

Cruel To Be Kind by Xanthe

<http://www.xanthe.org/xo/cruel-to-be-kind/>

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Part One by Xanthe

Fox Mulder stared at his shoes, crossed his legs, then uncrossed them, leaned back in his chair, leaned forwards, looked up at the ceiling and then back at the floor again. Anything to avoid looking at the expression on his lover's face.

He supposed that this moment was inevitable. It had been four months since he had surprised himself by falling hopelessly in love with his boss and since that first sweet consummation of their passion he had been as well behaved as he possibly could be. He had followed every procedure to the letter, written detailed, thoughtful reports without his usual scant attention to the scientific data, and he had been prompt and polite in every work meeting which involved A.D. Skinner. Even Scully was totally surprised by his attitude.

"Has Skinner got something on you or are you auditioning for the FBI agent of the month title?" she asked him quizzically one day.

"Don't be silly," he muttered, beavering away at another report. The truth was that he just wanted to make things as easy as possible for his lover. Ever since the pair of them had been holed up in a safe house alone for a few days he had come to see a different side to his boss. Whilst A.D. Skinner might be a trifle surly, abrupt and prone to getting cross about small matters like FBI procedures, Walter, his Walter, was kind, thoughtful, sensitive, intelligent and amusing. He had also demonstrated an interest in his young agent that went beyond professional concern and it had taken Mulder all of one night to be convinced that he had finally found the "truth" he had been looking for and in such an unexpected place.

Fox Mulder in love, was like Fox Mulder in the grip of any of his other passions; totally absorbed. He couldn't be sure that Walter returned his affections with the same ardour though. The other man was a much calmer personality, he didn't wear his heart on his sleeve like Mulder and sometimes Fox worried that his feelings weren't reciprocated with the intensity he would have liked. Fox was a man who liked strong gestures. His manner of laying everything on the line for his feelings and beliefs left him open and vulnerable and he yearned for tangible proof of his lover's affections. He had taken to spending every weekend at Skinner's apartment but that meant he spent every weeknight alone in his own.

Sometimes, in desperation, he phoned his lover for some much needed telephone sex which was always forthcoming, but that wasn't enough. Neither were snatched glimpses of the object of his affections in the FBI corridors and offices. Mulder was not a man used to restraining himself and his discretion was being stretched to the limit. In desperation he had argued that he needed at least one week night with Walter as well and Skinner had readily agreed. They couldn't risk any more than that, but one night...well Walter wanted it as much as Fox did. They had settled on Wednesdays and Mulder lived for them. Not this Wednesday though. This Wednesday he wished he hadn't been born.

Mulder examined his fingernails and twitched at his tie, glancing at Scully who was sitting beside him. She looked as calm and collected as ever, but then she wasn't the one in trouble. He could have cursed his impulsive actions the previous evening but looking back he knew he'd do the same thing again. No, this moment was just inevitable and they should have known it would crop up sooner or later. Mulder shifted in his chair and darted one small glance out of the corner of his eye at his boss. Skinner was looking at him, perturbed, his fingers gripped around his pen as he knocked it on his pad over and over again, forming an angry little mass of dark blue dots in the centre of the page. Mulder looked down again immediately, feeling himself blush. Around the table were those other faceless FBI people who always seemed to get to attend these meetings. "The bodies" Scully called them. People who only crawled out of the woodwork when somebody had screwed up - usually him, Mulder thought wryly, but not for ages. He had really been trying not to cause Walter any trouble ever since their relationship began. He realised that some of his attitude problems towards his boss in the past had been as the result of unresolved and unadmitted sexual attraction on his part and it pained him to remember some of the things he had said to Skinner in the heat of the moment. Not that Walter seemed to be holding a grudge, but still, Mulder felt guilty all the same. He chewed on his bottom lip and glanced up again. Scully gave him the smallest of smiles and he sighed with relief. He couldn't bear to have her mad at him as well, although she had every right to be.

"Do you have anything to say about this, Agent Mulder?" Skinner asked as one of the bodies came to the end of the interminable litany of his "crimes" of the previous evening.

"Well...I think I've covered it in my report, sir," he mumbled, gesturing, still not meeting Skinner's eyes. "I thought I was acting in the best interests of the truth, sir." He added, by way of an explanation.

"The truth?" Skinner's stillness was in sharp juxtaposition to Mulder's own hopeless fidgeting. Only the endless dotting motion of that pen betrayed his anger. "And what exactly is the truth, Agent Mulder?"

Mulder took a deep breath and looked up, straight into Skinner's eyes. They were masked, as ever, behind his glasses but there was no affection in them. Nobody would have guessed that these two were lovers, that Skinner was a man who could make him come within 15 seconds of touching him.

"That there has been an attempt by the government to hide a conspiracy from the American people..." he began, ignoring the sighs around the table as the bodies exchanged their usual "here we go again with the mad paranoid loony routine" glances with each other. "...and furthermore, that there is evidence to suggest that the suspect I apprehended last night was

in fact, not human.."

"What evidence? And where exactly is this suspect?" Skinner demanded. "We have 3 dead bodies in a warehouse and an extremely angry law enforcement officer who says you handcuffed him to the wheel of his car, but nobody in custody and certainly no evidence. Unless there's something you're not telling us?"

"Um..." Mulder hesitated. There was something, but he was sure that if he told them he'd be in even greater trouble than he was now. "No." He said at last, crossing his fingers under the table, and twitching his shoulders into an approximation of a shrug. He looked down again. That was the first lie he had ever told his lover, after 4 months of exchanging life stories, talking in the early hours of the morning about their thoughts, hopes and feelings and recounting some of the most difficult and distressing parts of his life. He hadn't shirked any of that, had shared even the hardest, saddest confidences but now he was lying to avoid getting into trouble and he felt wretched about it.

"Well, Agent Mulder, I don't think you need me to tell you that your report is not satisfactory, either in its conclusions or the evidence it presents, or lack of it." Skinner said tersely, still glaring at him. Mulder shrugged helplessly. "Futhermore I have had to make a personal apology on behalf of the FBI to the police department. I trust you understand how..." Skinner's face twitched irritably, "uncomfortable that was for me," he said.

"Yes, sir." Mulder murmured. He didn't want Walter to be uncomfortable because of him. He only wanted praise and kind words from his boss.

"You didn't follow procedure, you didn't clear any of this either with me or your partner, you seem to have jumped to a lot of unsubstantiated conclusions and you have no hard evidence. Neither is this the first time that you have acted in such a fashion." Skinner paused and Mulder bit down so hard on his bottom lip that he tasted blood. Skinner wasn't pulling any punches and it was made even worse by the fact that Mulder would have crawled through a burning building for this man who was so totally chewing him out. "I'm putting you on report, as of today, Agent Mulder." Fox jerked his head up, astonished. This was humiliating - going on report was rarely heard of and usually a reprimand only given to green agents who needed babying for a while. "You'll report to me every morning at 9am to let me know what actions you intend to take during the day and again at 5pm, starting this evening, to let me know what actions you have taken during the day. In addition you will write a half page daily report of your activities for our afternoon meetings which I will keep on file. We'll review your progress in 4 weeks. Dismissed." Skinner got up from the table abruptly and Fox shook his head, trying to fight back the conflicting waves of resentment and apology that were coursing through him. Scully saw the anger in his eyes and got hold of his arm, trying to tug him away. One of the bodies grinned at him, the malicious grin of someone glad to see a thorn in their side get his comeuppance and he snapped.

"This isn't fair, sir." Mulder said hotly. Scully gave a little groan. Skinner spun round, his face hard and cold.

"Don't push me on this one, Agent Mulder. You're on very shaky ground." He said in a tone

of barely repressed fury.

"I didn't make a mistake last night. I did everything I could to apprehend someone I thought was a danger to..."

"Save it, Agent Mulder!" Skinner's voice cut across his protest like a knife through soft clay.

"You're already in enough trouble, don't make it worse." There was an almost desperate quality to the intense gaze that Skinner gave him that made Mulder back down, but not before he got an inkling of Skinner's raw anger. Suddenly scared that he had lost the other man's respect and affection, he squashed his own rage back and turned on his heel, not quite slamming the office door as he left.

Mulder sat in his car for ages, trying to decide what to do. He had been so angry that he had completely forgotten about attending the 5pm meeting with Skinner. He had stormed back to his own office, with Scully in tow, ranted for half an hour and then taken himself off to the scene of last night's debacle to see if he could pick up any more clues. After a couple of fruitless hours of searching he had given up and driven around for an hour before he found himself outside Skinner's apartment at 7.30 pm. It was the time he usually arrived and he knew he would go there, even under the present unpleasant circumstances. He just couldn't stay away and yet he wanted to. Subconsciously he wanted to punish Skinner for the way he had treated him during that meeting, but more than that, he knew he was scared. He was petrified that Skinner wouldn't want to know him, that he'd still be angry and distant and they'd end up having another row on one of their rare, precious evenings together. He didn't want that. He wanted to go in and be comforted in his lover's arms, to be cherished and loved in a way he could never remember having been before. His childhood had been a muddle of tortured emotions. His mother's pain at losing his sister, his father's remote, dysfunctional grief, his own guilt and anger, all had tarnished him, leaving him desperate for a straightforward, unconditional love that he thought he had found in Walter Skinner. Only now he wasn't so sure that Walter's love was unconditional and right at this minute their relationship was certainly far from straightforward.

Fox stayed in his car for half an hour, chewing it over, before deciding that it had to be faced. He didn't take his overnight bag out of the trunk of his car. He knew people, he knew what they were like. Everybody had an agenda, nobody had ever loved him for what he was. There were always if's and but's and proviso's. Skinner was no different. He would be angry, there would be a row. Fox would lose his temper, as he always did, completely unable to cope with his own emotions and then he'd storm out. They wouldn't talk again - instead he'd be imprisoned in a daily torture of going to work, seeing his ex there every day and knowing it was all over between them and he'd been the one to screw it up.

With a sullen face he made his way reluctantly to the elevator and pushed the button, leaning against the wall as it took him up to Walter's apartment, feeling totally despondent. He hesitated outside the door, wavering. Perhaps it was better not to have the scene at all. Perhaps they should just call it a day now, without even bothering with the row. There was no way this relationship was ever going to work. Walter probably wasn't even expecting him anyway, after what had happened. He put his forehead against the cool door frame,

thinking, then with a sigh, took his life in his hands and knocked.

"You're late." Walter smiled as he opened the door. "I thought we'd eat in tonight. I'm cooking and don't screw up your face - sometimes my cooking's okay."

Fox stood there, sullenly, taking in the sight of Walter dressed in jeans and a red and black checked shirt, with an apron on. He remembered Walter wearing an apron back in the safe house, back when he first fell in love with him. He was the sort of man so assured in his muscular masculinity that an apron did nothing to lessen his macho appeal.

"I wasn't sure..." Fox paused, uncertain what this reception meant.

"Where's your bag?" Walter asked, his eyes friendly, open, genuinely puzzled.

"In the car."

"Well go and get it then!" Walter laughed and pushed him back out of the door again. "And hurry up. Dinner's nearly ready."

So, one minute he's snapping my head off and treating me like a schoolkid and the next he's Mr Friendly Sensitive Lover. Mulder stomped off back down to the parking lot. I can't keep up with this, he thought sourly to himself. It was just too confusing. How could Walter compartmentalise pieces of himself so thoroughly? Mulder was sure that in the office earlier Skinner had been genuinely angry and by tomorrow morning probably would be again. But here, in his own apartment, he was Walter, not angry at all, not even vaguely phased by their confrontation at work. It was all too much. He grabbed the bag out of his car, muttering to himself and sloped back up in the elevator. The apartment door was ajar. He went in and threw his bag down, wandering over to the kitchen.

"Smell's nice," he commented neutrally.

"My speciality." Skinner grinned. "A sort of casserole."

"Sort of?" Mulder wrinkled his face into a frown. "That sounds suspicious."

"Old family recipe." Skinner leaned over and kissed his lover on the lips, passing him a beer from the fridge at the same time in one smooth movement. Mulder stood there, unresponsive.

"I can't do this!" He said, suddenly, pushing Skinner away.

"What's the matter?"

"You are!" Mulder took his jacket off and slung it on the back of a chair, then loosened his tie. "How can you do this?"

"What?"

"Be two different people! At work you're this raging, surly, hard man and here you're all sugar coated candy floss! It's unreal. I can't hack it."

Walter was silent for a moment and then he sighed, taking off his apron.

"We don't have much time together as it is. You want to spend what we do have talking about work?" he asked, sitting down opposite Mulder at the table.

"No. But we can't pretend work doesn't happen. Or at least, I can't, even if you can."

"I just find it easier this way, that's all." Skinner shrugged. "It's worked alright so far, hasn't it?"

"So far yes. But that's only because I've been a good boy for 4 months. It's been easy to keep up this little illusion when it's never put to the test!" Mulder exclaimed.

"And now it is being tested?" Walter asked.

"Yes."

"And is it a test our relationship will fail? Its first real test and we flunk it?" He wanted to know. Mulder shrugged.

"I don't know. I just know that I'm angry and I can't pretend I'm not and you're angry and you can pretend you're not. That's the difference between us."

"And hasn't it been the case that you've never yet had a relationship that can withstand the test of your anger or other people's anger with you?" Skinner asked, perceptively. Mulder stared at him. "You can't see beyond it, Fox. You think people will stop loving you because they're angry with you or because your own anger offends them. I don't feel that way. We can have an argument about it right here and now but the only place you are going to sleep tonight is in my bed, in my arms. You don't escape from my life so easily. Not when I've waited so long for you. So fire away. Shout at me. I can take it." And he sat back, crossing his arms, waiting. Mulder just sat there. "Well? You want me to start?" Skinner asked. "We can do this. We can go over every stupid thing you did last night. We can do it here, now, while our dinner burns, or we can do it tomorrow morning, in my office, where this argument belongs. Always assuming you show up tomorrow morning. I'm not very happy about this afternoon's missed meeting."

"Oh. I forgot about that." Mulder went red.

"Well I didn't. You walk into trouble like other people walk into a bar, Fox. Now do we eat or do we argue?"

"Eat." Mulder leaned back with a sigh. "Definitely eat. But we do have to talk."

"Fair enough." Skinner shrugged, getting up to serve out the dinner.

"I was scared I'd lost you." Mulder confided, between mouthfuls. "I was scared you were so angry you wouldn't want me."

"Don't be an idiot." Skinner gave his lover a sympathetic look. "I can't pretend I'm happy about the situation you've landed us in, but let's face it, this isn't the first time we've crossed swords at work and it won't be the last. You're always going to be doing things that tick me off. I accept that. It makes life more fun and it sure as hell irritates the leeches."

"The who? Oh, Scully calls them the bodies." Mulder grinned.

"Always did like Scully." Skinner smiled. "I don't have much say in them being around but you shouldn't let them wind you up. You have more talent and integrity in your little finger than the whole lot of them combined."

"You really think that?" Mulder stared, surprised.

"Of course. You are so unaware, Fox! You are an amazing person and I adore you. Why do you believe the people you love will always push you away?"

"Because...they usually do. After Sam disappeared it was always like Mom didn't want to risk caring for me, in case I went too. And Dad...well Dad was always distant, even before Sam went missing. I could never do anything right in his eyes. I was always one walking disappointment. We argued about everything. Sometimes I think I argued with him just to get his attention. Maybe I still do that with people I want to notice me..." Mulder paused and glanced at Skinner who gave a wry chuckle. "Dad liked to lay down the law and you know me, I hate that. There was a time when he seemed to be tanning my hide over something every day of the week."

"Your father used to beat you?" Walter asked, grasping Mulder's fingers lovingly in his own.

"Yeah. I hated it but...but at the same time I sort of liked it as well because it meant he noticed me. I suppose I sort of provoked him into it half the time. And afterwards he'd be really nice to me, because he felt guilty maybe, I don't know. We sort of had an agreement. I'd be a pain in the butt, he'd whip my ass and then it would all be over. He wouldn't have a go at me about it after that, it would be totally forgotten. I used to have a friend at school - no I did, really. One friend..." Mulder grinned "...and he was shocked that my dad used to hit me. But his parents used to send him to his room and wouldn't talk to him for weeks at a time if he ever screwed up. Then they'd bring up stuff he'd done years ago, throwing it back in his face the whole time, punishing him for it over and over again. I couldn't bear that. All those long, cold silences." Mulder shivered. "I think I preferred it my dad's way. At least it was over quicker."

"My mom used to keep this damn great wooden spoon on the wall." Skinner told him with a short bark of a laugh. "And if we played up she'd chase after us with it and put us over the kitchen table. My dad was a kind man. He hardly ever raised his voice to us, let alone his

hand, except..." Skinner paused, his voice shaky and Mulder stared at him intrigued, wondering what had upset his lover.

"Go on." He squeezed Skinner's fingers.

"Except once. Just once. I did something so awful..." Skinner paused and for the first time since he had known him, Mulder thought he looked vulnerable. "I stole his car. It was just a prank. I must have been about 15. I took it out, got drunk, drove it back and crashed it, damn nearly mowing down some people in the process. Dad had to come and pick me up from the jail. The sherriff was a friend of the family. He knew me, so he let me off with a caution. But I'd never seen dad look like that. Disappointed in me. Desperately, desperately disappointed. He took me home, never said a word, sent me up to bed and in the morning he took me down to the barn and told me that I was a disgrace to the family. He didn't shout. Just told me quietly that I could have killed myself and other people, my mother had been beside herself with worry and that I had behaved like a fool. Then he told me that he was going to give me a whipping I'd remember for the rest of my life. He was right." Skinner shuddered and Mulder gripped his fingers even tighter. "He put me over a hay bale, took his belt off and hit me so hard, for so long, that I could hardly stand up afterwards. When it was over, I was sobbing, and I mean really sobbing. And when I looked at him I saw he was crying too. He just gathered me up in his arms and said "Remember this, Walter. Because this is how much I love you. I've been cruel to be kind, son." Skinner sat back and shook his head. "I understood what he meant. He was a gentle man, Fox. He'd never harm anything. It must have broken his heart to do that to me but he thought I was going off the rails, getting into trouble, that I'd kill myself and maybe someone else if I ever pulled another stunt like that one again and he wasn't about to stand by and let me do that. I tell you though, I couldn't sit down for 5 days afterwards. And he was right. I've never forgotten it. Or what it cost him."

"I can't imagine you being 15." Mulder grinned at him, still stroking his fingers.

"You, on the other hand, behave as if you still are!" Skinner grinned back.

"Perhaps you should give me a good hiding then." Mulder laughed. "Then you wouldn't have to be angry with me any more."

"Sounds like a sex game to me, Fox. You never mentioned this kinky streak before." Skinner ran a hand through his lover's thick hair. He loved doing this and Mulder tolerated it amiably enough.

"No way!" Mulder said, pulling a face. "Pain doesn't turn me on at all. Although..." he paused.

"Go on." Skinner ran his fingers along his lover's ears and Mulder sighed, leaning back into the embrace.

"Well, I did use to feel a lot better when it was all over. It was sort of cathartic, I guess."

"Are you serious about this? I don't think I could hurt you." Skinner said, still fondling.

Mulder made a noise like a contented little rabbit, nestling up for a cuddle.

"No. Forget it." He made a face. "I just remembered how much it damn well hurt!" He pulled Skinner's face over and kissed his lips firmly. "But we're no further forward on how we deal with stuff are we? And it's no use pretending that it's never going to happen again because we both know that I can't be good forever. I have been trying though. Honest."

"I know. I've been very impressed. All these amazing reports whizzing over my desk. Reports that actually made sense for once! All the technical data attached, not submitted three weeks later in a crumpled brown envelope. It's been...different." Skinner poured them both another glass of wine. "However..." he looked at Mulder seriously over his glass as he raised it to his lips. "You can't expect me to treat you any differently just because of our relationship, Fox. It wouldn't be fair for a start and while you have your integrity, you must allow me mine. So if you screw up, or act...imprudently, you've got to expect me to tell you so and knock you back into line. That's my job. I can't compromise it."

"I suppose." Mulder sighed. "But about last night..."

"I will protect you as much as I can." Skinner interrupted him. "I know you only act out of the best motives - I just wish you'd think before you jump sometimes."

"I really did have that guy. He just...morphed into something else under my hands."

"Morphed?"

"Yes. Totally changed shape. I was so surprised I let him go."

"You didn't mention that in your report."

"Can you imagine what the leeches would have made of that?"

"Yes. But all the same you should have mentioned it. I believe you, even if they don't. You've been right too many times before for us to discount this sort of thing. Even so, you should never have gone there alone, you should have taken Scully. You should have informed me and you should have phoned in for back-up. And you most certainly, should not have handcuffed that patrolman to his car. You have no idea how much that apology cost me."

"Yeah. I know. Sorry." Mulder sighed. He got up and sat down at Skinner's feet, taking the other man's hands and putting them on his shoulders - his unsubtle way of asking for a neck-rub.

"So, is there anything else you didn't put in your report? I can't protect you if there are things I don't know about." Skinner started massaging him, his big hands devouring the tension in Mulder's shoulders. Mulder thought about it for a moment. It was nice, sitting here, being massaged. He didn't want it to stop and it would stop if he mentioned the other thing. The thing he hadn't put in his report. The thing that would make Skinner go bright red and hopping mad.

"No," he said, crossing his fingers for the second time in a day. "No. That's about it."

"Good." Skinner leaned forwards and kissed his head. "Then I think we've successfully tackled our first big challenge, Fox. We're okay aren't we?"

"Yes." Mulder leaned back and let those strong fingers soothe away his guilty lie. "We're okay, Walter."

This, Mulder thought as he lay on the couch, his head on his lover's shoulder, was bliss. This was what he had wanted all his life but had never thought he could have. Walter had one of his big arms around his chest and had insinuated his hand into Mulder's shirt and was stroking one of his nipples, idly, as they lay, watching TV. It had taken him a while to persuade Walter to watch porn with him and even now, he knew that Walter wasn't really watching. He was dreaming, enjoying the sensation of his lover's hair against his cheek. Sometimes he read a book, surreptitiously, while Mulder watched.

"I could understand it while you weren't in a relationship." Skinner had groaned. "Watching porn probably helped relieve some of your more...basic urges. But you've got the real thing now. Why bother with the porn?"

"I just like it. It helps me relax. It's so...undemanding." Mulder had told him. "I like looking at bodies. I especially like looking at your body. I'm visually fixated." Skinner had laughed. He found porn boring, but he also found Mulder's interest in it endearing. Yet another example of how he had never quite grown up and was still a hormonal 15 year old at heart, fascinated by peeking.

The phone rang and Mulder was jolted out of his comfortable reverie. He moved his head to allow Skinner to answer it and lay back on the couch, his head in the warm spot that Walter had just vacated.

"Skinner." He half listened, half watched. "Uh-huh. Yes. I see. Yes. When was this? Are you sure?" A long silence. Mulder glanced up. Skinner was watching him. "Can you repeat that?" Skinner asked, his fingers rubbing his jaw. "No, no. I just want to be clear. You're sure there's no mistake?" Mulder felt suddenly very worried. Skinner had turned his back on him as he talked and he couldn't see the expression in the other man's eyes, but his shoulders looked tense and his voice was brusque. Finally Skinner slammed the phone down and stood there for a moment, looking at it.

"Walter...?" Mulder asked. Skinner turned round to face him.

"When were you going to tell me?" Skinner walked slowly back towards the couch. "Or were you hoping I wouldn't find out?"

"Find out what?" Mulder sat up, feeling unsafe.

"I've just had the ballistics report back on the bodies in the warehouse. A report which suggests they were all killed by your gun."

"Oh." Mulder took a deep breath. "Okay, I'm sorry. I should have said. But my gun was stolen. I swear it. It was a set-up."

"A set-up? By whom? The amazing morphing man?"

"No...yes. I don't know!"

"So you lied instead? Did you think I wouldn't find out?"

"More sort of hoped you wouldn't really..." Mulder gulped. "Look, I'm sorry, Walter. Really. I shouldn't have lied."

"Fox, you sat here less than an hour ago and swore to me that there was nothing else. I told you I needed to know in order to protect you for god's sake! I'm not doing this on purpose to make your life more difficult than you make it for yourself!"

"I know that. I know." Mulder got off the couch and backed himself up against the wall as Skinner advanced on him.

"How - can - I - protect - you - if - you - won't - trust - me." Skinner got hold of his head and thudded it gently against the wall as he said each word.

"I'm sorry." Mulder felt a wave of horrible guilt sweep over him. He should have said. Whatever trouble he would have been in couldn't have been anywhere near as bad as the trouble he was in now.

"What can I do to get the message into this thick skull of yours?" Skinner flicked his fingertips against Mulder's forehead. "Perhaps you were right in what you said earlier. Perhaps I should take my belt off to you. Would that work, Fox?"

"Um..." Mulder stared into his lover's eyes. He did feel horribly wretched about the whole thing. "I suppose I deserve it," he mumbled.

"Yes. You do. Come here." Skinner pulled him over to the couch. He undid his belt and pulled it through the loops in his jeans with a horrible swishing sound. Mulder felt himself trembling.

"Don't." He whispered, his mouth dry. "I won't do it again. I'm sorry."

"Here." Skinner said sternly, pulling him close and undoing his trousers, pushing them down to his ankles. Mulder stepped out of them. They had only undressed each other before as a prelude to sex but this was different. This was agonising!

"Please..." Mulder begged but Skinner ignored him, pushing down his boxers then seating

himself on the couch. "I'm scared." Mulder said. "It'll hurt...I don't want to be hurt..."

"But you deserve to be hurt." Skinner told him. He had his work face on. That implacable one. The one you couldn't argue with. "I mean it, Fox. I'm angry and you're guilty. My dad was right. Sometimes you have to be cruel to be kind. Now get your sorry ass over my knee and prepare yourself for a damn good hiding."

Mulder crept over like a terrified puppy and lowered himself reluctantly over his lover's knee.

He twisted his head back and watched as Skinner doubled up his the belt and gripped it firmly in his big hand. Then Skinner pushed his head back down and he found himself staring dismally at the carpet. Here we go again, he thought to himself, remembering vividly the red and brown pattern on the carpet in his father's study. He had had ample opportunity to study it over the years.

"Ready?" Skinner asked and he tensed, nodding.

"I suppose."

"Good. Keep your hands down and don't move or you may end up getting a swat somewhere more painful."

There was a whooshing sound and then the belt made painful contact with his bare backside. Mulder yelped. This was harder than his father had ever hit and Skinner was a far bigger and stronger man than his dad had ever been. Another whoosh and another streak of agony across his backside. He yelped again and gripped onto his lover's legs for support as his whole body flipped into the air. Another blow caught him in the join between buttocks and thighs and he screamed.

"Well hold still then. Or they'll all miss." Skinner hissed, his big hand pressing even tighter on Mulder's back. He got into a slow rhythm, bringing the belt back down again and again allowing Mulder to holler and get his breath back between each blow until Mulder was a quivering, yelling wreck. Skinner paused and about 30 seconds later Mulder realised that the onslaught had stopped and quit shouting.

"Finished?" Skinner queried.

"Um...yes. Have you?" He asked hopefully.

"No." That belt came back down with another swishing sound and this time Skinner went faster, not allowing him time to breathe or scream between blows until he was begging for it to stop, tears coursing down his cheeks.

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry." He moaned, over and over again.

"Alright. I think you've learned your lesson." Skinner flipped him off his knee and he knelt on

the carpet, still crying. Skinner smiled at him gently and gave him a kiss. "I do love you, Fox." He said. "And now you'll feel a whole lot better won't you?"

"I don't know." Mulder rocked back on his heels. "Ow!" he exclaimed. "You damn well hand out tough beatings, Walter." He complained. "I won't be able to sit down tomorrow."

"You'll be fine." Skinner leaned back and surveyed the results of his handiwork with some satisfaction. Mulder's backside flamed a bright red, like a beacon. He got up and fetched his lover a glass of water, watching as Mulder eased himself back into his boxers and trousers. When he sat back down on the couch Mulder edged forwards timorously, nudging at his lover's elbow with his head.

"You do still love me don't you?" He asked anxiously. "You're not cross with me any more? I'm forgiven?"

"I love you more than ever!" Skinner laughed, hauling him onto his lap face down and playing with his hair again. "But if you ever make me this angry again I swear I'll give you a beating that makes that one seem like a light spanking. Do you understand, Fox?"

"Yes." Mulder relaxed with a sigh. All the anger and tantrums and the unbearable guilt had gone. He felt happier than he had done all day.

"Breakfast!" Skinner appeared at his bedside with a tray.

"What?" Mulder mumbled, his tousled head appearing from under the quilt. "I thought you deserved a nice breakfast in bed. You've got a tough day ahead of you." Skinner informed him.

"I have?" Mulder squinted at him.

"Yes. Trust me. You have. Now eat up." Mulder tried to sit up and immediately let out a yelp.

"Damn you and your goddamn belt." He complained, squinting as Skinner opened the curtains. His boss was already dressed for work in a nice crisp shirt and tie. Mulder hated the way his lover would be up and ready in 3 minutes flat while it took him half an hour just to get his bearings in the morning. He also hated it when Skinner got dressed before he woke because it was damned difficult to get the man back into bed for a quick session once he was dressed. Skinner always resisted because it upset his sense of order and it meant he had to go and get another shower which made him late and he hated being late. It had become a sort of game between them as to whether Mulder could entice Skinner back to bed, a game that Mulder usually won.

Mulder managed to topple out of the bed and onto all fours before clambering back onto the bed and kneeling gingerly to eat his breakfast.

"What time is it?" He asked.

"7."

Skinner sat down beside him and flicked through his newspaper, smiling at Mulder every now and again over the top of it. Mulder really was very endearing first thing. All that messed up hair and big morning eyes. It was a shame he wouldn't be able to touch him again until Friday night. He watched as Mulder crunched on a slice of toast, the crumbs disappearing down into the bedclothes. Skinner sighed - he'd have to change those tonight. But his lover really did deserve some spoiling. He felt a little bit guilty about the beating he'd handed out, even if it had all really been Mulder's idea. He had been certain that he could never have harmed a hair on his lover's beautiful head and instead had found himself quite enjoying the sensation of the younger man wriggling and sobbing on his lap. He had also been overwhelmed by the strength of his anger and might have been more severe than he had intended. Certainly Mulder's backside still bore the stripes and would do for several days if he was any judge. He remembered the thrashing his father had given him well enough to know how much pain Mulder would be in for the next few days. He hadn't delivered anything like as hard a whipping as his father had but all the same, it had been bad enough. He wondered what effect, if any, it would have on his troublesome agent's behaviour.

"I'm going in a minute." He informed the younger man. "There's some stuff I want to get done first thing. Now don't go back to bed and remember that I want to see you in my office at 9 o'clock or there'll be trouble."

"Yes, boss."

"And let's keep it formal, Fox." He bent to kiss his lover gently on the head. "Work at work, fun at home. Yes?"

"If it means no more spankings, then yes." Mulder said hopefully.

"Uh-uh. I think you're right about that, Fox. They are cathartic." He grinned and kissed the other man again on his outraged open mouth.

One of the leeches was in Skinner's office when Mulder presented himself a couple of hours later. "Come in, Agent Mulder. Sit down." Skinner was his normal workday self but all the same he couldn't hide the slight tug of a smile that nudged around his lips as he gave that invitation. Mulder hesitated.

"Couldn't I stand, sir?" he asked, glancing at the man in a dark suit who was seated next to his boss at the table. "I've got a bit of back pain you see..."

"Nothing serious I hope?" Skinner asked slyly.

"No. I'm sure it'll be fine in a couple of days," he replied carefully avoiding meeting his lover's eyes.

"Well if it's not serious, I'd prefer it if you sat. This might be quite a long meeting."

"I see." Mulder shot his boss a vicious glance and eased himself carefully into a chair, wincing as his sore backside made contact with the hard leather.

"We've got the ballistics report back." Skinner threw it down on the desk. "It's a good job you reported your weapon missing a couple of days ago, Agent Mulder, or you would be in big trouble right now."

"Missing?" Mulder picked up the file and flicked through it. "Yes, sir. Missing." He gave his boss a grateful smile. "I've been thinking, sir. About my behavior yesterday," he began. Skinner looked alarmed. "And I wanted to apologise." Mulder said. Now Skinner looked surprised. "I behaved badly and you were quite right to throw the book at me, sir. If I could apologise to you as well and perhaps you could pass my apologies onto the other people who were at that meeting." Mulder directed his query at the man in the dark suit who looked quite startled.

"Well, yes, Agent Mulder. I'll do that," he said.

"Good. Should we run through my workload for the day then?" he asked, getting out a file. Skinner leaned back in his chair and the two exchanged a long, completely expressionless stare.

30 minutes later the man in the dark suit left the office, pleasantly surprised by the change in Agent Mulder's attitude.

"You know..." Skinner mused once they were alone. "I've been sent on dozens of personnel management training courses, spent the past 7 years overseeing agents and dealing with man management issues and I now realise I've been doing it all wrong."

"How's that, sir?" Mulder asked, getting up slowly and cautiously to return to his office.

"Corporal punishment is obviously the answer, Agent Mulder. I've never seen such a change in a man. Perhaps I should try and institute spanking as an official FBI disciplinary procedure from now on...."

Mulder fled.

The End of Part One

Psycho by Xanthe

Author's Notes:

Skinner has to drive a long way to rescue Mulder after an escapade and ends up in a very bad mood. Consequently, Mulder's vivid imagination projects a disturbing fantasy image onto his lover.

Mulder sighed and rubbed his eyes wearily. It had been a long night and the day was only just beginning. The sheriff grinned at him through the bars of the cell.

"You stopped shouting then?" he asked. Mulder sighed.

"Yes," he muttered. "Seeing as how you won't listen to me."

"I was listening." The sheriff told him. "You're with the FBI, you were investigating something in these parts and you ran into a spot of trouble. Now you can listen to me. I run this area, nothing happens here without my say so and you didn't take the time and trouble to introduce yourself to me nicely before causing mayhem and upsetting folk. So I'm not happy with you, lad. Now I can't take on the FBI and I can't charge you, but I sure as hell can make things difficult for you."

"Difficult?" Mulder looked up wearily. How could things be any more difficult?

"That's right, son. I've just rung your office and spoken to your boss."

"You have?" Mulder looked up, two emotions wrestling inside him. His first, immediate response was one of joy to hear his loved one spoken of, his second was one of trepidation as he realised he was in trouble.

"Yes. He didn't sound too happy neither." The sheriff smirked.

"No, he never sounds happy." Mulder commented. Except sometimes when you got your tongue right under his balls and flipped them gently he thought to himself, then he swallowed that thought back down. In boss mode, Skinner rarely sounded happy. He was a permanent bear with a sore head. It was only at home that he was transformed into a happy bunny by some miraculous process that Mulder had never fully understood.

"Well he sounded very unhappy." The sheriff stressed. "He told me to send you back on up to Washington but I said, no can do!"

"What?" Mulder looked up. "You can't keep me here. I'm a federal agent."

"That's right, sonny. However, if I let you go, you'll get off scot free and after you've upset all the folk around here with your UFO nonsense I don't think that'd be right. So...I thought to myself, how can we make sure that this lad gets what he deserves? And then I thought, how about if we tell this boss of his that the only way he's getting his agent back is if he comes down here and fetches him himself? That sound good to you? A three hour drive here, a three hour drive back with you in the car? I reckon any normal boss would be a mite put-out by such an arrangement and I can guess who they'd want to take it out on!" He grinned at Mulder who put his head between his hands and groaned deeply.

Assistant Director Walter Skinner turned up some hours later. It was clear that he hadn't exactly hurried himself and rushed straight on down. Mulder took one look at his boss and lover and sighed. He looked mad. Not mad in that he had gone bright red and was shouting, but worse, he was mad in that quiet, threatening way that made Mulder shiver and want to curl up and die. Please don't be angry with me, Walter, he muttered to himself. I love you, I don't want you getting riled. Please....

"Agent Mulder." Skinner looked at him as if he was something he'd trodden in as the sheriff opened the cell door. "I've had to cancel two meetings so you'd better have a very good explanation for this, Mulder." Skinner said tersely. The sheriff smirked and Mulder clenched his fists.

"Yes, sir," he mumbled, looking his boss in the eye and trying to detect any discernible trace of love or affection or even anxiety but there was none. He found himself getting angry inside. He'd been gone for 3 days and he'd spent half the night locked up in a prison cell. Wasn't Walter even the smallest bit concerned about his welfare or maybe he just didn't care. With a sulky pout he pushed past his boss as he left the cell, giving the sheriff a look of hatred as he did so. The sheriff grinned and chuckled.

"There really was no need for me to come down here." Skinner said grumpily to the sheriff. "You could have just packaged him up and sent him home with his tail between his legs. It wouldn't have been the first time," he commented sourly. Mulder looked at the ceiling.

"Well that may be the way other sheriffs run things but I'm not like other sheriffs." The man smiled. "I value courtesy and good manners and if something's got lost and got itself into mischief, I think it's only right that it should be delivered back to who it belongs to personal like. It's what we do with stray dogs hereabout."

"I'm not a goddamn dog!" Mulder snapped, losing his grip on the situation.

"Be quiet, Mulder." Skinner hissed in a steely undertone. "Right here and now you would do your cause a lot of good by keeping your mouth shut."

"But I..." Mulder looked into his boss's eyes and gulped, shutting his mouth.

"Good. Thank you for your concern, Sheriff." Skinner said. "I'll take over from here."

"I'm sure you will, sir!" The sheriff shot Mulder a saintly smile and Mulder took a step towards him only to find his arm grasped in his lover's iron grasp as he was pulled out of the jailhouse and into the sunlight.

"Get in the car." Skinner ordered peremptorily. Mulder did as he was told, throwing himself down sulkily in the front seat, dreading what might be coming next.

Skinner didn't speak as he started the car and headed them off back to Washington. After half an hour Mulder had had enough and decided to take his life into his hands.

"That really wasn't my fault..." He began. Skinner gave him a glance of absolute venom.

"Agent Mulder we have a long drive ahead of us," he said. "And I want a report on this incident on my desk tomorrow morning. So I suggest you spend the next couple of hours getting the details absolutely straight in your head. I don't expect to hear a word from you during this trip."

Mulder bit on his lip and seethed silently. This was ridiculous. They were alone together, there was nobody to overhear them. Why was Skinner being so nasty to him?

"Walter..." He never got to say any more as Skinner stopped him with one hostile glare.

"Agent Mulder, we're still on bureau time," he said briskly, glancing at his watch which read half past two. "I would appreciate it if you would remember that."

"Yes, sir." Mulder folded his arms and sank back into his seat feeling completely crushed. He half closed his eyes and allowed his gaze to linger over his lover surreptitiously. He knew Walter was angry and that he was just behaving as he would if Mulder were not his lover, but even so. It was hurtful and it made him feel anxious. He wanted his Walter back, the nice man who massaged his shoulders for him when he was feeling tense and who brought him soup when he was ill. He didn't like his boss but he adored his lover. It was very confusing.

He fought down the maelstrom of conflicting emotions and allowed himself to relax enough to fall asleep. It had been a very long night.

Walter Skinner turned to glance at the sleeping man next to him as he drove. He adored the way Mulder looked like an innocent child as he slept, all traces of his troubled personality and difficult life smoothed out. He would have liked nothing more than to reach out and fondle his lover's already ruffled hair but he would not permit himself that pleasure. He had a job to do and he had already compromised it enough by taking Mulder as his lover in the first place. He had no intention of compromising his integrity even further by allowing Mulder to get away with anything he should not. Mulder was a man who needed boundaries or he'd go haywire. Skinner knew that deep down Mulder found it comforting that there was someone who cared enough about him to tell him what he could and could not do. All the same he sighed. Why couldn't I find myself a regular lover? He pondered. Someone like Scully who never got into any trouble and who was pretty and normal and didn't have a strange dysfunctional family background and a close relative who had been abducted by aliens. It would have made life so much simpler. But not more enjoyable, he decided. No, there was nothing more enjoyable than Fox Mulder. He was so unpredictable, so abandoned in his quests, so completely open to new experiences and so endearing. Skinner smiled as he surveyed his lover. He was still angry, but he had every right to be in the circumstances. He allowed himself the luxury of touching Mulder's thigh with his hand as he changed gear. Mulder didn't stir.

"Wake up, Agent Mulder." Skinner said tersely as they pulled up.

"What? What time is it?" Mulder looked around blearily. He was hopeless when he had just woken up.

"It's nearly five o'clock. You'd better start work on that report. I want it first thing tomorrow." Skinner told him.

"But...I mean..." Mulder hesitated. He was due at Walter's apartment at 7.30 this evening. He wasn't going to get his report written by then. All the same, how was he supposed to broach this subject without getting into even more trouble? "Um...that is, what about this evening?" he asked in an agonised tone. "It'll take me hours to write that report. Should I come later? Or maybe you don't want to see me at all." He hated himself for saying that but he felt so insecure when Walter was mad at him. It always crossed his mind that this was the end and Walter didn't care any more, that he'd pushed him too far too often.

"I don't expect you to be late this evening." Skinner told him. "I don't see why I should be put out at all because of your behaviour."

"Well then...how...?" Mulder stared at his lover, quite perplexed. If he didn't upset his boss then he was obviously going to upset his lover. Which option did Skinner want him to choose?

"You can get up at 5 am to complete your report. I'll make sure the alarm is set for you." Skinner told him tonelessly. "Now get to work, Agent Mulder."

"Yes, sir." He got out of the car and sloped off to his office to begin the report.

He arrived at Skinner's apartment exactly on time. It didn't seem wise to risk upsetting Walter in either boss or lover mode. He couldn't be entirely sure what the reception might be. He still remembered that time a couple of months previously when Walter had put him over his knee and given him a spanking with his belt. Well that wasn't going to happen again! No way! They had to find a way of dealing with their problems in an adult manner, through rational discussion and talking and being sensible, Mulder thought to himself. Then he chewed on his lip, trying to remember the last time he had ever been rational and sensible. He found it hard not to lurch from one emotional response to another and sometimes wondered why a calm, unemotional, self-contained man like Skinner bothered with him at all.

"Hello!" Skinner was smiling as he opened the door. Mulder sighed. Was it better, he thought to himself, to be the sort of person who travelled the world on an uncontrolled rollercoaster of emotion and outburst or the sort of person who could calmly put parts of their life in a box and bring down the one labelled "Friend and Lover" as easily as they could pack away the one labelled "Snarling Angry Boss."?

"Hi." He responded cautiously, edging his way into the apartment. He noticed with some relief that Skinner wasn't wearing a belt. That was a good sign. Or was it? He looked anxiously around the apartment to make sure that it hadn't already been removed in preparation for his backside to be turned into reddened, glowing beacon of pain and discomfort. No, there was no belt to be seen anywhere. He heaved a sigh of relief. He hated being spanked.

"I've only just got back." Skinner told him, kissing him. "I didn't have time to get any food in. Shall we call for a take-out?" Mulder glared at him. Was he having a go? Making a dig about having to work later than he had anticipated because his day had been screwed up by inconsiderate agents? But Walter was just standing looking at him quizzically, no sign of reproach in his eyes. "Fox?" He queried. "Chinese maybe?"

"What? Oh, um...no. Pizza?" He suggested.

"Alright." Skinner ordered two pizzas and then went over to the couch where Mulder was flopped out in a state of exhaustion. He rubbed his lover's neck and kissed his hair. "You look tired. And you smell." He wrinkled up his nose. "Why don't you take a shower?"

"Will you join me?" He asked hopefully. If he could just get Walter undressed, he could do that thing with his tongue and then he'd know that Walter really did love him and wasn't just toying with him right now before throwing him out with the garbage.

"I've just had a shower." Walter told him with a smile.

"Yeah...but not with me!" Fox tried to leer seductively but as he leaned over he realised just how much he smelled. Nothing seductive about body odor, Mulder he told himself.

"No...it's tempting...but I've got a bit of paperwork I'd like to catch up on. Why don't you make yourself all pretty then we can talk." Skinner said. Mulder glowered and got up in a huff, feeling rejected. Walter was still making a point about not getting his work done today. Well screw him! Mulder stalked off to the bathroom angrily. Skinner watched him and sighed. Fox was always like this when he'd got himself into trouble. He oscillated between defensive tantrums and helpless insecurity with unbridled ferocity until he spun out of control. Skinner wondered how he could best resolve the situation.

I mean, how dysfunctional could you get? Mulder thought to himself without any sense of irony. What sort of man could change so suddenly, so completely? He got into the shower and allowed the water to stream all over him. It wasn't normal though, he pondered. In fact, it seemed symptomatic of some wider personality disorder. I mean, if Walter had two separate and distinct personalities then maybe there were more, ones he didn't know about. Supposing Walter were also a serial killer? An A.D. at the FBI by day, a bisexual sexual athlete on Wednesday evenings and weekends, and an axe murderer on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays. It was entirely possible. Mulder chewed that over thoughtfully, putting his psychological profiling skills to good use. Yes, indeed, the more he thought about it, the more likely it was. Walter was obviously a man with multiple personalities...he was a menace, probably a danger to the public...Fox came to with a start. There was someone in the bathroom with him! He could see a shadow moving outside the shower curtain...the sound effects from "Psycho" flashed instantly into his head and he let out a hoarse cry, ducking the blows of the knife he was sure was waiting to fall on his unprotected naked body and sliding out of the shower sideways.

"Fox?" Walter was looking at him, bemused. "Are you okay?"

"What are you doing in here?" Fox yelled accusingly, crouched on the floor staring up at his lover.

"There weren't any towels. I used the last one. I was bringing you one." Walter held it up slowly and carefully, so as not to further antagonise his clearly distressed young lover.

"Oh." Fox grabbed the towel and wrapped it round his waist. "Well don't creep and skulk!" He said angrily. "I don't appreciate being spied on and crept up on and very probably murdered with a big knife."

"What are you talking about?" Walter was astonished.

"I'm talking about you having some sort of multiple personality problem. And being the sort of person that probably murders people on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays!" Fox told him angrily.

"Alright." Walter took a deep breath. "I'm going back into the other room. And you're going to get dressed in some clean clothes and then you are going to come out and explain yourself. And this had better be good, Fox." Walter told him coldly before turning on his heel and leaving the room.

Mulder edged out into the lounge a few minutes later feeling a bit silly.

"I'm sorry." He said, going to kneel at Walter's feet and sighing, placing the other man's hands on his hair because he knew that Walter liked to fondle his hair. "I'm a bit tired that's all. I think my imagination got the better of me."

"I don't like being taken for some sort of psychotic killer in my own bathroom." Walter told him, removing his hands from Mulder's head and getting up, leaving Mulder staring folornly after him.

"I'm sorry," he mumbled.

"Do you want to make me angry with you? Is that it?" Walter asked, pacing around the room in a way he usually saved for his office.

"No." Mulder got up and went to sit at the table with a sigh. "It's been a bad few days. I screwed up...you got mad at me, and you wouldn't talk to me for that entire car journey and I hate it when you ignore me and I'm in trouble and you are not going to like my report, no way, and that means I'm in more trouble tomorrow and I'd...I'd rather get it over and done with now I think. I hate having things hanging over me. And I hate it when you're nice to me when you're obviously really mad at me. I'd rather you just...."

"Yes?" Walter asked quietly.

"I'd rather you just got mad at me now and we had an argument and then I wouldn't have to worry about it any more."

"Alright, I am angry with you but I don't want to have an argument. I want to have pizza and I want to have sex and I want to have conversation but I don't want an argument!" Walter exclaimed. "You know, Fox, I think there is only one way to resolve this situation to everyone's satisfaction."

"What's that?" Mulder looked at him, then realisation dawned and the color drained from his face. "No way. No, no, no. You are not doing that to me again. Not ever. It hurts!"

"Yes, but it seems to work. Afterwards you stop behaving like a spoilt child and I get my lover back." He advanced towards Mulder, a stern look on his face.

"No!" Fox made for the front door. "There is no way I am letting you hit me again," he said.

"That's a shame. I bought a paddle specially too." Skinner told him seriously.

"You did what?" Mulder's mouth opened, astonished.

"Well it worked so well last time that I thought we should be prepared. And I don't want to keep wearing out my nice leather belts on your backside." Skinner told him.

"You're sick." Mulder pulled open the door and exited, slamming it shut behind him. Walter didn't pursue him. Mulder sat down outside the door and realised he was trembling. Could Walter be right? Did his behavior really improve after he had been spanked? It certainly always had when he had been a boy and his dad had whipped him. But he hated it! His whole stomach churned with dread at the very thought of being swung upside down over Walter's great big thighs and paddled as if he were a child. And yet....and yet,

afterwards....afterwards Walter wouldn't be angry with him any more and they could sit and watch TV, or at least, Walter could sit and he could lie there on his stomach and Walter would fondle his hair and kiss him and...

"Well?" Walter opened the door and stared down at him with a frown. "Have you decided to accept your punishment yet or are you going to sit there all night?"

"How did you know...? Oh never mind." Mulder sighed. "And I'm still thinking."

"Don't think too long." Walter warned. "Because you're not coming back in here until you agree to accept what you deserve and trust me, I will not appreciate being woken up at 3am to hear that you're finally ready."

"Okay, okay!" Mulder stormed finally, getting to his feet. "But I just want you to know that I really hate you."

"Understood." Walter opened the door wide and let him back in. In truth he was rather looking forward to having Fox over his knee again. He had enjoyed it last time, but more than that, he knew it was the only way of resolving the torturous emotional turmoil his lover was going through. No matter how much Fox might hate it, he really would feel the benefit afterwards. "It's for your own good, Fox." He said sternly. "Now get your trousers off and get over to the couch."

Mulder stood there for a moment, still wondering if he dared to be rebellious but one look at Walter's frowning features made it clear to him that it was not a good idea. He undid his jeans reluctantly and removed them, throwing them onto a nearby chair with a sigh and then he walked very, very slowly over to the couch, so slowly that his feet hardly seemed to move.

"I'm waiting." Walter said ominously. Fox finally got there, his face red and his lower lip pouting frenziedly.

"Please..." He began, then he stopped and raised his head defiantly. "Don't think I'm happy about this," he said, trying to muster some dignity. "And don't think I'm going to apologise or anything."

"Get over my knee." Walter growled. Mulder swallowed nervously, glancing at the fierce black paddle Walter held gripped in his hand. "And get your boxers off first. This paddle is going to make contact with your bare flesh, Fox. There is no way I'm letting you get away with anything after the appalling behavior I've witnessed today. So get over here." Mulder slipped his shorts off and laid himself reluctantly over his lover's knees. There was a long, agonising wait and he tensed, resolving that he was not going to give Walter the satisfaction of hearing him shout and scream as he had done last time. He was going to keep his mouth tightly shut and he was going to show Walter that he couldn't treat him like this and get away with it. Then next time this situation arose, Walter would realise that corporal punishment was most definitely NOT the answer. He felt Walter's hand pushing down on the small of his back, then he heard his lover's arm being raised and he closed his eyes and then...the paddle struck with a sharp thuddiness that the belt had not had. He clamped his jaws shut in the effort not to cry out loud.

Another blow and he counted to 3 in his head, breathing deeply. This was bad. This was worse than anything he'd gone through before. This was worse than getting shot and

infected with deadly diseases. He could not stop the low moan that escaped his lips as the next blow landed on his backside.

"How many times are you going to hit me?" He asked suddenly, thinking he could probably pace himself if he knew.

"That information..." Skinner paused and smiled to himself. "Is on a need to know basis. And you don't need to know." He said firmly.

"You're mean and nasty and I hate you." Mulder yelled as the next blow hit home.

"What did you say?" Skinner asked him dangerously.

"I said you're mean and nasty and I hate you." Mulder yelled again, angry with himself for crying out but unable to stop. Another vicious blow made contact with his bottom and he let out a sob.

"Say it again." Skinner said.

"I..." Mulder stopped. It didn't seem wise.

"Well?"

"Never mind." The next blow was so severe he jumped into the air and was quickly pressed back down again by Skinner's hand.

"We're not finished yet. Not by a long way." Skinner declared firmly. There was only one way to go with Mulder and once you started there was no point stopping until you reached the point where he was back to normal. The blows rained down with a hideous thudding regularity now, one after the other, biting his skin. Mulder gripped onto his lover's knees for support as his body flailed all over the place with every stroke that hit home until he was screaming for mercy in a way he had promised himself he would not. His whole backside seemed to radiate with agony and each further blow just compounded it until he could swear his bottom was on fire. He wished it would stop, he wished Walter wasn't angry with him and he was suddenly deeply ashamed of the way he had been goading his lover all evening. "I'm sorry," he cried helplessly. "I am sorry, Walter. I am, I am." Had he really told his beloved that he hated him? How could he? His Walter, who he adored more than anyone in the world? And had he really, in all honesty, accused him of being a serial killer? Walter Skinner, a man known for his strong adherence to the law and principles of decency and integrity? "Please, please, please...." He sobbed. "I am so, so sorry!" Walter smiled and with another couple of swats for good measure, he finally allowed his lover to get up. Mulder slipped onto the floor and crouched there, his body heaving with sobs and tears streaking down his cheeks. Walter fetched a handkerchief and tenderly wiped them away.

"Now. How do you feel?" He asked. Mulder shrugged.

"I hurt." He said.

"I should certainly hope so or it would have been a huge waste of my effort. But apart from that?"

"I don't know." Mulder sniffed, reaching for his boxer shorts, trying to pull them on and

failing.

"Here." Walter's cool hands helped to slide his shorts up and then he leaned on Walter's shoulders as his lover held out his jeans for him to step into. He couldn't resist bending slightly to kiss Walter's head. It was so enticing and bald, just waiting there. Walter smiled.

"I'm so annoying..." Mulder muttered, shame-faced. "You shouldn't bother with me. Honestly, when I look back..."

"Ssh." Skinner got hold of him and put his big arms around him, drawing him close.

"But really! I just get too angry and scared to think sensibly."

"Scared? What of?" Walter asked, looking into his lover's tear-stained eyes.

"Of losing you! And scared of the way you're so cool, calm and collected all the time, sometimes even when you're really mad. I've never been like that."

"I love you just the way you are." Skinner pulled him down onto the couch and he went, wincing as he adopted the only post-spanking pose that was really comfortable, on his front, his long legs stretching along to the end of the couch, his face angled sideways in Skinner's lap, staring up at his lover.

"I can't think why," he sighed.

"Because you're unique and incredible and amazing and utterly irritating." Skinner stroked his hair softly and he sighed, comforted and feeling a million times better. How did his lover always know what was best for him? "But did you never think..." Walter said, running his fingers along Mulder's shoulders and down his back in a gentle caress, "that I get scared too?"

"You? No." Mulder said honestly. "What would you get scared of?"

"Of something awful happening to you of course! You're always running off and getting into trouble and there isn't a minute goes by when I'm not scared that you've been eaten by aliens or something. It makes it worse for me when you don't even tell me where you're going or you get some mad idea into your head and go chasing after it."

"You really worry about me?" Mulder asked. "You didn't look worried when you came to fetch me from that prison cell."

"We don't all wander around with our emotions hanging out all over the place for people to see." Walter told him. "I hate people knowing how I feel. I'm only telling you because I love you."

"You do?" Mulder grinned and if he had been a cat he would have been purring as Walter rubbed his ears.

"Oh for goodness sake! How many more times do I have to tell you!" Walter exclaimed, exasperated. Mulder smiled to himself because really he couldn't hear it too many times and it was always nice to force Walter into having to say it.

"What happened to the pizza?" he asked, suddenly feeling very hungry.

"It arrived while you were in the shower. I put it in the oven to keep it warm." Skinner told

him. "Shall I go and fetch it?"

"Yes please!" He moved his head to allow Skinner up and closed his eyes, feeling an ecstatically happy pain throbbing through his body.

"So," said Walter, sitting down cross-legged on the floor with the pizza and handing Fox a slice. "What are you doing tomorrow evening? Only I've just bought this new knife and as it's a Thursday I thought I might try it out...."

London by Xanthe

Author's Notes:

The boys go to London for a conference with predictable results.

Someone emailed me suggesting that I might be English because some of my stories had spanking in them (?!) This is by way of a riposte. I make no excuses for the fact that it's utterly absurd.

Fox Mulder lay back in his seat with a sigh. It was going to be a long flight and it was going to be just him and Walter all the way to Heathrow airport, London. He was going to enjoy himself. Walter crammed his big body down in the narrow seat next to his lover and smiled.

"Hey, sleepy. Don't close your eyes just yet. There are some papers I want to go through with you first."

"Okay, boss." Mulder grinned. They were attending a conference on serial killers in London and he was going to be giving a paper on Eugene Tooms.

"Not your average serial killer to be sure," Walter had mused when he told him. "But still. It'll give them all something to talk about!"

"You bet." Mulder had winked.

"And I think I'd better accompany you. Just to keep you out of trouble you understand." Walter smirked.

"To say nothing of a few days break in one of the most happening capitals of the world?" Mulder asked.

"Nothing at all. I have no intention of going out sight-seeing or visiting loads of theaters or dining out in different restaurants every night with my beautiful lover, well away from the prying eyes of people who know us..." Walter mused, a sly smile on his lips and a mischievous glint in his eye.

"Stop! It's turning me on just thinking about it!" Mulder groaned.

So here they were. On a flight, just the two of them, with Walter in lover mode not boss mode which was just how Mulder liked him best. He sighed and smiled at his lover as Walter tried to get comfortable, flexing his broad shoulders and getting out a sheaf of papers.

"Sit up, Agent Mulder. Don't relax yet. Plenty of time for that in the hotel!" Skinner grinned and Mulder sat up with a sigh and began to leaf through the file Skinner handed to him, casting a resentful glance at his boss as he did so. If Skinner was going to be businesslike for the entire journey then this wasn't going to be any fun at all! Finally a couple of hours into the flight, Skinner let him relax and they both leaned back and fell fast asleep, their fingers touching lightly.

"So!" Walter took a deep breath of British air, "This is London, England!"
"Looks like it." Mulder spared the airport a cursory glance and then rummaged in his bag for his passport.

"Home of red buses, black taxis, men called Clive and Roger, chimney sweeps, outrageous dancing cockneys and a nation obsessed with corporal punishment!" Walter grinned.

"What?" Mulder looked up in surprise.

"Just kidding. Not a chimney sweep in sight!" Walter smirked. Mulder frowned at him.

"Don't you start any of that, Walter," he muttered. "And there had better not be a paddle packed away in that case of yours." He pointed at Walter's sleek, satanic black luggage which made his own look like a battered old rucksack left over from his student days and tied together with bits of string. In fact that was exactly what it was.

"Waste room on a paddle? When I had all my expensive leisurewear and a selection of my trademark crisp white shirts to pack?" Walter exclaimed. "Don't be silly. Besides, I've brought several of my thickest leather belts and I've heard wonderful things about what you can buy in British sex shops..."

"Shut up." Mulder made a face. "It isn't a joke. It's become a sick side of your personality, Walter and frankly one I think you should seek some help with. There'll be plenty of psychiatrists at this conference so maybe you should talk to one."

"Don't whine, Fox. You know I only do it for you." Walter smiled confidently and headed off towards customs.

"For me???" Mulder trailed along after him, his luggage falling apart in his hands and a selection of his ties falling to the floor.

"Now, where's the elevator?" Walter looked around briskly, anxious to be shot of the dull airport and hitting the bright lights of the big city. It had been a long flight and he wanted to

stretch his cramped legs.

"There." Mulder pointed to a sign saying "Lift."

"Lift? Lift?" Walter frowned. "Are you sure?"

"Yes, lift. I used to live here, remember?" Fox sniffed, pleased to be one up on his infuriating lover. He pressed the button and they waited for the lift to arrive. "There's all sorts of little differences like this. Pants for example."

"Pants?" Walter enquired, looking down at his expensive chinos.

"Yes. If you drop your pants here you'll be arrested for indecent exposure - they're underwear, not trousers!" Mulder grinned. "And they don't eat the same foods either."

"Ah yes. English cuisine. Revolting by all accounts."

"Fish and chips." Mulder murmured, his mood brightening as he remembered. "Fish and chips is like ambrosia, like heaven. When I was at Oxford we used to go down Harry's chippy every night of the week and eat fish and chips out of newspaper with salt and vinegar..."

"Ah, your mis-spent student days. The ones you so rarely speak of, Fox. I'm looking forward to finding out so much more. Perhaps being back in this country will jog your memory. I love the idea of a deliciously young and innocent Fox Mulder, studying hard for his degree at Oxford university, embarking on a series of fascinating sexual experimentations..."

"Not." Mulder said firmly. "I led a completely sheltered life while I was here. Hardly went out the entire time. Got up to nothing whatsoever!"

"Then why..." Walter asked, leaning close and whispering in his lover's ear, "have you gone all red?"

Mulder flushed a deeper crimson and kicked his lover's irritatingly perfect luggage.

"I haven't," he said, getting into the lift and pressing the "close door" button, hoping it would shut on his lover's burly frame and cause him some discomfort. It didn't. Walter swanned through bouncing his enormous case behind him in one huge arm as if it only contained one pair of socks and a toothbrush.

They stayed in a hotel off Charing Cross Road in 2 bedrooms with an interconnecting door.

"Must keep up appearances." Walter tossed his case onto the couch and took hold of his lover's face, bestowing a huge, wet kiss on his lips.

"What is the matter with you?" Mulder pulled away. "You've transmogrified into another of your strange alter egos, Walter."

"Transmogrified? Ah, to have an intelligent lover who knows such words. What a turn on! I love it when you talk dirty." Walter licked Mulder's ear affectionately. "Lighten up, Fox. We're in a strange land, we're on vacation!" He exclaimed.

"I'm not. I've got a paper to give. I'm nervous."

"Nervous? Why?" Walter bounced up and down on the enormous double bed in some delight.

"Well how many serial killers do you know who build nests out of newspapers, live for hundreds of years and feed off human livers?" Mulder asked him. "They're going to laugh me out of that conference."

"With me by your side? Assistant Director Walter Skinner of the FBI? I don't think so." Walter gave his meanest boss frown and Mulder had to laugh.

"That at least is a comfort." He sighed, sitting down on the bed beside his lover.

"Come on!" Walter got up again, rustling a brisk hand through Mulder's hair. "A shower, get changed, then we get on out there, sex machine!" He pulled Mulder up and walked him into the bathroom, undressing his uncomplaining lover and pushing him under the warm water before divesting himself of his own clothing and following on in.

"Gay bars, straight bars, S&M clubs..." Walter flicked through a copy of 'Time Out.' "The choice is ours."

"Well, no to the S&M clubs then." Mulder told him firmly. "Because you don't need any encouragement in that direction whatsoever, Walter."

"Oh honestly. A couple of light spankings and you're theorising a whole sexual perspective!" Walter groaned. "I've never even so much as tied you up in your life and anyway you deserved those spankings." He held up his hand to stop Mulder's protests before they began. "Gay bars then. Because I want to dance with you and kiss you." He smiled. "And nobody knows who we are or how respectable we pretend to be back in Washington. I want to be someone else tonight!" And so saying he marched off in the general direction of Soho.

"Comptons, Brief Encounter, Heaven, Bang, Two Brewers..." Walter read out from the list of gay bars and found one of them, putting his arm around Mulder's shoulders and pushing him into the darkly lit bar.

It didn't take them long to be the center of attention. Two such attractive men were bound to cause a stir. They were both tall and striking and Mulder had to admit that his lover was looking totally gorgeous this evening. He was clad in tight black jeans and a plain red shirt and he had even left off his glasses. As for Mulder, he was still nervous about his paper and couldn't relax. He watched in dull jealousy as the vivacious and utterly un-A.D.-like Skinner held center stage, flirting outrageously with every man who chatted him up. Mulder had his share of admirers but he was unable to compete with his boss. Skinner was on another level entirely, dancing the night away to trashy pop records, the sweat pouring off his bald head and soaking into his shirt.

"Y-M-C-A." Walter span around the dance floor making ludicrous arm movements as Mulder stared sourly into his drink.

"And he thinks I behave badly sometimes," he grumbled.

"Come on, Fox. Dance!" Walter yelled. Fox shook his head mutely and watched as a small, exquisitely beautiful punk with fluorescent pink hair, grabbed his lover's arms and whirled

him around. "Show off," he muttered.

"Feeling left out?" Mulder looked up at the huge blond god who was smiling at him.

"What?"

"Your boyfriend? He's not paying you enough attention. I've noticed." The Nordic god grinned, showing a set of perfect white teeth. "Why don't you come and talk to me?" And so saying he picked up Mulder's drink and took it off to a quiet corner of the bar. Mulder followed on glumly, not feeling like socialising when his lover was about to be seduced by small pink-haired people.

"I'm Sven." The god said, holding out a hand. That was the last thing that Mulder remembered.

Skinner paced around the room irritably. He had been up half the night waiting for Mulder to come back but there was no sign of him. He was worried. Had Mulder been captured by Cancerman? Abducted by aliens? Had he returned to the U.S. in a huff because Walter hadn't danced with him? He glanced at his watch. It was now nearly 7 a.m. and still there was no sign of him. He wished he was back in Washington - then at least he could have sent a couple of agents out to look for his errant lover. Here he felt so helpless. At last he knew he could delay no longer. He made a brief phone call to the police who assured him without snickering that they'd look into it sometime soon by which Skinner inferred that they meant sometime next week.

"A grown man, missing for 5 whole hours? And you last saw him where, sir? Oh there. The gay place isn't it? Yes, sir, very serious..." the policeman had murmured, without so much as a trace of a humorous cockney accent. All in all it was very annoying. Skinner pulled his red shirt off and headed for the shower.

Still no sign of him at 8 a.m. and Skinner realised with some trepidation that if Mulder wasn't there to deliver his paper then he would have to deliver it for him. Damn him! Damn, damn, damn! He was dressed for work in his crisp white shirt and striped tie, looking quite immaculate and forbiddingly angry, glaring at everybody who passed by his breakfast table. A small child wandered by and Skinner scowled at him, reducing the toddler to tears. Get a grip, man, he told himself sternly. He left the table, his breakfast untouched and made his way back to the elevator or lift or whatever the stupid Brits called the damn thing.

"Damn." He said again as he waited, glancing at his watch for the millionth time. Mulder's paper was scheduled for 11a.m.

"Damn indeed." A man next to him smiled. "Damn and bloody hell and bugger and..."

"Excuse me?" He glanced witheringly at the man.

"I'm late too." The man said. "I thought I'd join in with the swear words. You're American aren't you?"

"Yes."

"Due at the conference?"

"Yes." Walter tried to be less unfriendly but it was hard when he felt like this.

"Some tedious nonsense first thing, but the second paper should be good. That fellow Mulder. I've heard a lot about him."

"I expect it's all true." Skinner commented sourly.

"My name's Roger Hawthorne." The man held out a hand.

"Roger Clive Hawthorne?" Skinner asked wryly.

"Yes! How did you know?" Roger smiled.

"Just a guess." Skinner shrugged.

"But my friends call me Bunny." Roger grinned. Skinner gave him a suspicious look. He decided that he didn't like Britain.

Roger accompanied him down to the conference room and introduced him to a friend of his, Murray "Mad Hatter" McGuire. Skinner felt more and more like an alien in a strange land with each passing minute. However had Mulder got on here with these peculiar English people and their bizarre nicknames? On the other hand, with a name like Fox, and a nickname like "Spooky", maybe he had fitted in just fine.

"Can't wait to see Mulder." McGuire confided.

"You and me both." Skinner muttered.

"Do you know him?" McGuire asked.

"I'm his boss." Skinner grunted. And when I get my hands on him....he thought to himself grimly.

"Oh, really. Well I'm delighted!" McGuire laughed. "I used to teach Mulder at Oxford. What a little gem he was!"

"Was he?" Skinner looked askance at McGuire.

"Oh yes. A complete handful as well. Quite brilliant of course but I've never known a student able to sulk like that boy!"

"How did you deal with that?" Skinner asked, interested.

"Only one way to deal with it!" McGuire told him with a knowing wink. "Probably not something they encourage in the F.B.I though!"

"Tell me." Skinner leaned forward, eagerly.

"Well in England we find a short, sharp shock usually works best if you get my meaning!" McGuire grinned at him and for the first time that morning, Skinner found himself smiling.

There was still no sign of Mulder by 11 a.m and Skinner got up in fear and trepidation to deliver the paper for him. It was a testament both to his stern frown and his demeanour of

fierce belligerence that nobody dared to crack a smile as he aggressively intoned the details of the Tooms case. When he had finished, a sea of hands rose to ask questions.

"So..." One of the Brits smirked. "I don't know about you, but here in the U.K. we tend not to come across mutants all that often. Sure you haven't been watching too much American TV?"

A ripple of laughter passed around the room. Skinner quelled it with one savage glance.

"My initial reaction to this case was the same," he said. "But the data is all here on your factsheet. I suggest you look at it and then ask me a more informed question. Next?"

At that moment he saw a sorry figure enter the room, his work suit obviously hastily applied, the tie still half undone and the shirt sticking out of one side of his trousers. There was stubble on his chin and a hang-dog expression on his face.

"Excuse me but Agent Mulder has just arrived." He announced, ignoring the frantic headshakes his subordinate was giving him. "He'll take over now. Won't you, Mulder!" he barked.

Mulder sighed and nodded, inching his way forward and trying not to look at his boss. Mulder wasn't sure how he got through the next half hour but one thing he did know - he had disgraced the FBI by his late arrival, his appearance and the condition he was in and Skinner was hopping mad. He mumbled his way through the question and answer session and then followed his boss up to their hotel room, not even bothering to speak, his eyes cast down to the floor.

They were just about to go into their room when McGuire popped up.

"Fox! How are you? Oops. Better not ask perhaps!" He grinned, his eyes raking over Mulder's dishevelled appearance and taking in Skinner's fuming, furious face.

"Mr McGuire! Sir...I'm mighty glad to see you," Mulder babbled, hoping that by talking to McGuire he could delay the inevitable confrontation with Skinner.

"You know..." McGuire looked at Skinner and winked. "I have something I think you're going to need. Come with me, Mr Skinner." And so saying he waved them into his room. Mulder watched in alarm as McGuire opened up his case and got out a thick leather tawse.

"Brand new." McGuire slapped it against his thigh heartily and handed it to Skinner.

"You have a case of this stuff?" Skinner asked, peering at the other items McGuire had with him.

"Oh yes. I'm British. We're obsessed!" McGuire laughed. "Do you know how to use one of these, Mr Skinner?"

"No, I don't believe I do." Skinner gave Mulder a cool glance. "But I'm certainly interested in finding out. If you'd like to show me, Mr McGuire."

"Certainly." McGuire arranged a pillow on the bed and took aim at it. Mulder winced and edged towards the door, feeling distinctly unsafe.

"Not another step, Mulder." Skinner rapped out in a tone of absolute command. Mulder froze. He watched in agony as McGuire went through the mechanics of how best to aim and deliver the blow for maximum effect, his backside already starting to hurt and the tawse hadn't even been near him yet. Then McGuire got out other items from his case and gave Skinner a lesson in using them as well. Straps, canes, paddles (like he needs a lesson there, Mulder thought grimly), riding crops, the full works. There was no item of torture not brought out, waved around threateningly, its merits thoroughly discussed and technique gone over in meticulous detail. Mulder started to feel like a lamb in a lion's den.

"So, a cane..." Walter swung the vicious implement through the air. "How painful is this?" He asked McGuire.

"Very. Only to be saved for pretty bad offences. Can cut the skin." McGuire smiled and winked at Mulder. Mulder winced.

"The strap is a lot milder. Don't use rubber unless you really have to." McGuire got out a rubber whip. "The most painful of all. Only for serious misdemeanours."
"I see." Skinner fingered the rubber whip and glanced thoughtfully at Mulder. Mulder bit his lip and shook his head, mutely. Skinner glared at him. Finally the demonstration came to an end.

"Well, I'm late," McGuire said, glancing at his watch, "and you must have a lot to say to this naughty young pup. See you later." And he ushered them out of his room again. Skinner unlocked the door to his own room and charged inside. Mulder followed on quietly behind, staring glumly at the tawse Skinner still held clutched in his hand. There was no way he was going to get out of this one. He might as well just start undoing his trousers and bending over right now.

"I was drugged." He said quickly before Skinner could speak. "A man put something in my drink then took me outside and left me in the gutter somewhere, making off with my wallet. I only woke up a couple of hours ago. It wasn't my fault," he said defensively.

"It never is your bloody fault!" Skinner yelled.

"Bloody?" Mulder queried.

"I've been learning some new swear words." Skinner informed him. "And I am so angry that I can barely speak."

"I know, I know." Mulder traced a pattern on the carpet with his foot. He had been in trouble with his boss before but never with his lover and his boss at the same time. Of course they were the same person, weren't they? He had never been quite sure. "I didn't sleep with him," he said quickly, covering the lover angle as well, just to be on the safe side. He glanced up out of the corner of his eye to see how mad Skinner was and wished he hadn't.

"Look at you. You're a mess. Really as assistant director and your supervisor I should....I should...god I don't know what's bad enough really. And as your boyfriend I was so worried! I've been up all night, worrying! What is it with you, Fox? You want to kill me? Send me to an early grave?"

"No." Mulder muttered resentfully. "I'm sorry. Are you going to use that thing on me?" He gestured at the tawse.

"You bet I am!" Skinner undid the buttons on his sleeves and rolled them up, revealing his brawny forearms. Mulder felt that familiar sinking feeling in his stomach.

"Please don't...really. You're so mad that it scares the hell out of me..." he pleaded pathetically. "And that thing looks really mean."

"Good. Come here." Skinner beckoned him over and he sighed and obeyed, reluctantly, undoing his trousers as he went, anxious not to make Skinner any more angry than he already was. "Why don't you bend over the back of the couch?" Skinner suggested menacingly. "I think I want to take a good swing with this." Mulder felt his stomach lurch as he did as he was told, dropping his pants and boxers and biting his lip.

The kiss of the tawse against his bare buttocks was all too familiar from his days at Oxford. He had never told Skinner how Mr McGuire had treated difficult undergraduates. It was all too embarrassing. Somehow there was just something about him that made people want to spank him he thought to himself. Probably people just passing by in the street secretly yearned to spank him as well. I expect it's my face, he thought mournfully to himself, or the fact that I'm so annoying and get into so much trouble and have this ridiculous lower lip...

It wasn't a short spanking. It was long and agonising and seemed to involve a lot of grunting on Skinner's part and a lot of shrieking on Mulder's. Moreover, Skinner seemed to take a special delight in aiming the tawse in the same spot over and over again until Mulder wasn't sure he could stand up for much longer. Now he longed for the comfort of his lover's knees and his hand pressing him down, keeping him in one position. It was all he could do to stop sliding all over the place as he clung on to the back of the couch.

"Please, Walter...." He stammered at last. "I can't stand any more...really..." He could feel the tears coursing down his cheeks and hoped this would melt his lover's heart. It didn't.

"You'll have to. I'm still angry." Skinner told him.

"I was drugged, I don't see how..." he shut up as a glance back at his lover's face convinced him that talking only made things worse. Could they be any worse? He was sure his backside was thoroughly bruised now, it certainly felt like it. And more than that, he was genuinely concerned that Walter might not love him any more. He hated it when his lover got this angry.

"This is for making me worry all night." Skinner pounded a blow down with particular harshness making Mulder scream.

"And this is for making me deliver that damn paper to all those smirking Brits." Another savage blow that took Mulder's breath away.

"And this is for turning up looking like something left over from last night's dinner, for disgracing me and yourself." Skinner delivered this blow so hard that Mulder was dazed by the force of it.

"Please..." he begged but Skinner took no notice, raising the tawse again...and again...and again...

"Fox, wake up!"

"What?" He came to with a start.

"We've arrived." Skinner smiled down on him. "Look, London." He pointed out of the aeroplane window. "Are you alright? You look like you've just had a nightmare."

"I have." Mulder shuddered. "You do still love me don't you, Walter?" He asked anxiously as Walter got up and rummaged around in the overhead luggage locker.

"Of course!" Walter stroked his lover's arm gently and gave him a look of devotion that allayed all his fears. Mulder ran his fingers over Walter's big hands, wincing slightly as he remembered his dream.

"And you don't want to hurt me." Mulder asked anxiously.

"Why? What have you done?" Walter laughed out loud.

"Nothing." Mulder told him with wide innocent eyes. Yet, he thought to himself. "You know, Walter...I'm pretty tired," he said. "When we get to the hotel, do you think we could just turn in and have an early night?"

THE END

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