you're done. You should be as unobtrusive as possible. If I want to notice you, I can assure you that I will."

Mulder swallowed as his Master's voice caressed him, entering that private plane he seemed to have washed up on. When Skinner finished speaking he nodded.

"Yes, Master," he replied, eyes down, fixed on his feet. He was surprised when Skinner drew him into a quick hug, kissing his forehead.

"Fox, you're clever, brave, and independent. I like that in you, and in time that's what I'll allow you to be again. I like your conversation, to say nothing of the vibrant personality it reveals," Skinner grinned fondly at his slave. "I would never, **ever** want that lost. I know it's harder for you to be silent than almost anything else I'm going to demand of you, but it's a lesson in submission that you need to learn."

"Yes, Master." Mulder whispered, spellbound, his head resting lightly on Skinner's shoulder.

"Good." Skinner stepped back, and slapped his butt firmly. "Get moving," he ordered.

Mulder sprang into action, trotted quickly into the bathroom, and turned on the shower, making sure it was the right temperature before finding Skinner's towel and draping it over the radiator. He watched Skinner step into the shower, fighting down an urge to follow him in, and run his hands over his Master's naked body. Instead he did as he had been commanded, and returned to the bedroom. He found Skinner's gray sweats hanging in his closet, and laid them on the bed, adding the tee shirt, briefs and socks from the dresser, and finding his Master's sneakers. Then he returned to the bathroom, and when Skinner emerged from the water, he stepped forward, enveloping his Master in the soft warm towel. He dried the other man with reverence, not even daring to steal kisses this time, just addressing himself to the task. He was fascinated by the tiny fringe of hair around the back of his Master's scalp, and towel dried it with particular care and reverence. He noticed for the first time, much to his own surprise, that Skinner's hair must have been wavy when he was young.

Dressing his Master was more a pleasure than a chore. Mulder loved smoothing his Master's briefs up his long, tanned legs. He couldn't resist taking extra care to see that the other man's cock was nestled nicely into place within the white underpants, lingering over that task more than was entirely necessary. Then he held out Skinner's sweats for him, before handing him his tee shirt. Finally Skinner sat on the

bed and Mulder lovingly peeled his socks on, then tied his sneakers for him, before following his Master obediently out of the bedroom and down to the kitchen.

The silence was strange, and yet curiously welcome, Mulder thought, as he knelt watching Skinner eat. He concentrated every nerve ending on being alert to his Master's needs, jumping up to pour him some orange juice when he emptied his glass, and buttering his toast for him. He lost himself in the tasks, operating on some hazy level of submission that soothed his usually overactive mind. It was as if he had switched off for the first time in his life, and it was such a blessed relief that Mulder wanted to hang onto the moment forever.

After they had both eaten, Skinner took him into the study. Mulder knelt obediently beside his Master resting his chin on Skinner's knee as the big man sat behind the desk. It was nice here, he thought drowsily to himself. He could sit here forever, in silence, watching Skinner work. He wondered if it would be possible to sneak up to the 5th floor occasionally when they were back at the Hoover building, to worship his Master like this. He loved the feel of Skinner's hard thigh under his jaw, and the simple pleasure of waiting to catch a stray caress; a light touch to his hair, or a gentle finger against his cheek.

"I have invitations to send out for your party." Skinner looked down on his slave, and smiled.

"**My** party, Master?" Mulder echoed, sitting up straight.

"Of course it's your party, little one. It's where I'll show you off in all your glory," Skinner chuckled. Mulder tried to keep himself from shuddering visibly at the horror of the mental image **that** phrase inspired. "I've already spoken to various people on the 'phone, but a proper invitation is only polite," Skinner told him. "Here's a list of the people I'm going to invite. You can write out the envelopes, while I design something to go inside them." He handed Mulder a list of type written names, and addresses, and Mulder gave a little moan of distress.

"Is there a problem, slave?" Skinner asked.

"These people, Master...I know some of them," Mulder replied in an agony of humiliation. "You seem to have invited a large number of my previous tops."

"That's right." Skinner looked at Mulder over the top of his glasses. "Do you have a problem with that?"

"No, Master...yes, Master." Mulder hung his head, and gazed miserably at the list.

"Well?" Skinner prompted.

"I have a temper, Master." Mulder admitted, his face flushing bright red. "We, that is I...um, we didn't always part on good terms, Master. I might have been a bit, uh, honest in my opinions of some of them when we parted company."

"And the problem is?" Skinner's face was impassive.

Mulder bit on his lip. "I never thought I'd see them again, Master, that's all."

"No, the problem is that the last time you saw them you treated them to one of your famous Mulderesque rants on their inadequacy as tops, and when you see them at the party, you'll be naked, submissive, and walking on the end of **my** leash. You think they'll enjoy themselves far too much seeing you finally put in your place. Isn't that the problem?" Skinner pressed.

Mulder sighed, every single inch of his body squirming at the very thought of it. "Yes, Master," he whispered.

"You should be proud," Skinner chided. "I will be. They failed with you - I'm going to show them that with the right handling you can be the perfect slave. They'll envy me my slaveboy. You'll walk to heel like a puppy, Fox, straining to serve me, and obedient to my every word. Nothing else will be important - not your previous tops, not their new subs - nothing but serving me, and making me proud of you. Yes, it'll be hard for you, little one, but you'll do fine."

Mulder nodded, glumly, none too sure on that point. He recognized several names on the list, which contained nearly all the key players on the DC scene. The fact that Skinner's party invites included such illustrious names brought home to him just how important a person Skinner was in this circle. He was the property of the most legendary player on the scene; he felt a little glow of pride as he considered that fact. The thought of being displayed naked, pierced, marked, and obedient in all his rings, in front of that forbidding audience still scared him shitless though. Supposing he did something wrong? Supposing he let his Master down? Mulder trembled. It didn't bear thinking about.

Skinner designed a neat invitation, just plain black lettering on white card, announcing that he had a new slave to unveil, and stating that the dress code was 'casual', and the Playroom would be open for his guests' amusements. There was also an ominous note at the end: *Refreshments and entertainment provided.*

"What will the entertainment be, Master?" Mulder asked.

"Why, you of course, little one. What else?" Skinner chuckled, patting his slave's head affectionately. Mulder had a nasty feeling that his Master had something special in mind for him.

When they'd finished, Skinner ordered him to dress in sweats, and then took him down to the gym.

"I usually find the place is pretty empty." Skinner handed Mulder his towel, and began his warm-up stretches. "Especially during the day on a weekday. It's a small gym and the equipment isn't particularly fashionable. Most of the people who live here prefer to go to gyms where they can see and be seen. I'm don't give a damn about that crap so this place suits me fine." Mulder nodded, transfixed by the sight of his Master's rippling biceps as he swung an arm above his head, and flexed the muscle. "Do you use a gym?" Skinner asked, placing his leg on the window ledge, and leaning forward over it, treating Mulder to the prefect vision of taut gray-clad buttocks.

"No, Master. Usually I just run and swim."

"That's good aerobic exercise. Running can be hard on the joints though," Skinner told him. "Using the track machines here will give you a similar result, without the stress on your knees."

"Running isn't about the exercise so much, Master," Mulder murmured.

"What is it about then?" Skinner glanced at his slave, his expression curious.

"It's...escape, Master," Mulder confided. "When I'm out running, I can let my mind wander. I feel like I'm floating...I feel free."

"Do you sometimes run too far, too fast - so that you can get the endorphins rush?" Skinner asked.

Mulder flushed. "Yes, Master," he admitted.

"And you ran more when you didn't have a top available who could provide you with the endorphins in a different way?" Skinner placed both his hands against the wall, and pushed one of his long legs back, leaning forwards, but he still gazed at Mulder, an intent expression in those dark eyes.

"Master knows me too well."

Mulder crossed his arms over his stomach, suppressing the sensation of fear that Skinner's words had woken in him. He had never been known like this. Nobody had ever taken the time or trouble to **get** to know him like this. No, that wasn't strictly true - he had never let them. Mulder felt a lump form in his throat. Sometimes he had gone out running for hours at a stretch - usually on cold, wet nights, when the atmosphere suited his moods. He had been swallowed by the darkness, and had allowed it to eat him whole, taking him down to a level of existence where he didn't have to think - he could just be. It was the same place Skinner seemed to want him to go to while in this deep submissive mode, and it scared him. It was a place where he was used to being alone - his secret place achieved through sweat and pain, and now Skinner wanted to accompany him there, to follow him in, and stand beside him. Mulder wasn't sure he could share. Looking back, he could see that his marathon runs were just another way in which he had sought to control both his body and his mind, to seek respite from the demands of both - demands he couldn't meet. He had sought to bludgeon himself into submission, and Skinner was showing him a different path to the same end. It was as if someone had offered to share a burden with him, and he was both grateful to be relieved of the load, and scared of giving it up, at one and the same time.

"Fox," Skinner's voice was soft, like a light kiss, breaking into his reverie. "You can still run - but ask for my permission first. I might not always give it. In the meantime, try using these exercise machines. I'll show you how they work."

"Yes, Master." Mulder nodded.

"I'll also show you the settings I use for them. I want you to remember the seat heights I prefer, the number of weights I use, and any other details I show you. When we come back tomorrow, you can go ahead and prepare each machine for me when I'm ready."

Mulder nodded again, relieved to have something practical to occupy his mind. He knelt by the treadmill and watched Skinner do a quick warm-up program on it, before moving onto to the kayak machine, and then various other pieces of equipment, in quick succession. The session was finished off by a bout of rigorous weight lifting. The sweat was pouring off his Master by this point, making his body gleam as if oiled, and the number of weights Skinner could lift seriously impressed Mulder.

Skinner grinned at his obvious admiration. "I have to keep fit if I'm going to whip recalcitrant slaves into shape. Excuse the pun," he said as he accepted his towel from his slave, tousling Mulder's hair in the process.

"I've noticed that Master's puns **are** excruciating," Mulder observed.

"So are Master's whippings, so I'd take care if I were you, little one." Skinner winked, and slapped Mulder's butt firmly, making his slave yelp.

They returned to the apartment, where Skinner instructed Mulder to kneel in silence while he took a shower. Mulder fully intended to obey... but after 5 minutes of silent kneeling he found he couldn't reach that restful place in his mind that he had discovered earlier. His brain wouldn't shut down - it kept buzzing at him. How did Skinner understand him so well? What had those other tops told his Master? What were the contents of those files in the study just along the corridor? Mulder risked craning his head to peer in the direction of the study, and from there it was really only one short, scurrying, breathless walk to the door of the study, and a quick prayer for good luck as he turned the handle and tiptoed inside.

The files were laid out neatly on Skinner's desk; he had never known his Master to be untidy in his work or his play. Mulder took a deep breath, but this was no different to the many other places he had broken into when he knew he shouldn't. True, the penalties were slightly different: on those other occasions he had risked death, but this time he was only risking his Master's wrath. How come then, that he felt more nervous doing this than he had on all those other occasions put together?

Mulder flicked open the first file, one ear straining to hear his Master's footstep on the stair. He was sure that if he heard him, he could scurry back just in time to avoid Skinner finding out about his disobedience. The files were all written in Skinner's neat scrawl, and Mulder didn't have much difficulty deciphering them. A quick survey revealed that Skinner had been as meticulous as Mulder had known he would be. There were dates, times, and exact quotations - Mulder recognized the phrasing of one of the tops. If he closed his eyes he could even hear the man saying the words.

"Mulder fights you, you know? Even when he was giving in I felt like he was just playing me along. It was crazy - like a fucking battle, and I don't think I ever damn well won. After a session with him I used to come out feeling like I was the one who'd just been topped."

Mulder read silently, chewing on his lip. He wasn't sure he **wanted** to know in plain English precisely what his previous playmates had thought about him but it was such fascinating reading he couldn't tear himself away. He recognized the description of himself all too well though - he was just surprised that he hadn't managed to hide himself better.

"Fox." The word was spoken softly, from a position just behind his left ear, and all the hair on the back of Mulder's neck stood instantly on end. He froze, like a cat caught by the scruff of its neck, body dangling, helpless and immobile. He could feel Skinner standing directly behind him, warm, and oh, so dangerous.

"Master." He closed the file, and replaced it carefully on the desk, then turned, sank to his knees in one swift motion, and kissed Skinner's feet. "I'm sorry, Master," he whispered.

"No, you're not; but you will be." Skinner lifted one booted foot, and raised Mulder's chin with it. Mulder looked reluctantly into those dark, dangerous eyes. "Following orders never has been your forte, has it?" his Master commented, in a deceptively light tone.

Mulder shivered. "Please, Master, I can explain."

"I intend to give you every opportunity to do just that," Skinner said. "Before I whip the living daylights out of you."

"Master..." Mulder looked up, seriously scared. "Please, I'm sorry. It won't happen again."

"Yes, it will - until you learn," Skinner said. Then, unexpectedly, he crouched down in front of Mulder, and took his face in his hands. "This isn't work, Fox. Whenever you disobeyed me there, the only sanctions I had at my disposal were the empty threats of dismissal, and the tedious official reprimands, such as warnings on your file, which you don't give a damn about. You put me in a difficult situation: how could I reprimand you in any way which had significance without booting you out of the FBI, which common sense told me was the only reasonable solution, but which I could never bring myself to do. So, you forced me to get creative, and I came up with a host of petty humiliations and punishments, which, I think, caused you some small degree of discomfort."

"Tape surveillance." Mulder winced, keeping his face perfectly still in his Master's hands, like a stunned mouse between a cat's paws. "Yes, Master, you were creative, and I did hate it."

"Apart from that, my only weapon was long sessions of punitive rhetoric. I hope they were as unpleasant for you as they were for me," Skinner murmured.

"Master has always been very skilled at telling me off," Mulder said, looking down at the ground, unable to keep the eye contact. "Trust me, sir. It had impact." He remembered the many times he had stood in Skinner's office, undergoing one of the AD's famous tongue-lashings, and wishing he were anywhere else in the universe.

"Now though...we are in a different situation." Skinner's voice was silky. Mulder looked up in surprise, and saw the grim smile on his Master's face.

"Master is going to enjoy this," he whimpered.

"Yes, Fox, Master is going to enjoy this very much indeed. Just think of it as payback for all those times you disobeyed me in the past, when I couldn't do more than give you a talking to." Skinner released his face, and stood up. "The Playroom is open. Go up there, and kneel in front of the throne. Fox..." Skinner stopped the slave with his foot. "This is a different kind of kneeling to what I showed you before. I want you to press your body down on your knees, and place your forearms on the floor in front of you, as if giving obeisance to an Emperor. Your nose should touch the floor. I want you to stay in that position until I come up to give you what you deserve. I call this the Confessional position - when you're in it, I'll expect you to talk, openly, and honestly. You won't be looking at me, and I won't interrupt you. Now, go!" he barked. Mulder scrambled to obey. He ran out of the study at full pelt, and chased up the stairs two at a time in his haste.

It felt strange to open the door to the Playroom without Skinner being there beside him. He tiptoed over to the throne in awe, and knelt before it, in the position his Master had instructed him to assume. It wasn't until he was in place that he realized his heart was thudding in his chest, and he was more terrified than he had ever been in his life before. This was worse than haunted houses, worse than vampires and werewolves, worse even than Scully in gun-toting mode. In short, it was worse than just about anything else he had ever encountered. Mulder began to tremble.

He wasn't sure how long Skinner kept him waiting; it felt like an eternity but he suspected it was probably more in the region of twenty minutes. When he heard his Master's footsteps clicking across the Playroom towards him he couldn't decide whether relief or terror had the upper hand in his heart. The footsteps came to a halt by his ear. Mulder held his breath. He could see his Master in his mind's eye, staring down on his naked, contrite, terrified slave, and his trembling intensified.

"You'd do well to remember how scared you are right now," his Master said softly. "Maybe in future you'll think twice about disobeying me."

"Yes, Master," he croaked. He heard Skinner move away, and seat himself on the throne. "All right, slave, your explanation please - and make it full and thorough. You won't save yourself a whipping but you might earn yourself a reprieve on how harshly it's delivered."

Mulder swallowed, and wondered what he should say. "I was scared, Master," he volunteered at last.

"Of me?" Skinner asked.

"No, yes...partly. Of myself too - and of what you knew about me. When we were in the gym, I felt as if you'd found my soul, and laid it bare. That scared me. I didn't know how you could know me so well. I went to look in the files to see what **they** had told you about me."

"And did you find what you were looking for?" Skinner's voice was calm, and deep.

Mulder felt his nerve grow stronger. "No, Master," he admitted.

"I'm not surprised," Skinner snorted. "Fox, I've learned a lot about your submissive fantasies from those files, and the games you liked to play, but none of it comes close to telling me about you in the deepest sense of the word. I've learned that from watching you work for the past 6 years. I know you sometimes don't sleep, because you arrive at work with dark rings under your eyes. I know you sometimes don't eat because I've watched you toy with your food, and I know that your demons sometimes rise up to slay you, because of the shadows I've seen in your face and the dejected set of your shoulders. I know you walk a fine line between life and death, because I've read your reports, and I know that you sometimes long to fall into the abyss because I've seen it in your eyes."

Mulder looked up wordlessly, forgetting about the position he had been ordered to keep, and gazed at this man who spoke about him as if he cared. Yesterday, Mulder had asked for permission to fall in love with his Master, but today he knew it was too late: he had already fallen in love with him. Not just for the sexual pleasure he knew the other man could give him like the maestro he was, but for the fact also, that for the first time in his life, Mulder didn't feel that he was struggling on alone any more.

"Master should punish me hard," he whispered, burying his face in his knees again, scrunching himself up tightly.

"We haven't finished yet," Skinner told him firmly. "Before I decide on the punishment, I want more information. What did you learn from those files?"

"Nothing good." Mulder gave a short bark of laughter. "They seemed to say...mostly negative things about me. They didn't like me. That's fair enough." He shrugged. "When I first came to you, Master, I told you I was a good sub - the best you'd find. I was wrong. In my heart I wasn't a sub at all."

"I know that." Skinner gave a wry laugh. "You will be though, Fox. I'll take you there, and you'll see what you've been denying yourself for so long. You're wrong about the files though. Your tops did like you; nearly all of them mentioned that they found you very endearing. You seem to have chosen to edit that information out."

"Maybe, Master." Mulder said wretchedly. "I'm sorry for looking in the files. I've failed you."

"No, you failed yourself, Fox," Skinner told him. "What happened? This morning you seemed to be enjoying the deep submission I instructed you to learn. What was the trigger that snapped you out of it?"

"I'm not sure." Mulder bit on his lip.

"All right - tell me how you felt when you were in that headspace."

"Serene." Mulder looked up again, his eyes glowing. "It gave me peace; respite from all the shit that goes on in my mind, Master."

"Head down," Skinner told him. Mulder obeyed instantly. "Serene - did you enjoy that feeling?"

"Yes, Master, but I couldn't stay that way."

"You couldn't be expected to; it was a new state for you and it's hard to learn, but you should have told me you were coming out of it, Fox. I know lots of tricks that would have put you back under. Next time, tell me **before** you get yourself into this kind of trouble."

"Yes, Master." Mulder mumbled into his knees.

"Is there anything else?" Skinner demanded, his voice penetrating Mulder's huddled form. Mulder was going to shake his head, but instead he found himself talking.

"Master...I think...I was scared of the commitment of accepting your permanent mark on my body." Mulder knew he had hit on the truth, as he began trembling again. He was glad he didn't have to look at his Master - it made the confession easier. "I'm afraid of the pain too, Master. Phoebe...I had a fantasy once that I asked her to act out. I asked her to whip my nipples, and she did - but she did it so hard that she made me bleed. I...couldn't handle the pain, Master. She was disappointed in me. I wanted to please her, and that hurt more than the pain. I'm scared of the same thing happening with you, Master. I'll disappoint you."

"Fox," Skinner's voice was gentle. "You've been shot, beaten up, involved in car wrecks, hurt in dozens of different ways in the course of your job. You don't need to prove to me that you're brave. I already know that." Mulder heard his Master move, and a second later, he was surprised to feel a tender hand on his hair. "Your piercing isn't a punishment, Fox, it's a celebration. Trust me - surrender yourself to me, and I'll finish what we started a few days ago, with a permanent affirmation of those contracts we both signed. Kneel up, and look at me."

Mulder did as he was told, and drowned in those strong, knowing, dark eyes. "It'll hurt, but the pain will be erotic - I promise you that. The endorphin high will make you buzz, little one. Phoebe didn't understand her responsibilities. I do. This will be different. Trust me." Skinner fondled the side of Mulder's face, then leaned down and kissed him softly on the lips. Mulder moaned and opened up, wanting his Master's tongue, but Skinner laughed and pushed him away.

"We'll spend the afternoon preparing for the ceremony, Fox. By the time it happens, you'll be ready. Now, before I punish you, I want to taste the flesh I'll be piercing later. Come with me." Skinner sat back down on the throne, and beckoned Mulder to kneel in front of him. Then he closed his legs around his slave, trapping him there. "Closer." Skinner pulled him in. "Kneel up straight, that's good." His Master dipped his head, and flicked a tongue over Mulder's nipples, making them go immediately erect. "Do you like having these clamped?" Skinner spidered his fingers over his slave's nipples, squeezing them.

"Clamping hurts, Master," Mulder replied.

"Yes, but do you like it?" Skinner asked, tugging at both nipples playfully.

"Sometimes, if it's done right." Mulder admitted. Skinner's mouth nuzzled Mulder's right nipple, and then sucked on it. Mulder moaned, putting his head back, arousal shooting through his veins. The sucking got harder, the intensity too much to bear, and Mulder put his hands up to push his Master away for a moment's respite from the pleasure/pain. "You forget yourself, slave," Skinner told him firmly. "Your body is mine to play with as I want. Put your hands behind your back."

"It was too intense..." Mulder began.

"Behind your back - now!" Skinner ordered. Mulder obeyed, then watched as Skinner undid his belt. He wondered if his Master was going to whip him for this latest disobedience, but instead, Skinner tied his hands firmly in place with the belt. "Now, you'll let me touch you where and how I want, when I want - you don't have the right to withhold any part of yourself from my attention," Skinner said firmly. Mulder nodded, his cock going rock solid, and he moaned as Skinner returned his attention to his nipples, sucking hard on each one, reducing his slave to a state of quivering, moaning insensibility. Then his Master began to nibble, teasing the flesh with little bites that stopped just as they started to really hurt. Mulder squirmed, sweat running down his face as he accepted the exquisite torture.

"I can't wait to pierce you," Skinner murmured, drawing back, his fingers taking the place of his mouth, twisting Mulder's nipples hard. "Do you have any idea what a turn on for me that is? Think how I'll feel when we're sitting in a meeting back at work, knowing that you're wearing **all** my rings - but only one of them will be visible." He drew Mulder's ring finger up to his lips and kissed it. "Knowing that you're wearing my collar..." he traced the slender gold chain, "and my cock ring," his hand brushed against Mulder's straining cock, "and that underneath your shirt, you're wearing my other rings, embedded in

your flesh, placed there by my own hand. It's a beautiful thought, Fox." Mulder could see the picture his Master had painted for him. Himself, sitting across a table from Skinner, surrounded by serious FBI officials in suits, and him bearing this delicious secret underneath his shirt - proudly wearing the symbols of his Master's ownership, embedded in his very flesh.

"Yes, Master...please," he whispered. Skinner smiled, and delivered a light kiss to each reddened nipple.

"Soon, slave," he promised. "We have a punishment to deliver first, don't we?"

"Yes, Master." Mulder sighed.

"You know..." Skinner grasped his chin firmly, and looked at him, "you'll always be spanked once a day - that's a given. However, it would be nice if you could just once get through the day without earning yourself extra punishment. Trust me - when you're back at work, sitting on a hard chair all day, you'll regret it if you make me deliver extra whippings. You've been here three days, and earned yourself extra swats over and above your daily slave discipline on all three so far."

"I'll try harder, Master," Mulder promised.

"Good. Now get up and go to the cupboard. I want you to get out every single different kind of implement for delivering your punishment that you can find. Just one of each - a switch, crop, paddle, and so on."

"Master is going to use each of them?" Mulder asked, his heart thudding in his chest.

"Yes, I am. And you, little one," Skinner punctuated his endearment with a light twist to one of Mulder's nipples that made his slave gasp, "are going to give each one a rating for how painful it is. I want to find out how you react to each implement. Then, in future, I'll know which one to use for minor offenses, and which one to get out when we have something really serious to address." He undid Mulder's hands, and pushed him in the direction of the cupboard. "And Fox?" Mulder turned around, a questioning look in his eye, "be honest. You're in enough trouble right now without making it worse for yourself."

"I wouldn't lie, Master," Mulder replied, somewhat indignantly.

Skinner grinned, and gave him a light swat on the butt. "No, I don't think you would!"

Mulder took a sleek, black leather paddle to his Master first. He held it reverently in his hands, and knelt before his Master, holding it up to him. Skinner took it, and placed it on the table. Mulder returned to the cupboard, and found a strap. He repeated the journey with a heavy rattan cane, a riding crop, and a flogger, then found a heavy rubber tawse. The last object he brought out was a long whip, with weighted tips. Skinner took one look at it, and shook his head.

"I will give you a proper whipping one day, but not today. We'd need to create a lot of headspace for that," he said. Mulder returned the whip to the cupboard, shivering at the feel of that heavy leather in his hands. "I think we have enough to be going on with," Skinner surveyed the implements. "I'm going to tie you for this - stand up to the whipping post." Mulder did as he was told, quaking inside. Skinner fastened his hands just a fraction too high, so that he was standing on tiptoe, then knelt down and tied his legs as well, keeping them wide apart. Finally, he encased Mulder's testicles in the same protective

leather pouch he'd used previously, when marking him. "The good thing about this is that you won't need marking again for a couple of days," Skinner chuckled. Mulder made a face at the wall. As Good Things went, he didn't rate this particular one very highly.

"I'm going to give you two strokes with each." Skinner picked up the paddle, and delivered a sound thwack across Mulder's butt without any warning. Mulder gasped - he was still sore from the thorough spanking he'd received this morning. The second one landed with a thud across the center of his butt. "Reaction?" Skinner asked.

"It's a dull kind of pain, Master. Heavy," Mulder said. "It doesn't hurt too bad. Maybe you could use it for lighter offenses?"

"Very well." Skinner picked up the cane, and stroked a line along Mulder's butt, before delivering a firm lick.

"Shit!" Mulder bucked into the air as much as his fastenings would allow. Another blow came down on his backside, and he whimpered. "That **bites**, Master. It's worse than the paddle - much worse."

"All right." Skinner picked up the strap, and stroked two swats across Mulder's butt in quick succession. Mulder fought back a sob.

"It's painful, Master. Not as bad as the cane, but worse than the paddle."

"Good. You're doing well." Skinner paused for a moment, and stroked Mulder's striped butt lovingly with gentle fingers. "You're pinking up, sweetheart," he whispered in a chillingly erotic voice, "two nice welts, and a glowing ass." He bent down and kissed the ass in question, then licked it. Mulder shivered. "Let's continue." Skinner picked up the riding crop, and delivered the strokes quickly.

"Not quite as bad as the cane, Master, but almost," he whispered. "They sting rather than bite."

Skinner nodded, and retrieved the heavy tawse from the table. "Now, Fox, I want you to remember to take a lesson from this punishment," he said in a solemn voice. "Have you ever been spanked with a rubber implement before?" he asked.

"No, Master," Mulder looked back over his shoulder at the implement in question. "Does it hurt, Master?"

"Yes, Fox. This is a real heavyweight. Two will be more than enough to make you regret disobeying me, I think, but just to make sure the lesson goes home, I'm going to double that. Ready?"

"Y...yes," Mulder said uncertainly. He buried his head in his arms, and then yowled out loud in sheer pain as the heavy tawse made impact on his buttocks with a loud thwapping sound. "Worse than the cane, Master, much worse..." he panted, hopping as much as he could within his bonds. "Please, don't use it again, Master."

"I promised you four, and four's what you'll receive," Skinner told him. Mulder tensed, waiting for the blow, and when it came it didn't disappoint him.

"Oh shit, Master...that, that instrument is **demonic**," he sobbed, lines of flame radiating out from his butt.

"I did warn you. Perhaps it'll help remind you of the consequences of disobedience in future," Skinner remarked. "Brace yourself - and remember that the pain is a direct result of your behavior." Skinner swung the tawse against Mulder's naked, vulnerable bottom again. Mulder squealed, and his whole body shook.

"That's bad, Master. It hurts more than anything," he panted.

"Not quite **anything**, but nearly," Skinner replied tersely. "Now, one more and then we're done." He didn't give Mulder time to think about it - the next stroke came down hard and fast, and Mulder let out another roar of pain, shockwaves of pain reverberating through his ass.

"How did you know, Master?" He asked weakly, as the pain subsided.

"Know what, little one?" Skinner kissed his forehead firmly.

"How that feels." Mulder moaned, enjoying the feel of Skinner's hands caressing his body.

"I wouldn't try out anything on someone else that I hadn't first tried on myself," Skinner replied unexpectedly. Mulder tried to come to terms with the mental image **that** sentence evoked, and failed. He resolved to find out more about his Master's past when his butt wasn't distracting him by hurting so much.

"Relax, your punishment's over." Skinner soothed him. "What did you learn?"

"Not to disobey you, Master," Mulder said quickly.

Skinner smiled, and kissed him again. "Good. Now, I'm going to use the flogger, but this will be nice - you'll enjoy this." Skinner untied Mulder and re-tied him loosely, and more comfortably. Mulder relaxed into his bonds, as his Master swirled the flogger over his body; up and down, down and up, kissing him with the warm suede strips. Mulder entered a blissed out sensation of hazy peace as the endorphins swept in, taking over, and making his whole body tingle. His cock hardened, and strained against his ring.

"You'll come later, Fox," Skinner promised. Mulder nodded, satisfied with that. Later...later he would be pierced...later he would come. He still feared the one as much as he looked forward to the other.

Skinner used the flogger liked the expert he was until Mulder was perched, dripping on the edge of erotic bliss. Then Skinner stroked his hair softly, and whispered to him.

"Who do you belong to, Fox?"

"You, Master," he replied, dreamily.

"And what can I do to you?"

"Whatever you like, Master."

"Good boy. I want you to stay in that place in your head while you go to your room, and bring me the gold rings."

"Is it time, Master?" Mulder looked up, the fear leaping into his eyes.

"It's time." Skinner kissed him reassuringly, then untied him, holding him up until he got his balance. Mulder walked slowly to his bedroom, fighting down the fear and anticipation. He found the gold rings, and walked back to the Playroom, then stopped, on the threshold. Skinner had changed - instead of his jeans, he was now wearing a pair of tight leather trousers, and a soft cream-colored shirt that hung loosely, and comfortably from his muscled frame. He looked like an old fashioned romantic hero. Mulder sighed.

"Come in, sweetheart." Skinner beckoned him in, and locked the door behind him. "Kneel down in the center of the room, and put a ring in each hand - close them into fists. That's right. Now close your eyes, and don't think about anything but how I'm going to make those rings part of you."

Mulder did as he was told, feeling the gold warm up under his fingers. Soon they would decorate his body, placed there by his Master's hand. He heard Skinner move around the room, and fought down an urge to open his eyes, concentrating instead on the rings, as he had been ordered.

"Okay - open your eyes, but don't move," Skinner commanded him a few minutes later. Mulder did, and looked around in surprise. Skinner had pulled the blinds down over each window, plunging the room into darkness. Now his Master was lighting what looked like a hundred candles with a long taper. The room seemed warm, intimate, and cozy.

"This is private - between you and me," Skinner told him, walking slowly around the room, igniting each candle. They gave the room a warm glow, enchanting the kneeling slave and bathing him in warm, flickering light. When Skinner had finished, he blew out the taper, and beckoned Mulder over to the massage table, which had been adjusted to a sitting position. "Put the rings on the table and sit down," Skinner instructed. Mulder did as he was told, and Skinner paused and kissed him deeply on the lips. Mulder moaned, as Skinner's hand brushed over his nipples, a wave of electricity surging through him at his Master's touch. "I'm going to tie you to keep you still," Skinner informed him. "You'll be tied tight because I don't want you moving while I work. Understood?"

"Yes, sir," Mulder replied, never taking his eyes off his Master's face.

"Good boy." Skinner kissed him again, and then fastened him onto the chair, binding his shoulders and legs into place. "Can you move?" He asked, when he had finished. Mulder tried to wriggle, but he was secured firmly into place.

"No, sir."

"Good."

Mulder watched as Skinner retrieved a bowl full what smelled like alcohol, and some cotton balls and placed them on the table. It was warm in the room, but even so, he started to shiver.

"Hush," Skinner smiled at him. Mulder tried to relax, watching as Skinner sat down beside him, and opened a pack of sterilized needles. His Master picked up one of the rings, and dipped it in the bowl, then threaded it to the blunt end of the needle. Skinner swabbed his left nipple with alcohol, then picked up a pen, and moved his hand forward. Mulder moaned as the tension built up. Not knowing what to expect was the worst part.

"I'm just marking the spot," Skinner told him. "Would you prefer to be blindfolded?"

"No. No - I'll watch." Mulder whispered. Skinner placed a dot on either side of his left nipple, and then retrieved a vicious looking instrument with a triangular head from the table.

"It's a clamp - it squeezes the flesh into place. It'll help me make a more precise job," Skinner told him. Mulder nodded. "When I've finished decorating you, your body will be even more pleasing to me," Skinner's voice was low, and soothing. "You don't have a choice, little one. Just relax." So saying, he attached the clamp into place. Mulder bit down on his lip as his nipple was lightly crushed between the metal, then his Master picked up the needle. He didn't say a word, just matter of factly plunged it straight through Mulder's flesh. Mulder let out a startled scream of surprise, but the pain didn't kick in until a few seconds later, when it zoomed through his body in a warm wash of agony. He struggled pointlessly against his bonds, wanting to do something, anything, to rid himself of what felt like a strip of molten steel pressed through his nipple.

"Hush, it's okay, that one's done," Skinner stroked his chest soothingly.

"Take it out! Oh fuck, it hurts!" Mulder yelled.

"It looks beautiful though. Look at it," Skinner commanded. Mulder glanced down, and saw the gold ring lodged in his nipple. He was surprised by the sudden surge of pride that welled up inside him.

"Okay...okay...that one can stay, but you can't do the other one. I can't face it...we'll do it another day," Mulder said firmly.

Skinner smiled at him, and swabbed his right nipple with alcohol. Mulder changed his mind - not knowing what to expect was **not** the worst part. He knew what to expect this time, and that made the anticipation even worse.

"You're doing well." Skinner pushed Mulder's damp hair off his forehead. "All right, little one, here we go again." Skinner marked the nipple with his pen, and then clamped it. Mulder tensed his muscles in preparation, and closed his eyes. He felt Skinner's fingers on his flesh, and then a sharp prick, and he yelled again. It seemed to take Skinner forever to tug the ring into place and close it, all the while jolting that sore, newly pierced flesh. When it was finally over, Mulder hung limply in his bonds, gazing down at his newly decorated body.

"I told you they'd look beautiful," Skinner smiled, clearing away the piercing apparatus. He returned and untied his slave, and then walked him over to the mirror. "They suit you, and now you're fully mine, Fox." Skinner stood behind his slave, and touched his cock ring, and his collar, then picked up his hand and fingered his wedding ring before finally brushing the tips of his fingers gently against Mulder's nipples. Mulder flinched, but the endorphin high he had been on after the flogging was made even more intense by the piercing, and although it hurt, the pain sent a dizzy wave of arousal through his body.

"Let's get this off before it's too late, shall we?" Skinner grinned, releasing Mulder from the cock ring. "You can't come yet - I want to play with you first," he said, taking Mulder over to the throne. He sat down, and made Mulder straddle his lap, facing him. "Undo my shirt - touch me. Good. Now open my trousers, that's right..." Skinner's cock leapt out eagerly from its restraint under Mulder's caress, and Mulder quickly slipped the condom Skinner handed him onto the broad penis. "I'm going to play with my new toys," Skinner smiled, and kissed the tip of each pierced nipple, making Mulder moan. His nipples were so sensitive after the piercing that the tiniest caress resonated deep inside his body, making his cock jump and harden. Skinner circled the tip of each nipple with his tongue, and Mulder held onto his Master's shoulders for dear life.

"Oh shit...that feels...incredible," he whispered.

"Good. I'm going to make it hurt a little more - hold still, slave." Skinner pulled Mulder closer, holding him tight within his muscled arms, and then fastened his lips around the sensitive nipple. Mulder howled, feeling the metal rubbed against his tender flesh. Skinner wasn't doing anything more than very light licking, but it caused wave after wave of pain in the sensitized nipple.

"Shit...that hurts...that hurts..." he whimpered, his endorphin level skyrocketing.

"Good. Hush..." Skinner continued his caress, and Mulder almost spasmed with the pleasure/pain. Each light touch of Skinner's finger, or lick of his tongue hurt those tender nubs of flesh, but each wave of pain sent him even higher in the sky until he felt as if he was floating. "Dear little slave," Skinner murmured, brushing his nipples lightly, "don't wriggle, Fox...just accept my caress...good slave." He continued stroking Mulder's pierced nipples as Mulder climbed the walls of pleasure to dizzying heights. His cock was rock hard, and he began to thrust into his Master's lap, hoping that the friction would bring him some release.

"Not yet. I haven't finished with you yet. I told you I wanted to use you today. Now, I'm going to teach you another trick." Skinner's fingers slipped into Mulder's lubed anus, and Mulder opened up for them, trying to impale his body on them, wanting to experience the pleasure of having his prostate stimulated in time to the throbbing in his nipples.

Skinner laughed. "No, not my fingers," he said, still thrusting in and out, until Mulder was writhing in frustration on his lap. "My cock, Fox. I want you to go down on me, while I play with these," Skinner flicked the nipples lightly and Mulder threw back his head, the sweat pouring from his face.

"Go down...?" He panted, trying to wrench himself back to reality.

"That's right." Skinner took Mulder's hand, and placed it on his hard cock. "I'm ready and waiting for you." He grasped Mulder's buttocks firmly in his hands, and held them open as he guided him down onto his waiting cock. Mulder moaned as he felt the tip of his Master's cock slide into place, but he was unprepared for Skinner's next move. His Master suddenly grasped his thighs, and pulled him down hard onto his cock, bucking up with his hips at the same moment, and his cock rammed home, right up to the hilt. Mulder sat there, speared on that cock, his eyes watering as he grew used to the intrusion. He was still sore from yesterday, but the sensation of his anus being stretched mingled with the endorphin high of the piercing, and he almost passed out from the intensity. Skinner held him tight, keeping him upright, his big arms clutched around Mulder's body.

Mulder put his head back, sweat pouring down the side of his face. "I can't...it's too much, Master..." he moaned.

Skinner ignored him, and pressed his face against Mulder's nipples, licking them lightly. "Move, Fox, up and down..." He tugged at Mulder's hips, and Mulder felt that hard cock sliding inside him. He did as he was commanded, acting on instinct alone, and moved up, then impaled himself back down on his Master's cock. Somewhere along the way it found his prostate, and Mulder gasped, and held onto Skinner's shoulders for dear life. "That's okay, keep going, find it again," Skinner murmured, still toying with his nipples.

Mulder started to move rhythmically, up and down on his Master's cock. He had never experienced anything like this before. Yesterday's orgasm had been explosive enough but what he was feeling today was even more intense. It hurt - it hurt bad, but it hurt so **good** too. Mulder rocked up and down on Skinner's cock, and with every thrust, Skinner stroked or licked one of his nipples, alternating the two. It was more than Mulder could bear.

"Please, let me come..." he gasped, his hand milking his desperate cock hopefully.

"Not yet - ride me for longer," Skinner instructed.

Mulder was half out of his mind on sensation, as he obeyed. He moaned as that hard cock slid up and down his narrow passage, his nipples being lovingly tortured by his Master. His own cock stood out rock hard in front of him, but he could barely feel the ache in that with all the sensation in the other parts of his body.

"Hurts...oh god, I've got to come...oh shit...Master, please...ow! Fuck...Stop, please...oh shit..." Mulder moaned, as his Master skillfully built the scene to climax, thrusting up inside his slave, and fondling his hot, pierced nipples in timed strokes.

"Keep going," Skinner insisted, his firm voice the only thing anchoring Mulder to reality. Mulder didn't know how long he rode that cock in a haze of pain but suddenly he was aware that he was getting faster and faster, his movements governed by the bounce of Skinner's hips into the deepest recess of his body. "Now," Skinner whispered, and Mulder knew he wasn't coherent, but somehow his cock responded, even though his mind was far, far away. He orgasmed, his come splattering out over his own hand and over his Master's chest, and he felt Skinner's arms pull him close, as his Master reached his own climax buried deep within Mulder's ass.

"Oh shit." Mulder clung onto his Master as they both rested in the aftermath of their shared orgasm. "Oh shit, oh shit, oh shit..." he nuzzled Skinner's neck, then his lips found those of his Master and he kissed him, half fainting in his big arms. He could feel Skinner's cock softening inside him, but still neither of them moved.

They sat there, Mulder straddling his Master's lap, their arms around each other for an eternity. Mulder watched the candles flicker and die out of the corner of his eye as Master and slave floated away together, on a haze of shared pleasure.

"I'm so high you're going to have to send a helicopter to get me back down," Mulder murmured.

Skinner smiled, and licked some sweat from his neck. "Good?" He asked.

"Oh god, yes," Mulder sighed. "I've a feeling I'm going to hurt like hell tomorrow though."

"Maybe - was it worth it?" Skinner asked, his hands gently stroking Mulder's back.

"You know it was. For you too, Master?" Mulder asked anxiously.

Skinner laughed out loud. "In case you didn't notice, I was having a ball!" He grinned.

"I like you like this...so close..." Mulder shut his eyes, and held on. There was just him, and the tautly muscled, lightly furred body of his Master, and the scent of sex, and sweat. Mulder felt a twinge of anxiety nag deep inside his stomach: his desire to spend a night in his Master's arms was no longer just a wish - it was a **need**. He thought of the trials ahead with a sinking heart. He knew his heart's desire depended upon him behaving himself for the next few days, and making Skinner proud of him at the party. Could he transcend his own self-destructive tendencies for long enough to avoid screwing things up? Mulder pulled his Master closer, relishing the feel of their bodies as they sat pressed together. *Of course I can do it*, he told himself. *Easy*. He closed his eyes, rested his head on Skinner's shoulder... and crossed his fingers behind the other man's back.

**End Of Part 6**

## I Must Always Be Honest With My Master by Xanthe

### Author's Notes:

Posted 23rd October, 1999

**WARNING: Oh hell, what's the point? If you've got this far you're clearly made of stuff as stern as Master Skinner :-)**

This chapter *\*was\** going to be the party one, but Mulder just needed so much training to get ready that it was getting longer and longer. Consequently, I decided to post the training as a separate chapter instead. Party's next up!

Many thanks to Emma, who told me a very intriguing tale that sparked this story off, as well as providing invaluable technical assistance, and some rather interesting ideas...

Massive thanks to Cadillac Red for giving me some authentic US baseball dialogue for this chapter, and special thanks to Gaby for the fun inspiration.

Quotation courtesy of my sweet Alex. None of this is beta'd. It's far too much fun to take seriously.

**24/7** is an erotic fantasy and NOT a BDSM resource guide. The truth is sometimes exaggerated, or played with, for dramatic effect. For more information, please visit the **24/7 BDSM Glossary**.

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*"A truth, still apparent, though disregarded, that things move violently to their place, but calmly in their place. To put it another way, everything has its right home, the region that suits it, and, unless forcibly restrained, will move thither by a kind of homing instinct."*

**J. Winterson**  
**"Art and Lies"**

Mulder paused outside Skinner's door, carrying two cups of coffee. It was amazing - he'd only been living here for a few days, and already Skinner was allowing him to sleep in his bed, to have sex on demand, and to skip the ironing chores. He'd even promised to give Wanda away to Scully. Mulder smiled, and pushed open the door: everything was good. He felt safe, secure, loved, and the sex was so damned hot! This was everything he could have hoped for, or dreamed of. What could possibly go

wrong? He entered the bedroom, and stopped short. The coffee spilled, dark brown liquid spiraling in slow motion, scalding his naked chest.

Skinner wasn't in the bed.

He was standing by the window, frozen, caught in the beam of a bright light. Mulder shouted at him to get away, ran to the night-stand, found a gun, aimed it, and tried to fire, but nothing happened. He could hear his own voice from a great distance, screaming, and his chest hurt. He watched, helplessly, as Skinner disappeared in front of him, and he couldn't do, or say, anything to bring him back. As the light faded, Mulder knelt down beside the bed, and cried until his ribs ached, and his chest hurt damn it! It hurt.

Mulder woke up, still sobbing from the dream. His chest did hurt - his nipples throbbed from the piercing yesterday. His cock twitched as he recalled the erotic heat of that ceremony, and he longed to pump it into a full erection, and jerk off, but Skinner had hobbled that particular pastime by strapping him into the chastity belt again. His Master had also warned him that he wasn't allowed to come for the next few days, so he'd be wearing the damn thing every night until the party, after which he'd consider the situation again, depending on how well Mulder behaved. Four days without being able to come! Here he was, slap-bang in the middle of the most erotic situation he'd ever been in, in his entire life, and he was unable to relieve the pressure. It was a most exquisite torture, and his Master seemed to know the best way to manipulate it for maximum torment value. His Master... Mulder felt a cold sweat sweep over him as the full details of the dream came flooding back. He tried to calm himself. He wasn't exactly a stranger to insomnia, but he'd never had this particular nightmare before.

He got up, turned the light on, and the sparkling gold of the nipple rings caught his attention as he passed the mirror on his way to the bathroom. His nipples were erect, and if they weren't so damned painful he'd have enjoyed how enticing they looked. As it was, he shuddered at the very thought of anyone touching them. His Master had already exhibited a strong interest in this particular part of his anatomy, so he might well choose to fondle them. Mulder knew there was nothing he could do if Skinner wanted to play with any part of his slave's body, but he was hoping that his Master would be merciful, and allow the painful nubs of flesh a few days in which to heal.

Mulder winced as he saw how pale he looked, with dark shadows under his eyes. Damn! Where had that dream come from? He went to the bathroom, then crawled back into bed, but, try as he might, he couldn't erase the image of Skinner disappearing from sight, wrenched away from him. Taken, just as Samantha and Scully had been taken, and he couldn't do a thing to stop it. He was always so damn helpless, a victim of circumstance, and fate. It was as if everyone he loved was doomed to this particular fate. Everyone he loved...Mulder bit on his lip. Love. It had been a long time since he had allowed himself to fall in love with anyone. Skinner had entered his heart like an unstoppable force of nature, and taken up residence there as if it were a kingdom he had been born to rule.

Mulder tossed and turned, and then finally gave up any hope of sleep. He thought about Skinner lying all alone in his bed, unprotected, unaware of the danger he was in, and struggled with himself for half an hour. He knew he was being stupid, that it had just been a dream that had tapped into his worst fear, but he couldn't stop himself worrying. Losing Skinner would just about kill him. However likely or unlikely, he couldn't just stand by and let it happen. He'd never be able to forgive himself if he did. Mulder got up, picked up his blanket and pillow, grabbed his gun for good measure, then crept

noiselessly down the stairs. He paused for a moment outside Skinner's bedroom, then took his life in his hands, and opened the door.

Skinner was lying under the bedclothes, arms and legs outstretched as always, in a pose of abandoned repose. Wanda was nestled under one of his strong, muscular arms. She looked up as Mulder came in, and he willed her to be silent. She didn't move, just stared at him with those glowing green eyes as he lay down on the floor at the foot of the bed, and pulled the blanket around him. He didn't even want to think about the trouble he'd get into if Skinner found him here. It was just where he needed to be. Mulder fell asleep within seconds, reassured by the deep, comforting sound of his Master's breathing.

He awoke just after 8 am, wondering why he was suffocating. He soon located the source of the problem: Wanda was sitting on his chest, gazing at him curiously with her shining eyes. Clearly the novelty value of having a strange man lying on the floor for half the night had been too much for her.

"Wanda, there's a saying you should be aware of. It goes 'curiosity killed the cat'. Remember that," Mulder hissed in an undertone, casting a glance at his sleeping Master to make sure he wasn't in deep shit. He sent up a swift prayer of thanks to whatever deity looked out for insomniac slaves for the fact that his Master was clearly a deep sleeper, and disengaged himself from Wanda, placing her soundlessly back on the bed.

"Just view it as a friendly warning," he whispered, patting her head. She emitted a trilling purr that erupted like the sound of a volcano in the quiet room, and Mulder hotfooted it for the door, making it just in time as his Master mumbled something drowsily in his sleep, and turned over.

"Did you sleep okay?" Skinner asked, an hour or so later, looking at his slave keenly as he sat up and accepted the coffee Mulder brought him.

"Yes. Why?" Mulder replied defensively. Of all the Masters, in all the world, why the hell had he been lumbered with the one with eyes in the back of his head, and the ability to seemingly know what was going on in the entire household when he was clearly fast asleep?

"Because of your piercing," Skinner replied mildly. "I thought you might have been in some discomfort during the night."

"Oh, yeah. That." Mulder shrugged. "No. I'm fine."

"So you slept okay?" Skinner repeated, those dark eyes still staring at him searchingly.

"Yes. I slept fine," Mulder lied, just managing to stop himself from rolling his eyes in irritation at his Master's sudden obsession with his sleeping habits. He let out a startled yelp, as Skinner put the coffee down smartly on the night-stand, plucked his ear between his thumb and forefinger, and dragged him onto the bed, delivering several slaps to his upturned rump in quick succession.

"I'm hearing some attitude this morning," Skinner told him, cheerfully peppering this statement with a series of stinging slaps.

"I'm sorry!" Mulder gasped, taken by surprise.

"No, I'm still hearing it." Skinner clamped one hand firmly over Mulder's waist, and began whaling his slave's ass in earnest.

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry...Master!" Mulder yelled at last, dimly realizing what had offended his Master. The spanking stopped, abruptly.

"That's better. Kneel." Skinner clicked his fingers, and Mulder quickly obeyed, getting into position beside the bed, back straight, and head down. "All right, let's start again. Did you sleep well last night, slave?"

"Yes, Master," Mulder responded immediately.

"Are you sure? You're not exactly looking bright eyed and bushy tailed this morning."

Mulder looked up, suppressing a sigh. How the hell did Skinner get to be this observant? Was he never going to get anything past his Master?

"My chest did hurt a bit in the night, Master," he admitted finally.

"Did you take any painkillers?" Skinner asked.

"Um, no." Mulder remembered the medicine cabinet in his private bathroom. He had been so preoccupied by his nightmare that he hadn't even thought of taking any painkillers, but he wasn't going to admit that to Skinner. He never spoke of his restless nights - not to Scully, not to anyone. Investigating the causes of his insomnia required a level of self-analysis that he didn't feel capable of. He was so used to his fucked-up, dysfunctional life that he didn't even think there might be a solution to any of it, and he sure as hell wasn't telling Skinner that his worst nightmare was seeing his Master whisked off by a spaceship. For a start, that would mean admitting how much the other man meant to him, to say nothing of the fact that he'd probably die laughing at the absurdity of it.

"Why not?" Skinner took a sip of coffee, his eyes never leaving those of his slave.

"I don't know," Mulder snapped, with a sulky shrug. "Master," he added hastily as Skinner's face darkened.

"Well in future, please remember to take better care of yourself," Skinner told him firmly.

"Yes, Master," Mulder muttered.

"Good. Go and get me a bowl with some boiled water in it, and the salt," Skinner instructed, "and bring me some cotton balls as well."

Mulder scurried to obey, and returned a few minutes later with the requested items, laying them on the night-stand. Wanda wandered over and sniffed at them curiously, clearly intrigued by the proceedings.

"On the bed. I think we'll do a thorough inspection today," Skinner told him, clicking his fingers.

Mulder felt stupid clambering onto the bed and trying to arrange his long limbs as tidily as possible for Skinner's examination.

"All right - I'm going to start your leash training today, so we might as well start with some basic commands," Skinner said, as he surveyed his slave's clumsy maneuvering. "When I click my fingers, you'll assume the kneeling position that I've already taught you. Kneel facing me on the bed - you can put your knees on either side of my legs. That's right." He moved Mulder into position. "Hands behind your back, eyes down. I've noticed that you're not very good at keeping your eyes down, slave."

"No, Master. Sorry, Master." Mulder bit on his lip, keeping his eyes lowered. "I like reading your expressions, Master."

"Well, you can listen to what my voice tells you instead," Skinner replied. "You should learn to respond to non-visual clues, Fox. I want you to become attuned to every aspect of my command - from my voice to my gestures."

"Yes, Master." Mulder nodded. This was so hard though! He liked looking at his Master, and he found it almost impossible to keep his head down, in the submissive position. He was just too curious, too eager to know what was happening, and to figure out a response to it.

"I suspect that you disobey me on this because you're fighting your submission," Skinner observed. "Isn't that the case? You're so busy trying to read my response to **you**, that you aren't thinking about pleasing **me**. I've already told you that addressing yourself to my needs is the only thing you need concern yourself with. Forget about yourself, Fox, and learn to embrace your submission."

"I'll try, Master," Mulder replied in a small voice. He let out a deep sigh, and Skinner chuckled.

"I know - it's hard, but we'll get there," he said gently, kissing his slave's forehead. "If I want you to look at me, I'll lift your chin up. When I want you to look down again, I'll click my fingers. Understood?"

"Yes, Master."

"Good. Remember it then. Now, let me have a look at these."

Mulder watched from under lowered lashes, as Skinner's hand came into his field of vision, making a beeline for his sore nipples. It was all he could do not to flinch, as his Master investigated the newly pierced nubs of flesh gently but thoroughly, then reached for the bowl of salt water.

"I'll bathe these twice a day. It might hurt," Skinner warned him. Mulder nodded, and took a sharp intake of breath as his Master carefully dabbed the warm water over his sore flesh. It was actually quite soothing, and he soon relaxed, but he yelped when Skinner gently turned one of the rings, and put his hands out instinctively, looking up. Skinner paused, and flicked his fingers again.

"Eyes down, hands behind your back. Get used to it, Fox," he said softly. Mulder swallowed hard, and then did as he was told. He'd found that one of the hardest thing about his slavery was allowing Skinner to touch his body whenever, and however, he wanted - but it was also one of the things that aroused him most as well. Skinner finished up with his nipples, much to Mulder's relief, and continued his inspection.

He undid the chastity belt, and examined his slave's cock, and balls, although Mulder wasn't entirely sure what he was looking for.

"Is there a problem, Master?" he asked, as the examination continued for several interminable minutes, during which his cock started to swell and rise.

"No, I just enjoy touching my slave, and you know, I'm thinking that a piercing would look pretty here." Skinner grinned, caressing the tip of Mulder's cock.

Mulder looked up in alarm. "Please, Master..." he said weakly.

"Any argument with that?" Skinner asked dangerously.

Mulder hesitated for a long time before backing down. "No, Master," he whispered.

"Good. Fox - you're supposed to be in deep submission right now. I don't recall asking you a question, or giving you permission to look up." He clicked his fingers, and Mulder reluctantly lowered his eyelashes. "That's better." Skinner slapped his rump lightly. "Turn around. I told you today's inspection would be thorough, and that's exactly what it's going to be. On your hands and knees, slave."

Mulder obeyed, flushing furiously. He found this to be the most humiliating position of all - butt raised in the air, right in front of his Master's nose, and not for the purpose of their mutual pleasure, just for inspection. He felt Skinner's hands on his bottom, stroking, and prodding. His Master trailed along a sore area with his finger, and Mulder winced.

"This is where I punished you yesterday afternoon. I told you that would leave a mark. Do you remember the lesson you were being taught with that punishment?" Skinner's fingers pressed hard on his sore butt, and Mulder gave a strangled yelp. "I'm waiting. If you can't remember the lesson less than 24 hours after the punishment, then I'll clearly have to make your corrections more...memorable."

"Ow! Sorry, Master. I do remember," Mulder gasped. "I must not disobey my Master. That was the lesson!"

"Good."

Mulder bit on his lip, as Skinner's finger continued to examine the welted area in exquisitely painful detail. Then he moaned as Skinner pried his buttocks apart, and inserted a finger into his anus, wriggling it around. It felt different, and Mulder realized, too late, that after his interrupted night, he had forgotten to lube himself.

"Fox, you're dry. Supposing I'd wanted to use you this morning?" Skinner asked.

"I'm sorry, Master. I forgot." Mulder wriggled as Skinner inserted a second finger, and then a third. He was rewarded by a slap on his bottom.

"Still." Skinner commanded. "Forgetting isn't good enough, Fox. Have you ever experienced a dry fuck?"

"No, Master."

"Well, trust me, you wouldn't forget it in a hurry. Can you feel that this is more uncomfortable dry?" He pushed all three fingers forcefully into Mulder's anus, making Mulder gasp.

"Yes, Master," he panted.

"Well, imagine it's my hard cock, slave," Skinner said shortly. "You're a bit red here after yesterday, so I'm not going to use you today. This..." he thrust his fingers deep into Mulder's anus, and twisted them, making his slave yelp, "will have to get used to receiving me on a daily basis, but we have more than enough ground to cover today without wasting time on pleasure."

Mulder's heart sank at that statement but he didn't dare say anything. Skinner withdrew his fingers and clicked them again, and Mulder turned around and knelt obediently, facing his Master.

"Hands out." Skinner ordered, dipping his own hands in the water, and wiping them on the washcloth beside the bed. Mulder obeyed, confused.

"Why does Master want to inspect my hands?" He asked, as Skinner took hold of his wrists, and examined each finger in detail.

"Has my slave forgotten that he's in deep submission and forbidden to speak until spoken to right now?" Skinner asked.

"No, Master," Mulder sighed. After a shitty night, it looked as if he was in for a shitty day. His nipples throbbed, and his head felt like it was filled with sawdust after his nightmare and lack of sleep. He wanted to scream, and shout, but instead he was forbidden speech altogether. Mulder wondered how the hell he was going to get through this day without bringing his Master's wrath tumbling down on him like a ton of bricks.

Skinner finished his inspection of Mulder's hands, then examined his head, sifting through his hair as if looking for nits, and bending his ears back to look behind them. Mulder endured this with a growing sense of frustrated humiliation. Skinner tugged at the hair under his arms, and chest, then continued down his belly, stopping to insert his little finger carefully into Mulder's navel, for no reason Mulder could fathom, then his Master's firm, capable fingers traveled down his thighs, and examined his feet. Finished with that, Skinner tipped his slave's face up, and ordered him to open his mouth. Mulder obeyed, flushing to the roots of his dark hair. He felt like a damned horse being examined for purchase! Skinner felt around in his mouth for what seemed like hours, then he let him go, and sat back, regarding his slave with a frown.

"Your fingernails are dirty, and a couple of them are broken. Your hair could do with a cut, and you haven't brushed your teeth this morning," he said briskly. "To say nothing of the fact that you haven't prepared yourself properly for my use. You will, in future, ensure that whenever you are in my presence your grooming is impeccable. The same applies for when we return to work, when I will expect you to look your best whenever I see you. Your hair grows quickly?"

"Yes, Master." Mulder replied sullenly from under lowered lashes.

"Then I'll trim it once a week starting this weekend," Skinner said.

"What?" Mulder looked up, alarmed.

"Problem, slave?" Skinner asked.

"No, Master...just...I hope Master isn't going to make my appearance, um, emulate his own," Mulder said, then regretted it instantly.

"You think I'm going to shave your head?" Skinner roared with laughter. "Why would I do that? I love your hair, slave, and, you know, I wouldn't want it too short, or I wouldn't be able to do **this** with it." He buried his fist deep into Mulder's locks, and tugged his slave's head back so that his throat was exposed, then ran a finger down his jaw, and over his Adam's Apple. Mulder hung in mid-air, trying to keep his hands behind his back, as Skinner licked a line from his collarbone to his chin, finishing up at his slave's lips, and kissing him firmly. Mulder moaned.

"You really like being kissed don't you?" Skinner grinned, releasing him a few seconds later.

"Yes, Master," Mulder agreed.

"Well, perhaps if you behave yourself, you'll earn more kisses." Skinner's words sounded somewhat ominous to Mulder's mutinous ears. "Now, it's time for your morning discipline. We'll do things differently today. Go and brace yourself against the wall. Hands flat, legs open, butt out. We'll call this the Grace position shall we?"

"The Grace position, Master?" Mulder raised an eyebrow, but he did as he was told, scrambling off the bed, and going to stand in front of the wall, placing his hands on it, and sticking his butt out.

"That's right," Skinner took up position behind him, and delivered a stinging slap to Mulder's backside. "As in, 'for what we are about to receive, may the lord make us truly thankful.'" He punctuated this statement with a series of smacks to Mulder's exposed ass. Mulder made a face. Really, the scariest factor about this whole Master/slave thing was discovering the true weirdness of Skinner's sense of humor. It had been bad enough discovering his Master had one at all, but it just kept getting worse with each new corny pun and wisecrack. "Keep that ass out, ready and waiting, slave," Skinner ordered, as Mulder hopped from foot to foot, trying to ease the pressure of the punishment on his already sore backside.

It took all Mulder's willpower to stay with his hands flat, his legs open, and his ass pushed up to receive the punishment his Master was dishing out. Skinner was as thorough as ever, although he did only use his hand, for which Mulder really **was** truly thankful. He still remembered the vicious sting of that paddle his Master kept in his night-stand.

"What are you, Fox?" Skinner asked, the familiar morning litany, slapping his slave firmly on the middle of his ass.

"A slave, Master." Mulder panted, his cock going hard, and immediately lurching into a full erection.

"Wrong. Again." Skinner slapped him hard.

"Ow! Um...oh, **your** slave, Master. I'm your slave!" Mulder yelped.

"Good. And what is your status?"

"None, Master! I have none. I exist to serve you!" Mulder cried.

The spanking came to an abrupt halt, and Skinner turned him around.

"Thank me," he ordered.

Mulder swallowed, and nodded, then knelt and kissed his Master's beautiful toes. "Thank you, Master," he whispered.

He looked up at Skinner's magnificent, naked body, and felt a wave of serenity wash over him. He blinked back his tears, and kissed his Master's toes again, and then again, hiding his face from the other man, not wanting him to see how much he loved him. All he could think about was that damn nightmare, and how much losing his Master would hurt. *I can't lose you, Master. I'll protect you with my life...*

"All right," Skinner said softly, soothing Mulder's hair. "Stand up, little one."

Mulder obeyed, trembling slightly. Skinner pressed his lips softly against Mulder's forehead, and pulled him close, fondling his buttocks lightly as he pressed him against his body. Mulder's hard cock got even harder, and Skinner laughed. "You're amazing, slave," he murmured, pushing Mulder away from the warm, comforting circle of his arms.

"Master?" Mulder frowned.

"Like a car ad." Skinner glanced at Mulder's erect cock. "From zero to fully erect in less than 10 seconds," he grinned. "It's a shame that this," he squeezed Mulder's cock, "won't be racing anywhere for the next few days, but it sure as hell is nice looking at it!" He ran a finger along Mulder's swollen shaft, and Mulder felt himself start to leak. "Hold it, slave," Skinner whispered in an unforgivably sexy tone, making Mulder shiver. "You have to learn to come on order," Skinner told him.

"Yes...Master..." Mulder ground out, wishing he could think of anything but the close proximity of his Master to his straining cock right now.

"And the cock ring keeps you nice and erect, doesn't it?" Skinner purred, touching the ring, and the hard flesh around it.

"Yes...Master..." Mulder gasped, clenching his fists behind his back, desperately wanting to pump his cock into orgasm.

"Does it ache, slave-boy?" Skinner asked, circling him, his warm breath caressing Mulder's naked flesh.

"Yes, Master...it aches...I want to come, Master." Mulder looked at his Master with a plea in his eyes, but Skinner shook his head.

"Not today, not tomorrow, not any day soon, sweetheart," he replied. "After the party, if you've been good all week, then, when I take you to my bed, I might allow you to come. Would you like to come

down my throat, slave? Do you think you deserve to have my mouth wrapped around this desperate, needy piece of flesh? Sucking you? Taking your shaft whole and warming it with my tongue?"

Mulder closed his eyes, unable to reply.

"I'm waiting for an answer, slave!" Skinner's voice hurt him with its intensity.

"Master...I want that so bad, I could weep," Mulder managed to stammer at last. "Please, Master...please let me come, let me come now..."

"No." Skinner smiled, and flicked a lock of dark hair from his slave's forehead. "Now, we have work to do. Let's recap on what you've learned so far, Fox. The three positions. When I say them, I want you to assume them - immediately, and without question. First - the Submissive position."

He clicked his fingers, and Mulder knelt, hastily, hands behind his back, shoulders straight, head down.

"Good. The Confessional." Skinner slapped his hands together once, and Mulder immediately went down on all fours, nose pressed against the carpet. "Good - remember the non-verbal signal as well, the single clap. Now, the Grace position."

Skinner slapped his hand against his own thigh, and Mulder got to his feet, and leaned against the wall, butt out, legs spread wide, hands flat.

"Very good." Skinner delivered a quick smack to Mulder's exposed buttocks, and then turned him around. "I want you to focus all your attention on getting into position whenever I ask you to. I won't always ask verbally, but my non-verbal signals will always be very clear and direct. Follow them, Fox. I expect you to be alert to them at all times. I'm sure you don't need to be reminded that you'll be punished if you're slow or don't pay attention."

"No, Master," Mulder agreed, very sure that he knew what sort of punishment to expect for such lapses.

"And we have one more position don't we?" Skinner moved close, his large body overwhelming, and Mulder's cock went into a painful spasm against the gold ring. "Wanda." Skinner said in a sibilant undertone, his voice dark with sexual promise. Mulder glanced around frantically, then knelt down by the bed, bending over it.

"First things, first," Skinner stood over him, forbiddingly. "Before you get into position you will hand me a condom. When you're bent over, ready, you'll make access easier for me by holding yourself open with your hands until I'm inside you. Understood?" Mulder felt as if his heart had stopped beating, as he nodded, his cock about ready to burst. "Do it then!" Skinner commanded, and Mulder put his head down, and grabbed his buttocks, holding them open. He flushed as he did it - this was the most unbearably humiliating position he'd ever been in, in his life, and yet his cock was practically perpendicular to his body. Skinner stood there, just looking at him for an eternity, and Mulder waited, wondering if his Master was going to take him despite what he'd said earlier. Then a thought occurred to him.

"Master...I don't have a condom at the moment," he confessed.

"I know that, slave. That's fine, as I have no intention of using you right now. When you're naked in the apartment you will ensure that you have a stash of condoms in every room. You will go and get one, present it to me, and then make yourself available. When you're clothed, and out and about, you will carry a supply of condoms around at all times, in case I should wish to make use of you. You will not talk. When I say this particular word to you, I want you to enter into the deeply submissive mode immediately, and simply present yourself for my use."

"Yes, Master. Is there a signal for the word, Master?" Mulder asked, looking up into his Master's dark eyes.

"Well, I allowed you to pick the word - why don't you pick the signal too?" Skinner suggested.

"Thank you, Master." Mulder swallowed and racked his brains. Skinner seemed to have taken all the best signals already. "Master could...um...cross his arms?" Mulder suggested.

Skinner raised an eyebrow. "I cross my arms a lot during the average day, Fox. Unless you want to spend your entire life on your hands and knees, I'd suggest a different signal if I were you."

"Master could...make two fists and bang them together once?" Mulder offered.

"Hmm, that's verging on Neanderthal. Another suggestion, please, and quickly, slave."

"Um..." Mulder thought frantically. "When I was a kid, we got a puppy, and when we were teaching her to lie down, we went like this." He held his hand flat, and moved it down towards the floor.

"Okay, that works for me." Skinner looked at his slave thoughtfully, then smiled. "Pup," he said. "I think I'll call you that for the rest of the day, pup. After all, I'm going to be training you to walk on the leash, and you make such sweet puppy-dog eyes. I believe the fox is a member of the canine family as well, although personally I've always thought them fairly feline. You're that same nice mix of cat and dog, puppykins." He tickled Mulder under the chin, and smiled at him fondly.

"Yeah, a puppy with a degree from Oxford." Mulder said, tartly, unable to bear the humiliation of that **particular** term of endearment. He didn't usually give his degree a second thought, but there was something too degrading about being reduced to the level of household pet.

"You know, I'm sensing that my slave is having some trouble keeping silent today," Skinner mused. "Is that the case, Fox? If it is, just say, because I have a few tricks that will help you with that little problem."

Mulder looked his Master in the eye, and bit back his smart reply. Skinner was looking very dangerous right now, and he had no wish to become acquainted with any of his Master's 'little tricks'. He had a feeling that they were likely to be either very painful, very humiliating, or both.

"No, Master." He bowed his head.

"You're sure you don't want my help, pup?" Skinner fondled Mulder's ears affectionately.

"No, Master. I promise I'll try harder," Mulder whispered.

"Good, pup. You know, I think that we should consider getting you your own kennel. What do you say to that, puppykins?"

"A kennel?" Mulder echoed faintly.

"Yes, a kennel. For the puppy to sleep in." Skinner grinned.

Mulder closed his eyes, and swallowed, then opened them again. He had a sudden mental image of himself naked, his long limbs arranged awkwardly in a kennel, and a thick dog's collar around his neck with the name **PUPPYKINS** written on it.

"Whatever pleases Master," he whispered, drowning in his Master's dark, brown-eyed gaze.

"Good puppy." Skinner patted his head. "I think we'll keep this theme for a while. It might help you with the problems you're clearly having with obedience today. Let's give the puppy a good wash, and then feed him, shall we?" Skinner grinned, cuffing Mulder lightly around the head, and then shooing him in the direction of the bathroom.

The shower was business-like; Skinner had forbidden Mulder to touch him, so he just watched, miserably, as his Master soaped himself down then handed the soap to Mulder. His Master didn't even allow his slave to help him get dressed, so instead Mulder had to kneel in Submissive mode, his eyes cast down so he couldn't even enjoy the sight of his Master pulling on his jeans and tee shirt.

If that was bad, breakfast was worse. Mulder knelt by the table, expecting to serve his Master as he had the previous day, but again, Skinner neatly circumvented his expectations, clicking his fingers instead towards the corner. Mulder watched surreptitiously, from under lowered eyelids, as Skinner made some oatmeal, then placed the bowl on the floor in front of him. Mulder looked up at him, horrified.

"Breakfast, pup!" Skinner grinned. He seated himself at the table, and immersed himself in the newspaper.

"Um, Master hasn't given me a spoon," Mulder pointed out.

"That's right, pup, Master hasn't." Skinner didn't even look up, his intent obvious.

Mulder sighed loudly and tragically, then hastily lowered his face to the bowl as Skinner looked at him warningly. It wasn't easy, dipping his tongue in the oatmeal, but he managed to consume most of it, although not before thoroughly decorating his face with the creamy mixture. When he'd finished, Skinner put a couple of slices of toast on a plate in front of him. "No hands," his Master warned, and Mulder shot him a look of pure malice.

"Problem?" Skinner asked mildly.

"No, Master." Mulder swallowed down his reply, and picked up a slice of the toast with his teeth, somehow managing to get a bite of it.

"Good, make sure you finish it all up." Skinner patted him on the head and returned to the table.

With breakfast over, and his face given a brisk wipe with a cloth, Skinner announced that it was time his puppy learned to walk to heel. Mulder felt his stomach flip, and his nipples started to ache before they'd even begun. He followed Skinner up the stairs, and into the Playroom. It looked totally different to the previous day. Then it had been so nice, and warm, decorated by candles, and today - well today it was a mess. There was wax on the floor, implements strewn around, and the remains of the piercing operation on the table.

"Looks like you have some clearing up to do," Skinner glanced at his slave. "I think this is the perfect opportunity to train you to the leash." He clicked his fingers, and Mulder knelt immediately, watching as his Master went over to a cupboard, and returned a few seconds later with a gold chain, and a leather lead.

"Shoulders straighter - that's right." Skinner clipped the ends of the short gold chain to each of his nipple rings. "Oh, that's nice," Skinner smiled, opening the cupboard door so that Mulder could see his reflection in the mirror. "Look up, slave - there, don't you look good with this piece of decoration?"

Mulder considered himself for a moment. He **did** look kind of cute, in a slave-boy way, with the gold chain stretched in a loose semi-circle between his nipples. The chain was gossamer light, and didn't tug on the healing flesh.

"Yes, Master." He smiled up at the other man.

"Sweet pup!" Skinner laughed, and then he unwound the long, leather leash, and clipped that onto the gold chain, midway between the two nipples. "Now, there's no reason why this should be painful," his Master told him, "as long as you remain alert at all times, and concentrate on my every signal, and move. I have no intention of causing you any distress or discomfort during your leash training - if that happens, it'll be because you aren't paying attention. Understood?"

"Yes, Master," Mulder gulped, quivering slightly at the thought of any pull on his tender nipples.

"All right - let's take this slowly. I'll explain the rules, and then I'll lead you around the room. You can clear up gradually as you go. Firstly - whenever you're on the leash you'll walk to heel. There's no exception to this rule. When I'm walking, you'll walk one step behind me." Skinner started to walk, and Mulder followed him, making sure he kept exactly one step behind. He didn't allow his Master to get any further ahead than that, for fear of creating a pull on his sensitive nipples. Skinner took him on a tour of the room, and then stopped beside the disciplinary implements. Mulder stopped immediately behind him.

"Okay, rule number two. Whenever I stop - you kneel." Skinner clicked his fingers and Mulder immediately sank to his knees. The leash stayed loose between them. "Very good," Skinner bent down and kissed his slave soundly on the lips. "Well done, pup. Now, I want you to pick these implements up, and return each item to its proper place in the cupboard. Take them one at a time - and pup?" Skinner looked down into his slave's eager eyes. "There's no need for me to accompany you. When I send you on errands, I'll place the lead in your mouth so it doesn't trail. Open for me." Mulder opened his mouth obligingly, and Skinner slipped the leather between his lips. "I don't want to see any bite marks," Skinner warned. "Hold it under your tongue - that's right." Mulder picked up the rubber tawse and took it to the cupboard, then returned and reached for the sleek black paddle.

"Not that." Skinner plucked it out of his hands. "We'll keep that out for now. Let's just call it my doggy paddle shall we?" He grinned maliciously at his own joke. Mulder sighed, and rolled his eyes. Another bad pun - he was beginning to wonder if they weren't more of a torment than all the discipline and slave training put together.

It took them a couple of hours intensive work to clear up the room, with Mulder walking to the leash the entire time, every nerve fiber in his body concentrating on following his Master, and obeying his every command - non-verbal as well as verbal. Skinner tested him several times on each position, and introduced some new commands.

"Fetch." Skinner pointed at the paddle he'd left on the throne, and Mulder walked over obediently, picked it up in his mouth, and walked back. Then he knelt at his Master's feet, and offered the paddle to him. "Good pup." Skinner fondled his head, and Mulder surprised himself by practically panting with appreciation for the caress, and rubbing his head against his Master's leg.

"When I issue the 'stay' command, you'll remain put, wherever you are, until I come back for you. Understood?" Skinner looked down into his slave's willing hazel eyes, and Mulder nodded, uncertainly.

"Even at work, Master?" He asked, having a vision of waiting in meeting rooms, or outside Skinner's office for hours on end while Skinner was off elsewhere, leaving him bored.

"Fox - do you remember the terms of your contract?" Skinner frowned down at him.

"Yes, Master." Mulder gulped.

"Then I think you'll recall that your obedience is required at **all** times, not just when you're naked on the end of my lead," Skinner said sharply. Mulder nodded, his heart sinking. He didn't think he liked this 'stay' word. Somehow, it seemed to be the very opposite of the 'ditch' word, which he was fairly partial to. "In your free time you'll learn the terms of your contract off by heart," Skinner informed him tersely. "I expect you to be able to recite them to me when ordered."

"Yes, Master." It wasn't that much of a chore; Mulder was pretty sure he already knew the terms of **both** contracts by heart.

Mulder returned all the implements to the cupboard, then knelt beside his Master again, awaiting further instructions. Skinner took the lead out of his mouth, and led him around the room, opening each blind as he went, letting the daylight in. Mulder knelt beside him obediently each time he stopped, and made sure he stayed exactly one step behind him the entire time. It was tiring, concentrating on each minute detail of his Master's walk, and pretty boring too. Mulder went on automatic. When Skinner reached the end of the row of blinds on one side of the room, he assumed his Master was going to cross the room to the other row of blinds, but instead Skinner wrong-footed him, going in the direction of the cupboards instead. Mulder howled as the leash gave a tiny tug on his nipples, sending shock-waves of pain through his entire body.

"Shit, fuck! Shit!" he yelled, stopping immediately.

"All right - kneel down." Skinner crouched in front of him and examined his chest carefully. "No damage caused, but I think you learned a lesson. Don't try and second guess where I'm going, pup - just follow me."

"Yes, Master," Mulder sobbed, leaning his head on his Master's shoulder. Skinner rubbed his back for a moment, then stood up.

"Come on, pup, that wasn't so bad, let's continue."

"After just having my fucking nipples yanked around? No fucking thanks!" Mulder growled, the aftershock of the tug still reverberating through him. Mulder wasn't sure what happened next, but before he knew it, he was face down over his Master's raised knee, and the paddle was being applied liberally to his ass. After four sharp strokes, that took his breath away, he was walked over to the cupboard, and shoved unceremoniously onto his knees. Skinner pulled out a ball gag, and pushed it into his slave's mouth, fastening it behind his head, with short, angry movements.

"That's better." Skinner looked down on his gagged slave. "Now, perhaps you'll lose the attitude."

Mulder stared up at him miserably. The ball gag was large, and it kept his mouth uncomfortably open. He felt tired, sexually frustrated, and humiliated, and now he couldn't even damn well say so!

"You'll wear that until I see an improvement in you," Skinner warned, then his expression softened. "The sooner you give in, the easier it'll be. Now, try harder," he said, gently fondling his slave's hair. "Fox?" He tipped Mulder's chin, and looked directly into his eyes. Mulder nodded, feeling all the fight leave him. He hated this gag, but more than that, he hated himself for fucking up so badly. He wanted his Master to smile at him again, and call him 'sweetheart', and kiss him, and most of all, he wanted to sleep in his Master's bed on Friday night, and if he carried on like this, he knew that wouldn't happen. He nuzzled his face against Skinner's knee in a gesture of contrition.

"Fox - this is for your own benefit. I want to display you at the party, and I want you to be proud of your slavery, and eager to show off your training, but if I don't prepare you properly, then you'll freak out. I told you this week would be hard work." Skinner looked down on his slave thoughtfully. "You look very tired. Are you sure you're feeling okay, Fox?"

Mulder stared up at his Master miserably. He knew he should tell Skinner that he hadn't had much sleep the previous night, and he also knew that he should probably tell him about his nightmare, but he just couldn't. He knew how stupid his worries would sound in the cold light of day apart from anything else, and he also knew that it would be clear he had lied this morning when Skinner had asked him how he'd slept. All these thoughts whizzed through his head, and he came to a decision, and shook his head.

"Fine, we'll continue then."

Skinner picked up the leash again, and started walking. Mulder buried himself in the lesson, the tears pricking at the back of his eyes even while his cock stayed swollen and erect. The idea of being on the end of his Master's lead was so horny he was permanently hard. He could see himself, naked, walking to heel, straining to obey the slightest change in his Master's body language. He hated the gag, but in some ways the silence it afforded him was a relief. As he wasn't able to protest, he had to resign himself to

Skinner's will, and, somewhat to his own surprise, he realized that his Master was right: he **was** happier when he just gave in, and accepted.

By the time the Playroom was tidy again, Mulder had returned to that serene state he'd enjoyed briefly the previous day. He knelt, obediently, as Skinner got the harness out of the cupboard, so lost in a submissive daze that he hardly wondered what was going to happen. Skinner smiled at him.

"Stand," he ordered, and when Mulder obeyed he pulled his slave into a loving hug. "You've done well, pup." He kissed Mulder's forehead, and held him close, hugging him tightly. Mulder felt as if his entire body had melted into nothing, as he nuzzled into his Master's chest, burrowing there, loving the attention. Skinner looked down on him fondly. "This gag seems to have done the trick, Fox. Is it uncomfortable?"

Mulder nodded vigorously, longing to have the pressure on his aching jaw relaxed. Skinner ran his finger around the sides of the gag, checking it carefully.

"It isn't biting, so I'm going to keep you in it, uncomfortable or not." Skinner smiled at Mulder's obvious disappointment at receiving this news. "It's a punishment, Fox, for your smart mouth - a sore jaw might help you remember to keep it closed in future. Learn from this, and then hopefully I won't have to gag you too often. You know, Fox..." He tipped Mulder's chin and gazed into his eyes, "I think that sensory deprivation might be a good way of dealing with you. You clearly have some trust issues, and you find it hard to let go. I need you to trust me implicitly, to give yourself up to my every command, obedient to my every whim. Come with me."

He marched Mulder over to the hoist, buckled him into the harness, and then blindfolded him. Mulder took a deep breath around the gag.

"I'm not going to do anything to hurt you - I won't let you come but this will be entirely pleasurable. I want you to relax, and trust me, without being able to see what I'm doing," Skinner said. "If you're in real distress, shake your head, but I expect it to be genuine distress or there'll be trouble. Understood?"

Mulder nodded, and a few seconds later he gave a gasp as his feet disappeared from under him, and he was suspended in mid-air.

Mulder felt strangely dislocated from the world, wrapped up in black silence, his body hanging in space. He relaxed into his bonds. Skinner hadn't put him in tight bondage at any point during his slavery so far, and Mulder had never yearned for it before, but for the first time, he felt as if he'd enjoy it, and wanted to try it. Maybe he would ask his Master for that, next time he was offered a reward.

He lay in mid-air for a long time, suspended in nothingness, every part of his body supported by the harness. He couldn't see Skinner, and the big man was being very quiet. Mulder strained his ears to hear where his Master was, but after several long minutes he relaxed his vigilance, and just gave himself up to the sensation. Therefore, he nearly jumped out of his skin when he felt a light touch on his abdomen.

"Easy," Skinner's voice soothed. "I'm going to play this particular game with you every day until Friday. There's only one rule - you mustn't move. Not a muscle. It doesn't matter what I do to you, you must stay completely still. It's important - I have the paddle here," he touched it against Mulder's thigh, "if you move, you'll get a lick from it."

Mulder relaxed again, determined to obey. He felt what must have been Skinner's fingertips, trailing over his chest, and down to his cock, which leapt in response.

"Well, I'll forgive you for **that**, as it's clear you don't have any control over this part of your anatomy," Skinner said with a wry chuckle.

His fingers moved on, just stroking gently, touching every part of Mulder's body - his hair, his neck, his throat, even his sore nipples. Mulder didn't move - he didn't even flinch. He just allowed it all to happen. This was nice, this gentle stroking. "I'm doing this for a reason. By Friday, I need you to be able to keep absolutely still. I'm not telling you why," Skinner whispered, his fingernails continuing that light, scratching caress.

Mulder barely heard him - his whole body was sinking into a state of bliss. He was floating away, on a haze of...Mulder jerked into the air as Skinner's fingers tickled under his armpit, and he was immediately rewarded by a slap from the paddle on his butt. He gave a muffled "oomph", and squirmed in his bonds.

"Relax...breathe through your nose," Skinner advised.

His fingernails continued gently scraping at Mulder's armpits, and it was all Mulder could do not to wriggle. He started to break out into a sweat, wishing Skinner would touch him **anywhere** but there.

"You have to get used to this," Skinner told him, "relax."

He delivered another firm swat to Mulder's butt as Mulder twisted away from the tickling fingers. Mulder couldn't think of one single reason **why** it was important he had to get used to such agony, except possibly to satisfy his Master's more sadistic impulses, and he felt somewhat aggrieved as the paddle kept thwacking against his ass. *I'm trying, dammit!* Finally, Skinner turned his attention to Mulder's balls, teasing them unmercifully, and tugging on his pubic hair. Mulder began to relax again - he wasn't so ticklish here, and soon he was transported away on that haze of serenity again.

There was a pause, and he felt Skinner turn him over, onto his front, and refasten him. He hung there, in the darkness, and silence, his jaw aching in earnest around the ball gag. Skinner's fingertips scraped over his legs, up and down, down and up, and then played around his butt for a while, just lightly caressing him. He didn't push his fingers inside Mulder's ass, just played with the hair on his butt, tweaking it. Mulder moaned, and moved, wanting his Master's fingers inside him, and was immediately rewarded by a hard smack from the paddle. He gave in, and surrendered to the stroking. It was delicious - soothing without being overtly erotic. Just what he needed to relax him after his tense day.

Mulder enjoyed this so much that at some point he tuned out completely. The silence, the way the gag denied him a voice, focusing him inwards, the darkness...it all contributed to his blissful mood. Mulder gave himself up to the moment, and the next thing he knew Skinner was laughing as he took the blindfold off his slave.

"I think someone fell asleep," Skinner grinned, kissing his slave fondly. "What's the matter, pup - didn't I send you to bed early enough last night?" He lowered Mulder to the ground, and untied him, before instructing him to kneel.

"How's your jaw holding up?"

Skinner fondled the side of Mulder's face, checking the straps again. Mulder looked up at him eagerly. His jaw muscles ached so much, he was sure he couldn't stand having the ball gag in his mouth for one more second.

"Have you learned your lesson?" Skinner asked. Mulder nodded enthusiastically. "So, when I take this out, you'll be respectful, courteous, and obedient?" Skinner asked. Mulder nodded again. "I'm glad to hear it. However..." Mulder's heart sank. "Before I remove it, I just want to warn you that there are worse punishments than this for a smart mouth." He opened the cupboard. "The ball gag you're wearing is pretty small. I save this one for when I'm really pissed." He pulled out the most enormous ball gag Mulder had ever laid eyes on. He blinked, horror registering in his eyes. He already felt as if he had a giant bomb in his mouth - he had no wish to experience its big brother. "I can see that you're duly impressed," Skinner chuckled. "And let's not forget, that good, old-fashioned favorite - mouth washing. There's some hard soap in the bathroom - I find that more effective than the liquid variety. There's nothing like a good scraping around the teeth to really drum the message home. I always choose a quick foaming variety - guaranteed to clean the most filthy of mouths!" He laughed at Mulder's look of complete outrage, and undid his slave's gag, easing it out of his slave's mouth. Mulder moved his jaw cautiously, relieving the ache.

"Thank you, Master," he leaned forward and kissed Skinner's feet devotedly. "And I'm sorry for swearing at you, Master. Thank you for taking the time and trouble to correct me."

"You're welcome, pup. You see, you really do have the prettiest manners when you try." Skinner smiled fondly. "Now, you can spot me while I work out, and do a small work out yourself, then we can eat. After that - I have some new lessons I want you to practice, and then it's bed for you, I think."

Mulder spent the next few hours wondering what the 'new lessons' would be. After they'd eaten, Skinner handed him a packet of balloons, some shaving cream, and a cutthroat razor. Mulder looked at them in surprise, wondering what the hell he was supposed to do with them.

"Blow up a balloon, cover it in shaving foam, and then give it a nice, clean, shave," Skinner instructed him.

"Can I ask why, Master?" Mulder ventured, thinking the whole thing sounded like a giant waste of time.

"No, but I'll tell you anyway. I like to have a good, clean shave once a week - slow and thorough. It will be your job to perform that task, but I'm not letting you anywhere near my throat with a razor until I'm sure you can do it without cutting me."

"Yes, Master," Mulder gulped, suddenly seeing the sense in the preparation, even though he knew he was going to feel stupid shaving a balloon.

He set to work, while Skinner sat down on the couch, leafing through the sports section of the paper. Mulder exploded 7 balloons in all, showering himself in shaving foam on each occasion.

"I can see this is going to take a lot of practice," Skinner observed, surveying the mess of foam and balloon remnants and a rather bedraggled slave an hour or so later. "An hour a day until Sunday, Fox. Don't forget - if I do, then remind me. My face isn't going anywhere near your razor until you can shave 3 balloons in front of me without killing them."

"Yes, Master," Mulder sighed, wondering why the very idea of shaving his Master sent a delicious warmth through his body.

"Sundays are when I expect a full service," Skinner tickled him under the chin. "You'll wait on me in the bath, dry me, shave me, give me a massage...talking of which, did you call Clark?"

"No, Master. I forgot." Mulder admitted.

"Go and do it now - and wash yourself down. Then come back here, and keep that smart mouth of yours occupied putting condoms on this dildo." He placed the object on the table. "That's another skill I want you to have in your repertoire, slave. Talking of skills," he looked at Mulder thoughtfully, "before you go to bed you can serve me with your mouth - you can demonstrate what you've learned with the dildo, and I want to help you brush up on your oral techniques."

Mulder stared at his Master resentfully for a while, but turned on his heel and scurried to the 'phone when Skinner took a threatening step towards him. *First he doesn't like the way I massage, then my hair's too long, now he doesn't like the way I give head. Fuck, what the hell does the miserable bastard like?* He aimed a kick at the passing Wanda with his bare foot, only to succeed on stubbing his toe on the wall, which didn't help his mood. He made the call, then returned to address himself to the task of putting condoms on the dildo using only his mouth. This was almost as stupid as the balloon shaving, and Mulder grew tired of it. His jaw ached, and the whole exercise was ridiculous. What possible difference was there to Skinner whether he put his own condom on, or made Mulder twist himself into contortions doing it using his mouth?

"Problems, pup?" Skinner asked from the couch, hearing his loud and dramatic sigh.

"I can't do this." Mulder pouted. "And it's ridiculous. Look, I have..."

"A degree from Oxford, yes, I know." Skinner nodded. "You're also a talented profiler, an excellent, if ill-disciplined agent, and my slave. The last part of that description is the only one I'm interested in right now, so get cracking." He turned his attention tersely back to his paper. Mulder sat there for a moment, staring at his Master resentfully, and then turned back to his task with a sigh. It didn't help that his jaw still ached from the ball gag incident earlier.

After another half an hour, Skinner called him over, and for a demonstration of what he'd been practicing. Mulder knelt in front of his Master, while Skinner opened his jeans, and stroked himself into an erection.

"Hands behind your back, pup. Serve me with your mouth."

Skinner placed the condom in Mulder's mouth, and the younger man leaned forward, and carefully tried to ease it into place. He failed.

"One more try. If you don't get this right, then you can spend another hour practicing before bed, pup." Skinner pulled on Mulder's ear to punctuate this statement, and his slave nodded, glumly. He put all his effort into the next one, and managed to get it almost into place before it slid off with a sloppy, plopping sound. "Not bad, but you clearly still need practice. You can take the dildo and condoms to your

bedroom. I won't check up on you, but if you still can't manage this the next time I ask you, then there'll be punishment," Skinner told him.

"It's not fucking easy!" Mulder protested, his hackles rising. Skinner grabbed his hair, and thrust his hard cock into Mulder's mouth, holding him still.

"Right - I've just about had enough of your opinions today. I think this might be a good way of keeping you quiet."

Skinner held Mulder's head, and thrust back and forth into his slave's mouth. Mulder opened his eyes wide - he was used to being the one giving oral sex, not having his mouth so comprehensively fucked in this way. He struggled to keep his throat open, and his gag reflex under control, as Skinner pushed back and forth in his mouth.

"Now, you give head pretty well, slave-boy, but you can still learn a thing or two," Skinner told him brusquely between thrusts. "In the next few days I want you to try varying your technique, and experimenting with a few new things. In other words - surprise me. It's not enough to just deliver the same thing each day. I want variety. I want to be the proud owner of the slave that gives the best head in this city, hell, in this whole damn country. Think you're up to that?" He eased himself out a little way, and Mulder nodded, his cock hardening. He really loved it when Skinner got forceful with him - the feeling of being totally dominated by someone bigger, stronger, and more powerful than himself just did it for him, and the mouth-fuck was a giant turn on. He lowered his eyes, and sucked Skinner's hard cock enthusiastically, until the big man came down his throat.

"Good." Skinner fondled Mulder's hair affectionately. "Now, you've been tired and cranky all day. Go to bed, slave, and wake up in a more willing mood tomorrow."

"Yes, Master." Mulder knelt there for a moment.

"Is there something else?" Skinner demanded.

"Could...Master kiss me?" He asked, hesitantly. He was dreading what dreams the night would bring, and had no wish to hurry off to bed. Skinner looked at him coolly.

"Kisses have to be earned. Have you earned one tonight, pup?" he asked.

Mulder sighed, and looked down. "No, Master," he whispered. "I'm sorry. I'll try harder tomorrow."

He was surprised when Skinner tipped up his chin, and planted a sweet, tender kiss on his lips. He moaned, opening his mouth for more, but a tongue wasn't forthcoming. "You can have that on account," Skinner murmured, squeezing his slave's naked buttock. "Before you go, slave." He held up the chastity belt. Mulder sighed.

Mulder tried to avoid sleep for as long as possible. He went over the day's events, and was just about to drop off, when a chilling thought occurred to him. Why was Skinner insisting that he got so good at giving oral sex? Was it because he wanted to show off his skills at the party on Friday? Mulder shuddered. He had been forced to give oral sex to strangers before, with other tops, as an extreme demonstration of his submission but somehow, this time, it felt different. It would be the ultimate

humiliation, and usually he got off on that, but...but...he heard a small voice deep inside: he didn't want to know that Skinner felt so little jealousy, that he could just stand by and watch Mulder serve another top. He wanted Skinner to become enraged at the thought of anyone else enjoying his services - he wanted a degree of exclusivity that he knew he was in no position to ask for. Mulder tossed and turned, worrying about it for an hour or so. He didn't know that was what Skinner intended, but it was a reasonable assumption to make, wasn't it?

Skinner's bedroom was empty when Mulder pushed the door open the following morning. He glanced around, but the only occupant in the bed was the green eyed Wanda. He checked in the bathroom but there was no sign of his Master. Feeling anxious, he began checking the whole apartment, room by room, then the upstairs one. He was starting to feel worried now. Skinner hadn't told him he'd be going anywhere this morning...Mulder began to run, looking under beds, and in closets, chasing around in circles like a dog pursuing its own tail. Outside, it got darker and darker, until he couldn't see anything. "Master!" He yelled. "Skinner! Where are you?" Finally, he gave up, and just sat, alone in the dark, by his Master's bed, clutching one of his lost Master's crisply ironed shirts to his chest, and drinking in the scent of him, sobbing his heart out...

Mulder woke up, still shaking, exhausted by his dream. He sat in bed for a long time, but he knew he couldn't stay there. The need to check that Skinner hadn't really disappeared was overwhelming, and he grabbed his pillow and blanket as he had the previous night, then picked up his gun just in case his Master needed protecting, and slipped silently down the stairs.

Wanda didn't even look at him as he tiptoed into the room. Mulder's heart skipped a beat - Skinner was there, spreadeagled as usual. He couldn't resist tiptoeing closer, and kneeling for a moment beside his Master, in silent worship. Then he leaned forward and laid the merest whisper of a kiss on Skinner's thumb, before going to lie down on the floor at the foot of his Master's bed. As he had the previous night, he fell asleep immediately, the tension leaving his face as soon as his head hit the pillow. Here he was not only safe; he could be of service. If anyone came to hurt his Master, he could protect him, with his gun, and every last drop of blood in his body.

A bright light shone into Mulder's dreams a few hours later.

"Fuck - get away, get away from the window!" he yelled, disorientated. He sat up, reaching for the gun under his pillow, only to find his wrist grasped firmly, and twisted behind his back.

"Slowly...it's only me," Skinner said, disarming him. Mulder blinked, and then let out a groan. The clock beside Skinner's bed read 6:38. "Now, perhaps you'd like to tell me what you're doing here?" Skinner asked, placing the gun out of his reach, and taking hold of Mulder's other wrist, keeping both Mulder's arms firmly at his side. Mulder swallowed, and looked up into his Master's dark eyes.

"I couldn't sleep, Master," he admitted.

"Did you sleep last night?" Skinner asked.

"No, Master," Mulder began to tremble.

"Did you lie to me about that?" Skinner demanded.

"Yes, Master." Mulder's trembling got worse. Skinner pulled the quilt off his bed, and sat down on the floor behind his slave, wrapping them both in it. He pulled Mulder back so that his shoulders were resting against his Master's chest.

"So you thought you'd come down here and sleep in my room without permission?" Skinner continued.

"Yes, Master," Mulder said miserably.

"With a gun?"

Mulder knew without looking that Skinner had that raised eyebrow expression. "Yes," he replied, not sure just how bad this was going to get, but feeling pretty certain that he was up to his neck in shit.

"Okay, I'm going to ask this, although I'm sure I'll regret it - the gun, Fox. Why?"

"Oh, you know, in case you found me, and got so angry I had to defend myself," he wisecracked. This was a bad move. Skinner's body stiffened.

"All right. It's early, and I was on my way to the bathroom when I tripped over you, so, as you're clearly not in any mood to be co-operative, I think I'll continue just as I would have done." Skinner got up, and Mulder immediately regretted the loss of his Master's warm body, and his comfortable quilt, which was whisked away and replaced on the bed. "I told you I want your honesty, Fox," Skinner told him firmly.

"Are you going to punish me?" Mulder couldn't keep the quaver out of his voice.

"Yes, I am - in a way that will cause me the least inconvenience. I'm going back to bed, slave. I want you to use the next couple of hours to think very carefully about this honesty issue. You can do that from **this** position."

He moved quickly, dragging Mulder to his feet, and over to face the wall. "That's nearly two hours corner time you've bought yourself, slave. I don't want to hear a peep out of you in that time. You can go downstairs at 8:45 and get me my coffee. When you come back, I'm going to want a full explanation. Think very carefully about it," Skinner hissed into his ear.

Mulder bit on his lip. He didn't dare defy his Master, but two hours! Standing, facing the wall, while his Master slept in his nice, warm, comfy bed. Mulder heard Skinner return from the bathroom, and walk towards the bed. He half turned his head.

"Master, I'm..." he began.

Skinner froze him with a look. "Face back towards the wall. You had your chance, Fox. Now you can think about how you blew it, and how you're going to make up for that in the morning." He picked up the quilt, and slipped under it. "Fox - trust isn't just about the things I do to your body in the Playroom. It's about your heart and mind too. Give me those and the rest will follow," he said softly, then he turned out the light, and left Mulder standing there.

It was a long two hours, and cold too. Mulder didn't dare move in case Skinner was still awake, so he stood, as silently as he could, resting his forehead on the wall, churning things over in his mind.

He felt as if there were two of him. There was Mulder, the FBI agent, who was preoccupied by his quest, who was bright and intelligent, and haunted by nightmares, and there was Fox, who wanted nothing more than to give it all up, and kneel at his Master's feet. So far, he had gone as willingly as he was able down this path. He knew he wanted it - it had been his choice to sign himself into slavery. Skinner was asking him for more than he could give though. He was looking beyond Fox, to Mulder, and he wanted to have them both. He wanted to see into the darkest recesses of Mulder's psyche, at what made him tick, and to know even his darkest nightmares. Mulder wasn't sure that he could give him that. He took a deep breath. This was just the beginning. Next week, when they returned to work, he could see the difficulties would start in earnest. No wonder Skinner was putting him through this intensive training program. Mulder closed his eyes, and wondered what the hell he was going to tell his Master in the morning.

Mulder slipped out, as he had been ordered, at 8:45, and grabbed the paper. He was almost distracted from his problems as he read that the Red Sox were playing the Yankees for the American League title that evening. He wondered if there was any chance in hell that Skinner would let him watch it.

Skinner was already sitting up in bed when Mulder returned.

"Master is awake," he murmured, putting the coffee down on the night-stand.

"Master had an interrupted night," Skinner scowled.

"Sorry, Master." Mulder knelt down, wretched, beside the bed. "I think...Master might want to give up on me," he said, surprising himself. "I think...maybe I'm not trainable, Master."

He was surprised when Skinner broke into a long, deep laugh. Mulder looked up, wide-eyed.

"I'm sure you'd like to believe that, Fox. It'd save you from having to reveal anything about yourself. You could just duck out of this, as you've done before whenever anyone has gotten too close. Well, tough luck, sweetheart. This is it. There's no escaping this one. You're mine, and that's the way it's going to stay, however hard it damn well gets for you. Now get up on this bed, and into the Confessional position."

He patted the empty space on the bed beside him. Mulder hesitated, feeling an overwhelming sense of relief, combined with a gnawing anxiety in the pit of his stomach.

"Do I have to come and get you?" Skinner asked dangerously. "If I do, your butt will pay for it."

Mulder was galvanized into immediate action. His butt had been on the receiving end of enough spankings in the past few days. He knelt beside his Master, tucked his whole body neatly into position, and placed his nose on the quilt, eyes closed. He was surprised when Skinner's hand came down gently on his exposed back, stroking him.

"All right, little one. Tell me why you were sleeping on my floor last night," Skinner asked softly.

"I couldn't sleep, Master. I have...nightmares. It isn't a recent thing," Mulder admitted.

"But you didn't feel the need to tell me before?" Skinner asked.

"I...I didn't think it was relevant, Master," Mulder whispered.

"Something that affects my slave's well-being, and you didn't think it was **relevant**," Skinner echoed, in a tone of disbelief. "Well, in future, slave, let **me** decide what's relevant and what isn't."

"Yes, Master."

Skinner's hand continued its slow caress up and down Mulder's spine. "Keep going," he ordered. "What do you normally do when you have these nightmares?"

"I watch TV, Master," Mulder said, "and sometimes I go out for a run."

"I see. Well, you can't run without my permission, but you have a television in your room. Did you try that?" Skinner asked, his fingers straying into Mulder's hair, stroking him softly, like a cat.

"No, Master," Mulder said.

"Why not?"

"Because it doesn't work. I just lie awake all night, watching. Sometimes it takes ages to fall asleep again. Sometimes...I just don't."

"But you didn't even try - why?"

"I don't know," Mulder said the lie before he was even aware of it. He did know. He knew he couldn't have just stayed in his room watching TV when his nightmares had been about Skinner. The urge to check that his Master was safe had been too strong for him to resist.

"What were your nightmares about, little one?" Skinner asked gently.

Mulder started to rock back and forth. He hated being perceived as weak, or emotionally needy. Even in his submission he tried to keep his strength, the strength that had kept him going for so long through innumerable ordeals. He didn't need his tops - emotionally any way. He just needed what they could give him. If he let them get close it would end up like...Phoebe.

"My nightmares are usually about my sister, Master, or Scully. About them being abducted. About...not being able to help them." Mulder told the half-truth, curling himself up even tighter in the semi-fetal position and rocking with a vengeance now. *And about you, about losing you, Master...*

"Usually?" Skinner picked up on the detail. "Was that what they were about last night?"

"Very similar, Master, yes," Mulder whispered. There was a long silence during which he hoped Skinner wouldn't delve any further or he knew he would tell the other man an outright lie.

"All right. Come here." Skinner held out his arms, and Mulder looked up in relief, and crawled into them eagerly. He found himself settling against his Master's chest, clinging on for dear life. There was something so reassuring about the scent, and strength of his Master, about his muscular arms, and

powerful body. *It's just a physical thing, not any big emotional deal, he told himself*, as he closed his eyes and allowed his Master to kiss his forehead.

"Is there anything else?" Skinner asked.

Mulder didn't want to lie, but somehow, the truth was beyond him. "No, Master," he whispered.

"All right." Skinner pushed him back so that he could look into his eyes. "I won't have my slave distressed, and tired during the day. It'll interfere with your training, and your ability to serve me, apart from anything else, but I also take the terms of my contract very seriously. Quote me clause 2 of the Master Contract, slave."

Mulder thought about it for a moment, then opened his mouth.

"I will provide the physical and emotional necessities of life for my slave, and he will know my love as I choose for him to know it," he gabbled.

"I think sleep counts as a physical necessity," Skinner commented. "Now, as far as I'm concerned, being allowed to sleep on my floor, is just one step down from allowing my slave to sleep in my bed. In other words - it's something that I would usually make you earn. However, I have an idea, pup, based on our discussion about the kennel yesterday."

He got up, and pulled on his robe, clicking his fingers for Mulder to kneel in the submissive position.

"Stay," he ordered. Mulder did as he was told, and Skinner returned a few minutes later, bearing a long length of chain. He fastened one end of it to one of the legs at the foot of the bed, then beckoned his slave over. "In future, if you have a nightmare, and feel that you need to sleep in my room, you can. However - if you do, you must sleep chained to the foot of the bed, in bondage. Please try to ensure you don't wake me as well. Just clip this," he held up the end of the chain, "to your collar. It's a locking mechanism - I'll be the only one with a key to it. So, you should think very hard about whether to come down here. If you do, you'll be chained for the rest of the night, unable to use the bathroom, or to move around much."

"Yes, Master." Mulder nodded, feeling relieved. He didn't mind about being chained - in fact, his cock told him that he rather liked the idea. It was just so good to know that he could spend the night here without worrying about the consequences.

"And if I find you here in the morning, I'll expect a full account of what brought you here," Skinner warned. Mulder crossed his fingers behind his back, and nodded.

"All right - I'll do a quick inspection and then we should get moving. I want you to do a thorough work out in the gym this morning." Skinner took off his robe, and headed for the shower.

"Doesn't Master want..." Mulder gestured to Skinner's cock.

"No - I'm going to be using you in the shower. Get a move on." Skinner slapped Mulder's butt and his slave scrambled quickly for the door.

Skinner inspected his slave briefly, and removed his chastity belt, before stepping into the shower. He allowed his slave to soap him thoroughly, and then he told him to get into the Grace position. Mulder obeyed, placing his hands flat against the wall. Skinner soaped his fingers and finger-fucked his slave for several minutes, then withdrew. Mulder watched out of the corner of his eye, as Skinner unhooked the long back scrubbing brush from the shower rail.

"Oh shit," he murmured.

"I told you, slave, morning discipline is a given. Accept." Skinner warned.

"Yes, Master," he gasped, putting his head back, the water flowing down his face. The brush packed an almighty whack as it slapped against his buttocks. Wet skin always hurt more than dry, and the brush was as big and hard as any paddle, although Skinner was swinging it lightly on his already tenderized flesh.

"What are you?" Skinner asked.

"Your slave, Master," Mulder replied automatically, knowing the litany by heart now.

"And your status?"

"I have none, Master, I exist to serve you," Mulder panted, as the brush made painful contact with his upturned butt several times.

"Who does your body belong to?" Skinner demanded.

"OW! You, you, Master," Mulder whimpered.

"And how can I use you?" Skinner asked.

"Anyway you like. Unnnnhh! Ow!"

"That's just what I intend to do."

Skinner threw the brush down, and Mulder heard the sound of a condom being unwrapped. He gasped out loud as his Master grabbed his sore buttocks, and entered him swiftly, and smoothly. "Push your butt out, slave. More," Skinner squeezed Mulder's red ass, making his slave's internal muscles contract around his hard cock, milking him. Mulder struggled to push his butt out, gasping as Skinner's cock slid home. His Master's hands slipped around, and lightly touched his slave's sore nipples, making Mulder yelp. His cock, already hard, went as straight as a ramrod.

"Master...please..." he whimpered, as Skinner continued that gossamer light touch on his nipples.

"Quiet, slave. Accept me." Skinner grabbed Mulder's hips and thrust into him with more urgency. It took all Mulder's strength to keep in position as Skinner pounded into him, over and over again, his wet hands fondling Mulder's entire body, sometimes stroking, sometimes pinching, sometimes making the lightest contact with his nipples, or squeezing his tender ass, before finally reaching climax. He stood, covering his slave's body with his own for several minutes, while their breathing returned to normal, and

then he withdrew, and disposed of the condom. He returned to the shower, and turned his slave around.

"Good boy." He kissed Mulder firmly on the lips, plundering his slave's mouth with his tongue, and Mulder opened up, and went weak at the knees, holding onto this Master's shoulders for dear life.

"Please..." he found himself rubbing up against Skinner's groin, trying to achieve the climax that was always just out of reach.

"Naughty." Skinner stepped out of the shower, flicking the switch to cold as he left. "You know the drill. You can stay there until **that**," Skinner pointed at Mulder's erection, "has gone down."

Skinner took Mulder through the rest of the day at such breakneck speed that his slave barely had time to remember his broken night. He was given a thorough work out in the gym, whisked up the Playroom for an hour's light stroking in the harness, then ordered to spend another hour shaving balloons. After that, it was time to wash the brunch dishes. Mulder approached the full sink and noticed Wanda nosing around under the faucet.

"Stupid cat," he murmured. "You **have** a bowl of water, Madam. On the floor, which, incidentally, is where you belong." Wanda didn't take any notice of him, she just continued licking moisture from the faucet. Mulder glanced over his shoulder, but Skinner was in the other room. With a grin of evil delight, Mulder reached out, and snapped the faucet on quickly. Wanda jumped, as the deluge consumed her, and scurried away, her tail twitching angrily and one damp ear flicking back and forth. It was at that moment that Skinner came into the kitchen.

"Not even started yet?" Skinner raised an eyebrow. "Hurry up, Fox. I want you to join me on the couch." He picked Wanda up absently, and kissed her, then paused. "Fox - Wanda has a wet ear," he commented.

"Does she, Master?" Mulder busied himself clearing up, plunging his hands in the soapy water.

"Do you know anything about that?" Skinner asked ominously.

"No, Master," Mulder gave a seraphic smile, his hazel eyes meeting Wanda's. "Maybe she dunked it in her water bowl by mistake, Master," Mulder commented neutrally.

Skinner's eyes narrowed and he regarded his slave thoughtfully. "Maybe she did," he murmured, taking Wanda with him back to the other room. "Come on, little darling," he crooned as he went. "Let me take you away from the nasty slave."

Mulder made a face. It was ridiculous, a grown man talking to a stupid cat like that, although not, he pondered, any more ridiculous than a grown man doing the washing up stark naked, save only for a cock ring, 2 nipple rings, a gold collar, and a wedding ring.

He joined Skinner on the couch as requested after doing the dishes. Skinner was leaning back, looking through the TV Guide, and he beckoned Mulder to sit between his open knees, then he pulled his slave back against his chest. Mulder relaxed into the embrace with a sigh. This was so nice.

"You had an interrupted night, last night, pup," Skinner mused, gently stroking Mulder's hair. "Now, I want you to take a nap."

Mulder closed his eyes obediently, listening as Skinner rustled through the TV Guide again. A thought occurred to him, as he remembered the game. Normally, nothing on this earth would have stopped him watching a playoff game between the Red Sox and the Yankees for the American League title. Skinner seemed to be in a very mellow mood this afternoon. He wondered if there was any way he could wheedle his Master into allowing him to watch the game. Still musing, he turned on his side, and fell into a deep slumber.

He was awakened a couple of hours later, by an insistent stroking inside his anus. He blinked, and glanced up. Skinner was finger fucking him awake.

"You can't sleep all day, pup," Skinner smiled. "We do have some more chores to do. However, I must say, this is nice."

His fingers picked up speed, and Mulder started to writhe, and moan, as they found his prostate. His cock jerked awake with a vengeance.

"You know, I think it's your lucky day," Skinner murmured into Mulder's ear. "I think I'm going to use you again." He dug into his pocket for a condom, then removed his finger, and pressed his hard cock against Mulder's buttocks, rubbing it between them. "One of the good things about having you in my bed, when the day comes, is that I'll have you to hand to use if I wake up in the night. I'll enjoy using you while you sleep."

"I'm sure I'll soon wake up if you do that, Master," Mulder moaned, trying to impale himself on his Master's cock. He could hardly believe himself. Up until last week he had avoided anal sex, but now he was rubbing himself on Skinner's cock like a cat on heat. He still found Skinner's thick cock hard to take, but the sensation of it filling him, left him satisfied in a way he could never have imagined. He opened up eagerly, as Skinner pushed his hard length into him, and rocked his hips against his slave's body, getting into an insistent rhythm, never quite thrusting to the hilt, just dipping in and out. It was a new angle for Mulder, with both of them lying on their sides on the couch, and he had to will himself to relax for the first few strokes, which he always found the most painful. Once Skinner was fully inside him, the big man stopped moving, and held his slave close. Mulder closed his eyes. Shit, this felt so good. His back against Skinner's chest, being held tight, his Master's cock fully inside him, claiming him. They were still for a moment that seemed to last forever, and then Skinner started a slow, tantalizing movement, back and forth, every thrust seeming to stimulate Mulder's prostate, until Mulder felt sure he'd come just from that dizzying pressure. Skinner seemed to sense that he was on the edge, and pinched the tip of his cock firmly. "You don't come. Not yet. Not until Friday, and then only if you're good. I've been too soft on you so far, slave." Skinner murmured in his ear.

"Master feels pretty hard right now," Mulder quipped.

Skinner tightened the grip of his arm across the front of Mulder's chest and thrust a few more times before coming. Once more, he stayed inside his slave for several minutes, as his penis softened inside Mulder's body.

"I want you to remember what this feels like, to think about me inside you, as often as possible," Skinner whispered in his ear. "I read somewhere, about someone who had a plaster cast made of his cock. I'd like to do something similar - have the shape and size of my hard cock fashioned into a butt plug, and make you wear it all the time, so that I'm claiming you, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, like the slave you are. The only time I'd take it out would be to use you, like I just did, so there would never be a time when you couldn't feel me inside you. How does that sound, slave?" his voice was low, and sexy, and Mulder groaned, his cock aching with need.

"Master is just tormenting me now," he whispered.

"That's right. I like tormenting you, little one. It gives me pleasure," Skinner laughed. "How are you feeling after your nap?"

"Fine, Master." Mulder snuggled against his Master's body.

"Is there anything you want to talk about?" Skinner's hands gently stroked his body.

Mulder sighed happily. "No, Master," he whispered.

They lay there for a long time. Mulder felt himself drifting off into a dreamy haze. He glanced at the TV Guide on the floor, and remembered his plan. He was sure Skinner wouldn't let him watch the game if he asked him, so he decided on a different tack.

"Master?"

"Hmm?" Skinner hugged him close, and kissed the back of his neck, making Mulder's hair stand on end.

"You know what I was saying about not sleeping?"

"Yes," Skinner nibbled at his earlobe.

"Well, I usually find that watching baseball before I go to bed helps me drop off. I don't know why," Mulder said, taking his life into his hands.

"Baseball?" Skinner licked behind his ears. Mulder shivered, willing his erection to go away.

"Yes, Master. It works every time. I'll probably sleep all night if I watched the game this evening," he said. It sounded unbelievable, even to his own ears, but Skinner seemed to be relaxed, and zoned out, so it was worth a try. It might work. His Master sounded as if he could be in an indulgent mood right now, on his post-sex high. "Could we have the game on tonight, Master?" he asked.

"Why not?" Skinner nipped Mulder's earlobe again. "Yes, we'll have the game on tonight, slave. I'll enjoy that. Very much."

Mulder grinned silently to himself. Hah! At last he had found a chink in his Master's armor. Appealing to Skinner's good nature, taking advantage of his concern over Mulder's nightmares, and asking straight

after some hot sex. Those were the keys. Mulder snuggled down in his Master's arms, feeling pretty damn pleased with himself.

Skinner seemed to be looking forward to the evening as well. He put Mulder through his paces once more on the end of the leash, then they had dinner, after which, Skinner got out some beers, and a bag of popcorn and handed them to his slave.

"You can't watch a game without these vital accessories," he grinned. Mulder grinned back, sensing the training being relaxed. Maybe tonight, for just a couple of hours, they could be regular guys. They could immerse themselves in the game, and forget about the training for a bit. Maybe, if he was lucky, Mulder could lie in his Master's arms again while they watched TV, just as he had that afternoon. Mulder took the beers into the living room, and put them on the table, then sat down expectantly, turning on the TV to catch the intro. Skinner came in and sat down beside him.

"On the floor, pup," he gestured. Mulder pouted, reluctant to relinquish his fantasy of lying in Skinner's arms, but Skinner clicked his fingers and he didn't dare disobey. "Okay, I think we can use this as a training opportunity." Skinner smiled down at his slave. "For tonight, Fox, I'd like you to be my footstool."

"What?" Mulder opened his mouth wide in wordless shock.

"You heard me, pup. On your hands and knees. No - facing that way." Skinner pointed in the opposite direction to where the TV was located. Mulder just knelt there, mouth opening and closing uselessly.

"But - Master said I could watch the game!" he protested at last.

"No, Master said we'd have the game on, and we will - but you won't be watching it." Skinner smiled at him. "Instead you'll be on your hands and knees with my legs on your back. I think I'll balance the remotes on you as well. Get used to it, slave. I'm fond of human furniture - and it's a hard skill to learn. You have to be completely still for a start. I won't put any drinks on you tonight, but I will at some point, and I don't expect them to spill. I think it's time that you found a quiet center to your soul, boy. Blank out the rest of the world, and just concentrate on being a footstool."

Mulder choked in disbelief, but Skinner turned him around, placed his unwilling limbs into position, and then rested his long legs on Mulder's back.

"Master, please," he whimpered, hearing the game start on the television behind him. He was rewarded by a swat on the butt from a rolled up copy of the TV Guide.

"Quiet, boy." Skinner said, leaning back in the couch. He opened a beer, and dug his hand into the popcorn.

Mulder flushed to the roots of his hair, feeling utterly humiliated. Apart from anything else, it was uncomfortable, this kneeling in position. He tried to remain still, but after barely ten minutes, he felt sure he'd collapse, and shifted his weight - only to receive another hearty slap. From then on, every wriggle was met by a swat from the TV Guide. Behind him, he could tell he was missing one of the most exciting games in living memory.

"This has been a game for the history books so far! I've never even seen a play like that before," Tim McCarver, the Yankee announcer babbled. Skinner leaned forward, excited, removed his legs from Mulder's back, and plunked his remote and the popcorn down on him instead.

"Master!" Mulder protested, flinching from the anticipated blow from the TV Guide. He wasn't disappointed as it swatted down on his upturned butt.

"And now here's the play at the plate!" Mulder heard from the television behind him. "This run could be it! He's out! No! The ball is dropped! He's safe! He's safe at home!"

Oh god, this was excruciating. Mulder craned his neck to get just one glimpse of the play, and found the back of his head swatted with the rolled up magazine. Fuck! He couldn't bear this!

"Master, I'm sorry. Please let me watch," he begged, doing his best to sound contrite, while thinking furious thoughts.

"What are you sorry for, slave?" Skinner asked.

"For lying to you so that you'd let me watch," Mulder admitted with a sigh. "Hell, it was worth a try, Master!"

"What about just asking me? Wasn't that worth a try?" Skinner demanded.

"I--you might not have let me, Master,"

"Well, I'm sure as hell not going to let you now!" Skinner retorted. "Just kneel there, and give the matter of honesty some more thought. That seems to be a theme with you at the moment."

"Is Master going to punish me?" Mulder asked, suddenly worried.

"Yeah. Now shut up. I'm watching the game, boy. One more word out of you and I'll kill the sound so you can't even listen to it."

Mulder opened his mouth, and then closed it again. It wasn't worth the risk. He listened in agony, as the duel between the Yankees and the Red Sox progressed. Mulder missed it all, including a final 'once in a lifetime' triple play that brought the game to an end.

"But not in my lifetime," Mulder groaned to himself as the announcers exulted about the end of a baseball game that would go down in the history books as one of the most exciting ever played.

Skinner turned the TV off, and clicked his fingers. Mulder rose up stiffly into an upright kneeling position, his back protesting the movement.

"Okay, we have some issues to address." Skinner got up, and took off his belt. Mulder watched him, alarmed, his butt cheeks clenching in anticipation. "I don't know what it's going to take to get this message home, Fox, but I do know I'm going to keep trying until we get there. I need your honesty."

Skinner stood in front of his slave, looking down on him. "It's important. I need it in the little things - like the stunt you just pulled, because if you can't be honest about that, then there's no hope with you about the big things. And I **need** you to be honest about those, Fox, because if you're not, I might end up doing you some serious harm, and I don't want that any more than you do. I'm talking emotional harm as much as physical harm," Skinner warned. "By big things, I mean the truth about your nightmares, because I don't think you gave me that this morning did you?" Skinner asked.

Mulder looked up, his eyes wide and fearful, then looked down again, and shook his head, wordlessly.

"I did hope that relaxing you on the couch might encourage you into confessing of your own free will, but I can see that's not going to happen, so I'm going to be take a harder line with you. You deserve to be punished for the crap you spouted to manipulate me into letting you watch the game. I hope you learned that lesson. Did you?"

"Yes, Master." Mulder bit on his lip, and watched as Skinner doubled up the belt in his hands, and pulled it taut, then slapped it against his thigh a couple of times with a resounding thwack.

"What did you learn?" Skinner asked. "Tell me the lesson you learned, slave."

"That I must always be honest with my Master?" Mulder suggested.

"Yes - that's about right, and to drum that lesson home, I'm going to give you one lick of my belt for every word in that sentence, with you spelling each one out as we go. Present yourself for discipline, Fox."

He sat down, and patted his knees. Mulder got up quickly, and bent himself over them, his stomach churning. He **really** didn't want a spanking right now.

"Okay, let's go," his Master said, laying the first lick right across the middle of Mulder's tender flesh.

"I," Mulder panted.

"Leg's further apart," Skinner widened them with his knee, then, trapped Mulder's cock between his legs, before delivering the next lick.

"M!" Mulder yelled. Another swat followed on quickly behind.

"U!" he cried.

Each lick came hard on the heels of the next one. If Mulder was too slow spelling the phrase, Skinner laid down an interim stroke to remind him to hurry up. He got lost somewhere around the middle of the word 'honest,' so Skinner started all over again from the beginning of that word. By the time he'd finished spelling out the phrase, Mulder's butt felt like it was on fire, and he was sobbing freely, his head buried in the couch. "Okay," Skinner paused. "Say each word for me, and I'll give you a stroke for each, then we're finished."

"I...ow! Must...always...fuck!...be...hon...honest...please, ow!...with...my...unnnh...Master!" Mulder repeated frantically, each lick of Skinner's belt printing a line of fire in his flesh. Finally, the onslaught

stopped, and Mulder lay, panting, over his Master's knee. He felt Skinner's hand soothing his back, and got up, burying his face in his Master's shoulder.

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry..." he sobbed incoherently.

"I know you are. Come here." Skinner pulled his kneeling slave between his open legs, and kissed his hair until the tears finally subsided. Mulder felt sure he'd soaked his Master's shirt through to the skin. He'd never cried like this after a whipping. He'd always had his escape, damn it! He hated himself for his weakness, and tried to draw back, to retreat, but Skinner held him close, soothing him, which just made Mulder's sobs start up again. He cried for a long time, then lay limply in his Master's strong arms. Skinner pushed him back, and gently wiped the tears from his slave's cheeks, and deposited a light kiss on Mulder's swollen lips. "Now, talk to me, sweetheart," Skinner murmured, "and this time, make it the truth. Or I'll throw you back over my knee, and make you spell out that phrase again. In fact, every time you're dishonest, that's exactly what I'm going to do to you."

"Please...I promise I'll tell you..." Mulder babbled. "The nightmares...they were about you, Master."

"About me?" Skinner frowned.

"Yes...I..." Mulder closed his eyes and some instinct made him assume the Confessional position. "I dreamed you were abducted, just like Sam and Scully were abducted. It happens to everyone I love." He froze, annoyed with himself for uttering that word. He didn't want Skinner to know the hold he had over him. It made him vulnerable, and weak. "I saw you being taken away, and, another time, you just disappeared. I looked for you everywhere. When I came to your room, I brought the gun because I wanted to protect you. I feel so goddamn helpless in my life, Master. I couldn't stop them taking Samantha, or Scully. I suppose - I wanted to protect you if they came for you. I know it's load of fucking stupid crap, but it was 4 o'clock in the morning, and it made some kind of half-assed sense then." Mulder sighed, trembling with the effort of the confession.

"Hush, it's all right." Mulder was surprised that Skinner hadn't burst out laughing at the absurdity of what he'd heard. "Fox, I'm not going anywhere," Skinner told him, softly. "Not now, not ever. You're stuck with me, slave." His fingers gently massaged Mulder's stiff shoulders. "We have to deal with these issues, Fox. You've had some bad crap happen in your life. You **can** move on - but only if you deal with it, instead of trying to hide from it. From now on, you'll tell me if you have any more nightmares, and you'll tell me what they are. Now, do you have anything else to confess?"

Mulder shook his head, and was surprised when his mouth opened and he started talking.

"I'm worried you'll make me suck the other tops at the party, Master," he admitted, shaking again. Skinner's fingers dug deep into the back of his neck.

"What the hell made you think I'd do that?" he asked.

"Because you want me to be so good at it. I thought that was why," Mulder admitted.

"I want you to be good at it for my own benefit, not anyone else's!" Skinner laughed. Mulder felt his shoulders relaxing in relief. "Anything else, sweetheart?"

"I turned the faucet on, and soaked Wanda's ear," Mulder gabbled, seemingly unable to stop the torrent of guilty secrets. Skinner roared with laughter, and Mulder looked up in surprise.

"Well, I'm not saying I condone that, but hell, she does hover around that faucet like she's **asking** for it sometimes," Skinner said between great gasps of hysteria. "Well, Fox, it seems like you've got a lot on your conscience. I think, maybe, we should institute a confessional half hour every evening." He leaned forward, and helped his slave to kneel upright, his face turning suddenly serious. "The honesty issue is important, little one," he said, fondling Mulder's cheek. Mulder nodded, a lump in his throat. "The fact that you have trouble being honest with me shows you don't trust me yet. I need that trust. I told you, Fox, I'm going to take you right down. If you don't trust me, if you fight me all the way, then it'll be a harder experience for you. Learn to trust me, and it'll be a lot less painful."

"Yes, Master," Mulder bowed his head.

"And, you know, the excitement of that game has made me horny. There's something I'd like to do to you before you go to bed. Lie on the floor, hands above your head. Good."

Mulder lay on the carpet, watching as Skinner approached him. Without warning, the big man knelt down on top of him, his legs astride Mulder's ribs. He took hold of Mulder's arms, and pushed them back onto the floor, leaning over his slave, and looking into his eyes for a long moment. "Who do you belong to, slave?" He asked. Mulder felt a thrill pass through his body, at being held in such a submissive pose.

"You, Master," he said, happily.

"There are many ways of marking you." Skinner grinned. "Do you know that cats scent mark their territory? That's what I'm going to do to you now. Hold still."

He opened his jeans, and pulled out his cock, then fed it into Mulder's waiting mouth. "Suck me until I'm just about to come. No, don't move. I'm going to hold you down, slave boy."

Mulder obeyed his Master, sucking on his hard cock, his hands held captive over his head, the weight of Skinner's body keeping him pinned to the carpet. When Skinner was on the verge of coming, he withdrew from his slave's mouth, and spurted out on his naked body, his come splashing onto Mulder's chest, and over his neck. Mulder closed his eyes as he accepted the semen onto his body.

"Okay," Skinner leaned forward, and held Mulder down again. "Wait here until it dries, slave boy. Then go to bed stinking of me, with my come still marking your chest. You can't wash it off until tomorrow morning. If you wake up in the night, I want you to smell me on your body, to feel claimed by my come, and to remember that it's me marking you as my territory. **Nobody**," he said the word with savage intent, "gets to use you but me, boy. You're mine." He dipped his finger in his come, and painted some down the center of Mulder's chest. "Scent-marked," he whispered.

Mulder shivered. He felt more owned than he ever had in his life. He loved the note of jealousy he heard in his Master's voice. Skinner had even made the thought of sleeping in dried spunk sound sexy. Skinner held him there until the moisture had dried on his body, and then let him up. He fastened Mulder into his chastity belt for the night, and then pulled his slave into a deep, loving kiss.

"Sweet dreams, sweetheart," he murmured. Mulder gazed at him in wordless adoration, and then retreated to his bedroom in a haze of happiness.

He got into bed, smelling of sex, the dried semen feeling slightly itchy on his chest, but for some reason he found the smell and sensation reassuring - and he didn't have one bad dream all night.

**End of Part 7**

## It's My Party and I'll Cry If I Want To by Xanthe

### Author's Notes:

Graphic by Sergeeva.

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Posted 31st October, 1999.

**WARNING: There's explicit BDSM play in this chapter, including scenes of public humiliation. It's all consensual, and done with love, but don't read on if you don't like this kind of thing.**

Many thanks to Emma, who told me a very intriguing tale that sparked this story off, as well as providing invaluable technical assistance, and some rather interesting ideas...Thanks also to Geoffrey for the useful URL, and Gaby for the encouragement, and fun stuff :-)

Quotation courtesy of my sweet Alex. None of this is beta'd. It's far too much fun to take seriously.

By the way, when I first posted this chapter, there was a typo in the feedback addy, so if you sent it and it bounced, by all means re-send!

**24/7** is an erotic fantasy and NOT a BDSM resource guide. The truth is sometimes exaggerated, or played with, for dramatic effect. For more information, please visit the **24/7 BDSM Glossary**.

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*"A truth, still apparent, though disregarded, that things move violently to their place, but calmly in their place. To put it another way, everything has its right home, the region that suits it, and, unless forcibly restrained, will move thither by a kind of homing instinct."*

J. Winterson  
"Art and Lies"

The first thing Mulder's Master did on Thursday morning was to order him into the shower. The second thing he did was to tell his damp slave that he was taking him down even further, and that he would be silent for the rest of the day. Mulder stared up at him in shock. A whole day of silence? Without even the benefit of the gag to enforce it?

"You have to learn, sweetheart," Skinner chuckled, reading his expression. "You'll be silent for most of the day, until I give you the command that you can speak. View this as a learning opportunity, Fox."

Mulder opened his mouth to protest, and Skinner placed a finger over it. "It's one stroke with the strap for every word you say today. I'll keep tally and deliver them this evening. Now, do you think you can take your morning discipline without talking? Screams are fine, and I'll keep it light."

Mulder thought about it for a moment, and then nodded, but it was with some trepidation that he lowered himself over his Master's knee. Skinner was true to his word, and the slaps that rained down on Mulder's ass from his bare hand didn't do more than sting, but even so, after the sheer volume built up on his sore ass, Mulder was writhing, and kicking. It took all his willpower not to cry out, or beg his Master for a reprieve. When it was over, Skinner placed him back on his knees, and gave him a deep, searching kiss.

"I'm very proud of you, Fox," he said when he'd finished, leaving Mulder almost whimpering for more. "When you can regularly take even the most severe discipline without pleas, or resistance, accept it as your due, as symbolic of your slavery, and kneel and kiss my feet afterwards in thanks, then your training will be complete. This was a good first step. I'm pleased."

The afterglow of Skinner's praise stayed with Mulder for most of the day, and the trial of silence actually turned out to be pleasurable, as he watched his Master intently, relieved of the necessity to communicate in any way save through his body language. Skinner was firm but attentive. He took his slave on an hour's leash training - Mulder's nipples were still sore, but the worst of the initial aftermath of the piercing had worn off. Skinner assured him that within 2 weeks they wouldn't give him any discomfort at all. "Then we can really begin to play with them," he promised, touching the tip of his index finger to one, which sent tingles down Mulder's spine.

Mulder was now confident on the leash. Learning the signals had been a walk in the park - Mulder's worst enemy was his over-active mind. If he switched off, and, as Skinner had told him to do on so many occasions, surrendered to his submission, then he performed brilliantly. If, however, he tried to think about it too much, or to second-guess his Master, then he usually screwed up. Skinner was firm but patient, and Mulder actually came to actively enjoy his sessions on the leash. He had a mental image of himself walking behind his Master down the corridors of a deserted Hoover building, himself naked, Skinner fully clothed, leading him by the chain attached to his pierced nipples. It was the kind of image that made him immediately hard. He was so used to his aching, unrelieved erection now, that it was easier for him not to be distracted by it. He still couldn't wait to be allowed to come, and he hoped desperately that the party would go without incident, and he could claim his prize of a night in his Master's arms. Skinner had even hinted that he'd perform oral sex on his slave, and Mulder practically salivated at **that** prospect.

Mulder went through a familiar litany of tasks on his day of silence. He shaved 5 balloons, and only killed 3 of them, then performed an extensive workout, under Skinner's watchful gaze.

"I'm going to improve your diet - more protein, less junk food," Skinner informed him, as he ran on the treadmill. "And add some definition to your pecs and upper body. I've worked out a program for you that should achieve that. I like you as you are though - I don't want you bulked up, so the program will just tone you, and increase your levels of fitness. Your body is over-stressed," he frowned at the full

fitness survey he'd made his slave complete, including an in depth study of his eating habits, fitness methods, body stats, and a cardio vascular work out. "We'll work on that. You'll find that being a slave has its own stresses, but, by and large, it can be a very restful condition."

Mulder shot him a look of disbelief, and made his first slip up of the day by not being able to contain the "yeah, right," that slipped out of his mouth. Skinner raised an eyebrow.

"That's two with the strap this evening, Fox," he warned. "Keep a tally - I'll ask you for the total later on. I hope for your sake that it doesn't grow too much."

Afterward the workout, Skinner took him to the Playroom, and tied him up in the harness again. He didn't blindfold him, and Mulder enjoyed another hour of soothing, light stroking, and tickling. He only earned two swats for not being able to stay still, and he only gasped out a "shit!" once, when Skinner indulged in some prolonged tickling of his armpits. All in all, he thought his Master was pleased with him.

Later that afternoon, Skinner made him kneel on the floor with his hands outstretched, and placed a pot in each of them.

"Half an hour without moving, then you can go on all fours and be my footstool again for another half an hour," Skinner informed him.

Mulder made a face. He hated this human furniture thing. It made his muscles ache apart from anything else, as Skinner insisted on complete stillness. "You can take a rest every time the strain is too much - 30 seconds or so to get the blood moving again, just lower your hands until the ache has gone, then raise them again," Skinner told him. "I'm not asking you to be superhuman, just to learn the benefit of discovering a still center to your soul, and how to inhabit it for short periods of time. If, at the same time, you can also be of service, then that's even better," he grinned, pouring water into one bowl, and filling the other with peanuts, which he helped himself to every time he past his hapless, silent slave-come-coffee table.

Mulder sighed, and tried his best to master the skill, but he still hated it. He hated being a footstool even more. There was something utterly degrading about kneeling on all fours with his butt in the air, having his back used as a footrest. Skinner's long legs were **heavy** as well, and the demands that he be completely still were hard for him to obey. Skinner pulled him into a hug when his half hour was up, and kissed his slave's forehead tenderly.

"Well done. I know that wasn't easy," he said, and Mulder laid his head against his Master's shoulder, with a heartfelt sigh.

"I hate being furniture, Master," he said mournfully.

"That's five more, Fox." Skinner said cheerfully. "Now, I want to use you. Do you think you can remain completely still **and** silent, while I do that? I can gag and tie you if need be, but I'd prefer it if you learned to obey me of your own volition."

Mulder looked at his Master wide eyed. He loved that Skinner found his body so exciting, that he enjoyed exploring it, and opening it. Having his prostate stimulated wasn't quite as enjoyable as being

allowed to come, but it was the next best thing. However, he did have a tendency to move around, and shout out a lot during sex. His Master was combining two lessons in one with his question. Mulder thought about it, and nodded - he would **try** at least.

"Good boy," Skinner kissed his forehead again. "Lie down on your back, and open your legs. I'll place you into whatever position I want you in - I don't want you to move at all, and speech is forbidden. If you disobey me on either of those, then I'll add it to the list for punishment tonight."

Mulder nodded again, wondering if he would regret turning down the use of the gag, and bondage. He lay on his back on the floor, and opened his legs wide. Skinner knelt between them, and entered a finger into Mulder's anus, probing gently, and thoroughly. Mulder started to moan, and had to bite back the sound. It was much harder than he thought to lie completely still, without moving, as Skinner continued that long, probing caress. Two fingers, then three, and Mulder wanted to shout out loud, and put his arms above his head, to lean into the slow, loving caress. It took all his willpower to resist.

After several minutes of this, Skinner undid his jeans, and took out his pulsing erection, stroking it. He laid it against Mulder's inner thigh, and teased him with it, then he unwrapped a condom and placed it on his hard cock. He raised Mulder's legs over his shoulders, and grasped his slave's thighs, impaling him on his cock in one swift movement that made Mulder shout out, then bite on his lip. The first moments of entrance were always slightly painful to Mulder, but when Skinner started to thrust, and found his prostate, that discomfort rapidly changed into an intense, burning pleasure. He was amazed by how much he enjoyed anal sex now. Part of it was the thrill of being dominated, opened by his big, strong, powerful Master, and taken by him without mercy, subject to his whim, and will, but part of it was simply enjoyment of the act itself. Mulder strained every muscle in his body to keep still, and quiet, as Skinner pounded into him, back and forth, stimulating his sensitive nerve endings, and making his whole body quiver with the need to shout, and move. It was hard to lie so still when his anus was being stroked to the heights of ecstasy, and Mulder started to sweat, the moisture dripping off his face with effort. He longed for it to go on forever, and for it to be over, at one and the same time.

Skinner had enormous control of his body, and he hadn't been lying when he had told Mulder on his first night as his slave that he could stay hard for a long time. Mulder felt as if he was subject to the most bizarre form of sexual torture he could ever have imagined. Skinner's big body possessed him, slow stroke, by slow stroke, thrusting and withdrawing so many times that the whole event became a haze, and finally Mulder snapped, and flung his head back, the sweat flowing down his neck.

"Oh god!" he cried out.

"That's another 2 - add them to the tally," Skinner told him between panting thrusts. "Hands back down by your sides, keep very still or it won't be the strap I use tonight - it'll be the tawse." The threat of **that** particular implement was enough to stun Mulder into silence again, and he bit down hard on his lip, his bare back starting to rub on the carpet.

Mulder watched, the enforced stillness and silence making him focus his attention not the sensations in his own body, but on his Master. He noted the way Skinner's strong neck muscles bunched up as he thrust into his slave's body, how his Master's broad forehead was covered with a thin sheen of sweat. He watched, fascinated, enjoying the way his Master half closed his eyes as he went about his pleasure, how he focused all of his formidable will on the event, pursued it almost, until he was sated. Skinner

came with a long exhalation of breath, and Mulder lay silently, not moving, just watching, as his Master's breathing slowed, and returned to normal.

"Good boy. That's another hard lesson. We'll be returning to it several times." Skinner smiled. "I notice you watched me - that's good. Next time, focus on me even more, and you'll gradually learn how to please me. When you can finally come to concentrate on me, and how best to serve me, then you'll have learned the true nature of your enslavement. Remember," he withdrew from his slave's willing body, "your own pleasure is incidental, Fox. My pleasure is paramount. If I choose for you to be rewarded, or for this," he tugged on his slave's hard cock, "to be allowed to release, it's because it pleases me, not because I want to please you." Mulder blinked, drinking in these words, and the breath-taking vision of the full range of his own submission that was being presented to him. His already hard cock almost went into spasm. Skinner grinned, and slapped it.

"Down boy!" he laughed. "Hopefully, tomorrow night it'll please me to give this little monster what it's panting for."

Skinner got up, rearranged his clothing, and disposed of the used condom, then he clipped Mulder's leash on him and set him some basic household chores to get the house ready for the party the following day. Mulder followed his Master in a haze of silent obedience. He fought his slavery less this day than any other day previously. The serenity he had caught only briefly before, now claimed him, and he was almost surprised when the day came to an end.

"Your punishment before bed." Skinner smiled, handing him the key to the playroom. "Go and get the strap, Fox, then go and wait for me in your bedroom." Mulder looked up at him in surprise. "Your bedroom isn't your own personal territory, sweetheart!" Skinner laughed. "You're still my slave in there, just as you are everywhere else. You shouldn't get into the habit of thinking you're exempt from my attentions in any particular place. Go and kneel beside your bed, with the strap in your mouth, and consider what you've learned today."

Mulder nodded, and went up the stairs, holding his leash under his tongue. He retrieved the strap and went back to his bedroom, then placed the strap with the leash in his mouth, and knelt, waiting for his Master. He watched as the minutes ticked by - long, endless minutes of waiting. He considered getting up, but somehow he just knew that Skinner would choose the exact moment he disobeyed, to appear in the doorway.

Half an hour passed, and Mulder experienced a range of emotions. Nervous anticipation about the spanking mingled with anger about being kept waiting. He tried some mental tricks to help him get through, reminding himself that his Master could keep him waiting if he wanted to, just as he could whip him, when, where, and how hard he liked for as long as he liked, if he wanted to. His buttocks clenched in fear of the event. He could taste the leather strap, and knew that it would soon make hard contact with his ass, but Mulder reminded himself that had no choice but to accept, and allow it to happen. Finally, he reached a state of serenity and acceptance. He switched off, and allowed the time to pass, without noticing it. When Skinner did finally appear, his slave was almost surprised to see him.

"Good boy." Skinner patted his head, and took the strap from his mouth. "Bend over the bed." Mulder obeyed quickly, spreading his knees as instructed, so that Skinner had full access to every part of his ass. This also made it harder for him to clench his muscles, and made his bottom feel even more exposed,

and available for his Master's correction. Even then, Skinner didn't put him out of his misery straight away. He paused, and Mulder tried to slow his breathing.

"I make it eleven in all," Skinner informed him, Mulder having earned a couple more at various points during the day. "Do you agree with that tally, slave?" Mulder thought about it for a moment, and then nodded. "All right. I want you to accept this discipline in the same manner as I asked you to accept your discipline this morning. Without speaking, calling out, or begging. Focus, slave." There was silence. Mulder strained, waited for the first blow, and waited...and waited...Finally he started to relax, to switch off, and regain the silence - and that was when the first blow struck home.

The strap was a light, snappy implement, and it stung badly but didn't leave much by way of evidence once the redness had worn off. Skinner whipped it lightly across his slave's ass, and the shock of it made Mulder jump, but he didn't cry out. After six licks he was breathing hard, and he longed to shout out loud, but he didn't. Instead he kept breathing, and kept reminding himself who he belonged to, and what he was being asked to do. He was stunned to find how easily he accepted the stinging swats, and how quickly the whole event was over. When the last blow had been delivered, he turned around, and kissed his Master's feet, and then knelt in happy submission, looking up at his Master with adoring eyes.

Skinner was clearly delighted. He crouched down, took his slave in his arms, and kissed him again.

"I'm so proud of you. Keep this up, and I'll be the envy of all the other tops in the whole country," he laughed. "If you perform like this at the party tomorrow night, I'll be inundated with requests to buy you."

Mulder looked up, his eyes holding a wordless plea.

"Don't worry, sweetheart. I'd never sell you," Skinner reassured him. "Apart from anything else, I don't think anybody else could handle you - and I wouldn't want a runaway turning up on my doorstep every few days!" He laughed, and kissed Mulder again. "You're very special to me, Fox," he murmured. "I promise I'll take very good care of you. Do you trust me?" Mulder's eyes were shining as he nodded. "Good. I know I'm strict with you, but I think you respond well to boundaries. When you can take the lessons I've taught you today about your own submission, and weave them into the tapestry of everyday life, then you'll feel so free you could fly, little one. It won't be easy, and it'll take a lot of getting used to, but I'll get you there. Now, after seeing the benefit of that confessional last night, you can get used to talking to me most nights." Mulder looked up wordlessly, suddenly no longer sure that he had anything to say, but Skinner's expression was firm, and his dark eyes serious. "You can kneel, or sit, look at me, or look down, I don't mind, but I want to hear what's going on in your head. I won't ever punish you for what you say during this half-hour, so long as you are truthful, and polite, and I won't interrupt. All I ask for is your honesty."

Skinner sat down on the bed, and gazed at his slave expectantly. Mulder took a deep breath, then found himself crawling over, and placing his head on Skinner's knee. He couldn't look at the other man, but he was reassured by the way Skinner stroked his hair.

"I..." He stopped - his voice sounded strange and unreal as he broke his silence. Skinner's hand continued to stroke his hair, encouraging him to continue. "Uh..." Mulder cleared his throat. "Today was good. I found a place...I really liked being there." He closed his eyes, and rubbed his cheek against his

Master's thigh. "I want to be everything you want of me, Master, but...I think I'll screw it up." Skinner didn't say anything, and Mulder found it impossible to look at his Master. "You could be harder on me, Master," he shrugged. "Some of that stuff you do to me turns me on so much...I **like** it when you're hard on me. Okay, sometimes I hate it too, but it sends shivers up my spine, it has an **edge** to it...I need that edge..."

He felt as if he was rambling now, but the words just came out in a disjointed torrent.

"Sometimes I feel like I'm flying into orbit, and I need someone to pull me back down to earth, and keep me here - by force if need be. I'd like you to do that for me. I want you to, and in return, I'm happy to serve you. It's easy to worship you for doing that for me. That doesn't make me weak. I'm not needy." Mulder clenched his fists. "With Phoebe, it was...she wanted to dominate me, but then she despised me for allowing it. I didn't get off on her loathing. I wanted more from her than that, I thought we were well-matched, that we had complementary needs, so when I saw the naked loathing in her eyes - that hurt. **You**...if I thought **you** despised me for being what I am, I'd be so fucking angry...so..." Mulder couldn't continue, because he couldn't bear thinking about that.

"The submissive kink - that isn't all I am. When we go back to work...it'll be different. I'm not sure how I'm going to deal with that... how **you're** going to deal with that. I have all these questions. I want to know about you, and about the Playroom. How did you get into the Lifestyle, and what do you mean you've tried out all that stuff on yourself?" Mulder paused, but no answer was forthcoming. "I've known you for 6 years and I never guessed, although, hell, I suppose, if I'm honest, I did get off on some of our, uh... altercations." He bit on his lip, wishing he hadn't shared **that** particular guilty secret, and longing to know what Skinner made of it, only he didn't dare look up.

"I know, you've known me the same amount of time, and you probably didn't guess either. Or maybe you did. Jeez, you are **so** going to regret giving me the opportunity to talk. One thing about this crazy shit deal that totally freaks me, and has taken me by surprise, is how much I **want** to serve you. The shaving thing...the idea of washing you...I never knew shit like that would turn me on. Phoebe used to fuck with my mind more...I hated that, but I really loved her... This scares me, Master. I go to bed every night, and I wake up every morning scared shitless about how deep I'm getting into this, but it's so good too. So damn good, and I want to give in, I really **want** to, but there's this crazy Mulder person holds me back sometimes. Fox could kneel at your feet forever, but Mulder...I dunno about him. He's such a difficult bastard."

Mulder finally ran out of steam, the stream of consciousness coming to a faltering halt. He watched the seconds tick by on Skinner's watch, and then the time was over. Skinner hadn't said a word throughout. Mulder had no idea how his confessions had been received, but he felt curiously light-headed at having spoken so freely and openly. There was more, so much more, that he hadn't said, and couldn't say, but this was a start. Skinner seemed to think so too, because he got up pulled his slave to his feet, gave him a deep, loving kiss, then pointed to the bed. "Thank you, Fox," he murmured. "Sleep well. Tomorrow's the big day, and I know how cranky you can be if you don't get enough rest."

Mulder nodded, and watched as his Master went to the door. He wanted to say more, to ask questions about the party, to tell Skinner how freaked by the whole idea he still was, but he found that he couldn't.

"Fox." Skinner turned around as he opened the door. "Just one thing. When we get back to work - it won't **be** any different. Agent Mulder is merely the public face of my slave, Fox. Fox is what you are. I won't allow you to be two people at once. You're mine; body, heart, mind, and soul. Here, there, and everywhere, as the Beatles once said. Maybe that should be our song," he grinned. Then he turned out the light, and disappeared.

Mulder awoke the next morning with a knot of anxiety in the pit of his stomach. He was worried about so many things to do with the party that he wasn't sure what concerned him most. Seeing his old tops, the mysterious 'entertainment' that he was somehow supposed to provide, being displayed naked, having to be submissive all night, and, most of all, he was scared he'd screw up, and there was so much at stake. Not only the night in his Master's arms that he'd been promised, but also his Master's honor, and prestige on the scene. If Mulder screwed up, it would reflect badly on his Master.

Skinner, on the other hand, seemed positively jovial when Mulder took him his morning coffee. His Master remained on a high all day, accepting deliveries of food and drink, directing Mulder in tidying up the Playroom, and upstairs lounge, to make it spick and span for their guests, and fitting in a brief session of leash training, and stroking.

"Excellent," Skinner beamed as he released his slave from the harness, after their daily ritual of Mulder keeping still while his Master touched him all over. "Not one swat of the paddle. I think you'll be ready for tonight, little one."

"Why, Master. What are you going to do to me?" Mulder asked, anxiously. Skinner just grinned mysteriously, and gave him a swat on the backside.

"Whatever I want, slave," he reprimanded mildly. "Now, you've done so well that I'm going to grant you a reward. Come with me." He went over to one of the cupboards, and opened it. "You can choose what I wear tonight, Fox," he said, waving a hand at the sumptuous array of clothes inside the closet.

This was Skinner's 'fantasy' wardrobe, which contained completely different items to the starched shirts, and formal suits that could be found in his normal closet. Mulder looked in, eagerly. He'd never been particularly interested in fashion before, but there was something erotic about choosing the clothes his Master would be seen in at his slave's party. If Skinner was looking forward to displaying the charms of his naked slave, then Mulder found the idea of making his Master into an object of envy, equally appealing.

He rifled through the many costumes, before short-listing a pair of black leather trousers, a black vest, a garnet silk shirt, a pair of stone-colored chinos, a black polo neck, and a leather waistcoat.

"Problems choosing, slave?" Skinner inquired.

Mulder looked up thoughtfully. "If Master would consider giving me a, uh, display?" he asked.

Skinner sighed. "All right - but make it quick," he said, although Mulder noticed that he couldn't stop grinning.

Mulder undressed his Master swiftly, and then helped him into the garnet silk shirt, and chinos. Skinner looked magnificent in them, although Mulder just knew they weren't items his Master would be seen

dead in at the office or in fact, anywhere but at a scene party. They were too extravagant, the garnet too deep. It made his Master look...exotic. Mulder exchanged the shirt for the black vest.

"Now this is a look I could really go for..." Mulder surveyed the way the vest displayed his Master's rippling biceps to best advantage. He hung the leather waistcoat over it, and was pretty damn pleased with the result, but the black items didn't go with the chinos, so he helped Skinner into the leather trousers, then stepped back in awe.

"Master looks...hot," he grinned. "But...maybe a bit obvious? Try on the black polo neck."

Skinner shook his head. "Just wait until I take you shopping tomorrow, sweetheart," he laughed. "Then I'll get my own back for your indecision."

Mulder helped Skinner into the thin cotton polo neck, and took a step back, then felt his knees go weak.

"Oh, yeah!" he muttered feebly. The polo neck clung to his Master's broad chest, displaying his rugged good looks to the best advantage, and accentuating his flat, washboard stomach. The leather trousers weren't too tight, but they were snug, and they seemed to make his long legs even longer. "I, uh, think that's it," Mulder whispered, awe struck.

"Good. Take them down to my bedroom, then run me a bath. Our guests will be with us in a couple of hours. Kneel." Skinner clicked his fingers and Mulder obeyed immediately. "Fox..." Skinner tilted his head to look into his slave's eyes. "From now on, you're in deep submission and you'll remain that way until after the party. Then, if you behave well, I'll release you from deep submission, and take you to my bed tonight. Do you have any questions before we begin, little one?"

"Supposing I screw up?" Mulder blurted.

Skinner frowned. "Fox, I've been preparing you all week for this. You're ready. I have every confidence in you. All you have to do is embrace your slavery, and remember all the lessons you've been taught. If you are having any difficulties, you will tell me."

"What's going to happen, though, Master?" Mulder couldn't keep the whining tone out of his voice.

Skinner sighed. "I'm not going to tell you everything, Fox. You'll go into the unknown, because I tell you to, and because you trust me. I'll be beside you all the way. That's all you need to know. Anything else?"

Mulder shook his head, numbly. Skinner nodded, and his whole demeanor changed. He pulled himself up straight, and glanced down at his slave from what seemed to be a great height.

"All right, slave. You're in deep submission now. Let me tell you what I expect of you tonight. You will not speak to any of our guests. When they arrive you will take their coats and place them on the bed in your room. If they talk to you, you won't answer, no matter what they say. The only person you may talk to tonight is **me**, and then only unless spoken to, except in the case of an emergency, or if you need to draw my attention to any distress you're feeling. Our guests won't touch you, little one."

Skinner's expression was serious, and his fingers held Mulder's chin firmly, forcing his slave to drown in his gaze throughout this long speech.

"Nobody will touch you but me. If anybody **does** touch you, tell me immediately, and they will be ejected from the party. Forcibly," Skinner said flexing his muscles unconsciously. Mulder nodded gratefully. "It might please me, at some party in the future, to tie you to a spanking horse, with an array of disciplinary implements in a rack beside you, and allow other people to administer discipline under my supervision, but that won't happen tonight," Skinner told him. Mulder's cock did a strange leap. He wasn't sure whether he thought **that** idea was horrific or not, but his cock certainly seemed to like it. "For tonight, you will wear your leash at all times, and you will watch for my every command. You will concentrate on pleasing me, and obeying my every order. That is **all** you need do. You are not required to be witty, or charming or entertaining, although I will certainly expect you to display these talents at other parties I might hold in the future. For tonight, I will display you in such a way as to entertain our guests, but I will decide how, and you will merely follow my orders. You will do everything I tell you to, immediately, and without question - without even thinking about it. That is the level of submission and trust that I require from you." Skinner's dark eyes impressed upon Mulder the serious intent of this statement. "That is all, boy. Go and run my bath."

Mulder scurried to obey. He ran the bath, added scented oils, and laid out his Master's clothes on the bed. When the bath was ready, he undressed his Master, and placed a towel to warm on the heated rail. He returned to kneel beside the bath, eyes down, completely submissive. He didn't even steal a glance at his Master as he soaked himself thoroughly. After about twenty minutes, Skinner sat up, and instructed his slave to soap him. Mulder obeyed, quickly and efficiently, not daring to steal any kisses. Then he helped his Master out of the bath, enveloped him in the warm towel, and dried him thoroughly, before escorting him into the bedroom. Skinner insisted on his slave dressing him completely, from head to foot, and Mulder reveled in pulling those tight leather trousers up his Master's thighs. He finished by combing the tiny fringe of hair at the back of his Master's head, and then waited in silence, kneeling beside his Master, awaiting further instructions.

"Take a shower - and meet me in the playroom. I want to..." Skinner paused, a slight smile tugging on his lips, "decorate you," he murmured. "And Fox?" Mulder turned on his way to the door. "You'll be marked," Skinner told him. Mulder felt his stomach do a nervous flip, but he nodded, and exited quietly.

He examined himself in the mirror when he got back to his room. His morning discipline had been light, and despite the punishment it had undergone that week, his butt was curiously clear of marks - Skinner was skilled enough to deliver even quite severe punishment without leaving much evidence. The marks he'd received a few days earlier had now faded almost completely. Mulder shivered. The idea of being marked was a turn on, but the reality of it was damn painful. He knew he had no choice, so he went to the shower, and cleaned himself thoroughly, inside and out, before presenting himself back at the Playroom for his Master. Skinner was already waiting for him, a long, thin cane hanging loosely from his belt. Mulder's stomach lurched.

"First things first." Skinner opened the cupboard, and pulled out something that made a tinkling sound. Mulder looked up, intrigued. "I'd like to be able to hear where my slave is at any given point, and although I want to display you naked, a bit of decoration doesn't go amiss." Skinner grinned, and approached his slave. "So...you're going to be the prettiest slave in the house this evening...with bells on." He laughed at his own joke, and Mulder opened his mouth in silent horror. He watched, dismayed, as Skinner clipped a tiny, gold bell to each nipple ring. "Get up, and, uh, **prance**, boy," Skinner ordered.

Mulder knelt there, mutinously. Skinner raised an eyebrow.

"I think I gave you an order," his Master told him dangerously. Mulder tried to get back down into his submission, but it was hard when he just knew that if he moved so much as a muscle, his nipples would... **ring**. Skinner raised the cane, ominously, and Mulder gave in and got to his feet, his face flushing with embarrassment as the bells tinkled. There was an irritating, tinny quality to the sound.

"Master, please," he whispered, "don't make me wear these."

"Why not? I like them. They're pretty." Skinner placed the end of the cane under one of the bells, and flicked, making it tinkle merrily. Mulder clenched his fists behind his back.

"I feel like a fucking fairy or some kind of Christmas ornament or something," Mulder growled.

"Well I like the look. Now, I think I told you to prance," Skinner said firmly.

Mulder shot him a look of pure hatred, and Skinner drew himself up to his full, formidable height, and stood over his slave. Mulder went eyeball to eyeball with his Master for a long time, and then, slowly, reluctantly, backed down.

"I hate this, Master," he whispered, as he attempted to prance, as directed.

"And why should that interest me?" Skinner asked dangerously.

"Master did say I could tell you if I was in any distress," he reminded Skinner.

"And having bells attached to your nipple rings distresses you how?" Skinner demanded. Mulder opened his mouth to argue, then closed it again. "There's a difference between being in genuine distress, and submitting to the will of your Master, even when you hate what he is asking of you," Skinner told him. "Don't confuse the two. Remember the cautionary tale of the boy who cried wolf."

Mulder nodded glumly.

"Come here." Skinner pulled him over to the cupboard, and showed him his reflection. The gold bells were very light, and barely tugged on his nipple rings, but they looked ridiculous - to Mulder's mind at least. Skinner stood behind him, and stoked his nipples gently, with a gossamer touch, mindful of the fact they were still healing. "When these have healed, we'll play some fun games with them. They can stand a lot of pulling." He nuzzled his slave's cheek with his own. "And I have far more interesting ornamentation than these little bells. I had to keep it lightweight for now, but did you know there are weights that can be attached to these? The pull can be very...erotic. Painful, but full of sensation." He pinched Mulder's right nipple lightly, making his slave gasp. "Now, I've had enough disobedience from you, boy. I think it's time to remind you who's in charge. When you go into that party this evening, you'll be wearing the signs of my ownership - my rings on your body, and the marks of my cane on your ass." Mulder felt the handle of the crop push between his butt cheeks. Skinner tightened the hold of his arm across Mulder's chest.

"Who do you belong to?" Skinner demanded.

Mulder looked at their reflections in the mirror. They seemed to fit together perfectly. Skinner was just a bit taller than him, his bald head in stark relief to Mulder's thick hair. His Master's chest was just broad

enough to be visible around the side of his slave's naked body. Skinner's black clothing, so smooth, and satanic, was in contrast to Mulder's pale flesh. There was something so perfect about their reflection. Skinner so much the Master, Mulder so much the slave. He wanted to encapsulate the moment forever, to imprint it on his memory.

"You, Master," he replied. "I belong to you."

"And what can I do to you?" Skinner asked, flicking a bell with one lazy finger, making it chime repeatedly.

Mulder closed his eyes, his body melting against Skinner's black clad form. "Whatever you like, Master," he said, with a resigned sigh.

"Good. Now, I'm going to mark you." Skinner took out the leather pouch, and fastened it around his slave's testicles. "Go and stand by the horse." Mulder did as he was told, his stomach flipping. "Ask me." Skinner stood in front of him.

Mulder dropped to his knees. "Please mark me, Master," he requested.

Skinner held the cane under his slave's nose. "Kiss the cane, Fox," he ordered. Mulder did so, his mouth dry. The cane was long and thin, and quite vicious looking. "I save this cane for special occasions so you won't have seen it before," Skinner informed him. "I've found it marks exceptionally well. It's got a sting on it that you won't believe, but the line it draws is perfect."

Mulder didn't feel at all heartened by this news.

"Bend over the horse," Skinner instructed. Mulder did so, his heart beating anxiously in his chest. "As this is a special occasion, and as we want our guests to see the extent of your submission, this marking will be particularly severe. This is less to cause you pain, Fox, than to remind both you, and our guests, that you are my possession, and subject to my whim. Understood?"

Mulder wasn't sure it made any difference what the reasons were, but he nodded, and steeled himself for the first cut.

"Legs further apart, slave." Skinner ran the crop between the inside of his thighs, and Mulder stretched his legs out even further. "Lift that ass up to me so I can kiss it with my cane. I want to make sure my aim is particularly true tonight. I'm going to mark you with parallel lines so our guests can admire my skill. Each mark will be clear, and to do that, I have to hit my target cleanly. Make sure you don't move."

"Yes, Master," Mulder said, and his voice sounded like a whimper to his own ears.

Skinner rested the crop on Mulder's butt for what seemed like an eternity, and then it was removed. Mulder heard a swishing sound, and then the cane landed on his ass, with an almighty streak of pain.

"Oh shit." He stood up, and hopped around for a moment his hands going to his abused behind. Skinner stopped them before they got there.

"Don't touch my handiwork," Skinner said. "I don't think it'll do you any harm to live with the sting." He put a big hand on Mulder's shoulder, and thrust him back over the horse. Mulder was dimly aware that his Master hadn't been kidding when he said the cane had a sting to it. It was like nothing he'd ever experienced before. "Prepare yourself for the next one," Skinner told him. Mulder spread his legs wide, his knees shaking, and Skinner caressed his back for a moment, calming him. "Ass up more, that's good."

Mulder felt the cane against his buttocks again, and he took a deep breath. Skinner's hand stopped stroking his back, and rested just above his bottom, holding him pressed firmly into the horse so that he couldn't move. The second blow landed fractionally lower, and Mulder let out a loud yell, and squirmed beneath Skinner's hand. Somehow, bellowing at the top of his voice took his mind off the appalling sting of the cane.

"We've only just started," Skinner warned, settling his slave back down again. Mulder's heart sank. Last time he had been marked, his Master had only given him three strokes and that hadn't even been with this particularly nasty instrument of torture. Mulder was amazed he'd endured that much. He was sure he couldn't take more than three with the cane, and said as much. Skinner laughed, soothing his back again.

"You'll take more than three, Fox. I think 6 would make the right impact on your ass, as well as being, uh, somewhat traditional as well, and I'm a traditional kind of Master. Ass up." He tapped Mulder's ass with the cane, and before the slave knew it, another stroke had kissed his buttocks, leaving a trailing red line of fire.

"No more, Master. Please. I can't stand it," Mulder whimpered, trying once more to caress the sting out of his buttocks, and once more finding Skinner's hands blocking his way. He moaned in frustration. Skinner pulled him up, and looked into his eyes.

"Fox, you can stand more. You can stand three more to be precise. You'll stand it, because I'm asking you to, and because you want to look your best for this party. You'll enjoy the attention your ass gets, all nice and striped - my own little zebra!" Skinner grinned, and kissed his slave's forehead. "Now, bend over, Fox, and I don't want you to get up again until I'm finished. Understood?"

"Yes, Master." Mulder muttered, angling his face hopefully for a kiss. Skinner laughed, and patted his cheek.

"When we've finished you can have your reward, slave," he told him.

Mulder bit on his lip, and lowered himself reluctantly back over the horse. He spread his legs, and pushed his ass out before Skinner could tell him. He felt so exposed, his butt waiting to receive its marking from his Master's cane. A part of him just wanted to run away from the pain, but some other instinct kept him in place. He saw himself, naked under his Master's cane, being marked as his Master's property, and his cock sprang to attention. The next stroke bit deep into his flesh, making him cry out again, but he didn't move, and kept his ass in place to accept the next sharp, stinging caress from the cane. The final cut came hard on its heels and Mulder let out a sob of pure pain, tears springing into his eyes.

"That's all, boy." Skinner helped him to his feet, and Mulder held onto him, shaken. He was immediately enveloped in a pair of reassuringly strong arms. Skinner tilted his chin and looked into his eyes. "Well

done, little slave. I'm so proud of you. I know that wasn't easy. The sting will go soon - no, don't touch," Skinner batted Mulder's hands away from his abused butt again, grabbed them in his own big paw, and held them behind his slave's back. Then he dipped his head, and opened his slave's mouth with his own, holding Mulder tight, his mouth plundering his slave's with passionate force. Mulder melted against that strong chest, and surrendered to his Master's kiss, loving it, losing himself in it. Then Skinner marched him over to the mirror in the cupboard.

"Look at how beautiful you are. This is how our guests will see you."

Mulder looked over his shoulder at his buttocks, and gave a gasp of surprise. Skinner had placed the marks at evenly spaced intervals, imprinting them with perfect precision on his flesh. Six clear, distinct welts were raised on his ass, each of them the same length. Skinner hadn't made the novice's error of 'wraparound', of lashing the end of the cane around his thigh. The marks stopped at the edge of his buttocks, all in perfect, synchronous lines. Mulder was astounded. He'd never seen a more accurate job with the cane.

"Thank me." Skinner prompted. Mulder fell to his knees, kissed his Master's feet, and then kissed the proffered cane, shivering slightly as his lips touched the hated, biting wood. He hoped this wasn't an instrument his Master would use on him too frequently.

"Now, I think an hour's silent reflection before our guests arrive will do you good." Skinner propelled Mulder back over to the window. "An ass like this, **should** be displayed I think." Skinner grinned, slapping Mulder's sore backside soundly, making his slave yelp.

That hour went quickly, and soon Mulder felt his Master's breath on the back of his neck, and his hands on his arms, caressing softly.

"Time, Fox. Our guests will be here shortly. How are you?" Skinner turned him around to face him. Mulder looked into those dark eyes and trembled.

"I'd rather be out chasing mutants, or facing down Big Foot, Master," he admitted, making a face.

Skinner laughed. "You'll do fine," he said firmly. "Just keep your eyes on me the whole time, or on the floor. I have every confidence in you, sweetheart. Hell, I've been training you solidly for a week now. You've come a long way. Your old tops aren't going to recognize you."

He kissed Mulder's forehead, then attached the leash to the chain hanging from his nipple rings.

"Follow me," he instructed.

Mulder fell into step instantly behind his Master. After only a few days, it already felt like an old habit, an instinct, something ingrained deep in his soul. It helped that Skinner's ass was framed beautifully in his tight black leather trousers, the two taut globes of flesh jostling inside the fabric, like some kind of ripe fruit, offered up for the plucking. Mulder felt his cock react appreciatively to the sight. He resisted the impulse to grab his Master's buttocks, and sink his teeth into them, but that was pretty much all that was on his mind as he followed along behind.

The upstairs lounge was all laid out ready for their guests, with peanuts, pretzels, and other nibbles on the various coffee tables. There was a pile of crudités and dips stacked untidily on one side.

"Master - shouldn't we make more room for these?" Mulder asked.

Skinner glanced at him. "Fox - you're in deep submission. Don't speak again unless spoken to. As for the dips, leave them where they are. I have plans for them later."

Mulder dropped his head, and gazed at the floor, trying to recapture the serenity he'd found in deep submission before, and trying even harder to ignore the way his heart was beating so fast in his chest.

The small galley kitchen had been turned into a bar, with drinks and glasses laid out. Mulder had already been informed that he would serve his guests with their beverages of choice when they first arrived. At that moment the doorbell chimed, and Mulder's heart flipped wildly. He looked up, wanting nothing more than to bolt wildly out of the door. Skinner placed a hand on his head, and tipped it back down to look at the floor.

"Remember who and what you are, slave," he said in a low, sexy growl.

Mulder's cock skyrocketed at the same time as his heart plunged and they met somewhere about midway. Skinner opened the door, and greeted someone - Mulder wasn't sure who as he had his eyes down. His Master turned, and handed him two coats, and he scurried off obediently to his bedroom with them, leash in his mouth, ignoring the jingle of the hated bells as he walked. He returned to Skinner's side, and was told what drinks to bring from the kitchen. He did as he was ordered, returned with the drinks, and knelt in front of their guests, holding up the tray with the drinks on them.

"Hmmm, most impressive," a man remarked.

Mulder recognized the voice as belonging to JM Lucas, one of the top players on the DC scene. He had never played with the man, although he knew him well, and had spoken to him at several parties. It was Lucas who had finally agreed to set up the meeting with Skinner. Mulder relaxed. He had no history with Lucas, who only played with women. "I like the way you have him decorated," Lucas laughed. "I must do something similar with my own sub, sometime."

"Stand up, Fox, and show them your markings," Skinner ordered. Mulder obeyed, shaking as he got to his feet, and turned around. Skinner's fingers brushed lightly over his welted backside, as he displayed him to their guest. Mulder held still, hardly daring to breathe.

"Very nice!" Lucas whistled. "You've outdone yourself, Walter!"

"Thanks. It was a pleasure," Skinner grinned at Mulder, and kissed his slave's head, then clicked his fingers. Mulder knelt immediately beside his Master, in the submissive mode, head down, shoulders straight.

"An excellent level of obedience. I'm impressed," Lucas murmured. "You achieved all this in just a week, Walter? I'd have said this boy was untrainable."

"Clearly not." Skinner patted Mulder's head fondly. "I won't say that it was easy, but with patience, and a healthy dose of discipline, we got there, didn't we, Fox?"

Mulder looked up. "Yes, Master," he said, then he put his head down again.

"Amazing," Lucas mused, clearly astounded. "I'm pleased you've decided to throw a party, Walter. Your parties are always legendary - perhaps because they're such a rarity. That amazing Playroom you have...I hope you'll be treating us to one of your demonstrations later on."

"Of course," Skinner grinned, sipping at the glass of fruit juice his slave had brought for him.

The other guests arrived quickly, one after the other, and everybody was assembled by 8:30. Mulder guessed that nobody would dare be late to one of Skinner's parties. He recognized some of his old tops among the guests, but his Master kept him too busy running around with coats, and fetching drinks to be worried by them. People were dressed in the usual scene costumes, and there were a variety of outfits on display. Some were in rubber, some in PVC. There were vamps, virgins, stern Masters, corseted Mistresses, even a couple of transvestites. There was, in short, an endless variety of clothing, and that was just the point. Everybody but Mulder was fully dressed. His solitary naked condition stood out like a sore thumb.

When everybody had a drink in their hands, Skinner clapped his hands for silence. That was when the pit of anxiety opened up in Mulder's stomach. Conversely, he felt amazingly alive and alert at the same time, completely preoccupied with watching out for his Master's slightest command, relishing every small caress.

"Welcome, friends," Skinner said. "I'm holding this party to introduce my new slave to you, and to display him for your appreciation. I've been working him hard, training him for tonight, so I hope you enjoy looking at him. I've already told you not to touch, and I know you'll all respect that. Fox, stand up."

Skinner took the leash out of his slave's mouth, and drew him into the center of the room.

"Take a good look everyone!"

An appreciative murmur spread around the assembled audience, and Mulder closed his eyes, flushing bright red. He could see a blur of bodies - all of them clothed, while he stood here, stark naked, and chained, being scrutinized. It was so...humiliating. "As you can see, I've pierced him, and decorated him with signs of my ownership. His collar bears my insignia," Skinner traced his fingers over the gold collar around Mulder's neck. "He's parceled up prettily for his Master," Skinner grinned, his fingers touching the gold cock ring. Mulder's cock jumped involuntarily, and the audience laughed.

"Looks like he's responsive to his Master's touch!" someone shouted.

"Of course. I told you - he's been very well trained," Skinner replied, with a deep laugh. "He bears the signs of my ownership, because he's my property. Fox and I have exchanged contracts," he told the assembled audience solemnly. There was a muttered response, as people digested the implications of this statement. "He is my slave, and I am his Master. He belongs to me; body, heart, mind and soul. Isn't that so, Fox?" Skinner asked.

Mulder licked his lips, his mouth having suddenly gone completely dry. "Yes, Master," he managed to whisper.

"Louder, Fox, they can't hear you, and I don't want there to be any mistake about this," Skinner told him.

"Yes, Master. I'm yours. I belong at your feet," Mulder replied. Then, acting completely on impulse, he knelt at Skinner's feet, and kissed his shiny leather shoes. A hush descended over the party guests, and Mulder heard a few heartfelt sighs, and at least one "awww," of appreciation.

"All right, little one." Skinner drew his slave back up to a standing position, and kissed his lips softly. "The purpose of this party was partly to show my beautiful slave to you all, and also, by doing this, to remind you that this particular creature is off limits to all of you from now on. If he should approach you, which I very much doubt he'll do, then you should inform me immediately. He isn't free to choose his partners any more. He belongs to me, and will serve only me. If anyone touches him, or propositions him, then they'll have me to deal with."

Mulder looked at his Master, a feeling of awe washing over him. Skinner's voice was so determined, and his tone so dangerous, that it sent a thrill running through his body. He could tell, glancing around the room, that some of the other subs there were equally enamored with his Master, and he fought back a wave of jealousy. He felt the bubble they had existed in for the past week, all alone in the apartment, being burst as outside reality intruded in. Skinner had the right to take other subs, or slaves, if he wished. Mulder did not. That was implicit in the terms of their contract. Mulder wondered if he was interesting enough to hold his Master's attention, and the jealousy inside his gut settled into a seething rage. If anyone made so much as the slightest move on his Master, they would answer for their audacity.

"I'm sure you all know the difference between a slave and a sub," Skinner continued. "A slave is property. He has signed away his rights to his Master. As an outward sign of this commitment, Fox wears my ring."

Skinner picked up Mulder's hand, and kissed his ring finger tenderly.

"He's mine to punish, mine to love, mine to do what I like with. He has no rights of his own. He has given himself to me freely, and I wanted to show you all what a beautiful thing it is when this happens. When a person willingly gives himself to a Master, or Mistress, and enters into a state of complete submission, and devotion. It's not an easy life, and I'm sure Fox will tell you that during this initial week of training, he's been on the receiving end of some harsh discipline, but he's learned, and he's learned well. I'm proud of him." Skinner wrapped his arms around his slave, and for a moment, Mulder felt as if he'd been transported to heaven. To be praised, and admired, in front of all these people. Suddenly he understood what Skinner had meant when he'd told him he should be proud to be displayed to his former tops in this way, as an example of what the right Master could achieve, and to show how they had so signally failed him. Mulder glowed.

"When I first told my slave he would be wearing these decorations," Skinner flicked at Mulder's bells, "he wasn't very happy about it." A laugh went around the audience. "However, I think they're very pretty. Fox, prance for your guests - let them all admire you," he ordered.

Mulder looked at his Master, appalled, a mute plea in his eyes, but Skinner just slapped his butt, daring Mulder to disobey. Mulder clenched and unclenched his fists, then stepped forward and...pranced. He shook his body, so that the hated bells pealed, and rang, and an appreciative round of applause went up from the audience.

"Good boy!" Skinner kissed him again, and Mulder heaved a sigh of relief that this particular humiliating ordeal was over with, although somehow, he was sure that there would be more before the night was through. "All right, little one, I think our guests need some time to mingle, and enjoy themselves before the demonstration I'll be laying on later. Please, everyone, help yourself to food and drink. Fox, here, will serve you all by acting as a table for the next half an hour. I'll put the dips on his back, and you can help yourselves. Crudités are on the coffee table over here." Skinner pointed, and Mulder's heart sank as he was made to kneel on all fours, and his Master placed bowls full of various dips on his back. He wanted to protest, but somehow his voice wouldn't work. Instead he settled down without a murmur.

"All right, Fox?" Skinner asked, tapping his head. Mulder looked up, and drowned in his servitude. He was surprised to find that it **was** all right. It was more than all right. His whole body was suffused with a kind of sexual excitement he didn't think he'd ever experienced before in his life. To be so totally owned, so completely subject to his Master's will, to embrace his own submission so comprehensively...it made every nerve ending in his body tingle. He wanted to impress his Master, to serve him, and more than anything else, he wanted to be rewarded by his Master's smiles, and caresses, and for the evening to end with his Master taking him to his bed, and allowing him to sleep there. Mulder nodded.

"Yes, Master," he whispered, and then he put his head down again.

"Good. This is for half an hour. You must stay completely still and not dislodge the pots, but you've done longer than this in training so you should be fine," and so saying, Skinner left him, and circulated amongst their guests.

Mulder tried to work out why he was so turned on by this. Being Skinner's slave in private was one thing, but being seen to be his Master's slave, visibly showing his submission, and his training, submitting to this most humiliating of experiences somehow worked at some deep level in his psyche. He wasn't sure how or why. Usually, in his real life, he hated being humiliated, or shown up. It happened so often during his career, from being called "Spooky", to the way he was talked about in the canteen, and jeered at by jerks like Tom Colton. On such occasions it was all he could do to keep his notoriously fiery temper in check. Yet with Skinner it was different. With a jolt of surprise, he realized that with Skinner it had **always** been different. He remembered the time when he'd barged in on his boss during a meeting. Skinner had allowed him into his office, knowing he would be humiliated, and had made his errant agent stand there, and state why he was protesting his current assignment. Mulder treasured that memory. Skinner had been so hard, so uncompromising - he had used Mulder's agitated state, and brought him down, forced him into submission, his eyes boring into his subordinate's soul. Even then, all those years ago, Mulder had thrilled to the moment, and had gone and jacked himself off, even while trying hard not to figure out **why** this was such a turn on for him. If it had been anyone else...if it had been someone like Kersh for example, it would have given him no pleasure at all, but with Skinner... Mulder saw a truth he hadn't admitted to himself before: he had been attracted to his Master for a very long time.

Mulder was so deep in thought that he barely noticed the constant milling of people around his back, as they discussed whether the salsa dip tasted nicer than the guacamole. On a couple of occasions he felt cold dollops of the various dips drop on his back, accompanied by a muttered "oops," and while one part of him squirmed in humiliation, another part just accepted it all serenely, as his due. His eyes continuously followed his Master around the room, drawn to the big man's leather clad form wherever he went. He saw him laughing, animated, totally alive, in a way the other man rarely was in their working environment. Skinner was a man who understood control, Mulder realized. He understood how to control himself, those under his command, and his slave. The man was a master at it. Mulder smiled to himself. His Master. Skinner was **his** master, and he was suddenly sure that there wasn't a sub in the room who didn't envy him, as he knelt here, acting as a piece of goddamn furniture of all things, his body marked with so many different signs of his Master's ownership.

Skinner removed the dips on the very second that the thirty minutes were up, and wiped Mulder's stained back with a washcloth, then led him around the room, as he continued to circulate. Mulder knelt whenever Skinner stopped, and got to his feet and followed meekly to heel whenever Skinner walked. His Master kept introducing him, fondling him, showing him off to his friends, and extolling his virtues as a slave, punctuating every order with a kiss or caress, barely able to keep his hands off his slave, and Mulder responded in kind, loving the attention.

After half an hour or so of this, Skinner ordered his slave to kneel submissively in the corner. Mulder did as he was told, reveling in his submission. He was used to being on the outside, looking in, so this wasn't much different, and he was pleased that Skinner was so proud of him. The unusual feeling of being admired had gone to his head, and transported him to a different place entirely. He was feeling so happy and serene that he was surprised when a voice broke into his reverie.

"Looks like you've got your Master well trained," it said.

Mulder glanced up from under his eyelashes. He saw a man, at least a decade younger than himself. The kid was beautiful: that was the only word for him. Almond shaped brown eyes, set in an olive skin, and an amazing shock of thick, long black hair, dyed blond at the tips. He was dressed in a tight, leopard-skin vest, and ass-hugging, black velvet jeans that showed off his lithe, graceful body. He held himself like a dancer, and he was sneering haughtily at Mulder.

"He thinks he's in charge, but I'll bet you've got him wrapped around your little finger," the youth continued. "Isn't that the way with Masters? We manipulate them into giving us what we like? My Master's that fat guy over there - see." He pointed with his finger, and Mulder couldn't resist taking a peek. The youth laughed at his disobedience. "He won't be my Master much longer. I've seen something I like better, and you know, I don't think much of the competition," the youth smirked. "Oh, I forgot, you're not allowed to talk, are you? Or to move. That's a shame - it means you'll just have to watch while I steal your Master."

He gave Mulder a wink, then slipped gracefully across the floor in Skinner's direction. Mulder knelt quite still, his mind racing. He didn't know who the hell the kid was, but he could feel that familiar surge of jealousy rise within. The youth was beautiful, he was young, he was goddamn pushy...and Skinner could take as many slaves as he wanted. Mulder's hands clenched into fists behind his back. He could see Skinner in his mind's eye, kissing this man, making love to him, making Mulder watch from the corner as they shared a bed together.

Mulder bit down hard on his lip, frozen in time. He watched, unmoving, as the youth laughed extravagantly at something his Master had said, then ran a perfect, tanned hand over his Master's arm, circled his Master's biceps...even from this distance, Mulder could see the "wow" that formed on the kid's lips, and his expressions of delight. Skinner smiled, and they talked for a few minutes. Mulder could feel the heat rising inside him. The other man was still stroking his Master, still touching him...Mulder couldn't take it any more. He was on the verge of getting up, and doing something really stupid, when Skinner looked in his direction, and clicked his fingers. Mulder was over there like a shot. He elbowed the enemy out of the way, and knelt beside his Master, where he belonged.

"All right, ladies and gentlemen," Skinner clapped his hands again. "I think it's time for the main event. If you'd like to follow me to the Playroom, I'm going to put on a display, using my slave's body." Skinner pointed in the direction of the Playroom, and Mulder was distracted from his jealousy by the ominous sound of that announcement. He followed his Master obediently, glaring at the kid who laughed at him, and licked his lips lasciviously, in the direction of Skinner's leather clad buttocks.

"He's going to forget all about you by the time I'm through with him, sugar," the youth hissed, as he pushed past Mulder.

The Playroom was soon filled with a jostling throng of BDSM players - the best on the scene. Those who hadn't been there before, wandered around, awe-struck, looking in the cupboards and admiring the hoist, and harness which were both out, ready and waiting, much to Mulder's concern. He was even more concerned when he saw the enormous bullwhip Skinner was holding.

His Master strode into the center of the Playroom, and snapped the bullwhip, making a cracking sound that provoked a roar of delighted admiration. Skinner clicked his fingers, and Mulder found himself obeying on instinct, his legs moving him to his Master's side of their own volition, his mind screaming frantically that he should turn around and run. His outward demeanor gave no hint of this internal struggle though. He knelt beside Skinner, and leaned into the soothing caress his Master gave him.

"As a sign of his commitment to me, Fox is going to undergo a very special, transformation ceremony," Skinner announced. Mulder swallowed, hard. He was? "In the old days, when people entered into a monastery, or convent, their hair was ceremoniously shaved to symbolize their new commitment. The transformation of the body can represent the transformation of the soul, the putting aside of the old life, and embracing the new. That is what Fox is going to demonstrate today. I've been training him all week to undergo this particular ceremony. It will be the culmination of our work, symbolizing, both to him, and to me, and witnessed by all of you, that he has chosen to enter into my service as my slave, and he has put his old life behind him. He won't be going back," Skinner said that with such a note of finality that Mulder looked up, surprised.

"During the first few days of a new slave contract, there's always a period of wariness, when the slave worries about his decision, and maybe the Master wonders what he's taken on. Many contracts collapse under the weight of expectation, or fear. Fox and I have weathered a couple of crises during our first week, but that's behind us now. He knows what to expect from me, and I from him. The ceremony I will perform next, is symbolic of our commitment to the future - he as my property, me as his Master. Fox, hold out your hands."

Mulder did as he was told, and Skinner strapped the cuffs around his wrists, then fastened him, carefully, into the harness, checking each strap, and fastening thoroughly, in an unhurried manner, oblivious to his audience. When he'd finished, he attached Mulder to the hoist, and swung him into the air. It was only then, suspended in mid-air, that Mulder saw the shaving apparatus on the table. His Master had told him that he liked his hair. He'd **promised** him he wouldn't shave his head. Was he going to renege on that promise? Mulder couldn't even begin to imagine what Scully would say if he arrived at work on Monday morning with a shaved head.

Skinner left him hanging there for a while.

"Admire my slave," he commanded his audience, turning Mulder around so that they could all get a good look at his naked body. "Witness his marking." Mulder felt Skinner's finger on his buttocks. He flushed bright red - this was **so** embarrassing. "My slave was caned not because he had disobeyed me, but as a demonstration of my skill, and his obedience, and also..." Skinner lowered his voice conspiratorially, "because an ass like this," he pinched Mulder's butt, "should bear its Master's imprint, dontcha think?" A laugh greeted this statement, and a mini round of applause rippled around the room. Mulder knew Skinner to be many things, but he'd never seen evidence of the showman in his Master before.

Skinner swung the harness down, and arranged Mulder so that he was lying at a tilted angle, on his back, the whole of the front of his body clearly visible to the audience.

"All right, little one," Skinner murmured, reassuring his slave with a kiss. "I've been preparing you for this all week. The stroking?" he reminded Mulder. "There was a method in my madness."

Mulder suddenly understood. It wasn't his head his Master was going to shave - it was his body, and he was going to use a...Mulder's balls tried to fight their way back into his body as he saw the cut-throat razor lying on the table. He remembered his own failed attempts at shaving the balloon. *Please god, let Skinner be more skilled with that razor than I am...*

"My slave will keep perfectly still throughout this procedure," Skinner announced. "He's used to his Master touching his body, and understands that it's his Master's wish that he be clean shaven. I'm going to confine myself to his torso, and the area between his neck," Skinner gestured, "and his thighs." Mulder heaved a sigh of relief. At least his arms and legs were to be spared this particular humiliation.

He watched, nervously, as Skinner approached, and began lathering his groin, chest, and armpits with shaving cream. Then his Master picked up the razor, and began to scrape away the hair on his body. Mulder was used to being tickled and stroked, but even so, it took all his willpower not to wriggle or squeal as the razor went about its work, shaving under his arms, then down over his chest. It removed the line of hair leading from his navel to his groin, and then Skinner paused, and grinned at his audience, flourishing the razor as he approached his slave's balls. Mulder gave a squeak of alarm, as he felt the sharp edge of the razor on that particular part of his anatomy. The entire room seemed to hold its breath as Skinner worked, slowly and painstakingly, disposing of swathes of dark hair into a dish on the table. Mulder was trembling with the effort of keeping still now. He wanted to scream, and kick out at every tiny caress of that vicious instrument as it carefully worked on the most sensitive part of his body. He knew he mustn't move though - if he did, one small flick of that razor could cause the most unpleasant damage. So he stayed perfectly still. Finally, **finally**, it was over. Skinner washed the foam

from his body, and he looked down on his newly shaved body. His penis was pink and shriveled, bereft of its usual dark nest. It reminded Mulder of one of those sphinx cats, born without fur.

"Beautiful." Skinner ran his hand over the smooth flesh. Then he poured some lotion onto Mulder's chest, and worked it into the skin. When he was finished, he turned Mulder over, and his slave realized that his Master hadn't finished yet. His legs were spread, and he was placed in a bent position, his butt exposed to the room. Mulder flushed - this was the most embarrassing position he'd been placed in so far. He closed his eyes, trying to block out the knowledge that the entire room had a good view of his most private of private parts. Skinner lathered the cream over his ass cheeks, and upper thighs, then set to work again. He didn't stop until he'd shaved his slave's butt completely, then he washed it down, and gently rubbed lotion onto the flesh.

A round of applause broke out, and some cheering. Mulder heaved a sigh of relief. A part of him enjoyed all the attention being focused solely on him, while another part was curled up in a little ball inside his mind, desperately hoping he'd be able to live it all down, and actually look all these people in the eye again one day. Skinner finished caressing his slave's butt, and lowered him gently to the ground. Mulder looked down on his naked body. There wasn't one cut, not even the slightest nick.

"58." Skinner whispered, as he unfastened Mulder from the harness. "In case you're wondering."

"58 what, Master?" Mulder asked, confused.

"58 balloons to get this good." Skinner grinned, winking at him. Mulder laughed out loud. He actually felt rather proud of his shaved body. There was something silky about it, and he liked the way it made his cock look so clean and pink. "Here's my slave, Fox, newly shaven in celebration of his status," Skinner announced, presenting Mulder to the room. There was another round of applause, and Mulder noticed that the kid in the leopard skin vest was giving him a glare worthy of his own dear Master.

"Now for the next part of the demonstration," Skinner said. "Fox, go and fetch my bullwhip." Mulder looked at his Master, wide-eyed, but obeyed anyway. He picked the long whip up in his mouth, and took it back to his Master, trying to balance it so that neither end trailed as he walked. He knelt in front of Skinner, offering it up, and Skinner took the whip from his slave.

"Remove my sweater," Skinner ordered. Mulder did as he was told, carefully taking his Master's glasses off first, and returning them again afterwards. He noticed that the audience all seemed most appreciative of his Master's physique - the kid was positively ogling him. Mulder felt a growl rise in the back of his throat. Luckily his Master distracted him at that moment by handing him a piece of paper.

"Take this, and go and kneel at the far end of the room," Skinner ordered. Mulder did as he was told. "Hold up the paper, and kneel perfectly still, slave," Skinner instructed. Mulder did as he was told, trembling slightly. He had no idea how skilled Skinner was with that whip, but it took all his nerve not to move, as his Master raised his arm, and swirled the whip into the air, and then forward in his direction. There was a sharp crack.

Mulder closed his eyes, fearing the worst, waiting to feel the whip tearing into his flesh. When nothing happened he opened his eyes to find that instead of holding one piece of paper, he was holding two: the whip had sliced the paper right down the center. Another round of applause broke out, and Skinner clicked his fingers as he took a bow. Mulder returned to his Master's side, wondering what other

displays of skill the big man had up his sleeve. He soon found out. Skinner placed a hat on his head, and ordered him back over to the other side of the room. Mulder knelt again, perspiring, and discovered the new sensation of sweat rolling down his underarms, as there was no hair to soak it up. He waited, watching as Skinner paced around, cracking the whip into the air, his biceps rippling as he moved. Then his Master was still. He looked at Mulder, concentrated for a few seconds, and then swung the whip forward. It cracked in mid-air again, and Mulder felt the merest whisper on his head, and then the hat went flying. Another round of applause greeted this display. Mulder knelt quite still, waiting until the thumping stopped in his chest, then he got weakly to his feet, and returned to his Master's side.

"Master is...magnificent," he whispered, kneeling and kissing Skinner's feet in total adoration. The image of his Master, standing bare-chested, wearing those tight black leather trousers, and whirling that long, vicious whip above his head, was one that would stay with him for the rest of his life. It was his every fantasy made flesh. Mulder was overcome.

"To finish off the proceedings," Skinner told the assembled multitude, "my slave would like to address his previous tops, and to apologize for any rudeness in the way he behaved during his time serving them."

"I would?" Mulder looked up in dismay.

"Yes. You would." Skinner grinned at him. He picked up Mulder's lead, and led him over to a small, stocky man, who had his arms around another man. Both were dressed entirely in bright blue rubber.

Skinner clicked his fingers, and Mulder knelt, mutinously, in front of his old top. Skinner nudged him with his foot.

Mulder cleared his throat. "I'd like to say...I'm sorry," he whispered.

"Kiss Jackson's feet." Skinner prompted. Mulder obeyed. "What is the lesson you learn during your morning discipline?" Skinner asked. "Repeat it, please, Fox."

"I belong to you..." Mulder looked up at his Master, and suddenly understood what was required of him. "I am now the property of Walter Skinner. Thank you for your kind attention in the past, sir," he said.

"That's okay, Mulder." Jackson grinned down at him. "It was always a pleasure. You were cute, if a goddamn handful. I'm glad you're Walter's problem now, not mine!"

Skinner took him to the next top. She was a beautiful, buxom woman, with dark golden hair, wide hips, and vivacious blue eyes. She was one of the first tops who'd taken pity on him when he arrived in DC, and he'd almost fallen in love with her. She had a smart, well-behaved, handsome sub at her side. Mulder was pleased for her. She deserved someone nice.

"Elaine, thank you for being so kind to me," he told her sincerely. "I know I behaved like a brat, and ran out on you. I'm sorry." He kissed her feet. "I'm now the property of Walter Skinner," he announced.

Elaine smiled at him, tears in her eyes. "Oh, Mulder, you little darling!" she exclaimed. "Walter, you've worked wonders with the boy. He looks so much happier now than when I knew him. I know you'll take good care of him, my dear."

"You can rely on it," Skinner nodded to her. He took her hand, and kissed it tenderly, bowing to her. Mulder watched, intrigued. He sensed a history here, and wondered what it was. As Elaine was a dominatrix, who only took men as subs, and as Skinner was a top who preferred male subs...hmmm. Whatever there was between Elaine and Skinner, Mulder wanted to know more. It was inconceivable to him that Skinner had ever been anyone's sub, so he dismissed that thought out of hand. He wondered if Elaine ever wanted to walk on the wild side, and sub to someone safe, like his Master... He was so busy pondering these mysteries that it took a sharp jerk on the leash to remind him that he had other tops to apologize to. Skinner took him to each and every one of his previous tops, and there were several of them. He made Mulder kneel before them, kiss their feet, apologize for his past behavior, and announce that he was now the property of Walter Skinner.

When he'd finished, Skinner pulled him to his feet, stood him in the center of the room, and kissed him soundly. It was a long kiss, a claiming kiss, designed to show everybody in the room that this slave belonged to his Master. Mulder loved every second of it. When it was over, they both received another round of applause.

"All right, show's over. I hope you enjoyed it!" Skinner grinned. He directed Mulder to help him back into his sweater, and then returned to the lounge. He placed Mulder in the submissive position again, and then went to get a drink. It was at that moment that a pair of shiny PVC boots stopped right in front of him.

"Aw, poor, shaven, little bunny rabbit," the kid sneered. "Made to apologize to all the people he's ever fucked for being such a lousy lay."

"Fuck. Off." Mulder muttered in an undertone.

"Oh, it speaks!" the kid said in an outraged falsetto. "And it doesn't have anything to say for itself. How sad. How bored the bunny rabbit's Master must be. Did you ever see that film, *Fatal Attraction*, little slaveboy? Did you see what happened to the bunny in that? That's what's going to happen to you, honey. Your Master isn't going to look twice at his bunny after he's tasted Lee. You watch." And so saying, Lee made a beeline for Skinner who was just emerging from the kitchen with two drinks in his hand. Skinner said something to the youth, and continued walking over to Mulder. Lee followed. Skinner held a drink to Mulder's lips, and he drank, eagerly. He hadn't realized how thirsty he was. Lee was simpering, sidling up against his Master.

"That demonstration with the bullwhip really impressed me," Lee purred. "I've never seen anyone so accurate. You could try it out on me, any old time."

"I'm sure your Master would have something to say about that," Skinner told his admirer.

"Oh, I'm sure he'd love to watch," Lee winked.

"The bullwhip leaves an almighty sting. I wouldn't use it on anyone but my own slave." Skinner fondled Mulder's head fondly. Mulder wasn't sure whether to be pleased or dismayed by that piece of news. "Now, if you'll excuse me, I have someone I need to speak to," Skinner smiled affably, and left.

Lee smirked down at Mulder. "It's just a matter of time, honey," he said.

"Leave him the fuck alone or..." Mulder began, looking anxiously out of the corner of one eye to make sure Skinner was out of earshot.

"Or what? You can't do anything, sugar, your Master's got you hobbled! Lee grinned. "Which leaves the field clear for me. After all, why would he want a weak, obedient piece of shit like you, when he could have someone with balls, someone who's more fun, someone who'd be a real challenge to him!" He sauntered off in the direction of the bathroom.

Something inside Mulder snapped. The place was thronging with guests. He only needed a couple of minutes alone with that little jerk, and he'd soon scare him off. He saw Skinner talking animatedly to a group of his friends. Everyone else was busy chatting, and drinking. Nobody was looking at him. He stood up, and moved noiselessly towards the bathroom. He waited outside, and when Lee emerged a few seconds later, he grabbed his neck, and pushed him back into the bathroom, shutting the door behind them.

"Listen to me, you little shit. Skinner's mine. You don't touch him. Nobody touches him."

"Oh, funny, I thought you belonged to him, not the other way around," Lee sneered.

"I don't give a fuck what you thought. He's mine. Go near him again, and I'll damn well kill you," Mulder snapped. He was so angry, he couldn't even think straight. Lee had called him weak, he had sneered at the submissive state Mulder had been so proud of being able to achieve, and which he'd worked so hard at. Worse than that, he had tapped into Mulder's fears of inadequacy, the insecurity that still dogged him from his relationship with Phoebe, by suggesting that his Master might be bored by him.

"Yeah, right. The shaven, collared, ringed... **belled**," Lee reached out a finger and flicked at the bells contemptuously, "slave, is really scaring me now!" Lee laughed. Mulder's fists went into action before he could stop himself. He swung a right hook at Lee's jaw, knocking him back against the toilet, and then jumped on top of the prone man, and pummeled him repeatedly in the stomach. Suddenly his fists stopped working - someone had grabbed his arms from behind.

"Stop that, **now!**" a low, growling voice barked in his ear. "Is this what you call obedience, Fox. Is it?"

Mulder's heart sank, and all the fight went out of him. He could hardly bear to look into his Master's angry brown eyes. He took a step back, and looked down on his whimpering tormentor.

"He's been winding me up all fucking evening," he fumed at Skinner.

His Master clicked his fingers, but Mulder ignored him. He drew himself up to his full height, and glared back at Skinner. "Don't give me that submissive crap. This bastard has been rubbing himself up against you all night. Every time your back is turned he comes over and taunts me. You can't damn well expect me to stand by and watch some stupid kid fawning all over you. It's not fucking fair!" Mulder ranted. "I'm not a machine, Skinner. I've done everything you asked me to, I..." He trailed off, as he took in his Master's body language. Skinner was standing with his hands on his hips, his face dark with anger. "Shit...I'm in real trouble now, aren't I?" Mulder asked miserably.

"Yes, you are. Now kneel down and shut up, and I'll see if I can limit the damage you've caused," Skinner snapped. Mulder opened his mouth to protest again, but he felt like a kid in the school playground,

saying "it was all **his** fault, sir, not mine," and it sounded lame, even to his own ears. He got down on his knees, his eyes still rebellious, and watched as Skinner crouched down beside the kid, and examined his cut lip.

"You'll live, Lee." Skinner said, his tone almost amused as Lee continued to sob. "Get up, you'll be fine." Skinner helped the other man to his feet.

"You can't just let him..." Mulder began. Skinner silenced him with a glare. "Fox - heel, and put that damn leash in your mouth - maybe that'll shut you up. Follow me, keep very quiet, and listen carefully," Skinner told him. "Lee, this way." He put his arm around the kid, and ushered him back to his Master, singling him out of the crowd and taking him into a private corner. "Lee has behaved very badly this evening," Skinner told the fat man. Lee's head spun around in dismay. "Please take him home. He isn't welcome here any more. And, Mike, when you get him home, see that you give him the worst punishment he's ever had," Skinner instructed. Mike raised an eyebrow at Lee, took hold of him by the arm, and dragged him away. Mulder watched them go, then glanced up at his Master.

"Thank you," he mumbled.

"I told you that if you were in any distress, you could speak to me at any time," Skinner snapped. "You chose not to do that. You chose instead to disobey me."

"I know. I'm sorry," Mulder sighed.

"No you're not, but you will be," Skinner warned ominously. "Now, you're just damned lucky that all took place in private. I'll deal with you properly later, but for now, I think I have a way of keeping your mind focused in one place."

He disappeared in the direction of the Playroom, and returned a few seconds later with a length of chain. He attached one end to the chain hanging between Mulder's nipples, and the other end to his cock ring. Mulder stared down, uncomprehending. The chain was slack, and apart from being a nice piece of decoration, it didn't seem to serve any other function. "Submissive position - now!" Skinner ordered. Mulder put his head down, and pulled his shoulders up straight, and then gasped in pain, as the slack chain became taut. It only exerted the tiniest pressure on his sore nipples, but it was enough to damn well hurt. "Keep your shoulders back - if they slacken, I'll notice. I'll be watching you," Skinner warned. "Now kneel there, like that, until the party's over."

"Yes, Master," Mulder whispered. His nipples hurt like hell, but he knew that was all his own fault, and no less than he deserved.

Mulder knelt in abject misery for another half an hour or so. He had fucked everything up. He had been so close to achieving his goal of spending a night in his Master's bed, and now he knew that wouldn't happen. He bit back the tears of anger, frustration, and sheer disappointment, but two escaped, and crept silently down his cheeks. He couldn't even move his hands to wipe them away, as Skinner would be sure to notice.

Their guests began to leave, and soon there was only Skinner and a couple of his closest friends left, including J M Lucas, and Elaine. Skinner returned to his slave, and undid the chain that was tormenting his nipples. Mulder breathed a sigh of relief.

"All right, Fox?" Mulder looked up in surprise. His Master's tone was gentle, and loving. His big fingers caressed away the wetness on Mulder's cheeks, and dropped a kiss on his mouth. "Come on, little one, you must be tired. We're going to sit down and talk for a while. You can join us."

Skinner led him over to the couch and sat down, then pointed at the floor beside his feet. "Any position you like, just relax," he told his slave. Mulder nodded, and rested his head on his Master's knee, looking up at the other man adoringly. It was dark in the room - which was only lit by one lamp, and the flickering orange glow of the flames in the grate. It was peaceful. Mulder sighed. He loved looking at his Master, watching him talk, watching him listen to his friends talking. Skinner's face looked so familiar, so handsome, the light illuminating the cleft in his jaw, and the golden hue of his skin. Mulder sighed, and moved his head so that he could kiss his Master's fingers. Skinner smiled, and gently stroked his slave's head.

"You've worked wonders with that boy," Elaine remarked. "Really, Walter, it's a joy to watch him like this, so happy in his slavery. I'm glad he finally figured out where he belongs," she smiled at Mulder.

"Elaine's right. He's just where he should be," Lucas commented. Mulder thought it was strange the way they were all talking about him as if he wasn't there. "When he was making a nuisance of himself, pestering me to contact you, throwing himself around the scene, getting himself a reputation, I just despaired of him. Seeing him here tonight, it's like a miracle. He's been transformed."

"He just needed a firm hand." Skinner smiled, ignoring his slave. "He was running out of control. He needed to be brought down."

"And you were just the man to do it," one of the other men said. Mulder didn't know his name. He gazed dreamily at his Master, tracing imaginary lines over the other man's lips. He knew he'd be punished severely for what had happened with Lee, but he didn't care right at this moment in time. It just felt so good to be sitting here, naked, at his Master's feet, adoring him.

"How did you manage it?" the man continued. "What's your secret, Walter?"

"Discipline, discipline, and more discipline!" Skinner laughed. "No, seriously, lots of hard work, Jeff. The details are between me and Fox. Taking him as a slave, rather than just a sub helped."

"Yes, that was intriguing," Elaine's soft, mellow voice. "I have my reservations about 24/7 arrangements usually, but it seems to have worked in this case."

"I agree with you, Elaine," Skinner said, nodding his head in her direction. "Usually I wouldn't consider a 24/7 arrangement either. There has to be an enormous degree of trust between the two participants in such an arrangement."

"I didn't even realize that you even **knew** Mulder before you took him on," Jeff commented.

"Oh yes. I knew him. I knew him very well," Skinner chuckled.

"I'm of the opinion that lifestyle slavery only works when the Master or Mistress and the slave love each other," Elaine commented. "Otherwise it can lead to abuse."

"Hmm, take Mike and Lee for example," Skinner sighed. "That's a relationship that really isn't working. There's no love there at all."

"Oh god, yes. They're a terrible couple!" Lucas laughed.

"What about love, though?" Elaine pushed, clearly worried about this issue. "It seems evident to everyone in the room that your slave is crazy about you, Walter, but how do you feel about him?"

Mulder went quite still, his shoulders freezing under his Master's insistent caress.

"Fox's emotions are new to him, aren't they sweetheart?" Skinner smiled, and ran his fingers through Mulder's hair. "I think he's been surprised by the bond that developed between us, and because his emotions are so new, they sometimes overwhelm him." He looked at Mulder meaningfully, and his slave bit on his lip, remembering the fight in the bathroom. "For me, well, it's easier for me to keep my emotions under control - it's what I've been doing for years after all!" Skinner laughed. "Of course I love my slave, Elaine. I've known him for six years and I've grown to love him more as each one passed. I knew he'd have to come to me - that was the only way we could make it work, but even then I resisted for a long time. Sometimes it's hard to believe I have the reality after so many years wanting him. He's the perfect slave, just the right mixture of charm, initiative, challenge, and spirit. What's the matter, Fox? Were you really in any doubt that I love you?" Skinner asked, noticing his slave's look of amazement.

"I...yes, Master. I didn't know. I thought I just amused you," Mulder whispered.

Skinner roared with laughter. "Fox, I've been in love with you for far longer than you've been in love with me, sweetheart," he sighed. "It's been a long, lonely road. There have been many times I've wanted to take charge of you, and give you what you need. I'm glad you finally managed to ask for it, although I suspect we have many difficulties ahead. Don't ever doubt that you're loved, little one." Skinner leaned forward, and kissed his slave softly on the lips. Mulder melted into his Master's thigh, his heart pounding. He knew in that second that he could take any punishment his Master gave him because he was loved. He was on cloud nine, far above the stars. He didn't hear the rest of the conversation as his mind buzzed with this new information. His Master loved him. He loved him...he had loved him for years...Mulder felt warm and safe, and shit, yes, actually **happy**, in a way he didn't remember feeling in his life before.

When the last of the guests finally left, Skinner commanded him into the confessional position.

"Well, slave," he sighed. "Have you earned your night in my bed?"

"No, Master," Mulder replied in a small voice. "I'm sorry. I let you down."

"Yes, you did. That display of jealousy was petty, and unnecessary. Do you really think I was interested in that stupid kid?"

"I don't know, Master," Mulder replied. "Are you going to punish me, Master?"

"Yes, but I'm going to offer you a choice as to how," Skinner informed him. Mulder looked up in surprise. "You behaved impeccably apart from that one lapse. I was proud of you, and you saw how impressed

my friends were. Tonight was a great success, and you helped to make it so. Now, I know that you wanted to spend the night in my bed, and I'm still prepared to offer you that," Skinner told him. Mulder's face broke into a smile, and he scurried forward and kissed his Master's feet.

"Thank you!" he beamed.

"Wait - there's a price," Skinner said solemnly. "You do have to be punished, Fox. You can either be punished by not sleeping in my bed tonight, or, and I want you to think very carefully about this, you can sleep in my bed, but in the morning I'll use the bullwhip on you." Mulder's heart leaped into his mouth. "The bullwhip is a special punishment," Skinner continued, "which is why I want you to think about this very carefully. It won't be an easy thing to endure."

Mulder did think about it, but not for very long. Much as he was scared of the bullwhip, he didn't know when he'd ever get another chance to spend the night in his Master's bed. He'd cope with the bullwhip tomorrow, but for tonight, he'd sleep in his Master's arms.

"I want to sleep with you, Master," he told Skinner.

"Are you sure? Be very sure, Fox," Skinner warned him. "You've seen the bullwhip in action."

"I am sure, Master. Please, take me to your bed," Mulder begged.

Skinner's expression softened, and he broke into a smile. "Very well, sweetheart. Go and run a bath in my en-suite. We'll share it," he said.

Mulder ran to do his Master's bidding, and ten minutes later, he was sitting between Skinner's legs in the big corner bath, soaking up the warm water, relishing the feel of his Master's arms around his body. He had never felt so relaxed in his life.

"Fox, you can come out of deep submission now," Skinner nuzzled at his ears with his lips. He had already removed his slave's bells, and the chain linking his nipple rings. "I want you to be yourself. Talk to me. Tell me what you thought of the party - you can be as honest as you like. There won't be any repercussions for it." He squeezed Mulder's chest encouragingly. "How do you like being shaved?" he grinned into Mulder's ear.

"I'm not sure. It's different," Mulder grinned back. "Do I have to stay this way forever?"

"No, that's not necessary." Skinner kissed his head. "However it will make what I intend to do to you tonight nicer for me!"

"What's that, Master?" Mulder asked, craning his head to look up into his Master's eyes.

"I'm going to take you into my mouth, and remind your poor cock what it's been missing," Skinner told him. The cock in question immediately leapt to attention. Skinner laughed, and fondled it gently. "I'll shave you occasionally, when I feel like it, but you don't have to keep yourself shaved." Skinner nibbled Mulder's neck.

They talked for half an hour about the party, sharing observations, laughing about the costumes a

couple of the guests had been wearing. It was so nice, Mulder thought, to be lying here in the arms of someone he loved, someone who loved him. He didn't care what the future brought, or about the past. At least he had this one moment in time.

They got out of the bath only when the water became cold. Mulder picked up the towel to dry his Master, but Skinner brushed it aside, enveloped both of them in it instead, and dried them both. "Fox." He looked down into his slave's eager eyes. "Have you ever had a male lover before?"

"What do you mean?" Mulder frowned, confused.

"I mean, have you ever been involved with a man who you had plain, old, regular sex with, not just the BDSM variety?" Skinner clarified. Mulder shook his head. "I thought not. Well, tonight, that's what you've got. There's not going to be any BDSM, there's just you, and me, two lovers, sharing a bed. That doesn't mean you're not still my slave," Skinner grinned, "just that for tonight, this is how I choose to love you. Go and wait for me in the bed, sweetheart."

Mulder did as he was told, trembling in anticipation. The sheets felt cool against his warm, clean skin. He waited there, until Skinner came into the room. His Master turned off the light, and slipped into the bed beside him. He pulled Mulder into his arms, and held him, kissed him tenderly, in a way no other top had ever kissed him before. His hand stroked Mulder's body, his fingers rubbing inside him.

"We'll rely on the alarm to wake us tomorrow," Skinner whispered. "So you're exempt your normal wake up call." His head dipped, and he kissed his slave's throat, and neck, ending up at his abdomen, then disappeared further, down to his groin. Mulder's cock was already erect by the time Skinner's warm, wet mouth descended on it. Skinner swallowed him whole, and Mulder gasped out loud, bucking into the expert caress. Skinner's hands continued to gently stroke and caress his body, while his mouth devoured him. It was too much for Mulder. He ran his hands over his Master's naked scalp, mewling and whimpering in ecstasy.

"Oh, that's good, Master...oh fuck...Master...oh shit..." and after several days abstinence, Mulder came. And came. And came. He tried to draw back, but Skinner held his thighs close, and devoured every drop. Then he emerged once more, grinning.

"Like that?" he asked.

"It was wonderful," Mulder sighed dreamily. He snuggled up close to his Master's furry chest, and laid there for a long while, just licking and kissing the other man's body. Skinner's hands meanwhile kept up their languorous stroking on Mulder's skin, soothing, and loving him. Mulder could feel his Master's hard cock digging into his thigh. "Can I take care of this?" he asked, taking the broad length in his hand, and savoring the feel of it.

"If you like," Skinner smiled. "I don't need any release though, Fox. I've had plenty this week."

"I'd like it if...would you...?" Mulder's hand increased its pressure on his Master's cock, and he could feel it pulsing into life between his fingers.

"What, Fox? What do you want? This is your evening," Skinner whispered.

"I'd like you to make love to me, Master," Mulder told him. Skinner smiled, and kissed his slave's forehead.

"All right, sweetheart. Lie on your back."

Skinner rolled over, and got a condom out of the night-stand, and put it onto his hard cock. Then he turned back to his slave. He knelt between Mulder's legs, and inserted a finger inside him. Mulder groaned, and bucked. Skinner inserted another finger, then another, before pushing Mulder's legs further apart, and gently pushing his cock inside the other man. Mulder stared. He was fascinated by this position, as he had been last time his Master had used it. He loved watching his Master make love to him. He rested both his hands on Skinner's shoulders, and opened up his body, pulled his Master deep inside him, relishing the power and hard length of his Master's cock as it made love to him.

"Oh god, it's so good," Mulder sighed, Skinner's cock rubbing his prostate into a frenzy of sensation. His Master came, and collapsed on top of Mulder, softening inside his slave. Then he withdrew, and threw the used condom into a dish on his nightstand.

Mulder was utterly sated, and spent. It had been the perfect ending to a perfect day. Skinner rolled towards him again, and took him in his arms.

"Now sleep, sweetheart. We have a busy day ahead of us tomorrow," he murmured.

"I want this night to last forever." Mulder didn't think he'd ever been more relaxed in his life before, all wrapped up in his Master's loving arms, their naked bodies entwined. Skinner's flesh was warm and comforting, and his Master occasionally kissed his ear, or nuzzled his neck. He could feel the other man's chest hair on his back, and the weight of his body pressed against his own.

This was where he belonged, this was the only place he could truly call his home. It was his natural environment, and he knew he could never be truly happy anywhere else. With a sigh, Mulder closed his eyes and fell asleep, locked in his Master's loving embrace.

**End of Part 8.**

## Suits You, Sir by Xanthe

### Author's Notes:

Posted 11th November, 1999.

I chose this pic by Mika because it just about sums up this chapter: Mulder sleeps in Skinner's arms, and then they go out shopping for the sort of clothes Mulder doesn't usually wear <G>.

**Warning: Whip alert, although it's really not that scary. Except to Mulder. Obviously ;-)**

You probably have to be British to understand the joke in the title of this chapter, unless you get *The Fast Show* in the US (Long live Ted and Ralph!)

Big thanks to DiAnn for providing me with some invaluable research material. Special thanks to Carol for the daily diet of naughty pics to keep me in the mood (I think we can safely say that worked ;), to Gaby for the truly appalling daily *X Files* jokes, (you really don't want to know the one about Krycek and the bees). Also, thank you to Rachelle and Asrana for sending me some out of the blue extra feedback that helped inspire me to get going again when I was in the doldrums.

Many thanks to Emma, who told me a very intriguing tale that sparked this story off, as well as providing invaluable technical assistance, and some rather interesting ideas...

Quotation courtesy of my sweet Alex. None of this is beta'd. It's far too much fun to take seriously.

**24/7** is an erotic fantasy and NOT a BDSM resource guide. The truth is sometimes exaggerated, or played with, for dramatic effect. For more information, please visit the **24/7 BDSM Glossary**.

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*"A truth, still apparent, though disregarded, that things move violently to their place, but calmly in their place. To put it another way, everything has its right home, the region that suits it, and, unless forcibly restrained, will move thither by a kind of homing instinct."*

J. Winterson  
*"Art and Lies"*

The room was dark, and there was something warm and heavy resting on his thigh. Mulder felt disorientated, wondering where he was, and why he felt so damn **good**. He shifted his hip, and the weight on his thigh moved, then settled again a bit lower down. Mulder wondered what it was, and what it was doing in his bed. He opened his eyes, then closed them again with a contented smile. Skinner's arm. His Master's arm was draped over his slave's body.

Mulder frowned. Something soft and furry was nestled under his chin, and it was vibrating. Mulder opened his eyes again, and glared at Wanda. She notched her purring up a decibel, and rested her head proprietarily on Skinner's shoulder. Mulder nudged her out of the way with his chin, and claimed this prime position himself. It was strange seeing his boss, his Master, at such close quarters - asleep, unguarded, emitting his powerful Skinner pheromones that made his slave dizzy.

Mulder studied his Master carefully for several minutes. Skinner looked so different asleep and at such close, intimate quarters. He looked much younger for a start. Without the aura of power that usually surrounded him, without the trappings of his office, his trademark white shirt, without his glasses...he looked serene, and he had a rugged, intensely masculine beauty that turned Mulder on.

Mulder pressed his lips gently against his Master's shoulder, enjoying the feel of the bare flesh under his lips. His welted butt ached, and his nipples were sore, but he had never felt more relaxed in his whole life. He felt somehow different this morning. Mulder kissed his Master's shoulder again, and pondered the change. He felt...happy. No, it was more than that, it was something much more profound. A wave of peace and radiance swept through him as he remembered last night. Skinner had said he loved him. More than that, he'd loved him for years. Mulder went through every single one of their confrontations in his head, since the moment Skinner had taken on the X Files, and tried to figure out how the hell that had happened. He remembered drug induced tantrums, throwing a punch at his boss, his constant rebuttals of the other man's authority, to say nothing of his own paranoia and distrust. He winced as he recalled the numerous occasions when he had accused Skinner of betraying him, or his work, and yet Skinner was here, solid, unmoving, like the proverbial rock. He had always been here, catching Mulder when he fell, cleaning up after him, and yes, disciplining him when he needed that too. It was as if Skinner understood him, in a way nobody else ever had, or ever could - not even Scully. Skinner saw the darkness inside his slave, and neither allowed Mulder to drag him down into it, nor held back from reaching into the void to anchor him to sanity. Mulder remembered calling him his beacon in the night once - he'd meant it facetiously at the time. He would never have guessed the resonance the words would one day hold for him.

The hand on his thigh shifted, and Skinner muttered something in his sleep. Mulder moved closer, and pressed his body against his Master's as if he wanted to melt into him. He could feel Wanda's soft, furry presence between them, the three of them warm, close, sleepy. Usually, this was the time when he ran. He had managed to separate love and sex quite happily for several years. He hadn't wanted this. He still wasn't entirely sure how it had happened. He had been looking for an extreme thrill, a way of satisfying sexual urges that wouldn't go away, and he had found this instead. Last night had been the first time he had ever made love to another man. Love. Love, as opposed to sex. Love, as opposed to giving his body over to sensation, to use and abuse in order to get the high he craved. And it had been good. Mulder shivered, and burrowed his head into Skinner's warm chest, whimpering softly to himself. He was scared by how much he wanted this, by how completely he'd fallen in love with his Master, his boss, in just this short space of time. By denying him his liberty, Skinner had effectively forced him to stay around long enough to care, and more importantly, to be cared for. Mulder wasn't used to the sensation. A part of

him wanted to run, while another part, one that he had denied for so long, wanted to rest his head on Skinner's shoulder forever, and never leave his Master's side.

He was so busy thinking, that he gave a start of alarm when he looked up to find his Master's eyes open, and his gaze fixed on his slave.

"Awake, little one?" Skinner kissed his hair.

"Yeah." Mulder smiled, and stroked his hand along his Master's thigh.

"And thinking hard, I see." Skinner drew him into the circle of his warm, strong arms, and held him.

"Yeah." Mulder shrugged.

"About?"

Mulder hesitated, then looked up into his Master's eyes. "Love," he admitted honestly, "and what you said last night."

"Ah. Love," Skinner murmured absently.

"Yeah. I never thought I was interested in all that emotional crap," Mulder confided.

"But?" Skinner prompted.

"Today I woke up happy, Master, for the first time," Mulder whispered.

"Good." Skinner grinned.

"No, you don't understand." Mulder looked up again. "I woke up happy for the first time **ever**, in as long as I can remember. Usually, every morning I wake up to the same old angst of being me, of living my life the way I do. I wake up thinking 'fuck, another day.' Today...I woke up thinking that being me could be pleasurable for a change..."

"That's good." Skinner's hands ran up and down his slave's back.

"...and I wanted to run away," Mulder finished.

Skinner's hands found his welted buttocks, and stopped, pressed hard on the sore flesh, making Mulder squirm. "Well, that's not an option, slaveboy," he growled. "You belong to me, and the penalty for running away isn't one you want to pay."

Mulder's eyes were alight and curious, and his cock lurched to attention. Skinner in he-man mode always did it for him. "What would you do, Master?" he asked, in a faltering tone.

Skinner's expression hardened, and his eyes were deadly serious as he replied. "I'd track you down, drag you back here, and whip you within an inch of your life," he promised.

"Oh." Mulder wasn't sure why he found that reassuring.

"And when I'd finished tanning your hide, I'd hold you down, hold you damn tight, and keep you there, until you told me why you'd left. I wouldn't allow you to be dishonest, or flippant, or to get by on those half truths, and that half baked crap you tell yourself, in order to hide from what you want most," Skinner informed him.

Mulder thought about this for a moment, then kissed the other man's lips, tenderly.

"Thank you, Master," he whispered.

They drifted off, dozing for a while, then, without warning, Skinner angled his knee forward, and pulled Mulder's body over it, so that his butt was raised a little way in the air, then the big man thrust a finger inside his slave's body. Mulder moaned, and wiggled, accepting the finger, opening under the caress. Another finger followed. Skinner's other hand came down on his slave's back in a hard, fluid motion, pinning him to the bed, immobilising him there. One more finger joined those already probing inside Mulder's ass.

"Have you ever been fisted, boy?" Skinner asked, in the low, throaty tone that made Mulder's cock ache.

"No, Master," Mulder whimpered, his rectal muscles clenching in response to this horrifying question, trapping his Master's fingers in his body.

Skinner laughed. "Not today, little one, not today," he soothed, "but one day soon." He slid his entire hand into Mulder's body, keeping the fingers straight. It didn't hurt - a part of Mulder liked the sensation of accepting **any** part of his Master's body into his own. It seemed to be the ultimate expression of his Master's power and authority over him. Another part of him remained frozen with fear at the very mention of the word "fisting". Skinner had big hands, and Mulder was sure they would make very capable, very large, fists. It didn't bear thinking about.

"Scared, boy?" Skinner asked, one hand stroking his slave's trembling body, as the other caressed insistently inside him.

"Yes, Master," he replied.

Skinner laughed, and kissed the back of his neck, nipped at it like a lioness picking up her cub by the scruff of his neck. "Good," he replied, in that low, sexy drawl.

"Master, can I come?" Mulder asked, writhing, pressing his cock into the bed.

"No. I thought I'd made that clear," Skinner replied. "Unless I tell you otherwise, you can only come with my permission, boy. You'll experience pleasure entirely at my discretion."

"Yes, Master," Mulder's body tingled at his Master's words and tone. He felt Skinner's tongue on his buttocks, tracing a line along the welts that had been raised there the previous day, and he squirmed, and moaned.

"Keep still," Skinner advised. "I'm in the mood to play - that's one of the consequences of waking up to find my naked slave in my bed. If you don't like it, then don't insist on sharing my bed, boy."

"Yes, Master," Mulder panted, privately thinking that being played with was hardly a disincentive to asking to spend a night wrapped up in his Master's arms.

Skinner stroked light, gentle circles on his slave's buttocks, then pressed harder, his large, blunt fingers massaging Mulder's sore ass, making his slave cry out, at the same time as the younger man's cock got harder within its golden prison. Skinner moved down the bed, and trapped Mulder's body beneath his own, covering him with a heavy thigh, and strong, furry chest. Mulder lay, inert, trying to remember to breathe. He felt Skinner's tongue on his ass again, then his Master pulled his buttocks open, and Mulder gave a squeal of pure pleasure, as the sensitive nerve endings on his asshole responded to his Master's wet caress.

"Have you ever been rimmed before, boy?" Skinner asked, his voice muffled by the bedclothes, and his close proximity to Mulder's butt.

"No, Master," Mulder panted, taking a fistful of sheets in one hand, and slipping the other one down to caress his aching cock.

"Hand back up." Skinner slapped his butt hard, and Mulder obeyed him quickly, flushing. "Okay - I think we need to invent a new rule, slaveboy. The only time you touch your cock from now on is when you use the bathroom. Other than that, it's out of bounds to you. It belongs to me, and I'll say when, and if, it's going to get any attention. If I catch you touching it you can bet the punishment will be swift, and painful. Understood?"

"Yes...Master..." Mulder agreed, writhing as Skinner dipped his head back down to continue rimming his slave. His Master never ceased to amaze him. If he had assumed, after last night, that he had any rights, or any new privileges, then Skinner had been quick to disabuse him of that notion. Last night Skinner might have treated him as a lover, but this morning he was quite clearly back to being a slave again.

Skinner's hands massaged, and kneaded Mulder's sore buttocks, at the same time as he skilfully licked his slave's sensitive opening, overloading Mulder's nervous system with the twin sensations of pleasure and pain in a way that threatened to make him black out. He gasped, and began to rhythmically thrust against the bed in time to the kneading, licking rhythms until he was sure he couldn't last any longer.

"Please let me come, Master," he begged.

"No," came back the inevitable reply. "Do you seriously think the slave should come before the Master? Do you, boy?" Skinner slapped his butt again, and Mulder yowled.

"No, Master...I'm sorry!" he cried.

Skinner returned to his work, and Mulder endured the delicious torment, until his entire body was drenched with sweat, and he wasn't coherent. He kept himself from coming by the skin of his teeth, his cock almost going into spasm with need. He longed for it to stop, and to go on forever, at one and the same time. Finally, it came to an end, and Skinner's head reappeared beside him on the pillow.

"I'm hard - ride me," Skinner ordered.

Mulder gulped, and nodded, trying to pull himself back together for long enough to obey. He got up, pushed the sheets back, and found his Master's large, hard cock standing out straight. Mulder fished a condom out of the night-stand, and placed it reverentially on his Master's cock, then he took it in his hand, and straddled his Master, facing him. He concentrated for a moment on opening his body, then slid the cock into position against his entrance, before impaling himself on the hard length, allowing it into his body, sliding down on it all the way until it fit snugly inside him. He stopped, the sweat still running down his face, his own cock hard, and neglected. Skinner grabbed his hips.

"Hard - and fast," he ordered, and Mulder began to rock, rhythmically, taking his Master's penis deep into his ass, then sliding back up the solid shaft, up and down, over and over again. He flung back his head, his adam's apple bobbing in time to his moans.

"Good boy..." Skinner murmured. "Oh, that's good...keep going, boy..." His hands stroked Mulder's thighs, and his body moved up urgently to meet his slave's movements. At the moment he was on the verge of coming, Skinner suddenly wrapped his hand around Mulder's cock. Mulder felt his rectal muscles go into immediate spasm, and that was enough to finish his Master off. He came with a shuddering sigh of satisfaction, and then continued pumping Mulder's cock.

"How long can you hold on?" Skinner grinned, sliding his hand along his slave's hard shaft, milking it.

"Not much longer when you do that, Master...unnnhhh!" Mulder screamed in pleasure, and need, his body protesting that he couldn't hold on any more, his mind, and his Master, insisting that he had to.

"Do you want to feel my crop on your ass, slave?" Skinner asked. "If you come, you will."

"Please, Master...don't...I can't..." Mulder begged helplessly. He could feel Skinner's cock softening inside his body, even as his Master's hand pumped up and down his own hard cock. "It's not fair..." Mulder whimpered, his body limp, wrung out with effort. "How can I hold on...if you're going to do that...?" he accused.

"You'll have to learn. Think of something else," Skinner grinned, still continuing his caress. "Come and I'll punish you."

Mulder tried to think about work, about wading through sewers, and running through forests being chased by monsters. In desperation he even thought about AD Kersh, but nothing worked. He could still smell his Master's earthy scent, see his half-naked body, **feel** him inside his ass...

"Come!" Skinner said the word at the very moment Mulder was unable to hold on, and he pumped out onto his Master's chest. Then he looked down on the semen apologetically.

"Sorry, Master."

"For what? You came on order. That's good." Skinner grinned. "Now go and turn the shower on - I think it's time we got moving. We have a busy day ahead of us." He glanced at the clock, which read 8:30. "We won't do your normal morning discipline today. We have some unfinished business to take care of anyway," Skinner commented. "That will suffice."

Mulder stopped in mid-stride, his heart suddenly sinking like a lead balloon as he remembered what would take place today.

"Fox?" He heard Skinner got out of the bed behind him but his legs wouldn't move.

"I forgot." Mulder hung his head, his whole body trembling. "About the whip. I forgot about it."

"You had what you wanted, sweetheart," Skinner said gently. He put a hand under his slave's chin, and lifted his face to look into his eyes. "It was your choice. You do have to be punished."

"I know, but not the bullwhip, Master. Please." Mulder got down on his hands and knees, and kissed Skinner's feet. Last night it had all seemed so different. Last night, he had been so focused on what he wanted, that he had been prepared to pay any price to attain it. Today, in the hard light of day, he wasn't so sure of himself.

"I promised the bullwhip, so the bullwhip is what you'll get," Skinner told him firmly, pulling him to his feet. "What kind of Master would I be if I didn't keep my promises?"

Mulder swallowed hard. "A compassionate, kind, and sympathetic Master?" he asked hopefully.

Skinner laughed out loud. "No - a bad Master," he said, aiming a swat at Mulder's ass. Mulder hopped into the shower to avoid it.

"I want you to think about this in relation to your life, Fox," Skinner told him seriously, as his slave washed him.

"What do you mean?" Mulder frowned.

"Well, how many times have you pursued something, and regretted it later?" Skinner's eyes were dark, and intense. "Do you weigh the risks and possible outcomes, Fox, or do you ignore them? You always assume that you can deal with the pain of the consequences - but one day, that might not be the case."

"Today?" Mulder hardly dared ask.

"If not today, then one day."

Skinner took hold of his slave's shoulders and pushed him against the cool, tiled wall of the shower. Mulder tensed, uncertain what was coming next, but Skinner didn't hurt him. He just lowered his head, and kissed his slave's wet lips, pinning him against the wall with his large body, keeping him upright with his hands, as his mouth plundered his slave's. When the kiss was over, he kept his slave standing there, and looked at him with that serious, dark-eyed gaze. "Your actions, and your decisions, always have consequences - both for you and the people around you. Remember that, Fox," he advised, and his tone was a world away from the deep, throaty, sexy growl that Mulder loved so much. It was firm, but curiously vulnerable, and for the first time Mulder saw himself as others must see him: running headlong into trouble, risking his life in pursuit of his quest...and hurting those who cared about him.

"I don't know that I can change," he said.

Skinner sighed. "You don't have to. I don't want you to," he said. "I just want you to make some better decisions than you have in the past."

"Choosing to sleep with you last night wasn't a bad decision," Mulder declared angrily, pushing his Master away. Skinner caught hold of his arms, and pinned them behind him, placing him roughly back into position.

"You haven't felt the kiss of my whip on your back yet, boy," he replied.

"I don't care." Mulder assumed an air of bravado that he didn't feel. "It was still worth it."

"Maybe this time," Skinner warned, his brown eyes seeming almost black, as if in despair, or grief. "Maybe not next time. One day, you might pay the ultimate price for a poor choice. If you don't care about your own life, think about the others who **do** care."

Mulder stared at him for a moment, unable to reconcile this side of his Master with the man who had been training him all week. He bit on his lip. All eroticism had gone from the situation. Skinner was taking him back to reality - and he didn't like it one bit.

Mulder went about his tasks in silence - washing his Master, then drying him, but inside he was scared. Scared of his decision, scared of the newly revealed depths of his Master's emotions, and most of all, scared of that damned whip. He'd seen enough flogging scenes, in enough movies, to be seriously worried about it. Skinner had said they were going shopping today. How the hell was he going to manage that when the flesh was about to be torn from his bones?

Mulder dressed Skinner in a pair of stone colored chinos, and a white henley, then towel dried his own hair.

"Time to take care of business," Skinner said grimly.

He opened the bedroom door, and gestured his slave through it. Mulder walked slowly, as if going to his execution. His legs felt like lead as he climbed the stairs to the Playroom. He knelt without even thinking about it, when Skinner clicked his fingers, and watched as Skinner made the room ready. His Master got out the bullwhip and laid it on the table, and then he pulled out some cuffs, and fastened them on his slave's wrists.

"We'll use the whipping post," he told Mulder gravely. Mulder's throat was so dry he wasn't even sure that his mumbled "Yes, Master" was audible. "Before we begin - what are you being punished for, and what lesson will you take from your correction?" Skinner demanded.

"I'm being punished for..." Mulder closed his eyes, and thought back. It had only been last night, but so much had happened since that it seemed like a lifetime away. "For hitting a guest, Master?" he offered, his entire body flushing as he remembered the altercation with Lee.

"What else?" Skinner asked.

Mulder swallowed. "Disobedience." He hung his head.

"All right - that's part of what you did wrong last night, but it's not what I'm really getting at here. What else?" Skinner demanded. Mulder sat back on his heels and thought about it, but he couldn't make his brain work while that bullwhip was sitting there, waiting for him.

"Jealousy?" he offered at last. He looked up in surprise as Skinner tapped his head.

"No. I would never punish you for an emotion. I can't dictate what you feel," Skinner told him firmly. "And I wouldn't want to. The crux of what you did wrong last night is the problem you have all the way along the line - the problem we keep coming back to. Now, what is it?" Realization flooded through Mulder. "Honesty, Master," he sighed. "I should have come to you, instead of, uh, losing it like that."

"Yes - you should. Look, Fox, I don't need you to come running to Master every time you have a problem, but I placed you in deep submission last night. That made you vulnerable, and removed the normal weapons you would have had for dealing with an obnoxious little shit like Lee. It's my duty - my responsibility - to take good care of you while you're in that state. I can't do that if you don't follow my orders, and tell me if there are any problems."

"No, Master." Mulder bit on his lip.

"Are you ever going to learn this lesson?" Skinner shook his head wryly, and fondled his slave's hair. Mulder leaned into the caress eagerly.

"I hope so, Master," he said with a shrug.

"Do more than hope, slave." Skinner took firm hold of his shoulders, and looked down into his eyes. "Try harder," he ordered. Mulder nodded, awe-struck. "Honesty goes hand in hand with trust," Skinner continued. "You have issues there as well."

"Yeah. I know," Mulder agreed. "I will try harder. I promise."

"Good. Go and stand by the whipping post." Skinner turned away, and picked up the whip. When he turned back, Mulder was still frozen to the spot. "I believe I gave you an order, Fox," Skinner said firmly. Mulder licked his lips. "There won't be any reprieve - no last minute cavalry riding over the hill to rescue you. This is real life. Today my whip - tomorrow maybe someone's gun. All consequences of your actions, and your choices. Now get up, and go over to the post."

Skinner's tone wasn't harsh, but it was firm. Mulder knew there was only one way out of this. He got to his feet, shakily, and walked over to the post. Skinner followed him, and strapped the cuffs onto his trembling slave, checking them in his usual thorough way. Mulder clamped his mouth shut, and tried to still his nerves, wishing that Skinner would just get on with it. He wondered how good Skinner's first aid was, and how much blood the whip would draw. He remembered the way it had sliced through paper last night, and his flesh crawled as he thought of it doing the same thing to his own tender skin.

Skinner moved away, pacing his steps with precision as he went. Mulder tensed. The whip cracked in mid-air as his Master did a little practice, and then Skinner turned to face his slave's naked back and buttocks which were ready and waiting to receive the kisses of their Master's lash. Mulder was determined to show Skinner that he didn't regret his decision, but all the same, he was sure he would

pass out during those few seconds waiting for the whip to fall. He clenched his fists tight, and offered up a prayer to any deity that was listening. He could feel his heart beating in his chest, the noise so loud that he felt sure it was echoing around the room. He had memory of a dozen different hurts. Of gunshot wounds, of his finger being broken, and he had taken each and every pain, defiantly, faced up to them, and endured, but this was so different. To go willingly into this dark arena was so much harder than to have it happen to you, without your collusion. Mulder hung his head, and wondered at the darkness of his own soul, that he was offering himself up like this, to be flayed alive.

There was silence behind him, then a sudden rush of movement, and Mulder cried out the minute he heard the whip crack, his over-anxious body convulsing in his bonds, but he felt no pain until a split second later, when the burning lash caressed his skin. He clung to the post, yelling his head off, more in anticipation of pain than any real sensation of it.

"Hush, little one." Skinner's voice, close to his ear. He felt his Master's hands on his body, soothing him. "Think, Fox. How much did it hurt?" Mulder calmed down as his Master's fingers continued with their stroking. He started to relax. It **had** hurt, but now that Skinner mentioned it, it wasn't as bad as he had expected. "All right?" Skinner's lips nuzzled the back of his neck. "All right, little one." His Master's big body was folded around his back, warm and reassuring. Mulder put his head back, rested it on his Master's shoulder, and nodded.

"Yes, Master," he whispered.

"You can take more, sweetheart, can't you?" Skinner's hands were so comforting on his naked flesh, gently rubbing little circles on his skin.

"No." Mulder said, automatically and emphatically.

"The truth," Skinner whispered, his voice tickling Mulder's ear.

Mulder was silent for a moment, then he sighed. "Yes, Master," he agreed. "I can take more."

"Good boy - my brave Fox." Skinner pulled his slave's head back, and kissed his lips, gently parting them. He gave Mulder the sweetest, most loving kiss, and then gently pushed him back against the post.

Mulder gave a whimper when his Master walked away again, and paced back to his former position. He closed his eyes, and his whole body flinched when he heard that terrible cracking sound, but this time he was dimly aware that the whip didn't actually touch his body until a split second after it made that sound. It hurt! It was a quick, flashing, bite of pain that stung deep into his flesh. There was a pause, and then another crack, and he felt the lash land on his shoulder - adjacent to the other two licks. Then Skinner was at his side again, unlocking the cuffs from the post. Mulder fell on the floor at his Master's feet.

"Am I bleeding, Master?" he whispered.

Skinner laughed, picked him up, and held him tight against his chest. "I didn't break the skin, sweetheart!" he exclaimed. "Did you think I'd want my slave scarred?" He pushed Mulder back and looked into his eyes.

"I don't know," Mulder mumbled.

"Come with me." Skinner led him over to the mirror, and showed him his back. There were three distinct red welts on his shoulders, but they weren't any worse than those on his butt, and they were a damn sight smaller.

"How...?" Mulder looked up at his Master, mouthing the word soundlessly.

"The crack isn't the sound of whip on flesh," Skinner told him, holding him close, and soothing his hair gently. "The whip hits the floor first - that takes most of the power out of the stroke. If I hit the skin direct, then you wouldn't have any skin left, little one. I paced my position to ensure that only the very tip of the whip touched you at all. What you felt was the last inch of it - that's how long the welts are. You were more scared of what you thought it would be, than what it actually was. I can do worse than this with it, little one, but as we have a busy day planned, I had no intention of giving you any more than that. Three strokes didn't do you any harm - I think your anticipation was more punishment than the lash, yes?" He tipped Mulder's chin up.

"You bastard," Mulder muttered. "You let me think...?"

"What you think, and what you feel, are two entirely different matters," Skinner told him tersely, unbuckling his cuffs. "Using language and anticipation to keep you on edge is a trick I've been using on you since you arrived. You're smart, Fox. You must have figured that out."

Mulder closed his eyes. He remembered the first time Skinner had entered him. His Master had talked about being rough, and fast, as he thrust into his slave, but in actuality he had gone slowly, and carefully. When he talked of 'using' his slave, it was a turn on to Mulder. It helped create the submissive head-space that he enjoyed so much.

"And as for being called a bastard," Skinner sighed, and without warning placed his foot on a shelf in the cupboard, and tipped Mulder over his knee, then he applied half a dozen stinging swats to his slave's upturned butt with his hand. "Don't do that again. It **really** pisses me off." He righted Mulder, who immediately went down on his knees, and kissed his Master's feet.

"Sorry, Master." He made a face. "It's just...nobody's ever got into my head and freaked me out like that before. Let's just say I'm not use to being played so well."

"Fox." Skinner lifted his chin, and looked down on him. "You're the only one playing a game," he warned. "I'm deadly serious. The sooner you come to terms with that, the better it'll be for you. Now, go and get dressed."

"Dressed?" Mulder repeated blankly.

"Yeah - unless you want me to walk you down the street on the end of your lead stark naked."

"Uh, no." Mulder got to his feet.

"Fox - take another shower first - you got all sweaty just now. And Fox?" Mulder paused, his hand on the door. "You'll wear briefs, blue jeans, and that navy blue sweatshirt. Timberlands on your feet."

"Yes, Master." Mulder nodded. It felt weird to have his choice of clothing dictated to him, but not as weird as the thought of actually being dressed after days of nudity. He ran along to corridor to his room, feeling curiously elated by the prospect of the shopping trip. Usually he hated shopping for clothes, and only did it twice a year in a frenzy of activity, desperate to get the whole event over and done with as quickly as possible so he could get back out chasing UFO's as soon as possible.

Mulder's bedroom door was ajar. He crashed through it, and came to a skidding halt. Wanda was sitting on his bed, viewing the contents of his fish tank with a predatory eye. She must have slipped through the door to the upstairs apartment, which was usually kept shut.

"You - out!" he ordered.

She gazed at him with the disdain of one not used to acknowledging commands.

"I said, **out**," he repeated, picking her up, and looking into her haughty green eyes. "It's a fish tank - not cat TV," he told her firmly.

She glared at him, and he opened the door and put her down smartly on the floor outside his bedroom. "Don't make me tell you the story about the enormous cat-eating mutant fish that wiped out every feline within a 5 mile radius of a small lake in Minnesota," he told her. She put her head on one side, and began washing her ears with an air of studied disinterest. "It's true - I have an X File on it at the office. I'll bring it home and read it to you if you're not careful," he said, then looked up into his Master's questioning brown eyes, and one raised eyebrow.

"I was just, um...oh fuck," Mulder sighed.

"Clothes, Fox. Now. You have ten minutes - there'll be one stroke with the paddle for every second you go over that time." Skinner clapped his hands. "Daylight's burning, slave."

It felt strange to be wearing clothes. Mulder trotted down the stairs 9 minutes 57 seconds later, feeling decidedly weird. Having clothes transformed him immediately from Fox, slaveboy, into Mulder. Skinner, wearing a smart jacket, was already waiting for him by the door, checking through the contents of his wallet. He looked up when his slave came down the stairs, and assessed him for a moment, then clicked his fingers. Mulder stared at him, then suddenly remembered that, clothes or no clothes, he was still Skinner's slave. He got down on his knees.

"A bit slow," Skinner tapped his head reprovably. "All right - this is your first trip out with me in public since you became my property, and that's going to be difficult for you. I want you to remember one thing - you're my slave. Clothed or naked, in public or in private, at work or at home, you're mine. That's the bottom line. If you keep it in mind at all times, you'll do fine. If not...vell, ve haf ways of reminding you," he grinned, affecting a silly accent. Mulder sighed. His Master was clearly in one of his jocular moods. That didn't bode well for the outing. "You're not in deep submission, and I don't expect you to walk to heel. I don't think it'd be very smart to address me as 'Master' out there either. You can call me 'sir'. You should be used to that - you've been doing it for years after all. Do you have any questions or anxieties?"

"No, Mast...sir," Mulder replied.

"Good - then let's go." Skinner opened the door, and Mulder leaped to his feet and ran out, like an eager little puppy being taken on a walk. Skinner laughed, and shook his head.

Skinner didn't take his slave to the mall as Mulder had expected. Instead he drove him to an exclusive establishment of the kind Mulder never even knew existed before. A tall, silver-haired gentleman in his fifties greeted Skinner with a warm handshake.

"Walter - on time as usual." The man had a smooth, cultured voice, and an elegant manner. He was dressed impeccably in a silver-gray suit, with a pink tie and matching handkerchief. He looked exquisite. His young assistant hovered behind him, shadowing every move his boss made. He was about 25 years younger than the silver haired man, with floppy blond hair, and the bluest eyes Mulder had ever seen.

"Elliott." Skinner shook the older man's hand warmly, and then waved a hand in Mulder's direction. "This is Fox. He needs a couple of new work suits, a wide variety of casual clothes, and some **tasteful**," he stressed the word with a meaningful glance at his slave, "underwear." Mulder remembered the imaginative and assorted array of Star Wars, and Bart Simpson boxer shorts his Master had thrown out forcefully on his first day in his service. "In addition, I'd be grateful if you'd show him your tie collection." Skinner winced, and Mulder rolled his eyes. His ties weren't **that** bad. "Basically, his clothing tastes need...re-educating," Skinner said ominously.

"Dear me, yes." Elliott fixed Mulder with a disapproving stare, taking in his jeans and crumpled sweatshirt. Mulder was suddenly aware of looking so much less elegant than his neatly dressed Master, and he felt resentful. He was only wearing what Skinner had **told** him to wear. Of course, when he thought about it, he didn't actually own any elegant, understated clothes of the kind Skinner was wearing, but even so - he still felt aggrieved.

"It would be a pleasure to help this young man, Walter," Elliott mused, ushering them over to a set of comfortable armchairs. Mulder was starting to feel like Julia Roberts to Skinner's Richard Gere in that scene from *Pretty Woman*. It wasn't a good feeling.

Elliott's assistant seemed to share his boss's opinion on Mulder's lack of sartorial elegance. He fixed Mulder with an appraising stare that made the agent's hot temper rise. The younger man's blue eyes traveled the entire length of Mulder's casually dressed body, examining his ruffled, towel-dried hair, and faintly stubbled chin with a supercilious air.

"Donald, please fetch coffee for our guests." Elliott waved his hand, and his assistant gave Mulder a smug smile, then disappeared.

Mulder glanced around, bored, while Elliott and his Master made small talk. Jeez, this was dull. He felt like he had as a kid when his Mom took him out shoe shopping. His busy mind needed distraction, and stimulation, and shopping just didn't do it for him. Of all the Masters in all the world, he had to get landed with the one who had some weird fascination with fashion of all things. I mean, what the hell did it matter what clothes Mulder wore, when it was his slave's naked body his Master was interested in? Mulder smirked to himself, enjoying **that** thought. His Master did seem very interested in his body. He flushed when he remembered being 'played' with this morning. Boy, that had been good. He could feel himself going hard just thinking about it.

"....Fox?" Skinner was looking at him expectantly but Mulder didn't have a clue what he'd said.

"What? I wasn't listening," he admitted. Skinner fixed him with a frown, and Mulder's stomach did a flip. "Sorry, sir," he added contritely.

"Pay attention, Fox. I don't expect to have to say things twice," Skinner reprimanded. He placed one hand on the back of Mulder's neck and squeezed lightly, making his intent clear. Mulder swallowed nervously. Donald had reappeared with the coffee, and he caught this exchange, doing a double take. Mulder flushed to the roots of his dark hair. Shit, they all thought Skinner was his sugar daddy, taking him out, buying him clothes, like he was some stupid 18 year old, bimbo toyboy. It was so damn embarrassing. *And isn't the truth even worse, **slaveboy**?* A mocking internal voice asked him. He felt a sullen mood start to settle around him like a storm cloud.

"I was saying that you'll be a regular visitor here from now on. You'll collect items for me, as well as for yourself. I have an account here," Skinner informed him.

"Yeah. I'd kind of figured that out," Mulder muttered, thinking that the whole place was incredibly camp, from Donald's prima donna body language, to Elliott's exquisitely coiffured hair, and pink tie. *I mean **pink** for chrissakes!*

"If you'd like to go with Donald, he'll measure you. We'll keep your measurements on file, as we do for Walter," Elliott informed him. "That way when you need any new suits..."

"I don't," Mulder snapped. "What's wrong with my suits?" He turned to Skinner.

"Nothing," Skinner replied, urbanely, his dark eyes belying his casual manner, as they bored holes into Mulder's soul, warning him. "Maybe it's the way you wear them but they do have a tendency to look a bit...crumpled. However, you can clearly do with some spares - especially considering all the wear your clothing gets, running through forests, falling into swamps, stepping in burning piles of green goo...need I go on?"

"No. I think you've made your point," Mulder muttered sulkily. Skinner raised an eyebrow. "Sir." Mulder added, after thinking about it for a few seconds.

"Good - get moving." Skinner nodded his head in the direction of a curtained recess, and Mulder couldn't quite manage to stop the cross between a growl and a sigh that emerged from his throat.

Donald's superior air got on Mulder's nerves even before the other man started measuring him.

"If sir would like to undress." Donald pursed his lips, investing the 'sir' with a tone that implied profound disrespect. *He's so obviously gay*, Mulder thought to himself, as he peeled off his sweatshirt and started tugging at his jeans. *As opposed to me. I mean, I'm just a regular guy who likes being screwed by my, big, strong, macho Master- come-boss. Huge difference, asshole.* His brain chuntered along at top speed as he stripped down to his briefs. Donald took in the sight of his nipple rings without comment, but Mulder caught his expression, and wanted to land a good right hook on the other man's baby pink skin. He knew just what Donald was thinking, and how he was laughing at him. He turned away, to avoid the other man's smug stare. Donald took a sharp intake of breath and Mulder remembered, too late, the three welts on his back. He swung back in time to see the other man's expression of shock, before it was replaced by that polite, supercilious mask. Mulder was suffused by a wave of intense embarrassment. He was about to make up some story to explain the welts away, but couldn't think of anything that

wouldn't just draw attention to them, and make the whole thing even worse. If Donald had been in any doubt about his relationship with Skinner before, then he wasn't now. Mulder opened his mouth, and found himself saying:

"So, Don-baby, do you prefer to be called Donny as in Osmond, or Donald as in f...duck?"

Donald stared at him for a moment, then smoothed a hand nervously through his floppy hair. "Donald," he replied politely. "Now if sir would..."

"Oh cut all this 'sir' crap," Mulder snarled. "You've made it clear as hell that you think I'm something you walked in on the street."

"Please, sir, I just need to take your measurements." Donald pressed the tape against Mulder's leg, and hurried through his task. Mulder felt his whole body flush, from the tips of his toes to his forehead. Hah, if Donald was intrigued by the welts on his back, he should see the ones on his butt. Oh shit. Mulder remembered that Skinner wanted him to buy underwear. It would be just his luck if his Master made him try it on for his approval. He fidgeted throughout the measuring process, then waited in sullen silence as Donald slipped back into the other room. Fuck. This whole shopping trip was his idea of hell, and he hated his Master for putting him through it.

Donald returned a few seconds later, his baby blue eyes full of some emotion Mulder read as barely suppressed amusement. Blondie was **laughing** at him.

"Your...um..." Donald hesitated, clearly unsure how to refer to Skinner.

"Master?" Mulder supplied, knowing he was behaving badly, some devil in him wanting to make it worse, trying deliberately to shock. Donald paled.

"Um...that is, Walter, Mr. Skinner, uh, he said to try these on," Donald murmured weakly.

Mulder snatched the beige trousers and shirt savagely from the other man's grasp, and pulled them on, then glanced in the mirror. Damn, he looked stupid!

"Oh, that looks good. It suits you, sir," Donald said encouragingly. Mulder quelled his enthusiasm with a glance, and marched out into the other room.

"These, are crap," he announced to his Master. "I'm not wearing them."

Skinner looked at him coolly. "I think the shirt would benefit from being buttoned up properly, and tucked into the pants," he observed. "Go back, and straighten yourself out, then come back out here, and present yourself properly."

Mulder saw Donald out of the corner of his eye. The man was wide-eyed, his gaze going from slave to Master, and back again, and then flickering over to Elliott. Mulder felt a heat rising from deep within. He knew that the minute they left, these two ghouls would laugh their heads off. Mulder stomped off back to the changing room, and obeyed his Master, feeling his temper spiral out of control. He hated the beige shirt and pants. He'd never, ever wear clothes like this. Scully would laugh at him. Scully. Mulder felt a pang as he thought about his partner. This was the first time since he met her that he'd gone more

than a couple of days without even seeing or speaking to her, except for when she had been abducted. He felt guilty about the fact that, much as he loved and cared about his diminutive partner, he hadn't thought about her all week.

He rearranged his clothes, and stepped back outside. Skinner was deep in conversation with Donald, and the young man's blue eyes were fixed on his Master in an expression of barely concealed awe.

"While you're here, you might as well have a fitting for that new suit, Walter," Elliott was saying. Donald nodded eagerly. *Can't wait to get his hands on him, I expect*, Mulder thought angrily.

"Not today." Skinner shook his head. "Today is for Fox. Another time."

"Yeah, right. Like you really give a damn about doing anything other than showing off what a complete fucking wuss I am!" Mulder exploded. "How does this look?" he asked, doing an ironic twirl. "What am I? Some kind of fucking performing monkey for these goddamn clowns?"

There was a shocked silence, then Skinner turned smoothly to Elliott, and Donald, and smiled through gritted teeth. "My apologies. Please, would you give us a couple of minutes alone?"

"Of course." Elliott quickly ushered his young protégé out of the room. Mulder was sure he could hear them sniggering as they went. That thought was driven out of his head by his more immediate awareness of imminent danger. He swallowed nervously as he realized that he was in deep shit right up to his eyeballs. He saw a big shadow looming over him and bit on his lip, then looked up defiantly into his Master's dark eyes, but Skinner's expression was puzzled, rather than angry.

"Fox." Skinner put his hands on his slave's shoulders. "I thought you looked pretty damn good in this actually." His fingers smoothed along the silky fabric. "Of course, if you don't like it, we won't buy it. I don't want to change your tastes - I'm sure there'll be things we can both agree on."

"I wouldn't wear anything like this and you fucking know it," Mulder snarled.

"Well, maybe you need to have your horizons broadened?" Skinner suggested mildly. "Now, tell me, what brought this on, sweetheart?"

"They think we're sleeping together," Mulder blurted.

"Hmm. We are," Skinner pointed out. "Why is this a problem?"

"What I am. What I like...it's private," Mulder whispered.

"It wasn't last night," Skinner told him, his hands continuing to rub his slave's shoulders. "Last night I displayed you naked in a room full of people. I told them you were my slave, and I your Master, and you loved it."

"That was different!" Mulder protested. "That was us, in private, with people who understand. This is..."

"Public? Fox, I've known Elliott for years. His very name is a byword for discretion, and he wouldn't employ anybody who didn't abide by his rules on this. Whatever happens here won't go beyond these four walls."

"But..."

"You're ashamed." Skinner lifted Mulder's head, and looked into his eyes. "You're ashamed of what you are, little one. Why? There's no need to be. I love what you are, and at the end of the day, pleasing me is the only thing that should matter to you."

"He's laughing at me. He thinks I'm weak." Mulder muttered, trying to hold onto his outrage in the face of his Master's kindness, and failing.

"Who? Elliott? Of course he doesn't..."

"Not Elliott - Donald stupid duckface."

"Fox - he's not laughing at you, and even if he were, it's irrelevant. What's important is that you focus on me, not anyone else, and not on your own fears."

"Okay, okay. I know he's just a stupid tailor's assistant, but what will happen when someone important finds out?" Mulder snarled. "What will Scully think?" he asked in a broken voice.

"Ah." Skinner rocked back on his heels. "That's what's behind this."

"I suppose." Mulder wrapped his arms around his body, and hugged himself.

"Well, Scully's your partner, and a damn good friend. Why don't you trust her not to judge you?" Skinner asked.

"Because. Because..."

"You judge yourself so harshly that you think that everyone else will too? And you're always scared of love being withdrawn? Isn't that why you try not to let anyone get close in the first place?" Skinner asked, moving in close, his eyes searching.

"I...damn you for knowing me like this," Mulder whispered, feeling as if he'd been hit in the stomach.

"Fox - you're mine. I need to know you. I've been studying you for a long time. I understand you, sweetheart. I can help you, but you have to learn to trust: me, Scully, and most of all - yourself." Skinner's eyes were dark in their intensity.

"Oh shit." Mulder clenched his fists, and then thumped one angrily against the wall, his whole body suffused with self-loathing. "You're thinking what a fucking screw-up I am. The first time you take me anywhere, and I fuck it up. I won't be able to handle this in the real world, sir. I can't do it. When we get back to work..."

"It'll be tough." Skinner shrugged. "We both know that. However, you're only human, Fox. When you screw up I'll punish you, and you'll learn. Then we can go forward. I don't expect you to adapt without any problems. It'll take time. We have plenty of that. You've given me the rest of your life."

"A life sentence, huh?" Mulder made a face.

"If you like. Let's hope it's a long and happy one, for both of us." Skinner smiled, and pulled his tense slave into an embrace. Mulder stiffened, then finally relaxed into his Master's arms, and buried his face in his shoulder. "Now, I'm going to punish you," Skinner whispered tenderly into his ear. "You deserve that, Fox, don't you?"

Mulder couldn't disagree on that point. "Here, Master?" Mulder looked up, his eyes wide and alarmed.

"Yes. That way we can put this incident behind us, and you can stop wallowing in the guilt trip. Take off your pants, Fox, and your briefs, and bend over the armchair."

"Master, please...not here." Mulder glanced at the door, nervously. For all he knew, Elliott and Donald were lurking just outside. He couldn't stand the thought of them hearing every last scream.

"Here. Now." Skinner said firmly. "Then it'll be over, and we can start again," he promised. He gentled his slave, soothed him, ruffled through his hair, and caressed up and down his back.

Mulder swallowed hard, then nodded, and did as he was told. He leaned over the armchair with a feeling of dread in the pit of his stomach. Then he watched, out of the corner of his eye, as Skinner undid his belt. There was a familiar swish as the belt was pulled through the loops on Skinner's pants, and then his Master doubled the leather, and slapped it against his hand a few times. Mulder closed his eyes. He felt the cool leather against his buttocks, and then it thwacked down hard on his bare butt.

"What's the lesson you're learning from this punishment, Fox?" Skinner asked.

"Shit!" Mulder buried his head in his arms, as another lick flashed down on his ass. "To...be polite, not to care what other people think...oh shit, sir, I don't know!"

"All right." Skinner's hand stroked his back, calming him, and he paused the strapping. "I think it goes back to the issue of trust, and honesty. If you'd spoken to me about the way you were feeling before you exploded, we could have avoided this. Yes?"

"Yes, Master." Mulder agreed.

"Like last night. Yes?"

"Yes." Mulder sighed.

"Good. Keep that in mind then. I'm going to make this count." Skinner swung the strap again, delivering a good dozen licks to Mulder's butt. Mulder tried his best not to scream, but it damn well hurt, and he yelped out loud on more than one occasion. Then it was over. Skinner stopped, and ran a hand through his slave's tousled hair. "Up you get, sweetheart. This incident is over - or it will be just as soon as you've apologized to Elliott and Donald."

"Yes, sir," Mulder mumbled contritely. Somehow he had just known that Skinner was going to insist on that. His Master had some kind of manners fetish.

"Ready for that?" Skinner asked, placing a big arm around his slave's shoulder. Mulder heaved a huge sigh, and pulled himself back together.

"Yes, sir," he agreed at last.

"Good. Later on we'll go to a very expensive French restaurant I know," Skinner grinned. "I want to spoil my beautiful slave after all. Fine clothes, good food, wine." Mulder managed a wan smile, then he donned the hated beige pants again, and stood, head down, as Skinner strode over to the door and disappeared. He reappeared a few seconds later with Elliott and Donald in tow. Mulder took a deep breath, and stood up straight, the Mulder charm kicking in.

"I'm sorry for the way I spoke to you just now," he said, smiling at them. "It won't happen again."

"That's all right, Fox. Let's start over, shall we?" Elliott beamed.

Mulder nodded, relieved. He caught sight of his reflection in the mirror and decided he liked what he saw. "These clothes aren't bad. Can we have them?" he asked Skinner.

His Master grinned at him. "Of course, Fox," he nodded.

"Next one then?" Mulder disappeared back into the changing room. Donald appeared a few seconds later, with another outfit, and a selection of briefs and boxer shorts. He put them down on the table gingerly, and backed away. He watched as Mulder pulled on another shirt, and then he edged closer, and cautiously began to help Mulder button the shirt.

"Did he...?" Donald swallowed hard, and looked around. "What did he do?" he asked, clearly taking his life in his hands. Mulder tried to remember what Skinner had told him. His Master was right. What did he care what this supercilious, baby-faced little brat thought of him?

"He whipped my ass with his belt," he replied.

Donald's fingers faltered on the buttons, and he closed his eyes. "Oh god," he breathed. "You lucky bastard."

Mulder looked at him in surprise. "What?"

"I envied you from the minute you walked through the door," Donald confided, continuing to button Mulder's shirt for him with shaking fingers. "I could see the way you looked at him, the way he looked at you...you were so right together, like you belonged to each other, fitting together like a hand in a glove. I wish...I want...that is...it's hard when you work with someone, and they don't even know how you feel..." He glanced towards the other room, his expression wistful.

"You mean...Elliott?" Mulder raised an eyebrow.

"I worship him," Donald sighed. "But he doesn't even take any notice of me. Sometimes I pull all kinds of crazy shit just to get his attention. If he'd just once throw me over his knee, and give me a good spanking like Walter did to you, I'd be in heaven," he grinned, and Mulder's jaw dropped open in surprise. "The way I fuck up sometimes, I'm lucky he hasn't fired me," Donald added.

"Donald - hang in there, buddy," Mulder grinned. "I think it could all work out for you and Elliott. Trust me - stranger things have happened," he winked. "Shit, I've been an idiot. I thought you were looking down on me, but..."

"Hell, no. I'm so jealous I could die," Donald told him melodramatically. "You do know how lucky you are, don't you? Having someone like that, who cares about you - who cares enough to correct you too?"

Mulder sighed, and glanced out into the other room. Skinner was deep in conversation with Elliott. His Master looked so composed, one long leg balanced over the other at a 90 degree angle, his Henley showing off a broad expanse of lean, muscled chest.

"Yeah," he told Donald. "I do, buddy. I do."

The rest of the day passed in a blur of activity. Mulder and Skinner emerged with Mulder dressed in a new pair of pants, and a soft, silky green shirt that brought out the color of his eyes, a pair of expensive Italian loafers on his feet.

"I'm starving," Skinner grinned.

"Time to check out that very expensive restaurant then?" Mulder suggested, a gleam in his eye.

"Oh yeah. I think so."

The restaurant was so classy it was untrue, and Skinner was clearly a regular, and honored guest as the maitre d' fussed over him, and called him by his first name.

"Where the hell did you get all this money?" Mulder asked, taking a sip of the most exquisite wine he'd ever tasted.

"Well, I work hard, without having much by way of expensive pleasures, until relatively recently at least," Skinner gave an amused little smile. "I've dabbled on Wall Street a bit - nothing much - I'm pretty cautious. Enough to finance more than you'd expect on my salary though," Skinner poured himself some wine, and held up his glass. "To you, Fox," he said, sincerely.

"Me?"

"Oh yes. **My** Fox," Skinner told him, his dark eyes twinkling with pride of ownership in the lamplight. "This is our first meal out together - order what you like. I want you to enjoy it."

"Thanks." Mulder grinned.

It felt weird just sitting, wearing clothes, eating, talking, drinking like normal guys. At first, Mulder wasn't sure he'd know what to say, but Skinner asked him some questions about his work, his life, his hopes,

and before long Mulder found himself talking nineteen to the dozen in typical Mulder style. He hopped from subject to subject, making a determined effort to both amuse and entertain his Master, and it seemed to have the desired effect. Skinner was a pretty good conversationalist himself. He talked about his early career in the FBI, which had his slave listening with rapt interest, and before long Mulder forgot all about the Master/slave situation between them, and was firing questions at the other man, pulling his experiences apart, and digesting them. He relished the time and attention he was getting, and the wine loosened his tongue, and relaxed him.

He realized, glancing at his watch, that several hours had passed with him barely noticing the passage of time. It came as a shock to discover that he liked Skinner not only as a Master, and lover, but also as a friend - someone to talk to. Mulder had a kind of goofy, geeky friendship with the Lone Gunmen, and a close and unique bond with Scully, but he couldn't remember ever having a male friend he could really talk to; someone to hang out and have a few beers with. Someone he could watch sport with, or talk about politics, history, the X Files, or any subject under the sun. Skinner was quirky, and smart, with his own distinctive views on a myriad of different subjects. Mulder sat and watched his Master run a finger around the rim of his wineglass, transfixed. This was so good. It was better than good. It was perfect.

"So, that's what the X Files was like in the bad old days before we got assigned to you," Mulder grinned, finishing an anecdote. "And before Scully made them respectable," he added.

"Have you spoken to Scully this week?" Skinner asked.

"No." Mulder shrugged. "You told me I wasn't to speak to anyone apart from you."

"You have your cell phone though. You could have made calls from your room." Skinner looked at him keenly.

"Yes, but I didn't." Mulder shrugged, then he bit on his lip. "The truth is...that I didn't even think about it. All this is so new, I didn't have the head-space to even think about anything else. Scully will wonder what's happened to me."

"Call her." Skinner got out his cellphone, and handed it to Mulder. Mulder looked at the other man uncertainly, but Skinner just nodded. Mulder punched in Scully's number, and grinned across the table when she answered.

"Yo! Guess who this is?" he said.

"Mulder!"

His face lit up in delight at the sound of her voice.

"Where are you? Who is she?" Scully demanded.

"What?" Mulder laughed. "What the hell is that supposed to mean, Scully?"

"Mulder it's been a week! Now I'm assuming it would have been all over the papers if you'd found Bigfoot, or the Loch Ness Monster, or ET, or something, so it has to be a woman."

"Not necessarily," Mulder reached over the table, and stroked his Master's hand.

"Oh, all right, play it cool!" Scully laughed. "Are you coming back to work on Monday?"

"Yeah." Mulder sighed dramatically. "I guess. Did you miss me?"

"Of course," Scully replied. "I actually managed to get some work done without being interrupted for once!"

He talked to her animatedly for a few more minutes, and agreed to go out for lunch with her on Monday so they could catch up. Then he severed the connection and gave Skinner the phone back, with a grateful smile.

"Thanks."

Skinner shrugged, and pocketed the phone, then drank some of his coffee. "How was she?" he asked.

"Fine." Mulder chatted on for several minutes. He wasn't sure if it was the wine, or the phone call, or just being with his Master, but he felt so high he was in danger of spinning off into orbit. Skinner just listened, tolerant, and indulgent as Mulder rambled on and on. Therefore it came as a total shock, when Skinner leaned across the table, looked him in the eye, and said one word:

"Wanda."

Mulder tried to process what his Master meant - did they have to get back home because of the cat or something? Then he remembered his word - **that** word, and he glanced around the restaurant. True, it was late, and most people had gone home, but there were still several diners finishing off their meal. What the hell did his Master want from him? They couldn't - not here, surely...?

"Master?" he protested weakly.

"Go and wait for me in the men's room - and have a condom ready. I'll be along when I've finished my coffee." Skinner gestured with his head in the direction of the bathroom.

"Master? Please," Mulder begged.

Skinner fixed him with a severe stare. "Are you questioning me, boy?" he hissed.

"No, sir. I'm just..." Mulder glanced around again, scared of being overheard, but even more scared of his Master. "Yes, sir," he said at last, slipping out of his chair.

His stomach was churning as he made his way to the men's room. He remembered that he and Phoebe had once made love on Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's grave, but that had been in the middle of the night and in the middle of nowhere, damnit! Not in the public restroom of one of the most expensive restaurants in town. All the same, his suddenly hard cock told him that he found the idea a turn-on, even while his mind was yelling at him to get out of there and run. He walked into the men's room, and glanced around, relieved to discover that he was the only occupant. He went into one of the stalls, and fished a condom and the lube out of his pocket. He had remembered that much at least. He took down his pants

and briefs, and lubed himself again, then spent a while stretching himself. Skinner had told him quite specifically that he'd enter him without prepping him, and take him hard and fast, in silence. Mulder's cock ached in longing at the very thought of it. There was something so impersonal about it - the fantasy of being overpowered by a stranger, combined with the safety of knowing it was his own Master, who he was learning to trust, and whose body was now so familiar to him. He loved the idea of his body being so comprehensively used by his Master as a vehicle for the other man's lust. It exhilarated and scared him at one and the same time.

Mulder stood there for a moment, wondering what to do next. Skinner had been very specific about what was expected of him when he gave him his 'word'. Mulder shivered, his cock arcing to full erection, as he remembered the humiliating position in which he was supposed to present himself to his Master. He wondered if he had enough time to jerk off before his Master came and used him, but dismissed that thought almost immediately. Skinner had told him not to touch his cock, and he was sure his Master would know if he did. Mulder put the lube back in his pocket, and wondered where to put the condom. There was nowhere obvious in the small stall. Finally, scared that his Master would come in and find him unprepared, he placed his hands on the wall behind the toilet, and got into position, butt out, legs wide apart, pants around his ankles, ready and waiting for his Master's attention. Then he reached up and put the condom on his own back, where Skinner wouldn't have any trouble seeing it.

He waited in that humiliating position for several minutes - although it felt like hours. He started to get nervous. Finally, he heard the sound of the main restroom door being opened, and he took a deep breath. The stall door was closed, although it wasn't locked, and that just made Mulder even more twitchy. Supposing this wasn't Skinner? Supposing someone else came in? Then he heard the sound of a key turning in the lock of the main door, and he realized, without surprise, that Skinner had borrowed the key off his friend, the Maitre d'.

The stall door behind him was suddenly flung open, and he had to resist turning around to make sure it was his Master, and not a stranger. His cock almost went into spasm at the eroticism of the moment, of being found here, ass in the air, waiting to serve his Master. He took a deep gulp of air, trying to clear his head. He felt hands caressing his butt, and then the sound of the condom being torn open, and something hard nudging his anus. He placed his hands on his ass, spreading the butt cheeks to make it easier for his Master to enter him, and sighed as he felt the familiar, hard length of Skinner's cock slide into his lubed passage. He placed his hands back on the wall to steady himself, and stood bent over, moaning as his Master began to move his hips.

Skinner was true to his word: he grabbed Mulder's thighs, and buried himself deep in his body, sinking himself in, back and forward, in a series of hard, jerky thrusts that made his slave pant. It was, quick, perfunctory, and to the point, and the most devastating display yet of his Master's power of him. Mulder struggled to keep his hands on the wall, as his Master's cock devoured him, then suddenly it was over. He felt the shudder of Skinner's climax, then his Master withdrew. Mulder got up, and turned around, suddenly feeling an urge to make sure that it **was** his Master who had just taken him, and not a stranger. He found himself looking into Skinner's dark, amused eyes. Skinner removed the condom, threw it into the toilet, and flushed it, then adjusted his clothing, and left the stall without a word. Mulder watched him go, his heart beating fast in his chest. It had been everything Skinner had promised, and more. It had pulled him back down to the most basic level of his slavery. Mulder marveled at his Master's skill. First he had allowed Mulder to be himself, chatted to him all evening like a friend, and

lover, and then he had reminded his slave, in the most clear, and unsubtle way, just who he belonged to at the end of the day.

When Mulder went back into the restaurant a few minutes later, his Master was signing the check. He looked up, and smiled as his slave rejoined him.

"I'm tired. Time to head for home I think. How about you?"

"What?" Mulder tried to drag his head out from the surreal scene they had just enacted. He could hardly believe that Skinner was acting as if it hadn't happened.

"Time for bed?" Skinner raised an eyebrow.

"Will you do that often?" Mulder asked, ignoring the question.

"As often as I want. You're mine. I can use you whenever the urge takes me. Now, you're looking tired. Tomorrow you have to clean the apartment - it's still in a mess after the party, so I suggest we turn in."

"Do I...I mean, is there any chance that...?" Mulder faltered, his eyes hopeful.

"No, sweetheart. You have to earn a night in my bed. You know that," Skinner told him with an affectionate smile. "Don't get me wrong, I'm not saying that last night wasn't good - it was. However, don't get into the habit of thinking it'll happen **every** night."

"No, sir," Mulder murmured.

He **was** tired, he realized, as Skinner drove them home. He kept yawning, and staring dreamily into space. He still couldn't believe he was sitting here, in his new clothes, behaving as if nothing strange had happened, when all the time he was owned by the man sitting next to him. He had traded himself for security, and sexual fulfillment, and he didn't regret it at all. Leaning back, he saw the street lamps light his Master's face as they passed beneath each one, illuminating his strong jaw, and bouncing off the large expanse of forehead. Mulder was suffused with a combination of emotions that almost overwhelmed him. He closed his eyes, and swallowed down the lump in his throat. He had never been this happy in his life before.

When they got back to the apartment, Skinner ordered him up to his room.

"We didn't have time for a confessional last night, but I don't want you to get out of the habit. Go and get undressed, and wait for me in your room. I'll be up in a few minutes."

Mulder obeyed. He took off his clothes, and hung them neatly in his closet, then knelt by the bed. Skinner appeared on cue, a few minutes later, and sat down. Mulder immediately crawled over to him, and laid his head on the other man's knee. Skinner smiled, and stroked his hair softly.

"All right, sweetheart. Say whatever you want to. I won't interrupt, and you won't be punished for anything you want to talk about - including any criticisms of me, and my treatment of you. Just as long as you keep a civil tongue in your head,"

"Yes, Master." Mulder closed his eyes, and thought for a moment, but he was so tired. Skinner nudged him with his knee. "Okay...I...last night. I'd never had a man, a **top** make love to me like that. You know, I thought that vanilla sex wouldn't turn me on to be honest. I thought I needed the BDSM stuff to get my kicks, but last night...well, I was turned on! And it was good, it was really good. You're right, about trust, about honesty, about all of it, but don't expect me to give it all up without a fight. I know it's crazy, because it's what I want, but I'll fight it all the way. I'll fight **you** all the way. You'll have to be strong to tame me, Master, really strong, and I'm scared you'll give up, because it isn't worth the effort. I'm too much work. Shit, I'm rambling...I'm so tired..." Mulder closed his eyes, and zoned out for a moment, then started again. "You can be as strong, and tough, and as much a bastard to me as you like, so long as you don't give up on me. I don't want you to give up on me..." His voice faded into nothing again. "Tired..." he mumbled into Skinner's thigh. His eyes closed, and opened, then closed again, and stayed closed.

He was dimly aware of a hand soothing his hair, for several long minutes, then he felt himself being lifted up. He opened his eyes drowsily, then closed them again, and buried his face in his Master's neck. Skinner placed him gently on the bed, then covered him with the sheets. Mulder's head lolled onto the pillow, and he sighed. He felt his Master kiss his lips softly, then he heard the other man walk towards the door. Skinner paused, and turned the light off, and only in the silence, in the anonymity of darkness, and the haze of sleep, could Mulder say the words his waking mind always refused to let him speak:

"I love you, Master."

**End of Part 9.**

**Chapter End Notes:**

**Gaby sent me the pic below, which I like to think is Mulder wearing one of the suits Walter just bought him, puzzling his perennial Wanda problem.**

## Master's Day by Xanthe

### Author's Notes:

Posted 4th December, 1999

Fabulous pic courtesy of Foxtail. Hey, Skinner doesn't need \*any\* encouragement - and neither do I!

**Warning:** I'm sure there **should** be one here but I can't think what it is, so you'll just have to take your chances.

Many thanks to Emma, who told me a very intriguing tale that sparked this story off, as well as providing invaluable technical assistance, and some rather interesting ideas...

Thanks to CDavis and Gaby for their ongoing attention to my ego :-) and to Twisted Sister for her suggestion.

Quotation courtesy of my sweet Alex. None of this is beta'd. It's far too much fun to take seriously.

**24/7** is an erotic fantasy and NOT a BDSM resource guide. The truth is sometimes exaggerated, or played with, for dramatic effect. For more information, please visit the **24/7 BDSM Glossary**.

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*"A truth, still apparent, though disregarded, that things move violently to their place, but calmly in their place. To put it another way, everything has its right home, the region that suits it, and, unless forcibly restrained, will move thither by a kind of homing instinct."*

J. Winterson  
*"Art and Lies"*

Mulder thought that the sound of his Master's beating heart was the nicest sound in the world. He lay with his head on Skinner's chest, just listening to that steady *thrum* sound, his cheek nestled against the warm fuzziness of his Master's chest hair, wondering if life could get any better than this. Skinner was reading his morning newspaper, and sipping his coffee, one hand playing idly with his slave's body as he read. Mulder liked that. He liked the steady stroke of Skinner's fingers across his chest, along the side of his jaw, and through his hair. He especially liked it when his Master gently tickled the rings embedded in his nipples. It hurt just enough to be erotic, but not so much as to make him have to bite his lip to keep from screaming. Skinner had been kind to his slave, allowing him to stay in bed after

delivering his customary wake-up call, and holding him in his big arms. Mulder loved mornings such as these. Being allowed to stay close to his Master, warm and safe, just lying nestled against him, was his ultimate goal in life. He thought he might almost swap it for all the erotic pleasures his Master was so expertly skilled in delivering. Almost. They were nice too. He supposed he should make the most of this moment in time. Tomorrow, the specter of work loomed large in both their lives.

Mulder wondered what it would be like to leave for work from **this** apartment block, wearing his work suit. Would he and Skinner travel to work together? His heart leapt as he remembered how damn good his Master looked in his work clothes. How was Mulder going to be able to concentrate on work knowing how much more fantastic his Master looked underneath those crisp white shirts that **he** had ironed? Would Skinner treat him differently at work now? Would he be more patient with the way Mulder operated, or less? Would he make sexual demands on him in his lunch hour? Mulder's cock told him that whatever he might think about that idea intellectually, sexually he found it a real turn-on.

Mulder thought back to when he first sold himself into slavery a little over a week ago. He remembered his mistrust of his new Master, his attempts to manipulate Skinner, his insecurity, insolence, and downright disobedience. He knew the change in himself to be profound. In just over a week his Master had transformed him from manipulative sub into passable slave material. Skinner had certainly been strict with him, but he had also been patient, and loving, and Mulder knew how hard it was to find that combination in any top. More than that, Skinner knew and understood him, in a way that made Mulder feel both safe and trapped at one and the same time. Knowing there was no way out kept him here, kept him from running, but sometimes the impulse was still there. *Only you could want to run away from the best thing that's ever happened to you, asshole*, his mocking internal voice told him.

A familiar, cold fear gripped his heart - supposing he let Skinner down at work? Supposing his Master found him just too much to handle, and gave up on him? Then he'd have to move out, leave this place that already felt like home, with its amazing fantasy Playroom, far behind. Worse than that, he'd have to leave his Master, the one person he had come to rely on almost as much as he relied on himself. Hell, Skinner was legendary on the scene - he wouldn't have any trouble finding a new slave, but Mulder knew he'd never find another Master he could hope to care about the way he cared for Skinner. God knows he had been looking for long enough before Skinner had turned up to claim him. He had a sudden image of someone else sleeping in his Master's arms - another, different slave, and he felt a surge of jealousy. Not for the first time, he wondered who had occupied the slave's quarters in the upstairs apartment before he'd arrived on the scene. Mulder chewed on his lip, lost in the implications of his dark thoughts. He was surprised when Skinner's fingers gently touched his lip, then held up bloodstained evidence of his anxiety.

"What was that about?" Skinner asked softly, glancing down on his slave, and wiping away another drop of blood as it welled up in the wound.

"Work," Mulder sighed. "I know I'm going over old ground, but I feel like my execution date has been set for tomorrow. Shit, how the hell is this going to work out when we go back to our jobs, sir?"

Skinner opened his mouth to reply, but Mulder interrupted him, sitting up in a state of agitation.

"I already know the answer. I'm going to screw up big time, you're going to get really mad and dump me, and we're both going to have to deal with the embarrassment of knowing we were once... once..." he came to a floundering halt.

"What?" Skinner's dark eyes were cool, assessing, and ever so slightly amused.

"Involved?" Mulder finished weakly.

"Wrong choice of word." Skinner shook his head, and Mulder had a sudden sensation of imminent danger. "Several wrong choices of word, as a matter of fact. Firstly, there can be no 'once', Fox. I own you. You are my property. There is no time in the future when I will stop owning you, so you can put that idea out of your head. I thought I'd made your status clear to you more than enough over the past week, but I can see that we still need to work on that. Secondly, the only one thing I have given you permission to worry about is pleasing me. There is no possibility that you'll be "dumped" as you put it, so you can forget about that as well. The consequence of screwing up big time, is being punished big time - not being dumped. Understood?"

Mulder nodded, reluctantly.

"Was there anything else?" Skinner demanded.

Mulder thought about it, then blurted out his worries. "What happened to your other slaves, Master? You say that I won't stop being your property, but if that's the case, what happened to them? I don't see them here now. I thought...the same thing could happen to me."

Skinner sighed, and Mulder caught a curiously wistful expression in the other man's eyes. "I understand your curiosity, Fox," he said. "However, there are some answers you will have to be patient for, and in the meantime you must accept my assurances that you have nothing to worry about on that score."

"I'm not very good at waiting for things to happen," Mulder admitted, kneeling on the bed, gazing at his Master. "I prefer to go out and meet them halfway. I wish tomorrow was **here**, so I could get on with it."

"That would be a shame, because then you'd miss out on today," Skinner observed, with a sly glint in his eye, "and I have plans for today."

"What kind of plans?" Mulder didn't know whether to be nervous, or excited, and settled for a combination of both.

"All in good time. Now get your butt over here. I'm having that same problem with the Sunday sections of the paper as I had last weekend, and, as I recall, your ass served as a nice newspaper prop - very nice in point of fact!" Skinner chuckled, guiding his slave into position. Mulder sighed, and resigned himself to an hour's duty as inanimate object.

"Master," Mulder piped up, half an hour later.

"Hmm?" Skinner glanced at him over the top of his paper.

"I've been thinking. I mean...that is..."

"Yes, Fox." Skinner put the paper down, with the merest hint of a weary sigh, but his eyes were encouraging.

"You said to tell you when the marks on my butt faded, Master," Mulder whispered.

"Yes, I did." Skinner glanced at the butt in question. "They haven't - not completely, anyway." Mulder knew that the six distinct welts on his backside had faded to the merest hint of a pale pink.

"I know. It's just that...I can't even feel them now, and I just thought that...well, by tomorrow, they'll be almost gone."

"Yes." Skinner nodded, then waited patiently to see what was coming next.

"And...as we're going back to work, I'd like to feel...that is...I want to be reminded of what I am. I think I might forget," Mulder admitted, shamefaced. "You know what I'm like, Master. I get engrossed in what I'm doing...and I'll forget, and...if you..." Mulder took a deep breath. "If you marked me again today, Master, it might help me keep it in mind," Mulder managed to blurt out before all his courage left him.

"You're asking for a taste of my cane when it isn't, strictly speaking, necessary?" Skinner raised an eyebrow. Mulder flushed.

"I don't like the cane, Master, I'll be honest," he admitted. "I just thought...if, every time I sat down, I was reminded what I am, then I might not do anything really stupid," he finished in a whisper.

Skinner looked at him for a long moment that stretched into an eternity. Mulder flushed an even deeper shade of crimson. Finally, Skinner put aside the paper, and took his glasses off. Mulder began to bite on his lip again. He wasn't sure how good Skinner's eyesight was, but he always found the sight of his Master without his glasses to be awe-inspiring. Skinner's dark brown eyes had an intensity that was diluted when he was wearing his wire-rims. Without them, he looked not only younger, but also somehow more frightening, as the full force of his personality was unleashed upon the world.

"Fox," Skinner said gently. "Come here."

Mulder shuffled nervously up the bed, unable to meet his Master's stern gaze, but Skinner wasn't going to tolerate that. "Look at me." Skinner took hold of his chin, and looked deep into his soul. "You're mine. I could take off these..." his fingers touched Mulder's nipple rings gently, "and this," his fingers brushed over Mulder's cock ring. "I could even remove this." He touched Mulder's collar, "or this." He took hold of Mulder's left hand, and lifted his ring finger to his lips, pressing the gold to his mouth. "I could remove all the marks and symbols I have placed upon your body, and it wouldn't make any difference. You would still be mine in here." Skinner laid his hand over Mulder's heart, and his solemn, dark eyes held Mulder in thrall. Skinner moved his other hand to the back of Mulder's head, entwined his fingers in his slave's abundant hair, and drew Mulder close. Then he kissed him, hard, and deep, reaching into the very depths of Mulder's heart. Mulder moaned, helpless in his Master's grasp, completely and utterly abandoned to that long, claiming kiss.

When Skinner finally released him he was gasping for breath, and had gone, quite literally, weak at the knees.

"Don't get me wrong - I enjoy marking my ownership on your flesh," Skinner grinned, tracing a line over the fading welts with one hand, and squeezing Mulder's tender nipples gently between the thumb and forefinger of his other hand. Mulder gasped. "I'm just saying that it isn't necessary. It's for show; visible symbols of a truth we both know. I don't need the props, little one, and neither do you, although they're a very valuable training aid. I could have achieved the same effects without using them, but I had more fun this way." He grinned, and pulled Mulder close, took a nipple gently in his mouth, and sucked. Mulder gasped, and put his hands on Skinner's head. His nipples were healing, thanks to the careful attention his Master gave them, and frequent washings in salt water, but even so, they were still very tender. Skinner took one of the rings between his teeth, then flicked it up and down with his tongue, not pulling on it. Mulder felt his cock harden, and he cried out, clutching onto his Master's shoulders. Finally, Skinner finished playing with him, and drew back.

"I'm not dismissing your concerns lightly, slave." Skinner laced both his hands into Mulder's thick hair, and looked intently into his eyes. "However, for my own reasons, I don't want to mark you today. You see...I have something else in mind." His eyes held a hint of promise, and Mulder felt his cock harden even more.

"What, Master?" He asked, trembling in anticipation. Damn, but how did Skinner always manage to keep him on the brink like this?

"Well, as morning discipline will be a feature of your life for...well, for the rest of your life," Skinner gave him a truly evil grin, and Mulder's stomach lurched. "And as morning discipline takes place in the bedroom, and not in the Playroom, I thought it was time to invest in a set of implements to be kept solely for the purpose of reminding you of your status. Open the closet and bring me the brown briefcase," Skinner ordered.

Mulder scrambled eagerly off the bed, ran to the closet, retrieved the shiny, new case waiting for him there, and returned with it. He knelt obediently in the submissive position beside the bed, and offered his Master the case, with his eyes down.

"Good boy. You've come a long way, sweetheart. I'm so proud of you." Skinner leaned over and dropped a kiss on Mulder's head, while his slave's heart did a dozen little flips in response to his Master's praise. "Okay, you can look," Skinner informed him, and Mulder glanced up, bright-eyed and busy-tailed, eager to see what the case contained. "Here's the key." Skinner held up a small key. He unlocked the briefcase, then beckoned Mulder closer, and fastened the key to Mulder's collar. "These are your implements, Fox," he said, in a deep, sexy drawl that made Mulder's cock harden even more. "It's only right you should wear the key around your neck. Don't lose it." Mulder shuddered. He wouldn't dare. "All right, little one," Skinner laughed, and soothed his hair affectionately. "Open the case."

Mulder glanced up nervously, and Skinner affirmed the verbal command with a nod of encouragement. Mulder placed his thumbs on the shiny gold locks, pressed them hesitantly, and they sprang open. He paused, then slowly, in trepidation, he opened the lid. The inside of the case was made of rich, burgundy silk, and nestled upon **that**, in their own separate spaces, were four items that took Mulder's breath away.

"Can I...can I touch them, Master?" he asked, awe-struck.

"Please do." Skinner smiled.

Mulder put his fumbling, sweaty palms into the beautiful case, and reverently touched a thick, brand new strap, fashioned out of the finest brown leather. He withdrew it from the case, and his breath caught in his throat, as he saw that the implement had been engraved. There, written in beautiful, copperplate lettering, was his name. *Fox*. Next to it was a perfect drawing of a fox - the same one that he wore on his collar. Mulder held the leather to his nose, and inhaled the heady scent of fresh, new leather.

"Good?" Skinner ruffled his hair again, laughing at his slave's reaction.

"Yes, Master. Oh, god, yes." Mulder thought he'd come just from the smell, from knowing that these items were for him, and him alone. They hadn't been used on anyone else, and they never would be. His Master had bought them to be used on his slave, had engraved them to mark them out for sole use on Mulder's body, and his flesh tingled at the thought.

He nervously plucked at the next item - a sleek, solid paddle. This implement was fashioned out of the most expensive brown leather, just like the strap, and again, it bore his name, in large lettering across its center. Another exquisitely detailed picture of a fox, with wide, curious eyes, and a long, inquisitive snout was drawn beneath it. Mulder slapped the paddle experimentally against his hand, swiftly coming to the conclusion that it was designed to administer a hearty slap, but not to cause the longer lasting discomfort that a heavier paddle would deliver. He turned back to the strap, and tried that on his hand, too enthusiastically, then let out a yelp of surprise.

"The strap stings," Skinner offered sympathetically. "The paddle's probably kinder - it spreads the impact over a wider area."

"I hope Master remembers that," Mulder said, with a gulp.

"Oh yes. I'll remember it. You can rely on it," Skinner replied with a sly, and none too reassuring chuckle.

Mulder put the strap back in its place, and drew out a flogger. The handle was made from the same leather as the other implements, but its short, thin tendrils were fashioned from a soft, pliant brown suede. It would kiss, and deliver the lightest of bites, if used properly, and somehow, Mulder was sure that Skinner knew every nuance of sensation it could deliver. He found his name, and the emblematic fox, engraved on the handle.

Finally, his hand shaking, Mulder plucked the last object from its resting-place in the case. It was a crop: smooth brown leather, with a tiny brown flap at its tip. Mulder raised it to his mouth and kissed it, found the engraving of his name on its long stem, and pressed his lips reverentially against the carved leather. Then Mulder carefully returned all the items to the box, and when he glanced up at his Master, he had to blink the tears out of his eyes.

"Thank you, Master," he whispered.

"You might not want to thank me in a minute," Skinner said wryly. "After all, it's only right that we should christen all these implements, hmm?"

Mulder's heart missed a beat.

"**All** of them, Master?" he echoed faintly. "In one go?"

"All of them," Skinner replied firmly. "Each implement has its own weight and feel, and I would be most negligent in my duties as your Master if I used them on you without discovering how you experience the sensation of each one. Fetch the pillows, slave, and arrange yourself over my knee...and Fox?" Mulder paused in his wild scramble, and glanced up, a question in his eyes. "Make sure that you're comfortable. I might not agree with you on the marking, but I do think you should have a tangible reminder of your status before we return to work. It probably won't be possible to linger over your morning discipline during the week, so this will be a very long session." Mulder swallowed nervously, then nodded. Skinner smiled. "Good boy. Get settled."

Skinner sat back, watching, while Mulder gathered up four or five pillows, and placed them over his Master's knee, and on the bed beside his knee. Then Mulder carefully got himself into place. He rested his torso on two of the pillows, hugged another one under his chin, and kicked his long limbs into the most comfortable position, then tried to ignore his racing heart, and relax. He felt Skinner's hand on his bottom, and almost jumped out of his skin.

"Hush, little one," Skinner murmured, as if soothing a leggy, inexperienced racehorse. "Just relax." He caressed Mulder's butt for a long time, until Mulder gave into the sensation, and started to bliss out, losing all the tension in his limbs. Then Skinner began to deliver a series of little taps, warming the flesh, until Mulder was moaning, his cock growing hard again. Skinner paused to kiss his slave's ass, and delivered a couple of gentle play bites. Mulder squirmed. Then he tensed, as Skinner drew back. He heard his Master opening something, and glanced over his shoulder. Skinner was holding a silver tin, containing some kind of ointment. "This is a special cream, little one," Skinner told him. "It increases the sensation."

"You mean it increases the pain!" Mulder protested.

Skinner laughed. "Yes, it does, but that means I don't have to swing as hard, which in turn means that I can carry on for longer, without causing you any lasting damage. Ingenious, isn't it?"

"Diabolical more like," Mulder muttered, then yelped as Skinner delivered a stinging swat to his upturned butt.

"Careful, boy," Skinner growled, and Mulder felt his insides turn to mush. A few seconds later, something cool was rubbed into his butt. Skinner took his time, making sure that his slave's entire bottom, and the top of his thighs were liberally massaged with the ointment, and a few seconds after it had been applied, it turned warm, creating a burning sensation that made Mulder gasp in surprise.

"Interesting effect, isn't it?" Skinner murmured.

"I'm not sure," Mulder croaked. His butt felt unbearably warm, and his Master hadn't even started yet!

Skinner started slapping him with hard, measured strokes, and Mulder could feel the difference on his butt now that the cream had been applied. Each slap stung! The pain was sharper, and clearer than he had ever known before. He started to squirm.

"Fox." Skinner paused, and Mulder glanced over his shoulder at him. "You'll learn to take your morning discipline without all this fuss, or I'll make sure that it's more painful than it would otherwise be," Skinner stated sternly. Mulder bit on his lip, and nodded. "Remember, I've only just started," Skinner remarked ominously. Mulder's cock stirred significantly, as he contemplated a long session utilizing each and every one of those exquisitely beautiful, and horribly dangerous new toys.

Skinner peppered his ass with a series of stinging blows from his hand, then paused.

"Which one would you like to try first?" He asked.

Mulder glanced at the open briefcase. "The paddle," he said firmly.

Skinner grinned. "Easing yourself in gently?" He raised an eyebrow.

"Too damn right. I'm not stupid," Mulder muttered into his pillow. Skinner guffawed, and pulled the paddle out from the case. He laid the cool leather against Mulder's warm flesh for what seemed like an eternity, and then swung. The paddle made contact with a slapping, thudding sound, and although it smacked his butt hard, it didn't hurt too much. Mulder gave a dreamy smile, and rested his head on his pillow.

"How did that feel?" Skinner soothed his sore flesh with a tender hand.

"Flat pain...kind'a nice," Mulder murmured.

"Obviously I was doing something wrong then," Skinner commented. He set to work in earnest, slapping the paddle down on Mulder's ass, building the pain up expertly to levels just short of exquisite torture. Mulder liked the paddle - it got his endorphins racing without taking him to the edge of his endurance. He started to moan, pressing his erect cock into the pillows, wanting to fondle himself, knowing that wasn't allowed.

"Next." Skinner put the paddle to one side. "I can see that particular paddle is never exactly going to strike fear into your soul."

"Strap," Mulder said from his endorphin high, sighing softly to himself. He nearly jumped out of his skin as the first stroke from the strap streaked a stinging pain across his butt.

"Details please," Skinner remarked, laying another couple of stripes on his ass.

"It's sharp, it stings, it...oh fuck!" he yelled. "No more! Please, no more, Master!"

"Nonsense. I want to give each implement a thorough test." Skinner pressed his hand into the small of Mulder's back, and applied the strap with considerable gusto to Mulder's rapidly reddening ass.

"Oh shit...oh fuck..." Mulder squirmed helplessly under his Master's strong hand. Skinner paused, and Mulder breathed a sigh of relief, but the respite was only temporary. A few seconds later, he felt Skinner's hand smoothing cool ointment onto his butt again, and he tried to get up in protest. "Not more of that stuff!" he objected, but Skinner quelled him with a hard look, and the next minute, the most exquisite wave of hot pain flooded through his body. "Oh god," he moaned weakly, taking a bite

out of the pillow as the waves of pain billowed liberally through his body. "My ass is one fire! Please, wash it off. Please!"

"Hold still." Skinner gripped his body firmly, and then resumed the strapping. Mulder could hardly believe the sting in that first blow. He knew Skinner wasn't hitting at anywhere near his optimum strength, but the ointment that had been rubbed into his butt made the stroke hurt like hell. If he had ever doubted the fiendishly diabolical ways in which his Master's mind worked, he didn't now. As far as Mulder was concerned, his Master knew tortures that even the Spanish Inquisition would have been proud of.

"Master!" he begged. "Oh god, MASTER! Please!"

"I think you've forgotten what your morning discipline is for," Skinner said in a low, hard voice. "Remind yourself, slave. Out loud. Why are you disciplined every morning?"

"To...to...help me to remember...that..." Mulder tried to think but it was hard while that strap was doing its evil, burning work, on his tormented, flaming flesh. "That I'm your slave, Master," he gasped at last.

"And?" Skinner prompted, continuing the onslaught.

"I don't have any rights. You can do what you want with me. My body belongs...to...you...ow!" Mulder's whole body dissolved into the pain, his hard cock competing for attention now with his tormented ass.

"Not just your body," Skinner reminded him grimly. Mulder blinked. This was a new part of the litany. Skinner brought the strap down again, smartly, on his burning backside.

"No, Master!" he yelped. "All of me! All that I am. I belong to you."

"Where?" Skinner asked.

"EVERYWHERE!" Mulder cried in reply. "Please, Master, I won't forget, just stop, please, stop for a second, just a second...oh god..." Skinner's hand was relentless though, and the strapping continued until Mulder was sure that his ass was quite literally on fire. Then, suddenly, it stopped.

"Not bad, little one." Skinner soothed Mulder's sweaty hair from his eyes. "Not bad at all. Now, what next?"

"Breakfast, Master?" Mulder asked hopefully. Skinner's hand was so fast he never even saw the strap deliver another, stinging blow. "Ow!" he yelped.

"Moral." Skinner leaned forward and kissed Mulder's ear. "Never smart-mouth your Master when you're lying butt naked over his knee and he's holding a strap in his hand. Only you would need to be told that, pup," he grinned, blowing softly into Mulder's ear.

"Yes, Master. Sorry, Master." Mulder wriggled, the burning in his ass competing with his aching cock for his attention.

"Next. I'm waiting." Skinner said, folding his arms, and glancing at the contents of the case.

"The flogger, Master," Mulder whispered.

"Okay." Skinner put the strap back in its place, and removed the flogger. "Hmmm. I'm not exactly at the optimum angle for this, but let's see what we can do anyway." He sat up straight, and pushed Mulder away a little. "Splay your legs, and arms, that's right. And don't move," Skinner warned.

Mulder nodded, and buried his face in his pillow. A few seconds later he felt the tender kiss of the flogger on his shoulders. Skinner couldn't do a proper backhanded motion with the implement, but he managed to deliver a series of biting, stinging kisses all the same, covering Mulder's back, bottom, and thighs, and then working his way up again. Mulder relaxed. This was nice. It nipped, but it didn't deliver the vicious kick that the strap had done. He felt his shoulders open up under the onslaught. It was like a really fierce massage; it hurt, but it was such a nice hurt. Mulder sighed. To be fair, Skinner gave the flogger the exact same work-out that he had given both the strap and the paddle. He increased the tempo as he went, and by the time he'd finished, Mulder was sweaty, and had started to squirm and wriggle, and his hard cock was desperate for release. "We can do more with this another time," Skinner said, shaking the flogger to even out the strands, and returning it to its case. A whole session with you in the Grace position against the wall will acquaint you with the darker side of this particular implement I think," he grinned, the implicit promise in his voice making Mulder's cock ache even more. "All right. Last, but most definitely not least." He picked up the crop, and swung it around experimentally. Mulder flinched as the implement made a hissing sound as it sliced through the air.

"Oh shit," he muttered weakly.

"Hmmm. Sounds good, doesn't it?" Skinner's deep, low voice spoke next to his ear.

"No, it sounds scary," Mulder replied, clutching onto his pillow for support. "Please, Master, my butt's already on fire."

"Then perhaps we should stoke the flames up a little more," Skinner mused. Mulder's heart sank as Skinner reached for the evil contents of his silver tin. "Hold still." Skinner rubbed more of the ointment into Mulder's fevered flesh, and it was almost too much for his slave. Mulder started to sob, as waves of fire consumed him.

"I need to come, Master," he begged. "Please!"

"Not yet. First I want to make sure that you're fully aware of your position in this household. Let's run through it again." Skinner picked up the crop, and held Mulder still, then he raised his arm, and delivered a hard swat to Mulder's bottom.

"FUCK!" Mulder took a huge bite out of his pillow. He knew that the angle made it impossible for Skinner to deliver as hard a blow as he was capable of, but the ointment made the swipe across his butt hurt as much as the most viciously swung stroke.

"I'm going to take you down," Skinner informed him, swinging the crop again. "Make the journey with me, Fox. Tell me who and what you are. Let the words - and the tears - flow." Skinner set up a steady rhythm with the crop on Mulder's backside, and Mulder felt the tears start to run down his cheeks.

"I'm your slave, Master. I exist to serve you. I have no status, I am your property. You own me, you can hurt me...or love me...or play with me...whatever you want. I give myself up to you, Ma...aster," he moaned. The words came out in a torrent. "I want only to please you. I worship at your feet, Master. I belong to you. Do whatever you want to me...I'll accept it willingly. I'm yours, Master...yours..." He was panting now, as the crop continued its deadly, accurate work, but he didn't beg Skinner to stop. He reached that place in his head that was so elusive, and so beautiful. Here he was truly at his Master's mercy, could truly offer himself up, and be only what Skinner wanted him to be. He thrust into the bed in time to the blows raining down on his flaming butt, feeling the pain as the most intense mix of pleasure and sensation. He wanted it to stop, and never end at one and the same time. "I'm yours," he whispered. "Here, at work, wherever...here, there, everywhere...like you said, Master." He felt the blows diminish, and then stop completely, and he lay there, in a stupor, as Skinner caressed his glowing, beacon-red backside.

"Beautiful, little one. You've taken your discipline well. Will you keep that lesson in mind?" Skinner put the crop back into the briefcase, and clicked it shut.

"Yes, Master," Mulder replied, dreamily.

"Good boy." Skinner rubbed his butt gently, then opened the silver tin again. Mulder lay there, accepting his Master's will. Skinner tenderly rubbed more of the ointment onto his sore flesh, and Mulder moaned as the now familiar wave of fire consumed him. His butt was so hot he thought he could have heated the entire building with it. Then Skinner bent his head, and pressed his lips firmly into Mulder's hot flesh, and he almost jumped out of his skin. The imprint of Skinner's mouth, left a trail of fiery red kisses, as if Skinner's lips had been made of pure flame. It was the most intense, most erotic sensation he'd ever known. Skinner bit his flesh gently, and Mulder dissolved into a series of incoherent whimpers. His Master's teeth felt like sharp pin-pricks, his tongue like warm water.

Skinner kissed his sore buttocks over and over again for an eternity, and Mulder gave himself up to the moment, possessed by the sultry caress. When it finally came to an end, he was on the brink of total erotic exhaustion.

"Get up," Skinner whispered in his ear, aiding him as he struggled to make his lifeless limbs obey. His cock was sticking out at an angle, leaking badly. "I want you to remember," Skinner said, drawing him close, "that I can bring you pain, and pleasure - or both at once. You can come whenever you want." And, so saying, he put his hands on Mulder's red-hot buttocks, pulled him towards him, and without warning enveloped his slave's cock in his warm, wet mouth.

Mulder cried out, and placed his hands on Skinner's shoulders. "Master...oh fuck...that's so good," he yelled, as Skinner expertly tongued and sucked his hard cock, at the same time as kneading his punished, glowing buttocks with big, strong hands. Mulder's nerve endings went into overload, and he became a creature of pure sensation, the pain and pleasure merging in one exquisite torment that blew his mind. He didn't remember coming. The next thing he knew he was lying on his back on the bed, his head on Skinner's chest, his whole body a quivering mass of jello.

"Ah, you're still with us then?" Skinner glanced down at him.

"Not necessarily," Mulder replied, dreamily. "Oh shit, sir, where did you learn to do this stuff?"

Skinner gazed at him coolly for a moment. "That's the second time you've called me 'sir' this morning. I understand the difference, Fox. 'Sir', although undeniably a term of respect, is what you call me in the office. It distances you from your condition, so I would appreciate it if you saved it for work, or in public. Addressing me as 'sir' in here is one step away from calling me 'Walter', and that, I can assure you, is not acceptable."

"I wouldn't dare, Master." Mulder shivered in dread. "You didn't answer my question," he ventured tentatively.

"I learned...from an expert." Skinner smiled. "And I learned the hard way - as you are, sweetheart." He looked sad for a moment. Mulder frowned. What the hell was **that** supposed to mean.

"Is Master saying that...you didn't ever... I mean you've never **subbed**, Master, have you?" He asked in surprise, and alarm.

Skinner smiled another wistful smile, and tangled his hand in Mulder's hair. "You ask too many questions, slaveboy," he growled. Then he clicked his fingers, and pointed to the floor beside the bed. Mulder tried desperately to get to his feet, but his muscles hardly obeyed his brain's command, and he half-staggered, half-fell off the bed, and into a kneeling position. "Today was unusual," Skinner told him. "Normally on a Sunday we will follow a very specific routine. Remember it, Fox, as I do not expect to have to keep instructing you in the basics. Sunday's are your Master's day. After the morning, uh, cuddle that you seem to have instituted as a new ritual, and after you've been disciplined, you will go and run me a bath. When you've finished bathing me, you will give me a full body massage, trim my hair, and give me a full, clean, shave, before dressing me. I do not expect to dress myself. You will lay out my clothes and help me get dressed. Then you will prepare brunch, and you will wait on me while I eat. You will make sure that you have bought appropriate groceries, and you'll cook for me. Understood?"

"Yes, Master." Mulder nodded, his eyes wide. He had never before thought that the idea of waiting on somebody so fully could be so erotic. He likened himself to an old fashioned manservant, seeing to his Master's every need, and the idea turned him on.

"Fox." Skinner tapped him on the head, and he looked up, eagerly. "Sunday may be Master's day but Saturday is slave's day. Before you get too excited..." he held up a hand. "This does not mean that I will wait on you on Saturdays. It **does** mean that you can expect a session in the Playroom if you've behaved well the previous week. It's also likely that I'll put you into the deeply submissive mode, and brush up on your training. This weekend was different for obvious reasons, but I want you to understand that there will be some pattern to your existence here."

"Yes, Master," Mulder whispered, awe-struck, and ever so slightly annoyed that he had to wait six whole days until the next Saturday.

"That doesn't mean there won't be other sessions in the Playroom during the week - **or** that I won't demand a massage or other services at other times. It's just to give you some structure and routine. I think you respond well to routine, sweetheart."

"You do?" Mulder looked up in surprise. This didn't exactly fit with his own assessment of his personality.

"Yes, little one. However much you might think you hate it, secretly you like to know what is expected of you - with a few surprises thrown in along the way to keep you on your toes," Skinner grinned. "Now, get to work, slave. I'm looking forward to experiencing your tender ministrations for the next couple of hours - and Fox?" Mulder paused on his way to the bathroom. "This is the true heart of your servitude. Not the discipline, or what takes place in the Playroom. Here, in small, dutiful ways, in the everyday acts of service, you can show me what's at the heart of your slavery." Skinner's dark eyes were so intense that Mulder had to hold onto the door frame to stop himself from toppling over. He nodded, swallowing down the lump in his throat. He wanted to serve his Master more than anything else in the world. He resolved to pour all his devotion into the next few hours of servitude.

Mulder prepared Skinner's bath exactly the way he knew his Master liked it, then laid out the towels to warm, before helping his Master into the bath. Skinner sat back with a contented sigh, and Mulder knelt down beside the bath in the submissive position. Damn, but it was hard keeping his eyes down! He loved watching his Master lying naked in the water. Silent adoration had never exactly been his scene before, but he was definitely coming around to the merits of it. Skinner, though, had other ideas.

"Go and kneel over there," he instructed. "I want to look at you."

Mulder obeyed, kneeling in Skinner's line of sight. Skinner surveyed him for a moment, and Mulder felt himself going red under the intense scrutiny.

"Is there a problem, Master?" he ventured.

"No. I just enjoy looking at my property," Skinner stated mildly. "I was also thinking of various things I'd like to do to you."

"Yes, Master?" Mulder could hardly believe it when his flaccid, completely sated cock, started to harden within its gold ring.

"Yes. Fox, you've never trusted a top to do more than spank you and humiliate you a little, have you?" Skinner asked.

Mulder bit on his lip. "You've researched me, Master," he pointed out. "You know what I've done in the past...and what I've allowed to be done to me."

"Yes. I have." Skinner mused on this. "You've happily sucked other men, and you've enjoyed being dominated by them verbally. You've experienced some harsh whippings - which were always instigated by yourself, and you determined the level of intensity as well. You've also accepted some light bondage. On only two occasions you allowed anal intercourse, but you adamantly refused that again after the second time."

"Yes, Master." Mulder clenched his fists behind his back. He didn't enjoy in-depth analyses of his psyche, and he was worried about where this was going.

"So, despite several years on the scene, there are many practices you are unfamiliar with," Skinner pointed out.

"Such as?" Mulder could feel himself going red again.

"Well, I mentioned fisting to you yesterday," Skinner mused. "I think I'd also enjoy placing you in very tight bondage." Mulder looked up, suddenly wondering why he was gasping for air. "Does that scare you?" Skinner asked, looking at him intently.

"A little," Mulder admitted.

"Did Phoebe ever do that to you?"

"No. Hell, no! I allowed her to tie me up occasionally, but nothing heavy, just the usual handcuffs. That's not to say I didn't want more, Master, it's just I wasn't under any illusions where Phoebe was concerned. I didn't trust her not to run off and leave me there." Mulder fought down a sense of claustrophobia at **that** thought.

"I will **never** leave you while you are in bondage," Skinner said fiercely. "It's bad practice, and shows a blatant disregard for safety - and whatever I might put you through, you will **always** be safe with me, Fox." His tone was forceful.

Mulder gave a little smile. "Yes, Master. I know that."

"Were you ever clamped?" Skinner asked, as if making idle conversation.

Mulder swallowed hard. "A couple of times, Master. I didn't like it much," he admitted.

"Hmmm. I can do some interesting things with clamps," Skinner said, with a wry chuckle. "While I'll take your likes and dislikes into consideration, little one, there are some activities I will insist upon, whether you like them or not."

"Yes, Master." Mulder's cock hardened almost immediately. He found the idea of enduring something disagreeable at his Master's insistence almost unbearably arousing.

Skinner grinned. "Something's woken up," he commented. "Speaking of which, have you ever had that particular part of your anatomy whipped, Fox?"

Mulder almost choked. "NO!" he exclaimed. "Oh god, Master, please..." he spluttered.

"Quiet!" Skinner held up his hand. "I think we agreed barely an hour ago that your body is mine to treat as I wish, didn't we?"

Mulder's cock was now fully erect, and he nodded, feeling a wave of almost orgasmic pleasure flood through him.

"Good." Skinner nodded. "Now, I want to relax, and I want **you** to entertain me." So saying, he leaned back in the bath, and crossed his hands over his stomach, expectantly.

"Entertain you, Master? How?" Mulder asked, frowning.

"Play with yourself. Put on a display." Skinner waved a negligent hand. "You have my permission to come again, but make sure that it takes a little while - I want to enjoy watching you first."

Mulder thought the ground would open up and swallow him. It was one thing to jerk off in the privacy of his bedroom, or even to wriggle and squirm in his Master's hands, but another to kneel here, and **perform** under his Master's watchful gaze.

"Don't make me wait too long," Skinner said, ominously. "Or the contents of that briefcase might get another workout. Fox? What's the problem?" He asked, as Mulder knelt there, unmoving, his cock flagging.

"I've never done anything like this, Master," Mulder admitted, miserably.

"Well there's always a first time," Skinner said, reasonably. "And you'll only get better with practice. Or would you prefer it if I ordered you to fetch my bullwhip? A couple of taps from that and I'm **sure** you'd put your heart and soul into the performance."

"No, Master. That won't be necessary." Mulder shot Skinner a withering look.

"Good. Get on with it then."

Mulder put his hand on his cock, and squeezed, lightly, but there was no response. Shit! When he thought of all the times he'd been ordered **not** to touch the damn thing, when it had been all he wanted to do, and now, when he'd been given permission, it hung like a piece of putty, limp and soft. He tried running his hand up and down it, but there was still no response. Mulder started to flush an angry, frustrated red.

"Fox," Skinner's voice was curiously gentle. "Close your eyes," he ordered. Mulder did as he was told. "Put your head back...that's good. Now, moisten your lip with your tongue, and run your hands over your body. Imagine it's me touching you, claiming you..." **That** definitely got a response, and Mulder felt a tentative stirring in his cock. "Now, play with your nipple rings, flick them, suck on one of your fingers...that's good..." Mulder did as he was ordered, allowing himself to go into a trance, just obeying each of his Master's commands, and enjoying the sensations in his body. "No, don't touch your cock yet. I want you to sway a little, moan, move your hips - no, stay kneeling - that's right. Now caress your neck, and down over your chest...good boy..." Mulder felt his cock definitely starting to perk up. "Keep going now, just improvise...think how beautiful you are, little one. I want you to imagine how pleasing a sight you are to your Master. Think of how your Master is enjoying watching you on your knees, playing with the toys **he** likes playing with..."

Skinner's voice trailed off, but Mulder kept moving his hands, sliding them sensuously over his body, enjoying himself. Mulder could see the picture of himself that Skinner had painted for him. Kneeling, legs splayed, a lock of his dark hair plastered to his sweaty forehead, his wide lips swollen with desire.

"Good, now you can touch your cock." Skinner broke into his reverie. "And open your eyes, sweetheart, make love to me as you touch yourself. Imagine me making love to you."

Mulder moaned as he wrapped his hand around his cock. He opened his eyes, and stared directly at his Master, faltered for a moment, as reality kicked in again, then continued with his caress, finding that place in his head where he had been. Skinner's eyes were dark, and appreciative, and Mulder responded to the fact that he was pleasing his Master.

"Is this good, Master?" he asked, running his hand along the full length of his hard shaft, and gently tweaking one of his tender nipples.

"Yes, Fox...very good..." Skinner grinned. "Keep going. I want to watch you come."

Mulder nodded, and suddenly realized how damn great this felt! He had always had an exhibitionist streak, and this was a turn on! Especially, when it was obvious that it also turned his Master on - big time, judging by the way Skinner's hard shaft was visible sticking out from the bath water.

Mulder moaned, and put his head back, but he never took his eyes from Skinner's face, as he continued caressing his body, and pumping on his cock. He had an image of Skinner's hard cock pounding into him, of his Master covering his naked body with his own, and claiming him, fast and rough, the way he had done last night, with no thought for his slave's pleasure, only his own, and the idea turned him on. He existed to serve, and his Master adored using his slave's naked body. Skinner loved taking charge of him, and making him submit to his will. Mulder could hear himself panting. He was on the brink.

"Do you want me to come, Master?" He asked.

"Yes, slave. Hard," Skinner ordered.

Mulder let go with a whoosh, and his come spilt out on his hand, and on the tiled bathroom floor. Mulder knelt there, spent, his head hanging, his chest heaving.

"Good. Very good," Skinner sighed appreciatively. "Now, clean up the floor, then come over here." Mulder did as he was told, then went and knelt beside the bath. "Soap me, then you can climb in and wash yourself down before washing me," Skinner ordered.

Mulder grasped the soap eagerly, and placed it on his Master's chest, then began to gently lather the wiry chest hair. He loved the scent of his Master's damp skin, and frequently leaned forward to smell it. While he was there, it was impossible not to press his lips against the flesh and steal a series of little kisses. Skinner accepted this evidence of his slave's devotion with a wry, amused smile, and when he was fully soaped, he beckoned Mulder into the water. Mulder knelt, facing his Master, nestled between his knees, and carefully passed a washcloth over Skinner's tanned skin, caressing it in circular motions. He stopped when he got to the bullet wound on his Master's stomach, bent, and kissed it. There was evidence of other, older wounds, on Skinner's back, and thighs. Mulder kissed all of them, then looked up.

"Vietnam, Master?" he asked in a whisper.

"Yes, Fox." Skinner nodded quietly.

"I've wanted to ask before." Mulder trailed a finger over the scars. "But I didn't dare."

"You can always, ask, sweetheart," Skinner said, catching Mulder's hand, and kissing it. "Just don't always expect a reply."

"No, Master. You were badly wounded though?" Mulder fingers continued their gentle caress.

"Yes, but I lived." Skinner shrugged. "At least I lived." He looked suddenly so sad that Mulder couldn't stop himself pressing his lips against his Master's, and pulling the big man close. Then he backed off, apologetically.

"I'm sorry, Master," he said quietly.

"No need to apologize, little one," Skinner said softly, drawing Mulder back for another kiss. Mulder drowned in dual sensations of the warm water, and the wet warmth of his Master's tongue as it pushed into his mouth.

"I want to know you," Mulder confided, when they broke away a few seconds later. "Hell, you know so much about me, but you're such a damn enigma."

"All in good time, sweetheart," Skinner replied. "You have the rest of your life to get to know me - there's no need to rush, although I know it's not in your nature to wait, my impatient little slaveboy." He smiled, and pushed the dark lock of hair off of Mulder's forehead. Mulder smiled back.

"Master is very patient with me," he murmured, then dipped his head, and sucked Skinner's nipples lightly.

"Amen," Skinner muttered ironically, stroking his slave's head as he worked.

"Would..." Mulder broke away, and pointed to his Master's hard cock. "Would Master like to use me?" He asked.

"Does the slave have a condom to hand?" Skinner asked pointedly.

Mulder grinned. "Yes, Master!" he announced, reaching under the bath mat, and drawing one out triumphantly. Skinner grinned, and slapped his slave's butt affectionately. "Although..." Mulder bit on his lip. "Master...I'd like to feel you inside me, without anything between us. Flesh on flesh," he admitted. Skinner's hands stoked his thighs as he considered this.

"Well - that's something of a commitment, Fox," he stated.

"I'm clean," Mulder said hopefully.

"So am I - however...I think we should both think about that some more before we take that step. I also think we should both be tested as a show of good faith. Much as I want to experience your ass without a layer of rubber between us, I'm your Master, and as such I'm responsible for your welfare. I won't rush this, Fox."

"No, Master," Mulder sighed, crestfallen.

"And you know..." Skinner grinned. "I think this might be a good opportunity to see if you've been doing your homework, as instructed." He opened the packet, then put his fingers in Mulder's mouth, and slipped the condom inside. "Impress me, slave," he ordered.

Mulder felt his heart beat anxiously inside his chest. He **had** been practicing, but even so, there was a difference between putting a condom on an inanimate object, and sliding it onto his Master's hard cock while they were both in the slippery confines of the bath. Still, his Master had given him an order. He just hoped that Skinner would bear the difficult circumstances in mind when he punished him for his failure.

Mulder took hold of his Master's thighs, and positioned himself with his mouth over Skinner's cock, tonguing the condom to get it in the right place. Then he dipped his head, and smoothly went down on Skinner's penis, drawing the condom tight around the hard shaft in one deft movement. He wasn't sure who was the more surprised, him or Skinner, when the condom stayed perfectly, tautly in position.

"Shit!" Mulder breathed.

"Well done, little one!" Skinner laughed, and gave him a full-throated kiss by way of reward. The bath was of the corner variety, very large, with a little seat on one side. Skinner levered himself onto the seat, and then turned Mulder around, so that he was kneeling in front of him, his chin just out of the water. Mulder felt his Master part his buttocks, and then water flooded into him, in a deliciously warm wave. Skinner played with his ass for a while, slipping his finger in and out, and then he grasped Mulder's buttocks firmly in his hands, and slid his hard cock between them. Mulder, completely relaxed by the soothing warmth of the water, and the previous foreplay, opened up with a moan, as Skinner's shaft found that spot deep inside him that tingled vibrantly at each hard stroke.

"Oh shit, Master...shit...it's so good..." he whispered, as his Master took him, deeply, and thoroughly, plunging hard and fast into the very depths of his slave's body. Mulder could feel Skinner's hands on his back, and thighs, and the water splashed around them, soaking the bathroom floor. Mulder wondered why he had ever had an aversion to anal sex before. With Skinner it just felt so **right**. He gave himself up to the joy of serving his Master with his body, with his whole heart, reveling in the fact that his Master took such pleasure from entering him, and consuming him in this way. When Skinner came, and withdrew, Mulder turned around, and removed his condom, then kissed his Master's now flaccid cock.

"Thank you for honoring me with this part of yourself, Master," he whispered. They were words he could never have imagined even thinking before now, let alone saying, but they just felt right for the moment. Skinner smiled, and caressed his slave's ears.

"Good boy," he murmured. Then he laughed out loud. "You've come a long way, slave," he said. "I'm so proud of you." Mulder knelt between his Master's legs, and closed his eyes, cherishing the moment, his Master's praise still ringing in his ears.

Mulder helped Skinner out of the bath, and dried him - slowly, lingeringly, and with exquisite care and attention to detail. He was so used to rushing through tasks, getting from a to b by the quickest possible route, that he would never have imagined that something so simple could bring him so much pleasure. He lost himself in the task, rubbing down his Master's glistening body, gently patting his butt, and stroking his penis and balls with the soft towel, bending to dry between each and every toe until he was finished. Then he wrapped Skinner in his bathrobe, and walked him back into the bedroom.

"You can massage me on the bed - and shave me in front of the mirror," Skinner pointed. Mulder nodded, and went to get his oils. He returned to find his Master stretched out, naked and glorious on

the bed, like a large lion resting in the sun. He warmed the oil in his hands, then dripped it onto his Master's body and began to stroke his tanned flesh, losing himself in the task. He poured every ounce of his devotion into the massage, and was pleased when his Master relaxed completely under his tender ministrations. Skinner's hard muscles gradually loosened, as Mulder's long, skillful fingers smoothed away his Master's cares and stresses. This felt so good! Being a slave, being able to serve his magnificent Master. Mulder was struck suddenly by how damn lucky he had been. He could have sold himself to **anyone**, to someone who didn't understand him, and didn't even want to try. He stopped suddenly, in mid-stroke, stunned by what he had done.

"Fox?" Skinner sat up and looked at him.

"I've been such a fucking idiot," Mulder told him.

"What are we talking about in particular here?" Skinner raised a questioning eyebrow.

"Signing that contract," Mulder replied, distracted. Then he looked at his Master and caught a glimpse of hurt misunderstanding in those usually expressionless brown eyes. "Oh shit, no. I didn't mean that. I meant...you were right, when you pointed out how reckless I was to sell myself to a stranger. If it hadn't been you..." he broke off, a lump rising in his throat, as he imagined how terrible it would have been if he **hadn't** ended up with Skinner. If he was standing here, serving someone else, someone who didn't love him, someone he couldn't love the way he loved his Master...Mulder felt his chest constricting - he couldn't breathe.

"Fox. Hold on." Skinner took hold of his shoulders, and shook him lightly. "It **was** me, and this is a good breakthrough - if you can see your behavior like this. If you can see the way you throw yourself into situations that are potentially harmful to you, without thinking about the risks. Now, breathe. In, out...that's good."

"A breakthrough?" Mulder sat down on the side of the bed, his body nerveless, taking deep gulps of air.

"Yes," Skinner grinned at him, and tousled his hair. "A good breakthrough. I told you I'd take you down to the bottom of yourself, sweetheart. Don't worry - the process might hurt occasionally but it'll be good for you."

"Only a top could say something like that," Mulder grinned back.

"You betcha!" Skinner cuffed him lightly on the side of his head, and then his expression became thoughtful. "Fox - did anything lead to you spinning out of control to the point where you were prepared to sign that contract? Was there a single event that led to it, or was it just a gradual build up?"

Mulder frowned. He didn't like coming out of the role they'd built up here, and tackling any of his real life issues, but he knew that Skinner wasn't about to let him evade this subject.

"No, there wasn't anything in particular," he shrugged.

"And in the past - when you sought out punishment in order to get sexual release, was there a pattern to that?" Skinner took hold of his face, and looked directly into his eyes. "Did it happen after particularly difficult cases, or if there had been a set-back in pursuit of your quest?"

"No." Mulder tried to drop his eyes, but Skinner stroked his thumbs down the side of his cheeks, until he raised them again. "I know what you're thinking, but I'm not punishing myself for Sam, or for anything else...the plain truth is I just get off on it. I don't deny that sometimes I sought out this kind of release after I'd been involved in a particularly cerebral case - as if I needed to get back into my body again, to touch bases with it. I know that sometimes, I, uh, I ignore what my body needs, with food, medication, rest and so on." He bit on his lip, but Skinner's eyes were encouraging.

"Go on," Skinner prompted.

"Then it helps me to **feel**, to really feel - pleasure, pain, both." Mulder's could see his own shining eyes reflected back at him in his Master's dark eyes. "But usually, after bad stuff happened with my quest, as you call it, my libido went into hibernation to be honest. That wasn't when I felt the urge to be topped most. It's when I'm distanced, when I'm **not** so involved in that obsession that the sex thing kicks in, and starts spiraling away from me. Sometimes I think I've used my quest in the past simply to avoid my sex drive, not the other way around. I don't pretend to understand it. Does it have to **be** understood?" he asked.

"No." Skinner smiled. "Some things are just the way we're made. I just wanted to get a handle on your behavior patterns. Are you feeling calmer now?" His dark eyes were searching. Mulder swallowed hard, and nodded. "Okay - get back to work then, slaveboy." Skinner slapped his thigh affectionately, and laid himself back down on the bed.

Mulder didn't need telling twice. He devoured his Master's body with his oiled hands, wondering at himself. He knew **why** he had wanted the safety and security of that contract now. He knew he had wanted to be stopped, before he went too far. He knew he had wanted to throw himself into the abyss that had haunted him all his life, to drown in whatever darkness awaited him, and to finally give into it. Only Skinner had been waiting for him, had caught him, and carried him back to the light, and now Mulder was lost and found at the same time, and he didn't know what would happen to him next.

"Master...I said something last night, but you didn't hear. I didn't have the courage to say it to your face - I still don't, but..." Mulder began in a flurry.

"It's all right, little one. In your own time," Skinner said soothingly.

"Okay. I wanted to say..." Mulder was glad Skinner was face down as he wasn't sure he could have continued otherwise. "I know...that it'll be hard when we go back to work. I know I'll drive you crazy, and I'll probably resent you, and that sometimes you'll curse Agent Mulder and wonder what the hell happened to your slave, and... I just wanted to say that this last week has been the best week of my whole crappy, fuck-up of a life. Somehow, being this, to you, is at the core of my soul. I think I've been more truly myself here than at any other time, in any other way. I know it can't carry on. I know we have to go back to the real world...but I wanted to tell you that anyway. So that you know."

"I do know, Fox." Skinner caught Mulder's hand as it massaged his shoulder, and kissed it gently. "I know."

Mulder finished his task silently, enjoying every second spent massaging his Master's taut, firm flesh. Then he wrapped Skinner in his robe again, and sat his Master down in front of the mirror, before fetching all the apparatus for shaving him. He was nervous, but he had managed to shave the requisite

number of balloons without killing them, and if Skinner thought he was ready, then he had to hope he was. He lathered his Master's chin with shaving foam, then held the other man's face steady, and raised the cut-throat razor to his jaw. Skinner didn't so much as flinch. His eyes met Mulder's, and they held an expression of total trust. Mulder felt his nervousness leave him, and he set about his task with a firm, steady hand, whisking the foam from his Master's chin, and neck, with sweeping movements, utterly confident. When he'd finished, he applied after-shave, patting his Master's face appreciatively, and Skinner ran a hand over his newly shaven jaw, and gave a whistle.

"Thank you, Fox. That's one of the finest shaves I've ever had," he said. Mulder glowed with the praise, and went to get his Master's clothes ready. He dressed Skinner in faded blue jeans, and a navy henley, then laced him into his timberlands, before leaving his Master in order to go downstairs and prepare the breakfast.

Cooking wasn't exactly Mulder's strong point, but he managed to serve up something passably edible for breakfast. When Skinner had finished, he left Mulder to eat his own breakfast, and clear away the dishes, instructing him to join him in the lounge when he was done. Mulder went about the task happily enough, whistling to himself. Wanda sat and watched him, or, more accurately, sat and watched the faucet, hoping for a stray drip of water to escape so that she could bat it with her paw. Mulder tolerated this for a while, then suddenly took a handful of bubbly suds, and deposited them on her head. She gave a startled squawk, shot him a venomous look, and then ran towards the kitchen door, shaking her head vigorously. Mulder got there first, and banged it shut, looking down on her from a lofty height.

"Not so fast, Wanda baby. If you go telling tales to daddy, then the next meal I'll be serving up to him will be cat stew. Comprendi?" he said. She glared at him for a second, then sat on her haunches and licked her bottom energetically in reply. He nodded sagely. "I see that we understand each other, madam!" He opened the door, and she walked haughtily though it, with as much dignity as she could muster while burdened by one limp, and completely sodden ear.

Mulder sauntered out to join her a few minutes later, then stopped. Skinner was seated on the couch, with a bedraggled Wanda on his lap. She was washing her assaulted ear with far too much enthusiasm, Mulder thought, clearly drawing attention to it. He approached, cautiously, and Skinner pointed to his feet. Mulder crouched beside them. Skinner laced his hand in Mulder's hair, and drew his head back.

"Wanda has a complaint," he hissed, ominously.

"She got in the way!" Mulder yelled.

"The truth, Fox, or you'll go over my knee until you remember the honesty lesson," Skinner warned.

"Oh, okay. I dumped some water on her - but she **was** in the way." Mulder glared at the cat.

"Well, I won't have you upsetting her. You'll have to be punished," Skinner told him. Mulder pouted, not seriously worried, although his butt still ached from earlier. At least if Skinner upended him over his knee then Wanda would have to vacate her cozy position, and that was a victory of sorts. "Yes - I want you to apologize to her," Skinner told his slave. Mulder's mouth hung open in dismay.

"You have **got** to be joking!" He exclaimed. "Master," he added, as a hasty afterthought.

"No. I'm deadly serious. And after you've apologized - on your hands and knees - you can kiss her nose," Skinner informed him.

Mulder had the very real suspicion that his Master was trying hard not to laugh. He glared at him through narrowed eyes. "No," he said. Skinner's hand tightened in his hair.

"Would you like to repeat that?" Skinner asked pleasantly.

"No...**Master**?" Mulder offered, hopefully. Skinner's hand went to his belt. "Oh all right. I'll kiss the stupid cat," Mulder capitulated gracelessly. Skinner released his hold on Mulder's hair, and Mulder got to his knees, and looked at Wanda. She looked back at him, calmly, from the safety of her slave's lap, a triumphant gleam in her eyes.

"Wanda, I'm sorry, okay." He glanced at Skinner, who made a movement with his eyebrows, indicating that Mulder should continue. Mulder sighed. "You're a cute cat, whose been spoiled rotten by an indulgent master laboring under the misapprehension he's your slave, and who..."

"Fox." Skinner's voice held a warning.

"Oh, all right. Sorry, Wanda," Mulder sighed. "You're a really nice cat." He leaned forward, and planted a kiss on her delicate creamy nose, and she waved her tail menacingly in reply.

"I don't think you're forgiven, but it's a start." Skinner fondled the cat's ears affectionately. "However, in view of your attitude, from now on I'm going to institute a ten minute compulsory cuddle period every day. That's you and Wanda - not you and me," he stated firmly.

"So, now wouldn't be a convincing time to mention my cat hair allergy would it?" Mulder asked. Skinner raised an eyebrow. "I thought not," Mulder sighed. "You're such a hard bastard, Master."

"Yeah, and don't forget it," Skinner grinned. "I think ten strokes with the strap before bedtime for your tone and attitude will help you keep it in mind, Fox, and another six for the 'bastard' comment. Remind me to administer them. Now, you fell asleep before you could finish your confessional last night, and I don't want that habit to lapse, so I think we'll do another one now."

"Now? Here?" Mulder found the confessionals hard, and he didn't feel in the mood. He was never sure how Skinner took his honesty, and he always ended up revealing far more than he wanted to, in a way that made him squirm with embarrassment afterwards.

"Here. Now," Skinner told him. "Sit however and wherever you like."

Mulder thought about it. Where he really wanted to sit was with his head in Skinner's lap, which was where Wanda was right now. On the other hand, he wasn't sure he'd be able to talk in such a position, and he couldn't look straight at Skinner during a confessional. He found it hard enough as it was, without seeing those dark eyes watching him intently as he talked. Instead, he knelt on the floor beside Skinner's knee, and leaned into his leg. He felt his usual insecurity about revealing too much of himself, but Skinner's hand found his neck, and started a gentle massage, and he started to relax.

"Okay, yesterday...yesterday...I...did you know that bathroom thing in the restaurant was just about every wet dream I've ever had come true? And I didn't even get to come! In fact, that was part of what made it so good. There was this place I went into in my head, where I was on fire with being a slave, being your slave, being of service. It made my whole body tingle. Just remembering it is enough to fuel my next dozen jacking-off fantasies...not that I **would** - jack off I mean," he added hastily. "Not unless you gave me permission anyway..." He stopped, hating himself for sounding so damn stupid. God, Skinner must be laughing his head off at his clumsy, hesitant attempts at explaining the way he felt. Skinner's hand picked up speed on his neck, kneading him encouragingly. "You know me so well it's scary sometimes. You must have been a fantastic field agent, sir..." Skinner's fingers stopped momentarily. "Um, **Master**," Mulder corrected. "So damn thorough. Not that I'm not - just that I suppose I act more on inspiration and pay less attention to detail...and consequences." Mulder buried his face in his knees, with a sigh. "I know what you were trying to teach me with the whole bullwhip thing...but I don't think I'm going to change. I just know that when I put on my shirt and tie tomorrow, when I get back to my office, that it'll be as if all this never happened. I'm scared that it won't **work** there, that I'll go back to spinning out of control and I won't know why, although it's nice knowing you'll be around to pull me back in. That's the only thing that makes me feel okay about tomorrow. You will be there to do that, won't you?" Mulder suddenly looked up at his Master, his heart pounding. Supposing Skinner kept their home life and work life so separate that he **wasn't** there to provide the safety net Mulder so desperately needed? Skinner didn't reply, but he did smile, and his blunt fingers continued their soothing caress on his neck. Mulder bit his lip.

"Okay...I'll be patient, I'll try not to get too edgy. I bet I don't sleep tonight. I want you to know you've got my permission to be as much of a hard-ass as you need to be if I look like I'm running wild. Hell, not that you need my permission! Just so you know. I'd prefer to be reeled in than to float off into space. I scare myself when I get in too deep. Sometimes I can't even see what's happening to me until it's too late. Shit, you landed yourself with one psycho slave. You must really be regretting taking me on..." He trailed off, sat down gingerly on his still glowing ass, gathered his knees to his chest, and hugged them with his arms. He was silent for several minutes, then decided that he was through. He moved his head, rested his chin on Skinner's knee, closed his eyes, and was rewarded when Skinner gently stroked his hair. Mulder sighed. This felt so good. This felt the best. He could sit like this forever.

Skinner broke the mood a few minutes later, by disengaging Mulder's head from his knee, and getting up.

"Okay, little one. We have some practical details to sort out. Are you listening?" Mulder came out of his reverie, and sat up straight. "Good - first of all, money." He took a credit card out of his pocket and handed it to his slave. "This is yours. There's a spending limit of \$5,000. I'll keep track of any purchases you make, so I'd advise you to be...circumspect. This is not because I don't trust you, but more because I want you to understand that your life is transparent to me. There can be no secrets. I want to know everything you do, think, or feel. Understood?"

"Yes, Master." Mulder glanced at the credit card. "Master...this is going to feel a bit weird. I mean, I've been handling my own finances since I was 17 years old. I'm not sure about this."

"Tough." Skinner shrugged. "This may not be the way it will always be, Fox, but you've only been my slave for one week, so you'll have to expect to be kept on a short rein to begin with."

"Yes, Master." Mulder bit down his resentment. He had signed away his money knowingly when he'd made that contract. He could hardly complain about it now.

"This isn't a marriage, Fox, or a negotiation between lovers. You are my slave. Have I ever given you cause to misunderstand that basic fact?" Skinner asked him.

Mulder shook his head. "No, Master."

"You knew what that entailed, and you entered this condition willingly, didn't you?" Skinner pressed.

"Yes, Master. I did." Mulder nodded. "Master...what about cash? I mean, a credit card's okay, but I'll need some cash, for lunch, or to buy a soda, or whatever."

"Yes, Fox, I expect you will. You can ask me for cash whenever you require it."

"What?" Mulder gasped. "Like, come up and ask you for lunch money in your office or something?"

"That's right." Skinner placed his hands behind his back, and looked down on his slave from his full, forbidding height. "I said it was a short rein, Fox, and that's exactly what it'll be. When you can accept these restrictions, and learn to live happily within them, that's when I'll consider lengthening the leash - but not before then. You think you've learned a lot in the past week, and you have, but trust me, you have a long way to go."

"I see." Mulder's heart sank. "Master - I'm used to behaving like an adult, making reasoned decisions..." he began. Skinner held up his hand.

"I'm not treating you like a child, Fox. I'm treating you like a slave - which is exactly what you are. As for the reasoned decisions...from now on you can check them with me. If they really are 'reasoned' there shouldn't be any problems, should there?" His tone was deceptively pleasant, but Mulder knew just what he was getting at.

"No, Master. There shouldn't," he said sulkily.

"A friend of mine, who lived in a similar set-up to this one, had a very efficient slave who used to do his books for him, and keep a check on the household finances," Skinner said. "He earned that right, by proving he was worthy and capable. You can earn the same rights, Fox. In time. With diligence, and commitment."

"I see." Mulder nodded glumly, sure that he'd never be good for long enough to earn any such rights.

"As for the rest of your behavior - I do not want you to come to me with every tiny decision you have to make. You're more than capable of using your own initiative and I'm sure that in most given situations you'll know what I expect of you. If you choose not to take that course of action, then you know there will be consequences," Skinner said ominously. Mulder's heart did a flip. "If you're in any doubt - just ask. I will not punish you for not being sure, or for being tempted. I **will** punish you for disobedience, dishonesty, disrespect, and putting your own life in unnecessary danger. Those are the four givens. Punishment will not necessarily be of the physical variety, Fox," Skinner informed his kneeling slave.

Mulder looked up, curious. "I'm very good at devising alternative forms of punishment when I think it's more appropriate," Skinner warned.

"I know," Mulder sighed. "I haven't forgotten the exquisite boredom of tape surveillance, Master."

Skinner laughed. "I'm glad to see my punishments were effective even before I had the leeway to be truly creative." He crossed over to where Mulder was kneeling, and got out his wallet, then began counting out some cash. Mulder had a sudden vivid flash of an old fantasy, as his Master handed him the folded up notes.

"Here's some money for tomorrow," Skinner began, then he glanced at Mulder's burgeoning erection, bemused. "Was it something I said?" He murmured. Mulder flushed.

"It's nothing." He willed the erection away, but it stayed resolutely in place as he took the money his Master was giving him.

"No, it's very clearly **something**," Skinner observed. "You can either tell me, or I can give you six strokes with my belt, and **then** you can tell me. It's up to you."

Mulder bit on his lip. "It's not a very politically correct fantasy, Master."

"Neither is slavery," Skinner pointed out wryly. "How we conduct our fantasies, needs and desires is nobody's business but our own, I think, so long as we don't harm anyone else. Speak, slave. I'm waiting. If my slave has a fantasy, I think his Master should know about it - don't you?"

"Okay, it was when you handed over the cash, Master. It kinds of ties in with what you did last night. I've always wondered what it would be like to be picked up in a bar by some wealthy stranger, and to be...paid...you know, for services rendered."

"Ah." Skinner nodded. "Well, that's a commonplace enough fantasy, and certainly nothing to inspire any shame."

"I wouldn't want it to actually be real," Mulder said hastily. "I mean it must be a crappy lifestyle, and anyway, I'm far too old to take up a career as a rent boy. I just like the fantasy. Hell, that can't surprise you. Selling myself, quite literally, into slavery, has to be the ultimate version of the fantasy."

"Hmmm. Yes. Although being a hustler would give you more...control over the fantasy," Skinner observed. "Now, let's get back to business. Do you know what is expected of you tomorrow?"

"Yes, Master. I have to get up at 5 a.m., swim for half an hour, make you your coffee, wake you. Then we both get dressed and go to work?" Mulder looked up for confirmation.

"Yes. That's good. Once you've accepted your morning discipline, and been dismissed, you're on your own recognizance. You can drive to work in your own car, or take the metro, and leave at whatever time is convenient to you. I expect you to be back in this apartment by 6 p.m. every evening, unless there's a legitimate work reason to explain your absence, and you've cleared it with me. When I return home in the evening I expect to find you naked, and waiting for me. Bedtime is no later than 10 p.m." Mulder's heart sank again, and Skinner must have noticed the expression on his slave's face, because he gave a

rueful smile. "Fox - this is all part of the short leash. If you respond well, I'll let you have more freedom. First you have to show me that you're prepared to work for that."

"Yes, Master." Mulder nodded, sighing internally. He had a feeling that the next few days were going to stretch both his obedience, and his Master's patience, to their respective limits.

"Good. Now go and get washed and dressed," Skinner ordered unexpectedly.

"Dressed?" Mulder looked confused.

"Yes. Wear anything you want. You're going back to the real world tomorrow, and it's time we got you used to that idea. And Fox?" Mulder turned back, his foot on the stair.

"Whatever you do, I promise you that I will never, **ever** regret taking you on. Understood?"

Mulder swallowed hard, remembering what he'd said in his confessional. "Yes, Master."

"Good. Go get dressed." Skinner shooed him on his way.

Mulder ran back to his bedroom, took a shower, washed his hair, then pulled on his jeans, and the new shirt Skinner had bought for him the day before. He ran back down the stairs, two at a time, reveling in the feel of his sneakers on his feet, instead of going around barefoot. Skinner looked at him appreciatively.

"Good," he said, "now take your clothes off."

"What?" Mulder glared at him. "I just put them on."

"And now your Master is telling you to take them off. Do you have a problem with that?"

"No. Master." Mulder ground out, sullenly. He put his hand up to his shirt, and started unbuttoning.

"Not like that," Skinner interrupted. "What's the first rule of this house, Fox?"

"Your pleasure is paramount, Master," Mulder said quickly. He'd learned **that** lesson well.

"All right. Undress in such a way as to please me then. Put on a show - like you did earlier, in the bathroom."

"You want me to do a striptease?" Mulder asked, horrified.

"Yes," Skinner replied blandly. "There's no point having a slave if you can't make him perform. There will be many occasions when I take you to parties, and instruct you to undress. I don't want you to slip out of your clothing as if your body embarrasses you. I want you to undress in such a way as to make everyone in the room watch, and I want them to envy me for owning such a beautiful, entertaining, obedient slave. This is a skill you'll have to practice."

"You'll make me undress in front of a room full of people?" Mulder's heart thudded in his chest.

"Of course. I've already displayed you naked at your party, Fox. What's the problem here?" Skinner asked.

"Just...going somewhere else, away from here...having people look at me, making them look at me..."

"Ah, I see. Well, firstly, I'll be with you, and that's all that should matter. It doesn't make any difference where we are - I'll be at your side. Secondly, I know that I showed **you** off at the party, and you didn't display yourself, as such, but you'll have to learn. I insist." Skinner's eyes were deadly serious. Mulder swallowed nervously, then nodded. He put his hand up to his shirt again, and tried undulating his hips. Skinner sat down on the couch, nursing a glass of whisky, and watched over the rim. Mulder felt himself going red.

"Shit... I'm no good at this, Master," he said, stopping in the middle of a clumsy hip-roll.

"Then you have to learn. It's more a question of enthusiasm than skill," Skinner said. "Proceed."

Mulder sighed, and started again. He closed his eyes, and tried to imagine he was in his room, alone. Damn, but he felt stupid doing this. He slid his hand into his pants, and played with pushing down his jeans, then turned and waggled his bottom half-heartedly in Skinner's direction. He did finally manage to undress completely, then stood there, naked once more, his whole body a nice shade of vermilion. Only then did he pluck up the courage to open his eyes. Skinner was giving him an assessing stare.

"Okay. I know I was shit," Mulder sighed.

"You could certainly do with some more work, but you'll get there. In time. You really don't have a choice," Skinner told him with a wry chuckle. "All right - put your clothes back on."

"You're not going to make me try it again, are you?" Mulder asked.

"No. I'm not. Next time I ask you to do this, I expect you to do it properly - or there'll be consequences. Give it some thought, Fox."

"Yes, Master." Mulder buttoned up his jeans gratefully.

"There's something else you can give some thought to," Skinner added, when he'd dressed. "I told you that Sunday is 'Master's Day'. I've kept you amused and occupied all week, which, don't get me wrong, has been very enjoyable," he mused, pursing his lips and smiling. "But now I'd like to relax. I have some paperwork to do in preparation for tomorrow, so you have a couple of hours free time. You can go out, swim, work-out, or do whatever you want, but our evening plans are up to you. Organize a nice meal for us both if you want, although I wouldn't advise you to actually **cook** it yourself, or dream up some other nice treat, but I'd like you to think of a way to make it a good evening for me. I'll expect you to come up with something every Sunday. It doesn't have to be much. Just something to surprise, and please me."

Mulder nodded, and watched as Skinner disappeared into his study. Damn! He wished he could think of something really fantastic to surprise Skinner with, but his mind was a blank. Skinner had said that it didn't have to be much, but Mulder **wanted** it to be good. When he looked back on what Skinner had done for the past week, he appreciated the other man's skill and ingenuity. He had contrived to keep Mulder continually on edge, while teaching him some important lessons along the way. The man was

truly a Master - completely skilled in his art. Mulder was apprehensive enough about going back to work to want to show Skinner how much he appreciated what he'd done for him, before he started jerking him around as Agent Mulder to his Master's Assistant Director Skinner. An idea occurred to Mulder. Skinner had said that he was a **sensualist**. There had to be a way to appeal to that side of his Master's personality. He went to the hall phone, and checked through the list of restaurant menus that Skinner had left there. A couple of them were particularly well thumbed so Mulder took that as evidence that they were Skinner's favorites. He settled on the Thai one, then telephoned the restaurant and asked them if they knew what Walter Skinner's favorite meal was. Luckily his Master was well known to them, and before long Mulder had a complete menu ordered. Now it was time to work on the next part of his plan.

At 7 p.m., Mulder knocked on the study door, then opened it and put his head around it. Skinner was hard at work, and glanced up, frowning.

"It's late, Master. I thought it was time to interrupt you," Mulder told him. Skinner glanced at his watch.

"Shit, is that the time? I didn't realize." He shook his head, then did a double take, as Mulder entered the room. Mulder grinned, relishing the look his Master was giving him. He was dressed in one of the new outfits Skinner had bought for him the previous day: a pair of tight, black chinos hugged his ass, and he was wearing a shiny, petrol blue shirt. "You're looking good," Skinner said appreciatively. "Something smells good too. What is it?"

"If Master would follow me, I'll show you," Mulder said.

He led Skinner back into the dining room, and held out his Master's chair for him, expectantly. Skinner glanced around the room, his eyes shining in delighted surprise. Mulder had been out and purchased a dozen candles, which were placed strategically around the room, casting a soft, orange glow. Skinner sat down in the chair, and Mulder went and opened a bottle of wine.

"What are we drinking?" Skinner asked.

Mulder shook his head. "That's a surprise," he said. "Um, this might be too much, so tell me if it is, but how does Master feel about being blindfolded?"

Skinner looked up sharply. "That would depend upon the purpose, Fox," he replied.

"Well..." Mulder stood behind the other man, and massaged his shoulders lightly, noting that a few new knots had appeared in them since earlier in the morning. "I've arranged for a special meal, Master, but I'd like to feed it to you myself, to surprise you."

Skinner considered this for a moment, then nodded. "That would be...interesting," he agreed.

Mulder grinned, and went to fetch a velvet scarf that he had ready for the occasion. He caressed Skinner's head lightly with the lush fabric as he tied it around the other man's eyes. Then he brought the meal to the table, and placed a fork full of steaming food against Skinner's lips. The other man opened obligingly, and took a bite, considered the taste, and then broke into a broad grin.

"Red chicken curry?" he exclaimed. "That's my favorite."

"I know, Master." Mulder poured the wine, and held the glass to Skinner's lips. Skinner took a sip, and laughed again.

"Do you know all my favorites, little one?" he asked, whipping off the blindfold and surveying his plate in pleased anticipation.

Mulder grinned. "I'm a trained investigator, Master. I did a little research of my own."

Mulder pressed a button on the remote, and the CD player started playing a random selection of songs; some jazz, some Mozart, some Sinatra.

"I see that even my musical tastes have been discovered." Skinner raised his glass to his lips, and smiled at Mulder over the rim.

"Of course, Master. How's your meal?" Mulder picked up his own fork, and started to eat.

"Delicious. This is lovely, Fox," Skinner said sincerely.

"I noticed a series of travel guides in your bookcase, Master. Have you traveled widely?" Mulder asked.

Skinner shook his head. "Not as widely as I wish," he said with a sigh. "I did go to Europe on vacation a few years back - I'd like to return. I'm something of a history buff."

Mulder spent the next hour discussing his time at Oxford with his Master, and sharing reminiscences of journeys to foreign lands. He did his best to be entertaining, and attentive, and he loved watching his Master relax, and talk to him openly about his past.

"It's stupid, but I think one of the reasons I enlisted for 'Nam was because I had some damn crazy idea about traveling." Skinner shook his head sadly.

"It's one way to see the world," Mulder shrugged.

"Only if you want to find out what the world looks like through the sights of a gun," Skinner remarked grimly.

"There must have been more of a reason to you enlisting than that," Mulder held his breath. He longed to know more about his Master.

"There was." Skinner shrugged, and wiped his napkin over his mouth.

"Do you ever talk about it? To anyone?" Mulder pressed.

"Once. Then no more." Skinner shrugged again. "Some memories are too painful to keep getting out, and tearing apart, Fox."

"I know." Mulder nodded. Skinner's eyes met his, and Mulder knew that they understood each other. He steered the conversation onto lighter topics.

When they'd finished dessert, and coffee, Mulder got up, and held out his hand.

"Would Master like to dance?" he asked. Skinner looked at him in surprise. Mulder shrugged. "I've never danced with another man, Master," he admitted honestly. "So I'm probably crap, but I thought...well, it might be a stupid idea, but..."

"Don't spoil it, Fox." Skinner grinned, getting up. "It's no more stupid than some of the things we've done over the past week."

Mulder thought of being led around on the end of his Master's leash, and broke into a grin himself. Skinner closed his hands around Mulder's waist, and pulled him close, and Mulder rested his head against his Master's cheek. He felt brave enough to caress Skinner's taut buttocks lightly, enjoying the feel of his Master's solidly muscled body pressed against his own. It felt so good, to be encased in Skinner's big arms, sated after a good meal, drifting in time to the music. After about half an hour, Mulder dropped to his knees, and opened his Master's pants. Skinner moaned, and allowed his slave to reach into his briefs, and take his throbbing cock in his hand. Mulder stroked it into full erection, then bestowed several little kisses along the hard shaft.

"I just want you to remember that I can do this," he whispered. "Before we go back to work, I want you to know that I can be attentive, and obedient, and thoughtful. I want you to believe I can be the perfect slave, and, um..." he looked up into Skinner's dark eyes, "I want you to remember that next week when I screw up, because I **will** screw up." And before Skinner could reply, Mulder enveloped his cock in his mouth, and brought him skillfully to climax, holding the other man's hips as his Master pumped into him. When he'd finished, Mulder looked up, hesitantly.

"Thank you, Fox," Skinner murmured, stroking the side of his face, softly.

Mulder smiled. Seeing Skinner like this today had made him appreciate the other man as a person, and not just as his Master. He was determined to find out more about the man who'd captured his heart, whether Skinner wanted to tell him or not. He wanted to discover what had happened to his Master in Vietnam, and he wanted to know who had lived in the upstairs apartment before he had arrived. He wanted to understand Skinner. He was hungry to uncover every last fact about his Master's past. He was, after all, as he had pointed out, a very good investigator, and he intended to put his skills to good use.

Mulder knew he faced a strapping before bed, and very probably a sleepless night, to say nothing of a stressful week ahead, but right here and now, he felt good - damn good, and that was because he knew where he belonged. Irrevocably, and without doubt. Whatever trials they faced, he knew he could cling onto that one fact.

"No. Thank **you**, Master," he replied softly.

## End of Part 10

### Chapter End Notes:

That was a sappy interlude before the storm. In the next chapter, Mulder returns to work, and just can't stop himself getting into trouble..

## Ring, Master? by Xanthe

### **Author's Notes:**

Posted: 10th December, 1999

No warning. I couldn't be bothered.

Many thanks to Emma, who told me a very intriguing tale that sparked this story off, as well as providing invaluable technical assistance, and some rather interesting ideas...

Thanks to CDavis for all the fabulous pics.

Special thanks to Gaby for the great suggestions, some of which turn up in this chapter :-). And to Phoebe too! There's a bit in this for her.

Quotation courtesy of my sweet Alex. None of this is beta'd. It's far too much fun to take seriously.

**24/7** is an erotic fantasy and NOT a BDSM resource guide. The truth is sometimes exaggerated, or played with, for dramatic effect. For more information, please visit the **24/7 BDSM Glossary**.

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*"A truth, still apparent, though disregarded, that things move violently to their place, but calmly in their place. To put it another way, everything has its right home, the region that suits it, and, unless forcibly restrained, will move thither by a kind of homing instinct."*

J. Winterson  
*"Art and Lies"*

Mulder lay very still, one eye on the clock as the digital display gradually changed, taking him closer and closer to doomsday. 5:58, 5:59...He should have got up an hour ago. He should have swum, he should be making his Master's coffee, and giving him his wake-up call, and instead he was...6:00. Skinner's alarm clock hummed into life. Mulder jumped. So, his Master wasn't going to leave his wake-up call **entirely** in the hands of his slave on a work day. Mulder didn't know whether to be insulted or relieved. He rolled over, the chain clinking around his neck, and squeezed his eyes shut as he heard Skinner get up. There was the sound of footsteps that stopped by his head, and then a deep, heart-felt sigh.

"Pretending to be asleep, pup?" He felt a toe dig into the side of his ribs, and sat up.

"No, Master. Yes, Master. Are you angry with me, Master?"

"Not yet. Should I be?" Skinner crouched down beside his slave, and Mulder looked into his Master's deep, dark, eyes, and swallowed nervously. Skinner held up a key, and unlocked his slave from the foot of his bed, where Mulder had chained himself in the middle of the night. "Go and make the coffee, and bring it back. Quickly, Fox. We're behind schedule now."

"But, Master..." Mulder began.

"You can fill me in on the whys and wherefors of how you came to be sleeping in my room when I've got a cup of coffee in my hands. I'm already kind of pissed off to have missed out on my usual wake-up perk, and I definitely don't function well before my morning coffee. Run, slave, and while you're making the coffee, you'd better give some serious thought to how you're going to explain yourself," Skinner warned. Mulder sighed, nodded, and left the room at a run.

He wasn't invited into the bed. Somehow that didn't surprise him. He knelt beside the bed while Skinner skimmed the paper, and hastily drank his coffee, then his Master and frowned at him.

"All right, pup. The honeymoon's over so we don't have time to linger. Make it quick."

"I couldn't sleep, Master," Mulder admitted.

"Why?" Skinner looked at him searchingly. Mulder shrugged. "Did you have another nightmare?" Skinner pressed.

Mulder bit on his lip. "Not exactly," he confessed.

"Hmm." Skinner moved his hand, and Mulder hesitated, then remembered his training, and went down on all fours, pressing his nose into the carpet. "I seem to recall that I gave you permission to come down here only after you'd had a nightmare. Not just if you couldn't sleep."

"Yes, Master. I know," Mulder sighed. "The thing is...I knew I'd be able to sleep down here, and I didn't want to screw up today because of being too tired, so..."

"So, you thought you finagle a night in your Master's room without paying for it," Skinner finished.

"No! Maybe." Mulder made a face. "Jeez, don't think I don't hate myself for coming over all needy, Master."

"Needy? No, that's just the problem, Fox," Skinner said. Mulder looked up in surprise. "If you were needy, I wouldn't have had to insist on you signing that contract - you'd have stuck by my side whether I wanted it or not. Nervy - yes, like a temperamental colt, but not needy. Half your trouble is that you don't see what you need, and you'd have no idea how to get it anyway. That's what I'm here for."

"Is it?" Mulder blinked.

"Yeah. Now get me the crop, and assume the grace position. Quickly."

Mulder did as he was told, and scrambled into position. He had a feeling that this was really going to hurt. He wasn't wrong. Skinner had given him a mild strapping the previous night, his arm, or maybe his heart, clearly not in the task, but this morning he was back on form. The crop landed with awesome precision on his ass, and it was all he could do to keep his position in the wake of the onslaught.

"Your litany, please, slave," Skinner demanded.

"I'm yours, Master," Mulder yelled.

"Just here?" Skinner prompted.

"No! Everywhere!" Mulder screeched.

"Will you remember that today?"

"YES! Oh god yes, I promise!"

When Skinner finally finished with him, the tears were flowing freely down his cheeks, and his breath was coming in hitching sobs. Skinner clicked his fingers, and Mulder sank gratefully to his knees, and kissed his Master's feet. "Now, remember that even small pleasures require sacrifice," Skinner told him. Then he bent down, and kissed his slave's lips, firmly. "You'll do fine, Fox," he murmured. "And if you don't, your ass will know about it."

"Master is..." Mulder began.

"Cruel? Tough? Yeah - like I said, boy, the honeymoon's over. Yesterday was about indulgence: me indulging you, and you indulging me. Today, we're back in the front line, back in the office, and you are back to being my subordinate, as well as my slave. You can and will handle it. I'll be with you every step of the way. Now get in the shower." Skinner pointed. Mulder hopped away quickly. Skinner was in a very brisk, very uncompromising mood this morning. Why did he love that so much?

Skinner joined him in the shower a second or so later. He pinned his slave against the wall, and held him under the water, then he kissed him again.

"Condom," was the first thing he said, when he let Mulder up for air. Mulder put his hand around the edge of the shower curtain, and fumbled his fingers along the shelf above the basin until he found the item in question. He handed it to his Master, then stood there awaiting further instructions. "Turn around," Skinner ordered. Mulder quivered, his cock hardening. Damn but he loved Skinner in full Masterful mode. It was such a turn on. He put his hands against the wall, and opened his legs, thrusting his butt back, ready to receive his Master. He felt Skinner stand behind him, and take his buttocks in his hands, caressing the hot flesh gently. His Master probed one finger into his ass, then two, and Mulder moaned and opened up even more. He gave a cry of sheer bliss as he felt the familiar tip of his Master's hard cock against his opening, then Skinner thrust inside him, up to the hilt, taking his breath away.

"Who do you belong to, pup?" Skinner demanded, his chest warm against Mulder's back.

"You, Master," Mulder panted.

"All right. Remember this moment all day - it should help you concentrate." Skinner's voice had a tone of wry amusement. He then proceeded to thrust into Mulder so hard, and so fast, that the slave thought he'd pass out. The stimulation of his prostate, combined with Skinner's masterful manner, was too much of a turn on for him. "Keep your hands on the wall. You can come but only after me, like a good slave," Skinner commanded, and a second later, he took hold of Mulder's cock and started to pump it in time to the rhythm of his thrusting. Shit, it was good! Mulder put his head back and let the water run down his face, gasping for air. It took all his willpower to hold on until Skinner came a few minutes later, and Mulder had his own climax barely seconds afterwards. They both stood there, panting, for a while, and Mulder enjoyed the sensation of being connected in the aftermath of their mutual pleasure. Then Skinner withdrew. "Okay. What do you have to say to me, boy?" He asked. Mulder swallowed, and went down on his knees in the water.

"Thank you, Master. You are such a fucking stallion," Mulder grinned. Skinner frowned, and cuffed the side of his head lightly with the back of his hand.

"And you are always just one step away from a taste of my strap on your bare ass. Remember that, slave."

"Yes, Master." Mulder allowed himself to wallow in a moment of total adoration, then got up, and began to soap his Master.

"Do yourself. I don't want you to **ever** be late for work on my account," Skinner told him firmly. Mulder nodded, and washed his own body quickly, watching out of the corner of his eye, as Skinner finished, and then handed the shower head to his slave.

"Don't you want me to dry you, Master?" he asked, frantically.

"No, not today. Dry yourself, then get upstairs and get ready. You're dismissed," Skinner told him curtly.

"Yes, Master."

Mulder finished washing and drying himself, then scampered back into his Master's bedroom to find Skinner getting his clothes out of his closet. Mulder ran past him, and put one hand on the door, then some devil in him prompted him to turn back. He sidled up to his Master, and kissed the back of his neck, pausing long enough for a quick grope of Skinner's sleek, muscled flesh.

"See you in the office, Master," he murmured. Skinner turned with another growl, and swatted him hard on his naked, glowing backside. Mulder yelped. "I love you too, Master," he flung over his shoulder, before beating a hasty retreat. Something told him that it wouldn't be wise to linger.

He didn't see Skinner again before he went to work. He didn't know whether he left the apartment before his Master or after him. He put on one of the new shirts and ties Skinner had bought him, and examined himself in the mirror. He looked fine. Crisp white shirt, tasteful navy tie. His Master would approve. Mulder grinned at his reflection, grabbed his keys and cellphone, then let himself out of the apartment and ran along to the elevator. He felt alive! He had never gone into work feeling so completely alive before in his life. He just felt so damn good!

Mulder took the metro to work. His butt was stinging nicely, and at least he could spend the entire journey standing to give it time to recover. He breezed into the Hoover building, waved a cheery hello to anyone he recognized, and laughed when most of them looked over their shoulders, wondering if he was waving at someone else. He sauntered along the corridor, couldn't be bothered to wait for the elevator to take him down, and took the stairs two at a time instead. He paused for a moment outside the door to the basement, and then put out his hand to open it...and froze. Shit! The ring! Scully would see it and ask him all kinds of questions. What the hell was he going to tell her? Mulder went back and perched on the bottom step of the staircase for a moment, thinking it through.

He could tell her that he just got married. *No, asshole, she'd be hurt that you didn't tell her you were dating!*

Well, he could tell her it was a sudden thing - he just met someone and married them in the space of one week. *No, asshole, then she'd ask you lots of questions about your new wife and insist on meeting her!*

Okay. He could tell her...that he was sick and tired of being chatted up and this was to keep the vultures away. *Yeah, right. How many times has she ever seen you being chatted up? That is so convincing, lame-brain.*

Okay, how about...how about I tell her the truth? Mulder's withering internal voice didn't even bother to snort in disgust at **that** suggestion.

Okay...how about...

The door to the basement office suddenly opened. Mulder felt his life flash in front of him, and in a split second made his decision. He took the wedding ring off, shuffled it swiftly into his pocket, then got to his feet and smiled a falsely cheerful grin just as Scully stepped into the corridor.

"Oh, hi, Mulder," she said absently, flicking through a file. "Have a good vacation?"

"Fantastic," he breathed.

She looked up sharply. "It must have been good. My god, what's **happened** to you?" She asked incredulously.

"What do you mean?" Mulder looked down. Were his nipple rings showing through his shirt? No, that was impossible - he'd worn a vest underneath on purpose to hide them. Had Scully suddenly developed X-ray vision? Could she see through his pants? Had she somehow caught a glimpse of his cock ring?

"You! My god!" Scully circled around him, then gave a low whistle. "You look so...clean. And well dressed, and...Mulder - are you glowing?" She asked suspiciously. Mulder flushed. *Only my ass, Scully.*

"No. Only pregnant women glow, Scully. Everyone knows that," he told her loftily, disappearing into his office.

"Mulder! You're not pregnant are you?" She teased, following him in.

"Ha, ha. Very funny. No, I'm not." He flicked a paper clip at her.

"Then you must be in love," Scully said firmly. He looked up, too quickly. "You **are** in love! I knew it. Tell me everything." She perched herself on the side of the desk and looked at him expectantly.

"There's nothing to tell. You've been reading too many romances," he said, glancing nonchalantly around his office. Oh, it was good to be back! He went over to his filing cabinets and delved into his beloved X Files. "I missed you babies," he crooned to them.

Scully rolled her eyes. "They didn't miss you, Mulder. You should take a vacation more often. It obviously agrees with you."

"Yeah. Maybe. It wasn't so bad after all," Mulder said softly.

"I'm pleased. When you left here last Friday, you were so nervy I thought you were going to your doom or something. It obviously turned out better than you expected."

"Yes." Mulder glanced at her, a shy smile on his lips. "Yes, it did, Scully. It did." He took a bundle of files out of the cabinet, and dumped them on his desk.

"What are you looking for?" Scully frowned.

"People who undergo transforming sexual experiences," he grinned at her.

She put her hands up in mock surrender. "Okay, Mulder. You're on your own with that one." She walked back to her desk, and he sat down with a sigh, then gave a yelp and jumped right up again.

"Problem?" Scully raised a quizzical eyebrow.

"Uh, no. I'd just, um...forgotten how hard these Bureau seats are." Mulder smiled feebly at her.

She raised her other eyebrow. "Are you sure you're feeling okay, Mulder?" She asked. "I mean first of all you come in here looking like...like...Skinner or something, all crisp and clean - not that you're normally dirty, just that now you're almost sparkling. Then you talk about pregnancy and transforming sexual experiences, and now you're jumping around as if you have ants in your pants...a girl has to wonder, Mulder."

"I'm fine," he said firmly, seating himself back at his desk gingerly. "Never better in fact."

"That's good." She smiled sweetly, and handed him a note. "Because Skinner called just before you got here. He wants to see us both in ten minutes. Mulder? Hello?"

Mulder banged his head on the desk. Ten minutes. You'd think his Master could have given him longer than that to adjust to all this, although he couldn't blame the man for wanting to check up on him so soon. Ten minutes. Ten minutes until he had to sit in the same room as his Master, with Scully by his side, and pretend that they hadn't just spanked, screwed, and sucked their way through an entire week. Mulder came out in a cold sweat.

He spent the next ten minutes searching frantically around his office for the reports he had been working on before he went away. He had almost forgotten about them, and Skinner would be bound to ask. He found them under a pile of junk mail, and a dozen or more inter-office memorandums which he threw straight into the trash with his usual disdain for such things. He skimmed through the files quickly, trying to remember the salient points about the cases. Luckily his eidetic memory kicked in, and he was astonished how quickly he snapped back into work mode.

"Did you finish the medical evidence on these?" He asked Scully. She nodded, and handed him another file. He looked through it, fascinated by her findings. "I said you'd find evidence of Alzheimer's in the brain tissue, Scully," he told her.

"Yes, Mulder. And you are always right, Mulder." Scully made a face at him.

"Well I am!" He grinned. "Well, about this kind of stuff anyway."

"It's time." She glanced at her watch, and finished her coffee.

"Damn. I'm not quite up to speed..." Mulder got to his feet, flicking through the file frantically.

"Don't sweat it, partner!" Scully opened the door for him, and pushed him through. "Skinner knows you've been on vacation. Hey, Skinner's been on vacation too, so he's probably got some catching up to do as well."

"Right. Good." Mulder put a finger under the collar of his starched new shirt, and loosened it slightly.

They waited for a couple of minutes in Kim's office, while Skinner finished a call, and Mulder paced, anxiously.

"Mulder!" Scully stared at him. "Calm down. You didn't go off investigating something while on vacation did you?" She asked suspiciously. "There's nothing going on here that I don't know about is there?"

"Um, no I didn't go out investigating, Scully. I took a vacation, like I said I was going to," Mulder protested. "In fact, I hardly went out anywhere all week." That was true enough. "I was a slave to the chores and the apartment." He grinned at his own little joke. Scully didn't have time to reply, as Kim's buzzer went, and they were nodded into Skinner's office.

Scully went first, and Mulder's heart nearly stood still as he caught his first glimpse of his Master back in his more familiar domain. Skinner was wearing one of the crisp white shirts that Mulder had ironed, and he looked devastatingly, dangerously...deadly. His Master's eyes flickered over Mulder as if he were nothing more than...one of his agents. Which he was of course. *Just keep moving, asshole. Don't do anything stupid.* Mulder shuffled nervously over to one of the chairs in front of Skinner's desk, and sat down.

"Welcome back, Agent Mulder," Skinner said urbanely. "I trust you had a good vacation?"

Mulder swallowed convulsively, willing his vocal chords to work. "Yes, sir," he managed to croak. "The best I've ever had, actually." He glanced up at his Master from under his eyelashes, and saw the faintest flicker of a knowing smile in Skinner's dark, shielded eyes.

"Good."

"I hear you were on vacation too." Mulder sat back in his chair, and relaxed slightly.

"That's right." Skinner took the file Scully was handing to him, and opened it. He didn't give any more information than that on his vacation, much to Mulder's disappointment. He **thought** it had been good for Skinner too, but maybe it hadn't. Maybe Skinner had trained better, cuter, more obedient, and sexually insatiable slaves in his time. Maybe Mulder had just been another in a long line of people willing to do his Master's laundry. God knows, there had never been a time when Skinner hadn't worn those exquisitely ironed shirts, so he probably had a conveyor belt of slaves, constantly doing his washing. When one moved out, another one just moved straight in.

"Agent Mulder." Skinner's voice broke into this bleak internal reverie.

"Yeah. What?" He growled back. Scully gave him a surprised look, clearly startled by his tone.

"You were writing me some reports too?" Skinner prompted.

"They're not finished." Mulder snapped.

"Did you bring what you have?" Skinner asked mildly, his dark eyes boring into Mulder.

"No. You hate receiving unfinished reports," Mulder told him, sulkily.

"A progress report is acceptable."

"Okay." Mulder shrugged.

"Do you have anything further to add to Agent Scully's report?" Skinner pressed.

"Yes - it's clear that with this advanced level of Alzheimer's, the perp could not have committed these crimes..." Mulder began. Then his eyes flickered away from his boss, and skimmed over the briefcase that was on the floor beside his desk. His throat went dry. He recognized that briefcase! It was **his** briefcase. The one with all the special, Fox-engraved implements in it...Skinner had brought it here! Mulder's throat dried up in horror. Surely, surely, Skinner didn't intend to use them on him in the **office?**  
*Please, god, no!*

"Agent Mulder?" Skinner was looking concerned. "Would you like a glass of water?"

"Uh, yes...please..." he whispered. Scully got up, poured Mulder some water, and handed it to him. He took it, and gulped it down thankfully. It was only as he placed the glass back on the table that he realized he wasn't wearing his ring.

SHIT!

Mulder felt his whole world collapse around his ears. Why hadn't he put the ring back on for the meeting? Why had he forgotten?

FUCK!

He pulled his hands back quickly, and covered his left one with the right, hiding it from sight.

"Your theory?" Skinner asked pleasantly.

"My theory..." Mulder's eyes shifted back to the briefcase, while his fingers nervously caressed the place where his missing ring should have been. *Please god, don't let him have noticed. Please!* "...is that, um, in his weakened condition, the perp's body was taken over, and inhabited by a being, or beings who committed these crimes in his place," Mulder gabbled. There was no good way to expound this particular theory, so he didn't bother dressing it up in more acceptable language.

"I see. In other words, the perp was possessed," Skinner commented, neutrally.

"Um. Yes." Mulder went red.

"By what? Or whom?" Skinner asked.

"Evil spirits?" Mulder shrugged, trying manfully to drag his eyes away from the briefcase.

"Right." Skinner nodded, then glanced at Scully. "And the scientific viewpoint would be, Agent Scully?"

She smiled. "Sometimes people with Alzheimer's regress to a point in their past when they were younger, and stronger, and they experience that as their current reality. I would suggest that's what happened here."

"Good. Thank you." Skinner smiled at her. *Hah! Yeah, trust him to go along with the scientific viewpoint*, Mulder thought bitterly. "Tell me, Agent Scully, were there any identifying signs on the perp's body? You're sure we've got the right person?" Skinner asked. Scully raised an eyebrow. It was a pertinent question but she'd covered it in her report.

"Yes, sir. He was wearing a distinctively engraved wedding ring," she said. Mulder's heart sank. He looked up into Skinner's dark, impassive eyes. His Master stared back, coolly.

"I see. He still wore his wedding ring even though you say his wife passed away..." Skinner flicked through the file, "ten years previously. How devoted of him." He glanced at Mulder with a look of pure ice. "Some people only have to be in a committed relationship for five minutes before they forget their devotion, and are only too happy to discard the visible symbols of the vows they've made." Mulder felt the ground open up and swallow him. He'd noticed! Oh, god, now he was in such deep shit. "Well, agents, I think that's all." Skinner handed them the file, which Scully took, with a smile. She got up, and Mulder found himself numbly following her to the door, his legs functioning on auto-pilot. He almost got there. He was so nearly safe, so close to freedom. He actually had his hand on the door, and one foot outside the office, when Skinner reeled him back in, like a fish on the end of a line.

"Agent Mulder." Skinner's voice was silkily smooth, but Mulder wasn't fooled. He froze, took a deep breath, then turned back. "I'd like a private word with you, if I may. You can go, Agent Scully." He smiled at her over Mulder's shoulder. "I have a little task for Agent Mulder. He might be some time." Mulder's heart, already inhabiting the pit of his stomach, now fled into his shoes. He sent Scully a desperate,

telepathic plea for help, which she clearly didn't receive, as she just smiled, and continued on her way, leaving him all alone with certain death. Mulder shut the door quietly, and turned around.

"Before you say anything - I can explain!" He said desperately.

"All right." Skinner sat back, expectantly. "But this had better be more convincing than 'I was drugged', Fox."

"That was the truth!" Mulder protested. Skinner raised an eyebrow. Mulder decided that now was not the best moment to go into **that** particular event. "Look, I'm sorry." Mulder walked back to the desk, and stood in front of his Master. "I know I shouldn't have taken the ring off, but I didn't want to upset Scully."

"Why would you wearing a ring upset your partner?" Skinner frowned.

"I just figured she'd be upset I hadn't told her I'd got married!"

"All right. Why didn't you raise this issue with me?" Skinner asked.

"I forgot!" Mulder protested desperately.

"You've had a while week to bring this up, Fox. One factor in our relationship was most definitely not negotiable, and I made that very clear. Your ring stays on at all times. In fact, **all** your rings stay on at all times, unless I remove them."

"Why? **You** don't have to wear a goddamn ring!" Mulder growled in protest.

"I'm not a slave. You are," Skinner replied pointedly. "And I'm not arguing about this. You knew the rules." He clicked his fingers. Mulder stared at him.

"Not here. I mean..." Mulder glanced around the office nervously. "I mean...Kim's next door," he whispered.

"Yes, she is. So you'll have to keep quiet. Now, are you going to obey me, or do I have to make you." Skinner got to his feet, and Mulder sank to his knees without further protest. He wasn't stupid. "Good. Now go and get the briefcase." Skinner pointed. Mulder crawled to retrieve the case, and presented it to his Master.

"I still can't believe that you brought this here," Mulder whined.

Skinner raised an eyebrow, and glanced at his watch. "Fox, it's 8:54 a.m. You've lasted less than half an hour before requiring correction. I think it's a good thing I **did** bring this in," Skinner said coolly. He loosened Mulder's tie, then undid the top button of his shirt, and reached inside. Mulder closed his eyes as Skinner retrieved the key to the briefcase, and opened it. His Master gave him an assessing look for several seconds, his fingers touching each implement in turn as he considered the matter. Then he pulled out the strap. Mulder's heart sank out of his body and down into the very foundations of the building. "Open your mouth," Skinner said unexpectedly.

"My mouth...?" Mulder had no sooner opened it to speak, than Skinner stuck the strap between his lips. "Now, follow me," Skinner said. "You can walk."

Mulder got up, feeling ridiculous with the strap in his mouth, and walked across the room. Skinner opened the door to his en-suite bathroom, and turned the light on, then he put down the lid on the toilet seat.

"Kneel," he instructed. Mulder obeyed, glumly. "Undo your pants, and bend over the seat," Skinner commanded. Mulder looked up at him, with a mute plea. Skinner raised an eyebrow. Mulder sighed, and obeyed. "Good."

Mulder felt Skinner's hands tug his trousers and boxers down to his knees, leaving his butt exposed. He moaned, softly, but he had to admit that he found the idea of being punished in his Master's office a turn-on. He looked up at Skinner expectantly, waiting for his Master to take the strap out of his mouth, but he didn't.

"Now, I have a meeting in a couple of minutes. I expect it'll last an hour or so. You'll wait there, butt up in the air, until I have the time, and inclination, to give you what you deserve. Use the time wisely, Fox, and don't move. I'm sure I don't need to tell you not to make any noise either - not unless you want your fellow agents to come and take a look at what I'm keeping in my bathroom. I'm sure that they'd find it a most amusing sight - Agent Mulder, ass up over the toilet seat, with a strap in his mouth, awaiting punishment." Mulder gave a deep, heartfelt groan. It was both excruciating, and fiendish. Only his Master could have come up with something like this. He tried to speak but only succeeded in muttering a muffled, garbled sentence. Skinner removed the strap from his mouth and looked at him expectantly.

"What if someone wants to use the bathroom, Master?" Mulder squeaked.

"You'd better hope they don't." Skinner put the strap back in his mouth, and pushed Mulder's head down so that he was looking at the tiled floor. "An hour, Fox. Think about how much you hurt my feelings with your behavior, and how disobedience is **always** punished. Your bare, exposed butt, offered up for my attention should serve as a reminder."

Mulder bit down on the strap to avoid making a smart reply, and Skinner delivered a swat to his ass with his hand. "Don't ruin that strap, boy - I don't expect to see teeth marks on it," he warned, and then he left the bathroom, leaving the door ajar behind him.

Mulder knelt there for a long while, still reeling from this turn of events. This could not be happening to him. It couldn't! He could not be kneeling in Assistant Director Skinner's private office bathroom, ass exposed to the world, with a strap in his mouth awaiting punishment. Just over a week ago, the very idea would have been unthinkable. Shit! How the hell had this happened? Something that Skinner had said stayed in his mind though. *"Think about how much you hurt my feelings..."* He had never intended that. He should have realized how much his Master enjoyed seeing visible symbols of his ownership on his slave's body. He'd mentioned it enough times over the past week after all, and the wedding ring was the only visible symbol when Mulder was fully dressed. Mulder sighed. He had screwed up and he hated that Skinner might have been made upset rather than angry by his actions.

Mulder stiffened, hearing sounds in the office behind him. His whole body tingled in nervous anticipation, as he heard Skinner greet a couple of agents, and instruct them to sit. Mulder tensed, and

stayed tensed for a good ten minutes. Shit, supposing one of them wanted to use the bathroom? Supposing he dropped the strap - his jaw was already aching. Supposing he moved, and made a noise? His tense muscles were making him shake with the effort of staying in position. Surely Skinner wouldn't know if he moved into a sitting position, would he? How could he know if Mulder took the strap out of his mouth? Mulder thought about it for a second, then came to a decision. He slowly, silently, removed the strap, and placed it gently on the floor, then he turned around, oh so carefully...and froze.

Skinner had left the door ajar on purpose. From where he sat at his desk, the interior of the bathroom was clearly visible - although the angle would have made it impossible for anyone sitting facing him to see in. Mulder crossed his fingers behind his back. If he moved very slowly back into his original position it might not be too...damn! Busted. Skinner's eyes suddenly flicked in his direction. The big man's expression didn't change, but his gaze lingered just long enough to make it clear to Mulder that he'd been seen. Mulder sat on the floor, wretchedly, trying to come to a decision. This wasn't helped by the fact that his cock seemed to have found the whole event a complete turn-on and was now starting to harden. Inside he was terrified though. He was in enough trouble as it was, without making things worse for himself. *How do you always manage to do that, asshole?*

Finally, deciding that he could at least repair some of the damage by returning to his original position, Mulder turned around, and arranged himself back over the toilet seat. He picked up the strap, and placed it in his mouth, then raised his butt so that it was once more in Skinner's line of sight. *Enjoy the view, Master, you mean son of a bitch.*

Mulder didn't think he'd ever spent a worse hour in his life. Each second trickled by slowly, and his muscles seized up with the effort of staying in position. The strap smelt divine but it didn't exactly taste good, and he was petrified that it would drop out of his mouth, onto the tiled floor. He listened with one ear as Skinner discussed tedious expense reports, and for a brief second pitied his Master for having to spend his days in such boring pastimes. No wonder he wanted a slave on the premises to take his frustrations out on. No, that was definitely not a good thought. Mulder was painfully aware of his ass, waiting naked for its inevitable punishment. Very soon, this strap, which he knew stung like hell, would be tormenting his poor, exposed butt. Mulder wished he could sigh, but he was too scared of making any noise.

Finally, the interminable meeting came to an end, and Mulder heard the other agents leave the room, and Skinner murmuring something to Kim. Then he heard heavy footsteps crossing the office in his direction. His stomach started to do that series of flips that it always did when he knew he was in trouble. The door was pushed open, and then shut, and locked, and Mulder looked up into his Master's stern, dark eyes.

"Is it too much to expect you to be obedient in even the most minor matters?" Skinner asked him. "Do you take any aspect of your slavery seriously? Or is it all just a game to you? Is your servitude, something you offered up freely to me, so worthless? Merely something you pay lip service to - to be ignored whenever you think you aren't being watched? Well?" Skinner folded his arms over his chest and waited for an answer. Mulder knelt up, and took the strap out of his mouth.

"I'm sorry, Master, but how the hell was I suppose to keep still for a whole hour?" He demanded.

"Fox, if I told you to fly to the moon I'd expect you to at least try," Skinner riposted, hands on hips. Mulder opened his mouth to make a smart reply, then closed it again, sensing that he was on very dangerous ground. "All right - you're in trouble, boy. Big trouble. Now, give me that strap and get back over the toilet seat. And Fox?" Skinner took the strap from his hapless slave, and Mulder looked up at him, glumly. "Don't count on being able to sit comfortably for the rest of the day," Skinner warned. Mulder gave his Master a look of intense dislike, and then, grudgingly arranged himself over the toilet seat. "All right. What lesson will you learn from this?" Skinner asked, holding the strap over Mulder's exposed butt, caressing the leather against his flesh in a way that made his slave moan in scared anticipation.

"To obey you, Master."

"Well, I'm not holding my breath on **that** score, but yes. **And?**" Skinner prompted.

"To talk to you about what's going on in my head, Master," Mulder said with a sigh.

"Good." Skinner laid the first stroke across Mulder's butt, and he gave a strangled yelp as the pain kicked in. Damn but that strap stung! "Here." Skinner paused, and gave Mulder a clean, freshly starched handkerchief. Mulder stuffed it into his mouth, with a hitching sob, glancing up at his Master out of the corner of his eye to see if his distress would earn him a reprieve. It didn't. Skinner pushed him back down and proceeded to tan his hide thoroughly, and efficiently with the strap until Mulder squirmed, his long arms waving like a windmill as he tried to stay still and take his punishment. Finally, Skinner let him up, and gestured to him to kneel in front of him. He took the handkerchief out of Mulder's mouth, and used it to gently wipe his slave's tear-stained cheeks, then he took Mulder's face between his hands, and looked down at him.

"What am I going to do with you?" He asked, softly.

"I dunno, Master." Mulder shrugged.

"Where's the ring?" Skinner held out his hand, and Mulder reached in his pocket and handed the wedding ring over. "Fox, this isn't just a piece of metal to me. It's a lot more than that." Skinner took Mulder's left hand, and kissed it, tenderly. "I'd like it to mean a lot more than that to you, but it's clear that it doesn't."

"It does!" Mulder protested. Skinner's disappointment was harder to bear than all the punishments in the world. "Master, I'm yours. I've given myself to you and I wear all your symbols with pride. You have no idea...no idea at all how much they mean to me," Mulder choked.

"Good - because you have no idea how much **you** mean to me," Skinner told him quietly. He pushed the ring gently back onto Mulder's finger, before reaching down and helping the other man to stand. Then he took Mulder in his arms, and kissed him firmly on the lips. Mulder hung there, in his Master's grasp, wanting to hate him for strapping him so hard, but succeeding only in melting against that big body, and holding on to that solidly muscled form. Skinner released him, and was immediately back to his business-like persona.

"Get dressed, Fox, and get those reports to me as soon as possible," he ordered.

"Yes, Master." Mulder pulled his boxers and pants gingerly over his backside. Skinner looked at his bobbing cock, and shook his head.

"Fox - if you go and relieve **that** particular ache in the men's room, then the strapping I just gave you will seem like a walk in the park. Understand me? I don't want you playing with **my** toys, or there'll be less left for me later."

Mulder sighed. "Is there even the faintest possibility that you will **ever** give me the slightest break?" He asked.

"No." Skinner grinned, then he put a big arm around the younger man, and hugged him. "So, tell me," he whispered, directly into Mulder's ear as he escorted him out of the bathroom, "how long have you had this fantasy about being disciplined in my office?"

Mulder went red. "Since the very first day I sat in front of that big head-fuck of a desk of yours, while you made me wait like a schoolboy as you read my first report," he replied.

"That long?" Skinner raised an amused eyebrow.

"Yeah. I have a desk fetish - did I ever tell you that, Master? And a ruler fetish - you kept slapping your ruler against one of your hands in a way that gave me a hard-on so bad I had to pick up a file to hide it."

"A desk fetish, hmm?" Skinner shook his head. "Ah, my insatiable little slave. You'll be the death of me yet," he sighed.

"And how long have you wanted to hand out some office discipline?" Mulder asked with a sly grin. "Don't tell me that never crossed your mind before."

"It never crossed my mind before I had to deal with **you**, that's for sure," Skinner growled, landing a swat on Mulder's sore backside that made his slave yelp. "Now, get out of my office, boy, and try and behave for the rest of the day." He opened his office door, and ushered Mulder out. "And Agent Mulder - I have a meeting with you and the other department heads at 2.30. Don't be late."

"No, sir!" Mulder shook his head vigorously.

Mulder ran down the stairs and back into his office, whistling to himself. His butt ached, but somehow his Master's kisses had made everything better. Scully was busy working on her report and he was eager to get to work on his. His ingenious brain was filled to the brim with facts relating to the perp with Alzheimer's and he wanted to get them down and move on to the next case. He perched gingerly in front of his computer, and logged on to the Internet, tracking down some obscure facts about the disease, and saving them to incorporate into his report. A sudden thought occurred to him. His fascination with his Master's mysterious past was always bubbling away in his mind, and now they were back at work there seemed to be even more of a curious dichotomy here. It was hard to reconcile hard-assed, tightly controlled Assistant Director Skinner with the sensualist owner of that 18th floor Playroom, and Mulder was burned up with curiosity on the subject. He shelved his research into Alzheimer's, and went into the records of previous owners of the apartment that was his new home. It took him an hour or so of diligent study, but then he found his answer: Skinner hadn't bought either the 17th **or** the 18th floor apartments. He'd inherited them a few years previously. Mulder scrolled through

the information eagerly, and found that Skinner's mysterious benefactor had been a man called Andrew Linker. So far, so good. Mulder filed the name away for future reference, and looked up, feeling hungry...only to find Scully staring at him, both eyebrows raised sky high.

"So, Mulder, who's the lucky lady and where did you spend the honeymoon?" She asked.

"What?" Mulder frowned, then he remembered the ring. "Oh this?" He grinned, pointing to the ring and affecting nonchalance. "It's just a..." he racked his brains, and blurted out the first thing that came into his head, "a bet!" he said triumphantly. Scully's eyebrows disappeared into her hairline and showed no signs of ever reappearing. "Um...yeah, I lost a bet with a friend, and the penalty was wearing this for a month," he told her. It sounded stupid even to his own ears.

"Uh huh." She crossed her arms over her chest, and waited. Mulder searched desperately for those eyebrows but they had clearly decided to go for a trek over the top of her head and down the back of her skull.

"Okay...the truth... the truth is..." Mulder hesitated, and went with one of his earlier options. "I was getting sick of being hit upon the whole time, you know. I thought the ring might keep the vultures at bay."

"What?" Scully frowned. Mulder's heart sank. "Well, I've noticed that you get looked at a lot, partner, but I didn't realize you had a problem with that. To be honest, I wasn't sure you'd even noticed. I've seen some women, and even the occasional man," she gave him a sly grin, "try and chat you up, but it passes you right by."

"When?" Mulder asked blankly. "When did that happen?" Then he realized he'd blown that cover story too.

Scully sighed. "Come on, Mulder - why are you really wearing a wedding ring? Did you get married?"

"No." Mulder said, grateful that much was the truth at least.

"Then why?"

Mulder sighed, running out of options. "Okay, but you won't like it," he warned.

"Just spit it out, partner!" She cried, clearly exasperated.

Mulder took a deep breath. She was his friend, right? And friends were supposed to be supportive about this kind of stuff. Okay, so it was a lot to hit her with all in one go, but she deserved the truth. "All right," he began, looking studiously at his own feet to avoid her searching stare. "There's some stuff you don't know about me. Basically...I, um, I'm into the BDSM scene, and I just, uh, sold myself into slavery and last week I was being, um, trained which is why I took a vacation. So now I belong to someone and that's why I wear the ring to signify that I'm owned and therefore not...um, available." He ran out of steam, and looked up to see what the reaction was.

"Uh huh." He hated it when she said that in that special tone of voice. "I see." She gave him her patented Scully "look" and he squirmed. "And, uh, how long have you known this, um new **owner** of yours?" She was one step away from giggling. He could tell.

"A long time." Mulder went an interesting shade of brick red.

"And is she attractive?" Scully pressed.

"Very...but, uh, she's not a she." Mulder winced, and waited for the reaction. Scully put her head on one side and gazed at him quizzically.

"She's an alien?" She asked.

"I wish!" Mulder shook his head ruefully. "No, I mean, that is...my new owner is a man. I have a...Master."

You could have heard a pin drop.

"Right." Scully said in a tone that implied she didn't believe a word of it but was going to indulge him in the fantasy anyway. Mulder heaved a sigh of relief and took a deep gulp of his now cold coffee. "Okay, Mulder. So, tell me about this training of yours. Did your, uh, **master**, give you a slave name?"

Mulder's coffee went down the wrong way and he choked, then coughed energetically onto his desk. "What..." he rasped feebly after several minutes, "do you know about slave names, Scully?"

"I'm not a complete innocent, Mulder." She gave him an infuriating wink, and he stared at her mesmerized. His Scully. His lovely Scully - surely she wasn't into the lifestyle? An image of her in a tight corset waving a whip sprang into his mind and he dismissed it. Not his Scully. He'd know if she played on the scene anyway - he'd gone through all the tops around, male and female, until he'd fetched up in Skinner's lap, so to speak. "So, come on, what's your slave name?"

"It's Fox," he told her weakly.

"Fox?" Her eyebrows went on another of their mountaineering expeditions into the far reaches of her hair. "Isn't that a bit unoriginal, Mulder? Or doesn't your master have much of an imagination?"

"Well, it's not that." Mulder shifted uncomfortably. "It's more like an exquisite form of torture, Scully. You see, he knows I hate my name, and to have your slave name be your real name is kind of cruel as well. Sort of the ultimate humiliation, so that's why he chose Fox. I didn't have any say in the matter."

"I see." She nodded. "So does your master spank you, Mulder?" He could see that she was enjoying every second of this game. She thought she was calling his bluff, when in actual fact every word he'd told her was the truth. Mulder couldn't help but appreciate the irony, and he laughed out loud.

"Yeah, Scully. He spanks me good - but only when I'm bad," he winked at her.

"Oh dear. Your poor master. His right arm must ache then," she mused. He glared at her, and she burst out laughing. "Oh, Mulder, honestly, you could have come up with something more realistic than this

cock and bull story!" she exclaimed. "I don't care about the ring, Mulder. If you don't want to tell me, that's fine - it's none of my business, but you could have just said that," she told him reprovingly. He sighed, and nodded. Jeez - she was worse than Skinner on this whole honesty issue. "You haven't forgotten that we're having lunch together, have you, Mulder?" She asked him.

"No," he grinned. "My treat." It was the least he could do, and it was Skinner's money anyway - he'd use the credit card his Master had given him.

"You're on!" She grinned back. "Slaveboy!" She added as an afterthought. Mulder cringed inside. Maybe it hadn't been such a good idea telling her the truth after all. She seemed to be enjoying the whole joke immensely. On the other hand - it was good to see her so happy. He was so content himself, in his new life, and his new living arrangement that he could hardly begrudge her a little bit of fun at his expense.

The telephone interrupted them. Mulder picked it up.

"Yo! Slaveboys R Us!" he announced, grinning at Scully who gave him a thumbs up sign.

"Mulder - long time, no talk," a voice on the other end of the line purred. Mulder sat down heavily, ignoring the streak of pain that shot through his body as his sore backside made contact with the chair. Krycek.

"What do you want?" he hissed.

"That's no way to greet an old friend."

"You're no friend of mine."

"I could be though. I have information you might like to hear." Mulder glanced at Scully. She'd returned to her report, although she was obviously listening to this conversation with half an ear.

"It's about your sister," Krycek murmured, in sibilant tones.

It was a trap. It had to be a trap. Krycek knew that the one way to lure him anywhere was to mention Samantha. He had a pavlovian response to her name. He thought about Scully, and her dead sister, about his own dead father. You can't trust this man, Mulder, he told himself. *You can't*. "Remember I gave you that information about the black oil," Krycek told him, sounding like the devil himself in his efforts to tempt Mulder.

"No." Mulder snapped. "I'm not playing this game with you."

"We could arrange to meet," Krycek ignored him. "She's fine - safe and well. A... mutual acquaintance of ours visited her last week. He took me along as his driver. Don't you want to know where she's living?"

Mulder closed his eyes, and counted to ten. He remembered Skinner telling him only yesterday that Mulder knew the kind of behavior his Master would approve of, and what he wouldn't. He had been ordered to go and speak to Skinner if he was in any doubt. He wasn't in any doubt though, and he knew what Skinner would say - he would tell him it was too risky.

"No," he said, finally, through great effort of will. "This time I'm not biting," and he slammed the phone down. A sense of euphoria flooded through his veins. He'd done the right thing. His Master would be proud of him. That didn't still the tiny, nagging voice at the back of his mind though. Supposing Krycek had been telling the truth? Supposing his sister was out there, just waiting for him to find her?

"Mulder?" Scully was looking at him with concerned blue eyes.

"It's okay." He gave her a half smile. "Hey - isn't it time for lunch, partner?"

Mulder took Scully to an expensive Italian restaurant nearby. He talked too much, trying to distract himself from thinking about Krycek's phone call, but he knew he sounded like he'd taken speed. He was gabbling, and not making a lot of sense. Scully was giving him one of her worried looks, and he could see she was wearing her 'Dr. Scully' hat.

"Slow down, Mulder." She put her hand gently over his. "Is there something worrying you?" She asked him.

"No. Why should there be? Do you like that sparkling water? I could get you still, or how about a diet coke?"

"This is fine. Mulder...if you can't talk to me, perhaps you could talk to..." Her eyes flickered over his wedding ring. "The person who gave you that," she finished.

Mulder bit on his lip. "I said, I'm fine. I'm great. Hey, tell me how work was last week without me to keep you entertained." He sat back in his chair, and tried to stop fidgeting.

"Quiet. I missed you." She smiled. "But you needed the break and you're looking terrific, Mulder. Seriously - this, uh, master of yours is clearly doing you good." Her lips twisted up at the side, as if she wasn't sure whether this was a game or not.

"Thanks." He took a sip of his own water and caught a reflection of himself in the mirror opposite. He looked rested, and his skin was...well Scully was right - he did look 'glowing'. *It must be love...*

It was so good to be back with Scully again that Mulder started to relax. They talked for longer than they should have done, and overshot their lunch hour. Mulder looked around for a waiter so he could call for the check...and then froze. A familiar face loomed into his vision. Green eyes sparkled at him, and Krycek's mouth twisted into a grin of greeting. He was sitting at a table across the restaurant, just watching...and waiting. It was too much for Mulder. He got to his feet, angrily.

"Mulder?" Scully looked at him in surprise.

"Go back to work. I'll see you later," he told her.

"Mulder...the check...I didn't bring any money!" She protested.

"Here." He reached into his pocket and pulled out all the cash Skinner had given to him - he didn't have time to wait for the credit card to be processed. Then he turned and ran.

Krycek had already disappeared by the time he got to the door of the restaurant. Mulder pulled it open and ran outside, and down the street. A car pulled up in front of him, and the door opened.

"Get in." Krycek was the only occupant of the car. Mulder weighed it up, looked up and down the street, and then did what they both knew he was going to do anyway. He got in.

"What's the deal, Krycek?" Mulder drew his gun and held it pointed at the other man. Krycek grinned.

"Use that and you'll never find her," he said.

"Where is she?"

"I can't tell you." Krycek grinned again. Mulder grabbed him by the collar, nearly resulting in the car going off the road. Krycek shoved Mulder away.

"You told me you knew where she was," Mulder snarled.

"I did. She's been moved," Krycek shrugged. "My...employer moves her around a lot. She's important to them. Something to do with the virus they're developing."

"They're experimenting on her?" Mulder closed his eyes, and tried to remember to breathe.

"Yes. They've been experimenting upon her for years. Poor kid."

"Don't. If this isn't true, don't do this," Mulder said, in a broken tone.

"Sorry, old friend, but it's true," Krycek said softly. "Look - I don't like it either. She's had a tough life."

"Where was she when you last saw her?" Mulder demanded.

"California." Krycek handed him a piece of paper, with an address on it. "Check it out if you want, but you won't find her there, and there won't be any clues as to where she's gone. This is just a gesture of good faith, from me to you, so that you know I'm telling the truth." He stopped the car abruptly, in a quiet street, and turned to face Mulder. "I'm ideally placed to find out more," he said. "When I do, you'll know about it." Then he leaned over, opened the door, and pushed Mulder out onto the road. "I'll be in touch," were his last words before the car screeched away. It could have been a threat, or a promise. Mulder wasn't sure which.

Mulder found himself miles from the Hoover building without any cash. He sank his hands deep into his pockets and began the slow walk back to work.

It was almost 3 when he got there. He jogged the last couple of miles, but even so, he knew that he was dead meat. Skinner had warned him not to be late for the meeting, and now he would ask him a lot of questions about **why** he was late, and Mulder wasn't in any mood to answer them, knowing as he did that he'd just get into even worse trouble. He ran up the stairs and burst into Skinner's office to find his Master talking quietly to a group of agents.

"Ah, Agent Mulder. Good of you to join us." Skinner's unerring eyes took in his disheveled appearance, without giving any hint of what he was thinking, but Mulder knew. He knew his Master well enough by now to know that he was in deep shit. "Sit down." Skinner gestured with his hand, and Mulder went and plunked himself into the vacant chair, only to jump up again as his painful buttocks reminded him of the whipping he'd received up here just a few hours ago.

"Problem, Agent Mulder?" Skinner asked him.

"No, sir. It's just these Bureau chairs, sir. They're a bit uncomfortable..." Mulder mumbled, going red.

"Agent Mulder, you've held up this meeting for long enough. I'd be grateful if you would take your place as quickly and quietly as possible," Skinner growled, his eyes meeting Mulder's and holding a promise of imminent punishment.

"Yes, M...sir." Mulder bit on his lip, and lowered himself cautiously into his seat.

The meeting, which had already gotten off to a bad start, got even worse. Mulder couldn't keep his mind on the subject they were discussing. He was too busy thinking about Krycek, and what he'd told him. His sister had been experimented upon? He couldn't stand thinking about it. He was distracted, and paid little attention to Skinner's briefing. When his Master asked him questions he didn't know the answers, and after a while he stopped attempting to keep up. His eyes strayed over to the briefcase in the corner of the office every so often. Damn! It was hard enough keeping up with the labyrinthine conspiracy that threatened to overwhelm all of them, without worrying about getting his ass whipped as well. Mulder's lack of attention turned into a full-scale sulk, and he crossed his arms and answered Skinner's questions with barely any attempt at civility. He knew he was testing his Master's patience to the limit, but he figured that he might as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb. He was going to get punished anyway, whatever he said, and he was so **not** in the mood.

"So, Agents Phillips, and Goodacre, I'd be grateful if you could research this issue for me," Skinner wound up the meeting.

"Yes, sir." The two agents nodded, and picked up their brief. Mulder glared at them. *Asslickers.*

"Agent Mulder, do you think you'll be able to tie this in with the X Files you mentioned?" Skinner turned back to his most truculent agent.

"Oh, I think I can just about manage that, yes, sir," he sneered, almost rolling his eyes sarcastically. "Unless you doubt my competence," he challenged. There was a silence around the table. Several agents looked as if they wanted to run for cover. Mulder didn't blame them. Skinner's mouth settled into a hard line.

"Not your competence, no," he replied coolly, his message going home loud and clear, and not just to Mulder. He knew the other agents were wondering whether he was insane. Nobody took on Skinner and won. "That will be all, agents. You have your assignments." Skinner dismissed them. Mulder didn't even bother to move. Skinner also remained seated, as the other agents filed out nervously, casting glances in their direction. Mulder could see from the looks on their faces that they were all glad that they weren't in his shoes. Suddenly he wished that **he** wasn't in his shoes either, and cursed his earlier bravado and display of bad temper.

The door closed behind the last agent, and still Skinner didn't move. He surveyed Mulder like a snake, watching its prey for any sign of movement. Mulder sat slumped in his chair, looking back, not dropping his gaze. He was going to stare Skinner out and take the consequences. Two minutes passed. Then three. Mulder suddenly felt very hot. Skinner's dark eyes were fixed on his face, waiting. His Master was leaning on one hand, his fingers caressing the side of his jaw as he sat there. Mulder cleared his throat, opened his mouth, then closed it again. Skinner's dark eyes were unwavering. Four minutes. Mulder snapped. He dropped his gaze, unable to bear it any longer, and that was when Skinner finally spoke.

"Go and get me the paddle," he said, in a low, hard tone.

"No." Mulder clenched his fists. "Don't you want to hear my explanation first?" He asked.

"You mean you actually have one?" Skinner sounded surprised. "You're saying there can be any excuse for the appalling behavior I just witnessed? Well then, by all means, go ahead. Explain away. This should be good." He sat back in his chair and folded his arms, expectantly.

"Oh fuck it. You're not going to listen to me anyway!" Mulder exploded, getting up and flouncing across the room to the briefcase. He opened it and drew out the paddle. While he hadn't exactly found this implement to be the most painful implement in the case yesterday, he knew his butt was so sore after the caning, and strapping he'd already received today that the paddle would add another level to his current agony. He brought the paddle back and threw it down on the table in front of his Master. Skinner caught his wrist in a vice-like grip.

"I **always** listen," he said in a deep, urgent tone. "Now, talk." He kept hold of Mulder's wrist, and clicked the fingers on his other hand. Mulder tried to resist, but Skinner pulled his arm down and he found himself sinking onto his knees beside his Master. He knelt there glumly because he knew there was nothing he could say. Well, he could tell Skinner about Krycek, but he just knew how well that would go down. Skinner would have his hide for chasing after his old enemy and if he knew he'd got into the car with him...Mulder bit on his lip. It wasn't worth it. Some small part of him also knew that he didn't want to share this information, regardless of any punishment. He was a grown man, capable of making his own decisions, and he'd continue to make them regardless of any sanctions his Master placed upon him.

"I was having lunch with Scully. We forgot the time," he said lamely. Skinner placed a finger under his chin, and pulled his head up to look at him.

"And that's the reason why you showed me up in front of a room full of agents?" He asked incredulously. "Why, for god's sake, Fox?"

"I don't know. I got annoyed with you." Mulder shrugged. "I knew I was in trouble anyway, and I just got angry. I'm not used to all these restrictions. I need some leeway."

"Tough." Skinner got to his feet, his expression grim. "Quote me the first clause of your contract, slave."

Mulder stared at him. Then did as he was told, with a sigh.

"The slave agrees to obey and submit completely to his Master in all ways. There are no boundaries of place, time, or situation in which the slave may willfully refuse to obey the directive of his Master," he gabbled.

"Did you put your name to that contract, Fox?" Skinner asked. Mulder struggled for a moment.

"Yes, but I didn't know that you'd be working **here!**" He protested.

"It makes no difference. At least you were lucky enough to end up with a Master who understands about your quest - can you imagine how many other Masters would be so accommodating to that side of your life?" Skinner turned back, and glared at him. "Now, yesterday I told you that the consequences of screwing up big time are being punished big time. Now I'm going to show you exactly what that means."

He moved around the room, drawing the blinds, and locking the doors. Mulder watched, his heart sinking into his stomach. He wasn't in the mood for a spanking. This morning it had hurt, but it had also been a turn on. This afternoon it was more like a punishment, which was exactly what Skinner intended, of course. Mulder clenched his fists and willed himself to be anywhere else in the universe but here. Skinner finished his task, then turned back, and silently handed Mulder his handkerchief again.

"You'll need it," he warned.

Mulder took it, and Skinner pointed at the table. "Pants down, and bend over," he ordered. Mulder's breath caught in his throat. Usually those words thrilled him, but on this occasion...he wasn't sure. Skinner was genuinely angry. It still wasn't too late. He could still tell the other man about Krycek, about his sister. He longed to share the information with **someone** if he was honest, but a lifetime of dealing with this issue on his own kicked in, and instead of talking, he took his pants down, as ordered, and bent over the table.

Mulder held onto the table with sweaty palms as he felt the paddle, cool and sleek, brushing his backside. The hard surface of the table dug into his thighs. Skinner didn't even bother to ask him what lesson he was learning. There was silence for a moment, then the most almighty blaze of pain. He choked into the handkerchief, as his Master punished him thoroughly. His already sore bottom reached new levels of pain as his Master laid into him with the paddle. Skinner was an expert of course, and he applied the paddle to cover every single inch of Mulder's red buns, until the agent was sure that he couldn't stand it any more, and he dissolved into hiccuping sobs, trying to breathe through the handkerchief. Then it was over.

"Get up, get dressed, and put the paddle away," Skinner told him firmly. Mulder pulled the handkerchief out of his mouth and gazed at his Master resentfully. No hugs? No kisses? No little words of reassurance? Mulder did as instructed in silence, watching out of the corner of his eye as Skinner returned to his desk, and started writing something down. Mulder finished his tasks, and went to kneel beside his Master. He rested his head on Skinner's knee in his favorite position, then nudged his Master's hand with his nose, like a puppy needing attention. Skinner looked down at him, and frowned. Then he ruffled his hand through Mulder's hair. Mulder sighed, and leaned into the embrace.

"That hurt, Master," Mulder whispered.

"I know. It was supposed to, little one," Skinner replied. "You know I'll be hard on you if you're disrespectful or disobey me. I've always made that very clear." They sat there for a moment, Skinner's fingers gently caressing his slave's hair. Then Skinner took Mulder's face in his hands and looked at him. "You're sure there's nothing else?" He asked, his eyes scanning Mulder's face, searchingly. Mulder

closed his eyes. He wanted to tell his Master. He did want to, but an old instinct took over. He shook his head.

"No, Master," he whispered. Skinner carried on looking at him for a moment, then dropped Mulder's head, abruptly.

"Get up," he ordered. "Here." He handed Mulder the note he had been writing. "This is a list of the groceries we need. Make sure you get them on your way home." Mulder stared at the list, his throat dry. He knew he had disappointed Skinner, but he didn't know how to make things better. "Now go," Skinner told him. "Unless you have anything else you'd like to say?"

"No." Mulder shrugged. He looked at Skinner for a moment, then pocketed the grocery list and walked over to the door.

"And, Fox - don't be late home," Skinner advised. "I really wouldn't recommend that today."

"No, Master."

Mulder wandered downstairs, dejected. *I knew this would happen. I told him this would happen. It's just not going to work. Jeez, the expression on his face - as if I disgusted him or something. He couldn't wait to get rid of me.* He hunched his shoulders, and returned to his office. Scully glanced up, concerned.

"Mulder - are you okay? Where did you get to? What happened to you?"

"I'm fine, Scully." Mulder sighed. "I'm sorry for ditching you." Scully's eyes widened in astonishment. "What?" Mulder asked her, surprised by her expression.

"Mulder - that's the first time you've ever apologized for ditching me in your entire life, and it's happened enough times!" She exclaimed. "That Master of yours must be really hot on manners," she grinned slyly. Mulder managed a feeble smile in return.

"Yeah. He is," he murmured, seating himself gingerly in his chair.

"Aw, what's the matter, slaveboy? Master spank you too hard?" Scully teased, watching him.

"Something like that." Mulder shook his head wryly.

Mulder's mood wasn't made any better by having to sit on his aching butt all afternoon. He gazed at the address on the note Krycek had given to him. He knew there wasn't any point in running off to California, although he was sorely tempted. He did a search on the address and dug up some details that didn't verify anything, one way or another. He was glad when it was time to go, and was about to leave when he realized he didn't have any money to pay for the metro. He was damned if he was going to go and ask Skinner for some, like a school kid, and he sure as hell wasn't going to start borrowing off Scully. Mulder decided to jog home instead. He kept some gym clothes and sneakers in his locker. He said goodbye to Scully, and went and got changed, then set off.

It felt good to be running off his misery. He went over and over the events of the day in his head but he couldn't see a way of changing anything. He wished he could have told Skinner about Krycek, but it was

as if he became mute at the very idea. Something stopped him, something too deep for him to tackle. He felt as if he were floating off into space once more, and he desperately wanted somebody to pull him back, and keep him grounded. As he ran, he felt the endorphins kick in. This felt good! He'd missed being able to jog. Mulder glanced at his watch. It was almost 6. He should go home, but he didn't want to. He wanted to run and run, and if he ran for long enough he might be able to escape all his problems. He remembered the groceries Skinner had asked for, but he didn't care. He didn't care if his Master whipped his ass all night. He needed this. He needed to run and run forever. It got dark, and Mulder started to feel cold. It was so **good** though. He had gone into a dream-like state where nothing mattered. It must have been a good two hours later, when he realized his feet had stopped moving. He looked up and found himself standing outside the Viva Towers. Some homing instinct had brought him here. He glanced up at the seventeenth floor, and then, with a sigh, went inside to meet his fate.

He considered going straight up to the 18th floor and locking himself in his room, but he knew that his Master had to be faced, sooner or later, so he knocked on the 17th floor apartment. Skinner opened the door, and looked at him for a long moment.

"Can I come in?" Mulder asked. Skinner didn't move. "Master," Mulder added. Skinner stood aside, and Mulder entered the apartment. "All right, I know I'm in deep shit. Spare me the lecture," Mulder said with a smirk. "Just whip my ass and send me to bed without any supper. I didn't get the groceries, and I went out running without your permission. I've been a very bad slave," he mocked.

Skinner didn't explode as he'd expected. He just shook his head.

"Why, Fox?" He asked mildly. Somehow, his Master's unexpected reaction was like a red rag to a bull, and Mulder went ballistic.

"Because I wanted to fucking run! And I didn't want to do the fucking shopping! And I don't want to do any more of your fucking laundry either. Now get off my case, asshole!"

Skinner moved so fast that Mulder only saw a blur of white. Then he felt himself being propelled into the kitchen, and pushed over to the sink. He had no idea what was even happening, until a handful of white, sloppy goo was thrust into his mouth.

"UGH!" He spat out the soap, but the aftertaste lingered. "Fuck you! Fucking, fuck...oh my god that tastes like SHIT!"

Skinner grabbed hold of his sweatshirt, dragged him out of the kitchen and across the living room, opened the balcony door, and threw him outside. Then he reached into his pocket, snapped a set of handcuffs around Mulder's wrist, and secured him to the balcony railing, before getting to his feet and looking down on his recalcitrant slave.

"You can stay out here until you cool down," Skinner told him.

"You bastard!" Mulder yelled. "Come back here! Fuck you, Skinner. Let me go!"

Skinner gazed at him impassively for a moment, then went back into the apartment, leaving the door ajar. Mulder struggled pointlessly in his bonds for a moment, then sank back on his haunches, growling to himself as he tried to find a position that didn't involve placing his sore butt on the hard balcony floor.

He kept up a screeching monologue for several minutes, cursing his Master, calling him every name under the sun, but although Skinner could clearly hear him, he made no reply. Mulder could see him through the balcony door, moving around in the kitchen, making dinner. Finally Mulder subsided, reconciling himself to a long stay out here. Damn, but Krycek had been right - it was cold out here. Damn Skinner. Damn him. Why the hell had Mulder agreed to that stupid, fucking contract? Mulder closed his eyes, blinking back the tears. He remembered the words security, and love. He had wanted that, and he hated himself for that weakness.

Skinner came out a few minutes later. He didn't say anything. He just placed a bottle of water on the ground next to Mulder, and gazed at him for a few moments. Mulder glared at him, angrily, still tasting the soap in his mouth. He couldn't wait to wash that away with the water, but he had enough pride to wait until Skinner had gone before he grabbed the bottle and held it between his knees so that he could twist the cap off. Then he drank down the entire contents in one go, lost in his own misery.

Mulder knew the danger signs only too well. He wasn't angry with Skinner. He was angry with himself, and his fucked up life. He was angry that he'd lost his sister in the first place, angry that men like Krycek used her to lure him into god knew what kind of trap. He was angry with himself for responding, for still needing this so badly that he'd risk screwing up the best thing that had ever happened to him in order to get it. This was one of those moments that he had warned his Master about. He was about to go out of control, about to spin off into the edges of insanity and he knew that when he came back down to earth, he'd feel empty, and lost, without hope, and full of despair. Those were the moments when he woke up wishing that he were dead. It was on one of those days that he knew he might decide to die. Mulder wrapped his free arm around his body. He felt so cold. So alone. If he closed his eyes he could see his sister, lying in some laboratory somewhere, faceless men looming over her. Mulder fought against the image, fought against it swallowing him whole, and twisting his gut until he could feel real physical pain.

He watched his Master move around the apartment. He knew that if he called out, if he apologized, Skinner would come out here, and undo the cuff, but Mulder wouldn't ask. He dipped his head down to his chest, sunk in misery. A few minutes later he felt something wet nudge against his hand. Wanda had come to investigate the novelty of her slave's slave sitting out on the balcony and she was sniffing at him curiously.

"Go. Away," he told her. She looked at him with clear green eyes, then climbed calmly into his lap, and snuggled up against his chest. He longed to accept the comfort, and his chin dropped for a moment against her soft head, but then his self-loathing kicked back in, and he shoved her angrily off his lap and onto the floor with his free hand. "Shoo!" He snarled, and she ran back into the apartment. He saw her climb onto Skinner's lap where his Master was sitting on the couch. She snuggled up in his Master's arms, and that just added to Mulder's misery. He wanted to cry but he had too much pride, so he just sat there, glaring at Skinner, glaring at Wanda, glaring at the world.

A couple of hours passed, and finally Mulder's mood played itself out. Skinner appeared in the doorway.

"How are you feeling?" He asked softly.

"Fucking freezing," Mulder snapped. "Not that you care."

"You must be hungry." Skinner came out onto the balcony, and crouched down in front of him. He was holding a plate full of the most delicious smelling food. Mulder realized that he **was** hungry. Very hungry. "Open up." Skinner pushed some food onto a fork, and held it up to Mulder's mouth.

"I can damn well feed myself," Mulder protested.

"Open up," Skinner repeated, his tone brooking no further resistance. Mulder obeyed, grudgingly, and Skinner fed him a forkful of food, then another, and another. Mulder was too overwrought to eat much though, and he refused any more after the 4th serving. Skinner looked at him calmly. "You'll eat the whole plateful," he stated firmly. "You've been out running for hours. You need to replace the energy." Mulder turned his face away, but Skinner turned it back, and held another forkful of food against his lips. Grudgingly, Mulder ate. He finished the plate of food, and then Skinner disappeared into the kitchen and returned with dessert. "No slave of mine **ever** goes to bed hungry," Skinner insisted, holding up a spoon full of cheesecake. "There are some punishments you'll never suffer at my hands, and missing meals is one of them."

Mulder swallowed it down, feeling completely and utterly wrung-out. "I'm sorry, Master," he whispered between mouthfuls.

"I know you are." Skinner smiled. When Mulder had finished, Skinner took the bowl back into the apartment, and then returned to the balcony. "Ready to come in now?" He asked. Mulder looked at him wearily, all the anger having fled his body, leaving him completely drained.

"Yes please," he said softly.

Skinner knelt down beside him, and unlocked the handcuff. Then he pulled Mulder to his feet and enveloped him in a hug. Mulder clung to his Master's big body as if his life depended on it. He felt so safe here. So warm, and comforted. Skinner was his earth, his grounding. It felt good knowing he could rely on the other man to pull him back down when he was about to fly off into orbit.

"Okay, little one," Skinner soothed, gently stroking his slave's hair. "Now, I won't usually reward bad behavior, but on this occasion I'll make an exception as you're clearly in a bad way. Go and wait in my bedroom. You can spend the night with me."

Mulder pulled back, and looked into his Master's eyes. "Really?" he whispered.

"Really." Skinner kissed his forehead. "Now go and kneel in the bedroom and wait for me. I won't be long."

Mulder didn't need telling twice. He walked wearily up to the bedroom, and sank down on the floor, waiting to be told what to do next. He didn't want to think. He just wanted to be held, and loved. Skinner came up a few minutes later. He sat on the end of the bed, and pulled his slave over, then he undressed him gently, kissing him, and soothing the weary agent with loving words as he worked. Mulder went into a trance. He was so tired. He wanted to escape, to be free. He needed to find some place in his head where there was peace, but all he could see was his sister. He gave a stifled sob, and Skinner drew him close, and kissed his lips. Mulder drowned in that kiss, and realized, with a start, that he had found his escape in his Master's arms. Here he was safe from the demons that had haunted him

all his life. He surrendered to Skinner's insistent mouth, to his claiming tongue, and melted against the big man, warming himself in that loving embrace.

"I've run you a bath," Skinner said when he released him. "You need warming up." He helped Mulder to get up, and walked him into the bathroom. He deposited his weary slave in the bath, and then got undressed himself and slipped in beside him. He pulled Mulder over, and soaped him down, rubbing his muscles briskly. Mulder started to feel more human. He was warm, clean, fed, loved...He leaned back in his Master's arms, and allowed the other man to take care of him. Skinner didn't linger in the bath. He made sure Mulder was warm, then he walked him back into the other room, and helped him into the bed. Mulder watched his Master wander around the room, tidying up clothing, and longed for him to join him in the bed. Finally Skinner finished, turned off the light, and got into the bed beside his slave. Mulder hesitated, then inched his way hesitantly towards his Master, and put his arms around him, burying his face in the other man's chest.

"I'm so, so sorry. I'm such a shit head. I..."

"Fox. Stop. I never use abusive names when I talk to you, do I?" Skinner asked.

Mulder blinked. "No, Master."

"And do you think I'd keep a slave that wasn't worthy of me?" Skinner pressed. Mulder felt so tired that he couldn't think.

"No, Master. I suppose not," he agreed reluctantly.

"Well then." Skinner kissed him gently, lovingly, holding him tight. "Don't use names like that for yourself again."

"Make love to me, Master," Mulder whispered.

"No, sweetheart, you're too tired," Skinner replied.

"Please. I want to feel...good again," Mulder kissed his Master's chest, and lightly teased a nipple with his tongue. "You make me feel good, Master. Help me forget..."

"Forget what, Fox?" Skinner held him so tight that he couldn't escape. "What happened today?"

"Nothing. Nothing. Nothing..." Mulder found his Master's soft cock and caressed it with his hand. He loved his Master's bed too much to want to lose the privilege by telling him what had happened, and apart from anything else, he just didn't want to talk about it. It was his pain, and his alone. It always had been, and he nursed it close to his heart and never let anyone in.

"Please, Master...make love to me."

Skinner sighed. "Fox, **something** clearly happened today. Now I can't make you tell me, but I want you to know that you **can**. When you're ready. I might whip your ass, but I'll always listen. Understood?" Mulder nodded, dumbly. Skinner shook his head. "Fox, I don't like watching you tear yourself apart like this."

Mulder ignored his Master, and kept nuzzling at Skinner's broad chest. He kissed his way down to his Master's groin, and took Skinner's cock into his mouth. It hardened under Mulder's expert caress. He drew back, and looked at Skinner expectantly.

"Please...make love to me," he begged.

Skinner nodded, finally accepting that it was the only thing that would soothe his deeply troubled slave. He turned Mulder around, and held his slave close against his chest. Mulder could feel his Master's hard length pressing against his buttocks.

"Okay, stroke yourself. Come if you want," Skinner said. Mulder heard him putting a condom on his hard cock, and then his Master handed one to him as well. "So neither of us has to lie on the damp patch," Skinner whispered.

He took hold of Mulder's buttocks gently, and eased himself between them, sliding into the lubricated hole without difficulty. Then he held Mulder tight, and gently rocked back and forth into his slave. Mulder lost himself in the sheer pleasure of his Master's touch, pressing back to impale himself on even more of Skinner's length. His own cock was hard, and he entered a dream-like state of total bliss, lying comfortably in his Master's arms, lulled by the scent of sex, and the pleasure of being made love to, of being loved. Skinner kissed the back of his slave's neck, and nibbled on his ear, and they both came a little while later. Skinner disposed of the condoms, then joined his slave back in the bed. He took Mulder in his arms again, and Mulder felt at peace for the first time since Krycek's phone call.

"Listen to me, Fox, before you go to sleep," Skinner said.

"Hmmm?" Mulder felt his weary mind begin to drift away.

"Today was a bad day. Tomorrow we'll start again."

"Yes...again." Mulder nodded.

"Remember one thing." Skinner's arms tightened around his slave. "You belong to me, and you're hurting right now. I'll do everything in my power to help you. You're mine, sweetheart. Body, heart, mind, and soul, and whatever hurts you, hurts me."

"I can feel myself spinning off course. Just don't let me go." Mulder had a vision of himself flying off into space. Deep inside, he doubted that even Skinner would be strong enough to keep him on the ground.

"I won't," Skinner promised, and his voice was grim. "I might be hard on you, Fox, but I'll always be here for you."

Mulder remembered, with a guilty start, the information he'd found out about Skinner inheriting these apartments from Andrew Linker. He had spied on his Master, lied to him, disobeyed him too many times to mention, and been insolent to him all in the space of one day. He'd shouted at Skinner, and pushed him to the limits of his patience, but at the end of the day the other man was still here, with his arms wrapped tightly around his slave. Maybe he had finally met his match, after all. Maybe he had at last found somebody he could trust with the true darkness of what he knew lay within himself. Just not yet. Not quite yet.

**End of Part 11**

## Dog Days by Xanthe

### Author's Notes:

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Posted 15th January, 1999

**Warning: Sex, leashes, belts - you know the kind of stuff.**

Many thanks to Emma, who told me a very intriguing tale that sparked this story off, and for the long discussions over high calorie snacks. Happy Birthday, Em. Happy Belated Birthday to Geoffrey too, whose birthday note went missing in my inbox while I was away.

Big thanks to CDavis for all the fabulous pics.

Special thanks to Gaby for all the great suggestions (and the silly ones too...).

Quotation courtesy of my sweet Alex. None of this is beta'd. It's far too much fun to take seriously.

Wonderful relevant pic courtesy of **Sean Spencer**. Look closely at what's around Mulder's neck and who's holding it and that should set the scene for this chapter for you. There's another inspirational pic at the end of the story.

**24/7** is an erotic fantasy and NOT a BDSM resource guide. The truth is sometimes exaggerated, or played with, for dramatic effect. For more information, please visit the **24/7 BDSM Glossary**.

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### **24/7**

*"A truth, still apparent, though disregarded, that things move violently to their place, but calmly in their place. To put it another way, everything has its right home, the region that suits it, and, unless forcibly restrained, will move thither by a kind of homing instinct."*

J. Winterson  
*"Art and Lies"*

Mulder woke some time during the night. He shifted, and turned, mumbling something drowsily in his sleep, then realized that the room was lit by soft lamplight. He lay still, aware that Skinner was sitting up in bed, reading a book. His Master's hand was playing with his slave's hair, gently caressing it, so lightly as not to wake him. Mulder lay still, pretending to still be asleep, enjoying the feather-light touch.

He gazed up at his Master from under hooded eyelids. Skinner was wearing his glasses, but he was naked, which made him resemble a strange hybrid between Master and AD. After just one day back at work, the office Skinner and the Playroom Skinner were still two very distinct beings in Mulder's mind.

Mulder was transfixed by his Master's fingertips as they held the book loosely. Skinner had thick, blunt hands, with neatly trimmed, exquisitely manicured nails. They were big hands, that could cover a large area of naked butt very efficiently, as Mulder knew all too well. Mulder's gaze lingered on burly forearms, tanned, and covered with a light covering of wiry hair, then traveled up to take in the finely honed pectorals, rippling under taut, honeyed skin. Mulder hungered after those arms. He hungered to be enveloped in them, to be held, made love to, and, when he was spinning out of control, to be restrained by them as well. Skinner's arms had been a subject of his fantasies for longer than he cared to admit. He remembered being held down, and held up, too many times, even before he had become the other man's slave. Large arms holding him against a broad chest in the hallway of the Hoover building, when he was half out of his mind on hallucinogenic drugs, strong arms disarming him when he reached for his gun in the grip of a waking nightmare. The same arms had refused to hurt him when he had so recently flailed around on the edge of total insanity under the influence of an alien artifact. These were arms that caught him when he fell, captured him, and held him tight, held him upright, and kept him safe within their warm, comforting circle.

Mulder watched as Skinner finished reading, and gazed at the ceiling for a moment, lost in thought. Then his Master fished out a bookmark from the back of the book, and studied it intently. Mulder moved slightly, to get a better look at it: it was a photograph - a picture of a man. He must have been in his sixties, but he was handsome, with silver hair, and sparkling blue eyes. His wide jaw hinted at a strong personality, but his face was intelligent, and friendly. Skinner's expression softened and he gave a wry chuckle, as he fingered the photo.

"Andrew, sometimes I wonder what **you** would have done with him," he murmured.

Mulder felt a pang of guilty insecurity. It was clear that **he** was the cause of Skinner's sleepless night. After the way he had behaved the previous evening, he wasn't surprised that Skinner despaired. He was intrigued by the warmth and affection in Skinner's voice as he addressed his dead friend. Mulder felt even more guilty as he reflected on how he came to know who Andrew was, although he couldn't even begin to speculate as to what the other man might have meant to Skinner.

Skinner replaced the photo in his book, and placed it on the nightstand, then he turned off the lamp, and slid down in the bed. Mulder closed his eyes again, and was surprised when Skinner placed his arms around his slave, and pulled him against his chest. Mulder muttered something, still feigning sleep, and then he felt Skinner's lips pressed against the back of his neck, and his Master bestowed a series of soft, gentle kisses there.

"My wild fox. Not tamed yet," Skinner whispered, his voice hazy with sleep. His fingers stroked soothingly down Mulder's flanks, and across his torso; tender touches, gossamer light, not designed to wake. "My captive animal. Still not feeding out of my hand." Skinner's lips found the tips of his ears, and traveled gently along the line of his jaw. "In my bed. In my heart." Skinner's hands and lips came to rest, his breathing deepening, and Mulder felt a lump rise in his throat. He so rarely saw the man behind the Master. Skinner didn't want him to see, at least not yet, and maybe Mulder didn't want to see either, although god knows he was curious enough. It was easier to stay as he was, distrustful, locked up within himself, than to take the first, tentative steps towards trusting. Mulder pressed his body back against Skinner's chest, and placed his hands over the other man's, clasped, as they were, over the front of his stomach. He had fooled himself that he could use this situation for sex, and to fulfill the fantasies that had been part of his psyche for as long as he could remember, only Skinner wasn't allowing him to do that. Skinner was demanding more, and Mulder knew that was partly the reason why he had reacted the way he had yesterday. He could quit. He could get up, leave the warm circle of these beloved arms, and renege on this contract he had signed. He could do that. He **should** do that if he wanted to keep the other man out, and his own secrets safely locked away in the darkness within, but he didn't want to give this up. He hadn't even realized he had wanted it until it was too late.

Mulder closed his eyes again, too weary to keep thinking. He wanted to give it all up to this man. Damn, he wanted that so badly, but the inner strength that had kept him alive, and kept him going, despite all the knocks, for so many long years, wouldn't allow him to do that without a fight; and the fight was exhausting him.

"Ow!" Mulder woke up several hours later to a stinging pain in his buttock. Someone was damn well spanking him awake! He jerked into consciousness with a start, to find that Skinner had one big arm holding him still, while his Master delivered a series of mild swats to his slave's ass with his other hand. "What did I do?" he mumbled into the pillow, his cock immediately erect.

"Nothing." Skinner slapped his warm ass again. "It's morning, and I enjoy spanking my slave. There doesn't need to be any other reason." Another slap made Mulder press his erection into the mattress, with a startled "Oomph!" Then Skinner moved, and Mulder felt a wet tongue descend on his smarting ass cheeks, and lovingly lick the warmed flesh. He relaxed, moaning into the delicious embrace, and a few seconds later, another slap descended on his buttocks. He moaned again, and buried his face in his arms. More licking followed, and then sucking, gentle play bites on his tender ass that made his cock scream out for release.

"Can I come, Master?" He panted, lifting his head from the pillow.

"Not until I'm done," Skinner informed him firmly. Mulder moaned again and placed his head under the pillow this time. More light swats on his ass followed. He was still sore from yesterday's several punishments, but this was less like his usual morning discipline and more like a highly charged erotic game. Skinner was keeping the spanking light enough to do no more than sting and arouse. More licking, and the bites increased their intensity on his warmed flesh. Mulder shrieked, the sound coming out muffled from beneath the pillow. He had never enjoyed such exquisite tortures until he had met Skinner. Before that, a spanking had just been a spanking. He had sought them for the pain and the release, but had never experienced them given with such attention to sensory detail before. He was practically on the ceiling from the high. Yesterday, with all its sadness, was forgotten as he surrendered himself to his own pleasure, and to the pleasure his Master took from him. He knew it was a brief

respite from a pain that would always been in his heart, until he found out, once and for all, what had happened to his sister, but it was better than nothing.

"Who do you belong to?" Skinner asked him, between measured swats.

"You, Master," he replied, comforted more than he would have thought possible by the familiar morning litany. Skinner had told him that he thought his slave responded well to routine, and for the first time Mulder wondered if he might not agree with that assessment of his personality, however unlikely it was.

"Where?" Skinner asked.

"Everywhere," he whispered, awaiting the next swat, and squirming with enjoyment as it landed on his sore ass.

"Your status?" Skinner asked, his voice keeping time with the spanking like a metronome.

"Your slave. I exist to serve you, Master," Mulder said, and then he realized he meant it. For the first time he actually meant it. He lay, obedient and acquiescent as Skinner's loving swats turned into several minutes of licking and caressing that carried him away on a cloud of total bliss.

Then it was over. Skinner rolled him onto his back, and lay down next to him, one hand propping up his head. He looked down on his slave for a long moment, and, embarrassed by the silent scrutiny, Mulder looked away. Skinner reached out, and turned his head back.

"Look at me, slave," he said firmly. Mulder nodded, but it was hard looking into those intense brown eyes, just looking - without speaking, and after a few seconds, he cracked.

"I'm sorry about last night, Master," he said. "Hell, I'm sorry about all of yesterday."

"Will you tell me what happened?" Skinner asked.

Mulder kept the eye contact, but couldn't give Skinner the answer he wanted. "It was nothing. Just me being an idiot. You were kinder to me than I deserved," he said with a shrug.

"No. I think that yesterday you deserved more than my kindness," Skinner mused. "That was the least I could give you."

"No. You should have just whipped my ass and sent me to bed like I told you to." Mulder shrugged.

"Since when do I take orders from you?" Skinner commented with a wry smile. "And you have never been very good at judging what's best for yourself. As for your ass - well that was on the receiving end of far too much discipline as it was yesterday. It could do with a rest today as well. Will it get one?" He raised an eyebrow.

"I'll do my best," Mulder began. Skinner stopped him, placing a finger over his lips.

"No. I want an undertaking, Fox," he said firmly.

Mulder nodded, uncertainly. "Yes, Master," he muttered.

"Good pup." Skinner ran a gentle hand over Mulder's naked chest, caressing his slave gently. Then his hand went lower, and grasped Mulder's hard cock. He played with it, never taking his eyes from Mulder's face. "Alright, pup, today I'm going to keep you on a very short leash. I realize that I made a mistake yesterday..."

"Master?" Mulder looked confused. "You didn't do anything wrong yesterday. I was the one who screwed up..."

"Quiet, boy. I said we'd start again today and I meant it," Skinner told him firmly. "I made a mistake in allowing you so much freedom at precisely a time when you needed to feel secure. I gave you too much rope, Fox, and you well and truly went and hanged yourself on it, didn't you?"

"Yes, Master. That's one way of putting it," Mulder bit on his lip as Skinner stroked his cock firmly. It was hard carrying on a serious conversation when he was being caressed in such an intimate way.

"So, pup, today I'm putting you on a very short leash indeed."

"That's not necessary. I can..." Mulder began, his heart sinking. He had the day planned out in his head. He wanted to look through the X Files to see if he could trump up a case in California so that he could check out that address Krycek had given him. He also had every intention of finding out whether Andrew Linker had any living relatives as well. He wanted to find out more about this mystery man that Skinner kept a photograph of. He couldn't do either of those things with Skinner breathing down his neck all day.

"Pup." Skinner raised an eyebrow, his hand still continuing its slow torment on Mulder's cock.

"Yes, Master," Mulder said with a sigh. "What exactly do you mean by short leash though?"

"You'll see. Now, it's late. Go and take a shower," Skinner instructed.

"Alone?" It was Mulder's turn to raise an eyebrow now.

"Yes. I have something I want to do...oh, and Fox..." Skinner's skillful hand movements became faster and more furious. Mulder gasped and threw his head back, moaning softly.

"Yes... Master?" he panted.

Skinner leaned over and whispered in Mulder's ear: "You can come."

Mulder obliged almost immediately and Skinner guffawed, and removed his hand, then got out of the bed, pulled on a robe, and left the bedroom.

Mulder lay weakly on the bed, his body humming with sexual release. After a few minutes he supposed he should do as Skinner had instructed, but it was so nice just lying here lazily in the aftermath of orgasm. Finally, mindful of Skinner's words on the subject of further spankings, he dragged himself off the bed, and was about to go to the shower when he caught sight of the book on Skinner's night-stand. He stood, uncertainly, then, with a glance at the door to make sure that Skinner wasn't around, he

reached out and picked the book up. He had expected a novel, so he was surprised to find that the book was a psychology text. Mulder frowned, intrigued, as he read the blurb on the back. It wasn't some kind of pop-psychology book: it was a serious, heavyweight, in-depth study. Mulder tugged on his bottom lip for a moment, then opened the book. On the inside cover was an inscription: "To Andrew, thanks for all you taught me. Everything good in this long tome I owe to you. All the bullshit is mine. Much love, Peter." Mulder glanced back at the front of the book to find that it was written by a Doctor Peter Mayfield. "Weirder, and weirder," he muttered, wondering who the hell this Andrew Linker had been that someone as eminent in the world of psychiatry as Peter Mayfield had sent him signed copies of his books.

Mulder flicked the book open to the page where Skinner had stored his bookmark, and held his breath as he found the photograph. Up close, he could see that Andrew Linker had been a handsome man, in a quirky, off-beat kind of way. His heart quickened as he wondered if he was looking at his Master's former lover. What kind of relationship had they shared? Andrew wasn't smiling in the picture, but he looked thoughtful, and his blue eyes contained an element of mischief. Had he subbed to Skinner, Mulder wondered? Or, unthinkable surely, had Skinner subbed to him? Mulder couldn't envisage his Master on his knees serving anyone. It just wasn't possible. He heard a footstep on the stair, and hastily shoved the photograph back inside the book, then scurried to the shower.

Skinner didn't join him in the shower, although Mulder heard his Master moving around in the bedroom. Mulder washed himself, then wrapped a towel around his waist and walked back into the bedroom - and stopped. Skinner had laid out some interesting items on the bed.

"Good. Come here," Skinner beckoned Mulder over, "and lose the towel. When we're alone in the apartment together you'll go naked, unless I tell you otherwise. That's a given. Please remember it."

"Yes, Master," Mulder murmured with a shiver of arousal, taking the towel off and glancing at the items on the bed.

"All right. I said it would be a short leash and it is. You'll travel to work with me, and home with me as well - for the next few days at least." Mulder didn't say anything but he knew that a mutinous look had flashed up in his eyes. Skinner stared at him for a long time, then surprised Mulder by pulling him close. The big man laced his hands together behind Mulder's back, and kept him trapped there. "Yesterday was bad. I won't let it happen again," he murmured in Mulder's ear. "I'm going to take you down whether you want that or not. Fight it, and it'll be harder. Give it up, and you'll learn how to fly, little one."

Mulder felt his heart beat faster inside his chest. "Don't you think I don't want to?" He asked, in a dry, rasping voice. "I can't change quickly though. This is the way I've been all my life. Alone, not letting people in. A week and a half with you isn't long enough to change me, Master. One day. Maybe."

"I'm a patient man," Skinner assured him, "and you, are mine, sweetheart. If the things I demand from you are hard, it's only because I want you to be happy."

"I am," Mulder said quietly. "Believe me. If you hadn't been here yesterday..." He closed his eyes, and leaned his head against the side of Skinner's face. "Well, I might have lost myself."

"So you'll accept the short leash and all the restrictions it brings?" Skinner pushed him back, and looked at him intently.

Mulder sighed, knowing that he really didn't have any choice. "Of course, Master."

"Good." Skinner was suddenly business-like again, and Mulder regretted the loss of those warm arms around his waist, and that big body pressed close to his. Skinner picked up a light chain from the bed, and fastened it to each of Mulder's nipple rings. Then he picked up a long, slim, metallic lead, and attached that to the chain.

"Uh...I do have to go to work, Master," Mulder pointed out.

"I know. Which is why I'm going to fasten the lead to your cock ring...so." Skinner clipped the lead to one side of Mulder's cock ring, leaving another few inches hanging down below, then surveyed his handiwork. "The lead won't flap like that, and your clothes will fit over it nicely. Nobody will be any the wiser. Now go and get dressed - and here." He handed Mulder a pair of boxer shorts. They were plain navy, cool and silky.

"Master?" Mulder frowned.

"I want you to wear them today."

"Why? I have my own?" Mulder asked, confused.

"And I want you to wear mine today," Skinner said firmly. "Now go and get dressed and meet me down here in fifteen minutes."

The whole boxer short thing was bizarre, Mulder thought to himself, as he wandered back upstairs. He pulled on the blue silk and surveyed himself in the mirror. The boxer shorts fitted him fine, and he liked the feel of the silk against his skin. Mulder straightened his shoulders and winced as his newly attached nipples were tweaked by the chain. Damn! Trust his Master to come up with another exquisite torment. There was no way he'd be doing any running today, that was for sure. In fact, every movement would have to be a slow and considered one, which was what his Master had in mind, he supposed. He was still puzzled about the boxers though. Mulder got dressed, and smoothed his clothes down. The lead and chain were only visible if you knew what you were looking for. Mulder's clothes were always slightly baggy on his lean frame, so that hid the tell-tale line of the lead. The loose end of the lead hung down his thigh, a couple of inches below his penis. It was cold against his leg, and bounced around as he walked, reminding him constantly of its presence, but it wasn't anything more than distracting. Again, Mulder supposed that was what Skinner had in mind.

Mulder grabbed his cell phone, credit card, and keys and ran back downstairs. Skinner was waiting for him by the front door, the brown "implement" briefcase in his hand.

"Do you have to bring that thing?" Mulder asked, his butt quailing at the idea of more office discipline while it was still sore from being on the receiving end of so much of it yesterday.

"No. In fact I'm not going to take it to the office today," Skinner said with a smile.

"Thank god!" Mulder exclaimed cheerfully.

"You are." Skinner handed it to him.

"What?"

"You'll carry it wherever you go. Wherever you are, I expect the briefcase to be within 2 feet of you - touching you if possible. In your office you can place it under your desk so that it touches your leg. If you're called into a meeting, you'll take it with you. If you go to the bathroom - the case goes too."

"Won't people find that strange?" Mulder asked.

"From you? Nah." Skinner grinned, patting Mulder's cheek affectionately.

"You mean they'll just think it's Spooky Mulder carrying around a piece of alien brain or proof of a global conspiracy?" Mulder sighed, knowing that was the truth.

"Probably." Skinner shrugged. "You see - being interesting allows you to get away with all kinds of things. It's the boring people like me who have to take care not to arouse suspicion."

Mulder shook his head. "Boring my ass. If the truth about you ever got out the world would be SO surprised."

"If the truth about you got out, they'd just be surprised it was something so mundane," Skinner commented. Mulder couldn't help laughing out loud at that. "Daylight's burning, slave - we're late." Skinner glanced at his watch, then made a little trilling sound between pursed lips. Mulder looked at him in alarm. "Wanda-Wanda-Wanda...honey," Skinner called, and a few seconds later the little Burmese cat scampered into the hallway. "Daddy's going to work now, darling." Skinner scooped her up and she settled into his arms with a purr, and rubbed herself against his face affectionately. "See you later, sugar princess. Have a lovely day, my sweet precious, Daddy's little plush paws," Skinner crooned, stroking her behind the ears affectionately.

Mulder rolled his eyes. "That's another thing that would surprise the world," he commented. "Big, tough Assistant Director Skinner going goopy over his stupid cat."

"Say goodbye to Fox." Skinner held the cat out towards Mulder's face and she glared at him sullenly. "A kiss is appropriate at this point, slave," Skinner told him. Mulder deposited an airy and entirely insincere kiss on Wanda's silky head.

"Foxy's ickle, wickle powder puff," he crooned in a fair imitation of his Master. You had to hand it to Skinner, Mulder thought to himself a second later as he nursed a stinging butt cheek. His Master could somehow manage to hold a cat in one hand, and still deliver the fastest, snappiest swat to his slave's buttocks with the other without even blinking. It was probably some kind of trick you learned at dom school.

Skinner gave Wanda one last kiss, and placed her on the floor, then he gestured his slave out of the door.

"What about lunch?" Mulder asked as they got into the elevator. "Do I have to take this case to the cafeteria? Or to a restaurant?"

"Everywhere," Skinner said firmly, "but you'll be lunching with me, anyway."

"I will?" Mulder looked up, startled.

"Yes. 1 p.m. Don't be late. Oh, and Fox, you'll go to the cafeteria and bring us both a tray of the best thing on the menu. We'll eat in my office."

They exited the elevator and Mulder tagged along behind Skinner as his Master strode swiftly across the parking garage to his car. Mulder was aware of the loose inches of his lead flapping against his thigh, and the tug on his nipples where the lead was getting caught against the waistband of his pants. The combination of soreness from his nipples and discomfort from the cold length of chain bashing his thigh was already starting to irritate him and the day had hardly begun. Skinner's silk boxer shorts felt nice against his butt though. Mulder felt a sudden surge of unexpected pleasure at wearing so intimate an item of his Master's apparel.

"How will I know what food to bring you?" Mulder asked, as Skinner drove them out of the garage.

"You can do some investigating." Skinner grinned. "You're good at that and I like to make the most of my slave's talents. It keeps him from getting bored." Mulder gave a deeply ironic grimace and Skinner guffawed. "You'll soon get to know my tastes, Fox. Remember to bring food for yourself as well. You can eat on the floor."

"While you're sitting at your desk, I suppose?" Mulder grouched.

"No, at the conference table - I like to spread out and it wouldn't do to get gravy on any official documents. Am I detecting a note of complaint?" Skinner's eye dropped meaningfully to the briefcase nestled by Mulder's foot.

"No. Definitely not," Mulder told him firmly. "It sounds like...a perfect day."

Skinner laughed again. "Sarcasm aside, you might just be surprised, Fox," he told his disbelieving slave.

Scully was already in the office when Mulder arrived. She raised an eyebrow.

"What?" Mulder asked, placing the briefcase under his desk and out of sight as quickly as possible, wondering if it was his cosmic karma to be blessed with two people in his life with this strange, eyebrow-wagging disease.

"Mulder, this is the second day running that I've been in the office before you. What's the matter? Master keep you up too late last night?" She teased.

"No. He wasted precious minutes saying goodbye to his cat." Mulder took his jacket off and placed it on the back of his chair, then sat down.

"He sounds like he's got his priorities right," Scully commented.

Mulder paused in mid-swallow of his coffee. "Don't tell me that you're a cat person too? I'm surrounded," he groused.

"I like cats," Scully glanced at him over the top of her glasses.

"That's good because I know one you can have for free. Two years old, only one previous owner, obsessed with faucets, washing her backside, and making my life a misery - you two would get on well."

"She sounds lovely," Scully laughed. "Mulder - are you okay today? I was worried about you yesterday. To be honest, I thought that today you'd be...in one of your distracted moods. In the past when you've had bad days they've hung around for a while. You seem pretty upbeat today though."

"I'm okay," Mulder said, too quickly, then he sighed, and looked into her concerned blue eyes. "No, that's not true, Scully. I'm hanging in there. That's the best I can say. Right now, I feel like it could go either way. It depends on what happens next."

"That man at the restaurant was Krycek, wasn't he?" She asked, softly.

"Yeah." Mulder admitted with a frown.

"What did he want?"

"To tell me that my sister is alive, and well, and being experimented upon. That she's been experimented upon for years," Mulder told her, speaking too fast, trying to fight back the sense of helpless anger that threatened to consume him.

"Mulder, I'm sorry." Scully looked shocked, and concerned. "Did he give you any information on where you can find her?"

"Not really. An out of date address in California." Mulder shrugged.

"Mulder... I'm not complaining, but why are you telling me this now? You wouldn't tell me yesterday," Scully chided gently.

"And I wouldn't tell you today, hell, you're not even the person I **should** be telling, but the truth is, that I need your help."

"My help?"

"Yeah. Scully - I need you to help me check through all our files. Find out if there's any case in California we can legitimately go and investigate."

"Mulder - this might not be a smart idea," Scully said uncertainly.

"No, it almost certainly isn't." Mulder shrugged.

"Krycek isn't known for being reliable," she pointed out.

"I know."

"And if it means that much to you, why not just take a couple of days vacation and go and check it out?"

"I can't." Mulder bit on his lip.

"Why not?"

"I just can't." Mulder sighed.

"You could fly there at the weekend," Scully suggested.

"Can't do that either," Mulder shrugged. "Trust me, Scully, someone has me on a very short leash right now. Literally." He was all too aware of the cold metal of the lead dangling against his thigh. "I'd be missed."

"A short...Mulder, you're not referring to that master/slave cock and bull story you told me, are you?" Her blue eyes threatened to scald him alive.

Mulder gave a feeble smile. "Scully - the truth is in California, not my living arrangements. Daylight's burning, partner." He grabbed a handful of files from the cabinet, and placed them on her desk. She looked up at him in amazement but he turned on his computer, and buried himself in his work, brooking no further conversation.

Mulder was torn between checking out the X Files for cases in California, and checking out the mysterious Andrew Linker. In the end, having set Scully to work on the X Files, he turned his attention to the man in the photograph. His curiosity was getting the better of him. He **had** to know who Linker was, and what he had been to Skinner. It was eating him up. He was an hour into his search when the 'phone went.

"Agent Mulder, I'd like a progress report on those cases you were writing up for me," Skinner's voice growled at him.

"What - now?" Mulder asked, trying frantically to find them on his desk. "Um...sir," he added hastily as his knee nudged the brown case.

"Now." The connection was severed. Mulder made a face at it.

"Gotta go, partner. The lord and master calls," he told Scully with a sigh. "Skinner," he clarified hastily. "Not, you know, the other master I was telling you about." She rolled her eyes at his assumption of her ignorance and he gathered up the files and ran up the stairs with them.

"You called, m'lord," he said with a mock bow, presenting the files to his Master, breathing heavily from his run. Skinner didn't take the files. Instead he gave his slave a hard look, then clicked his fingers. With a sigh, Mulder sank down on the floor on his knees beside his Master.

"When I call you to my office, and we're alone, you will, in future follow this procedure," Skinner said tersely. "You'll lock the door, kneel silently at my side, open your shirt and attach the end of your leash

to the desk leg. If you have anything requiring my attention you'll hold it in your mouth and wait for me to take it."

"What?" Mulder exploded.

"Freedoms are earned," Skinner reminded him. "They can also be forfeited. That's what happened yesterday. You can earn that level of freedom again, by dint of your service, and obedience. Understood?" Mulder tried to stare his Master out again, but, as he had yesterday, he failed.

"Yes, sir," he murmured.

"Good. Go and lock the door, then come back here. And, Fox?" Mulder turned, halfway to the door. "I think you forgot to bring something with you. Go and get it."

Mulder remembered the briefcase with a sinking heart. "Yes, sir," he muttered.

He returned a few minutes later with the briefcase, and obeyed Skinner's instructions to the letter, locking the door behind him, and kneeling at Skinner's side. Then he unbuttoned his shirt and pants, unclipped the leash and clipped it to the desk leg. He re-adjusted his clothing, and sank back on his knees, wincing as the movement tweaked the nipple rings. Then he placed the two files in his mouth, put his hands behind his back...and waited. Skinner kept him waiting for a good fifteen minutes, which didn't surprise Mulder. His Master clearly wanted to show him who was boss - as if there was any doubt on **that** score.

Mulder let his mind wander, watching as his Master worked. Skinner seemed lost in thought, which gave his slave ample time to appreciate his Master's firm jaw, with its slight dimple, and the contours of his Master's face. He had a weird out of body sensation, wondering, dreamily, how he looked, kneeling at his Master's desk, tied to it by a chain attached to his nipples, the files in his mouth. Part of him wanted to laugh, but his cock was already bulging in his pants. Finally, Skinner finished what he was doing, and glanced at his slave.

"Good, boy," he murmured, retrieving the slightly damp files from Mulder's mouth. Mulder smiled, and placed his chin on Skinner's knee while his Master read the files. He liked being here, leaning against his Master's solidly muscled thigh. Skinner absently fondled his slave's hair while he read the reports, then he looked down, with a frown.

"You don't seem to have added much to these since I saw them yesterday," he said.

"I...was distracted yesterday afternoon, Master," Mulder admitted, biting on his lip.

"And today?" Skinner raised an eyebrow.

"Today?" Mulder repeated blankly, remembering that he had thus far spent the day in tracking down his sister and his Master's old lover. Neither of which activities were anything he was going to admit to if he wanted to keep any skin on his butt.

"What were you working on today? You clearly weren't working on these." Skinner pointed. Mulder swallowed. "I'm used to organizing my own work time, Master," he hedged.

"Well, then you'd better get used to doing things differently," Skinner said firmly. He placed his index finger on the leash and tugged on it, creating a gentle pull on Mulder's nipples. Mulder yelped. "Short leash, remember, slave. Now go back downstairs and do some more work on these. You can bring them up to me at lunch-time so I can see what progress you've made."

"Oh for fuck's sake!" Mulder exclaimed. Skinner looked at him impassively. "Yes, Master," Mulder muttered. He gingerly unfastened himself from the desk, and rearranged his clothing. Then he grabbed the files, and was about to leave when Skinner pulled him back, and kissed him firmly on the lips. Mulder melted into the kiss, and Skinner's hands kneaded his buttocks enthusiastically.

Mulder sighed. "Why the hell do you bother with me?" He asked afterwards, a feeling of guilt washing over him for his many deceptions and deceits.

"You're mine. I love you," Skinner replied simply, gently caressing the side of Mulder's face, his tone completely sincere without being in any way sappy. Mulder swallowed down the lump in his throat, and grabbed the briefcase, before scurrying out of the office and back to the basement.

"Scully, put the files away," was the first thing he said when he got there. She looked up, startled and he started stuffing them back in the filing cabinet with frenzied movements.

"Does this mean we're not going to California?" She asked, bemused.

"Yup." Mulder nodded fiercely. "If I so much as mention it again you have my permission to do that eyebrow thing of yours, and you can yell at me, bang my head against the desk, anything you need to do to stop me."

"Oookay," Scully sighed, turning back to a pathology report she had been working on before, used to her partner's mercurial moods from long experience. "By the way, someone called you from Central Records. Something about a guy called Andrew Linker. He's got the information you asked..." Scully blinked as Mulder screwed up the note she was holding and tossed it in the trash.

"I'm not investigating that any more," Mulder said, putting the briefcase back under his desk, and laying the files out, oblivious to Scully's expression of surprise at this contradictory whirlwind of activity sweeping through the office. "I'm working on these. Top priority." He buried his face in the files, frowning in concentration, was completely silent for two minutes, and then looked up again into her disbelieving eyes. "Scully, what's on the menu in the cafeteria today?" He asked.

Three hours later Mulder entered Skinner's office bearing a plate of pasta covered in a tomato sauce, with a salad. Skinner was talking on the 'phone, so Mulder placed the tray on the conference table, knelt down beside it, fastened his leash to the table leg, and waited.

"Well done, pup," Skinner patted him on the head after he'd finished on the 'phone. "This looks good."

"Yes, Master."

"Where's yours?" Skinner asked.

"I'm not hungry, Master," Mulder said. He wasn't. He was still over-wrought after yesterday. His stomach, always a barometer of his emotional state, was the first thing to shut down when he was under pressure.

"Why?" Skinner asked him.

Mulder shrugged. "Scully brought doughnuts into the office this morning. I stuffed myself," he said. Skinner got up and reached for the 'phone, wordlessly.

"What are you doing?" Mulder asked.

"Checking with Scully."

"You don't trust me!" Mulder protested.

"Well," Skinner paused, his hand on the 'phone. "Let's talk about trust shall we? If you were to ask me if I trusted you with my life, then I'd say 'yes' - immediately, without thinking about it. If you were to ask me whether I trusted you to do a good job on the X Files, I'd say 'yes' - but with some reservations about your methods. However, if you were to ask me if I trusted you not to self-destruct, I'd say 'no'. Now, shall I call Scully or not?"

"Not." Mulder sighed.

"I thought doughnuts didn't exactly sound like Scully." Skinner put the 'phone down and turned back to his slave. "What's this about, Fox?" He took Mulder's face between his hands, and looked down at him.

"Sorry, Master. I'm just not hungry." Mulder shrugged.

"Fox." Skinner said in warning tone. "Last night we didn't have the time for a confessional. I'm going to eat my lunch, then you are going to talk. You can spend the next few minutes thinking about what you're going to say."

"Yes, sir." Mulder bit on his lip. He had no idea what he was going to say.

Mulder watched Skinner eat. His Master went about consuming his lunch in an unhurried way, ignoring his slave. When he was done, he turned back to Mulder, glancing at his watch.

"You have half an hour. Take your time. Don't hurry." Skinner unfastened Mulder's leash. "Any position you want. Sit down if need be. Get comfortable." Mulder glanced over to Skinner's big, black, imposing office chair, behind his desk. Skinner raised an eyebrow. Mulder flushed. "I said anywhere," Skinner repeated. "Go ahead, if that's where you'll feel comfortable."

Mulder got up eagerly, and went over to the chair, then sank down into it. "You have no idea how many of my fantasies this chair has featured in," he said with a grin. "Of course usually I'm not sitting in it. I'm more kinda draped over it, or, um, over your knee while you're sitting in it." He went bright red at having admitted **that** particular fantasy.

Skinner didn't say a word, but his brown eyes were thoughtful and impassive. Mulder swiveled in the chair. It was comfortable, and still warm from its previous occupant. It felt...nice against his bare skin where his hands touched it. He liked that thought - it was like his Master's boxer shorts. Just being close to something that belonged so intimately to his Master made him feel good. Mulder looked up in surprise.

"How did you know that making me wear your shorts would give me this buzz?" He asked. Skinner shook his head at this tangential leap of conversational topic, then he put his finger over his mouth, gesturing his own silence, and that Mulder should continue. Mulder nodded, and took a deep breath.

"Okay. Where to start? I don't know where to start. Except that I know I'm already giving you sleepless nights. That's the Mulder curse. I have insomnia and everyone I sleep with catches it too." Mulder paused, wondering if he'd revealed too much. Skinner crossed his arms over his chest, waiting. Mulder didn't like being looked at during a confessional - it disrupted his flow of thought and made him think too much about how ludicrous his outpourings must sound. He turned the chair around so that he could look out of the window. "Curiosity. Wanda would be proud of me. I wish I knew more about you," he murmured absently, watching the tiny ant-like people moving around on the street below. "Just when I think I know you, you do something that surprises me. You always seem to be one step ahead of me. I know..." Mulder faltered, "I know that in the past I've done some good work on the X Files, but that's irrelevant. I want you to be pleased with my work **now**, now that I'm, you know. Yours. I really want to make you proud of me. I don't get too proud of my own work. There was that time you told me I'd done good work - that time when Modell's twin sister almost made me take Scully out, but I couldn't feel it. I went home that night and your praise meant so much to me. Knowing you thought I'd done something good gave me a buzz, even though I knew I didn't deserve it. I got a first..." He suddenly felt stupid sitting in the chair, like a kid inhabiting his father's space, trying to emulate him, and got up, and leaned against the window, looking out, lost in the memory. "At Oxford. I got what they call a first - a first class degree. It's the highest grade you can get. You know that, I suppose. Mom cried when she found out. Tears of joy. She said she was so proud. I always thought I should feel something too - I mean, I'd worked so hard for it, but I didn't feel a thing. I wanted to. I'd worked damn hard to get it, but when it came...well maybe they're right. Maybe the journey is more important than arriving." Mulder shrugged. He started to wander around the room, glancing at the books that Skinner kept for reference. "There's no personal knickknacks in here, you know that?" He asked, not looking at his Master. "Photos on the desk - that kind of stuff. Don't tell me that you don't have any photos of people who mean a lot to you. Everyone does." Mulder bit his lip, wondering just how damn obvious **that** had been. "None of it means anything, not my degree, my success on the X Files, not really. Not in here." He gestured vaguely in the direction of his heart. "I wish it did. Sometimes, sometimes...I wonder if finding Samantha might not be the same as my degree. I've chased it for so long, fought so hard for it, that when it finally comes - if it finally comes - supposing it's a disappointment? What will I do...after?"

Mulder stared into space, numbly. Somehow, he found himself coming to a stop by the chair where Skinner was seated, silently listening to his slave's outpourings.

"What will there be left to do? How will I fill my days and nights if I don't have this quest? What will I be? What will be left of me?" Mulder found himself sinking to his knees, and his face sought the respite of his Master's knee. This felt so good. Just kneeling here, beside Skinner, being an obedient puppy. He sighed as he felt Skinner's hand stroking his hair. "I know this stuff isn't what you want to hear. I wish I could tell you the other stuff. I'm not any damn good you know, Master. I've done things...if you knew.

Yesterday. Oh well..." He trailed off, was silent for a while, just enjoying the silent moment with Skinner, then he started again. "If you hadn't been there...I owe you a lot. I'll make everything up to you. I promise. I was a jerk."

"Fox." For the first time, Skinner interrupted him during a confessional. Mulder looked up in surprise. "Words," Skinner said, tapping his head reprovngly. Mulder thought about it and remembered his habit of calling himself names.

"Right. Yeah. Well I fucked up, and you were right to take me down like you did. Nobody has ever done that for me before. Mom and Dad didn't know how to handle me. Dad used to run a mile from one of my moods - he was that generation that didn't like talking about anything so our whole screwed up family shit got swept under the carpet. Scully does her best, but you know...hell, I get my own way with her. She's a tough lady but I ditch her if she's in the way. You'd flay me alive if I ditched you. Not that that would necessarily stop me from doing it." Mulder grinned. Skinner's fingers tweaked his ear lightly in response. "I'll prove what I can be. I mean it. I'll make you proud of me," Mulder vowed fiercely. He was silent for a moment, then glanced around the room. "Yesterday when you paddled me, that damn well hurt. There isn't usually a spanking I can't take but that was a close call. D'you know what was going through my mind? I just thought what a bastard you were because you didn't want to make it good. You knew I had the desk fantasy so you used the table. There's a whole world of difference between a turn-on spanking and just a good old-fashioned punishment but you seem to understand it like it was in your soul or something. What makes it good, or bad - it's so subtle. Yeah, I know the psychology, I understand my own kink, I'm just surprised someone else understands it, that's all. Maybe you've got a psychology degree too." Mulder couldn't stop thinking about that book he'd found Skinner reading. He was silent for a while. Skinner's hand remained on his head and Mulder knew that his time was nearly up. He felt curiously soothed and at peace - almost drowsy. "You said you loved me," Mulder muttered. There was a long pause. "Crazy," he murmured, shaking his head. "Patsy Cline," he mumbled in a disjointed way a few seconds later. "I'll shut up now," he finished.

There was silence in the office for a few minutes, then Skinner moved his knee, and dislodged Mulder's head.

"Go down to the cafeteria and bring up a plate of whatever looks good to you," Skinner ordered.

"I already said I'm not..." Mulder began.

Skinner forestalled him with a raised hand. "Do it," he commanded.

Mulder did as he was told. He returned with a pizza. He noticed Skinner frowned disapprovingly, but he had told Mulder he could bring up whatever he wanted, so his Master let his slave's choice of food pass with only the merest hint of a grunt.

"Kneel down." Skinner gestured. Mulder obeyed instantly, and sighed as his Master opened his shirt, and pulled out the lead. Skinner fixed it to the table again, then he sliced the pizza, and held up a forkful of it to Mulder's unwilling lips.

"You know, I could feed myself," Mulder pointed out.

"Yes, and if you'd brought a meal up in the first place, like I asked you to, then I'd have let you," Skinner retorted. "Learn, Fox. Every disobedient act is going to take you one step back. Just count yourself lucky that I'm allowing you to stay dressed."

"You'd make me kneel here, and eat...naked?" Mulder asked in horror. "In the office?"

"Of course. Here, there, and everywhere. You know the rules," Skinner replied, thrusting the food into Mulder's mouth in a bid to shut him up. Mulder took an unwilling chew and then rediscovered his appetite as he realized how nice the pizza tasted. He chewed with renewed vigor, and Skinner made the most of his slave's silence to do some talking of his own.

"I won't normally spend so much time on slave issues in the office, but getting you straight is important and I figure we've put in enough unpaid overtime over the years to take some time to work on this right now. You're right, Fox. I know the difference between erotic spanking and a punishment session all too well," Skinner's eyes were serious, "and I also know that sometimes only a severe punishment session can give a person the release they need. There are many different levels to the mental and emotional aspects involved in spanking, as I'm all too well aware." Skinner gave a heartfelt grunt. "Different people have different needs," he mused thoughtfully. Mulder's eyes widened as he tried to fathom the subtext of Skinner's words. "I don't like to work just by enforcing discipline though. There have to be rewards as well, Fox. So," Skinner's brown eyes were twinkling behind his glasses as he looked at his slave. "If you react well to the short leash, and behave like a model slave for the next few days, then I'll make sure that there will be a special treat for you on your slave's day on Saturday."

"What kind of a special treat?" Mulder's ears pricked up at that, and he envisaged a whole day spent having erotic tortures and delights applied to his body in the Playroom.

"Anticipation is half the pleasure," Skinner said slyly. "So you'll have to wait." His Master curled his long legs around Mulder's body, pulling his slave closer, then waved another fork of the pizza at him. Mulder opened his mouth obligingly. Skinner grinned at him.

"Just like a baby bird, waiting to be fed," he observed. "And one day I'll teach you now to fly," he promised. Mulder's cock leapt as he decided to interpret that literally, as referring to the harness in the Playroom. Maybe his Master would swing him high into the air on Saturday, trapped in his bondage, and...Skinner interrupted this train of thought by leaning forward and whispering silkily, "your ears are glowing, slave-boy. Don't second-guess me. You'll almost certainly get it wrong. Now, a couple of other issues. I don't have any photos of loved ones in here because I don't need them - I have the real thing and if I want to see him, I can just call." Skinner finished feeding Mulder the pizza. "You know me well enough to know that I don't like parading my personal life around at work. I'm a deeply private man. If I'm taking certain risks with you right now, it's because it's necessary for your training. I won't ever put us in a position of jeopardy. You are my slave here, and it's important that you understand that, so I'll discipline you here if you need it, but do not expect nice, erotic office discipline of the kind that takes place in your fantasies during our working hours. We're here to work, and I'm here to straighten you out - not attend to your libido."

"Yes, Master," Mulder muttered sullenly. He liked that fantasy but he could see the point to what Skinner was saying.

"All right. We're done." Skinner unfastened Mulder's leash, and re-clipped it to his cock ring, before straightening his slave's clothing. "You're dismissed," Skinner said, and Mulder turned to go. "Oh, one more thing." Skinner stopped him before he reached the door, and Mulder heard him come up behind him, and the next thing he knew he was enveloped in a pair of big, warm arms. "You make me proud just by striving to be an attentive slave," Skinner whispered, his breath tickling the side of Mulder's face. Mulder felt a shiver run up his spine. "You make me proud just because you're charming, witty, and smart. Most of all, you make me proud because you're mine and sometimes I want to shout that fact from the treetops, so that everyone knows how proud I am of you. I want to show you off to the world, little one. The night of the party was the happiest of my life, because people saw that you belonged at my side - and that it was where you were meant to be." Skinner's arms were tight and protective around Mulder's body and he felt as if he had been transported onto another plane of existence and there was just his Master's silky voice, whispering in his ear.

"I'd do anything to please you, Master," he said, his own voice shaky, his knees almost giving way.

"I'll help you by always being here to bring you back down, by loving you and keeping you safe, by disciplining you when you need it. You already eat out of my hand, but one day you'll learn to trust me too - enough to tell me everything. I'll be here. I'm a patient man. I can wait," Skinner promised. "There's no escape from me, slave."

"I know. Thank you." Mulder closed his eyes, savoring the moment, then Skinner kissed his ear and pushed him away gently.

"We're done," he murmured ironically, and Mulder was reminded of the last time his Master had performed that action and said those words. This time there was a world of difference.

Mulder went downstairs still reeling. He was quiet for the rest of the afternoon, to the extent that Scully even asked him if he was feeling all right. He smiled at her dreamily, and then reached for the 'phone and called Skinner's office.

"Skinner," his Master answered tersely.

"Hi. I've nearly finished the first report, sir," Mulder informed him.

"And?" Skinner waited.

"That's it. I thought you'd like to know," Mulder said, wondering just how obvious it was that he had wanted to hear his Master's voice.

"I see. Well, bring it up when you're done." Skinner put the 'phone down. Mulder smiled seraphically at Scully and then turned his attention back to his work, ignoring Scully's raised eyebrow.

Half an hour later he called Skinner again.

"What time are we, um, I mean, are you leaving tonight, sir?" He asked.

"About 6," Skinner answered tersely.

"If it was 6:30 I could have that report done by then," Mulder said eagerly.

"Don't knock yourself out, Agent Mulder. Tomorrow will be fine," Skinner answered.

"Oh. Right. Okay." Mulder hung up.

"Jeez, Mulder what happened to my partner?" Scully asked him in disbelief. "Don't tell me - you're the model agent clone Skinner had made and the real Mulder is stuffed into Skinner's desk drawer desperately hoping to be rescued."

"Yeah. As if." Mulder made a face at her. "I just want to do a good job, Scully. Skinner's put his ass on the line for us in the past, and it's the least I can do to make sure he gets reports on time. Especially considering all the shit we've thrown at him over the years."

"Right." Scully nodded, her eyebrows kaleidoscoping into her hairline.

Mulder smiled at her sweetly. "Have you ever considered having an operation for that eyebrow problem of yours, Scully?" He asked.

Mulder was waiting outside Skinner's door on the dot of 6 p.m. He helped his Master into his coat, then took his Master's briefcase and carried it for him. Skinner drove them home, then unfastened his slave's leash, and ordered Mulder to get changed into his sweats.

"We're going jogging," he announced. Mulder was surprised, but pleased. "I like the idea of taking my pup for a little exercise," Skinner grinned, slapping his butt. Mulder ran to get changed and a few minutes later they both emerged onto the streets of Crystal City. Mulder was surprised by how fit his Master was. Skinner easily kept up with his own loping strides, although he forced Mulder to hold a slightly slower pace than he was used to.

"I don't want you running yourself into the ground," he warned. They ran for just under an hour, then returned back to the apartment. A delivery boy from the local restaurant arrived at the same time. Mulder couldn't help but marvel at his Master's organizational skill. They ate, and then Mulder ran Skinner a bath and cleared away the dishes, all without being told. When the bath was ready, he went to kneel beside his Master, and awaited further instructions. Skinner turned the television off, and smiled at his slave.

"Today was good, sweetheart. Keep this up and you'll be off the short leash by next week."

"Yes, Master." Mulder smiled, pleased by the praise.

"Now, go and get undressed and get into the bath. I'd like you to be nice and clean when I use you."

"Master is going to...?" Mulder looked up hopefully.

"Oh yes. I missed out on my usual wake up call this morning, and you've been tantalizing me all day with glimpses of your body, so I'm in the mood." Skinner grinned. "It's amazing what an attentive slave-boy can do for his Master's libido."

"I'll remember that, Master," Mulder said gleefully. He scurried to do Skinner's bidding, making sure he lubed himself thoroughly before getting into the bath, and placing a condom on the shelf by the soap, in easy reach.

Skinner put his slave to good use that evening. First he made Mulder wash him thoroughly, then he took him once in the bath with the water sloshing all over the floor. They both lay back in the warm bath afterwards, sighing in contentment. Skinner held Mulder for half an hour as the water grew cool around them, and then he made Mulder jerk off for his pleasure, before harrying his slave out of the bath and into the bedroom.

"Time to crash out in front of the TV," Skinner said gazing at Mulder hungrily as his slave wandered naked and clean towards the bedroom door, "but not before... Assume the grace position, slave." Mulder did as he was told, surprised, and Skinner came up behind him, grabbed his butt cheeks, and kneaded them firmly. "Not before I taste your hot, eager body again," Skinner growled, turning Mulder on instantly. He could feel his Master's hard cock rubbing against his crease, and thrust his butt out.

"Please, Master," he said, excited by the fact that Skinner could get hard again so soon after the last time, and all because he found his slave's body so enticing.

"Beg me," Skinner insisted.

Mulder blinked. This was new. He liked it. "Please, Master. Take me. Hard, fast, now. Don't show me any mercy," he grinned, getting into the swing of the scene.

"Hard and fast?" Skinner nipped his neck with his teeth and Mulder arched his back, and moaned. "Or slow, and deep?" He squeezed Mulder's buttocks and Mulder cried out.

"I don't care, Master. Use me any way that pleases you!" He gasped. Skinner's hands wandered all over his body, then ended up on his buttocks again. His master eased them apart, and entered a finger. "Is this what you want, you wanton little slave?" he asked. Mulder nodded, opening his legs wider and pushing back on Skinner's finger.

"More please, Master. Use me, please. Put your cock inside me, nail me to the wall," Mulder begged.

"Is that what you want? Hold still then." Mulder heard a condom being unwrapped, then Skinner held his buttocks apart, and slid slowly, so slowly into Mulder's body. He pushed, then stopped, then pushed again. It was the slowest, most agonizing entrance Mulder had ever endured and he cried out from the sheer pleasure of being kept on the edge of anticipation. "More?" Skinner asked.

Mulder nodded. "Please. Yes..." he whispered.

"Good. Because there's plenty more," Skinner hissed into his ear. Mulder felt his anus stretched another agonizing inch. Surely his Master was fully inside him? He felt completely filled, to capacity. "There's still more," Skinner said. "Want it all?"

"Yes!" Mulder screamed. "Please!" He gave a gasp as Skinner suddenly thrust hard, deep inside him. He could feel his Master's body pressed up tight against his own. "How did you like it slow?" Skinner asked, his hands brushing over Mulder's sensitive nipples and awakening his slave's cock.

"It...it's mind-blowing, Master," Mulder gasped.

"You're so nice, and tight, and hot, and wanton," Skinner murmured in a low, sexy tone that went straight to Mulder's hardening penis. "I'm going to fuck you slowly, so slowly, until you're begging me to come, but I'm just going to keep going, enjoying myself in your warm, slick body...feels so good. Do you like feeling me in here like this? Taking you, filling you? Reminding you that you're mine. You belong to me...does that feel good?"

"God...yes...!" Mulder managed to stammer. He could feel the heat of Skinner's body, and the pulsing of his cock inside him. It was the most amazing moment, as he stood there, trembling, trying to keep his hands on the wall and his butt out, while Skinner stood behind him, filling him to capacity, stretching him with his big cock, and all the time talking to him in that deep-toned, intimate way. Mulder was on the verge of collapse when Skinner slowly, so slowly, moved his hips back, sliding his cock so that it was almost out of Mulder's body, and then inching it back in again. His slave almost dropped to the floor as he felt every last sensation of being possessed by that magnificent, hard cock.

"Shit, Master..." he murmured.

"Hold still. Don't move. I just want to enjoy doing this. Very slowly...here we go again." Skinner slid out, then back, and Mulder marveled at his control. His Master's hands found the chain linking his slave's nipple rings and tugged on it. Mulder yelped as the combination of the pain in his nipples and the slow, exquisite caress of his prostate sent him to a different plane of sensation. "Good boy. Take it. Take it all," Skinner whispered as he slid back in at a snail's pace. He repeated this maneuver several times, combining a slow pull on Mulder's nipple chain, with a slow entry into his body, until Mulder thought that he was in serious danger of expiring. His own cock was standing out perpendicular to his body, and Skinner suddenly wrapped his hand round it. "Okay, boy. You can come whenever you like, but remember, I'm going to go on using you until I'm through, so if you come too early you'll have to stand here and take me until I'm done." Skinner continued his agonizingly slow entry and withdrawal, one hand caressing Mulder's cock, the other tugging the chain on his nipples, until his slave couldn't take any more and he bucked into Skinner's hand, coming with a cry of complete bliss. Skinner licked the back of his neck, holding him upright until his orgasm passed, and then he began that grinding, slow entry and exit again. Mulder's nerve endings cried out at being so stimulated after he'd taken his pleasure and he suddenly understood his Master's warning that he'd have to stand here and take this. While he'd been erect, this had been so mind numbingly pleasurable that he hadn't been able to hold on, but after his climax the sensation was too much, and he began to whimper.

"Sensory overload," Skinner chuckled, but he didn't speed up. He slid into his slave several more times before finally speeding up, and coming with a sigh of pleasure. Mulder felt as if he'd crumple up on the floor in a sated heap, but Skinner stayed buried deep inside him, his arms holding Mulder tight around the stomach. It was a good feeling, being held like this by his Master while the big man softened inside him, being so comprehensively owned by him, and Mulder drowned in it for a while. Finally, Skinner withdrew, but with the same exquisitely aching slowness as before, and Mulder sank immediately to his knees and kissed Skinner's feet.

"If you're ever going to do that to me again, please warn me," he gasped beseechingly.

Skinner grinned. "Too much for you, slave-boy?"

"No. Too good. It blew me away," Mulder sighed.

"Good. TV then bed." Skinner pulled him up, grabbed a robe for himself and they both went back downstairs. As it turned out, Skinner was the only one who watched any TV. He sat on the couch, and Mulder lay down next to him, with his head in his Master's lap and was asleep within seconds. He was dimly aware of his Master fumbling to answer the phone without dislodging his slave, and listened with a sleepy ear to what Skinner was saying.

"He is? Fantastic. That should be worth seeing. He does? Great. You're fine with that? Yeah, I thought so. God, yes. Wouldn't miss it. I'll bring Fox. Yeah, yeah, yeah. He is, yes." Mulder heard his Master give an almost teenager-ish laugh. "No, he'll love it. When he's gotten over the shock that is. I might have to hold him down while it's happening though! Yeah, yeah! Oh I promised it. Not yet. No, this is for keeps. It'll happen one day. A hawk? Nice. I'm just trying to figure out what mine will be. No hurry on that though. No, yeah, see you then, Murray." Skinner put the phone back and gazed down at his dozing slave. "Time for bed soon, boy," he whispered. "You know one good way of dealing with puppies with too much destructive energy? You keep them constantly stimulated, don't leave them alone for too long, feed them well, give them several vigorous bouts of exercise, and a thorough grooming, and they just curl up and go to sleep on you, instead of chewing through your favorite pair of slippers." Skinner stroked his slave's hair, and gave a little chuckle. Mulder grunted, and stretched, and Skinner took advantage of the moment to tickle his slave's belly. Mulder gave a contented gurgle and fell asleep. Mulder vaguely remembered being half-carried, half-walked back to bed a few minutes later. His bed. Not his Master's, but he was so tired he didn't even care. He was asleep before his head hit the pillow. It had been a good day.

Several other good days followed it. Mulder was on his absolute best behavior. He stuck to Skinner's side like the proverbial puppy, and was rewarded by being frequently petted, or better - made love to, by his appreciative Master. He suddenly understood what his Master had told him about rewards as well as punishments. This felt so good that he didn't ever want it to change, and, he reasoned, if Skinner could make him feel this good during the week, then his slave's day had to be something really special.

Mulder awoke on Saturday morning feeling tingly. Today was the day. It had been nearly a week since he'd last set foot in the Playroom and he couldn't wait to get in there. Maybe Skinner would take him there straight after breakfast he thought to himself, idly, as he performed his wake-up call. Skinner didn't seem to be in any hurry though. He sipped his coffee, used Mulder as a newspaper prop for an hour, and then sent him to the corner when Mulder fidgeted.

"You can stand still for half an hour. Butt out. I want something good to look at," Skinner ordered. Mulder obeyed sulkily. Twenty minutes later he emitted a deep sigh. "Problem, slave?" Skinner asked dangerously.

"Today's Saturday, Master!" Mulder protested.

"Thank you for reminding me. Your old Master can't keep track of the days any more," Skinner replied acerbically.

"No. I didn't mean...I meant...today's slave's day, Master!" Mulder protested.

"Is it?" Skinner flicked open the paper again. Mulder could feel himself pouting. He banged his head against the wall in frustration. "Don't do that, boy. That's my property you're damaging there," Skinner growled. "Slave's day? Hmm. You know, I could have sworn it was puppy day. Go and get me the item that's waiting in the closet," he ordered. Mulder turned gleefully, just in time to catch the twinkle in Skinner's eye.

"What is it?" He asked, running over to the closet. He found a bag, and brought it to the bed, kneeling beside his Master and offering the parcel up prettily, eyes down, but with a big smirk on his face.

"It's a special item that I want you to wear when I take you out today," Skinner told him with a wide grin.

"You're taking me out?" Mulder asked anxiously. This wasn't in his plan for slave's day! He had thought they would be staying in. All day. In the Playroom.

"Yeah. You'll like this - we're going to party," Skinner told him, with a grin. Mulder's heart sank. "It's one big social whirl for you, boy," Skinner said, tousling his hair. "Two parties in the space of just over a week."

"Yeah. I'm a lucky pup." Mulder pulled a face.

"My thoughts exactly, which is why I had this made for you."

Skinner opened the bag and pulled out an exquisite, thick brown leather collar, from the same range as the implements in Mulder's special case. Mulder looked at it, aghast.

"Here. Touch it." Skinner handed it to him and Mulder took it, numbly. It was so soft that it was almost like a second skin, but it was thick enough, and wide enough to ensure that Mulder wouldn't be able to forget that he was wearing it. There was a silver band across the front with FOX written on it in big letters, and a ring attached. "And this," Skinner rummaged in the bag again, "is the dog-tag." He grinned and held up a silver emblem, with a picture of a Fox on it. "Okay, pup, let's get you dressed for walkies shall we?"

Skinner patted the bed and Mulder climbed up reluctantly, and knelt while his Master fastened the collar around his neck. It fitted much higher than his gold chain, so Skinner didn't remove that. He pulled the buckle tighter than Mulder thought was really necessary, so that the hated collar hugged his throat, and it was so wide that it kept his chin up. "Beautiful," Skinner murmured, attaching the tag. "There. Very nice, pup, and we have a lead too." He drew out a long, brown leather lead and fastened that to the silver ring too. "Don't sulk, boy. You're going to be on display this afternoon, and although I could have made you walk to heel with the nipple leash, I thought it'd be kinder to allow you to stay fully dressed. You can thank me." Mulder suddenly appreciated that this was the better of the two options, and mumbled his thanks. There was something nice about the way the collar fitted him so snugly, reminding him of his status at all times.

"Thank you, Master," he whispered, chastened. "It's an afternoon party then, Master?" he asked.

"Yes. Over at the house of a good friend, and fellow dom. He has a big house, and his parties are great fun. It'll do you good to mix with some other subs. There's always plenty going on - swimming, tennis, volleyball, basketball. You won't be bored. Oh, and he's laying on some entertainment too."

"What kind of entertainment?" Mulder asked warily, remembering when he had been the entertainment on the menu not so long ago.

"A very special kind. A sort of...ceremony between Murray and his sub. You'll enjoy it, trust me." Skinner winked and Mulder was suddenly certain that he wouldn't enjoy it at all.

Mulder sulked all the way to Murray's house. Going to a stupid party was not his idea of 'slave's day', damnit! He hated parties. In fact, he'd avoided them for most of his adult life, so to suddenly end up going to two in the space of a week was enough to make him scream. Not that he hadn't enjoyed the last one...but this was different. This was supposed to be **his** day, a day when his Master did wonderful erotic things to his body, and made him shriek in ecstasy, or fulfilled some special fantasy of his. He didn't want to spend it at a stupid party. Mulder was already in a serious sulk by the time they arrived. Skinner ignored him. He parked his jeep, grabbed the end of Mulder's leash, and led his reluctant slave into the house. They were met by a thickset, dark haired man with bulging muscles and a broken nose. He was wearing tight leather trousers, and a leather vest, and was the scariest dom Mulder had ever met - apart from his own dear Master.

"Hi there, Walter." The dom grabbed Skinner's hand, and pumped it enthusiastically. "Sorry we had to miss your last party. This must be the slave, yes?" The bulked up man glanced at Mulder.

Skinner smiled, and pulled on Mulder's lead. "This is Fox, yes. Fox, say hello to Hammer. He's Murray's sub."

"He's...a sub?" Mulder asked in surprise. He knew, from his own experience on the scene, that people weren't always what they seemed but this guy was the toughest looking sub he'd ever come across.

"Oh yeah." Hammer grinned. "Nice to meet you, Fox. You landed a good Master here. Second best only to my own dear Murray. I hope he's treating you right?" He winked at Skinner.

"Well..." Mulder opened his mouth, and caught Skinner's look of amused warning, so he closed it again. "Get him to tell you the meaning of the term 'slave's day' sometime," he muttered mutinously to Hammer. The other sub raised an eyebrow, and Skinner burst out laughing.

"Don't mind him. He's in one of his sulks. I'll take my belt to his backside if he doesn't cheer up soon," Skinner warned ominously. Mulder gulped. Skinner was wearing a very big, very thick, black leather belt with a silver buckle, and he just knew it had to hurt - big time. He plastered a falsely bright smile on his face, and Hammer gave a giant guffaw.

"You've got your hands full with this one, Walter," he laughed.

"He has his moments, but he's been very good all week, and I adore him." Skinner pulled Mulder over for a deep kiss, then let him go again. Mulder tried to remember how to breathe. Skinner grinned at him and unfastened the lead from around his neck, leaving him in the collar. Mulder felt curiously bereft of his Master's guidance when the lead was gone.

"Mingle. Enjoy yourself," Skinner instructed, slapping Mulder's backside heartily. Mulder shot him a venomous look. He didn't do mingling. Everyone knew that. He was legendary for his 5 minute appearances at the annual FBI Christmas party.

"Come on, Fox, let me show you around," Hammer said, clearly sensing his uncertainty. "The doms like to hang out in the library, the subs in the pool-room at the start of one of Murray's parties. It's kind of tradition. They all get together later on so you can see your Master again then." Hammer grabbed Mulder's arm and led him away. He glanced back to see Skinner gazing after him with an amused smile on his face.

There were about 15 subs already milling around in the pool-room, playing pool, and helping themselves to drink. Mulder poured himself an orange juice and watched, feeling lost and lonely, without even Skinner by his side. Hammer stayed and made small talk with him for a while.

"Murray's got a nice place here. We've been living together for about 20 years now. Murray retired last year, but I still work,"

"What do you do?" Mulder asked, wondering what the hell Murray looked like if Hammer looked so scary.

"I'm a nurse."

Mulder choked on his drink. "Right," he spluttered, wondering how many patients had heart attacks on waking after surgery to find **this** apparition looming over them.

"I work with the terminally ill," Hammer said, and Mulder felt immediately chastened. "I've been looking forward to today for weeks. It's our anniversary, so Murray is giving me a very special gift," he winked, and then someone called him away.

Mulder pretended to be engrossed in a game of pool, and was therefore surprised when a voice piped up in his ear.

"Why, if it isn't the bunny."

Mulder swung around, remembering that voice all too well. "Grow up, Lee," he responded wearily. Lee was wearing the most outrageous pair of gold jeans, and a tight gold tee shirt. A gold crucifix hung between his perfectly toned pecs.

"Bite me." Lee clicked his gleaming white teeth at Mulder.

"Don't tempt me."

Mulder wandered out of the pool-room and into the yard. He had no wish to get into any trouble with Skinner today and staying anywhere near Lee would almost guarantee it. He found a game of volleyball in progress outside, and hung around on the outskirts of it, scuffing his sneakers in the dirt. He longed to join in and be accepted, but at the same time, he didn't have much time for any of this sub bonding crap. He had never actually made any friends on the scene. There had been people he played with, and that was it. He hadn't gotten close to anyone. He hadn't wanted to. He had come to terms with his own kink, but he almost despised it in others. He didn't want to belong to anything, or be part of anything. He was happier standing on the outside, being an observer.

"Hey, want a game?"

One of the subs, a small, wiry guy with a dark mustache beckoned him in. Mulder gave a half smile, and then loped over. He was soon too engrossed in the game to remember to sulk, and he found himself enjoying the activity. It felt good to get away from the X Files, from the all-consuming nature of his quest, and to just enjoy the sheer pleasure of exercising, and being with other people. He hadn't expected to enjoy it, but he was. The small, wiry man was called Ian, and they became friends the minute Mulder found out that Ian was the editor of *Anomaly* magazine, a publication devoted to reporting on the gap between what the government said it was doing and what it was **actually** doing. Before he knew it he was conducting an in-depth conversation with the other man, in between knocking the ball over the net. The team changed as people wandered in and out, and Mulder found himself so caught up in the conversation that he missed an easy ball, and then, too late, realized that Lee was playing on his team, and was pissed off.

"If you can't play properly, then fuck off elsewhere," Lee yelled.

"It's not the Olympics." Mulder shrugged. "Chill out, kid." He imbued the last word with as patronizing a tone as he could manage.

"Bite me!" Lee screeched, giving Mulder the finger. Mulder sighed and turned his back on him, grimacing at Ian. "Or do you need Big Daddy around to fight your battles for you?" Lee jeered. Mulder clenched his fists and tried to stay calm. "Do you know what my dom did to me last Friday?" Lee asked, coming up to Mulder, and shoving him. "He damn well took the skin off my butt, that's what."

"What kind of a sub are you if you couldn't take that?" Mulder inquired coolly.

"Bite me." Lee said obnoxiously. "It was all your fault, bunny. I'm glad your Big Daddy is here today because I am going to move in on him and then you'll be history." He turned back and bounced the ball over the net. Mulder stood there, getting his temper back under control.

At that moment, a hustle of doms emerged from the house, drinks in hand, laughing and joking. Mulder's heart soared as he saw that his Master was among them. Skinner was dressed in a pair of tight, faded blue jeans that hugged his long legs, and a black tee shirt, and he looked devastatingly attractive. Mulder could see that Lee wasn't the only one giving Skinner an appreciative stare. He stood out from the other doms, partly because of his height and stature, but also because he had an innate authority that even these most experienced of doms couldn't match. Skinner caught sight of Mulder and gave his slave a heart-stopping smile, meant only for him. Mulder was aware of some of the other subs eyeing him in jealous awe, and he couldn't stop himself grinning back at his Master, and doing an absurd little hop as he bounced over to pick up the ball. He threw himself into the game for a while, showing off for his Master and the other doms. He was completely surprised by himself. This wasn't his normal style of behavior at all, but he just loved the fact that Skinner was watching him, and boasting about his slave to the other doms, pointing him out and cheering him on when he was engaged in a rally. Ian grinned at him.

"You're his?" He asked, glancing at Skinner and looking seriously impressed.

"Yeah. His indentured slave," Mulder said with a nonchalance that belied his surge of pride.

"Wow!" Ian shook his head.

"What about you?" Mulder threw himself lazily at a ball and slammed it back to win a point, then turned smoothly, feeling 10 feet tall, knowing that Skinner was watching.

"I'm not with anyone right now," Ian said with a shrug. He looked suddenly very sad. Mulder felt sorry for him. "I lost my dom, my partner, lover and friend, in a car wreck about 2 years ago. I keep coming to the parties hoping to meet someone, but nobody lives up to...you know?"

"I'm sorry," Mulder said softly. He wondered how he would feel if Skinner was taken from him, and a lump rose in his throat. "I'm so sorry, Ian," he said sincerely.

"You must introduce me to your Master," Ian said. Mulder was surprised by the wave of jealousy that flooded through him. Ian wasn't making any moves on Skinner, but he was painfully aware that his Master was the object of considerable attention. Mulder had barely noticed that he had been looked at with considerable interest by several of the doms as well. He was too busy battling with his feelings of insecurity. Besides, he knew that he wasn't interested in anyone but Skinner, but he had no idea how his Master felt on the matter of exclusivity. Mulder shrugged these thoughts aside, and turned back to the game.

Everything was going fine until both he and Lee went for the ball at the same time, and crashed together, banging their heads.

"You fucking moron!" Lee seethed.

"It was my ball. You should have looked where you were going, goldie," Mulder spat back, annoyed at having been made to look like a clumsy idiot in front of his Master.

"Yeah? Yeah?" Lee challenged aggressively. "Well, bite me, fucker!"

"Okay." Something inside Mulder snapped, and he launched himself at Lee, grappled him to the ground, and sank his teeth into the kid's shoulder. He got a mouthful of vest, and barely even broke the skin, and then he found himself knee deep in doms as they came over to break up the fight. Mulder found himself being unceremoniously handed over to his Master. Skinner snapped the lead onto Mulder's collar, and hauled his resisting slave away from the crowd.

"All right, pup, this is taking the whole doggy theme too far," Skinner said angrily, giving him a swift shake. Mulder gasped as Skinner tugged hard on the lead, and he found himself unable to do anything but follow on behind his Master. He was suddenly very grateful indeed that the leash was around his neck and not attached to his nipples. "Now if you're going to behave like a disobedient puppy, then I'll treat you like one," Skinner snapped. He turned to a tall, florid, hook-nosed man, with a white beard, dressed in a flowing caftan robe. "Murray, have you got a muzzle in your Playroom? My pup's turned dangerous and needs to be kept quiet for a bit."

"That's not a pup you've got there, Walter, it's a hellhound!" Murray chuckled, nodding, and disappearing for a few seconds. He returned with what looked like a bag made of leather straps and buckles.

"Kneel." Skinner ordered curtly.

Mulder obeyed, trembling slightly. "This isn't fair. He started it!" He protested.

Skinner raised an eyebrow. "And who did the biting?" He asked.

"He kept..." Mulder broke off with a sigh as Skinner's expression became even more dangerous. "I did, Master," he agreed.

"I'm of the opinion that public displays of bad behavior should be rewarded by public displays of punishment...oh, don't worry, boy, I'm not going to whip your ass in front of these people, but you will be feeling my belt on your backside soon. Now open your mouth. You can wear this for the next couple of hours so people can see that you're being punished." Mulder obeyed, sullenly, and Skinner placed a strap over his tongue, and fastened it to a buckle on the side of the mask, then he strapped the whole contraption under Mulder's chin and over his head, keeping his jaw clamped shut. Mulder seethed. He couldn't even speak with this atrocious muzzle fastened to his face. "Okay, into the bathroom," Skinner ordered. Mulder obeyed, anger at the muzzle now mingling with fear at the punishment he knew he was about to receive. He watched, trembling, as Skinner locked the bathroom door, and then undid his belt. Mulder's stomach fell into his shoes. Skinner slammed the toilet seat down with a flick of his booted foot, and then sat down on it.

"Over my knee. Now, pup!" Skinner commanded. "Undo your jeans first."

Mulder's fingers were shaking as he obeyed. He pushed his jeans and boxers down, then knelt beside his Master. Skinner pulled him over his knees, taking endless long minutes to get his slave arranged in exactly the position he wanted him in, then he placed one heavy hand on the small of Mulder's back to keep him in place before delivering a firm swat with his belt. Tears sprang into Mulder's eyes. He couldn't even scream! He was reduced to making an absurd gurgling noise.

"Okay, the lesson you are going to learn from this is not to lose your temper and show me up in public, no matter what the provocation," Skinner told him forcefully as he raised the belt again. Mulder hadn't received any punishment spankings over and above his morning discipline all week and even his morning discipline had been light, so his butt was fresh. Even the lines from his last marking had paled into almost nothing. The belt was heavy, and it packed an almighty wallop as it rained down on his unprotected skin. Skinner gave him ten hard licks, then righted him again. Mulder could feel the tears, more of humiliation than pain, squeezing down his cheeks and was about to wipe them away angrily when Skinner grabbed his hand to prevent him. "No, I think we want to show folks that you are one contrite slave-boy who's been thoroughly punished by his pissed off Master. You are contrite, aren't you, boy?" Skinner demanded. Mulder thought about it for a moment, then noticed that Skinner still hadn't put his belt back on so he nodded, unwilling to taste any more heavy bites from that strap on his bare butt. Skinner gestured that Mulder could adjust his clothing, then he put a firm hand on Mulder's shoulder, and ushered him back out into the house. Mulder flushed bright red as people shot him glances. Although these people were all on the scene, they weren't dressed up today, so in his muzzled condition he stood out like a sore thumb.

"This way. We're back on a short leash," Skinner told him, tugging Mulder along behind him. "A **very** short leash," he clarified. Skinner took a seat on a couch in the library, and gestured that Mulder should kneel beside him. Mulder obeyed, aware that everyone was watching him. He flushed, and hung his head, wishing that the ground would open up and swallow him. It was so obvious that Skinner had just

taken him to the bathroom and spanked his butt. He couldn't sit back on his bottom because it stung, so he had to kneel up.

"Dangerous creature you have there," a well built, swarthy man commented, sitting beside Skinner.

"Yes. He'll learn. He's new to his slavery," Skinner replied, grabbing a beer from a side table.

"Oh, I like a sub with bite, and he's certainly got that," the stranger laughed. "If he's too much for you to handle, you might consider selling him to me."

Mulder's heart thudded in his chest and he looked up.

"Eyes down!" Skinner barked. Mulder obeyed, hastily, flushing again. "Thanks for the offer, but this slave will never be on the market," Skinner replied.

"Never's a long time." The stranger gave an easy smile. "Let me tell you about myself. My name is Franklin," he handed Skinner his card, "and I specialize in taming...recalcitrant slaves. My methods are severe, I'll admit. If this young pup was mine, I'd have stripped him naked in the middle of this room, and taken the hide off his ass with my crop. He wouldn't be able to stand afterwards. I find that they usually learn after the first couple of times. Then we can have more fun. I'd offer a considerable sum for a slave such as this. Oh, I enjoy the challenge of breaking them to my will," he said, his tone one of complete relish. He eyed Mulder as if he was something he was about to eat.

"You must be new here." Skinner placed the card on the table, making it clear that he had no intention of keeping it. "So I'll make allowances for you. However when I say that I won't sell, I mean that I won't sell. I don't care who the buyer is, or how much he offers. This slave is my own personal property. He's not available. Not now. Not ever."

"Ah, you've fallen in love with him." Franklin made a disapproving clucking sound with his teeth. "Always a mistake, if I might say so. It's fine to allow the slave to fall in love with you, in fact it's to be encouraged, but you should never reciprocate. It's a common mistake, but you'll learn in time."

Skinner looked as if he would explode, and then, much to Mulder's surprise, he burst out laughing. "Thanks for the tip my friend, but I'm not a green newcomer. I know how to play - and safely too. Incidentally, as you're clearly new to this area of the world, let me give you a tip - always make sure you know who you're talking to before you open your mouth. I'm the Guardian of The House - you've probably heard of me." He smiled, and inclined his head. Franklin's flashing brown eyes widened in astonishment.

"I...oh, I'm sorry. I didn't realize. Forgive me, Guardian," he murmured, paling visibly. He made his excuses and shuffled away. Mulder wished he could smile. It had been so good watching his Master put that upstart in his place. Mulder knew the phrase 'Guardian of the House' all too well. The 'House' was an exclusive enclave of the most experienced players on the DC scene, both subs and doms. They met occasionally, to discuss the other players, and whether they needed to step in to outlaw any unsafe players. It was their task to generally police the scene in a discreet way to ensure that it didn't fall foul of the law. The leader of the 'House' was referred to as the 'Guardian', and that was how Skinner was referred to on the scene. He was the legendary player who people rarely saw but whose reputation preceded him.

An hour or so passed. Mulder felt his anger and humiliation dissipate, as Skinner charmed a variety of people, who came to sit by him, almost as if they were seeking an audience with him. There was a distinctly reverential tone to the way they approached his Master, and Mulder decided that he liked the kudos of being the great man's slave. He felt tired and wrung out, and slumped down next to Skinner's thigh, and rested his head upon the other man's knee. As always, Skinner's hand absently stroked his hair, while he talked to his friends - both fellow doms and subs, ignoring his slave save for that steady fondling of the younger man's hair. Mulder grew to enjoy his enforced silence. Nothing was expected of him; he could just relax, contentedly curled up at his Master's feet, silently waiting for his Master to take notice of him again. He felt curiously relieved, almost blissed out, and he sighed and moved his face to gently nuzzle his Master's fingers as best he could from behind the muzzle. He was glad, once again, that Skinner was strong enough to take him down and make him submit when he got like this. It was what he needed, and nobody had ever been able to give it to him before. He gazed at his Master adoringly, lost in his slavery.

"Now, there's a change." Mulder dimly recognized Murray's deep, booming tones, and was aware that their host was standing over him, looking down, but he was too exhausted to move. "Doesn't he look sweet now that you've got him tamed? You'd never think he had such sharp teeth."

"That's my pup," Skinner said, tickling Mulder's ear. Mulder didn't even look up. "How's Lee, Murray?"

"Fine. Hammer took a look at the bite - it was nothing, just a scratch, and frankly no less than the little brat deserved. He always manages to upset someone, wherever he goes. Sorry it had to be your boy and he got into such bad trouble over it, though. I guess your Master whipped some sense into you, boy, hmm?" He asked Mulder. Mulder sighed, and buried his face even further into Skinner's lap, trying to forget **that** particular painful experience.

"Fox will learn," Skinner said firmly.

Murray nodded. "With you as his Master he'll turn out all right," he chuckled.

"I've been meaning to ask you, Murray - who was the man Fox was talking to earlier?" Skinner asked.

"At the game? That's Ian Rylance."

Mulder's ears pricked up at that, and he wondered why his Master was interested in Ian - unless, maybe he...Mulder pushed that thought back down. He couldn't cope with his own jealousy right now.

"What do we know about him?" Skinner asked.

"He's sound," Murray replied. "Lost his partner a couple of years back and hasn't played since. I'm very fond of him. He often stays here - Hammer adores him. I must go, Walter. The main event is almost due and I have to prepare Hammer."

"Of course. Go ahead - and good luck!" Skinner called.

Out of the corner of his eye Mulder noticed some bustle, and wondered what was going on, but he was too comfortable to move, so he just lay, being stroked, while some kind of brazier was brought into the room, and lit. Then he noticed that the room was filling up. An hour or so later, the room was burning

hot. Mulder finally looked up, to see that a stage had been set at one end of the room, next to the brazier. A bondage table was there as well, awaiting an occupant. Mulder glanced around, and saw Hammer being talked to by his Master. Hammer was pacing up and down, anxiously, a frown creasing his face, and Murray looked just as worried. Mulder looked up at Skinner uncertainly.

"It's all right, pup. Last minute nerves. They'll both be fine. Watch and learn - it'll be your turn one day," he whispered. "Although I don't think I'll make you wait 20 years for it!" Mulder's eyes widened frantically, and Skinner pulled him close, so that Mulder was practically lying in his lap, and stepped up his stroking. The room was now full up, and Murray called for silence.

"As you know, today is the day that Hammer takes my brand onto his body, to mark our 20 year partnership," he announced. Mulder glanced at Skinner again and his Master smiled, and placed a finger over his slave's lip to soothe him, and remind him to stay calm. "Hammer, come here," Murray ordered, his tone changing into a dom's tone of command, and Hammer stepped forward, his eyes fixed on his dom. Mulder thought they made a strange pair. Murray was portly, with a dramatic air that went with his deep, booming voice, and he was a good twenty years older than his sub. Hammer was muscled, with hard, toned flesh and a quiet, understated manner. Hammer looked infinitely the tougher of the two. Mulder wondered where he'd got his nickname. "Strip," Murray ordered. Hammer didn't stop looking at his dom, as he took off his trousers and vest, and stood, butt naked, awaiting further orders. "I'm going to burn my mark into Hammer's flesh myself," Murray told the expectant room. "I'm using a hawk - which seems appropriate." A wry laugh went around the room, as Murray made the self-deprecating reference to his long, hooked nose. "All right, Hammer, it's time to be branded." Murray's tone was hard. "I've already prepared Hammer. He's fully in his sub headspace as you can see. I've clamped him, and spent the past hour performing a series of escalating punishments on him, so he's ready to take a more extreme form of pain. Yes, Hammer?" Murray asked, his eyes keen and sharp, clearly wanting to make sure that Hammer was in the right place mentally to take what was coming next.

"Yes, sir," Hammer nodded. Murray led him over to the bondage table, and strapped him in tightly. Mulder bit down on his muzzle, and looked up to Skinner for reassurance. Skinner didn't really mean to put his slave through all this one day, did he? He had to be joking! Mulder buried his face in Skinner's lap as Hammer was fastened down on the table, face up. "For personal reasons, that are between me and my sub, his mark will be placed on the top of his thigh - here," Murray said. There was silence for a moment, and the moment stretched on and on in the hushed room. Finally, unable to stand it any longer, Mulder looked up just in time to see Murray bury a steaming brand in Hammer's skin. It made a hissing sound. Hammer let out a bellow of sheer pain, and Mulder smelled burning - he realized it was flesh and nearly choked. Skinner stroked him gently, calming him. Mulder buried his face in Skinner's lap again and didn't look up again. The branding continued but he didn't hear any of it. He was too busy wondering why the idea of bearing that atrocious pain in order to accept his Master's mark onto his body, both shocked him and turned him on at one and the same time.

Mulder wasn't sure how much time passed, but when he looked up again, the room was nearly empty, and Skinner was looking down at him gravely.

"I think you've learned your lesson, pup, so the muzzle can come off," he said. Mulder nodded gratefully, and Skinner unfastened the muzzle and pulled it away from his head. Mulder ran a hand

through his flattened hair and tested out his tongue, trying to swallow the taste of leather. Skinner handed him a glass of water. "Here. Now, how are you feeling?"

"Fine, Master," Mulder whispered, feeling subdued.

"Good." Skinner tousled his hair affectionately. "It's been a good learning experience, yes?"

"Um...I suppose so," Mulder agreed reluctantly, still feeling that it was a giant waste of **his** slave's day.

"Good boy. Now, you have one thing to do before we can leave." Skinner jerked on the leash and Mulder followed his Master. His heart sank as he saw that Skinner was taking him over to where Lee and his master were standing.

"Mike. Lee." Skinner inclined his head. "My slave has something to say." He waited expectantly. Mulder looked at him with angry eyes for a moment, then sighed.

"I'm sorry, Lee. I shouldn't have bitten you," he said.

"Yeah. Well you..." Lee began, but Skinner quelled him with one raised eyebrow.

"Don't push your luck, son," he advised and Lee shut up.

Mike laughed and slapped his sub heartily on the bottom. "We can't keep these young hot heads out of trouble, eh, Walter?" he chuckled.

Skinner grunted, and led Mulder back to the house to say goodbye to their hosts. Mulder stood numbly on the end of his leash, staring anywhere but at the new, livid red mark on Hammer's body as Skinner talked amiably to both men. Finally, Skinner tugged on his leash and Mulder looked up, startled. "Don't you have anything to say?" He asked.

"I..." Mulder looked at Hammer. "It's beautiful," he choked at last, unexpectedly. Then he flushed and looked down again. He didn't like the way all this made him feel.

Murray exchanged a glance with Skinner. "The boy will need..." he began.

Skinner interrupted him. "Yes. I know. I knew that when I took him on. He'll get it," he promised. Mulder wondered what the hell **that** had been about. "Fox - go and wait for me by the jeep," Skinner ordered, and Mulder went. He watched as Skinner took leave of their hosts but instead of coming over to the jeep afterwards, Skinner made a beeline for Ian instead. Mulder ground his teeth together. First his Master ruined his slave's day, then he brazenly approached another sub. Mulder kicked his feet in the dirt, feeling another sulky mood descending on him. He hated feeling like this - when he wasn't in relationships he was spared all this and functioned as a perfectly normal human being, but, as it had with Phoebe, being involved with someone brought out characteristics in himself that he barely recognized and certainly didn't like. Mulder watched as Skinner spoke to Ian for a couple of minutes, then took something the other man gave him and put it in his pocket before returning to the jeep.

Mulder was glaring at his Master by the time he arrived back. Skinner took one look at him, and sighed, then he unlocked the back door and held it open expectantly. Mulder looked at him in surprise. The back of the jeep contained an old blanket and a pair of Skinner's walking boots. There were no seats.

"Pups who can't behave themselves travel up behind," Skinner said, shoving him in. Mulder glared at his Master.

"I thought you'd already punished me!" he protested.

"Really?" Skinner got into the driver's seat and started the engine.

"Yeah. Jeez, a strapping and 3 hours in that fucking muzzle."

"I've got one at home. I'll put it straight on you when we get back if you're not careful," Skinner warned.

"Well it was all your fault!" Mulder exploded, crouched uncomfortably in the back.

"How so?" Skinner glanced at him in his rear view mirror.

"Because I was good all week damnit! And you promised me a slave's day!"

"Fox, I thought you'd enjoy mixing with other subs. Sometimes you seem to have some strange ideas about your needs. I thought meeting a other people with similar needs would help you rationalize your own better."

"I do not fucking need you getting into my head!" Mulder growled.

"I'd have said that it was exactly what you damn well need," Skinner responded tersely.

"So I suppose I've blown any chance of a session in the Playroom?" Mulder asked a few minutes later, already knowing what the answer would be.

"It was never on the cards, pup," Skinner said into the mirror. "I have to drop into the office to run through some paperwork anyway so..."

"What? Oh great." Mulder slumped down against the window, feeling at odds with the whole world.

"First, a swim," Skinner told his slave as they arrived at the Hoover building. You look as though you could do with some cooling off time too, pup." Skinner undid the collar around Mulder's neck, and slung it in the back of the jeep. "There's never many people here on a Saturday but we wouldn't want to take a risk," he said.

"I know. I have worked on Saturdays before you know," Mulder growled.

"Yes. I do know. I've sat up in my office, thinking about you down in the basement, wondering why you worked yourself so hard. It clearly wasn't for the promotion, or even because the job demanded it," Skinner remarked, looking at his slave intently.

"I enjoyed it." Mulder shrugged.

"Good, because I want you to help me." Skinner refused to say any more. They both got changed and Skinner dived smoothly into the pool, did ten brisk laps, then pulled himself out. "You carry on swimming. I'll be waiting for you in my office when you've swum that sulk off you face," Skinner told his slave. "I mean it, Fox. Leave the attitude behind when you come up."

Mulder took a deep breath and ducked under the water, ignoring his Master, and losing himself in that familiar, underwater world, blurry, and insubstantial, with its echoing sounds. He could lose himself here. It felt good - better than facing up to all these damn emotions. Mulder emerged, gasping for air, then did 20 laps in quick succession. He was, he noted with some satisfaction, a much faster swimmer than his Master. Finally, half an hour later, unable to delay the inevitable any longer, he got out, took a shower, lubed himself just in case, although he really wasn't in the mood, and then opened his locker - and stopped short. The casual clothes he had been wearing were gone, and in their place was one of his work suits, complete with shirt, tie, shoes, socks and a clean pair of boxer shorts. Mulder sighed, wondering just how anal his Master could be to insist that they observed Bureau sartorial protocol on a Saturday evening for god's sake.

"A Saturday evening we should be spending in the Playroom," he growled at the empty locker, banging the door shut in disgust. He had no choice but to dress, but he was deliberately slow about it, and then he took a long time drying his hair and making faces at himself in the mirror before finally wandering up to his Master's office.

The Hoover building always felt eerie on a Saturday, but he had never been to the fifth floor on a Saturday before. The empty corridors, usually bustling with agents and secretaries, were now empty, and his footsteps echoed as he walked. Mulder felt like a kid going into school on the wrong day of the week. He felt an almost overwhelming urge to peek into all the offices and see the secrets, usually kept hidden by weekday activity. Sensing that would most definitely NOT be a good idea, he carried on walking to Skinner's office.

Skinner had changed too. Mulder paused on the threshold of his office. The sight of Skinner in full work regalia never failed to take his breath away. Normally he couldn't show his appreciation because he was accompanied by Scully, and Kim was sitting in the outer office, but this time it was different. Mulder took in the sight of his clean, shining Master, sitting at his desk, wearing his crisp, white shirt, with a dark tie. His pants were perfectly pressed, and he oozed an aura of the most devastating power and authority. Mulder felt his throat go dry.

"Ah, Agent Mulder. Come in, and shut the door behind you," Skinner instructed. Mulder stood there, uncertainly. Why was Skinner calling him 'Agent Mulder' when they were alone?

Skinner raised an eyebrow, and Mulder hastened to obey.

"Yes, sir," he mumbled, striding over to Skinner's desk and standing in front of it. Skinner looked at him for a long time, until Mulder could feel himself flushing.

"Sir?" He asked. "What do you want me to do?"

"I want you to account for yourself, Agent," Skinner said. Mulder opened his mouth, then hesitated. Skinner seemed almost angry with him, but it was a controlled anger. He wondered what he'd done.

"Account for myself, how, sir?" He muttered weakly, wondering what the hell was going on.

"Account for yourself over the past 6 years." Skinner waved a hand at his desk and Mulder saw a pile of what he recognized to be X Files. "Yes, these are yours. I've been through them and picked out all the ones where you used questionable methods," Skinner said menacingly. He got up out of his chair, walked around to the other side of the desk, and stood behind his slave. "I'm sure that you thought you'd got away with it at the time, each and every time, but you didn't. I was watching, and waiting, and now, Agent Mulder, there has to be an accounting - and due punishment."

Mulder felt his knees grow weak. This was hot! This was every fantasy he'd ever had for six years while sitting in meetings in this office, come true! Skinner's presence was prowling, and predatory, and although his words were those of censure, his tone was low, and sexy, speaking straight to Mulder's cock. It was a world away from the way Skinner normally disciplined him in his professional capacity. A light bulb went on above Mulder's head. Skinner was creating a scene for him! And not just any scene - the scene that Mulder had played out himself so many times in his head, for so many long, lonely years, never even hoping that he could one day have the reality.

"Sir, I'm sorry, but I don't really think you can hold me responsible..." he began, relaxing into the scene.

"Quiet, Agent Mulder. When I want you to speak, I'll tell you, but I'm warning you, you're already in a lot of trouble, Agent." Skinner's voice was a bark of sheer authority, and it was like a soothing caress to Mulder.

"Yes, sir," he muttered, looking at his shoes.

"Look through the cases, and tell me what you did wrong in each one, and then we'll discuss how to punish you," Skinner said, sitting down again. He watched, unblinking, as Mulder picked up a file from the mound on his boss's desk.

"Could I sit, sir?" He asked.

"No," Skinner snapped. He picked up a ruler, and began slapping it against his hand menacingly. Mulder swallowed hard, and lost himself in the moment. His cock was already bulging inside his work suit, only this time it didn't matter. This time he didn't have to hide, or pretend that this situation wasn't a giant turn on. This time his fantasy was going to be fulfilled. "I'm waiting!" Skinner barked. Mulder nodded, and flicked through the file.

"I, uh, ditched Scully," he began.

"I think we can take that as read in most of these." Skinner slapped the ruler against his hand again. Mulder shuddered. Although it was only a game, Skinner was playing it so real that he couldn't have broken out of role if he'd dared.

"I upset the local PD with my attitude, I went into a dangerous situation without backup, I..."

"Let's backtrack here," Skinner interrupted. "As I recall, your 'upsetting the local PD' involved you calling the sheriff a 'self important loser who wouldn't know his ass from his elbow.' To his face. Yes?"

"Uh, I'm not sure I remember the **details**," Mulder hedged.

"Then try harder, Agent Mulder! FBI work is about detail. The devil, as they say, is in the detail."

"Yes, sir!" Mulder thought back frantically. "It's possible I said that, sir, yes. It sounds about right," he finished wryly.

"Very well. As you can see, Agent Mulder. This is a pile of transgressions bigger than I've ever, in my years as a Supervisor, had to deal with. So, the question is, how should I punish you?"

"I don't know, sir." Mulder looked at his feet, his whole body trembling in anticipation.

"In the past, I've put black marks on your file, I've given you menial work assignments far beneath your capabilities, and I've chewed you out. Did any of that work?" Skinner barked.

"Not really, sir," he admitted.

"I agree. So, Agent Mulder, I think the time has come to try a stronger form of discipline, don't you?" Skinner got to his feet. Mulder looked up, his eyes wide with a combination of arousal and alarm. This was much better than the reality of being chewed out and punished by his boss. Those times had always filled him with dread, and although they were erotic in his fantasies, in reality they had just been dreary, awkward and humiliating. This was the fantasy version and it was good - damn good!

"What...do you mean, sir?" he stammered.

"Marine discipline, Agent Mulder. Good, old fashioned, physical discipline, Agent."

"Isn't that against regulations, sir?" He protested.

"Very probably." Skinner cleared a space on his cluttered desk. "However, I'm not prepared to have a loose canon on my ship any more. You'll play by my rules or not at all. What do you say to that, Agent Mulder?"

"You can't do this, sir!" Mulder threw himself into the spirit of the game, enjoying the tingling in his body. He loved this! It was one thing to just allow his Master to do whatever he liked with him in the Playroom, or the bedroom, but to interact, and role-play - this was even better. He got the chance to participate in making the fantasy work.

"Someone has to stop you, Mulder, or you'll just keep getting into trouble. As your supervisor, it's my duty to haul you back into line - however painful that might be. Now, I think physical punishment is the answer with you, so that's what I'm going to use."

"Please..." Mulder muttered weakly. Skinner stood in front of him, drew himself up to his full, formidable height, and seemed to almost puff up several sizes in sheer bulk. When he spoke, his voice was so hard, low and sexy that Mulder almost came from the tone, as much as the words.

"Pants down and bend over my desk, Agent. Now! I'm going to whip you."

Mulder shivered, and opened his mouth to continue his protest, but Skinner's dark eyes were so captivating and compelling that he found himself instead undoing his belt with shaking hands. Skinner was right - he did know the difference between an erotic spanking and a punishment. Back at the party, the strap had just been painful, but this...this was making him tremble with arousal. He undid his pants, and pushed them down, then his boxers. He was so deeply into the role, that he blushed at exposing his bare backside, although his Master had seen it countless times before. "Over you go." Skinner put a heavy hand on the small of Mulder's back, and pushed him over the desk. Mulder lay there, savoring the feel of the moment, the unfamiliar cool wood pressed into the flesh on his bare thighs. The files were so close that his nose was almost touching them. He felt exposed, his ass waving in the air, awaiting its punishment, and his cock sticking out hopefully at the front. He lay there, in an agony of anticipation, listening to Skinner's footsteps as his Master walked around to the other side of the desk, and picked up his ruler again. Mulder's stomach did a leap, thrilled that Skinner was going to use the heavy wooden ruler. He almost jumped into the air when he felt the cool wood soothing his bare bottom.

"I think we'll start off with minor offenses," Skinner told him. "Then move onto the major ones. I'll put this here, so you can look forward to what you've got coming later." He placed the ruler on the desk in front of Mulder, so that it filled his vision. Mulder moaned softly, as he felt his Master's hand caress his butt. Then there was a smack. It was only light, warming him up, and he flailed, clutching onto the sides of desk to stop himself sliding off. Skinner put a big hand on the small of his back to hold him in place, then set about smacking his buttocks in earnest. Mulder wanted the moment to go on forever. He committed all the details to memory. His Master's sexy, demanding voice, telling him he was being punished, and why, instructing him to expect no mercy. The way the desk felt against his bare stomach, and thighs, the smell of paper, and wood that filled his nostrils, and the feel of that big hand slapping his exposed bottom. He could feel his butt heating up, and began to wriggle and squirm, and then begged to be let up. Skinner ignored him, rightly judging that being let up was the last thing Mulder wanted right now.

After several minutes of steady spanking, the pace dropped, and Skinner's hand soothed his slave's bottom, just delivering the occasional light swat in between gentle stroking. Mulder sighed. Damn, but this was good. It wasn't in character with the scene, but it was so damn good!

"All right. That was just the beginning. Time to deal with the serious issues now. Get up," Skinner told him. Mulder stood, starting to feel that dreamy high that a good spanking always gave him. Skinner walked around the desk, sat in his big chair, and then crooked his finger and beckoned Mulder over. Mulder bit on his lip, and shuffled towards his boss.

"I'm sorry, sir," he muttered, standing beside Skinner's chair. "I promise I'll always follow procedure from now on."

"Over my knee, Agent!" Skinner proclaimed, pointing.

Mulder felt as if his heart had stopped. That was one of his favorite fantasy lines. God, if anyone could see them - it was so absurd, and yet it felt so good. He nodded, and lowered himself over Skinner's strong, muscular thighs. Skinner picked up the ruler, and swished it through the air a couple of times. Mulder clutched onto his Master's thigh for support.

"This will hurt. There's no point using corporal punishment unless it drives the point home, and that's exactly what this will do," Skinner told him ominously. Mulder closed his eyes and held on even more firmly. He felt the ruler tapping his flaming butt cheeks, and then it landed on the fleshiest part of his bottom with a resounding thwack. Mulder let out a strangled cry. Another swat, and the pace and force started to increase. Mulder began to thrust against Skinner's leg, his cock screaming for release. "This is what happens when you disobey me, Agent," Skinner said, picking up the tempo even more. Mulder began to plead for mercy, to beg to be allowed up, but Skinner held him down and didn't stop until he'd delivered a swat to every single inch of Mulder's sore backside - several times over. Mulder grew intimately familiar with the color of the flooring, and the smell of the leather on Skinner's chair, and he felt as if he was floating on a cloud of hazy pleasure, fueled by each painful swat on his ass.

Finally it was over, and he lay, dazed and sated in his Master's lap, sweat soaking his hair.

"I won't do it again! I promise, I promise!" He cried, no longer even knowing what he was saying, or promising.

"Good. I'm pleased to hear it," Skinner said, brushing the sweaty hair out of his face. Mulder fell to his knees on the floor beside Skinner's chair, and lay his head adoringly on his Master's lap.

"That was fantastic, Master," he sighed. "So, so good. You seem to know everything that goes on in my mind...every trigger word..."

"I'm not finished yet, Agent." Skinner's hard tone brought him back into the scene. "Go and stand facing the wall. I want that red butt on display." Mulder looked at him, wide-eyed. Oh god, this was just beyond his wildest dreams. He got to his feet, and shuffled over to the wall. He was still trembling from the excitement of enacting the fantasy, and although his butt hurt like hell, the endorphins were making his brain buzz and he was as high as a kite. He needed the corner time to pull himself back together. It felt good too, standing with his nose pressed against the wall, red butt on display, in Skinner's office of all places. He glanced back to see that Skinner was either working, or feigning work.

"Look around again and I'll come over there and redden those cheeks some more," Skinner warned. Mulder turned back immediately, flushing. There was something so humiliatingly erotic about standing here, being almost ignored, while his Master worked. He sighed dreamily, wondering how long Skinner had been planning this. Now he felt guilty for all his snide complaints about missing out on his slave's day. This was a gift he could never have asked for. Skinner had taken him so skillfully into his sub headspace, and kept him there, like the Master he was. Mulder's cock was still straining against its gold ring and he touched it surreptitiously, squeezing it. He was so absorbed in this, that he jumped into the air when a swinging slap landed on his bottom.

"Touching yourself without permission, boy?" Skinner hissed, and Mulder knew that the scene was over, and they were back to normal - *whatever that is*.

"Sorry, Master, but that scene was just so damn hot," he said honestly.

"Want me to take care of it?" Skinner asked, rubbing his hands up and down Mulder's arms, and kissing the back of his neck.

"Yes...please..." Mulder croaked.

"Come back to the desk then." Skinner led him back to the desk and sat down in his chair, then he pulled Mulder close and took his weeping cock into his mouth. Mulder yelled in surprise as Skinner practically swallowed him whole. He put his hands on his Master's shoulders and dropped a series of kisses onto Skinner's bald head as he worked. Skinner's hands were holding his burning backside, caressing it, kneading the flesh, giving him that knock-out combination of pleasure and pain that took him new levels of bliss that he'd never known before. He came with force, bucking into Skinner's mouth, and his Master swallowed his come, then released his slave with a grin.

"I take it the earth moved for you, then?" He asked.

"You don't even need to ask the question." Mulder slumped against his Master, feeling utterly sated.

"You've been good all week. You deserved a reward," Skinner said, stroking him.

"I almost screwed up today though," Mulder sighed.

"Hmmm. You're fine in a controlled environment, sweetheart, but as soon as you're interacting with other people, it goes wrong. I can't keep you on a short leash all the time - I wouldn't want to and you'd grow weary of it and act up if I did."

"I'm sorry, Master," Mulder sighed, resting his head in Skinner's lap again. He liked this position best in the whole world.

"Fox - it's early days yet. I knew there'd be a struggle to begin with. We'll get there," Skinner promised, holding Mulder's face between his hands. "In time, with patience - and some healthy doses of discipline," he winked.

Mulder grinned. "Thank you, Master, for the fantasy - and for everything else."

"While you're here, I have a fantasy of my own..." Skinner grinned. He pulled Mulder up, and held out his hand for a condom. Mulder supplied it hastily, fumbling in his pocket. Skinner kicked away Mulder's pants and boxers, and then hauled him onto his lap. "Ride me. In my chair," he commanded. Mulder grinned back. He found 'riding' Skinner difficult, but the pleasure it gave his Master more than made up for the fact that the deeper angle of penetration sometimes brought tears to his eyes. He climbed eagerly onto Skinner's lap, opened his Master's pants, and put the condom on his Master's erect cock. Then he gingerly held his sore butt cheeks open, and slid Skinner's cock into his ass. Skinner grabbed his thighs, and jerked his hips up, and Mulder put his hands on Skinner's shoulders and slid expertly up and down on that hard cock, until his Master moaned, and pumped into him, gasping out his climax. They both hung there for a while, then Mulder daringly moved his face and caught Skinner's lips with his own, kissing him soundly, opening his Master's mouth and claiming his tongue. Skinner's arms tightened around his slave, and he pulled him even closer, devouring him.

They left the office fifteen minutes later, when they'd recovered, and readjusted their clothes. Mulder was on a total high as he walked down the corridor towards the elevator. His whole body was tingling and alive. He indulged for a moment in the fantasy that he was naked, and Skinner was leading him along by his nipple leash. It was therefore a total shock when a voice broke into his reverie.

"What's this? Working another Saturday, Walter?" Mulder froze. The Director. Skinner smiled at him warningly, then turned.

"Yes, sir. There's always work to be done. This is Agent Mulder. You've heard about him, I'm sure."

"Of course." The Director gave Mulder a keen stare. "Hard not to hear about you, and your exploits, Mulder."

"No, sir," Mulder gulped, hoping that his most recent exploits hadn't been heard. They continued down the corridor to the elevator, with Skinner talking easily to the Director, and Mulder, still floating high in the sky, trailing along behind them. He liked watching Skinner walk, his Master's taut body gliding like a panther, full of tightly controlled strength. Skinner stopped by the elevator, and, still in his leash fantasy, Mulder found himself sinking to his knees, acting on automatic pilot. Skinner grabbed hold of his elbow.

"Did you stumble?" He asked, helping Mulder up. Mulder flushed, wondering what the hell he had been thinking of, with the Director here!

"Yes...sorry," he mumbled, flustered.

He was relieved when they finally got to the jeep.

"Jeez, I'm sorry about that. What an asshole!" Mulder kicked one of the tires.

"I enjoyed it," Skinner grinned. "It shows that you're learning well - although I think such demonstrations of your obedience should be saved for when we're in private." He opened the back of the jeep and waved his hand at Mulder.

"Do I **still** have to ride in the back?" Mulder grouched, climbing in anyway, in too good a mood to argue.

"Of course. No puppies on the seats," Skinner retorted.

"Master...?" Mulder began, as they finally arrived home. He sank down on the couch, and then winced, and turned onto his stomach, kicking his shoes off with a sigh.

"Slave." Skinner got himself a beer out of the fridge, and threw one to his slave.

"Would you ever take another slave - or even a sub? It's just... I saw you talking to Ian, and..."

"Ah, that reminds me." Skinner took a card out of his pocket, and handed it to Mulder who took it blankly. "Ian's business card - he wrote his personal 'phone number on it too. You two seemed to be getting along well. I thought you might like to see him again."

"Why?" Mulder looked up, puzzled.

"You need friends, Fox. Everybody does. I'm not sure I entirely approve of Ian's work, but you liked him. Go out for a drink with him occasionally, swap horror stories about the Masters from hell that you've both had in your time." Skinner grimaced theatrically.

"You wouldn't mind?" Mulder asked, confused.

"Why should I? I want you to feel less isolated, Fox. You're isolated everywhere - in your working life, and your personal life. I know that you make a fiercely loyal, and very entertaining friend. A lot of people would like you if they got to know you - if you **let** them get to know you."

"I dunno." Mulder stared at the card.

"Well it's a good thing it's an order then." Skinner moved Mulder's feet and sat down on the couch beside him. "Call him tomorrow."

"Yes, Master," Mulder grinned, going to settle down again with his head on his Master's lap.

Skinner cleared his throat pointedly. "You're overdressed, boy."

"Oh." Mulder got up wearily, and removed his clothes, then lay down on the couch again. A few seconds later, he was startled when something warm and soft jumped on top of him. Wanda settled herself down on his lap and purred sonorously. Mulder considered pushing her off, but he was too tired to move, and he had to admit that her sleek fur felt good against his naked flesh, so he let her stay. Skinner ran a lazy hand over his slave's chest, and played with his nipples.

"These are healing nicely," he murmured. "I'll be able to do more with them soon. I'm looking forward to that." Mulder's stomach lurched. "There will be sessions in the Playroom. I have a cock whip I want to try out on you, and all sorts of clamps." Skinner squeezed a nipple fiercely, and Mulder whimpered.

"What about...?" he began, then bit on his lip.

"Go on," Skinner's fingers played with the nipple he'd just viciously squeezed, caressing it gently.

"That branding, Master," Mulder whispered. "You said you'd do something like that to me."

"I will. In time," Skinner said firmly.

Mulder closed his eyes, imagining taking that fiery object into his flesh, feeling it burn into his soul. "What symbol will you place on me, Master?" He asked, in trepidation.

"I haven't decided yet," Skinner grinned. "One thing's for sure though - you won't have any say in what I choose. You'll accept whatever sign I put on you."

"It has to hurt," Mulder muttered.

"It does, and it lasts forever." Skinner smiled affectionately, and stroked his slave, soothing him. "You'll take it, sweetheart, because I'll make you take it. Don't worry about it. It won't happen for a while yet. Now, it's late, and I'm tired. As you've been so good all week you can sleep in my bed tonight - that's an honor you can earn most slave days if you keep up your good behavior."

"Thank you, Master." Mulder closed his eyes, feeling completely happy. He'd made the right decision about California, and about Andrew Linker. He was sure of it. He wouldn't have forfeited today for anything.

"My puppy - he runs full bore until he drops and sleeps," Skinner whispered.

Mulder smiled.

Life was good, and only he could screw it up. Maybe he'd learned not to in this past week. Maybe. A part of him wondered what he'd do if Krycek called again with more information, but he pushed that thought aside. Right here and now, life was good and he didn't remember it ever having been so good before.

"I like slave's day, Master," he murmured drowsily, and he heard Skinner give a deep, rumbling laugh, before he fell fast asleep.

### **End of Part 12**

#### **Chapter End Notes:**

**Muzzle that boy!**

**(I should point out that DD posed for this pic, presumably of his own free will, so I can't be held responsible for any ideas it conjured up in my innocent little mind... Thanks to Gaby for sending it to me.)**

## Remote Control by Xanthe

### **Author's Notes:**

Posted 8th February, 2000

Wonderful pics courtesy of **Sergeeva**. There's another one with a more pained facial expression at the end of the story, but I loved this first one best because Mulder looks like the ultimate manipulative sub getting what he wants .

**WARNING: This chapter contains both schmoop, and some fairly hardcore BDSM scenes, so turn away now if either of these concepts isn't your thing. Everything portrayed in this chapter is consensual, and both participants are enjoying themselves but do NOT read on if you think this kind of stuff might upset you. I don't want to hear from you if you disobeyed me and got squicked. It's probably no worse than anything that's gone before, but I just felt like doing a REALLY long warning.**

Many thanks to Emma, who told me a very intriguing tale that sparked this story off, and for the long discussions over high calorie snacks.

Big thanks to CDavis for all the fabulous pics, and to Gaby for all the fun discussions. Hugs to RJ and the Persuaders for dragging me away from Donny Osmond in his loin cloth for long enough to \*finally\* get this finished. I'm coming back now, Donny, and I'm bringing my gag...

Special thanks to Mulder - he knows why.

Quotation courtesy of my sweet Alex. None of this is beta'd. It's far too much fun to take seriously.

**24/7** is an erotic fantasy and NOT a BDSM resource guide. The truth is sometimes exaggerated, or played with, for dramatic effect. For more information, please visit the **24/7 BDSM Glossary**.

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*"A truth, still apparent, though disregarded, that things move violently to their place, but calmly in their place. To put it another way, everything has its right home, the region that suits it, and, unless forcibly restrained, will move thither by a kind of homing instinct."*

J. Winterson  
*"Art and Lies"*

"You **really** don't have to do this, Master," Mulder said nervously.

"Nonsense." Skinner smiled - always an alarming sight, Mulder thought to himself, shifting uncomfortably. "Keep still." Skinner tapped on his shoulder reprovably and Mulder swallowed. "Would you like me to tie you?" Skinner asked, with a snort of amusement. "Would that help? I could put you in deep bondage if you'd prefer." He flexed his wrist threateningly.

"Uh, no. I can keep still." Mulder bit on his lip. "You have done this before, haven't you?" He asked, glancing up at his Master.

"Of course," Skinner said smoothly, picking up a small, black leather case and unzipping it.

Mulder swallowed again as he gazed at the contents. Three shiny implements were nestled on a bed of crimson silk. Mulder's heart missed a beat.

"How many times?" Mulder asked, wanting to yell that he wasn't letting any of those implements anywhere near him.

"Enough times to know how to do it." Skinner smiled disarmingly. Mulder fought down a wave of panic. "Relax," Skinner put his hands on Mulder's shoulders and his slave gave a startled jump. "We **are** nervous aren't we?" Skinner mused. "If I didn't know better, I'd think that somebody didn't trust his Master. Would that be right, slave?" This was Skinner's most dangerous tone, and Mulder knew better than to risk his Master's wrath by agreeing with him in this instance.

"Uh, no. It's just..." An idea came into his head and he looked up at Skinner with a smile of pure, seraphic innocence. "Today is your day, Master. Sunday - Master's Day remember? You shouldn't do anything for me - I should be doing something for you!" he said triumphantly.

"Oh, you will," Skinner chuckled. "You will - just as soon as I'm finished here." He picked up the shiniest, sharpest implement, and Mulder took a deep breath...and held it. "Why so nervous, slave?" Skinner asked. "I can't possibly make a worse job of it than the last butcher who cut your hair."

Mulder scowled at his Master in the mirror. He was seated on a stool, stark naked, his wet hair plastered to his head, and flopping into his eyes.

"I liked that cut," he growled.

"The one that made you look like you'd been in an argument with a lawnmower - and lost? Hmm, yes, I can see why it appealed," Skinner murmured. "Thankfully it's grown out, but it's far too long now. I should have cut it last week and forgot. Next time - remind me, slave." He flexed the long, shiny scissors he was holding. Mulder suppressed a low moan. Skinner picked up a silver comb from the exquisite black leather case, and parted Mulder's hair with a deft flick, then dragged the comb through the dark, wet locks.

"I'm not questioning your ability, Master..." Mulder began nervously. "It's just, you're not exactly a stereotypical barber - I mean, let's face it," he babbled, "you're an FBI employee for god's sake, and while you're a very skilled Assistant Director, that doesn't mean..."

"I can see that you'd like a full list of my hair-dressing credentials." Skinner put the comb down, and pinched a wad of Mulder's hair between his thumb and forefinger. "Which is tough because you're not going to get one. Trust me, I trimmed someone's hair every few weeks for a year, and **he** never complained."

"Who was he?" Mulder asked quickly, his heart beating too fast, a sudden wave of jealousy, warring with curiosity inside him.

"An old friend." Skinner smiled. "And that's all I'm going to say."

"Why won't you tell me about your past, Master?" Mulder turned his damp head to glance up at Skinner. His Master was dressed in a pair of jeans, but was otherwise naked, his bare chest level with Mulder's eye-line, which was distracting as it was rippling particularly enticingly this morning, Mulder thought.

"Why do you have so many delaying tactics in your repertoire, slave?" Skinner replied, firmly turning Mulder's head back to face the mirror.

"Answering a question with a question. Typical avoidance technique," Mulder muttered under his breath.

"Fox," Skinner said warningly. He took hold of a damp wedge of Mulder's hair again and opened the scissors. Mulder closed his eyes and winced theatrically, unable to watch. Nothing happened. Mulder opened them again. Skinner was watching him, the scissors still poised. "Would you prefer a blindfold?" Skinner offered in an amused tone. "I'm sure that can be arranged."

"No, Master."

"Then watch - and learn. I'll want you to cut my hair next," Skinner told him.

*What hair...?* Mulder thought to himself, and was surprised by a firm swat to the side of his thigh. "Ow! What was that for?" He demanded.

"For what you were thinking," Skinner replied.

"You cannot possibly punish me for what I was thinking," Mulder grouched. "Jeez, what is this - 1984? The thought police?"

"No, it's the year 2000, the year that this slave will finally learn to do what he's told, and give in to his Master's wishes - and I notice that you didn't deny what you were thinking. Now, hold still, or I'll take that razor and shave your hair off completely," Skinner said, pointing at the electric razor in the black leather case. With a resigned sigh, Mulder gave in.

In fact, Skinner proved to be as skilled as he had promised. He trimmed Mulder's hair neatly, although without any great creativity, used the razor to shave a swathe at the back of his slave's head, then dried the thick locks on top. Mulder had to concede that not only did he look fine, it was also nice not to have to keep pushing his hair out of his eyes.

"Now - I want my full Sunday service," Skinner told his slave, shaking the damp towel out. "That means a shave, a trim, and a full body massage."

"Right," Mulder said, getting up and grabbing the towel. Then he paused. "Master wouldn't like anything else, would he?" He asked.

"Such as?" Skinner raised a coolly assessing eyebrow. Mulder swallowed hard then took all his courage in his hands.

"Well, you did say that I could...that one day I might..."

"Yes?" Skinner crossed his arms over his broad chest, and Mulder suddenly wished that the ground would open up and swallow him.

"...be on top, Master," he finished, almost inaudibly. "Not top you," he clarified hastily. "Just serve you in a different way." Skinner looked at him thoughtfully, and Mulder bit on his lip. "Sorry, Master...I shouldn't have..." he said quickly.

Skinner interrupted him, pulling him close, and looking at him intently. "Never apologize for suggesting ways to please me, slave," he said. Mulder went quiet, flushing under the scrutiny. There was an expression in Skinner's eyes that he didn't understand and he wondered what the hell was going on. Finally, Skinner shook his head, and gave a wry, heartfelt sigh. "Fox, I will want you to serve me like that one day, but you're not ready yet."

"Why not?" Mulder argued. "What's to be ready for?"

Skinner frowned. "I've given you my answer, but let's discuss it anyway. Maybe it'll help you. Come here." He pulled his naked slave over to the bed, and sat him down, then sat down behind him, and put his big arms around Mulder's torso, grabbing his slave's wrists in his hands, thereby trapping him within his warm embrace. His legs wrapped themselves around Mulder's thighs, heavy and powerful. Mulder tensed for a moment, feeling as if he were in a kind of bondage, then relaxed as Skinner kissed his neck. "All right, tell me how you feel when I use you," Skinner said softly, nuzzling at Mulder's shoulders and the back of his head.

"How I feel?" Mulder craned his neck to get a glimpse of his Master, confused.

"Yes. Tell me." Skinner blew on the newly cut hair.

"It feels great. You know that," Mulder shrugged. Skinner's arms tightened around him and Mulder fought down an urge to struggle against the embrace, which was too firm, too close.

"I said, tell me," Skinner hissed.

Mulder gave up fighting his urge to struggle, and gave in to it instead. "Let me go!" He wriggled, fruitlessly, then pushed against his Master, and finally tried to twist away. At last, panting, he gave up, and was still, glowering at his Master.

"Let's start again. Why is it so hard to talk about?" Skinner asked.

"Because it is." Mulder snapped. Skinner pinched the top of his arm. "Master," he added, sullenly.

"All right, let me help you out here. Your fantasies about anal sex have always been about domination rather than love-making, haven't they?" Skinner asked, his breath warm on the side of Mulder's face. Mulder stiffened. "Well?" Skinner pressed.

"Usually. So what?" Mulder retorted.

"When I made love to you after your party - that was the first time you'd allowed yourself to just be loved by another man, maybe by **anyone**, wasn't it?" Skinner asked. Mulder felt another surge of frustration at being held here, so tight, unable to escape, and forced into facing **this** kind of scrutiny. Skinner squeezed his arms around his slave's body, searching for his answer.

"Yes! Yes, damnit! Why the fuck is that important?" Mulder growled.

"It's important because you enjoyed it," Skinner purred silkily in his slave's ear. "Didn't you?"

"Yes. Of course I did. You know that. You were damn well there."

"And that was okay, wasn't it? To enjoy it without the domination? To just enjoy good, old fashioned, vanilla sex? You were even a little bit proud of yourself for being able to enjoy it, weren't you?" Skinner paused, but Mulder made no answer. He closed his eyes, breathing heavily. "In your mind, enjoying being dominated, enjoying being fucked, makes you feel weak. You can't understand why you'd like feeling less than equal - it festers in your mind. When you first came to me, you told me that you knew what you were, that you'd come to terms with it, but you haven't. You've avoided doing that." Skinner's voice was relentless, boring into his soul. Mulder wanted to scream. "So, if I were to allow you to serve me by giving me anal sex, what would that make you think about me?"

Mulder felt the fight leave his body, and he slumped against Skinner. He was silent for a long time, head bowed, then he took a sudden, gasping breath as if he had been jolted into life.

"That you're weak, Master," he whispered.

"That's right. And then you'd be able to despise me, like you despised all those other tops you consumed. Then you'd be able to hit out, run away, convince yourself that I'm not what you need, escape from the intimacy that scares you, and from your own desires which you try to deny. Yes?"

"No." Mulder closed his eyes. "There's more to it than just one act of sex," he said. "You aren't my Master merely because of what you do to my body. Your authority, your skill, the things you say, the way you treat me, and...care for me - they all combine to make you my Master, and I your slave. You are my Master in more ways than just sex. Many more ways."

There was silence for a moment, then Skinner kissed his slave firmly on the back of his neck.

"Good. I know that - and I'm glad that you know it too." Skinner released his grasp on Mulder's wrists, and ran his hands lovingly down his slave's arms. "You can earn the right to serve me in that way, Fox. I'd enjoy it - but not yet. You have more things to learn about strength and weakness before I'd take that risk with you. Some rewards have to be earned in any case, and after that act of public disobedience yesterday I'm not inclined to grant you a reward of this magnitude."

"You're right. I don't deserve it. I don't know what I can do about...my perceptions though. Shit, it isn't as if I haven't read up on the psychology of my kink. You're going to make me face up to this, once and for all, aren't you?" He turned a scared face towards his Master. Skinner smiled at him, and brushed a gentle hand down the side of his slave's face.

"Yes, sweetheart. I promised you nothing less when I first took you on. Don't worry about it though, Fox. Your open mind, and willingness to learn are among your best qualities. If you could apply them to yourself, and throw in the same understanding and compassion that you show to others, then the lesson would be more easily learned. As it is..." he sighed, and the sound was heartfelt, "well, it might be painful." He squeezed Mulder again, reassuringly, and Mulder melted against his Master's strong, muscular body.

"I've wondered about your past," Mulder admitted. "Did you ever sub, Master? I need to know. I have to know," he said desperately. "Some of the things you've said...I see this image of you, kneeling, and I can't...I can't get my head around it. It isn't what you are."

"It isn't what you know me to be," Skinner said elusively.

"Did you?" Mulder looked up. "How did you get into the scene? When did you start? I know you were married, yet you've been involved with men...why?"

"So many questions." Skinner pulled away and got up, and Mulder followed him, consumed by his need to understand. "I will tell you everything, in time, little one," Skinner said softly, turning to face his slave. His Master's dark eyes were serious, and Mulder couldn't find the answers he was looking for in them.

"But not yet," Mulder said resentfully, his need to know burning him up inside.

"Not yet. Fox, there's so much that's new in this situation and your state of mind right now is fragile - I think you'll agree? I found you on the edge of an abyss, and I've managed to pull you back a couple of inches. I don't want you to turn back and jump right in."

"You've been playing me, psyching me out the whole time," Mulder accused, bitterly.

"And what have you been trying to do to me?" Skinner retorted. "You've been pushing the boundaries since you got here, slave." He pulled himself to his full height, his chest wide and solid. "You've tested me from the very beginning, constantly - and you still are."

Mulder shook his head, angrily. "So what? I don't stand a fucking chance. You hold all the winning cards," he spat. "You always did. The slave contract, those interviews with my former tops, the way you've crawled inside my mind. I can't win. I can't defeat you."

"Not only that," Skinner said, his tone deadly serious, "you don't want to win. Fighting me is like fighting yourself, and besides - you and I both want the same thing at the end of the day."

"We do?" Mulder asked, drowning.

"Yes. We do." Skinner's eyes were dark and intense as he pulled Mulder close, held his slave's head firmly between his hands, and kissed him hard on the lips. Mulder struggled, briefly, then surrendered to that familiar, beloved touch. His arms went around Skinner's waist, and his hands stroked his Master's bare back. Skinner reciprocated, drawing his slave close, plundering his mouth with his own. After several long seconds, Skinner pulled back, and clicked his fingers brusquely. "Submissive position, slave," he ordered, turning away and walking towards the bathroom.

Mulder bristled, drew himself up to his full height, faltered for a moment on the brink of rebellion, then sank to his knees.

"You bastard," he whispered. "You didn't even watch to make sure I knelt. You knew I would."

"Yes," Skinner said simply. "By my side, slave, and add 5 to your tally with the strap in your bedroom this evening. I can see the lesson about your use of word 'bastard' isn't sinking in."

"Yes, Master," Mulder whispered with a resigned sigh. He shuffled to his Master's side, and glanced up at Skinner's stunning physique hungrily, an expression of total, abject, helpless worship in his eyes. Skinner smiled, and gently patted his slave's head.

"We'll get there, sweetheart. I promise," he said softly. "Now, what do you have planned for me today?"

"Planned?" Mulder repeated blankly.

"Planned. It is, as you so rightly pointed out, Master's day, and I want to be surprised."

"Right." Mulder sat back on his heels. He'd been so absorbed with his own problems all week, that he hadn't given the matter of Master's Day any thought. He looked up and saw the flash of hurt in Skinner's eyes - his Master knew he hadn't even planned anything. "I'm sorry, Master," he said quickly, "but the truth is that I know a lot less about what would please you than you know about me. When you did that scene for me yesterday, it was perfect, and I'd like to do the same for you, but I don't know what kind of stuff would turn you on."

"Fair enough. We can talk about that," Skinner agreed. "And Fox - you don't need to take care of my whole day. Just do one thing to surprise or please me. I don't mind what - just that you think about it, and **try**."

"Well, I do have an idea," Mulder said, remembering his first lesson with Clark Hammond, the massage teacher, a few days before. "I'm not sure it's all that much of a treat, but I hope I can make it nice."

"Good." Skinner smiled. "I'll take a shower, then you can trim my hair and shave me. After that - I'm in your hands."

"Yes, Master." Mulder smiled happily, as he watched Skinner strip off his jeans and disappear into the bathroom. The one thing that continued to surprise him was how much he enjoyed losing himself in this role of devoted slave. Warming Skinner's towel, drying his Master, and seeing to his general comfort in a solicitous way, brought him almost as much pleasure as being made love to and he reveled in it. He made a passable job with the scissors on the fringe of hair at the back of his Master's head, then led Skinner over to the bed, and gave him his full body massage. After that he cooked his Master's breakfast, then excused himself in order to prepare for his Master's special treat. He found the scented candles he'd bought the previous week, and lit them, shut the drapes in the living room, turned the lights off, and led Skinner over to the couch.

"You have to sit on the floor for this," he said apologetically. Skinner raised an eyebrow, but complied, and Mulder sat on the couch behind him, his knees on either side of Skinner's head.

"I know this isn't that much different to the massage I just gave you - I mean it's the same kind of thing," Mulder said hastily. "But Clark said that the head and feet are the most neglected areas when it comes to massage, and, well, I know that this is something I really enjoy, so I hope you'll enjoy it too." He put calming hands on Skinner's shoulders, rubbed softly, then instructed Skinner to lie back against him and relax. His Master obeyed, closing his eyes with a deep, heartfelt sigh. Mulder then poured some oil into his hands, and warmed it, before placing his fingertips on Skinner's naked scalp. He caressed his Master's head with gentle strokes of his long fingers, allowing them to linger on that smooth scalp, enjoying the sensation of the oil sliding over the bare, pink flesh. He could feel Skinner grow heavier against his legs as his Master zoned out, and he smiled to himself as he worked. His fingers found slight bumps in the contours of Skinner's scalp and he committed them to memory.

"Did you know that phrenology is the art of understanding somebody's personality by the bumps on their heads?" He murmured to Skinner in a low tone.

"Uh-huh," Skinner replied, clearly off on his own special plane of bliss.

"I wonder what I could tell about you from this, Master?" Mulder whispered.

"Hmmm...dunno," Skinner said. Mulder's fingers moved the skin over the hard bone of his Master's scalp, relieving the tension that had built up there, then gently fondled behind his Master's ears.

"My grandmother used to give me head massages when I was a kid," Mulder said. "I used to get headaches, and she would rub my scalp with lavender water. I'd forgotten how nice that was until Clark reminded me."

"S'good," Skinner said drowsily. Mulder smiled happily, and worked for several more minutes. Then his movements became slower, softer, and he interspersed them with several kisses to his Master's newly polished, gleaming dome, before finishing the massage. Skinner shook his head blearily. "Over?" He asked, glancing up at his slave.

"That part is. Now for your feet," Mulder said. He patted the couch, and Skinner lay down beside him. Mulder swung his Master's feet into his lap, and began to massage them. Skinner wriggled and Mulder caught hold of his ankle. "Don't tell me my Master is ticklish?" He asked mischievously.

"I don't mind firm strokes, it's when you do all that light, whispery stuff," Skinner protested.

"Like this?" Mulder ran his fingernails down the underside of Skinner's foot and his Master gave a low gurgle and twisted up frantically to get away. Mulder held on tight. "I'll remember that," he winked, then he began to massage the feet with strong, deep strokes and Skinner gave another sigh, and leaned back on the couch, surrendering to the massage. Mulder took his time, and covered every inch of those golden feet. When he'd finished, he raised one of Skinner's feet to his mouth, and sucked each toe, then turned his attention to the other one. He finished off with a quick bite to Skinner's big toes, that earned him a growl in response, then let go of the feet, and went to kneel submissively at his Master's side. Skinner put a hand on his slave's shoulder and squeezed.

"Very nice, boy. I could get used to that. I don't think anyone's ever massaged my scalp like that before. It was a wonderful sensation."

"Thank you, Master." Mulder felt a wave of pleasure sweep through his body that almost knocked him out with its force. "I exist to serve," he whispered, picking up Skinner's hand and kissing the fingers.

"Well - sometimes," Skinner said. Mulder hung his head - his Master knew him too well. "You've done well, Fox," Skinner told his slave seriously. "I enjoyed that."

At that moment the 'phone rang, and Mulder went to pick it up, and presented it to his Master, head down, lost in his servitude. Skinner smiled at him, and answered the call.

"Hello? Yes. No, it's Walter. Yes, he is. Hold on, Ian." He handed Mulder the 'phone and Mulder looked at him in surprise. "It's your new friend - I gave him our number. Here." He got up and walked into the kitchen. Mulder took the 'phone cautiously.

"Hi, it's Ian. I was wondering if you were free to have a few beers this evening," the other man asked.

"Well...I'll need to ask..."

"Your Master. I know!" Ian laughed. "Hell, that brings back memories. I wish I had someone I had to ask," he sighed. "Go ahead, ask him then," he prompted. Mulder bit on his lip, half hoping that Skinner would say no. He had enjoyed meeting Ian the previous day, but he had never been very good at the guy thing of hanging out drinking beers. He didn't drink much for a start, and he couldn't see the point of just standing around, doing all that macho crap unless you were going to get completely drunk on your ass at the same time. "Ian wants me to go out for a drink this evening, but it's your day so I'll tell him I can't," Mulder said, following Skinner into the kitchen.

"Why?" Skinner frowned. "It's fine by me. Go out and enjoy yourself. I've got a few 'phone calls I need to make this evening anyway."

"Oh." Mulder stood there uncertainly.

"Fox," Skinner pointed at the 'phone.

"Okay," Mulder shrugged, and turned back into the living room, not at all sure about this new development in his social life.

Mulder trotted down the stairs a few hours later, dressed in jeans, a blue shirt, and a jacket, ready to go. Skinner glanced at him.

"Go and change into the red shirt," he said.

"What? Why?" Mulder asked, glancing down at what he was wearing. It felt understated, and comfortable.

"Because I say so," Skinner replied.

Mulder glared at his Master, and clenched his fists. "I've been dressing myself since I was a kid. I'm sure I know what damn clothes to wear to go to a fucking bar," he grouched. Skinner got up, and Mulder put his hand on the stair banister, ready to flee if need be.

"Fox - you're my slave, so when you go out in public what you wear, and how you present yourself, reflect upon me. Now go and change, and add another 5 to your bed-time tally."

Mulder considered protesting further but he'd already notched up nearly 20 swats over the course of a fairly average day so it didn't seem worth making a fuss about a different colored shirt, even though the red one was far more garish than he'd have liked. He got changed, grumbling to himself the whole time, then stopped, and thought about it. Skinner couldn't really care what color shirt he wore. He was simply finding a way to remind his slave who he belonged to - that even though he was going out socially on his own for the first time since he'd signed his contract, he still belonged to Skinner, and he should keep that fact in mind. Mulder found his cock hardening as he realized the thought processes going on there. Skinner was good. He was damned good. Not for the first time, he wondered where his Master had learned all these tricks. He trotted back down the stairs, ran into the living room where Skinner was sitting, and dropped a kiss on his Master's head.

"Thanks," he murmured.

"You're welcome - for whatever it is you think I've done," Skinner grinned, grabbing his clothed slave, and kissing him firmly on the lips. "Next time be more obedient," he said, slapping Mulder's butt affectionately.

"Yes, Master!" Mulder laughed.

"And don't be back any later than 10," Skinner warned.

"No, Master!" Mulder chanced his luck and went back for another kiss. Skinner growled, but allowed him his kiss.

At least with Ian he wouldn't have to make any excuses about why he had to leave - he could just tell the other man that his Master had given him a strict curfew and Ian would accept that without taunting him, or asking any awkward questions.

"And don't get into any trouble," Skinner said, keeping one hand wrapped firmly around his slave's wrist. "Remember that your behavior in public reflects on me."

"Yes, Master." Mulder rolled his eyes, and Skinner swatted him on the backside again.

"Apart from that - have fun," Skinner winked, finally letting his slave go.

"Yes, Master!" Mulder stole another kiss from his Master, then ran for the door before Skinner could swat him again for his temerity.

As it turned out, he thoroughly enjoyed himself. Ian was good company, with a wry, self-deprecating wit. He listened as Ian told him about his dom, Justin. Ian wasn't a great one for self-pity, but it was obvious that he still missed his lover a great deal.

"I've talked about myself for long enough. Tell me how you managed to snare the top top on the whole scene," Ian said, raising his beer to his mouth with a wide grin. "The one and only Guardian of the House. I'm seriously impressed. You must be a damn good sub."

"Slave." Mulder flushed and took a sip of his own beer. Ian raised an eyebrow. "He wouldn't take me as a sub. It was a slave or nothing."

"Interesting. I'm not sure how that works. I mean, is it a constant thing?" Ian asked.

"Yeah. 24/7." Mulder shrugged. "Or, here, there, and everywhere, as he's so fond of telling me."

"And that works out okay?" Ian frowned.

"So far." Mulder bit on his lip. "To be honest, it's been better than okay - but then again I've only been his slave for a couple of weeks, although it already feels like a lifetime - a very exhausting, very painful, permanently orgasmic lifetime!"

"It sounds horny," Ian grinned, "but I'm not sure I could deal with the loss of my freedom."

"That's the hard part, although..." Mulder paused, and thought about it, "he's not really unreasonable. I have a few..." he hesitated again, not sure how much to reveal, "well there's been some stuff in my past that I haven't really dealt with. I think maybe my Master insisted I become his slave to make sure I couldn't run away from it."

"Ah. I always find the dynamics of other people's lifestyle arrangements fascinating," Ian said with a grin. "I hope you don't mind me asking?"

"No." Mulder was surprised to find that he didn't.

"Tell me more about your work. You know, I'd love to run an article on these X Files of yours. They sound fascinating," Ian said. "There's no chance of a scoop, is there?"

"I can just imagine what my boss would say to see me giving an interview to a publication like *Anomaly*," Mulder laughed. "Hey, I work for the government remember, and your magazine is devoted to debunking everything the government says. We're natural enemies," he winked.

"Only you're also friendly with some friends of mine," Ian responded. "The Lone Gunmen," he prompted, when Mulder gave him a questioning look. "So, maybe we have more in common than the obvious?" he grinned.

"Maybe," Mulder grinned back. He wrestled with a question that had been at the back of his mind all evening, then finally gave in. "Ian...have you ever heard of a Doctor Peter Mayfield playing on the scene?" He held his breath. He had told Scully he was dropping the investigation into Andrew Linker, but his conversation with Skinner earlier in the day had reawakened his curiosity. He had to know more.

"Peter? Yes, of course!" Ian laughed. "Justin and Peter were an item a few years before I met Justin. Things didn't work out between them, and they split up - it was amicable."

"Right." Mulder nodded, telling himself he shouldn't go any further, but knowing himself too well to listen to his own advice. "And...Andrew Linker...?" He asked, in an undertone. "What do you know about him?" Ian's expression changed, and he looked at Mulder thoughtfully. "Why do you want to know?"

"Curiosity." Mulder shrugged. "I think he and my M...that is, Walter, were involved once." It felt strange referring to Skinner as "Walter." Strange, but kind of nice too.

"Well, I never met him, but I know that Andrew was the Guardian of the House before Walter. I don't know the exact details, but I'm assuming he trained Walter to take his place."

"Right." Mulder nodded, feeling almost relieved. Skinner had clearly been Linker's protégé - that was why he had left him the apartment. The other man had trained his Master to take over from him as Guardian - it had been a business relationship, nothing more.

"Mulder - why are you asking me all this? Why not ask Walter?" Ian looked puzzled.

Mulder shrugged. "There's some stuff he doesn't seem to want to tell me."

"Well, I wouldn't have thought it was a good idea to go digging around behind his back," Ian pointed out. "Unless you want your butt to suffer for it if he finds out." He gave a loud laugh and Mulder smiled, uncertainly.

"Yeah. Right," he muttered.

"As a matter of fact, I've met Peter a few times - he's got a nice place in LA. He's become some kind of celebrity psychologist out there. Writes a few books, works as a shrink to a few neurotic film stars," Ian smirked.

"LA?" Mulder's heart thudded inside his chest. "California?"

"Well, that's where LA was last time I looked!" Ian joked.

"Right. Yes. LA. California." Mulder repeated. California...if he went there, he could kill two birds with one stone. He could check up that address Krycek had given him, and look up Peter Mayfield and find out more about his Master's old mentor, or whatever Andrew Linker had been to Walter Skinner.

Mulder got home at quarter to ten, to find Skinner asleep on the couch, one arm hanging down, his hand almost touching the floor, with Wanda draped over his broad chest. The cat glanced up as Mulder came in. He put his finger over his mouth, and glared at her pointedly, then looked down on his sleeping Master. Skinner looked so peaceful, his long legs splayed out, his bare feet just touching the end of the couch. His head was still shiny and glistening from his massage earlier. Mulder felt a wave of self-hatred for what he knew he was going to do.

"I'm sorry, Walter. I have to know," he whispered. Wanda opened her eyes again, her ears flicking, and Mulder shook his head sadly at her. "Curiosity killed the slave, Wanda," he said wistfully. She gave a trilling purr of delight at being spoken to, and stretched out to an impossible length along Skinner's body. "You two make a good pair. I shouldn't have come along to break up the party," Mulder said, hunching his shoulders miserably. He crouched down on his haunches beside Skinner and looked at his Master intently. Skinner had clearly been working on some files, which were strewn over the floor, and he was still wearing his glasses. There was an empty glass of whisky on the coffee table. Mulder gently removed his Master's glasses, and delivered the faintest whisper of a kiss to Skinner's lips. Skinner murmured something and Wanda gave another loud purr.

California, California...it beckoned to Mulder, and yet, if he went, and Skinner found out why, then he feared that the fragile bond of trust they had built up over the past couple of weeks would be broken - maybe irrevocably. "Maybe you love him more than I do," Mulder told Wanda, reaching out a finger to stroke her soft head. She gazed at him steadily, looking into his soul. "You're certainly more devoted than I am, although you have no idea how much I envy you your current position." He tickled her under the chin and she purred again. "Don't think that this means I'm calling a truce, lady - I'm not. I'm just...in a weird kind of mood." With that thought in mind, Mulder got undressed, folded his clothes neatly on a chair, and knelt by his sleeping Master's side. He stayed there for a further ten minutes, eyes down, completely still, trying to find the serenity of belonging. Then Skinner blinked, and woke with a start. His eyes came into focus, and rested on his slave for a moment, then widened in surprise.

"Now, that's a sight for sore eyes," he murmured, reaching out to fondle his slave. "Why didn't you wake me?"

"I didn't like to, Master. You looked so peaceful," Mulder replied.

"You could have just gone up to bed," Skinner grinned.

"I didn't like to do that, either, Master. I'm owed a strapping," Mulder pointed out.

Skinner laughed and sat up. "Somehow I seem to have acquired a model slaveboy. How the hell did that happen?" He asked. "No, don't answer that - I'm just grateful it did. Come here, you." He dragged Mulder over to the couch, and kissed his slave thoroughly, his hands urgently covering every inch of Mulder's body, caressing his nipples, his hardening cock, his buttocks. "You know, to reward you for your thoughtfulness, I think I'll let you off your punishment tonight."

"Thank you, Master." Mulder nuzzled Skinner's neck.

"I told you, I reward good behavior, and punish bad behavior," Skinner said, keeping up his slow caress on Mulder's body.

"Yes...Master," Mulder panted, as Skinner's hand wrapped itself around his hard cock and pumped hard.

"Any time you want to come," Skinner grinned. "Although if you hold it, that means I'll have more opportunity to play with your exquisite body, slaveboy, and that would please me, and pleasing me is your purpose in life, isn't it?"

"Yes...it...is..." Mulder threw back his head, and sighed, as Skinner's hand kept up its pumping, while his Master's mouth lightly teased his nipples, flicking the rings with his tongue. Mulder groaned, and put his hands on Skinner's shoulders for balance. Skinner stopped and drew back. "Hands behind your back. I'm going to play, and you're going to just accept," he grinned. Mulder's cock jerked in appreciation of the game, and Skinner tugged on one of the nipple rings. Mulder gave a startled gasp as the arousal and pain shot through him at one and the same time. "Did you have a good time this evening?" Skinner asked, his hands continuing to play with Mulder's body.

"Y...es..." Mulder replied, sweat starting to roll down the side of his face.

"Good. I like Ian - I hope you two will be friends."

"Yeah..." Mulder agreed, beyond coherent conversation.

"See how good it can be, sweetheart," Skinner said in a deep, throaty, sexy tone that made Mulder fling back his head, his exposed neck glistening with sweat.

"YES!" he cried.

"How good it can be when we work together, slave and Master. I like rewarding you more than I enjoy punishing you, little one. It could be like this all the time. We could both make each others lives run a lot more easily and there would be so many rewards..." Skinner said, his fingers hooked in his slave's nipple rings, drawing Mulder forward and keeping him on the brink of climax. "Slave and Master. Master and slave, complementing each other. Your service and devotion, my love and protection." Mulder had now been dragged so close to his Master that all he could see were Skinner's lips as they neared his face. Then his own lips were parted and he was being kissed so hard, and so thoroughly, and his nipples were being gently soothed, with little teasing circular motions of Skinner's hand while his Master's other hand was sliding up and down his cock... He came with a shout, and then rested his head on his Master's shoulder, all thoughts of California banished.

"Thank you, Master," he whispered.

"My pleasure, sweetheart." Skinner replied, stroking his shaking slave's back tenderly.

"Could I return the favor?" Mulder asked, nuzzling forward against his Master's body, aiming for his crotch.

"No. I'm fine. It's been a good day - and it's time for bed. Your Master is tired."

"Hmm, well Master **is** extremely old," Mulder teased, holding out his hands to drag his Master to his feet. Skinner delivered a light swat to his slave's butt in response.

"We could re-think that strapping, slave," he growled, with mock ferocity. Mulder laughed, and skipped out of the way of another well-aimed swat to his ass.

Mulder was off the short leash, and he performed his morning tasks the following day to a level of perfection that earned him more praise from his Master, and several breath-taking kisses. Mulder would have sauntered off to work more happily if he hadn't been all too well aware of **why** he was behaving so well. Somehow, it was recompense for an act he hadn't even committed yet, and wasn't even sure he **was** going to commit.

He got into work early, beating Scully into the basement office, and then paused. There, on his desk, were 3 new X Files. It would be so easy to just bury himself in them, forget about Samantha, and Andrew Linker, and just get on with his life - a life that was a hundred times better since he'd signed that contract a few weeks before. The phone went as he sat down at his desk, and he reached for it, absently.

"Mulder," he said, flicking through the first file, his mind elsewhere.

"Hello, old friend. I'm surprised you're still in DC," a low, familiar voice said.

"Fuck off, Krycek," he replied, his hand making a fist around the papers it was holding, scrunching them up.

"You haven't been to check up that address I gave you," Krycek said.

"You told me she wasn't there, so what was the point?" Mulder hissed.

"You've changed. What's happened to you? In the old days you'd have taken off before I finished talking to you."

"Well now I'm older and wiser. That address could be a trap."

"It isn't," Krycek interjected.

"Or just a game of hide and seek. I don't want to play your games any more, Krycek. Someone always ends up getting hurt - and it's usually me."

"Not always," Krycek said pointedly, and Mulder remembered the other man's disfigured body. "I thought I was helping you out. I thought you were interested in finding your sister," Krycek continued in a low, baiting tone.

"I'm not listening." Mulder put the 'phone down, and then slammed his fist on the desk. Damn Krycek for always doing this to him, for cutting into his soul to find his weaknesses with almost surgical precision. He smoothed out the papers he'd scrunched up and read the file. He didn't take in any of the details on the first read, as his mind was still racing, but when he attempted a second read through, one word kept catching his eye: California. He sat up, and concentrated on the case. It was the kind of case that he might have ignored on a different occasion: a woman had died while out walking her dog on a beach. She had no enemies, and there were no footprints leading too or from the body, which had been burned to a crisp.

"Spontaneous Human Combustion?" Scully raised a bored eyebrow as he outlined the case to her half an hour later. "Haven't we looked into this before, Mulder?" Mulder shifted uncomfortably, remembering Phoebe.

"Yes, but this is a completely different case, and I think it's worthy of further investigation," he told her urgently, feeling a sense of excitement surge through his veins as his need to pursue his quest returned, wiping out everything else in his life, even his relationship with Skinner.

"Uh-huh. And the fact that this, uh, supposed case of SHC occurred in...California?" She did her performing eyebrow trick and he sighed.

"Such a suspicious mind, Scully. That's not why I'm interested in it."

"Well it sure as hell is why I am!" She grinned. "I could do with a few days in the sun. When do we leave?"

"Scully!" he remonstrated in a shocked tone.

"Mulder!" She mocked back. She got up and walked towards him, then, without warning, grabbed a handful of his hair, and pushed his head lightly towards the desk.

"Hey! What the hell are you doing?" he yelled.

"Just following orders," she grinned, releasing him and smoothing his hair back down. "You said to bang your head against your desk if you raised the subject of California again."

"Oh. Yeah. I did, didn't I?" Mulder said sheepishly. "And thank you, Agent Scully. Your attention to detail is, as always, above and beyond the call of duty."

"Where's the 302?" Scully glanced at the file over his shoulder. Mulder sighed, and bit on his lip.

"Ah, well, that's something I haven't had time to arrange yet," he murmured, wondering what Skinner's reaction would be to letting his slave out of his sight for the first time.

Mulder booked their tickets to California before going to see Skinner, reasoning that presenting his Master with a *fait accompli* would help him to get that 302 signed. He also took Scully along to his meeting with Skinner, feeling sure that his Master would think twice about turning down his request if she were there. After all, it **was** an X File, it had been on his desk, and it was exactly the sort of case he'd been investigating for the past 6 years. In fact, he had even managed to convince himself that he was genuinely interested in the case, and not just following it up for his own purposes. He had to admit though, that it was like his birthday, Christmas and Slave's Day, all rolled into one. Information about Samantha, a chance to find out more about the mysterious Andrew Linker's shadowy past, and an X File thrown in along the way. It was too good to be true.

He was almost quivering with anticipatory energy by the time of their meeting with Skinner. He took his seat, beside Scully, and his knee immediately began to dance up and down in a nervous gesture that he couldn't stop. Skinner, as always a picture of studied calm, read through the X File, and then glanced up at Mulder, and looked, pointedly, at his Agent's wildly rocking knee.

"You want to investigate this?" He asked.

"Yes." Mulder nodded.

"For what reason?" Skinner threw the file back down on the desk.

"For what reason?" Mulder echoed incredulously. He was unable to sit still, and got up in a wild burst of energy that took both Skinner and Scully by surprise. "Because we could be looking at a case of Spontaneous Human Combustion here!" He exploded.

"Spontaneous...? Isn't that a myth?" Skinner frowned.

"It's never been proved or disproved one way or the other. As a matter of fact there's considerable circumstantial evidence to suggest that it's a very real phenomena..." Mulder gabbled, pacing around the room, gesticulating wildly.

"Although I would postulate that the severity of burning in the cases on file have meant that a thorough examination is very rarely possible," Scully interjected. Mulder glared at her.

"If it isn't SHC, then what the hell did kill this woman, alone, on a deserted beach, at 6am? There were no footprints leading to or from her body," Mulder pointed out. "It's an X File, sir, and we **have** to investigate it."

Skinner looked at his slave for a long time, and Mulder swallowed, nervously, under that intense scrutiny.

"Agent Scully?" Skinner turned his attention away from his agitated slave.

"I think Agent Mulder's right. We should investigate," she said, with a butter wouldn't melt expression on her face. Mulder suppressed a grin. He wasn't the only one around here who wanted to go to California.

"I see. Well, I think you're right," Skinner said, reaching for the 302 and signing it with a flourish. Mulder opened his mouth in surprise. Skinner handed the signed 302 over to Scully then glanced back at Mulder. "So, when do you leave?" He asked.

"Tomorrow. First thing," Mulder managed to croak.

Skinner nodded, considering this information gravely. "Very well. I expect to be kept up to date on your progress, Agents," he said.

Mulder nodded, and exchanged a triumphant look with Scully. She got up, and he almost ran over to the door, and held it open for her. There was a smile on her face as she breezed through in front of him. Mulder was about to follow her when Skinner stopped him.

"Agent Mulder, before you go..." Mulder stopped, his heart sinking. He waved Scully on, and shut the door behind her with her a sigh. He turned back to his Master, and started to talk.

"I know I'm going to be away from home, but I'll be good, I promise, and you said the contract wouldn't interfere with my work at the very beginning, and..." He watched, nervously, as Skinner stalked stealthily out from behind his desk, like a panther hunting his prey. Skinner moved towards him, and Mulder held his breath...but his Master ignored his slave, and went over to the door, and locked it.

"Follow me," Skinner said tersely, crossing the room, his back to Mulder. He opened the door to the conference room that adjoined his office, and Mulder followed after him nervously, wondering what would happen next. The conference room was rarely used and only accessible from Skinner's - now locked - office. It didn't bode well. There was a large table in the center of the room, surrounded by formal chairs, and, to one side, two armchairs facing each other over a coffee table.

Skinner shut the door behind them, turned the key noiselessly in the lock, then turned back to his slave and said one word:

"Wanda."

Mulder stared at him, his eyes widening with shock, then glanced at the locked door.

"What? Here?" He hissed.

Skinner's eyes narrowed. "Don't make me repeat myself. In position, slave," he growled. Mulder swallowed again, considered disobeying, then glanced frantically around the room, trying to find a place to position himself. Finally, he decided on the black leather armchair, and walked over to it, unfastening his pants as he went. His stomach was crawling with a combination of fear and excitement. The idea of Skinner taking him here, in this way, with people going about their daily work outside, was so arousing that his cock was hard before he got his pants down. He fished a condom out of his pocket, and placed it on the back of the chair, then bent over, and waited. "Prepare yourself," Skinner growled, and Mulder stood up again, rummaged in his pocket for some lube, then began stretching himself, flushing wildly the entire time. This was so humiliating - and so good. He knew that Skinner was watching the whole process, in silence, and that made it even more wildly erotic.

Finally, as prepared as he could make himself, he bent back over the armchair again and a few seconds later he heard his Master walking towards him. Mulder held his breath. He found being used in this way unbearably arousing, even though he knew Skinner wouldn't allow him to come. It was the ultimate demonstration of his Master's power over him, and it made him feel more dominated than any of his Master's other little tricks. His whole body was on edge, waiting to accept his Master. He put his hands back and pulled his butt cheeks apart, moaning slightly to himself as he wondered what kind of an image he was presenting to his Master.

He heard Skinner come over to stand behind him, and the sound of him unzipping his pants. Skinner always promised him that these occasions would be rough fucks, which was part of the appeal to his slave, and he didn't disappoint on this occasion. Mulder heard the condom being ripped open, and then, a few seconds later, the feel of his Master's stiff cock against his anus. Skinner grabbed Mulder's hips, and slid inside his slave's willing body with a hard, urgent thrust that took Mulder's breath away.

"I want you to look at the clock," Skinner whispered. "Look at it!" he ordered. Mulder looked up with a groan, finding it hard to think about anything else but the large cock that was devouring him. "This is

going to be long and hard," Skinner promised, and Mulder's own cock skyrocketed at that news. "I'm going to use you for a good long time, slaveboy," Skinner hissed in his ear, and Mulder almost lost control and came there and then.

He trembled as Skinner began to thrust into him with fast, hard, urgent strokes that took his breath away. It didn't hurt, but it was rough, and undignified, and it turned him on like nothing he'd ever experienced before. He was dimly aware that Skinner was bringing him down from the state of wild agitation he'd been in during the meeting, and, at the same time, giving his slave a good reminder of his status to take away to California with him. It was working. Mulder glanced up at the clock, and wondered at Skinner's prowess and sheer stamina. His Master's hands gripped his thighs as he bucked into his slave, sliding back and forth with quick, surging thrusts that made Mulder's ass burn, and his cock want to explode. He couldn't believe it could go on for much longer, but Skinner's ability to hold back his own climax was phenomenal. After a while Mulder started to moan; his knees were in danger of giving way, his prostate had been stimulated into an explosion of sensation, and his cock was screaming for attention. Finally, after what felt like an hour, Skinner came with a shuddering sigh, and withdrew, roughly. Mulder lay, panting, on the back of the chair for a long time, and then, gingerly, stood up. His cock was stiff with arousal, and aching to be caressed.

"Don't touch that - it's mine, and I'll want to play with it later," Skinner warned, adjusting his own clothing and handing Mulder the used condom. He opened the door, and returned to his office, without a backward glance. Mulder took a moment to recover, then pulled up his pants and went into the ensuite bathroom to deposit the condom in the toilet. He ran some water and splashed it over his face, still feeling shaky. That had been so good, and so scary, and he knew it would feature in his jerk off fantasies every night while he was away...which was presumably something else his Master had intended. Finally, he looked at himself in the mirror, trying to pull himself together. His face was flushed, but his eyes - his eyes were alive, and sparkling. He took some deep breaths, and walked swiftly back into the office. Skinner was sitting behind his desk. He glanced up and Mulder went to his side, and knelt down beside him.

"Thank you, Master," he whispered, kissing Skinner's shiny black shoes.

"Good pup," Skinner tickled the back of his newly shaven neck. "Go back to work, and don't be late home this evening. As you're going to be away for the next few days, I want to see that you're well marked."

Mulder's cock did another spasm and he had to bite on his lip to keep from moaning out loud.

"Yes, Master. Of course," he said softly. "Whatever pleases you, Master." He kissed Skinner's shiny shoes again, then got to his feet, and scampered to the door, feeling absurdly light-headed. His former nervous agitation had disappeared - he felt relaxed and serene in his state of slavery, and returned to his office with a jaunty saunter, whistling to himself.

Mulder made sure he not only got home on time, but was early. He went to his room, and took off his clothes, hung them up neatly, and then returned to the downstairs living room to await his Master's return. He knelt in the center of the room, head down, arms behind his straight back, his whole body displayed proudly for his Master. Skinner returned home fifteen minutes later, and surveyed his slave with a loving smile.

"I'm going to miss you, boy," he murmured, putting down his briefcase. Mulder sprang to his feet and helped his Master out of his coat, then poured him a glass of whisky, and brought it to him as he sat on the couch. He crouched at Skinner's feet, unlaced his shoes, and took them off, then he sat back on his haunches to await further orders. "The question is," Skinner mused, one hand playing idly with his slave's hair, "how much ground will you lose when you're away?"

Mulder looked up. "Master - I won't forget any of the lessons you've taught me," he said earnestly.

"I've only just begun though." Skinner shook his head sadly. "You've learned a lot, but there's a long way to go yet. I don't want you losing yourself without me around to anchor you. So..." He paused and looked at his slave reflectively, "while I'm going to allow you to make this trip, you shouldn't make the mistake of thinking it will be the same as other field trips you've been on."

Mulder bit on his lip, wondering what Skinner was suggesting. He needed some leeway to pursue his own lines of inquiry in California, so he hoped his Master didn't plan on accompanying him, or anything like that.

"Just because you're out of sight, doesn't mean you're not still my slave. I'll be reminding you of that on a daily basis," Skinner said.

"How, Master?" Mulder asked, with a dry throat.

"You'll see. Let's go upstairs and oversee your packing, and then we'll go to the Playroom to mark you." Mulder's heart jumped nervously at the thought of being marked. "Slave?" Skinner put a finger under Mulder's chin and raised it so that his slave was looking at him.

"I have to sit on a plane tomorrow, Master," Mulder muttered.

"I know. It'll be painful." Skinner smiled ruefully and ran a hand through his slave's hair. "A constant reminder of what you are. I might be out of sight but I will most definitely **not** be out of mind!" He got up and Mulder followed him immediately, his obedience unquestioning. He loved it when Skinner brought him down to his most basic level like this. He felt a sudden wave of regret, as he realized that he would be leaving the warmth and safety of his Master's care and venturing out on his own. He didn't want to go back to the way he'd been before. He remembered long, insomniac nights on the couch, flicking through the TV channels, his mind in turmoil, or grueling jogging sessions in the dark and rain, trying to escape from himself, and he knew he didn't want to go back. He liked what he'd found here.

Skinner went through Mulder's closet and instructed him what clothes to take. They weren't any different to the clothes Mulder would have taken himself so he didn't mind. Then Skinner held the door open and nodded his head in the direction of the Playroom. Mulder's heart missed a beat, then he smiled at his Master, and obeyed his unspoken command.

"It's been a long time since you last allowed me in here, Master," he murmured, as Skinner unlocked the door.

"Well, if you're good, then when you come home I'll give you a special session in here to unwind you and bring you back to yourself." Skinner smiled, taking hold of his naked slave from behind, and pulling him close, kissing his ear. "I'll miss you, little one."

"I'll miss you too, Master," Mulder replied, perversely wishing that he wasn't leaving after all the trouble he'd taken to arrange the trip in the first place.

"Go and get my switch," Skinner instructed in a low, loving tone, his lips bestowing another kiss to the back of Mulder's neck, making him shiver. "And the leather pouch." Mulder went, trembling, to the cupboard, and retrieved the items, returning with them to Skinner's side, and kneeling obediently, with the items in his mouth. "I'm going to tie you," Skinner said, running his hands lovingly up and down Mulder's arms. "I've never placed you in real bondage before, sweetheart, but I think you need to find a still center to take with you on your journey."

"Yes, Master." Mulder looked up at Skinner with an expression of total trust on his face.

Skinner smiled down at him, and bent to bestow a kiss on his slave's eager lips. Mulder drowned in the kiss, opening his lips to allow his Master in. Then Skinner pulled back, and his demeanor changed to one of total authority.

"Follow me, slave," he said briskly. Mulder followed him to the harness, and stood, obediently, while Skinner fastened the protective pouch around his slave's balls and cock. Then Skinner buckled him into wrist and ankle cuffs, fastened a wide belt around his midriff, and attached him to the harness. He pulled Mulder's arms behind his back, and encased them in a leather glove that secured them tightly. His legs were bound together by a series of black leather straps. Then Skinner stepped forward and adjusted the harness, testing and double testing each strap to make sure it wasn't biting into flesh or causing any distress.

"Do you feel comfortable?" He asked. Mulder nodded, his eyes wide, fighting down the panic. "This isn't extreme bondage - just enough to keep you still and comfortable this evening. You'll be hanging here for a long time, just getting in touch with yourself, and focusing on what I expect from you in the next few days. Understood?" Skinner asked.

"Yes, Master," Mulder replied, trembling slightly.

"You'll be fine." Skinner pulled him close, and gave him another firm kiss, then he hauled the harness a little way into the air, and fastened it tightly. Mulder wasn't far off the ground, but he was completely suspended, unable to move a muscle. "Good. Now, I'm going to mark you. This will be thorough, slave - in order to make up for all the morning discipline you'll be missing," Skinner informed him. Mulder nodded fearfully, and closed his eyes.

He felt the switch rest against his backside, and then a whoosh. He tried frantically to move out of the way, but was held immobile, unable to even wriggle even a fraction of an inch. The switch connected with his naked flesh, blazing a path of pure pain, and he cried out.

"Good boy. Prepare yourself for the next one. Lower this time." Skinner patted the switch against Mulder's butt to show where the blow would land. "Remember that marking is less about causing you pain than about reminding you who you belong to, and making you carry that knowledge with you," he warned.

Mulder nodded, his eyes wide. He felt so vulnerable hanging here, unable to move a muscle, having to accept each blow without so much as flinching. The switch tapped his butt, then he felt a breeze, and

that whistling sound, and it descended on his flesh again, in the exact spot Skinner had aimed for, making him scream at the top of his lungs as it bit into his flesh. There was a pause, as Skinner allowed him to get his breath back - a kindness usually only granted during markings, not during other punishments - and then the loathed switch tapped his butt again. Mulder could feel his cock thrumming into life inside its leather casing. Much as he hated being marked, it always, without fail, turned him on. Another blow landed on his sore flesh, an inch beneath the last, and then another. Mulder started to moan.

"Please, no more!" He gasped.

"Two more. I told you this would be severe," Skinner warned.

Mulder nodded, trying to catch his breath, giving into the bonds that secured him, allowing his body weight to rest totally on them, his muscles relaxing. He closed his eyes, waiting for the next savage, beautiful strike, and gasped as the switch bit into his bottom. It hurt so good! The switch went about its vicious work one last time and Mulder came up for air like a drowning man. Skinner stood in front of him, and smiled. "Good boy. The marks are particularly clear and fine - and very evenly spaced if I do say so myself. Try not to get yourself shot when you're away - they might be difficult to explain in the hospital," he winked. "These marks should last until you return - and then I'll mark you again to celebrate having my slave back," Skinner grinned. "Maybe a nice erotic spanking will be in order," he mused.

"Yes, please!" Mulder replied eagerly.

Skinner laughed. "We'll see. It will depend on how well you've behaved. On that subject..." He went over to the cupboard, and pulled something out. Mulder craned his neck to get a glimpse of the object as Skinner returned.

"This...is something I promised you a little while ago." Skinner held a butt plug under Mulder's nose. "It's not an exact replica," Skinner grinned, "but the, uh, measurements are the same." Mulder's eyes opened wide in recognition. "As you won't be available for my use, I think a constant reminder of me will be necessary. You'll wear this plug during your off duty hours - and that includes all night. There are chains to keep it attached and in place. Don't even think about disobeying me on this, slave," he warned. "I can assure you that I'll find out. You are to wear this whenever you go out in the evening, and at all times when you are not officially on duty. Is that understood?"

Mulder nodded, unable to take his eyes off the butt plug. Skinner was not a man of small dimensions, and the plug was the largest he'd ever seen. There was no way he'd be able to forget that thing was up his ass - and he guessed that he'd be sitting down very cautiously.

"I'm going to insert it now and you'll wear it until you leave the apartment tomorrow morning," Skinner said, going to stand behind his slave. Mulder felt a lubed finger entering his ass, then another. He put his head back and moaned as Skinner prepared him thoroughly, making sure his ass was ready to receive the plug, and then he felt the hard, plastic tip pressing against his anus. "Open more - don't tense...you're used to accepting me, this is no different," Skinner said, tapping his slave's butt reprovingly as Mulder clenched his muscles against the intruder.

"It **feels** different!" Mulder protested. Skinner slapped his sore bottom hard, and Mulder tried to obey his Master, opening up his body to the plug. It entered slowly, wedging his butt cheeks wide apart, and Skinner didn't stop until he had pushed it all the way home, slow inch by slow inch, forcing the plug deep into Mulder's body. Then, to Mulder's surprise, he started to remove it again, then pushed it back and forth with long slow strokes that made Mulder's cock stand upright with need. "Oh god!" Mulder moaned, as the plug burned inside him. He was already sore from being used earlier in the day, and the plug was both stimulating him and rubbing at the sore area in a way that drove him insane, giving the pleasure that added burn of pain that tipped him over the edge of arousal.

Skinner unfastened the pouch, and Mulder's cock leapt gratefully to attention. Mulder gave a hoarse shout as his Master grabbed his hips, took his hard cock into his mouth, and then proceeded to suck him. At the same time, Skinner moved his hand around Mulder's butt and continued to manipulate the plug, pushing it in, and pulling it out in time with his sucking on his slave's engorged cock.

"Oh shit - no!" Mulder yelled, unable either to buck forward into that warm, waiting mouth, or to move away from that invading plug as it was pushed back and forth in his butt. The delicious torment went on for an eon, and he couldn't do anything but endure it, the sweat running down his body as he was sucked and fucked simultaneously. Finally, he came, his whole body convulsing within its bondage. Skinner pulled away, and cleaned his slave up with a washcloth, then he adjusted the butt plug, pushing it in to the hilt, making Mulder's eyes water. He fastened the plug securely in place, then tested the straps before coming to stand in front of his slave again.

"All right - in order to keep it this securely fastened, the strap needs to be buckled to the fourth notch," he told his slave. "When you get back from California, you'll present the straps to me so that I can see from the wear on the leather that you've fastened it correctly every evening."

"Yes, Master," Mulder groaned. The butt plug was so enormous he didn't see how he could perform any normal, everyday activities, and as for sleeping in it!

"When you're wearing it, I want you to think of me inside you, using you," Skinner purred into his ear, "and to remember who you belong to."

"I could never forget that, Master," Mulder whispered.

"Good." Skinner smiled heartily, and slapped Mulder's butt. "Now, I'm going to enforce your bondage with a blindfold and gag. Then you're going to just hang here, thinking about your condition. Understood?"

"Yes, Master," Mulder agreed quickly. His heart quickened as Skinner approached him with the thick, leather gag. He'd never been placed in this level of bondage before, and he wasn't sure how he felt about it.

"I'll use bondage as punishment occasionally," Skinner informed him, "in order to get you to think clearly about your behavior. On this occasion, I'm using it to make you focus, and remind you who you are. Open your mouth."

Mulder obeyed, and Skinner placed the wedge of leather between his teeth, and fastened the gag securely to his jaw and around the back of his head. It was a heavy duty gag, and Mulder found that he couldn't make so much as the smallest noise when it was in place.

"You won't be able to tell me if you get into any distress, so I'm going to fasten a bell onto the gag," Skinner said, attaching the bell. "If you need me, then just shake your head and the bell will alert me. I will not, at any time, leave you on your own. In fact, I'm looking forward to a quiet evening in your company," he said with a sly grin. Mulder would have made a face if he could. "Next, the blindfold. Close your eyes," Skinner ordered.

Mulder obeyed, and felt the thick, leather blindfold placed over his eyes. Again, it was impossible to open his eyes once it was in place, and he was unable to see even the faintest glimmer of light. "I'm not going to place anything over your ears to complete the sensory deprivation, but I certainly will another time. On this occasion though, I want you to listen very carefully to what I have to say and focus only on me. I'll give you a few minutes to become accustomed to your new deprivations, and then I'll start talking."

Mulder nodded, and was rewarded by the bell tinkling. His butt was slapped lightly in correction. "Don't move unless you're in distress," Skinner said. Mulder gave himself up to the bondage, relaxing into it. It felt strange to be in the dark, and unable to speak. He felt disorientated, and yet curiously at peace. He wasn't sure how much time had passed - a minute or an hour, when Skinner started speaking.

"All right, little one. This will be a big test for you. Conduct yourself well, and make me proud of you, and I promise you a reward that will blow your mind. However, if you let me down, or disobey me, I'll give you the whipping of your life upon your return. It's up to you."

Mulder was lost, floating in space, as that deep, sexy voice spoke to him. It filled his consciousness, disembodied, like a verbal caress.

"When you're away you will phone me three times a day. Once when you wake up in the morning, then at lunch, and again when you get back from your evening meal - please bear in mind the time difference on the West Coast. I do not want to be woken in the middle of the night. I will occasionally give you special tasks or duties to perform in your absence and I expect you to follow my orders to the letter, as if I were actually there - let's call it remote control, shall we?" He gave a little chuckle, then there was silence for a moment.

Mulder became lost in the undemanding beauty of that silence, and then Skinner started speaking again.

"You are not, I repeat, **NOT** to play with your cock during your absence. You are forbidden to come. Every night, before you go to sleep, you will lie naked on your bed, on your front, with your butt plug inserted, and think about this conversation. You will focus on the fact that your bare backside..." Mulder jumped, as his buttocks were grabbed, and firmly caressed, "is available for correction, even though I am not present to administer it. That is all you will think about for that half hour - in order that you remember that you are a slave, and subject to my will and whim."

Mulder tried to remember to breathe, as Skinner's hands massaged his sore flesh. His cock, which he would have sworn was sated, began to twitch.

"Hmm." Skinner's hand flicked at his penis, startling him again. "This is forbidden any more release until your return. Remember that," he warned. Mulder managed a low groan deep inside his chest. He didn't know that he could physically manage to abstain for that long, although he was sure that Skinner would find out if he disobeyed him. "Remember that this cock doesn't belong to you. It is mine and exists for my pleasure, to be granted release only at my discretion. I want you to spend fifteen minutes every morning on your knees beside your bed. During that time, I want you to think about your Master, and all the ways in which you will delight him upon your return," Skinner's voice was low and throaty with amusement. "Now, I will leave you alone in your bondage to consider what I've just said. Remember your signal. I'll be in the room but I won't talk to you again until it's time to release you. Your bondage will last for at least 90 minutes, so relax, and don't fight it. I might interrupt you occasionally to deliver any little swats or kisses that please me. You will accept these as your due, **slave**." He said that last word right into Mulder's ear and Mulder nearly jumped out of his skin. He hadn't realized that Skinner was so close. He felt warm breath against his shoulder, then his neck was licked, and after that - nothing.

Mulder hung in space, alone in the darkness. He knew he was only a couple of feet away from the floor, but it could have been miles away for all he could see or sense of it. He had never felt this free before, conversely, considering how restricted his movement was. His mind was floating in a daze, and all he was aware of was the sting in his buttocks from the switch, and the huge butt plug pressed deep inside him. He thought about his Master, how the plug was a substitute for Skinner's hard, large cock and that made his own cock twitch again, and stiffen. He longed to take hold of it, but he couldn't even move. He was consumed by a silent, convulsive frustration that just increased his arousal. He longed to feel Skinner's warm, wet mouth on his cock again, but knew that he would be denied that, and the knowledge of that denial was enough to make his cock grow even more erect. He was lost in the darkness of his own body, and his own desires, and it was mind-blowing.

Mulder careened off into space, his mind focusing down to the fact that he was tied here, suspended in mid-air, at the mercy of his Master's mood and whim. It was a feeling like no other. All thoughts of California, of Andrew Linker, and even of Samantha were banished from his mind. He was just Fox, his Master's slave, a chattel, and possession, existing merely to serve. He was so deep into this mindset that when he felt the warm, moist imprint of his Master's mouth on his buttocks, it took him by surprise.

Skinner licked his butt cheek, then his teeth closed around a portion of flesh, nipping it. It just started to hurt, when Skinner moved on to another part of his slave's buttocks, licked and bit again, and then moved on. Mulder's cock stood erect, his whole body in a state of arousal. Suddenly, without warning, that teasing mouth bit down hard on one of his nipples. He tried to scream, but couldn't. His whole body convulsed instead, making his bell ring. Skinner stopped immediately. "Shake your head again if you're in distress," he said in a low tone. Mulder got himself under control. He wasn't in any distress - he was having the most erotic time of his life.

Clearly satisfied that his slave was fine, Skinner's mouth suddenly bit into Mulder's other nipple, sharply cutting into the tender flesh, squeezing the nipple itself between his tongue and the top of his mouth. Mulder gasped, almost passing out from the acute sensation. It was amazing how being tied, helpless, gagged and blindfolded, focused his entire being on his body. Skinner's mouth withdrew, and Mulder gasped again as the butt plug inside him was twisted around inside his body. Skinner turned the plug

slowly, just a little way in either direction, burning his slave's tender flesh from the inside out, and Mulder saw a hundred white lights explode inside his mind. He hung, limp, and abandoned in his bondage, completely at his Master's mercy. Skinner laughed, and slapped his slave's sore butt, and then Mulder heard him move away again.

It seemed that only a few more minutes passed before he felt his Master's fingers on his face, removing his gag, and blindfold.

"Take some time to return to normality," Skinner advised.

"Why? What happened?" Mulder blinked and looked around. "That wasn't 90 minutes. I was fine - I could stay there for the full time," he protested.

"Fox." Skinner took his face between his hands and looked into his eyes. "You were there for nearly two hours."

"What?" Mulder screwed up his face, confused.

"It's easy to become disorientated when you're in total bondage like that. Did you like it, little one?"

"I...it was beautiful. A revelation," Mulder whispered.

"Good boy." Skinner's wide smile lit up his whole face. "I'm pleased you responded so well to it. Some people take a long time to adjust to the sensation, and they panic when they can't move. Giving up control completely is very hard. You did fantastically." He beamed again, and gave his slave another deep, long, claiming kiss. "I waited until I'd won some degree of your trust before taking this step, and it's worked well. It means we can have a lot of fun," he winked. "Are you back with me now?" He asked. Mulder nodded, slowly returning to normality. Skinner had dimmed the lights in the room, so they didn't assault his eyes, and his Master lowered him to the floor, and gently unbuckled him from the harness, releasing him from his bondage.

Mulder lay in a state of boneless abandon, and Skinner crouched down beside him, and began massaging some life back into his body with brisk strokes of his hands on Mulder's wrists and ankles. Finally, he helped his slave to stand.

"Go to bed," he ordered, planting a firm kiss on Mulder's forehead. "I'll say goodbye to you here, now, as you're relieved of your wake-up duty tomorrow morning." He picked Mulder up almost bodily, his large hands roaming over every inch of Mulder's body, and then he took hold of Mulder's hair, and his mouth descended on his slave's, forcefully, claiming the most aggressive kiss Mulder could ever remember. He lost himself in it, hanging onto Skinner's broad shoulders for dear life, his knees in danger of collapsing beneath him. Skinner finally let him up, and took a step back, looking at his slave intently. "Remember all my instructions, slave. I will **not** be merciful with disobedience," Skinner warned.

"No, Master," Mulder whispered.

"Go to bed then." Skinner grinned. Mulder turned and made for the door as if in a dream. "And Fox?" Mulder stopped, and glanced back. "Bon voyage," Skinner said, his brown eyes serious and full of

affection. Mulder couldn't stop himself from running back to Skinner's side, and kneeling at his feet. He took hold of his Master's hand, and kissed each finger.

"I'll miss you too," he said in a choked tone. Then he grabbed his Master's other hand and kissed every finger on that as well. Afterwards, he got shakily to his feet and left the room, his heart flying light and free inside his chest.

Mulder woke up early the next morning, and took a shower. He glanced down at his cock, encased as usual, in its cock ring, and decided to be daring. Skinner wouldn't know if he removed the cock ring. Contrary to his Master's instructions, he had no intention of not jerking off for the next few days. He was only flesh and blood, and Skinner had gone out of the way to put all those delicious erotic ideas in his head. His Master couldn't expect his slave to just **ignore** them. It was inhuman! Mulder felt a thrill of disobedience surge through his body, as he took the cock ring off. It felt almost strange to be without it - like going naked in public. He slipped it into his pocket, and grinned at himself in the mirror, then tip-toed downstairs. He grabbed his Master's newspaper as usual, then, on an impulse, took it up to Skinner's bedroom. His Master was asleep, sprawled out under the covers. Mulder looked at him for a moment, wishing he was staying, then placed the newspaper on the nightstand.

"I really will miss you," he whispered, reluctant to leave.

Something moved, and he watched, fascinated, as a lump traveled up the bed, and then Wanda's head appeared from under the sheet, her green eyes glowing. She looked at Mulder questioningly, and he stood there for a moment, their eyes locked, then she emitted a trilling purr and nuzzled against his hand.

"Okay, I'll miss you too," he sighed. He picked her up, and she rubbed the side of her face against his chin. "Yeah, you've won for now, lady - no wonder you're being so magnanimous," he grouched. "He's all yours - for a few days at least, and don't think I don't envy you for it, Madam." She headbutted him and he relented, and gave her a kiss on the top of her silky head. "That's not for you - it's for you to give to him," he warned, then he returned her to the bed. "And don't tell him I kissed you without being forced into it - he'd be unbearable if he knew." She sat there, and watched him go, and for the first time in his life he had the sensation of leaving behind something he belonged to, a person who loved him. Maybe even, if he was being sappy, a family. "Jeez, I must be going soft, if I'm counting the two W's as my kith and kin," he muttered. "Wanda and Walter...the Master and his little Mistress. Damn, I'm not going to be homesick. I'm never damn well homesick." A little voice inside whispered that he'd never exactly had a home to miss before, but he ignored it, pulled himself together, and went to the bedroom door. He hesitated before he left, and glanced back. Wanda had curled up in the crook of Skinner's large protective arm and he wished he was there with her, but he'd made his decision, and there was no turning back.

"California." Mulder sighed with relief as the plane touched down, and got up eagerly, anxious to take the weight off his sore butt. Scully drove them to the local PD, and Mulder glanced at his watch, anxiously, and reached for his cellphone.

"Who are you calling?" Scully frowned.

"Skinner."

"Why?"

"Just to, uh, report in," Mulder smiled weakly.

"Report on what?" Scully questioned blankly. "We haven't even got there yet."

"I know. Ssh!" Mulder waved his hand at her as he got put through. "Sir? It's Agent Mulder. I'm with Agent Scully en route to the local PD to find out more about the case. No, we're not there yet, but it's lunch time, so I thought I'd...yes, I did have a comfortable journey, sir. The seats were very comfy, yes. Thank you for asking." He made a face at the 'phone. "Well, I just wanted to check in. I'll keep you updated as you requested, sir. Yes, sir. No, sir. I'll remember that, sir," and so saying he severed the connection. "Keep your eyes on the road, Scully," he said reprovngly, ignoring her look of utter disbelief. "We wouldn't want to cause an accident now would we, Agent Scully?" He smiled at her with a false cheeriness, and replaced the cell phone in his pocket, then shifted his weight to his other buttock, and started to whistle. The sun was shining, the sky was blue, they were in California and he was completely, utterly, besottedly in love. Mulder couldn't remember ever having been this happy.

The officer in charge of the investigation introduced himself as Ray Glover. He was a large man, with an enormous, protruding stomach, and a kindly air.

"To be honest with you, we didn't know what to make of this case - that's why I sent the file over to you. I didn't think we'd be honored with a visit though," Glover grinned.

"We try to follow up on these kind of cases," Mulder said stiffly, knowing that if it hadn't been for his own burning desire to investigate two important personal issues in this state, they wouldn't be here. Glover took them down to the mortuary to view the body, then left them to it. Mulder took one look at what was left of the corpse, and winced.

"Hardly enough to do an autopsy," Scully murmured.

"Do the best you can," Mulder instructed her, turning on his heel.

"Where are you going?" Scully called after him.

"To take care of some business."

"Mulder." She ran up behind him, and grabbed his arm. "If you're going to investigate that address then you are not, and I repeat, **not** going alone. I'm coming too."

Mulder stood there, uncertainly, but her blue eyes were flashing fire, and her expression was full of concern. Finally, he nodded. "All right, Scully. You can come with me."

"Now?" She glanced back at the body.

Mulder tugged on his lip, suffused with guilt, then finally raised his arms in a gesture of despair. "Scully, I can't wait. I just can't," he told her. "Not now that I'm so near."

"It's a two hour drive," Scully pointed out.

"I know, but that's so close." Mulder glanced at the body again. He did care about his work - passionately - and this poor, dead woman deserved his best attention. He couldn't concentrate on her case when all he was thinking about was Samantha. "Let's go," he said to Scully and she nodded, understanding. Glover looked surprised when they told him they were taking off.

"A lead already?" He whistled, handing them his file on the case. "Boy, you guys must be really good! I'm glad I called you in on this!"

Mulder's ears had the grace to flush a guilty pink.

They drew up outside a pretty house in a normal suburb a couple of hours later.

"Nice." Scully surveyed the flowers in the garden. The whole place had a homely feel to it. Mulder knocked on the door, his fingers absently fingering his gun through his jacket pocket. Krycek had told him Samantha had been moved on, and it could be a trap. If the Consortium owned this house... There was no reply to his knock on the door, so Scully went around the back.

"You looking for someone?" A voice inquired. Mulder looked around to see a woman standing, watering her roses in the next door garden.

"Yes. A girl...no, a **woman**, in her thirties. I don't have a recent photo, but this was what she looked like when she was...about 8." Mulder fished out the photo, knowing this was a long shot. The woman gave him a puzzled look, and fumbled for her glasses. "Sorry, I'm Agent Mulder - FBI." He showed the woman his ID, and she relaxed, visibly.

"I wondered who you were. Now, this little girl could be anyone, Agent Mulder," she chided, peering at the picture.

"I know. Is anyone living in this house at the moment?"

"Not that I know of. Every now and again someone moves in - in the dead of night - we never see any furniture or cases being taken inside. Then they move out again a few weeks later. Again, in the middle of the night. Why, are they drug dealers or something?"

"No. Why do you ask that?" Mulder put the photo back in his pocket.

"Well, we hear some strange noises in there. Sometimes I swear I've heard someone moaning, like they were on drugs..."

"Or in pain," Mulder interjected, his heart beating too fast. "Didn't you ever think of reporting this to the police?"

"I mind my own business," the woman told him, turning back to her roses. "Sorry I couldn't be of more help, sonny, but I've never seen that little girl."

"Thank you." Mulder sighed, and turned back to find Scully coming towards him.

"Nothing around the back. Want to take a look inside?" She asked.

"Without a warrant, Agent Scully?" he questioned, in a shocked tone.

"Are you going to ask Skinner for one?" She replied, one eyebrow raised in amusement.

"Do I look stupid?" He responded.

She laughed out loud. "I won't answer that!"

She drew her gun, her expression becoming serious, and he nodded at her, and drew his. It didn't take them long to kick the door open, and then they moved inside, covering each other with a skill borne of long practice. The house was comfortable, just a normal, regular house - except for one room which was completely empty, with one, lone table in the middle. "What the hell happened here?" Mulder looked at Scully and she shrugged.

"No idea. It looks like a dead end though, Mulder."

"Maybe not." He bent down and retrieved a piece of paper from the floor. On it, was scrawled a telephone number.

"Or maybe this is all Krycek's warped idea of a treasure hunt," Scully murmured. "He starts you off, then you just keep following the trail. It's a good way to keep you occupied."

"Why bother?" Mulder shrugged.

"Because something big is going on somewhere else?" Scully suggested. Mulder frowned, and got his cell phone out of his pocket. "What are you doing?" Scully hissed.

"Making a call - what does it look like?" Mulder began dialing the number on the paper. "Damn." He put the phone back in his pocket. "Disconnected," he told Scully. "I'll get in touch with Holly and see if she can find me the address it belongs to."

He made the call to the FBI, looking around the house one last time. Had Samantha been here? He ran his fingers over the table. Had they strapped her down here, injected her? Had it been her screams the woman next door had heard? He pushed that thought aside, and walked unsteadily back to the car.

"I'll drive," Scully said, recognizing his mood. He nodded, thankful, and leaned back in his seat and closed his eyes. Damn, but he wished Skinner was here right now to distract him, and make him focus on anything but this. He longed, suddenly, for the feel of his Master's big, strong arms wrapped tight around his body, to feel his Master's warm breath on the side of his face, and to be comforted within his powerful, loving embrace.

They drove to their motel in silence, and then parted to go to their respective rooms.

"I'll see you for dinner later," Scully said, and Mulder nodded morosely. He unlocked his door, and flung his bag on the bed, then threw himself down beside it. He wanted his Master so much it was like a physical pain in his body. Skinner had instructed him to call after he'd eaten, but he didn't want to wait that long. He itched to speak to his Master, even if he couldn't tell the big man what was going on. Mulder stared at the ceiling for a long time, trying to resist his own weakness, then finally he gave in,

and picked up the 'phone. It rang a few times, and he began to grow impatient, then angry. Where the hell was Skinner? Was he making the most of his slave's absence to go out and enjoy himself?

"Skinner." His Master's voice interrupted this reverie before it got out of hand, and Mulder could have wept with relief.

"Master!" He exclaimed.

"Slave. Where are you?"

"Where were you?" Mulder shot back. "I thought you'd gone out."

"I was taking a bath. I've been working out," Skinner informed him, his tone calm, not responding to Mulder's obvious bad temper. "What progress have you made on the case?"

"Nothing...concrete, as yet," Mulder hedged. "I'll have more news for you on that tomorrow, I expect. Sir."

"You sound tense. I wasn't expecting you to call at this time," Skinner said softly.

"I...it's been a long day. I...wanted to hear your voice," Mulder admitted, clenching his fist angrily, hating being this needy.

"What are you wearing?" His Master asked, his voice becoming low, and sexy. Mulder could feel his heart speed up inside his chest.

"My dress suit, Master."

"Does the phone have a speaker function?" Skinner asked.

Mulder glanced at it. "Yes."

"Then put it on, and start getting undressed," Skinner ordered.

Mulder obeyed, his body trembling in anticipation. He stripped quickly and efficiently, telling his Master as he removed each item. Once he was naked, he stood in the room, feeling stupid, but aroused, his cock already starting to jump into life.

"All right, take your belt from your pants, and lie face down on the bed," Skinner instructed. Put the belt over your butt." Mulder obeyed. "I missed giving you your morning discipline, slave. The belt is to remind you of it - and also to remind you what you'll receive when you get back.

"Yes, Master," Mulder moaned, his cock hardening, as his Master's voice continued, saying those beautiful, terrible things to him.

"I'm going to give you a spanking you'll remember for a long time, boy," Skinner purred.

"Yes, Master." Mulder whispered, arching into the bed.

"Are you wearing your plug, slaveboy?" Skinner asked.

"Uh...no, Master," Mulder admitted.

"Why not? I ordered you to." Skinner's voice was a sibilant, throaty growl.

"I know. I only just got back."

"All right - get the plug, and put some lube on it," Skinner instructed. Mulder leaned over, and opened his bag, retrieving the plug, and lubing it. "Now tease it in and out," Skinner told him. "Just the tip." Mulder placed the hard, plastic tip of the plug against his anus. "Harder," Skinner commanded. Mulder moaned, as he thrust more of the plug into his body, then pulled it out a little way, then back in. "Now, push it all the way in, and tighten the straps," Skinner said. Mulder did as ordered. "Put the belt back on your butt, and just lie there, and think of me, inside you. Think of me, putting you over my knee," Skinner purred.

"Oh god," Mulder closed his eyes, allowing the image to fill his mind. He felt soothed by that voice, by the familiar feel of the hardness in his butt, by the reassuring touch of the leather on his ass. He felt the tension start to leave his body. "Can I touch myself, Master?" he asked.

"Yes, but you can't come," Skinner warned.

"All right, Master." Mulder turned over, and grabbed his hard cock.

"Before you go for your cock though..." Skinner interrupted him, and Mulder paused. He could almost believe Skinner had some kind of hidden camera on him. "I want you to put your fingers on your nipple rings." Mulder obeyed, flicking at the rings. "Now tug on them - just gently at first. Do it!" Skinner ordered.

Mulder obeyed, and was surprised by how good it felt. They had been so sensitive after the initial piercing that he hadn't wanted to touch them, but this felt good! They were completely healed now, and when he pulled on them it sent waves of pleasure/pain straight to his cock.

"Okay - now you can touch yourself anywhere you like," Skinner told him. Mulder put some lube in his hand, and thrust his cock into it, then back, pushing the butt plug deep inside him as he went, then up again into his hand. He used his other hand to play with the nipple rings. "Pull down hard on one of the rings - now!" Skinner ordered. Mulder obeyed, and gave a hoarse yelp as the pain kicked in, claiming him in its erotic embrace.

"Oh god..." he moaned, arching his back, all thoughts of his unhappy day forgotten.

"What are you?" Skinner asked.

"Your slave, Master."

"What is your purpose?" Skinner's hard, low tone demanded an answer. Mulder gave it, automatically.

"I exist for your pleasure, Master."

"Good boy. Remember, you can't come."

"Please...Master...I have to," Mulder moaned in low tones.

"You can't." Skinner's voice was implacable, sending Mulder to dizzying heights. "If you come, then when you get home I'll have to punish you."

"Yes, Master," Mulder panted, thrusting down on the plug, then up into his hand again.

"It's your choice," Skinner warned.

"Yes, Master..." Mulder sighed. "Uh, Master...?"

"Yes, slave?"

"I think I made the choice," he admitted ruefully, glancing down at his hand which was covered in his come.

"Why am I not surprised?" Skinner's voice sounded amused rather than angry. "All right, slave. Get up, get into the shower, and get dressed in your jeans and navy blue sweater. Are you eating with Scully tonight?"

"Yes, Master." Mulder nodded dreamily, lying in a boneless heap on the bed, utterly sated.

"Very well - from now on you will eat everything that Scully does - only in double portions."

"What?" Mulder sat up, too quickly. "Ow!" he yelped as the butt plug made its presence felt.

"Scully eats low fat yogurts and salads!" he protested.

"Then you will too - just make sure you eat enough of what she's eating not to go hungry. You know how I feel about that."

"Yes, Master." Mulder scowled at the telephone.

"There's no need to call me again this evening unless you want to," Skinner said.

"No, Master." Mulder got up, stretching his body, feeling light headed.

"And slave - that's 5."

"5 what, Master?" Mulder asked.

"5 strokes with the implement of my choice when you get home. Start making a tally. I'm sure you'll notch up a few more."

"Yes, Master," Mulder sighed, a delicious thrill tingling through his body. He ended the call, and went to take his shower, running his hands all over his naked body as the warm water washed away some of the

tensions of the day. He dried himself, then looked down at his naked body. It didn't feel right. Something was missing. He remembered the ring, and fumbled in his pocket for it. Somehow, his minor rebellion seemed childish now. He wanted to wear the ring. He **needed** to be reminded that he was Skinner's property. It both turned him on, and made him feel safe, at one and the same time.

They went to a diner down the road. Mulder was acutely aware, as he drove, of the huge butt plug inside him. He hoped he wasn't walking strangely as they crossed the parking lot and went into the diner. He was relieved to sit down - which he did very cautiously, suppressing a little whimper as the movement forced the buttplug deeper into his body. Mulder glanced at the menu - then paled. He just knew that Scully was going to choose the pasta with the low fat tomato sauce.

"Hey, Scully - doesn't the steak look good," he pointed out.

She made a face at him. "Mulder, since when do I eat steak?" She asked.

He sighed. "They've got cheeseburger!" He suggested brightly.

"So have it!" She replied, smiling at him.

"Keep me company," he wheedled.

"I don't think so. The pasta will do fine," she said, closing her menu.

Mulder glared at her and she looked at him in surprise. "Pasta's so dull, Scully," he chided. "Come on - live a little."

"Eating cheeseburger is living?" Scully raised an eyebrow. "You sure know how to let your hair down, Mulder."

"Come on, it'll be nice!" Mulder said brightly. The waiter came over and stood by the table expectantly. "Two cheeseburgers!" Mulder ordered.

"He means one pasta, and one cheeseburger," Scully amended, kicking him under the table. Mulder thought about it for a moment, opened his mouth to change the order, then closed it again. He needed real meat, damnit! Not pasta! Anyway, Skinner wouldn't know - how the hell was his Master going to find out? He relaxed, and settled down, amusing Scully with an endless list of observations about their fellow diners.

"You seem to be coping with this really well," Scully smiled. "After what happened earlier I thought you might be upset."

"I was." Mulder shrugged.

"You're really dealing with this stuff a lot better these days," Scully placed her hand over his, and squeezed, gently. "I'm proud of you, Mulder. In the old days, this would have sent you off into one of your tailspins. I used to ache for you when you were obviously hurting so much. I'm so pleased to see that you're finally coming to terms with this part of your life."

"Yes." Mulder nodded, uncertainly. "I think I'm improving, Scully." *With a little help from my Master...*

They had just started eating when Mulder's cellphone interrupted them. He answered the call, and choked on his cheeseburger as he recognized his Master's voice.

"Agent Mulder, I had a call from Ray Glover. He seems impressed by you."

"Uh, thanks, sir." Mulder swallowed his mouthful down hastily, and took a sip of water, coughing into the 'phone.

"You seem to be incapacitated, Agent. Why don't you pass me over to Agent Scully while you get your breath back," Skinner ordered. Mulder considered asking why Skinner wanted to talk to Scully, but this was a conversation he didn't want to get into right now, and anyway, Skinner would hardly ask Scully what her partner was eating - would he?

"Skinner," he mouthed at Scully, handing her the 'phone. She took it, and Mulder played with his meal, willing her not to say the wrong thing. He couldn't hear what Skinner was asking, but it seemed to be general things about the case.

"Yes, sir. Badly burnt, sir. I've scheduled an autopsy for tomorrow. Today? No, we had some other areas to investigate first. No, they were dead ends, sir," she said smoothly. Mulder put his thumbs up, and gave her an encouraging smile. "Seafood? No, sir. Yes, it is the right area! No, I'm very fond of it too." She smiled absently at Mulder, winding her pasta around her fork, clearly enjoying the informal chit-chat with their boss. Mulder waved his arms, trying to get her to stop talking. She frowned at him. "You're right, we should have chosen the seafood platter!" She laughed. "I had the pasta instead. Agent Mulder? No, he's clearly not a seafood addict either - he's chosen the cheeseburger!" She laughed again, and Mulder thumped his head down on the table. Who'd have thought Skinner would be this devious? He watched as Scully continued her conversation, clearly enjoying this culinary discussion with her boss. Then, a few minutes later, she handed the phone back to Mulder, who put it tentatively to his ear.

"Hello?" He croaked.

"That's 10. Add it to the tally," Skinner said crisply.

"Yes, sir." Mulder sighed.

"And obey me from now on, Fox."

"Yes, sir," Mulder muttered. Skinner severed the connection, and Mulder put the 'phone back in his pocket.

"Wasn't that nice?" Scully beamed. "Skinner's actually really interesting when he gets talking. Apparently his folks used to own a seafood restaurant up in Maine."

"Yeah. Right." Mulder made a face at his cheeseburger. He wriggled in his chair, his butt plug pressing deep into his body, and his welted backside reminding him painfully of its existence. How the hell had Skinner managed to be such a presence? He was miles from home - his Master was over the other side of the country, for god's sake, and yet he might as well have been sitting at this table for the control he

was still managing to exert over his hapless slave. Mulder felt curiously comforted by that thought. However, it also increased his desire to find out more about his Master's past. He had to understand the enigma that was Skinner - and to find out how his Master had become so skilled at this game.

Despite his desire to seek out Peter Mayfield, Mulder knew it would be stupid to do anything other than devote the next couple of days to the investigation. If Skinner was in contact with Glover then he wouldn't be able to bluff any more time away from the case. After a hearty breakfast of yogurt and fruit, he spent the following morning interviewing the man who'd found the dead woman's body, then met up with Scully to hear the results of her autopsy over a lunch of vegetable lasagna and salad.

"I'm glad to see you're taking a healthier approach," Scully smiled at him, nodding at his plate.

"What? Yeah." He scowled. "Well, you know, this stuff isn't too bad, Scully, and I like to try new things," he muttered lamely. "After a day spent eating this stuff, you must be dying for a nice pizza, with garlic bread, smothered in cheese, followed by chocolate cake, in the evening," he suggested hopefully.

"Not really." She shook her head, blithely unaware of his interest in her eating habits, and his heart sank.

They spent the afternoon going through the case notes, and arranging interviews for the following day. Mulder devoured three seafood platters in the evening, trying not to be distracted by the smell of pizza that was wafting from the people sitting next to them where an entire family seemed to be carving into thick crusted, cheese-filled monstrosities as if on purpose to torment him.

Their trip to the dead woman's family revealed that she'd recently suffered a stroke. Mulder spotted a steel cane she'd used to help her walk, and the rest slipped easily into place. He made a few calls, found out that there had been a lightning strike in the area on the day she died but no rain, and then they reported their findings back to Glover who laughed out loud.

"Something as simple as that!" He exclaimed. "I don't know how I missed it. Strange the way she burnt up so much though."

"Sometimes that happens." Scully shrugged.

"We're going to look like idiots when you turn in the report on this one," Glover sighed.

"Well..." Mulder mused, "how about we make sure you don't look like idiots in our report, if you don't tell our supervisor that we wrapped this up today? That way we get to spend a day sunbathing, and you folk come out of this smelling of roses."

Glover's face broke into a broad grin, and he slapped Mulder heartily on the back. "It's a done deal, son," he beamed.

"Tomorrow, while you're sunning yourself on the beach, I need to go and look into something," he told Scully over a dinner of roast vegetables and ciabatta. She looked up at him in alarm.

"This isn't about Samantha is it?" She asked, her eyes worried.

"No, it isn't about Samantha," he told her gently. "It's something else. I won't be long, I promise - it's just something I need to do."

Mulder woke early the following morning, and took a quick shower. He removed the butt plug, and washed it, and was about to stick it back in his bag. He sat down on the side of the bed and considered it instead. It was early, so he was still, technically, "off duty". Should he put it back in until later, and if so, when should he remove it? His mission to speak to Peter Mayfield was a personal one, so he would really be "off duty" for most of the day, but...

Mulder laughed out loud, unable to believe that he was really having this internal dialogue with himself. If Skinner found out about his unauthorized visit to Mayfield, then a missing butt plug here or there would be the least of his problems. On the other hand, Mulder realized that, uncomfortable and intrusive though the plug was, there was something strangely comforting about its presence. Finally, after considering the matter for a few minutes, he decided to wear it. If he was going to do something so obviously against his Master's wishes as digging into the other man's past, then the least he could do was to pay a price for it. Sacrificing his comfort seemed like a just penance. With a sigh, he slathered some lube onto the plug, and strapped it back on.

Peter Mayfield lived in a luxury beach-front property a few hours drive away. Mulder took one look at the palatial residence, with its neatly kept gardens and whistled.

"Maybe I chose the wrong career path," he murmured.

Although Peter Mayfield was an eminently respectable psychologist, with a number of seminal publications to his name, he was now more popularly known as the "shrink to the stars", and spent his days listening to the neuroses of his famous and wealthy neighbors.

"Nice work if you can get it," Mulder muttered under his breath, knowing that he couldn't have stood it for five minutes, no matter how well it paid. Money had never played a big part in his life - even before his slavery. He had enough to pay the bills and eat, and he used the rest to further his quest, and that was all that was necessary as far as he was concerned. He knocked on the door, feeling uncomfortably hot in his dress suit. He was just considering whether to remove his jacket, when the door was answered by an attractive, burly, blond-haired man of his own age.

"Dr. Mayfield?" Mulder asked.

The man laughed. "No, I'm his...housekeeper," he replied. Mulder noticed the slight hesitation. "Did you have an appointment?"

"No."

"Then I'm sorry, you can't see Dr. Mayfield."

Mulder bit on his lip. He didn't want to turn this into an official mission, but even so, he hadn't driven all the way out here to return empty handed. He made a split second decision.

"This won't take long, and I'm afraid Dr. Mayfield will have to make time to see me. My name is Agent Mulder. I'm with the FBI." He showed the housekeeper his ID, and the other man frowned.

"Well, he's in the courtyard working on his new book. He doesn't usually like being disturbed, but it's time for his chamomile tea, so..." He gestured Mulder to follow him into the house. It was a beautiful place, containing the most exquisite examples of ethnic art. Mulder followed the housekeeper into a wide, sunny courtyard, containing an aviary, and a bubbling fountain. It was beautiful - a peaceful place to write, and Peter Mayfield was doing just that. He was seated in front of a lap-top computer, dressed in a pair of shorts and a tee shirt, typing away with two fingers.

"Peter - we have a visitor. An Agent Mulder from the FBI," the housekeeper announced.

Mayfield looked up with a frown, and peered at Mulder from behind his glasses. The doctor was about Skinner's age, a plump man, but not unattractive, with light brown hair, and the most beautiful green eyes.

"Agent...?" Mayfield looked startled.

"Mulder." Mulder held out his hand, and Mayfield took it, still looking startled.

"Thank you, Troy," Mayfield said to his housekeeper, who gave him a wide, intimate smile.

"I'll bring you both some chamomile tea," Troy said, then he exited. Mulder noticed that Mayfield's green eyes remained fixed on Troy's taut buttocks until the other man disappeared from sight.

"I'm sorry to disturb you, Doctor Mayfield," Mulder began, sitting in the chair he had been gestured to, then giving a low yelp of surprised pain as the butt plug made its presence felt. Mayfield looked at him curiously. "Sorry," Mulder muttered, flushing. "Stiff muscles. I do a lot of...riding," he improvised wildly. Mayfield frowned, clearly bemused.

Mulder took a deep breath. "Uh, what I have to say next is highly confidential," he began. Mayfield's eyes flickered over his shoulder, and Mulder turned to see Troy returning with the tea. There was no point in saying anything to Mayfield while Troy was around. The doctor was completely oblivious to anything when the muscle-bound 'housekeeper' was present. Finally, Troy disappeared again, and Mulder took a sip of his tea, wondering how the hell he was going to explain his interest in Andrew Linker from an official FBI viewpoint. In the end, he just opened his mouth and started to talk.

"I'm doing an investigation into Andrew Linker..." he began.

Mayfield's reaction was startling. He dropped his cup, and it shattered on the floor. "Andrew?" he stuttered. "Why? I mean, Andrew had cancer. Everyone knew that but there was no question of anything sinister taking place. God, even though he was in such terrible pain at the end, he would never have asked Walter to...and surely Walter would never have..." He looked at Mulder in abject horror. "Are you suggesting that some kind of euthanasia took place, Agent Mulder?" He asked.

"No," Mulder said quickly, suddenly realizing that there was a whole story here he knew nothing about. "Walter...Walter Skinner **nursed** Linker through the final stages of his cancer?" He asked.

Mayfield nodded. "He was a rock - an absolute saint. Ask anyone. I mean, we all helped out - Walter had a busy job and couldn't be there 24 hours a day, but he was so good to Andrew, even when Andrew was

very weak, and I know that Walter felt so helpless. He's not very good at talking about his emotions, but I think I managed to get him to open up a little to me," he said, smiling softly.

*I know, Mulder thought, understanding all too well how little Skinner liked talking about himself. I know, Mulder thought, understanding all too well how little Skinner liked talking about himself.*

"Andrew wasn't short of friends. There was always someone with him. He had a number of good people around him," Mayfield said. "He was much loved."

"Yes." Mulder swallowed down a lump in his throat. So this was Skinner's secret past that he didn't want his slave to find out about - devotedly nursing a good friend through his terminal illness.

"Not least by Walter," Mayfield added, and Mulder felt a pit of jealousy open up inside.

"They were...lovers?" Mulder asked, his throat dry.

"More than that. It was more than that," Mayfield replied. "I mean, Walter knew that there could never be anyone in Andrew's heart after the death of his long term partner in 1988. They'd lived together for twenty years, so of course Walter couldn't take Ryan's place, but there was a bond between Andrew and Walter. It wasn't a love match. It was more than that. Andrew pulled Walter back together, and in return...Walter devoted himself to Andrew's comfort."

"Ah." *Like a slave, devoting himself to his Master's comfort*, Mulder thought.

"Please, Agent Mulder, Walter's not in any trouble is he?" Mayfield asked.

"God no! We aren't investigating him," Mulder replied hastily, hating himself for having distressed this man so much for no reason. He had been stupid. He should have realized how much Andrew had meant to Peter from the inscription in that book, and yet he'd blundered in here, asking his questions. He'd been such an idiot.

"Then what are you investigating?" Mayfield asked, his plump fingers playing with the hem of his tee shirt.

"Nothing that need worry or concern you, Doctor," Mulder said firmly. "I promise. I must apologize for coming here like this, upsetting you. Trust me, this is very peripheral to the investigation, just fact-finding really, to eliminate it from our inquiries. There's no question, no question at all, of Skinner being in any kind of trouble."

"And what about you?" Mayfield looked at him keenly. Mulder loosened his collar, sweating profusely from a combination of nervous guilt, and the heat. "What about you, Agent Mulder? You don't look comfortable. Are you in any kind of trouble?"

*Not yet...*

"I'm fine, just not used to the climate. Can you tell me anything else about Andrew Linker, and his involvement in the, uh, sadomasochistic lifestyle?" he asked, deciding that he might as well be hanged for a sheep as for a lamb; he'd come this far, after all. To his surprise, Mayfield laughed out loud.

"You people. You always ask these questions - you pretend that it disgusts you, when really you just want the prurient details, don't you?" Mulder flushed again, and finally gave in, and shrugged his jacket off. "Well, if you want the details, I'll give them to you. Andrew was well respected in the lifestyle. He was the safest top on the scene."

"He was a top?" Mulder's throat was dry.

Mayfield smiled, and shook his head. "He was sublime. Oh, I never played with him - although god knows I'd have liked to! No, I met Andrew when I was a barely out of college. I was going through a bad time, and he was my counselor. He refused to play with people he counseled on a professional basis, which was sound - although if he took you as his sub, you just had to benefit from all that remarkable wisdom. He was a truly great man, Agent Mulder. You won't find anybody, anybody at all," he stressed, his pudgy face changing out of all recognition as he imparted his utmost sincerity to the words, "who'll say a bad word about Andrew. He was charming, quietly spoken, unfailingly polite - a good man. The best kind. He always had time for everyone - and he knew how to listen. Not that he couldn't be tough." Mayfield shivered. "As a dom, I believe he could scare the wits out of sub with just a stare."

*Sounds familiar... Sounds familiar...* Mulder gave a pained smile.

"Don't make the mistake of thinking he was evil, or in any way perverted because of his lifestyle. He wasn't. He knew how to make his partners happy - very happy. Ask Walter. Andrew took him in, and straightened him out. I don't doubt there was a great deal of pain experienced along the way, but if Andrew thought Walter needed it, that's what he'd have given him."

"I see," Mulder croaked, his head pounding in the sun, his mind in turmoil.

This wasn't what he'd expected, and it wasn't what he'd wanted to hear. He couldn't imagine Skinner subbing to anyone. It just didn't fit in his world-view. He knew that a high proportion of people on the scene were "switches", that they took either role, but he didn't understand how Skinner could be such an expert top if his true preference was to be submissive. He examined his own heart for a moment, wondered if he had a longing to play the top, to swing a whip, to inflict... **pain**, but his mind shied away from that thought. He was lost, confused, and it was all he could do to make his excuses to Mayfield, and then stagger out of the house and into the sanctuary of his waiting car. Suddenly all this seemed too much: the glaring sun, the charred remains of that poor woman, the revelations that this state had yielded. He wanted to escape from it, to return to the arms of his Master, where he belonged. The truth was out here, and he had found it too hard to deal with. It was time to go back home, to accept what his Master told him, to wait to hear the truth from Skinner's own lips, in his Master's own time - a time when his slave might be better able to handle it.

Mulder put his key in the ignition, and started to drive back to pick up Scully. Home. He was going home.

He arrived back in the middle of the evening. He wondered whether to go straight to the 18th floor apartment, or whether to knock on the door of the 17th floor one. In the end he decided he couldn't wait to dump his bag - he needed to see his Master **now**, so he knocked noisily on the door. There was

no answer. Mulder frowned, wondering where the hell his Master could be. He'd called Skinner before he'd left California, so the other man was expecting him. He knocked again, but there was still no reply. With a resigned sigh, he got back in the elevator and went up to the next floor, letting himself into the apartment wearily. Surely Skinner hadn't stayed late at work when he knew his slave was due back, had he?

Mulder walked along to his bedroom, dispirited, then noticed that the door to the Playroom was wide open, and a red glow was emanating from the room. He frowned, and dropped his bag in the corridor, wondering what was going on. He walked hesitantly towards the glowing light, and then stopped in the doorway, his mouth opening in surprise.

The lights in the Playroom had been dimmed, and orange and red lamps glowed on the walls. Skinner was standing in the middle of the room, dressed in tight leather trousers, and the longest leather boots Mulder had seen in his life, stretching all the way up his Master's long, muscular legs, and ending up at his thighs. Skinner's chest was gleaming - clearly having been anointed with oil, and his Master was holding a sleek, black riding crop in his hands, which he slapped against his boots impatiently. His back was to Mulder, and when his slave gave a whimper of sheer arousal, Skinner turned, slowly, and looked at him. It was too much for Mulder. He ran into the Playroom, and knelt at his Master's side, looking up at him in total adoration.

"I couldn't wait to get home, Master," he whispered.

Skinner looked down on him, his boots seeming to lend him even greater height.

"And I couldn't wait to have you home, little one," Skinner murmured. He leaned down, took Mulder's face between his hands, and brushed a lock of hair away from his slave's forehead.

Mulder kissed his Master's fingers, eagerly, then slid his hands up Skinner's shiny, polished boots. "Master looks...incredible," he breathed.

"And the slave looks..." Skinner smiled, "edible," he grinned, drawing Mulder close, raising him to his feet, and cupping his denim clad buttocks. Mulder buried himself in that glistening chest, kissing his Master's honeyed flesh, licking at his hard nipples, at the cleft between his collarbones, and finally daring to go in for a kiss on his Master's welcoming lips. Skinner's big hands clasped Mulder's butt firmly, as if testing a fruit for ripeness, pinching, weighing, squeezing, and drawing his slave closer, so that their erections rubbed together inside their pants. Mulder pressed even tighter, wanting to bury himself in his Master's divine body, wanting almost to merge with him, to become one, and Skinner laughed, and pushed him away. "Pretty though you look, I don't think you're dressed appropriately, slave," he murmured.

"Sorry, Master, I'll..." Mulder began to undress, but Skinner stopped him.

"Don't. I have other plans," he said, gathering Mulder's hands behind his slave's back, and holding them there in one big fist. He reached for the fur-lined handcuffs hanging from his belt, and fastened them onto Mulder's wrists, securing them firmly. "I've missed playing with my property," Skinner smiled, in a way that was so completely the dom and Master, that Mulder's cock hardened immediately. "I've been...deprived," Skinner smirked, "so I think it's time I reminded my slave who he belongs to - yes?"

"Yes, Master. I belong to you," Mulder whispered, dropping his head and kissing those shiny toed boots.

"Lick them," Skinner ordered, and Mulder obeyed without hesitation, lapping at the smooth, polished surface, his hands tied securely behind his back Skinner traced the riding crop over Mulder's back, and down the side of his face as he worked. "Good boy, now the other one," Skinner instructed and Mulder went about his task eagerly, losing himself in his devotion. "That's enough," Skinner ordered. "I think that you've been allowed too much free time over the past few days, slave. I think some restraint is in order. Don't you?"

"Yes, Master." Mulder nodded eagerly.

"Get on the table."

Skinner nodded his head in the direction of the massage table, and Mulder climbed up eagerly, and sat on the edge, expectantly. Skinner hung the crop back on his belt, pushed Mulder's legs apart, and stood within them, then placed his hands firmly on the massage table on either side of his slave, and leaned over him. The orange, glowing light just served to make his Master even more imposing, and Mulder swallowed nervously, as Skinner looked into his eyes for several long minutes.

"How many of my orders did you disobey while you were gone?" Skinner asked him.

"Not...very many, Master," Mulder admitted nervously. Skinner leaned in and gently nipped the side of his slave's neck with his teeth.

"How many?" He asked.

"Well...you know that I came that time on the 'phone," he began.

"And the following morning you jerked off as well." Skinner continued nuzzling his slave's neck.

"How did you...? Oh, never mind," Mulder sighed.

"I know you, little one. I know you too well," Skinner moved his head, and began nuzzling the other side of his slave's neck, licking, and nibbling his earlobe. Mulder tried to remember to breathe. "How many times did you jerk off in all?" his Master asked.

"Three," Mulder said quickly. Skinner's teeth sank into his earlobe, just hard enough to make Mulder wince. "Five," Mulder amended hastily. "I couldn't help it, Master! You filled my mind with too many erotic fantasies - first, taking me in your office before I left, then putting me in the harness...oh god, please, stop," he whimpered, as Skinner burned a trail of fiery kisses along his collarbone.

"You're mine, I can do what I want with you, and right now, I want to devour you," Skinner said in a low, sexy tone. "I want to remind myself what you taste like, slaveboy." He put his hand in Mulder's hair and pushed his slave's head back, then started licking Mulder's exposed throat.

"Oh shit, Oh fuck..." Mulder hung there, limp in the delicious embrace.

"How else did you disobey me?" Skinner demanded.

"I..." Mulder tried to think, but it was difficult when his hair was being grasped in his Master's big paw, and his head was bent so far back. His throat was so vulnerable, and every now and then Skinner would pause and lightly nip the skin with his teeth. "I ate a cheeseburger!" He yelled at last.

"I know about that. Anything else?" Skinner demanded, his mouth trailing over Mulder's face, kissing the tip of his nose, and then descending on each closed eyelid, and gently depositing a kiss on each. His free hand moved to the front of Mulder's jeans and he ground his palm against Mulder's bulging, contained erection.

"No! Yes!" Mulder yelled, his head held immobile by that hand.

"Which?" Skinner asked, licking his way down the side of Mulder's face and ending up at his mouth. He claimed a long, loving kiss, all the while kneading his hand into Mulder's groin. Mulder felt as if his whole body was turning to Jell-O.

"I took off my cock ring, but only once, Master!" Mulder whimpered.

"Very well. Anything else?"

"No, Master," Mulder said quickly.

"All right." His Master released him abruptly, and then, moving fast, shoved his errant slave back on the massage table, picked up his legs, and swung them around too, then cuffed them to the ends of the table, wide apart. He turned Mulder on his side, and undid the handcuffs, but only in order to re-tie them, above his slave's head. Mulder lay, spread-eagled on the massage table, his eyes wide. Skinner loomed over him.

"What's your tally, slave?" he asked. Mulder tried to remember, but it was difficult to focus when those dark eyes were pinning him down with their masterful gaze.

"Um...twenty, I think, Master," he whispered.

"Very well. I'll add another ten for those you just mentioned - that comes to thirty. Where shall we deliver them, slave?" he asked.

Mulder frowned. "Where?" he repeated blankly.

"Yes. Where?" Skinner laughed, reaching into his pocket. Much to Mulder's surprise, he drew out a knife.

"Master!" he gasped.

"You know, I've never liked this shirt much," Skinner mused. He opened the knife, and cut his slave's shirt away from his body. Mulder held his breath, but the silver blade never went near the naked flesh beneath. "That's better - my ragged slaveboy," Skinner grinned, sheathing the knife. He flicked aside a few stray pieces of fabric, then pressed his lips against his slave's nipples. "I could give you the strokes here," he mused, his tongue brushing the sensitive nubs of flesh, making his slave squeal with pleasure, "but you know, there are other ways to torture these."

He reached behind Mulder, to a table, and drew out a set of nipple clamps, dangling from a shiny silver chain. "These aren't my most vicious clamps, slave," he whispered in Mulder's ear, his fingers gently caressing Mulder's nipples until they were rock hard, "but they hurt, and do you know what's really nice about them?" he smiled, a dark, sinister smile. Mulder shook his head. "They're adjustable," Skinner murmured.

He opened the head of one, and Mulder groaned and tried to twist away.

"Still, slave!" Skinner tapped his slave reprovably on the head, then, with one quick move of his hand, he snapped one of the clamps onto his slave's nipple. Mulder tensed, but it wasn't painful. "I said they're adjustable," Skinner smiled. "So we can take our time, build up to something very, very, tight." He punctuated this phrase by tuning a little wheel at the side of the clamp, and Mulder began to feel it dig into his flesh. He took a deep breath, and watched as Skinner fastened the second clamp to his other nipple, then tightened it, almost imperceptibly. "Now, slave, let's see about making this a little more painful shall we?" Skinner wrong-footed Mulder, by pressing a lever under the massage table with his foot, lowering it several inches. Then he swung one long leg over it so that he was straddling his hapless slave.

"Poor boy," he cooed, "all trussed up, and unable to resist. Who do you belong to, slave?" he asked, in a low, sibilant tone.

"You, Master," Mulder's hazel eyes never left his Master's dark brown ones, and Skinner's fingers returned to one of the clamps. His Master continued to look down on his slave, as he slowly turned the little wheel on the side of the clamp. The vicious implement started to squeeze Mulder's sensitized nipple, making its presence felt.

"How does this feel?" Skinner asked, bending forward, and taking a kiss from Mulder's full lips.

"Hurts, Master!" Mulder whimpered, his body jackknifing up against Skinner's leather clad groin.

"Not enough. Not yet," Skinner said softly, turning the wheel again. Mulder let out a groan as the clamp bit down into his tender flesh.

"Oh god! No more, Master, please!" he begged.

"I haven't finished yet!" Skinner smiled, and turned the wheel slowly, one more notch, his eyes never leaving his slave's.

"Please!" Mulder cried, his nipple throbbing in earnest now.

"Not yet." Skinner turned it another notch and Mulder let out a cry of sheer pain. He could already feel the endorphins kicking in, and his cock was straining so hard against the front of his jeans that he thought it might break through the fabric. "Let it out," Skinner smiled, pushing his slave's sweaty hair out of his forehead while Mulder yowled. "Good boy. Now, time for the other one," he announced, his fingers turning on the wheel of the second clamp, slowly fastening it tighter around Mulder's tortured flesh.

"Shit! Please...!" Mulder begged, knowing it was useless. His entire body was suffused with aroused anticipation.

"I think..." Skinner lowered his lips, and sucked the flesh around the side of the clamp, "that this nipple is the more sensitive one, slaveboy. Am I right?"

"Yes...Master!" Mulder gasped, bucking up against Skinner's groin, his cock desperate to be released from its denim prison.

"So, I think," Skinner gave him a smile of pure sexual evil, "that this nipple should suffer more for your crimes than the other one. Yes?"

"NO!" Mulder yelled as Skinner's fingers suddenly turned the wheel three times in quick succession closing the clamp shut around his nipple like a vice. "Oh shit, oh fuck, take them off, please, take them off!" he yelled, his body flapping on the table like a fish beneath his Master's thighs.

"Hush, little one, hush." Skinner's hands stroked his slave's body gently, and wiped some sweat from his slave's forehead. "My beautiful slave, so bravely taking his Master's will. I've missed this body - my plaything." He looked full of loving pride, as he ran his hands up and down Mulder's torso, gentling and calming him. "See, my will isn't too hard to bear, little one?" he whispered. "Is it?"

"I don't know..." Mulder whispered, the pain in his nipples receding slightly as he became accustomed to it. Skinner smiled at him lovingly, and returned to his slave's mouth, taking another long, deep, tender kiss. He drew back, and sighed regretfully.

"I'm afraid, little one, that you haven't been punished enough yet," he whispered in a blood curdling tone. Mulder's cock went into spasm inside his jeans. "I'm afraid, that you have to suffer some more before you've atoned for your wrong doing, slave," he murmured. Mulder sighed in aroused anticipation, and put his head back, gazing at the ceiling. Skinner undid his ankle cuffs and then he felt his Master's hands unbuckle his belt. His Master unzipped his jeans, and pulled them down his legs. Mulder lifted his hips to accommodate the action, and the pants were dropped onto the floor. His boxers soon followed suit. His cock leapt up, ramrod straight, ready to burst.

"It's so eager to receive its punishment," Skinner murmured in a regretful tone, re-fastening the ankle cuffs.

"Wh...at?!" Mulder tried to sit up, craning his neck to see what was happening. Skinner smiled, his hands running down his slave's naked legs.

"Well, somewhere has to be punished, and I think it should be this little beauty, don't you?" Skinner smiled wickedly, and reached over to the table again, and brought forth a miniature, black flogger, made from tiny lengths of suede. He grasped Mulder's cock in one hand, and Mulder groaned, and thrust up. "This cock will have to pay for the slave's disobedience," Skinner crooned. He fingered the cockhead, manipulating the flesh that was softer there, playing with the skin. Mulder sighed, his whole body a morass of sensation, then yelped as Skinner brought the tiny flogger down on his cockhead. It flicked against the flesh, making him yelp, but it wasn't as painful as he'd thought it would be. "It needs time to build up," Skinner whispered, winking at him. "Thirty strokes should be enough, little slave. Thirty licks with my flogger and you'll be begging me to stop."

"Oh god." Mulder put his head back again, the sweat streaming down his face. He felt the flogger on his cockhead once more, a sharp, flicking pain, quickly receding. It felt like nothing on this earth. His endorphins were having a party, taking him to a new level and the boundary between pleasure and pain didn't seem to exist for him any more. "Oh...shit..." he whispered hazily, as Skinner landed three more blows onto his eagerly waiting shaft. His cock burned, wanting its release.

"Not yet. Not until I'm done." Skinner pinched the cockhead hard between his fingers, and Mulder yelled out loud. "Hold it," Skinner urged, and Mulder fought back the urge to come. Skinner finally let go, but only in order to deliver another lick to that straining cock head. Mulder was dimly aware that his Master was varying the intensity of the blows, sometimes soft and caressing, sometimes hard and flicking, and he never aimed at the hard shaft itself, or the sensitive area underneath, just the soft cockhead. It caused a sensation like nothing he had experienced before - burning, and stinging, creating an arousal that shot through his belly, warming his entire body. He was dimly aware that his nipples ached, that his cock ached, that he longed for release, but at the same time he wanted to endure this torture forever, and to suffer whatever trials and torments his Master chose to put him through. He knew he was babbling, talking nonsense, but he wasn't sure what he was saying. His cock burned more and more, until he was sure he couldn't take one more caressing stroke from the whip, and then he dimly heard Skinner whisper "thirty," and the torture stopped.

"My slave's body is so enticing," Skinner murmured, putting the flogger to one side. Mulder would have jumped into the air if he hadn't been bound, as Skinner's mouth descended on his hot, burning cock, and enveloped it.

"OH. MY. GOD!" he cried, as his Master's tongue skillfully warmed the hurt away, soothing the tortured flesh. Skinner sucked him gently for a few minutes, bringing him to the edge of climax, then drawing back again, leaving Mulder panting on the brink. "Master, please!" Mulder begged. "Master, you have to let me...!"

"Not yet. Soon." Skinner leaned over his slave, his fingers finding the clamps, and then, smiling down lovingly at his slave, he moved the wheel another notch, pinching the tortured nubs of flesh even more in that cruel embrace. Mulder cried out, as exquisite waves of pleasure/pain coursed through his body. He watched, in a haze of pleasure, as Skinner unfastened his leather trousers, revealing his hard, resplendent cock. Mulder groaned.

"Master...please, let me worship you..." he begged.

Skinner smiled, and ran his fingertips along his slave's body, making Mulder tingle all over.

"You will. You'll worship me with your open legs, and with your ass," he said, placing a condom on his erect cock. Skinner placed one lubed finger inside his slave, and Mulder closed his muscles around the intrusion. "Relax," Skinner soothed, and soon his Master had entered two fingers inside his naked, prone, tied slave, then three. Finally, having fully prepared his slave, Skinner drew his fingers out, and unfastened Mulder's legs. He placed them on his shoulders, and positioned his hard cock in the entrance to his slave's anus. Mulder cried out, welcoming that familiar, hard intrusion, trying to draw his Master deep inside him. Skinner grinned, and thrust with one smooth, fluid motion, burying himself up to the hilt inside Mulder's hot, slick flesh.

"Yes, Master! Please!" Mulder begged, out of his mind with sensation. Skinner began to thrust, slowly at first, then harder. As he drove in and out, his hand massaged Mulder's cock in time to his thrusts, and Mulder knew he couldn't hold on any more.

"Come before me and I'll whip you," Skinner hissed. Mulder cried out, no longer caring. "I'll use the bullwhip - 10 on your naked back and butt, 10 on your bare flesh," Skinner warned.

Mulder clawed his way back from the brink, unwilling to taste the bullwhip on this joyous homecoming. He had no doubt that his Master would keep his word if he disobeyed him. Skinner always kept his promises. His mind spiraled away, and he felt as if he was having an out of body experience. For one, brief, vivid moment, he looked down into his own eyes, saw the sweat running all over his body, his hair soaked through with it. He saw his Master thrusting into his prone body with deep, powerful strokes, and then watched, in slow motion, as Skinner slid his hands sensuously up his slave's body, and removed the nipple clamps with a whisk of his fingers.

The world exploded into a point of bright white light. The pain was indescribable, as the blood rushed back into those tormented nubs of flesh, and yet the pleasure, the endorphin rush, was like nothing he'd ever experienced before. He knew he was coming. He could feel his come bursting out of his body like a train emerging from a tunnel into the light, but the sensation was so intense as to be indescribable. He knew he was screaming out his pleasure, knew that his come was splattering all over his stomach, all over his Master's stomach. He knew, dimly, that Skinner was coming too, deep inside his slave, and then there was only the beating of their hearts in unison, and the calm after the storm. Skinner bent over his slave's body, panting, his hands soothing, gentling, rubbing the salty come into Mulder's sweaty flesh. Mulder lay there, trying to return to himself, as high as a kite. He felt Skinner withdraw and heard him dispose of the condom, then his Master was leaning over him, undoing the cuffs, his brown eyes twinkling.

"I guess you missed me then, huh?" Skinner asked, his fingers rubbing Mulder's wrists solicitously.

"You don't even need to ask," Mulder whispered, getting up and falling against his Master's solid chest. "I wanted to be back here beside you so many times, wanted to feel your arms around me, loving me."

"Oh, you're loved, little one." Skinner tilted Mulder's head up, and kissed him slowly, chastely, on the lips. "Don't ever doubt that you're loved," he murmured, stroking his slave's sweaty hair away from his face. "Did you like your homecoming?" he asked. Mulder rested his head on his Master's shoulder with a satisfied sigh.

"It was...out of this world, Master," he said. "I worship you." He kissed Skinner's shoulder, tasting the salty flesh. "I exist to serve you, Master," he said, all thoughts about what he'd found out in California completely banished from his mind. Skinner was so completely the dom, so totally the Master - he **lived** the role, 24/7, just as Mulder lived the role of slave. They moved like clockwork together, each in his right place, where he was supposed to be, complementing each other, like parts of a sophisticated piece of machinery, designed only to operate as a whole, each part needing the other.

"Come on. Let's take a bath," Skinner said, helping his slave to his feet.

They soaked in the tub for well over an hour, Skinner's long legs wrapped around his slave's thighs, Mulder's head on his Master's furry chest, too dazed and sated to talk, just enjoying the companionable

silence. Then Skinner pulled on a robe, and they went downstairs, and laid on the couch, Mulder's body entwined in his Master's. Skinner played with Mulder's hair as they lay, listening to music, Wanda's furry body nestled up against them, purring loudly. Mulder felt sleepy, and happy. He was back where he belonged, with his family. He should never have left in the first place. He had never really belonged anywhere until now, and it felt so good.

The 'phone went, and Skinner reached for it lazily.

"Skinner. Peter? My god, it's great to hear from you! It's been a while." Skinner sat up.

Mulder tried to run this piece of information through his dazed mind, feeling sure that the name 'Peter' was important, and that he should be worried, but he was too happy, and on too much of a high to care.

"Yes, I'm fine. Are you okay? How's Troy? Hmm...a-ha...mmm." Skinner twisted his slave's hair through his fingers, and then ran his hand down the side of Mulder's face, ending up at his mouth. Mulder opened his lips and took those fingers between them, sucking on them. Skinner smiled down on him lovingly. "A visitor?" Mulder was aware of Skinner's body stiffening beneath him, but he wasn't sure why, or what the implications of that were. "Andrew?" Skinner's voice caught in his throat as he said the name. "There is no...who? Mu...? Yes, yes...no." Skinner's whole tone changed, and he pushed Mulder off his lap, and sat up, his body hard and tense. Mulder stared at him, wondering why his Master's mood had changed so dramatically.

"No, Peter, it's nothing to worry about. Yes, Peter...I do know him. I know him very well. No, no, it's got nothing to do with Andrew. No, of course there was nothing suspicious about his death. I can't even understand the implication." Skinner's voice was full of hurt. "Look, this is to do with me, and the new situation I've gotten myself into. No, you did the right thing. Thanks for the information."

Mulder twisted to look at his Master as Skinner put the 'phone down, then suddenly, he remembered why he should be worried. He sat up, shocked out of his sated stupor, a chill going deep into his heart.

"I'm sorry," he whispered, trembling slightly.

Skinner stared at him for a moment, and there was an expression on his face that Mulder had never seen before.

"Don't ask me to leave. You can do anything to me apart from that," Mulder begged, flinging himself down at Skinner's feet. "I don't care what you do, Master. Do anything, but please don't make me leave," he begged.

Skinner's hands clenched by his sides, and for a moment Mulder thought he'd see his Master do something he'd never done before - lose control. He watched as Skinner fought a silent, internal battle, a range of emotions flitting across that normally self-contained face, then finally, Skinner spoke, and it was in a low, soft tone, as if he didn't trust himself to talk in his normal voice.

"Mulder, go to bed," he said.

Mulder flinched at the use of his surname. "Please, Master...don't..." he whispered.

"Just go. Now. I can't..." Skinner struggled hard, and visibly, to retain control. "Not now. Later," he said in a choked voice.

"Please, just tell me you won't send me away," Mulder pleaded.

"I won't send you away," Skinner repeated, in a dull, mechanical voice, "but I can't promise you anything else right now. Go, Fox. Please. For me," he urged, and it was a request, not an order. Mulder nodded, relieved, both by the use of his first name, and Skinner's promise.

"I'm sorry," he said again, and then he fled. Mulder reached the stairs, and looked back briefly. Skinner had his back to him, and the tight muscles of his Master's back were clearly visible under the other man's robe. Skinner was hunched, his body full of tension, and he looked so lost, and heartbroken, that Mulder longed to run back and make it better, but it was he who had done this, and Skinner couldn't handle him right now.

Mulder knew he had no choice but to return to his room. He threw himself down on the bed, and covered his eyes as the tears threatened to spill out onto his face. Damn, trust him to take the one good thing that had ever happened to him in his entire life and to screw it up like this. Damn! If only he hadn't gone to California, if only he hadn't spoken to Peter Mayfield, if only Mayfield hadn't jumped to conclusions about euthanasia of all things, when nothing could have been further from Mulder's mind. He had been so stupid. It hadn't even occurred to him that Mayfield and Skinner might be friends. He had been so sure that Mayfield and Andrew had been involved, before Skinner came onto the scene, so caught up in his pursuit of the truth, as always...

Mulder caught a glimpse of the framed contracts on the nightstand. He grabbed the Master one, and held it tight against his chest, and then he couldn't hold back the tears. He buried his face in his pillow, and silently convulsed against the fabric, curled up in a fetal position, the Master contract clasped against his heart.

### **End of Part 13**

#### **Chapter End Notes:**

Oops - was that a cliffhanger? I fear so.  
Xanthes are well known for their cruel and sadistic tendencies. Something  
really BIG  
happens in the next chapter and I'm not gonna say what, but I think it'll be  
quite a  
surprise for everyone, especially Mulder...

You can email me feedback, virtual  
chocolate, virtual Mulders (lifesize model, fully spankable please), real  
Skinners,  
paddles, straps, and exotic items of footwear etc to:



Release by Xanthe

**Author's Notes:**

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Posted 18th February, 2000

**Pic courtesy of [cdavis99@prodigy.net](mailto:cdavis99@prodigy.net). Shower her with praise so that she makes some more!!! (PLEASE!) For the colored, Skinner-only version, go [here](#).**

**This is \*Walter's\* chapter!**

**WARNING: Heavy angst, and a really intense whipping or two follow.**

Many thanks to Emma, who told me a very intriguing tale that sparked this story off, and for the long discussions over high calorie snacks.

Huge thanks to Phoebe, for her usual wonderful insights into Walter's character and the food thing <G> I used one of your lines here, Phoebe.

Thanks to Gaby for the Macy Gray lyrics, and to CDavis, as usual, for the especially inspirational Sk/M pics, as well as all the others ;)

Quotation courtesy of my sweet Alex. None of this is beta'd. It's far too much fun to take seriously.

**24/7** is an erotic fantasy and NOT a BDSM resource guide. The truth is sometimes exaggerated, or played with, for dramatic effect. For more information, please visit the **24/7 BDSM Glossary**.

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*"A truth, still apparent, though disregarded, that things move violently to their place, but calmly in their place. To put it another way, everything has its right home, the region that suits it, and, unless forcibly restrained, will move thither by a kind of homing instinct."*

J. Winterson  
*"Art and Lies"*

Mulder woke early. He didn't think he'd managed to snatch more than thirty minutes sleep at a time throughout the long, dark night. At the beginning he'd cried for himself, but as the night wore on, his emotions quieted, and he was left with a desperate, harrowing sadness for the man he had left downstairs, his back shaking. He tried to imagine how **he** would feel, if someone had blundered into his life, re-opening old, and still tender wounds, and he empathized with his Master all too well. If Skinner **was** still his Master. He didn't see how the other man could want him now. What had seemed merely to be his usual headlong pursuit of the truth had spiraled out of control, and caused repercussions that he had not envisaged. Mulder's heart ached, not just for himself, but also, and most of all, for Skinner.

He felt as if he was experiencing a loss of innocence. He had been so content to bask in the erotic heat of Skinner's expert caresses that he had forgotten that the other man didn't simply exist to tend to his slave's needs. Skinner was real flesh and blood, and however hard they played this game, at the end of the day he was more multi-faceted than this one role allowed him to be - as was Mulder. There was so much more to both of them, and what made it all worse was the fact that Mulder was sure that Skinner had been trying to show him that. Mulder had been too lost in the excitement, and the erotic fulfillment of so many of his dreams, to notice though. Maybe, in time, he would have, but now he felt sure that time would be denied him.

Mulder got up, and dutifully performed his morning swim, for no reason other than to anchor himself to his Master's will at the very moment when he was sure it had been withdrawn from him - along with the other man's love and trust. Then, not knowing what else to do, Mulder made his Master coffee, picked up his newspaper, and went to Skinner's bedroom. He would perform his wake-up call if Skinner would let him, or kneel beside the bed if his Master would not. He just needed to know it would be all right, and to be given a chance to repair the great damage he had wrought.

Mulder pushed open the bedroom door - and stopped. Skinner wasn't there. Somehow Mulder wasn't surprised. He stepped into the room, and laid the coffee on the night-stand. The bed was made, and when he checked inside, it was cold. Skinner had either got up very early, or he had never gone to bed. Either way, he wasn't in the apartment. Mulder sat down with a thud on the bed, and bit back more angry tears. He didn't know what to do. Nothing he could think of would redress what had happened.

It was over.

He sat, staring absently around the room for a long time, then reached out and caressed his Master's pillow. He picked it up and smelled it - it carried Skinner's scent, faint but still that essence of Skinner that Mulder loved so much. He pressed it against his face, and gave in to the silent tears again. Not that it made any difference, but he couldn't stop them falling. Something nudged against his elbow, and he looked down into Wanda's curious eyes and managed a wry smile.

"Hello, girl. Come to see what a fuck up the interloper has made of this situation, huh? But you always knew I would, didn't you, lady? You knew I wasn't good enough for him from the outset."

She regarded him calmly for a few seconds, then climbed onto his knee and settled there with a contented trill. He pulled her close and buried his face in her fur.

"You are beautiful - you know that though, don't you? He's lucky to have you. I wonder how the hell he **did** end up with a cat. I can't exactly see him going out to buy one. I could ask him, but I think my

curiosity has got me into enough trouble, don't you?" She blinked at him, slowly, and he sighed, and buried his face in her fur again, stroking her soft body. She nestled in close and he was surprised by what a comfort she was. He hugged her for a long time, then finally disengaged himself, and wandered back upstairs to get dressed.

As he showered, Mulder looked down at the trappings of his slavery. Just a few short days ago he had removed his cock ring in a stupid gesture of rebellion. Now he wondered what it would be like to go without them, to have Skinner remove all of them, as the other man had said he would if he released his slave. Mulder shivered. He had become accustomed to his rings. He found them not only to be horny reminders of the contract he had signed, but also something to be proud of, something that signaled he belonged to a man he had come to love.

Love.

You've got a strange way of showing it, Mulder, he berated himself. He went to work, his stomach churning, his footsteps leaden. He wanted nothing more than to see Skinner, and make sure the other man was all right, but he knew that as soon as he did see his Master, he'd have nothing to say. He also wasn't sure whether he could bear the look of disappointment he would see in his Master's eyes. He walked into the basement, his shoulders slumped and dejected, and Scully looked at him in surprised alarm.

"Mulder? Are you all right?" Her blue eyes radiated their concern.

"I'm...fine. Just...tired. It was a long day yesterday."

"Yeah! You're not...you're not thinking about what we found in California are you?" She asked him anxiously.

"No, Scully, I'm not. Don't worry about it. I'll be fine."

"Good, because I've scheduled us a meeting with Skinner in a few minutes to go over the report."

"Right. I see." Mulder's heart lurched. However much he wanted to see Skinner, he wasn't sure he could face his Master as "Agent Mulder" after what had happened, to carry on a pretense when there was so much that he wanted to say - that needed to be said.

Skinner looked rough - presumably he'd had a night as bad as the one Mulder had suffered, wherever he had spent it. Mulder's heart went out to the other man. He had dark rings under his eyes, and his face was pale. When he thought about the homecoming Skinner had given him, and how perfect that had been, Mulder shuddered, hating himself even more.

"Sir..." He handed Skinner his interim report, and their fingers touched as Skinner took it. Mulder held the moment, wanting to look into his Master's eyes, but Skinner's gaze remained resolutely fixed on the file. He wouldn't even look at his errant slave. Mulder released the file hopelessly, and took his seat. Skinner read through the report, then looked up.

"I see Ray Glover agrees with your conclusions," he murmured.

"Yes, sir." Scully nodded.

"And you wrapped this up yesterday?" Skinner asked, flicking through the file.

"That's right." Scully crossed her legs, and shot Mulder a look from under her eyelashes.

Mulder noticed Skinner flinch, visibly, from this information. Not only was his slave lying to him, but both Scully and Glover were lying to him as well. He didn't deserve that.

"That's what Glover says too," Skinner murmured, the surprised hurt sounding in his voice.

Mulder couldn't stop himself. "Actually, sir, we wound up the case on Wednesday - it wasn't very hard. The woman was killed by lightning, it didn't take a genius to work that out," he said quickly. Scully looked at him in alarm. "We could have come back straight away, but I felt like taking a day out in California, so I had Glover cover for us. It wasn't Scully's idea," he added swiftly. Skinner put the file down on the desk, and looked at his slave for the first time, and now it was Mulder's turn to flinch. Skinner's eyes were dark, and bleak.

"Thank you for your honesty, Agent Mulder," his Master said quietly. "I appreciate it. I'm sure we've all done something similar in our time. I trust you had an enjoyable day?" He directed the question to both of them. Scully smiled, relieved, and nodded.

Mulder bit on his lip, and shrugged. "Not really. I wanted to satisfy my curiosity about something, but it was a mistake. I should have let it go. I wish I had," he said, his tone urgent and intent. Scully looked at him, her eyebrow raised in unspoken query.

"Well, this report seems clear enough. I'll see that personnel note that yesterday was taken as vacation time," Skinner said tersely. "Write up the report properly, and I'll sign it, then we can bury this case."

"Yes, sir," Mulder nodded, his throat dry. Skinner was like a man functioning on automatic pilot. Mulder wanted nothing more than to kneel at his Master's side, with his chin on Skinner's knee, and offer the other man the same comfort Wanda had given him this morning. He wondered whether he would ever be given the privilege of assuming that position again.

"You're dismissed, Agents," Skinner said, and Scully got up to go.

"Mulder?" She asked, when she reached the door and found he wasn't following.

"I'll catch you up, Scully." He gave her a wan smile, and she nodded, frowning.

When she had gone, he turned to Skinner. "I'm sorry," he said quietly. "I'm so, so sorry. I had no idea what I was stumbling into. I never intended to cause you such pain."

"No. You never do," Skinner stated cryptically, in a low tone. When he spoke again, his voice had changed to his usual brisk, business-like tones. "Agent Mulder, I don't have time for this conversation right now. I'll see you at home, this evening, when we'll decide where to go from here."

"Are you going to take my rings away?" Mulder asked, hardly daring to voice the question, but needing to know. He didn't really believe Skinner's reassurance last night that he would not be sent away. There was silence. Skinner frowned, as if he didn't trust himself to speak.

"Please, sir, are you going to release me?" Mulder pushed, in a desperate tone.

"Just be there this evening. We'll talk," Skinner said, not looking at his slave.

"Please." Mulder stood in front of his Master, trying to make Skinner look at him. "Understand that I'm sorry at least, if you're going to release me. Understand that. I wouldn't want to hurt you, I promise. I'd never intentionally..."

"That's enough, Agent Mulder," Skinner snapped, his jaw clenching spasmodically. "Intentional or not, you **did**, and you aren't helping right now."

"I'm sorry, it's just that I..." Mulder began.

"Yes, that's it - I. That just about sums you up. I've said this before, Fox, but not everything is about you. This was about me, it still is. Now, please leave, before I say something that I regret and that you don't want to hear."

Mulder hesitated but the look in his Master's eyes showed that the other man was deadly serious. He turned and left, the pain inside digging into his chest like a dagger, making it hard to breathe.

Mulder sleepwalked through the day. He composed his report on auto-pilot, submitted it, and then went home. After the morning's conversation he no longer dared hope that Skinner would keep him. He wouldn't, and there was no point nursing any false hope. He decided to save himself the heartache, to walk before he was sent, and went straight up to his room, and started packing his belongings away. He had no idea where he would go, but it was obvious that he couldn't stay here.

He finished packing away his meager belongings, deciding that he'd have to come back for the fish tank. He was nearly packed by the time Skinner got home. His cases were in the hallway, waiting.

"Nearly done," he managed a wan smile in Skinner's direction as the other man threw his briefcase down on the table. "I'm sorry - I should have been out of your way by now. I won't be long."

"You're running out?" Skinner crossed to the decanter, and poured a large tumbler of whisky, raised it to his lips, then stopped, and slammed it back down. Mulder winced. "Is that what you're doing? Running out?"

"Isn't that what you want?" Mulder asked, bewildered.

"No, it's what you want. Isn't this what you do, Fox? You run out when there's a threat of real intimacy."

"No." Mulder stood up straight, considering the point. "No, but I know when I've screwed up, and I know when I'm making things worse by staying than by going. Believe me, I know that feeling all too well," he muttered, with a bitter, ironic laugh. Skinner gazed at him dispassionately. "I spent the 6 years after Sam

was taken knowing I was in the wrong place at the wrong time. I knew I was in the way and I got out as soon as I could."

"And now you're doing it again." Skinner strode into the kitchen, poured a large glass of water and took a deep gulp. Then he turned back. "Well you can't," he said to Mulder. "You can't leave because I'm not going to release you. You signed a contract, remember."

"Yes." Mulder shrugged. "But you and I both know that it's entirely dependent on us keeping up the game."

"It's not a game." Skinner slammed his glass down again, and Mulder backed off from the real anger he saw in the other man's eyes. "It's a role, yes, but not a game, damnit." He advanced on Mulder, his body shaking in fury, and Mulder shrank back, towards the door.

"All right," he said, trying to calm the situation. "Whatever you say."

"No, not whatever I say. You don't understand because you refuse to," Skinner said despairingly. "Never mind. Go if you want to. Escape was always what you both feared and wanted most. This way you'll have managed to hit out, to forestall rejection before it comes to you - which is what you always do. Not because you're a coward, but because you think your presence in some way hurts people, and you can't stand doing that. I was hoping to show you something else, but I can't make you stay. You're right about that. Contract or not, our current living arrangement depends upon our mutual collusion."

"Yes," Mulder said simply. He had always known that, even if he'd maintained the fiction in his own mind that he had no choice. He did have a choice. He'd always had a choice. "You should have let me come to you as a sub. That would have been easier," he said softly.

"Easier, yes, but you'd have learned nothing, and I couldn't have lived with myself if I hadn't tried..." Skinner broke off, abruptly. He downed his water in one long gulp, then took off his coat and threw it on the couch. His suit jacket followed, then he started to undo his tie, with quick, angry movements. That ended up on the couch too, and he jerked his collar open, as if struggling for air. Mulder watched the other man, noticing the depth of controlled anger in those terse gestures. Then Skinner was walking towards him, coming close, too close. Mulder took a step back, then another...then found himself backed up against the wall. Skinner placed his hands on either side of Mulder's head, keeping the younger man trapped, his large body as overpowering and physically intimidating as ever. Mulder swallowed, smelling Skinner's anger through the other man's shirt. Skinner's eyes were dark, and deadly serious as he started to speak.

"I'm giving you one last chance. What you did..." Skinner's jaw clenched spasmodically, "...was wrong," he said finally.

"Why? You dug around in my past," Mulder said, finding the defense from somewhere, surprising himself with it. Skinner took a gulp of air, as if he had been physically hit in the stomach.

"I only asked about your preferences, not your life," Skinner murmured, clearly winded by the attack. "I asked because I needed to keep you safe, and because I had to take your choices away in order to save you. I didn't want to hurt you - I needed to know what you liked, how far I could go. I judge some of it by how you respond, but not all...I needed a basis to work from." His voice dropped. "I'm sorry. Maybe I

didn't play this right, but it was the only way I could see to do it. I know you too well. I know that Andrew..." He paused.

Mulder bit on his lip. "Andrew did something similar to you?" He asked.

"No." Skinner shook his head. "You and I have very different needs, Mulder. You don't understand that because you don't understand yourself."

"And I don't understand you. I wanted to though. That was why..."

"I know why!" Skinner responded angrily. "I damn well know about you and your insane curiosity. I asked you to trust me - I'd have told you in time, but you couldn't do that for me, could you? Now you've forced the pace, and you've stirred up some damn hard personal memories for me in the process."

"And I've said I'm sorry," Mulder shrugged. "Look, I'll just go." He tried to move, but Skinner slammed him back against the wall. For the first time since he'd signed the contract, Mulder felt in genuine fear of his Master.

"Go, if you want to," Skinner said, "but I'm offering you a choice. Run out on all this if you can't take what you've done, but if you go, I think you'll kill yourself within a year. Oh, not deliberately, but because you can't live with that restless core inside you, the demons that haunt you, and you go to any lengths to escape them, take all kinds of stupid, ridiculous risks." He moved his hands, cradled Mulder's face between them, caressing his thumb down the sides of Mulder's cheeks. "I don't want you dead, little one. I don't want that."

"No." Mulder looked down, fighting back the tears. "You wanted to be the one to save me."

"No." Skinner shook his head. "Only you can do that. I wanted to be the one to show you how though."

Mulder stared at his Master, wordlessly. He needed to get out of here, he needed to breathe. He couldn't take this kind of emotional scene. He couldn't deal with it. He never had been able to deal with his own emotions, to deal with hurting people he loved. He remembered telling his Mother that Sam had gone, remembered telling his father the second time he had lost his sister. On each occasion he had turned away, unable to face their grief because of what he'd done to them. He couldn't face it now either.

"Let me go," he said again.

"I will." Skinner's fingers continued caressing Mulder's face, gently, despairingly. "You can go if you want to. I'm asking you to stay and face it though. It won't be easy. If you stay, I'll make you endure something worse than anything you've suffered before in your life, Fox."

Mulder stared at his Master wordlessly. He rarely craved punishment to atone for his sins. He craved it simply because it turned him on. It was about sex for him. He could endure punishment as part of a sex game, because it gave him a high, but somehow he didn't think that was what Skinner had in mind here.

"I don't know," he stammered at last.

"Then make up your mind." Skinner stood back, his dark eyes cold and sad, as if Mulder had profoundly disappointed him. He glanced at his watch. "You've got half an hour. I'm going to get changed. If you're still here when I get back, then we'll go forward but it'll be hard. I won't lie to you - this will be very hard for you."

"What will you do?" Mulder closed his eyes, put his head back against the wall, his Adam's apple bobbing convulsively in his exposed throat.

Skinner shook his head. "Come with me into the unknown, walk beside me, and we'll face it together, but you have to take that first step alone - and with trust. Trust in me. If you can't find that trust, then the journey's over, before it ever really began." Skinner ran his finger slowly down Mulder's throat, then, abruptly, turned away. "Half an hour. It's your choice. If you choose to leave we won't mention this again. I'll see that your money and your contract are returned to you, and we'll erase the past few weeks from our lives as if they never happened." He picked up his coat, jacket and tie, and walked out of the room without looking back.

Mulder stood, slumped, against the wall, trying to make sense of this. Every instinct in his body was telling him to run, to get away from this situation, from the breach of trust, the pain, the sheer emotional trauma. He couldn't fight it. He picked up his cases, slung a bag over his shoulder, and walked out of the door. Mulder made it all the way down to the parking garage before he realized he'd stopped breathing. He came to a halt, gasping for air, and leaned against the wall, his heart beating fast inside his chest.

Finally he pulled himself together enough to stagger over to his car, threw his belongings inside, then got in, and started to drive. He didn't know where he was going, just that he had to get away. Skinner's voice echoed over and over in his mind. He remembered the word "endure", and wondered what Skinner would do to him if he went back. His mind went nervously to the bullwhip, which was the instrument that scared him most. Just a few serious stripes of that across his back would cause him to pass out, but if it atoned in any way for what he'd done, he'd willingly face it, willingly **endure** it. It wasn't fear of punishment that was sending him away - Skinner was right about that much. It was fear of himself, of his emotions, fear of the trust that had been built up between himself and his Master. He was so used to living with his paranoia - even Scully had barely managed to breach it. There were still moments, even after all this time, when he doubted her, when he imagined her writing up her reports on him, submitting them to some unknown, shadowy organization who monitored his every move. Mulder stopped driving, and opened the window, taking deep, gulping breaths of air, fighting his own panic. He wanted to trust Skinner, damnit! He wanted to commit himself back into that loving care, to sell his service in return for the other man's protective love.

Mulder took several deep breaths, and came to a decision. He was better off alone. He had always been alone, and that way he didn't end up hurting the people he loved. He could deal with anything except that hurt. He'd seen the same expression in Skinner's eyes that had been in his parent's eyes when he'd told them about Sam. Yes, it was better to leave, before he made things worse. Mulder sat up, and started the car again, nodding to himself. He turned the car stereo on to distract himself. It took a few minutes for the song playing to register in his mind - he'd only bought it a few days before, and had been playing it non-stop ever since. It was a haunting, lyrical melody. The lyrics didn't have much meaning for him on a personal level beyond that his Master - ex-Master - had given it, but there was something so beautiful about it.

*Each of us thinking how good it can be...someone is speaking...but she doesn't know he's there.* Mulder slammed his foot on the brake again, and reached out to silence it just as the song reached its chorus, with all the memories and meaning that went with it; *Here, there...and everywhere*. Mulder flicked the control panel in relief, turning the radio on instead, and continued driving.

*Nothing compares...nothing compares, to you*, Sinead O' Connor's voice blared out, taut with pain. Mulder savagely changed the radio station. It was dark outside and starting to rain. The music seeped into focus, and he realized that he had hit some kind of golden oldie radio station. *I can't forget this evening, oh your face as you were leaving, but I guess that's just the way the story goes...* the plaintive warbling rang out. Mulder clenched his fists around the steering wheel. Was every damn song in the whole damn world about failed love affairs? It was driving him insane. *I can't live... if living is without you*, the music blared. Mulder glared at the radio, suspecting a conspiracy. This couldn't be for real.

"Where's mindless pop trash when you need it anyway?" He grumbled, diving for the control panel again. He located a contemporary station, playing some kind of repetitive mantra that suited his mood, and began driving again. How come music always seemed so relevant at times of high emotional angst? He remembered how he'd sat up for several nights running after Scully had been abducted, just listening to the most depressing music he could find, seeing relevance in each heartbreaking melody, deliberately torturing himself with her loss. Mulder drove, lost in a mindless haze. He glanced at his watch. Half an hour, Skinner had said. He had ten more minutes. If he turned back now...Mulder slammed his foot on the brake, and rested his head on the steering wheel. "You made your decision," he whispered, his skin prickling at the thought of enduring what Skinner had promised him. Something worse than anything else he'd ever undergone... Mulder buried his face in his hands. The words of the next song infiltrated his consciousness.

*I try to say good-bye and I choke,*

*I try to walk away but I stumble,*

*Though I try to hide it, it's clear*

*My world crumbles when you are not near.*

"Fuck it!" He roared, turning the car around and screeching back to Crystal City. He drove up with two minutes to spare, left his belongings, and ran to the elevator, stood inside it, thumping his fist against the wall, willing it to go faster. He arrived at the 17th floor, ran along the corridor, found the door still ajar as he'd left it, burst inside...just as Skinner jogged down the stairs. His Master stopped, and looked at him.

"I take it you've made your decision?" Skinner said softly.

"I didn't stand a chance. Every radio station in the universe was against me," Mulder replied, making a face. Skinner had changed into gray sweatpants, matching sweater, and sneakers. He wasn't wearing his glasses, and he didn't look remotely like a Master. He looked lost, strangely distant, and remote - and very distracted.

"Sir? M...aster?" Mulder asked.

Skinner looked around the apartment, his expression confused. "My keys...where did I put my keys?" he muttered, patting his pockets.

"On the table." Mulder picked up the keys, and handed them to his Master. "Are we going somewhere?" He asked.

"Somewhere?" Skinner frowned. "Oh. Yes. Look," he pulled Mulder around to face him. "I said this would be hard, and it will be. Are you sure you want to stay?"

Mulder nodded, never taking his eyes off Skinner's face. "Yes. I've never been more sure of anything in my life," he said softly. "I can take whatever you want to hand out."

Skinner smiled, a hazy, sad smile. "This is different. This will be harder," he whispered. "I know you too well. This will hurt. Are you sure? Really sure, Fox?"

"Yes," Mulder said firmly. "Whatever it is, I deserve it."

"No." Skinner shook his head. "This isn't about you - it's not a punishment, it's just something to be endured. Punishment for you will come later. Understand that, or we can't go on."

"I don't though," Mulder replied, bewildered.

"Understand that I'm not punishing you. Understand that this is for me. Can you understand that much?"

"Yes." Mulder nodded slowly.

"Good." Skinner went to the door, and left, without a backward glance. Mulder swallowed nervously. Whatever was going to happen next would be bad. He could feel it.

They drove in silence. Skinner wouldn't reply to any of Mulder's questions, so in the end he stopped asking them. They arrived at a house that Mulder knew.

"Elaine?" He asked. "We're going to see Elaine? Why?"

"Because she's an old friend," Skinner told him tersely, lost in a world of his own.

It was almost as if his Master was elsewhere, Mulder thought. He certainly didn't seem to be in the here and now. He was fidgety, on edge, and Mulder had never seen Skinner like that before. He got out of the car, and followed his Master to the door. It was opened before they even got there, and Elaine's arms went around Skinner's shoulders, drawing him into a heartfelt hug.

"My poor Walter. My poor, dear Walter," she whispered, kissing his cheek, holding him close. Mulder stared at her, guilt warring with curiosity. She saw him, and smiled, holding out her hand to him. "And poor Mulder too," she said softly. "My poor boys. Come in."

Mulder followed, numbly. He had only played with Elaine a few times. She had been too nice. It would have been easy to fall in love with her, and, as Skinner had so accurately pointed out, he was afraid of

that, so he had ended the liaison. She was a good person though - he had trusted her as much as he trusted anybody. She was dressed in a flowing robe, that accentuated her full figure, with her large breasts and wide, curvy hips.

"Come on. Everything's waiting," she told them, leading them towards what she called her "boudoir". It was a large, beautiful room, painted red and gold, lit by dim wall lamps that gave it warm glow. There were chairs covered in lush purple velvet throws, and cushions on the floor, but these homely touches couldn't disguise what the purpose of this room was. There was a whipping post at the far end of the room, and hooks in the ceiling. A cabinet of whips, canes, paddles and chains was on full display.

"Sit, Walter," Elaine said, taking charge, and pulling Mulder's shell-shocked Master into a chair. Skinner went, still numb. She nodded Mulder into a chair too, and he went, silently. "David, bring us tea," she ordered, and Mulder started, realizing that Elaine's sub was in the room too. He was a tall, slender man, with thick dark hair - just as Elaine liked them, he thought ruefully, the irony not lost on him. He, also, had been Elaine's physical ideal, but Skinner wasn't. What was his Master to her, he wondered, or she to him? "It's been a long time, Walter." She knelt on the floor in front of the big man, and pulled his head around so that she could look him in the eye.

"Yes. I know," Skinner cleared his throat. "It hasn't been... I haven't needed..."

"It's all right. I was just surprised to get your call. You know I'm always here. It's what we arranged with Andrew, and you know I'd never break that promise."

"No. I know," Skinner whispered in a broken tone.

Elaine looked up at Mulder, her fingers stroking the sides of Skinner's face. "You never met Andrew did you?" She asked.

"No but I'd have liked to. Everyone speaks very well of him," Mulder replied. "Is he going to be okay?" He asked Elaine in a hushed tone. Skinner seemed so out of it, as if he wasn't there.

"Yes, he'll be fine, but he needs some help. I don't know all the details, but I know enough." She got up, and fixed Mulder with an assessing stare. "You can't know, because you weren't there, but Andrew's death was painful and protracted. It hurt all of us who witnessed it, but it hit Walter the hardest of course."

"Yes. They were lovers," Mulder nodded. "I know that."

"More than that - Andrew rescued Walter at a time when he was very low. Walter owed Andrew, and he couldn't bear to let him down. He did everything for Andrew when he was ill - too much maybe - he ran himself into the ground. Memories of that time hurt. Walter has certain needs. They're nothing to do with you, so don't take any guilt upon yourself. I know what you're like, boy," she chuckled, kissing Mulder's hair softly. "It's just what Walter requires. He needs you to be here for him now. Can you do that, boy?" She asked him. Mulder swallowed, nervously.

"What's going to happen?" He asked.

"Release," Elaine replied. She looked up as David came in, with the herbal tea. Skinner drank his down in one gulp, his hand shaking, then he looked up, and seemed to see Mulder for the first time.

"You can go if you want," he told his confused slave.

"No. I'll stay," Mulder said firmly. "I told you, I've made my choice."

"Why don't you go and prepare, Walter," Elaine said to his Master. "Go and choose the implement, and get to where you need to be."

"Yes. Of course," Skinner muttered. He got up, and as he went, Elaine grabbed hold of Mulder's arm and pulled him into the corner, her fingers digging into his flesh.

"Are you sure about this, because if you can't take it I want you to get out - now. He won't take you back if you ask to leave halfway through and I, for one, will never forgive you if you can't give him this," she hissed.

"I'll accept anything," Mulder replied. "Anything he, or you, hand out. I can take anything. I'd do anything to get things back to the way they used to be."

Her blue eyes searched his face for a long time, then she nodded. "I believe you. I hope, for his sake, that you mean that," she said. "If you fail him now, then god forgive me I'll..." she let the sentence hang.

Skinner returned to the table. He was holding a long, heavy, rubber whip in his hand. Mulder had never seen such an instrument before. He knew from his own experience of the tawse, how painful rubber was. It didn't cause any scarring, because it didn't split the skin if it was used by a skilled hand, but its heaviness caused intense bruising and severe pain. He bit on his lip, knowing it was what he deserved, and prepared to face it. If Skinner needed to whip him red raw in order to get over the pain he had caused his Master, then so be it. Mulder could accept that, maybe he'd even welcome it.

"Cuffs," Skinner said to Elaine. "He'll need them," he added, pointing his head in Mulder's direction.

"Why? Won't he stay still?" Elaine asked.

"No. He'll scream, and fight," Skinner replied. "If he asks to be let go, then do it, but he'll need the cuffs to endure this," he said adamantly.

Elaine nodded, and beckoned Mulder over. He came, his throat dry. Elaine fastened the cuffs on Mulder's wrists, and led him over to a hook in the wall. She snapped a length of chain onto each of the cuffs, and then checked it. "Now you can scream and shout all you like - the room is soundproofed as you know, but if it's too much for you, just ask to be released and you can go," Elaine told him, her expression showing him just what she'd think of him if he did that.

"I don't understand. Why are you chaining me here?" Mulder asked, glancing at the whipping post.

"Walter thinks you might interfere. He doesn't think you can just watch, without trying to stop it," she told him.

"Watch?" Mulder repeated slowly, the truth sinking in, as he saw Skinner pacing the room, back and forth, out of the corner of his eye.

"Watch," Elaine said firmly. "Can you do that for him?"

"No! You're not..." Mulder tugged on the cuffs, but they held firm.

"Quiet!" She hissed. "This is Walter's time. Watch and learn." She turned her back on him, and went over to his Master. "Walter - are you sure this is what you want used?" She asked, taking the rubber whip from him.

"Yes," Skinner said in a dull tone. He glanced at Mulder. "Is he...?"

"He'll be fine," Elaine said firmly, completely in control of the situation. "Walter," she took his face between her hands. "This is for release, my dear, not punishment, not correction, just release. You do understand that, don't you?"

"Yes, Elaine," he nodded, his eyes glazed.

"It stops whenever you ask for it to stop. You know I won't tie you. This is for you - it's your catharsis."

"Yes," Skinner bowed his head. He looked so lost and alone that Mulder began tugging frantically on the cuffs that bound him, wanting to go over to his Master and comfort him, to stop this.

"Take your clothes off then, my dear," Elaine said gently.

Skinner nodded, and peeled his sweater off, toed off his sneakers, and then threw his sweatpants onto the pile of clothing on the chair. Mulder noticed that Skinner wasn't wearing any underwear, and the other man's choice of clothing also took on significance. With a start of surprise, Mulder realized that Skinner had planned this, that it was a familiar ritual. He also noted that the prospect of an imminent whipping did not seem to be arousing his Master. Skinner's cock was flaccid, and utterly un-aroused.

"Come with me." Elaine took Skinner over to the whipping post, and gave him a leather cord to hold in each hand. "It stops whenever you say the word, darling. You're in charge here," she reminded Skinner. "This is a service for a good friend. You're in control," Elaine repeated, as if drumming this idea into a very small child. "Walter!" She said sharply. He emerged from his reverie for a moment, and nodded. "I mean it!" she said fiercely. "Just enough to give you release - no more. No punishment. You did nothing wrong."

"No." He shivered, and she wrapped her arms around his chest, and planted a kiss on the side of his face.

"Good, Walter. Good." She stroked his cheek several times, with such affection that Mulder felt a lump rise in his throat. He watched as she stepped away from Skinner, and went back to the table. She picked up the whip, and handed it to her sub, David.

"NO!" Mulder yelled, but nobody took any notice of him. Mulder felt as if he'd been punched in the gut. It was one thing for Elaine to administer whatever it was Skinner was craving right now, but he couldn't

stand the idea of her sub giving his Master this whipping. Elaine was a domme; he could understand it if Skinner turned to her, and gave her permission to hurt him in what amounted to an exchange of power between two equals. To give up himself over to a sub though - that flew in the face of everything Mulder understood, and more than that, it made him feel a wave of deep and bitter jealousy. Skinner was **his** Master. If anyone performed this service for the other man it should be him.

David took the whip, and coiled the end around his hand, leaving a long trail. He flicked it through the air a few times, then looked at Elaine. She nodded. David stepped up to the whipping post, and spoke softly in Skinner's ear.

"How hard, sir?" He asked.

"As hard as you can," Skinner replied, his eyes unfocused, his grip tightening around the cords he was holding onto.

"Do you want me to start more easi...?" David began, but Skinner interrupted him.

"No. Start hard. Don't let up until I say. No warm up. I don't need it."

"Yes, sir." David withdrew, respectfully, and stood a few feet away from Skinner. He drew back his wrist, and then threw his arm forward with all his force. A wild, primal scream rent the air, but it didn't come from Skinner. Skinner merely grunted as the force of that hard, heavy lash hit home across his back, leaving a long, red, raised welt in its wake. The scream came from Mulder. He opened his mouth, put his head back, and keened, and he didn't stop, couldn't stop, as the whip picked up pace, tearing into his Master's beautiful, golden body, biting deep swathes of vicious red into the tender flesh. Skinner gasped, the sweat tricking down his face, his whole body shaking under the onslaught, but he didn't speak, and he didn't scream. Mulder tugged on his cuff frantically, yelling his head off. The whipping went on, and on, and on...nobody could stand this. It wasn't humanly possible. Mulder didn't know how Skinner was still standing there, taking it, without even cuffs to hold him in place. His frantic yells reached a crescendo.

"It's too much, stop or you'll fucking kill him!" He screeched.

Elaine held up her hand, and the blurred movement of the whip was stilled. Elaine crossed the room to Mulder. "Do you want to go?" She asked.

"Yes," he said, unable to take any more of this. Her expression hardened. Mulder licked his lips, and glanced at Skinner. "No," he whispered. "I can't leave him."

"Then accept - he told you this would be hard," she reminded him.

"I know, but I never expected...I didn't know..." Mulder shook his head, trembling from the violence of his emotions. "I'd trade places with him," he said. "I'd do it. I'd take Skinner's place."

"I know." She smiled, and kissed his face. "Hush, Mulder. Allow him this. Afterwards - well, he'll need you." She got up, and walked over to his Master. "Walter," she said softly. Skinner blinked, and moved his head.

"Not yet," he told her.

"Walter, I know this is a bad one, but it has to be soon. You know my rules. I won't put you in the hospital."

"No. I know. Not yet. More." He gestured with his head. "I haven't found it yet, Elaine. The place Andrew took me too. I'm not there yet," he whispered.

"All right, my dear." She put her arms around his shaking body, and held him for a moment, then she turned back. "Harder, David. Make it count. Bring him to his release," she commanded. David nodded, and swung his arm back again, and Mulder opened his mouth and started to scream once more, tearing at his cuff, suddenly grateful that Skinner had ordered him to be tied.

Skinner's body was covered by a myriad of hard, red lines, and raised, purple welts. Mulder couldn't bear to watch as that whip covered every inch of his Master's back and buttocks. Skinner's cock remained flaccid and Mulder was aware that whatever release his Master hoped to get from this, it wasn't sexual. He knew that his own response to this situation would have been to go hard, at the beginning at least, although he sincerely doubted he would have kept an erection through this kind of punishment. It was too much, too severe. David redoubled his efforts, and now Skinner was moaning, a low, throaty sound, his hands grasped tightly around the cords that held him up, as he swung against them. Mulder marveled at his Master's endurance, as that whip continued its savage work, covering Skinner's flesh from the top of his broad shoulders, to the back of his knees. Then Skinner started moving, his body thrashing from side to side, convulsing, as if he were only just feeling the pain. David looked inquiringly at Elaine, and she nodded. David's arm moved even more swiftly, his face covered in a sheen of sweat, and a few seconds later there was a breakthrough. Skinner suddenly let out a giant roar, threw his head back, and gasped out one word:

"Andrew!"

Mulder recognized it as a safe word. The name was Skinner's safe haven: Andrew. Andrew Linker. David's arm came to an immediate halt in mid-flow, and Elaine was at Skinner's side within seconds. She took his arm, helped him step back, and Skinner sank immediately to the floor. Elaine grabbed a glass of water and held it to his Master's lips, and the other man drank, heavily. Then she handed a key to David, and he stepped over and undid Mulder's cuffs. Mulder ran forward, then stopped, unsure what to say or do, as he surveyed his Master's broken body. Skinner was on all fours, panting hard, his face drained of color.

Elaine got up, and went to Mulder, grabbed his arm, and dragged him out of Skinner's earshot.

"He needs looking after. Can you do that for him or shall we keep him here?" She asked. "I won't let him go if you can't take care of him."

"I can," Mulder rasped, from a dry throat.

She gazed at him searchingly. "If I let him go, and you don't stay with him...well, he's too stubborn to come back to me for help. If I hear you've abandoned him, then so help me that whipping you just witnessed will seem like a walk in the park compared to what I'll do to you," she told him, her eyes flashing sparks of pure fire.

"I'll take care of him," Mulder replied hoarsely, anxious to go to his Master's side and check that he was all right. "Of course I'll take care of him! I promise."

"Mulder - do you love him?" she asked suddenly.

"What?" Mulder frowned, unable to take his eyes off his stricken Master.

"Love. Do you love him?"

"Yes," he replied. "You know I do."

"Have you ever told him?" She asked, looking at him searchingly again with those intense blue eyes.

"What? I...no," Mulder whispered. "Not in his hearing at least." He felt ashamed about that. His own reticence was in stark contrast to Skinner's constant expressions of affection. It had always been so hard for him to admit though, as if he was afraid of hearing the truth spoken out loud, committing him irrevocably to more than just his slavery.

"Then don't you think that now would be a good time to make that known?" she said softly. "Oh, not here, not now, but when you get him home. He needs that right now, and he's taken care of your needs often enough."

"I will. I promise," Mulder whispered. "Please, Elaine, let me go to him." He wanted nothing more than to be at Skinner's side, where he belonged, serving his Master to the best of his ability.

"All right." She smiled, as if a weight had been removed from her shoulders. "Go to him then, slave," she ordered, and he nodded, and ran to be with his Master.

Skinner was shaking his head, as if he'd gone ten rounds with Mike Tyson and couldn't see clearly.

"Hey, you." Mulder took hold of the other man's face, and looked into his eyes. "Hold still, Master," he said, grabbing Skinner's clothes. Now he understood why his Master had worn sweats. "I'm going to dress you, then take you back home, Master," he said. Somehow, he wasn't sure why, it felt important to keep stressing Skinner's title. The other man nodded. His face and body were soaked with sweat. He was quiet as Mulder helped him stand, and the slave dressed his Master as if tending to a child, easing Skinner's arms into the sweatshirt, and pulling his pants gently, and carefully over his swollen, tender flesh. Skinner shuddered as the fabric rested against his hot skin, and Mulder made soothing noises, found Skinner's car keys, and led his Master out of the boudoir. David was waiting by the door. Skinner smiled at the other man, wanly, and Mulder was relieved to see that his Master was back. The strange, hazy, lost look was gone. Skinner's dark eyes were clear, even if they were filled with pain.

"David. My thanks." Skinner held out his hand, and David took it and shook it warmly.

"My honor, sir. Thank you for your trust," David replied, bowing his head.

"Your Mistress has trained you well," Skinner remarked, glancing at Elaine.

"I did better with him than with another young pup," Elaine laughed, glancing at Mulder. "It took a stronger top than I to tame him."

"Stronger? Within that velvet bodice beats the strongest heart I've ever known," Skinner said with a wry smile. "Thank you, Elaine, as always, for being here for me. Sorry it was such short notice."

"You're the only person I'd trust to do the same for me, Walter, and to understand," she replied, drawing him down to kiss him firmly on the lips. He stood there for a moment, his head bowed, visibly drawing strength from her, then he straightened his shoulders slowly, hissing with pain. "I wish it hadn't been so hard," Elaine said. "It's never been that bad before, Walter."

"I know. Hopefully it never will be again. I allowed myself to get sucked back down. Andrew would be angry with me for letting it happen," Skinner admitted ruefully. Mulder flushed a guilty red. Elaine smiled at him, and shook her head.

"It's not about you, darling, so don't go getting ideas," she told him, kissing him firmly on the cheek. "Now, go serve your Master."

"Yes, Ma'am," he replied. "Master, can I help you to the car?" He said to Skinner. Skinner nodded, and placed a heavy arm over Mulder's shoulder, allowing his slave to lead him to the car. Mulder opened the door, and moved the front seat forward. "Master should lie down in the back," he said quietly.

"That sounds good." Mulder helped his Master into the car, then started driving them back to Crystal City. "I know you have questions," Skinner said in a tired voice from the back seat. "And I promise that I'll answer them, just not tonight."

"That's fine, Master," Mulder said quietly.

Mulder helped Skinner out of the car when they got back, and walked him to the elevator. His boss, his Master...his **lover's** arm was slung heavily around his shoulder, as Skinner rested all his weight on his slave. Mulder felt like some warrior in ancient times, helping a wounded comrade from battle. Skinner was battered, and bruised, but strangely unbowed. Despite his physical frailty, it seemed to Mulder as if he had his Master back. The man he had seen all day, so distant, lost, and remote, was gone, and Skinner was himself again. Mulder half carried his Master into the apartment, then walked him up the stairs to the bedroom. He deposited the other man face down on the bed in the darkness, then went into the bathroom, and began running a bath. Skinner called him back.

"Not a bath," he told his slave. "Wet some towels and make sure they're cold. I think I could heat the room with the warmth coming off my back right now."

"Yes, Master." Mulder obeyed swiftly. His own emotions were on hold right now while he tended to the other man. He dunked two big towels in the bath, then came back into the bedroom. Skinner's eyes were closed and Mulder wasn't sure whether the other man had gone to sleep. "Master?" He said softly. Skinner opened his eyes slowly, and looked at Mulder for a long time as if he didn't recognize him. "Master?" Mulder repeated, sitting down on the bed.

"Andrew?" Skinner whispered.

"No. It's me." Mulder put his fingers gently on Skinner's face. "It's me, Fox. We need to get you undressed." He sat Skinner up, and untied the other man's drawstring pants, then gently removed his sweater. Skinner winced with pain as he put his arms up for the sweater to be pulled away, and Mulder bit on his lip, tears springing unbidden to his eyes.

"I'm sorry. This is hard for you," Skinner murmured.

"It's okay." Mulder wanted to say that **he** was the one who should be apologizing for bringing his Master to this state, but he knew it would be the ultimate act of selfishness to burden Skinner with his own emotions right now. He should have known that his Master would see what was unspoken in his eyes.

"Don't go getting guilty on me, Fox," Skinner said in a weary tone. "Sometimes this is what I need. I would have preferred it if it had happened further down the road, but hell, you wanted to know about me, well, this is me - a part of me at least. Does it disgust you?" Skinner's eyes searched Mulder's face in the dark.

"No. It scares me though," Mulder replied. "That wasn't about sex."

"No, it wasn't," Skinner agreed. "I told you, everyone is different. Did what you find out about me in California make you think I'm weak?"

"No!" Mulder protested, gently peeling Skinner's sweatpants from his Master's long legs.

"And what you witnessed today?" Skinner grabbed Mulder's hand.

"To go through that? I couldn't have endured it," Mulder replied, still awe-struck by his Master's ability to bear such excruciating pain without a murmur.

"I don't have a problem with it. Andrew taught me to understand myself very well. It's when we need help, and won't ask for it that we're weak," Skinner said. Mulder bowed his head, remembering Krycek, remembering the way he had been unable to ask Skinner for help. Was it possible that he had everything the wrong way around?

"I hate needing it. Don't you?" He asked, lacing his hands around the back of Skinner's head, and resting his forehead against the other man's.

"No. No, little one. Sometimes you have to know when to question, and when to accept." Skinner dipped his head forward, and kissed his slave on the lips. Mulder opened up, offering himself to this stranger, this man who had revealed a side to him that he had never thought to witness.

"You aren't like me though - tonight...was a **service**. Even Elaine's sub called you 'sir'," Mulder said as their lips parted. "You didn't give away any of your control - unlike me. That's part of what I need."

"I told you, we all have different needs," Skinner replied, moving his hand to caress the side of his slave's face in the dark. He winced, as the small gesture hurt him, and Mulder got up, guiltily.

"Damn. You need help. What should I bring you?" He asked helplessly. "You've done this before - what do you need?"

"Put the cold towels on me. Keep another couple soaking - you'll need to rotate them fairly fast to begin with," Skinner said with a grimace. "When I've cooled down, there's some antiseptic gel in the cabinet. It speeds the healing. Other than that - I just have to live through the next few days. This is the worst part," he said with a sigh, rolling over onto his stomach, hissing with pain.

Mulder brought the towels and laid them on Skinner's back and legs. His Master was right - his skin heated the towels up within minutes, and Mulder had to refresh them constantly for the next couple of hours. He even resorted to keeping a supply of wet towels in the fridge. Skinner gasped when his slave put the first ice cold towel on his tender flesh, but it took longer for it to warm up. After several hours of this, with Skinner dozing in between towel changes, Mulder finally decided that the fevered skin had cooled enough. He wanted his Master to get some proper sleep, judging that was the best way of healing him. He turned the bedside lamp on, and carefully straddled his Master's body, wincing as he examined the wounds more closely. Skinner's flesh was liberally marked with dark, livid bruises and welts - it was far worse than anything Mulder had ever undergone. He squeezed some gel onto his fingertips, and laid them gently, so gently, against his Master's skin. Skinner's entire body trembled, but he didn't speak, or even whimper, although Mulder guessed that it must have hurt like hell. Conversely, instead of finding his Master weak, he was even more in awe of him than ever for being able to take such a degree of punishment, and to suffer through its aftermath with such good grace, never complaining. He went very slowly, with infinite care, and Skinner was so badly marked that it took him an hour or more to finish applying the gel. Then he got up, washed his hands, and came back to the bed. Skinner was lying on his front, his eyes closed. Mulder got a clean sheet and placed it lightly over his Master's back. The normal bedclothes were too heavy for Skinner's raw flesh.

"Can I sleep at the foot of your bed, Master?" Mulder asked. "I'll go back to my room if you want, but I'd prefer to be on hand to serve you in case you're in any distress."

"Stay. The foot of the bed will be fine," Skinner said, his voice heavy with weariness. Mulder nodded, and went upstairs to get some bedding. His Master was asleep by the time he returned. Mulder looked down on him for a long time, feeling light headed. Skinner needed him right now, and Mulder could be of service. Mulder was surprised to find that being of service was the one thing that calmed him. He enjoyed losing himself in his attention to his Master, and with Skinner laid low like this, Mulder could throw himself into his devotion. He bent and placed a kiss on his Master's cheek, then retired to the foot of the bed, and covered himself with his blanket.

Mulder checked on his Master every few hours, but Skinner slept right through until mid-day. Mulder didn't wake him. He fed Wanda, then made breakfast for his Master and took it up to him, opening the drapes, flooding the room with light. Skinner stirred, sleepily, then gave a growl of pain as his back protested. Mulder drew back the sheet, and examined the damage - in the harsh light of morning it looked even worse than last night, but the skin had at least lost its puffy look, and wasn't as red, largely due to Mulder's unceasing attentions the night before.

"How do you feel, Master?" Mulder asked, setting the tray down.

"Fine - considering I missed out on my normal wake-up call," Skinner growled tersely.

Mulder was startled. "I didn't like to..." he began.

"Did I give you permission to miss that?" Skinner demanded.

"No, Master." Mulder said, hesitantly.

Skinner smiled. "Well, I'll have to ensure that you make up for it at a later date," he said. Mulder grinned back, and nodded. "And your current attire doesn't meet with my approval," Skinner frowned. Mulder looked down, then nodded, and swiftly got undressed.

He helped his Master onto his side, then sat on the bed beside him and handed him a plate of waffles.

"You learned how to cook?" Skinner raised a suspicious eyebrow, then he sighed. "I can see I should have trusted you with more earlier on. I think I was over-protective and I underestimated your ability to learn."

"Well, the waffles were the frozen variety," Mulder admitted with a grin, "but that was partly my fault, Master. I was too busy being the rebellious slave to address myself to your needs in the way I should have done."

"A lesson for us both then," Skinner said with a sigh.

"I wish it hadn't been such a hard one," Mulder replied seriously.

Skinner shrugged, then froze, a spasm of pain crossing his face. "Well, the hard ones are usually the ones we learn fastest," he replied a few seconds later.

When Skinner had finished his breakfast, Mulder took the tray away, then rubbed more gel into his Master's back.

"That rubber whip was vicious, Master," he whispered. "I hope you never have cause to use it on me."

"I hope so as well," Skinner grunted, and Mulder shivered, realizing from that statement that it was by no means a foregone conclusion that Skinner wouldn't use that whip on his slave. "You have skilled fingers," Skinner whispered, laying his head on his arms as Mulder went about his work, slowly, and carefully.

"I enjoy serving you," Mulder replied.

"Really? You've done nothing but fight your service, one way or another, since you got here," Skinner grunted.

"Only because it disturbed me how much I enjoyed it," Mulder replied. "You know me, Master."

"Yes. I do." Skinner gave his slave a smile over his shoulder. "And I wouldn't want you any other way, Fox."

Mulder finished his task and washed his hands again, then he looked back into the bedroom. Skinner appeared to be sleeping, so Mulder went downstairs, did the washing up, and made his own breakfast, then wondered what to do next. It astonished him that in just a few short weeks his own life had

become so entwined with Skinner's that he was at a genuine loss without him. Finally, unable to bear being apart from his Master, he plucked Wanda from the couch and carried her up to the bedroom. She gave her usual trilling purr as he placed her on the bed next to her beloved Master. She immediately went over and nestled against Skinner's chest, reaching out an idle tongue to lick her slave's skin a couple of times. Mulder smiled, and settled down on the bed beside her, stroking her soft fur, making her explode with a humming, vibrating purr of pure pleasure.

He looked at his Master, tracing lines over that familiar, beloved face, suddenly scared by the enormity of what he had so nearly given up the previous day. Skinner was right - it had been a worse ordeal than anything Mulder had ever gone through before. He came out in a cold sweat as he remembered screaming his head off, and he noticed, for the first time, that his wrists were covered in bruises where he had strained against the unyielding cuffs. The day wore on, and turned to evening, and the light faded, casting the room in a dull glow. Mulder continued to stare at the enigma that was his Master. He had scratched the surface with his insane curiosity and found depths underneath that astonished him. He reached out and caressed his Master's cheek with the back of his hand. Skinner's eyes fluttered open in surprise.

"I love you," Mulder said. His heart quickened, scared by the fact that there was no turning back, that it was out in the open between them. Not a quip, not said in the heat of sex, but here, in this silent moment of peace, with only Wanda's faint purring in the background.

Skinner looked at him for a long moment, then his mouth curved into a smile. "Thank you," he said sincerely.

"You knew," Mulder stated blankly. "You already knew."

"Yes, but I didn't think I'd ever hear you say it." Skinner moved his hand, and stroked his slave's thigh, and Mulder felt his cock jump despite himself. "I'm glad to see that your training is working," Skinner remarked with a wry laugh. "I'll have you trained to respond to my merest touch before I'm through with you, slave."

Mulder gave an involuntary groan as the promise in that voice made his cock harden even more. "Don't tell me - I'm forbidden to come," he said, with a sigh.

"Of course," Skinner replied smoothly. They were silent for a while, then Skinner shifted, an expression of discomfort passing across his face as he rearranged himself on the pillows. "Come here." He pulled Mulder close, dislodging a sleepy Wanda who shot the slave a look of disgust and took up a new position on Skinner's pillow. Skinner held Mulder close, his hand resting on his slave's thigh. Then he took a deep breath, looked into Mulder's eyes, and said: "I think it's time for some explanations, don't you?"

"You don't have to..." Mulder began.

"No, but I want to," Skinner said firmly. "You wanted to know, and I want you to find out the right way - so that you understand what you witnessed last night. I still have my reservations about whether you're ready, but I think I'd prefer you to hear this from me, and not from anyone else. This a gift, Fox, accept it in that spirit."

"Yes, Master." Mulder nodded.

"All right. Where do we begin?" Skinner thought about it for a moment. "I was married - you know that - and happily married for a long time. We wanted children but they never came along, and that was our great sadness. Sharon..." He paused. "She was, uh, fairly uninhibited in bed," he said, with a grin. "She opened my eyes to the possibilities of role playing, and she, rather like you, little one, was something of a spanking devotee."

Mulder grinned. "I always knew we had something in common. We hit it off from the moment we met," he said.

"Well, she took me by surprise during the early days of our relationship when she insisted on being spanked as part of foreplay. She was a tough little lady, and I had no doubt that if I didn't oblige she'd ditch me for someone who **would**. What did surprise me was how much I enjoyed it. All that wriggling, hot flesh under my hands and the chance to really appreciate a fine butt," he said. Mulder grinned again, and dropped a kiss on Skinner's shoulder. "Sharon introduced me to Elaine - they used to be roomies at college, and it was Elaine who introduced us both to the scene. I was very uncomfortable with it at first, as you can imagine."

Mulder laughed out loud at that. "Yeah - big, strong, macho AD Skinner dressing up in fantasy clothing...hell, you know how much it surprised **me** to find out about your alter ego."

"Well I wasn't an AD then, and I had to be **persuaded**," Skinner commented with a wry grin. "Definitely persuaded, but Sharon was a persuasive woman, and she wore me down. I refused to wear anything more kinky than a pair of leather pants on my first outing to a club, but when I saw what everyone else was wearing!" He shook his head. "Well, I realized I looked more out of place not joining in, and next time I was less inhibited. It was fun, anyway. I think Sharon was kind of obsessed with making me enjoy myself. She knew how hard I found it to unwind, and just **be**, and she knew I'd had a bad time in 'Nam. She wanted to make me smile and she wanted to forget her own sadness about not having any kids. I suppose for both of us the scene was a place where we could forget about Sharon and Walter, and be other people, different people."

Mulder closed his eyes, understanding that all too well.

"Anyway, I met Andrew on the scene. There was nothing between us - we just used to hang out, have a drink together, two doms enjoying ourselves, both of us in committed relationships. I knew Andrew was gay, and that was fine. For years we were just friends - and then..." Skinner hesitated, and Mulder placed his hands on his Master's face, gently encouraging him to continue. "...then I lost touch with myself," Skinner whispered. "It happened so gradually I didn't notice until it was too late. I was working too hard, so we didn't have as much time for the scene. I still saw Andrew occasionally, but...the truth was, I wasn't comfortable around him after his partner, Ryan, died, and that made me feel guilty. Sharon loved Andrew and Ryan. She'd invite them around for dinner, coo over them. I never knew a woman could be so interested in two gay guys! That surprised the hell out of me. So, I got to know both of them pretty well, and more than that - I got to know their relationship, and I envied it. It brought up some memories for me, of my time in 'Nam. I had..." Skinner hesitated again, and took a deep breath. "I had an affair with another marine. It was brief, and hurried, and it ended in that ambush along with everything else...no, that's a lie, it ended before. I ended it because I was scared of being in love with another man, and then a few days later he died, and I never forgave myself. I never told anyone about that, not even Sharon, but seeing Andrew with Ryan brought it all back. I wanted what they had, and to escape from

the implications of that need, I threw myself into my work, got promoted, saw less and less of Sharon, saw nothing at all of Andrew. My life became unbalanced. All work and no play - and boy, was I dull! It did wonders for my career, but I suffered for it. I could never have been unfaithful to Sharon. It wasn't in me. I loved her, but I just stopped talking to her. So she left me." Skinner swallowed, and Mulder saw the pain in his eyes. "I don't blame her. It was what I deserved. I was slowly falling apart, and the only way I could pretend it wasn't happening was by becoming even more controlled on the surface. I was the hard-assed AD. I lived it, breathed it, needed it to keep myself from spinning out of control, but however much I kept a stranglehold on my waking hours..."

"You couldn't stop your dreams," Mulder said softly.

"That's right. I was haunted by what had happened in 'Nam and my guilt over not being there for Andrew when Ryan died. I knew what it was like to lose someone, but I wouldn't go to him. I couldn't. I was too scared of my feelings, so I kept it all inside. I even tried to reassure myself I was normal by sleeping with that call girl. My god, what a nightmare that turned out to be."

"Yeah, normal isn't a word I'd use for that," Mulder sighed. "Shit, I'm sorry. What a goddamn awful thing to have happened to you on top of everything else you were going through. I know Sharon died in that car wreck, and I wanted to say something to you after, but you were so cut off, and remote, and I suppose I felt guilty because they set you up to get at me. What happened after that?"

There was silence, and outside darkness fell. Skinner bowed his head, and gently stroked Wanda's fur with nerveless fingers. It was a long time before he spoke, and when he did his words were so bleak that they chilled Mulder to the bone:

"I fell apart."

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Skinner came home from another bad day at work, threw his briefcase down and almost ran to the whisky bottle. His hand was shaking as he poured himself a glass. He sat down on the couch, raised the glass to his lips, then caught sight of the reflection of himself in the mirror opposite. God, he looked like shit. His skin was pale, his eyes shadowed with dark circles, and worse than that - he truly didn't recognize the expression in them. He took a sip of the whisky, but his hand was trembling so badly he couldn't keep the glass still, and it dropped, noiselessly, to the floor, where the whisky soaked into the carpet. What did he have to look forward to but another night with only drink for company. In a few short hours he could go to bed, but what would the night bring? More dreams? More guilt? He closed his eyes, leaned back on the couch. This wasn't home - it was a place he came back to in the evening. He hadn't even finished unpacking. What the hell - he hadn't even **started** unpacking. He wasn't a man who liked living in this state of chaos. He liked beautiful things; statues, paintings, ornaments. He hated being surrounded by boxes and yet he knew in his heart that he couldn't bring himself to unpack because that would mean acknowledging that the past year had been true, not just another one of his nightmares. Sharon was dead. First she had thrown him out - rightly - and now she was dead. He scrambled around on the floor for the whisky glass, but all its contents had spilled into the carpet, leaving a stain that should have annoyed him, but didn't - because he didn't care. He didn't care about anything any more.

Skinner closed his eyes, and buried his face in his hands. God, what was he? What had he become? A pathetic loser who couldn't face up to his problems, who couldn't get through the evening without a drink? The truth hurt, and he flinched. He needed to talk. Finally, when he knew he needed help, there was nobody to go to because the one person he would have called was Sharon, and she was dead. Skinner got up, and slammed his fist into the wall, over and over again until his hand was numb with pain. It felt good - damn good, to let the physical hurt take over from the mental pain. He sat down again and examined his hand - it was badly bruised, and bleeding. He stuck it into his mouth, sucking the pain away, and found that he was shaking.

This visible symbol of his mental state galvanized him into action, and he grabbed his keys and ran back out to his car. He didn't have any friends left - a legacy of too many years allowing his friendships to slide, of wrapping himself up in his work to the exclusion of everything else. He found himself driving, blindly, and ended up at Elaine's house. He had seen her briefly at the funeral, but he hadn't spoken her for years before that. He was half out of his mind as he pounded on her door. She opened it to him, a look of alarm on her face.

"Walter?" She pulled him into the house. "Walter? God, it's been a long time." She pulled him close, enveloped him in her warm arms, and for a moment, he thought he had found a safe haven, somewhere to rest. She held him for a long time, maybe hours, kissing his head, running her hands up and down his back. "I worried about you after the funeral. I tried to 'phone..."

"I'm sorry. I moved away..." he mumbled, drawing back, and looking into her concerned eyes. He needed comfort, and he moved towards her, wanting to lose himself in her, but she pulled back.

"Walter - you're a dear friend, but we both know this isn't a good idea," she told him gently.

"Yes." He stared into space, his body hunched. "I have nowhere else to go," he whispered. "My own fault. Nobody left."

"Of course there is." Elaine put her arm around him. "Walter, you can stay here for as long as you like, but I think you've come to the wrong person."

"Why? What makes you say that?" He asked blankly.

"Because I'm not what you need right now, tempting though it is," she put a finger gently over his lips.

"Then who?" He asked in despair.

"Andrew." She got up, and deposited a kiss on his wide forehead. "He still lives in his Crystal City apartment. Go there - he can help you."

Skinner gazed at her, wondering how - and what - she knew. Andrew was a psychologist, so maybe she was suggesting him purely because of the state he was in. "I can't," he said, hoarsely. "After Ryan died, I did nothing...I wasn't the kind of friend I should have been."

"Andrew would understand if you told him," Elaine stated firmly. "You know Andrew. He has a way of understanding people."

"You think I need a shrink?" Skinner bristled.

"Andrew's retired," Elaine said softly. "He doesn't take on any clients these days - although I think he might make an exception for you."

"He retired? Why?" Skinner frowned. Andrew was in his mid-sixties, but he'd always said that he'd never retire.

Elaine looked at him thoughtfully, then shrugged. "He can answer that question for you. If you ask him. He might be able to answer a lot of your questions, Walter."

"Yes," Skinner nodded blankly.

"Go to him, Walter. I think he can help you." Elaine pulled him to his feet, pushed him out of the door.

He didn't drive straight there. He drove around for hours, thinking about it, trying to avoid the inevitable, but somehow he ended up outside the Viva Towers, and found himself going in. Elaine had clearly called ahead, as the doorman was expecting him and sent him right up. Skinner had been to Andrew's Crystal City condo a few times with Sharon, but this was so different. He didn't know what good this would do, or what he wanted, or expected from it. He staggered along the corridor, and knocked on the door, berating himself the whole time.

"I don't need a fucking shrink," he muttered under his breath, shaking at the thought of it, wondering what the hell Andrew would make of him turning up on his doorstep at 2 am. The door was opened a few seconds later, and his heart lurched when he saw his old friend. Andrew was thinner than he remembered him, and his hair was now a pure, snowy white, but he still had those wise, bright eyes. He was in his pajamas and was busy fastening a robe around his body as he opened the door - Skinner had clearly dragged him out of bed.

"Walter, it's so good to see you," Andrew said, as if Skinner had been an invited guest, and not somebody he hadn't laid eyes on for years who had descended on him in the middle of the night. "Come in." He grabbed Skinner's hand, and pulled him into the room, guided him over to the couch and sat him down. Then he brought him a glass of water. "I'd bring you something stronger, but in your condition - I don't think that would be a good idea," Andrew said in his deep, mellifluous voice.

"I look that bad, huh?" Skinner downed the glass of water in one gulp.

"Worse," Andrew took the glass away and as he did so, Skinner's hands began to tremble. Andrew put the glass down, covered Skinner's hands with his own, stilling them, and examined the dark bruise on Skinner's fist. "Walter - what on earth happened to you?" he asked, those piercing blue-gray eyes transfixing Skinner, pinning him down in their fierce gaze.

"Nothing. Everything. I don't know. That's just it - I don't know, Andrew. I don't know. It's been building up for years, and I can't stop it. I don't know what I am, or what I want...I'm not used to...I can't..." Skinner couldn't trust himself to speak. He hated feeling like this, so out of control.

"Walter!" Andrew's voice was firm, bringing him back to himself. He put his hands on Skinner's shoulders, and dug his fingertips in hard. Skinner looked up, unable to escape from that piercing gaze. "Why did you come here, Walter? What do you want from me?"

"I don't..." Skinner looked down, unable to face the question.

"Walter." Andrew's fingers dug into his shoulders again, making him look up. "Walter, tell me what you want from me. I can be a friend, or a counselor, or a Master - which one do you want? Which did you come here for, Walter?"

Skinner looked up in surprise. He was even more surprised when his mouth opened and he found himself replying: "Master. I want you to be my Master."

Andrew smiled at him, and released his grasp on Skinner's shoulder. "Walter, if I take on that role, you get the counselor and friend for free," he said softly, placing his finger under Skinner's chin, and drawing the other man's face up so that he was looking him in the eye. "Now listen to me, Walter and understand. You're mine now, and that means you do as I say. I'm going to give you some orders - you're good at following orders, Walter, you did that in the marines. These will be comfortable orders, easy orders to understand and to follow - later on, we'll get into more difficult territory, but for now I need to take care of basics. When did you last eat?"

"I have no idea," Skinner admitted, comforted more than he would ever have expected by the thought of a routine, something to follow, something to cling to. "Yesterday. Maybe?" He looked at Andrew in despair.

"Then you'll eat now. Go and sit at the table. Don't question me - don't ever question me, just go."

Skinner obeyed, blindly, and sat as ordered. He ate the plate of warmed up lasagna that Andrew placed in front of him, then started to feel more human again as the food warmed him.

"All right, Walter. Here's the basics - you live here now. You can move all your stuff in tomorrow. I don't care about work." Andrew raised a hand. "Call in sick, or take a few days vacation. I want you here, and I'm in charge."

"Yes, sir." Skinner nodded. It felt so good not to be the one taking all the responsibility for once. He felt as if a burden had been lifted from his shoulders.

"Take your clothes off, Walter," Andrew commanded.

"What?" Skinner's head jerked up, startled.

"Don't worry - I'm not going to hurt you. I'm not even going to touch you. I just want you to get back to yourself, to your body, to become aware of its needs."

"Yes." Skinner nodded, uncertainly.

"Undress, Walter. I'm going to get to know you as you've never been known before." Andrew got up, and started clearing the plate away. Skinner undid his shirt, feeling stupid, wanting to flee. Somehow he

managed to undress, fighting down his fear and embarrassment the whole time. Andrew returned from the kitchen in time to see him removing his briefs. Skinner folded all his clothing neatly on a chair, then stood, awaiting further orders. Andrew smiled, and shook his head slightly, then walked over, and, without any preamble, began examining his new possession's body. Skinner flushed.

"I'm not sure..." he began.

"Hush." Andrew put a finger over his lips. He was shorter than Skinner, and much slighter. Skinner could have overpowered him in seconds, but Andrew had an innate authority that he wouldn't have dared to question. It seemed to come from deep inside him. Andrew was still, calm, at peace, and that gave him a strength that Skinner envied. Andrew circled him, one hand always on Skinner's shoulder, making contact, flesh on flesh, but he didn't touch him anywhere else.

"You've clearly been neglecting yourself judging by the condition you're in," Andrew said softly. "In future, if you forget to eat, I'll punish you. Do you understand me?"

"Yes, sir." Skinner nodded, his eyes flashing at the word 'punishment'.

"Ah - so that's why you're here, is it, Walter?" Andrew mused softly. "For punishment? What, I wonder, do you feel you need to atone for?"

"Everything," Skinner said, finally relieved that it was out in the open. Andrew was right - he had come here for this. "For 'Nam, for Sharon, for you."

"Me?" Andrew looked puzzled.

"After Ryan died, I deliberately avoided you." Skinner hugged his arms around his body. Andrew stood in front of him, and unclasped Skinner's hands from around his torso.

"Put them behind you. Stand up straight. You're mine now, and you don't skulk, and hide, and cower. You stand tall and proud."

"Yes, sir." Skinner stood to attention, his old military training kicking in.

Andrew sighed, and ran his hands down the sides of Skinner's arms. "Not so formal, love," he said kindly. "Walter, you stopped wanting to see me a long time before Ryan died. I understood. I know you had issues you'd never dealt with, and I knew you were running away from them, but you didn't come to me for a professional opinion so I was hardly going to foist one on you. I missed you, but I always hoped you'd come back. Now you have, and I'm pleased, very pleased." He grasped Skinner's neck in his warm hand, and pulled the other man's head down towards him. "Yes, you want punishment, but you want something else too - and in any case, I don't give one without the other." His lips found Skinner's, and for the first time in thirty years, Skinner found himself kissing another man. He stood frozen under the embrace, then broke his position, and grasped hold of Andrew, throwing his arms around the other man, and kissing him hard. Andrew laughed, and responded, deepening the kiss, and then he pushed Skinner away, and slapped him lightly on the buttock.

"Slower, boy," he murmured.

"Sorry." Skinner hung his head again, and Andrew laughed.

"What the hell am I going to do with you, boy?" he sighed. "First things first - you're fit to drop. Follow me." He walked upstairs, and Skinner followed him, blindly. "Tomorrow I'll give you your own room, but the bed isn't made up in there now, and besides, tonight, Walter Skinner, you need someone to hold you."

Skinner hung back, watched as Andrew pulled back the bedclothes, and beckoned him over to the bed.

"Uh, it's been a long time...I mean...I haven't, even back then, we didn't..." he began in a hoarse voice.

"Walter, I'm not going to ravish you, tempting though that thought is," Andrew murmured mischievously. "I'm simply going to hold you - because that's what you need right now. Now come here. Immediately!" he snapped, in the kind of voice you didn't disobey. Skinner practically ran to the bed, and slipped in between the covers without needing to be told twice. He lay there, his whole body stiff, aware of his nakedness, and his proximity to the other man, someone who, he realized, despite many years of acquaintance, he barely knew.

"Walter." Andrew's hands fastened across his midriff, calming, gentle, and kind. "Come here. Don't think, just be. Here, in my arms, just be for a while. There's nothing else. Just you, and me. No past, no future, just the present. Us." Skinner tried hard to relax, but his body remained stiff, unused to being held, unused to these strange arms. Andrew kissed the back of his neck, over and over again. "I can see what we'll need to work on with you, boy," he whispered, his hands stroking Skinner's chest gently, soothingly. Skinner was surprised to find his cock hardening. Andrew must have been aware of it, but he didn't say anything. He just kept talking, as if to a pet, murmuring, and whispering little relaxing phrases, interspersed with kisses, until finally, Skinner gave in, his muscles losing their tension, and a little while later, he fell fast asleep.

When he woke up the next day, it was late. He glanced at the clock, and groaned. 11 a.m. Damn! He rolled over, and tried to get up, only to find that he was chained to the bed by a cuff fastened around his ankle.

"Going somewhere?" Andrew pushed open the bedroom door, and entered, carrying a tray containing two cups of coffee, and several freshly baked muffins.

"I'm late for work," Skinner replied, flushing as the events of last night flooded back.

"I called them and told them you were sick," Andrew said calmly, setting the tray down on the nightstand.

"You did what?" Skinner growled. He started to yank on the chain around his ankle again.

"You heard." Andrew handed him a cup of coffee and a muffin.

"Look, last night, I was upset. I shouldn't have come here. I'm sorry for disturbing you, and thanks for...what you did, but I must go. It was a mistake."

"I thought you'd say that in the harsh light of day, which was why I chained you to the bed. You should get used to it. You'll be here for some time," Andrew said cheerfully, biting into his muffin.

"You can't keep me here!" Skinner protested. His yanking on the chain reached a frenzy.

"Of course I can." Andrew chewed cheerfully on the muffin. "You're mine, Walter. We discussed that last night and that's the choice you made."

"Well, I've changed my mind," Skinner said abruptly, wondering what on earth had possessed him to do anything so stupid.

"Unfortunately, it's too late for that." Andrew gave an angelic smile. "You need help, Walter. You asked me for it, and I'm damn well going to make sure you get it, whether you like it or not. Don't you understand? You're one of the good guys. Without you, the world would be a sadder place. I'm going to make sure that whatever is hurting you so much inside, is taken care of, dragged out where we can see it, and made better. And we can do that, Walter. You and I, between us. I promise." Andrew put his coffee down, and took hold of Skinner's face between his hands. "Walter - you can't have forgotten how you felt last night. You must admit that you need help."

"Yes...but not...I don't need a Master," Skinner said, shamefaced.

"What's wrong with a Master? I had one once," Andrew said with a shrug. "He taught me all I know. I'd like to pass the favor onto someone else. Someone worthy." He brushed his hand down the side of Skinner's face, and Skinner was shocked to find his cock responding all too visibly to the intimacy of the gesture.

"It's all right, Walter," Andrew said gently. "It's not anywhere near as shocking as you think it is. Being bisexual isn't a crime."

"It might be if you're an assistant director at the FBI," Skinner growled.

"So get another job," Andrew shrugged. "No job is worth the hassle if it makes you this unhappy."

"I don't know," Skinner sighed. "I don't know anything any more. I don't know who I am, or what I want."

"Well, then we'll find out shall we?" Andrew broke a piece off Skinner's muffin, and fed it to the big man. "Together. It'll be fun." He smiled. "Walter, I can't make you stay - despite the cuff," he said, his expression changing, his voice serious. "You need help, and last night I think you asked for exactly the **kind** of help you need. I'm happy to give it to you, but first I have to tell you something."

Skinner nodded, accepting as another piece of muffin was fed to him, then washing it down with coffee. He was totally unprepared for what came next.

"I have cancer, Walter. I have less than two years to live. I wouldn't take you on without telling you that. If it works out between us, then there'll be some inevitable heartache down the road."

"Cancer?" Skinner repeated, scarcely able to take the news in.

"Yes. It's fair enough. I've led a good, happy life. I've done everything I needed to. At least...I thought I had, until last night. Now, I think, there's maybe one more thing left for me to do." Andrew smiled gently.

"You're taking it a damn sight better than I would have done," Skinner commented.

"Oh, I've had my moments, believe me," Andrew shook his head ruefully. "But I've had six months to come to terms with the diagnosis - you haven't. I'm sorry I had to hit you with this news, but you had to know before you got in any deeper."

"I'm sorry." Skinner didn't know what else to say.

"Don't be. You don't owe me anything, but I'd like to do this for you - and maybe for myself too," Andrew said softly. "Walter, there hasn't been anyone else for me since Ryan died. Oh, I've played a bit, here and there, just to keep in practice, but nothing more than that. To be honest, nobody can really take his place in my heart, but that doesn't mean I don't have any love left inside me. I do - and I'd like to give it, freely, without expecting it to be reciprocated." He looked at Skinner searchingly. "You can love me, Walter. In fact, I rather hope you'll learn to do just that - but don't fall in love with me, because I'm not going to be here forever."

"I understand." Skinner nodded, slowly.

"It's up to you - but I think you need me, and I'd like to help." Andrew leaned forward, and placed a gentle kiss on Skinner's lips. "It won't be easy - that punishment you seek, well, I'll give you that and more besides, and I predict that you'll take the physical pain easily enough, but not the rest. If you run out now, you'll never know what's behind it all, Walter. I **can** help you, but only if you let me. I know that if you decide, in the harsh light of day, to stay and face this, then you'll do just that. I know you're not a quitter, but it's a hard path - necessary, but hard. You choose, Walter. I'm going to take a shower." And so saying, he put his empty coffee mug down on the nightstand, slipped his robe off without the slightest hint of embarrassment, and walked naked into the en suite bathroom. Skinner watched him go, fighting down the arousal he had kept so long repressed. Andrew had long, slim legs and a neat butt, and although he was a little too slender, presumably because of his illness, he was still a damned attractive man. Skinner took an absent-minded bite out of the muffin, then another. He tested the strength of the cuff again with his leg, pulling at it, and then gave in with a sigh. Andrew was right. He was where he needed to be, and he'd never shirked a duty in his life. He couldn't carry on the way he had. Something had to change, or he'd end up killing himself.

"Have you made your decision?" Andrew emerged from his shower fifteen minutes later, his wet, white hair plastered against his head.

"Yes." Skinner nodded. "I'll stay," he whispered. "I want to...but..." He pulled on the chain again. "I really can't stand being tied."

"No. I thought you'd find that distressing. Loss of control, feeling helpless - these are difficult emotions for you to deal with aren't they, Walter?"

"I suppose." Skinner shrugged.

"Well, then that's where we'll start. I'll keep you chained whenever we're alone, Walter. Nothing that confines you, or hurts you, just enough to remind you that you're not in charge here. I am. When you stop fighting that, we can move forward."

"I don't think I'm going to like this," Skinner sighed.

"Don't you?" Andrew raised an amused eyebrow, then sat down on the bed beside the other man. "I think, Walter, that you'll find you're wrong about that." He leaned forward, took Skinner's face between his hands, and kissed him firmly on the lips. Skinner gave into the kiss, and afterwards Andrew smiled and rubbed his hand over the big man's shoulder. "That was a very good first step, Walter," he murmured. "Now, let's take care of business. There's a gym and pool in the building - use them. I've contacted security to arrange for a pass for you. You have a busy job, I know that - and you're used to working hard. That's fair enough - I have more than enough hobbies to amuse myself with." He gave a wolfish grin. "However, if you work late too often, I'll call you on it, and if you're using work to avoid personal issues I'll expect you to be honest with me. I know you will be - that isn't your problem. Articulating is." He got up, and unfastened the cuff from the end of the bed, but not from around Skinner's ankle, then he handed him the length of chain. "Time for your shower. Follow me," he ordered. Skinner grimaced, but followed him all the same. He submitted to being tied to the towel rail while he took his shower, and then untied and taken downstairs where he was re-tied to the table leg while they ate breakfast.

"Is the chain really necessary?" He asked, feeling slightly ludicrous. He was, after all, a grown man, and this struck him as absurd. "I'm not going anywhere, Andrew."

"I know that. If you wanted to you'd only have to unfasten the clip," Andrew replied with a smile. "It isn't locked."

"It isn't...?" Skinner looked down, confused. "Then why...?"

"It's symbolic. Yes, you can undo it anytime you like, but I'm telling you not to. My command is your bond, Walter, not the chain."

"I see," Skinner said slowly, trying to absorb this.

"No," Andrew laughed. "You don't, but you will, in time."

After they'd eaten, Andrew took Skinner up to the 18th floor apartment, and showed him the Playroom.

"Ryan designed it - he was fantastic at this kind of thing. That's why it's probably more of a sub's room than a dom's one," Andrew remarked with a wink.

"Did Ryan get off on this?" Skinner asked, opening one of the cupboards and whistling in awe. "I mean, Sharon and I had a little collection of paddles, but this! It's incredible!"

"I know. You can buy new implements - whatever you want. It's up to you."

"For use on me?" Skinner's breath caught in his throat. Andrew gazed at him curiously.

"Walter, I won't do anything to you that you don't want. Ryan was a masochist - he enjoyed receiving pain as part of his sexuality. There's nothing wrong with that - I enjoyed indulging him. You, I suspect, don't have the same kink. If you did, I'm sure you'd have realized it by now!" he exclaimed.

"Then why...?" Skinner bowed his head, and placed his arms around his body again, hugging himself as he had the previous night.

"Why do you want to be punished? I was rather hoping you would answer that question. Well, Walter?"

Skinner spread his hands helplessly. "I don't know," he whispered. "I've never felt this way before."

"Haven't you?" Andrew raised an eyebrow. "You box, don't you, Walter?"

"Yes...but..." Skinner blustered. Andrew raised his hand to silence him.

"You box, and sometimes you work out to the point of exhaustion. You use pain, on a subliminal level, to escape from your emotions. Yes?"

"Maybe." Skinner shrugged. "I don't know," he said again.

"Well, then we'll have to find out," Andrew told him, with a confident nod. "One thing, Walter - whatever you want, you come to me. I will give it to you if I think it's reasonable, and not if I don't. I'm not just talking about punishment, I'm talking about love as well. We'll go at your pace."

Skinner gazed at the other man uncertainly.

"Ah, you wanted the decisions taken away - well I can't do that. I can help you make them, and I can talk you through them, but you're still you, Walter. We just have to figure out what that means." Andrew gave a delighted chuckle. "You know, Walter, I think you might have given me a new lease of life!" he said, his eyes twinkling. Skinner smiled, a slow smile, responding to the other man's infectious warmth. It felt good here. Safe. However confused and uncertain he was, he knew that he'd found a safe haven - and a place he could finally call home.

They spent the next few hours going through the cupboards. Skinner talked about Sharon, and the sex games they'd played. It felt strange, talking so candidly about something so personal, but Andrew had an air about him that made it easy, and Skinner found himself strangely reassured by the chain around his ankle, that kept him from leaving the room when the conversation grew hard for him. Andrew had found a very effective way of making him face up to himself. Skinner enjoyed touching the implements and costumes in the cupboards, stroking them, using them experimentally on his hand or thigh. Andrew watched him, those sharp blue-gray eyes missing nothing.

"I think you're a fetishist at heart, Walter," he commented. Skinner looked up from his examination of a soft, furry paddle, which he ran against the side of his face, enjoying the sensation.

"Me? No!" He laughed.

"Yes." Andrew grinned. "Look at the way you dress - your work suits. I always used to wonder at those perfect starched shirts, the creases in your pants, and the way your shoes always shone. Ryan said that

it was just your military background, and it's true that you do have a need for perfection, but it's more than that. You actually have style, and taste. You radiate it - and that implies that you're interested in clothes, in the feel of fabrics against your skin, in color, and texture. Even your casual clothing is neat, and color co-ordinated. Green sweatshirts tucked into brown jeans, nothing sloppy, always clean and un-rumpled - I think you've just never really allowed yourself to express this side of yourself, Walter, but now you will."

"Okay," Skinner shrugged, uncertain about Andrew's assessment of his personality. "My god - what's this for?" He asked, holding up a box containing a set of needles and other strange apparatus. Andrew laughed.

"Ryan badgered me to pierce him. It took him five years to convince me, and even then I asked why he couldn't go and get it done professionally like everyone else, but he was adamant. He wanted to turn it into a scene. I had to become very skilled before I'd attempt it - I took some lessons!" Andrew placed a hand on Skinner's shoulder. "Would you like to be marked as belonging to someone, Walter?" He asked. "Piercing, branding, tattoos - they're all ways of marking ownership."

"I'm not sure." Skinner thought about it. "A lot of the guys in my unit at 'Nam had tattoos, but I never wanted one," he said at last.

"Ah, but would you like to place your mark on someone else?" Andrew whispered, his mouth close to Skinner's ear. Skinner's cock started to harden involuntarily, and Andrew grinned, knowingly.

"Ah. I see you like that idea. Hmmm," he mused thoughtfully. "First though...we need to discuss the real reason why you came here." Andrew took the piercing box from Skinner's hand.

"The real reason...?" Skinner bowed his head, tugging at the chain again without even realizing he was doing it.

"Yes," Andrew said insistently. "You came to me because you thought I'd punish you. You knew enough about my relationship with Ryan to know that I'm skilled with all these implements, and you wanted that pain badly last night. Do you still want it?"

"Yes," Skinner said quickly, knowing he did, but not why.

"All right. I'll give it to you, Walter, but only because you're asking me. I don't think you need to be punished for anything. For that reason, I'm giving you the responsibility over your punishment. **You** will choose the implement, and **you** will decide how long it lasts. Just tell me when you want it to stop."

Skinner nodded, numbly, and glanced at the little heap of implements at his feet. "Now?" He asked. "Are we going to start now?"

"Yes. Why not? I think only punishment will loosen your tongue sufficiently to get to the heart of your troubles, more's the pity." Andrew sighed. "It's your choice though. If you say you don't need it, then that's fine."

"No. I do...I want..." Skinner shrugged, helplessly.

Andrew just laughed, and put his arms around the big man, drawing him into a firm embrace. "Like I said, punishment might be the only thing that helps you articulate your feelings." He squeezed Skinner's broad shoulders firmly. "All right, make your choice, Walter."

Skinner ran his hands over various implements, wondering how they'd feel on his flesh, and decided on a hard, leather paddle. He handed it to Andrew, who took it wordlessly. "Go and bend over the horse, he said, unclipping Skinner's chain. Skinner went, mutely, wondering why the hell he was doing this, and what the craving inside was all about. He was surprised to realize that he was trembling as he bent over the horse. He was even more surprised when Andrew gently touched his back, soothing him.

"Like I said, Walter, I don't think you need to be punished. This is for you. Tell me when to stop," Andrew whispered.

Skinner nodded, just wanting it to start. Even so, he was stunned when the first blow hit home. Shit! It hurt! It hurt more than he had expected. In his head it gave him comfort, release, catharsis, but in reality it just hurt. Skinner ground his teeth together, determined to take it, and endure it, for some reason deep inside that he didn't understand. The paddle covered every inch of his buttocks and the tops of his thighs, and somewhere along the way, Skinner stopped feeling each individual stroke, and instead felt a deep, comforting burn, a slow agony of sensation that sent him to a place he'd never known before. He felt a peculiar high, and longed to stay there. The pain got worse, but he refused to cry out, refused to end it. He wanted that pain, and he refused to be weak, to yell or sob. There was a pause, and he felt Andrew's fingers on his face.

"Walter - I won't go on forever, and I think you'd let me. I think you'd let me kill you like this. Let me raise the stakes a little. If you insist on too harsh a punishment, I will punish you in return, by using tight bondage on you when it's over. You won't like the bondage, Walter - but I'll use it if I think you've been too hard on yourself. Do you understand me?"

Skinner blinked. "I don't want to be chained even more," he growled. "I don't like..." he could feel the frustration rise up inside his body, as if he were already fighting the invisible chains.

"No, I know you don't," Andrew told him firmly. "That's why it's a punishment, Walter, the only kind that I think will work with you. I knew you'd have no problem taking physical pain, but being restrained is much harder for you. Now, I'll continue, but I expect you to end this soon."

"All right." Skinner shrugged. He didn't want it to end yet. The pain was excruciating, and he welcomed it, nursed it close to his heart, drowned in it. Andrew began again, and the sweat poured off Skinner's face. He could endure this for as long as it took.

"Walter," Andrew said warningly. Skinner flung his head back, gasping for air. It hurt so much, and he wasn't sure he knew how to end it. He'd reached a place where he was free, unfettered by duty, responsibility and the goddamn awful guilt.

"Andrew!" he gasped, and the onslaught stopped immediately.

Andrew laid gentle fingers against his face, wiped the sweat from his forehead with a cloth, then helped him up, his hands never leaving Skinner's shoulders, soothing him constantly. He walked Skinner out of the Playroom, and down to the living room in the apartment below, where he deposited him face down

on the couch, and covered him with a blanket. Then he disappeared for a moment, and returned with a pair of wrist cuffs. He fastened them to Skinner's wrists, while the big man watched, wordlessly, hating it. He joined the two cuffs together behind Skinner's back, then attached his ankle cuffs together, drew Skinner's knees up to his chest, and attached a length of chain between the ankle cuffs and those around Skinner's wrists, securing them. Skinner squirmed, fighting his bondage, but he was too tired to do more than struggle fruitlessly for a few seconds before giving in. Andrew sat down on the couch beside the bound man and pulled Skinner's face onto his lap, angling him sideways so that he could breathe freely, and also so that he could see the expression in Skinner's eyes. Then he gently stroked Skinner's shoulders and the side of his face.

"Well, Walter, it would appear that you feel there's a lot you should be punished for," Andrew said, his voice full of wistful regret. Skinner closed his eyes, not wanting the kind concern. "Would you rather I was angry with you? Is that what you want? I'm sorry, Walter, I never take my anger into the Playroom. It could be dangerous. I'm not angry with you - you're far too angry with yourself to need my censure as well," Andrew told him, still stroking him.

Skinner struggled again, hating the bondage so much. "I feel like I'm suffocating," he rasped.

"Sorry - but if you're going to insist on such hard beatings, then you'll have to pay a price," Andrew said in an implacable tone. Skinner pulled at his cuffs again, wriggling on the couch.

"Please!" He cried hoarsely.

"No," Andrew said. "Stop struggling - now! You'll hurt yourself." His tone was so full of authority that Skinner found himself responding to it, calming, trying to get his breath back. "Good boy, give into it. Accept," Andrew said soothingly.

"Boy?" Skinner raised an incredulous eyebrow.

"You are to me. You're my boy, I'm your Master," Andrew smiled. "Age is immaterial."

"Right." Skinner closed his eyes, enjoyed the sensation of being caressed. After a few minutes, Andrew nudged him.

"What did you just atone for back there, Walter?" He asked.

"Being alive," Skinner replied, burying his face in Andrew's shirt.

"You think it should have been you killed in that car wreck, and not Sharon?" Andrew asked.

"It's my fault she died," Skinner shrugged.

"No, it isn't. You didn't place a gun to her head. You were victim, as much as she was. Why else do you feel guilty about being alive, Walter?" He pressed. Skinner floated for a moment, surfing the pain, and the frustration of being tied.

"Because everyone else died, and I don't make a damn bit of difference doing what I do. Mulder brings things to me, and I know he believes in them, but...I wish I could be more on his side, but I can't."

"Mulder?" Andrew frowned.

"A subordinate. Someone I work with. He's finding things that shock me. I don't know how to deal with him. If he gets himself killed it will be my fault."

"How?" Andrew's fingers played with Skinner's jaw, his tone thoughtful.

"Because I don't know how to help him. I'm so fucking useless. What's the point of my life being saved when I can't damn well be any use when it counts?"

"Your life was saved? Are you talking about Vietnam, Walter?"

"Yeah," Skinner growled, closing his eyes. "Fuck, I should have died out there. Jack died. The stupid bastard. He died, but I didn't."

"Jack?"

"We were...lovers." Skinner admitted a truth he'd spent so many long years trying to forget.

"Ah." Andrew nodded, his expression inscrutable.

"I told him to fuck off. I told him that because our tour of duty was coming to an end. We were going home and I didn't want a goddamn boyfriend to explain to my folks. I used him."

"No. You were, what? Eighteen years old? You were scared. Nobody could blame you for that."

"Jack might. He died in an ambush along with every single one of my unit. I was the only survivor."

Andrew's fingers stiffened, silenced for a moment by this news. Then he dropped his head to Skinner's face, and kissed him, over and over again - soft, nuzzling kisses.

"You don't need punishment, Walter," he said, between kisses. "You just need time, and you need to talk, and you need to be loved. I can give you all those things." Skinner lay, on his side, scrunched up against Andrew's chest, stiffly accepting the caresses, not as his due, but as something to be endured, because he didn't deserve them. "So, Jack, your unit, now Sharon. And you're worried it'll be Mulder next. Why does that upset you. Do you love him too?" Andrew asked quietly.

Skinner's heart missed a beat. "Yes," he replied, facing a truth he'd never acknowledged before. "Yes. I do."

"Does he know?" Andrew asked.

"I don't see how. I didn't know myself until this minute," Skinner muttered. "Damn! Sharon deserved more than me. I was a sorry excuse for a husband."

"No, you grew apart. Anyone who saw you together knew that you were in love once, and you were fond of each other to the end," Andrew said. "It takes two to make or break a marriage, Walter, and Sharon fell out of love too. It happens." He shrugged.

"She talked to you?" Skinner looked up in surprise.

"Yes. We were friends," Andrew smiled. "She didn't blame you - she wanted other things as well, but I know she never stopped caring about you. She cared because she knows you're a good man, Walter. I won't let this defeat you, I promise."

"How?" Skinner asked helplessly. "God, listen to me. I sound like a grade A, fucked up basket case."

"No, you don't. I'm just amazed you carried on as long as you did before this crisis hit you. Walter - did you ever receive any counseling when you returned from Vietnam?"

"Counseling? No," Skinner snorted. "They didn't want to know us when we came back - they certainly weren't going to sit and hold our hands. If you were really fucked up they sent you to a psychiatric hospital, and that was that," he shuddered.

"Well, things have moved on since then, and if you've buried all this for so many years, then you are a very strong man to have coped so well for so long, Walter. Have you ever heard of post traumatic stress disorder?"

"Kinda. In passing. I never thought it had any relevance to me though." Skinner shrugged.

"Have you had any nightmares, or trouble sleeping?" Andrew asked.

Skinner was silent for a long time, then sighed. "Yes," he admitted.

"Hallucinations, alcohol issues?" Andrew pressed.

"Yes." Skinner took a deep breath. "Both," he whispered.

"Feelings of anger and alienation? Do your hands shake?" Andrew's voice seemed to come from a long way away, and Skinner hesitated, trembling on the brink of a precipice. Damn it, he hadn't cried since he was 12 years old, and he wasn't going to start now.

"Yes." His mouth formed the word, but he made no sound.

"Walter - it's all right. You're not alone, and we can deal with all these issues. Have you heard of a concept called survivor's guilt?" Skinner shook his head, feeling perilously close to losing it and sobbing like a kid. "I'm going to give you some books to look at - to help you understand that what's affecting you is normal considering what you've been through in your life. It won't necessarily help you deal with it emotionally, but at least you can understand it. I'll help you with your emotions, if you trust me."

"I do," Skinner said, in a barely audible tone. He had to. There was nobody else left to turn to.

"Good. Now, can we dispense with further punishment, or will it be necessary for your healing process?" Andrew asked.

"I think I need it," Skinner replied, his voice shaking. He didn't think he could have got this far, or admitted this much, if Andrew hadn't broken him down first.

"Very well," Andrew sighed. "Then I'll continue to use the bondage. I'm sorry, Walter, but everything must have its price."

They spent the day quietly, talking, listening to music. Skinner chafed against his bondage, but he hurt too much to seriously argue about it, and besides, he soon came to realize that Andrew had the most implacable will. If he said "no," he meant it, and it was useless to try to argue with him. Andrew released Skinner from his bondage after a few hours, and rubbed out the cramps that had developed in the big man's muscles. They ate, and afterwards Andrew soothed cool gel into Skinner's hot, raw flesh.

When it got late, Andrew ordered him to bed, and he prepared to walk up to the small room in the 18th floor apartment that Andrew had earmarked for his use. He was therefore surprised when the other man forestalled him.

"No, I've changed my mind about that. You've been alone with yourself for too long, I think, Walter. You'll share my bed, and submit to being held, however much it embarrasses you!" Andrew winked. Skinner bowed his head, his arms going around his body again. "Walter." Andrew stood in front of him, demanding his attention. "I told you - if you want anything, you must come to me. I find you very attractive, and as your Master I'd like to show you the many ways I bring my subs pleasure, but it's up to you. It's been a long time since Jack, so you'll have to decide when you're ready - and if you never are, that's fine. A waste," he grinned, "but fine."

"Thanks," Skinner rasped out, his voice hoarse. He could hardly believe he'd ended up in this place, with someone who seemed to care, and understand, and he was more grateful than he would have thought possible. "Uh...do you want me to address you as Master?" He asked. Andrew looked at him keenly. "If you want to - when you want to. It isn't obligatory. We both understand the situation," he said. "I'm in charge though, Walter - don't ever forget that."

"I won't," Skinner said in a heartfelt tone, more than relieved to hear it.

Andrew ordered him up to the bedroom, and Skinner groaned when his Master fastened his ankle cuff loosely to the bed. Andrew slapped the side of his thigh lightly. "Accept, boy," he growled.

"Yes, Master," Skinner said with a resigned sigh.

Andrew sat on the bed beside him, and looked down at him affectionately. "Do you feel better?" He asked. "I'm curious - you clearly don't get off on pain. Did it relieve the other feelings for you?"

"Yes," Skinner admitted honestly.

"Don't get addicted," Andrew warned. "We'll have to find other coping mechanisms for you. I don't mind handing out the occasional whipping when you really need it, but only if you make a real effort to deal with your issues. Otherwise it's self perpetuating and you'll never learn anything."

"No. I know. I can hardly believe I need it," Skinner said, shamefaced.

"It's nothing to feel guilty about," Andrew exclaimed. "Everybody's different. I prefer it when my sub enjoys my attentions and doesn't just endure them, but your need is just as real as Ryan's was, and I respect that." He bent and deposited a kiss on Skinner's lips, then changed into his pajamas, and joined

the big man in the bed. Once again, his arms slid around Skinner's waist, and he held his new sub tight. It took Skinner less time to relax than the previous night, but he still stiffened. "You're worthy of affection, Walter," Andrew told him, stroking him gently. "I'll make you see all that's inside you - the good and the bad, and I'm sure you're in for a big surprise, boy," he promised, in a low, sexy growl.

Skinner moved in the following day. All his possessions were in boxes, already packed, so it didn't take long. He took a week off work, and settled into Andrew's condo. His need for punishment was almost constant to start with, but Andrew insisted that every session was paid for by several hours in bondage, during which he was expected to talk - openly, honestly, and at length about what he was feeling. It took several months of the hardest work Skinner had ever done, but he woke up one morning and realized that he had emerged from that dark tunnel where he had been trapped. He looked at the man lying next to him on the pillow, and reached out a hand. Andrew's illness had progressed, and his appearance was more gaunt. He never complained of any pain, but Skinner had noticed that he occasionally took medication, to relieve the worst symptoms. Nothing dimmed the unquenchable spirit in those sparkling, faintly mischievous, blue-gray eyes though. Andrew's eyes fluttered open, as Skinner touched the side of his face.

"Hello you," Andrew murmured.

"I want you," Skinner replied, inching forward for a kiss, his hands reaching out for his Master. Andrew stopped him, placing a finger over the other man's mouth.

"Walter, trust me, I'm honored, but be sure before you take this step. You know about my illness. I don't want you to get hurt. We both know there's no happily ever after in this."

"No. It doesn't matter. I've skipped around the edge of my sexuality for long enough," Skinner said in reply. "I wanted to...a long time ago, but I kept holding back. Now...I don't want to waste any more time. We may not have much."

"All right, love." Andrew smiled, sat up, and reached into the drawer of his nightstand for condoms, and some lube. He had to rummage, and looked back with a grin. "As you can see - it's been a while!"

Skinner tried to smile through his own anxiety, and Andrew shook his head. "Walter - it'll be good, trust me, not an ordeal. Why must everything be such an ordeal for you? Can't you give yourself permission to just enjoy something?"

"Things don't always have the habit of turning out very well - even enjoyable things," Skinner responded, remembering the call girl.

"Well, this time they will," Andrew said firmly, and Skinner didn't think that anything or anyone, would dare defy the other man. Even ill, his strong will shone through every action, and word. "Now, which do you want to be - top or bottom?" Andrew asked with a grin. "Your choice."

"It is?" Skinner looked bemused. "I assumed that you'd..."

"God, no! I don't like to just take the one position. That would be so damn boring apart from anything else - and it would mean denying myself of a whole world of sensory delight. So which do you want, Walter?"

"I want you inside me," Skinner said quickly, before he got cold feet.

"Sure?" Andrew slid down in the bed beside him, and tweaked a nipple playfully.

"Yes. Please. I haven't - with Jack I always went on top. I used to enjoy it. I could kid myself that I was almost straight if I did that," Skinner said. "I don't want to pretend any more," he added.

"Ah, a virgin, how nice!" Andrew smacked his lips together in a gleeful anticipation that broke the tension. Skinner laughed and started to relax. "I'll take the lead," Andrew said. "Remember - I'm in charge. You just let me amuse myself with you for a while, give up that phenomenal control of yours, allow yourself to feel pleasure, Walter." Skinner nodded, arching his back as Andrew moved forward, and took a nipple in his mouth, rolling it under his tongue. Andrew was as good as his word. He played with his sub for what seemed like hours, bringing Skinner to the brink of climax, then denying him his release until Skinner was begging. Only when his sub was completely aroused, did Andrew insert a lubed finger into his anus. Skinner tensed up immediately, and Andrew gave him a light slap on the butt. "Who's in charge?" He asked.

"You are...Master," Skinner said meekly.

"And have I hurt you so far?" Andrew demanded.

"No."

"Then relax," Andrew ordered, and Skinner found himself obeying, loosening his muscles so that Andrew could insert another finger, then a third. Andrew spent a long time stretching him, caressing him in a way that nobody had ever done before, and Skinner was climbing the walls, begging for more, **needing** to feel his Master's hard cock inside him before Andrew relented, and withdrew his fingers. He placed a condom on his own cock, and spread it liberally with lube, then gently parted Skinner's thighs, and placed the other man's legs on his shoulders. "I want to look at you when I take you this first time," Andrew said. He held Skinner's buttocks apart and nudged his cock into Skinner's entrance. Skinner held his gaze, radiating a sense of pure trust. Andrew pushed swiftly home, to the root, and rocked there for a moment, making Skinner gasp out loud. "How does that feel?" Andrew asked, his hands caressing Skinner's thighs.

"Burns but it's a good burn," Skinner nodded. Andrew smiled, and started to pump in and out, slowly at first. Skinner moved his hips, rolling in time to the movement. He had been so well stretched that it didn't hurt - it just felt damn good. He almost leapt into the air when Andrew grabbed his hard cock, and started pumping that too, in time to his thrusts. Skinner thought he'd explode with sheer sensory pleasure and came, shouting out his Master's name. Andrew took his own climax a few minutes later, and looked down on his sated sub, affectionately. He withdrew, and dropped on top of Skinner, then kissed his lover firmly on the lips, with a deep, claiming kiss.

"You, are very special, Walter Skinner," he murmured.

"And you are extraordinary, Master," Skinner replied, wrapping his arms tightly around the other man.

Andrew smiled. "You have no idea how much fun we are going to have, Walter. Your body is so new to you, your needs, your desires - I'm going to show you everything about yourself, and it's going to be so

good," he promised. Skinner held the other man's slender body to his chest, and thought he never wanted to let go.

Andrew was as good as his word. In the next few months he and Skinner played every sex game possible, performed every sex act Skinner had ever heard of, and a good many he hadn't, and talked about the nature of Skinner's sexuality. Andrew was happy to allow Skinner to top him, and introduced his lover to BDSM sex both as top and bottom.

"I never realized..." Skinner murmured, after a session where he had undergone the most mind-blowing climax after being tied, spanked, and subjected to intense sensation play using hot and cold objects, feathers, and a myriad of textured cloths. "I never knew this could be so good. I often wondered what Sharon got out of it - I mean I was happy to oblige, but I didn't know this could be so erotic, this giving up, the exchange of power, willingly giving that to someone else."

"You have a sensualist's soul, Walter," Andrew laughed. "You're a true connoisseur - never wanting to be rushed, savoring each new sensation."

"If I'm anything, it's because of you," Skinner replied. "I never would have discovered all this by myself."

"Maybe one day you'll show all this to someone else, share the knowledge and the pleasure," Andrew whispered. Skinner stiffened. He knew that Andrew was preparing him for his death, but he didn't want to think about that right now. The other man had come to mean too much to him for him to bear thinking about losing him. "Walter," Andrew said gently. "We both know what's going to happen. I don't want you sliding back to where you were before. You've made such progress. I don't want my work with you to have been in vain. Promise me, boy."

Skinner sat up at that tone. It wasn't one he would dare to defy. "I'll try," he said, "but it's going to be damn hard."

"You can cope." Andrew shouldered his slender frame into a robe, and fastened it around his waist, musing on something thoughtfully, then he turned back to his naked lover. "Walter, it strikes me that you might need someone to go to occasionally - when you need release."

Skinner shook his head. "I couldn't ask anyone else. Nobody could take your place," he said.

"No, but there are people who could give you what you need. I'm pleased that you need it less and less these days, but it would be short sighted of us to imagine that you'll never need it again. If you do, I want you to have somewhere to go, so I'm going to ask Elaine to take care of it. You trust her, don't you?"

Skinner thought about it for a moment. "I'm not sure. I mean, yes I do trust Elaine, but I'm just not sure," he said. "I don't think it would be the same if it wasn't you."

"You just need the release - and someone who'll listen to you, and understand you," Andrew said. "It doesn't have to be me."

"No."

"You might never need to go to her, but just in case you do - I'd hate for you to lose yourself again. I think we should be prepared for the eventuality that you might feel the need." He crouched down in front of his sub, and took hold of his head, making Skinner look into his vivid blue-gray eyes. "I might have to make it an order, Walter. Even when I'm not here I still expect you to follow my orders."

"What will you do, haunt me from the grave?" Skinner said, with a sad smile. "Come into my room as an apparition and tie me to the bed until I do as you say?"

"Don't count against it," Andrew warned, his eyes deadly serious.

Skinner sighed. "All right," he said finally.

"Promise?" Andrew demanded.

"Promise." Skinner nodded.

"Good boy." Andrew caressed his ears affectionately. "Now, tell me about your work. Has Mulder been behaving himself recently?"

Mulder was a frequent topic of conversation between them. Skinner often went to Andrew for advice on how to deal with his most troublesome subordinate, and Andrew had the most amazing insights into Mulder's personality.

"It strikes me that the boy is looking for someone to help him. All these cries de coeur. He reminds me of you, Walter," Andrew said mischievously, glancing at his sub as they ate a meal one evening.

"Me? Since when did I ever behave like that? I'm not headstrong, I don't flare up at the slightest provocation, and I do not, I especially do not, go running off without telling anyone, disobey orders, and then have the bare-faced cheek to sit in my boss's office and blame **him**," Skinner growled.

Andrew laughed out loud. "Oh, Walter, the boy is desperate for you to notice him. Anyone can see that," he chided.

"Notice him? Why?" Skinner repeated blankly.

"Because he knows you can give him what he needs, maybe?" Andrew said. "And you can, but the question is - do you want to?"

"I don't know." Skinner sighed. "He's such a handful - what would I be taking on?"

"Someone who needs you - the way you needed me last year." Andrew got up and placed his hands on Skinner's shoulders, then deposited a kiss on his head. "You could do it, Walter. I've taught you all you need to know, and, my dear boy, you make a very good top. I always knew you did from the contented little smile Sharon had on her face at those scene parties you used to go to, and now of course I've experienced your skill myself..."

"I'm nothing compared to you and you know it," Skinner replied.

"On the contrary, you just lack confidence. I wish you'd play more," Andrew said with a sigh. "All these subs I keep bringing home for you..."

"I **have** played with them," Skinner interrupted, "but they're not you," he added softly, his hand covering Andrew's as it rested on his shoulder.

"And they're not Mulder either - isn't that the truth as well?" Andrew asked with his usual keen insight.

"Maybe. What would **you** do with him, Andrew? How would you deal with him? Would you tie him up, the way you did with me? Make him talk? Make him listen?"

"God no!" Andrew exclaimed. "Your Mulder wouldn't react well to that at all. He sounds very different to you, Walter - and you'd have to set aside what you learned from my treatment of you and treat him as an individual - with quite different needs. You, my dear boy, had to be broken, you had walls that you hid behind, that kept you strong, but isolated. Now, Fox Mulder on the other hand - you wouldn't want to break him. That would destroy his spirit, not release him as it did you. Fox has to be tamed I think, like the wild creature he is."

"How?" Skinner glanced up at his lover. "God knows I've tried all the sanctions at my disposal and none of them have worked. I'm scared he'll get himself killed..." He broke off, and Andrew's fingers kneaded his shoulders lightly.

"I know - that's always your fear, Walter. Dear boy." He dropped a light kiss on Skinner's bare scalp. "Now, Fox. Dear Fox. How do I think you should deal with him? Well, for a start, I don't think he'd stay willingly. He's like his namesake; too wild, and quick, too cunning, too afraid to trust. You'll have to entice him with something he needs, something he wants, and then when you've got him, you'll have to win his trust enough to make him want to stay and eat out of your hand."

"Ah, well that's easy then!" Skinner growled.

Andrew laughed, and patted his lover's shoulders. "I never said it'd be easy. It won't. One thing though, Walter - if you take him on, I know you'll be there for him, because I know you and your damn obstinacy and sense of duty and responsibility. However, that doesn't mean you can neglect yourself, and your own needs," Andrew said fiercely.

"No, Master." Skinner made a face.

"I mean it." Andrew cuffed him lightly across the back of his head. "I know you. If you feel yourself going under, you must go to Elaine. She'll take care of it. Walter - you're really a very skilled top. You have nothing to worry about there," he said, sitting down again, a spasm of pain passing across his face. Skinner got up, and brought the other man a glass of water. "You know they're even clamoring to play with you on the scene?" Andrew asked slyly. "You've made something of a name for yourself, boy," he grinned. "Who'd have thought it? My protégé, becoming more famous than his Master!"

"Nobody could take your place, idiot," Skinner said cheerfully, watching anxiously, as the lines of pain refused to fade from the other man's face.

"If anybody can it's you - I'm proud of what we've achieved together," Andrew said seriously. "You've come a long way from that lost soul who knocked on my door in the middle of the night another lifetime ago." He was suddenly racked by a fit of coughing, and Skinner got up, and was at his side in seconds.

"You need to go to bed," he said firmly.

"No. Walter - when I retire to my bed it'll be to die, and I'm not ready for that just yet," Andrew commented acerbically. "I'm still in charge here until they carry me out feet first - and don't you forget it, boy," he said firmly, his eyes sparkling.

"How could I, Master?" Skinner replied, his heart breaking. "How could I?"

As Andrew's illness progressed towards its inevitable conclusion, Skinner moved out of the bedroom, and into the small upstairs room. He had a bell installed so that Andrew could summon him whenever he needed him. Every morning, before he left for work, he would wash and dress his Master, then pick him up in his arms, and carry him down the stairs to the living room, where he'd place him on the couch. The first visitor would arrive at 7am, and somebody would stay with Andrew until Skinner returned home. There was never any lack of volunteers, whether they were friends, old clients, or former lovers and subs. Everybody who had ever met Andrew cared about him. His good humor, love of life, and abilities as a top were legendary. Skinner found himself in the company of a good many awe-struck subs - who were as anxious to worship Andrew's sub as much as they worshipped his Master. He turned down each and every invitation, until Andrew chided him on the matter.

"You're still human, Walter, and I'd like you to keep your skills up to scratch," he teased. "It doesn't have to be about sex, - some of these subs would just like to kneel in front of you and feel your whip. You could give them that much."

"I'm not in the mood." Skinner rolled his stiff shoulders.

"It might ease those stresses. You could ask one of them to massage you - the queue of volunteers would stretch around the block, believe me." Andrew smiled knowingly. "You're the epitome of the perfect top, my dear, if only you'd see it."

"Nonsense," Skinner growled.

"It's not. Come here," Andrew commanded, and Skinner obeyed, immediately, and without question, as he always did. "Kneel," Andrew said. It made no difference that his Master was frail, and weak, his spirit was as strong as ever. Skinner knelt. Andrew looked down into his sub's eyes. "You're good because you're strong without being brutal, strict without being unfair, loving without losing your authority - and most of all, you never make the mistake of treating a sub as anything less than human. Any number of subs would gladly serve you - and you deserve to be served, love." Andrew stroked Skinner's head thoughtfully.

"I don't need it." Skinner shrugged.

"Or is it that you still think you don't deserve it?" Andrew asked. "You do. You could make a sub very happy by just allowing them to serve you. You look after me, you do a stressful job - you deserve some R and R. In fact, I'm going to arrange it."

"I don't..." Skinner began. Andrew placed a silencing finger over his mouth.

"It's an order," he said. Skinner clenched his jaw, then gave in with a sigh, experience having taught him that Andrew's orders had to be obeyed. Andrew smiled, and tickled him under the chin. "Cheer up - you might even enjoy yourself!" He laughed. "Honestly, Walter. There are those subs who lose themselves in their service, who want to belong to a special Master. I suspect..." he frowned, and paused, then continued, "I suspect your Mulder might be one of them."

"Mulder! Serve me?" Skinner laughed. "He'd hate it! Besides, you don't know he's into any of this stuff, Andrew."

"As a matter of fact I do," Andrew smiled softly. "He's active on the scene, Walter. You wouldn't know because you don't venture onto the scene these days, but my sources have kept me well informed."

Skinner took a deep breath, shocked. "He's on the scene? As a sub? Is he safe?" He asked.

"Very. I've made sure of that," Andrew replied grimly. "Someone had to - the idiot is all over the place, and he's been taking risks that I don't approve of. I think he needs someone to take him in hand, Walter."

"Not me," Skinner growled. "It's too complicated - I work with the man for god's sake!"

"And you're in love with him. From what I've learned about him on the grapevine you complement each other. You'd make a good partnership."

"No," Skinner shook his head.

"You can't deny that you want him," Andrew put his head on one side, intrigued. "I'm not too weak to tie you very tightly and get **that** truth out of you, Walter."

"No, you're not," Skinner grinned. "And you don't need to," he added hastily. He had come to tolerate being tied, even to appreciate the silence and loss of control that tight bondage entailed, but it still wasn't exactly his favorite activity. "I don't deny that I want him. What I mean is...I don't want him as a casual fling. I want something more, and I would never approach him - he'd have to come to me."

"I see." Andrew nodded thoughtfully. "In the meantime then - I think you should get some practice in."

Skinner raised an eyebrow. "You're so sure he'll come to me."

"Yes. I am." Andrew smiled. "You see, it's where he belongs. I just hope he's good enough for my boy." He dropped a kiss on Skinner's forehead. "Now, I'm going to put the word out, and you, my dear Walter, are going to polish up those skills of yours - as well as allowing every sub who wants to do so to worship at your feet. You've been neglecting yourself, taking care of me," he added softly. "Let me find some people to take care of you." With a sigh, Skinner gave in, and nodded. "Good." Andrew chuckled. "That's what I love about you, Walter - so stubborn, even to the extent of refusing to take pleasure when ordered!"

As Andrew's condition worsened, Skinner had cause to be profoundly grateful to the other man for arranging the "R&R" as he'd termed it. It gave him an hour away from the gnawing pain of watching someone he loved so much slip away from him, day by slow day. The subs were as plentiful as Andrew had promised, and Skinner lost himself in their massages, their service, their desire to please him. He gave them back as much of himself as he could, and was surprised to find that it was enough. They went away in awe of his skills, and he soon developed a reputation on the scene that rivaled that of his legendary Master.

However, Skinner was sinking further and further into despair as Andrew's pain level skyrocketed. He oversaw his lover's pain meds, and knew that even the huge amounts he took didn't take away the other man's discomfort. One night, Andrew summoned him with the bell, and Skinner found him gasping for air. He took him into his arms, and held him tight, rocking him back and forth through the long, dark night. Andrew smiled at him, a wan, listless smile, his vivid blue-gray eyes dimmed, but still containing a faint remnant of their famous spark.

"I never thought I could love anyone after Ryan," Andrew murmured. "I was wrong." Skinner crossed his arms protectively around his lover, wanting to keep him safe, knowing he couldn't. Andrew took a breath, and his body spasmed with pain. "Damn! Hurts so much..." he whispered.

"I can't stand seeing you like this," Skinner said hoarsely. "I wish there was something I could do."

"There is," Andrew whispered. "If I were to ask you, would you leave the medication by my bed, where I can reach it?"

The two men looked at each other for a long time. Skinner knew what Andrew was asking of him - he wanted to take an overdose. "No," he said softly.

"It would be my decision - nothing to do with you. I wouldn't implicate..." Andrew began.

"No." Skinner clasped him close.

"I'm not saying I will, but if I asked you - would you do it?" Andrew asked. "For me? One last duty performed for the only man you'll ever call Master?"

Skinner closed his eyes, feeling the frail flesh beneath his fingertips. "Yes," he breathed at last. "I'd do it for you."

"Good boy." Andrew patted his hands comfortingly. "I'll try not to ask then."

"Thank you." Skinner kissed Andrew's snowy hair, and rested his chin on the other man's head.

His Master was as good as his word. When he passed away a few weeks later, he did so without having made his request, for which Skinner was profoundly grateful. The funeral passed in a haze, and he could barely take in the fact that Andrew had left him the two condos in his will, to say nothing of the honorary title of Guardian of the House that had been bestowed upon him.

Skinner got into the habit of waking up, going to work mechanically, then coming home again and sitting slumped in front of the television. He tried not to regress, knowing that Andrew wouldn't want that, but

even so, it was hard remembering to take care of himself, remembering to sleep, and eat, and put one foot in front of the other. When the pain got too much he took himself off to Elaine, and she did as Andrew had asked her, without question, and afterwards took care of him.

"You need something to take you out of yourself," she told him during the aftermath of one visit.

"I'll be fine," he growled tersely.

"We'll see." She smiled.

A few days later he came home to find a small kitten sitting on his couch. There was a cat tray in the laundry room, water and food in two new bowls on the kitchen floor, and a note on his dining room table.

"She's for you. Someone to take care of. Someone to take care of you. Oh, and she's a platinum calico Burmese, in case you were wondering. A friend of mine breeds them. Elaine." Skinner crumpled the note up in his fist and put his head on one side, considering the small bundle of fur who was eyeing him with an equally assessing stare. "Damn Elaine. I knew I should have gotten that key off her," Skinner muttered, glaring at the small interloper threateningly. "A cat?" He growled. "Why the hell would I need a cat?" The animal in question stretched out two dainty paws, and yawned. Skinner watched, fascinated, as her pink tongue emerged from between two sets of white whiskers. "Do I look like the kind of man that keeps small furry creatures?" He asked her. "Do I look like I need a cuddly toy?"

He turned his back on her and went to pour himself a glass of whisky. Whisky was one of his pleasures in life, but he had learned to limit himself to one glass an evening – a legacy of Andrew's hard work in sorting out his sub's issues, and putting him back on an even keel.

He set the glass to his lips, muttering to himself that the first thing he would do the following day was pack the kitten up in a basket and return her whence she had come from, when he suddenly felt the most excruciating pain in the back of his legs.

"Ow..." he hopped around, trying to dislodge the tiny creature that was determinedly climbing up the back of his dress pants like an intrepid explorer breaching the North face of Everest. He tried to reach out a hand to pull her off, but her claws stuck fast wherever she planted them. Skinner could almost hear Andrew laughing, and could imagine his wry comment: "Finally, Walter, a creature as obstinate as you. I think you've met your match."

He grunted, and gave in, allowing the kitten to reach the sanctuary of his shoulders, where she sat, radiating a sense of pride at her dazzling feat of mountaineering. She rubbed her face against his jaw, then insinuated herself beneath his chin, holding on tight to his shirt so that she wouldn't fall off. Skinner sighed, looked down into a pair of sparkling green eyes – and fell completely, and utterly in love.

"Well, little girl, looks like you don't take no for an answer," he crooned, placing one big hand under her rump, and using the other to tickle her behind the ears. She exploded into a tidal wave of purring, and responded ecstatically to his caress, her eyes glowing with adoration.

"More responsive than a sub," he teased her, and she bit his finger playfully. "And more capricious than the most demanding top I see. All right, princess, I'm your devoted servant." He planted a kiss firmly on

the top of her silky head, and buried his face in her fur. It felt good to have someone to come home to, someone to get up for in the morning, someone to take care of. He kissed her again, and she snuggled up even closer to his face, satisfied that in the space of less than ten minutes she had wrapped this big man around her tiny, dainty paw.

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"I always wondered how you and Wanda first met," Mulder murmured, stroking the cat's ears.

"She saw me through the hard times after Andrew's death," Skinner said. "Not that there was ever any doubt in her mind who I belonged to. She took one look at me and claimed me."

Outside it had grown dark as Skinner told his story. Mulder hadn't taken his eyes off his Master's face once as Skinner completed his narrative. He had been completely absorbed in the story. Although he found it hard visualizing his Master subbing to anyone, somehow the fact that Andrew Linker, this legendary top, had been the one Skinner called Master made it all slot into place, as if it were the most natural thing in the world.

"So, slave – that's the story you were so eager to hear," Skinner said.

"Thank you. I'm sorry. I should have waited," Mulder sighed. He wasn't sure how he felt knowing all this about Skinner. In some ways he was relieved - he had learned nothing that diminished his love and respect for the other man. Mulder had enormous reserves of compassion, and Skinner's story had moved him. He also knew what it was like to face the depths of despair that his Master had faced. It was reassuring to know that Skinner understood the dark recesses of his slave's heart, because of what he had suffered and experienced himself. It gave his Master a depth of experience that Mulder valued deeply.

"Well, I knew your insane curiosity, and I also know what a talented investigator you are, so I should have expected that you wouldn't be satisfied with my promises that I'd tell you one day," Skinner replied. "The truth is that I wasn't sure you could handle it. You're in a dangerous place, Fox. I know, because I was there once myself, but my story is irrelevant right now – we're focusing on you. That's the only reason I didn't tell you. Andrew helped me, and I know and understand myself much better as a result, but you... well you still have a long way to go, sweetheart."

"Yes." Mulder felt relieved to simply admit it. "Andrew sounds amazing. He's a tough act to follow. I can't ever shape up to that," he shrugged.

"Fox – you're you. I don't want you to be Andrew," Skinner said firmly. He gave his slave a hard kiss. "I love you for what you are – and I have done for years."

"But you're going to punish me, right?" Mulder said anxiously. Skinner's arms tightened around his slave. "For disobeying you? For deceiving you?"

"Wasn't yesterday punishment enough?" Skinner asked softly.

"No. I need..."

"Yes. I know." Skinner sighed. "I know that feeling all too well. Fox – the reason I went to Elaine yesterday had less to do with you than you think. It wasn't my intention to make you feel guilty. The truth is...that there was something I'd buried since Andrew died, and you unwittingly made me face it." He paused, and Mulder kissed his Master's collarbone, encouraging him to continue. "Andrew didn't ask me to perform that final act of service – he was so strong, despite his pain. He didn't want to leave me with that burden of guilt. However...I felt I should have done it for him anyway. When Peter called and used the word euthanasia...well, it just brought up those feelings again. It would have been a simple enough thing for me to do. I could have just left the medication within easy reach...but I didn't."

"And you think you should have?" Mulder asked.

"It might have been a kindness," Skinner said softly. "I've never dealt with that issue before, so you were a catalyst, but nothing more. I needed what happened yesterday – Andrew would have been furious if I'd neglected the danger signals, and I'd be no use to you as a Master if I hadn't gone to see Elaine last night."

"Master..." Mulder began hesitantly. "I...next time you need...if you need..."

"Say it, slave," Skinner prompted, in an amused tone.

"I could do that for you, Master. You don't need to go to strangers. I could serve you like that." Mulder said.

Skinner gave a wry chuckle. "Thank you, Fox, but I should point out that you nearly yelled the house down back there, so I'm not sure you could give me what I need."

"I could do it if you asked me," Mulder replied firmly.

"Maybe. One day. I'd like very much to know I could turn to you in such moments, but you're not ready yet," Skinner said softly. Mulder nodded. "And it doesn't happen very often any more," Skinner added. "Now, it's late and I'm hungry. What's for dinner?"

"Something good – something I arranged just for you." Mulder smiled, and got up, then he leaned down and deposited another kiss on his Master's lips. He returned a little while later bearing a tray.

Skinner sat up, cautiously, with a grimace, and looked at the contents of the tray expectantly, then his eyes lit up. "Clam chowder!" He exclaimed. Mulder grinned. "With pilot crackers!" Skinner shook his head in amazement. "This is incredible. How did you know?" He asked his slave. Mulder sat down on the bed with his own serving, a goofy smile on his face at having done something so right.

"Scully told me about your folks having a seafood restaurant in Maine – I thought you might enjoy this."

"Fox, it's wonderful. My favorite," Skinner beamed. "My talented slave," he teased.

"You never did answer me – about the punishment," Mulder said in a hesitant voice. "I know I deserve it."

"Yes. I think you probably do." Skinner said with a sigh. "More than that – you need it, don't you?"

"Yes," Mulder replied bluntly. "Although that doesn't mean I'm not scared," he added, making a face. "You sure as hell know the difference between an erotic spanking and a punishment one."

"I hope so," Skinner said wryly. "Or Andrew failed in his tutelage! All right – I'm in no fit shape to deliver anything now, but I will be soon. On Monday evening, before bed, I'll deliver what needs to be done then – and Fox," his dark eyes were serious. "It'll hurt," he said.

Mulder shivered, and ducked his head down to his meal. "Yes, Master," he whispered.

"And afterwards..." Skinner added, "well, I said I'd use you on a daily basis, and it's been a couple of days, so afterwards, I think I'll take you to my bed, and reaffirm your status, slave."

"Yes, Master!" Mulder looked up again, his eyes alight with anticipation.

Mulder marveled at Skinner's self control when they returned to work on Monday. The big man had to still be in some discomfort, but he didn't show it. True, he did spend the better part of his meeting with the X Files department, pacing around his office, and preferred to lean against his desk rather than sit down, but all the same, he didn't give so much as the smallest clue as to what he had undergone the previous Friday evening. Mulder was in awe of his Master. At the same time he was dreading his own punishment, and wishing more than anything else, that they could skip it and go straight to the sex. He even suggested this to Skinner, who just laughed, and slapped his slave's butt affectionately.

"I don't think so," he said firmly, much to Mulder's chagrin – and relief. Mulder knew that he needed this, he just found the waiting so hard.

He spent Monday evening on tenterhooks. Skinner kept him occupied with a myriad of mindless tasks, including a whole pile of the hated laundry. At 10 pm his Master summoned his slave, and ordered him to go and wait in the playroom.

"Do I get to choose my own implement?" Mulder asked, hardly able to breathe. Skinner looked at him curiously, as if assessing what effect learning about his Master's past was having on his slave's psyche.

"Do you want to?" He asked.

"Um...on this occasion...yes," Mulder said.

"Very well. The level of severity will still be my decision though, boy," Skinner growled. "I'm your Master, and you belong to me to treat as I wish."

"Yes, Master." Mulder's treacherous cock quivered hopefully. He couldn't help himself – he just loved it when Skinner talked to him like that.

"And slave – not the bullwhip," Skinner said. "I know you have a fascination for that particular implement, but only I will decide when that will be used."

"Yes, Master." Mulder shivered. The bullwhip held a curious fascination for him, and he knew that one day his Master would make him submit to its savage caress again – but not today.

"Go then." Skinner ordered, and Mulder turned and ran.

Mulder had already made his decision before he got to the Playroom. He went straight to the rubber tawse, and removed it with a shudder. It was heavy, and he remembered the punch it packed all too well from the previous occasion when Skinner had used it on him. He had a particular reason for choosing it though – the whip Skinner had chosen for his release had been made of rubber, and Mulder knew he was trying to see if he could endure what his Master had endured. He took a certain satisfaction in Skinner's physical prowess at being able to withstand the whip for so long without uttering a sound. In some strange way it merely reassured him of his Master's strength - not only physically but mentally as well.

He knelt down in the submissive position, back straight, eyes down, arms outstretched, holding the tawse up to his Master for use on his slave's naked body, to punish, and correct.

Skinner entered the Playroom a few minutes later. He stood for a moment, looking at his naked, contrite slaveboy, then gave a grim sigh, and strode over. He took the tawse, and, looking up, Mulder could see that the significance of the implement wasn't lost on his Master.

"All right, slave. Go and bend over the spanking horse," Skinner ordered, in his most authoritative tone. Mulder shivered, and hurried to obey. Skinner was in full Master mode and he was quite frankly frightening when he was like this. Mulder lowered himself over the horse, and held on tight. He heard his Master come up behind him, then Skinner's hands fondled his slave's white, unmarked butt lightly.

"This has been allowed to get away with too much," he murmured, continuing to stroke his slave's buttocks. "It's been far too long since it was last subjected to my attention. Push it out, slave, to meet its punishment," Skinner ordered, slapping one exposed butt cheek sharply. Mulder complied swiftly. Skinner spent several agonizing minutes placing his slave into position, then he stepped back – and Mulder tensed.

"All right, boy. Tell me what lesson you will learn from this punishment," Skinner demanded.

"Not to be disobedient," Mulder said quickly. "Never to lie to you, or to deceive you again, not to be curious..."

Skinner's hand came down on his back, stopping the litany. "I won't ever punish you for an emotion. I've told you that before. A curious, inquiring mind is part of you and I wouldn't want to change that. Continue."

"Um..." Mulder thought frantically. "I'll learn to trust you more, Master," he said softly. "I'll trust that you act for my own good, and accept that."

"Good. That would be a breakthrough," Skinner said in a gruff tone. "Very well, slave. I think we can commence." Mulder tensed, and a few seconds later, the rubber tawse imprinted a red line across his butt. Mulder grunted from the force of the blow, but bit down hard, determined to endure this beating without screaming. The next blow almost scuppered his intentions there and then. It hurt like nothing he had ever felt before, and his breath left his body in a gasp. He took four more without a sound, but this was a serious whipping, and Skinner meant for it to count, so he wasn't sure he could hold on much longer.

"Fox." The whipping paused, and he clung onto the horse, his knees trembling. "It isn't a competition. Everyone has different needs – you're naturally a more vocal person than I am," Skinner said softly. "I haven't ordered you to stay silent on this occasion. You might need the release of screaming."

"Yes, Master." Mulder felt a wave of relief, as if Skinner had removed a burden from his shoulders. He yelled out loud as the next blow fell, and it felt so good to let the tension and anxiety of the past few days go, to scream, and feel the hot tears flow down his cheeks. Skinner delivered each stroke as hard as he had promised, and the whipping didn't let up until every inch of Mulder's backside had been painted a deep red. Then, finally, it stopped. Mulder lay, still yelling for several seconds before he realized it was over. Then Skinner helped him to his feet, and held the swaying slave against his big chest.

"All right, little one. It's all over now," Skinner murmured, stroking Mulder's back until his slave stopped shaking. "I want you to go downstairs and get into my bed. It's cold – but with this hot butt in my bed, I think we'll be taking the phrase 'bed-warmer' literally tonight." He gave one of his sexy smiles, and Mulder grimaced, strangely relieved that the excruciating pun meant his Master had gotten his weird sense of humor back.

Mulder walked stiffly down to the bedroom, and slipped between the sheets. Skinner slid in beside him a little while later, and reached for his slave immediately.

"Who do you belong to, boy?" he demanded gruffly.

"You, Master," Mulder replied, his cock hardening instantaneously at his Master's presence beside him.

"All right, boy, I'm going to enjoy myself with you tonight. You'll serve me as you've never served me before," Skinner promised in a tone that went straight to Mulder's cock.

"Thank you, Master," he whispered. Skinner rolled him over, so that his slave's back faced him, then grabbed his slave's flaming buttocks.

"Oh shit!" Mulder yelled, grabbing onto the sheets.

"Hurts, huh, slaveboy?" Skinner said, kneading the buttocks between his fingers.

"Oh god, yes. Please, Master!"

"Quiet!" Skinner growled. "What can I do to you?"

"Whatever...you...want...to, Master," Mulder panted, his sore buttocks aching, and his cock almost going into spasm.

"Good boy. Do you want to please me?"

"Yes, Master." Mulder nodded frantically.

"Good – get on your hands and knees then," Skinner ordered. Mulder did as he was told immediately. He felt so exposed kneeling like this, waiting for Skinner to use his pliant, eager body. Skinner moved behind him, and he felt his buttocks being parted, and a lubed finger entered inside his body. He

moaned, opening up to the insistent caress. Another finger stretched him for several minutes, and then they were both withdrawn. His buttocks were seized again and he gave a strangled yelp, then his Master's cock slid smoothly into his body, claiming him, reaffirming his slavery. Skinner's hands slid under his slave's body, finding his nipple rings, and tugging on them, gently at first, then harder, and harder, in time with his deep, measured thrusts. Mulder spun off into another dimension. This was so hot! He was so turned on, and he knew that his Master was reminding him, after all the revelations, and the trauma of the past few days, of the essence of what was between them. Skinner reached his climax and then lay, panting, on his slave's back, before withdrawing, and pulling Mulder around to face him. Mulder went, willingly, wondering what was coming next, and was taken by surprise as his Master's mood seemed to have changed abruptly. Skinner kissed him, a gentle, loving kiss, that made him moan. Then his Master's hands roved gently over his slave's body, caressing him, holding him, and loving him in the most tender way. Mulder blinked, wondering at this change of mood.

"Mine to punish," Skinner whispered in Mulder's ear, "mine to use, mine to love, and pet, and take care of." His mouth roved all over his slave, and ended up at Mulder's cock, taking it deep into his throat, making his slave cry out hoarsely, and grab his Master's head. "Hush," Skinner drew back, soothed Mulder's thighs for a moment, then returned to his task. He brought Mulder to the brink of climax, then stopped, and turned to another part of his slave's anatomy. He did this over and over again, until Mulder was shouting hoarsely – this time in pleasure, begging his Master to allow him his climax. Finally, after reducing his slave to a quivering jelly of sensation, Skinner allowed Mulder to come – and come. And come. Afterwards, Skinner took his slave in his arms, and kissed him again, another deep kiss.

"Who do you belong to?" he whispered.

"You. As if there could be any doubt about that," Mulder grinned.

"I'm pleased to hear it," Skinner said into his slave's ear, and Mulder knew that his Master had restored their relationship to where it had been before he'd gone to California. Of course it wasn't exactly the same. They had both learned, and grown, but it was back on track. "Tomorrow, we'll get tested," Skinner said. "Then we can dispense with the condoms. I want to feel you without the encumbrance of a sheet of rubber between us."

"Thank you, Master." Mulder snuggled up against his Master's furry chest, feeling more truly happy than he had done in days. Skinner's promise to be tested was a sign of something having moved on in their relationship. They had weathered their first real storm - and come out the other side stronger than before. "Master..." Something nagging at the back of his consciousness finally came to the fore. "Krycek called me. He said he had information on Samantha. That's the other reason why I went to California. He gave me an address. I went to check it out." Mulder held his breath, wondering if he had ruined everything, but Skinner's arms just tightened around his slave's body.

"And what did you find?" Skinner asked.

"Nothing. A telephone number. He said...that she'd been experimented on. That's why I went off the rails on our first day back at work," Mulder mumbled into a warm, solid shoulder. "I should have told you. I wanted to tell you...but this is so much my crusade – and, uh, I knew you'd disapprove," he admitted ruefully.

"**Our** crusade," Skinner said firmly. "Next time – tell me. Did it never occur to you that far from reeling you back in, I might offer you my assistance?"

Mulder looked up in surprise. "No. It didn't," he said. "To be honest, I'm used to dealing with this on my own. Even Scully doesn't really understand. I didn't think anybody else would."

"Trust me next time, Fox. I might not give you carte blanche to go and get yourself killed, but I understand what this means to you. I'm your ally, not another obstacle. I want you to solve this, and to be at peace with your demons, as much as you do," he said fiercely.

"Thank you, Walter," Mulder said sincerely, without even thinking about it, then his heart thudded in his chest at having addressed the other man by his first name. He hadn't done it consciously, but Skinner's words went to the heart of his quest, and therefore seemed somehow removed from their Master/slave relationship. He sneaked a look up at his Master from under his eyelashes, but Skinner seemed not to have noticed. His Master's eyes were closed, and there was a satisfied smile on the other man's face.

#### **End of Part 14**

#### **Chapter End Notes:**

**And don't worry - that's not the end of the series - I have several more things planned for our boys before I'm through tormenting them!**

## Unchained Melody by Xanthe

### Author's Notes:

Wonderful pic courtesy of [CDavis99@prodigy.net](mailto:CDavis99@prodigy.net)

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Posted 15th March, 2000.

### Author's Notes:

**Warning:** There's a **really** explicit BDSM sex scene in this one. I took expert advice on one of the activities depicted here, and was assured that it could be not only pleasurable, but totally mindblowing. However, if the really heavy stuff squicks you, don't read the Playroom scene!

Many thanks to Mulder for his wonderful help. You're a total star, buddy!

Many thanks to Emma, who told me a very intriguing tale that sparked this story off, and for the long discussions over high calorie snacks.

Thanks of course, to CDavis, as usual, for the especially inspirational stream of Sk/M pics, as well as all the others ;) and also to Gaby, for the great pic at the end, and the little story nuggets.

Quotation courtesy of my sweet Alex. None of this is beta'd. It's far too much fun to take seriously.

**24/7** is an erotic fantasy and NOT a BDSM resource guide. The truth is sometimes exaggerated, or played with, for dramatic effect. For more information, please visit the **24/7 BDSM Glossary**.

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*"A truth, still apparent, though disregarded, that things move violently to their place, but calmly in their place. To put it another way, everything has its right home, the region that suits it, and, unless forcibly restrained, will move thither by a kind of homing instinct."*

**J. Winterson**  
**"Art and Lies"**

Mulder yawned. It was well past midnight, but he was busy in the laundry room ironing his Master's shirts. He glanced over at Wanda, who was curled up fast asleep on top of a laundry basket full of warm clothes.

"Trust Madam to find the comfiest position in the whole apartment," Mulder hissed into her ear. She twitched it back and forth insouciantly, but didn't even bother to open her eyes. Mulder finished up, then straightened his back with a sigh. He knew he should go to bed, but he wanted to study that massage book Clark had given him. He'd been told to learn all the different essential oils and what ailments they could be used to treat. With his eidetic memory, learning wasn't hard. Getting his head around the fact that he was FBI agent, and legend of the paranormal, Fox Mulder, sitting down to learn about some girly oils was the problem factor.

Mulder sighed, and packed away the last of the laundry. Ever since Skinner's big confession a few weeks before, Mulder had thrown himself into his slavery with a sustained gusto that had been lacking before. It wasn't enough for him to be a good, obedient, slave, he had to be the best slave in the whole damn universe in order to repay his Master for the breach of trust between them that had so nearly ruined their relationship. Consequently, Mulder was on a steep learning curve. The laundry, which he'd once surveyed with an appalled dread, had become his main priority in life. He'd even asked Scully her opinion on various kinds of detergents and their effect on cotton shirts. She'd just sighed, rolled her eyes, and put the back of her hand against his forehead to check that he didn't have a fever.

With his Master's permission he'd started taking classes in cooking, and his massage technique had improved enormously. He'd also taken heaped armfuls of books from Skinner's study, and piled them up on his nightstand to immerse himself in the finer points of his condition. He'd found *Story of O* strangely arousing, although it had taken all his willpower not to skip the tedious bits and jump straight to the erotic parts. He was secretly of the opinion that Jacqueline was a closet domme, while Rene was clearly a sub who should have been kneeling at Sir Stephen's feet as that was obviously where he belonged. Mulder re-wrote that part of the novel in his head to fit his own situation as he couldn't read about the sexy Sir Stephen without grafting his own Master's image onto the character. He found *Venus in Furs* hard going, but at least he was able to talk about it intelligently to his Master, which seemed to please the other man. Mulder thought Severin was a certifiable idiot, but he kept that opinion to himself. The Marquis De Sade made him giggle, when he didn't want to throw up, leaving Mulder with the opinion that the erotic classics weren't nearly as much fun as the real thing. He only had to think of his Master and he got a hard-on these days - a fact which seemed to gratify Skinner. The big man had always said he'd train his slave to respond to his tone of voice, to the merest glance, or the slightest touch, and Mulder thought his Master was well on the way to accomplishing that goal.

Mulder rolled his shoulders wearily. Being the best slave in the whole universe was a constant strain. He couldn't bear giving it less than his all though, even if, perversely, that meant disobeying his Master. Skinner had sent him up to bed at 9.30, and Mulder had crept downstairs again to finish the ironing at half past eleven, after Skinner had retired to his own bedroom. Mulder hung up the last shirt, and then glanced around with a sigh. His own laundry still had to be done. In the past, he'd sent it out, but now he didn't have control of his own finances he couldn't do that any more. Still, keeping his Master in pristine condition was what mattered. His own clothes could wait. Mulder plucked the dozing Wanda from her warm nest, and turned the light off in the laundry room. He tiptoed up the stairs, dropped the cat off

outside Skinner's open bedroom door, and then set off up to his own room where he fell down onto the bed with a deep sigh of exhaustion. It was nearly 2 am. He had to be up again in a few hours. Mulder fell asleep in the very act of reaching out to pick up his book on essential oils.

Mulder dragged himself wearily down to the pool when his alarm clock went a few hours later, dutifully completed his laps, then returned to the apartment to make his Master his coffee. He brightened as he neared the bedroom. He loved performing his wake up call. He placed the coffee on the nightstand, shrugged off his sweats, and disappeared under the covers.

Skinner smelt divine as always. Mulder thought he could get drunk on the scent of his Master. There was something earthy yet sweet about it. He located his Master's drowsing cock, and contemplated it in the dark for a moment. It was broad, like Skinner himself, slightly curled over the heavy ball sacs, surrounded by dark, wiry tufts of hair. Mulder pressed his nose against his Master's cock, and kissed it gently, then licked a long swathe along the entire length of the shaft. The cock jumped, welcoming Mulder's attention, and he grinned to himself. If he was becoming responsive to his Master's touch, then it was clear that Skinner wasn't immune to his slave's charms either. Mulder took the hardening shaft whole into his mouth, and sucked down hard on it. The cock became instantly hard, and he heard Skinner make those little sounds in his throat that meant that his slave had his Master's full attention. With a happy gurgle, Mulder set about his task in earnest. Surprisingly, he never tired of serving Skinner in this way. It didn't make any difference that he performed this same act every single morning. He still enjoyed it each and every time.

A few minutes later he emerged, licking his lips.

"Good morning, Master," he said politely, then he quickly slid out from under the covers, and knelt beside the bed, eyes down, in the perfect submissive position, awaiting further orders. He sensed Skinner's gaze on him, but didn't look up. A few seconds later, there was a deep sigh, and a hand landed on his head, and tousled his hair.

"Look at me, boy," Skinner commanded. Mulder did as he was told, and looked up into a pair of amused dark eyes. "What am I going to do with you?" Skinner asked.

Mulder frowned. "I'm sorry, Master. Have I done something wrong?" He asked anxiously.

"No. In fact you've behaved perfectly for over a month. That's the problem," Skinner said, taking a sip of his coffee.

"It's a problem?" Mulder's heart beat anxiously in his chest. He didn't want to be a problem. He wanted to be perfect.

"Sweetheart, I want **you** back. My Fox. Not robo-slave!" Skinner exclaimed. "Don't get me wrong - I love the way you're throwing yourself into your servitude, but you aren't doing it because you want to please me, or even because you enjoy it - are you?"

"Yes I am!" Mulder protested indignantly. Skinner raised an eyebrow, his dark eyes glinting dangerously. Mulder bit down on his lip. "I don't know, Master," he admitted with a sigh.

Skinner's expression softened. "Come here, little one."

He patted the space on the bed beside him and Mulder didn't need any further urging. Like Wanda, being curled up anywhere in Skinner's immediate vicinity was his main goal in life. If his Master also deigned to pet his slave, then he was instantly transported to heaven. On this occasion he was in luck. Skinner settled his slave down so that he was lying on his back, his body in his Master's arms, his head angled sideways on Skinner's naked, furry chest, gazing upside down into Skinner's eyes.

"You look tired," Skinner frowned, stroking down the side of Mulder's face. "Have you been sleeping all right? You haven't chained yourself down here for awhile."

"I've been sleeping fine. I go out like a light as soon as my head hits the pillow," Mulder said, mentally crossing his fingers. That was the truth, although he was sure his Master wouldn't interpret it that way if he knew what his slave had been doing behind his back.

"Hmm." Skinner played with one of Mulder's nipples idly. Mulder flinched as his Master pulled on one of his rings, then relaxed as he realized it didn't hurt any more.

"They're all healed up, boy," Skinner laughed. "In fact, I think it's time we did some heavier play with these."

"Master?" Mulder croaked weakly, wondering what Skinner meant by 'heavier' play.

"You'll see." Skinner tugged down hard and Mulder gasped. It was a delicious sensation - painful but sending sparks of pleasure down his nerve endings at the same time. His cock went into a spasm of hopefulness in response. "Down boy!" Skinner laughed, slapping it. "Fox, I'm not saying you're doing anything wrong. I just want you to lighten up. You're too eager, not relaxed in your servitude. What I want is for you to lose yourself in your condition, to find serenity in it, not throw yourself at it and run around frenetically trying to perform all your duties at once. No wonder you're looking tired. You'll burn out if you carry on like this."

"I want to please you, Master," Mulder muttered, feeling faintly resentful.

"Maybe you do. And maybe it's also true that you can't stand to be anything less than the best at whatever you put your mind to," Skinner said gently. "Let's face it, Fox, you've always been an over-achiever."

"Yeah, like in my career," Mulder said pointedly, making a face.

Skinner laughed. "Don't confuse progressing up the greasy pole, with over-achieving, slave," he admonished. "You may not be on the fast track to making Assistant Director by the time you're forty, but you do conspicuously over-achieve on the X Files. You have an excellent solve rate, and you always give 150% of yourself to whatever you've made a mental commitment to. I bet you got straight 'A's every time at school," he added. Mulder flushed, and shrugged. "Who were you trying to impress?" Skinner asked.

"It wasn't that. I wasn't trying to impress anyone," Mulder said sullenly, plucking at the sheet with his fingertips.

"Then what?" Skinner's hands found Mulder's wrists, and stilled his restless, questing fingers. Mulder knew that he wasn't going to get out of this one without providing his Master with some answers. He knew that his Master intended his slave to make a similar personal journey to that which the big man had gone through with Andrew Linker - and he wasn't going to let him wimp out.

"It wasn't about impressing. It was about...not disappointing. I hate being a disappointment. Letting people down," Mulder shrugged. "People I care about at least. The rest can swing for all I care, but the ones who matter..." He sighed.

"You can't always be perfect. Everybody makes mistakes. The people who genuinely love you will forgive you," Skinner said.

Mulder stiffened. Skinner's hands rubbed encouraging warmth up and down his arms, loosening him up again. "Well then, I guess my folks didn't genuinely love me then," Mulder said softly, "because they sure as hell didn't ever forgive me."

"For Samantha?" Skinner asked intently.

"That was the biggie, yeah. There were other things though." Mulder shrugged. "For going to Oxford - would you believe my Father was pissed off about that because he wanted me to go to Harvard which was **his** old school. For going into the FBI - you'd have thought I'd put a knife into his heart when I told him about **that** career move. The disapproval used to hang in the air between us. It was so heavy I felt like it was suffocating me sometimes. There was no forgiveness, Wal...Master. Not from him. Not from Mom. She didn't care so much about Oxford or the FBI stuff - she just used to care that I couldn't find Samantha. No matter how hard I tried, I never brought Samantha back home to her. The one time Samantha came back, or that clone Samantha...I lost her again. I couldn't even let my mom have that much."

"And it was easier on you, and, you thought, kinder to them, to just leave it behind, than to stay and try and fight the disapproval," Skinner whispered into his ear.

"Whatever." Mulder shrugged, having had enough of a heart to heart for one session. He didn't like examining himself like this. It broke into his otherwise cheerful mood.

"Well, I don't need you to be perfect - I'd like you to be happy, healthy, and at one with your slavery."

"I am!" Mulder protested, his tone angry. "Jeez, what the hell else do I have to do to show you I'm trying?"

"Stop trying so hard?" Skinner suggested mildly. "I can see this is a sensitive issue for you, boy, but that doesn't give you the right to mouth off at me. Go and get your case, and let's take you back down to basics shall we?"

"Now?" Mulder glanced at the clock on the nightstand. "We do have to work today, Master."

"That's right - so you'd better get a move on, slave," Skinner said, pushing him off the bed and administering a firm swat to his butt as he went.

Mulder got his case out of the closet, his mood lifting as he entered the serenity of subspace. He loved this place in his head, however painful it was reaching it. Skinner knew exactly how to get him there as well. He placed the case reverentially on the bed, and knelt submissively at Skinner's side. His Master's fingers touched the cane, and Mulder took a deep intake of breath. The cane was his least favorite implement. It damn well hurt. Skinner's fingers skimmed the paddle, and Mulder relaxed. He liked this paddle. It was flat, and the pain was deep and warm, unlike the strap, which stung. Mulder didn't like the sharp pain of the strap as much. Skinner's fingers tiptoed between the paddle and the strap for a moment, as he pondered the matter. Then he glanced down at his slave.

"Well, boy. Which would you prefer?" He asked.

"Paddle, Master," Mulder said immediately. Skinner laughed out loud. "That means you're going to use the strap doesn't it?" Mulder said with a sigh.

"No. I'm not," Skinner tousled his slave's hair affectionately. "The paddle will do just fine."

He patted his knees, and Mulder grabbed a couple of pillows and got into position. Skinner fondled his ass for several long minutes, then, without warning, brought the paddle down with a sharp crack. Mulder gave a surprised screech. Usually his Master warmed him up with some gentle taps from his hand, but not this time. The paddle landed with another resounding thwack, and Mulder took a deep intake of breath. His Master then proceeded to warm his slave's bottom in earnest. Mulder started wriggling, only for his wrists to be grasped in one large hand that also clamped down hard on the small of his back, pinning him to the pillows so hard that he could feel his Master's knees through them. It was at that moment, that the tension inside broke, and he gave himself over to his Master's will. Skinner's paddle efficiently brought the back of his slave's thighs, and both his buttocks to the same red hue, then he paused.

"Who do you belong to, boy?" He asked. Mulder considered his position, lying butt naked and immobile over the lap of a man wielding a paddle; it was all too plain who he belonged to.

"You, Master," he said softly. "I am your slave, your plaything. I am yours to punish for my insolence, lack of respect, and general attitude. Please forgive me, Master."

"You're forgiven." Skinner delivered another few swats, making his slave cry out with each hard stroke, then he laid the paddle to one side, pulled the younger man up against his chest, and held him tight, soothing him. His lips found Mulder's, and kissed him deeply and Mulder gave a sigh of contentment, allowing the warmth of his Master's embrace to engulf him.

"Thank you, Master," he whispered, looking up.

"You're welcome, pup." Skinner took his slave's face in both his hands. "Those big puppy-dog eyes will be the death of me," he snorted, shaking his head ruefully. "Go and take a shower and get to work, slave. We neither of us have time to linger." He slapped his slave's glowing red bottom to punctuate this point. Mulder grinned, and scrambled hastily off the bed, then paused.

"I'd like to dress Master, if I may?" He asked tentatively. Skinner looked up, surprised.

"Please," Mulder said respectfully.

Skinner's eyes narrowed, and he took hold of Mulder's chin and looked at his slave thoughtfully.

"I want to. It's not trying to be perfect...it's just because...oh damn it, I just enjoy it!" Mulder snapped, grinning.

"Andrew was right about you." Skinner shook his head as if stunned. "I never would have guessed that willful, hot-headed Agent Mulder could lose himself so completely in servitude - and find himself so completely there as well," he murmured.

"Hell, I'm surprised myself!" Mulder responded. "Well, Master? Can I?" He pressed eagerly.

"Why not? Be quick though, boy. I have a meeting at 8 am and we're running late. I'll take a shower while you choose my clothing. I'll trust you!" Skinner walked towards the bathroom, then paused, and glanced back. "You do know that leather pants and a suede waistcoat are NOT office attire, right?"

Mulder grinned, and made a face, and Skinner laughed out loud and disappeared into the bathroom.

Mulder retrieved some of his Master's exquisitely laundered clothes from his closet. He chose a pale blue shirt, just for a change, and a tasteful navy tie, gray dress pants, and suit jacket, and a pair of black silk boxers. Skinner raised an eyebrow at the boxer shorts, clearly thinking they were weekend wear, but didn't protest his slave's choice. He stood by the bed, and allowed his slave to dry him, and then Mulder slid the silk shorts up his Master's long, tanned legs, and over his penis, taking some time to make sure his Master's cock and balls were comfortably arranged within the underwear. He picked up a shirt, and held it out for Skinner to walk into, then smoothed it over his Master's solidly muscled arms and shoulders, before buttoning it. He turned over Skinner's arms, and fastened the sleeves with silver cuff links in the shape of tiny boxing gloves, which he knew had been a gift from Andrew Linker. Then he held out Skinner's dress pants, and helped him into them. He buttoned and zipped him up, before fastening his Master's plain black belt with a little shiver - it was a belt that had been used on his backside more than once, and that gave touching it a certain frisson for Mulder. Finally, he sat Skinner on the side of the bed, and put his Master's socks on, then he eased his Master's feet into a pair of shoes that had been polished to the highest level of shine by the slave's own hand. He kissed each shoe when he had finished, then stepped back and surveyed the ensemble.

"Master looks pretty damn edible," he grinned.

"And slave looks pretty damn naked!" Skinner stressed, swatting his slave's butt. "Go get dressed and get to work, boy. Your boss is as much a stickler for promptness as your Master."

"Yes, sir!" Mulder gave a mock salute, then jumped out of the way of the inevitable swat that was aimed in the direction of his prettily glowing butt cheeks.

Mulder scrambled up the stairs and shouldered himself into his own clothing in a hurry. He grabbed his keys and cell phone, then paused to glance under the bed where Wanda had recently taken to hiding in an attempt to be imprisoned all day with the fish-tank, which was her second main object of desire in the world after Skinner. Sure enough, she was there. Mulder hauled the recalcitrant golden furred cat from under the bed, and glanced around to make sure that Skinner wasn't in the immediate vicinity, then dropped a kiss on her head.

"It'll never happen, lady," he told her, depositing her outside the bedroom door. Her loftily swinging tail assured him that one day it most certainly **would** happen, and all she had to do was bide her time. He closed his bedroom door, and raced out of the apartment, mindful of his Master's warning about not being late.

Mulder sat cautiously at his desk. Scully had taken a few days vacation time, and, while normally he enjoyed his own company, for some reason this time he felt lonely. The basement walls were starting to close in on him, and he could frequently go for a whole day without seeing anyone. More than that, there was a note at the bottom of his in-tray that he kept avoiding. With Scully to distract him, it had been easy but now that she was gone... Finally, unable to resist, he picked it up, and opened it. It was from Holly in Communications and had been in his tray for weeks. After what happened with Skinner, he hadn't even been able to trust himself to open it, let alone act on the contents. Mulder took a deep breath, and read it. It wasn't very informative. It was simply an address. Mulder bit on his lip, and resisted logging on to the FBI database to check it out with all his willpower. He got out some old X Files, and re-examined them, tried to lose himself in the study, but his eyes kept going back to the note. Finally, to stop himself going crazy, he picked up the 'phone and called Kim to make an appointment to see Skinner.

His Master's shoes had been scuffed on his journey in, Mulder thought with a frown a couple of hours later, mentally polishing them back up to full shine again. His own performance as a slave was reflected in his Master's appearance after all.

"Agent Mulder?" Skinner looked at him questioningly, trying to wrest his subordinate's attention away from his footwear.

"What? Oh, yeah." Mulder sat down. He noticed as he did so that Skinner had the tiniest smudge of ink on the sleeve of his shirt, and mentally made a note to look up the best way of getting ink stains out of cotton.

Skinner frowned. "Agent Mulder?" He said again. "I'm sure you have a reason for calling this meeting. A very **good** reason," he added, dangerously.

"Yes." Mulder bit on his lip, and fingered the slip of paper in his pocket.

"Well?" Skinner's expression softened as he surveyed his slave.

"I've got some news," Mulder muttered faintly.

"Good. So have I," Skinner wrong-footed him, and Mulder looked up, startled. "The results of those tests we took?" Skinner handed Mulder a letter. "I was going to tell you this evening, but seeing as you're here..."

"They're clear?" Mulder unfolded the letter.

"Of course," Skinner grinned. "So you are absolved of condom duty from here on in, slave," he murmured in a low growl.

Mulder's cock did a flip, and he looked up with a grin. "When...?" He began.

"I believe we have a Slave's Day in a few days time," Skinner said, a broad smile creasing his blunt features. Mulder's own smile nearly split his face in two.

"You're going to go bareback?" Mulder tingled at the thought of Skinner coming inside his body, and his cock hardened even more.

"That's right. Are you going to come in your pants right this second?" Skinner asked slyly, rightly guessing his slave's reaction to this news.

"Not without permission, sir!" Mulder answered, and his Master laughed out loud.

"Permission denied, boy," Skinner grinned.

"Do we have to wait until Saturday?" Mulder wheedled. "I mean, what's wrong with a weekday?" Skinner frequently used him during the week, so there was no reason that Mulder could see to wait.

"I want to make it a memorable occasion," Skinner told him, "and besides, the anticipation..."

"...is half the pleasure. Yes, I know, Master." Mulder made a face. "Although I should point out that as I'm always the one doing the anticipating that's easy for **you** to say."

"Poor slave, it's a hard life," his Master smirked, without any sympathy whatsoever. "Now, what is it you wanted to discuss?" Skinner said, his tone becoming brisk and business-like.

"This." Mulder took the note out of his pocket, and handed it nervously to his Master who read it, then glanced up questioningly.

"It's an address in Seattle. Explain," he ordered.

"It's the address where that 'phone number was registered. The one I found in California." Mulder glanced at his hands, then back up at his Master, trying to gauge the other man's reaction.

"And what do you want to do about it?" Skinner asked, leaning back in his chair and examining his slave's face intently.

Mulder was surprised. He wasn't sure what reaction he'd expected, but it sure as hell hadn't been that. "I'm not sure. I've been sitting on it for a while because...well, I'm just not sure."

"Fox - I'm pleased you came to me with this instead of just setting off for Seattle. That's real progress, sweetheart. I'm proud of you," Skinner said softly. Mulder felt a glow of pleasure start somewhere in his stomach and creep up to his face, making him flush slightly.

"Question is - what do I do now?" He asked.

"I can advise you, but the decision is yours. You know the consequences of poor decisions," Skinner shrugged.

"Yeah," Mulder winced theatrically, and Skinner shook his head ruefully.

"All right - my advice is to leave it. Krycek's got you following a trail, and he knows it. He's toying with you, Fox, like a cat with a mouse. Like Wanda with those fish of yours, watching which way you'll jump. What you need to ask yourself is not 'what's in Seattle?', but 'why does Krycek want me to go there?' What purpose of his does it serve?"

"I don't know the answer to that question," Mulder shrugged.

"No, and it may be that the only way to get that answer is to play his game and go there - but first, you can try figuring out what he's up to. It's harder than just running off like a dog chasing his own tail. Pup," Skinner added, to push the point home.

Mulder grimaced. "You're right. If I did decide to go to Seattle..." he began, looking at his Master keenly.

"Tell me. I'll come with you," Skinner replied. "Just don't run off alone and get yourself dragged into something dangerous."

"No." Mulder remembered the many occasions when he'd done just that. It felt strange to share the burden - strange, but nice. "Thank you," he said surprising himself, and his Master.

"No problem," Skinner shrugged. "A word of warning though - if I tell you to stop, at any point, you obey me, Fox. I've told you before, your quest is mine, and I won't ask you to give it up, but if I judge that a particular course of action is too dangerous, I'll expect your instant, unquestioning obedience."

"All right," Mulder said, uncertainly.

"I mean it," Skinner frowned. "You're too close to this to be objective, Fox. You get caught up in the details, and forget the big picture. It might be that together, we can crack this thing. Alone...well, I have no intention of losing the services of my slave, so you're no longer allowed to go off risking your life at the drop of a hat. Fox?" Skinner's tone was dangerous. Mulder continued looking at his shoes, knowing his Master wanted him to look up. "Fox?" Skinner's tone was firm.

Mulder finally looked up with a sigh. "Yes, Master," he said wearily. "Y'know, being a slave is the hardest thing I've ever done," he muttered. "Harder than my exams at Oxford, harder than being the FBI's most unwanted...harder than any of it."

Skinner nodded. "I know, little one," he said softly. "And the rewards?" he asked.

Mulder gave another heartfelt sigh. "You know those make it worthwhile, Master. Bastard," he added. "Yes, I know, you'll punish me for that comment," he grinned.

"Always," Skinner agreed. "Come here." He got up, and Mulder did as instructed, expecting to receive swift justice. Instead Skinner tilted his chin, and kissed him firmly on the lips, a sweet, almost chaste, and completely loving kiss. His Master's hands gently roved over his slave's butt, and up and down his back, as he tenderly embraced his property. "I love you, slave," Skinner said sincerely, "and I'll keep you safe, come what may. Now..." He took a step back and surveyed Mulder with a critical eye. "I know I haven't done an inspection for a while, and I can see that was a mistake. Your grooming is most definitely not what it should be. Your suit is rumpled, and your shirt looks distinctly lived in. What's your explanation?"

"I thought...that is...I didn't have time to see to it, Master. I wanted to make sure that **you** were attended to, and..."

"Fox." Skinner put a finger over his slave's mouth. "Your own appearance and grooming reflect upon me. I wouldn't want anybody to think that that you have less self-respect since becoming my slave, and taking pride in your appearance is part of having a healthy self-esteem. My task, as your Master, is to make you happy and accepting of your condition. I do not want a slave who thinks his own comfort and appearance are less important because of his status. They aren't. Apart from anything else, it's an essential part of your duty to keep yourself groomed for my pleasure, so that I have something good to look at."

"Oh." Mulder scuffed his shoe on the floor. "I didn't think of that."

"No." Skinner put his head on one side and regarded his slave steadily. "Fox, we've had several ups and downs already and I just cure you of one set of misconceptions when another set rears its head. Now, listen to me. If you're having trouble with time-keeping, and getting everything done, talk to me about it. You can raise any issue with me, so long as it is done respectfully. From now on, we will address these kinds of matters in your evening confessional. You will be honest with me, slave," he said firmly.

"You think I can't perform all my duties," Mulder accused, feeling frustrated and resentful, both with himself and his Master. Damn it! He wanted to be good. He wanted to be the best. He wanted Skinner to forget about every other sub he'd so much as looked at. He wanted...too much. He knew that. He couldn't help himself though.

"No, I think you're trying to perform too many at the same time," Skinner corrected him. He pulled his slave to his chest for another sweet, chaste kiss, and Mulder melted, despite himself. "Now, back to work." Skinner released him, and slapped his butt. "We'll talk about this again this evening."

They didn't. Mulder was called away on a case, and when he got home it was almost midnight. Skinner left him a note, telling him not to perform his swim or wake up call the following morning, as he needed the extra sleep. Mulder sighed. He wanted nothing more than to fall into bed but there were so many chores he had to do. After Skinner's lecture earlier, he wanted to prove to his Master that he was efficient and organized. He could hardly go into work a second day looking a crumpled mess either, and he had no freshly laundered clothes to wear.

Mulder tiptoed down the stairs, pausing outside his Master's bedroom, and glanced inside. Skinner was sprawled out, fast asleep, so Mulder continued downstairs to the laundry room. He rolled his neck, feeling stiff, and knowing that he was building up a considerable sleep debt, but he couldn't help himself. He hated the thought of disappointing any of the people he loved. It always seemed to happen, and nothing he did ever seemed to stop it, which had been one of the reasons why he hated getting involved with anyone. Not this time though. Skinner wouldn't have any reason to find fault with him the way he had today. His slave would be impeccably dressed and groomed from now on, not a hair out of place if it killed him. Mulder set his lips into a determined line. When he put his mind to something he was completely focused, and utterly driven. Skinner was going to get the best damn slave in the whole universe whether he wanted it or not.

He was so busy working his way through a pile of his own shirts, swaying with weariness as he went, that he didn't notice the dark shadow fall across the door. The first sign of his Master's presence came when a dangerous, silky voice cut into his reverie of perfection - making him jump.

"What, exactly, do you think you're doing?" Skinner asked.

Mulder looked up, startled out of his skin. His Master was standing in the doorway clad only in a silk robe. His arms were on his hips and he looked...mad.

"Sorry, Master. I just wanted to get these finished...and..." Mulder trailed off, trying desperately to find a reason for being here that wouldn't get him into trouble. "I couldn't sleep," he said hopefully. "I thought this would help...you know, I mean, it's so boring..." He trailed off again. Skinner wasn't buying that one.

"You know that when you can't sleep you have standing orders to chain yourself to my bed. That's always worked before," Skinner said, in that same, silky, dangerous tone of voice. Mulder started to feel distinctly nervous.

"Yes...I know...but...I thought..." he blustered.

Skinner crossed the room in two strides, and Mulder faltered, and stepped back, genuinely afraid. Skinner had been a good Master, but the other man had always been very fussy about his orders being followed, and Mulder wasn't sure just how angry he was.

"Oh for fuck's sake!" Mulder exploded, his common reaction to threat being to fight back, all guns blazing. "I'm a grown fucking man. I can decide whether to do some fucking **ironing** or not!"

"Yes, you're a grown man - but you're also my slave, and you knew what that meant when you signed your contract," Skinner said curtly, stopping in front of his slave, and looking at him searchingly.

Mulder tried to avoid those dark eyes, and failed. All the tension left his body as he looked wearily at his Master, and saw concern mingled with the displeasure.

"I'm sorry. I just wanted to get this done," he said with a sigh. "I guess you're right about me being over-zealous. I don't want to screw up."

"Which is exactly what you've done, isn't it?" Skinner pressed.

Mulder gave a self-deprecating laugh. "Yeah. Are you going to...punish me?" He asked, distinctly not in the mood for any kind of hard object to make contact with his butt at this moment in time.

Skinner looked at him thoughtfully. "I should. I probably will - but not now. You look so tired, pup. I have no intention of adding a sore butt to your reasons for not being able to sleep. Now, as you know, I don't reward bad behavior, but I do want you where I can keep an eye on you. I'm also concerned about you. Go up to my bed and wait for me there. When I do punish you, I want you to remember how good the rewards are as well," he said.

"Your bed, Master?" Mulder felt a weary elation. "Thank you." He dropped to his knees, and pressed his lips against Skinner's bare feet, then fled.

Skinner joined him a few minutes later, slid down in the bed beside his slave, and pulled him close. Mulder wondered if his Master intended to use him, but Skinner just held him, caressing his slave's body gently, and a few minutes later, Mulder fell fast asleep, with a smile on his face.

They were rudely awakened a couple of hours later by several loud knocks on the door. Mulder sat up, disorientated, and fumbled for his gun on the nightstand - which wasn't there because he wasn't in his own room. Beside him, Skinner was opening his eyes blearily, a surprised look on his face. His Master was not one of the world's most easily roused sleepers, as Mulder knew, and the slave was out of the bed, and halfway to the door before he realized he was naked. He grabbed Skinner's robe, reached for his Master's gun, and ran down the stairs. The urgent knocking continued apace, and Mulder was suddenly very concerned for his Master's safety. Who the hell could be knocking on the door at this time of night, and why did they want Skinner?

"Who is it?" He yelled, placing a hand on the door, cautiously, the gun raised.

"Mulder, it's me. Ian," a shaky voice on the other side of the door replied.

Mulder frowned, recognizing the voice, and began opening the door. He heard Skinner trotting down the stairs behind him, and half-turned, mouthing, "it's Ian." Skinner was dressed in sweat pants, and nothing else, and he frowned at his slave in annoyance.

"Fox!" He hissed.

Mulder bit on his lip, suddenly aware that he'd not only stolen his Master's robe and gun, but he'd also answered his Master's door, which was definitely against the rules. This was Skinner's apartment - they shared the 18th floor one, but this one was Skinner's. If their visitor had been someone from the FBI...Mulder felt a cold sweat rise on his body, but they didn't have time to address the issue, as Ian walked, hesitantly, into the room. His demeanor was at odds with his urgent knocking. He was shaking, and running his hands up and down over his own arms.

"I'm sorry. I'm sorry..." he kept saying. "I shouldn't have come here. I didn't know where to go...I'll go." He tried to turn, but Skinner got in his way, blocking his exit. He motioned with his head to Mulder to shut the door, and gently laid his hand on Ian's arm. The other man jumped as if he'd been stung, and Skinner withdrew the hand again, exchanging an anxious glance with Mulder.

"Ian, it's Walter Skinner. You're safe here," Skinner said urgently, ushering their unexpected guest over to the couch.

"Yes...I know. Sorry," Ian said again, sitting down cautiously on the couch. Mulder exchanged another puzzled glance with Skinner.

"Ian, what's wrong? Was it Fox you wanted to see, or me?" Skinner asked gently. "How can we help you, Ian? Just tell us."

"I...it's nothing. I've been stupid that's all. It was my own fault," Ian shrugged, then shivered again.

"Are you in pain?" Mulder asked, coming to sit down beside the other man.

Ian shook his head vehemently. "I'm fine. Really. Let me just get my breath back. You must wonder what the hell I'm doing here, crashing in on you like this in the middle of the night. Damn! I've been so stupid. I'll go..." He got up, and this time Skinner was more forceful.

"Sit down, Ian," he said firmly, in his most authoritative tone. "You're not going anywhere."

Ian looked at the other man for a moment, then nodded, his bravado fading. "Sorry," he whispered again.

"Fox - go and get Ian something hot and sweet - hot chocolate I think," Skinner said, looking at Ian intently. Mulder nodded and disappeared into the kitchen. When he returned, Ian was sitting on the couch again, and Skinner was seated in the armchair, neither of them talking. Ian's head was dropped between his knees, and he was looking at his feet - Skinner was just looking at Ian, waiting.

"Ian - here." Mulder handed the other man the drink. Ian took it, gratefully, and sipped it. A few seconds later, the color started returning to his cheeks, and he looked more relaxed.

"I've been an idiot," he whispered, squinting up at Skinner from under his eyelashes as if he feared what the other man would say.

"Go on," Skinner said, his gaze never leaving Ian's face.

"A damn, stupid, idiot!" Ian swore. "I played with someone tonight."

"What's wrong with that?" Skinner asked.

"Nothing. I suppose. I...it wasn't a casual thing." He glanced at both Mulder and Skinner, clearly wanting to stress that fact. "I'd met him at a few scene parties. We'd talked. We'd negotiated, been out for a drink, discussed limits, safe words. I hadn't heard anything bad about him..." He trailed off.

"What happened, Ian?" Mulder asked gently, his experience with dealing with traumatized victims of crime kicking in.

"He wasn't what he said. He's a sadist..." Ian gave a hollow laugh. "Yeah, I know, but this guy really **was**. Not a player, just a sadist. It started okay - he's good looking, and boy, he was hot. He made me feel...high. I don't play much. I thought I was lucky to find such a good-looking dom, someone who seemed to understand what I want...I suppose I got my hopes up that he might be..." Ian trailed off again, and took another deep gulp of his drink. "It was a façade. He got deeper and deeper into the scene. He wasn't just turned on by my pain - he liked hearing me scream. Really liked it. There was a look in his eye I've never seen in a top before. Like...he was out of his head on some drug, and the drug was me - or, more correctly, my suffering...He..." He stopped again, taking a deep breath to calm himself, and Mulder leaned forward.

"Go on, Ian," he urged gently.

"I yelled out my safe word but he ignored it. He just ignored me..." Ian started to shiver, and Mulder pulled the comforter off the back of the couch, and folded it around the other man. "Looking back, he didn't do anything too bad, but I think that's only because I managed to get through to him. When I was

fighting him - he liked that. I went limp, talked in a reasonable tone of voice...and that finally got through to him. He liked the struggle."

"Ian, what did he do to you?" Mulder asked, his tone firm, but kind.

He went further than I wanted, but he didn't actually hurt me," Ian shivered, avoiding the question.

"Are you sure?" Skinner asked, looking at Ian keenly. "Do you need a doctor, Ian?"

"No. God no," Ian shook his head. "I was just scared, more than hurt. Afterwards, when he'd freed me, he just kept saying, 'you needed that, you needed to extend your limits, boy. I showed you how. I took you there, boy. You should be grateful...'" Ian shuddered again. "Oh god...I think I'm going to throw up," he said apologetically. Mulder got to his feet, and grabbed Ian's arm, guiding him to the bathroom just in time. Mulder left him to it and returned to the living room.

"What's going to happen?" He asked Skinner anxiously, seriously freaked out by what they had just witnessed.

"I think, that it's time the Guardian of the House called a meeting," Skinner said thoughtfully.

"You're going to chuck this guy off the scene?" Mulder asked.

Skinner shook his head. "No, I'm going to speak to the others, and call this man in for a friendly chat. If that doesn't work, I'll put the word around that he's dangerous and not to be played with. Oh, I expect he'll still find partners somewhere, but not with responsible players."

"Poor Ian. Shit, he didn't deserve that," Mulder said bitterly.

"No. I think we need to find out a little bit more though," Skinner said grimly.

At that moment Ian returned. Mulder got him a glass of water, and the other man took it gratefully.

"I feel a lot better now. I have a nervous stomach," he said with a wry laugh. "Look, I'm sorry that I barged in on you both like this."

"Stop apologizing, Ian. We're your friends," Skinner said firmly. "You'll stay here tonight, in the spare room. Now, are you sure you weren't injured?"

"No. Not...A little discomfort," Ian admitted. "Not much worse than a normal scene though, just...without the high," he said ruefully.

Skinner nodded. "Who was it?" He asked.

Ian hesitated. "I don't want to cause any trouble. I mean, I'm not pressing charges or anything," he said anxiously, the realization visibly sinking in that he was talking to two FBI agents.

"You should," Mulder cut in vehemently. "Hell, this guy shouldn't be allowed to get away with..."

"Quiet, Fox," Skinner hissed. "Ian, I understand," he said softly.

"Well I sure as hell don't!" Mulder fumed. "Ian, this guy might try and do this again with some other poor sucker."

"Fox," Skinner said in a low tone that brooked no further disobedience. Mulder bit down on his lip angrily.

"Mulder - I know what you're saying," Ian shrugged, "but look at the facts. Walter understands. I'm a gay guy, who gets off on being whipped and humiliated. The courts don't give a crap about safe words, and the code of consensuality on the scene. All they'll see when they look at me is a pervert who got what he deserved. I wouldn't be able to prove a thing against this guy. My past, and my preferences, mitigate against me."

Mulder opened his mouth, then closed it again with a sigh. Ian was right - that didn't make the situation right, and his crusading side still wanted to press ahead to see that justice was done but he knew Ian was right all the same. Trust Skinner to demonstrate the pragmatic approach that he'd always adopted over the years - and which had often caused the Master and his more idealistic slave to be at loggerheads with each other professionally.

"Fox, trust me, a bad name on the scene will be punishment enough for this guy," Skinner said. "Who was he, Ian?" He asked again.

"I...I'd rather not say," Ian whispered.

Skinner looked at him for a moment, frowning, then nodded. "You need to get some rest. This wasn't your fault, Ian, know that much," he said firmly.

Ian nodded. "I just feel a bit stupid. If only I'd..."

"Ian!" Skinner interrupted forcefully. "This wasn't your fault. Understand me?" Ian looked up with an expression of awe on his face.

"Yes, sir," he murmured.

"Good. Fox, show him to the spare room, and see that he knows where everything is. Ian - you're our guest. We'll talk about this again tomorrow."

"Yes, sir." Ian nodded gratefully.

Mulder showed the other man to the spare room and checked again that he was okay. Ian smiled and took a deep breath.

"I'll be fine. Thanks, Mulder - and thank Walter for me. He's...something else," he gave a little wink and Mulder laughed.

"Oh yeah. He's that all right. You're sure that you're okay?"

"Fine. Much better for being here and talking it out. Thanks. You've been good friends."

"No problem," Mulder smiled, then went and joined Skinner back in the bedroom.

"What a night," Skinner said ruefully, reaching for his slave. "God, sweetheart, I get so angry." He pulled Mulder close, and held him tight. Mulder went, surprised, as Skinner's fingers gently tangled in his hair, and brushed over his eyelids, nose, and mouth. Skinner was breathing heavily, and his body was full of tension.

"Master?" Mulder asked, uncertainly.

"Do you have any complaints about my treatment of you, Fox?" Skinner asked. "If you have, then tell me. This situation, us..." he drew back abruptly. "It's open to abuse," he said, clenching his fists.

"Because I don't have safe words? You made it clear to me before I signed that I wouldn't have that option. I signed anyway. Shit, when I look back - if the guy who just did that to Ian had been the one who I signed my life over to..." Mulder took a deep breath. "Master, you've never done anything except provide an erotic canvas so broad that I've drowned in it, over and over again." He knelt beside Skinner and rested his head on the other man's knee. "Okay, so some individual parts of it have been painful," he made a face, "but only so that you could skillfully create the whole - and I wouldn't have missed out on that for anything. I'd have walked out, like Ian did, if you'd ever truly done anything against my will. You haven't, and you won't - because you love me. You loved me enough to take the choice away from me at just the point when I was going into self-destruct."

"Thank you, Fox." Skinner stroked his slave's hair, the tension starting to leave his body.

"You know, you haven't really taken me anywhere near my limits," Mulder said thoughtfully. "Sometimes..." He hesitated.

"Go on," Skinner prompted.

"I'd like you to take me down even further. I'd like to test myself - and my limits."

"Edge play," Skinner said bluntly. "Don't you do that enough in your everyday life, boy?" He asked. Mulder made another face. "And isn't this whole situation, the whole slavery contract, edge-play enough?" Skinner demanded. "Why else did you get yourself into it?"

"As usual, Master knows me all too well," Mulder murmured.

Skinner's hand tightened in his hair. "These past few months have been a settling in period, slave," he said in a throaty whisper. "Me getting used to you, and you getting used to me. Now that you're settled, we can increase the tempo."

"Thank you." Mulder nuzzled into Skinner's hand again, wanting another caress. The incident with Ian had shaken him as much as it had shaken his Master. "When I saw what you could take at Elaine's..." he murmured. "I want to see if I could take anything like that."

"Fox," Skinner took hold of his slave's face warningly. "It's not a question of 'taking' anything. It's a question of needs - and you don't need that. I know how your fascination can get out of control - but don't let it happen about this. Just accept that you and I are very different and have different requirements. Hell, that's why you're the slave and I'm the Master, boy!"

"Yeah. Guess so," Mulder grinned. "I'm not sure I agree with you about Ian not reporting this to the police though. If what happened is what I think happened, then Ian could have this guy up on a rape charge,"

"Yes, he could, and then he'd be raped all over again - in court," Skinner replied. "It's his decision, Fox. I'd stand by whatever he chooses to do, but it's his word against this other guy, and with his history of liking rough sex...well, you and I both know how the courts would interpret that."

"I suppose," Mulder muttered unhappily. He turned his head sideways and looked up at his Master, enjoying the serenity of the moment after what had just happened.

"You're looking so tired," Skinner sighed, stroking Mulder's face. "I want you to take tomorrow off - you worked late today, and god knows you deserve a day off with the pace you work at. Spend it with Ian, and make sure he's okay. I want to speak to him when I get home from work tomorrow evening, so make sure he's still here."

"Okay." Mulder nodded, relieved to have the time to see that his friend was all right, and to help him recover from his ordeal.

"Good. Let's get some sleep then," Skinner said. "C'mere." He pulled Mulder close, and gave him a kiss. "I'll never do to you what was done to Ian tonight," he said firmly.

"I know that," Mulder replied, surprised. "I trust you, Master."

"Good." Skinner got into bed, and held up the sheets for his slave to join him. "Good," he repeated, placing a proprietary arm over his slave's body, his fingers roving over Mulder's body as if searching for something, or checking that his slave was undamaged.

"You know, I've been lucky. I never had any bad experiences like Ian did when I was on the scene and I played with a few people. I didn't always take as much care as Ian did either," Mulder admitted, flushing slightly as he remembered how reckless he'd been. How he'd chased from top to top, seeking out something elusive, trying to find a high that he'd glimpsed but never truly experienced. He knew, subconsciously, that Skinner had insisted on his slavery, and taken his safe words away from him in order to create the edge play that he craved - and which he'd seek in his job, and everyday life if his Master didn't provide the risk and thrill here, within their relationship.

"You could call it luck," Skinner mused, a chuckle in his voice. "Or you could put it down to Andrew Linker and Walter Skinner keeping an eye on you."

"What?" Mulder twisted his head and looked up at his Master.

"We scared away a couple of vultures. I thought you had enough problems in your life without attracting the attention of unsafe players. Andrew, on the other hand, was acting from purely selfish motives - he

was keeping you safe for me. He knew I was in love with you, and he wanted us to get together one day."

"Oh." Mulder tried to figure out how he felt about that. The paranoid side of him couldn't believe that they'd been watching him, interfering in his life in that way, but a saner side had to admit that he'd never had any bad experiences when he'd been chasing recklessly around the scene, and he clearly had the two Guardians, past and present, to thank for that. "So me being your slave is a kind of destiny then," he mumbled drowsily.

"Andrew thought so. I bet he's chuckling away to himself right now, wherever he is," Skinner grunted. Mulder felt Skinner's lips press against the back of his neck, and he relaxed. He loved being here, in his Master's bed. It was warm, and safe, but more than that, it was where he belonged. He was asleep within seconds.

Mulder was alone when he woke the next morning. His Master had slipped out without waking him, although he'd left the strap on his pillow with a note attached to it. "Don't think I've forgotten, slave," it read. Followed by: "All my love, your Master," which ruined the stern tone of the note somewhat, and made Mulder laugh. He soon realized that he wasn't entirely alone as Wanda was pressed against his chest, purring loudly, clearly considering that her slave's slave was an adequate substitute for the real thing - at least he was a warm body to nestle against.

"You, are taking liberties, madam," he warned her, peeking under the sheets. She trilled at him, and he sighed, and allowed her to stay, telling himself that it was too much effort to move.

A few minutes later he was startled by a knock at the door, and Ian poked his head around it.

"Hi, Mulder. Sorry to disturb you. I thought you might want breakfast," Ian said, coming in with a tray bearing two cups of coffee, and some croissants. Mulder sat up, and Ian whistled in appreciation as he glimpsed his nipple rings. "I never would have guessed," he teased.

"Don't start," Mulder flushed. "I didn't have any say in the matter. My M...Walter thought it would be a good look for me."

"He was right," Ian laughed, sitting on the edge of the bed and handing Mulder a cup of coffee. "Oh, wow!" He pointed at the slender gold collar Mulder wore. "That's beautiful," he sighed. "I've never seen such a subtle, elegant slave collar before."

"That's my Master. Subtle, and elegant," Mulder grinned, feeling a surge of pride.

"Look, I don't want to hold you up or anything - don't you have to get to work? I heard Walter leave hours ago."

"No, he told me to sleep in. I...well I got into some trouble last night, so I was late getting to bed, and then..."

"Then I showed up," Ian winced. "Sorry."

"Don't start that again." Mulder took a croissant and bit into it. "God, these are good! No wonder Skinner likes being the lord and master - being waited on is nice," he grinned.

"Don't go getting ideas. I'm not in the market to become a slave's sub," Ian grinned back.

"As if **Sir** would let me have one," Mulder replied ruefully. "How are you feeling today?" he asked, looking at Ian carefully. The other man was pale, and appeared tired, but none the worse for wear apart from that.

"Fine. I think I probably over-reacted to the whole thing. If it had been a scene it would have been hot, you know, it's just that he ignored my safe word, and that look in his eyes - for a moment there, I was really scared that he'd kill me, or something. I don't really get off on danger," Ian admitted.

"Why won't you tell Walter who it was?" Mulder asked. "Ian, Walter's the Guardian, he could swing something that would make this guy's life really not worth living."

"I don't want to cause any trouble," Ian said unhappily. "I just won't play with him again. It'll be fine." Mulder wasn't so sure, but Ian was adamant, and he had a quiet, unshakable, stubborn streak that reminded Mulder of his Master, so finally he let the matter drop.

They hung out, visited the Lone Gunmen for lunch, played computer games with Langly all afternoon and got home in time for Skinner's return in the evening. Mulder was curious as to what his Master had to say to his friend, but Skinner sent his slave to the laundry with a malicious glint in his eye. When he was summoned back, a couple of hours later, Ian looked more relaxed than he had all day.

"I was saying to Ian that you and he should go out again sometime soon," Skinner told his slave.

"Yeah - why not," Mulder nodded.

"Saturday night?" Ian suggested.

"Saturday..." Mulder looked at his Master, concerned. Saturday was Slave's Day!

"I'm sure that we'll have time to cover all the things that need doing before the evening," Skinner told him, one corner of his mouth twisting up in a meaningful smile.

Mulder broke into a broad grin, and nodded. "Saturday's fine then!" he said.

"Good." Ian nodded. "Look, thanks again for your hospitality, Walter."

"No problem. You're welcome to stay for a few days if you'd like," Skinner said.

"No. No, I'm a big boy, I'll be fine."

"Call if you change your mind, or you reconsider what we discussed," Skinner said pointedly.

"I will. Thanks." Ian nodded. He got up, shook Mulder's hand, then pulled the agent into a bear hug. "See you on Saturday," he said. Mulder nodded, and watched as Ian shook Skinner's hand. His friend didn't dare repeat the bear hug maneuver **there**, he noticed.

Ian was barely out of the door when Mulder turned to Skinner, and opened his mouth. His Master forestalled him.

"No, I am not telling you what we talked about, it was confidential. No, Ian has not given me the name of the guy who did this to him, and yes, you are still in trouble. Now get undressed, go get the strap, and we'll address last night's little escapade, shall we?"

"We don't have to," Mulder pouted. "It isn't obligatory or anything."

"I'll count to ten. If you're not down here, undressed, and over my knee, with that strap in your mouth by then, you'll get double the punishment," Skinner growled. Mulder didn't hang around to debate the point.

Ten seconds, or near enough, later, he was exactly where his Master had told him to be, and his butt took the brunt of his disobedience the night before. Skinner made it very clear that this was a punishment, not a pleasure, and Mulder wasn't in any doubt on that point by the end. Skinner pushed him off his lap, strode him over to the corner, and left him there while he went to fix them both some dinner. Mulder hated standing "on display". Even though there was nobody but Skinner to see him, it still felt so humiliating. He rested his head against the wall, his butt stinging from the kiss of the strap. It didn't help matters that just being over his Master's knee had given Mulder a raging erection. He was like a dog on heat around Skinner, which was unfortunate given how much Skinner liked denying his slave a climax. Mulder was on the verge of running away and asking Ian for sanctuary, when he felt something cold press against his burning backside.

"Fuck!" He yelped, jumping three feet into the air. He looked over his shoulder to see Skinner rolling a full glass of iced water over his neon red bottom.

"Still," Skinner ordered, rolling the glass back the other way. Mulder moaned again, resting his head on his arms, and leaning against the wall. It felt good and bad at the same time. Skinner finished amusing himself with his slave's butt, and slid his arms around Mulder's waist. "So, what did you learn from that particular lesson?" Skinner asked, his hands going promisingly down towards Mulder's groin, then stopping, tantalizing inches from the desired destination.

"Something about laundry," Mulder muttered, gasping and pushing his butt back against Skinner's body.

"You'll have to do better than that, boy," Skinner said, tweaking a nipple firmly between thumb and forefinger.

"That...I have to do my own laundry during my leisure time, which I don't get any of, incidentally, and not when I'm supposed to be in bed," Mulder snapped, wanting those fingers to go lower. His butt was slapped firmly instead, making him yelp.

"All right, let's get back to basics," Skinner said, taking out an ice cube from the drink, and pressing it down the entire length of Mulder's hot, thrusting shaft. Mulder moaned again, hating his torturer, at the

same time as not wanting the torture ever to end. "Have you ever checked how much money I leave in the housekeeping jar?" Skinner asked.

"What? No," Mulder said, puzzled.

"Enough to pay for dry cleaning," Skinner informed his slave.

"What?" Mulder stiffened, and started to turn around.

"Face the wall!" Skinner slapped his butt again, and Mulder bit down on his lip.

"Are you saying I've been flogging myself to death all this time when I could have **paid** someone to do the laundry?" He asked.

"I sincerely hope that if anyone's been doing any flogging around here it's me," Skinner informed him with a snicker in his voice. Mulder made a face at the wall. "Fox, use your common sense. There's only so much one person can do. If you'd approached me, and asked if you could use the housekeeping money to pay for someone to do some of the laundry, I'd have agreed. I was waiting for it to occur to you."

"Why? Why not just tell me?" Mulder asked from between clenched teeth as Skinner tweaked his nipple, hard, then ran the cold ice cube over the hot nub. "Shit," he squealed. Skinner slapped his butt again, then continued with his work.

"Because this is a two way street. You need to play a part in defining and shaping the nature of your own slavery. Don't assume so much. You always assume that I'll disapprove of everything you want to do, or that I'll forbid you to do it. Last night you said that you trusted me. You could extend that trust beyond the bedroom, you know." One hand continued to play with Mulder's right nipple, while the other ran the ice cube along his shaft again. Mulder moaned, and arched his back. He felt Skinner trail a line of hot kisses down his spine.

"Will you remember to do that in future?" Skinner asked.

"Yes! Oh god, yes," Mulder sighed, as his cock thrust urgently against his Master's hand.

"Would you, in fact, agree to anything right now, my little slut?" Skinner asked, running the ice cube back over Mulder's nipples.

"Oh god, yes! Yes!" Mulder shouted.

Skinner laughed, and slapped his slave's bottom again. "You can come then," he instructed, and Mulder did as he was told, almost immediately. "In addition," Skinner told his blindly sated slave, "please remember NOT to answer the door in the middle of the night unless it's unavoidable. I am entirely capable of protecting myself incidentally."

"Sorry - I got carried away," Mulder said hazily.

"That's what I thought...which is why we're going on a little trip on Saturday." Skinner ran his hands loving over his slave's body, stroking him continuously.

"A trip? Where?" Mulder asked suspiciously. "And Saturday is..."

"Slave's Day. As if I could forget," Skinner said in an amused tone, "and if you're good between now and then I promise you an afternoon in the Playroom that you certainly won't forget in a long time. However, I want you to pick up some suits from Elliott in the morning, and then you and I will take our little shopping trip. After that, you'll get your Playroom session, and a couple of hours to rest up before your evening out on the town with Ian." Skinner's lips nipped the back of Mulder's neck.

"It's not a tattoo is it? Or the...branding?" Mulder ventured in a worried voice. "The trip on Saturday. Are you going to mark me, Master?"

"Would you like that?" Skinner turned Mulder around to face him.

"No!" Mulder said quickly, then he hung his head. "Yes," he admitted. "I mean being marked as your property, not the actual marking process if you get my meaning."

"I think so." Skinner nodded. "You do understand that one day I'll make you endure the process, don't you?" He asked, looking at his slave intently.

"Yes," Mulder bit on his lip. "I want it...it just scares me."

"Well, you can stop worrying for now. I'll save a more permanent form of marking for a special occasion. The trip on Saturday is for a more pragmatic purpose," Skinner grinned.

Mulder nodded, uncertainly, not entirely sure that he liked where this was headed.

Skinner dispatched him to Elliott's early on Saturday morning. Mulder couldn't help being struck by how much his life had changed. Being a slave, running errands for his Master, dressing, bathing, shaving and generally worshipping the other man filled his leisure time now. In the past he'd watched porno films, and hung out in his apartment throwing his basketball around aimlessly, but now his time was filled. Skinner did occasionally schedule him some down time - enough to give him a chance to catch up on reading obscure paranormal journals and surfing the net for bizarre sources of information, but not enough to get himself in too much trouble.

Mulder was met at the door by Donald, and shown into a waiting room.

"Elliott will be with you shortly. He's just finishing a call," Donald said. He was dressed as impeccably as usual, his pale blue shirt emphasizing his baby blue eyes, but he looked pale, and unhappy, Mulder thought.

"Still no progress with..." Mulder gestured with his head in the direction of Elliott's office.

Donald flushed. "No. I don't think he knows I exist. I'm thinking of looking for another job," he muttered. "Seeing him every day is just a kind of exquisite torture," he added.

Mulder nodded glumly, empathizing with the other man's predicament, and suddenly aware of how it must have been for Skinner all those years.

"Maybe that's for the best. Maybe you need to forget about him," Mulder said brightly. Donald's pale face paled even more and Mulder could have kicked himself. Counseling people about their love lives had never exactly been a talent of his.

"If only it were that easy," Donald murmured wistfully.

"You should cheer up, look around for someone else. There are other fish in the sea beside Elliott." Mulder regretted that comment almost as soon as he said it. Damn, he was bad at this. Donald, never exactly one of the world's most robust personalities, now looked as if he was about to burst into tears. "Why don't you come out with us tonight?" Mulder suggested desperately, trying to remedy the situation. "We're going out for a drink."

"You and Walter?" Donald blinked uncertainly.

"No, me and Ian. No, it's nothing like that," he remedied hastily when Donald's eyes widened in surprise. "I'm still **with** Walter, Ian's just a friend. He's, uh, a sub, uh, submissive, like me - and you," Mulder said cautiously, not entirely sure how familiar Donald was with the scene.

"Will you be going to...?" Donald's pale face flushed a baby pink. "Um, you know, one of **those** kind of places?" He asked.

"A leather bar? No," Mulder shook his head. "I don't think Walter would let me go to that kind of place without him. Just a regular bar - Ian's planning it, I don't know where it is."

"All right," Donald said, clearly relieved. Mulder guessed that although the young man had a rabid curiosity about the scene, he was too scared to venture out there on his own. Maybe they could take him under their wing, and help him find someone else if Elliott wasn't ever going to take pity on him.

Mulder made arrangements to meet up with Donald later that evening, and collected the suits, then returned home, whistling cheerfully to himself. He only had to get through whatever nasty little ordeal his Master had planned for him this morning and then - the Playroom! Mulder had been perfect all week, so he was on tenterhooks anticipating what his treat would be this weekend. Skinner was waiting for him, clad in jeans and a white sweatshirt, and they set off straight away.

Mulder wasn't entirely sure what he had expected, but it sure as hell wasn't a visit to the local *Petsmart*.

"What are we doing here? Buying Wanda **more** toys?" He asked, raising a disbelieving eyebrow. Wanda had an entire collection of furry mice, and feathered sticks, to say nothing of the giant piece of cat furniture that was situated in the living room, and on the summit of which she liked to perch, surveying the scurrying humans below with a superior smirk on her face.

"No," Skinner smiled urbanely, "although now you mention it, she'd never forgive me if I didn't bring her back a little something. Maybe one of those little plastic rings with a ball in it for her to chase, or a new bed."

"A bed? What the hell for? She sleeps in your bed," Mulder protested, feeling aggrieved that Wanda got to sleep in the one place that **he** coveted most in the world.

"Or she might like one of those little cradles that hangs off the radiator," Skinner mused.

"If we're not here for Wanda what are we here for?" Mulder grouched as they walked into the store.  
"Don't tell me you're buying me a new fish-tank."

"Do you need one?" Skinner asked.

"No," Mulder shrugged.

"Well then," Skinner said pointedly, making his way over to the dog accessory section.

"Oh no, please don't let this be what I think it is," Mulder sighed, trailing along behind. He fully expected Skinner to examine the various leads, collars and muzzles, so he was surprised when Skinner stopped beside a display of enormous kennels.

Mulder raised an eyebrow. "We're not really getting a dog are we?" He asked.

"No point when I've already got one," Skinner winked. "Pup," he said a sly undertone. Mulder made a face. "I just thought it was time I bought my pup a kennel."

"To put where? We don't have a yard! Not...not on the balcony?" Mulder grabbed his Master's arm.  
"PLEASE tell me that you're not going to make me actually sit in one of these things?"

"After the ironing incident, I thought it might be a good idea to have you somewhere I can keep an eye on you at all times," Skinner smiled benignly. "A kennel seemed the logical choice. That way, when you've been particularly naughty, I can chain you in there to cool your heels."

"That is SO not necessary," Mulder snapped.

"You think?" Skinner smiled again, and grasped the back of his slave's neck, his fingers digging in just enough to make their presence felt. "I think it's **very** necessary. A little lesson in humiliation, to say nothing of being fairly uncomfortable, as well as keeping you restrained and out of harm's way. What could be more perfect?"

"Chaining me to your bed?" Mulder suggested hopefully.

"You enjoy that far too much," Skinner replied, calling the store assistant over. Mulder went bright red and tried to sink through the floor. "I'm interested in a kennel - which is the largest size?" Skinner asked.

"Well, what breed of dog do you own?" the girl asked.

"A big one," Skinner grinned, glancing at Mulder who was gazing determinedly at the floor.

"Rottweiler? Golden Retriever? Labrador?" The girl asked. Skinner considered the question for a moment, looking Mulder up and down as he did so. Mulder's face flushed an even more interesting hue of vermilion.

"Mongrel," Skinner said finally. "A real mixture. In fact, we think he might even have some fox in him."

"Really?" The girl looked fascinated.

"Yup. He's got this bushy coat, and a long snout, golden eyes...and he's a bit wild too," Skinner continued, clearly enjoying himself enormously. Mulder shot his Master a look that would have killed a lesser man on the spot.

"I've never heard of a fox cross-breeding before," the shop assistant mused.

"Yeah, he's a bit of a scavenger as well. Always slipping his lead, and getting into places he shouldn't," Skinner grinned, "usually under cover of darkness. Of course he's got something else in his blood too - he's a beautiful animal to look at, sleek lines, runs well."

"What about temperament?" The girl asked.

"Oh, he's got a great temperament. Very loving, a bit excitable, but he's just a pup so that's to be expected." Skinner patted Mulder's arm, and Mulder let out a growl to let his Master know that this wasn't anywhere near as funny as he thought it was. "He's obsessed with slippers though, and belts," Skinner continued with a sly wink in Mulder's direction.

The girl laughed. "That's puppies for you!"

"He always wants to get in the bed..."

"You'll have to be firm with him about that. They need to learn who's boss from the beginning," the girl advised.

"Oh, he knows who's boss all right," Skinner winked. "Doesn't he?" he asked Mulder, slapping his arm lightly.

"If you say so," Mulder replied stiffly.

"Is he house trained?" The girl asked.

Mulder gave a low moan of humiliation.

"We're getting there," Skinner said in a low, conspiratorial tone. "He still has the occasional accident of course, but..."

"I think this kennel looks pretty big," Mulder interrupted desperately.

"Why don't you crawl inside and test it out?" Skinner said with an urbane grin. Mulder shot him a look of pure venom, but got on his hands and knees and did as he was told. "Perfect," Skinner said, surveying

his slave's thunderous face with barely disguised amusement. "We'll take that one!" Mulder glanced around the small space in dismay. It was big enough to crouch in, but it sure as hell wasn't comfortable - which he supposed was the point.

"It really doesn't go with the décor," Mulder commented stiffly when they got home and surveyed the kennel in situ in the corner of the living room.

"A small price to pay," Skinner grinned. "Now, I think we should make it comfy, don't you? What kind of things usually go in kennels? Old towels, a squeaky rubber bone..."

"Don't labor the joke." Mulder shot his Master a filthy look.

"Suit yourself. I'd re-think the old towels part though - you'll need something to rest on in there," Skinner warned. "You never know how long you might be incarcerated."

"I so hate you," Mulder fumed, disappearing upstairs to find the old towels in question. He was all too well aware that Skinner meant what he said, so it was a wise precaution to make sure he had something nice to sit on, especially if he was tied up inside the kennel naked, which, unfortunately, was all too likely.

"So, you hate me, huh?" Skinner said, swallowing a glass of water down in one go. "I guess that means you don't want your Slave's Day reward then. Pity, I had some fun stuff planned..."

He sat down on the couch, and put his feet up on the coffee table. Mulder stood there for a moment, torn between his pride and his pleasure. The latter finally won out and he went over and knelt beside his Master, and placed his head on Skinner's knee, hoping the famous 'puppy dog' eyes would win his Master over. They had to be good for something besides getting him a kennel!

"Sorry, Master," he said hopefully.

"How sorry?" Skinner asked, one hand hovering over Mulder's head.

"Very?" Mulder suggested.

Skinner grinned, and tousled his slave's hair. "All right - go upstairs to the Playroom. Here's the key," he handed it to Mulder who gave a whoop of delight. "Get undressed, boy, and shave your cock and balls, then kneel and await your Master," Skinner ordered. Mulder nodded, wide-eyed, wondering why he had been ordered to shave. He got to his feet and ran for the stairs. "And slave?" Skinner called. Mulder paused in mid-stride. "Prepare yourself, boy. This will be intense," Skinner warned.

Mulder shivered at the promise implicit in his Master's words, and continued up the stairs at a more sedate pace. His heart was thumping inside his chest. Intense. Well, he'd **asked** Skinner to step it up a level, so he could hardly complain that his Master had taken him at his word. All the same, he was suddenly very scared.

Mulder undressed slowly, a delicious thrill creeping through his body as he took off each garment. His cock was already half erect in anticipation. He wondered just what Skinner would do that would be so intense. He performed the shaving ritual in a dream, taking care to shave himself cleanly, and feeling all

the more naked with the pink flesh of his cock and balls on display when normally it was covered in a dark nest of curls. When he'd finished, he knelt in the center of the room, arms behind his back, shoulders straight, head down, knees wide apart, his cock sticking out, and angled up, like an offering, waiting. Time passed but Mulder didn't move. He tried to lose himself in his slavery, as Skinner had taught him to do, but his body tingled all over, and he was on edge. He was just about to snap from the tension, when his Master appeared in the doorway. Mulder sensed him, and heard his footsteps, but he didn't break position.

"Good boy," Skinner said softly, and Mulder heard the door shut, and the key turn in the lock. He gave an involuntary shiver. "I'm going to play with you for the next couple of hours," Skinner said, coming over to stand behind his slave. Mulder shivered again, as his Master's finger ran down his spine. "I'm going to hurt you," Skinner growled in his ear. Mulder's cock went into a spasm of sheer need, and he took a gasping intake of breath. "I'm going to make you scream, make you beg...do you understand that?" Skinner asked, his finger continuing that slow stroke, up and down Mulder's spine. Mulder opened his mouth, and struggled to find his voice.

"Speak up, slave!" Skinner ordered.

"Yes, Master," Mulder croaked.

"I'm going to take my pleasure from this soft, naked, beautiful flesh." Skinner's tongue replaced his finger and he licked along Mulder's spine, making Mulder's whole body tingle. Still he stayed in position. "You, will suffer for my pleasure, endure my every whim, and do you know why?" Skinner came around in front of his slave, and lifted Mulder's chin. Mulder looked up, helpless, and drowned in those hard, dark eyes. Skinner wasn't wearing his glasses, and there was no barrier between Mulder and the inky depths of that fiery gaze.

"No, Master..." he muttered weakly.

"Because you're mine," Skinner said softly. "You have no choice, boy. You'll accept every last thing I do to your helpless, defenseless body, because you exist to serve me. Your body isn't your own - it's mine, it belongs to me."

He bent forward and Mulder closed his eyes, and parted his lips, expecting to be kissed, but instead he felt Skinner's jaws close around his neck, and bite down, hard. He gave a strangled yelp, and Skinner's hands descended on his shoulders, and held him down.

"Hold still. I'll play with you all I like, slaveboy." Skinner's voice was like warm honey, trickling over Mulder's senses, taking him to a different plane of consciousness. He arched his back as his Master licked his neck, then bit sharply on his earlobe. Mulder gasped, aching with need. Skinner drew back and looked down on him. It was only then that Mulder saw that his Master had changed. Skinner was wearing a black silk shirt, with black leather pants, and soft black boots. He looked - satanic. Dangerous, still, and completely ruthless. Mulder searched for some sign of the man he knew beneath the mask, but there was nothing. Skinner's gaze was intent, and Mulder was completely in his thrall.

Skinner snapped his fingers, and Mulder broke position instantly, and went to his Master's side. The other man moved swiftly over to the throne, and sat down.

"Bring me my crop," he ordered. Mulder ran to obey, kneeling before the throne, and handing his Master the crop, eyes down, back straight. He felt the tip of the crop brush against his chin, and looked up. "Now, go and pull the blinds down, slaveboy," Skinner ordered.

Mulder nodded, his throat dry, and did as he was told. Soon the room was in total darkness. Mulder fumbled his way back to the throne, and knelt there again. He could barely see Skinner in the dark. A few seconds later he almost jumped out of his skin as he heard the sound of a match being struck, and then a taper was lit. Mulder knelt, transfixed by the glow of the taper.

"Bring me a candle," Skinner instructed. Mulder scurried to obey, and returned with a candle.

Skinner lit it, and the room was cast in an eerie glow, that illuminated his Master's stern, almost unrecognizable face with flickering light. "Do you know what I'm going to do with this, boy?" Skinner asked.

"No, Master..." Mulder faltered. Skinner gave a smile of pure evil.

"You'll see, slave," he said. He handed Mulder the taper, and the lit candle. "Go around the room and light the other candles," he ordered, "then come back here."

Mulder did as he had been ordered, and soon the room was awash with color. It looked completely different - transformed by just some strategically placed candles into a flickering, seductive den, where good and bad things would happen in equal measure. Mulder started to shake.

"Cold, boy?" Skinner got up, and loomed over his kneeling slave.

"No...Master. Scared..." Mulder admitted honestly.

"Of what? Me?" Skinner knelt in front of his slave, and lifted Mulder's head again, so that he was looking at him.

"Partly. Also of..." Mulder swallowed and looked at the candle Skinner was holding once more in his hand. "Fire...Master," he whispered. "I don't like flame."

"The flame won't touch you," Skinner said, holding out the candle. "I promise you that, slave. The rest...well, you'll have to endure the rest, but not the flame."

"The wax?" Mulder swallowed hard.

"You'll see," Skinner promised. "Go and lie on the table, face down."

Mulder ran to do as he'd been instructed, trying to find a position that didn't trap his erect cock too painfully against the surface of the massage table. Skinner followed him, moving slowly, his powerful, leonine body lit by the flickering candlelight, making him seem elusive, shadowed, prowling like a wild animal seeking his prey. Mulder closed his eyes, and held his breath, knowing that he was on the menu, offered up like a sacrificial offering.

Skinner set down the long, round candle on the table beside his prey, and then quickly and efficiently strapped Mulder to the table using wrist and ankle cuffs, rendering his slave immobile. Then Mulder felt his Master's hands descend on his slave's butt, massaging his buttocks gently, then more firmly, moving them up and down, squeezing the flesh, parting it with his fingers, slipping one inside, then withdrawing it, then another, until Mulder started to moan, and push up onto those questing fingers.

"Down!" Skinner ordered, and Mulder subsided with a moan of frustration. He felt Skinner's mouth on his butt, and then his teeth, and gave a hoarse shout as his Master gave him a long, lingering bite. It wasn't too painful, just a love-bite, but it stung all the same, and his endorphin levels started to rocket. "I know what you want," Skinner purred, "You want me inside you. You want me to take you hard, and fast, and show you no mercy, and most of all, you want me to come inside you but..." His hands continued their slick caress, "you'll have to wait, boy. First I'm going to show you that pleasure has to be earned with pain." Mulder swallowed hard, as another finger was inserted inside his body. He wasn't sure what his Master was talking about - there was no pain here, just the most intense pleasure. "Are you ready to be used for my entertainment, boy?" Skinner hissed.

"Yes, please," Mulder almost whimpered.

Skinner wrapped his hand in his slave's hair, and drew Mulder's head back. "Sure?" He asked with a demonic smile. "I have such delicious torments in mind for you, boy,"

"Do whatever you will, Master. I'm yours," Mulder said, hoarsely.

"Good boy." Skinner traced a finger down his slave's exposed throat, then he dropped Mulder's head, and picked up the candle. Mulder tensed, expecting the dripping candle to be held over his naked butt, for the hot wax to land on his body, but that didn't happen. Instead, Skinner waved the candle under his nose.

"Just a candle - not the flame," he stated firmly. Mulder nodded, trusting his Master. "Hold still then - the more still you are, the easier this will be for you," Skinner warned. Mulder swallowed hard, and nodded again, resting his head on the table, and trying to relax. He felt Skinner's hands on his butt again, and a finger pushed a little way inside him - no, not a finger - the round, blunted end of the candle! Mulder looked around in surprise. He looked like a birthday cake, the candle sticking out of his ass, still lit.

"Hold still," Skinner grinned. "I'm going to push this further in." He took his time, gently twisting the candle into its improvised holder, until the bottom inch was nestled snug between Mulder's butt cheeks. "Good." Skinner stepped back and surveyed his handiwork. "Now, watch." He brought the large gilt mirror over, and placed it in front of Mulder, giving the prone man a clear view of his own backside, with the candle wedged firmly in place. Skinner then moved back to the candle, and with a smile in Mulder's direction, flicked at it with his index finger.

Mulder's strangled "no!" died in his throat, as tiny droplets of hot wax spewed onto his naked bottom. The feeling was incredible. It hurt, but the pain died away so quickly, leaving only a pleasurable sting.

"Oh god," Mulder whispered.

"I've only just started, boy," Skinner said, with a grin of pure sexual evil. "I'm going to let the candle burn down while I get out the instruments of torture I intend to use on you next."

Mulder shook his head to clear the hair out of his eyes, but that movement just made the candle spew out more hot wax onto his buttocks, and he gasped in pain. For a fleeting moment he worried that Skinner would allow the candle to burn right the way down to the wick, but he knew that wouldn't happen. He watched, in trepidation, as his Master returned to the table, bearing a box full of items.

"I'm going to punish you, boy," Skinner promised, flicking the candle idly as he passed, causing more hot wax to drip onto Mulder's helpless, outstretched body. "Do you know why?" Skinner asked, setting down the box, and starting to unpack it.

"No...Master," Mulder panted, trying to keep as still as possible, seeing the tip of the candle starting to fill with hot wax, waiting for the well to get too deep, for it to drop on his body.

"Because it pleases me," Skinner said, smiling. He flicked the candle again, depositing more burning droplets on his slave's helpless body. Mulder felt the ache in his cock grow almost too much to bear. He loved Skinner like this - implacable, demanding, his dark voice bonding the slave to his Master more thoroughly than all the chains in the world. The candles, the darkness, Skinner's prowling, predatory, black-clad presence - all of it combined to overload his senses, and transport him to another plane of consciousness. He drowned in his slavery, knowing that Skinner could, and would, play with him, and torture him in the most delicious ways, and that Mulder couldn't stop him. Not that he wanted to, but knowing he couldn't just took him to the edge, and left him quivering in anticipation. He watched, in a dreamy haze, as Skinner got out a bowl full of something that made a sloshing, gurgling sound. It was warm - Mulder could feel the heat coming off it. His Master left the bowl on the table, and walked around to stand in front of his slave. All Mulder's attention focused on his Master's every move. Skinner pressed Mulder's face into his groin.

"Unzip me," he ordered, in a low growl. Mulder found Skinner's zip with his mouth, and struggled to pull it down. Every movement sent a droplet of wax spitting onto his naked flesh, but it was impossible to perform the task without moving his body. He finally succeeded, and found that his Master was naked beneath his pants, and his pulsing cock, once freed, sprang immediately to attention. "Suck it," Skinner ordered, his hand twining in Mulder's hair. He rocked his hips forward, and Mulder took the beautiful, engorged penis in his mouth, lovingly caressing it, sliding it over his tongue, and deep-throating it. Skinner took the control away from him, and began rhythmically thrusting into his captive mouth, in and out, in and out, not allowing Mulder to set the pace, or to practice any of the little tricks that he loved to use on his Master in the mornings. Mulder moaned in frustration, every movement of Skinner's hips against his face causing more droplets of molten wax to land on his butt and thighs.

Skinner fucked his mouth for several long minutes, back and forth in a persistent rhythm until Mulder's jaws began to ache. He knew how long Skinner could keep an erection, so he knew this particular activity would continue for some time. He loved the feel of his Master's cock between his lips, and was completely aroused by the knowledge that, bound as he was, he could only worship his Master with his open mouth, and willing, eager tongue.

"Oh, that's good," Skinner murmured, his hand heavy in his slave's hair. "Keep going, slave." He thrust deep into Mulder's throat, stepping up the pace, engulfing Mulder in his scent, tickling his slave's nose with the wiry curls around his groin, his heavy ball sacs slapping against Mulder's chin. Mulder felt Skinner stiffen and knew his Master was close to climax, but Skinner withdrew before that happened. He stroked his slave's hair, then bent over and kissed him, deeply. It felt strange to feel his Master's

tongue, after so many long minutes sucking on his big, hard cock, and Mulder worked his jaws, devouring his Master's lips as he had just devoured his cock, losing himself in the kiss. "Beautiful boy," Skinner whispered, stroking Mulder's shoulders, and nudging his wet cock against the side of his slave's cheek. "That won't save you from your punishment though," Skinner whispered, in a low, dark tone. Mulder's cock reminded him once again that it was desperate for release. "I think you have to endure more before you'll feel me come inside you, boy. If I'm going to honor my slave's body with my come, then I think he should suffer ordeals first, don't you? To show that he's worthy?"

"Yes, Master," Mulder whispered. If he wasn't so deeply engrossed in the scene then he'd probably have laughed out loud, but it was too good - Skinner was too commanding, too powerful, and it was sexy as all hell.

His Master moved down the table, and, much to Mulder's relief, removed the candle, and replaced it in the holder on the table, then he undid his slave's cuffs.

"Sit up," Skinner ordered. Mulder obeyed as quickly as he could, and sat on the side of the table, awaiting further instructions. "Put your hands behind your body and don't move them. I'm not going to chain you, I want you to show me what you're made of, boy, and whether you can obey me without being tied. What I do next will test your resolve to the limit."

Mulder shivered, his cock standing out perpendicular to his body. Skinner grinned, and took the eager member in his hand, rolling his thumb over the crown. Mulder broke out in a sweat, and gave a gasp of need.

"You know you can't come," Skinner warned. Mulder nodded, trying hard to keep his hands behind his back. "Good. Now, I want to play with these. I'm going to make these suffer," Skinner promised, leaning forward and catching a nipple in his mouth. He caressed each nipple to points with his tongue, causing wave after wave of pleasure to course through Mulder's body, making him moan.

"Now, how much pain can you take?" Skinner asked.

Mulder blinked the sweat out of his eyes. "However much Master wishes to inflict," he whispered in reply, offering himself, and his total obedience, to his powerful Master.

Skinner smiled, and gently tugged on one of the nipple rings. "I think it's time to add a little weight here, don't you, boy?" He asked. Mulder's eyes widened and he watched in silence as Skinner picked two tiny weights from the box on the table. "Sit up straight!" Skinner ordered, "Keep your hands behind your back and don't move - if you move, I'll punish you."

"Yes, Master," Mulder said, lacing his hands together behind his back.

"Back straight, chest out...I want you to feel the pull of these," Skinner grinned. Mulder felt his cock lurch again. Part of Skinner's seductive power resided in his voice. It was implacable, Mulder's anchor as he was cast adrift in a sea of sensation. All he could hear was his handsome Master, demanding that he endure these erotic ordeals, making him take them obediently. All he could see was his Master's powerful, dark clad frame, standing beside him, his constant companion while he screamed and suffered, before finally, Mulder hoped, allowing his slave the climax that he craved.

"We'll start off light," Skinner murmured, attaching one of the weights to Mulder's left nipple ring, and supporting it with his hand. "How does this feel?" He took his hand away and Mulder cried out as the weight pulled his nipple down.

"Shit! Please, take it off, Master!" he cried, leaning forward to mitigate against the weight.

"Shoulders straight!" Skinner ordered again. Mulder pulled his shoulders back, cautiously. It hurt! He glanced down at his tormented nipple with a certain measure of pride at taking the torture, then looked up at his Master, giving him a sweaty grin of triumph at having endured this much. Skinner leaned forward, and kissed his slave deeply in reply.

"Now the other one," Skinner said. Mulder steeled himself, but his right nipple was the more sensitive of the two, and having weights attached to each one was exquisitely unbearable.

"Oh god. Please, Master, please...!" Mulder sobbed, leaning his head against Skinner's shoulder, panting. Skinner ran his hands comfortingly over Mulder's back.

"Do you want me to come inside you?" he whispered in Mulder's ear.

"Yes," Mulder muttered miserably.

"Then endure, little one, endure," Skinner growled. "You haven't earned that honor yet." Mulder's cock, already rock hard, did a bounce of arousal at his Master's words. "Ready?" Skinner asked. Mulder nodded, and slowly pulled away from Skinner's shoulder, and straightened his back, feeling the pull exerted on his nipples, and whimpering softly to himself. It was harder being unchained, but it made his obedience all the sweeter.

"Now, hold still..." Skinner took Mulder's cock in his hand, and caressed it. Mulder put his head back, and felt himself fly on a haze of endorphins, the pleasure/pain combination overloading his senses. He was dimly aware that Skinner was reaching towards the table, and grabbing the bowl he had got out earlier, and then something hot descended on his penis.

"Oh shit!" He bucked up into Skinner's hand, as his Master massaged hardening wax into his slave's shaft. This was like nothing he'd experienced before. He was shaking, as waves of warmth rolled through his midsection, his whole body having become one big nerve ending. "I have to come. I have to!" he screeched.

"Not yet, little one. Not yet," Skinner whispered, soothing his body. "God, you're so beautiful, you can take so much...I love your eagerness to please, your receptive body, this willing cock..."

Skinner continued rubbing the wax into Mulder's shaftskin, and then dribbled some onto his scrotum. Mulder yelled, and clutched Skinner's shoulders again, but his Master ordered his hands behind his back, and, struggling, he obeyed. "Your body is mine, little one. I want to play with it without you interfering. Accept," Skinner murmured, and Mulder drifted away on the haze of sensation. There was just him and that wonderful, deep voice. That voice - demanding, soothing, caressing all at the same time. Skinner's appreciation of his slave's responses just turned him on even more. He loved performing for his Master, taking whatever his Master wished to inflict. It turned him on more than he would ever have thought possible.

Skinner poured another layer of warm wax onto his cock, encasing it in heat, making him sweat. Now Mulder understood why Skinner had made him shave. The very thought of his Master removing the wax from his unshaven groin made Mulder want to scream.

"How much can you take, slave, hmm?" Skinner asked, over and over again, his fingers never ceasing their rhythmic massaging motion along Mulder's shaft-skin, and scrotum.

"However much Master wishes," Mulder whimpered, his cock almost screaming at him for release. He was used to holding his erections now - Skinner had trained him well, but even so, he was desperate to come, and felt sure he'd pass out when he did.

"Not yet." Skinner reached for another item on the table. Mulder almost jumped out of his skin as his Master wrapped a cold, damp washcloth around his hot cock, cooling it, and soothing away some of the dried wax. Mulder sighed, enjoying the relief from the heat, and intensity of the wax, and then Skinner put the washcloth aside, and dribbled more wax, then cooled the flesh with the washcloth, and repeated the motion once more. Mulder wasn't sure if he was even human any more. He had never known two sensations contrasted to more effect and was amazed by his own ability to take **anything** that his Master demanded of him. If someone had done this to him 'cold', without putting him into subspace first, it would have been truly agonizing, but in Skinner's expert hands, the scene was just mind-blowingly erotic.

Finally the torment came to an end. Skinner put the bowl of molten wax and washcloth aside, and then undid the weights attached to Mulder's nipples.

"You can't come until I come inside you," Skinner whispered in his ear, removing the weights. Mulder felt a haze of sensation as the blood flooded back into the nubs of flesh. He nodded, not entirely sure that he'd either heard, or understood, what his Master had said to him.

"On your hands and knees," Skinner patted the table, and turned his stricken slave around for which Mulder was grateful, as he wasn't sure that he had the ability to move of his own volition any more. "I'm going to take you doggie fashion," Skinner whispered in his ear. "It seems appropriate!" Mulder was beyond caring about his Master's bad jokes. He thrust his butt back hopefully, as Skinner lowered the table so that Mulder was at groin height, then he felt his Master lovingly caress his slave's butt, scratching little morsels of dried wax from the surface.

He felt Skinner slip a lube covered finger inside his anus, then another, stretching and preparing him.

"Are you ready, boy?" Skinner asked, withdrawing his finger, and grabbing Mulder's haunches.

"Yes...please!" Mulder panted. Skinner parted his butt cheeks, and then he felt his Master's large cock slide into his body.

"God, this feels good. My slave feels so hot, and tight, just flesh on flesh, my skin against yours, making us one," Skinner whispered, thrusting deep into Mulder's body.

It didn't feel all that much different to Mulder, but just knowing that his Master's naked cock was nestled inside his body, skin against skin, was enough to arouse him. He was relieved when Skinner put his hand on his slave's cock, and began to pump it in time to his own thrusts. Skinner started slowly,

savoring each sliding entry and exit, surging into and out of his slave's body, the sound of flesh on flesh slightly different, smoother without the rubber.

"You feel wonderful...oh god...fantastic," Skinner panted as he rode his slave hard, back and forth.

Mulder moaned, and arched his back, accepting the hard length into his body, feeling it rub against his prostate, sending his already aroused body into sensory overload.

"Oh shit...oh please..." Mulder whimpered, as the pace picked up, and then he was floating, his body completely joined to that of his Master so that he didn't know where he ended and Skinner began. They were two beings irrevocably united in one long, beautiful, intense rocking motion that brought total pleasure to both of them, each lost in the other, each found in the other.

Mulder screamed, but he didn't know what he was saying, or even whether he was coherent. Skinner was caressing his cock, and stroking his butt at the same time, murmuring to his slave, loving him, encouraging him, taking him. Mulder put his head back and felt the sweat run down the side of his face, dripping through his hair, and hanging from the end of his eyelashes. He felt Skinner buck inside him one last time, then come, felt warm semen spill into the deepest recesses of his body, felt it drip out, coming in waves, running down his leg, and then Skinner was saying something to him, he wasn't sure what. He tried to concentrate and finally made out one word: "come!". He was being given permission to come, and immediately he knew he was allowed to, his body convulsed, and the semen rose up out of his cock like champagne out of a bottle, and he ejaculated over and over again. A sharp white light appeared in his mind, and he almost passed out from the intensity of his orgasm, then it was over.

He wasn't sure how much time passed before either of them came to. Skinner was slumped on his slave's butt, his face on the back of Mulder's neck. Mulder lay there, unable to move a muscle, and then Skinner stirred. He stroked Mulder's hair, and withdrew from his slave's body with a plopping noise that was almost funny. Mulder smiled, tiredly, and looked around.

"All right?" Skinner asked, getting up, and adjusting his clothing. He staggered around to the head of the table, and deposited a kiss on Mulder's face. "All right, sweetheart?" He asked anxiously.

"Hmmm...Just...y'know..." Mulder muttered.

Skinner disappeared for a moment, and Mulder heard the sounds of a bath being run. Then the lights were turned on, to a dim glow, and the candles were blown out. Finally, Skinner returned to his sated slave.

"Come here." Skinner straightened up, and slung his slave over his shoulder, carried him into the bathroom, and deposited him in the bath. Mulder slid into the water, feeling it soothe out all the kinks caused by their wild, frenzied love-making. He watched as Skinner undressed and slid in beside him, catching his slave in his arms, and kissing his neck, and the side of his face.

"I totally, and completely, worship you," Mulder whispered. "Nobody has ever taken me to that place before."

"Good," Skinner whispered, getting a washcloth and gently loosening some more of the dried wax from his slave's body.

They took a leisurely bath, then staggered into the bedroom and slept for a few hours, Mulder nestled in his Master's powerful arms, where he loved being so much.

Mulder was still on a high a few hours later when Ian turned up at the door. Ian took one look at the dreamy expression on Mulder's face, and rolled his eyes.

"Someone's been having fun," he murmured, casting a shy, and somewhat overawed glance in Skinner's direction.

"Yeah," Mulder grinned sheepishly.

"Hi, Walter," Ian waved. "Wow!" Ian noticed the kennel. "That's pretty impressive," he grinned at Mulder knowingly.

"Tell him it doesn't go with the décor," Mulder instructed, nudging his friend.

"I wouldn't dare!" Ian said diplomatically.

"Are you going to Murray's party next weekend, Ian?" Skinner held up an invitation. "This just arrived in today's mail."

"Murray's having another party?" Mulder looked over at his Master.

"Yeah. His big annual party. There's a slave auction, pony trials, the full works," Ian said, his eyes lighting up. "It'll be fantastic - Murray's parties always are."

"Pony trials? I don't know anything about riding," Mulder said.

Ian burst out laughing and exchanged a glance with Skinner.

"Don't worry. You'll pick it up," Skinner said, clearly struggling to keep a straight face. Mulder had the distinct impression that the joke was on him.

"We're going then?" He asked his Master.

"Yes." Skinner nodded. "It's a weekend party - we'll drive down there on Friday evening."

"What's the slave auction all about?" Mulder wanted to know. "You wouldn't sell me to anyone would you?" He asked Skinner anxiously.

"Only for the night," Skinner winked.

"What?" Mulder's jaw dropped open in shock.

"Don't worry about it." Skinner patted the side of Mulder's cheek lovingly. "You'll be fine."

"Are we ready to go, Mulder?" Ian asked.

"Yeah...oh!" Mulder remembered about Donald, just as there was another knock on the door. "Um, I hope you don't mind but I asked someone else along," he told Ian apologetically.

Donald was standing on the other side of the door looking like a lost child. Dressed in ripped jeans and a tee shirt he seemed impossibly young. Mulder ushered him in and introduced him to Ian, then he shouldered himself into his jacket and was about to leave when Skinner surprised him by grabbing his arm, and maneuvering him smoothly into the kitchen.

"Fox, what are you doing?" His Master asked.

"Going out for a drink?" Mulder replied hopefully, giving his Master a lustful look, still high as a kite after their sex session.

"With that jailbait?" Skinner raised an eyebrow.

"Donald's gotta be about 24. He just **looks** 16!" Mulder protested.

"He's also led a pretty sheltered life. Don't get him into any trouble," Skinner said firmly. "You're walking on air tonight and that might affect your judgment."

"Who me? I'm a federal agent. What could be safer than that?" Mulder shot back, feeling vaguely annoyed that Skinner didn't trust him.

"Fox," Skinner purred, lovingly adjusting Mulder's jacket so that it sat smoothly on his shoulders, "You and I both know that you live your life in a state of extremes. You've been excessively well behaved for far too long, and when you finally blow up again, I'd be grateful if Donald wasn't involved. At least Ian's going with you - he's sensible enough."

"So much for trust," Mulder grouched.

Skinner grinned, and deposited a kiss on his slave's forehead. "I do trust you - I trust you to be exasperating, confusing and irresistible. I'm worried though. I've never seen you as high as this. I think maybe you should cancel tonight."

"What?!" Mulder exploded. "You're the one who made me go, now you're saying I can't - and you wait until my friends actually arrive to pull the rug out from under my feet? That is going to look fucking embarrassing - or maybe that was your intention."

Skinner sighed, and ran a hand across his forehead. "No, that wasn't my intention. I thought you'd be fine with Ian...look, just take it easy. Don't drink too much - you're high enough as it is without that. And don't be too late back."

"Aw - you're worried about me," Mulder felt a warm glow in his stomach. He couldn't remember the last time anyone had cared whether he came or went the way Skinner did right now. It felt good.

"Always." Skinner kissed his slave's mouth firmly, gave him a swat on the backside, and pushed him back into the other room. "Don't forget what I said," he warned, as he held open the front door for the three men to leave. Mulder made a face at his Master, and winked conspiratorially at his two companions. He

felt so good, so high, all the blood coursing through his veins after their vigorous sex session earlier in the day. Tonight was going to be good! He could feel it in his bones.

Ian took Donald under his wing and the younger man soon relaxed. Mulder had never exactly been the kind of guy to hang out with friends. He'd always been a loner, so this change in his lifestyle both bemused and fascinated him. A part of him still longed for the security of his empty apartment and nights spent in front of trashy TV programs, or hooked up to the Internet, but he had to admit that he had more balance in his life since Skinner had taken charge of him. He genuinely liked Ian - the other man had a quiet wit that frequently made Mulder laugh out loud, and once Donald had a few drinks inside him he loosened up and started talking. Mulder felt a strange heady sensation at being allowed out without his Master. The combination of alcohol, which Mulder notoriously didn't handle well, his sky-high endorphin level, and being out on his own made him act more and more outrageously.

Mulder wasn't sure whose idea it was to go into the karaoke bar. Normally, he wouldn't have been seen dead in one, but somehow tonight it seemed like a hilarious idea, and before long, he and Ian were standing up on the stage, serenading everyone with a truly appalling rendition of *Bohemian Rhapsody*.

"I'm just a poor boy, nobody loves me," Mulder yelled at Ian, who collapsed into drunken giggles while Donald turned bright red and tried to hide under the table.

"Scaramouche, scaramouche, can you do the fandango," Mulder sang, twirling around and waving his arms in the air. There was less than enthusiastic applause when the two of them stumbled off the stage a few minutes later, but they were too far gone to care. "Why don't you try, Donald?" Mulder nudged the younger man. Donald shook his head vehemently.

"Go on," Ian urged. "We just made total idiots of ourselves - why not you?"

"Here." Mulder slammed a double vodka down on the table. "Shoot that one down straight, then get up there and SING!"

A look of daring flashed into Donald's eyes, as he looked at Ian and Mulder's encouraging, wildly nodding faces. He steeled himself visibly, downed the vodka in one go, then wiped his mouth with the back of his hand and got up.

"Way to go, Donnie baby!" Mulder crooned.

Donald got up on the stage, grabbed the microphone, and surveyed an audience who were, by and large, ignoring him. The lyrics to *Unchained Melody* came up on the screen, and he opened his mouth, and...everyone shut up.

Donald had the most beautiful voice. The song took on the most mournful tone, pure and sweet, rendered all the more exquisite by the heartfelt delivery of the lyrics.

"Oh, my love, my darling...I've hungered for your touch, a long, lonely time..." Donald warbled.

Mulder felt tears pouring down his cheeks. "It's so sad," he told Ian, drunkenly. "You don't understand...Donnie here has a broken heart...Elliott doesn't even look at him. It's tragic!" He sniffed morosely into his beer. Ian raised an eyebrow, and grinned. "Poor Donnie!" Mulder sighed, as the song

wafted around them, somehow rendered all the more poignant by the fact that Mulder was completely and utterly drunk on his ass.

When Donald finished singing, there was a definite ripple of applause, and the kid blushed bright red and returned to his seat.

"Such a shame Elliott wasn't here," Mulder wallowed, handing Donald a drink and patting him thunderously on the back at the same time, making the young man splutter. "Sooo beautiful...soooo sad. If he'd heard... f'he'd know..."

"Mulder, shut the fuck up," Ian bellowed over the sound of the next singer.

"Can't," Mulder draped himself over Donald's shoulder. "Poor Donald. Poor Elliott...if he heard you sing... that's it!" He said triumphantly.

"Whatzit?" Ian took another gulp of his drink, and smiled stupidly.

"We go and sing to Elliott, then he'll fall in love with Donnie baby, and then everyone will live happily ever after!" Mulder proclaimed triumphantly.

"I won't," Ian said mournfully into his drink.

"S'you will," Mulder swayed back towards Ian. "Everyone will. I say so." He got up, and caught hold of Donald's arm. "C'mon, Donnie. Let's go serenade the love of your life."

Donald grinned stupidly, and downed the tumbler of whisky that was on the table in front of him.

"Y'do know where he lives, don't you?" Mulder asked, frowning, and stumbling over the chair leg.

"Oh yeah..." Donald gave a goofy smile that was testament to long hours sitting outside his boss's apartment staring hopelessly at his windows.

"Then that's it!" Mulder grabbed Donald's arm again.

"I dunno..." Donald replied, giggling hysterically, clearly drunk on his ass as well.

"Trust me," Mulder leaned in close, and tapped his nose, "I'm an FBI agent," he hissed.

"Oh - well then!" Donald giggled again. "Letzgo!" he announced, getting up. Mulder beamed at him, and put an arm around the younger man's shoulders, then took a tentative step towards the door, as if trying out his legs to see if they still worked. They did - after a fashion.

"No, wait!" Ian yelled.

"What?" Mulder looked back over his shoulder.

"S'bad idea!" Ian said solemnly.

"Why?" Mulder demanded.

"'Cos...cos...you're drunk!" Ian proclaimed.

Mulder looked at Donald and they considered the matter for a moment, then turned back to Ian with identical silly grins plastered over their faces.

"Yeah, we are!" they both said at the same time, then they turned and staggered towards the door. Ian took one look at them, then grabbed his jacket and followed on behind.

They got a taxi to Elliott's apartment. Donald puked up out of the window, and Mulder waved drunkenly at pedestrians every time they stopped at a red light.

"Which one is it?" Mulder asked Donald as they got out of the taxi. Ian paid the driver, and then followed reluctantly behind them.

"I still don't think this is a good idea," Ian muttered unhappily.

"Ssh!" Mulder said, waving his arms around. "This one?" He asked Donald, stopping outside a huge apartment block.

"Think so," Donald nodded, glancing around.

"Okay - which floor?" Mulder squinted up at the block.

"Third," Donald said, going green.

"Right. You start, and Ian an' me will do the chorus." Mulder slung an arm around Donald's shoulder and the kid started to sing. He got as far as "hungered for your touch," when a woman opened her window and looked out.

"Shut up!" She bellowed.

"Ignore her, keep going," Mulder urged, joining in to keep his friend company. They made it all the way through one rendition of the song and came to a halt. Nothing happened.

"Maybe he's not in," Donald said mournfully.

"No - he's asleep. It's late. Try again," Mulder instructed. Donald started again, while Ian looked around nervously. He interrupted Donald in the middle of a choked; "I neeeeeeeed your love, I neeeeeed your love," a few seconds later, grabbing his arm, and pulling Mulder by the sleeve of his jacket.

"Police car!" He yelled, pointing to the quietly patrolling car coming towards them. "RUN!"

Ian bundled Mulder and Donald in front of him, and ran with them down the street and into an alleyway, where they all stood panting against the wall, catching their breath. The police car rolled silently past them, and Mulder took a deep breath, suddenly realizing that he was in big trouble if he

ended up spending the night in the drunk tank. Somehow he didn't think he'd be sitting too comfortably for the next week or so if **that** happened.

"Gotta keep running," he slurred, grabbing Donald, and pushing him down the alley.

"No, wait!" Donald came to a halt, and threw up again all over Mulder's shirt.

"Oh fuck," Mulder sighed. He was dimly aware of Ian getting out his cellphone and making a call, while he held Donald up through another bout of sickness. "Who'd you call? The Gunmen?" Mulder asked Ian, as Donald spewed up all over the wall.

"No. Walter," Ian replied.

Mulder dropped Donald and the kid sank down onto the ground.

"Double fuck," Mulder groaned.

Skinner showed up ten minutes later. He pulled up outside the alleyway, got out of the jeep, and strode towards the three men.

"Are you all okay?" He asked, casting a glance over them. Mulder flinched. They all looked definitely the worse for wear, and presented a sorry tableau.

"Fine, sir. Sorry for bothering you," Ian said apologetically.

Skinner's gaze rested on Mulder for a moment, his dark gaze unreadable. "Fox - how about you?" He asked brusquely.

"I'm fine," Mulder muttered. "There was no need for Ian to call you..." He trailed off as Donald was sick again all over Mulder's shoes.

"I can see that," Skinner commented wryly, grabbing Donald's arm and marching him back to the car. "You, Fox, open the window and keep his head out of it. I do not want vomit in my car."

"Yes, sir," Mulder muttered. Ian slumped into the front seat, and they drove back home in silence. Mulder cringed inwardly, some part of his brain that was sober telling him that all this was going to go very badly for him when his Master got his hands on him.

Skinner didn't say a word as he escorted the three worse-for-wear men up to the apartment.

"All right, gentlemen. It's 2 am and I'm not dealing with this now," he said, surveying them coldly. "You," he pointed at Donald, "can sleep in Fox's room. Show him where it is and for god's sake give him a bucket as well, in case he doesn't get to the bathroom in time during the night," he instructed Mulder. "Ian, you can sleep in the spare room - you know where that is."

"Yes, sir." Ian disappeared almost immediately, clearly recognizing that now was not a good time to linger.

"What about me?" Mulder asked, hoping that Skinner would allow him to sleep in his bed after such a traumatic end to their evening.

"Well, I didn't expect to have to use this so soon, but you might as well get acquainted with your new bed," Skinner told him, a dark look on his face. Mulder looked at him inquiringly, then his heart sank when he saw that Skinner was pointing at the kennel.

"You can't be serious! I'll sleep on the couch!" He protested.

"You'll sleep where I tell you to. Now get him upstairs, then get your butt back down here. Now!" Skinner barked. Mulder gave his Master another resentful look, then walked Donald up to the 18th floor apartment, got him a bucket as instructed, pulled his own sodden, vomit-stained shirt off and went back downstairs to face the music.

"I'm sorry, Master," he said as contritely as possible when he got back to the living room.

"I told you, I'm not having this conversation now. Get in there," Skinner instructed, pointing at the kennel.

"Please..."

"NOW!" Skinner roared. Mulder jumped. He'd never seen Skinner this mad before, and he scurried to obey. Skinner strapped the dog collar around his neck, and attached a heavy length of chain to it, then fastened that to the kennel and padlocked it in place.

"Oh shit," Mulder muttered, realizing he was well and truly trapped for the night. Skinner ignored him and turned on his heel, snapping the light off and making for the stairs.

"What if I need to pee?" Mulder shouted desperately. "Don't chain me here, Master, please!"

"Oh yeah. If you need to pee..." Skinner went into the kitchen, and turned the light on, and Mulder heard him opening the refrigerator door, and then the mystifying sound of something being poured down the sink, that made Mulder cross his legs as his over-burdened bladder made itself felt. Skinner returned with an empty carton of orange juice, and handed it over. Mulder stared at it.

"You cannot be serious," he complained.

"Deadly. And one more word out of you and you'll get a taste of the sole of my sneaker across your butt," Skinner warned him.

"But..." Mulder opened his mouth to protest, but closed it again when he caught sight of Skinner's thunderous expression. He slunk back inside the kennel, clutching his empty orange juice carton.

The kennel had a hard floor and was cramped, but the old towels provided some comfort. Mulder found that if he curled sideways and stuck his head out of the hole at the front, he was reasonably comfortable. He was so drunk that he fell asleep as soon as he'd relieved his aching bladder into the carton. He woke up, feeling like death, to find daylight shining in through the living room window, and groaned as he remembered where he was. He had to use the orange carton again, then lay on his back,

looking up at the ceiling, his mouth tasting like shit and the pervasive smell of vomit clinging to his clothes. He was dying for a drink of water, and his head was pounding, but neither painkillers, nor water was within reach, so he just lay there for another couple of hours, dozing on and off, and feeling a distinct queasiness in his stomach that had nothing to do with being hung over and a lot to do with worrying about how his Master would punish him for this escapade.

He winced as he remembered the events of the previous evening. It was so out of character. He never got drunk, he barely even touched liquor. He did remember being high - which was all Skinner's fault, he thought bitterly to himself. His Master shouldn't have sent him out after that wild sex session. It was asking for trouble. Skinner had known something like this would happen - he'd even warned him. He should have forbidden him to go... Mulder had a sudden realization that Skinner was right about his personality. He had tried to so hard to be perfect, that, once he let up on himself for just one evening, he'd spun right out of control. He lacked any kind of balance. The only balance in his life had been that which Skinner had forced him to accept. When left to his own devices he veered wildly from one extreme act to another.

"How are you feeling?" A voice broke into his reverie, and he looked up into Ian's sympathetic brown eyes.

"Like shit," Mulder groaned. "Bring me some water, Ian."

"Um, I'm not sure..." Ian glanced around with a worried frown. "I don't think the big guy would like me interfering."

"I'm dying here," Mulder croaked. Ian took pity on him, and brought him a glass of water, then crouched, sympathetically, beside the kennel.

"You do know you could have done that yourself, don't you?" Ian asked.

"What?" Mulder frowned.

"The chain around your collar isn't locked. You can undo it," Ian pointed out.

Mulder sat up and examined it, then let out a sigh, as he saw Ian was telling the truth.

"He's good," Ian grinned.

"Yeah. Very." Mulder sank back down again. "Not that it would have made any difference if I'd known. I wouldn't have dared move," he muttered.

"Wise boy," Ian nodded. "Me neither. Your Master scares me to death. What's he going to do? Should I just creep out of here now?" Ian asked.

"Not if you want to live. He'll never let me go out with you again if you do that," Mulder said, downing the drink with one gulp. "Shit, why didn't you **stop** me last night?"

"I did try," Ian sighed.

"At least one of you was sensible," a voice behind them said. Ian started, and shuffled guiltily away from the kennel, leaving Mulder to face up to his coldly furious Master. Skinner was dressed in gray sweatpants with a white tee-shirt, tan colored timberlands on his feet. He unlocked his slave, and pulled him out of his kennel. "You - go and take a shower and get changed. Then get Donald up, and bring him down here. I want an explanation," Skinner commanded, in a tone that sent a shiver down Mulder's spine.

"Yes, Master." Mulder took off up the stairs two at a time, ignoring his pounding headache. He took a shower, swallowed a couple of aspirin, got dressed, then roused the sleeping Donald, and lent him a clean set of sweats. "You'd better hurry," he told his guest, "My Ma...Walter wants to see us downstairs."

"Is Mr. Skinner in a really bad mood?" Donald asked, trembling slightly, clearly in total and utter awe of the big man.

Mulder thought about this for a second, his head on one side. "On reflection I'd say - yes. What the hell do **you** think?" Mulder snapped.

"I think I'm about to pass out," Donald replied, his face pale and scared.

"Don't worry. It's me he's mad at, not you," Mulder said with a sigh.

"Why? It's just as much my fault..." Donald began, and Mulder had to laugh.

"Listen to us. We're like kids trying to decide who takes the blame in front of the principal," he said, shaking his head ruefully. "Look, I'm in big shit, Donald. I've already accepted that I'm not going to be sitting down easily any time soon. You'll be fine though. I really don't think that Walter will spank you. He might chew you out a bit of course and that's not pleasant either, but at least your butt is safe."

"Oh god." Donald closed his eyes. "You are so lucky," he whispered.

"Trust me, I don't **feel** lucky right now," Mulder replied.

The two hapless men returned to the living room, and shuffled to a nervous halt in front of Skinner who was sitting at the table, talking to Ian in a quiet voice. He didn't seem too angry, Mulder thought, then changed his mind again the minute Skinner looked at him.

"All right, you two, go and stand over there," Skinner ordered. Mulder grimaced at Donald, but did as they had both been told, and stood in front of the couch. "Okay, Ian's told me what happened, now I want to hear about it from you. Donald?"

"Uh...we got drunk, and I got a bit sick. Sir," Donald said nervously.

"That much was obvious. Perhaps someone could explain about the singing, and the police car? Fox?"

"That. Right." Mulder flushed as he remembered the singing. Oh shit! What the hell had he been **on** last night? "It wasn't singing as such, Master. It was more...serenading."

"Serenading?" Skinner asked dangerously, his eyebrow making it clear that he needed more information - and fast.

"Yeah. I had the idea - and this wasn't Donald's fault, or Ian's - that it might be nice if..." Mulder glanced at Donald who had gone completely pale as he remembered the thought processes behind the serenading. "Well...it's personal stuff," Mulder finished lamely.

"Personal?" Skinner barked. "Serenading who? And why?"

Mulder bit on his lip, unwilling to share Donald's secret.

"Oh shit," Donald whispered. "Elliott...supposing he heard us last night? Supposing he knows?" He turned to Mulder, a horrified expression on his face. Mulder winced.

"Sorry," he muttered. "I was completely and utterly out of my head, Master," he told Skinner. "I really screwed up."

"That much is obvious," Skinner said. "Now, would somebody explain this to me?"

"I was serenading Elliott," Donald whispered. Skinner raised his eyebrow again.

"But it was my idea," Mulder interjected hastily.

"Then the police car came, and Ian got us away and I was sick," Donald finished. "Shit," he said again. "Supposing I've lost my job? If Elliott finds out..." He looked as if he was going to pass out.

Skinner got up. "Donald, you could have ended up in the drunk tank, to say nothing of causing a public nuisance last night. However you're young - and you're not my responsibility. All I'm going to do to you is to make you watch Fox being punished."

"What?" Mulder gasped. Skinner had never punished him in front of anyone before, and he could feel himself going red at the very idea.

"You were happy enough to make a fool of yourself in front of these two last night, so I can't see it'll make any difference this morning," Skinner told him tersely.

"No...please. I know you have to punish me, but..." Mulder began.

Skinner fixed him with a steely look, and Mulder closed his mouth with a resigned sigh.

"Ian, you were the only one to behave sensibly last night. Do you want to stay and watch me punish Fox, or do you want to leave?" Skinner asked.

Ian glanced at Mulder, then shrugged. "I'll stay," he said.

"Ian!" Mulder protested

"Sorry, buddy," Ian replied with a wry grin, "but I think you're lucky. I wish I had someone taking care of me like this."

"It must be some new definition of 'taking care of' that I wasn't aware of before," Mulder grumbled, suddenly aware that he was about to become the floor show in a piece of Sunday morning entertainment that he had no wish to be involved in.

"That's enough. Donald, stay where you are. Ian, take a seat. Fox, get my slipper, and bring it to me," Skinner ordered. Mulder glared at him. Skinner took a step forward. "As you spent the night in the kennel, I think you can spend the rest of the day in puppy mode as well. That usually helps focus your mind on your status. Bring the slipper to me in your mouth," he instructed.

Mulder knew that his humiliation was now complete. He trotted up the stairs to Skinner's bedroom, butterflies positively swarming in his stomach. A public spanking, like a little kid caught acting out at a restaurant - and worse, a public spanking in front of friends. He wanted the ground to open up and swallow him. He found one of Skinner's tasteful black leather slippers, and shuddered, picking it up and placing it in his mouth. The leather smelt divine, but his cock remained resolutely unaroused. This would be a full blown punishment spanking - he had no illusions about that whatsoever.

He went back down the stairs, to find Skinner seated on the couch, Donald still standing nervously in front of him, and Ian sitting at the table. His so-called friend shot him a sympathetic smile as he passed, which Mulder ignored. He went and knelt beside his Master, and dropped the slipper into Skinner's lap. He was aware of Donald gasping as one of his most personal fantasies was played out in front of his eyes.

"Pants down," Skinner ordered.

Mulder looked up, but the protest died in his throat as he saw the stern look in Skinner's eyes. Of course his Master was going to see that he exacted the full amount of humiliation out of this little lesson. Mulder's cheeks were burning furiously, as he slid his pants and shorts down to his knees, exposing his butt. Then he lowered himself over Skinner's strong thighs, and buried his face in the couch. Skinner didn't waste any time. The flat sole of the slipper made hard, stinging contact with Mulder's buttocks, and he almost jumped out of his skin. He'd never been spanked with this slipper before, and it had a weight and sting that was worse than the strap.

Mulder steeled himself not to cry out in front of his audience, but Skinner intended to make him do just that. The slipper peppered his backside with blow after stinging blow. Skinner, as always, was thorough in his work, and when Mulder tried to put a hand back to protect his burning backside, Skinner just transferred his attention to his slave's thighs, and down to the top of his knees instead, until Mulder removed his hand, howling in protest. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Donald's pale face, his mouth open in shock, and a clearly not disinterested bulge in his sweats. A glance in Ian's direction showed him that his other friend was enjoying the scene too. Mulder gave in, and started to holler, but still Skinner didn't let up. Mulder began to squirm, and wriggle, but Skinner merely placed a big hand on the small of his back, and pinned him down. Thus trapped, Mulder had no choice but to endure, as his previously pale bottom was turned bright red.

He was sure that it was the longest spanking of his entire life. It was certainly the most humiliating. What felt like hours passed before Skinner felt his slave had been punished enough. Then it was over. He felt Skinner rub his back, and tousle his sweaty hair, while he panted, and sobbed over his Master's knee like a little kid, then his Master flipped him onto the floor, grabbed his slave's tee shirt, and escorted him over to the corner. He parked Mulder there, nose to the wall, his sweats and shorts around his ankles, presenting his punished, red backside to all the room's occupants. Mulder closed his eyes and rested his forehead against the wall, sure that he'd died and gone to hell.

"What lesson did you learn from that spanking?" His Master asked him. Mulder's heart thumped. Surely his Master didn't intend to humiliate him even more by making him go through this part of their usual punishment spanking routine? He knew that his Master did, and he didn't dare disobey him.

"Not to...get drunk?" Mulder offered.

"Hardly," Skinner snorted. "Try again, please."

"To remember that I don't hold my liquor well," Mulder muttered.

"That's marginally better. Continue," Skinner ordered, bestowing another slap on Mulder's flaming butt cheeks to speed the process.

"Ow! Uh, not to get my friends into trouble. Not to make damn stupid suggestions..." Mulder paused. Skinner slapped his bottom again.

"More please," he ordered.

"Ah! Don't...I'm thinking..." Mulder said desperately.

Skinner smacked him again. "Think quicker," he said.

"To heed my Master when he gives me advice about my behavior, and warns me when he thinks I'm heading for a fall," Mulder gabbled.

"That's better," Skinner said approvingly. "Will you learn from today, Fox?" He asked.

"Yes, Master," Mulder said miserably.

"Good. Then you can stay there for half an hour while I talk to Donald. Fox - hold your tee shirt up. I want this butt on display to the room so that your friends can see the consequences of poor decisions - and don't touch your backside."

"No, Master," Mulder whispered, wanting nothing more than to massage some of the pain out of his flaming bottom and now finding that even that was denied him. He gathered up his tee shirt and held it away from his buttocks, sure that his face was as red from humiliation as his bottom was from being so thoroughly spanked.

"Right - Ian, I think it's time for you to go," Skinner said.

"Sure," Ian cleared his throat. "Um, bye, Mulder," he called.

"Bye," Mulder muttered into the wall.

"You are a lucky bastard. You have no idea," Ian said softly, and for a moment, Mulder caught a glimpse of the other man's desperate loneliness, and sadness. He heard Skinner show Ian to the door, and then he heard his Master sigh.

"All right, Donald. I'm not going to eat you. Come and sit down. I want to talk to you."

Mulder heard voices, but he wasn't sure what was being said, except that the two men were discussing Elliott, and Donald's unrequited love for the other man. He felt so damn stupid, standing in the corner of the room with his ass hanging out for everyone to see. He was a grown man, for god's sake...a grown man, and an owned man, he reminded himself, putting his shame into perspective. Half an hour later, he was awakened from his reverie by another stinging slap on his tender butt cheeks.

"Had enough?" Skinner asked.

"Yes, Master," Mulder said softly.

"Then pull your pants up, and turn around," Skinner ordered. Mulder did as he was told and turned to find himself facing a broad chest.

"I'm so sorry, Master," he said meekly, gazing into Skinner's dark eyes. Skinner grinned, and enveloped him in his arms. He held his slave tight for a long time, just rocking him against that big chest, then dropped a kiss on Mulder's forehead.

"You'll be the death of me, boy," he muttered, kissing Mulder again.

"I hope not, Master," Mulder said sincerely. "I am sorry. You did warn me last night, but I was out of it," he sighed. "You were right about me living in extremes as well. I do. You've brought balance into my life for the first time ever, but as soon as you loosen the reins I go and do something stupid."

"Don't punish yourself, boy. That's what I'm here for," Skinner said, with a wry chuckle, "and Fox," he dropped his voice. "This isn't over yet, you know."

"No, Master." Mulder looked at his feet.

"We're going on a little trip. When we get back, you're in puppy mode for the rest of the day - including mealtimes. Understood?"

"Yes, Master," Mulder nodded. The whole puppy thing was weird. He didn't like it, but he had to admit that on some level it worked, taking him down into his slavery, and restoring the sense of balance and serenity that Skinner had helped him to achieve.

"Good. For now, though, we have an errand to run. I've got a phone call to make, then, Donald, you're coming with me," Skinner said. "You too, Fox."

Mulder didn't dare ask where they were going, but his heart sank when Skinner's jeep drew up outside Elliott's apartment block. Donald's face went positively gray as he realized where they were. They stepped over a pile of vomit in the street, which Donald also recognized, and he swayed momentarily. Skinner grabbed hold of the young man's arm, and propelled him into the apartment block, and up a couple of flights of stairs. The door to an apartment at the top of the stairs was opened and Mulder recognized Elliott. The other man was dressed in an impeccably casual ensemble that made everyone else look scruffy, even Skinner. Elliott even had a neatly folded, striped handkerchief in the top pocket of his jacket.

"Walter, please come in. These, I take it, are the miscreants." Elliott looked down his nose at Mulder and Donald, and the latter gave a low moan of total embarrassment.

"I'm sorry, sir. I don't know what we were thinking last night," Donald said quickly. "Please, I don't want to lose my job. I know that you expect us to maintain the same standard of professionalism in our private lives as at work, and..."

"Quiet, Donald. I think we all heard more than enough from you last night," Elliott said in a firm tone. Donald flushed bright red, his worst fear that Elliott had heard them being confirmed. "I wondered what all the noise was about," Elliott said with a frown.

"Oh god, excuse me, I think I'm going to..." Donald put his hand over his mouth, and looked around in desperation.

"End of the corridor, first door on the left. Quickly!" Elliott said. Donald disappeared.

Elliott turned back to Skinner with an amused shake of his head. "Kids," he murmured. "Please, sit down, Walter. This is a very serious matter. I can assure you that Donald will..."

"Excuse me, Elliott," Skinner interrupted, clicking his fingers. Mulder knelt immediately by his Master's side, ignoring Elliott's look of shock at his instant submission. "Sorry to interrupt, but I didn't bring Donald here to get him into trouble. You must know that the boy's crazy about you. Last night was just a desperate attempt to attract your attention."

Mulder held his breath, wondering what the hell Skinner was doing.

"Of course I know," Elliott replied, with a deep, heartfelt sigh.

"And? I know you're on your own, and have been since you and James went your separate ways but that was years ago. Isn't it time to let someone new into your life?" Skinner asked softly.

"Walter, I'm fifty," Elliott said, shaking his head. "Donald is 25 years old. He's half my age. I'm flattered of course. Who wouldn't be? A beautiful looking boy like that, mooning over them the whole time..."

"Then why not put him out of his misery? He doesn't care about the age difference so why should you?" Skinner asked. "He's a good worker isn't he?"

"What? Yes. The best," Elliott said proudly. "He has a real flair for our work, an unerring instinct about style, and what suits the client."

"What will happen to the business when you decide to retire?" Skinner asked softly. "Shouldn't you be grooming a successor? Someone who shares your ideas?"

"Well...I..." Elliott shook his head. "I just don't know," he said.

"I've known you for years, Elliott. You hate taking the plunge - you know how cautious you are, and god knows that boy needs someone as patient and even-tempered as you. This isn't a passing phase. He's been in love with you for three years. He told me so. Isn't it about time you did what you both want instead of condemning two people to loneliness?"

Elliott ran a hand through his white hair, pacing the room. "You're right," he said at last, and Mulder felt his heart leap in his chest. He wanted to exchange a high five with his Master, but instead he kept his gaze fixed firmly on the floor, and rested his chin on Skinner's lap. Skinner's hand came automatically to rest on Mulder's hair, and stroked softly. "You're absolutely right, Walter. I've let this situation continue for long enough. I'm so fond of Donald - more than I've even liked to admit to myself. It's time to take that boy in hand."

"Congratulations," Skinner laughed. "One thing though, Elliott," he said in a warning voice. The older man looked at him with a worried frown. "Oh, it's nothing difficult. I'm sure you'll be able to manage this, knowing you as I do. Donald is young, and in need of a few rules. He needs to know that you're...in charge," Skinner said, a wry smile tugging at his lips.

"I understand, Walter." Elliott glanced at Mulder, kneeling by his Master's side.

"Oh, nothing like this," Skinner said hastily. "Just the occasional firm reminder of your authority, preferably delivered to his backside. I think anything more than that would scare the hell out of Donald."

"I agree!" Elliott joined in Skinner's laughter. At that moment, Donald sidled back into the room, looking a little less gray than he had a few moments before.

"Are you all right, my love?" Elliott asked the young man. The look on Donald's face as he realized that Elliott was talking to him, and using such fond words, was priceless. Mulder had to bite down on the inside of his cheek to keep from laughing out loud.

"Yes, sir...thanks," Donald whispered, flushing to the roots of his blond hair.

"Good. Then I think we have some matters to discuss, don't you?" Elliott ran the back of his hand gently down the side of Donald's face. "There, don't be so scared, Donald," he said tenderly. Donald's eyes were suddenly wide and full of hope, and Mulder felt a lump rise in his throat.

"It's going to be fine - but first we'll have to deal with all that nonsense from last night," Elliott said reprovingly. Donald's eyes flashed with anticipation, and he glanced at Mulder who nodded at him encouragingly. "Then, we can get on with the rest of our lives," Elliott said with a broad smile.

"Time for us to leave. Our work here is done," Skinner grinned, making Mulder wince at his Master's corny choice of phrase. Skinner got up, and moved his hand to bring Mulder to heel. They shook hands with Elliott, then left the two lovebirds to it and returned to the jeep.

"Master..." Mulder said, climbing onto the back seat, knowing that he was in puppy mode for the rest of the day.

"Hmm?" Skinner started to drive.

"You do know I love you, right?" Mulder said, resting his head on his Master's shoulder.

"Yeah," Skinner grinned at him in the mirror.

"The way you sorted those two out." Mulder shook his head in amazement.

"A skill I learned from Andrew - when to interfere in people's personal lives, and when not to," Skinner said with a wry chuckle. "I've made a few mistakes along the way, believe me, but I'm not blind, Fox. I've known for some time that Elliott had a thing for Donald, and it was equally clear that Donald had a massive crush on his boss. It was good to finally bring those two together."

"I don't think they'd have managed it on their own," Mulder said, kissing the back of Skinner's neck.

They drove the rest of the way home in companionable silence. When they got there, Mulder went straight to his kennel while Skinner fixed them a giant brunch. Mulder ate his off a plate on the floor, sitting by Skinner's side, using only his mouth. Afterwards, Skinner sat down on the couch with a sigh. Mulder, mindful that today was Master's Day and that his Master had already missed out on his wake-up call, bath, and shave, crouched at Skinner's side, undid his timberlands, and took his socks off. Then he went and fetched his Master's slippers, bringing them to him in his mouth. Skinner grinned, and tousled his slave's hair affectionately.

"Good boy," he murmured, lying back on the couch. Mulder went and found his Master's unread newspaper, and brought that to him in his mouth as well. Skinner took it, and Mulder rested his head on his Master's lap drowsily while the other man read. After an hour or so, Skinner patted the couch, and Mulder jumped up eagerly and settled down beside his Master, lying on his front because his sore backside was in no condition to be sat upon.

"Well, boy, we had a few dramas there, but it all turned out okay in the end," Skinner said, looking down fondly into his slave's eyes.

"Yeah, for those two. I wish it would turn out like that for Ian though," Mulder said.

"It might. In time," Skinner shrugged.

"And I wish I knew who that bastard was who freaked him out like that."

"If anyone makes a complaint against that guy then I promise you that he won't play in this city again," Skinner said, his tone deadly serious

"Do you really have that kind of power?" Mulder looked up at his Master.

"Oh yeah."

"That is such a turn on," Mulder grinned.

"Everything's a turn on to you," Skinner tweaked a nipple playfully.

"As far as you're concerned it is," Mulder retorted. "I really am sorry I screwed up last night," he added.

"Fox - I told you, I don't want roboslave. I knew we were heading for a fall by the way you were being so damn perfect. We must have that talk about how you organize your life."

"Yes, Master."

"And I must take some of the blame for last night. I'm not condoning what happened, and I did warn you, but still, you're my responsibility, and I should never have allowed you out when you were still so clearly in scene-space. I made a bad mistake. It won't happen again."

"Hey, if you screwed up, does that mean I get to spank you?" Mulder asked hopefully, grinning obscenely at his Master.

"What do you think?" Skinner growled. "Who the hell is the slave and who the Master around here anyway?"

Mulder smiled and snuggled up contently against Skinner's chest. "Just checking," he murmured meekly. "Thought it might be fun to feel you wriggling over my lap for a change!"

"You know, for that, I think another spanking might be in order." Skinner squeezed one of Mulder's hot buttocks, making his slave moan, and writhe against his Master's chest. "Out of interest..." Skinner moved his other hand up, and teased Mulder's other nipple between his thumb and forefinger, making his slave twist and moan. "What exactly did Donald sing to his amour last night?"

"*Unchained Melody*," Mulder grinned, glancing up at his Master.

Skinner winced theatrically. "Oh dear. I can just imagine how that sounded in the middle of the night, on a quiet street, sung by a couple of drunks."

"It was...pretty bad," Mulder admitted, laughing at the memory.

"And strangely appropriate," Skinner mused. "Trust you to pick a song with the word 'chain' somewhere in the title."

"It wasn't deliberate!" Mulder protested. "I'm sorry," he said again. "This hasn't been much of a Master's Day."

"Never mind. You can make up for it next weekend at Murray's party by making all the other tops very envious of my beautiful slave," Skinner said, patting Mulder's rump reassuringly.

"You wouldn't really sell me, would you? Even for the night?" Mulder asked, remembering their conversation the previous day.

"Slave auctions are hot," Skinner said, by way of reply. "All the slaves get put up on the stage, and examined. You'll have to strip off so that your potential buyer gets a good look at you. People put in bids - I'd love to see them bid for you. You'd get the highest price of the evening I expect."

"I couldn't serve anyone else," Mulder said, his cock hardening anyway because the auction was such a horny idea.

"Even if I ordered you to?" Skinner whispered in his ear, his arms folding around his slave lovingly.

"Not...with my body."

"With your service? Massage, dressing, running baths, attending another top...I'm sure you could manage that much. They wouldn't touch you," Skinner said.

"Well..."

"If I ordered you, then you'd have no choice," Skinner said in that sexy growl. Mulder's cock hardened instantly.

"Yes, Master," he replied. He didn't know how he felt about the slave auction, but he trusted Skinner not to make him do anything that would upset him.

"Good - then we'll see what happens, pup," Skinner grinned.

Mulder saw himself, in his mind's eye, standing on the auctioneer's block, being bid for by strangers, and his cock lurched to attention.

"Now, pup...I think I want to experience your serenading talents myself." Skinner pulled his slave over his knee, and raised his hand. "Sing to me, boy, while I accompany you on the drum..."

## **End of Part 15**

### **Chapter End Notes:**

**Fun pic below courtesy of Gaby**

## P.E.T.S by Xanthe

### Author's Notes:

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Beautiful pic courtesy of **Sean Spencer**.

Posted 10th May, 2000

**WARNING: Scenes of public humiliation, the usual quota of BDSM thingummies and some sappy stuff.**

Quotation courtesy of my sweet Alex. None of this is beta'd. It's far too much fun to take seriously.

Many thanks to Emma, who told me a very intriguing tale that sparked this story off, and for the long discussions over high calorie snacks.

Thanks to Gaby and Phoebe for their help, and as usual to CDavis for the tapes and the pics :-)

This chapter is for Don.

**24/7** is an erotic fantasy and NOT a BDSM resource guide. The truth is sometimes exaggerated, or played with, for dramatic effect. For more information, please visit the **24/7 BDSM Glossary**.

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*"A truth, still apparent, though disregarded, that things move violently to their place, but calmly in their place. To put it another way, everything has its right home, the region that suits it, and, unless forcibly restrained, will move thither by a kind of homing instinct."*

**J. Winterson**  
**"Art and Lies"**

"I've been surfing," Mulder glanced up from his lap top as his Master came into the living room, still dressed in his work suit, carrying his briefcase.

"And?" Skinner frowned slightly, and Mulder got up hastily, and helped his Master out of his coat, hanging the garment up.

"And, I'm not stupid," Mulder said, pouring the other man his usual malt whisky, and handing it to him. Skinner raised a questioning eyebrow in response to this statement, a teasing look in his dark eyes. Mulder loosened his Master's tie, and pressed his lips quickly against the other man's stubbled jaw, then jumped back, tie in hand, out of the way of the swat that was aimed at his backside for his temerity to steal a kiss.

"I know from the way you and Ian were laughing that this whole pony thing is some kind of really bad joke on me. I want to be prepared," Mulder said, winding his Master's tie into a neat ball and placing it on the table, then approaching the other man cautiously, undoing the top button of his collar, and then helping him out of his jacket.

Skinner caught the back of his slave's neck, holding him still. "If anyone does any preparing around here, it'll be me," he said in the low, masterful tone that always went straight to Mulder's cock.

"I know that..." Mulder said quickly, "I was just looking!"

"And what did you find?" There was a glint of amusement in Skinner's eyes.

"Waaaay too much information," Mulder said mournfully. "Please, tell me that you have no intention of, uh, **riding** me next weekend, Master." He eyed Skinner's huge bulk in some trepidation.

His Master laughed out loud. "Ah, that's what's worrying you. Well, slave, sleep easy. I have no intention of riding you...at least not in **that** way. I can think of plenty of other pleasurable ways to see you're well mounted though." Skinner chuckled at his own joke, and swallowed down his whisky in one smooth gulp.

Mulder knelt down and undid his Master's shoes. It was an established evening ritual between them. When Skinner came home, Mulder would be waiting, naked and available. He would bring the big man a drink, and make him comfortable, hang up his coat and jacket, and then fetch his Master's slippers, before addressing himself to any other little needs his Master might have.

"Hmmm, well, while I was online I found some interesting stuff," Mulder said, glancing up at his Master from under long eyelashes, a grin in his voice. "And I joined *P.E.T.S...*"

"Pets?" Skinner looked down at his slave inquiringly.

Mulder smirked, and, taking his life into his hands, tied Skinner's shoelaces together and prepared to flee.

"Yeah - I thought that would appeal to you seeing as how you keep trying to turn me into a dog, and now a damned **pony**," Mulder said the word with some venom. "Although it doesn't have anything to do with pets, as such," he grinned. "It stands for *People for the Ethical Treatment of Slaves...*"

Mulder was up and running before he finished the sentence. Skinner gave a growl, and took a step in pursuit of his slave, only to find himself tangled up in his own shoelaces. He fell heavily to the floor, with

a startled grunt, quickly followed by a bellow of masterly rage. Mulder ran up the stairs, two at a time, his heart beating in his chest.

Mulder found Skinner's slippers, and sat on the end of the bed, holding them, for a moment, wondering if his Master would follow him up the stairs to dispense his righteous masterly wrath. Mulder was suddenly startled by what he had just done. He hadn't planned it - it had just happened, and it had taken him as completely by surprise as it had clearly taken his Master. After a few minutes, when he hadn't heard the sound of Skinner's footsteps on the stairs, he decided that it was time to face the music, and trotted back down. Skinner was sitting on the couch - although lounging might have been a better description. His shirt sleeves were undone, and his head was lolling back, his eyes closed. Mulder crept around and knelt in front of his Master, offering him the slippers.

"Uh, do you want me to go chain myself in the kennel now, or after you punish me?" He asked, unable to stop himself from grinning slightly, even despite the imminence of punishment.

Skinner opened his eyes and looked at his slave steadily, and Mulder looked back. There was silence. The silence stretched on, and on...but still Skinner's hard gaze didn't crack. Mulder started to feel nervous.

"Come on...it was just a little joke...you weren't hurt or anything - were you?" He was suddenly aware of how tired his Master was looking. Skinner had dark shadows under his eyes, and his shoulders were stiff, and tense. "I didn't mean anything. Oh shit," Mulder muttered, his mouth going into overdrive as Skinner's continued silence frayed his nerves. "Okay, I'm an idiot. You're right. I know that. I don't know why I did it. I just..."

Mulder stopped talking as one of Skinner's fingers was placed over his mouth.

"C'mere," Skinner muttered, in a throaty growl. He dragged his slave onto the couch, and kissed him - a long, deep kiss that took Mulder's breath away and made his body melt against his Master's white shirt, and dark dress pants. His cock, always on the edge of permanent arousal, started to harden against his Master's thigh.

"What was that for?" Mulder rested his head on Skinner's shoulder, and relished the feel of his Master's blunt fingertips as they ran over his naked back and down to his buttocks.

"That was for you playing - for the first time since you sold yourself to me. I wondered whether you'd ever relax enough to just play," Skinner whispered into his ear. "You've taken everything so seriously."

"I have?" Mulder glanced at his Master in surprise.

"Yes." Skinner slapped his slave's butt affectionately. "You have."

"Does this mean you won't punish me then?" Mulder asked hopefully. Skinner's large, flat hand descended rather more sharply on his slave's upturned butt.

"Don't push your luck," Skinner chuckled.

"Now?" Mulder asked, his stomach lurching in the mixture of anticipation and dread that usually preceded a spanking.

"Not this minute, no. I'm tired." Skinner rubbed a weary hand over his eyes, and Mulder sat up, worried.

"It's my fault - you've missed out on two Master's days because of me, and..."

"No, it isn't your fault. I'm tired because I've been busy at work, and that means that you missed out on a couple of morning spankings, which, clearly, hasn't been good for you," Skinner frowned.

"Not only that," Mulder sighed, "but my markings have gone," he glanced over his shoulder at his pristine white bottom, which was displayed with naked abandon for his Master's pleasure.

"Since when?" Skinner sat up and held his slave at arm's length.

Mulder bit on his lip, and glanced away. "A few days," he admitted.

"You are on strict instructions to let me know when your marks have faded. They aren't an optional extra to your slavery, boy, they're fundamental to it," Skinner told him, his eyes dark. "Until such a time as you have my permanent mark on your flesh, you will at least have a temporary one, reminding you of your status, and who you belong to."

"I know. I'm sorry. I decided I'd tell you tonight - like you said, you've been busy, and the truth is..." Mulder paused.

"Yes?" Skinner prompted.

"Marking hurts, Master," Mulder admitted. "Worse than anything. That's why I did the thing with the shoelaces. I thought that if I was going to be caned then I'd at least like to have done something to deserve it." He sat back on his haunches, shame-faced, realizing that it had been a while since he and his Master had actually had a chance to really **talk**. Oh, they talked at work, as A.D. to Agent, but that wasn't the same as Master to slave, or...lover to lover. Mulder was surprised to find that he missed that. He missed their easy conversation in the evenings as they ate dinner together. He missed his Master's blunt fingers, and warm, wet mouth, claiming his slave's body for his own, missed giving his wake up call because Skinner had been going to work so early, and missed his morning spanking which he enjoyed far more than he'd ever admit to anyone, least of all himself. Most of all though, he just missed hanging out with the big man, his head in Skinner's lap or resting on his shoulder, while Skinner idly, absently fondled his slave, almost like a reflex action, without conscious thought.

It had only been a few days since Skinner's job had required him to work all hours, but it felt like weeks. Conversely, Mulder wasn't very busy on the X Files at the moment, and he would be the first to admit that he didn't react well to having too much time on his hands. The old adage about the devil making work for idle hands was all too true when applied to himself, as he knew very well. He had spent half an hour that very morning phoning around for flight times to Seattle, and only a surprise email from his Master of the most intimate nature had stopped him from leaving Skinner a note and hotfooting it to Seattle to investigate the house that phone number had been registered to.

"Marking is less about inflicting pain, than reinforcing the lesson of who you belong to," Skinner murmured, placing his big hands on his slave's butt and kneading it thoughtfully.

"I know," Mulder sighed.

"And truthfully, tell me how you feel when you see my mark on your body," Skinner whispered in a deep, throaty growl. Mulder's cock skyrocketed. "In words. **That** doesn't count," Skinner said with a sly grin, glancing at the newly aroused state of his slave's cock.

"I don't like the process," Mulder began, "although...okay, there's something about it that arouses me, the whole ritual maybe - but it's freaking painful. Afterwards though, I get a thrill out of knowing the marks are there - our secret, written in my flesh...it's like a constant tingle. I prefer it when the sting fades a bit, and the marks just remind me occasionally, when I least expect it. Remind me that I'm yours, your slave, your property, your devoted boy." He glanced up at his Master's dark, inscrutable eyes. "Sometimes I get hard just thinking about them being there," he admitted.

"Good. Then the marking process stays - at least until you're wearing my brand, or tattoo," Skinner commented. "And maybe even then as well, just because." He grinned, and slapped his slave's butt. "However, marking takes precision, and I'm tired so I have no intention of marking you tonight. I won't mark you again until just before we leave for Murray's place on Friday evening, and when I do - it will be a special kind of marking," he promised.

Mulder gave Skinner his best hopeful look, complete with puppy dog eyes, but his Master just laughed and refused to elaborate further on what form the special marking would take.

"On the subject of Murray's party - I want to show you off this weekend," Skinner continued, steepling his fingers as he spoke. "For that reason, I'll be putting you in deep submission for the entire time. If you feel yourself coming out of that state, for whatever reason, you must tell me. Understood?" Mulder nodded, feeling his body flush, and his already hard cock give a little spasm of anticipation. It had been a while since they had taken their relationship to the depth of total surrender, and submission that Skinner would require from him at the weekend. He found it almost unbearably exciting. "I want to show people how your training is progressing," Skinner murmured. "At Murray's last party, as I recall, there was an unfortunate incident." Mulder sighed, and nodded again, as he remembered biting the loathsome Lee. "I do have a certain reputation to maintain," Skinner grinned. "I would like people to see what a truly attentive, well trained slave can do and I'm sure they'd all like to see how an efficient Master can improve the behavior of even the most...challenging slave. I realize that I've been neglecting your training after all the dramas of recent weeks." He tangled his hands in Mulder's hair, reassuring him that he didn't hold his slave to blame for those events. "I've probably been too easy on you as well - you need taking down again, boy," he said in a gruffly affectionate tone. "If you go too long without being taken down, you start getting antsy." Mulder's hard cock begged for release, tortured exquisitely merely by his Master's tone of voice.

"Master, please," he croaked, glancing at his erection hopefully.

"You're forbidden any release between now and Saturday," Skinner told him, in a brisk, business-like tone, crushing that hope mercilessly. "There's a method in my cruelty, slave - you've done some reading, so you know a little of what will be expected of you during the pony trials on Saturday afternoon. I've

given you plenty of practice in holding an erection over the past few months, and I believe you've become fairly proficient at that," he smiled with a kind of grim satisfaction and Mulder made a face. "That's good - because you'll be required to keep a very visible erection for quite some time on Saturday."

"In public?" Mulder said faintly.

"In public," Skinner confirmed with a firm nod of his head. "Get used to the idea, boy."

Mulder closed his eyes, and nodded, seeing himself in his mind's eye, naked, and erect in front of an audience. A blush started on his face, and seeped down to his chest, making his Master give a deep, throaty laugh.

"You'll look magnificent," Skinner murmured. "My beautiful, thoroughbred steed. A little temperamental maybe, but with the right handling..." he pulled Mulder's butt cheeks apart, and inserted a finger, at the same time as his lips plundered his slave's mouth, demanding nothing less than the total capitulation of his slave to his will. Mulder gave himself up without demur, his whole body lost to the joy of his Master's touch. Finally, Skinner released him, and Mulder rocked back on his heels, stunned.

"All right, boy. You're in training mode now. I want you to be watchful to my every signal - disobedience or inattention will be paid for on the butt, with my hand or any implement close by," Skinner warned. "We'll refresh your memory on working from non-verbal signals." He gave a single clap of his hands, and Mulder responded immediately, scrambling off the couch, getting on his hands and knees, and pressing his nose into the carpet. "In addition, I think some minor inconvenience of movement will assist you in getting into the right frame of mind for the weekend's challenges." So saying, he got up, and left the room.

Mulder heard him go, but remained silent, completely still in his prone position. He longed to break it, and look up, but didn't dare. He wouldn't have put it past his Master to still be there, watching him. A few minutes later, he heard Skinner's footsteps on the stairs, and his Master returned.

"Up, boy, and into the kitchen. You can stand facing the wall while I fix us dinner," Skinner commanded. Mulder obeyed, noticing as they walked into the kitchen that Skinner had something in his hands. Closer inspection revealed it to be a leg spreader. Skinner had never used this kind of bondage device on him before - he rarely ever used bondage on Mulder outside of the Playroom.

"Face the wall, slave, palms flat against it - lean on them," Skinner said. Mulder did as he was told, and placed his hands on the wall, bracing himself. "Legs wide apart - wider," Skinner instructed. Mulder obeyed, flushing wildly again. Positioned like this, he felt achingly vulnerable. His ass hole was exposed, wide, and waiting, and his butt was angled out - unprotected, offered up like a sacrifice. Skinner fastened the leg spreader between his legs, using ankle cuffs. "Good, I like a well hobbled steed," Skinner joked as he got up.

Mulder was sure he couldn't hold this position for long. His legs were held so wide apart that he didn't see how he would be able to walk.

"Concentrate on keeping still," Skinner instructed. He turned around and left his slave facing the wall, butt still out, legs open.

Mulder heard his Master move around the kitchen, humming cheerfully to himself, and made a face at the wall, which was a particularly dull shade of pale green he decided after examining it in tedious detail for several minutes. At that moment, a sharp sting on one of his buttocks made him cry out in surprise. He glanced over his shoulder to see Skinner brandishing a large wooden spoon.

"That's for hobbling **me** earlier with the shoelace trick," Skinner told him. "Payback is not just a bitch, it's inevitable, boy."

"Yes, Master," Mulder said meekly, enjoying the familiar sting on his buttocks after the few days respite he'd experienced, painful though it was. Skinner had never used this particular implement on him before - in fact, nobody ever had, and he was intrigued by the feel of it. Similar to a paddle, but snappier, stingier, but not as stingy as the strap. "Face the wall, boy. I'll slowly toast this butt of yours as I cook."

Skinner gave him a sharp slap on his other buttock with the flat end of the spoon, making Mulder gasp, and rock forward on his spread feet. He listened as his Master moved around the kitchen, but each one of the spanks that descended on his waiting, proffered ass came as a surprise. Several minutes would pass and then his Master would treat him to 4 smacks in quick succession. More respite, then a sneaky stinging slap when he wasn't even aware that Skinner was within arm's reach. He could smell something delicious cooking as well, and was suddenly aware that he was hungry - mouth wateringly so. He hoped his Master would unfetter him while he ate. His leg muscles began to ache with the strain of being held so widely open. Finally, Skinner finished up, and he heard his Master behind him.

"Now, this butt is nearly cooked, but I think it needs a little more heating, don't you?" Skinner asked in a malicious tone. Mulder let out a strangled little cry as the wooden spoon slapped down over and over again on his already stinging backside, until he was writhing and moaning, his cock standing stiffly to attention in front of him. He couldn't even hop around to alleviate the discomfort because of the leg spreader, and he was sure he would topple over if the sublime torture went on for too long. He decided that the wooden spoon was on a par with the hairbrush - definitely on his list of Extremely Painful Implements. "That's good..." Skinner murmured, and the onslaught came to a sudden end. "Now I think we need to add some oil," his Master said, and Mulder gasped as he felt an oiled finger press into his open, waiting hole, "and some seasoning," Skinner growled, grabbing his slave's thighs. Mulder gasped again, as he heard his Master unzip his pants, and then the tip of Skinner's hard cock nudged against his freshly glowing buttocks. Oily fingers caressed his warm butt cheeks, and then his bottom was grasped firmly and his Master's cock entered him smoothly, without any further ado. Mulder almost melted against the wall - it had been days since Skinner had used him, and he had missed the feel of his Master's cock filling him. He moaned, and pushed his ass back to meet Skinner's thrusts forward.

"I thought we were going to have dinner," he gasped, vaguely wondering just how hygienic it was to be doing this in the kitchen and then dismissing that thought as being ridiculous. It was his Master's decision where he took his slave, and if Skinner wanted to serve him up on the dining room table, with his cock garnished by a sprig of parsley, then Mulder had no say in the matter.

"That's exactly what I'm doing," Skinner said in an amused growl, his lips descending on the back of Mulder's neck and licking a swathe along his slave's shoulder blades. "You're on the menu, boy." His

long, sweet thrusts reached a crescendo, and Mulder felt his Master convulse against him, and then go still.

"Are you going to **insist** that I don't get to come until Saturday?" Mulder asked mournfully, as he felt his Master soften inside him, and his own cock strained in painful need.

"Yes - a little bit of denial never did you any harm," Skinner said with a guffaw. He kissed his slave's shoulders over and over again, making him shiver. His Master withdrew, and Mulder felt his semen dripping along his thigh. It was messy, but Mulder liked the sensation. It was like being marked; it was all proof of his Master's total ownership of his slave, and he couldn't help but love that. "Clean yourself up, boy, and me," Skinner ordered. Mulder turned, and almost fell over as he remembered the leg spreader. "Hop," Skinner suggested with a grin. Mulder made a face, and shuffled uncomfortably over to the sink. He cleaned his Master, then himself, then Skinner grabbed him and kissed him deeply and sweetly on the lips. "A very nice appetizer," he murmured. "Now, let's get to the main dish."

Dinner was delicious, even if his Master did make him eat kneeling beside his chair, with his legs still forced open by the leg spreader. Skinner fed him with a fork, taking it in turns to feed them both from the same enormous plate, talking to his slave as he fed him.

"While you're in training mode, your normal privileges are suspended," Skinner was saying. Mulder did a visible double-take. *What normal privileges?*

"Ah, you're thinking what a hard life you have," Skinner chuckled. "Think again, boy. You will continue to swim in the morning, but you do not have my permission to run. I want you full of pent-up energy and raring to go this weekend. Learning how to school your normal impulses is part of your training."

"Yes, Master," Mulder nodded. It was Wednesday, so it wasn't as if he'd suffer too much by this injunction.

"Tomorrow evening I'll spend some time refreshing your memory on your leash skills - I want you walking to heel all weekend, whether I've got these little beauties under hostage or not," Skinner pinched one of Mulder's nipples lightly, making his slave gasp. "Do you understand, Fox?" He asked, gazing at his slave keenly. "I want you to show me just how far you've come since the early days, and I want you to show everyone else as well. I want them to envy me my beautiful, spirited, tamed, obedient, and completely attentive slaveboy. Can you do that?" He asked in that low, throaty growl. Mulder stared at his Master transfixed.

"I'll do my best," he replied, meaning it.

Mulder woke in a sweat in the early hours of the morning. He sat up with a start, remembering his dream. He'd been standing in a room full of people, and he'd tried to maintain his erection on his Master's orders, he'd really tried, but everyone had been pointing at him, and laughing, and he had felt his cock wilting before their hostile gazes, and ribald amusement. Shit. A few months ago he would never have dreamed that something like this could ever happen. Him, Fox Mulder, being paraded naked and hard in front of a room full of strangers for his Master's pleasure. He went cold at the very thought of letting his Master down in front of witnesses. Suddenly, that Seattle trip seemed very enticing. Mulder got up, and in a flurry of activity threw some clothes into a bag, and got dressed. He'd leave a note for Skinner. Sure, there'd be hell to pay when he got back, but he just needed to evade his Master

for a few days, and then the party would be over, and all he'd have to suffer was maybe an appointment with the bullwhip, which right now seemed preferable to naked humiliation in front of dozens of staring eyes.

Mulder pulled some clothes on and ran down the stairs to retrieve his cellphone, sneakers in his hands to avoid making a noise and waking his Master. He'd buy a ticket at the airport. Hell, he'd **drive** to Seattle if need be. Mulder found his cellphone in the living room, and sat down on the floor, pulling on his sneakers. Something wet brushed against his hand in the dark and he jumped and almost yelled out loud. A pair of yellowy-green eyes glowed at him, and he heard a familiar trilling purr.

"Go away," he snapped. "If he wakes up and finds out you're not in his bed he'll come and investigate. You know what he's like. He's almost as nosey as you are, ugly butt."

Wanda sat on her haunches and surveyed him steadily.

"Don't pull that emotional crap on me. I'm going. He'll be fine without me. Mad as hell, but fine," Mulder told her, wincing slightly as he imagined just **how** mad his Master would be. He had visions of himself in Seattle, phoning Skinner from the airport. "Hi, it's me. I thought I'd just go away for a few days, you know, bit of a vacation." He shuddered, anticipating the bellow of rage from the other end of the 'phone. "Or I could just not call him," Mulder told Wanda. She put out a dainty forepaw, and licked it with some relish, her ears twitching back and forth almost as if she was laughing at him. "I know, I know, he'd worry...maybe I could send him an email. That way he wouldn't worry, and I wouldn't have to talk to him either. Yeah...that would be best." Wanda finished washing her paw and turned her attention to her bottom, lifting one hind paw delicately in the air as she thoroughly investigated the area to be cleaned.

"I am **not** talking crap!" Mulder seethed at her. "It makes perfect sense."

She sat up and stretched out her two front legs, yawning disinterestedly.

"I know what you're thinking - you're thinking it's my funeral, and you're right, girl. I can do what the hell I like!" Mulder glowered at her. She shook her whole body briskly as if her fur was out of place. "I can!" Mulder repeated. She gazed at him steadily, and then slowly and deliberately turned her back on him and sauntered off in the general direction of Skinner's bedroom. He watched her go. She paused when she got to the stairs, and glanced back at him.

"Don't do this to me!" He implored her. She blinked slowly, then just carried on walking. Mulder stared after her, and then, with a sigh, followed. "Don't think I'm doing this because of you," he hissed, as he followed her through Skinner's bedroom door. She settled down on the bed next to her slave with a triumphant trill of pleasure, and Mulder set his bag down quietly on the floor, and knelt down beside the bed. He gazed at Skinner for a long time, watching his Master's chest rise and fall, rhythmically, then finally, he gave in, and placed a hand on Skinner's large, warm shoulder. His Master came to with a start.

"Fox...what is it?" He asked.

"It's me..." Mulder admitted miserably. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to wake you but Wanda talked me into it."

"Right." Skinner nodded solemnly, sitting up in bed. "She's very talented like that," he said, reaching out a finger to tickle his Mistress under her chin. Mulder allowed his gaze to feast on his Master's naked flesh. Damn it, but suddenly he could see the attraction in tying someone up and just playing with their body...especially a body such as this. He shoved that thought aside, as his ever ready cock started to stir inside his pants.

"You were going somewhere?" Skinner glanced at Mulder's packed bag, and his slave's clothed state.

"Yeah. Seattle," Mulder admitted unhappily. "Only Wanda thought it was a bad idea, and she's probably right, so I thought I should mention it to you so you could maybe chain me up to stop me doing something really stupid."

"You'd be in bondage for the rest of your life if I did that," Skinner remarked wryly. Mulder made a face. "All right," Skinner's tone of voice changed, becoming deadly serious. "Is it that you really want to investigate what might be in Seattle, or is it just that you're running away from what I have planned for you this weekend?" He asked.

"Both," Mulder said quickly, then he sighed. "No, more the latter, I suppose. I had a nightmare about being naked and...uh, **hard** in front of all those people. I couldn't hold it...I'd let you down, Master," he admitted. Skinner laughed. It was a deep, baritone sound, that echoed around the room, making Wanda pull her ears back, her eyes as round as saucers. Mulder felt sure his own eyes were mirroring her response.

"Fox, get your clothes off and get under here - you're not going anywhere," Skinner told his slave firmly.

Mulder had to admit to a certain feeling of relief as he toed off his sneakers, and discarded his jeans and sweater on the floor. It felt so good to slide into Skinner's waiting arms, and the warmth of that huge double bed.

"You have to trust me, boy," Skinner whispered into Mulder's ear, in a low growl. His Master's strong fingers wrapped around Mulder's wrists, and his legs encased Mulder's thighs in a firm hold, so that the slave found he couldn't move.

"Your performance at the weekend is my responsibility," Skinner told him firmly. "It'll be a testament to my training abilities. Any failure will be mine. Your only thought should be pleasing me, and **that** is all that I ask from you. You should know that by now, boy. I've told you often enough."

"Yes," Mulder whispered, his mind heady from the scent and sensation of being wrapped up in his Master's reassuring arms.

"You can ignore everyone else. If I display you - either privately or in public - it is solely for **my** pleasure, not for theirs. It's unlikely that you'll even notice them much during your display on Saturday anyway," Skinner told him.

"Why?" Mulder asked, his throat dried. "Will I be blindfolded or something?"

"Blinkered," Skinner informed him. "With a nervous, newly-broken colt like you, blinkers will definitely be required. You'll only be able to see what's straight ahead, and you'll concentrate on my commands. Nothing else will matter."

"Blinkers?" Mulder mulled that thought over for a moment. "Shit," he added. Skinner laughed again. "I dunno..." Mulder shook his head, still in shock. "All these years of me thinking of you as this dull bureaucrat without a life, and all this time you're the kind of guy who participates in human pony races - naked, erect human pony races, what's more...it's just too surreal."

Skinner gave another low laugh. "As a matter of fact, I don't participate much in human pony races. I never had any reason to before." He squeezed Mulder lightly. "I know what I'm doing, but it's not exactly a hobby of mine. To be honest, I haven't spent hardly any time on the scene since Andrew died. I've been something of a recluse. I do my duty as Guardian, and keep myself available if people want to approach me with problems, but aside from that I haven't indulged this side of myself much. Until I took on this new, wild, exotic, willful and completely irresistible slaveboy, that is. **He** needs to mix, and he needs to be shown off. It would be a crime to keep a boy like this locked up in an upstairs room, or down in a basement. I think that he's been neglected for too many years."

"Oh yeah?" Mulder asked, suddenly going very still. Skinner rarely spoke to him like this, and when he did, his slave loved it. It was the kind of sappy stuff that he couldn't imagine ever being able to accept in his persona as Agent Mulder, but as Fox, the slave, well - he had no choice, did he?

"Oh yes," Skinner affirmed. "This beautiful slave shouldn't be locked up out of sight - he should be on display for all to see. This boy has been left to his own devices for too long, ignoring his own needs even while he was crying out for attention."

"Needs?" Mulder wasn't even sure that he was breathing. He was enjoying this too much - being in his Master's bed, being held so tight, listening to his Master's voice, lulling him to sleep.

"Yes. This boy needs discipline," Skinner chuckled, squeezing Mulder's butt lovingly with his hand. "He needs a firm hand, someone to take him down, someone to obey, and to worship...and he needs to be loved, whether he wants it or not. He needs someone strong enough to take all his crap, and never let go, because he belongs to his Master and because he just needs to see how beautiful that can be, the belonging, and the being belonged to in turn. The slave belongs to the Master, and the Master belongs to the slave."

"Yes?" Mulder grinned stupidly to himself. "So, if you belong to me, how come you don't have my mark on you the way you keep me marked? Huh?"

"I do," Skinner whispered in his ear. "Only the mark you've placed on me isn't visible. It isn't carved on my skin, Fox, but on my heart."

"Oh." Mulder felt a profound sense of something slotting into place. "Oh, well then, that seems fair," he whispered, his whole body relaxing in his Master's arms. "Ow!" His eyes snapped open, as he felt the sting of a slap on his backside. "What was that for?" He complained.

"Because I can." Skinner chuckled in his ear. "Or are you going to report me to *P.E.T.S* for ill treating you?"

"I've already emailed them with a long list of complaints and grievances," Mulder grinned.

"Somebody clearly wants to go to sleep with a **very** hot bottom," Skinner growled menacingly, slapping his slave's butt again with mock severity. "Now sleep, boy, and no more talk of fleeing. I'm not inflicting this weekend on you - when you get there, I think you might actually enjoy it. You'll just have to trust me."

"I do," Mulder muttered sleepily, snuggling down further under the covers, reveling in the feel of his Master's warm, naked flesh against his own. "I do, Walter."

Despite his Master's best efforts, Mulder was wound up like a ball of string by the time Friday evening arrived. He did his best to obey his Master, by **not** running home from the Metro, but even so, he couldn't resist jogging up the entire 17 flights of stairs and thus arrived at the apartment panting heavily, to find a woman he vaguely recognized as their neighbor from across the hallway standing in the living room. She was a large lady, with spiky blonde hair and a wide, smiley face.

"Hi, I'm Fox Mulder..." He held out his hand, and gave her his most charming smile and she melted. Visibly.

"Fox - this is Mrs. Asher. She's going to be looking after Wanda for us this weekend," Skinner said, emerging from the kitchen with a glass of iced tea which he handed to their guest.

"Looking after...? We're only going for 2 nights, M...uh, Walter," Mulder remonstrated with a wry glance in Mrs. Asher's direction. "How much looking after does one cat need? You can leave food and water for her. She'll be fine for 2 days."

"Fine?" Skinner looked aghast. He scooped the cat in question into his arms, and held her against his face. "She'll be lonely!" He scolded Mulder over Wanda's gleefully purring head. "All on her own for two days! My poor baby," he crooned, rubbing Wanda behind the ears.

Mulder winked at Mrs. Asher and raised his eyes heavenward. She choked on her ice tea as she tried desperately to suppress a giggle.

"You know where everything is, Mrs. Asher," Skinner continued, ushering the lady into the kitchen with one big arm, while still cradling Wanda with the other. "There's dried food in this cupboard, canned food here..." He opened the various cupboard doors. "She only drinks water - not milk, that gives her a funny tummy, doesn't it, sweetheart?" He tickled the cat's stomach. "And don't forget her kitty grass, Mrs. Asher. She sometimes likes to chew on that. Sometimes she brings it back up though. Just leave that - I'll clear it up when I get back on Sunday."

"Of course, Mr. Skinner," Mrs. Asher said exchanging another glance with Mulder behind Skinner's back.

Mulder put his finger to his forehead and twisted it slowly, a sad expression on his face. "Nuts," he mouthed silently to Mrs. Asher, safely out of sight of his Master. Mrs. Asher feigned a sudden coughing fit.

"You will come in twice a day, won't you? She'll miss her cuddles..." Skinner said in a worried tone, tweaking Wanda's ears anxiously.

"Twice a day. I'll stay for an hour each day so that she can sit on my lap and have a cuddle," Mrs. Asher said reassuringly. Mulder bit on his lip to keep from laughing out loud. Mrs. Asher was clearly having the same problem.

"I'll leave the vet's details just in case, and my cellphone number so you can reach me. Call me any time, day or night," Skinner told her, holding Wanda up in the air over his head, then lowering her down gently so that he could kiss her nose.

"Day or night, Mrs. Asher," Mulder repeated sternly. "Just call. And remember that her favorite toy is that red mouse over there. She likes you to throw it so she can retrieve it. I've always thought that was some kind of dog envy myself," he mused. Skinner cast a suspicious glance in his direction.

"I can't tell you what a relief it is, knowing that Wanda will be taken care of," Mulder continued. "Walter **does** worry so, don't you, dear?" He patted his Master's arm without the slightest temerity. Skinner's eyes narrowed. Mulder smiled angelically in the certain knowledge that he was safe while Mrs. Asher was present.

"I'm not the only one who should be worried," Skinner growled.

Mulder shook his head. "Oh, I'm worried too. You wouldn't believe **how** worried," he camped up. "But Walter's such a softie. You wouldn't believe it to look at him, Mrs. Asher." He dropped his voice, and adopted a conspiratorial tone.

"No, I wouldn't!" she laughed, patting his arm like an old friend, "and do please call me Sofia."

"Sofia. What a beautiful name," Mulder purred.

"My mother was Spanish although you'd never know it," Mrs. Asher beamed, pointing at her blonde hair and pale complexion. "She christened me Sofia Luisa, after **her** mother."

"Well **do** please call Walter by his first name. It's so nice knowing we have a treasure like you living just opposite. We know you'll take good care of our little angel while we're gone." Mulder patted Wanda negligently on the head. "There pookums, Sofia is going to take good care of you while Daddy and Daddy are gone."

Mrs. Asher's face went a shade of bright, amused red with the stress of not giggling at this remark, while Skinner's glare reached a new height of surliness.

"I'm so glad Wanda will be in such safe hands," Mulder added, escorting Mrs. Asher to the door.

"And I'm glad that Walter is in such good hands," Mrs. Asher confided to him, still giggling. "We worried about him after Andrew died you know," she whispered. "Night after night alone in his apartment."

That brought Mulder up short, and he nodded, his face growing suddenly serious. "Well, you know, that's why he worries so much about Wanda," he murmured. "He knows what it's like to be lonely," he mused thoughtfully.

She stared at him for a moment, with a look of respect on her face, then took his hand and squeezed it. "But not any more. I think you're good for him," she whispered.

"And he's good for me too. Thanks, Sofia," he squeezed back, "and, uh, thanks for looking after the cat from hell too," he grinned.

She laughed and waved goodbye to Skinner over his shoulder. "Don't worry, Walter. Wanda will be fine," she assured him, then she left.

Mulder turned back to face the music.

"Two years of being on perfectly respectable last name terms with the woman and you ruin it all in 2 minutes," Skinner lamented, putting Wanda down on the table.

"Calling someone by their first name does not signify that the relationship is in tatters," Mulder pointed out. "She's wonderful. I like her."

"Obviously," Skinner growled. "I don't know, a couple of months ago you were red-faced and embarrassed at the very idea that Donald and Elliott might think you're gay, and now you've turned into some kind of camp caricature. It's ridiculous."

"And fun," Mulder winked. "She loved it! She knew about you and Andrew so it hardly came as a surprise to her that you and I are together."

"Hmph." Skinner gazed at his slave speculatively. "Someone is high this evening," he commented.

"Well what do you expect? I haven't been able to run, you've had me in bondage for the past couple of nights hardly able to move, and tomorrow you're making me parade naked with a hard-on in front of a crowd of people," Mulder grouched. "It's no wonder I'm off my head."

"You know, I think it's time to mark you," Skinner said, giving his slave a dark, intense stare. "That might settle your nerves and remind you of your status - something you seem in danger of forgetting, boy."

Mulder's stomach churned, and he hated himself for loving Skinner in full masterful mode so much. "Yes, Master," he whispered weakly, feeling as if his legs were turning to jell-o.

"Go up to the Playroom." Skinner took the key from around his neck and handed it to his slave. "And get undressed. Wait for me there. When I'm through with you, we have some packing to do."

"Yes, Master," Mulder said quickly, running up the stairs two at a time. Damn, but he'd never burn off this excess energy. He was just too wound up.

He was breathing heavily by the time he got to the Playroom - nervous breathing. He tried to calm himself the way his Master had taught him, tried to find the silent serenity of his slavery, but it eluded him. He removed his clothing swiftly, and then surveyed the jumbled mess of pants, socks, briefs and so on. He should have undressed slowly, and tried to get control of himself again. With a sigh, he bent down and retrieved the clothes, forcing himself to go slowly, then he folded each garment and left them tidily on the table. Finally, he was done. He knelt down, and pressed his nose against the floor in the

confessional position, taking deep breaths but he just couldn't relax. He sprang up again a moment later, and paced the room anxiously, lost in a whirlwind of emotions. He was so distracted that when two warm hands descend on his shoulders he almost jumped out of his skin in surprise.

"Relax," a deep voice murmured in his ear.

"I can't," he growled in reply.

"Yes, you can. Stay still."

Mulder stiffened, but managed to still his restless feet for a moment. His Master pulled him close, so that his back was resting against the big man's broad chest.

"Still, and quiet. Breathe in time with me," Skinner ordered, placing one large hand over Mulder's diaphragm.

Mulder closed his eyes, and relaxed against Skinner's large bulk, finally feeling a shaky peace flood into his stressed limbs.

"I'm in charge of you this weekend, boy," Skinner told him, in that same low, intense voice. "You'll answer only to me. Your only significant duty is to please me. Nothing else. You give everything else up to me. Your nerves, your fears, everything, and trust me to take good care of you."

Mulder found his breathing slowing, and a sense of deep calm seeping through his body.

"In a minute, I'm going to mark you as my property. You'll accept my mark onto your body with pride, and wear it with the same pride. You'll want to show it off. You won't be ashamed. Yes, it will hurt - and you'll accept that pain as a sign of your devotion to your Master. It's my pleasure to hurt you, and your duty to endure."

Mulder sighed deeply, his cock starting to stir in response to words he found highly erotic for reasons which eluded him. There was silence for a while, during which Skinner kept his hand gently positioned over his slave's abdomen, monitoring his breathing.

"Are you ready to serve me?" Skinner asked a few minutes later.

Mulder took one more deep breath, then nodded.

"Good. Go and lie face down on the massage table. I'll be using the cuffs on you for this marking as I need to be very precise."

Mulder nodded again, and walked slowly over to the table, as if in a dream. He positioned himself face down on the cool leather table, and a few seconds later, his Master came over and spread his slave's legs, then fastened a leather pouch in place to protect Mulder's genitals. He fastened cuffs to Mulder's ankles and wrists, and a strip of leather over his waist to keep him secure, before moving back over to the cupboard. Mulder watched, his stomach churning, as Skinner withdrew his special cane. He'd only used it once before to mark his slave, but Mulder remembered the sensation vividly. He choked back a small whimper. He would do as his Master had instructed, and accept any pain his Master wished to

inflict on his waiting body. That was the only way in which he could show his devotion at this moment in time, bound and helpless as he was. He knew his cock was hard beneath him, and equally, knew it wouldn't get any release today. Mulder tensed his buttocks as his Master returned to the massage table, but the marking didn't commence immediately. Instead, Skinner ran the tip of the cane over his slave's waiting, trussed body, soothing him with words of endearment. Mulder started to relax, knowing what would come next, but at the same time no longer resisting it.

"There will be just four strokes, Fox, but they'll count," Skinner warned him.

Mulder nodded. He felt the cane rest on the far left side of his left buttock, and then there was a long pause. Finally, he felt a surge of energy, as Skinner raised the cane and brought it down hard in one smooth, practiced movement. The pain didn't kick in until a moment later, and then Mulder gave a little sob as the sting consumed his body.

"Oh, shit," he whispered.

"Good boy. Hold still. This is delicate work," Skinner told him.

Mulder felt the cane rest diagonally for a moment, between the bottom of the last stroke, and the crease between his buttocks, then a split second later, the marking continued.

"Fuck!" Mulder moaned. "Oh, god, Master, that cane is evil."

"It is a very impressive instrument. Luckily you're only being marked - not punished," Skinner said with a chuckle. Mulder wasn't quite sure why that constituted being "lucky". He certainly didn't feel lucky at this moment in time. His sore left buttock was throbbing. Now Skinner laid the cane on his right buttock, and delivered two more strokes in swift succession. Mulder was suddenly grateful for his bonds, or he was sure he'd have reared up as the last one hit home. His whole bottom felt as if it had strips of pure fire imprinted on it.

"Good boy. Very nice," Skinner said in a proud voice. "I think you'll like what I've done, Fox."

He undid the straps tethering his slave to the table, and helped him up, then ruffled his slave's hair, drawing him into a deep kiss. Mulder surrendered, as he always did when kissed like this. Skinner seemed to find a way into his very soul when he kissed him. As the embrace continued, his Master's fingers roamed lightly over his slave's newly marked flesh, tracing the line of the strokes, in a way that hurt as much as it was blindingly erotic. Mulder squirmed and surrendered even more to the plundering mouth, and the equally demanding fingers. Finally, Skinner released him, and he swayed for a moment, light-headed.

"Come and see what I've done," Skinner said with a grin, leading his slave over to the mirror. He placed Mulder with his back to the mirror, then moved a couple of steps away. "All right - you can look now," he commanded and Mulder turned his head, glanced over his shoulder, to survey his bottom - and gasped. There, marked on his flesh in vivid red lines, was a perfect 'W', the two 'V's separated by the crease between his buttocks. "See how smooth the line is - how the strokes meet at the right points." Skinner used the cane to lightly trace over the marks on Mulder's flesh, illustrating what he was saying. Mulder shivered, unable to take his eyes off of his newly marked body.

"It's...perfect," he whispered finally, sinking to his knees, and bestowing a kiss on his Master's shoes. "Thank you," he said, feeling an absurd sense of giddy joy at bearing his Master's initial on his body. "Please, promise me you'll brand me one day," he asked sincerely, sitting back on his knees and gazing up at his Master in supplication.

"Branding is a sign of commitment - the brand can never be removed. Maybe one day you'll belong to a different Master, and hate having my brand on your skin," Skinner told him sincerely.

"Like Johnny Depp," Mulder offered. Skinner raised a puzzled eyebrow. "He still had Winona Forever tattooed on his arm - long after she dumped him," Mulder explained.

"Right," Skinner grinned. "So, we'd have to be sure."

"I **am** sure," Mulder said fiercely. "The only way I'd ever belong to anyone else is if you sold me, and...you wouldn't do that, would you?" He asked fearfully.

Skinner smiled down on his worried slave, and placed the tip of the cane beneath Mulder's chin, drawing it up so that he could look into the other man's eyes.

"You'll always belong to me, boy," he promised. "You're mine. That's all there is to it."

Mulder nodded, and kissed his Master's feet again. "Then brand me, Master," he said. He hesitated for a moment, then swallowed his pride. "I beg you," he pleaded in a hoarse whisper.

Skinner leaned over and grasped a fistful of Mulder's hair. "Very well, boy. I will," he said, his tone so sincere that it sent shivers down Mulder's spine. This moment was sacred. What had passed between them had been almost like an exchange of vows. How much better would the moment be when he was actually branded, his hide scored for life, marking him completely, and irrefutably as Walter Skinner's property? Mulder quivered in anticipation at the very thought, and his Master smiled down on him and released his slave's hair, smoothing it back down on his head.

"Not now, boy, but soon. Now, get up. We have more mundane matters to deal with."

"Do we need all this stuff, Master?" Mulder surveyed the two huge open cases that Skinner wanted to take.

"Yes, we do, slave," Skinner replied, handing Mulder a pair of thigh-high leather boots to pack. "Murray has a lot of equipment at his place, but I wouldn't dream of allowing him to decide on my slave's manner of dress - or my own. This will be a full scene party, boy. We want to look the part, don't we?"

"You mean I actually get to be dressed?" Mulder asked wryly.

"Some of the time. If you're good," Skinner replied with a laugh, and a mock swat in the direction of his slave's newly marked butt. "Although 'dressed' is a less accurate term than 'decorated.' He handed Mulder a harness, and some chains which made his slave shiver, although he didn't have time for a closer examination. "All right, we're done here - except for your briefcase of course," Skinner smiled. "We wouldn't like to go anywhere without the implements we keep in there, would we, boy?"

"No, Master," Mulder replied demurely from under long eyelashes, a grin curving along his lips. Skinner laughed out loud and handed him a case.

"Get dressed, boy, and meet me downstairs. I have a goodbye to make." And so saying, he retrieved Wanda from her vantage point peeping out from inside her slave's tee shirt in the other case, and stalked off with her under one arm, whispering endearments to the little cat as he went.

The journey to Murray's house was all too short for Mulder, although Skinner did at least allow his slave to sit in the front seat, like a man, and not in the back like a puppy. As soon as they arrived, they were greeted by Murray, who was wearing another of his bright, kaftan robes, in a startling shade of sunburst yellow.

"Walter, glad you could make it. You've turned down so many invitations to my parties that I'd almost stopped issuing them," Murray beamed. "Especially the weekend events. I think this young scoundrel is having a good effect on you." He beamed at Mulder. "I've given you and your boy the biggest guest bedroom, as befits our glorious Guardian," he winked, and Skinner grinned, and slapped his host heartily on the back. They followed Murray up a flight of stairs, along an enormous corridor to the end, and into a huge room. It contained a massive double bed, and an en suite bathroom, and Mulder was seriously impressed.

"No wonder you have so many parties," he whistled, glancing around, then he bit on his lip anxiously, annoyed with himself for talking out of turn, but Murray just laughed.

"Exactly - a big place like this feels empty without people, and I love to see my friends. We're nice and secluded here as well, with extensive grounds, so we can dress and behave any way we like, out of sight of prying eyes. I'll leave you two to unpack, then you can meet us downstairs for something to eat," Murray said.

"Thank you." Skinner nodded at his friend. "Murray," he said, as their host turned to go. The other man looked back, questioningly. "I mean it - it's good to be here, relaxing like this. I think it's going to be an...interesting weekend."

"Walter - it's always an honor to have you here - and your young scamp too, of course. I've got the muzzle out ready downstairs in case you need to use it again," he commented wryly, winking at Mulder.

"He won't," Mulder interjected swiftly. "Sir," he added, as Skinner frowned at him. His Master clicked his fingers and Mulder sank to his knees immediately. Skinner put a finger over Mulder's mouth.

"Deep submission, slave. No speaking from now on unless I ask you a direct question."

Mulder nodded, wide-eyed, and Murray laughed again, and patted him on the head. "You've come a long way, scamp. I'll be interested to see what new tricks your Master has taught you since I last saw you." So saying, he left. Mulder continued kneeling, nervously, by his Master's side.

"Undress, slave. Then run me a bath and unpack. I'll wear the cream-colored shirt and black leather pants tonight. If any of my clothes are creased, go and get and iron, and see that they are returned to their usual pristine condition. Remember, my appearance reflects upon you. I've brought some boot

polish," Skinner pointed to one of the cases. "Unpack it and have it ready to bring downstairs later. You can be polishing my boots while I talk to my friends."

Mulder nodded, his cock responding with its usual desperate lurch for freedom, taking no notice of the fact that it wasn't getting any release until after it performed to his Master's satisfaction during the pony trials.

He busied himself running his Master's bath, and unpacking his Master's clothing, hanging it in the wardrobe. Skinner was insisting on nothing less than full slave mode, and Mulder threw himself into the tasks. He undressed his Master carefully and attentively, not even daring to steal his usual quota of kisses along the big man's collarbone, which was one of his favorite spots. Instead he helped his Master into the bath then knelt submissively, awaiting further orders. He couldn't quite manage to keep his head lowered while Skinner bathed. His Master's body was too beautiful for that. He snuck a look, through his eyelashes, at Skinner's broad chest, covered in little curls of hair, and vowed that he would do his best to make his Master proud of him over the course of the next couple of days.

"Soap me," Skinner ordered peremptorily, breaking into his reverie, and Mulder did as ordered, then washed the lather from his Master's body. "Dry me," Skinner commanded, getting out of the bath, "then a shave. After that I want a massage. Nothing too deep - enough to relax me, and coat my skin in oil."

"Yes, Master." Mulder scrambled to obey. He performed the shave quickly, and efficiently, then helped Skinner lie down on the bed. He loved massaging his Master. Often he used it as an excuse to take all kinds of liberties with his Master's magnificent body, dipping his tongue or fingers between the cleft in Skinner's buttocks, sucking his Master's broad, inert cock as it lay sleeping atop his balls, or gently kissing his way down his Master's spine, but on this occasion he didn't dare. He confined himself to a respectful massage, and when he'd finished, he knelt beside the bed, eyes down.

"Very nice." Skinner sat up, and lifted his slave's head to bestow a kiss on his mouth. "Now, you can use my cast-off water to wash yourself, boy, and that includes your hair. I want you looking clean and beautiful. You have twenty minutes and then I want to inspect you."

"Yes, Master."

Mulder did as ordered. When he returned to the other room, Skinner was sitting in the armchair in his robe, waiting. Mulder sank to his knees again, awaiting further orders.

"Oil yourself." Skinner handed him the bottle of oil. "And make it interesting. I want to watch." So saying, he opened his robe, and began gently stroking his own cock, waiting expectantly for his slave to amuse and entertain him.

Mulder took the oil, nervously, and poured some into his hands. He hated putting on a performance, but he loved the idea of his Master being aroused by his actions and when he got into it, he always found his deeply buried exhibitionist streak and ended up enjoying himself enormously. He put his head on one side, and allowed his tongue to moisten his full lower lip, then began to massage to oil into his chest, and down towards his groin. He lazily played with his cock, until it began to harden under his insistent embrace, watching all the time as his Master sat back, enjoying the floor show, his own wide cock already hard.

Mulder ran his hands across his lower back, then turned, and displayed his naked, marked butt to his Master, sliding his fingers over it, and dipping them into his own anus, stretching it, and moaning slightly as the motion sent a thrill of arousal through his body. He turned back, and continued down, sliding the oil over his legs, and arms, around his neck, and back down to his cock, never taking his gaze off his Master's dark eyes as he worked. Skinner rocked back in the chair, his cock large and pulsing.

"Come over here and finish what you've started," he ordered, his eyes twinkling. Mulder obeyed, ensconcing himself between his Master's legs, and taking that large hard cock in his mouth. "Hands behind your back," Skinner ordered, "take care of me with just your mouth." Mulder did as he was told, then ran his eager tongue over his Master's hard flesh. Damn, but this felt good! He loved sucking his Master's beautiful cock, taking it into his body and worshipping it. "Good boy," Skinner murmured, stroking Mulder's head as he worked. A few seconds later he came, and Mulder swallowed his come, cleaned his Master with his tongue, and then awaited further orders.

"Dress me," Skinner commanded, getting up and discarding the robe. Mulder helped his Master into his tight leather pants, lingering far more than was entirely necessary as he eased his Master's exquisitely long legs into the shiny fabric. He knelt and buckled his Master's heavy shoes, then sat back again, and adored the vision he had helped to create. Skinner looked magnificent - washed, oiled, and clad in tight leather and a flowing shirt that revealed just a hint of the hard muscle underneath. He resembled some noble warlord going out to dine after a victorious battle, his favorite slaveboy at his side.

"As for you," Skinner murmured. "I want everyone to see my handiwork, but I don't want to reveal **everything** just yet. Here." He held out an identical set of leather pants to his own - with one significant difference. The whole of the buttock area of the pants was cut away, leaving the backside of the wearer completely exposed.

"Is this all I get to wear, Master?" Mulder asked faintly, somehow knowing that neither a shirt nor underwear were going to be an option tonight.

"Of course." Skinner smiled. "Hurry up and get dressed. No shoes. I want you barefoot." Mulder hurried to get ready. The pants slid on easily enough over his oiled flesh, and they fitted him like a second skin. He wondered when his Master had instructed his tailor to make such a diabolical item of clothing. It felt so strange to be ostensibly wearing trousers, but with a cool draft wafting around his backside.

"Ah, the red on both sets of cheeks is so becoming," Skinner teased, holding his slave at arm's length and surveying him. He pushed his slave over to the mirror and made him admire himself. He looked absurd, Mulder thought, although he had to admit that from the front, the tight leather pants suited him. They hugged his flesh so tightly that the outline of his cock was clearly visible. Skinner swung him around and ordered him to look at himself from the back. Mulder groaned as he took in his freshly marked buttocks, the 'W' clearly visible, perfectly framed by tight, shiny black leather. "Perfect," Skinner breathed. "Exquisite. This fine ass, bearing the imprint of its owner's cane. I love it!" He grinned widely, then grabbed his slave in an embrace, kissing him soundly, his hands splaying over Mulder's bare bottom as he did so. "It'll be hard to keep my hands off this ass this evening," Skinner exclaimed happily. "So temptingly displayed for all to see, but belonging only to me. Mine alone - only I can touch it," he beamed at his slave boy. "So, it's a good thing I won't **have** to resist the temptation," he chuckled, with a slap to Mulder's butt. "With these pants I'll be able to help myself whenever I please," he said, clearly extremely satisfied with himself. Mulder's cock dug urgently against the confines of his pants, turned on

to distraction by the thought of being an available plaything, on display to the world, but available only for his Master's exclusive use.

"We're not quite finished yet, of course," Skinner said. He opened a slender case, and drew out a beautiful gold chain which he fastened to Mulder's nipple rings. Then he attached another, much longer gold chain to that one, in the center, creating a lead. "You're on the leash all evening unless I say otherwise," Skinner informed his slave. "That means you walk to heel, you obey every verbal or non-verbal command I give you, immediately, and without protest. When I'm not holding your lead, you'll carry it in your mouth. Understood?" Mulder nodded, said mouth having suddenly gone dry. He felt as if he'd died and gone to some kind of erotic heaven. "Very well." Skinner gave the end of the lead a light tug, that transmitted a pleasurable zing to Mulder's nipples, and the slave immediately fell into step behind his Master, trotting along obediently behind as they left the room.

Almost everybody stopped and looked at the two newcomers as they entered. Mulder was aware of his Master receiving numerous admiring glances, and a little whisper went around the room as people were aware that the 'Guardian' and his slave had arrived. Mulder felt a little surge of pride, being the property of such an important Master. He flushed as he realized that not all the admiring glances were for Skinner either. Some of the men allowed their eyes to linger for longer than was entirely necessary on the half-naked, oiled slave on the end of the Guardian's leash. Mulder flushed even more when Skinner led him into the center of the room and his exposed butt went on public display. There was an immediate reaction, as people admired his Master's handiwork, and some of them clustered around to get a better look at the perfectly inscribed 'W' on Mulder's bottom.

"Can I touch?" Someone asked politely, his finger hovering over the marking.

"Yes, but only in my presence, and with my permission," Skinner told the little crowd in a firm voice. "Butt out, slave," he ordered. Mulder's face was now almost purple with humiliation, but he pushed out his butt and yelped slightly as several fingers traced the lines on his butt, their owners whistling in awe and asking Skinner all manner of technical questions about what kind of implement he'd used and the force required for the marking. Finally Murray rescued them, showing them over to a large buffet laid out on huge wooden tables.

"More people are arriving tomorrow morning," Murray told them as he waved at them to help themselves to the food. Mulder found his Master a seat, and then went a filled a plate of food. He returned to Skinner's side, and knelt, offering his Master the plate. Skinner was deep in conversation with Hammer, and helped himself to the food, occasionally pressing a morsel into his slave's mouth, ensuring that Mulder ate his fill too, even if he had no choice about what he ate.

Mulder felt himself descend into the serenity of subspace. He loved being here next to his Master, and with Skinner clad in that sexy costume. He glanced around the room, taking in a wide variety of clothing. He was used to the outfits people wore on the scene, and some of the people this evening hadn't bothered dressing up, but most had. Part of the fun of Murray's weekend parties was that people could dress as outrageously as they wanted and nobody blinked an eye. There was one man dressed from head to foot in a snakeskin outfit, several people clad in fantasy rubber costumes, and a few people in stiffly starched uniforms. None of them looked as handsome as his Master though, Mulder thought dreamily, placing his head on Skinner's knee.

"Hi Fox," a voice said, and he glanced up to see Hammer grinning at him. He glanced at Skinner, unsure how to respond. He'd been told not to talk, but it seemed rude not to reply. "Can I talk to him or is he forbidden?" Hammer asked stealing a sandwich from Mulder's plate.

"He's in deep submission all weekend," Skinner replied, ruffling Mulder's hair fondly. "So you can talk to him - but don't expect a reply! I'll let him know if he's allowed to converse."

"Cool." Hammer grinned at Mulder, and sat down beside Murray. "He seems to have improved a lot since he was last here," Hammer commented. "I take it the training's been going well."

"He's a fast learner, and eager to please," Skinner replied. Mulder flushed from being the subject of a conversation he wasn't included in. He gave a small whimper in the back of his throat and rested his chin on Skinner's knee again, gazing at his Master mournfully.

"I envy him - still new to his condition, still learning. It's a beautiful time," Hammer sighed, winking at Mulder.

"Yes, it is." Skinner smiled. "Put the plate down, boy, and sit up. I want that ass on display for my pleasure at all times." Mulder did as instructed, wondering if he was going to be blushing all damn evening, as his Master maneuvered him into position so that his butt was sticking out for all to see.

"Nice marks," Hammer commented cheerfully between mouthfuls of a sandwich.

"I intend to mark him permanently soon," Skinner said with a smile.

"Branding?" Hammer smiled at his own dom, and kissed Murray's cheek. "I envy you **that** as well then, Fox. The day I was branded was one of the happiest of my life."

Mulder closed his eyes as he remembered the smell of the brazier, and the scent of burning flesh. It should have been horrific, it had to have hurt like hell, and yet...he wanted it so much. Skinner grinned, and his hand fondled his slave's bottom brazenly, making Mulder flush even more deeply, even as he couldn't help but thrust back against his Master's hand, enjoying the way he was being stroked.

"Fox, you have my permission to speak to Hammer about your impending branding before we leave. Not tonight, but tomorrow or Sunday. Make sure you do it before we leave," Skinner instructed. Mulder nodded, thanking his Master silently for instructing him to do something he desperately wanted to do anyway.

"Walter - we have a House meeting scheduled for this evening," Hammer said. "As you requested."

"Thanks. I don't want to break into everyone's party time, but as most of us here, I thought it would be a good opportunity to talk about an issue that came up recently," Skinner replied. Mulder's ears pricked up at **that** and he wondered what the 'House' would be talking about.

He soon found out. After about an hour, Skinner took his slave's leash and led him back up to their bedroom. "Get my boots and the polish - bring the harness as well. I want everything shining for tomorrow," Skinner ordered.

"Yes, Master," Mulder nodded.

"And everything in this case as well. I want it done, boy, so you'll stay up until it's finished - understood?" Mulder nodded again. It was so good being this deep in his slavery, and seeing Skinner so confident and in command as a Master, taking their relationship to a level they had never been to for this amount of time before. He felt his cock making another desperate bid for release inside his tight leather pants, and sighed, hoping that Skinner wouldn't make him wait until Sunday for his climax.

"I want you beside me, while you work, but be silent," Skinner ordered. "We have a lot to discuss at the meeting, and I don't want any interruptions. A good slave should be attentive to his Master at all times, but not intrusive. If I need anything, I'll ask you."

"Yes, Master," Mulder gulped. This all sounded so serious! Skinner smiled at him, relenting slightly, and pulled his slave close, his hands going to Mulder's naked buttocks, and kneading them.

"You're doing well, boy. I'm pleased with you," he growled, nipping Mulder's ear with his teeth, and then kissing him firmly on the lips.

"I exist to serve you, Master," Mulder said softly when he'd been released.

"Good." Skinner smiled.

The 'House' enclave was meeting in the library - a large room with a roaring fire flaming in the grate. Skinner took his place at the head of a large old table, and Mulder settled down beside him, and began his polishing work. He stole glances at the other members of the House enclave as he worked. He was surprised to see that Murray wasn't a member of this inner consortium of Scene elders - although Hammer was. There were a few faces he recognized and many he didn't. The total number around the table was 14, but Skinner was the only one with a slave in attendance - a right that Mulder assumed was extended only to the Guardian.

"Thank you for taking time out from Murray's wonderful hospitality in order to have this gathering," Skinner told the assembled group. "It's been some time since we last met, and there are various issues we need to discuss - one of which is very important."

Mulder's ears pricked up at that, although he gave no sign that he had heard anything, concentrating instead on his polishing work. He soon had Skinner's boots shining so brightly that he could see his own face in them. He set them aside, and picked up the harness. The House business was actually fairly dull. Discussions about funding workshops on safe practice, talk about the current state of the scene, and continuing co-operation with the authorities so that scene venues weren't raided by the police, as they had been routinely in the not-so-distant past. Mulder glanced up at his Master, with a worried expression. It was late, and Skinner had been working hard all week. The last thing he needed was to have to continue to work during his leisure time. Mulder vowed that he would make sure his Master got a chance to relax at some point during this weekend. He opened the case Skinner had given him, and gazed at the contents in dismay, unable to stop the small gasp that passed his lips. His Master swiveled his head to survey his slave, and Mulder bowed his head, and kept his mouth very firmly closed. He turned back to the business in hand...which was a set of silver body chains and something that looked very much like a horse's 'bit', complete with oiled leather reins, and various other items of tackle. He swallowed down a deep sigh, and continued polishing.

"Finally, last on the agenda, is an informal complaint I received from a sub player a couple of weeks ago," Skinner said. Mulder's ears pricked up again. This was clearly about Ian. "The player came to my apartment in the middle of the night in a highly agitated state and made some accusations against a top he had been playing with. He refused to give a name, so I can't take the matter further, but I would like you all to be aware of the situation. If it happens again, and a formal complaint is made, then we might need to take action."

Mulder wondered what form 'action' might constitute. The conversation continued, and he listened intently, his curious mind taking in all the details, enthralled at being allowed access to the secret workings of this inner sanctum.

It was gone midnight by the time the meeting finished. Mulder packed away the paraphernalia he had been working on, and opened the door for his Master, then followed him back to their bedroom. Skinner sank down on the bed with a weary sigh.

"Master works too hard," Mulder murmured, kneeling down in front of the other man and removing his shoes and socks.

"Slave is forbidden to talk without permission," Skinner growled in reply.

"Slave is worried about his Master's wellbeing," Mulder replied, kissing the deliciously naked feet in front of him. There was silence for a moment, then Skinner laughed, and shook his head.

"Slave should seriously consider how close he might be to being hauled over his Master's knee for his impudence," Skinner said in a gruffly amused tone.

"Slave would enjoy that far too much for his Master to even consider using it as a serious deterrent," Mulder replied in kind. He pushed Skinner's knees apart and began unbuttoning his Master's shirt, taking his time, lingering over the task, delighting in revealing a small portion of golden flesh, pressing kisses against his Master's newly naked torso. Skinner put his hands back on the bed, and allowed his slave his devotion. Mulder moved on to his Master's pants, undoing the belt, and unzipping his Master. Skinner stood up and Mulder eased the pants down his Master's legs, and then hung them in the closet. Skinner disappeared into the bathroom and Mulder heard him using the toilet, then cleaning his teeth, before he reappeared in the doorway, a frown on his face.

"Slave - you are under standing orders to be naked when we're alone together," his Master instructed, getting into the enormous double bed. Mulder quickly shucked off his own leather pants and hung those up, visited the bathroom himself, then finished tidying up his Master's discarded clothing. When he turned back, Skinner was lying in the bed, his head propped up on his hand, watching his slave work.

"Master," Mulder began uncertainly. "Am I to sleep in the bed with you, Master, or on the floor beside you?"

"Oh, I think I want my slave to keep me warm this evening," Skinner said, pulling back the sheet invitingly.

"I haven't finished all the polishing..." Mulder began.

"You can do it tomorrow morning. First thing. Now get in. You've been tormenting me with the sight of that great ass all evening - I want to get my hands on it."

Mulder didn't need any further prompting. He slid eagerly into the bed beside his Master, and Skinner turned out the light. Then he pounced on his slave, pushing Mulder onto his back, and pinning him against the pillow.

"You are doing extremely well in your service here, little one," he murmured, idly stroking big, blunt fingers through Mulder's hair. "I'm proud of you."

"I'm enjoying it," Mulder replied honestly, his own fingers making out the shape of his Master's beloved face in the dark; the wide planes of his cheeks, and jaw, the fullness of his lips, the dimple in his chin, and the rough stubble on his skin. "I was surprised that Murray wasn't at the meeting this evening, Master."

"Murray isn't a member of the House committee. Hammer is," Skinner replied. "Why does that surprise you, slave? You've seen them both in action. Hammer is a proactive kind of person, very go-getting. He likes to be involved in things. Murray is more laid back. He leaves the serious stuff to his sub."

"I know. I suppose I just..." Mulder shrugged.

"When will I **ever** cure you of the notion that subs are somehow second class citizens? They aren't. There are more subs on the scene than tops, and more subs on the House committee than tops. It's pure chance that I'm the Guardian, Fox. There have been previous holders of that title who were as submissive as you can imagine in the bedroom - that doesn't mean they weren't effective as Guardians."

"Oh." Mulder's eyes had become accustomed to the dark, and he caught Skinner's wry shake of the head.

"I mean, god, look at you. Like a terrier after a rat in your work, the most assertive agent I've ever had arguing with me in my office," Skinner grinned. "Just because you enjoy a certain kind of sex doesn't mean you aren't also assertive and extremely strong-willed - as I know all too well," he finished in a rueful tone of voice.

"But I..." Mulder began but his Master interrupted him.

"Think about it, boy - but not now," Skinner said, the faintest outline of a grin showing on his face. "Because **now**, I'm going to use you. I'm going to make love to this beautiful slave, until he's begging me to allow him to come."

"Please...Master, use me however you want. I'm yours," Mulder whispered, so enthralled by the utter joy and serenity of his own submission during his servitude and display this evening, as well as by his Master's towering domination that he didn't even care that he wouldn't be allowed to come.

"Good boy." Skinner slowly inserted one long, probing finger into his slave's lubed anus, and Mulder sighed in contentment, opening his legs wide to allow his Master better access.

Skinner loomed over him, pushing the slave's legs up, so that they were resting against the big man's chest. Skinner's large hands came down on the bed on either side of his slave's body, and then his face was so close to Mulder's that if the slave moved his head forwards a couple of inches he could kiss his Master.

He felt his Master's hard cock nudging the entrance of his anus, and opened his body, relaxing as his Master entered him, slowly, his face still almost touching that of his slave. Then they were connected, and Skinner moved inside his slave, adjusting his position to get comfortable, their eyes never leaving each other's face. Slowly, infinitesimally, Skinner began to withdraw, and then to slide back in. He dipped his head, and kissed his slave occasionally as he made love to him, sometimes on the nose, or chin, sometimes pressing tongue deep into the other man's mouth in a mirror image of the way his cock was entering his slave's body.

Mulder had never felt closer to his Master than in this moment. Skinner's body was heavy inside him, pinning him down, his anus was filled so pleasurably by his Master's large cock, and his Master's face was so near, his dark eyes keeping his slave as transfixed as his hard, muscled body.

Mulder started to moan as Skinner's thrusting picked up speed, unerringly finding his slave's prostate with each forward slide. Mulder's cock was straining for a release he knew it wouldn't receive, but he didn't even care. He just loved watching his Master's face as he took his slave so completely, filling him, totally claiming him. Skinner's thrusts reached a crescendo, and Mulder felt as if he had drifted away on a sea of the most intense pleasure. His focus had shifted from his own neglected cock, to the sensation in his prostate, and the nearness of his Master's face, brought closer with every forward thrust. Then his Master was crying out, his face convulsing, but his eyes never leaving his slave's face as he came, crying out his slave's name over and over again as he did. Mulder felt his Master shuddering inside him, and then his own body was convulsing as he reached a state he had never known before - and he orgasmed without coming.

It was an orgasm that started in his prostate and then spread to every nerve-ending in his body, turning him into a boneless specimen of slavehood, gasping as a white light exploded behind his eyes and he went into a state of pure nirvana. He felt his body constricting around Skinner's cock, milking it for all that he was worth, and Skinner was shouting, still convulsing with the power of his own climax. They gazed at each other in disbelief, then the moment came to an end, and Skinner gave a sigh, and slumped down on top of his slave, still inside him. Mulder found the strength from somewhere to wrap his arms around his Master's damp, sweaty body, as they both panted together in the aftermath of their mutual pleasure.

"God I love you," he whispered into Skinner's ear.

"Yeah," Skinner managed to growl out. "That...was..."

"I know," Mulder sighed. "It was...it so **was**."

Skinner grinned, both of them clearly beyond coherent speech. He withdrew from his slave, and rolled over, then pulled Mulder into the circle of his big arms, both their bodies reeking of sex.

"Love you too," Skinner muttered in Mulder's ear as they both fell asleep.

Mulder awoke early, too keyed up to sleep in. He stretched, and grinned as he felt the slight soreness in his anus. Last night had been good - the best he'd ever known. He almost laughed at himself for his trepidation last week. The way he felt now, he would happily stay at Murray's house for the rest of his life. He glanced over to his Master. Skinner was a heavy sleeper, and he still looked tired, with dark smudges under his eyes. Mulder guessed that the responsibilities of the past week weighed heavily on him. Even his role as Guardian was taxing, creating even more duties for the big man. Mulder got up and washed, lubed himself again, in a familiar morning ritual, cleaned his teeth and then sat down and finished the polishing his Master had set him to do the previous night. The mindless ritual helped him return to that serene mental state that he loved so much, stilling his ever whirling mind, and granting him respite from himself. He took a pride in his work, determined that his Master wouldn't be able to find fault with him. It took him an hour and then he glanced at his Master again. Skinner was still asleep, but Mulder could hear the sound of cars pulling up outside so he decided that it was time to wake his Master. He pulled on some jeans and went down to the kitchen. Murray was there, dispensing freshly brewed coffee to various of his guests and he beamed when he saw Mulder, and handed him two cups, with an admonishment to "drag that lazy Master of yours out of bed...although with you in it I can see why he'd want to stay there!"

Mulder grinned and walked back to the bedroom. He placed the coffees on the nightstand, shucked off his jeans and crawled under the sheets, then kissed his Master into wakefulness. Skinner blinked blearily, then focussed on his slave with a dazed morning smile.

"I'd give you your more usual wake-up call, but, uh, I wasn't sure if you'd gotten up to wash in the night," Mulder grinned. "That's one of the problems of not using condoms any more I guess! Here," he handed his Master his coffee. They drank in companionable silence, Mulder's head resting on his Master's shoulder, and then Skinner sighed, and stretched.

"Up slave. Get me washed, dressed and ready to face the world," he ordered.

"What will I be wearing, Master?" Mulder asked in some trepidation.

"Your jeans - for now," Skinner grinned, patting his slave's rump.

"What about...?" Mulder hesitated.

"Your morning spanking?" Skinner raised an eyebrow. "Not cancelled - merely delayed. I want this butt freshly glowing when I display you in your livery later on today."

"Yes, Master." Mulder quaked inside.

The morning passed in a haze of activity. Mulder met up with Ian, who was newly arrived, and his Master gave him an hour's free time to talk with his friends. He spoke to Hammer who served to confirm both his fears and hopes about the branding.

"How badly exactly does it hurt?" Mulder asked the other man.

Hammer shrugged. "Like nothing else. I won't lie to you, Fox. It's the worst pain I've ever experienced, but it's a special kind of pain, and if your Master has prepared you properly, and if you really want to accept his mark, then...well, it's just beautiful. It's a mind-blowing moment, and I still get pleasure out of

it - both remembering the actual branding and looking at the result," Hammer said. Mulder exchanged a glance with Ian, who had also been listening.

"I'd say go for it," Ian said. "You won't be really content until you're carrying his mark around on you the whole time, Mulder."

"I know." Mulder nodded.

"Have you ever been fisted?" Hammer asked, totally out of the blue.

"What?" Mulder stared at him, aghast.

"You might like to ask your Master to fist you - that involves a great deal of trust too, and you have to be in the right headspace for it, but if you can get into that, then you can get into the right place for branding too. It gives me a similar feeling," he smiled dreamily. "Total subjection to my dom's will."

"My Master has suggested it - and I'm sure he'll do it at some point," Mulder muttered, "because he can do what the hell he likes - but I haven't exactly brought the subject up."

"You should." Hammer grinned and patted Mulder's cheeks. "Hell, do it all, Fox. You're young, and you're a long time dead. He's already pierced you. Fisting, branding...these are other ways to enjoy the total thrill of absolute submission."

Hammer laughed at Mulder's expression and sauntered off to welcome some newly arrived guests.

"Ah, someone is getting sucked into the darkest extreme possibilities of his submission," Ian teased.

"Idiot." Mulder punched him playfully on the arm.

"Seriously, Mulder. He's right. I didn't have long with my dom. If I'd known then what I know now, well...I wish we'd done more. You have to go at your own pace though, and Walter seems pretty good at gauging what that is."

"Yeah." Mulder nodded, then glanced out of the window to see some strange apparatus being dragged out of an outbuilding. "Oh shit," he sighed. "Are you going to participate in the pony trials, Ian?"

"Me? Not fucking likely," Ian grinned. "I have too much fun watching. Last year I nearly peed my pants it was so funny."

"Thanks. That makes me feel so much better," Mulder grouched.

"You'll make a beautiful pony," Ian reassured him, with a wide grin. "Giddyap!"

Mulder stomped off in disgust, with the sound of Ian's loud and dramatic neighing ringing in his ears.

Mulder rejoined Skinner in their bedroom, and was immediately instructed to take a shower. When he'd finished, he presented himself, naked, for his Master's attention.

"Dress me," Skinner ordered and Mulder went about the task eagerly, helping his Master into a pair of the tightest fitting jodhpurs, that made his long legs stretch on endlessly, and the sleek, shiny riding boots he had polished for his Master the previous evening. Skinner wore a white shirt, with a tie, and a red hunting jacket. Mulder stepped back when he'd finished and surveyed the sight in awed silence. He could almost feel the drool dripping from every pore in his body. Skinner didn't just look good - he looked magnificent. It was all Mulder could do not to sink to his knees immediately and kiss those shiny black boots that had been polished by his own hands.

"Do we have to go downstairs? We could just stay here and..." he suggested, grinning.

"Control yourself, boy. You have work to do before you can enjoy yourself," Skinner told him in a peremptory tone. Mulder sighed and nodded.

"I'm missing something," Skinner glanced around, then smiled. "Ah yes, of course. My crop," he said, with a truly vicious smile in Mulder's direction. Mulder's stomach did a flip. "I think we'll use the one with your inscription on it, boy. Get it from the case."

Mulder obeyed, and handed his Master the brown leather crop, quivering slightly as he did so. Skinner tapped it menacingly against the side of his boots for a moment, sending his slave into another paroxysm of desire.

"Put your jeans back on and carry this case downstairs to the stables," Skinner ordered, sitting down on the bed. "And Fox - from the moment you arrive in the stables you're a pony."

"Right." Mulder rolled his eyes, and was surprised when his Master swung him over his knee, and delivered two hard swats to his upturned ass.

"Do we need to do some more work on reminding you of your status here?" Skinner asked.

Mulder gulped. "No, Master," he whispered.

"Good," Skinner said. "However, I think we need to make sure that the lesson really hits home." So saying he peppered Mulder's ass with a series of extremely hard swats, until his slave was breathing heavily, and clinging onto his Master's hard thighs for support. "Who do you belong to?" Skinner demanded, spanking him fiercely with his big hand.

"You, Master,"

"And what are you?" Skinner asked.

"Whatever you say I am! Whatever you want me to be! A fucking pony!" Mulder cried, as the swats rained down over and over again. Skinner wasn't using an implement, but even so, he knew his ass had to be burning a deep rosy pink by now.

"Again," Skinner insisted dangerously. "With attitude adjustment this time."

"A pony, Master. Your...oh shit, Ow! Your...pony. Your pony! Willing to serve you, any way I can!"

"Good," Skinner said again, slowing the pace. He ran his hands lovingly over Mulder's ass, delivered one final, stinging swat, then righted his errant slave. Mulder's hands immediately went back to his burning bottom, trying to massage some of the throbbing pain out of his sore buttocks. Skinner stood up. "Now, you're a pony. Which means you don't talk to anyone - including me, until I tell you that you can. You can whinny, and neigh though - we wouldn't want you completely silent after all," he grinned at his slave. "You can rear up, and you can even bite and kick, although I'd recommend that you don't unless someone is touching you or I might need to use my crop for more than just decoration. However, just because you are participating in a public event doesn't give anyone permission to touch you. Understood?"

"Yes, Master." Mulder nodded, his cheeks burning as red as his bottom.

"I'll let them pat you, and stroke your face with my permission, but nothing else," Skinner told him seriously. Mulder nodded, relieved. "All right - when we get you to the stables I'll give you more instructions."

The stables were just like any normal stables - with one significant difference: all the stalls were occupied by human 'horses.'

"We're stall number 8," Skinner said, leading Mulder into one of the stalls, and placing the case on the floor. "All right, ponyboy. Let's get you looking beautiful for your audience. Jeans off." Mulder obeyed, standing silently as Skinner opened the large case they'd brought down, and inspected the contents. "I'll just remove your cock ring - we don't want you to have any help maintaining an erection - that wouldn't be fair." Skinner slid the ring off Mulder's cock and balls as he spoke. "However, some decoration would be nice, like a ribbon braided in a fine mane..." Skinner mused. He rummaged in his case and withdrew a blue ribbon, complete with dangling silver bell. "Perfect," Skinner said, tying his slave's cock lightly with the ribbon, like a parcel, making sure it was loose enough to accommodate the swelling of an erection, but taking the precaution of fastening it around Mulder's buttocks as well, to make sure it didn't fall off.

Mulder stood still as his Master then massaged oil into every square inch of his body, smoothing him down, until he glistened. He had to admit that the sensation was entirely pleasurable, but then he always adored it when Skinner caressed him. Skinner even massaged oil into his slave's cock, a sensation that soon had Mulder leaning against the wall, trying to remember how to breathe, his eyes half closed, and his cock standing to attention.

"Lovely," Skinner breathed in his ear as he stood back to survey his newly gleaming slave boy. He slapped Mulder's butt enthusiastically, then turned back to his case. He took out a pair of knee-length black boots, and slid Mulder's feet into them. It was only then that the slave realized that the boots ended not in a sole, but a round, solid hoof. He almost toppled over until he became used to the different posture he had to adopt in order to stay upright in them.

"They stretch the calf muscles. You've got an hour or so to get used to them though and you won't be in them for long," Skinner said, stroking his slave to calm him.

Mulder watched as his Master returned to the case and drew out the light body harness. It was beautiful, intricately woven out of silver chains, and decorated in a myriad of tiny bells. Skinner strapped the harness over his slave, so that the chains ran down in rivulets over his back and chest, and Mulder

knew without a doubt that his Master would insist that he prance in order to make the bells ring. He bit on his lip and tried to concentrate on what was required of him but the damn boots were so uncomfortable!

Next, Skinner took out a brush, and ran it through his slave's hair, then surprised Mulder by carrying on down and brushing his newly oiled body as well. The brush was only used lightly, but it soon got his blood zinging, and somehow Mulder wasn't remotely surprised when his Master couldn't resist applying the flat of the brush to his ponyboy's already flaming red bottom. "Hard and glistening at the front, red and inviting from behind - just the way I like you, boy," Skinner purred into Mulder's ear. His slave shivered, his cock bobbing in response to his Master's words.

Skinner fastened cuffs on both of Mulder's wrists, then took out a contraption made of leather and chain which he placed over his slave's head.

"Open your mouth," Skinner ordered, and Mulder knew that his humiliation was complete when his Master slipped the bit over his tongue, and fastened it in place. He couldn't speak now, even if he had wanted to, and the metal felt strange in his mouth, although it didn't hurt and wasn't more than uncomfortable. Skinner fastened a set of leather reins to the silver bit, and they hung down Mulder's back. Mulder couldn't stand it - and put his hands up to rip the bit out of his mouth, only to find his way blocked by his Master's crop.

"Do I have to use this?" Skinner asked, his tone deadly serious, and completely masterful. Mulder considered it for a moment his cock reacting, as usual, to his Master's tone of voice, then, reluctantly, put his hands down, and shook his head.

"Good boy...you look beautiful like this," Skinner murmured, standing back and taking in the whole scenario. Mulder could see himself in his Master's twinkling eyes - naked, erect, oiled, clad only in black boots, and the silver chainmail harness, with a bit in his mouth. He supposed it was fair enough - he found the sight of Skinner in that riding outfit good enough to eat, so there was no reason why his Master wouldn't find his slave, similarly attired to befit his status, equally appealing. Mulder shook his head and stomped a hooved foot on the ground, trying to get used to his new costume, and his Master laughed out loud.

"One last thing," Skinner said ominously.

Mulder watched as his Master removed a large butt plug from the case, with a long horsehair tail attached to one end. He backed away as Skinner approached him with the butt plug and shook his head again, his eyes wide.

"I've warned you once." Skinner swung his crop lightly at his slave's buttocks and Mulder's bells jangled as he jumped from the sting of the implement on his oiled skin.

"Do I need to use it again?" Skinner demanded. Mulder stared at him for a moment, then shook his head once more, in acquiescence this time, and allowed Skinner to grab his bridle, and turn him around. "Bend over," Skinner ordered, and Mulder braced himself against the stable wall. He felt the tip of the butt plug against his anus, and then his Master slowly inserted it until it slotted into place. With a whinny of sheer humiliation, Mulder stood up, feeling the brush of the long tail as it hung down over the back of his knees.

"Ass out more - let that pretty tail swing for all to see," Skinner ordered. "You know, this is a good look for you," he winked. Mulder opened his eyes wide in horror, and shot his Master a venomous look, but Skinner refused to accept his ponyboy's lack of enthusiasm. "Submit, slave," he ordered, "and later on, I'll show you the rewards that an obedient slave can enjoy. Mulder gave a resigned nod and Skinner stroked him approvingly. "Good boy. Here's a little reward to be going on with." Mulder watched curiously, as Skinner reached in his pocket and withdrew a small carrot. He held it up to his slave's mouth, and Mulder accepted the morsel, trying to figure out a way to chew on it with the bit in his mouth. It was a messy business, but he managed to swallow it, with a little grimace of disgust.

"I'm going to lead you out into the paddock to watch the dressage," Skinner said, holding his ponyboy's bridle, and stroking his mane. "Only the experienced ponies participate in that. You, on the other hand, will be a carriage pony. You'll be fastened to my carriage and pull me. The course isn't long, and you've got more than enough pent-up energy to perform the task well."

Skinner pulled on Mulder's bridle, and led his pony out of the stables. Mulder walked slowly, acutely aware of the strange new sensations of his unfamiliar clothing: the bizarre, and hobbling footwear, and the feel of the tail against his buttocks. The large butt plug was pressed deep inside his body making its presence felt with each movement, and the silver bit felt strange over his tongue - to say nothing of humiliation of knowing that his cock was swinging naked and visible in front of him, still semi-erect. Skinner led him over to a wooden corral, and tied Mulder's reins loosely to the fence.

"Beautiful," a voice breathed in his ear, and Mulder glanced around to see Ian looking him up and down. He made a face at his erstwhile friend, who just smirked back, his smile stretching from ear to ear. "Oh, your Master is going to LOVE rubbing you down when he's through putting you through your paces," Ian told the hapless ponyboy.

Mulder hoped that his entire body language conveyed the phrase "fuck off" adequately.

"Bells too!" Ian exclaimed admiringly, "and such a lovely tail," he sighed. "Truthfully, Mulder, you're the best looking pony here today - quite the thoroughbred. Those long sleek flanks, that velvety nose, and...hmm, quite the stallion aren't we?" He joked, glancing at what Mulder had lurching in an attempt at full erection between his legs. "Can I pet him?" He asked Skinner. His Master nodded, and Ian grabbed Mulder's bridle and stroked his hair. "Good boy," he murmured, examining the bridle and bit. "Nice teeth," he remarked to Skinner. His Master laughed and slapped his crop against the palm of his hand.

"He's a fine looking animal," he commented.

"And you take very good care of him, I expect," Ian said, flicking at one of the bells so it chimed. Mulder scowled at him.

"Of course," Skinner nodded. "I've invested considerable time in his training. A creature like this has to be cherished."

A little crowd had gathered around them, and soon other people were stroking Mulder's nose, and patting his head. He glared at them all balefully, until a light smack on his rump from his Master's crop changed his attitude into one of grudging acceptance. Someone put a sugar lump on the flat of their

hand and offered it to him, and Skinner nudged him to accept. It was at least easier to eat than the carrot as the sugar melted on his tongue.

After several minutes of this, Mulder kicked his 'hoof' on the ground in what he hoped was a menacing fashion, trying to disperse the little crowd. How the hell had he come to be standing here, dressed in this ridiculous way, when he was a respected FBI agent, an Oxford graduate, with a string of qualifications after his name for god's sake?

He glanced at the figure of his Master, clad in that sexy riding outfit, still swinging his crop idly against the top of his boots and remembered exactly why he was here. He lowered his head and nuzzled at Skinner's shoulder, until his Master reached out a hand and tangled it in his slave's mane.

"Enjoy, Fox. It's not often we get a chance to really play is it?" Skinner whispered in his slave's ear. Mulder looked up at him, and sighed, recalling how work had come between them so many times, keeping them apart, or placing stresses on both of them, meaning they had so much less time to spend together than either of them would have liked. Skinner was right. It was hard to find the time to really **play**, to indulge in fantasies this wild and crazy, to forget about Agent Mulder and A.D. Skinner and just be slave and Master, and they had a whole weekend of it here. Suddenly he felt free, and he managed a small grin around the sides of the bit. "Good boy." Skinner bestowed a kiss on his slave's cheek, and pinched one of his buttocks. "Remember what I said about that reward - and we're not talking about a carrot or a lump of sugar here," he winked and Mulder's grin became even wider. This whole pony thing definitely had its compensations.

Ian was right about the pony trials being fun. Mulder was soon laughing so much he could barely stand, as the dressage horses were put through their paces - some by their trainers, some on their own. It was ridiculous, absurd, watching grown men canter across the corral, wheel around, and trot back, their harnesses gleaming in the sun, and yet curiously fascinating too. They held up their front legs and knelt down on their back ones, then swayed around in a circle. People patted their noses, stroked their manes, and generally admired them. Mulder relaxed. Bizarre though this whole thing was, he was actually having a good time. It would seem that there were more extreme possibilities in the world than he'd ever uncovered on the X Files.

Finally, Mulder's turn came. He was ushered over to a row of 6 buggies, and stood while Skinner fastened his wrist cuffs to the handles of the buggy.

"Walk with it without me in it first - get used to the feel of it," Skinner ordered, and Mulder obeyed. The buggy was light and easily pulled, although he guessed that it would be harder with Skinner in it. "Walk slowly, and lift your legs high at the knee with each step," Skinner told him, tapping his kneecaps lightly with his crop. "You need to bring your knees up this high with each step, and push that butt out more, boy. Let everyone see that fine ass. Watch the other ponies and copy them. Remember - you're a display pony so make sure that you give people something to look at."

Skinner came around in front of his slave, and almost made Mulder jump out of his skin when he grabbed his slave's cock firmly in his hand, and ran his thumb over the silky, glistening length. Mulder hardened almost instantly - Skinner had trained him to respond to his Master's slightest touch.

"I want you to imagine," Skinner murmured, looking deep into his slave's eyes, "that you're in one of those old movies. Ben Hur maybe. You're pulling your Master's carriage triumphantly into town after a great victory, and you're proud as hell to be serving him. Keeping this erect," he squeezed and Mulder moaned, "shows me just how proud you are to be chosen to pull your Master's carriage in the triumphal procession." Mulder closed his eyes, and focused on the mental image that conjured up. He sighed, and thrust forward into his Master's warm hand.

"Not yet. Keep it for me. Honour me with it," Skinner hissed in his ear.

Mulder opened his eyes and glanced around nervously at the crowd gathered to watch the race.

"Ignore them. You're staying hard for me - and afterwards..." Skinner allowed the sentence to remain unfinished, full of promise. Mulder nodded, uncertainly. "You'll barely see them anyway. First we have the procession to the starting point - that is when you need to look your best for the crowd. Then we line up for the main event, which is a short race. That over there is the finish line. Don't worry about winning - people are mainly here just to prance and show off. I don't want you twisting your ankles in your new boots. Just keep a comfortable pace, and focus on **me**. If I pull on the reins, you need to alter your course accordingly."

Mulder glanced anxiously at the long whip tucked down the side of the buggy.

"I'll only use this if necessary - and only very lightly to remind you of your duties," Skinner said, stroking his ponyboy's mane. "All right, boy. I'm going to blinker you - I don't want you to be distracted."

Mulder was sure that even if he got out of this alive he'd never be able to live with the humiliation of it. He closed his eyes again as Skinner attached the blinkers to his bridle. When he opened them, his field of vision had been reduced significantly and he found he could only see what was directly in front of him.

"Slave," Skinner said warningly, touching Mulder's flagging erection. "Keep this hard, or there won't be any reward. Remember how you've felt dozens of times over the past few days, when I've forbidden you to come." Mulder nodded, and his cock started to harden again. "Good boy. Time for a practice."

Mulder heard Skinner move around behind him, then sensed his Master's weight getting into the buggy. There was a tug on the bit and he started moving. Skinner wasn't exactly light, but it was easy ground and Mulder soon became accustomed to the weight and feel of the buggy. What was harder was remembering to walk with his knees held high, keep in a straight line, **and** remain erect throughout. If he got one thing right, the rest went wrong, and he earned himself a few light taps from his Master's long whip.

Mulder found himself moved into line behind another buggy, and then the procession towards the starting line began. The ponyboys went slowly, raising their knees, each of them proudly erect, and wearing polished harnesses. They were announced loudly to the crowd, one by one, as they entered the corral. Mulder was dimly aware when it was their turn, of a voice bellowing:

"Here comes the Guardian, his carriage drawn by his trusty steed, Fox - doesn't he look like a fine animal, beautiful long limbs..." Mulder's face went an even deeper hue of purple, but there was something curiously arousing about the whole spectacle, and he couldn't resist doing a fancy little

prance that made his bells jingle. His cock was hard within its ridiculous ribbon, and it bobbed around merrily in front of him, much to the amusement of the pointing spectators. Mulder noticed they got a large round of applause as they were announced - the loudest of the day. He felt a surge of pride. Being the Guardian's slave bestowed a certain element of celebrity on him, and he couldn't resist acting up to that - he was all too well aware of the many eyes fixed on both him and his Master, and he could imagine that they presented a pretty good spectacle to the onlookers. He was sure that nobody could fail to be impressed by Skinner in full Master of the Hunt mode, and he hoped his own appearance didn't let his Master down.

There was a long wait, but finally the procession moved into position at the starting line. Mulder turned his head to his left, and gave a hiss of irritation as he recognized the beautiful ponyboy next to him. Lee's long dark hair had been plaited into a real mane, and his whole body was glistening a smooth, honeyed tan color in the afternoon sun, in stark contrast to Mulder's own pale flesh. Mulder glared at him, and Lee turned and suddenly caught sight of his old enemy. He gave Mulder a smile of pure evil, and Mulder decided that despite what his Master had told him about taking it slowly, this was a race he wanted to win. He felt a pull on the bit, and ignored it, but a sharp sting from the whip across his buttocks made him turn around and glare at his Master in annoyance.

"Fox - don't even think about it," Skinner warned, from his vantage point on the buggy. "Ignore him - you'll find it a lot harder to ignore my whip if you disobey me."

Mulder tried to pout and found it was impossible with the bit in his mouth so he settled for another glare instead. Skinner raised a warning eyebrow, and Mulder pointedly ignored him, turning his head back to face the course again. He almost jumped out of his skin a second later, as his Master's whip landed with a very definite sting on his buttocks. He lowered his head in acknowledgement of his Master's reprimand, and exhaled a long, mournful sigh.

Once all the buggies were lined up, a flag was waved, a gun fired, and Mulder felt another sharp sting of the whip on his back. He jerked forward eagerly, anxious to get a head-start on the loathsome Lee. His nemesis however, was clearly not the novice Mulder was at this game, and he soon surged ahead, accustomed to pulling a buggy. Mulder forgot about everything but his desire to win and ran as fast as he could in his bizarre boots, dragging what now felt like a ten-ton weight behind him. He was dimly aware of his Master's whip descending on his back in a warning to slow down, and a light pull on his reins, but he took no notice. He was too close!

Lee glanced over his shoulder, and realized the Mulder was more of a threat than he had thought. He paused, waiting until Mulder was nearly alongside him, then spat at him. Mulder pulled up sharp as the spittle landed on his cheek, then, seeing red, he redoubled his efforts, drew up level with his nemesis, and landed a sharp kick on the other man's leg. Hell, he was a pony, wasn't he? And they kicked, didn't they? Lee made a whistling sound, but Mulder barely heard as the next minute his Master's long whip landed with fierce and very real intent on his buttocks.

"Fox - leave it!" His Master commanded in his most authoritative tone. Mulder tried to obey and to fight down his competitive urge, but Lee's look of triumph was too much for him. He gave a squeal of anger, and began running faster, to catch up and beat his rival into second place.

Lee glanced around, and seeing that Mulder was catching up, swung hard to the left, forcing his buggy over into Mulder's path, making Mulder pause and jump to one side, almost falling over in the dirt, and narrowly avoiding wrenching his ankle. By the time he'd recovered, Lee had already won. Mulder trotted sullenly in behind, and came to a halt, breathing heavily. He felt his Master get down from the buggy, and then Skinner was in front of him, untying him from the cuffs. Mulder glanced down dejectedly, his erection gone, knowing he'd let his Master down. Lee, meanwhile, was being led on a victory parade around the corral to the cheers of the onlookers. A rosette was pinned to his bridle, and then Lee's Master, Mike, decided to literally 'ride' his steed, ordering Lee up against the fence, and then taking him openly, with more enthusiasm than skill. The crowd applauded loudly, but Mulder felt a sour taste in his mouth.

"Some things are better kept private," Skinner murmured into his slave's ear, clearly agreeing with him.

He led his ponyboy away from the grunts of the public coupling, back to the stables. Mulder followed along behind miserably, wondering what kind of punishment to expect for his behavior out there. He had not only allowed Lee to get under his skin again, but he had also disobeyed his Master, and that was what was causing him the most distress. Just when he thought he'd got a handle on his submission, something like this just proved how far he was from achieving it in any degree of depth. Skinner was silent as he led his ponyboy back to his stall, and Mulder's heart sank. His Master was furious with him.

Skinner tethered his slave in his stall, then grabbed a handful of straw and began rubbing the sweat off him. Mulder stood there, feeling utterly miserable, and dirty, and still strangely unsettled by the incident with Lee. He didn't like the other man, but the image of him bracing himself against the fence, with his fat, ugly Master plunging into him was somehow grotesque.

"Hmmm." Skinner glanced down at his slave's decidedly limp cock, and shook his head. "I see you weren't psyched up enough to keep **that**," he said.

Mulder sighed, and was relieved when his Master removed the bit, so that he could speak. "I'm sorry. I was crap. I lost us the race, I disobeyed you, went after Lee, and as for..." he glanced down at his cock with a wry shrug. "Total crap. Punish me, Master, I don't deserve a reward," he said.

Skinner looked at him steadily for a long moment, and Mulder couldn't keep his Master's gaze, dropping his face so that he was staring at the floor. He stood there, just waiting for Skinner to explode - and he did, but not with anger. Instead, he gave a deep guffaw, and pulled his dejected slave into an embrace. Mulder looked at him in surprise.

"Fox, you've been paraded naked, dressed like a goddamn pony for god's sake, in front of a crowd of people for the past couple of hours. I'd say you deserve a reward for that alone!" Skinner exclaimed. "I'm proud of you, boy," he added, twining his fingers in Mulder's hair, and smoothing it back away from his sweaty forehead. "Now, I'm going to remove your boots - while I do that, I want you to think of something that will get you aroused again - don't use your hands. If you can stay hard all the way back to our bedroom then you'll get your reward. Understood?"

Mulder nodded eagerly, and placed one hand on his Master's shoulder for balance as Skinner undid the ridiculous boots. It was such a relief to be walking on the soles of his feet again!

"Thank god," he muttered. "These boots are fiendish, Master."

"Yeah - I'll just bet that you're going to email your friends at *P.E.T.S* to complain about them," Skinner grinned.

"Well, they **can't** be ethical, Master," Mulder grinned back, then he glanced down at his still limp cock in dismay. It was ironic that he could have a hard-on without any effort whatsoever when he was told he wasn't allowed to come, but now that there was a real prospect of some hot action, his penis decided to go into hibernation. Mulder closed his eyes, and remembered the way he'd felt the previous night, looking into his Master's face as he made love to him, and his cock was soon hard again.

"Good boy. Come on." Skinner grabbed his slave by one of the loose chains on his harness, and led him back to the house.

They had no sooner reached the privacy of their bedroom, than Skinner sat down on the side of the bed, grabbed hold of his slave's buttocks, drew him close, and, without any preamble, deep-throated Mulder's hard, waiting cock in one smooth move that made Mulder yell out loud, startled.

"Oh fuck!" He screamed, placing his hands on Skinner's head to stop himself toppling over. "Oh god, that's so good."

Skinner was an expert at giving head - a trick Mulder assumed he must have learned from Andrew Linker. Never had he been sucked so superbly. The smell of leather and sweat just intensified his arousal, and Mulder moaned in ecstasy. He was sure his knees would give way, and he leaned more of his weight against his Master's large body, as Skinner brought him to climax, then swallowed his slave's come and completed the act by cleaning up his cock afterwards. Mulder collapsed, sated, onto the bed, and draped his arm over his Master, pulling him down beside him. Skinner grinned, and kissed his slave firmly on the lips.

"You, are the most beautiful ponyboy I've ever seen," he said, his fingers twisting the butt plug that was still deeply embedded inside his slave, then slowly, gently removing it.

"And you...are the sexiest Master that ever existed," Mulder replied, relieved to be rid of the intrusive plug which had been a constant minor ache in his ass, to say nothing of the irritation of the ponytail swinging against the back of his knees. Yet he felt curiously empty with it gone, and almost missed it. "Which doesn't mean I don't hate you for putting me through that, but seeing as the reward was so damn hot, I suppose I'll just have to forgive you."

Skinner slapped his slave's rump, then put back his head and laughed. "Oh shit - I just had a flash...if only Scully, or Kim could have witnessed us out there," he said, the tears running down his cheeks. "That has to be the stupidest thing either of us have ever done - which in your case is saying something."

"Thank you," Mulder muttered ironically, loving the sound of his Master's deep laugh, echoing from inside his broad chest. He watched Skinner laugh for a moment, utterly fascinated by the sight, without knowing why - and then he figured it out: his Master sometimes laughed, and often smiled in private, but he had never, ever, seen Skinner give a belly laugh like this. It was such a good sight. He knew his Master had been stressed out recently, and it was a joy to see him relax like this, that large, muscular body loose-limbed with helpless mirth. Mulder couldn't resist joining in the laughter, and soon they were both lying weak and helpless in each other's arms, completely exhausted. Mulder couldn't help but reflect that he was having fun. However absurd the day's events had been, he had been totally

engrossed in them, and he so rarely ever enjoying social events, of any kind. He never fit in, and he hated making small talk. Here, he fitted in simply by virtue of being his Master's slave, and there was no requirement for him to make any small talk. Here he could just be Fox. There were no other expectations. He turned to share this observation with his Master, to find that the other man was fast asleep. Mulder smiled, and placed his head back on Skinner's chest, deciding to join him.

They slept for a while, then took a tranquil bath together, before preparing for the evening's entertainment.

"You won't sell me at the auction tonight, Master, will you?" Mulder asked, as he got dressed in the same cutaway leather trousers he had worn the previous evening.

"You like being sold," Skinner replied, tersely, watching his slave get dressed from his vantage point in the armchair, his long legs stretched out in front of him, resting on the ottoman.

"What do you mean?" Mulder looked at his Master.

"You figure it out - and when you do, we'll talk about it again," Skinner said in a low, firm tone, signaling that this conversation was most definitely at an end. Mulder bit down on his lip, wondering what the hell his Master was getting at. He didn't want to be sold. He glanced around the room; supposing he didn't spend the night here, in his Master's bed, but in some other top's bed...in some other top's arms? He hated the thought.

The main hall downstairs was already filled up with people when they went down. Mulder was once again wearing his nipple chain and leash, and in full submissive mode. He was worried by his Master's comments though. He didn't want to eat, but his Master didn't take "no" for an answer, and pressed food into his slave's mouth whether he wanted it or not. There was lively conversation resonating around them, and Skinner was soon talking to the many people who approached him, while his slave knelt obediently beside him, lost in his submission, just watching. These were the times he liked best - when he could just be with his Master, kneeling quietly at his side. Mulder found the true peace of his submission when Skinner allowed him to serve him in this way. Murray came over, a huge smile creasing his face.

"Ah - here is the magnificent, spirited colt who delighted us in the carriage race this afternoon," he exclaimed, beaming down on Fox. "I hope you perform for us again, Fox. You won the hearts of everyone in the crowd with your beauty. I hope your Master didn't punish you too much for your little, uh, over-exuberance," he grinned at Skinner. "Did your crop get a workout, Guardian?" He asked with a theatrical wink.

"No, I have to be careful, Murray," Skinner replied in an amused tone. "You see, Fox here is a fully paid up member of *P.E.T.S* so they'd have been down on me like a ton of bricks if I'd taken my crop to him."

"*P.E.T.S*?" Murray raised an inquiring eyebrow.

"People for the Ethical Treatment of Slaves," Skinner responded, straight-faced. Murray did a double take, then roared with laughter.

"Oh, god, that's good! I have to tell Hammer," he sighed, wiping genuine tears from his eyes. "Poor mistreated boy!" he clucked, patting Mulder's head affectionately. "Is your Master cruel to you?"

"Not yet, but he might be if the boy says a word," Skinner replied for his slave. "Fox is in deep submission right now, answerable only to me." He raised his slave's chin and kissed him deeply to emphasize this fact. Mulder sighed, and nestled in close. Being in submissive mode was like a rest for him, an escape. He couldn't believe that he'd ever once fought it. He wouldn't want to spend his whole life like this, but sometimes it was just what he needed in order to cope with the turmoil of his own thoughts and emotions.

"Adorable," Murray murmured. "Just as it should be. I somehow don't think you'll be needing the services of *P.E.T.S.*, my little Fox. Ah, when I remember the hellhound who was here last time - I think someone has well and truly tamed you."

"We've definitely made progress," Skinner replied with a smile, kneading his slave's neck firmly with his hand.

"It's always beautiful to see the Guardian in action. We've waited a long time to see you this happy again, Walter," Murray observed. "You may have worked wonders on this wild creature here, but I think maybe the slave has tamed the Master too, hmm?"

"Of course," Skinner replied seriously. "Shouldn't that always be the way?"

A tall, dark man passing overheard this exchange and gave a snort of disapproval before moving on. Murray and Skinner exchanged glances.

"I see our Mr. Franklin is back," Skinner observed.

"He's making a name for himself on the scene," Murray said with a shrug.

"A good name or a bad name?" Skinner asked pointedly.

Murray shrugged again. "I wish I knew. Hammer's been keeping an eye out, as he usually does, but nobody's saying much. There's just been some buzz around him."

Mulder felt his hackles rising as he watched Franklin circling the room, like a shark looking for his next victim. He shuddered involuntarily. He remembered the man - he'd tried to buy him off Skinner last time he was here, and Skinner had refused him in no uncertain terms. Both Master and slave had taken a dislike to Franklin.

His attention was distracted from his observation by Murray climbing onto a makeshift stage at the other end of the enormous room.

"Listen up, people!" Murray shouted over the throng of voices. "We're coming to the main event of the evening - the slave auction."

Mulder buried his face in his Master's knee, and looked at him with his biggest, most mournful expression. Skinner ignored him.

"If all the prospective slaves would like to come up here," Murray announced.

Mulder gazed at his Master, his heart beating fast. Skinner looked down on his slave, speculatively.

"Well, slave, I think it's time we parted company," he murmured. Mulder opened his mouth, and Skinner placed a finger over it. "One night, boy. You'll be delivered back to me tomorrow safe and sound." Mulder drowned in that dark-eyed gaze for an eternity, struggling with his own submission, knowing his Master was asking him to give himself up freely, because his Master commanded it. In many ways it was the ultimate test of his submission. Mulder agonized over it for a long moment. He knew that in reality he could just get up and leave. Skinner wouldn't stop him. He commanded his obedience through love, not fear. However, he didn't want to leave. He knew he should trust his Master, and hell, there was even a part of him that found the whole idea of the slave auction as horny as hell. Mulder sighed then lowered his head, and nodded. Skinner got up, and took hold of his slave's leash, leading him up to the stage.

"I want all the slaves - or whoever is offering them for sale - to write down the precise instructions on how they are to be treated for the evening. I'll be examining the instructions myself to make sure they are perfectly clear," Murray announced, waving his hand at a stack of paper, pens, and small black leather wallets on strings on the table. "When you're done, put the paper in the numbered wallets and place them around your neck."

Mulder watched glumly as the stage filled up. He saw Skinner tucking a piece of paper into a wallet numbered "4" and then he returned to Mulder and placed the wallet around his neck.

"Will you tell me what it says? What's expected of me?" Mulder asked.

"No." Skinner smiled. "You'll just have to trust me, boy," and so saying, he marched Mulder up onto the stage. He placed Mulder in position among his fellow slaves, then drew his sulking slave's chin up and kissed him sweetly on the lips. "I'm sure you'll fetch a very high price," he said. "Cheer up, boy - you're allowed to donate the sum you raise to your favorite charity."

Mulder shrugged, and glanced around. There were about 9 or 10 slaves lined up in various stages of undress. Skinner slapped his slave's exposed rump affectionately, then turned and re-joined the spectators.

"Hey, buddy - it's not that bad," a voice in his ear murmured and he turned to see that he was standing next to Ian.

"You're doing this voluntarily?" Mulder asked in amazement.

"Sure - I did it last year. It was great fun - one of the best nights of my life!" Ian exclaimed.

Somehow that made Mulder feel better - at least he wasn't in this alone. "You're crazy, you know that don't you?" Mulder growled.

Ian just laughed and pointed at Murray who was clapping his hands to get the attention of the crowd.

"The slaves will be naked - I'm sure our buyers will want to see the goods before they buy," Murray announced. Mulder wasn't sure why he should care about being naked after the pony trials, but it wasn't something that ever came easy to him. The prospective slaves around him undressed eagerly, until he was the only one left. Murray came over to him, and glanced at his leather trousers pointedly.

"Do I need to call your Master, Fox?" He asked. Mulder looked out into the sea of faces watching him, and unerringly found his Master's brown eyes. Skinner raised an eyebrow, and crossed his arms slowly over his broad chest. Mulder sighed.

"No, sir," he muttered, undoing his pants, and sliding them down his legs.

A cheer went around the room, and a few wolf whistles. Mulder closed his eyes and hoped the ground would open up and swallow him.

Murray led the first slave out into the center of the stage, amid a wild burst of clapping.

"This is number one. His name is Ethan," Murray announced, looking at the contents of the paper in Ethan's wallet. "If anyone would like to inspect the goods, please come up to the stage and do so."

"Oh shit." Mulder turned to look at Ian in dismay. "Tell me this isn't happening," he whispered.

"Hey, it's **hot**," Ian told him. "Don't worry - Murray won't let anything happen to you that's outside your Master's orders. Sometimes inspections are visual, sometimes they're physical. It depends on what's written inside your wallet," he grinned. Mulder didn't feel very reassured. He had no idea what his Master had written on the slip of paper he'd placed in the wallet around his slave's neck.

"What's the matter - is the bunny scared?" A familiar voice taunted from the end of the line.

Mulder clenched his fists. "Lee," he said, without turning.

"That's right. I still owe you for that kick earlier," Lee hissed. "Maybe your Master will put in a bid for me. He's clearly gotten sick of you. Maybe **my** Master will buy you for the night. I bet he could teach you a thing or two."

Mulder shuddered, the image of Lee's Master thrusting into his slave in full public view rising unbidden to his mind.

"Shut the fuck up, pretty boy," Ian snapped, to Mulder's surprise. "Hey, he talks too much," Ian said with a grin at his friend. "Enjoy, buddy. This is fun. Trust me," he winked, turning back to watch the auction. "Everybody's just having a good time - and it's not much different to meeting someone at a club. Some of the tops here are pretty wealthy, so the money usually flows. I think someone runs a book on which slave will fetch the highest price as well. Lee, here, usually wins that honor," he commented with a sour glance in Lee's direction. "Ah, here come the buyers," Ian said, eyeing them up approvingly.

Mulder watched as a small group of tops approached the stage, to examine the goods. Ethan's instructions clearly allowed physical inspection, under Murray's watchful eye. The young man's legs were spread, and his balls were weighed in various hands, his cock examined, and his nipples pinched. He was turned around, and bent over slightly, and hands were run lightly over his butt.

"Too white," someone murmured. "I prefer my slaves to glow a healthy red in this area!" There was some general laughter, and then Ethan was placed back facing the audience, and his mouth was opened, and his teeth examined. The prospective buyers talked about him as if he weren't there, and Ethan grew harder as the event progressed, so he was clearly enjoying himself enormously. The examination came to an end, and the prospective buyers went back into the audience, and the bidding began. It was too fast to follow, but Ethan sold for the princely sum of \$700, which, Mulder was informed, was about average.

"Supposing Ethan's wallet says he's only prepared to give a massage, and no personal services," Mulder whispered to Ian, hoping that his **own** wallet contained those exact instructions. Ian shrugged.

"Luck of the draw," he whispered back. The bidders aren't allowed to know what exactly they're getting for their money. That's part of the fun of the event!" He grinned.

"Supposing they try and do more than is said on the paper?"

"At one of Murray's parties? With the Guardian staying here? Nobody would dare. The slave would complain and they'd be out of the scene for good," Ian replied.

"Oh. Good." Mulder murmured.

"My turn!" Ian exclaimed. "Wish me luck."

"Luck," Mulder said sourly.

He watched as Ian went proudly forward, amid more applause, and a group of men came up onstage to examine him. At first, everything went well. Ian was clearly enjoying all the attention, because, like Ethan, his cock was looking decidedly interested in the proceedings. Then his mood changed suddenly. Out of the corner of his eye, Mulder noticed that Franklin had joined the buyers on the stage, and as soon as he touched Ian, laying one hand on Ian's chin, his friend stiffened, and moved his head away.

"The slave must keep still and allow scrutiny," Murray proclaimed, but Mulder could see that something was seriously wrong with Ian. His whole body had become tightly coiled like a spring, and his erection had wilted completely. Mulder took a step forward, but Murray was already onto it.

"Ian?" He took hold of Ian's arm, and waved the buyers away. Mulder watched the two of them talk in undertones, and then he was surprised to see Ian grab his clothes, get dressed, and then jump down from the stage. "Ian has withdrawn himself from the auction," Murray announced, quickly ushering the next exhibit forward to distract people from the drama. Mulder tried to see where his friend had gone, but there was no sign of him. He wondered why the hell Ian had changed his mind - he'd been looking forward to this, and he'd seemed so excited by it.

He didn't have time to think about it for long, because he was next up onstage. A roar of approving applause greeted him, and he realized that he was well known after his performance in the carriage race earlier.

"You'll have to watch this one - he kicks," Murray joked. "He's a fine, spirited specimen. He's also the Guardian's own slave. So whoever buys him undoubtedly has a treat in store. The Guardian does, after all, have exquisite taste, and the boy has been trained to our Guardian's usual exacting standards."

There was a rumble of appreciation but Murray didn't invite any buyers onstage. Instead, he had Mulder stand still, while he outlined the "selling points" about this particular slave, using a long, crook-handled cane to gesture to various parts of Mulder's body.

"As you can see, he has a particularly lean body..." Murray's cane trailed over Mulder's skin, raising goose bumps, and Mulder's treacherous cock began to swell. God, this was so humiliating. All these eyes fixed on him, and yet - of all the eyes in the room, the ones he was most aware of were the dark ones of his Master, watching his slave approvingly. "He's a beauty - fine, pale skin," Murray continued. Mulder closed his eyes. This was almost worse than being physically examined by all those pawing hands, and yet...so damn arousing! "A nice thick head of hair," Murray's cane tapped his head, "and look at these appealing eyes and this full lower lip..." Murray's cane lingered lovingly on his lip, pulling it down slightly, in a parody of a full Mulder pout. "He's very well endowed, as I'm sure we all noticed earlier today at the races," Murray said, to loud catcalls of appreciation, and the odd ribald comment which Mulder managed not to listen to. Murray's cane tapped his penis and he was embarrassed to find it swelling even more. "Very responsive too, as you can see," Murray winked. "Turn around, Fox."

He did as he was told, and more whistles greeted him as his exposed backside, with its impressive 'W' went on display. "As you can see, our Guardian, Walter, likes to mark his property in case it goes astray," Murray winked, to a smattering of applause.

"All right, how much am I bid for this beautiful specimen," Murray asked.

"\$500," someone shouted, which was the highest opening bid of the evening. Mulder found his Master's face in the crowd - Skinner was smiling broadly, and he raised his arm.

"\$600," his Master bid.

Mulder's heart soared. God, he'd been so stupid! It had never occurred to him that his Master might actually bid for him. The bidding went on fast and furiously around him, but he barely noticed. He was sure that his Master would outbid all of them. Finally, it came down to a contest between his Master, and Lee's master. Skinner smilingly upped every bid that Mike made, until the total stood at over \$2000. Mulder was staggered. So much money for one night in his dubious company. He wasn't sure why the hell Skinner would bother bidding for what was his own property, unless it was simply because he enjoyed showing off his slave, and how much he meant to him. The bidding stalled at \$2,500 when Mike dropped out.

"Going once," Murray called, milking it for all it was worth.

"Get it over with," Mulder muttered, wanting nothing more than to be reunited in his Master's loving arms.

"Going twice," Murray said.

"\$3,000," a voice said, cutting through the hallway like a knife. There was a gasp of surprise, and the crowd parted. Mulder closed his eyes, his stomach sinking into his shoes, hoping that it wasn't Franklin who had made the bid. When he opened them again, he found himself face to face with a burly man, with balding, blond hair, and a ruddy complexion. He had never seen him before in his life.

"Well?" The man asked, glancing at Skinner. Mulder crossed his fingers behind his back. Skinner glanced at his slave, then at the newcomer, and smiled.

"He's all yours," he said.

Another gasp went around the room, and pandemonium broke out. Mulder found his nipple leash being handed over to the newcomer, and he was led away. He craned his head around to catch a glimpse of his Master, but he couldn't see him.

"Perry." His new 'master' said, when he got Mulder into the relative quiet of the kitchen.

"What?" Mulder gasped, still confused by the evening's events.

"My name is Perry. And you are Fox." The other man grinned. "Here." He handed Mulder his leather trousers which the slave pulled on gratefully. "Thank god, there's food here. I'm starving," Perry said, going over to a table. "I only just got here. I was held up on a case. I thought I was going to miss getting here altogether. Glad I didn't though." He grinned at his new slave.

"A...a...case?" Mulder managed to stammer at last.

"Yeah." Perry stuffed a sandwich into his mouth.

"Are you...an FBI agent?" Mulder asked. Perry laughed, almost choking on his food in the process.

"God, no," he exclaimed around his sandwich. "I'm a doctor. Do I look like an FBI agent?"

"You never can tell," Mulder muttered, glancing down at his own semi-clad body, decorated by his nipple rings and leash.

"So I've heard," Perry grinned. "Oh, relax, Fox. I'm not going to eat you. This food is far tastier, if you'll forgive me for saying so."

Mulder smiled uncertainly. This man seemed normal. As a matter of fact, he seemed very nice.

"Would you mind if...I'm worried about my friend, Ian. Could I go and check up on him?" He asked. Perry nodded and waved a hand.

"Sure, fine by me. I'll be here for the next half an hour or so stuffing my face. I'll see you back here," he said.

Mulder ran out of the kitchen and headed back towards the main hall, but he was side-tracked by the familiar sound of his Master's voice, talking to someone in the bathroom. He peered around the side of

the open door, to find Ian, sitting on the closed toilet seat, looking pale, and Skinner leaning against the wall, gazing at the other man intently.

"Ian - are you okay," Mulder went up to his friend, and crouched beside him. "It's him isn't it? That bastard who hurt you last week - it's Franklin." Ian nodded, his arms clasped over his stomach.

"I thought I'd gotten over it," he said with a shrug. "When I saw him onstage though, I couldn't believe he'd have the nerve...and he **touched** me," he shuddered.

"Damn." Mulder slammed his fist into the wall.

"Will you make a formal complaint now, Ian?" Skinner asked softly. "As Guardian, I'd like your permission to at least speak with Franklin on the matter."

"I don't want to get a reputation for being a difficult sub," Ian murmured.

"You're hardly that!" Mulder exploded. "The bastard practically raped you for god's sake!"

"Fox - quiet," Skinner said. "I can handle this."

"Like you handled that slave auction? Selling me off to some fucking stranger?" Mulder yelled.

Skinner ignored him. "Ian," he began.

"No. Look, I'm going back into the auction. I don't want to let that bastard make me miss out on any more of the fun," Ian said, getting up shakily. Both Mulder and Skinner followed him back into the hall. The last 'slave' up for auction was Lee, and bidding was going well. Lee, ever the exhibitionist was preening himself on the stage, acting up and showing off his beautiful, lithe body in a variety of provocative poses. The bidding reached a crescendo, and Lee was sold for the very respectable price of \$1,500, which Mulder couldn't help but note, was less than he had fetched.

"Who bought him?" He asked, craning his neck to see over the crowd. Skinner, having the benefit of an extra inch on his slave, saw Lee's buyer stalk onstage and a hiss escaped his lips. He glanced at Ian, his expression concerned.

"Franklin bought him," he said.

There was silence as all three men gazed at each other for a moment.

"Ian, look, you know I hate Lee, but I honestly wouldn't wish on him what happened to you," Mulder said. "Please. We have to do something."

"I agree with Fox," Skinner said softly. "At least allow me to warn Lee about Franklin,"

"All right." Ian nodded. "And Walter?" He added as Skinner began shouldering his way through the crowd. Skinner turned back. "You can speak to Franklin as well. Warn him off. Let him know it's not... acceptable."

Skinner nodded, and disappeared into the crowd. Mulder couldn't resist following him. He was never one to hang back in moments of drama and he had some very strong opinions about this. He found Skinner talking in an urgent undertone to Lee, in the corner of the hall. Lee was smirking, and he was so busy casting flirtatious glances in Franklin's direction that he barely listened to a word Skinner was saying. Mulder noticed Skinner's body language becoming more and more irritated and then, with a shrug and a sigh, his Master gave up on Lee and turned to Franklin instead. Mulder watched as Skinner took the tall man aside. Franklin stiffened as his Master spoke, and his nostrils flared angrily. Mulder edged closer.

"It's none of your business," Franklin was saying.

"You're wrong. If you're playing unsafely then that **is** my business," Skinner hissed. "We're watching you, Franklin. If you fuck up again, then I can tell you that I will deal with it, **personally.**"

It was a threat and it was meant to be. Skinner's tone sent a shiver down Mulder's spine. Franklin looked startled - but his body language betrayed that Skinner had got to him. He glanced at his new possession, clicked his fingers, and then left the room without a backward glance.

"You just let him go?" Mulder asked his Master, incredulously, a few seconds later as he caught up with him.

"What could I do?" Skinner spread his hands helplessly. "Lee wanted Franklin and he wanted his new plaything. I can't stop two consenting adults spending the night together, Fox."

"I see." Mulder turned his back on his Master and stalked out. He knew he was behaving badly, and he wasn't sure what **he** would have done either, but he was still feeling betrayed by Skinner's failure to carry on bidding for him earlier. He got to the doorway of the hall, and glanced back. Skinner was standing on his own, rubbing a tired hand across his eyes. Mulder felt a twinge of guilt, and was about to turn back, when he saw Skinner walk across the room towards Ian, and take the other man by the arm, leading him away. With a resigned sigh, Mulder returned to the kitchen to find his new 'master' as his old one clearly didn't give a damn about him.

Perry looked up with a smile as Fox returned. "I'm beat. Time for bed," he grinned. "Come on, Fox, let's become better acquainted." He eschewed Mulder's leash, and put a friendly arm around his shoulder, ushering him up the stairs and along one of the myriad corridors to a bedroom. This one was considerably smaller than the bedroom he'd shared with Skinner, but it still had a tiny en suite bathroom - big enough for a small tub. Perry threw himself down on the double bed with a sigh, and Mulder stood, miserably, to one side, awaiting further orders.

"I'm so damn tired," Perry said.

"I could run you a bath," Mulder suggested.

"Would you?" Perry smiled. "That'd be great. I've been in the O.R. all day and I'm stiff as hell."

Mulder set about the task as silently and obediently as he could, wondering what the hell would happen next. When he returned to the bedroom, Perry was unpacking the contents of a small case. He straightened when he saw his 'slave' and smiled at him.

"Your bath is ready, sir," Mulder murmured, standing stiffly to attention.

"I don't think you need to be so formal, Fox," Perry grinned, slapping his arm heartily, "and call me Perry."

"I'm sorry...I don't know...that is, I'm not sure what you expect from me. You paid a lot...and...I think you should see what instructions my Master has left for how I'm to be used," Mulder said, taking the wallet from around his neck and handing it to Perry.

"Oh, there's no need to bother with that," Perry smiled, slinging it onto the dresser. "I'm sure you're very well trained."

"I am, but..."

"It's all right." Perry put his hands on Mulder's shoulders to calm him. He was a solid man, almost as tall as Mulder, and about the same age as his Master. "Don't get stressed, Fox. It's bad for your blood pressure, and I should know. Trust me, I'm a doctor," he grinned.

"What kind of doctor?" Mulder asked, warming to the man.

"I specialize in trauma medicine. I used to work in the ER, but I'm pioneering some experimental approaches to treating battlefield casualties for the military now," Perry told him, unbuttoning his shirt and throwing it lazily onto the bed, before disappearing into the bathroom. Mulder thought about it for a moment, then followed him, uncertainly.

"Uh, would you like me to...um, serve you?" He asked nervously. Perry toed off his shoes, and unbuttoned his pants, pushing them onto the floor along with his underwear. Then he lowered himself into the bubble bath that Mulder had prepared.

"Serve me?" He glanced at Mulder. "How?"

"I give good massages," Mulder said with a shrug.

"Sounds good. I ache." Perry rolled his shoulders experimentally. "Tell me about yourself, Fox," he invited.

Mulder sat down on the closed toilet seat and thought about it. Perry's green eyes were warm and friendly though, and, thus encouraged, he started to speak. He explained about his unsatisfactory experiences on the scene, and how he had sold himself to an unknown master, and ended up with someone he knew all too well. Perry laughed out loud at that.

"Your boss? Jeez! I think I'd have several heart attacks if that happened to me," he grinned.

"I almost did," Mulder admitted wryly, remembering the moment when he'd found out who had bought him.

"And how did it turn out?" Perry asked, soaping himself.

"It's become everything to me...well - almost everything," Mulder said quietly. "He is everything I never knew I wanted. I can be a stupid, blind bastard sometimes. It's taken me a while to trust him - that's still not easy for me, but he...I sometimes scare myself by the way I feel about him," he admitted.

"Love scares the hell out of me too," Perry grinned, getting out of the bath. Mulder got up and wrapped his new master in a towel. "No wonder it's a four letter word!"

Mulder laughed at that, and followed Perry back into the bedroom. The other man laid face down on his bed. Mulder stood helplessly by the bed, wondering what to do next.

"That massage would nice," Perry prompted, and Mulder got some oil from the bathroom and began his task. Perry's body was different to Skinner's - not as nice, although compact and burly - yet by serving Perry he was serving his Master, as his Master had ordered. Mulder took some pride in that fact. Finishing with Perry's back, he asked the other man to roll over, and began work on his front, concentrating on his arms and legs. His fingers discovered a number of old, faded, white scars on Perry's body, and he glanced at the man in surprise.

"'Nam." Perry said with a shrug. "That was why I decided to become a doctor. I was 20 years old, and I'd been bumming around from one job to the next before I enlisted, not knowing what the hell to do with my life. Then suddenly, lying there in that hospital bed, it suddenly came to me - become a doctor, Perry. This is why you were put on this earth. It was like the goddamn road to Damascus. Everything slotted into place and made sense. I went to med school straight out of hospital, which is ironic really. I hated hospitals so much that I decided to spend the rest of my life in 'em!" Perry grinned. Mulder finished his massage and sat down on the side of the bed beside the other man.

"Did you know my Master in 'Nam?" He asked quietly.

"Walter? No - not in 'Nam, but after, in the hospital. I was crazy about him, but he was way out of reach. I think he'd had a bad experience of some kind with another member of his platoon, then of course they were all wiped out so he felt bad about that. He was a surly bastard, but so damn good looking. Those dark, satanic, brooding looks!" Perry grinned. "Anyway, he ignored my, uh, advances, but we became good friends all the same. We both used to slope off to the bathroom to smoke dope - it gave us a sense of shared danger." Perry grinned.

Mulder raised an eyebrow.

"Well if you'd seen the nurses you'd know what I mean!" Perry exclaimed, "They were dragons - I'd rather my CO had caught me than one of them!"

Mulder grinned, loving the mental image of his Master as a 19 year old, sneaking out to smoke in the hospital bathroom.

"I didn't know you knew Walter," he sighed.

"You thought he'd sold you to a stranger?" Perry raised a surprised eyebrow. "You were talking about trusting him just now, Fox. If you know Walter as well as I do, you'd know he wouldn't have allowed that. He's a control freak apart from anything else," he grinned. "I don't think he likes leaving **anything** to chance!"

"Yeah." Mulder sighed, feeling angry with himself for ever doubting his Master. He remembered the way his Master had looked the last time he'd seen him. Warily rubbing his eyes, he had seemed so lost, and alone.

"I'm glad I've finally met you," Perry said. "Walter and I kept in contact over the years - I think we were both surprised we ended up so respectable; him going into law, me into medicine. Then when we bumped into each other a few years back at a scene party, I think we were both equally amused that the subversive streak was still there as well. I never guessed about Walter's toppy side to be honest. My own is a little under-developed I have to admit. I like the drama and spectacle and all the dressing up, but I get more out of it if my partner is really into it than because I'm into it. When I broke up with my boyfriend a few years back, I more or less dropped out of the scene - I only used to go because of him, really."

"So why are you here now?" Mulder asked, fascinated by the man.

"Walter asked me to come and bid for you," Perry grinned. "How could I say no? I'd been pestering the man to let me meet you for weeks!"

"Oh." Mulder bit on his lip, as the last piece of that puzzle fell into place.

"Jeez, it's late." Perry glanced at the clock, then got up, and walked naked into the bathroom. Mulder heard him using the toilet, and brushing his teeth, and a chill crept up his spine. What happened next? He liked Perry, but what was Skinner expecting of him? He glanced towards the bathroom door and then at the wallet on the bed, and finally, unable to resist, he picked up the wallet, and pulled out the piece of paper inside. His mouth opened in surprise as he examined the contents.

"It's blank, isn't it?" Perry said from behind him. Mulder jumped, startled. "Sorry, didn't mean to make you jump - although I'm sure snooping is a punishable offense or something. I'll have to ask Walter," Perry said, waving a vague hand in the air.

"Why?" Mulder held up the blank piece of paper.

"He knew he was going to buy you - or I would if I turned up in time," Perry said with a shrug. "Murray was under strict instructions not to sell you to anyone else anyway, so you were always quite safe. Are you sure you trust him?" He frowned. "I think he thought you'd enjoy all the drama but you seem a bit subdued by it all."

"I didn't know if it might please him to...some people get off on making their slave serve someone else. I had a Mistress once who ordered me to suck someone. I did it," Mulder admitted uncomfortably.

"What's more, I enjoyed it. I liked being asked to do something so humiliating in order to demonstrate my devotion - but I wasn't in love with her. Ever since Walter made me his slave..."

"Like I said. Love." Perry grinned. "You must have got something out of that slave auction though."

"What makes you say that?" Mulder frowned.

"Well, you sold yourself to Walter in the first place, didn't you?" Perry's question seemed innocent enough, but it hit Mulder hard. He nodded, and replaced the blank slip of paper into the wallet with nerveless fingers.

"Um, Perry...I'm not sure what the rules are here, but...would you mind if I went to see my Master? I'm sorry if you didn't get your money's worth..."

"Oh god, it's not **my** money!" Perry grinned. "Don't be an idiot, Fox. Walter paid - so technically you're his tonight, I guess! Go to him. I think maybe you have something you need to discuss?"

"Yes. I think so." Mulder nodded. "Thanks, Perry. It's be great meeting you."

"Likewise," Perry said sincerely. "I hope we get a chance to talk some more tomorrow."

The house was in darkness as Mulder slipped along the corridor to his Master's room. He hesitated outside. He wasn't sure if Skinner wanted to see him tonight. He wasn't sure if maybe his Master had wanted a break from him - hence the charade with Perry. He wasn't even sure if Skinner might not have found himself another companion for the night. He hesitated, then finally pushed the door open and slipped inside. It was dark in the bedroom, the curtains were open - and the bed was empty. That surprised him, and he fought down a wave of jealousy, as he imagined Skinner spending the night in someone else's room - Ian's maybe.

"Fox," a voice whispered, and he jumped. "Come here. Look at the moon." He glanced over to the far side of the room to see that Skinner had turned the armchair around to face the window, and was gazing out into the darkness. He didn't look around, just waved his hand in Mulder's direction. Mulder walked soundlessly over to his Master's side, and knelt beside him. He took a sharp intake of breath as he saw what Skinner was looking at. The moon was full and ripe, hanging in the sky, obscured by little tufts of orangey clouds.

"God, that's beautiful," Mulder whispered.

"Mmm." Skinner's hands tangled in Mulder's hair, where they always ended up.

"How did you know it was me?" Mulder asked.

"Who else would it be?" Skinner looked down on his slave, and smiled softly.

"Perry explained it to me. \$3000 for one night with someone you already own is a lot of money," Mulder commented

"Sometimes it's necessary to show someone how much they're worth," Skinner said, gazing back at the moon. "I knew you'd fetch the highest price of the evening."

"Well, you were almost bidding against yourself," Mulder pointed out.

"Only right at the end!" Skinner retorted.

"What you said earlier, about me liking being sold - that was about me selling myself to you, wasn't it?" Mulder asked. It felt easy, being here, beside his Master, in the warm darkness, under the gentle glow of the moon.

"Not to me. You didn't know it was me - to someone unknown. I recreated that for you tonight. I wondered how you'd react," Skinner said.

"You won't let me get away with not facing up to this question, will you?" Mulder said, going around to the front of the chair, to sit between his Master's open legs.

"No. I can't. You have to face it. What brought you to that most extreme of actions, even for you, Fox?" Skinner asked, stroking his slave's hair. "It wasn't just about sex - I don't believe that."

"No. I suppose not." Mulder placed his arms around his legs, and pulled his knees up against his chest. "I wanted an intimacy I couldn't escape from. I wanted to be forced into an emotional commitment that I wouldn't accept in any other way. I was running, hiding from myself, but some part of myself wanted that..." He trailed off, still thinking.

"And did you think you couldn't find someone to love, who'd love you back, in any other way?" Skinner asked.

"I hurt the people I love. Maybe it was easier not to have a choice. To just belong to someone, with no possibility of escape. It turned me on too, Master." Mulder looked up, a faint smile curving on his lips. Skinner returned the smile, and reached out to caress his slave's mouth with one tender finger. "Please, don't sell me again, Master," Mulder said quietly.

"Even for fun?" Skinner raised an eyebrow.

"Well, it was kinda hot," Mulder conceded with a grin. Then he became serious. "I don't need those extreme possibilities any more, Master. I found what I was looking for. I've stopped looking."

"Good. That's all I need to hear." Skinner got up, and stretched, then reached out and pulled his slave to his feet. "Progress, Fox," he whispered, sliding his hands around his slave's back, and caressing his naked bottom. "We still have a way to go, but you've come so far. I'm proud of you for not evading the difficult issues, when it comes to them, sweetheart."

Mulder's hands went to his Master's robe, and unwrapped him, pulling the other man close, and then devouring him with a long, deep kiss, mirroring the way his Master so often claimed him. When they drew apart, Skinner chuckled, and took off the robe, sliding into the bed. Mulder got in beside him, and wrapped his arms around his Master.

"It's good to be home," he murmured.

"Good to have you home," Skinner replied, depositing a kiss on his slave's forehead, his eyes closing in weariness.

"Does Master want to use me?" Mulder asked hopefully.

"No. I'm too tired to even move," Skinner replied, with some regret. Mulder thought about that for a moment, then burst out laughing. "What?" Skinner squeezed his slave.

"Don't kill me for this, but I was just going to offer to, uh, make love to you, and then this image slipped into my mind of you tied up, completely at my mercy, and all the things I'd like to, um, do to your naked, willing body," Mulder said, still chuckling.

"Well, that sounds interesting. One day, maybe," Skinner grinned, his big arms tightening around his slave. "Although you'd better take damned good care of me or I might have to report you to *P.E.T.S.*"

Mulder burst out laughing at that. When he looked up again a few minutes later, his Master was fast asleep. Mulder propped himself up on his elbow and gazed down on his Master's sleeping face. Skinner did look tired which was hardly surprising. First a difficult week at work, and then all these Guardian issues to deal with this weekend.

"At least tomorrow's Master's Day," Mulder said softly, tracing a finger over Skinner's open mouth. "I hope you like what I have planned."

Mulder woke his Master with his normal wake-up call late the next morning, followed by breakfast in bed. Then he knelt beside the bed in the submissive pose, awaiting his Master's further instructions. Skinner seemed to have regained his vitality and was in brisk Masterful mode.

He dispensed a most exquisitely enjoyable spanking to his naked slave, then they both took a shower together. Mulder dried his Master and shaved him, then dressed him in jeans and a tight white tee shirt. Mulder then dressed himself in the black leather harness which his Master instructed him to wear, complete with an intricate system of chains that attached to his nipple rings and which his Master enjoyed playing with, sending little shivers of sensation through his slave's body.

They went downstairs to discover an overnight sensation had occurred. There was uproar in the main hall.

"What's happening?" Mulder asked Ian, pushing his way through the crowd.

"It's Lee," Ian replied.

"Oh shit - he's all right isn't he?" Mulder demanded anxiously. "Franklin didn't..."

"He's fine." Ian shrugged. "I don't think Franklin would have dared try anything in Murray's house - especially after Walter spoke to him yesterday."

"Then what the hell is going on?" Skinner asked roughly. The crowd parted for him and Mulder and Ian followed in his wake to find Lee kneeling on the floor beside Franklin, who was in noisy negotiation with Lee's owner, Mike, with Murray looking on. "Perhaps someone would care to explain?" Skinner demanded, instantly commanding everyone's attention.

"I want to buy this slave, and the slave wishes to be sold," Franklin told Skinner. "But his owner is refusing to sell."

"That is his prerogative," Skinner snapped, glancing at Mike and then at Lee.

"This idiot can't keep a hot-tempered, wild creature such as this..." Franklin pointed at the beautifully submissive slaveboy kneeling at his feet. Mulder noticed that Lee's lips were swollen from sex, and his eyes were fixed on the tall, dark man with a besotted expression in their almond depths.

"He needs a firm hand, a Master who will tame him!" Franklin proclaimed. "And that is what the boy wants - he told me so. A night with me, and he wanted to become my property. You cannot keep him when it is so much against his needs," Franklin hissed to Mike. Mulder almost felt sorry for Lee's owner. He'd never liked the man much, and he thought they made a bad pair, but even so, the man looked crushed.

"Lee and I have been together for 8 months. He's mine," Mike whimpered pathetically.

"Find yourself another. I will pay you well for him," Franklin said. "Guardian - your word on this issue please."

Skinner glanced at the tableaux, and at Murray, then at the watching crowd. He took a deep breath, and went up to the three main participants in the dispute.

"Gentlemen, let's take this somewhere private, shall we?" He said smoothly. "Fox, bring us coffee in the library," he ordered over his shoulder. When Mulder arrived with refreshments ten minutes later, the discussion was in full swing. He served the coffee, then knelt unobtrusively beside his Master, keeping silent, as the debate raged around him. Skinner took all of the main players aside and spoke to each of them in turn, then gathered them around the table. Mulder noticed that Lee's eyes never left Franklin. Whatever had happened between the two of them last night, Lee was clearly crazy about the dangerous newcomer. Maybe he saw someone who would rein him in the way the indulgent Mike, pleased with himself to own such a beautiful young slave, never did. Maybe the very edge of ruthlessness about Franklin that appalled Mulder, appealed to something in his young enemy.

"Mike, you have every right not to sell the boy," Skinner said, in measured tones. "However, an unwilling slave is not a good asset for any Master. Think carefully before you deny him this."

Mike thought about it for a while, and then, grudgingly, gave in. Franklin brought out transfer papers and the matter was settled within seconds. Franklin clicked his fingers, and the newly obedient Lee scampered eagerly to his side, while Murray escorted Mike away to commiserate with him - probably plying the other man with drink, if Mulder knew Murray.

Finally, Mulder was alone with his Master. He gazed at Skinner steadily, awaiting permission to speak. Skinner sighed, and ran a weary hand over his forehead.

"Don't say it, Fox. I know you think I should have stopped that happening, but I took Lee aside, and warned him of what we know about Franklin in the strongest possible terms. He just wasn't interested. As for Franklin - he knows I'm watching him. When we get home I'll do some digging on his background to see if there's anything we should know."

Mulder got up, and planted a kiss on the other man's bare scalp.

"I wasn't going to say anything, but, uh, I'd decided to do exactly the same thing," he admitted. Skinner smiled tiredly. "Damn, but this was supposed to be a break for you and you've done nothing but work since you got here it seems," Mulder grouched.

"Doesn't matter," Skinner yawned. "And that's not quite true - about the work, I mean. I seem to recall some very recreational moments..." he smiled.

They went back into the main hall, to join the cabaret with which Murray's parties always ended. Mulder settled his Master in prime position on one of the many armchairs that had been dragged into the room, and excused himself on the pretext of getting his Master a drink. He found Ian in the kitchen.

"Is that guy you told me about here?" He asked, grabbing hold of Ian's arm.

"Mark? Yeah - let me introduce you." Ian found the most striking looking man, with deep ebony skin and startling white teeth and led him over.

"You're Mulder? Hi. I'm Mark," the beautiful apparition said, smiling broadly.

"Did you get the stuff I sent you?" Mulder asked.

"Yeah." Mark grinned lazily.

"And you'll do it?"

"For the Guardian - I'd be proud to!" Mark replied.

"Thanks!" Mulder grinned and slapped Mark's arm delightedly.

"How was your night with the mysterious stranger?" Ian asked as Mulder poured his Master a drink. Mulder grinned enigmatically.

"Illuminating," he offered by way of reply. Ian's eyes narrowed.

"Are you holding out on your best buddy?" He asked.

"Nah...as a matter of fact - there's Perry now. Let me introduce you," Mulder said ushering Ian over to the doctor.

Perry grinned at him sleepily, clearly having just emerged from his bedroom. "Ah, last night's fleeting purchase," he sighed regretfully. "Did all go well?" He asked Mulder meaningfully.

"Yes. Thanks," Mulder replied. "This is a friend of mine - Ian. Ian, this is Perry. Now, I've got to take this back to my Master before he comes looking for me and skins me alive," he grinned happily. He took Skinner's drink, and paused in the doorway to look back at the two men he had left talking together, crossing his fingers behind his back. Then he shook his head in disbelief. "Jeez, matchmaking, Mulder? You?" He muttered incredulously.

He crept back to his Master's side with his drink, and knelt down beside him, placing his chin on Skinner's knee, as he usually did.

"I was beginning to wonder where you were," Skinner said, tapping his slave's nose reprovably.

"Just...organizing something," Mulder grinned enigmatically, ignoring his Master's raised eyebrow of curiosity.

The cabaret was a mixed bunch of enthusiastic amateur performances, some of which parodied the weekend's events, including the strange reluctance of one of the slaves at the auction to get undressed. Mulder flushed and buried his face in his Master's leg at this item which drew a roar of laughter from the crowd.

Finally, the afternoon drew to a close and Mark came onstage. He was wearing a tasteful white leather harness which covered his modesty, but apart from that he was completely naked, his skin shining, clearly freshly oiled. The crowd fell silent as he approached the microphone.

"You have to listen to this guy," Skinner murmured. "He has the most fantastic voice."

Mulder smiled to himself. Skinner was right - Mark's voice was beautiful. He sang a few songs from his repertoire, then drew his spot to a close. "I have just one last song," he announced. "This one is a special request from a slave to his Master. It's a cute song - with appropriately amended words, so apologies to the Beatles!"

There was a buzz around the room as everyone wondered who the slave and Master in question were, but this stopped as soon as Mark sang the opening notes.

*"To lead a better life, I need my love to be here,"* he sang in a deep, throaty voice, his tone almost whispery, and intimate, as suited the song. Skinner glanced down at his slave in surprise, and Mulder smiled back, shyly, hoping this whole thing wasn't going to be too damned sappy.

*"Here, making each day of the year. Changing my life with a wave of his hand..."* Mark continued, his voice reaching out across the crowded room, yet curiously seeming to sing only to two people.

*"Here, running his hands through my hair,"* Mulder felt Skinner's hand descend on his head, and his Master's fingers stroked through his hair. *"I want him everywhere, and if he's beside me I know I need never care, but to love him is to need him everywhere..."* Mulder leaned into his Master's caress, his chin coming to rest on Skinner's knee.

*"Watching his eyes, and hoping I'm always there..."* Mulder didn't dare look at his Master again in case his eyes gave away too much of what he was feeling.

*"Here, there, and everywhere."* The song came to an end and there was a hushed silence, as if people were afraid to break the mood, and then the applause broke out. Skinner tipped his slave's head back and made him look him in the eyes.

"Thank you," he said softly.

Mulder shrugged. "Well, it is Master's Day, and I haven't done too well on the other Master's Days. I thought it would be good to prepare something really big - and Ian told me about Mark, and how good he is, and how he always sings at these events, so I contacted him and..."

"Ssh." Skinner dropped a kiss on his slave's lips. "You know, I think we should slip away, boy," he growled in a low voice, grabbing Mulder's hand and pulling him up, and away from the crowd in the hall. He led his slave upstairs to their bedroom and as soon as they were inside, pushed him urgently against the wall, his hands roving over his slave's body.

"You know," he said in a low, deep tone, husky with arousal, "I've decided to start my own organization. I thought I'd call it *P.E.T.S.*" He nipped a line of kisses along Mulder's jaw, and his slave melted against him. "Want to know what it stands for?" He continued, his big hands keeping his slave pinned to the wall, as he devoured him with kisses.

"Hmmm? Oh...sure," Mulder replied, almost incoherent with desire.

"People for the **Erotic** Treatment of Slaves," Skinner grinned. "What do you think?"

"Oh yeah," Mulder moaned. "Sounds good to me, Master..."

**End of Part 16**

**Chapter End Notes:**

Fabulously naughty pic courtesy of [CDavis99@prodigy.net](mailto:CDavis99@prodigy.net)

## Slaveless in Seattle by Xanthe

### Author's Notes:

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Pic courtesy of [CDavis99@prodigy.net](mailto:CDavis99@prodigy.net)

Posted 21st May, 2000.

Quotation courtesy of my sweet Alex. None of this is beta'd. It's far too much fun to take seriously.

Many thanks to Emma, who told me a very intriguing tale that sparked this story off, and for the long discussions over high calorie snacks.

Thanks to CDavis for the tapes and the pics :-) Special thanks to Gaby for having the biggest brain in the entire universe...and for the title. Big thanks to Phoebe for her help and to Twisted Sister for her suggestion.

**24/7** is an erotic fantasy and NOT a BDSM resource guide. The truth is sometimes exaggerated, or played with, for dramatic effect. For more information, please visit the **24/7 BDSM Glossary**.

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*"A truth, still apparent, though disregarded, that things move violently to their place, but calmly in their place. To put it another way, everything has its right home, the region that suits it, and, unless forcibly restrained, will move thither by a kind of homing instinct."*

**J. Winterson**  
**"Art and Lies"**

FROM: [Ian@Anomaly.net](mailto:Ian@Anomaly.net)

TO: [Fox@slavecity.com](mailto:Fox@slavecity.com)

FW: Things you don't want to hear your top say when you are naked and tied up

Hey buddy - are you bored investigating blood-sucking mutant pigs? Here's something to distract ya! Maybe you should forward it to Walter (I bet he doesn't have such an interesting email addy, although [Walter@whips.com](mailto:Walter@whips.com) has a nice ring to it ;-)) On second thoughts, maybe you \*shouldn't\* forward this to the big guy. Or if you do, don't tell him I sent it! Does he know that you download crap like this while you should be working on Important Government Business? I think it's disgusting. We at *Anomaly Magazine* are shocked to think what government employees get up to on our dollars - hmm, maybe I should write an article on that...

Ian, who is in a Good Mood owing to a night spent in the arms of a tall, blond, handsome Master :-)

Mulder smiled to himself, and scrolled down the screen to see what his friend had sent him.

### **Things you don't want to hear your top say when you are naked and tied up**

1. "Um, I \*think\* I have another key around here somewhere..."
2. "Oops."
3. "Don't worry. I'm sure there's a locksmith somewhere that's open at 2AM..."
4. "And this is my German Shepherd, Ralph. I know you'll just love Ralph."

Mulder gave a strangled sob of mirth, and shot Scully a glance. She looked up at him and raised an eyebrow.

"Reading something interesting, Mulder?"

"Just going through the FBI manual. You wouldn't believe how many procedures in here we don't follow, Scully," he grinned at her.

"Oh, I think I would," she replied pointedly.

Mulder gave a little chuckle and turned his attention back to Ian's email.

5. "Heh heh heh. You didn't tell anybody else you were coming here, did you?"
6. "Now, where DID I put that extra attachment for the chainsaw?"
7. "Uh oh. If this is the tube of Superglue, where's the KY?"
8. "Did I ever mention that little fantasy I have about tennis balls?"
9. "No, really. Trust me. I saw this work in a movie once."
10. "You like my straitjacket? Cool; I'm glad they let me keep it."
11. "Oh mighty Azathoth, accept this sacrifice I offer to You...."

Mulder snorted into his coffee at that one, and had to act quickly to wipe the resulting mess off of his keyboard. Scully looked at him speculatively.

"I didn't realize the FBI manual was such a good read," she murmured skeptically.

"Oh it's great. You should check it out sometime," he announced, turning back to the screen.

12. "I'm not crazy. Yes I am. Shut up, all of you."

13. "I always keep the speculum in the freezer. It's more fun that way."

14. "Don't worry if your hands go numb. You won't be needing those."

15. "Bye. I'm taking off for the weekend. Isn't suspension bondage fun?"

Mulder dissolved into a fit of helpless laughter at that last one, and was so distracted that he didn't see Scully sneak out from her seat and slip around behind him.

"Mulder, what the hell is so funny?" Scully asked suspiciously, glancing over his shoulder. Mulder did a superbly executed and well-practiced mouse click to reveal a page of guidelines on the subject of search and arrest warrants.

"Too late, [Fox@slavecity.com](mailto:Fox@slavecity.com)," she said, her eyes glowing with mischief. "Hmm, are you sure you're not taking this whole slaveboy thing a bit too far, Mulder?" She asked, raising an eyebrow. "And who is this Ian person? Is he your, uh, Master?" she stressed the last word in a tone of amusement.

"No, he's a friend," Mulder replied, sobering up, and wondering if she'd managed to read down far enough to see the references to "Walter". If she had, she didn't mention it.

"You haven't brought up that whole Master thing in ages," Scully mused. "I suppose you spent the entire time I was away setting up this email account and forwarding yourself these messages just because you can't accept that I've won this particular round of 'gotcha'. I'm not biting, slaveboy." She cuffed him across the back of his head with a grin. "I totally believe you." She gave a little giggle and went to sit back down at her desk.

"Uh good." Mulder winced, hating the fact that she thought he was lying to her, but not wanting to address the issue of who exactly his Master was, and the nature of his current lifestyle. "You know, it's good to have you back, Scully. I missed you." He gazed at his diminutive partner affectionately. "Don't abandon me to go off on vacation again," he said mournfully. "It was so boring here without you."

"Boring? When you had all those reports to catch up on?" Scully raised an eyebrow of teasing disbelief. "And Skinner breathing down your neck every five minutes chasing you for them?"

Mulder made a face. "It was hell," he said dramatically.

"Aw, poor Mulder - he has a Master at home and a **taskmaster** at work," Scully giggled.

"You have no idea!" He grinned back. "Seriously though - I missed you."

"You missed me editing your reports to make them into something Skinner would sign off on without a huge inquisition," she snorted.

"Ah - you know me too well," he lamented. "Lunch today?"

"Your treat?"

"Of course." Mulder nodded gravely. "Two weeks without you - we need to catch up!"

"Hmm, and perhaps you can tell me what you've been doing at the weekend these days," she said, glancing at him over the top of her reading glasses. "I rang you three times on your cell phone on Saturday to ask if you wanted to go and see a movie with me, and you didn't have it switched on the whole time. I mean, this is Mulder! The man who'll have to have his phone surgically removed from his hand when they bury him."

"Hey - I want it in the coffin with me," Mulder protested. "I mean, you never know who you might want to call from beyond the grave. Heh, heh, heh..." He waggled his eyebrows at her and gave a demonic laugh. She rolled her eyes, giggling to herself as she turned back to her work, but they both knew that he hadn't answered her question about his weekend's activities.

*How the hell do you tell someone you spent the entire weekend at a BDSM party, alternately being dressed as a pony, sold at a slave auction, and nailed to the mattress by your sexy as all hell Master? he thought to himself wryly as he turned his attention back to his computer screen and began typing a reply to Ian.*

**TO: [Ian@Anomaly.net](mailto:Ian@Anomaly.net)**

**FROM: [Fox@slavecity.com](mailto:Fox@slavecity.com)**

**RE: Fw: Things you don't want to hear your top say when you are naked and tied up**

"Very funny. Number 11 was scarily familiar - hey, you try working on the X Files for 7 years. You run into these Azathoth type guys the whole time.

And no, I won't be forwarding them onto He Who Must Be Obeyed. Like I'd want to give him any ideas. And this is my secret account so he doesn't know about it - and no, he doesn't know I do this on Bureau time either, but hell, I've given the Bureau my life and soul for years so I figure I'm owed.

So - you and Perry hooked up together, huh? I trust you ache this morning???? Can't have been a very good night if you don't...

Mulder.

He pressed the send key and glanced up to see that Scully was looking at him.

"What?" He asked.

"I was wondering..." she hesitated.

"Hmm?" He shut down his email account, and opened up a file containing his unfinished report.

"Mulder, I know you found out where that phone number was registered to - I just wondered if you followed it up at all."

"What phone number?" He frowned.

"Hello? Mulder? It's me - Scully. Your partner for the past 7 years. I do know a few things about the way your mind works."

"Okay." Mulder looked up with a sigh. "I almost went there, Scully - while you were away. I almost just upped and went to Seattle to see what was there."

"And what stopped you?" She asked.

Mulder thought about it for a moment, then shrugged. "My Master," he said honestly.

Scully sighed. "If you don't want to tell me then just say so," she said, looking hurt, "but don't throw all this Master bullshit at me."

"Scully, I'm not. Look - someone who is very close to me, who knows me at least as well as you do, told me not to go."

"So you didn't?" Scully raised an incredulous eyebrow. "Just like that? Who is this person and what hell have they done with my Fox Mulder?"

"Taught him not to throw himself into every passing trap maybe?" Mulder suggested.

"Or given him something else to think about?" Scully asked softly. "Something sufficiently interesting to distract him from the one thing he's been obsessed with all his life?"

"Yes," Mulder replied, his hazel eyes meeting her blue ones without flinching. "Someone who did exactly that. Scully I know you think I'm holding out on you. I just...it's very complicated," he finished lamely.

"It must be," she commented with a shrug. "Mulder, does this mean that you've given up on Samantha?"

He flinched at her words. Had he? After all these years searching for her, had Skinner woven a spell of sex around him that stopped him caring about his little sister any more? Had he finally abandoned her, and all hope of ever finding out what had happened to her?

"It's just that I've never seen you like this before," Scully continued. "I'm not sure it would be a bad thing, Mulder. I've watched you put your life on hold for Samantha. Always chasing after ghosts and illusions, being fed half truths by your enemies...maybe you've moved on. Maybe you needed to."

"Maybe." Mulder stared blankly at his computer screen.

Scully's words stayed with him all week. It didn't help that Skinner was so busy at work that he barely saw his Master. He felt that he needed to speak to the other man about what was going on in his head - the longer he spent alone with himself, the more he brooded, and, conversely, the harder it was to broach the subject. It was like the old days, before his slavery, when he'd dealt with this issue alone. The difference was that he actively missed Skinner's input, his calm way of looking at the facts, and the knowledge and experience that had helped make him an AD. Skinner was rational, and objective - two things Mulder could never rely on being on the subject of his sister. He sorely needed his Master's advice, but Skinner was busy working on an important Federal case against a scientist suspected of illegal drug experimentation. It was a complex case, and Skinner was working day and night, both with the FDA and his own agents. He frequently brought home case-loads of documentation to look at and he was too tired and distracted to notice that his slave was subdued.

Mulder struggled with the issue, waking early for the next few days, and taking his swim at 4 am, often swimming for a couple of hours, just trying to calm himself, and figure out what to do next, until matters came to a head on Thursday night. Mulder went to bed at 10, feeling exhausted, but was unable to switch off. He tossed and turned, and dozed until 2, then finally got up and tip-toed down the stairs. He had intended to chain himself to Skinner's bed, to find the peace that he always felt there. He was surprised to see a light on under Skinner's door, and pushed it open, hesitantly. His Master was sitting up in bed, wearing his glasses, several papers spread out on the bed around him, Wanda tucked against one of his forearms, enjoying her slave's unexpected nocturnal wakefulness. Skinner looked as tired as Mulder felt and he glanced up, and frowned when he saw Mulder, then his face softened into a faint smile, and he beckoned Mulder into the room with his head.

"Trouble sleeping, little one?" He asked.

Mulder shook his head, unsure whether now was a good time to burden his Master with his worries. He hovered beside the bed for a moment, wondering whether he should just turn around and go, but Skinner patted the empty space beside him, and invited him in. Mulder didn't need asking twice. No matter how many times he got to spend the night in his Master's bed, he still craved it and it was usually the ultimate objective of his slavehood. He slipped into the warm bed feeling better just for being near his Master.

"I'm worried about you working so hard," he said, which was the truth, although not the whole truth.

Skinner smiled down at him through his glasses. "No need. It just has to be done. This guy is hiding something even bigger than the charges we have him arraigned for, I'm convinced of it," he murmured, gesturing to the papers.

"Have you interviewed him?" Mulder glanced at some of the paperwork with an inner groan. This was his least favorite kind of FBI work. He liked to act on intuition, and had a hands on approach to his work. Sifting painstakingly through papers trying to find evidence, or at least a pointer as to where the metaphorical bodies were hidden was Mulder's idea of purgatory. He'd already offered to help Skinner, and had scanned several of the documents, but he was the first to admit that it wasn't his particular forte and he hadn't been able to help as much as he would have liked. It was far removed from his realm of expertise as well, although he'd tried to apply himself to the complex legal and technical issues involved.

"Yes - and he's hiding something - but I'm not convinced it's what we're charging him with."

"Do you have enough to get him on that at least?" Mulder asked. "That could buy you some time to investigate the other stuff."

"It's not as safe a prosecution as I'd like," Skinner sighed. "At the moment we don't have enough solid evidence to make me confident we'll secure a conviction."

"But you do have a lot of circumstantial evidence," Mulder mused.

"Yeah," Skinner sighed, rubbing a weary hand over his forehead.

"You can't keep working like this - you've hardly slept for days," Mulder said. "Isn't there anyone else who can share the workload?"

"Unfortunately not," Skinner frowned, picking up his pen and turning his attention back to the documentation. "I'm the only one with a complete knowledge of this case and a lot will rest on the evidence I give in court next week."

"You're the government's primary witness?" Mulder asked in surprise. While it wasn't unusual for Skinner to give evidence in court, it was something he was rarely called upon to do.

"I'm giving a substantial portion of the evidence, yes," Skinner murmured absently.

Mulder snuggled under the sheets, glaring at Wanda who was occupying the position opposite. She glared back, her ears flattening slightly. Skinner rested his hand absently on his slave's body and stroked him rhythmically as he worked. Mulder sighed, and laid his head on Skinner's chest, closing his eyes and dozing. It felt so good to be here. When he was here, he could forget about the other problems and issues he couldn't solve, issues that went around in his head until he thought he'd go nuts. Here he felt at peace. He exhaled deeply, as if he had been holding his breath, feeling his body relax, and a few seconds later he felt Skinner's lips brush against his forehead. He opened his eyes to find his Master looking down on him.

"Are you sure you didn't come down here to talk to me about something?" Skinner asked.

Mulder looked at the familiar, beloved features for a long time. Skinner's face was paler than usual, and there were dark shadows under his eyes. He looked stressed, and tired. The last thing he needed to deal with right now were his slave's problems. Mulder smiled.

"No, Walter. I was just worried about you. That's all," he murmured. Skinner smiled back, and played with his slave's nipple ring, rolling it between his big, blunt fingertips.

"I'm fine - but there's no need for both of us to lose sleep over this. You should get some rest too. You know how cranky you get when you're tired," Skinner grinned.

"I do not!" Mulder retorted. Skinner twisted the nipple ring just enough to sting. "Master," Mulder added sheepishly.

"Sleep, boy," Skinner growled, and Mulder smiled to himself, and closed his eyes, feeling serene for the first time in days, all the tension leaving his body. He was asleep within minutes.

Skinner was gone when he awoke the next morning, although he'd left a note.

"Fox - I'm going to need to go out of town today. I'll be back sometime on Saturday - which I believe is Slave's Day, boy, so we can catch up then. Remember to feed Wanda and don't get into any trouble while I'm gone. WSS."

Mulder sighed. Trouble. He was already in trouble and he knew it. He couldn't figure out the questions in his own mind and he was sure he'd go crazy and do something really stupid if he didn't speak to Skinner about it soon.

In the absence of his Master, Mulder spent the next two days quietly going off the rails. He didn't bother with his morning swim, and snapped at Scully constantly in the office until she crept back up to the bullpen to seek more congenial company. When he got home on Friday evening, he went straight up to the 18th floor apartment, and raided the bar that Skinner kept well stocked in the plush upstairs lounge. He retired to the beautiful cream colored couch for a thorough drinking session, lying on his back with one hand listlessly clasped around the television remote control, switching channels aimlessly as he stared absently at the screen, barely concentrating on the garbage he was watching. Wanda somehow managed to negotiate the doors between the two apartments, and she came up to sniff his hand aimlessly. He was heartened for a moment, relishing the company, until he realized that she was just nosing around for food as he'd forgotten to give her any, although she had plenty of dried food to stave off what was hardly encroaching starvation.

"Go and catch a mouse or something," he hissed at her. "Earn your keep the time-honored way, cat."

She looked at him uncertainly, then turned on her heel and wandered off down the corridor which for some reason just made him feel even more abandoned. He realized that this was the first time that Skinner had left him alone in the apartments since he had arrived here, and at some point in the middle of Friday night, he woke up, with a pounding headache, and a desire to make the most of his freedom. It was too late to call Ian over to party, and his friend was probably wrapped up in the arms of his **non**-absentee Master anyway, so he staggered down to Skinner's study, to nose around and see what he could find.

Skinner's study was normally off limits, but Mulder didn't care. He hated it when he wasn't allowed to investigate mysteries, and his Master's study was one mystery he hadn't yet had a chance to fully explore. He let himself in, and turned the light on, then glanced through Skinner's books. He'd looked at them once before and they were a more eclectic selection than Mulder had expected, but the more he got to know his Master, the less surprised he was by anything about him. Tiring of the bookcase, he wandered over to the desk, where he had sat so many times at his Master's knee. Mulder dropped to the floor in his normal position, and placed his chin on his Master's empty chair.

"I really wish you were here right now," he muttered. "You told me not to get into trouble, but there's all this stuff in my head I need to talk about. Let's face it," he sighed, "I'm going to get into trouble. Hell, I'm already in trouble. If you could see me now, to say nothing of the mess upstairs, and the dent in your

vodka supply...you'd have me over your knee in seconds." He stared into space gloomily. "Which might be nice," he added.

Then, feeling strangely light-headed, and with the air of someone breaking a dark taboo, he got up and sat in his Master's chair. It gave him the same thrill as sitting in Skinner's office chair. It was a big, old, threadbare brown chair, and Mulder frowned as he sat down.

"You really need a new chair y'know, Walt!" He proclaimed loudly and drunkenly. "This one's no good." He rocked back and forward in it for a while, idly opening the desk drawers and examining the none too interesting contents. Maybe he'd uncovered all his Master's mysteries, he thought mournfully to himself. Maybe there wasn't anything left.

"Maybe you're not interested in mysteries any more, Mulder," he growled at himself. "Not Skinner's mysteries, or Samantha's, not even the stupid, fucking pointless mystery that is Fox Mulder." He found a key in one of the drawers that he recognized as belonging to the Playroom, and fingered it thoughtfully. The Playroom still had mystery. It had cupboards full of the most beautiful, exquisite toys - toys which his Master only allowed him to touch or look at while in his presence. Mulder's fingers fastened around the key and he clenched it tight in his fist.

"Some mysteries still hold their appeal then," he murmured to himself, sliding out from behind Skinner's desk and lurching out of the room and back up the stairs towards the Playroom.

Mulder held his breath as he fumbled around trying to fit the key in the lock. It turned easily, and the door swung open. Mulder hesitated on the threshold, holding his breath. This was like going into Bluebeard's castle or something. The room was in darkness, but he could just make out the sinister shape of the massage table, and the harness, hanging lifeless from the ceiling. Usually this room was rendered dramatic, or sensual, or even terrifying by his Master's design, and he had never spent any time here without Skinner also being in attendance, stage-managing the many erotic delights this room both promised and delivered. Mulder tip-toed, almost reverentially, inside and turned one of the lights on. He jumped as the room came into sharp focus: wooden flooring, tall windows, plain walls. He wandered slowly around the Playroom, fingering the velvet upholstery of the throne, noticing a tiny tear, listening to the sound of his own footsteps echoing in the empty chamber. There was no sense of eroticism here, none of the usual sensations he felt as he knelt before the throne at his Master's feet, or allowed his Master to strap him down onto the black leather massage table, or push him over the spanking horse. In the harsh, artificial light, the Playroom was stripped of any mystery - it was just a room. There was nothing here but emptiness.

Mulder grew bolder, and flung open the cupboards. He tore through them like a hurricane, dragging the contents out into the light, exposing them for what they were: tawdry sex toys.

"This is what you gave up Samantha for?" he asked himself incredulously, sitting in a sea of silk clothing, polished boots, harnesses, butt plugs, canes and straps. "Christ, Mulder, what a fucking useless bastard you are," he muttered, his fingers closing around a set of nipple clamps. Pain...the memory of the eroticism of his own suffering distracted him, and he gazed at the clamps thoughtfully. Then, slowly, purposefully, he removed his shirt, and examined his pierced nipples. He fingered them, rolling the gold ring inside his own flesh, and then, without hesitating, he fastened one of the clamps onto the nub and bit down hard on his lips as the pain cut in, banishing everything else but the immediacy of his own

discomfort. These were particularly vicious clamps - Skinner had never used them on him, and they pinched so tight that he was sure they must be drawing blood although he couldn't see any. The pain faded to a deep, dull ache, and he turned his attention to the other nipple, moving fast, in case he was too much of a coward to go through with it. The pain seemed even more intense the second time around and he bit down even harder on his lip to stop himself screaming. He sat for a moment, shocked into numbness by the agony of the action, then lay back on one of Skinner's silk shirts and gazed at the mirrored ceiling. He missed his Master's loving embrace - he missed Skinner whispering to him, touching him, stroking him, taking him to a place where this kind of torture was an exquisite pleasure, not an agonizing torment. He imagined floating in his Master's arms; kissed, loved, wanted, and finally, exhausted, he fell asleep just as the rays of the sun crept through the huge Playroom windows.

Mulder awoke several hours later feeling stiff and uncomfortable. It was already the middle of the afternoon, and his chest was radiating a numb ache. He looked down to see the clamps still in position.

"You stupid, self-pitying bastard," he growled, the memory of the previous night's drunken excesses coming back to him. He steeled himself to remove the clamps, knowing from experience that they hurt more when they were removed than when they were first put in place. He closed his eyes, counted to ten, and then whipped both of them off at the same time. There was a few seconds when he thought he might have got away with it, and then the pain kicked in with a vengeance and he howled out loud. He sat there, winded, waiting for the torment to subside, and after several long minutes it did. Then he turned his attention to the Playroom, his expression one of horror. Skinner had said only that he'd be back today - he hadn't said when, and Mulder suddenly knew, without a shadow of a doubt, that if his Master saw the mess in the Playroom, then his slave's life wouldn't be worth living. He got up, and frenziedly started stuffing the equipment back into the cupboards, then slowed down, and thought about it. Skinner would know if everything was put back in the wrong place, so he'd just have to take it slowly, and hope he got it right.

An hour later, Mulder cast a satisfied look around the Playroom, and then quietly shut the door, and locked it behind him. Skinner need never know. He went back to his bedroom and took a shower, holding a cold washcloth over his nipples until they stopped looking so red and angry, although they ached like hell. He got dressed and went back downstairs to replace the key in Skinner's desk drawer. He felt like an idiot now, and was kicking himself for losing control. Last night he had behaved like the old Mulder, back in his apartment at Alexandria, lying half comatose on the couch, struggling with issues until he couldn't bear the pressure inside his own head and did something stupid. He vividly remembered one night sat holding his gun, seriously considering whether to use it or not. He thought he'd put that behind him - grown beyond it, but as soon as Skinner was out of town he had slipped back all too easily into old patterns of behavior. He was angry and frustrated with himself. For the first time since he had sold himself into slavery, he had woken up with that old self-loathing and fear of his own failures and shortcomings that often led him to despair. Today, maybe he would die. Or maybe he'd run off to Seattle. Or just stay here and go quietly insane. Either way, he wasn't sure that he cared.

Mulder wandered back into the downstairs lounge just in time to hear his Master's key in the lock. He was surprised to feel something apart from numbness. He felt...hopeful - and in the circumstances that was the better than nothing. Skinner was shaking his umbrella, mumbling something about the weather, and Mulder saw a way out from his own emotions in the serenity of his servitude. He quickly took Skinner's coat and hung it up, then sat his Master down, removed his shoes, poured him a drink, and

disposed of his own clothing. He knelt obediently, and contentedly at his Master's feet, in the submissive position - eyes down, shoulders back, cock displayed proudly within its gold ring.

"You're a sight for sore eyes, sweetheart," Skinner murmured, absently stroking his slave's hair. "I'm sorry I had to leave so suddenly. Has everything been okay here?" Mulder smiled and nodded, hoping his eyes didn't betray him. "Have you been okay?" Skinner pressed, his dark eyes questioning. "I haven't spent enough time with you recently."

"I've been fine," Mulder said smoothly. "I missed you though," he added with a mischievous grin.

Skinner laughed out loud, and undid his tie. "I've missed you too, boy," he growled in the low sexy voice that he usually saved for hot sex sessions. Mulder's cock responded to the tone the way it always did, leaping up hopefully, eager for attention. "I see that you haven't forgotten it's slave's day," Skinner said, glancing at his slave's wildly rampant erection.

"No, Master. How could I?" Mulder grinned.

"I think that you and I need to become re-acquainted, boy," Skinner said, standing up, and stretching. "I've missed you," he muttered, grabbing hold of his slave, and pulling Mulder's acquiescent body close to his own. Mulder threaded his hands together behind his Master's back, enjoying the feel of such solid, reassuring flesh next to his own naked body. Skinner would take him away from his stupid doubts. He'd take him to that place where he could fly, and everything would be fine. His Master kissed him with some passion, his hands roving over his slave's body possessively, as if he'd been away for a month, not just a couple of days.

"I'm going to get changed," Skinner said when he released his slave. "Go and wait for me upstairs."

Mulder nodded and sped off up the stairs. As he wandered along the corridor, he remembered the mess he'd left in the upstairs lounge and his stomach lurched. He broke into a run, and skidded to a halt outside the lounge, took one look at it and then slammed his fist into the wall. It was even more of a mess than the Playroom. He had to tidy it before Skinner came up here. He ran around the place frantically, trying to stuff the remains of last night's pizza and vodkafest into a garbage sack, as well as tidy away his socks and shoes, to say nothing of the entire sports section of the paper which was spread out all over the room. He was so busy that he didn't hear the footstep on the stairs, and so nearly jumped out of his skin when he heard a voice behind him.

"Fox?"

He stood up guiltily, and turned, making a face.

"Sorry, Master. I slept in here last night. I forgot it was a mess. I was just..." he waved his hand around. "Tidying up?" He finished feebly. Skinner was dressed in tight black jeans, and an even tighter black tee shirt, and there was a very definite scowl on his face.

"Shit," Mulder whispered. *Well, you wanted to be distracted*, Mulder told himself. And there was surely nothing more distracting than a Master catching his slave in the act of covering up the evidence of a night of drunken disobedience.

"You slept here?" Skinner raised an eyebrow, his tone dangerous. "You do have a bed. And a bedroom," he said pointedly.

"I know. I was watching TV. I fell asleep," Mulder gave a lame shrug.

"Hmm." Skinner crossed his arms over his chest. "You know that this area is out of bounds to you unless I'm here?"

"Yes, Master," Mulder shrugged again and bit his lip. "Sorry, Master," he added.

"Is there anything else about last night that you wish to tell me?" Skinner asked. "Any other rules that you broke in my absence?"

"No, Master," Mulder said in a low voice, crossing his fingers behind his back. He was sure that Skinner wouldn't find anything amiss in the Playroom. He'd been so careful when he'd tidied up in there.

"Very well. I can see that we have some areas of discipline to address," Skinner said, although from his tone of voice Mulder could sense that he was mildly amused. He clearly intended to use the infraction as no more than a backdrop to an erotic punishment scenario and Mulder was all in favor of **that**. "The Playroom. Now!" Skinner ordered and Mulder dumped the garbage sack and tried to sidle through the doorway past his Master without getting a slapped backside. It was a pointless exercise - Skinner's hard, heavy hand dropped on his butt with a resounding thwack.

"It's **really** good to have you home, Master," Mulder grinned, as he hurried along the corridor.

He waited impatiently while Skinner took out the key to the Playroom, and inserted it in the lock. He wanted to get in there. He wanted to be transported away from his problems, safe and secure in his Master's strong arms. He despised himself for needing the escape, but he was too weary with the struggle inside his head to put up any resistance. He needed this, damnit!

Skinner swung the door open, and they both stepped inside...to be greeted by a flying bundle of golden fur who threw herself into her slave's arms with a squawk of protest at having been locked away for so long. Mulder's heart sank. Trust the stupid, goddamn cat to ruin everything. Skinner gave the agitated creature a soothing cuddle, and fixed his slave with a cool look over Wanda's soft, furry, butting head.

"I'm waiting," he said ominously.

"Waiting, Master?" Mulder bluffed, giving Wanda the look hitherto reserved only for Tom Colton, Alex Krycek and any of Scully's boyfriends who didn't treat her properly, which was most of them in his opinion.

"Waiting," Skinner continued in a deceptively pleasant tone, "for an explanation as to the lie you told me about 3 minutes ago that you hadn't broken any other rules."

"Oh. That." Mulder croaked, his stomach sinking down to its familiar habitat at such moments, in the soles of his feet.

"Yes. That," Skinner said. "When I left this apartment, Wanda was most definitely not locked up in this room, so in order to get in here..." He paused meaningfully, and then continued. "Well, let's see. I have only two keys to the Playroom, one of which is always on my person. The other I keep in the desk drawer in my study. So, either you went into my study, took the key, and let yourself in here, or, your old friend the lock pick has been in action again. Either of which options leaves you, boy, up shit creek without a paddle," Skinner growled. "Although unluckily for you, paddles are not something that are in short supply around here." He strode over to the door and placed Wanda firmly outside it, then closed it and turned back to deal with his disobedient slave.

"There is another option," Mulder suggested as he Master advanced on him.

"Really?" Skinner crossed his hands over his chest menacingly as he surveyed his slave. "Do, please, enlighten me then. I'd be so interested to hear your other option." His tone dripped sarcasm. "Don't mind me," he said over his shoulder as he walked towards the cupboard and began removing certain implements of discipline that made Mulder shiver in trepidation just looking at them.

"Well...cats have many special powers..." Mulder began, deciding that he was in big shit anyway, so delaying the moment of retribution was probably the best result he was going to get. "Did you know that the cat used to be worshipped in Ancient Egypt as a symbol of mystery and good fortune?" He said. Skinner found a solid wooden paddle, and slapped it against his thigh. Mulder swallowed hard and continued, warming to his theme. "They've been known to save people from earthquakes and fires, and have long been acknowledged to have special sensory powers that humans don't understand..."

"And your point is?" Skinner asked, marching across the room, and placing one big hand on his slave's neck, then walking him over towards the chair.

"That Wanda, who we all know is a particularly **gifted** creature," Mulder managed to say that with just too much sincerity to be believable, "is very possibly capable of translocation. I have many X Files devoted to just this phenomena," he finished, gazing at his Master expectantly.

"Translocation?" Skinner sat down on the throne and regarded his slave without expression.

"Yup." Mulder nodded. "The ability to transport yourself from one place to another," he added helpfully. "Um, other than just by walking there, obviously," he continued. "Or taking a car or something," he finished, barely daring to look at his Master. Somehow he didn't think that explanation had gone down well.

"And these cases of translocation in your files - was there any actual proof there of this, **phenomenon** as you call it?" Skinner asked pleasantly.

Mulder winced. "Not proof as such..." he hedged.

"I see. Well, in the absence of proof, I must just assume that the truth lies in the more mundane explanation that you let yourself in here last night and snooped around. Is that the truth, Fox?"

Mulder jumped. Skinner's tone suddenly had bite. He thought about it for a moment, then sighed. "Yes, Master," he replied.

Skinner put his hand up, and beckoned very slowly with his index finger. "Come here," he ordered. Mulder swallowed hard, and crept forward so that he was between his Master's knees. Skinner placed the paddle on one of the arms of the throne and put his big hands on his slave's shoulders, then looked intently into Mulder's eyes.

"I'm sorry," Skinner said suddenly, confusing his slave.

"For what, Master?" Mulder asked in surprise.

"Quote me Clause number 2 of the Master contract," Skinner ordered.

Mulder gabbled the Clause off quickly, the words almost engraved on his very soul: "I will provide the physical and emotional necessities of life for my slave, and..."

"How long has it been since I last spanked you?" Skinner interrupted him.

Mulder looked startled. "Six days, Master," he replied.

"Exactly." Skinner shook his head. "Spanking, for you, Fox, is both a physical and emotional necessity of life."

"It is?" Mulder blinked.

"Yes. It is. I've failed in my duty and must therefore take part of the responsibility for what happened here last night. You need to feel the weight of my hand on your backside every day - come what may. I promised you that when I accepted you into my service, and I've been remiss in not keeping to that promise. I can't expect your obedience if I don't enforce it in such a way as to keep your status constantly fresh in your mind."

"It wasn't your fault. You were busy," Mulder protested, kneeling between his Master's feet, and looking up at him, as if in supplication.

"I know - but that's no excuse." Skinner's hands were firm on his slave's shoulders. "You have to be taken down, boy, every day, or you forget who you are and start spinning out of control."

Mulder felt all the breath leave his body. He felt light-headed at not only being so known but also so well understood. His hair stood up on his body and he felt goosebumps break out on his flesh. He hung his head, and placed his hands on his Master's knees.

"I'm sorry. You're right. I should have asked you..." he whispered.

"Like I said, it's my fault, and I'm not angry - at least not too angry," Skinner amended, his eyes flashing just enough to remind Mulder that he was still in trouble. Skinner placed a finger under his slave's chin and drew it up, making him look directly into his Master's eyes. "This reminds me of my early days with you. When you pushed the limits and boundaries to see where they lay, fighting yourself and your slavery."

Mulder bit on his lip, and nodded.

"You must be feeling tired of that fight, boy. I think you want to give it all up to me," Skinner said in a low, silky voice. Mulder melted against his Master's knee, and nodded again, not trusting himself to speak. "This won't be easy - I won't stop until you're back where you need to be," Skinner warned. "It'll be a long, painful ride, Fox, but rewarding in the end."

"Yes, Master," Mulder croaked, spellbound by the sound of his Master's voice.

"Good, then get your ass over my knee, and let's start," Skinner commanded. Mulder got up slowly, and did as he'd been ordered. He felt the usual dual emotions of trepidation and need that accompanied such moments. When he was being spanked he would have done anything, and said anything, to escape the relentless assault on his backside. However, when it was over, he was invariably glad that his Master hadn't listened to his pleas, and had continued to blister his ass until his slave was where he needed to be.

Skinner's knees and thighs were hard, and muscular beneath his torso. Although it was a familiar position for Mulder, his Master more often spanked him in the bedroom with pillows under his body, supporting him. This felt more raw, and basic and certainly less comfortable, yet was curiously intimate too. Skinner opened his legs, and placed one of them over the back of Mulder's knees, holding him in position. He planted a hand firmly on Mulder's back pinning him securely in place, and then rested his other hand on Mulder's backside. Mulder trembled, hating the wait, wanting it all to be over, needing to go where only Skinner could take him, to find the serenity he'd been missing for the past few days. Skinner didn't start spanking him though. Instead he ran his hand lightly over Mulder's backside, smoothing the skin, pinching it here and there, cupping his slave's buttocks lightly in his big hand, and caressing them with his thumb.

"What are you, Fox?" Skinner asked as he stroked his slave into a state of relaxation.

"Yours, Master," Mulder whispered.

"Do you understand why you're going to be punished?" Skinner asked.

"Yes, Master. For lying to you, and disobeying you," Mulder said softly.

"What lesson will you take from this punishment?" Skinner asked him.

"I'm not sure," Mulder confessed. "Not to lie to you or disobey you again?" He ventured, hesitantly.

"That would be nice, but you've promised both before," Skinner said.

"To...tell you next time, before it gets this bad?" Mulder offered.

"That's better." Skinner raised his hand.

"Master - you were working hard. You were tired," Mulder interrupted the moment. The hand didn't fall. Instead it gently dropped back on his backside and started to stroke again. "I meant to talk to you...but you had enough to worry about. I'm sorry that I've added to your workload with all my crap."

Mulder was surprised to find that he was pulled up, and pushed down on his knees in front of his Master again.

"Fox - you aren't my 'workload'. You aren't a case file - you're my beloved slave. I signed that contract knowing what I was doing. If I'm going to ask you to keep up your side of the deal, then I have to do the same and I didn't. I failed you. Next time, just talk to me, all right?"

"Yes, Master." Mulder nodded.

"Good." Skinner caressed the side of his slave's face with his hand, then dropped a light, chaste kiss on Mulder's lips. "Now..." His Master's tone changed radically as he drew away. "Get your ass into position again, boy. We'll address this situation in the old fashioned way."

Mulder quickly scrambled into position again and there was no preamble this time. Skinner's hand connected with his slave's bare flesh as soon as Mulder was in place. He winced - Skinner clearly meant business and he had a feeling that this would be a long, painful spanking, going far beyond any erotic enjoyment and taking him to a different place entirely. Skinner's hand was relentless. His Master worked in a slow, steady pattern around his slave's butt, leaving no inch of it uncovered by his large palm. There was an almost hypnotic rhythm to the rise and fall of Skinner's hand against his slave's bottom, and soon the slaps started to sting, then to hurt, until Mulder was gasping for air, moving his legs to try and escape the unceasing rise and fall of that hand on his backside.

"Shit! Please, Master...stop..." he begged.

"I've only just begun," Skinner informed him tersely. "You have a long way to go yet, boy."

Mulder struggled to get up, panicked by his Master's words, but Skinner held him securely in place and he was unable to do more than twist under his Master's hand and imprisoning leg. The spanking took on a new pace, and the build-up of fire in Mulder's backside grew worse. It was as if Skinner was finding a way deep into his flesh, embedding the palm of his large, flat hand several inches into his slave's skin. Then, suddenly, just when Mulder was sure he couldn't take any more, it stopped. Mulder's breathing slowed and he tensed as his Master gently rubbed his sore flesh, taking away some of the sting, and calming his slave. Mulder started to relax, pleased that it was over, and that he'd survived without disgracing himself, but then, out of the corner of his eye, he saw Skinner pick up the wooden paddle.

"NO!" He choked, hating the thought of that hard implement impacting on his already sore backside.

"Yes," Skinner said firmly, holding him in place, and resting the cool, grainy surface of the wood against Mulder's flaming buttocks. There was silence for a moment, and then a whoosh and a resounding crack that took Mulder by surprise. The pain kicked in a split second later and he howled out loud, before he could stop himself. The paddle was a flat, unforgiving implement, practical and workmanlike. There was nothing fancy, exotic or even erotic about it. It was a tool for meting out punishment, pure and simple. Skinner didn't even give his slave a chance to get his breath back after the last stroke before applying the next. The paddle moved like wildfire across Mulder's ass, burning up every single inch of his already sore flesh. He raged for a moment, against the pain, against the imprisonment, against the big man who commanded his obedience, and that was when Skinner moved the spanking up a pace. The slaps became harder, and faster, not slow and loving, or sensual and caressing, but just painful, and

unrelenting. Mulder fought it. He knew he was shouting, although he had no idea what he was saying, just that he was angry and resentful.

"Who are you shouting at?" Skinner demanded.

"You, fuck it, stop!" Mulder yelled.

"Who are you angry with?" Skinner asked, his pace swift, unconcerned by his slave's display of temper.

Mulder somehow managed to free his hand and put it back to protect his burning buttocks. Skinner delivered a resounding thwack to the offending hand and Mulder howled.

"Leave it there and I'll do that again," Skinner warned. Mulder fought with the choice - his butt or his hand, but the split second of decision-making took too long and Skinner delivered another sound lick to his hand. Angrily, Mulder tried to get up, struggling both against his Master's superior strength and the advantage that his position gave him.

"Keep still. Who are you angry with?" Skinner asked, as Mulder became a spitting, exploding mass of incoherent expletives.

"You. I fucking hate you!" Mulder screamed at the top of his voice. The paddle connected with the top of his thighs, making him yelp. It fell there again and again, and Mulder writhed beneath it.

"Who are you angry with?" Skinner asked again, his tone firm, and unchanging.

"The whole fucking world!" Mulder yelled. "You, Krycek, my mother, Scully, Samantha!" He screamed, not even aware who was included in the litany. The paddle cracked down even harder on his unprotected buttocks and he wasn't sure what he was saying any more.

"Who are you angry with?" Skinner asked again. Mulder felt all the anchors that tied himself to time and place snap, like a balloon being released into the air.

"Me, fuck it. I'm angry with me! Are you fucking happy now, you bastard?" Mulder began to sob, openly, something he always hated doing, but the rage inside him was still unabated; however far and hard he tried to outdistance it - it was always there.

Skinner's pace changed, abruptly. For a moment, Mulder thought with relief that the spanking was at an end, but it wasn't. Instead, it became more subtle. Skinner moved his hand down to the cleft between his slave's buttocks and parted them. Then he aimed the paddle at the sensitive inner flesh between the ass cheeks, which had hitherto been untouched.

"No," Mulder cried, not having the energy left to fight any more, lying over Skinner's knee like a stranded fish, accepting each carefully aimed swat. "Please..." he croaked, as the paddle found his most tender areas, each stinging stroke bringing fresh tears to his eyes.

"Why are you angry with yourself?" Skinner asked, his voice implacable, low, and yet clearly audible over the sound of the paddle.

"I don't fucking know," Mulder seethed into his Master's knee. He felt Skinner spread his thighs, and then the paddle cracked against the sensitive flesh between his legs. "Shit, not there," he panted. "Please, Master...not there. Please..." he sobbed.

"Why, Fox?" Skinner pressed, peppering his slave's inner thighs with more hard swats of the paddle.

"For giving up, for not being good enough, for being angry with her when it isn't her fault..." Mulder said, his words jumbled and only just coherent.

"Her?" Skinner asked, his hand rising and falling steadily, the paddle firm and unyielding in his grasp.

"Samantha," Mulder said, his anger dissipating in a haze of pain. "Take me away from myself, Master," he whispered. "Please..."

He lay still over his Master's knee, accepting the gentle rise and fall of the paddle as it slowed down, still delivering swats on Mulder's glowing, upturned butt, but softer ones. This continued for several minutes, while Mulder got his breath back, and his Master alternated a sharp, stinging swat, with a stroke of his hand over the reddened butt in front of him. Finally, it came to an end, and the paddle was placed on one side. Skinner kept Mulder over his knee until his slave's breathing evened out, and then he helped him to his feet and looked at him steadily for a long time. Mulder flushed, and glanced down, unwilling to meet his Master's eyes. Skinner shook his head ruefully, and gently brushed a lock of Mulder's dark hair away from his sweaty forehead.

"Go to the bathroom and get me the lotion in the cupboard," Skinner instructed in a soft, low tone.

Mulder nodded, trembling slightly, not entirely sure whether his legs would work. He walked unsteadily to the bathroom, then returned to the Playroom, and approached the throne. Skinner didn't speak, he just swung his tired slave back over his knee, and then dropped a small dollop of the lotion onto Mulder's hot buttocks. Mulder almost jumped out of his skin as the cold lotion made contact with his flesh, but Skinner continued rubbing the soothing balm gently into Mulder's flaming buttocks, gradually cooling them. He took his time, applying and reapplying the lotion and massaging it into his slave's flesh with long strokes of his thumbs that made Mulder sink his teeth into the fabric of his Master's jeans to stop himself crying out loud. He had to admit that his buttocks soon started to feel better, and the horrific sting had faded into just a dull, throbbing ache that filled him with a endorphin rush. He felt wrung out, physically, and emotionally, and he didn't even realize that he was crying silently until his Master wiped one of his fingers over his cheeks.

"Fox - come here," Skinner ordered. He moved Mulder off from his knee, and pulled him between his open legs, holding him, his arms capturing his slave within their tightly muscled circle. Mulder rested his head against his Master's shoulder, and cried silently into Skinner's tee shirt.

"I don't understand," Skinner said softly. "Where did that come from? When I went away you seemed fine..."

"I **was** fine," Mulder muttered, still hating himself for having allowed his mood to take him so low that he had screwed up like this. "I'm fine now. It's nothing."

"I doubt that. It took a long time for you to give it up," Skinner said gently, pushing Mulder back so that he could look at him. "Who do you belong to, Fox?" He asked, his dark eyes boring holes into Mulder's soul.

"You, Master," Mulder said easily, without hesitation.

"What are you?" Skinner asked.

"Your slave." Mulder knelt down, and hid his face in the carpet. He didn't want to talk about it any more. He was just relieved that the tension of last night had gone. He felt tired, but, conversely, almost rested. It felt good to be kneeling here; in his service he could find his serenity again.

"Very well." There was an odd, unsatisfied tone to Skinner's voice, as if that wasn't enough.

Mulder looked up, a faint shadow of a grin passing across his face. "I never thought I'd be grateful for my daily spankings," he said, "but if they save me from that kind of ordeal, then I'll take them gladly."

"I don't like handing out that kind of ordeal either - especially not on slave's day when I'd much prefer to be playing with my slave rather than disciplining him," Skinner said.

"Damn. I missed out on whatever you had planned," Mulder grouched, glancing around the room, wondering what erotic pleasures Skinner would have visited on his body if he hadn't screwed up so badly.

"Well - I could do with some recreation after that," Skinner said, getting up, and rolling his shoulders back and forth, trying to release some invisible kink.

Mulder's eyes lit up. "You mean...you'd still give me my slave's day reward even after I screwed up?" He asked hopefully.

"A truncated form of it maybe," Skinner said. "I don't think you deserve the full thing and I'm certainly too tired to deliver it now." He moved his head from side to side, and Mulder heard his Master's neck crack, audibly. "However...the idea of using my naked, tied slave appeals," Skinner murmured, giving Mulder a speculative look. "I think we could both do with some release before bed."

"Thank you, Master." Mulder pressed his lips to Skinner's feet.

"Go and lie on the massage table - face up," Skinner ordered.

Mulder nodded and eagerly ran over to the table. He still felt light-headed, but good, and full of anticipation. He longed to feel his Master's hard cock inside him, claiming him, and finally banishing his dark mood.

Skinner approached the table a few moments later, and Mulder glanced up at the other man through his damp eyelashes. Skinner looked tired, but clearly not too tired to enjoy his slave, if the bulge in his Master's black jeans was anything to go by. Mulder's own cock rose against its golden ring and Skinner chuckled.

"Yeah - we definitely both need this," he said, grabbing hold of Mulder's arms and pinning them above his head, then fastening them into cuffs. "Hard, and rough, and fast..." Skinner said in a growl, opening Mulder's legs wide and pushing them up so that his knees were bent, then cuffing his ankles to the table. He pulled Mulder's torso down, so that his slave's ass was close to the edge of the table, his touch purposeful and questing as he handled his slave's body. Mulder closed his eyes, and drifted off into space, as his Master caressed him. "My naked, willing slave boy," Skinner murmured, his mouth roving over Mulder's stomach. He pressed his lips to one of Mulder's nipples and Mulder bit down a yelp of pain. He'd forgotten about those clamps he'd used last night, and somehow he knew it wouldn't be a good idea to tell Skinner what he'd done.

"All right?" Skinner asked, sounding surprised.

"Yes...fine..." Mulder tried to relax, but even the lightest pressure of Skinner's fingertips or tongue on his sore nipples hurt, and he had to inhibit his pained response, which made him feel tense. He tried to relax again, closing his eyes, but was immediately assaulted by an image of Samantha. Krycek had told him that she'd been experimented upon. Had they tied her down? Had she been held motionless while they hurt her? He gave an involuntary shudder, opened his eyes and saw a dark shadow move beside him. It was only Skinner but it made him jump, and he panicked, tearing against the cuffs holding him down. He could see Samantha in his mind's eye, trying to do the same, trying desperately to escape from the people who were hurting her, and he twisted in his bonds, frantically struggling against them.

"Hush, boy," Skinner said, pushing him back down.

"No..." Mulder yelled, no longer able to breathe, feeling as if he was about to black out.

"Be still. Do what I tell you, slave," Skinner hissed.

"Shit, no, let me go!" Mulder moved his whole body from side to side in an effort to escape, no longer able to think clearly, fighting a rising sense of panic that was threatening to obscure his senses.

"Walter!" He gasped.

The cuffs were released with a single snap of his Master's fingers and within seconds he was free. He sat on the side of the massage table, breathing heavily, but feeling stupid for making such a fuss. Skinner was nowhere in sight. He wondered where his Master had gone, and felt a sense of dread at having refused the other man his pleasure, wondering what the penalty for that was. It had to be the worst thing a slave could do to his Master.

Skinner returned a second later and pressed a glass of water into Mulder's hand. His Master didn't touch him, he just looked at him, his eyes dark, and unreadable.

"Drink it," Skinner said softly. Then he crouched down so that he was at eye-level with Mulder, and placed a hand on his knee. "All right now, Fox?" He asked.

Mulder nodded uncertainly. "Sorry," he muttered, between hitching breaths.

"That was a full-blown panic attack," Skinner commented, taking the empty glass Mulder handed to him. He got up and gently caressed Mulder's back, stroking his slave for several minutes while Mulder rested

his head against his Master's chest. Then Skinner pushed him away, and looked at him intently. "Get your breath back. I'm going to run us both a bath. Then you're going to talk."

It wasn't a request. It was an order. Mulder nodded, his jaw clenching in a gesture worthy of his Master.

A few minutes later, Skinner helped him into a bath full of warm water, and drew his stricken slave between his legs. He ran a warm wash cloth over his slave's body, idly tracing circles on Mulder's flesh.

"I've tied you many times before and you've never reacted like that," Skinner said softly, still keeping up the soothing caress on his slave's body. "What was the trigger, Fox?"

"I thought about Samantha. Krycek told me she'd been experimented upon. I felt...for a moment as if I were her. Unable to move, or breathe."

"Samantha is on your mind a lot at the moment," Skinner commented, his arms resting lightly but securely around his slave's body. "Explain, Fox."

"It was something Scully said - about me giving up on her. Is that what I've done?" Mulder twisted and looked up at his Master.

"Is that what you feel you've done?" Skinner asked. "Is that why you hate yourself so much right now?"

"Yes." Mulder shrugged. "She's always been my constant, Walter. She's always been here, inside me, guiding me in everything I do, like the North Star...but since I gave myself to you..."

"You haven't spent so much time thinking about her," Skinner finished for him.

"Yes." Mulder bit on his lip. "One snap of your fingers and it's as if she meant nothing to me. Am I really so shallow? Can I forget about her that easily?"

"No. Never." Skinner tightened his arms protectively around his slave. "She's a part of you, Fox, an important part. I told you when I made you my slave, that I'd never take your quest away from you..."

"But? I sense a 'but.'" Mulder smiled wryly.

"But I've made no secret of the fact that inasmuch as that quest hurts you, or makes you risk your life in stupid, ill-planned ventures, then yes, I will interfere. I'll do everything in my power to stop your quest killing you."

"Keep the quest but lose the self-destruct button that comes with it, huh?" Mulder shook his head ruefully. If only it were that easy.

"Yes," Skinner said firmly. He planted a kiss on the top of his slave's head. "You're mine, boy. I won't let you kill my property," he growled into Mulder's ear.

Mulder shivered. "Well then, I'll try and stay alive," he murmured in reply.

"You'll do more than try." Skinner's arms tightened around him again. "I mean it, Fox. Samantha has always been your weak spot. Just admitting that you might never find her doesn't mean you've given up on her, but do you think she'd want you to give up your life either, chasing after every clue or half-clue that gets thrown in your path?"

"I don't know. She was 8 years old when I last saw her. For all I know she prays every night that I'll find her and release her from whatever prison they're holding her in," Mulder said.

"Or maybe she's dead. Or abducted by those aliens you used to be so sure had taken her," Skinner replied.

"Maybe." Mulder bowed his head, and his Master made the most of the opportunity to press a kiss on the back of his neck.

"You're thinking about Seattle," Skinner commented.

Mulder sighed, and lay back in his Master's arms, accepting both their warmth and comfort. "Yeah," he admitted.

"I'm surprised you didn't just go there while I was away," Skinner said.

"You are?" Mulder turned his head to look at his Master again. "After all the training you've given me?" Skinner raised an eyebrow, and Mulder sighed. "Okay, I'll admit it was hard not to. That's partly why I went stir crazy while you were gone, and why I stole the key to the Playroom."

"But you didn't go. I'm proud of you, boy." Skinner's hands ran gently over his slave's body, ending up at his cock, playing with it until it hardened under his caress. "Look," he said. "I know the Seattle issue won't go away. I also know that I think it's a pointless exercise to go there - if there ever was anything there, the trail's long gone cold. However..." He put up a hand to still his slave's protest. "I don't think you'll be able to rest easily until you at least check it out, and I'm not prepared to let you go there without me. You know I'm busy with the case next week, but when it's over, I suggest we take a trip up to Seattle and slay this particular ghost once and for all."

"You mean that?" Mulder asked, a smile wreathing his face. "You'd do that for me?"

"Of course. I want you to be happy," Skinner replied, his fingers fondling his slave affectionately. "Okay, and obedient too - and this seems as if it'll kill those two birds with one stone."

Mulder laughed, and his laugh became a moan as Skinner's hand slowly pumped his cock. He kicked around in the water, throwing his head back over Skinner's shoulder, and his Master made the most of the opportunity to kiss his slave's exposed throat. His free hand found Mulder's nipple and rubbed it gently, and Mulder arched his back and made a mewling sound in the back of his throat. Skinner pinched gently and Mulder yelped.

"Why does that hurt so much?" Skinner asked, moving his hand to caress Mulder's other nipple. Mulder tensed, not wanting Skinner to stop his insistent caress on his cock but not comfortable having his nipples touched.

"Please...now..." Mulder moaned, and Skinner brought his slave to climax with a swift, long stroke of his hand on Mulder's hard cock. Mulder pumped out into the warm bath water, and then fell back on his Master's chest, with a contented sigh. Skinner's wrapped his arm around his slave's body and held him there, then his fingers returned to his slave's nipples, and he held one lightly between his forefinger and thumb.

"Tell me why these hurt or I'll squeeze," he threatened.

Mulder opened his eyes and glanced up at his Master, his body tensing. "They don't hurt, Master," he lied.

"Then you won't mind me playing with them, will you?" Skinner said in a deceptively light tone. "Just a little squeeze - not something that would normally cause you any discomfort," Skinner continued. His fingers slowly, imperceptibly, began to tighten around Mulder's flesh. Mulder steeled himself to relax, but even the lightest touch on his tender nipples hurt too much.

"Fuck! Stop - I'm sorry," he said wretchedly.

"For what?" Skinner pushed him away and looked at him, frowning.

"When I was in the Playroom...well I was drunk," Mulder shrugged.

"What did you do?" Skinner demanded.

"Clamps." Mulder shrugged.

"Which ones?" Skinner asked, not looking remotely startled by this news.

"The ones with the little black plastic tips. Hurt like hell," Mulder sighed.

"I'm not surprised. How long did you wear them?" Skinner asked.

Mulder winced. "I fell asleep in them. Nearly passed out when I took them off."

"Fox, this is serious." Skinner got up abruptly, and stepped out of the bath. Mulder hurried to follow him.

"I know, it was stupid. I..."

"No, not just that. I've learned how to use every single item in that Playroom - and I've learned the hard way, believe me." Skinner's eyes were dark.

"I know, and I..."

Skinner quelled his protest with one look. "Listen to me, Fox - if I'd used clamps on you today, not knowing that you'd already had them on half the night, then I might have seriously hurt you. It's not a game - it's important. Your safety is important. Will you never understand that?" Skinner was furious - his whole body was shaking, and Mulder nodded silently.

"I'm sorry," he said miserably. "Fuck, I keep screwing up. How many times before you decide this particular slave is never going to get it right?" he asked with a grimace.

"Never," Skinner told him firmly. "I told you before - we'll go right down together, and then I'll bring you back up - but I won't ever stop trying and I'll make sure you don't either." He paused, and glanced at his disheartened slave, then gave a wry laugh, and shook his head. "Come here." He opened his arms and Mulder walked into them, relieved to be back in their safe, protective circle. "You scared me, sweetheart. First in the Playroom, then now, hearing this," Skinner said. "I made mistakes here tonight. I knew that there was something more going on with you after the spanking, but I didn't push you when I should have done. Maybe I thought it would go away. If I'd pushed you then, you wouldn't have gone into the session with the cuffs in such a jumpy mood. Damn." Skinner's body was tense under Mulder's hands and he looked up, concerned. He'd never seen his Master like this before. "I lost touch with you - I've been too busy," Skinner growled, clearly still pissed off with himself. He pushed Mulder away and ran his hand over his forehead, frowning.

"You can't guess what's in my head," Mulder shrugged. "I kept you out. I'm sorry. I suppose trust is still an issue for me. It just seems like one step forward, two steps back," he sighed. "Sometimes I don't think I'll ever get it."

Skinner shook his head. "Fox, I didn't get everything right either when I started out on this path. Not by a long way. What I'm taking you through, is a similar process to that which Andrew made me go through too. When I arrived on his doorstep that night I was, frankly, a mess."

Mulder edged close with a towel, and began to dry his Master. He loved hearing about Skinner's past, and especially about Andrew Linker. "I can't imagine you ever fucking up, Master," he said softly, patting his Master's damp flesh. Skinner laughed out loud.

"I did. Many times. Not in the same way as you, little one, but in my own way."

"Tell me," Mulder asked. He finished drying his Master and tied the towel around the other man's waist.

"I'm tired. Let's go to bed," Skinner said. Mulder opened his mouth to protest that he wanted to hear the story, but Skinner stopped him with a look. "You'll sleep in my bed tonight, and I'll tell you the goddamn story," he growled. Mulder grinned and ran ahead to open the door, eager to find out how his perfect Master had ever angered **his** Master.

They got into bed, and Skinner switched off the light and turned over as if to go to sleep. Mulder propped his head up on his hand and gazed at his Master expectantly in the dark, clearing his throat pointedly. Skinner sighed.

"All right. The story," he grumbled, turning back. "There was once a slave who was wild, headstrong, and almost untamable..." He grinned at Mulder in the dark.

"You?" Mulder asked in disbelief.

"No," Skinner snorted. "This slave thought he was the only one who'd ever fucked up, maybe he even thought Masters are born fully formed, and completely in charge from the moment they pick up their first whip," he chided. It was Mulder's turn to snort now.

"I don't think this slave is that naïve," he said.

"Do you want to hear the story or not?" Skinner demanded.

"Yes. Please." Mulder slid down further in the bed, and rested his head on his Master's shoulder.

"All right then. A good Master is made, just like a good slave can be made...with sweat, tears, training, and a large dose of discipline. It's not an easy process. I'm not infallible, as tonight proved only too well. This slave..." Skinner's hands caressed his slave's body, gently, "has a lot to learn. It isn't a crime. His Master did too, once, and maybe still does."

"This is where you say 'Once upon a time,' isn't it?" Mulder asked, with a grin. Skinner pinched his butt unexpectedly, making him squeal.

"No. Although I will now, just to spite you. Once upon a time..." Skinner began, in solemn tones. Mulder tried his best to suppress a giggle, and failed, which earned him another pinch. "...there was a very different kind of sub. He wasn't wild, or headstrong, although he was definitely a trial to his Master because he was obstinate, pig-headed, and obsessive."

"Obsessive?" Mulder looked up.

"Yeah - he was a perfectionist. He didn't like to get anything wrong, and if he did, he obsessed about it for days. He made non-communication into an art-form. He could be surly, and sullen, and he was so stubborn that it sometimes took all his Master's patience and skill, and sometimes his strong right arm, to get his sub to open up and admit that there was anything wrong." He sighed, ruefully. Mulder grabbed his Master's hand, and caressed it between his long fingers. "So, being wild, and headstrong aren't the only faults in the world," Skinner said, squeezing Mulder's fingers, "and you're probably no more exasperating to me than I was to my Master," he added. Mulder had to laugh at the thought of his Master being a handful to Andrew Linker. He found it hard to picture Skinner serving anyone, although if it had to be someone, he was glad that it was the mysterious and charismatic former Guardian.

"So, how did this stubborn sub screw up?" Mulder asked.

"He shared his slave's fascination with the Playroom," Skinner said. "Not from a genuine interest in what it contained, or even what it stood for, but because he had to be the most perfect expert in the world at using everything in that room. He practiced for hours, becoming familiar with every single damn thing in that room, from the bullwhip, to the nipple clamps..." he squeezed his slave's hand again.

"You used them on yourself?" Mulder asked in surprise.

"Yes. I needed to know how each set felt, and how long they could be used for. I could use the harness blindfolded, and I could cut a piece of paper in two with the bullwhip from across the room. There wasn't an implement in that room that I wasn't an expert on."

"What's wrong with that?" Mulder asked.

"Patience, grasshopper," Skinner teased, "I'm coming to that bit. Andrew sought me out one day and found me taking the harness apart, link by link. He looked at me, perplexed, and asked me what I was

doing. I told him that it was important that I be a totally perfect Master, that I knew not only how each piece of equipment worked, but also how it could be taken apart and put back together again, and so on. Andrew gave the deepest, most heartfelt sigh - and looked at me as if I were a small child who'd completely missed the point."

"Why?" Mulder asked, frowning.

"Well, he agreed with me that it's important to know how the equipment works, but he took issue with my need to be perfect. He reminded me that I wasn't perfect, however much I might wish otherwise," Skinner winced. "And also that I would make mistakes, from time to time, because I was human, and that when I did, it wasn't an excuse for me to beat myself up endlessly, and go into a morose period of self-examination, and then he asked me if I was having fun."

Skinner paused, and Mulder looked up to find his Master smiling to himself.

"Fun?" Mulder asked.

Skinner grinned. "Yeah. Fun. I repeated the word as if I didn't even know what it meant, and that's when he laughed. I don't think it ever occurred to me that I should be having fun. Like you, I took it too seriously. When he'd finished laughing, Andrew took away my key to the Playroom. Then he led me to his bedroom, ordered me onto the bed, and told me he was going to have a full sub/dom sex session with me without using any equipment at all - and I was going to come. Boy, was I gonna come!" Skinner laughed out loud at the memory.

"And did you?" Mulder asked.

"Did I hell!" Skinner retorted. "Andrew could reduce me to Jell-O just by using his voice - and he did. He took me into subspace, and kept me there by the force of his personality alone. Then, afterwards, when I was lying naked, sweaty and completely sated in his arms, he asked me what I'd learned."

"What did you say?" Mulder turned onto his stomach, and looked at his Master expectantly.

"The truth. That the mind is the sexiest instrument of all and that none of that equipment upstairs is any kind of substitute for affection, trust and a good erotic imagination. Andrew refused to let me practice with the equipment for weeks after that - in fact he denied me access to the Playroom. Instead, he made me use my mind, to think up erotic games, and then to try them out in the bedroom - and most of all, I had to play. I had to have fun with it, and make it fun for him. Illusion, personality, setting a scene or mood with my voice, and gestures...I learned all that from Andrew. Being a Master is more than just the A, B, and C of how to wield a cane, and where to place a stroke. There are things you must know about your craft, of course, but that's only a small part of being a good top - and I learned from being a sub to the best top in the country," Skinner said proudly.

"And the moral of the story is?" Mulder asked, propping up his head on his hand again and looking down on his Master.

"You tell me," Skinner grinned.

"Only belong to the best top in the country?" Mulder hazarded.

Skinner growled, and pulled his slave over and held him tight while he delivered a light swat to his ass. Mulder wriggled, laughing helplessly.

"Try again," Skinner commanded.

"Hmm...I dunno. How about: learn from your mistakes?" Mulder suggested.

"Sounds good to me. Will you?" Skinner asked.

"As long as you're here to point them out to me and take me back down like you did today, painful though it was, then yeah, I think so," Mulder nodded. "And I'm kind of glad that you do know your way around the stuff in the Playroom," he added thoughtfully. "Those cuffs were off my wrists and ankles in seconds when I panicked."

"Of course," Skinner said. "In a way, maybe it was a good thing it happened. You've never had an adverse reaction before because I've always prepared you well and been in tune with you enough to know how you're experiencing the sensations of what I'm doing to you. Now you know that I'll stop if you're in genuine distress."

"I don't think I ever really doubted that," Mulder said quietly. He felt his Master's hard cock digging into his buttocks, aroused by his slave's proximity. "Will you use me, Master?" He asked hopefully. "I wanted to feel you inside me earlier in the Playroom, before I screwed up," he said.

Skinner looked at him searchingly for a moment.

"I'm not going to have another panic attack if that's what you're thinking," Mulder said softly.

"Very well then, boy...I believe that I promised you that I'd use you at least once a day, so you're owed," Skinner growled.

Mulder smiled. He still felt fully sated after Skinner's attentions in the bath, but he loved it when his Master touched his slave. He lay on his side, and felt Skinner part his legs with his knee. Then he jumped as he felt a cool, lubed finger enter his anus. He moaned as his Master unerringly found his prostate, and opened up further. The finger was removed, and his sore buttocks grasped, and parted, making him gasp. He felt his Master's cock slipping into his entrance, and then sliding smoothly home. Skinner gathered Mulder up and pulled him back so that he was close. Mulder loved this moment, before his Master started to move inside him. He loved feeling Skinner this big, and hard and strong within his own body, the two of them bonded in this way. Then Skinner started to thrust, with short, slow movements of his hips, taking his time, his large hands drawing his slave's body onto his large cock. Mulder gave himself up to the moment, his head thrown back, his body arched as he surrendered to his Master's pleasure. It felt so good. It was where he belonged. He couldn't think of anywhere else he'd rather be than here, in this bed, serving his Master with his naked, willing body.

Skinner came a few minutes later with a decided grunt, then they both lay there, Mulder wrapped up in his Master's arms, too weary to move. He vaguely felt Skinner's lips brush the back of his neck, then his Master's weight leaning on him, and the deepening of Skinner's breathing. He could still feel his Master's cock, deep inside him, growing soft, but still warm, throbbing slightly, and he smiled, and didn't draw away. This felt so good. They had come through a mini-crisis, and soon his Master would

accompany him to Seattle. Life was good. A few seconds later he was as fast asleep as his Master, their bodies still joined.

Mulder arrived at work on Monday morning convinced that his recent crisis was over. Scully looked relieved to see that his mood had changed for the better, and he brought her in four different kinds of muffins and a mocha latte to make up for his mood the previous week.

"One muffin would have done fine," she told him, rolling her eyes.

"I was a bastard for four days, so - four muffins!" he grinned.

"That is such Mulder logic," she grinned back.

"Ah, so you admit I can be logical, oh Queen of Scientific Reasoning." He plunked himself down behind his desk and turned on his computer.

"In your own way you're the most logical person I know," she mused, "it just happens to be alien logic, not human." She threw him a cranberry and walnut muffin to quell his expression of outrage.

Mulder logged onto his Slavecity account. He hadn't been in touch with Ian for days, and the other man had sent him an email inquiring if he was okay, or whether the blood-sucking mutant pigs had got him. Mulder grinned, then frowned as he saw the other message in his inbox. Nobody else had this account name so who the hell could it be? There wasn't any clue in the sender's name, which was a collection of letters and numbers, and he would have dismissed it as junk mail if it hadn't been for the subject title which was just one word - but it was a word that made his blood run cold:

Samantha.

He opened the message, but there was no text, just a URL:

**<http://www.Samantha2000.com>**

Mulder followed the link, and waited impatiently for his browser to locate the page. A dark screen was painted, overlaid by a picture of an eight year old girl that he recognized all too well, but he barely noticed that because a few seconds later the sound kicked in.

He was aware of Scully looking up from her desk, as the screams rent through the air in the tiny basement office.

*"Please...let me go back to my room. Please...don't inject me again...it hurts...please...NO!"* The child's voice faded into a low whimpering sob.

"Mulder?" He looked up into Scully's eyes, to find them wide with worry. She came around to stare at the picture on the screen. "It could all be a fake, Mulder. A set up," she said to him, putting a hand on his shoulder.

"There's a link," he said numbly, accessing it. The next page showed a picture of a woman in her early thirties. She was wearing a hospital gown and her face looked pale, and pinched, but her dark eyes shone out, full of a quiet strength combined with desperation.

"Samantha?" Mulder's fingers touched the screen, falteringly.

"It could be anyone," Scully told him.

"It's her," Mulder said emphatically.

"You can't know that," Scully said softly.

"I do," Mulder looked up at her. "I do," he repeated firmly. He scrolled down the page but there was nothing else. No more information. Nothing.

"I'm going to find out who that website is registered to," Scully told him but Mulder was barely listening. Instead he reached for the phone and called Skinner's office.

"He's in a meeting..." Kim began, but Mulder cut her off curtly.

"Tell him it's urgent. Tell him I need him in my office - now!" he snapped at her, slamming the telephone down.

His Master didn't let him down. Skinner strode into the basement office less than 4 minutes later, an expression of concern creasing his blunt features.

"Agent Mulder - this had better be important," he said, shutting the door firmly and glancing at Scully who was desperately making calls.

"It is." Mulder paged back, then pushed his chair away and pointed at the computer screen. Frowning, Skinner came over to look at it. He heard the screams and his eyes darkened behind his spectacles.

"Who is this?" he asked, looking up, first at Mulder, and then at Scully for confirmation when he saw that his slave was in no condition to answer him. Mulder just pointed at the little girl on the screen.

"He was sent an email," Scully began, putting her hand over the phone.

"Who from?" Skinner snapped.

"That's what I'm trying to find out," Scully said.

"It was a private account." Mulder clenched his fists. "Nobody knows about it...unless someone's been in here...been at my desk...?" He looked at Skinner and Scully, almost as if he was accusing them. "Who would do that?" he asked.

"I can think of one person who seems to possess the ability to come and go within this building without authorization," Skinner replied tersely.

"Just the one?" Mulder spat. "I thought there was a whole army of Consortium bastards working out of the FBI."

"Agent Mulder sit down," Skinner said in a low, even tone. "Someone is clearly yanking your chain..."

"No. That was Samantha's voice. I recognize it - and that's her in that second picture. I know it is!"

"Fox, it's been thirty years since you last saw Samantha," Skinner told him in a low, urgent tone. "You can't know that's her."

"I know!" Mulder retorted angrily. His Master's eyes flashed behind his glasses. "I know," Mulder repeated in a whisper.

"Got it!" Scully scribbled something down on a piece of paper, and then opened her mouth in surprise.

"What is it?" Mulder grabbed the paper and read the address on it, his expression one of shock. "This is where the website is registered?" he asked Scully. She nodded, and exchanged a glance with Skinner. Mulder grabbed his jacket and ran towards the door but his Master's big hand crashed it shut before he got there.

"Where is it?" Skinner asked.

"It's that address in Seattle," Mulder replied, pushing past his Master and opening the door. Skinner placed a hand on his slave's shoulder, and Mulder half turned to face him. "I have to go there, sir. You can see that, can't you? I'm going to go there," Mulder told his Master in a determined tone. Slave looked at Master for a moment, and Master looked back at slave, both of them resolutely committed to a certain course of action. The tension in the room crackled almost tangibly, but Mulder's resolve was more than equal to his Master's in this instance.

"It's a trap," Skinner said in a flat tone.

"I don't care," Mulder replied, reaching for the door again.

"Well I do." Skinner's eyes were the darkest Mulder had ever seen them.

"You won't stop me," Mulder snapped. "You **can't** stop me."

"I have no intention of even trying," Skinner retorted, "but I'm sure as hell going with you."

Mulder pulled up short. "What about your case?" he asked.

"I have to be back to give evidence on Wednesday. Until then - I'm with you." Skinner pulled the door open and ushered Mulder through.

"Count me in too," Scully said in a determined tone, grabbing her coat and following on behind Mulder.

"Good. I think it'll take both of us to watch his back," Skinner murmured to her, as he brought up the rear.

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"It's wet." Scully surveyed the gray evening sky and pulled up the collar of her raincoat.

"It's Seattle," Skinner replied grimly. Both of them shot worried glances at Mulder, who hadn't said a word during the entire journey. "Agent Mulder!" Skinner cracked out sharply. "We'll get a taxi to our hotel and then..."

"If you don't mind, sir, I'd prefer to go straight to the address..." Mulder began.

"I **do** mind," Skinner barked back, asserting his authority in no uncertain terms. "Get your ass in the cab, Agent." He held the taxi door open and glared at his slave and subordinate. Mulder bit on his lip for a moment, clearly tempted to defy his Master and then sighed and gave in, throwing himself into the taxi with a disgruntled and barely disguised expletive. "We'll go to the hotel and dump our stuff. I've arranged for two agents from the local field office to meet us there. They can fill us in on any information about the house that they've been able to gather while we were traveling here," Skinner informed his two agents tersely.

If Mulder had been in a less volatile mood he would have realized that this made sense, but as it was, he was too caught up in his desire to get to the house to think straight. This was almost the closest he'd ever been. A voice, a photograph...a lead, damnit! And Skinner wanted him to sit down around a table with the local agents, have a few beers, and discuss fucking real estate prices or something?

It was late evening by the time they got to the hotel. Scully checked them in at the desk.

"Three rooms in the name of Skinner," she said, glancing back at where Mulder and Skinner were standing, both men's stances full of tension, neither of them speaking.

"I'm sorry, ma'am, but we only have two rooms in that name," the receptionist said.

"That's okay, Agent Scully." Skinner stepped in. "I had Kim just book the two rooms. It's not that I don't trust Agent Mulder," he said, smiling faintly, "just that I think it might be safer if he wasn't allowed to come and go on his own during this investigation."

Scully managed a faint smile as she accepted the room cards. "A wise precaution, sir," she murmured.

Mulder's heart sank at Skinner's words. He had assumed that his Master wouldn't be so blatant as to share his room with Scully along for the ride, but Skinner had clearly thought this through, and now Mulder was likely to spend his nights handcuffed to the bed.

They dumped their belongings, then met the two local field agents in the bar. Neither of them had anything worthwhile to say, as far as Mulder could see, and he barely heard a word they were saying in any case. After ten minutes of pointless talk, he just got up and told them he was leaving.

"Agent Mulder..." Skinner was on his feet, following, but he gave Mulder his head, and allowed him to charge outside to the car.

"I'm not sitting around while my sister could be a few miles away waiting for me," Mulder seethed as Skinner caught up with him, and grabbed his arm.

"Fine. We're all with you on this, Fox. Now slow down and start thinking with your head and not your hopes," Skinner growled.

Mulder's face crumpled as his Master's words sank in. "She's my sister," he hissed, in a heartfelt tone.

"I know that, son." Skinner grabbed the back of Mulder's head and looked him straight in the eye. "I know that. And we'll do our best to find her. I promise. Okay?"

Mulder looked at him then nodded. "Okay," he whispered, getting into the car.

Scully arrived just in time to see this exchange, and she gave Mulder a questioning look, which he ignored.

The journey to the house took less than twenty minutes, and Mulder was out of the car and running up the driveway before the car had stopped moving, with Scully and Skinner hard on his heels. While the local agents brought up the rear. All of the FBI agents had their guns in their hands as Mulder pounded on the door. When there was no reply, he stood back and kicked his way in, while Scully made her way around the back. Mulder crashed into the house, falling on his shoulder, and rolling over, immediately getting back on his feet, and waving his gun in the air. Skinner was behind him all the way, and Scully reached them in the hallway at the exact same moment as they heard it. It was a scream, and it was coming from an upstairs room.

"*FOX! Help me!*" A woman's voice cried.

Mulder took the stairs three at a time, and smashed through another door, yelling at the top of his voice: "FBI, drop your weapons."

There was no reply. Mulder stood in the room, his arms held out stiffly in front of him, his gun poised, and ready, clutched in both his hands, the sweat running down his face as he took in the scene in front of him.

"Fox...there's nobody here. It's a tape," Skinner said gently, pushing Mulder's arms down, and pointing at the speakers on the wall of the empty room. "She was never here. Someone's been playing with you."

"*NO! Please don't! I can't take any more. Please!*" The speakers wailed.

Mulder fired a single bullet into each of them, killing the sound dead. Then, without saying a word, he turned on his heel and went downstairs.

"Fox..." He was dimly aware of his Master's hand on his shoulder, pulling him close, and Skinner's warm, solid body pressed tightly against his own.

"She might have been here. Just because she's not here now doesn't mean anything. We have the picture. I'm going to do a house to house. I'm going to..." Mulder mumbled.

"Fox...look at me, little one," Skinner said softly, grabbing hold of Mulder's face and making him focus on his Master. "She's not here. She never was. This is someone's idea of a sick joke."

"No." Mulder's body shook with the effort of containing his wildly raging emotions.

"Fox." Skinner's tone was firmer now. Mulder was dimly aware of Scully's footstep on the stair, and the startled look in her eyes as she took in the sight of her boss and her partner locked in an embrace. "Listen to me, sweetheart. It's late. You're tired. It's been a long day. We're going back to the hotel, and you're going to get some sleep. That's an order." Skinner's voice was gentle but firm, and it was the only anchor holding Mulder to reality in this time and place.

"No. I'm going to knock on doors, ask questions..." Mulder began.

"In the morning," Skinner interrupted firmly. "I won't sanction you disturbing this neighborhood in the middle of the night on a wild goose chase."

"You never believed," Mulder muttered resentfully.

"No, but I'll come with you tomorrow. We'll find her if she's here," Skinner said soothingly.

"We don't have time. You have to get back to DC," Mulder said wearily.

"Not until the evening. I'll search with you all day - but Fox, I won't go home alone. I'm not leaving you up here," Skinner said, his dark eyes serious. "Do you understand me?" Mulder made no reply, but turned his head away. Skinner grasped his slave's shoulders and shook him, forcing him to turn back. "I said, do you understand me?" Skinner barked.

"Yes. **Master.**" Mulder made an ironic bow and then turned on his heel and left the house, slamming the door shut with a resounding bang behind him.

They rode back to the hotel in an uncomfortable silence. Skinner spoke to the two agents who had accompanied them to the house, then allowed them to go with instructions to meet them the following morning. Then he bought both Mulder and Scully a drink.

"I think we all could use one," he said. Scully nursed hers between her hands, darting silent, speculative glances at Skinner under her eyelashes every so often. Mulder wanted to say something to her, to clear up this whole mess, but he couldn't think of anything that would make sense right now. He downed his vodka in one gulp then got up.

"I'll go to bed now. If I have your permission that is, sir," he growled. Skinner's dark eyes were intense, but he made no reply, merely nodded.

Mulder walked stiffly up to their room, undid his tie and pulled it off, and opened the top button of his shirt. Then he threw himself down on one of the two beds, only to get straight up again, unable to relax. He paced for a few minutes, thinking furiously, wondering what the hell to do next, when a knock on the door broke into his reverie. He opened it to find Scully standing, hesitantly, outside.

"I'm not in the mood to talk," he told her tersely.

"I need to understand something," she told him, coming into the room anyway.

"What the fuck is there to understand?" he said stiffly. "I told you the truth and you didn't believe me. That's not my fault. Deal with it, Scully."

"Mulder - I'm not your enemy. Don't treat me like this," she said, laying a hand on his arm.

"I'm sorry. Oh shit, I'm sorry." He slumped against the wall, and looked at her in misery. "I didn't want to hurt you, Scully. I tried to tell you, but..." He shrugged, and looked at her helplessly.

"Are you telling me that it's all true?" She said softly.

He bit on his lip, then nodded, slowly.

"And that Skinner is...?" There was a look of almost comic disbelief in her eyes as she trailed off, unable to complete the sentence. Mulder didn't help her out. "Your..." She continued. "Lover?" she finished at last, when he didn't break the silence.

"If you want to call it that. If it makes you feel easier about it. I usually address him as 'Master'," Mulder snapped, really not wanting this discussion right now.

"Mulder, this is serious. If he coerced you in some way into..." Scully began, and Mulder gave a bitter, hollow laugh.

"Scully, nobody coerced anybody. In fact if anyone made the moves in this relationship it was me. I hunted him down for over a year before he gave in and agreed to take me on. His only condition was that I become his slave. I agreed. Willingly. I even signed a contract," Mulder told her, his tone savage, wanting to make her flinch. She obliged, and that just made him feel even worse. "I'm his slave, Scully. He's my Master - those are the terms we use. That's what we are to each other. Here. Look." He pulled open his shirt with one savage sweep of his arm, popping a couple of buttons with the force of the gesture, and showed her the gold chain around his neck. "He gave me this. It's his collar. I wear it all the time, just like I wear his ring." He held up his hand. "It's engraved with my name. So is the collar. They both belong to him. Just as I belong to him. Symbols of his ownership. Does that shock you, Scully? Does what I am disgust you?" He asked her, looking into her eyes, and fearing to see a mirror of the disgust that he felt for himself in their blue depths. There was nothing there save concern, and he felt a stab of guilt for not trusting her to care about him, after all they'd been through together.

"Disgust? No. How could you think that?" Scully replied slowly. "It's just...a lot for a girl to get used to," she tried to smile, feebly.

"Why? Don't you think it's possible for me to be happy in this kind of relationship?" Mulder asked her.

"No...I don't think that," she said. "In fact, you've been happier for these past few months than I've ever seen you before and than I ever expected to ever see you. You're calmer. If I didn't know you better I'd almost say that you were finally at peace with yourself. Until..."

"Until this crap started. Yes. I know. I can't..." Mulder felt his legs gave way suddenly, and, without warning he fell down onto the bed, and buried his face in his hands. "I'm sorry, Scully. I never, ever, in a

million years wanted to hurt you. You mean too much to me. You and Walter...you're all I have, and all I ever do is push you away," he whispered. "You shouldn't care, Scully. Not you. Not Walter. I am not fucking worth it."

"Mulder, that's not true." She sat down next to him on the bed, and put an arm around his tense shoulders. "Of course we care about you," she told him softly. "And do you think we'd care if you **weren't** worth it?" she chided, kissing his forehead and drawing him close, rocking him against her shoulder. He tried to blink back the tears that were threatening to fall.

"I don't know. I don't know..." he whispered.

"Of course you are. I've never known anyone more loyal, more passionate, and committed..."

"I sometimes think I should be committed," he joked feebly. She smiled, and kissed his forehead again.

"Mulder, if he, I mean, Skinner...um, Walter, makes you happy, then that's fine by me - whatever the nature of your relationship. I'll admit, I thought it was all just a joke, but...it makes a strange kind of sense. Somehow, although it's shocking - I'm not saying it isn't shocking - but it's not..." She wrinkled her forehead for a moment, struggling to find the right words. "It's not **surprising**," she finished at last. "I don't understand why exactly, just that it makes a strange kind of sense. That somehow, knowing, makes everything fall into place."

He smiled at her wanly, and took hold of her hand and kissed her fingers.

She reached out a tentative finger, and touched the gold collar around his neck. "As for being worth something...judging by all the exquisite and expensive gold he's put on you, I'd say that your Master thinks his slave is worth a great deal to him." She smiled at him, and gently touched the side of his face.

"Are we going to be the same?" Mulder asked anxiously. "Can we work together the same way again? Is this going to change anything?"

"Apart from making me extremely nervous of my boss you mean?" She grinned.

"You should be. Trust me. I know him," Mulder grinned back.

"No, Mulder. It won't change anything. Like I said, I just want you to be happy." Scully got up, just as the door opened, and Skinner walked into the room.

"Agent Scully." He gave her a strained smile.

"Sir. I was just leaving. Agent Mulder was explaining a few...things to me," she said, tiptoeing very carefully around Skinner and edging towards the safety of the door with a wide-eyed look that almost made Mulder laugh out loud.

"Agent Scully." Skinner held open the door for her. "Please don't worry. Agent Mulder will be fine with me," he told her sincerely, as she sidled past him.

"I hope so, sir," she said firmly, and a knowing look passed between them. Skinner shut the door behind her and gave a loud exhalation of breath.

"Something tells me that I'll have to live without my kneecaps if I don't treat my slave in the way his partner approves of," Skinner commented.

"Yeah - she's even more scary than Wanda," Mulder said with a faint smile.

"Oh, I've never doubted for a moment that the female of the species is more deadly than the male," Skinner replied wryly. "It doesn't matter which species. Feline, or Homo Sapiens. How are you feeling now, Fox?"

"Better. I'm sorry, Master." Mulder gazed at his Master helplessly.

"For what? I understand the pressures you've been under, sweetheart. Just remember that I won't let you self-destruct. If you even attempt it there'll be trouble," Skinner's threat was real, even if it was said in a joking tone. Mulder nodded glumly.

"Are you going to handcuff me to the bed for the night?" He asked.

"Do I need to?" Skinner replied with a raised eyebrow.

Mulder thought about it for a moment, struggling with the issue of honesty, then gave in with a sigh. "Maybe you do," he replied.

"What can you do in the middle of the night, Fox?" Skinner asked. "Seriously - what point is there in going back to that house now, in darkness? We'll go back tomorrow in daylight, and I promise you we'll search it from top to bottom for clues. If there's anything there - we'll find it. Now, I want to trust you, sweetheart." He crouched down and looked his slave directly in the eye. "I'll leave it up to you. I'll take you at your word. If you need to be chained to the bed, I'll do that. Otherwise, you can let your word be your bond. Tell me which it should be." Skinner rocked back on his heels and waited, his searching gaze never leaving his slave's face. Mulder knew that in that moment, more than any other, he wanted his Master to be proud of him, and to finally achieve the trust between them that they had both tried so hard to attain.

"I won't try and leave. You don't need to handcuff me," he whispered. Skinner gave a strained smile, and placed his hands on his slave's cheeks, then drew him close and kissed him sweetly on the lips.

"Good boy. I'll trust you then," he said.

Curled up in his Master's arms in the strange bed, Mulder could almost believe that everything was all right. Skinner's hands soothed him, gently tracing relaxing circles on his slave's naked flesh until most of the tension had left his body. He heard his Master's breathing change and knew the other man had fallen asleep, but Mulder still couldn't switch off enough to join him. He went over the day's events in his mind. If this was all a game, then why? What possible purpose did it serve to drag him all the way out here? It was absurd. There was no reason for it. Who was behind it? Krycek, surely, but again - why? He was lost in these thoughts when the ringing of his cellphone caught his attention. He glanced at Skinner

but the other man, always a heavy sleeper, continued to snore through the sound. Mulder slid out of bed, and fumbled for the phone in his jacket pocket.

"Hello?" He edged silently into the bathroom and shut the door behind him so as not to wake his Master.

"Hello, old friend. Did I wake you?" A familiar, taunting voice asked.

"No. I couldn't sleep. I'm sure you know why, Krycek," he replied stiffly.

"Too many old ghosts, maybe? The voice of an innocent, reaching across the years?" Krycek suggested.

"Cut the crap, old **friend**," Mulder snapped back. "My patience with you has just about worn out. What do you want?"

"Isn't that obvious?" Krycek hissed. "I want you."

A few minutes later, Mulder crept back into the bedroom and silently got dressed. He picked up his gun, and then stood for a moment, gazing down on his sleeping Master. He struggled with his decision, then gave up the fight, and sat down on the bed.

"Walter." He shook the other man awake. Skinner sat up with a start - to find himself looking down the barrel of his slave's gun.

"Fox - what the hell are you doing?" He demanded angrily.

"I've had a call. From Krycek," Mulder said. "He wants to meet me."

"When?" Skinner demanded.

"Now," Mulder replied, with a sad smile.

"Where?" Skinner asked grimly.

"I'm under strict instructions not to tell you - and I have to go alone, or I won't find what I'm looking for."

"If you do that you'll walk straight into a trap," Skinner told him flatly, his eyes registering the significance of the gun that was pointed at his chest. "Fox, we both know that you won't use that so stop pointing it at me," he growled.

"You're not coming with me, Walter," Mulder said softly. "I agree - it's probably a trap. Which is another reason why neither you nor Scully are coming with me. You've both suffered enough for my quest in the past. I'm not letting that happen again. This is my decision."

"You seem to have forgotten, boy, that you belong to me - so it's not your decision to make," Skinner said in a low, urgent hiss.

"I thought you'd feel that way," Mulder said, "which is why I'm going to do this." He held up his hand and took the ring off his finger. "I'm sorry, but I have to go. I know that what I'm about to do will shatter the trust we've built up, and I'm more sorry for that than you'll ever know. I know I'm fucking everything up, just as I always do, and I know you can't ever forgive me for this, so I won't put you under that obligation." He placed the ring on the night-stand, and got up. Skinner half rose from the bed, only to find the gun pressed under his jaw. He paused, his dark eyes meeting Mulder's, a question in them, but Mulder's resolve didn't waver for a second, and what he saw there made Skinner falter.

"You're wrong about me not using this," Mulder said softly. "I knew I'd have to, just to keep you off my trail for long enough to get away. This is why you won't be able to forgive me, Walter." He moved quickly, without warning, and slammed the gun hard against his Master's jaw. Skinner's head cracked back and he fell onto the bed, out cold. Mulder looked down on his Master's prone, silent body, and hauled him into a more comfortable position, checking to make sure that Skinner was merely unconscious and not more seriously wounded. Then he handcuffed his Master's wrist to the headboard. He went into the bathroom and filled a glass with water which he left on the night-stand, and then he moved the phone out of arm's reach. When Skinner woke he'd have to holler for help, which might buy Mulder even more valuable time to reach his destination without being followed. Mulder went to the door, then paused, and glanced back. He returned to the bed, and planted a kiss on his Master's lips.

"I'm sorry. I love you," he whispered, and then he left.

Krycek's directions took Mulder to what he wasn't surprised to find was an empty warehouse. There was a single light bulb shining over a battered crate - on top of which sat his old nemesis, wearing his usual uniform of white tee shirt, black leather jacket, and blue jeans.

"Hello. Old friend." Mulder pointed his gun at Krycek, and moved cautiously into the room.

"Ah. Mulder." Krycek smiled an almost perfectly genuine smile, his legs swinging against the side of the crate, seemingly unconcerned by the fact that Mulder's gun was aimed straight at his heart.

"You wanted to see me?" Mulder edged closer.

"You came alone I see," Krycek smiled. "You must have Skinner well trained to persuade him to stay behind. That's surely not the way it's supposed to be, hmm? I mean, isn't the Master supposed to train the slave?"

"What the fuck are you talking about, Krycek?" Mulder growled, breaking out in a cold sweat.

"Did you really think we didn't know?" Krycek smirked infuriatingly. "Come on, Mulder. You're our prize boy. We've followed your every movement for years. Did you really think we wouldn't notice that you'd moved in with the incredible hulk? Now, I could have understood it if it you'd wanted to be the cute redhead's sex slave - who wouldn't?" Krycek leered. "But the bald guy for fuck's sake, Mulder? And as for those cute lifestyle games you play..." Krycek shook his head. "If you wanted someone to tie you up and beat the crap out of you, you only had to ask you know," he said.

"Fuck you!" Mulder exploded, taking two strides towards his former partner. He skidded to a halt, as a switch was flicked and the warehouse was suddenly bathed in light.

He wasn't alone with Krycek. Not even close. Half a dozen men were standing around them both - and their guns were trained on Mulder.

"Shut up, Mulder. This is my party," Krycek said, getting off the crate, advancing on his old enemy, and plucking Mulder's gun from his hand. He snapped his fingers, and his men surrounded Mulder, and tied the agent's hands behind his back. "And I really know how to party," Krycek grinned, slamming his fist into Mulder's abdomen without warning.

Mulder doubled over and fell to his knees, gasping for air. Krycek grabbed hold of a fistful of his hair, and pulled Mulder's head back, then punched him hard across the side of the face Mulder went flying. Krycek stood over his stricken enemy and Mulder blinked up at him, one eye already closing.

"Why?" He asked.

"To make up for the many times you've done the same to me," Krycek grinned. "And for this, too," he gestured with his head towards his prosthetic arm. "And don't go thinking that when I'm done getting even, I'm going to take you to Samantha. I'm not."

"Skinner said it was a trap," Mulder whispered.

"You should listen to your Master," Krycek said, resting his boot against Mulder's ribs. "He was right." He moved his leg, and kicked Mulder hard, making the agent double over in pain. "This isn't about killing you," Krycek said, tracing his finger along the side of Mulder's bruised face, a thoughtful look on his face. "I have you for 48 hours. That's all. I'm not allowed to kill you - it isn't policy, apparently." He smiled again, and backhanded Mulder across the jaw. "So, I'll just have to cause the maximum amount of pain, with the minimum amount of actual damage in the time I have allotted to me," he said, casually delivering another backhander in the other direction.

At some point during that long night, Mulder passed out. When he awoke, it was daylight outside.

"Good afternoon, slave boy." Krycek kicked him awake and poured water onto Mulder's face. Mulder opened his swollen mouth eagerly to accept the drops. "This must be like your ultimate wet dream, huh, slave?" Krycek sneered, grabbing Mulder by the lapel of his blood stained shirt and lifting him into a sitting position. "You like being hurt, don't you, you sick, twisted fuck." He laced one real hand and one plastic one in Mulder's hair and looked down on his victim, with flashing green eyes. "Don't you like it? Feeling out of control, the pain. Is it good for you? Is the earth moving for you, baby, hmm?" Krycek grinned, thumping Mulder's head back against the wall. "Answer me!" he commanded.

"Trust me, this is doing nothing for me," Mulder croaked, his good eye closing wearily, his head lolling in Krycek's hand.

"Aw - are you saying I'm not any good at it? Is that it? I guess I'll just have to try harder then," Krycek said, slapping Mulder back into wakefulness.

"I don't understand. Why?" Mulder said. "Why bring me all the way out here, just to use me as a punch bag. You could have done that in DC."

"It's all part of the plan." Krycek smiled.

"What plan?" Mulder asked. Out of the corner of his eye he could see a couple of Krycek's goons leaning casually against the wall. The others were playing cards, as if none of this was happening, as if they weren't standing by while one man beat another to a pulp. Mulder shifted position. His ribs hurt, and his breath was coming in wheezing gasps.

"You're the clever boy. You figure it out," Krycek said, landing another punch to Mulder's torso that made the agent fall onto his side, the pain streaking like lightning through his body.

At some point Mulder blacked out again. When he came to, it was dark outside, the faint morning rays of the sun just filtering through the skylight above. Krycek was standing over him, kicking him into wakefulness with his foot.

"Come back to us, Mulder, I want to make the most of our time together," Krycek told his victim with a smile. He knelt down in front of Mulder, and reached out to unbutton Mulder's shirt.

"What are you doing?" Mulder croaked, trying to twist away.

"Anything I like." Krycek grinned. "You're helpless. At my mercy. Turned on yet, Mulder?"

"No." Mulder's head thumped back against the wall as another backhander flashed across his jaw.

"I thought you liked to be hurt," Krycek said, in a mock wounded tone.

"Not like this. Not by you," Mulder hissed. How could he explain the difference between the loving eroticism of what Skinner did to him in the Playroom, and this raw, sickening violence that made his stomach churn?

"Aw, is my technique not as good as his then?" Krycek asked, backhanding him again. "Doesn't it hurt bad enough to be good?"

"Your technique is just fine, believe me," Mulder muttered wryly. "It hurts."

"Good." Krycek grinned. "But not good hurt, huh?"

"No. Was it supposed to be?" Mulder flinched from the expected blow, which never came. Krycek's grin got even wider.

"No, now you mention it - it wasn't," he laughed. "So, have you figured it all out yet, Mulder?" He asked.

"You wanted me out of town for some reason. Samantha was a lure..." Mulder muttered, his head lolling sideways, exhausted by the effort of talking through his swollen, bleeding lips.

"Not bad. Not good, but not bad." Krycek nodded. "Maybe you're not quite as clever as we thought. Maybe I should explain it to you."

"Please do," Mulder muttered. "If it means you'll stop punching me then I'm all ears."

"Good, because I think you're going to like this," Krycek said, with an amused gleam in his green eyes. "When I first reported back that you and Skinner were, how would you describe it? Fucking each other - is that delicate enough? Yeah. Screwing. Fucking each other up the ass. I think that sums it up. When I first reported back I thought they'd send the blackmail boys in for sure. Only it seems that your Master isn't exactly in the closet."

"No?" Mulder squinted up at Krycek with his good eye.

"You didn't know that?" Krycek patted Mulder's face. "Call yourself an investigator? Skinner came out to his bosses a couple of years back. He was allowed to stay on because the Director has an even bigger secret than you two perverts. Apparently he's just following in FBI tradition on that."

Mulder raised a questioning eyebrow.

"J Edgar isn't the only FBI Director with a penchant for wearing panties," Krycek winked. "I still think there's blackmail material there, but my bosses thought otherwise. Who knows, maybe they have little secrets of their own to worry about," he mused.

"Like murder, maybe, or selling out a whole planet?" Mulder suggested.

Krycek ignored him. "So...all they did was note your unusual new living arrangement and keep it on file for future reference. What I was then instructed to do was to lay a little trail for you. To keep you hot and ready, should we need your services."

"Services for what?" Mulder asked, blinking. His jaw ached from the effort of talking, and his whole face felt swollen and numb.

"We didn't know," Krycek shrugged. "You were being kept on hold - pending further developments. You know, you're like one of Pavlov's dogs, Mulder - all I have to do is mention Samantha and you come running, waiting to be fed."

"It's a character flaw," Mulder shrugged. "Both Skinner and Scully have pointed it out."

"But you don't listen to them," Krycek moved his hand reflexively within its black leather glove. Mulder braced himself. "You're an idiot, Mulder."

"I know." Mulder nodded. Krycek's gloved hand made contact with his jaw and the back of his head crashed against the wall.

"So," Krycek continued, with a malevolent smile. "Where were we?"

"I'm an idiot," Mulder murmured, spitting out a tooth.

"Right. An idiot we just needed to call in when the time was right." Krycek grabbed a fistful of Mulder's hair, and dragged his head back up again.

"And was the time right? Was there something pressing I was supposed to be doing back in DC right now?" Mulder asked.

"You?" Krycek raised an eyebrow. "No. Not you, Mulder, but your Master is due to give evidence in..." he glanced at his watch, "about 15 minutes at the trial of one of our scientists. My sources tell me he won't show - which is a good thing for us, because this guy's been working on a project for us for the past 8 years - we'd hate to see him go to waste."

He released his hold on Mulder's hair, and Mulder fell back against the wall, every last spark of resistance leaving his body. This hadn't even been about him. It had been about Skinner - about getting Skinner out of town so that he wouldn't testify in the trial. Mulder knew, for the first time in his life, without any shadow of a doubt, that he'd reached rock bottom. He lay there in the corner of the warehouse, with Krycek's foot resting on his abdomen, hardly breathing.

"Skinner will show up at the trial," he said.

"No he won't. He's still busy scouring Seattle for you. Did you think he'd leave you to my tender mercies?" Krycek grinned. "Of course not. Given a choice between his slave and his job, he chose you. Trust me on this."

"No, he didn't. I gave him his ring back. He won't have come looking for me," Mulder said in a dull tone, not really believing that.

"Oh, he came looking. He's been looking for you for over 24 hours straight, now. In a few hours, I'm going to leave here, and then I'm going to call him and tell him where you are and he's going to come and pick you up. Then he'll have to go back home and face the music - and see if he still has a job," Krycek grinned.

"No," Mulder whispered, bringing his knees up to his chest, and lying on his side in a fetal position, hardly breathing.

"Yes. And when he finds you..." Krycek kicked Mulder onto his back, and then sank down on top of his old enemy, and continued unbuttoning his shirt. "...you won't be quite the same slave he used to have." Krycek took a knife out of his pocket, and Mulder gazed blearily at his captor, a dull look in his eyes, not caring what would happen to him - beyond caring about anything any more. "You see, I want you to remember our time together," Krycek said, spitting on the blade, then polishing it. "I want to give you a memento of these past two days, something I think that both you and your Master will appreciate. So, I'm going to carve my initials in your skin, Mulder. Right here - over your heart. So every time your Master touches your body, he'll find that I'm there. Written in your flesh."

"No." The word was almost soundless as it escaped from Mulder's lips. He twisted away, struggled with every last ounce of strength in his body to resist. His body belonged to Skinner. **He** belonged to Skinner. They had talked about giving him a permanent mark, something that proclaimed him as Skinner's property, his slave, and now Krycek was making a travesty of that decision. Krycek was taking something good, something that had been sacred between them, a bond they had both sworn, and was turning it into something dark and evil, for his own purposes. Mulder twisted and turned, but he couldn't escape the line of fire that Krycek carved into his flesh. The knife slipped easily through the skin, making a clear "A", and then, next to it, a "K". At some point during the carving, Mulder mercifully passed out.

It was dark again when he awoke, and he knew instantly that he was alone. He moved, feebly, and his whole body protested the movement. His throat was dry and he longed for water. He realized that his

handcuffs were gone, and moved his hands, rubbing his sore wrists, and sitting up. His chest hurt, and he looked down on the bloody carving on his body and the memories flooded back. He drew his knees up to his chest, and put his hands around them, his teeth chattering from cold and shock. He didn't need a mirror to know that his face was swollen and puffy. One of his wrists hurt so much that he thought it might be broken. His ribs ached when he breathed, and he knew without trying, that he couldn't stand up. His foot knocked against something in the dark, and he put out a hand and felt it close around cool metal. His gun. Krycek had left him his gun. Whether for mercy, or revenge, he didn't know, but he sat and looked at it in the dark for a long moment, trying to think clearly.

He'd been here before, staring at a gun in the dark, trying to decide whether to take his own life, and this time there seemed to be just as much reason as the last.

He had betrayed his Master, the person he loved more than any other in the world. He had been drawn into a stupid trap, and only had himself to blame. Krycek, Skinner, Scully - they had all been right. He did this every time. Chased after Samantha's ghost, hunted each one down, and only ended up exposing them for the illusions they were. He felt small, pathetic and very alone, in the dark, in that warehouse. He raised the gun, and placed the cool metal against his head, just waiting. Something stopped him from pulling the trigger though. On some level he knew that this wasn't his decision to make, so he waited. He didn't know how long he sat there, alone with his failure, waiting to make that final journey into the unknown, but at some point a sound filtered into his consciousness, and he looked up.

The door to the warehouse opened, and he saw his Master, standing in the moonlight. Skinner's gun was drawn, and he was wearing a dark sweater and pants - combat clothes, for facing an enemy who had long since departed.

"It's all right. They've gone," Mulder whispered into the darkness.

"Fox?" Skinner was at his side within seconds. "Oh, shit, Fox. Look at you." Skinner knelt down beside him, and shone his flashlight onto his slave, taking in his condition swiftly. Mulder winced at the reflection of himself in Skinner's glasses. His face was swollen and bloody, his lip split, his jaw bruised, one eye cut and closed. "Are you okay? Can you walk?" Skinner asked.

"No, and no," Mulder shrugged. "Where's Scully?" he asked.

"Waiting outside with back up. Some of my subordinates actually obey my orders," Skinner said tersely. Mulder winced.

"I deserved that. I more than deserved it." He saw the dark bruise on Skinner's jaw and winced again. "If it's any consolation Krycek paid me back in kind - with interest," he murmured.

"I can see that," Skinner said softly, putting the flashlight down and running efficient, probing fingers over Mulder's body, checking his injuries. "Does anywhere hurt particularly?" He asked.

"No. Everywhere hurts particularly," Mulder muttered.

"I need to get you out of here," Skinner said.

"Don't bother." Mulder's fingers closed tightly around the gun. Skinner saw the movement, and sat back on his heels, his eyes narrowing. Mulder gave a half-smile. "I told him you wouldn't stay. I told him you'd go back and testify."

"Then you were wrong," Skinner said softly.

"I'm good at that," Mulder shrugged. "The scientist?"

"Our case collapsed when I didn't show up so they let him go," Skinner said tersely. "Insufficient evidence."

"I'm sorry. It's not good enough but it's all I can say." Mulder bit down hard on his lip. "There's something else, Master." He faltered, then pulled open his shirt, and showed Skinner the initials carved into his flesh. "I'm sorry. God, I'm sorry. I couldn't stop him," he whispered, the world going as dark as the expression in his Master's eyes. Skinner surveyed the imprint of another man's mark on his slave's body, without speaking. Mulder couldn't bear it. He knew how Skinner felt about marking him, and placing proof of his ownership on his slave's skin, and he didn't see how the big man could still want him after this. Mulder moved the gun onto his lap with the last ounce of his energy, and pointed it at his own heart. "Permission to die, Master," he requested softly.

Skinner gazed at him for a moment, his dark eyes cold, hard, and assessing behind his glasses. Mulder held that gaze hopefully, waiting for his answer, wanting his release - both from the pain he'd caused, and the pain he felt.

Then Skinner moved forward, and Mulder felt the gun being removed from his hand, and something cold being pressed onto his finger instead. He glanced down to see that his wedding ring was back in its rightful place. Skinner picked his slave up in his strong arms, and carried him bodily towards the door.

"Permission refused," he stated flatly.

## **End of Part 17**

### **Chapter End Notes:**

- . (Someone is soooo gonna get spanked for pulling Madam's tail! Mind you, that butt's just asking for it...)

## Contractual Obligations by Xanthe

### Author's Notes:

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To die for pic courtesy of **Sergeeva**. Send her feedback for creating such fabulous eye candy. This is Master Skinner from **24/7** exactly how I've always envisaged him. I loved it so much I wrote a scene in this chapter especially to go with it! Thank you so much for making this wonderful pic and the wonderful one at the end too, Sergeeva.

Posted 15th June, 2000

Quotation courtesy of my sweet Alex. None of this is beta'd. It's far too much fun to take seriously.

Many thanks to Emma, who told me a very intriguing tale that sparked this story off, and for the long discussions over high calorie snacks.

Thanks to CDavis for the tapes and the pics ;- ) Special thanks to Gaby for discussions, ideas and the walking cane <G>. Hugs to Phoebe and Sergeeva for cheering me up recently with such kind words.

**24/7** is an erotic fantasy and NOT a BDSM resource guide. The truth is sometimes exaggerated, or played with, for dramatic effect. For more information, please visit the **24/7 BDSM Glossary**.

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*"A truth, still apparent, though disregarded, that things move violently to their place, but calmly in their place. To put it another way, everything has its right home, the region that suits it, and, unless forcibly restrained, will move thither by a kind of homing instinct."*

**J. Winterson**  
**"Art and Lies"**

Mulder drifted in and out of consciousness as his Master carried him outside to the waiting car. He was dimly aware of Scully's sharp intake of breath, and the dark intensity of her blue eyes as she took in his injuries.

"It looks bad, but it isn't life threatening," Skinner told her gruffly.

"Are you sure?" she demanded, running towards them, clearly intent on checking her partner for damage then and there.

"I'm sure," Skinner said in a quiet, authoritative tone that brooked no disagreement. Scully tried anyway.

"Maybe I should..." she began.

Skinner strode towards the car, his big arms never faltering as he bore his slave's weight. "Agent Scully, trust me, I've had more than enough experience checking wounded men to know whether they need CPR or not. He's down, but he isn't out for the count yet," he snapped at her. Then his expression softened. "He'll be fine, Scully - physically at least," he murmured. Her eyes whirled blue and anxious as she took in the implications of this statement. She reached out a hand, and brushed aside Mulder's blood-stained shirt, then drew back in horror as she surveyed the carved mess on his chest.

"When I find Krycek..." she said, leaving the statement hanging ominously.

"I'll be right beside you," Skinner told her grimly.

Skinner slid his slave into the back seat of the car and got next to him, while Scully took the front seat, beside the Seattle field agent, who sped the car away from the warehouse and in the direction of the nearest hospital without saying a word.

Scully turned in her seat and spent the entire journey examining her almost comatose partner in silent anxiety. Mulder opened his one good eye sporadically, but closed it again quickly each time, unable to face either his partner's concern or his Master's granite face. Skinner sat beside his slave, one big arm around Mulder's shoulder, cradling his slave against his chest, but even half-comatose as he was, Mulder could feel the tension in those hard muscles beneath him.

He didn't remember much about the trip to the hospital. He woke again when they moved him from the car onto a gurney, crying out in pain. Skinner's jaw tightened in response to his slave's distress - a gesture so small that only a slave used to studying his Master intently at close quarters would have noticed it. Mulder turned his face away from his Master. He could see Scully walking beside the gurney, one hand holding his, but he wouldn't look at Skinner. He couldn't face seeing his Master's disappointment and sense of betrayal, and most of all he couldn't face looking at the dark bruise on Skinner's jaw, which was evidence of both.

They wheeled him into the Emergency Room, and he was aware of a nurse cutting off his clothes. Scully was lost in the melee, and then someone was getting a drip into his arm.

"You can't stay in here, sir," he heard a nurse say to Skinner.

"I'm not leaving," Skinner replied in a flat tone, and he took up position by Mulder's head, his arms crossed over his chest, completely immovable. The nurse looked at him for a moment, clearly wondering whether to press the matter further.

"Are you a relative, sir?" She asked.

"Yes," Skinner stated.

"His brother?" She questioned, reaching for her notes.

"No. He belongs to me," Skinner said. "I'm responsible for him. He's mine - and I'm not leaving, so you'll have to work around me."

She gazed at him wide eyed for a moment, and then backed away, clearly startled. If it had been any other occasion, Mulder thought he might even have laughed at the expression on her face. He drifted off again, and when he came to, he found that he was bare-chested, and someone was leaning over the carved flesh on his chest, sewing up the wound. He flushed as he realized that his nipple rings were clearly visible but that was the least of his problems right now. Scully was nowhere in sight, but Skinner was standing immobile beside him, his arms still crossed over his chest.

"Someone did a good job carving him up," the doctor working on him murmured. Mulder winced, as he noticed his Master's jaw move spasmodically again, but still Skinner didn't speak.

"Get rid of it for me...please," Mulder begged weakly, his voice hardly audible through his swollen, cut lip.

"We can tidy it up a bit - you'll always have the scar, but we can make it less..." the doctor spoke, but Mulder stopped taking in the words after hearing that he'd always have the scar. He drifted off into merciful blackness, unable to face the implications of bearing those initials seared into his skin for the rest of his life. Even if Skinner still kept him, those marks in his flesh would always come between them, livid and permanent reminders of what he'd done and what had been done to him.

When he regained consciousness he was in a small, private hospital room. Scully was sitting beside his bed, and Skinner was gazing sightlessly out of the window. He cleared his throat, and Scully pressed a glass of water to his lips.

"Sorry," he whispered to her, grabbing her hand and squeezing it.

"Good," she said, with mock severity. "It'll take you more than muffins to buy yourself out of this one, Mulder."

"I know." He managed a faint grin, but didn't even dare look in his Master's direction.

"Oh, Mulder. You have no idea how worried we were." Her fingers closed around his, gently caressing his hand.

"No...sorry," he whispered again.

"Both of us," she added meaningfully, looking in Skinner's direction. Skinner turned, and glanced at her, a baleful expression in his dark eyes. Scully gave Mulder a worried frown and got up.

"I think I should leave you two alone," she murmured, leaning forward and planting a kiss on Mulder's forehead. He couldn't bring himself to let go of her hand. He didn't want her to leave. He didn't want to

have the conversation that he knew was coming next, but her hand slid out from his and then she was gone. He turned his face away to stare at the wall, still unable to meet his Master's eye.

Skinner came over to the bed and stood, staring down on his slave for a moment.

"Fox, look at me," he said softly. Mulder felt paralysed. He couldn't move, and he could feel the tears pricking against the back of his eyes, and blinked them away, angrily. "Fox." His Master's voice was stern and compelling, but still Mulder didn't move. Then he felt a hand on his chin, and his face was pulled around, firmly, but gently, to face his Master. He closed his eyes.

"Fox - if you can't face what you've done, then you'll never put this behind you," Skinner said softly. "You'll never learn, or move on. Now look at me, or I swear I'll walk out of this room and tear up those contracts that bind us."

"Maybe that would be best," Mulder replied softly.

"That's for me to decide," Skinner said, in a dark, granite-toned voice. "You've never been a coward in your life, Fox. Now, face me."

It took all his strength of will to open his eyes and look up at his Master. Skinner looked tired, and he had a streak of Mulder's blood still on his cheek. The bruise on his jaw was purple and raised.

"Thank you." Skinner sat down on the bed, and put a gentle hand on his slave's forehead, pushing the blood stained hair away from Mulder's face.

"Sorr..." Mulder began, but Skinner put a finger over his lips, quelling the word.

"You've said it more than enough times already, and I know you mean it, but it isn't going to mend anything," Skinner told him, his dark eyes serious.

Mulder nodded. He noticed for the first time that one of his arms was bandaged up to the elbow, one hand completely swathed in white. "You have badly bruised ribs, and a concussion," Skinner informed him, in a matter of fact tone. "You also have multiple cuts and bruises, and your left foot is badly swollen - we think it was stamped on," he explained, when he saw Mulder's questioning look. A memory of passing out amid the most excruciating pain in his foot came back to Mulder and he nodded. "Ditto your hand - one broken finger, one badly strained and bruised, and some torn tendons" Skinner informed him. "Apart from that - you're fine." He managed the faintest shadow of a smile.

"Except for..." Mulder gestured to the wound on his chest, which was covered with a bandage.

"Except for where Krycek carved his initials into you, yes," Skinner stated bluntly. Mulder closed his eyes again, then opened them when Skinner tapped his head. "It happened," Skinner said. "Accept that."

"I'm not sure I can," Mulder confessed.

"You can," Skinner told him. "You have no choice. I'm going to make you face up to every last thing that happened here, Fox, and it won't be easy. If you can't face that process, say so now."

"I can," Mulder replied, relieved to find that his Master still intended to keep him. "I promise that I can."

"It won't be that easy," Skinner's terse tone was at odds with the gentle motion of his fingers along the side of Mulder's face. "Let me explain, and then we'll see if you're so ready to accept my terms. Firstly - unquestioning obedience isn't just a requirement during your convalescence - it's a necessity. There is no leeway. There will be no smart-ass comments, no talking back, no deceit and most of all, no disobedience. My word will be your command, my will your every waking hour. If you thought I was tough on you before, then think again. You don't know what tough is, boy."

"Yes, Master." Mulder swallowed hard.

"Good." Skinner nodded. "Because I'm going to be riding you hard, Fox."

Mulder was curiously comforted by those words, and he sank back into the pillows, his body relaxing. Skinner's next words were less reassuring though.

"Secondly, we're dealing with this. We're dealing with every single issue. We're not avoiding it, and we're not letting it go. We're talking about it until you want to scream, and I'll make you face every last thing that happened here. It won't just be words either - you'll need to back those up with actions."

"What kind of actions?" Mulder asked.

"We'll see when the time comes," Skinner told him. "That's enough serious talk for now," he said, his hand smoothing Mulder's hair back again. "Do you agree to those terms, Fox?" Mulder nodded, without even thinking about it. Skinner exhaled deeply.

"All right, little one," he murmured, his tone softening. "For the next few days I want you to concentrate on getting well. We won't talk about this again until we get home. I don't want you to think about it, or brood on it. I just want you to get better. When you're home, then we will have another, serious discussion, but until then, we won't mention this again. Understood?"

Mulder nodded, hesitantly. "Not thinking about it...not brooding...will be hard, Master," he said.

"Tough." Skinner took hold of Mulder's bruised chin gently between his fingers. "I said this wouldn't be easy and it won't. It'll be the hardest thing you've ever done."

Mulder swallowed, hard, then nodded, brushing his bandaged hand across his face, swiping pointlessly at unshed tears that he refused to allow to fall.

"Good boy." Skinner said. "Now, come here." Skinner wrapped his big arms around Mulder's shaking shoulders and held him against his chest. Mulder tensed, then gave in and allowed himself to be held. Skinner's hands ran up and down his back, but he didn't speak and in the end, Mulder finally gave in to the wordless comfort, knowing he didn't deserve it. After what seemed like hours, Skinner finally released him and pushed him back down onto the pillows.

"Get some rest," Skinner ordered.

Mulder made a face. "I hate hospitals. Can we go home soon?" Mulder asked, wishing more than anything that he could fast forward through his life for the next few days, and get straight to the big, serious chat his Master had promised him, just to avoid the excruciating wait. "I **am** going home with you, aren't I?" He asked, suddenly realizing there was nothing he could take for granted about their relationship any more. Too many variables had changed.

"Of course," Skinner replied, "but you're not well enough to travel yet. Give it a few more days and then I'll take you home. I wouldn't be so keen to get there if I were you though, boy. There will be some significant changes when we get back."

"I know." Mulder swallowed again.

"Don't think about that now," Skinner told him gently.

"Master, what will happen about your job?" Mulder asked, needing to know.

"That's for me to worry about," Skinner replied tersely. "Everyone makes their choices, Fox. You made yours, and I made mine. I can live with the ramifications of my decision - whatever they might be. Know this though, boy." He held Mulder's face firmly between his hands. "My decision was just that - mine. My responsibility. Not yours." He got up and was about to move away to beckon Scully back into the room, when Mulder grabbed his Master's hand and moved it up to his lips. He kissed the beloved fingers with all the devotion he had, ignoring the protest of his cut, swollen lip.

"Thank you," he whispered.

The next days passed slowly as Mulder struggled back to health. He was tired, his whole body in a state of shock after the beating he'd received. When he looked in the mirror, he barely recognized himself. He found it hard to eat, and he was getting thinner, but even apart from that, the bruises on his face were now so multi-colored that they lent his features a grotesque rainbow hue. He still couldn't walk on his foot, or do much with his hand, and he couldn't even bring himself to look at the carving on his chest. He closed his eyes whenever the dressing was changed and refused to look at it. His days were spent playing scrabble with Scully, or being read to by Skinner. He was too tired to read anything himself, and one eye was still too bloodshot to see clearly. Besides, he loved listening to his Master's deep, mellifluous tones which were as soothing as any caress and cocooned him from thought and anxiety. When Skinner was with him, he managed not to worry about what the future would bring, but alone at night, on his own, the demons came out to play and he often didn't sleep. His tears remained unshed as well. He couldn't be kind enough to himself to indulge in the luxury of giving into them.

After several days he was allowed out of the hospital, under strict instructions that his convalescence continue at home for the next three weeks at least.

"Don't worry, Doctor," Skinner said grimly. "I'll see that he rests."

"Good - another few weeks and he'll be fine." The doctor smiled, and handed Mulder an envelope. Mulder opened it, and emptied the contents into the palm of his hand, then flushed. The envelope contained his nipple rings - which they'd removed when bandaging his chest - and his cock ring. He didn't even like to **think** about when they'd removed that.

"Uh...thanks," he croaked, ducking his head to hide his utter embarrassment. The doctor's eyes twinkled with barely suppressed mirth, but Skinner's expression was as granite and unrelenting as ever, no trace of amusement in his eyes. At least they'd allowed him to keep his collar and wedding ring, Mulder thought to himself, fingering the smooth surface of his collar with his fingertip as Skinner wheeled him out of the hospital in a wheelchair. He longed to put the other symbols of his slavery on as well, and chafed against the tedium of the journey ahead. Scully had returned to DC the day before and he just wanted to be home. It was surprising how easily the Crystal City apartments had become just that - home. He spent the entire airplane journey with his head resting against the window, staring at the clouds as they puffed past, thinking of home. It didn't matter what would happen between him and his Master when they got back - he just wanted to be there, in familiar surroundings, in a place he loved.

A few hours later, Skinner pushed his slave along the corridor to the 17th floor apartment. Mulder's foot injury wasn't so bad that he couldn't have walked with a cane, but that would have placed too much pressure on his injured hand and ribs so he was resigned to needing the chair - for now at least. He hated it, but he didn't dare tackle Skinner on the subject. Somehow he knew that wouldn't be well received. They reached the apartment, and Skinner fished for the key in his pocket, and opened the door, then pushed Mulder inside. There was silence, and then the room erupted, in a blaze of whistling and a round of applause. Mulder blinked. There was a banner above the fireplace, proclaiming: "Welcome Home Mulder!" in bright, cheery red lettering, and a small crowd of people gathered around the table, which contained enough food and drink to feed an army.

"What's this?" Mulder gasped in surprise.

"Hey, you didn't think I'd let my buddy come home after being beaten to a pulp by some psycho without laying on a surprise party for him, did ya?" Ian grinned, coming forward. His tone of voice was joking, but it was clear that he was visibly shocked by Mulder's frail appearance. He crouched down beside the wheelchair, and laid a hand on his friend's arm. "It's good to see you again, Mulder. I missed you," he said sincerely, his eyes serious.

"Thanks," Mulder said softly, glancing around the room.

He'd been injured many times before and had always gone home to an empty apartment - or worse, to an apartment containing his Mom. She had clearly felt it was her duty to look after him, but had then proceeded to make him feel much worse until he ended up by driving her out with his impossible moods and unpredictable temper - he had never exactly been a good patient after all. This was so...different. There was a throng of people: Perry, who was always so laid back he was practically comatose, was leaning against the wall, with a drink in his hand. Murray and Hammer were both there, and Donald and Elliott, both immaculately dressed in matching gray suits with pink handkerchiefs in their breast pockets which made Mulder smile. Elaine was there, with her sub in tow. Even Mrs. Asher was there. Mulder smiled despite himself, and risked a glance at his Master from under his eyelashes, wondering if Skinner had been in on the plans for the surprise party. He guessed so, considering that Ian had let himself in to the apartment to arrange it, but Mulder was under no illusions about what would happen now that they were home. He knew that Skinner would be addressing their future sooner, rather than later.

"I invited Lee and Franklin but they couldn't make it. I hope you aren't too disappointed," Ian joked.

Mulder pulled a face. "Somehow I think I'll survive their absence," he replied.

Ian snorted in delight, clearly pleased to have his friend back. "And I know you have some other friends, buddy - vanilla friends," Ian winked. "I didn't know whether to invite them or not though. I wasn't sure if they knew about your...uh, living arrangement."

"No. They don't," Mulder admitted, finding that one more thing to feel guilty about as he recalled telling the Lone Gunmen to only call him on his cellphone and not to drop by his apartment any more. "I suppose I should have told them. I didn't...know how," he broke off.

Ian gave an artificial smile, clearly concerned about Mulder's mental state, then he handed him a parcel. "Here, buddy. Welcome home present."

"What the hell is it?" Mulder frowned, fingering the long, slender package. "A fishing rod?"

"No...I'm sure you've more than got your hands full with the rod you've already got," Ian quipped, glancing at Skinner. Mulder shot him a look, and ripped open the package to find a cane - of the walking variety.

"I thought you might need it for when you get rid of this thing." Ian gestured to the wheelchair. Mulder gave him an incredulous look, wondering why the hell his friend thought that he'd want such a utilitarian present. "Oh, you didn't think I'd give you any old walking cane did ya?" Ian grinned. "This is a special S&M cane, buddy. Look!" He unscrewed the smooth, brown handle, to reveal a hollow center to the cane, and when he held it upside down, a beautiful, slim, very whippy switch fell out. "Finest there is," Ian said, swishing it through the air a couple of times - catching Perry's eye as he did so and giving his own Master a broad grin. "Not only that," Ian said, "the handle doubles up as a highly efficient butt plug too!" Mulder stared at the gift for a moment, his mouth opening and shutting in a plausible imitation of one of his fish.

"I'm speechless," he said at last, managing a faint smile.

"Knew you would be, buddy!" Ian thumped him playfully on the back, while he reassembled the cane. "So, when you and the big guy next take a walk, Walter has something to hand should his slave require some on the spot discipline!" He handed Mulder back the cane, a mischievous gleam in his eye.

Mulder shook his head, and thanked his friend for the gift, but he still couldn't tear his eyes away from his Master, wondering whether the image Ian painted of him and his Master doing something so mundane and domestic as taking a walk, would ever happen. Or, come to that, whether his Master even intended to discipline him again. As that was inextricably bound up with the intimacy of their living arrangement, he didn't know whether it would be part of what Skinner planned for him. Hell, he wasn't sure **what** Skinner had in mind for him from now on. For all he knew he'd be tied to a post to receive a workout with the bullwhip as soon as he was well enough. He wasn't sure whether it dreaded that more or less than the thought that Skinner might never discipline him again.

He was distracted from his reverie by Elaine, who came up to him, and gave him a firm kiss. "Silly boy," was all she said, as her sub, David, hovered at her elbow, holding her drink and plate of food.

Mulder smiled at her, enjoying the warmth of her affection. "I know," he muttered. "Does everyone else know?" he asked her anxiously.

"The full details? No," she said softly. "All they know is that you were hurt by an old enemy in the line of duty. They don't know any of the circumstances. I only know because Walter phoned me about it - he had to speak to someone. He was out of his mind with worry...and guilt," she added, looking concerned.

"Guilt?" Mulder glanced up at her in surprise.

"You're his. You know how seriously he takes his responsibilities. He thinks he should have placed you in bondage to prevent you leaving that night."

"He gave me the benefit of the doubt instead," Mulder told her miserably. "And felt the butt of my gun on his jaw for his pains."

"Well, you know what they say. No good deed goes unpunished." She shook her head ruefully and kissed him again. He found his face cushioned against her large, full breasts, which wasn't an uncomfortable place to be, he decided. It had been a long time since his mother had held him in such a way, and he was surprised by how comforting it was. "You'll be fine. Both of you," she said, drawing back, and gently rubbing Mulder's shoulder. "Don't push him right now though, Mulder, because I don't think he has a whole lot of that legendary patience left."

"I wouldn't dare," Mulder retorted.

He didn't take his eyes off his Master, and noticed when Skinner quietly slipped away from the party, and disappeared into the kitchen. Mulder wheeled himself over, and glanced inside to see his Master engaged in a loving reunion with Wanda. The little cat was beside herself with glee to have her slave back again, and Skinner was holding her tightly, showering her with quiet, heartfelt kisses. Mulder could tell by the way his Master was standing that the other man was tense.

"She missed you," he said, surprising himself. He hadn't intended to break into the private moment between Skinner and his little Mistress.

Skinner turned, and gave him a slight smile. "And you," he said, holding out the cat to Mulder. Wanda looked at him, and he looked at her for several seconds.

"Hello, cat," Mulder said at last. She gazed at him steadily and then blinked solemnly. He tickled her behind the ears and then backed the wheelchair out of the room.

"Another half an hour, Fox," Skinner warned as he left. Mulder nodded.

Skinner was true to his word, and half an hour later he emerged from the kitchen, where he'd spent the time alone, and bade farewell to their guests. Mulder watched them go, a gnawing anxiety growing in the pit of his stomach.

"Give us a call when you're bored," Ian said, cuffing Mulder lightly on the side of his head.

"Yeah. I will." Mulder nodded, suddenly feeling very tired. It had been a long journey, and his body still ached all over. He wondered what would happen next. Where would he sleep? And what exactly was Skinner going to expect of him? His Master closed the door behind the last of their guests, and then turned back to him, and fixed him with a speculative look.

"All right, Fox. You're tired. Time for bed," he said.

"It's only 8 o'clock..." Mulder began, then bit on his lip. "Yes, Master," he murmured.

"I considered having you sleep on the couch down here, but I need to keep more of an eye on you than that, so you'll be sleeping in my room until further notice," Skinner told him. Mulder nodded, the joy of receiving that news being short lived, as Skinner continued. "I'll carry you up there now, and then we'll talk," his Master said.

Mulder nodded again. He'd been waiting for this.

Skinner swung his slave into his arms and carried him slowly up the stairs. Mulder was impressed by his Master's strength - he wasn't exactly a lightweight and he was almost as tall as Skinner even if he was much slighter. Skinner placed him on the bed, and aided his slave in undressing, then helped him into the bathroom to wash up and clean his teeth before helping him to return to bed. Mulder hated being this dependent on anyone, and had to bite back the instinctive irritation caused by his physical frailty. When Mulder was settled, Skinner sat down in the armchair facing him, and regarded him for a long moment.

"I want to tell you how things are going to be, Fox," he said.

"You said things would change." Mulder felt his stomach flip anxiously. "In what way, Master?"

"Well, firstly in the way you address me," Skinner told him. "You've lost the right to call me Master, Fox. You gave that up when you took your ring off."

"How am I to address you then?" Mulder asked, taken by surprise both by that statement and the implications of it.

"You can call me 'sir', like you used to," Skinner said.

Mulder swallowed hard. "What am I if not your slave?" he asked, feeling as if his whole world had fallen apart.

"Oh, you'll always be my slave, boy," Skinner said, "for as long as you live. Nothing can change that." Skinner stood up, and his face was grave as he came over to the bed and sat down beside Mulder. "You'll have to earn the right to call me 'Master' again, Fox," he stated gently, but implacably.

Mulder felt as if all the air had been forcibly removed from his body. "Earn it, M...sir?" he managed to stammer.

"Yes. By showing me that you've learned from what happened, by going wherever I take you, however painful, and by your complete, and unquestioning obedience," Skinner said, his expression the hardest and most determined that Mulder had ever seen it. "I'm taking you back to basics, boy. I've always given you a certain amount of latitude, based on the level of trust between us, but now that's gone. The trust has been shattered. It can be rebuilt, but it will take a while. That is why, from now on, you are going to obey the contract you signed to the letter. Quote me Clause 5 of your contract, Fox."

"The slave understands that all that has, and all that he does, shall now move from right to privilege, granted only as He wishes, and only to the extent that He finds useful," Mulder gabbled, not sure what the significance of that was, still reeling from his Master's words about trust.

"Well, I'm withdrawing all privileges," Skinner said firmly. "I don't think you'll realize just how many you had until you lose them. You have no privileges from now on, Fox. You have only basic and complete slavery- at its lowest possible level. This is a probationary period. My respect for you doesn't come as standard - it has to be won. You've relinquished it for now, and I'm hoping that by dint of some hard work, you'll earn it back."

"And if I don't?" Mulder hardly dared ask that question.

"Then I'll rescind the contracts we signed," Skinner told him, without hesitation. "I mean that, Fox. I won't go forward without being able to trust you. I think you deserve more than that and I sure as hell know that I do."

Mulder closed his eyes, hardly able to breathe. "What about...?" He began, glancing at the empty space beside him in the bed.

"Sex? That will depend. You're not well enough yet in any case. As for affection." Skinner reached out and cupped Mulder's cheek with a tender hand. "That will never be withdrawn. You have my support, Fox, while we go through this together, and you have my love - always. Do you understand me?"

"Yes," Mulder whispered. "I guess. Can I tell you that I'm scared?"

"You can tell me anything. There is nothing I won't help you with. It's if you withdraw, afraid of dealing with these issues, that you'll fail," Skinner said. He picked up Mulder's hand and fingered his ring. "I put this back on you to signify that you are still mine, that the bond between us, although damaged, still exists. This ring is a traditional symbol, of both belonging and love - you can keep it," Skinner stated. "You do belong to me, and you are most certainly loved. I won't take that away from you and you'll need a symbol of our bond to get you through the next few weeks. However...your collar is a traditional symbol of your slavery, granted by me as a gift to my slave. You've dishonored both me, and your condition as my slave, so I'm taking it away from you. You'll have to earn it back."

Those words hit Mulder the hardest, and his hand went involuntarily to the chain around his neck. He knew he'd feel naked without it. Lost. "Please...don't," he whispered.

"I have to," Skinner replied, his dark eyes unwavering as he reached out and placed his hands on the collar. "If you apply yourself to this process, then I'll put it back on you, in a formal collaring ceremony, in front of witnesses." His fingers found the link and he undid the collar, and removed it, the precious metal disappearing into his big palm. Mulder bowed his head, feeling as if he'd lost a part of himself.

"I'll make you proud of me again, sir," he murmured, fighting the tears.

"I've never stopped being proud of you, little one, and I've never stopped loving you," Skinner told him, placing the collar on the night stand, then sliding his hands into Mulder's hair, and caressing him gently. "However there are always penalties, and you have to take responsibility for your decisions, Fox. I won't make it easy for you."

"No, sir." Mulder wanted to say more, but he was too lost, and tired, and felt too miserable.

"Fox - listen to me. I'll demand a lot from you in the next few weeks. I'll make you do things that you're resentful of, and that you think you can't do. I'll insist on your total and unquestioning obedience. No ifs or buts. No playing. Just you, trying to apply yourself to earning your collar and fulfilling the terms of your contract down to the last crossed 't' and dotted 'i'. Until then, you're a slave in the most abject and basic sense of the word, granted no privileges by an indulgent Master. Don't take **anything** for granted, boy. If you're in any doubt, then ask."

"No rights?" Mulder asked, trying to get his head around that concept. "Do I have to ask your permission to do everything? Is that what you mean, sir?"

"Near enough." Skinner's face remained serious. "You'll ask for permission to use the bathroom, to eat, to drink - every single thing. Don't assume **anything**, Fox. Not one thing. We're starting again from scratch, and this time you'll come to appreciate both the rights and the responsibilities contained in your contract. I made a mistake with you first time around. I didn't enforce your contract the way I should have done. I allowed you too much freedom, and too many choices, instead of giving you a thorough grounding in your slavery, and allowing you more freedom later, when you'd done more to earn it. All that has changed. I want you to be in no doubt about what exactly you are and what I expect from you."

"Yes, sir." Mulder was too tired to chafe under the idea of these restrictions, and, if he was honest, he didn't want to. He welcomed the utter grounding such a routine would give him. It was an escape of sorts, from the overwhelming sense of guilt and self-loathing he was currently experiencing. Skinner was taking every burden away from him, and leaving him with nothing save his Master's will and word. It was a relief. "Can I sleep now, M...sir?" Mulder asked, suddenly feeling desperately tired.

"I think that would be a good idea, yes," Skinner said. "Goodnight, boy." He leaned over and kissed his slave firmly on the lips. Mulder drank of his Master's touch as if it were his life force. Then Skinner drew back, and got up.

"Aren't you staying?" Mulder asked.

"No. I have a meeting to prepare for. I'm seeing the Director at 11 am tomorrow to discuss my future at the Bureau."

"Will there be a formal OPC hearing?" Mulder asked anxiously.

"I have no idea," Skinner shrugged. "Perhaps, a more informal hearing - in front of Jana Cassidy and various other peers. Either way, I need to be prepared. Now, sleep."

He held the sheets while Mulder slid further down the bed, then carefully tucked his slave in. Then he turned off the bedside lamp, and quietly left the room.

Mulder opened his eyes when his Master had gone, and reached out to touch the gold collar lying on the night stand where Skinner had left it. He fingered the smooth metal, finding the engraving of his name, and it was only then that he broke down and gave way to the tears he'd been fighting for days...maybe, if he was honest, years.

Mulder cried for hours. They were tears of complete despair. He was suddenly aware that if he had thought that he had reached rock bottom back at that warehouse, he had been wrong. Having his collar removed, seeing his Master's hurt, and experiencing the other man's disappointment in him, was far worse. On some level, it was the catharsis that he needed though. If Skinner had told him that everything was all right, and that it could all be as it had been before, Mulder's own sense of guilt would have kicked in, and he knew the misery that always resulted when that particular emotion was allowed to go unchecked. Skinner was taking Mulder's guilt from him, by acknowledging it, not glossing over it, or pretending it didn't exist. By both punishing and encouraging him, he was forcing his slave to face his issues rather than run. Mulder had no doubt that it would be a painful process, but on some deep and profound level, he was comforted by the knowledge that running wasn't an option any more. Skinner had taken that away from him, along with everything else.

The worst of his racking sobs had subsided by the time he heard his Master return to the bedroom three hours later, but the evidence of his tears was clear on his face. He buried his face in his sopping wet pillow, and tried to keep quiet. He heard Skinner walking around the room, and the sounds of his Master undressing and then using the bathroom. Finally, Skinner returned to the bedroom. Mulder expected his Master to get into the bed, and was therefore surprised when instead, Skinner sat down in the armchair beside him, and exhaled a long, deep sigh. He was aware of his Master looking at him, and moved his face, unable to feign sleep under such intense scrutiny. Skinner's eyes narrowed as he took in Mulder's swollen eyes, and tear stained cheeks, and he flicked on the lamp on the nightstand, and frowned down on his slave.

"I don't believe," Skinner murmured, wiping one blunt finger over Mulder's wet cheeks, "that I gave you permission to cry."

Mulder looked at him in silent shock for a moment. "I didn't realize I should ask for it, M...sir," he muttered.

"I told you, boy. You'll ask for permission for **everything** from now on," Skinner growled, sitting Mulder up carefully, and examining the sodden pillow he had been resting on. "You can't sleep on this all night," he remonstrated.

Mulder bit on his lip. "I'm sorry about the pillow," he offered, struggling between resentment at what seemed to be an inhuman demand, and a continuation of his abject misery.

Skinner removed the pillow, and disappeared into the guest bedroom, returning a few seconds later with a fresh one. "Next time you want to cry - ask," he ordered.

Mulder was dumbstruck, trying to take in the implications of such far-reaching authority over his every tiny action, to say nothing of his embarrassment at being found crying. He hated anyone seeing him cry - even his Master. Having Skinner witness his every last emotion had been one of the things he'd found hardest about his slavery, and now that he was in this dark place emotionally, it was even worse. He had a moment of longing for the silent emptiness of his own apartment. He could have retreated there, hidden from the demons that haunted him until he got them under control. Skinner wasn't allowing him to do that. He was keeping him visible, keeping him from hiding, and it was so damn hard.

"I would have given you permission," Skinner continued. "I would also have insisted upon staying in attendance until you were through. Are you through?"

Mulder bit on his lip again, then nodded. He hadn't wanted sympathy, and his Master's matter of fact approach to the subject was at least something he could accept without feeling even more guilt. He allowed Skinner to settle him back down under the covers again, and watched, uncomprehending, as his Master opened the drawer in his night stand and withdrew a length of thin chain and a leather cuff. Skinner came back to his slave's side of the bed, and wordlessly fastened the cuff onto Mulder's good wrist. He attached the chain to it, and then locked it onto the headboard. The chain was long, and there was plenty of room for Mulder to move around the bed, and its immediate environs, but he clearly wouldn't be leaving the room without his Master's permission.

"You'll sleep in chains until you earn back your rights," Skinner told him. "In fact, you can count on spending a lot of your time in bondage from now on. It's the only way to treat a runaway slave."

Mulder swallowed hard, and nodded. Rather than resenting the confinement, he welcomed it. Skinner had made a cradle of his slavery – a place to keep him warm, safe, and grounded. Mulder knew just how close he was to spinning out of control right now.

"If you need to use the bathroom, you'll wake me and ask permission," Skinner added. Mulder nodded again, then moved onto his side, trying to get used to the pull of the chain and the clinking sound it made whenever he moved. It felt strangely reassuring. He doubted his own judgement so much after what Krycek had put him through that it felt good to have the responsibility of decisions taken away from him. He didn't want to have even the temptation of leaving this place, or his Master, and running back into the dark emptiness that had been his life before he became Skinner's slave.

Mulder watched as his Master turned off the lamp, and he felt the big man get into bed beside him. Mulder stiffened, feeling unwelcome in this bed. He knew that he was only here so that Skinner could keep an eye on him, which was yet another indication of how little his Master trusted him. He hadn't earned the right to be here, as he'd earned previous nights in this bed, and he dreaded a whole night spent frozen in one place so as not to wake his Master. He expected Skinner to turn over, and put both his back, and considerable distance between Master and slave, but instead Skinner occupied the center of the bed, and reached out for his slave, pulling him close against his chest, amid the metallic clinking of his bonds. Mulder went very still, his whole body tensing, and was surprised a few seconds later to feel the flat of his Master's hand exploding with a sharp sting against his boxer short clad bottom.

"Relax," Skinner ordered in a gruff tone.

"Yes, sir," Mulder murmured, feeling curiously reassured. He melted back against his Master's chest, revelling in the warmth, and solid, reassuring comfort of that large, familiar body. Skinner didn't stroke, or caress his slave, but he rested his hands firmly on Mulder's torso, keeping his slave anchored against him. Mulder slept.

Mulder was woken at 9 am by the sheet being pulled away from his body, letting in a freezing draft.

"What...?" He looked up blearily, to find that his Master was already dressed, and looming over him.

"Time to get up, boy. You may be resting, but you aren't spending your whole day in bed," Skinner told him tersely, unlocking Mulder's cuff from the chain but leaving it on his wrist. "You'll get up, get washed, and dressed, and then I'll take you downstairs and you can sit on the couch under a blanket."

"Yes, Master," Mulder answered automatically, without even thinking about it. A second later, his boxers were yanked down and his butt was assaulted by two firm slaps on either cheek.

"Remember your place, slave," Skinner snapped.

"Yes, **sir!**" Mulder responded promptly.

"Don't even imagine that your physical condition exempts you from corporal punishment," Skinner told him, as he helped his slave from the bed. "It doesn't - I might not take anything more harmful than my hand to your butt for the next few days, but you can expect to feel that aplenty if you forget yourself."

"Yes, sir," Mulder whispered. In his current condition his libido had completely gone into hibernation, and Skinner's slaps gave him no erotic thrill whatsoever. They just stung - which was all the more incentive to stay on his Master's good side.

Skinner helped him into the bathroom, and Mulder clung on to the basin while he washed himself. His Master saw to it that his slave was thoroughly clean, and then helped him back to the bedroom to get dressed. Mulder flushed, hating the process of being helped, and feeling somehow that it was fundamentally wrong. He was used to dressing Skinner and waiting on him - the order of his world had been turned upside down.

When Mulder was clad in sweatpants and a tee-shirt, Skinner scooped him up again and carried him down the stairs. He placed his slave on the couch, and covered him with a comforter, piling a couple of cushions behind him, then disappeared. He returned with two more cuffs and a length of chain. He attached the new cuffs to Mulder's ankles, then to each other with a long loop of chain, before fastening both ankle cuffs to his wrist cuff with another piece of chain. It was loose enough to be comfortable, but all the same, it would prevent Mulder from going anywhere very fast. Mulder bit on his lip, dismayed by the level of distrust his Master was showing in him, but knowing, also, that he deserved it - and if they were ever going to recover their old intimacy then he had to take his punishment without argument. He was more than willing to do that. Deep down, he knew that he even welcomed it. While Skinner was punishing him, it relieved the need for him to punish himself, and that afforded him some peace of mind at least.

Skinner went into the kitchen and emerged a few minutes later with a bowl of oatmeal, and a plate of toast. Mulder realized, with a sinking heart, that his Master intended to feed him by hand.

"I **can** feed myself," he muttered, to be greeted by a hard look from his Master.

"If you were asking permission to do so, then I can inform you that it's been denied," Skinner told him, spooning some oatmeal to his slave's lips. Mulder accepted it, and swallowed down everything his Master gave him. He wasn't hungry, and if Skinner had given him the slightest leeway, he would have passed on breakfast altogether. His Master was very insistent though, and the stakes were too high for Mulder to give any hint of disobedience. When he'd finished, Skinner smiled, and ruffled his hair with his hand.

"Good boy," he murmured, dropping a kiss on Mulder's head as he got up to return the empty dishes to the kitchen. Then he picked up his jacket from the back of a chair, and put it on. Mulder itched to smooth the collar down, as he would have done if he had been dressing his Master, as he so often used to do. He longed to be better so he could do so again - if his Master would allow him. Somehow he knew that was a privilege, rather than a duty, and Skinner had withdrawn all his privileges.

"All right - here are my orders," Skinner said, standing over his slave, and looking down on him. "You're confined to the couch today. Elaine will be here shortly - she'll spend the morning with you, and Perry will be here this afternoon. Until you're able to move around the place more easily, someone will be with you whenever I'm not here to help you to the bathroom. You'll ask for their assistance - they've both seen everything you've got anyway. You do not need to entertain them - your main duty is to rest. Nor should you expect them to entertain you - they're giving up their free time to sit with you and they'll probably bring work over with them. You will not interrupt them if they want to work. Understood?" Mulder nodded, wondering whether Perry and Elaine knew that he was under these kinds of restrictions, and wondering also, whether they were part of an informal suicide watch. Surely his Master knew there was no need for **that**? Mulder had fought that particular demon at the warehouse, and had found that Skinner's mastery over him extended even unto death. "I've also asked Perry to change your dressing." Skinner pointed at Mulder's chest wound.

Mulder looked up sharply, feeling angry. "You **told** Perry about that?" He snarled, dreading showing anyone the carved initials on his chest that he couldn't even bear to look at himself.

"Yes," Skinner replied smoothly, unfazed by his slave's display of temper. "You're mine, boy. Your body belongs to me. I'll have whoever the hell I like look at it. Any arguments?"

"I don't want him seeing it. I don't want anybody fucking well knowing about it!" Mulder snapped.

"Tough. As I recall, your contract states that I can do what I like with you. I'm exercising that prerogative," Skinner informed him tersely. Mulder bowed his head. This man was so different to the Master he had known before Seattle. Skinner was riding him every bit as hard as he had promised. He wasn't giving his slave any breaks.

"You'll call me three times during the day at regular intervals," Skinner continued, placing Mulder's cellphone within easy reach on the coffee table. "I don't mind when. I won't call you because I don't want to wake you if you're sleeping." Skinner gave his slave a tight smile. "I also need you to show me your willingness to obey."

"Yes, sir." Mulder nodded. They weren't particularly onerous instructions. He wasn't exactly going to be doing anything else with himself and at least his Master wanted to hear from him. Skinner hadn't finished though - and his next instructions were far tougher.

"You are forbidden to watch television, to use your computer, or to read," Skinner said firmly. Mulder took a deep breath, wondering how the hell he was supposed to get through the day without any stimulation whatsoever. He gazed at his Master challengingly for a moment, and found Skinner's resolve unwavering, so dropped his gaze back to his lap. "If you need to occupy your mind then you can work on Clause 1 of your contract," Skinner told him.

Mulder looked up again, startled. "Work on it how, sir?" He asked.

"Firstly by copying it out one hundred times until you're sick of it - the handcuff might slow you down but you're still able to write. Going slowly might force you to concentrate on the words and their meaning. More importantly, you will also recite to me the exact ways in which you broke your contract during our time in Seattle. You will outline to me the trigger situations that might cause you to consider breaking it in future, and we will then discuss disciplines to keep you from doing so. I will require your undertaking that you will never again break this clause in your contract before I give you your collar back, and we will discuss how best to avoid that situation."

Mulder stared at his Master, open-mouthed. Skinner put out a finger, and pushed Mulder's jaw shut. "Do you understand?" Skinner asked. "Have I made myself clear?"

"As crystal, sir," Mulder murmured.

"Clause 1 is just the beginning. I consider you to have broken every single clause in your contract, slave, and before I collar you again, I expect you to have told me why, and how, and to have discussed each and every single instance in detail in order to prevent it happening again. A word of warning, boy - I'm happy to continue this process until you are heartily sick of it. Your willingness to undergo it will form part of my judgement on whether or not to collar you again," Skinner said firmly.

Mulder nodded, his mind racing. "Every single clause, sir?" He asked.

"Yes. Do you have a problem with that?" Skinner asked.

"No...it's just...I'm not sure **how** I broke Clause 3, sir."

"Quote me Clause 3," Skinner ordered with a frown.

"All of the slave's possessions likewise belong to his Master, including all assets, finances, and material goods, to do with as He sees fit," Mulder said obligingly.

"I consider it broken - and when we come to consider that clause, I'll expect you to tell me how," Skinner informed his slave. "However, for now you will concentrate on Clause 1. That is your only significant task - apart from getting better of course." He smiled again, and caressed his slave's cheek lovingly.

"Yes, sir," Mulder muttered faintly.

"I don't mind how long it takes, Fox," Skinner warned. "If you're not well enough to begin the process today then you can start tomorrow, or the day after, but we will tackle this. By the time we're through, I intend that you will have no doubts whatsoever about your..." he paused, and gave a wry grin, "...well, let's call them *contractual obligations*, shall we?"

Mulder managed a grin in return. At least his Master was back on his usual excruciating form in the bad jokes department. "Yes, sir," he agreed.

At that moment, there was a buzz on the entry-phone. Skinner let Elaine in, and exchanged pleasantries, while Mulder mulled over their conversation. Skinner returned to the couch, bent and kissed his slave firmly on the lips, then picked his briefcase, preparing to leave.

"I've told him what his duties for the day are," Skinner informed Elaine. "If he has any doubts he can call me."

"All right, Walter." Elaine smiled at Mulder over Skinner's shoulder.

"His medication is here - it's all labelled, and his food is laid out in the kitchen. Make sure he eats it - all of it," Skinner said. "Nothing else, and nothing less."

"Yes, sir!" Elaine mocked a salute, and he smiled at her.

"Pass that information onto Perry if he's the one serving lunch," Skinner continued. "Here's the keys to Fox's cuffs. Only unlock them if it's necessary. They're loose enough to allow him some movement so he should be able to use the bathroom okay in them. I can't think of any other instances in which he should be allowed his freedom right now," Skinner said sternly. Elaine shot Mulder a sympathetic, but firm glance, clearly signalling her intent to abide by Skinner's restrictions. "And don't let him get away with any crap," Skinner finished, tousling Mulder's hair affectionately. Mulder smiled up at his Master, feeling relieved that despite everything, Skinner's affection seemed undiminished. He grabbed his Master's arm as Skinner made to leave, his chain clinking as he did so.

"Good luck at the hearing," Mulder said urgently, his eyes meeting his Master's, trying to convey his heartfelt sincerity on this subject. Skinner held his gaze for a moment, then nodded, and bestowed another kiss on his slave's lips.

"And you get well soon. You're no use to me like this," he said with a glint in his eye. Mulder felt the faintest stirrings of interest in his cock, and his mood lightened accordingly. That answered that question. At least his Master still wanted him.

Elaine made herself a cup of coffee, and exchanged a few words with Mulder, then sat down at the table and got out a sheaf of papers. She was a self-employed Human Resources adviser, and was well known in her field for her famously entertaining seminars and conferences on the subject. She also acted as a specialist consultant to a number of major businesses, and she frequently worked from home, using her laptop. Mulder watched her work. He couldn't see what she was doing, but the intensity and focus of her concentration mesmerized him. It always amused him that she was such an expert on Human Resources. He often wondered if she used her colorful private life for her many observations on managing people in the workplace.

Mulder briefly contemplated writing out Clause 1 of his contract 100 times but that would have meant asking Elaine for paper and pen, and he was too embarrassed at being set the task in the first place to do that. So, he dozed, gazing longingly at the clock and wondering when he could make his first phone call to his Master. He knew there was no point calling Skinner at 11 as he would be in the disciplinary meeting. Mulder wasn't sure how long that would last, so he sat and worried about it.

"If you bite down on your lip any more you'll reopen that cut." Elaine's voice broke into his reverie. She stood up, and stretched, smiling at him.

"Sorry," he muttered.

"Don't apologize to me - it's Walter's property you're damaging. I'm sure he'll have something to say about it when he gets home." Her wide smile belied her words. "Mulder, it'll take a while to get back to normal - both physically, and with Walter," she said softly. "I firmly believe that it'll happen though, so don't fret about it."

"You do?" Mulder couldn't hide his own uncertainty.

"Yes. I do," Elaine said, sitting down on the couch beside him, and putting an arm around his shoulders. "You've been bounced right back to nothing, haven't you, Mulder?" she sighed. "I've never seen you this full of self-doubt, this lacking in purpose, and resolve. You're normally so committed, and full of fire and passion - even if it's misdirected sometimes. Whatever that bastard did to you, he did it well," she commented.

Mulder gave a silent shrug, and Elaine kissed the side of his face, and hugged him again. "We'll get you better," she said firmly. "I expect Walter's doing his best to be harder on you than you'd be on yourself," she murmured. Mulder looked at her in surprise. "Well, that's about the only thing that'll work, isn't it? If he doesn't do it, you'll do it for yourself, and god knows where you'll end up if you do that," she told him. "We all know the legendary self destruct button you have that kicks in when you're desperate."

"Yeah." Mulder gave her a wry smile. "You have such faith it'll be all right. I don't share it," he confided.

"Ah, well, I've been here before - or close to it," Elaine responded. "On more than one occasion, - but there's one that sticks in my mind in particular. Walter." She squeezed his shoulder, and he glanced at her.

"Walter?"

"You know what a state he was in before I pushed him in Andrew's direction," she said. "Trust me, it didn't go easily for him. Andrew wasn't the kind of person who'd let you get away with **anything**. When Walter went to him for help, Andrew made sure he got it - and some. I think Walter had a really hard time doing some of what Andrew asked. You know what a closed-off, private person he is."

"Yeah. It's weird thinking of him with someone else. All that time he was going through that stuff with Andrew and I never even knew about it," Mulder mused.

Elaine laughed. "They made a good couple. It wasn't..." she paused and looked thoughtfully at Mulder. "It wasn't like it is between you and Walter. It was a good relationship, based on a deep and abiding affection, but it wasn't **passion**," she said. "Andrew had already met and lost the love of his life - Ryan - and Walter...I don't think he ever thought he'd experience that kind of passion. I think he was resigned to living without it - but he was wrong."

"He feels that way about me? Passionate, I mean?" Mulder asked. For all the reassurances Skinner had given him over their months together, and the slow building of their relationship beyond mere physical compatibility, he still felt that Skinner's love had to have its limits. Sexual passion he could understand, but relationships were something he'd always screwed up if he was in them for any length of time. He'd never known anybody who could put up with the worst excesses of his quest without walking away from him. Skinner was no different.

"You've surely noticed?" Elaine commented, raising an eyebrow at him. Mulder flushed. "Walter loves you, Mulder. Heart, mind, soul and body. He has done for a very long time and I don't think he's going to stop overnight. He understands you – he's watched you for long enough, so he should! He knew exactly what he was taking on, and I'm sure he knew that there might be setbacks. Here, I might have something that will interest you." She fumbled around in her purse, and pulled out her diary. There, tucked in the back, were several photographs. She sorted through them until she came to the one she was looking for, and showed it to Mulder. It was a scene party, and in the center of the picture sat Andrew Linker, dressed in elegant, masterful black, a fond smile on his face. He had his hand on the shoulder of someone kneeling beside him, looking up at him as if he were a lifeline – it was Skinner.

"This was in the early days when Walter wasn't doing much beyond merely functioning. I think, maybe, he was in very similar place to where you are now. I expect Andrew dealt with that in a very different way to how Walter's dealing with you. You're very different people, but the caring is the same." Elaine smiled at Mulder.

He studied the picture, engrossed in the sight of his Master in a position of such abject servitude, wearing...nothing very much, his wrists cuffed behind his back."He makes a good slave boy," Mulder commented with a grin.

"Yeah - the big, dom guys always look good in bondage," she replied. "So, whatever he's doing to you now, he's doing because he's been there, done that, and probably has the leather tee shirt to show for it," she said with a wink. "He knows what you need, and he's strong enough to give it to you. Go with him on the journey, Mulder. Trust him to lead you out of the abyss - and follow him blindly, even when it hurts."

"I will," Mulder said, the tears that were never far away pricking at the back of his eyes again. He blinked down hard. It wasn't his custom to cry in front of people. "He sure as hell does look good in that slave boy outfit," Mulder joked, trying to change the subject.

"Be good, and get better, and he might dress up like this for you one day," Elaine told him with a mischievous smile. "Now don't, whatever you do, tell him I showed you this," she entreated. "The wrath of Walter is not something anyone risks lightly!"

"Oh, I know that," Mulder replied with a heartfelt sigh. "I know that all too well!"

Elaine took the photograph back and looked at it for a moment, then glanced at Mulder. "You know," she mused thoughtfully, "when a Master/slave relationship is working well, it's the most beautiful sight in the world - and I've never seen one work better or look more beautiful than what you share with Walter."

Mulder swallowed down the lump in his throat, and plucked at the comforter with nerveless fingers. "I threw it all away, Elaine. I gave him his ring back," he told her, almost choking on the words, suddenly aware of just how much happiness he'd given up chasing after apparitions who vanished into the night.

"And he put it back on your finger again," she observed, pointing.

"But he removed my collar," Mulder admitted to her, in an almost silent whisper.

She looked at him for a long time, then nodded. "I see," she said. "I think, in the circumstances, that he had to, don't you?" She asked. Mulder shrugged. "What you had doesn't just happen, without any work, or effort," she told him. "There was real commitment there, and a sense of trust. Now you have to start again. I believe your relationship can be stronger than before - in fact, I think that maybe this was a crisis just waiting to happen. At least it happened now, when your relationship had grown and blossomed. If it had happened right at the beginning you might have thrown all this away without realizing just what it could be."

Mulder felt a sudden sensation of loss. If he hadn't signed that contract, if Skinner hadn't been the unknown Master who'd taken him on, if he hadn't stayed with his Master in those difficult early days...his life could have turned out so differently.

"I've been lucky," he said.

"Yes," Elaine chuckled, "and it couldn't have happened to a nicer guy. I'm so fond of you, Mulder." She kissed his forehead, then got up and settled him down with the comforter tucked around him. "Now, I think you need to rest," she said firmly.

He slept for a while, and when he woke up, Elaine had miraculously disappeared to be replaced by Perry.

"What time is it?" Mulder asked, blearily.

Perry looked up from his work, and smiled. "Ah, it talks! It moves!" He exclaimed. "The time? Nearly 1. Why?"

"I must call Walter." Mulder located his cellphone, and punched in the number, eagerly, and then, abruptly, cut the connection. Supposing the hearing had gone badly? Mulder bit on his lip, and tasted his own blood. Supposing Skinner had lost his job?

"Problem?" Perry raised an eyebrow.

"No." Mulder stared at the phone.

"Then call him," Perry said firmly. "I'll get lunch. I understand there are strict instructions about that, and I wouldn't want to get into any trouble."

Perry always managed to maintain an air of being faintly amused by all the dom/sub rules and rituals, while at the same time effortlessly entering into the spirit of them when he chose to, in a way that was positively chameleonic. He disappeared into the kitchen, giving Mulder some privacy.

Mulder punched the re-dial button and waited nervously for a few rings. His heart thudded when Skinner picked up.

"Skinner." His Master's voice sounded terse.

Mulder swallowed hard. "Sir. It's me," he whispered.

"I was wondering when you'd call - how are you feeling?"

"Fine. I was sleeping. Sir...what happened in the meeting?" Mulder asked. There was silence, and he held his breath.

"Nothing for you to worry about. I'll tell you about it later," Skinner informed him. "Have you eaten?"

"No. Perry's just getting lunch."

"Make sure you eat it all."

"Yes, sir." Mulder nodded, not feeling remotely hungry.

"He'll tell me if you don't," Skinner warned, clearly detecting the note of uncertainty in Mulder's voice.

"Yeah. I know," Mulder sighed.

There wasn't much else to say so the conversation came to an end. Mulder knew he'd been told not to worry, but he did anyway. Unable to relax, he pressed the speed-dial button on his phone and was relieved to hear Scully's voice a few minutes later.

"Yo, partner! I hope you're not tidying the office or anything in my absence," he told her, feigning a cheerfulness he didn't feel.

"No, Mulder. I know how much you hate working in a tidy office," she responded in kind. "Are you okay? Do you want me to visit?"

"Not yet. I'm under house arrest at the moment," he joked feebly. "I'm not sure I'm allowed visitors."

"I could ask Skinner?" she suggested cautiously.

"Uh. No. Not a good idea right now," Mulder winced, suddenly aware just how much leeway he had been given before. Now he didn't even dare ask for permission to see Scully. He knew that Skinner was in no mood to be granting him any favors at this moment in time. Scully didn't know what had happened at Skinner's review either, so he said goodbye, and disconnected with a sigh, just as Perry returned with a steaming bowl of soup, and a plate of bread and butter, accompanied by a glass of water.

"Nice plain, healthy, nutritious food I see," Perry winked. "Just what the doctor ordered."

"I'm not hungry," Mulder snapped, closing his eyes.

"And I'm not moving," Perry replied, sitting down in front of Mulder, and waiting patiently. "Come on, Fox - Walter will kill me if you don't eat. You wouldn't want me dead would you?"

Mulder sighed, and sat up gingerly, opening his eyes again. This was the second meal today that he wasn't in the mood for, but somehow Skinner had contrived to ensure that his slave eat every single last morsel in both of them, even when he wasn't damn well here to threaten Mulder in person. He grudgingly ate the soup and bread.

After lunch, Perry washed his hands and came to sit beside Mulder again, bringing a medical bag with him.

"Fox – Walter asked me to change the dressing on your chest," he said gently. "He also wants me to examine it."

Mulder swallowed hard, then shrugged. "Whatever. If that's what he wants...did he tell you how it happened?" He asked.

Perry looked at him intently. "I know someone took a knife to you – that's all," he said. Mulder shrugged again, and turned his face away as Perry lifted his tee-shirt, and removed the dressing. He hadn't been able to face seeing the scar on his chest since Krycek had carved his initials into his flesh. Perry fished out his spectacles and examined the wound more closely, then pressed his fingers gently against the skin.

"It's healing nicely. It looks as if that ER doctor did almost as good a job as I would have done myself. Almost," he grinned modestly. Mulder kept his eyes firmly shut. "Mulder?" Perry asked, an inquiry in his voice.

"Just put another dressing on it. I don't want to look," Mulder growled.

"You'll have to at some point," Perry pointed out reasonably. "Unless you intend to close your eyes every time you get undressed or take a bath.

"Maybe I will," Mulder hissed. He felt a new dressing being placed on the wound, and opened his eyes to find Perry's expression thoughtful and concerned.

"It's not as bad as you think..." Perry began.

"It's someone else's initials. Someone who isn't my Master," Mulder pointed out. "How much worse can it be? It's always **there**, Perry. It'll always be between us. Every time he touches me...I can't see how he'd even want to with this here, anyway."

"I don't think his affection for you is just skin deep," Perry commented.

"Maybe not, but how would you feel if it was Ian?" Mulder asked bitterly.

"Very worried about his mental state if he couldn't even look at his own body," Perry replied forcefully. "Have you spoken to Walter about this?"

"No - and I don't want you to mention it either."

"Well, that's a difficult ethical dilemma, Fox, but seeing as I am merely changing your dressing and am not, officially, your doctor, I'm afraid that my allegiance is to Walter. You've chosen a particular lifestyle, and you signed a contract with him of your own free will giving certain rights over to him. Apart from anything else, I think he deserves to know," Perry said firmly. "Don't you?"

Mulder gazed at the other man balefully for a long while, then turned on his side and closed his eyes. He studiously ignored Perry, and spent the rest of the day alternately sleeping, and making his requisite phone calls to his Master. Mulder knew he wouldn't relax until Skinner walked through the front door again. Perry reminded him to take his medication at regular intervals, and Mulder pretended to comply, but the truth was that he welcomed the pain in his body - it matched the way he felt inside. So he palmed the painkillers, and as each hour passed, he relished the worsening throb of the scar on his chest. He tuned out every other pain in his battered body, and simply concentrated on that. Situated as it was, over his heart, it echoed the despair he felt inside, giving it a focus. He was lost in thought, running over several worries in an absent, distracted way, from the outcome of Skinner's hearing to the initials carved on his chest, when something landed with a thud on his stomach, jolting his sore ribs painfully, and making him yelp. He looked into Wanda's yellow-green eyes, as she settled down on top of him, tucking her front paws under her breast and clearly deciding to make the most of the unexpected pleasure of having a warm body around to sit on during a weekday.

"Fuck off, cat," Mulder snapped, pushing her off his lap. She sat and looked at him for a moment her eyes dark in surprise at being rebuffed, then wandered over to try her luck with Perry.

Mulder was sunk totally in lethargy and gloom by the time Skinner returned home, worn out both by pain, and his own tortured thought processes. He heard his Master exchange a few words with Perry, and then Skinner showed the other man out, and came over to his slave. Mulder kept his eyes firmly shut, but heard Skinner lean over him, and then felt the other man's lips press against his cheek.

"You're not sleeping, boy, so don't pretend," Skinner observed with a wry chuckle.

Mulder sighed, and turned over, opening his eyes. He watched as his Master slumped down in the armchair, and poured himself a glass of whisky, swallowing it down in one heartfelt gulp.

"What happened, sir?" He asked. "I've been thinking about it all day."

"I told you not to," Skinner growled.

"And I couldn't stop myself!" Mulder protested.

"I gave you plenty of other things to think about," Skinner told him firmly. "Is this what you call obedience, Fox?"

Mulder opened his mouth to reply, then closed it mutinously, and shrugged.

"I'll see to your punishment later – both for that and for mouthing off at me this morning. For now, I can at least put you out of your misery about my job. They were more sympathetic than I expected." Skinner took another deep gulp of his drink, and Mulder knew that, sympathetic or not, they had put his Master through hell in there. "The aspect of my relationship with you was not discussed - that's known only to the Director, and for some reason..." Skinner's mouth quirked at the corners and Mulder had a sudden mental image of the Director prancing around his office in a pair of frilly panties. "...he didn't think it necessary to make it known to the OPC." Skinner said. "He passed the file over to them for an informal hearing. While wondering what the hell I was doing in Seattle with you in the first place, they agreed that with an agent down and missing, my actions had been understandable - if wrong. In the circumstances, it was agreed that it would sufficient to place an official reprimand on my file."

"What does that mean?" Mulder held his breath. He had several official reprimands on his own file so he was familiar enough with the concept but he'd never heard of it happening to someone as high up as Assistant Director.

"It means I won't ever make Director - or even Deputy Director," Skinner informed him bluntly. "It means my career has effectively been stopped dead in its tracks."

"I'm so sorry," Mulder said abjectly, his wretched mood intensifying. He felt his breath constrict in his throat. This was agonizing - just one more nail in the coffin of his own guilt.

"Don't be. Promotion isn't that important to me." Skinner shrugged. "And I deserved the reprimand. My actions couldn't go unpunished. There are always consequences - you just have to be sure that you're prepared to pay them." He shot Mulder a meaningful look. "And I was. Very sure. One of the things Andrew finally drummed into me was that my job was meaningless if I wasn't happy in my private life. He reminded me that there were plenty of other jobs I could do, if I left the Bureau. It was hard..." Skinner's lips turned up at the corners again, in private reminiscence, leaving Mulder only to guess just **how** hard, "...letting go of all my old ideas, but when I put my ambitions and aspirations into perspective I was a lot happier."

Mulder remembered that picture that Elaine had shown him. Somehow he thought that Andrew had probably had his work cut out trying to drum that particular lesson into his Master. He knew how focused and committed the Assistant Director was to his work.

"Now, tell me about your day." Skinner finished his whisky, and waited expectantly.

"What's to tell?" Mulder muttered. "I spent it on the couch. I called you three times. I slept. I ate. I went to the bathroom twice in case you were wondering. That's it."

"Did you give the matter of Clause 1 any thought?" Skinner asked, loosening his tie.

Mulder wished his Master didn't look so tired. It had been one thing after another recently for Skinner, and the strain was clearly taking its toll on the big man. It was easy to think of him as invincible, but he was only human at the end of the day.

"Not much." Mulder shrugged.

"Well, there's time. I won't let this drop, boy," Skinner said, getting up. "Did you eat everything I left for you?"

"Yes, sir," Mulder nodded.

"And you took all your medication?" Skinner asked, looking down on his slave searchingly.

Mulder thought about it for a moment. A lie would be easy enough. Skinner wouldn't know...and yet...if Skinner found out that he'd lied, he might make good on his promise to rescind the contracts. Mulder closed his eyes, then opened them again, struggling with himself.

"No, sir," he admitted. Skinner's expression darkened. "I didn't take my painkillers," Mulder confessed, looking away. Skinner reached out and turned his slave's head back to face him.

"Why?" He demanded.

"Because they take the pain away. I wanted the damn pain!" Mulder snapped, shamefaced.

"I see. Well, let me make one thing clear to you - I can always provide pain, boy, if you need it. You'll ask for that just like you ask for everything else." Skinner found the medication and tipped a pill into the palm of his hand. "Tongue out," he said. "I want to make sure this one ends up where it's supposed to." He placed the tablet on the end of Mulder's tongue, then handed him the glass of water that was on the coffee table. He watched closely to ensure Mulder swallowed it, then took the glass of water back. "That's worse than getting a tablet down Wanda's throat," Skinner commented mildly, rocking back on his heels. Mulder made a face. "I meant what I said. From now on, if you need pain – you'll ask for it. I may or may not grant it. That's my prerogative as your Master. Now, is there anything else I should know about?" Skinner asked, crossing his arms across his chest.

Mulder racked his brain. "I don't think so. Mainly I was just worried about what was happening with your job. I phoned Scully to..."

"You made a call? Without my permission?" Skinner demanded.

Mulder opened his mouth in surprise. "Shit. I'm sorry. I didn't do it on purpose - I just forgot."

"I would have given you permission – it isn't Scully's fault you're on restriction after all - but asking isn't optional," Skinner told him. "I've told you to ask for everything, Fox. Don't take **anything** for granted."

"No, sir." Mulder bit on his lip.

"And stop that." Skinner put his finger on Mulder's split lip. "You'll gnaw it away to nothing if you keep on like this. All right - it seems to me that we have some issues to address. I'm going to get changed. You can await punishment." He turned Mulder carefully onto his stomach, and pulled his slave's sweat pants down. "I want you to lie here with your ass in the air and think about where you went wrong today. When I come back, I'll administer a reminder of what you are," Skinner warned.

Mulder's stomach did a flip, and he nodded, and buried his face in his arms. His sweatpants were around his ankles, leaving a cold draft wafting over his naked ass, but for the first time since his Master had left that morning, he wasn't focused on his own despair. This felt like a comforting ritual, and an affirmation that their relationship was still intact. He felt reassured, and curiously at peace.

Skinner returned a few minutes later dressed in jeans and a tee shirt, and there was no preamble. Mulder felt six stinging slaps on each of his butt cheeks, delivered by his Master's hand, then Skinner pulled his slave's sweatpants up, and sat down beside him, gently manoeuvring Mulder into his lap.

"Thank you," Mulder whispered, tears burning the back of his eyes. The peremptory spanking had helped break into his mood, and bring him out of his consuming despair.

"I said it wouldn't be easy, and it won't," Skinner said, smoothing his slave's hair away from his face, and looking down on him. "We've only just begun, boy."

"I know." Mulder nodded. "I'm sorry, I wasn't very good company for Perry this afternoon."

"You didn't have to be. I told you that before I left." Skinner continued idly running his hands through Mulder's hair. "You're recuperating, not providing entertainment."

"Yeah. Well, I'll apologize tomorrow," Mulder said.

"Perry won't be back tomorrow."

"Why? Did I drive him away?" Mulder joked feebly.

"No...but I elected to take four weeks unpaid leave." Skinner gave just the slightest hint of a grimace.

"You mean they suspended you in other words?" Mulder commented softly.

"Yes - but they aren't going to call it that." Skinner smiled. "They also don't intend to be completely without my services either, so they've piled me with paperwork. However, I think it might all work out for the best. This way I can keep a close eye on you for the next four weeks. It'll be a good opportunity to take you back to our first week together when you were in intensive training. Only this time I'll be harder on you, and you won't have the benefit of being able to profess ignorance, boy - the slightest infraction of the rules will be punished."

"Yes, sir. I accept your will, sir, totally, and absolutely. I surrender myself to it," Mulder said quietly and determinedly, meaning it.

"I'm pleased to hear it." Skinner bent down and kissed his slave's lips, lovingly. "Who do you belong to, boy?" He asked when he drew back.

"You, sir. Always," Mulder said, feeling almost at peace. "And about Clause 1, sir?"

"Mmm?" Skinner placed his feet on the coffee table, and looked down on his slave expectantly.

"The slave agrees to obey and submit completely to his Master in all ways. There are no boundaries of place, time, or situation in which the slave may willfully refuse to obey the directive of his Master," Mulder recited. "I think it's fairly obvious how I screwed that one up. It doesn't matter what the situation...I disobeyed you. I ran off to meet Krycek against your will. I might have thought the circumstances were extenuating, but in reality..." he paused.

"Go on," Skinner urged gently.

"In reality it's in exactly those kind of circumstances that I need some objective guidance," Mulder finished. "It's easy to obey when I don't care, or it doesn't matter, and if I'm honest...you haven't ever ordered me to do anything that wasn't in my best interests." He ventured another look at his Master, and gave a hesitant smile. "It slays me every time, sir," he admitted, his throat hurting from the effort of

holding back his own emotions. "Every time someone wants to get at me, they dangle Samantha in front of me like a carrot. Every fucking time. This time I was lucky. I could have died. I **deserved** to die."

"That's for me to decide," Skinner murmured, "and I most certainly disagree. Apart from anything else that would have deprived me of the services of my favourite slave."

"I'm your only slave," Mulder pointed out. "Aren't I?" He added anxiously.

Skinner laughed out loud. "I think I've got my hands full enough with one," he commented. "Now, explain it to me, Fox - why?"

"Why what?" Mulder looked startled.

"I can understand you wanting to find your sister - but why has it reached this level of obsession? Where you'd throw your life away in pursuit of it? Why, Fox?"

Mulder gazed at his Master blankly. He'd never really thought about it before. He just knew that it was important - it was his life's work.

"My quest **is** me," he said at last. "It defines me, I suppose."

"Not good enough." Skinner shook his head. "There's far more to you than that, Fox - but I don't think that you value any other part of yourself save your quest - why else would you be prepared to throw away everything else for it?"

"I don't know." Mulder shrugged. "Honestly, I don't. I mean...Samantha was my sister. She was just a little girl...I feel responsible for her disappearance - I always have. Maybe it's that?" He looked at his Master for confirmation.

"Maybe." Skinner clearly remained unconvinced. "I'm not going to allow this one to rest, Fox. You do know that, don't you? If I were to let it pass, then the next time someone said her name, you'd go again - and the outcome could be even worse."

"It's hard to think how it could be much worse," Mulder said, his hand going absently to his tee shirt, and fingering the dressing beneath it.

"I can," Skinner stated grimly, grabbing Mulder's hand away from his chest wound and looking at him. "And the fact that you can't worries me. Now, let's get you fed and put to bed, boy."

There was, Mulder thought an hour later, as Skinner swung him carefully into his arms, only one thing that made being this badly injured bearable - and that was being carried up to bed every night. Skinner's body was warm and solid beneath him, and Mulder couldn't remember ever having felt so safe. He was reminded of being a sleepy six-year-old, returning from a journey to visit his grandmother, and being lifted out of the car by his father and carried into the house and up to bed. He rested his face against his Master's cheek with a sigh, and drifted off in the bliss of being held in such strong, loving, arms. He had never thought that as an adult, he'd ever be able to find this kind of comfort, or love, let alone allow himself to accept it. He knew that having no choice on the matter was the only way he had come to be

in this entirely enjoyable position, and concluded that his Master was a sneaky bastard to have insisted on slavery or nothing in the first place. Feeling choked, he buried his face in his Master's neck.

"Permission to, I dunno...cry, sir?" he asked incoherently.

"Granted. What is it?" Skinner asked, carrying his slave into the bedroom and placing him on the bed.

"I dunno," Mulder said again, putting an arm over his face, fighting it.

"Then permission denied," Skinner told him, sitting down on the bed beside his slave. Mulder removed his arm and gazed up at his Master blankly. "Talk, and you can give in to it, slave," Skinner whispered, his voice as silky as a caress. He reached out and gently touched the side of his slave's face with the back of his hand.

"It's just...I've always fought against this kind of...intimacy...love...before," Mulder managed to rasp out, the tears starting to fall unchecked down his face. "I've always run from it. I've never trusted anyone to...I don't do this in front of people. I can deal with my own...feelings. I don't need to put on a fucking show. I don't like you seeing me like this." He curled himself up into a fetal position, and grabbed his pillow, clutched it to his chest, and buried his face in it.

"So, it's all right for me to see you stark naked, or screaming in ecstasy. I've see you at your best, your head thrown back in laughter, and that brilliant light shining in your beautiful eyes. You've let me see you at your ugliest as well, pulling a gun on me, and knocking me out with it - but I'm not allowed to see you at your lowest point, or witness you expressing your remorse, and sadness? Why is that, Fox?" Skinner made no move to comfort his slave, but sat, gazing at him, steadily, and expectantly.

"Feel weak..." Mulder growled into his pillow, a lump in his throat. "Being known..."

"Is hard. Yes, I know," Skinner said softly, "but if you can't share it with me, then who? I love you naked, Fox. I love you moaning incoherently during sex, I love you laughing, and I even loved you at your ugliest, when you were running out on me. I can see you weak and in pain too, and still love you. You don't have any barriers from me, boy. You're mine to know, mine to love. Give it all up to me, and accept that you have no control over it," Skinner said softly.

Mulder shook for a moment, with the effort of holding it in, and Skinner reached out, laid a firm hand on his slave's back, and rubbed up and down, and that was when Mulder gave in to the racking sobs. He cried for a long time, and Skinner did nothing except continue to caress his slave's back throughout, never breaking the physical contact between them. Finally, Mulder was all cried out, and he sat up with an apologetic half smile.

"I'm through," he said, still shaking from laying his grief so bare.

"No. You've only just started," Skinner replied softly.

He got up and helped Mulder into the bathroom, holding him up while he washed and brushed his teeth, then aided him back into the bedroom, locking him into the cuff once more, before he slid into the bed beside his slave and reached for him as was his habit. Mulder lay there in silence for a moment,

enjoying the weight of his Master's body against his back, the feel and smell of the other man, and then he shifted.

"Does sir want...? It's been a while. That is..." Mulder hesitated. "If you wanted to use me...I'm well enough."

"I'll decide when," Skinner replied gruffly. He ran his hand over Mulder's groin and then took his slave's shaft in his hand. Mulder enjoyed his Master's touch, but his cock remained resolutely limp.

"Maybe it's the meds," Mulder whispered. "I'm sorry, sir."

"For what? I can touch any part of my slave's body whenever I like," Skinner growled in his slave's ear. He played with Mulder's cock for a while, then ran his finger back along Mulder's crease, and inserted it into his slave's anus without warning. The finger wasn't lubed, and Mulder shifted uncomfortably.

"You've forgotten to keep yourself ready for me. If I'd used you tonight as you suggested, you could have been damaged," Skinner pointed out. "You're perfectly capable of lubing yourself, boy, even in your current condition. See to it in future." He removed his finger, and administered a hard slap to his slave's backside. "That's for forgetting," he said.

"Yes, sir," Mulder said quickly, feeling absurdly pleased by that small amount of sexual contact between them. "If you wanted to use my mouth, sir?" He suggested.

"I'm aware of my rights, boy," Skinner chided. "Choosing not to use you, is entirely my prerogative under Clause 2 of your contract. You have no say in the matter." Skinner fondled between his slave's legs again, opening them, and playing with Mulder's balls. Mulder gasped, enjoying the fondling but still feeling no response from his cock.

"Damn." He buried his head in his pillow again, feeling wretched. "I feel like my stupid dick's gone into hibernation or something. I hate this. Supposing I never get back to..." he trailed off, barely able to stand that thought. He enjoyed his sex life with his Master too much to even contemplate the idea that it might be over.

"I doubt that," Skinner chuckled. "A wanton slave like you? It doesn't seem likely."

Mulder smiled, and snuggled back into his Master's arms, resolving not to worry about the subject any more, but all the same, it nagged at the back of his mind.

Mornings were the worst. Mulder woke early, feeling wretched. He was lucid enough to understand that this was a symptom of depression, but that didn't make it any easier. He lay there, just listening to his Master's breathing, and watching Skinner's sleeping face, and that helped a little. It didn't relieve the pit of anxiety in his stomach though. That churned around inside him, making him feel ill. He knew that if he'd been at home he'd have stayed on his couch in a darkened room, not getting up, or dressed or washed, not eating, or showing any interest in his surroundings. He'd have given into the darkness, as he had done a couple of times before until Scully or his consuming need to be working had snapped him out of it. Skinner didn't give him that option. He didn't allow his slave to lie in bed feeling sorry for himself. He roused his slave from bed by the usual routine of two stinging slaps on his backside the next

morning. Mulder looked around blearily to find his Master standing over him, fully dressed in sweats and a tee shirt.

"Up, boy. Let's see if you can walk this morning," Skinner said, handing Mulder the cane Ian had bought him. He undid Mulder's chain with the key he wore around his neck, and Mulder swung himself hesitantly off the bed, and, with his Master's aid, stood up. His injured foot still wouldn't bear his whole weight, but he found that he was able to walk short distances with the cane, and was relieved that this meant he wouldn't be so dependent on his Master. Skinner followed his slave into the bathroom and Mulder propped himself up against the wall in front of the toilet and reached for his cock - only to find his hand slapped away.

"Sir?" He looked up, confused.

"You'll ask for permission," Skinner told him.

"Permission? To hold my own cock?" Mulder asked incredulously.

"Quote me Clause 2 of your contract," Skinner said.

"The slave also agrees that, once entered into the Slavery Contract, his body belongs to his Master, to be used as seen fit," Mulder stated. His eyes opened wide in the realization that Skinner intended to hold him to every last word in his contract.

"Exactly. So..." Skinner lifted Mulder's cock. "This is **my** property, and you'll ask permission before you touch it again. Now pee." Mulder took a deep breath and tried to do as ordered, inhibited by his Master's watchful gaze. He finally managed to oblige, and afterwards, Skinner released his slave's cock, and turned on the shower. "Get in." He gestured with his head. Mulder glanced down at his various bandages with a questioning look.

"Learning how to change dressings and tie a bandage were skills I picked up a long time ago," Skinner said, his dark eyes reflecting memories of 'Nam back at Mulder. His slave did as he was told and got in the shower. "These need some air anyway," Skinner said, undoing the bandage around Mulder's hand, leaving just the broken finger taped to the one beside it. Mulder gazed at his discolored wrist, and flexed his hand tentatively.

"It's getting there," Skinner observed. "Another couple of days and we can dispense with the bandage." He undid the one around Mulder's ankle, and then reached for the dressing on Mulder's chest. Mulder closed his eyes. "Fox. Open them," Skinner said. Mulder did as he was told, but resolutely refused to look at the wound. "Perry warned me about this," Skinner said, reaching out a hand to pull his slave's chin around and make him look at his Master. "You'll have to face it eventually," he said.

"Not now. Please not yet," Mulder asked in a desperate undertone.

"Sometime soon," Skinner said firmly.

Mulder nodded. "But not now," he said. "Please don't order me."

His Master looked at him for a long time, then finally nodded. "Wash yourself, and remember not to touch your cock," Skinner ordered, leaving the bathroom. Mulder complied, and it felt good to be taking a shower and getting really clean after so long just sitting around and taking basin washes. It improved his spirits. Skinner returned a couple of minutes later, and helped his slave out of the shower, then handed him a towel, and ordered him to dry himself. "But not your cock," Skinner warned. "I'll take care of that."

Mulder nodded, shivering with the erotic thrill of Skinner's words. His cock still remained limp, but his mind was definitely turned on. He handed Skinner the towel when he was done, and his Master took several minutes drying his slave's cock thoroughly, fondling it all the while, until Mulder wished he was on the edge of a frenzied orgasm, and could really enjoy his Master's touch the way he used to. Finally Skinner released him, helped him back into the bedroom, and sat him down on the side of the bed. Mulder saw the cock cage waiting on the night-stand and guessed it was the item Skinner had gone to retrieve. His Master picked it up, and brought it over.

"You'll wear this all the time from now on," Skinner informed his slave, buckling the cock cage around Mulder's cock and balls. "It's plastic - not pretty, but washable, and you can pee through this opening. You are forbidden to come - but you'll find it more or less impossible anyway. This cage is ingenious - it traps the cock, but allows some measure of arousal...see." Skinner demonstrated. "You'll find it virtually impossible to come though, which is good as you're forbidden to do so, just as you are forbidden to touch your cock, balls, or the cage without my express permission. You need to learn that your body doesn't belong to you. It isn't yours to run off and get damaged. It's mine - I say where it goes, and what it does from now on. When you've learned this lesson, then I'll think about giving you some privileges back - but not before."

Mulder swallowed hard. His cock had been his best friend since he'd discovered it, like most males, and to be told he couldn't touch it was like a kind of torture...and arousing. He was surprised to find that his cock made a little spasm inside its cage. Somehow, he thought it wouldn't be too long before he was wishing it **would** remain limp and uninterested.

Skinner spent the next half an hour slowly, and carefully, applying fresh bandages to his slave's injuries, taking his time, and making sure the fit of each one was comfortable. Mulder wasn't surprised by how gentle his Master was, but he was surprised by how good Skinner was at this. He was also surprised by the little kisses his Master stopped to bestow on his slave every few minutes, pausing in his work to press his lips against an injured finger, or discolored portion of flesh on Mulder's ankle, or his bruised ribs. The only place he didn't go anywhere near was the wound on his slave's chest - he merely changed the dressing swiftly, and moved on. Mulder was partly relieved, and partly worried by this omission. Relieved because he didn't want any attention drawn to the wound that had come to symbolise his own shame in his head, and worried because he feared that his Master would never feel the same about making love to his slave again.

They spent the day in Skinner's study, Skinner inching his way through a pile of paperwork, and Mulder making a start on his lines. It was a mind-numbing task, and yet curiously absorbing at the same time. There was a respite from his usual mental activity as he buried himself in the laborious process, allowing his mind to just be still. He still wasn't sure how he had broken Clause 3, but as he completed the task he was more and more aware of how deeply he had broken every single other clause. Skinner's regime had

served to focus his slave's mind on his contract and he was aware of living it, and breathing it in a way he had never done before. He gave a deep sigh, and his Master looked up, a question on his face.

"Explain, Fox," he ordered.

"I'm sorry, sir. I didn't mean to interrupt you. I...it's just that I broke Clause 2, as you pointed out this morning, by putting my body at risk, when it belongs to you. I broke Clause 4 by acting as if I wasn't your slave, and as if pleasing you weren't important. Clause 5...I took the rights you bestowed on me during the months of my slavery for granted, as if they were mine by right, not bestowed upon me as privileges because you are a kind and indulgent Master." He paused. "I still haven't figured out Clause 3 though, sir," he admitted.

"You've done well on the other clauses, boy." Skinner nodded. "You'll figure out Clause 3 too."

Skinner made him take a nap every few hours, and fed him at regular intervals, and within a few days he was feeling much better - physically at least. Mentally and emotionally he was still struggling, and his mood swings often took both him and his Master by surprise. He was calmer than he had been, but he sensed that he still had a long way to go.

A couple of days later, Skinner removed the bandages from Mulder's wrist and foot for the last time - and stepped up his slave's regimen as well.

"All right, as you're well on the road to recovery now, the rules have changed slightly," Skinner told his slave as he fed him his breakfast. "From now on, it won't necessarily be my hand you feel when I punish you - and I intend to increase your punishments, boy," he warned. Mulder bit on his lip, and nodded. His cock sprang to life inside its cage, and he was pleasantly surprised by the warm tingle it elicited. "You'll spend a good deal of time in the corner, in quiet contemplation as well," Skinner warned, "and now that you've completed your lines, I think it's time you learned how to appreciate the clauses of your contract in a more...practical way. Have you figured out how you broke Clause 3 yet?"

"No, sir."

"Very well. I'm going to set you a task that might help focus your mind on that subject. Follow me."

Mulder limped up to the playroom after his Master, wondering what the other man had in store for him.

"Watch me - I want you to know where I store each item so that you can return it to its proper place - under my supervision of course," Skinner said.

He opened the cupboards, and began removing some of the toys - butt plugs, paddles, nipple clamps, and a whole plethora of implements. He piled them in a huge mound in the middle of the room, then turned back to his waiting slave.

"You'll clean these. Thoroughly. Then put them back where they belong."

"But...I cleaned them after each session, sir. They aren't dirty," Mulder pointed out.

"True. Let me share a little secret with you, Fox. When I was in the marines, I was once ordered to scrub the bathroom floor with a toothbrush. That floor **was** dirty - it was covered in urine for a start - and it would have been a damn sight quicker, easier, and less disgusting to use a scrubbing brush. Some tasks are set not because they need doing, but because it's necessary that the person ordered to do them learns a lesson. Does that make it clearer?"

"You're asking me to perform a completely useless, time-wasting task just in order to make me learn that I am subject to your will at all times?" Mulder stated succinctly.

"That about sums it up, boy, yes." Skinner chuckled. "In addition it will help you focus on the little matter of what constitutes the phrase *material goods* around here."

"Yes, sir," Mulder said doubtfully.

"And go slowly, boy. There's no rush. I want a thorough job - done with love and duty. I also don't want you straining yourself. I'll be back in a couple of hours to see how you're getting along. Oh, and Fox..." Skinner beckoned his slave over, and then fastened the chain attached to his ankle and wrist cuffs to a hook in the floor. "Why am I doing this, Fox?" he asked.

"Because I ran away, sir," Mulder replied.

"And that means?" Skinner folded his arms over his chest, and waited.

"That I have to be tied because you don't trust me any more, sir," Mulder said, wincing.

"That's right." Skinner surprised his slave by grabbing him and pulling him into an embrace, plundering his mouth in a deep, searching kiss. "Who loves you more than anything or anyone else in the world, Fox?" he asked upon releasing him.

"You do, sir?" Mulder ventured uncertainly, trying to regain his breath. "Ow!" he yelped, as his Master's hand came down with a resounding slap on his backside.

"Next time don't hesitate," Skinner told him. He ruffled his slave's hair and then turned and left the Playroom. Mulder sat down and surveyed the implements with a sigh. Somehow he didn't think Skinner was going to let him out of here until every black leather paddle was shining, every nipple clamp sparkling, and every last butt plug gleaming like new.

Skinner released him for lunch, insisted that his slave took a nap, then returned him to the Playroom to continue his task in the afternoon. As it turned out, Mulder enjoyed himself. He was a fetishist at heart, and felt a thrill of arousal as he handled each implement. He dreamily washed and polished, imagining, as he did so, how the items could be used to best effect in the hands of a skilled Master - and they didn't come any more skilled than Skinner. When he was done, his Master inspected each item then instructed his slave to return them to their correct place.

"There will be a stroke from my belt for every item put back in the wrong place," Skinner warned, and Mulder nodded, licking his lips anxiously. He had a damn good memory, but even so, he mis-placed 5 of the items. Skinner nodded approvingly, then removed his belt. Mulder's heart skipped a beat. "Over my knee," Skinner ordered, seating himself on the throne. Mulder obeyed, and Skinner carefully kept him in

place, so as to avoid exacerbating any of his injuries. The lick of the belt when it came was hard, and each stroke counted. Mulder didn't even bother pretending it didn't hurt. He yelled out loud from the first lick, and was in tears by the 5th.

"Do you have an answer as to how you broke Clause 3 in Seattle, slave?" Skinner demanded when he'd finished.

Mulder blinked, trying to focus his mind. "I don't know! All my possessions belong to you! All assets and finances...I don't see how I broke that. You can't mean my body because that's covered in Clause 2," he cried.

"No. I don't mean your body. That, as you are discovering more with each passing day, most definitely belongs to me." Skinner ran his hands over Mulder's red bottom, kneading and squeezing the flesh. "All right. I'll give you more time to think about this one. Get up, boy." He swung Mulder carefully back onto his feet, and Mulder felt a familiar hardness poking against the confines of his cock cage. It wasn't even an attempt at a full erection, but it was comforting all the same. At least there was a chance he'd get his libido back. "From now on, you'll do corner time for an hour in the morning and an hour in the evening," Skinner informed him. "You can do it kneeling to begin with, but when your foot is completely healed you'll do it standing. Corner time will always, without exception, be done with a hot butt – just as yours is now. I think it helps focus a slave's mind on his duties and ensures he gets in the right headset to meditate upon his condition. Speech is absolutely forbidden during corner time – as is turning around. Downstairs, boy, and straight into the corner while I organize dinner."

Mulder complied quickly, following his Master back downstairs and taking himself off to the corner of the living room, kneeling and staring at the wall. An hour was a long time, and Mulder always found it hard to switch off. Skinner was right about one thing though – the faint throbbing in his butt did concentrate his mind on his slavery. He was aware, while kneeling, of his red bottom displayed to the room, and the fact that he was forbidden to talk. His cock stirred slightly – Skinner in full forceful mode always aroused him and while his current slight swell of interest was nothing compared to what he was used to, it was at least a start.

He could hear Skinner moving around behind him, and the smell of something in the kitchen, and then he heard his Master talking on the phone. Skinner made a number of calls; to Perry, Ian, Murray, Elaine, and, much to Mulder's surprise, Scully. It was clear from the tone of that phone call that he spoke with Mulder's partner every day, keeping her updated on his progress. Mulder was grateful – he knew Scully worried about him, and it was good to know that Skinner was keeping her in the loop. Mulder was almost surprised when the hour was up. He got up stiffly, and was about to take his seat at the table when Skinner clicked his fingers and gestured to the ground.

"All meals will be conducted with you on the floor from now on," his Master told him. Mulder knelt again, and submitted to being tied to his Master's chair. "Hands behind your back, eyes down – assume the submissive pose. You'll keep your mouth open in the hope of receiving a stray morsel," Skinner informed him, helping himself to a huge serving. Mulder opened his mouth obediently, flushing slightly. He was aware that it was humiliating to be so completely brought down to the level of slave, but at the same time he was comforted by it. He realized, with some surprise, that he had never totally submitted to Skinner's will before. His Master had taken him down, but never this far, and this completely. While a part of him still struggled against it, another part welcomed it.

With his eyes down, Mulder barely got a chance to see the food before it was in his mouth. His first taste was of eggplant – something he detested. He choked on it, then chewed it slowly, trying not to make a face.

"Problem, slave?" His Master asked.

"No, sir," he replied quickly, opening his mouth again.

Skinner fed him a few more tid-bits from his plate – each and every one being his least favorite foods. Mulder was sure that wasn't a coincidence and was surprised by how completely his Master knew his dislikes. He hadn't realized that Skinner had been paying that much attention. When Skinner had finished his own meal, he put the leftovers, both main course and dessert, on one plate, and placed it on the floor in front of his slave.

"Eat. No hands," Skinner ordered, getting up and clearing the dishes from the table. Mulder lowered his head and cautiously ate his way through the none-too-appetising combination of vegetable lasagne and apple pie. When he'd finished, Skinner wiped his slave's face with a washcloth. "What clause of your contract was most relevant to your treatment at the dinner table this evening?" Skinner asked, surveying his tied slave impassively.

"Several of them seem relevant," Mulder mused.

"Pick the most appropriate," Skinner ordered.

"I think...number 5. That all I have and do shall move from right to privilege." Mulder looked up for confirmation.

"Eyes down," Skinner barked. "Submissive pose, boy. Explain why you chose that clause."

"Because...my Master always used to grant me the privilege of sitting at the table, eating with him, talking to him..." Mulder whispered. "I miss that," he added miserably. "I didn't appreciate that it was a privilege at the time, but I do now."

"Good. You've done well. A little reward is in order, I think," Skinner said, fondling his slave's ears. "Join me on the couch, slave." Mulder followed his Master eagerly, and nestled down next to the big man on the couch. "Keep your hands behind your back," Skinner ordered. He took his slave's face in his hands, and gently stroked some hair from his forehead, then he tipped Mulder's chin up and kissed him. It was a long, passionate kiss that made Mulder's cock stir within its cage. His Master's lips were firm, unyielding, demanding, and his tongue claimed deep into Mulder's mouth. Mulder offered himself up, surrendering completely to his Master's need. Finally, Skinner released him, and Mulder gasped for air.

"Permission to touch you, sir," he requested, his eyes down, hands still clasped behind his back. Skinner considered the request for a moment.

"Permission granted, slave," he said finally. Mulder reached out and unbuttoned his Master's denim shirt as if he were unwrapping a fragile, much longed for present. He paused for a moment, to drink in the sight of his Master's broad, naked expanse of chest, then reached out reverent fingers to stroke his Master's chest hair. He turned his attention to one of his Master's dark nipples, and concentrated on the

small nub of flesh, playing with it until it hardened. He continued playing with the nipple with his fingers and pressed his mouth against the other, teasing it to a point with his tongue. Skinner wrapped his arms around his slave, and played with his buttocks as Mulder continued his caresses as if he were mapping a new, hitherto undiscovered country. It had been so long since he had last made love to this body, and he wanted his Master to know that he worshipped him, with every fiber of his being. He kissed his way along each collarbone, pushing Skinner's shirt from his shoulder, then licked up behind his Master's ear, pressed his devoted lips to his Master's wide head, and down over his nose, and cheeks.

"Permission to kiss your mouth, sir," he whispered.

"Granted," Skinner grunted, and Mulder dipped his face down and gave his Master a soft, loving kiss. It wasn't long, or hard, or passionate, but it conveyed every inch of his love for his Master. Skinner's fingers found the crease between his slave's buttocks and pushed up, fondling inside his slave's body, finding it lubed, as instructed, and Mulder gasped, and wiggled his hips back onto those questing fingers. His cock sprang into life – more purposefully than at any time since Seattle. Mulder moaned, twisting on his Master's fingers, and suddenly longing for release.

"Permission to touch my cock, sir," he gasped.

"Denied," Skinner replied. Mulder nodded, and continued his lapping, adoring caresses on his Master's beautiful tanned skin. He found Skinner's fly, unbuttoned and unzipped it, and reached into his Master's pants...only to find his way blocked by Skinner's hand.

"Permission to suck you, sir," Mulder whispered.

"Denied. Concentrate your attentions on everywhere above my belt," Skinner ordered. Mulder looked at his Master for confirmation, surprised that Skinner didn't want his slave to bring him to climax.

"Lower your eyes – remember your place, boy," Skinner rapped out.

Mulder returned to his former task, making love to his Master's chest, and neck, and face with all the skill he possessed. Skinner lay back, and accepted the attention without returning it. Finally, he pulled Mulder down on top of him, and they lay there in silence for a long time. This was the best part of his life, Mulder thought, lying on top of his Master, skin pressed against skin, listening to his Master's heartbeat. Being this close, this loved, this much his Master's slave, filled his heart with all it had been denied for so long. He watched his Master surreptitiously from under his eyelashes, drinking of the other man's broad features, the planes of his cheekbones and jaw, and the dark depths of his eyes.

The following day started with his usual wake up call of two firm slaps on his behind. When he limped back into the bedroom after washing, he found that Skinner had pushed an armchair into the corner of the room – with the back facing the wall.

"Kneel on it. You'll spend the next hour here," Skinner said. Mulder climbed onto the armchair, and his Master tapped his bottom. "Butt out. I told you that corner time would be done with a red ass, and it will. Every time. Hold still, boy and take your discipline." Mulder shut his eyes. He heard Skinner open a briefcase, and he knew immediately that it was the case containing his engraved implements. He wondered which one his Master would use, and a moment later yelped as something solid smacked against his backside. The paddle - he'd know the feel and weight of that particular implement anywhere.

Skinner applied it liberally to his slave's backside – just enough to sting, and redden the skin. Painful, but it was a pain that would be gone before lunchtime, and all trace of the spanking with it.

"Who do you belong to?" Skinner asked as he worked.

"You, sir," Mulder replied immediately.

"And what are you?"

"Nothing. I am...nothing," Mulder whispered. The paddle stopped, and Skinner turned his slave's face around so that he was looking at him.

"You're my slave," he said, his eyes dark and concerned. "That's not **nothing**, Fox. It's...**everything** – to me at least. I had hoped it was the same for you too."

Mulder opened his mouth, and Skinner took advantage of the moment to kiss him, gently, and firmly, full on the lips. When he released him, Mulder gave a rueful shake of his head. "I'm glad I don't have any slaves," he commented. "They can be pretty damn stupid some times."

"True," Skinner grinned, "but loved all of the time," he added. "Now, let's resume where we left off, shall we?" He picked up the paddle again.

"If we must, sir," Mulder said wryly, turning back to face the wall.

"What are you?" Skinner asked, landing a firm swat on his slave's buttocks.

"Your slave, sir," Mulder replied.

"My **beloved** slave," Skinner corrected him, landing another stroke, then putting the paddle down. "Now, think about that for the next hour."

Skinner left his slave to his silent reflection and again, Mulder was surprised by how fast that hour went. When Skinner returned, he ordered Mulder up, and then threw him his sweatpants and a tee shirt.

"Get dressed, boy. You've spent enough time indoors, you're too pale – we need to put some color back in your cheeks," Skinner said. "A bit of fresh air will do you good. Come downstairs when you're done."

Mulder dressed quickly, wondering where his Master would take him. He limped downstairs and knelt by his Master's side, awaiting further orders.

"We're going for a walk in the park. You can take Ian's cane with you to help you walk," Skinner informed him. "However, it's my policy to keep you in bondage constantly during the time you're stripped of your collar, and I have no intention of allowing you your freedom when we're outside. As you've also behaved very well for the past couple of days, I'm giving you a reward that will kill two birds with one stone. Lift up your tee shirt."

Mulder did as he was told, and watched with wide eyes as his Master picked up an envelope, and tipped two gold rings into his hand. "I'm giving these back to you, boy," Skinner told him. He threaded the rings

into his slave's nipples, avoiding the dressing on his slave's chest. Mulder felt a momentary discomfort but he was barely aware of that because his mind was humming with the pleasure of receiving two more of his Master's rings back on his body. Now there was only the cock ring and, more importantly, his collar left. He was only absently aware of Skinner fastening a long length of thin chain to the rings.

"Thank you, sir," he said when Skinner had finished, bowing and kissing each of his Master's shoes.

"Sit up, and pull your tee shirt down. I'm not done yet," Skinner told him. He picked up a knife and made a small incision in the side of Mulder's tee shirt. Then he threaded the chain through the opening, and attached it to a slim gold bracelet on his own wrist. "If you stick close by me, then nobody will even notice you're walking to heel," Skinner told his slave. "Because you **will** be walking to heel – every step of the way. You'll follow my every move, quickly, or you'll certainly feel a very unpleasant tug on a sensitive area of your body." He pinched one of Mulder's nipples hard to illustrate this point and Mulder gave a squawk. He could hardly believe that Skinner was really going to take him out publicly on a lead, but one look at his Master's face made it clear that Skinner was deadly serious. Skinner got up and Mulder mirrored the movement exactly, anxious not to allow any distance between himself and his Master. He trotted obediently behind his Master as they left the building, sticking to him like glue.

It felt so good to have the sun shining on his face again. They reached the park, and Skinner walked slowly, while Mulder leaned on his walking cane for support. Mulder lifted his head, and felt the wind catch his hair, and the sunlight warm and caress him, like a lover. His spirits soared. There were very few people in the park and it felt almost intimate, just a Master taking his slave out on his leash. Mulder nudged Skinner's arm every now and again, stealing little touches, enjoying the excursion. They had been walking for about half an hour, when Skinner changed direction, and took them across the grass into a shady, wooded area. When they were out of sight of the main park, Skinner stopped, and held out his hand.

"Give me the switch inside your cane please, boy, drop your pants, and brace yourself against the tree." He nodded with his head.

Mulder opened his mouth in surprise. "Here, sir? But what if...I mean..." He glanced back at the park. There hadn't been very many people and it was quiet here, but still...

"Until you can obey me, without pause, or question, you won't earn either your collar, or your privileges back," Skinner hissed. "Now, will you do as instructed, or not, boy?"

Mulder hesitated, then, with fumbling fingers he undid the top of the cane, and emptied the switch onto the grass. He bent to pick it up, and handed it to his Master, before sliding his sweatpants down, and placing the palms of his hands against the tree. Skinner rested the switch against his slave's naked buttocks, and brought it down, hard, twice, in quick succession, making Mulder gasp with the sheer sting. He was too shocked to cry out, and before he knew it his pants were up around his waist again, and when he looked around, Skinner had replaced the switch within the walking cane. The whole procedure had taken less than a minute.

Skinner gave his shocked slave's nipple chain a little tug, and they resumed their walk.

"The clause just illustrated, slave?" Skinner asked as they made their way back to the main path.

"Clause 1, sir," Mulder said quickly. "Possibly 2 as well, but definitely 1."

"Good boy." Skinner stole his hand around to Mulder's buttocks and squeezed unobtrusively, making his slave wince and squirm, while at the same time feeling his cock harden inside its cage.

They made a complete circuit of the park, and stopped in the same copse on their way back. This time, Mulder needed no urging. When Skinner held out his hand, Mulder gave him the switch, dropped his pants, and braced himself against the tree as fast as he could. His Master delivered two more hard, stinging swats, and then they left the park and returned to the apartment.

"Clothes off, boy. Face the wall for half an hour," Skinner ordered, as soon as they were inside. Mulder did as he was told, and submitted to his Master's inspection. Skinner kneaded his slave's hot buttocks for a moment, fingering the slightly raised edges.

"I told you we'd put some color back into your cheeks," he chuckled. Mulder groaned, audibly at the appalling wisecrack, and Skinner gave him a hard slap then chained him to his kennel before leaving him to his silent contemplation. His wounded chest itched as he stood facing the wall. He was very much aware that he was naked save for that one dressing, and that the stitches would need to be removed soon. Skinner had mentioned that Perry would be coming over for that very purpose in the next day or so. That meant that he might not need the dressing for much longer, and that meant...that meant that he might easily catch sight of those hated initials, however hard he tried to avoid them.

Mulder descended into a state of dark depression. He was still concerned that his Master hadn't used him since their return, and deep down inside he suspected that Skinner was repulsed by the thought of accidentally touching his slave's scarred flesh during sex – the carving was always between them. Once again, he felt the urge to leave, to run from this appalling hurt, like a wild animal hiding to lick its wounds. If it hadn't been for the chain attaching him to the kennel on the floor beside him, he might well have tried to do just that. Mulder bowed his head, clenching his fists. The only way he was getting through these dark days was because his Master was distracting him so thoroughly, giving him no opportunity to surrender to the self destructive impulses that were never far below the surface. Mulder wasn't stupid. He knew that his Master's insistence on focusing his slave on the letter and law of his contract was keeping him sane and grounded right now. What was it Elaine had said? Trust your Master, and follow him blindly out of the abyss? Mulder knew that if something like this had happened before he had entered into his slavery, he would have gone ballistic, and he wasn't sure he'd have survived the subsequent fallout. It felt almost as if Skinner was keeping him alive right now, keeping him going long enough to heal, staying beside him every step of the journey. The slight throbbing of his backside was a welcome reminder of the only demand Skinner was making on him. Be mine, exist for your slavery, expect nothing else of yourself save fulfilling your duties as my slave...it was a comforting creed and Mulder willingly gave himself up to it.

He was startled out of his reverie by his Master's voice behind him.

"All right, slave. Turn around, and kneel," Skinner said. Mulder did as he was told – then stopped in mid-kneel, as he caught a glimpse of his Master. Skinner was sitting in the armchair, his long legs clad in tight leather trousers, and knee length boots. He was naked from the waist up, his tanned flesh taut over his finely honed muscles, and he looked so completely fantastic that Mulder fell the rest of the distance to the floor and came to a thumping halt.

"Sir?" He muttered weakly.

Skinner regarded his slave for a moment, leaning on his elbow, one hand beside his head, the fingers curled in a characteristic pose. Mulder swallowed hard.

"Please...sir..." He crawled forward as far as his chain would permit, and found he couldn't get close enough to touch his Master, or even huddle beside the magnificent vision in front of him, head on his Master's knee, the way he loved doing. Skinner continued to look at his slave, then opened his fly, and began stroking his large cock. Mulder swallowed again, wanting to touch, to hold, to suck... "Please...let me..." he begged, feasting his eyes on the vision in front of him.

"No. You'll watch. Hands behind your back. Submissive position. NOW!" Skinner snapped.

Mulder did as he was told, lowering his head, barely able to tear his gaze away from his strong, beautiful Master.

"Head up this time – eyes on me. Don't move a muscle," Skinner warned. Mulder swallowed again, and raised his head. He didn't think he'd ever seen his Master look more beautiful, as Skinner sat in the armchair, his hand fondling his pulsing cock into life. Mulder could almost feel the silky flesh of his Master's engorged flesh under his tongue, could remember the musky scent of his Master's arousal, and he badly wanted to taste it again.

"Please, sir..." he whispered.

"You want to touch?" Skinner asked, idly stroking his cock to full erection.

"Yes, sir. Please," Mulder begged. He suddenly realized, in surprise, that his own cock was fighting a desperate struggle inside the cage. His libido seemed to have fully returned, without any side effects.

"Permission denied," Skinner said tersely. "Touching your Master is a privilege, boy, not a right. You can just sit there, in silence, and watch."

Mulder could have cried in frustration, his cock throbbing tightly inside the cage, desperate for release. Skinner's cock bobbed tantalising close, almost close enough to suck, but not quite. Mulder gave a whimper of sheer need.

"Please, sir..." He lunged as far as his chains allowed, ignoring the tug on his nipples as he leaned forward, anxious to be as close to the fantasy vision in front of his as possible.

"Submissive pose!" Skinner snapped. "Move again and you'll be in tight bondage for the rest of the day." He leaned back in his chair, and continued caressing himself, while Mulder watched, almost frantic with need. He wanted to be of use to his Master, he wanted to bring him pleasure. It was the only thing on his mind at this moment in time. He surrendered completely to the need, and became nothing but a slave worshipping at his Master's feet.

"I want..." he moaned after several agonizing minutes, unable to bear it any more.

"I said, silence. I can see that you'll have to be punished," Skinner growled.

Mulder's feet hardly touched the floor as his Master swept him up, undid his chain and frog-marched him up the stairs as fast as his slave could go on his injured ankle. Skinner propelled his slave into the Playroom, and then strapped him into a leather body suit. It covered Mulder from neck to toe, encasing every visible inch of him but leaving his cock and buttocks exposed. Mulder had never worn it before, and he liked the tight, supportive feel of the leather against his flesh. Skinner removed his slave's cock cage and Mulder's cock sprang free, weeping in need.

"You're forbidden to come," Skinner said. "If you're in distress, or pain, you'll tell me. Otherwise you'll stay silent. I want you to lose yourself in your bondage, boy." So saying, he tied Mulder's legs together, and fastened his hands to his side, then he attached a full body harness onto the suit, and swung Mulder up into the air, supporting him so that Mulder felt weightless, as if he was floating through the sky under the glass ceiling. His body, that had been a scarred battlefield for the past couple of weeks as it recovered from Krycek's brutal attack, was liberated. Skinner checked the links on the harness at all the pressure points and then moved away.

Skinner stood in front of his bound slave, and undid his own leather pants again, reaching in to release his captive cock and stroke it back to full erection once more. Mulder's own cock begged for release, and he could imagine that he looked almost comical, encased entirely in black leather with just his erect, swollen cock exposed, and desperate for attention.

Skinner continued this torture for several long minutes, then brought himself to climax with a thorough caress of his large shaft. Mulder moaned, his own cock going into spasm at the sight. Skinner cleaned himself up, then returned to his slave.

"I think a period of silent reflection is due." Skinner fastened a black leather hood over his slave's head. It encased him completely, leaving only a gap for his mouth, but covering his nose, eyes, and head. Now all of him was covered in black leather save for his cock and buttocks, which just served to make Mulder all the more aware of those areas of his body. This felt good. He couldn't move a muscle, and yet he felt free, despite his bonds. He couldn't see, or hear anything, and he floated off in a haze of well being.

He wasn't sure how much time passed. As always when placed in total bondage, he lost track of time and place. His mind soared, leaving his body and his problems far behind. A thousand thoughts buzzed into his consciousness: the sight of his Master ejaculating, his own desire to receive his Master's semen in his mouth, his job, his contract, his sister, Scully, his mother, his life. Thoughts and ideas flitted in and out of his mind and he felt almost, for one moment, as if he had grasped some essential truth about his own condition – and then it was gone, leaving him rested.

He was so lost to the world, that he shouted out loud when he felt a hand close around his cock. Mindful of his Master's stern injunction that he could not come, Mulder gritted his teeth as Skinner lovingly caressed his shaft, up and down, over and over again. Every time Mulder was close to coming, Skinner would use his other hand to slap his slave's buttocks sharply, and the urge would fade...until his Master reawakened it. It happened once, twice, three times, leaving Mulder on the edge of ecstasy on each occasion, and then it was over. Skinner released his slave's cock without giving him his climax, and lowered the harness to the floor.

Mulder collapsed into his Master's arms and Skinner removed his hood. Mulder blinked in the daylight, and looked up at his Master, then managed to gasp out two words:

"Wedding ring."

"What?" Skinner frowned, removing the body harness, but leaving his slave in his leather suit, his arms and legs still bound, his cock hard, straining and free.

"Clause 3. That's how I broke Clause 3. It came to me when I was up there...I found so many answers...it really was like flying," he said dreamily.

"Explain about the clause," Skinner insisted, sitting back on his haunches and regarding his bound slave solemnly.

"All of the slave's possessions likewise belong to his Master.... to do with as He sees fit," Mulder paraphrased. "The ring wasn't mine to take off. It's yours."

"Good boy." Skinner smiled, and undid his slave's bonds. "Very good," he said, smoothing Mulder's hair back from his face. "I think that deserves a reward." He finished untying his slave, and removed the bodysuit, then went and sat on the throne. "Come here, boy," he beckoned. "On your hands and knees. You may worship your Master."

Mulder crawled forward until he was between his Master's legs, and Skinner gestured with his head. Mulder felt a thrill of anticipation. This was the first time his Master had allowed him to touch his cock since his return from Seattle. The process of reward and forgiveness, slow step by slow step, was exhilarating. It relieved the burden of Mulder's guilt in tiny chunks, chipping away at it piece by piece. He undid his Master's leather trousers with trembling fingers, and took his cock in his hand.

"I took this for granted too," he said. "You, this..." he fondled his Master's cock lovingly. "Clause 5," he added. "Rights, and privileges. This is a privilege."

"Good boy. You might have to work hard...it hasn't been too long since I came," Skinner warned.

Mulder nodded. "As long as it takes, sir. I can worship at **this** particular altar forever if need be," he smiled.

"I don't think it'll take **that** long," Skinner retorted, sitting back and allowing his slave to work on his gradually swelling cock. Mulder took his time. Damn, but he had **missed** this! He fondled the penis between his fingers, caressed it hard in his hand, then bent his head and took it into his mouth, deep throating it in one sudden move that made his Master growl, and something suspiciously like a moan sounded from deep inside the other man's chest. Mulder smiled contentedly to himself, and continued going about his work. He felt the cock harden in his mouth as he sucked on it, taking it deep inside his body, longing to taste his Master's salty semen, to swallow his Master's come, and partake of the feast of his Master's body to its fullest extent. He was so close...Skinner was on the brink, when, much to Mulder's surprise, the other man withdrew, and purposefully ejaculated over his slave's face, and hair.

"You didn't ask permission to receive my come," Skinner told him. It was on the tip of Mulder's tongue to remind his Master that he'd had his mouth full, but instead he just bowed.

"Forgive me, sir," he said.

"Clean yourself and the room," Skinner ordered, getting up. Mulder nodded, and hurried to do his Master's bidding. "And slave." Skinner beckoned him back. "You're still forbidden to come," Skinner told him, picking up the cock cage and fastening it back on his slave. Mulder managed a small smile.

"Thank you, sir," he said, meaning it. Skinner had skilfully returned his slave's libido to him, a fact for which Mulder was heartily grateful. Skinner grinned, and slapped his boy on his way.

The following afternoon, Skinner dropped his bombshell.

"Take a bath, slave," he ordered, "then come out here for inspection. We have visitors tonight and I need you looking your best."

"Visitors, sir?" Mulder asked, startled.

"That's right, and you, boy, will be serving them," Skinner informed him. Mulder's heart flipped and he wondered who the visitors would be and how exactly he was supposed to be serving them. He washed, and then returned to kneel at his Master's side for further orders.

Skinner was in the bedroom, changing into chinos and a light shirt, looking as stunning as always.

"Permission to help you dress, sir," Mulder requested.

"Denied." Skinner finished dressing himself, then glanced at his slave. "However, if you do well tonight, boy, you'll win another reward – I'll allow you to come. How does that sound?"

"Whatever you wish, sir," Mulder bowed his head. Skinner grinned, and patted him.

"And, because you have done so well recently, I have another reward for you now. Come here." He sat down in the armchair and opened his legs, and Mulder knelt between them, placing his chin on his favorite position on his Master's knee. Skinner tousled his hair. "I'm proud of you, boy. You're not there yet, and we still have a lot of issues to address, but we have time, and your willingness to learn, and submit, make me very pleased," Skinner said. Mulder's heart soared. "You've almost completed the first two tasks I set you – getting well, and understanding the full meaning of your contract. Soon we'll move on to the wider areas we need to go into before you earn your collar back, but I want you to know that I'm delighted by your progress so far, boy."

"Thank you, sir," Mulder whispered, his eyes glowing at the praise.

"As a reward, I'm placing another of your rings back on your body." Skinner held up the cock ring, and Mulder's cock lurched immediately in appreciation. "We can dispense with the cage for now," Skinner said, removing that item. Mulder's penis did a forward leap for freedom. Skinner caught hold of it and threaded it quickly through the ring, securing it beneath his slave's balls.

"With this ring..." he grinned. Mulder grinned back inanely. "You still can't come yet," Skinner warned, "and this..." he tapped Mulder's swelling cock reprovngly, "is still mine. You don't touch it without permission."

"Yes, sir," Mulder agreed happily.

"A word of warning," Skinner said, his tone changing, and becoming more serious. "Tonight will be hard, boy. How you conduct yourself is important. I expect nothing but the best from you."

"Yes, sir." Mulder swallowed hard.

"Very well. You'll be naked except for this."

Skinner picked up a sleek leather harness and placed it over his slave's chest and torso, buckling it at the side. Mulder was relieved to find that it completely obscured the dressing over his chest wound. There were two holes cut out, through which his nipples, with their rings, stood out proud. Skinner pulled a length of leather strap down from the back of the harness, and wedged it firmly between his slave's buttocks, separating them, and creating two pink, plump, inviting mounds in the process. He pulled another strap from the front of the harness, and fastened it around Mulder's balls, separating them into two more plump, inviting mounds at the front. Then he secured a further strap around his slave's cock, binding it comfortably, but firmly, squeezing it tight. He propelled his slave over to a mirror and Mulder moaned when he saw his reflection. He looked like a boy toy, a plaything, his cock bound up like a present, his buttocks on display, his nipples exposed and available. Skinner wasn't finished with those. He connected a chain from Mulder's nipple rings to the ring around his cock, fastening it so that it was too short, keeping a constant pressure on Mulder's nipples, then he attached some bells, Mulder's least favorite item of decoration to his rings, and stood back to admire his handiwork.

"Beautiful," he breathed, kneading Mulder's buttocks in one hand, and flicking at his nipple bells with the other. Mulder flushed, but said nothing. "Good boy. I'm not finished yet though. You are, as I've told you, a slave without any rights," Skinner said to him firmly. "You exist to serve tonight, and serve you will. You'll wait on the table, and you'll follow my every command. You'll kneel by my side during courses, be fed at my whim, and clear away the dirty plates when our guests have finished eating. You'll ensure that nobody's glass is empty, and you'll do whatever you are ordered to do, either by me, or our guests. To ensure you understand your status at this gathering, I'm going to do something you'll find hard." He held up a large ball gag. "I'm going to keep you gagged throughout. This will provide some small discomfort which you will bear without complaint," Skinner informed him. "As always, if you're in genuine distress, you can let me know by tapping my knee three times. Other than that, you'll accept the ache in your cock, in your jaw, and in these..." he flicked Mulder's nipples again, "as your due. You'll appreciate that in suffering these discomforts you are pleasing your Master."

"Yes, sir," Mulder whispered.

"Good boy."

Skinner pulled his slave close, and held him, his hands roving everywhere over his bound boy. Mulder felt his cock harden immediately and painfully within the constricting bonds, and knew that there was no prospect of release any time soon. Skinner held Mulder's chin, and kissed his slave reassuringly.

"You'll do fine," he said. "Now, open your mouth."

Mulder obliged, and his Master placed the large ball gag between his jaws, then fastened it behind his head. Mulder felt as if his mouth had been stretched far too wide and he wasn't sure he could bear it for a minute, let alone the rest of the evening. Skinner did the straps up, and checked to make sure they were secure, but not digging into his slave's skin, and then he released him. Mulder looked at himself in

the mirror, his cock almost unbearably hard, trussed up as it was. He was a top's wet dream, he was wearing every submissive's fantasy outfit, and he was horny as hell. Yes, it hurt. His nipples chafed, the bells chimed, his jaw ached, and he was acutely aware of the leather strap separating his buttocks, and the thong constricting his cock and balls, but it felt so damn good too.

Mulder followed his Master downstairs on the end of his lead, and helped Skinner set the table. His Master laid 7 places and Mulder's heart lurched as he mentally ran through the guest list. Supposing Skinner had invited Ian? He wasn't sure he could bear his friend seeing him trussed up like this, totally servile. His whole body flushed at the thought of that and he was in an agony of humiliation. Skinner put the finishing touches to the meal, just as the entry-phone buzzed. He clicked his fingers to put his slave into the submissive position, removed his apron, and went to answer it. Elaine and her sub, David were the first guests to arrive. They greeted Walter, then said hello to Mulder, who could only nod his head in reply. He focused on the task his Master had given him, bringing them the drinks they requested, then settled himself beside his Master, his eyes fixed only on Skinner.

The next arrivals were Murray and Hammer. Mulder watched his Master hold a conversation with Murray, and Murray handed his Master an envelope which Skinner slipped into his pocket. Mulder was intrigued, but his services were required and he hurried to take Hammer's jacket, and bring them both drinks. The final guests arrived a few minutes later, and Mulder's heart sank as he recognised Ian's loud, uninhibited laugh, and Perry's more muted, laid back tones. He flushed as he walked forward to take Ian's coat, but his friend just took one look at him and whistled.

"Jeez, Mulder, you lucky bastard," Ian exclaimed, his eyes wide with appreciation. "I'll have to remember to talk Perry into this one day." Mulder couldn't even grin around the gag but he felt much better about his friend seeing him so completely and abjectly reduced to his slavery.

The guests talked, while Mulder knelt waiting for orders. He never took his eyes off his Master, and followed Skinner's every move. The outfit he was wearing stimulated him almost constantly, as too, did his service, if he was honest. His cock remained hard, and visibly so, within its bindings, straining purple against its confines.

Mulder served obediently at the table, barely listening to the chatter as he lost himself in his servitude. It no longer seemed strange to him that he was serving fully clothed people while trussed up half naked. It felt right, and natural...and good. He loved serving his Master, and he loved his Master showing off his obedient slave to his friends. Mulder made only one small mistake, when he spilt some wine onto the cuff of Perry's shirt. He looked at his Master, worried, but Skinner apologized to his guest, and after delivering a sharp slap to his slave's backside, the incident was forgotten. Mulder's cock ached. He'd never been so publicly and yet intimately chastised before, and he was surprised to find that it was a turn on.

Only when everyone had eaten, did Skinner undo Mulder's gag, and give him a plate of leftovers, to be eaten without using his hands. Mulder ate everything on the plate, knowing that his Master wouldn't let him get away with anything less, then he went and knelt by his Master's side as the big man sipped brandy with his guests. Skinner replaced his slave's gag and Mulder knelt dreamily with his chin on his Master's lap. These people were all on the scene, and they were his friends. He felt at peace among them. He belonged with them, and he'd never belonged anywhere in his life.

The evening stretched on far into the night, and it was well past midnight by the time their guests had departed. They took their leave both of Skinner and his slave, each of them thanking Mulder for his excellent service, and he could almost feel himself glowing. When the door was closed behind them, Skinner turned to his slave, and beckoned to him.

"Come here," he said. Mulder went, his heart thumping inside his chest. Would his Master use him, he wondered? He wanted to be used. He wanted to feel his Master's hard cock inside his ass. He'd missed that. He knelt obediently between Skinner's knees, and his Master undid his gag. Mulder opened and closed his mouth to stretch it back into place, profoundly relieved, and Skinner smiled, and gently massaged his slave's aching jaw.

"Good boy. Hands behind your back while I untie the rest of you. I'm beyond proud of you, Fox. You did wonderfully well tonight, and there will be a reward. Stand up."

Mulder did as he was told, keeping his hands behind his back, and Skinner unbound his cock from its prison, releasing the chain keeping his nipples pulled at the same time. Mulder heaved a sigh of relief, and his cock sprang up immediately. Mulder yelped out loud as the blood returned to it. It both hurt like hell and felt so damn good at the same time that he didn't think he could bear it. He gave another yelp as his Master took his hard cock in his mouth, and sucked the tip, then swallowed the shaft. He had never known his penis more sensitive than it was after the tight binding. Every nerve ending screamed with the combined sensation of pleasure and pain.

"Oh...god..." he cried, as his Master expertly tongued his cock, soothing the tortured flesh, and warming it in his mouth. Mulder clung onto his Master's shoulders for dear life, not sure whether he could even remaining standing, so intense were the sensations in his body.

"You can come. Any time you like," Skinner whispered, and a few minutes later, Mulder did just that, jack-knifing as an intense white light exploded behind his eyes. Then he was coming so hard and fast that it made him laugh out loud to think how worried he'd been that he'd never orgasm again. When he'd finished, he leaned, helplessly, on his Master's strong body, feeling Skinner's hard muscles holding him up.

"Good?" Skinner asked, smiling up at his slave.

"Beyond good," Mulder murmured.

"Excellent!" Skinner beamed. "Let's go to bed then. You can do the clearing up tomorrow."

"Will you use me?" Mulder asked as they climbed the stairs.

"Tonight? No. You've had your reward for tonight," Skinner informed him.

Mulder's heart sank. Although Skinner hadn't said as much, Mulder was sure that the initials on his chest were behind the other man's reluctance to take him. He reached up absently to touch the dressing, dreading its removal. Skinner seemed to read his mind.

"Perry will be coming to take the stitches out tomorrow," he said. Mulder nodded, his good mood evaporating, dreading what the morning would bring.

Perry's visit the following morning was brief and to the point. He stayed less than half an hour, removed the stitches, and examined the scar carefully – for far longer than Mulder thought strictly necessary.

"You're lucky," Perry said when he'd finished. "Sometimes the chest area is prone to keloid scarring, but Walter followed my instructions precisely on your aftercare, and you've managed to avoid that as a result. It's healing fine."

"Yeah. Right," Mulder muttered, pulling his tee shirt back down so he wouldn't have to see the scar. His Master shot him a warning glance.

"Stand facing the wall, boy, while I escort Perry back to his car," Skinner ordered.

Mulder did as he was told, knowing that the only reason why Skinner wanted to escort Perry to his car was so they could talk in private. About him. And his damn scar. A couple of minutes after they left, Mulder heard a knock on the door. Thinking that his Master had forgotten his door key, he left the corner and went over, unthinkingly, to open it – only to find that it wasn't his Master at all. It was his mother.

"Fox?" Teena looked at him, with a mixture of concern and relief. "I didn't know where you were. I tried calling your apartment, and your cellphone...but..."

Mulder bit on his lip. His cellphone was switched off. There had been no reason for him to expect any calls and Skinner hadn't given him permission to make any. He didn't know what to say.

"Fox?" Teena said again, uncertainly. "I called Scully and she suggested I try here. Can I come in?"

"What? Oh. Yes. Sure." Mulder stepped aside to let her into the room. Teena stood in the hallway, looking confused.

"Why are you staying here, Fox?" She asked. "Dana said that this is Mr. Skinner's home? Isn't he your boss?"

"Yeah. I..." Mulder cleared his throat. "I wasn't in any fit shape to take care of myself when I came out of the hospital, so he suggested I come here. He has a lot of room. It's a big place," he muttered, shifting uncomfortably.

"I see," Teena said, although she clearly didn't. "I would have thought Dana could have taken some time off work to look after you," she commented frostily.

Mulder sighed, seeing all his mother's hopes and dreams in her eyes. She was always questioning him about romance and he knew she didn't understand his apparent lack of a sex life. She wanted him to be settled, to get married, and, most importantly, to provide her with the grandchildren that she craved in her lonely old age. She wanted a regular family, just as she always had, and that was the one thing that had always been denied her. Most of all, she wanted a grand-daughter. She wanted a little girl to sit on her knee, and dress up – a little girl who would finally help to remove the pain of losing her daughter all those years ago. He could imagine her with a little girl on her lap, making a daisy chain – smiling, laughing, clapping; a grand-daughter who would fill the void that Samantha had left in her life. It wasn't going to happen. He had failed her in this, as in so much else.

"Scully has her own life to lead, Mom," he snapped back. Now was not a good time to come out.

"And Mr. Skinner doesn't?" Teena asked mildly.

Mulder wasn't fooled by the hazy look in her green eyes. His mother was only obtuse when it suited her – she was a smart lady. "He's a good boss," Mulder said weakly, and left it there.

"I was told you'd been injured. The Bureau phoned me. They said it wasn't life threatening, so I didn't go all the way to Seattle. I thought I'd visit when you got home...only I couldn't contact you," she said reprovingly.

Mulder felt a wave of guilt. He should have asked Skinner if he could call his mother, but he'd had so many other things to think about that he just hadn't, and, if he was honest, he hadn't wanted to.

"I'm sorry," he muttered.

"So, what happened this time?" She sat down on the couch, and looked at him, taking in the yellowing remains of the bruising on his face, and his cut lip, her gaze passing over his taped fingers.

"Someone lured me to a warehouse and spent a couple of days using me as a punch bag," he told her savagely, wondering when his Master would return, listening for the sound of his step outside the door.

"Lured you?" Trust her to pick up on that, and ignore the punch bag comment. She was an expert at denial.

"Yes lured me," he snapped.

"How?" Her eyes were radiating concern, and some emotion he couldn't quite understand.

"The usual way." He shrugged. "Samantha. Promises of where she is, and how to find her."

"Oh, Fox." She laid a hand on his arm, and he pulled it away, ignoring the flash of pain in her eyes.

"And before you ask she wasn't there. It was a lie, a ruse. They used her again, the way they always use her, to get me to act before I think, and this time I paid for it – big time. So, I didn't find her for you, I didn't bring her back, so if you're here for more information about her you're out of luck," he snarled.

"Fox, I..." she began, but he cut her short, unable to bear the look of disappointment in her eyes.

"Yeah, I fucked up one more time. You've found out what you came here for, now go." He got up, and limped across to the door, and held it open for her.

"Fox?" She said, following him, and trying to put her hand on his arm again.

"I said go. She's not here. I didn't find her. I failed you. You must be used to it by now," he spat. "Go, Mom, please, before we both say something we regret."

She looked at him, her eyes full of reproachful tears, and he couldn't bear it. He hustled her through the door then slammed it shut behind her, and rested against it for a moment, his own eyes filling up. He brushed the tears away angrily with his arm, hating himself for his weakness. He suddenly noticed how itchy his chest wound felt, and tore at it savagely with his nails, finding the pain intoxicating.,

He was aware of the wetness soaking into his shirt, and looked down full of abject loathing at the bright red blood seeping from his wound and some demon took over inside his head. He didn't even know what he was planning to do, as he half ran, half limped up the stairs to the bedroom, and lunged into the bathroom. He was full of savage hatred for himself, and no longer acting consciously as he opened the bathroom cabinet, and found one of his Master's razor blades. He slid the blade through his shirt, shredding it, and gazed for the first time at the mark on his body. The scar was raised, and red, and the edges were bumpy, but even so, there was no mistaking the initials it spelled out. A.K. The letters were clear on his chest. Mulder snarled in fury, and looked at himself in the mirror, not even recognizing the man who stared back. Then, slowly, without hesitating, he raised the razor blade, and inserted it into his flesh with one hard flick of his wrist. He sliced down, intending somewhere, within his desperate mind, to transform that hated "A K" and turn it into something else – anything else. To somehow, in this one act, transform the past into something he could live with, and undo the injury he had done to his Master. To wipe out the fact that he carried on his body the marks of man he hated, instead of the one he loved. Mulder hacked the razor blade repeatedly into his flesh, twisting violently, over and over again.

The pain brought him to his senses, and he dropped the razor blade from between nerveless fingers, gave an incoherent cry, then crawled into a corner of the bathroom. He gathered his knees up to his chest to block out the full import of what he had done, put his arms around them, and rocked himself back and forth, lost to the world.

He didn't know how much time passed. Time was meaningless. It could have been an hour or a minute, as he lay crouched in the corner of the bathroom, whispering incoherently to himself, and shaking as he rocked to and fro. Then the door opened, and he was dimly aware of a figure standing there, haloed in the light from the bedroom. He heard a startled "Christ," and then someone big was crouching in front of him.

"Fox...what did you do? What the hell happened? Christ, where's all the blood coming from? Okay, hold on...hold on, sweetheart. Fox...let me..."

Someone moved his hands away from his chest, and there was another silence. That silence penetrated his consciousness and he looked up for the first time into his Master's dark, horrified eyes.

"Did I do something bad?" Mulder asked.

Skinner swallowed hard, then nodded. He grabbed Mulder's head between his hands and looked intently into his eyes.

"I'm going to clean you up. Do you hear me? I want you to do **exactly** what I say."

Mulder felt himself shaking, and then a cloth was pressed hard against his chest. His Master disappeared for a second, and when he reappeared he was carrying his cellphone, talking into it urgently. When he'd finished the call, he turned back to Mulder, and pressed down hard on his chest again.

"All right, little one. It's all right. I'm going to make this better. Perry's on his way back. Hold on," Skinner said, throwing a blanket around his slave. He crouched down, took Mulder in his arms, and held him tight. "Oh god, why?" Skinner asked despairingly. "You were doing so well, Fox. Why? I thought we were winning here."

"I screwed up," Mulder said. "Didn't I, sir? I screwed up."

"Yeah." Skinner kept up the pressure to the wound on Mulder's chest, and held onto his slave for dear life. "Don't think about that now though," he whispered, bestowing kiss after kiss on Mulder's dark hair, and keeping him wrapped up safe within his big arms. "Just hush. I'm in charge now. Just stay quiet. I won't let anything else happen to you."

Mulder nodded, closing his eyes, and at some point he passed out.

### **End of Part 18**

#### **Chapter End Notes:**

Pic below by Sergeeva.

## Restitution by Xanthe

### Author's Notes:

Graphic by Mika

Quotation courtesy of my sweet Alex. Standing thanks to Emma. None of this is beta'd. It's far too much fun to take seriously.

Many thanks to CDavis, Phoebe, and Gaby for their big help with this chapter.

**24/7** is an erotic fantasy and NOT a BDSM resource guide. The truth is sometimes exaggerated, or played with, for dramatic effect. For more information, please visit the **24/7 BDSM Glossary**.

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"A truth, still apparent, though disregarded, that things move violently to their place, but calmly in their place. To put it another way, everything has its right home, the region that suits it, and, unless forcibly restrained, will move thither by a kind of homing instinct."

**J. Winterson**  
**"Art and Lies"**

Mulder regained consciousness to find that he was lying on a bed. He was dimly aware of someone leaning over him, examining his chest, and of someone else pacing at the foot of the bed.

"Sir?" He whispered hoarsely.

The frantic pacing slowed, and a second later his Master came into view beside him. Skinner sat down awkwardly on the bed, and smiled at his slave but his eyes were dark, full of some complex mix of emotions that Mulder was in no condition to decipher.

"Fox, it's okay," Skinner said softly, brushing his slave's sweat soaked hair away from his forehead. "Perry's here."

"Yup, I'm here," Perry piped up. "If you'd wanted me to stay earlier you only had to ask you know, Fox. There wasn't any need to resort to such extreme measures." He grinned his usual affable grin but Mulder couldn't return it. "All right, hold still. I'm going to stitch the wound," Perry said. Mulder turned his face away. He wasn't sure what the hell was going on. He knew he'd done something stupid, but he was too wiped out to remember what it was and he had a feeling that he didn't want to know. He reached out his hand, and just managed to brush his Master's arm with his fingertips. Skinner responded

by grabbing Mulder's hand and squeezing tight. Mulder closed his eyes, relieved in some wordless way, and comforted beyond belief by the feel of his Master's warm flesh against his own.

"Shouldn't we take him to the ER?" Skinner asked.

"If you want." Perry shrugged, his fingers moving at lightning speed over Mulder's chest. "I can deal with his wound here though. It isn't life threatening – just messy. All they'd do is stitch it up and send him home. I can do that just as well here. However..." He hesitated, and Mulder turned his head back to gaze curiously at the doctor, finding it hard to concentrate on the conversation.

"Well?" Skinner asked. His broad forehead was creased into a frown.

"If you take him to the hospital and tell them that this was self mutilation then they'll want to admit him for a psychiatric report," Perry said bluntly. Those last two words somehow permeated Mulder's consciousness.

"No," he said firmly, trying to sit up.

"Lie down!" Skinner snapped, pushing him back. "I make the decisions about what happens to you, remember? And right now, psychiatric help might be just what you need. This has gone beyond anything I can deal with."

"No," Mulder said again, succinctly.

"Perry?" Skinner looked at his friend helplessly.

"Well, I agree that we're out of our depth here – but on the other hand..." Perry thought about it for a moment, his fingers still doing their work on Mulder's chest. "In my experience many psychiatrists would view the kind of arrangement you have going with Mulder as an aberration in itself. They might even view it as part of the problem, when it seems very clear to me, and everyone else who knows you, that it's more likely to be part of the solution – a big part. Fox certainly needs help – that's not in question. Is it the kind of help they can give him though?"

"I don't know. I just...what if I don't take him and he does something else to himself?" Skinner asked. "I can't take responsibility for that."

"Forgive me, Walter, but isn't that precisely what you bear responsibility for?" Perry said softly. "He's yours, Walter, and from what I've seen you've done a good job with him. He needs you right now, and if you send him away when he needs you most then I'm not sure that he'll ever forgive you."

"Please don't send me away," Mulder said desperately, grabbing Skinner's hand once more, urgently trying to communicate. "I know I screwed up. I know I did something stupid, but don't send me back there again."

"What do you mean – again?" Skinner demanded. "I've never sent you away."

"When Sam went..." Mulder struggled hard to hang onto consciousness as his past flooded back in with terrible clarity. He could see the stainless steel sink, and his own vomit, and could hear someone

shouting at him. "People asked so many damn questions. The police, my parents...and then...there were these strange men, asking, always asking. I flipped," he admitted. "Mom and dad were worried about me. They sent me to a place...we went over everything. Over and over and over..."

"They were trying to help." Skinner leaned forward, and placed a glass of water against Mulder's lips.

"No...that's what I thought at the time. That's what they told me while I was there." Mulder pushed Skinner's hand aside. "It wasn't true though. They wanted to find what I had in my head – to get at the memory I'd locked away. Or maybe someone else locked it away – maybe I wasn't supposed to remember. They weren't cruel but they were...relentless. It was only when I grew up, and did some investigating of my own, that I realized I hadn't been sent to a psychiatric hospital at all."

"Where then?" Skinner's hand tightened around his slave's fingers.

"A consortium lab. Somebody desperately wanted to know what had happened to Samantha and I was the only witness," Mulder replied. "Either that or they wanted to make damn sure that I wouldn't remember."

"Are you sure?" Skinner asked, a troubled frown creasing his forehead.

"Oh yeah." Mulder managed a smile. "I wasn't there long. A few weeks. What they did to me sure as hell wasn't any therapy I've ever heard of though. Even for those days. The emphasis was less on helping me recover from the trauma and more on cracking me open to see what was inside."

"Shit," Skinner said, sitting back, an expression Mulder had never seen before clouding his face. "So they have files on you reaching all the way back to your childhood?" he concluded.

"Yeah. Like Krycek said – I'm their prize boy. Don't ask me why. I don't feel like a fucking prize," Mulder replied bitterly. His eyes closed, and then opened again as he struggled to concentrate.

"Krycek." Skinner stood up, and even in his current state Mulder could see that his Master was furious.

"Sir?" He whispered anxiously, glancing at Perry. The doctor finished stitching his chest, and then placed a clean dressing over the wound, but his eyes radiated concern at what he was hearing. He glanced over at his friend, and visibly winced as he witnessed Skinner's tense body language.

"Krycek would have had access to all those files on you," Skinner said, his muscles so tautly clenched that Mulder thought his Master might explode.

"I suppose so," Mulder murmured, the room spinning around him as he tried to focus on the conversation.

"So, he knows everything about you – everything you said in the immediate aftermath of your sister's abduction. No wonder he knows how to press all your buttons. Luring you to Seattle must have been like taking candy from a baby."

"Yeah," Mulder conceded, his eyes drooping again.

"Fox, what set this off?" Skinner asked in a despairing tone. "When I left you to go downstairs you seemed fine – rebellious, but basically okay. What happened to make you take a razor blade to your scar like this."

Mulder closed his eyes, not wanting to answer that question, but Skinner slapped his jaw gently, and he opened his eyes again.

"I mean it, Fox. I need to know if I'm going to make a decision about whether or not to take you to the hospital. Tell me what was going through your mind," Skinner insisted.

"Mom," Mulder muttered.

"You were thinking about your mother?"

"Not thinking about her, no. She was here," Mulder replied.

"Here? In this apartment?" Skinner repeated blankly, glancing around as if he expected to see her there.

"Yeah. Here. I let her in...oh shit. I said some fucking awful things to her." Mulder bit on his lip, the memory coming back all too vividly.

"How the hell did she get in?" Skinner demanded, getting up.

"Dunno. She just knocked on the door," Mulder replied sleepily, his eyes half-closing as he watched his Master's angry reaction to his news.

"Yes, but how did she get into the building, damnit! This is supposed to be a secure apartment block!" Skinner snapped. "I'm going to go down there and ask the doormen what the hell they're playing at! Will he be all right?" He asked Perry, nodding in Mulder's direction.

"The wound will be fine – it's a bit more interesting than it was last time but so long as it's kept clean it'll heal okay. Messy, but okay." Perry shrugged. "He'll need pain meds again. I've shot him full of them right now so he'll be woozy for a while. He lost some blood, but..."

Mulder watched, fascinated, as the two men talked. He couldn't hear what they were saying, but he watched their lips move as if from a great distance. He was tired. Too tired to concentrate. At least Skinner had stopped talking about taking him to the hospital so perhaps he would be spared that ordeal. He heard raised voices, saw Perry remonstrating with his Master, placing a hand on Skinner's arm which Skinner shook off in a gesture of anger. Mulder wondered what the hell was going on in but he was too tired to move or even care. He was dimly aware of his Master shouting, in a deep voice that sounded as if it was booming underwater. Perry's voice was higher, softer, full of unfamiliar cadences and rhythms. They were arguing about something but he couldn't figure out what it was.

Mulder closed his eyes and when he opened them again the scene had changed. Several hours must have passed because Perry was sitting in the armchair by the bed, his eyes closed, clearly dozing. Mulder felt a stab of anxiety and sat up, looking around for his Master, muttering something incoherently. A big hand pulled him back down, and he realized that Skinner was lying on the bed next to him. He stopped yelling, and submitted without demur to his Master's orders that he lie down and be still.

When he next woke, there was daylight outside. Mulder blinked, his head aching and his whole body throbbing, sensing some kind of commotion. A persistent buzzing noise reverberated around the room. It took him a while to figure it out but he finally realized that it was the entry phone. He felt Skinner move beside him, then the big man rolled off the bed. Mulder reached out and grabbed his Master's arm. He knew he was saying something but he had no idea what. Skinner was looking at him, perplexed and concerned, shaking his head.

"Fox – listen to me. Nobody is coming to take you away. I promise you!" Skinner remonstrated, sitting down beside his slave, and pushing Mulder back onto the pillows again. "Perry – will you answer the door?" He asked and the doctor nodded, and quickly left the room.

"Sorry...I thought...I'm disorientated," Mulder muttered.

"It's the meds," Skinner said, but Mulder could tell by the look in his Master's eyes that the other man was seriously worried that his slave had flipped completely.

"Sorry...not crazy...just don't want you to go," Mulder murmured, grabbing hold of Skinner's hand again, and not letting go.

"I'm not going anywhere," Skinner said, stroking his slave's hair. "It's all right, Fox. You're going to be fine."

A few minutes later someone burst into the room. "Mulder? Fox?" He opened his eyes to see Elaine leaning over him. "Boy, you always did know how to cause the maximum amount of trouble in the smallest amount of time," she scolded, smiling at him tenderly. "Walter," she glanced up at his Master, her expression stern. "What the hell are you doing here? You need some rest," she said firmly.

"I'm staying with him." Skinner ran a weary hand over his eyes.

"Like hell you are!" Elaine retorted. "When did you last sleep?"

Skinner shrugged. "I need to keep an eye on him, Elaine – in case he needs me," he replied. "I can't sleep anyway."

"You can and you will." Elaine's tone brooked no dissent. Mulder opened his eyes in surprise. He'd never heard anybody talk to his Master like that before. Skinner shifted uncomfortably, and wrapped his arms around his own body, radiating his unease.

"I won't leave him," he muttered. "I'll be fine."

"No, you won't. You're dead on your feet – and you're no use to him like this," Elaine retorted.

"I'm not sure I'm much use to him anyway," Skinner replied, sitting back down on the bed as if his legs had been cut away from underneath him. "Or how else did he end up like this?" His tone was bitter and despairing. "When I took him on, he was doing fine. I should have left him that way. Look at him now." Skinner buried his face in his hands. "I screwed up," he muttered. "I thought I was helping him but I clearly don't have a clue."

"Nonsense." Elaine's reply was brisk and to the point. "You didn't do this to him – he did it to himself. He's a grown man, Walter, capable of making his own decisions."

"He's mine. I took his decisions away." Skinner shrugged. "How can this be anybody's fault but my own?"

Elaine looked like a ball of bright, shining energy as she crossed the room, and leaned over his Master. She took Skinner's face between her hands and looked straight into his eyes.

"Walter – this was an accident waiting to happen. It's not your fault. In fact, it's my firm belief that if Mulder hadn't been with you, this would have finished him. It's only you who has kept him going for the past few days – anyone could see that. Give up on him now and you really will screw up. Keep going, and I'm convinced you'll see Mulder through to the light at the end of this darkness. With your help, he'll survive. Without you – I don't think he will."

"I can't do it any more, Elaine," Skinner said, shaking his head.

Mulder's heart turned cold. Skinner had finally had enough of him. He'd consumed him like he'd devoured all his other tops and Skinner was drawing a line, refusing to take it any more. Damn but he wished Skinner hadn't made him care. At least before, chasing from top to top, he'd been able to get out before it came to this. This hurt. It hurt more than any pain in his body - it hurt in a way he had spent a whole lifetime trying to escape.

"You don't have a choice," Elaine snapped firmly. "You've made him yours and you'll take care of what you started. You wouldn't be the Walter Skinner I know if you didn't see this through to the end. Remember what we talked about that night? The night before you offered him your contract? Remember how I advised you, and what your hopes and dreams were for this relationship? You had your doubts, yes, but we both know that if you hadn't stepped in to save Mulder from himself, someone else would – someone who didn't love, or understand, or care about him. Someone who'd have ended up killing him. Someone like Franklin. Now, you're exhausted, and you need a break. If you can't sleep, Perry will give you some pills but you are not staying in this room worrying yourself to death. You're going to go to the guest room and get some rest. Perry and I will take care of Mulder. Trust me, this boy won't be going anywhere."

"I'm not going anywhere either. I've screwed him up. The least he deserves is for me to be here when he wakes so that I can apologize," Skinner said.

"Walter Skinner that's enough!" Elaine retorted in a firm, no-nonsense tone. "I want to remind you of a thing or two, Mister. When Andrew died he bequeathed you to me. Would you answer him back like this?"

Skinner hesitated, blinking in surprise. "Andrew wouldn't..." he began brokenly.

"Andrew would do what was best for you. That's what I'm doing too!" Elaine told him. "Now, when Andrew gave an order you jumped. You'll do the same for me. The guest room. Now. Move!"

Skinner's face registered a kind of shock that would have amused Mulder if he'd been well. The big man got up, and swayed for a moment, then turned towards the door, a look of dogged determination on his

face. Mulder surprised himself by letting out a growling whimper from deep in the back of his throat, and Skinner turned back to the bed.

"Just keep walking, Walter," Elaine warned grimly, and his Master hesitated, then nodded, and allowed Perry to lead him from the room.

Elaine turned back to Mulder and came over and sat on the bed beside him.

"I know you're hurting, boy, but he is too," she told him in that same firm tone. "He'll be back – when he's recharged, and better able to see to what you need." She moved his head so that it was resting in her lap, and gently caressed his hair. He closed his eyes, relaxing. "I can still remember the day I first met you. All long gangling limbs and crazy charm, combined with that wild, stubborn streak...I thought you were going to be the sub I'd been looking for all my life, but I soon realized that your questing energy would never let you be at peace. Walter understands you much better than any of us ever did. He has the patience, and the skill to handle you – and the strength, too. I don't think you've ever understood that what you do is test your own strength, constantly, against everyone, to see if they can stand up to it. None of us ever could. Walter was the only one who could take all you threw, and still be left standing. You've met your match, Mulder. You won't find a better one. He'll see you through this too, if you let him."

Mulder's eyelids fluttered open and he gazed up at her curiously. Her blue eyes were vivid against her golden hair.

"You and Walter could have been made for each other," she told him "You've given him a hard time though. He expected that when he took you on, but I don't think he ever envisaged anything like this. It was clear to us all that you were spinning out of control. He told me he could give you a safe playground to spin in, and then reel you home. He wanted to keep you safe, but I think he knew that first you had to spin all the pain out of yourself before you could allow anything else back in. Mulder, listen to me." She nudged him gently. "Surrender to him. I mean it this time. I know you think you have before, because every sub always thinks that, but usually they're keeping something back. It's often just one small thing they cling onto, and keep secret, to make them feel they have something of their own, and in doing that they live a lie. They retain what they should offer up freely and thereby deny themselves so much."

Mulder knew that she was right. However much he told himself he was surrendering, deep down he kept a hard shell around his innermost self, to protect himself from harm, and it was that shell that was keeping his Master out, making it impossible for Skinner to either truly know, or own him.

"Give it all up to him, and he'll repay you in more ways than you can imagine," Elaine whispered, hugging him close. "I know it isn't easy to completely give your life to someone else, to trust them to do what's best, but you need that right now. Walter knows how hard it is – he went through all this with Andrew, and I've never known a man with more walls around his heart than Walter," she chuckled. "Andrew dealt with him so brilliantly – he was steadfast, strict, and loving, and he made Walter surrender. Slowly, surely, over months and months of hard work. Walter's tried to do the same with you – with some success I believe, but this is your crisis, Mulder. Your crunch time. Walter's making you face issues you've avoided all your life. If you don't give it all up to Walter now, then I'm not sure you'll ever have the same opportunity again. Trust him, my dear. Please."

Mulder closed his eyes again, her words repeating endlessly around his mind. He wanted to. He wanted that more than anything in the world, but he doubted his ability to do it. He was sure that if his Master saw what he really was, and knew what he truly was inside, that he'd stop loving his slave. It had been what he had always feared – his own weakness.

The next couple of days passed in a blur. Mulder was aware of what he'd done to himself, but he couldn't face thinking about it. He could barely remember why he had done it, or what had been going on in his mind when he'd carved into himself. Mulder didn't lay eyes on his Master during his initial recuperation. Elaine, Perry or Ian fed him. Perry saw to his medication and Elaine and Ian generally nursed him. He received a visit from Scully, but couldn't handle her kind, concerned blue eyes. He knew that she blamed Skinner for his current crisis and he didn't have the energy or the words to explain that it wasn't about his Master, or his sexuality, but had roots that went far deeper. In the end he asked her not to visit again - he was scared he'd end up saying something he'd regret, the way he had done with his mother. He frequently asked after his Master but each time he was told firmly that Skinner was not available. On the third day Mulder woke up to find that his army of carers had disappeared. He sat up, confused, thinking that he was alone - to find Skinner standing by the window, looking out.

"I'm glad you came back. I thought..." Mulder shrugged.

"That I'd gone? That I was through with you?" Skinner turned, and Mulder found no encouragement in the other man's face. "I very nearly was, Fox. Elaine turned me around but for a while there it was touch and go. I needed some space to figure out what to do next."

"And did you come to any decisions?"

"Yes. I did." Skinner's face was so serious that Mulder felt a shiver crawl up his spine.

"You're taking away my contract," he whispered.

Skinner waved his hand in a gesture of futility. "Contracts aren't important. They never were, save to give solid form to the essence of what binds us to each other."

"What is important then?" Mulder asked.

"Fox Mulder. Walter Skinner. Two people who need to make some hard choices about the future." Skinner came over to the bed and sat down.

"What happened about my Mom?" Mulder flushed as he remembered what he'd said to his mother, but he knew, even as he spoke, that he was changing the subject on purpose, in order to avoid the issues Skinner wanted to discuss.

"I've spoken to her – she's upset, of course, but she understands that you weren't yourself." Skinner was silent, and then he shrugged. "It was all I could say. Maybe it was even true. I'm not sure."

"Did you ever figure out why they let her up here?"

"Apparently..." Skinner stretched, and Mulder heard one of his Master's shoulders give a distinct crack. "They were expecting a visitor for this apartment – Perry, remember. However they'd had a shift change

in the meantime and the doorman just waved your mom up without checking her name. Little gray-haired old ladies are not viewed as a security risk it would seem. I don't think it's a mistake that will happen again," Skinner added and Mulder almost laughed at his Master's use of understatement. He was fairly sure that Skinner had given the apartment block's security team a reaming out that made even Agent Mulder's many dressing downs look like a walk in the park.

There was silence for a moment then Skinner carefully placed his fingertip over the dressing on Mulder's chest.

"Why did you do it, Fox?" He asked. "Was it something to do with your mother? She said something? Triggered some reaction? Make me understand why you cut yourself, Fox."

"I don't know." Mulder shrugged.

"Yes, you do – and until you share that with me we can't go on."

Mulder looked up sharply. "You are finishing it then?" He asked.

"No. You are. It's up to you. I've got work to do, Fox. If you want to talk to me then I'll be downstairs in my study. If not." He shrugged. "Well, then it is over. If you want me, then you'll have to come to me – and when you do, be prepared to talk. You can walk okay – you can go to the bathroom, and get yourself something to eat. I'm taking a step back. I'll be here if you need me, but it's up to you to come and ask for help. I'll never stop loving you, but I can't keep on guessing what's in your mind."

He leaned over and kissed his slave's forehead, then left the room without looking back. Mulder turned onto his side, pulled his knees up against his chest, and lay staring sightlessly into space. He was joined a little while later by a small, furry figure, who snuggled up under his chin and surveyed him with uncritical yellow-green eyes.

"Fuck off Wanda," he muttered, and she gave an uncertain purr and rubbed her face on the underside of his chin, then insinuated herself into his arms. He glared at her for a long while, but she seemed unfazed by it. Finally, Mulder wrapped his arms around her and buried his face in her creamy, golden fur. Wanda submitted without complaint, her eyes whirling in sympathy at his distress as she cuddled up even closer. She was the softest thing he'd ever touched, and her fur was plush and rich beneath his chin. Mulder held onto her for what seemed like hours. She was his only company and comfort throughout that long, dark day, and finally, he fell asleep, with his long body curled around her short, lithe one, her chin resting on his shoulder, and her whiskers tickling his ear.

Mulder didn't see Skinner again during that day. Neither did he eat but his Master didn't seem to care whether his slave ate or not and didn't force him to do so. Mulder was almost grateful for the time alone, with just Wanda for company. At eleven pm, Skinner returned to the bedroom and put his head around the door.

"Good night, Fox," he said, the faintest hint of a smile tugging at his lips as he saw Wanda curled up in his slave's arms. He turned to go again and Mulder sat up.

"Sir? Aren't you sleeping in here?" He asked.

"No, Fox, I'm not," Skinner replied, turning back. "Sleep well. I'll see you in the morning. I'll be along the corridor in the guest-room – if you want me, just come along. You can wake me any time you want, but if you do, be prepared to talk." He cast a meaningful glance at his slave. "Your pain meds are by the bed if you need them – it's up to you though." He shrugged, and then left the room.

Mulder felt more alone than ever when his Master had gone, and he grabbed Wanda in his arms and held her tight. She rubbed her face enthusiastically against his, purring ecstatically.

"Are you scent marking me?" He accused. "Marking me as your property?" She blinked at him, and he could have sworn that she was smiling. "Go ahead and smile, little missy," he scolded. "You know, I saw a documentary about this once, Wanda. You have all these scent glands in your cheeks..." he stroked one furry cheek gently "...and when you rub them against things, you mark them with your odor. Mere humans can't smell it of course but other cats can. So if there was another cat here right now, she'd know that I belonged to you - and that's just the way you like it isn't it?" Her only reply was to purr even more loudly, clearly enjoying the attention of being spoken to so earnestly, and then she rubbed her face against his chin again. Mulder smiled and lay back down on the bed, taking her with him. He was so tired. He didn't know what to do, or think any more. He was beyond tears, beyond anything save lying on this bed, stroking this solid lump of feline comfort beside him.

"You know, I can see why Elaine gave you to him after Andrew died," he murmured, scratching listlessly behind her ears. Her purring went up a decibel and she snuggled even closer. "I never really hated you, Wanda," he sighed. "Well, maybe just a bit – right at the beginning. I resented your place in his affections more, and it's easy to see why he worships you. You know, I think I do too. I think," he mused, turning his attention to the underside of her jaw, "that I've just become your second slave." Her contented trilling told him that she was pleased he had finally come to his senses – not that she had doubted for one moment that he would. "Now, don't tell him I said that, Wanda," he whispered. "There's no reason why he should know that we've declared peace. There's no reason why he should know...anything, anything at all...except that I really do want to tell him." He looked down on her bright eyes, shining in the darkness of the room, and smiled again, a small, sad smile. "I do," he asserted, "I honestly do. I'm just not sure that I can."

Mulder was awake when Skinner looked in on him the following day. Wanda was still wrapped up in his arms, although Mulder assumed she must have moved around to eat and use her kitty tray during the night.

"Morning, Fox," Skinner said in a polite, formal tone that broke Mulder's heart. "How are you today?"

"Fine. If you care." Mulder pulled a pillow over his head. He knew he was behaving badly, but he couldn't bring himself to breach the silence that had grown up between them.

"I do care. A great deal," Skinner replied, opening the drapes and letting daylight in.

"Whatever," Mulder muttered into his pillow.

"I'll leave you alone. If you want me I'll be in my study," Skinner said tersely.

"Stay." The words escaped from Mulder's lips despite his best intentions not to say them. Skinner stopped and turned back.

"I can't. You know my terms, little one." Skinner deposited a kiss on Mulder's forehead, then moved away.

"You don't know...how fucking hard it is. You have no idea..." Mulder choked incoherently. "I was just a fucking kid."

"I know." Skinner stopped by the door.

"I've been through all this with those Consortium bastards!" Mulder exploded. "The endless questions, tearing my guts out, telling them everything and for what? I went through all that for nothing, and I don't want to do that again. It's over. I'm over it."

"No, you're not," Skinner shrugged, "and you won't be until you let it go. If you won't deal with why you mutilated yourself then I can't help you."

"You don't fucking well understand!" Mulder snapped, fighting off a memory of his sterile room in that Consortium 'sanatorium'. He had a vision of his own 12 year old face, pale, pinched, and scared, reflected in the shiny surface of the stainless steel basin that he'd puked his guts into every night after yet another day of answering their endless questions. He'd missed his mother, and his father and most of all, he'd missed his sister. He still missed her.

Skinner stared at him steadily for a moment, and then left the room. Mulder threw himself back down on the bed, knowing that he'd finally blown it, once and for all. He was surprised when the big man returned a few minutes later, holding a framed photograph. Skinner threw it onto the bed beside Mulder, and then sat down. Mulder glanced at the picture and saw a row of bright, fresh-faced young marines.

"This was Jamie Sullivan – he could fart the tune of Yankee Doodle Dandy." Skinner pointed to a sandy-haired kid, with a freckled face. "And this was Luke Larraby – we used to joke that he had a film star's name and the looks to go with it." He pointed to a dark, stunningly good-looking youth. "This was my CO, Marco, he was from an Italian family, good with kids – and the ladies. He was a nice guy. We would have done anything for him. I hero-worshipped him. This," his voice softened, "was Jack." Mulder gazed intently at the young man Skinner was pointing to. He didn't look anything special, but he had floppy hair, like a spaniel, and bright, happy eyes. "They all died on 12th February 1971. All of them. So don't tell me that I don't understand, or that I can't, because I lost the people I loved when I was just a kid too." Skinner got up, and with one last look at his slave, left the room.

Mulder sat there for a moment, looking at the photograph. He unerringly found the dark, solemn eyes of his Master, staring back at him over the years. He traced his finger over Skinner's face, finding in the boy some essence of the man he had come to love. Skinner had been eighteen years old when he had lost his comrades. Mulder would have been nine, living a carefree life in Chilmark, running around with his kid sister, while a man he didn't yet know was fighting for his life in a foreign land. Mulder lay back down on the bed and stared at the ceiling, one hand listlessly holding the photograph. He felt too tired and numb to move. He wanted to give everything up to his Master, to finally relinquish each last bad memory, every single moment of weakness and inadequacy, to offer them up to his Master like a really bad gift, but he wasn't even sure that he had any answers. Skinner seemed to be expecting something that would explain what had happened, and Mulder didn't know if it was that clear.

He lay on the bed for what felt like an eternity, staring into space. His troubled life flashed before him in fits and starts. He remembered his father showing him a nest of baby birds in the garden when he was 6. He could see his little sister in his mind's eye, being pushed on a swing in the garden, and the long empty winter after her disappearance, when his entire world consisted of his mother's quiet sobbing, and his father's barely concealed anger. He was so tired of carrying the weight of that burden. It had been so long, and he hadn't realized just how tired he was. He thought of Skinner, his big, macho Master, spinning out of control after the death of his wife, ending up desperate, and alone on Andrew Linker's doorstep. His Master had been strong enough to be weak.

Mulder found himself moving, as if in a dream. His body didn't seem to belong to him and moved of its own volition, slowly, shakily, out of the door, and towards the stairs. He held onto the banisters as he walked slowly down, light-headed after the events of the past few days, and from his refusal to eat. He wandered along the corridor like a zombie, paused outside his Master's study, his hand raised, poised to knock, and then froze. He found he couldn't take the final step, and sat, shaking, outside the door, his arms clutched around his knees. He had a memory of himself, aged 6 or 7, unable to sleep because of nightmares, going to sit outside the family room where his parents were watching television. He had been too scared to tell them that he was afraid of the dark, and had sat in the hall outside the door listening to the sound of the TV, until, finally comforted, he had felt able to return to bed. They hadn't even known that he was there.

He could hear his Master inside the study, moving papers around, and occasionally getting up. It felt good, knowing that he was this close to Skinner, without actually having to face the other man. Mulder buried his face in his knees and disappeared into the memories again. He was thirteen, and it was Samantha's birthday. The first birthday after her disappearance. His mother was sitting in a rocking chair on the front porch despite the freezing weather. She was just sitting, waiting. She had convinced herself that her little girl would return on her birthday and she sat out there, rocking back and forth, holding a long, silent, lonely vigil. Mulder waited inside the house, his breath frosting the window-pane as he watched his mother. When darkness came she finally gave up, and returned to the house, moving like an old woman. When he looked into her eyes, he knew that something had died inside her that day... the door opened and Mulder looked up, startled out of his memory. Skinner almost tripped over his slave and gave a muffled exclamation. He looked at Mulder intently for a moment, and then purposefully turned in the direction of the kitchen, ignoring the man sitting outside his door. Mulder stared after his Master, too paralyzed to move. He felt as if he'd been caught out doing something forbidden. Skinner returned a few minutes later, holding two mugs of coffee. He didn't say a word to Mulder, but he didn't shut the door when he returned to his study. Instead, he left it ajar.

Mulder shivered involuntarily. He felt stupid sitting here. Skinner knew he was here. Just inside that tantalizing, open door was the one person who could help him right now. His Master was so close – and yet had never seemed more unreachable. Mulder swallowed hard, then nudged the door open, and crouched in the doorway for a second, neither in the room, nor outside, still undecided. His Master looked up – and smiled.

"Why don't you come in?" Skinner said softly. Mulder hesitated. He wanted to. Holding onto the door, he took one step forward - and was in the room. His Master smiled at him, and Mulder stopped, one hand still on the door, as if he was uncertain whether to stay or flee. Skinner took one of the mugs of coffee and placed it on the corner of the desk closest to his slave, then turned back to his work, ignoring his slave again.

The aroma of the coffee was enticing. Mulder crept towards the desk, took the mug, and swallowed its contents. Skinner didn't even look up. The drink warmed him, and Mulder began to relax. He stood there for a long time, and then slowly, like a wild animal furtively seeking food, edged over to where his Master sat behind the desk. Skinner didn't move, or say a word, as his slave found the position that he loved so much – kneeling at his Master's feet, his chin resting on the other man's knee. Mulder felt the tension start to leave his body. The hard part was over. He had managed to get here. He dozed for a moment, comforted just by being in his Master's presence. Several minutes later, his Master's hand brushed his hair...then came to rest on his head, stroking softly. Mulder gave a contented sigh, and closed his eyes again, relishing the feel of his Master's hand soothing his hair.

"We were very close," Mulder said suddenly, his voice sounding too loud in the silent room. His Master didn't reply. "After Samantha was taken – not so much before. After though...I was all she had. Dad was gone such a lot, and he was always so angry although I never knew why. He never used to be like that before she was taken. For years it was just Mom and me, alone in that big house, and she needed me. She was so sad. If you could have seen her – she changed almost overnight. Maybe we all did. Sometimes I see families on the TV when a little girl has gone missing. The mom always looks like my Mom looked. They're being so strong, and they're always convinced their little girl is still alive, but then the days go by, and they don't find her, and you just know that a little body is going to turn up..." Mulder trailed off, then took a deep breath and continued. "But they're still there, hanging onto a slim thread of hope and who the hell can blame them for that? A body didn't turn up in Samantha's case - we were just consigned to an endless limbo. Whenever we were out together we used to do the same thing – our heads would turn and follow every little girl who looked like Samantha, hoping we'd just see her in the crowd. Once, my Mom followed a family home convinced that their little dark haired girl was Samantha. She went a little crazy. Anybody would after months of that. It sends you insane. Dad was never there, and I looked after her. The doctor gave her some pills and I'd see she took them. I'd tuck her into bed at night, and try and get her to eat something. I don't know how long that time went on but it seemed to last for years." He stared into space for a moment, and was surprised to hear his Master's voice – he'd almost forgotten that he had an audience.

"You were just a kid. You shouldn't have had to be the adult, the one taking care of everything," Skinner said gently.

"No, but there was nobody else, and you know, it's just what you do," Mulder shrugged. "I loved her so much and for a while, I was scared that she'd be taken too. I was paranoid about her coming home late. If I came home after she'd gone to bed, I'd always look into her room and check she was there. I thought she'd be stolen away, like Sam was stolen. Mom did get better." He raised his head and looked at his Master for the first time. Skinner had stopped working and was listening intently. He nodded at Mulder to continue. "She was only crazy for a little while, but she was sad for a whole lot longer. I don't think that ever goes though. She's still sad underneath. She never got over it. Maybe you just never do. I'm not surprised they got divorced. Dad just wasn't there for her when she needed him most."

"You were though." Skinner brushed his fingers gently along the side of his slave's face.

"Yes. I was. I loved her. I used to spend my weekends circling around the area on my bike, looking for Samantha. I used to have this fantasy that I'd find Sam and bring her home, and my mother would be so happy. I guess most people grow out of their childhood fantasies," Mulder paused, and shrugged, "but I

never did," he added, almost silently. "Yes, I wanted to find Samantha for me, but more than that – I wanted to find her for my mother, and I never could."

"Did she ever ask you to?" Skinner asked softly, his hand still cupping Mulder's face.

Mulder frowned. "No...she didn't need to. I wanted to do that for her."

"And you tried. Nobody could have tried harder than you." Skinner's tone was insistent.

"But I failed..." Mulder said.

"But you tried," Skinner repeated. "And maybe now you need to let go, Fox. Maybe now you need to live for you and not your mother, or Samantha."

"I dunno." Mulder bowed his head.

"I do," Skinner said firmly. "What use is it to your mother, or Samantha if you die looking for your sister? I'm not telling you to give up – just to let go."

"I'm not sure I know the difference." Mulder managed a puzzled smile.

"I'll show you. We're not out of the woods yet, Fox, but I'm damn proud of you for coming this far." Skinner wrapped his arms around his slave, and Mulder rested his head against his Master's shoulder, relieved and elated to have shared memories he had never spoken of to anyone before in his entire life. That long dark period after his sister's disappearance, his mother relying on him for everything while she slowly and silently fell apart was one he had consigned to the back of his mind - too painful to relive.

"I've lived with it for so long that I thought I'd dealt with it, but it still hurts." His body was racked by a silent spasm of pain. His eyes were dry but his body jackknifed against his Master's large chest and he held on until the spasm passed.

"I know." His Master held on tight, his big arms solid and warm, keeping his slave safe and Mulder knew, without a shadow of a doubt, that after many long years wandering in the wilderness, he had finally come home.

"So, when your mother showed up here..." Skinner pushed his slave back, and looked at him keenly.

Mulder swallowed, and his hand went unconsciously to the dressing on his chest. "It's just I want to make her happy, and I know that I don't. I couldn't bear for her to see me looking like this...just something else for her to worry about. I behaved like an idiot when I ran off in Seattle, and I got the people I love - you, Scully, my mother, so worried. I suppose...that my scar was a focus for all my anger, resentment and self-loathing. I know I shouldn't have done it, but I wasn't thinking straight." He didn't say the rest of it - that he doubted that his Master would ever want to make love to his disfigured slave again. That, also, had been at the back of his mind when he took that razor blade to his chest.

"Okay. That's a good enough answer for me." Skinner pressed his lips against his slave's forehead. "Next time you feel like that, just wait until you can speak to me - okay?"

"Is that an order, sir?" Mulder managed a faint smile.

"Yes it damn well is," Skinner managed a faint smile of his own.

"I'm glad you're handing them out again. I didn't realize how much I'd miss them until you stopped," Mulder admitted.

"You'd better get used to it again, boy," Skinner warned. "I'm going to make you go a lot further than this, and I'll be with you all the way." Mulder looked up questioningly, but Skinner shook his head. "First things first. Right now I think we need to get you fed."

"I'm not..." Mulder began automatically. Skinner stopped him with a look.

"I'm back in charge now, boy, and if I say you eat, you eat. When did you last eat anyway?"

"I'm not sure I can remember," Mulder shrugged, shame faced.

"Well, you know my first rule – no slave of mine ever goes hungry. I'm going to cook you the biggest breakfast you've ever had."

"It's nearly 8pm," Mulder pointed out.

"Are you arguing with me, boy?" Skinner asked, with a dangerously raised eyebrow. "That butt of yours isn't exempt from my hand right now you know."

"No, sir," Mulder grinned. "Breakfast will do just fine."

"Come here then." Skinner stood up, and pulled his slave to his feet, then unexpectedly pressed his lips to Mulder's mouth and deposited a gentle, warming, loving kiss. "I love you, little one. Don't ever forget that," Skinner said in a suspiciously husky tone.

"No, sir," he choked.

"Good. Time to eat then." Skinner strode purposefully towards the door, turning his face away as he went, but Mulder saw him wipe the sleeve of his Henley across his eyes as he left the room.

Mulder was surprised to find that he was ravenous once he sat down to the huge repast Skinner prepared. He ate his way through plate after plate of blueberry pancakes, muffins and skillet until his taut stomach protested. His Master sat and watched his slave demolish his "breakfast" with an amused look on his face, but Mulder barely even noticed, so intent was he on feeding his neglected body. He came to a sudden halt, aware that he was stuffed up to the gills, and sat back in his chair with a sigh.

"Have we finished?" Skinner raised an eyebrow at the debris on the table.

"I think we have, yeah!" Mulder grinned, stretching and running his hand over his distended belly.

"Good. Time for bed then." Skinner stood up.

"Um...will you be...that is, do you want your old room back?" Mulder asked uncertainly. "I mean, I can go back to my room in the upstairs apartment if you do." Skinner looked at him speculatively, and Mulder flushed. "I'm sorry, sir. It's just I'm not sure where we stand now. Are we back to the way we were before..." He gestured to the dressing on his chest. "I mean, I still want my collar back, sir, and I still want to earn the right to call you Master again. Those two things are all I want, sir. I haven't changed in that. I'll do whatever it takes," he said earnestly.

"I'm pleased to hear it," Skinner replied. "Fox, the next few days might be hard. There are things you have to face that have nothing to do with our life here or your slavery. As your Master, I can't allow you to avoid dealing with them. I'd be shirking in my duty if I did. I want you to know that everything I do will be in your best interests. Do you understand that?"

"Yes, sir." Mulder nodded, scuffing his foot along the carpet.

"Do you trust me?" Skinner asked. Mulder looked up, and their eyes met.

"Implicitly, sir," Mulder replied. "Without question."

"I'm not talking about your body here, Fox. I know you trust me with that. I'm talking about what's inside. Do you trust me in here." Skinner placed his hand over Mulder's heart, his fingertips resting on the dressing over his slave's wound. Mulder swallowed hard. "I know that trust is hard for you, Fox. Hell, I've watched the way you work - trust doesn't come easy to you. You've trusted other tops with your body before but you've never trusted them with **you**. Will you give me that trust?" Mulder hesitated. He had come this far and he had already given Skinner so much. His Master was asking for one last thing - and yet, in this one thing resided Mulder's last vestige of self-protection. If he gave it all up to Skinner, as his Master was asking, then he left himself vulnerable, open to hurt, betrayal, and rejection.

"Yes," he said finally, knowing he had run out of options. "Yes, sir. I trust you." Skinner's smile was like the sun coming out. Mulder knew in that moment that he had done something profoundly right for maybe the first time in his life. More than that, he would go through hellfire to win such a smile again.

"All right, little one," Skinner said softly. "Bed. My bed."

Skinner wasn't wrong when he said the next few days would be hard. It took every ounce of that blind trust Mulder had given his Master, to keep him there. Skinner didn't demand anything of his slave except for his honesty, and they spent three days talking. Just talking. Mulder often sat with his head on his Master's lap, or sprawled on the bed, his Master beside him. Mulder shared everything: the good, the bad, and, to Mulder's mind, the very ugly indeed. Skinner's response was always, unfailingly, the same. He listened. Occasionally, he would stop Mulder, question him intently, or encourage or comfort him when the going was particularly hard. Mulder hadn't realized there was so much to say - and got thoroughly bored with the sound of his own voice. His emotions were volatile, and it was as if a dam had burst, and the words came flooding out in a torrent. He skipped from event to event, one memory leading to another, separated sometimes by a dozen years or more, lacking any coherence, just a continuing stream of consciousness.

"I bet you're really regretting you asked now," Mulder grinned one evening, his voice rasping from talking so much.

"On the contrary." Skinner smiled at his slave. "I am possibly regretting the loss of my cat though," he commented. Mulder laughed out loud, surveying the dozing bundle of fur draped across his lap. When it got really hard, somehow the only way Mulder could find to keep on talking was to hold the acquiescent Wanda, and stroke her numbly while he spoke. It was during the times when he found it hardest to meet his Master's gaze, that he found solace in Wanda's green eyes, and unfailingly serene expression. She didn't seem to mind him crying all over her fur either.

"Madam is in cat heaven, having two doting slaves around day and night," Skinner grinned, tickling the little cat under the chin.

"Doting? I don't **do** doting," Mulder objected, rubbing Wanda behind the ears amid an explosion of purring.

"Ah. Right. Okay. I believe you." Skinner smiled infuriatingly. Mulder threw a pillow at his Master to be rewarded a few seconds later, by finding himself face down over Skinner's knees. "I think..." Skinner murmured, pushing his slave's sweatpants down and lovingly caressing his butt, "...that someone has gone too long without a spanking, don't you? Someone..." He administered a little swat to his slave's waiting buttocks, "...has forgotten his place, hasn't he?"

"Don't tease!" Mulder giggled, wriggling against his Master's thighs to get comfortable, holding his breath in anticipation. While Skinner often touched his slave affectionately, there had been no sexual contact between them since he had mutilated himself.

"I'm not used to my slave having such a white, unmarked butt," Skinner commented, slapping one butt cheek lightly. Mulder squirmed, his cock responding with a lurch. "However," Skinner continued in a regretful tone, pulling his slave's sweatpants up again. "I think such pleasures must wait."

"WHY?" Mulder demanded, turning his head to look at his Master over his shoulder.

"Because I say so." Skinner grinned infuriatingly, and righted his slave. "What we've been through here for the past few days isn't about sex," he added seriously. "It's about you on the most fundamental level. In some ways by giving me your past, you've expressed your slavery in the most profound way you ever could - in a way that goes beyond sex. I don't want anything to detract from that. Do you understand?"

Mulder sat back on his haunches and gazed at his Master thoughtfully. "Yes, sir. I do," he said eventually, but that wasn't true. He did recognize, on a rational level, that without sex as a distraction his Master had stripped him down to the very core of his soul. However, a nagging voice inside doubted that Skinner wanted to make love to him any more. Mulder felt like damaged goods and the fact that his Master hadn't made love to him since Seattle just confirmed that. Mulder suspected, deep in his heart, that Skinner was merely sticking with him in order to see him through this crisis. While he accepted that Skinner loved him, his knowledge of his own ugliness meant that he sincerely doubted that the other man could feel any desire for his slave again. The easy days of heated sexual encounters, and long, lingering, loving sessions in the playroom had gone. Mulder knew that subconsciously he always screwed up anything good in his life, and this was no exception.

"Perry is coming to take out your stitches tomorrow," Skinner said, as if reading his slave's mind. "You've made a lot of progress over the past few days, Fox, but the one thing you haven't done is face up to what you did to yourself."

Mulder shrugged. "I've explained it the best I can," he said, looking away.

"I know - but until you look at what you've done to yourself you won't heal. It's easy to ignore the evidence when it's covered in a dressing, but tomorrow the dressing will be gone."

"I don't want to see what a fucking mess I made of my body," Mulder snapped, knowing, also, that he didn't want Skinner to see it either.

"I didn't press this issue once before and I regret that now. I think you have to look at what you did in order to come to terms with it," Skinner told him seriously.

"I can, and I will," Mulder said, shaking slightly. "Just not yet. Not tomorrow."

Skinner sat back and looked at his slave thoughtfully. "All right - not tomorrow. However, I won't let this slide. That was my mistake last time. There are certain steps I expect you to take and this is one of them. I've already told you they won't be easy, but I'll make you take them, Fox."

"All right, damnit. I'm trying here!" Mulder flared. "Look, before this, before you, I dealt with my life just fine. I could walk out of here. I could go. Right now." He stood up, and started striding towards the door. He wasn't sure whether he was bluffing or not. His moods were so volatile at the moment that he could swing from tears to smiles within nanoseconds. He hated it. He hated feeling this unstable and out of control.

"Your choice." Skinner shrugged, unmoved by his slave's display of temper. "I won't keep an unwilling slave. I've told you that before. I'll release you from your contract over this if you want. It's one of the few issues I **will** release you over but if you refuse to face this, then we can't go forward and we have no future."

"That sounds like an ultimatum," Mulder growled, standing by the door, poised to leave. "Christ, when I signed that contract it just seemed like a hot idea. I didn't know I was going to have to go through all this crap!" He exploded. It seemed like Skinner was asking one thing after another from him and it was so damn hard. He remembered the peace and calm of his empty apartment, and the numbing anaesthetic of all-night TV to soothe him through his insomnia. He had been able to keep a lid on all this back then.

"Don't lie to yourself," Skinner told him calmly getting up and going to stand by the door. "Yes, the idea of 24/7 slavery turned you on, but I'm betting that wasn't the main reason you signed your life over to me, was it?"

Mulder glared at the other man, his fists clenching and unclenching. He could still remember standing in that room, all those months ago, listening to that voice offering him a fantasy fashioned from his wildest dreams. He had known then, and he knew now, that the one thing that had sold him on it, above even the throbbing of his cock, had been the idea of security, of safety, and refuge from his own turbulent emotions.

"Deep down, you thought you'd made a mess of your life, and you wanted someone else to sort it out," Skinner added, pulling no punches. "I won't do that, nobody can - but I'll sure as hell stand by you every step of the way while you do it."

Mulder swallowed hard. "You are such a fucking hard bastard," he growled, slamming his fist into the wall just above his Master's shoulder. "I've been spilling my guts here for days. Can't you give me one goddamn break?" He yelled.

"No." Skinner faced his slave, eyeball to eyeball and they stared at each other for a long time, Mulder's future hanging in the balance between them. "I don't think you want me to, not really," Skinner said softly. "I think you need me to be a hard bastard right now, and trust me, I can be exactly that."

"Damn it." Mulder crossed his arms across his stomach, feeling winded. "I hate you, and I hate this goddamn fucking apartment," he growled. "I feel like the walls are closing in."

"Don't give up now, Fox." Skinner grabbed his slave's shoulders and held him up. "I won't let you give up," he stated firmly, punctuating the point by slamming his slave's shoulders against the wall. Mulder looked into his Master's eyes, and the tension finally left his body, leaving him limp, and unresisting in the other man's grasp.

"I'm so tired." Mulder rested his head against Skinner's shoulder.

"I know." Skinner grabbed the back of his slave's neck, pulled him close, and pressed a kiss on Mulder's head. "I wish I could make it easier for you but I can't. If I'm hard on you now, it's to make it easier for you in the long term. Do you understand that?"

"Yeah. I do hate you though," Mulder muttered.

"Understood," Skinner chuckled. "Look. I'll make a deal with you - I won't force the issue over your scar for the next few days - in return for you taking a different step."

"Which is?" Mulder had a feeling that he wasn't going to like this but he would do anything to avoid facing his scarred skin.

"I've spoken to your mother," Skinner said. Mulder stiffened in his Master's grasp. "I told her you'd be going to visit her."

"What?" Mulder froze, and gazed, dumbfounded, at his Master.

"It's time, Fox. You need to clear the air with her. You know you behaved badly towards her and that will fester inside until you go and talk to her. Not just about that. About all of it."

"No." Mulder tried to push Skinner away but the other man refused to be pushed. "You don't understand. Our family doesn't talk. It's not what we do."

"My family was the same." Skinner shrugged. "It isn't any harder for you than it was for me, Fox. I think that maybe it's the hardest lesson Andrew taught me, and it still doesn't come easily to me. My wife died not knowing how much I cared about her, and how sorry I was for the mess I made of our marriage. Your Mother means a lot to you - don't make the same mistake I made, because one day you'll wake up and it will be too late. Do it now - while you still can."

"She's not going anywhere," Mulder muttered resentfully.

"Sharon was a young woman, in the prime of life. I had no idea that she'd die. You never know what the future might bring," Skinner said. "I live with the silence I built up with Sharon. I live with that on my conscience every day of my life because I didn't try to breach it until it was too late. I don't want you to have to live with the same guilt. I think you have enough of that particular emotion already. Don't you?" Skinner's eyes were dark and serious.

"Damnit, sir, you can't...you don't understand," Mulder snapped. "My mother and I have a history of misunderstandings. I'll just make things worse. What the hell will I say to her anyway?"

"Just what you said to me the other day. Even if she doesn't understand, at least you'll have said it," Skinner pointed out.

"You have no idea what it's like when we see each other." Mulder clenched his fists. "Christ, last time we had a personal conversation I more or less accused her of having an affair with Cancerman."

"Ouch." Skinner winced. "What did she do?"

"She slapped me." Mulder gave a wry shrug. "I seem to evoke that reaction in people."

Skinner snorted, but he still wouldn't let Mulder go. He tightened his grasp on his slave's shoulders, his fingers digging into Mulder's flesh. "Trust me," he said.

Mulder took a deep breath, feeling his resolve waver. His Master's dark eyes were compelling. "I do trust you," Mulder said at last. "All right, damn it, I'll go."

"Not alone. I'll come too."

"How the hell will I explain that to her?" Mulder muttered.

"I'm your friend and a colleague. There don't need to be any more explanations than that," Skinner pointed out, kissing his slave firmly on the forehead.

Skinner was true to his word. When Perry came to remove the stitches from his wound the next day, his Master absented himself from the room and made no demands on his slave. A part of Mulder was relieved, as he lay, staring at the ceiling, refusing to look at what he'd done to himself. However that nagging voice inside him whispered that Skinner couldn't stand to look at the ugly jagged mess on his slave's skin either.

Mulder made the journey to his Mother's house the following day in glum silence. He stared out of the airplane window, wondering what the hell his Master thought this would solve. There had been too many instances of misunderstanding between himself and his mother and he dreaded making their relationship any worse than it already was. Skinner drove them to his mother's house, and Mulder's stomach began to churn in anticipation. They drew up outside the house, and he sat staring gloomily at the door.

"Come on, Fox. It's time," Skinner prompted gently. "When this is over..."

"Yeah. Right." Mulder shrugged morosely. "When this is over I have to face the next goddamn milestone. That's a real incentive." He shook himself, got out of the car, and walked slowly, reluctantly towards the door. Skinner fell into step beside him, and Mulder felt strengthened by his Master's presence. He stood up straight, took a deep breath and knocked on the door. His mother opened it, her face pinched, and anxious.

"Fox." She looked at him for a moment, then, cautiously, pulled him into a hug. He resisted momentarily, and then gave himself up to the embrace, his eyes misting over.

"Mom. I'm sorry," he whispered.

"I know that. It's okay." She squeezed him and then let go, and drew back, inviting them both into the house.

"Mr. Skinner." She eyed Mulder's Master warily, sizing him up. "I wanted to thank you for taking care of Fox after his accident."

"It was my pleasure, Ma'am," Skinner said courteously, bowing his head deferentially to her, his old fashioned charm kicking in. Teena Mulder's eyes narrowed as she assessed the big man, but he remained unfazed by her scrutiny.

"I'll go and make coffee," she said.

"None for me, thanks, Ma'am. I'm not stopping," Skinner told her. "Fox...I'll leave you and your Mom to talk." Skinner patted his slave's arm. "I'll be in the car if you need me." He didn't remove his hand from his slave's arm until Mulder looked up, and smiled a hesitant confirmation. Then and only then did he leave. Mulder didn't take his eyes off his Master until the other man's broad back disappeared from sight.

Mulder sat in the living room while his mother made coffee and brought out a plate of cakes. Then they sat in silence. The ticking of the clock was so loud that Mulder wanted to grab it and throw it into the fire. He cleared his throat, remembering too many conversations with his mother that had ended in tears or angry recriminations - or him getting his face slapped.

"You're feeling better?" Teena asked.

"Yes, much better. I have another couple of weeks off work and then..." He shrugged.

"Don't go back," she said unexpectedly.

"What?" He frowned. She had never interfered with his work before.

"I worry about you. There have been so many phone calls, Fox. So many hospital visits. I'm getting old. I can't face knowing that one day I might get the call, the one telling me you're..."

"I have to go back," he interrupted. "The FBI isn't just a job to me. It's more than that."

"Because of your sister?" she asked, her voice strained and angry.

"Samantha," Mulder flared, unable to keep the resentment out of his own voice. "Say her name, Mom - it's always 'your sister'. She had a name."

"I know, I also know she's the reason you risk your life so often. Why else did you join the FBI? You know as well as I do that you thought you could use their resources to find out what happened to your...to Samantha."

"Yes. I know." Mulder shrugged. "I know that you're disappointed that I've failed to do that, but that doesn't mean that I..."

"Fox, I didn't ask you to give up your life in order to find Samantha," she interrupted.

"You didn't ask me, no, but it's what you wanted." He gazed at her hopelessly. "I was there, remember, Mom. I watched you after she was taken. You made me vow I'd find her for you again one day."

"Fox - I said a lot of things after she was taken. I wasn't myself. You know that. I had no idea you were keeping some vow to me...I don't even remember asking you," she admitted, her eyes full of pain.

"You did. You came into my room in the middle of the night, and you kept talking, and talking, not making much sense. You sat me up in bed, and told me I had to promise I'd never stop looking for her. I haven't stopped, Mom. I kept my promise," Mulder whispered. "I lost her after all. It's only right that I find her again."

"You didn't lose her." Teena Mulder's face crumpled in front of his eyes. "Oh, Fox, I didn't know you thought that."

"Of course I thought that. A few years back, when we thought we'd found her - and I lost her again, Dad as much as said it to me. He asked me if he knew what it would do to you, losing her a second time. You never forgave me for that."

"You're wrong!" Teena's voice quavered with emotion. "I don't blame you for any of it. Is that what you've thought? All these years?"

"What else? I knew you wanted me to find her. I knew..." He broke off. His mother was shaking her head vehemently.

"No, Fox. You don't understand. I just want you to be happy. To live your life and not be tainted by the mess that your father and I made of everything. Oh god, Fox, don't you see what you mean to me? You're all I have left." She came over to him, sat on the couch, took hold of his face between her hands and looked at him. "Fox, I've lost Samantha. I'm reconciled to that. I just hope that she's at peace, wherever she is and that what happened to her was swift, and painless."

"You don't think she's ever coming back?" Mulder's asked in a broken tone.

"No. I don't think she's ever coming back, and even if she did - she's not my little girl any more, Fox. My little girl is gone. Everything has been taken from me. My daughter, my marriage, my husband, but I still have you." She said the words fiercely, and he drew back, shaking his head.

"I haven't given you the things you want. I know you want me to make a success of my life, to get married, have children...I'm sorry, Mom. I don't think I can give you those things," he whispered, his whole body shaking.

"You're wrong. All I want is for you to be happy. We've both spent too long being unhappy. I haven't asked questions, but I'm not blind and I'm not stupid, Fox." He looked at her questioningly, and saw that she knew. Maybe she had known for a long time. "You never had girlfriends, Fox. You never once brought a girl home," she said in a strained tone.

"There were girls. Maybe they just weren't the kind you brought home," he replied, thinking of Phoebe.

"None of them lasted though. Not one relationship?"

He closed his eyes, remembering a long line of tops, first women, latterly men. "No," he murmured. "I'm not very good at commitment, and there wasn't room for a relationship in my life. I know that you hoped that me and Scully..."

"Yes, I did," she acknowledged, "but you never looked at Scully the way you just looked at Mr. Skinner."

There was a long silence. Mulder bit on his lip, then finally raised his eyes to meet hers. "How long have you known?" he asked.

"I guessed. I thought it might have been my fault. We were so close after Samantha was taken. It's a cliché - men who identify too much with their mothers..."

"No," he said softly. He had no intention of explaining it to her, of trying to unravel his sexuality in front of her. It was too private, and somehow he didn't think she'd understand that it was his submissive fantasies that had always been with him, not his bisexuality. The fact that his submission had found its best outlet with a man, not a woman, was almost incidental to him. "It had nothing to do with you. I've known about this side of myself since I was a kid, and before you ask, yes, I knew before Samantha disappeared. It had nothing to do with her. Do you mind? Does it...upset you?"

"I'd be lying if I said that I didn't want you to get married, and have children, but that's just because I want you to have an easier life than the one you've chosen," she told him, clearly struggling to be honest. "At the end of the day, Fox, after what our family has been through, I'd settle for just one of us achieving happiness. Your father and I never did, and Samantha..." She paused, and shrugged, and he knew she was making a huge effort not to cry. "I want it for you, Fox. You've been such a good son - it's the least you deserve, and if this Mr. Skinner makes you happy then I'll learn how to cope with that. I promise. Does he make you happy?" She put her hand on his arm, and looked at him, and he smiled, and covered her hand with his own.

"Yeah. He does." He gazed at his feet, uncomfortable talking about his Master with his mother.

"Then he's always welcome here, just as you are." She kissed him firmly. "I always thought our problem was that we loved each other too much. It hurt sometimes, watching you...knowing you had all this pain inside. All I saw when I looked in your eyes was Samantha, and I know that's all you saw when you looked at me. If I've been distant, it's because I saw your pain echoing my own and it all hurt so much," she stumbled, desperately trying to explain.

"I know. I understand," he said, and he did.

"Can you let her go?" She asked him.

"Can you?" He drew back and looked into her eyes.

"Yes. I have. A long time ago."

"The first birthday she had after she disappeared," he murmured, remembering her long, silent, lonely vigil, and his own - watching her.

"Yes. Oh, a tiny glimmer of hope still remains inside. I don't think that will ever disappear, but I let her go, Fox. You need to do the same."

"My M...Walter said something similar recently." Mulder smiled.

"He's right." She reached out and touched the side of his face. "He sounds like a good man," she said, trying to smile.

"He is - and I'll try. I promise I'll try," he told her.

They talked for hours, making up for too many lost years of anger, strained silences, and misunderstandings. Then, she glanced at the clock and put her hand over her mouth, pointing to the window, and he remembered that Skinner was still sitting outside in the car, waiting for him. He ran out to the road, and found his Master fast asleep inside the car.

"Sir!" He got into the car beside his Master and Skinner woke with a start.

"Fox?" He rubbed his hand across his eyes.

"It's all right. Everything's all right." Mulder grinned insanely, unable to keep his delight from showing on his face.

"Good." Skinner's eyes glowed with pleasure in response to his slave's obvious excitement.

"Come inside. She wants to meet you. I've agreed to stay for the next couple of days. We had so much to talk about." His expression changed as he realized he hadn't asked for permission. "Is that all right? You could stay too..."

"No." Skinner put his finger over his slave's mouth to stem the flood of words. "I think that you and she need some time alone together. I'll come in for a drink, and then I'll head back to DC. I have...some business to attend to."

Mulder nodded, too keyed up to wonder what business his Master might be referring to.

"I'll carry my cell phone with me the whole time. Any crises - you call. I mean it," Skinner said casting a firm glance in his slave's direction. "The penalty for not calling is severe," he added in a stern tone. Mulder gave a wry smile, and nodded.

"You were right," he said suddenly. "This was the right thing to do."

"Just remember that next time you're feeling rebellious, boy," Skinner grinned, treating his slave's butt to a sideways swat as they walked up the drive.

"Yes, sir!" Mulder grinned, but a small voice inside reminded him that the battle was only half won and that Skinner would make him fight a harder one before he was through with his slave.

Skinner returned to collect his slave three days later. Mulder's heart lurched when he saw the big man striding up the driveway. He had mixed feelings about their reunion. Much as he had longed to see his Master again, he wasn't looking forward to tackling more of his issues. He had worn a tee shirt under his shirt for the past few days, despite the warm summer weather, so that he didn't have to catch even a glimpse of what he'd done to himself. It was at times like this that he longed to be back at work, able to bury himself in his beloved X Files, and lose himself in familiar banter with Scully. Chasing after mutants and monsters was easier by far than tackling the demons within. His visit with his mother had gone well but he was so weary of dealing with one hard issue after the other. He desperately wanted some respite from it, and he knew that his Master wasn't going to allow him that.

Skinner was dressed in a pair of tight black jeans and a white tee shirt, and, intriguingly, he was wearing a pair of black leather gloves. Mulder found them fascinating, idly wondering what sound they'd make slapping onto a bare, vulnerable butt. It also didn't escape his notice that Skinner had a cut on his jaw.

"What's the matter? Forgotten how to shave yourself in my absence?" He grinned at his Master, reaching out to finger the cut. Skinner moved his face away, flushing slightly, and Mulder wondered what the hell that was about.

"We should get moving," Skinner said stiffly, by way of reply, grabbing Mulder's bag and slinging it into the car. Mulder said goodbye to his mother and got into the car beside his Master. He sensed that something had happened, something Skinner didn't want to talk about, and it bothered him. This whole process of revelation made him feel so vulnerable. He had existed in a state of high emotion for the past few weeks and it had taken its toll on him, making him sensitive to every last nuance in his relationship with his Master. He realized, with some resentment, that Skinner had tamed him, brought him in from the cold. He felt like a wild animal, sitting uneasily at his Master's hearth, warm, and well fed, but now dependent on his Master's love. The thought of losing it hurt, but Mulder was sure that at some point they both had to face up to the fact that Skinner wasn't physically attracted to his slave any more. No wonder his Master was so silent, and brooding. He was probably wondering how to broach the subject.

"This isn't the way to the airport." Mulder broke the silence, glancing at his Master in surprise.

"I know. We aren't going there. We're going somewhere else," Skinner told him.

"Where?"

"You'll see. I want to get there before dark." Skinner glanced at the sky. "Why don't you get some sleep? You look tired."

Mulder bit on his lip, wondering what the hell his Master had in store for him next. He half closed his eyes, and watched those sleek, black gloved hands as they rested on the steering wheel.

"What's with the gloves?" He asked. "They're, uh, kind of hot." He wished he hadn't said that as soon as the words were out of his mouth. Now was not a good time to bring up the subject of sex. He wasn't ready for this conversation yet. He wasn't ready for the rejection. His scar was itchy beneath his undershirt - it was too hot to be wearing it, and it irritated the healing flesh, a constant reminder both of what he'd done and what had been done to him.

"You like them?" Skinner gave a half smile but he looked so profoundly uncomfortable that Mulder knew he'd been right and could have kicked himself for his careless words. He closed his eyes and turned his face towards the window. He had never been less than brutally honest with himself. He knew his own faults and failings all too well, and he couldn't think why any Master would want such an emotionally volatile, physically disfigured slave. He folded his arms across his body and descended into the welcome oblivion of sleep.

Mulder was woken by the sensation of the car moving over rocky ground. He came to with a start and looked around blearily.

"Where are we?" He muttered.

"On a coast road. A long way from anywhere," Skinner told him. "We're nearly there."

"Where is there?" Mulder asked, sitting up.

Skinner didn't reply. He just swung the car off onto a gravel track, and drove for another mile, before pulling up outside a white gate. He got out of the car and opened the gate, then drove them up a long, grassy driveway and parked the car outside a large, pink house. Mulder got out of the car, still puzzled, and tasted salt water on his lips. The wind was fresh and warm, and the sun was just starting to set...over the sea.

"It's Murray's beach house. He gave me the key at the dinner party last week," Skinner said.

"Is he here?" Mulder asked, still confused.

"No. There's just you and me - there's nobody else for miles around. Murray has his own private section of the beach. Come on, let me show you." Skinner put his gloved hand on Mulder's shoulder and pulled him across the beach towards the lights of a small jetty, that were sparkling in the fading evening light. "I wanted to get here in time for the sunset. It's a beautiful spot to watch it from," Skinner said, drawing his slave across the sand. "This piece of land juts out some way into the sea - so it's one of the few places on the East Coast where you can see the sun setting over water - partially at least."

"What about my bag? Shouldn't I...?" Mulder hung back, pointing at the car.

"Leave it. I was out here earlier today. I brought everything you'll need which isn't much." Skinner grinned an almost feral grin. "Come here. I don't want to miss the sunset." Mulder found himself pushed down onto a blanket. Nearby, a bottle of champagne was cooling in an ice bucket, and there were a dozen candles, each standing two or more feet high, stuck into the sand in a semi-circle around the blanket. Skinner pulled a lighter out of his pocket and lit each one, then opened the champagne, poured his slave a glass, and handed it to him, before sitting down on the blanket sipping from his own

glass. Skinner spread his long legs and dragged Mulder over to sit between them, then pulled him into the warm circle of his arms, resting his chin on his slave's head.

"God, it's beautiful," Mulder breathed, watching the orange rays of the sun bathe the beach in their fading warmth, lighting the sea with sparks of pure gold and glancing off the land across the bay. A few stars were just visible in the sky, which was a velvety shade of deep blue. Skinner didn't speak, he just held his slave tight, his cheek pressed against his slave's face as they watched the sun go down. Mulder was completely wrapped up in his Master's arms and legs, trapped by their comforting weight. Only when the last rays of the sun had faded from the sky did Skinner move.

"Lie on your back," he whispered, in a throaty growl. Mulder looked up, startled.

"Do it, boy. Your Master wants to use his slave," Skinner ordered. Mulder gave a start of surprise, but he swallowed hard, and did as he had been told, lying back on the blanket. He stared up at his Master, as Skinner moved to sit astride his slave's body. "Who do you belong to, boy?" Skinner asked, resting his fingers on Mulder's chest.

"You, sir," Mulder replied automatically, his cock hardening inside his jeans.

"All of you?" Skinner asked.

"Yes, sir, all of me," Mulder answered. "I'm yours. You know that, M...sir."

"Put your hands above your head," Skinner ordered. Mulder complied, his eyes never leaving his Master's face. Skinner was shrouded half in darkness, lit only by the flickering candlelight which lent his face an air of mystery, casting shadows across his cheekbones and making his eyes seem to burn fiercely in the half light. "Don't move. There's a penalty for moving," Skinner said in that same low, throaty, sexy growl.

"Yes, sir." Mulder closed his eyes and tried to concentrate on staying still, but he opened them again when his Master kissed him full on the lips.

"Watch me," Skinner ordered.

"Yes, sir." Mulder whispered, and he watched as Skinner pulled his tee shirt over his head, revealing his hard, muscled chest, tapering down to that flat, narrow waist. Then his Master slowly, very slowly, grasped the tip of one glove, and pulled it from his hand. Mulder felt his cock harden unbearably inside his pants. It was the sexiest thing he'd ever seen. Skinner disposed of the other glove in a similar way, his eyes never leaving those of his slave. Then he reached down and unbuttoned Mulder's shirt, and opened it, to reveal his tee shirt underneath. "I said don't move and I mean it," Skinner hissed, reaching into his jeans and drawing out a pocket knife. Mulder tried hard to obey his Master, every muscle in his body shaking with the effort of staying still. "Who do you belong to?" Skinner asked again.

"You, sir," Mulder whispered.

"What have I commanded you to do?" Skinner demanded.

"Not to move, sir."

"Obey me," Skinner ordered. Mulder shivered at his Master's tone, and closed his eyes as the big man brought the tip of the blade down on his vest. "Open them. Watch me," Skinner commanded. Mulder licked his lips, fighting an inner struggle, then, finally, opened his eyes, and watched as Skinner inserted the blade of his knife in his slave's undershirt, and cut the fabric away, leaving Mulder's bare chest exposed. Skinner folded the knife and threw it into the sand.

"This," he said, fingering Mulder's collarbone with one blunt fingertip, "belongs to me."

"Yes, sir," Mulder agreed willingly. Skinner bent to kiss the collarbone.

"And so does this." Skinner brushed his fingers over Mulder's left nipple.

"Yes, sir," Mulder panted. He arched up as his Master dropped another kiss onto the nipple.

"And this." Skinner rested his fingers on his slave's scarred flesh. Mulder lay still, the sound of his beating heart the only noise he could hear. "Well, boy? Who does this belong to?" Skinner demanded, his hand resting firmly on the scar.

"I..." Mulder closed his eyes.

"Open them. Who does this belong to?" Skinner asked again. Mulder opened his eyes and met those of his Master, dark and commanding.

"You, sir," he whispered finally.

"That's right. Me." Skinner dipped his head and gently kissed the scar. He lingered over it for several long seconds, kissing every inch of the long, jagged lines.

"It's ugly," Mulder tried to wrench himself sideways, only to find that he was trapped between his Master's legs.

"It's mine," Skinner replied firmly. "Are you calling my property ugly, boy?"

"It's his mark," Mulder whispered.

"No. It's mine. It belongs to me. Look at it," Skinner commanded. Mulder closed his eyes again. Skinner gently tapped his jaw. "I said look at it, boy." Skinner ordered. Mulder opened his eyes, and for the first time, looked down on the raised ridges of the scar. The lines were pink, and still looked raw, the old wound combining with the new to form a lined mass on his chest. The A K was still visible, despite his best attempts to hack into it. Mulder bit down hard on his lip, struggling to accustom himself to the sight. "It's mine. All of you is mine," Skinner said insistently. "Mine to touch, wherever and however I choose." He lowered his face again, and kissed the scar, then licked the nipple close to it, sucking on it lightly. Mulder moaned, and bucked up into the embrace, forgetting the scar, forgetting everything save the fact that his Master wanted to caress him. Skinner leaned over his slave, and held his arms down into the sand, while he continued licking and kissing Mulder's scarred and wounded chest. "Mine to love. Mine to touch. Mine," Skinner repeated softly as he went. Mulder could hear the waves lapping against the shore, and the faint cry of seagulls. More stars had emerged in the darkening night sky, and the candles seemed brighter now, lighting their entwined bodies as the Master made love to his slave.

Skinner's fingers swiftly divested his slave of his jeans, and Mulder's cock sprang free, weeping and hungry. Skinner took it briefly in his mouth, sucking the hard length firmly, making Mulder cry out, and arch up from the blanket. Mulder watched as Skinner removed his own clothing, and then knelt over his slave again, his large cock pulsing in the candlelight. Skinner covered his slave's body with his own, taking Mulder in his arms, and kissed him hard on the mouth, his tongue demanding entry. His knee parted Mulder's legs, and their hard cocks rubbed against each other, trapped between their stomachs. Skinner's fingers were relentless, alternately fingering his slave's nipple, then his scar, then back to his nipple again until Mulder was crying out with his need to come.

"Not until I say," Skinner whispered. He reached out and pulled some lube from his abandoned jeans, then parted his slave's legs, and pushed his fingers slowly, teasingly into Mulder's ass. Mulder moaned, and bucked up into those cool, probing fingers. "You're so hot, so ready," Skinner grinned. "My beautiful slave slut," he murmured, dipping his head to kiss his slave's scar again. Mulder didn't think his Master had ever looked more magnificent, as he parted his slave's legs and knelt over him, preparing to enter him. His Master's body was sleek, its powerful lines lit by the glowing candlelight, which illuminated tantalizing glimpses of honeyed golden flesh. His big cock was hard with desire and hunger for his slave, as he positioned himself between Mulder's legs and slid home, all the way into Mulder's ass, deep inside his slave's willing, eager body. They lay there for a long while in the candlelight, neither of them moving, Skinner's hard cock pulsating inside his slave's ass, where it belonged. Then his Master began to thrust - slowly, very slowly, dipping to lick his slave's scarred chest with every forward motion. One of Skinner's hands was wrapped firmly around his slave's cock as they rocked together, one flesh, one being, beneath the stars. "In time with me, slave," Skinner whispered, rocking back and forth in a steady rhythm, hitting Mulder's prostate with every forward glide. "Hold it...we'll come together. Hold it until I say." Mulder cried out, his body abandoned to the large, sliding cock inside him, the sensation of his Master's hand pumping his own hard shaft, and his Master's warm mouth as it descended on his body, over and over again. Their timed thrusts reached a crescendo, and then Skinner was going faster, harder, his head slung back, his naked scalp illuminated against the backdrop of the velvety night sky. Mulder was just sensation, his one single, coherent thought being to hold on, for as long as his Master commanded.

"Now!" Skinner cried, his hand pumping Mulder's cock hard, one last time, as he shot his warm come deep into his slave's body. Mulder surrendered, throwing back his head and crying out his pleasure as his own come shot out over his belly, and his Master's hand. They lay there, panting, and sated for a long time, Skinner still deeply embedded inside his slave, looking down on him, his fingers resting lightly on Mulder's scarred chest. Then Skinner withdrew, lay down beside his slave, and pulled Mulder into a warm embrace, his chest against his slave's back. Mulder grabbed his Master's hand and kissed it, then paused - the knuckles on Skinner's right hand were badly bruised, illuminated in the glow of the candlelight.

"So this is why you were wearing those gloves? To hide these bruises? Sir?" He turned over, and ran his fingers along the cut on Skinner's jaw. "What happened?" He asked.

"I told you. I had business to take care of." Skinner's eyes were dark, and haunted.

"Krycek," Mulder stated flatly. "How did you find him?"

"I set a couple of agents on his trail straight after Seattle," Skinner admitted. "After I left you with your mother I chased up each and every lead until I caught up with him late last night. I think he was surprised to see me," he murmured. Mulder drew back, startled. "Don't look at me like that, boy. The only reason I didn't do this before was because you needed me. I wanted to go after that bastard straight after Seattle, and then again when you hurt yourself. On that occasion it was all Perry could do to talk me out of it, and you were so adamant that I stay. I knew then what I'd do as soon as I got the chance though. Knowing that he'd read those files on you, written when you were just a kid..." He broke off, his body suffused with a kind of anger Mulder had rarely witnessed in his Master.

"What did you do to him?" Mulder asked, sitting up and surveying what he could see of his Master in the dim candlelight. Skinner didn't seem to be too badly hurt so he had to assume that his Master had gotten the better of his opponent - not that he would have expected even Krycek to stand a chance against Skinner when he was on the warpath.

"What did I do?" Skinner gave a distant, strained smile, then leaned forward, grabbed Mulder's hand, and fondled his slave's taped fingers. "Well...I broke two of his fingers," he said. Then he raised his hand to Mulder's face, and spidered his fingertips over the yellow bruises that had nearly faded away. "And I landed a few punches to his face and split his lip. I closed his eye for him too." His index finger lingered over Mulder's left eye, which had been badly swollen for days after Seattle. Then his hand moved down to Mulder's torso, and rested on his ribs. "I kicked his ribs a few times, and..." he glanced at Mulder's foot, "...he won't be walking comfortably for a while either. Everything he did to you, I did to him. Nothing more. Nothing less. Except..." His fingers paused, poised over the scar on Mulder's chest.

"Did you carve your initials into him?" Mulder asked, his breath catching in his throat.

"No. You see, when I put my mark on someone's body, I want it to be an act of love, and ownership not one of hate, and defilement," Skinner said in a husky voice. Mulder closed his eyes. In that one sentence, his Master had given his slave back the promise he had once made to him, that he would one day mark him as his own. Permanently, and irrevocably.

Mulder shook his head, unsure how he felt about what his Master had done. "I can fight my own battles," he said.

"I know," Skinner agreed, "but this wasn't your battle. It was mine. Nobody ever, ever lays a finger on my slave and gets away with it."

Mulder sat back, winded, and looked at the other man, the full realization of what Skinner had done sinking in. "You could have been killed," he pointed out.

"Trust me, there was no danger of that. I had the element of surprise, and I planned it very carefully."

"I'm sure you did. I know how good you are at planning." Mulder grinned, aware of his Master's almost military precision. "I bet he didn't know what hit him."

"Oh, he knew. I made sure that he knew exactly what hit him, and why," Skinner replied, in a tone of voice that Mulder had never heard before. It sent shivers up his spine and he was suddenly aware that he was face to face with his Master's dark side for the first time. Skinner was usually so self-controlled, so cool, and rational - the epitome of common sense. Mulder felt just the tiniest flicker of pity for

Krycek, being faced with this dark, angry apparition in the middle of the night, as stealthy and deadly as any panther. He hoped that the wrath of this particular Skinner would never be directed at him. "I wanted him to know exactly why he was suffering and what he could expect if he contacted you again. Ever. About anything. I think that message went home," Skinner murmured absently, fingering his bruised knuckles. "Your enemies are my enemies. These consortium bastards will have to go through me to get to you in future. They can destroy my career but they damned well won't destroy you. I won't let them. They've been playing with you like you're their own goddamn personal toy since you were a child and it stops here and it stops with me. You're mine now."

"Thank you." Mulder fingered his chest absently, trying to get used to the feel of the scar. "For all of it," he said sincerely, flushing in the darkness as he remembered how he had doubted his Master's love for him.

"I have plans for that too." Skinner's fingers joined those of his slave, and traced a line over the jagged flesh. "But first it has to heal some more. I have a lot of plans for you, boy, starting right here. Murray has a dungeon," he murmured into Mulder's ear, holding his slave tight. "A fully equipped dungeon," Skinner added. Mulder's cock hardened again, involuntarily, when he could have sworn that he was fully stated just seconds before. "I think you need some intensive retraining, boy. We have a couple of weeks here and I'll be putting you through your paces. You'll have every chance to win your collar back. Nobody will disturb us. It'll just be you, and me...and Wanda," he grinned.

"Wanda's here?" Mulder asked in surprise.

"I brought her with me. She's in the house." Skinner nodded. "I didn't want to leave her behind and besides, I think she could do with a vacation too."

"Yeah. She wouldn't be happy without her willing slaves around her," Mulder grinned, pleased his little Mistress was here too. He found a small bruise on Skinner's ribs and fingered it gently. "I'll be the best slave you could ever want. I promise, sir."

"Master," Skinner corrected, placing a finger over his slave's lips. "You've done everything I've asked and more. I think you've won back the right to call me Master, Fox." He leaned forward and replaced his finger with his mouth, claiming his slave with both his kiss and his words.

Mulder settled into his Master's arms, and stared out across the sea, feeling more profoundly at peace than he could ever remember.

"Yes, Master," he said softly.

## **End of Part 19**

### **Chapter End Notes:**

Heavy stuff, but there'll be lots of BDSM fun and games in the next chapter

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## Dungeons and Dragons by Xanthe

### Author's Notes:

Beautiful pic by Mika

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#### **-This chapter is dedicated to DiAnn -**

It's not quite the same writing or posting a chapter of **24/7** knowing you won't be reading it or sending feedback, DiAnn, when you took such delight in this story, and encouraged me to give free rein to the excesses of my erotic imagination. But, knowing you, I expect you were reading it over my shoulder as I was writing :-)

---

Posted 3rd October, 2000

Quotation courtesy of my sweet Alex. Standing thanks to Emma. None of this is beta'd. It's far too much fun to take seriously.

Many thanks to CDavis, Phoebe, and Emma for their big help with this chapter, and to Gaby for providing the Shakespeare - blame her!

**24/7** is an erotic fantasy and NOT a BDSM resource guide. The truth is sometimes exaggerated, or played with, for dramatic effect. For more information, please visit the **24/7 BDSM Glossary**.

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*"A truth, still apparent, though disregarded, that things move violently to their place, but calmly in their place. To put it another way, everything has its right home, the region that suits it, and, unless forcibly restrained, will move thither by a kind of homing instinct."*

**J. Winterson**  
**"Art and Lies"**

Mulder felt as if he was floating. He couldn't remember ever having felt this relaxed, or content, this still, and peaceful. He was warm. The sun was shining through a window, and he was an integral part of

a mound of hot human flesh entangled with a soft, vibrating feline presence. His head was resting on a broad chest, his ear tickled by curls of chest hair, and he could hear a heart beating in time to the steady purr that was emanating from the general direction of his chin. Lazily, he opened one eye, and found himself looking into unblinking yellow-green orbs. Wanda gave an explosive purr on seeing that he was awake, and arched her dainty back along the length of Skinner's torso, which was where she was stretched, both front paws languidly draped on Mulder's arm which was, in turn, flung over his Master's chest. Damn but it felt good here, being part of this feline/human triad: too good to move. Outside, the sound of waves ebbing and falling on the seashore lulled him, while inside, the sound of his Master's heartbeat and Wanda's purring had a similar, soporific effect. Mulder lay still, just soaking up the moment, his head turned fractionally so that he could gaze at his Master's sleeping form.

Skinner slept, as always, as if he owned the bed, and everything in it, which, Mulder reflected, wasn't far from the truth. That thought gave him a warm glow of contentment, and he pressed his lips reverently to Skinner's chest, and bestowed a tender kiss on the other man's honey-toned flesh. Skinner didn't move. He was a deep sleeper at the best of times and they had been late to bed the previous night. Mulder loved watching his Master in repose. Skinner always looked younger and more vulnerable without his glasses, and the trappings of his status as Mulder's Master. The cut on his chin had yielded a bruise that stood out in livid hues against the tan color of his flesh. Mulder found another bruise on his Master's ribs, but they were the only legacies of Skinner's fight with Krycek. Mulder wished he could have been there to witness his Master taking care of their old enemy. Somehow, he knew that the event had been accomplished efficiently, with the minimum of intrigue or fuss. Skinner would have arrived in the middle of the night, let himself in to the other man's apartment, and taken him by surprise. Krycek would have been allowed one free shot in the scuffle, and then Skinner would have subdued him - quickly, and efficiently, without raising his voice or losing his temper. Mulder shivered. There was something particularly ruthless about the thought of his Master calmly exacting from Krycek **precisely** what the other man had visited upon Skinner's slave. The level of calculation that had taken was more impressive and chilling than if Skinner had just hit out at his enemy in rage, not caring where the blows fell. Mulder processed this new information about his Master in his profiler's mind, as he gazed at the other man's sleeping form. Skinner was a man of such complexity, that he felt as if he was only now getting to know him.

Here was a man who had run from his own emotions for so many years that by the time he stopped to face them he was weak from exhaustion, and crippled by his own feelings of self-loathing. It had taken a man as clever and devoted as Andrew Linker to draw forth the Master Mulder knew so well from the wreckage that had been Skinner's life after his wife's death. Somehow, Andrew had found the sensual man inside the AD, and helped him become the living, breathing embodiment of the perfect Master. Then there were the contradictions; the big, strong man who was in thrall to a small, dainty, imperious cat. The experienced, legendary top, who willingly put himself under the lash when his own emotions got the better of him. The hard-assed boss who time and again moved heaven and earth for his chosen, troublesome slave and subordinate. The serious man with an appalling taste in puns, and one line ripostes. Skinner was stern Master and tender lover, hard taskmaster and curiously gentle friend at one and the same time. Friend. Mulder paused at that thought. He had never yet had a lover who had also been a friend. He had never expected to find a Master who would fill that role. In his fantasies, his faceless Master had always been cruel, and demanding, almost dehumanizing - Skinner couldn't have been more different than the fantasy. After last night, there was nothing Mulder couldn't imagine being able to share with his Master. He could quite literally tell the other man anything and everything. He had

never been in a relationship like this. It felt...good. He felt happy. Curled up here, part of this Master/slave/Wanda unit, he knew that he had at last found a place where he belonged.

Mulder dozed for another hour, enjoying the peace and sense of belonging, then finally stirred, and glanced at the clock – then glanced back in surprise. It was nearly noon. He couldn't believe how long they'd slept, and yet they had both needed the rest after the traumatic intensity of the past few weeks. Mulder slid quietly out of the bed, and padded along the corridor to the bathroom. He peed, and caught a glimpse of himself in the mirror tiles that lined the room.

“Shit, Murray – did you **have** to cover this entire room in mirror tiles?” he chided their absent host. “I do **not** look good right after waking up.” It was impossible to avoid seeing his naked body from all angles as he peed, and there was something curiously arousing about watching himself holding his own cock. He finished, and was unsurprised to find himself half hard. Somehow, he had the feeling his cock was going to be spending the next couple of weeks in an almost permanent state of arousal, and, equally, he knew he was only going to be allowed to come with his Master's permission. That delicious thought made his cock harden even more, and it looked absurd, jutting out from his body and reflected back at him all around the bathroom. If he looked straight ahead, he could see his butt reflected in the tiles on the walls behind him. His white, unlined butt; smooth after many spank-less days. Too many.

“You are seriously kinky, Murray,” he observed. He filled the basin with cool water and washed his face, and smoothed his sleep-mussed hair, then looked at himself again. The bruises on his body and face had faded almost to nothing, and all that remained as a reminder of what had happened in Seattle was a chipped tooth, and the raised scar on his chest. Mulder looked at the carved wound without flinching. Last night, Skinner had kissed it, and touched it, and made it **his** and that had gone a long way to curing his phobia about the scar. Mulder ran his fingers along the edge of the wound. He still didn't like the fact that it was there, but he could at least live with it now.

Mulder left the bathroom, and wandered down the wooden slatted stairs. It had been late by the time they had gone to bed last night, and Skinner hadn't done more than show him where the kitchen and bathroom were before they both fell into bed, and immediately into a deep sleep. Mulder was aware of the honor of being allowed to share Skinner's bed. He hoped that was a situation that would continue throughout their vacation, but he wasn't about to take anything for granted. He knew he was still on probation. He had won back the right to call the other man “Master”, but he was still a collarless slave, without status, and he was bitterly aware of his fall from grace. Having once been a collared slave, he would do anything to return to that state again. He wasn't aware just how much it was a part of his psyche until he had lost it. The collar had been the outward symbol of his place in his Master's life and the lack of it was a constant ache in his heart. He dreaded that Skinner would take him to another party, and that everyone would see he was collarless, and disgraced. He accepted that he had deserved the punishment, but the humiliation of his disgrace went very deep.

Mulder filled the kettle and put it on the stove, smiling to himself as he considered the irony of his position. He was a person of extreme independence. He had made his own decisions from a young age, and he was so determined a personality that nobody and nothing could stop him when he made up his mind to do something, however foolhardy and risky it was. Yet for so long he had been a restless soul, eaten up by guilt, and pain, and a voiceless need that had nearly destroyed him on countless occasions. All that had changed the moment he had accepted Skinner's rings onto his body. They had been outward symbols of an inner truth: Mulder wanted to belong. He wanted to belong to someone who

would allow him to keep his strength but would channel his self-destructive energies into the service of a Master as strong as himself. Mulder could turn his cool, rational profiling mind on himself, and had done, frequently, over the years. He usually understood himself all too well, with a bitterness and lack of compassion that he showed only towards himself. Now, though, he could see himself more calmly, through less jaundiced eyes than before, because now he was loved. Now he saw himself reflected back through his Master's eyes, and if his Master found his slave pleasing, who was Mulder to disagree with the man he worshipped?

There had been many times when Skinner had made him look at himself. In fact, Skinner seemed to enjoy making his slave view himself in his most abject and basic condition. Marked, naked, bound, willing, and eager, his Master's marks and symbols adorning his body – Skinner had always taken great delight in displaying his slave to himself. He had made Mulder look into the mirror, had pointed out the marks he'd made on his slave's skin, the rings he'd threaded through his slave's flesh, the bonds he used to bind his slave, and slowly, so slowly, Mulder had come to see himself through his Master's eyes. Skinner saw not a weak, pathetic slave, but someone who had handed up his body voluntarily to his Master's whim, offering him a gift of all that he was, and could ever be, without qualification, or hesitation, or proviso, making no terms as to how the gift was used - merely accepting. He had offered himself in totality, holding nothing back, because his own self was all he could give to his Master in return for the other man's love and affection. Skinner relished his gift, played with it, adored and protected it like the precious treasure that it was to him. He wanted Mulder to appreciate it as much as he did. He took such joy in his slave that he wanted his slave to see what he saw, to love what he loved – and in some way that Mulder couldn't even begin to understand, he was starting to do just that.

Mulder sipped his coffee, then wandered over to the window, and glanced out. It was beautiful – the sun was high in the sky, and the sea was a shimmering silvery-blue. He heard a rumbling sound around his feet, and something soft rubbing against his ankles and reached down to lift Wanda up against his chest. She nuzzled against his scar, clearly deeming it irrelevant in her universe, and Mulder smiled, and tickled her ears. She gazed out of the window at the sea, her ears flicking back and forth, and her pupils dilating.

“What does the apartment cat make of the big bad world, huh?” Mulder crooned, tickling her under the chin to soothe her. She trilled and nestled into him, her gaze still transfixed by the sea – or, more accurately, by the seagulls that were flying around outside squawking. “So, where's the dungeon, Wanda?” Mulder asked, which was the thought that had been uppermost in his mind since he woke. He imagined a basement, with cold, stone walls, manacles hanging from menacing hooks. He saw himself bound naked to a rack, his tall, strong Master bending over him, while he tormented him to ever greater heights of pleasure. Mulder glanced around, wondering where the dungeon might be, and whether he dared sneak a peek at it, but he guessed that Skinner would wake soon, and he wanted to give his Master a wake up call that he wouldn't forget in a hurry, so, reluctantly, he decided against further exploration.

Mulder finished his coffee, and placed Wanda on the kitchen table, then poured his Master a cup of coffee, and padded silently upstairs to the bedroom. He opened the drapes, and then gazed around the room in shock. It had been dark the previous night, and he'd been too tired and spaced out to look around, but the room they were in was frankly...unique. The bright yellow walls were covered with erotic homosexual art, much of it primitive and crude, hanging in huge wooden frames. Mulder stared at pictures of a kneeling man deep-throating a laughing, budda-esque figure that looked suspiciously like

Murray, and swallowed hard. He looked closer at the kneeling figure and saw that it resembled Hammer. Glancing around the room, he saw that **all** the pictures were in fact of their host and his sub having wild, frenzied, unrestrained sex in all manner of positions. Mulder felt almost as if he was intruding, although he had to admit that the artwork was definitely inspiring. That thought made him turn his attention back to his Master. Skinner was still asleep, his whole body sprawled out over the sheets, taking up as much room as possible. Mulder smiled, placed the coffee on the nightstand, and then slid beneath the sheets and located his Master's sleeping cock. He licked it, lazily, and it stirred beneath his ministrations, as it always did. Mulder wasn't in a hurry though. He wanted this to be a nice, slow wake up call for his Master. It had been so long since he'd delivered a wake up call, and he wanted to make it good. It certainly felt good for the slave; Mulder gently lapped at his Master's hardening penis, and then took it into his mouth. He guessed that Skinner was now awake, because his Master made a small, throaty sound, and twisted slightly, his hips bucking up into Mulder's eager mouth. Mulder slid his Master's cock reverentially back and forth between his moist lips, and then finally deep throated it in a move that made his Master gasp out loud. A hand appeared on his head, and grabbed his hair, and he sucked hard, delighting in the way he could send his Master into such a frenzied state so easily.

He tasted Skinner's come, and continued sucking until he was sure that his Master was done, and then crawled back up the bed, smiling to himself, to find his Master wide awake, his dark eyes full of affection.

"I'm glad to see you've remembered your place, boy," Skinner murmured, and Mulder grinned and dared to steal a kiss from his Master's lips. Skinner grunted, and grabbed his slave's butt cheeks, kneading them as he responded hungrily to the kiss. Mulder's cock dug into his Master's thigh, hard, and aroused, but he had no expectation of being allowed to come. The kiss finished, and Skinner stroked his slave's butt, his expression thoughtful. "It strikes me that this butt is a good deal too cool, boy," he growled. "It's been allowed to get away without correction for too long, and that's made you bold."

"Yes, Master, sorry, Master," Mulder said without any shred of sincerity, delighting in saying the word **Master**. Skinner chuckled, and slapped his slave's ass again, and Mulder moaned and lifted his butt up eagerly for more – which wasn't forthcoming.

"I think I mentioned that you are subject to some intensive re-training for the next couple of weeks," Skinner said.

Mulder nodded. "Yes, Master." He angled his head forward and stole a kiss from Skinner's neck, then tried to go back to his Master's mouth and was stopped by another slap on the ass.

"Master- permission to kiss you, Master," Mulder said hopefully.

"That's better. Permission granted." Skinner pulled his slave's body close as Mulder angled his head down again. He opened his mouth as his lips met those of his Master, and their tongues immediately twined, passionately claiming each other. Skinner's hands were never still, constantly kneading his slave's butt, and occasionally his fingers disappeared into Mulder's crease, pushing inside his slave's body. Mulder moaned, and twisted on his Master's fingers, opening up his ass, hoping that his Master would use him. It was a forlorn hope.

“Very nice, boy,” Skinner chuckled when they parted. “You know, I think it’s possible that you might have missed me.”

“I did, Master.” Mulder nodded, daring to drop his head and kiss his Master’s nipple. He was rewarded with a smack on his butt, which only emboldened him to kiss the other nipple. Another smack sent his cock leaping. “I’d like to show Master how much I missed him,” Mulder said slyly. Skinner gazed at him for a moment, a smile in his eyes. He knew he was being manipulated, but his expression said that he was more than happy to go along with it - for now.

“Very well, boy. Show me.” Skinner moved his pillow and lay propped up on it, looking at his slave expectantly.

“Where shall I begin?” Mulder asked, kneeling astride his Master and gazing down as if he wanted to consume the other man. “Perhaps at the top. I missed your head, Master.” He leaned forward, and bestowed several kisses on his Master’s bare scalp. “I missed my Master’s warm, naked flesh. I missed kissing it, and licking it.” He gently trailed his tongue along his Master’s bare head, and Skinner chuckled, and slapped his butt half-heartedly.

“Keep going, boy,” he ordered.

Thus emboldened, Mulder ended his wet trail at one of his Master’s ears. “I missed my Master’s beautiful, edible ears,” Mulder said, nibbling on a lobe. Skinner convulsed slightly, and slapped Mulder’s butt again.

“Edible?” He raised a skeptical eyebrow.

“Eminently so, Master,” Mulder replied, grinning.

“Carry on, boy,” Skinner commanded.

“I missed my Master’s dark, expressive eyes.” Mulder pressed his lips to Skinner’s eyelids, closing them with his tongue, and then kissed each one, “and I missed my Master’s perfect nose.” He kissed Skinner’s nose, and his Master grunted, clearly fighting back laughter. “I missed my Master’s firm jaw, and wide cheekbones, and most of all...” Mulder bestowed a kiss to each of those areas, and then ended up eyeball to eyeball with his Master. “I missed Master’s lips, and the taste of his kisses,” Mulder whispered, stealing another kiss from his Master’s mouth – one that was given very freely. He disengaged reluctantly, and moved further down. “I missed the small dimple in my Master’s chin.” Mulder kissed it, and then went further, “and his broad, strong neck.” He bestowed several kisses on Skinner’s neck, and then moved again, sliding back along his Master’s body as he went. “I missed my Master’s broad chest...” He ran his hands over Skinner’s chest, fondling each of his Master’s nipples as he did so. “And, of course,” Mulder paused, and drew back the sheet dramatically. Skinner’s cock stirred under his slave’s gaze. “His long legs,” Mulder grinned, bypassing Skinner’s genitals. Skinner growled and Mulder turned, offering his butt to his Master as he kissed his way down said long legs, and all the way to his Master’s feet. Skinner used Mulder’s ass as a drum as his slave worked, tapping out a beat on his slave’s white buttocks. “I missed Master’s cute feet, and his exquisitely perfect toes,” Mulder said. Skinner guffawed, and then grunted, and gave Mulder’s ass a sharp swat as his slave took each of his Master’s golden toes in his mouth and sucked on them. Mulder finished sucking and began working his way back up his Master’s body. “Hmm...I’m sure there’s something else I missed,” he murmured,

feigning a puzzled look. Skinner was laughing now, as well as trying to look stern, and displeased. Mulder grinned, delighted that he was amusing his Master so much. "I remember!" he announced. Skinner raised an expectant eyebrow. "I missed my Master's taut, bite-able butt," Mulder said, nuzzling his face against the side of one butt cheek which was all he could reach with his Master lying on his back.

"Bite-able? Just you try, boy," Skinner warned.

"I wouldn't dare, Master," Mulder replied. He sat astride his Master again. "I think I've finished," he said, still grinning.

"Are you sure there wasn't something you missed?" Skinner asked, dangerously.

"Hmmm, I don't think so," Mulder replied, feigning a thoughtful expression.

"Are you sure, boy, or will a trip over my knee refresh your memory?" Skinner asked.

"A trip over Master's knee will refresh more than my memory," Mulder riposted, glancing down at his half erect cock.

"Perhaps we should see..." Skinner rose up and grabbed his giggling slave, threw him face down over his knee, and delivered several deliciously stinging swats to Mulder's wriggling, eager ass. Mulder writhed, and panted, and gasped, and called out, all the time loving every second of the light spanking.

"I've remembered something else, Master!" he cried at last.

"Well." Skinner righted him and looked at him expectantly.

"I missed Master's big, strong, hard, pounding, throbbing, pulsing..."

"All right, boy. I think I get the idea," Skinner interrupted, his eyes alight with amusement.

"...huge, delicious, pulsating, claiming, filling, totally gorgeous, completely edible, and utterly satisfying..." Mulder dropped his face to Skinner's hardening penis. "...cock," he finished, enunciating the final 'k', with a lascivious click of his teeth, and licking his lips salaciously at the same time. Skinner broke into a wide smile, and Mulder bestowed a big kiss on the member in question, delighting in the fact that he could make his Master so full of lust for him that he was already showing signs of arousal so soon after last time.

"Come here, scamp." Skinner pulled his slave back down onto his broad chest, and kissed Mulder's forehead. Mulder went obediently, and lay still on his Master's body, sighing contentedly. Skinner's big hands gently caressed his slave's warm bottom.

"One other thing I missed and am glad to have back, Master," Mulder murmured, glancing up.

"Hmm?" Skinner continued stroking his slave's ass, gently fondling Mulder's body.

"The right to call you Master."

“Ah, that must explain why you’ve been working the word into every sentence,” Skinner said with an amused grunt.

“Yes, Master. Also...” Mulder paused, not wanting to ruin the moment. “Will Master allow me some hope of ever winning back my collar?”

“There’s always hope, boy.” Skinner gazed down on his slave affectionately. “If you do well during the next two weeks, and if you can keep that up when we return to work, then I have every expectation that I’ll be sending out invitations to your collaring ceremony sometime in the not too far distant future.

“Invitations? You’ll collar me publicly?” Mulder whispered, his heart thumping inside his chest.

“Of course. Not only that,” Skinner promised, “if I invite our friends to witness your collaring then I’ll want to make sure they’re kept amused and entertained. It will be an ideal opportunity to show off how obedient my slave is, how well he has submitted to the re-training process, and all the things he’s learned with a willing, eager heart. I want them to see what a credit he is to both his Master, and himself.”

Mulder swallowed hard. He saw himself in his mind’s eye, blindly following Skinner’s every order, no matter how hard or personally uncomfortable, being watched by a room full of people, and his cock hardened immediately.

“Thank you, Master,” he whispered.

“My pleasure, slave,” Skinner replied, stroking his slave’s hair gently. “One thing, Fox. I’ll be disciplining you in front of our guests as well, so you need to become accustomed to that idea.”

“Disciplining me...?” Mulder looked up, his heart sinking into his shoes at this unexpected turn of events. He had only ever been disciplined in front of Ian and Donald before, and, briefly, in front of their close friends at the dinner party Skinner had held. He had found the former occasion in particular to be utterly humiliating, and he had no wish to repeat it.

“Yes, slave. Any complaints?” Skinner asked, raising a dangerous eyebrow.

“I won’t like it, Master,” Mulder said, burying his face in Skinner’s neck.

“I know. Think of it as a final act of contrition in order to win back your collar. It will be hard, and vigorous – you’ll cry. I’ll make you do that much in front of our friends. I won’t stop until you’re begging for it to end. I want you completely chastened when I put my collar on you again, boy. Then the slate will be wiped clean, and we can both go forward. Do you understand?”

“Yes, sir,” Mulder muttered into Skinner’s neck, his whole body trembling.

“Good boy.” His Master’s hands soothed his back gently. “That’s a long way off yet, Fox. For now, I want to concentrate on relaxing, and rediscovering exactly why you’re the best slave boy this side of Reticular.”

"I could point out that we don't know what the Reticulan slave boys are like," Mulder said, sitting up with a grin. "Or any other alien slave boys come to that.

"And I would reply that they could come with ten foot cocks, and lush, spank-able butts, but the fact remains that you are the only slave boy I want in my harem, Fox."

"Thank you, Master." Mulder's face broke into a wide grin.

"Oh, I wouldn't thank me if I were you." Skinner smiled, dangerously. "After all, if I only have one slaveboy, then he has to do all the work, and submit to all his Master's vicious impulses, without having anyone to share the torment with..." He reached up, took hold of each of Mulder's nipples, and squeezed, hard. Mulder yelped, and squirmed. "Stay still, boy," Skinner growled, "hands behind your back. Submit to your Master's will."

"Yes, sir," Mulder swallowed hard, his cock hardening immediately.

"Good boy." Skinner stroked and pinched the nubs of flesh for several minutes, and Mulder put his head back, enjoying his Master's attention. Last night's lovemaking was still a beautiful, treasured memory, and he longed for them to return to their old insatiable sexual relationship. It turned him on so much being this man's slave, worshipping him, and submitting to his every whim, however painful. He was fully erect within seconds, as Skinner sat up, and pulled him close, then latched his mouth onto his slave's nipples, and sucked and nibbled at them until it was all Mulder could do to keep still. Skinner's lips gently brushed Mulder's scar, kissing and licking at it, reinforcing the message he had drummed into his slave last night, that his scar was part of him, and as loved as the rest of him, then his lips traveled back to Mulder's nipples again, and attacked them in earnest. Mulder began to moan, his eyes half closed, sweat breaking out on his body from the effort of keeping in position. Then, suddenly, it stopped. Skinner drew back, and slapped his slave heartily on the butt.

"Time for a shower, I think," he grinned, and then he eased himself out from under his slave and disappeared in the direction of the bathroom. Mulder knelt there, reeling from the sudden absence of his Master.

"Bastard," he muttered.

"I heard that," Skinner called from the corridor.

"Spank me then," Mulder teased, rolling off the bed and going to join his Master in the mirror tiled bathroom. "Oh god, how can Murray and Hammer stand being in this room," Mulder said, wincing as he caught sight of his swollen, throbbing cock, reflected back at him all around from every single conceivable angle.

"Judicious use of blindfolds perhaps?" Skinner suggested, with a knowingly raised eyebrow. He stepped into the shower, and Mulder grinned, and stepped in beside him, but there were no fun and games on offer. His Master didn't command him to soap his body, and merely set about washing himself before tossing the soap to his slave, and stepping out again. He grabbed a towel, wrapped it around his waist and disappeared into the other room. Mulder stared after him, perplexed, wondering if these were some new rules he didn't know about, or understand.

He finished his own shower and then wandered back into the bedroom. Skinner was already dressed, in a pair of denim shorts, and a tee shirt. Mulder stared at his Master: he had never seen the other man dressed this informally, and it was, he had to admit...nice. Not sexy, but just nice. Comfortable. Skinner didn't look like his Master any more; he just looked like a regular guy on vacation. Mulder finished drying himself and toweled his hair, then sat on the end of the bed, looking a little lost. He didn't know if he was allowed to dress – he wasn't in their apartment, but now they were on vacation, and their lives had been so different recently anyway that their old routines seemed a lifetime away. He gazed at his Master as Skinner grabbed some sunscreen, and started lathering it on his arms, and bare scalp. Mulder felt this was a task he should perform, but his Master didn't ask, and he didn't know whether that was on purpose or not. Confused, he just sat, watching.

“Hurry up,” Skinner urged, seeing he wasn't moving. “I brought your things – they're in the green suitcase. Oh, and make sure you slap plenty of this on. It's looking pretty hot outside and the only part of your body I want to see glowing red is your ass – and not because it's been sunburned.” Skinner tossed him the tube of sunscreen, and then left the bedroom. Mulder got up, still perplexed. He wasn't sure what he had been expecting, but it wasn't this. True, Skinner had given him a cursory spanking, but it was a long way from the morning discipline he'd come to expect. He had expected orders, and punishments, a list of rules, and tasks to perform – a general framework in which he could show that he had learned, and grown, that he was truly contrite about the whole Seattle fiasco, and that he was genuine in his desire to win back his collar. How could he show Skinner how good a slave he was if his Master wasn't asking him to be a slave at all?

Confused, Mulder wandered over to the suitcase, and opened it. He rummaged through it, and found that Skinner had packed a comprehensive array of garments, mostly vacation wear such as shorts, and tee shirts, but also a pair of jeans, and chinos, and a couple of smarter shirts, and even one tie. His Master hadn't forgotten anything. There was underwear, footwear, and even a bag of toiletries. Mulder didn't bother to unpack. He rarely did whenever he stayed in hotel rooms anyway – he lived out of a suitcase, and ignored Scully's pointed remarks about crumpled suits. His suits usually ended up covered in green goo, or full of bullet holes anyway, so he had long since stopped caring about them.

Mulder pulled on a pair of khaki shorts, a navy cotton shirt, and a pair of sneakers, and then trotted down the stairs. He didn't feel like a slave, dressed like this. Was that the point? Was Skinner saying that after what had happened he viewed Mulder more as a lover, and less as a slave? Mulder wasn't sure how he felt about that. He enjoyed being the big man's lover. That felt good, and he appreciated having gotten to know the man behind the Master, but he didn't feel ready to change their relationship. The bottom line was - and Mulder smiled at the pun – he **wanted** to be Skinner's slave. He wanted it so badly it hurt.

There was no sign of his Master in the kitchen. Mulder glanced around, and his heart skipped a beat as he wondered whether his Master was in the Dungeon, preparing some particularly nasty piece of equipment.

“Master?” He opened the kitchen door and found himself on a path leading down to the beach – and there, wearing sunglasses, and lying sprawled out on a sun lounger, reading a newspaper, was his Master. Mulder frowned, and wandered down the path.

“There you are,” he said to the other man.

Skinner glanced up. "Yup." Mulder stood on one foot and made patterns in the sand with his other foot, feeling disgruntled. "Problem?" Skinner asked, shaking out his paper. Mulder sighed, and shrugged.

"No. Just wondering about breakfast, that's all," he murmured, glancing around the beach. He could hardly believe that this was the scene, just last night, of the most beautiful, intense love making of his life. Skinner had been masterful enough then, so why wasn't he behaving more like a Master this morning?

"Yeah?" Skinner glanced up again. Mulder couldn't see the expression in his Master's eyes behind the dark glasses. They both looked at each other, as if waiting for something. Finally, Skinner sighed. "There's food in the fridge. I brought groceries, and Murray always keeps the place well stocked." He turned his attention back to his newspaper.

"Oh. Right. I'll go and check that out. Uh, do you want some?" Mulder asked. Skinner lowered his paper very, very slowly, almost menacingly. Mulder had the feeling that he had said the wrong thing.

"That would be nice," Skinner replied politely.

"Right. I'll go and see what there is then." Mulder turned on his heel, and marched back up to the house, feeling decidedly pissed off. What the hell had **that** been about? He returned with a mountain of toast and some fruit juice, and put them down on the sand between himself and his Master. He wasn't sure where to sit – there was a small shed by the side of the house, and it was open, so he presumed the sun loungers were in there. Should he go and get one? Or did Skinner want him to sit on the sand?

"Are the sun loungers in there?" He asked in a neutral tone, pointing to the shed.

"I believe so." Skinner crunched on a slice of toast.

"I...could go and get one?" Mulder suggested feebly. He felt horribly out of his depth. He knew suddenly that this was the reason why he never came on vacation. Vacations were confusing things, full of alien rituals, the smell of sunscreen, and too much time to ponder dark, nasty thoughts. Then there was also the problem of sand getting into your sneakers. No wonder it had been ten years since he had last taken a beach vacation. Skinner was looking at him from behind those dark glasses, and Mulder had the feeling that if he could see into his Master's eyes, he would discover something very revealing. Finally, Skinner gave a curt nod, combined with a shrug, as if he didn't give a damn where his slave sat. Mulder shrugged, and limped off up the beach with two shoefuls of sand. He dragged out a folded teak chair, carried it down the beach, and spent ten minutes figuring out how to put it up, sweating all the time, and thinking how much he really, **really** loathed vacations. He finally constructed the chair, sat down on it cautiously, and laid back. This was nice enough, he supposed, and god knows his body appreciated the rest after all the recent stresses and angst it had been through, but all the same, he'd have **much** preferred to be locked up in a dungeon facing an array of torture implements in the hands of his skilled Master.

A couple of hours passed and Mulder started to get fidgety. Was this **it**? Was this what they were going to be doing for the next two weeks? Sitting in the sun? He hated sunbathing. Mulder tried reading his Master's cast off paper but the sea breeze kept blowing it out of shape, and he wasn't interested enough to continue struggling against the elements. He idly considered going for a run, and suggested it to his Master, hoping the other man would come too, but there was no reply. Mulder turned to repeat

the question and then realized that his Master was fast asleep, his mouth open, and his whole body relaxed.

“How much sleep does one person **need**?” he grouched, wondering whether he and his Master might be incompatible vacation companions. Not that it mattered, because he knew there was no question he’d be allowed to go home back to a nice, comfortable apartment without sand, sea breezes and marauding wasps. Mulder just didn’t **do** relaxing. He found it hard keeping his legs still for long enough. A good hard spanking followed by some stern orders could probably have gotten him to be still, but that didn’t seem to be on the vacation menu. Mulder gave a loud, tragic sigh, but Skinner didn’t so much as twitch and Mulder didn’t dare go so far as to wake his Master. Finally he got up and wandered back to the house. If his Master wasn’t going to introduce him to the delights of the dungeon then he’d just have to find it for himself.

Mulder walked through Murray’s house, Wanda on his heels, intent upon thoroughly exploring their new abode. The place was decorated in a somewhat dramatic and eccentric fashion, which was only to be expected, Mulder thought wryly to himself, remembering Murray’s strange taste in robes, extravagant gestures, and booming voice. The master bedroom and bathroom had clearly been merely a taste of what was to be found in the rest of the house. The kitchen was large, and contained every single cooking utensil that a person could ever need, and quite a few that Mulder thought entirely unnecessary. It was a large room, with an enormous wooden table in the center, around which were arranged several rickety, mismatched wooden chairs. It had a charming, rustic feel. Mulder found a walk-in larder, and a laundry room, equipped with state of the art washing machine and dryer. Mulder shuddered, feeling no desire to linger in **there**. He wandered along a corridor, and tried a door at the end, only to find that it was locked. His curiosity piqued, Mulder crouched down on his haunches, and tried to peep into the keyhole, but it was too dark to see anything. This **had** to be the dungeon. Mulder briefly considered picking the lock, but decided, regretfully, that it would be a stupid thing to do, and besides, it was no way to win back his collar, so he turned and wandered up the stairs.

The house was large, and there were three guest bedrooms apart from the main bedroom. Mulder poked his head around the door of each, and stifled a laugh at the décor. One of the bedrooms looked as if it was straight out of a medieval movie, with wooden flooring, rough plaster walls, and a giant four-poster bed. Delighted, Mulder stepped inside and threw himself on the bed – then laughed again when he saw that a decidedly **un**-medieval mirror was fitted on the ceiling above. The other bedrooms were equally eccentric. One didn’t even contain a bed – just a load of burgundy and gold cushions arranged on the floor, and it was decorated like some kind of Egyptian harem, complete with flowing drapes, and friezes depicting half naked slave boys in positions of worship. The walls were a dark red, and the wooden floor was covered in dark rugs. Mulder liked that room. A lot. The other bedroom was more like a cell, containing one bed, plain walls, and black and white furnishings. Mulder dubbed it the Puritan room. The cheerful yellow bedroom with its primitive, original erotica that he and Skinner occupied was positively normal by comparison with these other bedrooms.

The final room at the end of the corridor wasn’t a bedroom at all. In fact Mulder wasn’t entirely sure **what** it was. Part library, part junk room, part den he surmised, judging by the enormous bookcases on one side of the room, and the many trunks, covered in tapestry throws, and the closet on the other. There was a large desk, two comfortable armchairs, and a worn rug covering plain wooden floorboards. Mulder thumbed through the books, and was surprised to discover that most of them were plays or poetry. There was also an interesting erotica section, which he made it his business to devour for well

over an hour. He finally tore himself away and went to investigate the trunks, only to find them locked. The large closet, however, was not, and opening it, Mulder discovered that it was full of costumes. Mulder stared in surprise, until he remembered that Murray had been an actor, and was still involved in Community Theater. That explained the plays as well. Maybe this was where the cheerful, rotund top came to learn his lines and rehearse. Mulder left the room, and trotted back down the stairs. He hesitated outside the dungeon, desperate to find out what treats lay within, but again he resisted. He was sure his Master would introduce him to the delights inside sooner or later – he just hoped that he wouldn't have to wait too long.

He wandered aimlessly back outside, only to discover, to his profound disappointment, that Skinner hadn't moved. His Master was still fast asleep. Mulder stared at the other man for a while, and then, with a sigh, gave in, threw himself noisily down on the sun-lounger, and closed his eyes, attempting to emulate his Master.

The next two days followed in much the same manner. The freezer was stocked with food, and there were plenty of groceries. Skinner was affectionate towards his slave, but while there was plenty of cuddling, and a lot of kissing, especially of his scar, his Master wasn't behaving, well, much like a **Master**. And that was what was bothering Mulder. He had been told that he would be re-trained during these two weeks, and yet nothing was happening. He was confused. Skinner hadn't even used him, although he often reached out and pulled his slave into an embrace. Mulder wasn't sure whether he was allowed to come or not. His cock was often half hard, and Skinner hadn't told him he couldn't come, and yet, all the same, Mulder wasn't sure he should. What made the whole thing even worse was that he wasn't sure how to broach the subject – so he didn't. They ate in companionable silence on the evening of the second day, and then Skinner got up, leaving the dirty dishes and plates on the table. Mulder shrugged, and left his too. His Master hadn't ordered him to wash them, any more than he had ordered him to make the dinner. In fact, there was a general lack of orders all around, and in the absence of them, Mulder just followed his own inclination. Maybe, he thought, Skinner intended this to be a vacation for his slave as much as for the Master. Maybe he was giving them **both** a vacation from their roles. It was the only explanation he could come up with as the pile of dirty dishes grew.

By the morning of the third day, Mulder couldn't stand it any longer. He woke early, too sated by his frequent daytime naps to stay sleeping, and glanced at the clock on the nightstand with a groan. 6 am. It was obscene. He lay there for a moment, thinking about the locked dungeon downstairs, all the hair on his body standing on end as he imagined what delights that room might contain, and finally he couldn't stand it any more; he **had** to see that room. He gazed at his sleeping Master, but Skinner slept long and heavily whenever he was given the chance, so Mulder knew there was no likelihood of the other man waking soon. Thus emboldened, he slid out from under Skinner's arm, and held his breath as his Master grunted, and murmured something in his sleep, then released the breath as Skinner rolled over, still fast asleep. Mulder pulled on his sweatpants and a tee shirt, and tiptoed carefully down the stairs, Wanda scurrying along behind him, clearly unable to bear the idea of being left out of some interesting early morning activity.

The door was still locked, but Mulder wasn't going to let a little thing like **that** get in his way. He was, after all, experienced with locked doors. He removed the lock pick he had brought with him from his sweatpants, and played around with the lock for a while. It was hardly the most difficult lock he'd ever picked, and a few seconds later, the door swung open. It was pitch black inside. Mulder fumbled for a light switch but couldn't find one, so, taking a deep breath, he stepped inside. In his mind's eye he

envisioned a large flight of stone steps leading down into the dungeon itself, so he took a tentative step forward, searching for the top step with his toe...but there was nothing. He took another step forward, growing bold, and then another, and then found himself falling, his arms flailing. His first thought was that the entrance had been booby trapped in some way as dozens of objects rained down on him. He landed with a thump on his ass, and heard Wanda make a loud-pitched squawk.

“Ssh!” he growled, but it was too late for that – the noise he had made was still reverberating in his ears, loud enough to wake the dead – and certainly loud enough to wake a sleeping Master. Mulder tried to get up, only to find himself trapped under a long handled object. He pushed it aside, and tried to see what the hell it was in the darkness...when the light was suddenly snapped on, and he found himself face to face with his rudely awakened Master.

“Perhaps,” Skinner said evenly, holding out a hand to help his errant slave to his feet, “you'd like to explain what you were doing breaking into the broom cupboard at the crack of dawn?”

“Broom...?” Mulder glanced around, his heart sinking. Skinner was right. He was in a small room, containing cleaning equipment; the item that had attacked him had been a vacuum cleaner. “Oh shit,” he whispered.

“Shit indeed, and you're up to your neck in it as usual,” Skinner observed. Mulder allowed his Master to pull him up, and kicked a feather duster out of his way. The floor was littered with a variety of cleaning fluids, and cleaning apparatus that he had stumbled into and dislodged from the shelving when he fell. “Tell me that you felt compelled to do a spot of cleaning that was so urgent it necessitated you picking the lock,” Skinner implored.

“Uh...” Mulder hesitated.

“Rather than using the key which can be found here,” Skinner continued, reaching up and fishing down the key from its resting place atop the door surround. Mulder's misery was complete. He shrugged, dusted down his sweatpants, and walked haughtily back to the kitchen with what was left of his dignity.

“So,” Skinner followed him, filled the kettle and placed it on the stove. Mulder sat at the table, his head buried in his hands. “Are you going to tell me what this was about, or must I assume that you have some kind of compulsive cleaning disorder – bearing in mind that I'll be extremely skeptical about that considering the amount of washing up that's piled in the sink.”

“I was looking for the dungeon,” Mulder said quietly, seeing any chance of winning back his collar fast disappearing down the nearest toilet.

“I see. And you thought it might be in the broom cupboard?” Skinner's eyebrow was raised, and his lips looked decidedly amused.

“I didn't know it was a goddamn broom cupboard!” Mulder exploded. “I didn't know what it was because you haven't told me where the dungeon is!”

“It isn't a secret, but so far, you haven't deserved a session in it,” Skinner replied mildly.

"I haven't...?" Mulder looked up, surprised. "What do you mean? You haven't given me any orders since we got here! How could I do anything to deserve a reward?"

"Ah. I see. You'll only behave like a slave when I'm behaving like a Master," Skinner said dangerously, and suddenly Mulder understood. He glanced at the dirty plates, remembered the way he'd grudgingly made breakfast, and suddenly it all made sense. "What comes first, the chicken or the egg?" Skinner murmured. "The Master or the slave? I wanted to see where our training needed to begin, Fox, and it would seem that it needs to begin right back at basics."

"Oh, shit." Mulder buried his face in his arms again. "I thought maybe you were giving us both a vacation from being slave and Master or something," he explained into his arms. That sounded ridiculous, even to his own ears.

"Fox." His Master touched his face, making him lift it to meet the other man's gaze. "I thought you understood from the beginning that this is a 24/7 arrangement. Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. You are **always** my slave, and I am **always** your Master, even on vacation. However, you seem to think your obligations begin and end with your responses to what **I'm** doing. They don't. I expect you to act like a slave in order for me to reward you for being what you are, and performing your tasks well." Skinner's eyes wandered over to the dirty dishes piled up beside the sink. "Do I have to keep reminding you what you are? I had hoped you could truly inhabit the essence of your slavery without prompting. You made a good start, but then it all just..." He opened up his hands in a gesture of despair. "I can give you constant guidance if it's necessary," Skinner said with a sigh, "but I want to move on from there. I want us to reach another level, Fox, where we function effortlessly, completely in tune with each other, each of us inhabiting our status with confidence, knowing what we **are**. I see no reason to indulge you if you show no inclination to be what you are, and to impress me with how well you can do so."

"You could have damn well said something," Mulder muttered mutinously.

"So could you. That's the point," Skinner replied. "It all comes back to honesty, Fox. You've been holding out on me. You could, at any point, have asked me what was wrong, and how you could please me. You didn't. Instead, you chose to do what you always do – to find out for yourself, to take the lonely path. We have to get beyond this if we're ever to achieve what I want for us," he said softly, reaching out to cup Mulder's cheek in his hand, in an infinitely tender gesture. "Fox, I wish I could make you understand. I've seen a Master and slave working in tandem, in perfect symmetry, and it's the most beautiful sight. It's a partnership of true equals, each knowing his place, and what is required of him, each dedicated to the other. It's like watching the most perfectly choreographed ballet. I want that for us. I won't accept anything less than that. Now, the question is, is that truly what you want, or do you only want the fun stuff? The sex, the eroticism of being a slave, without any of the other chores and duties associated with it?"

"I..." Mulder stared at the dirty dishes, and then back at his Master. Skinner was wrapped up in one of Murray's worn old robes, which was two sizes too big for him. It was decorated with large sunflowers, and looked incongruous on his Master's burly frame. "I want you, Master, and I want my slavery," he said firmly. "I can learn."

"I know you can." Skinner smiled. "You know by now what I require of you, Fox. I don't expect to have to spell it out." He glanced at his watch. "Now, I think another hour or so in bed would be nice. I'm sure

you have things to do.” He bestowed a kiss on his slave’s forehead, and began walking back upstairs without even so much as a pointed look at the dirty dishes, and remains of last night’s dinner.

Mulder watched him go, feeling numb. He’d been such an idiot! Why the hell hadn’t he spoken up before? Why hadn’t he asked Skinner what was going on? That was all it would have taken.

“Master!” He blurted out before he could stop himself.

“Slave.” Skinner stopped on the stairs, and turned to glance down at Mulder.

“You’re right. Even now, after all this time, I still don’t tell you everything. There’s, uh, something else I wasn’t honest about,” he admitted.

“Go on.” Skinner prompted gently.

“My scar. I felt sure you were disgusted by my body and didn’t want to make love to me,” Mulder said quietly, feeling his face burn. “I thought you were going to end it but didn’t know how. That’s honestly what I expected when you brought me here.”

“I know that, Fox,” Skinner replied.

“You do?” Mulder was surprised.

Skinner gave the smallest hint of a smile, and nodded. “And why couldn’t you tell me?” Skinner asked.

“Because...pride,” Mulder admitted finally. “I didn’t want your pity. I didn’t want you to feel you had to pretend...and I didn’t want to see the look in your eyes when you told me you still wanted me and I knew it was a lie.”

“That didn’t happen though, did it? I do still want you. I think I proved that on the beach the other night,” Skinner pointed out. “Didn’t I?”

“Yes. You did.”

“So you could have saved yourself a lot of worry if you’d just said something,” Skinner rebuked gently.

“Yeah, I know that now.”

“So don’t keep making the same mistake over and over again.”

Mulder took a deep breath, and glanced down at his bare feet. He wished he could say that he wouldn’t. He heard footsteps as Skinner left him to muse on that thought, and bit down hard on his lip. He wasn’t surprised Skinner didn’t want to hang around to debate **this** issue: his Master must be bored rigid with going over the same ground again and again. He **was** surprised, however, to feel hands on his shoulders a few seconds later, and then his chin was pulled up, and he found himself looking into a set of dark eyes.

“Don’t bite that lip.” Skinner ran his finger over the chewed lip in question. “It’s mine, remember, boy,” he said, his eyes full of affection. “You’ll get it, Fox. One day,” he promised. “I’m not giving up on you so you really don’t have a choice.” He leaned forward, and captured his slave’s lips with his own, claiming him, and Mulder surrendered, a warm wave of relief flowing through his body. “Now, there will be punishment for the broom cupboard incident later,” Skinner promised when he eventually released Mulder’s mouth. Mulder felt his heart thump hard inside his chest, and he rested his head on his Master’s shoulder.

“Yes, Master,” he whispered contritely.

“And we’ll start the vacation again. This time, I don’t think you’ll be in any doubt about who your Master is, and I trust he won’t have any reason to doubt his slave?” Skinner said seriously.

Mulder nodded. “Independence is a hard habit to break, Master,” he murmured.

“Oh, I don’t want you broken, slave,” Skinner grinned, drawing back and slapping his slave’s butt heartily. “I just want you tamed.” Mulder grinned back, and gave a wry chuckle. “And tamed to **my** whip, **my** touch, and **my** bit and harness only,” Skinner said, his hand resting on Mulder’s neck, squeezing gently. “Tamed only for me. You can be a wildcat with anyone else, but with me you’ll be a pussycat,” Skinner said. Wanda chose that moment to twine between them, clearly thinking it was breakfast time and they both laughed out loud. Then Skinner turned and disappeared up the stairs, leaving Mulder to contemplate the huge stack of dirty dishes with a regretful sigh.

Mulder washed and dried the crockery and cutlery, tidied the kitchen thoroughly, and then brewed a fresh pot of coffee. He tidied the broom cupboard, and then wandered upstairs to the bathroom, where he took a warm shower, and cleaned himself properly, inside and out, before pushing his fingers into ass and lubing himself thoroughly – and somewhat hopefully. Then he examined himself critically in the mirror. His cock and nipple rings were in place, and his hair was freshly washed, and dried. He was looking much better than he had in weeks. If it weren’t for the disfiguring scar on his chest, he would be a halfway desirable slave boy. Mulder placed his hand over the scar, trying to obscure it. He didn’t think he’d ever really become sanguine about bearing that mark on his body, no matter how many times his Master kissed him there. He finished his self-examination, went back to the kitchen, and poured his Master his coffee, then took it up to the bedroom. Skinner was already awake. He was sitting up in bed with his glasses on, reading a book. He put it to one side, and looked up with a smile as his slave walked in.

“Your coffee, Master,” Mulder said respectfully, placing the coffee on the nightstand, and then kneeling beside the bed in the submissive position, eyes down, shoulders back, his genitals thrust forward in a way that was humiliating, like an offering.

“Thank you, slave,” Skinner replied, taking the coffee and returning to his book. Mulder concentrated on finding in the still center to his soul, a depth of submission that he had attained on only a few occasions before – each time enjoying a serenity in his slavery that he longed to recapture. Minutes passed, and he kept in position until finally he heard his Master put his book aside, and felt his gaze upon him.

“At ease, slave. Relax,” Skinner ordered, and Mulder looked up, relieved to be able to kneel more comfortably. “Do you have anything you wish to ask me before I apply your morning discipline?” Skinner inquired.

“Yes, sir,” Mulder nodded. Skinner gestured that he should proceed. “What are the rules, Master? Am I still without privileges? Do I still have to ask your permission to use the bathroom?”

“No. As we’re on vacation, I think we’ll ease up on those restrictions,” Skinner told him. “You are, however, forbidden to touch your cock at any other time than when washing, or peeing – understood?” Mulder nodded. “Good. You are forbidden to come without my express permission, and your cock is off limits unless I tell you that you can touch it. If I ignore it during sex it’s because I don’t wish to give it any pleasure. You will not attempt to redress that touching it yourself.”

“No, Master.” Mulder brightened. At least it sounded as if his Master **intended** having sex with him sometime soon.

“As for the other rules – you’re in deep submission today, boy. That means you talk only when spoken to. If you have anything you wish to ask, then you simply request my permission to speak. If you forget, you’ll be punished. Understood?”

“Yes, Master.” Mulder’s cock decided that this was the most arousing speech it had heard in a long time and did an upward lurch.

“We’ll spend today taking you back down to basics, I think,” Skinner mused, gazing at his slave. “We’ll re-establish some valuable routines – starting with an examination. Present yourself, boy. I wish to inspect my property.”

Mulder didn’t need any urging. He scrambled onto the bed, knelt back on his haunches in position, his hands firmly clasped behind his back, his knees on either side of Skinner’s chest, straddling his Master, within easy reach of the big man’s hands. Skinner ran his fingers through Mulder’s hair.

“Time this was cut, boy,” Skinner said. Mulder nodded. His Master’s hands traveled down, and stopped at his jaw. “Open,” Skinner ordered. Mulder obeyed, relieved that he’d cleaned his teeth that morning. Skinner’s finger lingered on his slightly torn lower lip. “I don’t want to see **this** again. It shows poor wear and tear of my property, and it’s entirely self inflicted and therefore unnecessary. There will be punishment for this,” Skinner warned. Mulder blinked, nodding slightly, his face still held between Skinner’s big hands. The other man continued his examination, his fingers tugging on Mulder’s nipple rings, making his slave’s eyes water as he tried to keep from yelping, and then down to his slave’s cock and balls. He inspected these minutely, without any sexual interest.

“I’d prefer my slave to be decorated here. A piercing has gone beyond being desirable – I think it’s a necessity. I’d like to train you to the leash down here as well.” Skinner tugged on Mulder’s penis a couple of times and Mulder felt a dizzy tingle of pleasure pass through his body. He had no wish for his dick to be pierced, and the idea of being pulled around on a leash attached to a penis piercing horrified him, but, at the same time, he did love the fact that his Master was so interested in his body, and how it could please him. “I think I’d prefer you shaved during this vacation period. I’ll shave you myself right now,” Skinner mused, as he played with Mulder’s balls, weighing them in his hands. “All over, so you’re smooth like a seal. You can keep yourself oiled – I’ll enjoy catching you when you’re swimming.”

“Whatever pleases you, Master,” Mulder said quietly.

He followed his Master into the bathroom, and laid in the bath with his legs wide open, resting on the sides of the bath, as commanded, gazing fixedly at the ceiling. Skinner always insisted on using a cut-throat razor when shaving his slave, preferring the smoothness of the skin that way, and Mulder knew it would take all his concentration to keep still while his Master was waving such a dangerous item so close to his genitals. He heard Skinner assemble the items he would need, and then felt the shaving foam being applied to his cock and balls. A few seconds later, he heard the scrape of the razor, and the tingly, tickly sensation of it on the most prized parts of his anatomy. He clenched his fists, and tried not to think about what was happening. After several minutes of this torment, his chest was shaved, and then he was ordered to raise his arms, and they were stripped clean of hair as well. Finally, Skinner ran the razor over his slave’s legs, and then he was ordered to turn over. His Master shaved his slave’s buttocks, and the back of his legs, until Mulder was hairless, having already shaved his face earlier. Then Skinner turned on the water and ordered his slave to wash off all the foam and dead hair, and Mulder did so, watching with a strange sense of loss as all his hair disappeared down the plug hole. His whole body felt so weird without hair: cooler, and just plain strange. He got out of the bath and dried himself, and then Skinner handed him some oil. “Coat yourself all over and remember to re-apply it regularly throughout the day. It’s sun block oil, so it serves a convenient dual function,” he added. “When you’ve finished come back into the bedroom, and present yourself for the rest of your inspection.”

“Yes, Master,” Mulder said meekly. He poured the golden oil into his hands and warmed it, then rubbed it in to his naked body. This felt good. The oil glistened on the surface of his skin, without hair to prevent it from forming an all over sheen. Mulder made sure he was thoroughly oiled from his face down to the soles of his feet – he even rubbed some up into his ass, delighting in the smooth feel of it on his inner skin. He finished up, returned to the bedroom, and climbed onto the bed as commanded.

“Turn around. Present your ass to me,” Skinner ordered, and Mulder turned and knelt, with his elbows on the bed, his ass raised for his Master’s perusal. Skinner tapped the flesh a couple of times. “I’m sure I don’t need you to tell me what’s wrong with this, boy,” he growled.

“No, Master.” Mulder smiled to himself, envisaging his perfectly white buttocks in his mind’s eye.

“Good, then we’ll redress that later.”

Mulder gasped as a finger entered between his butt cheeks without warning, or preparation, but the thorough lubing helped made the entry smooth. “I’m pleased to see that you’re prepared for me – remain that way, boy. I expect you to be always clean and ready for use,” Skinner said, one hand fondling his slave’s buttocks, while his first finger had now been joined by another. Both probed deep into Mulder’s anus. “Hmmm,” Skinner mused after several minutes. “Well, you’re still responsive, but you need to practice keeping yourself open for my attention at **all** times. I think the trouble is that you haven’t been used enough of late. You’re a little tight – not relaxed enough. We’ll have to take care of that. I want my slave to be open, and accepting of his Master’s caress, whatever it might be – at all times. Is that clear?” He punctuated this question by several sharp slaps on his slave’s buttocks. Mulder’s cock went into spasm. The situation, his Master’s words...he found both intensely arousing.

“Yes, Master,” he replied obediently.

“Good boy. Go and get me a damp washcloth, and bring me the silver box from the closet,” Skinner ordered. Mulder did as he’d been ordered, and returned with the cloth, which Skinner used to wipe his fingers. He knelt in the submissive position as Skinner opened the silver box – to reveal an array of dildos, ranging in size from slender, through the size of an average man’s cock, to one so enormous that Mulder hoped it would never be stuck up **his** ass. Skinner picked out one of the smaller ones, and applied a coating of lubricant to it, and then he ordered Mulder back on the bed again, ass in the air. Mulder obeyed, and a few seconds later the cold tip of the dildo was inserted in his ass. He found his muscles closing involuntarily against the freezing intrusion, and was punished for this by a slap to his buttocks.

“Keep your body open, boy,” Skinner growled.

Mulder closed his eyes, his cock crying out to be milked, but he knew he wasn’t allowed to touch it. Skinner slid the dildo back and forth inside his slave’s ass, in a rhythm that made Mulder thrust his body back to meet the sliding intruder, enjoying the penetration.

“Good. Time to move on to something a little more challenging,” Skinner murmured, removing the dildo. Mulder watched as Skinner’s fingers lingered over the larger dildos.

“Please, Master,” he whimpered pathetically, and then he gave a cry of surprise as his Master slapped his buttocks hard.

“Don’t speak without permission, slave,” Skinner said sharply. Mulder hung his head, and watched out of the corner of his eye, as Skinner selected one of the larger dildos, but not the huge monster one. “I intend to make you take the largest one though, even if only for a short time, so prepare, boy,” Skinner ordered. Mulder swallowed hard, and watched as his Master slathered the larger dildo with lube, and then he felt the cold tip of it pressed between his ass cheeks. He concentrated on relaxing, and opening up, and a second later the dildo slipped easily into place. This one filled him nicely. It was about the same size as his Master’s cock, and it felt good. It exerted just enough pressure to make itself felt, but not so much that he couldn’t take it. Mulder moaned, and rocked back and forth in time to the rhythm Skinner was using to slide the dildo in and out. Finally, it was removed, and he felt his Master’s fingers enter him again. “Okay, this is nice and loose. Now, as part of your punishment for that unauthorized trip to the broom closet this morning, I’m going to make you take the large one.”

Mulder closed his eyes, his body shaking with arousal, wondering how he was going to bear this. He wanted to feel that monster dildo inside him, but at the same time, he was scared that it would hurt too much, or, worse, that his body would close against it, denying his Master access. He concentrated on keeping his anus open, ready to accept whatever his Master wished to do to his body. It was so humiliating, to be kneeling in this position, ass in the air, just waiting to be penetrated by this cold, inanimate object, and it almost made him beg out loud to feel his Master’s warm cock inside him instead, claiming him for his own. Skinner clearly didn’t intend to allow him that pleasure just yet though. He wanted to make sure his slave had earned it by showing his obedience, and by enduring something hard, and painful first.

Mulder held his breath as he felt the tip of the monster dildo nudge his anus. He willed his rectal muscles to stay relaxed. They had been loosened by all the previous probing play and that, combined with his arousal, and obedience to his Master, made it easier. However, the lubed dildo was truly

enormous, and for a moment he didn't think he could physically take it. He gave a little cry as he felt his muscles distend, but kept his ass as open and welcoming as he could manage.

"Good boy." His Master's praise meant more to him than anything else in the world, and Mulder closed his eyes, imagining that it was his Master's monster dick he was taking into his body. His ass felt impossibly stretched, and just when he genuinely thought he couldn't take it any more, the widest part of the dildo had breached the ring of muscle, and he was fully distended. The rest of the dildo slipped home easily from there, and Mulder gave a gasping cry, trying to remember to breathe, as he was filled by a larger object than he'd ever taken inside his body before. He could feel his muscles clenching around the intruder, trying to adjust to the impossible width, and then he was aching from the size of it within him.

"Please, Master," he croaked.

"Is it hurting, boy?" Skinner asked. Mulder considered that for a moment. It wasn't really hurting. It was, though, supremely uncomfortable and he would have done anything at that moment in time to be relieved of it.

"No, Master," he replied honestly, "but it aches. Please, please..."

"You'll hold it for longer," Skinner said firmly, and Mulder felt a wave of sweat break out on his body. His cock was aching almost as much as his ass muscles, and he thought he'd explode from this slow torture. Then he felt Skinner's fingers on his ass, and the dildo was slowly worked out, much to his relief – only to be slid carefully home again almost immediately. Mulder gave a cry, the sweat running down his face in streaks.

"Oh god. Oh please. Oh...god..." He tried to get up, but his buttocks were firmly slapped, reminding him to stay in place. He put one hand behind his back to try and relieve the pressure, to release that tormenting dildo just a fraction from its deep insertion in his body, but his hand was pushed back.

"Is this what you call obedience, boy?" His Master asked.

"Sorry...just..." Mulder closed his eyes again, and for a moment he was alone with the sensations in his body. He felt as if he was being overloaded. He was sure that if he had to carry that large mass in his body one second longer his nerves would explode, but at the same time he loved the feel of being so comprehensively owned and stretched by his demanding Master. He loved being made to endure this exquisite torture, with its dual sensations of pleasure and pain.

Skinner set up a steady rhythm with the dildo, moving it back and forth inside his slave until the ache went, leaving Mulder with the most intense burning sensation which seemed to be wired straight to his cock. That massive dildo couldn't fail to miss his prostate, and soon he was floating, the endorphins flooding through his body.

"Oh god...oh please..." he whispered incoherently, and this time it wasn't a plea for his Master to remove the dildo, but to keep on pushing it back and forth, relentlessly, inside his slave's body.

"That's enough. I think it's time to administer your morning discipline now," Skinner said, thrusting the dildo home, deep into his slave's rectum.

“No...you can’t...oh god...” Mulder protested, not wanting the delicious ‘punishment’ to ever end.

“You’ll take your spanking with the dildo in place,” Skinner told his slave firmly. “Over my knee, boy. Now.”

Mulder moved slowly into place, his movements hampered by the enormous dildo lodged deep inside his body. He lay, supine, on the pillows Skinner had placed on his knees. He felt Skinner’s large hand on his butt, and groaned as the first slap hit his white buttocks. The oiled condition of his skin somehow made the slaps sound louder, and they certainly stung more. Worse than that, each swat moved the dildo, making him even more aware of its presence, burning deep inside his body. Skinner started slowly, as he usually did, administering merely light swats, but soon he moved the spanking up apace, and then the slaps rained down on Mulder’s willing bottom.

“Please stop...please...” Mulder gasped, unable to writhe because of the dildo that Skinner was keeping in place with one hand, while he spanked with the other. “Oh shit!” Mulder almost jumped out of his skin, as his Master’s large hand landed on the dildo, pushing it deeper inside him, hitting his prostate, making his eyes water, and almost causing him come on the spot. He ground his cock into the pillows, desperately wanting release as the spanking continued. Skinner occasionally moved the dildo, or pressed it in even further until Mulder was a mass of sensation, unsure even what his name was.

“Why are you being punished?” His Master asked. Mulder blinked the sweat out of his eyes. **Was** he being punished? It was so intense, and arousing that he couldn’t be sure. His Master’s large hand cracked down on the top of his thighs and a hazy memory returned to him.

“The broom cupboard, Master!” he yelled, as Skinner’s palm slapped down again on his bottom. “I’m sorry. I should have just asked you about the Dungeon. I’m sorry!” He yelped again as the spanking intensified in pace and strength until his bottom was on fire both inside and out, and he knew he couldn’t answer any more questions because he was flying far away into space, transported to a different plane entirely.

“You can come,” a voice whispered in his ear, and he was profoundly relieved to be given permission because he couldn’t hold it any more, and ejaculated into the pillows, then lay, exhausted, and aching over his Master’s knee, the onslaught over. Skinner dropped the tempo of the spanking, and lightly ran his hands over his slave’s buttocks, before finally grabbing hold of the dildo, and removing it swiftly in a motion that made Mulder gasp out loud.

“That was...fiendish, Master,” Mulder moaned, and was rewarded almost immediately by a sharp slap.

“And that was against the rules. Remember to talk only when spoken to today, boy,” Skinner growled. “Now, this butt is looking a nice shade of red, but I’m afraid I haven’t finished with it yet.” Mulder lay there for several seconds as the import of this statement sank in. He loved being spanked, but right now he was shattered – and pretty positive that he’d had enough. That wasn’t his choice though. Skinner continued stroking his buttocks for a long time, and he dozed, contentedly over his Master’s knee, and then, dimly, as if from a great distance, he heard a clicking noise. He ignored it, and a few seconds later he heard it again. He glanced up, and realized his Master was giving him the signal to get into the submissive position by snapping his thumb and forefinger.

“Let me warn you that even the tiniest slowness, or disobedience will be punished today. After this morning's little broom cupboard performance I'm not in a mood to overlook **anything**,” Skinner told him. Mulder swallowed hard, and half slid, half climbed off the bed, his whole body still shaking in the aftermath of his explosive orgasm. He knelt beside the bed, head down, genitals and chest thrust out, and waited for his next order.

“Dress me. Now.”

Mulder stood up, and waited for his Master to choose his clothing. Skinner eschewed shorts and tee shirt this morning, and opted instead for a pair of plain black jeans. Mulder helped to smooth them up his Master's long legs, but when it came to fastening them, he was aware of how his Master's semi erect cock hadn't had any attention yet, and he desperately wanted to take it into his mouth. He knelt, and nudged the swelling cock with his lips, and his Master grinned, and placed a hand in his slave's hair.

“You like that, huh, boy?” He asked in a throaty tone. “You want to suck it, yes?” Mulder nodded, looking up hopefully. “Go on then - quickly.”

Skinner guided his cock into Mulder's willing mouth, and his slave accepted it like an offering from a god. He licked it reverentially, and then took it deep into his throat, eliciting a little moan from his Master. He was well on the way to pumping his Master to climax when he felt his head being tugged away.

“Enough,” Skinner said, in a low tone that implied that he was close to coming. Mulder could have wept. He wanted his Master to come – he wanted him to come deep inside his throat. He wanted to taste his Master's semen, to gratefully accept it, and it was being denied him.

“Please,” he whimpered but Skinner merely tucked his cock inside his jeans, ignoring his slave's pleas. “Not yet. I have other plans,” Skinner grinned, his jeans bulging magnificently as he confined his cock inside them, zipping them up. Mulder wondered at his Master's self control. He didn't think he could have drawn away at that point, or have imprisoned his hard cock in such a cruel prison. “Get up and follow me, boy,” he said. Mulder did as he was told, following his Master out of the bedroom, and along the corridor. “You're so interested in finding the dungeon, that I think now is the time to show you,” Skinner said. Mulder looked at his Master in surprise. He'd been in all these rooms, and none of them was a dungeon. Skinner stopped at the door at the end of the corridor, opened it, and ushered Mulder inside. Mulder looked around, surprised. They were in the library-cum-storeroom.

“This isn't the dungeon, Master. Is it?” He looked at the other man, his eyes wide, and Skinner laughed out loud.

“Fox, we all have our favorite names for the places where we play. Elaine calls hers the 'Boudoir', and I have another friend who refers to his basement as the 'Sanctum'. 'Dungeon' is a pretty common one, as is our own 'playroom'. It doesn't mean it has to have stone walls and instruments of torture all over the place.”

“Oh.” Mulder looked decidedly disappointed. He had never shown much interest in the niceties of what people called their playrooms. Whenever he had been driven to 'play' before becoming Skinner's slave, it had been such a consuming need, and one he'd fought against for so long, that by the time he ventured out on the scene all he wanted was someone to give him the pain he required. He hadn't

engaged them in conversation and he sure as hell hadn't asked them what they called the room where they dished out what he needed so much. "So this is it?" Mulder muttered.

"Don't look so upset! Skinner grinned, clicking his fingers. Mulder knelt obediently, still feeling let down and resentful about the so-called 'dungeon.' "Watch me," Skinner ordered, and Mulder looked up. "Everyone has their own way of playing, Fox," Skinner said softly, as he walked around the room. "Murray was never interested in the S/M aspects of our lifestyle particularly – he was attracted to Dom/sub role playing. You know Murray. He likes to act – it turns him on basically." Mulder suppressed a smile, remembering the larger than life Murray, striding around his mansion, his loud voice booming. "Hammer, on the other hand, just enjoys sensual pain." Skinner shrugged. "He submits to Murray's role play scenarios because they're hot – and because that way he gets what he wants. Murray, for his part, has learned how to give Hammer the kind of physical sensations he requires in exchange for being able to dress his boy up in costumes, and act out fantasies. This room is perfect for that. I believe Murray enjoys playing stern headmaster to Hammer's scared schoolboy." He gestured at the large, imposing desk.

"Oh god," Mulder choked at the image of Hammer in long white socks and shorts that Skinner's explanation conjured up. Hammer was the sturdiest, toughest looking sub he had ever encountered. The idea was ridiculous.

"Now if you want a basement dungeon, with all the manacle fittings, I'm sure I can arrange something," Skinner grinned. "Maybe as a treat one slave's day. I know a few people in DC who have them. This place though, is a dungeon of the imagination. Look." He opened the cupboard to reveal a huge array of costumes, picked one out, and held it up. It was the school uniform Mulder had so recently choked at the idea of Hammer wearing. There was a white shirt, striped school tie, blazer – even a cap. "You'd look good in this," Skinner grinned. Mulder blanched.

"Over my dead body," he growled, forgetting himself.

"No, over your nicely spanked body," Skinner grinned. "I like the idea. I'll consider it for later." He pulled out a schoolmaster's gown and mortarboard, and held them up. "I think I'd cut an imposing figure in these, don't you? Complete with an accessorized cane of course," he added smugly.

"You'd look a lot sexier in **that**, Master," Mulder pointed to a white naval uniform, complete with cap, and ceremonial sword. He wasn't sure he wanted to encourage his Master to be thinking about canes.

"We'll see." Skinner eyes were twinkling. "I think that we should take advantage of Murray's huge collection of clothing though. Let's see..." He rummaged through the closet, and then drew out a pale cream, gossamer thin pair of harem pants, decorated with gold piping. "Perfect," Skinner murmured.

"Hmm." Personally Mulder thought his Master would look stupid in harem pants.

"You don't like them? That's a shame because I want to see you dressed up like a proper, old fashioned slave boy from ancient Egypt," Skinner grinned. "Ah, the imagination is a wonderful thing. Stand up, boy, and put these on while I find some more decoration for you."

Mulder gave his Master the most disgusted look in his repertoire, and reached for the harem pants. They were made of some gauzy, floaty fabric, and they were entirely transparent. He stepped into them,

pulled them up to his waist, and then realized, much to his dismay, that they were also crotch less and had been cutaway at the back to reveal his naked, glowing, glisteningly oiled butt.

“Oh shit,” he said.

“Delicious,” Skinner grinned, coming over, clearly having the time of his life. Mulder regarded his Master sourly. “You’re not wearing them properly,” Skinner scolded, his large hands playing with the folds of fabric at the front of the pants. “Your cock should be on full display at all times. Like this,” he commanded, pulling Mulder’s newly shriven penis into place so that it was clearly visible, hanging proud and pink at the front of his pants. “Turn around.” He motioned with his hand that Mulder should do a twirl, and, flushing all over his body from his glowing butt cheeks to his glowing face cheeks, Mulder did as ordered. “Beautiful. The perfect slave. Don’t forget your slippers though.” Skinner handed his slave a pair of gold, embroidered slippers, and Mulder took them, with a half growl. They had ridiculous pointed, and slightly curled up toes, and open backs. He slid his feet into them, hoping they’d be too small, but unfortunately they weren’t. “Lovely,” Skinner announced appreciatively, with just the slightest note of teasing camp in his voice. Mulder glared at him suspiciously. “Your torso needs decorating though.” Skinner went over to one of the trunks, and unlocked the smallest one. He drew out a clear bag full of gold chains, and considered Mulder for a moment, before making his selection. Then he beckoned his slave forward, and clipped a gold chain to each of his nipple rings, connecting them at the center. He drew forth a gold chain body harness, and placed that over his slave’s head, so that a multitude of chains decorated his upper body, tinkling when he moved. “And, just so that you keep your status firmly in mind...” Skinner pulled a case out of the trunk and opened it, to reveal several shining gold-colored butt plugs all with multiple chains attached. Mulder closed his eyes, and sighed tragically. “Bend over the desk boy,” Skinner said, undoing a tube of lube and liberally applying it to the plug. Mulder did as he was told, bending over the large oak desk, his cock and bare stomach pressing against the cool surface. “Legs open wide,” Skinner ordered, and he moved his ankles further apart, then, a moment later, felt Skinner insert the butt plug into his stretched opening. The butt plug was slender at one end, but much thicker at the other, and Mulder made a face and took a sharp intake of breath as the wider end was pushed home, stretching him once more. “That’s good. Stand up.” Mulder obeyed, trying to get used to the feel of the butt plug inside him. Skinner grinned at him, and picked up the chains hanging from the end of it. They were long, and he attached one to the harness chains on Mulder’s back, and threaded the other through Mulder’s legs to the front, and fastened it to his slave’s cock ring.

“There. Perfect,” Skinner said, eyeing his slave appreciatively. “We’re not finished yet though. Come here.” He opened a small side door, and ushered Mulder into a tiny shower room, complete with the usual wall-to-wall mirror tiling that Murray seemed so fond of. Mulder shuddered as he viewed himself in the mirrors.

“Oh god. Kill me now,” he muttered as he took in the sight of himself, resplendent in his gauzy outfit, a grown man looking like a ridiculous harem boy.

“Not quite yet. I still have plans for you,” Skinner said, tapping his slave’s bottom reprovingly. “Here.” He pulled out two tiny gold baubles from the bag he was carrying, and pressed one on each of Mulder’s ears.

“No!” Mulder croaked, closing his eyes so that he wouldn’t have to look.

“Yes,” Skinner said firmly. “And, a little make up to complete the image.” He took advantage of Mulder’s closed eyes to apply a coating of mascara and a smudge of eyeliner. “Just be grateful that I’m not insisting on rouge,” Skinner teased, applying a trace of lip-gloss to his slave’s sensuous lips. “All right. You can open your eyes now,” Skinner said, and Mulder did so in trepidation. If he hadn’t been so full of loathing for his new image, Mulder would have seen that he looked frankly stunning. Skinner hadn’t done more than was tasteful, and Mulder’s eyes were accentuated by the eyeliner, and looked wide and dramatic, while his moist, shimmering lips positively begged to be kissed. The gold clip-on earrings were merely in keeping with the ensemble of the harem outfit. He looked, to all intents and purposes, like exactly what he was – a pleasure slave.

“This is a really good look for you. I might have to ask Murray if we can take it home with us,” Skinner mused, gazing at his slave appreciatively. Mulder wondered whether Murray was bribe-able. “I’ll enjoy having something so good to look at all day,” Skinner murmured, idly playing with Mulder’s cock, “and they don’t come much better looking than this, sweetheart,” he beamed into the mirror tiles, his hands sliding all over Mulder’s oiled body, as if he couldn’t keep his hands off his slaveboy. Mulder’s mood brightened. Wearing this costume wasn’t so bad if it meant his Master was going to be so attentive. “All right, now we have another matter to address, don’t we, slave?” Skinner said sternly, his hands sliding around to cup Mulder’s buttocks. Mulder swallowed hard and nodded. “It’s been a long time since I last marked you,” Skinner said softly. Mulder stiffened, his eyes meeting those of his Master in the mirror. The last time Mulder had been marked was by himself, trying to get rid of Krycek’s initials on his chest. He and Skinner had once talked about his Master placing a permanent mark on his slave, probably a brand, but events had overtaken them, and now the whole concept of marking had been changed from an idea that excited both of them into a possible psychological minefield. “You **do** need to be marked again, little one,” Skinner said softly, his hands still kneading Mulder’s buttocks gently, making Mulder’s cock start to harden again. They continued gazing at each other in the mirror for a long time, Skinner’s fingers soothing his slave. Mulder remembered how he had always felt bearing his Master’s temporary marks. While he hated the marking process, which was completely different to an enjoyable hand spanking, or even a strapping, or paddling, he had always loved the fact that his body bore the imprints of his Master’s attention. Once the initial sting of the welts wore off, they faded painlessly, and he had enjoyed glancing over his shoulder to see them, or just the thrill of knowing they were hidden underneath his starched suit while he worked, a secret reminder of his bond to his Master. He often would get hard while just walking to his car, or sitting at his desk, knowing that his body bore those marks, and what they meant to him.

“Yes, Master,” he whispered softly into the mirror, and Skinner nodded, and kissed the back of his slave’s neck.

“I’m going to use a special implement,” he said in a low, dangerously sexy voice. “It’s a dragon cane – a Murray special. He’s got a whole stock of them, and this one is brand new, unused. I wouldn’t use second hand butt plugs, or canes on you. Do you know anything about dragon canes?” He asked. Mulder shivered within his Master’s arms, and shook his head, swallowing convulsively.

“Well, they’re special,” Skinner smiled. “Made of a specially dense, and springy wood. They pack a real punch, slave. Do you feel able to take such an implement? They’re not for everyday use, just for special occasions – like the first marking a slave is to receive after far too long.”

Mulder shivered, his Master's words arousing and scaring him at the same time. He loved the tingly sensation his fear created inside his stomach. He felt as if he had a whole roomful of insects trapped inside him, all fluttering, making breathing difficult.

"Will it hurt, Master?" He asked, sinking back against Skinner's chest, surrendering to his Master's strong arms, and trusting them to hold him upright.

"Oh yes, little one," Skinner breathed softly into his ear, like a seduction. "It'll hurt. The dragon cane has real bite. You'll feel it all right. However, because of its special qualities, I'll limit the strokes to two. You can take that many can't you?" He asked seductively.

Mulder shivered, and stared at them both in the mirror tiles as if from a great distance. He saw himself, naked, plugged, and adorned with his Master's chains, and baubles, standing within the protective circle of his Master's arms. Skinner was standing half naked, his torso bare, but still every inch the Master, his slave nestled against his hairy, muscled chest. They both knew Mulder would agree – this was just the foreplay, a means to arouse the slave, and make the event more exciting for both of them. He nodded, his pink, shaven cock lurching eagerly, and visibly, against its nest of cream and gold gauze.

"Good boy. I'm proud of you." Skinner squeezed his slave's buttocks, and kissed the side of his face. "Go into the other room, stand in front of the desk, and wait for me."

Mulder went, still trembling. His chains clinked and chattered as he walked, and he was acutely aware of the pull on his nipples from the harness, and the pressure inside his body from the butt plug. The image of himself, dressed like this, about to be marked by his Master, served to arouse him again, and his cock rose inside its gold prison, and pulled on the chain attached to his butt plug, making the plug move fractionally inside him, exciting him even more. He took a deep breath, and bent over the desk once more. He could feel the coolness of the desk against his body, and the breeze from the open window caressing his shiny, oiled bottom.

His Master kept him waiting, and as each second passed, Mulder grew more nervous. Finally, he heard footsteps, and Skinner stepped into the room. Mulder swallowed hard, and looked up. He watched as his Master opened the largest trunk, and gasped as he saw the treasure trove it contained. Every single variety of cane, flogger, and whip imaginable was inside that trunk, all of them brand new, and in pristine condition. Skinner drew out a large, solid looking cane, and Mulder's heart lurched. That thing was big. It would hurt. A lot. He whimpered as Skinner held it between his hands, and bent it back and forth. It was surprisingly malleable for such a thick object, and bent readily, without breaking. Mulder supposed that was why it was so special.

"Look at it, boy. Smell it," Skinner ordered, placing the cane under Mulder's nose. Mulder saw a smooth brown object, with an intricately carved handle in the shape of a dragon's head. "You see he has his mouth open – that's because he's breathing fire," Skinner said in that low, sexy tone. "The fire that you'll soon feel on your butt, boy," he growled. Mulder's stomach lurched in anticipation. Skinner removed the cane from the desk, and swished it through the air. Mulder flinched. The sound it made was so beautiful, so arousing, so incredibly frightening that it was all he could do to remain in position. Skinner swished it around a few more times, getting a feel for it, testing the weight, and strength, and then he turned back to his waiting slave. "Two strokes. I won't ask you to count them because I think after the first one you'll be too stunned to speak," Skinner said softly, resting his hand on the small of

Mulder's back. "However, if you bravely take the two of them, I'll buy you a souvenir to commemorate the occasion. I have something in mind." There was a grin in his voice as he said that. Mulder shivered. His Master had stoked up the anticipation so much that he was desperate for the other man to get on with it. He felt the cane rest against his buttocks, and then Skinner stroked him with it, making his nerve endings jangle as he waited for the first stroke.

"Please, Master...do it quickly," he begged.

"In my own time, boy," Skinner reprimanded sharply. "Now, you do understand that this isn't a punishment, Fox, don't you?"

Mulder nodded mutely. It sure as hell felt like one the way it was being dragged out. It was the most terrible, wonderful torture he had ever endured and it hadn't even begun yet!

"It isn't a punishment," Skinner continued, still stroking his slave's backside with the cane. "This is something much more important. This is to cement the bond between Master and slave. To ensure that you are marked, and that through this marking you come to understand that you belong completely, and irrevocably, to me. The purpose of this is less to inflict pain on you, although it will hurt, but more by means of that pain to impress upon you that you are a slave, subject to your Master's whim and will at all times. It is also something else..." Skinner's voice was low, and deep, binding Mulder to his Master, making him lose awareness of anything save his Master and the instrument his Master would shortly use upon him. "It's also an interim measure before I mark you more permanently. If you can suffer these markings obediently, and without complaint, then I will soon place something more enduring on your skin."

Mulder closed his eyes, the image of his scar rising, unwanted to his mind. He fought to remain in the moment, to keep the bond Skinner was forging between them, tying his slave to the sound of his Master's voice. Skinner seemed to guess what he was thinking, because he started to tap Mulder's buttocks lightly with the cane, drawing him back to the scene. "This marking wipes out any previous marking. This marking reasserts my rights to imprint myself on my slave's flesh. This is a marking of new beginnings," he said softly. Mulder understood suddenly what his Master was doing, and it was so effective. By talking in this way, Skinner was making new associations in Mulder's mind, helping to put Krycek and his carving in the past, where he belonged. "It has to hurt to have any meaning," Skinner insisted. "Like a rebirth. When it's over, you'll know you've come out of the heat of the fire a new slave. Do you understand that, little one?"

"Yes, Master," Mulder replied, in a tone so low that he could barely hear himself.

"Good, then prepare yourself for the ordeal."

There was an almighty pause, and just when Mulder thought he couldn't take it any more, there was a swish, a cool breeze, the sound of something connecting on flesh with a snap that reverberated around the room, and then the pain kicked in. He could hear himself howling from a long way off, but almost wasn't aware that it was him. His Master hadn't been wrong likening the sensation to fire. He felt as if his entire butt was aflame. He pushed himself away from desk, and grabbed his buttocks, trying to massage the appalling sting, but found his way blocked by the dragon cane.

“Don’t touch. You don’t get to touch,” Skinner said, every inch the Master. Mulder’s soul rebelled for just a second.

“Oh god, you have no idea...” He said pleadingly. “That thing is vicious...I’ve never felt anything like it. I can’t take a second one. Please.” He gazed at his Master, but Skinner’s face was implacable.

“Turn around, and bend over. Now!” He ordered, in a tone so severe that Mulder jumped. He swallowed hard, thinking desperately. He really wasn’t sure he could take another one, and yet...that was what his Master was asking, and he knew that if Skinner let him off now they would never wipe Krycek out of their relationship. This was important on some fundamental level that he couldn’t even begin to unravel. He took a deep breath, and looked deep into his Master’s eyes for confirmation. Skinner gave a slight nod, then drew his slave forward and kissed his forehead. “Go on,” he said pushing him away afterwards. Mulder felt his heart pounding in his chest, and his stomach seemed to have disappeared into the soles of his feet as he turned back, and bent over the desk once more. He closed his eyes, and held on tight, and the next minute he felt the cane on his backside again, resting there lightly.

“It makes a good mark. Deep, but blunt, not sharp and raised like the switch,” Skinner informed him. Mulder thought of that mark, replacing the image of his scarred chest with one of his welted buttocks instead. He gave a nod, and then next thing he knew the cane had been lifted again and came swishing back down, biting a line of fire deep within his bottom.

“Oh shit.” He was too stunned to move for a moment, and then the pain reverberated out from the line across his butt, traveling up his spine and down his legs, and even into his cock, making it stir, and leap hungrily. “Oh...shit,” he whispered again, speechless after his ordeal, and yet curiously elated as well. Skinner helped him up and he made to grab his buttocks again, desperate to rub some of the appalling sting from them, but again his way was blocked, this time by his Master’s large hands, which grabbed his wrists and held them tight.

“Feel it,” Skinner said, holding Mulder against his chest. Mulder whimpered and buried his head in the other man’s shoulder.

“Please let me just rub...” he began.

“No. Feel the sensation. Remember it,” Skinner said. Mulder hung on, the fire consuming his entire backside, and him, powerless to do anything to lessen it. Sweat started to creep down the side of his face as they stood there, savoring the moment together. Then the first wave of pain passed, leaving him with an aching, widespread glow of pure heat. “Please, please don’t ever give me 6 of the best with that thing, Master,” Mulder said in a muffled tone, speaking into his Master’s chest.

“Let’s hope you’re never naughty enough to deserve it then,” Skinner laughed.

“You have no idea what it’s like,” Mulder growled. Skinner went silent, and massaged his slave’s back for a moment. “Master?” Mulder lifted his head, to meet Skinner’s thoughtful dark eyes.

“Oh, I think I do, little one,” Skinner said, lowering his face to capture Mulder’s lips with his own. “Remember I’d never do anything to you that I hadn’t first tested on myself.”

“Who...? When...?” Mulder asked incoherently.

“At Murray’s house – when I was with Andrew. It made a lasting impression let me tell you.” Skinner made a face.

“Did you do anything to deserve it?” Mulder asked breathlessly, “Or was it just some kind of experiment?”

“Oh, I think I probably deserved it. Andrew certainly seemed to think so,” Skinner grinned, and Mulder felt it might be best not to pursue the subject any further. He was intrigued though. He loved hearing stories about his Master being trained by Andrew. It made his cock ache. Skinner seemed to notice that as well, because he smiled down at Mulder’s hardening cock, and pushed his slave away.

“I can see you like the idea of your Master being punished,” he mused, a twinkle in his eye. “Well, I won’t deny you that after what you’ve just been through. Come here. I want to show you my handiwork.” He took hold of Mulder’s hand, and led him back into the bathroom, and Mulder gazed, transfixed, at the two deep stripes across his bright red bottom.

“Mine,” Skinner said possessively, wetting his finger and then running it lightly over the welts in a way that Mulder shiver. He could almost hear his buttocks sizzling. “Now you look the part perfectly,” Skinner said, holding Mulder at arm’s length and gesturing down the entire length of his slave’s body. “The costume, the harness, the rings, the chains, the butt plug, the cock on display...” He touched Mulder’s cock briefly, and it lurched again. “And now the glowing red bottom, perfectly marked. My beautiful, perfect slave.” Skinner pulled Mulder to him, and kissed him long and passionately on the lips until his slave was light headed. He didn’t think he had ever felt happier in his life. He was dizzy with happiness. He loved being so completely his Master’s plaything. Skinner finally released him, and grinned.

“Now,” he said matter of factly. “I think it’s time for breakfast.”

Mulder leapt into action immediately. Breakfast was **his** responsibility. While Skinner went outside, and lay down in the sun, Mulder cheerfully cooked them a full breakfast, whistling happily as he worked. Cooking wasn’t exactly his forte in life, but he did his best, and put his whole heart into the task. He carried their breakfast out on trays to find that Skinner had erected a table for them to eat at, although Mulder noted, somewhat ominously, that there was only one chair. Sure enough, Skinner sat in the chair, and gestured for his slave to crouch beside him, which Mulder did, still floating on a haze of happiness. Wanda meandered outside, and flopped down in the sun beside Skinner.

“Is she allowed out here?” Mulder asked, worried.

“She’s fine. She’s been here before. I brought her when she was a kitten. You know what she’s like - she never strays far away from me so she’s not in any danger,” Skinner replied, eyeing the feast that Mulder had placed in front of him. “My, this **does** look good, boy. I can see that I underestimated your cooking abilities.” Skinner helped himself to a huge plateful of food, and ate for a few minutes, ignoring his slave. Mulder’s stomach rumbled unhelpfully. He tried to think serene thoughts, which was easy enough, out here in the sun, with the blue sea sparking a few feet away, and his handsome Master seated beside him. He was lost in the thought of how surprisingly **perfect** beach holidays could be after his dire hatred of them earlier in the week, when he felt something press against his lips.

“Open,” Skinner ordered, and he did as commanded and chewed on a pancake thoughtfully. They ate slowly, at a leisurely pace, Skinner sometimes feeding himself, and sometimes feeding his slave. Mulder had no say in what he was given, but he was thoroughly fed, and he noted that his Master made sure to give him something of everything. When his Master had finished, Mulder collected the plates and returned them to the kitchen, where he completed the washing up before returning outside. Skinner had placed a large blanket on the sand beside his sun lounger, and Mulder noticed that a large stake had been inserted into the ground next to it as well. He knelt submissively beside his Master, and awaited further orders.

“Well, boy, you haven’t done too badly,” Skinner mused, looking down on his slave. “You’ve spoken out of turn a few times, for which you’ll be punished, but I’m going to save that until later because I think your little session with the dragon cane is enough for now. I’ve already allowed you to come once today – so you won’t be allowed again. If you’re good, I’ll allow you to come once again tomorrow, and every day until further notice, but no more than once,” he said, “and don’t take it for granted – it has to be earned. I expect you to maintain at least half an erection for me to look at when I’m bored as well,” he grinned. “If I let you come more than once a day you might not be able to manage that.”

Mulder sighed. Being kept on the edge of arousal was agony – and yet it focused his mind on his slavery, and in some contradictory way made him feel happy, and content, an object of his Master’s lust. He had no idea why this should be, but it was. “You have no freedom. You’ll ask for everything, and you’ll be in light bondage all day,” Skinner said, picking up a long length of chain. He attached one end to the stake in the ground, and the other to the chain linking Mulder’s nipple rings. “You’ll be at my side for the rest of the day. If I want anything I’ll release you so that you can get it but you’ll return with it immediately, and then you’ll be tied again. Remember to work on keeping that erection,” Skinner warned. “I want you to be at least half hard whenever I look at you. If you aren’t then I’ll punish you.”

“Yes, Master,” Mulder said obediently, his cock obligingly immediately, clearly aroused as all hell as much by the idea of the retribution as by the order.

“Good boy. In keeping with the Egyptian theme, if it gets too hot, I’ll be asking you to fan me with this.” Skinner pointed to a long handled, old-fashioned fan, resembling a broad palm tree leaf. Mulder nodded. “Good boy. Now undress me and rub me in with oil,” Skinner ordered. Mulder quickly dispatched his Master’s jeans, and Skinner lay face down on the sun lounger, completely naked. It was a private beach, accessible only by boat, so there was no question of anyone chancing across the handsome, naked Master, and his scantily clad, harnessed, bonded slave, although that thought made Mulder shiver and squirm deliciously. It really amazed him how much he enjoyed this role. He had blundered through his life, single-mindedly following what he thought was his destiny, only to find that his psyche had other ideas, and wanted to follow a completely different path. What surprised him was how relaxed this role made him feel. He felt as if he was coming to life at the same time as he handed over so much of his life to this bronze-bodied man lying in front of him. He poured some oil into his hands to warm it, and then went about a duty that was more of a pleasure.

Mulder took his time, and covered every single inch of Skinner’s body with oil, massaging his Master’s firm, toned flesh as he worked. He caressed his Master’s buttocks reverentially, and risked inserting a finger into his crease, and oiling inside his Master’s dark entrance. Skinner sighed, and opened his legs wider, allowing his slave’s impertinence, and, thus emboldened, Mulder knelt between his Master’s thighs, and kissed those perfect, round buttocks, and then dipped his tongue into his Master’s anus. His Master tasted of oil, and indefinable eau de Skinner, and he wriggled deliciously beneath Mulder’s

caressing tongue. Mulder rimmed him for several long minutes, until Skinner raised his head, and said: "Thank you, slave. That's enough," and then he reluctantly drew back, and turned his attention to his Master's beautiful golden shoulders and back. He massaged firmly but gently for what seemed like hours, and he felt Skinner's whole body unwind beneath him. Finally he turned his Master onto his back, and carefully anointed Skinner's naked head, soothing his long fingers into the flesh, and then covered his Master's face, stealing dozens of small kisses as he went. His Master grinned, but was clearly feeling indulgent because he didn't stop his slave, although he did deliver a half-hearted swat to Mulder's backside when his slave dared to press his lips against his, and open his Master's mouth with his tongue. Mulder continued with his task, and smoothed oil on his Master's chest, pausing to bestow a kiss on each shining brown nipple, and then proceeded on to his Master's swollen cock. He spent a particularly long time oiling this part of his Master's anatomy, his fingers sliding over the long width of the splendid organ. It was all he could do not to take it in his mouth, or pump it to climax with his hand. His Master was clearly ready for action, and he wondered why the other man hadn't used him yet.

Mulder spent some time on his Master's balls as well, licking them before oiling them, rolling them over in his hand, and then he smoothed the oil down his Master's long legs, before ending up at his feet. He lingered here too, rubbing between each edible toe, and daring to suck them thoroughly before applying the oil. Then he finished, and withdrew to his blanket where he knelt in the "at ease" position, awaiting further orders.

"Ensure you're kept oiled as well," Skinner murmured and Mulder applied more oil to his own body, taking care not to soil his harem pants, and soon they were both gleaming, shining specimens of manhood, their oiled bodies catching the sun. "You can lie down," Skinner said when Mulder was done, and he did as ordered. It was so relaxing being **ordered** to lie there. When he tried to lie still of his own accord and just sunbathe, Mulder always got bored and fidgeted, but this was a different matter. Now he was in bondage, his nipple rings attached to the stake in the sand, so he wasn't going anywhere. Thus forced into resting, and enjoying the sun, Mulder did just that, and was surprised to wake with a start a few hours later to find that he was lying in the shade of a beach umbrella.

"Some sun is good. Too much definitely isn't," Skinner said, glancing at him with a grin. He was sitting on his lounge, reading a novel. "I'm thirsty. Go and get some water, boy." He undid the chain from his slave's nipples, and Mulder returned to the kitchen obediently, and brought a cool box containing several bottles of water back outside. His Master handed one to him and they both drank in companionable silence, and then Skinner pointed to the fan. "Cool me down, boy," he ordered, and Mulder did as ordered. He felt fairly stupid, waving the huge plastic palm frond around, and was reminded of one of those really bad old Hollywood epics in which a half naked Elizabeth Taylor could be found lounging around being fanned by a slave in a loin cloth. He closed his eyes, and concentrated on keeping his erection at least at half-mast. It wasn't hard. This whole scenario turned him on. After a while his arms began to ache, and Skinner opened an eye and gestured that he could put the fan away.

"I think it's time to administer that punishment I promised earlier," Skinner said. "Over my knee, boy." Mulder wasn't sure his tormented buttocks could take any more punishing today, but his Master clearly thought that they could. He played with them for a while, squeezing here and there, and delivering light taps, and he pushed the butt plug in further, where it had loosened with Mulder's movements. Then he began to spank in earnest, peppering Mulder's bottom with hard slaps from his broad hand. Mulder started to squirm as that hand covered the marks left by the dragon cane, but Skinner was remorseless, and his slave was soon yelping and hollering.

“What are you, boy?” Skinner demanded.

“S...slave, Master!” He gasped.

“Who do you belong to?” Skinner asked, his hand rising and falling relentlessly.

“You, Master!” Mulder cried, repeating the familiar litany he remembered from old that was as comforting as pulling on an ancient, comfortable, and much-loved sweater.

“What is your purpose?”

“I exist to serve you!”

“Good.”

The spanking came to an end, and Mulder lay over his Master’s large thighs, struggling to regain his breath. He felt Skinner removing the chains that fastened his butt plug, and then it was removed. “Stand up, and undress. I think this butt needs to cool off.” Skinner gestured with his head towards the sea, and Mulder quickly scrambled out of his harem outfit and harness, and toed off his ridiculous slippers. “Into the water – run,” Skinner ordered, and Mulder obeyed, his cock bouncing merrily as he jogged into the sea. He turned to see his Master following, at a more leisurely pace, grinning broadly. “Right in,” Skinner commanded, and Mulder continued walking, then threw himself head first into the water. He shivered as his hot bottom met the cold water.

“Oh god!” He exclaimed, clutching his butt. Skinner laughed, and eased himself more cautiously into the water, surfacing close to where his slave was standing. “Shit, cold water, burning butt,” Mulder grimaced, half laughing himself.

“A seductive combination,” Skinner agreed, sliding an arm around his slave, and pulling Mulder close. He kissed his slave long, hard, and thoroughly, playing with Mulder’s cock until it started to respond, despite the cold water. Mulder noticed that his Master’s cock was also hardening, and he ducked under the water, and took it in his warm mouth, sucking it to full erection, before choking to the surface with a mouthful of seawater.

“Warm and cold...that felt so good,” Skinner said, grabbing one of his slave’s nipple rings and twisting. Mulder grabbed on to his Master’s shoulder in order to stay upright. “My slippery seal,” Skinner grinned, his fingers sliding across his slave’s oiled body. “Although you’re a little on the large side to be a seal. More like a whale.” He grinned at Mulder’s expression of outrage. “And you know, I think it’s time for this whale to be harpooned.” He grabbed Mulder’s head and pulled it close, then whispered one word in his ear. “Wanda.”

Mulder glanced towards the shore, but the little cat was lying under Skinner’s sun lounger, fast asleep. Then realization sank in.

“Here...now...?” He squawked. Skinner frowned.

“The day you can accept this particular command without question is the day I’ll really know that you’re my slave down to the core of your being,” he said. “Now, bend over, boy. I’ve been patient enough, and now I want to use this hot butt.”

Mulder felt a warmth rise up from the pit of his stomach. He loved it when Skinner used this particular command on him. He loved the sensation of total and utter submission it induced in him. He loved being used, roughly, and without any thought for his own pleasure. He took a few quick steps towards the shore to make sure he had room to bend over without drowning, and then did as his Master ordered. His chin was dipping in the water, and he wasn’t able to bend all the way, but it was enough to offer his Master access. His anus was thoroughly stretched after the morning’s many activities, and he was lubed, as always. He felt Skinner’s warm hands on his sore buttocks, and shivered as he felt the tip of his Master’s cock press into his entrance. Then his Master thrust once, hard, and buried himself deep in Mulder’s body. Mulder was knocked partially off balance and took another mouthful of water before finding his legs again, his Master’s hands holding him up. God, this felt so good! The many sensations of hot and cold were exciting in themselves. His Master’s warm cock inside his hot buttocks, both of them surrounded by cool, clear, sparkling water. Skinner grunted, and rested for a moment inside his slave, and they both felt the warm pulsing connection between them. Then his Master slid his fingers around Mulder’s chest, and took his nipples between his thumb and forefinger, squeezing hard. Mulder gasped again, and almost toppled over once more. Skinner didn’t speak, just shifted his thighs back, and then slammed into his slave again, and with each savage thrust, he squeezed down hard on Mulder’s nipples. Mulder rested his hands on his thighs for purchase, and surrendered to the moment. The sun was shining on his back, and his Master was using him the way he had used him before Seattle. He was slamming into his slave, rough and fast, and overpowering him the way Mulder loved, but had been too fragile to withstand in recent weeks.

“Oh god...oh shit...” Mulder panted, his own cock hard, and weeping, and Skinner twisted his slave’s nipples, made another lunge deep into his slave’s bowels and came. The warm semen mingled with the cool water, and Mulder felt a sense of well-being and elation flood through him. Skinner stayed embedded in his slave, and then, without warning, kicked Mulder’s legs from under him, and pulled him back into the water so that he was lying on top of his Master, both of them face up, floating, his Master’s cock still inside him.

“That was good, boy. Now, time to relax,” Skinner murmured. They floated for a long time, Skinner’s arms stroking his slave tenderly as they relaxed together in the water, bathed in sunlight, Skinner’s cock still buried deep inside his slave’s ass. The back of Mulder’s head was on his Master’s chest, and they both moved their feet and hands aimlessly to keep themselves afloat. Mulder wanted that moment to never end, but finally, his Master pulled away, and it felt so cold without the other man’s large cock embedded inside him.

“Beautiful,” Skinner murmured, pulling Mulder close for another kiss. “This is a day I’ll never forget, Fox.”

“Me neither,” Mulder said, nuzzling his Master’s salty neck.

“Time for more sunbathing,” Skinner grinned, pulling away and cleaning his penis carefully in the water before returning to the shore. Mulder followed him, and they both flopped back on their respective lounging areas. They dried in the sun, but it was getting late, and cooler, so as soon as they were dry,

Skinner ordered Mulder to dress in his harem outfit once more, and fitted the butt plug in place, and then they returned to the house.

They had just gotten into the kitchen, when there was a loud knock on the front door. Mulder gave Skinner an alarmed look, but his Master just smiled, and shrugged.

“Stay here,” Skinner ordered. “I’ll go and investigate.” Mulder stayed in the kitchen, wondering who on earth would be calling on them, and hoping that his Master would get rid of them as soon as possible. He was, therefore, horrified to hear the sounds of two sets of footsteps, coupled with his Master’s laugh, and two voices conversing. He slunk into the corner of the kitchen as the voices came closer. Oh god! He was clad in this ridiculous harem outfit, complete with eye make up, his cock and striped buttocks clearly on display. The idea of anyone seeing him like this sent shivers up and down his spine. Surely Skinner hadn’t forgotten how his slave was dressed? The door opened, and, much to Mulder’s profound alarm, Skinner ushered a man he didn’t know into the room. What was worse was the fact that the man was a police officer.

“Fox, this is Hank Tanner. He’s the local sheriff,” Skinner said.

“Please to meet you, boy,” Tanner said in a heartily booming voice. He looked Mulder up and down approvingly, a wide grin on his face, and Mulder felt like sinking into the ground. He felt so naked and exposed, dressed like this. Hank didn’t seem surprised though, as, after a cursory glance at the slave, he turned back to Skinner. “I thought I’d just look in on you Walter. Murray told me you’d be arriving with your boy. I meant to get along before now, but events got the better of me. It’s good to see you again.”

“And you, Hank. Here, take a seat. Fox will bring us coffee, and we can catch up.” Skinner ushered their guest to the kitchen table, and Mulder swallowed hard, and set about making coffee as instructed. He went about the task silently. Skinner clearly wasn’t fazed by their guest seeing his slave boy dressed like this, so he guessed that he shouldn’t be embarrassed either. On the contrary, he knew that he should be pleased that his Master was so proud of his slave that he was showing him off in public. Mulder took a deep breath, and held his shoulders back, determined to show his Master that he could be a perfect slave. He was aware of Hank’s eyes traveling over his chained, harnessed, gauze-clad body, and lingering on his striped buttocks, and visible butt plug, but he was proud of his marks, and grew in confidence as Hank and Skinner continued talking as if the slave didn’t exist. He brought coffee and cookies to the table, and laid them silently in front of the other men. Skinner clicked his fingers without even looking at his slave, and Mulder sank to his knees beside his Master, and rested his chin on Skinner’s knee. Skinner’s hand came to rest immediately on his slave’s head, and he fondled Mulder’s hair absently while he talked to his guest. Mulder closed his eyes, and relaxed.

“Well, if you need anything, just holler,” Hank said, half an hour or so later, getting up. “Or send your boy into town with a message.” He glanced at Mulder. “Boy’s a credit to you, Walter. Well trained. Murray always did say you were the best. I can see why now.”

“Fox is a quick learner. He deserves a vacation,” Skinner replied. “I think we both were in need of one to be honest!”

“Well you’ll get it out here. I’ll make sure nobody bothers you.”

“Thank you.”

Mulder got to his feet in time with his Master, and stood, unobtrusively, as Skinner bade their guest farewell. "I'll show you out, Hank. I have something I want to ask you," Skinner said, clicking his fingers again. Mulder knelt, and put his head down, as the other two men left the room, still talking. Skinner was a long time saying goodbye to his guest at the front door and Mulder wondered what they were talking about. He couldn't help but feel pleased with himself after his performance though. He'd been so completely his Master's slave, and it had felt so damn good. His chest swelled slightly as he remembered Hank's praise. This was what Skinner had always wanted – to be proud to show him off in public and know he wouldn't be disgraced by his slave's behavior. Mulder was both disturbed and aroused to find that he had thoroughly enjoyed the whole thing.

Skinner returned a few minutes later, and came to stand in front of his slave. Mulder kept his eyes cast down, and gazed at his Master's feet, trembling slightly under his Master's scrutiny. He thought he had done well – he **hoped** he had done well. Finally, Skinner placed a finger under his slave's chin, and lifted his face up. Next thing he knew, his Master's face had dipped down, and the sweetest, softest, gentlest kiss had been deposited on his lips.

"Good boy," was all Skinner said. "Hank is an old friend of Murray's - he's well used to our lifestyle, or I wouldn't have brought him into the kitchen, obviously. I don't approve of outsiders having our little foibles being inflicted upon them. Now, I'm going up to the red room upstairs to get things ready for the evening's entertainment. I'll be making a call to a local restaurant who will deliver some food in a couple of hours. They'll leave it on the porch, and knock on the door. You'll go and bring it in, arrange it on plates and bring it upstairs. I will provide the wine. You have two hours free time – during which I want you to think about how you'll please me this evening. You might have noticed that there's no television out here. Murray and Hammer always make their own entertainment and we'll do the same. I expect my slave to put on some kind of performance, whether it's a strip tease, a dance, or something else of your own devising."

Mulder's heart dropped into his curled Moroccan slippers at these words, and he gazed, dumb struck at his Master as the other man disappeared up the stairs.

"Dance? Have you ever **seen** me dance?" he muttered, wondering what the hell he could do to entertain his Master. He racked his brains, and finally decided to go to the dungeon for inspiration. Skinner hadn't said he couldn't go into that room, and it wasn't kept locked. He wandered up there, and found the dragon cane still lying on the desk where Skinner had left it. Mulder went to look at it, but was careful not to touch, although he wasn't sure why – maybe as a mark of some kind of respect to what was a very formidable implement. His buttocks ached just looking at it. He walked over to the bookcase, and glanced at that, hoping to find some inspiration there, and an idea struck him. He remembered the first time his Master had made love to him, and the erotic charge of that poem his Master had recited as he touched him. Mulder's fingers raced over the spines of the books, taking some down, and glancing in them, flicking impatiently through the pages until finally he found one he was looking for. He considered it for a moment. Too much? But time was getting short, and Skinner said they had to make their own entertainment, and these words resonated with him so much. Finally, deciding it was either that or dancing, Mulder settled down to learn the sonnet off by heart.

His eidetic memory ensured that the task wasn't too onerous, and Mulder half-remembered the sonnet from his schooldays anyway. He had always hated Shakespeare at school, but this sonnet had spoken to something deep inside him that he hadn't even dared voice at that age. He had memorized the sonnet but forgotten it over the years. Now, the words leapt out of the page at him with even more meaning,

because now he would be saying them to somebody specific, not just a nameless fantasy Master of his own imagination.

Mulder was flushing with nervous embarrassment as he knocked on the door of the red room a couple of hours later, carrying a huge tray of food. The door was opened, and he was immediately assaulted by the scent of incense. The room was lit by several large candles, and glowed warm and red. The many cushions were piled up invitingly in the center of the room, and several little tables were scattered around. Mulder just had time to take that information in when his attention was claimed elsewhere. He wasn't the only one dressed for the occasion; his Master had also taken some time to dress up. Skinner had clearly taken a bath, and he was dressed in a pair of tight fitting leather pants, and a loose embroidered red waist-coat with nothing underneath. He was barefoot, and he looked – better than dinner, Mulder decided.

“Put the tray down, and serve me, boy,” Skinner ordered, settling his large frame down on the cushions, and beckoning Mulder over. Mulder swallowed hard, and did as ordered. He knelt beside his Master, and Skinner handed him a large glass of wine. Skinner watched him over the top of his own glass, and Mulder took one sip and then looked up, with a delighted smile. The wine was warm, and spicy, and different to anything he'd tasted before.

“Good?” Skinner asked.

“Oh yeah.” Mulder nodded enthusiastically. He felt the wine warming him, and it combined with the incense to make his head swim. He felt as if the glowing red walls were embracing him, and his cock was responding to the eroticism of the room.

“Kiss me,” Skinner commanded, and Mulder leaned forward, and took his Master's lips in his own, tasting the wine on the other man's tongue. This was so seductive, so good. He kissed his Master for as long as he could before the big man gently disengaged.

“Feed me,” Skinner ordered, and Mulder picked up a plate, and took one of the tidbits from it. Skinner had ordered some kind of ethnic finger food, which was perfect for the occasion. Mulder held a piece of some kind of spiced meat to his Master's lips, and Skinner took it, licking Mulder's fingers clean and then nodded that he wanted another morsel. After he'd tasted many of the different foods, he returned the favor, and fed his slave boy in return. The combination of wine and incense, the room and his powerful Master seduced Mulder, and his cock was now so hard it ached. He knew he wouldn't be allowed to come, and that gave the evening an intensity of pleasure that aroused him even more. When they'd finished eating, and licking the food off each other's hands, Skinner pulled his slave onto his lap, and played with him. He ran his hands through his slave's hair, and teased each of his slave's nipples, moved his butt plug, and tugged on his chains, until Mulder was sighing with pleasure.

“All right, your turn to entertain me now, boy. What do you have prepared?” Skinner asked.

“A sonnet, Master,” Mulder said, all the embarrassment he thought he'd feel disappearing in this warm, inviting environment.

“I like the sound of that.” Skinner nuzzled his slave's jaw with his lips.

“Master...I’d like to make it more personal by...attending to you as I speak it. Could I remove my plug?” Mulder asked.

Skinner nodded. “I asked to be entertained, and this sounds most entertaining,” he grinned. Mulder moved into the shadows and prepared himself for what he intended to do. Then he returned to where his Master was lying, spread-eagled on the pillows amid the remains of their feast. Mulder straddled his Master, pushed Skinner’s waistcoat aside, and took one brown nipple in his mouth. He sucked on it, and then turned his attention to the other. His Master closed his eyes, and surrendered to the attention, his body relaxing beneath Mulder’s ministrations. Mulder opened his Master’s leather pants, and released the other man’s pulsing cock. It didn’t take too many flicks of his deft fingers for that cock to become rock hard in his hands. Then Mulder settled himself over his Master’s penis, and lowered himself gently onto it. He always found riding his Master hard, because of the angle of the penetration, which was deeper, even though he could control the thrust. Mulder slowly slid his Master’s cock deep into his own ass, his eyes watering slightly as he rode it home, into the darkest recesses of his body. Skinner sighed, and moved his hips and then they were joined, Skinner’s cock pulsating and hard, warm within his slave’s body. They stayed that way for a long time. Mulder loved the intimacy of this position, as he looked down on his Master. He loved being able to look into the other man’s eyes when they made love.

Slowly, he leaned forward, and kissed his Master on the lips. It wasn’t a deep kiss, just a brush of lips on lips.

“Being your slave what should I do but tend,

Upon the hours, and times of your desire?” He quoted softly, nuzzling his Master’s ear with his mouth.

“I have no precious time at all to spend;

Nor services to do till you require.”

He moved his body, raising himself up on his haunches, and then slowly impaled himself on his Master’s cock once more. Skinner’s lips parted, and his dark eyes opened and looked at his slave. He moved his hands to cup Mulder’s buttocks, and they were still for a moment. Then Mulder leaned forward again, and licked his Master’s nipples, before continuing.

“Whilst I (my sovereign) watch the clock for you,

Nor think the bitterness of absence sour,

When you have bid your servant once adieu.”

He gave a choking cry as his Master kneaded his buttocks, and put his head back, feeling the sweat trickle down his neck. Oh god, this felt good. His Master moved his hips again, thrusting deeper into his slave’s body, and Mulder moaned. His own cock ached for attention but he didn’t touch it, and neither did his Master. It stood between them, shaven, and rock hard, weeping slightly.

“Nor dare I question with my jealous thought,

Where you may be, or your affairs suppose," Mulder continued, taking his Master's face between his hands, and bestowing several kisses on the other man's features, his fingers caressing Skinner's square jaw, and the familiar planes and contours of his face.

"But like a sad slave stay and think of nought,  
Save where you are, how happy you make those."

He rose and fell on his Master's cock once more, and then again in quick succession and their breathing quickened. Skinner grasped his slave's hips to keep them both steady.

"So true a fool is love, that in your will," Mulder quoted softly, dipping his head forward for another kiss.

"(Though you do any thing), he thinks no ill."

He quickened his pace, and rode his Master hard, his body aching from the deep penetration, but glowing also from the intense eroticism of the moment. Skinner gave an inarticulate cry, and came with a shuddering bellow of sheer pleasure, grasping his slave's body close to his as he did so. Mulder grinned down on his Master, delighted by the effect of his seduction.

"Thank you, Fox," Skinner said softly, brushing his slave's sweaty hair out of his eyes. "Sonnet 57. It's been a long time since I heard that, and I don't think it's ever been delivered to better effect," he grinned. "Well done, sweetheart." He undid Mulder's chain harness and removed it, leaving him in his usual attire of nipple and cock rings. Mulder looked at him questioningly.

"We'll sleep in here tonight. I've enjoyed this particular theme," Skinner explained. "And besides, I'm comfortable where I am. I don't want to move," he grinned. Mulder was aware that his Master's softened cock was still inside him, and grinned back. "Move down beside me without dislodging me," Skinner commanded. "Fail and I'll punish you." Mulder nodded, and slowly, carefully, managed to move his legs and body so that he was lying with his back against his Master's chest, cradled in his Master's arms, Skinner's cock still inside him. It was a tricky maneuver, and took all his ingenuity but he managed to achieve it. The threat of punishment was an effective incentive – he really felt he'd been spanked enough for one day. It felt good to be lying down together on the plentiful cushions, still connected. Skinner pulled a light blanket over them, and they watched the candles burn down to nothing, the gentle lapping of the waves outside the only sound in the warm, glowing, scented room.

The following day was spent in much the same way. Skinner seemed so taken by his harem boy that he was reluctant to relinquish this particular fantasy, and Mulder, for his part, felt as if he was growing stronger with each day that passed. His skin had started to tan slightly, and he no longer felt the remains of the lethargy that had plagued him since Krycek's assault. His body was rested, and he felt more like himself than he done in a long time. His confidence was returning with his strength, and he basked in his Master's attention. When they were working, neither of them had this amount of time and energy to lavish on the other. Skinner reintroduced the daily confessional, and although Mulder always found them hard, he also found that he **needed** that daily outlet. It helped Master and slave understand each other better and once he started talking, he was surprised by easily the words came.

On the following night, he expected to bed down with his Master in the red room again, so was surprised to find the other man had different ideas.

“You’re not sleeping with me tonight, boy,” he grinned. “Tomorrow we’ll be playing a different game and I want you to get into the feel of it so you’re ready and willing.”

He took Mulder back to the dungeon, and ordered his slave to undress. Mulder wasn’t too unhappy to see the back of the harem outfit. “Go and take a shower,” Skinner commanded. “Then come back out here to accept your new role.”

Mulder did as ordered, wondering what Skinner had in mind for him next. When he returned to the Dungeon, naked, and still toweling his hair dry, his heart sank as he saw the items his Master had arranged on the desk.

“Tomorrow, I want to play with my pup,” Skinner said, smiling broadly, and clicking his fingers. “Pups don’t talk – at all,” he reminded his slave. “So you’ll spend all day tomorrow in total silence.”

“Yes, Master,” Mulder sighed.

“I’ll keep you gagged some of the time so that shouldn’t be a problem. For now, pup, I think a collar is in order. This isn’t a slave collar, boy, so don’t get excited – it’s a dog collar, pure and simple.” Skinner opened the thick, soft leather collar, and buckled it around his slave’s neck. Mulder didn’t care that it wasn’t a slave collar. It felt good to have something around his neck again, reminding him of his status in his Master’s life. The collar had a little tag hanging off it, with *Fox* engraved upon it. “And of course, the best dogs have a nice, bushy tail,” Skinner grinned, holding up a solid butt plug with a long dark tail hanging from it. Mulder closed his eyes, remembering the horsetail his Master had made him wear recently. He got to his feet, and bent over the desk obediently though when commanded. Skinner lubed the butt plug, and then worked it slowly into his slave’s ass, taking his time.

“This one is a little bigger than the one you’ve been wearing,” he announced. “I want to ensure you’re fully stretched, boy, as I have plans for you next week.” Mulder wanted to ask what those plans were, but he wasn’t entirely sure that he wanted to know. Skinner decided to tell him anyway. “You know I once mentioned fisting you,” he murmured in Mulder’s ear, where Mulder lay, prone and naked, over the desk. Mulder shivered. “I’m going to fist you before the end of this vacation, boy. I’ve been stretching you nicely for the past few days. You’ll be ready to take my fist before I’m through with you.”

“Yes, Master,” Mulder croaked, his cock responding almost immediately to the suggestion. He found the idea of being fisted both profoundly frightening and incredibly erotic. It was such an expression of trust, to allow his Master to do this to his body, and yet, at the same time, he had no choice. If Skinner wished to fist his slave, then that was his prerogative.

“Good pup.” Skinner sank the final few inches of the butt plug home, and twisted it slightly, making his pup yelp. It **was** considerably bigger than the last plug, and it was holding his rectal muscles open. He could feel them spasmodically clenching around the plug, trying to repel the intruder, and failing. “You’ll soon get used to it,” Skinner said, smiling happily. He slapped Mulder’s buttocks, and then pulled his slave up. “Here’s your blanket. Follow me down to the kennel,” Skinner commanded.

“Kennel?” Mulder repeated, surprised. “Don’t tell me you brought that thing with you all the way from DC.”

“Of course not,” Skinner grinned. “Murray has his own kennel. I believe Hammer loves sleeping in it. It’s a warm night, you have a blanket – you’ll do fine.” He led Mulder downstairs, out into the back garden,

and around a small bank of shrubs. There, lying on the lawn, was a large, wooden kennel, with a long length of chain attached to it. Skinner picked up the chain and fastened it to Mulder's dog collar.

"You can unclip this at any time during the night," he said, showing Mulder how easily the chain could be unfastened. "I would suggest that you don't," Skinner added, "for any reason other than a genuine emergency. The punishment for disobedience on this matter will be severe." Mulder nodded, and crawled into his kennel, clutching his blanket. Skinner disappeared and returned a few minutes later with a bowl of water. The bowl, Mulder noted, had "Pup" written on the outside.

"No hands," Skinner warned, placing the bowl outside the kennel. "Your day as a pup has begun. I'll see you in the morning." He kissed Mulder's forehead affectionately, and then returned to the house. Mulder watched him go, mournfully. The past few nights he had spent in his Master's arms had been so perfect that he felt like howling like a dog as the other man disappeared from sight.

The kennel was actually fairly comfortable. Mulder lay with his head sticking out, looking up at the sky, and he had to admit that he felt pretty good. Being chained was a fantasy of his, and, regardless of the fact that he could easily undo the chain if he wanted, he was enjoying the feeling of being kept in light bondage. He could hear the waves washing up on the shore a stone's throw away, and if he looked at the house, he could see the light on in the bedroom, signaling that his Master was reading before going to sleep. It was all rather restful, and Mulder lay back with his hands under his head, thinking. It had been a little over seven months since he had signed that contract, binding him to his unknown Master, and his whole life had changed radically since then. What surprised him, and even scared him a little, was how much he preferred this life to his old one. He felt calmer, and more at ease with himself. After the tumultuous events of the past month, he knew that he had genuinely reached a turning point. And now, out here by the sea, in this fantasy vacation straight from BDSM heaven, Mulder was aware that his erotically skilled Master was completing the process of healing his slave's shattered psyche as much as the sun, sea and rest were healing his body. It didn't escape Mulder's notice that Skinner was recapping the finer points of his slave training, in an entirely pleasurable way, prior to the undoubted stress of their return to work. Mulder counted the stars, remembering a time when being alone with his thoughts, gazing up at the sky, would have led inevitably to thoughts about Samantha, and a consuming need to do something, **anything**, to show her he hadn't given up on her. Now he could see that his drive had been more about himself, and his need to outrun his guilt over her abduction, than anything to do with her. Yes, he still wanted to find her, but that quest didn't define his life any more. He had found something else; he had found someone to love him and in return he gave that man his whole life. Willingly. Mulder closed his eyes. His demons, so long with him, had been at least partially slain. As long as that man in the house remained his Master, then he didn't fear anything that could happen to him. He was at peace.

Mulder was wakened by a loud whistle in his ear the following day.

"Morning, pup. Time to get up." Skinner grinned, unfastening the chain from Mulder's collar. "Sleep well?"

Mulder opened his mouth, and then narrowed his eyes, remembering that he was supposed to remain silent all day. He nodded, and grinned sideways at his Master who laughed out loud, and slung a big arm around his slave's shoulders, tousling his hair affectionately. "Go and take a shower, and then come

back downstairs to eat," Skinner ordered. "You can remove the plug to shower. Clean it and bring it back for me to insert it again."

Mulder hurried to do as he had been commanded, then scampered down to the beach to find his Master seated at the table, chewing on a slice of toast. A bowl of water, and a plate of pancakes cut into bite-sized pieces were on a plate on the ground. Mulder sighed, but couldn't stop himself grinning. This was so absurd, and conversely so ridiculously horny. His cock was already starting to wake up. After breakfast, Skinner whistled to him again, and he went obediently to his Master side. The other man attached a leash to his slave's nipples.

"I'm taking my pup for a walk," Skinner explained. "He's been lounging around for too long. I think he needs some exercise." Mulder felt the same way. He was longing to stretch his legs along the expanse of beach. He fell into pace beside his Master as Skinner jogged along the beach. The other man was wearing a pair of cut off shorts, and a tee shirt, with a baseball cap protecting his naked scalp from the fierce overhead sun. Mulder loved the feel of the warm wind whipping over his almost nude body, and got an extra frisson from running on the lead, subject to his Master's commands. They ran up and down the beach for half an hour, and then Skinner slowed to a walk, and opened the small bag he had slung across his back. "Time for my pup to play," he grinned, pulling out a Frisbee. Mulder placed his hands on his hips and dared his Master to throw it, but Skinner was enjoying himself far too much to take any notice of his slave's lack of enthusiasm for the game. He threw the Frisbee along the beach and then gazed expectantly at his slave. Mulder stared back at him, one step away from laughing out loud.

"You know, I think most dogs would fetch without having to be ordered, but I can make it an order," Skinner said easily. Mulder glowered at him, and then, with a heavy and pointed sigh, turned and ran after the Frisbee. "Remember, no hands!" Skinner called after him, chuckling to himself as he sat down and watched his pet perform. Mulder picked up the Frisbee in his mouth, along with a mouthful of wet sand, and returned it to his Master's lap, where he dropped it and the sand with a challenge in his eyes.

"Is my pup being defiant?" Skinner asked, brushing the wet sand off his shorts. Mulder's eyes widened in innocent surprise, and he shook his head, shrugging extravagantly and trying not to laugh. "HmMMM. We'll see." Skinner stood up, and threw the Frisbee in a wide curving arc – straight into the sea. Mulder looked at the Frisbee, then looked back at his Master. Skinner smiled pleasantly. "Fetch," he said mildly. Mulder gave an even more dramatic sigh, and ran into the water after the Frisbee. It was actually nice to cool down in the water after their jog, and he doggy paddled after the Frisbee, and nosed it around in the sea for a long time, playfully ignoring his Master who was whistling for him to return. "Well, you wanted a pup," Mulder murmured, ducking under the water, and coming up with the Frisbee balanced on his head. "And I've just remembered another thing pups do..." he muttered mischievously to himself, an idea forming in his mind. He tossed the Frisbee into the air, and leapt up and batted it back into the water before retrieving it in his mouth. He ran back up the beach to his Master, dropped it in Skinner's lap...and then shook himself all over his nice dry Master. Skinner was sitting down and couldn't avoid the spray of cold water from Mulder's body and hair, but he shouted loudly, and got to his feet just as Mulder ducked away and made a run for it back up the beach. He easily outran his Master, who chased him, still yelling, although there was a gurgling sound interspersed with the shouts that sounded suspiciously like laughter to Mulder's ears. Skinner pursued his errant pup back to the house, where Mulder sat himself down on his blanket, awaiting his fate.

“All right, boy. I think this naughty pup needs some discipline, don’t you?” Skinner said, putting his hands on his hips and glaring down at Mulder, who shrugged - rather hopefully. “Go into the house, and fetch me the black leather gloves on the kitchen table – bring them in your mouth,” Skinner ordered. Mulder looked askance at his Master, who raised an eyebrow. “Now would be good. Your butt’s in enough trouble as it is.” Mulder loped off to the house and retrieved the gloves in question, returning them to his Master and dropping them in the other man’s lap. “All right, boy. I think it’s time for your morning discipline.” Skinner sat on his beach chair, and pulled the gloves on slowly – very slowly. Mulder sat transfixed, watching him. He had something of an erotic fixation with those gloves, and his cock was responding very eagerly to the idea of his Master wearing them while he punished his errant slave.

“Over my knee.” Skinner pointed at his lap, and Mulder, all too eagerly, got himself into position. He closed his eyes as his Master ran loving, black-gloved hands over his slave’s proffered bottom. “You can cry out, but no coherent words,” Skinner warned. Mulder nodded dreamily. He could feel those black leather gloves exploring his backside, slapping gently here and there, making a satisfying cracking sound with just the slightest touch. “Open your legs,” Skinner ordered and Mulder obeyed. Skinner’s black clad fingers fondled his slave’s balls, and cock, making him instantly hard, and then, without warning, withdrew the dog tail plug in one smooth action, making Mulder gasp. Then the spanking began in earnest. Those black leather gloves afforded Skinner’s hands protection while delivering a more stinging slap than flesh alone could manage. His Master went slowly, building up the pain like the maestro he was, then slowing down again, until Mulder felt himself trembling on the brink of total jellification. He started to squirm and wriggle over his Master’s knee, alternately sobbing and panting. His butt felt as if it was on fire, and he was yelping and howling loud enough to make Wanda glare at him pointedly and return to the house, her tail high in the air. Finally, just when he thought he couldn’t take any more without coming or bursting into tears, it finished. Mulder lay, moaning, over his Master’s knee and was then flipped to the ground.

“I hope you learned your lesson,” Skinner admonished. Mulder nodded tearfully.

“I don’t think you have. Not yet,” Skinner said, taking Mulder’s hard cock in his black-gloved hand, and caressing it firmly. Mulder closed his eyes, and made a choking sound in the back of his throat. There was something so intensely erotic about those gloves. “You can come if you want – but remember this is the only time you’ll be allowed to come today,” Skinner said. “You might want to hold it until later.” Mulder nodded, determined to save his pleasure until later in the day, and Skinner grinned, and ran the back of one gloved hand over his slave’s cheek.

“Sure?” Skinner said. Mulder nodded again, wishing Skinner would stop toying with him, and his Master suddenly, and unexpectedly, leaned forward, and grabbed both his slave’s sore buttocks within his gloved hands, and, at the same time, dipped his head to swallow his slave’s hard cock deep into his mouth. Mulder groaned and bucked back and forth into that warm, wet embrace. “Oh god!” He yelled, and was rewarded by a hearty slap on his backside in punishment, while his Master’s mouth continued to devour his slave’s cock. Mulder didn’t even **try** to stop himself from coming. He orgasmed with a deep, satisfied shudder into the back of his Master’s mouth. Skinner drew back, wiping his lips contentedly.

“I thought you were going to save it?” He said smugly.

“You try damn well holding on when someone is deep-throating you like that!” Mulder retorted without even thinking. Skinner grinned, and flexed his gloved hand menacingly.

“Oh dear. I think someone spoke out of turn. Time for another spanking,” he growled, grabbing his errant slave and throwing him back over his knee for another short session with the relentless black glove. When at last they’d finished Mulder clung, whimpering somewhere between ecstasy and oblivion, nestled against his Master on the lounging chair. It was warm, and they were both laughing and relaxed, and before long they were both fast asleep.

Mulder managed to get through the rest of the day without speaking and was rewarded with a doggy chew when Skinner took him back to the kennel that night. He rolled his eyes, and raised a disbelieving eyebrow at his Master who roared with laughter, and slapped his slave heartily on the bottom. Mulder spent the night sleeping in the kennel again, and woke the next morning to find himself staring at a pair of white pants, and shiny white shoes. His startled gaze traveled up a pair of long limbs, to discover that his Master was wearing a full sea captain uniform.

“Wakey wakey, boy. We have a busy day’s sailing ahead of us,” Skinner said, undoing his slave’s chain. Mulder sat up, speechless, and took in the full impact of his Master in Naval dress uniform, complete with starched white jacket, epaulettes, and peaked cap.

“Oh, shit,” he exclaimed. “You look fucking amazing.”

“Thank you, slave. You look...naked. Go and shower, and then report to the kitchen.” Skinner removed his slave’s collar. “You can lose the dog tail butt plug. Your puppy days are over - for now,” Skinner said with a grin, slapping his still astounded and seriously impressed slave boy into action. Mulder went, with one last lingering look over his shoulder at his gloriously attired Master.

Mulder was given a pair of cut off denim shorts, a white cotton shirt, and some deck shoes to wear, but not before his Master had inserted yet another butt plug, just as big as the last. Skinner gave his slave a brief inspection before pushing the butt plug home. “We’re getting there, boy. You’re stretching out very nicely,” he commented. Mulder thought that was hardly surprising after being forced to endure wearing a butt plug day and night for days on end but he had to admit that he was becoming used to the familiar intrusion pressed deep inside his body. He pulled his shorts on over the plug, and glanced at himself in the mirror. He looked...ordinary. Nobody would know there was a butt plugged, nipple pierced slave beneath the vacation clothing. They ate a quick breakfast, and then walked along the beach to the jetty at the far end of the bay, where a small boat was waiting for them. They scrambled onboard, and, much to Mulder’s disappointment, Skinner stripped off his jacket to reveal a plain black tee shirt underneath. “This is Hank’s brother, Tom. He’ll be taking us along the coast. We’ll stop off at a few places along the way,” Skinner said, introducing Mulder to a man who was unmistakably Hank’s brother, with the same sandy head of hair, freckles, and pale blue eyes. Tom didn’t say a lot, as Mulder soon found out, but he also proved completely unflappable as well, taking no notice whatsoever when Skinner told his slave that he’d be addressing his Master as ‘Captain’ all day.

“And you know, boy, one of the things I’ve always wanted to do, is to administer some good, old fashioned naval discipline,” Skinner said, escorting his slaveboy out onto the deck. “You haven’t had your morning spanking yet, so I think now’s a good time.” Mulder stared at him aghast.

“With Tom just over there, Ma...I mean, Captain?” He asked, horrified.

“Oh, Tom’s paid not to watch,” Skinner said with a grin. “Undress, boy. Your Captain wants to punish you.” Mulder pulled his clothing off, one eye on where Tom was standing in the wheelhouse, steering the boat away from the coast. Skinner bent his slave over some barrels on the deck, and then retrieved a length of rope from his bag. “We want to do this properly, don’t we, boy?” He asked rhetorically, tying Mulder over the barrel. Mulder felt exposed, bobbing on a small boat, beneath the sun, the sea sparkling just a few feet away, and yet paradoxically, despite being tied he felt curiously free. He watched his Master remove his white braces, and Mulder’s stomach went into freefall.

“Oh god,” he muttered.

A few seconds later, Skinner rested the braces against his slave’s backside, and tapped gently on his buttocks in a series of stinging little slaps that were more like kisses, so light were they. The pace built up, and Mulder moaned, hugging the barrel, feeling his cock harden despite himself.

“Why are you being punished, Fox?” Skinner asked.

“Because it pleases you, Captain,” Mulder replied quickly.

“What are you?”

“Your slave, Captain.” Mulder felt the braces burn a line of fire across his buttocks.

“Will you forget that?” Skinner demanded.

“No, Captain! Never!” Mulder cried out, as the braces whipped freely across his backside again. It was a short, sweet spanking, and was soon over. Mulder was relieved when his Master untied him from the barrel, and reached for his clothes.

“Not yet, sweetheart. I want to feast my eyes on that beautiful, naked, glowing red butt for a while. Go and stand facing that mast over there.” Mulder did as ordered, and Skinner tied his hands together loosely around the mast with the rope, and then stepped back. He spent several minutes lovingly fondling his slave’s backside, and kissing his neck, telling Mulder how beautiful he was, and how proud of him he was, and then he left his slave in position, and returned to the wheelhouse. Mulder watched his Master deep in conversation with Tom, and rested his cheek on the side of the cold metal pole he was hugging. The sea wind whipped around his naked body, and the gulls were crying out overhead. He wondered what other erotic treats his Master had in store for him before their vacation was over.

Skinner left his slave standing naked and on display for an hour, before untying him, and allowing him to pull his clothing back on.

“We’re stopping for lunch in a little town,” he said, pulling Mulder close, and pointing at the shore. Mulder nodded happily. They disembarked a few minutes later, Mulder’s denim shorts chafing against his newly reddened backside, and wandered down the local high street, looking in the tourist shops.

“I didn’t bring my credit card,” Mulder complained mournfully, looking at a rack of postcards. “I wanted to send one to Scully.”

“Just buy whatever you want. I’ll pay,” Skinner told him. “Send one to your mother as well while you’re at it.”

They stopped at a restaurant and ate on a balcony overlooking the sea. “This is amazing,” Mulder murmured, placing his hand over his Master’s and gazing out at the blue water. “Can we come back here for a vacation every year?”

“You bet. When else do I get to pretend to be captain of my own boat?” Skinner grinned in reply. “Are you enjoying yourself, little one?” He asked in a low, soft tone. Mulder looked up, surprised, to find an almost anxious expression in his Master’s eyes. Didn’t Skinner know that this was the best time he’d ever had in his entire life?

“Walter, this is an erotic fantasyland. How the hell could I **not** be enjoying myself?” he replied sincerely. “Are you?” He asked in return. He was aware that it fell to Skinner to think up their more extreme and imaginative erotic adventures, but then as he did most of the household chores, that did give his Master time to dream up and arrange such outings as today’s boating excursion.

“It’s the best vacation I’ve ever had,” Skinner replied sincerely. “To be honest, I never took many before I met Andrew. I hated being away from the office, and I sure as hell hated all the paperwork that had built up in my absence. Andrew had different ideas though. He made it quite clear that all work and no play isn’t good for a top – or a sub.”

“I wish I’d known him,” Mulder said, taking a sip of his coffee.

“He’d have been stricter with you than I am. He was a very firm master,” Skinner grinned.

“I bet he had to be in order to tame you,” Mulder laughed. “I have trouble imagining you as submissive you know.”

“Serving Andrew was easy.” Skinner shrugged.

“I’m still intrigued by that dragon cane. I want to know the story. I can’t imagine you ever being naughty enough to deserve it.”

“Well, there are different kinds of deserving. Yours generally tends to be sheer mischief, combined with a smart mouth, and a certain level of willfulness,” Skinner grinned.

“And yours?” Mulder asked, as intrigued as ever by his Master’s tales of being a sub.

“I was just stubborn - and secretive. And Pig headed.” Skinner shrugged. “Once I decided on something, or got an idea into my head, Andrew had the devil’s own time trying to turn me to his way of thinking. I’m glad he didn’t give up on me. I’m sure he must have been tempted at times.”

“No. He knew he had a good thing. He wouldn’t have given up on you,” Mulder said softly, fingering his Master’s palm thoughtfully.

“And I’ll never give up on you. You do know that, don’t you?” Skinner said, looking into Mulder’s eyes.

"After the past month when I've put you through all this shit, I think I'm beginning to," Mulder replied, flushing slightly.

"I put Andrew through a fair amount of shit too," Skinner said. "You're not the only one with a monopoly on shit, Fox. He and I weathered a few storms, and you and I will as well. We already have."

"Yeah." Mulder nodded, and looked straight into his Master's eyes. "I love you," he said, honestly, and without embarrassment.

"I love you too. Come on. Daylight's burning." Skinner got up and Mulder followed him.

That one small moment had been another breakthrough. To be able to say what he felt so easily, in passing, and to have it treated so matter of factly, a statement that was so obvious it needed no further elaboration: that was a moment of profound contentment.

They wandered in and out of shops, and Skinner emerged from a jeweler's store with a small, mysterious box, which he put in his pocket. "I said I'd buy you a souvenir of your encounter with the dragon cane, didn't I?" He grinned, but refused to elaborate further. They returned to the boat, and found a small, deserted bay, where they stayed for a while, diving off the side of the boat naked, and swimming like white fishes in the cool water, before finally returning home just as darkness fell. They bade goodnight to Tom, and walked wearily along the beach.

"I going to build a small fire. Go and get some food, and bring it out, and we'll sit and eat out here before turning in," Skinner said.

It was yet another beautiful, clear evening. They sat on the blanket and looked into the flames of the fire, toasting marshmallows on long sticks. Mulder sat between Skinner's open legs, his back resting against the big man's chest.

"I don't want to go home again. Ever," Mulder sighed.

"You'd get bored if you stayed here long enough. One mention of UFO's and you'd be off chasing all over the country again. You know you would," Skinner said, squeezing Mulder tight.

"Yeah. I suppose, but this is so good. I never used to like vacations much either. I guess it's who you spend them with that's important," Mulder mused, taking a bite out of his marshmallow. "And maybe what you do as well," he grinned, elbowing his Master in the ribs. "So what else did you have planned for me, Master?" He asked.

"You'll see." Skinner threw another twig on the fire and they watched it burn. "You've done very well though, Fox. I'm pleased with your progress. Carry on like this and we'll have that collaring ceremony sooner than you think. I have some plans for you, sweetheart. If you continue to respond so well, then before we leave, I'll give you a treat of the kind you've never received before. It'll be something very special."

Mulder glanced up. "Can't you tell me what it is?" He asked.

"No. It's a surprise." Skinner dropped his head and kissed Mulder's neck. "And one I think you'll enjoy a great deal. I think you're ready for it now."

"You're not talking about the fisting are you?" Mulder asked nervously.

"No, sweetheart!" Skinner laughed. "I'm talking about something very different. Wait and see. You know, this has been such a good week that I'm giving you a little reminder of it."

Skinner reached into his pocket, pulled out the little box he had bought from the jewelers, and gave it to his slave. Mulder glanced up into his Master's eyes, surprised, and Skinner nodded, urging him to open it. Mulder pushed the box open with his long fingers, and smiled. There, nestled inside, was a small gold charm in the shape of a tiny, perfect, fire-breathing dragon.

"It's beautiful, but I don't have anything to wear it on," he lamented.

Skinner laughed. "Sure you do." He unbuttoned Mulder's shirt, and fastened the tiny charm onto his slave's right nipple ring. "Perfect," he observed, giving the nipple a little squeeze of approval. Mulder lay back in his Master's arms, smiling. He left his shirt open, loving the way the firelight caught the gold dragon, making it shine. "That's for enduring the dreaded dragon cane," Skinner said. Mulder shivered, remembering his marking.

"That thing was appalling. Will you ever use it on me again?" He asked.

"I expect so." Skinner nuzzled his slave's ear. "The dragon cane makes an effective instrument of punishment as well as of marking, and let's face it, you're bound to deserve a severe punishment every now and again. You wouldn't be you if you were always perfectly well behaved. I wouldn't want you to be perfect all the time either. That would spoil the fun." Skinner grinned. Mulder sighed.

"Somehow I thought you'd say that. That thing is lethal though, Master."

"I know." Skinner's arms squeezed tighter around his slave.

"Tell me about your time on the receiving end," Mulder requested.

Skinner was silent for a moment, and Mulder wasn't sure his Master was going to answer him, but then Skinner sighed.

"All right. You really enjoy stories involving my suffering far too much, boy," he chided.

"I know. It's just I get to see you in a completely different light," Mulder admitted, chuckling. "The dragon cane story, Master," he reminded Skinner when the other man fell silent again. Skinner nipped the back of his slave's neck reprovingly, and then began the story.

"It was the first physical punishment I hadn't requested myself," he recalled. "Usually, Andrew only used corporal punishment on me at my own request – and he often made me pay for being too hard on myself by a session of bondage, which, as you know, I found very hard to take. I wasn't fond of being restrained. I'm still not, but I have come to appreciate the stillness, and calm of being placed in bondage."

It's hard for me to feel out of control, which was why Andrew used that as a punishment, rather than pain, which I've always found easier to take."

"Do you ever enjoy pain - I mean, being spanked, or paddled, or whatever I mean?" Mulder twisted around to look at his Master. Skinner considered it for a moment.

"I'd defy anyone not to enjoy a really well delivered erotic spanking, so yes, I understand the appeal. I don't usually get an erotic thrill from more severe instruments though, or more serious punishment spankings, unlike you, my little pain slut." He kissed Mulder's ear, and Mulder grinned goofily in the firelight.

"Trust me, there are some punishments that even I don't enjoy," he retorted. "But then you know **that**."

"Yes." Skinner shrugged. "Well, a top must have some sanctions after all. Anyway, I was never really what you'd call 'bad' or disobedient. On the contrary - I was almost too eager to be of use. I was very grateful to Andrew for dragging me out of the mess I was in, and I didn't want to be any trouble to him. I'm used to obeying orders from my time in the military - and Andrew rarely asked me to do anything I didn't want to do anyway. I was very eager, very helpful...but Andrew hadn't really tamed me. I was just scared of losing him. I was too proud to admit that then, but it's the truth. When I arrived at Andrew's house I was already an all but broken man. He rebuilt me. We never went through the processes that you and I have been through, because I was drowning from the beginning and I clung to him for reassurance. He never had to take me down, the way I took you down, because I was already at rock bottom. Andrew needed to find my fire, to push me into becoming myself again, because I wasn't. I was becoming completely dependent on him, and he didn't want that, and he knew it wasn't right for me. He knew that at work I could act confidently, and make decisions that affected many people's lives, but at home... I'd lost all confidence in myself on an emotional level. He wanted to free me up, to make me find myself again, to be as assured on a personal level as I was in my career. It wasn't easy because getting to open up about anything was always the hardest part. You're not the only one who has trouble with honesty, Fox. I learned that the hard way. Not because I deliberately wanted to keep anything from Andrew, but because I was too used to hiding my secrets deep inside, and coping alone. I'm not like you. I can hide the way I'm feeling much more easily. Your emotions are read in your eyes, and your responses. You don't hide yourself. You say what you think, you protest, even if it'll get you into trouble. Not that you don't have your secrets, everyone does, but I was much less forthcoming than you. It was hard for Andrew to know what was going on inside my mind when I'd just agree with him or stay silent about my worries and fears so he didn't guess what they were, and one day, he just called me on it." Skinner stopped and gazed into the fire for a long time. Mulder waited, patiently, eager to hear the rest of the story.

"We were staying at Murray's house. I'd had a bad week. It was during that time when we had that second Waco on our hands, the Temple of the Seven Stars or whatever they were called. I took hell for that fuck up." Mulder winced, remembering the pile of dead bodies that had been the end result of that particular case. He hadn't realized Skinner had been in such deep shit with the higher echelons of the Bureau about that. "I didn't tell Andrew any of this, because that was my habit with Sharon and I just didn't know how to break it, but I was tired, and stressed by the weekend. I didn't know Murray very well and I resented staying with him. I had wanted to spend the weekend in the apartment with Andrew, recharging my batteries, not making polite chit-chat with people I barely knew. I didn't tell Andrew that though. I didn't let my annoyance show, but Andrew had a sixth sense. He asked me how I

was four times during the Saturday, and each time I replied that I was fine. He asked me if I was enjoying myself, and if I was pleased to be there, and I answered that I was. Finally, in the evening, he made our excuses to Murray and took me back to our room, where I found the dragon cane waiting. He picked it up, and asked me again how I was. I stated that I was fine. So he ordered me to strip, and bend over the bed. I was surprised.” Mulder looked up, to find Skinner staring straight ahead, lost in the memory. “Like I said, Andrew had never, ever punished me for something without me asking him to before. I didn’t know what I’d done wrong. I asked him what I’d done, and he told me that he expected me to be honest about my feelings. I got angry, and told him I was being fucking honest – because I was, to my mind. I **was** fine. I just needed a bit of time to get over the events of the week. I didn’t need to do a whole emotional scene with Andrew. What I really didn’t want was for him to find me weak, or a burden. I wanted to be perfect, and undemanding, so he wouldn’t dump me.” Skinner shrugged. “He didn’t take any notice of my protestations to the contrary. He just fixed me with those vivid blue eyes, and said that if he had to tell me again, he’d use handcuffs to hold me in place. I didn’t need telling twice.” Skinner gave a rueful shrug. I bent over the bed, and I was really unsure how to take this. I could absorb a lot of punishment, but I was angry with him for not being sensitive to my needs by dragging me away to Murray’s house for the weekend, even though I hadn’t told him that I didn’t want to go. He rested the cane against my butt, and asked me again how I felt. I yelled that I was ‘fine, and what do you expect me to fucking well say?’ and that was when I felt the first stripe.” Skinner shivered, and pulled Mulder closer. Mulder empathized all too well. He lowered his head and kissed his Master’s hands. “Well, you know what that damn cane feels like. I hollered something, and he asked me that same damn question over and over again, and it became a matter of pride to me to resist, to just yell that I was fine, to prove to him that he couldn’t damn well break me. Only of course he intended to. After the 8th stripe, I was shaking.”

“Eight?” Mulder kissed his Master’s fingers again. Two had been bad enough. He wasn’t sure he could have stood eight.

“Yeah. After the 8th, he came over, and ran his hand over my back, and asked me again how I was feeling. This time I snapped. I roared that I was fucking angrily. I told him I didn’t want to be here, that I’d had the week from hell, and I wanted to be relaxing at home, and then I stopped, worried by what I’d done, but instead of yelling back at me, he just sat down beside me, pulled me close, and held me. ‘At least that’s honest,’ he said, and I think...” Skinner paused for a long time. “Yes, I think that’s probably when I started to cry,” he finished.

Mulder looked up, startled. “You cried?” It didn’t even seem possible. He couldn’t imagine it.

“Yeah. I cried. Like a fucking baby. And Andrew held me until it was over, and then he packed our bags, made our excuses to Murray, and took me home. It was the first of many such battles we had over my inability to talk about my feelings.”

“You’ve come a long way,” Mulder murmured.

“Andrew drummed that lesson home the hard way, believe me. Whenever I feel I’m backsliding, I take myself off to Elaine for another reminder,” Skinner said, hugging his slave close. “You’ll get there too, eventually,” he whispered into his slave’s ear.

“The hard way?” Mulder glanced up.

“To be honest, I don’t think there’s any other way,” Skinner replied with a grimace.

“Thank you for telling me that story.” Mulder leaned back in his Master’s arms again, and they stared into the fire for a long time, each lost in their own private thoughts. They had been here a week, and had a whole week left. Mulder felt a tingle of anticipation at the thought of the treat his Master had promised, and wondered what it was. He didn’t think the vacation could get much better, and even the fisting didn’t seem so horrifying now.

“You know, I used to hate beach vacations,” Mulder murmured some time later.

“Me too. Sand, sea, swimming, sleeping, spanking and far too much sex. So boring,” Skinner grinned.

“Exceedingly dull,” Mulder agreed, angling his head up for a kiss.

**End of Part 20**

## His Master's Voice by Xanthe

### Author's Notes:

Beautiful vacationing pic by Mika. There are 2 more great pics at the end of this chapter.

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Posted 4th November, 2000.

Quotation courtesy of my sweet Alex. Standing thanks to Emma. None of this is beta'd. It's far too much fun to take seriously.

Many thanks to Phoebe. Thanks also to Ann and Emma for their input re puppies and serial killers respectively <G>. Big thanks to Sergeeva for the poem (yes, there's MORE poetry in this chapter. It's quite scary, but if people will insist on sending them to me then what can I do?)

**24/7** is an erotic fantasy and NOT a BDSM resource guide. The truth is sometimes exaggerated, or played with, for dramatic effect. For more information, please visit the **24/7 BDSM Glossary**.

**WARNING: This one is a big warning. This chapter contains graphic scenes of BDSM sex, including bondage, penis whipping, and fisting. Now, nothing's gonna go wrong as a result of a sex game with \*MY\* Master Skinner in charge, but then he's an ubertop. There's a lot of anal play in this chapter as a necessary precursor to the fisting so don't read on if that kind of stuff squicks you.**

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*"A truth, still apparent, though disregarded, that things move violently to their place, but calmly in their place. To put it another way, everything has its right home, the region that suits it, and, unless forcibly restrained, will move thither by a kind of homing instinct."*

*J. Winterson  
"Art and Lies"*

“The purpose of tight bondage,” Skinner was saying, “is less to punish you, or to cause you discomfort, than by the means of that discomfort, to help you reach a stillness inside, and acceptance of your Master’s will in all things.”

He finished tying an intricate knot, and Mulder looked down on his bound body with a feeling of claustrophobia. Skinner had used rope, and had bound Mulder in a style that had a strange kind of symmetrical beauty. His arms were flat against his body, which was criss-crossed by a dozen or more lengths of rope. He was totally encased in the stuff – from his neck to his feet, and literally couldn’t move a muscle.

“As this is the first time I’ve used rope on you, and as you’re relatively inexperienced in coping with tight bondage, I’ve tied you in an easy position. All you have to do is just lie still. I will progress to demanding more of you – including making you quite uncomfortable for extended periods of time. You’ll learn how to deal with this,” Skinner said.

Mulder stared at his Master glumly, already squirming and trying to fight his new bondage. They were in the Dungeon, and Mulder was lying on a large, black massage table. He was so tightly bound that he could do nothing – literally – except stare at the ceiling, or, if he craned his head a fraction, at his Master who, having finished, had taken a step back and was surveying his handiwork with an expression of satisfaction.

“Master...please...I don’t think I can take this,” Mulder said.

“I understand.” Skinner nodded. “However, you will take it because I order you to. You have no choice, little one, so give up, and accept.” He stroked his slave’s head gently, and smiled down at him. “I’ll be here throughout – I will **never** leave you alone when you’re in tight bondage. If you are in any genuine difficulty then I will ease the bonds a fraction – but I will only release you if you are in severe difficulty. There is no reason for that to happen if you relax in your bonds, and submit to your Master’s will. Breathe deeply, slave – the bonds give you plenty of room to do that.”

Mulder tried to follow his Master’s orders, but, while he could easily have lain on this couch without moving a muscle if he had **not** been bound, the very fact that he was trussed up, and unable to even move so much as an inch, made him, conversely, want to wriggle and scream. Skinner stood over his slave, and looked down on him.

“You’re not trying, boy,” he growled.

“I don’t like it, Master,” Mulder protested.

“You don’t have to like it,” Skinner purred. “You simply have to endure it.”

“Master...you told me how much you hated bondage, when Andrew tied you... please...you must understand.” Mulder wriggled frantically, but the ropes didn’t move so much as a fraction of an inch. He was well and truly tied up.

“I did hate bondage, Fox, but I learned how to endure it – and I did that because Andrew insisted.” Skinner gave a wry half smile. “Bondage was good for me – and it will be good for you too. If you truly

submit to the process, you will discover a kind of serenity and peace that you need. I've tied you before, slave, and you did discover such an inner peace, I believe, didn't you?"

"Yes, Master, but that felt different!" Mulder protested. He remembered being suspended in the harness, and that had felt as if he was floating. This felt...like being tied up. Imprisoned. Out of control.

"Learn to accept the many facets of your slavery, Fox. Tight bondage is an important part of understanding who you are, and coming to terms with yourself. It helped me enormously." Skinner brushed his slave's hair gently away from his eyes. "I'll place you in bondage twice a day for the next few days. Each time you will be tied for longer, and in more complex ways. You'll learn to endure considerably more than this. I am not doing this merely for my own amusement – although you do make a very appealing figure." Skinner grinned. "You know that I'll fist you before the week is out. Now, fisting can carry an element of danger if there isn't total trust between the two participants. I have no doubt that if you can surrender yourself to the experience, you'll enjoy it, and that it will bring us very close." He leaned over, and deposited a kiss on his slave's lips. Mulder moaned. "Fisting is very...intimate." Skinner smiled at his slave, their noses almost touching. "We'll take our time, develop it into a little scene, and we'll both be completely relaxed when it happens. While I'm fisting you, I'll want you to keep still. I hope that after a week of tight bondage you'll be able to relax at will, and submit to me without resistance."

"Master...please..." Mulder tried again to fight against his bonds, and again he failed. He could feel the sweat breaking out on his forehead. "I don't think I can do this, Master. Not the fisting, and not the bondage. I'm sorry," he said, brokenly, feeling that he'd let his Master down. He was surprised, therefore, when Skinner just smiled at him, and shook his head.

"I'm not releasing you, boy," he growled softly. "This isn't a choice. Not the bondage, nor the fisting. You're mine, little one. I'll torture you, or love you, or bind you, or fist you, or whip you...I'll do whatever pleases me with this beautiful body because it belongs exclusively to me." He ran his finger over one of Mulder's exposed nipples, and pinched it, hard, between his thumb and forefinger. Mulder gasped. "Who do you belong to, slave?" Skinner asked.

"You, Master...but..." Mulder began. Skinner's fingers tightened, and he gave a squeal of pain. "But...I can't..."

"Hush. Don't you see?" Skinner's face loomed into his field of vision again. "I'm taking away your right to use the word 'I', boy. You can make no demands. You can have no desires, or wishes, save pleasing your Master. Do you understand?"

Mulder stared into those uncompromising brown eyes. He knew his Master wouldn't do anything to cause him any real harm, but he didn't think he could endure all the other man had planned, and yet...Skinner was asking him to trust him, to give up everything, and he couldn't refuse.

"I'll try, Master," he whispered.

"Good boy. You see, you aren't making the choices, and you aren't calling the shots any more," Skinner purred, languorously stroking those parts of his slave's naked flesh that were exposed between the ropes. "This is always what you've had the most problems with - the surrender of self. You're strong, and proud, and you fight against what you need, which is why I'm here, boy. I'm here to make you accept

your needs, and to help you find that elusive peace you've always sought and so rarely found. You belong to something outside yourself now, Fox. This body isn't yours; it's mine, to do with as I please. I don't think you've ever truly embraced that concept, little one. You've paid lip service to it, but you've never truly understood what it means. You're about to learn." Skinner removed his hands abruptly, and Mulder watched, open-mouthed, as this man he thought he knew, but who seemed to have turned into something tantalizingly, frighteningly different, moved away from the couch, and over to one of the large trunks on the floor. The big man rummaged in the trunk for a while, and then returned to the massage couch holding a ball gag. Mulder groaned, and shut his mouth firmly.

"You're talking too much. You won't find any serenity if you do that," Skinner said. "Open your mouth."

"No," Mulder said defiantly. "How will you know if I'm in trouble if you put that thing in me?"

"You can wiggle your toes," Skinner said. "I left them free. Try it." Mulder wriggled his toes and found that they were, indeed, free.

"What if you're not watching when I move them?" He asked, playing for time.

"I'll be watching. I wouldn't want to take my eyes off this beautiful sight for a second," Skinner replied, grinning an almost feral grin.

"What if..." Mulder began, only for his Master to take advantage of his slave opening his mouth to slip the ball gag between his teeth. Mulder growled, and thrashed his head around, as Skinner fastened it firmly around his jaw.

"There'll be punishment for your disobedience afterwards," Skinner warned, ominously. Mulder could have wept. Now, not only was he completely naked, and bound, but he was also gagged and couldn't make a sound except extremely annoyed moaning.

"I'm going to sit over there and watch. You won't be able to see me. I want you to switch off, and relax," Skinner said. "When your time is up, I'll return, and play with you for a while. You'll submit to that, and learn how to endure it without moving. As you become more accustomed to this process, I'll tie you in far more complex ways, and do much more...interesting things to your body. You'll learn to take all of it. Without question. You might even," he paused, and grinned, that same evil grin, "Enjoy it."

Mulder closed his eyes, the sweat pouring down his forehead. He fought an internal battle as his Master disappeared from sight. He felt stranded, and he wanted to scream, and move, and the frustration of not being in the slightest control of his body was making him even more anxious. He couldn't stand this. He moved his toes frantically.

"A word of warning. Wiggling your toes won't automatically ensure release," Skinner said, placing two firm hands on Mulder's feet, testing the bonds thoughtfully. "I'll simply check to see that you're breathing okay, and aren't in real difficulty." He pressed his fingers against Mulder's wrist, taking his pulse. "You're fine, boy, just freaked out. I'll punish you for that false signal later," Skinner promised. Mulder's treacherous cock betrayed him by fighting against the ropes that covered it. Skinner laughed, and patted it affectionately. "Severely," he added.

Mulder thumped his head back down on the table with a sigh, and gazed at the ceiling in despair. There was clearly no way his Master was letting him out of this nightmare, so, from somewhere, he had to find the strength to accept it. He concentrated on relaxing each of his muscles, and closed his eyes, trying to drift off. The ropes were making themselves felt. He could feel them all over his flesh, tight, constricting, keeping him immobile, and that made him even more aware that he was out of control of his own body. He couldn't give in, and he found himself squirming against the restriction.

"I can see you're having difficulty coming to terms with your bondage," Skinner said, and Mulder almost jumped – he'd forgotten the other man was there. "All right, I'm going to give you some help. I'm going to give you something outside yourself to focus on. This is a luxury you won't have later on, boy – then I'll expect you to focus on what's inside, but on this first occasion, you can focus on my voice. Just close your eyes, breathe in, and empty your mind of all thoughts."

Mulder relaxed a fraction. Skinner's voice was so deep, and calming, so sexy and sensual, so full of dark, masterful promise that before long he was drifting, soothed beyond belief by those mellow tones. They reminded him of smooth, warm, melted chocolate, and he gave himself up the sensation of drowning in them, indulging in their rich wonder.

"You're a helpless boy, at the mercy of his Master. You're very much loved, but you're very much a slave. You have no rights. You have no existence save that which it pleases your Master to bestow upon you. You are a plaything. You will surrender yourself, body, heart, mind and soul, to your Master. You will give yourself up entirely to his wishes, and his will. See yourself as he sees you - naked, and bound. It pleases him to see you so submissive, so completely reliant on his will, and word. You are no longer yourself, little one. You're mine. You always were, and you always will be. You just needed to find the strength to be what you always knew, in your heart, was your destiny, and what you want most in the world. Mine, Fox. Mine."

Mulder shivered in his bonds, alone with his Master's voice. He was in thrall to the other man, utterly and completely, and all the fight went out of his body. He could hear Skinner walking around the room, and then his Master stopped.

"I enjoyed it when you recited that sonnet to me the other night - and I think you liked it when I said that poem to you, the time I first took you. Do you remember that time, Fox? You were hungry for my touch – you were so hot for me you were practically melting. You were my virgin – virgin to me. I made you my own that night, as I thrust into your waiting, willing body. Do you remember that?" Skinner whispered. Mulder could see the moment behind his eyelids, could feel his Master's hard cock lancing deep into his body, taking him, making him his own. It had been such a good moment. "Nobody else existed for you before me, and nobody will again," Skinner said, and Mulder knew that was the truth. "You are my creature, my slave. Mine to use, and abuse, and to love, and cherish, and hurt, and take into oblivion. Mine," Skinner said again, possessively, full of pride. The bond between them was so strong in this moment, that Mulder could almost feel an invisible chord joining them together. "Murray has a good selection of erotic poetry," Skinner said. "Would you like me to read you another poem, boy? This time, a poem of Master to slave. I'm sure I can find something suitable. Concentrate, slave!" He snapped, as Mulder moved his head, trying to see where his Master was standing.

"Close your eyes, and think of me. I'm going to read to you. Empty your head of everything except me, and the sound of my voice – the voice of your Master, of the man who owns you. Surrender to my voice, Fox."

Mulder felt his body start to relax again. He was no longer aware of the ropes, or the tightness of the binding. All he could think about was his Master, and that beautiful dark, rich voice, so full of promise. He heard Skinner flick through a book, and then the other man started to read.

*"magic seldom comes twice to the*

*s*

*ame house*

*i know i whispered*

*but here you are again"*

Mulder shivered. There was something about the way his Master intoned the word "magic" that made him tingle. The disembodied beginning of the poem seemed to echo his own, bound state.

*"it's no secret*

*that he loves*

*me*

*i beat it out of*

*him every night"*

Mulder had an image of himself, bound over a desk, or chair, or ass up on the bed, and recalled his own difficulties in telling his Master that he loved him.

*"he says I'm only*

*interested in his butt*

*i wanted to*

*deny it but my*

*first thought is to*

*turn him over*

*my knee*

*he seems to*

*do everything he can*

*to get spanked*

*I suppose if I had*

*A butt like his*

*I'd be the same way"*

Mulder moaned softly. He recognized the yearning in this poem, and the truth of his own life, and that of his Master. He remembered the many shameless ways in which he had asked for a spanking, even when he hadn't realized that was what he was doing. Skinner's voice shifted, moved down an octave, and became so low and soft that Mulder had to strain to hear it.

*"Quiet now almost*

*Asleep he*

*Breathes as if*

*I weren't even here*

*I move closer and*

*Pretend to be his dream."*

Mulder felt the warmth of his Master's breath on his cheek, and knew that Skinner was standing beside him, but kept his eyes closed, enjoying the moment too much to want to break it.

*"First time he*

*Called me*

*Honey I*

*Wanted to pour*

*Right in*

*his glass*

*and*

*slide on*

*down*

*his throat*

*his lips tremble*

*when his pants*

*are down*

*I pretend not to notice"*

Mulder could hear the tiny catch of amusement in his Master's voice at that line. It was too close to home. He knew his own lips had an unfortunate tendency to tremble at moments of impending punishment. This poem could have been written with their relationship in mind.

*"n*

*aked at last*

*we can turn*

*o*

*ur thoughts to*

*better things*

*it doesn't take much to*

*wake him up*

*just a slap a kiss*

*and about ten minutes"*

Mulder felt himself drifting off, sharing the experiences of the unknown sub being addressed in the poem. His Master's voice was soothing, just like the image of honey that he had recited earlier. He hoped his Master would decide to slide his beautiful honey colored cock down his slave's throat sometime soon. That thought pleased him, and he ached to be of use to his Master.

*"please let me finish*

*writing I*

*interrupted*

*don't let me disturb*

*you he*

*said softly*

*brushing a bare*

*butt against the back*

*of my arm*

*he's thin for*

*a wrestler*

*it sometimes*

*takes all my strength*

*to be pinned"*

Skinner's voice was low, and intense, as he finished the poem but Mulder barely noticed it was over. He was drifting in a world of his own.

There was silence, but it was a peaceful silence, that was like bathing in a dark, warm womb. Mulder had long since ceased struggling. Now he had started to appreciate Skinner's words about losing himself, finding serenity. He felt...at peace. His Master didn't speak again, and Mulder didn't move. He just lay there, accepting of his Master's will. Some time later – he wasn't sure how long, he heard movement in the room, and came back to the here and now. He hadn't wanted that feeling to end, and felt almost bereft at being returned to reality. He had been somewhere good, somewhere true, where

he could fully experience his slavery, and love it for being what he most wanted in the world. Skinner had been right about so many things. He seemed to know his slave better than Mulder knew himself.

"All right, little one?" Skinner whispered, gently stroking Mulder's hair. Mulder blinked slowly, and Skinner smiled. "Good, because now I'm going to bring you back, and play with you a little, and then I'm going to punish you, as promised. Don't move while I play with you. Keep in mind that place where you were."

Mulder closed his eyes again, slowly, to show he had understood, and then he felt his Master's warm lips brush his eyelids, and his nose. Skinner moved down, and sucked on Mulder's neck. He stayed there so long that Mulder knew he'd have a hickey there. He liked that thought. He loved it when his Master placed his mark on his body. Skinner's mouth fastened around his slave's left nipple, and he sucked on it hard, and then gently teased it with his teeth, before sinking them into it more firmly. Mulder kept as still as he could, holding onto that calm place in his mind, trying to stay there despite the almost unbearable eroticism of the moment. He was his Master's plaything. He existed to serve, and if the only way he could serve his Master was with his naked, bound, gagged body, then that was enough for him. Skinner's teeth stopped tormenting him, and his Master bestowed a loving kiss on the tortured nipple, before moving onto the other nub of flesh. He licked that, as with the previous one, and then sucked on it, and this time Mulder anticipated the bite, and tried to steel himself for it, only for Skinner to draw back. "Don't think, slave, just accept," he warned. Mulder relaxed and Skinner resumed sucking on his reddened nipple, languorously, slowly, enjoying himself until Mulder thought he would go out of his mind with sensation, and then, without warning, those teeth nipped him hard again, and held him there, and he couldn't scream, or writhe, he could only accept. The bite seemed to last a long time, and then it was over, and Skinner's mouth was traveling down his torso; his tongue dipped into Mulder's navel, and then down over his genitals, to his feet. Skinner sucked each of Mulder's toes, and then kissed each one. Finally, he ran his fingers lightly over the soles of Mulder's feet, and that, thought Mulder, was the worst torture of all. If he hadn't been gagged he would have screamed. As it was, he writhed as much as his bonds would allow.

"Bad boy, Fox. Keep still," Skinner said, although he must have known it was surely impossible. Mulder did his best, and by the time his Master finished that particular torment, he was a sweating, exhausted wreck. And Skinner had said he would go lightly in the beginning! If this was light, Mulder dreaded to think what heavy would be.

"All right, boy. Well done."

Skinner slowly, oh so slowly, began removing the ropes, and finally, Mulder was free. He lay there, dazed for a moment, and his Master looked down on him, grinning broadly. "Good?" He asked.

"Some of it," Mulder replied, shooting a dirty look at the other man. He sat up. It felt strange to be using his body again. All his muscles felt light, and insubstantial – it was the most bizarre feeling and he gazed at his Master in wonder.

"Like walking on air – yes?" Skinner asked and Mulder nodded, surprised.

"I feel...weird."

"Make the most of it. It doesn't last long," Skinner advised. Mulder looked down on his body, expecting to see marks from the ropes, but apart from a few reddened areas, which were rapidly changing back to their normal color, there was no sign of the bondage he had just undergone. He ran his hands over his body, feeling where the ropes had been. He could almost feel them still there, but they had gone without leaving a trace.

"Good boy." Skinner tilted Mulder's chin and claimed a deep kiss. "However, a severe punishment is required I think," he said sternly when he released his slave.

"Yes, Master." Mulder bit on his lip, remembering his disobedience, and disrespect.

"I think that I'd like to create a more formal environment for this punishment," Skinner mused. "Go and get yourself a glass of water from the kitchen, and remain there for ten minutes. Then go to the master bedroom, and dress yourself in the clothing you will find there. Make sure you look tidy – or there will be more punishment. When you're dressed, come back here, and knock on the door. Then wait outside, until such time as I call you in. Understood?"

Mulder nodded, wondering what the hell was going to happen next.

He did as ordered, wandered down to the kitchen, still naked and barefoot...and trod on something squishy.

"Shit, what's that?" He muttered, glancing down to see that he had trodden on the corpse of some kind of disemboweled rodent. "Damn, that's so disgusting. Wanda!" he yelled, and the little Burmese cat scampered in, tail held high, and wound herself around his feet, clearly pleased with herself. "Was this you?" Mulder demanded, disposing of the corpse, and then washing his foot. Wanda jumped onto the kitchen table and examined the foot washing closely, and he rubbed her behind the ears. "Murderer," he whispered to her in loving, sibilant tones. "Ruthless, cold-hearted killer." She trilled with delight, clearly thinking he was murmuring terms of endearment. "Savage," he taunted, and she leaned into him and exploded with cheerful pride.

Mulder glanced at the kitchen clock in alarm. His ten minutes were about up. He got a glass of water, and downed it in one gulp, and then ran back up the stairs, his stomach flipping in anticipation at his impending punishment. He had already been spanked once today – his morning discipline – but it hadn't been very severe. He was aware that his marks were fading though, and he knew his Master was kind of fanatical about them. His stomach lurched as he wondered whether he was due another appointment with the dragon cane. He glanced down, with an expression of pride, to see the tiny gold dragon charm hanging from his right nipple ring. He loved the fact that Skinner had decorated him like this last night. The memory of sitting on the beach, wrapped up in his Master's arms, toasting marshmallows, was so sweet. This vacation was turning out to be one delight after another – although, frankly, he had come to the conclusion there was such a thing as too much discipline. He shivered in anticipation about the coming punishment. Maybe this wouldn't be a real punishment, maybe it would just be an erotic prelude to sex. Mulder opened the door to the master bedroom, surveyed the clothes waiting for him on the bed, and felt his stomach sink to his feet. It was clear there was absolutely no chance that this would be anything less than a severe chastisement, for there, lying waiting for him, was a pair of dark pants, white socks, shiny shoes, a white shirt, and striped tie, blazer with crest on it...in short, a school uniform. Mulder felt stupid just looking at it. He also felt 14 years old again, about to account for some misdemeanor or other with the school principal. While not exactly a problem pupil, he had gotten into

his fair share of trouble. He'd almost forgotten that feeling, but now he was experiencing it all over again.

"Shit, you're a grown man!" He scolded himself. "You're almost 40 for god's sake!" But as he pulled on that uniform, he felt exactly as he had done as an unruly teenager. In fact, looking in the mirror, he saw that the clothing had taken years off him. He looked impossibly young, and rather sullen and sultry in a hormonal teenage kind of way. Mulder liked the look. If his Master wanted him to act a part, and had taken the pains to dress him up, then maybe he should enter into the spirit of the event. It might make the punishment less painful. He was aware that while Skinner set up all these scenes, and he reacted to them, he hadn't really initiated any himself, or fully thrown himself into the role-playing as yet. Maybe it was time to start.

Mulder wandered along to the Dungeon, and knocked, tentatively on the door. It didn't take much imagination to get himself in character for **this** particular scene. He'd been in and out of trouble all his life, with one authority figure or another – so much so that sometimes he felt he'd never really left his schooldays behind. There was no reply, so he stood outside the door, feeling decidedly nervous. He tried to remember to breathe, but this scene was starting to feel **really** realistic. After his Master had made him wait for long enough for him to want to climb the walls, the door was finally opened. Mulder looked up, and gazed at his Master, and his Master gazed at him, and there was a period of several seconds when they both tried very hard not to laugh. Skinner was dressed like the kind of old fashioned school principal that hadn't existed for years – if ever. Like some kind of weird 1950's English schoolmaster. He was wearing an academic gown and mortarboard, and he looked really rather nice, Mulder thought. Very strict...and kind of horny.

"Fox, come in." Skinner opened the door, and Mulder shuffled cautiously past him, and then stopped. There, on the desk, rested the dragon cane, waiting for him. He swallowed hard, his stomach doing several somersaults. His right nipple, which was decorated with the tiny dragon charm, gave a little tingle.

"You've been sent to me for punishment?" Skinner said.

"Yes, sir," Mulder muttered, trying to relax into the scene. If he was going to get the cane, then he'd at least like to be heavily into a scene when it happened – not, he suspected, that his Master would use that particular implement on him without preparing him for it first. Mulder came to a halt in front of the desk, and continued to eye the cane nervously. Skinner sat down behind the desk, and bent the cane casually between his hands as he watched his slave squirm. He fixed Mulder with a stern eye, and there was silence. Mulder felt himself starting to blush, and dropped his eyes, unable to meet that searching gaze.

"Why have you been sent here?" Skinner asked finally. Mulder decided to play the sulky adolescent for all it was worth.

"For disobedience, and disrespect sir. Although it wasn't my fault." He threw his Master a deeply insolent look, and tried to look as bored as possible.

"This isn't the first time I've had to punish you for your attitude," Skinner rapped out in stern, crisp tones that went straight to Mulder's cock.

"No, sir," he growled resentfully. "It really wasn't my fault though. I was provoked." He glared at his Master meaningfully.

"It's never your fault, boy, is it?" Skinner said. "Well, I think we must teach you to take responsibility for your actions, Fox. I'm going to cane you."

Mulder felt his breathing hitch. "That's not fair, sir!" he protested.

Skinner's eyes darkened, and for a moment Mulder felt genuinely worried.

"What isn't fair, boy?" He asked, coldly. Mulder caught a gleam in his Master's eyes, and suddenly realized that the other man was enjoying this! Thus emboldened, he responded heatedly.

"I try to stay within the rules, sir, but if the rules are crap that's not my fault."

"What did you say?" Skinner's body had suddenly become tense, and taut. Mulder swallowed hard.

"The rules are crap, sir. Well they are!" He flung. "Screw you, and screw your fucking rules."

That did it. Mulder felt a thrill of sheer erotic delight as his Master got up, grabbed his slave's ear, and pushed him over the desk.

"Six of the best, boy," Skinner hissed. Mulder's stomach lurched. He could smell the surface of the desk beneath his nose, and the polished wood was slippery against his shirt. Oh god, this was good. It was at that moment that the impact of Skinner's words kicked in and he shuddered – six! He'd barely been able to take two the other day. However, he soon realized that it wasn't to be as bad as it sounded, as Skinner's cane rested against his clothed bottom; he wasn't going to receive the strokes on his bare ass. The cane tapped on his buttocks for a moment, and then there was a whoosh, followed by an explosion of pain across his backside. He gave a strangled yelp, but it wasn't anywhere near as bad as taking licks on the bare, and as Skinner wasn't marking him, he wasn't hitting as hard either. Two more followed down in quick succession but the fourth really stung, and he jumped up, shrieking "shit" at the top of his voice. Skinner pushed him firmly down again. There was a pause, and then the cane was rested against his backside again. There was a long pause, and, then the cane was drawn back. Mulder couldn't stand it. He reached out and placed his hand across his throbbing butt, trying to ward off the blow. Skinner held back the stroke, and gave his slave's hand a firm thwack with the cane instead. Mulder yelped again, and removed his hand.

"Don't do that again," Skinner told him, delivering the next stroke at full speed, closely followed by the last. Mulder lay over the desk panting for a moment, his cock rock hard inside his pants. The illusion of the scene was such a turn on. Shit, no wonder Murray and Hammer enjoyed having this role-playing dungeon so much. "You can stand up now," Skinner ordered, and Mulder stood, gingerly. "Corner." Skinner pointed with the cane, and Mulder went, eyes cast down, feeling thoroughly, and delightfully disciplined. He revised his earlier opinion. In the hands of a skilled Master there was no such thing as too much discipline.

He stood staring at the wall for twenty minutes, enjoying the little waves of pain emanating from his stinging butt; he didn't dare rub it in case it brought the wrath of his Master down on him. Then, he felt

a hand wrap itself around his chest, and a large, strong body cover him from behind, pressing up close and rubbing against him.

"Like that?" Skinner whispered, effectively bringing the scene to a close. "Did you enjoy that, sweetheart?"

"Oh god, yes." Mulder moaned, leaning back against his Master's chest. "Could we play more often, Master?"

"If you're good...or should that be bad?" Skinner swatted his slave on his sore rump and Mulder gave a dramatic and not entirely convincing yelp.

"It's about time you relaxed and loosened up. I've told you before that you take things too seriously. I loved you like this – throwing something back at me, moving the scene on. It was good...and quite a turn on." Skinner grinned, reaching for his slave, and pressing a hard, firm, loving kiss on Mulder's mouth. Mulder returned it, eating his Master eagerly, and then he started giggling. A wave of total euphoria washed over him, and he couldn't contain it. He was on a post-scene high. After the calm silence of the bondage, he had suddenly become aware that he was alive – totally, blood tinglingly alive. His body, which had so often borne the brunt of his self destructive streak in the past, had been transformed into a playground, and his brilliant mind, which he had devoted to his quest all his life, had now become a fantasy world, where he could go anywhere, and do anything, and all in the company of this man who had opened his mind and body to these new ideas, and shown him a pleasure he had never even known existed.

"What is it?" Skinner drew back, as Mulder started to giggle insanely. "Fox?" Skinner was grinning too, in response to his slave's obvious mirth.

"I love you!" Mulder yelled.

"What?" Skinner raised an eyebrow, and Mulder grabbed his Master's face, and kissed him.

"Punish me – I don't care. I love you. Oh god, it's all so easy. All of it. Life, the universe, everything. I feel as if I could..." Mulder was suddenly 8 years old and out trick- or- treating at Halloween, sick with excitement, and unable to stay still. His whole body vibrated with the intensity of this energy, and he had to move. The bondage, followed by the exhilaration of the scene, had somehow loosened his inhibitions, and made him appreciate everything he had always denied himself. "I love you, I love you...I love this house...I love our apartment. I love my job, my life. I love Scully!" Mulder cried, throwing his arms around expansively, and almost hitting his Master in the process. He ran out of the dungeon, and down the stairs, dancing, and singing. He twirled into the kitchen, picked up Wanda, and held her in the air. "I love Wanda!" He proclaimed. "I love all cats!" He kissed Wanda firmly on the forehead and dumped her on the kitchen table. "I love the sea!" He yelled glancing out of the window. He was aware of his bemused, amused Master coming down the stairs behind him. "I love it all!" He cried excitedly, running around the table with a surfeit of energy, jumping up on it, and then leaping down to crash at his Master's feet. "I love my Master! I love being a slave. I love..." Skinner placed a finger over his slave's lips, looking down on him.

"Yourself?" He asked.

Mulder hesitated. "Almost," he replied. "Almost, Master." He wasn't quite there, but he was closer than he'd ever been in his life. He might not have learned to love himself, but he had, at least, learned not to hate himself, and he'd learned to enjoy himself as well.

Skinner smiled, and shook his head. "We'll get there, boy," he said. Mulder kissed his Master's shoes, and then stood up. "Are we done, Fox?" Skinner asked. Mulder was reminded of a completely different time and place when his Master had asked that same question. They had come a long way since then.

"I don't think so, Master," he replied. "I have too much energy."

"And I love seeing you like this." Skinner grinned. "Careful you don't crash though, slave. Sometimes I've watched you soar so high, and fall back to earth. This time I want to make sure you don't crash land."

"I won't," Mulder said airily, and too cheerfully.

They spent the evening cooking an exotic meal, which Mulder assured his Master would taste nice, although Skinner clearly had reservations about the mix of spices his slave was putting into the food. However, some of Mulder's exuberance must have gone into the meal, because it was delicious. It was all Mulder could do to sit still enough to eat it, and finally Skinner had to threaten him with deep submission and tight bondage to get him to shut up and at least try and eat the meal. Mulder got up a dozen times, to get wine, or water, or just because he couldn't keep still. He kept up a constant stream of conversation as well, blinding his Master with his knowledge, skipping over a hundred topics, his whirlwind mind buzzing with a euphoria that he couldn't contain, and had to transmit in some way to his audience. Skinner indulged him. The other man was looking gorgeous in an open necked shirt, and jeans, and he ate slowly, never taking his eyes off his slave, nodding here and there, inserting a comment when he could get a word in edgeways, and smiling to himself when Mulder went off on some flight of fancy. When Mulder next paused for breath, he saw that it was dark outside, and the kitchen clock showed that it was past midnight. Shit! Where had the evening gone? His Master was still patiently enduring his verbal diarrhea, and he wasn't sure he was going to be able to stop. Luckily, Skinner saw the problem.

"Fox, it's time for your second session of bondage for the day," he said, taking advantage of the momentary pause.

"Master...no, please...I can't be still." Mulder waved his hands expansively in the air.

"But you do need to come down from the high, boy," Skinner said firmly.

"I know, but...oh god, please don't tie me up. I'll implode if you do!" Mulder said, getting up, his long legs twitching restlessly.

"I won't tie you. I have something else in mind," Skinner told him. "Go up to the bedroom – leave the dishes, you can do them tomorrow."

Mulder nodded, still uncertain about whether he could endure more bondage, and danced up to the bedroom, whistling tunelessly to himself as he went. Skinner was right behind him, and accompanied the whistling with a drumbeat on his slave's bottom as they climbed the stairs. Mulder tumbled into the

bedroom, and opened his mouth to start talking again, when Skinner stopped him by the simple expedient of placing a hand over his mouth.

"Quiet, boy. You'll never sleep tonight if you carry on like this, and I think you're tired." Skinner raised an eyebrow, and Mulder thought about it, and then nodded. Skinner withdrew his hand and Mulder opened his mouth, and then closed it again, and bit down hard to keep himself from descending into more verbal diarrhea. "Stay quite still. I'm going to undress you," Skinner said, and Mulder nodded fervently, and started unbuttoning his shirt. Skinner's hands stopped him. "I said that I was going to undress you. **You**, are going to remain still." Mulder nodded again, and tried to concentrate on remaining still, but it was hard when he was buzzing so much. Skinner quickly divested him of his shirt and tie, and then moved on to his slave's pants. Mulder started to hop. His mind was going through a dizzying freefall, and he couldn't keep either quiet or still.

"Did you know that the earth revolves at almost 1000 miles an hour? When I was a kid I couldn't understand why we didn't all whiz off into space. I mean how can it be that fast and we don't even feel it?" He asked Skinner.

"I have no idea," Skinner grunted, trying valiantly to divest his slave of his pants while Mulder gesticulated frantically with his hands, and skipped to and fro, completely unable to stay in one place.

"I wonder what it would be like to be on a planet that went really fast? Or really slow. Would that make a difference to the way you perceived the world? What kind of life would evolve on such a planet?" Mulder mused thoughtfully, holding out one leg and hopping out of his pants with the other.

"Maybe some of us wouldn't talk so much?" Skinner suggested.

"All this movement," Mulder said, ignoring his Master. "I mean we're whizzing around the sun and the sun is whizzing around the Milky Way and the Milky Way is whizzing around the other galaxies, and there's all this energy, all this movement, and..." He couldn't stop himself gesturing as he spoke, and he thwapped his Master soundly in the face.

"That's enough, boy!" Skinner roared. "All this energy, and all this movement are coming to an end right now." And, having divested his slave of the last of his clothing, he threw Mulder on the bed. Mulder looked up at his Master in surprise, and began to bounce back up again, when Skinner suddenly descended on him, grabbed him firmly in his arms, and wrestled him back down. Mulder gazed up at the pair of dark eyes that were literally an inch away. Skinner was lying on top of him, pinning him down, and he couldn't move. He started to wriggle, and his Master captured his hands, held them firmly against his side, and kept him there. "Human bondage," Skinner said. "Half an hour, Fox. Don't move."

"You're going to lie on top of me for half an hour?" Mulder asked in alarm. "I can't breathe."

"Yes you can," Skinner sighed patiently. "Now, I want you to be very still, and very silent. I want you to focus on the sound of our hearts beating."

"I can't..." Mulder started to panic. He had too much energy for this! But Skinner's hands were firm, and his body was too big for Mulder to throw off. He fought, uselessly, against the other man for a long time, his breath coming in gasps, but Skinner was unrelenting. He held on tight, and refused to allow his slave to get up, or even to move as much as he wanted beneath his Master's large bulk. Mulder felt that same

frustration he had felt earlier, when tied with his Master's rope, but there was something so intimate about this situation, with his Master's face so close to his own, and his hands, and his body holding him down. He gave a cry, and finally the energy broke, and he came to rest, silent, and still. Breathing heavily, he examined his Master's features – rendered strange, and unfamiliar at such close quarters. Skinner's skin was mostly smooth, but a little craggy in places – rugged, and Mulder found that very attractive.

"Calmer now?" Skinner asked. Mulder nodded, surrendering to his Master's will.

"Was I that out of it?" He whispered.

"Yes. It was nice – but you were definitely heading for that crash landing," Skinner grinned.

"This isn't it?" Mulder glanced pointedly down at what he could see of his body that wasn't obscured beneath his Master.

"No. This was more of a controlled landing," Skinner said.

"We don't have to stay like this. We could have sex," Mulder suggested hopefully. His cock was hardening at being in such close proximity to his Master's body, and being able to smell the other man's scent.

"No, slave. First you experience the bondage, and then you might be in the right frame of mind to get some sleep," Skinner said firmly. Mulder made a face.

"Want you," he murmured mischievously, kissing the side of his Master's face.

"That's two," Skinner said.

"Two what?"

"Four now – one stroke of my belt for every single word you say from now on, boy," Skinner informed him. Mulder made a face, and then finally slumped and relaxed beneath his Master's body. Skinner didn't move. He was like a rock; firm, solid, unyielding, and Mulder felt himself sinking into the warmth and serenity of his slavery. He had to concentrate on breathing – Skinner was a considerable weight – but if he was calm, and didn't use up his energy in fighting, it was easier to accept the bondage, and breathe easily. He concentrated on his Master's ear – which was nicely edible, and the feel of his Master's naked scalp against his cheek. His energy seeped out, slowly, but surely, until he found that place he had been in earlier in the day. As he had been before, he was almost surprised when Skinner told him that his time was up, and carefully disengaged himself. Mulder stared up at his Master - and found he couldn't move.

"I'm so tired," he whispered.

"I know. I could tell." Skinner smiled. "Stay there." He got undressed, went to the bathroom, and returned to his slave's side. "You can take those four swats with the belt tomorrow morning," he promised.

"Yes, Master," Mulder murmured, closing his eyes. He was dimly aware of his Master climbing into the bed, and turning the light off, and then Skinner grabbed his slave, and pulled him close, against his naked body. "Where'd you learn that trick? From Andrew?" he asked, finding it hard to imagine his Master being pinned to the bed by his much slighter, more slender top. Andrew hadn't been a big man.

"No, from my puppy, Ruben, when I was a teenager. Dogs respond well to firm, loving discipline, just like slave boys, and they need to know who is the pack leader, and dominant animal – just like slave boys." Skinner squeezed Mulder's buttocks lightly. "When we first got Ruben he was so wild we had to call in an animal behaviorist. Her advice was to push him to the ground, and hold him there for several seconds so that he understood who was in charge. It seems to work on slaves too." Skinner kissed the back of Mulder's neck. "I adored Ruben," Skinner murmured. Mulder closed his eyes sleepily. "And you," Skinner said, just before his slave fell fast asleep, with a smile curving along his lips.

Mulder was wakened by the sting of belt leather on his naked bottom.

"Shit! What's that for?" He growled, glancing around blearily to find the covers drawn back, and his Master's belt thwacking lightly, but soundly on his naked flesh.

"Last night's punishment," Skinner told him.

"Yowl!" Mulder buried his head in his hands, and pulled the pillow over his head as his Master delivered the final two swats in quick succession. Mulder's morning erection was excited by the sudden, and unexpected discipline. The punishment was soon over, and Skinner slid into bed beside his naked slave and caressed his hot bottom.

"Also, I wanted to use you, and I like doing that best when this ass is glowing and warm." Skinner pinched it to illustrate the point, and Mulder yelped. He felt completely uninhibited, and at ease. His Master pulled him close, and parted the burning halves of his slave's butt, and soon he felt Skinner's hard cock pressing against his opening, and then he was impaled on his master's cock, and his Master was riding him deep, and hard. It felt so good, and his senses were still reeling from the unexpected awakening. He wondered if this was what it was like for Skinner to be awakened by a blow job each morning; these dual sensations of laziness, slack muscles, raging libido, and sluggish, slowly wakening senses. His Master thrust one last time, and then came, and they were still for a while.

"Did you know," Skinner said conversationally, resting his head on Mulder's shoulder, "that the Earth revolves at 1000 miles an hour?"

"Shit," Mulder groaned. "Did I really talk all that crap last night?"

"Yes – it was adorable," Skinner chuckled.

"Oh god." Mulder buried his face in his pillow. His cock was aching, and he was aware that his Master was still buried deep inside his ass. "Master...permission to come," he requested politely, longing to touch his cock but knowing that was forbidden. Skinner thought about it for a moment.

"Permission denied," he said finally. Mulder nodded.

"As you wish, Master," he whispered, so deep into his slavery that he didn't mind. In fact, it just made his cock ache all the more exquisitely, knowing that his Master had this degree of power and control over him. They dozed for a few minutes, and then Skinner withdrew from his slave with a plopping sound, and walked, naked, to the bathroom. Mulder rolled off the bed, and followed him, his cock sticking out from his body at almost comical angle. He found Skinner brushing his teeth, the shower already on, waiting for them. Mulder stood behind his Master, and surveyed the pair of them in the mirrored bathroom tiles. They were reflected back, all around, Master and slave, the one fully sated, the other with a massive hard on. Mulder brushed a kiss along the back of his Master's neck.

"Did I mention yesterday that I love you, Master?" He asked.

"Yes, several times," Skinner grinned rinsing his mouth, and stepping towards the shower.

"Good. I love you." Mulder felt as if this great truth was one that needed to be expressed every day. It made him laugh to think how hard those three simple words had once been for him. "Shit, how many months has it taken for me to be able to say that, out loud, so easily?" He asked, shaking his head.

"It's all the more sweet for taking so long. Anticipation is..."

"Half the pleasure!" Mulder finished for him. "You make that damn saying apply to everything, Master."

"Yes, slave, I do. Which is why you're forbidden to come until further notice," Skinner grinned. Mulder smiled back, and shook his head.

"I still love you, Master," he said. "In fact, I think now I've discovered how easy it is to say, I might have to say it almost constantly."

"That's fine by me, boy." Skinner got into the shower, and Mulder followed, and grabbed the soap in order to begin attending to his Master. He started at Skinner's feet, kneeling under the spray of the shower, and kissing each one, before soaping them. "One thing, boy." Mulder looked up, and his Master flicked the spray of water into his face, making him splutter. "I love you too," Skinner said, bending to deposit a perfect wet kiss on his slave's lips.

The shower was long, hot, and satisfying. Afterwards, Mulder pulled on a pair of shorts and a tee shirt, and trotted down the stairs feeling totally and utterly relaxed. So relaxed, in fact, that he forgot to check where he was treading, and once more landed on the squishy entrails of a rodent. The body was strewn out in various places all over the kitchen.

"Shit, Wanda. It looks like a scene of rat carnage," Mulder growled. The little cat immediately wound her way around his ankles, purring ecstatically. "That's the trouble with apartment cats – once they get the taste of blood they change," Mulder said mournfully, picking her up and depositing her on the table, so that she wouldn't interfere with his rodent mopping up operation. "By day, mild mannered, furry feline, prone to sappy bouts of total adoration, and by night a ruthless hunter. That's you – barbarian." She rubbed her head against his waist, still fairly pleased with herself. Mulder opened the kitchen drawer, looking for something to wrap the corpse in, and found some chalk, and duct tape, amongst numerous other items in the drawer. An idea occurred to him, and, feeling impossibly cheerful, he painstakingly drew a chalk outline on the tiled floor around the dead rodent, and then picked the corpse up, and

deposited it in an old grocery bag, before throwing it in the trash. He cordoned off the area with duct tape, just as Skinner came down the stairs.

"What's this?" Skinner asked, glancing at his slave with a bemused expression.

"Don't walk there, Master. You're disturbing the crime scene," Mulder said. "One dead rat." He pointed at the chalk outline. "And there was another one in the same spot yesterday. It looks to me as if we have a serial killer on our hands, Master."

"You could be right." Skinner mused thoughtfully, crossing his arms over his chest, and tugging on his lip. "Hmmm. Any ideas as to who the culprit might be?"

"Well, I know I have an alibi for last night. How about you?" Mulder asked.

"Tucked up in bed with a naked slave all night long," Skinner replied. "So, Agent, any other clues to go on? Have you gathered forensic evidence from the scene of the crime?"

"Not yet, sir. I'd like your permission to interrogate our prime suspect though."

"Ah yes, and who might that be?" Skinner asked with a definite twinkle in his eye.

"Well, I've done a profile, sir." Mulder began pacing the kitchen floor, as if deep in thought. "I think our perp is almost certainly female – the act was particularly savage, with entrails everywhere, and we all know the female of the species is more deadly than the male."

"Quite so." Skinner nodded.

"Small, agile, and possessed of a great cunning," Mulder continued. "About two years old – I sense an almost kittenish mischief to the act...hmmm. Any ideas, sir?"

"None, Agent. I'm completely stumped," Skinner grinned, pouring himself a glass of orange juice.

Wanda sat on the kitchen table, purring at them both serenely. Skinner sat down beside her, and rubbed her ears. "What kind of animal could do such a thing as this, Agent?" He asked, in a shocked tone.

"Only a devious, unprincipled creature, sir," Mulder replied. "Utterly without morals, and completely bloodthirsty."

"Maybe there were mitigating circumstances?" Skinner pressed his nose against Wanda's and she rubbed her cheek against his. "Perhaps the perp was killing to feed her starving children, or to bring gifts for loved ones who have shown no aptitude for hunting, much to her dismay?"

"Possibly." Mulder mused. "One more thing, sir. The perp is almost certainly a feline."

"What?" Skinner gasped theatrically. "You don't mean...you're not saying that the serial killer is...Wanda?" He picked her up and hugged her possessively to his chest.

"I'm afraid so, sir." Mulder shook his head mournfully.

"What's the sentence likely to be?" Skinner asked, tickling Wanda behind the ears.

"Life imprisonment in a huge apartment in Crystal City where she'll be doted upon by two adoring slaves, and given every indulgence she requires at a flick of her tail," Mulder replied with a grin.

"A fitting punishment." Skinner kissed his cat, and then reached up, drew Mulder's head down, and kissed his slave firmly on the lips. "You know, Fox, I think that someone is ready to go back to work," he commented when he released his slave.

"You know, Master, I think you might be right." Mulder grinned. "But not just yet."

"No." Skinner traced the outline of his slave's scar through his tee shirt. "You've done very well, sweetheart," he murmured. "You're everything I knew you could be once you relaxed, let go of the past, and started to enjoy yourself."

"Thanks to you, Master." Mulder covered his Master's hand where it lay over the scar, and his heart. "Master, does this mean you'll collar me again?" He couldn't keep the yearning out of his voice.

"I hope so," Skinner said cautiously. "You've done well, Fox, but I won't lie to you – the test is still how you behave when you're back at work. You find it harder there. It's easier without any outside pressures."

"I know, but I think I've turned a corner...um, not that I think I'll be excessively obedient or anything..."

"God forbid," Skinner interrupted.

"Just that it all just seems to make sense in my head now. It seems so easy, when before it was hard," Mulder mused.

"That's because you were fighting it before."

"Yes. I know. Not any more." Mulder smiled, and deposited a kiss on Wanda's face. "Master...one thing I've wanted to ask you. I know I'm not in any position to be asking anything but..." He hesitated but Skinner nodded, urging him to continue, and Mulder took his life in his hands and plowed on. "Being here, sleeping in the same bed with you every night...I was wondering, when we go back...can I sleep in your bed every night at home as well?" He asked. Skinner didn't reply, and Mulder's heart dived into the soles of his feet. "I'm sorry. I shouldn't have...it's just something I want so much," he said.

"Well, it's something I'd enjoy too," Skinner said thoughtfully. "All right, slave, I agree – however this is a privilege, and not a right. I may choose to punish you by sending you to your old room for the night when you misbehave, or simply on a whim – because I can."

"Yes, Master. I understand." Mulder couldn't help feeling elated. This was one of his secret pleasures. It was amazing how something so simple could cause him such delight. He loved sleeping beside his Master.

After breakfast, Skinner ordered him up to the Dungeon, instructed him to take off his clothes, and then began preparing several lengths of rope. Mulder watched, apprehensively.

“Will you be tying me the same way as yesterday, Master?” He asked.

“No, boy. I won’t. Today’s bondage will be for a special purpose. I want to whip you,” Skinner said, glancing at his slave, his hands full of rope. Mulder’s heart lurched.

“Whip me, Master? Have I displeased you?” He asked, in a faltering tone.

“No. In fact, you’ve been very pleasing, which is why I’m going to whip you. This will be a very special kind of whipping, but it’s one I think you’re ready for. Lie on your back on the table.” Skinner pointed, and Mulder swallowed hard, but found himself obeying despite his fear.

“On my back, Master?” He questioned, wondering where exactly this whipping was to take place.

“Yes, boy and don’t **question** me,” Skinner growled. “You heard first time.”

Mulder quickly shimmied onto the table and lay there, trying to breathe.

“You know what’s going to happen,” Skinner purred, coming over the table, and flexing a length of rope thoughtfully. “Don’t fight it, boy. It’s your Master’s pleasure.”

Mulder’s cock lurched, and then gave a shiver of anticipation before shriveling pitifully.

“Yes, you do well to be afraid,” Skinner smiled. Mulder was shocked by just how dark and masterful the other man could become when he wanted. This was the hard, uncompromising Skinner of yesterday, a man Mulder feared, and wanted to please without question.

“Open your legs wide,” Skinner ordered, and Mulder obeyed, feeling completely exposed. Skinner bound his slave carefully, and precisely; a process that took half an hour, so meticulous was his Master. Mulder glanced down at the network of ropes and found them curiously beautiful. He was astonished by how good his Master was at tying the most intricate knots.

“Don’t tell me, you were a boy scout,” he commented, as almost every inch of his body disappeared beneath the rope.

“An Eagle scout as a matter of fact,” Skinner grinned.

Mulder groaned, and rolled his eyes. "Figures. They threw me out of the scouts," he said mournfully.

"Figures," Skinner threw back with a chuckle. He tightened a knot, and then stood back to survey his handiwork. Mulder craned his neck to see the results; he was tied even tighter than yesterday – completely immersed in rope, like an ancient Egyptian Mummy, except for one crucial area of his body that was entirely free; his cock and balls. The sensation of being tied everywhere but there made his cock give a leap of interest, which was quickly subdued as he recalled **why** his genitals had been left free. His legs, arms, and torso had been bound to hooks at the end and side of the table. Skinner was obviously taking no chances of his slave moving.

"All right, you're done. I'm going to leave you for half an hour. You can call me over if you have a problem, boy. I want you to spend your time wisely, preparing for the way in which I intend to discipline you later," Skinner said warningly. Mulder swallowed hard, but his lips were too dry, and he was too nervous to reply. He entered a state of peace and calm more easily than the previous day, but at the back of his mind all he could think about was the fact that his Master was going to whip his exposed genitals. Skinner had never done anything like this before, and Mulder was seriously scared by the idea. Only the comforting mummification of the ropes stopped him from freaking out. They also reminded him of his status. He couldn't fight, couldn't wriggle, or do anything except every single stroke his Master decided to land on his body. He had no control over the process. His Master was in charge and would, undoubtedly, do exactly as he pleased. It was out of Mulder's hands. That thought relaxed him, but the half an hour passed all too quickly, and soon his Master was by his side again. The big man was holding a small, many lashed whip in his hands – it was so delicate and perfect that Mulder was reassured. Surely that beautiful object couldn't cause him too much pain? The suede lashes were so light, and slender. Mulder was acutely aware of the fact that his legs were bound open to reveal his genitalia, offered up to his Master like a sacrifice, and he shivered inside his bonds.

"Close your eyes. I want you to shut out every single sensation except what I'm going to be doing to you," Skinner said. "I won't talk. I want you to concentrate."

Mulder did as ordered, and tensed, waiting for the first blow. When it came it was so light and feathery that he almost laughed out loud. It hadn't hurt at all. It had been more like a caress. He relaxed in his bonds. His Master stroked his penis, and alternated that with blows from the tiny whip. It was an entirely pleasant process, and soon Mulder was fully erect. The longer his Master worked, the hotter his hard cock became...and slowly, oh so slowly, what had started as little more than a warming caress, sharpened into a slight sting. Mulder was aware of an edge of pain that hadn't been there at the beginning, and he started to moan, and pant. He was unable to do anything to move away from the insistent stroking of the whip because of his bonds, but it was starting to hurt. Not much, just enough to be erotic, and to send the endorphins buzzing around his body.

"Master..." he croaked.

"You can't come, boy," Skinner said.

"I know...please..." He wished he could move away from those endless nipping bites that were starting to drive him crazy, but he couldn't. He was tied fast, and every single blow aimed at his exposed penis went home. It was arousing, and maddening, and painful and hot all at the same time. He was going to go out of his mind on the sensation.

"Hush. I'm not done yet. You have a lot more to endure before I'm through," Skinner said, rubbing Mulder's penis with his hand, soothing and arousing it. Mulder sighed, relieved by the brief respite, but then Skinner's hand was removed, and the stinging, biting caress of the tiny little whip started again. Mulder opened his eyes, and watched his Master work. Skinner was totally immersed in the task at hand, and he wasn't doing more than flicking his wrist, and lightly whipping Mulder's exposed penis, and yet the build up and intensity of those strokes was sending Mulder out of his mind. Mulder noted that his Master had placed his free hand by his slave's cock, and thus tested each stroke delivered, ensuring they were kept at an even, bearable pace and strength, and caused no harm to his slave.

"I said close them," Skinner grunted, and Mulder started in surprise – his Master clearly had eyes in the back of his head because he wasn't even looking at his slave. "I want you to focus on your cock, and on your Master's will, and how he is enjoying disciplining his slave in this way," Skinner hissed. Mulder closed his eyes as ordered. In fact, it was impossible **not** to focus on his cock. Every single inch of the rest of him was fully bound in rope, and his cock was the only thing undergoing any kind of sensation. He became fixated on that organ, aware that it was hard, and aroused, and hurt, and that every single flick of his Master's wrist brought him even closer to the kind of endorphin high that he loved so much. Soon he was screaming, not for Skinner to stop – but for him to continue, as he felt his ecstasy spiral out of control.

"Oh shit...shit...please...let me come..." Mulder begged, but the relentless whip just continued its work, caressing Mulder's hard, weeping, hot cock. He felt sure his cock was covered in welts it stung so much, but still his Master didn't stop. Now the pain was much more severe; it had built up to a level where it hurt so much and felt so good that Mulder wasn't sure whether it was pain or pleasure that he was feeling. He was beyond coherent thought. He was just his exposed cock, and the terrible torment that was being done to it...and then suddenly, without warning, the whipping stopped, and his cock was immersed in a warm, wet, caressing, soothing mouth. Mulder shouted out loud, and went over the brink. His mind exploded with a firework display so stunning and intense that he actually passed out for several seconds. When he came to, his entire body was limp, and exhausted, utterly without life. He was aware of his Master standing over him, busily undoing the ropes that bound him, but even when they had all gone, he couldn't move. He was beyond movement.

"So, little one, still so horrified by the thought of a cock whipping?" Skinner grinned. Mulder shook his head.

"Unbelievable. I had no idea..." he managed to murmur, glancing down at his poor cock, expecting to see it had been whipped to shreds. Instead it looked remarkably healthy, if somewhat red. He reached out a freed hand to touch it, and it felt so sensitive that he yowled out loud.

"That will teach you to touch what isn't yours," Skinner grinned. "Now, outside for a swim – some salt water should soothe that back to normal."

"Swim? I can't even walk," Mulder grumbled, trying to get up, and failing, collapsing back onto the couch. Skinner picked up the small whip and held it out threateningly.

"Swim – or another whipping," he threatened, and Mulder reluctantly swung his legs away from the table.

They spent a perfectly nice day, until Skinner decided it was time for Mulder's second bout of bondage in the late afternoon.

"I'm in the mood for some beach bondage," Skinner said, eyeing his slave thoughtfully. "I like the idea of you staked out." He returned to the house and reappeared a few minutes later with a little bag of goodies. He ordered Mulder down to some wet sand closer to the water, and banged 4 heavy stakes into the ground. He positioned Mulder spread-eagled on his front on the ground, and tied his wrists and ankles firmly to the stakes. Mulder felt stretched – his Master had not given him any slack, and his legs and arms were fully extended, and tied without any room for relaxing.

"This will test your endurance, little one, but I won't keep you here for too long," Skinner said, retiring a few yards up the beach to sit on his beach chair once more, and enjoy the view of his naked, staked out slave. Mulder put his face down on the wet sand, and a few minutes later, evidence of the full extent of his Master's devious nature became plain as he felt water lapping against his ankles. The wave receded, and washed in again, and each time crept slowly up his body, immersing more of him in cold water on each occasion. Mulder glanced up at his Master, but Skinner was just sitting, watching, thoroughly enjoying himself. The water was freezing, but his body was warm from lazing in the sun, which made the contrast all the more severe. Mulder cursed his Master under his breath. Only Skinner could think up a torture this cunning. The next wave lapped right up to his cock, and he gave a startled shout. His cock was still so sensitive from the whipping that every single sensation was enhanced a hundred times over. Mulder tugged pointlessly on his cuffs. He was bound tight, and they were utterly unyielding. He felt as if he was in a film, the captive of vicious cannibals, and about to be eaten.

Finally, just as the water reached his slave's chest, Skinner returned to untie him.

"You know," he murmured thoughtfully, as he released Mulder's wrists, "I've always had a yen to replay that scene from the movie, *From Here to Eternity*."

Mulder looked up at his Master, and grinned. "Strange, I never took you for a closet Debra Kerr," he winked.

"Sorry to disappoint you, boy, but you're going to be Debra – I'm going to be Burt Lancaster," Skinner growled, launching himself on his slave, and taking him in his arms. Mulder laughed, and surrendered to his Master's embrace as the sea lapped up over their naked bodies. Skinner pinned Mulder to the sand, and slid easily into his slave's waiting ass. Mulder loved sex in this position – with Skinner above him, overpowering him, and at the same time able to look into his slave's eyes as he thrust into him. Skinner went slowly, savoring the moment, and claiming several long sweet kisses from his slave as the water washed over their bodies, and the sun began to sink down over the horizon. His Master pushed deep inside him, and Mulder convulsed against him, milking his Master's hard cock with his internal muscles for all his was worth, and enjoying the look on his Master's face as he came with a shout, his slave's name on his lips. The water washed around them for a few more minutes as they lay sated on the sand, and then Skinner withdrew, and helped his slave to his feet.

"Time for a hot bath," he murmured. "Sand has a tendency to get stuck in the most unfortunate places."

Mulder was woken in the middle of the night by his Master's finger entering between his ass cheeks. He opened his eyes blearily, and looked around. The room was in darkness, but his Master was clearly wide awake.

"Keep still, boy. I woke up and saw you lying here, in the light of the moon, and decided I wanted to use you. Hold still." Mulder gave a squawk of surprise as he felt his Master's hard cock push home, up to the hilt, in one fast thrust. He was still half awake, and his body wasn't sure what the hell was going on. Skinner clearly wasn't half awake though. He thrust energetically into his slave, using him hard and riding him for what felt like hours. Finally, his Master came with a shuddering sigh of pleasure, released his slave, and then pushed him out of the bed.

"Go and wash yourself, and then clean me up," he ordered. As Mulder walked to the bathroom he was aware that his own neglected cock was sticking out in front of his body. His Master had never before woken and needed to use him with such urgency. He liked the feeling. He returned to bed, and Skinner reached for him, and held him lazily, ignoring his slave's hard, weeping cock, and they were soon asleep again.

Mulder woke again a few hours later, to find his Master's fingers once more pressing into his ass.

"Did you wish to use me again, Master?" he whispered, opening his legs slightly to facilitate Skinner's finger, which thrust easily home.

"No, boy. I merely wished to remind you that you're available to **be** used," Skinner murmured. "I'm not in the mood to use you, but in order to keep in mind that you're available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, I'm going to plug you." He withdrew his finger, and turned on the light, and Mulder blinked, surprised by the night's activities. He had worn a butt plug several times all through the night, but he had never been woken half way through for an insertion. His eyes opened wide, suddenly very much awake when he saw the thick, solid, pointed, plastic object his Master intended to insert into him.

"M...Master?" he questioned. Unlike the monster dildo his Master had made him take a few days ago, this butt plug was pointed at one end, but thickened out into an almost impossible width before narrowing and then flaring at the base.

"Fox, my fist is this size." Skinner made a fist next to the butt plug, and Mulder could see the appreciable difference in size. "I will ensure that you're adequately prepared – and a little night time discomfort won't do you any harm. I'd like my slave to keep in mind that even when his Master is not using him, it still pleases him to keep his slave stretched, and his ass filled."

"Yes, Master." Mulder swallowed, and watched as Skinner covered the butt plug in lube, and then rolled his slave onto his stomach, and placed a pillow under his groin.

"Spread your legs...that's good," Skinner said in a soft tone, and a second later Mulder felt the tip of the butt plug press against his opening. Skinner worked it in until Mulder didn't think he could take the impossible width, and then Skinner slid it out again. "Allow the muscles to relax...that's good." Skinner pushed the plug in again, and Mulder moaned, and held on tight to his pillow, arching his back. A sharp slap landed on his buttocks. "Stop that. I told you to relax the muscles. I'll ease it in gently, but it will go in," Skinner warned. Mulder closed his eyes, and concentrated on relaxing every single muscle in his

body. Skinner pressed the butt plug in again, for the third time, and this time he slid it right up to its widest point, and held it there, keeping Mulder's ass muscles open.

"Oh shit," Mulder whispered, biting down on the pillow. It was stretching him more than he'd ever been stretched before, and it hurt.

"I can take it out and try a fourth time, or I can push all the way in now. Which do you want?" Skinner asked, stroking his slave's buttocks to calm him.

"Do it now," Mulder hissed, and a second later he felt a wave of pain, as the plug was rammed home. "Oh god, take it out, take it out, hurts..." he begged, reaching to try and pull the thing out himself, but Skinner stopped him by grabbing his wrists and attaching a cuff to each one, before fastening them together behind Mulder's back, well out of reach of the butt plug. Then he lay down in the bed beside his slave, and took him in his arms.

"Ride it out. It doesn't last," Skinner said soothingly, and Mulder tried hard to stay still, as the pain washed through him and then, just as Skinner had said it would, gently receded, leaving him feeling comfortably full.

"Thank you, Master," he whispered into Skinner's chest. His Master chuckled, and cupped his slave's buttocks, kneading them thoroughly.

"For what?" He asked.

"For making me take it," Mulder said.

"I know exactly what you can take, boy, even when you don't know it yourself," Skinner said softly. He lifted Mulder's chin and brushed a tear from his slave's cheek where his eyes had watered at the insertion. "How does it feel now?"

"Good...warm, and full," Mulder said.

"You'll wear it for the rest of the night. You'll find that the ache returns by morning – the muscles grow tired of being stretched and want to return to their natural state – they can't," Skinner said. "I want you to surf the pain and discomfort. You can sleep in bondage as well. I don't want you removing anything when I'm not looking."

"Yes, Master." Mulder snuggled against his Master, and closed his eyes again. His cock was rock hard. Despite the unexpected nature of the intrusion into his ass, he was turned on by his Master's total control over his body. He liked that Skinner had woken him for no other reason than to remind him that he was owned, and he loved being made to sleep with his hands tied behind his back. It was just before dawn when he was woken again, this time by a sharp pain in his right nipple.

"Oh shit..." He half sat up, and lost his balance and fell back as he realized his hands were still tied. Looking down, he saw a clamp firmly attached to his nipple. It wasn't a particularly fierce one, but it sure as hell felt bad when attached first thing in the morning to a sleeping slave boy.

"Lie down. I'm not finished yet," Skinner told him.

"Why...oh god..." His nipple hurt so much but his bound arms prevented him being able to remove the source of the torment. "Shit..." he moaned, moving his legs frantically as he tried to become accustomed to the sensation in his nipple. Skinner held his slave down, Mulder's back against his chest, and then he started to fondle Mulder's left nipple with his fingers, playing with the nipple ring until the nipple was hard, and ready. Mulder could have cursed the treacherous nub of flesh. "Please...not that one too..." he moaned, pressing back against his Master's chest.

"Please..."

"Hush. I want you to remember who you belong to at all times," Skinner said. Mulder closed his eyes, and felt his Master's fingers brush against his left nipple, and then the clip was attached. He gave a cry, and jackknifed against Skinner's chest. His Master held him tight, stroking him up and down his body, murmuring to him. "Ride out the pain, little one. Good boy," Skinner said softly, caressing his slave tenderly. Mulder felt a wave of sweat break out as he grew accustomed to the pain in his nipples. "There," Skinner soothed when Mulder finally relaxed into the warmth of his Master's arms. Skinner wrapped his slave up, and held him tight, nuzzling his neck. "Back to sleep little one. I just wanted to remind you what you are, and who you belong to," he whispered.

"I hadn't forgotten," Mulder retorted, and was treated to a pinch on his backside.

"A little reminder doesn't go amiss," Skinner said, his voice low, and completely masterful. Mulder's cock immediately became rigid with need, but, with his hands bound behind his back, he couldn't even touch it. "You'll wear the clamps until we get up. Just a couple of hours and they're not so savage that they'll cause any harm," Skinner said softly, tweaking one of them, and making Mulder wince, and yelp. "Be careful how you sleep, boy. If either of them have been dislodged when we get up then there will be ten hard strokes with the paddle."

"Yes, Master." Mulder said meekly. He had been considering trying to rub them against the mattress and dislodge them, but that clearly was no longer an option. Instead, he relaxed onto his side, and enjoyed his Master's stroking.

"I want you to focus on what I've done to you tonight, and think about why," Skinner said softly. Mulder closed his eyes. Skinner was right. His ass was starting to ache from the large intrusion. His nipples were a counterpoint to the throbbing discomfort in his ass, and both melded into a pleasurable miasma of being owned, claimed, trussed, plugged and clamped. It was a good ache. Finally his Master fell asleep again but Mulder lay awake, enjoying the feeling of his Master's hand on his thigh, his Master's clamps on his nipples, his Master's plug up his ass, his Master's ring on his cock...He was a slave to the core of his soul, but a slave to one man only. He knew he could never belong to anyone else. He could never give himself to anyone else. His slavery was conditional upon his Master and while with other men he would continue to be as difficult, bloody minded, and smart assed as he had ever been, with Skinner he would be servile, docile, and tamed. It was a relief to know it, and give into it, and to be what in his heart he wanted to be. He had never before met anyone who could take him on this journey, and, more to the point, whom he could trust to walk beside him every step of the way, as Skinner had. Mulder knew that he was happier than he'd ever been in his life.

Mulder was woken in the morning by a sensation of appalling pain in his nipples. He realized immediately that the source of the pain was the fact that his clamps had been removed, and glanced up to see his Master sitting beside him on the bed.

"Morning, slave. Did you sleep well?" Skinner asked, with a wide, knowing grin.

"Perfectly, Master," Mulder replied, without any trace of sarcasm.

"Good. Lie on your front and hold still. I want to remove your plug."

Skinner grasped the plug, and moved it slowly, and Mulder gasped as the large middle part slid out, stretching his overworked muscles. Then it was gone, and he breathed a sigh of relief.

"Don't be too relieved," Skinner said. "I'll be using something bigger on you later during your bondage session."

"Bigger than that?" Mulder was aghast.

"I'm preparing you for your fisting, sweetheart. It's necessary," Skinner said, bestowing a kiss on Mulder's forehead, and then undoing his slave's wrist cuffs.

"When will you fist me, Master?" Mulder whispered, scared. Taking that butt plug had been hard, but taking his Master's fist seemed unimaginable. He picked up his Master's hand, made it into a fist, and looked at it thoughtfully. Shit - it was enormous.

"On Thursday. Take it well, and on Saturday you'll have that treat I promised," Skinner said.

"Master, do you think I'll be able to take it?" Mulder traced his finger over Skinner's hand, worried that he'd let his Master down.

"Of course. I'll make sure of that. Fox, before I brand you, or tattoo you, or render you any more mine than you already are, I think we need to push the boundaries of your trust, and the limits of your body to make sure you're ready for such big steps. Your fisting will be an intimate moment – a special ceremony between you and me. Do you remember your piercing?"

Mulder nodded - how could he forget? His Master had laid on the most perfect scene for the occasion.

"Well, this will be similar. Perfect trust between Master and slave. We'll be bonded as we never have been before. I wouldn't do it if I didn't think you were ready." Skinner smiled, and kissed his slave on the lips, a deep, reassuring kiss. "You'll do fine, boy. Just show the aptitude and courage you've already shown."

"I'll try, Master," Mulder promised.

"And I'll help you," Skinner promised in return.

For his next bondage session, later that day, Mulder was placed on a mat in the dungeon, on his knees, and tied in the most humiliating way imaginable. His legs were drawn up under his chest, and he was

tied around torso and legs, leaving his ass open and exposed. Again, he found he couldn't move, and he had to keep quite still in order to breathe comfortably, his nose inches from the floor. Sometimes he rested his chin on the floor in order to relax, but mainly he was just aware of his asshole, wide, and open, for whatever his Master intended to do with it. Unlike other occasions, this time Skinner didn't leave Mulder alone. Instead, he played with his ass. At first he just fingered his slave, wetting his finger, and running it around the rim of his slave's ass, pushing it in and out, and playing with Mulder's hole in a way that would have been more pleasurable if Mulder hadn't been trussed up, and unable to move. Then Skinner's one finger became two, and then three...and then four. Mulder held his breath, wondering if his Master intended to fish him here and now, but while Skinner wriggled his fingers around, he didn't do any more than that, and soon withdrew his fingers and replaced them with something else. Mulder gave a start, followed by a deep sigh of contentment, as he felt his Master's tongue on his exposed asshole. This felt good. Despite being tied, ass up, face down, in this humiliating position, his Master's tongue took away all his embarrassment, and he relaxed, and rested his chin on the ground once more. As soon as his muscles were loose like this, it was so much easier to just enjoy the sensations in his body, and he started to drift away. The ropes bound him in position and when he relaxed against them they held him up, and that felt so good. The rimming stopped, and glancing around he noticed that his Master had a large dildo in his hand – larger even than the plug he'd worn the previous night. He gave a little whimper.

"This isn't a butt plug, it's a dildo. That means you'll have to work hard to keep it in place. I'm going to insert it and I want you to grip it. If it comes out before I return then you'll be punished," Skinner said softly. Mulder nodded. Skinner gently worked his slave's ass open again, and nudged the tip of the dildo inside. It was a good size, and at first Mulder experienced that same ache he'd felt last night, and then, suddenly, the dildo slid home far more easily than he'd expected. It even felt good inside him. Skinner patted his exposed buttocks lightly, and he heard his Master stand up.

"Keep it in place, slave. I've marked the outside where it's visible – if you allow it to come out even by a fraction, then you'll be punished," he warned.

"Yes, Master." Mulder was aroused both by the position, and the challenge. He concentrated on keeping that dildo in place, claspng it tightly between his clenched butt cheeks, but as the minutes ticked by, he wasn't sure he could hold on any longer. He knew that if he didn't concentrate, the natural motion of his muscles against the intruder would easily expel it, but it was large, and slippery, and he was growing tired. His eyes felt heavy after his interrupted night and he was right at the end of his endurance when he felt his Master return.

"Good boy." Skinner removed the dildo, much to his slave's relief, and untied Mulder. He gave his slave a swift massage, loosening the crimps the tight bondage had placed in his muscles, and then pulled him to his feet, and kissed him thoroughly. "You are so good – I love how responsive you are, how obedient, and willing," he whispered, holding his slave tight, and petting him all over. Mulder glowed from the praise.

"I love you, Master," he said. "I don't think I've mentioned that today." He grinned brightly.

"No, slave, but it's always nice hearing it. I love you too." Skinner kissed his slave thoroughly to illustrate the point.

By the time Wednesday arrived, Mulder thought he might be ready for the next day's fisting – physically at least. Mentally, he wasn't so sure. He was put through his paces and responded perfectly, but by the time evening fell, he started to get fidgety, until he was completely unable to stay still.

"Master, permission to go for a walk," he requested as they sat in companionable silence, worn out by the day's activities. Skinner was reading a book, and Mulder had one open, but he couldn't concentrate on the words. All he could do was think of his Master's fist inside his body, and it aroused him and gave him cold sweats at one and the same time. Skinner looked up, his expression concerned.

"Are you all right, boy?" He asked.

"Yes...just restless," Mulder replied.

"Is this about tomorrow?"

"Yes. It's all I can think about. I need to run," Mulder said, getting up. "Please, Master. Can I run?" he asked. Skinner thought about it for a moment, and then nodded.

"You can go to the town. Keep to the path – and run there, and straight back. Don't stop anywhere, and don't run anywhere else," he said. Mulder nodded, got to his feet eagerly and went to change.

It felt good being out on the open road, with the wind in his hair. The moon as large and bright overhead and he was soon running fast enough to get all the restless energy out of his limbs. He reached the town, and briefly considered stopping at the bar for a drink, but decided that he didn't want to risk his Master's wrath by doing that, so he turned and started to run back. He was half way back to the house when he heard a sound of a motorbike ahead. He stopped, transfixed, as a magnificent black Harley came around the corner. Seated upon it was a tall, black leather clad stranger in a crash helmet. The motorcyclist swerved across the empty road, and pulled up beside Mulder who gazed longingly at the gleaming black bike, and he was human enough to spare a glance at its equally magnificent rider, in tight black leathers.

"Want a ride?" the stranger asked, and that was when Mulder recognized his Master's voice. He did a double take. Skinner looked fantastic, but completely different in his biker clothes.

"This is yours? Where did you...?"

"You look tired, as if you need a lift," Skinner said in a hard, low voice. Mulder realized he was playing a part – and it was a hot one at that. He was pretending to be a stranger, out cruising. "I saw you jogging. You look good. I like the way you run." Skinner reached out and touched Mulder's thigh. "I could take you for a ride."

Skinner handed a dumbstruck Mulder a helmet, and Mulder took it. My god, he had wanted a distraction, and what a distraction **this** was.

"Where will you take me?" He asked. "I'm not used to being picked up by strange men." He grinned leeringly.

“Oh, I’m very strange,” Skinner promised, grinning back. “And as for where I take you – will somewhere hot do?”

“Sounds good to me,” Mulder said, going to climb on behind the other man – his dark, mysterious stranger, on the beautiful, gleaming, sexy black Harley.

“Not there. When I said I want to take you for a ride, I meant it,” Skinner said with a wry laugh. “Get on in front.”

Mulder looked questioningly at the other man. The isolated country road was completely deserted, and Skinner opened his leather trousers, and drew out his cock. He stroked it into hardness, and then beckoned Mulder astride the bike. “Climb aboard,” Skinner said, and Mulder grinned, and placed one leg over the bike. “Hold on,” Skinner said, and, taking out a small pocket knife, he cut a hole in Mulder’s shorts, pushed aside his jock strap, and gently prized his slave’s ass open, before arranging Mulder on his hard cock. Mulder slid down easily, until his Master’s cock was lodged firmly in his ass, and then Skinner placed his arms around his impaled slave, put his hands on the handlebars, and, looking over Mulder’s shoulder, steered his bike along the road. There was nobody to see them, but even if there had been, nothing seemed to be amiss, except for the fact that the two men appeared to be sitting very close together. They only traveled a couple of miles like that, before Skinner swung the bike off onto a side road, and into the woods, following a rough track. Mulder held on for dear life as they jolted along that track, his Master’s cock still embedded firmly in his slave’s ass, bouncing him up and down. It was exciting for both of them – Mulder’s own cock hardened as his prostate was stimulated unbearably by his Master’s hard penis. He threw back his head and gazed at the stars, placing his hands back, around his Master’s waist, and stroking what part of the other man’s toned buttocks he could reach through his tight leather trousers.

“Oh god this is good,” he breathed, sliding up and down on that cock.

“I thought you’d like it,” Skinner said. He drew up and removed his helmet, and took Mulder’s off as well. “We’re off road now. We’ll go slowly, and enjoy ourselves. We’re on Murray’s property so we won’t come across anyone.” He stored the helmets away, encircled Mulder in his leather clad arms once more, and began riding both his slave and his Harley hard. They meandered slowly down to the beach on the bike. Mulder had never felt more alive in his life.

“This is fantastic!” He yelled. “The wind in my hair, my Master’s cock up my ass, and a purring, throbbing, powerful machine between my legs – the bike isn’t bad either,” he joked, and Skinner snorted, and kissed his slave’s neck, giving Mulder the shivers. “Has this bike been in the garage all this time and you never mentioned it?” Mulder accused his Master over his shoulder.

“Master’s prerogative. I thought I’d save it for the right occasion, and this is definitely it. You needed a distraction,” Skinner said, kissing his slave’s neck again. “Distracted?” He asked.

“Oh yeah!” Mulder grinned. He moved his hips a few times, and clenched his muscles around his Master’s cock, making Skinner grunt with pleasure. His Master rode the bike along the moonlit beach, and Mulder didn’t think he’d ever had such a horny experience in his life. The Harley was so beautiful, and the smell of his Master’s leathers was almost as intoxicating as the feel of his pulsating cock in his

ass. Skinner stopped the bike at the end of the beach, and they sat, silently, gazing out at the sea, with the moon rippling across the water, and the lights from the bobbing boats in the opposite bay.

“Does it get any better than this?” Mulder breathed, still aware of his Master’s warm, hard cock inside him.

“Oh yes. It does,” Skinner said. “Wait and see.” He pushed Mulder forward, guided his slave’s hands to the handlebars, and placed his own gloved hand around the other man’s cock. He then proceeded to fuck him, slowly, and thoroughly, pumping Mulder’s shaft in time to his rhythmic thrusts deep into his slave’s body. Mulder threw back his head, tasting salt water on his lips, and the smell of leather in his nostrils. His knees gripped the leather seat of the Harley, and he felt as if he were floating in the most delicious fantasy of all time. Skinner, the Harley, that cock in his ass, the taste of the sea, the beauty of the moonlight, the scent of leather, his Master’s warm, gloved hand pumping his cock...it all merged into one incredible scene that he truly wanted to last forever, and he knew that if he died at this precise moment in time, he would die happy – and said as much to his Master.

“What the hell are you going to die of?” Skinner grunted, as he smoothly impaled his slave back and forth on his cock, kissing his neck with each forward stroke.

“A heart attack? Sheer bliss? Over-stimulation of the prostate?” Mulder suggested, panting with need as his cock thrust into that hard, black-gloved hand.

“Not without my damn permission!” Skinner snorted.

“Well, maybe I’ll get hit by an asteroid!” Mulder yelled over his shoulder, glancing up at the myriad of stars in the sky, and wondering if one of them would fall on him at this moment of extreme bliss.

“I state again – not without my goddamn permission!” Skinner growled.

“Ah, my Master can even stop the stars in their courses,” Mulder misquoted cheerfully. “He can command asteroids not to fall, and the sea not to wash up on the shore, like Canute.”

“What is this new habit of talking during sex?” Skinner asked, squeezing Mulder’s cock.

“You inspire me to words, Master!” Mulder yelled expansively, sweat pouring down his face as their congress reached a climax.

“I know a few words myself – ones guaranteed to shut you up,” Skinner remarked.

“Oh yeah?” Mulder challenged, his ass milking his Master’s cock for all it was worth as his own cock spasmed with need.

“Yeah – the words are: you can come,” Skinner said, in a tone that was unnecessarily smug Mulder thought – although it was the last coherent thought he had for several minutes as he obeyed his Master’s command, and came, and came, and came all over the bike, and all over his Master’s gloved hand, and he felt Skinner push inside him two, three more times and then his Master was shuddering to his own climax. They both collapsed, Mulder leaning over the handlebars, and Skinner leaning over Mulder, covering his lean, slender frame, with his large, leather clad body.

"Looks like you failed..." Mulder muttered weakly.

"Explain," Skinner said, in a muffled tone, his face buried in Mulder's neck.

"I just died. Now I'm in heaven," Mulder said, and Skinner just chuckled, and allowed Mulder the last word for once.

They stayed that way for what seemed like hours before Mulder started to shiver, and realized that he was cold. Skinner took off his jacket, to reveal a plain black tee shirt that showed off his rippling muscles to perfection, and placed it around his slave's shoulders, then he started the bike again and rode it up the beach towards the house, his now softened cock still firmly embedded in his slave's ass. They disengaged and put the bike away in the garage.

"You can clean it up tomorrow," Skinner said, patting the black leather seat fondly.

"It's beautiful," Mulder said, staring at it dreamily. "We're going to do that again before we leave, right?"

"Oh, there are plenty of other things to do before we leave," Skinner chuckled in an ominous tone.

Mulder woke next day to find the inside of his stomach crawling with what felt like a nest of spiders. He placed himself in voluntary deep submission, because he was sure it was the only way he'd get through the day. He gave his Master his wake up call, and then waited beside the bed, eyes down, trying to remain calm. Skinner directed him in a number of menial chores, which helped; Skinner had told him that they would build up to the fisting later in the evening, but as the afternoon wore on, Mulder found it more and more impossible to remain still. Finally, Skinner tied him firmly beside his beach chair, in an easy position, lying out straight, but so tightly bound that it was impossible to fidget. He kept his slave that way for almost two hours, before releasing him, and fastening a leash to his slave's nipple rings.

"All right, Fox," he said softly, looking into his slave's eyes. "You're in deep submission by my command now. You'll obey everything I say, immediately and without question. Go and clean the bike, and then prepare the hot tub."

Mulder did as ordered, lingering over the bike, lovingly polishing it back to a full shine. Then, slowly, dragging his feet, he went outside to the hot tub. It was fully dark by the time he was done, and he kneeled beside the hot tub and waited for his Master, eyes down, knees wide apart. Skinner hadn't used him since last night, and the morning's spanking had been light, and gentle, and entirely pleasurable for both of them. Skinner came out, and got into the hot tub, and then ordered his slave in beside him. The water was warm, and the sky was as clear as it had been the previous night. Stars were already visible. Mulder loved the warm water on his naked body, and submitted to being pulled over his Master's knee, and played with. Skinner went slowly, opening his slave's buttocks, playing with his ass, and kissing his body. He sucked on Mulder's nipples, and kissed his lips so many times that Mulder felt himself entering a dream state. This was so good.

"Could we do this all night, Master?" He suggested.

"It's tempting, but we have other plans," Skinner whispered, pushing two fingers gently into his slave, and moving them around. Mulder sighed, and placed both his arms around his Master's neck in order to

keep upright. Skinner played with his slave for over an hour, fondling, stroking and caressing him. There was no pain, just warmth and comfort.

Finally, Skinner got up, and led his naked slave out of the hot tub, and up the stairs to the medieval bedroom, which they'd never used before. The lights were down low, and the bed was covered with towels. Skinner ordered his slave to lie face down on them, and Mulder obeyed, and watched as his Master prepared the enema. He had never been given one of these by his Master, and he didn't know what to expect. Skinner gently inserted the nozzle into his slave's rectum, and he felt the warm water flood into him. The cramps came a few moments later, and Skinner ordered him to the bathroom. "Make sure you're clean before you return – use the shower if need be," he instructed his slave, and Mulder nodded, and did as he had been told. He was surprised, and even a little embarrassed when his Master followed him in, but Skinner took little notice of his slave, and concentrated instead on washing his arms and hands thoroughly over and over again, before clipping his nails. Mulder watched these preparations with some trepidation. Skinner finished before he did, smiled at his slave, and returned to the bedroom.

Mulder knew that he was as scrupulously clean as his Master by the time he returned. Skinner was sitting on the bed, thoroughly lathering his right arm and hand with lube, making it glisten in the dimly lit room.

"Come back here and lie down, sweetheart," Skinner said in a gentle, tender voice. Mulder did as he had been told, trembling despite the warmth of the room. "Hush." Skinner stroked his slave's body gently, and Mulder tried his best to relax. Skinner played with him for a well over an hour, massaging his buttocks, gently stroking his cock, and kissing him everywhere, including his lips, until finally, Mulder started to let go, and give in. That was when Skinner placed a pillow under the towels, and arranged his slave on top of it, on his back, his buttocks hanging in the small bit of space where the pillow stopped, giving his Master room to work, his genitals sticking up in the air. "Legs wide apart, sweetheart...that's right. I want access to your cock as well as your ass." His Master's hands kneaded his buttocks, and Mulder leaned his head back on his arms, bolstered up by numerous pillows. He felt totally relaxed, and at ease, apart from the lingering nervous anticipation.

"Do you know what I'm going to do to you tonight?" Skinner asked, continuing with his stroking, and massage, dropping a series of loving kisses on his slave's body at regular intervals.

"Yes, Master," Mulder muttered into his arms. "You're going to fist me."

"Do you know why?" Skinner asked. Mulder thought about it.

"No, Master," he whispered.

"To show you who has complete mastery over your body, slave. Not so long ago you ran away from me, and got into trouble. This isn't a punishment – but I hope by means of this act to prove to you once and for all, that you belong to me. I won't tolerate you running away again," Skinner said in a low, forceful tone. Mulder shivered. The scene was starting to get hot. His Master was saying all the right things. Skinner ran a light finger over Mulder's nipples, gently exploring the hardening nubs of flesh. "You have to be brought back down to basics, slave, and, trust me, there is nothing more basic than feeling your Master's hard fist inside you. You'll learn a lot about yourself in the next couple of hours, Fox. You'll

learn that you have to trust your Master in order to survive, and you'll learn that there's no part of your body your Master doesn't own, and command, and no part of yourself that you can withhold from him. With this one act, we'll reaffirm those contracts we made. You will surrender yourself to me, and I will take from you any last illusion of your independence. I'll hold you literally in the palm of my hand. I want you to be still, and obedient, and open throughout, as we make a new bond between us. I'm not going to tie you, because you must submit, and endure of your own volition, to show your Master you deserve your collar back, and with it the rights you had before. All right, little one?" He pressed his lips against Mulder's mouth, and Mulder nodded, and opened his mouth gratefully to receive his Master's tongue.

"Now, you'll experience a great many new sensations as I do this. You might find it a little painful, but if you surf the pain, you'll also find it pleasurable as well. If you feel any particularly sharp pain, tell me. You must be completely honest with me. I won't cause you any injury. You're my slave – my treasured possession." Skinner illustrated this by bestowing another loving kiss on his slave's lips, and then he drew back.

"All right, prepare yourself to receive your Master, slave," he ordered. Mulder lay back on his pillows, and sank into them. He watched as Skinner put on a latex glove, and covered it with more lubricant, and then he closed his eyes, and waited. He felt Skinner push one slippery finger into his ass. One was easy. He barely noticed it. A second finger was worked in, and then a third. Skinner stroked, and rubbed, and stretched his slave's body and Mulder opened up, writhing as his Master unerringly found his prostate. To Mulder's surprise, Skinner didn't do any more than that. In fact, he played with Mulder's asshole for a long time, stretching, playing, relaxing his slave until Mulder was floating on a haze of bliss.

"All right, lift your hips a little. I'm going to put my whole hand in," Skinner said softly when his slave was fully relaxed. "Breathe, boy," Skinner ordered, and Mulder took a deep breath. He opened his eyes, and glanced down to see his Master insert his whole hand in his waiting hole. At first it wasn't so bad, but when the widest part of the hand was pushed in, his breath hitched, and he glanced at his Master for reassurance. Skinner smiled, and stroked his slave's thigh. "Relax. You can take this much. Relax," Skinner whispered. Mulder nodded, and swallowed, and the next minute Skinner pushed until he was in up to his wrist.

"Oh god!" Mulder breathed.

"Hush...that's fine...you're doing well."

"Hurts...please...shit..." Mulder hissed.

"Give it a minute," Skinner said. "Trust me." Skinner caressed his slave again with his free hand. Mulder could feel the bones of his Master's wrist where his ass was clamped around them. It did hurt...but as he grew used to it, he began to enjoy the sensation, and he found he no longer wanted his Master to remove his hand. Skinner waited until Mulder had calmed down, and Mulder slowly became used to the large intrusion. "All right – now the fun part," Skinner smiled. "I won't make you take much more depth, but I'm going to make you take the width as I ball my hand into a fist. Remember, boy, that you are a slave, and that you belong to your Master. Don't move so much as a muscle. I want you to just relax, and take my fist, and through the process come to fully understand what you are."

"Yes, Master," Mulder whispered, barely able to breathe. He felt Skinner's hand move inside him, and then the fingers closed slowly, oh so slowly. He could feel every single inch as his Master made a fist inside him, widening the walls of his rectum, and stretching him internally more than he would have thought possible. It was a curious sensation. He felt so ...full. Full of his Master. It was a good feeling, but strange. Skinner was talking to him but Mulder wasn't aware of anything except that fist inside his body, claiming him, reminding him that he was this man's slave, and subject to his whim, and will. His cock was now rock hard, and he was lying back, staring at the mirrored ceiling above. He could see his Master's wrist inserted in his own ass, and that was when he realized why Skinner had chosen this room.

"That's right," Skinner said, as if reading his mind. "I want you to watch yourself being fisted, boy. I want you to see the process...I want you to keep that image seared on your memory as proof of your Master's total control over your body. You belong to me, boy."

"Yes...Master," Mulder panted.

"All right, I'm going to move...hold still." Skinner slid his hand in a little way, making a smooth, controlled, and very slow punching motion and Mulder gave a hoarse shout.

"Good?" Skinner asked.

"Not sure...yes...no...yes!" Mulder cried.

"Again," Skinner insisted, as he moved his wrist back and then punched gently again.

Mulder moaned. Yes it was good, yes it hurt, but the image of himself, lying on his back, naked, ringed, and utterly submissive, his Master's fist inside him, went straight to his cock. Skinner took hold of the rigid member and ran his glistening, lubricated spare hand over it, in a motion that made Mulder moan and unconsciously grip his Master's wrist tighter. Skinner made a slight sound, so Mulder guessed that might have hurt. "You are my beautiful slave. Worthy of my love, and my attention," Skinner whispered. Mulder felt as if time had frozen. There was just him, and his Master, and his Master's hand deep inside his body. He could feel his Master's pulse in his wrist, beating in time with his own heart and it felt good. He could feel every single movement Skinner made with his hand, even down to the tiniest clench or ripple of muscle. He had never felt so completely owned in his life before, and what aroused him most was knowing he had offered himself up to this, given himself completely to this man, without reservation, and that he now belonged somewhere as he had never belonged before – his Master's balled fist inside him was proof of that. He closed his eyes, and abandoned himself to the sensation; his Master moved his fist in time to the pumps he gave his slave's hard cock, and it was an intoxicating rhythm. He wanted more, he wanted it harder, and faster, but Skinner was going slowly, firmly, inexorably, and it hurt, and was good, and blew Mulder's mind at one and the same time. He knew his Master intended him to come, and wouldn't stop until he did, but he wanted to prolong the intimacy of the moment as well. For Skinner was right – it was intimate. It was also very loving. As his Master sat there, bringing him to the brink of this sublime pleasure, their eyes met, and Mulder found he could not look away. Skinner didn't break eye contact as he kept on and on stroking, and punching and pumping, and they were linked that way for an eternity. Mulder felt as if the moment had almost mystical, or spiritual significance, as if there were a real, tangible thread linking him to his Master. He was drowning in his Master's dark brown eyes, could see himself reflected back in them, and his whole existence came

down to this moment, and this feeling of connection with his Master. Skinner moved his hand again, brushed Mulder's prostate, and slid his other hand along Mulder's cock, and Mulder knew that he was on the brink.

"I'm going to come, Master," he panted, and Skinner smiled, and nodded.

"Any time you want," he said, and a few seconds later Mulder gave in to the intensity of the sensations he was experiencing and orgasmed. He was aware of his ass contracting over and over again around his Master's wrist at the same time as he came, and he felt so good that he came again, and again. Finally, he lay back on the bed, completely exhausted and unable to move. "All right, little one. This can hurt a little so I'm going to go very slowly," Skinner murmured. He pulled back his wrist gently, opened his fist, and slid his hand carefully out of his slave's ass. Mulder was too far gone to even notice. He just lay there, watching the procedure on the mirrored ceiling with almost clinical detachment. He felt as if he had stepped outside time, and no longer belonged to the world. He was dimly aware that his Master was cleaning him up, and washing himself, and then Skinner was removing the towels from the bed, before tucking his slave beneath the sheets, and getting in beside him. He pulled Mulder close, for which the slave was grateful – he didn't have the energy to move anywhere himself. His ass felt incredibly stretched, and that worried him.

"Master...will I be able to give you enough pleasure when you use me if I'm this open?" He asked. Skinner smiled.

"There are a lot of myths about fisting. Your muscles will spring back – they've just been exercised. So, little one – was that good?"

"Yes, Master." There was silence for a moment. "Master..." Mulder lifted his head a fraction to gaze up at the other man. "I trust you with my life," he said softly.

"I know." Skinner stroked his slave's body.

"Will you brand me? Please?" Mulder asked, holding on tight to his Master's body. He felt suddenly vulnerable, and needy. Whereas in the past he would have reacted defensively to those emotions, and mouthed off at whoever was closest, now he just accepted them, and took the comfort he needed from his Master's solid flesh.

"Soon." Skinner kissed his slave's head.

"Very soon? I can't stand having his mark on my body and not yours, Master," Mulder said, suddenly able to talk on the subject that was hardest for him. The intimacy he had just experienced with his Master brooked no silences or secrets.

"Your scar still bothers you that much?" Skinner stroked his slave's scar gently.

"It always will. I feel better than I did, but it's always there," Mulder said honestly.

"Very well. I'll deal with that. Trust me, Fox."

"Always, Master. You will brand me then?" Mulder asked.

“Of course. You’re mine. A slave should bear his Master’s brand.” Skinner kissed his slave again.

“I want it now, but when it happens...I’ll be afraid.”

“I know. It’ll hurt – more than anything you’ve ever experienced.” Skinner’s arms tightened around his slave’s body. “I’ll be there though. Throughout. You’ll survive, and you’ll love it when it’s done. We’ll get you through the last minute nerves, even if you invent UFO cases in Antarctica the day before in order to try and get out of it.”

“You know me far too well, Master.” Mulder lay his face down on his Master’s chest, and played, idly, with one of his Master’s nipples.

“Oh yes. I do, Fox. I do,” Skinner whispered.

Mulder was very subdued the next day. He needed to be at his Master’s side the whole time, and couldn’t bear for the other man to be out of his sight for a second, even following his Master into the bathroom. Skinner seemed to understand that this was necessary, and while there was no sexual contact between them all day, he spent a good deal of time cuddling, and petting his slave, and generally reassuring him. Mulder felt as if he were in a dream. The fisting had profoundly affected him, and he felt closer to his Master than he had ever been. More than that, he was able to talk honestly, and easily, without embarrassment, about even those subjects he felt most ashamed of.

“I know I do things that piss people off,” he told Skinner, as he sat between the big man’s legs, both of them sprawled on a blanket on the beach, in the shade of a large sun umbrella. “I’m sure Scully thinks I’m a case of arrested development – that I’m still 12 years old inside. I feel guilty for the way I’ve treated her sometimes. I decided a long time ago that I couldn’t care what people thought. I learned that at school after Sam was taken. Kids are cruel – and Sam’s abduction made me different. I put up some defenses then that I never took down again, even with Scully – even with you to start with. I had to be independent, and strong, for Mom’s sake – and for my own. Inside, I sometimes longed to be weak, to give in...but I fought it. I couldn’t let anyone see the weakness.”

“I do understand that.” Skinner nudged his slave’s neck with his lips. “In some ways I had similar issues. You’re more explosive – when you can’t handle what’s going on inside, you lash out, and run off, and try and take on the world single-handedly in order to outdistance your demons. I went the other way. I internalized, and would go very quiet, and brooded. For what it’s worth, I think Scully has the utmost respect for you. She cares about you.”

“I care about her. In a different lifetime we would have been lovers, but it couldn’t have happened here, not with what I’m carrying around inside. I think you’re the only one who could deal with that, Master.”

“When you go back to work – will you carry any of this increased self awareness with you?” Skinner asked gently. “It’s not too late to behave differently with Scully.”

“I know. I feel as if I can now. When you’re not happy, when you need to keep defenses against even those closest to you...it can make you behave like a bastard at times. When you’re happy...when you’re at peace with yourself...” He trailed off, glanced up at his Master, and smiled. “Well, it’s easier,” he said.

“Yes. It is.” Skinner stroked his slave fondly.

“I promise that I’m going to try to toe the line more at work and not be such a pain in the ass. I’ll be the best agent you’ve ever had,” Mulder proclaimed.

Skinner laughed. “You already are, idiot,” he exclaimed. “I trust you’ll also continue to be single minded, occasionally obnoxious, undiplomatic, and brilliantly intuitive. I hope you’ll still piss off the top brass at the Bureau, local law enforcement officers, and, occasionally, your boss.” He gave a self-deprecating grimace. “The world needs its Fox Mulder, and as long as he’s always honest with his Master, and obedient, then I’d rather put up with the usual difficulties that come with being Fox Mulder’s supervisor, than have you lose that shining excellence you bring to everything you do.”

“Really?” Mulder couldn’t stop flushing at the praise. He might have believed he didn’t care what people thought of him and his work, but he did – especially when it was his Master.

“Really. You might end up with a sore ass when you get something wrong, but I don’t want you to stop being you for anything. I just want you to be a happier you.”

“I am. Thanks to my Master.” Mulder said, looking up into a pair of loving brown eyes.

“I’m looking forward to tomorrow.” Skinner caressed his slave thoughtfully, smiling at him.

“Have I earned my reward, Master?” Mulder asked. He hadn’t forgotten the promise Skinner had made him.

“Oh yes. You certainly have.” Skinner nodded.

“What is it?”

“Wait and see, slave. Wait and see.”

Mulder was on the edge of anticipation from the moment he woke up the following day, but Skinner refused to be rushed. He delivered his slave’s morning discipline with particular firmness, and sent his red-bottomed slave to stand in the corner for half an hour to calm down. Mulder had no idea what his treat would be, and he was like a kid just before Christmas, longing to find out what presents he was getting. At least it was a distraction from the knowledge that they would be going home the next day. Mulder didn’t want to go back. This vacation had soothed and healed him in ways he had never imagined possible, and he was closer to his Master than ever before. He understood what Elaine had meant now, when she said that he and his Master had needed this crisis to bring them closer together. Even if the pay off was the scar on his chest, he wasn’t sorry that it had all happened. He had lost something, but gained something of even greater value. It was a fair trade.

Skinner ordered his slave to do the laundry, and pack ready for the journey home the following day, and then allowed his slave a few hours on the beach. Late in the afternoon, he told Mulder to go to the medieval bedroom, and prepare massage oils, and lubricant, and then to wait, in the submissive position, for his Master. Mulder did as ordered, and prepared the room thoroughly, humming to himself

as he worked. He wondered what was going to happen next. Skinner had told him that it would be something he had never done before, and he got a tingle of anticipation as he considered what that might be. This vacation had been a time of many firsts, but after the penis whipping, and fisting, he had now come to the conclusion that there was nothing his Master could suggest that would freak him out again. He trusted the other man to know his limits, and to make each and every experience entirely what his slave needed.

Mulder knelt for half an hour, fully descending into the most serene of headspaces, completely devoted to being of use to his Master. He didn't even look up when he heard his Master's footstep on the stairs, and his hand on the door handle. Skinner came into the room, and stood before his slave.

"Boy, look at your Master," he instructed in a low tone. Mulder looked up. Skinner was wearing Murray's big, patterned sunflower robe. "I want you to serve me, slave," Skinner said softly. "I want you to show me that you can be controlled, obedient, and that you can take care of your Master's pleasure. Can you do that?"

"Yes, Master. I'll do my best," Mulder said, his throat dry.

"Very well. I want you to undress me, and massage me all over. Then I want you to serve me by making love to me." Mulder looked up in surprise.

"Making...I'm sorry, Master, I don't understand," Mulder stammered.

"I want to feel your cock inside me, serving me," Skinner told him, his dark eyes intense, and serious. Mulder swallowed hard. He had never given anal sex to anyone before, and the idea of serving his Master in this way made his cock harden, even as he felt himself starting to have performance anxieties.

"Remember this is a service," Skinner told him, placing a hand on Mulder's shoulder. "It's a way of pleasuring your Master, of allowing me to relax, and enjoy your attention. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Master," Mulder croaked. "But, Master...I've never..." he began.

"You've experienced it the other way around often enough, boy. You'll do fine," Skinner said, placing his finger under Mulder's chin and making him look up. "I'm still your Master, and you are still my slave. That doesn't change. I expect you to perform well, and serve me to the best of your abilities. I want to switch off, and be pampered. I want you to think about how you can please me. I don't expect to instruct you. This is your show, boy. Take care of me."

"Yes, Master." Mulder felt a thrill running through his body. He had dreamed of doing this but hadn't thought he would ever be allowed such an honor. He kissed his Master's feet in gratitude, and then got up, and carefully, with great deference, removed his Master's robe. He guided Skinner to the bed, and helped him lie down.

"On your back, Master. I want to massage you all over," Mulder said deferentially.

Skinner lay down with a sigh, and Mulder mixed some oils, sat astride his Master, and began massaging him. Skinner closed his eyes and his whole body began to relax under his slave's ministrations. Mulder was surprised to find how stiff his Master's muscles were, and how much work he had to do to relax

them. He realized, with a degree of shame, that the past few weeks had taken their toll on his Master. It had been tough for both of them, but Skinner, with his calm, controlled façade, always seemed to be dealing with everything better than his slave. Mulder was just beginning to understand that this was an illusion; Skinner had his vulnerabilities as well, and Mulder didn't want to be the cause for his Master needing another session with Elaine. As he worked on his Master's smooth, honeyed flesh, he realized that he was in the precise thing he had avoided all his life: a relationship. For a long time he had been telling himself he didn't care, because it hurt so much to care about other people, and to risk rejection, or loss, as he had lost his sister, and been rejected by his father, and Phoebe. Skinner was giving him a new start, and Mulder wasn't someone who did anything by halves. He was in a relationship, and he'd be in it all the way. Skinner had tamed him. He had taken in a wild, uncontrolled, spitting Fox, and trained him with love, and care, and attention. Mulder didn't want to go back to the way he had been before. He wanted to bask in his Master's love forever – and he knew that carried responsibilities. As Skinner cared for, and took care of him, so he would do the same for his Master. Mulder found a deeply knotted muscle in his Master's arm, and pressed down hard to release the fluid. Skinner gave a low groan of pain. Mulder persisted with the searching massage, despite his Master's grunts of discomfort. He saw in this a metaphor for what Skinner had done for him – keeping up the pressure, even when it hurt, until the pain was gone. Theirs was no longer an unequal relationship. Mulder was determined to put back in what he had taken out – with interest.

Mulder took his time over the massage, and finally turned his Master onto his front, and surveyed the sight of the other man's beautiful, taut, round buttocks with a sigh. Skinner did have the most magnificent ass. He poured more oil on his fingers, and smoothed them all over his Master's back, taking great care to release the tension in his Master's stiff neck. Finally, he allowed himself to contemplate the treat that was Skinner's glorious ass. His cock was rock hard at the thought of worshipping his Master by entering the other man's body, but he took some time playing with that beautiful bottom first. It was so rare that he was given permission to just play with his Master's body, that he made the most of it, cupping those ass cheeks, and kissing each one over and over again, working them apart, and sliding a finger inside. Skinner made a small noise in the back of his throat, and opened his legs wider to facilitate Mulder's questing fingers. Mulder entered another oiled finger, and found his Master open, and ready for him. He withdrew his fingers, and replaced them with his tongue. Skinner gave a low moan of sheer sexual pleasure, and thus encouraged, Mulder rimmed the other man for a long time, thoroughly enjoying himself. Mulder had given some thought to how he wanted to serve his Master, and as his own favorite position was lying on his back so that he could look into the eyes of the man thrusting into him, he decided that was what he wanted to do for his Master. That would also give him access to the other man's cock so that he could bring him off. So, finally finishing with the rimming, he gently guided Skinner onto his back once more.

"Is Master comfortable? Does he require more pillows?" Mulder asked.

"No, I'm fine," Skinner said, his entire body laid out like a feast in front of his slave, his cock lying large, and lazy, over his thighs. Mulder nodded, and poured some more oil into his palms. He was almost shaking with desire for the man in front of him, as he took his own cock in his hands, and massaged it firmly into a full erection. He took some pride in the job, and looked at his Master all the time he was anointing himself, seeing Skinner's arousal in his dark eyes. When he felt ready, he slipped his oily fingers into his Master's ass once more and made sure it was fully lubricated.

"I'm going to take good care of you, Master," he whispered.

Skinner smiled, never breaking eye contact. Mulder withdrew his fingers, and nudged his hard cock against the entrance to his Master's ass. He guided Skinner's legs onto his shoulders, and paused for a moment, staring down at the beautiful man he was making love to. Skinner wasn't just his Master; he was also his friend, and his lover, and he was giving himself to his slave in a gesture of trust that Mulder felt so proud to be granted he could have wept. He pressed against his Master's anus, and was surprised how easily he slipped inside. It was like coming home. It was where he belonged. It was so warm, and welcoming, so tight around his hard cock that it took all his control not to come there and then. He took a deep breath, and reached out to take his Master's hand in his own, squeezing tight. Then Mulder grasped his Master's buttocks in both his hands, and slid back, and then forward again with an easy thrust. His Master's eyes widened, his pupils dilated with pleasure, and his cock hardened. Mulder felt a heady sense of power; he was bringing his Master this pleasure. It was **he** who was making Skinner hard, he who was filling his Master's ass, and making this big man whimper, and sigh, and cry out in ecstasy. It was the best feeling in the world, and he could feel himself floating on a haze of pleasure. No wonder Skinner so enjoyed using his slave's ass, and bringing him this same pleasure. It was wonderful. He got into a steady rhythm, looking into his Master's eyes as he thrust back and forth, and Skinner's mouth opened, and he was lost in the pleasure that Mulder's deft strokes brought to him. Mulder took his Master's cock in his hand, and as he slid forward with each thrust, he pumped the hard, solid penis until it seemed to Mulder that they had become one. They were no longer Mulder and Skinner, slave and Master, but had become two complementary sides of the same coin. It was fitting that they should come together, in an explosion of satisfaction, and as he came, Mulder heard his Master bellowing with sheer pleasure. His heart surged with pride. **He** had brought his Master to the heights of such sexual ecstasy. It was a good feeling. He collapsed, exhausted, on top of his Master, and lay there for a while, panting, and listening to Skinner's heartbeat. Then, mindful of his station, he carefully withdrew, and cleaned himself, and his Master, before kneeling beside the bed.

"Is there any other way I can serve you, Master?" he asked, eyes down, heart still pounding after the exertion, and joy of serving Skinner in this way.

"Yes, you can join me in the bed. I want you to hold me," Skinner ordered, and Mulder scrambled eagerly onto the bed and took his Master in his arms. It felt good to be holding this solid flesh, and he kissed the back of his Master's smooth scalp, and held him tight, sighing contently.

"Did I please you, Master?" he whispered.

"Oh yes. Very much," Skinner murmured hazily, still clearly lost on the sexual high.

Mulder laughed. Tomorrow they would return home, and life would crowd back in as he did his best to win back his collar, but these two weeks had shown him something he had never understood before; that his Master trusted him as much as he trusted his Master. They **were** equals. Each had needs, and looked to the other to fill those needs. There was no weakness in their cravings or desires, and no shame. They belonged together, in the same way that their bodies fitted so perfectly inside each other.

"Thank you for allowing me to serve you in this way, Master." Mulder slid his hands over his Master's body proprietarily. "I've just realized, Master," he whispered, wrapping his legs around Skinner's body, as if he wanted them to become one flesh. "I belong to you, without question or dispute, but you...you also belong to me."

He wondered if he had gone too far until Skinner convulsed against him in a rare fit of mirth. He turned in Mulder's arms, so that they were face-to-face, legs still entwined, sated cocks rubbing limply together.

"Oh, Fox," he laughed, running his hands over Mulder's face, smiling. "Have you only just figured that out?"

## End of Part 21

### Chapter End Notes:

We're in the final countdown to the end of this series now, with only a few chapters left to be written. The boys have had their nice vacation, Mulder is finally figuring out the slave thing... and there are three very large juggernauts waiting just around the corner to knock both slave and Master down.

The poem in this chapter was ***Magic*** by the gay poet Gavin Dillard, sent to me by Sergeeva. Never let it be said that **24/7** isn't educational.

Lovely pic below entitled ***Morning after Coffee*** by **Sean Spencer** - I thought the relaxed look in this pic was appropriate for the 'serial killer' scene in this installment.

Gaby sent me the pic below - it looks just like staked! Mulder from this chapter.

## The Collaring by Xanthe

### **Author's Notes:**

Perfect pic made especially for this chapter by **CDavis**.

Posted 5th December, 2000

I'm delighted that **24/7** has made the final nominations for best Mulder Slash Story in the 2000 **Spooky** awards, along with some of my other stories in other categories. Final voting now open.

Quotation courtesy of my sweet Alex. Standing thanks to Emma. None of this is beta'd. It's far too much fun to take seriously.

Many thanks to Phoebe and Gaby for their help and to Becky for her detailed medical information and suggestions. Special big thanks and hugs to Ann, Emma, Penny, Sals, and Sharon for an inspiring visit to Amsterdam that fuelled so many more **24/7** fantasies, and for the long discussions of the story over dinner! To the thieves who stole my purse and Sharon's bag – may the wrath of Master Skinner descend on you.

**NOTES:** Needless to say, the events of *SR819*, *Closure*, and *Requiem* never happened in the **24/7** universe. After all, who would do Skinner's laundry if Mulder were abducted by aliens? And what aliens would **dare** to steal the Guardian's slave from under his very nose? Nope, it just couldn't happen. However, that doesn't stop me having a little bit of fun with a certain new character in this chapter...

**WARNING:** This is a poetry free chapter.

**24/7** is an erotic fantasy and NOT a BDSM resource guide. The truth is sometimes exaggerated, or played with, for dramatic effect. For more information, please visit the **24/7 BDSM Glossary**.

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This chapter is dedicated to DiAnn who was very worried about what I'd do with Mulder's scar.

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*"A truth, still apparent, though disregarded, that things move violently to their place, but calmly in their place. To put it another way, everything has its right home, the region that suits it, and, unless*

*forcibly restrained, will move thither by a kind of  
homing instinct."*

**J. Winterson**  
**"Art and Lies"**

Home.

When had this become his home, so completely, and categorically? When had he stopped thinking of Hegal Place as his home? When had he finally let go of the sterility and emptiness of his own apartment, and started thinking of this place as where he belonged? This place, with its familiar smells, and sounds, and occupants; this place, containing this man, and this cat had become his home by stealth, creeping through the defenses he had constructed so carefully around his heart. These two beings, by dint of seduction, determination, and sheer persistence had come to symbolize everything he had never had in his life, and had tried so hard to convince himself he had never wanted.>

Home.

"Fox?" His Master was looking at him, a quizzical expression in his dark eyes.

"We're home," Mulder said simply.

"Yeah. We are." Skinner put the cat basket on the table, and opened it, and Wanda hopped out happily, her eyes bright. She jumped off the table and scampered around happily, ran crazily up and down the stairs, and then chased her own tail for a few minutes before pretending that she had done nothing so undignified and kittenish by stalking off to the kitchen for a snack, tail held loftily in the air.

"She's pleased to be home too," Mulder murmured, still standing, unmoving, in the center of the room.

"Yeah. You know, it's good to go away, but it's always damn good to come home again, isn't it?" Skinner grinned.

"Yes, Master. It's the best feeling in the whole world." Mulder grinned a goofy grin, and then, like Wanda, felt a need to touch base with his home. He ran up the stairs two at a time, opened the door to every room, glanced inside, and then ran along to the next room. He opened the door between the two apartments and ran up to the 18th floor, checked the lounge, then paused outside his own small room, and gazed in nostalgically. A shocked thought occurred to him, and he hurried over to his fish and checked the tank.

"It's okay – I gave Mrs. Asher a key. She fed your fish while we were away," a voice behind him said. Skinner came into the room and placed a hand on his slave's shoulder.

"Thanks. I can't believe I forgot. I'm usually pretty careful about them," Mulder frowned.

"You had a lot to think about. You still do," Skinner said, in a slightly weary tone. Mulder glanced around.

"Master?" He watched as Skinner closed the door, sat on the bed, and then clicked his fingers for his slave to kneel beside him. Mulder did as commanded without hesitation.

"We talked about you sharing my bed. It's a big step, Fox, and I need to make sure that you're ready for it."

"Ready for it?" Mulder snorted. "Master, with all due respect, sleeping in your bed has pretty much been my main fantasy and ultimate goal ever since you first took me as your slave."

"A fantasy, yes. Reality is something different. While you were sleeping here, alone, you weren't freaked by your loss of independence. You could even convince yourself that you weren't in a relationship, and that you could leave any time you wanted. We both know that you want to run whenever the walls look like they're closing in. I will not, and I repeat, **not** tolerate another Seattle," Skinner said, in a tone that was so serious his slave looked up in surprise.

"There won't be another Seattle, Master," he replied softly. He placed a hand on his Master's knee to emphasize the point, looking into the other man's eyes to try and convey his sincerity. "Shit, I've learned such a lot from you over the past 7 months. I'm not going back." He glanced around the small room that had been his for all these months. "I thought you didn't want me sleeping in your bed," he murmured. "I thought I was too much to have around the whole time – that you needed a break from me – but it wasn't that at all, was it? Not even at the very beginning?"

"No. Ours was an unusual situation, Fox. You threw yourself into that contract knowing nothing about your new master. Even when you found out it was me you didn't know anything about me – not really. Oh, you knew your boss – you knew me in a working environment, but this was a very different situation. I needed to give both of us some time to get used to the arrangement, but I also knew that you needed some space to sort out what was going on inside. Crowding you out would have turned that non-stop, whirring mind of yours into a pressure cooker and you'd have imploded. As it was, maybe I didn't stick close enough, and give you enough guidance. Maybe that's why this happened." Skinner ran his finger over Mulder's tee shirt, tracing the outline of the scar beneath it.

"Maybe it needed to happen," Mulder replied. "For me to be able to move on."

"Maybe." Skinner shrugged. "But for me, it's testament to my failure as a Master."

"What?" Mulder gazed at the other man open-mouthed. "Christ, Walter, that's absurd. I was the one who held the gun to your head and knocked you out cold, and I was the one who ran off to that warehouse.

"You were quietly freaking out and I was too busy at work to notice. I took you on – I don't have any excuse not to see when you're in crisis." Skinner shrugged. "Fox, being your Master carries a great weight of responsibility. I do things to you that could be considered abusive, and I've modified your behavior. I can only justify that if it's what we both want, and if it's what you need to make you happy. If that isn't the case then our contracts are meaningless."

"I am happy." Mulder blinked back his tears angrily. He had never found it easy to talk about his emotions without deflecting the subject, or making smart-ass comments. "Walter, I've never been happier. I admit that it was hard at first. It still is sometimes, but it was harder being alone, and it was a damn sight harder being so..." he clenched his fists. "So fucking mixed up - defensive, hostile, and paranoid. I feel kind of free inside in a way I can't explain. I don't wake up thinking "fuck" every morning like I used to, and I think I might even care whether I live or die. At least I have something to live for now." He gazed at the other man desperately, needing to convince him. He knew that Skinner carried a burden of unspoken thoughts and emotions, but he hadn't realized the depths of the other man's self-reproach – hadn't even vaguely considered it. He was the one who had screwed up, not his Master.

"All right. That's a good basis for where we go next then." Skinner smiled, and Mulder suddenly felt able to breathe again. "You can move what you need into my room – but remember I'll terminate this arrangement, either temporarily or permanently, if I see fit. It isn't a right. It's a privilege."

"Yes, Master." Mulder nodded eagerly, and began to get up. Skinner frowned, and clicked his fingers again.

"I told you before but I want you to be very clear on this – getting your collar back will take some hard work on your part. I need to be convinced before I'll let you have the same amount of freedom you had before Seattle."

"I know that." Mulder nodded. "I won't let you down."

"Good." Skinner nodded. "Don't get me wrong, that vacation we just took was nice – very nice – and I think we had more than one breakthrough while we were there, but the hard part is everyday life. This is where you're under the most strain, and this is where you've struggled before."

"I know. I feel differently now though." Mulder didn't know how to convey just **how** differently he felt now. He was changed in a deep and profound way, and he would never go back to how he had been before. When he thought of himself fighting his Master at every turn, trying to play him as if in a game, deceiving him without hesitation, digging around in the other man's past without a second thought...it made him deeply ashamed. He **had** changed. Apart from anything else he was more in love than he had ever believed possible before – and the truly astonishing thing was that he wasn't afraid to say it.

"Very well." Skinner nodded, thoughtfully, and then exhaled a deep breath. "Let me tell you how it's going to be then, slave. First off – you can abandon your morning fitness regime. The wake-up call stays though." He gave an ever so slightly salacious smile that made Mulder chuckle.

"I'm pleased to hear it, Master," he grinned.

"Instead of a morning swim you'll work out with me in the evening. You can use it as an opportunity to keep me informed about what's going on in that labyrinthine mind of yours."

"Yes, Master." Mulder nodded. That didn't sound too onerous.

"Secondly, you're still under restriction. Don't take **anything** for granted. If you're unsure – ask." Mulder nodded. He had expected that.

"Thirdly – I'm aware that you haven't had a chance to have a proper talk to Agent Scully since the events at Seattle overtook us all. Redress that, slave – immediately - upon your return to work. Agent Scully is a damn fine agent and she's been a good friend to you. I know you've spoken to her a few times on the phone, but I'm sure she has a lot of questions she'd like answered in person. I know you're a private kind of man, and I know that won't be easy for you, but I think she deserves as honest and complete an explanation as you can give her. Understood?"

Mulder took a deep breath, wondering if Skinner had any idea how hard it was facing down his partner's icy blue gaze. He nodded anyway. It wasn't a choice; it was an order. And, as Skinner had so rightly pointed out, he had given up any rights he might have had to argue over such an order. His Master was right anyway - Mulder had missed Scully over the past few weeks, and he was looking forward to seeing her again, and working with her, side by side. He had dropped his bombshell about his relationship with Skinner and then just left her hanging. She deserved more than that.

"Good. Then I think it's time for you to do the unpacking, and sort out what to send to the laundry. Let's get moving, slave." He stood up.

"Um...there's something else." Mulder took a deep breath and fought a battle with himself about what he wanted to say next.

"Honesty, slave," Skinner reminded him.

Mulder swallowed hard. "About Seattle. You didn't punish me for my actions there, Master," he whispered. Skinner was silent. He stood, towering over his kneeling slave, gazing at him impassively. Finally, just when Mulder's nerve had almost deserted him, his Master spoke.

"I took away your rings and privileges, slave," he pointed out.

"I know, but I was too ill for you to punish me the way a Master should punish his slave." Mulder took all his courage in his hands, and looked up. His breath caught in his throat. Skinner was gazing at him with the most solemn expression in his dark eyes.

"Closure," Skinner murmured, reaching down to tousle his slave's hair. "You need that to believe we can move on, and to know that you're forgiven. Yes?"

Mulder bit down on his lip. "I don't want to be punished, but we both know I deserve it. I love the discipline my Master is so often pleased to hand out, but we both know this wouldn't be like that. We both know that would be a pleasure, and this should be..." Mulder bit on his lip again.

"A punishment." Skinner finished for him. He raised Mulder's chin with his finger. "I told you that I'd discipline you on your Collaring Day – in front of witnesses, slave. You know I always keep my promises."

"Yes, I do know, and I'll accept any discipline my Master chooses to bestow." Mulder moved his face and kissed his Master's shoes.

"I think you'll find your closure there," Skinner murmured softly. "Let me explain it to you, slave. The witnesses to your punishment will be those of our scene friends we choose to celebrate the day with – and those who have suffered, either directly or indirectly, as a result of your actions in Seattle." He

paused, and Mulder winced at that comment. "I will leave it up to you to draw up the guest list of those you feel were affected by your actions," Skinner said. "I will allow our guests to choose an implement each – and the number of strokes you will receive with it, commensurate with the inconvenience and worry that each of our friends experienced." Mulder swallowed hard. This was all a lot more interactive than he'd expected, and he felt a red hot glow of humiliation at the thought of it. "I will also take my turn choosing an implement and deciding on a number of strokes," Skinner finished.

Mulder nodded – he had expected no less. "You suffered the most as a result of my stupidity," he said numbly. "I betrayed your trust, I lied to you, and I knocked you out. I almost lost you your career. Assuming you choose to grant me my collar again, I will expect the punishment I receive from you to be..." He raised his head to meet his Master's eyes, took some comfort from the uncompromising expression in them, and then continued, without faltering. "I expect it to be severe, Master. I'm not looking for leniency. I'm fit. I can take whatever you want to hand out."

"Good." Skinner nodded. "I'll bear that in mind. However you're wrong. I didn't suffer most as a result of your actions in Seattle. There is one person who suffered more. He will choose an implement and a number of strokes as well."

"Who?" Mulder frowned. "Perry?" The genial doctor had been dragged into Mulder's dramas, but Mulder couldn't see there was any way that Perry had suffered more than his own Master.

"No. You," Skinner said softly. "Give the matter some thought, slave. I'll expect you to choose an implement and a number of strokes proportionate to the suffering you underwent."

"Master?" Mulder felt a cold hand grasp his heart. He wasn't sure he could bear to be in charge of his own punishment in this way, and that, he supposed, was the point.

"It's not a choice, slave - it's an order. I will give our guests the opportunity to order your punishment, and then you will take your turn. I will go last."

"Will you...?" Mulder had a sudden thought that made him tremble.

"Slave." Skinner stroked his slave's shoulder reassuringly.

"Will you let our guests actually administer the punishment, Master?" He asked. The hand on his shoulder squeezed so hard that it shocked him into glancing up. Skinner looked...pissed off.

"Nobody except me will **ever, ever** lay a finger on you. Understood?" Skinner asked gruffly, as if the very idea offended him. "Nobody will punish you, and nobody will hurt you. Nobody will touch you either – nobody will kiss you, and sure as hell nobody but me will **ever** make love to you. Is that clear, slave?"

Mulder rocked back on his heels, surprised by the vehemence of this reaction.

"Sorry, sweetheart." Skinner stroked his slave's hair, his expression softening. "But that question took me by surprise. You know, Fox, I don't think you really have any idea how it feels being your Master – or why I was so attracted to the job in the first place." He gave a wolfish grin and Mulder stared at the other man, fascinated. "I'm a little possessive. I'll admit that." Skinner's jaw gave a familiar, sideways clench. "I signed that contract because I enjoy having control over your body, slave. I like making you

scream, and squirm, and I like making you come. I also like having the power to deny you that pleasure as well." The corner of his mouth turned up in a slight quirk. "You're mine, boy. I don't know how many times I have to tell you that before you finally understand exactly what I mean. You're available for my exclusive use. Your body is mine to cherish, to love, to hurt – in short to do what the hell I like with." Mulder closed his eyes, feeling his cock hardening in his pants. His Master's words were as much of a turn on as the most intimate and arousing caresses. "That's why Seattle was such a profound breach of trust," Skinner said, ruining the mood abruptly. "I could understand the curiosity that led you to investigate my past a few months back. I could even understand the numerous little lies and deceptions, and the problems that you've had with honesty since I took you on. Adjusting to slavery isn't easy after all; I understand just how hard it can be, and I've made allowances for that. However, what happened between us in Seattle struck at the core of what we are. You disobeyed me, yes, but more than that, you raised your hand against me in violence. I have never done that to you, and I never will. Ever. You have my promise on that. Whatever punishments I bestow on you, or however I choose to take you to a sexual high, my methods will always be considered, and always have your safety and well-being in mind. I will never, **ever** harm you, and you need never live in fear of that."

Mulder felt as if he had been punched in the gut. He had never realized, until this moment, just how close he had come to losing this man he had come to love so much.

"Forgive me," he whispered in a choked tone. "I didn't understand. I don't think I ever really understood the way you were feeling, Master. I was too caught up in my own problems. Master, you often talk of how I must be honest about how I feel, but there's so much I don't know about how you feel...I would like the same honesty of you that you rightly demand of me," he said, surprising himself.

"Can you handle that?" Skinner asked. Mulder nodded. Even if it was bad, he could take it. He just had. Skinner smiled, and Mulder thought it looked as if the other man had been relieved of a burden. His shoulders looked looser, and his face younger, his eyes less shadowed. "All right, let me tell you one thing - it might explain the way I just reacted to your question about discipline," Skinner said softly. "When I was out searching for you in Seattle, I was sick with anxiety. I was worried about your safety, and your well-being, but I was also furious - with you for leaving, and with Krycek for having you in his power. I didn't know what he was doing to you, and I'm grateful, in a way, that his interest didn't extend to more than what he did, bad though that was. Knowing my slave was in trouble and not being able to find him, or help him, ate away at me. The thought of another man - that man in particular - laying his filthy paws on **my** slave still upsets me."

Mulder gazed at his Master, silently processing this information. Skinner was so cool, and kept his emotions under such perfect control, that he had never fully appreciated the depths of the other man's feelings. He knew Skinner loved him, but he had never understood the complex nature of that love before. He had never felt drawn to the role of top, had never even thought about what those who were drawn to it got out of it, but now he felt a curiosity on the subject.

"Walter, when I ran off to see Krycek I don't think I ever appreciated how fundamentally that act was a betrayal of what we have. I didn't even consider it. You're sick of hearing my apologies, and they don't change anything, but I'm coming to understand both myself, and you, and the depth of the Master/slave bond between us, a lot better. I've often wondered about the appeal of being the one in charge," Mulder said hesitantly. "The one in control. I've always been so controlling of my own emotions – I used to take them home with me and stew with them until I had them beaten into some kind of submission,

even if it meant cruising around the scene for a top to take me to a level where I could transcend them. I liked hearing what the appeal is for you in ownership.”

Skinner stood up, a wry smile tugging at his lips. Somehow Mulder had the feeling that they had just experienced another profound breakthrough.

“We’ll have to see if I can educate you a little in the joys of topping then,” Skinner commented. “God help me in **that** endeavor. In the meantime, you’re overdressed, boy.”

“Yes, Master.” Mulder removed his jeans and tee shirt with considerable speed, and then knelt, naked, at his Master’s feet.

“First the laundry – make sure we both have clean suits for work tomorrow. Remember I always expect to see you looking your best. While you’re doing that I’ll make some room for your clothing in the closet in my room. You can keep some basics in there but the rest can remain in here. You can come and get what you need, when you need it. As for the fish...I think they should move into the lounge where we can both enjoy them.”

“Wanda will **so** be in heaven,” Mulder murmured. Skinner grinned.

“Cat TV was how I think you described it once. Yup, she’ll have many a happy day spent watching them, but the tank’s secure, so they’re quite safe. One more thing, slave.” Skinner caught Mulder as he passed, and, placing one leg on the desk in the small room, swung Mulder over his thigh and delivered several hard, stinging swats to his backside.

“Ow! Shit! What the hell was that for?” Mulder asked, as he was placed back on his feet. Skinner grinned, and leaned forward to claim a kiss from his slave’s outraged lips.

“Because I felt like it, and because that ass of yours looks best when it’s glowing a healthy red. Now get a move on. Daylight’s burning, slave.”

Mulder went about his tasks with all the serenity of a well-spanked slaveboy who was sure of his place in his Master’s affections. He was more eager to go to bed than he’d ever been in his life, and was tingling with anticipation at the thought of going back to work the next day. He had missed his work. He had been driven by it and defined by it for so long that it had been hard discovering that there were other sides of his personality that he had repressed for too long. Now, he just hoped that he could combine the two more successfully than he’d done in the past. He also hoped he could sleep with all this churning around in his mind. The last thing he wanted was to be kicked out of his Master’s bed for fidgeting.

Mulder slid into the bed, waiting for his Master to emerge from the en suite bathroom, laughing at himself for feeling just like a virgin bride on her wedding night, awaiting her husband. Skinner emerged, naked, gazed at his slave, and raised an eyebrow.>

“You’re in the wrong place, slave,” he commented.

“Master?”

"You will kneel by the bed every night and **ask** for the honor of sharing your Master's bed. That way you should keep in mind that this privilege might not always be granted," Skinner said. Mulder scrambled out quickly, berating himself for not having thought of that. It seemed pretty obvious now that Skinner had said it. He knelt beside the bed in the submissive position and then watched as the other man got into the bed, and crooned for Wanda. The little cat jumped up a few seconds later and positioned herself beside the big man.

"Now, slave. What do you have to ask?" Skinner glanced at Mulder dismissively.

"Please can I share your bed tonight, Master?"

There was silence, as Skinner mused on the issue. Mulder looked at his Master through narrowed eyes. He was being played with...but on the other hand, it was pretty hot. His cock certainly thought so. The whole bed-time ritual could get to be quite a turn on. Finally, Skinner came to a decision.

"Yes," he said, and Mulder began to scramble into the bed. "But not there," Skinner added.

"What?" Mulder asked, aghast.

"I never said you could sleep beside me. On this first occasion you can sleep down the bottom of the bed. My feet are cold so I'll warm them up on your body."

"Master is...too kind," Mulder said with calculated insolence.

"And Master can find ways of warming up smart-ass slaves too," Skinner responded with a pleasant smile. "Your punishment case is in the closet. Would you like me to order you to bring it over?"

Mulder thought about it for a moment, and then sighed. "No, Master."

"Then be grateful for what you're given."

"Yes, Master." Mulder slipped down to the bottom of the bed, and tried to arrange himself by the footboard. It wasn't comfortable – the bed wasn't wide enough for a start, and his feet dangled over the edge.

"Here." Something big and soft landed on his face. "I'm not such an unkind Master that I'd make you sleep without a pillow," Skinner said. Mulder was thankful that the pillow in question swallowed up his none-too-polite reply. He watched as Skinner turned over and lifted the sheets, and Wanda snuck down next to his Master's chest and snuggled up there.

"She gets to sleep with you but I don't?" He could help asking.

"You **are** sleeping with me – just not where you expected to be. One more thing, boy - I like to get a good night's sleep. If I'm kept awake answering the questions of a disgruntled slave then I might decide to give him a thorough strapping and send him to stand facing the wall for the rest of the night. Do I make myself clear?"

"Yes, Master." Mulder grabbed his pillow, and arched his body around it, pretending it was his Master. A few seconds later he almost yelped out loud as two very cold feet came to rest on his stomach.

"Problem, slave?" Skinner asked.

"None, Master," Mulder replied. "In fact...your feet are cold, Master. Let me warm them." He wrapped his hands around Skinner's feet, one at a time, massaged them lightly, and then took each toe into his mouth, sucking gently, until both feet were thoroughly warmed.

"Thank you, slave," Skinner muttered, and Mulder grinned to himself in the dark. He was learning.

He waited until his Master's breathing deepened, signaling that the big man was asleep, and then very cautiously slid up under the sheets, located Wanda's tail, and gave it a slight tug. She turned her head towards him, her ears flicking.

"All right, Madam. Can I just remind you while I may only be the slave **you** are just the cat. Okay?" He whispered. Her green eyes fixed him with a look of total indifference. "It was just a truce," he hissed. "While I was ill. And anyway you were doing that whole cute cat routine to try and get round me. Now that things are getting back to normal I want you to know that he's definitely mine." She purred at him, clearly having decided to indulge the deranged and deluded slave boy. Mulder started to crawl back down to his position at the bottom of the bed, stopped, and turned, half-way there. "And another thing. He only took you to the beach because he thought I wanted you with us," he told her. "So there." She blinked owlily, and he had the distinct impression that she was laughing at him. "Just so you know," he finished, ending up back at his pillow. "Shit, and he thinks **he's** possessive," Mulder lamented to himself under his breath, closing his eyes and falling easily towards sleep. It might have been his imagination but just before he dropped off he was sure he heard someone give an amused snort.

"You can't go in yet." Mulder stopped Scully outside his office. He had got into work early, striding side by side to the Metro with Skinner, enjoying the frisson of knowing he was his Master's slave beneath this starched white shirt, tie, and neatly pressed suit. He had bought Skinner a bagel and coffee, and carried his Master's paper. Life didn't get any better. They had split up at the elevator in the Hoover building, as Skinner ascended to his lair, while Mulder descended to his. Mulder had only allowed himself one look of regret at his Master's broad back as it disappeared into the elevator before running eagerly down to the basement. His beloved X Files were all still there, in their filing cabinets. He had spent an hour dealing with his bulging in-tray and making the room ready for his partner's arrival, and for the past ten minutes had stood outside the door, waiting for her. His heart had beat a little faster when he heard the unmistakable sound of her little kitten heels clicking and clacking up the corridor. He had no idea what she thought of him since his revelation in Seattle. It had only been 5 weeks ago, but it could have been a lifetime. He had seen her so little since, and although they had spoken on the phone they had both kept the conversation away from the huge bombshell that was Mulder's sexuality. He dreaded seeing some kind of contempt in her eyes, but instead she just looked confused – and, he thought, pleased to see him too. He hoped so.

"Mulder!" She exclaimed, enveloping him in a brief hug and then pushing him back to get a better look at him. "My god, you look fantastic. Is that a **tan** I see before me? An actual real life tan on our basement dwelling Mulder?"

"Yup. I'm now officially a sun worshipper. I've been seduced over to the dark side of the sun, sea and sand," he proclaimed mournfully. "No!" He reached out as Scully began to push the door open. "Not yet!"

"I can't go in?" She asked, clearly startled. "Why? Is there some problem, Mulder?"

"No problem. You just have to be prepared." He grinned, and pulled out one of Skinner's huge, clean white handkerchiefs from his pocket.

"For what? Some kind of giant, mutated flu virus?" She asked, gazing pointedly at the handkerchief.

"Nope. I'm going to blindfold you." He grinned, standing behind her, and wrapping the handkerchief around her eyes.

"Mulder, could I just point out before things go any further that blindfolds are your lifestyle choice and not mine," she said, in a not entirely serious tone of voice. Mulder laughed out loud. Her joking comment had broken the ice between them, and showed him that at least she didn't despise him for his preferences – it also got that particular awkward subject out in the open.

"Okay, Scully. I'm opening the door. Here we go." He took hold of her hand, and led her into the office, walked her a few paces to the right, and then, with a loud "Da – nah!" he whipped off the blindfold.

"And I'm seeing what?" Scully looked around, bemused.

"The desk." Mulder pointed. "Okay, it's just one of the tables I was using to dump stuff on, and it's the desk you usually requisition when you're down here so it isn't exactly anything special, but I've ordered you your very **own** desk from supplies – it'll take a few days to arrive but it's on its way. And, look." He pointed to the nameplate, with **Dana Scully** written on it in gold lettering. "I had that done a while back but I kept forgetting to give it to you, and, uh, I was probably not sure about...well, you know, this has always been **my** office and I'm not very good at sharing my territory."

"Who are you and what have you done with my partner?" Scully teased, running a perfectly manicured finger over the nameplate. Mulder laughed again, self-consciously, and wrapped his arms around his body, hugging himself.

"Well, you know it's been almost seven years. I kind of figured you'd proved your worth," he grinned. "Um, there's something else. Look, I know that you and I need to talk. I want to say sorry for screwing things up so badly in Seattle, and thanks for sticking by me recently. I'll...uh, answer any questions you have, even though I would, obviously, prefer to be locked in a sewer with a very large and angry flukeman than talk about my sex life."

Scully laughed, and fingered the desk.

"Open the drawer," he urged, and she looked at him in surprise, and then did as he had instructed, finding a little box inside.

"For me? Since when did you buy me gifts?" She asked.

"Since I got my life more figured out, and started appreciating the people who've always been there for me," he told her sincerely. She gave him a blinding smile that made him aware that he'd just done something very good. She opened the box, gasped, and then drew out a sparkling sapphire pendant, on a long, slender chain.

"It's white gold, not silver," he said, anxiously, watching her expression. "I got it on vacation. Do you like it? Is it okay?"

"It's beautiful." She ran it through her fingers, and then looked up at him. "Skinner chose it didn't he?" She guessed. Mulder made a face, and held his hands up.

"Okay, I surrender. You got me. He did. I chose something different, but he thought you'd like this one better. We still, uh, bought the other one, so you can have a choice depending on your mood. They both fit on the same chain." He reached into his pocket and pulled out a small pendant wrapped in tissue paper and handed it to her. She unwrapped it, and then laughed out loud; inside the tissue paper was a small, gray alien, with big bug eyes, also made of white gold. "This is so much more you," she said.

"Yeah, but the other one is so much more you, isn't it?"

"They're both perfect, in their own way," she said diplomatically, pulling him towards her for a hug. "Oh, Mulder, I've been so worried about you," she sighed into his shoulder.

"I know. I'm sorry. Look, I got you coffee and muffins." He pointed, and ushered her into her seat.

"Ah, muffins. The perennial Mulder apology food," she commented with a smile.

"Yup. I bought you one of each variety too, just to cover all my bases." He grinned, sitting at his desk, wincing slightly as he did so – his discipline that morning had been **very** thorough, which he was sure was Skinner's way of creating an impression that would last all day and remind his slave of a few basic facts of life. "Look, I need to explain some things, just so you understand, and then maybe we can kind of not talk about it too much." He grimaced. "Sorry, but Walter is way too obsessed with the whole talking about your emotions and being honest thing, and it'd be a relief not to have to do it at work as well as at home."

"You two really are an item then?" Scully looked utterly bemused. "I'm sorry, Mulder, I've tried to get my head around this since you told me, but I just never...I mean, I always knew there was something about you, but you never came over as gay, although then again you never exactly came over as completely straight either," she conceded with a wry smile. "As for the whole other issue," she coughed politely. "Well, that freaked me a bit, I'll admit. You and Skinner are in some kind of S&M relationship?"

"Yes." Mulder shrugged. "But before you go jumping to any conclusions, I need you to understand that it was a mutual decision. He didn't force me into it – if anything it was the other way around."

"You told me that before. I guess...I just don't understand." She shrugged helplessly. "How long have you been into this lifestyle, Mulder?"

Mulder took a deep breath, and prepared to try and explain something he didn't even have a good handle on himself. "Forever, Scully," he answered her honestly. "It's got nothing to do with my parents,

or my childhood, or what happened to Sam – I've had certain fantasies in my head since I was a kid. They were pretty innocent back then, but they developed when I hit puberty. That wasn't exactly an easy time for me what with the Sam thing happening. Dealing with my sexuality wasn't something I could cope with back then. I repressed a lot. I've always been attracted to women, so I just ignored my attraction to men for a long time. I had a mixed up, twisted relationship with Phoebe, and she introduced me to all the manifold joys and terrors of sexual submission." He tried hard not to turn beetroot red but it was difficult trying to explain this under his partner's searching, puzzled gaze. "She also did a total headfuck on me, and our relationship was such a disaster that for a long time I repressed the need for any kind of S&M encounter until...until..." He paused, and then plowed on again. "When the X Files burned down I went into self destruct mode. I'd dabbled in the S&M scene in DC for years, on and off, but I started trawling in earnest after that fire, looking for what I needed, and it was only then that my old, repressed attraction to men finally emerged again. I was out of control, Scully. Nothing worked – at least not for long enough. It was like being an addict, needing the high of pain. I was slowly losing it, finding it harder and harder to concentrate on my real life. I just needed the pain."

"It doesn't sound a very healthy lifestyle," Scully commented. "Is that what Skinner does for you? Just gives you pain? I think therapy might be more useful."

"No, you've got it all wrong. Skinner rescued me from what I was doing. He saved me from it, Scully. It's as simple as that."

"By making you his...slave?" It was Scully's turn to flush.

Mulder gave a little bark of laughter. "I know it sounds crazy to you, but yes. It was the only way he **could** save me I think. He made it impossible for me to run out on him, made me stay for long enough to trust him, and then...to fall in love with him."

"And he loves you?" She asked warily.

"I'm lucky. I think he's loved me for a very long time. He took a lot of time to study me, and watch out for me, to see that I didn't come to harm...only when I pursued him relentlessly did he finally reel me in. He needed it to be my choice, and it very much was."

"And the stuff that happened with Krycek?" Scully asked.

"Would have happened even without Skinner being my Master – only the fall-out would have been much worse. Without him around I would have gone under this time around, Scully. He has a handle on my problems in a way that even I don't. He's made me face up to a lot of stuff, and I feel better for it. I didn't always at the time." Mulder bit on his lip, remembering how hard some of it had been. "But I do now. I reached a turning point. There's no going back now."

"I see." She drummed her fingers absently on the desk. "Mulder, look, if he makes you happy then that's fine by me. I can't pretend that I really understand the appeal of your lifestyle, and I'm a little uncomfortable at the thought of being in a meeting with the pair of you, but..."

"You don't need to worry about that. He is always nothing less than professional at work, and he'd have my hide if I weren't as well. You don't need to be embarrassed," Mulder said softly, leaning forward to place his hand over her drumming fingers.

"Mulder, it isn't you - to be honest I think I'd have been more surprised to find out that you were 'normal'..." She raised an eyebrow at him, "but, finding out about Skinner. Well...he's my boss too, and quite frankly learning all this about him has freaked me out. Uh, I'm a bit scared of him now." She made a face.

Mulder gave a whistle of awe. "That's a first. I didn't think you were scared of anything, Scully!"

"Idiot." She smiled at him, hesitantly.

"Okay, I'd like to tell you not to be scared of him, but that would be hypocritical because he scares the hell out of me sometimes, but I can tell you that he's also a very good man - the best, and under that gruff persona I think he's probably the kindest person I've ever known. He speaks very highly of you as well. Please, just give him a chance."

Scully took a deep breath, held it for a moment, and then exhaled with a sigh.

"All right. We'll take it from there then, partner," she said.

"Good." He leaned back in his chair and surveyed his little basement domain with considerable satisfaction, delighted to be back. "So, tell me - what's been happening in this place while I've been away?"

His first week back at work went so fast that Mulder barely had time to draw breath. Some of that was down to the natural build up of work during his absence, and some of it was down to the fact that his Master clearly wanted to keep him both busy and out of mischief. Mulder was almost relieved to make it to Saturday, which, he realized, with some surprise, was slave's day. It had been so long since he and his Master had lived any kind of normal routine that he wasn't entirely sure what would happen. It had also been weeks since he'd even stepped foot in the Playroom, and he was hoping for a nice long session in there, so he was disappointed when he and his Master merely spent a leisurely day working out, eating a long brunch, reading the papers, and talking. However, just when Mulder thought that any hope of a slave's day treat was out of the question, his Master ordered him to go upstairs, get changed into the clothing his Master had laid on the bed, and go out.

"Is there anywhere in particular I should go?" Mulder asked with a frown, wondering what this was about.

"Yes, to Beelzebub," Skinner said with a grin.

Mulder raised an eyebrow. "On my own?" Beelzebub was a well-known gay pick up joint, often frequented by jailbait rent boys. Mulder was sure he'd be hit upon within two minutes of walking in the place, and he could hardly believe his possessive Master was comfortable with **that**.

"Yes - on your own." Skinner nodded. "Order a drink and wait at the bar."

"Oookay," Mulder said uncertainly. He got up and walked over to the stairs.

"And Fox - be very careful who you talk to. Remember who you belong to," Skinner said firmly. Mulder nodded uncertainly, and continued up the stairs. Skinner obviously had something planned - but what?

Mulder laughed out loud when he saw that his clothing for the evening consisted of a pair of tight, ripped jeans, and an equally tight, burgundy lycra tee shirt. There was no underwear and he knew his Master well enough by now to know that was intentional. He pulled the clothes on and gazed at himself in the mirror, cringing from his reflection. He looked like a hustler. Maybe that was the point. Mulder looked at himself again, and grinned. Maybe that **was** the point. He went to the bathroom, found some gel, and slicked his hair back, then surveyed himself in the mirror again. He pouted, and adopted an air of sultry indifference, and then laughed at himself.

“You are way too old for this kind of thing,” he berated his reflection, but all the same, it was a horny idea.

Beelzebub was heaving with the usual Saturday night fervor when he got there. He had to push his way through the throng to reach the bar, and by the time he'd got there he'd had his ass patted by several questing hands. He managed to find an unoccupied seat in the far corner of the bar, and ordered a coke – somehow he didn't think it would be a good idea to get drunk in this bar, looking like this. He watched the boys gyrating on the floor. There was a fair preponderance of wealthy businessmen looking for renters, and more than enough young men to go around from what he could judge. His coke hadn't even arrived when a swarthy man placed a hand on his shoulder and asked if he could buy him a drink. Mulder refused, politely, and sat and watched the heaving bodies dance in time to the music. He was dressed so provocatively that he knew what kind of image he was giving out but that wasn't his fault. His Master had ordered him to dress like a hustler, at the same time as making it damn clear that he wasn't to pick anyone up – as if he'd even think about it. Somehow he doubted whether any of these plump, sleazy business men could give him what he needed, and having been Skinner's slave for several months he knew that he was spoiled for anyone else. Nobody would ever live up to his Master. Nobody ever could. He reached for his coke, and was surprised when a hand was placed over his glass. He looked up – into his Master's dark eyes.

“Allow me to buy you a drink,” his Master said. Mulder looked the other man up and down with a delighted, critical eye. Skinner was dressed like the consummate professional man, in dark navy suit, crisp white shirt, and tie. Several eyes had already devoured his broad frame from the dance floor.

“What will it cost me?” Mulder asked, with a slightly lascivious grin.

“Nothing. It's on me. Which is where I'd like you to be,” Skinner said, his lips brushing Mulder's ear.

“Well that will cost **you**,” Mulder replied, warming to the theme. God he loved these role-play scenarios. Seven months ago, when he'd sold himself into slavery, he had thought that all he wanted was someone to spank his ass, and take him deep into his own pain, but now he found there was so much more to his own sexuality than that.

“How much?” Skinner asked.

“That's very direct.” Mulder raised an eyebrow.

“I don't have time to fuck around, son. Tell me the price,” Skinner growled. “I bet you're pretty expensive.” He placed his hand on Mulder's chest and stroked gently down over a nipple. Mulder felt as if someone had put an electric current through his veins.

"I am. You might not be able to afford me," Mulder said, grabbing Skinner's hand and stopping it in its tracks as it began to snake towards his pants. "You haven't bought me yet," he hissed.

"I like to try before I buy," Skinner replied. He put his hand into his pocket and brought out his wallet, then slapped a 50-dollar note on the counter. "That's just a taste – now I want something in return," Skinner growled, his voice hard, and full of sexual promise. Mulder's cock hardened in his pants. He took hold of Skinner's hand and placed it on his groin, allowing the other man to feel his bulge through his tight jeans.

"Worth paying for?" Mulder asked.

"I think so." Skinner stroked Mulder's groin, making Mulder moan. He put his head back, sweat running down his neck and over his Adam's apple. It was hot, and the whole place smelled of testosterone – most of which he was sure was being given off by the man standing stroking him. Skinner leaned forward and licked a line of sweat up to Mulder's jaw. "Want to take this someplace else?" Skinner asked.

"No. I want a night out first, and then maybe I'll consider it," Mulder replied.

Skinner's eyes narrowed. "Don't jerk me around, son," Skinner snarled. The tough guy impression made Mulder's cock throb even more. "I want you, and you want what's in my wallet. Do we have a deal or not?"

Mulder thought about it for a moment – which seemed to make his Master a little tetchy. He looked the other man up and down several times, and Skinner's eyes narrowed with a ferocious challenge, daring his slaveboy to refuse him. Finally, after making his Master sweat it out, Mulder grinned.

"Okay – but first we dance," he said.

"I don't dance," Skinner replied flatly.

"Then you don't buy," Mulder laughed, enjoying himself enormously. Somehow he didn't think Skinner was going to enjoy dancing in this kind of club. It really wasn't his natural environment. Usually Mulder would have been pretty embarrassed as well, but he was enjoying himself far too much to even think about it. Skinner gave him a look that would have felled a lesser man in his stride. Mulder met it, and grinned, then slowly but surely reached out and caressed his Master's ass. Skinner swallowed hard. "You want it, you dance for it," Mulder purred.

"All right." Skinner shrugged, giving in to the inevitable, although he did shoot Mulder a look that made him worry about his own ass when the other man got him home. Mulder felt as high as a kite as he pulled his Master onto the dance floor. He rarely got a chance to show Skinner off, and he wanted to make a statement that this man was **his**, and nobody else could touch. He turned, caught hold of Skinner's tie, and pulled him close.

"You are **such** a drama queen," Skinner hissed.

"And you make **such** a good randy businessman out cruising," Mulder winked. "Are you sure you haven't done this before?"

"No, I haven't – and I'm damn sure you haven't either, despite the convincing performance," Skinner growled under his breath.

"Are you kidding? I've played this role in my head countless times. This has been a fantasy of mine for years," Mulder replied.

"I know. You told me." Skinner grinned, and then took his astonished slave by surprise by pulling him close, leaning him backwards, and swinging him around enthusiastically. Mulder gazed at him, still winded, trying to remember when he had confided this particular fantasy.

"Get back in role," he chided, grinning, not wanting the fantasy to end. His Master gave a little growl at being addressed in such a cavalier fashion, but they were both laughing. Mulder drew his Master close, and ran his hands over the other man's expensive suit. "Kind of dressed up for a place like this aren't you?" He asked.

"Some of us have to work at the weekend and need a little recreation in the evening," Skinner replied, his hands wandering down to Mulder's ass. Mulder removed them.

"You haven't paid for that yet," he said.

"How much do you want for it?"

"Depends on what you want me to do." Mulder shrugged. "It's 50 to touch, 200 to suck, and 500 if you want a real piece of my ass." He had absolutely no idea whether he was selling himself cheaply or ridiculously expensive – they were just the first sums that came into his head.

"Do anything kinky?" Skinner asked, with a raised eyebrow. Mulder had a vision of his life for the past few months and seriously wondered whether there was anything kinky that he **hadn't** done.

"Yes, but it's extra," Mulder grinned.

"Hmmm. Okay, have we danced enough? I want to take our little deal to the bedroom."

"Did you have anywhere in mind?" Mulder raised an eyebrow.

"Yeah, a little hotel nearby. I already booked a room."

"Sure of yourself, aren't you?" Mulder grinned.

"With this particular hustler – yes." Skinner snorted.

"All right." Mulder shrugged. "Do you have a name?" He asked.

"Yes. But you can call me Jim," Skinner replied.

"Jim. Okay. I'm...Walter," he said, feeling absurdly high. He watched Skinner's eyes narrow again, and the other man gave a snort of pure outrage at Mulder's temerity. "Do you have a problem with that, **Jim**?" he asked.

"No. Not at all, **Walter**." Skinner gave a deceptively pleasant smile that told Mulder that he didn't have a problem with it but Mulder's ass would when he got him back home. "Come on, Walter. Let's go." He put a big hand on Mulder's shoulder and propelled him over to the door.

The hotel was a seedy, grimy place, fit only for one night stands paid for by men out looking for sex of one variety or another.

"Nice place," Mulder commented sarcastically, glancing at the peeling paint, and dirty wallpaper. "You know how to show a boy a good time."

"I thought it suited the mood," Skinner grinned, paying in cash at the front desk before taking the room – as was hotel policy. They crowded into a tiny elevator, and Skinner pushed him up against the wall, his hand groping Mulder's crotch. "I can't wait to see what I'm buying. It feels promising," Skinner murmured, his breath warm in Mulder's ear, his wool suit thick and itchy against his cheek.

"You haven't bought yet," Mulder said reprovingly, pushing the other man back. He loved the power dynamic they had going here, and the idea of being paid for sex. He didn't envy any of those poor bastards who had to do it for real, but as a safe role-play with someone he loved, it was hotter than hell. They reached their hotel room, and Skinner opened the door. Mulder had no sooner stepped inside than his Master pushed him up against the wall, his hands wandering over Mulder's entire body.

"Wait...first you show me your money," Mulder panted, trying to ward off his Master's insistent caresses.

Skinner stepped back, opened his wallet, counted out \$500 and then slowly, never breaking eye contact with his slave, opened Mulder's fly and tucked the money neatly into his pants, where it nestled against Mulder's hard cock. Mulder swallowed hard, took the money out, and counted it himself, one eye on his Master who was clearly torn between impatience and amusement at his slave's role-playing.

"Okay, Jim. I'm all yours," Mulder grinned, leaning back against the wall, and putting one hand down the front of his jeans, playing with his cock. Skinner gave a growl of sexual need, grabbed his slave, and angled his head towards his lips for a kiss. Mulder pushed him away. "Uh-uh. Kissing's extra," he purred. Skinner almost snapped. Mulder fought hard to keep himself from laughing out loud as he saw his Master struggle to remain in character when his slave was refusing him the most basic of rights.

"Okay," Skinner said, with appropriately masterful self-control, getting out his wallet again. "I can see you're having fun with this, boy."

"Oh, I am, Jim. I am." Mulder grinned wickedly.

"Will a 100 do it?" Skinner asked, taking out a couple of fifties and waving them in the air.

"Yeah. That'll do." Mulder leaned forward to grab them, but Skinner wrong footed him by taking a step sideways, and then lunged at the off-balance Mulder, thrust him up against the wall, and devoured his lips in a kiss of pure ownership. He kissed him for what seemed like hours, his big hands wandering over every inch of Mulder's flesh until the younger man didn't think he could stand, or breathe. He was just aware of Skinner's big, suited body covering his own, of the warmth of his Master's breath, the taste of him in his mouth, and the way his hands were rubbing and stroking, and groping. When Skinner finally

released him his knees gave way and he sank to the floor, gasping for breath. Skinner tucked the two fifties down the front of Mulder's shirt with a malicious grin.

"I just wanted to make sure I got my money's worth. That was a pretty expensive kiss," Skinner commented. Mulder looked up at him, his chest heaving as he regained his breath. He could see his Master was panting as well.

"I think it was worth it though – yes?" He asked, with a challenging grin, stuffing the cash he'd been given into his pocket.

"Maybe. Let's see if your ass is worth what I paid for it as well, **Walter**," Skinner ground out, advancing on his slave again. He grabbed Mulder, hauled him to his feet, and turned him around, his hands roughly stripping Mulder of his jeans, and pulling them down to his ankles. "Oh yeah...nice..." Skinner murmured in a low, rough tone that made Mulder's cock leap in excitement. Skinner slapped his ass a couple of times, and then kneaded it urgently. "You're a pretty boy, you know that? I'm going to enjoy fucking you," Skinner hissed, his arm pressing Mulder against the wall, like a lion holding down prey. Mulder kicked off his jeans and opened his legs wide, longing for his Master to take him, hot and hard from behind. This was all so rough and urgent that he could almost feel the steam coming out of his ears.

"Not here. I'm going to make you watch," Skinner growled. He hauled Mulder away from the wall, and propelled him over to the long mirror nailed to the wall on the other side of the room. He pushed Mulder up against it, so that the cool surface caressed Mulder's cheek. He could feel the cold glass on his cock as well, and the idea of being fucked from behind against the mirror made him moan with need.

"Do it then, Jim," he whispered. "You paid for it. Fuck me."

"Oh I intend to, Walter, believe me," his Master answered grimly. "Open your legs wider." He slapped Mulder's thighs further apart, and then slid a finger inside his ass, without warning. Mulder gasped. "Ready for me?" Skinner purred. Mulder swallowed hard, but he was beyond doing anything else. He could see Skinner behind him in the mirror, still fully dressed, and the urgency of the fantasy was overwhelming him. He just wanted Skinner inside him – now. "I'm big – think you can take me?" Skinner asked, two fingers now sliding back and forth into Mulder's ass.

"Just do it!" Mulder gasped, opening his legs even wider. He was lost in the moment. His body was just sensation, while his mind was wrapped up in the fantasy. Everything seemed so intense – every word, every action. He could feel his Master's itchy wool pants rubbing against his naked butt, and the other man's body seemed bigger and more imposing than ever. Skinner's arm was pressed against Mulder's neck, keeping his face angled against the mirror, keeping him still, making the whole scenario furtive, and hungry, full of raw need and power.

"Okay, Walter. I'm going to spear you against this mirror while you watch me pound into your ass with my hard cock. Watch," Skinner said. Even the use of the name 'Walter' gave Mulder a curious frisson, and a second later he gasped out loud as Skinner pulled apart his ass cheeks and lodged firmly in his anus. His Master gave a hard thrust, and impaled himself deep in Mulder's body. "Feel good, Walter? I bet that's the biggest and best you've ever had," Skinner rasped, as much in character as Mulder was right now. Mulder could do nothing but moan helplessly, as his Master began, slowly at first, to thrust in and out of his slave. Mulder's warm breath misted the mirror, rendering his Master's body just a

shadowy dark mass behind him, moving and thrusting, back and forth, over and over again, hitting his prostate unerringly each time until he was crying out in ecstasy, grateful that Skinner's big hand was keeping him upright. He almost yelled in surprise when Skinner's other hand came around the front of his body and grabbed his hard cock.

"Oh shit!" he moaned.

"Is it extra to bring you off, Walter?" Skinner asked. "Or do I get that pleasure for free?"

"It's on the house!" Mulder gasped, desperate for that hand to continue stroking and pumping his hard cock.

"I'm pleased to hear that, Walter," Skinner purred in his ear, still thrusting urgently. "Because this is some good meat you have here, and I'm going to milk it until it's dry." His lips dropped to the back of Mulder's neck, and nipped him there, biting, like a big cat mounting and rutting, holding its mate down during the process. Mulder began to whimper, sweat pouring off his face, his ass split wide open by his Master's cock, his own cock leaking in anticipation...and then he was coming over Skinner's hand, and his breath had obscured the mirror completely, and Skinner was soft and still inside him so he guessed his Master had reached his own climax too.

"Good?" Skinner whispered into his ear, both his hands holding Mulder under his armpits to keep him upright.

"Wha...? Yes..." Mulder managed to mutter. He felt Skinner's low, rumbling laugh, and then the other man was helping him over to the bed, and dressing him in his jeans. Mulder just lay there, barely able to move his hips in order to allow his Master to finish clothing him.

"Oh god," he moaned. "That was so damn hot."

Skinner grinned down at him, tucking his own cock away in his pants. Mulder realized that the other man hadn't even undressed and if he hadn't been so sated that would have turned him on all over again. "First Master's Day," Mulder murmured.

"What?" Skinner frowned at him.

"That's when I told you about this fantasy. I can't believe you remembered it after all this time!"

"That's why I'm the Master," Skinner said with what Mulder was sure was a wink. "Seriously, you weren't ready for a fantasy like this back then. Now you're relaxed enough to play with it, and enjoy the change in the power dynamic. You could only see me as your Master back then – you couldn't see me in any other role. And, as I recall, on that day you were too inhibited to even do a striptease for me so I don't think you'd have been able to play at being a hustler."

"How long did it take you to loosen up and play like this?" Mulder asked in wonder, gazing at his lover, Master and boss.

"Longer than it's taken you. Repressed wasn't the word for me," Skinner chuckled. "Oh, I could manage the odd spanking scenario with my wife, but it took Andrew to truly liberate my sexual imagination."

"Care to elaborate?" Mulder propped his head up on one hand. He loved hearing about his Master's subby days. Skinner sighed theatrically, and rolled his eyes.

"All right – but quickly. I told you that once Andrew refused to allow me access to the Playroom for a couple of months," he said, shaking his head at the memory. "We role-played fairly extensively during those months, and once I got into it, I found I loved it. It was so liberating not being me, with whatever hang-ups and insecurities I had. I could literally **be** anyone, and go anywhere – once I got rid of the sense of embarrassment that is. Andrew had to alternatively encourage and beat that out of me." He rubbed his chin, smiling. "Andrew could be very persuasive when he wanted to be," he added. "I remember the first couple of times he tried to make me initiate a fantasy scenario. Well, you know me. I was the buttoned up Assistant Director at the FBI. Pretending to be a pirate, or a slaveboy, or a biker or whatever really didn't come easily to me."

Mulder gave a snort of amusement. "I'd love to have been a fly on the wall watching you back **then**," he laughed. "I get off on just thinking about how I was wandering around the FBI thinking of you as the starched shirt boss, while all the time you were playing these kinky sex games at home." He smirked, and Skinner slapped him on the butt. "Tell me how Andrew managed to tame that sense of macho embarrassment," Mulder requested.

"Oh, Andrew was an expert. He had trained more recalcitrant and terminally shy subs than me – although he always did say that I was a special challenge," Skinner grinned. "I would go bright red in the beginning, and just stand there, not participating in the verbal side of the fantasy – just responding to what he did physically. He told me I looked more of an idiot by doing that than by joining in and he was right. It was a lot about relaxation and feeling comfortable – and of course, there was always Andrew's cane as a last resort."

"The dragon cane?" Mulder asked.

"No, this was a thin, whippy little cane that he called his 'encouragement'. He was so fast with that thing I'd never see it coming. If I was too slow responding to the fantasy, or wouldn't move it along or play off him, he'd just deliver an extremely stinging reminder that I had to participate too – he wasn't going to do all the work. It's amazing how much that loosened my inhibitions!" Skinner gave a hearty laugh. "You, on the other hand, my wanton slave-slut, don't need anywhere near as much help in that department."

"I've actually always had a thing for dressing up and being someone else since I was a kid. Hallowe'en was my favorite night of the year – even better than my birthday," Mulder said softly, remembering the better times of his childhood, before Sam had been taken.

"Andrew really enjoyed dressing me up for some reason I never understood until I had a sub of my own." Skinner gazed at Mulder speculatively, and grinned. "Now I can see the appeal of course."

"I can see the appeal in a slave dressing a Master too," Mulder said, his eyes wandering lasciviously over Skinner's burly, suited frame.

"Don't push your luck!" Skinner grinned. "Now come on. I don't want to stay in this dive any longer than necessary," he commented, glancing around the dirty room. He pulled Mulder to his feet, and his slave stayed there for a moment, swaying, before walking unsteadily towards the door. "One thing, boy,"

Skinner said, as Mulder put out his hand to open the door. "I get to do **this...**" He pulled Mulder into an embrace, and kissed him firmly on the lips. "Any time I like."

"Yes, Master," Mulder chuckled. "I wouldn't want it any other way. Oh...what about the money?" He fumbled in his pocket for the cash, and offered it back to his Master. Skinner shook his head, his eyes glittering in amusement.

"No, you keep it. I think you earned it...Walter," he grinned, swatting Mulder on his butt as they left the room.

Mulder had a surprise of his own planned for Master's Day. He had always found it hard knowing what to do for the other man in the past, but now his mind was full of ideas, and he just found it hard picking which one to go with. He had decided on something fairly simple for their first Master's Day in a while, but all the same it had taken a few phone calls to pull it off in time for Sunday – as well as keeping it secret from his Master. He prepared brunch for Skinner as usual the following day, washed, shaved, and massaged the other man, and then asked his Master for the key to the Playroom in order to get some equipment. Skinner looked at him quizzically but handed over the key without asking any questions.

"I have a special Master's Day surprise planned," Mulder said, grinning at Skinner's look of surprise. "I need you to get out of the way – perhaps you could go and watch TV in the upstairs apartment? I need about an hour to prepare, and then you can come to your study."

"My study?" Both Skinner's eyebrows looked as if they were about to shoot off his head.

"Yes. Your study," Mulder repeated mysteriously, before running off up to the Playroom to get what he wanted. He returned to the study, laid out the items he had brought with him, and then dressed and ran down to the basement storage area, where a certain item he had ordered was secreted. He wheeled it into the elevator, and then pushed it along the corridor back to their apartment, and installed it in the study. Finally, he undressed, anointed himself in oil, and knelt to await his Master. A few minutes later there was a knock on the door. Mulder opened it, and ushered his Master into the room...where Skinner's eyes immediately alighted on the brand new, sleek, black leather executive chair that was stationed behind the desk.

"For me?" He turned and looked at Mulder, his eyes bemused.

"Of course." Mulder grinned. "I noticed your chair was looking pretty threadbare, Master, so I ordered a replacement."

"Thank you." Skinner gave a smile that lit up his whole face and Mulder felt himself glowing. His Master went over to the chair and caressed the leather, then bent to smell it, and inhaled deeply. "Ah, nothing like the smell of new leather," he murmured.

"My thoughts exactly," Mulder grinned. "Uh, did I ever tell you that I always had a fetish about that chair in your office, Master? I used to sit in meetings fantasizing about sucking you off as you sat in that big, don't-fuck-with-me chair. Or just slowly undressing you..."

"You fantasized about me?" Skinner looked surprised. "Before we were involved? I didn't know that."

"It wasn't something I was comfortable about." Mulder shrugged, "but it sure as hell got me through a few of our more unpleasant meetings. You're a lot less scary when you're being given a blow job," he grinned.

"I can see you had something else planned." Skinner eyed the two sets of handcuffs Mulder had brought from the Playroom.

"Oh yeah. The way I see it, a chair like this should be christened. Now...I could have wrapped it up in a big stupid bow, but I can think of a much better way to christen it." Mulder picked up the handcuffs and glanced at the other man. "Do you trust me, Master?" he asked.

"Of course," Skinner answered smoothly, a smile tugging at the corners of his lips.

"Good, because as this is your day I want to do all the work, and that means keeping you still." Mulder guided his Master into the chair, and then opened one of the sets of handcuffs. "I chose a chair with this kind of armrests on purpose," he said, snapping the cuff around Skinner's wrist and then fastening his arm to the chair. "Okay?"

"Uh-huh." Skinner nodded, his eyes still amused.

Mulder fastened his Master's other hand to the chair, and then surveyed him. "Cuffs suit you, Master," he teased.

"Don't go asking for trouble, boy," Skinner retorted swiftly.

"Okay...now for the fun bit. I know you like me riding you, and this chair was made for riding – but I want you helpless. This is your day. I don't want you thinking about pleasing me. I'm going to do all the work – that's why I put the cuffs on you. Well, that and as revenge for all the hours I've spent sitting in your office listening to one of your lectures about proper use of cell phones, or following Bureau procedure."

"Always thoroughly well deserved!" Skinner exclaimed.

"Probably." Mulder grinned. "Now, if Master would like to shut up, I can address myself to his pleasure." And so saying he swung a leg over Skinner's knees, sat in the big man's lap, and began unbuttoning his denim shirt. He went slowly, allowing his fingers to slip inside the fabric and caress his Master's chest. He could tell by the way Skinner's cock was starting to dig into his slave's thigh that his Master was finding this a definite turn on. "Slowly," Mulder said, opening his Master's shirt and dropping his head to lick at Skinner's right nipple. His Master gave a little moan of pleasure. "Very, very slowly," Mulder murmured, licking up to Skinner's jaw, and bestowing a little kiss on his Master's lips, drawing back without dipping his tongue in, leaving Skinner open mouthed, wanting more.

"Tease," his Master berated. "When I get the use of my hands back..."

"You can spank me," Mulder purred, "although you might be too tired."

Skinner gave a snort, and Mulder just knew his Master was itching to bestow a judicious slap on his slave's backside. He sat facing Skinner for a long time, working on the big man's chest, and nipples, occasionally kissing his lips, sinking his tongue a little way into his Master's mouth and drawing back,

always leaving Skinner wanting more. He spent several minutes on each nipple, sucking them into little points, and gently lapping at them, noting, with some satisfaction, that not only was his Master writhing and moaning under his caress, but also that the bulge in his pants had gotten even bigger. Finally, Mulder opened his Master's pants, and released the big man's cock. He stroked the head for a while, and then ran his fingers up and down the shaft. Skinner was fully erect, and ready for him, but Mulder wanted the whole event to last as long as possible, so just when Skinner looked about ready to explode, Mulder left his cock, and returned to his nipples. Skinner sighed, surrendering himself to the slow, delicious, torture of the lovemaking. Mulder was having the time of his life – he rarely had a chance to play with his Master's body as much as he would have liked, and he was making the most of this opportunity. Finally, judging that Skinner couldn't hold out much longer under his insistent caresses, he positioned himself over the big man's hard cock, and slowly lowered himself onto it, impaling himself up the hilt. Skinner gasped as he sank home into Mulder's ass, and Mulder grinned, and, dipping his head down, he pulled his Master close, and kissed him again. He loved the feel of Skinner's bare scalp under his fingers, and he played with it as he rested with his Master's hard cock sheathed deep inside him. This position wasn't always the most comfortable for him, but he did love being face to face with his Master like this. His only reservation was that this position put Skinner at eye level with his chest – and his scar – and despite everything, Mulder still couldn't come to terms with the ugliness of that blemish on his body – and what it stood for. He couldn't see how Skinner could get turned on by having his face thrust up against evidence of his slave's betrayal, and another man's initials, but Skinner most definitely **was** aroused, so Mulder pushed that anxiety to the back of his mind. He rose up, slowly, and then down again, equally slowly, and Skinner sighed, and moved his hands pointlessly, clearly wanting to hold and caress his slave, but finding that was denied him. Mulder grinned, and moved up the pace, sliding up and down faster and faster. He was aware of Skinner's face pressing against his chest, and his tongue tickling his nipples. The sensation of riding his Master had made his own cock hard but he had no intention of bringing himself off – this was Skinner's session, and besides, he hadn't been given permission to come. He felt Skinner straining and bucking underneath him, and then the other man came deep inside him. Mulder stopped rocking up and down on his Master and flopped against the other man, resting his chin on Skinner's head.

"Good?" He asked, unconsciously echoing the question Skinner so often asked him.

"Oh yeah," his Master growled. "Very, very good. Thank you, boy."

Mulder reached on the desk behind for the key to the handcuffs and unlocked his Master, and Skinner's hands went automatically around his slave, stroking him. Then, unexpectedly, he pulled Mulder close, and buried his face in his slave's chest.

"Are you okay?" Mulder glanced down on his Master's bald head, wondering what was going on inside it.

There was silence for a long moment, and then Skinner looked up, a strange expression in his eyes, which looked suspiciously as if they were bright with unshed tears.

"Fine," Skinner said, in a voice an octave lower than normal. "I meant what I said. Thank you, Fox. That was good." He gazed thoughtfully at Mulder's chest, which was at eye level, and then raised a finger to gently caress his scar. "Do you still want this taken care of, Fox?" He asked softly.

"Yes, Master. More than just about anything in the world," Mulder replied quickly.

"All right. I spoke to Perry last week, and he has an idea."

"What does he have planned?" Mulder looked down on his Master, knowing that his eagerness and hope showed in his eyes.

"It's not a huge procedure, but it will involve surgery – and some discomfort. He can perform a full thickness skin graft that will alter the appearance of your scar - and improve it considerably."

"I want him to do it," Mulder said immediately, grabbing Skinner's head and looking down into his Master's dark eyes.

"Fox – this is not a decision to make lightly, and it's not one I'll make for you. It's too important for that. If you go ahead, you'll have to have some skin taken from somewhere else on your body – probably your lower abdomen. That means you'll end up with two scars - which might not be an ideal situation. However, the new scar can be created in any shape I order - so it's one way of placing my own mark on you. How do you feel about that?"

Mulder grinned. "Well, it doesn't sound as sexy as a branding, but I sure as hell like the idea of it. What shape will you go for?"

"If we decide to go ahead, that will be my choice - you won't know and you won't have a say in the matter," Skinner said firmly. Mulder found that idea appealing. Having Skinner's mark on his body had been his aim since early in his slavery, and it would wipe out some of what he had suffered at Krycek's hands.

"What about the scar on my chest?" He asked.

>"Well, we can improve the appearance of that dramatically with a skin graft. You'll still have a scar - I don't want you to be in any doubt about that - but it won't be as messy, and it'll be a completely different shape. It won't be Krycek's mark any more - it'll be one we create together. Will that be enough for you?"

"Yes," Mulder said, without hesitation.

"And you'll be back behind a desk for a couple of weeks while it heals. Absolutely no field-work, and I mean that. I don't care if aliens land on the White House – you are **not** going to investigate **anything**. Also, this isn't a procedure that Perry can undertake lightly. Usually he'd wait for six months to a year – he's only prepared to do the op now because the scar is so emotionally disturbing to you."

"I want him to do it." Mulder said firmly. "Walter, please. Even just now, making love to you...at one point all I could think about was this fucking scar. I can't stand the thought that Krycek's out there, the smug bastard, walking around thinking he's put his mark on my body." He clenched his fists angrily.

"It's all right. I do understand that, sweetheart." Skinner caressed Mulder's ass and back lovingly, calming him. "But you must understand that this skin graft won't get rid of the scar completely – it'll just alter it so it isn't the mess it is now – and it won't say AK."

"We were talking about branding...that's still going to happen isn't it?" Mulder asked in a worried tone.

Skinner nodded. "After you earn your collar back we can talk about branding again," he confirmed.

"Well then, this is no different. If by doing this I get rid of Krycek's mark and get **your** mark into the bargain, then that's all I need to know. I'll be proud of it if it's your mark," Mulder whispered, resting his head on Skinner's wide forehead.

"All right. I'll call Perry this evening. He'll want to talk to you first to make sure you know what you're doing but I think he'll agree to it."

"Thank you." Mulder kissed his Master gratefully. He felt as if a huge weight had been lifted from his shoulders. He was going to be whole again, untainted by Krycek's knife, and he was determined to win back his collar – life was definitely looking up.

The operation took place the following Friday evening at a small outpatients clinic where Perry seemed to have some connections. The other man was as jovial and laid back as usual, and even outlined his credentials of several years working on a burns unit in order to reassure Mulder that he was in safe hands. Mulder had spent more than enough time in hospitals not to want to watch what was being done to his body, so he lay back and gazed the ceiling, trying not to think about the strange smells, and noises that abounded as Perry and his assistant worked on his body. His scar and the donor site had been injected with lidocaine, so the operation didn't hurt, although the injection sure as hell had. His Master remained at his side throughout, and Mulder was almost surprised when Perry loomed over him, and told him it was all over.

"It was quicker than I thought it would be," Mulder said, trying to sit up.

"It wasn't a hard op – we didn't encounter any problems. You're young, you're fit, and you don't smoke, so I think you'll heal fine," Perry told him. "Don't get either scar site wet; no showers or baths for a few days – Walter will have to wash you - and keep your arm in this sling until Tuesday. It's very important that you keep the chest wall as still as possible for the next few days. I had to remove one of your nipple rings, but I'm sure your Master will allow you to go without one of them for a week or two." He looked at Skinner, his eyes twinkling with amusement. Skinner nodded, his own eyes grave. "And that's it," Perry said. "I'll want to see you again in about a week to remove the stitches – but I'll come around to Walter's apartment for that. Any questions, Mulder?"

"Yes - what shape is the new scar?" Mulder asked quickly.

Perry laughed out loud. "Ah, I think that's between you and your Master, don't you?" He said. "Rest assured that it has a much more pleasing aspect and symbolism than the last scar you were given had."

Mulder endured a weekend of sink washes and enforced rest, with a threat of dire punishment hanging over him if he so much as moved his sling arm an inch. He minded this a lot less than he would have done just a year previously. Now that he was a slave, the humiliation of being washed by his Master was more of a turn on than anything else, and he usually he found he got an erection every time his Master went near him with a wash cloth, much to Skinner's amusement and exasperation. His Master got his own back by refusing to reveal what the new scar would look like. Mulder was back in his office, arm still

in a sling, on Monday morning, and was surprised when he and Scully were both summoned to Skinner's office at 10 am.

"What does he want?" Scully asked, as they made their way upstairs.

"Don't ask me!" Mulder replied. "He hardly ever even mentions work at home."

"Not even pillow talk?" Scully asked mischievously.

"Definitely not." Mulder grinned. "You're freaked. I can tell." He glanced at her pale face and thoughtful expression.

"I told you - he scares me," she replied, chewing absently on one of her usually immaculate fingernails.

>"Okay." He grabbed her arm, and pulled her to a standstill. "You remember I told you months ago that my Master is crazy about his cat? Well, it's true. If it helps, I want you to imagine him in thrall to the smallest, dainties, most imperious little cat you can think of."

"Skinner has a cat?" Scully frowned.

>"Yup. She's called Wanda, and he's besotted with her. Nothing is too much trouble for the divine Wanda - she has him wrapped around her little paws."

"You're making this up, right?" Scully giggled.

>"Nope. Still scared of him?"

>"A bit - but I like the mental image of our big, bad boss cuddling up to a cat. Thanks, Mulder."

"No problem."

They were ushered through Skinner's outer office by Kim, passing a tall, spiky haired man reading a newspaper and drinking a cup of coffee. Mulder glanced at the agent suspiciously.

"Who's he?" He whispered to Kim as she opened Skinner's office door.

"You'll find out soon enough," she replied sweetly.

Skinner was as cool, brisk and professional as ever while in work mode. He smiled at Scully, frowned at Mulder, and then launched straight into a speech that took his slave totally by surprise.

"Agent Mulder, as you're out of action for the next couple of weeks, I'm reassigning you," he said. Mulder looked up in total and abject horror.

"Sir, with all due respect, I can still work on the X Files from my office," he said.

"I'm sure you can move bits of paper around, but that isn't the same as working," Skinner said tersely. "I'm assigning you to work on the Annual Bureau Training Seminar. We have agents coming in from field

offices all over the US – I want you to organize a program for them, as well as giving the keynote speech.”

"A keynote speech? About what?" Mulder asked, his tone dripping with ire at what he was hearing. Skinner fixed him with a hard look.

"Your work on the X Files of course," Skinner said tersely.

"You want me to stand up in front of a bunch of green agents from Hicksville, and tell them about aliens, mutants and ghouls?" Mulder questioned. "Are you setting me up as the fall guy for some kind of huge Bureau joke, sir?"

"No, Agent Mulder. I'm giving you the opportunity to share your knowledge and experience," Skinner snapped. "Do you view the X Files as a legitimate use of Bureau resources?" He demanded.

"Of course!" Mulder flared.

"Well, so do I – and as such I think we should be educating our other agents about the X Files department. That way you might encounter less hostility when you go out in the field," Skinner rapped out. Mulder stared at him, aghast, but Skinner took no notice – he just continued talking. "You'll work with one of the Bureau's training agents. He's organizing the logistical side of bussing in the agents from the more remote field offices. I believe you've worked with him before – his name is Tom Colton."

"Ah, the final nail in my coffin. Thank you for completely making my day - **sir**," Mulder said, his heart sinking. He couldn't understand why his Master was doing this to him. He glanced sideways at Scully who looked extremely nervous about the level of tension between Master and slave.

"What about me, sir?" Scully asked. "We have a couple of cases that really require me to go into the field to investigate. I wouldn't be happy to go without back up."

"There's no need. I'm assigning another agent to assist you while Mulder is incapacitated. He's a good agent - I wouldn't assign you someone less than the best, and I have no doubt that he will be a very able replacement for Mulder, Agent Scully." Skinner pressed a button on his phone. "Kim, you can send him in," he said, his tones still terse from his exchange with his slave. The man from the outer office strode into the room, his confidence evident in every step he took, his back straight, and his eyes clear and direct. Skinner introduced him.

"Agent Scully, this is your new partner for the next couple of weeks. Agent John Doggett – Agent Dana Scully."

"Agent Scully, it's good to meet you. I've been reading up about your work – it's...fascinating," Doggett said, in a voice that Mulder decided was far too deep and sexy. It certainly had an effect on Scully, who flushed pink around the ears as she shook her new partner's hand. Mulder bristled.

"Agent Doggett – what exactly are your credentials for working on the X Files?" He demanded, ignoring both Doggett's outstretched hand, and the cautioning looks that both Scully and Skinner were shooting at him. Doggett, however, took his question seriously, and thought about it for a few seconds before replying.

"I'll admit that I'm having trouble taking in some of the things I've read about your department, but I'll do my best to cover for you in your absence," Doggett said in that deep, considered voice. "After all, there's only one real qualification required for working on the X Files, Agent Mulder, and that's an open mind."

Mulder hated him instantly.>

Scully offered to show Doggett around the filing cabinets containing the X Files, while Mulder stood there, his fist itching to plant some serious damage on either Doggett's face or his Master's. He cast Skinner a look of fury before stalking towards the door to follow the other two out. He had one hand on the handle, when his Master spoke.

"Fox."

Mulder hesitated. If Skinner had called him Agent Mulder he might have just carried on walking, but the other man was calling him by his slave name, and while he might mouth off at his boss, he wasn't sure he dared ignore his Master. He closed his eyes, trying to come to a decision. He remembered that he was trying to earn back his collar, and that a tantrum now would be ill advised, but all the same he couldn't pretend that he wasn't angry. He could sense his Master behind him, waiting for his decision, and finally he turned back.

"Master," he said quietly.

Skinner's expression softened. "I know you're angry, but I have good reasons for doing this."

"You have good reasons for replacing me with that jerk?" Mulder snapped. "Well I sure as hell would like to hear them, sir."

"Agent Doggett is only a temporary replacement and you know it. Are you annoyed because he's taking your place or are you annoyed because he might actually turn out to be good at the job?"

"That is such crap! You saw him - he was all over Scully!" Mulder said heatedly.

Skinner raised an eyebrow. "Oh, I see. This is all about Agent Scully now. She's a grown woman, Fox, she can take care of herself. It didn't look to me like she needed any protecting from Agent Doggett. In fact, I think she rather liked him."

"He isn't good enough for her," Mulder muttered angrily.

"You're jumping to a lot of assumptions here. They only just met," Skinner pointed out reasonably enough. Skinner placed a hand on his arm, but Mulder shook it off angrily. "All right." Skinner shrugged. "I know you're pissed off, but I want you to apply yourself to the best of your considerable ability. I know you can pull off the finest Annual Seminar the Bureau has ever had."

"Working with Tom Colton? With all due respect, sir, you have to be deluded. The man hates me."

"You might find him changed. He was injured in the course of duty a year or two back and he rides a desk full time now - not just temporarily," Skinner said pointedly.

"I don't suppose he'll have changed his view of me."

"Maybe not, which is why you're going to convince him he was wrong."

"Just how the hell am I supposed to do that?" Mulder flared.

"By dropping all this defensive crap!" Skinner snapped. "Your work is valid, Agent Mulder. It's not your work that antagonizes people – it's you. You seem to take that giant chip on your shoulder with you wherever you go. Stop expecting people to take the piss out of you and your work, and you might just find that they're actually interested in the X Files."

"That's fine coming from someone who was never given the nickname Agent Spooky," Mulder yelled.

"No, I was given the nickname Agent Hardass," Skinner replied. "You're not the only one who ever got called names – I took it as a compliment. Look, Fox..." His tone changed to one of infinite patience. "One of the things I've learned in life is that people take you at face value. If you present your work as serious, and valid, and explain your methodology and investigative process, you might just find that people are more willing to listen than you've ever given them credit for."

Mulder bit on his lip, staring at the other man uncertainly.

"Your career is more important to you than you've ever admitted," Skinner said softly. "I know it hurts that you went from being the golden boy in the profiling unit, to... what is it you called yourself? 'The FBI's most unwanted', when you took on the X Files. That's unfair – you've done some of your best work on the X Files. I've seen the reports to prove it. Now you have to present that work to your peers, and not just ask for their respect – **demand** it."

"Is this what I have to do to get my collar back?" Mulder demanded.

Skinner surveyed him for a moment. "No. However the way you conduct yourself during the next week or two will have an effect on that issue."

"Well then. I don't have a choice, do I?" Mulder snapped, turning on his heel, opening the door, and wondering whether he dared slam it behind him.

"Twenty four hours a day, seven days a week," Skinner said softly. "Not just when it suits you, or you want an erotic thrill. You signed the contract - you knew the deal. Now close the door, and get your ass back in this office."

Mulder considered defying his Master, but he was suddenly acutely aware of the absence of his collar. He couldn't afford to screw up right now, and he was already half-way there. With a sigh of pure frustration he swung the door shut with a resounding thud, and turned to face the music.

"Time for an attitude adjustment," Skinner told him. "Go and stand facing the wall, pants around your ankles."

Mulder swallowed hard. It was mid-morning. He assumed Skinner wasn't expecting any visitors but all the same...

"Now!" Skinner barked and Mulder needed no further urging. He did as he was told, fumbling to unzip his pants with one hand, the other incapacitated in its sling. He felt a total idiot standing with his bare ass hanging out in his Master's office, and was relieved when he heard the sound of a key turning in the lock, as Skinner ensured their privacy. At least his humiliation was between himself and his Master now - although he was acutely aware of the faint sounds of people talking and walking in the corridor outside. A few seconds later he heard his Master come up behind him, and clenched his buttocks in anticipation...but nothing happened.

"Open your mouth," Skinner ordered. Mulder did as he was told, with an inner groan, and a piece of soap was placed on his tongue. "Keep it there," Skinner said tersely, "and listen carefully. You're entitled to disagree with me professionally, and you're entitled to tell me so - politely, but the bottom line is that I'm both your boss and your Master so what I say goes. Understood?"

Mulder nodded, mutely, feeling faintly sickened by the taste of soap.

"All right. Now I can't give you the spanking you deserve because of your arm, but that doesn't mean you're going to get off without feeling my ruler across your ass. I want you to hold still while I deliver the punishment you deserve. I do NOT want that arm to move. Understood?" Mulder nodded again, closing his eyes. He felt the hard wood of the ruler on his ass, and then a flash of pain across his buttocks. He rocked slightly, but held position. A second forceful swat drummed the message home, and then Skinner was done. "You can stay there with the soap in your mouth and your ass on display for ten minutes, boy. I don't want to hear a word out of you," Skinner said gruffly.

Mulder nodded again. The soap tasted disgusting, and softened by the second in his warm mouth, creating little bubbles that slid down the back of his throat, making him want to retch. His ass burned from the peremptory spanking with the ruler, and he was all too aware that it was on display to his Master, where he sat working at his desk. His ill-considered outburst had won him nothing, and gained him only humiliation and discomfort. He knew he had to learn from it, and not allow his turbulent emotions to get the better of him in future, but it was so hard. The corner time did at least give him the opportunity to cool down - and Mulder was surprised by how much happier he felt when the ten minutes were up.

His Master returned to his side, held out his hand, and ordered Mulder to spit the soap into it, which the slave did eagerly. He remained in position as Skinner disappeared, and returned holding a glass of water, which his slave drank down in one gulp. Only then did Skinner give him permission to do up his pants. "What do you have to say?" Skinner asked, gazing searchingly at his slave.

"Thank you for taking the time to correct me, Master." Mulder dropped to his knees, taking care not to move his arm in the process, and kissed his Master's shiny shoes.

"Good boy." Skinner said approvingly, helping Mulder stand. He kissed his slave on the cheek, and then escorted him to the door, unlocked it, and smiled at him. "Trust me," he said, before opening the door and allowing his slave to leave.

Mulder arrived home late. He hadn't even been sure that he wanted to **go** home - the day had been too unsettling for that. In fact, when he left the Hoover building he found himself going somewhere else entirely, as his feet, seemingly of their own volition, made their way to Alexandria instead of Crystal City.

Mulder stood outside his old apartment, and gazed at it for a long time. It seemed strange being here. He had never come back since entering into his slavery. He had barely even had the time to think about it. He closed his eyes and tried to remember a time when he had called this place 'home'. He had been free then. Free to come and go as he pleased, answering to nobody. Free to mouth off at his boss without consequence or repercussion, free to run off for days on end, to disobey orders, and expect Skinner and Scully to cover for him. Free...Mulder tried to remember what that had felt like, but all that came to mind were endless long, insomniac nights sitting in front of the TV watching soulless porno videos, not even turned on by them, not even jerking off to them, just watching, mindlessly, trying to find in the rhythms and groans of sex some ritual and order that would help him switch off from his life, and attain some peace. That had been his freedom. Unhappy with his life, and with himself, finding solace in his beloved X Files, or the whip of some unknown top who he would seek out, demand what he needed in order to get off, and then leave, feeling even emptier than when he had arrived. His slavery, despite all its many restrictions, had given him so much more freedom to be what he wanted, and achieve what he needed, than his freedom had ever done. Damn Skinner for being right about work making their Master/slave relationship so much harder. It had been so easy back at the beach house. He thought longingly of those endlessly sunny days and hated work for coming between them, and Skinner for giving him this impossible task, and himself for not being able to deal with this new setback. He tried to remember the last time he had felt like this and what he'd done about it. It had been the time he'd gone out running and come back late. Skinner had chained him to the balcony and spoon-fed him his dinner. Mulder knew he had to figure out a way of dealing with emotions like these, but he wasn't sure how. One thing he did know, and clung to, was that he trusted his Master, and he wanted to win his collar back. Finally, with a heavy heart, he headed home.

It was late, and Skinner had already eaten.

"Slave." Skinner looked up as Mulder walked in. Mulder detected the concern and anxiety in his Master's eyes and his own mood softened, abruptly. It still amazed him that there was anybody in his life who cared what time he got home, where he had been, and how he was feeling. Some instinct in Mulder took over. He went straight to his Master's side, knelt down, placed his head on Skinner's lap, and stayed there mutely. Skinner stroked his slave's hair, but didn't say a word. It felt good being here. It felt like touching base with what they both were, and with a serenity that had eluded him for most of his life and which he'd found only since becoming Skinner's slave. It took well over an hour before he felt some kind of peace descend, and then he finally looked up.

"When I got back to my office there was a note from Scully. '*Mulder – John and I have taken some of the files up to his office on the 3rd floor so that you can have some privacy to work on your speech. Speak to you soon. Scully.*' Mulder recited in a bitter tone, having memorized the note after just one read-through, its words seared on his brain. "John and I," Mulder mimicked. "**John**," he said again, sneeringly. "Agent Dogface and I will be in his office, with **your** files, Mulder."

"Fox, what gives with the jealousy?" Skinner took hold of Mulder's face and looked into his eyes searchingly. "Is it professional, or something else?" Mulder shrugged, and replaced his chin on his Master's knee. "Let me tell you what I think it is," Skinner said softly, stroking his hair again. "I've watched you and Scully for years. You have a fantastic working relationship but you know, to me it's always seemed that you treat her like a little sister." Mulder frowned and glanced up at his Master. "Well you do. You tease her, you run off and leave her, you both joke together, and wind each other up in equal measure. You do everything short of pulling on her braids. You look out for her, like a big

brother, and she looks up to you in a way, like a little sister. She's used to having brothers, and you...I think in many ways you've recreated the relationship you had with Samantha with Scully. I'm not saying that's a bad thing because I don't think it is. It's worked for both of you, but I think it's partly why you're so upset now. You lost your real sister, and you don't want to lose Scully too – but you're not going to, Fox. Or at least you won't if you don't push her away."

"Did I mention today that I love you?" Mulder said, getting up, Skinner's speech having hit several nerves. "Okay. I do. I might not like you much at the moment, but..." He shrugged. "Spank me," he requested suddenly. Skinner looked up in surprise. "I need to scream," Mulder said, "and you told me I could always ask for pain if I wanted it."

"And I also said that it was at my discretion and I might refuse it," Skinner replied.

"So you won't?" Mulder asked, slumping into a chair and gazing at his Master.

"Your scar is still healing. I'd prefer for us to deal with all this without me giving you the kind of long, exhausting, thorough spanking you need to take you down right now. Just how badly do you need the release? What will happen if you don't get it?" Skinner asked.

Mulder considered this for a moment. "I don't know. I just wanted distraction, Master. I can't run with my arm in this damn sling, and I really hate the idea of someone else working on my files, to say nothing of the nightmare of organizing a training seminar of all things." Mulder shuddered. "Master - did I ever do or say **anything** to give you the idea that I'd be good at something like this?" He asked in despair. "I mean, that time you tried to send us on that team building seminar..."

"Which you miraculously managed **not** to attend, somehow locating an X File to pursue in the middle of the woods instead," Skinner pointed out.

"Exactly. Which should tell you that I'm crap at this kind of thing."

"No, it tells me that you avoid them. You've avoided a lot of things, Fox, and we've faced them together since you became my slave. Demons don't go away unless you look them square in the eye and shoot them down. You're a brilliant agent, and I want you to get the respect you deserve."

"I won't get it. I'll screw this up," Mulder said desperately.

"What makes you think that? I'll help you, and so will Scully – you just need to ask." Skinner said gently, reaching out to put a hand on his slave's despondent arm. "Now, you wanted distraction, and with your arm in that sling, and being mindful of Perry's instructions on keeping it still – the best I can come up with is a DVD." He retrieved a disc from his briefcase and held it up.

"**Gladiator**?" Mulder commented morosely. "Oh. Great. Men in skirts fighting lions. I can't wait."

Two hours later Mulder lay with his head on his Master's lap, eating popcorn idly from the tub balanced on one of Skinner's large thighs, utterly engrossed in the movie.

"Y'know, Master," he commented, as a chained, half-naked, enslaved Russell Crowe dangled at the mercy of a sadistic but beautiful emperor. "I think I might have changed my mind about this movie –

although you'd definitely give Russell a run for his money in the arena any day. Hmm, that's a nice thought." He grinned and glanced up at his Master, who snorted, and tweaked his slave's ear by way of reply. "And another thing," Mulder commented, munching thoughtfully. "The short tunic and chain mail? A seriously good look for you."

Mulder was allowed to abandon his sling the following day, much to his relief. He also realized that he could organize the majority of the seminar via email, which at least meant he didn't have to actually **talk** to Tom Colton, and he spent much of his time locked up in his office trying not to scratch his newly healing chest and the donor site for the skin graft on his abdomen – both of which were combining to drive him crazy. It was hard to concentrate on his speech, although he went through the files for two days searching for relevant material, but he just knew he was going to be laughed off that stage when the time came, and that thought made him sick to the pit of his stomach. He had been able to get by for years by convincing himself he didn't care what anyone else thought of him or his work, but that was different to standing up in that arena and making himself a target.

"Russell, you had it easy with the lions," he muttered to himself, as he flicked through his files. He was startled out of his reverie when Scully poked her head around the door a few hours later.

"How's it going, partner?" she asked brightly, perching on the side of his desk.

"Badly," Mulder snapped grumpily. "How's it going with Agent Dog-eared?"

"Fine." Scully gave a dreamy smile that implied that working with Agent Doggett was more than fine. Mulder made a face.

"But he's not you," Scully added hastily. "And it's taken us three days to solve a case that you'd have cracked in three hours. Without you, there's nobody to make the leaps of both imagination and faith that always seem to lead to right answer."

"Well let's do a swap – you try and bludgeon, trick, or blatantly bribe people into addressing the training seminar, and I'll investigate the X File with Agent Dodgy," Mulder offered.

"You're having trouble finding speakers?" Scully asked, in a sympathetic tone.

"Yeah, hardly anyone replies to my emails, even when I spam them," Mulder grumbled, "and those that have replied have all said no."

"Ahem." Scully coughed pointedly.

Mulder looked at her. "Yes? Am I missing something?" He asked.

"Yes, damn it, ME, Mulder," she said in an exasperated tone. "You didn't ask me to address the seminar – I could give a talk on autopsies. I did used to give classes at Quantico on the subject, remember."

"You'd do that?" Mulder asked, kicking himself for not thinking of it himself.

"You may be completely clueless about some things but you are still my partner," she chided. "Of course I'll do it!"

Mulder was on a high as he watched her go, until he realized that he still had 5 more guest speakers to find. Two hours later there was another, firmer knock on his door. Mulder looked up eagerly, expecting to see his Master, but his smile faded when Agent Doggett walked into the room.

"Can I help you?" He asked in a disinterested tone, turning back to his files and ignoring the other man.

"As a matter of fact you can," Doggett replied. "I'm intending to ask Agent Scully on a date, and I wondered if you had a problem with that."

Mulder slammed the file he was looking at onto the desk and glared at the other man with barely concealed loathing.

"You're asking my permission to take Scully out?" He asked incredulously. Was the man serious? Scully would foam at the mouth if she knew.

"No." Doggett shook his head. "I'm asking if you have a problem with it. I'm still going to ask her out, but you mean a lot to her so I'd like for the two of us to be on good terms."

Mulder thought about it for a moment, and then got up. He walked over to Doggett, looked him straight in the eye, and then spoke in a low, forceful tone.

"Try as I might, Agent, I haven't been able to find anyone who has a bad word to say about you – not even your ex-wife which some might think was suspicious of and by itself. All your colleagues respect you, your friends like you, your file speaks about you as if you're god's gift to the Bureau...in fact, I've only been able to find one person who dislikes you and that's a certain Herman J. Rochester, currently residing in jail in New York."

"Herman Rochester?" Doggett looked bemused. "You mean the guy I put away during my last year with the NYPD?"

"Yes." Mulder nodded. "And I can say quite categorically that he hates you, which, unfortunately, is no bad thing considering he's a double murderer, and you're the person who arrested him."

"Jesus. Scully said you were thorough, but I had no idea," Doggett said, startled.

"Oh, not as thorough as you - you pursued this guy for 5 years before finally nailing him...so to speak." Mulder smiled sweetly. "Go ahead, Agent **Dogged**, ask Scully out, but let me make something clear, in words of one syllable so you understand: You hurt her and you're dead. Got it?" Mulder wasn't joking - he meant every word, and Doggett's eyes flashed in recognition of that fact. Mulder was gratified to see that the other man took his warning as seriously as it had been intended.

"Oh I think so." Doggett nodded thoughtfully. "You don't have a lot of friends in the Bureau, do you, Mulder?" He asked out of the blue.

"I don't have time," Mulder replied, taken by surprise, his hackles rising defensively.

"Would you have time to join me for a beer after work? I'm a great admirer of your work." Mulder stared at the other man, open-mouthed. Doggett smiled, and slapped his arm heartily. "I'll see you later

then. Oh, and by the way, Agent Scully tells me that you aren't having much of a response to your emails for guest speakers?"

"That's right. Don't tell me that you came here to volunteer?" Mulder raised a disbelieving eyebrow.

"No, but I would suggest that you actually go and talk to a few people – emails are easier to ignore than the very persistent, very charming, and somewhat legendary Agent Mulder."

Doggett turned to go and Mulder made a face at his back.

"One more thing, Mulder." Doggett paused, his hand on the door. "The name thing – knock it off." And then he was gone.

Mulder found, much to his annoyance, that Doggett was right – by pestering various FBI personnel in person and pursuing them with the same relentlessness that he brought to the X Files, he was able to secure all but one of his speakers - and it took his Master to point out that a certain Assistant Director might be able to offer some insight into general crime trends and give the benefit of more than twenty years law enforcement experience if asked. All in all, Mulder was finding that he had more friends than he'd realized.

Perry came to remove his stitches the following week, although both scars were still covered by dressings, and he was under strict orders not to either touch or look at them – only Skinner was allowed to change the dressings, and Mulder was always ordered to close his eyes during the process. As an added precaution, and an entirely unnecessary one in Mulder's view, Skinner also blindfolded his slave on each occasion as well. The scars were healing well though, and Perry promised that the dressings could soon come off altogether.

The scars were the least of his worries though. By the day of the training seminar, Mulder still hadn't managed to compose a speech that he was happy with. His first attempts failed miserably - just reciting them in the emptiness of his office brought him out in a cold sweat. He was going to get laughed off the dais, and he knew it. It didn't help that he'd die a death in front of Tom Colton, Scully, Doggett and his own Master, to say nothing of all those agents from every field office in the US, who would be sitting there sniggering at him. Mulder crept out of the apartment early on the day of reckoning, leaving an apologetic note for his Master. He got into his office at 4 am and sat staring at the wall for the best part of an hour, before trying another attempt. His speech was the first one, scheduled for 9 am, with the expectation of kicking the whole day off with some degree of panache - only he knew that he'd fail. Skinner had offered to listen to his speech several times, as had Scully, but Mulder had turned down both offers. He was in desperate trouble, and he knew it. He considered walking out, taking a plane to nowhere – anywhere - and waiting until his Master tracked him down and punished him, but he didn't dare do that. Somehow he knew that would be the end of it and he could kiss his collar goodbye forever if he did something so stupid. He had confided his fears to his Master, but Skinner just seemed utterly resolute in his belief that Mulder could pull it off. It wasn't a faith in himself that Mulder shared.

The sound of the phone ringing at 7.00 am startled him out of his reverie.

"I missed my wake up call this morning," his Master growled.

"Sorry. I...I needed to work on this speech," Mulder muttered, glancing at the clock. It was too late to work on the damn thing now. In an hour and a half he would have to greet Colton and the visiting agents, and half an hour after that he would die a miserable death in front of hundreds of witnesses, and there was no doubt in his mind as to who the murderer was. *It was AD Skinner, in the main lecture hall, with a knife to the back,* he thought morosely.

"How's it going?" Skinner asked.

"The truth? It's fucking awful. Everything I come up with sounds like something from a really bad documentary about the Paranormal. It's risible. I'm going to be laughed offstage," Mulder snapped.

"Calm down," Skinner said softly.

"I can't. It's going to be a total fucking disaster. Colton is still sending me these polite, thinly-veiled, 'I can't wait to see you fall on your ass and fail' emails - I even got one this morning sent before he left, the bastard."

"Fox..."

"I have to go." Unable to bear even thinking about it for another second, Mulder put the phone down, and then, just to be on the safe side, took the receiver off the hook. He stared at his blank computer screen again, and a few seconds later a little envelope appeared in the bottom right hand corner and a woman's voice cheerfully announced that he had mail. Mulder thumped his finger down savagely on the keyboard, and brought up the message, then stared at it, numbly, trying to make sense of it. It was from Skinner, the subject header was "You Have Ten Minutes," and the email itself consisted of one word: **Wanda.**

Mulder sat in a state of shock for several seconds. Wanda - his Master was choosing **now** of all moments, to have a Wanda moment? Where? Here? In the basement? Mulder supposed that was what his Master intended. He racked his brains, trying to remember the original instructions regarding this particular order. His Master had been specific; he was to stop whatever he was doing, find somewhere to bend over, and present himself to his Master. He didn't recall anything about what to do if the order came via email, but he assumed the original instruction still stood. He wasn't supposed to go to Skinner - his Master would come to him. Here. Now. At this particular moment in time, just when Mulder wanted to scream and run away to Hawaii, his Master wanted to come down and make use of him. Mulder gave a laugh of near hysteria, and sat slumped in his chair, trying to decide what to do. In truth, there wasn't much of a decision to make. He had learned, slowly and painfully, to trust his Master. He had never yet obeyed a "Wanda" command without questioning it first, but on each occasion it had somehow been the right thing - and had connected him with his Master in a fundamental way that created a sense of peace and serenity deep inside him. Mulder stood up, took a deep breath, checked there was a key in his office door, and then undid his pants and bent over the desk.

He felt an idiot, waiting, bent over his own desk, his nose pressed against his useless speech notes, enduring the long minutes before his Master came down to take him. Cool air wafted around his ass, and even despite his own nerves, he found the humiliation, and sense of vulnerability a turn on. About five minutes after he had assumed the position, he heard footsteps outside the door, and nearly stood up. Supposing it wasn't his Master? Supposing it was someone else? He nearly laughed out loud at the idea of someone entering this room and finding him here like this. He'd have to plead insanity. The door

clicked open, and he held his breath, waiting for some kind of reaction. The fact that there was none reassured him that this was his Master, and a few seconds later a whiff of cologne confirmed that fact - he'd know his Master's scent anywhere. Mulder heard the sound of a key turning in the lock but Skinner didn't speak. Mulder almost jumped out of his skin as big hands slapped his ass, and then began to caress his butt cheeks. Mulder rested his face on his arms. Oh god, this couldn't be happening to him. His Master was going to take him in his own office, on his own desk. He was going to enter him hard and fast and use him, as was the custom when this particular command had been issued.

Mulder felt his cock hardening. He was a slave. He belonged to his Master who had absolute authority and control over his body. He had given up everything to the man who was standing behind him, and who could enter him whenever he pleased, and take whatever he required from his slave. Mulder trembled as he heard the sound of a zip, and then felt rough wool against his bare buttocks. His ass was pulled open, and he felt the warm, familiar sensation of his Master's cock entering him easily. He gave a gasp, and moved his bottom back to help his Master thrust deep into his body. It felt so good. It felt so right to be here, reminded of who he was, at his most basic and fundamental level. He belonged to this man. He loved this man. Skinner's hands caressed his slave roughly, and his body was large and reassuring, his breath warm on the back of Mulder's neck. His thrusts were hard, giving Mulder no time to draw breath between each one. His rhythm was almost savage, as he plunged deep into Mulder's body, making his slave gasp with both pleasure and pain with each controlled but brutal thrust. Mulder started to pant, his body alive with sensation. He was his Master's slave. He existed to serve. His body was responding to his Master's touch as it always did, aroused beyond belief by the total mastery Skinner was exerting over his slave. Mulder forgot the seminar, forgot his speech, and Tom Colton, and was simply Fox, his Master's beloved, eager slave, and he welcomed the other man's large cock into his body, lost in the joy of being used, of having his prostate stimulated, and of knowing that his own weeping cock would be ignored and neglected by his dominant lover. Skinner went slowly, leisurely, speeding up, and then slowing down again, maddening in his total control of both his own body and that of his slave. Just when Mulder thought he was about to pass out, he felt his Master's convulsion inside his body, and then Skinner finished, and withdrew, leaving his slave still lying on his desk. He heard his Master zip up his pants, and felt Skinner's handkerchief, mopping up the semen that was trickling down his slave's legs, and then Skinner slapped Mulder's ass, jolting him back to reality.

"Turn around, boy, and face your Master," Skinner said in a low, sexy growl. Mulder did as ordered, his pants still around his ankles. "You're mine, boy. You belong to me," Skinner said urgently. Mulder nodded, gazing at his Master, completely transfixed. "You bear my mark on your body," Skinner said. Mulder nodded again. "Let me show you how completely you belong to me." Skinner's hands went to the small dressing over the scar on Mulder's lower abdomen, from where the skin for the graft had been taken. Mulder held his breath as the dressing was removed. "You can look," Skinner said, in a husky voice. "You haven't needed the dressing for a few days but I wanted to wait for the right moment to reveal this to you." Mulder exhaled his breath, hardly daring to look down. When he did, he saw a perfect, thin 'M'.

"Looking down, to your eyes it reads 'M' - for Master," Skinner said, tracing his finger over the scar. "But to me, looking at it face on standing opposite you, it reads 'W' - my initial. And you'll note it's pointing directly towards this." He took Mulder's hard cock in his hand, and squeezed lightly. Mulder almost passed out. "That's because this cock belongs to your Master, Walter Skinner. It's mine."

"Yes, Master." Mulder swallowed hard. "It's perfect, Master."

"Yes it is, boy. Perfect - just like my slave. Now come here." Skinner pulled Mulder forward, and kissed him hard on the lips, holding him close. Mulder's arms snaked around his Master's back, and held him tight in return, never wanting to let go. When Skinner had finished, he released his slave, bent his head, and gently kissed the 'W' shaped scar. "Perfect." Skinner pulled Mulder's pants up, and buttoned them, and then looked his slave in the eye. "It's nearly time. I'm going to be walking into that hall beside you, and you are going to show the world why my slave is the best damn agent this institution has ever had."

"Yes, Master." Somehow it wasn't even a command - it was a statement of fact. Mulder didn't bother with his notes. He allowed his Master to usher him out of his office, and propel him along the corridor to the elevator. They rode up to the 4th floor in silence, and when the doors opened they were met by dozens of bodies crowding towards the hall, queuing noisily to get in.

"Agent Mulder."

Mulder stiffened. He knew that voice. Colton. Skinner's hand came down reassuringly on his shoulder and he turned - to find himself looking at a man he barely recognized. Tom Colton's face was badly disfigured - he'd lost an eye, and the whole of the right side of his face was lopsided, and scarred. Mulder tried not to stare, but it was a shock.

"Yeah, take a good look. People always seem to need to. I was caught up in a shoot-out in a case I was investigating a couple of years back. It was my own fault. I had a certain level of arrogance about my own mortality," Colton said, with a strangely twisted grin. "Nerves down the right hand side have gone," he added, by way of explanation.

"I'm sorry." Mulder shook the other man's hand.

"No need. It was a while back. I've gotten used to kids asking me weird questions and pointing in the street. Getting used to my own son cowering away from me when I went to kiss him goodnight was harder." Colton shrugged. "I'm looking forward to seeing what kind of a seminar you have planned for us, Mulder." His good eye gleamed with a certain anticipatory relish.

"It'll be good," Mulder said firmly.

"Well, I'm sure it'll be educational, one way or another," Colton chuckled, his speech rendered slightly slurred by his injury. He stalked off into the hall, following the last of the waiting agents.

"There but for the grace of god," Mulder murmured.

"The same goes for all of us," Skinner told him. "But you handled him a lot better than you did last time the two of you met, I think."

"I don't know why, but his injury somehow gave us some common ground. He seemed less confrontational," Mulder shrugged. "I couldn't help but feel sorry for the guy as well. However much of a jerk he was, he didn't deserve that. He still thinks I'm crazy though, and he's just waiting for me to make an ass of myself in that hall."

"And you're going to prove him wrong." Skinner's reassuring hand propelled Mulder towards the lecture hall. "Just remember what you are, and what's on your body," Skinner hissed in Mulder's ear, as they entered the hall. Mulder felt a warm glow start in his cock, and rise up into the scar of his lower

abdomen, where his Master's initial was carved; 'M' for Master when looked down upon from above, 'W' for Walter when looked at face on. It was perfect.

Skinner left him, and went to sit down, and the room quieted expectantly, as Mulder made his way to the dais. He stood at the lectern for a moment, surveying the crowd. The hall was full. He could see Colton, sitting in the front row, and a few rows behind Scully was sitting next to Agent Doggett, their hands so close as to be almost touching. A few of his old colleagues from the Profiling Department were here, and there, right in the very center of the crowd, was his Master, his broad shoulders taking up more space than anyone else. He gave Mulder a little nod, and his slave found his mouth opening.

"I want to welcome you to the Annual Training Seminar. I'm sure you've all heard of me. My name is Agent Spooky Mulder, and I'm head of the X Files Department." There was a shocked silence, and then people began to laugh. It was just a small ripple, but it broke the ice, and Mulder started to warm up. "Some of what you'll hear today will surprise you, some of it will shock you - if I do it right, some it might even scare you." Another little ripple of laughter. Mulder realized, with some surprise, that the room was on his side. They **wanted** to like him.

"I want you to bear in mind that all the case files I present to you today are **actual**, recorded crimes. They were investigated using Bureau procedures, and they were signed off by the Assistant Director in charge of Criminal Investigations." He caught his Master's eye, and basked for a moment in the warmth of the other man's acknowledging nod. Whatever the audience thought of Spooky Mulder, there was no way that **anybody** would ever poke fun at AD Skinner. Nobody would dare.

"They may seem spooky, but they aren't science fiction," Mulder continued. Each of these cases was solved only because I am lucky enough to work with the best forensic pathologist in the FBI - namely Dr Dana Scully."

A nod in Scully's direction, and he saw the startled expression in her blue eyes, and then the little smile as her loyalty and help over the years was rewarded by his high praise.

"Her rigorous scientific methodology cannot be disputed - my own contribution was less standard, but I hope it will show the importance of following your instincts as well as the hard facts, when conducting **any** investigation - however mundane." Mulder paused. The audience was silent, their gazes rapt. He realized suddenly that they were fascinated by the X Files. The notoriety of his department had clearly spread throughout the FBI and these people, who had only heard of his exploits second or third hand, via the FBI gossip mill, now had a chance to see for themselves exactly who Agent Spooky was, and what his department actually did. Mulder had a unique opportunity to show the world exactly why his work was important. He leaned on the lectern, pressed his hand against his scar, and began a speech of such brilliance, insight and candor, that it would be talked about in the corridors of the Hoover building for years. He wasn't sure whether the assembled agents believed half of what he presented to them, but they sure as hell were relieved that instead of the usual dry and dull speech on procedure and methodology, they got a sparkling discourse on the Paranormal, and they loved him for that alone. When he finally ran out of words, two and a half hours later, and asked if there were any questions, there was a stunned silence for thirty seconds, and then 200 hands went up into the air. Mulder grinned, and it was then that he caught his Master's gaze. Skinner was sitting with his hands on his knees, an expression of total and utter pride on his face, and a wide smile on his lips. Mulder nodded to his Master and they shared a moment in which they could have been alone, in this hall full of hundreds

of people. Skinner had made Mulder's acceptance possible by forcing his slave to believe. If he could have done, Mulder would have gone down on his knees there and then in front of his Master and kissed the other man's feet in silent adoration. As it was, he just placed his hand briefly but pointedly over his wedding ring, and smiled.

The rest of the day passed in a blur. Mulder was dimly aware of Scully being surrounded by people during the recess, all of them eagerly asking her questions. He vaguely recalled later that Skinner gave a thought-provoking speech on criminal trends, punctuated by the dry wit that was so rarely in evidence in the Assistant Director but which was a hallmark of his Master. He treasured forever the memory of Tom Colton shaking his hand, a new respect in his eyes, muttering something about Mulder having "come a long way", and he was even able to have an animated discussion with his old nemesis on the subject of profiling serial killers, even if they did disagree fundamentally but politely on several major points. Then suddenly it was over, and he was standing, lost and alone, in an empty hall, all the agents having departed. He looked around, and ran his hand over the lectern, smiling softly. It had been the scene of a triumph he had never expected to experience.

"I have one more question for you, Agent Mulder," a voice at the very back of the hall said. Mulder glanced up, surprised. He had thought he was alone. He saw his Master emerge from the shadows at the back, and walk down to the dais where his slave stood.

"You have a question, sir?" he asked, devouring his Master's broad frame hungrily with his eyes.

"Yes, Agent Mulder." Skinner got up onto the dais beside his slave, looked Mulder in the eye, leaned in close and whispered: "Who would you like to invite to your collaring ceremony, Fox?"

"My collaring...?" Mulder repeated stupidly, and then it sank in. "You're giving me my collar back?"

"Yes. You've earned it. There were moments when you almost screwed up, but you pulled through each time. I never expected you to be perfect, just to trust me, to learn from your mistakes, and to try. I was as proud as I knew I'd be watching you speak today, and I want to proclaim to the whole world that this slave is mine - **my** collared slave." Skinner said, his voice full of a possessive kind of pride.

"When?" Mulder croaked, his fingers going to his neck, tracing the line where his collar should be.

"Soon. How about the weekend after next?"

"Sounds good to me...or - the weekend after that is my birthday," Mulder said. "Maybe we could combine the two?"

"No." Skinner smiled mysteriously. "I have something else planned for your birthday, boy. Besides, I want you collared as soon as possible. Now, collaring is a big event so you can invite any of our scene friends you want to witness it - remember that they will also witness your punishment, so that might have a bearing on your decision."

"I don't want many people there." Mulder shrugged. "I want it to just be our close friends. Ian, Perry, Elaine, David, Murray, Hammer..." he reeled off.

"Okay. Now, my second question is - what do you want to wear?"

"Wear?" Mulder felt as if his brain was a fog. The day's events had barely sunk in and here was his Master asking him all these questions.

"I think your collaring should have a costumed theme. We could ask our guests to dress up too. I suspect they'd enjoy that, knowing them as I do." Skinner grinned. "It's your day, boy - your collaring - so you can choose the theme."

"Does this mean I get to choose what you wear?" Mulder asked.

Skinner's eyes narrowed. "Within reason," he said cautiously.

"Oh well then, I think I have the perfect theme," Mulder said, a wide grin splitting his face from side to side. "You see, being up here today..." he waved his arm around the dais expansively, "was like being in the arena - thrown to the lions." He gestured in the direction of the rows of seats where the audience had sat. "And as I think you'd look pretty hot in a tunic and chain mail, I'm going for a *Gladiator* theme."

Skinner looked at him steadily for a long time. Mulder stared him out.

"Okay," his Master said finally. "Gladiator...Fine." He gave a decidedly sadistic smile. "As I recall, in the movie, the gladiator was the slave, and the Emperor," he stressed the word with a purr, "was therefore his Master. The Emperor wore a very nice robe I think...while it was the **slave** who wore the very short tunic...You know, **slave**," he slung an arm around Mulder's shoulder and escorted him to the door, "I think this will prove to be an excellent choice of theme."

Mulder laughed out loud. He didn't care - he bore his Master's mark on his body, he had just put his career back on track, his Master was proud of him, and most of all - most of all he was soon going to be a collared slave again. Life was sweet.

With the seminar over, and his wounds healed, Mulder was back in charge of the X Files again. He saw Doggett off his territory quickly and efficiently, without any qualms whatsoever. He had nothing against the other man but it was early days yet, and he hadn't made up his mind whether he liked Scully's new boyfriend or not. As far as he was concerned, the jury was still out. The next two weeks dragged by interminably. Mulder found that as the big day approached he was torn between the joyful anticipation of being a collared slave again, and his fear of the public punishment he would have to endure before he was given his collar back.

"Have you thought about how you wish to be punished?" Skinner asked, the night before the Collaring, as they lay in bed. Mulder was sweaty, after a long, kinky and extremely thorough bout of love making which had left him completely exhausted - as he was sure was his Master's intention. He shifted in the other man's arms, trying to catch a glimpse of his Master's inscrutable face.

"Yes," he said finally. "Have you thought about how you'll punish me when it's your turn, Master?" He asked in return.

"Yes." Skinner stroked his slave's body affectionately. He didn't volunteer any further information. Mulder bit on his lip. "Don't worry about it." Skinner put his fingers over Mulder's mouth, to stop the chewing.

"I'm going to look a total ass in front of our friends," Mulder murmured.

"No, on the contrary. They'll admire you for taking your punishment and wiping the slate clean. It doesn't matter if scream, or cry - just as long as you willingly take what you're due."

"Yes, Master." Mulder's voice was almost a whisper.

"I'll take you to where you need to be," Skinner said reassuringly. "I'll be in charge of the evening - you just need to do as you're told."

They spent the next day preparing for their guests, and at 6 pm both took showers, and then got dressed in the clothes that Donald and Elliott had made specifically for the event. Mulder had to admit that Skinner looked magnificent in his embroidered purple cloak, although his Master had refused to allow his slave to help him dress, which concerned Mulder. His own attire was a denim blue tunic with a wide leather belt, which he donned with a sigh - although he had to concede that Russell Crowe had managed to retain his dignity while wearing the same outfit. He examined the scar on his chest before getting dressed. The final stitches had come out, and the appearance of the scar had been greatly improved. It was no longer an ugly, ridged mess, and was now smooth, and even in appearance, and there was no trace of the "AK" anywhere. The skin graft had taken, leaving him with a much smaller, neater scar. He could live with this much better - especially as it had left him with that beautiful 'W' just above his cock. He loved that mark, and often traced it with his finger just before he fell asleep. It had been worth going through the events of Seattle in order to end up with such a perfect mark on his body. He was still determined to be branded, but his new scar was very satisfying in the meantime.

Elaine was the first of their guests to arrive. Mulder took her coat, his head down, unspeaking, staying in the deep submission his Master had insisted upon to get his slave into the right frame of mind for the event ahead. Elaine looked beautiful - she was wearing her gold hair in little ringlets down the side of her face, and she was clothed in a beautiful, floating silk dress, bound with satin ties that criss-crossed her body. Her sub, David, was dressed only in a loincloth, and removed his shoes when he entered the apartment, following his Mistress around barefoot. Murray and Hammer came in the most exotic outfits - a long, bright robe for Murray, complete with head-dress, and full Roman centurion regalia for Hammer.

"I'm the Oliver Reed character!" Murray announced in his booming voice, swanning around the room theatrically, and brandishing a wooden sword. Ian showed up in a tunic much like Mulder's, which made the agent feel much happier, and Perry arrived late, wearing what was clearly a halfhearted attempt at a toga.

"I haven't seen the film," Perry said with his usual laid-back shrug. "Will this do?" Ian rolled his eyes, and Mulder tried not to laugh. Somehow Perry never quite 'got' the whole fantasy role playing side of lifestyle, although he was always happy enough to play at it to keep his partner amused.

"Friends, Romans, Countrymen..." Murray proclaimed, to everybody's snorts of derision.

"We don't have any ears to spare," Elaine interrupted. "We're lending them to Walter." She coughed pointedly, and a silence fell on the room as Skinner held up his hands. Mulder went to kneel beside his Master in the submissive position, head down, shoulders back.

"Thank you all for coming. As you know, this is a special day, and we wanted to share it with you, our closest friends in the lifestyle. Fox and I have been through difficult times, but we want to put that behind us, and renew our contracts. As you all know, Fox gave up the right to wear a collar a couple of months ago, and today, I'm giving him back that right. He's aware that he screwed up, and he's also aware that in doing so, he upset and inconvenienced you - our friends. If you'd like to accompany us to the Playroom, I've arranged for Fox to undergo the kind of closure he requires before he can be collared, and move on. Follow me."

Mulder followed his Master, his knees trembling in anticipation. He dreaded the thought of the public punishment, but at the same time, he was dying to get his collar back. Skinner hadn't allowed him to help prepare the Playroom, and his heart did a little flip of sheer terror as he saw that there was a spanking horse in the center of the room, beside a table containing a variety of implements. Several chairs were arranged around this little tableau.

"Please take your seats," Skinner said, gesturing. Mulder was glued to his Master's side. He followed wherever Skinner walked, and knelt whenever the big man stopped for a moment. When everyone was settled, Skinner looked down on his slave.

"Fox - remove your belt and tunic," he ordered in low voice.

Mulder swallowed hard, and then did as he had been told. He had been naked in front of these people before but that didn't make it any easier. However, what happened next surprised him. Skinner reached up, unbuttoned the long robe he was wearing, and allowed it to fall away - revealing that underneath he was bare-chested save for a metal harness and breastplate that looked as if it could have come straight from the film. He was wearing a pair of tight leather trousers and his arms were adorned with thick leather bracelets, which again, looked startlingly authentic. Mulder stared at his Master, lost in wordless adoration. Skinner smiled, and tousled his slave's hair.

"I drew the line at wearing a tunic, but I think you maybe had something like this in mind when you made your original suggestion - yes?" Skinner asked. Mulder nodded wordlessly, still lost in rapt adoration. His Master looked nothing short of magnificent. Skinner turned back to his audience.

"You've been invited here because you've all suffered, in varying degrees, as a result of Fox's actions in Seattle," Skinner said. "For that reason, you are each requested to select an implement to be used to punish him with, and a number of strokes you feel appropriate for the crime. Elaine - if you'd like to go first. Fox - please outline to Elaine what injury she suffered as a result of your actions."

Mulder hung his head, and swallowed again, sure that his voice would desert him. He knew that on some deep level he both wanted and needed this, but it didn't make it any easier.

"I'm sorry, Elaine. I know you had to give up a lot of your time to help nurse me." Mulder's voice was barely more than a whisper.

"Mulder, I care about you, and I was so worried." Elaine lifted his face, and kissed his forehead tenderly. "I'm your friend - I was more than happy and willing to give up my time to help you. I don't think any punishment is required."

Skinner cleared his throat, and Elaine sighed. "Very well, darling. If it'll make you feel better - 2 with the paddle, Walter."

Skinner nodded. Mulder was about to argue that this was hardly sufficient, but his Master's stern expression made him change his mind. It was clear that Skinner was going to give Mulder exactly what was ordered, nothing more, nothing less, and would do nothing to make the punishments either more or less severe than requested. Mulder quickly got into place over the horse and waited for his retribution, the back of his legs trembling as he tried to stand still. His face was flushed a deep red – in his position his ass was on display to the whole room. He felt the paddle rest on his ass, and then his Master swung it forward – hard, and without giving Mulder any warm up or preparation first. Mulder received his two blows without making a sound. Skinner didn't hold back on the swats - they were firm and delivered at a cracking pace, but there were only two. Afterwards, he placed a soothing hand on his slave's back, stroked him for a second, and then told him he could get up. Mulder went to Elaine, and kissed her feet.

"Thank you," he said.

"No problem, my dear boy. I'm just so glad you came back to us safely!" She exclaimed, pulling him into a warm hug.

"Ian next," Skinner said. Mulder took a deep breath. Ian was his closest male friend and this was a hard thing to have to do.

"Ian, I'm sorry - I know I worried you, and you had to give up time to nurse me as well," Mulder said. He felt stupid to be kneeling before Ian, but he knew Skinner would allow him to get away with nothing less.

"Hey, old buddy. I'm with Elaine. I was happy to help and I don't think you need to be punished either, but in order that Walter doesn't get mad at me, I'll go for 2 swats with the strap." He grinned cheekily, and Mulder managed a wan smile in return. He lowered himself over the spanking horse again, and took his 2 firm swats without complaint, then returned to kiss Ian's feet and thank him for the punishment.

"It's enough to make me want to run off and be bad just to end up in this kind of horny scene," Ian whispered, just loud enough for only he and Mulder to hear. Mulder couldn't smile in return though. It might be a hot scene for Ian, but for Mulder it was deadly serious. He wasn't getting off on this - he knew he deserved punishment, and he needed to receive it in order to get his closure, and to feel that he had truly earned his collar back.

"Murray and Hammer were inconvenienced because they had planned to use their beach house and had to give up their time there to us instead," Skinner said. Mulder looked up in surprise - he hadn't realized that.

"Oh, we can go there any old time." Murray waved his hand expansively in the air. "We were just pleased to be able to give young Fox here a place to rest up and get well." He gave his wide beaming smile, his white teeth gleaming through his salt and pepper beard.

"Nonetheless, you were inconvenienced," Skinner said firmly.

"Give the boy two with the crop," Murray said.

"Four," Hammer corrected. Mulder exchanged a look of recognition with his fellow sub; Hammer knew how much he needed this - and that it needed to count.

"Four." Skinner nodded, and Mulder returned to the horse. The crop hurt most - it stung deep into his butt and he knew he'd have a welt or two as a result. Still the punishment hadn't been bad enough to make him scream or cry yet.

"Finally, Perry." Skinner pointed, and Mulder went to kneel in front of the affable doctor.

"Perry, you've been amazing," he said. "From applying first aid when I flipped, to the skin graft."

"I don't want to see the boy punished any more," Perry said to Walter over Mulder's head, as usual not quite understanding.

"Nonetheless, Fox must be punished," Skinner said mercilessly. "May I suggest 6 with the cane?" Perry exchanged a long look with Skinner, and then sighed heavily.

"Very well, Walter, if you must," he said.

Skinner nodded at Mulder who walked back to the spanking horse in some trepidation, dreading that his Master would use the dragon cane. He didn't. Instead he used a thin, whippy cane that certainly stung a good deal, but still it didn't bring Mulder to tears. Mulder thanked Perry, and then turned back to his Master.

"All right, Fox. The next person is you," Skinner said.

There was a little rustle from the assembled crowd. Mulder took a deep breath, and faced his Master.

"I screwed up big time, Master. I knowingly placed myself in physical danger, I gave up the one thing that meant everything to me - the ring you gave me, and I ran away from the one person who has ever...meant something to me." He bit down on his lip. This was the hardest thing he'd ever done.

"Your punishment?" Skinner asked, in a curiously gentle tone.

"The bullwhip, Master. Twenty lashes," Mulder said firmly. He had thought about this at some length, and he knew this was the least he deserved for the way he had so nearly ruined his life forever. There was a little gasp from the audience, but Skinner said nothing. He just turned, went to the cupboard, and retrieved the bullwhip, which had not been among the items on the table. Mulder took a deep breath, and got up, then started to walk to the whipping post at the far end of the room.

"Not there, Fox." Skinner clicked his fingers, calling him back to his side.

"Master?" Mulder frowned, confused.

"There are more ways to use this than against a post. I'm an expert with it, and I would prefer to make this a more intimate experience - for both of us. And as I'm in charge of this punishment, that's exactly what I'm going to do. Come here."

Mulder went, still confused, and he was even more confused when Skinner cleared a wide space in the center of the room, and then drew his slave into his arms so that he was facing him. "Put your arms around my waist and hold on tight," Skinner ordered. Still puzzled, Mulder did as he was told. His Master smelled of leather and sweat and sheer physical dynamism. Mulder buried his face in Skinner's neck, wondering what would happen next. "The angle is awkward, but it still packs a punch," Skinner said, looking into his slave's eyes. "Ready, little one?"

"Yes, Master." Mulder closed his eyes. He heard Skinner raise his right arm, and a few seconds later there was a loud crack, followed by a sharp sting as the whip blazed a fiery trail over his buttocks. He gave a gasp and bucked against his Master.

"All right?" Skinner's brown eyes were impossibly close, and his left arm was clasped firmly around Mulder's waist. Mulder wasn't even entirely sure how Skinner had managed to deliver that stroke, but it had been very effective.

"Yes, Master," Mulder whispered.

"Good. Then we'll continue."

The strokes burned - there was no other way to describe them. Mulder dreaded the hiss of the whip, and the sharp crack as it made contact with his flesh, and yet the pain was fast, and faded quickly. His Master gave him time to recover from each lick, his big arm holding Mulder up. It was so intimate a punishment, and so lovingly delivered, that Mulder almost forgot that it was intended to **be** a punishment. It filled him with wonder that his Master had taken a retribution Mulder had intended to be extreme, and turned it into this experience of devotion instead. He forgot about the room, and forgot about the witnesses. There was just him and his Master, standing with the arms entwined, awaiting each of those burning, cracking licks. Mulder started to cry out, his whole body twitching, when the number of strokes reached six. It hurt, each stinging lick building into a crescendo of pain, but that wasn't why he was crying. The position in which Skinner had chosen to deliver these licks, facing his slave, holding him up, meant that his Master couldn't get the swing he'd have achieved at the post. That prevented the punishment from being anywhere near as severe as Mulder had wanted, and it was **that** fact that was making him cry. His Master was telling him he loved him, and that he would be kinder on Mulder than his slave was on himself. After each lick, his Master looked at his slave, and asked him if he was all right, and each time Mulder nodded, and buried his face in his Master's neck again, to await the next lick. All the same, it was a hard whipping to endure. The bullwhip was still a formidable instrument of discipline. Mulder found himself holding on tighter as each stroke bit home on his already sore buttocks. His Master's left arm held him up, his big body firm and unyielding, something for Mulder to cling on to. Mulder's breath hitched with each successive stroke, until he was gasping out loud, and flailing against his Master for support towards the end. There was a moment when, lost in the sheer cutting pain of that whip across his ass, he considered begging the other man to stop, but he knew that Skinner would remain strong when he was not. His Master seemed to see the weakness in his slave's eyes.

"Four more." Skinner said, pausing for a moment, and shaking the whip out. Mulder nodded, trembling, sweat soaking into his hair. "You can stand them. I know you think that you can't right now, but I'll be here, beside you. I'll make you take them," Skinner said softly.

Mulder swallowed, and nodded, reassured by his Master's words. Each lick was unerringly accurate, slaking across the bare flesh of his buttocks, hurting, and yet cleansing at the same time. When the twenty were up, Skinner threw the bullwhip down, and held his slave tight, caressing his trembling body. Mulder surrendered himself to those strong arms, seeking a short respite from the punishment. His buttocks felt as if they were burning up. He glanced over his shoulder to see that his ass was colored the brightest shade of red he'd ever seen.

"Okay, that's all over. You must forgive yourself now - that's the rule, Fox. You have to forgive yourself," Skinner told him. "Do you understand me?"

"It wasn't as bad as it could have been. You didn't punish me as much as I deserved," Mulder said, too softly for anyone but his Master to hear.

"No - but it was a hard punishment all the same. You'll bear those marks for a few days. Now, do you forgive yourself?" Skinner demanded. Mulder took a deep breath and then nodded. The memory of that intimate whipping would stay with him for a long time.

"All right. My turn now." Skinner went and sat in the throne. "Come here." He beckoned. Mulder went, oblivious of the witnesses, just needing to make things right between himself and his Master. He kneeled in front of the big man, and then began to speak.

"I'm sorry, Master, for running away, for allowing another man to hurt me, for giving you back your ring, and for hitting you. I'm sorry for being such a total fucking idiot and..." His words were stopped when Skinner placed his fingers over his slave's mouth.

"You know how I feel about name-calling," Skinner warned. Mulder nodded. "All right. Over my knee," Skinner ordered.

"What implement are you going to use, Master?" Mulder asked, wondering how much more his sore buttocks could take. They already felt as if they were on fire but he would have willingly endured it even if his Master had insisted on 50 cuts with the cane.

"The best implement of all - my hand," Skinner said.

He pulled Mulder into position, and ran his hand lovingly over his slave's burning buttocks for a minute, and then began to spank. There was no warm up - each hard swat connected with a painful sting, and Mulder soon realized that his Master intended this spanking to be in deadly earnest. Mulder couldn't escape the relentless power of that hand as it covered every single inch of his already sore buttocks. He was already too close to tears to hold them back, and was soon crying like a child over his Master's knee, screaming something pathetically at the top of his voice - he wasn't sure what. The spanking was both long and memorable, as Mulder needed it to be, to atone for all he had done on that night in Seattle. He needed to feel that he deserved his collar, and that his Master had punished him significantly enough to wipe out the crime. Skinner didn't fail him that respect. Mulder stopped crying at some point, and just lay there, blindly accepting what his Master was meting out. His Master had taken him down to a place

where he was completely serene, and at peace. Later would come the euphoria, the high of the endorphins, but first he experienced the strange, otherworldliness of total submission to someone else's will. He wasn't even aware that it had stopped, but reality slowly crept back in, and he suddenly realized that his Master wasn't spanking him any more, but was stroking him gently instead, soothing him, and talking to him in a low, gentle tone. After several minutes, he was helped to his feet, and his Master silently handed him a handkerchief. Mulder managed a faint smile as he rubbed his red, tear-stained cheeks with it.

"It's all done, Fox. We're done. Over. We can go forward now," Skinner said softly, drawing his slave close, and placing an arm around him to lead him back over to their audience. "Thank you for being a witness to Fox's punishment," Skinner told them. He turned his slave to display his thoroughly punished butt, and Mulder's face cheeks turned the same color as his ass cheeks, although the only sound from the audience was a sigh in appreciation of what had been a beautiful, tender scene between Master and slave. Skinner turned his slave to face him again, and looked him in the eye. "I think you've earned your collar now. Kneel, Fox." Mulder knelt, holding his breath. His legs felt unsteady beneath him, and he hoped he wouldn't make an ass of himself by falling over. He was sweaty, but curiously satisfied, the endorphins racing in, making him dizzy, but contented.

His Master stood behind him, and then Mulder felt something large, and dark against his throat. He looked up in surprise - this wasn't his slender gold collar.

"I decided that in order to mark this special day, I'd have a new collar made for you. This one will be for special occasions only," Skinner said, buckling the collar around Mulder's throat. Mulder put up his hand and felt the shiny surface. The new collar was made of dark burgundy-brown leather, and smelled delicious. There was a small tag on it. Mulder traced the engraving - it spelled out the word *slave*, in fine, italic lettering. "I'll use this collar when I want you to fully appreciate your slavery - and I might, occasionally, make you wear it when we go out - covered by a scarf or sweater of course, but you and I will both know it's there," Skinner said with a smile.

Mulder grinned back. "It's beautiful, Master," he whispered.

"Now, for your old collar." Skinner held up the slender gold chain. "You'll wear this day and night - and never remove it from this day forward. Understood?"

"Yes, Master." Mulder closed his eyes as Skinner fastened the flat gold chain around his neck. It hung lower than the collar, and felt right, nestled cold and familiar against his collarbones. Mulder realized just how much he had missed it.

"One more thing, before we finish this ceremony," Skinner said softly. "I've noticed how on occasion you call me Walter. I haven't corrected you, because you've only used my name at times when it's been appropriate. However, as this is day of gifts, and as you have so freely accepted the gift of punishment, I'm going to give you one more gift. You may use my given name at your own discretion without worrying about correction."

Mulder gave what he was sure was a pathetically goofy smile. He was quite content to call Skinner 'Master' but being given permission to use his Master's given name held great significance for him.

There was something intimate about it, something that spoke of permanence, and a level of connection that was both fundamental and profound.

"Thank you - Walter," he whispered. Skinner smiled, drew his newly collared slave to his feet, and pulled Mulder into a long, slow, healing kiss.

"Welcome home, slave," Skinner said, when he finally released him. "It's good to have you back."

The little group of witnesses gathered around to examine his new collar, and David, Hammer and Ian also showed a healthy level of interest in his thoroughly punished buttocks as well.

"That's so going to hurt tomorrow when the high's gone," Ian said with the air of an expert, tracing a finger over a welt, much to Mulder's chagrin. "You certainly won't be sitting easily any time soon."

"Your Master is very skilled. I've never seen that trick with the bullwhip before – I must ask him to show me how it's done," David commented.

"You'd never use a bullwhip on Elaine would you?" Mulder asked, astonished.

"Of course not – but my Mistress sometimes requires me to punish her other subs. It's a duty I enjoy." David smiled a peaceful smile, utterly enraptured by his role in life. Mulder envied him. It was a state he only managed to achieve occasionally, but he loved it when he did.

"I wanted to thank you for making me take the extra strokes with the crop," Mulder told Hammer, leading the little group out into the lounge, where food and drink was laid out waiting for them.

"No problem. I understood how you were feeling back there – and what you needed. Ian's right though. That was very thorough and painful discipline," Hammer said, glancing at Mulder's glowing backside.

"It needed to be." Mulder shrugged, pulling his tunic on quickly. His bottom had received more than enough attention for one evening in his opinion.

"You're lucky that you have a Master who understands that." Ian glanced regretfully at Perry who was sitting on the couch, laughing with Elaine. "Not that he's not great," Ian amended quickly. "Just that it isn't his kink really so he just goes along with it for me half the time. I just wish that he was a bit more, well...masterful," he sighed. "Like Walter."

"Are you and Perry okay?" Mulder asked.

"Yes. Fine. I'm just pissed off with him because he's going away for six weeks – something to do with work." Ian shrugged. "He can't help it, but I'm missing him in advance and taking it out on him. Unfortunately he's so laid back that I don't think he's even noticed I'm sulking yet!"

"Talking of masters – does anyone know how it's working out for that kid who got bought at the slave auction?" Hammer asked. "The one there was all the fuss about? Lee wasn't it?"

"Don't know. Don't care." Mulder helped himself to some food. Lee wasn't exactly his favorite person in the world.

"We haven't seen much of them on the scene," Ian said. "Last time I saw them, Lee didn't look so good. I asked him if he needed any help but he shook his head. He looked terrified though. I wish he'd let me help him. I know some of what Franklin will have been putting him through." He took a deep gulp of his drink, and Mulder remembered the night his friend had knocked on their door, scared and hurt after a run-in with Franklin.

"Maybe it suits Lee. Maybe it's what he likes," Mulder pointed out.

"Maybe." Ian shrugged. "I hope so," he murmured.

"Hey, come with me." Mulder tugged on his friend's arm, an idea occurring to him that he hoped would distract Ian from his melancholy mood.

"Why, where are we going?" Ian glanced around the room anxiously.

"Downstairs. We have a little collaring ceremony of our own to perform..." Mulder grinned mysteriously as they slipped away.

Later, when their guests had gone home, Mulder lay on the bed, and his Master lovingly applied cool gel to his fevered backside.

"Was that what you expected, little one?" He asked as he worked.

"It was more...more..." Mulder struggled for the word. The whole experience had been more profoundly affecting on an **emotional** level than he had been expecting. "Just more," he said, giving up with a shrug.

"You did well. I'm proud of you. Your new collar does have to come off at some point though," Skinner grinned.

"Can't I wear it just for tonight?" Mulder asked.

Skinner laughed. "All right. What the hell...?" He broke off, strode across the room, and picked up Wanda who had just poked her head around the door. "Fox?" He asked, in a warning tone. "What exactly is the meaning of this?" Mulder looked up with an innocent expression on his face. Around her neck, an extremely mortified looking Wanda was wearing a neon-pink suede collar, encrusted with little diamante studs.

"Well, it **is** Collaring Day, Master," Mulder said, smiling seraphically. "And I thought Wanda might be feeling a bit left out, so I got her one too and performed a little ceremony on her with Ian. She wasn't quite as docile as I was about the whole thing though. She made a bit of a fuss."

"No cat of mine wears a collar," Skinner snorted, relieving Wanda of the monstrosity around her neck, and using it to deliver a firm lick to his slave's backside. Mulder laughed, and rolled over quickly, and his Master rolled on top of him, managing to land two more hearty swats on his newly collared slave's burning backside.

An hour or so later, after some exhausting, and entirely recreational sex, a thought occurred to Mulder.

"Master?" he whispered.

"Hmm?" Skinner replied sleepily.

"You said you had something planned for my birthday?" Mulder was too keyed up to sleep, and he propped his head on his hand and gazed at his Master in the dark.

"That's right," Skinner muttered.

There was silence for a long time.

"What?" Mulder asked, suddenly consumed by curiosity.

"You'll see," Skinner replied mysteriously.

"Will I like it?" Mulder questioned.

"Oh, I think you will." Skinner's voice sounded rather smug, Mulder thought.

"Will it involve a session in the Playroom?" Mulder persisted, looking for clues.

"Oh, I'm sure it will at some point," Skinner replied into his pillow.

"Hmm. Will you be using any special apparatus?" Mulder pressed.

"I doubt it." Skinner sounded as if he was laughing now.

"Will...?" Mulder's next question was stopped by the simple expedient of his Master taking an inch of his slave's sore butt flesh between thumb and forefinger and holding it threateningly.

"You'll see," Skinner said. "And if the next question is going to be 'will this slave's bottom be made even hotter than it already is in the next few minutes?' then I can tell you that the answer is 'yes' if he asks one more thing about his birthday."

Mulder pouted - an effect that was lost in the darkness. He smiled soon enough though when Skinner gathered him in his arms, and held him against his chest. His Master's fingers played with his slave's body for a while, tracing the line of the 'W' on his lower abdomen.

"Walter..." Mulder whispered in the dark, savoring the way that name sounded on his lips.

"Hmm?" Skinner's mouth brushed his slave's shoulder.

"Thanks," Mulder said softly.

He reached up, and gently touched the thick, leather collar around his neck, and then traced the slender gold chain with his fingertips.

He was a collared slave once more.

## End of Part 22

### Chapter End Notes:

**Friendly, gladiatorial, collared feedback please, If you can't manage that, I'll gladly accept delivery of any chocolate-covered Russell Crowes you might happen to have in your possession...**

Still no sign of those juggernauts yet, but they're on their way... There are 3 or 4 chapters left in this series, depending on how long each one turns out to be, but the next chapter is going to be a fun one, dealing entirely with Mulder's birthday treat, which, I can assure you, I am looking forward to just as much as he is Both he and I are really going to part-ay J

Oh, and by the way, before some know-it-all emails me on the subject - that bullwhip thing is possible. I saw a demonstration with my own eyes last Thursday...

## Lord of Misrule by Xanthe

### **Author's Notes:**

Lovely pic by **Sergeeva**

Posted 26th February, 2001

Many thanks to the following:

Gaby for pink thingummies and much- needed encouragement.

Ann and Penny for the wonderful gift of two beautiful teddy bears in bondage cuffs and thongs, one wearing a pair of specs, with a whip sewn to his paw, and the other sporting a pair of fine nipple rings on his furry chest, a gold chain around his neck, and a gold stitched wedding ring on his left paw... you made my day, gals!

Raven for the encouraging poem.

Emma for many recent spanky/XF chats and the usual standing thanks <G>

Russell Crowe (I saw him in Leicester Square last week and he was wearing some really nice spanky black leather gloves! <G> It was very inspiring!)

Quotation courtesy of my sweet Alex.

**24/7** is an erotic fantasy and NOT a BDSM resource guide. The truth is sometimes exaggerated, or played with, for dramatic effect. For more information, please visit the **24/7 BDSM Glossary**.

Note: No, Oct 13th didn't fall on a Saturday last year. People who really **care** should remind themselves that Scully has been gestating her baby for 9 months without showing yet. It is therefore canon that time and dates are a curiously inconstant factor in the XF universe...<G>

**Warning:** Enormously long chapter follows, crammed full of loving BDSM stuff...and there's a little bit of a difference in this chapter ;-)

*"A truth, still apparent, though disregarded, that things move violently to their place, but calmly in their place. To put it another way, everything has*

*its right home, the region that suits it, and, unless forcibly restrained, will move thither by a kind of homing instinct."*

**J. Winterson**  
**"Art and Lies"**

"I'm stuffed." Mulder sank down on the couch with a contented sigh. "That meal was amazing, Master. Are you sure you don't want to tell me how much it cost?"

"Very sure, boy." Skinner glanced impassively at the restaurant receipt, and then transferred it from his jacket pocket to his wallet.

"That has to be one of the most expensive restaurants in Washington though," Mulder commented, glancing down at his stomach, which was showing a distinct bulge through his shirt.

"It is." Skinner grinned urbanely. He was dressed exquisitely, in a plain dark shirt, tie, and tailored chinos that hung in soft folds over his backside, accentuating the shape of his toned buttocks.

"I can't remember when I last even celebrated my birthday, let alone went to a place like that," Mulder murmured, eating up the sight of his Master as Skinner removed his jacket and hung it neatly in the closet under the stairs.

"I know," Skinner replied, coming to sit on the couch beside his slave. "Which is why I wanted to make the occasion special for you."

"Thanks." Mulder felt himself flushing slightly. He knew his Master loved him, but somehow it always took him by surprise when he was given tangible **proof** of that love. Skinner wrapped a large arm around his slave, and pulled Mulder's head down onto his lap. Mulder gave a relaxed sigh, and settled back, gazing up at his Master as Skinner stroked his hair. Skinner had sent his slave a message at work earlier in the day, telling Mulder to meet him at the restaurant at 7pm. He was not, under any circumstances, to go home after work – he was to go straight to the restaurant. Mulder had been even more intrigued when he had called Skinner's office at ten past five to find that the other man had already left for the day, and he had wondered whether Skinner was off arranging his slave's special birthday surprise for tomorrow - Saturday – Mulder's birthday. Mulder still didn't know what his surprise was going to be. Skinner had teased him with little hints several times over the past couple of weeks, and his slave's curiosity was now well and truly piqued.

"It's my best birthday ever and it doesn't even begin until tomorrow," Mulder commented. "Why **did** you choose to take me out tonight instead of tomorrow night, Master?"

Skinner gave a small grin, and tugged on his slave's hair just enough to hurt. Mulder gave a yelp. "Because I have other plans for tomorrow, as you well know, boy, so stop fishing for details."

"Master, this is me, your slave, Fox," Mulder replied with a grin. "Fishing for details is what I **do**."

"I know – but it won't be a surprise if you know in advance, will it?"

“It’s **almost** my birthday.” Mulder glanced at the clock. It was ten past ten. “Why not just tell me an hour and fifty minutes early?”

“Because you’re not going to find out anything until we wake up tomorrow.” Skinner grinned.

“Master is a sadist,” Mulder pouted amiably.

“Master sure as hell is!” Skinner replied with a guffaw. “Now, boy, as we’re going to be busy tomorrow, I think you should open your birthday presents now.”

“Open my...” Mulder sat up in surprise. “I thought you just said I wouldn’t be getting my present until we woke up tomorrow?”

“There are different kinds of presents, boy,” Skinner said with a solemn wink. “Tomorrow’s gift will be something you only get to play with for one day, and one day only, so I’m sure you’ll want to make the most of it and not be distracted by anything else.”

He gave a seraphic smile and Mulder couldn’t help laughing out loud. He watched as Skinner retrieved the key to his den which he’d kept locked for the past couple of weeks, presumably to protect its contents from the eyes of his prying slave, and then his Master disappeared out into the hallway. Mulder leaned back and put his hands behind his head. He still couldn’t believe his life was this good. His last birthday meal had consisted of pizza and beer – eaten alone in his apartment. He never would have guessed then, in a million years, that he’d be spending his next birthday as the property of his boss, with the two of them engaged in an alternative lifestyle that suited them both, and which had given Mulder the kind of happiness, stability and love that he had secretly craved all his life.

Skinner returned a few seconds later, his arms filled with parcels. Mulder stood up, his mouth dropping open in surprise.

“Are all these for me?” He asked, dumbfounded.

“Of course. If a Master can’t spoil his slave, then what can he do?” Skinner grinned, spilling the parcels onto the coffee table - all except for one, which he put to one side, next to the couch, out of reach of his slave.

“Which one first, Master?” Mulder knelt beside the table, and gazed at the many parcels. He had never much cared about birthday presents one way or the other before – he had other things to think about in life – but somehow the fact that these presents were from his **Master** made them very special. He no longer had the right, under the terms of his contract, to own anything. He didn’t even have his own bank account, so the fact that Skinner was buying gifts for him that were his to keep truly meant something. He gazed up at his Master expectantly, and Skinner shook his head, wryly, and massaged his slave’s neck gently.

“Whichever you like, boy,” he said softly. “It’s your birthday.”

Mulder laughed and reached out to pick up the nearest gift – only to find his hand stopped by his Master. “I think you’re forgetting something, boy,” Skinner said, gazing pointedly at Mulder’s body.

Mulder glanced down, confused, and then realisation sank in; he still hadn't removed his clothing after returning from their evening out together, and he was under standing instructions to be naked in his Master's presence when they were alone in the apartment.

"Sorry, Master. I guess I was distracted." He got up, and removed his clothing, placed it in a neat pile on the armchair, and then knelt, naked, in front of the coffee table again. He looked at Skinner, and his Master nodded that he should proceed, so he picked up a small box. He held it against his ear, and shook it, but was none the wiser. He returned it to the table, his eyes having been drawn to the strangest parcel in the collection – it was long and thin, and, as he discovered when he picked it up, very heavy.

"Master?" He raised an eyebrow at Skinner and his Master's mouth quirked at the corner.

"I'm not even going to give you a clue," Skinner told him. "Open it and find out." Mulder surveyed his other gifts but this was the most intriguing. He had no idea what it could be. He tore his finger under the wrapping paper and something clanged out onto the coffee table. He grabbed it, staring at it with eyes wide with shock; it was a long metal stick, and at one end there was a large, carved, metal 'S'.

"Master?" he croaked, his throat going suddenly dry.

Skinner got up, and came to kneel behind his slave. He put his arms around Mulder, and kissed the back of his neck.

"It's a branding iron, slave," he murmured in a deep, low, throaty drawl. Mulder's heart skipped a beat. "It's the iron I'm going to use to mark you." Mulder felt his cock start to harden. He was scared out of his wits by the idea of being branded, and yet he wanted it desperately too. "The 'S' is for 'slave'," Skinner told him. "It's also for 'Skinner'. It signifies that you're my slave, my property, and that's the mark I'm going to sear into your skin. I'm giving the iron to you now because I want you to have plenty of time to prepare – mentally and physically – for your branding. It won't take place yet. It won't be for a little while – but I'm not going to tell you when. I just want you to get used to it. Up until now it's just been an abstract idea, but it's going to become reality fairly soon. I'm going to heat this iron until it's white hot, and then press it deep into your skin. You'll scream," Skinner warned, his arms warm and comforting around his slave's naked body, caressing him, and holding him close, gently soothing the body of his slave - a body he owned and would soon mark with his brand. "You'll scream for a long time while the iron claims you, but afterwards you'll carry the mark I put on your flesh. A mark of love, and of ownership." Skinner kissed the back of Mulder's neck again, and his slave trembled slightly. He was both unbearably turned on, and scared shitless at one and the same time. "Soon you'll bear both my initials on your skin. This 'W'," Skinner fingered the thin scar low on Mulder's abdomen, "and now an 'S' to complete it. Back and front." Skinner's fingers cupped Mulder's left buttock and fingered it gently.

"Will you mark me there, Master?" Mulder asked in a choked voice.

"Yes. Low on the buttock leaving plenty of room for the marks of the cane above, for when I choose to mark you **that** way," Skinner growled into his ear.

"I'm scared, Master." Mulder didn't mind admitting that – he **was** scared of the branding and he wished he wasn't. His Master might have caused him pain in the past, but the erotic pay-off had always made it

completely worthwhile. His own fear had almost overwhelmed him before he had been fisted and had his nipples pierced, but he counted both of those occasions as among his most treasured memories now. He was sure that, in time, he would feel the same way about the branding – but right now, holding this iron and understanding that his branding would soon be a tangible reality, he was just plain freaked out.

“I know...but I’ll prepare you, boy. You’ll submit to the iron because it’s my wish that you do so – I’m not actually giving you a choice in the matter, sweetheart.” Skinner’s words took away Mulder’s doubts. He wanted to be branded as much as he knew Skinner wanted to brand him. His Master had always enjoyed marking his slave’s skin, and Mulder loved walking around with bites and welts on his flesh reminding him constantly of his Master’s affection. He knew he would be filled with pride at having a permanent mark on his body...if only he could get over his fear. However, knowing that it was going to happen anyway, and he had no say in the matter, relieved him of some of his worry.

“How will you prepare me, Master?” Mulder asked.

“For a start, you’ll kiss the iron every day – in my presence. I want you to become accustomed to it, and to think about how it will feel to have that mark on your body – I also want you to tell me any thoughts you have on that subject.”

“I want to bear your mark, Master,” Mulder said firmly. He had no doubts at all about that. “It’s the pain I’m afraid of. I don’t think there’s any way you can prepare me for it.”

“Don’t be so sure,” Skinner growled. Mulder’s cock lurched at his Master’s gruff, sexy tones, and he leaned back against his Master’s broad chest, his body afire with arousal. Skinner gave a knowing chuckle, and tapped Mulder’s hard cock. “I think you’re in the right frame of mind to enjoy opening the rest of your presents now,” he commented with a laugh.

Skinner got up, and resumed his seat on the couch, while Mulder surveyed his other gifts in some trepidation. He picked up the small box again, and tore off the wrapping paper to find a leather jewelry case underneath. He opened it carefully, to find two gold cufflinks nestled inside. Closer examination revealed that each of the smooth gold ovals was also engraved with a perfect, tiny ‘S’.

“When you look at these cufflinks you’ll be reminded of your status.” Skinner gave a satisfied nod. “I’ll expect you to wear them every day at work – I don’t want you to save them just for formal occasions. I want you to see that ‘S’ when you’re working, and to remember what you are, and who you belong to.”

Mulder’s cock gave a little spasm of delight at his Master’s words. He ignored it – he hadn’t been given permission to touch it. His cock, like the rest of his body, belonged to his Master and wasn’t his to touch unless it pleased Skinner for him to do so. Mulder reached out, found another small box, and unwrapped it. This time he discovered two gold charms, each in the shape of a fox. He looked at his Master wordlessly, his eyes shining.

“Decoration,” Skinner said, taking one of the tiny foxes and fixing it to Mulder’s left nipple ring. He completed the task with the right ring, his fingers rubbing Mulder’s nipples into hard little points. Mulder moaned, and arched his back. Skinner grinned, and leaned forward to nip his slave’s neck with his teeth. “I like my slave to be adorned. I like the idea of dressing you up, and decorating you. My fox. My slave.” Skinner took one of the charms in his mouth and pulled on it gently. Mulder’s breathing

quickened, but Skinner withdrew once more, nodding at Mulder to continue opening his packages. With a dreamy, aroused smile, Mulder did just that.

The next item to fall out from its silver and blue striped packaging was what looked like a wheel on a handle – and all around the circumference of the wheel were dozens of sharp, pointed steel nails. Mulder's held it up, wordlessly, with a raised eyebrow. Skinner gave a grin of pure, feral evil. He took the implement, held Mulder's arm out, and then gently pressed the moving wheel against his slave's flesh. Each tiny nail dug into Mulder's skin, creating a sensation of dozens of tiny pinpricks. "Imagine how this might feel when applied to a particularly sensitive area – and with more force," Skinner growled into his slave's ear. Mulder closed his eyes, his whole body shivering in anticipatory delight. Skinner wheeled the evil little implement up and down his arm, and then replaced it on the coffee table. Mulder opened his eyes with a sigh, and gazed at his Master accusingly.

"I never knew opening presents could be such an erotic torment," he muttered.

His Master laughed. "If you're a good boy, then maybe we'll end the evening by relieving some of that torment," Skinner commented, gazing pointedly at his slave's cock. "Or maybe not. It isn't your birthday until tomorrow, after all."

Mulder sighed and rolled his eyes. His Master enjoyed playing these little games with him. He opened four more of his parcels, finding an exquisite blue cotton shirt in one, a pair of steel gray chinos in another, a matching jacket in the third, and a tastefully patterned tie in the last package – an entire, color co-ordinated outfit. He went and stood in front of the mirror, holding the suit against his body.

"Looks good," Skinner observed, watching. "I thought the colors would suit you. Elliott brought me several bales of cloth to choose from – it took me a long time to decide. I wanted something that would be just right."

"It's perfect," Mulder breathed, gazing at his reflection in the mirror. Two more packages revealed a new pair of Italian shoes, in soft, charcoal black leather, a pair of silk boxer shorts, and the softest pair of socks he had ever owned.

"I wanted to buy you a complete outfit," Skinner murmured.

"It's just right. Thank you," Mulder said softly.

"There's more." Skinner reached into his pocket, and pulled out a tiny, odd-looking gift, awkwardly wrapped because of its size and shape. Mulder opened it and held up a key in surprise.

"It opens the door to this apartment," Skinner told him, reaching out a hand to gently massage his slave's neck. "I thought that as you were now sharing my bedroom, it might be appropriate for you to have a key to the front door instead of having to go all the way up to the 18th floor apartment and use the stairs and interconnecting door to get into this one."

Mulder swallowed down the lump in the back of his throat as he fingered the key thoughtfully. This present meant more to him than all the rest because it symbolized something about their relationship - something very important.

"Thank you, Walter," he whispered.

Skinner smiled, and claimed a kiss from his slave's willing lips. "You're welcome, Fox," he replied. "Now, I have one more parcel for you. This one is special and you won't fully understand its significance until tomorrow."

"Ookay." Mulder grinned. He had never been particularly interested in surprises before but Skinner's usual Masterly planning had turned his birthday into the most delicious, anticipatory game. Skinner handed his slave the parcel that he had kept beside the couch, and Mulder examined it, with a smile, completely unable to guess its contents. "You're good at this surprise thing, Master. I haven't a clue what you have planned for me tomorrow. Will I be any the wiser after opening this?"

"Probably not," Skinner chuckled.

Mulder tore through more of the striped blue and silver paper, and a plain silver collar with a padded lining slid out onto his lap, closely followed by two plain silver cuffs, also with padded linings.

"They're beautiful," he murmured, fingering the collar. "But I already have a collar, Master."

"I know." Skinner smiled softly. Mulder went to put the collar around his neck, but Skinner stopped him. "No. These have a different purpose. Wait until tomorrow, and then you'll find out what the collar and cuffs are for," he said, a strange twinkle in his eyes. Mulder gazed at him, speculatively, but his Master wouldn't be drawn any more.

Skinner got to his feet, and looked down on his slave. "All right, boy, it might be late but I have plans for the rest of the evening."

"I was kind of hoping you would." Mulder grinned. His cock was still semi-erect, and he hadn't been able to take his eyes off his sexy Master all evening. All this birthday anticipation was getting to him.

"First – you have a birthday spanking due." Skinner slid his hand into Mulder's hair, and then slowly bunched it into a fist, and pulled his slave's head back. "Don't you, slave?" He hissed.

"Well, technically speaking, not until tomorrow, Master," Mulder said cheekily. Skinner tightened his hand and pulled Mulder's head back even further. Mulder swallowed hard, fighting down a fit of nervous anxiety. He loved it when his Master did this, but all the same, it scared the hell out of him.

"I can spank you any time I like, boy. Don't forget that," Skinner said in a warning tone.

"Never, Master," Mulder gulped.

"And, for reasons which will become clear tomorrow, I want to administer your birthday spanking tonight. Any objections, boy?" It was said in a deceptively mild tone but Mulder knew better than to argue.

"No, Master," he replied promptly.

"Good. I also want to use you – hard." Skinner grinned a feral grin that went straight to Mulder's cock, reviving it to full erection once more. "I want you to be fully aware who is Master and who is slave around here, boy."

"I don't think either of us is in any doubt about that, Master," Mulder managed to croak, staying quite still within his Master's grasp. There was no doubt that Skinner could be exceedingly scary when he was in this kind of mood, and Mulder wouldn't have dared cross him.

"I hope not, but just to be sure I'm going to spank that sweet white ass of yours to a nice shade of blushing birthday red. After that, I'm going to tie you up and christen your new birthday present." Skinner picked up the small wheel with nails embedded in the surface, and Mulder swallowed hard, his gaze transfixed by the sight of that little implement of torture. "What's the matter, boy? Are you scared?" Skinner demanded, tugging Mulder's head back again.

Mulder nodded convulsively. "Yes, Master," he said honestly.

"Good." Skinner purred, stroking his slave's neck thoughtfully. Mulder held quite still, like a mouse caught by a cat. "Very good." Skinner let go, and pulled his slave roughly to his feet. "Go to the bedroom now – you'll find I've prepared it. Wait for me there, in the submissive position, until such time as I deign to come and take you, boy."

"Yes, Master!" Mulder was on his feet and running towards the stairs the moment Skinner finished the sentence, every nerve ending in his body tingling in anticipation.

"Fox!" His Master called him back. "Take this birthday present with you." Skinner handed him the little wheel. "Put it on the floor in front of you, just touching your knees. I don't want you to take your eyes off it."

Mulder nodded, then turned and ran up the stairs two at a time, clutching his present to his chest. He sped into the bedroom...and then paused, his stomach somersaulting as he took in the sight that greeted him there. All four corners of the bed had chains attached to them. His nightstand had been cleared, and instead of its usual clock and selection of books, it now boasted an array of various implements of discipline; his Master clearly had a full bondage session planned. It was unusual for Skinner to indulge in such sessions outside the Playroom, but Mulder had long since learned not to ask questions. Skinner demanded nothing less than his total obedience and if his Master wanted to bend his slave over the toilet basin and screw him senseless then that was fine by Mulder. It wasn't his choice – he had relinquished that control to his Master and he loved being a sexual plaything, surrendering himself to Skinner's every whim. It turned him on. The room was lit by the dim glow of two lamps, changing it from its usual everyday familiarity into a place of erotic mystery.

Mulder knelt beside the bed, head down, knees wide open, shoulders back, displaying the front of his body for his Master to enjoy, eyes demurely fixed on the floor in front of him where he had placed the small, nail-covered wheel. With his eyes focused on that, he quickly entered the serenity of subspace, and wasn't even aware of the time passing. He was both terrified and fascinated by the wheel. It was fixed on a short handle, and would have resembled a pastry cutter were it not for the shiny, tiny steel nails sticking out of it. He had no idea what they would feel like pressed deeply into the sensitive skin around his nipples, or over his cock, but he was sure he was soon going to find out. He was on a precipice of need, his cock straining within its golden ring, and, not for the first time, he was grateful that he had no choice. If he had a choice, he might be too scared to go through with the very things he wanted most in the world. As it was, he could do nothing but endure whatever his Master wanted to do to him.

After what could have been an hour, or just a few minutes, Mulder zoned into the fact that a pair of shoes were standing in front of him. He hadn't even heard his Master's footstep on the stairs.

"All right, boy. Between my knees and unzip me. No hands," Skinner warned, as Mulder reached forward eagerly. "I want you to suck me – but don't bring me to climax. I'm coming inside you tonight," Skinner told him in those rough, masterful tones that Mulder enjoyed so much. He sped quickly into position, and bent to open his Master's fly with his mouth. This wasn't easy, but, like the good slave he had become, it was a skill he had mastered to Skinner's satisfaction. It had taken several months but he was now able to undo every single item of his Master's clothing using only his mouth. With his hands behind his back as he had been taught, Mulder released his Master's large, swelling cock from its confines, and captured it in his mouth. Skinner's cock was always responsive to his slave's ministrations and Mulder loved the warm, hard feel of it beneath his tongue, and pressing against the back of his throat. He sucked for several minutes, until his Master pushed him away. "All right, boy. It's time for your birthday spanking. How old will you be tomorrow?" Skinner's eyes were dark, and for a moment Mulder was lost in them. A nudge from his Master's shoe reminded him that he had been asked a question.

"39, Master," he replied softly.

"Very well. Then you'll receive 39 swats. I'm going to start with my hand, and then use each and every single one of those implements on your nightstand – and you, boy, are going to bring me each one in your mouth, drop it into my hand, and then beg me to use it on your ass. Understood?"

"Yes, Master." Mulder gave a dreamy smile, lost in the joys of subspace. He liked it when Skinner added embellishments to a spanking – or demanded some action or response from him.

"Very well." Skinner slowly folded his sleeves up to his elbows, and then gestured to his knee. "No pillow – we'll do this the old fashioned way, slave," Skinner growled.

Mulder's heart thudded at those words as he got into position. Skinner's thighs were hard but they were also wide, and provided ample resting place for Mulder's long frame. His Master opened his legs and trapped Mulder's cock and balls between his knees, and then he began playing with his slave's ass. Skinner rarely spanked him in this position – usually his Master sat with his back to the headboard, and his slave supported on the bed, and Mulder felt curiously vulnerable with his nose pressed so close to the carpet, and his cock imprisoned. Skinner's hands were gentle on his backside and he fondled his slave's bottom for several long minutes, before, without any warning at all, he slapped down a hard, hearty smack on Mulder's waiting buttocks. Mulder gave a small, startled yelp, but Skinner soothed away any pain with some more gentle fondling. Mulder had just begun to relax when another hard smack made him yelp again. His Master was very good at lulling him into a false sense of security, and then rudely waking him from it. Mulder's cock was certainly appreciative of the other man's skill in delivering the perfect erotic spanking. More fondling, and then another smack – Skinner followed this pattern for ten swats, and then sat back. "Bring me the hairbrush, slave," he ordered. Mulder slid off his Master's lap, and retrieved the hairbrush from the nightstand with his mouth. He dropped it into Skinner's outstretched hand and knelt beside his Master once more.

"Please, Master, spank me with the hairbrush," he said in hazy tones. He felt lost, drowning in a sea of endorphins, but even so he was dimly aware of how far he'd come. There would have been a time, not

so long ago either, when he would have been embarrassed to say those words, and would have felt the need to make some smart ass comment to deflect his own sense of humiliation, but now he had learned to accept not only his Master's will, but also that his Master knew how to give him the most intense pleasure. It was a matter of trust – and Mulder trusted his Master implicitly. He bent over Skinner's knee again, and soon the fondling continued – this time interrupted by ten sharp slaps from the hairbrush. Mulder began to squirm against his Master's thighs as his buttocks started to heat up, sending waves of stimulation through every nerve ending in his body. He was almost startled when the spanking stopped and his Master deposited him on the floor once more.

“Bring me the belt, boy,” Skinner growled, and Mulder moved fast, picking up the belt in his mouth, and returning with it. He had learned never to mark the soft leather with his teeth – he would get extra if he did and, more worryingly, his Master would be displeased with him. Skinner took the belt from between his slave's lips, and Mulder gazed at him dreamily. Skinner waited. Mulder gazed. Skinner cleared his throat.

“Oh...uh, please tan my ass with your belt, Master,” Mulder requested.

Skinner gave the slightest sigh, and beckoned Mulder back onto his lap. Ten more lovingly administered swats sent Mulder into the stratosphere. He really felt as if he was floating. This was one of the most intense erotic spankings that his Master had ever delivered, and it was beautiful. His ass was on fire, and he just wanted to swallow his Master's cock deep within his body and lose himself in the big man's embrace. The belt rose and fell slowly – punctuated by loving caresses, and then Mulder found himself on the floor once more.

“The paddle, boy,” Skinner ordered, and Mulder returned the belt to the nightstand and gingerly wrapped his mouth around the leather paddle, before returning to his Master's side again.

“Please, Master, spank me with the paddle,” Mulder whispered. The lamp lit room seemed to be glowing an even more intense orangey-red as Mulder re-arranged himself over his Master's knee. The first blow from the paddle stung on Mulder's already sensitized butt, and he squirmed, and yelled in earnest. Skinner placed a hand on the small of his back, keeping him in position, and then proceeded to blister his slave's ass faster and harder than he had hitherto done. Mulder kept mental count of the swats and on the 9th he tried to rise – only to find himself still pinned.

“You're forgetting the one for luck,” Skinner told him, before administering one last mighty swat from the paddle. It cracked against his slave's bottom and Mulder howled on impact - and then the spanking was over. Mulder lay over his Master's knee, panting, and Skinner grabbed his slave's wrists and held them behind his back.

“Who do you belong to?” He asked in a fierce growl.

“You, Master.”

Mulder didn't struggle as Skinner held his wrists in place, leaving him without any way of balancing himself. He trusted that his Master would hold him up, and as always, his trust wasn't misplaced. Skinner opened his legs to keep Mulder safely over his knees, and then, holding Mulder's wrists in one hand, began to squeeze his slave's newly punished buttocks with the other. He cruelly pinched the

reddened flesh between thumb and forefinger, pressing hard until Mulder cried out, and then moved on to another piece of hapless flesh. Mulder started to move rhythmically, his cock aching with need.

“If you come before I tell you, then I’ll use my cane on your ass,” Skinner hissed. Mulder stopped rocking back and forth, and buried his face in the sheets with a moan. He dreaded his Master’s cane above any other implement – it usually delivered a pain far too severe to bring him any pleasure. Besides, Mulder knew that his Master would let him come tonight, but he wasn’t sure he could be patient. Finally Skinner released him, but only in order to tip him onto the bed, before leaping on him with a predatory growl. He sat astride his naked boy, pinning him down, and held Mulder’s arms above his head. Mulder went quite still, as he always did when his Master was in this particularly dominant mood. Skinner’s face was just inches away from his own, his eyes dark, and fiery with arousal. Skinner fastened each of Mulder’s wrists to the cuffs on the headboard, before removing Mulder’s nipple rings and the charms attached to them, and placing them on the side, leaving Mulder feeling curiously naked without them.

“Now I’m going to use your new birthday present on you, boy,” Skinner whispered. He reached down and grabbed the little wheel from the floor, and Mulder moaned, tugging pointlessly on his cuffs.

“Oh god...oh shit,” he whispered. “Please, Master...please...”

“Afraid?” Skinner asked, his lips full, and sensual, twisting in pleasure at his slave’s reaction to the toy.

“Yes, Master.”

Mulder tensed as Skinner waved the wheel over his body, not touching his skin. He was tied too firmly to escape, and, in any case, he didn’t really **want** to escape. He was dying to feel that wheel on his skin almost as much as he was afraid of it. Skinner’s white teeth gleamed in the lamp lit room, and he dipped his head suddenly and claimed a deep, unexpected kiss from his slave. When he withdrew, Mulder arched his head up, wanting more, and Skinner laughed, a deep, masterful laugh, and ran the wheel over Mulder’s nose and eagerly parted lips, but so lightly that Mulder barely noticed the tiny pinpricks. Skinner moved down Mulder’s body, and sucked at one of his slave’s nipples until it hardened beneath his tongue.

“All the more to play with.” Skinner grinned approvingly, pinching the swollen mound of flesh between his thumb and forefinger. Then he placed the wheel on Mulder’s breast and rolled it slowly towards the nipple. It didn’t hurt – but it was the most curious sensation. Mulder took a sharp intake of breath as Skinner’s hand pushed down harder on the wheel. Now he could feel those pinpricks in earnest, and his Master’s hand was going so slowly that Mulder was sure he could feel each and every little nail as it dug into his flesh. His Master’s hand slowed even more, at the same time as he increased the pressure, and then that tiny, tormenting wheel was traveling over Mulder’s swollen nipple, creating a sensation like a dozen pins pressing into his sensitive, aroused skin. He gasped and found himself staring into his Master’s laughing eyes.

“Was that good? Hmm?” Skinner demanded, soothing the abused nipple gently with his fingers.

“Oh god,” Mulder moaned.

“That was just the beginning.” Skinner reached over to the nightstand and grabbed a small bottle. Mulder gazed at it, hazily, trying to read the label on the side. Skinner swabbed some of the contents of

the bottle onto a cotton ball and Mulder realized, in some dim recess of his aroused mind, that it was alcohol. "We just want to startle the skin a little, in preparation," his Master crooned, jacking up the tension quite considerably, as if it wasn't high enough already to Mulder's mind. Skinner applied some alcohol to his slave's other nipple, and Mulder arced up as the cool liquid anointed him. "Now feel this," Skinner hissed, drawing the wheel swiftly over Mulder's breast, pressing down hard. There was a sharp flash of the most intense sensation – not exactly pain, but something close to it, and then it was over, leaving Mulder's entire body tingling, and his cock aching. Strangely, it hurt less when Skinner went fast than when he went slowly, but both sensations overloaded Mulder's already stimulated nerve endings.

"Oh shit...oh shit..." Mulder writhed in his bonds, and Skinner gave another of those wicked, feral grins, and anointed Mulder's stomach with the alcohol, and then swept the wheel over his slave once more, making Mulder twist in his bonds.

"If you don't keep still I'll tie your feet as well," Skinner warned. Mulder moaned, looking down on his stomach, convinced that he was being cut to ribbons – only to see just the faintest pink mark, already fading. He suddenly became aware that Skinner was dabbing the alcohol on his cock and screamed even before the vicious little wheel was swiped over his tender flesh. He struggled pointlessly in his bonds, desperate to escape what he knew was coming.

"NO! Oh shit NO!" he yelled, loving and hating each second, wanting it to stop and never end at one and the same time. Skinner grinned demonically, and flashed the wheel fast along his slave's cock. Mulder screamed again at the overload of sensation. It hurt...it hurt so much...and yet it felt so **good**. "No...oh god, NO!" He cried, thrashing around helplessly.

"What did you say, boy? Are you denying me?" Skinner leaned forward and kissed Mulder savagely, demanding entrance with his tongue. Mulder surrendered, ceasing his struggles, his entire body limp and exhausted. When he was done, Skinner drew back, and swabbed alcohol on his slave's cock again. "I wasn't going to do this twice, but as you're resisting me...I think a second time is necessary. I'm going to go very slowly this time," Skinner said, "As you're defying me I'm going to make this count."

Mulder trembled on the brink of ecstasy as his Master ran that sharp, vicious, completely wonderful implement over his cock again, very slowly as promised, pressing it deep into his slave's hard length until Mulder was screaming incoherently. Skinner stopped the noise by the simple expedient of claiming another kiss from his slave's open mouth. Mulder opened his lips hungrily, his entire body a mass of stimulation.

Skinner soothed his slave for a few minutes, allowing him time to recover, then he undid Mulder's chains and rolled him onto his front, before tying him again – and this time he tied Mulder's ankles as well, securing him spread-eagled on the bed, his head angled to one side. Mulder wasn't even sure that he was still breathing. He gave a startled shriek as the cool alcohol made contact with his hot buttocks, and then the evil, tormenting spokes of that wheel dug deep into his sore flesh, making every nerve ending in his body jangle and scream.

"Who are you?" Skinner demanded.

"Yours!" he croaked.

“What are you?” Skinner asked, swiping that vicious wheel into his slave’s flesh over and over again until Mulder didn’t think he could hold back his desire to come for another second.

“Your slave, Master. Your slave!” Mulder cried out.

“Good. Then prepare to receive me. But don’t come. I’m going to come inside you but you must wait for my order...I have something else planned for you, boy.”

Mulder felt his warm buttocks being parted, and he lifted his butt as far as he was able, desperately wanting to thrust back onto his Master’s hard cock, but being restricted by the chains. Skinner entered him smoothly, his hands rough and hard on Mulder’s sore buttocks. He slid back and forth inside his slave, using him as hard and fast as he had promised, pausing only to nip the back of his slave’s neck, or kiss his shoulders. Mulder couldn’t move his hands to caress his own cock, but he could slide it against the friction of the sheets, back and forth in time to his Master’s thrusts against his prostate, only supreme self-control and the knowledge that he had been ordered not to come keeping him from climaxing. He felt his Master convulse inside him, and sigh in pleasure, and then Skinner withdrew, leaving Mulder still on the brink.

“I want you to lie there, and think of the moment when I brand you,” Skinner said silkily, stroking Mulder’s hair with his hand, his voice low and seductive in Mulder’s ear. “I’m going to give you a taste of how it will feel, boy, so I want you to lie here and imagine the moment when I sink that iron into your flesh and mark you as mine - once and for all.”

Mulder shivered. He couldn’t hold on much longer...he couldn’t! He heard his Master leave the room, and gave a groan of total and utter frustration and despair. He briefly toyed with the notion of letting go and coming all over the sheets as he wanted to so badly, but he knew that wouldn’t be a good idea. His Master had ways and means of making his displeasure felt – and Mulder was too well acquainted with those ways and means to want to risk it. All he could think of was the mental image that Skinner had left him with. He could imagine that branding iron pressing deep into his skin, sizzling with heat, marking him with that ‘S’, branding him not only as a slave, but as Skinner’s slave - Skinner’s property, a belonging. He shivered. It was what he wanted more than anything in the world. He knew that being branded would finally wipe out, once and for all, what had happened in Seattle. His buttocks clenched involuntarily as he visualized that iron sinking into them, claiming him with its fiery kiss, and then he heard his Master, and, looking over his shoulder, saw that Skinner was holding the branding iron in his hand.

“Oh god no!” He cried. “Not now...not yet...” He was dimly aware that there was no sensation of heat coming from the iron, but his Master was moving closer and closer, and Mulder was so lost in his arousal and fear that he wasn’t thinking clearly.

“Hold still, boy, and accept the iron into your flesh. You can come whenever you like. This is just a dry run for the real thing,” Skinner said in a firm tone, and with that, he pressed the iron onto Mulder’s right buttock and it hurt! It was freezing cold, and that made it burn as if it was white-hot. His Master held it, pressed deep into his slave’s flesh, branding him as his property, making his mark on his slave’s body, and Mulder knew that he was coming, explosively, all over the sheets with that branding iron buried cold and hard in his skin.

It took some time for Mulder to come back to reality but when he did he found that he was no longer in bondage – in fact he was lying on his side wrapped up in his Master's arms. The bed seemed to have been changed around him, all the implements had been tidied away...and Skinner was grinning down on him like a cat that had stolen the cream.

"Good, slave?" Skinner murmured, his lips touching Mulder's forehead gently.

"No...fucking...fucking...evil," Mulder spat, grinning inanely.

"Language," Skinner corrected mildly with a swat to his slave's backside.

"Where did you learn to be so...despicable?" Mulder shook his head.

"You like to be surprised – and I really enjoy surprising you." Skinner kissed his slave again and Mulder snuggled closer. "It's only now that I feel able to play with you more. I knew you'd respond but I needed to reach a level of real trust first. I think we've reached that level," Skinner murmured.

"Does this mean you're going to do stuff like that to me again?" Mulder asked suspiciously. "Playing tricks on me? Psyching me out?"

"Oh, I expect so. It did, after all, have the desired effect. I had to change the sheets as we'd both have slept on the wet patch after you came so hard." Skinner grinned, and wrapped his big arms firmly around his slave. "You're just lucky that I'm feeling so benevolent after that splendid meal that I didn't get you to change them, slave, as I normally would."

"That meal..." Mulder sighed, "all those presents, and now this fantastic sex...and you're seriously telling me that my birthday hasn't even begun yet?" Mulder glanced at the clock – it was ten minutes to midnight.

"Yes. Tomorrow will be a different ball game entirely." Skinner grinned. "Now go to sleep."

"I don't think I could stay awake if you ordered me...oh, okay, maybe if you ordered me," Mulder amended hastily as his Master frowned. He rested his head lazily on Skinner's shoulder. "You put that branding iron in the freezer didn't you?" He murmured accusingly, his eyes drooping.

"Yes, boy. I did. It felt as if it were burning but it didn't leave a mark," Skinner chuckled. "Well, just a faint one from the pressure and temperature," he amended, fingering Mulder's ass thoughtfully. "And besides, your hot butt needed to cool down."

"Master is soooo funny." Mulder made a face, but sleep was claiming him fast. He wondered, briefly, what the hell his birthday surprise could be after the evening he'd just had, before he was lost to the world.

The first thing Mulder was aware of when he woke the next day was that there was something warm wrapped around his cock, sucking him hard. The next thing he was aware of was that his cock ring seemed to have been removed...He wasn't aware of anything else for the next few minutes though, as that mouth around his cock brought him to climax with some slow, intense, and very experienced

sucking. A few seconds later, his Master slid out of the bed, and knelt beside it, in the submissive position, knees apart, shoulders back, head down.

“Good morning, Master,” Skinner said softly. “Happy birthday.”

“Wha...?” Mulder blinked and sat up, trying to make sense of this. He felt as if he’d been transported to another universe, some kind of *Star Trek* alternate universe where everything was the opposite of the way it should be.

“If Master would like to collar his slave.” Skinner placed the silver collar and the two wrist cuffs he had given his slave the previous night onto the bed. Mulder stared at the collar, and then at his Master, and then back at the collar and cuffs.

“You’re not serious...” He opened his mouth several times in a passingly good imitation of a fish.

“Yes, Master. Today is your birthday, and this is your present. For today, and for today **only**,” Skinner stressed that word firmly, “I am the slave and you are the Master.”

Mulder sat there, gazing at his Master for several seconds, completely dumbfounded, and then a slow smile spread across his face.

“Oh shit. Oh my god. You mean it, don’t you? You’re serious about this.”

“Very serious, Master,” Skinner replied solemnly. “I’ve brought you coffee and your morning paper. I trust your wake-up call was to your satisfaction?”

“My wake up...? Oh god, yes. It was.” Mulder shook his head wonderingly. “I still can’t believe this. You...you’re my...” He pointed at Skinner, and then at himself. Skinner nodded. “All day?” Mulder raised an eyebrow. Skinner nodded again, a smile tugging the corner of his mouth. “I get to do whatever I like...?” Mulder asked, grinning inanely.

“Whatever you like,” Skinner said. “Well, within reason,” he amended hastily. “But I trust you, Master. I know you’ve learned a great deal from your own experiences as a slave, and I have every confidence that you will be a responsible, caring, and loving top.”

“So I can spank you?” Mulder was sure that he was going to laugh out loud with sheer glee. He felt almost light-headed.

“If it pleases you, Master. I’m your slave.” Skinner shrugged.

“Tie you up?”

“Yes, Master.”

“In the Playroom?” Mulder pressed.

“Of course. Here, Master.” Skinner leaned forward and hung a chain around Mulder’s neck. On the end of it there dangled a familiar bronze key. “The Playroom is yours for the day,” he said softly.

"I can sit on the throne?" Mulder asked. "And look in all the cupboards...and...use all the toys on you?" Mulder felt a wave of excitement course through his body.

"Of course, Master." Skinner bowed his head.

Mulder frowned suspiciously.

"Wait...there's got to be a catch," he mused. "I mean, what happens tomorrow?"

"Tomorrow I'll be Master again," Skinner told him in a more purposeful tone than he had hitherto been using.

"And payback's a bitch." Mulder made a face.

"There won't be any payback." Skinner promised.

"You promise?" Mulder said cautiously.

"Of course. Today is your birthday, and for one day only you get to see what it's like to be the Master. You can experience all the joys, all the power – and all the responsibility as well. I'm in your hands, Master."

And so saying, Skinner knelt back on his haunches, smiled a serene smile, and waited expectantly for his first order.

Mulder lay in the bed, still dumbfounded. He had never expected this. Skinner was kneeling as if he had been born to inhabit the submissive position, eyes down, waiting so patiently...Mulder was suddenly aware that Andrew had trained a very obedient sub and Skinner did have considerable experience in this role, but even so...to give himself to Mulder so completely, and honestly... Mulder had never been in this position before, and he was surprised by how touching he found the sight of his waiting sub. Did Skinner feel that way about him, he wondered? Did his Master appreciate the gift of his slave's submission – did it affect him the way it was affecting Mulder? He knew immediately that the answer was 'yes'.

Mulder felt excited, elated, and proud – but he was also nervous, surprised, and unsure where to begin. He was like a kid being let loose in a candy shop. He didn't know whether he wanted to spank his new slave, play with his slave's magnificent body, order his slave to massage him...or any one of a dozen other courses of action open to a Master...

"You know, this reminds me of the ancient festival of Saturnalia," he gabbled, his overactive mind kicking into gear as it always did in moments of emotional overload. "Of course that was a Christmas festival, and not related to birthdays, and the term 'Christmas' is misleading because it pre-dated that festival and referred to the big mid-winter festival that is common in most cultures...but anyway there were various traditions whereby the natural order of the world was inverted – sometimes there would be a big feast in which the slaves were served by the master of the house, or even freed for the day, and at other times they appointed a lowly member of the household, usually a fool or jester, to be in charge of the revels and he was given the title Lord of Misrule, and..." Mulder trailed off as he became aware of the incredulous expression on his slave's face. He had the distinct impression that the other man was longing to growl at him to shut up – or else to quiet him more directly by means of a firm kiss. Both

courses of actions were currently denied to him of course, but the expression on Skinner's face told its own story.

"Problem, slave?" Mulder asked innocently.

"No. That's all very...fascinating, Master," Skinner said faintly.

Mulder grinned. "You know, slave," he murmured, "I think I'm going to enjoy this!"

Skinner raised an eyebrow. He was clearly fighting back a flippant comment but controlled himself and instead replied, in demure, subservient tones: "Yes, Master."

Mulder gave a chortle of sheer glee, and leaned back, placing his hands insouciantly behind his head. "Oh yes...I'm **really** going to enjoy this!"

Mulder sat and gazed at his Master...no, **slave**, hundreds of ideas buzzing through his mind. Master. He was a Master...even if it was for only one day. Master. He ran the word around in his mind trying to make sense of it as applied to himself. He had always known that his fantasies were of the submissive variety, from when he first started having them as a kid, but since becoming Skinner's slave he had begun to wonder what it would be like to top. He was aware that before Skinner had contracted him into his service he'd been guilty of topping from the bottom, going to any lengths to experience the kinds of sensations that he wanted. He remembered, with a flush of embarrassment, how when he'd first met Elaine he'd told her precisely how he wanted to be spanked, for how long, and with which implement. He was a strong-willed personality, and the notion of truly giving up his power and control to someone else, however much he **wanted** to do so, had been impossible for him. And none of the tops he had met had been strong enough to make him, and take him to the true serenity of subspace the way Skinner had, and the way he had secretly craved. Some of them had tried to strong-arm him into it, using physical threats, but he had been contemptuous of their lack of real authority – the kind that came from within, from the soul. Skinner was the only person he had ever met who had that in sufficient abundance to truly claim mastery over him, and now the other man was showing that he was so secure in his own status as Master that he was prepared to give his slave a chance to experience what it was like, even if only for a day.

Mulder suddenly wasn't sure where to start. Being a slave had its own set of rules. It had by no means been the passive role that he had expected, as Skinner required his slave to fully participate in his own slavery, to show initiative in taking care of his Master, and see to the smooth and efficient running of the household, and his own personal grooming, as well as holding down his stressful job, and providing conversation and activities to keep his Master entertained. However, as far as sexual situations went, Skinner was in charge. He thought up the multitude of diabolical ways in which to torment his slave, and all Mulder had to do was accept – and give himself up wholeheartedly to his Master's will and all the many rewards that brought with it.

Faced with being the one who devised the sex games, Mulder felt like someone thrust on stage without having learned his lines. His slave was kneeling, expectantly, and he didn't know what to do. Was this how Skinner felt he wondered, suddenly realizing that his Master had this responsibility twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. How often had Skinner said those words to him? 24/7 - only he had meant it as a reminder to his slave of his status – Mulder was suddenly aware that the 24/7

arrangement was also true for Skinner. He, also, had no escape from his role as Master, just as his slave had no escape. Sometimes being a slave had been hard for Mulder - now he was dimly aware that there might have been occasions when it had also been hard for his Master.

“Master?” Skinner seemed to be reading the thoughts as they raced through Mulder’s complex mind, but then Mulder knew he had always been an open book as far as Skinner was concerned.

“Slave. I think...that some rules are required,” he said, wondering frantically, even as he spoke the words, what the hell those rules would be. “First – you don’t speak without permission.” Skinner nodded, and bowed his head obediently. Mulder chewed on his lip. Damn stupid choice of rule, he berated himself. Skinner had clearly been offering his help and he’d more or less told him to shut up. Shit! Now he was well and truly on his own. “Okay...second rule – no clothes. I want you naked all day.”

Skinner nodded again, and stretched said naked body slightly. Mulder gazed at the sight of his nude slave hungrily. There were so many things he wanted to do that he wasn’t sure which to begin with. Spanking was fairly high on his list. Just the thought of running his hands over those beautiful globes of taut butt flesh made his cock twitch – to say nothing of the utter glee of finally being able to give back what he’d been receiving. But...morning discipline was Skinner’s style, and Mulder didn’t just want to copy everything his Master did – he wanted to think up his own activities, and imprint his own personality on the role.

“Okay, good. The third rule is...” Mulder grinned an evil grin – he was going to enjoy this one – “you are not, under any circumstances, to come without my express permission. Understood?”

Skinner glanced up, his dark eyes unfathomable, which made Mulder feel more uncomfortable than he felt should be the case in the circumstances.

“Yes, Master,” Skinner said softly. “Master – permission to ask a question?”

“Go ahead.” Mulder waved his hand airily, almost dislodging his coffee cup. He grabbed the cup quickly, minimizing the spillage, and raised it to his lips as if the whole clumsy maneuver had been entirely intentional.

“Am I allowed to touch myself, Master, or must I ask your permission?”

“Definitely not. No touching,” Mulder said sternly.

Skinner nodded serenely. Mulder nodded, pleased with his rules thus far, and trying to think up some more. Skinner cleared his throat. “Permission to ask another question, Master,” he requested politely. Mulder thought about denying permission but it seemed a little churlish in the circumstances so finally he gestured impatiently with his head that Skinner should proceed.

“What about in the bathroom, Master? Or should I call you for assistance if I’m not to touch myself?”

Mulder frowned. “No, you can touch yourself in the bathroom,” he said, casting a suspicious look at his slave. All this attention to detail was a little irksome. He wasn’t very interested in details himself – he had always been better at looking at the broad picture and details bored him. His quick brain could see

them, and store them, and then move on to making them fit the whole jigsaw, while other people were still laboriously figuring out the first one. "Any other questions?" He asked, his eyes narrowing.

"No, Master." Skinner smiled, his eyes utterly bereft of challenge.

"Okay, the fourth rule is that I want you to obey my orders quickly, without question. I'm going to keep a tally. Any infringements of these rules, or slowness in following my orders, or smart-ass comments, or lack of respect, and you'll earn yourself a stroke from an implement of my choice. Understood?"

"Perfectly, Master." Skinner nodded.

At that moment Wanda nudged the bedroom door open and stalked into the room. She glanced at the kneeling, naked Skinner for a moment, clearly puzzled by this new world order, and then glanced at Mulder, lying in comfort in the bed. She weighed it up for a moment, and then made a beeline for Skinner, and rubbed her chin on his knees.

"Permission to pet Wanda, Master?" Skinner requested. Mulder glared at her. Didn't she realize that he was in charge now? It was very frustrating.

"Permission refused," he said, with a smug smile. Skinner nodded, put his head down, pulled his shoulders back...and waited.

Just like that? Mulder thought to himself. No questions? No resentment? Skinner was crazy about the little cat, so he would have expected that his new slave might try to sneak in a little stroke of the furry underside of her chin at the very least. In fact, he was kind of hoping that the other man **would** because then he would have excuse to spank him. But no. Nothing. Mulder sighed. Skinner's head snapped up at the sound.

"Permission to speak, Master."

"Proceed – and, uh, let's forget the permission to speak thing. You have my permission to speak until I say you don't. Okay?" It was grating on his nerves.

"Yes, Master. Thank you, Master. You seem out of sorts, Master. Could I help? Maybe I could draw you a bath, shave you, and, if Master would give me permission, I would love to have the honor of massaging Master. After I dress you, Master, I could cook your breakfast. I have a special birthday meal planned for you, Master."

Mulder wondered just how many times Skinner had managed to work the word 'Master' into that speech. Not that it mattered – somehow he had the feeling that no matter how many times he was addressed in that way, he'd never actually **feel** that he was anybody's Master. It was a state of mind, and he wasn't sure that it was one he could ever acquire. Skinner was looking at him with the earnest expression of the perfect little slave. Mulder decided that he really needed to take charge.

"Very well, slave. That sounds...good."

Actually, it sounded more than good, Mulder thought. An entire day of pampering, with this gorgeous naked slave waiting on him hand and foot – and he had never received a full body massage from his

Master, although Skinner had been kind enough to occasionally give his slave a back rub when he thought he needed it. Usually though, the massages that Mulder was on the receiving end of entailed him being manacled down to a table and enduring all kinds of painfully erotic surprises along the way. Not that he was complaining – those massages were among some of his most cherished memories, but he liked the idea of just having a simple, relaxing massage delivered by an adoring slave.

“First though – we have to take care of your collaring.”

Mulder swung his legs out of the bed, and looked down on his naked, kneeling slave. Skinner looked up, his eyes alight with what seemed an almost innocent glow of submission. Mulder wasn't sure whether his slave was feigning that or not, but there was something utterly wonderful about being on the receiving end of such a look. It made him feel a hundred feet tall, and as if he could jump over skyscrapers and fly through the air. His slave's total and utter confidence and trust in him made his own self-esteem shoot through the roof – but with it came a nagging worry that he might not be worthy of all this devotion, and a sense of huge responsibility settled on his shoulders.

“Come here, swe...” Mulder caught himself in time before he addressed Skinner as ‘sweetheart’. It had almost been instinctive. There was something about having a slave that made you want to give them a pet name. He had never minded Skinner's pet names for him, which were usually either ‘sweetheart’ or ‘little one’. In fact, he'd always found them rather endearing. His name had always been too short to be further shortened, and the only other name he'd been known by was the hated ‘spooky’. He had never been given such affectionate terms of address before he became Skinner's slave. ‘Little one’ had always made him laugh because he was far from being little and was only an inch or so shorter than his Master, although admittedly much slighter in build. Now he decided to give Skinner an endearment of his own. “Come here, pet,” he crooned. Skinner raised just the tiniest hint of eyebrow at Mulder's choice of address. “Well, what would you prefer?” Mulder grinned, opening his legs, and allowing Skinner to settle between his knees. “Honey? Love? Sweet cheeks?” Skinner looked faintly appalled at the very idea of that last nickname. Mulder grinned, and placed both his hands on Skinner's cheeks. “Well, they **are** sweet – although not as cute as your butt cheeks!” He laughed, reaching down to pinch said cheeks affectionately. Skinner allowed this indignity without protest, although Mulder had the distinct impression that the big man was desperately holding back a desire to swat his ‘Master’ with one of his big paws, and growl at him, rather like Wanda when he tweaked her tail. “And it occurs to me that you should have a slave name,” Mulder continued. “Walter is just a bit too dignified isn't it? What should your slave name be? How about...Maximus?” he exclaimed. “After Russell Crowe's character in *Gladiator*. He was a big tough guy who became a slave after all.” He grinned, and pinched Skinner's buttock again just because he **could**. He felt like a kid not only **in** a candy store but also behind the counter, in charge of all the candy, and it was intoxicating. “I could call you Max for short.”

“If it pleases you, Master,” Skinner said evenly.

Mulder looked down on his slave thoughtfully for a moment. He wasn't sure that it **did** please him. It was cute, but it wasn't quite right. He wanted his slave's name to somehow sum up the essence of the man, as well as being a term of endearment. There had been times when his Master addressed him as ‘Fox’, in a certain tone of voice, that he had shivered all over and felt as if he could have come at the sound of his Master's tone of voice alone – and the way it imbued his name with the essence of his slavery. He had never been more the slave, or Skinner more the Master, when the big man spoke his name in that way. He could have said that name in the office, in front of a crowd of people, and Mulder

would have known that his Master wasn't simply using his given name – Fox - he was speaking to his **slave**, and there was a significant difference.

"You know...you've often told me that I suit the, uh, more vulpine characteristics of my animal name," Mulder mused thoughtfully. "What is it you say? Long snout," he tapped his nose, "bushy tail..." he glanced down at his eager cock with a grin, "an insatiable curiosity and tendency to wildness." He looked at his slave who smiled, and shrugged.

"It does seem that your slave name is particularly apt, Master," Skinner commented carefully.

"Well, maybe you're right...which is why I think you should have an animal as your slave name as well. Wolf is nice...but not really you." Mulder shook his head. "I like Horse...you've got a nice broad back, and you're sure as hell hung like a stallion, but you're somewhat lacking in the mane department," he grinned. "No, wait...I've got it!" He exclaimed triumphantly. "Sometimes, when it's been cold and I've been wrapped up against that furry chest of yours, I've thought you bore more than a passing resemblance to a bear. Resourceful, something of a loner, dangerous but cuddly, big, and definitely furry...Bear. I like it – and of course it has the advantage of me being able to change it to 'Teddy' occasionally – when you're being particularly cute." He grinned exuberantly. Skinner's face was a picture of studied calm but his eyes were flashing a little dangerously. "Or there's always Grizzly for when I make you growl," Mulder commented, glancing at his slave's big paws. "So, Ted...it's time you were collared." He beckoned his slave closer.

Collaring was important to Mulder. Somehow it summed up the difference between merely playing, and it **meaning** something important – something to do with consent, and trust, and affection. He knew he would never be able to spank his slave if he hadn't first collared him. He wasn't sure he really understood why it was so important, but it was. Skinner hadn't laid a finger on his new slave until he had been collared, and the removal of his collar several months later had signaled that their relationship was in a state of serious hiatus, and that he had no rights save those his Master was kind enough to give him. His recent collaring ceremony was still very fresh in his mind – and the marks of the bullwhip used during that ceremony were still faintly visible on his buttocks, so he didn't want to demean the collaring process with smart ass comments. He stopped treating the whole thing like a giant joke, and looked down into the willing eyes of his new slave.

"I'm going to collar you, Bear. When I do, it will signal that you're my slave, that you belong to me, and that you're my property for this entire day, October 13, 2000. Do you understand that?"

"Yes, Master." Skinner's eyes were serious too. He knelt straight-backed and solemn, never taking his eyes off his Master's face, alert to every nuance of his Master's mood. Mulder picked up the silver collar and ran his fingers over it lightly.

"It's a beautiful collar. Thank you, slave." Mulder realized how often his Master praised and thanked him. It was something he had barely been aware of before he had become a Master himself. His Master always insisted on good manners from his slave, but the fact that Skinner also practiced those same exquisite manners had passed him by. "I want you to kiss your collar before I fasten it," Mulder said softly, holding out the strip of silver to the kneeling man. Skinner bent his head, and kissed it reverently. Mulder smiled, and ran his fingers over his slave's bald scalp. Touching Skinner's head had always been a favorite fantasy of his. Usually it was something he had to ask permission to do – and that permission

was often denied - but now he was aware, with a heady thrill of joy, that he had a whole day to touch any part of his slave's beautiful body with impunity. Skinner was his to do as he liked with, to touch as he liked, caress and fondle as he liked – and hurt as he liked too...if he liked. Mulder wasn't sure about that last thought. A part of him longed to run straight up to the Playroom, get out all the most exotic toys, and try them out on his new slave...but something was stopping him. Was this how Skinner had felt, he wondered, when he first took possession of his new slave, all those months ago? He recalled that his Master had examined him thoroughly, but had been remarkably restrained in taking possession of his slave. In fact he had waited several days before sinking his cock into Mulder's ass, despite his slave's insistence that he was ready, and wanted to be taken in that way. Skinner hadn't rushed him straight into the Playroom, and dug out all the best toys to use on his new plaything either. There had been a dignity and restraint in the way his Master had gotten to know his slave first, before introducing him to more exotic play slowly during the course of his training. Mulder's fingers trembled slightly, as he opened the collar and snapped the fastening shut around his new slave's neck. This wasn't a game. This was important. Skinner closed his eyes as the collar tightened around his skin, and Mulder felt the weight of that responsibility even more keenly. This man was offering up everything to him. How had he never understood how it must feel to be the recipient of such a gift?

"You're mine now," he whispered to his slave. "Say it, slave."

"I'm yours, Master. I belong to you."

Skinner dipped his head and kissed his Master's bare feet and then sat up again, utterly obedient, polite, and well trained – the epitome of the perfect slave...but not **his** slave. Skinner was the product of Andrew's training, not Mulder's. Skinner wasn't **Mulder's** creation, the way Mulder was his Master's creation. Mulder was aware that he hadn't tamed this slave in the slightest. Any power he had over Skinner right now had been given to him as a present from a kind Master. He hadn't earned it, and he didn't really know how to wield it. That thought made him a little glum. He had struggled all his life with a sense of not being good enough, and all those insecurities were resurfacing. Both he and his Master had fought a battle with Mulder's self-destructive tendencies during his slavery – and it was a battle that they were finally starting to win. Mulder knew all his faults intimately. He had always been acutely self-aware, and far more critical about himself than he ever was about others. At his worst he could be wild, unrestrained, and headstrong – and bitterly cruel to himself. Skinner's firm hand had steadied him, and he had finally come to understand that by offering up his weaknesses to his Master, he had, in some measure, learned how to control them. Now, ironically, having been given real control and freedom, he felt as if he was floundering. Mulder shook himself out of this reverie, a little shocked by the process he was going through. When Skinner had first delivered his birthday bombshell, Mulder had found the whole idea highly amusing - he had never expected that it might actually touch a nerve, and cause him to examine their relationship in a very fundamental way.

"Will you cuff me as well, Master?" Skinner asked, his eyes fixed intently on Mulder's face. Mulder nodded, grateful to be distracted from his thoughts. He picked up the cuffs, and pulled Skinner's wrists onto his lap.

"My slave. My captive," he murmured, fastening the cuffs shut with a satisfying snapping sound. He imagined tying those cuffs to a post, or to the headboard of the bed, and immobilizing his slave, and his cock hardened at the thought.

“That bath sounds good, Bear. Go and prepare it,” Mulder ordered.

“Would Master like oils in the bath?” Skinner asked.

Mulder nodded and watched as his slave disappeared out of the door, and then he sank back on the bed, with a sigh. It was only as he relaxed that he realized how tall he had been holding himself. There was something about being a Master that made you stand up straight, and hold yourself proudly. His own Master walked with such grace and restrained power in every stride – it was no wonder that his muscles were often unexpectedly tense when Mulder massaged him on Master’s Day.

Skinner returned a few minutes later, bearing a toweling gown. He held it out for Mulder to step into – only for the fledgling Master to find that it had been warmed.

“Thank you, slave,” he murmured, flushing slightly. He had never thought to warm his Master’s robe. It had never even occurred to him. He wondered how many more of his own shortcomings his slave would show up. His slave escorted him to the bathroom, which, Mulder noted, had been equipped with fresh, fluffy towels. Skinner’s shaving kit was laid out ready beside the basin. Skinner turned off the faucets, and then rose and pressed his fingertips lightly to his Master’s shoulders.

“Are you ready to take your bath, Master?” He asked courteously. “Should I help you with your robe?”

“Yes, slave.” Mulder nodded, feeling completely and utterly ridiculous. He was acutely aware that this was all wrong. **He** was the slave, and Skinner the Master. He just didn’t feel comfortable with this role reversal and he couldn’t relax. Skinner undid his robe, and then smoothed it away from his shoulders, and hung it over the radiator to warm again. Then he took Mulder’s hand and helped him into the bath – something that was entirely unnecessary, to Mulder’s mind, but, he had to admit, it was **nice** to feel so pampered. Skinner knelt beside the bath, and Mulder leaned back with a satisfied sigh, allowing the warm water to soothe him.

“This smells amazing. What oils did you use?” He asked his slave.

“Ylang ylang and sandalwood, Master,” Skinner replied with a smile.

Mulder gazed at his slave, startled by the pleasure in that smile. Skinner was **enjoying** this, he decided. His Master, his big, macho, utterly commanding, very stern Master, actually enjoyed being praised for something so small and inconsequential as the choice of bath oils. It was perplexing. Mulder closed his eyes, and then opened them again – his slave was still kneeling in position, awaiting his Master’s next order, utterly attentive.

“Play with yourself, Bear,” Mulder found himself saying. It was so good to just be able to feast his eyes on his slave’s naked flesh. Usually Skinner was clothed, and Mulder was the naked one, so his opportunities to just look at his Master up close and nude were limited. Now he could look all he liked - and he loved what he saw.

“Yes, Master.” Skinner gave a surprisingly shy smile, reaching for a small vial of oil that was resting beside the bath. He poured it into his hands until they were glistening, and then ran them idly over his body, starting at his chest, moving his fingers from one nipple to the other, fingering them. He smoothed his large, blunt fingertips down his stomach, going at a leisurely pace, and never taking his

eyes off his Master's face. Mulder was transfixed. Skinner might have been pleasuring his own body, but it was clear by the expression in his eyes that he was making love to his Master as he worked and Mulder's cock hardened with the knowledge. He watched, completely enthralled, as Skinner wrapped a big hand around his cock, and slid it back and forth, until his meaty penis began to respond, hardening beneath the caress. His slave gave a little moan, and rocked in time to the rhythm he was playing on his cock, sliding, and pumping, his back arched, and his eyes fixed on his Master's face. It was a beautiful sight and when, finally, Skinner moved his hand away from his cock it was Mulder's turn to moan. His slave's cock was rock hard, and weeping pre-come, and Mulder felt the loss of that hand almost as keenly as his slave must surely be feeling it.

"No," he whispered, as Skinner began playing with his chest again, oiling his body with slow, sensuous hands. "Go back to your cock."

"I'd like to, Master...but Master has forbidden me to come," Skinner told him. "If I play there too much longer I'm afraid that I'll disobey my Master."

"All right," Mulder sighed, feeling vaguely dissatisfied by the exchange. "You can stop, slave. That was very...entertaining," which was an understatement, Mulder thought wryly to himself. He would never have imagined that his restrained Master could give himself over to such an exhibitionist display so easily. There had been nothing showy or vulgar about Skinner's performance though – it had been entirely dignified, a private display purely for the pleasure of his Master. He remembered his own difficulties when his Master had first asked him to put on such a display. Skinner's performance had been far more polished and willing – but then he supposed that this was another thing that Andrew had taught the big man, and that thought made him feel unaccountably irritable. He sat up.

"Soap me, slave," he ordered tersely.

Skinner looked startled by his change of mood, and quickly did his Master's bidding. He didn't run the soap directly over his Master's skin though. Instead he lathered it between his own large hands first, replaced the soap on the dish beside the bath, and then placed his hands on his Master's body, spreading the soapy lather lovingly over Mulder's flesh. Mulder was startled. Why had he never thought to do that, he berated himself? Shit, he had been wandering around imagining himself to be a good little slave all this time, but Skinner knew moves he didn't even know existed. It was depressing. His slave picked up a washcloth, and removed the soapy lather from his Master, never touching Mulder for long enough to be disrespectful, but making sure that every inch of his Master was gently and lovingly washed. All his heart and soul seemed to go into this simple act, and Mulder felt utterly prized, treasured and adored. It was a good feeling – but no different to the way he usually felt in his Master's presence if he was honest. Slave or Master, Skinner's love for him was always obvious, even if the ways in which he expressed it were completely different. Skinner politely asked permission to wash his Master's hair, which Mulder gave, and then leaned back as his slave poured warm water over his head and gently massaged shampoo into his scalp. It was all so soothing that he almost fell asleep. When his slave was done, he helped his Master from the bath, and enveloped him in a warm, fluffy towel. Then he took another towel and bent to dry his Master from the toes up. Mulder enjoyed the sight of his slave's broad back, the muscles rippling under the skin as he caressed his Master's body. He was starting to zone out as a result of all this attention, and, try as he might, he couldn't think of a way to exert his Mastery over his slave in any way. Skinner seemed to have the whole slave thing down pat anyway. There just didn't seem to be anything he could order his slave to do that Skinner wasn't already doing

and that made Mulder feel jittery and out of control. He had the feeling that somehow something more was expected of him but he didn't know **what**. Finally, his slave wrapped him up in that warm robe again, towel-dried his hair, and gestured to his Master to stand in front of the mirror in order that he could shave him. Skinner took up position behind Mulder, applied shaving cream to his Master's face, and then picked up the cut-throat razor from the neatly arranged kit beside the basin.

"How many balloons did you kill first?" Mulder asked, eyeing the razor wearily.

"Hundreds." Skinner grinned. "I can assure you that I'm perfectly proficient with this, Master. I used to shave Andrew every day with it. It's not a skill you forget."

Mulder nodded at him, feeling surly again. So Andrew got shaved every day did he? While Mulder only shaved his Master once a week, on Master's Day. Skinner was as good as he said he was though - Mulder didn't think he'd had a cleaner shave even at the barbers. He stroked his flesh in wonder and thanked his slave who smiled and washed the razor carefully before replacing it in its case. Then he escorted his Master back to the bedroom.

"Would Master like to be massaged on the bed, or in the Playroom?" Skinner asked softly, kneeling beside the bed in the submissive position while he awaited his reply.

"Here will be fine." Mulder cleared his throat, his voice slightly croaky. When Skinner had first given him the key to the Playroom, the first thing he had wanted to do was to run up there and play...but now he found himself avoiding going there. He knew why, deep inside. Skinner was such an expert on all those devices in the Playroom. How could Mulder possibly be expected to be as good at wielding them as his Master? He'd do something stupid and make an ass of himself, and ruin forever even the illusion that he could ever be a top.

"Very well, Master. Shall I prepare the bed?" Skinner asked. Mulder nodded, and hung around, his arms folded defensively across his chest, feeling useless as he watched Skinner place towels over the sheets and plump up the pillows. He tried to remember what Skinner did while waiting for his slave to prepare something. How did a Master stand? What did he do? He found that he had no idea. Skinner was so much the Master that he could have stood on his head eating peanuts while Mulder made the bed and he still would have looked like a Master. He just had 'it' whatever 'it' was - that indefinable, effortless quality of authority that made a good Master, and Mulder was acutely aware that he **didn't** have it. Skinner finished his preparations, returned to his Master's side, pressed his fingertips to his Master's shoulders, and asked if it would all right for him to remove his robe once more. Mulder nodded curtly, feeling more like a child than a Master. He threw himself face down on the bed, wondering when this whole experience had gone from being good fun to being so disconcerting. He knew that he could turn around and tell his slave that he had had enough, and wanted to return to the status quo but he had his pride - and besides, it seemed churlish to throw a birthday present back into the face of the man he loved. Skinner had thought he would enjoy this, and he felt guilty because he **wasn't**.

Not even his strange mood could stop him enjoying the massage though. Skinner proved to be as expert at that as he had been at everything else, and Mulder became more and more blissed out as those strong, oiled fingers explored every inch of his skin, soothing out a myriad of little knots and stresses. Even so, a part of him longed for his slave to slip a finger between his ass cheeks, the way his Master would have done when caressing him. Skinner was far too well trained a slave to take such liberties. Mulder was dimly aware that Andrew Linker must have thoroughly deserved the reputation he had in

BDSM scene circles. From all he had heard from the big man's own lips Skinner had not been an easy student to teach, but he had certainly learned his lessons well. Mulder felt utterly boneless by the time the massage ended. Skinner's hands were curiously gentle for such a large man, and he served his Master well. Mulder was so out of it that it actually took him several minutes to realize that the massage was over, and that his slave had once again resumed his kneeling position by the bed, eyes down, back straight, his cock and balls thrust a little forward should it please his Master to play with them.

"That was..." Mulder felt dreamy, and detached, and his voice sounded strange to his ears. "Fantastic," he mumbled, dropping his head to the pillow again.

"If Master would like to rest for a while, I could begin cooking his breakfast," Skinner suggested.

"What? Yeah. Breakfast. Uh...yes. Thanks." Mulder felt his insides squirming with embarrassment as his slave disappeared. Oh god, how Masterful had **that** been? He buried his face in the pillow, wondering how on earth he could be a worthy Master to such an amazingly perfect slave. It was frustrating. Skinner seemed to be one step ahead of him the whole time. It seemed almost cruel to even **think** about spanking such a slave, even though that was one of the things he had been itching to do since he had first woken up to his birthday surprise.

With a sigh, Mulder got up, and quickly dressed himself in sweatpants and a tee shirt. He felt somewhat rebellious getting dressed when Skinner had said that **he** would dress his Master but he wanted some control here though, damnit! At least he'd go down to breakfast, rather than wait for his slave to grab the initiative again by coming back up here and being all solicitous in escorting him down the stairs – or, god forbid, by bringing his breakfast to him in bed. Mulder quailed at that thought, and, grabbing his sneakers and newspaper, ran down the stairs two at a time.

His slave had set the table and was busy in the kitchen. Mulder looked at the table, and frowned.

"Bear," he called. Skinner glanced out of the kitchen, a surprised look on his face. "There's only one place setting," Mulder commented.

"Yes, Master. I didn't like to presume that you'd allow me to eat with you. I could lay another place if it pleased you. Or I'd be happy to eat in the kitchen after Master has eaten, unless Master wished to feed me himself? Or maybe Master doesn't intend me to eat?" Skinner waited patiently for his answer, and Mulder felt wrong-footed again. Skinner had neatly outlined all his Master's options and now none of them felt like commands – he just felt he would be following his slave's suggestion, whatever he did. He felt like waving a hand and snapping, "please yourself," but stopped himself.

"Wait on me, and then you can kneel beside the table for me to feed you," he growled tersely. Skinner's eyes widened slightly at Mulder's tone. Mulder winced slightly – in their usual roles he knew he'd have been punished for behaving like this, but they weren't in their usual roles and he felt all at sea.

"Have I upset you in some way, Master?" Skinner asked gently.

"Yes, you have. You're too fucking perfect!" Mulder snapped.

There was silence. Skinner's eyes were startled, and a little hurt. Mulder suddenly felt like a total bastard. That little display hadn't exactly come out of the 'Good Master's Handbook' he thought. His own Master had never sworn at his slave or belittled him like this.

"Would Master like me to be less attentive?" Skinner asked softly, after a long period during which they both stood there, gazing at each other uncertainly.

"No. No." Mulder was surprised to find he meant that. On one level he was **enjoying** all the attention, but he just couldn't rid himself of the feeling that he didn't deserve it. "I'm sorry. It's just...I've never had so much as a cleaner for my apartment before. I sure as hell haven't had a maid, cook, manservant and sex slave rolled into one," he joked feebly. "It takes a bit of getting used to. Bring breakfast out when you're done. I'll be reading the paper." Skinner's "Yes Master," wafted after him as he returned to the dining room.

Mulder read the paper, relaxing, and enjoying the feeling of being able to lounge around actually wearing clothes in the apartment, his feet up, being waited upon, and not having to address himself to his Master's needs, or to always have his ass available for any stray spank his Master wanted to bestow on it.

Breakfast was delicious – which didn't come as even the remotest surprise to Mulder. His slave rustled up a stack of the most perfect, fluffy pancakes, and then knelt beside his Master while Mulder devoured them. He decided that he'd feed his slave **after** he was done. Maybe that would make him feel more like a Master. It was nice, he had to admit, eating happily, reading the paper propped up on the table in front of him, his free hand fondling his slave's head as he chewed. Skinner put his chin on Mulder's knee, and Mulder smiled as he played with his slave's ears. He knew from personal experience how good it was to kneel in silent devotion beside his Master, his chin on his Master's knee like an adoring puppy. Maybe slaves everywhere felt the same way. He glanced down at his slave, who looked up at him, his dark eyes attentive behind his wire-rims.

"Are you hungry, Bear?" He asked.

"Yes, Master." Skinner sat up.

"Do you want breakfast?" Mulder grinned, and arranged a nice gooey piece of pancake, covered in blueberry sauce, on the end of his fork. He held it out enticingly.

"Yes, Master." Skinner nodded.

"Beg for it then," Mulder ordered.

Skinner hesitated and Mulder suddenly felt like the worst Master in the entire universe. Why on earth had he demanded that his slave do something so demeaning? Skinner had never given him such a humiliating order, for which he was suddenly profoundly grateful. "It's okay." Mulder put the forkful of food into his slave's mouth, silencing him before he could beg. He didn't want to see this beautiful, dignified, attentive man humiliated in any way. Skinner was giving him his slavery as a gift; the last thing Mulder wanted to do was to belittle this man. His own slavery had bolstered his very flagging self-esteem and confidence to such a degree that it seemed a travesty of the Master/slave bond to do anything that would undermine his own slave's confidence. It struck him that in the hands of the wrong

Master a slave could have his whole life ruined, but with the right Master his life could be transformed, and he could learn how to fly. That was what Skinner had given to him. How could he ever hope to emulate such a Master? He fed his slave quickly, carefully, and solicitously, and then sent him to do the dishes, while he sat down on the couch with a sigh. Everything he did seemed to be wrong and he didn't know how to assert himself at all in this situation. He was so lost in these dark thoughts that he was surprised when something nudged his hand half an hour or so later, and, looking down, he saw his slave, kneeling by the sofa.

"Does Master require anything else?" Skinner asked.

Mulder felt his slave's insightful dark eyes boring holes into him. Trust Skinner to be sharp enough to know what was going on in Mulder's tortured thought processes. He didn't want to be at the mercy of those eyes right now. He wanted to enjoy his birthday present, to feel strong, and masterful, and give orders and really immerse himself in this whole experience and those dark eyes seemed to be judging him, and finding him profoundly lacking.

"No. Go and do some chores or something," he snapped moodily. Skinner flinched slightly, but withdrew, leaving Mulder to channel-hop idly while his slave was otherwise occupied. It felt weird not being naked, and being able to do whatever he liked on a Saturday. Usually his Master had plans for him, and often they involved very dull and mindless chores – or else a totally mind blowing session in the Playroom, Saturdays being slave's day after all. He wished he could enjoy his freedom a little more, but Mulder felt too much on edge – and for too many reasons of him to fully analyze. The key to the Playroom seemed to be burning a hole into his neck. Usually on a Saturday, he couldn't wait to go up to that treasure trove, and now, having been given carte blanche to do just that, he was hesitating. Shit, he'd been Master for several hours already and he had neither spanked nor fucked his slave yet – what the hell was wrong with him?

His mood grew darker as he pondered this thorny issue, and when his slave returned a few minutes later he glared at him. Skinner looked at him for a moment, clearly sensing his Master's mood. He sat down on the armchair opposite Mulder, and surveyed his Master intently.

"Is there a problem, Master?" He asked. "Is there something I can do to help?"

Mulder wrestled with it for a while. He really didn't want to come out of role. He **wanted** to do this damn it, but he just felt so inhibited about it. Finally he gave in.

"Yes. I think...I want to be a slave again," he said with a sigh.

"I could sense that you didn't seem to be enjoying yourself enough," Skinner commented softly. "What's the problem, Fox?"

"I don't know." Mulder stared moodily at the TV, but he wasn't watching it.

"Look, if that's what you want then it's fine." Skinner shrugged. "I can order you up to the Playroom and take you back down to what you are for the other 364 days of the year. This wasn't supposed to be an ordeal – it was supposed to be fun. If it isn't then we can change that."

"Yeah." Mulder played listlessly with the buttons on the remote control.

“Do you want that?” Skinner pressed. “It’s your birthday, Fox.”

“No, see, I like the idea of this...but I can’t seem to do it,” Mulder growled savagely. “And you, you’re such a perfect slave, which just makes me realize that I’m **not**, and I can’t even begin to do the Master thing either. I’m useless. I mean, you haven’t screwed up once so I can’t even spank you. And what’s the point of ordering you not to come when you don’t have a damn hard on anyway?” He grouched, glancing pointedly at Skinner’s flaccid cock. “I spend my whole time with a hard on so it means something when you say I can’t come, but you...” he shrugged. “Oh I don’t know.” He sank back into the couch.

“Okay.” Skinner pressed his hands together thoughtfully. “Look, Fox, you’ve recently talked about wondering what it was like to top – so I thought I’d give you the opportunity with as little pressure as possible. This is your birthday after all. As far as I’m concerned you can sit here and have me feed you chocolate all day if that’s what turns you on. You’re the Master. I’m not judging the kind of Master you want to be. That’s the freedom I wanted to give you - the freedom to do what you like without worrying about it, because it’s a one off. I forgot about the phenomenal amount of pressure you put on yourself.” He gave a wry smile. “Now, we can do this another way, with me giving you a tutoring session in the Playroom, perhaps using a willing sub like Ian so you can have some experience of topping, but you’d be limited as there are a great many things that I won’t tolerate my slave doing to another man. That’s why I offered myself. Another way to do it would be for me to just give you a tutoring session using myself as the sub, but I didn’t think you’d appreciate being told what to do and how to do it – and I don’t think it would give you any true idea of what it’s like to be in charge. You wanted the full experience of being a top, and this is it, warts and all.”

“You mean you feel like this?” Mulder looked up. “All this responsibility, the pressure of having to think up what to do, and to always be the Master? To behave like a Master, so that you walk, talk, think and breathe it? To be strict with your slave without crushing his spirit or making him do anything that demeans him? To know how to turn him on, and to be turned on yourself at the same time? To have the freedom to go as far as you want, and do what you want, without forgetting that he’s real flesh and blood too?”

Skinner gave a gentle smile. “Yes, Fox. All of that,” he murmured. “Only I have a lot more experience of it, so it comes a little more easily to me.”

Mulder nodded thoughtfully. “There are things I want to do.” He examined his fingernails. “But I guess I’m also a bit freaked that they **are** things I want to do. Spanking for example.” He bit on his lip. “I really want to do that, but how do you resolve the issue **inside**? How do you deal with the fact that you want to hurt someone? To inflict pain?”

“It comes with the territory.” Skinner shrugged. “Fox, I know what you mean. There have been times when I’ve done things to you that would be considered torture. I’ve enjoyed them in the most part because you enjoy them so much, but there’s also something inside me that enjoys it period. I’m not a violent man, or a bloodthirsty one, and that realization was something that freaked me out too to begin with. Sometimes I very much **don’t** enjoy it either. There have been times when I’ve punished you for instance, when I’d much rather have been fucking you senseless or giving you an erotic spanking, but you’ve needed to be brought down, and you’ve needed to know that I’ll do that for you, even if you’d have done anything at the time to escape so severe a spanking. I’ve delivered some spankings after all that were purely for punishment, and gave neither of us any pleasure during your time as my slave.”

“You can say that again.” Mulder shifted uncomfortably on the couch, remembering at least three occasions when the spankings had been in deadly earnest and exceedingly painful and there had been no question of him being turned on by them.

“So what I’m saying is that there are duties as well as pleasures to being a Master – just as there are to being a slave.” Skinner smiled, and Mulder returned the smile uncertainly. “And if you can’t come to terms with the side of yourself that wants to inflict a little bit of pain, by way of spanking, or nipple clamps, or whatever, then you don’t have to.” Skinner shrugged. “This entire day is in your hands and you can go as far as you want – or nowhere at all if you don’t want to explore this side of yourself. If you **do** want to however, then I’m here.” He smiled again. “You see the thing is that I trust you. I don’t think you’re going to unleash a sadistic monster. I know you too well for that. You should have more faith in yourself. And as for enjoying it – well, think how you’ve been beating up on yourself for being weak because you like being sexually submissive, and then think of the amount of beating up on myself I did when I realized I liked being sexually dominant. It’s easier to accept that you like being spanked than to accept that you like inflicting pain.”

Mulder stared at Skinner open-mouthed, trying to take this information in. He had never viewed the world this way before and it was both mind blowing and liberating. The psychology of it fascinated his profiler’s mind.

“So how did you come to terms with it?” He asked.

“Well, it helps not to think of it as pain – I mean there are many acts of love-making where pain and pleasure are so interlinked as to be indistinguishable. Sometimes the sensation of orgasm can be painful just because it’s so intense – but nobody would deny that it’s also pleasurable. So, that’s how I think of it. Not as giving pain per se, but giving sensation – intensity. And there are people like you, who enjoy receiving, who need people like me, who enjoy giving. It doesn’t mean that you’re weak or that I’m sadistic. It just means that we’re responsible adults, who’ve recognized our needs and are fulfilling them without harming anyone. Not ourselves, not anybody else, not society in general. That’s what I call being responsible anyway.” He shrugged. “Do you still want to give up the role, Fox?” He asked softly. “Because if you do that’s fine. Like I said, it’s your birthday.”

“No. I don’t want to give it up. I want to see what it is that attracts you to it. I want to find out something about myself,” Mulder sighed. “But I need to let go and I seem to be too inhibited to do that.”

“Well, it’s a big role reversal so I can see where you might have problems with that, but this isn’t a performance, Fox. It’s a journey of discovery. I’m not judging you on how good a Master you are today, so you shouldn’t judge yourself. You certainly shouldn’t judge your own slavery against how well or badly I perform as your slave.”

“But you do all this great stuff, and...I wondered if you were being the kind of slave that you wanted me to be...that I’m not,” Mulder said miserably.

Skinner laughed. “Fox, I’m more than happy with my slave, thank you very much,” he said. “I’m the slave I want to be. We each of us have to find the kind of Master and slave that we can be, that we feel comfortable being. Some Masters never use pain – they are only interested in the dom/sub aspects of a relationship. You might find that you’re one of those Masters. Some Masters only use pain because it’s

what their subs want – like Perry does with Ian. Some enjoy using it, but do so wisely, knowing that when used properly it's like a maestro playing a violin and can bring his sub the most intense pleasure. You have to figure out what kind of Master you are and that takes time, and experience. None of us can be a copy of anyone else – that would stop us being what we are, for a start and just make us all into clones, and I, for one, do not want a clone slave, and I'm sure that you don't want to be one. You **couldn't** be one. It isn't you – and I chose **you**. And it has to be said that you've only seen my strong points. Taking care of my Master, seeing to his comfort – those are what I'm good at. There are other situations you could put me in where I'd be a lot less satisfying, believe me!" He gave an amused grin.

"I'd like to know what those situations are." Mulder gave a sly grin of his own. Skinner shook his head and wagged a finger at him.

"Uh-huh."

They were silent for a while as Mulder digested what he'd just learned. "I know exactly what you mean about being the slave or Master that you can be..." Mulder mused eventually. "I don't want to just copy you. I don't feel that's **me**."

"Well go with that then," Skinner said encouragingly. "I could give you a few technical pointers. You mentioned that I was so perfect you couldn't find a reason to spank me. Well, hell, you don't need one, Fox! You're the Master. You can spank me just because you like the idea and it turns you on. You have to remember that I've given myself to you. I've done that freely, trusting you, and knowing that there are many ways in which you might want to amuse yourself with me. Giving yourself freely, without caveat, is at the crux of what it means to be a slave, but accepting that gift freely, without caveat, is equally at the crux of what it means to be a Master. You do your slave a disservice by not accepting that gift in the spirit in which it was given."

Mulder felt stunned by this revelation. There was something so perfect about it, and so true, that it took his breath away.

"As for me not having an erection...well, Fox, you're in charge. Order me to keep one all the time I'm in your presence, and at the same time order me not to come." Skinner shrugged, a broad grin playing across his face. "Those are the tricks of the trade. Use them!"

Mulder shook his head, laughing softly. "You see, that's why you're the Master," he commented.

"And you have one day in which to experience that state to the max yourself," Skinner replied. "One day, Fox. That's all I'm giving you right now. Who knows when this opportunity will present itself again? Just let go, and enjoy. You know you'll regret it if you don't."

Mulder nodded, feeling much more confident. "Okay." He took a deep breath.

"Do what you enjoy, not what you think you should be doing – it'll flow much better if you do," Skinner advised. Mulder nodded again. "And tomorrow, we need to have a serious discussion about why you think a well behaved slave is boring and a naughty one is more fun." Skinner grinned.

"Hey, you promised no payback!" Mulder protested, relaxing now that he'd aired his worries.

"I said discussion." Skinner raised an amused eyebrow. "Not punishment. You seem to have a permanently guilty conscience, boy."

“Okay, okay, already,” Mulder grinned. “Now, are you going to be my slave again or what?”

“Your wish is my command.” Skinner stood up, stretched his magnificent body and then knelt gracefully by his Master’s side. Mulder considered the matter for a moment. No matter how butter-wouldn’t-melt Skinner looked right now, kneeling in the submissive position with his eyes cast down, he refused to believe that his slave could enter subspace that easily. Just a few seconds ago he’d called him ‘boy’ and now he was a fully submissive slave? Mulder didn’t think so. They both needed some space to adjust to the change in roles or it wouldn’t work. An evil idea occurred to him – something that would have the virtue of helping his slave get back into role as well as providing Mulder with some innocent payback. He got up, and ordered his slave to follow him, then strode out of the room with a broad grin creasing his face, mirth bubbling up inside him. Oh this was good! This was revenge!

“Here you go,” he said, flinging open the door to the laundry room with a flourish. “My shirts, slave. I want them ironed.” He gestured in the direction of a pile of crumpled shirts in a basket. He sent both his and Skinner’s work clothes out for cleaning, but he often washed their casual clothes himself. Skinner liked to have a little bit of laundry for his slave to do occasionally, as a suitably mindless pursuit both for punishment purposes and to remind him of his status in the household. Mulder’s slave surveyed the laundry with an impassive look on his face, and then walked obediently across to the basket of crumpled clothing, but Mulder caught the look of barely suppressed amusement in his slave’s eyes. Skinner was biting down hard on his lip as he turned on the iron.

“Yes...” he began in a choked voice. He swallowed hard, his eyes full of mirth, and tried again. “Yes, Master.” His face had gone red, and he looked as if he was going to have an apoplectic fit from trying not to laugh at the poetic justice of finally having to do the chore his own slave hated so much.

“Was there something you wanted to share with me, slave?” Mulder raised an eyebrow, struggling hard to keep from laughing himself.

“Uh, no...Master,” Skinner said weakly, hanging to his persona of perfect slave by the skin of his teeth.

“Are you sure?” Mulder purred, unable to resist. He felt a wave of pure malicious glee course through him as he stalked over to his naked slave, took up position behind him, and rested his chin on Skinner’s shoulder, his mouth close to his slave’s ear. “Shirts.” Mulder enunciated the word as if he was making love to it. “Lovely, crumpled shirts, just waiting to be ironed.” He picked one up, and held it in front of his slave, his arms wrapped around his slave’s body. It was very nice being this close to Skinner’s naked butt he thought to himself, his cock responding hungrily to the knowledge.

“Yes, Master. I love ironing, Master,” Skinner said in a dreamy voice.

“Nobody can love ironing. It’s not humanly possible,” Mulder responded, despairingly, utterly aghast.

“I do, Master.” Skinner grabbed the shirt that was being held out tantalizingly towards him, put it on the ironing board, and began the chore in question. “It appeals to my sense of order, Master. Bringing smooth, unwrinkled perfection where once there was chaos,” he said in an almost orgasmic tone, sliding the iron across the garment, and ironing out the wrinkles.

“You wouldn’t be lying to me, slave, now would you?” Mulder purred, waiting to pounce, waiting for Skinner to give way to the laughter that was threatening to consume them both. Skinner struggled. His

body was trembling with the effort of not laughing but then, with the masterful self-control that Mulder had come to know and respect all too well in the big man, he pulled himself together, smiled beatifically at his Master, and shook his head.

“No, Master. I wouldn’t lie to you, Master,” he intoned unctuously.

Mulder gave a snort of pure disbelief, and gave in. “That’s good, slave, because there’s a whole basket full of clothes here for you to **enjoy** ironing. You can come back to the living room when you’re done,” he ordered.

Skinner nodded at him, his face utterly serene, only the tiniest of glints in his dark brown eyes betraying his amusement. Mulder shook his head, still grinning, and exited the room. He was only half way down the corridor when he heard a deep, bass, peeling belly laugh emerge from the laundry room. He paused in mid-stride, and gave in to the laughter himself, giggling helplessly until he was out of breath before struggling back to the living room and throwing himself down weakly on the couch, utterly exhausted.

He lay there for a moment, and then pulled himself together. He had to plan his next step. He didn’t want to waste his time as Master by having his slave do chores all day. Skinner was right – Mulder had one opportunity to experience this, and it might never come again. He wanted to enjoy it. Even if he turned out to be the most useless Master in the universe, he wanted to know what it felt like to take this role. What surprised him most was how much he was learning about his own slavery through this whole experience, and somehow he was sure that wasn’t by accident. His Master was a very astute man, and he must have known that this little lesson in topping would give his slave pause for thought. Now he had to think what to do next. Skinner had told him to enjoy himself, and do what he **wanted** rather than what he thought he should. What did he **want** to do? Mulder found the answer to that one easily enough. He realized that although his own Master loved having a naked slaveboy around, and much as he appreciated looking at his Master’s nude body, one of the things he always fantasized about doing was dressing Skinner. The other man’s magnificent physique looked so good when shown off under the right clothing – and until now he’d had little say in what his Master wore. Of course Skinner was a pretty good dresser, but Mulder had a yen to put his slave in outfits he would never normally wear. What else...? When he thought about it, it occurred to him that he liked the idea of **playing** with his Master a lot more than anything else. Just the thought of having his slave tied up and writhing under his mouth and hands was a turn on. He remembered that Skinner had mentioned having problems with tight bondage...he had no wish to cause his slave any undue distress, but it would be good to put his slave in a position where he wasn’t so sure of himself, and where he had to trust his Master. Another idea occurred to him. He gave a sly grin, got up, and went purposefully into the kitchen. He examined the contents of the cupboards and fridge, retrieved a few items, and then he headed for the Playroom.

It felt strange to be letting himself into this hallowed room, which he had only entered before as a slave. He took a deep breath, and then dumped the items he had brought with him in the en-suite bathroom and left them there, before going to examine the contents of the Playroom cupboards. Finally, with a satisfied nod, he turned and went back downstairs to the laundry room. He paused outside for several seconds, psyching himself into the role. He was the Master. He was in charge. His slave existed to do his bidding. Then, with butterflies emerging unexpectedly in the pit of his stomach, he opened the door.

Several shirts were hanging stiffly from hangers, utterly devoid of even the slightest crease. Mulder had expected nothing less of his perfect slave and managed to refrain from rolling his eyes in disgust – just. He gestured his slave out, holding on hard to his Master’s demeanor as he did so.

“I want you to go upstairs to the Playroom, and wait for me in there,” he ordered in a low tone of voice. “I want you kneeling but not in the submissive position. I want your ass in the air, and I want you to think about how that ass is available for me to use, or spank. Now go.”

Skinner gazed at his Master thoughtfully, clearly digesting this change in attitude, and then he nodded, and disappeared without another word. Mulder watched him go, and then turned back and examined the shirts. They were all perfectly and exquisitely pressed. They even smelt delicious, and he guessed his slave must have sprayed some kind of fragranced softening agent onto them or something. It was disgusting. He caught sight of Wanda lying happily in a basket on top of the dryer and idly stroked the top of her head.

“How come, that even when he’s the slave you still prefer to hang out with him, huh?” He teased her, tweaking an ear. She regarded him solemnly as if the answer to **that** question was entirely obvious and he laughed. He lingered for a moment, stroking her, giving his slave plenty of time to get into position – and into the right frame of mind - and fighting his own battle with a severe attack of stage fright that was making his insides churn. Finally, he took several deep breaths, and then climbed the stairs to the Playroom.

His slave was waiting for him as ordered. In fact, the sight of his naked slave, with his beautiful, taut ass raised perfectly in the air for his Master’s attention was such an erotic sight that Mulder paused on the threshold just to enjoy it. He remembered many occasions when his Master had seemed to him to pause for an agonizingly long time before approaching his kneeling slave. At the time he’d assumed it was just a way of further tormenting his waiting slave, but now he realized that maybe it was simply so that the other man could appreciate the sight in front of him.

Skinner’s body was completely still. He looked as if he’d been carved from marble. His muscles were slightly bunched, and the curve of his back was mirrored by the curve of his smooth scalp and his ass, like some beautiful, symmetrical work of art. His head was bowed low, and his buttocks had never looked more perfect. They were two unblemished, rounded globes of flesh, and they were also, Mulder realized with a warm glow of appreciation, his. They belonged to him. He had never realized what a thrill that would be – the owning of another being, the knowledge that they belonged to you, and with it the profound realization that they trusted you to treat that gift wisely, and not abuse it. Mulder went to stand beside his slave. He crouched, ran a gentle hand over his slave’s back, and was surprised and gratified when his slave shivered slightly at his Master’s touch. Skinner was clearly a very responsive slave.

“Very good, Bear. You can relax now.”

His slave did so, visibly, and came into a more upright position. Mulder turned and went over to the cupboards.

“Heel, Bear,” he ordered and he knew, without looking around, that his slave had fallen into step behind him. He opened the cupboard and looked through it.

“I want to dress you, Bear,” he said softly, never raising his voice, concentrating hard on staying in role. “Bring out all the items befitting a slave that will fit you and place them on the table so I can decide how you should be clothed.”

“Yes, Master.” His slave hurried to do his bidding, and Mulder went to the next cupboard, that contained toys instead of clothing. He searched through it and found the sturdy wooden paddle that had never been used on his own butt that he had earmarked earlier. He got it out and swung it through the air a few times, becoming accustomed to the weight and feel of it, and making sure his slave heard the swishing sound as it whistled through the air. Then he placed the paddle on the table next to the array of clothing his slave had arranged there. He sorted through the items, noting as he did so that his slave was once again kneeling in position, ready and waiting.

A long black leather harness drew his attention. He liked the idea of his slave wearing this. It wrapped around the body, the leather looping into several round steel rings at regular intervals. Mulder could see that there were clips for attaching it to a collar and cock ring and he glanced at his slave thoughtfully. Skinner had a large, meaty cock - not pretty, but powerful looking. Mulder decided that cock needed more of a work out. He gestured with his head and his slave was by his side in seconds.

“I’m going to put this on you, but first I want you to bring me a cock and ball harness from the cupboard,” he said, in the same low tones that he’d been using since he’d made a decision to tackle this role properly. In his head, for some reason he’d always associated Mastery with terse orders and even yelling, which was absurd because his own Master certainly never spoke to him in such a manner. Now that he was in the role himself, he found that he didn’t want to be either terse, or to yell. It struck him that both those things spoke of a Master with a certain amount of insecurity. He remembered earlier, when he had snapped at his slave and belittled him, and how both those actions came from his own fears and worries about his ability to perform this role. Now that he was trying to get into the mindset, he found that he wanted to speak softly, and politely. It wasn’t necessary to posture and pose – he already had his slave’s undivided attention after all.

Skinner returned with the items Mulder had requested, and before he could kneel again, Mulder told him to remain standing.

“Put your hands behind your head, Bear, and look straight ahead.” His slave did as he was told, his sharp brown eyes assessing his Master’s order behind the wirerims. That gave Mulder another thought. His slave was very self-assured – and he wanted to throw him off balance a little.

“How well can you see without these?” He asked, touching his slave’s glasses.

Skinner frowned. “My vision is blurry without them, Master, but I can see well enough to serve you,” he said.

“Blurry. Well, I think I’d prefer you to be blurry right now,” Mulder replied. He removed his slave’s glasses, and placed them carefully on top of the spanking horse, well out of the way of any harm. Then he returned to his slave...and stopped short, startled by the difference the lack of glasses made to his slave’s appearance. He had seen Skinner without the wirerims on several occasions of course, but not for long as the other man didn’t like to be without them. This, Mulder assumed, partly stemmed from his need to be sharp, alert, and in control of his world. Well, now there was no need for him to be in

control of anything. What surprised him though was how much the glasses stripped away his **own** perception of Skinner's identity. His slave, he noted, had very beautiful eyes, and his eyelashes were thicker and longer than he had ever noticed before. There was a bashful, almost shy expression in those eyes now that the glasses were removed. Had that always been there, or was it only there because his slave was in a position of such vulnerability, naked, his hands behind his head, and without the familiar security of those glasses, guarding his eyes and hiding his true feelings. Mulder came close, and stared for a long time at the new face this gave to the man he had thought he knew so intimately. Skinner endured the gaze for a few seconds and then dropped his eyes. Mulder tapped his chin.

"Eyes up, slave. I want to look at them."

His slave obeyed, and Mulder spent several minutes just looking at his slave's face, occasionally reaching out to turn his slave's head to the side, or back to the front again. Skinner looked younger without his wire-rims, that was for certain. His eyes were much warmer without the glass barrier as well.

"All right, Bear. Hold still. I don't want you to move or break position for any reason while I dress you. Understood?" Mulder asked.

"Yes, Master." His slave stared straight ahead, and Mulder was pleased to see him swallowing hard, as if steeling himself for an ordeal. Skinner had been right when he said that in certain situations his slave's skills were less polished. Mulder could imagine that worshipping and taking care of a Master came easily to the big man, but allowing his Master to play with him, without knowing exactly what would be done to him, came much harder. He also knew that his slave had a perfectionist's streak. He would want to obey to the best of his ability and would berate himself if he failed in any way. Skinner was not a man who liked to fail.

Mulder went slowly, wrapping the harness around his slave's shoulders, and then down to the cleft between his buttocks. He pulled the thong tight, making sure that it dug deep into his slave's crease, and his slave gave a sharp intake of breath.

"All right, Bear?" Mulder asked.

"Yes, Master." Skinner pulled his shoulders back and straightened again.

"Good, then open your legs. I want you to feel the thong between your ass cheeks." His slave obeyed, and Mulder ensured that the thong was pressed even further into the dark cleft of his slave's ass, until it separated the buttocks nicely into two enticing globes. He pulled the thong forwards, and threaded Skinner's cock through the ring at the other end. Then he pulled two leather straps down from the chest harness, and attached them both to the ring. He arranged the harness so that his slave's nipples were showing through two more steel rings, and then stepped back to admire his slave.

The harness showed Skinner's body off to perfection. Mulder gave a satisfied smile and then returned to run his hands over it.

"Does it chafe anywhere?" He asked his slave.

Skinner shook his head. "It's a little tight in my ass, Master," he replied.

“Painful, or just a little uncomfortable?” Mulder asked.

“Uncomfortable, Master,” Skinner said.

“Well, then it stays. I’m sure my slave won’t mind suffering a little discomfort for his Master’s pleasure.” Mulder smiled.

Skinner nodded, accepting his Master’s decision without question.

“It does show off these exquisite ass cheeks to perfection,” Mulder observed, squeezing his slave’s buttocks. Skinner made another tiny sound in the back of his throat, and Mulder grinned. “I’m not finished yet though. I want that cock of yours to experience a little discomfort too,” he murmured. He drew close to his slave, and, without warning, pulled Skinner’s head close, and kissed him firmly. His slave made a little sound of surprise, but didn’t break position, his hands remaining locked behind his head as his Master plundered his lips thoroughly. This was good, Mulder thought to himself. Usually he yearned for kisses as a slave, and had to ask permission to receive them, like everything else. The sheer joy of being given carte blanche to just claim them, whenever he liked, was exhilarating. While still kissing his slave, Mulder reached down and took Skinner’s hardening cock in his hand. He pumped it firmly, kissing his slave the entire time, until the other man’s cock was fully erect in his hand. Only then did he release his gasping slave.

“That’s good. I like that,” Mulder crooned, looking down on the rampantly stiff member that had risen between them. His own cock did a reciprocal leap of appreciation within his sweat pants. “Now, we’re going to make sure it stays that way.” He reached for the cock harness – which was of the leather ‘Gates of Hell’ variety, and fastened it around his slave’s cock and balls, pulling it tight so that it would keep his slave erect, but not enough to cut off the blood supply. He drew back, noting with some satisfaction that his slave’s cock was now darkly purpled from the stimulation and slight discomfort of the device.

“Do you know what I’m going to do to you now, slave?” he asked, circling his slave appreciatively, and enjoying the sight of his slave’s muscled flesh, displayed perfectly within the leather and chain harness.

“No, Master.” His slave remained perfectly still, hands behind his head.

“I’m going to play with you, Bear. I don’t want you to move, and I don’t want you to speak. I just want you to accept. Understood?”

“Yes, Master.”

Mulder reached out a hand and inserted it between his slave’s thighs, slapping them further apart, and then he insolently fondled the sensitive inner skin there, trailing his fingernails over it. His slave licked his lips with his tongue, his face no longer impassive. Mulder grinned. He intended this to be a hard order to obey – that was the point. He trailed his fingers up over his slave’s chest, enjoying the feel of being able to indulge himself like this with Skinner’s body. There were so many places on his slave’s body that he had been able to explore only with Skinner’s permission. Now he didn’t need it. Now he could explore them at will, and somehow Mulder thought this might take a **very** long time. And the joy of it was that Skinner couldn’t move. He just had to accept. Mulder stood in front of his slave, and bent his head to take one of his slave’s nipples in his mouth. His slave gasped. Mulder wanted more than that though. He sucked down hard, teasing the nipple between his teeth, and at last his slave broke, his

hands going instinctively down to rest on his Master's shoulders. Mulder continued what he was doing, teasing the nipple until he was satisfied, nibbling on it harder and harder, then biting down with some force, causing his slave to give a strangled sob and break position - trying to push his Master away. Mulder straightened.

"I gave you an order, Bear. If you're having difficulty following my orders then you must say so. Your body belongs to me. This..." Mulder plucked the offending nipple between thumb and forefinger and his slave writhed in an entirely satisfactory way, "belongs to me," he said, reaching for the paddle on the table. "I'm going to discipline you for your lapse. Hands behind your head again, Bear. Don't break your position while I punish you."

"Yes, Master." Skinner nodded, doing as ordered. His eyes were expressionless as he obeyed so Mulder had no idea how the other man felt being on the receiving end of a spanking for once. It sure as hell gave **Mulder** a certain frisson at being able to hand one out. He was definitely going to enjoy this!

Mulder took up position behind his slave, and ran his hand lovingly over the globes of flesh in front of him. He felt more in control of events now. He seemed to be establishing some kind of dynamic. It's true that he had given his slave an order that he couldn't be expected to obey under the circumstances, but what was it Skinner had said? He was Mulder's slave – Mulder could do what the hell he liked with him. Mulder raised the paddle but he didn't bring it down straight away. Instead he waited, grinning as his slave's buttocks twitched in anticipation. A heady sense of power coursed through him. It was so good to be able to watch every last play of muscles under skin, to observe the way a slave's body moved and responded to how it was being stimulated. After a significant pause, and just when Skinner's buttocks were starting to relax, Mulder brought the paddle down hard on his left ass cheek. The blow left an immediate red mark on impact, and elicited the smallest of noises from his slave. Mulder knew that Skinner was not the kind of slave who would cry during a spanking – he knew from having watched his Master being whipped at Elaine's house that day that Skinner's tolerance for pain was immense – and that the big man didn't cry easily. He didn't even intend to bring his slave to that today. He wasn't sure he wanted to make his slave cry. He wasn't ready for that responsibility. He loved the red mark on his slave's flesh though. Suddenly he understood the appeal to Skinner in marking his slave's buttocks. There was a sense of ownership about it that thrilled him. He ran his hand over the mark, then raised the paddle and brought it down again – even harder. This time the impact mark was even redder, and Skinner struggled to stay in position. Mulder got into the swing of it, and began paddling his slave's butt in earnest. He was so into the whole event, delivering several cracking swats, that he forgot to check in on his slave. He was too preoccupied with achieving an even pattern on his slave's buttocks, and making sure that every square inch of that beautiful, taut ass was glowing a shiny red. Mulder was something of a spanking aficionado. It fascinated him, and it had always been his most cherished fantasy. As this was the first spanking he'd given he lost himself in it, giving himself over to the rhythm and sounds, until he became one with the paddle. He only paused when he grew breathless, and, looking up, was startled to see that his slave's back was stiff and tense. He was still holding position, although he moved forwards a little with every blow, and then quickly righted himself and shuffled back – a little dance that Mulder allowed because it was clearly physically impossible to remain motionless under the forward pressure of the blows his slave was receiving.

Mulder put the paddle down, pleased to see that he had delivered an extremely thorough spanking and that his slave's buttocks were now a dark red in color. However, when he returned to the front of his slave, he noted, with a frown, that Skinner had completely lost his erection. Mulder chewed on his lip,

anxiously. Spankings always aroused him, but he remembered that his Master had told him that while a good erotic spanking turned him on, he didn't get any particular pleasure from either the notion or the reality of anything more than a hand spanking or carefully light activity with an implement. Mulder suddenly felt guilty. He knew that he was the Master and Skinner was the slave, and his Bear certainly hadn't made any complaints...and yet it didn't seem fair to subject his slave to an activity that he so obviously found completely un-arousing. His Master had given him punishment spankings in the past, as they'd discussed earlier, but if he wasn't doing it for the purpose of arousing his slave there was usually another, entirely necessary purpose – either to help his slave back into subspace by reminding him of his status, or to give him absolution and closure after he'd made a mistake, or to take him down to where he needed, on some deep and profound level, to **be**. None of these applied to Skinner in these circumstances. Mulder felt like saying 'sorry', because his guilt was as much to do with the fact that he'd **enjoyed** giving the spanking as anything else. However, he had been getting into the Master's role and didn't want to break that by apologizing at this point...and yet his slave did look somewhat forlorn, his shoulders squared as he stood, with his hands behind his head, looking straight ahead for all the world as if he were at boot camp being tormented by a vicious Sergeant Major.

"It's okay. You can put your hands down now," Mulder said softly, and then, on an impulse, he reached out, pulled his slave close, enveloped him in his arms and gave him a sweet, loving kiss of apology. He might not feel able to apologize in words, but this was the next best thing. His slave responded hungrily, sliding his powerful arms around his Master and reciprocating the kiss wholeheartedly, clearly accepting Mulder's non-verbal apology and making his Master feel a whole lot better in the process.

Now Mulder decided that it was time to do something that his slave enjoyed. He cast his mind back to the things Skinner had told him about his sub days, but nothing obvious sprang to mind. Then he remembered that one of the first things Skinner had told him after they signed their contracts was that he was a sensualist. That gave Mulder an idea.

"In a minute I'm going to tie you down," he told his slave. Skinner nodded, but Mulder saw a tense line of resignation appear on his slave's forehead. Skinner clenched his fists by his side, clearly steeling himself for an ordeal. "Relax," Mulder whispered, running his hands over his slave's body, stroking, soothing and calming him. "You have to trust me. This is going to be good. I promise." He realized, a little guiltily, that he was enjoying his slave's fear, and equally that he enjoyed reassuring him as well. It felt good. It felt powerful.

"Before we begin though..." Mulder glanced down at his sweats. "I need to change." He recalled that when Skinner put on a scene for him in the Playroom, he often dressed up so that his slave would have something good to look at while he was being slowly and deliciously tormented. It helped set the scene. Mulder had been so intent on seeing Skinner dressed up in his harness, that he'd forgotten that his slave also deserved some visual stimulation.

Mulder went back over to the closet where the fantasy dressing up clothes were kept and glanced inside. The trouble was that most of the obviously 'Master' clothes belonged to Skinner and wouldn't fit him. Mulder pulled a couple of outfits out, held them against himself, and then put them away again despondently. They were all far too long in the leg, and too broad in the chest. He'd look like a kid dressing up.

“Master, if I could suggest something,” his slave said quietly. Looking down, Mulder saw that Skinner was kneeling silently beside him. He smiled down on his slave affectionately.

“Of course, Bear.” He nodded.

“There are some other clothes...clothes that belonged to my former Master,” Skinner said softly. Mulder felt his breath catch in his throat. Andrew...Skinner was offering him Andrew’s clothes? He was aware of the honor implicit in that gesture.

“Are you sure, Bear?” He asked, reaching out to caress his slave’s scalp.

“Yes, Master. You’re a little taller than Andrew was, but you’re of much the same build. He was slender like you. I think they would fit you. I keep them over here.”

“Do you think he’d mind?” Mulder asked anxiously, following his slave to a closet that was very rarely ever opened.

“Andrew?” Skinner’s face was alight with fond memories. “No. In fact I think he’d be pleased. He was the only other person I ever subbed for – he’d think it was fitting that my new Master wore his clothes. I suspect he’s hanging around here somewhere watching anyway.” He gave a wistful little smile, and Mulder glanced over his shoulder, thinking privately that from his own experiences on the X Files he’d have said it was all too likely. He wasn’t sure how he felt about that. Skinner opened the closet, and drew out a pair of black leather trousers, and a chain mail vest.

“I think these would suit you, Master,” he said.

Mulder nodded. “All right. Dress me, Bear.” He stood with his arms outstretched, allowing his slave to remove his sweats, and then to lovingly dress him in the clothes. Skinner was right – they fit him perfectly. In fact, they fit so perfectly that it was eerie. Even the belt did up at the exact same worn notch where Andrew had clearly fastened it. Mulder looked at himself in the mirror, feeling a strange sensation as he gazed at the man wearing these clothes. It was almost as if Andrew’s spirit had settled into him the moment he put them on.

“Master looks...hot.” Skinner grinned up at him from his kneeling position.

“Thank you, Bear.” Mulder glanced over his shoulder, delighted with the way the pants hugged his ass. Usually when he wore leather he only got to wear cutaway pants that left his bare backside exposed and available for correction. It felt good to be wearing the Master’s pants for once. “All right.” He drew himself up to his full height, reveling in the way he looked, and the feel of the leather against his skin. A sudden confidence swept through him, and he put all the mistakes of the day behind him. His time as a Master had come.

“Okay, slave. It’s time that you were tied,” he said firmly. “I want you helpless so that you can’t escape my caresses.” He glanced at his slave, and saw that there was a guarded expression in the other man’s eyes. Skinner really did have an apprehension about bondage – surprising that a man who knew how to perform it on his slave so exquisitely should have such a real anxiety about experiencing it himself. Mulder gazed at himself in the mirror, wondering how Andrew had tackled his slave’s limits in this area. Limits...he recalled the first time his Master had given him a Playroom session. Skinner hadn’t known his

limits then either, so he'd ordered his slave to bring him two implements of his choice. Looking back, Mulder could see what a clever strategy this had been. By making Mulder choose, his Master had gained a valuable insight into his slave's psyche and the kinds of activities he might enjoy, while still remaining in charge.

"I'm going to tie you, but it's up to you to choose how tightly, and with what bonds," he told his slave. Skinner looked up, with an expression of total surprise on his face. Maybe he hadn't expected Mulder to have such a sophisticated understanding of his needs. "You don't have to be completely immobile, Bear," Mulder said, caressing the side of his slave's face. "Just tied in one place. And I want access to all parts of your body. Tell me which method of bondage would suit you best."

"The sling, Master," Skinner told him. "It's suspended – so you'll have access to me, and I prefer not to be tied across my midriff. Wrists and ankles are usually fine. I don't like...if it pleases you Master, I don't like sensory deprivation. If I'm going to be tied then I like to be able to see and hear, even if I can't move...but of course if you wanted to remove all my senses except touch, then I would do my best to endure that for you, Master."

"No. That won't be necessary. What I have in mind requires only that you're tied. Prepare the sling for me, and show me how you like to be tied." His slave went ahead eagerly, and gave Mulder a demonstration of how to fasten him into the sling so that his body was supported, and safe. Mulder gave himself a mental congratulation for having figured out a way to use apparatus he wasn't familiar with, without losing his Master authority. He was a quick learner, and he easily mastered the intricacies of the sling, and before long his slave was in place – naked, tied, and available. Mulder removed the bottom half of his slave's harness to give him access to his slave's asshole and unclipped the steel cock ring as well – but not the leather Gates of Hell cock and ball harness. Soon Skinner was on his back, spread-eagled, his legs stretched wide open and elevated slightly, revealing not only his bound cock and balls, but also his ass. He was also, Mulder noticed, trembling slightly.

"All right, Bear?" He placed a hand on his slave's arm.

Skinner nodded. "It's been awhile, Master, that's all. I usually enjoyed the sling...I just forgot how I feel being restrained this tightly. It takes me a few minutes to become accustomed to it. It always did. Andrew was kind enough to allow me some adjustment time."

"And I will too. Breathe." Mulder stroked his slave's torso, and played with Skinner's nipples for a long time, until the other man's breathing slowed, and became deeper, and the tension left his muscles. "All right, slave. Your Master wants to play with you." Mulder smiled down on his slave. "You can make any sounds you like, but you must accept everything I do. It won't do you much good to struggle anyway. You aren't going anywhere."

Skinner nodded. His dark eyes were intense, as if he was concentrating very hard. This was a totally different slave to the confident, attentive one Mulder had seen earlier that morning. He was, Mulder noted to his own satisfaction, much less sure of himself in this situation, however much he tried to hide that fact beneath his usual stoic demeanor.

"I want you to keep your eyes closed," Mulder ordered. "I'm not going to blindfold you, as I know you're not comfortable with that when you're in bondage, but I will punish you if you open your eyes."

“Yes, Master.” Skinner nodded, and closed his eyes as ordered.

Mulder went over to the cupboard, removed some items, and placed them on the table. Then he dragged the table close to the sling so that he would have them close to hand. He then went to the ensuite bathroom and retrieved the items he had placed there earlier. He kept the door to the Playroom open the whole time. His Master had always told him he would never leave his slave alone when he was in bondage, and now that he was in charge he could see how vital that was. If he wasn't nearby then he wouldn't be able to see if his slave was in any distress. Mulder returned to the table and put the new items with the others. He considered the array of toys for a moment, and then selected one, with a smile. It was a furry mitten, as soft as Wanda's coat.

“Keep your eyes closed, Bear,” he reminded his slave. He stopped by the sling, and just enjoyed looking at his naked, bound, exposed slave for a while. Skinner definitely looked hot in bondage. Mulder remembered a photograph of Skinner that Elaine had once shown him. His Master had been dressed submissively, kneeling at Andrew's side. He'd thought then that the big guy made an impressive looking slave and he was right. There was something about the juxtaposition of a big, powerful man in such a submissive, vulnerable position that was incredibly erotic. Mulder's cock twitched inside his pants and he longed for release – but that would have to wait. First he wanted to play. He had never had Skinner at his mercy like this before, had never been able to just enjoy himself, and do what he liked. Now that he had the opportunity he was going to make it last for as long as possible.

He positioned himself between Skinner's open legs, and stroked him with the mitten. His slave jumped when he first touched him, but then relaxed. His cock, which had been dormant since the spanking, started to look a little more interested in the proceedings. Mulder smiled – so, Skinner was right – he **was** a sensualist.

“Does this feel good?” He asked.

Skinner smiled, dreamily. “Yes, Master. Very good,” he murmured. “Thank you, Master.”

Mulder laughed. “Oh don't thank me. I'm just pleasing myself. Do you have any idea how good you look like this? Naked, vulnerable...exposed...” he trailed the mitten along Skinner's inner thigh and the other man gave a little squawk of surprise, mingled with pleasure. “Very exposed. Very open. I can do what I like to you.” Mulder dipped his finger in a bowl on the table, and then trailed it around the sensitive opening of Skinner's asshole. His slave jumped, his abdominal muscles twitching.

“It's cold, I know. Can you guess what it is?” Mulder asked.

“No, Master.” Skinner frowned, shaking his head.

“It's cream.” Mulder moved his head suddenly, and darted his tongue into the cleft between his slave's buttocks. Skinner bucked in his bonds. “Warm and cold,” Mulder murmured, circling Skinner's anus with his tongue, licking away the cold cream. “You taste good, Bear,” he said, still stroking his slave's groin with the mitten, while licking his ass muscle, darting his tongue occasionally through the tight ring and into his slave's ass. Skinner sighed, and Mulder opened his slave's legs up even further to get better access. “It's been a while since breakfast, and I'm a little peckish, so I'm going to have a little feast,” he said. “My slave, and my favorite foods...what could make a nicer meal?” And so saying he swirled a

dollop of the cold cream on each of his slave's nipples. Skinner gave a gasp and struggled momentarily in his bonds, but soon surrendered when Mulder's tongue lapped away the cream, sucking noisily as he did so. "Hmmm. Very nice. And now I think it's time to mark you." He watched his slave's eyes fly open in surprise at that comment, and tapped Skinner's buttocks reprovngly. "Closed, Bear. Or I'll have to punish you." His slave closed his eyes with the very slightest hint of a sigh.

Mulder grinned and picked up the tube of chocolate sauce he had purloined from the kitchen cupboard. Then he squeezed the dark contents onto his slave's chest, spelling out his own name, F-O-X in big, wavy letters.

"You can open your eyes just to view your marking before I eat it!" Mulder told his slave, and Skinner did as he had been told, cautiously glancing down at his chest. He laughed out loud at what he saw.

"It's a good thing Master doesn't have a longer name," he commented, gazing pointedly at the way the 'x' dived off down the side of his ribcage where Mulder had run out of space.

"Close your eyes again," Mulder ordered, and then he bent his head and noisily licked the chocolate sauce away, enjoying the way his slave's abdominal muscles tightened a little as he did so. "Ticklish are we, slave?" He inquired.

"A little, Master," Skinner admitted.

Mulder grinned – that was something he hadn't known about his Master in all the time he'd been with him, but then Skinner have never given him permission to touch his abdomen like this before. Mulder finished lapping up the chocolate and bestowed a chocolaty kiss on his slave's mouth, before standing up straight and moving in the direction of his slave's ass.

"That was very nice...but you know what, slave...I think I want to eat something a little more healthy." He grinned as he picked up the carrot he had peeled earlier, and smothered it in a layer of cream. Then he positioned himself between his slave's thighs again, and gently teased his slave's opening with it. It went in easily – it wasn't a particularly large carrot – and Mulder purposefully left a few inches sticking out. Then he began to eat, nibbling on the exposed portion of the carrot, his lips caressing his slave's buttocks and the underside of his balls as he chewed. He ate it a little way, pulling it with his teeth as he did so, in order to tease the carrot out of its position. He wasn't sure what this felt like to Skinner but he sure as hell was enjoying it, and, judging by the grin on his slave's face, he didn't have any objections either.

"All right, Bear. You've been very good so here's a little reward." Mulder went around to his slave's head, and, dipping his fingers in the cream again, placed them in his slave's mouth. Skinner sucked on them greedily, and Mulder laughed and kissed his slave's head. This was good! He was having so much fun! "Time to make it count now, slave," he whispered, picking up a feather from the table. He floated it gently over his slave's body, tickling him, and Skinner gave a deep moan and twisted and bucked in his bonds, trying to escape the evil, tormenting sensation. Mulder laughed. With his eyes closed Skinner had no idea where the feather would tickle next, and it was fun to watch him writhe beneath it. His slave was laughing as much as his Master, and panting as he twisted and turned, to and fro.

Mulder changed tactics, and turned the feather around, then scratched the spiky end of it along his Master's torso. He liked the thin red mark it made, and he played with it for a while, trailing it quite hard

over his Master's flesh. He fetched up at Skinner's cock, and prodded him there a few times, scratching the sensitive flesh. Skinner bucked again, and gave a hoarse shout, which just encouraged Mulder to keep going. He tormented his slave's cock for several minutes, and then transferred his attentions higher up on his slave's body, pressing the end of the feather into Skinner's nipple without warning. Skinner bellowed, and strained in his bonds. The end of the feather was sharp, and made a little dent for a few seconds, and Mulder guessed that the sensation was uncomfortable, but not too desperately painful. He did this a few times, loving the way his slave's body jack-knifed each time. Then he put the feather aside, and used the mitten again, to calm his jittery slave. Skinner was dripping with a fine layer of sweat after this, and Mulder blew over him, cooling him. His slave relaxed in his bonds, and laughed out loud when Mulder blew in his ear.

"Ah, you like that huh?" Mulder lingered there, blowing, and then sucking, before nibbling with more intent. Skinner moaned and started thrashing around. "I think we've found an erogenous zone!" Mulder proclaimed triumphantly. He worked the other ear for a while, then trailed down to his slave's neck and sucked there. "I think that I want my slave to bear my hickey," he said, holding Skinner in place and giving the man's neck area his full attention. With his free hand, he played with the nipple closest to him, alternately fondling it and pinching it. Each time he pinched it, Skinner rose up in his bonds, and each time he released it, and soothed it gently instead, the man fell back again. It was the most amazing feeling to have this much power over this powerful man. Mulder could feel his cock throbbing in appreciation.

He finally relinquished his hold on Skinner's neck, and trailed his lips down over his slave's bound cock, taking it whole into his mouth, leather harness and all. Skinner gave a moan, as Mulder expertly tongued him. Mulder knew that he was being a little mean – as Skinner's cock hardened and swelled even more, it dug into the leather straps that were fastened tightly around it. That had to hurt...and also stimulate and tease. Mulder grinned.

"You can't come, Bear," he murmured.

"No, Master," Skinner growled.

"Ah, that's my grizzly bear. He wants to come and he can't. Keep hard for me now, Bear. I want to see this cock standing proud for me. I like seeing it like this, hard, trapped, and straining at the leash. If you strain hard enough I might release your cock and let you come, but not before your Master comes, slave."

Mulder eased the carrot out of his slave's anus, and, after dipping his hand in oil, inserted a finger instead. Just one, and then two. Skinner started to moan, his cock harder than ever, desperate to be released. Mulder teased his slave for several minutes and then withdrew his fingers and went to stand beside his slave's face again. He opened his pants, and his own swollen cock sprang forward. He nudged it against his slave's lips. "Suck me, Bear. I want to be hard as rock when I fuck your ass," he whispered in a low, promising tone. Skinner opened his mouth immediately, and sucked Mulder's cock eagerly, greedily, until Mulder was on the verge of coming.

"Uh-uh. Not yet. Your ass gets to receive my come. Not your mouth," Mulder chided, withdrawing his cock, and loving the little moan of loss that emerged from his slave's throat. He returned to his position between his slave's thighs, and, on a whim, coated his cock in cream. Then he parted his slave's buttocks

and slid the tip of his cream-covered cock easily inside. "You should see the way this looks," he murmured to his slave. "I'm creaming you, slave." His slave gave what sounded like a distinct snort, making Mulder laugh out loud – but he delivered a little slap to his slave's bound cock to punish him for his disrespect all the same. Then he took hold of his slave's ass and sank his cock deep inside. Skinner gave a little shout, and tried to open his legs wider, to give his Master better access. Mulder paused, panting for breath, and a strange sensation swept through him. He felt almost as if he was looking down on his slave from outside his own body. This moment was so perfect, and so beautiful. They were joined, Master and slave, in a new, totally unique way to any they had ever experienced before, and it was so good. He had given Skinner anal sex before, but on that occasion it had been as a slave, giving service. This was different. This time he was the Master and his slave's ass was his to take, his to enter, his to pound into as hard or as slowly as he liked. He noticed, with some pride, that his slave's penis was still rock hard – harder than ever in fact. He hadn't realized how satisfying it could be to bring a slave to the brink of such divine pleasure and keep him there for so long. And Skinner's achievement in staying hard for his Master wasn't lost on him. He felt proud – and that was another emotion he hadn't expected.

Then the strange sensation was gone, and Mulder felt himself return to the moment. He ran his hands over his slave's body, caressing him, slowly pulled his hips back, and then thrust them back again. His cock slid to and fro with an easy movement, and now he remembered how **good** it felt to be giving anal sex rather than just receiving it. He loved both, but he had only experienced this once before, and he'd been so intent on serving his Master on that occasion that he hadn't noticed the myriad of small details that he noticed now. He saw that Skinner's head was flung back, and his adam's apple was exposed, and bobbing, and he saw a droplet of sweat roll down his slave's face, and drip onto the floor. He could feel his slave's internal muscles, working his Master's cock for all they were worth, and noted the way his slave's cock bobbed in time to the play of those muscles. Even in his bondage, utterly at his Master's mercy, his slave was trying to serve him as best he could. Mulder smiled, and got into a rhythm, his pace more urgent. He hoped he was brushing his slave's prostate, and guessed that he was by the way Skinner was making the strangest mewling sounds in the back of his throat, and then Mulder was coming, deep in his slave's ass, and there were so many stars exploding behind his eyes that he had to hold onto the sling to stay upright. He came to rest, still buried to the root in his slave, and just as his own climax reached its peak he removed his slave's cock harness, releasing his swollen cock. "You can come, slave," he panted, fastening his hand around Skinner's hard penis, and he was astounded when his slave did just that, almost immediately, and then lay moaning in his bonds.

They were silent and still for a while, both lost in the moment. Mulder slowly withdrew, laughing as a puddle of warm cream mingled with his own come, pooled out of his slave's ass.

"How are you?" He grabbed a towel from the table, and cleaned up his own cock, and then wiped his slave clean. "You can open your eyes if you want. Or stay there for a bit longer if you'd prefer." Mulder knew from experience how bone melting the aftermath of such a vigorous orgasm could be.

"I'm fine." Skinner opened his eyes slowly, and Mulder looked down into those dark orbs, and saw that they were utterly sated. "Thank you, Master," Skinner whispered.

"You're welcome, slave," Mulder replied, and then he bent forward and kissed his slave soundly. "You're very, very welcome," he murmured when he released his slave. He was surprised by the fierce wave of love that was coursing through him. He had never felt more protective of the other man than at this moment. Skinner had given himself up so completely to his Master's will, had opened his body, and

given his soul to Mulder, in a stunning display of trust. It was the most amazing sensation. Mulder gazed down at his slave, utterly winded by it.

"It's hit you, hasn't it?" Skinner asked gently. "That feeling. I call it the Top's High."

"It's incredible. I feel so powerful...it's like nothing I've ever felt before." Mulder took a deep breath. "I feel like I want to be so caring...after you've given yourself up to me, taken everything I handed out, and there's a weird sense of pride as well...it's the most curious sensation." He stared at his slave in wonderment, and Skinner laughed, and then winced. "I guess those cuffs are cutting in. Hold still." Mulder gently released his slave, and then lowered him to the floor.

"And that," he murmured, crouching beside his utterly jellified slave, "is what we call the sub's state of boneless bliss, Bear." He grinned, putting his hands under his slave's arms, and dragging him to his feet. They staggered together to the en-suite bathroom, where Mulder undressed them both, then pushed his unsteady slave under the shower and joined him there.

He had taken many showers with his Master, but this was different, and he intended to enjoy the change to the utmost. His slave, although still reeling slightly from the aftermath of his Master's attentions, was as attentive as ever. He reached for the soap, and lathered it, then asked permission to place his hands on his Master's body. Mulder grinned, leaned back against the wall of the shower, and opened his arms wide.

"Be my guest, Bear." He closed his eyes, and allowed the water, and his slave, to clean him up. Skinner was as thorough as he had come to expect, and he lovingly washed his Master's body, kneeling to run his hands over Mulder's ankles and feet, and stopping there to kiss his Master's toes while he was at it. Mulder grinned, as he looked down on this big, powerful man, who was serving **him**. Damn but this felt good! When Skinner had finished, Mulder handed him the soap.

"Now wash yourself, slave. I want to watch," and so saying he settled back against the wall again, and treated himself to the joy of being able to feast his eyes on his slave's naked, wet body. Skinner's big hands slapped lather all over his own tanned skin, pausing here or there when he found a mark Mulder had made on his body to examine it. Mulder sighed happily – Skinner's flesh bore many of his marks and he was surprised how arousing it was knowing that he had made them. There were occasional bite marks, the faint lines from where he had etched with his feather, the rising hickey on his slave's neck, and, he noted with a little twinge of guilty pleasure, his slave's butt was still glowing a healthy red from the spanking he had delivered. Mulder loved the way his slave's wet chest hair was flattened against his skin...he so rarely had a chance to just watch his Master in the shower – usually he was too busy washing him, and if his services weren't required in that capacity then Skinner usually sent him away and showered alone. Now he could enjoy his warm, wet, naked slave to his heart's content. He reached out, grabbed his slave, and pushed him bodily against the wall. Skinner braced his hands on the tiled surface, and Mulder stepped in close, and pushed the other man's legs apart.

"I think I should inspect my slave...make sure he's cleaned himself thoroughly," he purred in Skinner's ear. His slave obligingly pushed his ass out, and Mulder ran his hands over those glowing globes and fondled them affectionately. His slave made a little noise, and Mulder guessed that his ass was still sore, but he was enjoying his play, and he didn't think a little discomfort would harm his slave. He slipped a finger inside his slave's ass, and, at the same time, slid his arm around the front of his slave's neck,

pulling the other man's head back so that it rested on his shoulder. He licked the droplets of warm water that were soaking his slave's neck, and then sank his teeth lightly into the other man's back. Skinner's flesh tasted so good – warm, clean, and wet. Mulder didn't bite down hard, just enough to enjoy the sensation of having his finger in his slave's ass, his arm around his slave's neck, and his mouth fastened to his slave's skin, keeping the other man utterly immobilized and at his mercy. Skinner was completely still under this attack, his arms braced, his legs trembling slightly from the position he was in. Mulder liked the way his slave felt, naked, wet and muscular beneath him. He changed his bite into a kiss, removed his finger, soothed his slave's body with his hand, and then parted his slave's butt cheeks again and inserted two fingers this time. His mouth roved freely over the back of his slave's neck and his scalp, and Skinner started to pant. Looking down, over his slave's shoulder, Mulder saw that the big man was starting to harden again – which was impressive considering how recently he'd just come.

"That's good, Bear," he whispered. "Your Master likes to know he can turn you on, and he likes seeing proof of it. Keep that cock hard, and I'll reward you later."

"Reward me how, Master?" Skinner asked. Mulder laughed, and twisted his fingers inside his slave a little – just enough to make his displeasure felt. Skinner gasped.

"That's for me to know, Bear, not you," Mulder reprimanded.

"Yes, Master. Sorry, Master. I just wondered what was at stake," Skinner said a little cheekily. Mulder laughed and slapped his slave's butt. His slave dropped his head and kissed his Master's arm, where it was fastened around his neck.

"All right, slave. I think we're done here. Dry me, and then yourself. I have plans for the rest of the day."

Mulder turned off the shower, and allowed his slave to dry him. Then he strode back into the Playroom and opened the closet. He knew what he planned to do, and he knew it was impulsive, but there was something he just **had** to try. It wasn't enough to know that he was the Master here, in this room, with all these toys around, and with a highly experienced and exquisitely trained slave who was giving him this day as a gift. No, he needed to find out if he could pass as a Master out there, in the Real World.

He sorted through the clothes, looking for some that his slave could wear out in public. The only problem was that his own clothing was too tight for Skinner, and the only clothes that fitted his slave were those he usually wore when he was the Master.

"Is there a problem, Master?" Skinner asked, from his usual position at his Master's feet. Mulder noted, with some satisfaction, that his slave was holding a fairly respectable erection, as ordered.

"No...it's just...I want to dress you, Bear. We're going out." He watched his slave for some kind of reaction but Skinner's expression was serene – he merely nodded, accepting his Master's decision without question. "I want some clothes for you that don't shriek 'Master', although..." Mulder looked down on his slave, and sighed, despondently. "To be honest, I think you could go out naked on the end of a chain, with a sign around your neck saying 'slave' and people still wouldn't be fooled. You just don't look like a slave. You look like a Master."

"With all due respect, Master – that's not necessarily true," Skinner said. Mulder raised an eyebrow, prompting his slave to continue with a nod of his head. "It's true that clothing can help people get into

the right mindset, but it's also the case that you can signal what you are by your body language and the way you behave – by what you're feeling and thinking. If Master wanted to take me out, he could rest assured that I would be his slave absolutely, in body, mind and spirit."

"All right. Let's try these then." Mulder handed his slave a pair of sleek, black leather pants, and a black, sleeveless tee shirt. "You keep the wrist cuffs and collar on," he said, although he was aware that they just looked like fetish items and didn't necessarily proclaim Skinner as a slave. Skinner dressed quickly, and then stood, waiting for his Master's approval. Mulder gestured to his slave to circle, and then sighed again. "I'm not convinced about this, Bear. You certainly look good, but..." He shrugged. "Okay. I think it's the best we can do. I can't dress you more provocatively because we'll be dining out later...so, that will have to do for now. One thing, Bear." He unzipped his slave's pants, and took hold of his cock. "This stays hard for me. Understood?"

"I'll do my best, Master." Skinner nodded.

"Just to help you along..." Mulder gave a sweetly evil smile, and fastened a leather cock ring around his slave's thick penis. "This only comes off when I take it off – and that's the only time you'll be allowed to come. No jacking off in the men's room." He zipped up his slave's pants, noting that his slave's erection bulged enticingly and a little painfully against the shiny fabric, and then gave Skinner the address of a leather bar. His slave looked at him in surprise.

"I'm to go alone, Master? Now?" he asked.

"Yes. Sit at the bar and order yourself a drink. I'll join you in a little while. I have some plans to make first."

"Yes, Master."

"And slave." Mulder reached for his slave's glasses, and replaced them on his slave's face. "I wouldn't want you to walk into anything!" Mulder said, caressing the side of his face.

Skinner nodded and smiled, and then knelt, and briefly touched his mouth to each of Mulder's feet, before getting up and walking to the door of the Playroom.

"One more thing, slave," Mulder called out.

Skinner stopped, and turned, blinking behind the wirerims. "Master?"

"It's cold out. You can take a jacket. And...uh...I'm not sure anyone would dare come on to you, but if they do – remember you belong to me."

"Yes, Master." Skinner gave a small grin and Mulder could see that he remembered his own instructions to Mulder a few of weeks previously when he'd sent him out to Beelzebub, a well known gay pick-up joint. Tonight's little excursion would be different though – in more ways than the obvious. For a start, they'd be at a leather bar, used to the Master/slave dynamic, and not just a gay bar. An unaccompanied slave or a particularly attractive Master would be likely to get some attention...and, Mulder thought with a sigh, as he watched his Master's tall, burly, utterly macho frame exit the Playroom, Skinner came into the latter category, not the former. He couldn't believe anyone, looking at his slave tonight, would

think Skinner was a sub. The other man was just too confident, too sure of himself and his strength. He oozed power and authority.

Mulder turned his attention back to the closet containing Andrew's clothes. While he didn't for a moment think that Skinner would be mistaken for a sub, he also wasn't sure that he could ever pass for a top. He pulled out some clothes, examined them, and sighed. Andrew didn't seem to go in for outfits that yelled 'MASTER'. Instead, all his clothing was very plain and tailored. His own Master had similarly discreet clothing. Was Skinner right? Was it all down to attitude?

"Okay, Andrew, help me out," he said to the empty room. "Walter seems to think you've been with us in spirit if not in body today. And as you're the only person other than me who has ever topped the big guy, then maybe he's right. You're sure as hell a tough act to follow." Mulder's fingers searched urgently through the clothing as he spoke. "So, if you are around, and I kind of think that maybe you are, but then I'm a spooky kind of guy as we all know, so, if you're here, I could really do with some help right now."

His fingers chose that moment to hit upon a black silk shirt. He drew it out and examined it. "Very tasteful, Andrew. So, you think I should wear this, huh?" He slipped his arms into the shirt, and buttoned it up, then went back into the closet for a pair of pants. He found some black chinos that fitted him perfectly, and a tailored black jacket to complete the ensemble. He ran along the corridor to his old bedroom, where he kept his clothes, grabbed a pair of his own black shoes and socks, quickly put them on, dashed some gel into his hair, and then sauntered back to the Playroom to take a look at himself...and stopped dead as he caught sight of his reflection. For just a moment, he could have sworn that instead of his own dark hair, and hazel eyes, he caught a flash of silver hair, and piercing blue eyes, a smaller nose, and a quietly smiling mouth – and then it was gone.

"Andrew, I always knew you and I shared the same sense of humor." Mulder grinned at himself in the mirror, smoothing the gel into his hair until it looked very sleek. He didn't feel in the slightest bit spooked by his experience – in fact, he felt good about it. He felt as if Andrew approved. He regarded himself in the mirror for a long time. The clothes suited his lean, athletic frame. He looked tastefully dressed – very understated, but these were Andrew's clothes, and Andrew had been a legendary top. He hadn't been tall or built like Skinner, he had just been an ordinary-looking guy, who imposed his authority on people by force of personality alone. That was a skill that Mulder had to discover within himself...and wearing Andrew's clothes next to his skin was a good place to start.

"Stay with me, buddy," he said to the room. "I could use your help on this."

Mulder made a telephone call to book a table for dinner, and then grabbed his wallet and keys and strolled out of the apartment. He got a cab to the leather bar, and paused outside for a few minutes. He closed his eyes, and immediately had a mental image of Andrew Linker putting his arm around his shoulder. That was when he felt ready. He pushed open the door to the bar, and paused on the threshold. It was noisy inside – it was early evening, and the place was starting to fill up. It wasn't heaving as it would be later, but there was a respectable crowd inside. Most of them were wearing leather – and he was not – but that didn't matter. Mulder had purposefully chosen this place as it was unlikely that there would be anyone here who knew them. He had only been to this place once before, long before he had met Skinner, and it wasn't part of the main BDSM scene in DC. Mulder stood there, scanning the bar for a long time. He was standing as tall as he knew how, his shoulders back, meeting the eye of anyone who looked at him. His breath caught in his throat as he saw Skinner, sitting by the

bar, nursing a drink. The other man looked as if he was trapped in a little bubble of subspace. He had that same serene expression he had worn for most of the day. His eyes were gentle, and bereft of any challenge. He didn't seem to be taking up the large amount of space he usually occupied. He looked, Mulder thought, content. He wasn't wary, or watchful. He just seemed lost in his own thoughts. Mulder waited a little longer, noted how a guy tried to chat up his slave, and how Skinner shook his head, and returned to his drink, barely making eye contact with the man who was interested in him. Mulder wasn't entirely sure that Skinner would, even acting so mildly, pass as a sub, but it was certainly interesting watching his erstwhile Master occupy subspace, even if only for a short period of time.

Mulder suddenly became aware that he wasn't the only one watching. His stance by the doorway had attracted attention and several pairs of eyes were scrutinizing him. He was uncomfortable with that at first, not wanting to attract any kind of trouble, but then he relaxed. It was almost as if Andrew had whispered something in his ear. *You don't need to posture, you just need to be confident, and masterful*. He stayed where he was, carried on looking for a few more minutes, utterly comfortable inside his own skin, and then started walking down to the bar area. The eyes followed him. He was aware that he was now the object of several watchful gazes, but that didn't bother him. He was surprised to find that the throng parted as he walked through them. No stray hands reached out to fondle his ass but a few boys inclined their heads towards him, slightly longing expressions on their faces. Mulder caught the eye of a butch man in leather, who had a huge moustache, and a prominent nose. They stared at each other for a moment. Mulder kept his gaze steady, but devoid of challenge – or interest. The other man studied him for a long time, and then broke into a smile, and nodded his head at Mulder, dom to dom. Mulder nodded back, feeling a sensation of power course through his veins. Someone nudged his hand, and, looking around, he saw a slim man, at least ten years younger than himself, standing there.

"Hello, sir. I saw you come in. Could I buy you a drink, sir?" The man asked politely. Mulder almost keeled over at being addressed as 'sir', and was sure he heard Andrew's amused chortle at his surprise.

"No. Thank you, boy. My slave will take care of that," he said in his low, soft, Master's tones. The young man looked around, startled.

"I'm sorry, sir. I didn't know you were with anyone. Did you...uh...if you needed someone else to serve you as well, sir...I'd be very willing."

It was all Mulder could do to stop laughing out loud. Instead he just smiled and shook his head. "No. I have my hands full with the slave I have, thank you. He's more than enough," he chuckled, aware that he was borrowing his Master's own words about him. The young man looked disappointed, and backed away.

Mulder stepped out into the middle of the room, and that was when it happened. Just as he turned, to try and locate his slave, he was aware of the room clearing around him. Someone was standing in front of him, and then kneeling. Looking down, he saw his slave's powerful shoulders, bunched up as he knelt down, at his Master's feet – in front of the entire bar. The world seemed to slow down, and come to a halt, and it was a moment Mulder would never forget in his entire life. His slave placed a drink on the floor, and kissed Mulder's shoes. Then he looked up, his eyes full of devotion.

"I'm sorry, Master. I saw you come in and ordered a drink for you – that was why I didn't greet you sooner," Skinner said softly.

“That’s all right, Bear.” Mulder smiled, and his slave stood, and handed him the drink.

“Would Master like to stand or should I bring him a chair?” His slave asked. “There’s a free table over there if Master would prefer.”

“There’s only one chair,” Mulder pointed out.

His slave shrugged. “I don’t require a chair. I will kneel of course, Master,” he said.

Mulder felt as if he was walking on water as his slave preceded him over to the table, clearing a path for his Master like the President’s secret service bodyguard. His slave pulled out his chair for him, waited until he sat, and then knelt beside his Master, with his head down. The men in the room shot them several approving glances. Mulder noted the envy of some of the tops at his perfectly behaved, exquisitely mannered, and utterly devoted slave, and he felt a surge of pride. His slave’s behavior reflected on **him**. He had known that while a slave himself, but somehow had failed to realize just how heady this sensation of pride was, and he was determined that when he was a slave again he’d do his utmost to make sure that his own behavior would bring his Master nothing but credit. He lowered his hand and caressed his slave’s smooth head as a reward, and his slave leaned into the caress. Mulder’s pride in his slave was also combined with a protective sense of jealousy as he saw the looks on the other men’s faces. He felt sure he would fight to the death for this prized slave and he suddenly understood Skinner’s fierce jealousy towards him. He sat back in his chair, legs open, and shoulders back, utterly relaxed, and took a sip of his drink. The young man who had approached him earlier sidled by.

“Master must be very strong to have tamed such a slave,” the man whispered, in an awe-struck tone, gazing down at Skinner.

“Oh, I didn’t...” Mulder began, feeling unable to accept the credit for Skinner’s training, but his slave looked up.

“My Master commands only my very best attention. There isn’t another man alive I would give it to,” Skinner said, interrupting him. Mulder couldn’t help smiling. He could forgive the interruption when the message was so loud and clear. He might not have trained this slave, but Skinner would perform like this only for him. Nobody else would ever command this man kneeling beside him now. That knowledge made him glow inside. Skinner deemed him a worthy Master, someone he would go down on bended knee for – and there was nobody else in this world who could say the same thing.

“I can see what you mean about having your hands full,” the young man commented, casting a last, regretful look at Mulder before moving on. Mulder grinned and then turned his attention back to his slave.

“You interrupted me, Bear,” he said softly. “Do you want me to punish you?”

“Here, Master?” Skinner swallowed hard, looking around the busy bar. Play wasn’t unusual in this kind of place, but nobody else was playing right now. They’d be very conspicuous. “I’m sorry, Master. I shouldn’t have interrupted you. Punish me if you wish, Master.” Skinner bowed his head and waited, perfectly still, awaiting his Master’s judgment.

“I don’t want to punish you.” Mulder lifted his slave’s chin so that he could look into the other man’s eyes. Then, without warning, he bent his head and kissed Skinner on the lips, hard, and forcefully, making his point clearly to the whole bar. He opened his slave’s mouth with his own, and plundered it with his tongue. His slave gasped for breath, and surrendered to the kiss completely. “I liked what you said,” Mulder whispered. “Thanks for saying it.”

Skinner smiled and rested his head on his Master’s knee. “My pleasure, Master,” he said, closing his eyes.

They stayed for a couple of hours. Mulder enjoyed showing off his slave – he hadn’t realized what a powerful sense of ownership he would have as a Master with such a strong, attractive slave. The dynamic of a younger man with an older slave was also a little unusual, and he knew he gained kudos just **because** Skinner was such a big, macho man. People looked at them and judged that Mulder must be a particularly strong Master to have this kind of total control of such an eye-catching well-trained slave. Every now and then, Mulder would pat his slave’s crotch, to ensure that he was still maintaining an erection, and found that Skinner was performing that part of his duties perfectly too. He loved that thought. He had suffered from his Master’s enjoyment of keeping him permanently on edge for his pleasure enough to know how it felt, and to enjoy a little innocent payback.

Finally it was time to go to their dinner reservation. Mulder got up, and his slave followed him, keeping close behind him, walking always to heel.

“Should I hail a cab, Master?” Skinner asked, and Mulder nodded. It felt so good to be waited on like this, and have all his needs taken care of. He sent a silent prayer of thanks to Andrew for the immaculately trained slave that was Walter Sergei Skinner, aka Bear, and property of Fox William Mulder.

Mulder’s slave opened the door to the restaurant for him, and they were shown to the table in a corner, on a little dais, which Mulder had requested specifically. He was handed a menu, but he waved away the Maitre ‘D as the man tried to hand one to Skinner.

“That’s okay. He’ll be eating what I order for him,” he said. Skinner winced slightly, but Mulder enjoyed the moment. Just because his slave was perfect didn’t mean that a display of Masterly authority wasn’t in order every now and again. He studied the menu, and made his choices. He would choose the very finest meal for his slave. There was no question of him ordering something Skinner disliked – but his slave would have no choice in the matter.

“I’ll have the cannelloni, and my companion will have the steak in **béarnaise** sauce,” he said with a grin at his pun on his slave’s name. He glanced at Skinner who smiled and nodded his thanks to his Master for choosing one of his favorite dishes. They talked for a while. They’d had many intimate dinners together since they had exchanged contracts, but this was different, and Mulder was acutely aware of the responsibility of drawing out his slave, and finding out about him. There were some questions he had not dared ask as a slave that he had no trouble asking as a Master. Skinner was a little more reticent as a slave than he usually was though, and he seemed much shyer than usual. It was endearing to almost entice out the man from behind the persona. Mulder had never felt closer to Andrew Linker than during this meal. He could see what the other man had loved about this particular sub. Skinner was a little hesitant, a little reticent and unsure of himself, and Mulder was suddenly aware of how very much

confidence the other man took from his role as Master. He had never realized it before because he had never seen Skinner as anything other than firm, decisive, and in charge, but he was beginning to see that to a certain extent that was a role that his Master hid behind. Without his status as Master to obscure his essential shyness, Skinner was a quieter, less forceful, more watchful personality.

As the meal came to an end, and they lingered over coffee, Mulder glanced around the restaurant. He had chosen this place on purpose because the tablecloths reached down to the floor, and there were dozens of potted plants effectively screening off each set of diners from the view of the others. He slipped off his shoe, and placed his foot on his slave's crotch. He was pleased to find that the other man's erection was still there, if a little flagging and he wiggled his toes around to revive it a little, much to his slave's obvious, squirming embarrassment.

"All right, slave. I require your oral attention," he said softly. Skinner looked around, a little flash of panic showing behind the wirerims. They'd had sex in public places before, but Skinner always took great care to make sure that discovery was almost an impossibility. Mulder was sure that he had taken the same pains. "The place is nearly empty, and the waiter won't be coming back for a while. Nobody's watching. Slide under the table, and bring me off with your mouth and then swallow." Mulder grinned, watching the subtle play of emotions chase across his slave's face. Skinner took a deep breath, and there was an edge of Master's challenge in his eyes. He struggled with it for a moment, and then clearly almost visibly reminded himself that this was his slave's birthday and he'd made him a promise when undertaking this role, because he nodded, glanced around again to make sure that nobody was watching, then slipped under the table cloth.

Mulder leaned back, and a few seconds later felt hand on his fly. It was unzipped and a warm, skilled mouth took hold of his cock, and expertly tongued it. Mulder smiled, and took a sip of his coffee, making sure that the tablecloth obscured his pants completely, leaving only his top half visible. The thrill of outwardly seeming to be so respectable, while his slave was sucking his cock under the table, made him unable to hold on for long and he was soon coming down his slave's throat. He tried not to make a noise, gurgling his climax into his coffee cup, and gripping the side of the table hard with his free hand. He felt his softened cock being licked clean, and reached under the table to caress his slave's ears by way of thank you. A few seconds later his slave reappeared, licking his lips and looking decidedly flushed and flustered. Mulder wanted to laugh. He wished he could have a photograph of this moment so that he could treasure it forever. His Master, the oh-so-proper and correct Assistant Director Skinner of the FBI, had just sucked his cock under the table of a public restaurant. God, he could feel himself going hard all over again as he savored the memory – which was a good thing, as he still had plans for his slave.

Mulder glanced at his watch. It was nearly 11 o' clock. He only had another hour in which to enjoy his slave and there was one last thing he wanted to do before his day as Master was over. He could still remember the way it had felt to have his Master at his mercy, against the wall of the shower, and he wanted to explore that dynamic a little more. Their love making earlier had been slow, erotic, and utterly enjoyable, but Mulder was a Master and he wanted to experience something harder, rougher, and faster. He was always turned on when his Master took him furiously and fast, and he wanted to know what it felt like the other way around. He also wanted to give his slave his reward, for staying hard for so long without release.

“Well done, Bear,” he said, tucking the credit card receipt for the meal into his wallet. He had put the meal on his own card, which his Master allowed him to keep for personal expenses. It felt good – as if he was the one paying for the meal, when in reality his Master picked up the tab at the end of the day. “Come on. We don’t have much time.” He got up and strode to the door, his slave following. “See you later, Gianni!” He waved at the Maitre ‘D who hurried to open the door for him.

“What’s the rush – do you turn into a pumpkin at midnight, Mr. Mulder?” Gianni commented, grinning at him.

“Something like that, yes.” Mulder exchanged an amused glance with his slave.

They arrived back home at eleven forty-five, and Mulder was acutely aware that time was running out. As soon as they walked through the door of the apartment, he bundled his slave up against the wall, and held him there, the other man’s face pressed up against the cool surface.

“I’m going to take you – hard and fast, Bear,” he hissed into his slave’s ear, finding himself turned on by the words alone. His slave grunted, and braced his hands against the wall. “And if you’re good, then you can come when I’m done. I want you.” He stripped his slave of his pants and tee shirt, and ran his hands over the other man’s butt cheeks, finding them still a little hot from his spanking. He pressed a finger into his slave and then grinned, and slapped Skinner’s buttocks fondly. “I see you’ve remembered to keep yourself lubed for me, Bear,” he said.

“Yes, Master. I hoped you’d want to use me again, Master,” his slave replied, opening his legs wide, and moving his butt back so that his Master would have ease of access.

“Your Master does. This ass should get used as much as possible,” Mulder said, releasing his cock from his pants, delighted to find that the role excited him, and he was fully erect once more. He reached around and found that his slave shared that condition with him. “Good slave,” he said, fondling the other man’s hard length. “I’m pleased you kept that for me. You’ll get your reward later...but first, I’m going to pound into you. Ready?” He grabbed his slave’s buttocks and his slave nodded.

“I’m yours, Master. You can use me whenever you wish,” Skinner replied in a deep, throaty growl, clearly anticipating the event with some relish. Mulder grinned, utterly intoxicated by the words. He eased himself into his slave’s ass, and then thrust home with considerable force. His slave grunted, and Mulder took hold of the other man’s hips and began to thrust into him in earnest, back and forth as fast as he could, loving the pressure on his cock of his slave’s warm, internal ass muscles. “Oh shit, you’re good...feels fantastic...” Mulder whispered, caressing his slave’s body as he pounded into him, over and over again. His slave looked beautiful like this, he thought. Skinner’s head was flung back, and his hands were flat against the wall. The back of his neck was enticingly, edibly near. Mulder sucked on it noisily, as he slammed into his slave, and his slave made little mewling noises of pleasure so Mulder guessed he’d found the other man’s prostate. He reached around, and pumped his slave’s rock hard cock. “You can’t come...not yet,” he warned and Skinner nodded, a strangled cry emerging from his throat as he did so.

“Soon...please,” he snarled, his voice thick with arousal.

“As soon as I’m done...hold it...” Mulder said, grinning insanely as he spoke. This was one bit of payback he was definitely enjoying. Then he felt his climax start, and forgot everything else as the moment took

him. He came over and over again inside his slave, and then withdrew, as soon as he was done, and roughly turned the other man around. "Time for that reward I promised you," he grinned, sinking to his knees and taking his slave whole into his mouth. He sucked Skinner for a minute or so, and then reached up and undid the leather cock ring around his slave's hard penis. His slave gasped, and bucked hard into his Master's mouth. Mulder released him as he came, and directed the flow onto his slave's flat stomach. He dipped his fingers in the come, and pressed them to his slave's lips. "Suck," he ordered, and his slave obeyed without question, his dark eyes flashing, still aroused.

Mulder stared at the other man stupidly, feeling heady with power. He had done everything – the payback laundry session, a scene in the Playroom, spanking, a shower, showing off in the leather bar, public sex, and now this rough ride, and somewhere, during the course of the day, he had come to do more than just play at the role. He had somehow managed to grasp the essence of it. He didn't fool himself that he'd ever inhabit the role as easily or as well as his Master did, and he'd made plenty of mistakes, but he'd made the journey and enjoyed it, and he sneakily suspected that his slave had too – and that was the important thing. He gazed at the disheveled man lying in front of him, and Skinner smiled at him, a smile of utter and complete devotion. Mulder smiled back, then collapsed beside his exhausted slave, and hauled him over so that Skinner was resting with his head on his Master's chest. Mulder wrapped his arms around his slave, and they both watched the clock in the hallway as it ticked slowly towards midnight. 11:58, 11:59. Mulder looked down, and claimed one last kiss from his slave's lips.

"Goodbye, Bear," he whispered.

His slave smiled. "Goodbye, Master," he whispered back.

Mulder closed his eyes. When he opened them again, the clock read 12:00 and he was a slave once more. He glanced down at his Master.

"Thank you," he said softly. "Thank you so much."

Skinner shook his head.

"Thank **you**," he said, disengaging himself from his slave's arms. "That was a most interesting and enjoyable experience."

"You made it easy for me." Mulder shrugged. "Andrew Linker was a very lucky man."

"And Walter Skinner is an equally lucky man." Skinner stood up, still naked, held out his hands, and pulled his slave to his feet. He led his slave up to the bedroom, ordered him to undress and retired to the bathroom to clean up after their vigorous sex session.

Mulder removed Andrew's clothes regretfully. He held the silk shirt up to his face for a second, nuzzling it.

"Thank you, Andrew," he murmured, before relinquishing the shirt to the laundry basket. He was sure he heard a little laugh, and felt a ghostly hand tousling his hair, and he smiled.

His Master returned a few seconds later, and sat down on the side of the bed with an exhausted sigh. Mulder used the bathroom himself, washed himself, and then brought his cock ring and nipple rings over to where his Master was sitting. He knelt before the other man, eyes down, and offered the rings to him. Skinner took them with a smile, and put them on the bed beside him.

"First things first." He held out his wrists. "You put them on. You take them off," he said. "That's the way it works." Mulder nodded, and unbuckled them, easing his fingers over the slightly red marks on his Master's arms, rubbing them away. Then he reached up, and touched the silver collar around his Master's neck. He undid it, his eyes never leaving those of his Master as he did so. He removed it, and handed it back to the other man with a sigh.

"Regrets, little one?" Skinner asked gently.

"No. None. I enjoyed it very much, but it isn't what I want to be, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week," Mulder replied. His Master nodded and threaded his slave's nipple rings into place, a thoughtful look on his face.

"You, Master?" Mulder asked, trying to interpret his Master's expression.

"No. It's a valuable experience though," Skinner said. "Every Master or top should make sure they sub occasionally every now and again. It reminds you how things feel. Sometimes it's easy to get jaded, or fall back into the same routines. It's always good to touch base with what it's like on the receiving end."

He took hold of his slave's penis, and threaded the gold cock ring back onto it. Mulder gave a sigh recognizing that the status quo had been returned.

"Get into bed, boy. Your birthday's over," Skinner said firmly, reasserting his authority.

"Yes, Master." Mulder scrambled into bed, and waited for his Master. Skinner placed the silver cuffs and collar on the dresser, and then returned to the bed, walking a little stiffly. "I think I'm going to be sore tomorrow after all this activity. I haven't been on the receiving end of that amount of anal sex in a long while...to say nothing of..." He raised an eyebrow. "Carrots?" he deadpanned.

"Very healthy, Master." Mulder grinned cheekily.

"Possibly not when eaten with chocolate sauce and cream," Skinner pointed out. Mulder laughed. His Master slid into the bed beside him, and pulled his slave into his arms. A few seconds later a noise and movement around their feet alerted them to the fact that Wanda had arrived on the bed as well.

"Poor baby. She hasn't had enough fuss today, have you, my little precious?" Skinner pulled the cat close, on the other side of him, and both cat and slave purred for a moment, wrapped up in the big man's arms.

"What I never realized was how much I'd learn," Mulder said, still trying to process the day's events. His Master chuckled. Mulder turned on him in surprise. "You knew!" he said. "You knew I was going to feel like this!"

"I had a fair idea, yes." Skinner played idly with one of his slave's nipples and his cat's ears simultaneously. "What did you learn, sweetheart?"

“Confidence,” Mulder said, unexpectedly. “You had total confidence in your position as my slave. When we were out, you didn’t feel demeaned, or in any way inferior. It was as if you were completely and utterly at peace with yourself and the world. You’ve spoken before about Master and slave complementing each other, working in tandem, as equals, each attune to the other’s needs, and tonight I felt as if that was what happened. I wish...I want that for us in our usual roles too. I feel I let you down. You’re such a great slave and I...”

“Fox – you are an excellent slave,” Skinner interrupted him. “You’re too hard on yourself. This was your first time at being a Master, remember, and I’ve had plenty of experience at being a sub. I was a long way from perfect in both roles when I first tried them. You did very well.”

“Thanks...but it’s just that seeing you today I realize that I haven’t had the confidence to be the slave I want to be. I’ve fought it, when really I’ve wanted so very much to give in. You showed me how to find that confidence today. Thanks for that.” He kissed his Master’s chest. “When we were in that bar, people envied me for having you as a slave. People wanted you. Nobody looked down on you – they were too busy wishing they owned you, or could be you.”

“It sounds as if that’s resolved something that’s been bothering you for a long time,” Skinner said softly, tweaking Mulder’s nipple affectionately.

“Yes. I think so.” Mulder nodded. “I learned a lot more than that though. I didn’t realize how good you’ve always been to me – and how you could have been so much more abusive. I didn’t understand what it feels like to have all this power over a person’s life, and how it feels to choose to wield it kindly, rather than throwing your weight around like that bastard Franklin.”

“You were an excellently restrained Master yourself – once you relaxed and gave yourself permission to have a good time.” Skinner squeezed his slave. Mulder surrendered himself to his Master’s embrace, nuzzling up to the big man. His Master’s hands roamed over his body, checking his property, reclaiming it as his own.

“So...what kind of Master was I? You said we all have to find the Masters that we want to be.” Mulder looked up into his Master’s dark eyes.

“Hmm. Well, you were very dramatic,” Skinner grinned. “And **vocal!** All that talking when you had me tied up – I almost wished you had gone for the full sensory deprivation so I wouldn’t have to listen.” He poked his slave in the ribs and Mulder laughed out loud.

“And you were very inventive – which comes as no surprise to someone who has sat through your many excuses and justifications for various misdeeds over the years,” Skinner observed wryly. Mulder groaned. “I never knew you had a kinky streak where foodstuffs are concerned either,” Skinner mused, his eyes twinkling. “I’ll have to slather you in cream and chocolate sauce one of these days and see how you like it.” Mulder’s groan turned into a distinct giggle. He loved it when his Master teased him.

“Seriously though,” Skinner mused, “I was interested to see how you dealt with your authority issues.”

“My authority issues?” Mulder propped himself up on his elbow, rested his head on his hand, and gazed at his Master, frowning.

“Yes. You’re always the one bucking against the system, railing against those in charge, and reacting defensively when criticized by older males with some kind of authority over you. I realize that’s some kind of reaction against your father, and a sign of your own insecurities with your sexuality, so it was good to watch you cope with being the one with the authority for once. You’ve never been in that situation before.”

“That’s true.”

“And I think that was the main reason why you almost gave up after brunch. You were scared what you might find out about what it’s like being the one with all the responsibility, the one giving orders – effectively becoming both the enemy and the object of desire. I’m not surprised that made you uncomfortable.”

“Ouch. You know me too well, Walter. I couldn’t have profiled myself better if I’d tried.” Mulder made a face. “And how did I deal with those issues?” he asked, chewing on his bottom lip.

“Surprisingly well. I noticed you were flippant, and sent up both yourself and the situation you were in on occasion, in order to defuse the fact that you aren’t comfortable wielding that much power – but you were fairly responsible with it. Even when you forgot yourself, and went too far, you were aware you’d done so – and made rather pleasing amends for it.” Skinner lowered his face and kissed his slave gently, reminding Mulder of the kiss of apology he had given his own slave after spanking him too hard.

“And what about you?” Mulder asked. “How did it feel for you? Was it a significant difference? Did it change the way you viewed me?”

“Hmm. I’m not sure. At first I was just playing for you – to make your day work out well. Later though, when you got into it and genuinely started engaging in the power dynamic, I started really responding to you as Master, and I actually did enter subspace. That was your doing. I wouldn’t have been able to manage it if I wasn’t reacting to you. So, much as you might fight it, you **do** have the capacity to be an authority figure, Fox Mulder.”

Mulder sighed and shook his head. “Damn. After trying so hard to avoid it all my life too.” He grinned. “I saw a side of you that I never usually notice as well. I, uh, think I’m guilty of projecting a lot of my authority issues onto you, Walter,” he said, in an apologetic tone. “I’ve always cast you as the strong, surly, in charge guy, but you’re a lot more than that. I saw a different side to you today, and you know...that Bear person was kind of cute.” Mulder smiled, reaching up a finger to touch the hickey on his Master’s neck.

“Well, maybe one day you’ll see him again,” Skinner said softly. “For now though – we’re back to normal. Which means what, boy?”

“I’m your slave, Master. You own me.” Mulder felt there was something very right with the world when he said those words. “And truthfully, I wouldn’t want it any other way, Master.”

“Good.” Skinner chuckled. He kissed his slave firmly, and then settled back into the pillows with a contented sigh.

"That thing you did in the bar," Mulder whispered. "Kneeling like that in front of all those people. I think that's the nicest thing anyone has ever done for me."

"You deserved it. You looked every inch the Master you were trying to be - I wanted to respond to that, and encourage you to keep going."

"Today has to be the best birthday present I've ever had," Mulder said sleepily.

"I'm pleased to hear it. My slave deserves nothing but the best after all." Skinner squeezed Mulder's ass with a proprietorial hand, and a few moments later they were both fast asleep.

It was still dark when Mulder woke, a few hours later, just before dawn. He reached for his Master only to find himself alone in the bed. He heard his Master in the bathroom, and smiled. A few seconds later his Master returned to the bedroom, and Mulder opened his eyes a little, still half asleep. His Master was walking softly, clearly trying not to wake his slave, not realizing that Mulder was already awake. Mulder watched through half-lidded eyes as his Master went over to the dresser, where the silver collar and cuffs were lying, abandoned. Skinner picked them up, opened the bottom drawer of the dresser, drew out a case, and placed the cuffs and collar reverently inside. Then the big man paused, and drew out the collar again. He caressed it for a little while, and then raised it to his mouth and bestowed a little kiss on it, a smile curving on his lips.

"Bear," he murmured, shaking his head, still smiling. "Lord of Misrule." He shook his head again, and gave a little grunt of laughter, before returning the collar to the case, and, with one last regretful look, replaced the case in the bottom drawer of the dresser. Mulder closed his eyes tightly, feigning sleep as his Master got back into bed, not wishing to intrude on the other man's private moment. Skinner pulled his slave close, and kissed his forehead. "Your Bear, my crazy Lord of Misrule," Mulder heard his Master whisper softly. "Always your Bear."

### End of Part 23

#### Chapter End Notes:

Beautiful subby Walter pic below courtesy of **Gaby**. Good enough to eat, ain't he? <G>

Another gorgeous subby Walter pic! This time by **Sergeeva**:



## Guardian of the House by Xanthe

### Author's Notes:

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Great title picture by **CDavis**

Spoilers: Vague references to *Requiem*.

Observant readers will have noticed slight, teeny tiny differences between the **24/7** universe and the canon *X Files* universe - like Skinner not having been infected by nanocytes, and Scully not being pregnant, oh and Mulder and Skinner being in a Master/slave relationship - that kind of tiny, inconsequential little thing. I'm operating on a 'divergent universe' theory, whereby similar events happen in the characters' lives, but they might take place at a different time or be slightly altered in some way. Hence in this universe the event in Oregon from *Requiem* takes place in November and not May. Therefore people need not email and tell me this because I do actually know.

Quotation courtesy of my sweet Alex. Standing thanks to Emma.

Many heartfelt thanks to Phoebe for giving her time so generously to help with this mammoth chapter.

***24/7 is an erotic fantasy and NOT a BDSM resource guide. The truth is sometimes exaggerated, or played with, for dramatic effect. For more information, please visit the 24/7 BDSM Glossary.***

***Remember those juggernauts I mentioned? A couple of them show up in this chapter... There's also something that is possibly a little controversial in this chapter, involving a decision that Skinner makes. I ummed and ahed about it, but decided to go for it in the end - don't yell at me for it! Just a reminder: Alex Krycek is \*bad\* in this universe. He's pretty damn bad in canon as well, but I know we tend to forget that in fanfic as he's so cute. Just a warning that he's bad here though as I don't want complaining emails on that topic.***

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***"A truth, still apparent, though disregarded, that things move violently to their place, but calmly in their place. To put it another way, everything has its right home, the region that suits it, and, unless forcibly restrained, will move thither by a kind of homing instinct."***

***J. Winterson  
"Art and Lies"***

Mulder was humming softly to himself as he paused outside the 17th floor apartment and reached into his pocket for his key. It still gave him a thrill to use the key his Master had given him on his birthday a couple of weeks previously. It was surprising that something as simple as a key could mean so much but it made all the difference to be entering this apartment through the front door, truly belonging here, rather than descending to it via the internal staircase. He opened the door, hating the fact that he was returning to an empty apartment. His Master was away attending a high level briefing in Los Angeles and wouldn't be home for another few days. Mulder had coped well with Skinner's absence – much better than the last time, he thought wryly to himself as he let himself into the apartment. He could scarcely believe the change in himself. A few months ago, when Skinner had last gone away, Mulder had spun out into orbit, but now he felt curiously grounded. The apartment felt empty without his Master, but Mulder was pretty sure that Skinner would make up for his absence upon his return. In the meantime he had Wanda to keep him company. He was surprised by how fond he had become of the little cat. He had been taking care of Wanda while Skinner was away, seeing to it that she was fed and watered, and he never retired to bed, which seemed so empty in his Master's absence, without taking her with him, wrapped up in his arms, something to hold until his Master returned home. Not that he'd ever tell Skinner that of course – it was a secret between him and Wanda. He didn't want his Master thinking he'd gone soft, or that he and Wanda had declared a truce or anything.

Mulder glanced around, frowning. Wanda always ran to greet him on his return home – she loved to come and say hello, and receive her customary petting. If he was leafing through his mail and ignored her for too long she'd miaow accusingly and rub her face around his ankles. If he persisted in his impolite behavior she'd stand on her hind legs and dig her claws into his shins until he picked her up and gave her a cuddle. After that she was fine and would wander off happily do Cat Things. She clearly needed the correct proprieties to be observed, and a formal greeting ritual to be performed. Mulder chuckled as he considered how well she had him trained – which made it all the more surprising that she wasn't here engaging in her usual welcoming procedure. A sudden panic gripped him, as his overactive imagination presented him with a picture of her lying dead somewhere, slain by some negligence of his - a sink full of water in which she'd drowned, or a knife left out carelessly upon which she had somehow impaled herself - but he quickly shrugged this off as being ridiculous. Only Skinner himself could have taken better care of the little cat.

"Wanda!"

Mulder threw his keys absently onto the hall table, feeling that something was wrong. Something was very wrong. The hair on the back of his neck stood up on end as he walked cautiously towards the living room, drawing his gun as he went. He wasn't sure why he felt that was necessary, just that he did. Some instinct was warning him, and he had learned over the years not to ignore his instincts.

“Wanda,” he said again, softly...and then he froze.

Wanda was sitting on the couch, purring happily...and she wasn't alone.

“Krycek.”

Mulder stood in the doorway, eyeing the assassin, and then nervously glanced at the cat who was sitting happily on his enemy's lap, being petted and fondled. She took no notice of Mulder, being far too busy rubbing her chin enthusiastically against Krycek's gently caressing, oh so dangerous hand: a hand that to Mulder's certain knowledge had killed and beaten with impunity; a hand that would surely take less than a second to crush a cat's windpipe.

“Put the gun down, Mulder. You aren't going to shoot me. Not with the cat so close. Skinner would never forgive you if anything happened to her.” Krycek's hand effortlessly circled Wanda's neck and Mulder stiffened but Wanda just purred, seemingly oblivious to any danger, her eyes opening and closing sleepily, only the pricking of her ears indicating that she had sensed the sudden tension in the room.

“Put her down, Krycek,” Mulder said, still holding the gun pointed at his enemy's head.

“Don't be ridiculous.” Krycek rolled his eyes. “I'm not going to kill her – she's adorable. I'm just here to talk. Put the gun away.”

“We have nothing to talk about. How the hell did you get in here anyway?” Mulder glanced at Skinner's state-of-the-art security system, which was winking away merrily, oblivious to its own shortcomings.

“It wasn't exactly hard.” Krycek shrugged. “Sit down, Mulder. You're making me jumpy.”

“Krycek, last time we met you lured me into a trap that ended up with me in the hospital. **I'm** the one who should be jumpy, not you,” Mulder growled.

“That was payback for all the punches you've landed on me over the years.” Krycek smiled sweetly. “Now that I feel suitably avenged, I'm happy to let bygones be bygones.”

“It might surprise you to find that **I am not**,” Mulder snapped.

“Aw, you're not still smarting over my handiwork with the knife?” Krycek raised an eyebrow, a grin hovering on his lips. “And there was I thinking that kind of thing was just part and parcel of your lifestyle of choice, slaveboy.”

“Why are you here?” Mulder refused to rise to the bait. He felt a sense of deadly calm settle into the pit of his stomach. This bastard couldn't touch him any more. Whatever power Krycek had once held over him was gone because he wasn't going to give him that power any more.

“To offer you information. That's all. There's no need for confrontation, or violence.” Krycek tickled Wanda under the chin and she gave a trilling purr. Mulder shot her a murderous glance.

“Traitor,” he muttered under his breath.

“Don’t be like that.” Krycek grinned. “She likes me. I have a calm aura.” That much was true. Krycek held himself very still, with a deadly kind of detached tranquility that suited his profession. “I bet she doesn’t like sitting on your lap,” Krycek goaded. “Too fidgety.”

Mulder furled his hand into a fist. Krycek was always able to make his most violent instincts rise to the surface. He seemed to know exactly the right buttons to press to make Mulder itch to plant his fist in that smugly grinning face. What, after all, did it matter that Krycek was right? That Wanda invariably preferred sitting with Skinner rather than him, because Skinner had a gentle, relaxed core to his soul, and could sit still for more than a few minutes without feeling the urge to stretch, twitch, rustle or otherwise behave in the restless manner of his slave. Only when Mulder was in deep submission, experiencing the total serenity of subspace, would Wanda deign to sit anywhere near him. It was absurd – it **didn’t** matter that Wanda found Krycek’s a more congenial lap than his, but somehow it made him boil with anger.

“Just say what you have to say and then go, Krycek,” Mulder muttered grimly.

“All right.” Krycek smiled, and allowed Wanda to sniff his plastic hand and nibble on the end of one of his artificial fingers. “I’m not here to fight, Mulder. I’m here with information.”

“You always offer information, Krycek. Most of the time it isn’t any use,” Mulder snarled.

“Not true.” Krycek looked wounded. “Sometimes I’ve risked my life bringing you information that’s been **very** useful to you, Mulder.”

Mulder chewed on his lip. That had a nugget of truth to it. Krycek’s motives might be hard to fathom but he had occasionally done Mulder favors... which did not negate the fact that his information was just as frequently flawed, and had often landed Mulder in deep trouble.

“Just tell me,” Mulder snapped. He leaned back against the wall, prepared not to be interested in anything Krycek had to say...only to be completely stunned by what came next.

“There’s a spaceship in close contact orbit around Earth. It’s massive – a total motherfucking beauty. Get there and you could become the first person to provide documented proof of extra-terrestrial life.”

Mulder gave a bark of laughter, shaking his head incredulously. “First Samantha, now a giant UFO – you know my buttons and you sure as hell know how to press them. I’m not buying this, Krycek.”

“I’m not lying. Call your geeky friends – radars are going crazy and the UFO watchers are out in force, chasing across the country to get there. They’ll confirm everything I’ve said.”

Mulder clenched and unclenched his fist, still holding his gun in his other hand, loosely pointed at Krycek. Finally he snapped, and reached into his jacket pocket to pull out his cell phone.

“If this is a lie...” he began.

“It isn’t.” Krycek’s tone was flat, and deadly serious. Mulder speed-dialed the Lone Gunmen with one hand.

“All right...where is this spaceship?” Mulder asked his uninvited guest as he waited for the Gunmen to pick up.

“It’s in Oregon.” Krycek leaned back into the soft cushions of the couch, and smiled.

Mulder froze. He wasn’t sure why, but the hairs on the back of his neck were standing on end, and a cold shiver was creeping slowly up his spine.

“Oregon?” He repeated blankly, surprised by his physical reaction to this information.

“That’s right.” Krycek nodded.

“Gunmen.” Langley’s voice.

“Langley it’s me. Turn the tape off,” Mulder replied.

“Yo – Mulder. We were going to call you but it’s so crazy here right now we didn’t have enough hands.”

“What’s going on?”

“Something big.” Langley’s voice sounded distant and then came back into focus. “Oh Jesus, Mulder. You wouldn’t believe what I’m looking at right now.”

“Radar of the skies over Oregon?” Mulder hazarded a guess, glancing at Krycek.

“You’ve heard already!” Langley sounded crestfallen. “Well, dude, you’d better get yourself over there – it’s all happening. This one is like the mothership or something. It’s massive, and it’s on a mission, crawling over the state on a go-slow like it’s looking for something. There have to be sightings of this one – maybe film. This could be it, Mulder. The big one.”

“Thanks, Langley.” Mulder turned his phone off and looked at Krycek again. “So you’re right. What worries me is why you want me to know about this ship. Why do you want me in Oregon, Krycek?”

“Maybe the time has come to make the world aware of what’s up there.” Krycek stroked Wanda’s head thoughtfully and her purring went up a decibel. “And you’d be the perfect person to do it. You’re credible, Mulder. However weird you are, you’re also an FBI agent. You’re a suit. A fibbie. A G-man. People will believe you. You’re not crackpot trailer trash out looking to make a quick buck. You’re the best we’ve got if we’re going to be believed.”

“Well you can find someone else. I’m not going.” Mulder held the door wide open and gestured towards it. “Get out of here, Krycek.”

“Not going?” Krycek raised an eyebrow. “Hell, what did Skinner **do** to you, Mulder? The Mulder I used to know would be on a plane right now. What’s the matter – do you need your Master’s permission to leave town, **slave** boy?”

“As a matter of fact I do – but that’s not why I’m not going. I’m not going because I know you, Krycek. Whatever this is it won’t be what I think it is. I’m not taking any more risks for you. Go and tell **your** masters that, **errand** boy.”

Krycek’s face darkened slightly, and Mulder felt a wave of grim satisfaction that his barb had hit home. He raised his gun cautiously as Krycek slowly and carefully picked up Wanda and deposited her on the floor. Then the assassin got up himself and stretched, his own movements almost as feline as those of the cat. Finally, he sauntered slowly towards the door, where Mulder was standing.

“It won’t be there forever, Mulder,” he hissed as he passed. “Get down to Oregon tonight – or you could miss out on what you’ve been looking for all your life.”

“Thanks for your concern.” Mulder smiled unpleasantly. He escorted Krycek to the front door, ushered him through it, then shut it again afterwards and locked it – a gesture that he knew to be pointless considering how easily Krycek had gotten into the apartment in the first place. That done, he sank to the floor, his knees feeling like jelly. Seeing Krycek had brought back too many memories, and he fingered the fading scar on his chest absently, his throat constricting as he recalled the hours spent as his old enemy’s captive, imprisoned in a warehouse waiting to die, the betrayal of his Master eating away at his soul just as Krycek had eaten away at his body with his knife. Finally, still trembling, he walked back to the living room, and collapsed on the couch, his body nerveless, bereft of energy. He sat there for a long time, staring out onto the balcony. Wanda leapt onto the couch and sniffed him curiously, puzzled by his lack of activity.

It was a UFO, very probably an alien vessel, something he had been looking for all his life, and it was out there, waiting for him. There would be answers to all the questions he had ever asked, and probably a few more besides. It could be the culmination of his life’s work...or it could be a trap. It would be so easy to just pick up his cell phone and call the airlines, to get a taxi to the airport...he could be in Oregon within hours.

Mulder reached into his pocket and pulled out his cell phone. His fingers pressed the buttons, seemingly not of their own volition. He wasn’t breathing. He wasn’t even sure that he was thinking straight. A reassuring voice on the other end of the line broke through his trance, jolting him back to reality.

“Skinner.”

Mulder started to breathe again. “Master, it’s me,” he whispered.

“Fox – what’s up?” Skinner seemed to know immediately that something was wrong by Mulder’s tone of voice.

“Krycek was just here.” Mulder felt the blood start to roar through his veins again, and the world came back into focus. His Master was an anchor on the other end of the line, keeping him safe, keeping him grounded, not allowing him to spin off into orbit along with whatever it was that was hovering over Oregon right now. There was a pause on the other end of the line, and then the sound of Skinner taking a sharp intake of breath.

“Are you okay?” Skinner’s voice was full of anxiety and Mulder gave a little smile. Skinner’s first thought was for his slave’s safety.

"I'm fine. He didn't do anything. He was sitting in the apartment when I got ho..."

"He was in the apartment?"

Mulder winced. Skinner sounded as if he was having an apoplectic fit. "Yes. He broke in."

"Is Wanda okay?" Skinner asked anxiously.

"She's fine. She actually seemed to like him." Mulder scowled at the cat who gazed at him steadily, without any trace of remorse.

"Damn the rat bastard. I thought I made myself clear last time we 'spoke'," Skinner snapped. "What did he want?"

Mulder filled his Master in as quickly as he could. When he finished there was silence.

"Master?" He prompted.

"I'm still here. Tell me where you are right now, Fox. Be honest," Skinner said softly.

"I'm in the apartment. Krycek only left a few minutes ago."

"Fox, don't take this the wrong way but I really need to know. You're not lying to me are you? You're not on your way to the airport?" Skinner asked.

Mulder winced but he knew that he had earned that inquiry. "No, Master. I'm still here," he said quietly.

"And will you stay there?" Skinner wanted to know.

"I...don't know," Mulder replied honestly. "This is everything I've ever wanted, Walter."

"I know, Fox, I know." Skinner's voice was husky with repressed emotion.

"It's evidence of extra terrestrials. It could be answers about Samantha. It could be proof."

"And it could be a trap," Skinner said flatly.

"I know that." Mulder chewed on his lip. "Are you ordering me not to go, Master?" He asked. There was another silence on the other end of the line, followed by a heavy sigh.

"No. No I'm not," Skinner replied. "I couldn't do that to you, Fox. You'd resent me for it for the rest of your life if I did. No, this is your decision. I'm **asking** you not to go but I'm not ordering you."

"Thank you, Walter," Mulder said quietly.

"Damn...if I could get back home I would, but I have a top level meeting tomorrow on a highly sensitive national security issue. I can't..."

"You don't need to. I don't need babysitting. I'll figure this one out," Mulder interrupted him.

"Fox – do what you have to do but listen to me," Skinner said urgently. "I want you to promise me that you'll keep me informed - even if you decide to go. Even if, when you're there, you make decisions that you know I'll disapprove of – just keep me in the loop. Let me know where you'll be staying and take Scully or some other kind of back-up with you. Don't do this alone. That much is an order, both as your Master and your boss."

"Yes, sir." Mulder gave a wry grin.

"I mean it, Fox," Skinner said, his tone in deadly earnest.

"I know you do, Master and I promise that I'll do what you say."

"Good. I have to go. I'm due in another meeting in five minutes." Skinner hesitated, clearly unwilling to end the call.

"It'll be okay," Mulder said reassuringly, still chewing on his bottom lip. "You go, Master. I'll be fine."

"All right. I'll be home in a few days, Fox. If you go to Oregon...if you're still there...I'll come straight to wherever you are as soon as I'm free."

"Thanks." Mulder felt the weight lift a little from his shoulders. It was good to share the problem, and to know that Skinner cared. He had never had that in his life before. Ever since he was 12 years old he had been used to shouldering burdens alone, from his sister's abduction to his mother's ill health. He had been the one who took care of everything and nobody had ever taken any of that strain from him before. He had never realized how good that would feel. "Take care, Master," he said softly. "I, uh, you know...love you." His voice dropped to a whisper as he said that. He still found it hard admitting to such an emotion at any time outside the heat of sex or his own intoxicating submission, but the evidence was so incontrovertible that there didn't seem to be any point in fudging the issue.

"I love you too. Go carefully, Fox," Skinner warned, "and remember what I said about keeping me informed. Call me anytime, day or night, just let me know what's going on."

"I will." Mulder ended the call and sat back on the couch with a sigh. If he only knew what was going on himself, he'd happily keep his Master informed.

Mulder sat staring into space for a long time, trying to come to a decision. Finally the grumbling of his stomach forced him to make a foray to the freezer to dig out a pizza. When he'd finished eating he glanced at his cell phone again. Should he call the airlines? Or the Gunmen? If he asked them for an update he knew that he'd crack and head straight for Oregon and he didn't want that. He felt like a dog with his damn Pavlovian response to every piece of bait Krycek dangled in front of him. It had always been his weakness. One sniff of an answer to the burning questions that had consumed his life and he went, like an obedient puppy, tail wagging, and it nearly always ended in disaster of one kind or another. He had to move on. He had to transcend it. And yet...Oregon beckoned.

Mulder had never been more aware of his own weaknesses than during this long, dark night of the soul. Hour after hour passed. Night fell, and the sounds of traffic far below faded into the usual night-time

lull. He lay on the couch, the restless churning of his mind at odds with the listlessness of his body. His jacket was discarded on the chair, and his shoes were kicked under the coffee table. His tie was abandoned on the floor, his shirt unbuttoned at the collar. When Skinner had first gone away he had reveled in being clothed in the apartment. Usually he was naked, on display, and while he found that a turn on it made a change to be wearing clothes for once, as if it were some kind of exotic, forbidden luxury. Who would have thought that something as simple as wearing clothes could feel so illicit? He longed for the uncomplicated reassurance of his role as Skinner's slave and yet even as he thought that he knew he couldn't hide behind that role. Skinner had never allowed him to use his slavery as an escape from his problems – instead he had made it a tool by which Mulder faced up to them. Being naked, kneeling at his Master's feet, would certainly be a distraction right now but it wouldn't solve anything. If only the answers were simple. His heart told him to go – but his soul told him to stay. His head said that logically he had nothing to fear as long as he took someone with him, and went to Oregon with backup, but some instinct he didn't understand made him doubt that logic. Somehow he knew that it would make no difference. Even if his Master himself accompanied him to Oregon, somehow something would happen to him there...and he wasn't sure what.

Cold fingers of uncertainty nagged at him whenever he came close to making a decision. Several times he got up, sure that he had made the decision to go, and each time he sat down again, a cold sweat breaking out on his skin. He even got as far as packing a small bag and bringing it back down to the living room. He sat with it between his feet, still trying to come to a decision. He wanted this. He wanted it badly. He needed to go. If he didn't go he knew that he'd regret it forever...he'd always think of what might have been, of the answers he could finally have uncovered.

It was nearly dawn when Mulder finally made up his mind. He stood up, and grabbed the bag. He'd go. He'd call ahead to the local PD and request back up. There was no need to involve Scully in this. If there was any danger then he didn't want her to get hurt. Relieved to have finally made up his mind, Mulder patted Wanda's head absently, and wrote a note to Mrs. Asher asking her to feed the cat and fish for the next couple of days. Then he got up, picked up his bag, walked to the door, grabbed his keys...and hesitated. He looked back over his shoulder at the apartment and that icy sensation swept through him again. Suddenly he knew, without any shadow of a doubt, that if he left here this evening he wouldn't come back for a very long time - if ever. The sensation was so sudden and so strong that it winded him, and he crouched, trying to get his breath back. He saw Wanda through the open living room door, lying on her side on the couch in a state of blissful feline contentment. He saw one of his Master's paddles hanging from a hook outside the kitchen – serving both as a permanently on display reminder to his slave and a conveniently available implement for Skinner to use when his slave required immediate correction. Mulder took a sharp intake of breath. This was it. This was his home, his whole existence, and he loved it. If he walked out of the door now it would all disappear, as if it had never existed. If he went, he'd lose it forever. He wasn't sure how, or why, he just knew that it was true. If he left now, he might find his answers, but in so doing he'd lose himself.

Mulder gave a low, choking sob, and walked back into the living room. He threw his bag onto the floor, slumped on the couch, and buried his face in Wanda's fur. He had just undergone a most profound moment. He had been tested, and had found the resolve to walk a different path, and by that one act he knew that he had somehow freed himself from a particular destiny, and chosen a different one instead. The strange thing was that it didn't feel like a bad choice. It felt good. It felt right.

"You're still here." The voice made him stiffen.

“Go away, Krycek.” He didn’t even look around. Krycek was no longer a threat. Mulder was so sure of his decision that nothing Krycek said or did would alter that.

“Skinner must have really screwed with your mind. I thought you’d come to your senses when you had time to think about it.” Krycek sounded surprised. “Well, well. This is different.” The room was in darkness. Mulder heard Krycek walk over to him, and he tensed, uncertain whether the other man had a gun. “I’m not entirely sure how to play this one. In fact, I’m speechless,” Krycek said, his lips brushing Mulder’s ear as he leaned in close.

“You’re patently **not**,” Mulder commented acerbically. He could feel Krycek’s breath on the back of his neck, making his hackles rise.

“I brought you this.” Krycek threw an envelope onto the coffee table in front of them. “Plane ticket...and a couple of pictures.” He walked around the couch and perched on the side of the coffee table. “You might find the pictures particularly interesting.”

Krycek waited, but Mulder just sat, making no move to open the envelope.

“I can see that Skinner also stole your curiosity. Okay.” Krycek opened the envelope and drew out the photographs. He held one up. “Remember Billy Miles? One of your first cases with Agent Scully I believe. He’s an abductee. You suspected aliens and she...well, Agent Scully has always been more of a skeptical personality, hasn’t she?” Krycek’s teeth gleamed a vivid white in the dimly lit room – the only light being that from the hallway slanting through the open door. Mulder clenched his fists, wanting to strike but he still wasn’t sure whether Krycek had a gun – or worse, a knife. Mulder’s finger went absently to his scar again. “This photograph is of Billy. He’s older now of course – it’s been a few years since you saw him after all. He disappeared last night. In Oregon.” Krycek threw the photograph onto Mulder’s lap. “His car was found abandoned on the open road. The electrics weren’t working.” Krycek paused, gazing intently at Mulder.

“It’s just a photograph.” Mulder shrugged. “It doesn’t prove anything. You could have got it anywhere.”

“The second photo might interest you more.” Krycek held it up. Mulder could just about make out a cylindrical object with flashing lights, hovering in a dark sky.

“It could be anything.” Mulder shrugged. “You know how easily those shots can be faked.”

“This one isn’t. It was taken a few hours ago. In Oregon.”

“Okay. I’m still not going.” Mulder shrugged. Wanda stretched and yawned beside him, then sat up, her yellow-green eyes sparkling in the half light.

“Why? Because of Skinner? He doesn’t own you, Mulder.” Krycek sounded genuinely angry now, as if he hadn’t anticipated meeting this kind of resistance.

“As a matter of fact he does,” Mulder chuckled. “And no, not because of him, because of me. You wouldn’t understand, Krycek.”

"I understand one thing – it's my mark on your chest, Mulder. I'm the one who pulls your strings, whether you like it or not. You'll go." Krycek sat back confidently, his green eyes glowing like Wanda's.

"No. I won't." Mulder shook his head wryly, refusing to rise to the bait.

"You couldn't even come after me yourself, could you?" Krycek growled in a sneering tone, clearly annoyed by Mulder's refusal to play the game his way. "You had to send Skinner to take revenge on me for what happened in Seattle. You had to hide behind him – just like you're doing now."

"That's crap and you know it," Mulder bristled. "I've never shied away from a fight with you in my life Krycek. I enjoy beating the shit out of you too much. And on that subject, I think that you and I have some unfinished business to take care of, don't you?" Mulder threw his fist at Krycek's jaw without warning, striking the other man a glancing blow. Krycek recovered quickly and launched himself forward, landing on Mulder's body and winding him as he pushed him back on the couch. He brought his fist down hard on Mulder's face, making painful contact with Mulder's cheek. Mulder twisted, and pushed up with all his might, aware of Wanda scurrying away frantically out of the corner of his eye. Anger gave him the strength to

lever his opponent away. "Get the fuck out of my life, Krycek," he hissed, pummeling the other man with his fists. They both fell off the couch and crashed onto the coffee table, which shattered beneath them. They landed amid the remains of sheared wood and broken glass, Krycek on top.

"No deal, Mulder. I'm with you forever," Krycek growled. "You'll never get rid of me." They rolled over together, each landing a punch but not hard enough to decide the outcome of the fight.

"You fucking bastard," Mulder shouted, lashing out in a blind frenzy. He had a vision of Krycek following him for the rest of his life, always there, smirking, offering him leads that turned into traps, wrong-footing him at every turn, and a wave of frustration swept through him. Krycek took advantage of his loss of control and managed to land a punch to Mulder's midriff that knocked him onto his back. Mulder fell awkwardly, with a grunt, winded, and he lay there, helpless, as Krycek raised his fist to strike.

"Let's face it, Mulder," Krycek hissed, his fist poised ready to deliver the decisive blow in this particular battle. "You're always going to be a sick, crazy pervert, playing your stupid sex games with that thick as shit moron you call *Master*." He said that word with a distinct sneer. "You don't need my help to be any more fucked up than you already are, slave boy." And with that he brought his fist down. Mulder steeled himself for a blow that never arrived. Instead the lights snapped on, blinding him momentarily in the sudden glare. He heard a low growl of surprise and then Krycek was lifted bodily from him and thrown unceremoniously against the wall, where he crashed to a halt and then slid slowly to the ground.

"Thick as shit?" Skinner's voice was as cold as ice, and almost expressionless. "It seems to me there's only one moron around here, Krycek. Tell me, what part of 'leave Mulder alone' didn't you understand when I visited you last time?" He grabbed the collar of Krycek's black leather jacket and flicked a savage punch at the other man's jaw that made Mulder wince. Krycek's head lolled back against the wall, blood running down his chin.

"Leave me alone, Skinner," Krycek snarled, struggling desperately in Skinner's grasp. He was suddenly transformed into a vicious animal fighting for his life. "Mulder doesn't need you to protect him. He's a

big boy now, and he wants to go to Oregon - don't you, Mulder?" He glanced at Mulder over Skinner's shoulder. Mulder sat up, gingerly feeling his tender abdomen and bruised jaw.

"There's his bag by the couch, all packed and ready to go," Krycek pointed out. Skinner glanced at it and then his eyes swept over Mulder's face, utterly impassive. Mulder shook his head. He didn't need to prove anything to Skinner - his Master would take his word over Krycek's any day of the week. Skinner's expression hardened as he turned back to their uninvited guest.

"You see, no amount of 'Yes Master, No Master' is going to change him," Krycek taunted. "He'll always be what he is, however hard you work on him."

"Oh yes. And what exactly is it that you think he is?" Skinner asked, his fingers digging deep into Krycek's neck. Krycek gave a smirk, his cut lip splitting open even more, causing a large bubble of blood to well up in the crack.

"He's easy," Krycek replied. "Mulder's easy. You just wind him up, press his buttons, set him in the right direction, and he goes - and I know which buttons to press far more than you do, Skinner. He isn't really yours - I'm the one who knows him best. I'm the one who can make him dance to my tune like a puppet."

"Is that so?" Skinner's voice was deceptively mild.

"Yeah - those are my initials carved on his chest after all." Krycek grinned smugly as he threw his ultimate jibe at the man holding him against the wall.

Skinner's expression didn't change. "Fox, come here," he ordered. Mulder walked over, wondering what his Master was going to do. Skinner gestured with his head. "Open your shirt, Fox. Show him what's on your chest."

Mulder exchanged a grim glance with his Master, and then unbuttoned his shirt to reveal the smooth, neat, almost invisible scar - a scar that no longer spelt out the initials AK.

"You see, things can change, **boy**," Skinner said. "Just like that scar changed. Mulder is mine - don't be in any doubt about that. He's mine. Don't mess with him again."

Krycek's eyes were sullen and angry as he recognized that he had lost this particular argument. "Let me go, Skinner," he gasped, struggling pointlessly in the big man's grasp.

"Not yet. I want to make something very plain, in words that a **moron** like you can understand," Skinner said, his large paw holding Krycek upright as he threw off another of those punches that looked so easy but which had to hurt like hell. The assassin's eyes were starting to look a little glazed. "Leave Mulder alone," Skinner growled. "Leave **me** alone. Don't ever, **ever** come back here. I don't give a shit how scared you are of your masters - you should be more afraid of me because if you ever contact us again you'll really feel my wrath. And I mean that, Krycek. It isn't an empty threat. If you ever bother either of us again then it's serious. I won't play nice. I won't play by the rules. There will be consequences. Do you understand?"

“Sure.” Krycek nodded, licking his lips nervously and wiping away the blood, only for it to well up again almost immediately.

“No.” Skinner shook Krycek as if he were a rag doll. Mulder was in awe of his Master’s angry strength. Skinner was like a cat playing with a mouse – deadly and dangerous. Mulder had no doubt that his Master could have killed Krycek with one flick of his hands, snapping the assassin’s neck as if he were nothing, and he was suddenly profoundly aware how much Skinner held back when dealing with his slave, how those big hands also knew how to caress, and be gentle, and loving. He had never seen Skinner like this before, and it was a revelation to him. He suddenly became aware, with an acute sensation of embarrassment, that his cock had started to swell within his pants. Christ, that was the last thing he needed right now.

“No, that’s not good enough,” Skinner said in a low, intense voice. “You have to **really** understand, Krycek, because this is the last warning. There won’t be another one.” He shook Krycek again to illustrate the point. The blood running down Krycek’s jaw dripped onto his tee shirt and splattered onto Skinner’s face. “Leave us alone. Don’t come near Mulder – and that means no phone calls, no visits, no turning up here or at the Hoover Building. No emails, no letters – no contact of any kind. Don’t follow him. Don’t come anywhere near him - or I promise you that it will be the last time.” Skinner’s voice was so low and hard that it was almost unrecognizable. “Now I’m going to ask you again – do you **understand?**” Skinner pressed.

“Y...yes...sir...” Krycek stammered. Mulder smiled – even Krycek was in awe of his Master.

“Good. Then it’s time for you to leave.” Skinner hauled Krycek bodily to the door, then paused and pulled his cell phone from his pocket. He called the doorman and requested two members of the security team. When they arrived a few minutes later, he handed Krycek to them with a grim request that he be thrown onto the street and not allowed re-admittance – ever. Then, finally, he shut the door and turned back to his slave boy.

“I thought you had a meeting,” Mulder said, unsure what mood his Master was in. Skinner’s chest was still heaving, and he didn’t know whether his Master had come down off his battle high or not. If not...then he could still be dangerous.

“I couldn’t stay knowing what you were going through. I wanted to be with you for this decision – whichever way you decided to jump,” Skinner told him. “I said a personal emergency had come up. I’m sure the Director wasn’t impressed, but this was more important.”

Mulder was stunned by his Master’s grasp of his priorities. He wasn’t sure he had ever come so decisively first with anyone in his life before. “I had made up my mind,” he said softly. “I wasn’t going. I almost did. I packed to go but I turned back at the last minute. I just had a really bad feeling about it. My decision seemed to upset Krycek. He’s used to me jumping through his hoops. That’s why we were fighting.”

“Are you okay?” Skinner’s eyes were dark and concerned. He wasn’t wearing his wirerims and his face was still spattered with Krycek’s blood. He traced his fingers over Mulder’s bruised cheek.

“I’m fine. You?” Mulder caught his Master’s hand and examined it. Skinner’s knuckles were badly bruised and the skin was scraped in places.

"I'm fine too. Come here." Skinner wrapped his arms around his slave and held him tight, then pushed him away and glanced in surprise at Mulder's crotch. "You're hard," he observed, in a tone of mild astonishment. "I'm impressed. After all the drama here tonight I'd have thought sex would be the last thing on your mind."

Mulder felt the heat rise to the surface of his skin and cursed his body silently for giving away a long-held fantasy that fascinated and appalled him so much that he had never been able to give it voice.

"What's this about?" Skinner asked, his dark eyes intrigued, his fingers gently brushing his slave's swelling cock.

"You're hot when you're in he-man mode that's all. You know it turns me on," Mulder deflected the question, feeling utterly embarrassed, hating his body for giving him away. He disengaged himself from his Master's grasp, turned, and went into the kitchen. He dug out some antiseptic gel from the cupboard, and then returned to escort his Master into the lounge, where he knelt and applied the gel to Skinner's knuckles.

"I know how it looks – with the bag," Mulder said softly as he soothed the gel into his Master's discolored skin. "But I really wasn't going to go. I'd made up my mind."

"I believe you." Skinner smiled, and placed his free hand on Mulder's shoulders, stroking him affectionately.

"You can go back to LA. Krycek would be an idiot to show up here again and I'm not in danger of being abducted by aliens in Oregon." Mulder gave a faint, rueful smile. He felt that cold sensation again, and shivered.

"Boy?" Skinner's fingers found Mulder's chin and forced his face up to look at him.

"It's nothing, Master. Just this weird feeling I've been having all night. I think I made the right decision."

"So do I. As for LA – I'm in no mood to fly back straight away. I want to go to bed and have my slave remind me what I've been missing while I've been away." Skinner flicked Mulder's dark hair away from his face, and gazed at his slave boy fondly. Mulder melted into the caress, as he always did. "Before that though..." Skinner drew back reluctantly, and glanced around the room. "I suspect we weren't the only ones spooked by what happened here this evening. I think a certain someone will be in need of some reassurance too."

"Wanda." Mulder got up, frowning. He remembered seeing the little cat rush away at the first sign of violence but had no idea where she had gone after that. They spent the next twenty minutes scouring the apartment but couldn't find her. Eventually, Skinner called a halt to the search with a sigh of resignation.

"I guess she's gone to ground. That's fair enough. She obviously doesn't want to be found. We'll have to wait until she decides she's ready to come out. I've learned the hard way that you can't force Madam to do anything she doesn't want to do." He glanced at Mulder. "I don't know about you, boy but I'm tired. Let's hit the sheets."

Skinner headed for the bedroom and Mulder followed, chewing on his lip. He was still disturbed by his earlier arousal and somehow he knew that this wasn't something Skinner would allow to rest. He got undressed, knelt beside the bed, and waited until his Master was settled under the sheets before requesting permission to join him. Skinner nodded, and Mulder slid into bed, and was immediately pulled into a pair of big arms. Skinner pushed Mulder's legs open forcefully with his knee, and pinned him to the bed, kissing him thoroughly. Mulder's cock hardened immediately.

"You denied me earlier," Skinner said, his large hands holding Mulder down as surely as any method of bondage. Mulder moaned, too distracted by sex to be able to fathom what his Master was talking about.

"Denied you? I never...I wouldn't, Master," he replied in astonishment. He had never once rejected his Master's sexual advances – he enjoyed them too much for that.

"You denied me a part of your sexuality. I noticed you were aroused and you made an excuse not to talk about it. I **want** to talk about it," Skinner insisted, one hand holding Mulder in place, the other stroking his slave's chest. He paused over Mulder's left nipple and took it between his fingers, rubbing it to a point. Mulder gasped out loud.

"I'm waiting." Skinner's fingers squeezed, and Mulder jack-knifed against his Master's body.

"I don't know what you want me to say. I was embarrassed, that's all. I didn't mean to deny you anything," he said quickly. The pressure of the fingers on his nipple eased a little.

"Talk to me about it. If it's a sexual fantasy then I want to know. I have a right to know my slave's desires. Why does it embarrass you after all we've done?"

"Because...because it's..." Mulder struggled with what he wanted to say. Skinner increased the tension on his nipple. "It's not very PC," Mulder gasped.

"Neither is slavery." Skinner released the nipple, and dropped his head to suck the abused nub of flesh, warming and soothing it with his tongue. When he'd finished he kissed his slave on the lips again, a deep, heartfelt kiss then leaned back and gazed at him, clearly waiting for Mulder to elaborate on his fantasy. Mulder remained mute. This wasn't something he wanted to talk about. After a long silence, Skinner gave a loud sigh, clearly accepting that he wasn't going to get any answers and unwilling to press the issue after all they'd just been through.

"I was afraid you'd gone to Oregon. I wasn't sure what I'd find when I came home," he murmured, caressing Mulder's features in the dark with his fingers as if to remind himself what they looked like. "I sure as hell didn't expect to see you writhing on the carpet with Alex Krycek."

"We really need to get a new security system," Mulder said wryly. "He broke in twice without any difficulty at all."

"I'll look into it," Skinner murmured absently. He released Mulder and turned over with another deep sigh. Mulder lay there, his cock still hard and aroused. He knew he'd upset his Master with his lack of trust, but this was difficult. All the same – Skinner was right. He was a slave, and he had given control of his body and his desires to his Master. By withholding them he was committing a breach of their contracts, and they both knew it. It was only because they were both so shaken after Krycek's visit that

his Master wasn't pressing the issue and he was taking advantage of that fact. Mulder thought about it for a moment, and then touched his Master's shoulder.

"It was you, holding Krycek against the wall, being so dangerous and uncompromising," he said quickly, before he could change his mind. "You didn't care about him. You weren't careful with him the way you are with me. You know I have a thing about you in he-man mode anyway. You know how much I enjoy really rough sex." He bit on his lip. Skinner turned to look at him in the darkness. Mulder took a deep breath, unsure how to proceed.

"You want me to force you?" Skinner asked.

Mulder made a face. "Kinda," he whispered.

"Tell me more." Skinner slung his thigh over Mulder's legs, drawing him close. He reached down and began to slowly caress his slave's hard cock.

Mulder grimaced, torn between pleasure and confession. "It's not an easy thing to admit," he murmured.

"You can tell me anything. In fact I insist. As your Master." Skinner smiled, his white teeth gleaming. "I won't judge you, Fox. It's just a fantasy. Tell me," he urged.

"I know you're always careful with me and I'm grateful for that because some of what we do is pretty...extreme...but...I'd like to try maybe...something a bit more...when we're playing that is..." He broke off, realizing what little sense he was making.

"Keep going." Skinner pumped his cock hard and he gave a gasp of need.

"I'd like to struggle," Mulder murmured, thankful that it was dark so Skinner couldn't see the shade of bright red his face had turned. "I want to be subdued. I want to fight...I want to be..."

"Raped?" Skinner flicked some of Mulder's hair out of his eyes. He was propped up on one elbow, gazing down on his slave with an amused look on his face.

"No! I mean...not for real," Mulder said quickly.

"I know what you mean, slave boy." Skinner's hand was firm on his cock as he milked Mulder to climax. "It isn't anything to be ashamed of. It's a common fantasy."

"Is it? For men?" Mulder grimaced again.

"Well, a lot of men fantasize about being overpowered by a strong, sexy woman so yes, why not? Your fantasy is more skewed to your particular sexuality but it isn't uncommon. It's okay, Fox. I know it's just a fantasy. I also know that if anyone actually tried to rape you you'd fight him tooth and nail. Being my slave means you can't say 'no' to me. You're saying you'd like to have a controlled fantasy scenario where you **can** say no. Where you can fight and struggle against me without the normal rules applying. You want me to take you by force, to **make** you submit. Yes?"

"I guess." Mulder glanced at his Master apprehensively, waiting for some kind of reaction. This was a fantasy that he had never shared with **anyone** before. It was too personal, and, on some level, too shaming, but the idea of his Master overpowering him, forcing him to do what he enjoyed so much anyway...it turned him on. He should have known better than to doubt his Master's response to his fantasy. There wasn't the remotest trace of disgust in Skinner's eyes as he dropped his head and devoured Mulder's lips with his own, kissing him thoroughly, massaging his slave's cock hard and fast at the same time.

"How much force?" Skinner whispered in his ear. Mulder tried to concentrate on the question, his breathing coming fast and hard as his Master expertly brought him close to orgasm.

"Uh...as much as it takes. I want to feel the heat of the fight...oh shit...I want to let go, to really get physical, violently physical...oh god!" Mulder jack-knifed off the bed as he came, helplessly, with a groan of satisfaction, and then he lay nerveless and sated, sweat pouring down the side of his face.

Skinner grinned down at him. "That seemed pretty physical to me," he commented.

"It was. I'm not dissatisfied with anything you do to me, Master," Mulder said quickly.

"I know." Skinner nodded.

"But you asked...I was being as honest as I could." Mulder felt himself flush again. It was bad enough admitting to a rape fantasy, but it was made worse by the fact that it also meant admitting that part of that fantasy was that he refused his Master his rights over his slave – and that was something that went against the very heart of the contract he had freely signed.

"I'm going to fly back to LA tomorrow," Skinner told him, as the aftermath of Mulder's orgasm still buzzed in his ears. "Just for a few days." He smiled at his slave. "As for the other thing...I'll think about it," he promised. "There's something else I want to talk about. Krycek broke in here. He violated our home. Do you need to talk about that? Do you still feel safe here?"

"After the way you threw the rat bastard around? Sure." Mulder grinned. "It reminded me of that time, years ago, when I brought him here and you slugged him in the gut and handcuffed him to your balcony; the sight of you doing that, bare-chested, fuelled my jerk off fantasies for years. I walked out of this apartment with a hard on the size of Mount Everest in my pants. I had no idea I'd be lucky enough to have the real thing one day."

"You might like to reclaim the experience," Skinner mused.

Mulder moved his head in order to examine his Master's face. He couldn't read Skinner's expression in the darkness though. "I don't understand," he said.

"Well...just as we took what Krycek did with your chest and made it our own – a bond between **us**, maybe we could do the same with what he did here tonight and how he violated our home, where we have every right to feel safe."

"How?" Mulder frowned in the dark, wondering what Skinner was getting at.

“Like I said, I need to give it some thought.” Skinner sank back on his pillows with a weary sigh. Mulder grinned. There was something he could do to make his Master more comfortable. He disappeared under the sheets, and located his Master’s cock with his mouth. Skinner’s hand came down and rested on his hair, as it usually did when his slave was serving him orally. His Master’s cock was as responsive as usual despite his weariness, and it didn’t take long for Mulder to bring him to climax. He swallowed his Master’s come, cleaned Skinner’s beautiful smooth cock, and then snaked his way up the bed. Skinner pulled him into his arms and gave him a kiss and they both lay there in silence. Mulder felt warm and safe within the circle of his Master’s arms but he knew that it had been so close. He had nearly lost everything this evening.

Everything.

If he had gone to Oregon he could have found that space craft - or it could have found him...If he had gone, then instead of being held safely in his Master's arms right now, he could be high above the earth, abducted, just like he was sure his sister had been abducted. Mulder felt as if someone had walked across his grave. He bent his head, and kissed his Master’s wrist, bringing himself back into the present. It hadn’t happened. Whatever might have happened if he had gone to Oregon hadn’t happened, and that was all because his Master had given him something else to live for beside his quest.

“Thank you,” he whispered silently. Skinner laid his cheek against his slave’s. If he was puzzled by the remark he didn’t say so.

A few seconds later a soft thump on the bed and a little squeak alerted them to the fact that Wanda had decided it was safe to come out. Skinner scooped her up, and checked her thoroughly for injury, but the little cat was clearly fine – and equally clearly was thoroughly enjoying all the attention. Mulder could empathize with that. He enjoyed being examined by his Master himself, but for entirely different reasons. Finally, Master, slave and cat settled down to sleep, in a tangle of warm fur and entwined limbs.

Skinner left reluctantly to return to LA first thing the next day. He had arranged for the meeting he should have attended in the morning to be put back until the evening, and he would make it there just in time. Mulder was left with the debris of the previous night’s drama to take care of. The coffee table had been broken in the melee, and the furniture in the living room was upturned. There was blood on the carpet and the wall. Krycek’s blood. Mulder looked at it for a moment, then sighed, grabbed his keys, kissed Wanda on the head and left for work. He'd clean up the apartment when he got home.

Scully was already ensconced in his office talking on the telephone when he arrived. He could tell by the teasing tone in her voice that she was talking to John Doggett and he struggled with his jealousy for a moment. He was pleased for her. She deserved to find someone who'd give her the kind of love that he wasn't capable of, but that didn't mean that a part of him didn't hurt. She was his best friend and he didn't like the idea of sharing her with anyone, any more than he liked the idea of sharing Skinner with anyone.

He didn't have long to think about that subject, because as soon as he sat down at his desk he saw that his computer screen was covered in yellow post-it notes. He raised an eyebrow at Scully who mouthed the word 'gunmen' back at him. Mulder reached for the phone, and called his geeky friends.

"Hey, dude." Langly sounded bubbly. "How's Oregon?"

"I wouldn't know. I'm in DC," Mulder grunted, his heart plummeting. However sure he was that he had made the right decision last night, a part of him would always regret not going after that UFO.

"You're what? Damnit, Mulder. This is what we've been waiting for!" Langly remonstrated.

"Sorry, Ringo but you can get to Oregon just as easily as I can," Mulder pointed out.

"We were relying on you, buddy!" Langly lamented.

Mulder's hand tightened into a fist around the phone. "I know. It just wasn't...the right thing to do."

"Why?"

"Let's just say that someone else wanted me to go there too much to make it safe."

"Safe?" Langly sounded incredulous. "Yo, Mulder, this is **me** you're talking to! When did you ever want to play it safe?"

Mulder gazed at Scully, who was giggling down the telephone in a way he'd never have believed possible if he hadn't seen it with his own eyes.

"It's just...sometimes...sometimes other things are more important," he murmured.

"Yeah. Right. Either you've found religion or you've found lurve," Langly teased. "Oh shit. You haven't, have you?" He asked.

"Found religion? My work **is** my religion," Mulder deflected. How long had he and Scully been locked away down here in this basement? And for how much of that time had either of them been really happy? They'd sacrificed their happiness to their work, and now they both had a chance to be fulfilled in an area of their lives that neither of them had been very successful in before. It felt good. He grinned at Scully as she finished her call and put the phone down – only for it to ring again almost immediately. "So, what happened in Oregon? I didn't see anything in the papers about a flying saucer landing," Mulder said, swinging his feet onto his desktop.

"That's because it moved on hours ago. It hovered over Arizona for awhile and then disappeared into god knows where," Langly told him. "It clearly didn't find what it was looking for in Oregon so maybe it had more luck in Arizona."

"What the hell is in Arizona?" Mulder mused. Out of the corner of his eye he saw all the color drain from Scully's face as she answered the incoming call. "Langly, I'll call you back," he said quickly, putting the phone down.

"Scully?"

She stared at him, her face drawn and tense. "It's Gibson Praise. He's been abducted."

"Abducted?" Mulder repeated stupidly. "From where?"

"He was being looked after at a children's home in the Arizona desert."

Mulder felt as if a cold wind had blown up his spine, causing all the hairs on the back of his neck to stand on end. "Arizona?" he whispered.

"Yes. Why? Does that mean something to you?" Scully asked.

"Nothing that makes any sense. Shit!" Mulder rested his forehead in his hands. "Oh shit."

"Mulder." Scully came over to him, and laid a hand on his shoulder. "What is it that you know?"

"It's hard to explain. I just know that...Last night I made a decision, Scully. I think someone had to be taken last night...and if it hadn't been Gibson then it would have been me. That poor kid. Shit!" He kicked his desk, feeling utterly shattered. Gibson Praise was just a kid. If someone had given him a choice, if someone had only **explained** it to him, then he would have traded himself. He'd have gone instead - if only he'd known.

"Mulder, you aren't making any sense," Scully perched on his desk and rubbed his stiff shoulders.

"It's just a feeling, Scully. It doesn't make any sense and I don't blame you for not taking it seriously. If it were someone else, someone like your sister, Melissa, coming in here and saying the same thing to me then I'd dismiss it as just new age crap...but that wasn't what it felt like. I felt as if my destiny was taking some kind of divergent path – and it was all linked to a decision I made last night. You know, I saw a play once where the whole outcome depended on whether one of the main characters smoked a cigarette before the end of Act One. They had all these different scenarios to play out depending on that cigarette. Last night...last night felt like that." He looked into her uncomprehending blue eyes and shook his head. "I can't tell you how I know but I just **do**. Last night Gibson Praise was abducted – and if I'd gone to Oregon like I was supposed to then it would have been me, and somehow, and again I'm not sure how I know this, but somehow if it **had** been me then it wouldn't have been him."

"Oh, Mulder." Scully put her arms around his shoulders and held him. "You don't know that. You can't know that. It's just that over-developed sense of guilt of yours talking."

"No. It isn't." He drew away from her. "It isn't, Scully. Not this time."

"What will you do?" She gazed at him searchingly.

"What can I do?" He spread his arms helplessly. "What the hell can I do?"

Mulder booked a flight to Arizona, knowing in his heart that it was pointless. He called his Master to let him know what he was doing. Skinner sounded worried, and Mulder knew that the other man thought, just like Scully, that this was just his overactive sense of guilt taking responsibility for what had happened. Arizona yielded the dead ends he'd expected. He spoke to a friend of Gibson's who, communicating in sign language, told him what he already knew in his heart. She and Gibson had been walking back from a cook-out in the desert, when they'd seen bright lights overhead. Gibson seemed to know what would happen. He hadn't been scared – instead he had seemed almost fatalistically

resigned. She had looked away for a second and when she looked back he was gone. She called his name, but the bright lights overhead had moved away, taking Gibson with them.

Mulder spent another day in Arizona searching for clues, but he already knew it was a waste of time. Exhausted and heartsick, he returned home – to find the evidence of his fight with Krycek still littering the living room. He gazed at it for a moment, and then sank down on his haunches, fighting back tears of anger and frustration. This reminded him so much of another time, a few years ago, when Scully had been abducted and he'd returned to his trashed apartment – only on that occasion he had been alone, with nobody to share his despair. This time it was different. He checked that Wanda was okay - his Master had called Mrs. Asher to ask her to drop by and feed the little cat – and, finding her as bright eyed as ever, he loosened his collar, flung himself down on the couch, and speed-dialed his Master on his cell phone.

"Skinner." Hearing those familiar deep tones made all the difference. Mulder felt the tension start to lift from his aching shoulders.

"Hi. It's me," Mulder said softly. "I just wanted to hear your voice. Things have been pretty shitty the past couple of days."

"No luck in Arizona huh?"

"No. Damn! I feel so useless."

"Listen to me, Fox. None of this was your fault," Skinner told him urgently. "How are you holding up? I mean honestly? I don't want to come home and find you've done something stupid."

"Like going up to the Playroom and taking out my frustration on myself with some of the more savage implements in there?" Mulder asked.

"Something like that."

"No. I won't do that. I just want to fucking well..." Mulder gave into another wave of angry frustration and thumped his fist into the remains of the broken coffee table, watching with some satisfaction as the shards of wood went flying. "I'd trash the place if it wasn't already trashed," he joked feebly.

Skinner gave a wry grunt. "I take it that sound effect was you taking out your anger on inanimate objects?"

"Yeah. The coffee table was already wounded. I just put it out of its misery."

"Look, I'll be home tomorrow. I know you're taking this badly and I understand why, but hurting yourself – or the apartment - won't change anything, and besides, that's my property you'd be damaging, boy – in both cases." Skinner's tones were deep, throaty and masterful, and Mulder felt himself tuning out the rest of the world, and allowing his Master's voice to wash over him, soothing him.

"I know," he replied. "I told you, I won't do anything stupid, Master. I just wish I had a way of getting rid of all this anger. Christ, I almost wish Krycek would break in here again just so I could have the satisfaction of sinking my fist into his stupid ass face. He must have known something like this would

happen. This was what he intended to happen to **me**. If he'd just warned me...if I'd just known that Gibson was at risk..."

"You couldn't have known that – and you can't be sure that Krycek wanted you to go to Oregon so that you'd be abducted either," Skinner pointed out in reasonable tones. "Shit – I have to go, I've got a meeting in a couple of minutes. Listen to me, boy," his tone dropped even further. "I want you to take a bath, and then go and find the butt plug in my nightstand drawer - the big one. Lube it up, and wear it to bed tonight. Remember that you're mine, and that's where my cock belongs – and where it's going to be planted just as soon as I get home."

Mulder managed a wry smile, feeling his own cock swell at the thought of his Master using him.

"Yes, Master," he murmured.

"You can remove the plug tomorrow morning and not before. And Fox – I want you to check your email before you go to bed tonight," Skinner ordered.

"Yes, Master." Mulder frowned, wondering what that was all about. He jumped, startled, as something wet touched his outstretched hand. "Damn, Wanda – you shouldn't be in here. I thought I closed the door," he chided, worried in a case she trod on a splinter of glass. He scooped her up out of harm's way, nestled her on his chest, and tickled her under the chin.

"When did you last eat?" Skinner asked, oblivious to the minor piece of cat drama being enacted on the other end of the line.

"I have no idea."

Mulder heard his Master give a deep, heartfelt sigh. "I don't think you're taking very good care of my property, boy," Skinner growled. "You'll call the Lotus Flower for take out. Menu options 14, 61 and 37."

"I don't believe you know that menu by heart," Mulder commented, impressed.

"Well I do."

"And what **are** menu options 14, 61 and 37, Master? If it's all vegetable dishes I won't be a happy slave boy."

"It's healthy – and you need something healthy right now. You know what you get like if you run on empty for too long and trust me, I have ways of dealing with cranky slave boys that you will **not** like."

"Oh, I know all about those," Mulder laughed down the phone, the combination of Wanda's purring and his Master's erotic threats combining to de-stress him after the events of the past few days.

"Damn. Much as I'd like to stay here and discuss the many slow and painful ways in which I would enjoy punishing your ass, I really **do** have to go," Skinner sighed. "Be good, Fox."

"I will. When will you be home, Master?"

"Tomorrow sometime. I'm not sure when – it depends on when I finish up here."

"I can't wait."

Mulder switched off his phone and settled back to stroke Wanda. Tomorrow couldn't come too soon as far as he was concerned. He did as his Master had instructed and called for the take out - which actually turned out to be a selection of some of his favorite dishes. Afterwards he took a bath, and then went in search of the butt plug as ordered. Skinner wasn't kidding – it was huge. He surveyed it somewhat glumly – this one wouldn't be easy to either insert or ignore, but that, he guessed, was the point; his Master was trying to distract him. He was loose and relaxed after his bath, and he slathered the plug with lube, lay on the bed and toyed the plug in and out of his anus, just teasing, inserting it further each time. He closed his eyes and imagined it was his Master's hard length, sliding effortlessly into him, and played with his cock, which hardened immediately at the thought of his Master's touch. The butt plug slid into place after a couple of false starts, and Mulder brought himself off with his hand, excited by the thought of following his Master's intimate orders in this way. He was about to turn over and go to sleep when he remembered that Skinner had instructed him to check his email. He was tired and fought a battle with himself about whether this was an order he could ignore until the morning. It was a battle he lost, and, with a resigned sigh, he got up, pulled on his robe, and wandered upstairs to his old bedroom to check his email. He sat down without thinking and jumped straight back up again, his eyes watering, as the butt plug made its presence unequivocally felt. Then he perched back down again, very gingerly, and turned on his computer. There was only the one message in this particular in-box, which was reserved for Master/slave correspondence only. Mulder brought it up, and read it:

To: [slave@WSS.com](mailto:slave@WSS.com)

From: [Master@WSS.com](mailto:Master@WSS.com)

Subject: A New Command For you

*Dear Slave,*

*When I give you the command 'Wanda' I expect to be given total control of your body, without question or hesitation, for my immediate and urgent use.*

*As this is a special word between us, with considerable significance, and one which holds a certain degree of affection for both of us, I have decided to give it to you as a special gift for a special reason. Needless to say it will **not** have the same meaning when you say it as it does when you hear it from me – so don't even think about it, boy.*

*Upon hearing you say the word 'Wanda' I will immediately cease any action that is giving you distress. However it is **only** to be used in certain specific circumstances, which I trust you will find clear upon my return. Please reply to this email so that I'm sure you've understood.*

*BTW, my right arm has had a good rest over the past few days and is feeling very strong right now, so I would advise you to stay out of trouble until my return - unless you want to discover just **how** rested it is.*

*As always,*

*Your Loving Master*

Mulder laughed at the last comment, then re-read the email, with a frown of surprise. His Master was giving him a safe word? Why? And why **now**, after all this time? Not that he needed a safe word. Skinner had never done anything that had distressed him...and the one time Mulder had freaked out during sex play he had found that using his Master's given name had been enough to make Skinner stop what he was doing and release him immediately. Not that he disapproved of his Master's choice of safe word – it seemed pretty fitting - but why now? And what did Skinner mean by 'specific circumstances'?

Puzzled, Mulder hit the reply key.

To: Master@WSS.com

From: slave@WSS.com

Subject: Re: A New Command For you

*Dear Master,*

*I understand, Master. You're saying that 'Wanda', besides being the name of the devil cat from hell, and the command by which you make very thorough use of your poor, helpless slave, is also to be some kind of safe word between us. I assume you'll explain it all to me when you get home. Speaking of which – this butt plug is not an adequate substitute for the real thing so get your ass home quickly. Uh, that wasn't an order, just a fervently expressed wish...but obviously if you want to spank me for it I'd be very interested in trying out the rested arm.*

*Ass raised high in anticipation,*

*Your slave,*

*Fox*

He shrugged as he pressed the *send* key. Obviously that was all the information his Master **wanted** to give him, or he'd have elaborated further in his email. So what the hell was it all about? Unable to figure it out, Mulder turned off the computer and went back downstairs to curl up with Wanda in bed.

Mulder was relieved that it was the weekend so he could catch up on his sleep. He dozed until noon, then got up, dressed in sweats, and went downstairs to begin the task he'd been putting off for so many days – clearing up the mess from his fight with Krycek. He carefully gathered up the remains of the coffee table and put it in the trash, vacuumed the carpet thoroughly to get rid of any last splinters, and then opened the door and allowed Wanda to reclaim the living room, which she did with her tail held loftily high.

"Typical cat," Mulder commented, watching her pace around the room and sniff in all the corners. "No sooner is a door closed to you than what is on the other side becomes **instantly** attractive. Don't you dare," he warned her as she gazed at him speculatively. "No, we are **not** similar like that. My comment was entirely justified - **yours** is just plain ridiculous. I mean, I always have **reasons** for breaking into secure government installations. With you it's just plain curiosity and we all know the proverb about what curiosity did to the cat." She gave him a look of studied indifference and then washed her flank with considerable vigor. "Ha. See - you know I'm right," he told her.

He got a bowl and cloth from the kitchen and began sponging the spattered blood from the walls. There wasn't much, but it wasn't a nice task and it reminded him uncomfortably of the image of his Master, holding a bleeding, hissing, spitting Krycek against the wall. His emotions were mixed on that topic – a part of him was furious with Krycek for showing up and trying to ruin his life yet again, but another part of him couldn't help but be aroused as he remembered the sheer anger that had been evident in Skinner's tense muscles as he'd dished out those casual punches to their enemy. Damn, but it was just plain **perverted** that this memory turned him on so much, and it made him even angrier with Krycek.

Mulder was relieved when he had finished. He made sure the whole apartment was tidy, then set off for the grocery store. He wanted his Master to come home to a clean apartment, a full fridge, and a very loving slave. It did cross his mind that today was Slave's Day but he didn't give it much thought. Their lives had been so chaotic these past few days then he wasn't expecting the normal rituals to take place. Apart from anything else he wasn't even sure that his Master would be home before midnight. He'd called Skinner on his cell phone when he first woke up, and the other man had been in one final meeting so he wasn't expecting him back for hours. Mulder hoped his Master wouldn't be **too** late home. He was still harboring a certain degree of anger and jitters after the week's events and he was fairly sure that it was going to take a long session in his Master's capable hands to slay a few of the demons that had resurfaced.

Mulder returned home to watch back-to-back sport on the TV – a luxury that his Master rarely gave him permission to indulge - Wanda perched on his stomach, the remote hanging loosely in his hand, a bowl of popcorn and can of beer resting on the floor in the absence of the broken coffee table. He hadn't heard from his Master but he wasn't unduly worried. He'd left a message asking if Skinner wanted to be met at the airport but his Master hadn't replied so he assumed that his chauffeuring skills weren't required. At 8pm Mulder tried his Master's cell phone again, only to find it switched off. With a sigh, he settled back on the couch and closed his eyes, resigning himself to the wait. He was a little concerned not to have heard from his Master. He wanted to be a dutiful slave and serve Skinner by driving him home, and carrying his suitcase, and he felt he had been denied that opportunity. Even if his Master didn't want his slave's help would a phone call have hurt? And supposing Skinner was in trouble? Mulder was aware that he wasn't the best at phoning in, but his Master had drummed into him the importance of that lesson over the past several months, and the basic tenet was always that he worried when Mulder wasn't in phone contact. Didn't the same thing apply the other way around?

Mulder was so busy nursing these resentments that he was surprised when he heard a sudden noise behind him, and then the light was turned on, flooding the room. He sat up, bemused, and saw his Master framed in the doorway. Skinner was wearing black chinos and a black sweater – and Mulder's first reaction was lust, followed shortly after by a resurgence of his anger.

"Master. I would have come to the airport for you. I left a message," he said, unable to keep the resentment out of his voice.

"I know."

"So why didn't you reply?" Mulder snapped.

"Come here." Skinner said, ignoring his question. He seemed different. He was almost...distracted. Mulder went, reluctantly, still disgruntled and in no mood to be treated so peremptorily. Skinner

grabbed him when he was within arm's reach, and pulled him close. He was much rougher than usual, and Mulder put out a hand to protect himself. Skinner growled, grasped the offending hand and placed it securely behind Mulder's back, holding it there painfully.

"Don't resist me, boy," he growled. Then he gave a vicious smile, lowered his head, and whispered into Mulder's ear: "I'm going to fuck you."

Mulder gazed at his Master, startled. This wasn't Skinner's usual behavior. He normally gave orders and expected obedience. He didn't usually grab, twist and...overpower. A light-bulb went off in Mulder's head, as he remembered the substance of that email he had received, and his own faltering admission that he wanted permission to struggle, and be overwhelmed. He remembered all the anger he'd felt earlier in the day, and how he had thought he needed a session at his Master's hands – it appeared that Skinner was giving him just that. He felt as if he was in a strait jacket, with his arm pressed up his back, and his Master's hands roughly imprisoning him. He straightened up as best he could, and looked the other man in the eye.

"Go to hell," he said, allowing all the anger and frustration of the past few days to rise to the surface.

"Are you refusing me?" Skinner snarled. He looked more dangerous than Mulder had ever seen him, and for a split second he knew how Krycek had felt being on the receiving end of this a few days before - and that made his cock harden in his pants.

"Yes, I fucking am," he rasped. There was silence for a moment, and then Skinner gave a low roar, and pushed Mulder bodily against the wall. He grabbed his slave's hands, held them above his slave's head, and leaned in close.

"You don't have the right to refuse me, **boy**," he growled.

Skinner's breath was warm on his slave's cheek. He smelled of sweat and arousal, and looked so magnificently frightening that Mulder wondered whether he'd misread this and his Master was serious – and whether he should say his safe word just to find out. He studied his Master's face, searching for clues, and found them in his Master's eyes. They weren't angry but they were very focused, and that reassured him.

"What are you going to do – rape me?" Mulder challenged. Skinner's fingers were hard on his wrists – painfully so. It felt...exhilarating; very raw, and very real.

"If there's a word you want to say to me, boy then you'd better say it now," Skinner told him in a low tone, "because if you wait then it might be too late."

Mulder relaxed, sure that they were playing now. His Master was giving him a chance to end this but Mulder had no intention of doing so. The scenario was hot, and he didn't want to do anything to spoil it. Besides, he was just getting warmed up. He was being given a safe arena to express all the fears and frustrations of the past few days and he intended to make the most of it. He met his Master's eye and they shared a moment of understanding. Thus reassured, Skinner bounced Mulder back against the wall, and pushed his slave's legs apart with his knee. "Get on your hands and knees now," Skinner said, punctuating each word with another bounce, each one jolting the back of Mulder's head. "Get your ass in the air because I'm going to fuck you into tomorrow."

"Fuck's a good word – let's add another. How about... **off**..." Mulder replied, and then he suddenly relaxed his resistance and, surprised, Skinner loosened his hold for a split second – but it was long enough for Mulder to break free, and throw himself towards the door. He didn't get there. He had his hand on the handle when Skinner tackled him round the waist, grabbed him bodily, and threw him in the direction of the couch. He pinned Mulder there, bent over it, his own large body covering that of his slave.

"The only fucking that is going to be done around here is me fucking you," Skinner hissed into his ear. Mulder's cock gave a spasm of arousal. He struggled with all his might as Skinner started to slide his sweatpants down. Mulder could feel that his butt was exposed, and he was suddenly overcome with a need to make this more **real**. It felt too easy, too staged. He pushed back hard with his elbow, and Skinner gave a grunt of genuine pain. Mulder slid out from under him, and threw himself at his Master. They both went down, with Mulder hissing, spitting and struggling like an enraged cat.

"You want to screw me then you'll have to take what you want by force," Mulder snarled. He grabbed his Master's head and thumped it on the floor. Skinner's face contorted momentarily, and then he got one arm free, pressed it against Mulder's throat, and pushed him away. Mulder fell back, but Skinner was on him again almost immediately. He pinned Mulder under him, held him down with one hand, and reached into his slave's pants with his other.

"Oh I'll make you all right, boy. I'll make you," Skinner told him. His hands were sweaty and rough on Mulder's skin, arousing him unbearably. Skinner hauled Mulder onto his hands and knees, and stripped his pants and briefs off, leaving him naked and exposed from the waist down. Feeling vulnerable, Mulder kicked back with his foot, and then managed to turn over, and swipe at his Master with his open palm. Skinner took a glancing blow on the side of his face, and gave a growl of pure anger. Energy sparkled between them in the room. Mulder was so pleased at this minor victory that he hesitated – and next thing he knew his Master had grasped his hard cock and was holding it firmly in his hand. He couldn't struggle without causing the most sensitive organ of his body considerable pain.

"Shit! Let me go!" he said, trying to push Skinner back.

Skinner just grinned, an evil, feral grin, and, still holding onto Mulder's cock with one hand, reached with his other to undo his belt. Mulder watched, momentarily transfixed by the inherent threat in the action, then realized he was missing his chance to escape. Suddenly divining his Master's intent, he pulled away – only to stop with a yelp of pain as his cock paid the price for that action. Skinner moved in again. He grabbed Mulder's wrist, and dragged it in front of his body. Then he released Mulder's cock but only in order to grab his other wrist. At the same time he took Mulder by surprise, kicked his legs from under him, and toppled him back onto the couch. Mulder gazed up, winded and startled by the turn of events – just in time to see his Master tie his wrists firmly together in front of his body with the belt.

"Now just submit, boy, because your ass is going to be royally nailed," Skinner hissed. Mulder tried to pull his hands apart but the belt was unyielding. Realizing that wouldn't work, he bunched them into fists and try to knock his Master sideways. Skinner easily ducked the blow, and Mulder fell off the couch and onto the floor from the force of it.

"Don't fucking come near me. Don't fucking touch me. I swear I'll fucking kill you!" Mulder shouted, finding a strange kind of security in the restraint of the belt, almost as if in losing the chance of seriously

resisting his Master he was able to release all his inhibitions, giving him the opportunity to really let rip. Skinner grinned. He stood astride his slave, and then slowly undid his chinos. Mulder was still for a moment, transfixed as Skinner released his large, swollen cock.

"See this, boy? I'm going to make you take every last inch," Skinner told him in a dark, low tone that washed over Mulder like molten chocolate. Mulder swallowed hard, and then tried to slide back along the carpet, using his feet to lever himself along. Skinner followed him, slowly, still grinning. He watched as Mulder almost reached the door – and then pounced, grabbing Mulder's ankles and pulling him back bodily into the center of the room. Mulder twisted pointlessly in his grasp, flailing with his tied hands, but Skinner easily subdued him by the simple expedient of sitting on him. He sat astride his slave's body and pinned Mulder to the floor. Mulder twisted and turned but eventually gave up, exhausted – Skinner was just too heavy to dislodge. Finally satisfied that his prey had stopped struggling, Skinner reached down, grabbed Mulder's tee shirt, and literally tore it from his slave's body. Mulder heard the sound of the ripping and wondered what it was before he realized what his Master was doing – and then, within seconds, he was completely naked, his torn tee shirt discarded on the floor beside him. He shivered, shocked by the look of intent and lust in his Master eyes, but he wasn't about to give in just yet.

"Let me go," he hissed, raising his bound arms in attempt to punch his Master in the stomach. Skinner caught his fists easily, and pressed them back over Mulder's head.

"You're mine, boy. Submit and it'll be easier for you. Resist and it'll hurt. I'll enjoy hurting you, boy. I'll enjoy ramming your tight hole until you scream."

Mulder swallowed hard, feeling all the struggle leave him. His cock was so hard and he was so turned on by Skinner's display of strength that he wasn't sure he wanted to resist for much longer.

"Had enough, boy?" Skinner mocked. "Giving in?"

Some competitive instinct in Mulder took over. "Not on your fucking life. I told you, if you want to screw me you'll have to do it by force," Mulder snarled, wriggling as best he good within the prison of his Master's large thighs.

"Oh, that can be arranged." Skinner grabbed Mulder's bound wrists and held them above his slave's head, pressing them into the carpet. Then he bent his head, took one of Mulder's nipples in his mouth – and sucked down hard. Mulder gave a hoarse cry – although he wasn't sure whether it was in pleasure or pain. He bucked up against the savage caress, shouting in earnest as the sucking turned into a full bite, and his Master's teeth chewed on his nipple unmercifully, pressing the metal of his ring into his flesh. Finally Skinner released him with another feral grin.

"Beg me to fuck you, boy. Beg," Skinner demanded.

"Never," Mulder replied. "You can do what the hell you like to me but I won't beg."

"Oh, you will. You'll scream at me to fuck you before I'm through. You'll plead and scream and beg," Skinner told him. He bounced Mulder's bound wrists back down on the carpet again, and then paused. The look in his eyes changed slightly. "Are you sure there's nothing you wanted to say?" He asked softly. "You have a word."

Mulder didn't even need to think about – he shook his head vehemently. He wanted this to end the way he'd fantasized about it. He didn't want a let out, and he didn't want to use his safe word. Skinner immediately snapped back into the scenario.

"Good, because I'm going to screw you harder than you've been screwed in your life, boy. You'll be so sore you won't walk for a week, but, like I said, you're going to beg me first."

"Go fuck yourself," Mulder replied, squirming beneath his Master's body.

"No, I'm going to fuck you." Skinner lowered his head again, and took Mulder's other nipple between his teeth. Mulder tensed even before his Master bit down, and screamed with all his might as his Master thoroughly tormented his nipple.

"Shit...oh shit...let me go...please!" He cried, trying feebly to push Skinner away. His Master held on tight, releasing Mulder's nipple only to bite it again within seconds. It was a maneuver he repeated over and over again until Mulder was lost in a frenzy of his own desperate screams and struggles. Finally Skinner pulled away from the tormented nub of flesh. He looked down on his slave again, took Mulder's sore nipple between his thumb and forefinger and said one word: "Beg."

Mulder hesitated, but this had become a matter of pride.

"No," he replied and began screaming almost before Skinner pinched his abused nipple. He was dimly aware that his cock was rock hard and that he was as turned on as he'd ever been in his life. The boundaries between pleasure and pain had become so close that they were impossible to separate. Skinner released the nipple, but only in order to pinch the other one – savagely. Mulder roared and twisted but it was no use. He was completely captured.

"Open your legs and let me fuck you," Skinner ordered.

Mulder shook his head mutely, and Skinner grabbed his hair, and kissed him. It wasn't a kind kiss. It was vicious, and brutal. Skinner's tongue forced its way into Mulder's mouth, and explored it, hard and thrusting. At the same time Skinner reached down again and squeezed hard on Mulder's left nipple. Mulder couldn't even scream, with his mouth completely full of his Master's tongue, and his hair grasped in his Master's hand. He surrendered to the harsh caress and when his Master finished, and pulled back, he panted desperately for air.

"I said, open your legs and let me fuck you, boy," Skinner told him.

"Go to hell." Mulder wasn't really sure why he was resisting any more, as he was more than happy to be fucked, but there was something so cathartic about the struggle after all he'd been through this past week, and besides – he was interested to see what his Master would do next.

"Maybe I will – but not before I've pounded my cock into you so hard that you scream," Skinner promised with another of those feral, evilly sexual grins. Mulder groaned, his cock rigid with need. Skinner bent his head and caught Mulder's right nipple this time, and tortured the flesh with his tongue and teeth again, showing Mulder no mercy. Mulder kicked out, desperate for the agony to end, and Skinner used the moment to insert his leg between Mulder's thighs. He released the nipple with a

triumphant grin, and moved his hand down to between Mulder's legs. One finger pushed up roughly into Mulder's ass.

"Nice and tight. Just the way I like it," Skinner purred. "Beg me for my hard cock, boy. Beg." He moved his finger savagely, in and out, thrusting hard. Mulder couldn't help raising his hips off the ground to meet the thrusts, swallowing that finger deep inside his body, wanting more. "Beg for it, boy," Skinner hissed. "Beg to feel my cock in your tight hole."

"No..." Mulder replied, no longer sure he could hold out.

"Beg." Skinner inserted another finger. He held Mulder down with one arm across his body, while he thrust in and out of his slave's ass with his fingers. Mulder had lost all sense of himself. He was too turned on.

"Want...want..." he gasped.

"Say it." Skinner twisted his fingers brutally and Mulder cried out.

"Your cock. Please...in me now!" Mulder demanded.

Skinner gave a bellow of triumph. He withdrew his fingers, thrust Mulder's legs apart with his hands, grasped his slave's buttocks, positioned his erect cock, and then sank himself deep into Mulder's ass, right up to the hilt without pausing, all in one fluid motion. Mulder thought he was going to pass out. He had never felt so filled, and he was sure that he had never been penetrated so quickly, and with so much power. Skinner's cock was burning hot inside his ass – he could feel it pulsing - large, ravaging and hungry. Skinner leaned forward, and as he did so the force of his weight pushed his cock even deeper into his slave's body. He rested his hands on the carpet next to his slave's head, and pushed Mulder's legs over his shoulders. Now there were almost nose-to-nose, both panting with the exertion.

"Fuck me," Mulder said.

Skinner gave another of those terrible, evil grins. "When I'm ready," he said.

Mulder could have screamed. Skinner drew back a little, shifting his weight and stimulating Mulder's prostate unbearably in the process. He nuzzled Mulder's nipples again, and then nibbled in earnest. Mulder began to yell – he wasn't sure what he was saying but the dual sensations of his Master's huge cock filling him to the brim, Skinner's large, sweaty, muscular body keeping him pinned to the carpet, his own bound hands increasing his sensation of powerlessness, and his Master's roving mouth on his sensitive and tortured nipples was too much. He screamed and screamed but his Master ignored him. Skinner remained buried to the root in his slave, his teeth biting down on Mulder's flesh. He would let go of one nipple just to start on the other. Mulder needed to be fucked so much that he wasn't coherent. He longed for the torment on his chest to cease and for his Master to pound him into the floor with his massive, hungry cock.

"Please, please, please, please, fuck me, fuck me, fuck me...I beg you!" Mulder cried. "I BEG YOU!" He screamed, banging his bound hands uselessly over his head. "Please, I'm begging. I'm begging!"

"I know." Skinner raised his head for a moment, and then grinned again – and this time he looked so evil that Mulder almost came just looking at him. "I heard you," Skinner said. "But I'm enjoying myself too much. Maybe later." He dropped his face again, and, taking Mulder's right nipple ring between his teeth, drew back, pulling on the tortured nub. Mulder hollered so loud he was surprised that Mrs. Asher wasn't knocking on the wall to complain.

"FUCK ME! PLEASE FUCK ME! PLEASE!" he screeched.

Skinner released the nipple and Mulder heaved a sigh of relief. Skinner then plunged back for another deep, brutally rough kiss, plundering Mulder's lips with his own. Mulder opened up, wriggling to try and force more of his Master's hard cock into him as he did so. He wanted Skinner to thrust. He **needed** Skinner to thrust. Finally Skinner released him, and Mulder was almost weeping now.

"Do it...do it...fuck me..." he moaned feebly.

"You know, I still don't think I'm ready." Skinner grinned.

He dropped his mouth to Mulder's body and began licking, and biting all over Mulder's chest and neck. Mulder screamed again, but this time from frustration and pure need.

"I hate you!" Mulder roared. "I fucking hate you."

"Is that any way to talk to your Master?" Skinner gave a smug grin. "Now I might just decide to have another snack on these tasty morsels." He enveloped Mulder's left nipple in his warm mouth again and Mulder was sobbing now, weak with need. His body was a mass of sensation. Skinner's mouth was as rough as ever, biting, and savage, and Mulder wasn't sure he could bear the agonizing pleasure of it for one second longer. He put his bound hands around his Master's neck and tried to pull him deeper into his body. Skinner looked up with another evil grin.

"Getting impatient?" He asked. "Is this what you want, boy?" He moved his hips back, with agonizing slowness, and then slammed back into Mulder's body fast, taking his slave's breath away in the process. Mulder whimpered, still hanging onto his Master's neck.

"Oh god...yes...fuck me...fuck me...please," he begged helplessly.

"All right, boy. I hope you're ready for the ride." Skinner moved his hips back again and then thrust deep into Mulder, and then again, and again, over and over, hard and fast. Mulder could feel his Master's balls slamming against his bare ass and he felt as if he would explode. He had never been fucked harder in his life. Skinner's cock seemed to go deeper than it had ever penetrated before, until Mulder almost passed out from the sensation. His own cock was exploding, and he felt his come on his chest, but still Skinner wasn't finished, still he rode his slave boy, on, and on, and on. His Master's face was close to his own, and his brown eyes were fixed on his slave's as he pounded into him. Mulder was lost in the moment, transfixed, and then he felt his Master shudder. Skinner's face went a shade of mottled red and then he collapsed on top of his slave.

They lay there for a long time in a messy tangle of arms and legs. Mulder couldn't move – not just because he was tied, with his legs akimbo and his Master's weight on top and inside of him, but also because his muscles just wouldn't obey his commands. Skinner's head was resting on his slave's cheek,

and his Master seemed to be just as exhausted as he was. Finally Skinner managed to raise his head, and glanced down on his slave speculatively.

"Okay?" he rasped.

"Would now..." Mulder's voice sounded croaky. He swallowed hard and tried again. "Would now be a good time to say 'Wanda'?" He asked.

Skinner grinned, and then gave a deep roar of laughter that made his cock twitch, lodged as it was, deep inside Mulder's body.

"No, now would be entirely too late," Skinner replied, his voice weak with laughter. He tried to move and then gave up and flopped down on Mulder again. "Oh...fuck," he muttered, and then he kissed his slave gently on the lips.

"Fuck, I think, being the operative word," Mulder commented. "One hell of a fuck."

"And good?" Skinner stroked his slave's hair. "Was it good? It looked good from where I was, uh, lying."

"Yeah, it was good. My nipples are in agony and I'm not sure I'll ever walk again but yeah..." Mulder grinned. He pulled his Master's face close, and kissed him again. "It was definitely good," he murmured. They lay there for what felt like the rest of the night, then Skinner finally groaned and moved. Mulder gave a hiss as his Master withdrew from his body – he had known he'd feel sore in the morning but not this soon!

"I'd better take a look at that," Skinner said, with a frown. He rearranged his clothing, and then reached down a hand to haul Mulder to his feet.

"It's fine. Just...over-stimulated." Mulder grabbed his Master's shoulder as he found his footing, trying to ignore the loud buzzing sound in his head. "Oh shit." He glanced around the room. "You do realize I just cleaned the place this afternoon don't you?" He muttered accusingly. Skinner took a look around at the disturbed couch, overturned chair, and scattered clothing.

"That's the price of enacting a fantasy," he commented wryly.

"It was a hot fantasy though," Mulder winked.

"Yes." Skinner looked a little strained and Mulder caught the taut tone in his voice.

"Master? Was it hot for you?" He hadn't even considered that. Skinner seemed to be having just as much fun as he was.

"Yes. Maybe that's the problem." Skinner reached out a gentle hand and lovingly caressed his slave's face with the most tender of touches.

"I don't understand."

"Ah, well, you weren't the one getting off on raping someone." Skinner pressed a gossamer light kiss on his slave's lips.

"I see." Mulder nodded. "But you knew it was a fantasy. You gave me a safe word. It was hot. Thank you." He pulled his Master close and wrapped his arms around the big man. Skinner looked oddly vulnerable, completely different to the man with the evil, feral grin who had just overpowered him. "I needed that tonight. Although I still think you could have called." He pinched his Master's butt cheekily and Skinner gave a grunt, and drew back, reaching for his slave's hand and pulling him with him.

"I did try as a matter of fact – not calling you wasn't part of the scenario. I couldn't get a connection on my cell phone and I figured I'd be home soon enough anyway. I'm sorry if you were worried."

"Apology accepted."

Mulder followed his Master up the stairs and into the shower. Skinner turned it on full force and Mulder stepped under the hot spray. It felt so good on his strained muscles. He watched his Master undress and then Skinner joined him in the shower. Mulder reached for the soap, but Skinner stopped him, and took it from him.

"I want to wash you. I want to make sure you're okay," he said, running his fingers carefully over Mulder's chest, and checking the bite marks on his body.

"I'm fine." Mulder smiled. "I mean I ache all over but it's one hell of a good ache."

His Master refused to be deflected though. He insisted on examining his slave thoroughly. Mulder submitted easily – he was used to being inspected. In fact he usually found it a turn on, although he was so spent on this occasion that his cock remained resolutely limp. Finally Skinner finished with him and sent him into the bedroom. Mulder flopped down, exhausted, on the bed, and Skinner emerged a few seconds later with a towel wrapped around his waist and a tube of gel in his hand.

"This will soothe the irritation. I want to take a careful look. On your front, legs open," Skinner ordered. Mulder rolled over and opened his legs as commanded. His sated cock even gave a little twitch of interest at the order. Skinner was gentle but thorough. He turned on the bedside lamp, parted Mulder's buttocks, and probed him with his finger. Mulder winced – there was no doubt that he was sore. He had never been this sore after a sex session but all the same, he wouldn't have given up the scenario they'd just enacted for anything. He had enjoyed himself too much.

"There's no tearing," Skinner noted.

"That's because you keep me so well stretched." Mulder glanced at his Master over his shoulder. "You had me wear that massive butt plug last night, after all."

"It's still sore. I'll rub in some gel. If you feel **any** discomfort during the night then tell me. I mean it." Skinner gazed at Mulder sternly and Mulder nodded, a little surprised by how big a deal his Master was making of this. He gave a yelp as Skinner inserted a cold, gel-tipped finger into his ass, and then relaxed. The gel stung a bit but it wasn't too bad, and once it was applied the soreness did fade. Skinner finished up, put the gel away, and then got into the bed. They were silent for a moment. Mulder had the feeling that something wasn't right.

"Master...thank you for the fantasy. I know you have some issues with it but I enjoyed it. I'd never ask you to do anything that freaked you out, but I hope that doesn't mean we can't play this particular game again sometime."

"Maybe. I...need some time to digest this one, Fox," Skinner said. His voice sounded a little strange in the darkness. Mulder reached out, and pulled his Master close. Skinner just seemed so...vulnerable. It was the opposite of what he would have expected. He might have expected his **own** emotional state to be fragile after such a fantasy but instead he felt fantastic. He understood where Skinner was coming from but it surprised him. He was also surprised by how easily Skinner submitted to being held in his arms, and cuddled - there was no other word for it. It was the first time in their relationship that Mulder had ever seen his Master like this and it brought out a fierce protective instinct in him. He kissed his Master's face, and held him, and at some point they fell asleep.

Skinner seemed to have recovered his equilibrium by the morning. He certainly delivered his slave's spanking with enough gusto. Mulder made sure to smother his Master with affection – he was pleased to have him back in any case so that wasn't hard. He also felt that Skinner needed it right now. He was grateful to his Master for fulfilling his fantasy for him, and he understood that Skinner was as bemused by the reaction he was having to the mock-rape as his slave was. Mulder cleared up the living room while Skinner prepared brunch, and later they retired to the couch with the Sunday papers. Mulder lay with his head in his Master's lap, gazing up at the other man. Skinner was looking at the paper, but he didn't seem to be reading it – instead he was lost in thought.

"Want to talk about it?" Mulder asked. "Maybe we both need to debrief after that kind of fantasy."

"Probably." Skinner took a deep inhalation of breath.

"Don't bury it." Mulder sat up, and faced his Master. "Walter, it was consensual. I asked you for it, you gave me a safe word, you prepared me with the plug – you gave me two opportunities to duck out of it. It was entirely what I wanted."

"Yes, I know." Skinner nodded thoughtfully. "Don't get me wrong, Fox. I enjoyed it myself. It was hot. It was just so...violent."

"My fault." Mulder made a face. "I stepped up the pace when I poked my elbow into your ribs and thumped your head on the floor. It's no wonder you responded. I needed that struggle – I wanted it to feel real. It doesn't mean I have any hostility towards you, repressed or otherwise. I just enjoyed...letting go. Strangely, I felt most able to let go after you tied me up – because I **knew** I couldn't escape then."

"I suppose what shocked me was how lost I became in the moment. There was a time when I was so into the fantasy that I can't say for sure that I would have stopped if you'd used your safe word. That worries me. I've **never** felt like that before. I'm used to being more...in control." Skinner looked deeply troubled.

Mulder shook his head, and placed a comforting hand on his Master's neck. "You might doubt yourself, but I have no doubts, Walter. You would have stopped. I know you too well. I was into it too – you probably needed a safe word to protect yourself from me!" Mulder traced a scratch on the side of Skinner's face. He knew his Master also had a couple of bruises on his body from the fight – hell they both did. "Come here." Mulder pulled his Master into his arms and they sank back on the couch.

Although this was a little different to their usual Master/slave interaction it didn't feel wrong. In fact, Mulder was surprised to find that it felt entirely right. A slave served his Master with affection as much as with his body and his sexuality. Just because his Master always seemed so invulnerable didn't mean he wasn't allowed to occasionally be fragile. He was pleased he had the opportunity to show Skinner that he could take care of all his Master's needs, and not just the simple ones.

They talked quietly for the rest of the afternoon, and by the early evening Skinner seemed to be his old self once more. They were both surprised when there was a buzz on the entry phone.

"Expecting anyone? Scully's not on her way over with some X File the two of you want to chew over is she?" Skinner raised an eyebrow. Scully often dropped by to discuss X Files with Mulder, and Mulder was used to the wry glances his Master would give them as they bounced bizarre ideas off each other.

"I'm not expecting her." Mulder shrugged. The entry phone buzzed more urgently, and Skinner went to the door and picked up the phone next to it.

"Skinner. Who is it?"

Mulder watched as Skinner frowned. His Master replaced the phone and quickly unlocked the door, gesturing Mulder forward as he did so. He was just in time. There, standing in the doorway, was Ian – and he was covered in blood. Beside him was a frail, pathetic figure, hanging from Ian's arms, also covered in blood.

"Help me! He's too heavy..." Ian gasped.

Skinner and Mulder were just in time to catch the man. Mulder helped his Master to carry him into the living room and lay him on the couch. It was only when they put him down that Mulder realized that the prone figure was Lee. He didn't look the way he had when they had last seen him. Gone was the long, dramatic braid, and he now sported a much shorter, floppy cut, that fell into his eyes, although the shorn tips of his thick dark hair had been dyed the same shade of peroxide blond as before, giving him a strangely jagged appearance. His formerly tanned face was now pale, his exotic, almond-shaped eyes were closed, and his nose was swollen and cut. Blood was pouring out of it, staining his shirt and matting his dark hair. There was another bloodstain on his pants – one that Mulder didn't even want to think about. Skinner turned immediately to Ian.

"What's going on?" he asked. "What happened?"

"I'm sorry, Walter. I didn't want to dump this on you," Ian said in a desperate tone. Mulder crouched beside Lee and examined him visually – he didn't touch, he just observed, listening to Ian at the same time. "He just showed up on my door step an hour ago. He refused to go to the hospital, and Perry's out of town on business – remember, I told you? He came to me because he knew Perry was a doctor, but I'm useless. I didn't know what to do."

"You did the right thing." Skinner placed a soothing hand on Ian's shoulder. "Do you know what happened to him?"

"He won't tell me, but I can guess." Ian shrugged.

"Franklin?" Mulder noticed how Skinner's fists clenched involuntarily. Ian nodded.

Mulder stood up. "We have to call the police," he said firmly.

"That's Lee's decision. First we have to get him to the hospital," Skinner replied.

"No hospital." It was the first thing Lee had said. They all looked at him. He opened one eye – the other was swollen shut.

"I'm sorry, Lee, but I'm over-ruling you on this," Skinner said gently, crouching beside the couch. "You're badly hurt. You haven't done anything wrong. There's no need to feel ashamed – or as if you've got anything to hide."

"He said he'd kill me," Lee whispered.

Skinner's jaw tightened. "Nobody is going to kill you," he said firmly. "Now, we need to stop this bleeding." Skinner glanced at the fresh, glistening blood-stains on Lee's pants. "Fox, get some water and some towels. Ian, call for the paramedics. Do it," he said firmly, when Ian gave Lee an agonized glance. Ian didn't need any more prompting. He pulled out his cell phone, and punched in the number.

"No..." Lee's face twisted and he looked as if he was going to cry.

"Lee, listen to me. You're going to the hospital and then we'll talk about what happens next, but nobody is going to hurt you. I promise you that."

Lee gazed at Skinner with a glassy eye. Mulder could see Lee responding to Skinner's innate authority almost by instinct. Finally, he nodded, and Skinner smiled.

"Lee, I'm going to try and stop the bleeding so I'm going to need to touch you. Just lie still. I'll be as gentle as I can," Skinner said softly. He moved Lee onto his side, and pulled his sweatpants down. Mulder moved forward to hand him a towel, and then stopped, shocked: Lee's backside was covered in long, raw, vicious welts. Many of them were bleeding. There were also some faded scars on his back.

"These were caused by more than just a sex game," Skinner muttered grimly. "A lot more. This is torture, not BDSM." He pressed the towel onto Lee's wounds, and his hand came away bright red. "Oh shit," he whispered. Mulder swallowed hard. His Master looked up at him, a shocked look on his face. "There's severe rectal bleeding," Skinner said in a horrified tone. "Ian, we need those paramedics **now**."

"They're on their way. I'll go downstairs to show them where to come," Ian said, his face frightened.

"All right, Lee. Not long now." Skinner packed Lee's sweats with the towels as best he could, and then stood up. He went into the kitchen to wash his hands and Mulder followed him.

"We should have known this would happen," Mulder said, kicking the fridge with his foot. "Christ, Walter, we should have **known**."

"We **did** know, Fox." Skinner's shoulders seemed bent with the whole weight of the world. "I should have done something back then. I warned him...I told him...shit. If only I'd done more."

"No." Mulder took a deep breath, and tried to get control of himself again. "No...this isn't your fault. Lee was warned...but christ, what a price to pay for not listening."

"We'd better get back to him. Poor bastard." Skinner finished washing his hands and returned to the living room, Mulder at his heels. Mulder crouched beside Lee again, but was careful not to touch him. He knew from his years in the FBI that while a touch might seem to be an obvious way of giving comfort, to someone who had just been raped it could seem like a threat.

"Lee – are you okay? Do you need anything?" Mulder asked gently.

Lee's face crumpled and he shook his head, but a tear leaked from his good eye. He moved his hand feebly, and Mulder caught it in his own. Lee held on as if he thought Mulder was going to disappear. Mulder glanced up at Skinner, with an anxious frown. He and Lee had never exactly been close – in fact they'd hated each other from the moment they first set eyes on each other – but Mulder wouldn't have wished these injuries on anyone. He noticed the muscle in Skinner's jaw doing a vicious sideways clench and he wished he knew what was going on in Skinner's mind. This couldn't have been worse timing, he thought to himself, bearing in mind the sex game they'd played the previous night, and how concerned his Master had been about his own slave's soreness subsequently. There was one huge hell of a difference between that and Lee's condition, but somehow Mulder wasn't too sure that his Master was in the right frame of mind to appreciate that right now.

There was a noise at the door and then Ian burst through with two paramedics in tow. They took over, and Mulder tried to step back – only to find that Lee wouldn't let go of his hand.

"Don't leave me," he implored.

"I'll be over here. I'm not going anywhere," Mulder replied, gently disengaging himself. The paramedics checked Skinner's first aid, and then transferred Lee to a gurney.

"Where are you taking him?" Skinner asked, grabbing his keys.

"Arlington Hospital," came back the reply.

"We'll see you there."

"There's room for one person to ride with him," the paramedic said, glancing back at them as they pelted down the corridor towards the elevator.

"I'll go." Mulder glanced at his Master. Their eyes met, and Skinner nodded.

Mulder climbed into the ambulance and took hold of Lee's hand again as they made the short journey to the hospital.

"Lee, you have to let the police know how this happened," Mulder told the young man. He didn't want to force this issue when Lee was so traumatized, but he was struggling hard to keep his anger at what Franklin had done in check. He was also annoyed with himself that he hadn't made more effort to get Ian to report Franklin when he'd come to them a few months before after **his** encounter with the

sadistic top. If Ian had reported it then maybe Franklin's behavior could have been checked before it got this far. Lee shook his head.

"He warned me not to drink," was all he said, mystifyingly. Mulder frowned, and leaned in close. He smelled Lee's breath, and thought he detected the faint odor of alcohol, but Lee didn't appear drunk.

"Listen, Lee, nobody has the right to do this to you," Mulder said, gently but insistently.

"He does. You know he does." Lee fixed his good eye on Mulder, with an agonized expression. He squeezed Mulder's hand fiercely. "You know how it is. It's the same with you and the Guardian. You know. He had every right. I disobeyed him."

Mulder bit on his lip and sat back, still holding Lee's hand. He was glad his Master hadn't been present to hear that comment. It was wrong, but he knew he wasn't going to be able to convince Lee of that while he was in this condition – it was clear that Franklin had done quite a number on Lee's mind. Untangling that might prove difficult.

They arrived at the Emergency Room and Lee was whisked away. Mulder met Skinner and Ian in the corridor, and they leaned against the wall, waiting for news.

"Shit, this is my fault. I knew what Franklin was," Ian berated himself.

"Lee made his own choice. We all tried to warn him but he's an adult. He makes his own decisions," Skinner told Ian firmly.

"Lee thinks Franklin had the right to do this – because...well you know why." Mulder glanced up and down the corridor to check they weren't being overheard. "I talked to him about it in the ambulance. I don't think it'll be easy convincing him to report this. In fact, I think it'll be impossible – for the same reason that Ian didn't want to report it."

"Dragging the lifestyle into the courtroom. They wouldn't get it." Ian shrugged. "Vanilla people never do. Even if they accept Franklin went too far, they'll take one look at Lee and think he was a perverted faggot who had it coming."

"Maybe I have more faith in the justice system of this country." Skinner shrugged. "Even if it's hard someone has to make a stand, to try and change attitudes and prejudices. Lee has as much right to justice as anyone else in the US."

"I agree. I don't want to see that bastard Franklin get away with this kind of thing – over and over again," Mulder said vehemently. Ian looked from Master to slave, and shook his head.

"I know you both have to believe in the law because you spend your day working to uphold it, but some of the rest of us are just a little more cynical," he commented. "Me and Lee included."

At that moment they were interrupted by the doctor.

"Lee's asking for you," he said, addressing himself to Skinner, as people generally tended to do.

"Is he all right?" Skinner asked.

"He'll live – but we'll need to admit him overnight. If you'd like to follow me." The doctor led them into a side room. Lee looked a little better, with some of the blood washed from his face, and a couple of butterfly stitches inserted in the bridge of his nose.

"Lee, is there anyone you want me to contact?" Skinner asked. "Any family? Friends?"

"Don't have either," Lee replied. He suddenly looked very lost, and small. Mulder found himself taking Lee's hand again, and squeezing.

"We just spoke to the doctor, you're going to be fine."

"Yeah? What's the damage, doc?" Lee glanced at the doctor, who, in turn, glanced at Lee's visitors. Lee blinked. "I don't mind them hearing. They probably already know," he muttered.

"Well, your nose isn't broken – just badly bruised. The swelling will go down in a few days. You have a rectal bleed as a result of some tearing. We've stitched it up, so there's no danger of peritonitis, but it's a good thing you got here when you did." The doctor shrugged.

Lee glanced at Skinner.

"Looks like you made the right call, sir," he whispered sleepily.

"Does he have someone who can take care of him?" The doctor glanced at Skinner again. "He'll need somewhere to stay when he gets out – he can't be on his own."

"He can stay with us," Skinner replied tersely.

"All right. We'll be moving him upstairs in a few minutes. You can stay here until then if you want." The doctor left the room, shutting the door sharply behind him.

"See. Disapproval radiating from every pore," Ian commented, making an obscene gesture at the door.

"He was just being professional. There was nothing personal going on," Skinner said, going over to Lee's bed. He gazed down on the injured man. "Lee, rape is a very serious crime. You have to report..."

"Wasn't rape." Lee shook his head. "S'not rape if..." He frowned. Mulder moved forward in his chair by the bed, and squeezed on Lee's fingers again, encouraging him to continue.

"What are you trying to say, Lee?"

"It wasn't him...in me. That's not rape. He said it was a lesson...He told me not to drink. I used to sneak the liquor when he was out. Filled up the bottle with water so...he wouldn't know." Lee shrugged. "He found out. Said I had to learn. Beat me first and then...used the bottle to...he said to ram the point home...he was laughing, called it the punishment fitting the crime. That's not rape though...is it?"

Mulder glanced up at Skinner, horrified, to see that all the blood had drained from his Master's face. Franklin had punished his slave by inserting a **bottle** into his rectum? Mulder thought he was going to explode. He didn't know how his Master could remain so calm when he felt so furious he couldn't even trust himself to speak.

"It's a serious sexual assault, Lee," Skinner said in a low, growling tone.

"Yeah. Well...I shouldn't have. I knew he'd be fucked off with me." Lee shrugged. "He's out a lot. I just wanted him to notice me. I get bored...it was my own fault...I knew he'd be mad."

"Nothing justifies this, Lee," Ian told him.

"He's just edgy, that's all. You've played with him, you know." Lee wet his dry lips with his tongue. "He can be really hot when he's angry – I just pushed him too far."

"The police will want to talk to you," Mulder said, struggling to control his temper. He badly needed Lee to make his report – he wanted to see Franklin brought to justice because if he **wasn't** then Mulder thought he might very well decide to take the law into his own hands.

"I'm not saying a word." Lee shook his head. "He'll kill me if I do."

"We can protect you," Skinner told him.

Lee glanced from Mulder to Skinner and back again.

"You two make me laugh," he said, still shaking his head. "I don't trust you or anyone else to protect me. He'll find a way to kill me. I'm not saying a word." And with that he closed his good eye, and ignored them. A few minutes later the door opened again, and the medical staff prepared to move Lee upstairs.

"We'll visit," Mulder said, but Lee didn't even open his eye to watch them go.

It was late by the time Mulder and Skinner dropped Ian off, and then got back to their own apartment. Mulder was concerned about his Master. Skinner hadn't said a word throughout the entire journey home, and his face was closed off, and wary, lost in thought. Mulder didn't know whether to try and engage him in conversation or to leave him to his introspection. After several uncomfortable minutes, he decided that he couldn't bear the silence any more, and turned to Skinner, opening his mouth to speak.

"Mast..." he began, but he didn't get any further.

"Your silence, please, Fox," Skinner snapped.

Mulder closed his mouth, surprised. This wasn't behavior he'd witnessed from his Master before, and it worried him. He wasn't sure what was going on in Skinner's mind and he didn't like being shut out – more than that, he didn't think it was good for Skinner to shut him out. He had pieced together a good deal about Skinner's relationship with Andrew over the months of his slavery, and one factor had recurred – the hardest part of Andrew's task had been getting Skinner to open up to him, and talk about whatever might be causing him anxiety. Mulder knew he wasn't Andrew Linker, but he **was** his Master's

slave, lover, and friend. Whatever was going on in Skinner's mind, he wanted to know about it – and he wanted to help. This protective instinct he had towards his Master wasn't new. It had been something that had surprised him since the early days of their relationship, but as his feelings towards Skinner had deepened, so had Mulder's protective instinct intensified. This, he knew, was one of the reasons why he had always pushed people away when they threatened to get too close in the past. He ended up caring too much – and that hurt. He was at a loss as to how to deal with this situation. He didn't have the same kind of relationship with Skinner that Andrew Linker had enjoyed – what he had with Skinner was just as close, maybe more so, but Skinner wasn't his sub. Although, as a slave, there had to be a way of making his Master confide in him, Mulder wasn't sure how to go about that task. He hated feeling this helpless, but in the end there was nothing he could do but sit in the car and watch his Master drive.

They made the journey up to the 17th floor in silence, and entered the apartment in silence. Then Skinner turned to his slave, and spoke to him in a low, terse tone.

"Go upstairs and go to bed," he said.

"What will you do, Master?" Mulder asked, as Skinner turned on his heel and walked towards the living room. His Master paused, his back tense. He didn't turn around.

"I believe I gave you an order," he hissed.

Mulder stared at his Master's back, uncertain what he should do. Yes, Skinner had given him an order, but he wasn't sure that order was in the best interests of either of them. On the other hand Skinner was still his Master – and he couldn't **choose** which of his Master's orders he would obey. With a sigh, Mulder began to walk up the stairs. He paused, halfway up, and glanced back down. Skinner was still standing frozen to the same spot. His muscles were bunched under his shirt. He stood there for a moment, and then shook his head, and, with brisk, jerky steps, disappeared into the living room. Mulder sighed and resumed his walk up the bedroom. He got undressed and slid into the bed, but he couldn't sleep. He wasn't by nature someone who could just stand by and watch. He was used to taking action. Slavery had curbed some of his more headstrong instincts but Skinner had always told him that he didn't want him not to be Fox Mulder – it was Fox Mulder he had fallen in love with after all. It didn't seem right to Mulder that his Master could delve so deeply into his psyche and help **him** when he was obviously struggling, but refused to accept the same help back. Skinner had only once before shut him out like this but on that occasion it had been as a result of something Mulder had done, and a trust that he had breached between them by investigating his Master's past. This was different – this time Mulder hadn't broken any trust – and his psychology background told him that it wasn't healthy for Skinner to deal with whatever was troubling him alone. The truth was that Mulder cared far too much about his Master to ignore his problems – but he needed to find a way to tackle them that didn't threaten the bond they shared. Mulder struggled with it for a long time, but when two hours had gone by and there was still no sign of his Master, he couldn't bear it any longer. He got up, pulled on his sweatpants, and padded downstairs, barefoot and bare-chested. Usually he went naked in his Master's presence, but that didn't feel right at the moment. He didn't want to lure Skinner into bed – he wanted to talk to him.

He found Skinner in the living room, sitting at the table with some papers strewn out in front of him, the phone perched on top of them. Mulder also noted the nearly empty glass of whisky. His Master was staring absently into space, and Mulder's heart did a little lurch. He hated seeing his lover look this lost. He crossed the room, and placed a hand on Skinner's shoulder. It never occurred to him that Skinner

had not heard his approach, so his Master's startled reaction took him by surprise. Skinner slapped his hand away with a growl, and Mulder fell against the table. He regained his footing and looked at his Master. Skinner's jaw was practically scissoring in distress, and although he put out a hand as if to steady Mulder, he drew back, as if stung, without actually touching his slave. There was a grim sense of resolve in his Master's eyes.

"You surprised me. You should have said something. I didn't know you were here," Skinner muttered. Mulder just gazed at him, thoughtfully. "I thought I gave you an order. Go to bed," Skinner snapped, refusing to meet his slave's eyes.

"Come with me," Mulder urged softly. "Then we can talk about this."

Skinner crossed his arms defensively over his chest – he clearly didn't want to engage in any kind of conversation. Mulder was going to try anyway.

"Walter – it's late. I'm worried about you," he said softly.

Skinner took a deep breath. "I know. I'm sorry. Go to bed. I'll be along soon."

"What are you thinking?" Mulder ignored the order.

"Nothing." Skinner reached out and played idly with the papers on the table.

"You made some phone calls?" Mulder pressed, glancing at the phone.

"Yes. Guardian stuff. I thought..." Skinner cleared his throat and began again, not looking at Mulder. "I thought I should call a meeting of the House."

"What can the House do?"

"That's what I need to find out. We can certainly tackle Franklin." Skinner shrugged. "We can make sure he isn't welcome at any more parties or clubs in DC – but there are always parts of the scene that we can't police, and there will always be places that will welcome someone that dangerous. There'll even be some stupid boys who venerate him for being a violent abuser. They'll just think he's particularly masterful." He clamped his jaw shut, clearly not having intended to say so much.

"If Lee would only make a report to the police..." Mulder began hotly.

"Let's face it, Fox, that isn't going to happen," Skinner snapped. "The House is our only other option. Now, I thought I told you to go to bed."

"And I thought I should find out whether my Master was all right." Mulder put his head on one side, and gazed at the other man. "Is he? What's going on, Walter? Don't shut me out."

Skinner glared at him for a moment, and then all the tension suddenly left his body, and he lifted his hands, helplessly. He shook his head, but didn't seem to have any words.

"Don't even think it," Mulder warned him.

His Master raised an eyebrow. "You know what I'm thinking now?" He asked.

"I have a pretty good idea." Mulder stepped close to Skinner, and gently touched his Master's cheek. Skinner stiffened. Mulder reached down, took hold of one of Skinner's hands, and placed it on his own waist. "I'm not made of glass, Walter, and I won't break. You're not Franklin. You'd never hurt me."

"I've often hurt you," Skinner replied, still unmoving, his hand like a lead weight on Mulder's body.

"What was it you said when you first brought me home? You'd hurt me, for my own pleasure – but you wouldn't **harm** me? That's the distinction here. Lee and Franklin aren't holding up a mirror to our relationship, Walter. What they have is no more or less than domestic abuse – something that happens in non-BDSM relationships as well."

"Sometimes I don't know my own strength. Last night..."

"Was fantastic. We talked about this."

"And if one day I went too far?"

"I don't believe you could. It isn't in you. Even last night."

"What do you mean?" Skinner's dark eyes were intense.

"I mean that I asked you for a rape fantasy but you wouldn't deliver. You had to make me beg to be fucked – you needed my consent on some level. Even in a fantasy."

"I..." Skinner hesitated.

Mulder put his other hand on his Master's face, and caressed him with his thumbs, stroking Skinner's cheeks softly. "You aren't Franklin. You aren't going to abuse your power over me, or turn me into a victim. You've always told me that we're equals, Walter. We complement each other – like two sides of a coin. You have what I need, and I have what you need. It works, and it works well."

Mulder pressed his lips against his Master's and found the other man's mouth soft, and yielding, but unresponsive. "I'm your slave. I love you," Mulder said, drawing back a little way. "Don't shut me out, Master."

Skinner seemed to break out of his frozen trance at those words. He took a deep inhalation of breath, then placed his hands on Mulder's shoulders, and looked at him. Finally he moved his head, and returned his slave's kiss with a gentle one of his own.

"When did you get to know me so well?" He asked softly.

Mulder smiled, put his arms around his Master, and caressed those taut muscles, trying to relax them.

"I'm not sure. Maybe during the many occasions when I've knelt at your feet, with my chin resting on your knee, which is the best place in the world to be. Or maybe during those times when you stroked my body to ever greater heights of ecstasy, or when you spanked my bare ass until I floated as high as a

kite. Or perhaps it was when you picked me up off the floor when I cut my chest, or carried me out of that warehouse bloodied and bruised. Or when you made love to me in the sand on the beach, kissing my scar to make me feel better about myself ...or maybe it was when, after I'd been cruising around DC looking for a top who would help me self-destruct, you stepped in to offer me the safe haven of your contract. Or maybe it happened during those nights I couldn't sleep, when I'd turn over and watch you sleeping instead; naked, unguarded, devoid of all the trappings of my Master so that I could see the man himself underneath. A good man. A gentle man. I don't think I'll ever tire of watching you sleep, so maybe that was when I got to know you, Walter. What I do know is that you've been there for me whenever I've needed you, and you've been more patient with me, and kinder than I probably ever deserved, and that you couldn't hurt me if you tried. I'm more likely to hurt you. I know you, Master, better than you know yourself."

Skinner didn't say a word for a long time after this speech – Mulder didn't think his Master trusted himself to speak. His eyes were glistening, and he glanced down at his feet and then back to Mulder. Finally he pulled himself together, took Mulder's hand, brought it to his mouth, and kissed the wedding ring on Mulder's finger. It was a gesture Mulder remembered from their first evening together and for some reason he found it peculiarly touching.

"I think it's time for bed," Skinner said, in a low, growling tone. "Both of us this time," Skinner added, before Mulder could protest. He put his arm around his slave's shoulder and they walked upstairs together.

"Did you arrange a meeting of the House?" Mulder asked.

"Yes – but it'll have to wait for a few days. It wasn't easy getting everyone in the same place at the same time. They're all busy people. We'll meet on Friday."

"And in the meantime?" Mulder glanced at his Master.

"In the meantime we hope that Lee will talk to the police about Franklin, so that the House doesn't have to deal with it, but if that doesn't happen..." Skinner shrugged. "Well, we might have to take some more radical kind of action."

"What does that mean?" They had reached the bedroom, and Mulder began to undress his Master. Skinner stood there and let him. He looked profoundly weary.

"Let's not go there just yet," Skinner said softly. Mulder looked up at his Master from a kneeling position where he was undoing his Master's sneakers. Skinner put a hand on his slave's shoulder to steady himself.

"But it might be necessary to talk about more...extreme measures? At some point?" Mulder asked.

Skinner's face was hard as granite. "Maybe, at some point. Let's see what happens first, though, shall we?"

Mulder placed his Master's shoes neatly under the bed, then removed the big man's socks and threw them in the laundry basket. He undid Skinner's jeans and slid them down his Master's long legs, then put them away in the closet. His naked Master smiled at him, and glanced at Mulder's sweats pointedly.

"I'm not sure those are allowed," he murmured.

"No, Master." Mulder grinned and lost the pants quickly. He pulled back the bedcovers for his Master and Skinner slid between the sheets with a tired sigh. Mulder covered him and then went to his own side of the bed and knelt.

"Permission to sleep with you, Master," he requested obediently.

"Oh for god's sake, just get in," Skinner said, a wry laugh in his voice. Mulder grinned and slid in beside his Master. He was surprised when Skinner reached for him – he had imagined his Master would be too tired for sex. He opened his legs obligingly, to allow his Master access to his ass, but Skinner gently pushed him back.

"Just lie still," he whispered. Then he bent his head and touched the merest hint of a lick to Mulder's still sore nipples. They zinged into life, and Mulder gave a little gasp. Skinner continued on down, pressing the tiniest, most tender touches of lips and fingers to his slave's flesh. Mulder had never been treated more gently. Skinner's caresses were like whispers. His Master reached his cock and bestowed a dozen or more tiny licks and kisses on it. Mulder was hard immediately. He groaned and opened his legs again, expecting Skinner to lift his buttocks, and enter between his ass cheeks – but his Master just fondled his slave's bottom tenderly.

"I'm not going to use you there," Skinner murmured. "You'll be too sore after last night."

"I don't care," Mulder groaned, too aroused to worry about it.

"Well I do." Skinner nuzzled his slave's flesh gently. He stroked the soft flesh of Mulder's inner thigh and then applied his warm, wet tongue to Mulder's ass. Mulder nearly jumped out of the bed at the sensation. He'd been rimmed before but it wasn't a frequent occurrence, and this was so slow, and intimate, and loving. Skinner's tongue made dozens of long, leisurely swirling motions over his slave's opening, at the same time as gently pumping his slave's cock in time to the motion of his tongue. Mulder was lost in a haze of sensation. This felt so warm, sensuous, and comforting. It was a different kind of sex to the wild excess of the previous evening, but it was just as satisfying in its own way. It was so beautiful, so languorous. Skinner made love to every inch of his slave's body for the next hour. He went so slowly that there were times when Mulder thought he'd scream – for just as he seemed to be getting close to climax his Master would stop what he was doing and move on to some other area of his slave's body. When Mulder tried to caress his Master in return, he was told to just lie still, and accept his Master's will. Mulder didn't need much convincing considering how deliciously erotic and arousing his Master's will was on this occasion. Finally, after more than an hour of love making, Skinner allowed his slave to come – which Mulder did, copiously. Afterwards, Skinner gathered his slave in his arms, and held him.

"Wouldn't Master like me..." Mulder began, noting that Skinner hadn't taken his own pleasure.

"No, boy, Master wouldn't," Skinner said softly, nuzzling his slave's neck with his arms. Mulder understood. His Master had needed to show his slave that a gentle love making session could be just as good as all the explosive violence of the previous evening. Skinner had also needed to show his slave how much he was loved, and how his Master could reveal to him all the gentleness at his core and yet still be his Master.

"I didn't need to be convinced," Mulder murmured.

"I know. Maybe I did," Skinner replied.

They brought Lee home the following evening. The young man was able to walk – but slowly and unsteadily. His face looked a mess – the swelling had gone down but a huge, multi-colored bruise had risen in its place. Mulder helped him along to the spare room, and Skinner settled him in the bed.

"There's a small TV to keep you amused. Fox and I have to work but we'll be here in the evenings – we've arranged for a small army of people to be with you during the day," Skinner told their guest.

"What kind of people?" Lee asked irritably.

"Scene people," Skinner replied. "You'll know most of them – Ian, Hammer, Murray, Elaine..."

"I don't like her. She looks as me as if I'm something she stepped in," Lee muttered. Mulder smiled to himself. Elaine had always been a lady of discerning good taste.

"She's nice and she's willing to help. You can't be left on your own," Skinner told their recalcitrant guest firmly.

"Why not? You scared I'll steal something?"

"No. I'm more concerned for your well-being. We don't know who might turn up on the doorstep, do we?" Skinner said pleasantly.

Lee's face paled. "He wouldn't come here – would he?"

"I don't know. Would he?" Skinner sat on the side of the bed and looked at their guest discerningly.

Lee shrugged. "I don't know. I'm his slave. I suppose he'll come looking for me eventually. If he still wants me."

"Isn't it more to the point whether you still want him?" Skinner asked.

Lee looked surprised. "I don't have a choice. He **owns** me," he said. "You two both understand what that means."

"I know what it **doesn't** mean," Mulder said, leaning against the wall, and gazing at the young man. "It doesn't mean that he has the right to put you in the hospital."

"Yeah, like you two never played a game that went too far," Lee sneered.

"No, we haven't," Mulder said bluntly.

"Yeah right. My Master told me **you'd** been in the hospital recently. Don't tell me that wasn't as a result of **your** Master deciding to play blood sports on your chest." He nodded in the direction of Mulder's scar. Mulder stared at him, aghast. Was **that** what was being said on the scene? He could see how those kinds of Chinese whispers got around but it made him so angry as to be almost speechless. How could anyone think Skinner had been the one who had hurt him? He glanced at his Master who looked as

surprised and shocked as Mulder felt – and not a little wounded as well, although he was clearly trying to hide that particular emotion. Mulder could have cursed – every time he thought he had managed to get it into his Master's head that he was not remotely in the same league as Franklin, something happened to set the process back.

"Don't be a little idiot, Lee. Of course Walter didn't hurt me. As a matter of fact he saved me. The only one who hurt me was myself." Mulder didn't think he had either the patience or the energy to explain about Krycek at this point in time.

"If you say so." Lee waved his hand in the air and then reached for the remote.

"I don't just say so, it's the goddamn truth!" Mulder exploded.

"Fox. It's okay." Skinner shot him a warning glance. "Lee, do you want anything to eat?"

"No. I want to watch TV." Lee turned on the television and flicked through a few channels, ignoring his hosts. Mulder felt his anger start to boil over again. He had forgotten, in his horror over Lee's injuries, what a total little shit the kid was.

"Not yet. First we need to talk." Skinner got up, and turned the TV off at the wall. Lee gave him a look that would have felled a lesser man. Skinner ignored it. "Lee, I'm not giving you back to Franklin just to have this happen all over again," he said. Lee twisted the comforter between his fingers and shrugged. "If you tell me that you want to be released from whatever contract you have with Franklin then I'll report that to the House and we'll protect you from him, but I need to know what you're thinking first," Skinner said.

Lee shrugged again. He had an air of such brooding sulkiness that Mulder couldn't help thinking what an excruciatingly irritating slave he must have been, and he didn't imagine that Franklin had any patience for such slaves – not that it excused what Franklin had done for a moment, but he could see how Lee would annoy anyone, even if they had the patience of a saint, which Franklin clearly didn't.

"Lee, I need your answer. Give it to me," Skinner ordered firmly.

"If he wants...I mean...I can't refuse him." Lee shrugged. "He owns me," he said desperately, looking at Skinner with a pleading gaze. "I'm not allowed to refuse him. If he comes for me..."

"Lee, you've been owned before. Mike owned you, and you had no qualms about ending that contract so you must see that you do have the right," Skinner said forcefully.

"Mike was different. My Master...Franklin...he wouldn't tolerate it. He hates it when his authority is questioned."

"Forget Franklin. What do **you** want, Lee?"

"Dunno." Lee shrugged again and gazed moodily at the comforter.

Skinner tapped his head. "Look at me, boy," he said firmly. Mulder glanced at his Master, surprised by his tone, but he soon saw there was a method to it as Lee responded to Skinner's authority, his head snapping up. He looked Skinner in the eye and his face crumpled as if he was going to burst into tears.

"What do you want, Lee?" Skinner asked again. "This isn't the first time Franklin has hurt you, is it? And I don't mean as part of a sex game. When I applied first aid last night I saw the scars on your back, and buttocks. Those were deep, savage wounds. How did you feel about them at the time?"

"It hurt." Lee struggled to keep his head held high, but his shoulders had sagged and he looked utterly dejected. Mulder found himself feeling sorry for the young man again. "My step dad used to beat me up some, and then after...well he'd be good to me. Franklin was like that. He said I had to learn – it was all part of some big training plan but I never knew when he was playing and when he meant it and sometimes he...he'd just go ballistic about something I never meant. I thought I could play him...you know..." Lee shot a glance at Mulder. "You know what I mean," he whispered.

"Yes. I know." Mulder sighed. He remembered his first few days in his Master's apartment. He had been so sure he could 'play' Skinner and get what he wanted without giving anything back. Luckily Skinner had been playing a different game completely. He shuddered to think what would have happened if the unknown Master he had sold himself to had been Franklin and not Skinner. "It didn't work with Franklin, though, did it?" He said, shaking his head.

"No. He just used to get mad. Really mad. Sometimes that was hot, but mostly it just scared me shitless."

"Do you love him?" Skinner asked softly.

"No." Lee shuddered. "No...I don't even like him. He's loco...but...I have to go back to him. You don't understand what he's like. He'll find me. He'll **kill** me. He told me once that no slave of his had the right to leave – that if they wanted out then he'd give them permission to die, but that was the only way they could go. He used to tell me about some Indian tradition – sooty or something..."

"Sutee," Mulder murmured.

"Yeah – that's it. Where if a man died, his wife had to burn with him. He approved of that. He said that if he ever died I had to die too – that he wouldn't let me live if he was dead. He'd send someone after me to kill me. He used to tell me that death was the only way I'd ever get away from him. He **meant** it. He'll kill me."

"He won't kill you, he was just trying to scare you – and it's illegal to make death threats in this country," Skinner said. "Lee, you have to trust me. I want you to report Franklin to the police."

Lee dropped his gaze again, and Skinner put a finger under the young man's chin and raised his head. "Lee." He looked at him searchingly.

"I can't," Lee said. "You can't make me do it. I can't. I'll run away. I'll kill myself. You can't make me...I won't stand up in court and say what he did to me. They'll ask me questions. They'll make me say I enjoyed it."

"No, Lee, it doesn't have to be that way," Mulder began, but Lee interrupted him.

"Yes, it **does**. You know what I look like, the way I talk. They won't take me seriously. He's older, he's rich, he's a businessman and I'm just a bum. I have..." his voice dropped. "I have convictions for hustling, for drugs, for stealing... I used to be a hustler. I'd share drugs with my tricks and then, when they were completely out of it, I'd steal their money. I've been to prison for it. There isn't a jury in the land that will take my word over his."

Skinner sat back and glanced at Mulder for a second. Mulder could see in his Master's eyes that Skinner didn't rate Lee's chances much either.

"All right. If you won't testify against Franklin, that's fine." Skinner gave a sigh that implied it wasn't fine but he couldn't do anything about it. "But you've told me that you don't love him and I don't think you really want to go back to him." He raised a hand as Lee opened his mouth to interrupt. "Forget about his death threats – take them out of the equation and tell me honestly whether you want to go back to him."

Lee chewed on his lip for a moment, and then shook his head. "No. I'm scared of him. I hate him," he whispered.

"All right. That's all I wanted to know." Skinner stood up.

"What will you do?" Lee asked.

"Don't worry about it. I'll sort it out," Skinner said.

"You're not going to kill him are you?" Lee asked. Mulder glanced at Skinner, wondering the same thing himself. He knew his Master to be a law abiding man, but he couldn't see a way out of this particular problem without Skinner at best having to resort to using his fists, and at worst taking Franklin out of the equation altogether. Somehow he couldn't see Skinner sanctioning that last option – so what **did** he have planned?

"I've told you – don't worry. Just concentrate on getting better."

"If I do...I don't have anywhere to go," Lee muttered.

"We'll find you somewhere. When the time comes." Skinner put a gentle hand on Lee's shoulder and pushed him back onto the bed. "Get some rest, Lee. We'll be across the hallway."

"I want to watch..." Lee reached for the remote, only to have it plucked from his fingers by Skinner.

"Rest. You can watch TV tomorrow. You need to get some sleep." Skinner gestured with his head at Mulder and left the room. Mulder, following on behind him, was the only one who witnessed the look Lee gave his Master – it was somewhere between hero worship and sly intent. Mulder gave an inward sigh. He knew Skinner didn't mean anything by commanding Lee in this way – his air of authority was innate to his personality, and he was just being himself by sternly demanding answers, and being kind, solicitous and firm with it – in short by showing Lee just how a good Master behaved. And of course Lee, like any other sub, couldn't help responding to Skinner's manner. He had never made any secret of his

attraction to Skinner in the past – and Mulder, in the grip of that same attraction, couldn't blame him. So, Lee was developing a huge crush on his Master - and now they had one more problem to worry about.

"What will happen on Friday, Walter?" Mulder asked as they retired to their own bedroom, across the hallway. "Will the House want to speak to Lee?"

"If he's up to it." Skinner shrugged, disappearing into the bathroom. "It doesn't matter – I can put his wishes to them and tell them what's happened if he's not well enough, but he should be by then."

"And what do you think they'll decide? What will they do? What will they expect you to do?" Mulder followed his Master into the bathroom and watched while Skinner peed.

His Master sighed. "Fox, I don't know. That's the whole point of having the meeting," he said, finishing and washing his hands.

"Have you ever encountered this kind of problem before?" Mulder pressed, undressing. "Did Andrew? Is there some kind of precedent for...?"

"Fox." Skinner fixed him with a glare. "House meetings of this kind are confidential. While nobody objects to the Guardian's slave sitting in on them as just that – a slave – I don't think it's appropriate for me to discuss previous confidential incidents with you."

"Oh." Mulder hadn't even thought about that. He went to the basin and began brushing his teeth.

"However..." Skinner took a deep breath, and looked at his slave for a long moment.

"What?" Mulder shifted uneasily, his toothbrush still in his mouth.

"I know you feel very strongly about this subject, and I'm sure you have a lot to say on the matter. You can have your say – but only if you decide to become a Member of the House."

"A Member?" Mulder removed his toothbrush and stared at his Master, stunned, a little stream of toothpaste running down his chin. "But I...that is...you're asking me if I want to be part of the House? I mean, I thought you had to be on the scene for years and know all the right people to even get asked."

"You **have** been on the scene for years – well on and off anyway - and if sleeping with the Guardian isn't knowing the right person then I don't what is," Skinner grinned, wiping Mulder's dripping chin with a towel.

Mulder was dumbfounded. "I had no idea...but, I mean, is there a vacancy?" he asked, stupefied.

"As a matter of fact there are two. People move on - they move to new towns or their interests and priorities change. I'm more of a nominal head – Hammer is in charge of meetings and policing the scene by and large because I don't have the time. We've also found that it pays to have a Guardian with a certain amount of mystique – one who isn't too visible and who can be brought in to act the heavy on special occasions. My reputation is far more frightening than the reality." Skinner removed his sweatshirt and threw it in the laundry basket.

"I'm not so sure about that." Mulder grinned. "Are you sure Hammer would be okay with me being a Member of the House?"

"It was Hammer who suggested it. How do you feel about it?"

"What would it entail?" Mulder followed his Master out of the bathroom and into the bedroom.

"Well, a certain amount of work – it isn't just going to meetings. Members of the House have to be active on the scene – more active than you are at the moment. That will mean going to clubs, parties, munches and events. It'll also mean taking the time to get to know the new players on the scene, to make sure they're safe, and get a feel for people, so that you will have a fair idea of the problems and personalities if something should come up."

"Oh." Mulder wasn't sure how he felt about that. While he enjoyed the scene parties he'd been to, his lifestyle was so frenetic and his commitment to both his Master and the X Files so all consuming that he wasn't sure he'd have the time to really give his all to anything else. He wasn't somebody who did **anything** by halves and his interest in the scene was fairly limited.

"There might be some minor paperwork involved as well." Skinner glanced at his slave. "So, what do you think?" He asked.

"I don't know. I'm not sure I have the time. That's the plain truth. I mean, I've enjoyed the scene, but it isn't my life – the X Files are my life, and you're my life. If I'm honest, I don't think I could give enough to it. I don't think I'd enjoy it either. Networking has never exactly been a skill of mine after all." Mulder gave a theatrical grimace, and sat down on the side of the bed.

"That's fine." Skinner smiled.

"It is?" Mulder looked up. It didn't feel fine. He felt as if he was letting people down in some way.

"Of course. It does mean that you won't have a voice during meetings though, so if I want you to attend as my slave you'll have to be silent, as you were during the meeting you attended at Murray's house a few months back – although that one was fairly mundane. The one on Friday is likely to be a lot more interesting."

"You mean that if I'm not a Member you won't let me attend?" Mulder asked. He had just assumed he'd be at the meeting. He wanted to know what was said and how the situation was resolved. He was involved in the whole incident in such a personal way that he felt he had a right to know.

"I have no objection to you attending – as my slave," Skinner said with a shrug. "None of the other Members will object to the Guardian having his slave in attendance either, but if you want a **voice** then you must become a Member and put in the time and effort. It's only fair."

"Yes. That's fair enough, and much as I hate having to give up any opportunity to get very angry and talk in a loud voice," Mulder grinned at his Master, "I think I have to say 'no'. I have enough long term commitments in my life as it is – one of them being very time consuming." He gazed at his Master meaningfully.

"Ah, the X Files don't take up **that** much of your time," Skinner teased.

"I was thinking more of the demands of my Master and his insatiable sexual needs." Mulder grinned.

"Insatiable?" Skinner slid his sweat pants down to reveal a sizeable erection. "That's right, boy – completely and utterly rampant. Now get your ass over here and take care of this." Mulder went, laughing out loud.

Their houseguest proved to be a moody addition to the household over the next few days. Mulder and Skinner worked out a routine whereby Skinner would take care of Lee in the mornings, getting him his breakfast, doling out his medication, and helping him take a Sitz bath to ease his rectal injury, before handing their charge over to one of the many people who had volunteered to sit with him during the day. Mulder would go to work earlier than usual and leave earlier as well – while Skinner stayed late to finish his work. Mulder would give Lee his evening meal, and look after him until Skinner got home. Mulder couldn't help being of the opinion that it was like having a bad tempered child – or a very recalcitrant puppy in the apartment. The only problem being that he was sure that he could have felt some affection for a puppy or child but Lee was a different matter. Their guest was frankly rude to Mulder, while butter wouldn't melt in his mouth when he was with Skinner. Not that Mulder was surprised – in fact, on some level he even understood it. Lee was scared, and he was looking to someone to fill the gap that Franklin had left. He was also desperately afraid that he would have nowhere to live when he recovered and was clearly hoping that if he played his cards right Skinner would decide that he was in the market for another slave. Mulder did his best to keep both his jealousy and his temper in check – his Master had a lot on his plate right now and the last thing he needed was for his slave to go off into the deep end and cause him even more problems, but even so, it gnawed at him.

Mulder was so preoccupied with the situation, to say nothing of the looming House meeting, that he got careless – and as a result found himself alone in the parking garage of the Hoover Building at 7pm on Friday evening with a gun pressed to the back of his head. He and Skinner had swapped their Lee shifts for the day, as Skinner wanted to get home in plenty of time to have a long talk Lee before the meeting of the House which he had called for 9pm. Lee was already nervous about it - he seemed to view it as being akin to coming up before a prison parole board, despite Skinner's assurances to the contrary. Mulder wanted to be in time for the meeting as well. He was so lost in thought as he jogged towards his car that he didn't see the dark shadow inside the vehicle until it was too late and he was sitting inside – and that was when he heard the click of the gun.

"Hello, Mulder, " a familiar voice said. "Out on your own without Big Daddy to hold your hand?"

"Krycek. You must be either deaf or stupid," Mulder growled, his hands clenching hard around the steering wheel. "Didn't you hear what Skinner said to you last time you showed up?"

"You mean the idle threats? I heard. What you've got to understand is that Skinner is one of the good guys." Mulder glanced in his mirror, and saw that his old partner had a grimly amused expression on his face. "And the good guys don't do more than punch you in the gut once or twice. Skinner knows that there isn't a prison in this country that will hold me, considering who and what I know, and he's far too bright and shining to kill me himself. So it was just a bluff. I'm much more concerned about **my** masters' threats than yours, Mulder."

"Who are your masters, Krycek? Who are you working for these days? Are you still letting that cigarette smoking bastard breathe his foul fumes all over you or have you moved on, and sold your services elsewhere?"

"That isn't important. What is important is that you have a chance to make up for last week's lost opportunity."

"Ah, is there another spaceship hovering over Oregon?"

"Not yet - and not Oregon. I figure that last time I didn't give you enough notice. This time you can be prepared."

"It won't change anything. I still won't be going," Mulder snapped.

"You have to. This is bigger than you, and your fucking stupid Spartacus complex. This is something you'll regret all your life if you don't follow it up. I'm leaving now, but you can expect another visit from me very soon - and I'll want to hear that you're willing to play ball when I return. Oh, and Mulder, this time – don't tell Skinner I visited." The cold metal of Krycek's gun dug into harder into Mulder's neck and then was gone. Mulder heard the door open and close, and then he was alone again. He briefly considered getting out of the car and chasing after his nemesis, but he knew it would be pointless – Krycek was too fast and too good at hiding in the shadows.

Despite Krycek's injunction, Mulder had every intention of telling his Master about the visit. It might not be the best timing what with everything else that was going on, but he knew Skinner would want to know. He let himself into the apartment, and went straight into the living room calling his Master's name – only to find that Skinner was not alone. Franklin was with him.

"What the hell is he doing here?" Mulder asked hotly, all thoughts of Krycek vanishing from his mind. Franklin raised an eyebrow and glanced at Skinner.

"Your slave isn't very well trained. I had expected something more of the **Guardian's** slave," he commented.

"Franklin just arrived," Skinner told his slave. "He says he wants to talk. I thought it would be churlish to kick his ass onto the street without hearing what he had to say first."

Franklin's lip curled up into a sneer. "You won't be kicking me anywhere, Skinner." He glanced around the room, saw the couch, and sat down on it. Mulder stepped forward, ready to explode at the way their uninvited guest had assumed a hospitality that he hadn't been shown.

"Fox." Skinner clicked his fingers and Mulder reluctantly went to his Master's side, and knelt.

"That's better. We must show these boys their place," Franklin smirked, placing his outstretched arms along the back of the couch as if he owned it. "I'll come straight to the point. You have something that belongs to me, Skinner. I want it back."

"If you're referring to Lee, then he doesn't want to belong to you any more," Skinner replied.

Franklin waved his hand negligently in the air. "Ah, he's just a boy. He doesn't know what he wants."

"As a matter of fact he does. I spoke to him at some length on the subject, both when he first came out of the hospital and this evening. He was very clear on the point that he wants nothing more to do with you."

Mulder watched as Franklin's urbane veneer faltered. The other man's face darkened, and his eyes flashed angrily. Mulder felt his temper rising again as he remembered what this man had done to both Ian and Lee. He was dangerous, sadistic, and violent.

"It's of little concern to me whether the little brat wants to return or not. He's my slave. My property. Since when did **property** choose who it belonged to?"

"Since this was a democratic country in which slavery only exists as part of a sexual contract between two consenting adults," Skinner replied. "You have no legal right to him, Franklin, and you certainly don't have a moral right to him."

"He signed a contract. I believe that has **some** meaning in the circles in which we move." Franklin allowed his eyes to rake over Mulder in a pointed fashion.

"Yes, it does, but you abused whatever contract you had with Lee and now he's finished with you. He has that right."

"Would you give **your** slave that right?" Franklin growled. "If he decided he wanted to leave?"

Mulder glanced at his Master. Skinner had told him when he first took him as his slave that he would be released from his contract only if it was what his Master wanted as well – and yet...and yet on one of the two occasions when he'd tried to leave, Skinner had let him go – only for Mulder to return of his own free will. On the other occasion his Master **should** have washed his hands of him altogether, and Mulder was eternally grateful for the fact that Skinner had refused to release his slave even when Mulder had returned his wedding ring and made a mockery of their contracts.

"No." Skinner glanced at Mulder. "No, I wouldn't – but then I'd never push a bottle up his rectum either. It could have broken. That rip you put in Lee's ass could have led to infection – peritonitis – even death. My slave doesn't live in fear of his life like yours. People like you shouldn't be responsible for another human being, Franklin. What you do isn't BDSM. You're attracted to the lifestyle because you think it gives you the right to abuse. It doesn't. BDSM isn't about abuse, or cruelty, or crushing someone else's self esteem."

"Ah, you're going to tell me it's about love next," Franklin laughed. "I can almost hear the violins tuning up, Skinner."

"Love? Not necessarily – not unless you're lucky anyway." Skinner placed a hand on Mulder's head and Mulder leaned into the caress, as he always did, as he couldn't help doing, no matter who was watching. "But it **is** about mutual respect and trust, and you don't have either of those with your slave, Franklin."

"He's my slave. He doesn't have any rights. I don't require his respect, or his trust – just his body – and his obedience," Franklin snapped.

"Then, like I said, you've got this lifestyle all wrong. Treat your slave like a whipped pup and that's all you'll have," Skinner said, "and beware if you turn your back on him for one minute or he'll bite you for all the abuse you've handed out. Tell me – when you touch Lee does he enjoy it and lean towards you hoping for more, or does he cower away from you?" Franklin pursed his lips and Skinner shook his head. "I know which I'd prefer," he commented. "Having a slave isn't about having someone to abuse, Franklin. It's about finding someone who you can live with, in a kind of symbiosis, each bringing out the best in the other. You and Lee – you bring out the worst."

Franklin sat back and applauded Skinner's speech, with slow, mocking claps of his hands.

"Very good. You've had your say – now give me back my slave."

"He isn't your slave any more. You gave up any right to him when you smashed your fist into his face and rammed a bottle up his ass."

"I won't give up my claim to him – and you can't protect him here forever," Franklin hissed. "And while I'm waiting, well, there are plenty of other pretty boys in this town who'd beg for a touch of my whip. You know, there are always boys who like it rough. And if you're going to keep my slave, I might just decide to take yours in recompense. Fair exchange is no robbery after all." He glanced at Mulder with a glint in his eyes.

"Is that a threat?" Skinner went very still. Mulder could feel his Master's muscles tense through his pants. He glanced up, knowing that the mood had changed, and the gloves were coming off.

"It's a fact. If you keep my boy, then you should take care to protect your own – some might consider it greedy to take another man's property when you already have a slave of your own."

"Don't bluff me, Franklin. If you lay one finger on Fox then you're dead. You know that." Skinner moved his hand and laid it on protectively Mulder's shoulder, squeezing firmly.

"Who is threatening who now?" Franklin sneered.

"I haven't got time for this. Get out of here, Franklin, and get out of this town, because you won't find anyone who'll play with you after this."

"You're a fool, Skinner. You're too soft. You think everyone in this town wants to play like you? You're wrong. There will always be submissives who like men with my kind of edge. I'll keep playing, even if you misuse your power as Guardian to advise all the subs in the city against playing with me. You see, there will be those to whom your warning will just serve as a great aphrodisiac. Rather than being frightened away, they'll seek me out. You know it, and I know it."

Mulder glanced up at his Master. He could see by the way the big man's jaw was clenched that his Master recognized the truth of this statement. Franklin was only saying what Skinner had already said privately to Mulder.

"How many times do you think you'll get away with it?" Skinner asked. "Sooner or later, one of your victims will go to the police."

"You think?" Franklin smiled. "Just like Lee is going to do maybe? Or that whiny friend of yours - Ian?" Mulder was on his feet and half way across the room, his fist raised to strike, before Skinner caught up with him, and propelled him back.

"Maybe you need some tips on how to control him," Franklin offered. "I could suggest a few things...I like boys like him - boys with fire, boys who won't easily obey – boys that need to be crushed underfoot until they do what their Master requires." He gave Mulder an insane grin, his eyes afire with a kind of evil enjoyment. "I always did find him interesting. I like my boys a little more conventionally beautiful, I'll admit, but he has such fire. It would be so good to stamp it out." Franklin ground his heel into the carpet to illustrate the point, and Skinner's hand, which had been digging into Mulder's shoulder, turned instead to a reassuring caress. "Such a spitfire. It's no fun when they're easy to tame. I like the challenge," Franklin continued. "Lee has been amusing but he's just a child. So naughty, even though he knows he'll be punished. He just can't help himself. When I get him back, I'll take him on the final step of the journey. I'll break him. Then he won't disobey me any more."

"You won't be breaking anyone because you're going to be leaving town," Skinner said firmly. "And I'll make sure that the word is spread about you wherever you go. I'll tell every city with a scene that you're too dangerous to be played with. Word will get around. You'll find your activities severely curtailed."

It was Franklin's turn to look shaken now. His dark eyes glittered angrily as he realized that Skinner did, indeed, have that power, and although he might still find willing submissives to play with, it wouldn't be easy, and he'd have to trawl the less respectable bars to find what he was looking for. It would take more of his time and energy, and it would be more personally dangerous for him.

"I'm not going to leave," he snarled. "Who is going to make me? I've committed no crime that will ever be punished in court, and you aren't going to take the law into your own hands, are you, Skinner? I have business interests in this town. I'm settled here and I intend to stay. You aren't going to get rid of me that easily. You've made yourself a formidable enemy, Skinner. I'll not only get Lee back - I'll also make a challenge for your job. I rather enjoy the thought of being the next Guardian of the House – does the slave come with the job I wonder? I do hope so." Franklin gave a little laugh at his own joke, his eyes raking over Mulder's body lasciviously, as if mentally undressing him.

"I think it's time that you left." Skinner moved menacingly in Franklin's direction, every muscle in his body taut. Mulder knew that it was taking all his Master's self-control not to snap, seize Franklin, and throw him bodily from the apartment.

"I think so too. It's been a pleasure seeing your willful slave again, Skinner. I'm sure he'll be happier with the firmer hand that I can provide. I find the most uncontrollable ones always are. In the meantime, when you've come to your senses on the subject of my slave, you can reach me on this number." Franklin reached into his wallet and withdrew a business card, which he placed on the arm of the couch. "If I don't hear from you then you can consider yourself involved in an extremely messy, and very dangerous battle. I look forward to getting your call," he murmured.

Skinner didn't reply. He just opened the door for their uninvited guest to walk through, and then slammed it shut again afterwards.

"It's all bluff," Skinner said when their guest had gone.

"You think?" Mulder replied. "I'm sorry, Walter, but I've known men like him before. He's a fanatic – and he believes what he says. I'm not so sure it **is** a bluff."

"But what can I do?" Skinner sat down on the couch with a sigh. "He knows that my hands are tied. All I can do is put the word out about him – but he's right about that as well. There will always be some idiots out there who want to play with him precisely **because** of his reputation. He'll find it a little annoying not to be able to attend the big events and the main bars, and being ostracized on the scene will make him angry - but he will find people to play with somewhere. Men like him always do."

Mulder was reminded of Krycek's comment about his Master. It made him angry – both Krycek and Franklin could get away with behaving like this precisely because men like Skinner were honorable and law-abiding.

"I guess the good guys just don't have the array of weapons that the bad guys have," Mulder murmured.

"I guess not." Skinner spread his arms helplessly. Mulder considered telling his Master about Krycek but this didn't seem the right time. He wasn't sure there would **ever** be a right time the way things were going.

"Where's Lee?" Mulder glanced around the room.

"I sent him upstairs when I realized Franklin was at the door."

"I'd better go and see if he's okay."

Mulder walked slowly up the stairs, lost in thought. He was angry at being in thrall to Krycek, just as he was angry that Franklin looked as if he was going to walk out of this without paying any kind of price at all for what he'd done. Not only that – Franklin was escalating the situation into some kind of all out war. Mulder was more than angry – he was incensed. Both Krycek and Franklin were fucking up so many lives, and they seemed to be immune from the law – a law he had spent his career trying to uphold. Why should these men be immune from justice? And why should people like his Master and Ian, and even Lee, obnoxious brat that he was, suffer because of it? Mulder paused outside Lee's bedroom, and knocked on the door. There was no reply. He pushed open the door and peered inside – but the room seemed to be empty. Puzzled, Mulder stepped into the room and glanced around.

"Lee?" He called. Silence – which was broken by a slightly muffled sound coming from the closet. Frowning, Mulder opened the closet door. The closet was full of an overspill of his own clothes that hadn't fitted into the closet in his Master's bedroom, but he could just see two feet peeping out from underneath them. "Lee?" He said again, kneeling to get a better look. Lee was cowering beneath the clothing in a way that would have been comical if it hadn't been for the expression on the kid's face. He was shaking uncontrollably – and his skin was pale and covered in sweat.

"Is Walter going to give me back to him?" Lee whispered. "He'll punish me for running away. He'll..."

"Lee, it's okay. Walter sent Franklin away. Nobody is going to give you to him. Come on out. It's safe." He reached out a hand. Lee looked at it for a moment, then took it, and allowed himself to be pulled from the closet. "Oh shit." Mulder saw the stain on Lee's sweatpants, in the area around his crotch.

"I'm sorry. I couldn't help myself...I thought...I heard them talking. I heard Walter say that he wouldn't allow you to leave, so I thought he was going to..." Lee covered his stained crotch with his hands, clearly embarrassed that he'd pissed his pants in fright.

"It's okay," Mulder said soothingly.

"It isn't! He's after me! He's going to kill me! You don't understand! He's going to fucking kill me!" Lee screamed hysterically.

"This isn't helping..." Mulder began, placing a soothing hand on Lee's shoulder. The younger man went ballistic, throwing himself around the place, sobbing his heart out. Mulder watched him for a moment, dumbfounded, and then he couldn't help laughing. Lee subsided, and gazed at Mulder, an outraged expression on his face. "I'm sorry," Mulder said between chuckles. "But you really do look ridiculous like that Lee."

"You bastard!" Lee ran for him, and pounded his fists against Mulder's chest. Mulder was many years older, several inches taller, and a trained FBI agent into the bargain, so he easily sidestepped the kid. He grabbed Lee's arm, pushed it up his back, and propelled him bodily along to the bathroom.

"Take those pants off, and get into the shower, Lee," Mulder said firmly. Lee struggled for a few seconds, flailing around helplessly in Mulder's much stronger arms, and then the kid suddenly crumpled, and began to sob – only these weren't tears for show. They were real. Lee clung onto Mulder for dear life and cried his heart out. Mulder put his arms around the kid and held him, stroking Lee's shorn dark hair gently. He felt his anger towards Franklin rising again. Lee wasn't exactly his favorite person in the world, but his fear and grief were genuine enough. From what Mulder had learned of Lee's past, the kid had drawn the short straw in life so far, with a violent, abusive stepfather who had set the pattern for Lee's later relationships with other men. Unfortunately, instead of running into someone like Skinner, who might have been able to help him, Lee had chosen Franklin – and now he was lost, hurt, and scared witless. Finally the sobbing slowed, and Mulder disengaged the young man, helped him undress, and then pushed him under the warm shower. Skinner had always helped Lee bathe before, so Mulder had never seen the younger man completely naked – and the sight shocked him. Lee's body was a map of abuse, from cigarette burns to the white scarring caused by what had to be fairly heavy duty whipping, some of it obviously recent, but some so old that the damage had to have been inflicted when he was still a boy. Mulder couldn't help but feel sorry for the young man, which just made him even angrier that Franklin could brutalize someone who had been so obviously abused in the past.

"I'll get you a change of pants." Mulder returned to the bedroom, and took a deep, gasping gulp of air, shocked by what he had witnessed, both in terms of Lee's behavior and his scars, and he resolved to treat the kid as best he could from now on, no matter how much Lee provoked him. Mulder grabbed some sweats from the dresser, and strode back to the bathroom. Lee gazed at him with a new respect in his eyes when the agent returned, although he couldn't stop himself from shivering theatrically as he stood under the shower, just to milk the situation a little bit more.

"I take it that you were listening outside the door downstairs when Walter was talking to Franklin?" Mulder commented in a neutral tone.

Lee shrugged. "I needed to know what was going to happen to me," he whispered, now thoroughly subdued after all the hysterics.

"Lee, Walter told you that he wouldn't hand you back to Franklin. You should have trusted him."

"Why?" Lee blinked, the water clinging to his long eyelashes, making him look impossibly young.

"Because he's a man of his word."

Lee shrugged. "I've never met one of them. I don't believe they really exist," he replied.

Mulder took a deep intake of breath. From what he'd learned of Lee's life he wasn't sure he blamed him. "Well, we're the only friends you have right now, Lee, so I suggest you at least try to trust us." He turned the water off and handed the young man a towel.

"You don't like me very much, do you?" Lee said, drying himself.

"I want to like you, Lee," Mulder answered carefully. "But you don't care whether I like you or not," he pointed out, handing the kid the clean clothing.

"You're scared I'll take your Master away from you...and I will. You see, that's the only way I'll be safe. If I stay here, Franklin won't dare touch me. I haven't got anywhere else to go. I don't mind if I'm second slave or whatever to you – we could do a threesome maybe? I bet Skinner would like to watch us go down on each other. We could put a show on for him. You and me...what do you say? You could suggest it to him." Lee's almond shaped brown eyes were alight with glee over his plan. Mulder shuddered at the very thought of it.

"Lee, it isn't going to happen," he said calmly. "I understand your fears but hiding behind Walter isn't going to solve your problems."

Lee's face crumpled, angrily. "You can either work with me or I'll work around you," he snapped. "But either way, I'm staying." And with that he stalked back to his bedroom. Mulder sighed, and ran a hand through his hair wearily. First Krycek showed up, then Franklin, and now this little complication reared its ugly head. He knew he should tell his Master but he was of the opinion that Skinner had more than enough on his plate to deal with right now, without discovering that Lee was planning on enlarging his harem for him.

Mulder shook himself out of his reverie and glanced at his watch. It was 8.45 – the House would be meeting in a few minutes. He ran down the stairs and found his Master in the kitchen, brewing coffee and laying out cups.

"Sorry – Lee was having a crisis," Mulder said by way of explanation. "Walter – he's shit scared. He overheard some of what you said to Franklin. I found him hiding in the closet – he was so freaked that you'd hand him back to Franklin that he peed his pants."

"Oh shit." Skinner placed his hands on his hips.

"It's okay – I calmed him down and stuck him under the shower, but I don't know whether he's going to be able to talk to the House tonight. He's freaked out enough as it is."

"We'll deal with that when we come to it. I won't **make** him talk to them," Skinner said, rubbing a tired hand over his eyes. Mulder felt infinitely sorry for his Master. He had always thought of the title Guardian of the House as being fairly honorary until now – just a source of status and kudos, but he was beginning to see that it brought a lot of responsibility with it – and his Master already had more than enough responsibility resting on his broad shoulders. Nobody was invulnerable – Skinner was only human, and he had to be feeling the strain. There were just too many demands on his time and energy – he did a difficult, high powered job, had a slave who Mulder would be the first to admit was high maintenance, and now this.

"How do you wish me to behave in the meeting, Master?" Mulder asked, standing behind his Master, and giving him a neck rub. His Master leaned back against him gratefully.

"Answer the door, show the Members into the living room – I've put some extra chairs in there. We can just about get everyone around the table. Ask our guests if they'd like coffee, and serve it. After that, you can kneel beside me. Fox..." Skinner turned and gazed at his slave. "Are you sure that you don't want to accept Hammer's offer to be a Member?"

"I'm sure." Mulder nodded, biting his lip. "I'm not saying it wasn't tempting – but it's not for me, Walter. I don't like belonging to things...uh, well, you know what I mean," he grinned. "I mean, belonging to you is fine...but clubs, societies, associations...even the FBI..." He shrugged. "Well, I'm just not very good at it," he sighed.

"All right. Then remember that you don't have a voice in this meeting. You're there in your capacity as my slave – you don't speak unless spoken to other than to see to the comfort of our guests. Understood?"

"Yes, Master." Mulder nodded.

At that moment there was a buzz on the entry-phone, and Mulder pulled away to answer it. Skinner hauled him back, and planted a loving, possessive kiss on his slave's lips.

"This will all be over soon," he said as he released his slave. "Then we can relax. Have some fun."

"Yeah. Soon." Mulder gave a faded smile. He wasn't so sure about that. There seemed to be too many balls in the air right now that required juggling. He was worried about how his Master would hold up under the strain...and he still hadn't told Skinner about Krycek's latest visit.

By ten past nine all the members of the House had gathered. Mulder showed them into the living room, brought them coffee, placed some cookies on the table, and then settled down at his Master's feet with a contented sigh. There was a part of him that longed to be involved more directly in the proceedings but he was happy enough to just be at this meeting in his capacity as the Guardian's slave. Ian wasn't the only one who shot him a look of envy as he zoned out, with his chin on Skinner's knee. Subs by far outnumbered tops in the House, just as they did in the scene, and Mulder's position as the slave of the most important top in DC was a source of some envy. If this had been a professional meeting, involving the X Files, then Mulder knew that there was no way he could have stayed silent – and his Master

wouldn't have asked him to either. Mulder knew that Skinner held him and his opinions in the highest respect. Mulder wasn't just Skinner's slave - he was also the best agent he had, even though Assistant Director Skinner sometimes winced at the methods Special Agent Mulder employed to get to the truth. Here though, in their own apartment, and at this particular meeting, Skinner was Guardian of the House and Mulder was his slave – and he was happy enough to be just that.

Skinner opened the meeting by filling in the Members on what had happened to Lee. There was some murmuring around the table, and then Skinner outlined the substance of his conversation with Franklin earlier in the evening. The meeting erupted at that until Skinner brought them to order.

"I haven't asked you here to just sit and chew over what happened – I need to know what action to take about Franklin," he said firmly. "Does anyone here know anything about him? As Lee won't testify, are there any other skeletons in his closet that we can use to force him out of the scene, or to frighten him enough to keep him in line so that he doesn't hurt anyone else?"

"I've heard rumors..." A shy, slight, blond haired man piped up. "I don't know if they're true, but..."

"Fill us in, Ben." Skinner nodded.

"Franklin says he came here on business, but I heard he got into trouble like this in another town, and when he was challenged...well, let's just say that the guy who accused him turned up dead in a dumpster a few days later."

"Was Franklin investigated by the police?" Skinner demanded.

"Yes – but he always has an alibi. Someone else said he knows trained killers. Assassins. He pays them to do his dirty work for him." Mulder's ears pricked up at that. He couldn't hear the word 'assassin' without thinking of Alex Krycek – and that reminded him of Krycek's visit earlier in the evening. How long before Krycek visited him again, as promised? A day? A week? And what would he do if Mulder refused to investigate the UFO this time, as he had the last time? **Should** he investigate it? Last time he had refused, Gibson had been taken. Who would be taken next? Scully? Skinner? He glanced up at his Master, his heart beating fast in his chest. He couldn't bear to lose either of his two closest friends. Without Scully and Skinner he would be lost. Losing Samantha had been hard enough - he couldn't go through that kind of pain again. This was the reason why he didn't get involved with people, but somehow both Scully and Skinner had snuck in under his defenses when he wasn't looking, and had colonized their own special niches in his heart – and now both Krycek and Franklin threatened that. His anger, never far below the surface, bubbled back up to the surface and he felt himself tensing under his Master's casually caressing hand as the big man idly stroked his hair.

Mulder listened with a growing sense of dismay as all the House members had their say. It was all so much **talk**. People were happy enough to go on and on endlessly about what had happened, what the ramifications were, and how horrifying it all was, but they ignored Skinner's repeated request that they discuss what action could, realistically, be taken. They preferred to wail and indulge their own sense of drama rather than find a solution. Mulder wondered how much it really **mattered** to any of them. Lee wasn't popular, and what had happened to him was removed and abstract – they hadn't had to see the immediate aftermath of it as Mulder had. Lee's fear and his injuries weren't even real to them – and neither were Franklin's threats.

When the Members did discuss a course of action none of them could agree on anything. Mulder watched the meeting disintegrate, his anger levels rising by the second. Skinner was allowing them all to have their say, which he was sure to his Master's credit, but it wasn't getting them anywhere. Mulder noticed some subtle differences between the way his Master acted as Guardian and the way he behaved as AD of the FBI. As the latter he demanded a considerable amount from his trained, paid agents, and didn't hesitate to come down hard on them if they didn't give him the information he required, but he trod far more carefully as Guardian. Mulder wished that the AD **would** make an appearance, and bark out a few orders, but Skinner was being scrupulously diplomatic in his role as Guardian.

"Where is Lee? Can we talk to him? How do we even know his accusations are true?" One of the House Members asked.

"Lee is very scared right now. I'd rather not call him unless it's absolutely necessary," Skinner said.

"Well I think it **is** necessary," someone else pressed.

"Oh, for god's sake – the boy is scared enough as it is," Ian replied. "Walter's told us all we need to know."

"Lee's a notorious liar."

"Someone stuffed a bottle up the kid's ass – he's not lying about that – there's medical evidence to prove it. And Franklin's his Master so I don't think it's very likely that anybody else did it," Ian snapped.

"We have no real proof..." Another Member chimed in.

"Don't we? This isn't the first person Franklin's played rough with." That was Hammer. Everybody joined in at that point, and the room was filled with angry voices.

"Even if that's the case, Lee might have consented to it. Everybody has their own sexual fantasy..."

"I think that's a good point. We might be interfering in what is essentially a private matter between Master and slave. We're not here to question anyone's preferences after all."

"I don't see how you can say..."

"That's not what I'm saying – what I'm saying is..."

"OH, FOR GOD'S SAKE!" Mulder exploded, his voice cutting through the cacophony of voices like a knife. He got to his feet, utterly unable to stay still for a moment longer. "Lee isn't lying – and if you let Franklin get away with this then you might as well disband the House as being nothing more than a talking shop. Walter's asked you for suggestions for action. He's got a kid upstairs who is scared witless for his life, and he's turning to you guys for help. If you're not going to be any fucking use then get the hell out of here and let Walter handle it on his own – but don't fucking carp that he didn't consult you because he sure as hell tried."

There was a long, horrified silence, and then Skinner turned to his slave, and said, in the softest tones.

"Fox, I want you to go upstairs to our bedroom, get out the black paddle from the top drawer of my dresser, undress, and then wait for me. I'll be along when I've finished with the meeting and you know what you can expect."

Mulder swallowed hard. He glanced around at the assembled people who were still gazing at him with shocked expressions, and then back at his Master. Skinner's face was set in a grim, granite mask, and his eyes were deadly serious. Mulder was aware that he had just made everything worse for his Master, and that was something he truly regretted. He bowed his head at Skinner, muttered a hasty "Yes, Master," and quickly exited the room. He caught Ian's eye as he went, and his friend made a sympathetic little face at him, which cheered him slightly. At least Ian wasn't mad at him – as his Master had every right to be.

Mulder walked slowly up the stairs to the bedroom, his heart thumping in his chest. He was still angry – but angry with himself this time. Skinner had offered him a voice – on more than one occasion - but he'd turned it down. His Master had allowed him to attend the meeting in his capacity of slave, but even that had been an indulgence on Skinner's part – and one that Mulder had royally fucked up. Mulder sat numbly on the bed. He didn't regret what he'd said – it had only been the truth, but he was aware that not only had he not had the right to say it but also he certainly hadn't had the right to say it in the **way** he had. When he remembered the skilful way in which Skinner had been chairing the meeting, how diplomatic he had been, how he'd listened to everyone's arguments, Mulder felt ashamed. He deserved this punishment – and he had a feeling it was going to be a hard one.

With his stomach churning, he went over to the dresser and opened it. Skinner had chosen this particular paddle deliberately - and Mulder knew why. It wasn't one his Master used very often; he kept it in the drawer for those occasions when Mulder was doing corner time in the bedroom. If he fidgeted, Skinner would give him one swat with the black paddle and that would be enough to remind his slave to stand still in position. His Master had never actually delivered a whole spanking with the paddle – just one swat here or there – and those swats stung so much that Mulder had always been heartily grateful that his Master didn't use this particular implement to deliver more than one swat at a time. Mulder sat on the bed, and examined the paddle. It was made of wood, covered in rubber, and there were holes drilled in the surface to allow it to travel through the air more swiftly and thereby pack more of a punch. Mulder felt his stomach do a little somersault. This wouldn't be a cozy little erotic spanking – it was going to hurt - but what hurt most was knowing that he had disappointed his Master and made his job as Guardian more difficult. Mulder was fairly sure that Skinner was busy smoothing over the results of his slave's outburst, being his usual urbane, diplomatic self. Mulder had seen Skinner in full diplomacy mode at the office often enough to know how good his Master was at it – and he had been the subject of enough dressing downs when they were alone together afterwards to know, also, how much Skinner hated being put in the position of apologizing to people he loathed. No matter how good he was at doing it, it always took its toll.

Mulder stared at the paddle for a long time, coming to terms both with his actions and the impending punishment. Finally he got undressed, and waited for his Master to come and give him what he deserved. He heard sounds downstairs, and voices by the door, and then there was silence. Several minutes passed and then more voices, and the sound of the door being opened and shutting again. Then, a few seconds later, he heard footsteps on the stairs. He got up, and knelt by his Master's side of the bed, waiting for him in the submissive position, shoulders back, eyes down. He heard Skinner come into the room, followed by the sound of a deep heartfelt sigh. Mulder steeled himself, offering the

paddle in front of his body with his outstretched hands. A few seconds later he heard his Master cross the room towards him, and he closed his eyes, his stomach churning at the thought of what was to come. Skinner's thighs came into Mulder's field of vision as his Master sat down on the bed, and then he felt a gentle hand on his hair.

"Fox," Skinner said softly.

Mulder looked up, a little surprised by his Master's tone. "I'm sorry, Master," he said swiftly. "I'm so fucking sorry. I screwed everything up for you down there. It isn't as if you didn't give me a chance to contribute but I turned it down so I had no right to lose it like that down there."

"Fox, come here." Skinner held out his arms, and Mulder stared at him, blankly. "Now," Skinner said quietly.

Mulder got up and walked into his Master's arms. He stood between Skinner's open thighs, and Skinner wrapped his arms around his slave's body and hugged him close. Mulder looked down on his Master's large, bunched shoulders in surprise, and then returned the hug. He held Skinner tight, and kissed his Master's head. Finally, Skinner released him, and patted the bed. "Sit beside me," he ordered.

Mulder did as he was told, handing Skinner the paddle as he sat. "You've forgotten this," he said.

"No. I haven't." Skinner brushed the paddle away, took his slave's face between his hands instead, and kissed him soundly on the lips. "You only said exactly what I was thinking. I can't punish you for that," he said when he drew back.

"But I didn't have the right to say it," Mulder pointed out.

"Ah well." Skinner shrugged.

"And I made things worse for you – that's something I'm truly sorry for, Walter. It was a difficult enough situation in there for you as it was."

"It doesn't matter." Skinner shrugged again.

"Yes it does. I didn't have the right to..."

"Fox – you were protecting me, and you were saying what you thought. I respect you for that." Skinner put a hand on his slave's neck and squeezed gently.

"Shit. Did you have to do a lot of fast talking when I'd gone to smooth it all over?" Mulder asked, leaning his face wretchedly against his Master's shoulder.

"As a matter of fact – no. I told them that while you had no right to say what you did, I agreed with every word. Then I went around the table and gave each of them 2 minutes to give me a suggested course of action, rather than to just endlessly rehash all the same old arguments. At the end of it I asked them to vote on the various suggestions – including one that I deal with the matter in whatever way I see fit – and that they give me their full support and trust to do so."

"That's the one they all voted for, isn't it?" Mulder glanced up at his Master.

Skinner smiled down on him, wearily. "How did you guess?"

"So now you're landed with the difficult decision."

"I always was." Skinner shrugged. "But at least I have the comfort of knowing that they support me 100% in whatever action I decide to take."

"Without knowing what it is? Either they must really trust you or they just wanted to pass the buck."

Skinner chuckled. "Well, I was being rather stern down there after you left – and as most of them are subs...well, I guess that was a little underhand of me."

"Hmm, that's not playing very fair, Walter." Mulder dug his finger into his Master's ribs. "I know how impressive you can be in stern mode. No wonder they trust you to figure this whole mess out."

"They mean well. They're all good people. It's just hard getting a whole bunch of folks to agree on one course of action – especially in a situation as difficult as this one. At the end of the day I guess I always knew I was on my own with it."

"Not exactly on your own," Mulder said softly.

Skinner put his arm around Mulder's shoulder and pulled him close. "No - in fact, not remotely on my own. Ian and Hammer and a couple of the others stayed back to talk more calmly after the rest had gone – but it's your opinion I value most. You're the smartest guy I know, after all." He smiled at his slave again and Mulder gave a little snort.

"Flattery will get you everywhere – but you already know what I think. If you let Franklin get away with this then the House, the whole being Guardian gig, and everything Andrew left you – then it's all just worthless posturing."

"And yet, as one of the most senior agents in the biggest law enforcement agency in the world, I'm the last person who could sanction taking the law into my own hands just because it's expedient," Skinner sighed.

"Nobody said being the one in charge was easy." Mulder kissed his Master on the lips, a slow, deep kiss, and then sat back on the bed. "But we'll figure out something together. Right now you need some sleep though. With all due respect, Master, you look like shit." Skinner had dark shadows under his eyes that told of the strain of the past week or so.

"Thank you, boy. You're looking a little weary yourself."

"I'm not carrying the weight of responsibility that you are. You need some rest – but first." Mulder handed his Master the paddle. "You have a punishment to mete out, Master."

"I don't want to do this, Fox," Skinner frowned, staring at the paddle.

"I know, but you have to." Mulder gave a wry smile. "I was in the wrong down there and you know it. You've spanked me for a lot less before. I do know I deserve it, and, frankly, I'd like the closure if I'm not going to be beating myself up about it for the rest of my life."

Skinner stared at his slave for a long moment and then let out a heartfelt sigh. "All right. I, of all people, can understand that. Six is all you're getting though, Fox. They'll hurt enough with this as it is, so don't think I'm being lenient on you."

"No, Master." Mulder arranged himself over his Master's knees and closed his eyes, waiting for the first swat. He felt Skinner rest the paddle on his buttocks for a moment then there was a loud swishing noise, followed by an explosion of stinging pain in his backside. He gave a strangled yelp.

"That's one." Skinner soothed his back gently for a moment. "Take your time to get your breath back. This paddle hurts like hell."

"Tell me about it," Mulder croaked.

Skinner chuckled and tousled his slave's hair. "All right, little one, prepare yourself," Skinner ordered. Mulder moved his right arm and gripped onto his Master's leg with his hand. A second later there was a little draft of air on his already burning bottom, a loud crack as the paddle made impact with his ass, and then a fierce wave of pain kicked in. Mulder couldn't help yelling out loud. Again Skinner waited until the after-shock had subsided. He stroked Mulder's burning butt with tender fingers.

"You're doing well, Fox. I'm proud of you. I always am. When you threw yourself at Franklin today and I had to haul you back – you were just doing what I wanted to do, and when you said what you did in the meeting I agreed with every word."

"I'm sorry I can't control my temper more," Mulder whispered, turning, and burying his face in his Master's side.

"Ah, but then how would I look calm and reasonable by comparison, hmm?"

Mulder was in mid-chuckle over that joke when another swat took him by surprise.

"FUCK!" He roared. "That wasn't funny, Master."

"It wasn't supposed to be. I believe this is a punishment, Fox," Skinner replied, tousling his slave's hair fondly.

"Don't remind me. I'm already regretting being all noble and insisting on it," Mulder grouched. "Next time I do that, just ignore me."

"You know you'll feel better for the punishment." Skinner brought the fourth stroke down sharply on his slave's backside and Mulder almost flipped off his Master's knee. Skinner hadn't been kidding about it hurting like hell – when applied seriously like this, rather than as just a casually aimed swat when he was standing in the corner, this particular paddle was vicious.

"Oh shit...oh shit." Mulder clung weakly to his Master's leg while Skinner rearranged him back over his knee. "Couldn't we call it a day at four, Master?" He asked.

Skinner gave a wry smile, and stroked his slave's sweaty hair. "No, we couldn't. I said six – and you and I both know that you'll fret more if I don't give you the full amount than if I do. Besides – you're right. You do deserve them." He ignored Mulder's look of abject misery, and raised his hand again. "All right, slave, let's get this over with. Two more – one after the other, quickly, to finish it."

It didn't matter that Mulder immediately protested that he couldn't take two in swift succession – Skinner banged then down, hard and fast, one on top of the other, and then it was over...and Mulder was left a panting, gasping, sweat-sodden heap on his Master's lap.

"Fuck," he whispered pathetically.

Skinner laughed. He gathered his slave up in his arms, and held him tight against his chest, and then he kissed Mulder noisily and extravagantly over and over again on his face.

"Yeuch...I'm not Wanda!" Mulder protested.

"Aw, but you're just as cute and kissable." Skinner spent the next few minutes bestowing dozens of kisses on his slave's face, covering every inch from his forehead to his chin, including his eyelids. Mulder felt too weak to struggle – and anyway he was enjoying it, ridiculous though it was. Finally Skinner pushed him back over his knee.

"Oh god. No more please! You said six!" Mulder pointed out.

"Relax." His Master slapped him on his bottom – not too hard but he was so sore he yelped anyway. "I'm going to cool you down a bit." Mulder heard his Master open his nightstand drawer, and, a second later something freezing landed on his ass.

"Shiiiiit," Mulder commented succinctly.

"It's lotion. Your ass will feel better in a moment. Hold still, I want to enjoy fondling my boy's glowing red bottom. Mmmmm!"

Mulder relaxed and enjoyed the sensation of his Master rubbing the cool lotion into his warm buttocks. Skinner stroked him for a long time, and then he opened Mulder's legs a little way and inserted a finger inside him. Mulder moaned and opened his legs even further. Another finger opened him up some more and then the endorphins kicked in, and he felt as if he were floating. He knew there was something he was supposed to tell his Master but he wasn't sure what it was. Something about Franklin? No, something else had happened...earlier in the day...Krycek...that was it...Krycek...but he was enjoying being finger fucked too much to spoil the moment. All thought of Krycek was banished in the next instant as his Master pulled him up so that he was kneeling with his legs on either side of his Master's thighs, his body facing Skinner's. His Master undid his own pants, and positioned Mulder over his large, erect cock. He held Mulder's cooling buttocks open, and guided his slave down easily onto his penis. Mulder reveled in the feel of that hard cock, buried up to the root in his ass. They paused, and kissed for a long time, tongues clashing and devouring, Skinner's cock pulsing deep inside his slave's body, Mulder's arms wrapped around his Master as he rode him. This was a good position for post-spanking

anal sex, as Mulder's ass didn't have to touch any surface. He could just move up and down on his Master's large cock, with Skinner stroking his slave's erection in time to the rhythm, sucking on his slave's nipples as he did so, until they both came.

Afterwards Mulder sagged against his Master's chest. It was the first time Skinner had entered him since the mock-rape, and it felt so good.

"D'you think we could roll over and just go straight to sleep?" Mulder murmured wearily.

"Mmmm. Sounds good...but I'm still dressed," Skinner muttered in reply.

"We don't have to move do we? We could just stay like this all night, couldn't we?" Mulder said, wrapping his arms even more tightly around his Master's shoulders.

"Sure," Skinner replied drowsily.

They stayed there for a long time, just enjoying the moment, Skinner's hands lightly cupping his slave's sore bottom, his soft cock still lodged within his slave's body, their faces resting against each other. Mulder would happily have stayed there forever but they were interrupted by a knock at the door.

"Oh shit. Lee," Skinner muttered. "Hold on, Lee," he called, disengaging himself from Mulder, and tucking his cock back into his pants. Mulder rolled onto the bed with a groan, and then rolled over again – quickly – with a hiss, as his sore ass made contact with the mattress. He watched as Skinner opened the door, and Lee sidled in. He was wearing one of Skinner's tee shirts and a pair of Mulder's boxer shorts, and both were far too big for him. He looked all washed and clean, like a little kid at bedtime.

"Sorry...I just..." Lee hopped from one foot to the other, his eyes wide and pathetic.

"What is it, Lee?" Skinner asked patiently.

"I can't sleep. I'm scared to be on my own," Lee whispered.

"We're just across the hallway."

"I know. But please...can't I sleep in here? I'll be very quiet. You won't even know I'm here."

Skinner sighed, and glanced at Mulder who shrugged. Skinner turned back to Lee.

"All right, Lee. You can sleep in here – but on the floor, and just for tonight. We'll talk about this in the morning. Go and get your pillow and blanket and bring them in here."

Lee's face broke into a wide smile and he ran to do as he had been bidden. Skinner looked at Mulder.

"Not a word," he said.

"I wasn't going to say anything!" Mulder protested. Skinner raised an eyebrow at him, and started walking towards their en suite bathroom. "Big softie," Mulder said sotto voice at his Master's departing back.

"I heard that!" Skinner growled.

"So spank me," Mulder riposted with a grin.

Lee returned to the bedroom with his pillow and blanket, which he arranged on the floor on Skinner's side of the bed.

"Uh huh." Mulder gestured to the foot of the bed. Lee glared at him for a moment, and then moved his bedding as ordered.

"I see someone's been in trouble," he said snidely, glancing at Mulder's red ass. "Maybe your Master would prefer a slave who'd give him fewer problems," he commented, in a meaningful tone.

"What - you mean like you?" Mulder grinned. "Forgive me for not feeling remotely threatened by that remark."

Lee flushed, and muttered something angrily under his breath, but then Skinner came back into the room, and the kid's expression changed to one of sweetness and light. Mulder rolled his eyes, and slid under the bedcovers. His Master joined him a second later, and switched off the light.

"Don't snore, Lee," Mulder called. Skinner poked him in the ribs. "My Master needs all the beauty sleep he can get," Mulder added.

Skinner gave a low growl and placed the flat of his hand over his slave's still burning buttocks. "Anything you'd like to add to that comment?" Skinner asked quietly.

"Uh. No." Mulder grinned. He grabbed his Master's free hand and pulled it over to rest on his own stomach. He was just about to fall asleep when he came to with a start. Krycek. Oh shit. He still hadn't told Skinner about Krycek but he wasn't about to do it with Lee lying on the floor so it would just have to wait until the morning...

Mulder woke early the next day to find that his ass was hanging out over the side of the bed. He felt cramped - as if he was about to fall, and on opening his eyes and looking around he figured out why. At some point during the night Lee must have crept into the bed, because the kid's lithe, slender body was curled up beside Skinner, and his Master, unwittingly, or perhaps by Lee's design, had one big arm slung protectively over the youth. Mulder stared at them for a moment, fighting down a wave of jealousy. He was pretty sure that Skinner didn't even know Lee was in the bed with them - his Master was a notoriously heavy sleeper and even Mulder hadn't woken when Lee had crawled in beside them. Even so, the sight of his Master cozied up so intimately with another man upset him. The truth was that they'd never talked about whether their relationship was exclusive or not. Skinner had made it clear that Mulder wasn't to have another lover - but the terms of their contract didn't exclude Skinner from taking another slave. Skinner had told him often enough that Mulder was more than enough for him to handle, but that didn't mean that his Master couldn't choose to have a casual fuck with anyone else he wanted - and Lee was eminently available right now. He was also at least 10 years younger than Mulder and exquisitely beautiful. Mulder gazed at the sleeping men for a while, and then, with a sigh, slid out from the bed. He didn't want to wake his Master by dislodging Lee - Skinner had been looking so tired the previous night and he needed his sleep - but all the same, he couldn't stay in the same bed knowing Lee was there too. Mulder grabbed some clothes and his sneakers, and took them along to the bathroom in

order to get dressed. He wasn't sure what to do next – and he didn't have time to think about it because there was a letter waiting for him downstairs - one that had been pushed under the door during the night. Mulder opened it, frowning.

*"This time you don't have to go as far as Oregon. There's a UFO hovering near Richmond. You can drive there. Head out for Charlottesville, and keep to the back roads - you should find what you're looking for. Don't fuck this one up, Mulder. You're about to make the biggest discovery of your life. AK."*

Charlottesville. It wouldn't take him more than a couple of hours to drive there...He thought of his Master, with the new slave on the block wrapped up in his big arms, sleeping like a baby upstairs. He could leave a note. Skinner didn't even need to know until he got back...always presuming he did get back. Mulder pulled on his sneakers, and watched as Wanda idly played with the laces as he tried to tie them. She batted them with her paws, and then got hold of one in her teeth and pulled vigorously. He wrested it away from her, in no mood to play, then got up, grabbed a pen and a piece of paper, and wrote a note.

*"Gone for a run. Be back later. Fox."*

He crumpled Krycek's note in his fist and threw it in the trash. He'd made this decision once. He didn't need to make it again.

It felt good to be out jogging. He loved the feel of the wind in his hair. It was turning cold, the first chill of Winter just starting to set in, and Mulder relished the way it stung in his lungs, making him feel very alive. His footsteps took him, as they so often did when he went jogging, to the waterfront at Alexandria. He came here partly because it was so beautiful, and partly because it was where he had once lived, before his slavery, and he had an affection for the place. He ran beside the river for a while, watching the sunlight glint on the water, but his mind was elsewhere: in Charlottesville to be precise. It would be so easy to go there but he was intrigued as to why he wasn't even vaguely tempted this time. The last time Krycek had contacted him with this information had been some kind of turning point. He wouldn't be going to Charlottesville. He had enough to deal with right here in Washington. His priorities had, at some point, subtly shifted. He still wanted to know what had happened to his sister, but he was no longer prepared to risk his own life rashly and needlessly in order to find out. His life had become worth much more to him than it once had. He had a reason for living now. Having mulled over that for a while, and come to terms with these new emotions, Mulder headed back to Crystal City. He was halfway there when his cell phone rang. He slowed to a walk so he could answer the call.

"You got my note." Krycek.

"Yes, I did."

"And can I take it that as you're out jogging you've decided not to go to Charlottesville?" Krycek asked.

"How did you kn...oh forget it," Mulder sighed. He should have known that Krycek would be watching him. "No, Krycek. I told you last time, I'm not playing your game anymore. I won't be going after any UFOs, or any sightings of my sister, or any top secret documents or tapes that I have to break into high security air force bases to steal so that you can then arrange to have them stolen from me."

"Pity. It's always been so much fun throwing you a bone and watching you fetch it." Krycek sounded as if he was enjoying this. "It's unfortunate, because I **was** hoping we could do this the old fashioned way. Still, there are other ways of making a dog wag its tail."

"What do you mean?" Mulder slowed to a halt, his heart pounding painfully in his chest.

"I mean that I was given orders to get you to Charlottesville one way or another - so that's exactly what I'm doing. There's somebody here who'd like to talk to you...oh, no, wait - I had to gag him because he was swearing and cussing at me, and calling me every name under the sun. It was so hurtful. Here's someone else instead." Mulder pressed his hand into the stitch that had suddenly developed in his side.

"F..Fox?" A hesitant voice came on the line.

"Lee?"

"What's going on? Who is this guy? He..."

"That's enough." Krycek's voice came back on the line. "Get your ass to Charlottesville, Mulder, and I'll let Big Daddy and his new slave boy go, but if you don't..."

Mulder didn't stay still for long enough to hear the rest. He had already started running the remaining distance back to Crystal City at top speed.

Mulder wasn't sure what he was thinking but he knew he had to get back to the apartment. He considered calling Scully as he ran - he also thought about calling the FBI for back up agents, but he decided against it. He couldn't afford for anyone to get trigger-happy - not with his Master's life at stake. He covered the distance back to Crystal City faster than he had ever made it before, ran up the stairs because he couldn't wait for the elevator, and then crashed through the front door.

"Walter!" He yelled. He glanced into the living room, but it was empty. "Master!" He bounded up the stairs, and into the bedroom...and then came sliding to a halt, raising his hands in the air as he did so. "Master?"

Skinner was lying on the bed on his side. There was a bruise and raised lump on his forehead, and a large ball gag in his mouth that had been fastened so tightly it had split his lip open, causing a trail of blood to run down his chin. He looked dazed. His wrists were handcuffed together in front of him, and attached to the headboard of the bed with a length of chain. Lee was sobbing in the corner of the room, his hands and legs tied together - and Krycek was standing beside the bed, his gun pointed loosely at Skinner's groin.

"I would have pointed it at his head - but I thought you'd be more worried about him losing this portion of his anatomy," Krycek grinned. "So much more important than his brain, don't you think? To you at least."

"Let them go." Mulder took a step forward and Krycek removed the safety catch with a loud click.

"I wouldn't, Mulder. Not unless you want to be slave to a eunuch. As for letting them go - I will - just as soon as you're safely in Charlottesville. All you have to do is drive there. My sources will tell me when you arrive and I'll let your Master and his new fuck-toy go. That's all there is to it."

"I'm surprised you didn't just abduct me and take me there yourself," Mulder growled.

"I considered it." Krycek inclined his head. "But this way is better. You can take a horse to water after all, but you can't make him drink. This way you'll drink. Or at least you will if you want to see your Master alive again."

Mulder glanced at Skinner. His Master's face was pale, and he was looking at Mulder mutely, his brown eyes communicating some kind of message but it wasn't one that Mulder could decipher. Mulder couldn't stand to see his Master looking like this - bound and hurt. It was a travesty of what was between them, and the way they led their lives. As he watched, Skinner shook his head slowly, almost imperceptibly. He didn't want Mulder to go to Charlottesville - but what else could he do?

"What's so important about Charlottesville?" Mulder asked in despair. "Why do you want me to investigate these UFO's so badly Krycek?"

"Oh, it isn't me." Krycek gave a taut, faded smile. "It's someone else. They want to meet you, take you for a little spin in their ship, Mulder."

"Their ship?" Mulder frowned. "Are we talking about an alien abduction scenario here, Krycek?"

"That's what you'll find out in Charlottesville. I wouldn't want to ruin the surprise." Krycek waved his gun negligently in the air and Mulder flinched. "You know, I was so surprised when I came up here after you went jogging," Krycek murmured silkily. "I was expecting to find Big Daddy here, all alone, missing his slave, and instead I found he hadn't wasted any time in filling the gap in his bed. I'm surprised - somehow, knowing you as I do, Mulder, I wouldn't have thought you'd take kindly to having to **share** your Master's attention with someone else. You always need so much attention for yourself, after all."

"You don't know what you're talking about, Krycek."

"You're right. I don't know. There must be a lot of things I don't know, Mulder - such as why you'd pass up the biggest opportunity in your life - the chance to witness the proof of extra terrestrial life at first hand - on the order of a man who has already replaced you with a younger, prettier slaveboy."

Mulder glanced at Lee, whose eyes were wide with fright. *Out of the frying pan, into the fire, kid*, Mulder thought grimly to himself. Lee had escaped Franklin's clutches just to end up in the hands of someone equally, if not more, dangerous.

He looked back at his Master. Skinner's eyes were dark with pain. He shook his head again, to deny Krycek's words - but Mulder didn't need his denial.

"They were both fast asleep, lying in each other's arms. It was adorable - or should that be sick and perverted? I don't know." Krycek gave a theatrical shrug. "Anyway, it was an easy matter to knock the big bad Master unconscious. He didn't even know what was happening. The kid just screamed his head off so I guess he's even more of a faggot than you are. One of the good things about this place is that I

didn't even have to bring my own equipment to tie up my hostages with." Krycek smirked. "There were already some convenient lengths of chain attached to the headboard, and handcuffs **everywhere**. If only all my jobs were this simple." He grinned at the prone Skinner and then turned his attention back to Mulder again. "Are you still here, Mulder? You should be in Charlottesville. Run along, there's a good pup. You can have your Master and this screaming little idiot back when you've done as you're told."

Mulder wasn't listening. He hadn't taken his eyes off his Master throughout Krycek's speech. Skinner could move his hands - not very far, as they were fastened to the bed, but he could move them a little within the confines of his bonds. His Master, very slowly, made his right hand flat, and then gestured it towards the floor. It was a subtle gesture, but it was one Mulder was very familiar with. It was the non-verbal signal that his slave should lie flat on the floor. Mulder had been trained to obey those signals instinctively, on sight, and he found himself sinking down without even thinking about it.

Comprehension kicked in as got halfway down and he wondered what Skinner had planned next and what he expected his slave to do in order to make sure it worked. Time slowed down and he watched in slow motion, his knees hitting the floor, as Skinner suddenly moved his bound legs off the bed, and delivered a powerful kick to the back of Krycek's knees. Krycek, distracted, by Mulder's sudden lunge towards the carpet, didn't notice the kick until it was too late. He staggered, and Mulder, completing his downward dive, was able to pull their already off-balance attacker onto the carpet beside him. Krycek still had the gun, but Mulder had something more important - a fierce instinct to protect his Master, whatever the cost, even with his own life if need be. He saw Krycek swing the gun up - not at him, but at Skinner - and then heard a roar of sheer rage that reverberated in his ears. He wasn't even aware that the sound came from his own throat. All he could see was that gun, pointed at his Master's head, and Krycek's finger tightening on the trigger. Krycek glanced at Mulder, gave an evil grin, then took aim.

"Say goodbye to Daddy, Mulder," he hissed.

Mulder gave a hoarse cry, and threw himself bodily at Krycek, in an attempt to dislodge the assassin's aim. The gun went off with a loud bang. From somewhere in the corner, Mulder heard a frightened scream, but he took no notice because a wave of sheer despair was sweeping through him, together with the dull certainty of one thing: Krycek had killed his Master. His old enemy had robbed him of the one thing he loved with his entire being, and now his rage, compounded by an agony so strong it cut into his gut like a knife, knew no bounds. He leapt on Krycek, and brought his fist down on the other man's face. One punch, delivered with all the anguish and passion in Mulder's heart, knocked Krycek out cold. Mulder wrested the gun from his enemy's nerveless fingers, and then turned, his heart in his mouth, to see whether his Master was still alive.

Skinner's eyes were wide open – and he was breathing. Mulder ran to him, and removed the gag from his Master's mouth. It was tied far too tight, and Mulder had to pull the straps even tighter before he could undo them. He fumbled for a moment, before managing to pull the gag free.

"Are you okay? Did it hit you?" He demanded.

Skinner shook his head. "Over my shoulder..." He gestured at a hole in the wall behind him. The bullet had missed his Master by a matter of inches. Mulder took a deep breath, and sat down on the side of the bed as his legs almost gave way beneath him.

"Thank god. I thought he'd killed you. I thought..."

"Stop thinking and get me untied before he wakes up," Skinner commanded. "The keys to the cuffs are in Krycek's pocket."

Mulder nodded, fighting off a sudden desire to laugh hysterically. He found the keys, and undid his Master. Skinner's wrists and ankles were chafed - Krycek had clearly been as gentle with the cuffs as he had been with the gag. Skinner used the discarded handcuffs to restrain Krycek, while Mulder untied Lee. Then Skinner pulled on some sweats and went to check on the young man who had unwittingly been caught up in a drama that had nothing to do with him.

"Are you okay, Lee?" He asked softly, crouching in front of the kid.

"I dunno. Who the fuck is that?" Lee asked, still clearly terrified.

"He's an old enemy." Mulder stood up, and glanced down at their still unconscious nemesis. "Walter, I'm sorry. I was meaning to tell you but there was never a right time. Krycek contacted me yesterday evening. He said there was another UFO he wanted me to investigate. When I woke up this morning, there was a note from him. I threw it in the trash and went out jogging. I didn't think he'd do anything like this. I was going to tell you about it when I got back but I wanted to let you sleep. I know how shitty last night was for you. Both of you." He glanced at Lee, and shrugged.

"We'll talk about this later." Skinner glanced meaningfully at his slave and Mulder nodded. "Are you both okay?"

"I'm fine." Mulder placed his hands on his Master's face and moved it so that he could examine the lump on Skinner's forehead. "You might have a concussion though."

"No. I'm okay." Skinner brushed his slave's concern aside. "Lee - we'll discuss what you were doing in the bed another time. For now, get washed and dressed and wait in your bedroom." Lee nodded, ashen faced, and scurried towards the door. "Lee," Skinner stopped him. "It's fine. Don't worry about it. You're safe now. It's over. Understood?"

Lee glanced at Krycek, and then back at Skinner, his face pale. He couldn't bring himself to nod and just stumbled from the room. Skinner sighed.

"What do we do with him?" Mulder looked at Krycek, and then at his Master. Skinner was only wearing sweat pants, and his bare chest was rising and falling heavily as he stood over their enemy.

"I'm not sure," Skinner mused. His hand tightened on the gun - a gesture that didn't go un-noticed by Mulder.

"When I saw him last night, he said that you were one of the good guys so you wouldn't follow up on the threats you made to him," Mulder said softly, never taking his eyes off his Master's gun. "He said his friends would never allow him to stay in jail, so he'll never face justice that way. Basically, he thinks our hands are tied - that we can't do a fucking thing to stop him showing up in our lives whenever he wants."

"It sure as hell looks that way." Skinner crouched down in front of their enemy, and stared at him intently.

"Is that it? You mean we just let him go? Or maybe you punch him around a bit first to make us feel better and **then** we let him go?" Mulder said.

Skinner looked up at his slave. "No. I've tried that a couple of times before and it didn't work. I can't let him get away with this. I warned him - if I don't follow through on my warnings then we're at his mercy forever."

"Maybe we **are**," Mulder said savagely. "Maybe there's not one damn thing we can do about it, Walter."

Skinner's face was a cold mask as he stood up. "No," he said again, in a tone that sent a chill down Mulder's spine. He reached out, and put a hand on Mulder's shoulder, his fingers digging in painfully. He pulled Mulder close, and examined him with his hands, covering his slave's face, neck and body possessively. When he'd finished he wrapped his arms around his slave with a sigh, and buried his face in Mulder's hair, inhaling the scent deeply. "Thank god you're all right," he whispered. "I thought I'd lost you. I thought you might go to Charlottesville in order to save me and never come back - and then, when you were struggling with him on the floor and the gun went off - I thought he'd killed you. Oh Christ. I thought he'd killed you."

He squeezed Mulder so tight that the slave wasn't sure he could breathe - and he wasn't sure he cared either. He was just so glad that his Master was alive and well enough to hold him. "That's why I can't let this go," Skinner whispered to him, his voice as cold as ice. "He came in here, knocked me out, tied me up, and held a gun on me. He used me to get to you, just as he once used you to get to me. He's violated our home on more than one occasion. He's shot at me with every intention of killing. He's more or less stalked you. He's been warned - more than once. No. I can't just let him go. It ends here, and it ends now."

"With the gun?" Mulder placed his hand over his Master's gun hand. "I don't believe you could shoot a man in cold blood, Walter. Not even him. Could you?" He looked his Master in the eye for a long time. Skinner's eyes were so dark and angry that they made him shiver.

"I've killed men before," Skinner told him. "Plenty of times."

"In the heat of battle, and in the field - never execution style," Mulder pointed out.

"I could do it," Skinner told him in a low, hoarse tone. "I've done it before."

"I know - but what would it do to you?" Mulder asked, remembering the story his Master had once told him about the 10 year old boy strapped down with grenades who had walked into Skinner's camp in Vietnam, and who his Master had shot and killed. He knew that was a memory that still sometimes woke his Master screaming at night, even if Skinner rarely spoke about it. "There must be something else we can do to get him out of our lives. There has to be another option."

Skinner's jaw did a savage sideways clench. "I have an idea," he said softly, turning back to Krycek. He gazed down at the unconscious man. "Although I think he might prefer death to what I have in mind. He's kind of pretty wouldn't you say?" He said unexpectedly.

"What?" Mulder glanced at his Master in surprise. "You're going to add him to your harem as well as Lee?" He asked.

"Don't be stupid," Skinner snapped. "I'd sooner take a real snake to my bed than this viper in human form." He kicked Krycek with his foot, none too gently, and the prone man made a little groaning sound in the back of his throat.

"Then what?" Mulder asked.

Skinner put the safety catch back on the gun, and then tucked it into his sweatpants. "Let's just say that I think I have a way of killing two birds with one stone," he muttered grimly. "Tie him to the bed - you can be as gentle with him as he was with me. Then come downstairs." He turned on his heel and, with one last, bitterly assessing look at Krycek, left the room.

Mulder did as ordered and then followed his Master downstairs. Skinner was pouring himself a large glass of whisky - but he didn't drink it. Instead he stared at for a moment, before pouring it back into the bottle with a sigh.

"I need to be stone cold sober for this," he muttered, pouring himself a glass of water instead. He downed it in one gulp.

"For what?" Mulder put his hands on his Master's shoulders and looked him in the eye. "What are you planning on doing, Walter? Whatever it is, I'll be here with you. Just tell me what you want to do."

"No." Skinner looked his slave in the eye, and shook his head. "This is my decision. I won't involve you in it. I'm not telling you, not because I don't trust you, but because I won't make you complicit in what I do. I'll bear the burden of this alone."

"You don't need to," Mulder said softly. "Whatever you decide to do I'll back you up."

"Not on this. I don't want your back up. I don't want you to feel implicated, Fox."

"Christ, now you're scaring me, Walter. What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to make a call. Sit down, and don't talk." Skinner guided him to the couch and sat him on it. "I mean it," he told his slave fiercely. "Stay out of this, Fox...all I ask is that you're here to pick up the pieces when I'm done."

Mulder gazed at his Master in surprise. He had never heard Skinner talk like this before.

"You can count on it, Master," he stated.

"Thank you," Skinner said quietly. He picked up the phone, and then retrieved a card from the pile of papers related to House business that were still spread out on the table. He called a number, and then waited. "It's Skinner," he said. "I have a proposition for you. Be here in half an hour." And then he put the phone down. Mulder gazed at him steadily.

"I'm sure I should be one step ahead here, but I'm not. What are you planning on doing, Master?"

"A trade - and not a nice one. Stay here. I'm going to get properly dressed and then I'm going to tell Lee to stay in his room. When our guest arrives, you're to remain silent, Fox. Whatever I say, and whatever I do, I don't want you to be involved. You can be present, or you can go out. What do you want?"

"I'll stay. Whatever it is you're going to do, I'm going to be right beside you, complicit or not," Mulder said firmly.

"Thank you," his Master said again, in that same firm tone he'd used earlier. He disappeared up the stairs, leaving Mulder to puzzle what the hell was going on. Skinner reappeared twenty minutes later. He had clearly taken a shower as the fringe of hair on the back of his head was damp, and the blood on his chin had been washed away. He was wearing a black sweater and black chinos - and a black cloud that seemed to hang over him like a visible shadow. He would have looked totally hot if it hadn't been for an air of deadly danger that was so serious it went far beyond the erotic. Mulder had never seen his Master more grim-faced and utterly intent before. A few minutes later there was a buzz on the entry-phone.

"Stay here and don't say a word throughout," Skinner told his slave. "Can you do that?"

"Yes. I promise," Mulder replied.

"Good." Skinner grabbed his slave's face and bestowed a kiss on his lips. His Master's hands were cold and hard, and Mulder had an intuition that Skinner was about to do something that would have a profound effect on their lives. Skinner pulled away and went to answer the door, and a few seconds later returned with a man in tow. It was all Mulder could do to stop himself from getting up and asking what the hell was going on - because the man Skinner had invited into their home was Franklin.

Franklin took the seat Skinner offered, settling himself into an armchair opposite Mulder so that the agent had plenty of opportunity to examine their guest. Franklin wasn't as tall as Skinner, and he was well built - he clearly worked out and had hard, well-defined muscles. He had a swarthy complexion, and was dressed in tasteful clothes. His nose was aquiline and he was, by any standards, a handsome man. No wonder Lee had been so enamored of him.

"Well, Skinner. What is this proposition? I trust it involves the return of my slave?"

"No. I have something more...attractive than that for you," Skinner said smoothly. Mulder glanced at his Master, wondering what the hell he was getting at.

"And what is that?" Franklin asked.

"Lee is a nice looking kid, but let's face it, he isn't exactly more than a little bit of a brat, a little bit willful, is he?" Skinner said. "He isn't a challenge - he's easy."

Franklin frowned, clearly wondering, just like Mulder, where this was going.

"He's young - and a little malleable, I'll admit," Franklin murmured.

"What you'd like is the real thing; someone who would really fight you - someone who you'd have to **make** obey you. Someone with fire - someone dangerous," Skinner said.

Franklin smiled, and inclined his head. "I've never made any secret of my inclinations," he said.

"You want the thrill of taming someone. Someone wild. You don't want one of these eager little subs who'll beg to kiss your boots and enjoy the touch of your whip. You want someone you **really** have to subdue so that it would mean something to finally bring him down and make him submit to you. I have someone like that for you," Skinner said in a hard, flat voice.

The last piece of the jigsaw slotted into place for Mulder, and he stared at his Master open-mouthed - too shocked to speak even if he hadn't given his promise that he wouldn't.

"Is that so?" Franklin raised an eyebrow. "Who is this someone, and what is his price?"

"His price is that you leave town and never come back. In fact, I'd have to insist that you left the country - and took him with you."

"Would this...mystery slave be agreeable to such a thing?" Franklin asked.

"No, he wouldn't. However... you don't need to worry about kidnapping charges as nobody will come looking for this man."

"I can't imagine that any slave would be attractive enough to make me want to abandon my business affairs and leave the country," Franklin snapped.

"I agree. The slave is the carrot. The stick is this: if you stay I'll have your business dealings investigated. I'm sure that everything will turn out to be above board but I'm equally sure you can imagine how damaging it would be to your reputation to suffer an in-depth investigation by the FBI - to say nothing of the loss of trade suffered while we shut you down pending further inquiries."

"You wouldn't." Franklin gave Skinner a hard, assessing look.

"I would," Skinner replied flatly. "However, if you accept my offer then you can run your business from abroad - and you can appoint someone in this country to take care of it in your absence. You'll be busy anyway, breaking in your new slave."

"And what does he look like, this new slave? I won't waste my time on someone who isn't to my taste," Franklin said.

"Oh, I think you'll like this one. It's true that he's maimed - but I think you'll find that not only does that add to his charm, but also that it makes him a little easier to control. You're going to need that because he's very dangerous. If you let him off his leash for one second then he'll kill you. I mean that." Skinner leaned in close, his eyes deadly serious. Franklin gazed at him for a moment, and Mulder could see that Skinner had his complete attention. "I want to be very clear on this, Franklin, because I'm giving you a choice. You can have the FBI breathing down your neck for the rest of your life, and accept that the BDSM scene is more or less closed to you in this and any other city in the US, or you can take this slave and leave the country. Be in no doubt though - this man is dangerous. He **will** kill you if he gets the chance.

"Well you've laid your cards on the table. I can see that I under-estimated you, Mr. Skinner," Franklin murmured. "Can I see this person before I make my choice?"

"Of course. Fox - go and unchain Alex and bring him down here."

Mulder stood, gazing at Skinner steadily.

"Or if you would prefer not to, I'll get him," Skinner said. "That wasn't an order."

"No. I'll get him," Mulder said softly.

He went up the stairs and into the bedroom. Krycek was lying on the bed, his eyes open.

"About fucking time," he snapped when Mulder came in.

Mulder stared down at him for a moment, wondering how he felt about this. "Krycek, you stupid, sorry son of a bitch," he said, shaking his head. "He warned you, time and again."

"Oh, I'm **so** scared," Krycek snarled. "Mulder, you and I both know that all he's going to do is hang me up by my balls and punch me a few times. Then he's going to throw me out onto the street with a warning not to be a bad boy again. It'll hurt, sure, but I'll get over it, and then I'll be back to haunt you all over again. There's nothing else he can do - being who and what he is - and there's nothing else I can do, being who and what I am."

"He's more than you know. He's got a certain...responsibility," Mulder said, still gazing down on the captive man. Could he do this? Could he take Krycek down there, to face a future as Franklin's unwilling slave? Could he do that to anyone, even this man?

"Mulder, you stupid fucking faggot, you don't get it, do you? I'm always going to be with you, old friend. You're **never** going to get rid of me," Krycek hissed.

"Oh, I think we might have found a way," Mulder murmured, a grim resolve kicking in. He unfastened Krycek from the bed, hauled him to his feet, and then shoved him out of the bedroom, down the stairs, and into the living room. Franklin's head jerked up when he saw what they'd brought him and Mulder had to admit that Krycek did look the part. The assassin was dressed in a black tee shirt, black jeans, and a black leather jacket. The bruise on his jaw just made him seem all the more sexy and dangerous.

"Who the fuck is this?" Krycek growled looking at Franklin. His good arm was handcuffed behind his back to his prosthetic but he was safe enough within the bonds.

"This is your new Master," Skinner said softly. "I didn't like your old masters, Alex, so I've found you a new one. I don't suppose you'll find him any less demanding, but he will have a different agenda for you."

"What the fuck are you talking about, Skinner?" Krycek snarled.

"This." Skinner put an arm around Krycek's shoulder and led him into the corner of the room. Mulder was just close enough to overhear what was said.

"I'm giving you a choice, Alex – not a very nice one, but a choice nonetheless. This man is a brutal, abusive sadist, and he's looking for a new slave. Someone he can dominate, and hurt. If you agree then you can leave with him, and be his slave."

"Why the fuck would I agree to that?" Krycek asked.

"Because if you don't, then I'll kill you," Skinner said, in a quiet, deadly tone.

"What?" Krycek's head jerked up.

"Did you think I wouldn't? I told you before that there would be consequences. I accept that somehow you've managed to become above the law, and I accept that my only alternative is therefore to take care of you outside the law – which is the way you live your life, so presumably you must understand the risks. I will do it, Alex. Don't make any mistake about that. It might be kinder to put a bullet through the back of your head than hand you over to Franklin so I want you to think very carefully about this choice. He will treat you like a slave - a sex slave. He will beat you, and he will hurt you. He'll almost certainly rape you."

"You're bluffing, Skinner." Krycek drew back a little way and gazed at Skinner, clearly trying to see whether he was serious.

"No, I'm not. I just want you to be clear about what's on offer here, Alex. There's either the bullet – I'd make it quick, one bullet to the back of the head, you won't feel a thing - or there's Franklin. I've already told you what you can expect at his hands and I'm not lying. His last slave ended up in the hospital after Franklin rammed a bottle up his ass."

"You aren't serious." Krycek shook his head. "I **know** you, Skinner. I **know** how people like you behave. You might knock me around a little, but you won't kill me, and you sure as hell won't give me to this bastard."

"I can and I will," Skinner said quietly, in a tone of such deadly earnest that Krycek's eyes widened in shocked realization. "You see, you can push and push, but if you push too far then even people like me retaliate," Skinner told him. The arm he had around Krycek's shoulder tightened, almost affectionately. "I'm sorry, Alex. It isn't a choice I'd like to face myself – the instinct to survive is so strong that it overrides all other considerations, but I don't want you to be in any doubt about what will happen if you choose to live. Franklin will take you out of the country. While you might one day escape from him, I don't suppose it'll be any time soon – and a lot will happen to you during that time."

"You bastard." All the color drained from Krycek's face.

"Yes." Skinner nodded, accepting the insult. "So what's your decision, Alex?"

"I have to make it now?" Krycek glanced at Franklin, licking his lips nervously. The swarthy man returned the look with a lustful one of his own. Krycek turned back to Skinner.

"Yes, you do. We're not playing a game here, Alex. This is for real. What's your choice?"

"Oh, you already know what I've decided." Krycek's eyes burned with a dark kind of knowledge. "Not that it's really any kind of choice is it? Life or death – only one of them offers the option of escape so yeah, I'll take your twisted little deal. I'll say this for you, Skinner." He looked at Mulder's Master with a profound respect in his expression. "I never took you for a real player before but it's clear that I was wrong. I won't misjudge you again."

"You won't be coming back, Alex. This is a one-way ticket to hell. Next time there won't be a choice - there will just be the bullet," Skinner told him flatly. "No warnings, and no reprieve. You come anywhere near me or Fox, ever again, and I'll kill you without hesitation."

Krycek nodded, a grim understanding reflected in his green eyes. Skinner propelled him back towards Franklin.

"Your slave awaits - if you want him," he said to the other man. "You might want to inspect him further. He's missing his left arm but apart from that he is, I think you'll agree, an attractive proposition."

"Yes. Oh yes," Franklin purred. He made a circuit of Krycek, circling him like a tiger circling prey. He placed a hand on Krycek's ass, fondling him in a way that was both crude and intimate, and the assassin snarled and jerked away. Skinner pushed him back.

"You made your choice, boy. Live with it," he said. "It's going to get a lot worse than this."

"Definitely wild," Franklin murmured affectionately. He took a handful of Krycek's hair and pulled the assassin's head back, to examine his face. Krycek struggled, pointlessly, his bound arms offering him no escape from the inspection.

"You can see that he's going to be a challenge," Skinner commented.

"Yes. Oh yes," Franklin grinned. He slid his hand down the front of Krycek's jeans and the assassin gazed at Skinner with desperate eyes. Mulder watched as Skinner turned to look away, and then, by some great force of will, made himself turn back to witness his own handiwork. Krycek's jaw was clenched shut but his eyes gleamed with an intense revulsion as Franklin toyed with his cock.

"Make the most of it," Krycek hissed to his prospective new master. "Because every time you touch me I'll be keeping score in my head. I won't forget any of it and I'll make you pay one day. That's a promise."

"Ah, he **is** a fighter. I like that!" Franklin purred. He removed his hand from the front of Krycek's jeans, only to slide it around the back. "Is he a virgin?" He glanced at Skinner, who shrugged.

"I have no idea. I suggest you ask him – but not here. Make up your mind, and decide, Franklin, so that we can get this over with."

"He is very tempting." Franklin withdrew his hands regretfully and pondered Krycek, his head on one side, still circling. "Very pretty...very bad. I like bad boys, Alex," he murmured, stroking Krycek's cheek. "I like them very much." Krycek moved his head suddenly, without warning, and snapped his teeth at Franklin's fondling fingers, only narrowly missing them as Franklin pulled his hand away just in time.

"Oh yes," Franklin purred. "Yes. I must have him. He's beautiful. You have yourself a deal, Skinner."

"Do you agree to my terms?" Skinner asked.

"I'll need to stay a few days to wind up my business interests."

"Not acceptable. You leave tonight and you take him with you. You can appoint someone else to clear up your business affairs. I've heard that you have some business interests overseas - you can go and pursue them - if you have the time. I suspect you'll be kept fairly busy training your new slave. Are we agreed?" he asked.

Franklin gazed at Krycek for a long time, a deep frown furrowing his forehead, but Mulder could see he was hooked. Finally, he nodded.

"Agreed. We'll leave the country this evening. You can keep that sniveling little brat, Lee. I've a feeling that this boy will prove to be **far** more entertaining."

"You can't do this, Skinner!" Krycek yelled, the true extent of his situation seemingly sinking in as Franklin placed a hand on his shoulder and started to push him out of the room.

"I just did," Skinner said, his face like granite. He escorted them to the door, and then held out his hand to Franklin. "Goodbye, Franklin - and good luck," he said, his face like a mask. Franklin took his hand and shook it, that same grudging respect that Krycek had displayed evident in his eyes.

"I meant what I said," Skinner said softly. "Don't ever turn your back on him for a second, Franklin, or he'll kill you. This isn't just some erotic scenario I'm spinning for you - he's that dangerous. He's killed men before - easily. He won't think twice about killing you."

Mulder swore that Franklin's pupils dilated - the idea of his new acquisition being dangerous turned him on. Alex was like a walking wet dream to him. An unwilling slave, one he literally had to subdue with his own hands, one who, if he submitted, would do so only because of the force of his Master's will, and not because he wanted to. Franklin nodded curtly at Skinner and then he took a dog lead and collar out of his pocket, and held them up. "I brought these with me thinking I was going to get Lee back. I'm so glad they won't go to waste. I think these accessories will suit you, Alex - although I'm looking forward to buying some new ones, just for you." He slipped the lead and collar around Krycek's neck with some difficulty, as Krycek thrashed and twisted in his grasp, but the bound man was no match for the determined, experienced top and Krycek was soon collared. "Come to heel, boy. You and I are going for a little walk," Franklin said, grinning as he pulled Krycek out into the hallway with him. Skinner closed the door on them both, and then stood there, with his back leaning against it.

"Shit. That was..." Mulder began.

"Please, Fox. Don't." Skinner held up his hand. He looked terrible.

"You did what you felt you had to," Mulder said softly.

"What I did was immoral, illegal and evil," Skinner replied. "Don't think for one second that I'm proud of myself. I'm not. I love what I am, Fox," Skinner whispered, gazing at his slave. "I love being your Master. I love commanding you and having the gift of your submission. I love that you give yourself to me freely. Your consent, as you've pointed out to me before, is important to me. The idea of someone taking what

we do, and turning it into some travesty of a BDSM relationship, using it to break and abuse...it sickens me. Even if it's Krycek on the receiving end, even after all he's done to us – I still wouldn't ever have wished that on him."

"Krycek will survive. He always does." Mulder shrugged, not entirely sure what his feelings were on this subject. He was still too stunned and confused by the turn of events.

"I know. Franklin however, will not." Skinner crossed his arms over his chest, as if trying to comfort himself, or ward off evil. "Franklin will have his fun with Krycek for a while and Krycek will hate it - but like you said, Krycek's a survivor. Next to him, Franklin's just an amateur. Krycek will escape one day - and then he will very slowly and very thoroughly kill Franklin - or maybe, if we're lucky, they'll both kill each other."

"Shit." Mulder bit down on his lip as he considered the implications of that comment.

"None of this is on your shoulders," Skinner told him insistently. "It was my decision. I take full responsibility for it."

"I didn't stop you."

"You couldn't." Skinner spread his arms helplessly. "It was a way out. It was...expedient. It was wrong, deeply and profoundly wrong - and I'd do it all again." He walked past his slave, went down the hallway, disappeared into his den, locked the door, and didn't come out again all evening.

Skinner's silence grew deeper as the days passed. Mulder despaired of ever getting through to his Master. It worried him that Skinner was unable to talk. Mulder couldn't help comparing himself to Andrew Linker, and felt himself to be lacking. Andrew could have gotten through to Skinner - could have found the man inside the lost soul that was currently inhabiting Skinner's body, and he could have brought him back. Every day Skinner worked late, and every night he hid himself away in his den. He emerged only when it was past midnight, and then he would slide into bed beside Mulder and lie there, not touching his slave, as if he thought he might sully Mulder with his own guilt just by association. He wouldn't talk, and refused all Mulder's entreaties to do so - sometimes with a curt, snapped order, and sometimes with a plea. Both broke Mulder's heart.

Mulder was aware that **this** was the most profound test of his slavery so far. Not any of the games they'd played, not his betrayal of his Master and subsequent attempts to win back the other man's trust - but this. In this issue resided the truth about what they had together, and whether it transcended those contracts that Mulder kept in his nightstand drawer, which he knew by heart.

Mulder sat on the bed the following Friday evening, and opened his nightstand drawer. He pulled out the contracts, and looked at them, nostalgically. Once they had meant everything to him, to the extent that when his Master had withdrawn the rights enshrined in them, he had been distraught, and desperate to win them back. Now he saw them for what they were - pieces of paper. Surely what he and Skinner had built together transcended that? The contracts represented a truth about their lives, certainly, but Mulder was suddenly profoundly aware that it wasn't the whole truth - or anything near it. Skinner had once told him that he would take his slave down to the depths of himself and then guide him all the way back. It had felt good to have a guide, someone who put himself back in touch with his own soul when he had been so dangerously at sea. Did it just fall to Skinner to be the guide, and Mulder

to be guided? What about his Master's needs? What happened when the Master needed a guide of his own? Was it impossible for Mulder to fulfill that role, and if so, then who the hell **else** had a right to fill it?

All Mulder knew was that when Krycek's gun had gone off, and he had thought Skinner dead, he had felt as if his own life was over. If that didn't give him the right then he didn't know what did. With a regretful sigh, he folded the contracts carefully inside a protective tee shirt, and placed them in his suitcase, which he pulled out from under the bed. He had been clinging to them as if in them resided some basic truth about their relationship, without which it meant nothing, or even ceased to exist, but that wasn't true. Their relationship transcended the contracts. It always had, but he just hadn't seen it before. They were more than two pieces of paper – a lot more. No one relationship could be enshrined in a few words. The contracts had been there for him when he needed a rigid structure to hang onto, during a period of his life when he was lost. Now his Master was lost – and it was his turn to be the guide, and not the guided.

A shadow fell across the doorway as he finished pushing the case back under the bed. Mulder looked up, hoping it was his Master, and instead found it was Lee.

"Don't look so disappointed," Lee reproached him. "I'm probably more fun than he is these days. Boy, is he **always** this moody?"

"No. You know he isn't. He had to make a tough decision and now it's eating him up inside," Mulder replied tersely.

"Maybe he needs some TLC," Lee said with a suggestive leer. "If you aren't willing to give him that then I could. Sex is always the best distraction."

"He doesn't want sex, and he sure as hell doesn't want sex with you."

"Are you so sure about that?" Lee smiled.

Mulder was suddenly aware that Lee was dressed to kill, in a pair of tight leather pants and a see-through black mesh vest. "It's a Friday night and I'm bored," Lee purred. "I figure it's about time someone went down there and reminded our Master what he's missing."

"**Our** Master?" Mulder shook his head. He felt strangely distant. In the past he knew that he'd have felt a jealous rage exploding inside him, but not any more.

"It's what I want - now that my old Master is out of the picture." Lee grinned. "It's convenient. I like living here, and Walter's fond of me. If that man hadn't shown up last Saturday, Walter and I...well, let's just say that things were just starting to heat up. I had my hand..."

"Lee, you were both asleep when Krycek showed up. That's how he managed to overpower Walter in the first place. Remember?"

"Oh, Walter might have been dozing - or pretending to - but I wasn't," Lee laughed, shaking his dark head. The blond-tipped ends of his hair danced tauntingly. "I was fondling him in a very intimate place and he was responding. Another few minutes and..."

"He thought you were me. Like you said, he was asleep."

"Fox, wake up and smell the roses. Walter is a man - and he's a top. You aren't enough to keep him interested forever. You and I both know how our faithless little eyes stray at every passing beefed-up body that we see. Walter's no different. I'm fully healed, I'm looking pretty again, I want some action, and I intend to go and get it right now."

"I don't think so." Mulder stood up. He was surprised that he had **ever** been jealous of this boy. Lee was just that - a kid. He wasn't a threat, and he never had been. Walter wasn't remotely interested in him. "Come with me, Lee." He grabbed the youth's arm, and propelled him across the hallway to the spare bedroom. He found a bag, and pushed Lee's meager belongings into it. "You're leaving, Lee," he said in a low, firm voice. "Walter's going through something pretty big right now and I'm not having you fuck with his mind even more."

"You can't make me leave. It's Walter's decision!" Lee protested. "He's in charge here!"

Mulder shook his head, a grim smile on his face.

"No, Lee, that's where you're wrong - it's also where you don't understand what any of this is about. Walter's the top, yes. He's the Master - but we're equals in this household, even though that may seem strange to you given the fact of my slavery. Walter and I are lovers, and we're friends. I'm not some helpless boy toy who doesn't have a say in his own life. Walter doesn't want that from me. If he wanted to take another lover - or if I did - then we'd talk about it, and what it meant for our relationship, but to be honest, I don't think that'll ever happen."

"You're his slave," Lee protested. "You don't have a say in it!"

"I'm also a human being." Mulder shrugged. "If we both found it hot for him to give me to someone else, or for me to watch him with someone else then I'm sure it might happen, but right now it isn't what either of us wants. I know that because, yes, I **am** his slave, and I know him better than anyone else on this planet. Yes, he **is** the Master, and he **is** in charge - but he rules by my consent, and I surrender my will to him freely, knowing that he would never trample roughshod over it or do anything that would make me genuinely unhappy. You're leaving, Lee. With the way things are right now he won't even notice you're gone."

"You can't do this!" Lee wailed, seeing that Mulder was in deadly earnest. "I don't have anywhere to go!"

"I'll find you somewhere. Pack your things. I'll have someone here to collect you within the hour."

"You don't have the right..." Lee began.

Mulder stepped so close to the younger man that they were almost nose to nose.

"Yes, I do, Lee. I don't think you understand that I **only** give up power over myself to Walter - nobody else. I give myself to him as a gift, because it turns me on, and he takes that gift, because it turns him on to do so. Don't mistake what I have with Walter for what I am with you, or anyone else, or you'll find me a very dangerous adversary indeed. In fact..." Mulder paused before continuing, finding something inside himself that he had always known, but had never acknowledged before. "In fact, underneath the

roles you'll find me a harder person than him, so don't fuck with me, Lee. Under that tough exterior of his resides a very gentle man. I'm a lot more temperamental than he is, and I love submitting to him, but underneath it all I'm just as tough. I think that's partly why he likes me – partly why it **works** so well. I'm certainly more than a match for you. I'm not the great big softie he is - I can see through you and all your shit. Now, get your ass in gear, get packed, and get downstairs."

With that, Mulder turned and went down to the living room. He found Skinner's House papers, searched through for one particular name and phone number, and made a call.

An hour later, the entry phone buzzed. Mulder escorted Lee into the hallway, ignoring the petulant, slightly scared expression on the young man's face.

"You'll be fine," Mulder told him, with a wry smile, as he went to answer the door. A fat man stood in the doorway, an expectant look on his face. "Hello, Mike," Mulder told Lee's former master. "Thanks for dropping by at such short notice. I have something here that needs taking care of...unless you want to take care of yourself for a change, Lee?" He looked at the young man questioningly. "I'm sure you can do it - but if you can't, I know Mike would love to have you back. Perhaps you could discuss it between you. You've overstayed your welcome here."

Lee gazed at Mike, and then at Mulder. Finally he shrugged, and picked up his bag.

"Hi Mike," he whispered. He sidled up to the large top, put his arms around him as far as they'd reach, and bestowed a kiss on Mike's cheek. The other man melted, visibly. Mulder sighed internally - he wasn't sure that Mike and Lee were good for each other, but maybe they were as good as it got considering their respective personalities and shortcomings.

"It's so good to know you're coming home, baby!" Mike exclaimed. "I always knew you'd come to your senses! Boy I should take the skin off your ass for what you did, walking out on me like that."

"Go easy on him," Mulder told Mike. "He's had a tough time of it lately. Make him tell you all about it – and don't let him get away with bullshitting you."

Lee glared at him, but Mulder ignored it. Instead he offered him his hand.

"Goodbye, Lee."

Lee looked at the proffered hand as if it were something he'd stepped in on the street. "Go to hell, Fox," he said sweetly.

"Mulder," Mulder corrected firmly.

"What?"

"Fox is the name my Master uses for me. Mulder's the name you'll use."

"Whatever." Lee shrugged, and handed his bag to Mike. "I misjudged you," he said to Mulder, his eyes narrowing.

"Maybe I misjudged myself. Take care of yourself, Lee," Mulder said softly.

"Yeah." Lee shrugged.

"And if you ever want to talk to me, without all the bullshit and the cozying up to Walter, then you can. You haven't had it easy in your life, and I'll help you in any way I can, but I won't put up with any of your crap. Understand?"

Lee bit on his lip, his eyes filling with tears, which he blinked away angrily.

"Yeah," he whispered. Uh...thanks for...you know, when Ian first brought me here." He looked profoundly awkward. Mulder remembered how the young man had held onto his hand for dear life, needing the comfort and support of human contact. "And...I guess for letting me stay...Mulder."

"No problem." Mulder smiled and opened the door for them to leave, and then he shut it after them with a sigh of relief. That was one problem taken care of - now for the other.

Skinner was in his den. Mulder knocked but then entered anyway without waiting for a reply. He wasn't going to give his Master any opportunity to rebuff him.

"Fox." Skinner looked up, a startled expression on his face. "I'm busy right now," he said curtly, glancing back down at the open case files in front of him – work he'd brought home with him.

"Like hell you are," Mulder said.

Skinner looked up again, even more startled this time.

"Listen, Walter, I might not be Andrew Linker, but I know when you're hurting and I know that it doesn't do you any good to deal with it alone. I won't **let** you deal with it alone, Walter, so start talking." Mulder sat down on the side of Skinner's desk and gazed at his Master expectantly.

"Since when did we swap roles, **slave**?" Skinner asked.

"We didn't. I figure that being your slave means taking care of your needs – and that extends to even when you don't want them taken care of. I also figured that the times when you try to push me away might just be the times when you need me most. This doesn't just work one way, with you taking care of me and all my dramas. You're a real person as well as being my Master, and you've got a very real issue that you need help with."

Skinner sat back in his chair with a sigh. "I'm sorry, Fox. I didn't mean to push you away. This one was big," he murmured.

"I know. I was there," Mulder acknowledged.

"You disapprove of what I did?" Skinner's dark eyes were full of a complex mix of emotions that Mulder couldn't begin to unravel.

"It wasn't my decision to make," he replied neutrally. "You're the Guardian – and you did what you thought best."

"But if it was, then you wouldn't have taken the action I took."

"I don't think **any** of us can really know how we'd react unless we're in a certain situation. I've made some questionable decisions in my time, some of them right, and some of them most definitely wrong. The name John Lee Roche springs to mind," Mulder grimaced, referring to a child serial killer he'd once had released from prison and then managed to lose - thereby endangering a little girl who Roche had subsequently kidnapped. The reference wasn't lost on Skinner, who gave a tight little smile.

"That was different," he said.

"In what way? I had a choice and I made it. I was wrong on that occasion. I'm not saying that you were wrong on this occasion - but I am saying that I **honestly** don't know what action I'd have taken in your shoes. You were the one who had to make that decision. It was a tough call. It's done now - for good or ill. You slayed our two greatest threats with one inspired stroke - whether that proves to be the right thing or not, I don't know. Whether it was morally or ethically wrong bearing in mind that neither of them was going to be restrained or punished for their actions in any other way - I also don't know. I do know that you made the decision as best you could and for the good of as many people as possible, not just yourself."

"Maybe." Skinner shrugged.

"You can let it destroy you, or you can carry on trying to do the right thing. One thing's for sure - if it was either Krycek or Franklin who'd made that decision, you can rest assured that they wouldn't be beating themselves up like this about it. They'd be congratulating themselves on having gotten rid of two enemies. It says something about you that you're giving yourself a hard time about this."

"Yes, it says that I know what's wrong and do it anyway. That doesn't make me better than them, Fox, it makes me worse."

"Who's judging? Just you," Mulder told him. "Nobody else - certainly not me. You're always your own harshest critic, Walter."

"I know. I guess we have that in common." Skinner gazed at his hands for a moment, and then looked his slave in the eye. "Fox, I've been struggling with it but I can't any more. I think...I **know**...I need to go and see Elaine," he said softly.

That winded Mulder. He remembered every detail of the last, terrible time his Master had needed to see Elaine in this way, and it still gave him cold sweats.

"Walter...are you sure? Can't we just talk this through?" he asked gently.

"I'm sure." Skinner took Mulder's hand and curled it tenderly in his own. "I'm sorry. You don't have to come and you don't have to watch. I'll take care of it myself. I don't want you to suffer any fallout from my actions."

"No." Mulder reached out and caressed the side of his Master's face. "No, Walter. I don't want you to go and see Elaine. If there's something that needs to be done, I want to do it for you."

Skinner looked up at him in surprise. "Fox, I'd never ask you to..."

"I know. You're not asking. I am. I want to take care of your needs, Master. I have that right, don't I? I know what you want, and I can give it to you. I know you doubted that before, but we've both come a long way since the last time you needed this. You don't need to doubt me now. I can take care of you, in any way necessary."

"I don't know." Skinner shook his head.

"Walter - this won't change anything between us, and it won't change the way I view you. I'll just consider it...another service I can offer to my Master. One I would very much hope he didn't seek elsewhere."

Skinner gazed at his hands for a long time. His face was lowered so Mulder couldn't read the emotions in his Master's expressive eyes but Skinner's shoulders were hunched, and tense. Mulder reached out and soothed them. "Master, I want you to go upstairs to the Playroom. Get whatever you need, and lay it out for me. I promise I'll continue until you say my name - then I'll stop."

Skinner looked up. His eyes were dry with need. He nodded. "What about our guest?" He asked.

"Lee left this evening," Mulder informed him.

"He did? Where did he go?" Skinner looked startled.

"I called Mike and asked him to pick him up. He'd overstayed his welcome and he needed to get on with his own life. He seemed to be holding out some hope that you were going to invite him into your harem. I told him that was never going to happen." Mulder gave a wry smile.

"Damn. And there was I looking forward to training a new slave," Skinner said with a hollow grin of his own.

"I figured it was a complication you didn't need right now." Mulder reached out to caress his Master's cheek again. "Go upstairs, Master. Take your time. Get to where you need to be mentally. I'll be along in a little while."

His Master looked at him searchingly for a long time, and then nodded. "Thank you, Fox," he said softly, and then he got up and left the room.

Mulder reached for the phone on his Master's desk and called Elaine. He filled her in on the problem, and asked for her advice.

"Go in hard, Fox," she told him, with a little sigh. "This isn't an erotic spanking. He doesn't need warming up - it just agitates him if anything. Don't go easy on him thinking that you can trick him into accepting less punishment - it never works. It just takes longer for him to reach where he needs to be. If anything go as hard as you can - he'll get there quicker and it'll be over sooner for both of you. Be courteous. Make sure he knows he can stop it at any time. Don't for god's sake tie him or try to engage him in any kind of 'scene'. He isn't doing this to get his rocks off. He won't be aroused and you won't make him aroused by beating him. He isn't wired the way you are. Just...do what he needs and then take very good care of him afterwards."

"Oh, I will. I can promise you that," Mulder said, wondering what the hell he was doing. He had promised his Master that he would see him through this but would he be able to? Did he have it in him? He remembered what he had said to Lee about the difference between himself and his Master and he knew that he could do this. He knew he had a streak of pure steel inside himself - he had developed it over time to deal with all the many disappointments and sheer horrors that life had thrown his way, and probably he had been born with it as well. Where Skinner had developed a hard outer shell to hide his soft center, Mulder knew that his own center had always had a kernel of steel deep within that often surprised those who under-estimated him. He could handle on this - he had no choice but to handle this because his Master needed him, and he would never, ever let his Master down. Last weekend he had come close to losing him, and now he knew just what Skinner meant to him. He'd do anything for him. Anything. Whatever it might cost him personally.

"Honey - take care of yourself as well. I'll call you tomorrow to see how you're both holding up," Elaine said softly. Mulder smiled. He wasn't alone. Neither he nor his Master was alone. They had some good friends around them. They'd pull through this, as they'd pulled through all the other crises they'd been through, and they'd find their way out the other side.

"Thanks, Elaine," he said, and then he put the phone down.

Mulder sat there for a moment, staring into space, and then he took a deep breath, squared his shoulders, and began the long walk up to the Playroom.

Skinner was already stripped by the time Mulder arrived. His Master was pacing the room, lost in his own world. Mulder wasn't even sure Skinner noticed him when he entered the room. His Master hadn't even bothered to turn on the lights in the Playroom, and Mulder left it that way. This was Skinner's show - he didn't want to change any of it. Maybe his Master needed the semi-darkness. Mulder closed the door softly behind him, and walked over to the table to see what implement his Master had chosen. A heavy rubber whip was laid out on it - he had expected as much. It was the same implement that Skinner had requested at Elaine's last time this had been necessary. The rubber was heavy, and it packed an incredible punch, causing quite severe bruising. Mulder knew that was what his Master wanted, but even so, he flinched a little at the thought of causing it himself. Skinner was muttering something to himself as he paced, as if he couldn't have kept his limbs still if he tried.

Mulder rummaged in one of the cupboards for the big, protective belt that he knew was there, found it, and then located the leather genital pouch that his Master had used on him before during marking. He was new to this, and he wanted to make sure that he didn't cause any unintentional damage, even if he was being over-cautious. David hadn't had to take such protective measures but then he was an expert with the whip, and Mulder was not. He would prefer to be safe rather than sorry where his Master's well-being was concerned.

He went over to his Master, and placed a hand on his shoulder. Skinner stopped pacing, and looked at him, his dark eyes glazed and unfocussed.

"I want you to wear this belt to protect your kidneys, Master," Mulder said, fastening the belt around the other man's torso. "And the pouch." He encased his Master's genitals in the leather pouch to protect them. Skinner didn't pay him much attention. He accepted what his slave was doing, although his feet

barely stopped moving and it took all Mulder's concentration to fit both belt and pouch correctly in place.

"Where do you want to stand for this, Master?" Mulder asked deferentially when he was done.

"At the post. I'll hold onto the chains."

"Okay." Mulder walked his Master there, keeping one hand on the other man's shoulder, trying to be a reassuring presence. He waited while Skinner got himself in position, his legs apart, his body leaning against the post, his hands clinging onto the chains that hung from the cross-section and which were usually used to tie Mulder into place on it.

"All right, Master," Mulder whispered, keeping his tone deferential. He stroked Skinner's bare shoulders softly, noting how tense they were, and equally knowing that there was nothing he could do right now to make the other man relax except to use the whip that Skinner had laid out for him. He would have preferred to stay and fondle his Master but he knew that he was just delaying what had to be done.

"I'm going to start now. I want you to say my name when you're done. Just say my name and I'll stop. If there's anything you need when we're doing this then just ask me. I'll do whatever you say. This is your show, Master - you call the shots." He soothed Skinner's back and neck with his fingers, and then, reluctantly returned to the table and picked up the whip. Skinner had often allowed him to play with the implements in the Playroom, but Mulder had never done more than flick them through the air a few times. He wasn't trained, as David had been, but he did have a very good memory so he knew how David had used the whip, where he had placed his strokes, and the effect each one had. He focused on that memory, needing to get this as right as he could – it was too important for him to screw it up.

Mulder held the whip for a moment, to get used to the weight and feel of it in his hand. It was heavy, and he knew how powerfully painful it would be if thrown with his full force - but he also knew that he had to give his Master that, and nothing less. He took a deep breath, composed himself, and then walked forward. He marked out his paces carefully, so that he was close enough to land the strokes accurately, but not so far away that they wouldn't reach. Then he raised his arm.

Skinner didn't even seem to be aware of him. He was just hanging there, still muttering something to himself under his breath. Mulder flicked his wrist, and brought the whip forward as hard as he could. It connected with a loud thudding sound that took Mulder by surprise. He was startled also, by how the impact jarred back along his arm. His Master didn't emit more than a grunt and Mulder examined his handiwork to gauge the effect of the first stroke in order to judge how to deliver the next one. There was a dull, red mark on Skinner's back, which seemed about right - but it was just a beginning.

Mulder stepped back and brought the whip down again - and this time he didn't pause to examine his work. He raised his arm again immediately and delivered the next blow, and then the next. His Master was moving in time to his strokes, leaning into the post as each one hit and then pushing himself back to receive the next. His eyes were closed, and he still seemed lost in a world of his own. Mulder intensified the pace, leaving no part of the back of his Master's body untouched. His whip scoured Skinner's flesh, from the top of his shoulders to the back of his knees, covering his buttocks, thighs, and upper back liberally, but avoiding the area covered by the belt that was protecting Skinner's kidneys. The whipping seemed to be taking forever. Mulder was aware that he was sweating, and panting with each stroke

delivered, and that Skinner's body was now covered in a fine layer of sweat as well as dozens of thick red stripes. Mulder needed, for his own sake, to check in with his Master, so he walked over to the post and put a gentle hand on Skinner's shoulder.

"Master, how close are you? I don't want this to continue much longer," he said softly, anxious not to cut into Skinner's mood too much but needing some feedback.

"I'm fine. A little bit longer. Step it up...you can hit harder, faster...I'm close...close..." Skinner mumbled.

"All right."

Mulder stepped back and began anew. He did as ordered and delivered the blows even faster and harder than before, finally starting to see a change in his Master. Skinner began to do more than grunt as each stroke hit home. He was bellowing out loud and then the roars of pain turned into what sounded like a choking sob at the end. His knees were bent and he was hanging onto the chains by sheer force of will alone. His whole body was shaking, and all Mulder's instincts told him to stop, to gather his lover in his arms and hold him tight, but he knew that wasn't what Skinner needed so instead he continued with the punishing blows. His arm ached in earnest now, but still he didn't stop. He felt at one with the semi-dark room, and his Master's quivering, shaking body. The whip had become an extension of him - part of his arm, part of his soul. The moment seemed to go on forever, until finally there was some kind of resolution. Skinner's throaty yells became sobs, and then he just seemed to break in two. He let go of the chains and sank to his knees.

"Fox," he gasped and Mulder stopped immediately. He hadn't been sure, in the midst of all this, whether Skinner would say his name or Andrew's as he was more used to. He would have stopped whichever name his Master had used as a safe word, but all the same, he was grateful, on some fundamental level, that Skinner had been aware that it was his slave serving him in this most intimate of ways.

Mulder dropped the whip and ran forward to catch his Master before Skinner fell completely to the floor. The big man lolled in his arms, his body smelling of sweat, and his eyes now wet with tears of sheer pain. It had been a necessary catharsis though - Skinner's face looked less drawn and tense, and his eyes were no longer dazed and unfocussed.

"Hold on. I'm going to walk you down to the bedroom. I have some towels soaking in the bath," Mulder told his Master. He hauled Skinner up, draped one of his Master's arms around his neck, and then escorted Skinner out of the Playroom and down to their bedroom. He dropped his Master face down onto the bed, and then went to get the cold towels.

He used the towels to cool his Master's burning flesh, changing them regularly for an hour or so as his Master's body warmed them, and then he covered Skinner with thin sheets to keep him warm without placing too much pressure on his skin.

"More cold towels," Skinner said, gripping the pillow with his hands.

"No. You'll get hypothermia. This will do for now. I want to warm you up for an hour and then I'll resume the cold towel treatment. We can keep that up for most of the night - judging by the level of bruising that will be necessary. Just lie still and let me take care of you," Mulder said. He slid under the sheets beside his Master, rested his head on his hand and gazed at Skinner lovingly. "Are you all right? Are you

feeling better now?" he asked, gently soothing Skinner's bare scalp with his fingertips. "Inside I mean. I assume you're feeling pretty shitty physically."

"Yeah. Thanks," Skinner grunted. Mulder smiled, and pressed his lips against Skinner's forehead.

"It's passed. Whatever happens it's out of your hands now," he told his Master. "Franklin and Krycek deserve each other. They chose their own fate. Remember what I told you about that mock-rape scene we acted out? How even in the middle of that you needed my consent? It was the same with Krycek and Franklin. You couldn't even resist giving **them** a choice."

"It wasn't much of a choice – for either of them." Skinner made a face.

"You gave them more than they've ever given **their** victims," Mulder said firmly. "Walter, you made a hard decision. Let it go now – you can't take it back even if you wanted to. Remember that kid in Vietnam? The one with the grenades strapped to his body? You shot him. You took the hard decision then, and you've been doing it ever since because you're the kind of person who is strong enough to do that, in order to keep the rest of us safe. That's just you. I know it's also you to give yourself a hard time about it, but it's over now. Let it go."

"I'll do my best." Skinner gave his slave a wry smile. "That's an interesting analogy you make to Vietnam." Skinner gazed thoughtfully at his slave for a moment. "That whole damn war seemed to be one big issue of consent, Fox. Maybe that's partly why, as you keep pointing out, consent is so important to me."

"Partly? I think there's another reason too," Mulder commented.

"Maybe." Skinner nodded, his eyes darkening. "Yeah. Maybe," he repeated softly.

"Wanna share?"

"I don't know." Skinner shifted slightly and took a sharp intake of breath as the pain kicked in.

"I wanted to say...thank you, Fox, for what you did this evening."

"I'm glad to be of service. Always. I'm your slave after all. I exist to serve." Mulder kissed his Master's lips gently. They were quiet for an hour or so, and then Mulder got up and resumed the cold towel therapy. He kept it up for another forty-five minutes, and then, when Skinner started shivering, he covered him in the sheets again, and got into the bed beside him once more.

"I'm curious." Mulder stroked his Master's head with gentle fingers. "What is it you find when you need to be whipped this hard? What place do you reach inside your head?"

Skinner shifted, and winced. "That's a good question. I'm not sure I can put it into words."

"In your own time. If not now, then maybe tomorrow? We're not going anywhere all weekend, after all. On that subject, I hope you realize that sooner or later I'm going to subject you to my home made clam chowder."

"Oh god. That's great. I love your clam chowder." Skinner smiled. Mulder had spent several months learning how to perfect this one dish because he knew his Master loved it, even if the slave remained resolutely useless at everything else in the kitchen.

"You never did tell me how my Texan boy's folks came to be running a seafood restaurant in Maine," Mulder teased gently. "If you'd prefer to sleep we can add that to the list for later as well. I figure we're going to have plenty of time to just lie around here chatting. It's not often I have your undivided attention at a time when your right arm is out of spanking action," Mulder grinned. "Do you want to sleep now?"

"No...I think I'd like to talk," Skinner replied. "It'll take my mind off the pain - and you have the right to ask. You of all people have the right to ask. I suppose there's a lot of stuff we forget to talk about because we're so busy with our everyday lives." Skinner moved his arm, and grabbed Mulder's hand. He held his slave's fingers in his own, curling them both up together and rubbing little circles onto Mulder's skin. "The subject of the Seafood restaurant in Maine, my need to experience this kind of severe whipping occasionally, and, I suppose, even the issue of me needing consent are kind of related anyway. At least I think they are." Skinner frowned. "Andrew asked me about it. He didn't understand why I needed such levels of pain - and you have to remember that when I first fell into his hands I needed it on what felt almost like a daily basis. He wouldn't give it to me that frequently, but I woke up every day wanting it. You see..." Skinner hesitated and closed his eyes. He seemed suddenly very vulnerable. "Where to begin?" He sighed.

"Wherever you like. We have all weekend - just the two of us. No interruptions," Mulder said, pressing his lips against Skinner's forehead once again. "There's no escape for you - you're in my evil clutches for the next couple of days, oh helpless victim," Mulder said, wild eyed and manic. He punctuated the point by launching into his 'mad professor' cackle. Skinner laughed out loud - and then winced again.

"Shit – don't make me laugh – and that's an order, boy," he commanded.

"Sorry," Mulder chuckled.

They both settled down in the bed again, and relaxed. Mulder waited expectantly, and a few minutes later, Skinner began.

"Okay...the beginning...or at least, a long way back. Let's start with my father. He was a marine in Korea. For a long time - for a very long time - I thought he was a hero. Maybe he was. He certainly talked up his war experiences so that I thought he defeated an entire army single handedly...and he had a medal. Oh boy did we all know about that damn medal. It was a Bronze Star and I think it was the only thing he'd ever really won in his life – so we practically had to worship that medal." Skinner shook his head wryly at the memory. Mulder smiled, encouraging him to continue.

"I looked up to my father, but he was a perfectionist - and nothing I did was ever right. When I was a kid I thought he was ashamed that his eldest son wasn't as clever or as brave as he was - but that wasn't true. The truth is that he never achieved much his whole life beyond that medal. He was a brilliant man - but he could never sit down and apply himself to anything. The same thing happened with jobs. He had one job after another and he was always fired - he used to come home and blame the bank manager, or office manager, or whoever it was who had fired him and I used to believe him. It was never his fault.

Ever." Skinner sighed. "So when he was tough on me, I used to think that I deserved it, that I didn't live up to his expectations, and would never be the great man he was. I think he had a mild form of ADD – Attention Deficit Disorder - because he could never settle down long enough to achieve something tangible. He was a good man - don't get me wrong - he did a lot of work for charity and would give the clothes off his own back to folks less well off than him. His duality was, I think, what was so confusing to me as a child." Skinner closed his eyes, lost in thoughtful contemplation.

"Did he beat you?" Mulder caressed his Master's face with his fingertips. Skinner opened his dark eyes and sighed again.

"Yeah. Oh yeah. Which I guess brings me on to the issue of consent. In fairness, that generation **did** beat their kids, especially their sons, so I don't think he thought he was doing anything wrong. Maybe he wasn't, but he was a lot stricter than the other kid's dads and he whipped me for things that I couldn't really help. I wasn't very good at science, but if I didn't get straight 'A's in all my subjects at school I knew I could expect a whipping when I got home. He would freak out if my grades weren't up to scratch, and then we'd make that walk down to the woodshed - and his whippings were extremely hard. I didn't realize just how much they went beyond what was normal for the times until I was older. It was almost as if he needed to take out all his frustrations on someone - and I was the one he chose. Maybe because I was the oldest, or because he saw something of himself in me, or because he didn't want me to screw up my life the way he had his. I don't know. Maybe in some way he was punishing himself for never achieving anything, for wasting his promise..."

"Or maybe it was because he saw in you what he could have been," Mulder interrupted. "Maybe that's closer to the truth. You were the one who got the good grades, and who **could** concentrate enough to be a high flyer."

"Maybe there's a grain of truth in that," Skinner conceded with a wry grunt. "It got to how I was almost scared to breathe in the house. If I made so much as one mistake, said one thing the wrong way - he'd take his belt off to me."

"What did your Mom say about all this?" Mulder asked.

"Mom was great – she often protected me, but she had my brother and sister to take care of as well."

"You have a brother and sister? All this time and there's still so much I don't know about you," Mulder murmured.

"I know. My fault probably. There's no reason why you shouldn't know but I don't see them very often and the subject just never came up. I'd like you to meet my sister. She'd love you – she always did have a thing for stray pups." Skinner grinned.

"I'd like to meet her some time." Mulder grinned back.

"Well, we'll see what we can arrange then." Skinner nodded. "Anyway, getting back to Mom - she didn't approve of what my dad was doing, but times were hard, and just keeping body and soul together took up most of her energy. She had a husband who was out of work more often than not, and she had to work herself, as well as take care of us kids. I came to view myself as a casualty of the war that was their marriage. She'd have huge arguments with him, and it was me she'd turn to after. Maybe he even took

his anger out on me **because** I was the one she confided in. I was the oldest and she and I were on the same wavelength. We talked a lot, she and I, after my brother and sister were in bed. I think that infuriated Dad because he was the other adult but she seemed to prefer talking to me."

"You told me once that you enlisted for 'Nam because you wanted to get away. Was this what you were getting away from?" Mulder asked.

"Yes. Partly. I also wanted to be the big war hero like my father. I wanted to do something to finally make him proud of me and instead...it must have driven a stake through his heart when I got awarded the Silver Star, because I'd stolen the one piece of glory he'd ever had. When I got home and showed him my medal he gave me a look that cut me to the bone. He still wasn't proud of me and I think I knew then that he never would be - that with him, nothing I did would **ever** be good enough. I didn't understand why then, although I pieced it all together later when I went to stay with my Mom's parents in Maine, and they told me a few home truths about my dad. He thought I was just showing up his inadequacies, and all the time I was trying desperately to win his approval, to be good enough to win his affection instead of his anger. That sense of perfectionism never left me. That's why I understand you so well." Skinner squeezed on his slave's fingers, and Mulder gave his Master a smile of recognition.

Skinner took a deep breath and then continued. "After Dad had made a mess of everything and was up to his eyeballs in debt, he had to do the most humiliating thing of all - he had to leave his beloved Texas behind and go and work for my Mom's parents in Maine. That was just after I got back from 'Nam. It was my grandparents' seafood restaurant he and Mom went to run when her folks got too old. My parents needed the money but boy did it upset him. I was pretty much grown up by then, but I helped out at the restaurant to make some money before I went to college. And getting back to your original question - what stayed with me all my life was the way those sessions in the woodshed were the inevitable consequence of me not being **good** enough as a kid. At some point during my childhood I guess they became my conscience, and I suppose that's why I found myself needing them in the aftermath of Sharon's death. I'd had other outlets before then - usually drink - and it wasn't until I came crashing down after Sharon's death that I found myself needing the kind of extreme pain I'd experienced when I was punished as a teenager."

Mulder put a hand on his Master's arm, and stroked him gently.

"Don't get me wrong - I hated it," Skinner shivered. "My father beat me hard and often, so when Sharon told me she wanted me to spank her as a sex game I took some convincing. I wasn't comfortable with it at first, but she showed me that there was a world of difference between a consensual erotic spanking and what I'd experienced as a child. I came to appreciate that some people do experience spanking and some other kinds of pain as pleasure - and that others find the thrill of submission profoundly sexual, so that even if they might occasionally hate being punished, they need it on some level. Perhaps partly to reinforce the rest of the fantasy - but for other reasons as well. People are complicated." He gave Mulder a little smile, and his slave grunted in recognition.

"I didn't have a choice as a kid though. I couldn't say no. I suppose I've reclaimed that experience as an adult - now I only receive a whipping on my terms, but back then..." He shivered. "Well, I suppose that's why consent is so important to me. I know how it feels to have something that painful done to you against your will." He took a deep intake of breath. "Maybe I'm making it all sound too emotive - I didn't have an unhappy childhood by and large. There were good times too - great times in fact. My father could

be an incredibly amusing, and entertaining man. He was a really fantastic person to be around, and as my friends were occasionally whipped by their fathers too - probably with good reason when I think back on some of what we got up to as kids - I didn't think too much of it at the time." Skinner gave a little laugh. "I didn't know that what got meted out at my home was a little more extreme than most, and certainly more often than most, but that sense of perfectionism my father instilled in me left me with an ability to concentrate, and saw me through school with straight 'A's and the same at college." He sighed. "So maybe my father did me a favor. Anyway, at the back of my mind, there was a sense of that deep, intense physical pain somehow inevitably following on from some failure of mine, and at the same time relieving the burden of that failure - and that was what I came back to time and again with Andrew. He let me get away with it at first, but later he would only allow me to ask for that kind of pain to relieve really strong emotions of guilt. As he made me talk about my problems - and face up to them - I found that I needed it less and less frequently, until it's gotten to how it is now - a fairly rare occurrence. I understand myself a whole lot better now as well. I wish I didn't need it at all. I have to fight hard not to hate myself for it because it feels like a weakness, and most of the time I'm a strong person so this side of myself appalls me. Andrew told me it was okay for me to admit to feeling weak occasionally but it's not always that easy." Skinner shifted uncomfortably.

"It **is** okay. You've told me the same thing often enough. If we can't occasionally ask for support from the people who love us then it isn't much of a love." Mulder cradled his Master's head in his arms, and gazed down at the other man, who lay there trustingly.

"Yes - but the dynamic we have here, and the kind of person I am at the office, makes me worry about this side of myself even more," Skinner admitted honestly.

"Don't." Mulder shook his head. "Nobody at the office has any right to know about this side of your life, and I'm your slave. Tonight was about me serving you in the way you needed it most. In that sense it's no different to how I've served you by giving you a massage, or more personal services." He gave his Master a knowing wink. "You let me top you a few weeks ago - that didn't change anything between us. We evolve, Master, and I don't think I'd want it any other way. When I think what a selfish, self-obsessed brat I was when I first came here I'm glad that's happened."

"You were in crisis then - just as I was when I first came to Andrew." Skinner shrugged, and then winced, a hiss escaping from his throat as the movement pained him. Mulder pulled back the sheet and examined the back of his Master's body. Skinner's flesh was red and raw, and obviously very painful, but nothing more serious than that. Mulder disappeared into the bathroom and started the cold towel treatment again. When he finished, he settled back in the bed beside his Master and pulled the sheets up around them both once more.

It's weird," Mulder commented, "because I was never spanked at all. I can't think of any childhood experience that would explain my sexually submissive kink. I've always been wired this way. What you need looks so intense and painful. I wish you could experience it the way I do - so you'd get some pleasure from it."

"It does what it needs to." Skinner shrugged. "I wouldn't say I enjoyed it, but - catharsis is really the only word that sums it up. It helps. It helps relieve the negative feelings. Sometimes I can get a similar relief from a hard boxing session, or a really vigorous work out but sometimes, when it's something very big, it takes this to help me come to terms with how I feel."

"That's fine. I hope you can ask me if you ever need it again." Mulder kissed his Master gently on the forehead.

"Fox - do you regret not going after Krycek's UFOs?" Skinner asked suddenly, out of the blue.

Mulder thought about it for a while. "No," he said finally. "I mean, I suppose a small part of me always will, but you see, if I'd gone, I'm not sure whether I would have come back. I don't know why, I just know it's true. I think something bad would have happened. Something I might not ever have recovered from."

Skinner exhaled sharply. "You felt that too? That's what I felt," he said. "It's such a strange feeling. I'm glad you chose not to go."

"It was never really a choice. You cured me of that one, Master - that old Pavlovian response I had whenever Krycek dangled Samantha, or some other aspect of my quest under my nose and I just used to go running off, and end up needing to be bailed out by either you or Scully."

"Speaking of Scully - how is the great romance between her and Doggett going?"

"Fine, if anyone can really like a man with hair that spiky," Mulder grouched.

"You've had some questionable haircuts yourself in your time," Skinner teased.

"I must point out that you are hardly any authority on hair," Mulder replied with a pointed glance at his Master's bald scalp. He punctuated the comment by leaning down to kiss his Master's bare head again - and then again. A few seconds later, a furry head insinuated itself between them, also demanding to be kissed. They lay there, in the dark, cat, Master and slave, wrapped up together, a tangle of limbs and fur and hot skin.

"Is it just me, or does it seem as if you've undergone something of a transformation these past couple of weeks?" Skinner murmured.

"Oh, I don't think it's been a matter of weeks. I think it's taken nearly a year," Mulder replied, "and I think it began right about the time I signed a certain contract."

"How do you feel about it?"

"I think I detect a note of anxiety in your voice." Mulder laughed. He leaned forward and kissed his Master again, a reassuring kiss this time. "I feel good," he commented. "I feel as if I've found some part of myself that's been missing. It's strange that by becoming your slave I've been set free to be myself on some level. That all finally slotted into place for me today. It all made a strange kind of sense. I remember you once told me a story about a Master and slave complementing each other, each being a support and comfort to the other, each living their roles in such a way that they it made them both stronger. I feel as if I can finally understand that, as if I can see it, touch it, and inhabit it. All this time, you've been sorting me out, and helping me find what I can be - what I am - and it's so liberating."

"That's good," Skinner said softly.

"Yes it is." Mulder felt his Master draw another circle on his hand with his fingertips.

"I think," Skinner said, "that you're finally ready for that last step now, Fox. The one we've discussed many times before. I think you're ready to be branded."

Mulder felt his heart skip a beat. This was what he had wanted and what he had feared for a very long time, and yet somehow it felt very right. If it had happened before it would have been too soon. He had finally become that slave inside that he had always longed to be and with that knowledge there came a sense of strength and serenity that he didn't think he'd ever lose. He might have found that in himself, but it had been his Master who had guided him to it.

"You know, Master, I think you're right," he said, laying his head on the pillow beside Skinner's bald one and Wanda's furry one. "When?" He asked simply.

"Well, Christmas isn't all that far away and we'll be able to take a few days off work then. That would seem like a good time."

"It sounds good to me too."

"We'll talk about it some more tomorrow. Over that clam chowder you promised," Skinner murmured.

"Yeah." Mulder chuckled. "Master - as we seem to be in the mood for confessionals, there's one thing that's been on my mind."

"Mmm?" Skinner's voice sounded profoundly weary.

"I've been wondering why it was so important to Krycek's masters, whoever they are, that I should investigate those UFO's. I wonder why they wanted me? What did they intend to do to me?" He shivered, having a sudden image of himself, strapped down, being experimented on, as he had read about in so many reports on alien abduction. The image was so real that it was almost like a memory, and he felt as if someone had walked over his grave.

"It doesn't matter," Skinner growled. "They can't have you, whoever they are, because you belong to **me**."

Mulder felt the hairs on the back of his neck stand on end as his Master said those words. He knew, although he wasn't sure how, that being Skinner's slave had somehow saved him from a fate too cruel to contemplate, and now another future had clicked into place for him - a better, kinder one.

"Yes," he said softly. "I might doubt a lot of things in this universe but I don't doubt that. I'm yours, Master. No questions, no doubts, and no regrets."

"I'm glad to hear that, boy," Skinner said, his voice fading in the darkness. Mulder glanced at the clock on the nightstand. It was very late.

"Sleep, Master," he murmured.

"Yeah. G'night, Fox."

"Good night, Guardian of the House." Mulder replied, knowing the other man was already asleep.

He reached over, turned off the lamp on the nightstand, and then settled down in the bed beside his Master and his Master's cat. He lay there, silently, watching his Master sleep. He had no intention of sleeping himself. He owed a lot to this man, and he was glad that he finally had the opportunity to give something back to him. Mulder stroked Wanda's head softly, never taking his eyes off his Master. He felt strong and peaceful inside. He had finally become the slave he had always aspired to be, and he was completely at one with himself, and his own submission. Skinner was right – there was only a joyful, liberating strength to being a slave - although Mulder suspected that you had to be with the right Master in order to appreciate that. He was as much his Master's protector as his Master was his - and soon there would be a branding to celebrate and deepen their bond.

Mulder kissed his sleeping Master's head and smiled. He couldn't wait to accept his Master's mark on his skin. They had survived so many trials together, including those thrown at them by Krycek and Franklin, and he knew that they'd survive anything else that fate sent their way.

Nobody would ever take him from his Master's side. He was exactly where he belonged.

**End of Part 24**

## The Branding by Xanthe

### Author's Notes:

Pic by **JenR**

Many thanks to **JenR** for the branding iron graphic <g>

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Well, I managed to get this one in under the wire, just before it became a year since the last chapter was posted. I did promise that I would try to finish this series in my July 4 update last year, and I'm still hoping to keep that promise - there's one more chapter left after this one. This series is close to my heart and I have always appreciated the phenomenal response it has generated and the generosity of its fans with your wonderful feedback, friendly emails, specially adapted teddy bears <g>, pics, poems etc etc <g> I want to say thank you by finishing the series if I can :-)

This chapter has a bit of everything *24/7* in it - armloads of angst, reams of relationship stuff, several steamy sex scenes, a punishing amount of BDSM action, lashings of Master/slave love, and not just one but several guest appearances by everyone's favourite cat. This chapter is the longest thus far, at around 60,000 words, so kick back, get yourself a nice cold drink, find yourself a warm slave to rest your feet on, and start reading... Oh, and please don't forget to fling me a crumb or two of feedback when you're done!!!!

Quotation courtesy of my sweet Alex. Standing thanks to Emma.

Very special thanks to Phoebe for your usual sound advice and beta comments - you've been wonderful as always!

A little moist cheese on toast with ketchup and Boromir-friendly dedication to Emma and Penny who just visited, and to Ann who was here in spirit this weekend :-)

**24/7** is an erotic fantasy and NOT a BDSM resource guide. The truth is sometimes exaggerated, or played with, for dramatic effect. For more information, please visit the **24/7 BDSM Glossary**.

**Warning: Lots of BDSM action in this chapter although really if you've reached Chapter 25 without being phased then I'd say nothing in here will frighten you particularly!**

**It goes without saying that this chapter is not some kind of "how to do it" guide to home branding. Don't do a home branding based on anything in this story!**

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*"A truth, still apparent, though disregarded, that things move violently to their place, but calmly in their place. To put it another way, everything has its right home, the region that suits it, and, unless forcibly restrained, will move thither by a kind of homing instinct."*

**J. Winterson  
"Art and Lies"**

"Fox, if you won't sit still I have ways of making you," Skinner commented ominously.

"I'm nervous." Mulder bit down on his already worried looking lower lip. He tasted the slight tang of blood and licked it away nervously. If Skinner saw he'd chewed into his lip enough to draw blood then there would be trouble.

"I know you're nervous, sweetheart, but there's absolutely nothing to be scared of." Skinner gave his slave a sympathetic sideways glance.

"That's easy for you to say," Mulder muttered, wriggling in his seat. His elbows felt unaccountably cramped. He shot his arms out to relieve some of the tension and caught his Master a glancing blow on the side of his muscled arm, causing the car to swerve across the road. Luckily it was deserted, and Skinner soon got control of the vehicle again and guided it back to safety.

"All right. That's it." Skinner slammed his foot on the brake, and then edged the car slowly over to the side of the road.

"I'm sorry," Mulder sighed as they came to a halt. "I really am. It's just...I don't think I've ever been more nervous in my entire life."

"I know." Skinner pulled on the handbrake, and unbuttoned his shirt-sleeves. Mulder gazed at his Master apprehensively as Skinner rolled his sleeves up to his elbows.

"You're just doing that because you're hot, right?" He asked.

Skinner turned to face him, a grim smile on his face. "Fox, it's November. I'm not overheated – but your ass will be in a moment. I think it's time to give you something to be **really** nervous about. Maybe a spanking will distract you from your thoughts for the rest of the journey. We have a long way to go and I have no intention of driving next to a whirling dervish. It's dangerous aside from anything else. Get out of the car."

Mulder stared at his Master blankly. Skinner wouldn't really spank him just for **fidgiting** would he? Here? By the side of the – admittedly deserted – road?

"Master..." he hissed urgently.

"Now," Skinner said tersely, opening the driver's door and getting out. Mulder unbuckled his seatbelt swiftly, and hopped out of the car. His warm breath misted the cold November air the minute he stepped out. "Come here," Skinner said in a curt tone. Oh shit – was his Master going to throw him over the hood of the car and spank him in full view of the world? Not that anybody was watching apart from a disinterested horse grazing in a nearby field. Mulder went quickly, without question, to his Master's side. Skinner exhaled loudly, and the resulting plume of breath mushroomed in the frosty air, enveloping Mulder for a split second in a cloud of warmth.

"What on earth am I going to do with you?" Skinner shook his head, exasperated, placed his hands on his slave's shoulders and looked into his eyes. Mulder found the safety and reassurance there that his Master always gave him. He managed a tentative smile. Skinner ran his fingers over Mulder's forehead, down over his nose, and stopped for a second on his lip, lingering on the tiny tear he found there. "What have we said about you damaging my property?" He asked.

Mulder sighed. "She's your **sister**," he protested, nonsensically.

"I know – and she's very nice. You'll like her," Skinner said softly, his large hands caressing his slave's shoulders gently.

"I'm not worried about that. I'm sure I **will** like her. If she's anything like her brother I'm certain to." Mulder gave his Master another wry grin. "It's the whole part about her liking me I'm more worried about," he said, his teeth going unwittingly to his lip and biting down again. Skinner entwined his hand firmly in his slave's hair and placed one finger over the lip to prevent the action.

"Tabi very kindly invited us over for Thanksgiving. Do you think she'd do that if she wasn't interested in meeting you? And, seriously, what's not to like?" Skinner asked. "Plenty of people like you. I like you. Scully likes you, Ian likes you - your weird geeky gunmen friends like you," Skinner added forcefully.

Mulder shrugged. "I'm a disaster at social occasions. I'll screw this up."

"You've accompanied me to plenty of parties," Skinner told him patiently. "You did just fine at all of them."

"They were scene parties," Mulder pointed out. "This is different. This is your family we're talking about."

"Not my whole family - just my sister."

"She'll hate me," Mulder predicted morosely. In truth, what was worrying him was not so much that his Master's sister wouldn't like him as the fact that he wanted to be liked – and that was something new for him to deal with. He wasn't someone who suffered fools gladly, and he didn't have the patience to deal with people who were obstructive or less than sympathetic to his ideas or his quest. He knew that sometimes came over as a kind of arrogance but he genuinely didn't feel that way – he was just too consumed by what he knew to be right to take the time to soothe people's ruffled feathers. That, he thought wryly, was his Master's talent. Mulder was now so used to alienating people that he had long ago told himself that he didn't care what people thought of him – his work was the important thing, not whether he was liked. However, now, for the first time in a very long while, he found himself caring – and he didn't like the feeling of vulnerability that induced. His Master had a kind of quiet, understated charm that seemed to work on people. He had a knack for listening to people, to seeming to empathise with them – Mulder didn't have that knack. His relationship with his own family had been so dysfunctional that he dreaded having to take on a whole new set of family politics with Skinner's family. Families, as far as Mulder was concerned, were a battleground. And ironically, it was he who had suggested visiting Skinner's sister – not his Master. In the closeness that had followed his Master's whipping a few weeks previously, the two men had talked frankly and candidly about their families. It was then that Mulder realised that Skinner had an affectionate, if slightly distant relationship with his sister – and, feeling confident after recent events, and wanting to help his troubled Master, he had thought it would be nice for them to get together for Thanksgiving – a suggestion that he was now regretting.

Skinner gazed at his slave for a moment, and then, without another word, he opened the back door of the car. He grabbed Mulder's wrist, climbed inside the car, and hauled his slave over his knee, all in one swift movement. Mulder gave a cry of sheer surprise as his pants and briefs were pulled down, and a gust of cold air from the open car door wafted over his naked, upturned ass.

"You can be an extremely charming man when you try," Skinner said, punctuating each word with a sharp swat to his slave's backside. Mulder wriggled helplessly in his Master's grasp, his long legs scissoring against the car's upholstery, but, as usual, there was no escape. Skinner's thighs were too sturdy, his chest and upper arms far too strong. He pinned his slave in position with seemingly effortless ease and then began spanking him in earnest, talking the whole time as he did so. "You can be courteous, polite, amusing, attentive and a very good conversationalist. I know this because I've witnessed you being all these things – frequently, and without effort. If you antagonise people it's usually in a professional capacity, because you care too much about your work to compromise. That's just you. I might not always agree with your methods but I haven't sought to change you – just to help you win the respect that you undoubtedly deserve but which your own pride and cussedness has held you back from attaining."

"Oh shit..." Mulder held on to his Master's thighs for dear life, as the swats became even louder and stung his exposed backside even more. Now he was grateful that the car door was open – the cold November air cooled his glowing ass.

"Are you listening to me?" Skinner demanded, his hand seemingly tireless in delivering endless stinging slaps to Mulder's backside.

"Yes! Master!" Mulder cried, desperately thankful that the road was deserted and no passing carload of people was witnessing his humiliation.

"Good. Then hear this: My sister is a very nice woman. She won't be judging you. You are accompanying me as my slave, my lover, my life partner, and my permanent companion. That status alone should give you all the confidence you need. What is your primary purpose in life, slave?"

"Pleasing you, Master!" Mulder gasped. "I exist to serve you!"

"That's right. You will therefore forget your insecurities, and concentrate solely on that task. And you can best please me by being yourself. That's all I ask. Tabi will love you. I already told you that she's got a thing for waifs and strays, and with your puppy dog eyes and chewed lip she'll melt the moment she sets eyes on you. Now, do you understand, or does this lesson need reinforcing some more?" Skinner's hand slowed, and began caressing gentle circles on his slave's backside instead of swats.

Mulder glanced back at his red bottom. He wasn't sure he could take much more – and they still had another two hours driving ahead of them in order to reach Skinner's sister's apartment in time for Thanksgiving dinner. Oh god. Dinner. With his Master's sister. Mulder found himself biting down on his lip again, wholeheartedly regretting his enthusiasm for this visit. Why did he do these things? Why did he throw himself into these dangerous situations without thinking about the consequences?

"What if she...?" he began.

He never finished the sentence. Skinner's hand began its stinging work again, making another circuit of his backside, paying particular attention to the swelling under-curve of his buttocks, where he sat, purposefully enflaming the region so that his slave would be in no doubt at all about what was expected of him – indeed his sore bottom would remind him of this conversation throughout the day.

"You will please me today the way you do every other day of your life. Today is no different. You will be the beautiful, attentive, charming slave that you always are, and that is all I ask of you. Nothing else. Nothing more complicated than that. Pleasing me is your sole consideration today as it is every day. Do you understand?" Skinner asked again.

"Oh god, yes!" Mulder gasped, finally giving himself up to the lesson his Master was teaching him.

"Good." Skinner finished spanking him, and caressed his hot bottom instead. "Hmmm...such a beautiful sight. The most erotic sight in the world," he said in a throaty tone. "If we were anywhere else, I'd throw you on your hands and knees and bury myself up to the hilt inside this beautiful red ass. As it is...I'm going to keep the memory of these glowing butt cheeks permanently in mind today, so that every time I look at you I'll visualise your hot bottom, waiting for me under your pants." Skinner's voice was almost dreamy, and Mulder realised they were both hard. He moaned, and wriggled on his Master's lap, pressing his erection into Skinner's thigh hopefully.

"The road is empty, Master," he whispered, all traces of his earlier embarrassment at their location disappearing at the thought of being taken, roughly and without mercy, by the side of the road. "You could use me. Nobody would see."

"It's tempting – but too risky," Skinner said regretfully. "It'll have to wait until tonight."

"Oh god. In your sister's apartment? In her spare room? No. We can't...she might hear..." Mulder babbled. Skinner slapped down a warning swat to silence him.

"You're mine, slave. I can use you anywhere or anyhow I choose – and I most definitely will want to use you tonight after this little scene, wherever we might be sleeping, so get used to the idea."

"Yes, Master," Mulder whispered, burying his face in his arms and surrendering himself once more to his Master's will. Just a few short months ago he knew he wouldn't even have been able to tell Skinner honestly what was worrying him. He would have become defensive, and angry – might even have lashed out, run off or otherwise gotten himself into trouble. Being honest about what was worrying him hadn't come easy to him. It felt self-pitying and weak, but he had to admit he felt better for it. Mulder sighed happily as Skinner stroked his bottom for several minutes, and then his Master nudged him to get to his feet, and ordered him to adjust his clothing and get out of the car.

Mulder scrambled out, his bottom protesting his awkward and undignified exit. He tidied himself up, tucking his shirt back inside his pants, as his Master climbed out of the back seat. Without pausing, Skinner wrapped his big arms around his slave's shoulders, pulled him close, and then gave him a deep, claiming kiss that made Mulder go weak at the knees. He clung onto his Master for dear life, then grinned at the other man stupidly when he was released, all his nervousness banished in the face of Skinner's masterly display of ownership, comfort, and love.

"Has this little 'conversation' helped?" Skinner asked softly, caressing the side of his slave's face. "Can we drive in safety now?"

"I think so." Mulder smiled, and drew his Master back for another kiss. Skinner's hands went around his slave's back, and cupped Mulder's thoroughly spanked buttocks, squeezing hard, making Mulder squirm.

"Stealing kisses – I'm sure that's a punishable offence," Skinner murmured huskily when Mulder released him.

"I'm yours, Master. You can punish me whenever you want," Mulder replied. "Although...I would prefer to eat my Thanksgiving dinner sitting down if it pleases you. Tabi really will think I'm strange if I insist on eating standing up!"

"You'll sit," Skinner predicted firmly with another masterly grin. He opened his door and got into the driver's seat again. Mulder slid cautiously into the passenger seat, his sore bottom making its feelings on the subject of the two-hour drive ahead very clear indeed.

"'Conversation'." Mulder made a face. "Only you could call what just happened on the back seat a 'conversation'. What is it with tops and their euphemisms? That wasn't a conversation."

"Yes it was. It was my hand conversing with your butt. And in case you didn't realise it – my hand won." Skinner grinned widely, reaching for his seatbelt and buckling it.

"Yeah, like I wasn't aware of that," Mulder grouched, still smiling good-humouredly. He wasn't looking forward to sitting on his sore ass for the next two hours but he had to admit that the spanking had worked. He felt calmer. The butterflies that had settled in the pit of his stomach seemed to have flown away – for now at least. He leaned his head against the car window, and gazed at his handsome Master happily as Skinner put the car into gear and pulled back onto the road.

"Love ya," Mulder murmured, unembarrassed by the admission, and full of admiration for the way his Master always seemed to know, unerringly, how to handle his wayward slave.

"I love you too." Skinner glanced at him, with a smile curving his full, kissable lips. "And so," he added firmly, "will Tabi."

"Tell me more about your sister," Mulder requested as they drove. Skinner gave a thoughtful little smile.

"She's...different. Always was, always will be. She doesn't fit in...she's her own person. I guess that's why we get along so well. She's a lot younger than me as well which helped I think. There's only four years between Brian and myself but I was 13 when Tabi came along and...well, I suspect she wasn't planned, although my folks never said as much. Tabi kept me sane when I got back from 'Nam. I used to sit in my bed in the family room - I couldn't walk well enough to make it upstairs to my bedroom – and Tabi used to sit on my bed with her colouring book. She'd make up all these stories about the people she was drawing to keep me amused."

"What about later? When she was older? You've never mentioned her until recently so I'm assuming you're not close."

"It's not that – we're both just busy, that's all. Tabi travels a lot." Skinner shrugged. "And I have the Bureau – and you." He grinned. "Both of which take up a lot of my time."

"Will your folks be upset that you aren't spending Thanksgiving with them?" Mulder asked cautiously. From the few things Skinner had said, he sensed relations between his Master and his parents were strained.

"I have no idea – they haven't invited me to Thanksgiving since Sharon died." Skinner shrugged but Mulder picked up on the slight sense of dejection in his body language.

"Walter?" He prompted softly.

Skinner took a deep breath. Mulder knew that his Master wasn't comfortable talking about himself – most of their most intimate conversations had taken place after a severe whipping had put Skinner in a state of mind in which he found it easier to talk about his most personal experiences and feelings – but Skinner demanded no less than total honesty from his slave and wasn't any kind of hypocrite. He might have found it hard but he did his best to share his thoughts and feelings.

"Being with Andrew...well, he wasn't the kind of man who could live with deception. He knew it wouldn't be easy for me but living a lie is even harder. He didn't insist I had to tell my family about our relationship but I knew that it was something I should do all the same." Skinner gazed moodily out of the window.

"I guess it was a shock to them. Their big, ex-marine son. Their Vietnam vet. And you'd been married, had this high powered job in DC – I expect finding out about your sexuality was the last thing they expected," Mulder commented. Skinner smiled at him gratefully.

"Yeah," he grunted. "You could say that. My father...I think he took enormous pleasure in finding the news offensive. It was as if it was the chink in my armour that he'd always been looking for. Finally, he

had something he could fail me on. Something legitimate, something that made me less than him despite the important career, the Vietnam medals – despite all that. I was, at the end of the day, just a fag, regardless of the fact that I had a long and happy marriage with Sharon, which I guess makes me bisexual - although that kind of differentiation is lost on my father and I'm not sure it matters anyway. He couldn't see beyond the 'fag' label and that's his loss." Skinner shrugged, and Mulder reached over and placed his hand on his Master's neck. He rubbed gently, easing the tension there.

"His loss," Mulder commented. "I'm lucky I never had to come out to my father. Mind you, he was predisposed to disapprove of me anyway, so I'm sure he'd have just grunted and taken it all in his stride as yet one more example of how incredibly disappointing I was to him. What about...?" He paused.

"The BDSM stuff? Christ, I never even got into that with them!" Skinner shook his head. "I figured that was really nobody's business but my own anyway. Tabi was the only one who didn't make me feel as if I was letting the whole family down – and she was the only one who asked to meet Andrew. They got on well – but then it was impossible not to like Andrew." Skinner glanced at Mulder who felt his sense of inadequacy surfacing again at that comment. He was no Andrew Linker. He didn't possess the kind of effortless charm that had made Andrew a man about whom nobody ever had a bad word to say. "He was like you in that respect," Skinner commented softly. Mulder shook his head, but he couldn't help smiling anyway – his Master saw things in him that he wasn't so sure existed but he was glad that Skinner had such a high opinion of him. "She's a good person," Skinner continued. "I don't think she has a judgemental bone in her body. She just wants me to be happy and I want the same for her." Skinner turned his head and kissed Mulder's fingers where they rested on his shoulder.

"She sounds great. I can't wait to meet her." Mulder was surprised to find that was nothing less than the truth.

The discussion, combined with the after-effects of the impromptu roadside spanking calmed Mulder to the point where he was able to fall asleep. He woke in surprise an hour later as his Master pulled up outside a large old building.

"Wake up, sleepyhead," Skinner said, tousling his slave's hair affectionately.

"We here?" Mulder gazed around blearily, confused.

"Yes." Skinner made no move to get out of the car. He just sat there, watching, as Mulder roused himself. "You okay, Fox?" He inquired gently. "Ready to go in?"

"Yes. I'm looking forward to it." Mulder nodded. Skinner's sister was the only member of his Master's family who had stood by Skinner during the darkest days of his life. Whether she liked him or not, he was sure, from all that he'd heard, that he would like her.

Mulder retrieved their overnight bag from the trunk of the car, and then they headed up the steps of the large building. Skinner pushed the entryphone button and a few seconds later the door swung open. Skinner trotted up two flights of stairs, Mulder in tow, and they stopped outside a red door at the end of

a long corridor. Skinner paused outside, and looked at his slave questioningly. Mulder took a deep breath, and then nodded. Skinner smiled, and knocked on the door.

"Hang on!" A female voice inside yelled. "I'm coming!"

Mulder exchanged a glance with his Master, and found the other man grinning.

"Tabi," Skinner mouthed. Mulder rolled his eyes.

"I'd never have guessed," he murmured. That earned him a none-too-serious swat from his Master. There was a sound akin to a miniature herd of elephants galloping across a hard wooden floor, and then the door was opened, and a second later something was flinging itself at his Master.

"I knew you'd be exactly on time to the minute! I knew it! What is wrong with you, Walter? Why are you so punctual? It isn't natural," the whirlwind protested, fastening itself around Skinner's neck, a mass of dark curls and bright blue sweater. Skinner gave a delighted laugh and spun his little sister around. Mulder watched, pensively, feeling suddenly detached from the family reunion. He wondered what it would be like to have a grown-up sister like this one – someone who invited him to Thanksgiving, and was open-minded enough to meet his male partner. It wasn't something he'd ever experience and that saddened him. What would Samantha have been like, he wondered? Would she have been accepting, like Tabi, or would she have been stiff, formal, and withdrawn? He was suddenly aware of a pair of bright, dark eyes gazing at him speculatively.

"And you must be the stray. Walter said he'd adopted a stray. I was expecting some gangling grad student, but you're a man!" Tabi said, with a refreshing honesty. "God, you're probably older than me - and you look able to handle yourself. Not a stray at all."

She disentangled herself from Skinner and then took Mulder completely by surprise by throwing herself enthusiastically at him. Her arms went around him and she squeezed and kissed his cheek. He was so dumbfounded that he didn't even move. Nobody but his Master ever hugged him with this degree of enthusiasm – not even Scully. People rarely hugged him at all – a fact for which he had always been profoundly grateful until now. Tabi's hug was nice – welcoming, and affectionate. "Oh god!" Tabi said, as she took a step back from him. "You're an FBI agent too, aren't you?"

"How did you know?" Mulder glanced at his Master in surprise. Skinner shrugged so he clearly hadn't told her that much about Mulder.

"The gun." Tabi patted his hip with a grimace. "Walter always carries one, although exactly what kind of desperate criminal he expects to uncover in my apartment is anyone's guess." She gave her brother a wicked smile, and then opened the door so they could step out of the gloomy hallway. It was only when they walked into the brightly lit apartment that Mulder got a good glimpse of Skinner's little sister. She wasn't what he'd expected – although he had no idea exactly what he **had** expected, just that it wasn't this. He supposed that in his mind's eye he'd had a vision of a female version of Skinner; slim, tall, self-assured, restrained...his mental image had faltered at the idea of assigning her hair, but this creature had masses of it, tumbling from her head in unruly dark brown curls. She wasn't slim, or particularly tall. She was of no more than average height, and quite plump, with a homely looking face rather than a beautiful one. Her inner beauty shone through though, in her laughing brown eyes, and the most

amazingly deep dimples that lit up her whole face whenever she smiled, which was frequently. Mulder gazed at her, transfixed.

"Fox, this is Tabi. Tabi – this is my..." Skinner paused and then smiled, "partner, Fox," he finished, although Mulder had the distinct impression that he could have introduced Mulder as his slave and Tabi wouldn't have batted an eyelid.

"So you're the famous Fox." She smiled at him, and those dimples made another appearance. Mulder put his head on one side, and grinned back at her, fascinated by her. "I knew it had to be someone fairly special for him to bring to Thanksgiving – and to explain why he's been so quiet recently. It's a pleasure to meet you, Fox. What an unusual name. Is there a story behind it? I love hearing people's stories! Shit, I'm talking too much, aren't I? I always do when I'm nervous."

"You're nervous of me?" Mulder laughed out loud. "Oh thank god, because I was so scared of meeting you that Walter had to 'talk' some sense into me on the way over here." He shot his Master a knowing look and Skinner grinned at him.

"Well, Walter's very good at talking sense. He was born sensible. It's very sad." She fixed her brother with a disapproving glare.

"It is," Mulder agreed. "Very sad." He sighed theatrically and then joined Tabi in a fit of giggles. He couldn't help it – her laugh was infectious. Skinner shook his head wryly, but was clearly delighted that his sister and his slave were getting along so well.

"I'm dying to get to know you, Fox," Tabi said, drawing them both into the living room. "It'll be cool having someone to tease Walter with. It's a hard job, but someone has to do it after all," she grinned.

"Uh, I don't **have** to be teased," Skinner remonstrated, shooting his slave a stern look.

"Yes you do, big brother." Tabi patted her brother affectionately on the cheek. "Your family and friends are the only people who know you outside that big, high-powered job you do. All you get there is 'yes, sir', and 'no, sir'. You need us to bring you back down to reality, doesn't he, Fox?"

Mulder almost choked. "Well, all he gets at home is 'yes, sir' and 'no, sir' as well," he winked. "I think he must like it that way," he told Tabi in a conspiratorial tone. She gave a delighted gurgle and they basked for a moment in their little mutual admiration society. Mulder dared a sideways glance at his Master. He might pay for it later when they were alone in their room, but somehow he thought that in the company of Skinner's little sister he was going to have some fun teasing his Master without mercy. Judging by the benign look on Skinner's face, this wasn't a state of affairs he was too unhappy about. He looked delighted that Mulder and Tabi were clearly going to be friends, and they all relaxed accordingly.

Tabi's apartment was something of an endearing mess. She showed Mulder and his Master to their room, which, Mulder was somewhat chagrined to find, was next to her own bedroom, then left them to go and check on the meal she was cooking.

"How thin d'you think the walls are?" Mulder whispered to his Master when they were alone, crawling onto the bed and placing his ear to the wall.

"Thick enough for us not to have to whisper," Skinner told him in a normal tone, an amused smile on his face.

"It wasn't talking I was worried about." Mulder made a face at his Master. "I know what you said in the car but I don't want your sister...I don't want her hearing anything," he muttered, flushing a bright red. "Perhaps we shouldn't..."

"Fox." Skinner placed their overnight bag on the bed. "I'm going to ride you to within an inch of your life tonight. Get used to the idea. Now, unpack the bag while I go and see my little sister."

Mulder gazed after his Master's disappearing back glumly. He was always uncomfortable at the thought of their intimacy being witnessed in any way – scene parties were fine, because they were for people who understood, but he could still remember his acute discomfort when he had first met Donald and Elliot. He just didn't like the idea of people outside the lifestyle knowing about their Master/slave relationship. He still had a fear of being judged, or maybe looked down on, for his sexual preference. His experiences with Krycek hadn't helped in that respect. His old enemy hadn't wasted one opportunity to sneer at Mulder for his submission, and that had rankled beyond endurance with Mulder. He didn't feel submissive towards anyone but Skinner. On the contrary – with just about everyone else he felt antagonistic and constantly prepared to do battle, partly because of the continual hostility he had encountered during his tenure on the X Files, and partly also because of a residual, defensive prickliness that his childhood had left him with. Only Skinner knew how to tame him – and Skinner was the only person he was prepared to be tamed by. With everyone else he was as wild and uncontrollable as he had always been. If they knew that he was prepared to act as another man's slave, to wait on him, serve him, offer up his body to him...

Mulder began unpacking their overnight bag, pondering the issue. He was proud of his slavery, but that didn't mean he wanted to share the details with anyone outside the lifestyle – and certainly not with Skinner's sister. He wasn't sure why that thought bothered him particularly, but it did. Mulder took a deep breath. His Master had left the door open and he could smell the scent of something delicious cooking, and could hear the low rumble of his Master's voice, punctuated every now and again by Tabi's warm laugh. Mulder pulled his Master's favourite black shirt out of the bag and inhaled the scent of it deeply. The smell of his Master's pheromones always calmed him, and the residual Eau De Skinner clinging to the shirt was enough to distract him. He put the shirt on a hanger and then unpacked his Master's chinos and hung those up too. He made sure his Master's clothing was lovingly unpacked before hastily seeing to his own clothes, and then, with another deep breath, he followed his Master into the kitchen.

Mulder found it so easy talking to Tabi that he seriously wondered whether he might have known her in a previous life. It was as if they'd known each other for years and Skinner hardly got a word in edgeways as his sister and his slave talked non-stop about just about everything over a splendid dinner of roast turkey, accompanied by so many different kinds of vegetable dishes that Mulder thought his stomach would explode but it was all too delicious not to indulge to the full. He chatted to Skinner's sister animatedly over their long, leisurely dinner – cramming in conversation between mouthfuls of sweet

potatoes, succotash, green bean casserole and some special kind of Russian salad that was, apparently, an old Skinner family recipe. Tabi took a keen interest in UFOs and other related paranormal phenomenon - Mulder was surprised at her depth of knowledge on the subject and she was clearly delighted by his.

"So how come you **know** all this stuff?" He asked her in awe when they both stopped for breath.

"I researched it once for a children's book I was working on," she grinned. "And I found it fascinating. 99% of it is crap in my view, but there were just a few cases that I could find no explanation for – they fascinated me."

"Oh I agree." Mulder nodded his head, animated. "So many cases aren't even worth investigating. I can take one look at a photo and judge whether it's been faked in most cases. So you write children's books?"

"Factual ones, yes." Tabi grinned. "Walter says it's because I've never grown up but then I don't think big brothers ever think of their little sisters as having grown up, do they?" She grinned at Skinner and he leaned over and flicked some hair away from her face affectionately, a fond smile on his face.

"I don't know." Mulder shrugged, feeling his mood change. A silence fell on the room. Skinner shot a concerned glance at his slave. "I had a little sister...she was abducted when she was 8 years old. We never knew what happened to her," Mulder said softly. "I'm still looking for her... Walter's the only reason why I haven't thrown my life away in the search. So, maybe it's not that they can't let you grow up...maybe it's just that big brothers can never let go of that protective thing they have for their kid sisters." He played with the threads on the table cloth for a moment, his long fingers worrying at them and was surprised a few seconds later when a tanned, dimpled hand descended on his own.

"Fox, I'm sorry. I had no idea. What a terrible thing to have happened," she said and he looked up into her warm, sympathetic brown eyes. "I might grumble about big brother here," Tabi continued, glancing at Skinner, "but I wouldn't be without him for the world. I am so sorry for your loss."

"Thank you." He squeezed her fingers. "I wouldn't be without your brother for the world either," he added softly, with a glance at Skinner. His Master gave a small, heartfelt smile, then leaned forward and kissed his slave on the forehead.

"It hasn't always been easy reaching this point, but I'm glad that you were able to turn away in time, before it went too far, before you got yourself killed," Skinner murmured and Mulder knew from the look in his Master's eyes that they were both thinking of Krycek, and how he had so recently tried to lure Mulder away using Samantha as bait – and how Mulder had finally found the strength to say 'no'.

"You always understood – even before we became involved. I don't think I ever realised that. Now I've met Tabi it's much clearer to me," Mulder said, gazing at his Master with a new understanding, meeting those brown eyes and finding in them a dark knowledge and sense of empathy.

"If anything ever happened to Tabi I would go to the ends of the earth to find her," Skinner said simply, with a shrug, his eyes never leaving those of his slave. "I've always understood what drives you, Fox. Always." His voice was firm and his expression unwavering and Mulder realised that just when he thought he knew everything there was to know about his Master, he uncovered more layers to this

complex, intensely private man. It was almost as if something had clicked into place, and yet another significant connection had been made between them – this one transcending sex, or their roles, and reaching right to the core of what attracted them to each other. Yes, of course his Master understood his quest - Mulder had always, on some level, been aware of that - but he hadn't fathomed the depth of that understanding until today. For a moment they weren't Master and slave, or boss and subordinate – they were simply older brothers with sisters they loved very much.

"I've already got two big brothers but you know there's always room for another one," Tabi said softly, gazing at Mulder thoughtfully. "The two I've got are very serious and grown up. I think you would make a very amusing brother, Fox."

Mulder grinned at her. "You should watch out – I'm a teasing, tickling, braid-tugging kind of big brother, Tabi."

Tabi grinned back and shot a glance at Skinner who was watching them both with a very happy expression on his face.

"Oh, I'm more than used to **that** kind of brother," she laughed. "I should warn you that I give as good as I get though as Walter will testify!"

"I sure can!" Skinner said in a heartfelt tone and they all laughed out loud, their earlier serious mood was broken. As Mulder got up to help Tabi bring in the coffee, Skinner caught his hand and bestowed a fond kiss on it, and Mulder in turn dropped a kiss on his Master's naked scalp. Something good had just happened here; something very good indeed.

Mulder joked around in the kitchen with Tabi as they made the coffee, and then they returned with it to the table where Skinner was busy clearing away the remains of their huge Thanksgiving meal.

"So, what's Tabi short for?" Mulder asked conversationally as he put the cups on the table.

"Tabitha," Tabi plonked the coffee pot down on a mat beside the cups.

"Nice name," Mulder commented.

"Oh god it's not my real name!" Tabi laughed. "It's a pet name Walter and Brian dreamed up for me."

Mulder was aware of Skinner suddenly stiffening, and glanced at him in surprise as Tabi carried on chatting away blithely, unaware of the sudden tension in the room.

"My mother was a great fan of that show, *Bewitched* which she watched avidly when she was expecting me, so she named me Samantha after the witch, but Walter said I was just a baby so I should have been named after Samantha's little girl, Tabitha – and hence I ended up with this ridiculous nickname!"

"Your name is Samantha?" Mulder stood there for a moment, and felt his universe rearranging itself around him as he processed this new information. He glanced at his Master who looked concerned.

"Sorry, I should have told you – I just forgot to be honest. We never call her that," Skinner told him in hurried tones.

"What's the problem?" Tabi looked from one to the other of them, her expression confused.

"My sister was called Samantha," Mulder said softly.

"Oh. I see." Tabi made a little face. "I guess it was a pretty common name in the mid-sixties."

"Excuse me. I need to...use the bathroom," Mulder muttered, and then he turned on his heel and fled along the corridor. He splashed his face with cool water and gazed at himself in the bathroom mirror. He was so many things - FBI agent, son, slave, and the grieving brother who had never been able to let his sister go. Now...he wasn't sure he understood it, but in some way this day was a rite of passage. He had become a brother again, and while he hadn't found the sister he had sought for so long, he had found someone else, another Samantha, not to take the place of the one he'd lost but maybe to occupy the little corner of his heart that had been frozen in time for far too long. It felt too profound a moment for him to comprehend and he stood, gazing at himself in the mirror for a long while, not, at this moment in time a son, or a slave, or an agent, but a brother again.

"Fox." He heard a tap on the door and then Skinner opened it, and stepped inside, closing it behind him. "Are you all right, sweetheart?" Skinner asked softly. Mulder turned to face the other man.

"Walter...I..." Mulder shook his head, uncertain what he was feeling right now as he faced the man who was his Master but who, more importantly right now, was also his lover and closest friend.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean that to be such a shock...I had no idea this trip would bring up these kind of issues. I should have thought of it and warned you. Forgive me." Skinner looked wretched. He crossed over to his slave, and put his hands on Mulder's shoulders. Mulder gazed at him steadily.

"Walter it isn't a problem. I just needed a few moments to...deal with it. It brought up some emotions I hadn't expected," Mulder explained. He shifted forward and settled himself easily into his lover's arms, which closed around him gently, clasping him close. And for a moment lovers were exactly what they were. Walter and Fox, not Master and slave, and, for the first time since his slavery had begun, Mulder saw a whole world beyond it, a world he had barely begun to explore, but one which he longed to. Mulder stayed there for a long time, his head resting on his lover's broad shoulder, swaying a little as he mentally came to terms with these new roles: Brother and lover.

"What are you thinking?" Skinner asked, his big hands still caressing his lover's back. Mulder sighed and burrowed in closer. These hands that could spank so hard and deliver such delicious torments to his body could also be so gentle, comforting and reassuring.

"That it feels almost as if...having given up everything to become your slave, having given up on a 'normal' relationship whatever that may be, and having given up on searching for Samantha as if my own life didn't matter, that somehow, through that act of giving everything up, everything I ever wanted has been given to me. I don't understand it. Kind of like those people who find love only when they stop looking. I know she's your Sam, not mine, but...I may never find my own sister...and..." Mulder ran out of words, blinded suddenly by tears. Skinner hugged him close and kissed his head and they stood there, sharing a very important moment.

Finally Skinner released him. "I'm going to make some phone calls to the office from the bedroom. Why don't you go and spend some time with Tabi alone? I think she's wondering what's happening right now."

Mulder smiled at the other man, and nodded. As always, Skinner seemed to instinctively know the right thing to do. Although he must be dying to catch up with his sister's news, he was more concerned that his lover got to know her, and began to forge a relationship of his own with her.

"That sounds good. Thank you," he said. Skinner nodded and walked towards the door.

"Walter," Mulder called him back. Skinner turned, one eyebrow raised questioningly. "For all of it," Mulder added. "Thank you for everything. For sticking with me even when I was unbearable, especially during those first few days of my slavery when I was all over the place, and for later, when I screwed up so badly in LA and then again in Seattle. And thank you for taking me as your slave in the first place. If you'd just taken me as your sub then I'd have run the moment you got too close. This way I didn't have a choice – so I couldn't sabotage it for myself. Thank you for all those things. I'm not sure I've ever said it before, maybe I have in bits and pieces but it bears saying again. Thank you – for being my Master and my lover. I think that now, more than ever before, I can see a way to be both slave and lover to you in return."

The expression on Skinner's face took Mulder completely by surprise. The big man closed his eyes for a moment, and sighed – a sigh that reminded Mulder of that first long sigh he had overheard in that room nearly a year ago, the sigh that had signalled that Skinner was prepared to take him as his slave. When Skinner opened his eyes again there was an expression of profound contentment in them.

"You already started on that journey awhile ago, Fox," Skinner told him softly. "What you did for me a few weeks ago, after that crap with Krycek, that wasn't something I ordered you to do. You stepped up the plate when I needed you most, and took some of the weight from me. You saw beyond the roles then, and you glimpsed it many times before that."

"Yes." Mulder nodded. "I just didn't see it **clearly** until today. You've waited a long time for me to see this particular truth. You must curse me sometimes – always pursuing the truth that's 'out there' and ignoring the one under my nose."

Skinner chuckled. "The journey has been a long one," he admitted, "but I don't regret one single second of it."

"Come here," Mulder ordered, and Skinner came, without argument or question, into Mulder's outstretched arms. Mulder kissed his lover soundly on the lips, and then released him. Skinner looked down on him with a tender expression in his dark eyes.

"We're not quite there yet, Fox, but we're very close now."

"You have to brand me, Walter," Mulder said firmly. "I know we talked about it happening over Christmas but we haven't discussed it since we agreed on that and I can't wait any longer. It's time."

"I know. We'll make the arrangements as soon as we get home," Skinner promised. Mulder smiled. It was definitely time.

When he returned to the living room, Tabi was sitting on the couch, her legs curled up beneath her, sipping her coffee as she stared out of the window. She looked up when she saw him, her expression uncertain, and he tugged her curly hair slyly and grinned at her broadly.

"Hey, sis," he said. "What's up?"

Her face broke into a wide grin and she patted the couch beside her. "Come and sit with me, Fox," she said. "We have so many years to catch up on."

Mulder sat down eagerly beside her and they started to talk, like old friends, or like siblings catching up after a long absence, with perfect ease, as if they'd known each other for years. Mulder relaxed back into the couch, utterly contented, drinking in the sight of her dark eyes, and her animated expressions as she talked. He hadn't found what he'd lost, but, after all these years, he had finally found a sister.

It was late by the time Mulder and Tabi finally took themselves off to bed. Mulder planted an affectionate kiss on his sister's cheek and then walked into the bedroom he was sharing with his Master. Skinner was sitting on the bed, reading a book. He glanced up when his slave came in and smiled.

"It's late – so I'm presuming you two had a lot to talk about," he commented.

"Yeah – it's so weird. I feel like I've known her all my life. Maybe because she's so much like you in some ways," Mulder said.

"She is?" Skinner folded his glasses and closed the book he'd been reading.

"Yes – she works like crazy for a start, and she knows all kinds of stuff that you wouldn't expect her to know."

"Perhaps that's because of her job. She has to research some quite varied subjects I believe," Skinner said. "I was just reading one of her books." He held up the book that had been perched on his knees. "She has a whole pile of them on a shelf over there." He pointed. Mulder wandered over and looked at the array of books – they were factual children's books, with a variety of interesting titles. He stared at the name on the spines, unsurprised to find that she used her real name on her work, and not the family nickname. "Samantha Skinner," he murmured, tracing his finger over the name. "Kind'a catchy."

"I think that's partly why Mom chose it," Skinner said with a nod. "I'm glad you like her, Fox."

"I do. I'm more glad that she seems to like me though." Mulder grinned. "I'm sorry – I hope you weren't bored in here on your own."

"Not at all." Skinner grinned. "It gave me some time to contemplate what I plan on doing to my slave tonight."

Mulder flushed – he had forgotten his Master's promise to use him but his cock told him in no uncertain terms that he liked the idea, even while his brain was already shrivelling up in embarrassment at the idea of his Master making love to his slave with Tabi in a room just down the hall. "Don't worry – we won't be making any noise, and even if we did I'm sure Tabi would take it in her stride," Skinner grinned. "I thought this would be a good opportunity to put you into some voluntary bondage, boy."

"Bondage, Master?" Mulder frowned. "We didn't bring any equipment."

"I know. We don't need any. That's why it's 'voluntary'," Skinner chuckled. "Go and clean up and brush your teeth, slave, and then get your ass back in here. I want to ride it hard tonight."

"Yes, Master." Mulder nodded, his excitement rising. He used the bathroom quickly and then went back into the bedroom. His Master was already undressed, and wearing his dressing gown.

"Take off your clothes, Fox, and lie on the bed, on your back," Skinner instructed.

Mulder did as he was told, shaking slightly from excitement. He crawled onto the bed and lay down, then waited for his Master to come to him.

"All right, boy – your slavery goes beyond physical bond. My orders are your bond," Skinner hissed, trailing a finger over his slave's naked body. Mulder moaned and Skinner placed the finger over his lips. "I want you to imagine that I've gagged you," he said. "You can't speak, you can't moan – you can't make any sound at all. It's physically impossible for you to do so. You have a huge gag wedged in your mouth and you can't so much as squeak around it. Understood?"

Mulder gazed at his Master, wide-eyed, wondering if he was going to be able to manage to do as commanded. He found his answer in Skinner's dark, uncompromising eyes. He would obey because his Master was expecting him to do so, however hard it might be. His Master wanted to use him without disturbing their hostess, and his Master **should** be able to use his slave whenever he wanted, however he wanted. Mulder nodded and closed his mouth firmly. Skinner smiled down on him.

"Good boy. Now, I want you to imagine that you're tied in the tightest bondage. I'm going to attach your wrists to the bedposts." Skinner raised first one of Mulder's arms and then the other so that they positioned over his head, and Mulder stretched them out taut, imagining how they would feel if they really were tied.

"Relax – you might have to keep this position for some time," Skinner warned. "Now your legs." He spread Mulder's legs wide as if they were being attached as well and Mulder's cock leapt to attention as he realised how open he was for his Master's use. "Good boy. Being a slave is an attitude of mind as much as anything else. It isn't about the equipment - the implements, the ropes and chains," Skinner told him, running that teasing finger over his slave's body as he spoke. "It's about what goes on in here." He tapped Mulder's head gently. "Your slavery begins and ends here, Fox, and you're going to demonstrate to me tonight how well you understand that. You're tied and gagged, subject to your Master's whim. You're an offering, a slave belonging to your Master who can use you as he pleases - hard..." Skinner slowly pinched one of Mulder's nipples between his thumb and forefinger with increasing pressure until Mulder bucked up beneath the hard caress, although he kept his arms and legs in place, as ordered, and didn't make a sound. "Or soft..." Skinner continued, releasing his grasp on

Mulder's nipple and bending to kiss the pinched flesh softly. He enveloped the abused nub in his warm, wet mouth and gently tongued it, until Mulder began to bliss out on a haze of pleasure.

"Good boy," Skinner murmured, his hands moving over Mulder's body like a maestro playing with a familiar, favourite instrument. Mulder concentrated hard on keeping his arms where his Master had placed them and his legs wide open, his ass available for whenever his Master should wish to take him. Skinner dropped his head down towards Mulder's body and sucked and played in earnest, pausing to render a loving bite to his slave's body at intervals, making Mulder squirm and long to cry out but, mindful of the mental gag in place, he remained utterly silent.

"My beautiful slave. I love your body when it moves and writhes beneath me," Skinner whispered, "but I love it like this, utterly still, as well. I love your obedience. It turns me on, slave."

He opened his dressing gown to reveal his large erection. Mulder swallowed hard. He longed to take his Master in his mouth or to touch that magnificent cock with his hands but that was denied him, so he feasted on the sight of it instead.

Skinner shrugged his gown away from his shoulders and returned to his task. He trailed one fingernail down Mulder's body, pressing just too hard to be comfortable but not so hard as to be painful. Mulder clenched his teeth together, bearing the torment, enjoying the torment, loving his own submission. He heard his Master reach for something on the nightstand and wondered what he was looking for, and then a moment later he found out as something rough began to scrape its way along his chest. He looked down, startled, to find that his Master was rubbing a nail file over his chest – just lightly, but it was an interesting sensation. The file moved inexorably towards his nipples and Mulder couldn't stop the slight moan of anticipation. Skinner tapped him sharply and he nodded, and closed his eyes, as if that would block out what he knew must be coming next. Sure enough, a few seconds later he felt the sensitive flesh of his nipples being rubbed by the file – just lightly, not enough to hurt, but enough to make itself felt. Mulder was sweating now, and he pulled on his imaginary cuffs, needing there to be **something** that would make him endure this without moving or putting up some resistance, but there was only his Master's command. Mulder hoped it would be enough because he was sure that Skinner was going to test him to the edge of his resistance this evening. Skinner took hold of his left nipple and ran the nail file more firmly over the tender surface. This time it did hurt – it wasn't a sharp pain but it was a rough one, and his nipples had already been sensitised by Skinner's earlier pinching and sucking on them. Mulder desperately wanted to put up his hands, to push his Master away, to bring the torment to an end.

"These are so sensitive aren't they?" Skinner murmured. "Even before we pierced them they were sensitive but now they're even more so. Hmmm?" Mulder knew he wasn't expected to reply but he opened his eyes to find Skinner totally engrossed in his task, his head bent as he busied himself with his slave's body, his eyes alight with enjoyment of his play. Mulder put his head back, utterly turned on by the expression in his Master's eyes. "Shall we go harder?" Skinner asked, in a husky, sexy whisper. "Hold on, slave, let's really torment these." And so saying he took one of the nipples in his mouth at the same time as he continued to rub the nail file over the surface of the other one. Mulder stiffened and bucked up into his Master's painful embrace, loving it, hating it, and needing it, at one and the same time. Skinner swapped sides, and sucked hard on the other nipple while using the nail file on its twin and it was all Mulder could do not to cry out. He twisted, but his arms never moved from the position in which they had been placed, and he kept his legs wide open, his body ever ready for his Master's use.

"Beautiful," Skinner murmured. "You know, one day, slave, when we're home and have plenty of time, I'll take several hours to torture these nipples. I have lots of interesting implements to use on them – I'll devote a whole session to them. By the end you'll be begging me to stop but I'll continue despite your pleas until you think you can't bear one more sensation. I'll use ice and heat, and clamps and weights." He squeezed Mulder's right nipple with one hand while he spoke and continued rubbing the nail file over the other one at the same time. Mulder thought he would expire from the dual sensations. "I think I'd enjoy that, slave," Skinner whispered, releasing both nipples and calming them with gentle lapping of his expert tongue. Mulder couldn't help himself – he whimpered, and Skinner slapped his thigh. "Quiet, boy...remember that your body is an offering to your Master, that you are tied and gagged, and cannot resist your Master's attentions, however cruel they might be."

Skinner grinned and pinched hard on the already sore nipples. It took all Mulder's strength of will and devotion to his Master's orders not to cry out.

"Good boy," Skinner said, releasing him. He kissed Mulder's forehead gently. "That's very good. You're doing very well," he said. Mulder felt his cock start to leak. This situation was so hot! His Master grinned down at him. "I think it's time I put you out of your misery," he said. "Hold tight, boy. I'm going to undo your legs but your arms will remain tied." He knelt between Mulder's spread legs and parted his buttocks and then carefully, slowly, inserted his cock, nudging it in, inch by inch, until Mulder's ass was fully distended. Then he leaned forward, and, resting his weight on his forearms, lowered his head to suck on Mulder's abused nipples once more. Mulder wanted to scream – his nipples were now so sensitised that the lightest touch felt like too much, and the sensation of his Master's massive cock fully lodged in his opening, filling him to the brim, added to the sensory overload. He longed to scream and wrap his arms around his Master, but he could do none of those things so instead he lay there, his arms above his head, his legs open wide, as Skinner claimed him with his tongue and with his cock. Finally his Master released his nipples and began slowly pounding in and out of his slave's body. He went so slowly that Mulder thought he'd expire, feeling every single inch as it entered him and then slid out again. He looked up to find his Master gazing down on him, a fond expression on his face.

"Beautiful slave...take me...that's it," Skinner whispered, shifting his hips for another slow, lazy thrust. Mulder was sure that if Skinner didn't move the action up a gear soon that he'd have to open his mouth and yell. He couldn't bear the sensations – he was minutely aware of even the tiniest movement. His voluntary bondage seemed to have made him more aware of every single nerve ending in his body and he was sure he could feel the message of each one individually.

Skinner slowed again, and came to rest once more on his slave's chest. This time, when his mouth closed over his slave's right nipple, he used his teeth, biting until Mulder bucked against him, although still Mulder remained in position, arms above his head, mouth closed, even though his legs were flailing like crazy. Skinner grinned a totally evil grin and transferred his attention to Mulder's other nipple, biting down even harder, his hard cock still lodged deep within his slave's body. Mulder gave a small, inarticulate cry, but Skinner didn't release him; it was as if he was glued to his slave's body and he wouldn't release the tortured nub of flesh between his teeth until he was good and ready. They were frozen like that for what seemed like an eternity, neither of them moving or speaking, bodies pressed so closely together that they were one, Skinner's cock embedded in Mulder's anus up to the hilt, and Mulder's tortured nipple inside Skinner's mouth. Then suddenly it was over. Skinner released him and, although he was relieved to be rid of the feeling of his Master's teeth on his sore nipple, Mulder also missed that warm, tormenting mouth, and perversely longed for it to return. Skinner didn't disappoint

him. A few more languid thrusts and he returned his attention once more to Mulder's nipples, biting down on the right one this time, and Mulder bore it as he had before, never breaking in his determination to remain in the position in which his Master had 'tied' him, to offer up his body for his Master's pleasure, however harsh that pleasure might be.

Finally Skinner released him, and began thrusting with more purpose. Mulder gazed, transfixed as always at his powerful Master as he entered him over and over again, faster and faster, his arm and shoulder muscles bulging as he neared his climax, his dark eyes alight with arousal and love for his slave who was demonstrating his devotion in the only way possible to him – with his obedience. Skinner came with a gasp, and rested his head on Mulder's chest. "You're still tied, little one," he said huskily. Mulder nodded, longing to caress his Master's back. Skinner withdrew from his slave's body and, dropping his head, took Mulder's cock in his mouth in one swallow. Mulder almost shouted in surprise and pleasure, and only just managed to keep from making a noise, and Skinner rewarded him by sucking him at length, before finally allowing him to come in his mouth. His Master swallowed and then slid up his slave's body and reached for his arms.

"I'm untying you, Fox," he whispered. "You've behaved excellently, little one. I'm very proud of you."

He moved Mulder's arms back down and dropped his mouth to Mulder's lips, his deep, searching kiss ending the pretence of the gag. Mulder sighed and opened up, his arms finally going around his Master's big body, holding him close. Skinner released his slave and looked down on him with a grin.

"See – we barely made any noise at all," he said. "Nobody heard us."

"No, Master," Mulder said dreamily. "Shit that was hard," he murmured, as Skinner flopped down beside him and pulled the sheets over them both.

"I know – but you did very well." Skinner wrapped his arms around his slave and held him close to his chest. They lay there sleepily for a while, and then Skinner gently touched his slave's nipples. "How are these?" He asked.

"Sore, Master!" Mulder retorted in a heartfelt tone. Skinner chuckled.

"It was so good playing with them while you couldn't move," he murmured, and Mulder grinned. He loved knowing that their sex life turned his Master on just as much as it turned him on. They were silent, both of them dozing towards sleep, and then Mulder spoke again.

"Master...did you mean what you said...about having a session in the Playroom just playing with my nipples?" He asked. Skinner kissed the back of his neck.

"I'd enjoy that – it's pretty close to edge play for you though. It isn't easy dealing with that much attention to just one area of your body for such a long time. I'd make sure you got some breaks but even so...it's a real endurance test. You might find that a turn on – by the end you'll probably be screaming for me to stop but you'd come harder than usual. Would you like to try it, Fox?" he asked.

Mulder shuddered, his sore nipples protesting at the very thought of it – and yet, as with all demonstrations of his Master's power over him, when it was extreme and took him to the very limits of his endurance he found a massive sexual energy in it.

"I don't know," he murmured. "Nipple play is so like walking a tightrope between pain and pleasure."

"You do have very sensitive nipples – that helps," Skinner chuckled. "And I enjoy watching your reaction to having them played with...I know you like being taken close to the edge and brought back again and this is a good way of doing it. Think about it. We could do it one slave day."

Mulder snuggled closer to his Master, resolving to think about it another day so he was surprised when he opened his mouth a few minutes later and said "Yes."

"Mm?" Skinner asked hazily.

"I'd like you to give me that session in the Playroom, Master," Mulder said. "Even though I'm sure I'll change my mind the minute it actually happens so please make me see it through to the end."

"Very well, little one," Skinner chuckled softly in his slave's ear. "We'll have such fun," he murmured, finding Mulder's nipples under the sheets and rubbing them softly. "I'll let you scream and twist next time – it's very erotic when you buck up against me," he commented in a husky tone. Mulder smiled to himself, and relaxed into his Master's loving embrace once more.

Mulder was genuinely sorry to leave Tabi and return to DC the following day.

"Promise me you'll come again for a longer visit soon," she said, grabbing him by the shoulders and hugging him tight. "And promise you'll call me – you can speak to me even if Walter isn't around. In fact, that would be best – you can keep me updated on all the gossip in my brother's life – all the stuff he doesn't tell me." She released Mulder and shot Skinner a significant look. He laughed and gathered her into a big hug.

"And you...don't be a stranger. I know we're both busy but it's been so good seeing you again," Tabi told her brother, her eyes dark with affection. "And very good seeing you so happy," she added in an undertone. "Fox is good for you, Walter. I've never seen you looking so relaxed. This is serious isn't it?" She asked. Skinner smiled and glanced at his slave.

"Oh it's more than that, Tabi. This one's for keeps."

"I noticed the wedding ring," Tabi whispered, almost conspiratorially, with a nod in the direction of Mulder's left hand. "It's your ring isn't it, Walter?" Skinner smiled again and nodded.

"Nothing much gets past you, Tabi. Yes, I put that ring on Fox's finger." He and his slave exchanged a meaningful glance – neither of them had forgotten the exact circumstances of that particular act and what it had signified.

"But you don't wear his ring?" Tabi asked. "Why's that?"

Skinner's smile faded a little. "Well, maybe because he hasn't given me one yet," he murmured. Mulder frowned. It hadn't even occurred to him to give his Master a wedding ring – Skinner was the Master and

he was the slave. It would take a very bold slave indeed to make his Master wear a symbol of his commitment on his hand...and yet, now that she had mentioned it, Mulder thought he'd like very much to see Skinner wearing his ring. He wondered whether it was something that could ever happen. Skinner's tone had been wistful when he'd made his reply, so maybe there was a chance that it could.

"Here's my cell phone number." Tabi tucked a piece of paper into Mulder's shirt pocket. "Call me," she ordered firmly. Mulder laughed and this time swung **her** into up a brotherly hug, which wasn't something he'd done since he was 12 years old. It felt good.

"I will, sis," he said grinning into her dark curly hair.

"Oh, and here." She handed him a cooler.

"What's this?" Mulder frowned.

"Leftovers from dinner yesterday – I can't possibly eat them all up and I know Walter has a healthy appetite and you look as if you could do with fattening up." Tabi grinned at him. Mulder shook his head and grinned back, before drawing her into another hug, reluctant to leave.

He got into the car beside Skinner, and they both waved farewell to Tabi. She stood on the sidewalk for a long time waving until the car was completely out of sight. Mulder sat back in his seat with a sigh.

"That was the best Thanksgiving of my life," he murmured. "Thank you, Walter."

"What did you do this time last year?" Skinner asked.

"I sat in my apartment eating pizza and watching very bad science fiction movies." Mulder shrugged. "You?"

"Elaine invited me over." Skinner smiled. "After dinner she held a play party but I wasn't in the mood so I went for a very long walk and tried to figure out where my life was going. I didn't know that just a few short months later you'd arrive on my doorstep and demand to be let in."

"Talking of play parties..." Mulder glanced at Skinner. "Do you have any idea when exactly you'll brand me, Master?"

"I was thinking – how about 10 days before Christmas, on the Saturday?" Skinner suggested. "It gives us time to prepare and to invite guests, and as it's so close to Christmas we could take two weeks vacation starting immediately afterwards to give you time to..." He paused. "Adjust," he finished, but Mulder knew what he meant. He had no wish to return to work immediately after what he knew would be both a profound and a painful experience – he liked the idea of having some time to heal afterwards, and the chance to spend some quality time with his Master.

"Sounds good to me," he said with a nod. "Who will you invite, Master?"

"I think we should both decide on the guest list – it's an important moment for both of us after all," Skinner mused. Mulder smiled and stroked his Master's hand. That was a boon his Master didn't have to grant him – Skinner could say when and where and how, just as he had for their first party together, so

many long months ago.

"Thank you, Master," Mulder murmured softly.

"You're welcome, slave." Skinner replied.

They were no sooner through the door than a small bundle of creamy coloured fur hurled herself at them, wailing piteously.

"Don't over-dramatise. It was only one night, Wanda," Skinner said, picking her up and allowing himself to be head-butted by her furry head.

"Madam is so spoiled," Mulder commented, bringing the bags in, but he couldn't wait for Skinner to put the little cat back down again so that he could pick her up and make a fuss of her himself. Wanda submitted ecstatically – never one to refuse the devotion of human slaves she was always happy to bestow her largesse on anyone who would tickle her vigorously behind the ears. Mulder knew that he could never hope to rival his Master's place in her heart, but he did think that he came a close second these days. Skinner would sit still for hours on end so that she could sleep on his lap but it was Mulder who got down on his hands and knees and played with her so he guessed that she had somehow, somewhere along the way, managed to train both of them to see to her every need.

The invitations to the branding went out a few days later and they started receiving replies almost immediately.

"Who's coming?" Mulder asked from his vantage position kneeling next to his Master, his chin on Skinner's lap, as the big man went through the replies in his den a week or so later.

"Everyone." Skinner grinned, glancing down at him.

"Everyone?" Mulder was shocked. "Every single person we invited is coming?" He asked, kneeling up straight in surprise. They had invited over 40 people – all friends from the scene. It was going to be a huge gathering.

"Yup!" Skinner laughed out loud at the expression on his slave's face. "Did you seriously think anybody would turn down an invitation to one of the few parties the Guardian holds? Especially when they know he's going to brand his slave?"

"I guess I hadn't thought of it like that," Mulder mused. "Oh shit. I hope I don't make a complete idiot of myself."

"And how would you do that?" Skinner asked, with a raised eyebrow.

"By...I don't know...screwing up. Screaming too loudly..." He suggested ruefully. Skinner laughed.

"You can scream as loudly as you like, Fox. That's what a branding is about – being completely honest about who you are, what you feel, and who you belong to."

"Can I look at the branding iron again, Master?" Mulder asked.

"Of course. It's yours. I gave it to you as a birthday gift," Skinner told him. He opened one of his desk drawers, withdrew the sleek, metallic branding iron, and handed it to Mulder who took it, shivering as he did so. Mulder rocked back on his heels and ran his hand over the surface of the brand. It was a simple, elegant S. "S for Skinner, s for slave," he murmured.

"That's right, boy." Skinner smiled and tousled his hair affectionately.

"Seriously speaking – how much does it hurt?" Mulder asked.

Skinner mused on that for a moment. "Well, I won't lie to you, Fox - the pain will be intense. Some people pass out. It won't be any shame on you if you do pass out – Perry will be on standby to administer first aid if required. However..." Skinner put a warm hand on Mulder's shoulder to still his trembling. "I'll ensure that you're deeply in head space first, Fox. I don't want this to be an ordeal – I want it to be a celebration."

"I think you said something similar when you pierced me," Mulder murmured.

"I probably did – but this is different. This is a permanent mark. Nipple rings can be removed – a brand is for life," Skinner said softly. "Do you trust me, Fox?" He asked, his hands sweeping over Mulder's shoulders, up and down, reassuring, comforting and loving.

"Yes, Master. You know I do," Mulder replied, and his trembling stopped to be replaced by a warm feeling in the pit of his stomach. "I am scared but you know how much I want this. One thing I was wondering, Master..." He hesitated. Skinner put a finger under his chin and lifted his slave's face and Mulder found himself looking into a pair of dark eyes. "You said you'd mark me on my buttocks...?"

"I was considering that, yes." Skinner gazed at him implacably.

"Well, I was wondering whether you'd mark me somewhere else...I'd like to be able to see the brand when I'm naked," Mulder blurted. "I'd like it to be somewhere I can touch it, even when I'm clothed, so that I can feel you there, marked on me. If you mark my butt I'll look damn strange if I keep touching my ass!"

"I can understand that," Skinner mused. "In fact, I can think of somewhere else I'd like to mark you – somewhere that I'll be able to touch when we're out together – although only you and I will know the significance of that touch."

"Where, Master?"

"Your thigh. Here." Skinner reached out and touched Mulder's right flank. "Another good thing about that position is that I can look into your eyes when I'm branding you. I think that would make the

moment more...intense, for both of us."

"Yes, Master," Mulder whispered, drowning in his Master's dark eyed gaze.

"However..." Skinner said and Mulder's heart sank. "If your butt is to remain unmarked, then it's only fair to warn you that I will have to continue marking it regularly with my switch, slave. I told you when you arrived, that this ass of yours should bear your Master's mark at all times. If it isn't going to have a permanent mark then it will need to accept my more temporary marks every few days."

Mulder swallowed hard. Much as he hated the actual process of being marked, he did love the ritual of marking that they had built up between them. He considered the matter for several moments. It had been impudent of him to suggest an alternative site for the branding, but his Master had been indulgent – although he had allowed his slave to know that he wouldn't be granted this boon without a price. All told, it was a price Mulder thought he was prepared to pay for being able to look into his Master's eyes as he was being branded, and for being able to look at his brand and touch it with impunity, whenever he liked.

"I understand, Master," he said, bowing his head. "I would like the brand on my thigh, Master. I'm happy to be marked with your switch for the rest of my life to pay for that honour."  
Skinner smiled, and stroked his slave's hair softly. Then he raised Mulder's head and kissed his lips gently, before releasing him.

"You have become the slave I've always wanted you to be – and the slave you've always wanted to be," he said softly. "Well done, Fox." He bestowed another tender kiss on Mulder's willing lips and Mulder clung to him for a moment, his heart positively zinging in his chest at his Master's praise. "We've come such a long way, haven't we?" Skinner said when the kiss drew to an end.

"Yes, Master. Such a long way." Mulder remembered the many ups and downs of their relationship thus far – and flushed slightly when he recalled how long it had taken him to get to this place in his slavery, and how much he had fought the very thing he wanted most in the world.

The phone broke into their reverie and Skinner picked it up. Mulder resumed his position kneeling at his Master's side, and was surprised when, after a few brief moments of chat, Skinner passed the phone to him.

"It's Murray," he said.

"And he wants to talk to me?" Mulder asked, bemused. Hammer's large, dramatic, hook-nosed top was Skinner's friend – Mulder always felt they existed on some kind of toppy plane together, and that as tops they were rarely interested in any sub or slave other than their own.

"Why not?" Skinner handed Mulder the phone and he took it, warily.

"Fox!" Murray's voice roared into the earpiece. "We got your invitation, lad! I can't tell you how delighted we are that you've finally managed to talk that Master of yours into branding you."

"I'm pretty pleased about it myself!" Mulder replied with a laugh.

"This is the best news we've had in a long time. One of Walter's magnificent parties and the chance to see you two make that last commitment to each other. Hammer – remind me to take my handkerchief. I always cry at these ceremonies," Murray proclaimed and Mulder had no doubt that was the case. Murray was a man who wore his emotions loudly, proudly, and unashamedly on his sleeve.

"I'm delighted for you, lad, truly delighted. Hammer had to talk me into branding him but it was the best thing we ever did. I love that little symbol, seared into his flesh...just love it! He went through that pain for me and I'm proud of him for that. I'll bet Walter is just as proud of you."

"I think maybe he is." Mulder glanced at his Master who smiled at him encouragingly.

"You can bet on it," Murray said confidently.

"Did you want to talk to my Master again?" Mulder asked tentatively.

"God no. I called to speak to you!" Murray laughed.

"Oh, I just thought...that, well, Walter's another top and I assumed..." Mulder began, feeling himself flushing.

"That tops only want to talk to other tops? Nonsense!" Murray scolded in his roaring tones. "The world would be a very boring place if that were so."

Mulder smiled. He was both surprised and gratified that Murray wanted to talk to him. He felt like he'd arrived, like he was finally accepted amongst these people, as one of them – and then he realised that it had only been his own misguided notions of his place in this subculture that had ever prevented him feeling this way before. Ian, after all, was perfectly at ease with everyone on the scene, and he was a sub, but Mulder had always felt that he was being judged, looked down on, and even sneered at for his preference. Talking to Murray he knew he couldn't have been more wrong.

"Where would we be without our subs, Fox? You're the other half of us – what are we without you? Hmm?" Murray demanded on the other end of the phone. "You define us, you make us what we are. You enable us to enjoy this exchange of power that we find so erotic. Without you we wouldn't be whole." Mulder relaxed, and leaned his head against his Master's knee as he continued the conversation. Murray's deep, booming voice was curiously comforting and they conversed for several minutes before the call came to an end.

The preparations for the party proceeded without hitch. They ordered food and drink and generally prepared. On the weekend before the party, Skinner took Mulder up to the Playroom and they discussed how they wanted to arrange it to best effect so that everybody would be able to view the proceedings. Mulder felt a strange tingle in his stomach as they matter of factly talked about a ceremony that would culminate with a white-hot iron being plunged into his flesh. While he knew Skinner had never branded anyone before, he also knew that his Master had studied the subject thoroughly and knew exactly what he was doing.

"Fox, I'm going to tie you down while I brand you," Skinner told him. "It's not that I don't trust you, but I

need you to be very still while I brand you and I don't think that's something you'll physically be able to do without some help. So, I'm going to tie you down on the massage couch. I'll alter the height so you're in a sitting position – I want you to be able to see everything that's going on. Here, it'll be positioned like this."

He sat Mulder down on the couch and showed him exactly how he'd been tied, with his leg and torso held completely immobile.

"I'll heat the brand over here." Skinner waved his hand. Mulder swallowed hard, trying to visualise the scene and failing, his stomach somersaulting in nervous anticipation. Skinner seemed to sense his mood and changed the topic of conversation accordingly.

"What do you want me to wear?" Skinner opened the cupboard containing his scene clothes and gestured inside.

"You mean I get to choose?" Mulder was delighted.

"Sure." Skinner grinned. "You, of course, will be naked for the actual event, but not for the preceding party. I'll strip you just before we begin. You'll wear those leather pants with the butt cut out of them – I love you in them and I'll mark you beforehand so folks will have something to look at – apart from your cute ass of course." He grinned, wolfishly. Mulder sighed and rolled his eyeballs. "I'll let you wear a harness on your chest – gold, I think. It's either that outfit or the harem boy one which I adore, so take your pick." Skinner folded his arms and looked at his slave with an amused raised eyebrow.

"I'll take the leather pants, Master," Mulder said hurriedly. The harem pants look might feed into one of his Master's most cherished fantasies but he really felt stupid in them.

"Somehow I thought you'd say that." Skinner grinned. "Well, I might have to dress you up in the harem outfit sometime soon just for myself...I love you in that costume. Let's get back to my outfit for the party. Any suggestions?"

Mulder spent a happy hour sorting through his Master's closet before deciding on the pair of tight black moleskin pants, the black belt with the silver buckle, the black silk shirt and the long leather boots that Skinner had been wearing the day he had first collared and ringed his slave.

"Interesting choice, little one," Skinner commented softly as he surveyed the outfit. "Any reason?"

"It seemed...fitting." Mulder murmured. "Last time you wore it you took me as your slave. This time...you'll be marking me as such for all to see, for all time."

"I like your sense of occasion." Skinner bestowed a loving kiss on his slave's lips. When he released his slave, he put an arm around Mulder's shoulders and they surveyed the Playroom together.

"This time next week it'll be full of people, waiting to see you branded," Skinner murmured. Mulder shivered and leaned into his Master's warm embrace.

"I can't wait, Master," he replied.

Mulder was woken in the early hours of the morning a few hours later by the sound of the phone. He blinked, blearily, and listened with half an ear as Skinner answered it. He came to as he heard the tone of his Master's voice change.

"When? How bad is it? Where?" Skinner asked, sitting up in bed and swinging his legs over the side. "We'll be there. We'll come now. No, listen, Hammer, we'll come. Of course we'll come," Skinner said urgently. "Just hold on, Hammer. We'll be there." He put the phone down and sat there for a moment, his expression one of shock and distress.

"Walter? What's happened?" Mulder got up and knelt on the bed behind his Master, putting his hands on the other man's shoulders. "Is everything okay?"

"No. That was Hammer. It's Murray..." Skinner took a deep breath and his jaw shifted sideways so fast that Mulder heard an audible click.

"What's happened to him, Walter?" Mulder asked gently. He knew Skinner and Murray had been friends for years and Skinner was clearly upset.

"He's had a heart attack. He's in the ICU. Hammer is there with him but he says..." Skinner paused and took a deep breath. "He says it's bad, that Murray might not make it. I said we'd go over there now. I'm about the closest friend Murray's got apart from Hammer. He's always been very good to me. After Andrew died, Murray, Hammer and Elaine were very kind to me. Murray often invited me over at the weekends – he worried about me being lonely. We even took a vacation together in the beach house, all four of us...Elaine wasn't with David then. Murray has the biggest heart of anyone I know..." Skinner broke off and Mulder was shocked to realise that his big, strong, normally stoical Master was very close to tears.

"Come here," he whispered, and he pulled Skinner close and hugged him for a moment, kissing his head over and over again, soothing the big man. After a couple of minutes, Skinner visibly pulled himself together and got up.

"I'm coming with you," Mulder said, grabbing a pair of jeans and a tee shirt.

"No, you don't have to..." Skinner began but Mulder stopped him short.

"He's my friend too – I want to be there. And, more than that, I want to be with you, Walter – where I belong."

Skinner gazed at him for a moment and then nodded, his eyes glassy with tears.

They found Hammer pacing up and down a hospital corridor.

"Walter, Fox...thank you for coming," Hammer said in a choked voice when he saw them. Skinner put an arm around Hammer's shoulder and squeezed him tight.

"We had to be here," Skinner said firmly.

"Any more news?" Mulder asked.

Hammer shook his head. "It was so sudden. One minute he was fine...then he just literally keeled over. He was holding onto his chest...I did CPR, gave him aspirin, and kept him going until the paramedics arrived. The doctors worked on him when they got him to the ER but they say he's in a critical condition." Hammer wrapped his arms around his stomach as if he was going to be physically sick. "I know he looks like he's this big, strong, blustery guy...he's so larger than life...but underneath he's the sweetest man. He's a pussycat really. People don't understand...they don't know him."

"We do. We know what kind of man he is," Skinner said softly. "Hammer – don't give up hope just yet. He's still with us and he's a fighter. He won't give in easily."

"Yes." Hammer nodded, still hugging his stomach.

"Can we see him?" Skinner asked softly.

"Yes...I...they were putting a new IV into him so I came out to try and pull myself together. They said we can sit with him as long as we don't get in the way."

They walked into the ICU and Mulder took a deep breath as he caught sight of Murray. Hammer's lover was a big man – but now he looked small, and frail. He was as big in personality as he was in girth and now that he was sedated, he seemed so diminished – the most vital part of him – his personality - was missing.

Skinner sat beside the bed and gently stroked the other man's hand, while Hammer took up position opposite him. Mulder stood beside Skinner, a hand on his Master's shoulder, giving what comfort he could.

"Hey, Murray. You have to pull through this," Skinner said softly. "We need you, buddy."

Mulder swallowed down the lump that had risen in his throat. He had spoken to Murray so recently when the other man had called to congratulate him on his imminent branding and he'd been so thrilled by that phone call. It hardly seemed possible that Murray could be lying here, looking so pale and small beneath the sheets, attached to all these machines by tubes and wires.

They stayed all through the night and all the next day. Towards evening, Murray's condition improved a little and the nurse told them to go home and get some rest – they'd be called if there was any news.

"I kept telling him to make a living will," Hammer muttered tiredly as they walked out of the hospital towards Skinner's car. "I work with terminally ill people and I kept saying to him..." Hammer shook his head. "But you know Murray – he didn't like to think he'd ever die. I think he thought he'd just disappear in a puff of smoke one day. He didn't think he might be on a life support machine...do you know that his closest relative is his niece – a woman he's only met a few times in his entire life? She now has the power of life and death over him. She gets to decide. Not me, not his lover of 20 years, the man who's

shared his life, his laughter, his tears for two decades...not me, but her. I should have sat him down and **made** him do it. I knew...I've seen this kind of thing happen. I knew and I should have insisted..."

"Hey – you're tired - don't give yourself such a hard time," Skinner told him. "We all know Murray. It's the devil's own job to get him to do anything he doesn't want to. Hell, he doesn't even **listen** to things he doesn't want to hear."

"Yeah." Hammer gave a little laugh. "That's Murray. He's such a mule-headed, big hearted, totally..." He broke off, a little choke in his voice.

"Hammer – do you want to come back with me and Fox?" Skinner asked. "You could stay with us."

"Thank you...but no." Hammer shook his head. "It's very kind of you, Walter, but...I'd rather be in my own home...with his stuff all around me...just in case..." His voice trailed off again.

Over the next few days, Skinner spent every spare minute outside work at his friend's bedside and Mulder was there almost as much...only now he wasn't so much worried about Murray as about his own Master. Skinner had caught a cold and the strain of his friend's illness was taking its toll on him. His face had a pale, haggard cast, and he looked extremely tired. Mulder realised, with a pang of guilt, that Skinner's reserves of energy had already been low before this latest crisis. When he thought back to the events of the past year, he could see how much responsibility his Master had taken – and was continuing to take – for everyone, not least his own slave. There seemed to be no limit to the responsibilities resting on his Master's broad shoulders. At the office, Skinner was in charge of the FBI's violent crimes division, a job that required enormous amount of drive and dedication. On the scene, Skinner had all the responsibilities of Guardian of the House, culminating in the nightmare that had been Franklin's abuse of his slave, Lee. At home, Skinner had taken on the task of pulling his self-destructive slave back from the brink...a task that had overwhelmed both their lives for the past 10 months. Mulder thought back to all the many crises of his relationship with Skinner, from that first week of training when he had been trying to play Skinner, to that disastrous first day back at work when he had spun off into orbit. There had been the many other highs and lows on the roller-coaster ride – his trip to California where he had pried into his Master's personal life, uncovering his painful secret, his subsequent witnessing of the kind of punishment Skinner took on himself, his own crisis in Seattle and the fallout from it that had seen him carve into his chest with a razor blade...all this Skinner had dealt with, and there had been many pleasures along with the drama, but when, Mulder thought to himself, had Skinner ever had the chance to just kick back and relax? No wonder the strain was finally starting to show.

Mulder did all he could during that week to ensure that his Master had food, clean clothing and the comfort of his slave's arms whenever he needed any of those things, but it felt so little compared to all that his Master had done for him. He was grateful that Skinner felt able to lean on him, even if it was only for the small things like remembering to feed Wanda and clear out her litter tray, but he wished he could be of even more help to his Master and really relieve the burdens resting on those broad shoulders.

By Tuesday, Murray was officially declared out of danger, although he was still very weak and would need an angioplasty. Mulder worked late and went to collect Skinner from the hospital and do some visiting of his own that evening. Murray was still asleep – Mulder had yet to see him awake – but Hammer and Skinner were talking softly over his bed.

"Hey, Fox," Hammer smiled at him as he came in and Mulder smiled back as he placed a hand on his Master's shoulder and gently kissed the other man's head.

"How's he doing?"

"Fine – good." Hammer nodded. "Okay, so I don't think he'll exactly be well enough to attend your branding on Saturday but..."

"The branding?" Mulder interrupted. "Shit...to be honest I'd forgotten about it with all this going on."

"I think we should postpone it..." Skinner interjected.

"Don't you dare!" A dry, rasping voice said and they all turned to gaze at Murray, whose eyelids had fluttered open and who was staring at them as imperiously as was possible when you're that ill.

"Hey you." Hammer clasped his lover's hand in his own, raised it to his lips, and kissed it gently. "I might have known you'd have something to say on that particular subject!" He grinned.

"Maybe if we'd started talking about it before you'd have woken up earlier!"

"Hmmm...just so long as this young pup gets his brand. We've all waited more than long enough for the occasion," Murray muttered. "And I've never seen a lad more in need of his Master's mark on his body than this one."

Mulder laughed out loud and squeezed his Master's shoulders.

"I think you're right, Murray," Skinner agreed, putting one hand over Mulder's long fingers and stroking, tenderly.

"What the hell are all these damn tubes doing sticking out of me?" Murray exclaimed. He tried to sit up and then lay back down as if he'd been toppled. "Was I hit by a bus, Hammer?" He asked plaintively, sounding almost like a little boy.

"You'll be fine," Hammer told him firmly. "But you have to take it easy for a while. You did have a heart attack, Murray."

"Hmph. Don't say 'I told you so'," Murray murmured, gazing hazily at his lover. "Always nagging me to eat right and do this and do that. Never met a more pushy sub in my life."

"That's just the way you like it and you know it," Hammer retaliated with a grin.

Mulder had a sudden vivid glimpse into their relationship. It was very different to that of his own with his Master. Hammer was the fussy, the nurturer, the one who got things done. He effectively managed

and took care of Murray who, Mulder suspected, probably couldn't even take care of his own socks let alone his life. Murray in return was a larger than life character who kept his sub constantly entertained, and whose generosity and big heart were legendary on the scene. Mulder was surprised to find tears pricking at the back of his eyes. Everyone had their own way of making this work, and they were all different. He thought of urbane, laid back Perry – never quite the stern master that his friend Ian wanted, but prepared to inhabit the role periodically in order to keep his lover happy. Murray loved being a top, more for the sense of drama and the chance to dress up in elaborate costumes than because of any intrinsic interest in the eroticism of the role, while Hammer, who, with his battered face and strong, wiry body looked like the last person you'd want to meet on a dark night, worked in a hospice, nursing the terminally ill, and was a super-efficient sub who liked nothing better than taking charge of his eccentric, chaotic top. Then there was himself and Skinner. Mulder glanced down at his Master, wondering how they appeared to the outside world. Skinner was so calm, and good-natured, prepared to be as strict as it took to keep Mulder from spinning off into space in a self-destructive frenzy. Who on the outside understood the nuances of **their** relationship? Who saw and understood that the veneer of slave and Master told so little of the truth about what and who they were, and how they complemented each other so well?

Mulder glanced at his Master as he drove the other man home later that evening.

"Will you go ahead with the branding, Master?" He asked.

"Well...Murray was pretty insistent that we shouldn't put it off on his account and we have waited a long time..." Skinner hesitated and looked at his slave wearily. "How do you feel about it?" He asked.

Mulder shrugged. "It'd be nice to proceed with our plans," he commented, unsure exactly **how** he felt on the topic. "The room's all ready and all the food and drink will be arriving on Saturday."

"I know...it feels a little rushed though," Skinner commented.

"I agree." Mulder nodded as he sighed.

"But...damnit, this is something we've both wanted for such a long time...and it'll be a nightmare cancelling everything at the last minute," Skinner said. "It'll probably be easier to go ahead with it than cancel."

"Will you be well enough, Master?" Mulder asked.

"Me? I'm fine," Skinner said tersely.

"You haven't been well and you're exhausted," Mulder pointed out gently.

"It's just a cold – it's already going and as for being tired, it's nothing that a few good night's sleep won't cure," Skinner replied.

"Okay – then let's go for it!" Mulder had as little enthusiasm for the task of calling everyone to cancel and dealing with the food and drink deliveries they were expecting as his Master did. Skinner was right – it was simply **easier** to go ahead with it...so why did Mulder feel a sense of foreboding settle into the pit of his stomach as they made their decision?

Mulder barely saw his Master for the next few days. They were both busy tying up loose ends at work prior to their vacation and Skinner's end of year workload was heavy and was taking some hugely long hours to shift. Skinner also liked to visit Murray whenever he could as well so he never had any free time to spend with his slave. Mulder felt himself becoming increasingly irritable as the day of the branding drew closer. He snapped at the forensics lab who were providing information for a report, and lost his temper with Scully – which he bitterly regretted afterwards and told her so.

"Are you okay, partner?" She asked, with a worried frown. "I haven't seen you this jumpy since...well since before you and Skinner..." She let that sentence trail off.

"I'm fine. Just busy with finishing all this stuff before my vacation," Mulder told her shortly, turning back to his work.

"Are you and Skinner doing anything nice?" Scully asked carefully, clearly searching for a safe topic of conversation and unwittingly alighting on one that was very far from being safe.

Mulder bit down on his bottom lip so savagely that he knew he'd drawn blood. Christ – what the hell was wrong with him? He wanted to be branded as much as Skinner wanted to brand him, so why did he feel so unsettled and at odds with the world in general and himself in particular?

"Nothing much," he told Scully, his tone making it clear that he didn't want to pursue this line of conversation. He had no intention of telling his partner about the branding. However close they were, there were some aspects to his lifestyle that he knew she just wouldn't understand...hell, right now he was having a hard time understanding them himself.

He got home late that evening and found the apartment empty. He gave a growl of annoyance – he had hoped his Master would already be home. He wanted them to spend some time together – the way things were going they'd wake up on the morning of the branding not even having exchanged more than a couple of words all week. And there had been no sex – even Mulder's daily spankings had gone by the wayside. He didn't like to badger his Master about either topic – Skinner had enough on his plate right now without his slave whining on about his needs. Besides which, he knew that his Master's usually rampant libido was in hibernation at the moment. For the first time in as long as he'd been Skinner's slave, his Master's cock had ceased to respond to his early morning ministrations and yesterday Skinner had brushed him off and told him that his wake up call was suspended until further notice. It was all wrong – and on some level it hurt. It jangled on Mulder's nerves and he felt himself becoming more and more wound up.

With a sigh, Mulder removed his tie, and, ignoring the waiting Wanda who was expecting her hello kiss, he marched sullenly into the kitchen to find something to eat...only to discover that the cupboards were bare. Groceries were technically the slave's responsibility but usually Skinner pointed out when they were getting low and made a list of what they needed and Mulder did the actual shopping – or, as happened more often these days, they went shopping together. Now, with everything that had been going on, Mulder had forgotten some of the most basic rules of his slavery and he was angry with himself.

The door slamming alerted him to the fact that his Master had returned home. Mulder went out into the hallway and gave the other man a faint smile. Skinner still looked terrible, whatever he said, and that didn't help the jarring sense of unease in Mulder's stomach.

"Hiya." Mulder pressed a kiss to his Master's cheek.

"Hello, Fox. What's cooking?" Skinner asked. "I didn't have time for lunch today and I'm starving."

"There's nothing fucking cooking because I forgot to get any fucking food," Mulder growled and then he charged up the stairs and threw himself into the bathroom, slamming the door behind him. He washed his face in cold water and pulled himself together, wondering what his Master had made of that display of temper. He hadn't intended to behave so badly – it had just come out, and now he regretted it, just as he regretted snapping at Scully earlier in the day. His butt started to throb in anticipation of the strapping he was sure his Master would dole out for his behaviour – Skinner hated being yelled or sworn at, and rightly so. It was a lesson he had drummed into his slave a long time ago, one of the first and most basic lessons of Mulder's slavery, and Mulder had just demonstrated that it wasn't as well learned as it should have been. With a sigh, Mulder decided to go down and face the music.

He found his Master sitting on the couch in the living room, still wearing his coat. Wanda was sitting on his knee, trying desperately to get his attention by rubbing her face against his chest but he was just staring out of the window, weariness etched in every line on his face, his shoulders set in a dejected slump. Mulder went to kneel beside him, full of abject remorse.

"I'm so sorry, Master," he whispered, resting his chin on Skinner's knee. "I shouldn't have spoken to you like that. It's been...a difficult day."

"That's all right, slave. It's been a difficult week," Skinner said with a totally exhausted sigh. He put his hand absently on his slave's hair and tousled it gently. "I know you didn't mean to shout at me like that. We can order take out. It isn't a big deal."

Mulder glanced up at his Master. "Will you punish me, Master?" he asked, holding his breath.

"What?" Skinner looked down at his slave for the first time. "No, Fox," he said gently. "I know you're getting nervous leading up to the big day. I expected you to act out a bit. It's fine. We'll get there."

Mulder felt as if someone had literally punched him in the gut and it was only then that he realised he had **wanted** to be punished. He needed to be punished, to be taken down, to find the serenity of subspace once more. He longed for that – he longed for his Master to throw him over his knee and reassert their roles so that he could feel right about the imminent branding, so that it would be the natural culmination of the relationship between Master and slave...because he didn't feel like that right now. He just wasn't in the right headspace.

"Master, I deserve to be punished," he said, nudging Skinner's hand with his head, much like Wanda did when she wanted his Master's attention. Skinner looked down at him again and Mulder felt a wave of guilt course through him – Skinner was just too damn tired to discipline his slave. Skinner looked so pale, drawn and haggard that Mulder was surprised his Master was still standing; he looked completely at the end of his tether.

"Fox...I'm not going to punish you. We both know why you acted out just then," Skinner said softly. "Come here." He patted the couch beside him and Mulder got up and sat next to his Master. Skinner put a weary arm around his slave's shoulders, pulled him close, and kissed his head fondly. "You'll do fine, Fox," he murmured.

Mulder swallowed down his frustrations. There was no way on earth he'd add to his Master's burdens when Skinner was at such a low ebb. On the contrary – he'd do his best, as he had been doing all week, to relieve the burden on his Master and ensure that of all the areas of responsibility in his life, the one area that Skinner would not have to worry about was his slave.

"Thank you, Master," he whispered, and then he got up and went to call for the take out. When he returned to the living room a couple of minutes later he found his Master already fast asleep on the couch. Mulder knelt and removed Skinner's shoes, loosened his pants, pulled a comforter over the sleeping man and looked down on him for a moment, then gently soothed his Master's head with light, loving fingers.

"I'll take good care of you, Master," he said softly. "I promise."

The day of the branding arrived and Mulder woke with what felt like a whole host of butterflies in his stomach. He lay with his head on Skinner's bare chest for half an hour, both of them awake, gazing at the ceiling, enjoying a few moments together before their busy day began.

"How are you feeling?" Skinner asked.

"Fine," Mulder lied. "Well, pretty nervous," he amended, although he was aware that got nowhere close to the truth.

"Me too," Skinner admitted.

"Really?" Mulder turned his head to look at his Master. He was pleased that Skinner had his own sense of nervous anticipation...but at the same time it niggled with him as well. He didn't want his Master to be so...human. Not on this day of all days. He wanted Skinner to be splendidly, imperviously masterful. Mulder needed to feel every inch the slave and he didn't right now. He felt lost and confused, and the rock he normally anchored himself to at these times was his Master – only now he didn't want to be another burden on the big man. Mulder desperately wished the day was over, and that he could get through the branding. He no longer even considered enjoying it. The day stretched out ahead of him like an ordeal.

They got up, had breakfast, and checked the Playroom and upstairs apartment to make sure they were ready to receive their guests. Then Skinner called his slave over and clicked his fingers. Mulder sank obediently to his knees, and gazed up at his Master.

"All right – for the rest of the day I want you naked. You can get dressed just before our guests arrive," Skinner told him. "I want you to think about what you are and what's going to take place in this room

tonight."

"Yes, Master." Mulder wished he could feel that involuntary shiver of anticipation that he usually felt at such moments, but he was numb inside. Something wasn't right and he didn't know how to put it right.

"I want you to take some time for yourself," Skinner told him firmly. "Find the heart of your submission, Fox, because I'll want you to offer it up to me this evening. You're in deep submission – I don't want you to talk for the next few hours. Understood?"

Mulder nodded, but he felt as if he was drowning. He couldn't do this!

"I'm going out for a few hours," Skinner told him and Mulder looked up wildly.

"Where? Now? Master..." He began, feeling frantic.

"You're in deep submission, slave," Skinner reminded him. "I'll only be a few hours. You need some time on your own to ground yourself. I'll be back later. You can go into any room you want – even the Playroom."

Mulder nodded, but inside he was churning up with hopelessness. He needed Skinner here right now! Yes, usually it was enough for his Master to order him into deep submission but not today, not when he felt so at odds both with the world and his own slavery. None of this felt as it **should** damnit! He watched, forlornly, as his Master left the apartment, wondering where Skinner was going. He assumed his Master was going to visit Murray and couldn't begrudge the other man that. Maybe they did both need some time. Maybe Skinner was taking himself away so that when they saw each other again they would both have had time to really sink into their roles, and they could come to each other afresh, as Master and slave, and not as Skinner and Mulder who had both had such a very difficult week. Mulder could understand that reasoning but it was all wrong, and he was too concerned for his Master's well-being to discuss his fears with the other man. After all, what could Skinner do at this late date? It was too late to cancel the party – they had 40 people arriving within a few hours. So what possible purpose did Mulder raising his doubts serve?

Mulder slowly undressed and then he stood there, uncertainly. Skinner hadn't allowed him to see the brazier, which was screened off in one corner of the room, and he wondered whether it would help him to take a good look at it or not. He decided against it – his Master had screened it off for a purpose, and while he hadn't forbidden Mulder to look at it, somehow it felt against the spirit of the occasion to try and get a sneak peek prior to the evening's activities.

Mulder sat on the waiting massage table, and tried to imagine what it would feel like being tied here, under the watchful gaze of 40 guests, but somehow he couldn't manage it. Instead his mind kept going over the events of the week; he kept seeing Murray, lying on that hospital bed attached to all those tubes, and his Master, struggling with illness, worry, and all his usual responsibilities, and starting to look, for the first time, as if it might all be too much for him. Something else was bothering him as well...something that he had been pushing to the back of his mind and refusing to think about, but now that he had the time it came creeping in. He thought of Hammer, who had come so close to losing his lover and top, and he knew then why his own worries for his Master's health were nagging him so much. Skinner was so important a part of his life – how would Mulder cope if something like this happened to

him? Mulder shivered, his naked flesh covered in goose-bumps. This was his worst nightmare made real. He had struggled against his feelings, had tried not to love Skinner, because sooner or later he always lost everyone he loved. He remembered those nightmares he'd had early in his slavery, that Skinner would be taken from him, just as Samantha had been taken and Scully. He lost the people he loved. It always happened, and for that reason he had always tried to keep people at arm's length, to not let anyone get close...but Skinner had snuck under his defences, and now Mulder was deeply in love with the big man. Skinner wasn't just his lover and his Master – he was the centre of Mulder's very existence. Skinner had made him belong, had given him a place to take sanctuary, and had anchored Mulder with the force of his love.

Somehow Skinner's absence exacerbated Mulder's fears. Without his large presence giving Mulder reassurance and tangible proof that his Master was alive and well and always would be, Mulder's worries were beginning to get too much for him. He was a long way from being the man he had been before his slavery, who hovered so close to self-destruction that emotional turmoil sent him spinning out of control. The past 10 months as Skinner's slave had taught him so much and he could handle his own crises much more effectively these days...but it was one thing to control himself, and another to get himself anywhere near the headspace he was supposed to be in for the evening's activities. Mulder resigned himself to the fact that this was just going to be unpleasant – and he could deal with that. He had dealt with worse things before – having his finger broken, being beaten up and shot in the course of his work. He had no problem dealing with pain, but his response to erotic pain had always been different. Erotic pain allowed him to express himself in a way he never did when faced with more mundane agony. From the very beginning of his time as Skinner's slave he had cried when spanked hard, wriggled and writhed, squirmed and yelled...he let out everything during sex games in a way he did not in his everyday life. There his response to pain was fury rather than tears. He could ignore it, and even control it, with a toughness that probably only his Master could match. Mulder knew his own strength – but he bought it at a price, and that price was the way he allowed himself to express pain, pleasure, fear, joy and all the other feelings he experienced during sex games. Those were his release, the necessary flip side to the way he fought the many pains he had encountered during the course of his job. Tonight Skinner would be expecting his slave's usual response to erotic pain...but Mulder was afraid that instead he would only be able to offer **Mulder's** response, not that of the slave, Fox. Mulder would struggle against being tied down, Mulder would scream and yell abuse at his torturer...and Mulder would swallow his pain and turn his face against it – he wouldn't look into Skinner's eyes with peace and acceptance, and he wouldn't accept that brand on his body with joy and celebration. He would fight it all the way.

Mulder took a deep breath and tried to get himself under control. Of one thing he was certain: his Master must never know. Tonight, if he couldn't **be** Fox, if he could only be Mulder, then he would just have to fake being Fox to the best of his ability. Having made **that** decision Mulder felt calmer. He squared his shoulders, knelt in the centre of the Playroom, and awaited his Master's return.

Skinner was gone for a few hours, as he had said. When he found his slave kneeling in the Playroom he smiled, crossed the room towards him and dropped a light kiss on Mulder's forehead.

"That's a beautiful sight, little one. It never ceases to take my breath away," he commented approvingly. Mulder smiled, glad that he was getting this right. Skinner looked a little sweaty and his eyes were dark as if he had just undergone some kind of ordeal. Mulder got up and put his hand on his Master's forehead.

"Are you sure you're okay? I thought you were getting better," he commented anxiously.

"I am. I'm feeling much better," Skinner assured him. "I just got a little hot running up the stairs. More to the point – how are **you** feeling?"

"I'm fine." Mulder smiled brightly.

"Good. Then it's time we got ready," Skinner told him. "Take a shower, slave, and get dressed for your branding."

"Yes, Master." Mulder bowed his head so that Skinner wouldn't see the expression in his eyes. He was surprised when Skinner stopped him as he began to walk to the door.

"I love you, Fox," Skinner told him softly, swinging Mulder into his arms. He kissed his slave on the mouth, slowly, savouring him, and Mulder melted against his Master's chest. Skinner gave a slight grimace, as if in pain, and drew back.

"Master? Are you okay?" Mulder frowned, reaching out a hand to touch his Master's chest.

"I'm fine." Skinner pushed his slave's hand away quickly. "Daylight's burning, Fox. Go and get ready."

Mulder turned, frowning. Something else wasn't right here – something wasn't right with Skinner...and that worried him all over again. He remembered Hammer saying that Murray had just fallen over, clutching his chest... It would surely be too much of a coincidence for Skinner to have a heart attack so close to Murray's, but Mulder had seen too many X Files to be completely convinced on that point and the thought nagged at him.

He took his shower and got dressed slowly. Instead of thinking about the evening ahead, and how erotic it was dressing himself in the revealing clothes his Master had chosen for him, he barely took any notice of his clothing, lost in his own thoughts and half-formed worries.

When he was done he went downstairs to help his Master with his clothing but found, to his dismay, that Skinner had already finished dressing. He stood there, resplendent in the black moleskin pants and silky black shirt that Mulder remembered so vividly from their first meeting as Master and slave. Skinner looked truly magnificent, as ever, despite his pallor, but Mulder felt as if he had been deprived of one last chance to find a space in his head where he could become totally the slave once more, performing a duty for his Master, helping the other man dress.

"You look good," Skinner said with a smile, admiring his slave. "Turn around, boy, so I can get a good look at you." He twirled his arm around and, feeling a bit stupid, Mulder turned to reveal his naked bottom, his buttocks cosily sticking out from their framework of black leather. "Very nice...very tempting," Skinner grinned. "I don't think I can resist that sight – against the wall, Fox, in the grace position."

Mulder positioned himself against the wall, hands pressed against it, butt out, his naked bottom feeling even more exposed in the revealing pants than they would have done if he had been completely naked.

"Mmm." Skinner came up close behind him and grabbed his slave's buttocks, kneading them hard. Mulder breathed in, enjoying an intimate moment with his Master for the first time in days. He loved it when Skinner played with him, and he felt some of his tension dissipate. Skinner drew back and then slapped Mulder's buttocks hard, and Mulder moaned and pushed his butt out even more. Skinner had promised to mark him, and maybe that would help him reach the serenity of subspace that he needed so much right now. The spanking helped a little, and after a few minutes Mulder's butt was thoroughly warmed up and he was too busy concentrating on the stinging sensation in his ass to worry as frantically as he had been doing. Then the spanking came to an end, and Skinner swung his slave around and kissed him thoroughly. "Our guests will be here soon. Go upstairs, Fox. I'll be with you in a second," he said.

Mulder stared at his Master...surely Skinner was going to mark him? His Master had told him he'd be marked. While Mulder hated marking, he felt he needed it right now. He needed proof of his Master's power over him...he needed to be taken down, damnit! Surely...it wasn't possible that Skinner had forgotten, was it? His Master was so precise and organised that Mulder had never known him forget anything like this before – certainly not something this important...but it was clear from Skinner's dark eyed gaze that he **had** forgotten. Mulder considered reminding him, but decided against it. He could manage without being marked and the last thing he wanted to do was draw his Master's attention to a failing at this moment in time. Only Mulder knew how close Skinner had been to buckling these past few days. He didn't want to give Skinner any cause to doubt himself and lose confidence at this crucial moment in their relationship. So, he ran off up the stairs, trying hard to forget his worries and resolved to enjoy the party as best he could.

Skinner took his place beside Mulder a few minutes later, just as the doorbell proclaimed the arrival of the first guest. Mulder was relieved and delighted to find that it was Ian.

"I thought you'd need a friendly face as soon as possible," Ian said with a grin. "I feel like I'm the bridesmaid come to attend the bride on her big day."

"Careful, Ian," Mulder warned. "I am a trained FBI agent and I do have a gun."

"Hmmm...I wonder if it's as big as your Master's gun?" Ian said slyly and Mulder grinned. It felt good to have his friend with him, especially when he was feeling so out of sorts.

"Is Perry here?" Skinner asked.

"He's parking the car. I let him do all the masterful, being in charge stuff like driving today, seeing as how this is a scene party. He rolled his eyes a bit but I think he'll play along for the evening," Ian grinned. "He'll be up in a minute. He is the technical consultant for the evening's entertainment after all! I think he's looking forward to the kudos!" Now it was Ian's turn to roll his eyes and Skinner laughed. The doorbell rang again and Skinner went to answer it.

"So...I bet you're all jittery," Ian said to Mulder. Mulder thought about it for a moment. No, he wasn't, and that was the problem. He just felt wrong when normally he'd have been high on a combination of nerves and anticipatory excitement.

"I'm fine," he told Ian quietly, and his friend looked at him in surprise.

"Is everything okay?" Ian asked softly, glancing at Skinner and then back at Mulder.

"It's fine." Mulder smiled brightly, resolving to try harder to fake the required responses. If Ian could see through him then Skinner wouldn't have any trouble at all.

Luckily the party was soon in full swing so Mulder didn't have a chance to do much more fretting. Skinner made his slave walk to heel, and Mulder lost himself in the required responses, kneeling when his Master stopped to talk to people, fetching drinks and taking coats and generally being the most perfect slave, but he felt as if he was doing it all by rote. None of it came from the heart – it was all simply a learned response. Skinner greeted their guests and talked politely, but Mulder had the impression that his Master's heart wasn't entirely in the event either as Skinner wasn't his usual strong presence. He was quieter, more reflective, and he didn't have a great deal to say to his guests. Mulder even caught his Master staring into space on a couple of occasions, lost in thought despite the tremendous bustle and noise as all their guests filled the penthouse apartment with their noise and colour. People had really made an effort to dress up – there were all kinds of costumes and outfits and under different circumstances Mulder would have loved the array of people in rubber and leather and corsetry, but not tonight. Elaine arrived with her sub, David, in tow. She was wearing the most beautiful blue velvet evening gown that hugged her voluptuous hips and breasts, and her hair was hanging loose in golden curls down her back.

"You look gorgeous!" Mulder said, taking her coat and kissing her.

"My, you look rather impressive yourself," she replied with a sneaky grin at his exposed backside. Mulder flushed.

"This will be such a beautiful celebration," Elaine told him, grabbing his face and looking at him proudly. "I'm so happy for you, darling." Mulder felt almost guilty for not being as happy about it as he was expected to be, and he withdrew from her embrace with a wan smile, making an excuse to hurry away to avoid her sharp, blue-eyed gaze.

The highlight of the evening was Hammer's arrival, long after everyone else was settled in and eating, drinking and chatting away merrily.

"Sorry I'm late. I wasn't sure I'd make it at all but Murray insisted. He wouldn't shut up about it until I agreed to come," he told them with a weary, but relieved smile.

"How is he?" Skinner asked and Mulder glanced at his Master, surprised. Hadn't Skinner spent the afternoon with Murray? Where else had he been during those missing hours if not at the hospital doing some visiting?

"He's fine. I'm bringing him home tomorrow," Hammer said.

"Tomorrow? So soon? That's excellent news!" Skinner exclaimed.

"Well, I can look after him better than they can – what he needs now is nursing, and I'm the best nurse for him. I'm taking time off work until he gets better so I can be with him all the time. They don't know how to handle him in the hospital anyway." Hammer grinned. "He drives them all nuts – when he isn't making them all laugh of course."

Mulder smiled – this was so much the Murray they all knew and loved, alternately exasperating and amusing but never less than outrageous with a childlike innocence and an equally childlike tendency towards throwing the occasional tantrum.

"This is wonderful news, Hammer – the best I could have hoped to hear," Skinner said in a heartfelt tone. "Come into the kitchen – let me get you a drink." He put an arm around Hammer's shoulder and ushered him away. Mulder was about to follow when his arm was grabbed and he found himself being dragged into the bedroom.

"Ian...what are you doing?" He demanded.

Ian propelled him into the bedroom, shut the door firmly behind them, and threw Mulder onto the coat-covered bed.

"I could ask you the same question," Ian hissed. "What the hell is going on here, Mulder?"

"Nothing is going on." Mulder felt himself flushing furiously. He got up from the bed and tried to pass by his friend on his way to the door in the narrow, cell-like bedroom.

"Not so fast." Ian stood his ground. "Mulder, I've been watching you all evening and something isn't right. Walter is acting like some kind of absent-minded professor and you...you just look so unhappy. This should be one of the happiest days of your life and you look as if you're at a wake."

"I think the 'one of the happiest days of your life' thing is stretching the wedding analogy a little too far," Mulder snapped. "It's just a party."

Ian gazed at him, his brown eyes genuinely shocked. "Now I know something's wrong," he said grimly. "Mulder, this isn't **just** a party, this is a branding party – it's important and significant. It's just as big a deal as your re-collaring ceremony was, maybe more so – and I **know** you'd never have described that as 'just a party'. Now what's happening?"

Mulder felt as if he had been punched in the gut and yet in some ways it was a relief not to have to hide any more. He sat down on the bed once more, with a heavy sigh.

"Ian, I don't know what to do," he whispered, putting his head in his hands.

"Why? What's happened?" Ian crouched down in front of him, and removed Mulder's hands from his face so that he could look into his friend's eyes.

"Nothing...and yet...everything is wrong," Mulder said. "We haven't had any time together lately, and Walter hasn't been well. I'm genuinely concerned about his health – he's doing too much and has been for months. I'm not in subspace, Ian. I'm not anywhere near it. I'm dreading the branding – everything feels wrong. I can't ask Walter for more of his time because god know the poor guy doesn't have any

more time left to give, but I need to be taken down and he's too tired and stretched too thin to see that. I hate to have to say this after the amount of time I've waited for this – but I'm not ready. I mean..." Mulder screwed up his face. "I am ready for it to happen mentally – I want it so badly...but I'm not in the right place emotionally or physically today." He gazed at his friend, feeling utterly wretched.

"Have you told Walter any of this?" Ian asked.

"No. I can't. He has enough to deal with right now without me being demanding. I thought I'd just get through this – it's just a hump. In a couple of weeks it'll probably have all blown over."

"Mulder, you aren't being branded in a couple of weeks. You're being branded tonight," Ian told him in a shocked tone. "This isn't something you 'get through' – you either do it because it's a beautiful, symbolic moment for both of you, or you don't do it at all. Personally I don't see how you can even contemplate it if you aren't in subspace. It's like being bullwhipped without a warm-up – it just hurts."

Mulder gazed at his friend wearily. "I'll be able to handle it. It's only a moment's pain."

"And a brand that is with you for a lifetime – whenever you see it do you want to remember what a goddamn awful day it was when you got it? Or would you prefer to remember how beautiful it was, and how close you felt to your Master when he put his mark on your body?"

"I won't feel like that," Mulder said angrily.

"How can you, of all people, say that?" Ian asked. "What about this." He brushed aside the harness on Mulder's chest and laid his hand on the faint scar he had revealed. "Look what extremes you went to in order to get this off your body because of what it represented, Mulder," he said desperately.

"This is different!" Mulder pushed Ian's hand away.

"You have to tell him, Mulder," Ian told him urgently. "You have to. I won't stand by and watch you being branded when you feel like this. It's barbaric if you're not in the right headspace. I won't be party to it." Ian stood up and gazed down at his friend sternly. Mulder was about to reply when the door opened. They both turned, startled, to see Skinner standing in the doorway.

"Is everything okay?" Skinner asked, clearly surprised. "Fox, I've been looking all over the place for you. It's time." He glanced at his watch.

"I should be getting back to Perry," Ian said. "Mulder." He gazed at his friend in a meaningful way and then gestured with his head towards Skinner. Mulder shook his head mutely. Ian gave an audible sigh and then turned on his heel and walked out the door, leaving Master and slave alone together.

"What was all that about?" Skinner asked. Mulder got up.

"Nothing." He smiled at his Master as he passed him on the way to the door. Skinner grabbed his arm and shut the door with a sharp nudge from his boot.

"Not so fast. I want to know what's going on, Fox, and don't say nothing – it didn't look like nothing from where I was standing."

"Ian is just getting worked up over nothing," Mulder growled, trying to wrench his arm away from his Master's grasp and failing. Skinner grabbed his other arm and gazed into his slave's eyes.

"Fox, one of the first lessons I taught you was to be honest with me. Tell me what's going on," Skinner said firmly. Mulder took a deep breath. It was clear his Master wasn't going to be fobbed off with any more assurances that nothing was going on, but at the same time, Mulder had no intention of ruining the evening for everyone by backing out at this late stage.

"I was just having some last minute jitters, that's all," Mulder said.

"Why didn't you come to me?" Skinner looked genuinely hurt – which Mulder hadn't expected at all.

"I...I didn't need to. It's nothing. I was just..." Mulder shrugged. "Just nervous. Ian was giving me a pep-talk. That's all. Honestly."

"Fox." Skinner's dark eyes bored holes into his soul. "Are you sure that's it?" Skinner asked.

"Yes, Master. Completely sure. We should go – our guests will be getting restless." Mulder tried to pull away from his Master's firm grasp only to find that it was unrelenting – as was Skinner's gaze.

"Fox...I won't brand you if there's a problem," Skinner told his slave. Mulder looked up in alarm.

"Master we have 40 people out there in case you've forgotten," he pointed out desperately.

"And one person in here – and he's the only one I'm interested in right now," Skinner told him firmly. He brushed one of his hands gently down the side of Mulder's face, although he didn't release his grip on his slave's arm with his other hand. "I won't do anything that would harm you, Fox."

"You can do what you like to me, Master," Mulder pointed out. "I'm your slave."

"I know, and I signed a contract to say I wouldn't harm you and I won't. Clause 3, slave, of the Master's contract, in case you've forgotten, states the following: *I will use my slave's body as I wish, such usage to be limited only by my responsibility not to damage either his physical or mental being.*' Burning a permanent mark on your skin if you're not sure about it comes under my definition of damaging both your physical and your mental being."

Mulder closed his eyes. They had waited for this for so long – he wanted this, damnit! No, he wasn't in the right mood for it today, but he wanted it. If he bailed out now who knew when the chance would ever arise again – and what would their guests think? It would be humiliating for the Guardian of the House if his own slave turned around on his branding day and said he'd changed his mind. No. Mulder couldn't bear for that to happen.

"I'll be fine," he said firmly. "I want this, Master." That much was the truth, and, clearly swayed by the resolve in his slave's eyes, Skinner finally released his slave's arm and smiled.

"All right, little one. Then let's go," he said softly. He pulled Mulder close and kissed him firmly, and then ushered him out of the room, one arm around his slave's shoulders.

Mulder felt as if he was in a dream as his Master walked him along the hallway towards the Playroom. Their guests were already crammed into the Playroom waiting eagerly for the evening's main event to begin, and an expectant hush fell on the room as Master and slave made their entrance. The sea of people parted before them, and Mulder felt his chest constrict as Skinner escorted him into the centre of the room and then clicked his fingers to signify that Mulder should kneel. Mulder did so, barely able to breathe as he felt the warmth emanating from the furnace, still hidden behind the screen. This was going to happen. This was actually going to happen! Panic stricken, he tried to gulp more air into his body, longing for his Master's reassuring touch, but Skinner was busy addressing the assembled guests. Mulder stifled a growl of claustrophobic rage as it welled up inside his throat. He didn't want to feel like this. His eyes flashed frantically over the assembled throng. He couldn't let them down – he couldn't let himself down...and, most importantly of all, he couldn't let his Master down. He found one set of eyes in the crowd, met them, and couldn't tear his gaze away. Ian's eyes were dark with worry, still desperately trying to communicate with Mulder that this was wrong, and that he should put an end to it. Mulder lowered his head so that he wouldn't have to meet that sharp, inquiring gaze.

His Master was moving around, and the screen was being removed. Mulder took one look at the exposed brazier with the branding iron sticking out and felt sick to the pit of his stomach. He should be fighting...he wanted to lash out, and flee as far away from this room as possible. His Master was looming over him now. Skinner took Mulder's face in his hands, making him look up, but Mulder wouldn't meet his Master's eyes. He stood, under his Master's guidance, but still he wouldn't look at Skinner.

"Fox..." Skinner's hands rubbed his arms gently. "Are you with me?"

"Yes, Master," Mulder replied, his gaze still averted.

"Fox...what are you?" Skinner whispered softly.

"I'm your slave, Master," Mulder said, almost inaudibly, every muscle in his body screaming his tension. His Master's hands felt hot and heavy on his skin and he wanted to throw them off. He shook his arms involuntarily, dislodging his Master.

"Fox...look at me," Skinner demanded.

"I...can't," Mulder hissed, keeping his gaze fixed on a spot over his Master's shoulder.

"Fox...I'm going to start undressing you now," Skinner said softly. Mulder knew the routine – his Master had told him what would happen. He would undress Mulder in front of their guests, leaving his slave completely naked, and then he would tie his slave tightly to the massage table. Skinner placed his hands on the golden harness covering Mulder's chest and began unbuckling it. Mulder couldn't help himself. He gave a low growl, and his hand came up and took hold of his Master's wrist in a firm grip. Skinner stopped immediately. Mulder kept his gaze fixed on a spot in the distance so it came as a surprise to him when he felt a sharp slap on his cheek. It seemed to bring him back into focus, and he found himself looking into his Master's dark eyes.

"You're not in sub-space, Fox," Skinner told him in a low voice – too low to be heard by the watching throng. "You've been lying to me...you've been pretending."

"I'm not lying!" Mulder snapped. Skinner's hand went to his crotch and felt his cock.

"Yes you are. If you were in sub-space, this would be hard as a rock by now. I know you and your responses too well, Fox."

"I'll be fine. Just get on with it," Mulder hissed in an undertone, releasing his Master's wrist.

"No." Skinner took a step back. "I want you to go downstairs to my bedroom, Fox," he said softly.

"What?" Mulder clenched his fists by his side. "I can do this, damnit, Walter!" he exclaimed.

"I'm sure you can. I, however, can't," Skinner told him. "Go, Fox. Now."

Mulder looked at his Master and then at the expectant faces in the room. If he left now he'd not only be bailing out on his Master but he'd be leaving him to clear up his mess after him.

"Please...Master," he whispered.

"Fox...it's okay," Skinner told him gently. "Just go. I'll be along in a minute."

Mulder caught sight of Ian's face in the crowd, and could feel his friend silently begging him to listen to his Master. From somewhere Mulder felt the strength to move. His Master beckoned Ian forward and his friend materialised by his side. Ian put his arm around Mulder's shoulder and helped him from the room, away from all those inquiring gazes.

As they walked towards the stairs, Mulder heard Skinner's voice addressing their guests, although he couldn't hear what his Master was saying.

"You did the right thing," Ian told him.

"He did. I didn't do anything," Mulder muttered.

"You and he together – you did the right thing," Ian said sharply. "I know how hard it was for you to walk out of that room, Mulder but it was the right thing." He walked Mulder down the stairs and along the hallway to his Master's bedroom, then sat Mulder on the bed and went into the en-suite bathroom, returning with a glass of water. Mulder gulped it down gratefully.

"Oh shit. What a fucking mess," Mulder sighed.

"Walter will smooth it over. Don't worry about it," Ian told him.

"You have no fucking idea how much I wanted this," Mulder growled, utterly desolate. "Christ I hate myself right now." He lay down on the bed and brought his knees up against his chest in the foetal position.

"Not as much as you'd have hated yourself if you'd gone through with that branding this evening," Ian told him forcefully. Mulder didn't reply. He lay there for a long time, and then glanced up at his friend, who was sitting beside him, a worried expression on his face.

"Ian...I need to be alone," he said, desperately needing to pull himself together before his Master came down. Ian hesitated. "It's okay – I won't do anything stupid. I just need to get my head together. Please."

Ian gave a little smile. "Okay – but call me if you need anything."

"I will. And Ian..." He called the other man back from the door. "Thanks," Mulder said softly. Ian smiled and nodded, then left the room.

When he was alone Mulder rolled onto his back and gazed at the ceiling sightlessly. He was cringing inside at the thought of his Master explaining to all those people that there wasn't going to be a branding tonight. He had been hoping to spare his Master any problems but instead his actions just seemed to have landed Skinner in the deepest shit of all at a time when he already had enough to deal with. How the hell could he hope to repair this kind of damage? Mulder decided that he couldn't – that all he could do was throw himself on his Master's mercy and hope for the best. Suddenly galvanised into action, he got up, and got undressed. Then he went to the closet and retrieved the briefcase containing his own special Fox engraved disciplinary implements that his Master always kept there. Mulder opened the briefcase, took out the 4 implements nestled within, and laid them out on the armchair in the corner of the room. Then he stood next to the chair, facing the corner, his nose pressed into it, and waited for his Master's return.

Upstairs Mulder heard the sound of feet moving and people calling goodbye to each other. The upstairs front door seemed to close an interminable number of times as their guests left the party, and then, after about half an hour, he heard a tread on the stairs. He stood up straight, trembling slightly, waiting for his Master, and a few seconds later he heard the bedroom door open. There was silence for a moment, followed by a deep heartfelt sigh.

"Fox...come here, sweetheart. I'm not going to punish you," Skinner told him. Mulder turned, genuinely bewildered, expecting anger and disappointment, to find only love and warmth in his Master's eyes. He ran across the room in a split second and melted into his Master's big arms. Skinner held him tight for a long time, and they stood there, just holding each other, Skinner occasionally dropping a kiss on his slave's head. Finally, Skinner pushed him away.

"I think we have a lot of talking to do, Fox," he said, gently but firmly.

"Yes, Master," Mulder said with a sigh. "I'm sorry."

"So am I." Skinner sat down on the bed and pulled his slave down beside him. He put his arm around Mulder and his slave rested his head on his Master's shoulder. "I didn't realise you were having problems, Fox. I wish you'd felt you could have told me."

"You had so many problems to deal with, Walter. I didn't want to be one more," Mulder sighed.

"You're not a problem, Fox. You're my beloved slave." Skinner kissed his slave's cheek. They were silent for awhile then Skinner gave a wry chuckle.

"What?" Mulder glanced at his Master.

"You – when I think how you started out when I first took you as my slave – everything was about you...it's almost as if you've gone too far in the other direction now, to the point where you'd prefer to have a burning iron pressed into your skin when you aren't in the right frame of mind to handle it, than upset me. I can see we need to work on some balance here, Fox."

"Yeah." Mulder made a wry face. "You know me, Walter. I exist in a state of extremes."

Skinner laughed again and squeezed his slave's shoulder.

"Have they all gone?" Mulder asked. "The guests?"

"Yes."

"Oh. Shit. How did they react when you...?" Mulder bit down on his lip.

"They were fine about it. I explained that we'd had a difficult week and we hadn't had time to prepare properly. They'd already had a lot of food and drink and a fine time catching up with friends and they all understood."

"I hope so," Mulder murmured.

They were silent for a long time, and then Skinner squeezed Mulder's shoulder again.

"I think it's time to discuss this," he said. "What went wrong, Fox? What was going on in your head?"

Mulder thought about it for a long time, but he really didn't know where to begin. Some of what he had to say would entail criticising his Master and he didn't want to spoil the mood by throwing recriminations at the big man. After several minutes had passed, Skinner sighed and sat up.

"All right, Fox. Let's go back to basics here." He clicked his fingers and Mulder sat up, startled. "On the floor, in the confessional position," Skinner ordered.

Mulder stared at his Master, confused. They hadn't done any formal confessionals for months now – they talked so much more easily and freely than they had at the beginning that it wasn't necessary.

"Quickly, slave." Skinner made it clear this wasn't going to be an optional discussion – it was a Master/slave issue and would be dealt with as such.

Mulder got into position on the floor beside the bed. He pressed his nose onto the carpet and waited for the words to come.

"I won't interrupt you and you can say whatever you like." Skinner reminded him of the rules. "In your own time, but you must be honest and you must talk, slave."

Mulder nodded, and pressed his nose even further into the carpet. He had previously found that once in

the confessional position he could speak easily and freely – it sometimes took him awhile for the words to flow but once they did they usually came out in a torrent.

"I've been struggling for several days, Master. There were several things going on – it's confusing. Murray's heart attack....made me worried about you," he said.

"About me?" Skinner sounded surprised and Mulder looked up at his Master. Skinner rarely interrupted him during a confessional. "I'm sorry – carry on," Skinner murmured.

"You've been under a lot of strain recently. Murray's illness was one more thing you had to deal with – and you did. You visited him every night even though you were busy clearing your workload prior to our vacation. You also had a cold, and you weren't getting enough sleep. I love you, Master, and it worried me. Seeing Murray lying there, watching Hammer deal with his illness...made me wonder how I'd deal with it if it had been you...and I couldn't get that worry out of my mind."

Mulder was silent for a while. Skinner said nothing. Finally, Mulder sighed, knowing his Master wouldn't let him stop until it was all out in the open.

"I couldn't get into sub space, Master because I barely saw you this past week. I needed to spend some time with you but it didn't happen and you had too many other things to deal with to make it happen. I do understand that. I hated feeling needy when you were so stressed out but this was a time when I really did need you to be my Master. Not Walter, not my lover, but my Master. The branding is a huge deal for me – I need to feel every inch your slave and I need to feel that you are every inch my Master, but instead you cut me some slack when I acted out when instead I wanted to be reined in. I needed you to be particularly strict and stern with me – not kind and understanding - but really tough and uncompromising. I needed to be taken down. Today...today you left me alone when I needed you to be there. I'm sorry...I tried to get into the right mindset without you...but you didn't even mark me..." Mulder trailed off, biting his lip, hating what he was having to say. "Not that marking would have solved the problem necessarily, but..." Mulder shrugged. "I wanted to bathe and dress you before the ceremony but you didn't let me do that." He pressed his nose further into the carpet. "I'm sorry. I should have told you all this before now. I just thought I could get through the branding without you finding out – that even if it was an ordeal I could handle it rather than disappoint you. Ian said I had to tell you. He's learned his lessons better than I have. Wasn't that one of the first lessons you taught me? *I must always be honest with my Master?* I screwed up on that, big time."

Mulder finished with a sigh and knelt there, waiting to hear his Master's reaction. Skinner was silent for several minutes, and then, finally, he spoke.

"Fox. Look up," he said. Mulder did so, trembling in anticipation of his Master's reaction to his honesty. "I'm sorry, little one," Skinner told him softly. "I failed you in this – I must take a large part of the responsibility. Yes, you should have been honest with me about what you were feeling, but I was too busy and stressed out to notice. Like you, I wasn't particularly in the mood to go through with the branding tonight either – but I carried on because I didn't want to disappoint you. So I can't blame you for doing exactly the same thing. It seems as if we both screwed up here but my fault was the greater. I should have realised that your explosion the other day was a cry for help – I usually don't have any difficulty picking up on those signals." He shook his head ruefully.

"I don't want you to take all the blame," Mulder said vehemently. "I know how hard this week has been for you."

"Well...let's agree that we were both so concerned about each other that we failed each other," Skinner said with a wry grin. Mulder gave a sigh and smiled back.

"I think that's about the truth of it, Master. So...what now?"

"We put it behind us and move on," Skinner told him firmly.

"What about...the branding?" Mulder ventured uncertainly. "Will we still...?"

"Oh yes." Skinner smiled. "But I'll decide when, Fox. I won't tell you in advance but rest assured you will be ready. To that end...we still have a couple of weeks off work. I suggest we use them first to recover, and then to revisit your basic training."

"That sounds good to me, Master." Mulder smiled at the other man in relief.

"I'll make one thing clear right now – I'm in charge," Skinner said firmly. "However for the next two days I think we both need to be kind to ourselves. So, we'll just spend the days hanging out together and resting – we need that to get ourselves back together physically if nothing else, or at least I certainly do. I've been running on empty and ignoring the signs. For future reference – if I ever do that again, Fox, you are under orders to tell me so and to insist I get some rest. I feel as if I need a week's worth of sleep to recoup my energy levels."

"Perhaps we should make the next 2 days both Master's Days," Mulder said. "That way I can take care of you and you can rest."

"Sounds good to me!" Skinner beamed. "After that – I intend to take you right down, Fox. I'm taking you at your word and I'll be as hard as is necessary to get you back on track. So it might be a case of 'be careful what you wish for' because things are going to change around here."

"Thank you, Master." Mulder gave a faint smile. "Uh...I think," he added nervously. Skinner grinned.

"You won't be in any doubt who is the Master by the time I do come to brand you, Fox. I can promise you that. I'll take you down to the most basic level of your slavery."

Mulder nodded, feeling happier than he had in awhile, despite the knowledge that the next few days would undoubtedly be demanding – at least with his Master's help he'd be able to find the serenity of sub-space again. He leaned forward and kissed his Master's feet, where they were resting on the bed.

"One more thing," Skinner said, with a sigh, and Mulder looked up again, wondering what was coming next. "The issue of why I wouldn't allow you to bathe and dress me, and where I went today...I can see it wasn't a good move to leave you alone for those few hours. If it's any consolation...it was done for the best of intentions. You see...I wanted to do something to surprise you. I thought that as you were going to take my mark onto your body today, then I also wanted to make a similar commitment to you. I intended to show you this after your branding, so this spoils the moment a bit...but I think you need to see it now. You'll see it before long in any case as I won't be able to hide it until I **do** brand you." And so

saying, Skinner unbuttoned his silk shirt to reveal a small white dressing over his chest.

"What have you done?" Mulder got up, and went close, his heart pounding in his chest. Skinner peeled off the dressing to reveal the most beautiful tattoo of a fox, positioned right over his heart.

"Oh shit...it's perfect," Mulder said softly – and it was. The little creature had bright, inquisitive golden eyes and bushy orange/brown fur. It had clearly been drawn by a talented tattoo artist. It looked intensely lifelike – and very appealing. Somehow the artist had imbued the fox with an innate curiosity and sense of innocence that made the tattoo all the more enchanting.

"They had to shave some of my chest hair," Skinner grimaced, "but I wanted it placed here on purpose. I already carry you in my heart, Fox – so I knew you'd understand the symbolism of this."

"Did it hurt?" Mulder reached out a finger and gently touched the surface of the tattoo.

"Yes." Skinner grinned. "But I figured that if you were going to undergo a painful marking process then I would too."

"Oh shit." Mulder hung his head. "That just makes me feel worse for wimping out of this."

"You didn't wimp out of anything – you'll have that brand, but in my time," Skinner said firmly.

"Thank you." Mulder gently fingered the tattoo in wonder. "So this is why you winced and pulled away from me earlier - with my stupid, overactive imagination I thought it might be because you were about to have a heart attack - just like Murray." He shook his head, laughing at himself bitterly.

"I had no idea that was going on inside your head." Skinner sighed. "If I had, I'd have put a stop to it there and then."

"It's so strange – when I woke up this morning I knew one of us would get marked today. I just didn't realise it would be you and not me." Mulder smiled at the irony. "I feel very honoured that you did this for me, Master. I'll do my best to be worthy of it." He pressed his lips against the tattoo with a gossamer light touch and Skinner sighed and ruffled his slave's hair.

"Fox – it was my pleasure. I wanted to do it. I wanted you to understand that you aren't the only one who wants to live with a celebration of our relationship embedded in your flesh." Skinner's dark eyes were alight with love. "Come here." Skinner lay down on the bed with an exhausted smile and beckoned his slave to lie beside him. Mulder obeyed eagerly, resting his head on his Master's shoulder. "What a day," Skinner sighed.

"Yeah." Mulder gave a wry chuckle.

"One more thing, boy..." Skinner squeezed Mulder's shoulder with his hand, holding him tight. "I can't promise that I won't die, Fox. Nobody can promise that," he said softly. "I can't promise I won't fall ill, any more than you can promise that somebody won't take a pot-shot at you when you're out in the field one day. We lead more dangerous lives than most, after all. However, I have no intention of keeling over just yet. I have a lot of living I want to do, especially now that I have you here, keeping me on my toes and providing me with so much fun, excitement and sheer erotic pleasure."

Mulder glanced up into his Master's brown eyes to find them more serious than he had expected.

"But..." Skinner bestowed a kiss on his slave's forehead. "I might die one day, Fox...as might you. When Andrew died and when Sharon died I experienced intense grief and I know that if you died I would be desolate...but I would carry on. I'd survive – a little tattered and torn around the edges maybe, and with a bruised heart, but I'd keep on putting one foot in front of the other, trusting myself to the kindness of my friends, because if there was one thing that Andrew taught me it was that I had to carry on. If I'd crumbled after he'd died, I would have let him down. I feel the same way about you, Fox. I hope I've given you something, not taken away from you. I hope I haven't made you so dependent on me that you can't lead your life without me. I hope you've become stronger during our time together, not weaker. You've always been a survivor, Fox – I hope that if I died you'd do just that: survive. Because if you turned your face away from life then I'd have failed in every single thing I tried to do."

Mulder swallowed hard, tracing a finger over his Master's newly shaven chest, outlining the little fox that was etched on his Master's skin.

"I **am** stronger, Master, just from having been your slave, and from having experienced your love –which was something I never expected for myself in a million years, and could never even have hoped for. I promise I won't fail you, not even in death."

"Good – because that would be my last order to you, Fox. If I should die before you, I order you to carry on with your life and make a success of it, to let your friends take care of you while the grief is at its worst, and, in time, to admit to the possibility of loving again."

"You're making that an order?" Mulder asked, utterly winded by the solemnity of the conversation.

"Yes. Yes I am. Do you understand that, little one? Will you promise that, if the day should ever come, you'll obey me in this?" Skinner held him tight and Mulder shivered, as if someone had walked over his grave. He gazed at his Master, his finger still tracing the little fox that adorned the other man's skin, and then, finally, he gave a long, loud sigh.

"Yes, Master. I promise," he said softly.

"Good." Skinner leaned over and kissed him firmly on the mouth. Mulder opened up, surrendering to his Master's kisses, always wanting more. Finally Skinner released him and they both lay there in companionable silence for awhile.

"Tomorrow I'm going to give you the special Fox massage," Mulder murmured, his fingers itching to get to work on his Master's skin and soothe away all the knots in the other man's weary muscles. "I'm going to spend hours bathing you, shaving you, massaging you, dressing you," Mulder continued. "I'm going to make you feel better, Master." He glanced up to find that his Master was already fast asleep. Mulder gave a wry laugh. Skinner was exhausted and god knows he needed the rest. Mulder disentangled himself from beneath his Master's arm and gently undid the other man's belt and then unbuttoned his pants. He pulled Skinner's shining boots from his long legs, and then slowly, carefully, lovingly undressed his Master, being careful not to wake him. Then he undressed himself, got into the bed beside his Master and pulled a blanket over them both before turning out the light. He held the big man in his arms and kissed him softly in the darkness. It wasn't the ending he had expected this evening to have,

but he felt more at peace than he had done at any point in the past week.

"I'll take good care of you, Master," Mulder whispered before he fell fast asleep himself.

Skinner was still sleeping when Mulder woke the next day. Mulder slid out of the bed, leaving his Master still lying there, Wanda curled up on his pillow, her chin resting on Skinner's shoulder. Mulder smiled at the sight and then went downstairs. It was already ten o' clock but Mulder had no intention of waking his Master – he wanted Skinner to get all the rest he needed for the next few days. Mulder made himself some coffee and settled down to read the paper, checking on his Master at regular intervals. At just gone 11, the phone rang. Mulder grabbed it quickly, hoping it hadn't woken his Master in the upstairs bedroom.

"Hi, it's me," Ian's voice said. "I was just calling to see if you're okay."

"I'm fine." Mulder settled down on the couch to talk to his friend. "In fact...I'm better than fine. We had a long talk last night and we worked it all out."

"Hallelujah!" Ian proclaimed.

"Thanks, Ian – if it hadn't been for you I'm not sure the evening would have ended so well," Mulder admitted.

"You're welcome, friend! So, have the calls begun yet?" Ian asked.

"What calls?" Mulder queried blankly.

"Well it's early yet. Give it awhile and you'll see," Ian told him with a laugh. They chatted for a few minutes and then the conversation ended. Mulder had no sooner disconnected than the phone rang again.

"Mulder? It's Elaine. How are you, darling?" She asked, in her familiar warm tones.

"I'm fine. Look, I'm sorry about last night," he began.

"Oh hush. I'm not calling to make a fuss. I'm calling to make sure you're both all right. I've never seen Walter look so tired or you so dispirited. Usually you're the most high octane person I've ever met! And he's always filled with that Walter sense of purpose and determination. You were like two different people last night."

"We were tired – we hadn't had any time to prepare and Walter had a cold all last week. We needed some time out. I'm just sorry that our guests had to go away without seeing what they came for."

"You did the right thing," Elaine told him firmly. "All your guests understood that."

Mulder nodded, reassured by her no-nonsense tones. He had no sooner finished talking to Elaine than

the phone rang again. Mulder wondered if it was even vaguely possible that his Master had slept through all this as he answered the call.

"Mulder! It's Hammer. I've just got Murray home and settled in and I wanted to call to make sure you were okay..."

Mulder grinned, feeling an attack of the warm fuzzies coming on. He had been so worried about letting his guests down last night but this morning they were all rallying around. Suddenly he understood his Master's comment about throwing himself on the kindness of his friends, and for the first time he felt like they **were** all his friends – not just Ian, but Elaine and Hammer and all the others as well.

"How's Murray?" He asked.

"He's fine – in fact he's gesticulating wildly at me because he wants to talk to you too!" Hammer said. "He'll have to wait though. Mulder, I know you must be feeling pretty disappointed right now. I've been branded – I know what it feels like and I know it was one of the best days of my entire life, but I also know that it wouldn't have been for you if you hadn't been in the right place last night. Yes, Murray, give me a second will you!" Hammer chided his lover, laughing as he did so. Mulder smiled to himself.

"Thanks, Hammer. That means a lot to me," he said sincerely.

"I've no doubt Walter **will** brand you – but it'll be at the right time in the right circumstances," Hammer informed him. Mulder felt a little shiver of anticipation sweep through him and with it came a sense of total relief – he had worried that he'd never feel this way about being branded again - but this was a start. With his Master's undivided attention he knew he could find his way back into the beautiful serenity of subspace and total submission - and from there his branding could be the beautiful experience that Hammer spoke of.

Mulder took the phone off the hook after speaking to Hammer and Murray and went back upstairs to find his Master, amazingly, still fast asleep. In fact Skinner didn't wake until a well after noon, and, Mulder was pleased to note, his Master looked much better than he had done in days. His skin was pinker, and had lost its pallor.

Mulder was as good as his word and spent the next couple of days throwing himself whole-heartedly into taking care of his Master. He bathed, shaved, massaged and dressed Skinner, and under his ministrations his Master swiftly recovered from the last vestiges of his cold. Skinner also caught up on his sleep and with Murray home and off Skinner's 'to worry about' list, the big man started to look more like his old self. Skinner didn't make any use of his slave, but Mulder was content enough – somehow they both needed the space and anyway it was nice just being together, talking quietly about anything but the scene, or their roles, or the branding. These were subjects they avoided altogether until they retired to bed a couple of evenings later. Then Skinner turned out the light, and pulled his slave close.

"Feeling apprehensive, Fox?" He asked quietly.

"Yes, Master." Mulder gave a little shiver.

"With good reason," Skinner told him in solemnly. "Tomorrow I'm going to take you right back down to basics. These will be a demanding few days."

"Yes, Master." Mulder swallowed hard.

"I won't brand you until I'm sure you're ready, but this time I want you to understand that it'll be my decision, and not yours. Do you understand that?"

"Yes, Master." Mulder felt his cock start to harden which pleased him. It had been several days since he'd had anything approaching an erection and that was unusual for him.

"Good." Skinner kissed his slave firmly on the cheek. "Good night then, boy." He turned over and settled into his pillow. Mulder lay there in the darkness for a few minutes, pondering hard, until Skinner let out a loud sigh.

"Fox, I swear that the sound of your mind chewing over a problem is the loudest thing I've ever heard," he said. "What is it? I don't want you lying here all night worrying – I want you fresh and alert and ready to fully embrace your slavery first thing tomorrow morning."

"Sorry, Master." Mulder made a face in the darkness and moved closer to the other man for reassurance. "It's just that...I do want this...I want to be branded...but I'm afraid I might fight you on the way down into submission. I don't know why – that's just how I'm feeling right now."

"I know that, boy," Skinner replied. "I don't anticipate that the next few days will be without incident, but we'll get there. I'm very confident of that."

"Master...I need you to promise me that you'll be tough with me," Mulder confessed, feeling his cheeks flushing bright red. "I know I'm going to regret saying this in the morning but to get into the headspace for this I need to really go down. Right down. I love it when you're in full Master mode, and sometimes I need a kind of..." he hesitated, "a kind of rough physicality to get myself psyched up. Does that make sense?"

"Yes, boy – although I suspect only my Oxford educated psychology graduate would phrase it like that," Skinner chuckled. Mulder gave a wry laugh.

"I just didn't want you to think I was fighting **you** or fighting being branded. I want to obey you, to do everything you ask of me, but I think I might dig my heels in like a stubborn mule and fight you instead. Shit, I don't know why I feel like this but I do," he sighed.

"Maybe you need to make sure I'm strong enough to be your Master – that I'm worthy of that title," Skinner told him quietly. "Maybe you need to be sure that you're surrendering yourself to a kind of dominating force you can't resist – maybe only then will your subconscious view me as being a good enough Master to put a brand in your flesh – a brand that will stay there for the rest of your life."

"Ah, now who's being the psychologist?" Mulder muttered, kissing his Master's shoulder gently. "Maybe you're right, Master. Promise me you won't give up on me no matter how much of a jerk I am?"

Skinner laughed out loud. "Fox, you're mine. I've told you that a thousand times before. There's no question of me giving up on you. In this battle for dominance, I promise you that I'll be stronger and

more demanding than I've ever been before. You'll bow to me, Fox, the way you so desperately want to – and it won't feel like a defeat or a surrender – it'll just feel right."

Mulder sighed happily and rested his head on Skinner's warm chest. "Thank you in advance, Master," he said softly. "In case I don't seem very grateful at the time – thank you."

Mulder closed his eyes, his mind eased by the conversation. Now he had no choice but to just surrender himself to his Master. Skinner would take care of the rest, and, however hard it might be, Mulder knew that his eventual submission would be all the sweeter for it.

## The Branding Part Two by Xanthe

Mulder was in the middle of deep, comfortable sleep when a voice cut through his dreams. He struggled to make sense of it, burying his head in the pillow with a little moan, trying to ignore the insistent tones that were rousing him.

"Wanda," the voice said to him. "Wanda!"

"Mmmm?" Mulder woke enough to wonder whether his Master was trying to find the little cat, but a second later he felt a whoosh of cold air as the sheets were pulled from his body. "Wanda!" His Master said in his ear, a discernible note of irritation in his voice.

"Wha...?" Mulder gazed around blearily.

"Obey me, boy!" His Master growled, and then, a split second later, Mulder found himself being flipped, none too gently, onto his stomach. His hips were grabbed and yanked up, and he found himself kneeling. He put out his hands to brace himself, and then came fully to wakefulness as he felt his Master's hands pull his buttocks open and enter forcefully into his anus with one powerful thrust.

"Oh shit! What the fuck...?" Mulder shouted, as every nerve ending in his body jangled at the sudden intrusion into his sleepy flesh. His Master ignored him and Mulder struggled to stay upright as Skinner pumped into him forcefully. 'Wanda' fucks were always of the rough, extremely basic variety, which was usually a turn on for Mulder, and sure enough, his treacherous cock responded as soon as his brain got to grips with the situation. He realised that his Master had woken him early using the 'Wanda' word with the sole intention of making use of his slave without any finesse. Mulder glanced at the clock – it was 6.30 am, but they had been in the habit of sleeping in over the past few days so it felt as if he had been woken in the middle of the night. Skinner clearly intended for this to be an object lesson as well, because he kept up a fast but controlled pace for several long minutes while Mulder tried to come to terms mentally with what was happening. The suddenness of the event and the time his Master was taking was making him sore, and he was all too well aware that this was part of the lesson – his Master was making his slave fully aware that he was starting as he meant to go on.

"Shit...please...ow...shit..." Mulder moaned as the onslaught continued relentlessly.

"Hold your position, boy. I want to make full use of you," Skinner told him tersely. His Master's hands were firm on his hips, wrenching them back to meet his powerful thrusts and there was no way that Mulder could escape from the other man. Skinner finally came with a low roar and withdrew from his slave's body. Mulder collapsed forward onto his arms, burying his head in them.

"Jeez, what a wake up call," he murmured weakly, wondering if he'd ever walk again, although the ache in his cock told him he'd enjoyed the sensation of being so powerless and available even if he hadn't enjoyed the actual physical sensation very much.

"Up." Skinner's hand thwapped down hard on his exposed bottom. "Go to the bathroom and clean yourself up and bring a washcloth for me, and then get your ass out here. I am NOT happy about your

response so consider yourself in a whole heap of trouble, boy."

Mulder slid out of the bed so fast he nearly fell over. Skinner sounded pissed as all hell and, as he headed for the bathroom, Mulder realised why. Skinner had used his special word, the one that Mulder had chosen, only to be almost completely ignored by his, admittedly sleepy, slave. This wasn't good. Mulder washed himself down and then scrambled back to the bedroom with the washcloth. He knelt beside the bed and held the cloth out to his Master, his eyes down.

"Clean me," Skinner ordered tersely.

Mulder did his task quickly, and then knelt back down again.

"All right – your explanation, boy," Skinner demanded.

"I'm sorry, Master." Mulder grimaced. "I was asleep...I didn't understand what you wanted. It took me a few minutes to wake up enough to figure it out and by then it was too late.

"Maybe I haven't made myself clear," Skinner told him, in low, stern tones, "but you are my slave. Your body exists for my pleasure and use, and when I want access to it I expect it to be given to me immediately. I don't care if you're asleep – I expect you to be so attuned to your Master's will that if I came to you in your dreams and commanded you to get on your hands and knees so I could use you you'd do it, immediately, and without question."

"I'm sorry, Master," Mulder said again, his cock responding as it always did to his Master's more forceful choice of words.

"Maybe you are, but this is an indication of the fact that you've been backsliding, boy. I can see we have a lot of work to do to make you responsive to me. I've been too soft on you – you need to be reminded of who and what you are. There isn't any part of your body that doesn't belong to me. It isn't yours, boy, it's mine. You will **not** deny me entrance to your mouth or your ass – and I'll enjoy myself in both those places whenever I please, for as long as I please, whether you're asleep or awake. Understood?"

Mulder nodded, his throat dry. "Yes, Master," he said croakily.

"Good. However, in order to make sure that the lesson has really been learned, I think a long punishment session is necessary," Skinner informed him.

Mulder looked up, his heart pounding in his chest. It had been a long time since he had been on the receiving end of a serious punishment session and he wondered exactly what it would entail. He was astonished by how quickly his Master had succeeded in completely wrong-footing him. He had imagined that Skinner would slowly get him into headspace, maybe play some demanding but highly enjoyable sex games with him on and off over the next few days, but still be his kind lover, Walter. At the moment, however, there was no sign of Walter in those stern dark eyes. Skinner was completely and utterly every inch his Master and he was making it very clear to Mulder that right now he was a slave and that he would be treated as such. If Mulder had imagined he would struggle and resist he felt a very long way from being able to do so at this moment in time. He had been caught off guard and now he didn't have a clue what he was doing – the control hadn't so much been taken from him as yanked out from under his feet completely, leaving him out of breath and disoriented.

"Eyes **down**, boy," Skinner barked. "Hold the submissive pose the way you were taught – or have you forgotten **everything** I taught you?"

"No, Master!" Mulder said hastily, straightening his back, widening his legs so that his erect cock was offered to his Master, and holding his chin up high but lowering his eyes, as he had been instructed a long time ago. Skinner rarely made him hold these poses nowadays – and Mulder hadn't even realised that he missed it. Most of the time he enjoyed the comfortable relationship he had with the other man too much to even think about it, but in terms of getting into subspace it certainly didn't hurt to revisit some of the basics – which was what Skinner had warned him they would be doing.

"That's better. Now, this will be a long punishment session – in fact it will last the entire day," Skinner told his slave. Mulder felt sure that his gulp was audible. "By the end of the day I want this to be a lesson you have learned down to the core of your soul so that if I were to whisper your special word to you while you were eating you'd present yourself to me the way you were taught to and the way in which you signally **failed** to do just now. Do you remember the position you are to assume when I use your word, boy?" Skinner barked.

"Yes, Master!"

"Then assume it now," Skinner ordered.

Mulder got up, quickly, bent over the back of the armchair, and presented his ass to his Master. He held apart his ass cheeks to make his Master's access easier should he choose to use him, flushing wildly as he did so because the position was both humiliating and intimate.

"Good," Skinner commented. Mulder began to get up. "No – don't move. I like the view," Skinner said. "And as you didn't present yourself properly to me earlier you can stay like that for the next few minutes. I'm going to use your special word several times for the next few days and I expect you to assume your position as quickly as you did just then – whatever time of the day or night I give the order. I might not choose to use you on many of the occasions I give the word, but you will stay in that position each time until I tell you that you may get up again. Understood?"

"Yes, Master," Mulder said, squirming at the thought of how he must look, standing here, his asshole exposed in this way.

"Good. The choice isn't yours, Fox – you'll do what you're told, when you're told, for as long as you are told."

A firm slap on his bottom illustrated this point, and then Mulder heard his Master go into the bathroom. He listened to the sound of his Master peeing, taking a brief shower, and then brushing his teeth. Finally, after several long, degrading minutes, Skinner returned to the bedroom. Mulder watched from under his own armpit as Skinner pulled on sweats and then glanced at his slave again.

"I'm leaving the room. Remain in position, boy. If you move so much as an inch then you'll take 6 strokes of the cane before I even begin your punishment session. Understood?"

"Yes, Master," Mulder muttered, wondering how long he could stay like this. This really was a reminder of their early days together – Skinner was uncompromising and demanding and Mulder found himself

responding, even if he knew there was a rebellious, mutinous nugget deep inside himself that would have to be subdued before he achieved the total serenity that was eluding him. Although Skinner was doing a mighty fine job of taking him down, Mulder knew he was nowhere near the bottom of his submission yet – they had barely scratched the surface. The real challenges lay in front of him – and his cock told him that on some level he would enjoy every single torment even while his mind reeled from the knowledge of what was ahead.

His Master returned a few minutes later bearing an armful of disciplinary implements, including the hated dragon cane. Mulder swallowed down hard, barely even daring to look at his Master from under his arm.

"All right, boy." Skinner clicked his fingers and Mulder sank quickly into the submissive position at the other man's feet. "First I'm going to clamp you," he said ominously, opening a little velvet box and showing Mulder a set of nipple clamps. Mulder gave a low moan – these nipple clamps were the most vicious ones that his Master possessed and he knew just how painful they were.

"Fox," Skinner said sharply. "You do understand that this is a punishment session, don't you?"

Mulder swallowed hard, never taking his eyes off those hated clamps.

"Yes, Master," he said, his voice barely audible.

"Good – do you understand why you're being punished?" Skinner asked. Mulder shrugged. Skinner tapped his head firmly. "Well?" He asked.

"For not obeying you more quickly, Master?" Mulder asked with a tinge of rebellion in his voice.

"Although I **was** asleep, Master," he added resentfully. Although he had told Skinner to take him down, he hadn't expected to be so forcefully wrenched back into his slavery and it was rankling with him. He had expected to be eased down gently with his Master's usual erotic skill, and after the past few days of peace and quiet and enjoyable togetherness he was in no mood to be pushed, which was precisely what his Master seemed to be doing.

"I've already explained this to you, Fox, but you seem unwilling to accept it," Skinner told him firmly.

"You're a slave – your sole purpose is to address yourself to my pleasure. I own you and it pleases me to introduce myself into any part of your body whenever I wish. I don't care whether you're fast asleep, boy. When I want to make use of you then I expect you to open your legs or mouth for me and **immediately** make yourself available."

"Yes, Master," Mulder murmured.

"You do understand that such service is the most important and basic function of your slavery?" Skinner pressed.

"Yes, Master," Mulder agreed.

"Then you will understand why you are being punished," Skinner told him in a tone that allowed for no contradiction. Mulder squirmed. Put like that then it was all entirely logical but he had been asleep damnit! And he was a long way from the early days of his slavery when all this had been new to him and

he was alert to every single nuance of his Master's needs. Things had gotten...comfortable between them. Routines weren't always followed. They knew each other much better now, and had settled into a version of slavery that wasn't quite so demanding as this. Mulder wasn't sure he wanted to be reminded so forcefully of the basics.

"Yes, Master," he agreed at last, with a resentful grimace.

"You will also understand why this is going to be a particularly harsh punishment session," Skinner told him. Mulder felt as if his heart had dropped out of his chest and into the soles of his feet. He glanced up and met his Master's eyes for the first time.

"Eyes down!" Skinner snapped. Mulder obeyed hastily, shivering slightly.

"Yes, Master," he said at last, feeling as if he was drowning, splashing around blindly with nothing to hold onto except his Master.

"Good. I don't want you to be in any doubt about this. I want you to prepare yourself mentally for an extremely long and painful day," Skinner said. "You may look at the implements on the bed." Mulder did so, shaking even more as he took in the array of disciplinary implements lying there. Skinner had brought down half a dozen of the most no-nonsense implements in the Playroom. "I will be spanking you every hour, on the hour," Skinner said, glancing at his watch. "Beginning at 8 am and continuing until your bedtime. For each spanking you will wear the nipple clamps. It's your responsibility to remind me when your next spanking is due. Keep an eye on your watch – I can assure you that your punishment will be considerably worse if you forget to remind me."

"Yes, Master." Mulder was shaking in earnest now. This sounded so damn **serious**.

"I'll use whichever implement I feel appropriate at the time – although it will always be one of these 6 implements. You will therefore carry them around all day in preparation for your next spanking – I don't want them to be further than an arm's reach from you at any point in time. For this first spanking, I'll use the paddle." He picked up a hard, wooden paddle. It was plain, workmanlike, and utterly un-erotic - and Mulder knew from personal experience that it packed a flat, solid punch.

"However, as we have another half an hour or so to go until 8 am, I think some silent reflection would do you good. It will give you time to consider the day's punishments, how you've brought them on yourself, and what you will learn from them. I think that in order to give the next half an hour some additional impact, that you can wear the nipple clamps as well."

Mulder had to bite down hard on his lip to stop himself from protesting but his heart did a flip from where it was currently residing in the soles of his feet.

"Problem, slave?" Skinner asked.

"Those clamps are particularly painful, Master," Mulder said in a voice that sounded suspiciously like a squawk to his own ears.

"Yes, they are," Skinner affirmed. "Did I not make it clear that this was to be a punishment?"

"No, Master...I mean, yes, you did," Mulder replied.

"The clamps are part of your punishment, boy. They're supposed to be painful. Maybe the pain will help to focus your mind on where you went wrong this morning and how you can improve on that dismal performance," Skinner snapped. "Now, come here and present yourself for clamping."

Mulder shuffled closer to his Master but didn't dare get to his feet without permission. He knelt, instead, his shoulders thrown back, his nipples standing pert and proud on his chest, seemingly unaware of the torture that was about to be visited on them. Mulder watched in trepidation as his Master removed the clamps from their box.

"Eyes down!" Skinner commanded. "If I have to remind you of that again then you'll receive a lash from my bullwhip." Mulder shuddered and dropped his gaze immediately. He had no wish to experience the bullwhip while his Master was in this kind of mood. "Shoulders out, arms behind your back – and keep them there," Skinner ordered. Mulder obeyed, aware that the action pushed his chest out even more, leaving his nipples totally exposed and vulnerable. He waited for what felt like several long minutes, expecting to feel those torturing clamps on his nipples at any point, wondering what on earth could be taking his Master so long. Finally he started to tremble in earnest – the anticipation of imminent pain was almost worse than the pain itself, and he was on the brink of getting up, and telling his Master it was a mistake, and he couldn't face it, when suddenly his left nipple was grasped firmly, and a second later the steel jaws of the clamp snapped shut over it with a resounding lash of pure pain. Mulder gave a gasping cry, which his Master ignored.

"Now the other one," Skinner told him.

"Please...Master...it hurts..." Mulder whimpered. Skinner had never made him wear these clamps for more than five or ten minutes before. He couldn't imagine how he would endure half an hour in them, followed by a spanking, which was to be conducted while he was still wearing them, but Skinner was utterly implacable.

"It's supposed to hurt, Fox. This is a punishment. I want to hurt my slave in order to make him understand the full extent of his Master's displeasure. Now, what are you being punished for?"

"Not making myself immediately available for my Master's use," Mulder whispered.

"Exactly – and as the crime is so serious, I can assure you the punishment will be correspondingly severe," Skinner told him. Mulder didn't have time to reply because Skinner grasped his other nipple and fastened the clamp onto it with a swift movement that took Mulder's breath away.

"Oh shit..." He broke position, his hands coming up to whisk those cutting steel-jawed points of pure fire from his nipples – only to find the way blocked by his Master's large hands.

"Back into position, boy," Skinner said firmly, pushing him back down. Mulder gave a disconsolate cry, and settled back on his heels, tears of pure pain pricking in the back of his eyes.

"Good boy. If you take your punishment well I'll be proud of you," Skinner told him, more gently than Mulder had been expecting. His Master pushed his slave's sweaty, tousled hair away from his face. "That's good. Go with the pain, boy. Give yourself up to it," Skinner whispered and Mulder moaned and leaned his head in to meet his Master's embrace, needing Skinner's strength and reassurance to see him

through this ordeal. His nipples were points of blazing agony and it still hadn't abated to a manageable level.

"Please...please..." he whispered, nuzzling his Master's hand hopefully. "I can't wear them for much longer, Master...please..."

"You'll wear them for the next half an hour and you'll continue to wear them through your spanking. Only when your spanking is over will I remove them," Skinner told him, although his tone was loving, almost erotic now. He bent down, lifted Mulder's chin, and then pressed his lips against his slave's, claiming him utterly with his mouth. Mulder moaned again and leaned in to his Master's body, distracted a little from the burn in his chest by his Master's sweet, loving kiss. "Good boy," Skinner said releasing him. He crouched in front of his slave and took Mulder's face in his hands. "This will be hard on you, little one, but it's a lesson you need to learn," he said, his dark eyes full of encouragement.

"It hurts so much, Master," Mulder said miserably, leaning his head against the other man's chest.

"I know, sweetheart. Go with the pain, bear it as your right and your due. Take it into yourself, and learn from it," Skinner whispered, stroking his slave's hair comfortingly.

Mulder gave a choking cry and tried to do just that. The presence of his Master, gently stroking and comforting him helped – with Skinner at his side, encouraging him, he felt he could endure any ordeal.

Skinner stroked him for several long minutes and the pain subsided into something a little more bearable although still unbelievably agonising, and then, just as Mulder thought he might be able to endure this, Skinner moved away and said: "Wanda."

Mulder looked up at his Master in alarm, and then, seeing Skinner's expression start to turn thunderous at his slow reaction, he quickly turned, got to his feet, and bent himself over the armchair once more. Every movement seemed to jolt his painful nipples unbearably, and he had to be careful how he arranged himself over the back of the chair so that they didn't dig even further into his pained flesh. When he had gotten himself ready, he carefully moved his hands back and held his buttocks open for his Master, should he wish to use him. Skinner stepped over to him, and slapped his butt sharply.

"Still too slow. When will you understand that there is to be no delay on this, Fox? I say your word to you, and you **immediately** present yourself to me for use. You don't look at me for confirmation, and you don't hesitate, or play for time. You just get into position, smoothly, quickly, and demonstrate to me what a good and available slave you are." Skinner illustrated the word 'available' by sliding a finger into his slave's anus. Mulder closed his eyes, and tried to ignore his hard cock – it went without saying that his Master didn't intend for him to come today but despite the pain and frustration of his current situation, he couldn't deny that he was turned on, as he always was when Skinner treated him in this most uncompromising and yet erotic way. Skinner sank his finger deep into Mulder's anus and Mulder sighed and pushed his butt out as his Master unerringly hit his prostate.

"Don't move, boy," Skinner warned. "This is NOT about your pleasure."

"No, Master," Mulder replied, wishing desperately that it **was**.

His Master finger fucked him for several minutes, which Mulder thoroughly enjoyed despite his Master's injunction that it wasn't about his pleasure, and then Skinner withdrew his finger and walked into the ensuite bathroom, leaving his slave exposed over the armchair, his hands still keeping his buttocks open should his Master wish to use him.

Skinner left his slave there for what must have been ten or fifteen minutes. It was the most unendurably humiliating position, made even worse by the fact that Mulder couldn't lean comfortably on the armchair for fear of disturbing the vicious points of steel that were digging into his nipples. Mulder felt as if he was going to pass out – the nipple clamps were unbearable and the position he was in was making his legs shake from the strain but his Master showed him no mercy. Skinner insisted that his slave remain clamped and in position until 8 am precisely, and only then did he call his slave over. Mulder stood up, red faced and winded by the fact that it was only 8 am and the day had a long, painful way to go before this punishment session was over.

"All right – time for your first spanking. Get yourself into the grace position, boy, and prepare to be truly thankful for what you're about to receive." Skinner gave a macabre smile, which made Mulder shudder. He walked over to the wall and got into position, his hands flat against the surface of the wall, his legs wide apart, his butt jutting out, exposed, waiting for its punishment. He heard his Master approach and then jumped as the other man placed a gentle hand on his butt, fondling tenderly.

"Ah, this is such a beautiful bottom. Unfortunately I haven't kept it as red as it should be. An ass like this should be permanently glowing and I can assure you that today there will be no opportunity for the lovely blush I'm about to bestow to fade. I'll keep your ass constantly warm..." Mulder lost himself in the litany, loving the deep, rich sound of his Master's voice even as he quailed at the import of what the other man was saying. The caressing hand was removed from his ass, and, a few seconds later, the hard wooden paddle descended on his waiting flesh with a resounding thwack. Mulder gave a hoarse cry and was soon yelling in earnest as his Master rained down blow after blow. He didn't give Mulder time to get his breath back between swats, and he didn't stop until every square inch of his slave's bottom had been covered numerous times.

The onslaught came to an abrupt end and Mulder stood there, still braced against the wall, his breathing coming in hard pants.

"Good boy. I'm very proud of you for taking that so well. I enjoy punishing you, Fox. Your ass looks so good when it's red...I love watching it wriggle as it waits for my paddle to punish it. You look very sexy when you abandon yourself to me, head thrown back, legs wide apart...I like that," Skinner said throatily, making Mulder's cock become even harder, if that were possible. "Good boy. I'm going to play with you for a while. Hold still," Skinner said, standing close behind his slave, his sweats rubbing maddeningly on Mulder's sensitised backside. His Master kneaded his buttocks for awhile, making Mulder squirm and cry out although he held position – just. Then Skinner's hands went around his slave's front and he gently rubbed Mulder's chest. His fingers spidered up towards Mulder's nipples, and then there was a slight jerking tug as Skinner removed the clamps and a few seconds later Mulder felt a flash of pain so bright that it almost blinded him. He knew he was howling out loud and reeling as the blood flowed back into his nipples after their half hour of torment.

"Oh god! Oh shit!" he cried. "Please, Master...please..." His cries didn't fall on deaf ears. Mulder felt Skinner's hands on his body, pulling him away from the wall, turning him, and then his Master's warm

mouth descended on his nipples, soothing them, roving from one to the other, softly reviving them. After a few seconds of this, Skinner drew back and pulled his slave close, hugging him to his chest, comforting him.

"Good boy. I'm proud of you...good boy...well done, Fox..." he murmured over and over again and that was the only thing that gave Mulder the strength to continue. He buried his face in his Master's shoulder and held on for dear life as Skinner fondled, kissed and caressed his naked slave, taking good care of him.

"Please don't use those clamps on me again, Master," Mulder whispered abjectly. "Please don't...I'm sorry...please..."

"Hush, little one," Skinner told him, hugging Mulder and rocking him against his chest. "I will use them again because I promised I would and because you're being punished. You'll endure it, little one, every hour, on the hour, although only for a few minutes next time. You'll take it because I ask you to, and because you have to learn your lesson."

"I've learned it!" Mulder protested.

"Wanda," Skinner murmured and Mulder didn't even register the word for several seconds. He didn't want to leave the comfort of his Master's loving arms. He wanted to be rocked here forever. "Wanda," Skinner said again, pushing his slave away. Mulder gave a moan of protest and got onto his knees. He leaned forward, and held his buttocks open. "You see," Skinner said, tracing a finger down his slave's back. "You haven't learned this lesson yet, Fox. You just want the punishment to stop and that's a different thing entirely. Now, you can get up and get washed and then come downstairs for breakfast. Remember to bring your implements with you. And Fox..." He called his slave back as Mulder walked, disconsolately towards the bathroom. "Don't jerk off in there," Skinner told his slave, a knowing expression in his dark eyes. "From now on you don't even touch your penis without my permission – and that includes going to the bathroom. Ask me if you need to go."

Mulder nodded miserably. This was a familiar part of his Master's training routines – and one he hated. He knew that Skinner was trying to remind him that his body belonged to his Master, even down to the most basic of bodily functions, but it was humiliating to have to ask permission to touch his own cock in order to take a piss. Mulder fought with himself for a moment, struggling with what he knew he had to do, and then he opened his mouth.

"Master, please may I touch your property when I pee?" He asked.

Skinner nodded. "Very well, slave. And?" He prompted.

"And may I wash your property in the shower, Master?" Mulder whispered, hating the words as he fought his own submission. If only this was easy! If only he could just be in the right place in his head at a snap of his Master's fingers, but Mulder had to concede that it had been a very long time since his Master had last taken him this low, and while he fought it and struggled against it, he so desperately wanted to achieve the serenity and joy that always awaited him when he made the journey. He remembered, wryly, how he was the one who was always urging Skinner to take him close to edge play, to make it really count – and yet now it was happening to him he just wanted to fight it.

"No, slave. You may not," Skinner told him. "You can allow the water to wash over you but you won't touch yourself. You can do without soap and you can dry off naturally by walking around the house."

"Yes, Master," Mulder murmured, only just managing to stop himself from answering back at the absurd limitations that had been placed on him.

"Well hurry, slave. Daylight's burning." Skinner shoed him into the shower and then turned and went back downstairs. Mulder glared after him.

If Mulder imagined there would be any respite over breakfast he was sorely mistaken. Skinner swiftly instructed him to kneel beside his chair at the dining room table, eyes down, and disappeared into the kitchen to retrieve the food. A few seconds later Mulder was instructed to open his mouth and a spoonful of food was pushed between his lips. He couldn't see the food so it was only when he started to chew that he realised what it was – and almost spat it out in disgust.

"Problem, slave?" Skinner asked.

"It's salad, Master," Mulder told him.

"Very observant, slave," Skinner replied urbanely, pushing a spoonful of beetroot into Mulder's mouth. Mulder almost gagged on it.

"For breakfast, Master?" He questioned, swallowing the vegetable down hurriedly.

"That's right," Skinner affirmed pleasantly.

Mulder wasn't a great fan of salad at the best of times and his Master seemed to have gathered together all his least favourite items of food and put them on one plate. They were all foods he could actually eat – he didn't loathe them and they didn't make him retch so he could swallow them down - but he didn't actually **like** any of them. Skinner continued feeding his slave until Mulder had devoured a fair amount of lettuce, cucumber, beets, and various other salad vegetables. Then his Master handed his slave a portion of plain brown bread, without any butter on it. His Master disappeared into the kitchen and returned a few minutes later with a plate of eggs and toast, which he proceeded to devour. It smelled divine and Mulder's mouth was watering as he slowly put bite-sized pieces of the plain, cold bread into his mouth. His Master didn't offer him any of his own breakfast though, and he spent a long, leisurely hour eating his fill and reading the paper, utterly ignoring his kneeling slave. Mulder felt the nugget of rebellion grow inside him. He couldn't stand much more of this. On the dot of 9 am, Skinner stood up.

"On your feet, slave," he ordered. Mulder got up, and was taken by surprise when his nipples were grasped firmly and the clamps reapplied to them. Skinner had moved so fast that he hadn't even realised what was happening until too late and then that familiar flash of agony shot through his chest, making him cry out loud.

"Good boy. Now, over the table. I'm going to use the strap on you this time." Skinner pushed Mulder firmly over the dining room table and Mulder found his face ended up so close to his Master's plates

that he could smell the divine scent of a really good breakfast. It was tantalising and it distracted him from his pained nipples – but not for long, as within seconds his Master's strap was making painful contact with his bottom. The spanking was short and to the point, and then he was pulled to his feet, and the clamps were whisked away from his nipples, making him hop, silently yelping with pain as he did so.

"Don't make a fuss, boy. Take your punishment properly, like an obedient slave who knows he is deserving of his Master's correction," Skinner told him sternly. Mulder took several deep breaths, trying to pull himself back together, his resentment growing. His Master clearly had no idea how damn painful those clamps were – and that strap had gone about its work with a mighty sting as well. "Clear away the plates and wash up," Skinner ordered. "Quickly, slave, we have a lot to get through today." And so saying he went and sat down on the couch.

"We?" Mulder muttered under his breath. "**We** have a lot to get through today?" He piled up the plates on top of each other and started taking them into the kitchen. He was half way across the room when Skinner's voice rang out.

"Wanda."

Mulder skidded to a halt, unable to believe his ears. Now? When he had his arms full of dirty plates? He shot his Master a vicious glance, returned to the table, dumped the plates back on them, and bent over, grasping his buttocks to open himself for his Master's use.

"Still too slow – and next time lose the attitude, boy," Skinner snapped. Mulder gritted his teeth and tried to keep from growling out loud. His Master made no use of him. He just left him there for a few minutes and then ordered him to continue with his task of washing the dishes.

Mulder found Wanda sitting in her usual place by the faucet waiting for someone to turn it on so she could drink, despite the fact that she had a full bowl of water waiting for her on the floor.

"Oh fuck. Shit, fuck, shit," Mulder growled in a low undertone once he was alone in the kitchen. "Fuck," he said again, kicking a cupboard for good measure. Wanda flicked her ears at him. "Nothing personal, Wanda, but I'm coming to really hate your name," Mulder mused. He rested his elbows on the kitchen counter and stared morosely at the wall. "Your slave is a total bastard, you know that?" He told her. She blinked solemnly. "Yes, I know I told him to take me down, but I didn't expect **this**. I was thinking more of a long, hot sex session in the Playroom," he grumbled. Tears pricked at the back of his eyes, taking him by surprise. "It's so hard, Wanda," he whispered, and she tripped daintily across the counter and nestled under his chin, rubbing her head affectionately against his face. He buried himself in her fur, and she purred delightedly, coaxing a small smile from him. "I know," he told her. "A session in the Playroom would have been fun but it wouldn't have taken me down enough to cope with being branded – and I do want that, Wanda. I just wish it wasn't so hard...Maybe if it was easy then I wouldn't appreciate it...I dunno. I'm trying to find a silver lining here because I hate him so much right now." He said that with such vehemence that Wanda's yellowy-green eyes widened and gazed at him anxiously, her ears darting back and forth. "It's okay. I didn't mean to scare you. Come here." He picked her up and gently caressed her until she relaxed again. Then, with a sigh, he put her down and returned to the dirty plates.

As soon as he was finished, Skinner clipped his nipple lead on him and took him upstairs to the 18th floor apartment. Mulder walked to heel, as he had been taught many months previously – but it had been a long time since his Master had leashed him and he struggled to remember all the correct moves. They hadn't been upstairs since the aborted party and Mulder's heart sank when he surveyed the total mess that greeted them. There were empty glasses and bottles strewn around, as well as the congealed mess of food on dozens of plates.

"You'll clean the entire apartment," Skinner told him. "Make sure that your implements are within arm's reach at all times. I'll sit here and direct operations." He cleared a space on the couch and sat down. Mulder stared at him.

"I'm sure that will very helpful, Master," he said sarcastically, unable to stop himself. Skinner raised an eyebrow.

"There's no point in keeping a slave and working yourself," he replied sweetly. Mulder clenched his fists and tried hard to hold onto his temper. "Wanda," Skinner said, piling on the pressure. Mulder fought a split second battle with himself. Of all the freaking times to use that word, now was one of the worst his Master could have chosen. Mulder knew he was close to the edge, knew he was fighting a silent battle with Skinner every step of the way instead of just surrendering himself to his Master's will, but he couldn't stop himself. He seriously considered **not** obeying, as Skinner watched him, his dark eyes studying his slave's response searchingly, although he made no move, as if waiting for Mulder to come to a decision. Finally, with a growl of anger, Mulder got on his hands and knees and presented his ass to his Master. He was surprised a few seconds later to feel the strap on his still warm bottom. His Master gave him three swift swats. "That's for the delay, Fox. Now get this hot ass into the kitchen and start washing the glasses," Skinner ordered.

Mulder scrambled to his feet and disappeared into the little galley kitchen, his cheeks flushing almost as bright as his butt cheeks. Damn but he really **couldn't** take much more of this.

The day didn't improve. Mulder suffered through 3 more hourly spankings, and his nipples were now sore almost all the time from the repeated clampings. The tidy-up in the upstairs apartment went at a snail's pace – mainly owing to Skinner's insistence that he take his disciplinary implements everywhere with him, so if he was carrying glasses from the Playroom to the kitchen he had to carry his implements in one hand and under his arm, leaving him with only enough room to carry a couple of glasses back to the kitchen. It was infuriating, and Mulder's irritation level was soon sky high. Skinner stopped the proceedings after his slave's 1 o' clock spanking and fed his slave a bean stew – which Mulder disliked to the point of almost spitting it out. Then it was straight back to his task of cleaning the upstairs apartment. By 3 o' clock Mulder was close to the edge. He took a garbage sack around the apartment, picking up litter, nudging his implements into accompanying him with his foot as he went. He glanced over to the couch and saw that his Master's eyes were closed – which seemed like a perfect opportunity to abandon the implements and chase around the apartment at a much faster pace in order to clear up all the litter. He worked quickly and efficiently, one eye on his Master as he went, and he was almost done when he heard a noise behind him.

"I thought I made it clear that your implements were to be kept within reach at all times?" Skinner said ominously, rising from the couch.

"Oh for god's sake!" Mulder snapped. "It'll take all night to get this done if I have to bring them along every step of the fucking way!"

"Who said there was any hurry?" Skinner replied smoothly. "There isn't. If it takes all day then that's fine. If it takes 2 days then that's fine too." He smiled urbanely. "You aren't going anywhere, slave and I'm happy to supervise you until it's done."

"This is ridiculous!" Mulder complained. "What the fuck point is there in this?"

"The point, slave, is that you learn to obey my orders," Skinner said in a tone of pure steel. "But as I can see you prefer to circumvent them and as you can't keep a civil tongue in your head I think we need to help you. Now, stay." He gestured with his hand and Mulder sank reluctantly to his knees, wondering what was going to happen next. His Master went along to the Playroom and returned a few seconds later with an item that made Mulder's heart sink. "Maybe this will keep you quiet," Skinner said, holding up the large ball gag. "Open." He stood over Mulder, waiting for his slave to open his mouth. Mulder stared up at his Master, mutely, and they gazed at each other for several long moments. Mulder could feel himself giving up precious fragments of his independence with each passing minute and he hated it – and hated his Master for bringing him to this, for being so implacable, for not giving an inch, and for making Mulder take everything he handed out. Skinner didn't give the order again, he just held out the gag, waiting for his slave to obey. Mulder stared him out for a long time, and then, finally, with a growl of pure frustration, he gave in and opened his mouth. Skinner strapped the ball gag into his mouth and Mulder moaned as he realised this was one of the most punitive ball gags his Master possessed – his jaw was aching within seconds from the sheer size of the thing. His misery was complete.

Skinner set Mulder back to work, which he did in enforced silence, his rebellion growing with every passing second. He hated the ball gag with a vengeance, and longed to rip it from his mouth and throw it at his Master who was sitting comfortably on the couch reading a novel while Mulder did all the hard work. What made matters worse was that while he couldn't talk, he could **drool** which was both humiliating and annoying. The large ball gag made it impossible to stop the spittle sliding out of the side of his mouth and dripping down his chin and when he tried to wipe it away with his hand his Master forbade him to touch his property which just put Mulder in an even worse mood as he had to endure the slow, steady tide of his own spit rolling down his chin almost constantly. Mulder stomped around the apartment with bad grace and his next few spankings did nothing to improve his mood. Skinner made sure that each one was hard and his bottom was now as sore as his nipples. He couldn't even yell during spankings because of the intrusive ball gag and the ache in his jaw was getting worse with every passing second. Skinner didn't remove the gag for several hours, and Mulder couldn't bring himself to go and beg his Master to remove it by sitting at the big man's side and giving him his famous pleading puppy dog gaze. Skinner ignored both him and the atmosphere of total anger and frustration that was now emanating from his slave. Mulder's movements became noisier and noisier as he cleared up – if he couldn't speak then he could sure as hell make his annoyance known by crashing plates and glasses around and generally making as much of a racket as possible.

Skinner only released him from the gag at dinner-time, when he fed his slave a watery vegetable stew. Mulder jaw ached so much that for several minutes he couldn't do much but kneel, working his jaw back

and forth trying to loosen it while his Master fed him. Mulder was close to retching as he swallowed the tasteless meal, and then his Master directed him to finish in the upstairs apartment. It was now 7 o' clock, and Mulder was exhausted, sore, and in the worst mood he'd ever been in his life. He finally finished cleaning at 8.45, and then Skinner inspected the apartment, wiping his finger over all the surfaces to ensure that they were clean and dust free. Mulder's internal voice kept up a bitter dialogue throughout as he silently berated his Master for putting him through such a day from hell.

"Good, slave. I'm pleased," Skinner said, gazing around the now spotless apartment. Mulder breathed a sigh of relief. He was exhausted and wanted nothing more than to go to bed – as soon as possible. "I'll just inspect the Playroom," Skinner said, and he walked along the corridor with Mulder at his heels, inspected that room as well, and then, finally satisfied, he nodded to his slave. "You've finished now, slave, so I think it's time to mark you. Hand me my cane." He held out his hand.

"What?" Mulder stiffened.

"My cane, slave, and quickly," Skinner urged.

Mulder felt the full force of his anger and misery well up inside him. "You cannot be serious!" He snapped.

"I most certainly am." Skinner drew himself up to his full height and gazed imperiously at his slave. "Your ass may be sore but it isn't marked – and it's time it was."

"You've been spanking me all fucking day," Mulder spat. "My ass hurts so much...I can't **take** a marking as well, Master. You are not going to use this fucking cane on me after all the spankings I've taken today. You're not...YOU ARE NOT!" Some wild urge inside him made him throw all caution to the wind and he grabbed the cane from the pile of implements and snapped it over his knee, breaking it in two.

"Come here," Skinner said in a deadly tone.

"NO!" Mulder cried. "I've had enough!"

His Master walked towards him and something in Mulder snapped. He lunged at the other man, transformed into a sobbing, hissing wildcat. He pummelled his fists against Skinner's chest, screaming incoherently at the top of his voice. Skinner endured the worst of his slave's explosion, just standing there, absorbing the blows, and then he grabbed his slave's wrists and held them firmly behind Mulder's back. Mulder tried to free himself, struggling pointlessly against his Master's superior strength for several long minutes, still screeching like a banshee.

"I hate you! I fucking hate you!" He screamed, fighting for breath, all the anger washing through him, exploding out of him in a torrent of abuse. Skinner held him for several long minutes while he struggled, and then finally Mulder gave up, all his energy leaving him in one go. He almost fell but his Master, whose hands had been holding him down, now held him up.

"It's all right, little one," Skinner said softly. "Let it all out. It's fine. Scream all you want. Let it go. I'm not going to let you fall." He held Mulder up for a long time while Mulder sagged against him. Finally Mulder's anger turned into tears and he found himself holding onto his Master for dear life, burying his

head in Skinner's shoulder as the sobs came out of him in great choking gasps. Skinner released his slave's wrists and his hands came up and gathered Mulder in close, holding him tight against his chest.

"You can get as angry as you like, and you can struggle as much as you like," Skinner said in firm, low tones, "I'll still be here. I'm strong enough to take all of it, Fox. I can take all of you."

"I hate you," Mulder whispered into his Master's shoulder.

"Yup. I guess you do right now," Skinner said with a low, rumbling laugh. "I didn't think you'd last as long as you did. You are such an obstinate boy."

"What?" Mulder drew back. "You were testing me?"

"No, I think you were testing me. I was just trying to get all that anger out of you so we could move on," Skinner said softly.

"I wasn't angry until you **made** me angry," Mulder muttered.

"Sure you were. You wanted to be branded and it didn't happen. You're angry with yourself for not being able to go through with it and you're angry with me for not insisting that you did. I can insist, Fox, as I'm sure I proved today. I can be every inch the implacable, demanding Master whenever it's necessary. I think in your heart you already knew that, but you needed a reminder."

"Fuck." Mulder leaned his head wearily against his Master's shoulder. "You've been psyching me out again," he murmured.

"Yes. I just didn't expect the explosion to take this long to happen – although you sure as hell have been building it up all day. How's it going in there? Do you need to kick and scream any more or are you done?"

Mulder glanced up into his Master's amused brown eyes.

"You knew I was going to explode?"

"You wanted to struggle...you told me so last night. I needed to get that struggle out of the way so we could move you down into a more serene state of acceptance. I am **not** going to brand a slave who is spitting, cursing and hollering at me all the way through. I just forced the pace a little, to get to the stuff you'd buried deep. You never can just let something go – you need to get it out and express it before you can move on. That's just you." Skinner gently kissed his slave's forehead. "Now listen to me, pup," he said fondly, and Mulder sighed and relaxed against his Master's chest, comforted by being addressed lovingly as 'pup' and not the colder and more distant 'slave' which was how Skinner had been addressing him all day. "Good boy." Skinner kissed him again. "I know it's hard being taken right down – and we still have a way to go. It's been a long time since I've made you go this far down but we'll get there," Skinner said soothingly.

"I just want to be at peace," Mulder sighed, swaying in his Master's arms. "I want to feel that serenity again."

"I know, and you will – but first you have to give up all the Mulder stuff," Skinner told him calmly. "You have to give up what **you** want, or what you think you want, and you have to remember that first lesson I taught you – the one about honesty. You have to stop fighting me, boy. I needed to make you literally fight me in order to move you beyond it. You have to start working with me. Remember that you don't have any choices...I'm in charge. Do you trust me, Fox?"

Mulder looked up into his Master's dark eyes, then sighed and replaced his head on Skinner's shoulder.

"Yes, Master. You know I do," he said at last.

"Good. Then surrender yourself to that trust and we can start to make some progress here. Put aside your own small wants and needs, give up the pettiness, anger and guilt...and just be, Fox. Find the root of your slavery and enjoy it. Give all the negativity up to me. Give me the fear – of your own submission, of being branded and all the commitment that entails because you are afraid of that, deep inside. Give all that up. Give up your worries about the last time someone put a mark on your body." Skinner's fingers gently caressed the scar on Mulder's chest where Krycek had carved his initials into his flesh. "Because you have been worried about that, pup," Skinner said softly. "This will be different. This branding will be done with love, and when it happens you'll welcome my mark onto your body. It won't be done in fear and pain by someone who hates you."

"How do you know all this?" Mulder felt as if all the most secret parts of his psyche had been uncovered, and that his Master had found a secret side of himself that he had not even known existed.

"Because you're my slave," Skinner said softly. "And you belong to me."

Mulder rested his head against his Master's shoulder again. Those few words just about summed everything up, and they filled him with warmth.

"You've been fighting me, sweetheart," Skinner said, caressing his slave gently. "Oh not just now, you've been fighting me all day. Instead of giving yourself up to me, you've fought with me every single step of the way, over every order. Today was a battle of wills – I expected it to be and it was, and of course you fought tooth and nail but you didn't win, sweetheart because you didn't want to – not deep inside. Now...are you ready to trust me properly? Are you ready to accept my mastery over you? Can you turn off that little voice inside your head that questions and complains about everything I ask of you?"

Mulder bit on his lip, shame-faced. He had done that. Although he had superficially obeyed his Master throughout the day, he had not done so willingly, and several sharp retorts had risen to his tongue, whether he had actually spoken them or not. He had not actually accepted his Master's right to punish him, even though he had presented himself for that punishment.

"I can do that, Master," he said, wearily, feeling better just for saying it and for starting on the journey to true submission that would bring him the reward he wanted at the end of it.

"Good boy." Skinner kissed his slave. "Because I can keep being an S.O.B if I have to."

"I'd rather you didn't have to, Master," Mulder said softly.

"So would I," Skinner chuckled. "I will keep pushing you though, boy, because you need that right now. I'd like to make it more erotic for you though...if you're good, I might even let you come."

Mulder glanced up eagerly and Skinner laughed out loud. "I can see that's an incentive. Bear it in mind, pup."

"Yes, Master." Mulder angled up his face for a kiss, which Skinner duly obliged him with. It was a deep, loving kiss, full of warmth and reassurance, and Mulder drowned in it for a long time. Then Skinner disengaged his arms and pushed his slave away. He picked up the remains of the dragon cane and held them up.

"Very impressive," he commented.

Mulder made a face. "I'm sorry, Master," he said with a sigh, although he wasn't sure he felt all that repentant.

"Fortunately, I have more than one," Skinner told him brightly. Mulder knew his face had to be a picture of dismay. He watched as Skinner opened a cupboard and pulled out another hated cane.

"Please, Master," he begged. "You're not...you're not still going to mark me are you?" After the catharsis of releasing his own emotions, and their conversation, Mulder couldn't believe Skinner still intended to go ahead with the marking.

"Yes, Fox, I am," his Master told him firmly.

"But...Master, I thought...that is...I'm not fighting you any more, I promise...but I really can't stand any more tonight," Mulder said desperately. Skinner put the dragon cane on the massage table and walked over to his slave. He put his hands on Mulder's shoulders and looked into his slave's eyes.

"Yes you can, sweetheart. If I ask you to, you'll take it. You'll take whatever I ask you to, however hard, because you're my slave, and you want to obey me," Skinner said.

Mulder bit on his lip again and looked down at the floor, trying to get control of himself. He could feel the tears threatening to well up again and fought them down. He had made enough of an idiot of himself for one day...but he really couldn't bear the idea of being marked. His ass felt sore and sensitised from all the spankings it had received during the day, and he was tired and over-wrought and just wanted to go to bed, lie down in his Master's arms, and recover.

"Fox." Skinner put a finger under Mulder's chin and tipped up his head so that his slave had no choice but to look at him.

"My ass hurts so much, Master. Please, can't we do this tomorrow?" Mulder asked.

"No, little one, we can't," Skinner told him, gently, but firmly. "You understand it intellectually but you aren't **feeling** it yet, Fox. You're my slave. You don't have a say in what I do to you, sweetheart. You aren't making the choices around here - I am. It pleases me to mark you - and you need to know that

there's no way out, and that when your Master promises something, he delivers it."

"I do know that. I'm just asking..." Mulder began. Skinner hushed him by putting a finger over his mouth.

"Come over here, Fox," he said, leading Mulder over to the heaped array of cushions in the corner of the room.

Skinner turned off the lights, casting the Playroom into darkness, and then settled himself down on the cushions and pulled his slave between his open legs. He wrapped his legs and arms around his slave, effectively imprisoning him, and they both gazed out at the city beneath them. There was no more beautiful view than that from the huge Playroom windows at night, Fox thought to himself as he surveyed the sight. Gradually he felt his tense muscles relax and he melted back against his Master's chest. Skinner stroked his arms and kissed his hair and then, when Mulder was almost asleep, he started talking.

"Once upon a time..." he began.

Mulder opened his eyes. "You're telling me a story?" He interrupted.

"Yes, I am," Skinner said. "I'm going to tell you a story and I want you to keep this story in mind for the next few days. When I've finished, I'm going to mark you with the cane – 3 strokes, Fox."

Mulder shivered, whimpering slightly, and his Master gently soothed him with his hands.

"Once upon a time," he began again, and Mulder tried to listen and not to think about that cane descending on his vulnerable flesh, "in an ancient world, long, long ago, there was a warlord. He rode into battle and was always victorious, and his fame spread throughout the land."

Mulder found himself fascinated despite himself. He would never have imagined his Master to be a story-telling kind of man, but Skinner's deep, baritone voice soothed him, and he was intrigued by the subject matter, despite himself.

"The warlord had many slaves," Skinner continued, "and he used them all well. He bought men and women in the slave markets or won them as spoils of war, and they worked in his house and on his fields, and he worked many of them in his bed as well. Remember that this was an ancient society, Fox. His slaves had no choice but to serve him and submit to his will. He wasn't a harsh master but he was unhappy because despite all his success, he had never been in love. The slaves came and went from his bed but he barely noticed – one body was so much like another, and he didn't love any of them – nor did he find any free man or woman to love either, not even among the nobles with whom he mixed. He had simply never been in love and began to wonder whether he was even capable of it. He was an intelligent, literary man, and it pained him that he could not identify with the great classic romantic stories. It also pained him that the one thing he was good at was warfare – he knew that he was a genius at that, and it worried him greatly that he should be good at something so destructive and yet fail at something as simple and beautiful as falling love. The warlord became desperate – he tried to find something in his slaves to keep him interested, but failed. They all bored him and he cast them off, one

after the other, as a result. One day, the warlord went to battle and met the spoiled young prince of a neighbouring city in a fight. The young man was beautiful and strong, and he fought well. He wore the most sparkling breastplate, and his sword was decorated with the most magnificent jewels – all of which made our warlord laugh. He wore more comfortable clothes in which to do battle - a little torn in places but weathered and practical. He didn't need adornments – he knew he was there to fight and to win, and that was what he did. As he fought the young prince, he decided that when he won he would take this pretty, overdressed young man as his slave, and enjoy himself with the spoils of this particular battle."

Mulder leaned further back against his Master's chest, loving the story. His cock was semi-erect as he imagined the spoiled young prince as the slave of the strong, lonely warlord. Skinner paused and Mulder looked up.

"He did win, didn't he, Master?" he asked, anxiously.

"Yes, Fox, he did win, and he took great pleasure in stripping the lovely prince of his fine cloak, his jewelled sword, and his sparkling armour. He tied the prince's hands in front of his body and then dragged him back to the camp behind his horse. The prince ran well, the warlord noted, and he often turned back so that he could see the young man's long legs chase along behind the warlord's horse, keeping pace with him. When he got back to the camp, he untied the prince and took him to his tent. He ordered his other slaves to bring warm water and then he commanded the prince to kneel in front of him. He explained to the young man that he was no longer a prince – he was now a slave, a spoil of war, and subject to the whim and will of his new master."

Skinner's hand reached expertly for Mulder's now erect cock and caressed it firmly, and Mulder sighed and leaned back.

"Much to the warlord's surprise, his new slave didn't protest, or howl, or scream, or struggle, or complain as many before him had done. Instead, he knelt at his master's feet, and offered to wash his master's bruised body. The warlord was taken aback – he had not expected this - but he allowed the prince to wash him. Then the young man asked for permission to oil his master's battle weary body, and, surprised once more, the warlord agreed. The prince took a long time slowly, almost reverentially, massaging his fingers into his master's skin. When he had finished, he knelt at his master's side, awaiting his orders. The warlord was delighted. He instructed his new slave to remove what was left of his expensive clothing, and then he inspected his new slave's beautiful body."

Mulder moaned and thrust up into his Master's hand. Skinner squeezed the top of his penis hard.

"Uh-uh, boy, not until the end of the story," he instructed. "The warlord took a long time inspecting the prince – the young man was exquisite, if a little bruised from battle, and the warlord was delighted with his new acquisition. He took the young man to his bed, and used him hard, still high from the adrenaline of battle. He expected his slave to cry out and flinch from him, as so many had done before, but this strange, exotic new slave responded in a way that none of his other slaves ever had. Instead of flinching from his master's touch, his slave returned the warlord's passion with a passion of his own. He begged for his master's kisses, and covered his master with caresses. When the warlord finished with his slave the first time, the young man rested in his master's arms, and kissed him, sighing with contentment. Instead of cowering at the far side of his master's bed, he stayed close to him, and, when his master had recovered from his first climax, his slave asked permission to pleasure him again. He brought his master

to climax over and over again during the course of that night and the warlord was stunned and delighted. He was so strong that his slaves often feared him, but not this one. This one took all his strength and matched it with his own. His new slave sighed and moaned in his master's arms and came as many times as the warlord. He was excited by the warlord's slightest touch, and begged for more. He begged to feel his master's hard cock in his mouth and up his ass, begged for his master's kisses – he even begged to feel his master's whip on his back and butt. The warlord had never had a more exciting lover, and for the first time he felt the cold around his heart begin to thaw. Over the course of the next few weeks, he spent many a long hour pounding into his slave..."

Mulder gave a little cry and struggled hard not to come...this story was turning him on so much.

"And when they were not making love, the warlord talked to his slave and discovered an intelligent man like himself, a literary man who shared his love of the romantic classics. They had so much to talk about that the warlord found himself growing besotted not only with his slave's beautiful body but also with his mind...and this scared him."

Mulder groaned, as Skinner dropped the tempo on his cock, soothing it more slowly now.

"He was scared by how much he loved the prince, and, because of his fear, he decided that he had to remind the young man that he was just a slave. So, he took his whip to his slave. When he had finished, the prince crawled to his master on his hands and knees, kissed his whip, and thanked him for his attention. The warlord was astonished – and even more in love than before. And because he was so much in love he became jealous, and decided that he must show the world that the prince belonged to him and was his slave – so he resolved to brand him."

Mulder glanced up, jolted out of the story, but Skinner's eyes were warm and reassuring as he continued.

"He told the young man that he was no longer a prince but was now his slave, and he wanted to put his mark on him to proclaim that fact to the world so that everyone would know – and, more importantly, so that the slave himself would fully understand and appreciate that fact as well. The young man trembled but knelt before his master and kissed his master's feet. He had no choice – his master wanted to brand him and the prince could do nothing to prevent it. He was a slave, a possession, a belonging and his master could brand him if it pleased him to do so. The warlord tied his slave, heated a brand in the fire, and then pressed it into his slave's flesh as if he were a calf, or some other animal. When he released his slave, the warlord was amazed when the young man sank to his knees again and kissed his master's feet. When he raised the prince's head, his slave's eyes were full of tears. The warlord was filled with remorse but his slave brushed his concern aside – he told his master that they were tears of joy because at last his master had chosen to acknowledge his love by placing a brand on him. The warlord hadn't branded any of his other slaves so the prince took this as a sign that he was special, and beloved."

Mulder sighed, and grasped his own Master's arm. He stroked it gently, and Skinner smiled down on him and kissed his forehead.

"The warlord was disturbed and he took himself off to his tent to be alone. He was afraid. Although he was a big, strong, powerful man he was afraid of his own emotions because falling in love made him feel vulnerable, and weak. He sank into a decline, and refused to allow anyone to come near him - but his

slave was not so easily dissuaded, and one night he managed to bypass the guards his master had placed at the entrance to his tent, crept inside, and knelt at his master's side, watching him as he slept. His master woke and, in despair, asked his slave why he was there, and his slave replied: "Where else would I be but by my master's side?"

The warlord was upset by his slave's words. "You are so devoted to me, despite everything I do to you," he said, taking hold of the young man's face and gazing deep into his eyes, searching for an answer to this enigma. "Why?"

His slave smiled. "Because I know that you whip me and brand me because you love me, and that makes me happy," he replied.

The warlord shook his head. "I do love you," he said, no longer able to fight it, and amazed to find that he had finally fallen in love after so many long, lonely years. "But what I don't understand is why you should love me when I enslaved you."

"Oh, master, you didn't enslave me - I gave myself to you freely," his slave replied. "I followed your exploits for years, my lord. I watched you go into battle, and you were so strong and noble and yet also so alone and lost. You became an obsession with me and I longed to bring happiness into your life. I was a spoiled prince but I had always known in my heart that I longed to worship at the feet of a strong man like you. I knew that I had fallen in love with you but I also knew that you only ever took slaves to your bed and I was sure you would reject me if I approached you any other way. So, I decided to meet you on the battlefield. If you killed me there, then I could at least die happy, having been felled by your beloved hand. If I survived, then I hoped you would find me interesting enough to take as your slave. I was lucky - you did - and as soon as I felt your touch I knew I was where I belonged. It was as if I was consumed by fire - I'm still burning for you and always will be. I'm yours, master, which is all I ever wanted to be. You can do what you like to me but please don't turn away from me because I worship you, my master."

The warlord gazed at his slave, shocked. "You gave yourself up to slavery because you loved me?" He asked, uncomprehending.

"Yes, my lord," his slave replied. "And I have never been happier."

The warlord smiled, finally understanding that in this young man he had found the ideal complement to himself - the other side of his own coin. He pulled his slave close. "Even if I whip you, or use you harshly?" he asked. "You love me, even then?"

"I am yours, master. I love the kiss of your whip." His slave smiled. "And you may use me in any way that pleases you, because I am your slave." The young man kissed his master, and his master held him tight. And the warlord was never lonely again from that day forward - he loved his slave until the end of their days and sometimes, as he looked at his naked, sleeping slave, he would trace his finger over his slave's brand and wonder who, exactly, had enslaved who."

Skinner came to an end, his hand still grasping his slave's cock firmly.

"That was beautiful, Master," Mulder said dreamily.

"I'm glad you liked it, little one," Skinner said softly. "I want you to use it. Over the next few days I want you to remember the prince whenever you feel that you can't go on, or you don't want to obey me. I want you to think about the joy he took from his own submission, and I want you to find that same joy inside yourself."

"Yes, Master," Mulder agreed readily. He wanted that too.

"Now...I'm going to allow you to come, and then I'm going to mark you," Skinner told his slave.

"Yes, Master," Mulder agreed, no longer protesting. He thought of the prince, back in a time when he truly wouldn't have had any choice in what his Master did to him, and he found that thought unbearably erotic. It took no more than a couple of strokes of Skinner's hand on his hard cock to make him come. Skinner smiled and held his panting slave against his chest in the aftermath of his climax.

"Good boy," he murmured. He waited until Mulder's breathing had returned to normal and then squeezed Mulder's shoulder lightly. "Get up, Fox. I want to mark you," he said.

Mulder got to his feet quickly, eager to accept his Master's mark onto his flesh. Yes, his butt was already sore, but he didn't care about that any more. Like the prince in the story he was his Master's slave and Skinner could do what he wished with him. He waited, in a dreamlike state, as his Master tied the leather pouch over his genitals, and he obeyed immediately when Skinner directed him to lie over the spanking horse. He shivered as he felt the tip of his Master's cane between his knees.

"Further apart, slave. Offer this ass up to me for marking," Skinner ordered. Mulder opened his legs wider, and pushed his bottom out to meet the cane. "Good boy." Skinner rested the cane on his slave's buttocks for a long time, and then Mulder heard a sudden whoosh followed by a deep, stinging pain. He gave a little cry, but didn't break position. The second stroke hit the sit spot with a powerful force and Mulder gave a gasping cry, but still he didn't break position – instead he just pushed his ass out even further, making an even easier target for his Master. He repeated the litany over and over in his head – he belonged to Skinner, he was his Master's beloved slave, his Master could do what he wished with him. He was proud to bear his Master's marks on his bottom and would be even prouder to wear his Master's brand, proclaiming who and what he was, the proof of his Master's love and ownership burned into his flesh. The final stroke took his breath away and he lay over the spanking horse, gasping, for several seconds until his Master helped him to his feet, enveloped him in his warm arms, and deposited a deep, heartfelt kiss on his slave's lips. Mulder swayed dreamily in his Master's arms, utterly lost in the possibilities of his own submission.

"Well done, slave. I'm proud of you," Skinner said. "Now, I think it's time for bed."

"Yes, Master!" Mulder agreed readily.

They went back downstairs to the main bedroom, and Mulder slid eagerly under the sheets. Skinner emerged from the bathroom, took one look at his slave, and shook his head.

"On the floor, pup. You'll sleep at the foot of the bed tonight," he ordered. Mulder gazed at his Master in dismay – after the day he'd had, he longed to sleep curled up in his Master's arms.

"Quickly, slave. On the floor." Skinner pointed and Mulder scrambled hastily from the bed. He lay down at its foot instead, and Skinner threw him a pillow and some blankets, and then he went over to the closet and drew out a long length of chain.

"You'll sleep in bondage," he instructed. He fastened Mulder's thick, heavy collar around his slave's neck and then attached the chain to it, and finished by tying it to the leg of the bed. There wasn't much slack – Skinner had tied his slave tightly, not giving him much room to move around during the night.

"I'll leave the key here." Skinner put it under his slave's pillow. If you need to use the bathroom, or there's an emergency, then you can unlock yourself – but you are forbidden to do so under any other circumstances. Understood?"

Mulder nodded glumly and then settled down at the foot of his Master's bed. He would have given anything to have slept in Skinner's arms so he consoled himself thinking of the prince, and how he would have enjoyed even the small boon of being allowed to sleep close to **his** master's feet, and within seconds Mulder was fast asleep.

He was woken early the next morning, by someone leaning over him and saying one word in his ear:

"Wanda."

Even half asleep as he was, Mulder rolled immediately onto his front, kicked his blankets away, and presented himself for his Master's use, wincing slightly as his hands made contact with his sore, marked bottom. A few seconds later, he felt his Master's hard cock enter into his body and cried out, welcoming it in, opening himself up even more to his Master's touch. Skinner had spurned his slave so many times the previous day that Mulder was delighted to find himself being so comprehensively used today. His cock was already hard, knowing he was being of service to his Master, and Skinner made very good use of him, riding him hard and fast and then coming deep within his slave's body. His Master lingered there for a few moments, surprising his slave by dropping several kisses on his back, and then he withdrew.

"That was excellent, boy. I'm very pleased with you," Skinner told his slave affectionately. He turned Mulder over and kissed his slave soundly. "Time for a shower – please remember that you are forbidden to touch your cock for the rest of the day without my permission," he told his slave. Mulder nodded and followed the big man into the shower. Skinner turned on the water, pulled his slave in behind him, and then frowned, looking down at his own, now flaccid penis.

"My slave isn't as clean as I'd like," he commented.

"I'm sorry, Master. I didn't have time yesterday to perform my usual cleaning routines," Mulder said, shamefaced and embarrassed.

"Then today I will take charge of the matter," Skinner told him. "There will be no spankings today unless you do something to earn them, slave. I'm more than satisfied with the state of my slave's buttocks this morning. Today we will concentrate on what's inside instead. Hands against the wall, boy."

He turned Mulder around and pushed him against the tiled surface of the wall. Mulder put his head back, loving the feel of the warm water washing over him, and his Master's strong hands playing with his body. He felt his buttocks being parted, and then Skinner pushed a finger inside him. "This area is going

to get a lot of attention today, boy," Skinner hissed into his ear, only just audible above the sound of the water gushing down on both of them. "I want you to focus on this opening, and how it's ready and available for your Master's use at all times," he purred. "You were a little tight this morning – probably because it was early and you were surprised, but we'll loosen you up today. I want to keep you stretched, and I want you to understand that I can fill you whenever I choose, however I choose, because your body belongs to me." His teeth closed gently over Mulder's skin, nipping his back as he roved over his slave's shoulders, one of his fingers sliding in and out of his slave's anus. Mulder moaned and pushed his ass back, and Skinner wrapped his arm around Mulder's body and thrust into him several times with his fingers until Mulder felt as if his cock would explode. Then Skinner withdrew, and handed his slave the soap.

"Wash us both, boy," he commanded. Mulder obeyed, and then dried his Master. He was overjoyed that Skinner allowed him to dress him as well, and then he followed his Master downstairs.

Mulder wasn't surprised when his Master ordered him to kneel beside his chair, instead of allowing him to sit up at the table, but he did as commanded immediately, and knelt there peacefully, allowing his submission to wash over him. It felt like such a relief not to be fighting his Master! His cock stood out proud from his body, on display for his Master to touch or ignore as he saw fit, and Mulder felt much calmer than he had the previous day. He was pleasantly surprised to be fed warm, sweet oatmeal for breakfast, and not salad, and he opened his mouth obediently for his Master to feed him, keeping his head up and his eyes down throughout. After breakfast Skinner took his slave by surprise by walking him along to the little workroom that was next to the laundry room.

"I'm going to make something," Skinner told his slave. "Something secret," he added. "I want you here, boy, but I don't want you to see what I'm making until it's ready, so I'm going to blindfold you. A bit of sensory deprivation will do you good, and you can keep yourself occupied by imagining what exactly I'm building."

"Could you give me a clue, Master?" Mulder surveyed the pieces of wood that his Master had piled up in the corner of the room but he had no idea what Skinner intended to make from them.

"Well, this has been something I've been thinking about for some time. I bought the necessary materials some time ago but haven't had a chance to work on the actual project. Rest assured that it's something very intimate that I intend to ensure my slave makes full use of." Skinner gave a broad grin, and Mulder tried not to look as apprehensive as he felt. "You can kneel over here. I'll put you through all your positions at ten minute intervals. You can start with the submissive position," Skinner told his slave with a click of his fingers.

Mulder obeyed and a few seconds later a thick, dark, rubber blindfold was placed over his eyes. It was a very efficient blindfold and Mulder couldn't see anything around the edges. He knelt for ten minutes, listening to his Master move around the room. Skinner was whistling softly to himself and a little while later, he returned to his slave's side.

"Grace position, slave," he commanded.

Mulder got up, shakily, and turned to the wall, which was just behind him. He reached out fumbling hands, found the wall, and leaned against it, ass out. He heard his Master move away and then there was the sound of sawing. What on earth could Skinner be making, Mulder wondered? A paddle? They had plenty of those upstairs so why would his Master need to make one? Anyway, there had been too much of that wood for just a paddle. The blindfold was a strange sensation. It really did make Mulder focus on the sounds in the room, and the feel of his own body, naked, his ass pushed out and exposed to the room. He was woken out of his reverie by a swat from his Master's hand on his butt.

"All right, boy, confessional position," Skinner ordered and Mulder got into position quickly. He wasn't sure how many hours were spent changing positions in this way, listening to his Master work, and wondering what on earth the big man was making. Mulder lost himself in the fantasy of visualising his Master's strong arms as he worked on the wood. In his mind's eye he could see a bare-chested Skinner leaning over whatever he was building, lovingly working the wood with those blunt capable fingers, in much the same way as he lovingly worked his slave, his burly forearms rippling, effortlessly pushing the plane down the wood, brow furrowed in concentration, little curls of wood shavings clinging to his chest hair... The smell of sawdust filled Mulder's senses, making the fantasy image seem achingly real. He longed to be able to sit in silent contemplation, studying his Master at work, and yet curiously found that being denied that simple pleasure was somehow the gateway to his submission. He settled into it, accepting it, and felt a calmness descend on him that seeped all the way into his body and gave him a feeling of genuine peace. He felt at one with his Master, felt as if he had contributed somehow to whatever it was his Master was making, and that he was a vital part of that creation. >

They broke for lunch, which Mulder ate at his Master's knee in the dining room, still blindfolded, trying to identify each new taste, and sometimes failing. It was amazing how hard it was to guess what some foods were by taste alone, but thankfully his Master only fed him one thing that he disliked – although the big man insisted that he swallowed down the broccoli without complaint. They spent some more time in the workroom in the afternoon, and then, after much sawing, banging and sanding, Skinner seemed to be satisfied with his creation.

"Stay here. I'm going to put this in the living room. I'll be back in a minute," Skinner informed his slave. Mulder was tempted to peek when his Master had gone, but he figured it wasn't worth it – the item, whatever it was, was gone, and he wasn't sure he'd be able to tell what his Master had made just by examining the sawdust. Skinner returned a few minutes later, and took his slave's arm.

"We're going up to the Playroom, boy," he said. "I'm going to keep you blindfolded – I think it'll help focus your mind on the sensations in your body."

Mulder cock leapt at that and he docilely allowed his Master to lead him up the stairs and into the Playroom, all the time wondering what erotic delights his Master had in store for him.

Skinner escorted his slave into the Playroom's en suite bathroom, and Mulder frowned, wondering what on earth was going to take place in here. His heart sank as he was bent over the side of the bathtub and a nozzle was pushed into his ass. A few seconds later he felt a flood of warm water in his bowels and he gave a little exclamation.

"Quiet, pup. I told you once that if you didn't keep yourself clean for me I'd give you an enforced enema," Skinner told him firmly. Mulder gritted his teeth, disliking the sensation intensely. The cramps started a couple of minutes later and Mulder tried to get up.

"I need to go..." He said, reaching for the blindfold, feeling a sensation of panic. Skinner grabbed his hands and put them back down at his sides.

"I want you to hold it," he said.

"I can't!" Mulder protested, disoriented, wondering where the toilet was.

"Yes you can." Skinner grabbed his slave and held him.

Mulder tried to remember to breathe as he held on, trying to ignore the sensation in his bowels. He knew what Skinner was attempting to do – first he removed his slave's sense of vision, making him dependent on his Master, and then he demonstrated the level of control he had over his slave, even down to the most fundamental of bodily motions. Mulder rested his chin on his Master's shoulder, giving in and accepting.

"Please...soon..." he whispered.

"Another minute. Hold it," Skinner told him.

Mulder found the strength from somewhere to obey and when the minute was up his Master led him to the toilet and allowed him to relieve himself – only to then push Mulder over the bath and repeat the process, much to his slave's dismay. Skinner went through the whole thing a third time, by which time Mulder had become more familiar with the sensations and less panicky, but all the same he was very relieved when his Master handed him a towel and told him it was over. Skinner gave his slave a kiss as a reward.

"Good boy – you're now all clean and ready to use the new toy I made for you," he said. He took Mulder's arm again and led him back down the stairs to the living room. "All right, boy, kneel in the submissive position, then I'll remove the blindfold so that you can appreciate my handiwork but afterwards it goes back on. I think you benefit from being blindfolded." Mulder wasn't too sure about that but he had to admit that it did focus his thoughts inward and he was starting to enjoy the hazy darkness, and lack of visual stimulation. He knelt and then held his breath as he felt his Master stand behind him. Skinner removed the blindfold and Mulder blinked – and then gazed at what was in front of him. It looked like a seat, attached to a pole, and sticking out of the centre of the seat was...a large dildo. Mulder glanced up at his Master in alarm.

"See how nicely it's designed so that you sit on the stool at precisely the right height to give me your oral services should I need them." Skinner waved his arm expansively at the extremely pervy looking seat.

"I've got to sit on **that**?" Mulder squeaked.

"You've taken bigger." Skinner raised an eyebrow. "It pleases me to have you on display, and to know that you will be constantly thinking about what's inside you, boy. I'm going to start you off this

afternoon. You'll be here for quite some time so I want you to relax and learn from the experience. In a moment I'll put your blindfold back on, and then I'll seat you. Once you're in position you will remain as still and silent as possible. You will only talk if in distress. Whenever you hear me walk past, I want you to open your mouth, in case I should wish to use it." He gave a broad grin and Mulder swallowed hard.

"It's diabolical, Master," he said, somewhat awestruck.

"You like it then?" Skinner asked. "I thought you would, little one." He glanced down at Mulder's straining, erect cock with a delighted smile.

Mulder watched as his Master placed a condom on the dildo and lubed it thoroughly, and then his blindfold was replaced and his Master ordered him to his feet. He was ushered over to what his Master had dubbed the 'peg seat' and he was lowered over it. "Hold your ass cheeks apart...that's good," Skinner said, as he eased his slave down.

"Shit!" Mulder complained as the broad dildo distended him.

"Keep going." Skinner pushed him into place, so that the dildo completely filled him, and then he bound his slave's hands behind his back, and fastened them to the pole. Mulder settled down cautiously, with a grunt. The dildo was hard and unyielding and it felt different to wearing a butt plug – because the dildo was stuck into the surface of the chair and didn't move with his body so he had to be careful to sit up straight and not move around or it poked him. "Oh that's good...that's beautiful. You make a sight for sore eyes," Skinner told his slave, and then he kissed Mulder firmly on the mouth. "How does it feel?"

"Like I'm sitting on a chair with a big fuck-off dildo up my ass?" Mulder commented, wishing he could see himself, sitting here naked, his arms tied behind his back, his ass claimed by the large intrusive dildo. He was as turned on as all hell by it.

Skinner laughed. "Ah, I can tell you like it as much as I do! Now, be still, slave. And remember that I will expect your oral services at frequent intervals."

Mulder nodded, feeling utterly aroused by the whole scenario. He listened to his Master walk over to the couch, and imagined what he must look like to the other man. The large dildo served to keep the nature of his servitude constantly in mind - it wasn't painful but it was uncomfortable – and it was certainly impossible to think of anything else except the fact that he was sitting impaled on a dildo, especially as he was blindfolded so he couldn't even look around the room.

There was silence for a long while, and then Mulder heard his Master get up from the couch and walk over to him. He opened his mouth immediately, and was rewarded when he felt his Master's large, velvety cock pressed against his lips. He sucked enthusiastically for several minutes, enjoying the dual sensations of the dildo up his ass and his Master's big cock in his mouth. Skinner thrust into his open mouth for several long minutes and then withdrew without coming. Mulder closed his mouth and settled back with a sigh. This was good! This was better than he could have expected. He praised his Master mentally for his truly perverted imagination in coming up with something this utterly depraved

and delicious. He wasn't sure how much time passed but then he heard Skinner again. He opened his mouth, feeling a bit ridiculous, but this time Skinner walked past him and he was left disappointed. Soon his Master returned and again he opened his mouth, but once more he was ignored, and left, jaw open, like a hungry goldfish. He closed his mouth and bowed his head. He could feel himself fitting into his slavery, like a hand into a glove, being embraced by it, pulling it over him like a second skin. This was beautiful. The silence, the bondage, the intrusion in his ass, being dependent on his Master's every whim...he loved it. He was a slave, the young prince of the story, waiting to be of service to his Master, waiting, hopefully, to worship his Master's cock with his mouth. He couldn't stop concentrating for a second – he was utterly consumed by the knowledge of his slavery, and was on constant tenterhooks knowing he might be called upon to pleasure his Master at any moment. Another noise and Mulder opened his mouth – and this time he was rewarded when Skinner entered him hard. His Master tangled his hands in Mulder's hair and fucked his mouth for a long time and Mulder opened up and allowed his Master to penetrate deep into his throat, adoring the scent of his Master's cock, which he often didn't notice because he was too engrossed in the other senses of sight and touch. The movement of his Master's cock in his mouth made his ass move on the seat and that made the dildo press inside him, and Mulder felt as if he was lost in his slavery. This was so good...for the first time in a long time he felt himself reaching that beautiful, serene state that came whenever he gave himself up to deep submission.

Skinner made good use of his slave's mouth for the next few hours. He kept Mulder blindfolded and immobile and used him frequently, never staying long enough to come. Mulder abandoned himself to his slavery, losing himself in it, becoming utterly at one with it. He existed to serve, he was his Master's slave, and his Master's pleasure was his sole concern. Every second when his Master was not using him was one he spent in yearning, longing to feel that beautiful velvety cock in his mouth once more, hoping that his Master would soon bless him with his presence again. And then, finally, Skinner returned. Mulder opened his mouth and his Master fucked him harder than ever before, thrusting into him in a way that was almost savage, not allowing his bound, blindfolded slave any control, forcing Mulder to surrender everything which he did – willingly – and he was rewarded when his Master came in his mouth, his salty come sliding down Mulder's throat, much to his slave's profound joy.

Mulder wasn't released immediately after his Master's climax, and he felt strangely grateful for that. He needed those extra few minutes to savour the taste of his Master's come in his throat, and to remember the feel of his Master's cock thrusting into his waiting, willing mouth. He needed time to resurface from the blissed out state he was in, and to slowly come to. Skinner gave him that time, and, after perhaps half an hour or so, Mulder felt himself coming slowly back to life. He moved his shoulders and sighed, and then let out a startled yelp as something whiskery and wet tickled his inner thigh.

"Oh shit...Wanda...your timing, as always, is impeccable," Mulder groaned. He heard his Master give a loud guffaw but Wanda continued her nuzzling, clearly keen to investigate the new seating arrangement in the room, and the strangely bound and naked slave who was occupying it.

"OW! Oh, please, Master," Mulder begged, as Wanda's whiskers tickled his sensitive inner thigh area unmercifully, and her wet nose nudged perilously close to his genitals. His Master took pity on him and whisked Wanda away, then returned to untie his slave. He went slowly, standing over his slave, his clothes brushing Mulder's body. He dropped several kisses on his slave's face as he untied him, and then, slowly, and very carefully, he helped Mulder to stand. Mulder gave a gasp as he was pulled away from the dildo. His ass muscles ached from being distended for so long – something he hadn't even been

aware of when he was in his blissed out state of total serenity. Skinner held him up, supporting him as he stood, and Mulder swayed, disoriented by the blindfold and his return to normal existence after the past few hours of unreality. Skinner pulled him close, and held him gently but tightly while Mulder readjusted and Mulder hung onto his Master, reassured by those big, warm arms, holding him up.

"That was good, boy – you did so well," Skinner murmured lovingly and Mulder felt his heart swell with pride. "I'm very pleased with my boy. He's brought me a lot of pleasure today," Skinner whispered, stroking his slave in a proprietary way. "In a moment, I'm going to allow you to see again. I want you to prepare yourself for this, Fox. You've spent a long time blindfolded so you need to take your time to get used to being able to see again. I've dimmed the lights and I want you to close your eyes while I remove the blindfold."

Mulder nodded, astonished to find himself trembling as Skinner carefully removed the blindfold. The air felt strange on his face, and Mulder felt almost naked without the blindfold.

"All right, boy. Open your eyes," Skinner ordered. Mulder obeyed – and was glad that his Master still had his arms around him because everything seemed too bright and intense as his sense of vision was restored to him. He swayed but Skinner kept him upright and, after a few minutes, Mulder felt himself returning to normality.

"How was that, little one?" Skinner asked gently, tipping his slave's chin and dropping a tiny kiss on Mulder's lips.

"Mind-blowing, Master..." Mulder sighed dreamily and rested his chin on Skinner's shoulder.

"I can see that." Skinner grinned.

"I love you, Master," Mulder murmured, angling his face sideways, somewhat hopefully, for another kiss. He wasn't disappointed.

"I love you too, slave," Skinner told him solemnly when he released his slave's face several seconds later.

Mulder felt almost profoundly changed by the day's sensory deprivation. Skinner had succeeded in taking him down and he felt a sense of peace and calm deep inside. He would have been quite happy if his Master had branded him there and then, but Skinner was by nature more cautious than his slave, and he clearly didn't want to rush things. After dinner, he tied his slave to the foot of his bed as usual, and chuckled when Mulder closed his eyes immediately, completely worn out by the day's events. "My sleepy pup," he murmured, tousling Mulder's hair affectionately. Mulder wished he could stay awake and listen to all the nice things his Master wanted to say about his slave, but he was too tired and fell fast asleep, utterly content with his lot in life.

Skinner continued to wake him with the 'Wanda' command and Mulder found he was now so keyed into his Master's pleasure and wishes that he obeyed instinctively, even when roused from the deepest sleep. By dint of some hard work, Skinner kept Mulder permanently immersed in his submissive state

for the next few days, alternating hard demands on his slave, with impossible heights of sexual arousal – which were never allowed to reach fruition.

"I want you to save this – I have something special planned for it," Skinner told his slave, tapping Mulder's eager, expectant cock, as his slave moaned and begged for climax. Mulder had never felt happier surrendering his sexual release to his Master. Giving over control of his climax reinforced his own slavery and kept him constantly on edge...and he was full of tingling anticipation for when he would finally be allowed to come. His Master wouldn't tell him when that would be – he only promised that it would be an experience Mulder would never forget – and it wouldn't take place until after his slave had been branded.

"You'll never again come as an unbranded slave," Skinner told Mulder firmly. "Next time I allow you to come you'll be my branded slave," and Mulder shivered, aroused, excited and scared by those words all at the same time. "And it'll be very, very special," Skinner promised solemnly.

Mulder nodded, more than happy to wait in the circumstances.

"Just to make sure that you don't come by mistake..." Skinner held up the plastic cock cage and Mulder submitted to having his genitals firmly constrained within it, effectively preventing him from attaining a full erection. He could pee through the device, but not come – it was frustrating and arousing at one and the same time and Mulder found himself loving the restriction.

Mulder lost track of time over the next few days. He was totally absorbed in the enchanting possibilities of his own submission. He wouldn't have wanted to spend his entire life in this state, serenely, dreamily at peace with himself, relieved of the responsibility for any aspect of his life, unable to take even the most simple decision about what he would eat and when he would go to bed – but for a short period of time it was incredibly restful, and he could feel his batteries recharging almost tangibly. The days became a blur – sometimes he was bound onto the peg seat again, and at others he was commanded to present himself when his Master used the 'Wanda' word on him. They spent hours in the playroom, with Skinner tying his slave into all manner of different positions and playing with his slave's body at length until Mulder had no resistance to anything his Master did to him – he surrendered everything up to the other man. There were times when his Master left him alone in the Playroom, just facing the window, naked, adorned, but unchained, his ass freshly spanked, gazing out on the world below, lost in thought. Mulder didn't know where his Master went during those times and didn't question. He remained in position, at peace, and utterly in thrall to his Master.

The following day, his Master took his slave to the Playroom, made him kneel, and brought out the bullwhip. Mulder stared at the whip, mesmerised by it.

"I know you've been fascinated by this particular implement for a long time," Skinner told his slave. Mulder nodded, his throat suddenly dry. "I did once promise you a long session with it – but I also promised that you'd be in the right place mentally to deal with that," Skinner purred, circling his slave.

"You can do whatever you want to me, Master. I'm yours," Mulder said softly, although his heart still did a little flip. He was scared and exhilarated at the same time. He was fascinated by the bullwhip – he'd only ever received a couple of light taps from it, but he longed to experience it more fully. He had an image of himself as the prince once more, in a cruel, ancient world, where slaves might be whipped with such an implement for their disobedience.

"What are you thinking?" Skinner asked, still circling his slave. Mulder told him about the prince and Skinner smiled. "Or maybe the warlord whipped his slave just because he could – because he wanted to show his slave who was Master," he said in a throaty, sexual tone. Mulder swallowed hard.

"Maybe, Master," he whispered.

"I'm not giving you any choices at the moment, slave," Skinner told him firmly. "You'll accept it if I choose to whip you with the bullwhip, just as you'll accept whatever else I do to you. You belong to me, Fox."

"Yes, Master." Mulder shivered, the words soothing and caressing him.

"Prepare yourself, boy," Skinner ordered, "submissive position – head back, eyes down." Mulder obeyed and heard his Master go over to the cupboards that ran along the wall and open them. There was some rustling and a few minutes later his Master returned.

"All right – you can break position. Eyes up and look at me," Skinner commanded.

Mulder obeyed – and his jaw dropped open. His Master was wearing thigh length black leather boots that accentuated his long legs. He was also wearing a pair of tight black pants and an even tighter sleeveless mesh tee shirt that showed off his bulging biceps to perfection: he was, in short, every inch the warrior warlord come to life. Mulder couldn't stop himself bending forward and kissing those shining boots reverentially.

"Please, Master..." he whispered, not entirely sure what he was even pleading for. Skinner held the bullwhip under his slave's nose.

"Kiss it," he ordered, and Mulder obeyed, gladly, kissing the whip over and over again. "Good boy." Skinner shook the whip out and lazily snapped it in Mulder's direction. It wrapped around Mulder's body, not hurting, just caressing, the leather soft, supple and deadly against Mulder's naked flesh. Skinner circled Mulder again, soothing him with the whip, stroking it over his slave's body until Mulder started to whimper.

"Please, Master..." Mulder whispered, utterly fascinated by the snaking black leather as it twirled around his skin, making light contact here and there. Sometimes his Master snapped it sharply on the floor and the sound would make Mulder jump, but then the whip was wrapped around his skin again, comforting, and at the same time full of vicious promise.

"Move with it!" Skinner ordered and Mulder found himself dancing to the whip's tune. He rolled onto his belly and felt the whip caress his shoulders, and then he moved onto his back and the whip tapped lightly at his genitals, and strayed over his nipples. Mulder moaned and opened his legs and the whip

intruded between them, the long lash making love to him.

"Please, Master...please..." Mulder moaned, almost weeping now.

"Please what, slave?" Skinner demanded. "What do you want?"

"Please whip me, Master!" Mulder begged, longing to feel the lash on his body, wanting to really dance to its tune, lost in a wild choreography of snaking black leather and his own endorphins.

"You want to taste my whip?" Skinner asked, standing over Mulder, stern and demanding.

"Yes...please..." Mulder begged.

"You want to feel it sear my mark into your skin?"

"Yes! Master...please!" Mulder kissed his Master's boots again, lost in the scene.

"Stand up, slave," Skinner ordered and Mulder did so, trembling. "Go and stand in the centre of the room. I will see if you are worthy to receive my whip's kisses," Skinner said in a low growl. Mulder scrambled to obey. He stood in the centre of the room, waiting, shaking in earnest now. His Master looked at him and he felt his nerves begin to steady. "Keep your arms by your sides, and stay perfectly still," Skinner ordered. Mulder obeyed. "Good." Skinner grinned, and raised the whip. Mulder closed his eyes, shaking with fear and arousal. A second later he heard a sharp crack and then the whip folded around him and he found his arms pinned to his body. Mulder opened his eyes in alarm to find himself being dragged towards his Master, his entire body in the whip's bondage, unable to move his arms. Skinner pulled him close, caught him, and kissed his slave firmly on the lips. "Good boy," he said approvingly. "Again."

Mulder wasn't sure how many times they played that particular game but he stood in the centre of the room over and over again while his Master practised his skills upon him, always wrapping the whip around his slave, and drawing him back in for a kiss. It didn't even hurt beyond a slight sting as the whip first wrapped around him and Mulder stopped closing his eyes and instead watched, marvelling at his Master's skill. Finally Skinner was satisfied.

"Now, slave, as you've been so good, I think I'll give you what you want," Skinner told him. "Your Master will whip you. I'll take a long time, Fox, and I'll give you plenty of time to scream and recover between each stroke...but you have no choice as to when this will end, little one. I'll whip you for as long as it pleases me."

"Yes, Master," Mulder whispered, utterly engrossed in the scenario. He submitted to having his hands cuffed together, and was dimly aware of his Master wrapping a large belt around his waist to protect his kidneys, and fastening the leather pouch over his genitals to protect them – and that just made him shiver with anticipation all the more. If his Master was taking these precautions he meant business – and Mulder was both thrilled and scared by that fact. He was also aware that this was out of his hands, that he had surrendered himself to his Master, and that he had no choice in what would happen next, and that was a huge relief. It meant he could just relax, give in, and float out into space on whatever high his Master created for him. Skinner led him to the whipping post and hooked his bound wrists into

place, making sure that his slave couldn't free himself. Mulder struggled for a moment, wanting to know that he was well and truly tied, and when he had satisfied himself that he was, and could do nothing about it, he gave into it, relaxing into his bonds. Skinner circled him once more, caressing him with the whip. He grabbed Mulder's hair, pulled back his slave's head, and kissed him roughly. Mulder moaned, surrendering himself to the savage caress...then his Master stepped away.

Mulder felt as if he had been abandoned in limbo and the next few seconds seemed to last for an eternity – and then he heard a loud crack and a sharp stinging sensation on his buttock. He gave in to the emotion of the moment and howled, and, true to his word, Skinner let him scream. Only when he had quietened down did the next lash fall on his shoulder blade. His Master started very slowly, giving little licks between the harder ones, taking his time, flicking lazily at his naked, bound slave, or swinging harder, drawing forth a scream from his slave's lips. And Skinner stopped frequently, and came to stand behind his slave. He caressed Mulder's sensitised skin lovingly, dropping frequent kisses on it, sucking and nibbling. Often he would lick at a welt he had just made, and Mulder felt so aroused he was relieved that his Master had imprisoned his cock in the plastic chastity device to ensure that he couldn't come. The bullwhip hurt but only in a stinging way – and his Master wasn't using anything like his full strength – yet. Somehow Mulder had the feeling this wasn't a state of affairs that would last. He was right. As Mulder became fully warmed up, the strokes fell harder and faster on his naked, exposed body making him moan and squirm under the lash. Mulder was crying all the time now, transported to an amazing high, the endorphins sending him into the stratosphere as the pain merged with the most astounding pleasure. He saw himself; tied, naked, utterly subject to his Master's will and whim, completely unable to stop the torment. He was the prince from the story – he had no choice. His Master truly could do anything he wanted with his slave. It was all out of Mulder's hands. He could only endure.

His Master's stern voice was with him throughout, calming and comforting him.

"You look so beautiful under the lash," Skinner murmured. "I'll have to whip you more often. The way your body moves...ah, if only you could see the red lines I'm painting on your white flesh, boy. That's it, scream...your Master loves hearing you scream..."

Mulder obliged, screaming with sheer arousal and need, wanting to feel those little flashing licks landing on his body. He couldn't predict where they would fall, and they hurt so much, and yet they made him feel so warm and blissful. The strokes grew heavier and faster, with less time between them, and Mulder was lost in the sensation, totally absorbed in it as he writhed and squirmed under his Master's bullwhip. Finally, after what seemed like a whole day, his Master dropped the pace, and then slowed completely to nothing, and, finally, he came over to his slave and caressed him again. He kept one arm around Mulder as he unhooked his slave from the post and Mulder dropped immediately against him. Skinner deposited him gently on the floor and looked down on him.

"Kiss the whip, boy, and thank me," he ordered.

Mulder looked up at his magnificent Master, utterly consumed by love.

"Thank you, Master. Thank you!" He whispered as he kissed the leather whip, shivering as he realised that it was warm from tanning his own hide. He kissed it over and over again and then transferred his attention to his Master's shiny boots. His Master crouched down in front of him, took his slave's face in

his hands, and looked into his eyes. Mulder saw his own reflection in his Master's irises. His hair was sweaty and dishevelled but his eyes were bright and sparkling with life.

"Still with me, boy?" Skinner asked.

"Yes, Master," Mulder replied dreamily.

"Hmmm...well, only just," Skinner laughed. He disappeared into the bathroom and Mulder heard the sound of the bath filling, then Skinner came back and helped his slave to his feet. He opened the cupboard door and showed Mulder his reflection in the mirror. "Admire your Master's handiwork, boy," he ordered and Mulder did just that. His back and buttocks were covered with a myriad of small red welts – he had imagined the damage was so much worse when his Master had been whipping him, but Skinner had, as always, been careful to provide the maximum sensation with the minimum amount of damage.

"They'll last for a few days," Skinner murmured, fingering the welts, making Mulder shudder and hold onto the big man in order to stay upright. His entire skin felt so sensitive that the least touch set his nerve ends jangling.

Skinner didn't torment him for too long, and he soon escorted Mulder into the bathroom and helped his slave into the warm bath. Mulder howled out loud as his skin made contact with the water, but his Master was insistent. It didn't take long for the unpleasant sensation to subside, to be replaced by a feeling of warmth and comfort as he floated happily, caressed by the warm water. He watched, hungrily, as his Master undressed, and then Skinner climbed into the bath with him. He took his slave in his arms, seated Mulder between his legs, and they both lay back with a sigh. Mulder didn't think he'd ever felt closer to his Master.

"Thank you," he murmured.

Skinner chuckled and kissed his slave's cheek. "You're welcome, boy," he replied.

Mulder drifted along on the endorphin haze incapable of coherent speech. A few moments later he gazed at his Master again.

"Thank you," he whispered once more.

"I know that you're very grateful," Skinner grinned, "but hush, boy. Just let yourself come down gently. Here... this might help." He carefully parted his slave's buttocks, and eased his hard cock between them. Mulder surrendered, all too willing to being impaled, loving the sensation of his Master's big cock as it slid inside his hot, tortured, thoroughly whipped skin. Skinner embedded himself fully into his slave's ass and then held his slave close, his arms wrapped around Mulder's stomach, his slave's hot back pressed against his chest. Mulder closed his eyes and laid his head back on his Master's shoulder, utterly at peace with the world. His Master didn't thrust inside him – he just held his slave fully seated on his Master's cock, the two of them, Master and slave, joined, connected, and as one together in the warm, comforting water.

The following evening, Skinner took Mulder completely by surprise by laying out some clothes on the bed.

"Get dressed, boy. I'm taking you out," he said.

Mulder stared at his Master, confused. They'd had such a peaceful time alone together in the two apartments that he wasn't sure he wanted the outside world to intrude. Skinner wasn't giving him any choice in the matter though.

"Get dressed, then come and dress me," he ordered. "Oh, and you can lose the cock cage." He undid the plastic cage imprisoning his slave's cock and threw it on the bed. "But you're still forbidden to come!" He told his slave, disappearing into the shower.

Mulder picked up the clothes that had been laid out for him. They were pretty basic – a pair of black jeans and a black waistcoat – there was no underwear or shirt, so Mulder guessed that they wouldn't be going anywhere very conventional. His heart began to thump loudly as his mind kicked into gear: Was Skinner taking him somewhere to be branded? Had the time come? And if so, where was he being taken? Not to Murray's place, surely, with the other top still convalescing. Maybe, Elaine's house – she could host the branding in her boudoir...and who would be there? Mulder's heart thumped even faster. He wasn't sure he was ready for this. It was one thing to be completely and utterly his Master's slave here in the apartment, but he was worried that going out into the world would ruin the haze of submission he was currently in. It might break into the mood, and jar the beautiful bond they had built up between them. Still, he had no choice, so Mulder pushed his fears to the back of his mind and got dressed. Then he went into the shower, and dried his Master as he emerged. Mulder was surprised to see the outfit Skinner intended to wear – it was exactly the same as his own, and that gave Mulder a frisson. He eagerly dressed his Master, and then they surveyed themselves in the mirror; Master and slave, both dressed in plain black jeans and black waistcoats, their well toned biceps and just the hint of pectorals clearly visible. Skinner's chest was covered in curls of hair, while Mulder's was smooth – and the beautiful fox tattooed on his Master's chest seemed to be peering out just over the top of the other man's waistcoat. There was something incredibly erotic about the sight of the pair of them dressed like this.

"We look good, don't we?" Skinner grinned at his slave.

"Yes, Master." Mulder grinned back happily. He was just an inch or two shorter than his Master, but much slighter, and the contrast between them was highlighted by their identical clothes.

"Where are we going, Master?" He dared to ask as Skinner began walking towards the door.

"You'll see," Skinner replied over his shoulder. He picked up the bulging black bag that he'd left in the doorway, slung his arm around his slave, and escorted him out of the apartment.

Skinner drove them to a leather bar just out of town. Mulder knew the place as they drew up – it was the kind of bar where people who weren't serious players hung out. They were wannabes, people who liked to dress up but who didn't know much about proper BDSM play. Mulder had frequented the place for only a couple of weeks when he was new to the scene and soon figured out that this wasn't the right

place to meet the really serious players. He glanced at his Master wondering why the Guardian of the House would choose to come here. It was so far removed from the real scene that nobody here would even know who Skinner was! Mulder began to wonder whether that might not be the point. Skinner had clearly chosen to bring him somewhere where neither of them would be recognised, and where there would be no expectations. Mulder grew more and more curious about what his Master's intentions were.

"By my side, slave," Skinner said, as they got out of the car, clicking his fingers. "Remember who and what you are." He squeezed his slave's nearest butt cheek firmly to remind him and Mulder felt reassured. He was his Master's slave: here, there and everywhere as Skinner so often quoted to him. The evening, whatever it held, did not have to be an ordeal as long as he remembered that basic fact. Skinner handed his slave the bag and Mulder shouldered it silently, wondering what it contained.

They walked into the bar, and almost immediately there was a noticeable dip in conversation and noise as the men inside checked out the two newcomers. Both Skinner and Mulder were too attractive to go unnoticed, especially in their matching outfits. Mulder wondered if it was obvious which was the Master and which the slave – he felt sure it was. What was noticeable to him was how much confidence they both had in their roles. Mulder knew what was expected of him and he went to find a seat for his Master immediately while Skinner bought the drinks. His Master brought two large glasses of coke back to the table and sat down, while Mulder knelt beside him, placing the bag by his Master's feet should the big man need it. Their actions were so in sync with each other that they could almost have been choreographed. Skinner sipped his coke for a moment, surveying the crowded room and staring down anyone who looked at his slave for too long, while Mulder knelt in the submissive position, head up, eyes down, and waited for further orders. After a while, his Master clicked his fingers and Mulder looked up, alert to Skinner's every need. His Master handed him his coke with instructions that he could drink, which Mulder did, gratefully. It was hot, and the floor was dusty.

A few people came over and made conversation but Skinner politely rebuffed them. Mostly people gave them a wide berth though – contenting themselves with many awed looks in the direction of the burly, confident, utterly sure of himself Master and his slender, perfectly trained slave. Mulder loved the way they were being looked at – and he felt sure that his Master was more than a little satisfied with the response as well. A man in tight leather came up to them and surveyed the kneeling Mulder with interest.

"Hey, cute boy," he cooed.

Mulder ignored him, and kept his gaze fixed firmly on his Master.

"Doesn't he talk?" The man glanced at Skinner.

"No. He's my slave. He'll talk only to me," Skinner replied, sipping his coke.

"Your slave?" A sly grin appeared on the other man's face. "Is he for sale? I'd give you a couple of hundred bucks to have him for an hour."

Mulder's face betrayed nothing. He kept his gaze fixed steadily on his Master.

"He's not for sale," Skinner said curtly.

"Aw, come on – where's the fun in that?" The man persisted. Skinner got up very, very slowly, drew himself up to his full height and looked down on the other man.

"He's not for sale," he repeated. "Not for an hour, not for a day, not for a lifetime – not even for a second."

"Okay, okay." The stranger held up his hands and glanced around. "I was only asking! I mean for fuck's sake...you come in here looking like this and you say the boy's a slave. Who wouldn't ask for a piece of that ass, huh?" Skinner moved his hand slightly, and the man flinched and backed off. "I'm going!" he said quickly. Skinner waited until he was out of sight before sitting again. He rested his hand reassuringly on Mulder's head and tousled his hair gently. Mulder trembled. He loved it when his Master was possessive.

"Very impressive...got any other moves," a tall, skinny, mustachioed man asked casually. "Or are you all talk and no play, hmmm? That would make Jack a very dull boy!"

Skinner smiled. "I was hoping someone would ask," he said. He clicked his fingers and Mulder got to his feet immediately. "Is the play area still where I remember it?" Skinner asked, heading for a small side room in a dark corner of the bar from which Mulder could hear the thudding, grunting and wailing sounds of someone on the receiving end of a thorough spanking.

"Oh yeah," the man grinned, "but..." He put a hand on Skinner's arm and Mulder stepped forward between the stranger and his Master feet warningly. The man hastily removed the hand and Mulder stepped back behind Skinner once more, satisfied that his Master wasn't being threatened. "I was just gonna say that it'd be a shame to hide you two in that little room. I own this place – so I'm going to clear you a space over there, on that raised area, where everyone can see you. Then we'll see whether you boys are just for show or not." It was said politely, but it was definitely a challenge.

Skinner raised an amused eyebrow.

"That sounds fine," he said. "Bring me a post – I'll need something to tie my boy to."

Mulder swallowed nervously, wondering what his Master had planned for him, but Skinner fondled his butt reassuringly, and Mulder's nerves subsided. Whatever Skinner had planned, it was out of his hands. He belonged to his Master who could do what he liked with his slave, either privately or in public.

The owner of the bar clapped his hands and a couple of bar staff began moving tables. The denizens of the bar started to gather around, clearly expecting some hot action. Skinner climbed the steps to the little raised area now containing just the post and a table and Mulder followed behind. His Master stopped in the middle and began unpacking the bag. Mulder knelt beside him, eyes down, staying calm within his own submission.

"Look at me, boy," Skinner said softly, and Mulder did so. His heart did a flip as he watched his Master unpack a variety of disciplinary implements, some cuffs, and a couple of candles from his bag. He laid them out on the table, one by one, taking his time, talking to Mulder in low tones throughout. It could have been a totally private scene for all the notice Skinner took of the crowd watching them. An eerie hush had fallen over the room but Skinner wasn't hurried. He took a long time laying out his equipment,

and he insisted that Mulder watch him. He seemed unconcerned by the audience and didn't play to them. Mulder started to relax, tuning out the crowd, focussing instead on his Master's every move. His heart did another flip as Skinner took out the bullwhip.

"Front and centre, boy," Skinner ordered and Mulder went to stand in the middle of the platform. Skinner raised the bullwhip and Mulder waited...and a few seconds later there was a loud crack, and he found himself wrapped in the whip. There was a gasp from the crowd and a smattering of applause as Skinner pulled him forwards, kissed him, and then snapped his fingers. Mulder sank to the floor without saying a word. "Good boy," Skinner said soothingly, gently massaging Mulder's neck with his fingers. "Eyes on me now. Keep them on me throughout." Mulder nodded and gazed at his Master intently. Skinner ordered him back into the centre of the room and repeated the whip manoeuvre – this time to even more applause as people got into the swing of things.

"Very nice," the bar owner said from his vantage point on the edge of the platform. "But it's just a trick. Got anything more impressive than that?"

Mulder could have sworn he saw Skinner's mouth turn up at the edges in a wryly amused smile but his Master ignored the other man completely – his attention was fixed solely on his slave, and Mulder's on his Master.

"Here, boy," Skinner said, and Mulder went to his Master's side. "Undress," Skinner ordered, and Mulder felt his throat go dry. "For me," Skinner added. "Undress for **me**."

Mulder nodded, never taking his eyes off his Master. He began unbuttoning the waistcoat slowly, teasingly, using all the provocative skills his Master had taught him during their time together. He knew how to put on a good striptease and this was what his Master was asking from him. He finished unbuttoning the waistcoat and let it slide from first one shoulder and then the other. Vaguely, in the distance, he was aware of the room going completely silent, and could feel hundreds of hungry gazes focussed on him, but there was only one gaze he was interested in, and that was the dark-eyed gaze of the man standing in front of him. Mulder twirled the waistcoat on his finger and then dropped it onto the table, before reaching down and unbuttoning his jeans. He moistened his lower lip with his tongue as he worked the zipper down, wriggling his ass, going very slowly. Finally he slid the jeans down his long legs, and turned to present his ass to his Master as he bent over to step out of them. He turned back again fast, so that the watching crowd didn't get more than a glimpse of his genitals, and then knelt at his Master's feet, his nose pressed into the other man's crotch hopefully. He was very aware that he was naked, but it meant nothing to him beyond the fact that he was naked for his **Master**. The watching crowd almost didn't exist for him.

Skinner smiled, bent down, and kissed his slave to steady and reassure him, and Mulder nudged up, wanting more, always eager to be caressed by his Master. Skinner drew back, and reached for the cuffs on the table. He clicked his fingers and Mulder held up first one wrist and then the other. Skinner then moved the post into the centre of the platform, before attaching his slave to it. He spent some time fastening Mulder's cuffs, talking to his slave constantly.

"Good boy. I want to play with you now, Fox. Just give yourself up to me. Take everything I do...and stay relaxed. You'll be fine."

Mulder smiled dreamily and bowed his head. He knew he would be fine. He trusted his Master implicitly. He was more aware of the crowd now, as he was displayed, naked and tied in front of them for their entertainment. He heard his Master go over to the table and a moment later Skinner returned with a small snake whip. He showed it to his slave, and then began tapping him with it, taking his time, building the tension in the room. Mulder surrendered to it, throwing back his head and moving his body rhythmically in time to the light swats. Then it got serious. Skinner snapped his wrist and the whip flashed across his buttocks, drawing a line of fire there. Mulder moaned, seriously aroused. His cock rose in its gold cock ring and Mulder was glad that his Master had removed his chastity device. He knew he should be embarrassed to be displayed, naked and erect in this way, in front of all these strangers, but he wasn't. A part of him loved it. It was a part he had never had the courage to explore before – another, more timid side of himself always stopped him from enjoying events like this one – he fantasised about them but when he had his own free will he had never had the courage to participate in them, although he had watched often enough and had **wanted** to so much. Now his Master was demanding this of him so he had no choice – and he was finally able to give in and surrender to the pure pleasure of it, his exhibitionist side titillated by the watchful gazes of all these men. This was more erotic than the pony race had been - or even the slave auction. Everyone's gaze was fixed on him – and he was also being lovingly whipped by his strong, powerful Master. Mulder felt himself responding to Skinner's every slight touch, every hard stinging blow of the whip, every murmured order or lovingly given caress. He abandoned himself to his Master and felt a sweet serenity well up inside him. After a while Skinner stopped whipping his slave, and another hush descended over the room as his Master lit a candle. Mulder held very still as his Master came over to him, and showed him the candle. He looked into his Master's eyes and smiled.

"Thank you, Master," he whispered, nodding slightly. Skinner kissed him, and then began waving the candle over his slave's naked body. Nothing happened at first, and then Mulder felt the first sting of the hot wax as it landed on his buttocks. He gave a cry and stiffened in his bonds and his Master soothed him with his hands. Another drop of wax, and he writhed, trying to escape from its molten heat but to no avail. His Master soothed him again but a few seconds later more wax descended on his naked body and he cried out loud, throwing his head back, his cock proudly erect in front of him. He could almost feel the audience reaction as they drank in the scene – the quiet, powerful, totally confident Master teasing the most beautiful, erotic responses out of his slave as he played with him. Mulder felt a surge of warmth and wriggled his body excitedly. He was enjoying this! And so, judging by the rapt silence, was their audience.

The wax torture continued for a long time, the droplets falling onto his skin more frequently as Skinner upped the ante and now Mulder was wriggling and squirming the whole time, dimly aware of how this displayed his entire body. Then, finally, it was over. Skinner blew out the candle and his slave hung, exhausted in his bonds.

"Good boy," Skinner came to stand behind him again. "Ass out."

Mulder obeyed and Skinner slid a lubed finger into his slave ass, and just held it there. It was a moment of the most sublime and intimate intensity for slave and Master. The angle at which they were standing made it almost impossible for anyone to see what they were doing – his Master's large body blocked the view, and Mulder knew this was an act meant for him and him alone. His Master was confirming the bond between them, reminding his slave that this place in Mulder's body was for him and him alone – as well as, of course, making it clear to Mulder that he had complete mastery over his slave and could

enter him whenever he liked, however he liked – that no part of his slave's body was denied him. Skinner was talking all the time, whispering in his slave's ear, although Mulder couldn't really hear what he was saying. He was just aware of that finger lodged deep inside him, keeping him still, and making him sweat. After several long minutes Skinner withdrew his finger and wiped his hand on a cloth. He untied his slave and Mulder slumped against him, wondering if it was over.

Skinner took his slave in his arms and held him against his chest, so that Mulder was facing out to the audience. Skinner displayed his slave's charms thoroughly to the watching crowd, his hands covering Mulder's body with the confidence and ease of a Master totally in tune with his willing slave. Mulder leaned back against Skinner's chest, and his Master grasped his nipples and began squeezing. Mulder gasped, and bucked in his Master's arms, surrendering to the pain and the pleasure at one and the same time. The audience were a dim blur in front of him, the sea of faces all running into each other, and although Mulder knew they were all watching him, he was just aware of his Master's hands, claiming his slave's body. Skinner's hands were relentless, teasing his cock and balls, pinching his nipples hard then tickling them softly, sliding down over his abdomen, covering, and owning his slave completely and Mulder lay back limply in his Master's arms, taking it all, giving everything he had to his Master. Skinner's hand movements slowed, and then he moved his head so that his lips were by Mulder's ear and said just one word: "Wanda."

Mulder didn't hesitate. He knew he was in a room full of people, and that this was the most intimate command his Master could give him, but he sank immediately to his knees, his front to the audience, his back to Skinner, and used his hands to open his buttocks so that his Master could use him if he wanted. The audience gazed at the tableau, clearly wondering what was going on, and why the slave was abasing himself in this way, and it was only then that Mulder realised that his Master had cleverly got him into position so that only **he** would see Mulder's most private of places. Skinner didn't make him hold position for long. A few seconds later he slapped his slave's ass, then pulled Mulder to his feet and kissed him lovingly, signalling that the scene was at an end.

The audience erupted with a wild roar of approval, breaking the spell that had transfixed them since the beginning of the scene. They clapped their hands and stamped their feet but Skinner took no notice of them and, taking his cue from his Master, Mulder ignored them as well. He knelt by his Master's side as Skinner returned the equipment to the bag, and, at a click of his Master's fingers he got dressed. He picked up the bag and followed Skinner as he began to walk down the stairs of the raised platform.

"Wait!" The bar owner grabbed Skinner's arm and then released it again as Mulder gave a low growl. "Sorry...but you can't just leave! That was fantastic. Please – I'll pay you to do another scene. I've never seen anything like it. It was mind blowing!"

"Thank you, but we've got to go," Skinner said formally. "The scene is over. We don't perform for money."

"At least tell us your names!" Someone called.

Skinner smiled and shook his head. He clicked his fingers again and Mulder fell into step behind his Master. People parted in front of them as if in awe, and they left the bar without looking back.

They got into the car, and it was then that Mulder noticed that a crowd of people had tumbled out of the bar to watch them go.

"You do know that you just created a legend at that bar don't you?" Mulder said. "You'll be remembered for all time as the mysterious stranger who came among them and showed them what a really good scene should be like."

"Not just me. You were the other half of that legend, Fox," Skinner said with a smile. "You were superb tonight, little one. I can't tell you how proud I was of you. You did everything perfectly – you were the slave I've trained you to be and the one you always wanted to be in your heart."

"Thank you, Master." Mulder smiled back, feeling warm with the praise. For the first time he had obeyed the Wanda command outside of the apartment immediately, without questioning it, and he remembered that his Master had once said that if he ever did that he would finally, truly be his Master's slave. Mulder sat back in his seat with a dreamy smile, and let his hand rest on his Master's thigh as the other man drove them home.

It was late by the time they got back, and Mulder helped his Master to undress then removed his own clothing and settled himself down at the foot of the bed, waiting for his Master to fasten his chain for the night. Skinner crouched down beside him, a loving smile on his face. He touched Mulder's cheek gently.

"You know, slave, I think that as a reward for your superb service to me this evening, that you should be allowed to sleep in the bed," he said softly. Mulder sat up, surprised. He hadn't even asked, and yet his Master was offering to grant him the one thing he knew that his slave loved – sleeping by his Master's side, in his Master's bed.

"Thank you," Mulder whispered, bending his head to kiss his Master's toes. Skinner allowed the devotion for a few seconds, and then he held out his hand. Mulder took it, eagerly, scrambled to his feet, and slid into the bed. He resolved never, ever to take sleeping in this bed for granted. It was a boon, granted by a loving Master, and Mulder was fully aware of just how great an honour it was. Skinner got in beside him, turned off the lamp, and reached for his slave. Mulder went happily, loving nothing more than to feel his Master's large arms clasped around him. He wondered whether his Master would use him – Skinner had been very sparing in his use of his slave of late, as they explored the wider aspects of Mulder's slavery, and Mulder had missed feeling that large cock in his body several times a day. Skinner didn't use him though, he just nuzzled up to his slave, holding him tight, his hands wandering idly over Mulder's body, fondling here and there but not enough to be a serious prelude to sex.

"I'm very proud of you, Fox," Skinner said and Mulder was surprised to find that his Master's voice was hoarse with emotion. "This evening was one of the best of my life. You were so beautiful, your responses so perfectly tuned to me and what I was doing to you, your attention fixed so completely on me. I felt as if I was playing a musical instrument, and each note was clear and perfect. It was the culmination of my years as a top, of what I learned from Andrew, and what I've tried to teach you. Thank you, Fox," he whispered in a husky tone.

Mulder turned and faced his Master, overwhelmed by the occasion.

"Thank **you**," he said. "For showing me how to be what I most wanted to be and then for revealing just how good it can be as well."

Skinner leaned forward a little way in the dark and caught his slave's mouth with his own, then proceeded to kiss him for so long, and so thoroughly, that Mulder thought he might pass out.

Mulder was woken the next day by something warm and wet on his cock. He gave a startled cry of surprise, and then realised his cock was being vigorously sucked by his Master. He relaxed, opening his legs and enjoying the sensation. His Master did occasionally please himself by giving his slave oral sex and Skinner was a maestro at it. Mulder's sleeping, semi-erect cock soon hardened into a full blown erection and he moaned as his Master lavished attention on it, sucking, deep-throating, and licking until Mulder was on the verge of coming – at which point his Master withdrew. Mulder sighed – much as he longed to come, he knew that was forbidden until after he had been branded. Skinner slid up the bedclothes and surfaced beside his slave.

"Thank you, Master," Mulder said dreamily.

"I'm glad you enjoyed it, slave – because I did." Skinner licked his lips like the cat that got the cream and Mulder laughed. "I wanted you nice and turned on, boy, because there's something I wish to do to you."

"What, Master?"

"I want to make love to you – and I want to take a very long time about it. I thought, as a warm up, that a spanking would be in order." Skinner threw back the blankets and Mulder felt a waft of cold air on his body. "On your front, slave. Your Master intends to make very good use of you today," Skinner warned in an ominous tone. Mulder felt a shiver of arousal and it was all he could do to stop his still rampant cock from spasming and coming there and then. He rolled onto his stomach and relaxed, giving himself up to his Master. He still felt on a high from the previous night and it was so easy surrendering himself to his magnificent Master. He could hardly understand why, just a few short days ago, he had found it so difficult. He hoped that Skinner would ride him hard and use him well – he longed to feel his Master's hard cock inside him, longed to open up his body and be of use to the other man, to devote himself to his Master's pleasure.

Skinner leaned over his slave, and his tongue found a slightly raised welt – a legacy of the previous night's whipping. Mulder made a little sound in the back of his throat. It always turned him on unbearably when Skinner sucked on the marks he'd placed on his slave's body. Skinner held him down, although in reality they were now so perfectly attuned to each other that it only took the lightest touch for Mulder to respond to whatever his Master wanted of him. He loved being so in tune with the other man's needs and orders – it felt so easy, as if they flowed into each other and were a part of each other. Skinner spent a long time sucking on the marks on his slave's bottom, and then he drew back, and, straddling his slave, he bestowed several light taps on Mulder's backside. Mulder's skin was still sensitive from the previous night and he wriggled and writhed, staying still enough to accept his Master's swats, but moving around enough to give his Master a pleasant view – Mulder knew how much the sight of a squirming ass aroused his Master. Skinner gradually built the spanking to a climax, slapping harder and

faster, the palm of his hand flashing up and down. Mulder glanced back over his shoulder and saw that his Master's hand was almost a blur as he worked on his slave's exposed butt and Mulder began crying out and wriggling in earnest now, although he couldn't go anywhere as his legs were firmly pinned down by his Master's weight. Finally, when he knew his ass had to be glowing a sweetly rosy hue of red, the onslaught stopped. His Master dipped his head and licked the warm flesh like a cat and Mulder mewed like one as well, adoring the attention and starting to get high as the endorphins kicked in. Then his ass cheeks were parted and his Master entered a lubed finger inside his slave. Mulder sighed and opened his legs to facilitate an easier entry and Skinner finger fucked him for a long time, going at a slow, leisurely pace.

"You're my slave – subject to my every whim," Skinner purred. "I love opening you up for my use – making you nice and stretched so that you can take me, and bring your Master pleasure. Open wider, boy." He slapped Mulder's ass and Mulder obliged, opening his legs even more, and pushing back on his Master's finger. Skinner inserted another, and then a third, and played for a long time, teasing his slave's prostate, and taking Mulder right to the edge of climax before withdrawing. Finally, he finished playing with this slave, and turned Mulder onto his back.

"Move with me, slave. Become one with me," Skinner invited, opening his arms, and Mulder sat up and wrapped himself around his Master's body. They kissed for a long time, and then Mulder moved down to suck his Master's nipples, while Skinner moaned, and stroked his slave's hair. Mulder pushed his Master back onto the bed, and busied himself sucking and licking the other man's magnificent body, and then Skinner pulled his slave down on top of him and they rolled over, wrapped in each other's arms, kissing and nuzzling, both of them totally lost in their love making. They moved together, as Skinner had requested, each of them giving of himself totally, and after half an hour or more this, Mulder knew the time was right, and, moving perfectly in sync with his Master, he laid down on the bed, opened his legs wide, and guided his Master's hard cock into his anus. Skinner flowed into Mulder like a river, easily breaching the ring of muscle, and then sliding home, snug, right up to the hilt, his body rocking in time to that of his slave. Mulder gasped, and clung into his Master's arms, loving the sensation of that beautiful, warm, hard cock filling him. Skinner dipped down and kissed his slave firmly on the lips, his pulsing cock unmoving inside his slave's waiting body. Mulder moaned, and offered himself up into that kiss and then, slowly, Skinner began to thrust back and forth. He was true to his word, and went infinitely slowly, never taking his eyes off his slave as he moved within Mulder's body. Mulder arched his back and felt the sweat pouring off his forehead. He was making strange, animalistic noises in the back of his throat and his every sensation was filled by his Master's presence. Skinner's cock in his ass, Skinner's tongue claiming him in a kiss, or teasing one of his nipples with each slow forward thrust, Skinner's musky, sexual scent, filling the air around him, Skinner's voice, murmuring to his slave, Skinner's burly forearms on either side of Mulder's torso, bulging as they held his Master up. Skinner was everywhere and everything to him and it was intoxicating. The sex was so slow as to be almost dreamlike. Each lazy, measured thrust stimulated Mulder unbearably and his cock screamed for a release he knew it would not get, and that just aroused him even more. Time stood still, and ceased to have any meaning – there was just a slave and his Master, joined together in a beautiful communion.

Finally, after what felt like an eternity of slow thrusting, Skinner speeded up the pace, and then, not long after, came deep within his slave's body and Mulder cried out the climax with his Master, feeling it in tandem with him so closely were they connected. A bright white light flashed behind Mulder's eyes and he couldn't see, couldn't hear anything, could only feel that large cock still lodged inside him. After what felt like another age, he felt his Master withdraw and could have wept from the loss of that warm,

claiming cock. Without it he felt incomplete, and it was all he could do not to go down on his hands and knees and beg Skinner to fill him again. Mulder turned his head towards the window. He wouldn't have been surprised if night had fallen and they had spent the entire day in that one long marathon love making session, but, to his surprise, it was light outside.

"Thank you, Master," he whispered fervently, as Skinner took him in his arms.

"My pleasure, slave," Skinner replied. They lay there for awhile, recovering, and then Skinner got up and ordered his slave into the bathroom. They took a slow shower together, moving lazily, and Mulder was glad that he didn't have to wake from the beautiful, hazy, dreamlike state he was in.

"Your litany, slave," Skinner asked, as his slave washed him.

"I belong to you, Master. I'm your slave. I exist to serve you. All that I am belongs to you. My body, my heart, my mind, my soul. I love you, Master." Mulder bent to kiss his Master's toes and then knelt up and washed his Master's penis reverentially.

"Good boy," his Master said approvingly, tousling his slave's wet hair. Mulder got to his feet and Skinner pulled him in for a long, wet kiss, and then he turned off the shower and led his slave out into the bathroom. Mulder knelt and dried his Master, still lost in a blissful haze of serenity. Skinner then ordered him to dry himself, while he dressed in sweats. He returned to the bathroom when Mulder had finished, took hold of Mulder's face, and looked into his slave's eyes.

"It's time, my love," he said softly. It took several seconds for Mulder to even understand what his Master was referring to and then realisation flooded in, but he didn't feel scared – he just felt absurdly content.

"Yes, Master," he agreed, moving his face forward to meet the other man's lips. They kissed, and then Skinner drew back, took hold of his slave's hand, and led him out of the bathroom, through the bedroom, and up the stairs to the Playroom. Mulder followed, still lost in a dream. He didn't even think about what was going to happen – he was just happy to abandon his fate to his Master's hands and take whatever it pleased his Master to give him. Skinner kept hold of Mulder's hand all the way up to the 18th floor apartment, a gesture not of fear that Mulder might draw back, but of companionship, shared experience, and reassurance. Skinner opened the Playroom, and ushered Mulder inside and Mulder went and knelt immediately in the centre of the room in the submissive position without being told.

"You can look around, boy," Skinner said softly, and Mulder did so – and then gave a little gasp. Skinner had clearly gotten up early and decorated the room in preparation. It was warm in here and Mulder could smell the heat of the brazier, which was no longer hidden behind the screen but instead took up centre stage, next to the massage table. The blinds were all drawn, adding to the impression of intimacy, and his Master went around and lit every single candle in the room, making it glow.

"Sit on the table," Skinner ordered and, still in a dream, Mulder obeyed. Skinner caressed the side of his slave's face. "I'm going to brand you with my mark, little one," he said softly. Mulder nodded, trembling slightly, not from fear but from the intensity of the situation.

"I want you to understand that I'm doing this not to cause you pain, although it will hurt, little one, but because through the fiery pain of branding you will come to bear my mark on your flesh. You can wear it as a badge of honour – if it were painless there would be little pride to be taken from the mark," Skinner told his slave. "You must go through the ordeal and come out the other side a more worthy slave than before; cleansed, reborn, and more fully your Master's slave than ever before."

Mulder closed his eyes and leaned into his Master's hand, Skinner's words washing over him like rich, warm, molten chocolate - sweet, dark, beguiling and utterly satisfying.

"I'm not giving you a choice, Fox," Skinner told him, as he began to strap his slave down onto the table. "You have no choice. I'm branding you because it will please me to see my mark on your body and to know that you are my branded slave."

"Yes, Master." Mulder shivered, utterly lost in the moment. Skinner took his time with the straps, fastening them tight and then checking the fastening.

"I want you to be on your back although I'll mark your thigh slightly to the side...here." Skinner touched the spot. "I want you to look into my eyes throughout – you must look at me during your entire branding, Fox. I don't want you to close your eyes, or look away. You must keep your attention fixed on me unless I order you otherwise."

"Yes, Master." Mulder agreed, overawed by the solemnity of the occasion. Skinner finished with the straps and Mulder found himself completely immobile, unable to move so much as a fraction of an inch.

He watched as his Master walked over to the cupboards and drew out a pair of leather trousers. Skinner removed his sweats and slid the trousers up his long, lean legs. Mulder feasted on the sight, and Skinner went slowly, ensuring that his slave got a good view. Then Skinner stripped off his tee shirt, and grabbed a bottle of oil from the cupboard. He came over to his bound slave, and, standing right in front of Mulder, he began to oil his magnificent chest and arms. Mulder watched, transfixed by the eroticism of watching his Master prepare himself for branding his slave. Skinner's hands rubbed the oil into the tattooed fox on his chest and Mulder felt his heart leap; just as his Master had gone through a painful ordeal to bear a visible token of his love for his slave, so the slave would endure a painful ordeal to do the same for his Master. He had seen the tattoo rarely over the past few days, as Skinner had mostly been dressed when in his presence, or Mulder had been blindfolded. Now he feasted on the sight of it, a tangible reminder of why he was about to undergo this branding.

Skinner finished oiling himself and returned to his slave's side. He stroked his hand over Mulder's cock, which sprang eagerly to life, still semi-erect from the morning's love-making, and easily aroused into full erection both by the scenario and his Master's attention to it. Then Skinner turned to the little table next to the massage couch, which held a variety of different pots and jars. Skinner opened one of them, took out a cotton ball, doused it in liquid from one of the other pots, and then pressed the cotton ball against Mulder's thigh, where he would brand him, sterilising the area thoroughly. He took his time, and was firm and masterful but at the same time caressing and loving, a mix that made Mulder relax, his cock still standing stiff and hard in front of him. Skinner finished sterilising the area, and walked towards the brazier. He pulled on a thick glove, picked up the iron that was warming in the fire, examined it intently, and then held it out for his slave to view. Mulder could feel the heat emanating from it and the elegant 'S' glowed white with the intensity of that heat.

"My mark. 'S' for Skinner. 'S' for slave," Skinner told him.

"Yes, Master." Mulder remembered the story of the prince and the warlord and found in it a parallel with his own situation. The prince had no choice – his master had branded him because it was his will, and they lived in a time where even if the prince had refused, the warlord would have taken no notice and proceeded anyway. That thought comforted him for some reason. He was a slave who was being prepared to take his Master's mark. He would be proud to undergo the pain in order to bear that mark. It was his right and his destiny and he longed to fulfil it – and his eager cock told him he was very happy with that destiny. Skinner returned to iron to the fire, and Mulder watched the other man's oiled muscles ripple as he moved. The waves of heat obscured his Master's body somewhat, making the big man a large, hazy presence, and Mulder had never felt more impressed by that large, solid chest, and the long, lean legs. His Master was every inch the perfect Master – who would not want to bear the brand of a man such as this? Mulder would welcome it into his body, no matter how much it hurt.

"Remember, slave, you can scream all you like – be honest and open in your responses," Skinner said.

"Yes, Master," Mulder whispered, beyond any speech save the absolute basics. He gazed at the iron, transfixed, and then back at his Master. Skinner's dark eyes were fixed on him.

"Look at me, boy. I'm going to take the iron out of the fire now, and mark you."

Mulder nodded, his throat dry. He watched, as if in a dream, as his Master withdrew the white hot iron from the fire and then walked slowly, as if in a procession, around his slave to the right side of his slave's body. Mulder could feel the heat now, coming closer, and closer, and then Skinner came to a halt beside his slave's body. He held the iron a few centimetres away from the flesh on Mulder's thigh into which he would sear it, and looked at his slave intently.

"Look at me, not the iron," he commanded and Mulder managed to tear his eyes away from the iron itself and look into his Master's dark eyes. "What are you?" Skinner asked.

"Your slave," Mulder replied, lost in his Master's gaze.

"Who do you belong to?" Skinner asked.

"You!" Mulder replied. "You, Master."

"What can I do to you?"

"Whatever you like, Master. My body is yours to do with as you wish."

"Good boy. What I wish to do is to mark your flesh with my iron, to brand you as my slave for all the world to see, and to sear in your mind as much as I sear into your flesh, that you are mine for all time. I want you to look down and see my mark on your body and understand that basic, fundamental truth: you belong to me, boy. You're mine in times of crisis and in times of pleasure, mine to love, to play with, to enjoy - mine for all time."

Mulder nodded, his throat dry, and his cock still hard, utterly lost in the moment. He was his Master's slave and he longed to bear his Master's mark on his skin for all time. He was immobile, surrendered to

his Master's will, and Skinner had never looked more the magnificent Master as he did at this moment in time, with his oiled torso, and the look of love and determination in his eyes.

"I'm yours, Master," Mulder whispered, "please...brand me."

Skinner positioned the iron over his slave's thigh – Mulder could feel the heat of it and almost passed out just from knowing it was there and that this moment was finally about to happen. Just when he thought he couldn't bear the wait any more, Skinner moved his arm forward forcefully.

Mulder cried out loud, never taking his eyes from his Master's face. He could have sworn that the iron was lodged in his flesh for hours – or at least a minute, although later Skinner told him it was only 2 or 3 seconds at the very most. However even that short a time felt like an eternity as the fiery kiss of the iron claimed him and time seemed to slow almost to a standstill. He cried out loud, tried to move, to do anything to dislodge the burning metal from his flesh but he couldn't move, couldn't do anything except scream and gaze into his Master's eyes and accept his Master's will. It was those dark eyes that anchored him and reassured him throughout, despite the pain, and he was transfixed by them, relying on that steady, loving gaze to keep him calm. There was an odour of burning flesh, and still that branding iron seemed to be there, sunk deep into his body, claiming him, consuming him, and owning him utterly and completely and Mulder surrendered to it, offering himself up to his Master's brand.

Then it was gone. His Master replaced the iron in the brazier and returned to his slave's side but Mulder barely registered that the iron was no longer in his flesh – he was still screaming both from the pain of it and as a release from the sheer intensity of the moment. Skinner stroked his slave's sweaty face, and kissed him softly, murmuring to him the whole time, and Mulder started to calm down. He knew that his face was streaked with tears and sweat but he was proud beyond belief. He had endured it! He was a marked slave! He looked down, eager to see the mark on his body but his Master blocked his way.

"Not yet. Lie back and recover first. Get your breath back. You did well, little one. I'm very proud of you."

Skinner's dark eyes looked suspiciously glassy, as if he was holding back tears of his own. He smoothed Mulder's hair out of his eyes, all the time whispering encouragement and endearments to his slave and Mulder smiled happily at the big man. The endorphins started to kick in and Mulder felt as high as a kite. Yes, his thigh still hurt, but he was too high to care. He was dimly aware of Skinner rubbing something lightly onto the new brand and there was a momentary sting, followed by a numbing sensation. Mulder didn't ask what it was, and nor did he care. He just smiled insanely at his Master, giddy with joy. Skinner returned the smile, his whole face lighting up, utterly overjoyed by the occasion and Mulder knew he wasn't the only one who had been deeply affected by it. His Master cupped his slave's face in his hands and they stayed there for a couple of minutes, as one, at rest, both exhilarated by what had passed between them, and what it symbolised.

After about half an hour, Skinner untied his slave, with strict instructions that Mulder should not move. Mulder obeyed, gazing stupidly at his Master.

"Okay." Skinner took hold of Mulder's hand. "You can look at it now, boy." Mulder glanced down and fell immediately in love. The brand was perfect. The skin was raw and red and he guessed that it would take some time to heal but the brand itself was so elegant and beautiful – just the kind of mark he would

have expected his Master to put on his body, and completely different to the ugly jagged scarring that Krycek had initially left him with, until Perry had cleaned up that wound.

"Beautiful." Skinner traced his fingers over the 'W' on his slave's lower abdomen and then moved his finger over to his slave's right side. He didn't touch the brand, just rested his finger next to it the S. "Both my initials printed in your skin for all time," he whispered.

"Oh god. I love it," Mulder whispered, utterly overwhelmed. "It's so perfect."

"Good." Skinner smiled, and rested his forehead briefly against his slave's. Mulder felt exhilarated by the occasion and filled with an odd energy. "Now, I think I told you that the next time I'd let you come it would be as a branded slave," Skinner said, his hand going to Mulder's cock. Mulder felt his penis respond eagerly, as always, to his Master's touch. He was amazed that he could feel so horny after so much intense pain but he did – he felt utterly alive, as if the heat that had penetrated his skin had gone right the way through into his veins.

"So...lie back..." Skinner lowered the massage table and then, as his slave watched, he removed his leather pants, and stood, magnificently naked, before Mulder. "I don't want you to do anything," Skinner said. "Just enjoy – let your natural responses happen, whatever they are."

He swung his leg over his slave's body so he was straddling him, taking care not to let his thigh press against Mulder's new brand. Then he parted his own buttocks and sank down on Mulder's hard cock, guiding it into his body. Mulder cried out, completely dazed by the honour his Master was showing him. He so rarely got to serve his Master by giving him anal sex that he appreciated just how big a deal this was. Skinner slid down firmly onto his slave's hard cock, still in charge even though he was the one being penetrated. He rested his hands on his slave's body and squeezed his slave's nipples lightly. "Hmm, this reminds me of another important occasion," Skinner said, teasing Mulder's nipples, and then pinching them more firmly. Mulder growled and thrust up, almost overwhelmed by the overload of sensations - being buried in his Master's warm, tight ass, his burning thigh, and the pain in his nipples. He squirmed and that just excited his cock even more. Skinner was merciless – he slid up and down on Mulder's cock for a long time, always stopping his motion just before his slave was about to come. He waited until Mulder had stepped back from the edge of climax and then began riding him again. Mulder gazed up at his Master in awe. Skinner's body was so large, his muscles rippled so beautifully beneath the oiled golden skin and he rode his slave so expertly. Mulder reached out and touched his Master's tattoo lightly, smiling to himself. Skinner grinned at him, and, leaning forward, deposited a kiss on his slave's lips. Mulder moaned and opened his mouth, and his Master obliged by pushing his tongue inside. They kissed while Skinner squeezed his ass muscles around his slave's hard cock, and then he drew back and rode his slave once more, pinching his nipples with each downward slide, until Mulder began to scream out loud and then he was lost in his own ecstasy and a few moments later he came – loudly and violently, thrust deep inside his Master's body – and, more importantly, he came for the first time as a branded slave.

Skinner stayed where he was, straddling his slave's body for a long time, and then, finally, he slid off Mulder's softening cock. Mulder was dimly aware of his Master disappearing into the bathroom and the sound of water splashing and then the big man returned to his exhausted, sated slave and ran a wash cloth over him, taking care not to disturb his newly branded flesh. Finally, while Mulder still recovered, Skinner pulled on his gray sweatpants and white tee-shirt, and, still barefoot, returned to his slave's side.

"Are you back with me now?" He asked, grinning.

"Sure," Mulder replied hazily.

"What's your name?" Skinner demanded.

"No idea," Mulder slurred happily.

"Your name is Fox William Mulder, and you are my branded slave," Skinner told him firmly and Mulder gave a huge, beaming smile.

"Oh. Yeah," he muttered. "I remember that last bit!"

"Hold still. I'm going to lift you," Skinner said. He moved forward, and picked up his slave in his big arms. It never ceased to amaze Mulder how strong his Master was, and he submitted, feeling like a huge bag of jelly, to being picked up, carried out of the Playroom, and along the corridor to the upstairs lounge. Skinner deposited his slave on the couch and Mulder gazed round the room blankly. It was decorated with garlands and tinsel, and, in the corner of the room, next to the roaring log fire, was a huge Christmas tree, with a pile of wrapped presents underneath it."

"Is it...?" Mulder glanced at his Master in surprise.

"Yes it is." Skinner smiled. "Merry Christmas, Fox." He sat down on the couch beside his slave and pulled Mulder to rest against his chest.

"Today?" Mulder had completely lost track of the time.

"Today." Skinner nodded. "The fridge is fully stocked with food. I thought we'd eat later on this afternoon."

"Do I get to sit up to the table?" Mulder asked with a grin.

"You certainly do, boy." Skinner grinned back, giving his slave a big, wet kiss.

"When did you do all this?" Mulder asked, astounded, glancing around the room. He noticed Wanda stretched out in front of the fire, seemingly elongated to four times her normal length, looking as utterly blissed out as he felt right now. "And when did you buy all the food?"

"During those times when you were standing with your butt on display looking out of the windows in the Playroom," Skinner told his slave, one arm wrapped around Mulder's chest and shoulders. "I finished off this morning, while you were still sleeping. I got up early. I wanted this to be a very special day. You were so ready for this, Fox."

"Thanks to you. It's been such an incredible week," Mulder whispered. "I mean, I wouldn't want to live in this level of submission the whole time, but for a vacation, a few day's break from reality – it's great."

"I know. I enjoyed it too." Skinner looked pensive.

"It was harder for you – you had to plan it all, and gauge my reactions," Mulder commented.

"Hmmm?" Skinner looked down on his slave. "Oh...yes. That wasn't always easy. I wanted to make sure that this time it was right for you. I screwed up last time we attempted it and I wasn't going to have that happen again," Skinner said firmly. "There were times when I wondered if you were going to go down with me, or keep fighting me, but in the end it worked out just fine."

"That story about the prince and the warlord was amazing, Master. It really helped. Did you just make it up?"

"Sort of." Skinner grinned. "I don't think I'm that good a storyteller but Andrew insisted I explore erotic scenarios and we used to sit up at night, making up stories that turned us on. That was one of them. I'm so glad you liked it too. It's always been one of my favourites. I'm glad I could share it with you."

"It was fantastic. I hope you let me make up some horny stories with you at some point, like you did with Andrew," Mulder requested. "I like the idea of that."

"So do I." Skinner deposited a kiss on his slave's forehead.

"And the club...maybe we could do that again one day?" Mulder asked.

"My little exhibitionist!" Skinner grinned and tickled his slave. "I'll think about it, but I'm not sure I liked all those men leering at my property."

"Why did you take me there then?"

"I needed to see how into your role you were – and how easily you might be jolted out of it. There was no use you being in deep submission if you came out of it the moment I took you near the branding iron. I wanted to ensure that you could stay in the right headspace even under extreme conditions – and you did. In fact you did it remarkably well. I knew then that I could brand you today as I'd hoped to. What about the branding, Fox? Was it everything you wanted it to be?"

"Yes, Master. Everything and more," Mulder said dreamily. He registered the slight note of anxiety in his Master's voice and looked up. Skinner always seemed so sure of himself, so confident, that these little glimpses into his Master's soul always took him by surprise. "And you?" He asked, smiling at his Master to ensure the other man realised just how perfect it had been.

Skinner smiled back in return. "Yes, Fox. It was so intense, and it was better just being the two of us. I know you wanted me to brand you in front of everyone and I thought you might be disappointed that I changed that to a private scene."

"No, not at all. I didn't even think about it." Mulder shook his head vehemently. "I think that it didn't happen before because it wasn't the right way for it to happen. It had to be a private moment, just you and me and it wouldn't have been right if anyone else had been there. I wouldn't trade the intimacy and intensity of what we just went through for anything. It's a memory that will stay with me forever – one of the happiest days of my life. Honestly...I couldn't **be** any happier, Master."

"Good." Skinner kissed his slave full on the lips again, and Mulder was pleased to see that his Master's dark eyes were happy as well – and a little relieved too he thought. "In a moment I'm going to put some aloe on it and then I'll put a dressing over it to avoid infection," Skinner told him. "But you can have a few minutes looking at it first. Let me know when you need painkillers – you will soon. You're on a high right now but it'll wear off and then the pain will kick in with a vengeance."

Mulder grinned, stupidly, barely able to take his eyes off the brand on his skin. He felt ridiculously high – not just from the pain endorphins, but from the knowledge that he had undergone something this profound. He had walked into the fiery furnace and emerged stronger and more certain than he had been before – and more totally in love with his Master, if that were possible. Skinner had been right – it had to hurt that intensely in order to mean something - and because of that it had been somehow transforming; he felt as if he was new born.

"Okay, we have some presents to unwrap." Skinner got up and retrieved a pile of presents from under the tree. "Most of these are from me, but there's one from your geeky friends, and a little something from Mrs. Asher - and Scully and Doggett dropped something by for you the other day when you were in deep submission. Sorry I couldn't let them see you." Skinner smiled apologetically. "There's something from Elaine, and Hammer and Murray sent their usual case of champagne, which I'll open in a minute. Oh, and Ian and Perry said they'd drop by tomorrow if you're up to receiving visitors."

"I should think so." Mulder nodded enthusiastically.

"We'll see. You might come crashing down with a bump but Perry gave me some strict instructions for your aftercare so I think you'll be all right. I'd also like him to take a look at my handiwork to make sure everything is healing okay." Skinner sorted through the parcels, found one wrapped in purple paper with a large purple bow and gave a gentle little smile. "And this one is from Tabi," he said softly.

"For me?" Mulder was surprised.

"Yeah." Skinner handed it over to his slave and Mulder gazed at his Master, completely overcome.

"Open it." Skinner nodded.

Mulder ripped into it eagerly, and unwrapped a book and something soft, wrapped in tissue paper. The book bore the legend: "*UFO's – Fact, Fantasy, and Myth. By Samantha Skinner.*" Inside was an inscription: "*To my new big brother, Fox. Happy Christmas! Lots of love, Tabi.*"

Mulder bit down hard on his lip. He opened the tissue paper and found a cashmere sweater inside, in shade that was a cross between petrol blue and deep sea green. A note fell out: "*I thought it would suit you – I loved the colour. Oh, and the book is a stupid thing I wrote a couple of years ago but it seemed appropriate! Hope to see you soon. Tabi.*"

"We'll phone her later to thank her," Skinner said softly, seeing his slave's reaction. Mulder nodded, unable to speak. "And you can wear the sweater when we eat – I'll let you get dressed for that...although later on I'll want you naked again. I want to have something good to feast my eyes on."

"Yes, Master," Mulder whispered.

Skinner sat down on the couch again and pulled his slave onto his lap. Mulder lay there, naked, and at peace with himself and the world. He kept glancing down surreptitiously to see the brand on his thigh and it gave him a thrill each time.

"I'm sorry...I did order you a present, Master...but it hasn't arrived yet. Or at least I don't think so." Mulder looked up at his Master. He'd been in such deep submission for the past few days that he wasn't sure whether the package he had been expecting had been delivered or not. "I'm sorry. I wish I had something to give you today," he murmured. Skinner laughed, and his hand went down to rest next to Mulder's brand.

"You did, Fox," he whispered into his slave's ear. "You already did."

To see a very erotic and naughty NC17 pic by **JenR** that goes with the sex scene at Tabi's house, **[click here](#)**. **Warning - very explicit!**

## Here, There and Everywhere by Xanthe

### **Author's Notes:**

Pic by **CDavis**

**Dedication:** This chapter is dedicated to all the people who have been so supportive of this long series. They are too many to mention them all by name but you know who you are: the people who sent feedback, bondage bears, feedback, pictures they'd made themselves, quotes, poetry, pictures that reminded them of the series...oh, and did I mention feedback? <g> Thank you!

**Thank you:** Special thanks go to Emma, who was instrumental in the inception of this story and who has been a valued sounding board ever since. The prison sex is for you! A massive thank you also to Phoebe, who has beta read several of the chapters with her usual unerring eye and attention to detail. And finally, a big thank you to CD, BlueSpirit, Sergeeva, JenR and all the other people who have brought so many of my fantasies to life in pictures they made for this series.

**Feedback:** Yes please!!! And hey, if you've been reading this for 26 whole chapters and have never sent any - now might be a good time to start! I love getting feedback - writing takes a lot of time and even more effort, so it's wonderful to hear that people enjoy what I do :-)

**Posted:** 11th November, 2003

**Zine:** 24/7 will soon be available in zine format. Please keep checking back to this site for updates on where and when you can buy it.

Quotation courtesy of Alex. **24/7** is an erotic fantasy and NOT a BDSM resource guide. The truth is sometimes exaggerated, or played with, for dramatic effect. For more information, please visit the **24/7 BDSM Glossary**.

**Warning:** The usual BDSM sex warning although there's nothing any worse in here than in any of the previous 25 chapters!

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*"A truth, still apparent, though disregarded, that things move violently to their place, but calmly in their place. To put it another way, everything has its right home, the region that suits it, and, unless forcibly restrained, will move thither by a kind of homing instinct."*

**J. Winterson**  
**"Art and Lies"**

"I want you to get dressed," Skinner told his slave early one evening, a week after he had branded him. Mulder gazed up at his Master in surprise from where he was lying, naked, on the bed. The last week had passed in something of a haze for him; he and his Master had been in love for a long time now, but they had never been this close or as intimate with each other as they had since the branding. Still on vacation, they had spent every day for the last week completely wrapped up in each other, making love, talking, or just lying in each other's arms lazily, enjoying their closeness.

Mulder felt more than happy – he felt deeply and profoundly contented, existing in a state of total bliss. It both was and wasn't the branding – he had loved his Master before he had been branded, and they had been happy before his branding too, but somehow the branding was a culmination of all those feelings that had gradually been building inside him since Skinner had taken him as his slave ten months previously. Now he knew, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that he not only belonged to and with his Master, but that Skinner understood him down to his core and was strong enough to take him and all the emotional baggage that came with him, and to love him no matter what.

Strangely, the branding had not, in Mulder's mind, been so much about himself proving his love to his Master by taking his mark on his body, but instead it had confirmed to him that Skinner was strong enough to be his Master - and so much more besides. Skinner hadn't backed down from such a challenging expression of his love for his slave, and Mulder had known in that moment of being branded, that he had at last found someone strong enough to be his soulmate.

"Dressed?" Mulder blinked, feeling confused. He hadn't been clothed all week, save for the dressing covering his brand, and he would, quite happily, never be clothed again. He felt free in his nudity, and he loved the sensation of being constantly available for his Master's use.

"Yes. We're having a few guests around later," Skinner told him, striding over to the closet.

"We are?" Mulder got up, feeling like an idiot for being so slow on the uptake.

"Yeah." Skinner glanced over his shoulder and grinned at his slave. "You don't have any idea what day it is today do you?" He said.

"No." Mulder shrugged. "Should I?" He asked with a frown.

"It's New Year's Eve," Skinner told him. "And since you missed out on your branding party, I thought you'd be dying to show off that brand of yours to at least some of your friends."

Mulder's stomach did a flip; he had been enjoying his closeness with Skinner so much that he didn't

want to be jolted out of it in this way. The thought of the apartment being crowded with people was unbearable, and made him feel stifled. Skinner must have noticed his expression because he caught hold of Mulder's shoulders and held them firmly.

"Don't panic. It's just a few of our closest friends," he told his slave. Mulder brightened.

"Ian and Perry?" He asked eagerly.

"Yes." Skinner nodded. "And Elaine and David."

"That's it?"

"Yes...well, except for a couple of mystery guests who may or may not show up." Skinner smiled mysteriously.

"Mystery guests?" Mulder frowned. "You know how I hate mysteries, Master."

"Hmmm, yes I do. You seem to have built a whole career on that particular character quirk," Skinner grinned. "But I'm afraid you'll have to wait. Now go and take a shower while I lay out the clothes I want you to wear."

He turned Mulder around, pointed him in the direction of the bathroom, and gave his ass a hearty slap for good measure. Mulder gave a little yelp of complaint but he was grinning as he scampered to the shower. He wasn't sure when Skinner had organised this little party, as he was sure that they hadn't spent a second outside of each other's company for the past week, but then his Master moved in mysterious ways his wonders to perform, and Mulder knew better than to question him on the subject.

He showered and washed his hair swiftly, suddenly excited at the prospect of being able to show off his brand to their friends. He'd only been able to see the brand when his Master had changed the dressing covering it, but he got a thrill out of it every time and was looking forward to being able to dispense with the dressing for good soon. True, the brand wasn't exactly looking very beautiful at the moment, being scabbed over as it healed, but he was too proud of it to care much about that. Nobody had yet seen the brand except for himself and his Master; Perry and Ian had been supposed to drop by the day after Christmas, but Skinner had felt that Mulder was still on too much of a post-branding high to receive visitors. Beside, it just felt right that Master and slave spend some time alone together after the branding. However, their vacation time was drawing to a close, and although Skinner had been able to finagle them a few extra days they had to return to work shortly, so Mulder supposed now was a good time for his Master to re-acclimatise them both back to the everyday world again.

Mulder skipped out of the bathroom, full of excited anticipation – only to stop short when he saw the outfit his Master had laid out for him on the bed.

"No!" He said. "No, no, no, no, no. Absolutely not."

Skinner grinned at him. "Ah, the little slave thinks he has a choice about what he's going to wear this evening. How amusing."

"I'm not little, it's not amusing and I'm not wearing this!" Mulder said firmly, waving his hand at the turquoise, gold-trimmed, gauzy and totally transparent harem pants lying on the bed, together with a gold harness. A pair of aqua blue, pointy-toed slippers was laid out on the floor beside the bed. This wasn't the outfit that Skinner had dressed him in when they'd stayed at Murray's beach house, but it was very similar, and, to Mulder's eyes at least, just as repulsive.

"Of course you are." Skinner gave an infuriating beam of a smile.

"What are you wearing?" Mulder's eyes narrowed suspiciously.

"You're looking at it." Skinner gestured to his chinos and the thin polo neck sweater he had on.

"And Elaine, David, Perry and Ian – they're just coming in jeans and casual stuff too, aren't they?" Mulder demanded. Skinner's grin broadened.

"Yes, I should think so." He nodded.

"So why do I have to be dressed up like...like...?" Mulder glanced at the obnoxious outfit again, floundering for words.

"Like some kind of exotic slaveboy?" Skinner raised an eyebrow. "Oh, I don't know – maybe because that's exactly what you *are*, boy. My exotic, branded, *obedient* slaveboy." The inflection on the word obedient wasn't lost on Mulder. He had only been seen by one other person apart from his Master in a harem pant outfit and that had been someone Mulder didn't know, so although it had been embarrassing, it wasn't nearly as bad as this...and yet...on some level, Mulder knew himself to be deeply turned on by the scenario. He wasn't seriously questioning his Master's orders – they both knew he'd wear the harem pants but they both enjoyed his protests all the same – it added spice to their relationship. Skinner reached out and placed a hand on the back of his slave's neck, both reassuring and threatening at the same time. "You know, I could have sworn that you signed a contract submitting yourself and your body to my total care and control," he murmured, in a deep, sexy voice. "Hmm?"

"Yes, Master," Mulder whispered, completely in thrall to that rich, dark, masterful voice. He loved it when his Master got all uber-top on him; it made his spine tingle and his stomach do somersaults.

"So," Skinner purred, running a hand possessively over Mulder's body. "I think it's time you got dressed in this nice outfit your Master has so thoughtfully provided for you. Right, boy?" His hand closed over one of Mulder's butt cheeks and squeezed, firmly and affectionately, just enough to make Mulder squirm. Mulder considered continuing with his protest but he was too turned on by the way Skinner was holding him.

"Yes, Master," he murmured meekly. Skinner released his slave, giving him a firm little push in the direction of the bed, and Mulder went and picked up the gauzy fabric laid out for him. There was a time when he would have been horrified to be displayed publicly in such a costume, but now that he was being more honest with himself, and he was more relaxed in his slavery, he couldn't deny that he felt a sexual thrill at the thought. He was glad his Master always insisted on him obeying his orders even when he balked; Skinner usually knew what was best for his slave - and Mulder invariably ended up enjoying whatever his Master demanded of him.

"I thought the harem pants would be best because they'd show off your brand," Skinner told him, in a low, husky, seductive voice, coming up behind him and caressing his buttocks again with the casual caress of an owner touching his property. "And I want everyone to see your brand so there's no point in you wearing jeans. Besides, I've always wanted to show you off in harem pants to a wider audience."

Mulder made a little face, but only for the sake of it. Skinner roared with laughter and turned his slave around to face him.

"Okay, little one, I'm going to take your dressing off. You can keep it off all evening – I want Perry to examine how it's healing in any case. Remember that you don't have the dressing on though – don't go bumping into things or it'll hurt."

"Trust me, Master, I know exactly how much it hurts," Mulder said in a heartfelt tone.

Skinner stopped what he was doing and bestowed a gentle kiss on his slave's lips. There was no need for him to say anything; he was simply acknowledging what Mulder had gone through in order to have his Master's mark imprinted so permanently on his skin, and what it meant to both of them that he did.

"All right – get dressed," Skinner said when he released his slave. Mulder glanced down at his newly revealed brand with a dreamy sigh.

"You'll be able to see it just as well through the harem pants," Skinner pointed out, holding up the virtually transparent scrap of gauzy fabric. "In fact, it'll look even better seen through the gauze while it's still healing."

"Yes, Master," Mulder agreed softly, unable to continue pretending that he wasn't enjoying every single second of this. "Uh, Master...will there be any other...uh, accoutrements you'd like me to wear." He thought of the butt plug his Master had inserted last time he had worn harem pants.

"No." Skinner shook his head. "I don't want anything to detract from that brand – or your pride in bearing it on your flesh. Enjoy tonight, Fox. You have my permission to show off."

Mulder gave a little grin of delight at that news and began to dress himself swiftly in the outfit he both loved and hated.

"You will have to wear make up though," Skinner added, just as Mulder finished dressing himself. "Mascara, eyeliner and some lip gloss to make that pouty lower lip of yours shine and shimmer so appealingly."

"Oh god," Mulder sighed, but he was grinning despite himself and submitted quite happily to his Master's ministrations until Skinner was finally satisfied with him. Then his Master stood Mulder in front of the mirror and had him take a good look at himself. Mulder's heart usually sank at moments like this, but now it did a flip of excitement. He did, he had to admit, look pretty damn good. The harem pants clung to his long legs, accentuating them, and the brand was visible through the transparent fabric, yet also tantalisingly covered, so you could only get little glimpses of it as the fabric rustled and rippled when Mulder moved. The little gold harness showed off his nipple rings to perfection, and his gold collar nestled at his throat, complementing the harness. The pants weren't open at the crotch and buttocks like the pair he'd worn at the beach house, and Mulder guessed that was why Skinner had selected

them for this evening – beautiful those his slave was, it might be a little distracting if his charms were so completely on display during a casual dinner party. The slippers finished the outfit, and Mulder had to admit that he did look fabulously exotic with the eyeliner and the lush lips. He totally understood why his Master couldn't resist kissing him passionately several times, resulting in him having to reapply the lip gloss as a result. Mulder had never had much interest in his physical appearance before becoming Skinner's slave, but his Master was beginning to make him understand the importance of presenting himself to his best advantage, so that his Master always had something good to look at. Mulder had never viewed himself as a particularly good looking man, but over the past year he had gradually come to see himself through his Master's eyes and now he was ready to admit that it was a compelling sight. He was so shocked by his lush appearance that he was still busy gazing at himself when the doorbell rang. Skinner grinned.

"That will be Ian and Perry – I told Perry to get here early so he could take a look at how your brand is healing. Why don't you go and greet your guests?"

"\*My\* guests?" Mulder grumbled good-naturedly as he went to open the door, wincing dramatically at the way his pants flowed with his legs as he walked, making him feel utterly ridiculous. "Yeah, right, because I invited them, didn't I? I had a choice in the guest list. I..." He gave a yelp as his Master delivered a firm slap to his backside which felt almost naked, covered only by the thin layer of gauze, and then grinned and cast Skinner a delighted glance over his shoulder. The truth was that he loved acting up just a little, in order to get his Master's attention – and it was rare for him not to have his Master's attention, as he well knew. Mulder scampered along the hallway and opened the door to his guests without so much as a twinge of embarrassment. He knew that not so long ago he'd have found being dressed like this in front of others excruciating, but the last ten months with his Master had shown him he had an exhibitionist streak, and he had stopped being ashamed of that fact.

His Master was right – it was Ian and Perry. Ian took one look at him and his face broke into a huge grin.

"Oh god. Your Master is fiendish!" He proclaimed, stepping inside and motioning Mulder to do a twirl. Mulder obliged, grinning himself. Yes, this was ridiculous, but it was amusing too, and these were his closest scene friends who had seen him at both his best and worst – and in various stages of undress as well. There was nothing about his current costume that would shock them – although he did feel a twinge of humiliation at the way his virtually transparent outfit displayed his body so publicly while everyone else was comfortably covered up.

Perry raised his eyebrows heavenwards at Mulder's costume, and stepped around the two subs to present Skinner with a bottle of wine. The tops chatted for a few minutes while Mulder submitted to the indignity of having Ian laugh shamelessly over his costume, and then Skinner beckoned Mulder over.

"Fox, come here - I want Perry to check out your scar," he said with a click of his fingers. Mulder went obediently to where his Master was standing and knelt beside him.

"Ah. You'll have to teach me that trick," Perry muttered with a rueful glance in Ian's direction. "\*My\* sub just laughs when I give him orders."

"Well, it does take some discipline – and a considerable amount of training," Skinner commented, glancing down at Mulder who felt his ears beginning to flush. "It's hard work...but the rewards make it

worthwhile I think. Don't they, boy?" His hand brushed Mulder's head and Mulder leaned into his Master's blunt, caressing fingers. He never could resist it when Skinner fondled him.

"Yes, Master," he replied, smiling up at Skinner somewhat hazily.

"Hmm, well, he seems different..." Perry mused. "Not that he wasn't obedient before but...well, no, let's be honest, he did have his bad days." He glanced at Skinner and Mulder remembered all too well the dark days after he'd mutilated the wound Krycek had left on his chest. "But...I don't know, he seems to be practically glowing this evening. Can a branding make that much difference, Walter?" Perry frowned.

Skinner shook his head. "I don't think it was the branding so much as what it symbolised for both of us after all we've been through, Perry," he replied. "But we're in a good place right now. It feels as if everything finally came together last week when I branded Fox. We're both still a little high on those feelings I guess."

"I can see that." Perry glanced down at Mulder appreciatively. "Okay...well, let's take a look at the brand in question, shall we?"

Skinner nodded, clicking his fingers at Mulder again, and pointing to the couch. Mulder slid his harem pants down a little way and sat on the couch, and Perry fished his glasses out of his pocket, perched them on his nose, and sat down beside him. He leaned forward and examined the brand silently, without touching it. He observed it for several long seconds, before finally glancing back up at Skinner again.

"Is it okay?" Skinner asked, and Mulder didn't miss the note of anxiety in his Master's voice. Perry smiled, and removed his glasses.

"It's healing perfectly, Walter," he proclaimed. "I can see you've been following my instructions to the letter. There's no infection – it all looks like it should...and it's very well done too. A nice, clear mark." He nodded approvingly.

"Ah, I love it when he's in Doctor mode," Ian murmured to Mulder conspiratorially, leaning over his shoulder to gaze at the brand. "He's so..."

"Masterful?" Mulder raised an eyebrow. Ian grinned.

"Well, I guess it shouldn't come as any surprise that *that* turns me on," he said with a shrug. "Seriously though, Mulder – the brand is beautiful." There was a note of reverence in his voice.

"You'll be wanting one now," Mulder replied. Ian glanced at Perry who had stood up and was busy talking animatedly to Skinner, and then back at Mulder.

"I don't think that's something I could persuade Perry to do," he said with a little shrug. "He's great, Mulder, but let's not pretend he's anything like the great god of a Master you've landed yourself with. Perry..." Ian shrugged again. "We get on really well, Mulder. He's the nicest person – incredibly easy going and we have a lot in common, but he's never pretended to be as into the scene as I am. He does

things to please me, but, well, I think branding would be a step too far..." He paused, and then gave a little sigh, "For me as well as for him," he finished. Mulder frowned.

"I thought..."

"I know...but the truth is that I think I prefer living vicariously through you than actually doing some of this stuff myself. It's a good fantasy...but, not many of us can pull it off in real life the way you and Walter have, Mulder. It took me a long time to admit that to myself but it's true. Some of us have to settle for being mere mortals, and for living a more normal kind of life. There have been times I've envied you so much, my friend, but the truth is that I couldn't handle the kind of relationship you have with Walter. It works for you two, but it'd be too much for me. I'm glad someone is out there doing it, and I'm glad that I've stopped beating myself up about the fact that it isn't me." He gave a wistful little smile. Mulder gazed at him, still frowning.

"I had no idea you were envious of me...Christ, when I think how badly and how often I've screwed up..."

"Oh, you've screwed up spectacularly!" Ian agreed, with a laugh. "You've lived the life for all of us, Mulder, screw-ups notwithstanding. Your life has been a rollercoaster, one huge drama after another, but I'm more of a steady, even keel kind of guy and I couldn't cope with all the shit you've been through. It's taken me a long time to appreciate that fact."

Mulder gazed at his friend uncertainly. Ian's words bothered him on some level. He knew what Ian meant – his life thus far, and not just the past ten months either, *\*had\** been a rollercoaster ride. Maybe he was addicted to the constant dramas and thrills, but, as he gazed across the room at his Master, he had the sudden sure knowledge that Skinner was not, and he felt a pang of guilt for taking this basically quiet, kind, steady person, and dragging him into the endless highs and lows that life with Fox Mulder entailed. He hadn't thought about his life in these terms before, but suddenly he wondered whether Ian might be the one who had got it right, who had a sense of proportion about his sexual needs...and yet, he wouldn't give up being his Master's slave for anything.

"Being Walter's slave isn't *\*what\** I am," he murmured to his friend, "It's *\*who\** I am. Everything that's happened over the past ten months has basically arisen from me struggling to come to terms with that essential fact. Ian, you might have envied me all this time, but I envy you the way you've always been so comfortable with your sexuality. I might have Walter, but I've been all over the place emotionally on this journey I've been on. I've only recently come to terms with the more...uh, extreme aspects of what I need, and what he gives me. I couldn't have sat here, dressed like this, a few months ago, and yet the truth is that I love it, deep inside. I'd have fought him about it not so long ago though – fought myself really I suppose, because I didn't like myself for having these fantasies."

Ian's eyes were suspiciously misty and he patted Mulder awkwardly on the shoulder.

"Maybe we should talk about football or something now," he said, in a slightly choked voice.

Mulder laughed out loud at that and they changed the subject but he was still mulling over what Ian had told him. Supposing, he wondered to himself, that he was addicted to this kind of life, to the rollercoaster, the constant highs and lows? Supposing he was incapable of ever just settling down and living peacefully? Supposing he would always keep on sabotaging this relationship by continually

creating some new crisis for himself and his Master to deal with? Mulder didn't want to put either himself or Skinner through some of the wilder stunts he'd pulled over the past 10 months ever again and yet...the profiler in him was worried that it was so much a part of his pattern of behaviour that he'd never be able to break it.

The doorbell rang again a few minutes later and he jumped, startled out of his reverie. He was pleased to be able to push these troubling thoughts aside, and was keen to show off his brand to the new visitors so he got to his feet eagerly and went to the door to find Elaine standing there, with her sub, David, in tow. Elaine rarely ever dressed informally – she was a woman who loved to show off her voluptuous figure and long, golden hair whenever she could, and she was therefore clad in a tight-fitting, blue velvet dress that matched the colour of her eyes – it was very similar to the one she'd worn to his abortive branding party only not as dressy. She wasn't a slender woman, and the dress hugged all her curves in a way that was incredibly sexy. David certainly couldn't take his eyes off her. He was dressed impeccably too, in charcoal chinos and a shirt the exact same shade of blue as his Mistress's dress – although Mulder had the feeling that, like himself, David might have been ordered what to wear.

"Well, you're looking better than when I last saw you, Mulder," Elaine said, sweeping him up against her ample bosom and bestowing a firm kiss on his cheek. Mulder shook David's hand and then allowed Elaine to examine his brand through the gauzy fabric of his harem pants. "It's beautiful, my dear," she told him, patting his arm fondly. "And thank god it finally happened. I always said you wouldn't really be content until Walter put his brand on you and now...well, looking at you now, I know I was right."

"Yeah." Mulder could feel himself flushing slightly. "It's such a big deal, Elaine. I had no idea how much of a big deal until it happened."

"I knew, and I think Walter knew...but you've always been a little clueless about your own needs, my dear," she said gently. Mulder couldn't argue with that statement, and at that moment the doorbell rang again.

"Ah, that'll be Walter's mystery guests," he grinned. His Master appeared in the hallway, and Mulder glanced at him for permission to greet their new guests. Skinner nodded, and Mulder took a deep breath and then opened the door. Hammer was standing in the hallway, and, next to him, leaning heavily on a walking cane, was Murray. He was dressed in one of his usual flowing kaftans, in a bright red and gold pattern, but even the voluminous folds of the garment couldn't hide the fact that he had lost weight during his recent serious illness. His cheeks were a little pale and sunken, but his eyes sparkled as brightly as ever with that insatiable zest for living that nothing, not even a serious heart attack, could suppress.

"Ah, I see that the young cub has been taken by the scruff of his neck and finally offered up to the fiery kiss of the iron!" He proclaimed loudly, pointing at Mulder's brand with his walking cane.

"Oh god!" Hammer raised his eyes heavenwards. "This is the first time he's been out since I got him back from the hospital, and I knew he'd ham it up."

"Murray?" Mulder shook the grizzled top enthusiastically by the hand. "Are you okay?"

"Yes, my dear boy! I'm back! The rumours of my death were greatly exaggerated," Murray announced, in a loud, stage whisper.

"I don't think anyone thought you were dead, Murray," Skinner disputed, laughing as he came forward to greet his friends. "But you're certainly looking a damn sight better than you did when I last saw you."

"And that," Murray declared in a loud voice, "is despite the true hideousness of hospital food, and this new diet Hammer has me on which is fare only suitable for those of the lapine persuasion."

"He means rabbits," Hammer said, making a face. "He's been complaining about the new diet non-stop from the moment I got him home."

"There was a time," Murray said, in that deep, booming, dramatic voice of his, "when a submissive knew his place – but this boy here," He tapped Hammer lightly with his walking cane on his backside, "Hardly even listens to his Master these days," he lamented.

"Murray, when you talk everyone listens as you well know," Hammer replied, and Mulder noticed how tenderly he took Murray's arm, and helped him slowly into the other room. Murray might be able to put on a good show, but it was clear that he was still recuperating from his heart attack.

At some point, and Mulder didn't know when as he was sure he hadn't let his Master out of his sight for the past week since his branding, Skinner had managed to stock the fridge with food. Maybe he'd ordered it online one night while his slave slept, Mulder thought as they ate a simple pasta dish with salad, followed by a delicious chocolate and coconut pie. The conversation around the dinner table was lively, and Mulder felt himself falling silent. He gazed at the talking, laughing faces around him and wondered whether he'd ever get used to this kind of easy normality. These people, somehow, slowly, and without him even realising it, had become his friends, and he'd never really had any friends before, except for Scully and Skinner himself. He felt as if he was really part of this gathering, that he actually belonged in this easy, dinner party intimacy, and yet that tiny, doubtful voice inside questioned whether he could be happy like this in the long term. If occasions like this were his life, instead of the dramas that had marked it so far, would that be enough? Would simple friendship and the company of people who knew and accepted him be sufficient for him, or would he always hanker after something more? Did he need those battles with Krycek, and his endless quest to chase his own tail looking for answers to questions he had long since stopped understanding? He didn't know the answer even to that question, and was relieved when his Master noticed his silence and clicked his fingers to call his slave to his side and kneel beside to him. Mulder felt a sense of calm seep into his bones as he knelt there, excused from any obligation to be sociable, but all the same he knew this wasn't the answer he had been looking for. He couldn't use his Master to hide from the doubts he had about himself and his own personality, but for now, at least, it was relaxing to have permission to switch off from his problems. He enjoyed listening to his friends' conversation, and it was easier not to feel he had to contribute; with Murray and Elaine present it was hard for anyone to get a word in edgeways in any case. After dinner their guests went to sit in the living room, but Skinner hung back and looked down on his slave.

"Is everything all right, Fox?" He asked softly. "You went very quiet."

"I know. I was...a bit overwhelmed," Mulder admitted.

"That's fair enough." Skinner nodded. "It's been just you and me all week and it must have felt strange to you suddenly seeing all these people."

"Yeah." Mulder managed a wry smile. He hadn't lied to his Master, but he hadn't told him the whole truth either – he wasn't ready to share these doubts just yet. He wanted his Master to have some peace, and he didn't want to worry Skinner that there was even a possibility that he'd take off at any moment and embroil them both in another crisis just because he was addicted to a rollercoaster kind of lifestyle.

"Come on - we've left our guests for long enough."

Skinner motioned with his head and they walked into the living room, where Ian was giggling hysterically over something Murray had said, while Hammer was shaking his head in mock embarrassment. Mulder waited until Skinner was seated, and then knelt beside his Master, resting his chin on Skinner's thigh as he usually did.

"I have an announcement to make," Elaine proclaimed when everyone was settled. Mulder lifted his head, feeling like a curious puppy. Elaine glanced at David and Mulder lifted his head even higher – David had an expression of anticipation in his eyes as he gazed back at his Mistress. "I'm delighted to announce that there's going to be a wedding!" Elaine said. "A scene wedding of course!" She added with a grin. "I've decided to make an honest man of David and take him as my husband." There was silence for a moment and then the room reverberated to the sound of congratulations, and Murray saying over and over again, "My, my, my!" as if he'd never heard such extraordinary news although he didn't \*look\* very surprised so Mulder guessed that he probably already knew.

"A scene wedding?" Mulder questioned, wondering what that would entail.

"Oh yes." Elaine gave a broad grin. "Murray and Hammer have kindly lent us the use of their house for the ceremony, and Murray is doing us the honour of conducting the ceremony himself." She leaned over and patted Murray's hand affectionately and Mulder couldn't help smiling at how delighted Murray looked. He guessed that having something like this to prepare for, and an audience to impress, was exactly what Murray required to aid in his recuperation. "I will have a carriage, drawn by real human horses..." Elaine continued.

"Can I volunteer to be one of your ponies?" Ian interrupted eagerly.

"I'd be delighted, dear," she replied, patting his head fondly. "You'll have to be dressed appropriately of course." Ian's beaming smile made it clear that he had been hoping that would be part of the deal. "I'm having my dress made especially for the occasion – and David is working on his own outfit." She paused, and brushed her hand gently over her sub's cheek. Mulder was grinning inanely now; David was a quiet kind of person, but Mulder had no doubt that the other sub adored his Mistress with every bone in his body – and that he was exactly the right man for Elaine. "I'm hoping that that all my dear friends here today will join us on our big day," Elaine said, glancing around the room.

"When is it?" Walter asked, a note of anxiety in his voice. Mulder frowned, wondering what \*that\* was about, and watched as his Master got out his diary and started flicking through it.

"Six weeks." Elaine pointed to the date in Skinner's diary over his shoulder, and he breathed a visible sigh of relief.

"We will be going, won't we, Walter?" Muder asked softly.

"You bet," Skinner replied, squeezing his slave's shoulder affectionately. "Elaine, David, this is wonderful news. I'm delighted for you both."

"I had one more thing I wanted to ask of you, Walter dear," Elaine said. "You and I have been friends for a long time, and while this won't be a conventional wedding, I would be very pleased if you'd walk me to the altar."

Skinner got to his feet, and bestowed a little kiss on Elaine's hand. "I'd be delighted," he said in a suspiciously husky voice. "I'll visit Elliott next week and ask him to make me something..." He paused, and grinned, "appropriate to wear," he finished. "And I'll ask Donald to make something equally fitting for my slave," he added, casting a glance at Mulder.

"Oh god," Mulder muttered under his breath.

At that moment they were all distracted by Murray's booming voice informing them that it was exactly midnight and the new year was upon them, and there was a wild scramble to fill glasses with champagne and make a toast. Then, finally, an hour or so later, their guests took their leave of them, and Mulder and Skinner were alone together once more.

"Thank you, Master," Mulder said, as he closed the door behind Ian. "I enjoyed this evening."

"You're welcome, boy." Skinner bestowed a kiss on Mulder's cheek as he passed him on his way back into the living room. Mulder hesitated, and then ducked into the hall cupboard, and drew out a large package, bound up with string. He followed Skinner into the living room, and handed him the parcel. "What's this?" Skinner frowned.

"Your Christmas present," Mulder replied, with a guilty grimace. "I'm sorry – I've been meaning to give it to you all week but we were so..." He waved his hand in the air and Skinner grinned in acknowledgement, understanding the gesture, "That I kept forgetting. Then I thought that as it was a bit late for Christmas, it'd make a good New Year present instead. So - Happy New Year, Walter." He settled down at his Master's feet to watch him open the parcel. Skinner's blunt fingers made short work of it, and he peeled back the paper to reveal the painting underneath. Mulder held his breath, hoping that his Master would like it. Skinner gazed at it wordlessly, but the expression in his eyes told Mulder all he needed to know.

"Fox...how...no, \*when\* did you...?" Skinner glanced from the painting to Mulder and back again. The picture depicted, in a few skilful lines, Skinner, gazing down lovingly and protectively at his slave, who was staring back up at him with an expression of appropriately worshipful adulation on his face.

"There was an artist at that fetish fair you took me to," Mulder grinned. "I commissioned him to do it and he made a few sketches without you noticing. I also sent him some polaroids so he could flesh it out some more. It isn't as perfect as if we'd sat for him but I wanted it to be a surprise, and..."

"It's beautiful," Skinner said, shaking his head as he gazed at the picture. It *was* pretty good in Mulder's opinion. He'd been very impressed when he'd first opened the package; it wasn't so much the details of their features that the artist had captured, as the expressions in their eyes, and the way they were looking at each other. It was the perfect representation of the Master/slave bond, and that was why Mulder loved it so much.

"I thought we could hang it in the Playroom," Mulder suggested.

"I think I'd prefer to hang it in the bedroom – where we can see it every day," Skinner replied. "Come here." Skinner beckoned him over, and planted a loving kiss on his slave's mouth. "Thank you," he said softly, and then, without missing a beat, he said, in the same breath: "Wanda."

Mulder was surprised by the command, but he knew better than to hesitate or question the order, and immediately knelt down in front of his Master, lowered his harem pants, and held his butt cheeks open so that Skinner could enter him and use him. He loved being used like this, and his cock was half hard just from hearing the command and knowing the intent behind it. He leaned his upper body against the coffee table, and waited to feel his Master's hard cock pushing into his ass – so he was completely taken by surprise when he felt a warm, wet tongue pushing inside him instead. He gave a little squawk and almost lost his balance, but his Master's hands on his hips kept him steady. Skinner was an expert rimmer, and Mulder quickly surrendered to the sheer pleasure that skilful tongue was giving him. He moaned, and his cock was so hard it was leaking, but he knew better than to expect it to be given any release.

"Keep holding yourself open for me," Skinner growled, drawing back a little. "I want to really taste my slave's fine ass."

Mulder shivered, desperately turned on, and then moaned as Skinner's tongue dipped back inside him again, reaching even further this time, and exciting him even more. A few minutes later, after he'd been thoroughly rimmed, Skinner drew back, and Mulder opened up his legs and anus even further as he felt his Master's hands on his buttocks and then the familiar sensation of Skinner's thick, stiff cock sliding into his body. Usually his Master went hard and fast during these Wanda sessions, but on this occasion he went slowly, almost gently, his hands playing over his slave's body like a musical instrument as he slid in and out of his anus. Mulder moved his hands forwards and gripped the coffee table desperately as Skinner's slow, gentle thrusting reached a climax.

"You can come, Fox," Skinner said and for a moment Mulder wasn't sure he'd heard him right. He was rarely allowed to take his own pleasure during a Wanda session – the whole point of them was for him to make himself available to his Master for Skinner to use for his own pleasure, with no thought for his slave's enjoyment.

"Master?" Mulder panted, wanting to be sure that he'd heard correctly.

"I said you can come," Skinner purred into his ear on a forward thrust. "Any time you like, boy. Consider it a New Year's present."

Mulder didn't need telling twice. He reached down and massaged his hard cock to climax with a few strokes. He heard and felt his Master come inside him, and then Skinner rolled over onto the floor, taking his slave with him, his big arms pulling Mulder close against his chest.

"Oh god that was good, Master," Mulder murmured.

"Mmmm. It was," Skinner grinned.

"If surprising." Mulder glanced at his Master. "You've often given me the Wanda command, Master, but you've never varied how you use that command - until tonight."

"Tonight I thought I'd surprise you, the way you surprised me with that beautiful present," Skinner said, tracing a finger over his slave's lush mouth and inserting it a little way inside. "It was also something by way of a reward. You've improved a lot since the early days but I never thought I'd get you to the stage where you submitted so quickly and obediently, and so often, to that particular command. I always said that when you did it would show how completely and happily you had accepted your slavery - and it looks like we've reached that stage. Happy New Year, Fox."

Mulder smiled, and snuggled in close to his Master. "Happy New Year, Walter," he replied softly, tracing the outline of one of Skinner's nipples through his sweater. "You know, this time last year I wasn't your slave. I didn't even know you hid this surprising alter ego under those stiff white shirts and that surly office demeanour."

"I'm not surly!" Skinner protested mildly.

"Sure you are," Mulder grinned. "That's partly why I fell in love with you. Doesn't it freak you out though, thinking back to just a year ago and realising we weren't together then? I spent last New Year's Eve on my own, staking out a haunted house and freezing my ass off in the middle of nowhere..."

"On your own? Without backup?" Skinner gave him a dangerous nudge.

"It was a year ago, Master, before I became your slave," Mulder said quickly. "I was \*bad\* then."

"Hmmm," Skinner said, giving him a speculative look, as if he wasn't entirely sure that Mulder was exactly \*good\* now.

"Anyway," Mulder said, continuing hurriedly, "My point is that I had no idea that in just a year's time..." He hesitated. "My life would go from being a train wreck to being pretty damn perfect," he finished with a grin.

Skinner grinned back at him. "If I had the energy I'd fuck you again, right now, just because you're mine and I can and yes, \*that\* still gives me a thrill, boy."

"Ah, and I thought my Master, the sex god, was always up for it." Mulder snaked his hand down the front of Skinner's pants to his cock. Skinner stopped it on its way there with his own hand.

"I might be too exhausted to fuck you, but you can rest assured that my right arm is \*always\* available to hand out a good spanking," he warned.

"Ah, promises, promises," Mulder teased, and then wished he hadn't as Skinner suddenly sat up, pulled his slave over his knee, and administered several hard spanks to his backside. Skinner hadn't spanked him for over a week, as he had been very wary about damaging his slave's healing brand, but he

arranged Mulder carefully over his lap and laid into his ass with a very firm hand until Mulder was wriggling animatedly.

"I'm sorry! I take it back!" He hollered.

"Now I bet you wish you were back staking out haunted houses on your own without backup," Skinner commented. Mulder went suddenly still.

"No," he said softly, his ass glowing with pleasure at being so roundly and thoroughly chastised. "I'm exactly where I want to be, Master."

Skinner gave a little laugh, and his spansks degenerated into more playful caressing of his slave's bottom, until finally he just sat there, stroking Mulder's ass with those big, strong hands of his. "Me too, boy," he murmured softly. "Me too."

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It felt strange to go back to work a couple of days later, dressed in his usual work suit, knowing that he wore his Master's brand on his skin. Mulder couldn't help brushing his hand casually over his thigh when he was walking, and got a thrill each time as he remembered that he was an owned, branded slave, with the most magnificent Master in the world. It had taken him a long time to reach this stage, where he was so happy in his slavery and no longer fought it, and he wondered, as he bounced down the stairs to his office, whether his new found peace of mind would alter his thirst for his work. He knew he had thrown himself into the X Files in order to both pursue and avoid some of the big questions he had about himself, and now he was so content, and his Master had helped him to figure out his feelings both about his sexuality and his guilt over his lost sister, he wondered whether he might have lost his edge.

"Hey stranger...how was your Christmas?" Scully asked him the moment he stepped through the door.

"My Christmas was..." Mulder paused and gave a stupid smile. "Fantastic," he finished.

"Hmmm, I can see that. You're looking all...goofy."

"Goofy?" Mulder questioned in an outraged tone. "I don't DO goofy, Scully. I'm far too cool."

He ignored her giggle of sheer disbelief, and her muttered, "Dream on, Agent Mulder, dream on," and sat down at his desk and began sifting through the paperwork that had built up in his absence.

"Ahem," Scully said. Mulder glanced up. Scully raised an eyebrow.

"Oh. Uh, how was your Christmas, Scully?" Mulder asked hurriedly.

"Busy," she replied mysteriously. Mulder sighed.

"Okay. I'll bite. Why was it busy?"

"Because I moved into John's apartment," she told him.

"You moved in?" Mulder asked in mock-incredulous tones. "Without a wedding ring on your finger, Dana Scully? And I thought you were a good little catholic girl!"

"Well..." Scully actually blushed, "We did think - should I move in with him, or should he move in with me - but there's more room at his place for a baby...so his place won..." She trailed off, blushing even more furiously.

Mulder stared at her. "A baby?" He repeated, stunned. She bit on her lip, still flushing from the roots of her red hair to the tip of her chin.

"A baby," she repeated softly, her eyes shyly finding his.

Mulder just sat there, trying to figure out how he felt about this. She stood by her desk, staunchly holding her ground and yet clearly worried about what his reaction would be. He would be lying if he said he didn't feel a pang of something deep inside. He'd always had the feeling that in a different universe he and Scully might have been together and then this baby would be his... and yet, he knew that he wouldn't trade the life he had with his Master for anything. Maybe many other universes existed, and in one of them he and Scully were together and had a baby, but he wondered whether, fundamentally, he could ever be happy in such a world, the way he was happy in this one. He suspected not, and felt a shiver run down his spine – it was the same feeling he'd had when he learned about the spaceship that had abducted Gibson Praise; he'd felt the strangest sensation that in another universe he had been taken by that ship. He felt the same way about Scully's baby. It was as if they were all acting out variations on a theme, and some constants came up, like the spaceship and the baby, while others varied wildly, like his relationship with Skinner, and Scully's with Doggett.

"Scully, that's wonderful," he said, quietly and sincerely, getting up and taking her in his arms. He buried his face in her soft, red hair and inhaled the scent of her, a scent he knew so well. "I'm so happy for you," he whispered.

"Thank you," she replied, rubbing his back with her hands. "I'm glad. I wasn't sure how you'd feel about it. I know you have so much going on in your own life right now...but all the same...there was a time when..."

"When it could have been you and me? Yes. I know." He nodded. "But I think that would've been wrong, Scully. This is right. This is the right way for it to have happened."

She gazed at him, startled. "You say the strangest things, Mulder."

"I just have this feeling." He waved his arms around helplessly. "Don't you have it too, Scully?"

He stared at her and she bit down on her lip, and then took a deep breath.

"I...I have to admit...Mulder, you probably know this but John had a son with his ex-wife...and the little boy was abducted and murdered. When I found out I was pregnant...I didn't understand how it could have happened. You and I both know that..." She gazed at him, and then shook her head. "Well we both know it \*shouldn't\* be possible, but somehow it's happened, and so easily...I have to wonder whether this child was meant to be, for John as well as for me. For him because he lost Luke, and for me because

I thought that after all that's happened to me I couldn't have children." Her eyes were bright with tears which she blinked back. He knew how much this admission had cost her, and gave a little nod.

"It's not so hard to believe, Scully," he told her simply. "After all we've seen, how can it be so hard to believe?" He thought of himself just under a year ago, running around blindly on a mission to self-destruct, and ending up, somehow, at the feet of the one person in the world who was strong enough and who cared enough to pick him up, take care of him, and help him sort out his life. What were the chances of that happening? Sometimes it was hard not to believe in the guiding hand of fate.

She gave a sigh of relief. "That's just it, Mulder. That's how I feel. I'm not questioning this – I feel too happy."

"Good. That makes two of us then," Mulder said, squeezing her hand and then releasing her. "I'm gonna be an Uncle!"

Scully giggled at that and Mulder sat back down at his desk. He started working his way through the pile of paperwork that had built up in his absence, and then came across a stack of files, opened a couple of them, and frowned.

"What are these?" He asked, holding up the contents of one of the files.

"Those? Resumes!" Scully told him cheerfully.

"And why would I need to wade through resumes?" Mulder asked ominously. "You're not leaving me are you, Scully?"

"No." She shook her head. "But we're busy down here, Mulder, and I'll need to go on maternity leave in a few months so you'll need some help, and..."

"I managed fine before you showed up, I'm sure I can manage fine again when you go off and have your baby," he said with a frown. "I don't want anyone new in here asking stupid questions. It took me long enough to train you," he added slyly.

"Hah! It was the other way around more like," she muttered. "Mulder, I'm sorry, but we're having help and that's that."

Mulder's eyes narrowed. "Did you go over my head on this?" He demanded. Scully pursed her lips and made no reply. "Oh god. You went to Skinner didn't you?" He sighed. "And he approved this?"

"Yes. He thought it was a good idea. He thinks you work too hard," Scully said.

"We'll see about that." Mulder reached out a hand to pick up the phone when there was a brief knock at the door and his Master entered the tiny basement office.

"Agent Scully. Agent Mulder." Skinner nodded at each of them. "Ah, I see you've found the resumes, Agent Mulder. I thought you'd be calling me about now so I decided to save you the effort."

"There have been times, god knows, when the X Files department has needed help – usually when I have to go through my expenses report in front of that strange committee you always bring in when I go particularly over-budget." Mulder frowned meaningfully at his boss and Master. "So if there's any extra money going around I'd rather it was channelled into the work and not into hiring another person."

"I thought you'd say that, but there are more X Files cases now than ever before, and you could do with an extra pair of hands around here," Skinner said pleasantly. "You work too hard, Agent Mulder, and while you might have been happy running yourself into the ground before, now that you're more, uh, settled, in your home life, you aren't putting in the hours you once were – so the cases are building up. To be honest, the X Files department has always been undermanned – but while you were doing the work of two people the FBI was taking advantage of that fact. It's time that stopped. You're too important to us for us to mis-use that unique mind of yours. Accept the help, Agent."

"Is that an order?" Mulder challenged, suddenly acutely aware of the terms of his contract. He knew what his Master would say if he argued with him privately about this: *You're my slave everywhere, boy, not just at home or in the bedroom – you knew what the deal was when you signed on, and I expect your obedience here, there and everywhere.* And, in truth, was Skinner even saying anything unreasonable? He was actually paying Mulder a compliment by giving his department more help – and Mulder had to admit that it would be useful having someone else to handle the workload.

"This one is called Monica Reyes and she supposedly specialises in satanic cults," Mulder groaned, holding up a resume. "I bet all these resumes are similarly kooky. I'll get applications from every nutcase working in law enforcement."

"Hey, spooky, who are you calling a nutcase?" Scully said. "I came to work here didn't I? And you started the department and look at all the names you've been called."

Mulder glared at Scully and then tried to glare at his Master, only to find Skinner's dark brown eyes gazing back at him with just a hint of danger in them. Mulder swallowed hard, and tried to think this through. He trusted his Master to know what was best for him at home, and Skinner had never let him down there – maybe it was time to trust that he knew what was best at work too. Mulder knew he had a tendency to throw himself into his work to the exclusion of everything else in his life, and he also knew that his Master would only let him do that up to a point; the moment Mulder looked as if he was heading for self-destruct, Skinner would haul him back in. Sometimes that experience was painful, and sometimes it just made him angry, but Mulder knew that he trusted his Master with all of his life, and not just his sex life.

"Okay, okay." Mulder held up his hands with a sigh. "I give in."

"Thank you, Agent," Skinner said softly.

Mulder glanced at his Master from under his eyelashes, and then brushed his hand meaningfully over his thigh, just where his brand was. Skinner smiled, noticing the gesture, and briefly touched his fingers to his stiff white shirt, which Mulder knew hid the exquisitely beautiful fox tattoo on his chest. They shared a little moment, just the two of them, both of them acknowledging the bond between them and how that had influenced Mulder's decision, and then Skinner nodded at his agents, and left the room.

Mulder spent the next few days alternately interviewing candidates for the new position in the X Files department and catching up on the case files that had been left on his desk over the holidays. He fell back into his work so quickly that he knew he had been worrying about nothing before; he still loved his job, only now he'd achieved a better balance between his work and his home life. He was surprised to find that Monica Reyes actually turned out to be a fascinating woman with a lot of relevant experience and an open mind – and she won him over, much to Scully's disgust, by telling him how she had been following his work for years, and how in awe of him she was. He gave her the job on the spot.

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Later that week, Skinner took his slave to be measured for his wedding outfit. Mulder almost laughed out loud when he saw his old friend Donald, now looking for all the world like a younger Elliott. The two men wore matching grey suits, with the same pink handkerchiefs and ties. They looked immaculate - and completely and utterly besotted with each other.

"So, how's it working out, Donny?" Mulder asked as Donald measured him for whatever outlandish outfit he was sure his Master was going to make him wear. "I mean, with Elliott?"

"It's perfect," Donald breathed, a rather silly smile spreading across his face. "Thank you so much, Mulder."

"Don't thank me – I'm pretty sure it was Walter who got you two together. I just got you drunk." Mulder grinned, remembering that entirely memorable night. "Did Elliott tan your hide for that by the way?"

Donald flushed a shade of vivid pink, all the way up to his earlobes. "Mulder!" He hissed.

"Well, you watched my Master spank the hell out of me, so I don't see why you should be so coy about it," Mulder chided. "Come on, Donny – spill the beans."

"It's private," Donald hissed. "But yes...he was a little, uh, firm with me. He still is – but only when I play up for his attention and I don't usually because... spanking \*hurts\*, Mulder. You never told me that!"

"Well, duh!" Mulder shook his head. "It does hurt, Don, but...it's a good hurt." He grinned.

"Well, I like the idea of it more than the reality...although I love it when we play act it. I hate it when he does it for real because I don't like knowing that I've upset him or disappointed him in some way. I just want him to be proud of me."

"Hell, I'm sure he is, Don," Mulder grinned. "I can tell just by the way he looks at you."

Donald gave a cheerful little smile in return and his cheeks flushed an even deeper shade of bubble gum pink. Mulder chuckled – Donald was the easiest person in the world to tease.

"So, tell me, Don," Mulder said, lowering his voice into a whisper, "what does Walter have planned for me to wear to this wedding?"

Donald straightened up and put away his tape measure. "I can't tell you that I'm afraid, Mulder," he said, with a totally professional, and entirely evil smile. "I've been sworn to secrecy. One thing I do know

though is that you're going to attract one hell of a lot of admiring glances." And with that he sauntered out of the cubicle, leaving Mulder to reflect on the fact that Donald wasn't the only one who was easily teased.

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Mulder spent a busy few days in New Orleans with Monica Reyes, investigating a case of apparent bodily possession by an otherworldly entity. Reyes proved to be an able, if sometimes slightly annoying person to have around, with her endless questions and sunny disposition. Mulder found her new-age outlook on life thoroughly exasperating, and was keen to dispel any preconceptions she might have that working on the X Files was going to be some kind of a spiritual journey. In his experience, the X Files were about getting your shoes covered in acidic green slime and taking regular trips to the hospital, and he didn't want her to be in any doubt about the reality of their work. A part of him was secretly hoping she'd give up and he'd be able to report back to Skinner and Scully that she hadn't worked out, but, much to his annoyance, she seemed to love her first case, despite his best efforts to make the whole thing seem ten times more frightening than it actually was.

They returned to the office, where Monica began submitting the usual expenses report for a new pair of shoes and a cell phone, under Scully's expert and well practiced tutelage, and Mulder began typing up the case report. He waited until Scully and Monica had left the office to visit the cafeteria, and then reached for the phone.

"Skinner," his Master answered tersely.

"Hey. It's me – I'm home," Mulder replied. "Miss me?"

"You've only been gone 3 days," Skinner pointed out.

"Bet the bed's been kinda cold without me though."

"Wanda functions very well as a hot water bottle."

"Hah. Well, I know you missed me, and I'm sure as hell you missed my, uh, more personal services," Mulder riposted seductively.

"And I sure as hell hope Scully and Reyes aren't there with you right now listening to this," Skinner replied.

"Nah - they went in search of muffins...which is, of and by itself, an X File. Before Reyes came along Scully only ate low fat yoghurt – now she can't exist without regular infusions of pastries every few hours. There used to be a time when I could bribe her with muffins but now she eats several a day that just doesn't work any more," Mulder said mournfully.

"She *is* pregnant," Skinner reminded him. "She's eating for two now."

"Hmmm. So what have you been doing in my absence?"

"I went back to my old gym – did some boxing." Skinner's voice sounded distracted.

"You beat someone to a pulp without taking me along to watch?" Mulder asked mournfully. "You know I love it when you do all that he-man stuff."

"I didn't beat anybody to a pulp. I got creamed. I'm completely out of practice."

"You okay? Were you hurt?" Mulder frowned, finding it hard to imagine anyone besting his tall, strong Master in a fight.

"Just a little banged up. A couple of bruises but I'm fine," Skinner said dismissively.

"So, any chance of you leaving early tonight?" Mulder asked, with what he hoped was a purr in his voice. "I could rub something into those bruises..."

"Sorry, Fox," Skinner said, with a regretful little sigh. "But I'm snowed under here – I can't seem to finish this mountain of paperwork, and I've got one hell of a headache that won't go away."

"Sounds to me like you need some attention from your favourite slaveboy to relax you," Mulder suggested in a throaty voice. Skinner gave a wry, deep chuckle but it sounded strained. "You sure you're okay?" Mulder asked anxiously.

"What? Yes...just...I have to work, Fox," Skinner said in a distant tone of voice, and with that he finished the call.

Mulder sat and stared at the phone despondently. That wasn't the welcome home he'd been hoping for; he knew he'd only been away for a few days but right now, as in love with his Master as he was, that felt like a lifetime.

With a sigh, he turned in his chair and began wading his way through the little pile of case notes and evidence he had brought back with him. He worked steadily throughout the afternoon, until the phone interrupted him at about 4pm.

"Agent Mulder!" A breathless, frantic voice said on the other end of the line.

"Yes...who is this...?" Mulder stood up, a cold premonition seizing him. He had the feeling that something was wrong - very wrong.

"It's me...it's Kim...I...Agent Mulder..." She sounded distressed and tearful.

"Kim – what the hell is happening?"

"It's the Assistant Director," she whispered, and Mulder felt his heart fall several feet into the soles of his shoes – and stay there.

"What's happened...? No, wait...I'm coming up there."

Mulder dropped the phone and ran for the elevator. He waited for it to arrive for all of 6 seconds before deciding he couldn't stand there any longer and took the stairs instead, climbing them 3 at a time. As he ran, a hundred worse case scenarios flitted through his mind, the worst of them all shoving their way to

the front and refusing to go away: Maybe Krycek was back...maybe he'd come back seeking revenge, had somehow got access to the building and had put a bullet through Skinner's head. Or maybe those bruises Skinner had mentioned were more serious than he'd realised. Maybe he had damaged his heart. Mulder charged along the 5th floor corridor, barely able to breathe from anxiety, ran towards Skinner's office, threw open the door, charged inside, and stopped short, utterly shocked.

His Master was lying on the carpet in his office, with a makeshift pillow under his head. His face was white, the colour of chalk, and his eyes were closed, but what was truly shocking was the network of dark purple veins that criss-crossed his face, like a lattice. Mulder had never seen anything like them in his life before.

"He just collapsed," Kim said tearfully, from where she was kneeling beside Skinner's body. "One minute I was talking to him, and the next...his face started to go like this..." She waved a hand at the dark lines covering Skinner's face, "...and he went down like someone physically yanked his legs out from under his body. I've called for the paramedics...I put my sweater under his head..."

"Walter?" Mulder ran forward and knelt down beside his Master. "Master?" He whispered softly, placing his fingers against the big man's neck. The raised dark veins pulsed almost obscenely beneath his fingers, but he was relieved that at least his Master was still alive. Skinner made no move though, and he didn't open his eyes. "Walter?!" Mulder said again, more firmly this time, taking his Master's head in his hands. There was still no response and he looked up helplessly at Kim.

"Damnit, where are those paramedics?" He yelled.

"They're on their way," she replied, her voice catching in her throat. "Will he be okay? He has to be okay. He's the nicest man...the best boss I've ever worked for..."

Mulder grabbed one of Skinner's hands and held it tight, not caring whether Kim or anyone else saw or heard him. "You can't die now, Walter," he hissed. "Not now. Not when everything's so good. Christ, we went through all the shit we've been through just so we could reach this point, and you are not going to die on me now. You are NOT!" He said forcefully. There was no reply; Skinner remained oblivious to his slave's entreaties. "Christ, what the hell \*is\* this?" Mulder wondered out loud, his long fingers sweeping across the broad expanse of his Master's head again, examining the raised, pulsating veins. "I've never seen anything like it." It had the feeling of an X File – and Mulder had encountered enough of those in his time to be able to identify one when it was right beneath his nose. He tried desperately to remember whether any of the files in his basement office contained information on something like this, but his worry made it impossible for him to focus, and a few seconds later he was pushed out of the way as the paramedics swept into the room. He watched, helplessly, as they examined his Master and then strapped Skinner onto a gurney. Mulder jogged alongside his Master as they took Skinner downstairs and into a waiting ambulance.

"Sorry, sir," one of the paramedics said, blocking his way as he tried to get into the ambulance. "You'll have to follow on behind."

"Like fucking hell! I'm coming with him," Mulder replied, in a tone of voice that sent shivers even up his own spine, and seemed to have a similar effect on the paramedic, who backed away, startled. "I'm his

next of kin," he said firmly, suddenly thankful for the fact that Skinner had been so insistent on clarifying his slave's legal status in the wake of Murray's heart attack.

Skinner didn't move during the journey to the hospital, and he was still comatose when they wheeled him into the ER. Even then, Mulder refused to be separated from his Master. When they tried to get him to go into another room he point blank refused.

"I won't leave his side," he said, shaking his head. *I'm his slave*, he thought to himself. *If he dies I'll sit beside his goddamn grave until I die too.* He felt a stab of intense pain in his chest at the thought of his Master dying. He wasn't sure he could live without Skinner – he couldn't physically imagine a life without his Master in it, not after all they'd been through this past year, and not now, when he was more in love with his Master than at any point before. Supposing there was some kind of hideous symmetry about all this? Andrew Linker, Skinner's top, had died after helping Skinner towards an understanding and acceptance of himself and his sexuality. Supposing this was history repeating itself? He pushed that thought away, and watched, as if from a great distance, as the doctors swarmed all over his Master.

"Sir?" A sturdy, no-nonsense, black doctor took hold of his arm and forced him to look away from the scene in front of him, where his Master was having tubes inserted into his arms, and to look into her eyes instead.

"What is it? What's happened to him?" Mulder asked.

"We don't know," the doctor said gently, seeing his obvious distress.

"You don't know what's wrong with him?" Mulder shook his head incredulously. "Christ – surely he can't look like that and it not be obvious what the hell is wrong with him!"

"Nobody's seen anything like it, sir," the doctor told him. "We're making him more comfortable while we wait for the results of some tests."

Mulder couldn't even follow what she was talking about. Everything seemed hazy. All he could see was his Master, lying pale and prone under a hospital sheet. "But...he was fine...I spoke to him earlier. He had a headache...he said he had a headache but he was fine...I don't..." He paused and pulled himself together. "Is he going to be okay?" He asked quietly.

"We don't know yet," she replied honestly. "It's touch and go right now but we'll do all we can for him."

"Touch and go..." Mulder repeated. "Are you saying that he could die from this? Could it kill him?"

"Yes, Mr. Mulder. He could die," she told him quietly, and Mulder felt the icy fist that had been wrapped around his heart since he got Kim's frantic phone call, tighten its grip. "He's got severe circulatory problems to the extent where..." The doctor opened her mouth again, hesitated, and then continued. "It might be necessary for us to amputate his extremities," she told him.

"What?" Mulder stared at her blankly. "What the hell do you mean?"

"His arms and legs...if the blood flow gets worse then there will be tissue death – we might have to amputate his legs, and possibly his arms, to save his life. It might be necessary. We might need you to agree to the operation." Her brown eyes were sympathetic but that did nothing to lessen the horrific import of what she was saying.

Mulder closed his eyes and tried to visualise how his Master would feel about that. So much of Skinner's personality was invested in his sheer, physical presence – he couldn't imagine how his Master would cope with being disabled. Would he rather be dead than crippled for life? Or would he prefer to survive, whatever the price? Would he blame Mulder for giving them permission to operate? Or would he be grateful that Mulder had made such a hard decision for him? How would it affect their relationship, Mulder wondered? Not in a selfish sense, but simply in terms of practicalities. Could Skinner even \*be\* his Master in such circumstances? And could Mulder treat him as one? How much of both their perceptions of their roles rested on the fact that Skinner was able to physically subdue Mulder as part of a sex game and simply in the course of their daily lives, even down to the spanking he handed out to Mulder every day? Mulder knew it would alter their relationship irrevocably, but he also knew that he didn't care about that. He loved Walter Skinner, the man, and not just the Master, and Mulder knew he wanted to keep the man he loved alive at any price. It didn't bother him that Skinner would be handicapped – he just wasn't sure that he could face life without the other man's calm, sturdy presence. He knew that was selfish, and that made this decision even harder for him. Would Skinner want to be kept alive at any price? What would the other man want? He trusted Mulder to make this decision for him, and if he couldn't then who the hell could? Who knew Skinner as well as he did? He'd lived with the man for nearly a year; lived with him, worshipped him, loved him...he was Skinner's slave for god's sake! If he didn't know then nobody would. If only it wasn't such a hard decision to make.

"Will it keep him alive?" He demanded, opening his eyes again.

"We're not sure. We think it'll help improve his chances..." The doctor began but Mulder interrupted her, shaking his head violently.

"No – if you don't know what's causing this, if you can't even be sure that this will help, then no. There's no way I'm authorising you to chop off his damn legs if you can't tell me it'll save his life. I'm not putting him through that."

She backed away, perhaps shocked by his vehemence, but he knew that in this instance he'd made the right decision. It might get harder if the option was raised again, if and when they had any more information, but for now he knew this was the right decision to make.

They transferred Skinner to the ICU, and Mulder took up position in a chair beside his Master's bed, unable to take his eyes off Skinner's chalky white face, with those throbbing dark veins as raised and as angry looking as ever, hoping to see some sign of life. The hospital staff kept pumping the big man full of a cocktail of different drugs but still Skinner remained unconscious. The longer the hapless medical staff was unable to identify the cause of Skinner's illness, or an effective treatment for it, the more Mulder was convinced that they wouldn't find an answer in conventional medicine.

He made what felt like hundreds of calls – to Scully first, and then to Perry, because they were both doctors. Scully told him she'd come straight over. Perry couldn't leave work immediately, but he made Mulder outline what had happened – and couldn't find any fault with the treatment Skinner was

receiving. In fact, he seemed as flummoxed by it as the hospital staff. Mulder had never heard the laid back doctor sound so concerned – usually nothing could phase him, but on this occasion he had no answers.

Mulder phoned his Master's sister, Tabi, next. If this really was life threatening then Skinner's family should be here. He hated the way her voice broke in distress when he gave her the news. She said she'd be there as soon as she could, and Mulder left contacting the rest of Skinner's family up to her. From what he'd learned about them, he doubted whether they'd rush to be at his Master's bedside, and that made him so furious he didn't even want to think about it with everything else that was going on.

Various other people started to arrive in response to his calls; first Scully, accompanied by Doggett, and then Elaine swooped in, clutching a thick, navy blue cardigan around her ample curves. All around him there was a haze of shocked faces, and all he could hear was the sound of his own monotone voice, explaining and explaining and explaining, telling the same story over and over again as if it wasn't happening to him, as if none of this was real.

Scully scanned Skinner's medical notes with a professional eye and then turned back to Mulder.

"Mulder, these readings are impossible. It's almost as if he's been infected by some kind of poison – but an active one – the readings keep changing all the time, as if someone is pumping doses of it into him which is impossible." She glanced around the hospital room.

"That sounds familiar. I think I've read..." Mulder paused, trying to recall something he'd seen in one of his files. "Shit...I think I know what this is..." He strode towards the door but when he got half way there he paused, faltered, and glanced back. His Master was still comatose and Mulder was torn. He didn't trust anyone else to solve this. Nobody was as good an investigator as he was, and yet...he didn't want to leave his Master either. Supposing Skinner died, and Mulder wasn't there with him when it happened? Or supposing that scalpel-happy doctor stuck her knife into him when he wasn't there to agree to an operation – or to refuse one either? Or supposing Skinner woke up and asked for him? Supposing he woke up to find his slave wasn't there? Mulder couldn't think of a greater failure of his duty as a slave to not be there for his Master when Skinner called for him.

"I can't go," he said, turning back to Scully. "I can't leave him. Scully, you have to do this for me. You and Monica – and John too if you'll help?" Mulder glanced at Doggett. The ex-marine nodded firmly.

"We're here for you, buddy – and for him." He jerked his head in Skinner's direction. "We'll do whatever it takes."

"There's a file – something about nanotechnology," Mulder told them.

"Nanotechnology on a biological level is still in the theoretical stages," Scully frowned.

"Officially." Mulder shrugged. "Unofficially..." He shrugged again. "There was an X File about 18 months ago, Scully. A woman in Tahoma died and her body looked pretty much like his does right now. Her arteries had literally been packed with carbon – you could have used them as a pencil. Suppose she was a test subject? Supposing they were trying to see just how much damage they could do with the technology?"

"But – how would Skinner have been infected, Mulder?" Doggett asked, frowning.

"No – that's the wrong question," Mulder replied brusquely, meeting Scully's shocked, blue eyed gaze. She knew. "The right question is *\*why\** was Skinner infected. The how is easy enough – if this is what I think it is then someone wearing contaminated gloves could have brushed next to Skinner anywhere – on the metro, in an elevator – all it would take is contact with his bare skin – his hand, or wrist. Scully, you need to check 'nanotechnology' in my files. I've got it cross referenced on microfiche," Mulder told her. She managed a faint smile at that. She often teased him about the incomprehensibility of his microfiche filing system but he always knew where everything was. "Look it up," he instructed. "Find that file. Follow any leads you have on it. I think...no, I'm fairly positive, he *\*has\** been poisoned, Scully."

She nodded, and hustled off with Doggett by her side. Mulder watched her go, still seriously torn. Perhaps he was wrong. Perhaps he *\*should\** go. Supposing they were unable to solve this case without the benefit of his genius in this particular line of work? Supposing his Master died because Mulder hadn't taken on the case himself?

"Hush," Elaine said, putting a hand on his shoulder, and he turned and gazed at her blankly. "You're doing the right thing," she said soothingly, and he wondered whether the machinations of his brain were that transparent, written all over his face.

"I'm trying," he said hoarsely. "It isn't easy. All my natural instincts are..." He shook his head. He'd always been active, restless, needing to seek out the truth – that was as much part of his personality as his new persona as Skinner's slave. Now he was seriously torn between the two warring parts of his personality. The slave wanted to stay with his Master. The investigator, the FBI agent, the relentless seeker after truth, wanted to get out there, and do something useful.

"No, it isn't easy," Elaine told him, squeezing his shoulder softly. "But you're doing everything right, Mulder. I'm proud of you – and he would be too if he knew how well you were handling this."

"I don't feel like I'm handling anything. I feel like I'm holding on by the skin of my teeth," he growled, turning back to Skinner and sitting down beside him again. He had become so accustomed to the ugly dark veins throbbing in his Master's face that it took him a moment to realise that something had changed; the veins were darker, standing out more on the other man's face, raised, livid and black, in stark contrast to his Master's pale skin, and Skinner's breathing was becoming more laborious.

"Oh shit!" He hissed.

"What is it?" Elaine was by his side in seconds.

"Call the medical staff in here...no! Wait!" Mulder hesitated, something Scully had said to him coming back to him. "She said it looked as if someone was pumping doses of it into his bloodstream and that's the only thing that can explain the fact that his condition is worsening like this. There's someone here. Someone is doing this to him right now," he said, racing towards the door.

"Mulder! There's nobody here!" Elaine protested, glancing around the room.

"You don't understand – once the nanocytes are in his bloodstream there doesn't have to be someone physically standing next to him to activate them. They have a range so whoever is doing this has to be in the building, but they could be in the hallway, or in the elevator, or anywhere nearby," Mulder told her in rapid tones. "Elaine – stay with him."

He ran out of the door and into the hallway, drawing his gun as he went. He was barely out of the door when he caught sight of a man disappearing around a corner. He shouted at the man to stop but he just burst into a run. Mulder followed him, running as hard as he could. His Master's life was at stake here, and that lent him speed. He saw the man disappear into a stairwell and ran after him, chasing him all the way down to the parking garage four floors below. Mulder emerged into the dimly lit garage, panting hard but grateful for the fact that he was in such good shape, owing partly to his Master's excellent care of him and carefully prescribed diet and exercise regime. He had lost sight of the man, and walked cautiously between the cars, his gun raised. A sound alerted him and he threw himself down, slid across the garage, and ended up crouched behind a car, using it for cover. There was silence, and then a car slowly purred across the garage towards him, and stopped right next to the car he was hidden behind. A door was opened, a silent invitation to him, and he stood, equally silently accepting it.

He stepped inside the car, and wasn't surprised when the doors closed smoothly behind him, and he heard the click of a lock. The man who had lured him down here was seated in the front seat, next to the chauffeur – Mulder didn't recognise either of them but he knew the man in the back seat – not well enough to know his name, but sure as hell well enough to know that he was an enemy.

"Good day to you, Agent Mulder," the man said, in his usual exquisitely cultured tones.

"I'm surprised," Mulder drawled in return. "I thought they'd send that cigarette smoking son of a bitch to have this particular conversation."

The Englishman gave a wry little smile. "I do hope I'm not a disappointment," he said, those smooth tones hiding a core of hard, cold steel. Mulder sat back in his seat.

"That depends on what you want," he replied.

"We heard you were back on the X Files. You've been poking around again. It's tiresome." All pretence at civility was gone – the voice was as hard as the snap of his Master's cane.

"I've been doing this for a long time. It's always been tiresome for you," Mulder replied.

"Ah, yes, but over the past year you've been..." the Englishman paused and then gave a deliberate little smile, "shall we say distracted? We've enjoyed not having you on the X Files but whenever you returned..." He gave a heavy sigh. "Well, you've become less...predictable than you used to be," the Englishman murmured. Mulder gave a short bark of laughter.

"You mean I haven't been as easy to manipulate," he replied, thinking of the plane ticket Krycek had bought to try and get him to investigate that UFO in Oregon a few months previously. "Maybe I finally learned my lesson." And it had been learned the hard way, he thought to himself, remembering a warehouse in Seattle, the sharp blade of Krycek's knife slicing into his chest, and that long dark night of the soul as he waited for his Master to find him.

"We did prefer you when you were more...suggestible, yes." The Englishman inclined his head.

"So you did this?" Mulder felt a tide of icy anger rise inside him. "You poisoned Skinner in order to manipulate me?"

"Poison is a strong word." The Englishman shrugged. "What we did was implant several thousand dollars worth of very expensive technology into his bloodstream."

"You're killing him," Mulder snapped.

"We can reverse the effects at any time – he might be left with a few, minor side effects, but..." The Englishman shrugged. "Basically he'll be unharmed." He reached into his pocket and pulled out a small palm pilot which he placed on his knee. "With one press of this button, we can reduce the carbon build up in his bloodstream," he said, fingering the palm pilot with one elegantly manicured fingernail.

"It's a leash," Mulder said slowly. "You're leashing me – if I don't do what you say, then you'll hurt him."

"Ah, well, I've heard you understand all about leashes," the Englishman said, in a knowing, smirking tone. "This shouldn't be such a difficult concept for you to grasp."

"For how long?" Mulder asked, keeping a tight grip on his anger.

The Englishman raised an eyebrow. "We won't be asking for our expensive technology back immediately," he commented. "In fact, there's no reason why it can't remain in Assistant Director Skinner's bloodstream for a very long time."

"You've gotta be kidding me." Mulder shook his head. "You're leashing me for an entire lifetime?"

"I've heard that you're not averse to such arrangements," the Englishman replied, with just a hint of prurience in his voice. "Who knows, you might find our leash more comfortable than his. I'm sure we can duplicate your current contractual circumstances if you'd care to leave him and come into our warm and welcoming fold."

"What?" Mulder could hardly believe what he was hearing.

"You have certain needs. We can take care of them." The Englishman shrugged. "We've always been very good at taking care of those who help us," he continued, with an air of lofty superiority.

"You wouldn't know where to fucking start," Mulder growled. Did it always have to come back to this? Was his sexuality such a problem? Did the outside world really think he could be manipulated, judged and held hostage because of who he chose to sleep with and the way he chose to enjoy sex? Did this man in front of him really think his entire life revolved around his sexuality to such an extent that he'd trade someone he loved for it?

Mulder bit back his anger and despair, and tried to think this through rationally. What would his Master want him to do? What did *he* want to do? What were the implications for their future together if he agreed? He clenched his fists uselessly as he pondered that – did he and his Master even have a future together if he refused? And yet...Skinner had always refused to be held hostage, over his sexuality or

anything else. That wasn't something he'd found easy but it was something Andrew Linker had taught him, and he'd taught him well. Mulder knew that a life with them both dangling on the end of the Consortium string would be no life at all – for either of them - and he knew what Skinner would instruct him to do if he was here right now. The question was – could he do it?

"No," Mulder said finally, needing to say the word, to make it too late to take it back, knowing he could be condemning his Master to death. The Englishman raised an eyebrow.

"No?" He queried.

"No," Mulder said, with more finality in his voice. He leaned forward. "I'm sure you've heard the phrase, 'a servant cannot serve two masters'," he said. "It simply isn't possible for me to be what I am to him, and to work for you. He wouldn't tolerate that and neither could I."

"Then join us. We'll find you a new Master." The Englishman looked as if he found the idea appealing. Mulder shuddered.

"Not on your fucking life," he snapped.

"The alternative is...extreme." The Englishman fingered the palm pilot menacingly.

"Kill him then," Mulder replied, and this time, it was *his* voice which held a core of pure, raw steel. "But if you do," he continued, "I will hunt you down, all of you, and I will kill you myself, with my own hands, starting with you. You know a little of my capacity to love – I'm sure you know what losing my sister did to me, and how I devoted my whole life to tracking her down. I have this amazing capacity for obsession you see, and I never have been and never will be as obsessed with anyone else or as in love with anyone else the way I am with Walter Skinner, so if you kill him my own life won't matter to me. I'll pursue you until the end of my days, and, if I die in the process, I'll make damn sure that every single newspaper in the world understands why - and who killed me." His voice was a savage, even monotone, and he meant every single word of what he said.

"Very impressive." The Englishman sat back, and gazed at Mulder with eyes full of a new respect. "It would seem that you've changed, Mr. Mulder. However, this new maturity you're showing leaves us at something of an impasse."

"Agreed." Mulder nodded.

"So...perhaps I could suggest a compromise?" The Englishman gazed at Mulder thoughtfully.

Mulder inclined his head. "I'll accept nothing less than a total cure for him – you give me the means to clear the nanocytes from his blood totally and completely. I won't have this hanging over him," he said firmly.

"In exchange for what?" The Englishman enquired. "You've already told us that you're not for sale – so what else do you have to offer?"

Mulder took a deep breath. "The X Files," he replied. "Or at least, my presence on them. I'll resign. Immediately. Someone else will take over but that'll be your problem, not mine."

"You'd give up the X Files?" The Englishman looked intrigued.

"Yes. I don't promise to stop investigating anything I damn well choose, but I'll do it without my FBI badge, and without the power and authority of the FBI behind me," Mulder replied.

"You've fought for years to keep the X Files," the Englishman said, pursing his lips as he considered this. "Are we really to believe you'd give them up like this, without a fight?"

"To save his life? Yes. I would. Without even thinking about it - but that's the last goddamn concession you bastards get out of me," Mulder replied, in a low, deadly tone. "Well? Is this a decision you can make yourself, or do you need to call someone?"

The Englishman refused to rise to that bait. He just chuckled and shook his head. "Oh, I'm perfectly qualified to speak on behalf of my associates. You have yourself a deal, Agent...no, \*Mr\* Mulder," he grinned. "It's been a pleasure doing business with you."

"I wish I could say the same," Mulder replied grimly.

The Englishman snapped the palm pilot shut and then held it out. "Everything you need to know is detailed in here," he said.

"Fine. The minute the doctors have confirmed that his blood is clear, my resignation will be..." Mulder paused, and then sighed, and passed a hand over his eyes, "On his desk," he finished, wondering whether Skinner would even accept the letter he had to write, and yet knowing that neither of them, Master or slave, had a choice. His hand closed around the palm pilot, and it was only then that he felt a pang of finality about his decision. Had he done the right thing? He wasn't sure he could imagine a life without the X Files – they had defined him for so long. What was he without them? \*Who\* was he without them?

*Your Master's slave – what else do you need to be?* A little voice whispered inside his head. Was that enough though, Mulder wondered to himself? Or had he, in saving Skinner's life, somehow destroyed the glue that helped keep Master and slave together?

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It took the doctors, working closely with Scully, 12 hours to reduce the nanocyte activity in Skinner's bloodstream and another 12 to eliminate it altogether - yet still his Master remained unconscious.

"Why the hell doesn't he wake up?" Mulder snapped at the doctor, wondering whether somehow the Englishman had double crossed him. Sleep deprivation was making him more paranoid than usual, and he longed to have his Master back.

"His body has been badly stressed by the experience," the doctor replied. "We can't tell if he'll regain consciousness after what's been done to him – we just don't know. We don't have any data to go on."

"Christ, this is a fucking nightmare!" Mulder growled, slamming his hand against a wall.

"Even if he does wake up...we don't know what residual effects the nanocytes might have left him with," the doctor told him softly. "This is so completely outside our experience."

"He's strong, Mulder," Scully added, and he could tell she was trying to reassure him by the tone of her voice, but she didn't know anything either – nobody did. Nanotechnology on this level didn't even officially exist yet so how could they know for sure that Skinner would recover from what had been done to him? The Englishman had mentioned 'a few, minor side effects' but what the hell did that mean?

"If he's so strong why the hell hasn't he woken up?" Mulder demanded of them both.

"We don't know." The doctor shook her head. "Like I said, this is completely outside our experience. It could be any number of reasons – it could just be the level of stress to his system, or it might be that he was run down before this even happened and he isn't recovering as quickly as we'd like as a result of that."

"Run down?" Mulder repeated blankly. He had always seen his Master as this big, invincible top – it had never occurred to him that Skinner might actually find the role so exhausting that it was having a physical effect on him.

"Also, you should be aware that there are indications of an inexplicable residual nerve inflammation that may or may not be a result of the nanocytes," the doctor added gently.

"Which means?" Mulder looked first to the doctor, and then to Scully for an interpretation. It was Scully who gave it to him.

"Which means that even if he regains consciousness, he might never walk again," she told him softly. "Or at least it might be hard for him. He might never regain full mobility."

Mulder bit down his anger. He would be grateful if his Master just survived, but was *\*this\** what that English bastard had meant by 'a few minor side effects'? Had he given Skinner back his life, but in the sure knowledge that he wouldn't be able to enjoy it in the same way as he had before?

Mulder glanced back to where Skinner was lying on the bed. His Master's face was no longer criss-crossed with those ugly, raised veins, but his skin was still deathly pale, and there were dark shadows under his eyes. Mulder knew that if the Englishman were here right now, he'd squeeze his hands around the man's throat and never let go for what he'd put his Master through.

People came and went, a succession of worried frowns and whispering voices. Mulder was dimly aware that Skinner's sister, Tabi, was there, her face almost as pale as her brother's beneath her tan. Her dark curls were tied behind her head and she looked tired and concerned, her face a mirror of the way they were all feeling right now. She came and went, just as Doggett and Scully, Elaine and Ian, Hammer and Perry and everyone else came and went, and he barely even noticed them. Every single ounce of his being was focused on the man lying on the hospital bed, as if he could will Walter to get better by sheer force of his devotion alone. People tried to talk to him but he ignored them, and eventually they all left. All except one.

"Mulder." He was aware of Elaine, standing beside him, her hand on his shoulder. She was the only one in the room. "He'll pull through," she told him, squeezing hard, forcing him to acknowledge her.

"Maybe he won't. You heard the doctor. He's run down." Mulder gave a low, bitter laugh. "I'm not fucking surprised either after the year he's had."

"It's been the best year of his life," she told him, drawing up a chair and sitting facing him, beside Skinner's bed.

"Yeah. Right. I've given him the runaround all year, Elaine – we both know that." Mulder gazed sightlessly at his Master's pale face. "And then this happened to him – because of me, and my fucking quest. First it nearly ruined Scully's life, and now his - and let's not even talk about what it's done to my life. I shouldn't love people, Elaine. I'm like the fucking kiss of death. Like Typhoid Mary. Wherever I go I end up causing pain and loss."

"He chose you," Elaine said softly. "He chose to be involved with you and it's not as if he didn't know that you came with some baggage." She gave a little smile, but he couldn't return it. "He knew what being your Master would entail," Elaine insisted in a firmer voice. "He accepted that duty because he loves you and he wanted you in his life. He knew it wouldn't be easy."

"Well that's a goddamn understatement," Mulder growled. They were silent for awhile. Her hand stroked his where it lay on the bed beside Walter's pale arm.

"He had a cold just before Christmas," Mulder murmured. "And all I could think about was the damn branding...and then there was Murray...he was worried about him...and I just gave him more to worry about."

"No. That's not true. I've never seen him so happy. Walter's strong. He'll get through this, you'll see," Elaine said, squeezing his fingers firmly.

"He was happy with Andrew," Mulder said softly. "He was happy being the Guardian, doing his job, having all those young men worshipping at his feet before I came along."

"No. He wasn't," Elaine told him. "He was just treading water until you were ready to ask him for what he wanted to give you. He was content, yes, but not happy. Not the way he is with you. I saw him, Mulder. I was his friend. I know how many lonely evenings he spent. We often had dinner together and although he was fine on the outside, he seemed...just a little lost on the inside. He was waiting for that one big, transforming love of his life and he found it." Her fingers curled around his, impressing that point upon him.

"Transforming...?" Mulder frowned.

"Yes. Did you think that all that had been happening this past year was him transforming you? Him changing your life?" She shook her head. "You've changed his just as much. You've changed him."

Dozens of memories crowded Mulder's mind. He remembered the first day his Master had brought him back to his apartment, and how arrogant, stupid and selfish he had been back then. He had honestly thought he could play Skinner, treat him like every other top he'd been with, consume him and then

move on when, as was inevitable, Mulder felt a need to jump ship before his tops grew tired of him and rejected him. Only that hadn't happened; Skinner had taken every single piece of shit Mulder had thrown at him, and somehow remained strong, steadfast, and utterly implacable. The more Mulder had wriggled, like a fish on a hook, the more Skinner had calmed him, utterly refusing to let him go, until he'd finally allowed himself to be reeled in. It had never even occurred to Mulder that he might have been a positive effect on Skinner's life. To him, it was as if Skinner had appeared in his life out of nowhere, swooped in when he was heading for the certainty of an early grave, and forced him to face up to himself.

"I guess I hadn't even thought what Walter might have been getting out of the bargain," he commented. "Well, besides all the sex and worship," he said, managing a faintly ironic grin for the first time since this nightmare had begun.

"He got a lot more than that, trust me," Elaine said, returning his grin with one of her own. "Mulder..." she began and he saw the anxiety in her eyes.

"Elaine, you don't have to worry about me," he told her softly. "What Walter knows, what \*I\* know, is that despite all the shit I seem to attract, I'm as tough as old boots inside." He gave her a little smile. "I'll be here for him, Elaine."

"The doctors say he might be an invalid," she reminded him. "Can you live with that, Mulder? He won't be your fantasy sex god any more. He'll just be..."

"What he's always been," Mulder interrupted her. "My lover, my best friend, the person who knows me best...and my Master. He'll always be that, Elaine, even if he never walks again. He's my Master, and I'm his slave – it's as simple as that." And it really was. Nothing that happened could ever change that one fact; it was the bedrock on which his life was built. "He's not just my Master for show, for the scene, for some kind of sex game – he's my \*Master\* and I'm his slave. That's all there is to it."

Elaine didn't say anything. She just took his head in her hands, pressed a kiss to his forehead, and then left the room.

Mulder felt strangely serene after their conversation, as if he was existing in a dream. He believed that he and his Master belonged together, that they were united by some force he couldn't even begin to understand, and that he was lucky; in other universes, in other places and times, this hadn't happened, and he and his Master were no closer than colleagues who occasionally butted horns. In this universe, he felt that he'd lucked out, and found the one person in the world who he was meant to be with. There was nothing left for him to do but accept whatever happened next, just as had learned, over the past year, to give up his own selfish whims, and accept his Master's will. He was a slave, first and foremost – Walter Skinner's slave - and that was the role he would fulfil to the best of his ability. Everything else came from that.

Mulder busied himself in that role for the next few days. He read to his Master, bathed him, massaged his limbs, and oversaw every aspect of his treatment. He no longer fretted about the future, or what would happen if Skinner didn't regain consciousness or never walked again. Instead he just focused on his slavery and on tending to his Master, until, a week after Skinner had first collapsed, Mulder was sitting in silence beside the bed, stroking his Master's hand softly, when he felt the faintest pressure on

his fingers. He glanced up, surprised, to find his Master's fingertips gently squeezing his own, and then Skinner's eyelids fluttered open. Mulder held his breath, and a few seconds later his Master's deep brown eyes focussed on him, and Skinner gave a tired little smile.

"Hey," Mulder said softly.

"Hey," Skinner murmured. "Wass happening?"

"You clearly got jealous of my status as the dramatic one in this relationship, and felt a need to stage a theatrical hospital visit of your own," Mulder told him dryly.

"I...I was talking to Kim..." Skinner frowned.

"Yes – and then you collapsed. You've been out cold ever since. It's been a week. You were infected with a poison – courtesy of the consortium," Mulder told him softly. "But you're going to be fine." He stood up, leaned forward, and planted a gentle kiss on Skinner's cool forehead. "Master," he whispered softly under his breath. He felt Skinner tense as the full implications of what Mulder had told him sank in.

"The consortium?" he hissed.

"Yes." Mulder sat down again. "But it's okay. I took care of it."

"Took care...how, Fox?"

"It doesn't matter," Mulder told him. "You're the only thing that matters right now."

"You okay?" Skinner croaked, gazing at his slave anxiously. "They didn't hurt you?"

"I'm fine," Mulder told him firmly. "You're the one who's in a goddamn hospital bed, Walter. You have to stop worrying about me and concentrate on getting better."

Skinner gave a wry chuckle at that. "Old habits die hard," he murmured. Then he frowned. "My legs..." He glanced down. "They're tingling. They feel kind of prickly."

"Yeah." Mulder nodded slowly. "The poison affected the nerve endings, Walter," he said gently.

"What the hell does that mean?" Skinner attempted to sit up, and then gave a grimace and sank back down again, weak as a kitten.

"It's okay. It just means that you're going to need some physical therapy to get walking again," Mulder told him, placing a hand on the big man's shoulder. "And it might be tough - but you will do it. I'll help you."

Skinner's face looked grey against the white hospital pillow and his eyes were shocked.

"I can't walk?" He whispered, a shadow falling across his face.

"You will walk," Mulder told him firmly. "Only it might take some time. You have to take it easy, Walter."

"I...can't walk." Skinner looked haunted and devastated at one and the same time. "I can't...I don't want to go through this again, Fox." Mulder frowned, wondering what his Master was referring to. "I was just talking to Kim...I...poison?" Skinner looked to Mulder for confirmation, totally confused. Mulder took hold of his Master's hand and squeezed, gently.

"Yes, but it's okay, Walter. It's going to be okay," he said softly, stroking Skinner's fingers affectionately with his own.

"You look like shit," Skinner observed, gazing at his slave searchingly. "Christ – I've been out for over a week? Are you sure you're all right?"

Mulder shook his head, and gave a wry little chuckle. "Oh no, I told you, you don't worry about me, Walter. I'm fine and I think you've done your share of worrying about me and taking care of me these past 10 months. Now it's my turn to take care of you," he said firmly, but with the utmost respect. Mulder squeezed the other man's fingers again. "I mean it, Walter," he said. "Just relax and get better. You don't have to take responsibility for everything."

"Sure I do," Skinner muttered. "I'm the Master, remember?"

"And I'm the devoted slave, remember? It's a two way street, Walter. You're my responsibility as much as I'm yours, and your health and wellbeing are my first, last and only consideration." Mulder shrugged. "It's really that simple. Now let go, Walter, and let me be the slave you and I both know I can be. Let go and I'll catch you, Master."

Skinner gazed at him blindly for a moment, and then gave another little sigh, closed his eyes, and lay back on the pillows, and already, by the time Mulder called for the hospital staff a few minutes later, he thought that some of his Master's pallor had gone, and the other man's face had lost that spectral sheen.

Mulder took his Master home a couple of days later; he was out of immediate danger and there was nothing more the hospital could do for him. They strongly encouraged him to go to a rehab facility but he refused point blank, and Mulder was confident in his ability to take care of his Master so he didn't press the issue. Mulder figured that with Hammer, Perry and Scully as their closest friends, he wouldn't lack for help and advice on nursing and generally taking care of his Master. Skinner faced a difficult recuperation though, and nobody was sure whether he would walk again or not, and if so how long it would take. He seemed pleased to be home, but he was still weak and got tired easily, and, more worryingly, he seemed gripped by depression. He sat in bed, with Wanda curled up beside him, looking pale and listless. Mulder wasn't unduly worried; he knew that Skinner coped with huge personal crises by withdrawing into himself, just as his slave coped by hitting out and flaring up. It was just the way they were. All the same, he hoped this mood wouldn't last for too long.

Mulder continued to do what he'd started doing at the hospital; he bathed his Master, massaged his damaged limbs, prepared Skinner's food, read to him, talked to him, and generally took care of him. When Skinner was resting, Mulder knelt by his bed, in position, in case his Master needed him, and he went about his duties with devotion and dedication. He didn't surprise himself, and he didn't think he surprised his Master either, but he knew he surprised their visitors.

Ian paused by the front door after one his visits and gazed at Mulder with a serious look in his brown eyes.

"Mulder, things might not go back to the way they were before," he warned. "You're acting the slave for all its worth right now, but supposing he doesn't fully recover? Supposing he's never able to be your Master again? Not properly anyway – what happens then?"

Mulder shook his head. "Ian, you don't get it. I'm not *\*acting\** the slave – I'm just being what I am. You know, once, last summer, when we were at Murray's beach house, Walter said something to me that I've never forgotten. He accused me of only behaving like a slave when he was behaving like a Master. He asked what came first – the chicken or the egg - the slave or the Master - and he said he wanted us to move on from where we were, so that we each of us inhabited our status with confidence, knowing what we are. Right now he's tired, he's weak, and he's recovering from an illness that nearly cost him his life – he might not have the energy to be the Master, but that doesn't mean I'm relieved of my obligations to be his slave. On the contrary – now's precisely the time to show him that I can uphold my part of our deal, no matter what...and that's exactly what I intend to do. He deserves that, Ian. He's been my Master 24/7 for 10 months without a break. He's never once told me he's too tired to care, or pushed me away and told me to sort out my own life. This is the least I can do in return – the very least."

Ian gazed at him in surprise. "I didn't know it went this deep for you," he said. "I guess...I always thought it was a sex game – at heart."

"It never was. He told me that at the beginning but I didn't understand what he meant then. I do now," Mulder replied.

Mulder hired the best physical therapist he could find to help Skinner walk again, but it was hard work. His Master did his exercises to the best of his ability, his wide forehead furrowed with lines of grim determination, but he still seemed stunned by what had happened to him and by how quickly both their lives had been turned around. He withdrew even further into himself, and did no more and no less than his physical therapist ordered, as if it were an unpleasant duty to be endured rather than a real opportunity to get his health back. Mulder longed to see just a glimmer of the man he'd come to know and love over the previous 10 months but Skinner was like a stranger, and barely spoke to him. Mulder continued to do his best anyway; he still tried to give his Master his early morning wake up call, even though Skinner's cock had stopped responding to his enthusiastic ministrations, and he still knelt by his Master's bed, waiting to fulfil the big man's every need. All the same, he couldn't help wondering how long this would last – and whether Ian had been right, and his Master was gone forever. Mulder began to wonder whether there was something else he should be doing, or whether Skinner just needed time – his Master was recuperating from a life threatening illness after all. It was bound to take awhile before he felt right again.

Tabi visited whenever she could get time away from her work commitments. Mulder didn't have the energy to try and hide what he and his Master were to each other but she didn't seem phased by Mulder's attentions to his Master, and seemed to take his slavery in her stride, which was a relief, as the battle for her heart and mind over the issue of his sexuality wasn't one that Mulder could face right now.

After one particularly painful visit, during which Skinner had barely even managed to exchange a few words with his sister, Tabi took Mulder to one side.

"Mulder...I know you mean well, but I don't think this is working," she told him.

"What?" He asked cautiously. "What isn't working?"

"You – you're being incredible, totally supportive...but it isn't working. He needs something different. He needs an incentive to get better. While you're seeing to his every need he doesn't have one – and I think, deep down, that he's afraid of trying to walk again."

"Afraid?" Mulder frowned. "What do you mean?"

"He's afraid that if he really tries, if he gives it everything, and \*then\* he fails, then it'll be real, and he'll know for sure that he can't walk again. Right now, he's just going through the motions, and he can cling to the hope that one day, somehow, a miracle will happen and he'll get his mobility back."

Mulder thought about this for a moment, and then took a deep intake of breath. "When he was in the hospital, he told me that he couldn't go through this again. What did he mean?"

"He was talking about Vietnam," she told him quietly, sitting down on the couch and tucking her legs underneath her body. "He was badly wounded, Mulder, and when he came back he wasn't the loving, kind big brother I remembered. He was angry and bitter. He was only 18 years old and he felt he'd lost his entire life. He was young, and he'd just been growing into his strength – and now he had to sit in bed and watch everyone else get on with their lives. Mom converted our front room into a bedroom for him because he couldn't get up the stairs. I used to go and sit on his bed and draw pictures for him and talk to him. He was always kind to me, but even though I was just a little kid at the time, I knew he was deeply unhappy."

"So how did he get better last time?" Mulder asked, leaning forwards eagerly, searching for clues as to how he could help his Master.

"Well..." Tabi made a face. "I expect he's told you that he and Dad didn't have a very good relationship. In the end, Walter moved heaven and earth to get better, by sheer willpower alone, because he wanted to get out of the house - and as far away from our father as possible. He was very badly injured, Mulder. I mean, they thought he was dead for god's sake! They actually zipped him up in a body bag – it was only luck that one of the corpsmen noticed a faint movement and got him to the hospital. Maybe, if our home had been more comfortable, and his relationship with Dad had been better, he'd never have had an incentive to recover the way he did. I really do think he felt he didn't have a choice – he \*had\* to get better, despite the seriousness of his injuries, because he simply couldn't face living under Dad's roof as an invalid for the rest of his life. Dad said some cruel things to him about the fact that he couldn't walk, that he would be dependent on him and how that would be a drain on the family finances, how Walter was a parasite and even...that it would have been better for everyone if he had died." Tabi shook her head and Mulder had to force his anger down. That was about the worse thing anyone could say to Skinner, and Mulder wondered whether his Master had carried it around with him ever since – at least until he'd met Andrew Linker. He wondered, also, whether that comment had come back to haunt Skinner now that he was incapacitated once again, and was preying on his mind as he sat upstairs

feeling weak and useless. "It was evil, looking back, but maybe, just maybe, it was what Walter needed to force him to get better," Tabi continued. "You know as well as I do what a strong will he has."

"Yeah," Mulder chuckled, thinking of many occasions on which his Master had been resolutely implacable.

"He just needs a reason to start relying on that will again," Tabi told him. "I don't know how though, Mulder," she sighed. "I wish I had all the answers, but maybe that's a starting place?"

Mulder nodded, mulling this over. He wasn't sure what he'd do with the information, but there had to be some way to galvanise his Master into believing in his own ability to get better.

He talked it over with Elaine, and they agreed that she would be the first one to try to do just that. She swept into their bedroom the following day, took one look at Skinner lying in the bed, and dropped her bombshell.

"My dear, you'll have to make more progress than this. My wedding is in 3 weeks and you're walking me to the altar, remember?"

Mulder glanced sharply at his Master, hoping for some reaction, but Skinner just shrugged. "Elaine...that's impossible," he told her with a shake of his head. "You'll have to get someone else to do it. Hammer maybe?"

"Walter, I've asked you and you agreed to do it. I don't *\*want\** anyone else," Elaine told him firmly. "I'm not going to postpone my wedding and you *\*are\** going to walk me to the altar, whether you do it on crutches – or even if Mulder wheels you there in your wheelchair."

"I am not going anywhere in public in that fucking wheelchair," Skinner snapped.

"Then you'd better learn how to walk again," Elaine told him in an uncompromising tone.

"I'm doing my goddamn best!" Skinner roared.

Mulder winced. He hated watching his Master struggling to walk, like a lame lion, his pride being trod underfoot with every stumble, and every faltering step of his weakened legs. He was sure that Skinner genuinely did think he was trying his best, but his efforts were so dispirited that they seemed doomed to fail. Mulder didn't think the problem was all physical – he was more convinced than ever after his chat with Tabi that a large part of it was psychological.

"Well your best isn't good enough!" Elaine told him firmly. "Walter – you've had all the brooding time I'm going to give you. Now it's time for you to give 110% or 150% or however much it takes, because that's the only way you're going to get better. Yes, something terrible happened to you, but now it's time to put that behind you." She leaned forward and kissed his forehead. "I mean it," she told him. "I know you, Walter, and I know you're capable of so much more than this."

Skinner just grunted and she picked up her gloves, walked over to the bedroom door, and paused, her hand on the handle. "And that slave needs a good spanking," she said, with a nod in Mulder's direction.

"That's something else you're shirking, Walter." And with that she opened the door and swept out of the room.

Skinner didn't say a word for the rest of the day, and Mulder wondered whether, far from helping him, Elaine might not have pushed him even further into his black mood. Mulder slipped into the bed beside his Master that night and lay there, unsure whether to speak. He missed the old, easy intimacy and familiarity he had with the big man, and he wasn't sure how to get it back. If he spoke, Skinner answered in monosyllables, and although his Master remained polite, there simply wasn't any conversation between them. Skinner was too sunk in his own gloom, and Mulder could understand that; one moment Skinner had been Master of his own universe, the proud owner of a newly branded slave, secure and happy in his work and his home life, and the next it had all been torn away from him. Skinner was reacting to this devastating change of circumstances by shutting down and Mulder didn't know how to breach the silence.

Unable to sleep, he got up and wandered around the apartment. He found his feet carrying him upstairs, into the Playroom that had been the scene of so many of their most explosive love making sessions. Mulder turned on the lights and walked around the room, lost in thought. There had been a time when he would have felt a thrill of disobedience at being in this room alone. He had been forbidden to enter it unless in his Master's company or ordered here by the big man. Now those days seemed a lifetime away. Mulder reached out and touched the harness, a smile tugging at his lips as he recalled his Master fastening him in here that first time they'd made love properly, and then taking him, possessively, forcefully, lovingly. He missed the sensation of Skinner's thick, hard cock inside his anus, filling him, and bringing him to the most exquisitely pleasurable orgasms. He loved Skinner, even incapacitated as he was now, but he also missed his Master being his Master. He remembered his words to Ian – no, he wasn't only the slave when his Master was being masterful, but didn't the Master also have a duty to his slave? Their contracts depended on them both fulfilling their roles, and while their relationship had long since transcended their contracts, their roles as Master and slave were still very important to them both. Skinner's libido had been totally inactive since his illness – even without the use of his legs, he could still spank his slave, and make love to him, but he did neither. Mulder had been barely able to get a rise out of his Master during his usual morning wake up call either, although that didn't stop him trying every day anyway.

Mulder opened a cupboard, and lovingly fondled one of the paddles hanging there. He opened another, and gazed, longingly, at the row of sexy, fantasy costumes that hung there, wondering whether Skinner would ever encase those long, lean limbs of his in a pair of tight leather pants again. He massaged his Master's legs every day so he knew that the muscle tone was still there, and Skinner had feeling in them now – in fact, more feeling returned with every day that passed. Skinner's muscles might be stiff, and Mulder knew that his Master did have bad days when the nerve endings were inflamed, making movement incredibly painful, but he believed his Master had the capacity to walk again. It was, as Tabi had pointed out, just a question of giving him good reason to do so.

Mulder went and sat on the throne, gazing out of the huge row of windows at the city beneath them. It was beautiful up here. He could remember nights spent hanging in the harness, his ass on display, looking out, lost in the beauty of his own slavery. There were ghosts of their former selves everywhere in this room – the spanking horse looked eerie, standing there in this quiet, lifeless room; he could vividly remember several occasions when he had been tied over that horse and marked with a cane, could see his Master in his mind's eye, prowling and striding around this room, totally in charge of

everything that went on here, while his slave knelt in awed supplication, just watching as Skinner handled harnesses, the St Andrews Cross, and all the wonderful implements in the row of cupboards lined up on one side of the room. Mulder remembered the low whisper of erotic poetry said in a dark, molten chocolate voice, the soft thud of flogger on flesh, the screams of pleasure and pain intermingled, and the joyous shout of countless orgasms. This room had seen so much, and he had loved every single moment of the time he'd spent in here, even when shivering as he waited for the kiss of the bullwhip on his back. Mulder awoke from his memories to find that while he had been dreaming Wanda had stolen into the room and was sitting on his lap, purring.

"Ah, you miss him too, don't you, princess?" He crooned, fondling her ears. She glanced up at him, her emerald eyes radiating her joy at being both petted and allowed into the room she was so rarely given entry to. Mulder knew the feeling. "I know, he's here, but he's not himself," he murmured to Wanda. "He barely even notices you, let alone me, and we both know how much he adores his little mistress." He tickled her ears again, and she stretched out her little body, blissfully soaking up the attention. "He's the most devoted slave in the world to you," Mulder murmured, and that thought gave him an idea. He put Wanda down and returned to the cupboards. It took him a little while to find what he was looking for but when he did he took it out and stood staring at it for a moment. Would it work? He had no idea – but he had to do something, and this was worth a try.

Mulder picked up Wanda and held her with one hand, her warm body nestled against his chest, walked over to the door with her, and then paused to give the Playroom one last, lingering glance.

"We *will* play in here again," he said, his voice utterly determined, and with that he turned off the light, closed the door behind him, and locked it once more before returning back downstairs, with Wanda still in his arms.

Mulder didn't even attempt to give his Master his usual wake-up call the following morning. Instead, he got dressed in a pair of grey sweatpants and a red tee shirt, and then he laid the items he had taken from the Playroom the previous night on Skinner's night stand, placing a cup of coffee beside them. Skinner stirred, hazily, and glanced at his slave with his usual lack of interest in the day ahead.

"Things are going to be different today," Mulder told him. Skinner gave a grunt, as if he hadn't heard his slave – or, if he had, that he didn't care about what he had to say. "These are for you," Mulder said. He took the beautiful silver collar and cuffs from the nightstand and placed them on Skinner's lap. The word 'Bear' was engraved on the surface of the metal – they were the symbols of slavery that Skinner had given to Mulder to celebrate his birthday the previous year, when Skinner had allowed Mulder to top him for the first, and – so far – the last time. Mulder had had them engraved a few days after his birthday with Skinner's slave name – Bear – as a gift to his Master, and a memento for both of them of a wonderful day that they'd both enjoyed.

"What the hell are these for?" Skinner growled, pushing the collar and cuffs disdainfully off the bed. They landed on the floor with a resounding clatter. Mulder took a deep breath – these items were special, both to him and his Master, and he had never known Skinner treat them with anything other than respect. It hurt him to see his Master so lost in his own dark mood that he could just sweep them aside with a sneer in his voice. All the more reason for Mulder to continue with what he had planned.

"They're for you," he said calmly, retrieving the collar and cuffs and replacing them on the nightstand.

"In case you haven't noticed, I'm not in any mood to play any goddamn games," Skinner snapped.

"Oh this isn't a game," Mulder replied. "You said that yourself, Walter, when you first took me as your slave. You said it was for real and that doesn't change just because the circumstances have altered."

"You want me to sub to you when I can't even damn well walk?" Skinner asked, glancing at the cuffs and collar on the nightstand.

"No. I want you to be my Master but if you won't be that then I'll accept you as my slave," Mulder replied firmly. "You choose, Walter, but you do have to make a choice. Last summer, at the beach house, you told me that I was only prepared to be your slave if you were being my Master – visibly and demonstrably. I learned a lesson that day, and it's one I'll never forget. You *are* my Master, Walter, and I've been the best slave I know how to be for every single hour of every day during your illness. I will always be your slave, whether you can walk or not – but just as you could never be Master to an unwilling slave, I can't be slave to an unwilling Master. I'll walk through fire for you, Walter, you know that. I'll be by your side for every step you take. I'll hold you up and I'll help you down – but you have to meet me half way. You have to show at least a desire to get well. Now, if you don't feel you can be my Master right now, and I'll understand that completely, then you can be my slave. I'll take good care of you, but there will be some changes around here – and quite a few more expectations." Mulder crossed his arms and surveyed his Master. Skinner didn't look good. His face was pale and there were dark shadows under his eyes, but Mulder felt sure that most of his problems right now were psychological, and this was the only way he could think of tackling them.

"You mean you want to get your rocks off and I'm not obliging," Skinner growled, his dark eyes flashing accusingly. Mulder took a deep breath, utterly winded by that comment, but he knew this wasn't his Master speaking. This was Walter – lost, hurting, and desperately in need of his slave's help. "This is all about sex for you, Fox. It always is," Skinner continued, digging the knife in even deeper, and twisting it.

"No." Mulder shook his head. "Sex is the last thing this is about. I love you, Walter, and I'm not going to stand by and let you fuck up your life over this." He considered his Master for a moment, and then turned, deliberately, and walked towards the door.

"Are you running out on me?" Skinner snarled from behind him. "Did the going get too tough, Fox? Isn't it the truth that if you can't have me as your Master then you don't fucking well want me at all?"

Mulder turned, feeling more sure than ever that he had to stand firm right now, no matter what accusations Skinner threw at him. "No. I'd never run out on you," he said softly. "You know that. Just as you never ran out on me at any point over this last year, although god knows I gave you enough reason." His hand went to the scar on his chest where Krycek had carved his initials and he shook his head. "Never, Walter. You know me. God knows I have my faults but I'm a tenacious bastard – I never give up and I never let go. I'm not about to do either right now. I'm going downstairs. I'm not going to wait on you hand and foot any more. If you want me to resume my full duties as your slave then you'll have to start acting like my Master – and that means showing some commitment to getting well. I'm still your slave, Walter, but I think I can serve you better right now by backing off, and letting you think things through."

"What happens if I need to use the fucking bathroom?" Skinner growled, as Mulder continued on his way out of the door.

"Then you'll have to ask for my help and I'll walk you there – I told you before that you can lean on me and I mean it - literally," Mulder told him. "If you don't want to ask for my help then you can make your own way there."

He heard Skinner give a low bellow of anger but ignored it, and continued on his way out of the room. It took all Mulder's willpower to go downstairs, make himself a cup of coffee, and then sit on the couch with the newspaper. He didn't read a word – just stared at the pages blankly, Wanda curled up by his side. He didn't know whether he'd done the right thing, or what would happen next, but something had to break; they couldn't continue the way they had been.

Hours passed, and Mulder figured that his Master had to be feeling hungry, or at least need to pee, but still there was no sound from the bedroom. Mulder made himself some lunch, which tasted like sawdust in his mouth, and sat back on the couch again. He wanted to call someone, to talk this through, but he sensed there was nothing anyone could tell him. This was his problem and his alone. He wondered how many times his Master must have felt the same way over the past year as he, seemingly effortlessly, sorted out so many of his slave's problems. Mulder had always thought that Skinner had some kind of sixth sense that told him what he should do in any given situation, but, now he was facing a similar crisis, he wondered whether Skinner hadn't felt exactly the same way he was feeling now each time he had handled one of Mulder's problems. Mulder had always respected his Master, but now that respect was even more heartfelt as he realised how hard it was to know what to do for the person you loved when they were struggling. He thought of himself, slowly unravelling after Seattle, and the patience, kindness and occasional uncompromising strictness that his Master had shown to him. He remembered lying on a beach as Skinner kissed his scarred chest by candlelight, and showed his slave just how much he loved him, whether he was perfect or not. His Master had never failed him and he, in turn, would never fail his Master. Skinner needed him to step up to the plate and take responsibility, and it didn't matter who was the Master and who the slave – both men were strong and weak in their own ways. They complemented each other and they needed each other – now more than ever. Mulder had to be the strong one right now, and he was surprised to find how undaunted he was by that fact. He had come a long way since that day, nearly a year ago, when Skinner had taken him as his slave just at the point when he had been on a course to self destruct. Now he was strong, and felt safe inside his own skin, and he knew that he owed that to his Master. No, he would never let Skinner down. Never.

Mulder was interrupted in this reverie by a crashing sound upstairs. He got to his feet and ran up to the bedroom, taking the stairs 3 at a time, his long legs powering him as fast as they could to his Master's side. He found Skinner lying in the bathroom, just as Skinner had once found him lying in the bathroom with blood dripping down his chest and a razor in his hand. His Master was spreadeagled on the tiled floor, a slight bruise rising on a bump on his broad, naked skull.

"Was this easier than asking me for help?" Mulder asked, kneeling down beside his Master, and reaching out a hand to check Skinner's bruised head. Skinner batted his questing fingers away, savagely.

"I can fucking manage," he hissed.

"Not without my help," Mulder insisted, holding out his hands.

"We'll see," Skinner snapped. He reached out and grabbed the towel rail, and then tried to slide his way up the wall and onto his feet again, but his legs were tired, and he slipped and fell once more. Mulder didn't even try and catch him although just watching was the hardest thing he had ever done in his life. Skinner's face was paler than ever from the effort, and there were beads of sweat on his forehead. Mulder crouched down in front of his panting Master, and looked deep into those brown eyes he knew so well.

"Please let me help you, Walter," he said softly, reaching out a hand to gently touch the side of Skinner's face. Skinner turned away sharply, flinching, as if the touch burned him.

"What did you have to give them?" He rasped, in a low, dark, despairing tone.

"What?" Mulder frowned, rocking back on his heels.

"What did you have to give them in return for my life?" Skinner growled. "You said the consortium did this to me. You said you sorted it out. They had me by the fucking balls, Fox, and they didn't let go just because you told them to. You gave them something."

"Yes," Mulder said simply, sliding down so that his back was against the bath tub.

"They wouldn't accept anything less than your help. Your co-operation. You – period," Skinner said, his voice choking. "That would be their style – a life for a life. When do you have to start working for them, Fox? Or maybe you are already? Did you sell yourself for me? Is that what you did?"

Mulder stared at his Master, utterly amazed. Of all the things he had imagined were going on in Skinner's head, this hadn't even been close. Trust his Master to be thinking about his slave, even in these circumstances.

"I couldn't sell myself to them, Walter," he said softly. "Only you could sell me, and you always said you never would."

Skinner's eyes widened. "Oh for god's sake! You think they give a fuck about our contracts?" He snarled.

"No – and right now, neither do you," Mulder pointed out. "I didn't sell myself, Walter. If you taught me one thing it was how to stop myself pushing my self destruct button."

"Then what did you give them?" Skinner asked wearily, thumping his head back against the wall as he spoke. "It had to be something big. Something to make it all worth their while."

"It was," Mulder agreed.

"What?" Skinner asked, in a hoarse voice. "What did you give them?"

"The X Files," Mulder replied softly. "They were all I had to give, and you know how much I love them. Like you said, it had to be something of value – I was bargaining for your life after all. It wouldn't have said much about what you mean to me if I'd bartered away something that didn't cost me anything."

"No." Skinner's eyes were bleak. "NO!" He said again, his voice closer to a roar. His entire body convulsed in a fit of frustrated anger, and all Mulder could do was sit there and watch.

"Hey – it didn't hurt me that much," he whispered when Skinner was done. "In fact, when it came to it, it was pretty easy."

"No." Skinner shook his head quietly. "You love the X Files, Fox. They're your life."

"I love you more," Mulder told him simply. "You're my life now."

"Fuck that!" Skinner snapped. "I never asked you to give up your work, Fox. Not once. When I took you as my slave I told you I'd expect you to keep working. You made the X Files, Fox. You started them. You turned them into what they are today. They need you."

"They'll survive without me. Scully's still there, and Reyes is turning out well. Then there's Doggett – I've got a feeling that when he knows there's a vacancy for a new head of department in the X Files division he'll apply pretty damn fast. Of course his career will go down the drain but..." Mulder gave a wry shrug. "That goes with the territory. He knows that."

"I can't let you do this," Skinner whispered, looking small, sad and defeated.

"It's already done. I wrote the letter. It's waiting for you on your desk when you get back to the office. How else did you think I managed to get all this time off work while you were ill? I resigned, Walter. It's a done deal. It's over. I've left the FBI and, just between you and me, I really don't think the FBI is gonna miss me."

"Fox, you don't understand," Skinner said in a tired voice. "It seems like an easy enough decision now, but it'll destroy us, in the end. Once this immediate crisis is over, when I go back to work and you don't, when it really hits you what you had to give up for me...you'll come to resent me, Fox."

"No." Mulder shook his head firmly. "I'm not a victim, Walter, and this wasn't your decision to make - it was mine. Yes, I loved the X Files. I built them up from nothing and for a long time they were my life, but, trust me, now that I've resigned I don't intend to sit around with my thumb up my ass. Once you're better, I have some plans for what I want to do. Big plans." Mulder gave a grin, and warmed to his theme. "Walter, this is just the beginning for me," he said. "You taught me that there's more to life than the X Files – you showed me a whole other world out here that I never thought I could belong to but somehow, slowly, I've found myself fitting in."

"So what – you're going to become a professional submissive and hang out permanently on the scene?" Skinner asked scathingly.

"Hardly," Mulder grinned. "For one thing, I don't think my Master would approve..." He glanced speculatively in Skinner's direction, "...and anyway, I have other plans. Think of all the notes I've made about the X Files over the years, Walter. I want to go through them all, see if I can find a pattern, a reason behind everything I experienced – something to tie it all together and make sense of it all. I figure that at worst I'll get a bestselling book out of it." He broke off to grin again. "And at best...well, at best I might just get to save the entire planet," he said.

"Ah, ever my modest Fox," Skinner commented, and Mulder detected a glimmer of his old Master showing through.

"I told them I'd resign from the FBI. I never made any promises about the private work I'd do," Mulder told his Master. "I'm not giving up the X Files, Walter. I'm just finding another way to pursue my interests – and this way I'll have more leisure to spend with my demanding Master. Uh, talking of promises," Mulder glanced at Skinner through his eyelashes. "I expect I'll get into plenty of trouble even without the X Files, Walter. I'm still going to be an investigator – I don't think even the Consortium could stop me being that. It's part of what I am. As a matter of fact, I'm looking forward to working outside the FBI. It'll make a change not to have you breathing down my neck all the time."

"I'll still be your Master, boy," Skinner growled. "If there's any breathing down your neck to be done then I'll be there, doing it."

Mulder gave a heartfelt sigh of relief. "I'm very pleased to hear it," he said softly, "I'll still need your help – from within the Bureau," Mulder added. "I wouldn't ask you to do anything that compromised your job, but I'll still need your help occasionally. It's important work, Walter. It needs to be done – and maybe this has come at the right time. Maybe it's better for me to be working on the outside from now on. The FBI always did cramp my style a little. You must see there's some sense in what I'm saying?" Mulder gazed at Skinner questioningly. "You know the job was only a means to an end, Walter. I needed the FBI behind me to get my hands on these cases in the first place, but now I know enough to be working on my own, without the FBI tying my hands behind my back."

"That's always been a good look for you," Skinner commented. "Hands tied behind your back..."

"Naked. Erect. Freshly spanked..." Mulder continued. Skinner gave a wry grunt.

"At least you know what suits you, boy," he said.

"Yeah. I know." Mulder grinned. He paused, and then said, in a more serious tone: "I have contingency plans in place, Walter. In case you haven't noticed, between us we have a lot of friends. I've spoken to the Lone Gunmen, and they're watching our backs for us right now. I can't promise that the Consortium won't try to screw with us again, but if they do, I'll be ready for them – they won't take me by surprise again."

Skinner gazed at him thoughtfully. "You've changed," he said.

"That's what that English bastard said. He was wrong. I'm exactly who I've always been – it just took the love of a good Master to help me figure out what that is," Mulder replied. "Now, if we're done here, perhaps you'll let me help you back to the bedroom?"

Mulder got to his feet and held out his hands to his Master again. Skinner gazed at them for a moment, and then, with a sigh, he put his hands in Mulder's and allowed his slave to help him to his feet. It wasn't easy – Skinner was a big man – but Mulder was more than strong enough to take care of his Master. He slung one of Skinner's arms around his neck, put his arms around the big man's body, walked Skinner slowly into the bedroom, and deposited him on the bed.

"So, have you made your decision?" Mulder asked softly, picking up the cuffs and collar that were lying on the nightstand. "Slave or Master? What's it to be, Walter?"

Skinner glanced at the cuffs and a flicker of some unreadable emotion passed across his face. Mulder waited, patiently. Skinner glanced up at Mulder, and then over his slave's shoulder at the portrait of the two of them Mulder had given him on New Year's Day.

"It's going to be hard, whichever option you choose," Mulder said softly.

"I know." Skinner shook his head. He looked like a big, wounded bear as he bowed his naked skull and glanced at his hands for a long moment. When, finally, he looked up, Mulder was in no doubt about the decision he'd made. "Come here, boy," he said gruffly, holding out his arm. Mulder felt his heart do a little zing of pleasure. He would have accepted whatever his Master had chosen, but he was relieved that this was Skinner's choice. Mulder went willingly to his Master, and Skinner pulled him down on the bed beside him. Mulder nestled in close against his Master's body, and felt Skinner exhale a long, heartfelt sigh. "In a minute you're going to help me into the shower. Then I'm going to lie on the bed and you're going to open your ass cheeks and ride me into tomorrow. After that..." Skinner took a deep breath. "After that...we're going to do some exercises. How long is to Elaine's wedding?"

"Three weeks...Master," Mulder said softly, and he was relieved to be able to address Skinner by that title and for it to mean something again.

"Okay. Then I'm going to walk that woman to the altar if it's the last goddamn thing I do," Skinner said in a determined tone.

"She said she'd be happy if you used your crutches or the wheelchair. Just as long as you're there," Mulder pointed out, wondering, privately, whether Skinner was setting himself an unrealistic target.

"I'll walk," Skinner said, in a granite tone. "I'll damn well walk, Fox."

Mulder nodded, quietly, and then pressed his lips to his Master's solid chest. "I believe you," he said softly.

"Has..." Skinner started, and, looking up, Mulder was startled to see a look of vulnerability in his Master's brown eyes. "Has this affected the way you feel about me? Seeing me like this? Weak."

"No. I think they all wondered – Ian, Elaine, Perry...maybe even Scully. They kept looking at me, as if they thought I was going to break and walk out, but you know me better than that, Walter."

"Tenacious. Yes. I know." Skinner nodded. "But I'm not talking about that. I'm talking about our lives, and the roles we have. I know how much they mean to you. Has my illness affected that?"

"Don't be an idiot," Mulder said. "Master," he added, as an afterthought. "You're my Master – I'm your slave. Here, there and everywhere, Walter. You know that."

Skinner gave a little grunt of acknowledgement but Mulder noticed that his arm tightened around his slave's body. They lay there for a few minutes, gazing up at the ceiling. Then Mulder turned and propped his head up on his hand.

"Tabi gave me a little history lesson about what happened to you after Vietnam," he said. Skinner stiffened. "You never told me," Mulder added.

"It was a long time ago. Sometimes I feel like it happened to a different person," Skinner murmured.

"I'm sorry. It must be hard enough for you to go through this once. Twice..." Mulder shrugged. "I'm sorry."

"Don't be." Skinner shook his head. "I'm really very lucky you know, Fox. Very lucky." He bent his head and bestowed a kiss on his slave's forehead. "Now go and turn on the damn shower."

"Yes, Master." Mulder got up, but fell back down again as his Master grabbed his wrist and pulled him down over his lap. He caressed Mulder's ass for a second, and then pulled down Mulder's sweat pants and delivered 6 stinging slaps to his slave's bottom. "Ow," Mulder complained, rubbing the sting out of his bottom when his Master allowed him to get up, although he couldn't hide his gleeful grin all the same. "What was that for?"

"Elaine was right. You do need a good spanking. In fact, we both know that you should never go too long without being spanked. It makes you antsy," Skinner said. "And also there was one thing I wanted to make absolutely clear; I'm in charge around here, boy and don't you forget it."

"I won't...if you won't," Mulder replied softly. Master and slave shared a long, meaningful look and then Mulder turned and went to the bathroom to do as he had been bidden.

## Here, There and Everywhere Part Two by Xanthe

It wasn't an easy three weeks, but Mulder had never been more proud of his Master as Skinner struggled to regain his mobility. The problem was that on a good day he'd be walking almost as well as he had been before the Consortium had infected him, but the following day he might have a total relapse as his nerve endings flared up again, and even putting weight on his feet was an unbearable agony. It was disheartening for both Mulder and Skinner to have their hopes dashed; one moment they'd be celebrating a day of near normalcy and the next Skinner couldn't walk without leaning heavily on his slave – as he refused point blank to use the wheelchair again.

However there was a slow, steady improvement – and that was largely down to the big man's sheer force of will. Now Mulder could appreciate Tabi's comment about how his Master had recovered from his terrible injuries after Vietnam. It was testament to Skinner's strength of character that he forced himself to get back on his feet again for the second time in his life.

Skinner hadn't wanted anyone knowing about his recovery – he wanted to concentrate on it without any distractions and the only visitor he allowed was Tabi. Mulder had left his Master and his sister alone for an entire afternoon when she visited, and he suspected they'd done a lot of talking about Vietnam. She was looking suspiciously red eyed when she left, but very happy.

"Thank you," she whispered to Mulder, giving him a heartfelt hug on her way out. She didn't say anything more – she didn't need to. They both knew what she was referring to.

"Y'know," Mulder commented one day two weeks later as Skinner completed another set of punishing exercises aimed at restoring the muscle tone in his legs and aiding his co-ordination. "I think you're going to do it, Master. The wedding I mean. I think you're going to walk Elaine to the altar." He was crouched down beside his Master, naked, helping Skinner with his exercises.

"I said I would," Skinner growled. "Only don't tell her that." He paused in his exercises for a moment, sweat running down his forehead, and gave his slave a grin. "I want to surprise her. Tell her we'll be there, but don't tell her I'm back on my feet."

"Ah, you always were the Master of surprises," Mulder said, with an appreciative smile. "Speaking of which...what exactly will we be wearing to the wedding, Master?"

"Uh-uh." Skinner shook his head. "You'll find out on the day, boy, and not a moment before. Now, why don't you go and stand facing the wall, legs apart, ass out, so I have something nice to look at while I'm doing my exercises."

Mulder rolled his eyes but ran to do his Master's bidding all the same.

By the following Friday, Skinner was able to walk almost normally. He still got tired easily, and his right leg sometimes gave way unexpectedly, causing him to stagger, or even fall if there was nothing to hold onto, but he was at least mobile again. Mulder didn't want to ruin his laconic exterior by appearing to be excited by anything, least of all a wedding, but the truth was that he was looking forward to it and woke up on the Saturday with butterflies in his belly.

He gave his Master his usual wake up call, then started to get up – until Skinner pointed out that he was two hours early, and insisted his slave get back into bed. Mulder lay there, utterly unable to keep still, wondering what kind of a costume his Master had ordered for him to wear at the ceremony which wasn't going to take place until later that evening.

"Is my ass going to be on display?" He asked.

"What?" Skinner growled into his pillow.

"At the wedding. In the costume you had Elliott and Donald make for me. Is my ass going to be on display? Only, it's a pretty cold day – it's been snowing – so, I'm not sure that would be such a good idea."

"Oh, we can *\*always\** find ways of warming up your ass, as you well know, little one," Skinner said dangerously, placing a hand on Mulder's bottom to illustrate that point.

"Hmm." Mulder wasn't too thrilled by the way that had gone. "Okay, what about my chest...or my...oh god...I'm not going to be naked am I?" He asked with a little whimper.

"Who knows?" Skinner said grumpily, burrowing his head into his pillow.

"You do!" Mulder remonstrated. "And what will you be wearing? Will we match?"

"Oh, I think people will be able to tell who is the Master and who the slave," Skinner said with a little chuckle. "Now, will you be quiet so we can get some sleep?"

"I've never been married," Mulder mused thoughtfully. "You have. What did you wear then?"

"Something very conventional," Skinner snorted. "Because that was a normal, regular wedding and this, my noisy slave, will be a scene wedding. So, I think you can take it as read that you won't be wearing a black tux. Now be quiet."

"Did you get Elliott to adjust the size of your costume?" Mulder continued, ignoring his Master's order. "Only you did lose quite a bit of weight when you were ill, and I know Elliott wouldn't want you to be seen in public in an ill fitting...what? Tux?"

"Elliott's made some adjustments to the costume," Skinner replied patiently. "And as for whether it's a tux or not...you'll just have to wait and see."

"Did you say Donald and Elliott would be bringing our costumes over?" Mulder asked. "Or are we going to collect them? Because if we are I think we should get up now."

"You have the closest thing to a photographic memory of anyone I ever met," Skinner pointed out. "You know that I said they're being delivered. You're just fishing for information, boy."

"I was just wondering what time, and whether we should, you know, be getting up, because..."

"Wanda," Skinner said, suddenly and unexpectedly, in Mulder's ear.

Mulder had learned, during his time as Skinner's slave, to never question or delay his response to that command, and even though he suspected Skinner was only saying it to shut up his slave, he immediately backed up against his Master under the warm sheets, and pulled his butt cheeks apart to facilitate his Master's insertion into his body. A few seconds later he felt his Master enter him, hard and fast. Skinner placed his hands on Mulder's hips and pumped into his slave vigorously, sending all thoughts about the day ahead from Mulder's mind as he found himself able to focus only on how insanely pleasurable it was to feel Skinner's thick, hard cock thrusting in and out of his body. His own cock was semi erect but he knew it would get no release. He also knew that Skinner's climax would be a long time coming because he had already brought his Master to orgasm once this morning. He was right; Skinner took his time, his hands travelling over his slave's body in a proprietary fashion as he sank himself into Mulder's willing, waiting flesh. He tweaked a nipple, sucked down hard on Mulder's neck, and rested his hand heavily on his slave's thigh as he claimed Mulder totally and inexorably as his property. Mulder felt himself going into a daze. There was just him and his Master and the silence of that snowy world outside, and the feel of that beautiful, hard cock deep inside his warm body, making them one. A white heat took hold of him - and then he felt it; as Skinner's cock unerringly found his prostate with every thrust, Mulder felt as if his nerve endings had melted into each other, one after the other, sending a wave of the most exquisite pleasure through his entire body. He didn't come because he had been forbidden to do so during these Wanda commands, and because his Master hadn't given him permission to touch his own cock, but he saw a starburst of golden white lights and then he felt as if he was soaring through space, connected and yet disconnected from his own body. He stayed that way for what felt like an eon, and then he heard something, as if from a great distance.

"Hmm?" He asked, lazily.

"Nothing. Just testing," Skinner said, with what sounded like a distinct chuckle in his voice. Mulder knew his Master had come, but Skinner didn't withdraw. He just stayed there, lodged deep inside his slave's body, his hand still resting heavily on Mulder's thigh. Mulder closed his eyes dreamily, loving the sensation of being held, of being owned and enslaved, of being of sexual use to his Master as a plaything; something to be fucked, loved, stroked and petted at his Master's whim. At some point in this dreamy reverie, he fell into a deep, contented sleep, with his Master's cock still buried up to the hilt in his sweaty, sated body.

Mulder woke several hours later to find the Winter sun filtering weakly through the open drapes.

"Wha...?" he said, glancing up at his fully dressed Master.

"You were sleeping like a baby. I didn't want to wake you when Donald and Elliott brought our costumes around," Skinner said, smiling broadly as he gestured with his head to the two outfits, hanging on the outside of the closet, both encased in an impenetrable plastic shroud.

"Master is both cruel and dastardly," Mulder sighed.

Mulder spent the next few hours in a state of heightened anticipation once more until Skinner, tiring of his fidgety slave, told him to go and draw a bath. Mulder did as ordered, and then helped his Master to undress and get into the bath. He soaped Skinner lovingly, and washed the small fringe of hair on the back of his Master's scalp, stealing one or two forbidden kisses as he did so, but he knew his Master was indulgent of such behaviour. Then Skinner lay back with a sigh, and Mulder watched as his Master

reached down and playfully massaged his cock into a full erection. Then Skinner glanced up at his slave and beckoned to him.

"Get in the bath, boy. I want to use you again," he said. "You can slide down on top of me – and do it gracefully. If you splash any water outside the tub I'll punish you."

Mulder felt his customary thrilled shiver at hearing Skinner being so completely in Master mode. He did his best to lower himself onto his Master's waiting, ready cock without spilling any water, but it was a fairly impossible task and a little splashed out onto the tiles. Skinner laughed and nuzzled his slave's neck as Mulder impaled himself on his Master's cock, and then slid down into the warm water and rested there for a moment, trying to become accustomed to the sensory overload of being in this position in the warm water.

"Well done, boy," Skinner whispered into his ear. "I'll spank you for the water later, but you didn't do too badly."

"Master did set an impossible task," Mulder pointed out, sighing happily as Skinner angled his hips up and rocked even deeper into his slave's body.

"That's a Master's prerogative," Skinner said throatily, his hands fondling his slave's body idly. "Now, I want you to listen to me and listen well, boy. I want to be assured of your best behaviour at the wedding this evening. I want you to be a credit to your Master."

"Yes, Master." Mulder nodded, privately wondering what mischief he could possibly get into at a wedding.

"Also, you will not touch your cock from now on. If you need to use the bathroom you'll ask my permission," Skinner told him. "No jerking off, nothing. If you're good, you'll get to come in our room at Murray's house after the wedding. If not..." He left the sentence hanging ominously. "To make things a little more interesting..." Skinner's voice had a tone of amusement in it that Mulder found worrying, "I've had Donald and Elliott incorporate a chastity belt into your outfit."

"You did what?" Mulder said, trying to stand up, completely outraged. Skinner grabbed him firmly by the hips and kept him in position.

"You heard. Not only will you need my permission when you need to use the bathroom – you'll also need my key," Skinner said, in that same, low, throaty tone.

"Oh god." Mulder's entire body convulsed in anticipation of such deliciously restrictive torture.

"I own you, boy. This body is mine," Skinner told him, running his hands lightly over Mulder's pale skin. "And this..." Skinner reached for Mulder's cock, took it in his hand, and caressed it lovingly, making Mulder moan. "This is mine above all else. You can't come, boy, in case you were wondering. I want you nice and aroused all day just thinking about how you can't come, and how much you want to."

"Please..." Mulder whispered, throwing his head back as Skinner's big, blunt thumb caressed the sensitive flesh on the underside of his cock.

"No," Skinner told him firmly. "Who do you belong to?"

"You, Master," Mulder whispered, forcing himself back from the brink of his own arousal.

"That's right – you're mine, and this is my big cock in your ass, ramming that message home." Skinner wrapped his arm around Mulder's waist and began thrusting into him in earnest. Mulder tried to think of cattle ex-sanguination and fire wielding mutants but it was all he could do to hold back from coming while Skinner was filling him so expertly. Finally his Master came, leaving Mulder totally frustrated. He wanted to come so much that his balls ached, and yet there was something diabolically delicious about his Master's plan. Skinner lay back in the warm water with a happy sigh and Mulder turned and glanced at him over his shoulder.

"Master is beyond cruel," he said in an abject tone.

"Yes, boy." Skinner nodded and gave a broad grin. "Now get your ass out of the bath, and into the bedroom. I owe you a spanking and I think I'll administer it to wet skin – just to make it count."

Mulder got out of the bath, reeling from the dark thrill of being with his Master when he was in such an uncompromising mood. Skinner was a long way from being the lost, despairing man Mulder had nursed back to health a few weeks ago, and, while Mulder was seething with arousal and sexual frustration and trepidation about the spanking ahead, he was aware, in some dim part of his psyche, that, torture though this was, his Master was keying in to all his fantasies right now. He suspected, although he couldn't be sure and he knew Skinner would never tell him, that this was his Master's way of thanking him for his help and support during his recent illness.

Mulder scooted out into the bedroom, and stood, waiting for further orders. Skinner emerged a few seconds later, still damp, wrapped in a bathrobe.

"Put this towel on the bed and then lie face down on it," Skinner ordered, throwing his slave a towel. Mulder did as ordered and a few seconds later he felt the cool sensation of a long, thick, leather strap being trailed over his ass. He held his breath, waiting, but nothing happened. Skinner just kept floating that belt over his slave's back and bottom. Mulder began to relax, and then gave a gasp as his Master slapped a light, stinging swat onto his bare, wet bottom. It gave a little thwapping sound as it made contact with his damp skin, and it smarted. Mulder moaned, and opened his legs wide, loving it when his Master sometimes gently slapped the belt over his exposed asshole.

"Wider," Skinner instructed and Mulder obeyed readily. He told himself, in his head, that this was a particularly hard punishment to endure, but in reality he was always turned on when his Master sought out his anus with his belt, aiming deliberate little licks at it until it smarted both with sensation and the slight sting of pain. Skinner slapped the belt back onto Mulder's buttocks several times, warming them, and then returned to his slave's delicate opening. He aimed his belt in there over and over again, very lightly, until Mulder was wriggling around on the bed, both to evade the beautiful, hideous sting of the belt on this most sensitive of areas and also to try and accommodate his thick, full, hard cock which was jutting out uncomfortably in front of him. The spanking was less of a punishment and more of a deliciously erotic treat and Mulder was half out of his mind with pleasure by the time Skinner stopped.

"Okay, boy. You've gotten all sweaty again. Go take a shower and then come out here to get dressed – and don't you dare jerk off in the shower. I'll know if you do and then you can give up any idea of accompanying me to this wedding," Skinner told him sternly. Mulder's heart jumped in his throat. It had been a long time since he'd disobeyed his Master; he had wanted to jerk off in the shower, but he knew he wouldn't have done it. He rose up off the bed, and, overcome by the high of the spanking, he knelt down in front of his Master, and kissed Skinner's feet. His cock was still hard, and bobbed in front of him, but his Master was as cruel as Mulder liked him to be on occasions like this, and took absolutely no notice at all of his slave's plight. Mulder got up and went to the shower, feeling dazed. It was then that he realised, as he surveyed his desperate cock, that it would be hours before he got the chance to come. With a sigh, he turned on the shower to its coldest temperature and stepped under the freezing water.

When he finally stepped out 10 minutes later, his cock had just about returned to its normal size, for which Mulder was grateful. He returned to the bedroom, dried his hair, and then knelt by the bed at his Master's order.

"Close your eyes." Skinner came over to his slave, holding a blindfold in his hands, and Mulder did as ordered. Skinner bound the soft leather tightly over his slave's eyes, making it impossible for Mulder to see a thing, and then ordered him to stand. "First the chastity belt," Skinner said, and Mulder felt him wrap what felt like a cool box around his genitals. A belt was fastened around his waist and the box was attached to that. "It's open right now. I'm going to close it and then lock it," Skinner said. He placed his hand on Mulder's cock to force it back into the cage, and Mulder moaned as his treacherous body betrayed him once again, and he hardened instantly. "Ah, that's very flattering, but it'll just make it even more uncomfortable for you," Skinner said, forcing Mulder's cock down and back. A minute later, Mulder felt a terrible pinching in his genital area as Skinner closed the cage, and he gasped. "If you lose that erection it won't hurt," Skinner told him, without any sympathy at all in his voice. "Now, for the lock." Mulder heard a little click and he swallowed hoarsely.

"You won't lose that key will you, Master?" He said feebly.

Skinner laughed. "Don't worry about that, slave."

"You've got a spare set haven't you?" Mulder fretted.

Skinner just laughed again and made no reply. "Okay. Now for your pants. Here, lean on me and step into them," Skinner said, guiding Mulder's legs as he spoke. Mulder felt a plush, soft fabric on his legs and sighed with pleasure. This felt nicer. Skinner fastened the pants and Mulder frowned.

"Won't I look very strange with the fabric of the pants straining over the bulge of the chastity belt, Master?" He questioned.

"No need to worry about that, boy. That's what this is for," Skinner said, and Mulder gave another little gasp as something was fitted over the cock cage. "It's a cod piece," Skinner told him informatively. "Something the Elizabethans used to wear to, one can only assume, draw attention to their 'manhoods'. There. Ah, I can assure you that people's attention will be very much drawn to your manhood, slave. It's a good thing they'll only be able to look and not touch." He gave what Mulder could only describe as an evil laugh and then continued dressing his slave. He fastened what felt like light chains to Mulder's nipple rings and then helped his slave into what felt like a gauzy shirt. A pair of calf length boots were

pulled onto his feet, and finally Skinner applied lip gloss to Mulder's lips and then undid his slave's blindfold.

"Ready?" He asked. Mulder offered up a brief prayer and then nodded. Skinner whipped the blindfold away and Mulder gazed at the vision of himself reflected in the mirror in front of him.

"Oh. My. God." He hissed. "Oh my god!" He was wearing a pair of exquisitely beautiful cream coloured velvet trousers that hugged his legs, accentuating their long lines, and snuggled intimately into his ass, leaving nothing to the imagination. His groin seemed to jut out at a positively obscene angle; the codpiece was made of cream leather, and decked out with a multitude of glistening jewelled stones in reds, blues and greens. He was wearing a see-through gold gauze shirt, through which he could see the sparkling silver of the chains Skinner had attached to his nipple clamps. Skinner had also attached a length of fine but strong gold chain to his collar, which ended in a black leather lead that Skinner clearly intended to hold, keeping his slave leashed for the evening. Even the boots were kinky. They had two black spurs at the heel with a little hole in each, as if they had been designed for some particular purpose although Mulder couldn't think what. Mulder thought he looked exotic, beautiful, utterly ridiculous and, above all, like a total sex object. A creature to be petted, stroked and fucked, with his glistening lips promising oral sex, and his accentuated groin promising much more besides. "Oh shit," he whispered. "You don't think...there's the slightest possibility that I'll be, uh, overdressed, do you, Master?"

"No, slave. I don't. This is a scene wedding – trust me, you'd look an idiot if you turned up in jeans and a sweater. This occasion is a chance for people to wear their most outrageous clothing and to enjoy it, without worrying about looking stupid or out of place."

"What will \*you\* be wearing then, Master?" Mulder asked innocently.

Skinner grinned. "Watch," he said, in such a low, dark, promising voice that Mulder felt tingles of anticipation pass up and down his spine. He knelt beside the bed and did as ordered as Skinner took the other outfit out of its wrapping...and then practically drooled as Skinner showed him a beautiful, exquisite morning suit – made entirely from the finest, butter-soft black leather. There was an expensively tailored white cotton shirt to go with it, but the bow tie was also made from leather. Mulder just sat there and stared at it. The scent of fine quality leather filled his nostrils and made his cock harden uncomfortably again inside its prison.

"It's...beautiful," Mulder breathed. "Can I help you dress, Master?"

"I'm counting on it," Skinner said, laying the leather morning suit carefully on the bed. Mulder scrambled to help his Master. Skinner clearly wasn't going to wear underwear beneath such a magnificent outfit, and Mulder spent far longer than was entirely necessary helping his Master into those leather trousers and smoothing the fabric up his Master's long legs. He nestled Skinner's cock and balls lovingly into the pants and then fastened them at the waist. Skinner's legs were getting tired by this point, so he sat on the side of the bed, his arms outstretched, and allowed his slave to help him into the white shirt. Mulder took his time smoothing the cotton over Skinner's broad, strong shoulders and then did up the mother of pearl buttons. Then he fastened the crimson leather cummerbund around his Master's waist, before helping his Master into the leather jacket. Finally, he knelt and helped Skinner into a pair of black socks and some shiny, Italian leather black shoes, before standing back and surveying his Master in stunned

silence. Skinner didn't just look magnificent – he looked superbly glorious with the fabric stretched tight over his muscular frame. He was a little leaner than usual after his illness, but that only served to accentuate his enviably slim waist and endlessly long legs. It was such a perfect combination of traditional morning suit and fetish costume that Mulder was full of admiration for his Master's creative abilities.

"I should have known that someone who wore such expensive suits and tasteful shirts and ties would be hiding a deep, dark interest in fashion under his FBI work clothes," Mulder commented with a grin.

"There's nothing wrong with caring about your appearance," Skinner reprimanded mildly but Mulder couldn't help but suppress a grin. The truth was that Skinner loved clothes in a way that Mulder couldn't begin to comprehend, but that didn't matter. Skinner loved dressing his slave as much as he loved dressing himself, and despite his occasional embarrassed moments, Mulder was coming to enjoy the pleasure of being dressed to his Master's taste and exact specifications.

"Y'know...I think we look pretty damn good," Skinner said, putting a big arm around his slave's shoulders and surveying them both in the mirror. Mulder had to agree. His own cream outfit blended perfectly with his Master's black and crimson, and it was also clear who was Master and who was slave, just as Skinner had predicted. Mulder's costume was soft and lush against Skinner's harder leather outfit, and they looked as if they belonged together.

"Now go and put some kohl and mascara on your eyes," Skinner ordered. "I have one last thing I need to do."

Mulder gazed at him speculatively but did as he had been ordered. When he returned to the bedroom, Skinner was waiting, with two thick, long, dark coats laid out on the bed. He was also carrying a leather duffle bag, much to Mulder's curiosity.

"Am I allowed to know what's in the bag?" He asked.

"You'll find out soon enough," Skinner replied infuriatingly. They pulled on their coats, which effectively disguised their outfits, although Mulder couldn't help flushing at the thought of being seen out in make up.

"One more thing," Mulder said, as Skinner turned to go. "I went online and found something I thought would suit you. Having seen your outfit I'm pretty sure it'll look perfect with it." He knelt and retrieved a package from under the bed and then handed it to his Master. Skinner ripped the wrapping paper from it, and then gazed at the thick, black, leather bound cane, with a silver engraved handle in the shape of a bear's head. Mulder knew that Skinner was sensitive on the issue of needing to use a cane but although his walking was much better, this was a big occasion and they both knew that sometimes, especially when he was tired, he faltered and needed support. The cane would give him that while at the same time just looking part of the costume – and lending it an even more distinguished air. Mulder waited, unsure what the reaction would be, wondering whether Skinner would be offended that his slave thought he might not manage to be steady on his feet all night, but Skinner's expression told him he'd done the right thing.

"Thank you," he said softly. "It's just right."

Mulder smiled, and picked up their overnight bag, while Skinner swung the mysterious duffle bag over his shoulder and they set off for the wedding.

It was dark and cold when they stepped out of the car at Murray's house an hour or so later. The snow was crisp underfoot, and the lights were ablaze in Murray's house, making it look warm and welcoming. Mulder got out of the car and then went around and opened his Master's door. Skinner stepped out, his breath lacing the icy air.

"Take off your coat – I want to make a grand entrance with you," Skinner ordered, removing his own thick overcoat. Mulder crammed both the coats into the overnight bag, and was about to follow his Master into the house when Skinner paused, and opened the duffle bag. "There's one more thing I want you to wear," he said. "Something to set off the whole outfit and to remind you who you belong to and why you're wearing that chastity belt."

Mulder took a deep breath. "Somehow I have a feeling I'm not going to like this," he muttered.

"Oh, you're going to love it," Skinner chuckled. He pulled something that clunked and tinkled out of the bag, and then knelt down beside his slave, and fastened it to the spur of his boot. Mulder looked down in horror as he realised what was happening. Skinner fastened the other end of the thick gold chain to the other spur, and it was then that Mulder realised the spurs had been deliberately fashioned to serve this exact purpose. Skinner stood up, a somewhat evil smile curving his sensuous lips.

"Now you're hobbled," he said, before grabbing his cane in one hand and the end of Mulder's leash in the other, and walking slowly and majestically towards the entrance of the large house. Mulder had no choice but to follow on behind, stunned by this last, diabolical proof of Skinner's mastery over him. "Walk in pigeon steps or you'll fall over," Skinner warned over his shoulder.

"Yeah. Right. Way to spoil my fun for the whole night, Master," Mulder grouched, as he took one tentative step forwards, and then another. The hobble allowed him a couple of handspans of movement and, in fact, it wasn't hard to walk in the chains at all as long as he remembered that they were there. Mulder quickly realised that a little running step was the best way of keeping up with his Master's long strides. It was humiliating, but then Mulder figured it was intended to be. He felt like a geisha as he made his mincing little movements behind Skinner, at the end of his Master's leash.

The house was full to the brim with guests. Murray had clearly spared no expense in decking it out with dark red and white flowers, and the enormous staircase was swathed in velvets and silks in rich, deep reds, golds and creams – the exact same shades, Mulder realised, as Skinner's cummerbund and his own cream velvet suit and gold shirt. Obviously a \*lot\* of planning had gone into this wedding. The guests were dressed in a multitude of rich fabrics. Mulder saw uniforms and brocades, corsets and rubber, and other exotic plumage. People were laughing and showing off their costumes as Skinner walked into the house, carrying his walking cane in one hand and leading his slave by the other on the end of his leash. The laughing and chatting continued for a moment, as Skinner came to a halt and stood, unmoving, resplendent in the hallway, and then, slowly, a hush fell over the room, as everyone turned to gaze at the two late entrants, in their exquisite outfits.

Mulder felt a shiver run up his spine and he knelt beside his Master the moment Skinner stopped walking, as he had been trained to do, every inch the obedient slave. A little hum of approval radiated around the room at the perfect tableaux Master and slave made, framed in the doorway, dazzling and splendid. Skinner stood with his legs slightly apart, his walking cane on the floor in front of him, his hands resting lightly on it.

"I hope we're not late," he said, glancing at Murray and Hammer, who had materialised out of nowhere and who were both staring at him as if they'd seen a ghost.

"No...but...we built a makeshift ramp...we thought..." Hammer began, gesturing in confusion.

"Where's your damn wheelchair, man?" Murray roared, cutting through Hammer's polite stuttering.

"As you can see..." Skinner lifted his hands and gestured to his long legs with his black cane. "I don't need it. True, I'm not as steady as I was, but that's why I have my slave to lean on." He glanced down at Mulder with a little smile.

"This is fantastic, Walter! Last time we saw you, you were the colour of that snow out there. We were all so worried about you, and then Mulder said you didn't want any more visitors..." Hammer shook his head, still looking at Skinner as if he didn't believe his eyes.

"I told him to say that," Skinner said. "He and I had some things to work through. As you can see, we were successful."

"What I can \*see\* is that the Master is so jealous of his slave's beauty that he's got him hobbled and leashed!" Murray said with a roar of laughter. "Or maybe you thought you'd teach him a lesson about how hard it is when you can't walk properly – is that it?" He gave another hearty roar of laughter. Skinner shook his head and gave Mulder another little smile.

"Ah, the first explanation is closer to the truth. I couldn't have wished for a more devoted slave throughout my recuperation," he replied, reaching out a hand to tousle his slave's hair affectionately. Mulder was sure that he'd have found such a gesture profoundly embarrassing in any other company than this, but here he found himself leaning into the caress and smiling dreamily at the pleasure of being touched by his Master. He wanted all these people, all these exotically dressed slaves, Masters, Mistresses and subs, to know that he was with this magnificently attired man, that he was the Guardian's slave, and much loved by his Master. It made him tingle all over to know he was being so publicly viewed, and now he was pleased that his Master had dressed him in this exotic outfit. He had always had a love/hate relationship with people looking at him in the past, but now the love was definitely to the forefront. The truth was that he had an exhibitionist core to his soul, and he had grown more comfortable with that fact under his Master's tutelage. Whereas before he'd have found it embarrassing to be seen being so obviously submissive in such revealing clothing, now he found it thrilling, and he wanted to be showed off and displayed all night. He remembered one of the previous occasions when he'd been at Murray's house, when Skinner had sold him to Perry in a slave auction. Mulder hadn't enjoyed it at all and his Master had been surprised, as he had thought it would have given his slave a thrill. Now Mulder understood the appeal of public display, and he was much more relaxed about his role. Next time there was a slave auction, he thought he might ask his Master to submit him to it – on the understanding that he would not be required to perform any service more

personal than a massage of course. He knew Skinner wouldn't agree to anything other than that in any case; his Master had never made any secret of the fact that he was a very jealous man, and his slave was his property and his alone.

"Has the bride arrived?" Skinner asked.

"She's about to make her grand entrance," Murray said, waving his hand at the staircase. "The ceremony will take place in the Lodge." Murray's house was extremely palatial, and Mulder knew there was a guest house in the grounds which was referred to as 'the Lodge'.

"Fox – why don't you take your luggage up to your room?" Hammer suggested. "You know which one it is – the same one you used last time. It's the best in the house apart from our own and that of the bride, obviously!"

Mulder looked to his Master and Skinner gave him a nod of permission. He hobbled up to the big bedroom, with its four poster bed and en suite bathroom, dumped their overnight bag there, then scooted back down to his Master's side as fast as he could with his chained ankles, eager not to miss anything.

He got back just in time, as there was a sudden drumroll from the 5 piece band located in the centre of the stairwell, and everyone looked up. A collective cheer went around the hall as Elaine made her entrance at the top of the staircase. She looked stunning in a tight crimson velvet dress, made in the style of an old fashioned, turn of the century, riding habit. She was wearing a hat, from which hung a red veil, there were black gloves on her hands, long lace up boots on her feet - and she was carrying a riding crop. Mulder grinned, loving the sheer theatricality of this event. He joined in the clapping as she walked, in an utterly regal way, down the stairs, waving to people with an elegant twist of her wrist as she went, obviously enjoying herself enormously. She got to the bottom of the staircase, and that was when Skinner stepped forward and offered her his arm. Her eyes widened, and turned a little glassy as she saw him.

"Walter," she said softly. "I knew you wouldn't let me down. Hammer was prepared to be your stand in but I told him it wouldn't be necessary. I knew you'd be here."

"I wouldn't have missed it for the world," Skinner replied, in a low, husky voice. "You have my slave to thank for the fact that I'm not here in my wheelchair though."

"Ah." Elaine sought out Mulder in the crowd, and her eyes held his for a moment. Mulder knew, deep down, that however nice they had been to him, and however warmly they had welcomed him into their circle, Walter's friends had always wondered whether he was worthy of his Master. He didn't blame them. They had seen how much trouble he had been to Skinner; they had been involved in his dramatic falling apart this past year, and they'd watched Skinner put him back together again. Now, in this moment, as his eyes met Elaine's, he knew they wouldn't doubt him again. She smiled at him, a knowing smile, and he smiled back. Then the moment was over, and she took Skinner's arm and allowed him to lead her to the door.

The crowd surged behind them, with Mulder hobbling close to his Master, still at the end of Skinner's leash. They all rushed outside, where, on cue, there was a sound of clattering hooves, and 4 pony boys

ran up to the house, pulling a small carriage behind them. Mulder grinned at Ian as he came to a halt in front of the house. He was the first pony on the right, and, like all the other identically clad pony boys, was warmly clothed in winter furs, with a bridle over his face and polished black PVC boots on his feet. There was a tinkling of bells which was coming, Mulder surmised, from a variety of body areas. Mulder guessed that if this had been a summer event they might have been naked, but they looked good in their matching outfits.

"Here – Perry will hold your leash on the walk down," Skinner said, handing Mulder's leash over to his good friend. Mulder grinned good-naturedly, so caught up in the event that he didn't even care about being handed so casually over to someone else.

Elaine took the time to walk around stroking and offering sugar lumps to all her ponies which they all took with good grace, and then she sat in her seat, beside Skinner, in the little carriage. Skinner picked up the long, black whip and swirled it around alarmingly, making an impressive silhouette, lit by the lights from the house, his long legs tightly encased in their black leather, his arms powerful and strong as he wielded the whip like the Master he was, his breath making a little white cloud in the air around him. There was a loud snap as Skinner cracked the whip, and the pony boys started forward on their cue. It was only a short walk to the lodge so everyone else followed on behind.

The lodge was lit by slave boys holding real flame torches. They ran to greet the party, and formed an aisle for them to walk down. Then they were inside the lodge, and there, waiting in front of a large, stone table in the enormous back room being used for the ceremony, was David. He was dressed like a cavalry officer in a turn of the century uniform, the red of his epaulettes and the flash of red in his hat precisely matching the crimson of Elaine's dress. Mulder took his seat in the room, beside Perry and an un-harnessed Ian, and they watched as Skinner walked Elaine to the large stone table and then stepped away and sat down beside his slave. David was so overcome by the emotion of the event, and by his Mistress's costume, that he immediately knelt before her when she came to stand beside him in front of the stone table. Mulder didn't blame him – Elaine looked fantastic. She smiled down at her bridegroom, and then tipped his chin and stroked his cheek gently, but he remained on his knees throughout.

Murray presided over the ceremony with his loud, booming voice, and then David and Elaine read out their vows. Elaine presented David with a thin, shiny gold collar which she placed around his neck.

"With this collar, I thee wed," she said, holding the two ends open. "It's a specially crafted collar, David – once it's locked it will be impossible to unlock it again. The only way you'll be able to get it off will be to cut through it. Do you accept this symbol of my ownership of your body?"

"Yes, Mistress," he breathed and Mulder felt a brief pang of envy.

Elaine clicked the ends of the chain in place and the room broke out in a peal of delighted clapping. David, for his part, presented Elaine with a gold ring, in a more traditional wedding rite.

"I pledge to serve you for the rest of my days, Mistress, as your lover, servant and adoring slave until the end of time. I know I have no rights over your body or your will, but I would ask you to accept this gift as a symbol of my undying love," he said, in such a soft voice Mulder could barely hear him. "To wear or discard as pleases you, Mistress," he finished, glancing up at her hopefully. She smiled and gave him her hand, and, with a delighted smile, he removed her glove, kissed each of her fingers and then pressed the

ring onto ring finger. Another cheer went around the room and the happy couple looked as if they had been frozen there, in that tableau, with David kneeling at his Mistress's feet while she accepted his ring. Mulder's eyes were drawn to Elaine's face. Even though she was the top, she looked just as besotted with her sub as he was with her, and she seemed delighted to be wearing his ring. Mulder thought back to the previous November, when Tabi had asked why he wore a ring and his Master did not. He remembered the note of sadness in his Master's voice when he replied that nobody had given him one. Mulder knew that was what Skinner wanted, but he also knew why he had not felt able to give his Master that ring. It wasn't that he doubted his love for Skinner - he doubted himself. He had never thought he would be able to commit himself to one person, and live with him or her for the rest of his life. He was, by nature, too restless, too tormented by his own demons, and too scared that he might let down someone he loved, and hurt them. At least... he always had been. Was he still the same?

Mulder glanced at his Master sideways to find Skinner gazing, with rapt attention, as Elaine and David finished their vows. Mulder thought of the many times he had made his Master prove his love to him; by keeping him after he had deliberately disobeyed him by digging around in his Master's past in California; by chasing out to Seattle to rescue him from Krycek's clutches; by standing by him after he fell apart so spectacularly in the days and weeks that followed; by collaring and branding him, and taking everything Mulder threw his way and never, ever giving up on his slave. Mulder hoped he'd repaid some of that devotion in these past few weeks when Skinner had been so ill, and in some ways he thought Skinner's illness had helped him understand his role more clearly. He was just as capable as Skinner; he could be the strong one too, strong enough to keep them both together. He had been forced, during Skinner's illness, to make decisions that affected both their lives, and he had done so with confidence and maturity. Maybe he was wrong to doubt himself.

The ceremony came to a close, and Skinner picked up Mulder's leash and led him back out into the night, where they all followed the happy couple back up to the main house.

"Did you enjoy it?" Skinner asked his slave as they walked – or rather Skinner walked and Mulder trotted.

"It was okay. For a wedding." Mulder shrugged nonchalantly. Skinner gave him a sideways grin and tugged affectionately on his leash.

"Ah, my unromantic slave – although I think, this past year, you've come to appreciate some of your Master's more romantic gestures – yes?"

"Master's slave has no choice but to accept it when his Master is being romantic," Mulder replied with a sly grin. Skinner gave a bark of laughter.

"Insolent pup. I should tan your hide for that!" he growled, but instead he stopped, and pulled Mulder into a heart stopping kiss, his hands finding his slave's ass and fondling insistently. Mulder surrendered happily to his Master's embrace, feeling his cock stirring in the evil chastity cage that imprisoned it.

"Please, Master," he whispered, pressing himself against his Master's body. "We could steal away for a few minutes, couldn't we?" He asked plaintively.

"Ah, is my boy suffering?" Skinner looked as if he was pleased by the thought so Mulder guessed that sympathy was going to be in short supply. "Later, my boy, I'll fuck you so hard you'll scream," he said, his hands still caressing his slave's ass, his breath warm on Mulder's cheek.

"Why wait until later?" Mulder pleaded, his cock growing even harder inside its prison.

"Because we have a wedding to attend!" Skinner gestured with a flourish of his arm, and then he set off up to the house with long strides, tugging his slave behind him. Mulder had no choice but to hobble along in his Master's wake, taking fast little steps to keep up, cursing under his breath that he had a Master this fiendish.

They spent the next couple of hours talking, laughing and eating in Murray's huge house. Elaine and David circulated around the room, talking to all their guests, and then finally arrived at the table where Mulder, Skinner, Ian and Perry were seated.

Perry grabbed a chair and offered it to Elaine, and Mulder pulled one over for David, who declined with a slight smile, and knelt beside his mistress instead.

"Ah, I think someone's too sore to sit," Ian commented as Elaine started chatting with Skinner and Perry. "I thought you were walking in a certain, uh, way, Dave – what did your beautiful but capricious mistress do to you last night?"

"I was nervous." David gave a little grin and glanced sideways at Mulder. "She got tired of me pacing around the house and sent me out to have a good time."

"Ah. I think we know what that means." Ian grinned.

"What?" Mulder looked from one to the other, completely clueless.

Ian snorted. "Dave's mistress has forbidden him from going to one particular scene bar," he told Mulder.

"You disobeyed her?" Mulder was aghast. "On the night before your wedding?"

David gave a dreamy smile. "I would never disobey my Mistress without her permission," he replied.

"What?" Mulder said again, feeling even more confused now. Ian sighed.

"Mulder and his Master don't play games," he explained. "Everything they do is for real,"

"That's not true!" Mulder protested, feeling aggrieved. "This is a game?" He said, the light finally dawning.

Ian grinned at him, and then explained. "David is forbidden to go to a certain scene bar – so if he *does* go there, it's pretty much a done deal that he wants his Mistress to punish him. There's a barman there – Louis isn't it, Dave? – who can be relied to call Elaine and tell her that her errant boy is where he shouldn't be. She comes down and gives him a very public spanking. I was there one night when it happened." Ian winked at David.

Mulder glanced from Ian to David, intrigued by this insight into another couple's relationship. It wasn't true that he and his Master never played games – they had introduced a very satisfying role-playing element into their sex life and Mulder enjoyed it enormously. However, he realised that what had surprised him was that David so clearly initiated this particular game. He decided when he needed a public spanking scene and deliberately went to this forbidden bar in order that his Mistress could find him there and punish him. That was something of a revelation to Mulder. He always threw himself into role-playing games with his Master but when he thought about it, there was no reason why Skinner had to do all the work. Mulder was sure he could be just as creative in this arena. Maybe he'd lacked the confidence before, but he felt their relationship had matured since the branding.

"A public spanking?" Mulder questioned, feeling his body tingle all over at that thought. He remembered how he had enjoyed being displayed earlier, remembered that night, a couple of months ago, at the leather bar, where Skinner had stripped and whipped him while the crowd stood and watched, and how exhilarating that had been. "You're a lucky man, David," he said softly, and he glanced up to find his Master watching him, his dark brown eyes thoughtful. Maybe, just maybe, Mulder thought to himself, it was time for him to start initiating some sex games of his own.

He watched as Elaine and David started the dancing, and soon a sizeable group of couples had joined them.

"Would Master like to dance?" Mulder asked Skinner. His Master smiled and shook his head.

"I'm giving my legs a rest."

"Are you okay?" Mulder asked, with a worried frown. Skinner's legs had stood up pretty well to the whole event, but they both knew that Skinner was shakier when he was tired.

"I'm fine," Skinner replied. "Just pacing myself."

"Would you mind if I danced?" Mulder requested, surprising himself – he usually just stuck by Skinner's side at events like this, and he didn't even *like* dancing, but he had a glimmer of an idea and he thought it would add some spice to the evening if it worked.

Skinner looked surprised as well. He thought about it for a moment, and then nodded. Mulder looked mournfully at his hobbles. Skinner rolled his eyes.

"All right, boy. Come here. I'll let you off your leash for an hour or two."

Mulder grinned and shuffled over to his Master so that Skinner could remove the chain linking his boots. His Master did so and then placed a proprietary hand on his slave's cod piece.

"Be good, boy," he said.

"I will, Master," Mulder replied. "I know how jealous Master can be and I wouldn't want to make him angry." He gave a startled Skinner a wide grin, and hoped that would be enough to clue his Master in on what he was doing.

The dancefloor was teeming with people and Mulder felt strangely free without the fetters on his ankles. It was a peculiar feeling, being released from such confining chains, and he threw himself around, enjoying the sheer physicality of being able to move normally again. He saw people he knew from Murray's summer party the previous year, and the various scene parties he and his Master had attended, and he busied himself dancing with anyone who could stand to be near his flailing, over excited limbs as he charged around the dancefloor. Mulder had never been a good dancer – usually he was content to shuffle around in an embarrassed fashion whenever there was dancing, before making his excuses and sitting down again - but tonight he felt a wild energy take over. He felt comfortable inside his own skin, and he was with people with habits and lifestyles similar to his own, so he didn't feel as if he was being judged. More than that, he knew that somehow, inside his own head, something had clicked. Maybe he had never worried so much about being judged by others as being judged by himself. He didn't have that problem any more. He was content with himself and he knew who he was. There didn't seem to be any need for embarrassment, or to hide. No, he wasn't the best dancer in the world, but that didn't matter as long as he had a good time, and he definitely intended to do that.

Mulder was aware of his Master's eyes on him, as he danced with one person after another. He deliberately singled out the people he knew were tops, women as well as men, and, with one eye always on his Master, he danced with them energetically all evening. He was aware, in turn, that Skinner's dark eyed gaze followed him the entire time. Even when talking to Elaine, or Perry, or Ian, Skinner's eyes would wander back to the dancefloor to see what his slave was doing.

As the evening wore on, the dancing grew more intense. Mulder knew that he was stoking an invisible fire between himself and his Master, and he felt a warm, heady sensation course through his veins. This was fun! He would never do anything to consciously hurt his Master, but now Mulder could see a way forward – a way to walk that fine line between the rollercoaster and the quiet life, so that both he and his Master could have the occasional thrills and edginess that their relationship thrived on, without that being a threat. Mulder knew he had an inventive and curious mind, and he could see a whole future for them where Skinner wasn't the only one who had to think up scenarios they could both enjoy. The excitement of this knowledge fired up Mulder even further, and he began teasing and taunting his dance partners, flirting with them, fanning the flames between himself and his Master to fever pitch.

Mulder put his hands around the biceps of the Leather Daddy he was dancing with and made an admiring face, and then wiggled his hips in a hopelessly inept parody of Mick Jagger on a bad day, feeling like a shameless slut, his cock permanently semi-erect inside its cage. He really didn't have any interest in Leather Daddy's biceps, which weren't nearly as impressive as his Master's in any case, but he could feel Skinner's eyes boring into him, red hot and ready to explode. Just a little more heat...Mulder pushed his hips forward, and realised, too late, just how obscene that looked while wearing such a boastful codpiece, and the next thing he knew, his arm was being grabbed in a tight fist.

"You. With me. Now," his Master growled in a low tone in his ear, yanking his slave forcibly off the dancefloor. Mulder felt a thrill of excitement as Skinner bundled him physically out of the room, and then pushed him up the stairs.

"What's the matter, Master?" He panted, as Skinner pushed him along the hallway in the direction of their bedroom. Skinner's breath was warm on the side of his face and neck, and he could smell the other man's sweat and scent of raw, powerful jealousy.

"Your behaviour is the matter!" Skinner snapped, his grip on Mulder's arm tightening.

"I can't help it if people found me attractive tonight," Mulder said slyly, deliberately stoking the scene.

Skinner gave a little growl of annoyance and kicked open their bedroom door and threw Mulder inside. He slammed the door shut after him and Mulder backed away, seeing the wild expression in Skinner's eyes. He knew it was a sex game, a scene, but it was more than a game too, and that was what gave it its edge. He knew that he had a safe word – Wanda – if he was genuinely frightened, but he wasn't. He was loving it. This was the first time he'd initiated any play of his own, and although it wasn't a very sophisticated scenario, he loved the feeling. He always adored it when Skinner was in full he-man mode, and his Master sure as hell was looking big, strong and angry as he faced his slave down.

"Slut," Skinner growled. "I think you've forgotten who you belong to, boy."

"I think Master's jealous," Mulder taunted, edging back against the bed.

"Yeah – oh yeah," Skinner slurred, his breathing come in harsh pants. "Master sure as hell IS jealous, and I think I need to remind you who your Master is."

Skinner pounced on him, stumbling slightly as his unsteady legs gave way beneath him, and the weight of his body pushed them both back onto the bed, with Mulder squashed firmly underneath. He lay there for a moment, winded, and then realised he was trapped under his Master's weight and Skinner was making no move to get off him. He managed to free his arms but his Master grabbed them and pinned them over his head.

"Who do you belong to, boy?" He asked, in a rasping voice. Mulder's cock was as hard as it could get inside his cage and he gave a moan of frustration as he realised that unless Skinner released him, his cock would remain imprisoned throughout this scene.

"You, Master!" He panted.

"I don't think you understand what that means," Skinner growled. "I think I have to make you understand." Mulder felt Skinner's hands on his pants, and the cod piece went flying, then he heard a ripping sound as his Master literally ripped his pants from his body.

"Oh shit," he moaned softly, seriously turned on.

"Shut up, boy and get your legs open. I'm going to fuck you so hard you won't forget who owns you ever again," Skinner told him. He slapped the inside of Mulder's thighs open, and forced his body between Mulder's open legs. Then he opened his pants, and released his thick, swollen cock. Mulder watched, fascinated; no matter how often he had seen his Master's erect penis, it still never failed to impress him, and now, with Skinner in this mood, it seemed more magnificent than ever. Mulder decided that a little more resistance on his part was required – he didn't want his Master to have it all his own way – so he wriggled out of Skiner's grasp, and, hobbled by the remains of his pants, just as he had been hobbled by chains earlier, he turned and threw himself off the bed. He heard Skinner give a muffled curse behind him, and was half way to the door when he felt his Master slam into him. He was pushed up against the wall, his head angled to one side, his Master's big body covering him from behind. His hips were grabbed and pulled back, his buttocks forced open, and the next thing he knew his Master's large cock

was impaling him from behind, imprisoning him against the wall. He was cornered, completely unable to move, totally and utterly at his Master's mercy.

"I'm going to fuck you right through this wall," Skinner promised, and Mulder threw his head back, feeling the sweat run down his face. This was so raw, so intense, that all his emotions were heightened. "You'll think twice about making me jealous again, boy," Skinner said, in a threatening voice, and then he gave a forward thrust so savage that Mulder cried out. He lost all sense of the next few minutes as his Master used his slave without mercy. He was just grateful that Skinner had his arms wrapped around his slave's waist as otherwise he didn't think his legs would hold him up. He couldn't help but wonder about Skinner's stamina, and how long Skinner's tired legs would hold \*him\* up, but right here and now, Skinner seemed every inch the invulnerable, physically overpowering Master he had always been. His thick, powerful cock impaled Mulder vigorously with every thrust, and Mulder's own cock was so painfully erect inside its cage that it was agony and yet all the nerve endings in his body were telling him that he was having a fantastic time. He wanted to come but it was impossible. He could only stand there, his hands uselessly trying to find some purchase on the flat wall, as his Master made use of him with a jealous intensity that Mulder could almost smell. Skinner's cock pumped into him, hard and fast, stretching him as never before, filling him. "Who are you?" Skinner asked on his inward thrust.

"Yours!" Mulder panted in reply as Skinner withdrew.

"Who do you belong to?" Skinner asked, thrusting again, just one shade short of savage.

"You, Master. You! Please!" Mulder begged, knowing that he was pleading for it to go on forever, and not to stop.

"I own you, boy," Skinner told him, thrusting vigorously. "I own this tight asshole, and these nice, firm asscheeks. I own them. I own you. I own your cock, which belongs to me and me alone. If you're lucky I'll unlock that cage around it but not anytime soon. If you're unlucky I'll throw away the key and you'll never come again. I can do that because I own you, boy."

"Yes, Master. I know! I know! You own me! I'm yours! Fuck me, Master! Use me!" Mulder gabbled incoherently. "I love you, Master! I love you!"

Skinner's hard thrusting reached a crescendo, and he gave a loud roar as he shot his load deep inside his slave's body. Mulder convulsed in time with his Master's orgasm, seeing white stars in his head, his own body screaming for release. Skinner stood there for what felt like an hour, his entire body pressed against Mulder's, his arms still wrapped around his slave's waist, his cock still buried deep inside him. Mulder could feel that his Master's head was hanging down, resting slightly on his shoulder, and he could smell the heady scent of the leather outfit his Master was wearing. He waited, wondering what would happen next, and whether the scene was over, and then his Master spoke, in a low, growling tone, in Mulder's ear.

"I'm not done with you yet, boy. You were deliberately teasing me this evening and you're going to be punished for that."

"Yes, Master," Mulder whispered, and a thrill of anticipation ran up and down his spine while his stomach did several somersaults.

"I'm going to tan your hide, boy," Skinner told him, withdrawing from his slave with a plopping noise. Mulder tried hard to remember to breathe as his Master finally released him. He sagged, but Skinner held him up until he was steadier, and then his Master moved away and sat on the large, four poster bed, making himself comfortable on all the pillows. "Over my knee, boy," Skinner ordered. Mulder eyed his Master nervously. Skinner looked every inch the large, angry, Master, sitting there in his leather pants, his shoulders gloriously displayed in that tight, white shirt, open at the collar, the bow tie and jacket long since discarded somewhere along the way. "Don't make me come and get you," Skinner warned. "You're in trouble, boy. You forgot the first rule of your slavery – that you belong to me and nobody else touches you. You're going to be punished and punished hard."

"Nobody else *\*did\** touch me, Master," Mulder pointed out.

"People have been slobbering over you all night, boy," Skinner snapped. "And you were encouraging them like a shameless slut. Now come here – I'm going to tan your hide but good."

Mulder loved the threat inherent in those words and he stepped cautiously forwards to meet his fate. "I'm sorry, Master," he whispered, as Skinner grabbed his wrist and pulled his slave over his knee

"Oh, you will be, Fox. I can promise you that," Skinner replied. He took a few seconds arranging Mulder over his knee, and then, leaning forward and wrapping one arm firmly around his slave's waist, he went straight in, whaling on his slave's ass in earnest from the very first spank. Mulder hollered, kicked and screamed to begin with, but Skinner had a tight hold on him, and his Master's hand was big, hard and heavy, making short work of turning Mulder's ass into a crimson beacon. Mulder stopped struggling when the endorphins hit him, and he felt himself starting to fly. He felt his body relaxing, as he received the first proper spanking he'd had since his Master's illness. Sure, Skinner had started giving him his usual morning spanking again, but mostly that was a few hard swats, and there had been the occasional erotic spanking too, culminating in that beautiful strapping earlier that evening, but nothing this intense. This felt like punishment, a proper correction for transgressing his Master's rules, and that gave it a special edge, making Mulder's belly tingle and his cock ache even harder. It felt cathartic – more than that, it felt totally and absolutely necessary, as an expression of his Master's power over him after his recent illness. This felt like Skinner's way of reasserting their roles in the most raw and basic manner possible, and it thrilled Mulder to his core.

Then, finally, it was over, and Mulder lay a panting, sobbing wreck over his Master's knee. Skinner let him rest there for a long time, just stroking his slave's glowing ass, and muttering "Mine, boy, mine," over and over again. Mulder turned and gazed at his Master dreamily over his shoulder.

"That was fantastic, Master..." he began, but Skinner cut him off.

"I'm not finished with you yet, boy," he growled. "I think a further lesson on this subject is in order. Lie on your back." Mulder did as ordered, hissing as his throbbing bottom made contact with the cool sheets. Skinner knelt over him, and quickly divested him of the rest of his clothing, save for the cock cage. "This body is mine," Skinner told his slave. "And I'm going to play with it. You can just lie there and offer yourself up to me, boy. Don't expect any release. I'll only set that cock of yours free when I'm good and done with taking my own pleasure...and I might want to fuck you again before that happens."

Mulder felt his entire body spasm at that news. He hadn't thought this could get any better but it was. He watched as Skinner slowly removed his own shirt, and threw it onto the floor. His Master looked lean, tanned and fit, and Mulder wanted to touch him. He put out his hands to caress his Master's chest but Skinner batted them away. "Don't touch, boy. You belong to me – not the other way around," he warned. Mulder swallowed hard and his hands fell back to his sides. Skinner was only wearing his tight leather pants and the big black belt with the silver buckle, and he looked totally magnificent in the semi-darkness of the room. The moonlight bounced off the snow outside and in through the still open drapes, illuminating Skinner's large, domed head and shrouding him in silvery light as he bent his head and worked on his slave's body. Skinner hands were both gentle and cruel at the same time as they explored Mulder thoroughly. He stroked his slave, rubbed his nipples into fine points, and then moved lower, but always avoiding the groin area. Mulder moaned, and pushed his hips up, seeking release, but Skinner shook his head.

"Is that cage pinching you, boy?" He asked. "I hope so," he added darkly, and Mulder lay back on the bed, almost screaming with frustration. Skinner held Mulder's arms pinned into the pillows over his head, lowered his own head, and began licking Mulder's nipples. Mulder groaned, sure that he would explode from sheer sensory input.

"Quiet, boy. Take your lesson and remember that this body isn't yours to give to anyone else. It belongs to me and only I have the right to do this to it." Skinner lowered his head again and began sucking down more forcefully on Mulder's nipples, nipping at them lightly with his teeth, causing Mulder to squeal and wriggle pointlessly against his Master's superior strength and position. Skinner did as promised – he played with his slave's body for what felt like forever. Mulder felt sure his cock was dying inside its cage but his Master's cruelty in not allowing him his release just stoked the fire of his arousal even more, until he was incoherent with need. He couldn't, at this point, have said just what it was he wanted; he was just a total mass of jello, utterly surrendered to his Master's whim, allowing Skinner to do what he pleased with him.

Skinner took hold of one of Mulder's sensitised nipples between his thumb and forefinger and squeezed gently.

"You're a slave. You're my boy. You belong to me," he hissed. Mulder was beyond speech. He just lay there, whimpering. "And this cock..." Skinner's hand went to the cock cage, and Mulder took a sharp intake of breath, hoping beyond hope...only to have that hope dashed a few seconds later as Skinner's hand passed over it and grasped his thighs instead.

"I'm feeling horny again," Skinner told him. "I think I'm gonna bury myself in my slave's hot, tight ass and fuck him into the bed," he promised throatily. He moved his hands and began stroking his way up Mulder's chest. He stroked his slave's neck and then pressed a finger inside his slave's mouth. Mulder sucked on it greedily and Skinner laughed. "Slave slut," he said. "\*My\* slave slut," he clarified, presumably in case Mulder hadn't gotten that message. "Open your legs, boy," he ordered. Mulder moaned, unable to believe that his Master would fuck him again without giving him release but turned on by that very thought. Skinner leaned in and stole a long, deep, brutal kiss from Mulder's lips, leaving them bruised and him breathless. "This asshole is mine," Skinner said, his thumb slipping inside it as he went back in for another kiss that was so forceful it pinned Mulder back on the pillows. Skinner took hold of Mulder's hair in his fist and pulled his slave's head back, then kissed him again, his thumb slipping rhythmically in and out of Mulder's ass at the same time. Mulder opened his legs wider, greedily

needing more, and then Skinner removed his thumb, and Mulder heard him fumbling with his own pants and a few seconds later his Master entered him again, his mouth still covering Mulder's in a series of plundering kisses that left Mulder breathless and in no doubt at all about who owned him. His Master went more slowly this time, easily sinking himself in and out of his slave's ass with lazy motions of his hips, his fist still wrapped in Mulder's hair. Mulder was well and truly fucked by his Master. Fucked without any thought for his own pleasure; fucked for Skinner's release; fucked to prove a point – that he was owned, a slave, and he existed to serve his Master. It was thrilling and exhilarating and it was Mulder's ultimate turn on. He no longer cared if he came or not...he felt utterly quelled, and totally in thrall to his Master's every whim. Skinner was nose to nose with him, taking those dark, hungry kisses from Mulder's lips, while he powered slowly inside his slave's body. Skinner took his time drumming his message home and Mulder's already sore ass started to feel stretched and even more sore as the pounding continued. His whole body was quivering with a surfeit of sensation – he felt almost as if he had sailed through the waters of his own arousal and come out the other side. He was his Master's plaything, his toy, his property and that was the best feeling in the world. Skinner covered his mouth again, and stayed kissing him forever this time; Mulder felt him come inside his body and experienced his Master's groan of release deep inside the kiss. Skinner continued to kiss him for several seconds longer and then finally released him, and withdrew from his slave's body.

Mulder lay there, utterly shocked and stunned by the onslaught and barely noticed his Master fish a key out of his pocket, and undo the cage around his cock. It sprang eagerly up, and Mulder let out a howl as Skinner took it in his fist and squeezed, hard.

"This is mine too," he growled, sliding his hand along the hard, needy cock. "Shall I give it what it wants or not, boy?"

"I don't mind, Master," Mulder whispered, meaning it. "It's yours – whatever pleases you." Skinner surveyed him for a long moment, his dark eyes assessing, and then he gave a nod.

"I think it pleases me to let you come, boy. Whenever you want..." And with that he lowered his head and wrapped his warm, wet mouth around Mulder's sensitive penis. Mulder yelped and bucked up against his Master but Skinner didn't intend for it to be an easy ride. He took Mulder's abused cock to the edge of orgasm and then released it, sat back on his heels, and looked down on his slave again. "Whenever you like, boy," he said. Mulder reached out to touch his cock and bring himself to climax but Skinner brushed his hands back. "Your cock is mine, boy. Don't touch it," he said, and Mulder felt another wave of the most terrible frustrated arousal sweep through him. He was so close!

"Oh god..." he sighed, pushing his thighs high, needing release, needing stimulation on his cock.

"Master...Master..." He felt his cock spasm with need, and then, much to his own surprise, he was coming without even touching himself, and his come spurted out so explosively that it sprayed his Master's chest. Skinner roared with laughter as Mulder lay there, seeing white lights all around him. "Sorry, Master," Mulder murmured dreamily, almost out of it.

"Don't worry, boy," Skinner said, grabbing his discarded shirt and wiping himself clean. "Your come belongs to me too!" He gave a deep chuckle, and then threw himself down beside his slave and took him in his arms.

They lay there for ages, gazing out of the window at the moonbeams glancing off the white snowy world outside. Downstairs they could still hear the sounds of dancing and laughter.

"Thank you," Skinner said suddenly, after more than an hour had passed.

"Mmm?" Mulder glanced up at his Master hazily. Skinner dropped a gentle kiss on his forehead.

"For providing the entertainment. That was exhilarating."

"Ah." Mulder smiled. "Bet you'd begun to think I'd never initiate a scene, huh?"

"I was starting to wonder," Skinner chuckled. "But it was well worth the wait." He stretched out his big body, with a satisfied smile. "I thought, after seeing the way you reacted to hearing about David and Elaine's little arrangement, that maybe you wanted me to spank you down there in front of everyone," he said.

"Maybe another time," Mulder sighed. "What happened tonight was perfect. I wouldn't change any of it. You're really scary when you're jealous, Walter."

"Yeah." Skinner gave an amused grunt.

They were silent again for a long time and then it was Mulder's turn to speak.

"I think I can see it now, Walter," he murmured.

"See what?"

"Life without the rollercoaster. We can invent our own rides. I don't have to go into self destruct mode to make life interesting. That was something I was worried about."

Skinner hugged his slave tight and bestowed a kiss on the back of Mulder's neck.

"You're right. We don't need it. Although, knowing you, I'm figuring there will still be \*some\* rollercoaster rides we hadn't planned on."

Mulder gave a wry chuckle and stretched out - then moaned as every single nerve ending in his body protested the movement. "Oh god I ache. Why was it such a good scene, Walter?" He asked, stroking Skinner's chest idly.

"Because it was yours – that's exciting when you start a scene and someone else jumps in and runs with it," Skinner told him. "And maybe because it was rooted a little in reality. I \*am\* a very jealous man, Fox, and you...you've come into your own lately. You've grown and matured. You've been spreading your wings, preparing to fly – and while that's a good thing, it also can cause tensions in a relationship. We poured those tensions into a scene and made it hot."

"But you think the underlying tensions are still there?" Mulder looked deep into his Master's brown eyes.

"Yes." Skinner gave him a wan smile. "They have to be, Fox. I always wanted you to get this far but I knew that if you did it would inevitably decrease your dependence on me. I wanted to wean you off the self destructive behaviour though. I wanted you to see yourself and your needs more clearly, and be happy with them. If, in the end, that means you need to move on one day, then so be it. Nothing stays the same forever."

"Not even us?" Mulder frowned, trying to get his head around this new knowledge.

"Not if it isn't right for us both," Skinner replied.

"I don't want anyone else!" Mulder protested. "You've got no reason to be jealous."

"I know." Skinner kissed Mulder's lips with infinite gentleness and care.

"You're like my ultimate fucking wet dream and...a whole damn lot more as you well know," Mulder told him.

"Yes...but maybe we'll both want more one day. You might want more freedom and I..."

"You?" Mulder asked, feeling his breath catch in his chest.

"I might want more commitment," Skinner murmured.

"I asked you to brand me. What greater commitment is there than that?" Mulder replied, in a choked voice.

"Not your body. I know I can have that. I know you'd give me that because you like what I do to it and the way that makes you feel."

"You have my heart too," Mulder chided softly.

"Yes...but you never trust yourself enough to give all of it to me," Skinner replied, in a sad voice. Mulder gazed at him silently in the darkness. He understood what his Master was referring to. It was hard to put into words but he understood it. He worshipped his Master, he adored him, but Skinner was asking him to love Walter, the man behind the Master, and although Mulder honestly knew that he did, he was still afraid to commit himself totally and irrevocably to that emotion in case he let Walter down, the way he felt he'd let down so many other people in his life, from his distant father and ailing mother to his lost sister – and Walter, out of all of the people who had ever loved him, was the one, above all the others, who Mulder really didn't want to hurt. Better not to commit than to hurt Walter, a voice inside him insistently whispered, and Mulder didn't know how to make it go away. He wrapped his arms more firmly around his Master and kissed Skinner's mouth with as much love as he knew how to give.

"I do love you, Walter," he said, and his Master wrapped his arms around his slave in turn and kissed him back.

"I know," he whispered.

"Hey," Mulder said softly. "Of all the people I danced with tonight...there was one person I missed. Would Master care to dance with his slave?"

Skinner gave a little chuckle. "You hate dancing, Fox," he reminded him.

"Not any more. I felt like I kind of got the hang of it tonight – when I realised that it doesn't actually matter whether you're any good at it or not. So..." He got up, and held out his hand. "Would Master do me the honour?" He asked with a grin.

Skinner rolled his eyes but he accepted Mulder's hand anyway, and swung his legs over the side of the bed. He tried to stand, but the events of the day and the long, intense scene they'd just shared had taken their toll on his weary legs, and he staggered. Mulder ran forward and caught him, and Skinner hung onto his slave for a few seconds.

"It's okay if you're too tired," Mulder said. "We don't have to."

"I *\*want\** to dance with my slave," Skinner replied firmly. "You'll have to help me though. I'm beat."

"It'll be my pleasure," Mulder assured him softly, and he held his Master up, and allowed Skinner to rest his weight on him. He was surprised to find how much he liked the way Skinner leaned on him for support. It felt good. Mulder laced his arms around his Master's body, and they swayed together in time to the music floating up from downstairs. There had been so many revelations this past year, but he thought the most intense one, for him, had taken place these past few weeks, during Skinner's illness and recuperation and now, here, tonight. It felt good having a big, strong, loving Master, someone who could sweep all your worries away with a wave of his large, capable hands, someone to take care of you and look out for you...but, Mulder had to admit, it also felt good to be the one doing the take care occasionally. It felt good being the person the other guy leaned on, and knowing you were strong enough to do that – that your life didn't revolve around you and your needs, mental, emotional or sexual – that there was someone else who was just as important – more so, because you loved him more than you loved yourself. That felt best of all.

They swayed around the room for a long time, neither of them saying a word. Mulder thought they probably looked bizarre, himself naked, his Master clothed only in a pair of leather trousers, both of them covered in little bites and scratches from their vigorous sex session, but he didn't give a damn about that. He didn't give a damn about anything except showing his Master – no, showing *\*Walter\** - how much he loved him. At some point, he felt all the tension go out of Skinner's body, and his Master lowered his head and rested it on Mulder's shoulder, and that, Mulder thought to himself as he danced serenely around the room with his Master in his arms, was better than all the most explosive orgasms in the world.

Mulder woke feeling stiff the next day. He took one look at his sleeping Master and decided to go and make some coffee to bring to his Master. He got up and stepped into the shower. His entire body ached but it was such a good ache. Looking down, he saw that he was covered with a multitude of little bruises and bite marks and he soaped them down proudly, tingling all over again when he remembered just how good the previous night's scene had been. He didn't want to think too much about the conversation

that had followed it and skipped to that dreamy dancing instead, savouring the memory of his Master's muscled body under his hands, and the way Skinner had rested his head on his shoulder.

He got out of the shower, got dressed in a pair of jeans and a tee shirt, and then wandered downstairs. It was nearly noon, and several of the guests who had stayed overnight were already up. Mulder greeted Ian, and they both laughed as Murray told an outrageously obscene joke. He felt totally at ease in this company, and in his own skin, as he talked to the various people in the kitchen. Suddenly, looking around at the assembled guests in their various stages of undress, Mulder realised that he didn't have a clue who was a top and who was submissive. They were all just people, and, to be honest, it didn't really matter any more. It had only mattered when he had been ashamed of who he was and what he wanted. Now he could see that all these people were just like him, one way or another. Nobody was any better or any worse. It felt good – he felt, at last, as if he belonged. He stayed for several minutes, chatting easily, and then bumped into his old nemesis, Lee.

"Hey, Mulder." Lee, whose hair was now several shades of vermillion, still had an annoying habit of smirking whenever he met Mulder. He looked as beautiful as ever, his wide almond eyes and soft, tan skin clashing with the vermillion hair to give him an appealing, exotic look. "I saw your Master drag you off the dancefloor last night. Looked like he was pretty pissed with you."

"It was a scene, Lee," Mulder explained patiently, as if talking to an idiot. Lee frowned, clearly annoyed at having the wind taken out of his sails just as he was working himself up into full 'taunt' mode.

"Well, where's your Master now? If you're down here then I guess he's up in bed alone. I wonder if he needs any company?" Lee goaded. Mulder gazed at him blankly, wondering how on earth he'd ever let this insect get under his skin.

"Be my guest, Lee," he said pleasantly. "I'm pretty sure Walter will throw you out of the window but if you want to risk it then up you go."

Lee gave him a vicious glare, and then turned his back on Mulder and stalked away – but not, Mulder noted, in the direction of the bedrooms.

"Ah, it's amazing how some people change and others stay exactly the same," a voice commented, and Mulder turned to see Murray standing there, watching. "You're a good cub, Mulder. A handful, and headstrong – but I think we're all starting to understand what Walter always saw in you now. Hmm?" He reached out a surprisingly strong arm, pulled Mulder into a warm embrace against his chest, pressed a kiss against Mulder's forehead and then released him again, and was gone. Mulder stood there, stunned, and then remembered his Master and quickly made the coffee and took it upstairs.

Skinner was still asleep when he returned. Mulder put the coffee down on the nightstand, and kissed his Master awake.

"Hey," Skinner said groggily.

"I think your friends all thought I'd run out on you when you were ill," Mulder commented, sitting down on the bed beside his Master.

"Yeah, well, they don't know you the way I do." Skinner smiled. "You've always been loyal to everyone you love, Fox. Loyal to your mom when god knows she didn't seem to deserve it, loyal to Scully – and most of all loyal to your lost sister. I don't think you give yourself enough credit for that."

Mulder felt himself colouring at the compliment and changed the subject hurriedly. "Oh – that reminds me, when Elaine first mentioned getting married, you looked as if you weren't sure we could make it – you had to look up the date in your diary. What was that about?" It had vaguely bugged him at the time but he'd forgotten all about it until now. Skinner gave him a little smile.

"I wanted to make sure it didn't clash with next week," he replied.

"What's next week?" Mulder frowned.

"It's the anniversary of the day I took you as my slave. Next Saturday to be precise. One year, Fox. It's been a year."

"Shit," Mulder said, shaking his head.

"Yeah – and luckily, it happens to fall on Saturday. Slave's day. I have something special planned for that day," Skinner said mysteriously.

"Mmmm...and I suppose that you won't tell me what," Mulder sighed, snuggling against his Master and allowing Skinner to wrap a big arm around him.

"Now, now, boy. You know that..."

"Anticipation is half the pleasure," Mulder quoted. "Yeah. I know. Or at least I should since that's what you've been telling me for a whole year now."

"You'll find out on the day," Skinner promised, sipping his drink. He leaned down and gave Mulder a coffee scented kiss and Mulder opened up his mouth for more, his head spinning. A slave's day anniversary had to be good – he couldn't wait.

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They left early – the following day would be Skinner's first day back at work since his illness, and Mulder wanted to make sure that his Master got his rest. It felt strange the following day to bring his Master his coffee, give him his customary wake up call, receive his usual morning spanking, help his Master wash and dress...and know that he wouldn't be going to work with the big man. Mulder didn't regret his decision, but it had been easier to live with when it had been some nebulous thing in his future, and now the reality of it was kicking in and he felt at sea.

"Are you sure you're going to be okay with this?" Skinner asked, as Mulder smoothed his Master's dark navy suit jacket over Skinner's broad shoulders.

"I don't have a choice," Mulder replied with a shrug.

"You can change your mind." Skinner's dark eyes were sombre.

"I already told you – my resignation letter is on your desk...and besides, I think the price of me changing my mind is more than either of us would like to pay."

"Maybe so." Skinner gave a deep, weary sigh. "But I hate that they're essentially blackmailing you into this, Fox."

"It'll be fine. I told you – there's a lot of stuff I always wanted to do if I only had the time. Now...I guess I do. It feels weird but I suppose I'll get used to it. I can always hang out with the Lone Gunmen playing video games all day if I get bored." He grinned at his Master. "Or cards. Or role playing games. Or..."

"Not without my goddamn permission," Skinner growled and Mulder laughed. "Speaking of which, you do know you have my permission to go after the bastards that did this to us, don't you?" Skinner told him softly. "If there's a way, if it's possible to nail them – I'll be right there with you. Just keep me in the loop – run everything past me. I know you will anyway, but I'm saying that I'll help. I want to be free of them just as much as you do – but if you want to let it drop then I'm with you on that too. If you just want to live out the rest of your life writing, or..." Skinner smiled, "being my slave, then that's fine as well, although I don't think it'll ever be enough for you not to have an outlet for that ingenious brain of yours. I know it's too early for you to be making any decisions on this, but I want you to know that I'll support you – whatever you decide to do."

"Thanks." Mulder nodded. "That means a lot to me, Master."

"Oh, and there's something I had done while we were away overnight," Skinner said, grabbing Mulder's arm and pulling him towards the staircase leading to the 18th floor apartment. Mulder followed his Master, mystified, and he was even more mystified when Skinner led him to the room that had been his old bedroom when he had first arrived here as a new slave, nearly a year ago.

"Close your eyes," Skinner said. Mulder did as ordered. He heard Skinner open the door and he was walked inside, guided by his Master's hand on his shoulder. "Okay. Open them again," Skinner told him, and Mulder looked around – to find himself in a fully equipped study. The bed, nightstand and closet that had been here when this was his bedroom were gone. In their place was an expensive oak desk, several bookshelves complete with many of his books, a supply of pens, pads of paper, a telephone, his computer...and there, right above his desk, was his *I want to believe* poster. His fish completed the tranquil working environment, swimming happily around their tank in the corner of the room. "I realise this is a big change for you," Skinner said, "but I hope you'll find this a good place to work. I thought you might like to have the peace and quiet of this apartment as your office. You've got the en suite bathroom and the kitchen is nearby of course. I thought it might be helpful, psychologically, if you had somewhere else to go rather than our own apartment. So it felt like there was a clear demarcation between work and home."

"It's..." Mulder gazed around the room, lost for words.

"Will you be able to work here d'you think?" Skinner asked him. "Will it do?"

"Walter – I used to work in a basement, and you've put me up high among the stars," Mulder said, startled into lyricism by the unexpectedness of the gesture. "I think this will do just fine," he added softly. "It's perfect, Walter."

"Good." Skinner planted a kiss on his slave's cheek. "By the way – I also had some, uh, amendments made to the Playroom while we were away too. I know I can trust you not to peek in there before Saturday, but I'm just warning you not to go inside or it'll spoil the surprise on Slave's Day."

"Mmm. I'm so looking forward to this Saturday you have planned," Mulder grinned. They both knew that Mulder wouldn't peek in the Playroom. They also both knew that the Mulder who Skinner had first taken as his slave wouldn't have been able to resist the temptation, but that Mulder hadn't so much changed as matured, Mulder thought to himself, as he walked back downstairs with his Master and watched Skinner leave the apartment.

It felt strange at first. Mulder found himself making frequent cups of coffee and then running to the bathroom as a result, just to avoid sitting down and starting the huge, empty canvass that was his future working life. Then he clicked on his email and found Scully's request for a lunch date which cheered him up, and another few clicks brought up an email from one of his old correspondents bringing his attention to a mysterious case in Wisconsin that tied in with something he'd worked on a few years before, and that prompted him to go back to his old notes on the subject and before he knew it several hours had passed and he had written a chapter plan for the book he intended to write. He also emailed his Master for permission to fly to Wisconsin later in the month to do some more in-depth research. Somehow, Mulder doubted he'd be happy sitting behind a desk writing all day...he still needed to get out and do some fieldwork...but he could at least see what his future might be – and he felt content with it.

Someone else was very content to have him around as well. He'd been in his new office for less than an hour when the door was pushed open and he had a visitor. She leapt onto his lap, almost spilling his 3rd cup of coffee in the process, and proceeded to settle down while he worked around her warm, soft, sleepy, permanently purring body. Wanda spent the entire day on his lap, and was thereafter his constant companion whenever he was at home working.

"Y'know...I used to think you didn't like me," Mulder told her at one point, rubbing her ears and listening to her purring ecstatically. "But really I think you were just waiting for me to like you so you could add another slave to the one you already have. You played a clever waiting game, and I have to say you've won, Madam. You beat me. I worship at your altar, M'lady, and bow before your dainty paws." He bent his head and kissed her soft forehead and she tilted her head up to meet his lips. "Ah, you and I both know how good it is to be a pet, to be stroked and loved, don't we?" He grinned at her, and she trilled back her response. It *was* good, he thought to himself, but he also knew it wasn't the end of the journey. He could live like this forever, cocooned inside this comfortable world of slave, Master and cat, and he knew he could be as happy as Wanda here, safely wrapped up on his knee, but he was growing and he could see that one day the gilded cage might no longer be as attractive as it was now. He wasn't sure when that day would be, but he could sense the change in himself and he didn't know what it presaged or where it would lead him. It didn't scare him, as it might once have done, into going off and doing something stupid, but he was quietly aware that a change was in the process of taking place.

The week passed in a blur, but Mulder felt increasingly excited as Saturday drew near. He knew that whatever his Master had in mind for him would be good – it was such a special occasion, and Skinner had shown himself to have a very inventive erotic imagination. It was fortunate that their anniversary fell at the end of his first week working on his own, as it gave him something to focus on and look forward to, and that eased the transition slightly.

His Master didn't make him wait too long for his gift on Slave's Day. They ate a leisurely brunch together and then Skinner handed him a parcel tied up in brown paper. "Open it," he ordered.

Mulder glanced at his Master and then pulled the string on the parcel. The paper slid away easily, to reveal an orange prison jumpsuit...and a pair of hard, metal handcuffs. Mulder glanced at his Master with a frown.

"Get changed," Skinner said, his poker face giving nothing away.

Mulder quickly scrambled into the clothes, leaving the handcuffs on the table, unsure what to do with them. When he was dressed, Skinner stood up, and picked up the handcuffs.

"Turn around and put your hands behind your back," he ordered. Mulder did as he'd been told, and a second later he gave a little groan of arousal as the metal cuffs clicked into place. This was already hot and it had barely even begun. Skinner rarely used metal cuffs on him – they were usually too restrictive and besides, both men were used to handling these cuffs as the tools of their trade and that made them a little less erotic. However, there was something about the feel of the cold metal on his wrists, which, combined with his Master's increasingly surly demeanour, got to Mulder, and he felt his groin respond accordingly. There was something delicious about being pushed, barefoot, his hands in their bonds, his Master's heavy hand on his shoulder, up the stairs towards the 18th floor apartment.

They stopped outside the Playroom, and Mulder gave his Master a nervous smile. Skinner didn't return it – he just glowered at his slave and Mulder glanced at his own bare feet instead, feeling a little shiver of fear course through his body. Skinner opened the Playroom, and pushed his slave inside. The first thing Mulder noticed was that there was a screened off area in one corner of the Playroom. The room was enormous and they'd never used all the space so there was plenty of room to play with. Skinner pushed Mulder over to the screened off area, and then, just as they got tantalisingly close, he stopped his slave, pulled a blindfold out of his pocket, and placed it over Mulder's eyes. Mulder was now practically screaming in anticipation, wondering what awaited him beyond the screens. Skinner steered him there carefully; Mulder heard a clunk and the sound of a key and his fertile imagination supplied all kinds of scenarios. Skinner guided him forward again, and then, to Mulder's surprise, pushed him down so that he was sitting on something hard.

"You once went looking for something like this in a broom cupboard," Skinner told his slave, as he undid his handcuffs. "And I told you that if you wanted to play in one this badly, that I'd see what I could do."

"Oh shit. It's a dungeon?" Mulder asked, his stomach doing a flip.

"Yes – a very versatile dungeon," Skinner replied. "Today we're going to use it as a prison cell, but another day – who knows? Happy Anniversary, slave." Skinner whisked the blindfold off Mulder's head, and Mulder gazed around at his anniversary present with a sense of wonder. He was sitting on a hard, narrow bunk in a small 6 X 6 cell. It was a real cell, surrounded by bars and with a lockable door – there was no way out once locked inside what was barely more than a cage. There was a toilet and basin in one corner, both pretty basic, and a thin blanket on the bed. Apart from that, there was nothing in the cell. However, the screened walls, outside the cell, held their own terrors. They looked as if they had been roughly hewn out of stone, and there were hooks all over them, with shiny new manacles

attached, and, taking up one screened wall all of its own, was a cabinet of whips, paddles and canes. Mulder shivered.

"This is just a start," Skinner said. "I ordered a rack too but that'll take a few weeks to arrive."

"A rack?" Mulder moaned, his mind going into freefall.

"You'll love it," Skinner hissed into his ear. "Note the lighting – I've kept it deliberately low on purpose." Mulder glanced up at the one, bare lightbulb hanging from the ceiling overhead and shivered again. His Master stood behind him, and rubbed his hands over Mulder's arms. "Scared, boy?" He whispered, his body warming Mulder's.

"Yes, Master," Mulder replied.

"Good," Skinner told him and Mulder swallowed hard at the promise inherent in his Master's low, throaty tones. "Okay, let me tell you how it's going to be today. This is your prison cell. I'm going to leave you here for awhile to get acclimatised. I might choose to leave you for hours at a time in future – maybe even overnight. It's not comfortable, but there's a blanket and some basic amenities." Skinner gestured with his head at the small basin and toilet in the corner. "For now, I want you to think about how you ended up in here, boy, what you might have done to wind up in prison, what kind of a prisoner you are...and what awaits you at the hands of the other prisoners."

Skinner stepped away, and walked out through the cell door. He clanged it shut behind him, turned the key in the lock, and then left the screened area. Mulder heard his footsteps, and then the light click of the door signalling that his Master had left the Playroom, and that he was alone. He felt the butterflies rise in his stomach again, combined with a wave of total adoration for his Master. Trust Skinner to remember what he'd said about playing in a dungeon, and to go to all this trouble to hand him that fantasy on a plate.

Mulder gazed at the manacles hanging from the screen walls outside the cell and shivered, violently. He imagined himself hanging from those manacles, as his Master whipped him with one of the whips in the collection that was arranged so neatly on the other wall. It thrilled, excited and terrified him all at the same time. Today though, Skinner had signalled that they would play a different kind of game. Today, Mulder was a prisoner...what kind of prisoner, he wondered? A tough, seasoned pro? Or someone who'd never been in trouble before? Someone scared, out of his depth, worried about his future and the loss of his freedom...someone not entirely like himself, this time last year, as he contemplated his new life as a slave. He wondered if that had been what his Master intended, but it didn't matter; Mulder knew this was a feeling he wanted to revisit. He lay on the bunk, gazing at the metal bars of the cage he was confined in, trying to imagine what this would be like for real. He was an innocent, a man who had never been in jail before and had no idea what to expect. He was scared – petrified, and he was all alone in this dark, austere cell. Mulder stroked his swelling cock through his jumpsuit. He was seriously turned on, but he didn't want to spoil himself for the main event so he satisfied himself with just stoking up the heat a little.

Some time passed. Mulder turned onto his side, brought his knees up to his chest, and lay there, listening for noises. How long would he have to wait, he wondered? Hours? Days? Skinner could keep him locked up in here for as long as he wanted. Nobody was expecting him anywhere...it was a terrifying

thought, and, even though Mulder knew his Master would never allow him to come to any harm he allowed his imagination free rein as he really got into the role. He gave a jolt of surprise as he heard a door slam, and sat up on the side of his bunk, eager, expectant, and not a little afraid as his Master returned to the dungeon area of the Playroom. Mulder wasn't sure what he had been expecting but what he saw took his breath away.

Skinner was dressed like a prison guard, only he looked a million times sexier than any prison guard Mulder had ever seen in the course of his work. His long legs were encased in a pair of tight, navy blue pants, over which he wore a pair of knee length boots, polished up to such a high shine that you could see your reflection in them. His pants were so tight that you could see the outline of his large, straining penis through the fabric. Mulder took a deep breath, and managed, finally, to drag his gaze away from the other man's crotch, and take in the rest of his outfit. A pale blue shirt was stretched tautly over his Master's superb chest and arms; it was as crisp and sharp as the white ones Skinner habitually wore for his real job, but this one was considerably tighter, and the fabric was strained over bulging biceps and tantalisingly toned pecs. The shirt was tucked into the pants, and a neat, black belt covered his waist...hanging from which was a variety of keys that clinked and clanked as Skinner walked. Mulder found the sound arousing for some reason he didn't understand. Maybe it was the aura of power that those keys gave Skinner; he was the one with the authority to lock and unlock the prison which Mulder inhabited. In this situation, Mulder's whole life depended on pleasing this man, and he could tell by the way Skinner walked that he was aware of that too. A long, shiny black nightstick also hung from Skinner's polished belt, and the outfit was completed by a navy blue tie, and, on his head, a dark blue uniform cap. Mulder took a deep breath of surprise as he realised just how incredibly sexy his Master looked in this uniform. He wondered what Skinner had looked like in his Vietnam uniform, but couldn't imagine his Master as a gangly 18 year old boy. He was about to speak when Skinner unhitched the nightstick from his belt, and ran it along the bars of the cell. It made an appallingly loud noise and Mulder covered his ears with his hands, wincing.

"You - the new prisoner," Skinner said, beckoning, and Mulder realised they were going straight into this, and his cock gave a little leap of anticipation.

"Yeah," he said, standing up and trying to stare the other man down.

"SIR!" Skinner barked. "You will address me as SIR at all times. Is that understood, boy?"

"Yes...sir," Mulder said, licking his lips nervously. "But I think there's been some kind of mistake. I'm innocent, sir. I haven't done anything wrong. I shouldn't be here."

Skinner gave a thoroughly evil smirk. "Yeah, that's what they all say, son," he said.

"It's true!" Mulder retorted indignantly.

"Son..." Skinner shook his head, sadly. "A word of warning; you're here for the next five years. Now...you're a pretty boy...plenty of the other prisoners will be interested in you. You can make it easy for yourself or hard – it's up to you."

"Wha...what do you mean?" Mulder asked, throwing himself into the role and loving every second of it.

"I can take care of you, boy. I'll look out for you, and I'll put the word around with the other prisoners to leave you alone...but I'll want something in return."

"You're blackmailing me?" Mulder asked incredulously.

"No. I'm making you an offer...and the way I see it, it's an offer you can't refuse, boy." Skinner gave another of those evil grins. "Now, you can either be my bitch or you can suck the cock of every guy out there who wants a piece of your ass. Do you understand me now, son?"

"You can't do that!" Mulder replied, feeling his nerves tingling with arousal at the thought of being Skinner's 'bitch'.

"Sure I can." Skinner reached for the set of keys hanging from his belt, and Mulder took a step back as he selected a key, placed it in the lock, and turned. Within seconds the big man was in the cell with him, locking the door behind him. "So what's it gonna be?" Skinner asked, moving in too close, invading Mulder's personal space. Mulder took a deep breath and squared his shoulders.

"Go to hell!" He hissed. Skinner shrugged.

"You'll change your mind. When you see just how hard your life will be." He gave a confident laugh. "And just how hard I can make it for you - beginning right now." He gave a vicious grin. "Okay, son, it's time for your strip search. Stand against the bars, legs open." He grabbed Mulder by the shoulder and propelled him over to the bars. Mulder sagged against them, and a few seconds later he felt his Master's hand roughly undo his jumpsuit and yank it down to his ankles, despite his feeble protests and an attempt to block the other man's way with his hands. "You do what you're ordered, son. This is my prison and you're in my custody now," Skinner told him, grabbing Mulder's wrists and forcing his hands back onto the bars. He stood close, too close, so that Mulder could feel the warmth of his body, and the sharp, crisp folds of his shirt against his back. "Ah, you really are one of the pretty ones. The other guys in here are gonna love you," Skinner leered. "We have a couple of murderers – they usually like to take their pick of the new meat. I can see them fighting over you. They might pass you back and forth between 'em until one of them wins."

"You're just trying to scare me," Mulder hissed.

"You should be scared, son. You should be real scared," Skinner told him. "Now, keep your hands on the bars and your legs apart, or I'll call an trustee to hold you down while I search you." He ran his hands over Mulder's body, stroking lasciviously. "Mmm, nice toned body. Long, lean legs..." Skinner mused as he stroked. Mulder stood there, his entire body tense and trembling as Skinner's hands went lower. He reached Mulder's buttocks and cupped them.

"Please..." Mulder said throatily.

"What's the matter, son? Don't tell me you've still got your cherry?" Mulder trembled even more violently at that and heard Skinner's answering laugh from behind him. "Ah, you have. This is good. This is real good. Mmmm...I can't wait to take that cherry from you, boy. Better me than one of those guys out there – they might cut you up some, rip into you, maybe use a knife...I won't do that. I'll get you nice and ready for my hard cock, stretch you a bit, and then I'll slide into you, nice and easy. You'll like that, boy. You'll like feeling my hard cock inside you."

"No, please, sir...I've never done anything like this before," Mulder begged.

"You have to learn, son. Someone's gonna pop that cherry of yours while you're in here and it might as well be me," Skinner told him. "Now, hold still while I search you." Mulder gave a start of surprise as he felt something hard and cold ease between his butt cheeks.

"Oh god...please...no," he whispered weakly, hanging onto the bars of the cell.

"This is my nightstick, boy. I'm a similar shape but you'll find me larger. There...just let it slide a little way in..." Mulder held his breath as the cold, hard nightstick breached the ring of muscle in his anus. "Just slide it in...you'll thank me for this later, boy. Those guys out there wouldn't stretch you first – they'd just go straight in, take what they want. There, legs further apart, boy." Skinner leaned forward, insinuating one large thigh between Mulder's legs, forcing them further apart, and at the same time he twisted the night stick a little further in. Mulder felt the sweat pouring off his body and realised he was fully erect, and dripping pre-come. "Mmm, I think you like this, son," Skinner purred warmly into his ear. "I think you want to feel my cock inside this tight little virgin ass. Yes?"

"No...I...please, sir...please, don't..." Mulder whimpered. Skinner pushed the nightstick a little further in and Mulder gave a cry of surprise. It didn't hurt – it was smaller than Skinner's cock, but it felt cold, and different, and mainly he was just so totally into the scene that he felt as if he was this innocent, virginal prisoner being violated against his will.

"Someone has to get you ready for your new life," Skinner told him. "You have to be prepared, boy." He wrapped his arm around Mulder's torso and impaled him a little bit more on the nightstick. "Just take it, boy...take a bit more...that's good...I'm just slicking you up, getting you ready..." He slid the nightstick in and out of Mulder's ass for several minutes, one big arm keeping Mulder in position as he slowly, grindingly, worked the nightstick in and out of Mulder's anus. Mulder wasn't sure he could hold back from coming – Skinner hadn't told him he couldn't but he wasn't sure he wanted to just yet. He was enjoying this too much. "Now, it's me, or I throw you to the guys out there," Skinner purred. "They don't look so good and they don't wash much either...I could assign you to a different cell each night... they'd take you, one after the other. Or, I could put the word around that you're my bitch and anyone who touches you is dead...you should think about it, boy."

"I'll do it!" Mulder said desperately.

"Say it," Skinner ordered, still grinding that nightstick in and out.

"I'll be your bitch," Mulder said, moaning softly.

"There's a good boy. Okay. Let's see what I've bought myself then." Skinner removed the nightstick, wiped it casually on the remains of Mulder's prison jumpsuit, and took a step back. "Turn around, boy. Put your hands over your head and stand under the light."

Mulder stepped under the light and put his hands on his head as ordered. He flushed as Skinner walked slowly around him, viewing him from every angle. It didn't make any difference that this was his Master, who had seen him naked every day for the past year – Mulder was so caught up in the scene that it felt real.

"Mmm, nice hair...and as for these lips..." Skinner changed ends with his nightstick and stroked the handle down over Mulder's nose, ending at his lips. He pushed the handle a little way into Mulder's mouth and then gave a little sigh. "Yeah. I thought so. Cock sucking lips. You ever sucked a man, son?" He withdrew the handle of his nightstick and waited for his reply.

"No, sir," Mulder whimpered.

"That's another thing I'll teach you," Skinner promised. "You want to feel my hard, thick cock in your mouth, boy?"

Mulder shook his head. "Please, sir..." he whispered. "No...please don't make me."

Skinner snapped his nightstick back onto his belt. "I think you need some time to think this through, son," he said, turning on his heel and striding towards the door. He let himself out, locking the cell door behind him. "You just sit here and think about what those other guys will do to you, son. Then, maybe, you'll open those cock sucking lips and put them to the use God designed 'em for." He turned to go, and Mulder threw himself against the bars.

"Please!" He cried. "I'll do it. Show me what you want me to do!"

"Aw, you're all scared. Okay...seeing as you're so hot to trot...get on your knees, boy. This is one lesson I can teach you right now – and, trust me, I'm gonna make sure you get a damn fine education."

Mulder got down on his knees in front of the bars, so that he was at eye level with his Master's crotch. Skinner undid his pants, and his hard cock sprang out, stiff and purple with arousal. Mulder gazed at it in anticipation, pleased that the scene was turning his Master on as much as it was turning him on. "Okay, boy, just open your mouth and suck," Skinner ordered. He put his hands through the bars, grabbed a fistful of Mulder's hair, and pulled his head forward. Then he pushed his hard cock through the bars, and directed it into Mulder's mouth. Mulder opened, with feigned reluctance. He was excellent at giving head, having had a year's daily experience, but in his role, he figured he'd be a little clumsy and not know what to do, so he choked a little and tried to pull back.

"You need to relax your throat, son. Just let it slip down easy," Skinner instructed, nudging his cock back into Mulder's mouth. "There...oh shit...those lips of yours were made for this, boy. Now, you do a good job and I'll make sure those other guys don't get their hands on you. That's it...that's good...mmm, suck on it, son...that's it...take it all the way in..." Skinner pushed his cock more forcefully down Mulder's throat and Mulder held onto the bars to stay in position. He closed his eyes and imagined viewing this scene from afar. Himself on his knees, naked, hopelessly submissive, sucking desperately at this prison guard's cock in order to save himself from a much worse fate. It would have made a distressing reality but it was a horny fantasy, and Mulder loved the feel of his Master's magnificent penis in his mouth, the soft skin covering the hard flesh like velvet stretched over hard stone. "I'm going to come," Skinner told him, and Mulder could feel the big man's balls tightening. "And when I do I want you to swallow me down, son. Just swallow...don't draw back...there's a good kid. Doesn't that taste good, huh?" He came in Mulder's throat, keeping his hold on Mulder's hair until he was done. Mulder swallowed him down easily, but choked a little just for the sake of the scene.

"That was good, son," Skinner said, releasing his grip on Mulder's hair. "Now...I'm going to go and do my rounds. When I come back, I'm going to take that cherry of yours. I want you to lie here just thinking about how that's gonna feel – my hard cock inside your tight ass."

"Please don't do this to me," Mulder begged. Skinner grinned and banged his nightstick against the bars of the cell.

"Get back on your bunk, son. I'll be back soon and I'll want to fuck that virgin ass of yours when I do." And with that, Skinner walked slowly away, trailing his nightstick noisily against the bars of the cell as he went. Mulder sat back on his heels, feeling completely abuzz with exhilaration. He thought this might be one of the hottest scenes he'd ever played with his Master, and they'd played a few in the past year.

He got up, and threw himself down on his bunk. The thin wool blanket felt scratchy against his skin and his cock was sticking out at a rigid angle. Mulder couldn't resist. He ran his hand down over his long, hard penis and stroked it. He was aroused, but he didn't want to come too soon so he pinched himself to cool down, then began jerking himself off again. He did this a few times, until he was at fever pitch, replaying the scene of poor, helpless young man and blackmailing (and yet curiously seductive) prison guard over and over again in his head as he stroked himself until he couldn't contain himself any more and came over his hand. He lay there, sighing happily to himself, and then heard the door click again. He didn't know whether he was allowed to come or not, but he didn't want to hold up the rest of the scene so he ran over to the sink and washed himself off.

Skinner appeared behind the screens a few seconds later. "Are you ready to take the next part of your lesson, son?"

"Couldn't I just suck you off again, sir?" Mulder asked in trepidation, playing the young innocent for all he was worth. "It's just that your cock is so big. I don't think it'll fit inside my ass."

"It'll fit, son. You'll stretch to meet my size, or I'll force it a little," Skinner said, opening the cell door again and then locking it behind him with a rattle of his keys. He came close, reached out a big arm, and pulled Mulder against him. "Mmm, you're quite the cutie," he said, pawing Mulder's naked body. He bent his head and kissed Mulder's lips, still swollen from the sucking he'd done earlier. "My, you taste good too," Skinner said when he drew back. "So good I want to do that again, but this time I want you to kiss me back, son – or I know plenty of fellas out there who'll be happy to just take what they want from you without any preliminaries at all. Understood?"

Mulder gave a shy nod, and Skinner went back in for another kiss. This time Mulder kissed him back, and he gave a start of amazement as a buzz of electricity went through him. This was almost like the first time he'd kissed his Master – it was like kissing someone new to be roleplaying to this extent. He felt as if he was a young novice who'd never been kissed by another man, and that Skinner was the tough, seasoned, manipulative guard showing him the ropes. "That's better," Skinner said. "And I'm guessing you didn't find it so bad after all, huh?"

"No, sir," Mulder whispered. "Is that bad of me? I liked it, sir."

Skinner gave a roar of delighted laughter. "I thought you might if we just gave you the right kind of education, boy." He lowered his head and began sucking Mulder's earlobe, and then went down to his

collar bone. "Keep still, son. I want to enjoy taking your cherry," Skinner said, as he continued licking and kissing his way down Mulder's chest. His mouth found a nipple and stayed there, sucking and kissing it, before moving on to nibbling. Mulder gave a little moan as Skinner's teeth showed they meant business, but he felt completely trapped in the big man's arms. He had no choice. He was a prisoner and if he didn't agree to this then something worse would happen. Mulder's cock was already rock solid again as Skinner moved onto the other nipple. He continued his sucking, biting tormenting caress until Mulder was wriggling and squirming in his arms, and then drew back. "Hmmm...y'know, I think someone couldn't keep his hands to himself while I was gone. Yeah? I think you jerked yourself off. I can smell it on you." He sniffed at Mulder's body. "Yeah...I can definitely smell it," he said with a lascivious grin.

Mulder bit on his lip. "I'm sorry, sir. I was so turned on by having you in my mouth I couldn't stop myself," he said.

"That's fine, boy – as long as you remember that you're my bitch and no other man except me touches you then you can jerk off all you like."

"Thank you, sir."

"Of course, I'll have to give you a whipping each time you do it," Skinner said with a grin.

"What?" Mulder tried to draw back but Skinner had him in a vice-like grip.

"Oh yeah – there's always a price for everything, sonny. You want to jerk off that's fine, but I'll whip you for it after."

"No!" Mulder cried, but Skinner had him by the arm and was already unlocking the cell door. He propelled Mulder out of the cell, pushed him up against the wall, and locked his arms in the manacles.

"Now...which of my whips shall I use?" Skinner pondered, going over to the rack of whips. "I think this one. It's got a nice tail and it makes a good sound as it cuts through the air. Hear this, boy?" He raised the whip and flicked it through the air with feline grace. Mulder moaned as it swished by his ear. "Just a little whipping to warm you up, sonny," Skinner promised him, running a hand over Mulder's pale bottom. "Just to get a bit of heat into those cheeks and put my mark on you before I fuck this ass."

"Please...no....please!" Mulder begged uselessly, pulling against the manacles, but it was no use – they were locked tight. He buried his head in his arm as he heard the swish of the whip, and a second later a beautiful, stinging lick was stroked lightly across his ass. It wasn't so hard as to change the mood of the scene, or quell Mulder's arousal, but it was just hard enough to make it real. Mulder jumped. "Oh god...please...please..." he begged. "I'm sorry! I won't do it again!"

"Sure you will. I know boys like you," Skinner said behind him. "You can't keep your hands off your dicks...you have to jerk off every few hours or you go out of your mind. Now, like I said, you can jerk off all you like but I'll whip you for it every time, son. Not because I care but because you're mine now, and I want you to know it. Only time you can come without being whipped is when I'm in your ass – that should focus you on wanting to keep me happy. You just go ahead and offer me that fine ass of yours any time you want to come, and I'll take it whenever I feel in the mood."

"Oh god!" Mulder panted, as the big man laid down a couple more strokes on his naked bottom. He tried to think of the true fiendishness of what Skinner had just said and it aroused him beyond belief. He wanted to play it for real because he loved the sexual tension of it so much. Not to be able to come without being whipped...except when his Master was in his ass...maybe he could get Skinner to play that with him for real one day, for a week or two maybe - it was such a hot fantasy. His Master proceeded to lay several more stripes of the whip on his ass, and, glancing over his shoulder, Mulder saw a row of thin red weals on his bottom. He loved it when he was marked! Mulder wriggled in his bonds, feeling a heat rise up inside him. As the whipping continued he felt himself starting to fly, and he was almost sorry when it stopped. His Master came and stood behind him, cupping his glowing buttocks in his hands.

"Ow! Please, sir!" Mulder begged. "That hurts so much..." It didn't – it was a little sore, but Mulder loved the way his skin felt so sensitive from the kiss of the whip. However it turned him on to be this young man who had just had his first whipping and he played up the part. "My ass is on fire, sir. Please don't whip me again," he said.

"That will depend on you keeping your hands to yourself," Skinner told him. "Now, I like fucking a warm ass, so I'd be happy if you jerked yourself off a few times a day. I liked whipping your white butt, kid, and I'm going to like fucking it even more." He squeezed Mulder's butt cheeks unmercifully, making Mulder cry out, and then reached up and released him from his manacles. "Now, it's time to take that cherry," he said, pushing Mulder back into the cell. "Get on the bed on your hands and knees, son."

"Don't do this to me, sir...let me suck you again but don't do this," Mulder begged.

"You'll be fine, son," Skinner purred, stroking Mulder's naked shoulders gently. "Now go on – I'm impatient to be inside you, boy."

Mulder went, slowly, feigning fear and reluctance. He took up position on the bed, as ordered, and watched over his shoulder as Skinner released his big cock from his pants again. It was liberally wet with pre-come, proving his Master was as totally into this fantasy as Mulder was.

"Heh – see how hard I am for you," Skinner said huskily. "Now, be a good boy and stay still while I fuck you. This is for your own good...better to have just one cock in this fine ass of yours than to take every cock in this prison – and, trust me, a pretty boy like you would be very popular." He gave a grim chuckle as he came up close behind Mulder and slowly inserted a finger inside Mulder's ass. "Yeah, you're tight...we'll soon loosen you up though, boy. You'll learn how to take a man's hard cock and you'll learn real good." Skinner withdrew his finger, and then parted Mulder's buttocks, and slowly, aching, inched his cock into Mulder's ass. Mulder reacted as if it really was the first time he'd ever been fucked. He threw his head back and made a howling sound in the back of his throat. Skinner placed his hands on Mulder's back and hips, calming him. "There you go, son...just let it ease slowly in...there, that's a good boy...this is good isn't it? Mmmm, how does it feel having this big monster inside you...yeah you're tight...shit that's good. Work it, boy...that's right. Put that pretty head of yours back and scream all you like...nobody's gonna disturb us...."

Mulder made a gurgling sound in the back of his throat. His Master's cock felt impossibly big inside him. He'd taken it many times before, but now he was so into the role he really felt that it was too big, he was being stretched so much, he couldn't take it. He begged and pleaded, but Skinner continued to slide into him, slowly and surely, until he was buried up to the hilt.

"Oh god...take it out...take it out...please!" Mulder begged. "It's so big...I'm gonna tear..."

"You're doing fine, son...just relax," Skinner purred, stroking Mulder's back. "There...just get used to how it feels...that's right..." He adjusted his position a little, making Mulder's eyes water as his Master's cock hit his prostate. Then Skinner was still for a little while, and just stroked Mulder's back, as if calming a wild animal. "There, that's good...now I'm going to spice things up, son, so get ready..."

"Oh shit! Oh! Oh fuck!" Mulder screamed as Skinner started moving his hips slowly backwards and forwards. He thrust in and out of Mulder's tight passage, bringing him exquisitely close to orgasm each time. "Can I come, sir?" Mulder moaned, tossing his head back and feeling the sweat pour off his forehead and into his hair.

"Anytime you want, boy," Skinner said with a chuckle. He moved his hips faster now, and one big hand went around Mulder's body and squeezed his cock. Mulder almost bucked off the bunk and out of the cell at the sensation but Skinner had a firm hold on him and before long they'd built up a rhythm as Skinner roughly stroked Mulder's hard cock in time to his own inward thrusting. "Come for me, son...that's it...come for me...good boy," Skinner crooned as he took his own pleasure, and soon Mulder was doing just that, coming over and over again, his brain a mass of white starbursts of pure, intense pleasure. He flopped forward on the bunk, and lay there, panting, for a long time. When he finally came to, he found Skinner sitting on the bunk beside him, stroking his hair gently.

"I take it that was as good for you as it was for me?" Skinner said with a grin. Now he was clearly himself again – the curious persona of the guard, gruff and manipulative but also strangely affectionate, was gone.

"Oh god yeah," Mulder sighed. "Thank you. Thank you, thank you, thank you...a thousand times, for the best anniversary present ever, Walter." He turned over, put his head on his Master's lap, and lay there, gazing up at him. "I love you so much," he whispered. "This was such a perfect present."

"Yeah." Skinner stroked his slave's face softly, and affectionately. "And who knew you were such an innocent! And that that would be such a goddamn turn on! I really enjoyed naïve Fox. That's a cherry I could take time and time again!" He grinned.

"Yes please," Mulder said with a weary, totally happy smile of contentment. "I can't believe you remembered what I said about a dungeon, Walter...or that you'd go to all this trouble to give me the fantasy."

"Well, I'll admit I usually prefer things to be more erotic and less obviously about torture." Skinner surveyed the manacles and the rack of whips. "But this does set the scene for several fantasy scenarios – and if today's was anything to judge by, you and I are going to be having some fun in this room, Fox."

Mulder smiled, and reached up and gently touched his Master's face. "You know...when you were ill, I came up here and I vowed that you and I would play in this room again – and today we did."

Skinner nodded, his jaw tightening. "You did good, Fox. You were exactly what I needed when I was ill. I just wanted you to know – you never made me feel less than the Master, even when I couldn't walk. You were my rock – someone to lean on, and I won't ever forget that. You didn't let me down. Not once. When I needed you, you were there."

"Well, you've been there for me all year, through one screw up after another. Bet you never thought, a year ago, that I'd actually turn into someone who could stand beside you when you needed help. I was such a selfish bastard. I remember playing you and sneaking around, delving into your past and digging up whatever I could find, then running off after my own quest and causing havoc along the way. I'm amazed you let me stay this long, frankly."

"Heh. Well, you're mine – and I took you on willingly, so of course I let you stay. Oh, and I guess I loved you too. Yeah, that might have something to do with it." Skinner smiled and Mulder reached up, put his hand around the back of his Master's neck, and pulled the big man's head down so that he could kiss him.

It was, Mulder thought, one of the happiest days of his life. They took a long, shared bath together, and then went downstairs and cooked a meal together too. They didn't say much – neither of them was feeling very chatty. They just enjoyed being together, at one, both of them feeling mellow and at peace after their explosive and satisfying sex session. They ate the meal they'd prepared, then sat on the couch, Mulder's head in Skinner's lap and watched TV for the evening, before retiring to bed.

Skinner fell asleep almost immediately, as he usually did, but Mulder lay awake for an hour or so, just watching his Master sleep. He had plans for the next day – Master's Day. He doubted that he could make it as special for Skinner as his Master had made Slave's Day for him, but he would damn well try. He intended to give his Master a full massage and shave, and a few sexual services along the way. Mulder smiled and rested his head on his Master's shoulder. "Happy anniversary," he whispered, tracing a hand over his Master's chest, and then he fell asleep, having no idea that, once more, just as it had done a year ago to the day, his life was about to change for ever.

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Mulder was surprised to find that his Master was already up and dressed when he woke the following morning.

"Hey – I was going to give you your wake up call," he complained, sitting up in bed as Skinner placed a cup of coffee on the nightstand.

"I thought I'd make the coffee today instead," Skinner said softly, sitting down on the bed beside Mulder. "It's been a long time since I made the morning coffee."

"Well, that's what you have a slave for," Mulder grinned. Skinner didn't return the grin. He looked sombre instead.

"Not any more," he said softly.

"What do you mean?"

"Here." Skinner handed him a parcel. Mulder opened it, and found his framed slave's contract inside.

"What's this?" Mulder asked, with a puzzled frown.

"It's for you. I'm giving it back to you," Skinner told him, his voice low, and hoarse with emotion. "I'm setting you free."

"What?" Mulder swallowed hard. "What have I done?" He asked. "Did I do something wrong? Why are you doing this?"

"Hey – it's okay." Skinner reached out and gently brushed Mulder's hair out of his eyes. "It doesn't have to be forever – but that's up to you. It's your choice."

"Then I choose to be your slave," Mulder said quickly. Skinner shook his head, a little smile curving his sensuous lips.

"No, Fox. This isn't a decision you can make that quickly. There are some things you have to understand first." He got up, and stretched his neck, rubbing it wearily. "Fox – I made a vow a year ago. I vowed that I would take you as my slave, and honour my contract to the best of my ability...but I also vowed that I wouldn't make you stand by the terms of this contract forever. What suited you then might not suit you for the rest of your life...and besides...it wouldn't be good for both of us to take this relationship for granted, to set it in the stone in which it was first forged, when we might have moved on, and want something else. Something different."

"I don't want anything different," Mulder interrupted. "I'm the happiest I've ever been, Master. Yesterday was the happiest day of my life."

Skinner held up his hand to stop the torrent of words. "That's fine, Fox...and...don't call me Master. I've given you your contract back - you're free - and I want you to really think about what it is you want for the future. Don't make any decisions lightly. Think about it."

"Do you want me, Walter?" Mulder asked quietly, because he needed to know. "Or is this a way out for you?"

"No." Skinner shook his head. "You're my slave, Fox. On one level you'll always be my slave. I still have my Master's contract, and I'll be your Master forever if that's what you want. Here, there and everywhere – that's what I said and I meant it, but I knew what I was doing when I took you to be my slave. I knew the responsibility I was taking on and I was happy to take it because I already knew that I loved you. You, on the other hand – you didn't know anything. You didn't even know who your Master was going to be! I had to do that, Fox – I had to make it something you couldn't back out of and run away from if I was going to get around that legendary self destruct button you kept pressing. I had to make it non-negotiable, and provide a cage that was so full of love and damn good sex that you didn't notice the bars too much – but I knew even then that I had to stop after a year, and give you a real choice. I always intended for this day to happen."

"I don't need a choice, Walter," Mulder whispered, shaking his head. "I understand why you feel you have to give me one, but I don't need it."

Skinner shook his head. "I'm sorry, Fox, but this is my last duty as your Master, and I have to carry it out. There are some things I want to explain, and something I have to give you." He went over to the closet, opened it, and took out a briefcase which he brought back to the bed. "This is your old life, Fox. It's all in here," he said, sitting down on the side of the bed again. He opened the briefcase and handed Mulder a

piece of paper. "That's the lease on your apartment. I sublet it for 10 months. The tenant moved out a couple of weeks ago. Here." Skinner handed Mulder a bank statement. "I opened a bank account for you. I've been paying your salary into it ever since you became my slave. I deducted whatever you bought on your credit card and that's the balance – it's quite a tidy sum as you can see." He gave Mulder a little smile.

"You've been too generous. What about my food and lodging here?" Mulder said.

"You were my slave. My responsibility to feed, clothe and take care of," Skinner replied. "I wanted to bear that cost. Whatever is in the account is rightfully yours."

"It still seems too generous," Mulder murmured. "Characteristically so, Walter."

Skinner shrugged, and drew a set of keys out of the briefcase. "Your apartment keys," he said. "I don't know what you want to do with it but I felt it was a decision only you could make. You might want to go back there to live." He handed Mulder the keys and Mulder gazed at them, unsure what he was feeling. He hadn't set foot inside his apartment at Hegal Place for exactly a year and a day. He wasn't sure he wanted to go back there – and yet, curiously, he thought that for the first time since he had become Skinner's slave, now he would be able to handle revisiting this particular part of his past.

"I never wanted your money," Skinner explained. "I always intended to keep it safe for you. I thought you must have been wondering about that but..."

"Hell, no! Trust me, my mind was occupied elsewhere!" Mulder cut in, with a wry grin.

"Well, all the same. I needed to take away your financial independence if I was going to stand any chance of helping you – and you did need help."

"I know. I remember." Mulder shook his head. "I can still hardly believe that I was so stupid as to give myself in slavery to someone I didn't know. It could have turned out so badly."

"You were desperate."

"Yeah. Or I was thinking with my dick," Mulder said ruefully.

"No. This wasn't about sex." Skinner leaned forward and looked at Mulder. His eyes were warm, understanding and compassionate. "It was rooted in sex, and in your sexuality and your struggle to understand it, but it wasn't about sex. You'd been through just about every top in Washington DC after all. You'd had enough good sex to last you a lifetime. What you hadn't found was anything to fill the emptiness inside – and I knew I'd go the same way as every other top you played with if I let you take charge and dictate how our relationship was going to work. That self destruct impulse of yours would have crippled anything we had before we got anywhere. I had to take it out of your control. I had to make you a slave, and not a sub."

"I know. I've known this for a long time," Mulder told him. "So what's changed now, Walter?"

"You have," Skinner replied with an honesty that took Mulder's breath away. "You really have, Fox. You're still you. You're still wild and crazy and inventive, only now you seem to have found yourself. You

don't seem lost any more. You're not reeling permanently from one crisis to another. You're in control of yourself again. I think, maybe, that you even like yourself a little now."

"Because you loved me," Mulder whispered. "You gave me that, Walter."

"Partly. But partly you found it in yourself. You started to accept yourself, Fox. You accepted you couldn't save your sister – not now and not back then when she was taken. You accepted that you enjoy being sexually submissive and that there's nothing wrong with that. I think, maybe, that you've also accepted that you won't always hurt the people you love. I hope so because that's the last thing you need to do."

Mulder gazed into those dark, brown eyes, uncertainly. "You always did know too much about me, Walter. I feel as if you can see into my soul, and sometimes I think you know me better than I know myself."

"You make a fascinating study." Skinner smiled. "And I've loved studying you. I love you. You know that. I've loved you for a very long time – far longer than you've loved me - and I'm proud of what we've done together this past year. I knew it would be tough, and boy, at times it really was, but I wouldn't change any of it. It was necessary – even all the pain and heartache was necessary." He rested his hand, gently, on Mulder's chest, over the scar caused by Krycek carving his initials into Mulder's skin. "We've come a long way," Skinner murmured.

"And now you're saying it's over? You want me to go back to my old life? You want me to pick up the pieces as if all this never happened?"

"No. Not unless that's what you want," Skinner said, with a shake of his head. "I'm offering you your freedom, but I didn't put that brand on you for nothing. In some way, you'll always be my slave, and I promise you that I will always be your Master. Only now I'm giving you a choice. Go back, Fox. Revisit that old life. Be sure there's no part of it you want any more. I'll still be here. Decide what you want from your future. If you want, you can come back and tell me you want to be my slave for the rest of your life and that will be fine." Skinner broke off and gave a little smile. "Or, if you want to come back, with some new ideas, a different way to conduct our relationship – that's fine too. I'm happy to talk about them. Or...if you don't want to come back at all..." His voice trailed off. "I'm just saying it's your choice, Fox. It's for you to decide. I want you, and as far as I'm concerned this is your home. I just built you an office and a dungeon and I sure as hell didn't do that thinking we'd only get a week and a day's use out of 'em!" He gave a little laugh. "I'm hoping you'll come back – but you know the saying. If you love someone..."

"Set them free. Yes." Mulder nodded. "If they come back they're yours...and if they don't..."

"They were never meant to be," Skinner finished softly. "So go, Fox. Take as long as you like. I'll be waiting." He leaned forward and pressed a tender kiss on Mulder's lips, and then he got up, and quietly left the room.

Mulder sat there, gazing at the remnants of his old life, in a haze. He wasn't sure what he felt. He knew that if Skinner had set him free a few months ago, before he'd been branded, that he would have felt devastated, but now he just felt...curious. He had never had a chance to say goodbye to his old life. His slavery had happened so quickly, and had been such an impulsive decision. He felt so significantly

changed that he wasn't even sure he remembered his old life in any detail, and he wondered what it would be like to revisit it. He got out of bed, took a shower, got dressed, packed a few belongings, picked up the briefcase, and went down the stairs. Skinner was waiting for him there, Wanda in his arms. He looked strained – and he was stroking Wanda's ears desperately, as if he needed something to hold onto right now.

"Hey," he said. "You're going?"

"Yes." Mulder nodded. "You're right. This is something I have to do. There are some things I need to figure out for myself."

"Yeah." Skinner nodded. "Take care. You know where I am. If you need me, just call."

"I will." Mulder nodded again. They stood there, looking at each other awkwardly. "Oh god, this feels so weird, Walter," Mulder sighed.

"Yeah." Skinner smiled. "You'll be fine though. Look at you. Look at what you've become. You're smart, strong, and totally in control of yourself and your own destiny. You don't allow yourself to be swept along by anyone else any more. You don't throw yourself into the wind hoping that you'll find answers somewhere along the way. You know the answers – and you know that you find them inside yourself and not anywhere else. I'm proud of you, Fox."

"Thank you," Mulder whispered. "For everything." He didn't trust himself to say a long farewell, so he just leaned forward and pressed a kiss on Skinner's forehead. He paused and dropped a kiss on Wanda's head too, and then he opened the door, and left the apartment, a free man once more, for the first time in a year.

His own apartment was just how he'd left it. Mulder didn't know how Skinner had done that, but it was. Mulder opened the door and felt a sea of memories wash over him. He saw himself, taping an X to his window, and working late into the night on his computer. If he turned, he could see himself feeding his fish, or lying on his couch eating pizza and watching bad sci fi movies...and, if he turned again, he caught a glimpse of himself crouching in his own hallway, crying into his hands, lost, desperate and alone. He moved silently through the rooms of his apartment like a ghost. The bedroom seemed small, empty and cold after the warmth of the bedroom he shared with Skinner back at Crystal City, and the kitchen was tiny, although Mulder had to smile as he realised that he did at least know how to cook a fairly decent meal now, which was something he hadn't been able to do when he left this place. All his furniture was here – his couch, his bed, his closet, his nightstand...and yet why was it that they didn't seem to belong to him? He had been a slave at Skinner's apartment – he'd owned nothing – and yet he had felt more at home with all that furniture than he did here, with all this stuff that belonged to him.

He sat and turned on the TV, wondering what his future would bring. Did he want this old life back? He had missed his freedom, if he was honest. Having to account to Skinner for the money he spent had always grated, and now he had a chance to be his old self again. He could pick up the pieces easily enough. He was a grown man after all. He didn't need to be taken care of like a child.

Mulder lay back on the couch, easily settling back into an old, familiar position. He had always been wildly independent. Being a slave had been the antithesis of his personality, and it had been hard; there had been times when it had been almost *\*too\** hard to endure. Skinner had been a good, kind and

indulgent Master but he had been a Master all the same, and what he said went. Mulder had spent a good deal of the past year on his knees, waiting on his Master, serving him meals or drinks. He had taken his orders and learned not to question them. Skinner's word had been law, and Mulder had no say in how the apartment they shared was decorated, or what they would do with their free evenings, or where they might like to go on vacation. It was all decided for him, and that had been especially hard. Did he want that for the rest of his life? Was it possible to turn back the clock though? Could he negotiate a new living arrangement with Skinner, and, if he did, wouldn't it irrevocably change what they had come to cherish so much? Was there even any possibility of him having a future with Skinner if he changed the boundaries? Did their relationship only work when he was the slave and Skinner the Master and, if that was the case, was that what he wanted for the rest of his life?

Mulder gazed around the place, wondering what it would be like to live here again, to see Skinner for meals sometimes and occasionally for the big man to stay the night, or for him to go over to Crystal City. He could pursue his work quite easily – more easily alone than as Skinner's slave - and there would be no need to ask the other man's permission to follow any lead he wanted. He would be free to do that again, free to take off wherever he wanted without telling anyone. Skinner had seen to it that he had some sizeable savings – he could use those to pursue the Consortium, or to research his book...or to do what the hell he liked. He didn't have to account to anyone any more. He could go where he liked and do what he liked with the money he had.

Mulder pondered all these possibilities for the next few days. He purposefully didn't call Skinner. He needed to have time, needed to be sure he knew what he was doing and what he wanted. He did as Skinner had suggested – he revisited his old life. It felt strange sleeping in his own bed, and yet, after just a couple of nights it felt as if he'd never been away, as if the past year hadn't happened at all. He missed his Master's strong arms though, missed Skinner's scent, and the warmth of him lying in the bed beside him. He also missed Wanda's soft fur, her low, rumbling, ever-present purr, and the feel of her warm little body pressed against his as they all three of them slept in a tangle of human-feline limbs.

In the daytime, he went through some of the stuff he'd put in storage, placing big boxes of old belongings in the centre of his living room. He worked his way through it slowly, missing Wanda's enquiring nose pressing against his hand to see what he was doing. He found old photograph albums, showing him and his mother alone together after Sam's abduction. His father showed up rarely in the photos, although there was one happy family shot of them all together, when Sam had been about 5. He looked into the eyes of his 9 year old self and wished he'd known then what he knew now, wished he could tell him that despite all that would happen to him, it would all, one day, turn out okay.

Mulder found his parent's wedding photos. He'd barely looked at them before – knowing how badly that marriage had turned out, there had been little enough reason to do so. His mother looked happy though – radiantly happy – and his father had a serene little smile on his face. They hadn't known the future either, or Mulder felt sure that neither of them would be smiling in that picture. He rummaged deeper, and pulled out a little wooden box. Inside were odd items of antique family jewellery. A string of pearls that had belonged to his grandmother, his father's mother; she'd never got on with his mother, and, as she'd been slowly dying of cancer, she'd pressed the pearls into his hand.

"I wanted to give these to Sam," she told him sadly. "My only granddaughter. Maybe she'll come back one day – maybe you'll find her - and if not...you can give them to your wife instead."

Mulder smiled sadly, knowing there wouldn't be a wife to give them to, and accepting now, as he never had when he'd lived in this apartment before, that he'd never find Samantha and thus be able to give them to the one person to whom they truly belonged. Why hold onto them, he wondered? And that made him think they'd look nice hanging around Tabi's neck. She had been so fantastic during Skinner's illness that he wanted to give her something. He found an intricately worked jade brooch in the box, and thought how well that would suit Scully - maybe he could find something for her baby too. It made him happy thinking how well things had worked out for his diminutive partner. She deserved a good, solid, strong man like John Doggett, and soon she'd have the baby she had longed for too. In fact, Mulder realised that many of his friends were happily settled; Elaine had married David, Ian had found Perry. Hell, he'd even watched Donald and Elliott finally get it together after years of unrequited longings.

Mulder's questing fingers came to rest on a very small ring box, and he hesitated, knowing what was inside. Then, finally, he flicked the box open, and gazed at his father's wedding ring, nestled inside. He remembered this – it was one of the only things his father had left to him in his will. Everything else had gone to his mother, and now Mulder thought he kind of understood why. She'd lost her daughter, and his father hadn't been a good husband to her in that aftermath of that great loss. His father had clearly figured that his son would always be able to take care of himself financially, but his mother's health and state of mind were fragile, and he took some responsibility for that. He'd left her his money not to snub his only son, but to ensure that at least she wouldn't have to worry about her finances, and he must have thought that his son would end up with his inheritance anyway, after his mother died. Still, he'd given his wedding ring to his son – presumably figuring that his ex-wife wouldn't want to be reminded of how they'd failed at the one thing that had bound them together. Mulder gazed at it hazily, wondering how it would look on Skinner's finger, wondering how it would feel to place it there. The ring stared at him and he stared back. Was this what he wanted? Mulder thought about it for a moment, and then snapped the box shut. No. This wasn't it. This wasn't it at all. Suddenly his future seemed very clear to him, and he knew precisely what he had to do. He put the ring back into the box, and then began, purposefully, to sort through all the boxes. He wouldn't put them away again this time. He'd only keep the photos, and just a few keepsakes. The rest he'd throw out. This was a time for new beginnings – a time to say farewell to the past, once and for all.

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Mulder arrived back at Skinner's apartment on Friday afternoon. It had been less than a week, but it felt like a lifetime since he'd left. The apartment felt cold so he put on the heating, and dumped the bag of groceries he'd bought in the kitchen. He found Wanda sitting on the couch in the living room, and she blinked at him lazily, as if not at all surprised to see him.

"Hey. Did you miss me?" He asked, sitting down beside her, and hauling a massive brown bag up onto the couch with him. She gazed at him thoughtfully, as if considering that question, and he grinned. "Always playing hard to get, my inscrutable little mistress, huh? Well, okay. Let's see you keep that poker face when I show you \*this\*." And with that, he emptied the contents of the paper bag all over the couch. Little sparkling balls, and small, pseudo-mice with gaudy coloured feathers for tails fell out, amid a myriad of other cat toys. "This," Mulder said, holding up a big clockwork fish, "is because you're obsessed with fish, madam. I thought this might distract you from terrorising those poor guys in my tank."

Her green eyes lit up and she began to studiously examine her booty, but not with too much enthusiasm in case it betrayed a kittenish lack of cool.

"Hah!" Mulder said. "You don't fool me, M'lady. I know you're itching to play." He picked up one of the balls and threw it across the room, and Wanda hesitated for only a second before bounding off the couch and running after it. She picked it up in her mouth and came trotting back to him. She stopped a few feet short of him, as was her customary habit, and dropped the ball there. Mulder rolled his eyes. "What really pisses me off is that you know I'll come and get it and throw it anyway," he told her with a sigh. "Yeah... I know, what's the point of having an adoring slave if you don't make him work a little – and there's also that need you have to prove who's mistress, as if any of us were in any doubt." He got down on his knees, teased the ball out from between her paws, and threw it again, and then lay there, watching her with a stupid grin on his face as she danced and pounced and generally had a great time with his gifts.

Skinner returned home a couple of hours later. Mulder was sitting on the couch in the living room, waiting for him. He was surprised that he didn't feel nervous. He had thought that he would, but he didn't. This just felt...right. It did feel strange to be seated on the couch wearing clothes in the big man's presence, when as a slave he had so often been naked, but all the same, it didn't feel wrong. It just felt different. He was wearing the outfit his Master had bought for him on their first shopping expedition together – a green silk shirt that brought out the colour of his eyes, soft navy pants, and a pair of expensive Italian loafers on his feet.

"Hey," he said, as Skinner walked into the living room, making straight for the whisky bottle on the sideboard as he often did after work, for a small shot of his favourite drink.

Skinner turned, startled. "I thought it was warm in here...and I can smell something cooking," he said, sniffing the air.

"Yeah. I came back a couple of hours ago."

"And?" Skinner asked, his entire body tense.

Mulder smiled. "Relax. We have all evening. I even cooked."

"Hmm." Skinner remained standing, still as a statue. "So, you won't tell me your answer now?"

"No. You can wait." Mulder's smile widened. "After all, I seem to remember someone telling me that anticipation is half the pleasure."

"That guy was an idiot." Skinner grimaced. "You shouldn't have listened to him."

"Oh, but I did. He was a good Master. I learned a lot from him," Mulder said softly. He got up, crossed the room, and pressed a gentle kiss against Skinner's cheek. "It's good to see you, Walter," he said quietly, and then he carefully removed his Master's coat, with the unobtrusive, elegant flick of his hands that he'd learned from a year's devotion as this man's slave.

Skinner reached up and stopped his hands. "You don't have to wait on me," he growled.

"I'm not. It's just a kindness, a courtesy...a gesture of affection," Mulder told him softly. "Just the kind of thing you do for someone you love."

Skinner hesitated, unsure what he was being told. "Are you here to stay?" He asked, in a strained voice. Mulder suddenly saw a world of vulnerability in the big man's dark brown eyes, and he knew it had always been there – he'd just chosen to look away before, and see only the Master, and not the man underneath.

"Let's eat," he replied, taking Skinner's hand and leading him over to the dining table. It was laid for two, and Mulder had taken care to light candles, and lay everything so that it looked inviting and romantic. That was something else he'd learned from his Master; that taking the time to prepare something, whether it was yourself, or a meal, or a bath or whatever for someone you cared about wasn't time wasted. It was another kindness and courtesy, another gesture of affection. Just something you did for someone you love.

He held out Skinner's chair for him, and then served up what he knew to be one of the big man's favourite meals.

"Is this a last supper?" Skinner asked. "You've gone to a good deal of trouble."

"No trouble at all," Mulder replied with a smile. "It's been an interesting week, Walter."

"For me too." Skinner rubbed his chin absently, never taking his eyes off Mulder. "You look well. Did you come to a decision?"

"Yes." Mulder nodded. "Forgive me for not calling. I needed some time alone."

"That's okay." Skinner waved his hand in the air. "I knew you would. I wasn't expecting a call. Did it go okay? Are you alright?" There was an anxious expression in his eyes.

"I'm not your slave any more. You don't have to worry about me," Mulder told him gently.

"I do anyway. I always will." Skinner shrugged. "That's just the kind of thing you do for people you love."

Mulder smiled at having his own words repeated back to him. "I went through all my old stuff – threw most of it out," he said. Skinner nodded, those dark eyes of his so watchful. "I thought a lot about the past year – and about what led me to your door...in a manner of speaking anyway." He shrugged.

"Did you come to any conclusions?" Skinner asked.

"That you can't go back," Mulder said firmly. "You can't turn back the clock – you can only keep moving forwards."

"I guess so." Skinner nodded. They finished eating the main course and Skinner sat back with a sigh. He was wearing one of his crisp white shirts and a dark grey suit, with a swirly red and navy tie. He looked as handsome as ever. More so maybe, Mulder thought to himself, because he thought he was seeing the man more clearly than he'd ever seen him before. "The meal was delicious. Thank you, Fox," Skinner said.

"There's dessert." Mulder got up and brought a thick chocolate mousse to the table. He sat back down again and dipped his spoon into the dark, rich, creamy whorl. "You look tired," he said, gazing at the big man keenly. "Are you okay? You haven't been overdoing it? It's only been a few weeks since you were ill and you should be taking it easy."

"I'm doing fine." Skinner shook his head. "You're not my slave any more, Fox. You don't have to worry about me."

"Just something you do..." Mulder smiled, knowing he didn't need to finish the sentence. Skinner finished his mousse and pushed the dish away.

"That was superb," he said with a satisfied sigh. Mulder pushed his own unfinished dessert away too.

"Walter," he began softly. Skinner's jaw tightened, and Mulder reached out and put his own hand over the other man's tense one where it rested on the table. "I will always be your slave, in my heart," Mulder said softly.

Skinner nodded, a kind of realisation flooding into his eyes. "But?" he said, in a low, dull tone.

"But you deserve more than that," Mulder told him. "You've been so good to me. You put your own needs to one side for this past year to take care of me, to take the time and trouble to figure me out psychologically and emotionally, and to give me what I need. For a long time I wasn't worthy of that. When I think back...I once asked you for permission to love you, and you gave it – but I think you knew, and it must have been hard to live with, that I was falling in love with the Master and not the man. Kind of like the difference between loving Superman and not Clark Kent," he said, with a wry grin.

"How could I not expect you to fall in love with the Master?" Skinner replied. "He was what I was handing to you on a plate, and he was what you'd been searching for so desperately that you were prepared to sell yourself into slavery with a stranger to find him."

"I know. And I know why you gave me the fantasy as well. I wasn't ready for anything else. For the first few months I barely saw the man, hardly understood who was behind the fantasy. There are many things I regret, but that is the one I regret most," Mulder told him honestly. "You must have wondered if I even had the capacity to truly love anything but the reflection of what I most desired. You must have wondered if I had a single unselfish bone in my body."

"I didn't view you like that," Skinner interrupted him. "I knew what you were and I knew how you'd been damaged. I wanted to help. I wanted to love you – I just had to find a way of making you let me."

"And you sure as hell did," Mulder chuckled. "Walter...I'll always be your slave in my heart...but, like I said, you deserve something more."

"You're leaving?" Skinner asked, those dark eyes of his sad but resigned. Mulder thought of all the people the big man had lost – first his wife, then Andrew Linker, and now his slave, and his heart ached. He had been so preoccupied with the losses in his own life that for a long time it had passed him by how much Skinner had suffered too. Mulder reached into his pocket and pulled out a little box. He leaned across the table, and placed it in front of the big man.

"No. I'd like to stay. If you'll have me," he whispered. "I'll always be your slave, Walter, but I'd like to be that something more too. I'd like to be your lover, your friend, your soulmate and your life partner too. If you'll have me."

Skinner stared at him wordlessly, and then reached out and opened the box. He gazed at the thick, solid, antique gold wedding ring lying inside for a long time, still speechless. Mulder found himself filling the silence.

"I found my father's old wedding ring and I thought of giving you that, but it wasn't right, Walter. He and my mother had such a sad marriage, and I didn't want any of that mojo hanging over us. I intend this to be forever, and I hope you feel the same way too. I also wanted to choose a ring – to buy one, and have it mean something. I looked at a few – but I settled on this. It seemed like you. It's got a nice feel to it. It's solid and classy, and it felt good in my hand. I thought it would suit you. I had it engraved..." He pointed to the inner rim of the ring, and Skinner turned it up and held it just over the candle so that he could see what it said.

*"Here, there and everywhere,"* he read out loud.

"Yeah. I thought that kind of summed it up," Mulder said. "It's kind of our theme after all, and it can mean what it always did – and something new too." He got down on his knees in front of Skinner, and it felt different to the countless times he'd knelt in this position before. "Will you have me, Walter?" He asked, taking the ring from the big man's hand and holding it over Skinner's ring finger. "Here, there and everywhere, as it says, and not just as your slave. As your lover, friend, soulmate and life partner?"

Skinner gazed down on his slave, and Mulder thought that the other man's eyes were a little glassy.

"Are you sure this is what you want, Fox?" Skinner asked softly.

"Absolutely," Mulder replied with a firm nod. "I've been in love with you for a very long time, Walter. Your illness brought home to me just how much I love you – and I mean you, Walter, and not just the Master. I realised how much more we could be to each other – how much more we'd already become."

"You gave up the X Files for me," Skinner murmured.

"I love you more than I loved them. In the end, it was a simple enough decision to make." Mulder shrugged.

Skinner glanced back at the ring again. "Here, there and everywhere," he quoted softly. "This is pretty much all I ever wanted, Fox."

"So you'll have me?" Mulder held his breath. Skinner gave a slow smile that lit his entire face, making him look almost unrecognisable.

"I'd be delighted," he replied.

Mulder gave an insanely happy smile in return, and then carefully pushed the ring into place. It fitted perfectly, which he took to be a good omen for their future life together.

"With this ring, I thee wed. With my body, I thee worship," he murmured. He'd said it before, a little over a year ago, but he'd been joking with the words then to deflect how awkward he'd felt in that situation. This time he meant it, and he wasn't embarrassed to say it either. He noticed that Skinner's entire body had relaxed, and the other man's dark eyes were glowing. Mulder picked up his lover's hand and kissed the ring and his finger – he remembered Skinner doing this to him, in the elevator, the night he'd first taken him as his slave, and how much his Master's sincerity had affected him. He hadn't realised then how big a deal it was for Skinner to have put that ring on his finger. At the time it had just been a symbol of ownership for him – he hadn't known that Skinner had meant it for real. Now he knew what his lover must have felt like. He could see that Skinner remembered too, because the big man reached down, took Mulder's face in his hands, and dipped his head to bestow a loving kiss on his lips. Mulder could feel his lover's hard thighs under his hands, as he lifted his head to receive that kiss, opening his lips to savour the taste of their first kiss, not as Master and slave, but as lovers. It felt good. The candlelight was flickering gently, bathing them both in its warm glow, and Mulder felt as if everything was right in his world. It had taken him a long time to reach this place in his heart, but, now he was here, he wondered how on earth it had taken him so long.

"I'm not sure how this plays out. I guess we can talk about that," Mulder said when the kiss ended. "I'm still, you know...sexually submissive." He grinned. "And being your slave is still the hottest thing I know. Period."

"I'm pretty attached to being your Master too," Skinner replied with a grin, stroking his lover's hair.

"I'm thinking we could make up some new rules as we go along," Mulder said. "We have the rest of our lives to figure 'em out after all." He stood up, and held out his hands to his lover. Skinner took them, and Mulder pulled him to his feet. "I was also thinking that it would be a good idea to continue this conversation in the bedroom," he added, with a cheeky grin. Skinner laughed, and Mulder blew out the candles, and, still holding one of his lover's hands, drew Skinner out of the door, and up towards the bedroom.

Mulder had prepared the bedroom too. He turned on the disc he had placed in the stereo earlier, and then returned to where his Master was standing, gazing at the shrine Mulder had made on one of the nightstands of their two framed contracts, surrounded by lit candles.

"I don't want to ever put these contracts in storage, Walter," Mulder said, putting his arms around his lover, and drawing him close as the music began to softly play. "They're how it all began – and I think they'll be our touchstone in the years to come. When I need taking down, I know I can rely on you to do that. And when you need the worshipful attention of your adoring, naked slave – well, you know you can rely on me for that too. Also...there are all the little rituals we've built up. The confessional position, the grace position, the inspections, the Wanda command..." He paused and glanced at his Master with a mischievous glint in his eye, knowing how much they both loved that particular command. "The wake up call, the morning spankings, the marking...I've loved all of it, and I don't want to lose it."

"You won't," Skinner said huskily, lacing his arms around Mulder's waist and pulling him close, nuzzling at his hair. "We can work them all into our new life together."

"I was hoping you'd say that, Walter," Mulder sighed, laying his head on Skinner's shoulder.

"Hey...it sounds like they're playing our song," Skinner murmured. Mulder grinned.

"I asked Mark to make a recording of his version of *Here, There and Everywhere* – the way he sang it for you at Murray's party last year. It's definitely our song."

He nuzzled his face in for a kiss, and his lover happily obliged. "You weren't nearly this romantic when you were my slave," Skinner commented. "I'll have to set you free more often."

"I learned how to be romantic from you. It didn't come easily. I had to pull out the really big guns for this evening though – I wanted it to be special," Mulder said, swaying contentedly against his lover's shoulder as they danced. "There's something else I'd like to do – to mark the occasion?" He said, feeling a little nervous.

"Mmm?" Skinner glanced at him, his big hands stroking loving patterns on Mulder's back.

"I'd like to make love to you, Walter. To make love to *\*you\**, Walter, not my Master, but my lover," Mulder asked quietly. Skinner gazed at him for a moment, and his dark eyes glowed in the candlelight.

"I'd love that, Fox," he said, quietly and sincerely, and Mulder had the feeling that this was something for which his lover had been waiting for a very long time.

Mulder started to undress Skinner slowly, gently, lovingly as they danced. He tangled his fingers in the big man's tie, stripped it away from his collar, and let it fall to the floor. Then he sensuously began to unbutton his lover's shirt, slow button by slow button. His fingers dipped beneath the cool, cotton fabric, to find his lover's chest beneath, covered in its fine layer of light curls. He pulled the shirt off Skinner's shoulders, and then nestled back in again. He liked the feel of Skinner's bare flesh against his own silk shirt; Skinner felt so warm and solid. Mulder dipped his head and began licking his lover's nipples, and Skinner sighed, and threw back his head. His nipples were sensitive, something that it had taken Mulder several months to discover, and now he had the heady sensation of realising that there was no part of his lover's body that he couldn't touch and make love to. He didn't have to ask permission any more – Skinner was his, he belonged to him, in a way that transcended any Master/slave contract. Mulder reached for his lover's pants and undid them, then slid them down Skinner's muscular thighs, along with the big man's briefs, to reveal his lover's hard, erect penis.

"Mmmm..." Mulder sank slowly down to his knees, and took that beautiful penis in his mouth. His lover gave a deep sigh of satisfaction as Mulder tongued it, but after a few minutes, Skinner pulled Mulder up, and went down on his own knees. He opened Mulder's pants, and took Mulder's own hard cock in his mouth. It should have felt strange, his old Master on his knees sucking off his former slave, but it didn't. It just felt very natural, and very right. Skinner sucked on him for a little while, and then came back up again. Mulder gently guided him to the bed, pushed him down on it, and then slowly removed his own clothes, gazing down on his lover all the time as he did so. Skinner looked magnificent lying there, his large thighs outstretched and waiting, his deliciously edible golden skin glowing in the candlelight. Mulder finished divesting himself of his clothes, and slid onto the bed beside his lover. He covered Skinner's large, tanned body with his own more slender, pale one, delighting in the sensation of flesh

against flesh. Mulder gently pressed his lips to Skinner's tattoo, and his lover, just as gently, touched his own lips against the brand on Mulder's thigh.

Their bodies moved as one together, rising and falling, each coaxing the other to greater heights of arousal. They knew each other so well, knew each other's bodies so intimately, and yet, Mulder thought, there was always something new to discover. They were making love, after all, for the first time as lovers, and not Master and slave, and it felt breathtakingly beautiful. There had been a time when Mulder had wondered whether he could enjoy vanilla sex; he had wondered whether he needed submission in order to get off, but Skinner had taught him, as he had taught him so much else, that with the right person vanilla sex could be just as satisfying.

Mulder took the lube he'd left on the nightstand, and knelt between his lover's legs. Skinner opened up further, gazing at Mulder with a look of total trust and contentment in his eyes. Mulder lubed his fingers and gently inserted one into his lover's anus. Skinner sighed and stretched those long legs of his, making a little gurgling sound of arousal in the back of his throat. Mulder took a long time stretching the big man, enjoying the little noises Skinner made, and then, finally, he lubed his own cock, and nudged it against Skinner's entrance. He gazed down at his lover and then slowly, carefully, slid inside him. His lover welcomed him in, and soon Mulder found himself buried up to the hilt inside the big man's tight flesh. He looked down into Skinner's dark eyes and smiled, and his lover smiled back at him. Skinner reached out a hand to gently caress the side of Mulder's face, and Mulder caught a flash of gold as his lover's ring caught the candlelight. A starburst of happiness exploded in Mulder's heart and he paused, shocked by it.

"You okay?" Skinner asked, still stroking Mulder's cheek.

"I...yes...I just...everything just went whitehot and spangly. Is this how you felt when you first made love to me?" Mulder asked, still stunned.

Skinner chuckled. "That's how I felt every time I made love to you, Fox. That's how I'm feeling right now," he said. Mulder locked eyes with him, savouring the moment, and then started to slide in and out of his lover's anus. It wasn't a night for wild, rough, passionate sex. Tonight was about long, slow, gentle loving. They moved together, in perfect rhythm, Mulder's hand on Skinner's cock, his own buried deep inside his lover, and when they came, it felt as if the sun, moon and stars had all exploded at once. Mulder rested there awhile, still buried deep inside his lover, and then he rolled off him, lay down beside him, and took him in his arms.

They made love over and over again throughout that night, each taking turns to be on top, until Mulder didn't think he could rise to the occasion one more time, and yet whenever Skinner touched him his cock responded anyway, even when he felt he was totally spent. At some time, around dawn, they both fell into a sated, exhausted doze, arms wrapped around each other, bodies entwined.

Mulder guessed that Skinner thought he was asleep, because his lover moved his hand into the light cast by a chink in the drapes, and gazed at the new ring on his finger, as if he couldn't quite believe it.

"Here, there, and everywhere," Skinner quoted softly to himself, under his breath. Mulder smiled, and buried his face into Skinner's broad back, aware that he'd seen a rare glimpse into his lover's heart. There was a little 'whoomph' sound and Wanda appeared on the bed beside them. Mulder shifted

slightly so that she could get under the sheets next to them, and she took up her customary position, purring away happily to herself.

Mulder closed his eyes. His arms were wrapped loosely around his lover's body, and he could feel Skinner's warm skin against his, and smell his lover's heady, earthy scent. He felt totally at peace, as if his whole life had been leading up to this moment. He knew that on some level he would always be Skinner's slave, just as Skinner would always be his Master, and he knew also, that they were both happy with that. It was what they were in their hearts, along with a whole lot else beside.

And this was where it all ended, and where it all began, with Master and slave, entwined in each other's arms as lovers, living happily ever after.

## **The End**

### **Chapter End Notes:**

Well, it's been a huge, long ride, starting in Sept 1999, and finally ending right here. I hope you enjoyed it! And I hope you send me some feedback  
<g> Thanks for reading!

**[Click here for Shan's script for filming that last scene!](#)**

I've been sent a new picture by ASAP to go with this chapter - click on the thumbnail below to view it!

24/7 will shortly be available in zine format. Please keep checking back to this site for more details!

And Wanda says goodbye too :-)

This story archived at <http://www.xanthe.org/24-7/>