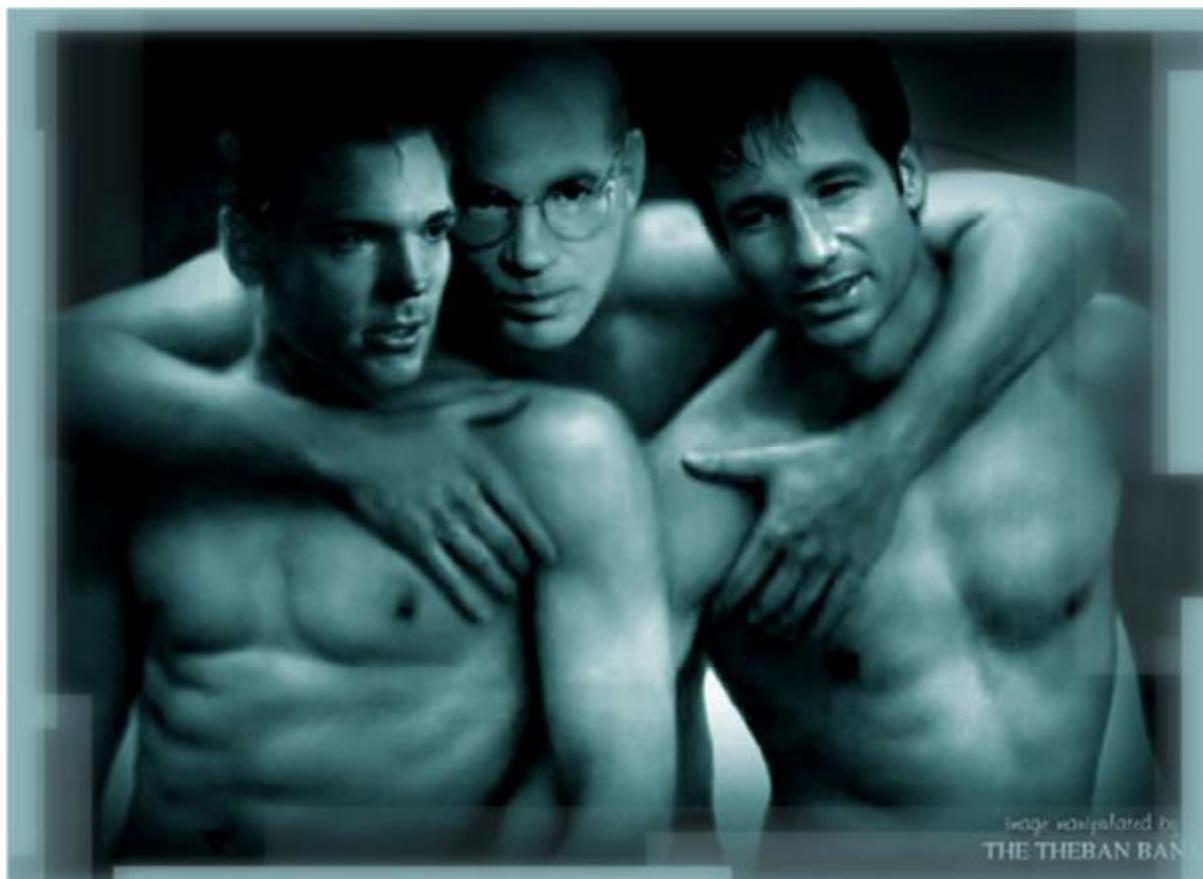


Walter Skinner's Day Off by Xanthe



<http://www.xanthe.org/walter-skinner-s-day-off/>
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The Director of the FBI leaned back in his chair, his expression growing grimmer and grimmer as the telephone conversation continued.

“Yes. I see,” he nodded, glancing at the Deputy Director, with whom he had been having a meeting before this phone call had interrupted them. She frowned, and raised a questioning

eyebrow. He shook his head, and mouthed “Mulder.” They exchanged knowing looks of exasperation. “Yes, I do understand why you won’t release him on his own recognisance. I’ll send someone to come and pick him up – no, scratch that - I’ll come and pick him up myself.” This last uttered in a tone of grim resolution. He positively threw the phone back down, and exhaled loudly and forcefully. The DD gave him a sympathetic glance – she knew what he was dealing with.

“Mulder’s in jail. Again,” Skinner growled.

“Don’t tell me – breaking and entering. He’s been going on and on about a conspiracy at the DOD for days now,” Scully sighed.

“When will he ever get it into his head that it’s all over, the planet is safe, the conspiracy defeated – the good guys won.” Skinner got up, his movements terse and angry, and grabbed his jacket from the back of his chair. Scully winced. She didn’t envy Mulder when his boss and lover caught up with him. Skinner had worked hard to turn the FBI around since his appointment as Director. Appointing her as his second in command had been the first of many moves he had made to rid the Bureau of any last surviving double agents planted there by the Consortium, and between them they’d done a fine job of restoring public confidence in the law enforcement agency. They were both all too well aware of how bad it looked when their own agents were caught playing fast and loose with the law – as Mulder was all too prone to do. The problem was that Mulder viewed himself as a special case...no, the problem was that Mulder **was** a special case, Scully conceded, watching as Skinner swiped his car keys from his desk drawer, his jaw doing its usual sideways pincer movement that warranted trouble for any agent in his firing line. The big man was two steps away from the door when it opened, and a bedraggled, soaking wet specimen of humanity stepped inside.

“Alex?” Skinner paused in mid-step. “Christ, what the hell happened to you?”

Alex Krycek stood dripping on the carpet, his expensive suit covered in mud and slime.

“I fell in the river,” Krycek muttered, in a tone that suggested very much that this was the tip of an extremely large iceberg. Scully and Skinner exchanged another look. It never rained but it poured. Skinner wavered, clearly trying to figure out which was the worse crisis. Scully held out her hands, and, with a reluctant sigh, Skinner threw her the car keys.

“Just don’t be too kind to him,” Skinner growled, as she set off.

“Oh, I won’t. Trust me.” She grinned. Skinner watched her go, and then turned his attention back to the dripping agent in front of him.

“Don’t tell me – Mulder got caught breaking into the DOD.” Krycek had a smug expression on his face, which Skinner swiftly wiped out, without answering the other man’s question.

“You could have changed,” he snapped, viewing the murky puddle that had formed around Krycek’s feet.

"I lost my keys. I couldn't get back into the house." Krycek made a face. "Well, not without breaking in at least, and I know how you feel about that...um, I'm sorry. I know I have a lot of explaining to do but..."

"Oh you're right there, Mister." Skinner snapped. "But first of all you are going to stop dripping on my carpet. Here." He strode over to a cupboard, pulled out a bag, and threw it to his agent. "My gym clothes. Get your ass into the bathroom, wash that stink off, get changed, and then get back out here with your explanation."

"Yes, sir." Krycek nodded vigorously, and scuttled off.

"And Alex." Skinner's voice was deceptively mild. Krycek paused in mid-stride, and swallowed, nervously. "It had better be good," Skinner added silkily. Krycek's skin broke out in a sudden rash of goose bumps; he knew that tone all too well, and feared it just as much. He gave a hurried nod and continued on his way.

Skinner watched Krycek disappear into his en-suite bathroom, and then sat down in his chair as if his legs had been felled from under him. Christ, what the hell had he done to deserve not just one, but two lovers who demanded such constant supervision? He buried his face in his hands and tried to gather his thoughts. Mulder was in jail for breaking into a government building, while Krycek had shown up looking like something the cat had vomited, with a look on his face that shouted that Skinner really wasn't going to like his explanation. What were the odds that they would both manage to get into this much trouble at the same time?

It had been three years since Krycek had shown up on his doorstep, bleeding from a dozen or more different wounds, with information he was prepared to sell in exchange for being allowed back in from the cold. Skinner had been sceptical at first, but Krycek's information had proved invaluable in bringing down the Consortium and thwarting the attempts of an alien race intent on enslaving humanity. For two years they had battled side by side, and while Mulder had risked life and limb in typically outrageous fashion, performing the kind of Mulderesque stunts they had all come to know so well, Alex had stood side by side with them, risking his own life more quietly, but with no less passion. There had been considerable animosity between the two men to begin with, and Skinner had been no more enthusiastic about Krycek's presence on their side of the fence than Mulder had been, but after two years working together day and night, they had grown to appreciate Krycek's dedication to their cause – to say nothing of the fact that he had saved both their lives on more than one occasion.

Skinner wasn't sure when he had started being fascinated by Alex's glowing green eyes, and pert ass, but his feelings towards Krycek became as strong as those he had harboured for Mulder for so many years. It took the final battle against the alien invasion force to finally bring the three men together. Holed up in a bunker together, with only 2 days food supply left, and an alien task force combing the area for them, the three men had faced their own mortality, and finally admitted to feelings that otherwise would have remained buried. Skinner could still remember the amazing release of years of sexual tension as they had fucked each other into the ground for a whole day solid, convinced they were on the point of death. When Scully and Doggett had turned up with the cavalry they had found three

naked, sexually sated men, their bodies entwined. It had been one of the more embarrassing moments of Skinner's life, but at least it made it easier to explain their subsequent living arrangement. There had been no going back. When the aliens had finally been defeated, Skinner had purchased a house big enough to accommodate himself and his two lovers. He hadn't reckoned on how hard living happily ever after could be though...

Alex Krycek hurriedly washed some green slime from his face before pulling his lover's white tee shirt on over his mud-streaked chest. The tee shirt was at least 2 sizes too big for him, and hung on his slender frame. He pulled on a pair of gray sweatpants, tied them as tightly as he could, and then turned up the hems – Skinner was longer in the leg than either of his two lovers. Krycek felt like a child wearing his father's clothes...not a good analogy considering what he knew would be coming next. Krycek swallowed hard, took a deep breath, slicked back his dark hair with his hand, and then walked barefoot into the next door office. Skinner looked up as he came in, glanced at his feet, and frowned.

"The sneakers were way too big," Krycek said apologetically, handing them back. He wasn't exactly a small man himself, but Skinner was built on a massive scale – he made everyone look small beside him...with the exception of Scully, Krycek thought wryly. The Deputy Director might be a tiny woman, but she more than made up for that by having a towering presence. He was almost as scared of her as he was of Skinner...and he was really scared of Skinner right now. He took up a position in front of Skinner's desk, somehow knowing that it wouldn't be a good idea to sit without permission.

"All right, Alex. I'm listening." Skinner sat back in his chair, a mildly thoughtful expression on his face. Krycek wasn't convinced. He had grown to know his lover all too well over the past few months, and he knew that he was in trouble. He also knew that he deserved to be, which didn't help.

"I'm sorry." Krycek cleared his throat. He thought that was a good beginning but Skinner just narrowed his eyes and nodded at him to continue. "Mulder's been whining on and on about those files at the DOD for days now, and I just wanted to prove him wrong, and shut him up once and for all," Krycek continued.

"And you did this by going for a swim in the Potomac?" Skinner raised a questioning eyebrow, his face impassive. Krycek winced.

"I didn't...I...uh, got involved in a car chase. Someone was pursuing me. I had met an informant you see – he had given me a file of papers. It's far less risky to get someone on the inside to steal things for you than to break in yourself." Krycek gave a smug smile. One up to him, he thought. Trust Mulder to always do things the hard way. His smile faded quickly as he saw the thunderous expression on Skinner's face. "Uh...anyway, I was followed on my way from the meeting. I took a side turn, got caught down by the river..."

"And you somehow thought it would be a good idea to get out of the car and go for a swim?" Skinner's eyebrow did an upward leap of disbelief.

“No...that is...I, uh, didn’t get out of the car. I sort of took it with me,” Krycek mumbled. Skinner’s other eyebrow joined the first now.

“Are you telling me that you wrote off a bureau car?” He asked, in an ominous tone.

“Something like that,” Krycek shrugged.

“Just because you wanted to prove Mulder wrong?” Skinner’s tone had gone beyond ominous and was now downright dangerous.

“Yeah.” Krycek shrugged.

“And the papers?” Skinner’s voice was silkily threatening now.

“In the car,” Krycek whispered.

“Which is...at the bottom of the river,” Skinner concluded.

Krycek swallowed hard. There wasn’t much he could say. “That about sums it up, sir, yes,” he murmured, glancing at his bare feet and waiting for the worst to happen. It did.

“Well, Alex, I think that you and Mulder have outdone yourself on this occasion. Christ, when will this stupid rivalry between the two of you stop? It’s absurd for grown men to behave like this. And as you insist on behaving like children, that’s how I’m going to treat you. Here are my spare house keys. Go home, Alex, get undressed – take a bath while you’re at it - and wait for me, ass on display, in the corner of the living room. I expect I’ll be a couple of hours, but don’t count on it. If you aren’t in position when I get home you’ll be in even more trouble than you are already. Understood?”

Krycek nodded. He shuffled forward and reached for the keys lying on Skinner’s desk. A big hand came down on his wrist, and stopped him. “Alex...” He looked up. “I’m glad you’re okay,” Skinner said softly. Krycek swallowed again, but for a different reason this time. He had never gotten used to anybody caring about him. He understood the language of punishment from his time in the Consortium, and Skinner’s punishments were a lot less painful than those he had received at the hands of his former colleagues – the last beating they’d given him was still fresh in his mind. He had barely been able to stand afterwards, and hadn’t even known where he was going until he found himself on Skinner’s doorstep, the big man gazing down at him with a bemused expression in his dark eyes. Skinner had been his sanctuary. He still was. Krycek could take his punishments, but he had a harder time accepting the other man’s care, and concern.

“Sorry,” he said again, in a voice barely louder than a whisper.

“Go home, Alex. I’ll be there soon to take care of this,” Skinner said, in a weary tone. Krycek nodded, grabbed the keys, and fled towards the door, not even caring that he’d have to drive home barefoot.

Skinner had no sooner gotten rid of one lover than another came strolling through the door. Mulder, like Alex, looked somewhat the worse for wear, but, unlike Alex, was covering up his feelings with a layer of defensive, angry bravado. Judging by the way his lover was insolently swaggering into his office, Skinner judged that Mulder must have screwed up very badly indeed. He knew these men so well. Krycek slunk around in the dark, his emotions hidden, and yet so transparent in those hooded green eyes, if you just knew what to look for. He was like a wild dog, kept on a lead, answering to his master only out of love and respect, but otherwise both untameable and unknowable. Mulder was very different. He was always the angry one, always in need of defusing, his emotions were volatile and explosive, where Alex's were subtle, and hidden. Skinner knew both his lovers very well, and equally knew how to deal with them both. It was just that sometimes it got so tiring. He took off his glasses, and rubbed his eyes wearily. He had a stack of paperwork to do, and a meeting with the President to prepare for. He could do without this right now.

"All right, Mulder. Let's make this quick. I don't want to hear the excuses, or the defences..." Skinner quelled Mulder's exclamatory protest with a dark, belligerent stare. "You're in big trouble, Agent. Don't make it any worse for yourself. Just stick to the facts."

"The facts." Mulder rocked back on his heels and gave Skinner a speculatively insolent look. Unlike Alex, Mulder never submitted easily to punishment. In fact, both men had entirely different reactions to physical chastisement. Skinner could vividly remember the day when he had decided that what they both needed was a damn good spanking. He had found them fighting in the kitchen – over him, he suspected – and it had taken all his strength to part them. In the end he had handcuffed Mulder to a cupboard, and, without even thinking, had swung Krycek over his knee and delivered 5 or 6 hard swats with a sneaker that one or other of the two men had lost during the course of the fight. Alex had gone strangely still during the spanking, and afterwards Skinner had handcuffed him to another kitchen cupboard, while he delivered the same treatment to Mulder. Mulder had not accepted his spanking anywhere near so quietly. He had kicked, yelled and fought Skinner all the way, screaming obscenities. Only Skinner's superior strength and own reserves of anger had ensured that Mulder got the spanking he deserved. Afterwards, Skinner had fastened him back to the kitchen cupboard, and left both men there while he went to cool down. His first emotion had been guilty remorse, but, when he returned to the kitchen to apologise, he found that they were not only quiet, and contrite, but that they had also made up their differences. Mulder had spent the entire evening following Skinner around the house in need of reassurance, which he had been only too happy to give, while Alex had been desperately eager to please, and devoted himself to ensuring that the big man had a drink to hand, and his creature comforts around him. Skinner had sat them both down to talk about what had happened, and, after some discussion, they had all agreed to continue with a discipline relationship. Theoretically it worked three ways – and Skinner was as much bound by its rules as his two lovers – but in practice only the two younger men ever seemed in need of discipline, and his own ass remained untouched.

That wasn't to say that the arrangement was always easy. It wasn't. The pattern of that first spanking continued. Krycek always submitted without question, but Skinner had the feeling that he hated corporal punishment more than his volatile colleague and lover. Mulder always argued to the best of his considerable ability, becoming ever more ingenious in the

methods he employed to try to escape punishment, even though nine times out of ten it still resulted in his ass being royally tanned – usually with extra added for his smart mouth. However, it hadn't escaped Skinner's notice that Mulder was invariably turned on by the spanking while Krycek was not. That was something none of them talked about, although Skinner was of the opinion that they probably should, but it was a difficult subject, and not one he felt very confident about tackling. In practice, Mulder required far more frequent discipline than Krycek, and while he fought it each time, he always seemed a lot happier when it was done. In fact, for a few days he would become a delight to live with; bright, eager, helpful, and thoughtful, all his fidgety Mulder edginess removed – even if only temporarily. Skinner was less confident about the success of corporal punishment when dealing with his other lover. The fact that Krycek accepted his punishment so silently and so willingly bothered him more than all Mulder's protestations. He wasn't entirely sure that Krycek **did** benefit. The younger man rarely cried, and he didn't seem to find the experience cathartic either. It was something he endured, almost as if it were the price for remaining in their unusual domestic living arrangement, and for his lovers to continue to keep him in their affections. This most definitely wasn't the case, and Skinner felt they should talk about that as well, but, once again, it wasn't something he knew where to begin with. Life was so hectic for all of them. He had thought that after they defeated the aliens it would calm down, but that hadn't happened. Instead they had been catapulted into worldwide fame, and 'rewarded' with promotion – which Mulder had promptly turned down as being too limiting for him. Krycek, on the other hand, had been almost too eager to return to the fold, and wore his FBI ID with a kind of pride that would have been pathetic if it hadn't been so heart-rending. They were all busy – Krycek was working his butt off to be accepted back, and to prove his worth in an organisation that still didn't entirely trust him, Mulder was making up for lost time on the X Files, and as for Skinner – if he had thought he was overworked as a lowly AD, he was coming to find out how much busier it was being Director of the whole organisation. He was lucky to have Scully and Doggett to support him. Doggett had taken on his old mantle, as Assistant Director in charge of Criminal Investigations, and he and Scully, like Skinner and his two lovers, had decided that life was too short to waste, and were now happily married.

"I was just doing my job, sir," Mulder hissed, insolently, bringing Skinner back to his current predicament. Mulder had a cut jaw, and his bruised knuckles implied that someone else probably had at least a black eye as well. His suit was stained and dishevelled, and his hair was a tousled mess. In other circumstances Skinner would have found the sight of him adorable, but not today. He was too overworked, over-stressed, and damn angry.

"Oh, I'm sorry, I didn't realize that your **job** entailed breaking into secure government buildings and stealing classified information," Skinner snapped.

"With all due respect, **sir**, my skill at uncovering classified information was one of the things that helped us defeat our enemies so recently," Mulder practically spat. "Or maybe you've forgotten that."

"No, Agent, I haven't. But you seem to have forgotten that our enemies are just that – defeated." Skinner sighed, and got up. He went to perch on his desk in front of his none-too-contrite agent. "Fox, it's over," he said, gently. "We all have to adjust to peacetime; you

most of all. I know how much you had invested in the war, but don't you see that we don't have to keep fighting? We're free now. We can relax, and enjoy ourselves."

"Forgive me if I find that extremely amusing coming from you, Walter," Mulder said in a heated tone.

"Meaning?" Skinner raised an eyebrow, feeling a headache coming on.

"Meaning that you're working day and night as if we still had a war to win. Christ, we almost have to make an appointment to see you these days. It's no wonder that..." Mulder stopped in mid sentence, and bit down hard on his lip.

"You've started. Please finish," Skinner said silkily.

Mulder shrugged. "Doesn't matter," he muttered.

"Oh, I think it does. What did you have to say?" Skinner demanded.

"Just that maybe screwing up is the only way I get to spend any damn time with you!" Mulder growled. "It's the only time you even fucking notice me."

"Don't throw that one at me, Fox," Skinner snapped back angrily. "You're a grown man. You don't need to resort to the tactics of a child. However, as you're intent on..."

"Behaving like a child, then I'll treat you like one. Yeah, yeah. I know the speech." Mulder rolled his eyes insolently.

"You also know therefore, that mouthing off at me is the surest way to increase your punishment," Skinner rapped out.

"You are **not** going to punish me for this!" Mulder protested. "I had valid concerns. I was justified in breaking into the DOD."

"If you were justified then you would have come to me, presented your facts, and asked permission to investigate further," Skinner pointed out. "The fact that you didn't implies that you knew all too well that I wouldn't approve. This clearly falls to be dealt with under the terms of the agreement we all made, Fox, and you know it. I want you to go home, get out of that sorry excuse for a suit, and stand in the corner of the living room waiting for me."

"I am not going to stand in some corner waiting for you to tan my hide!" Mulder objected.

Skinner drew himself up to his full height, and stared Mulder in the eye. The younger man bit on his lip, tried to stare Skinner out, and then gave up, and dropped his gaze.

"Yes, sir," he muttered.

"You'll find Alex in the other corner," Skinner said. Mulder looked up, surprised. "He tried to get the same information that you were looking for, only in a different way. Needless to say, you'll both be punished."

An angry light flashed into Mulder's eyes, and Skinner sighed. He knew what **this** was about. Mulder wanted his punishment - and Skinner's attention - all to himself. "You'll go home, get into your corner, and wait - without saying a word to Alex. Understood?" Skinner growled. Mulder thought about it for a moment. "Understood?" Skinner asked again, in a deeply warning tone. Mulder nodded quickly. "Good. One more thing...I tried calling your cell phone earlier. It wasn't switched on. I thought we agreed that you would stay in contact at all times," Skinner said. While Alex religiously and painstakingly did everything that Skinner asked of him, including staying in phone contact, Mulder was notoriously unreliable in that respect. He coloured, and shrugged.

"Fox?" Skinner waited. "You do know that it's extra on your punishment for being out of reach," he chided. Mulder exploded again. He reached inside his jacket pocket and removed the crumpled remains of a cell phone, which he threw onto the desk.

"There. One cell phone. It **was** switched on, but it seems it got damaged when I was having my head smashed in by the security guards at the DOD. My apologies," Mulder hissed.

"I see. Well, you **are** trying to set a Bureau record for the number of cell phones you manage to destroy after all," Skinner commented mildly, gazing impassively at the crumpled mass of plastic and wiring that had once been Mulder's cell phone. He picked it up, and dangled it under his agent's nose. "This could have been you, Fox," he said softly. "You could have been killed, you idiot."

"Lucky for you I wasn't - I wonder if you would have found the time to come to the fucking funeral," Mulder growled, turning on his heel.

Skinner winced as the door slammed behind his most volatile agent. He sat back in his chair, utterly drained. Mulder would obey him. He knew that. For some reason, the other man needed to be particularly mouthy just before punishment, just as Alex always went particularly quiet. It was just the way they were. All the same, Skinner could really do without this domestic complication right now. He gazed in despair at the stack of paperwork in front of him, and then grabbed a couple of Tylenol from his desk drawer.

"Everything okay?" Scully poked her head around the door, and he beckoned her in. Sometimes he wondered whether he had ended up with the right partners in his love life. Scully was so much more soothing to be with...which was exactly why it wouldn't have worked out between them. He knew, in his heart, that he was attracted to both Mulder and Krycek because they were so different to himself. He was so stable, so sure of things, so in charge...both his younger lovers needed that, but sometimes it could be so tiring.

"Yes. Everything's fine." He sighed.

"I heard Mulder storm out so I guess he screwed up big time," Scully commented, coming into the room, and sitting down in front of his desk. "You know how he gets when he's on the defensive."

"Yeah. I know." Skinner nodded, swallowing the Tylenol tablets.

"He means well." A lifetime of covering up from her former partner had made it almost a habit for Scully. Skinner gave her a faint, faded smile.

"I know. And he's going to be fine. He just needs...well...a firm hand." He flushed slightly at the unwitting accuracy of that statement, and Scully gave a little laugh.

"It's all right. I do know. I've, uh, seen the way he doesn't sit very easily after really spectacular screw ups." She grinned. "Don't tell him I know – he'd go ballistic. For what it's worth, I think it's the perfect way to treat him and I envy you being the one to do it. You have no idea how many times I've wanted to do the very same thing." She gave a decidedly un-Scully-like giggle, and Skinner looked at her in astonishment. "I think it's what he needs – what he's always needed," she added. "I'm glad you've got the guts to give it to him. I despaired of him ever meeting anyone who could both love him, and rein him in to the degree he needs. You're the best thing that ever happened to him."

"Thanks." Skinner gave her a strained smile. "I needed to hear that right now." He looked at his paperwork again, and gave another sigh. "Look, I'll just finish off the urgent stuff and then I need to go home to take care of my two wayward agents. Do you think you can take a look at the work I leave? I'm up to my eyeballs in files right now."

"No problem." Scully smiled, and patted his arm. "You do a great job, sir. Remember that." Skinner gave a wry grunt, and loosened his tie. He wished he had her confidence.

Mulder's hands gripped the steering wheel tightly, clammy with sweat. He swore furiously to himself under his breath as he drove, nearly jumped some red lights in his anger, and stopped, taking a deep breath to calm himself down. It would **not** be a good idea to draw the attention of the police right now – Skinner was mad enough with him as it was. Skinner. Mulder took another deep breath. He had very conflicting emotions about his boss and lover right now. Their relationship had always been marked by this kind of incident, from the very beginning, and there was something comfortable about the routine of screw up, punishment, and forgiveness...and yet he hated being in trouble with the big man. He much preferred looking into warm, loving brown eyes than stern, angry ones. If only he could slay these inner demons that caused him to screw up like this.

Mulder swung into the driveway of their large house in Georgetown, got out, and slammed the car door shut. He walked with terse, angry strides into the house, and paused outside the living room door. Skinner had told him to get straight into position, but he was thirsty. Could he risk getting a drink from the kitchen, and maybe a snack? Or had his lover left the office straight behind him...Mulder's butt clenched convulsively at the thought of being found, still fully dressed, in the kitchen, eating, when he should have been standing in his corner. That had happened once and the consequences had been such that he **really** didn't

want to risk it again. For a man who could be a total pussycat most of the time in their private lives, Skinner possessed a passion for delivering memorable punishments that was un-nerving – to say nothing of extremely painful. After debating the matter for a couple of minutes, Mulder gave a growl of frustrated rage and pushed open the door to the living room. He stopped in mid-stride as the sight of his **other** lover, standing naked in the corner, caught his attention. Alex didn't move so much as a muscle under Mulder's scrutiny, but, Mulder had to admit, the sight of a naked Alex standing waiting for his punishment was curiously arousing. Alex's buttocks were creamy, unblemished, round, and enticing. Mulder had to fight down an urge to go and stand behind his lover and fondle them. Now was not the time. Before Skinner was through those same buttocks would no longer be either creamy or unblemished. His own buttocks clenched again at **that** thought.

"What the fuck did you do to end up here, Alex?" He snapped, as he angrily jerked a finger through his tie, and threw it down on the couch, before beginning to unbutton his torn shirt. Alex glanced over his shoulder, swallowed nervously, looked at the door, and then back at Mulder.

"He could be back at any minute. If he finds us talking..."

"Don't pretend to be the good little agent," Mulder scoffed. "I know it's all an act. Christ, you've killed men with your bare hands. I really don't see you being scared by Skinner's belt."

A strange expression flickered in Krycek's green eyes. "I don't like being spanked, Mulder," he snapped. "And, unlike you, I'd prefer not to increase my tally by making Walter even angrier with us than he already is. In answer to your question, I crashed my car in the river after trying to get that information you stupidly broke into the DOD to find."

"You did what?" Mulder removed his shirt and let it fall to the floor before kicking off his shoes, and undoing his belt. "Why the hell did you do that?"

"To prove you wrong. Why else?" Krycek gave a maddening little smile that did nothing to improve Mulder's already filthy temper. He fought down an urge to start a fight with his lover. He didn't know how or why Krycek managed to do this to him, but when they weren't having wild, unrestrained sex, they were at each other's throats. The only peace the whole household had was when Skinner was there to take firm charge of both of them. They both responded to the big man's aura of quiet, loving calm. Skinner was always the focus of their interactions, and usually the only time they could be civil to each other was when he was there. Mulder had no idea why that was and he didn't want to start analysing it. He kicked his pants away from his ankles, shucked off his boxers, and, leaving all his clothes strewn messily over the floor, he walked with jerky, tense strides into his own corner. God he felt stupid! This was ridiculous. Two grown men standing in different corners of the room, butt naked, waiting to get their respective asses tanned by their lover and boss. If it weren't for the fact that his life had been so weird anyway, this would be the most bizarre thing that had ever happened to him. As it was, it was just one of any number of surreal moments in Fox Mulder's strange life. He rested his forehead against the wall miserably, his buttocks clenching again. Soon Skinner would come home, and stripe his ass until he screamed...and

in screaming came a kind of calm release that he knew he needed...if only he didn't have to endure the damn spanking to get there first. Mulder clenched his fists hard. He hated being spanked with a vengeance. He hated admitting he was wrong, hated the humiliation of offering his ass for discipline...and, more than anything else, really hated the way his body always betrayed him during these moments. He had no idea why he got a hard on during a spanking. He didn't **feel** turned on, but his cock obviously had other ideas. He cast a sideways glance across the room at his lover. Alex was standing quite still, as if none of this was upsetting him remotely. Mulder hated him for that. How **could** this whole humiliating, painful event not fill Alex with some kind of anxious trepidation?

Skinner let himself into the house with a set of spare keys, and took a deep breath, preparing to face what lay ahead. He pushed open the living room door, and, having confirmed that there were two naked, silent men waiting in there with their noses pressed to the wall, he carried on to the kitchen and poured himself a glass of orange juice. He had very mixed feelings about administering corporal punishment. While it undoubtedly **worked** (for short periods of time at least) he was feeling a good deal of resentment towards both his lovers for interrupting his busy schedule with this kind of absurd nonsense, and also for their reliance on him to be there and administer the kind of closure to the event that they always needed. Sometimes, just sometimes, he wished they'd think about him for a change. He'd be lying if he said he hated spanking them – there had been occasions when it had even turned him on to be administering a firm hand to a pair of wriggling, squirming buttocks – and both Alex and Mulder had extremely nice butts. However, bearing this kind of responsibility was all very well when he had the time, but right now he felt pressurised both at work and at home. This wasn't the way he had planned to spend the evening. He would have liked, instead, to come home to find Alex preparing dinner, and Mulder researching something on the computer in the living room. There would have been pleasant, homely smells, and one or other of them would have poured him a scotch. He'd have sat down on the couch and channel hopped for a while, with a dark head nestled on his lap, and after a good meal they'd all have retired to the bedroom where his lovers would have driven him to the heights of ecstasy with their tongues, and hands and cocks. Instead he was denied that. After being spanked Mulder would need reassurance, while Alex would go off into that silent, willing but shuttered state that Skinner had never yet been able to breach. There would be no love-making – Mulder would just want to be held, and Alex would lie with his back pressed against Skinner's, his red butt warming them both, needing to be near but turned away, and strangely distant. Skinner finished his drink in an angry gulp, and slammed his glass down on the table with a growl of frustration. He had been angry before, but he was even angrier now. Well, so be it. If he couldn't have the evening he was looking forward to, he could at least take it out on their respective butts for depriving him of it.

Skinner stalked back into the living room and gave a wry grunt as both Mulder and Krycek's buttocks clenched in anticipation. He paused for a moment, considering which one of them to punish first. If he kept Mulder waiting then he ran the risk that his volatile lover would be so unnerved by the sound of Alex's spanking that he'd do something stupid – but on the other hand Krycek had been waiting longer, and it wasn't always fair to give Mulder preference just because he made more fuss. Skinner was a man who prided himself on being scrupulously fair so he decided that Alex should go first.

“Alex. Come here,” he said in a soft tone. He noticed Mulder stiffen out of the corner of his eye, and sighed. “Your turn will come, Fox. Maybe listening to Alex being punished will focus your mind on what you’ve done to deserve your own punishment.”

“Or maybe not,” Mulder muttered under his breath. Skinner exhaled forcefully. He considered letting it pass, but knew that Mulder was challenging him into a reaction – and if he was to avoid further outbursts later it would be good to come down hard on his explosive young lover now. He crossed the room in two swift strides, and slapped Mulder’s buttocks hard, twice, being rewarded by an anguished “ow!” from the other man.

“You’ll receive an extra stroke of my belt for every word you say between now and when I call you for punishment,” Skinner said in a firm voice. Mulder swallowed – visibly. “Understood?” Skinner demanded. Mulder opened his mouth, thought about it, and then just nodded. “Good.” Skinner gave him another hard swat to reinforce the message. “All right, Alex. Come here,” Skinner ordered, turning back to his other lover. Alex was standing quite still, watching, clearly trying to psyche himself into some kind of resolve. He came immediately, and obediently over to where Skinner was standing by the couch. Skinner looked him in the eyes.

“I’m disappointed in you, Alex,” he said, in crisp, clear tones. That had an effect. Alex dropped his gaze, and looked utterly despondent.

“I’m sorry,” he murmured.

“I’m sure you are, but that’s only because you got caught. If you were truly sorry you wouldn’t pull stunts like this in the first place. Undo my belt,” Skinner said firmly. Alex’s green eyes opened wide, and a flurry of emotions passed through those momentarily unguarded eyes before the shutters came down again. Skinner sighed; he wished he knew what Alex was thinking. The young man reached out, undid his lover’s belt, began to pull it out of its loops, and then stopped. He hadn’t been ordered to remove it. “It’s okay. It wasn’t a trick order – you can take it out,” Skinner said softly. Alex obeyed. “Now, double it over, hand it to me, and bend over the back of the couch.”

Alex did as he was told, his face expressionless. Skinner accepted the belt, and watched as Alex got into position. He always insisted on this little ritual of being handed the implement he would use to punish them (unless he intended to only give a hand spanking) It signified, to his mind, that they were accepting both his right to punish them, and his choice of implement. If they refused to hand him an implement – and Mulder sometimes did although Alex never had - then he would discuss the matter with them, but he was rarely dissuaded from his original course of action.

Skinner surveyed the taut white buttocks displayed in front of him. They were an enticing sight, and his cock swelled a little, as it always did seeing the unadorned beauty of either of his young lovers. He ignored it. Now was not the time to sink himself into Alex’s deliciously hot, tight ass. They had more pressing business to take care of.

"All right, Alex. Concentrate." Skinner laid the doubled belt on Krycek's buttocks, and went around to the front of the couch. This was another little ritual he had initiated. He never punished either of them without first making them give a list of their crimes, recited while the implement they would be punished with rested on their bare backsides. He found that it concentrated their minds and gave them some time to prepare as well. At least he thought it did. Sometimes he wondered whether he hadn't just come up with these embellishments to make the spankings less tedious for himself, and more torturous for them. "Please tell me why you are in this position, Alex," Skinner asked, crossing his arms over his chest and surveying his young lover. Krycek put his head down and mumbled something into the cushions on the back of the couch. "Look at me, Alex, and start again," Skinner said in that same calm, reasonable, utterly implacable tone.

"I'm here because I disobeyed you, sir," Krycek murmured. Krycek always called him 'sir' during punishment. Mulder did not. He didn't mind what they called him as long as they were respectful.

"And?" Skinner pressed.

"I was instrumental in stealing files from a government building," Krycek said, his gaze fixed on Skinner with a deadened expression in those green eyes.

"And why do you think that upsets me?" Skinner asked.

"Because I didn't tell you what I was planning."

"And why didn't you tell me?"

"Because I knew you'd forbid me to do it," Krycek muttered.

"Good. Now, what else did you do?" Skinner asked.

"I trashed a car." Skinner heard Mulder give a loud and derisive snort at that.

"Did you have something to say, Mister?" He asked, rounding on his other lover angrily. Mulder opened his mouth, turned a frustrated red, and then closed it again, with a shake of his head.

"Please continue, Alex," Skinner nodded his head.

Krycek closed his eyes, and thought about it.

"Open them. Look at me!" Skinner ordered.

With some difficulty, Krycek did as commanded. He was acutely aware of the feel of the leather belt on his bottom. In a few minutes it would be doing more than just sitting there and that was distracting him – as was his naked, highly vulnerable position. It went against all his instincts to place himself in such a position. If he went into a bar, Krycek always had his back to the wall, and he always sat facing the rest of the room in restaurants so he could

see if there was any threat. It was a habit that had been so necessary to his survival that it had become everyday instinct, and offering himself up like this, naked and totally vulnerable, unable to see who might be standing behind him, was more of a tremendous act of willpower on his part than the stern man standing in front of him could possibly understand.

"I don't remember anything else," he muttered, trying hard to stay in place as a cool breeze wafted over his naked buttocks, making him want to jump up, prepared to do battle with anyone who might come in through the open door behind him. All the hair on the back of his neck was standing on end as he fought a desperate internal struggle to stay in place.

"Alex!" Skinner's tone was hard, bringing him back to the punishment. He took a deep breath – he **wanted** to obey. He desperately wanted that. His current situation was the best he had found in his entire life. He didn't want to do anything to fuck it up. He was already ruing the actions that had resulted in him being here. Somehow, Mulder always managed to get under his skin and make him forget he was here on sufferance, an old enemy, accepted, lusted after even, maybe even cared for, but still not really trusted.

"I'm sorry, sir, I can't remember anything else." Krycek felt a bead of sweat cord on his forehead, close to his hairline. It began to crawl, slowly, down the side of his face and he couldn't even move to brush it away.

"Alex, you nearly died for no good reason. What you did was risky, and foolish but more than that – it was life threatening. It's one thing to risk your life to save this planet, or even in defence of me, or Mulder, but quite another to just risk it in this stupid ongoing quarrel that you two have."

"Yes, sir." Alex whispered. Damn but he just wanted this to be over. He knew he had been stupid, and that Mulder had been his weak spot, as usual.

"Do you see why that might upset me?" Skinner pressed.

"Yes, sir," he replied, in a dull tone. He heard Skinner sigh, and he wasn't sure why but he knew that he had somehow disappointed his lover.

"All right. Let's begin. Thirty with my belt, and twenty with my hand to finish it off," Skinner said in strict, peremptory tones. Krycek nodded. He preferred it when Skinner was tough with him. It was the sense of disappointment and thwarted expectation radiating from the other man that upset and confused him. Punishment and pain were a language he understood, and could accept, far more easily.

Skinner moved out of his field of vision and a minute later the belt was removed from his butt, and, almost instantly, landed with an almighty crack against his backside. The pain kicked in a split second after the sound, and Krycek took a sharp intake of breath. Skinner didn't waste time – he went about his task thoroughly and speedily. Krycek gripped onto the back of the couch, and tried to count the strokes in his head. Dimly, through a haze of sweat, he could see Mulder's buttocks clench empathetically in time to each thudding lick on his own agonized backside.

Skinner paused, and ran a hand through Krycek's hair. Krycek looked up, confused.

"Sir? That was only ten," he said, frowning.

"I know, Alex. I'm just checking in with you." Skinner gave him a gentle smile, and tousled his hair again. "Okay?" He asked. Krycek gazed at him blankly. Technically speaking, no, he wasn't okay. His bottom hurt like hell, and he was ass up over the back of the couch. What else could Skinner mean by asking him that question?

"Yes, sir," he answered in stiff, robotic tones. Skinner looked at him searchingly, but Krycek just put his head down, gripped tight again, and waited. The strokes continued, hard, and utterly without mercy – both men had long since come to appreciate that when Skinner spanked them he meant business. Pleas and begging had very little effect on him - although only Mulder had ever tried that tactic. Krycek preferred to get his punishment over and done with as quickly as possible. After another ten, Skinner stopped again.

"How are you doing?" He asked. Krycek looked up again, still puzzled. He was getting no more or less than he deserved. He didn't understand why Skinner was showing him any concern.

"I'm fine, sir, thank you," he answered politely. He was being punished; kindness was out of place – and more than a little confusing. Skinner exhaled forcefully, and again Krycek had a sense that he had somehow been disappointing, but he didn't know **why**. The final ten strokes were the hardest to endure. It took all his willpower not to do more than grunt with the force of each one, and even so, he couldn't hold back the little sob that accompanied the sound. He didn't want to scream or cry – he had earned this and could hardly complain about it after all, and he didn't want either of his lovers to think less of him. He was aware that he was the spare part in this relationship; Mulder and Skinner would do well enough without him, in a more conventional couple relationship. He didn't want to give them any cause to think less of him than they already did. Finally the onslaught stopped. Krycek gasped for air, and felt two strong arms pulling him upright.

"All right?" Skinner asked, brushing away a sweat soaked strand of hair affectionately.

"Yes, sir." Krycek removed himself from Skinner's embrace and went to kneel in front of the couch, waiting for the next part of his punishment. Skinner gazed at him for a moment, hands on his hips, his brow furrowed, and then came and seated himself on the couch.

"All right, Alex. Over my knee," he growled in an angry tone. Krycek looked up, startled, wondering what had wrought this change in Skinner's mood. He quickly got himself into position, not wanting to give the big man any further cause for annoyance. Skinner placed one big hand on Krycek's back, pinning him into position, and then ran his other hand over Krycek's sore, extremely hot bottom. Krycek hissed. "I hope this lesson will stay with you for a long time," Skinner said tersely.

"It will, sir," Krycek said swiftly. He heard a wry grunt by way of reply, and steeled himself. A few seconds later Skinner's hand landed with a hard smack on his backside. Although it hurt much less to be spanked by a hand than a belt, the sore flesh on his bottom was so

sensitised by what he had already received that each and every swat hurt like hell. Krycek found himself holding onto Skinner's thighs, sure that he'd topple off, or worse – try to put a hand back to relieve the almighty sting in his buttocks.

He wouldn't have willingly offered himself up for this kind of punishment at the hands of anyone other than Skinner. When the Consortium had punished him it had been with fists, and, on one memorable occasion, knives. He had been fully clothed and the retribution had been long and unpleasant but he hadn't offered himself to it – it had simply been exacted upon him. Being spanked should have been easy by comparison, and yet it evoked strong reactions inside him. He didn't like it, but there was something so different between these loving, carefully delivered, intimate punishments and what he was used to that it brought a strange lump to the back of his throat. He didn't know why being spanked affected him like this, but it took all his reserves of strength to bite back the tears of emotion that threatened to overwhelm him. Then it was done. All over. Skinner was rubbing his backside very gently, examining the damage.

“Okay, Alex. We're through. It probably feels worse than it is. When you're ready, I want you to get up, and go and stand in the corner again.”

“Yes, sir.” Krycek didn't wait. He got up immediately, gasping in pain as the movement made his sore backside protest. He walked unsteadily into the corner and rested his head against the cool wall, struggling to get his equilibrium back.

Mulder watched him, every single nerve in his body protesting the knowledge that it was his turn next. He hated this so much that there was no way he was just going to endure it the way Alex had.

“Mulder. Your turn. Come here,” Skinner said.

“No, I will not fucking ‘come here’,” Mulder snapped, losing all self-control now that the moment was upon him. “You have no right, no right at all to do this.” He turned, angrily, as he spoke, until he was facing his lover.

“Yes I have, Mulder. You gave me that right, remember?”

Skinner crossed his arms over his chest and Mulder clenched his fists. What on earth had possessed him to not only give Skinner permission to do this, but also to insist that the other man go ahead, even if he protested? He vividly remembered doing just that after one particularly intense punishment session. Skinner had asked him if he wanted to continue with the discipline side of their relationship in future, and, in what **must** have been some kind of weird, post-punishment haze, he had not only agreed but he had actually insisted that Skinner use every force at his disposal to make sure he submitted to any future punishments he deserved, despite all the protests he might offer when actually faced with an imminent spanking.

“I said, come here. Now come!” Skinner barked. Mulder jumped, and walked, unwillingly, to where his lover stood. Skinner was still wearing his dress pants, shirt, and tie, although he

had loosened the top button of his collar and his sleeves were rolled up to the elbows. He looked like he meant business, and his eyes were flashing angrily behind his glasses.

"I was acting on my own principles. I refuse to accept that gives you any right to swing your fucking belt against my ass!" Mulder protested.

"I won't be using my belt, Mulder," Skinner said steadily.

"You won't?" Mulder licked his lips, uncertainly. "Good. I mean, if it's just your hand then maybe – **maybe** I can accept it. I mean, what Alex did was different. He wasn't acting on conviction. He was just interfering. I was..."

"I'll be using the cane," Skinner interrupted the tirade. Mulder felt himself swaying. "Go and get it and bring it to me," Skinner ordered.

Mulder felt a wave of anger rising inside that couldn't be contained. "NO I fucking won't!" he shouted, furious beyond belief in the face of Skinner's utter implacability.

"Yes you will. I consider your offence worse than what Alex did. You risked your life more directly, in a foolhardy action that got you hurt." Skinner's fingers gently explored the cut on Mulder's jaw, and then dropped to his bruised knuckles. Mulder pulled his hand away, still angry. "More than that, I told you last week that I would not authorise any investigation into this matter until you brought me evidence. You have brought me no such evidence," Skinner said firmly. "You directly disobeyed me and I can't let that pass. You involved the local police, spent some time in the cells, and, if it weren't for your current status as Hero of the World, and me pulling rank to extricate you from this mess, you'd still be in jail. Go and get me the cane."

"No." Mulder held his ground. "You can't do this every time I need to..."

The rest of that sentence was broken off as Skinner put a large hand behind Mulder's neck, and hauled him over to the couch. Within seconds he found himself, ass up, over Skinner's knee, his backside being peppered with hard, swinging swats from the big man's hand.

"No, you fucking bastard, you total and complete fucking shithead!" Mulder screeched, his legs scissoring energetically. "You are so dead. I am so going to..." he rambled on, no longer sure what he was saying as those swats thundered down onto his upturned, unprotected ass. Finally he ran out of steam, and just lay there, unable to fight any more. That was when the spanking slowed, and then came to a halt. He was lifted onto his knees.

"Go and get me the cane," was all Skinner said. Mulder opened his mouth, aghast. There was no way he could endure the cane after that hand spanking. His butt must be raw.

"N..." he began. Skinner grabbed him before the word was out, and he found himself once more over the big man's thighs, having his ass royally peppered with swats. Skinner lifted him again.

"Go and get me the cane," he repeated.

Mulder stared at him. "I fucking hate you," he said in a low tone.

"I know. Go and get me the cane," Skinner said once more.

Mulder bit down hard on his lip, and then got up and walked slowly into the little storage room next door where there was an umbrella stand full of mostly innocuous items – and one thin, snappy, hated cane. Skinner didn't keep all his instruments of discipline in the same place. He kept a paddle in the desk drawer in his den, and then there was Alex's flat-backed, tortoiseshell patterned hairbrush, which resided on the dresser upstairs in their bedroom, as well as Skinner's ubiquitous belt, which was always available of course. They all knew where each item was kept, so finding them when ordered to wasn't a problem – except when you really didn't want to and Mulder didn't right now. The cane was undeniably the harshest implement Skinner possessed, so his lover was making it very clear that he viewed Mulder's sins as being particularly heinous on this occasion. Mulder stared at the hated object of discipline for as long as he dared, before a low, growling command from the other room prompted him to retrieve it from its resting place. He fought back an urge to snap it between his hands, and went slowly back into the living room. Skinner was standing waiting for him by the couch.

"Hand it to me and then get into position," Skinner told him. Mulder hesitated. "Do it," Skinner said firmly. Mulder was thankful for the other man's resolve in that moment. If Mulder had sensed even the slightest weakness he would have pounced on it, and he wasn't sure what the outcome of that would have been. Slowly, his insides somersaulting, he handed Skinner the cane, and bent over the back of the couch. He felt the cane being placed on his sore buttocks, in that stupid little ritual Skinner always followed.

"Christ, this is so fucking absurd," Mulder groused.

"Yes, it is, and it would be very nice if we didn't have to do it at all," Skinner informed him. He moved around the couch until he was within Mulder's eye-line, and stood, watching his lover closely. "I'm waiting," he said. Mulder shrugged. "I expect to hear a complete list of reasons of why you deserve this punishment," Skinner continued. "Now, Mulder!" He snapped, when Mulder remained silent.

"I've been a very bad boy," Mulder said sulkily, in sing-song, insolent tones. "Spank me, daddy." He winced as soon as the words were out of his mouth. Christ, why the hell had he said that? And why was his cock currently rock-hard? At least the damn couch hid it from view, but he was painfully aware of it.

"Details please, Mulder," Skinner pressed.

"You know the fucking details. That's why we're here," Mulder growled, still embarrassed.

"Spell them out for me."

Mulder gave an almost soundless whimper of frustration in the back of his throat, fighting an internal struggle. He didn't want to give in. He hated giving in. He knew, intellectually, that it would be much easier for him if he **did**, but he couldn't bring himself to.

“I won’t punish you until you’ve given me a complete list of reasons as to why you’re being punished,

and for each minute you delay I’ll add another stroke.”

Mulder clamped his lips shut, still resisting. Skinner glanced pointedly at his watch and Mulder closed his eyes, hanging onto his resolve with all the strength he could muster. He was therefore surprised a few seconds later to feel the cane lifted from his butt in one smooth sweep, and a resounding snap as it made contact with his skin, followed a second later by the most intense agony. He had been so pre-occupied with keeping hold on his rebellious mood that he hadn’t even heard Skinner move.

“I can keep doing this until you talk, Mulder, and **then** I’ll give you the caning you would have gotten anyway,” Skinner rapped out in terse tones. Mulder gritted his teeth but another stripe weakened his resolve.

“Okay! I’ll give you the list!” he cried. The cane was replaced on his sore backside, and then Skinner was standing in front of him again. The other man looked completely and utterly stern, implacable, and resolute. Mulder felt a strange wave of thankfulness for that – Skinner was making him go through this, and on some level he needed that badly. He didn’t like to analyse why, just that he was grateful that Skinner was taking everything he could throw at him and not backing down. He gave his list of sins as quickly as he could, omitting nothing, and, unlike Alex, not needing to be prompted. Despite his protestations to the contrary, he knew exactly why he deserved to be punished. When he was done, Skinner nodded.

“Good. Keep that list in mind, Mulder.” He moved out of Mulder’s field of vision again, and once more the cane was removed. Mulder gave a low, soft moan, dreading the coming caning. The cane hurt like hell, and he knew that sitting would be hard for the next few days. “Five strokes for disobedience and deceit, ten for risking your life in this foolish way, three for all the swearing and cursing you’ve been doing, two for the cell phone – and I’m adding another one for the state of this room. I’m assuming all these clothes are yours. Yes?”

“Yes they fucking are!” Mulder snapped.

“Hold on tight then,” Skinner advised. “This will be both long, and painful.”

Mulder trembled both at the words and the terse, tense tones in which they were delivered. Twenty-one strokes were a considerable sum with the springy, biting cane.

The first stripe cut a swathe across the middle of his buttocks and he gave a hoarse, loose scream. He needed to let it all out during a punishment, and, on this occasion, there was a lot to let out. Mulder wasn’t sure what it was all about, just that his emotions had become increasingly pent up over the past few weeks and he really needed to yell, scream, and sob – and this caning was giving him the perfect reason for doing so. His whole body shook as the cane descended for two more vicious strokes, and his bottom alternated between feeling numb and moments of the most intense pain. Four strokes...five strokes...six...the relentless hiss and bite was almost too much for him. Skinner worked methodically – all the strokes

had thus far been placed at regular intervals on his ass, but on the seventh he changed his angle, and delivered a stroke that crossed all the previous ones at a downward angle. Mulder gave an almighty bellow and couldn't stop himself from standing up.

"Please, no more!" He yelped. He had endured beatings, gunshot wounds and worse, but this was different, this was something he was giving himself to, of his own free will. Skinner paused, and looked at him gravely, his eyes dark behind the glasses.

"You can have a break, Mulder. We'll start again in a little while," he said softly.

Mulder shook his head vehemently. "No more. Please. I'm sorry. I learned my lesson," he said in a low, urgent voice.

Skinner looked at him searchingly. "You earned them, and you'll take them. Either now, or later, but you will take them," Skinner told him firmly.

Mulder felt something give way inside him, something that needed to give way. He rested his head against Skinner's shoulder for a moment, and the other man gently soothed him, and kissed his hair. After a couple of minutes, Skinner tenderly guided him back over the couch, and the caning continued. Mulder screamed freely, his mind lost in a whirl of pain and need. When it was finally over, he lay on the back of the couch, gasping like a fish deprived of water. Skinner disappeared to return the cane to its usual abode, then returned, and gently helped Mulder to his feet. Mulder wrapped his arms around the big man and held on while Skinner soothed him.

"Thank you, thank you, thank you..." Mulder whispered over and over again.

"No problem." Skinner's hands caressed his back in loving circles. After several minutes, he guided Mulder back over to his corner, and left him there.

Skinner stood back, and surveyed his two spanked lovers. Both their butts were a shade of deep crimson – Krycek's bearing the flatter, wider imprints of the belt, while Mulder's was covered in numerous welts. Skinner always took great care when disciplining both his lovers to make the punishment fit not only the crime, but also their respective personalities. Krycek, on the face of it, was relatively easy but the problem was that Skinner had no idea whether he got it right or not. Krycek didn't give him anything back. His expression was always masked, his eyes impassive apart from just a few fleeting emotions that came and went too quickly for Skinner to interpret them. He did his best with Krycek but was always left with a guilty dissatisfaction after the event. Mulder was much easier to read, and Skinner was confident that he had not only given his other lover the punishment he so richly deserved, but that he had also met some deep need that Mulder couldn't express. His lover's language and behaviour before the spanking was in sharp contrast to his general demeanour after it. It was almost as if he needed to be taken down to that level where he could actually be nice again, as if somehow a spanking gave him permission to be that gentler, more loving personality he wanted to be inside, but somehow fought. Skinner sighed – both his lovers were so complex, and he was tired. He had a raging headache, and

his arm hurt – although not as much as their butts he suspected with a wry shake of his head.

“Alex,” he said softly. Krycek came quickly, his green eyes eager, and full of something akin to devotion. Skinner tipped Krycek’s chin up, and kissed him firmly on the lips. Krycek froze for a moment, as if stunned, and then he hung against Skinner’s body, warm and willing. His lips opened, and he returned the kiss with some passion. Skinner wrapped his arms around the other man and held him close, kissing him thoroughly. Finally he released him. “It’s over. All is forgiven,” he said softly. “We’re back to normal. Why don’t you go and get dressed?”

“Yes, sir.” Krycek nodded, and Skinner pulled him back with a frown.

“Walter,” he corrected. Krycek looked surprised, and then laughed as he realised that he had still been in ‘punishment’ mode.

“Walter,” he said, with a nod before disappearing upstairs.

Skinner then turned back to Mulder.

“Here, Fox,” he said softly. He rarely called Mulder by his first name, but he had found that after a spanking it seemed to soothe his lover. Mulder came haltingly, eyes down, as if ashamed of himself, or fearing further punishment. His cock, Skinner noted, was still semi-erect. Skinner sat down on the couch and patted his knee. Krycek always needed to disappear after punishment, and compose himself. Skinner knew that when his younger lover returned he would need to be near, but not touching. He wouldn’t accept caresses or cuddles. Mulder, on the other hand, needed reassurance following a spanking, and, while normally he wasn’t remotely tactile, after a spanking he seemed to crave physical contact. Skinner often wondered whether spankings didn’t allow Mulder to get certain things that he couldn’t ask for – and which he was maybe even a little ashamed of wanting. He remembered his lover telling him once about how his father had never hugged him – how they had shaken hands whenever they had met, instead of embracing, and how he had hated that. Nonetheless, the inhibition remained and it was only following a spanking that Mulder allowed himself to accept those hugs he had wanted from his father.

Mulder crawled onto the couch next to him, and buried his face in Skinner’s lap, and Skinner gently entwined his fingers in the younger man’s hair, stroking softly.

“Love you,” Mulder muttered, his face turning a shade almost as red as his butt. Skinner gave a wry chuckle. Mulder was hopeless at expressing his emotions. It was usually only following a spanking that Skinner ever felt he got close to the inner Mulder – the one curled up tightly within, hidden by the outer layers of bravado, determination, and outrageous ability and intuition.

“I love you too, Fox.” He combed Mulder’s hair assiduously with his fingers, and Mulder relaxed into his body like a contented cat. Twenty minutes later Alex reappeared. He was dressed in sweats and a tee shirt, and there was absolutely nothing in his demeanour to suggest that he had just been punished. Unlike Mulder, he showed no visible after-effects – he wasn’t even walking stiffly.

“I’ll make dinner,” he said, pouring Skinner a glass of whisky, and handing it to him. Skinner smiled, and took a grateful sip. Krycek would hover, anxious to please, and Mulder would be like a puppy wanting constant affection, and physical closeness, and that was the way they’d all be until tomorrow morning and probably for the next few days as well. He rubbed his head wearily. It wasn’t that he minded, just that sometimes he needed some space for **him**. There was all that work piling up at the office, and he was here, sorting out this domestic crisis. He felt as if he was spread too thinly. There was too little of him. Maybe having two lovers and living all together like this was impossible. Maybe he had been naïve to even think it could work.

The evening passed exactly as he had predicted. When they retired to their enormous Emperor sized bed, Skinner in the middle as usual, Mulder insisted on curling up with his back to Skinner’s chest, his hot buttocks warming Skinner’s groin, while Krycek, as Skinner had known he would, as he always did following a spanking, turned his back on both of them, his own butt resting lightly against Skinner’s. The big man was worried that Krycek wasn’t getting any reassurance, but the younger man genuinely didn’t seem to **require** it, and it wasn’t exactly something you could force on someone. Something wasn’t **right** though - Skinner could sense it. Usually after a spanking, Mulder and Krycek were affectionate with each other, but on this occasion they were avoiding each other, and he suspected that he knew why. For a start Mulder had been angry to share his punishment time with Krycek, and even angrier when he had heard the details of why Krycek was being punished, but there was more to it than that and Skinner was too tired to figure out what.

Skinner stayed awake worrying about all these issues long after the other men’s breathing had deepened into the smooth, mellow tones of sleep. They were all woken at 3 am by Skinner’s cell phone. He slid out of the bed, and answered the call, and his two lovers turned over and went back to sleep. It was the office calling him in because of a crisis hostage situation that had arisen, with sensitive political overtones. Skinner got dressed, left a note for his lovers, and then went to the office. The hostage situation was tense, and he spent the next four hours on the phone directing operations, and putting contingency plans into place. It was almost an anti-climax when the kidnapper released the hostages and gave himself up. By then it was gone 7 o’ clock and Skinner felt badly in need of a shave and a shower. He returned to the house, let himself in, and ran upstairs to the bedroom. The bed was empty, but he could hear the shower running in the en suite bathroom...over which also came the sound of raised voices.

“Well if you hadn’t been fucking trying to follow me...” Mulder’s voice.

“I wasn’t following you. I was trying to prove your stupid, shithead ideas wrong once and for all, and look where that fucking got me.” Krycek, sounding deeply pissed off.

“It got you what you deserved. Christ, this was none of your business.”

“You whining on about it for days made it my business. You can be such a fucking boring bastard, Mulder.”

Skinner sighed, and pinched the bridge of his nose wearily. He could do without this right now.

“You should just watch yourself brown-nosing Walter the whole time at the office – now **that’s** fucking boring. ‘Yes, sir, no sir, tan my ass for me please, sir,’” Mulder mimicked.

“Well at least I don’t fucking get off on having my ass tanned - unlike some perverts!”

There was silence, and Skinner winced, waiting for what would inevitably come next... and sure enough, two seconds later he heard the sound of a fist making solid contact with flesh. He strode to the door, and had his hand on the knob when his cell phone started to ring. Ignoring it, he wrenched open the door, and found himself enveloped in a cloud of steam that fogged up his glasses making it virtually impossible to see the fighting men. He used the sounds of grunts and bellows to locate them, grabbed an arm in one hand and the scruff of a neck in the other, and shook hard. His cell phone continued to ring insistently as he pushed one of his lovers – he didn’t know which one – under the shower, and turned it to cold, while he dragged the other – it turned out to be Krycek – back into the bedroom.

“You can damn well stay in there until you cool down, Mulder!” he shouted back into the bathroom, while he deposited a wet, bleeding Krycek on the bed. “And you, Mister, can stay right there,” he growled. The brief blaze of defiance in Krycek’s eyes flared and died, being replaced by his usual expressionless mask. Unable to ignore his cell phone any more, Skinner reached into his pocket and pulled it out, with jerky, angry movements.

“Sir?” Scully’s voice. “Sorry to call you back to the office so soon, sir, but we’ve had the press clamouring for a statement. I didn’t want to put out anything you hadn’t approved.”

“That’s fine, Scully. Just prepare something - I’ll be back soon.” Skinner turned, just in time to see a cold, dripping Mulder emerge from the bathroom, spitting venom at the top of his voice. “No – scratch that, Scully. Look, I trust you...just do whatever’s necessary. I...I resign.” He terminated the call, and stared at his two wet, sulky lovers who were staring back at him, open-mouthed.

“Resign?” Mulder looked shocked. “You can’t do that. Not because of this. Not because of **us**.” Skinner narrowed his eyes, and Mulder paled, and took a step back.

“You are not going to fucking well puni...” Mulder began. Skinner quelled the rest of that sentence with a glare.

“No,” he said. “I’m not.” Suddenly it all seemed so clear to him. He turned on his heel, struggling to breathe against the combination of the steam wafting out from the bathroom and his own emotions choking him, and walked stiffly out of the bedroom without saying another word.

Skinner ran down the stairs, and out of the house, slamming his car door shut behind him with a resounding bang. He reversed the jeep loudly out of the driveway, amid the sound of screeching tyres and then took off – to where he neither knew nor cared, just that he had to be anywhere but here.

He suddenly realised after fifteen minutes that he was driving alongside the Potomac - and up ahead there was a diversion while something was being fished from the river. As he drew closer he saw that the item being pulled from the water was a car, and his blood pressure spiked instantly. He got out of his jeep, and strode across to watch the operation. Sure enough, the car was standard Bureau issue - it belonged to Alex. He was sick to the pit of his stomach when he surveyed the tyre prints on the road. Christ, his lover must have been so close to death and all because of his stupid rivalry, or whatever it was, with Mulder. Skinner's head was pounding, his stomach was reminding him that it hadn't been fed in hours, and he hadn't slept in a long time either. Just as the battered car was landed on firm ground, with a deluge of water pouring out of it, his cell phone chose that precise moment to ring.

"Shut the fuck up!" Skinner yelled. A few people turned and looked at him curiously, and he clenched his fists. "Shit, can't I get any peace," Skinner growled under his breath. He took out his cell phone, and glared at it, full of loathing, and then some demon inside took over. He found himself pulling back his arm and throwing the cell phone high, and far, straight towards the river. It was a good throw - and it felt so satisfying to see the still ringing cell phone disappear into the depths of the water with a resounding splash. Skinner felt as if a weight had been lifted from his shoulders. He was free. He had liberated himself from all his responsibilities with one act.

Skinner got back in his car, whistling to himself. He was free and he was going to drive out onto the open road and see where it took him. Rolling his shoulders experimentally, Skinner steered his car back onto the main road, a wide smile on his face.

He drove for hours, stopping only to refuel and grab a sandwich. He loved being out on the open road, listening to songs from his youth on the radio, singing along, without a care in the world.

"Just like playing hooky from school!" He grinned to himself. Except for the fact he had only played hooky once, after being talked into it by his wild best friend, Danny Wallace, and the consequences of that had served to remind him never to do it again. He pushed that little piece of reality to the back of his mind, turned the radio up, and began singing along to Queen's 'Bohemian Rhapsody' in a deep, and not entirely unpleasing baritone.

"I see a little silhouetto of a man...Scaramouche, Scaramouche will you do the fandango? Thunderbolt and lightening, very very frightening dream .' What the hell were you on when you wrote these lyrics, Freddie? *'Let me go, let me go...we will not...Miss Miller no!'"* He misquoted happily. "Miss Miller? I mean what the hell's that about? *' We will not let you go...duh duh duh duh duh duh duh !'* Now the big rock crescendo." Skinner bounced up and down happily in the car in time to the music. *" Nothing really matters...anyone can see...nothing really matters..."* shit can't quite reach that note... *' nothing really matters...to me.'* Y'know, that just about sums up how I feel - Freddie Mercury you're a genius." Skinner gave a contented sigh, and then looked around, wondering where the hell he was.

A few seconds later he passed a road sign bearing the legend "Welcome to Little Oak." Little Oak; his hometown - where he had spent his childhood. Strange that he had been drawn back here. It was dark now, and he was tired from driving all day. He felt his eyes begin to

droop, and then came to with a start of surprise, swerving to avoid a deer he saw only at the last minute, its eyes big and surprised in his car headlights. The deer cantered off safely, but Skinner's car crashed off the road and into a tree trunk. He sat, dazed for a few minutes, but he was unharmed save for a cut on his hand. He shook off the blood and got out his handkerchief to wrap it around the hand, and then reached for his cell phone...only to discover, with a curse, that it wasn't there. Now it somehow didn't seem such a good idea to have thrown it in the river. He managed to kick the battered car door open, and stood for a moment, looking around. It was a good walk into town and he was tired. He remembered that there was a cabin, an old boyhood haunt, completely hidden from the road by all the trees, and decided to rest up there until morning. Sure enough, the cabin was still there - it was a longer walk than he remembered, and for a while he had begun to worry that it had burned down, or his memory was faulty, but he'd finally stumbled upon it. It was empty, and cold, but Skinner was too tired to care. He lay down on the wooden floor, and was asleep with minutes.

When he came to he was stiff, and cold - and starving hungry. It took him a moment to figure out where he was but then the memories came flooding back, making him wince. Oh shit, what the hell had he been thinking? And yet...and yet he didn't want to go back home just yet. He got up, every muscle in his body protesting, and walked out into the sunlight. Maybe he could get the car to work well enough to take him into town. He walked through the trees, savouring the sweet, fresh, clean air, and then stopped - his car had gone. He was sure this was where he had crashed. He stood, rubbing his head, and looking around, trying to figure out what the hell was happening. His hand throbbed, and there was blood on his shirt. A cursory examination of a paint marked tree confirmed that this had been where he had crashed. Damn, the police must have already removed the vehicle.

With a sigh, Skinner set off on the road into town. Somehow, his freedom was turning out to be a lot less fun than he had imagined. He was missing his two lovers, damnit! He was even missing his job. He remembered lying in bed, his hands full of two gorgeous young men who loved him, and his eyes misted over momentarily.

"Fuck it!" He blinked in a very determined way and the misting stopped. His usual obstinacy kicked in. He had no intention of going back. He had made a decision and he damn well stuck to his decisions. He walked wearily along the road, lost in a haze of misery combined with determination, when a voice permeated his consciousness.

"Walter Skinner? I'd know that face anywhere! My goodness! Walter Skinner after all these years!" He turned, to see a doughty little old lady striding down her garden path, waving at him.

"Ma'am?" He frowned, gazing at her as she came closer. He felt as if he was in some kind of surreal movie. Everything seemed hazy, and strange. Was this really his life?

"Hilda Stebbings!" The lady announced. "Mrs Stebbings," she amended, as he gave her a bemused frown. "Your fourth grade teacher," she added. He stared at her, the past flooding back in.

"Mrs Stebbings? My god, is it you?"

"Yes it is, and watch your language, Walter Skinner," she chided, with a smile. "My goodness you're in a state. Come in, come in, don't dawdle." She opened the gate for him, and he stepped inside, as if in a dream. He followed her obediently up the garden path and into her neat little house.

"I was just sitting outside in the sun, and I had no idea what was going to walk past...my goodness!" She kept up a little running commentary. "Sit down...I'll bring you some lemonade and cookies. You always did like my lemonade and cookies as I recall. I remember you, every summer out playing in the woods with that naughty Danny Wallace and that other boy, what was his name? The lad who didn't fit in?"

"Ricky Parry," Skinner said absently, downing his lemonade in one gulp.

"Ah, yes, dear Ricky. I wonder what happened to him?"

"He got knifed in a bar in 1982. I went to the funeral." Skinner ate a cookie so quickly he barely tasted it.

"Hmm, hungry and thirsty - what kind of mischief have you been up to, to get into such a state, young Walter Skinner?" Mrs Stebbings asked, noticing his bandaged hand and shaking her head sorrowfully.

Mischief? Skinner felt as if he were 10 years old again.

"I...uh...crashed my car," he sighed.

"Oh I know all about that." She opened a cupboard and pulled out a box containing various bandages and plasters.

"You do?" He frowned, wincing as she gently took hold of his hand and examined the damage.

"Reminds me of the old days. You were always scraping your knees, and my house was always the closest when you boys needed someone to help. Hold still. I'll just wash the dirt away." She carefully cleaned and dressed the cut, and he smiled at her. He remembered her very well now. She had been a lot younger back then, although, in the manner of children, he had always thought her very old. Despite her advancing years, she still had that spark of mischief in her eyes that had always endeared her to the children she taught.

"Now, Walter Skinner, I want you to tell me what on earth is going on, and no lies now." She waggled her finger in front of his face. "I always did know when you were lying, Walter," she added with a knowing look.

"Really, Ma'am, there's nothing going on. I just crashed my car. That's all." He coloured slightly, and she sat back in her chair and gave him a speculative look. He took another cookie to hide his embarrassment at being subject to this much scrutiny.

"Walter, I had a visit from two very nice young men a few hours ago. Now, if you don't want me to call them I suggest that you start talking," she said in a firm voice.

"Two young...?" Skinner frowned.

"Yes, dear, and don't talk with your mouth full." She patted his hand reprovingly. "Those nice young men who saved us all recently - the ones who were always in the news, along with you, dear. We were very proud of you, you know." She smiled at him, and he felt an absurd wave of pride.

"I was just doing my job," he muttered.

"Nonsense, dear. We all know what you young men did for us. It was lovely seeing them in person. Such nice looking boys - and so worried about you."

"Worried about me?" Skinner felt a pang in his chest.

"Yes, dear. Very worried. I sat them down, gave them lemonade and cookies - they seemed like the sort of boys who would appreciate home cooking. One of them asked me a lot of questions...the one with the nose."

"That would be Mulder."

"That's right. I do know his name, but I'm getting old and people look so different on the television don't they? Anyway, he was asking a lot of questions - couldn't sit still, and kept on and on and on with his questions. Very insistent, and very fidgety."

"That sounds like Mulder." Skinner gave a wry smile.

"While the other one sat very still indeed. He looked around every inch of the room though. Nothing gets past that one does it? Very green eyes. Still waters run deep I always say. There are a lot of things going on under the surface of that one."

"Yes, Ma'am. That's about right." Skinner suddenly felt very lonely. "That would be Alex." He savoured saying his lovers' names, aware of just how much he missed them both.

"Well, they were worried about you because they'd found your car, and of course there was all that blood, and they were beside themselves. Oh, they didn't say as much, but I know boys!" She gave a little laugh. "I always knew how you and your friends were feeling didn't I?" She said, patting him again. He smiled, recalling those long summer days spent in the woods, playing near the cabin, and then visiting Mrs Stebbings on their way home for cookies and lemonade. "What's the matter, Walter?" She asked him softly, her blue eyes shining perceptively. He sighed.

"I did something I shouldn't have done, Ma'am," he replied, examining his fingernails in detail. "I, uh, walked out on my job, and my friends. I've let people down."

"Nonsense. I've never known you let anyone down in your life!" She exclaimed. "What I do remember is that you always took too much upon yourself. Like the time you took the blame for something that naughty Danny Wallace did, and ended up being punished by the Principal right alongside Danny."

"I remember that." Skinner winced. The Principal had been possessed of a mightily strong right arm. "I couldn't let Danny take all the blame for that though - I should have stopped him."

"People make their own decisions, dear." Mrs Stebbings smiled at him fondly. "One of the things I loved about you, Walter, was the way you always took the side of the underdog. Like poor Ricky. He was from the wrong side of the tracks, and nobody gave him the time of day, but you saw something in him - something good. I remember that you took him under your wing, and let him play with you and Danny. You're a good boy, Walter; always have been, always will be. You just need to loosen up a little, and stop taking responsibility for everything."

"I'm the Director of the FBI. That's easier said than done," Skinner muttered.

"Well, that's not the only reason why you're out here, looking such a mess, is it?" Mrs Stebbings chided gently.

"You mentioned your friends as well as your job. I'm assuming you were referring to Alex and Mulder?"

"Yes, Ma'am." He tried to straighten his stiff back. There was something about Mrs Stebbings that made you want to sit up straight.

"They reminded me a lot of Danny and Ricky. You always did take the waifs and strays under your wing, Walter."

Oh shit, she's right, Skinner thought to himself. Why was he always attracted to the bad boys? Did he get some perverse satisfaction from being in charge of them, and taking care of them? Or was it that he could always see the good in them when others couldn't? Or maybe a combination of the two.

"The world won't stop turning without you, dear," Mrs Stebbings said softly. "But two young people will be very unhappy if you don't go home soon. Yes?"

He stared at her blankly, his eyes misting again. "Yes, Ma'am," he whispered.

"Good boy. I'll bring you the phone then and you can call them to come and collect you. I know they're going to be very, very happy that you're safe and well. They really were out of their minds with worry."

"I'm don't know, Ma'am," he said softly. "I left for a reason. Maybe it would be better if I just stayed away. They might be better off without me."

“Walter, nobody said it would be easy,” Mrs Stebbings fixed him with a stern look. “I remember a time when you went very quiet for several days. Something was clearly gnawing at you but you wouldn’t say what. Finally, I sat you down and made you talk, and it was all about some piece of mischief you’d been up to – I forget what now. You felt a lot better for talking about it and addressing the issue as I recall.”

“I’m not sure my butt would agree – I seem to recall that ‘addressing the issue’ entailed owning up to the Principal about what I’d done,” Skinner sighed.

“But you can’t deny you felt better afterwards?” Mrs Stebbings pressed.

“No, Ma’am, but this is different. There are too many problems – and besides, I need to be strong for...” He trailed off, and shrugged.

“You can’t take responsibility for everyone, Walter. Sometimes you must trust the people you love to not only take care of themselves – but to take care of you, also. Yes?” Skinner examined his shoes in minute detail, but finally he had no choice but to lift his gaze to meet Mrs Stebbings’ blue eyes.

“Yes, Ma’am,” he sighed wearily. She handed him the phone, and he took it, with a grateful smile.

“I hope they deserve to have you looking out for them,” she murmured, as he dialed Krycek’s cell phone number. “I really hope they do, Walter Skinner.”

Krycek hung onto the car seat for grim life as Mulder did a spectacular U-turn and drove them back to Little Oak at top speed. For once, he refrained from commenting on Mulder’s driving – he wanted to reach Skinner as quickly as his lover. The big man might only have been missing for a day, but Krycek was nursing a feeling of sick, empty loss that had eaten away at his usual expressionless mask. He and Mulder had joined together to search for their missing lover, and they had discovered that when they co-operated they actually made a pretty unbeatable team. They each had skills that complemented the other. Mulder’s dogged questioning and flights of brilliance were matched by Krycek’s eye for detail, and ability to look over every single painstaking fact, leaving no stone unturned. When they had found Skinner’s crashed car, both of them had thought the worst. Krycek had gone cold inside – supposing this had been some kind of Consortium plot? He knew, rationally, that the Consortium had been destroyed, but maybe there was a maverick out there they hadn’t caught – a sniper who had just been biding his time, waiting to get Skinner on his own. When Krycek had heard Skinner’s voice the nagging, gnawing emptiness inside had dissipated immediately, to be replaced by a quiet warmth. *Walter is okay. Walter is okay. Walter is okay.* He couldn’t stop repeating the words over and over again in his head as they drove back towards Little Oak. He glanced at Mulder, who gave him a tentative smile.

“Walter’s okay,” Mulder said out loud, his smile widening. Krycek opened his mouth in surprise, and then shook his head.

“Yes,” he said, smiling quietly to himself. “Yes, he is.”

They pulled up outside Mrs Stebbings' house, and were barely out of the car when Skinner appeared, hesitantly, in the doorway. Mulder stopped, a lump rising in his throat. Skinner's clothes were torn, and his hand was bandaged. There was blood on his shirt, and he looked tired beyond belief – but at least he was alive.

“Walter.” He couldn't stop himself. He ran up the path, and enveloped the big man in a hug, before shaking him soundly. “We were so damn worried about you! Christ, Walter, you have no idea!” He was aware of Krycek at his elbow, standing as silently as ever, waiting his turn.

“Actually, I do.” Skinner made a face and Mulder had the grace to flush. Krycek stepped forward, and kissed Skinner on both cheeks, in typical Russian style. Mulder stood there, still floored by Skinner's wry, weary comment. Of course Skinner knew what it felt like. How many times had he gone through this when Mulder had been missing? How well he must know that sick, empty feeling in the pit of the stomach.

“Not now,” Krycek murmured softly. “Now we will take him home.”

Mulder watched as Skinner turned, and enveloped the tiny, white haired Mrs Stebbings in a giant hug.

“Goodbye, and, uh, thanks...” Skinner whispered. “For everything.”

“You're welcome, dear.” She patted his cheek affectionately. “And next time don't leave it so long before coming home.”

“No, Ma'am!” Skinner grinned, and followed Mulder and Krycek back to the car.

“We found the car,” Mulder babbled, needing to talk about the whole drama.

“I crashed. I...I was too tired to be driving. Fell asleep behind the wheel then swerved to avoid a deer at the last minute,” Skinner admitted, flushing slightly.

“We searched and searched but...”

“I was in a cabin. In the woods. It's hard to find.” Skinner shrugged.

“We tried calling...”

“I threw my cell phone in the river,” Skinner admitted sheepishly. He opened the back door of the car, slumped inside, and when he looked up at his two lovers there was a pained expression on his face. Mulder was suddenly aware of the significance of what the big man was telling them. He had punished both of them, not 48 hours previously, for writing off a car, and losing a cell phone – among other things. Mulder swallowed hard, and looked at Krycek.

“Not now,” Krycek said again, in that same soft tone. “Get in the car, Mulder. You can drive. I'll take care of the big guy.” He went around to the other side of the car, and slid in beside Skinner, leaving Mulder staring at the younger man with an expression of surprise on his

face. He would never have imagined that Krycek of all people would rise to this occasion with such authority. "Let's go home," Krycek urged, in that same soft voice, as Mulder got into the car.

Skinner sat, gazing numbly out of the window. He barely even noticed Mulder start the engine, and begin to pull away.

"It's been quite a day for you," Krycek said, in a low voice. A day? Was that all it had been? One day of freedom? Skinner suddenly felt utterly exhausted and wiped out. His hand was throbbing, and his whole body ached. He closed his eyes, desperately wanting to sleep, and a few seconds later a hand came to rest on his shoulder, and pulled his head gently but firmly onto a denim-covered lap. Fingers tenderly stroked his head, soothing him, and he looked up into a pair of compelling green eyes.

"Sleep," Krycek ordered, and Skinner closed his eyes and did just that.

It was dark when they got home. Krycek locked up the car, while Mulder helped the weary Skinner back into the house. Skinner was hungry, and still desperately tired, but he was aware that they had matters to address, so he walked purposefully into the living room, squaring his shoulders as he went. He had always made it perfectly clear to his two lovers that their rules applied to all of them – he would never have used corporal punishment on them under any other circumstances. That didn't make this moment any easier though. He took a deep breath, and then turned to face Mulder wondering what would happen next. Usually **he** was the one who always took charge, but he didn't think it was appropriate for him to direct his own punishment. Mulder gazed back at him, uncertainly. With a weary sigh, Skinner realized that his lover was still looking to him to be in charge. Krycek followed them into the room a second later, his green eyes as calm and impassive as ever.

"Look...I know I screwed up," Skinner murmured tiredly. "And the rules apply to each of us equally, so that means..." He shrugged. "Well, you know what it means." Mulder had a look akin to abject horror on his face that would have been comical in other circumstances.

"Yes, we do know," Krycek said. "But it can wait. You're tired, and in no condition to do anything else except go to bed. We'll talk again after breakfast tomorrow."

Mulder nodded, casting Krycek a look of relief.

"What about the office? I need to call Scully." Skinner moved wearily across the room towards the telephone. So many responsibilities, and he was so tired. He swayed and reached out for support.

"That's all taken care of," Krycek said smoothly, grabbing Skinner's arm and swinging it over his own shoulder as Skinner's legs began to give way. "Scully is more than capable of taking care of the FBI for a few days – in fact I think she gets off on the power." His lips quirked at the corner and Skinner had to laugh out loud. Krycek's sly sense of humour always surfaced at the most unusual moments, often taking him by delighted surprise. Mulder took hold of his other arm, and he allowed the two men to lead him up to the bedroom, and push him onto the bed, but protested when Krycek knelt and began undoing his shoes.

"I can do that," he snapped.

"I know, but on this occasion you will allow us." Krycek looked up at him, his expression thoughtful. Mulder undid Skinner's collar and began unbuttoning his shirt, and Skinner flushed feeling like a child.

"I can..." he began again.

Mulder silenced him by placing a finger over his mouth. "Let us take care of you," he said softly, glancing at Krycek, who nodded. "You always take care of us. Now it's our turn." Skinner swallowed hard, and submitted to being undressed, and rolled under the sheets. He closed his eyes and felt two sets of lips press against his forehead before he fell asleep once more.

"I can't believe how close we came to losing him." Mulder sat down beside Skinner, and stroked the sleeping man's cheek tenderly.

"I know." Krycek didn't move. He was gazing at Skinner as if he thought that their lover would disappear again.

"You really find out how you feel about someone when something like this happens," Mulder commented. Krycek closed his eyes momentarily, and then nodded. "It's my fault," Mulder said with a sigh. "I kept pushing him. I always needed...needed...I'm not sure I understand it but I needed his attention on some level. I was insatiable. It was too much for the poor bastard."

"It was as much my fault as yours." Krycek shrugged.

"Is he serious?" Mulder glanced at Krycek over Skinner's sleeping head. "All that stuff about the rules?"

Krycek nodded. "Yes, he is serious – he's a fair man, Mulder. Scrupulously fair in fact. He expects this...no...I think he needs it on some level. The question is – can you do it for him." He looked at Mulder expectantly.

"Me?" Mulder whispered. "Why does it have to be me?"

"Because it does." Krycek's green eyes were implacable. "Because he trusts you."

"He trusts you!" Mulder protested.

"Yes." Krycek bowed his head. "But the difference is that I don't deserve his trust. You do."

"Bullshit." Mulder shook his head vehemently. "He doesn't think that way and neither do I, Alex."

"I know, which is also why it has to be you." Krycek gave a twisted, sad little smile.

“Why not you?” Mulder asked, puzzled.

“Because of what I once did to him. I caused him great pain. I made a vow I’d never hurt him again – ever,” Krycek said, “whatever the circumstances. And I will stick to it. But he needs this, and he needs it to be you who does this for him. You understand it better than me for a start. There is something...the two of you have shared some understanding of this for a long time, even before you made it a physical reality. For me, punishment is just...painful. For you two, it is intimate. I’ve always envied you that.”

Mulder stared at Krycek, his mouth open in wordless surprise. He knew that his lover was referring to the incident with the nanocytes but there was something in Krycek’s eyes that forestalled any attempt Mulder might have made to argue with him on the subject. “All right,” Mulder said at last, nodding. “I’ll do it. Shit, do you think he always hated it this much as well?”

“Probably.” Krycek shrugged. “Let’s go downstairs, Mulder. We need to talk about this properly. Tomorrow, when it happens, you must get it right. We have to talk about how you achieve that. It’s the least we owe him.”

“Yes.” Mulder took a deep breath. “Yes.” He deposited another kiss on his lover’s cheek, and then followed his other lover downstairs.

Skinner woke feeling refreshed. He turned over, and felt for his lovers, relishing the fact that he was back home, and in their huge bed, but, to his disappointment, found that he was alone. The smell of breakfast wafting up from downstairs reassured him, and, glancing at the clock, he realised in some surprise that it was nearly 10 am. He got up, took a shower, washing away all the grime from the past couple of days, and shaved. Finally, feeling 100% better now that he was clean again, he reached for his jeans...and then stopped. Somehow, he thought that sweats might be a better choice. He pulled them on with a determined grimace, wondering what the hell was going to happen next. One thing was for sure – something had to give. None of them could continue the way they had been. He pulled on a tee shirt and went down to face his punishment. He wondered what the strange sensation in his stomach was as he trotted down the stairs, and thought at first that he was just hungry, before realising in surprise that they were butterflies, and that he was intensely nervous about what would happen.

Mulder was reading the paper at the dining table, while Alex fixed breakfast – they had early on banned Mulder from going anywhere near the kitchen if food was involved, and he was now relegated to washing up duty only. He got up as soon as Skinner came down, and looked as if he was about to bound into the other man’s arms like an overexcited puppy – but then stopped himself.

“Come here,” he said softly instead, opening his arms wide. Skinner went, and Mulder pulled him into a hug.

“It’s good to see you back where you belong, big guy,” Mulder said, depositing a kiss on Skinner’s face and then guiding him to sit at the table. Krycek came out, and put a plate

piled with pancakes on the table, pausing to brush a slightly stubbled cheek against Skinner's face as he did so.

"I'm being spoiled." Skinner grinned.

"No, we're just fattening you up before we eat you." Mulder waggled his eyebrows suggestively and they all laughed as that broke the tension.

Skinner was ravenous and ate his way through third, fourth and fifth helpings before he was finally satisfied. Finally, he pushed his plate back with a sigh, and thanked Krycek for the meal. Krycek and Mulder looked up, and exchanged a glance, and Skinner felt those butterflies play havoc with his now full stomach.

"I guess we need to talk," Skinner murmured.

"We sure do." Mulder folded up his paper. "And we will, but first we're going to proceed with your punishment. Understood?"

Skinner frowned. He had never seen Mulder like this before. He seemed...so self-assured, and in control. It was puzzling, but also a relief. Skinner nodded, feeling his face flush. It was so damn humiliating being in this position when he was usually the one handing it out, not receiving it.

"Okay. I want you to go and find Alex's hairbrush, and bring it back here."

Skinner nodded again, feeling hazy, and lost. Was this really happening?

"Now, Walter," Mulder said firmly, jerking him out of his reverie. He nodded again and ran back up the bedroom, his heart thudding inside his chest. Christ, he was too old for this...and yet he was dimly aware that it was effective. He both dreaded and welcomed the coming punishment and was keenly aware of how being made to bring the implement that would shortly turn his backside a shade of bright red added to the whole ordeal. He had never understood just how much before, because he'd only ever been the one handing it out. He found Alex's hairbrush, and shuddered as he surveyed the smooth, flat-backed, tortoiseshell patterned surface. Alex treasured this particular item – it was the only thing he had left from his Russian grandmother and while it was a beautifully crafted hairbrush, it also made a highly effective paddle. Skinner had always liked the way it landed with a resounding crack, and the pleasing red imprint it made on a hapless bottom.

"Hoist by your own petard, Walt," he murmured to himself, retrieving the hairbrush and trotting back down the stairs. Mulder was waiting for him in the living room, by the couch, and Alex was lurking somewhere by the wall.

"Bring it here and hand it to me," Mulder commanded. Skinner did as he had been told, his eyes cast down. "Look at me," Mulder instructed, and Skinner sighed. It sounded as if his lover was really getting into this. He looked up, to find Mulder's eyes deadly serious – there was no trace of the usual joking, teasing, exasperating Mulder.

“All right. I want you to go and bend over the couch. And, Walter - undress first,” Mulder ordered. Skinner nodded. He had expected this. He took off his sweatpants, and folded them neatly over the back of the armchair along with his tee shirt. “Get in position.” He jumped. He had been so engrossed in his preparations that he hadn’t realised that Mulder had followed him. He swallowed hard, and bent over the back of the couch. A few seconds later the hairbrush was placed on his naked butt, and he winced. It didn’t hurt, but there was something particularly humiliating in the way Mulder was so scrupulously following the ritual that he himself had laid down. “Look at me, and then tell me why you deserve this punishment,” Mulder said in that same firm, unrelenting tone. Skinner took a deep breath. Damn, but why had he never realised how hard it was to talk when you were bare-assed over the back of this couch? He found that his throat was dry and he couldn’t speak. He made a strange sound in the back of his throat and for a brief moment he saw Mulder’s mask slip. His lover glanced anxiously at Alex as if for help. Skinner had almost forgotten that his other lover was there - Alex was, as usual, a quiet, brooding presence in the room, and yet somehow he seemed absolutely central to everything. Krycek moved swiftly into action. He glided silently over to the couch, sat on it, close to Skinner, and gently touched his face.

“Tell him, Walter,” he urged softly.

Skinner swallowed hard and nodded. “I threw my cell phone in the river, and I smashed my car. I...I shouldn’t have been driving because I was too tired. I worried both of you. I was out of phone contact...”

“You risked your life by being behind the wheel of that car in your condition, Walter,” Mulder said softly. “You could have killed someone, or you could have been killed yourself.”

“I know. I’m sorry.”

“You almost **were** killed.” Mulder pressed home the point, and Skinner winced. He would have done the same in Mulder’s position but that didn’t make it any easier. “When we saw that blood in the car...when we couldn’t find you...we thought you were dead, Walter.”

“I know. I’m sorry.” Skinner gripped the back of the couch tightly with his hands. He did deserve to be punished. He just hoped Mulder would get it over with – as quickly as possible.

“All right, Walter. You’ve earned yourself 20 with the hairbrush, and 20 with my hand. Understood?”

Skinner nodded. It was, he noted, the same amount he would have given either of them if they’d pulled a stunt like this – maybe a bit more lenient, but in the same ballpark. “Okay, big guy. Hold tight then.” He heard Mulder walk over to him, and then the hairbrush was lifted. Skinner took a sharp intake of breath, and a few seconds later the hairbrush landed agonisingly on his backside. He expelled the breath he had just taken, with a sharp whistle of pain. It had been years since he had been in this position and he’d forgotten just how much it hurt. A second cracking swat was more self-assured and Skinner gave a grunt of pain. He had no intention of crying. He didn’t know why – whether it was a matter of pride,

or some stupid, macho marine thing, but he knew that he didn't want to cry. He also knew, on a subliminal level, that Mulder intended him to cry, and would do his best to make him cry. Seven more hard whacks with the hairbrush tested his resolve to the limit, but still he held on. Mulder had gotten into his stride now, and each swat made his ass sting as if it were on fire. He squeezed his eyes shut, gasping for air, and was surprised to feel fingers on his face.

"Let it out, Walter. It's just us," Alex whispered to him.

"Can't," Skinner ground out, panting as another swat took his breath away. Mulder stopped.

"That was ten, Walter. How are you holding up?"

"Fine. Just get on with it," Skinner growled. He heard Mulder give a little snort of laughter.

"Always have to be the big, strong, tough guy, don't you? Okay, Walter. Hold on then. That was just the warm up. This is where it gets serious. I want you to think about how you risked your life – and how that was unacceptable."

Unacceptable. Skinner remembered using that word once with Mulder, years ago, when his lover had tried to resign from the FBI. Unacceptable. He tried to focus on Mulder's injunction about how he had risked his life but the pain in his backside was making rational thought almost impossible. He couldn't concentrate on anything but how much his ass hurt as Mulder began whacking the hairbrush down in even more deadly earnest than before. Skinner didn't think it could hurt any more than it already did, but he was wrong. The second set of ten strokes left a vivid impact on his mind as well as his butt – and he made a mental note to himself that if he ever had to punish either of his lovers with this implement again he'd go easy with it. It hurt like hell. He squeezed his eyes shut again, holding back the tears for all he was worth. He wasn't going to let them see him cry. It didn't matter that he'd seen both of them cry during punishment. **He** wasn't going to. Finally, after what seemed like an eternity, the onslaught stopped.

"Okay, Walter. Stand up." Skinner felt strong arms help him to his feet, and then he was enveloped in a hug. "Just the hand spanking now." Mulder said, holding him tight for a moment, before releasing him, and going around to the other side of the couch. He sat down and gazed at Skinner expectantly. "Now, Walter," he said in that firm, low voice, when Skinner hesitated. Skinner nodded, and walked slowly around to the other side of the couch. He lowered himself awkwardly over Mulder's knee, and Mulder rearranged him, taking his time. "We want you to be comfortable – this is going to take a little time. I'm not going to go quickly, Walter. It'll be slow. And cry if you want to. It doesn't matter to us."

"I'll pass on that if you don't mind," Skinner growled, and was rewarded by a light swat on his ass.

"Don't pull that macho shit with me, Walter. You're butt up over my knee right now getting the punishment you deserve so watch your manners."

Skinner bit down on his immediate sarcastic response, deeply impressed by Mulder's strong, firm demeanour. Finally Mulder managed to manoeuvre him into a position that was comfortable for both of them, and he found his face resting against Alex's thigh. He relaxed – surely a hand spanking couldn't be anywhere near as bad as the bite from that vicious hairbrush? He was soon to find that he was wrong about that. His ass was already sensitised by the brush, and Mulder's swats were hard, and meant business. Worse than that was the humiliation of being over a knee. He couldn't remember when he had last been in this position. He thought it might have been when he was a kid – a sulky 15 year old hauled over his father's knee for a thorough spanking. Decades later and he was in the same position. He found that hard to deal with – even harder than the pain. His breath started to come in raw, heaving sobs, and he fought back the tears once more. He was almost winning the battle against his own emotions, lost in a haze of pain, when Alex reached out, and touched his face with the gentlest brush of his fingers.

"It's all right, Walter," he said softly. "It's okay. We're here...we were so scared when we thought we'd lost you. You should have seen us – we went crazy trying to find you. We love you."

Those words caused something inside him to break, and the next thing he knew he was sobbing into Alex's jeans like a child, the tears running freely down his face. He lay there, accepting Mulder's hard swats without protest, crying his eyes out, and all the while Alex caressed his face with kind, gentle fingers. He barely registered when the spanking was over, just lay there, still weeping silently. Mulder caressed his back for a few minutes, and then shifted him so that he was lying evenly on both their laps, on his side facing them, his head on Alex's legs. Alex looked at him searchingly, and then dipped his head, and licked the tears from Skinner's face like a kitten lapping at cream. That one act calmed the big man, and made him feel warm, and complete. He stopped sobbing, and they all lay in a heap on the couch for a long time, lost in their own thoughts. Skinner had to admit that however much his butt hurt, it did feel good to allow himself to be weak, and the centre of attention for once. He could understand why Mulder liked the peace following a spanking so much.

Finally, Alex cleared his throat, and that broke them out of his reverie, and brought them back to the situation.

"All right. Would you like to tell us what Walter Skinner's Day Off was all about now?" Mulder asked gently, stroking Skinner's thigh. Alex watched them both quietly, his green eyes never leaving their faces.

"Walter Skinner's Day Off?" Skinner raised an eyebrow.

"That's what I'm calling it. It's like that movie – *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*. Only he didn't get caught and spanked, and you did. Now, talk, Walter. We're both listening."

Alex nodded his agreement, and Skinner swallowed hard and began. "I'm sorry for worrying you both," he said in a low, choking tone. "I...I guess I was angry. I've been under a lot of pressure at work, and I could do without the kind of half-assed crap you two pull at home as

well. I can't just keep going...I guess what I'm trying to say is that I'm only human. I might not like admitting it, but it's true."

Krycek nodded, his green eyes sympathetic. "You're right, Walter. We weren't thinking about you. Losing you, if only for a day, made us see how much you do for us...and how lost we'd be without you."

"Alex is right." Mulder agreed.

"There's other stuff we need to talk about as well," Skinner flushed. "Stuff we should have talked about a long time ago...I should have brought the subject up but, well..." he shrugged. "I guess that talking about how we feel isn't a strong point for any of us."

"If it gets to the point where you feel you have to walk out and nearly get killed, then I'd say that's something we have to overcome," Mulder said.

Skinner nodded. "All right," he said, sitting up, gingerly, sliding to the floor in front of them, and trying to kneel with his butt well away from any kind of surface. "Why do you do it? Mulder – what's with the need to attract my attention? And Alex, why do you always have to react? I know you both care about each other – you wouldn't be here if you didn't. So why?" They were silent. Alex glanced away, while Mulder worried at his bottom lip. Skinner sighed. "I'll tell you what I think – it's as if you feel safe admitting that you love me, but not each other. You've been enemies for too long. But it's stupid. It's clear as day to me that you're both crazy about each other – I see proof of that in the bedroom every night."

Krycek glanced sideways at Mulder, who was doing his best to look anywhere but at either of his two lovers.

"Mulder," Skinner said softly. Finally Mulder sighed, and looked back at him.

"Yes, Walter, you're right. About all of it," he said at last.

"Alex," Skinner urged. Krycek gave a strange, almost innocently childlike smile.

"Yeah." He shrugged. "I guess the sex part was always much easier than the, uh, love part."

"All right. So maybe you can stop circling each other like wild stallions about to charge and start behaving like you did when you were looking for me? And that means like two men who belong together – and who work well together."

"I guess." Krycek shrugged, and glanced at Mulder shyly from under his eyelashes. "Think we can do that, shitface?"

"I think we could try. Ratfeatures."

"Okay. I'll take that as a breakthrough," Skinner commented with a wry grin. "But we also need to address the issue of punishment. I'm not sure I do the right thing when I punish you."

Now you've experienced that yourselves, maybe you understand." Skinner sat back on his haunches, gave a grimace of pain, and rocked forward again.

Mulder made a face. "It certainly isn't easy," he said. "I'd be lying if I trotted out the old cliché that it hurts me more than you, but it sure as hell isn't simple."

"Exactly – and I worry about punishing both of you, but for different reasons. Alex – it's as if you endure it as the price to be paid for us loving you, and that **isn't** the case." He saw a flicker of bemusement flash into those green eyes.

"I know...I do know that, Walter," Krycek said softly.

"But do you **believe** it?" Skinner asked. Krycek thought about it for a moment, and then shook his head.

Skinner sighed. "You have to, Alex, or I'll have to find another way of punishing you when you screw up. As for you, Mulder, you won't like me for saying this, but while you shout and scream and give every indication of hating punishment, your physical response tells me a different story."

"Fuck." Mulder buried his face in his hands. "It isn't the spanking, Walter. I hate the fucking spanking," he said, when he looked up. "It's the way being spanked makes me feel. It brings us close in a way we just can't achieve otherwise. It's always been like this from the moment we met. When you were yelling at me in your office you were showing an interest in me. I liked that feeling. It felt good."

"And it turns you on?" Skinner asked quietly.

"Kinda." Mulder bit on his lip again.

"Then why don't we make it a sex game – without the spanking – or with it on some level if you need that," Skinner said softly. "Every now and again, when you think you need it, instead of going off on some wild goose chase, just come to me, and ask. Christ, we do all kinds of things in the bedroom, and a daddy/boy game is hardly that kinky."

"Daddy/boy?" Mulder questioned weakly.

"Isn't that what you want?" Skinner said. Mulder glanced at Alex, who gave him an encouraging smile. There was no hint of the teasing that usually typified their relationship.

"Yes. I guess so. Damn that's embarrassing." Mulder had turned a shade of red almost comparable to Skinner's butt.

"Hey, it's okay. Actually, I think it'd be fun," Skinner grinned. "I like it when you let me get near you, Mulder. I like those rare times when you let me call you 'Fox', and allow the barriers to come down." He pulled Mulder into a hug. "I, uh, quite liked this new Masterful Mulder as well," he murmured with a wink when he released his lover. "Maybe we could take him out to play occasionally too!"

Mulder grinned, his embarrassment completely forgotten in the face of Skinner's last admission. At least he wasn't the only one around here who had a kinky streak. Skinner turned back to his other lover, who, as always, was sitting silently to the side. He beckoned Krycek close, and gazed at him searchingly for such a long time that Krycek finally wilted under the scrutiny.

"And you, Alex, have to understand that you are integral to this relationship, and that you are **not** on the outside," Skinner said softly, one hand resting lightly on Krycek's knee. He looked at Krycek thoughtfully, and then continued. "Maybe next time you screw up I'll have you spank me instead of me spanking you – I think that might hurt you more, yes?"

"I couldn't do that," Krycek replied, aghast.

"Then think about how important you are to us before driving your car into any more rivers." Skinner gave a grin.

"That's great coming from someone who drove his into a tree," Krycek grumbled, smiling. "Seriously, Walter, we've talked about me, and Mulder, but we also need to talk about you."

"Me?" Skinner frowned.

"Yes. When you were missing we realised how much we'd been leaning on you. That isn't fair. You don't just exist to take care of us and our needs. No wonder you felt you needed some breathing space from us. In future, you can't let it get this bad before something snaps. What you did was drastic but necessary. Just because you're the oldest, to say nothing of being the most reliable and responsible, doesn't mean that you have to take care of us all the time. You're entitled to lean on us for support every now and again – and it shouldn't take a spanking to bring you to the level where you can ask for that."

"I'm fine. It won't happen again..." Skinner began but Mulder cut him off.

"No, Walter, it won't," he said firmly. "But only because you'll talk about the stuff that's going on in your head before it explodes and costs the Bureau a car and a cellphone, and your ass a whipping. Understood?"

Skinner's jaw dropped open in surprise. "Yes, Mulder," he said meekly.

"Good. Well, gentlemen, I think we've all done pretty well facing up to ourselves today," Mulder beamed. "I'd suggest a group hug but I wouldn't want you to kill me. However...perhaps I can ask if we're done here? Because you know, if we are, then seeing Walter kneeling here butt naked, and not having had sex for three days...well, I'm kind of horny."

"Oh, I think we're done," Alex agreed with a grin.

"My butt's sure as hell done," Skinner said ruefully. "You did a good job there, Mulder."

"I learned from the best."

Mulder leaned forward, pulled Skinner up to face him, and then kissed the other man's lips. Skinner felt Alex slide behind him, his already hard cock nudging at Skinner's hot ass through his jeans. A trail of wet kisses down his spine made him shiver, and then he felt hands on his cock, caressing him to full erection.

"You two are overdressed for this party," Skinner muttered weakly, and Mulder grinned, and slid off the couch and onto his knees.

"No, Walter, this time it's all about you...just hold still, big guy, and prepare for some hot monkey loving. We missed being able to play with this gorgeous body."

Skinner's reply was cut off, when, as if by some unspoken signal, Alex dipped his fingers deep, and probingly into his ass, just as Mulder enveloped his cock in his warm mouth. Skinner gave a hoarse shout as his two lovers efficiently brought him to climax between them, Alex's fingers working in time to Mulder's mouth. Then he sank back in Krycek's arms, with Mulder's face on his chest, wondering in that moment if he was the luckiest man alive and shuddering to think what he had so nearly given up. He caressed the dark head in front of him, and the arm of the man holding him lovingly from behind.

"Oh, I think they do, Mrs Stebbings," he murmured, with a satisfied smile. "They really do."

The End

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