

## Lies by Xanthe

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

### Story Notes:

This one's for Brown Eyed Girl.

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Mulder sighed and crumpled up the report in his hand. There was just no way Skinner was going to believe this. Hell, he didn't believe it himself. And he didn't believe it because it wasn't true and it wasn't true because if he told the truth he'd be in even deeper shit than if he lied so he was just going to have to lie...Mulder uncrumpled the sheet and stuck it between the pages of a book to try and flatten it out again. It would just have to do.

"Come in, Agent Mulder. Sit down." Skinner didn't smile. This wasn't a clue. Mulder couldn't remember a time when Skinner had ever smiled. That was just Skinner. "So." Skinner held the ragged report between his fingers and thumb as if it were something the cat had dragged in. "This is what you call a report is it, Mulder?"

"I'm sorry it's a bit of a mess, sir..." he mumbled, staring at his shoes.

"I'm not referring to its visual appearance, Mulder, unpleasant and unprofessional though that is." Skinner told him, running his fingers over the report in an effort to crease out the rumped paper. "I'm referring to the content."

"What's wrong with the content, sir?" Mulder asked innocently. Skinner took a sharp intake of breath.

"Don't push me, Mulder," he said coolly. "This report is a complete fabrication. A tissue of lies from beginning to end. Now I want the truth and I want it now."

"It is the truth, sir." Mulder muttered resentfully, annoyed that his subterfuge had been so easily seen through.

"I don't think you'd recognise the truth if it hit you in the face." Skinner told him evenly, "Which is what I want to do right now."

Mulder jerked his head up. It wasn't often that his boss made remarks like that. He must be really angry.

"It is the truth, sir." He insisted again, trying to keep the whiney tone out of his voice.

"Alright, let's try a different tack." Skinner leaned back in his chair. "You've written off a car, another cellphone, although what's another cellphone after the amount of them that you've run through? You've upset practically every police department you've come across in the past 4 days, you have no evidence, no conclusions, no proof, and you forgot to file a 302. So you have a bill of....several hundred dollars which you expect me to meet from this

department's budget and you have yet to let me know exactly what it is you were chasing or why. And no I don't believe this crap about ghosts. So, would you care to tell me exactly what has been going on?"

"I have, sir." Mulder stuck resolutely to his story. He'd run through the options in his head and there was really no choice but to stick to it because if he told the truth Skinner would be angrier than he was now and he was already pretty angry. Skinner breathed out, a long, slow, measured sigh. Mulder looked him straight in the eye, determined to bluff it out, but Skinner's glance was so dark and furious that he looked at the floor again. Damn, he hadn't felt like this since he was 14 years old and standing in front of the principal. Why did he always have to get into so much trouble? And why was there always someone out there waiting to pull him up over it and make a huge fuss about nothing? Well, nearly nothing.

"Mulder..." Skinner leaned forward over the desk, his voice silkily dangerous. "Look at me." Mulder raised his eyes up, biting his lip. "Good. Now look me in the eye and tell me that you haven't been lying to me. I won't be angry." Skinner crossed his fingers underneath the desk.

"I - haven't - lied - to - you." Mulder told him, realising he was being insolent but unable to stop himself anyway.

"Damn it, Mulder!" Skinner's reaction was immediate, slamming his hand down on the desk. "Alright, you want to play it like this, you can. But two can play at this game. Now you've got 24 hours. I'll see you back in this office tomorrow evening at 7 p.m. By which time I want a report that makes sense on my desk or..."

"Or?" Mulder got to his feet, relieved by the temporary respite.

"You just go away and fret about that "or", Mulder." Skinner shook his head and picked up his pen, putting a huge, red line diagonally across the report and then another, going back the other way to form a perfect angry 'X'. He handed the report back to Mulder. "Tomorrow evening at 7." Skinner said tersely, returning to his paperwork.

24 hours. A lot could happen in 24 hours, Mulder told himself. In 24 hours he could come up with a really good lie, a brilliant, perfectly believable lie, complete with fabricated evidence and receipts and hell, even a 3-d line graph that would show statistically that what he was saying was all absolutely, completely and utterly....garbage. Let's face it, Mulder, he sighed, even 24 years wouldn't be long enough for you to fabricate the evidence on this one. Even so, he was going to give it his best shot, because, frankly there was no other alternative. He wasn't going to tell the truth (his stomach contracted with fear at the very thought) and he was more than a little concerned about that "or" that Skinner had left hanging so ominously in the air. All in all he spent a sleepless night and the following day he rushed all over the place trying to construct a completely plausible new lie to replace yesterday's worn-out, unsatisfactory one.

7 p.m. approached all too quickly as moments of doom have a tendency to do. Skinner was still in a meeting and Mulder was instructed to wait. Someone seemed to have removed all the chairs from the outer office so he leaned against the wall as he waited, overhearing Skinner talking next door. Someone else was getting bawled out. Mulder smiled gleefully, then his expression changed as he realised that in a very short while that would be him in

there. He loosened his tie and took a deep breath, preparing himself mentally. Deny everything, stick to the story, oh shit what was the story???. Clammy hands, flicked through the new report, all neat and tidy and several pages in length. He felt like an actor who'd forgotten his lines just before he was due to go on stage. This was worse than stage fright. Much worse. He hadn't been able to eat all day, just dreading this moment. Finally, twenty minutes later, 2 agents sidled pathetically from Skinner's office. They were both red-faced and they both heaved a sigh of relief as they escaped, casting a pitying glance at Mulder. He chewed down on his bottom lip and cracked his knuckles convulsively in quick succession, one after the other.

"Mulder." Skinner appeared at the door. "Wait here," he said tersely. Then he nodded politely at his secretary. "You can go home now, Kimberly," he said. Great, Mr Nice Guy to his secretary, Mr Scary to his agents, Mulder thought bitterly. He started to follow Skinner back into his office when Skinner turned round and fixed him with a cold stare. "I said, wait there, Agent Mulder. I have to get a few things straight first." And so saying he ushered Mulder back and shut the door firmly. Mulder sighed resentfully and leaned against the wall again. Would this torment never be over?

Finally, ten minutes later, he was ushered into the torture chamber which was how he had started to view his boss's office. He handed Skinner the new report and sat down, trying to look businesslike and confident. Skinner stared at him.

"I don't recall asking you to sit, Agent Mulder," he said. Mulder looked confused. "I...that is, the report's quite long. Do you want me to come back when you've finished it?" He asked hopefully.

"No. I want you to stand there while I read it." Skinner told him firmly. Mulder got up with an angry flush. He was being treated like a schoolkid here and it rankled with him. So Skinner was angry, so what? Surely that didn't justify making him stand for another 20 minutes while Skinner inched his way through that report, his finger curling along his neck as he read, occasionally flicking back to an earlier page to re-check a fact. Finally, finally, he finished. Then he leaned back and gave Mulder a cool, completely expressionless stare. Mulder held his breath.

"So." Skinner fingered the front page of the report. "Very ingenious, Mulder."

"Ingenious, sir?"

"Yes, a great work of fiction. Quite creative and utterly false." Skinner took the report and tore up each page, one by one, with slow precision. "Probably I should make you eat them." He very nearly smiled then frowned at the last moment instead. "Did I ever mention that I had a Calvinist upbringing, Agent Mulder?"

"No, sir." Mulder was feeling bad about this. It wasn't going at all well.

"Well, I did. Very strict. If I submitted a poor piece of schoolwork, it was likely to be torn up and fed back to me. I soon learned how to make every word count if I wasn't going to end up eating them."

"Yes, sir." Mulder said dully, not pleased to be subjected to whimsical tales about his boss's childhood.

"Which brings me back to the matter of lies." Skinner told him. "I don't like them, Mulder. I always take the view that the truth, however unpalatable, should be told at all costs. Even if those costs are personal." He glowered grimly at Mulder. "And for a man with your obsession with the truth, I would have said that such reports as this must be a personal hardship for you to submit. I can only conclude, therefore, that the truth is going to get you into far more trouble than you think the lie will." Mulder gulped. Skinner had read the situation perfectly accurately. "So." Skinner leaned back in his chair and opened his desk drawer, pulling out a black leather strap. "I'm going to apply another lesson from my Calvinist teachers. If a boy won't tell the truth, then it'll have to be beaten out of him." "What?" Mulder was aghast. "You can't do that, sir!" "Can't I?" Skinner slapped the strap against the surface of his desk with a resounding thud. "What makes you think that, Agent Mulder?" "Because...I mean because it must be against the rules!" Mulder exclaimed.

"No, I don't recall any rules that say a supervisor can't take disciplinary action against deceitful agents if the need arises." Skinner told him with a certain grim pleasure. "Or to take extreme measures in order to get to the truth."

"Don't be ridiculous!" Mulder said angrily, his eyes transfixed by the thick leather strap. "I mean, this is absurd. You don't mean this, sir, you're just trying to frighten me."

"No, Mulder. I am serious. You are not leaving this office until I know the truth. Now, whether you tell me of your own free will or whether I have to beat it out of you, I don't much care. What's it to be?"

"I'll report you." Mulder told him. "I will. You won't get away with this."

"Nobody's going to believe you, Mulder." Skinner told him. "And any time you want a new supervisor, you just say, because frankly I'm getting damn tired of you and your ways. I'd gladly pass you onto someone else. Someone less...understanding about the X Files."

Mulder swallowed and thought about this for a moment.

"Please, sir," he said weakly. "I am telling the truth."

"Alright, Mulder. If that's the way you want it." Skinner sighed, getting up. "I want you to hold your hands out."

"No." Mulder resolutely crossed them behind his back.

"That's fine. I'll happily swing you over the desk and pull your trousers down." Skinner told him. "Don't think I won't. I'm bigger than you and I'm stronger. Perhaps handcuffs will be in order to keep you still, but you'll end up getting hurt one way or the other. Why not take the easy way out? The one that leaves you with at least some of your dignity still intact." Mulder found himself faced with a dilemma and after several seconds thought, he gave in to what was rapidly becoming an inevitability. Quivering, he held out his left hand.

"And the other one." Skinner said.

"What?"

"I think we'll take it in turns. Trust me - you'll find it easier that way." Skinner growled. Reluctantly, Mulder held out his other hand. "Good, now any time you feel you want to unburden yourself of the truth, you go ahead. That's when I'll stop." Skinner told him. Mulder looked away. His boss would get tired of this twisted little game, he was sure of

that. How much damage could one strip of leather do? A thick strip, admittedly, but still...He gritted his teeth and tensed as Skinner raised the strap and then brought it down sharply on his hand. Mulder took a deep breath and then looked up into Skinner's eyes. There was no way he was going to let his boss know how much that had hurt. Skinner didn't seem interested though - he was preparing for the next blow which came down swiftly on Mulder's other hand. Mulder breathed in, then out again. Skinner picked up speed, swinging the strap down on first one hand and then the other, over and over again, in swift succession. Mulder felt himself starting to sob.

"Was there something you wanted to say?" Skinner paused, looking at him keenly.

"No, sir," he muttered.

"Very well, let's continue then." Skinner brought the strap up and swung it down over and over again until Mulder, unable to bear it any more, pulled one of his hands away. Skinner stood there for a moment, regarding the agent with cold, dark eyes. Then he moved away round to the other side of the desk and pulled a set of handcuffs from the desk drawer, leaving them lying on the surface of the desk within easy reach. "Any time you want to be bent over this desk, you let me know, Mulder." He said softly. Mulder swallowed and put his hand back out again.

"You're sure you don't have anything to say?" Skinner asked. Mulder shook his head, re-examining his decision. What could Skinner do to him that was any worse than this torment? he asked himself, his mind reeling from the pain of the strap as it hurtled down onto his palms over and over again. How much could he take? He was sure his hands were already starting to blister and bruise. He wouldn't be able to write another report now if he tried, not for a few days at least. Hell, he wouldn't even be able to do up his shoelaces for a few days, and as for his tie...He shuddered, trying to escape from the pain and failing as the strap just kept on rising and falling. He could feel himself starting to choke to keep from sobbing out loud and he had a sudden wave of realisation that Skinner was going to continue indefinitely. The redness of his hands and the welts on them weren't going to stop him. Nothing was going to stop him, nothing except...the truth.

"Please stop!" He yelled.

"Finally." Skinner paused and looked at him. "Well? Are we ready to give in now, Mulder?" Mulder nodded dumbly. "I'll tell you the truth," he said weakly. "But you're not going to like it."

"Never mind about that. Just tell me." Skinner returned to his side of the desk and sat back down as Mulder began the long and very complicated story about the brothel, the crucifix and the man who said he was tryptomorph.

"A what?" Skinner frowned.

"Yes. My reaction as well." Mulder sighed and went into more detail, quaking as Skinner's frown became a grimace, became a scowl, became a...something too awful to look at any more so he stared over his boss's shoulder, out of the window instead. There was a long silence when he had finished and finally he brought his gaze back to look at his boss. Skinner was regarding him thoughtfully.

"So. No wonder you didn't want to tell me." Skinner mused.

"Yes." Mulder shrugged, putting both his hands under his armpits to try and ease the pain in his palms.

"Right. This will have to be sorted out." Skinner shook his head ruefully. "And as you have so far completely failed to sort it out satisfactorily, I suppose that I will have to do it. Is that what you want, Mulder?"

Mulder grinned feebly and nodded.

"Alright." Skinner picked up his phone and made several phone calls before returning his attention to Mulder. "Well, that's set everything in motion," he said.

"Thank god." Mulder sighed with relief.

"So you can just stand there until we have a resolution." Skinner informed him.

"Until...it could take all night!" He protested.

"Then you'd better get used to the view hadn't you?" Skinner said coolly. "Now I'm going to get on with my work. I don't expect to hear anything from you until I talk to you again. Understood?"

"Und..." Mulder opened his mouth and shut it again. He nodded.

An hour passed. Mulder tried standing on one leg and then shifting his weight to the other. Then back again. Meantime he licked away at the palms of his hand, taking a piece of blistered flesh between his teeth and nibbling at the edges of it.

"Stop fidgeting, Mulder." Skinner said, not looking up.

"Yes sir...um...sorry sir." Mulder gulped. Skinner carried on with what he was doing, paying the agent no attention whatsoever. Mulder tried to stay in one position he really did, but it was hard. He balanced on the balls of his feet, standing on tiptoe to relieve the cramp in the back of his calves. He was sure his hands had swollen to three times their normal size. That was certainly how they felt. He glared at Skinner's bald head as it was bent over his work. The strap was still lying on the desk next to the handcuffs. He glared at the strap instead now. When he got bored of that he tried to read what Skinner was writing, peering to try and interpret the upside down scrawl and then lost his balance as he forgot he was standing on tiptoes. He clung onto the desk to stop himself shooting across the room and yelped as the palms of his hands came into contact with the hard surface. Skinner stopped writing and looked up.

"Something you wanted to say, Mulder?" He asked, dangerously.

"No. Sorry. Lost my balance." Mulder squeaked.

"Is it too much to ask you to stand still?" Skinner wanted to know.

"No, yes, I mean, that is...couldn't I sit down, sir?" He asked. It had been nearly two hours since Skinner made the call and he'd been on his feet for an hour before then as well. He was exhausted. Who would have thought that standing still could be so tiring?

"No you can't. You've inconvenienced me, Mulder so I'm going to inconvenience you. And

you might like to try and behave yourself if it's not too much trouble. You don't want me in too much more of a bad mood while I'm busy thinking how best to punish you."

"Punish me?" Mulder was aghast. "But, sir, you've already thrashed me."

"That was just to get the truth out of you!" Skinner exclaimed. "I haven't nearly finished with you yet, Mulder. I haven't even started punishing you for what actually happened."

Mulder stared at him in glum, disbelieving horror. This was a nightmare. A total nightmare.

Finally, half an hour later, Skinner got a phone call. He hung up and then leaned back in his chair and looked at Mulder thoughtfully.

"Right. That's all sorted out then," he said.

"Is it?" Mulder was relieved. "Thank you, sir," he said, with some sincerity.

"So we only have the matter of justifying the expenses on this case." Skinner picked out the file and ran his pen down a column of figures. "A pretty expensive case for no discernible result, Mulder," he mused.

"Yes, sir. Sorry, sir." Mulder hung his head, thinking it couldn't hurt. "Sir.." he began.

"Yes?"

"When you said "punishment", you were thinking of something more...conventional, weren't you?" He asked in a quavering tone. "I mean, something like staking out a really boring suspect for 3 weeks without relief or something? Yes?" He looked up hopefully.

"No." Skinner told him. "Oh no. I've brought this strap in, Mulder, so I may as well get some use out of it, I think."

"No!" Mulder said desperately. "My hands can't take any more, sir. Look." He held out his hands to show Skinner. They were criss-crossed with red welts and looked very painful. Skinner surveyed his handiwork without expression and then nodded.

"Agreed, Mulder. Definitely not your hands. Which only leaves your butt really."

"No!" Mulder said again. "No, no, no. Please."

"Or we could just get you transferred to another supervisor..." Skinner remarked. "I'm sure there are other suitable supervisors who would be prepared to put their signatures to reports about human flukeworms and various other genetic mutants."

Mulder put his head back and closed his eyes.

"Where do you want me?" He asked.

"Well, over the back of that chair will do nicely, I think." Skinner told him, pointing at a black leather armchair, with a low back. Mulder sighed and walked slowly over to the chair. "And Mulder?" He stopped and looked back. "Trousers off please. And shorts. I need to see where I'm hitting." Skinner never once broke into a smile. There was nothing to relieve the grim tension. Mulder felt himself starting to shake as he gingerly took off his shoes, his sore hands fumbling with the laces, then unbuttoned his trousers and let them fall to his ankles, stepping out of them, then, blushing, his boxer shorts followed suit. He stood there in his socks, feeling stupid and humiliated and 10 years old.

"Bend over." Skinner told him. He complied, grasping hold of the handles of the chair. He heard Skinner come up behind him and pull up his shirt. He chewed down frantically on his lip in mute terror at what was coming next.

Skinner stared down at the agent with some satisfaction. He wasn't a brutal man but he had never felt pushed to such limits before. He had long been of the opinion that what Fox Mulder needed was a damn good spanking and now he was at last going to get the chance to deliver it. All the same, he couldn't help smiling as he surveyed the prone agent. It was a smile he saved for when nobody was looking. He raised the strap and brought it down with a resounding slap on Mulder's backside. Mulder jumped and let out a little squeal. Skinner raised his arm again. He needed to get into a rhythm on this. He brought the strap down again, harder and Mulder actually yelped. Good.

"I've been a patient man, Mulder," he said. "Nobody could say I haven't."

"No, sir." Mulder mumbled, breathing in sharply as another blow connected.

"And I've tried my best with you. Really I have."

"Yes, sir." Mulder shivered as a shockwave of pain washed over him.

"But, enough's enough. I have my limits and you've just found them.

"Yes, sir." Mulder yelped.

"So, hopefully this will be a lesson to you." Skinner brought the strap down again and again in the same spot until Mulder was unable to stand still any more and slid down the side of the chair with a moan. "I haven't finished, Mulder." Skinner said tersely, grabbing hold of Mulder's collar and dragging him round to the other side of the chair. Skinner sat himself down and pulled Mulder over his lap. Now he was able to hold the other man perfectly in position whilst he tanned that hide thoroughly. With a certain grim satisfaction he set about his task dutifully.

Mulder soon dissolved into a constant low hum of distress. He couldn't move an inch, with Skinner's big hand pressing him down over his knees and his butt hurt so much now that he had completely forgotten about the pain in his hands. He clung on miserably, sure that he was on the verge of death. Finally the onslaught stopped and Skinner flipped him onto the floor with a neat flick of his hand and knee. He knelt there pathetically, his face red and scrunched. Then, finally, like the sun coming out, Skinner smiled at him. Mulder stared, uncomprehending. Skinner had never smiled in his life before. It was a well-known fact. Nobody had ever, ever seen the A.D. smile. People sometimes cracked jokes just to see if they'd get a reaction, but no, Skinner remained resolutely po-faced.

"Is there something wrong, sir?" Mulder asked, alarmed and disorientated by the day's events and feeling light-headed from not having eaten.

"Not at all." Skinner said, getting up and passing Mulder his boxer shorts. Mulder pulled them on, carefully, wincing. Skinner handed him his trousers and he managed to get them

over his shorts only to find that his hands hurt too much to actually do them up. He gave Skinner a helpless look and his boss took pity on him and took care of it for him. Mulder tried to shuffle into his shoes but his sore hands plucked pathetically at the shoelaces. With a sigh Skinner bent down and did those up for him as well. Mulder's empty stomach gave an alarming rumble.

"You're hungry, Agent Mulder?" Skinner enquired, looking up at him, doing the shoelaces up into a firm knot with a flourish.

"Yes, sir. Too nervous to eat all day, sir," he mumbled.

"I'm not surprised, considering that pack of lies you tried to fob me off with. I hope you remember next time, Mulder, that no matter how bad it is, it'll only be worse if you lie about it."

"Yes, sir," he muttered. How could he ever forget?

"And now, you know, I'm feeling rather peckish myself!" Skinner exclaimed. "Chinese or Italian do you think?"

"What?" Mulder glared at him.

"My shout. You could do with some cheering up, Mulder." Skinner told him. And you think dinner with you would cheer me up? Mulder thought incredulously to himself. "I don't know, sir..." he muttered. "I mean, I'm beat, that is..." he reddened, thinking he was quite literally "beat".

"Mulder. Your company at dinner isn't a request. It's an order. You've put me out today and I've put you through hell to pay for it." Skinner stared at him with serious eyes. "Not that you didn't deserve it, but I'm a fair man, Mulder. I'd like to make sure that you get home safely without running into any more tryptomorphs. Just accept."

"Yes, sir." Mulder said resignedly, following his boss as he put the strap back in the drawer and made for the door, turning off the lights as he went.

"And of course there's the little matter of how you're going to get undressed for bed this evening." Skinner glanced back at his red-faced agent, the beginnings of another rare smile on his lips.

"I won't need any help!" Mulder told him quickly. "I'll be fine. Honest."

"Now, now, Agent Mulder." Skinner waggled a stern finger at him. "What happens when you tell lies....?"

**The End**

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