Pæan to Priapus VII  a multi-media slash anthology

Circumference
by M. Fae Glasgow
This is set very much during the Scully cancer arc. As with so many other things I’ve written over the past couple of years in particular, this story owes a great deal to conversations with friends (who know who they are and how much they are appreciated). We were talking about the ills of grafting a kink or favorite story-type onto characters with complete disregard for characterization, then began musing on what mainstays of other fandoms would, or could, or we wished would work with Skinner/Mulder. Play guess the fandom with this one: your only hint (& the only one you’ll need!) is that the working title was Pon Farr!
under his shoes; Walter Skinner assumed his agents wouldn’t be letting anyone walk through anything toxic, so the vile yellow ooze must be harmless, despite the smell. He pushed at a door; grabbed it as the hinges gave way, propped it quietly against the pock-marked wall.

Skinner made his way around a toppled caretaker’s cart, pushed aside a chair that appeared to have been hurled some distance and followed the sound of raised voices.

“…goddamned idiot Spooky Mulder telling me what to do!”

“Agent Mulder is not trying to usurp your position, sir, he’s simply—”

“You always do his dirty work for him, missy? I heard you had him by the balls, I guess that means he’s got no balls and you—”

Skinner pushed the standard laboratory door open, silence falling immediately. As the coterie of agents in the trashed room turned to him, he said very quietly, “Is there a problem?”

Obviously a nasty situation: Scully had clamped her mouth shut and her fists were tight little balls held carefully down at her
sides as she faced off the worst tin-Hitler in Skinner’s entire purview.

“Agent Davidson?” Skinner asked, still quiet.

Assistant Special Agent-In-Charge George Davidson swallowed audibly, then flicked a glance at the stony-faced Agent Scully, who was giving him no help at all. Good woman, Skinner thought, watching as Davidson shifted uneasily, unable to look at Mulder without also turning his back on Skinner. And idiot though Davidson was, Skinner didn’t think the man was fool enough to turn his back on an assistant director who was speaking very slowly and very quietly. Especially not when the assistant director had the reputation Skinner had so thoroughly earned over the years.

“Uh—Thank you for coming, Mr. Skinner, sir.”

Kiss-ass, Skinner thought, not that he’d allow such a personal opinion parking space on his face. He hated toadies with a passion, and Davidson—and his friends in high places—were spectacular examples of the species.

Eyeing the assistant director warily, Davidson stood at his tallest.

“Yes, sir, there’s a problem. Sir, Agent Mulder is refusing to obey orders—”
Skinner was still dangerously quiet, a small frown appearing between his eyebrows as he looked at Mulder. “Agent Mulder?” Mulder slanted an apologetic glance down towards Scully, met by her furious glare. “He’s telling the truth, sir.” Scully, breaking in to do her usual damage control. “Technically, sir, yes—” Skinner stopped her mid-spiel, his attention going entirely to Mulder. “The instructions you decided not to follow, Agent Mulder?” Mulder pushed himself away from the wall, his white shirt speckled with multi-hued dots and splatters, the sleeves rolled up, tie loosened, his hair mussed: enough to get Mulder written up by most ASACs even before the usual insubordination set in. Certainly more than enough to set Davidson off. Mulder was playing with a pen, fingering it, putting it down, putting his hands into his pockets. “The ASAC here, sir, believes we should close this up, let the clean-up crew come in.” “And you disagree with this?” “Disagree, sir? Sir, Spooky here—” Cold glare, quiet voice, Davidson subsiding immediately as

Davidson looking daggers at Mulder, canning it when he caught the expression on Skinner’s face. “Ah, it’s a nickname, sir.” Skinner didn’t say anything. He didn’t need to.

After a moment, nearly squirming under Skinner’s glare, Davidson cleared his throat and continued: “Sir, Agent Mulder was instructed that we were wrapping up this investigation. At that point, sir, Agent Mulder then informed me that my decision was wrong and based on misinformation and misunderstanding,” Davidson’s voice rising a little in remembered fury. “When I repeated my instructions as Assistant Special-Agent-in-Charge,” a heavy emphasis that did nothing to impress an assistant director nor, apparently, the two special agents in the room, “that the investigation was over, Agent Mulder once again refused to obey my instructions and replied,” Davidson took his notebook out, flipped to a page where he’d scribbled some notes: probably the list of chores his wife had given him, Skinner thought uncharitably. Probably something that had nothing to do with Mulder, but Davidson no doubt thought flicking through his notes would
make it look good, would get Mulder burned by by-the-book

tight-ass Skinner.

‘—your investigation is over, Davidson, but mine isn’t. You
can’t authorize the clean-up, you can’t close this site, and if you
get in my way, I’ll get my SAC, Assistant Director Skinner to tell
you the same thing.’ Sir.”

Davidson’s expression was disgustingly smug, and he did turn
then, staring at Mulder.

Well, if Davidson was waiting to see Mulder’s face when
Skinner ripped Mulder a new asshole, Davidson was in for a big
surprise. Skinner watched, mildly amused, as Davidson’s face
blanched when Skinner said, to Mulder: “An X-File?”

“Sir,” Davidson said, and he was red-faced now, probably from
trying not to yell at an assistant director, “he refused direct
instructions—”

“Yes,” Mulder was saying to Skinner as if Davidson hadn’t spo-
ken. “The yellow viscous fluid appears to be related to fluid
we’ve found at other sites, some of the files on some of the older
disks tie in with other…medically-associated investigations,” and
Skinner filed away the quick look Mulder gave Scully: filed it
away and recognized which case Mulder must be referring to. “Other files indicate the active research was on mind control, drugs to remove normal inhibitions—”

A muffled snort and a muttered “Sex drugs!” from Davidson, completely ignored by Mulder.

“—and there are other anomalies that mark this as an X-File, sir.”

Skinner ignored Davidson too. “Agent Scully?”

“We found evidence that some of the completed work here was connected to an earlier case which involved unsanctioned applications and treatments of various terminal illnesses,” and her voice did not tremble at all, “and it seems that while the current research is not lethal, if the reagents are applied, the results would be phenomena which I prefer not to codify until further study has been done on all of the documentation and the various fluids found.”

He lifted his shoe, goop dripping. “And this yellow goo?”

“Appears to be an inert medium used to transport as yet unanalyzed formulae, sir. The dangerous solutions would be clear and the other—”
Another mutter from Davidson.
“—would probably be cloudy white or cream.”
“I’ll be careful what I step in. Davidson, stand your team down; check with Agent Mulder if he’s going to need any of them to stay.”
“Sir,” Agent Davidson started, “Mulder was insubordinate—”
Perhaps he should feel just a smidgen of guilt at taking pleasure in putting Davidson so firmly in his place, but this was a rare pleasure, to be savored. “Agent Mulder prevented destruction of an investigation site pending authorization of an X-File.”
“But sir, Agent Mulder—”
“Send me a report, Davidson,” he said, allowing himself a sharp edge and a glare at Davidson. “Mulder, I expect this case to be closed with all appropriate speed.”
“Yes, sir.” Mulder didn’t even bother looking at Davidson.
“Agent Scully?” Skinner indicated the corridor and Scully stepped through, so tiny beside him.
Before he could say anything to her, Scully was speaking: “Davidson was determined to undermine Mulder from the start, sir. He insulted Mulder and—”
“Put it in your report, Agent Scully. This investigation—is it connected to your decision to pursue your own cancer treatment?”

She looked up at him, looked away almost immediately. “We hope so, sir.”

“Then remind Mulder that his instructions are to close this with all appropriate speed. Take what time you need, Scully.”

A flicker of something in her eyes, the vulnerability immediately hidden away, her fingers almost completely steady as she tucked her hair behind her ear. “Thank you, sir.”

What else could be said? She turned back to the lab, Skinner turned back towards the exit, ending the moment, when they both heard the sounds of a struggle—a shared glance for a split second, until they realized the noise wasn’t coming from Davidson and Mulder. Guns drawn, running down the corridor, Skinner keeping a cautiously moderate pace, Scully running full pelt to keep up with him, no hint of breathlessness in her voice as she filled Skinner in. “Three teams searched the entire building, they were still checking out the basement and the roof.”

“Sounds like they found someone.”
In the stairwell, a figure in FBI jacket—a flash of blue and yellow, fair hair flopping—tumbled down, Scully dropping to one knee to check him, Skinner climbing the stairs. Behind him, the stair door slamming open again, Mulder’s voice; above him, yells to stop, freeze, Federal Agents, and the clatter of shoes on concrete. A man in a white coat, a caricature of the mad scientist, hair wild, eyes wilder, words screaming incoherently from him came bolting down the stairs: no weapon, hands empty. Skinner simply grabbed him, twisted him into a half-nelson, nearly lifted the man off his feet.

More words, or numbers, or something, screamed, spittle flying, the man twisting and turning and kicking. Impossible to put more pressure on the maniac’s throat, not if he wanted to avoid an investigation into a suspect’s death, so Skinner reached for the man’s arms. More shouts and clattering feet, the rest of the team getting there, taking over for him—then someone slipping up, someone screwing up, and the cartoon-figure was loose. Something bright and shiny in berserker’s hand, a fluster of movement, and then the lunatic was flailing at Skinner, grabbing at Skinner’s hand. The needle went into the back of his hand at an angle,
pointing up towards his wrist, burning, burning, acid going into him, needle breaking off jaggedly, as the maniac jolted.

The man’s eyes were wild for another moment, as he was lifted up and backwards by unseen force, turning as he fell, blood splattering over the wall beside Skinner, the crack of gunshot fading slower than life.

Skinner swallowed every word he really wanted to say, forced his voice to calmness, started getting this mess under control.

The snap of latex, Scully taking his hand, Mulder’s eyes dark, mouth tight, Scully’s hands and voice cool as she murmured something about it only hurting for a second, the needle-shard pulling out hotter than it went in. The syringe was bagged, Scully taking it from Mulder, looking at the murky, creamy contents in the light. While Skinner was giving out terse instructions to get this mess cleared up and the situation properly assessed and reported, Mulder and Scully were quietly discussing analyses, computer hard drives, files and disks, familiar names—Pendrell, Frohike, Langly, Byers—dropped amongst the technobabble.

Minutes were passing, and Davidson still hadn’t done more than fuss over Skinner and holler ineffectually and demeaningly
at his team. Skinner gathered an appropriate remark that would leash Davidson without undermining the position of ASAC, but the words were... were... Scully and Mulder murmuring together drew his attention.

Scully was looking at Skinner, exchanging a look with Mulder, and that constrained concern was far more worrying than the vocal fretting everyone else was doing.

“We have doctors on site,” Skinner said, just to shut Davidson up, “I’ll go to the hospital as soon as this situation is under control.” He paused just for a second, but Scully didn’t contradict him: good. No immediate deadly danger, common sense would be enough for now. “Or if I feel any symptoms.”

His hand itched suddenly, more important than anything else for just a moment, but then that faded, too. To be expected, but he’d keep an eye on it in case it was an allergic reaction.

He went over to the team involved in the shooting, was pleased by the quiet efficiency of the team leader; filed the woman’s name away for future reference. There were medical people doing what they had to do, even though any layman could tell that Mulder’s mad scientist was far beyond help.
Behind him, he could hear Scully, but she sounded...different. Then again, everyone sounded different, whispering, murmuring, the cold clear words so at odds with the husky voices whispering at him. Mulder was still there, hadn’t ditched her, no, she was ditching him, cold words about science and medicine and expertise and training, but as Skinner neared his agents, her perfume struck him as warm, warm and delicate in a way she never permitted herself to be. She was so small, beside Mulder, who wasn’t really all that big, not as far as Skinner was concerned. Mulder wasn’t small, no, the shoulders were broad, but Mulder still seemed slim, a reed, a willow, bending in the wind, never breaking—

The burst of fanciful thought unnerved him; Skinner shook his head, dizziness grabbing for him but Mulder was there first, catching him.

“Sir? Are you all right?”

“Ye—” The automatic response of the guy in charge, but this was Mulder and Scully and that changed it. “No. I feel...” Warm. Hot. Hot tub, naked flesh, slipping beneath the hot, bubbling water, touching—
Scully’s cool hands taking his, examining where the broken needle had been taken out. “Have they found out what he injected you with, sir?”

Small hands, cool, she’d be warm elsewhere, under the curve of her breasts, between her legs, she’d be warm there, hot and moist and wet and— She was looking at him, professional concern, personal concern behind that.

She was staring at him intensely, making it harder for him to think beyond the blueness of her eyes and the when she started speaking, he couldn’t see beyond the plump lushness of her lips. “Have they been informed as to the nature of the compound? Have they figured it out yet, sir?”

What the hell was she talking about? It took time to analyze these things, days, or weeks, not… Had it been that long since the needle had penetrated him? “Not yet. Strange, degrading—”

Another exchanged look between Mulder and Scully. “Then it must have been very unstable if it’s degrading so quickly—”

Not what he meant. Strange, degrading, standing here with his cock hard and he thought his mouth was open, but at least he wasn’t panting.
“—which would make sense, if we’re 100% right about the research he was doing here,” Mulder was finishing for her.

Mulder and Scully, a perfect team. Perfect team. She’d disappear under him, red hair tangled on the pillow, in his hands, and Mulder on top of her, ass clenching as he fucked her and if he himself walked in at that moment, if he were sitting there watching them, he could get up on the bed beside Mulder, put a hand between them, feel the heat and the hardness and the wetness and the softness. Get his fingers wet, use that to open up Mulder’s ass, slide into him, yeah, slide into Mulder, fuck Mulder fucking Scully—

Horrified, he pushed the fantasies aside; what the hell was he thinking? He was on the job, he was working, he was— Shit. “I’m experiencing symptoms,” Skinner said, Mulder and Scully looking at each other before they looked at him.

Mulder, shifting uneasily, ducking his head. “What symptoms, sir?”

That’s what Scully had been asking him, about what the others knew, if the others knew what compounds the bastard scientist had been working on. Mulder and Scully knew: fuck, they both knew—
Knowing, very knowing, both of them, so knowing, so—Skinner squared his shoulders, his face twisting into a near grimace, all the cues and clues swimming groggily through the drug’s effects to the surface of his mind. “I think you can both make educated guesses as to the symptoms.”

Of course they could. They’d been here for hours before Skinner got here, they’d been tracking this guy for weeks, they knew, dammit to hell and back, they knew, that was why Scully hadn’t insisted on hospitalization and full medical stand-by precautions—how much was this goddamned drug affecting him?

It had been… Skinner had to actually think to read the time displayed on his watch and to work out how long it had been. Thirty minutes. It had been thirty minutes since that bastard had stuck him, Davidson jabbering on at him like an overprotective mother ever since, shit, the last thing he wanted was Davidson realizing that the ‘sex potion’ worked, he needed to—

“Get him out of here, Mulder,” Scully said, digging into her pocket and handing Mulder car keys. “I’ll keep checking the files to make sure that’s the only thing Valentine—” she couldn’t quite suppress a tiny wince at the name, “was working on, just in case.
You keep Davidson and the rest away from Skinner, I’ll keep them from finding out the stuff works. I’ll call you.”

An immediate nod of agreement—how does she get Mulder to do that, Skinner thought, losing track of that because now he was watching the rise and fall of her jacket front, eyes sliding to the pale perfection of her throat, the redness of her lips, the whiteness of her teeth, the pinkness of her tongue and—

She was still speaking, although Skinner obviously wasn’t hearing more than half of it. Visibly, Skinner brought himself back to the here and now. “I need to give Davidson some final instructions, then Mulder, you can drive me back to DC.” Caught the question in Mulder’s eyes, had no idea what Mulder was actually asking. “I’m not going to tell Davidson the details, Mulder. I’ll tell him the truth, that whatever that was, it causes dizziness and I’m not stupid enough to drive. Scully, you can drive my car back—” if she could get the seat forward far enough, those little legs, those perfect little legs in her silky hose and— Shit, he wasn’t a teenager, he could control this. He took a deep breath, focused, concentrated hard. “Leave it at the office.”

Without bothering to wait for their acknowledgments, he left to
talk to Davidson—“I’m fine, this damned stuff’s making me dizzy” dismissal, and he was out of there before his mind fuzzed over again. Outside at last, and he was speaking—fairly coherently, no distractions in a lump of plastic and wires—to his secretary on his cell phone all the way to Mulder’s car.

But then the calls were finished, and it was just the two of them, sitting side by side in the car. The faint smell of hair-warmed conditioner—or mousse or gel or whatever, Skinner wasn’t exactly an expert on hair products, or maybe it was aftershave, or cologne—he didn’t know what the hell it was, but damn, it smelled good.

Inviting.

The not so faint smell of sunflower seeds, and the rhythmic crack, crunch, munch of Mulder’s oral fixation. Full lips, strong jaw, such a generous jaw, even more generous mouth, bet it could open good and wide and—


Knowing.

No comments, not a single smart-ass remark, just Mulder pulling
into the gas station, sitting there, looking at Skinner with—fuck it—sympathy, or pity, or something, but knowing.

The car door slammed like a kid denied a birthday party, and Skinner stalked off.

Several minutes later; Mulder was inside the mini-mart, paying for the gas he’d filled up with—no point in wasting time—and the cherry Slurpee that was happily causing brain-freeze when Skinner came stomping back in, stopping dead in his tracks at the sight of Mulder leaning nonchalantly against the counter. Sucking, hard, on that red straw.

The scowl on Skinner’s face smoothed down into his habitually controlled expression, the bathroom key was handed over to the clerk with a nod and a strained “thanks,” then Skinner was stalking out of there, leaving Mulder to follow if he chose.

Outside in the sunshine, walking side by side back to the car, Mulder taking long strides to keep up, tense silence between them.

Mulder sidled a look at Skinner and apparently decided not to voice any of his infamously facetious remarks, which was, Skinner decided, battening down the hatches, a damn good thing.
Back in the car, Skinner clicked the radio on, pressing the preset buttons, finger tapping on the ‘scan’ button, bombarding them with tiny snatches of songs, ads, chat. Skinner snapped the radio off, leaned back stiffly against the back of his seat, and stared unsociably out of the window.

Exuding ‘do not touch.’

Mulder gave Skinner another look. “So it didn’t help, sir?”

Brief glare: “No, it didn’t fuc—”

Deep breath, hands shoved deeply into coat pockets, then the coat pulled closed across his lap, Skinner turned his withering glare on the scrubby roadside bushes. “No,” he finally said after another deep breath. What felt suspiciously like a blush seemed to creep across Skinner’s cheekbones. “The dizziness is gone, and the confusion. Now I’m just—” Swallow. Breathe. Go on. “The files you and Scully went through. Did they say anything about...about this effect?”

Mulder shifted in his seat; Skinner’s gaze drifted, drawn to the movement of Mulder’s thighs.

“According to the files, Valentine thought the—ah—effects would last 24 to 48 hours. The degree of...effect would vary in
intensity in different subjects. According to the notes he made on previous…test subjects, the increase in—” Mulder politely chose that moment to change lanes, looking ever so conscientiously in his rear and side mirrors and nowhere near Skinner. “The increase in libido and the decrease in inhibitions varied dramatically, and he was working on controlling the effects through dosage and variations in the components.”

Skinner’s voice was very dry. “I’ll be sure to write up a report for him.”

A small smile from Mulder, a reward, and an invitation for Skinner to take refuge in the absurd humor of the situation. Unfortunately, Skinner didn’t get beyond the ‘invitation’ part. That smile, the way one side of Mulder’s mouth kicked up higher than the other, crow’s feet appearing around Mulder’s eyes, shifting him from pretty boy to mature man with boyish charm, that guilelessness the greatest beguilement of all.

Skinner crossed his legs, immediately thought better of that, his left thigh squeezing his cock so nice and tight and hot against his right thigh. He slumped down in his seat, caught the flicker of Mulder’s glance: oh fuck. He sat up straight enough to please
even his Grandma S, twisted round a little, turning his body as far away from Mulder as he could.

Bet Mulder could still see his erection. That was it: no more light grey suits for him.

But Mulder could wear grey suits any time he wanted. The groan filled his throat like a cock, and he coughed, covering it. But he couldn’t cover up the image—God help him, he couldn’t cover up the memory: Mulder, in Skinner’s office, sitting opposite him, the desk between them, and there, between Mulder’s thighs, the heavy weight of cock, lax, filling the crotch of the impeccably tailored suit. And after the dressing down, Mulder standing, his cock pushing at the front of his pants, Mulder turning away, his cock following a second behind, big, heavy, pressing against those pants. He’d seen Mulder half hard, that gorgeous, glorious feeling of potency and promise, and brought on by what?

Mulder turned sharply at the thump of Skinner’s fist on the dashboard.

No questions, though. Who’d have thought Mulder capable of this level of discretion? Skinner dug his hands deeper into the pockets of his coat, twisted sideways a little and crossed his legs
again, flexing his thigh muscles even though he shouldn’t. For fuck’s sake he was sitting in a car with another man—sharp-eyed, sophisticated, knowing Mulder—with a hard-on, this close to embarrassing himself by blowing his load all over his pants, but Mulder wasn’t complaining and—

He forced his legs apart, sat there very properly, and chewed the inside of his mouth until it hurt. The drug. Anti-inhibitant, more effective than alcohol and with none of the brewer’s droop, just this heat, fire, burning, his pulse, beat, beat, beat…

He sounded embarrassingly hoarse even to himself. “How long before we get back to Washington?”


Too long. No way could he last that long. Already, his balls were shifting, crawling hungrily up to snuggle into the heat of his cock, his underwear cupping him, tight, now, tight, warm, and maybe Mulder would continue this shocking discretion enough to look away while Skinner reached in and adjusted himself, not letting his hand linger, touching just enough to get the head of his cock out from under the band of his underwear.
A sharp intake of breath, echoing, and it took Skinner a moment to realize it was Mulder breathing in with him.

Guess Mulder’s discretion had its limits.

But—

It didn’t matter that he was sitting not two feet from another man; didn’t matter that it was one of his own agents, didn’t matter that it was Mulder with his dangerously loose grip on convention-alism: Skinner finished moving his cock, fingertips slick with his own pre-ejaculate. Slick as saliva, slick as if Mulder had been sucking him, Mulder bent down, leaning over, wide mouth wide open, wet, sucking—

Mulder leaned over, and Skinner’s hands rose; shook, as he pushed them back into his pockets.

Probably having no idea how close they’d just come to disaster—driving and giving head weren’t exactly a recommended combo—Mulder took the map from the glove box.

Skinner couldn’t stop himself from staring at Mulder’s fine hands. Big hands, positively manicured: they’d be smooth and strong on his cock, strong and flexible in his own hands, or gripping the edge of the desk, God, Mulder in that grey suit, boxers
not briefs, or sometimes, nothing at all, every step, every move, sitting spread-legged opposite him, the dry words of the report and the dry sounds of Mulder’s palms rubbing along the thighs of his pants—

It took him a second to realize Mulder had pulled into the parking lot of a hotel.

Took him longer to accept that no, he just didn’t have the… balls… right now to look at Mulder.

“I need a break,” Mulder said, sweetly casual.

Well, one of them did. And maybe Mulder needed a break from being trapped in a car with a sex-crazed boss who was looking at him with all the subtlety of a hungry lion.

The lobby of the hotel was crowded, overflowing with breasts and asses and long legs, some in trousers, some in stockings, all of them luscious and ripe and tasty and—

Deep breath. So he’d been drugged: he’d been drugged before. He’d ride this out—endure this the way his last bout with drugs had let him endure a war. He’d be fine: ten minutes alone in a bathroom and he’d be fine.

Okay, so ten minutes alone in a bathroom every half hour, and
he’d be fine, and as far as he was concerned, the gas station stop had been an aberration, due to nothing more than the initial surge of chemicals through him. It would be better this time. This time, it would work, it would not leave him still hard and desperate.

He hoped to hell his dick was listening to him.

Mulder nodded towards the right: the restrooms. Only half a crowd to squeeze through to get there: he could do that without groping someone. Easy.

By the time he’d locked himself in one of the stalls, he was sweating, his hands shaking, barely able to get his zipper down, his cock leaping into his hand, aching, painfully aroused, the cooling sweat of his palm such a benediction—

A child’s voice, calling out to his daddy, the man answering, the boy knocking on the stall doors, and by the time daddy was half-way through his lecture on the etiquette of the public bathroom and why it was wrong to look under the stall doors, Skinner was half-way out the bathroom, the boy’s small voice asking why the man hadn’t flushed.

Mulder saw him immediately, and straightened up from his slouch against the corner, striding towards him, rapidly finishing
up his conversation, his cell phone flipped closed just as he reached Skinner.

“Sir?”

The compound was definitely degrading. “A room,” Skinner said, hating the breathlessness of his own voice and the rawness of his need. “Get me a room.”

Mulder’s face growing very still, thoughtful, then one of Mulder’s near smiles. “I’ll take care of everything, sir.”

Horribly uncomfortable, Skinner followed carefully, weaving through the people, eyes focused heavily on the breadth of Mulder’s shoulders. Mulder’s voice stroked him, warmed by a smile Skinner could hear but couldn’t see, while the clerk was so eager to please this handsome man. Skinner’s gaze lost Mulder, focusing in obsessively on the clerk. Nice smile, pretty face, long blonde hair pulled back with one of those godawful bows, but then, that wouldn’t be there for long once he got his hands on her. Natural blonde, too, with pale eyebrows and freckles, pale blue eyes and pink, glossy lips.

She was talking, not that Skinner was listening, because the tip of her tongue showed pink and wet, and her chest rose and fell as
she breathed. She was plump, with beautiful full breasts: they’d overflow his hands, or be perfectly soft around him, when he fucked her between her tits, the tip of his cock touching her chin with every stroke—

He forced himself to look away before she noticed him. Damn it, she was barely 20 if she was a day, and he was looking at her like that? He was old enough to be her father and—

Mulder taking him by the arm, turning him, heading them for the elevator, Mulder calling out: “Hold it!”

Mulder pushing him in first, eight or nine people in the elevator car, a whirlpool of perfume and aftershave, of musk and sweetness, a woman’s breasts pressed into his back, until he swore he could feel them, even through his coat. Someone moved, and he heard the rustle of their clothes, his mind providing the heated image of legs moving together. Male, female, it didn’t matter; clad in cloth or hose, it didn’t matter. Legs leading up to crotch, wet and welcoming, or hard and welcoming, it didn’t matter. He wanted them, all of them, and it didn’t matter that the polished steel walls distorted them, he could see them, every person locked in there with him, locked up in their clothes, their warm
skin so close, so very, very close. The elevator stopped, a 30ish man in sweats getting in and standing right in front of him, a high, firm ass, rounded, perfect, begging to be squeezed.

At the last moment, his hand lurched, spastic, jerked away from where it wanted to go and forced, instead, to press the call button, his voice rough as he muttered his apology for ‘accidentally’ brushing the man’s ass.

Pushing his way free, his own hands fighting him, trying to reach out to stroke, to caress, to pinch and fondle, coming damned close to succeeding, the impulse to touch almost—almost—getting there before sheer willpower could stop it.

The corridor was blessedly empty, apart from an equally blessedly silent Mulder, and the metal of the elevator frame was just as blessedly cool against his forehead. He was burning; red-faced, from lust, from shame.

It took two attempts to get words out past the pulsing stream of what he wanted to do to anyone who’d stand still long enough. “I’m going to take the stairs.”

Sympathy on Mulder’s face, and understanding. Knowing, again.
“It’s several floors, sir. I think you’ll be more comfortable if we get another elevator.”

His cock ached at the thought of several clothing-chafed floors and he conceded the wisdom of Mulder’s suggestion. And before he could stop it, the speculation slinked through his mind, endless pictures of just exactly how Mulder knew how it would feel to walk up stairs when his cock was hard between his legs. The ‘up’ arrow lit with a sickening shade of green and he tried to think about that, could only compare the arrow to an upright cock, a Priapus, a stone-hard cock, never soft, always ready, like him, just like him.

The first two cars were no-gos: at this stage, he wasn’t sure he trusted himself with his own aged grandmother, let alone hapless tourists and business travelers. The third, finally, was empty, and he stepped into it with all the dignified pride he could muster. Mulder was being suspiciously well-behaved about all of this, but that was no reason to skulk around cradling his aching balls in front of him.

The elevator positively crawled upwards. Or perhaps this was just a modern-day American variation on the ancient Chinese art
of water torture. The ping of the floors passing was drowned out by the loudness of Mulder breathing. By the hiss of clothes as Mulder moved. By the wetness of Mulder eating another sunflower seed. By the smell of Mulder. Not just the shampoo or whatever, but the smell of the man himself. Another side-effect of the drug concoction, no doubt, but Skinner swore under his breath as the intoxication of the faint smell of Mulder’s body wafted through him, coiling tighter and tighter and tighter round his cock. His hips thrust forward, once, before he caught himself, the small of his back aching with the suppressed imperative to thrust. To fuck, to take Mulder and thrust into him, to fuck him with his cock, deep, hard, right here, in the elevator, sliding up the shaft—

Hand on his shoulder, making him shiver; breath against the back of his neck, making his eyes shiver shut; the heat of Mulder at his back making him bite his lip and clench his fists against the fire consuming him, flames licking him, as he licked at Mulder, and consumed him, his cock devoured by Mulder’s body—

He pulled free, stepping forward, fists clenched, white-knuckled, against the chill and the smoothness of the elevator doors. A
sound from behind him, Mulder stepping forward too, far too close behind him.

“Don’t,” Skinner said, and heard the naked pleading in his own voice. “Don’t.”

So gentle. Gentle as a first innocent kiss. “Why not?”

Skinner laughed at that. Laughed out loud, laughed until his belly ached as much as his cock.

As if Mulder needed to be told why not. As if neither of them knew why not—as if the ‘why nots’ hadn’t kept them from laying a finger on each other from the very beginning.

The elevator pinged their destination, door opening on a forest green corridor. Mulder was still right there, walking beside him, looking at him, long fingers touching the cuff of his coat, stopping him outside one of the endless parade of doors standing there like soldiers at attention.

What was that old saying about being horny enough to fuck a knot-hole in a fence, Skinner thought, half-dazed by lust, by the drug.

The door closed safely behind him: nobody tempting him in here, nobody to be appalled or frightened by him losing control.
Nobody to be raped.
He wouldn’t do that.
Couldn’t.
Could he?
Could the drug loosen control that far? Destroy him that much?
He didn’t want to think about that.
Voice whispering seduction in his ear: “Why not?”
Nearly losing his balance as he whirled around. Not alone after all, somebody in here to more than tempt him: Mulder, looking at him so openly, so… willingly.
He had to swallow twice before he could answer. “You know why not.”
Elegant shrug, lithe movement hinting at what awaited anyone who took Mulder to bed. “We’re not working. We’re not in Washington. There’s no way anyone could have bugged this room—no one would ever know.”
Obvious answer to that. “We’d know.”
Ragged smile, tugging at his heart. “We could always delude ourselves. I could give you lessons.”
“We can’t.”
Steady, very nearly sad, eyes. “Why not?”
Because...because...when he was lucid, he knew why not.
Right now—Right now he had to back up, remember what he
knew when he was thinking with his brain and not his cock.
Mulder licked his lower lip.
“Out!”
And which of them was the more surprised by that roar?
“Get out!” He was pushing and shoving, desperate to get
Mulder out of there, to be rid of the repercussions of Mulder
staying, of having Mulder, of having what he’d wanted for so
damned long. But Mulder was struggling back, giving him the
hungry press of muscle against his own, Mulder’s mouth open,
protesting probably, saying something, probably, but all he could
see was that open mouth, open for him to kiss or to feed it his
cock, open and—
It was the drug. It was the drug and not him, he was not like
this, he was not a wild animal in rut. A heave, and the door was
opened, Mulder stumbling up against the opposite wall of the
corridor.
Door slamming. Head against it. Plastic in-case-of-fire notice
slick against him, the paint with the faint traces of brush strokes, and all of it so hard and smooth against his cock.

But he was alone. Alone, and safe.

He pushed himself upright, and headed for the bathroom. His cock was darker than he'd ever seen it, engorged, overfed with the heat and the bulk of his own blood. Too sensitive, almost, to be touched, but he had to touch it, had to stroke it. He spat into his palms, folding both hands around his cock, thrusting into that make-believe body, the images cascading in his head, flashes of people, the swell of a breast, the blade of a cock—

He came, joylessly, the spurt and pulse of his semen stinging unpleasantly, his balls still feeling too full, his cock unsatisfied, staying hard, only the color fading a little bit more towards normal. He stroked his own come across his cock, wincing, but needing the touch, needing to come again. Needing to do something about this black and bitter ache taking hold of him.

It invaded him, inside, far inside, in the hollows of his heart and the whispering moors of his mind. Black and bitter and weeping, even as his cock stayed hard, and what should have been pleasure faded into a dull, miserable dissatisfaction.
It wasn’t until he heard the door opening that he questioned why he hadn’t put on the deadbolt.

Reluctantly, he straightened; zipped his pants up, even though the susurration of fabric against his cock hurt now; walked carefully back into the bedroom, where Mulder was unloading the contents of a plastic bag. The dark head cocked in his direction, with pupils gone so large, Mulder’s eyes looked as brown as his own.

“Here,” Mulder said, tossing a clear bottle at him, the pink cap suitably nursery-ish.

Baby oil.

He should be embarrassed, but the angry ache of his cock sabotaged him. “Thanks,” he said, trying to sound grateful, knowing he sounded accusing.

“Don’t mention it.”

“Believe me, Agent Mulder, I have no intention of mentioning it.”

All right, so maybe it was a bit funny to cling to the formality of ‘Agent Mulder’ under the circumstances. But he was too old, and too horny, to risk calling anyone Fox right now.
Unbidden, the image flooded his mind and his cock: Mulder in skin-tight jeans and skin-tight shirt, open all the way to his waist, chest exposed, hair long enough to tangle a good handful of fingers in, jeans so tight over no underwear, cock long enough to fill a good handful or two. Mulder dancing like that, eyes dark under flashing lights, old, carefully forgotten drugs pulsing through them with the music—

He didn’t open his eyes. Didn’t dare. He could smell Mulder again, the hair stuff, the hint of soap, of sweat. Of lust. Desire. Need, hunger, wanting, wanting, yearning—

Whispered words, voice licking its way down his spine. “Why not?”

The reasons were fading with the echo of Mulder’s voice. But there were reasons; he wasn’t one of those men who claimed they just couldn’t help themselves. He wasn’t a teenager any more, he could control himself, he could get a grip on himself—

Mulder getting a grip on himself, naked on a bed, his bed, right here in this hotel room, Mulder naked and hard, one hand over his head, the other stroking his own cock, getting a grip, squeezing
his cock, Mulder’s hands over his head, the handcuffs gleaming and glimmering in the light, Mulder’s legs spread so wide, the dull satin glow of silk ties holding Mulder’s legs open, his own blue tie, Mulder’s dark grey, pale skin, dark hair, pale cock? Dark cock? Big, that much was certain, the eye weeping, slide his fingers over that, use it to slick up Mulder’s ass, opening to him, but tight, damn, Mulder would be tight—

Another whisper, even closer, liquid and limber as a tongue on his cock. “Why not? It’s what we both want.”

And that was the biggest ‘why not’ of all.

Skinner opened his eyes, and gazed, silently, at Mulder.

Saw the truth in Mulder’s eyes. No commitment, no strings, just tonight, just long enough to ride out this drug.

God, Mulder was a fool.

Nobody would know.

As if the two of them would ever forget.

As if they would ever again look at each other without remembering the other naked and abandoned to sex and honesty.

“I’ve already spoken to Scully,” in the lobby, who else would Mulder be talking to? “and to Kimberly. Told her you were
indisposed.” Another of those quirky smiles that begged to be kissed. “And in case anything leaks from the crime scene—”

His own cock, leaking, weeping, wet, ready—

“—I casually mentioned that unlike you, maybe she should be careful where she eats.”

Embarrassing, yes, but embarrassing in a way that no one was going to ask the boss about his ‘indisposition.’ Nowhere near as embarrassing as Davidson wondering if the boss had to stop on the way back with Mulder because of a mad scientist’s Love Potion No. 9.

Again, he had to clear his throat before he could speak. “Thanks. I’ll rent a car when I’m ready to come back to Washington.”

No smile quirking the lips, but warmth lighting the eyes. “I’m not leaving, sir.”

“Yes—”

“No.” A jerk of Mulder’s hand touching the baby oil in Skinner’s grip. “That isn’t helping.”

“That doesn’t mean I need one of my agents to…to…” Pulling away, letting the anger build, the fire of the anger mingling and meshing with the fire burning in his belly. “I can hire a prostitute—”
And Mulder didn’t need to say: ‘after the last time?’
No. He couldn’t hire a prostitute.
And no matter how smooth and easy the baby oil made it, flying solo wasn’t working.
There was no guarantee that having a co-pilot would make any difference either, every guarantee that it would change this between them forever. And absolutely no guarantee that he’d be able to keep on saying no, nor that he could get Mulder to see sense.
But he had to try. “Leave.”
“No.”
“Damn it, Mulder, get the fuck out!”
“Why?”
“Because—” words wriggling and squirming against his teeth, slithering out before he could stop them, more inhibitions biting the dust. “I don’t want you to see me like this.”
Such a gentle smile. Such a sweet smile.
So very, very dangerous.
“Too late,” Mulder whispered, leaning in closer, closer, his mouth a scant inch away, less, less—
Push him away. Refuse to care at the thump Mulder makes landing on the floor. Open the door. Push him again, push him out, get him away from here—

Hands grabbing his lapels, firm body against his, wrestling him, wrestling against him, resting against him—

Mind exploding in a pale cream buzz, his body taking over.

Grab, push, pull, turn Mulder to the wall, coat pushed up out of the way, belt fumbled, too many hands, Mulder helping, Mulder getting in the way of what he wanted, needed, now, right now, can’t wait, the fire in him burning and burning, pants and boxers pushed down, shirt and jacket and coat pushed up, strip of bare white flesh, dark crescent curving to split Mulder’s ass, his own clothes still in place, zipper rasping undone, cock free, pushing, pushing, slick, so slick, and easy—

Oh God, Mulder had lubed himself up; Mulder in a bathroom somewhere, slick fingers sliding up his own ass, making himself ready to be fucked—

Shove Mulder’s pants down lower, spread those legs wider, hot tight ass clutching him, clenching around him, Mulder’s neck tender between his teeth, salty against his tongue, Mulder pushing
back onto him, pushing into Mulder, pushing in and fucking him, heat and fire and burning and—

Surcease.

Fire pulsing from him, into the blessed softness that surrounded him, Mulder groaning, deep, deep, groan, vibrating all the way down, around Skinner’s cock, buried so deep inside him.

He could feel his own ejaculate slippery and cooling against his cock, and the shock of that nearly froze him. No condom? In this day and age? Mulder should be shot for letting someone do this to him. Even someone checked as regularly as a fellow bureau member.

Mulder’s voice was an astonishment of normality amidst this all. “You okay back there?”

A wriggle of hips, jiggling his balls up against the underside of Mulder’s ass, the hard edge of Mulder’s belt bumping against him, and the squeeze of Mulder’s ass teaching Skinner that whatever this drug was, it made a man perform miracles: his cock was still completely hard, a thick blade cleaving unto Mulder.

“Oh, yeah,” Mulder was saying, “you’re okay back there.” Another wriggle, and then Mulder was pulling off a little, pushing back down, fucking himself.
Skinner put his hands on the blunted points of Mulder’s hipbones, with the noble intention of extracting himself from Mulder, of getting them back to normal.

Felt his hand taken, and wrapped around a heated, silken hardness. Heard Mulder sigh. Felt Mulder buck, and begin to move. Oh, fuck, it was too late—

Mulder’s groan echoing his own, Mulder’s words echoing his thoughts. “It’s too late, Walter,” and dear God, what it did to him to hear Mulder call him by his first name, “might as well—” gasp, and thrust, “relax and—”

He filled his mouth with the lobe of Mulder’s ear; let go long enough to dip the tip of his tongue inside Mulder’s ear, the shudder of that traveling every inch of Mulder’s spine, all the way down to Skinner’s cock.

Too late, far too late, his control had long since fled like a virgin. “You like that?” he demanded of Mulder, fucking into him hard. “What d’you like more? My tongue or my cock?” He heard himself say all of it; wondered briefly if it was his own impulse or the side-effects of the drug. And did it matter any more?

Dear God, but it was too late. It was far too late.
Insidious voice, his own, or Mulder’s or the drug: so why fight it? “Yeah, you like that,” he said against the side of Mulder’s neck, his teeth nipping the soft skin below Mulder’s beard line, his cock thrusting up into Mulder’s ass, his hands tightening around Mulder’s own thrusting cock. “You love it, you love all of it, don’t you? You love being fucked—”

Mulder’s head tipping back, exposing more of his throat, the collars of his shirt and coat bunching up under his hair. “Yeah,” a long, throaty groan of satisfaction, “I love being fucked. Love being fucked—” high-pitched moan, and Skinner rubbed his fingers over Mulder’s balls, “by you—”

Mulder’s hands spreading against the wall, watch flashing in the lamp-light, head bowed, body braced, against the power of being fucked.

“You’re mine.”

God help him, but that was his own voice, snarling that. His voice, meaning that. His cock, making that true. He thrust again, even harder, his balls swinging up to bump against Mulder’s, his pubic hair pressing flat against the firmness of Mulder’s ass, the cool metal of his zipper against Mulder’s hot skin.
He felt it beginning, far inside, coiling and snaking and rushing and expanding—

Wetness back-splashing against his cock, Mulder groaning and pushing, needing more—

And then they were sliding down onto the floor in a tangle of coats and pants and hands, his cock softening just enough to slip free. He was aware of almost nothing, just hearing Mulder, feeling Mulder, Mulder’s arm moving in an only too familiar gesture.

“Let me,” he said and was more disturbed by the sweetness in his voice than by even the wild hunger of earlier. He and Mulder were in conflict against each other for a moment, Mulder assuming one thing, Skinner so lost to this that it took him a moment to realize Mulder hadn’t understood. And then, no common sense left, Skinner smiled as the thrill of realization dawned on Mulder’s face.

Mulder’s hands were shaking as he finally let go of Skinner’s hands, and those long thighs quivered as Skinner lowered his head and took Mulder into his mouth. He barely had time to taste Mulder, before his mouth was filled with whiteness and salt.

He mouthed Mulder’s cock, yielded it as Mulder twitched and pulled away. Too tender, he thought, filing that away for the next time.
There was a draft coming in under the door, and the sound of someone laughing.

Christ on a crutch, he’d fucked Mulder up against the door leading to a public hallway. The mad scientist’s potion obviously caused stupidity as well as inveterate lust.

“Come on, get up,” he said, struggling with complexities beyond getting to his feet, a sudden shock as he replayed his own thought of ‘next time.’ But then the drug whispered through his veins again, clouding thought, routing common sense and inhibition. Skinner sprawled there for a moment, then let his hand slide down to touch himself. The drug again, of course, for it couldn’t be him: he abandoned all other thought, to focus on getting to his feet, to hoisting Mulder up by one arm and to getting them where he wanted them to be. “Bed.”

On his way up from the floor, Mulder’s tongue darted out, flicking against Skinner’s cock—and the fire consumed him again.

The lights were off, the curtains drawn shut, the television was loud enough to blend with any noise they might make. As Skinner watched it, the bedside clock clicked to 9:31 PM. Seven hours.
They’d been in this room for over seven hours, and Skinner had let Mulder sleep for two hours and fifteen minutes.

For every one of those two hours and fifteen minutes, Skinner had lain in that anonymous hotel bed, and held Mulder. Held him, felt the evenness of his breathing, and endured his own slow burn of desire. And fear. Held onto his fear, and his control, and his inhibitions far more tightly than he held onto Mulder.

He’d tried to get up. He’d tried to leave.

Found that the best he could manage was to not fuck Mulder. He lay there, and watched the minutes pass, measuring time as he did battle with desires, carnal and otherwise.

He gave Mulder those two and a quarter hours, two and a quarter hours of something approaching self control. All he could manage, before the fear of who he needed was destroyed by the intensity of that same need.

In the dark, in silence, he knelt over Mulder, and took the sleeping cock into his mouth, nuzzling it, and Mulder, to wakefulness. The warm caress of a hand on the back of his neck, on the smooth skin of his head; the sweet, sleepy murmur of Mulder’s voice, welcoming him, encouraging him.
Of course, it was the drug making him do this. The drug, with its impact on libido and inhibitions.
Nothing else. Never anything else.
Mouth open, he made his way up the length of Mulder’s body: a last, reluctant farewell to the wakening cock, a lick across the sleepy warmth of Mulder’s belly, a sucking bite to a responsive nipple. Open kisses, up Mulder’s chest, to his neck, right up under the chin that was lifted for him, exposing the throat. Nice gesture, from a Fox.
He waited, just a moment, until Mulder lowered his chin and looked at him. Waited, just a moment longer, until he saw Mulder wondering what was going on. Slowly, he slid his body on top of Mulder, his erection rubbing against Mulder’s balls, along Mulder’s cock, across Mulder’s belly, a slick promise, a sliding desire. And then, with care, he leaned up on his elbows, his hips pressing his cock more firmly against Mulder’s, the sweet slithering slide, and he cupped Mulder’s face. Leaned down. Kissed him.
Long and slow.
As if it meant something.
As if it meant everything.
Kissing Mulder, and kissing him, with mouth and cock, with chest and belly, all of him touching all of Mulder, with Mulder’s arms hugging him so tight, and Mulder’s legs lifting to wrap around him so strongly, and Mulder’s cock so hard against him; Mulder’s ass so soft, soft as butter under the heat of his cock. It was so easy, to slide inside Mulder, Mulder still open and easy with the aftereffects of being fucked more than once already. Skinner relished this, these slow, easy undulations inside Mulder’s clinging, possessive heat. And through it all, the kissing, substitutes for the words he’d never say, if it weren’t for the drug.

And then even that battle was lost. All the words were there, spilling from him, beyond his control, let loose and free and completely beyond recall. Words he hadn’t believed for years—not when he was the one saying them.

But words he believed now. Words that frightened him, terrified him, and yet, were balm for his soul, for these were words that would bind Mulder to him stronger than any gold band.

And these were words he hadn’t known still lived in him.

He poured them out, voice rapid and soft as water, the words flooding him, flooding Mulder—flooding back into him, sprung
from Mulder’s mouth into him, returned to him, doubled, tripled, in equal measure, from one to the other and back again.

And later, in the darkness of the night, he took Mulder again, and held him, and said it all over again.

Skinner stumbled up from the depths of sleep at the phone ringing. He fumbled for the handset, heard the buzz of dialing tone, and in the background, more ringing, not this phone—

Mulder was swearing, clambering sulkily from Skinner’s arms, sifting through discarded, enmeshed clothing to find the cell phone.

“Mulder.”

Skinner sat on the edge of the bed, winced at the time displayed on the clock. Lunchtime? He had meetings today, he needed to speak to Kimberly—

Remembrance hit with all the delicacy of a sledgehammer to the balls.

Mulder was talking into the phone, glancing at him. “Skinner’s fine. Uh—he’s here.”
Even on the other side of the phone and the bed, Skinner heard Scully’s squeak.

“The effects—”

Mulder was looking at him, Skinner knew that, could feel the stare digging a hole between his shoulder blades.

“—have worn off, I think.”

His cock lay limply between his thighs, a small, pink thing, and just thinking about touching it made him wince. “Yes,” he said, steadily, for Mulder to report with abstract calm.

“Skinner says yes, the effects have worn off.”

Something said by Scully.

Skinner turned and looked at Mulder. Saw temptation warring with… something… in Mulder’s eyes. Dark lashes quivering as Mulder looked down, and away. “I don’t know. We’re in an Embassy Suites place, I took the couch.”

No one will know, Mulder had said.

Not even Scully.

Oh, God.

Skinner stood, grimacing as his back protested his recent
excesses. He could feel the pull of scratches on his back, from where he’d asked Mulder to—

The blush ambushed him, making him hot, and hideously aware of his nakedness.

Behind him, there was the small click of the phone being turned off, followed by the smaller sound of Mulder taking a deep breath.

“Scully wants to know if there are any side-effects now that the drug has worn off.”

It was hideously difficult to speak normally to Mulder, knowing what he did and what they’d done. “I’ll let her know.”

Skinner headed for the shower, intent on five minutes’ peace to get his head around what he’d done yesterday—and last night, and earlier this morning. What he’d said—oh fuck, what he’d said!

Mulder’s voice, as neutral as it had been on the phone to Scully, stopped Skinner. “Sir.”

Skinner turned, slowly, to look at Mulder. It was the least he could do, after what Mulder had let him do. After what Mulder just did, for him, with Scully.
“I uh—” Mulder was pulling clothes over himself, covering his lap. “I uh... You were under the influence of Valentine’s drugs, sir, I understand that. I just...uh...”

Skinner wished Mulder wouldn’t say it, not in the cold light of day.

But Mulder was brave, or foolish, or maybe there were traces of the drug in him now, after last night.

“You were under the influence. But I wasn’t. Sir.”

Skinner knew that of course; had known it for too long. Knew other things, too, now.

His face averted, Mulder was gathering up clothes, separating his own from Skinner’s.

“Mulder—”

“Sir?”

“You said no one would know.”

That hell-bent grin, those dark-shadowed eyes. “Know what, sir?”

“And I said that we would know.”

Mulder wasn’t even pretending to joke any more; he was serious now, hands stilled upon the wrinkled cotton and rumpled wool.
Skinner watched him, and wanted to run far, far away. Run and never stop running. Find a cave and bury himself in it. But that was the stuff of fairy tales, and this was real life. It was time to take a deep breath, to face what he’d done and shoulder his responsibilities. “I told you things…” Things he didn’t know if he could even deal with remembering in the harshness of reality.

It would be easy, so easy, to take the way out Mulder had offered him.

But he wasn’t a coward, unfortunately. Those hours with Mulder had been… Mulder had seemed… happy.

And not all of them had been under the complete influence of the drug.

For all his good intentions, he couldn’t actually say it. “I’m not usually… I don’t normally…”

Mulder got to his feet, graceful, lithe, even now, with bruises and bites covering him, from the times when need had overwhelmed finesse and honesty had overcome constraints. “What do you want, Walter?”

He wanted to scream and yell and rail against the injustice and
indifference of the world. He wanted to rip and rend the very fabric of society, and then stitch it together into a garment that fitted him better. He wanted the world and himself to be different. What he wanted was the impossible: he wanted plain, simple happiness in a world that was fair.

It was nothing more than wishful thinking: pointless, and ultimately self-destructive. The world was as it was, as it had always been: all he could do was deal with it, not fuss and fury like a teenager.

But then Mulder looked at him, the briefest glimmer of last night in his eyes before it was hidden away. “Tell me,” Mulder said, silken whisper of voice across his naked skin, the truth beneath Mulder’s generous, deceitful offer of amnesia, “just tell me what you want, Walter.”

Skinner rubbed his fingers over the crumpled mess of still-warm bed sheets. “I want…” No; too cruel to tell Mulder what he wanted when he wasn’t sure it could even be dreamed of between them. “I need to… figure this out. Make sense of… Time,” he finally said, lost for words. “I guess I need time.”

Mulder’s eyes narrowed, looking at him, assessing him.
Recognizing probably more than Skinner did himself, then Mulder was nodding, impassive, demanding nothing—the strain of that showing in the jump and spasm of muscle in his cheek. “Sure, no problem. Take as long as you need.” “Thank you.”

It was far more awkward now than it had been even during the worst of yesterday.

Skinner braced his shoulders, walking away. He could feel the weight of Mulder’s gaze lingering on him like a farewell kiss. The memory of what they’d done—what he’d trusted Mulder to take, what Mulder had trusted him enough to let him do—was dried and tight on his skin.

He needed a shower, to wash away the evidence. To wash away the memory.

Is that what he wanted?
Was it?
Fuck, no.
But what else could he do?
They couldn’t have a relationship.
Why not? Mulder’s voice whispered sabotagingly in his mind.
They’d be found out. They’d never be able to keep it secret. 

*Why not?*

It would be used against them. They’d never be able to keep it something to make them stronger and better together. 

*Why not?*

*Why not?*

Because the drug wasn’t wrapping him in its cozy little warm fuzzy blanket any more. 

Because the truth was out there. 

Because love wasn’t enough. Love on its own couldn’t be enough. Not for them, not in the world they lived in. 

*Why not?*

Because of what he’d already done, what he knew he’d do in the future, if he had to, sacrificing right if that’s what it took to win the war. 

Because of what last night meant to him. 

He wasn’t an animal, he wasn’t some heedless creature drunk on desire and sensation, he was a man, with responsibilities. 

One of whom was getting dressed in the next room, shoulders slumping under the weight of the morning after.
Why not.

Because the drug was no longer giving him any excuses, and reality was standing somewhere wreathed in a cloud of nicotine-smoke, just waiting to burn them.

That was why not.

Because what Mulder was doing was more important than last night.

That was why not.

Because…

Because…

Skinner slumped down on the floor, his forehead resting on his knees, arms clutched tightly around his legs, and he stopped himself, barely, from rocking back and forth in a search for comfort that didn’t exist

Why not?

Because he didn’t know who he’d been last night.

Because he didn’t recognize himself last night.

And that, in the end, was why not.

Walter Skinner finished his shower; shaved, ventured forth into
the almost tidy bedroom, nodded distantly, politely, to Mulder, trading rooms as Mulder showered and he dressed in clothes that made him sick with the effort of burying the surge of passion and misery.

The Assistant Director was knotting his tie, hands deft and very nearly steady, when Mulder came back into the bedroom. Fully clothed, Skinner noticed: the torn shirt hidden behind the buttoned-up jacket and the swing of the coat.

He should say something. He should find something to say that would make this easier on Mulder. He didn’t need to find anything to explain it, for hadn’t they spent months watching each other? Mulder knew the why-nots as well as Skinner himself did.

It still didn’t make it any easier.

Skinner cleared his throat, tried to find his voice, and then admitted that he couldn’t, quite, look Mulder in the eye for this.

But it was better (kinder, safer, his mind offered him its litany of reasons to ease the pain) to suffer a small hurt now, though, than what would happen later, when there was something to actually lose.

*Liar*, Mulder’s voice whispered in his mind.
“I’ve rented a car,” Skinner said, putting on jacket and coat before slipping his gun into its holster. “I think it’s easier if I drive myself back.”

“Easier.” Completely flat voice, and Mulder’s eyes were so clear, so utterly unreadable, silvered glass mirroring back bland images. “Makes sense, if the…dizziness has worn off completely.”

Skinner concentrated on strapping his watch on, analog face so much easier to look at than Mulder’s. “Completely worn off,” he said.

No response, and he could feel Mulder staring at him. Slowly, Skinner looked up, and met that reflective stare. “Completely?” Mulder asked.

In Skinner’s experience, hope was the most insidious poison of all, killing slowly, as dreams crumbled, ground to dust by reality. A clean cut, a clean end, cauterize the wound by taking the escape Mulder had offered. “Completely,” Skinner said firmly, dismissively. “It’s finished. Over. Out of my system.”

“Yes, sir,” Mulder said very quietly, and there was something in that voice, something under the hardness—
Skinner couldn’t catch it before it was gone. Called himself every kind of coward for being grateful for that small mercy. Mulder’s tone was perfectly bland, totally impersonal. “When do you need my report, sir?”

Bitter, to be given what sense and survival told him to want. Bizarre, to finally have Mulder being the perfect little FBI agent. “Thursday, if it’s complete.” Shit—damn, so caught up in his own selfish wants, he’d forgotten. “If Scully has had enough time to do whatever she needs to do.”

Skinner watched realization crash across Mulder’s face like guilt. “I’ll head back up there, help her—”

Scully, dying of cancer, and they’d been too busy fucking to think about anything other than where to shove their dicks.

Another ‘why not.’

Yet another one.

Very sensible, Skinner told himself, following Mulder out of the room, his own pace far more sedate than Mulder’s precipitous…flight. They were being very sensible, and that’s what all of these good reasons ‘why not’ were, too: very sensible.

What was sex and love worth if they were dead in a week? Or
had their feelings used against them, to make them give up the fight, to make them betray what they believed in.

There were things far more important than two individual lives, far more important than the wants and needs of just two men. Survival. Success. The Truth. Justice. The American Way.

Walter Skinner stood under the portico, waiting for his rental car to be brought to him. He just stood there, watching as Mulder started to drive away; watching, as Mulder stopped the car, just for a moment, and looked at him.

Finished. Over, Skinner had told Mulder. Oh, what a liar he’d become.

A nondescript car pulled up, forms and a pen were shoved at him, then a key, along with false conviviality and insincere wishes for a good journey. Not allowing himself even a glance at Mulder disappearing up the highway, Walter Skinner, Assistant Director of the FBI, started back to where he’d started from.