

Daddy by Xanthe



<http://www.xanthe.org/daddy/>

Story Notes:



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Dark. He opened his eyes, but it was still dark. There was something across his eyes, something soft, but tight. He couldn't even see a glimmer of light around the blindfold. His whole body hurt, and he couldn't move. He wasn't sure why. He tried to remember something, anything, and failed. His tongue felt heavy, furred, and when he tried to speak, all he could hear was a guttural grunt. He moved his head, and a spark of pain flashed

through his skull and down his spine, causing him to black out again. When he came to, someone was pouring cool, blessed water down his throat. He choked on the liquid, coughed it up, swallowed again, and his mind cleared - just a little.

"It's okay, Daddy," a soft voice crooned in his ear. He felt a gentle hand on his head, a caress on his earlobes.

"Who...?" The word was a gasp, cut off by a sharp slap that cracked across the side of his jaw.

"Quiet, Daddy. Stay quiet. I don't want to hurt you but I will if I have to. Now just stay still. I'm going to make you more comfortable."

He felt the sides of the bed creak, as someone straddled his back, then he gasped in surprise as the cool blade of a knife was placed against the back of his neck. "Stay still, Daddy. I'm going to do some cutting." He tensed as the knife came down, on his unprotected back...and ripped through his shirt, literally tearing it from his shoulders. "Ssh...it's okay, Daddy." A calming hand ran down his back, caressing him. He shuddered. "Hush, this doesn't hurt. Remember, that's what you said, Daddy. This doesn't hurt - and it doesn't, does it? Not this. Not yet."

Those words chilled him to the bone. He tried to move his head again, to work his tongue, and was rewarded by the sharp point of the knife, digging into the back of his neck. "Don't move, Daddy. That's how it goes, isn't it? Don't move, don't cry out...don't tell anyone. If you tell anyone they'll lock you up, and you won't ever see Mommy or me again. Do you want that? Well? Do you?"

He tried to focus on the voice, tried to figure out who, why...how. It was a high voice - a child? Too strong...the knees pinning him to the mattress didn't belong to a child, and yet the voice - that voice, burning its way into his soul, was that of a malevolent child, high in pitch, yet low, and determined in tone, and...and...

His mind sheared away from that thought, struggled as realization dawned; tried, desperately, to find some way of rationalizing his plight, tried to stay conscious and calm for long enough to figure out a way to escape...and failed. The truth flashed like a clear, bright light into the darkness of his mind: his captor was insane.

He was lying half-naked, tied, blindfolded and helpless, god knew where, at the mercy of lunatic.

"Let me get this straight. You're sending me out to talk to a guy who says he's been abducted by aliens?" Mulder folded his arms over his chest and glowered at his boss. Skinner's eyes darkened behind his spectacles, and he glared back. Scully shifted nervously in her chair.

"Forgive me, I thought that was what you **did**," Skinner snapped.

"Oh. Right," Mulder nodded facetiously. "You thought that was what I did?" he muttered in disbelief. "Sir, with all due respect, if I went out and interviewed every American who claimed they'd had a close encounter with ET, I'd spend my whole life taking notes from losers without lives who want to feel 'special' in some way. Why **this** guy?" He took the file from the desk, a frown creasing his forehead. The 'spooky' tag, irritating at the best of times, was even more annoying when applied to him by his boss, a man who, he thought, had a special understanding of the X Files. He felt his bad mood settle around him like a cloud. This was almost as bad as the time Skinner had sent him out chasing after monsters, although... he had to admit that there had been something about that case. Maybe there would be something to this one too.

"Why this guy?" Skinner's shoulders were knotted with tension as he thrust his chair away from the desk and stood up in one terse, angry gesture. Mulder glanced at his boss in surprise. He'd pushed Skinner further than this in the past without incurring his wrath, but this time Skinner seemed genuinely angry. "Well, because he asked for you, Agent Mulder." Skinner said in a supremely sarcastic voice. "It would seem that you have a **reputation**. In addition, he says that he has been marked as one of the Chosen Few, sent to help us mere mortals adjust to the coming of our alien ancestors."

"I see." Mulder raised an eyebrow at his boss. Skinner's jaw was set in granite. "And you think this is worth FBI time and resources? May I ask why? You clearly don't believe this man's story."

"No, I don't. Not for one second. However, he is highly credible. He's also an industry chief, on the Board of Directors of several major, high-profile US companies - if he talks, people will listen. I need you to get to the bottom of it, Agent Mulder." Skinner paced the room like a caged animal, and Mulder watched, fascinated. He'd never seen his boss behave quite this strangely before. His every move exuded a terse, pent-up anger and energy. Mulder exchanged a puzzled glance with Scully, who shrugged in reply, her blue eyes concerned.

"Is there anything else we should know, sir?" she asked softly.

Skinner stopped abruptly, his shoulders stiffening. "No," he snapped. He placed a forefinger under the slats of one of the blinds in his office and pulled, tugging it down a fraction, then gazed out of the window in brooding silence.

Mulder glanced at the file, one eye on the strangely tense body of his superior. Skinner's muscles were bunched so tight that Mulder could see the outline of his shoulder blades, jutting through the other man's cotton shirt at sharp angles. What the hell could there be about this case that was upsetting his boss this much? Or was it about this case at all? Mulder didn't mix much with any other FBI agents, but his phenomenal memory recalled a dozen fragments of recent conversations overheard in the cafeteria and by the photocopier, which he had barely taken any notice of at the time, but which now seemed to have a patchwork of significance. Nothing much, just grumbles, more grumbles than usual, about Skinner's insistence on timely reports, savagings over expense accounts, more instances than normal of Skinner hauling some hapless agent over the coals. Skinner seemed frozen, lost in thought as he gazed out of the window. Mulder glanced at Scully again.

"Is that all then, sir?" Scully asked.

Skinner jumped and looked around, as if startled that they were still there. "That's all, Agents. I expect a full report as soon as possible." Skinner sat down at his desk, and pulled a pile of paperwork over, opened his pen, and sat stiffly, to all intents and purposes immersed in what he was doing.

Mulder frowned. Something wasn't right here. He didn't know what, but his finely honed intuition radar was putting on a pyrotechnic display. Something was wrong. Something was very wrong.

Ray Selby watched. He sat in his car and watched, and waited. Most of the time it was boring, but occasionally, just occasionally, it got interesting. If you could call it that. He always knew when it was happening - after 5 years watching he had gotten good at this. This time though, it was just routine, for which he was grateful. Sometimes it sickened him, knowing what he did - **doing** what he did, and he'd had to do it so much more recently. He had no idea why, and he didn't ask questions. This time though - this time, it was just routine. He could tell. He watched as the car containing the dark haired agent, and his petite red-headed partner swung out into the traffic, then, slowly, purring along behind at a safe distance, he followed.

There had been something in the water. He felt woozy. His body didn't feel solid. It felt like Jell-O. Boneless. His muscles relaxed, and he stopped fighting the bonds around his ankles and wrists.

"That's better. I said you'd be more comfortable."

The man was still sitting on his back, swirling little circles on his flesh. He could feel the wet tips of the man's fingers as he traced patterns on his naked back. Every now and again his captor would pause to lick his fingers, then continue tracing, over and over again. It was curiously hypnotic.

"I love you, Daddy. So big. So strong." Tiny kisses on his head, a fluttering of hands over the side of his face, like a child, but big hands, long fingers. "Remember when you took me out into the woods? Remember that? You said we'd play our special game - we can play it again now. I'll play it on you, this time. Hush...hush...it doesn't hurt. You know it doesn't. That's what you always say, and you know best, Daddy."

A strange, malevolent laugh, and then those fingers were on his belt. Hands moved him, undid the buckle, then pulled it out from his pants. He couldn't resist. His muscles didn't work. He opened his mouth, tried to remonstrate, to do or say something that would change what he feared would happen next, but nothing came out. His pants were being pulled down now, to his ankles. He heard the knife, ripping through the fabric, and the sound of their remains being thrown onto the floor, the clink as the change in his pocket rattled free and

rolled across the wood. Then hands on his briefs, the feel of the cool blade of the knife on his bare thigh.

"No..." it took all his strength to say the word, but the knife didn't stop. It slid between his flesh and the cotton fabric of his underwear, and then sliced, quickly and efficiently. Soon his briefs were gone, and he was naked. He could feel goosebumps rising on his flesh as his captor's fingers gently caressed his buttocks.

"Naughty Daddy. Do you remember when I said 'no' that time? Do you remember what you did?"

He shook his head, not wanting to play this sick game. His captor laughed, and a second later he felt a sharp sting on his buttock. "You took your belt off and whipped me. This belt, Daddy. This one here. That's what happens when you say 'no'."

The belt descended again and again, and he hissed with pain. If only he could move...he pulled helplessly against the bonds that held him down, but his body didn't respond to his own commands any more. He could hear his captor's breath coming in heaving gasps, and the pain reached a crescendo. He was panting, muffled sobs into the pillow beneath him, unable to do anything except accept the stinging caress of the belt on his body. Then there was silence, and blessed respite from the onslaught.

"Sorry, Daddy. I'm sorry. I didn't want to hurt you. Please be good, then I won't have to hurt you any more." Hands slid around his neck, and he was being kissed, over and over again. "I don't like hurting you, but it's for your own good. Hush, hush...don't cry."

He wasn't. Even drugged, tied and in pain, he wasn't crying. His captor calmed down, stroked his naked shoulder, ran a hand down over his back, then straddled him again. He whimpered as he felt hands on his buttocks and something hard digging into his flesh.

"You know what's going to happen now, Daddy. You want this, you know you do." The voice had become higher in pitch; excitable, irritable, tense.

"Fuck...please...n..." The 'no' was choked off in his throat, as the belt slashed a wave of pain across his naked skin.

"Don't talk back."

He almost jumped out of his skin. The voice had changed, become deeper, harder, an unrecognizable snarl. His buttocks were seized in rough hands and pried apart.

There was no warning. No preparation. The other man's penis pushed hard at the entrance to his anus, demanding entry, and his treacherous muscles, loosened by the drug, gave in, allowed his captor access.

"Don't worry, Daddy. This will be good," his captor hissed, stroking the small of his back and his raw buttocks. "Do you feel me inside you? Hmm? Isn't this good?"

He felt as if he was being split in two by the invading flesh as the other man shifted his weight and drove it deep into the recesses of his body. He tried to scream, but had no words. Tried to understand how the hell this could be happening to him, and failed. He felt so sore. Without preparation, or lubricant, each hard, crazed stroke of the other man's body into his own, each withdrawal, each re-entry, made him reel from the pain, choking for air, his face hot with hurt and humiliation. To be invaded like this, by another man...taken in violence, against his will, and the pain, the goddamn awful pain...it was every man's worst nightmare. It couldn't be happening. In some recess of his mind, he convinced himself that it wasn't happening.

I'm not here. I'm not here. I'm. Not. Here...

"William Royce? I'm Agent Mulder of the FBI, and this is Agent Scully. Can we come in?"

"Of course." The man stood aside and opened the door wide. "I'm not Mr. Royce though, I'm his butler. Mr. Royce is expecting you."

Mulder raised an eyebrow at Scully. A butler? The house was enormous, tastefully decorated, and situated in one of the most exclusive areas of DC. William Royce was most definitely not your average abductee. They were shown into a spacious living room, where a tall man, with thick white hair, was seated. He got up as they entered.

"Agent Mulder, I'm William Royce. I'm pleased to meet you."

Mulder studied the man for a moment. He had broad shoulders, and a firm handshake. His blue eyes were intelligent, and sharp. There was something compelling about him. He had an air of authority of the kind Mulder was familiar with from his job. It was the same air that Senator Matheson had, that Skinner had - hell, even the Cigarette Smoking Man projected it. They were all men who were supremely confident of their abilities, of their place in the chain of command. Men used to giving orders, and to being obeyed. Men who demanded and commanded respect as their right. Men, who, if he was honest, he didn't feel entirely comfortable around. Always an iconoclast, it was men like these with whom he had so frequently gone up against in his career. He wished that wasn't the case. He wanted to give these men the respect other people gave them. He longed for them to be all knowing and all powerful - he was only human after all, and the desire for a strong, benign, fatherly protector was an instinct that had led people to construct whole religions around the concept. Mulder was all too well aware that men like this were no better than he. He couldn't look to them for redemption, and he couldn't ask them to take responsibility away from him. That was a sign of immature thinking. They were real people, with their own frailties and weaknesses.

"Agent Scully." Scully broke through his reverie, introducing herself and shaking the other man's hand. Mulder watched, his observant, never resting mind processing a hundred little details, such as the bookcases that lined the wall, each of them crammed full of...

"You're an H.G. Wells fan?" Mulder plucked a book from one of the shelves. "My god, you must be - this is a signed first edition!" His fingers ran excitedly along the bookcase, like a demented spider. "Asimov, Arthur C Clarke, Harlan Ellison, Robert Silverburg," he read out, his tone gleeful, like a child in a chocolate factory. "The greats," he grinned, and they were - of the 'old school' at least. These were the books his father had read, books Mulder himself had devoured avidly in his teenage years, stealing them from his father's bookcase to read at night when he'd finished his homework. "Larry Niven - I never could stand Ringworld myself," he mused.

"It's a classic!" Royce exclaimed.

"I know. I just hate it. Vonnegut," Mulder continued, his fingers still spidering, his body suffused with energy, "and you have A Canticle for Leibowitz! That's such a great book."

"I agree." Royce nodded, animated. Mulder was aware of Scully on the other side of the room, stifling a sigh as she sat down on the plush, immaculate, striped couch. Mulder put his head on one side and regarded Royce with renewed interest. Maybe Skinner had done him a favor sending him here. This man was interesting.

Ray Selby drew up outside the house and chewed on his fingernails thoughtfully. They were bitten down to the quick, and it hurt as he gnawed on raw, red skin. He knew this house, and this particular occupant, and that made him nervous. Why was he here? It was definitely different. It had certainly never happened before. He knew that for a fact. Ray tensed, wondering why the pattern had changed, then took a deep breath and tried to calm himself. Nothing could happen now. Not while it was still light, not in a public place, with witnesses. He could relax - for now at least. He tore open a bar of chocolate and stuffed it into his mouth.

"Ours is not to reason why, ours is just to do or die," he quoted to himself between mouthfuls, nodding over and over again, as if to convince himself.

"Does it hurt, Daddy?" Gentle fingers traced a feathery light touch over his swollen back and ass. He realized that he'd passed out. His whole body ached, but his ass hurt so bad he couldn't help the deep groan that escaped his lips.

"Yes," he whispered, not sure what the right answer was. The drug had worn off a bit, but somehow that just served to make the pain worse - and clarity was really something that he could do without right now.

"Poor Daddy. It always hurt me too. I was so small, and you were so big - always so big." His captors hands stroked his back appreciatively, making him wince. "I looked up to you, Daddy, even when you were hurting me."

"It wasn't me," he managed to rasp. "I'm not him, I'm not your Daddy for fuck's sake!"

There was an ominous silence, followed by a high, childish laugh. "Daddy, don't say that. Of course you are. Remember how you came into my room at night? I don't remember how old I was but I was very small. You came to visit me because you loved me...and then, when I got big, you stopped loving me, Daddy. You stopped visiting me. How old was I? About puberty I suppose. Around twelve. You just stopped. I missed you, Daddy. You know, you never kissed me after that. I used to long for you to visit me at night again, even though it hurt, because that was the only time you ever kissed me." The voice trailed off, tight with pain.

His stomach churned, listening to a kind of sickness he knew existed in the world but had never been so close to. He wanted to vomit; turned his head, tried to retch, and his captor pressed a glass of water to his lips again. He wasn't sure he wanted to drink, wasn't sure whether it was drugged or not, but his captor was insistent, and he was too weak to fight. How long had he been here? How had this happened? He wished he could remember, but he was too tired, and the drug in his system made everything so hazy.

"Poor Daddy. I was sick once - do you remember? When you made me suck you the first time? You punished me bad for that. Don't be sick, Daddy. I don't want to have to punish you again. I know how bad it feels."

He swallowed down the bile, fought against it. When would this nightmare end? He felt his captor climb onto his back again, and closed his eyes as the drug kicked in once more, loosening his muscles.

"Here, this will make you feel better. Hold still."

His captor pulled his buttocks apart and he let out a hoarse shout of pain as the other man entered him again. His back passage was already sore, and this time the penetration hurt like a knife being inserted deep into his body.

"Hold still, Daddy, hold still for me. There, you feel better now, hmm? Better..." The soft, gentle tone was at odds with the sharp, vicious, stabbing motions that accompanied each soothing inquiry after his health. Anger, hatred, and the inhuman strength of a damaged psyche lent his captor's thrusts a cruel force. He felt impaled, and the pain - the goddamn awful, gut-wrenching pain...He blinked the sweat out of his eyes, the smell of sex, blood, urine and perspiration sickening him, making him want to retch again. He fought against the impulse as his captor came inside him with a roar of victory and rage against his victim, against his father, and against a universe that had allowed one small, terrified child to be brutalized by somebody he loved more than almost anyone else in the world.

"Sir, you know why we're here." Mulder perched on the end of the couch, one part of his mind still humming over the amazing treasury of science fiction literature on the bookshelves, the other fixed firmly on his job.

"Yes, I do." The other man seemed at ease with being called 'sir', and didn't ask Mulder to address him less formally. It was just another fact that Mulder's busy mind stowed away for

future reference. "I asked for you, Agent Mulder, because while trying to make sense of this experience, I came across your work."

"You're lucky. Most people don't have access to their own personal FBI agent," Scully remarked, somewhat acerbically. "You must have pulled some strings, Mr. Royce."

"I did." He smiled, disarmingly. "I'm not the kind of man who sits and lets things happen around him, Agent Scully. If I need something, I go out and find it - ask around, pull a few strings if need be. I didn't work my ass off for all these years, didn't achieve all this," he waved his hand around expansively, "just to sit around twiddling my thumbs when I really need something. Look, I'm not stupid. I know how people view this whole alien abduction thing - it's a joke. I can understand that. Until last week, I'd have said the same thing. I'm not exactly a believer, Agent Scully, unlike your partner here."

"That's why you wanted to talk to me? You want me to..." Mulder paused, considering the matter, "validate your experience in some way?" That was close to the mark. Royce shifted uncomfortably.

"No. I don't need validation. I'd just like to share my experience with you - see if it's something you have any knowledge about."

"All right. Tell us what happened." Mulder nodded encouragingly.

Royce took a deep breath, and nodded back. "It was a weekend. Friday night. I was having a drink..."

"On your own?" Mulder interrupted.

"Yes." Royce frowned, not liking the interruption, and clearly not used to being questioned. "On my own - I don't have an alcohol problem, if that's what you're getting at, Agent Mulder. It had been a hard day. I wanted to unwind. I went to a bar I know. I didn't drink much, just a couple of whiskies, and..." he paused, a thin sheen of sweat breaking out on his upper lip. "The next thing I knew it was Saturday afternoon. I'd lost a day. I was lying by the side of the road miles out of town. It was a lonely area - remote. I was...not in good shape. I managed to get help, and was taken to the hospital. I didn't remember anything at first, but then...I started having flashbacks. I saw, bright lights, alien shapes. They told me..." Royce hesitated, and blinked. Mulder looked at him keenly, but the other man wouldn't make eye contact with him.

"They told me I was an ambassador, that they'd **chosen** me. I was important. I had to tell people that they were coming, that they didn't mean us any harm." He looked up again, his eyes bright and fervent. "What do you think, Agent Mulder? What does it mean?"

"I'm not sure." Mulder pulled on his lip, as he considered what he'd heard. "One thing puzzles me - you said they didn't mean us any harm, and yet you required hospital treatment? What kind of treatment?"

"Well..." Royce shifted uncomfortably.

Scully leaned forward. "If it's any help, I am a medical Doctor," she said softly, by way of reassurance.

"They placed a mark upon me," Royce rasped, flushing a bright red. "I know it sounds ridiculous, but they wanted to show the world tangible proof of their existence, so they put their mark upon me - to show that they'd come from the stars."

"Their mark?" Scully's eyebrows moved subtly, as she glanced up at Mulder to see what his reaction to this news was.

"Yes. Here." Royce stood up, and unbuttoned his shirt, his fingers fumbling nervously with the buttons. He kept his arms in the sleeves, as he shrugged the shirt away from his back, and the gasps that both Mulder and Scully emitted were audible.

There, carved on William Royce's back, red, and livid in his flesh, about the size of a human fist, was the outline of a star.

"I'll miss you, Daddy." The voice was mournful. "I like you. I like you best of all of them. I don't know why..."

Fingers played over his swollen ass. He hissed in pain. How long had it been? He had no idea. He just knew that he had lost count of the number of times he had been raped. At some point during this long nightmare, he had stopped caring if he lived or died. He wanted death now, would welcome it.

"Drink again." A glass was pressed to his lips once more.

He opened his mouth, needing the oblivion of the drug as much as he needed to feel the cool water on his parched throat.

"I'm going to let you go soon. It's been so good, Daddy. Before you go...I'm going to give you something to remember me by."

He started to tug on his cuffs, knowing it was useless, wishing he could see the face of the man who was doing this to him, wishing he could hurt him, slam a fist into him and finally quiet that malevolent, childish voice, but he couldn't. He was held fast, and he couldn't escape whatever new torment his captor had in store for him.

"Be still!" That cold, hard tone again - so different it could have come from someone else, completely at odds with the light, childish tone. He stopped struggling immediately. The belt rapped down on his flesh, over and over again, making him twist and arc his back in pain. "Keep still, now. It's important. I want you to be very still so that I can work." The mattress creaked slightly, as his captor knelt, straddling him again. "Hold still," the voice whispered. "Hold still for me." He felt the knife again, on his back, and this time it wasn't there to cut clothing from his body.

It was there to carve into his flesh.

He opened his mouth and roared his pain as the first long cut was made on his back. Another flash of the knife, another cut, and the drug was kicking in, immobilizing him, his muscles softening, unable to move or struggle or fight back as his captor cut into his skin. He could feel the blood running down his back, and his mouth was open, but no sound was coming out.

At some point, during that bloody carving, he took refuge in a dark, empty part of his mind and made a conscious decision not to remember.

"So..." Scully got into the car beside Mulder, her face expectant.

He couldn't stop himself from smiling. She was almost visibly bracing herself for a torrent of UFO theories. He could see it in her eyes.

"So, these aliens can travel through space at the speed of light, and all they can do to prove their existence when they get here is carve a star on someone's back with a knife," she said, daring him to disagree. He did, with a laugh, although not in the way she expected.

"Not a star, Scully." He shook his head. "A pentagram - and an upside down pentagram, actually."

"What?" She frowned in surprise.

"It was hard to see the exact shape as the wound was still puffy, but what was carved into William Royce's back was a pentagram, a five pointed star. Only in this case it was upside down - the single spire was on the base of the pentagram, pointing down, not at the top, pointing up."

"And that means...?" She raised an eyebrow.

"That we're not looking for something from outer space, but something much more earthly in origin." Mulder cracked a sunflower seed between his teeth, swung the car out into the road, and drove them back to the office.

"Black magic?" Scully sat at Mulder's desk, poring over the book of arcane symbols he had handed to her.

"The pentagram is a very important feature of any kind of magic. It's a powerful mystical symbol. However, an upside-down pentagram would be used in a black magic ritual - it's a reversal of the normal order of the world, a sign of evil."

"You think Royce was involved in a black magic ritual?" Scully raised an eyebrow. "A man like that? A man with his kind of background? Why?"

"And, more to the point, why lie about it?" Mulder shook his head. "No, Scully, I don't think he was involved in any kind of black magic ritual. I also don't think he was abducted by aliens. I think what happened to William Royce was something much more mundane. Sadly." He rubbed his hands wearily over his face. "Why didn't he want us to see his medical file, Scully? Why deny us access to that? We already know about the pentagram carved into his back - so there must be something else in that file, something he doesn't want us to see, because he can't face it himself - and because it would blow his whole alien abduction story out of the water."

"What?"

"Rape, Scully. I think William Royce was raped. I think he went out for a drink, someone slipped rohypnol or some other kind of drug into his whisky when he wasn't looking, took him somewhere, and raped him." Mulder tugged on his bottom lip, thoughtfully.

"Why lie about it, though?" Scully asked, her blue eyes wide with shock as she took in the full import of what he was saying.

"Because of who he is." Mulder sighed and shook his head, then gave her a sad, gentle smile, his hazel eyes dark with the kind of knowledge he'd won the hard way during his time with the Behavioral Sciences Unit. "Look, Scully, you saw him. He's tall, strong, self assured - he's probably never had to actually fight anyone in his life. Nobody would start anything with a guy that big, that confident. He's so sure of everything in his life, everything in his world. Then someone comes along and takes all that away in the space of one day. He's drugged, his memories are hazy, and the medical evidence shows he's been raped and carved up. He can't face **that** truth, so he invents one that he finds easier to live with."

"Aliens? UFO's?" Scully raised an eyebrow.

"Why not? He's a science fiction fan - he's been immersed in fantasy literature all his adult life. His mind has found the easiest way for him to deal with what happened to him. It's the only way he can rationalize it." Mulder rubbed his hand over his face again.

"Rape," Scully repeated, shaking her head.

"Yes. The question is who did that to him, and why, and why that pentagram," Mulder mused thoughtfully.

"I would have thought the question is how can we get Mr. Royce to make a full report to the police in order that we can catch this guy before he strikes again," Scully said.

Dark. He came to with a start and moaned out loud, then tensed, fearing retribution. None came. Something was different. The air was fresh. He was outside. He could smell grass under his cheek. His hands...he could move them. He shifted, turned onto his back, then screamed out loud as the pain sliced through him. He moved his hands, found the blindfold, and trembling, tore it from his eyes.

It was evening. He had no idea when or what day. He didn't know how long his ordeal had lasted. He didn't even know if it was over. He was lying by the side of the road, beneath a blanket. He pulled the blanket around his body, and tried to stand up. He lurched momentarily, then drawing on every last vestige of his stamina, he began to stagger towards the road. Cars went by in a blinding flash of light, horns blared, but he just kept on walking, numbly, not sure what he was doing. A white car purred to a halt silently beside him, and the occupant reached over and opened the door for him.

"You alright?" He gazed at the occupant, blearily, trying to understand what he was saying. "Get in - I'll take you to the hospital," the man said. He was short and podgy, his face round, and unthreatening.

"Okay..." His own voice sounded strange and unreal to his ears. He fell into the car and screamed again, a high, hoarse sound, like an animal, as his torn flesh made contact with the seat.

"Jesus. What the hell happened to you?" His rescuer asked. He noticed that the car was littered with the wrappers from dozens of chocolate bars. His rescuer's eyes were light blue and kind. The tops of the other man's fingers, where he gripped the wheel tightly, were covered in hangnails, which had been bleeding, staining his fingers with little streaks of red.

"I...don't know," he whispered, bowing his head.

"Did you see whoever did this to you?" The man asked insistently.

"See...no," he whispered, remembering a blindfold over his eyes. "I didn't see anyone." He caught sight of himself in the wing mirror and stared, not recognizing himself. He had one bruise along his jaw, but that was all - nothing else to show that he had just been to hell - nothing except the expression in his eyes. He didn't know this man. Didn't know this victim. He had always been strong, sure of himself. He had never been this person, he was sure of it.

"Don't you remember any of it?" His rescuer asked. "You were attacked?"

"Yes...I was attacked...but no...I don't remember...I don't...remember." He clung to those words. He didn't want to remember. He had no intention of remembering...that voice, the stench in that room, the pain, the humiliation. "I don't remember," he said again. "None of it," he added firmly.

"Right. You didn't see anyone. You don't remember. Okay..." The podgy man sat back in his seat, nodding vigorously, and started to hum happily to himself.

Mulder sat in his chair, watching his boss go through an extraordinary series of moves. When he'd first handed Skinner his report, the other man had grabbed it from him and set about reading it, one finger rubbing along his jaw in his usual report-reading mode. As he continued reading, that pattern changed, subtly. His neck muscles started to bunch up, and his finger closed into a fist, so tight a fist that it had to hurt. His facial expression didn't

change, but his eyes darkened behind the glasses, and when he'd finished reading, he didn't look up. Instead his eyes went back to an earlier passage, and re-read. Then returned to it again and re-read once more, as if he couldn't tear himself away from the detail. Mulder catalogued these reactions, storing them away in his profiler's brain, as he stored every single observation, every minute, of every day. Finally, Skinner looked up.

"So, your conclusion is that Mr. Royce wasn't abducted by aliens at all. He was..." Skinner didn't finish the sentence, so Mulder finished it for him.

"Raped, sir. Yes." He nodded.

"And have you approached Mr. Royce with these observations?" Skinner asked.

"Scully did, sir." Mulder nodded.

"And the reaction?" Skinner made eye contact with him for the first time.

"Hostile, sir. As you can imagine," Mulder sighed.

"You're absolutely sure...?" Skinner began.

"Yes, sir. I did some digging. This isn't the first time this has happened. The rape, the pentagram - they've been reported before."

Skinner's whole body froze. Mulder put his head on one side, wondering what the hell was going on. It was as if Skinner knew something. Something about this case. Something he didn't want to share.

"Who...?" Skinner's voice was a low croak. He gazed at a point somewhere over Mulder's shoulder.

"Two victims - two years apart." Mulder threw another report onto the table. "The perp hasn't been caught. He's very efficient - he doesn't leave any forensic evidence - he goes so far as to wash his victims thoroughly before dumping them, naked and drugged, in a location away from where the rapes actually took place. He knows what dosage of drug to use on them to get them out of the bar they're drinking in, and into his car, and when he gets them back to wherever he takes them, he gives them more of the drug, and blindfolds them. None of them remember his face - if they even see him. My theory is that he uses the date rape drug, rohypnol; its effects, including the memory loss, are well documented."

"I see." Skinner nodded, slowly. "Well, Agent Mulder, you've done your usual efficient work here. You can hand it over now to..."

"I'd like to stay on the case, if you don't mind, sir. I'm already helping the guys in BSU to come up with a profile for the perp, and--"

"No!" Skinner's hands shook slightly as he fumbled the papers back into their file, and handed them back to his agent. "This isn't an X File, Agent Mulder. There's no need for you to become involved."

"With all due respect, sir, I **am** involved, and I feel I have something to offer on this case..."

"I said, **no**," Skinner boomed, his dark eyes boring holes into Mulder.

Mulder shifted uneasily in his seat. What the hell was going on here? Why was Skinner so jumpy? And what the hell difference did it make to him if Mulder worked on the case or not? It was almost as if...he was scared that Mulder might actually solve this case - but why? Who was he protecting? Mulder's eyes darted sideways, saw the ashtray on Skinner's coffee table. There were four stubs in there, one of them still smoldering. Well, that made sense. He got up, angrily.

"I see. Stupid of me not to realize that you might be operating under someone else's orders on this. What does that black lunged bastard have to hide, huh?" He got up, grabbed the ashtray and thumped it down on Skinner's desk. "The trouble is that when you hang around with certain people, you start to smell of smoke," he hissed, challenging Skinner. His boss looked as if he'd been hit in the stomach. He recoiled visibly, and then gave a dark, bitter laugh.

"You don't know anything, Mulder. Not a damn thing," Skinner snarled.

"Don't I?" Mulder walked angrily towards the door. "I know I'm not damn well giving up on this case. I know that. **Sir**," he stressed the last word sarcastically, and left the room, slamming the door behind him to make his point.

His rescuer left him at the Emergency Room and then sped off. He wasn't sure why, but in the befuddled recesses of his mind, this struck him as strange. He wandered into the ER in a daze and stood, watching, wrapping his blanket tight around him, as medical personnel ran around, talking in a language he couldn't make sense of. It was like a strange, surreal, choreographed dance, and each doctor, each nurse, seemed to know their steps, as they waltzed and spun around the ER, a myriad of duets, a tango here, a waltz there. He stood, lost in the center of the room, and heard music as they twirled around him, and then the world suddenly stopped, and he swayed, dislocated, in the harsh, dim light of reality.

"Sir? Can I help you?" Someone, a nurse maybe, touched his back gently, and he screamed in pain. "Sir?"

He fell to his knees, unable to keep upright, and then there were people all around him, and he was being helped into a room, placed on a gurney, and they wanted his blanket. The blanket keeping his secret hidden. He fought with them over it, finding every last vestige of his strength to keep that blessed cloak close, but in the end he lost, and they pried it from his fingers, and stood back in horror as they witnessed whatever had been done to him. He didn't look over his shoulder. He didn't need to know.

"Sir...? Do you remember what happened to you? Is there any ID on him?"

"No. Nothing." Voices talked around him, so many words, none of them making sense.

"Sir - it's okay, you're safe now. Can you tell me your name?" She had pretty eyes. Dark brown. So pretty. He knew his name. He did know his name, but it was all he had left, all that had been left to him. If he gave it, here, now...then he would be this person. He would be this person who had been raped, and beaten, who had been held down, and carved into as if he was an animal.

"Doe," he whispered. "My name is John Doe." The nurse's mouth settled into a line of disapproval, and they were doing things to his body, things that hurt. He closed his eyes, and let the drama unfold around him, no longer part of it, merely an impartial observer.

"He called me 'Daddy'," the man whispered, taking a deep sip of water from the glass he kept cradling between his hands. "He was a psycho. Off his head."

Mulder nodded, keeping his full attention on the man in front of him, not bothering to take notes. He would learn far more by observation and intuition. It was the way he always worked. He hadn't brought Scully to interview Michael Green - one of the rapist's previous victims. She had asked not to be involved in the case, and since he was technically defying Skinner's orders by continuing his investigation, he preferred that she stay out of it. There was no reason for her to risk Skinner's wrath as well. He didn't know why he felt so strongly about this case, but there was something about it that had gotten under his skin.

"Did he talk to you a lot? What did he sound like?" Mulder asked, leaning forward and tugging on his bottom lip, thoughtfully.

"He sounded like a kid. No, that's not quite true - he was clearly an adult, but his voice was weird, kind of high pitched, like a kid, but so fucking...angry." Green took another gulp of his water.

Mulder nodded, encouragingly, trying to keep it light. Green, like Royce, was a big guy. About 55, with broad shoulders, and thick, salt-and-pepper hair. His gray eyes were deep and vivid. A Professor of Law, he taught at Georgetown University.

"Has he done this to someone else?" Green asked, looking at Mulder.

Mulder nodded.

"Recently?" Green pressed.

Mulder nodded again.

"Bastard. I knew he would. That's why I reported it. Took me a while though." Green swallowed. "I knew I should do it straight away, but I suddenly understood how women feel.

All you want to do is wash. I washed myself 10 times a day for 2 weeks, scrubbed myself raw. My girlfriend persuaded me to report it in the end - I wouldn't let her come near me. We split up soon after. She tried, but...I wasn't an easy person to be around. Hell, what am I saying? I've never been an easy person to be around. Irascible, that's me." Green gave a self deprecating smile. "I have a kind of pomposity - maybe it goes with the job. People think I like myself a bit too much...trust me, it was only that sense of self worth that kept me going after..." he trailed off and took another absent-minded sip of his drink. "It's been over a year since I was attacked. Why didn't he attack someone else before now?" Green asked.

"Maybe he did," Mulder said softly. "Male rape is still a taboo in our society, sir. It's not something men find easy to admit to. Just because it hasn't been reported... Some of them might even be in denial - pretending it didn't happen." He shrugged uncomfortably.

"I can understand that." Green swallowed and nodded. "Oh shit. I thought somehow I'd got over it. I mean, I still wonder, 'why me'? It just catches me sometimes - in the park, in the middle of a class. I was raped. I still have a fucking scar on my back that bastard left on me. A reminder, he said. Why me?" He looked at Mulder, his gray eyes helpless.

"Well, it may not be much of a comfort, but I think there was a very specific reason why he chose you," Mulder said softly. "It wasn't just random."

Green looked up in surprise.

"Does that help? Knowing that?" Mulder asked.

"I...yes." Green shook his head. "Why then, Agent Mulder? Why **did** he choose me?"

"You've probably already guessed some of it. He's playing out a trauma from his past, and to do that, he picks on men who can conceivably be viewed as father figures. Men who are big, strong, confident, self assured - the way his father must have seemed to him. He gets considerable satisfaction from inflicting on them what was inflicted on him."

"It's revenge, then. Pure and simple," Green sighed.

"It seems that way." Mulder frowned.

"But you're not sure?" Green asked.

"It's the pentagram." Mulder shook his head. "Why that?"

"Maybe his father did that to him?" Green suggested.

"Maybe, but somehow that doesn't seem likely. From all you've told me, his father tried to keep the boy quiet, warned him not to tell anyone. I'm sure someone would have noticed if the son had suddenly shown up at school with an inverted pentagram carved into his back."

"I see your point," Green nodded.

"Thank you for your help." Mulder got up, still musing on this subject. It was the pentagram that was at the root of his interest in the case, almost as if...the killer was talking directly to him, giving him a giant clue that he should be able to solve, and yet couldn't. He was sure the answer was simple, staring him in the face, and he was frustrated by his inability to see it.

The light on his answering machine was flashing when he got home.

"Mulder, it's me. Give me a call when you get home. I don't want you sitting around brooding about this case all weekend."

Scully. He smiled softly and picked up the phone, then replaced it again. Not yet. He knew what she was thinking. He knew she worried about him whenever he got involved in this type of case. Profiling always did this to him. He accepted that about himself. He had to throw himself into the profile, really try to get under the perp's skin and figure him out. He couldn't operate any other way.

Mulder went over to his bookcase and pulled out a psychiatry text, then took it back to the couch and sat down. He fumbled under the couch for his stash of beer cans and located one, flicking through the book as he drank. He wrote some notes as he worked, going through the files on the cases again.

How many other cases had gone unreported, he wondered? How long had this rapist been at large? And was there a pattern to the rapes? The earliest dated to May 1995, although it was conceivable that there had been others before then, unreported. What had happened in 1995 to set this rapist on this path? Some trauma? Or maybe just attaining adulthood, being free of his father. Who knew how old the perp was? Mulder couldn't find any common pattern to the times of the rapes. They didn't occur during a full moon, or on a particular day of the month. They didn't occur on days that seemed to have any magical or pagan significance, as far as he could see, making a nonsense of that pentagram. That damn pentagram. He could almost believe that it had been placed there on purpose, deliberately to intrigue him. The random pattern of the rapes led him to believe that they occurred at times when the rapist was under stress for some reason, maybe a particular kind of stress led to the need for the perp to take this kind of violent extreme action.

Mulder sighed and rolled his neck, trying to relieve the build-up of tension. Cases like this always affected him; it wasn't exactly the best time to be immersing himself in the mind set of a psycho, when he had pressures in his own life to deal with. His eyes darted sideways, to the small book lying on his coffee table. He had spent hours poring over it until he was word-perfect, and yet... somehow he still felt the lure. He abandoned his study of the case and picked up the diary.

Rows and rows of childish lettering greeted him. Samantha's last thoughts, the last troubled months of her life. Part of his mind mused over the case, while the other part tormented him with images of a small, frightened girl being tied, experimented upon...it wasn't so much different to the story he had just heard from Michael Green. God, all this fucking evil

existing in the world. He rocked forward, holding his stomach, wanting to be sick. Both cases had that same edge of darkness that both fascinated and repelled him.

The perp had been a small, frightened child once, just like Samantha, and he had been hurt, just like her. Not for the first time, Mulder wondered just what part his own father had played in Samantha's abduction. He recalled fragments of a conversation between his father, mother, and that cigarette smoking bastard, and wished that his memory, which so rarely failed him, had not chosen to let him down in this particular instance. Sometimes the truth seemed so close. Had his father failed Samantha, as the perp's father had failed him? Had the cigarette smoking man leaned over her naked, terrified body, as the perp's father had leaned over him, and hurt her as the perp had been hurt?

He didn't like to think about it. The two cases twisted and turned in his mind, so separate and yet so similar. Mulder buried his head under his arms and rocked himself, back and forth, back and forth, like a little, lost child.

He stayed that way for a long time, then growing suddenly calm, he got up and wandered over to the window, opening it and taking in a deep breath of air. He was so lost in thought that he barely noticed the white car with its single occupant, parked beneath his apartment.

His apartment looked the same as ever. Nothing had changed. Somehow that didn't seem possible. He fumbled with the locks, making a mental note to replace them with bigger, stronger versions - hell, it was time he changed his whole security system. He might not be safe. What if...what if that man came back for him?

Shut the fuck up, he hissed to himself. It didn't happen. It didn't happen. He held onto the mantra, repeating it over and over again, until he was quiet.

He'd discharged himself from the hospital this morning, surprised to find that it was only Monday. He was sure he'd spent a lifetime in that psycho's grasp, screaming under his knife, under his hands, his body...He'd discharged himself from the hospital this morning, surprised to find that it was only Monday. He was sure he'd spent a lifetime in that psycho's grasp, screaming under his knife, under his hands, his body...

He called into the office, told them he had flu and would be off for the entire week. He wasn't sure how long he would take to heal. He just needed a little time to himself, to lick his wounds. It was no worse than anything else he had been through. Physically, at least, he'd been through worse. Mentally...

He walked stiffly, slowly, going to the bathroom, and turning on the shower. He stepped beneath it, and lost himself in the warm flow of the water, scrubbed his flesh with soap, but he could still smell the scent of semen, and urine, and sweat and blood...and pain. He scrubbed his arms and torso over and over again, hearing that voice - the high-pitched voice of that bastard, calling him "Daddy"...

He pushed that thought away, remembering instead the pretty eyes of the nurse and how she had held his hand.

"You should talk to someone. You need to talk to someone. Let me make an appointment..."

"NO." He wouldn't talk. Not to a shrink, not to anyone. He'd handle this alone. If he talked...it would be like admitting it had actually happened. And it hadn't. It hadn't.

He got out of the shower and wrapped himself in a towel, carefully patted his body dry, trying not to dislodge the dressing on the small of his back, taking care not to go anywhere near his swollen anus. He walked back into his living room, fumbled for a bottle of whisky, and poured himself a whole glass.

He was going to get drunk. He was going to spend the next week scrubbing the scent off his body, and drinking. That was all he was going to do. Then he was going to pull himself together, and go back to work as if nothing had happened. Because it hadn't.

It hadn't.

*It **hadn't**.*

"Mulder?"

"What?" He gazed blearily at the clock and moved off the couch. God, he ached. That would teach him to sleep scrunched up on the couch instead of in his bed, like normal people. "Scully?" he muttered into the telephone.

"Yes, it's me. I've got something to tell you..." She hesitated, clearly uncertain about the news she was going to give him.

"Yes?" Mulder was suddenly wide awake. He glanced around the messy apartment. There were several beer cans on the floor, and the remains of what looked like pizza. Jesus, what a weekend.

"Mulder, there's been another rape," she said quietly.

The victim was a man in his late forties. Tall, broad-shouldered - Mulder had expected that. He was quiet, subdued, pale-faced, lying in the hospital bed. He gave his testimony quietly, without faltering, and Mulder could only guess at the great feat of willpower that had required. These men the perp chose - all of them had that same inner strength, even as they reeled from an event for which they had no frame of reference. They were men unused to being physically or emotionally weak. Articulate, intelligent, self-aware men. Mulder caught a glimpse of himself in the mirror. Unshaven, with dark shadows under his eyes. Christ, he looked like shit.

"Please, find the man who did this to me," the victim whispered.

"I will. I promise," Mulder replied. "Do you remember anything else? You're sure you didn't see his face?"

"No. I don't remember...just that voice..." the other man croaked. "One thing though...I don't understand this. The nurse said I was wearing a ring when they brought me in. I don't wear a ring, Agent Mulder. It was on my wedding finger, but I'm not married."

"I see." Mulder pulled on his bottom lip, considering this. He patted the man's arm, gently, then went out to see the nurse.

"He says he was wearing a ring. Can I see it?" Mulder asked. The nurse, nodded, and went to retrieve the victim's personal effects.

"It's strange - he's the second one I've seen with that mark carved into his back in the past couple of months," she told him. "The last one was in even worse shape than this one."

"What was his name?" Mulder looked up sharply. William Royce hadn't been brought to this hospital, so she couldn't be referring to him.

"I don't know. He wouldn't give one. Called himself John Doe, and discharged himself within 24 hours. I don't think he could handle what had happened to him. I hope he got help..." she found what she was looking for and handed Mulder the ring.

He took it, and examined it carefully, then froze. Inside there was an inscription, and a date. Love Forever, Sharon...

He knew this ring. More importantly, he knew who it belonged to. His heart started to beat, loudly, in his chest.

"Agent Mulder?" The nurse looked at him. "You've gone very pale. Are you all right?"

"I'm fine," he managed to gasp. "I need this. It's...evidence." He put the ring in his pocket, daring her to disagree, and before she could say anything, he strode from the building, without looking back.

"Mulder!" He could see Scully's concern in her eyes and wondered what the hell he must look like, turning up on her doorstep like this in the middle of the night.

"Scully...I don't know what to do. I don't know what the hell I should do." He pushed past her and paced around her apartment, trembling. He had been driving for hours, trying to figure it out in his head, but it still didn't make sense.

"Mulder, what is it?" She grabbed hold of his arm, and guided him to the couch, sat him down, and brought him a glass of water, which he downed in one gulp.

"It's Skinner. I think he might be the perp." Mulder fumbled in his pocket for the ring. "The latest victim was wearing this - but it wasn't his. It's Skinner's ring, Scully. How did it get on the victim's hand?"

"Skinner's ring? You're sure?" Scully picked up the ring, and gazed at it. "This inscription could apply to hundreds of people..." she began.

"No." He put his hand over hers. "I recognized it. I had it tested for his prints, DNA, anything they could find - it's his, Scully."

"Mulder, surely you can't believe..." She stared at him in horror. "Skinner couldn't have done this," she whispered.

"I tried to think it through. Tried to find a reason...He's been behaving strangely recently...and the attacks are more frequent than ever before...as if the perp is under some extra stress...some rapists and killers don't even remember their acts...it's as if a completely different personality took over their body, and committed the crime...do you remember Melissa? The Temple of the Seven Stars? She had those personalities, past lives, whatever..." Mulder paused for breath, then plunged in again. "They sounded different, each of those people - it was her speaking, but they sounded different, they weren't her...those nanocytes in his bloodstream...it's possible that it's a control thing...maybe at the very time he lost control over his body, it made him remember a time...as a child...when he had no control...brought up those same feelings...made him need to exert control over others..." Mulder's breath was coming in deep gasps.

Scully placed a cool hand on his arm. "Mulder, do you really believe any of this?" She asked him, her blue eyes steady, and calming.

"No, Scully. Not a word of it." He smiled at her, shakily.

"Good. Neither do I." She smiled back. "Now, we just need to figure out just how Skinner is involved in all this."

He made it through the first week back at work. He didn't think anyone noticed. He got through it, just by putting one foot in front of the other, concentrating on getting to work, concentrating hard on each and every conversation, frowning, pinching himself to keep himself on topic, so that his mind didn't wander.

*He didn't want time to think. Sometimes he saw people laughing, and turned, wondering if they were laughing at **him**, wondering if they knew. He was snapping at people more than usual. He knew that, tried to stop, but sometimes he couldn't help himself. They were all carrying on as if nothing had happened, and nothing had happened. Nothing.*

As the weeks passed, he thought it would get easier, but it didn't. It got harder. Now there was this case, and who knew what would be dug up? Stars on people's backs...or inverted

pentagrams or whatever. Fuck. What kind of a fucking world was he living in? He didn't want anyone to dig into this. Poking around...asking questions...asking him to remember...

He got up, walked stiffly down to the gym, grabbed his tee shirt and went into one of the stalls in the men's room to get changed. He wasn't healing well. Sometimes, the mark on his back bled. He should go back and get it looked at, but that would mean questions...He didn't want any more questions. He tied his sneakers and grabbed a towel, then strode into the gym with jerky, angry movements. Working out helped. He could lose himself in the physical exertion. It definitely helped.

He got on the treadmill, and started to run, waiting for oblivion to kick in.

Mulder took refuge in the gym, trying to figure out where to go next. He noticed Skinner working out across the room, and wondered whether he should approach him, but try as he might, he couldn't think of a way to even broach the subject.

"I mean, how the hell do you go up to your boss and ask him what his wedding ring was doing on the victim of a rape?" He asked himself, under his breath. He watched as Skinner worked out. The older man was always focussed, in complete control of himself, but this time he was different, Mulder thought. His movements were staccato, lacking their usual fluid grace, and there was a deep frown on his forehead, as if he wasn't doing this for pleasure, or even for the exercise, but for some other reason.

Mulder watched, still turning the issue over in his mind. The gym slowly emptied, but Skinner's pace didn't let up. He moved onto the weights, and lifted. Heavy weights, hundreds of repetitions. Mulder frowned. What the hell was wrong with his boss? Why was he pushing himself into the ground like this? Skinner's face was furrowed, covered with sweat. He lifted with nobody to spot him. Lift, pause, up, pause, down...lift, pause, up, pause...down. Lift...and falter...his impassive mask cracking, his face twisted in a kind of pain. Mulder found himself running. He grabbed the end of the weight before it came crashing down, deflected it away from Skinner's body.

"Sir? Are you all right? Sir?" He touched Skinner's arm, and the other man seemed to see him for the first time, turned, and punched him.

"Keep away from me! Fuck you...fuck..."

Mulder found himself on the floor, his jaw aching. He looked up to see Skinner blinking into realization of what he had done.

"Sir?" He said softly but Skinner was moving away, moving towards the door, and the back of his tee shirt was covered with spikes of blood, showing the clear outline of... "Sir!" Mulder was on his feet, running down to the locker room, after the other man.

"Mulder...go away. I'm sorry. I shouldn't have hit you..." Skinner was breathing hard, backing away from his subordinate.

"Sir, it's all right. I understand. I know what happened," Mulder said softly, holding up his hands in a gesture of his non-violent intent. "I'm sorry I touched you. No wonder you reacted the way you did. I'm sorry." He moved forward, and Skinner moved back, away from him, edging himself into the corner.

"Go, Mulder." It was clear that Skinner was struggling to retain his self control. He held up his hands, shielding his face from Mulder's view. "Please...go..." Skinner whispered.

"It's okay. You can talk to me...you have to talk to someone...You haven't talked to anyone about it since it happened, have you? Oh god, you poor bastard...locking this up inside..."

"No. No, I don't...Please...keep away. Fuck you! Keep away..." Skinner implored. Mulder edged closer. Skinner slid down the side of the lockers, until he was crouched, half seated, on the floor. He slid his arms around his knees, his whole body shaking, sweat running down his forehead.

"It's all right." Mulder crouched in front of him. "It wasn't your fault. You were in a bar, on your own, having a quiet drink...yes? Next thing you knew, you woke up somewhere else...tied...helpless?"

Skinner's face crumpled visibly in front of Mulder's eyes, and he felt a lump rise in his throat. "It wasn't your fault," Mulder repeated, his mind working overtime. "How long has it been? A few weeks? You took some time off...flu...you said it was the flu...was that after it happened?" Mulder asked gently. Skinner nodded, his body trembling with the effort of even that small movement.

"It's all right to admit it happened. It's okay. Nobody could expect to deal with this alone." Mulder felt the most wrenching pity for the man in front of him. Society didn't teach men like this how to deal with assault. The stigma women so often felt after being raped was multiplied for men, and for a man like this...Skinner was so big and strong. He had authority, he was used to being in charge, in control...for him to then be reduced to the role of victim, repeatedly raped, and tortured, that bloody pentagram carved into his flesh...Mulder could hardly stand the knowledge himself, could barely watch the other man's misery, but, like Skinner, he had no choice. There was no way he was abandoning this man just when he needed help the most.

"How have you been handling this?" he asked, awestruck, wondering how **he** would handle it if it had happened to him.

"Drink." Skinner rasped, managing a wry smile, his body still shaking. "And exercise helps...and I took up smoking again...haven't done that since 'Nam. Helped calm..." He couldn't finish the sentence, and Mulder rocked back on his heels. He'd seen those cigarette butts and jumped to all the wrong conclusions. Damn. He hated himself for that, for adding to this man's pain by accusing him the way he had.

"You need help. You must see that," Mulder said gently. "We can find you help."

"Go on my file," Skinner rasped. "Damn psyche evaluations, people knowing...people knowing I was fucked up the ass by some psycho..." Sweat poured down the side of his bald head in little rivulets.

"You can't keep going like this. Nobody will judge you. Please, let me help you." Mulder inched in close, put out a hand, and, very slowly, very gingerly, touched Skinner's arm. The other man didn't move, his breathing quickened but he didn't move. "You're going to be okay. This was a first step," Mulder said, gently stroking Skinner's arm with his hand. "Come on, sir...let me help you." He slid his arms around the other man's shoulders and pulled Skinner's head onto his chest. The other man came, unresisting, then grabbed hold of Mulder and convulsed against him, shedding silent, wracking tears. Mulder gently stroked Skinner's shoulders, over and over again, repeating his mantra. "It's okay now, you're going to be fine, we'll get you help...it's okay, it's okay..."

Damn, I'm going to find this bastard, I'm going to hunt him down and fucking well kill him, Mulder seethed silently inside, as he desperately offered what little comfort he could to the stricken man in front of him.

First the pentagram, getting inside Mulder's mind, getting him involved, and now Skinner, making it personal. He felt as if the perp was deliberately taunting him, showing him how damn useless he was. A fucking useless investigator, jumping to all kinds of wrong conclusions...why that wedding ring? A clumsy attempt to pin the blame on Skinner? Why? Why? Why?

A thought occurred to him, that there was a kind of desperation in the rapist's actions. It was almost as if he wanted to be stopped. If only he could figure out the meaning of the pentagram, that symbol of black magic, a sign of the paranormal, something Mulder investigated every day of his working life. Was it telling him something? And the inversion? What the hell was that telling him? The pentagram was a symbol of power and goodness, but inverted it was a symbol of evil and darkness. The same sign, but a simple inversion changed it from good, to evil. What the hell was he missing here?

Ray Selby's hair stood up on the back of his neck for a second as he watched the dark haired agent emerge, clearly in a highly agitated state, get into his car and drive off at top speed, but it was all right. Nothing was about to happen. Yet. But something was brewing. He hadn't been doing this for 5 years without getting to know the patterns. He couldn't make any sense of them, he wasn't clever enough - he'd be the first to admit that, but he knew what the patterns were all right. His job was just to watch and wait. He was good at that.

Mulder paced his apartment, surrounded by files, open text books - even Samantha's diary. Hell, if this perp thought he'd had a fucking difficult childhood he should damn well have lived in the Mulder household circa 1961 to 1978. Mulder cracked open a sunflower seed,

trying not to think about Skinner trembling in his arms, his back carved up and bleeding, his whole body convulsing in rage and shame.

Fuck. Mulder pounded his fist into the wall, then let out a howl of pain and went into the bathroom to hold his hand under cold water. He caught a glimpse of himself in the mirror and grimaced. He looked a fucking mess. Not as bad as Skinner, but still, a fucking mess. How could someone do this? What kind of evil existed in the world that could do this?

Evil. He always associated it with that cigarette smoking bastard. He closed his eyes, and formed his hands into fists, remembering something, a fragment he had heard when he'd been delirious, and close to death. That bastard, standing by his bed, telling him that he was his father. Not fucking likely. Bill Mulder had been his father. Not that evil, sickening, cigarette smoking bastard.

What kind of man would rape his own son, he wondered? But then again what kind of man would give his daughter up for experimentation? Or his wife? There were so many shades of evil in the world. Usually, child abuse occurred in broken families. The stereotype of the stepfather, raping, abusing, sometimes even murdering his wife's children from her former marriage or partnership.

He shook his head. Cases like this always did this to him. Made him question himself, made him look at his own life, placed everything under the spotlight. It was the way he worked. Like polishing a mirror, trying to make it clear enough to see the perp, and in the process placing everything else under bright, shiny scrutiny as well.

He had promised Skinner he'd find this man, and he would. It was almost as if the perp was daring him to find him, to stop him before he went too far, before he killed. He wondered what kind of abuse would make a man so psychotic he could do this.

Mulder realized he was still holding his hand under the faucet, and he stepped back and dried it with a grubby towel, glancing at himself in the mirror as he did so. Was he the kind of man who would interest the perp, he wondered? Was he tall enough, strong enough - did he exude the right air of invulnerable authority? Was the perp even now watching him, waiting to strike? Did he even know the man? Would he be lured somewhere, held against his will, attacked, just as Skinner had been attacked, when he least expected it? Skinner's denial didn't surprise him. The capacity of the human mind to find ways to survive never ceased to amaze him. He wondered whether he would have been able to suppress it if it had happened to him - to just pretend it hadn't happened, and carry on as normal.

It had been almost a week since his showdown with Skinner in the locker room. The other man was on indefinite compassionate leave while he underwent counseling. Mulder had been putting it off, but he knew he needed to formally interview Skinner, to see if he could provide any clues or new pieces of information. It wouldn't be an easy interview, but he couldn't delay any longer.

The perp was attacking more frequently now, and his violence might escalate. The next one might not end at rape. It might end only in murder. Wasn't that the ultimate power the son

could hold over the father? The power of life and death? Mulder ran through the pattern again in his mind as he reached for the phone. The perp was clever. He never left any forensic clues on the bodies of his victims. He usually attacked at weekends though, Friday nights or Saturdays, which implied that he was an office worker. Skinner had been held for two nights, Friday and Saturday, which was unusual - most of the victims were held for one night only. Maybe there was something about Skinner that the perp had particularly liked.

"Skinner." The other man's voice was as firm and brisk as usual on the other end of the line.

"Sir - it's Agent Mulder." There was silence, a kind of awkward embarrassment between them. Mulder wasn't surprised. Skinner was a deeply private man, and to know that Mulder had seen him at his lowest point...

"Mulder. You want to interview me." It wasn't a question. Skinner knew the routine, and he had been expecting this call.

"Yes, sir. I'm sorry." He shrugged apologetically, even though Skinner couldn't see him.

"That's all right. I knew you would. Why don't you come over?"

"Now?"

"Yes. I'd...like to get it over with, and, like you, I want this bastard caught as soon as possible. If anyone can solve this case, it's you, Agent Mulder."

"Yes, sir." He was touched by Skinner's faith in him and his work. "I'll be over shortly, sir," he said, hanging up.

Mulder glanced around the room, at the pieces of paper, the case reports, the interview transcripts, and texts scattered over the floor, at Samantha's diary, which was never out of his sight. Damn it, the answer was here, somewhere, he just had to find it. He crouched on the floor, rocking himself back and forth as he considered the clues in front of him. Next time, the rapist might kill. He was running out of time, damnit!

The monster was here. Selby shivered. He could always tell. The chill was almost tangible, like a cloud passing in front of the sun. The monster sauntered across the street, and walked slowly, deliberately, towards the building.

Ray knew that he was supposed to stand by, and watch, and afterwards to clean up and smooth away the evidence to make sure that nobody found out. Not that he often had to do much. The monster was too clever for that. Cunning. A sly, animal cunning that reminded Selby of his employer, who protected the monster so assiduously, for reasons Ray didn't understand. Sometimes it was necessary for Ray to kill, to keep things quiet. His employer always knew places to hide the bodies - they were never found. He hoped tonight wouldn't be one of those nights though. Maybe tonight he'd be strong enough to intervene, and stop it happening. Maybe tonight he'd find that courage from somewhere.

Selby thought for a moment, then reached for another bar of chocolate, and crammed it into his mouth whole. That was his tenth today, but who the hell cared? Everyone had their vices. His employer smoked his way through countless cigarettes, and Ray ate chocolate. Who the hell could blame him for that?

Skinner peered through the peephole on the door and saw Mulder's visage, rendered round and distorted by the glass. He unlocked the multiple locks, and opened the door to his subordinate, managing a tight smile, uncomfortable with this situation.

"Mulder...come in." He locked the door again, not taking any risks, needing the comfort of the many locks, keeping him safe, keeping evil out. "Take a seat." He gestured with his hand to the couch, and Mulder sat down.

"Sir, I have something that belongs to you." Mulder handed him the wedding ring. Skinner took it, frowning.

"I...don't wear it any more. Since the divorce," he said in a dull, rasping tone. "I keep in my pocket. I don't know why. Sentimental value, maybe..." He looked up, to find Mulder nodding sympathetically. "It must have fallen out when..." He trailed off, then changed the subject abruptly. "Would you like a drink?"

Mulder reached into his jacket. "I brought my own," he said drawing out a full bottle of whisky, and giving the other man a broad grin. "Look, sir, there's no need for this to be a formal interview. I know how difficult this is for you. I thought you might feel more comfortable if we kicked back, had a drink, and you talked in your own time, at your own pace. Yes?"

Skinner considered it for a moment, then nodded. "Yes. Okay, Mulder - thanks."

Mulder smiled, and nodded. "No problem. Hold on, I'll get us some glasses." He went over to the drinks cabinet, and poured them each a glass of whisky.

Skinner shifted nervously. He wasn't looking forward to this, but he was reassured by Mulder's gesture of friendship. Whisky had been his best friend for the past few weeks, and it would be nice not to drink it alone. Mulder came back to the couch, and handed him the glass. Skinner took a nervous sip.

"I'm...not going to be very good at this," he admitted as Mulder sat down beside him.

"Don't worry." Mulder surprised him by touching his arm. "Please. I'm not here to make things worse for you. God knows, I understand what you've been through. We'll take it nice and slow."

"All right." Skinner took a deep breath, and downed a large gulp of his drink. "Where do we begin?"

"At the beginning?" Mulder suggested. "You went to a bar?"

"Yes...in a hotel. I like hotel bars, they're anonymous places, you can watch the people come and go. It was a Friday night, after work. It had been a hard day...I felt...tense..." Skinner closed his eyes, feeling sleepy. He opened his eyes again with a start. "Drinking helps. I don't drink much. Just a couple of whiskies, and then I go home...I left my drink...went to the men's room...I could only have been gone a couple of minutes..." He paused. Mulder looked different. He wasn't sure how, just that he did. Maybe it was the drink. He was on medication so he really shouldn't be drinking at all.

"Go on." Mulder nodded encouragingly.

"I..." Skinner felt as if the collar of his denim shirt was too tight around his neck. He reached up a finger to loosen it and found he couldn't move. Damn it, he was more stressed out about this than he had thought.

"It's okay. I'll do it." Mulder leaned over him. Mulder's long fingers undid the collar of his shirt, and he took a deep breath. Mulder didn't move his hand away from his neck. "How does that feel?" Mulder asked.

"S'better. Sorry, whisky with the medication..." he slurred.

"It's okay." Mulder smiled. He ran the back of his hand down the side of Skinner's cheek. Skinner frowned. That didn't sound like Mulder. It wasn't Mulder's **voice**.

"Mulder?" He whispered.

"No. He's not here right now, but I am," a high pitched voice whispered in his ear. " **Daddy**."

The End

Screams of protest (or friendly feedback, which I'd much prefer!)

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