

Identity Crisis by Xanthe

<http://www.xanthe.org/identity-crisis/>

Walter Skinner locked his office door, pulled down the blinds, turned off all the lights and sat down on his black leather couch, his whole body shaking. He needed to rest. Goddamn it he needed a total break. He couldn't cope with it any more - the strain was getting to him. Three hours in a meeting with the Deputy Director. Three hours talking about Mulder and Scully. Three hours defending Mulder and Scully, defending the X Files, defending another one of Mulder's ridiculous theories. He had a headache. He had a neck ache and a back ache and damn it - everything ached.

"I want your personal assurance - your PERSONAL assurance that this won't happen again, Skinner." The Deputy Director had said.

"Yes, sir." He had replied dutifully.

"Or you'll have to find another way of dealing with those two."

"Yes, sir."

"I've never thought of you as a man who had a problem with discipline, Assistant Director."

"No, sir."

"Always thought that was one of your strong points."

"Yes, sir."

"So discipline them for god's sake!"

"Yes, sir."

"Or consider your position within the Bureau." The Deputy Director scowled at him.

"Sir?"

"Yes, Assistant Director. That's how serious this is. Dismissed."

Dismissed? DISMISSED? Like a school kid? Skinner buried his head in his hands. Had he been too soft on them? He thought to himself. He ran through all his dealings with them in his mind - he had been very tough on them when he had first been appointed as their supervisor. Oh what a poisoned chalice that had turned out to be! But he had kept Mulder on tape surveillance, generally squashed the young agent down and pulled him back into line. What had gone wrong since then? The trouble was that Mulder was brilliant and so was Scully. Both brilliant in their own way and both utterly unable to stay within the rules. And now this latest disaster - Mulder and Scully interviewed on live television proclaiming that the President of the United States was an alien.

"And is this the official FBI viewpoint?" The interviewer had asked.

"How many more people need to see the president behaving like an alien before they believe?" Mulder had neatly ducked the question, his face earnest.

"And Agent Scully - what's your view?"

"The evidence is conclusive." Scully nodded, waving a huge file full of scientific facts and figures.

An alien. The president - an alien. Skinner flinched. This was worse than anything else that had ever happened to him in his whole life and he included dying in Vietnam in that.

There was a knock at the door. Skinner ignored it.

"Sir! We need to talk to you! Sir!" Mulder's voice. Oh god, was there to be no end to his torment?

"Go away!" He shouted, burying his face in his hands.

"But, sir! It's important. The world is about to end, the president is an alien, the Deputy Director wants our skins! Save us, sir!"

Skinner got up, took a deep breath and unlocked the door.

"Sir!" Mulder charged into the room, closely followed by Scully. "Is this room bugged, sir?" Mulder started looking under chairs and behind desks. Skinner sat down weakly, feeling drained. "Sir! Sir!"

"Sir! Sir!" Scully was staring at him anxiously.

Skinner burst into tears.

"Sir?" Mulder put his head on one side, a quizzical look on his face.

"What's the matter, sir?" Scully approached him and put a gentle hand on his shoulder.

"Call me Walter," he beseeched them. "Please. Nobody does any more, not since Sharon left me."

"But, sir! Sorry, Walter." Mulder looked at his feet. "What on earth is the matter?"

"You've won, Mulder." Skinner sighed. "I give in. I can't do it any more."

"Can't do what, sir, um, Walter?" Mulder asked.

"Can't do this! You know, all the snarling and prowling and being angry and telling you off. I'm tired. I'm getting old. I've been doing this for too long now. Do you know how many times I've been allowed to get out from behind my desk in the past 5 years?"

"Um, no, Walter." Scully looked alarmed.

"I can count them on my fingers." Walter looked at his fingers and burst into tears again. "I sit here all day, every day and half the night as well - I've lost count of how many times you burst in on me at 5 o'clock in the morning and I'm still here. I don't have a social life - I'm prey to every paid-up call girl in DC who takes a fancy to me in a bar, my wife left me

because I had no conversation and when I'm not sitting behind my desk trawling through another one of your ridiculous reports, I'm getting beaten up or shot. It's not really a life, is it, Mulder? Scully?" He looked at them in despair. "I mean is it?"

"Well..." Mulder looked uncomfortable. "You did get to have sex, sir! That's more than me and Scully do, unless you count the vampire girl and the tattoo guy and I don't really."

"What vampire girl?" Scully asked suspiciously.

"Never mind." Mulder said guiltily. "I didn't make a fuss about the tattoo guy."

"Nothing happened!"

"So you say...but my point is that Walter here has at least had some decent sex recently."

"Decent? I woke up to find her dead in the bed!" Skinner protested.

"Hmm. Well, I've been shot too, sir, Walter, sir." Mulder said helpfully.

"And I've been abducted." Scully added.

"Oh that doesn't count - you're always getting abducted." Mulder told her scornfully.

"It's still nasty!" Scully protested. "And anyway you didn't get cancer."

"No, but I did get holes drilled in my head."

"That was your own fault!"

"Your sister wasn't snatched!"

"No, my sister was murdered instead!"

"Well so was my dad!"

"You don't get dragged out of bed regularly at 11:21 at night because your mad partner has found out something he shouldn't!"

"At least you have a bed!"

"At least you have an apartment!"

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"You know exactly what it means..."

Skinner slipped away into his private, en-suite bathroom and placed his bald head against the cool tiles. It was always about them. Always, always about them. It wasn't fair, it wasn't right. Wasn't he an interesting person too? Wasn't he passably good looking? Didn't he have an air of natural authority and a quite stunning physique? What was the point of working out every day if he only got to take his clothes off once or twice? Why did he have to cover his bulging biceps with these crisp white cotton shirts all the time? What would be wrong with him dressing in tight black leather and coming to the office on his Harley occasionally? Just to show that he had another side to his personality, a side nobody guessed at.

"Sir Walter, sir!" Mulder had followed him into the bathroom. "Please help us, sir. Even if you say you can't help us but then secretly do help us when we're not looking and then

never tell us you helped us so we never know and therefore we suspect you of being a bad guy next time we get betrayed."

"Or..." Scully appeared beside him. "Or, just look very bemused and make a little speech about this being too much for you to do and then risk your life saving us anyway. Please." "And we won't embarrass you by being grateful. Uh-uh." Mulder shook his head. "No. We'll just sigh and talk about you behind your back and be all mouthy to you and shout at you and flounce around in your office. And we'll assume you're working for Cancerman or Well-manicured man, or The First Elder or...or...one of the other bad guys whose names we haven't found out because although we're FBI agents capable of unmasking HUGE conspiracies, we've never been very good with names. So we'll think you're working to a different agenda because we don't really trust you, sir. Despite wanting you to save us and all."

"Please save us, sir." Scully said beseechingly. "Then when things get back to normal we'll file impossible reports that you have to sign off, sir."

"That's right, Walter sir. Monsters and bogeymen and black oil and aliens and you know the stuff." Mulder grinned. "You didn't want to be promoted did you?"

Walter turned on the cold water, and washed his face. His eyes were red from crying. He felt totally exhausted.

"It's no use," he sighed, wiping his face with a towel. "It's just no use. Did you know that I like cuddly toys? I sleep with a big pink fluffy bunny rabbit on my bed."

Mulder and Scully stared at each other, their eyes alarmed.

"And sometimes, when it's cold, I get out my Donald Duck slippers and make quacking sounds as I do the housework." Walter loosened his tie and undid the top button on his shirt, pushing past his two agents and returning to the other room. "I like 1970's disco beats - the Bee Gees are a personal favorite of mine. Staying alive, staying alive, ah ah ah ah, staying alive..." Skinner started to sing, jiving around his office, spinning and twirling. "Sometimes, when I'm feeling lonely, I bake cookies and invite all the kids in the neighborhood to come and eat them. Grease - what a great musical that was. You're the one that I want oo oo oo...I took a class in massage once. I like flowers - particularly lilies, and carnations - especially yellow ones. Why the greased lightning - I have a black motorbike that I call Sandy. She's my best girl, I take her out at weekends. Sandy, can't you see, I'm in misery, don't know where to start, now we're apart... I'm a rounded person, I have a life. I do." Skinner kicked his shoes off and then took off his socks, lying down on the couch with a huge, heartfelt sigh.

Mulder took a deep breath, exchanged a desperate glance with Scully and then went over to the couch. He took hold of Skinner's shoulders and shook him.

"Tell us off please, sir. Please," he said beseechingly. "Tell us off, send us to bed without any supper and then..."

"Spank us, sir!" Scully said. "Spank us and send us to bed without any supper and tell us off lots and lots and then save our lives, sir."

"Yes, sir! Walter, sir!" Mulder cried enthusiastically. "Put us over your knee and paddle us, sir and frown at us and rescue us from Cancerman and save our lives and our jobs, Sir Walter Skinner, sir."

Skinner shook his head.

"I'm sorry. It's no use. I just don't want to," he said, sighing. "I don't want to tell you off any more. I'm tired of frowning and getting angry and all that stuff. I just want to be your friend. I want us all to go out together and I want us to wear jeans and sweaters and drink beers and laugh and tell jokes and then I want us all to come back here and work on a perfectly normal case and for you to obey every order I give you and...and..." He paused, the tears rising to his eyes again. "I just want to smile," he whispered. "Just once. One small smile." "You nearly smiled when Scully beat the cancer, sir." Mulder pointed out.

"Nearly." Skinner sighed. "But don't you see - once I realized how close I was, well, it just made it unbearable to go back to being Mr Frown again. I want to laugh and sing and pick flowers and dance and be happy."

"Well you can't!" Mulder snapped. "We need you, sir. Pull yourself together."

"And no more of this Walter stuff either." Scully told him, her blue eyes hostile. "We won't stand for it."

"No smiling."

"No wisecracks."

"Or flowers."

"Or dancing. Ugh."

"No singing!" Mulder shook his head.

"Definitely no singing." Scully shook her head.

"Or laughing."

"Or crying."

"No. Crying's right out." Mulder said firmly. "I'm the only one who's allowed to cry around here. I'm good at it. And anyway, I'm very emotional. And needy. And whiny. And you're not, sir! You're strong and grumpy and..."

"Daddy!" Scully sat next to her boss and patted his knee. "You're daddy, sir. And we're your kids and we get into lots of trouble just so you'll notice us and tell us off and protect us lots."

"But I don't want to be your father any more. I just want to be your friend. We could go out on my bike." Skinner suggested hopefully. "I want to be a modern dad. More sort of hands-on. We could go out investigating together and then watch TV."

"No, no, no! We don't want a new-age dad. We want a strict dad, an old-fashioned type dad!" Mulder said impatiently. "We want a dad who'll lay down rules and boundaries."

"Yes. Someone who'll keep us in line." Scully frowned. "We insist, sir."

"Oh yes. We insist." Mulder added, in a sinister tone. "You won't like us when we're angry, sir."

"Oh no." Scully shook her head. "You won't like us at all, sir."

Skinner stared up at them both hopelessly. They looked very mean and ugly. Scully's hair seemed to be glowing a particularly angry shade of red and Mulder's hazel eyes were dark and intimidating.

"Please couldn't I...?" he began.

"No." Mulder told him.

"Just one small smile?" He asked hopefully.

"Absolutely not." Scully said.

"I have to be angry?"

"Yes. Very. And go all quiet and frightening. Probably when you're reading one of our more silly reports." Mulder said.

"And glare." Scully added.

"And follow us so that we think you're working for someone else when all along you're just concerned about us."

"And save us from ourselves."

"And feed my fish when I go missing for days on end without a word to anyone."

"What?"

"I was just pushing my luck." Mulder grinned.

"Here." Scully knelt down and put his socks back on him, shoving his feet into his shoes.

"We don't need to know what your feet look like, sir. And we especially don't need to know about the whole slipper thing," she said warningly.

"Absolutely not." Mulder leaned over him and did up his shirt button, tightening his tie around his neck like a noose. "On your feet." Mulder yanked him up. "Shoulders back. Sit behind the desk."

"Do I have to?" He asked in a tremulous voice. "Couldn't I...?"

"No." Scully told him, pushing him down in his intimidating black leather chair.

"Now, ready?" Mulder opened the blinds and went over to the light switch. "Lights, camera action. GO!" He flicked the switch. Skinner blinked in the harsh light. His heart was breaking inside as he fixed the two agents with his fiercest stare and frowned.

"You'd better have an explanation for this..." he began, "Or there'll be trouble!"

Mulder and Scully looked at each other and heaved a sigh of relief.

"Yes, sir!" They said in unison.

The End

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