

Summary: Colonization has begun. Four men set aside their differences and form an alliance to fight the aliens and stake out a new life together in their shattered world.

Categories: [X-Files/Sentinel](#) Characters: Commander Gayne (OC), Detective Noah Woods (OC), Doug/Katie/Michelle (OCs), Emperor Zahn (OC), Fox Mulder, Helmut Schmidt (OC), James "Jim" Ellison, Jim/Blair, Jim/Krycek, Jimmy Bond, Jimmy Bond, John Doggett, John Fitzgerald Byers, Knowle Rohrer, Leptans/Lycanthropes (OC), Major Pierce (OC), Margaret Scully, Maureen Blye (OC), Melvin Frohike, Mike Doggett, Mulder/Doggett, Mulder/Krycek, Mulder/Skinner, OMC/OFC, Original Character(s), Panther - Jim, Paul Doggett, Ranger Sean Smith (OC), Richard "Ringo" Langley, Sergeant Jacob Woods (OC), Skinner/Doggett, The Alien Bounty Hunter, Walter Skinner, Wolf -Doggett, Wolf- Krycek, Wolf- Mulder, Wolf- Skinner

Genres: Crossover, PreSlash, Slash

Warnings: Abduction/Kidnapping, Abuse, Adult Situations, Alien Conception, Alien Experimentation, Alien mpreg, Anal Sex, Angst, Apocalyptic , AU, Birth - Explicit, Brain-Insane, Coercion, Dark Themes, Experimentation, H/C, Hermaphrodite, m/m, Multiple Partners, Non-Con, One Sided Attraction, Partner Betrayal, Polyamorous, Scientific Conception, Slash, Unrequited Love

Challenges: None

Series: None

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Story Notes:

Author notes: It has some canon in it. ;) I did not watch season 9, except for a couple of episodes and the finale. For this story the parking garage scene in Existence never took place. I decided to use the premise of the Rat Patrol for this warped slash fantasy of mine. I hope you enjoy it.

I'd like to thank everyone that took time to read this first chapter and provided initial feedback. It helped to improve the direction and feel of this story.

Thanks to Medusa, Pamela, and valleygurl for providing initial editing help. An extra big thank you, to Medusa for doing the final edits.

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Chapter 1: The Attack by Jo B

Commander Gnaye stood before the portal watching the shimmering blue planet. The experiments on the population had finally come to fruition. After more than fifty years, their attempts to alter the human female in order to make her compatible as a breeder for their race had proven unsuccessful. It was only by accident that they had discovered the human male was the one best suited for their purpose.

He turned on the viewer and studied the recorded image of their first successful specimen. The human would be considered a classic beauty on his world, one of the reasons the leptans chose him. Not until after the human had been released was the success of their experiment revealed to them through the chip implanted in the man's testicles. They had since successfully repeated the procedure on five other human males, using the information provided from the implant.

Four of the five men were successfully impregnated. The fifth had escaped before he could be impregnated and a chip implanted in his body.

Once the invasion began, they would collect the first altered male. The emperor had expressed an interest in using this human as his personal breeder.

Gnaye turned as a leptan entered the room. He glared at the large-headed creature. They had their uses, but he found them physically repulsive from their sickly hairless gray skin to the large black eyes, small nose, and tiny mouth. If it weren't for their ability to morph into any form, he'd have no use from them.

The humans, on the other hand, he found beautiful and close in appearance to his own race in their unchanged form. The only difference was in the shape of their ears and sexual organs, also his race was hermaphroditic they didn't have two separate sexes.

~x~X~x~

The Fox

Blue Ridge Mountain

Thursday, September 20, 2001

The leaves rustled overhead as a strong wind blew through branches, and lightning flashed in the distance as storm clouds formed to the northwest.

A loud crack sounded as the log splintered in two as Mulder drove the axe through it. Sweat ran down his shirtless body emphasizing the muscles on his arms, chest, and back. He bent and retrieved the sections of wood, tossing them onto a growing pile. Mulder paused to wipe the sweat from his brow with a handkerchief he kept in the back pocket of his jeans. He'd spent the day collecting deadfall from the surrounding forest and had been chopping it up for over two hours. The sun was just beginning to set, so he decided to call it a day. He carried the ax to the woodshed and placed it inside, collected the wood he had chopped, and then added it to the ridiculously huge pile behind the log cabin, next to the small barn.

Chopping wood was how he had spent most of his free time over the summer. The hard physical activity allowed him to relieve his pent up anger, in a useful way, over the state that his life had become. His log cabin was heated by wood. It had a woodstove in the kitchen, a pot-bellied stove in the main living space, and a fireplace in the only bedroom. The pump house out back had a wood-heated water heater that supplied the cabin with hot water. The bathroom had a deep, old, claw-foot bathtub and a pull-chain toilet. It was the only update made to the inside of the cabin in over sixty years and that was installed forty years ago. There was even an outhouse on the property, along with a small barn, a chicken coop, and an equipment shed.

Mulder had bought the property for its solitude. No roads led to the cabin. The previous owner had cherished his privacy, too, when he had built the place countless decades ago.

Living in isolation required that Mulder park his car at the ranger station eight miles away and hike up to his home over the steep rocky terrain. The nearest town was twenty miles down the mountain, past the ranger station. A mountain stream ran through the back of his property, and a

lake was within walking distance down a winding path. The cabin was hidden by a grove of pines and raspberry bushes. Other than the ranger and a few of the area's residents, the only person who knew where he now lived was Frohike. Frohike had been the one who had found this place for him. His uncle had owned a cabin six miles from this cabin.

The roar of thunder in the distance made Mulder look up at the sky. He chewed on his lower lip as he watched the storm move in. Tonight he'd finally be free of them.

Mulder walked through the front door of the log cabin and was greeted by its other inhabitant who affectionately rubbed up against his leg purring loudly. He kneeled and petted the orange-striped tabby, smiling softly at his only companion.

"Hi, Tiger. What have you been doing all day? Did you catch yourself any fat mice for dinner?"

The cat meowed loudly and ran over to the cabinet where her food was kept and stared up at him.

"I take that as a no." Mulder opened the cabinet and pulled out the bag of dried cat food and filled her bowl. Then he filled the other bowl with fresh water from the kitchen sink. The cat had shown up at his door months ago and just made herself at home.

After Tiger was eating contently, Mulder pulled out a jug of corn whiskey. He had found it and four dozen others, in the root cellar along with some homemade wine. The old man who had previously owned this cabin had a still hidden out in the woods. According to Sean, the ranger, Old Man Peterson had actually been very good at making bootleg whiskey and blackberry wine. Not being much of a drinker, Mulder wasn't much of a judge on whether it was good or not. He had sampled it only a couple of times when the loneliness of living here had become too unbearable.

Tonight he needed a drink to help him through what he had to do. Setting the jug on the hard, oak table, he lit an oil lamp before going into the bathroom and coming back with the first aid kit. He pulled out the items he needed and set them on a clean white cloth he had laid out on the table. Then he undressed, draping his clothes over one of the hard oak dining room chairs and sat on another one.

He draped a clean white cloth over his thigh and under his testicles, then opened a sterile bag containing latex surgical gloves and pulled them on. Mulder felt his balls until he found the hard object just below the skin. He had discovered it several weeks ago and had slowly worked it up to the surface. He then poured himself some whiskey and took a long drink, choking as it burned its way down his throat. Picking up the bottle of antiseptic, he swabbed it on his hairless testicle. Next, he picked up a syringe filled with Novocain as he clenched his teeth against the pain he injected himself. Mulder wondered for the umpteenth time about the wisdom of what he was about to do as tears of pain ran down his cheeks. Maybe he should have asked Scully to help him. Only he didn't want her to suspect what he had become.

Thunder shook the windows of the cabin as Mulder wiped the tears from his eyes. After his sac was numb, he picked up the scalpel and took a deep breath. He used two fingers to pull the skin over the chip taut then made the incision into the flesh with the sharp blade. Blood poured from the wound as he used the point of the scalpel to extract the chip. He set it on the table then blotted the wound with the white towel. When the flow of blood slowed, he applied antiseptic gel to it, placed a butterfly bandage over it to hold it closed, and then taped gauze over it.

Mulder closed his eyes and breathed a sigh of relief. He knew that it was going to hurt like a bitch later, but at least he no longer had the offending object inside him. Now he just needed to get rid of it. He thought about smashing it to bits, but that might not be enough to prevent them from tracking him. As he stood, he prayed that Sean would be at the ranger station.

Thunder boomed outside as he pulled his clothes back on and grabbed his rain slicker off the hook by the front door, along with his flashlight and the jug of whiskey. It was pouring rain and pitched black outside as he ran to the barn and saddled his horse. He groaned as his groin made contact with the hard leather saddle. Thankfully his sac was still numb from the Novocain. After making the eight-mile ride to the ranger's station, Mulder breathed a sigh of relief when he saw the light glowing from the windows. Mulder dismounted and led his horse to the stable to get it out of the rain. He ran back to the station and knocked on the door, which was answered by a stocky bear-like man around his own age.

"Mulder, what in the hell are you doing out in this weather?" the ranger asked, letting him inside.

"Sean, I need a favor from you." He walked across the room and placed the jug on the table.

"What do you need?"

"I need you to fly me to the ocean in your helicopter."

"Now?"

"It has to be now."

"In case you haven't noticed there's a severe thunderstorm passing over our area and up along the whole eastern seaboard."

"That's why it has to be now." Mulder held up the plastic bag with chip inside still coated with his blood. "As soon as the storm is over they'll know that I removed this and come for me. The electrical interference from the storm is the only thing blocking its signal. If I can dispose of the chip far enough away, then they won't be able to trace me back here."

Sean looked at the object then walked over and pulled on his jacket. "We better hurry then, hadn't we?"

Mulder let out the breath he'd been holding and followed the ranger out the door. They raced across the muddy ground to the helicopter.

Sean was a UFO enthusiast. After seeing a UFO when he was a teenager, he had read every book available on the subject. So when Mulder moved into Old Man Peterson's cabin, Sean knew instantly who he was because Mulder was a legend in the UFO community.

"I'm going to fly low. Hopefully we won't be hit by lightning," Sean said as the helicopter lifted off the ground.

"Thanks for doing this for me," Mulder said as he watched the ground vanish below.

"No problem man. I do expect you to tell me how you got that chip out when we get back."

"I'll tell you over a cup of corn whiskey. I think I'll need a drink by the time we get back." Mulder looked out at the storm and marveled at how much control Sean had over the copter as it was buffeted by wind and rain. It would take them a couple of hours to reach the ocean, so he relaxed back in his seat and tried to ignore the throbbing pain in his groin.

~x~X~x~

The Bear

Crystal City, Virginia  
Thursday, September 20, 2001

Walter Skinner stood in front of his balcony doors looking out at the storm. He took a long sip from a tumbler of scotch as the lightning flashed outside. His life had become pointless. Nothing he did seemed to amount to anything that he could be proud of any longer. He used to enjoy his job and the challenges he faced each day. At one time, Skinner felt like he was making a difference and contributing something back to society. Now he felt dirty, like nothing more than a tool, used by various groups, each with their own agendas. When had he stopped fighting the good fight and start protecting his own ass?

He slapped his hand hard against the window in frustration, causing the glass to quiver and come close to breaking. This wasn't who he was! Why had he allowed himself to come to this? After all, he had stood up to CGB Spender! Put his career and life on the line for Mulder and Scully. Not just for them, but to help uncover the lies and conspiracy that were threatening his country. Then Krycek, that rat bastard, poisoned his blood with those nanocytes and forced him to spy on Mulder and Scully, betraying their trust. When Mulder had been returned after being abducted, Krycek tried to use him again. In the end Krycek had a change of heart and gave Skinner the palm pilot, setting him free. Skinner still puzzled over why Krycek hadn't just killed him. He frowned, for all the good it did him, he still wasn't free, Kersh now held his leash and that bastard's agenda was tied too closely with CGB Spender's and the conspirators for his comfort.

It was time to get out. Skinner couldn't fight the shadowy figures alone and he wouldn't risk his agents. Although he respected Agent Doggett and considered him to be a friend and an outstanding agent, the man lacked the intuitive brilliance of Fox Mulder. Skinner couldn't see him ever coming close to cracking the conspiracy, not unless Doggett developed more of an open mind to the paranormal and the existence of aliens. It was too bad that Mulder and Doggett couldn't have been partnered together, he had a feeling the two men would have been an unstoppable force. Tomorrow, Skinner would turn in his resignation. He had enough years in for a nice pension, and he was still young enough that he could find another job.

Decision made, Skinner downed the rest of his drink in one swallow. He gazed back out the window and wondered what Mulder was doing at this moment. It'd been months since he'd heard from him. Scully never mentioned Mulder or where he'd gone. Then she didn't really know. The only person who knew Mulder's whereabouts was Frohike and he wasn't talking.

Maybe Skinner would use his time away from the bureau to track Mulder down and get some answers as to why he had gone into hiding. The last thing Skinner had ever pictured Mulder being was a quitter.

~x~X~x~

The Rat

Alexandria, Virginia  
Thursday, September 20, 2001

A lone man shivered and pulled his leather jacket tighter around his body as he ran across the puddle-filled street, trying to protect himself from the cold, biting rain. He ducked into an alley, checking the doors before finally breaking into a warehouse on the outskirts of Alexandria. Krycek had first stopped at Mulder's apartment, but it had a new tenant who didn't know what had happened to its former occupant.

He shivered again, not from the cold but from fear, burying his hands deeper into his jacket pockets as he looked around.

"God, just my luck to choose a warehouse storing auto parts and not food," he muttered as he read the label on the crates. He couldn't even find a vending machine in the large space.

Krycek froze and listened as a car drove by in the alley. He was sure he'd lost the alien bounty hunter. The alien had tracked him to Mulder's apartment building. It was only through sheer cunning that he had eluded it.

As he searched the warehouse, Krycek thought about how lucky he had been to escape from the alien spaceship before they had implanted a chip inside his body. Unfortunately they had altered him. He swore at how careless he'd been months ago when agreeing to go with the alien bounty hunter. The promise of a new arm and answers to what they'd done to Mulder had been more than he could resist. Krycek flexed his new hand. He feared for Earth, Mulder, and himself at the answers they had given him.

Colonization would begin soon. He had to find Mulder and warn him, then confess the truth to him. He'd do anything to look into those bright hazel eyes again, even if Mulder killed him. Neither of them had won, now it was time to pay the piper.

Krycek made a bed out of bubble wrap in a dark corner of the warehouse. He needed a few hours of sleep. Then he'd find Scully. If anyone would know how to get in touch with Mulder, she would. He snickered as he laid his wet body on the nest he'd made. He really had become a rat. Running his hand through his long wet hair, he sighed, "A drowned rat."

His stomach growled and he wrapped his arms around his body, trying to ignore the gnawing emptiness in his belly. He concentrated on Mulder. The last image on his mind before sleep took him was of gentle hazel eyes and a sinfully lush mouth kissing him.

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The Dog

The FBI

Hoover Building

Friday, September 21, 2001

Doggett rubbed his tired eyes as he set the report back on his desk. He glanced up at the clock. It was nearly two o'clock in the morning.

"Shit," he muttered, standing and pulling on his wrinkled suit coat. It had been a while since he'd put in such long hours. The X-Files seemed to be taking up more and more of his life.

He was starting to relate to Fox Mulder in many ways. It was nearly impossible not to believe in aliens, after spending the past four months looking into several abductions. Deep in his bones, he felt that something big was about to happen. Maybe he should go and see Mulder. If anyone could fill in the missing pieces to this weird puzzle it would be the Spook himself.

Doggett strolled across the parking garage to his car. He stopped dead in his tracks when Knowle Rohrer stepped out of the shadows.

"What do you want?"

"We lost, John. Get as far away from D.C. as you can. By sunset tonight this place will be a charred pile of earth."

"What do you mean?" Doggett angrily pushed Rohrer up against the concrete pillar.

Rohrer brushed him off easily, as if he was a fly, knocking Doggett to the cement floor. He chuckled. "It's already too late for me. I only have a few hours left to live. Save yourself, John, and live to fight another day."

Doggett looked up at his former friend then climbed to his feet as Rohrer turned and left.

"What do you mean?" he shouted at Rohrer's retreating back.

Doggett stood in the center of the empty parking garage for several minutes before climbing behind the wheel of his car. It took him twenty minutes to drive to the Lone Gunmen's headquarters on the outskirts of D.C.

He pounded on the locked door until a bedraggled Langly let him inside.

"Dude, don't you know what time it is?" the tall blonde Gunman asked.

"I need to find Mulder! Dana Scully doesn't know where he is, so I figured one of you guys would know."

Langly held up his hands in a mock attempt to fend off the desperate agent. "Hey, don't look at me. Ask Frohike."

"Ask me what?" Frohike said, coming out of his bedroom and running his fingers through his greasy hair.

"Where is Mulder?"

Frohike looked at Doggett and shrugged his shoulders. "I'm not at liberty to say. However if you want to leave a message for him, I'll see that he gets it."

Doggett shook his head. "No, it's important that I get in touch with him immediately."

"I can't tell you where he is. Look, Agent Doggett, I'm not about to betray Mulder's trust."

Doggett was tired and irritable. "Look, Frohike, I wouldn't be asking if it weren't important!"

Byers came out of his bedroom when he heard their rising voices. "What's going on?"

"I need to reach Mulder, but Frohike is refusing to tell me where he is."

Langly in the meantime had plopped down in front of his computer monitor, and started scanning the different databases. "Holy shit! Guys, stop arguing and look at this!"

"What do you have?" Byers hurried over to his side.

"The whole fucking U.S. military has gone on a full scale alert. Something big is coming down."

"Terrorists?" Frohike asked.

Byers logged onto the station next to Langly's, and started scanning the messages being passed from the Pentagon to the White House. The color drained from his face. "Oh my."

"What?"

Byers looked at them with large eyes. "It seems we're on the brink of being invaded by aliens. Our satellites are picking up thousands of UFOs entering our galaxy."

Langly licked his lips. "Do you think there's any chance they're friendly?"

Doggett shook his head as he looked at the monitor. "I wouldn't bank on it."

Frohike grabbed Doggett's arm and pulled him toward his workstation. He opened the desk drawer and pulled out a map. "You need to get to Mulder and warn him."

Doggett's stomach was doing flip-flops as Frohike told him where to find Mulder. He wondered if he should call Skinner first. It was three o'clock in the morning, so he decided to wait until he talked to Mulder. He was still doubtful that this was really happening.

~x~X~x~

The Dog and the Fox

Blue Ridge Mountain

Ranger's station

Friday, September 21, 2001

The sun was just rising when Doggett arrived at the ranger station. He glanced at his watch. It was seven o'clock in the morning.

A tough looking stocky man answered the door. He was pulling on a plaid shirt over his hairy chest and looking like he'd just rolled out of bed. "How may I help you?" he growled.

Doggett flashed his badge. "I'm Special Agent John Doggett. Melvin Frohike sent me. He said Fox Mulder has a cabin in the area."

"You say Frohike sent you?" Sean asked suspiciously.

"Yeah, he said you'd show me how to find Mulder's cabin." Doggett put his badge away, realizing it didn't hold much weight with the ranger.

"I'm going to take your word for it, Agent Doggett," Sean said, taking a rifle from the gun rack. "But, if you're lying to me, you won't be leaving these mountains."

"I'm not lying," Doggett said, surprised by the man's protective behavior toward Mulder.

They walked out the door and Sean led the way to the stable.

Doggett wished he'd worn his hiking boots, instead of his dress shoes, as he tried to avoid stepping into the deep muddy puddles on the way to the stable.

The ranger saddled two horses. Doggett easily swung himself up in the saddle. He'd learned how to ride as a boy while growing up on his family's farm. He followed Sean through the forest and over the steep rocky hillsides. The overhead canopy of branches blocked out much of the sun. Doggett admired the beauty of the place and took a deep breath of the fresh air. They finally came out into a small clearing.

"We're here."

"Where?" Doggett looked around seeing only trees and bushes.

"It's a pretty good location. You can't see the cabin from the path unless you know where to look."



Doggett followed Sean through a small gap in the bushes, getting wet from the water droplets clinging to the leaves. He stopped and looked at the quaint log cabin tucked under a grove of tall oak and pine trees. He could make out other buildings on the property, behind the cabin. Doggett thought it would be almost impossible to spot this place from the air. The cabin had a wraparound porch and a large stone chimney.

Mulder opened the cabin door and limped out onto the porch. "Agent Doggett. If Frohike gave you my location it had better be important."

Doggett dismounted and tied the horse's reins to a hitching post in front of the cabin. "Mr. Mulder, it is important. May I come in?" Doggett asked, stepping up onto the porch.

Mulder stepped back, allowing him to enter. "Sean, would you like to come in? I'm fixing breakfast."

"No, I better get back. How are you feeling?" Sean's eyes dropped to Mulder's groin.

"Sore as hell. Thanks for the bottle of Tylenol you loaned me last night. I'll have to remember to pick some up next time I'm in town."

"No problem. I'll stop out later," Sean said, nudging the horse back through the bushes.

Doggett glanced around the cabin it looked very well constructed. The walls were made from whole logs. They were a rich honey hue that gave the room a warm feeling. The windows allowed plenty of light into the cabin. It was clean and homey, right down to the cat curled up sleeping on a rug in front of a woodstove, and it smelled of freshly baked bread. Above the kitchen was a loft that overlooked the main room. Doggett noticed two inner doors, one clearly opened to the bathroom, and the other he assumed was a bedroom. On one wall, in the main room, were bookshelves and hundreds of books.

"You have a nice place here, Mulder."

"I like it. Mr. Peterson was quite the carpenter, he built this place to last." Mulder walked over to the old-fashioned stove. "Would you like some scrambled eggs? I collected the eggs from the chickens this morning."

"You raise chickens?"

"The chickens, a horse, and two cows came with the place," Mulder said then chuckled. "Sean had to teach me how to milk the cows. They come in handy since I don't have electricity out here yet. If I need to keep something cold I have to put it out back in the stream or down in the root cellar."

"If it isn't too much bother, I'd appreciate breakfast. I haven't eaten since noon yesterday."

"It's no bother." Mulder cracked three more eggs into the bowl and whipped them with a fork.

Doggett watched him closely. There was something different about Mulder, but he couldn't quite put his finger on it. He'd always found the man attractive and mysterious. Finding Mulder living out here only added to the mystique.

"Do you want to tell me why you're here?" Mulder asked, pouring the eggs into a skillet.

"I was warned by an informant to get out of D.C. He said it was going to be destroyed today. I'm still not sure if it is bullshit or not, but I wanted to talk to you about it. So I went to the Lone Gunmen to try and get your whereabouts from them."

Mulder frowned, as he continued to stir the eggs in the pan.

"Don't worry, Mulder, Frohike wasn't about to give it to me. While I was there, they picked up some weird communications between the military and government on their computers. Supposedly there are thousands of alien spaceships entering our galaxy and the military is on a full alert. I know this sounds like utter crap. But, I've been looking into four abductions over the past four months...I now believe the men were abducted by aliens. Fox, I think something bad is going down."

Mulder calmly stirred the scrambled eggs with a spatula. "After breakfast I'll go back to D.C. with you. I want to check on Scully and William, in case there is any truth to your tale."

"You don't believe me?"

"I don't want to believe you. If what you're saying is true then life as we know it will come to an end today." Mulder divided the eggs onto two plates then cut two slices of bread from the loaf he baked that morning.

Doggett followed Mulder over to the table. He sat as Mulder set the plates down then went back for the utensils and jam. Doggett took the fork Mulder offered him and dug into the eggs. Maybe it was because he was hungry, but they were the best tasting eggs he'd ever eaten. "Mm, this is really good, thanks."

Mulder slowly ate his eggs, while worrying about what Doggett had told him. He lowered his hand under the table to rest it on his thigh not quite touching his groin. His balls were swollen from the self-surgery he'd performed last night, and they were starting to itch. He couldn't zip his jeans over them and was wearing loose fitting sweatpants.

~x~X~x~

The Rat

Alexandria, Virginia  
Friday, September 21, 2001

When Krycek woke up, he discovered he'd overslept. His body protested as he climbed to his feet and glanced at the clock on the wall above the door. It was already ten o'clock in the morning. He was surprised no one had come into the warehouse while he was sleeping.

Krycek searched for and found the restroom. He used the urinal then washed his hands, splashing cold water on his face. He frowned at his image in the mirror and ran a shaky hand over his smooth stubble free cheeks. The image looking back seemed so surreal, too pretty to be him.

When Krycek finally left the warehouse, the first sight to greet him were people standing on the sidewalk and looking up at the sky. His heart sank as he looked up and saw dozens of large alien spaceships hovering overhead as far as the eye could see. Each was the size of a football stadium.

He realized he didn't have much time before they attacked, so making a split second decision, he decided to head toward the Hoover Building and Skinner, instead of to Quantico and Scully. He needed to get to the A.D. before it was too late. After everything he'd done to the man over the years this would be his only chance to make it up to him. Krycek found a motorcycle parked in front of an apartment building, he hot-wired it and took off for D.C.

~x~X~x~

## The Bear

Washington, D.C.

Friday, September 21, 2001

Skinner joined the people outside the Hoover building, staring up at the spaceships hovering over D.C.

"Fuck, after all these years it looks like Spooky Mulder was right," Agent Jackson said.

"It's too bad no one believed him," Skinner said. He had only come to believe Mulder after he'd witnessed the agent's abduction. However, Skinner had done everything in his power to support his agent's work on the X-Files throughout the years.

"What do you suppose they want?" another agent asked.

"Do you think they're friendly?" asked another.

"No." Skinner shook his head. "Definitely not friendly."

Traffic in front of the Hoover building had come to a standstill as people climbed out of their cars to watch the spaceships. Skinner noticed a motorcycle jump the curb and speed up the sidewalk, causing people to jump out of its way. It squealed to a stop in front of where he stood. He stared open-mouthed at its green-eyed driver.

"Krycek, what the hell do you want?"

"Get on, Skinner! We don't have much time!"

As if on cue, one of the spaceships opened fire on the U.S. Capital. It seemed to be the signal for all the ships to open fire. As they were firing on the city a squadron of US fighter jets streaked into view and started launching their missiles at the alien crafts.

Most of the fighter jets were quickly destroyed, but not before a few of the spaceships were destroyed, raining debris down on the city. Surface to air missiles took out even more of the enemy crafts.

Skinner wasted no time climbing on the back of the motorcycle behind his archenemy. Krycek gunned the bike as people ran screaming in all directions. Skinner glanced over his shoulder just as the FBI Hoover building was leveled into a pile of twisted steel and concrete. Krycek drove down sidewalks and across lawns as he made his way to the interstate. Around them buildings were on fire. Several times they came close to being crushed by falling debris. Skinner averted his eyes as they sped past dead bodies and body parts.

Krycek hit the interstate going full throttle. Skinner thought they were going to crash several times as Krycek wove the motorcycle around crashed cars and people fleeing on foot down the middle of the freeway. When they were far enough outside of D.C. Krycek steered the bike off the road and behind some trees and shrubs.

Skinner climbed shakily off the back of the motorcycle and walked to the edge of the trees so he could look back at D.C. The sky above the city was bright orange as hundreds of fires burned. Black smoke drifted up from all directions around them. Skinner felt a rage building inside of him over all the lives that had been lost in less than a heartbeat. He also felt helpless over not being able to do anything to stop it.

Looking at Krycek, he noticed something different about the younger man's face then his eyes fell on the Krycek's hands. "Your arm."

"They grew me a new one," Krycek said.

The A.D. sneered and waved toward D.C. "Was it worth the price?"

"We're on the same side, Skinner." Krycek walked past him and looked toward the burning city. "I worked for the agency. My assignment was to do whatever it took to stop them."

"It looks like you failed." Skinner didn't know whether to believe him or not.

Krycek frowned. "Walter, do you know where Mulder is?"

"Why do you want to know?"

"I have some unfinished business with him."

"He's straight, Alex, why don't you just forget about him?" Skinner had known for years that Krycek was in love with Mulder. For some reason, Krycek just couldn't accept that his love would remain forever unrequited. At least Skinner wasn't delusional enough to believe that his own feelings for his former agent would ever be returned.

Krycek eyes became sad and distant. "I just want to see him one more time before I die."

"Frohike is the only person who knows where Mulder is and he's back there." Skinner nodded toward D.C.

Krycek walked back to the motorcycle. "They've stopped firing. After they assess the damage, they'll start up again. Eventually they'll send down the hunters to subdue the survivors. We don't have much time, Walter, let's go find Frohike."

Skinner pulled out his cell phone and tried the Gunmen's number. He received a busy signal. "Fuck." He climbed onto the back of the motorcycle and gave Krycek directions.

~x~X~x~

The Bear and the Rat

Lone Gunmen's Headquarters  
Friday, September 21, 2001

It took Skinner and Krycek longer to drive back to D.C. than it did to leave. They had to take back roads, the main ones were filled with people trying to flee from the city. When they finally reached the Lone Gunmen's neighborhood, it was in shambles. Soon the streets became so blocked with rubble that Krycek had to park the motorcycle behind the remains of a building and they walked the rest of the way.

Krycek winced and covered his nose at the smell of charred flesh. There were dead bodies scattered throughout the destroyed neighborhood. They saw the occasional person wandering mindlessly through the rubble, while calling out for loved ones that might never answer.

"Oh fuck," Skinner said as they stopped in front of what was left of the Lone Gunmen's headquarters.

"Do you think they got out?" Krycek asked.

Skinner shook his head. "I don't know. One thing's for sure, no one could have survived being in that building when it was hit."

"Now what?" Krycek was losing all hope of ever finding Mulder.

Skinner pulled out his cell phone again and tried to dial Scully but it was dead. "Damn." He tossed it into the rubble. "We need to get to Quantico and find Scully."

"I doubt that there will be anything left of Quantico--"

"We're going there, Krycek!"

"Okay, but if we see any hunters we're getting the hell out of here!" The last thing Krycek wanted was to fall back into the hands of the aliens, not after what they'd just done to his body. He'd been in too much of a hurry since escaping to even think about the changes they'd made to him.

~x~X~x~

The Fox and the Dog

Quantico

Friday, September 21, 2001

Doggett pulled his truck off the road. This was as close as they were going to get to Quantico. The roads were just too blocked with debris and people fleeing in their vehicles out of the city.

Earlier, when they had ridden the horses back to the ranger station, Sean had informed them about the spaceships that had appeared above all the major cities around the world. Mulder and Doggett wasted no time in driving back to the city. The drive to Quantico normally took four hours, but Doggett made it to the outskirts in three. By then it was already too late. As they got closer to the city, they noticed smoke rising in almost every direction around them. They saw fighter jets and surface to air missiles being fired at the spaceships. Amazingly many of the spaceships were destroyed by the US military.

Unfortunately, they weren't enough to save D.C. or the surrounding cities.

"John, I have a bad feeling about this. If for some reason we become separated, I think we should try to meet back at my cabin."

Doggett raised an eyebrow at Mulder's use of his first name. "Sure, Fox, but I plan to stick close to your side," he said as they cautiously walked by the smoldering remains of a downed F16 fighter jet.

They made their way to what was left of Quantico. Mulder glanced up at a UFO hovering in the distance. Most of the spaceships from earlier had fallen back after many had been destroyed.

When they reached Quantico, the building was on fire, but it hadn't been totally destroyed.

"SCULLY!" Mulder called.

They heard moaning coming from the ruins and people came stumbling outside. There were a few people on the front lawn trying to help the survivors. Mulder rushed up to them.

"Has anyone seen Special Agent Dana Scully? She's a short redhead in her mid-thirties! She

teaches here?" Mulder frantically gestured to the burning building.

One of the men looked up at him tiredly. His face was gray with ash and soot. "I know her, but I can't remember seeing her today."

Mulder started toward the burning building, but Doggett stopped him by grabbing his upper arm. "Mulder, you're going to get yourself killed."

Mulder shook his head. "Scully may be inside--"

"She may already be dead or safe elsewhere. Fox, getting yourself killed isn't going to do us any good."

"John, I need to know!" Mulder pushed him off and ran up the steps and into the building. He knew where Scully's classroom and office were so he covered his face against the smoke and headed in that direction. The ground shook and he was thrown off his feet onto a pile of broken plasterboard and tile.

Doggett swore as he started up the steps after Mulder. The bastard was going to get them both killed.

"Agent Doggett!"

He spun at the sound of his name and saw Skinner and Krycek running toward him.

"Sir, Mulder's in the building!"

Just then an alien ship came into view and opened fire on a building a couple of blocks from where they stood.

"I'll get him!" Krycek shouted and ran into the building before Skinner or Doggett could stop him.

The spaceship was getting closer to their location. The people that were resting in front of the building took off across the lawn, supporting the injured between them.

Doggett and Skinner looked at each other and swore, then followed Krycek into the building.

Mulder rolled onto his side. He had twisted his ankle going down and reopened the incision on his testicles. "Shit." The fire was getting closer to where he lay. Scully's office was in the middle of the inferno. No way could she or anyone be alive in that part of the building. He tried to stand but collapsed back to his knees, choking as smoke burned his throat and eyes.

"Mulder!"

"Over here!" Mulder choked out, looking up through tear-filled eyes as a shape appeared out of the smoke.

"Hey, Foxy, long time no see," Krycek said as he put an arm around Mulder and helped him to his feet. "Can you walk?"

Mulder bit his lower lip against the pain. "My ankle, it's sprained." He coughed as the smoke made it harder to breathe.

Krycek coughed. "Okay, lean on me."

Skinner and Doggett appeared at that moment. Skinner assessed the situation and bent down

and swung Mulder over his shoulders in a fireman's carry. "Let's get the hell out of here!"

Mulder moaned as his sore groin rubbed against Skinner's shoulder. They made it out of the building just as the alien ship opened fire on what remained of the structure.

"They seem more interested in destroying the buildings than people," Doggett said.

"Unless the people are in the building," Skinner growled.

"My truck is a half mile from here. In this direction," Doggett said, leading the way down the road.

"Sir, you can put me down now," Mulder said.

"Shut up, Mulder." Skinner tightened his hold on his former agent as they hurried down the street.

They paused briefly as two jet fighters roared overhead and engaged the spaceship. Both fighters were destroyed, but not before one launched its missiles, damaging the alien craft.

Krycek watched the smoke rise from the spaceship. "The military must have perfected their new missiles."

"What do you mean?" Doggett looked sideways at Krycek.

"They created a new alloy that could penetrate the skin of the alien spaceships. They've been working on it for nearly nine years," Krycek said.

Doggett raised an eyebrow. He had his suspicions about what the government knew and was covering up. "Are you saying that our government and military knew about aliens?"

Krycek nodded and smirked. "They've known since Roswell."

"Fuck. Those bastards kept this a secret for over fifty years!" Doggett was pissed. He wanted to hit something.

"It never was much of a secret, a lot of people knew. Ask Mulder," Krycek said.

When they reached Doggett's truck, Skinner lowered Mulder to his feet. He noticed the blood on Mulder's sweatpants over his groin. "You're bleeding."

Mulder balanced his weight on his good leg. "It's nothing. I'll take care of it after we find Scully and William."

Skinner frowned. "Okay. I think we should split up into two groups. John, you go with Krycek to Margaret Scully's house in Baltimore. She usually baby-sits William. Mulder and I will head to Georgetown and check Scully's apartment."

Doggett nodded his agreement. "I think we should rendezvous back at Mulder's cabin. It's a lot safer than here. Is that all right with you, Fox?"

"Yeah."

~x~X~x~

The Rat and the Dog

Baltimore

Friday, September 21, 2001

"No one's here," Doggett said as they walked through Mrs. Scully's home. A half-eaten breakfast was still on the table.

"The car's gone. It looks like they left in a hurry," Krycek said, closing the door to the garage.

"Along with everyone else in Baltimore. I'd hate to see what the roads are like now heading out of the city." There had been hundreds cars heading away from the city when he and Mulder first arrived after the initial attack. Now they must be leaving in droves. Doggett watched as Krycek opened the refrigerator and pulled out a container of leftover roasted chicken.

"Stealing food, Krycek?"

"I doubt they'll be coming back anytime soon, or that there will be anything left of this house to come back to." Krycek took a bite out of a chicken breast. "Besides, I haven't eaten today."

Doggett sighed and grabbed a drumstick from the container. "Do you mind if we swing by my house before heading to the cabin? I'd like to pack a bag."

"Where's your house?" Krycek grabbed a can of cola out of the fridge.

"It's in the suburbs outside of D.C."

"Okay, let's get going," Krycek said, while filling his pockets with homemade cookies from the cookie jar.

Doggett just shook his head as he followed Krycek out the door, locking it behind him.

"Krycek, I know where we're going so I'll drive," Doggett said, holding out his hand for the keys.

"Agent Doggett, I don't let just anyone drive my bike." Krycek swung his legs over the seat and looked up at Doggett, waiting for him to climb on behind him.

Doggett glared at him before climbing on the motorcycle.

"Tell me how to get to your place," Krycek said, starting the cycle.

Doggett gave him directions then placed one hand behind him on the seat to keep his balance as Krycek zoomed off down the street. On the outskirts of the city there was still very little damage and practically none in the suburban areas, except for the occasional crashed fighter or spaceship.

They took the back roads to Doggett's house. Doggett was grateful that his neighborhood was still intact. He waved at his neighbor who was loading his minivan with possessions and his kids.

His neighbor stopped what he was doing and ran across the lawn. "John, is it true that they blew up the White House?"

"I don't know much more than you do, Bob." Doggett's eyes fell on the children climbing into the van. "Isn't that the Smith's kids?"

"Yeah, I picked mine up at school along with Danny and Mary, but I haven't been able to get in touch their parents, they both work in downtown D.C. I left a note for them at their house that I'm taking their kids to my sister's farm in North Carolina. I just couldn't leave them here alone."



Doggett frowned. "What about the rest of the kids at the school whose parents never showed to pick them up?"

"Some of the teachers were organizing several buses to drive everyone away from the city to Madison County." Bob looked nervously at the sky. "I better get going, no telling when those things will be back."

Doggett looked around for Krycek and noticed that his front door was open. He found Krycek in the kitchen drinking a Budweiser, while eating a chocolate chip cookie. "If you're drinking, I'm driving! Hand over the fucking keys!"

"Chill, Dogbert, I haven't had a beer in over four months," Krycek said, tossing Doggett the keys. "I only wish you had better taste in beer."

Doggett caught the keys. "As the saying goes, beggars can't be choosers." He hurried into his bedroom and grabbed his duffle bag. He started filling it with clothes and a few possessions. He also changed out of his suit and pulled on a comfortable pair of jeans, and his hiking boots.

~x~X~x~

The Fox and the Bear

Georgetown

Friday, September 21, 2001

Skinner eased the truck over to the side of the road. This was as close to Georgetown as they were going to get. The whole town was on fire. Gas pipes must have broken, flooding the sewers with gasoline. Skinner could see flames leaping out of the manhole covers.

"I'm sorry, Mulder."

"Maybe Doggett and Krycek found them," Mulder said, his eyes wide as he watched the flames shooting up into the sky.

Skinner placed his hand on Mulder's arm. "Tell me how to get to your cabin. I think we'll need to stop for gas."

Mulder gave him directions. They stopped at a deserted gas station in Crystal City and filled the truck. Skinner also filled a couple of two-gallon gas cans.

"Mulder, I'm going to see if I can pick up some clothes from my apartment. It looks like the building is still standing," Skinner said, nodding to his apartment building down the street.

"Okay, but hurry up. No telling when they'll attack again." Mulder tried the radio again as Skinner drove toward his apartment building. He finally found a station that was on the air as Skinner pulled up in front of his building.

"Are you going to be okay down here alone?"

"I'll be fine. I'm armed," Mulder said, showing Skinner his ankle holster on his uninjured ankle.

"Okay, I'll be back soon." The power was off in the building, so Skinner jogged up the seventeen floors. Most of the residents worked in D.C., so he didn't see anyone on his way up. He doubted that a lot of them were still alive any longer. Once inside his apartment, Skinner hurried up to his bedroom and pulled out two canvas bags from the closet, filling them with jeans, shirts, underwear, and socks. He next went into the bathroom for his shaving kit and first aid kit. He

wanted to see the source of the blood on Mulder's groin. Then he stripped out of his suit, dressing in a pair of jeans, a sweater, and a pair of hiking boots.

Skinner rushed downstairs with the bags and set them down on his sofa. He went into the kitchen and filled a paper bag with food, figuring Mulder would be hungry...he knew he was.

Taking one last look at his apartment, Skinner knew this would be the last time he saw it. He pulled on his leather jacket and picked up his bags then hurried out of the apartment and down to the lobby. Mulder was still listening to the radio when he tossed his bags into the back of the truck and climbed behind the steering wheel.

"Anything interesting?" Skinner deposited the paper bag in Mulder's lap, careful that he didn't place it on his injured groin.

"Most of the cities in Europe and Asia have been destroyed. The aliens are still attacking over there and around the globe. It looks like our military have temporarily given them pause about attacking us. Many of their spaceships were destroyed by missiles hidden at secret sites throughout the Midwest and on the West Coast." Mulder looked in the bag and pulled out a slice of cold, day old pizza.

"What about damage done to our cities?" Skinner asked coming upon a traffic jam, he eased on the brake.

"Other than D.C., Boston and Atlanta were the heaviest hit cities." Mulder glanced up. "Take the next turn off. It will be faster taking the back roads than the interstate."

Skinner took the first right, which took them through a small neighborhood. He slammed on the breaks as a young man ran out in front of the truck waving his arms.

"Please, help me! My wife's in labor!" The man shouted as he ran around to the driver's side.

"Where is she?" Skinner asked.

"In the backseat of our SUV." The man pointed to the vehicle parked on the side of the road.

Skinner pulled the truck behind the SUV. Mulder opened his door and climbed out. He still couldn't stand on his injured ankle so he hopped over to the SUV.

"Walter, do you know anything about delivering babies?" he asked, staring down at the young woman lying in the backseat twisting and moaning.

Skinner shook his head. "Only what I've seen by watching the Learning Channel on cable. You?"

"I watched Scully deliver a baby once when we were on a case," Mulder answered nervously.

"Oh God!" the woman screamed.

Skinner turned to the woman's husband. "Go to that house and fill a bucket with hot water and see if you can find any clean towels or sheets," he said, figuring the man needed something useful to do.

Mulder in the meantime had climbed into the backseat and kneeled in the cramped space. "Hi, I'm here to help you. My name is Fox Mulder. Your husband has gone to get some things we're going to need."

The woman looked fearfully at him; her eyes were rimmed with tears. "I'm Katie. Oh God, it hurts!"

"Katie, it's going to all right. Is this your first baby?" Mulder wanted to take her mind off the pain.

"Yes."

He took her hand in his. "Have you chosen a name?"

"Michelle."

"That's a pretty name. Why did you pick it?"

Skinner watched as Mulder worked his magic, calming Katie. He wondered how long it would take the baby to be born and thought that maybe they should drive further away from D.C.

Her husband came back fifteen minutes later with his arms full. Skinner rushed over, taking the bucket of hot water from him.

"How is she?" the husband asked.

"She seems to be doing fine. My friend timed her contractions at under two minutes apart." Skinner set the bucket next to the SUV. "I'm Walter Skinner, my friend is Fox Mulder."

"Doug White."

Katie's scream drew them quickly to the van.

Mulder looked up at Skinner with a pale face. "I can see the baby's head."

Doug ran around to the other side of the SUV and opened the door. "Sweetheart, I'm here."

"Walter, what should I do?" Mulder asked.

Skinner started to reply but froze as the baby popped out suddenly with Katie's next contraction. Mulder picked up the infant covered in fluids. He used his finger to clean out the baby's mouth before turning her over and patting her bottom. The infant started crying, and Mulder eyes were filled with awe as he looked up at Skinner.

"Walter, I need something to cut the umbilical cord."

"I have scissors in my shaving kit, I'll go and get them."

Mulder placed the baby on her mother's chest. Katie smiled wearily and paled as she had another contraction and delivered the afterbirth.

Skinner came back with the scissors and handed them to Mulder. Mulder made a face as he snipped the cord. Next he grabbed a towel and cleaned up the after birth, tossing it out of the SUV onto the lawn.

"Doug, why don't you clean your daughter," Skinner suggested, watching as Mulder started cleaning the backseat and Katie. He took one of the blankets and wrapped it around her.

"Hey, Katie, you did really good," Mulder said as he made sure she was clean and comfortable.

"Fox, what will life be like for my baby?" Katie asked tiredly.

Mulder frowned. "I don't know, but we can't give up hope. Do you and Doug have someplace to

go?"

"Yes. We're going to my cousin's in Colorado."

Doug came back with the infant wrapped in a towel. "Hey, honey. I bathed our daughter...she's so beautiful. Can you hold her?" He placed the infant in his wife's arms. "I think we should try to put some distance between us and D.C.," he said, kissing her forehead.

Doug closed the door and walked over to Skinner as the A.D. was helping Mulder out of the SUV. "Walter, I want to thank you and Mr. Mulder for all you have done for my wife and me."

"You're welcome, Doug. I wish you and your family the best."

"Thank you," Doug said, climbing behind the wheel of his SUV.

Skinner helped Mulder back to their truck. He didn't like how swollen Mulder's ankle had become and prayed that it wasn't broken.

"How are you feeling?" he asked.

"I'm fine, sir."

"Mulder, you've been calling me Walter for most of the afternoon, there's no reason to switch back to sir. It's not like you're still working for me."

"Sorry, old habits." Mulder watched the White's SUV pull away. "Let's get out of here. The sun's starting to set and we still have a long drive to my cabin."

"Okay, Mulder." Skinner couldn't help staring at Mulder; there was something different about his former agent. He'd always been attracted to Mulder, but now he found his mere presence arousing.

The sun had set by the time they finally reached the ranger's station. Krycek's acquired motorcycle was parked out front. Mulder frowned, seeing no other vehicles, it meant they hadn't found Scully.

Sean rushed outside when he heard the truck. "Mulder, have we really been invaded?" The ranger was grateful that he had no family left to worry about.

"We've been attacked. It's only a matter of time before they break through our military's defenses." Mulder allowed Skinner to help him out of the truck. He wasn't looking forward to the eight-mile horseback ride to his cabin in the dark. "Sean, this is Assistant Director Walter Skinner."

"It's a pleasure to finally meet you, Mr. Skinner. Mulder's only had good things to say about you," Sean said, while watching Mulder. "What's wrong with your foot?"

"I sprained my ankle."

Sean shook his head. "It looks swollen. Your horse is in the stable. Your friends borrowed one of my horses and headed up to the cabin an hour ago. The dark-haired one wanted to drive his motorcycle there, but I convinced him that the ground was just too steep and rocky for the bike to make the trek in the dark."

"Thanks, Sean. I wasn't planning on guests, can you loan me a couple of sleeping bags?"

"I can do better. I have a large air mattress you can borrow for as long as you need it. It's one of

those self-inflating types." Sean walked back into the station as Skinner helped Mulder over to the stable.

Where, to Skinner's surprise, Mulder expertly saddled the horse while talking to it in soothing tones. They led the horse out of the stable and Skinner helped Mulder onto its back, then handed him the two canvas bags he'd packed before swinging his long legs into the saddle behind Mulder and wrapping his arms around the younger man's waist. Sean came back out and handed Skinner the bundle he was holding.

"Thanks, Sean, we'll see you tomorrow," Mulder said, spurring the horse into a trot.

~x~X~x~

Krycek wandered around the cabin. He held the orange tabby snuggled against his chest. He smiled at how cozy the place was and tried to picture Mulder up here all by himself. For some reason the thought made him sad. Next he wandered into the bedroom and sat on the large bed. The bedposts and frame were made out of logs, stripped of their bark then buffed and polished until the wood shone.

Doggett strolled into the bedroom. He'd been outside stabling the horse then feeding it and the cows some hay. He also fed the chickens. He grew up on a farm and had experience caring for animals.

"What are you doing?" he asked.

"Staking my claim to the bed, you and Skinner can sleep up in the loft. Mulder and I will sleep down here," Krycek said, setting the cat on the soft mattress, then swinging his feet up to lie down next to her.

"That bed is large enough for three. I think Fox, Walter, and I will be using it while you sleep on the rug in front of the stove," Doggett said menacingly. It'd been over twenty-four hours since he'd last slept and he was feeling irritable.

"Agent Doggett, why don't you make yourself useful and light a fire in the hearth. It's starting to get cold."

"Look, you little shit, I suggest you get your lazy ass off the bed and light the fire yourself. I'm going to see about starting a fire in the wood stove so I can put on some coffee." Doggett stormed out of the bedroom to Krycek's amusement.

"I don't think he likes me," Krycek said to the cat before he stood and walked over to the large stone fireplace.

Doggett first started a fire in the pot-bellied stove in the main room of the cabin, before heading into the open kitchen. Mulder had a bucket of kindling and logs sitting next to the wood stove. Once he had a fire lit, Doggett hunted around for the coffee, finding it in a metal tin appropriately labeled coffee. He looked at the old-fashioned percolator on the stove. He hadn't seen one of those since the early seventies. His mom used one before switching to the automatic Mr. Coffee.

By the time Skinner and Mulder walked through the door, the place was pleasantly warm and smelled of freshly percolated coffee. Krycek had lit the oil lamps and was reading in front of the pot-bellied stove with the cat sleeping on his lap. He looked up and smiled.

"Look, John Dear, the kids are home," he quipped, setting the book down.

Doggett only rolled his eyes and helped Mulder over to a chair in the kitchen.

Skinner set his bags down on the sofa and looked around at the cabin. "John, I need to unsaddle the horse and get her bedded down for the night. Can you tell me where the stable is?"

"Barn. I'll show you, Walter," Doggett said.

Krycek walked over and kneeled next to Mulder's chair, helping him off with his hiking boots.

"What were you reading?" Mulder asked, wiggling uncomfortable on the hard oak chair. Dreading the upcoming task of removing the blood encrusted bandage from his sac and applying antiseptic gel.

"One of the books on cheese making," Krycek said, unbuckling Mulder's ankle holster and placing it on the table. He then examined Mulder's swollen ankle. "It's interesting. Have you tried making cheese?"

"Yeah, not much else to do up here. I have some cheddar cheese aging in the root cellar. I want to try to make some Gorgonzola and Gouda next." Mulder sighed as Krycek's fingers massaged his foot. He should tell him to stop, but it felt so damn good. The strange thing was he no longer hated Krycek. Too much had happened to him over the past year that Mulder didn't have it in him to hate anyone, except for the aliens.

Mulder licked his lips and asked hesitantly, "Krycek, what did you find at Mrs. Scully's house?"

"Alex...I'd prefer to be called by my first name." Krycek gave Mulder a piercing look. "It looked like they left in a hurry. Fox, I'm almost positive Scully and William would have been with her. The breakfast table was set for two adults and the highchair was next to it with a bowl of what looked like cream of rice."

Mulder breathed out a sigh of relief. "Then they're still alive."

"Yeah, for whatever good it does them."

Mulder swallowed back tears. "I should have told Scully where I was staying."

"Why didn't you?"

"I didn't want her to find out what the aliens had done to me."

"I know what they did to you, Fox. They did the same thing to me." Krycek sadly shook his head. "I just haven't had time to consider the implications behind why they did it."

"You mean you have a--" Mulder looked down at Krycek's crotch.

"Yeah. I escaped before they could put it to use," Krycek said. "It wasn't the grays that are behind this invasion. It's another race of aliens. The grays are only slaves to them."

"Kry--Alex, I think our military gave them a bloody lip today. It's obvious they weren't expecting to have their ships shot down," Mulder said.

"Well, it's only a matter of time before the aliens win. If they had held off attacking us for a few more years we would have had our continent and our allies rimmed with our missile defense system." Krycek looked at the dried blood staining the fabric over Mulder's groin. "You removed the chip?"

Mulder nodded. "Sean helped me dispose of it in the ocean during last night's thunderstorm."

Krycek nodded with satisfaction. "Clever boy. C'mon, let's go into the bathroom and I'll help you redress your wound."

Mulder was starting to feel woozy, so he grateful for the help. He leaned on Krycek for support and limped into the bathroom. Krycek had lit the oil lamp on the wall earlier. The tiled floor was ice cold as Krycek helped him over to the toilet and closed the lid so he could sit. It was late September in the mountains and the evenings were beginning to get quite cold.

"Krycek, through that door is the wood-heated water heater. The water usually stays hot most of the day after the fire has gone out," Mulder said.

"I'll throw some more wood into it. I'd like to take a hot bath before bed tonight," Krycek said, opening the door he walked into the cold dark room. He found the iron door on the heater and put more wood and kindling inside then lit the fire. The tank was a large thirty-gallon.

Krycek came back into the bathroom and helped Mulder off with the soiled sweatpants, frowning at the dried blood covering the gauze bandage. "I'm going to place a wet washcloth over the bandage to help loosen it." He tried not to drool over the beautiful large penis lying flaccid against Mulder's thigh. The water was still warm as he wet a soft washcloth and placed it over Mulder's groin.

"While we wait for that to loosen the bandage, I'll wrap your ankle." Krycek was kneeling at Mulder's feet when Skinner knocked on the door and opened it.

"Mulder, are you all right?"

Mulder looked up at Skinner and was grateful that the washcloth covered his whole groin, not just his sac. "I'm fine, Walter. I could use a cup of coffee, if you don't mind?"

"Ah sure, I'll be right back with it." Skinner frowned, noticing the tender way Krycek was holding Mulder's foot.

"How's Mulder?" Doggett asked as Skinner entered the main room. He was climbing down the ladder leading up to the loft. Where he'd just setup the air mattress and covered it with sheets and a blanket. It was still to be determined who was sleeping where.

"He's fine," Skinner said, filling two coffee mugs, he walked back into the bathroom and handed one to Mulder and kept the other for himself. He smirked at the annoyed look Krycek shot him. "You have a really nice place here, Mulder."

Mulder smiled as he took a sip of the hot beverage. "It's a lot of work, but I like it. No phones, no traffic, no noisy neighbors, except for the family of raccoons down the creek."

"Sometime, when you're feeling up to it, I'd love a tour of your land." Skinner wasn't kidding when he told Mulder he liked it. He'd love to live in such a place; being self-sufficient and be surrounded by nature. He sighed remembering the reason they were at Mulder's cabin in the first place.

"I'd love to show you around. I was pretty fortunate to find this place, if it weren't for Froh...." Mulder gasped. "Oh fuck! I was so worried about Scully that I didn't even think about Frohike, Langly, and Byers. I wonder if they're all right."

Krycek and Skinner exchanged worried glances, before Krycek answered him. "Fox, we tried to find the Gunmen after the aliens attacked. Their headquarters had been destroyed. We don't know if they made it out alive or not. I'm sorry."

"It just keeps getting worse," Mulder said.

Krycek looked up at Skinner. "Wally, if you'll excuse us, I'd like to redress Fox's injury, and I think he'd prefer some privacy."

Skinner glared at the young man. "Fuck off, Alex." Then he looked at his former agent. "Mulder, if you need me, I'll be in the other room with John."

"Thanks, sir."

After Skinner left, Krycek carefully peeled off the bandage from the wound. "You should have stitched this closed. You're going to have a scar."

"It doesn't matter," Mulder said.

Krycek frowned it mattered to him. "Fox, can I ask a favor of you."

Mulder looked at his former enemy whose hands were being so gentle on his body. "What, Alex?"

"Can I sleep with you tonight? I spent months sleeping on a hard stone chair onboard the alien's ship and last night I spent sleeping on a cold concrete floor of a warehouse. It's been so long since I've slept in a real bed."

"I suppose. Sean sent an air mattress that Walter and John can share. If we're up here for long we can take turns in the bed."

Krycek smiled broadly as he applied the gel and fresh bandages to Mulder's wound. The back of his fingers brushed the length of Mulder's hardening penis. "Stay here and I'll go and get you something clean to wear."

Mulder blushed as Krycek stood. He noted the sorry state of Krycek's clothes. "Alex, we're about the same size, if you want to borrow something to wear."

Krycek wanted to kiss him, but he knew that Mulder was still nave over his true feelings for him. He went into the bedroom and started rummaging through the dresser. The fireplace cast a nice warm glow throughout the room. He pulled out a couple of pairs of boxer shorts, undershirts, and sweatpants. After his bath, Krycek was looking forward to sleeping in these soft garments.

Skinner and Doggett sat at the kitchen table talking as Krycek carried the clothes back into the bathroom and shut the door. Skinner glared at the closed door.

"You have feelings for both of them don't you?" Doggett asked.

"Mind your own business!" Skinner snapped.

"Walter, this is my business. I may be spending the remainder of my life with you guys. No matter how brief," Doggett said.

Skinner sighed, "John, I'm sorry. When I was in 'Nam I had sexual relations with other men. I've long since accepted that I'm bisexual. I've been attracted to Fox Mulder since the first time I met him. Getting to know him only made me more attracted to him. The man is so fucking brilliant and gorgeous." Skinner sighed. "Alex Krycek on the other hand, is a man's worst nightmare. He's too beautiful it's hard to resist him."



Doggett calmly sipped his coffee. "I found Krycek to be a spoiled brat in need of a good ass-whopping. I felt the same way about Mulder when I first met him, but he sort of grew on me after I got to know him a little better."

"Be careful with Krycek, John. He's more dangerous than he looks," Skinner said, glancing back at the closed bathroom door.

Mulder dressed while Krycek filled the bathtub with hot water and a generous portion of bubble bath.

"How did you get away from the aliens?" Mulder asked, watching Krycek undress. He noted that Krycek appeared thinner than the last time he'd seen him. More gaunt, but his skin was smoother a subtle sign of what the aliens had done to him.

"They had their spaceship cloaked in a field outside of D.C." Krycek lowered his body into the hot water and looked up at him from the suds-filled tub.

"How long were you in their hands?" Mulder lowered himself carefully to the floor beside the bathtub. His groin felt like it was on fire, but his ankle was feeling better.

"Four months...I escaped two nights ago."

Mulder licked his lips nervously; he finally had someone who could relate to what he'd been going through. "Have you touched it, Alex?"

"No. I've been too afraid."

"I used to feel the same way, until I finally found the courage to touch it. Later, I brought myself off to dual orgasms. I never experienced anything like it before," Mulder whispered, blushing.

Wide green eyes, fringed by long black lashes, looked up at Mulder in amazement. "You did?"

"I did." Mulder felt strange about confiding this to Krycek.

"I can feel it between my legs. Is it always so moist?" Krycek whispered.

"Most of the time." Mulder shrugged. "It seems to seep more when I'm aroused and then there's the time of the month when I'm menstruating."

"Menstruating? Oh shit, don't tell me I'm going to start menstruating!"

Mulder chuckled. "It was a shock the first time it happened to me. It's different than what a woman goes through, in that it only seems to last two days."

"I don't see how you can be so calm about it."

"I've had five months to adjust."

"Is that why you moved here? To adjust?"

Mulder looked away, his eyes becoming sad and distant. "Alex, I couldn't stand being around people. I felt so different from them--alien."

"So you came here all alone, not telling any of your friends where you moved."

"Frohike knew."

"People care about you, Mulder, not just Frohike."

Mulder shook his head. "No they don't...not really. When I was abducted the first time, no one spent more than a week searching for me. The last time, no one even knew they'd taken me again."

"You were only gone a week. Besides, you no longer worked for the FBI, and Scully was in San Diego visiting her brother and sister-in-law at the time."

"How do you know that?" Mulder asked.

"I just do." Krycek blushed, he didn't want Mulder finding out how much time he'd spent watching him. It was the main reason he agreed to go with the alien to find out what they'd done to Mulder.

Mulder frowned. "After they let me go, it took five weeks for my body to complete the change. I was sick to my stomach throughout that whole time."

"I'm surprised they let you go and didn't hold you like they did me."

"I don't know why they didn't either." Mulder stood and limped to the door. "I'm going to see how Walter and John are doing."

Skinner and Doggett were sitting at the dining room table when Mulder came out of the bathroom. Mulder limped over to the rectangle table and sat on the chair next to Skinner.

"How's your ankle?" Skinner asked.

"Better."

"Mulder, I've set up the air-mattress in the loft. We figured one of us can share the bed with you and the other two can sleep on the air-mattress," Doggett said tiredly.

"Guys, I already told Krycek he could sleep in the bed. If it weren't for my ankle I'd be happy to sleep up in the loft."

"No, Fox, this is your home. You shouldn't have to give up your bed," Doggett said.

"Well, I'm going to turn in," Skinner said, standing. "I want to head back to the ranger station in the morning and see if I can use his short-wave radio to get in touch with our military. Maybe there's something we can be doing to help defend our planet."

"I'd like to head back to D.C. tomorrow and see if I can be of any help," Doggett said.

Mulder nodded. "I'll go with you."

"Go where?" Krycek said, coming out of the bathroom.

"To D.C. with John tomorrow," Mulder said.

Skinner pulled his shaving kit from his bag and a pair of sweatpants. "Did you leave any hot water?" he asked as he passed Krycek.

Krycek shrugged his shoulders. "There should be a lot left." He turned back to Mulder. "Fox, you can't go to D.C. unless your ankle is better. You'll only slow John and me down."

"Whoa, Krycek, who says I want you along?" Doggett said.

"You can't go alone, and I want to pick up some things while we're there."

Mulder sighed. "I'm going." He limped back to the bathroom. "Walter, you can put your things in the medicine cabinet. If you don't mind, I want to wash my face and brush my teeth before bed. I'll be out of your way in a second."

"I don't mind, Fox," Skinner said, grinning at the look Mulder gave him for using his first name. He figured since Krycek and Doggett were getting away with calling him Fox, he'd get away with it, too.

"Walter, there's a wood-heated water heater through that door. After you're done with your shower, can you add some more wood to the fire? That way it will still be hot in the morning." Mulder squeezed some toothpaste on his toothbrush as Skinner stripped.

"Sure," Skinner said as he closed the shower curtain that wrapped around the whole claw-footed bathtub. Then he turned on the water and waited for it to heat up before stepping into the tub, keeping his back to Mulder the whole time. Skinner didn't want him to see the hard on he was sporting. He couldn't understand why Mulder was having such an affect on him. Maybe it was better that Krycek slept with Mulder, since Skinner didn't think he'd be able to keep his hands off him.

Mulder limped out of the bathroom and went to make sure the doors were locked. He never had a problem with anyone trespassing on his property, but he still didn't want to take any chances.

Krycek had already gone into the bedroom. Doggett was still at the table leafing through one of his books on canning.

"You're a regular survivalist aren't you?" Doggett said.

"No." Mulder leaned against the counter. "John, I didn't move here because I thought the world was coming to an end."

"Sorry, I didn't mean to imply that you did. It's just amazing how self-sufficient you are out here."

Mulder looked over at his bookshelves and grinned sheepishly. "I went overboard on the how to books. It's strange not having electricity and not being able to watch television. I have a battery-operated radio, but I'm only able to pick up a couple of stations most of the news I get from Sean. The ranger station has electricity, cable TV, and gas heat."

Doggett nodded. "I noticed the woodpile out back, did you chop all of that?"

"Yeah. I spent a lot of my time this summer preparing for winter, chopping wood, growing vegetables, and stocking up on items from town. The root cellar and cupboards are full."

"From the look of the barn and your livestock, I'll say you've done a great job."

"Thanks. Are you going to turn in soon?"

"I want to take a shower after Walter is done. Go to bed, I'll turn off the oil lamps," Doggett said.

"Okay, I'll see you in the morning." Mulder limped into the bedroom. Krycek was already sleeping on the side of the bed nearest the door with Tiger curled up sleeping at the foot of the bed.

Mulder stopped at the fireplace and put a couple of more logs on the fire, before climbing under

the covers and lying on his back. It felt strange having someone else in bed with him. The last person he'd slept with was Scully and that was before his first abduction. Although, he loved Scully, they both realized they could never be more than friends. It didn't matter, since the aliens had altered him Mulder now found that he was more attracted to men than women. Krycek smelled good. Mulder sniffed his own arm. He still smelled of smoke from the fire. He should have taken a shower.

Krycek rolled over in his sleep and snuggled up against his side. Mulder froze afraid of waking Krycek. The darkness didn't allow him to see the smile that spread across Krycek's lips as his arm lay across Mulder's chest.

~x~X~x~

Skinner climbed up to the loft and crawled under the covers. He was exhausted and was asleep as soon as his eyes closed.

After Doggett finished his shower, he added more wood to the pot-bellied stove and walked barefoot across the cold hardwood floor. He extinguished all of the oil lamps then climbed up the ladder to the loft. Skinner was taking up most of the mattress, so he had to push the larger man over to his side and crawl under the blankets. It'd been over twenty-four hours since he'd last slept, but he was too wired to fall right to sleep. Instead he lay on his back, listening to Skinner snore while enjoying the heat from his body.

~x~X~x~

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Chapter 2: The Pact by Jo B

Author's Notes:

The guys go to the military, wanting to help defend their country where Mulder meets an old foe. New neighbors move to the mountain.

Commander Gnaye's voice wavered as he reported the news of their destroyed warships back to his home world. All the ships sent to attack the North American Continent had been severely damaged or destroyed. A total of twenty-percent of their fleet of three thousand ships. Two hundred and ten thousand of the large-headed gray leptan slaves were killed along with six thousand of Gnaye's own race.

It made his stomach sink to lose so many of his people when there were so few of them left. Maybe he shouldn't have launched another attack on the continent last night after being defeated there earlier in the day. They did succeed in destroying many the major cities on the North American continent, but not without unprecedented losses.

"Commander Gnaye, how was it possible for these primitive humans to inflict such destruction upon us?" Emperor Zahn asked.

"My Emperor, the leptan's surveillance of the humans never gave us any indication that their technology was advanced enough to take down any of our warships." Gnaye wiped at his sweaty brow as the Emperor's chameleon eyes burn into him. Emperor Zahn was beautiful in his unchanged form. He had a proud straight nose, high cheekbones, and long lash-shrouded, almond-shaped eyes. He epitomized the classic beauty of the lycanthrope race.

Their home world of Uzan was also the home of the leptans. Both races had the ability to morph. While the leptans real shape was that of a large-headed, sickly gray skin being with a small nose, a form that the lycanthrope race found repugnant. The lycanthrope maintained two forms one that closely resembled the Earth humans, and the other that resembled what was known in human legends as a werewolf. In fact, the werewolf legends on Earth began after the lycanthrope first explored the planet.

"That was your mistake, Commander! You relied too heavily on our slaves to deal with Earth. You should have overseen the situation more closely."

"I apologize for my short sightedness. There was no indication that these humans would become so valuable to our race." Gnaye hoped the Emperor realized that most of their forces were needed in other areas around the galaxy. Their race was dying, and couldn't spare men to oversee the leptan experiments. How was he to know that the solution to their survival would be found on that small blue planet?

"How are you handling the situation?" Zahn asked.

"My Lord, it is only one small section of the planet that possesses these advanced weapons. We have most of Earth under our control and are proceeding to take control of the population. We will process them and determine their value."

The Emperor relaxed. "How much progress are you making on altering the human males?"

"I have sent the four originally altered males on to Uzan. We will be selecting only the prime males from the population to be altered."

"Four? I thought there were six?"

Gnaye swallowed. "Two have escaped."

"The human I have chosen to bear my children, is he on his way to Uzan?"

"No, my Lord. He is still in the land where the human's possess the advanced weapons."

"Commander, are you telling me, you attacked Earth before having my chosen breeder safely onboard your ship?"

Gnaye visibly shrank under his ruler's anger. "Not by choice. He had a chip implanted in him. I was going to have him picked up before we attacked, but the chip malfunctioned and I was unable to locate him."

"So you attacked anyway?" Zahn's eyes narrowed in anger.

Gnaye thanked the creator that a galaxy separated him from the Emperor. "My Emperor, we will soon have millions of humans for you to choose from--"

"Enough! You will find me Fox Mulder, Commander. No other human will do. Not only is he intelligent, but he bears an uncanny resemblance to my family line, as much as a human can resemble us."

"I will find him for you, My Lord," Gnaye said, trembling and bowing.

"You'd better, and if he is dead, your head will reside on a spike outside my throne room. All on Uzan will know of your disgrace." The Emperor disconnected and Gnaye was left staring worriedly at a blank screen.

He had seen images of the human his Emperor desired, and agreed that Fox Mulder's resemblance to the royal family line was uncanny. He never should have relied so heavily on the leptans to experiment and test the humans. It wasn't until the successful alteration of this Fox Mulder that they had become directly involved. Why hadn't he ordered the leptans to pick up Fox Mulder once the chip provided the data about his successful alteration? Gnaye would go through the files and pull out the ones on Fox Mulder. Maybe he'd be able to locate the human through

the information they contained.

~x~X~x~

The Dog, Bear, Rat, and Fox

Blue Ridge Mountain

Saturday, September 22, 2001

Skinner started awake to the sound of a rooster crowing. He stared up at the roughhewn wood ceiling in the dimly lit loft. It took him a moment to remember where he was and whose warm body was pressed against his.

As the rooster crowed again, Doggett muttered and swore under his breath. He tossed off the blankets and planted his bare feet on the floor and stood.

Skinner sat up and rubbed the sleep out of his eyes. He shivered as the cool air hit his bare chest, making him regret not wearing an undershirt to bed. Glancing up at Doggett, he admired his taut muscles of the agent's back as he stretched.

"Good morning, John."

"Morning, Walter." Doggett brought his arms down and squinted at his watch. It was hard to see in the dim light. Downstairs, the sunlight was beginning to creep in through the front windows.

"Why don't you get some more sleep? It's not even six o'clock yet," Doggett said.

"I usually get up before six." Skinner stood and walked to the ladder. He needed to use the bathroom.

"Me, too. When I was growing up on the farm, I always got up with the rooster. My Pa expected us kids to have our chores done before school." Doggett followed Skinner to the ladder, while his eyes admired his boss's muscular physique, furry back, tapered waist, and a tight ass encased in soft cotton sweatpants. This was the first time he'd seen Skinner without a shirt on and was impressed by the great physical shape Skinner was in for someone who spent his life behind a desk.

"I grew up in a three bedroom, one bath house in Chicago. I was the youngest child of three kids. I learned to get up early to beat my siblings to the bathroom." Once down the ladder, Skinner glanced toward the open bedroom door, and wondered if the rooster had woken Mulder and Krycek. There was no movement or noise coming from the room.

"I had a brother and a sister," Doggett said, pulling out a fresh pair of socks from his bag, along with the sweatshirt and jeans he had worn yesterday. He stripped off the sweatpants he had worn to bed, causing goose bumps to race up his legs. He hurriedly dressed and walked over to the pot-bellied stove and added a couple of logs to the remaining embers.

Skinner never talked about his family before with any of his acquaintances. "Only my parents and older brother are left. My parents live in Chicago and West lives up in Alaska with his family. He has a ranch there. I think I'll try to get in touch with him when we get to the ranger station. West has a radio at his place," he said, digging through his bag.

"My brother still lives with my dad on the farm. My sister was killed by a drunk driver ten years ago."

"I'm sorry to hear that. What about your mom?" Skinner asked.

"She died when I was seventeen. At least she isn't around to see our world attacked," Doggett sighed. "I think I'll put on a pot of coffee."

"I need to use the bathroom." Skinner carried his clothes across the room to the bathroom. He paused outside of the bedroom and looked in at the two men sleeping on the large bed. The orange cat peered up at Skinner from where she laid curled up between Mulder's spread legs. Mulder was lying on his belly with his face turned toward Krycek who was lying on his side with one arm over Mulder's back and his forehead resting against Mulder's. The two men were sleeping so close together that there was enough room for another man in the bed. Skinner felt a stir of jealousy, then shook it off, and stormed into the bathroom.

The cat stretched and hopped off the bed and padded into the main room. She walked over to Doggett and rubbed against his legs, meowing.

"You hungry cat?" Doggett bent down and scratched her behind the ear. "I'll see if I can find you something to eat." He started looking through the cupboards until he found the container of dried cat food.

After feeding the cat, Doggett walked over to the stove. He hoped Skinner didn't take too long in the bathroom. He needed to take a piss real bad. He shuffled from foot to foot as he opened the iron door on the stove and put a couple of pieces of wood inside. Once the fire was going, he filled the percolator with water and scooped coffee into the basket then set it on the burner. He wandered over to the open bathroom door. Skinner was shaving at the sink.

Not being able to wait any longer, Doggett entered and unzipped his jeans, and stood before the toilet. He sighed as his bladder emptied. "I shouldn't have drunk so much coffee before bed."

Skinner smirked as he scraped the razor over his cheek. "Being all the way up in the loft doesn't make a middle of the night bathroom run very easy."

Doggett shook his unit and tucked himself back in, zipping up his jeans.

Skinner moved over to make room for him at the sink. "Do you need to borrow my razor?"

"Nope, I packed my own."

After washing his hands, Doggett dried them on a towel hanging on a hook next to the sink. He frowned, looking around. "I never imagined I'd find Mulder out here, living like this. He never struck me as much of an outdoors man."

Skinner rinsed his razor under the faucet and shook it off before he placed it in the medicine cabinet alongside his shaving gel and after-shave. He picked up his wire rims and put them on. "I've known Mulder for nine years and he's never been one to run away from trouble. He always faced everything head on." Skinner sighed, and looked Doggett in the eye. "Something happened to him, he's different."

"Maybe his abduction has taken its toll on him. He's gone through hell this past year, not many men could have survived what's happened to him with their sanity still intact."

"Yeah, he takes a licking and keeps on ticking." Skinner's voice was filled with sadness.

"Walter, I don't know Mulder as well as you do, but maybe after everything he's been through, he just needed to get away."

Skinner shook his head and said in a low voice, "No. There is something different about him."

"Okay, say that there is? How do we find out what he's hiding?" Doggett asked.

"I don't know. I've already checked the back of his neck for bumps."

"Walter, let's just keep an eye on him for now." Doggett headed for the door. He needed a cup of coffee before he shaved. Skinner finished dressing and walked into the kitchen.

~x~X~x~

Krycek opened his eyes to a vision. Mulder's face was mere inches from his own, and his former nemesis' hand rested easily on his chest. God, Mulder looked so damned beautiful asleep. His features softened as the weight of the world, he usually carried around his neck like an anchor, disappeared. What Krycek wouldn't give to forever take away the pain from Mulder's life.

While his own life wasn't a picnic, at least he had the luxury of choosing his own destiny. Unlike Mulder who was born with his fate already cast upon the wind.

Voices drifted into the bedroom from the kitchen, and Krycek knew he should get up. Instead he snuggled closer to Mulder under the covers. It felt too damn good lying here, cradled in the warmth of the bed with the man he'd been in love with for years sleeping beside him. Krycek continued to study Mulder's face, while breathing in his smoky scent. He thought back to yesterday. He'd half-expected Mulder to beat the shit out of him, but was surprised at how calm and forgiving the former agent had been. The past year had changed Mulder in more ways than one.

Krycek watched as Mulder's eyes slowly opened and focused on his face. A blush spread across Mulder's cheeks and he pulled his hand off Krycek's chest and quickly rolled over to his side of the bed. "Sorry...I-I sometimes toss and turn in my sleep."

"You don't have to be sorry. It's so fucking cold in this room, I appreciated the added warmth."

Mulder threw off the covers and stood, carefully testing his ankle. "It's in the fifties. Once winter gets here, it's going to be a lot colder. I'll have to set an alarm clock to wake me, so I can keep the fires going in the cabin. It still gets into the seventies during the day, so there's no need to put any more wood on the fire."

Krycek reluctantly left the warm bed. "I'd be happy to take turns with you, getting up."

Mulder arched an eyebrow. "You're planning on staying?"

"I don't have anywhere else to go." Krycek shuffled his feet and looked at him with sad eyes. "Fox, you wouldn't throw me out into the cold would you?"

Mulder rolled his eyes. "Don't play games with me, Alex, I'm not that gullible." He walked around the bed to stand beside the younger man. "You can stay, but you have to help with the chores." Then he added bitterly, "Besides, I really don't think we have much longer to live anyway."

"We'll defeat them."

"Do you really believe that?" Mulder saw the doubt in Krycek's eyes and sighed, "I'm going to take a shower." He rummaged through his dresser for a pair of sweats and picked up his boots from the floor, then limped to the bathroom.

Krycek followed, carrying a pair of Mulder's faded jeans and a sweater. Normally he wouldn't be able to fit into a pair of Mulder's jeans, but he'd lost a lot of weight while he was a prisoner of the



aliens. He smirked at Skinner who was standing in the kitchen sipping a cup of coffee. He enjoyed rubbing it in, knowing Skinner had feelings for Mulder, too. Krycek closed the bathroom door behind himself and Mulder.

"Alex, I could use a little privacy," Mulder said, walking into the room with the water heater, he added more wood and lit the fire. The water in the tank should still be hot.

"I figured you could use some help after your shower re-wrapping your ankle and redressing your wound." Krycek hung the clothes on a hook behind the door then started stripping out of his sweats.

Mulder just looked at him perplexed. He was unsure about his feelings toward Krycek. While he no longer hated him, he hadn't quite begun to trust him either. Then there was the way his body responded being around the younger man. Yesterday, he was in too much pain for his libido to give away his interest. Now, blood rushed to his penis at the sight of Krycek's nude body. It didn't help that Krycek shamelessly stood peeing into the toilet bowl, giving Mulder a good glimpse of his equipment. Mulder shook himself. Pulling his eyes away, he started the shower. He stripped with his back to Krycek. Maybe if he kept the water cold enough, it would diminish his rising problem. Unwrapping his ankle, Mulder stepped into the tub and closed the shower curtain. All the while he could feel Krycek's eyes on him.

The water loosened the bandage on his testicle. He peeled it off and dropped it on the floor outside the shower, then carefully washed that area. It had scabbed over again. When he finally stepped out of the shower, Krycek was already dressed and waiting for him with a towel.

"Dry yourself, then I'll take care of your ankle and...." His eyes sparkled with mischief as he stared appreciatively down at Mulder's large penis and balls.

Mulder blushed as his penis twitched and rose with interest. He quickly turned his back on Krycek and dried himself. "Alex, if you don't mind...I'd prefer that you let me take care of wrapping my ankle and putting a fresh bandage on my wound.

Krycek frowned. "Mulder, I'm not trying to take advantage of you. I only want to help."

Mulder sighed with frustration and sat on the closed toilet seat. He put his head in his hands. "Alex, I grew up knowing my sexual identity. I like women. I've made love to women. Now the mere sight of a naked man has me harder than granite. Their smell and bodies arouse me...I don't know what to do. It's embarrassing."

Krycek smiled at Mulder's confession as he kneeled at his feet. He picked up the elastic binding and started wrapping Mulder's ankle as he spoke. "I've had sex with women when there was something to be gained. I prefer men. I always have. So maybe what the aliens did to us is affecting you more strongly than me."

Mulder shifted uncomfortably. "Did you have many male lovers?"

"Yeah, but only two meant anything to me. The others were just quick fucks or business. Does that bother you?"

"No." The corner of Mulder's mouth lifted in a grin. "I always suspected you were gay."

Krycek looked up at him startled. "Since when?"

"Since the first time I met you. I caught you checking out my ass a couple of times."

"I'm rather surprised that you didn't tell or request a new partner."

"I'm not homophobic, Alex. It didn't matter to me which way you swung. It was your lies and betrayal that pissed me off!" Mulder clenched his hands into fists at the memory. It seemed like a lifetime ago.

Krycek stood to get a fresh bandage from the medicine cabinet. "I was working for the CIA at the time. I still am if there's anyone left. I needed to gain the syndicate's and CGB Spender's trust. I'm sorry that I hurt you, Fox. It was one of two things that I regretted about my assignment."

"What was the second?"

"Skinner. My CIA bosses weren't sure about him. He teetered on the fence too often for their comfort. So when he was infected with the nanocytes, they made me use him to gather information about what you and Scully were up to, and to control him. I never saw him as a fence sitter, Skinner always supported and protected you and Scully, but I did what I was ordered."

"Alex, my father...?"

Krycek shook his head as he reapplied the bandage. "Not now. I'll tell you the whole story some other day." He patted Mulder's thigh and stood. "Get dressed. I'm hungry, if you can show me how to use that ancient stove. I'll fix us breakfast."

Mulder nodded as he started dressing. "I have a lot to do this morning. I need to clean the barn, milk the cows, collect eggs, and feed the animals."

"This place keeps you busy?"

"Yeah. My property is two hundred and twenty acres, just on the edge of the National park system. There is a four acre field a mile from here that Old Man Peterson used to grow alfalfa and hay for the livestock. Other than that it's mainly woods and rocky terrain," Mulder said, pulling on his socks and boots.

They left the bathroom together. Skinner and Doggett looked up at them from the table.

"Thanks for making the coffee," Mulder said, pouring himself and Alex a cup.

"No problem, Mulder," Doggett said. "Walter and I want to give you a hand with the chores this morning, before we head to the ranger station."

"How about we have breakfast first? Is pancakes okay?"

"That's fine with me," Skinner said.

Mulder walked over to the cupboard and pulled out a bottle of maple syrup, setting it on the table.

"Fox, can I help?" Krycek asked.

"Yeah, can you mix two cups of flour, two eggs, a quarter teaspoon of salt, and one and a half cups of buttermilk into this bowl?" Mulder set out the ingredients on the counter as he spoke. Krycek paid close attention to where he kept everything.

"I need to get the buttermilk from the stream." Mulder limped to the door and opened it.

"Mulder, I'll get it for you." Skinner stood and walked to the back door. "How's your ankle?"

"Sore, but I can manage." He stepped outside.

"You're still limping, go back inside sit down, Mulder. I'll get the buttermilk."

Mulder frowned but relented. "Okay, bring some butter back, too," he said, stepping back into the cabin.

Skinner jogged the hundred yards to the stream and found a waterproof metal box submerged in the cold water. It had a rope anchoring it to the bank. He noticed the shadowy shapes of fish darting around the clear water as he lifted out the box and opened the latches. Inside he found bottles of milk, buttermilk, and a crock of butter. He took the items he needed out and re-latched the box, then lowered it back into the water. He carried milk and butter back to the cabin.

Krycek took the buttermilk from Skinner and poured some of it into the bowl with the flour and eggs.

"Aren't you going to measure it?" Mulder asked, taking the butter from Skinner and setting it on the table.

"No need. I've made pancakes before. I know how thick the batter should be," he said, mixing the ingredients together. "Do you have any vanilla?"

"Yeah, it's on this shelf with the spices." Mulder pulled a flat skillet down from the overhead pot rack and placed it on the stove. He added some vegetable oil to it and adjusted the heat.

Krycek nodded, and took the small brown bottle off the shelf. His eyes fell on ceramic pots of fresh herbs growing on the window ledge above the sink. There were also several preserve jars of tomatoes on the counter. Next to them was a bowl with zucchini and carrots. He smiled at the thought of Mulder on his hands and knees gardening. On the far side of the kitchen were a hand-cranked washing machine and a clothes ringer. The cabin had quite a few homey details that he wouldn't have imagined Mulder capable of adding, including the cat.

"Fox, sit. I'll handle the cooking," Krycek said, spooning some batter onto the hot skillet.

Mulder sighed with frustration; he wasn't used to being waited on. "Okay, thanks."

"Do you have any neighbors, Mulder?" Skinner asked, pouring himself another mug of coffee. He carried the coffeepot over to the table and topped off Mulder's and Doggett's mugs.

Taking a sip of coffee, Mulder said, "Other than Sean, my nearest neighbors are ten miles away down in the valley, they raise sheep. There are people scattered throughout the mountains. Frohike's uncle had a cabin six miles from here. He passed away two months ago and left everything to Frohike. I trade with a woman who has a cabin twelve miles from me. She has beehives and makes honey, candles, and soap."

"It sounds like an interesting community," Doggett said.

"It is. Most of the residents are craftsmen and craftswomen. I haven't had a chance to meet everyone yet. Mary says there are a man and woman that live five miles from her cabin that make pottery, and jams and jellies, which they sell at a shop in town. I've been meaning to ride out to meet them." Mulder frowned. "You know, I like living here but I took comfort in knowing that I could go back to the city anytime I wanted to. Now that's gone."

"Dig in." Krycek set a large plate of pancakes on the table then went back to the stove to make some more.

"Thanks, Krycek," Doggett said, forking three of the nine pancakes off the plate and placing them

on his own. Mulder and Skinner followed suit.

Krycek came back a few minutes later with another large plate of pancakes. He sat in the empty chair between Doggett and Skinner.

"These are outstanding, Krycek," Skinner said, taking two more pancakes from the fresh batch.

Mulder nodded his agreement as he ate. It felt surreal, sharing breakfast in his home with his former boss, the man who took his job, and his nemesis. But then the last two days felt surreal. He was still having a hard time believing that the aliens had finally attacked even after he saw it with his own eyes.

"Fox, what's wrong?" Doggett asked.

Mulder raised his eyes and looked into Doggett's piercing blues. "What happened yesterday is starting to sink in. Millions if not billions of people are dead, and we barely escaped with our lives. I'm feeling guilty. I should have done more to--"

Skinner slammed his fork down. "Mulder, don't start taking the blame for something that was out of your hands! We all lost so much yesterday. At least you provided us with a place to sleep and a chance to regroup. We'll get back at those bastards!"

"Sir, I can't help how I feel. We're relatively comfortable here while around the world people are fleeing for their lives. Scully and William are out there somewhere."

"Fox, my parents still live in Chicago. Don't you think I'm worried about them? We need to find out more about what's happening across the country before we rush off in all directions," Skinner said.

Doggett nodded. "Walter's right, Fox. I'm worried about my family, too. But we need to discover what's going on with our government and the military."

"So what do we do first?" Mulder asked.

"Like I said yesterday, we go and see the ranger and use his radio to contact the military, and try to get information about what's going on," Skinner said. "I'm not sure if it's a good idea to head back to D.C. yet."

"I can take the motorcycle and scout the area," Krycek said.

Skinner turned to face the younger man. "Krycek, I still don't trust you. For all I know you'll use the opportunity to inform the aliens about our location," he said.

Krycek glared at him. "I saved your life yesterday, Skinner. I didn't have to do that...and I wasn't lying when I told you that I work for the Agency."

Skinner shook his head. "You've lied, killed, and betrayed too many people for me to take your word for anything."

"Walter, I'll go with him," Mulder said. "We need to get information about what's going on in D.C."

"No, Mulder, Krycek stays here with me." He turned to Doggett. "John, after we've contacted the military, I want you and Mulder to take the motorcycle to D.C. Take the back roads and don't take chances. If you see any aliens come back here immediately. See if you can pick up another bike. It might come in handy," Skinner said, taking charge.

"Who voted you leader?" Krycek said angrily.

Mulder looked over at Doggett and they both raised their hands.

"We did," Mulder said. "Look, Alex, I want to believe you're here to help us. But you need to earn all of our trust and make amends for the past."

Krycek pursed his lips as he stared at Mulder. "Fine. I'll stay here with Skinner, but you had better watch your ass. I'm going to be seriously pissed if you get yourself killed...no telling what I'll do!" His eyes flickered menacingly to Skinner.

There was a threat in that statement that sent a chill racing up Mulder's spine. He had no doubt that Krycek would make Skinner pay if anything happened to him. It puzzled Mulder why Krycek would care so much whether he lived or died. He remembered how solicitous Krycek had been toward him yesterday and today. Could it be that Krycek's feelings for him go deeper than a desire for forgiveness and friendship?

Mulder stood nervously. "I need to milk the cows and feed the animals before we go."

"Walter and I said we'd help you with the chores," Doggett said, standing and carrying his empty plate and mug to the sink.

Krycek sighed, "I'll help, too." He knew nothing about farming or farm animals.

The reluctance in Krycek's voice made Mulder chuckle. "You don't know what you're getting yourself into."

"Fox, if you can learn to milk a cow, I'm sure I won't have any trouble." Krycek continued to eat as Skinner rose and started doing the dishes.

"You two go ahead. I'll be out in a minute," Skinner said, filling the sink with water.

Mulder and Doggett walked over to get their jackets.

"Have you ever milked a cow, John?" Mulder asked.

"Yep. I grew up on a farm."

"Really? God, I could have used you when I first moved here." Mulder opened the back door and they both stepped out into the yard.

Skinner stood at the sink while Krycek sipped his coffee and finished eating. "Don't fuck with Mulder, Alex. If you hurt him, I'll beat the crap out of you."

"Walter, we both have his best interests in mind."

"Do we?" Skinner dried the dishes and put them away.

"I want him to be happy. I never wanted to hurt him or you."

"You did anyway. You killed his father and were an accomplice in Scully's abduction and her sister's murder. You infected me with those nanobots and-"

"I wasn't the one who infected you. I just took control of you after you were infected. Like I told you, I was ordered to do so." Krycek stood and handed Skinner his plate. "Mulder is willing to forgive me, why can't you?"

"Do you know how painful it is to have your blood boiling in your veins?" Skinner glared at him and snarled, "Thanks to you, I do!" He tossed the towel on the counter and stormed over to get his coat off the rack. If he stayed much longer he'd take a poke at Krycek.

Skinner paused in the yard and looked around. There was a basketball hoop over the barn door. A clothesline was stretched from the side of the cabin to a post twelve feet away. He took a deep breath of the fresh country air before stepping inside the small barn. It had four stalls and a loft where bails of hay were stacked. A heavy oak bench with various tools was set up at the back of the barn. A pot-bellied stove, similar to the one in the main room of the cabin, was in the corner.

Mulder was feeding the horses while Doggett milked one of the cows.

"What would you like me to do, Mulder?"

"Can you feed the chickens? Then collect the eggs and try not to disturb the sitting hens."

"How do I do that?"

Doggett chuckled. "Fox, why don't you show the city boy how to do it, and I'll finish milking the other cow."

"C'mon, Walter, let's do it." Mulder leered playfully.

"Don't tempt me, Mulder," Skinner growled as he took the chicken feed from him.

Mulder swallowed as Skinner's eyes burned into his. He backed away toward the shelf. "I-I need to get the basket for the eggs."

The hen house was built into the side of the barn. It had a mesh window that allowed the heat from the barn to spill in during the winter.

Skinner followed Mulder out of the barn and waited while he opened the gate to the chicken coop. The birds were outside, waiting to be fed.

"Pour most of the feed into their feeder. Then you can scatter some around on the ground. I need to fill the water container with fresh water," Mulder said, setting the egg basket on the ground then walking to a pump in the middle of the farmyard. He filled a wooden bucket with cold water and carried it back to the coop.

Skinner tried to count the chickens as he tossed the seed on the ground. There were at least five dozen outside. After he finished feeding them, he followed Mulder into the hen house. He expected it to be dirty and smelly, but surprisingly it was clean. Mulder must spend a lot of his time tending to the animals. Six hens sat on nests while two dozen nests were empty, except for the eggs that were in them.

Mulder set the basket down. "These three hens are broody and have been sitting on their eggs for the last two weeks. In another week the eggs should start hatching. You can collect the eggs from under the other three hens."

"What do you do with the chicks?"

"I allow the mothers to take care of them. They're pretty protective of their young."

"Have you killed any of the chickens for food?" Skinner asked.

Mulder shrugged his shoulders. "No. I haven't been able to bring myself to do it."

Skinner grinned. It didn't surprise him. "Fox, you're going to be overrun by chickens."

"Tell me about it." Mulder put the first few eggs into the basket.

In the meantime Krycek had come out of the cabin and entered the barn. He wrinkled his nose at the smell. "Where's Mulder?"

"He's doing it with Walter in the hen house," Doggett said with a straight face.

"What?" Krycek turned and dashed outside. He was so upset that he didn't hear Doggett start laughing.

Mulder was placing another egg into the basket when Krycek stormed into the hen house.

Skinner had been trying to get the eggs from beneath a hen when she pecked his hand at Krycek's sudden entrance. "Shit!" He glared at Krycek.

Mulder looked at Krycek as he set the basket down. "Alex, what's wrong?"

Krycek took in the innocent scene and blushed. He could see Doggett laughing through the wire mesh window in the barn.

"Ah, nothing, Fox. I wanted to see if you needed any help."

"Can you go and help John?" Mulder took Skinner's hand in his and looked at the red mark. "She didn't break the skin. You'll be fine."

Krycek watched Mulder holding Skinner's hand. He didn't like how close they were standing or the look in Skinner's eyes as he stared at Mulder.

Skinner glanced over Mulder's shoulder and smirked. "Alex, I thought you were going to help John."

Mulder turned around, completely clueless over what was going on. He looked at Krycek in the dimly lit hen house. "Is there something wrong?"

"I'd rather work with you. Agent Doggett doesn't like me."

Mulder took in the pout. "Okay, Walter can you go and help John? I want him to let the cows out after he's done milking them."

Skinner glared at Krycek then turned back to Mulder. "Mulder, aren't you afraid they'd wander off or get killed by predators?"

"No. There aren't any predators in the area large enough to harm them. They'll go to the nearby field for the day. When it starts to get dark they'll come back to the barn to be milked."

"Okay. After they're out what do you want us to do?"

"Rake out the barn and put fresh hay in their stalls. I have a compost pile on the edge of the property that I put the waste in. I'll show you where it is once Alex and I get done in here," Mulder said.

"Once we're done then what?"

"We ride the horses to the ranger station."

~x~X~x~

It took them an hour to complete the rest of the chores. By then Skinner had developed a whole new respect for Mulder. The physical labor involved in taking care of this small farm was impressive. He never imagined Mulder would have the patience for it.

Skinner used the bathroom to wash his hands. He had left his soiled boots on the stoop to be cleaned when they got back from the ranger station. So he pulled on a pair of sneakers and strolled out of the cabin. Mulder was already seated in the saddle with Krycek sitting behind him. Doggett was on the other horse waiting for him.

Skinner put his foot in the stirrup and pulled himself up onto the horse behind Doggett.

Mulder spurred his horse down the path toward the ranger station. Krycek's arms were wrapped comfortably around his waist and the younger man's thighs pressed sensually against the outside of his thighs. A telltale hardness was pushing against his ass. Mulder bit his lips and stifled a moan. God, he felt moisture seep into his boxers, caused by the hard body pressed so tightly to his own. Both his dick and new orifice throbbed with need. There was no longer any doubt in Mulder's mind that Krycek, if given the chance, would be all over him.

It frightened Mulder when he found himself wanting to be made love to by Krycek. Touched. Kissed. Penetrated. He glanced over at Skinner and Doggett, fuck, he wanted them, too. He found both men sexually appealing. What had the aliens done to him? Until that one night with Scully, Mulder had gone for years without the touch of another, solely depending on his own hand for any sexual gratification. He'd had fantasies about Scully, and even Skinner's secretary Kim, but never about other men. Now they were all he thought about during long lonely nights.

"You smell delicious," Krycek whispered. His hot breath sending shivers up Mulder's spine. One hand dropped to Mulder's lap. "How's your injury?"

"F-Fine. It itches...a little."

Krycek enjoyed hearing the nervousness in Mulder's voice. His fingers caressed over the hard length of him. A moan slipped from Mulder's lips, drawing Doggett's and Skinner's attention.

"God, Alex, stop." Mulder panted, air suddenly seeming to be in short supply. The horse trotted on, bouncing his butt against Krycek's erection.

"Krycek, take your fucking hands off him!" Skinner growled.

Krycek smirked at Skinner, but brought his hands back to rest innocently on Mulder's hips. He was satisfied by the response his touch had invoked from Mulder. Years of pent up sexual frustration were waiting to be released from the former FBI agent. Krycek was looking forward to making Mulder scream and beg. His cock was already dripping in anticipation of finally being between those gorgeous globes. He wondered what Mulder would taste like.

Mulder blushed and kept his eyes on the trail. He'd never felt more embarrassed. Skinner must think he was a sick degenerate.

~x~X~x~

The rest of the trip to the ranger station was agonizingly slow for Skinner. He'd witnessed Mulder's response to Krycek's touch and wanted nothing more than to separate the two men.



Years of desiring Mulder made it impossible for him to ignore how the younger man had responded to Krycek's touch. If he had known that Mulder was attracted to men, he might have found the courage to approach him years ago. Now Skinner wondered if he could get a sexual response to him from his former agent.

Skinner couldn't keep his eyes off Mulder's mouth. He'd never met a man with lips that begged to be kissed, and he'd love to feel those lips around another part of his anatomy. Skinner's face turned red when he realized that he'd gotten hard, and there was no way Doggett wouldn't feel his arousal.

Doggett allowed their horse to fall back behind the other horse and whispered, "Stop watching Mulder, Walter. You're drilling a hole in my ass."

Skinner answered back, keeping his voice low. "Sorry, John, he has that affect on me. When he used to work for me, I usually couldn't get up from behind my desk for a half hour after he left my office."

Doggett chuckled. "He's a sexy man. When I went through the academy, he was already a legend--Spooky Mulder. I'll admit that I scoffed at the idea that the FBI would allow one of its brightest agents waste his time hunting aliens and monsters. Especially someone who's record as a profiler was the best that the bureau had ever seen. I stopped scoffing after I was assigned to the X-Files." Doggett stared thoughtfully at Mulder. "He's seen and experienced things that no one on this planet could fathom in their worst nightmares."

Doggett words struck home with Skinner. They'd all been through hell, but Mulder's whole life had been ruined since his sister was abducted when he was a boy. "Now our whole world is experiencing their worse nightmare."

The ranger was outside pacing when they rode into the yard. He rushed over to them.

"Mulder, they attacked again last night! Atlanta, D.C., New York, Philadelphia, St. Louis, Chicago, Houston, Memphis, Los Angeles, Seattle, Toronto, Vancouver...have all been destroyed. A lot of other cities have been severely damaged. Our military was able to destroy hundreds of their ships and drive them off."

Skinner's face paled as he slid off the horse. Krycek dismounted and took the reins while Mulder jumped down, favoring his right foot.

"Walter, I'm sorry. I know your parents live in Chicago...maybe they fled before the second attack," Doggett said.

"I hope so, John." Skinner sighed, "There's no reason for you and Mulder to go to D.C. now."

"Sean, we want to try to get in touch with the military. Can we use your radio?" Mulder asked.

"Sure. But, there's a lot of interference over the airwaves," Sean said.

"Show me to the radio." Skinner's face took on a determined look.

Doggett tied the horses to the hitching post and hurried into the station after the other four men. Skinner was at the radio, dialing in the channel he needed. It took nearly a half-hour before he was able to contact anyone.

"This is Assistant Director Walter Skinner of the FBI, come in."

"Major Adam Pierce. Where are you, calling from? Over."

"A ranger station in the Blue Ridge Mountains. Over."

"How many are you? Over."

"Five. We'd like to be of assistance. Over."

"The best thing for you to do is sit tight. Over."

"Major, we'd like to help defend our planet. Over."

There was dead air for several moments. "Can you make it to Stapleton? Over."

"We can make it. Do you want us to head directly to the base? Over."

"Affirmative, AD Skinner. We'll supply you with weapons and further instructions. Over."

"Thank you, Major. Over and out."

Mulder leaned up against the desk. "How do you want to handle this, sir?"

"We'll take the truck. The town of Stapleton is only forty miles from here, there is a small military installation five miles outside of the town," Skinner said.

Doggett noticed the frown on Mulder's face. "What's wrong, Fox?"

"I don't have a good feeling about this. I don't trust the military."

"They're fighting the aliens. Wouldn't that indicate that they're on our side?" Doggett asked.

"I guess I've just had too many run-ins with them in the past where it wasn't clear what side they were on," Mulder sighed.

Krycek stayed close by Mulder's side. "Fox, we don't need to trust them in order to work with them."

"You would know, Alex," Mulder said.

Skinner in the meantime dialed the radio to his brother's channel. "West, come in." He spent ten minutes before he received an answer on the other end.

"Walter, is that you son?"

"Dad? What are you doing there? Is Mom with you? Over."

"We're visiting. Are you all right, Walter? We were all worried about you when D.C. was attacked."

Skinner breathed a sigh of relief. "I'm fine, Dad. I'm staying in the country with friends. Over."

"Good to hear. Don't worry about us, Walter. Your brother is taking care of us and your nieces and nephews. Will you be able to get up here?"

Skinner looked at Mulder. "Dad, I'm going to stay here and fight against the aliens, and help my friends. Over."

There was silence on the other end for a few seconds. "Make us proud, Walter."

"I will, Dad. Over and out." Skinner switched off the radio. At least his family was safe.

Everyone was looking at him. Skinner stood and cleared his throat. "C'mon, guys, let's get going."

"Sean, if I'm not back by tonight, can you feed my cat and take care of the animals?" Mulder asked.

The ranger patted Mulder on the back. "Don't worry, Mulder, I'll look after your place."

"Thanks, Sean."

Doggett slid behind the steering wheel while Skinner took the shotgun position. Mulder and Krycek climbed into the backseat.

"Sean seems like a nice man. Has he always been so helpful?" Skinner asked, while Doggett took the logging road to an unpaved side road, then down a long winding road to the highway.

"Yeah. He's been very helpful since I moved here." Mulder chuckled. "Sean is a UFO buff, he considers me to be a celebrity."

"I'm glad you had someone to help you adjust to living out here," Skinner said.

"Believe me, I am, too." Mulder was touched that Skinner would even care that he had someone to help him. He gazed thoughtfully out the window as Doggett pulled onto the main highway. They drove for fifteen minutes before they passed another car. The closer they got to the next town the more the traffic increased. The town of Holton only had a population of eight hundred people, but from the look of it, the population had quadrupled overnight.

Mulder wondered how the small town's citizens were going to cope with the influx of refugees from the city.

There was a long line at the only gas station in town. Luckily they didn't need gas yet. The power was still on in town. It surprised Mulder that the aliens hadn't attacked the power stations.

"Walter, would you turn on the radio?" Mulder asked.

Skinner flipped it on and turned the dial until he came upon an emergency broadcast.

\*...do not attempt to return to any of the cities that were attacked. Stay away from any downed spaceships. The National Guard and American Red Cross are setting up relief camps outside the following towns...\*

The radio went on to list dozens of towns in sixteen Eastern, Midwestern, and Southern states.

Krycek shook his head. "They're just making it easier for the aliens to round up people."

"What would you suggest?" Doggett asked.

"I'd suggest having the survivors form into small self-sufficient groups of no more than a dozen people. It would be easier to avoid detection and capture. The government can set up aid stations throughout the country."

Doggett looked through the rearview mirror at Krycek and nodded. "Sounds like a good

suggestion. We'll bring it up to the military once we get to the base."

The closer they came to the base, the more nervous Mulder became. He didn't know why he was filled with anxiety at the prospect of being around the military again.

"What's wrong, Fox?" Krycek reached out and touched his arm.

"I don't know. I feel like I'm walking into a trap."

"Hey, don't worry, it's a small base. It's not like we're going to one of the major complexes where they'd know you."

"I can't help it, Alex. Ever since-" Mulder looked at the backs of Skinner's and Doggett's heads. They had no clue as to what had happened to him and Krycek, and he wanted to keep it that way. "I just hate being around people, particularly the military," he said quietly.

Skinner turned around and looked at him. "Why? Mulder, what happened to you? You seemed to be adjusting just fine after your abduction. Now you're like a scared bunny. This is so unlike you."

"Walter, I'd rather not talk about it, and I'm not a scared bunny."

Skinner raised a skeptical eyebrow as he stared at Mulder through his wire-rims. "No? Look, Mulder, I'm here for you, if you ever need someone to talk to," he said.

"Leave him alone, Skinner. Fox doesn't want to talk to you or Mr. NYPD. Neither of you would understand," Krycek said.

"Alex--" Mulder warned.

"You've confided to Krycek?" Skinner's stunned voice made Mulder blush and look away.

"Sir, he's going through the same thing that I'm going through. Alex is right you wouldn't understand," Mulder said.

Skinner's voice softened, "I'm your friend, Mulder. We've known each other for nine years. I would never hurt or ridicule you."

Mulder shook his head. "Walter, it's too embarrassing to talk about."

"We're there, guys," Doggett said, pulling up to the gate.

The marine standing guard looked at them suspiciously as he stepped up to the driver's side window.

Doggett pulled out his badge. "Special Agent John Doggett and this is Assistant Director Walter Skinner of the FBI. We're here to see Major Adam Pierce."

"Just one moment, sir." The marine walked back to the guardhouse and picked up the phone. After a couple of minutes he hung up and opened the gates. "Take the first right and go to the last building."

Doggett drove to where the guard had directed them. The base was alive with activity. The building Doggett parked in front of was only a single story as were all of the visible buildings on the base. The men climbed out of the truck. Mulder hung back, allowing Skinner and Doggett to enter the building first. A man wearing a major's uniform stepped out of an office followed by four other uniformed men.

"AD Skinner, I'm Major Pierce." The major seemed to know which one of them was Skinner and shook his hand.

"Major, these are my colleagues, John Doggett, Alex Krycek, and Fox Mulder."

The Major shook their hands but paused at Mulder. "You're Special Agent Fox Mulder. The top command has been looking for you."

"Why?"

"They didn't say. We were ordered to keep an eye out for you. Funny that you'd show up here."

"What are your orders in regards to me?" Mulder asked. His voice was steady, but his whole being was filled with trepidation.

"We're to hold you until they can send someone to collect you."

"He's not being collected by anyone!" Skinner moved between the Major and Mulder.

Mulder watched the soldiers tense and reach for their side arms. He touched Skinner's arm. "Sir, it's okay." He turned quickly to Major Pierce. "This doesn't involve my friends. You promised to supply them with weapons and information so they can help fight against the aliens."

"Agent Mulder, I think it's best if we detain all of you, until we can get to the bottom this." Pierce signaled to his men. "Take these men to the brig."

Krycek moved protectively near Mulder. He wasn't about to be separated from him. They were shown to a room three levels down. It had a steel door and six cots. The guards locked the door behind them.

"I'm sorry, guys," Mulder said, looking at the barred door.

"What's going on, Fox?" Doggett asked.

"I told you that I've had run-ins with the military." Mulder sat on the cot furthest from the door.

Skinner sat on the cot across from him. "Mulder, don't keep anything from us."

"If I knew why they wanted to see me, don't you think I'd tell you?" Mulder grabbed to pillow and lay on the thin mattress.

Skinner took off his glasses and rubbed the bridge of his nose. "Look, Mulder, I believe you. I'll stick by you no matter what. You have my word on that."

"Me too, Mulder," Doggett said.

Krycek knelt beside the cot. "Fox, you know that I'm here for you."

Skinner nodded. "We need to depend on each other. At this point, we have no one else we can trust."

Mulder lips rose in a sad smile. "Thanks, guys. I never really had anyone that I could depend on...other than Scully. Lately I've had no one but myself...and Sean."

Skinner looked over at Krycek. "I think we should make a pact to watch each other's backs, and

work together as a team."

"I'm game," Mulder said, sitting up.

"Count me in," Doggett said.

Krycek met Skinner's eyes and pursed his lips. "It's about trust, Walter. Do you think you can trust me to be part of the team?"

"I think I can trust you to watch Mulder's back. For now, that's what's most important to me."

"Okay, what do we do now? Escape or wait?" Doggett asked.

"Wait." Mulder stood and walked over to the door. "I want to know why they want me." He knew if they stayed confined together for more than a day, Skinner and Doggett might notice the physical signs of his and Krycek's alteration.

~x~X~x~

The Frog, Otter, Stork, and Pup

Blue Ridge Mountain Ranger Station

Sunday, September 23, 2001

The sun was going down when the four hikers finally reached their destination.

"My feet are killing me," Byers complained as they arrived at the ranger station.

"Hey, it's not my fault you didn't think to grab a pair of more comfortable shoes," Frohike said, adjusting his backpack.

"I'm not the one who crashed the van. Besides, we didn't have time to grab too much. We barely made it out of the building alive." Byers leaned up against the porch. "It doesn't look like anyone is home."

"Sean shouldn't be too far. Let's go in and wait for him," Frohike said, lifting up the doormat and picking up the spare key.

"Are you sure this dude is trustworthy," Langly asked.

"He's one of the best." Frohike opened the door and flipped on the light switch. Langly and Byers entered, while the fourth Gunman hung back looking toward the east. "C'mon, Jimmy. I'm sure she's okay."

"Melvin, what if she's dead?"

"If she is, then maybe she's the lucky one." Frohike walked down the steps and took Bond's hand. "Jimmy, it's more than likely that Yves' survived, after all, we made it. C'mon let's raid Sean's refrigerator. I'm starving."

When Sean returned he noticed the light on in the station. He drew his gun and crept up to the window and peered inside. He let out his breath and holstered his weapon, then entered the station.

"Frohike, how the hell did you get here?"

"We walked. Our van broke down while we were fleeing D.C. yesterday."

"I'd offer you and your friends refreshments, but I can see you've already helped yourselves," Sean said, walking up to the table.

"Sean, we would have headed on to Mulder's cabin, but my friend's feet are pretty badly blistered." Frohike nodded to Byers.

"It just as well that you didn't. Mulder isn't home."

"Where is he?"

"He left with three friends to the military base at Stapleton. Mulder was vague on when they'd be back." Sean strolled over to the stove and poured himself a mug of coffee.

"What three friends?"

"Walter Skinner, John Doggett, and a dark-haired man named Alex."

"Krycek?" Frohike asked.

"Yeah, that sounded like it." Sean added some sugar to his coffee.

Byers looked at Frohike. "What do you think Krycek is doing with them?"

"I doubt anything good." Frohike turned back to the ranger. "Sean, have you been out to my Uncle's place within the past month?" he asked.

"Yep. I checked it last week. Why are you thinking of staying there?"

Frohike nodded. "We need somewhere to lay low with the aliens blowing up everything. I thought the cabin would be the perfect hideout."

"Do you think your friends are up to living there?" Sean asked, looking at the three men.

"What do you mean?" Langly stopped typing on the laptop. He had it plugged into the wall socket to conserve its battery. "Frohike, what does he mean?"

Frohike had been avoiding telling his friends anything about his uncle's cabin. "Ah...it doesn't have electricity, and it's heated by wood."

"Frohike I can't live someplace without electricity!" Langly whined.

Byers sighed, "Is that it, Frohike?"

"Ah...there's no indoor bathroom."

"Oh this is just lovely," Byers said.

"Guys, quit picking on Melvin, at least we're alive," Bond said, "and from the traffic jam heading out of the cities we're lucky to have a place to stay."

Byers sat back at the table. "Sorry, Melvin. Jimmy's right we shouldn't be complaining."

"Does Mulder's place have electricity?" Langly asked hopefully.

"No. It does have an indoor bathroom," Frohike answered.

Sean leaned up against the counter and sipped his coffee. "Hopefully, it will have electricity before winter."

"What do you mean?" Frohike asked.

"Mulder purchased a windmill, cables, an inverter, circuit breaker, batteries, and such. I was going to help him install it next week. I'm not sure what his plans will be now."

"How far is Mulder's cabin from ours, Melvin?" Langly asked.

"About six miles."

"Do you think he'd mind a roommate?" Langly asked, shutting down his laptop.

"I think Mulder already has three roommates," Sean said.

"Damn." Langly frowned. "Do you think we can get six miles of cable and another converter to hook up to that windmill?"

Byers threw up his hands in exasperation. "Langly, give it a rest. We barely escaped with our lives yesterday and you're worried about playing dungeons and dragons on your laptop."

"Am not."

"Sean, can we stay here tonight?" Frohike asked.

"Sure guys. You'll have to flip for the sofa and the guest bedroom."

"Thanks, Sean."

~x~X~x~

Skinner rubbed at the stubble on his chin as he watched Mulder pace across the room. Then he glanced over at Krycek who was also watching Mulder pace. They'd been here since yesterday, and neither Mulder nor Krycek had a trace of stubble. He and Doggett had a nice twenty-four hour shadow. Skinner thought back to Mulder's bathroom. There was a razor in the medicine cabinet, so Mulder still shaved. Maybe he and Krycek just had slower growing beards.

According to Major Pierce, a Colonel in the Special Forces was due here today to interview Mulder.

Mulder stopped pacing when the door opened and Major Pierce stepped into the room followed by four MPs, and an Air Force Colonel.

Mulder groaned. "It figures it would be you."

"Fox, it's a joy to see you again," the Colonel said sarcastically.

Skinner walked over to stand beside Mulder. "You know this man, Mulder?"

"Yeah, we go way back. Colonel Calvin Henderson United States Air Force," Mulder said. "The Colonel is an expert at securing and covering up alien crash sites, and silencing witnesses."



"He's fucking Black Ops!" Krycek said, swinging his feet off the cot and standing.

Henderson sneered. "Well, if it isn't Alexei Krycek. It's been a long time, assassin."

"That's the pot calling the kettle black. You and your boys have been responsible for more assassinations than me. And I've never killed an innocent civilian." Krycek turned to Skinner. "His team eliminated a whole small town in Montana to keep them from talking."

Skinner's eyes widened. "Twin Rivers?"

Krycek nodded. "Yeah. Two hundred and sixty-two people vanished without a trace in 1987."

Major Pierce's face paled as he looked at the Colonel. The MPs shuffled uncomfortably.

Henderson turned back to Mulder. "You're mine now, Fox. I'm taking you back to Area 51 with me. Say goodbye to your friends. It's the last time you'll be seeing them."

The room suddenly filled with the sound of a handgun discharging. Henderson's face exploded as the bullet exited between his eyes.

Everyone turned to look at Major Pierce who was holding the smoking gun firmly in his hand. Pierce spat on the Colonel's body. "Asshole, my sister and her family lived in Twin Rivers." Pierce holstered his sidearm and looked at Skinner. "You want to help fight the aliens. Come with me, I'll supply you with weapons and the latest intelligence information."

Doggett swallowed. "Shit. This just gets weirder and weirder."

Krycek relaxed. He had been preparing to attack Henderson.

Mulder stared down at Henderson's body as Skinner took his arm and led him out of the room. "So much death. Sometimes I wonder what point there is to going on."

Skinner knew Mulder wasn't bemoaning Henderson's death. The violence of the last few days was finally catching up with him. "Mulder, we can't let the aliens win. They've murdered and destroyed too many lives," he said as they followed Pierce and the MPs out of the building.

Mulder chuckled bitterly. "You don't have to remind me. I'm aware of what destruction they caused during the last fifty years to the present."

Pierce led them to a supply depot. "The military started distributing a new type of ammunition a year ago. It wasn't until after the aliens attacked that we were informed that the iron compound in these bullets would kill them, where our standard ammunition wouldn't. We haven't fought any aliens yet, so I'm not sure of the truth behind our military's claims." The Major chose several high-power automatic rifles, handing them to Skinner, Mulder, Krycek, and Doggett.

"Thank you, Major," Skinner said, hefting the rifle.

"My men will load your truck with the ammunition, a few extra rifles, and some explosives. Our intelligence networks have been sending photos back from Europe. The aliens have started rounding up the citizens in several countries. The elderly and the sick are being separated and sent up to the ships. The rest of the population is being sorted and tagged. Men between the ages of twenty and fifty are being evaluated. Those fitting some set criteria are separated and sent to the ships. The remaining men are formed into work details. They are being used to clear the rubble from the destroyed cities."

"What about the children?" Mulder asked.

Major Pierce sighed, "I'm not sure. This is all the data our agents have been able to collect."

"Does our military know why they haven't attacked us again?" Doggett asked.

"No. They speculate that the aliens weren't expecting the sort of resistance we showed them."

"Do we have enough missiles to fight off another attack?" Skinner asked.

"All I know is the munitions factories are working around the clock."

"So what should we do?" Mulder asked.

"Not much you can do until the aliens attack over here. We don't have the forces to take them on around the world. Go home and be prepared to defend our country." Major Pierce walked out of the warehouse with them.

"What about you, Major? You're going to be in trouble for killing Colonel Henderson," Skinner said.

"My men are loyal to me. The high command won't risk stirring up dissension by pursuing that bastard's death. Don't worry, I'll keep Mr. Mulder's whereabouts a secret." They stopped beside Doggett's truck where the marines were loading it with weapons. Skinner and the others placed the rifles in the back.

"Thank you, Major." Skinner shook the Major's hand. "You have the location of the ranger station if you need to get in touch with us."

"My pleasure." Pierce turned to Krycek. "Mr. Krycek, I'll pass on your suggestion for protecting the population up the command chain."

"Thanks." Krycek had talked to the Major yesterday, when they were being served dinner in their temporary prison.

Doggett placed his hand on Mulder's shoulder. "It looks like you're stuck with us for a while. I hope that's okay."

Mulder nodded. "It's fine. I was getting rather lonely living in the woods by myself. Besides we made a pact to fight the aliens together.

End Notes:

Author notes: Okay, it has some canon in it. ;) I did not watch season 9, except for a couple of episodes and the finale. For this story the parking garage scene in Existence never took place. I decided to use the premise of the Rat Patrol for this warped slash fantasy of mine. I hope you enjoy it.

Thanks Medusa for beta-reading this chapter.

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Chapter 3: Home, Sweet Home by Jo B

Author's Notes:

The guys start preparing their home for winter and making plans for defending it. Guess who else gets stuck far away from home in the Blue Ridge Mountains?

The Frog, Otter, Stork, and Puppy

Blue Ridge Mountain Ranger Station

Sunday, September 23, 2001

Byers shook his head in dismay as he walked around the cabin and started opening the windows. The place was even worse than he'd imagined it would be. It smelled like an old man, a layer of dust covered everything. A large stone fireplace divided the kitchen from the parlor, and there were two bedrooms off the parlor. One had a bed and a dresser, and the other was filled with boxes of old magazines. It looked like it had a bed too, under all the clutter. He watched a mouse scurry across the floor and under the stove.

"Melvin, where does your uncle keep the cleaning supplies?"

"In the broom cabinet in the kitchen."

"We better get started cleaning, if we're going to have this place livable by nightfall."

Jimmy bounded in through the back door, carrying an enormous zucchini. "This place is so cool! Byers, you should see the barn and pens. The vegetable garden is a bit overgrown, but there are a lot of nice sized melons and pumpkins. Frohike, do you think we can get some animals?"

"Whoa, Jimmy, we're not up to taking care of animals," Frohike said.

"You said that Mulder raises animals." Bond pouted.

"Mulder had all summer to learn how to care for them and put up feed for the winter." Frohike sighed, looking at Bond's sad face. The guy just doesn't know how much work raising farm animals would be. "Maybe we can get a cat to take care of the mouse problem in this cabin. I'm sure one of the farmers in the valley might be willing to part with one."

Langly looked into the back bedroom. "So we're going to have to share the beds?"

"Unless you want to sleep on the floor," Frohike said as another mouse scurried across the floor.

Langly jumped. "N-no. I'll sleep with Byers."

Byers carried a bucket of soapy water into the room. He was holding a broom in his other hand. "Jimmy, can you start hauling the boxes of magazines out of the back bedroom to barn? We should be able to use them for kindling this winter. Langly, I want you and Frohike to strip the bed in the front bedroom and take the mattress outside and beat it with a stick to get all the dust and dirt out of it. Once, Jimmy uncovers the bed in the back bedroom, I want the same thing done with it and the blankets. I'll be sweeping out this mess in the meantime."

"Why do you get to be the boss?" Langly asked.

"Langly, give it a rest," Frohike snapped. "We'll hold elections next week. Right now let's get this place cleaned."

~x~X~x~

The Fox, Dog, Bear, and Rat

Blue Ridge Mountain  
Sunday, September 23, 2001

Mulder was relieved when they finally made it back to his cabin. The sun had gone down an hour ago. Thankfully, Sean had milked the cows and fed the animals earlier. Mulder was so tired...and nervous. He glanced at Doggett as they led the horses into the barn. Skinner and Krycek had already gone into the cabin.

"Don't worry, Mulder, I don't snore," Doggett said. He had won the coin flip with Skinner and would be sleeping in the big bed with Mulder.

For some reason, Mulder felt like he was some unspoken prize.

"I'm not worried." Mulder took his time unsaddling the horse and brushing it down. He was worried. It was getting close to that time of the month and he could feel his hormones start to play havoc with his libido. At least Krycek wasn't sharing his bed tonight. He was sure that would have ended with him losing more than his virginity. He'd just have to ignore how horny Doggett was making him and hope the agent didn't notice.

"C'mon, Fox. We've fed and groomed them. It's getting cold out here, let's get indoors."

"Okay. In the morning I want to ride out and visit the Gunmen," Mulder said. He was relieved when Sean had told them that Frohike, Byers, Langly, and Bond had made it out of D.C. unharmed.

"I'll come with you. The guys will probably need some supplies. It doesn't sound like they brought much with them," Doggett said, strolling with Mulder back to the house. He liked the Gunmen even if they were weird.

"I'm sure they'll need help getting ready for winter." Mulder thought back to all the time he'd spent chopping wood, and putting up food over the summer. Milford Frohike had a nice supply of wood stacked at his place, but after his death, his vegetable garden had become over grown and his goats and pigs were sold to a farmer down in the valley.

"It looks like we'll have our work cut out for us the next few weeks," Doggett said. "I want to head down to North Carolina and check on my dad and brother. I can pick up some supplies from them with my truck. They raise pigs and cattle, and grow wheat, corn, and potatoes."

"You don't seem too worried about them," Mulder said, as they entered the kitchen through the back door.

"My dad and brother are tough men. I'm more concerned that they're worrying about me."

Skinner and Krycek had lit the stoves and fireplace. The oil and kerosene lamps were also burning. Tiger rushed over to greet Mulder and Doggett. Mulder scooped her up in his arms and cuddled her against his chest. "You miss me, Tiger?"

Skinner came out of the bathroom. "I started a fire in the water heater. It will be at least a hour before it's hot enough to take a shower."

Krycek was at the stove heating something in a saucepan.

"What are you making, Alex?" Mulder asked, walking over to peer in the pan.

He held up a bottle of rum that he'd gotten from one of the marines at the base. "Hot butter rum. I figured we all could use a drink."

Skinner smiled. "Good idea, Alex, I know I could use one."

"Me, too." Doggett hung his jacket on the rack by the front door.

"I could use a drink." Mulder set the cat down and shrugged off his leather jacket. "We're going to have to make several trips to the ranger station to bring back the ammunition and weapons we got from the military. Plus, I want to start hauling the parts back for the windmill and electrical

equipment. If we're here through the winter it would be nice to have electricity."

"We can start on all of that tomorrow. I'm pretty good with my hands," Skinner said.

Mulder swallowed back a smutty reply that was on the tip of his tongue. Now was not the time for sexual innuendoes.

Krycek in the meantime poured a little rum into four mugs then filled them with the hot, sweet, buttery liquid from the saucepan. They carried the mugs into the parlor and sat on the sofa and chairs.

Tiger hopped up onto Mulder's lap and curled herself up in a ball. Mulder absently petted her as he sipped his drink.

"Have you considered buying some solar panels or using the stream for power?" Doggett asked.

Mulder nodded. "Yeah, I thought of using the stream for backup, but I wanted to get the windmill installed first. It will supply more electricity than the stream. It gets really windy up here and I calculated if I place the windmill on the highest point of my property, even on days where the wind is only blowing at ten miles an hour, I'll be able to generate six hundred kilowatts of electricity per hour."

Skinner whistled. "With that much electricity you'll be able to light this place, and at the same time run a refrigerator, and an electric washer and dryer."

Mulder took a sip of the hot beverage. "I'm installing a bank of batteries, they should be enough to store up the power for days when there is little or no wind."

Skinner was impressed that Mulder had researched the subject so thoroughly. "Did you pick up enough electrical supplies to wire this place?"

"Yes, I have everything and enough wiring to light this whole place, including the barn and chicken coop."

Krycek looked thoughtfully into his mug. "I think we should try to get our hands on a HAM radio. This place is going to make a great base for us."

"I agree," Skinner said. "I'd like to be able to contact my family, and find out what's going on around the country."

"We're high enough up that we'll be able to get good reception," Krycek said.

Mulder yawned and set the mug on the end table. He lifted the cat off his lap and set her on the floor then stood. "I think I'll wash up and turn in. I want to get up early tomorrow."

Krycek started to get up to follow him.

"Sit down, Alex. I'd like some privacy."

"Are you sure you don't need any help?"

"Yes. Thanks for the drink." Mulder hurried into his bedroom, retrieving his blue pajama bottoms and undershirt from the dresser. It looked like he'd have to do the laundry soon. With Krycek wearing his clothes he only had a couple of pairs of clean boxers left.

He walked back into the main room then into the bathroom and closed the door. The water

wouldn't be hot enough yet for a shower. Since he took a shower at the base that morning Mulder decided to just brush his teeth and wash his face. The hot butter rum had made him sleepy and he was hoping he'd be asleep before Doggett joined him in bed.

Mulder tossed his dirty clothes into the laundry hamper in the bathroom. It was overflowing. He definitely needed to do the laundry.

He looked at his image in the mirror and ran a hand over his cheeks. Still no stubble. His upper chest and arms were nicely toned and muscled from chopping wood this summer. He smoothed a hand over his stomach...his abs were flat and hard. Mulder hadn't been in this great shape since he was in his early twenties. The wound on his testicle was healing fast and didn't need the bandage any longer. Mulder washed his face then ran the washcloth over his chest and between his thighs. After toweling dry he pulled on a sleeveless undershirt and his dark blue pajama bottoms.

He walked out of the bathroom and Skinner, Krycek, and Doggett turned to look at him.

Mulder swallowed when he saw the glint of lust in their eyes. Had it always been there and he'd been just too blind to notice it before? "Ah, good night," he said and hurried into the bedroom.

He put another log on the fire before extinguishing the oil lamp on the dresser. Pulling down the bedcovers, Mulder crawled between the cold sheets. He chose the side closest the doorway, since he planned to get up early and do the laundry. Despite his trepidation, Mulder felt more secure than he had since moving to this place, knowing that Skinner, Doggett, and Krycek were here. It's not that he needed them for protection, but at least he was no longer alone.

~x~X~x~

Doggett had caught his breath at the sight of Mulder in a tight sleeveless undershirt tucked into a pair of navy blue flannel pajama bottoms. The material hugged his round buttocks and flared out for the journey down his long legs. He'd never seen prettier feet on a man.

Skinner and Krycek's eyes had followed Mulder's trim form until he disappeared into the bedroom. They turned and looked at Doggett who was still staring at the bedroom doorway.

"He's never had sex with a man, so don't touch him!" Krycek warned, seeing the unmistakable look of desire in Doggett's eyes.

Doggett leaned back in the chair, pulling his eyes away from the bedroom doorway. He took a sip from his second hot butter rum. "I'm not a rapist, Krycek. Mulder does have a mind of his own."

"John, what are you saying?" Skinner asked, looking at his agent in confusion.

"I'm saying that it's up to Mulder if he wants to have a sexual relationship with any of us." Doggett raised his hand, stopping Skinner's protest. "Look, Walt, I'm not trying to take something that belongs to you. We're going to have to learn to work closely together and trust each other. However, you and Krycek have been behaving like you've already staked a claim on Mulder."

Skinner rubbed his temples. "I didn't think you were interested in men."

"I'm no choirboy, Walter. I've swallowed," Doggett quipped. He didn't want Skinner to feel threatened, since he really admired the man. "It was back in the marines before I met my ex-wife."

"God. It's a good thing the marines have that don't ask policy, otherwise they'd lose half their force." Skinner glanced over at the bedroom doorway. "John, I'll trust you to behave and not force yourself on him."

Doggett chuckled. "Did you miss the muscles on him? Mulder would beat the shit out of me if I tried to force him to do anything."

Skinner smiled. "Yeah, he's in great shape."

Krycek frowned. "Look, guys, Mulder was abducted and experimented on for a week back in May. Because of what the aliens did to him, he's now confused about his sexuality and doesn't need the two of you confusing him further."

"What do you mean, he was abducted in May?" Skinner stood and stalked over to Krycek's chair. "What did they do to him? Was it the same thing they did to you?"

"You'll have to ask Mulder. I'm not telling." Krycek stood. "Just leave him alone."

Skinner knew from their conversation yesterday that Mulder wasn't about to talk about it. The aliens had taken him again! Why hadn't Mulder said something at the time? Whatever they'd done, it had forced Mulder to move out here alone. "Alex, you don't seem too set on following your own advice."

"I know what I'm dealing with, you don't," Krycek said, walking toward the bathroom. He'd left the sweats he slept in two nights ago folded on a shelf. He debated going into the bedroom to borrow a clean pair of underwear from Mulder, but decided to hold off until the morning.

Krycek closed the door and started the shower. He stripped and stepped under the hot spray. God, it felt good! He ran a soapy washcloth over his body. He'd gotten so skinny that his ribcage was actually showing. Krycek decided he'd have to start exercising. Bringing the washcloth between his buttocks, he washed over his anus then took extra care over his new orifice. This was the first time he really touched it. Mulder was right; if he rubbed it just right it sent sparks of pleasure coursing through his body. He probed the opening with his finger. It parted, letting his digit inside. Krycek gasped, feeling the hot tightness of the orifice close around his finger.

Swallowing, he pulled his finger free, and looked down at his engorged penis standing hard and proud against his belly. Krycek wondered what it would feel like to fuck Mulder through his new orifice. God, he wanted to do him so badly. He frowned, thinking about the competition he had for Mulder.

It bothered him that Doggett was sleeping with Mulder tonight. He hated it even more that Skinner would be sleeping with him tomorrow night. Whose fucking idea had it been to switch off sharing the big bed with Mulder? Krycek's idea was to have him and Mulder in the big bed one night, then switch off with Skinner and Doggett for the air mattress the next night. He was sure that fucking air mattress would be tolerable with Mulder sleeping beside him. Now he'd have to spend two nights out of three sleeping there.

Krycek stepped out of the shower and dried himself, then pulled on the sweatpants sans underwear. When he stepped out of the bathroom, Skinner was waiting to use it after him. Doggett was at the sink drying the mugs and putting them on the shelf.

"Did you leave any hot water?" Skinner asked, stepping into the steamy room.

Krycek rolled his eyes and continued across the room to the ladder.

Doggett made sure the place was locked up. He extinguished the oil lamp in the kitchen, throwing the space into darkness. Then he placed another log into the pot-bellied stove. He scanned the titles of some of the books Mulder had on the bookshelf and pulled one down about vegetable and herb gardens. He sat in the chair next to the pot-bellied stove and oil lamp and

started flipping through the book as he waited for Skinner to finish in the bathroom. He put his feet up on the footstool and looked around the room. It felt like home. Even his own house never gave him this feeling. He suspected part of it was being out in the country, and another part was the company. Even Krycek was beginning to grow on him.

"The bathroom is free," Skinner said, looking at Doggett. "What are you grinning about?"

"Listen."

"What? I don't hear anything."

"That's just it. No traffic, no steady hum that we hear constantly living in the city. I like it here." Doggett smiled. He liked how good Skinner looked standing there in his bare feet and sweatpants. Skinner had on an undershirt this time.

Skinner nodded in agreement. "John, the day the aliens attacked was the day I was going to turn in my resignation...I couldn't take it any longer. I wanted to move away from D.C. to some small community. I also wanted to find Mulder and see if he was all right."

"It seems you got both wishes."

Skinner shrugged his shoulders. "I could have done without the invasion and the total destruction of D.C." His look turned thoughtful. "John, I'm glad that you're here. If we're going to fight the aliens, I couldn't have asked for a better team than you, Mulder, and Krycek."

"Even Krycek?"

"Krycek can be very resourceful. He's an asset."

"Then you trust him?"

It took Skinner several minutes to answer. He wandered over to the window and looked out. "Deep down I want to trust him."

"Do you have any idea what the aliens did to him and Mulder?"

Skinner walked over to the sofa and sat. "No, but I've noticed three things about them. One, they haven't needed to shave in the last couple of days. Two, their skin is smoother and they have no wrinkles. Three, they smell different...pleasant and arousing."

"I think we should try to get them talking. We need to know what was done to them," Doggett said.

"Let's give them time. I'm sure once we've been living with them for a while, they'll open up to us." Skinner stood. "I'm going to turn in. Goodnight."

"Night, Walt."

Doggett waited until Skinner was up the ladder before returning the book to the shelf and turning off the last two oil lamps in the room. He went into the bathroom and took a shower then added some more wood to water heater.

When Doggett entered the bedroom, he paused beside the bed and stared down at Mulder. The fire in the hearth offered enough light that he could appreciate the sight of the man sleeping with a cat curled up beside him. Mulder was one of the best looking men he'd ever met. Soft silky brown hair fell over Mulder's forehead and thick brown lashes fanned out across high cheek



bones. Then there was that delectable mole gracing his cheek and lips most women would kill for. Doggett walked around the bed and crawled beneath the covers. Damn, it felt good to sleep on a real mattress again with feather pillows and a warm down comforter. Doggett turned on his side so he could gaze at Mulder. Walter was right, his scent was different from any man he'd ever been around. It took sheer willpower for him not to snuggle up against Mulder. He closed his eyes and willed sleep to take him.

~x~X~x~

## The Frog, Otter, Stork, and Puppy

It was well past dark by the time the guys had the place livable.

Byers washed up in the kitchen sink. There was a large wooden basin in the kitchen that he assumed had been used by Frohike's uncle as a bathtub. It was large enough for one man to sit inside. He'd have to see about having a screen made to provide some privacy to the bather.

Frohike yawned. "I'm tired. I haven't worked this hard in years."

Bond was at the stove, cooking up a vegetable stew. He had found a jar of chicken bouillon cubes in the cupboard that he was using for a broth.

"That actually smells good, Jimmy," Byers said, looking into the pot with chopped zucchini, tomatoes, potatoes, and onions, floating in a rich chicken broth.

"Too bad we don't have any bread and butter," Bond said, pulling four freshly washed bowls from the cupboard.

"Or meat," Langly said. His stomach growled hungrily.

"Mulder raises chickens, we'll just have to help ourselves to a couple of birds," Frohike said.

Bond filled the bowls and the four men sat around the table and wolfed down their contents. Langly was first up for seconds.

"Speaking of Mulder, do you think he'd mind if we checked out his place tomorrow?" Byers asked.

"I don't think he'd mind," Frohike said, "I'm still wondering what he's doing with Krycek."

"Do you want to tell us now why Mulder moved up here?" Langly asked.

Frohike shrugged his shoulders. "He was abducted again back in May. They did something to him that made Mulder uncomfortable around people."

"They tortured him again? Why didn't you tell us this, Melvin?" Byers asked, his face etched with worry.

"Mulder didn't want anyone to know. He didn't tell me everything, only that he felt uncomfortable and wanted to find a place that was away from people. Old Man Peterson had just passed away and had left his property to my Uncle. They had been best friends for over sixty-years. I helped Mulder purchase it from him."

"Okay, we know how Doggett found Mulder. Do you think Doggett told Skinner where Mulder had moved?" Langly asked.

"More than likely. I only wonder how Krycek found him." Frohike carried his empty bowl to the sink and set it inside. "I'm going to turn in. Jimmy, what side of the bed do you want?"

"The left side, if it's all right with you."

"No problem. I have no preference."

~x~X~x~

Monday, September 24, 2001

Mulder rolled over on his back and opened his eyes. The fire in the hearth had died to embers. The room was lit by moonlight shining in through the windows. In a couple of nights there would be a full moon. He sighed. The last two full moons he'd sleepwalked, waking up outside. Mulder tried to will himself to get up.

"Fox, you awake?"

Mulder froze, aware of the other man's presence for the first time. "Y-Yeah."

Doggett rolled on his side then propped himself up on one elbow and looked down at Mulder. Mulder's smell and warm body had him sexually aroused. He was hard all night. "You don't have to be nervous...I'm not going to bite."

Mulder swallowed, looking up into Doggett's face. For some reason, his hand seemed to move of its own accord, fingers lacing through the short strands of hair on the back of Doggett's head. He pulled the other man's head down until their lips met. His legs spread wantonly as Doggett lowered his body on top of him. Mulder gasped at the feel of the hard cock pushing against his hip. Then Doggett's hand reached down and stroked him through the soft flannel pajama bottoms. Their tongues wrestled back and forth. Moisture seeped into his pajama bottoms as his body burned with unbridled need.

Their lips parted and Doggett combed his fingers through Mulder's thick silky hair. "Are you coming on to me, Fox?"

Mulder swallowed and closed his eyes, trying desperately to fight off the feelings coursing through his body. He sighed, "Sorry, I don't know what came over me."

Doggett squeezed the hard organ through the flannel. "I think you know just what you want. Don't fight it, Fox. Go with your feelings."

Mulder pushed Doggett off and slid out of bed. If he stayed, then Doggett would find out everything that the aliens had done to him. He didn't want to see the look of disgust he was sure would be on Doggett's face at that discovery. "No. I-I can't. I don't know what I'm feeling."

"Come back to bed."

Mulder shook his head, looking at the clock. "I want to get the laundry done before Albert crows and wakes everyone."

Doggett sighed, "You named the rooster?" He threw the covers off and climbed out of bed.

Mulder shrugged as he lit the oil lamp. "I named the cows, the horse, and most of the chickens."

"I can see the horse and cows. You shouldn't become attached to the chickens. It will make killing them for food all the harder."

Mulder sighed, "I don't think I'll be able to kill any of the chickens for food."

Doggett pulled on the jeans he had draped over the chair. "Don't worry. I used to kill the chickens with my dad. My brother and sister never could bring themselves to do it. It's not something everyone has the stomach for."

Mulder smiled weakly. "I'm not even sure I'd be able to eat one of my chickens."

Doggett chuckled. "I make a mean southern fried chicken. I doubt you'd be able to resist."

"Well maybe if I don't see you kill it." Mulder headed for the door, but Doggett's hand on his arm stopped him.

"Fox, about what happened in bed. There's nothing wrong with two men making love."

"John, I've never done it before."

"You want to though, I could feel your body respond to me."

Mulder blushed. "I'm going to take a shower before I start on the laundry. You're welcome to put your clothes in the tall dresser. It's mostly empty. I was going to tell Walter the same thing, but it slipped my mind yesterday."

Doggett decided not to push him. "Thanks, Fox. I'll unpack our bags while you shower." He walked into the main room and carried his and Skinner's two bags into the bedroom.

When Mulder came out of the bathroom, Doggett had a fresh pot of coffee percolating on the stove. Mulder carried the laundry basket to the washer and stretched the hose from the sink to fill it.

"I remember my grandparents having a washer like that before they bought an electric one," Doggett commented. He sat leafing through a cookbook while drinking a cup of coffee.

"It's a pain in the butt. I wanted to get an electric washer and dryer once I had the electricity installed. But it looks like I'm a day late." Mulder added the clothes and soap then started cranking the handle.

Doggett stepped forward. "Let me do that. Go, get yourself a cup of coffee."

"Are you sure?"

"Yeah, it will be good exercise."

Mulder let Doggett take over the cranking, and went to pour himself a steaming mug of coffee.

When Skinner climbed down the ladder a half-hour later, Doggett was putting the laundry through the wringer while Mulder was preparing breakfast.

"Hi, guys, you're up early." Skinner was relieved to see them up and out of bed.

"I have a lot to do this morning," Mulder said.

"Walter, I unpacked your things and put them in the top two drawers of the tall dresser in the bedroom," Doggett said, throwing the wrung-out clothes into the plastic laundry basket.

"Thanks. I'll be right out to help after I shave and dress."

~x~X~x~

Krycek rolled over and sniffed the air. He could smell potatoes frying and if he wasn't mistaken ham. Yawning, he sat up. God, he was exhausted. Skinner had hogged most of the blankets last night. This mattress wasn't big enough for two large men, unless they were lovers. Considering how Skinner felt about him that wasn't likely to happen.

He rose to his feet and climbed down the ladder.

Mulder looked over at him from the stove and smiled. "You're just in time for breakfast."

"Where are Doggett and Skinner?" Krycek plunked himself down at the table as Mulder carried a cup of coffee over to him.

"John's outside hanging up the laundry, and Walter is in the bathroom."

"Do you need any help?" Krycek asked, taking a long sip of coffee.

"No. How do you like your eggs?"

"Over easy. What's in the saut pan?"

"Sliced potatoes, onions, green peppers, and Spam."

"Spam?" Krycek made a face.

Mulder grinned as he cracked a couple of eggs into the skillet. "It's not bad. I have cans of it in the cupboard."

Skinner came out of the bathroom. "Mm, that smells good."

"Sit down, I'll dish you up a plate. How do you want your eggs?"

"Sunnyside up would be fine." Skinner got himself a cup of coffee and sat next to Krycek. The early morning sun lit the kitchen in a warm glow.

"After we take care of the chores, I'm going to start hauling the ammunition and windmill parts back from the ranger station," Skinner said.

"John and I are going to ride out and visit the Gunmen," Mulder said as he scooped the eggs, fried vegetables and Spam onto a plate and set it in front of Krycek.

"I haven't had Spam since I was in the service," Skinner commented, looking at the unmistakable sliced pieces of meat.

"I hope you like it, he has cans of it in the cupboard," Krycek said. Before cautiously tasting the ham like meat and finding it surprisingly not bad.

"I used to like it," Skinner said as Mulder placed a plate in front of him. "Thanks, Mulder. Do you have any bread?"

"Sorry, I didn't have time to bake bread this morning, and the loaf from three days ago is stale."

Doggett came in through the backdoor with the empty laundry basket. He noticed that Skinner

and Krycek were already eating. "Fox, can you make my eggs scrambled?"

"Sure. I'm fixing mine the same way."

"Great. I think we should take turns cooking," Doggett said, reaching for a coffee cup.

Skinner nodded. "Agreed. Maybe we should make a schedule--"

"Walter, I'm not going to have my life run by a fucking schedule!" Mulder said.

"It was just a suggestion. We need some sort of structure since there are four of us living here."

Mulder rolled his eyes as he filled his and Doggett's plates. "Look at us. We're all type A personalities. Everything will get done and then some. Let's just see how it goes. If it doesn't work we'll try your idea."

"Okay, Mulder. It's your place after all."

Mulder placed the plates on the table and sat between Skinner and Doggett. "No. I'm sorry, I want everyone to feel comfortable here. So let's dispense with this place being solely mine. Also, I'd like us to switch off using the main bedroom. It's not fair that I get the bed all the time."

Krycek chuckled and continued eating.

"What, Alex?"

Krycek raised his eyes and smiled. "I think we've established who's the head of this household."

"Do you want to elaborate?"

"Nope." Krycek stood and carried his empty plate to the sink. "I'm going to get dressed." He paused in the bedroom doorway and looked back at a puzzled Mulder. "Fox, your being the boss isn't a bad thing."

Mulder tried to figure out what Krycek meant as he finished his breakfast. Was he really being bossy?

Skinner chuckled at the perplexed expression on Mulder's face. "You would have made a good Assistant Director, if you hadn't thrown your career down the drain with the X-Files."

Mulder shrugged his shoulders. "They wanted to make me Section Chief of VCU, but I requested the X-Files instead," he said.

Doggett looked over at him. "You're one of the few agents that the bureau ever allowed to choose their own assignment. I understand why you selected the X-Files, after learning more about your family. I wish I could have worked with you on some cases. I probably could have learned a lot from you."

Mulder gave him a sheepish grin. "I could have used the additional support back then. Other than Scully and Walter there was no one at the bureau that supported my work."

"Until I worked on some cases, I always thought the department was a waste of money. Too bad you couldn't open people's eyes to what was going on." Doggett stood and scooped himself up some more fried potatoes and Spam.

There was a knock on the back door, it opened, and Jimmy Bond stuck his head in. "Hey, guys,

can I come in?"

Mulder stood and shook Bond's hand. "Come in, Jimmy, how did you find this place?"

"Frohike told me last night it was six miles down the path on the other side of the lake." Bond shook Skinner and Doggett's hands.

"We were happy to hear that you guys made it out of D.C. What are Frohike, Langly, and Byers doing this morning?" Skinner asked.

"They were still in bed when I left. I wanted to take a walk. Then I smelled the smoke from your chimney. I was heading here anyway, I wanted to see your animals." Bond's eyes kept drifting to the pan on the stove.

Mulder smiled. "Would you like some fried potatoes and Spam?"

"Yes, please, if you have extra," Bond said, licking his lips.

Skinner stood. "Mulder, sit and finish your breakfast. I'll get it for him. Jimmy, would you like a couple eggs, while the pan is still out?"

"Yeah, thanks, A.D. Skinner."

"How would you like them?"

"Scrambled, please." Bond stripped off his coat, draping it over the back of a chair and sat next to Mulder. "Do you have catsup?"

Doggett rose to retrieve the catsup from the cupboard. He set it in front of Bond along with a coffee cup then went back for the coffeepot.

"Thanks, Agent Doggett," Bond said as Doggett filled his cup.

Skinner set a plate piled high with food in front of Bond.

"Thanks, A.D. Skinner."

"Jimmy, you can use our first names."

Krycek came into the room, carrying Mulder's denim shirt. "Fox, do you have a needle and thread? The button is loose on this shirt."

"In the cabinet above the washing machine."

"Who's the guy?" Krycek asked.

"Jimmy Bond, this is Alex Krycek," Mulder said.

"It's nice to meet you, Mr. Krycek. Frohike mentioned you. You don't look like a rat," Bond said, squirting catsup on his eggs.

Mulder snickered.

"Frohike should watch what he says about people. Some might not have my mild and forgiving nature," Krycek said, opening the cabinet above the washer. Finding the sewing kit he carried it back to the table and plopped down in the empty chair.

Mulder finished eating and carried the plate to the sink. Skinner was already doing the dishes. So Mulder picked up a towel and started drying.

"Do you want me to collect the eggs this morning, while you and John milk the cows?"

"If you wouldn't mind."

"Mulder, you just got through saying we should think of this place as our home. So why would I mind collecting eggs from our chickens?"

Mulder looked at Skinner shyly. "Sorry, it's going to take a while for it to sink in that I'm no longer alone."

Skinner touched Mulder's hand. "It's okay, Fox. This is going to be an adjustment for all of us."

Mulder gazed into Skinner's warm brown eyes. Then reluctantly pulled his eyes away and sighed, "There just seems to be a lot we need to get done before winter gets here, including helping my friends get settled into their cabin. Fighting the aliens may be the least of our worries."

"We'll get it done. After all, you are right about one thing, we're all type A personalities."

"Can I help milk the cows?" Bond asked.

"Sure, Jimmy," Mulder said. "Do you have enough food at Frohike's cabin?"

"The vegetable garden has some vegetables that haven't been eaten birds and animals. There isn't much in the cupboards or root cellar."

"I was afraid of that." Milford Frohike died before he started putting up supplies for the winter. "We're going to have to get your root cellar stocked. Once winter gets here the roads out of the mountain can be closed by heavy snow. And there won't be any snowplows coming out here this winter."

"Fox, I should be able to pick up enough food from my father's farm. Why don't we drive down there together on Wednesday?" Doggett said. "You'll get to see a real farm in operation."

"I don't think it's a good idea for Mulder to leave this area. Not with the military looking for him. And I'm positive the aliens are searching for him, too," Krycek said. "Why don't you take Walter with you?"

"Why are the aliens searching for you?" Doggett asked, looking at Mulder.

Mulder leaned against the counter. "It's because of what they did to me. I'm certain they would have picked me up before they attacked, but I removed and disposed of the chip they had planted in my left testicle. However, that doesn't mean I shouldn't go to your father's farm. Neither the military or the aliens have any way to track me."

Skinner shuddered, putting his hand on Mulder's arm. "The blood on your pants was from cutting out the chip?"

"Yeah. I removed it the night before the aliens attacked."

"Fox, what did they do to you?"

"They turned me into a freak."

"You said that before. What-did-they-do-to-you?" Skinner said slowly.

Mulder shook his head. "I don't want to talk about it, Walter." He walked over to the coat rack and pulled on his jacket then hurried out of the cabin.

"Alex, tell us what they did," Skinner said.

Krycek was still staring at the closed door Mulder left through. He sighed, "Okay, I'll tell you what they did to me, only because I want you to stop asking Mulder about it. I went willingly with the alien bounty hunter after he promised to tell me what they'd done to Mulder. The offer of a new arm was only secondary to my decision to go with him."

Skinner walked over and sat at the table across from Krycek. Bond and Doggett remained quiet, listening.

"Go on," Skinner said.

"On the ship, there were four other human males in the room they took me to. They were all strapped into hard stone chairs that conformed to their bodies. Their legs were spread and a mechanical device covered their groins. I was strapped into a similar chair. It was fucking uncomfortable, but it had built in electronic stimulators that prevented the muscles in our arms and legs from becoming weak from lack of use. It took them three months to grow me a new arm. It was more painful than it had been having it chopped off in the first place." Krycek shuddered and looked at his new hand, flexing his fingers.

"During that time I watched what they were doing to the other men." Krycek closed his eyes, remembering. "It wasn't noticeable at first. It took me almost two months to notice the change in them. One of the men was close to fifty and had a lot of body hair. His body hair had fallen out and the wrinkles and age spots had disappeared. He could have passed for thirty. An alien different from the grays came into the room...he looked almost human. He walked over to one of the men, and lowered the device that was covering the man's genitals. The man's chair was positioned so I could see his privates. I didn't notice it at first or it didn't register on my brain, until the alien inserted a thick probe into the man's body."

The men listened quietly as Krycek took a deep breath and went on. "It wasn't inserted into the man's anus. He had another opening just above it."

"What do you mean, Alex?" Skinner asked.

"He had a vagina. The aliens had turned him and the others into a combination of male and female. They hadn't started altering me yet. They had been waiting for my arm to grow back first. I spent over a month watching them test and probe the four men, knowing that they planned the same thing for me. I escaped from the ship shortly after they had succeeded in altering me." Krycek stood and walked over to the coat rack.

"Are you telling me that you and Mulder have vaginas?"

"I see you were paying attention. Walter, Mulder's traumatized enough by what has been done to him--not just this recent abduction. I didn't want you to continue to pressure him. That is the only reason I told you." He pulled on his coat and walked to the back door.

"Alex, what was the purpose of them giving you, Mulder, and those other men female sex organs?"

"I don't know. For decades they've been experimenting on human females trying to impregnate



them with alien babies. It never worked. Maybe they decided to try something different."

"Did it work?"

Krycek paused with his hand on the doorknob. "I don't know. I didn't hang around long enough to find out." He opened the door and stepped outside, leaving the three men in the cabin to stare at each other in speculation.

"Do you believe him?" Doggett asked.

"Yes. Why would he lie about something like this?"

"Frohike is never going to believe this," Bond said, carrying his plate to the sink.

"Jimmy, we'd appreciate it if you didn't mention this to the Lone Gunmen."

"Why?"

Skinner sighed. The kid was so dense. "Because this is embarrassing to Mulder, and if he wanted Frohike and the others to know he would have told them himself."

"Okay, but Mulder didn't want you to know either, and that didn't stop Alex from telling you."

"We're living here with him and Krycek. We needed to know. The Gunmen don't need to know."

Doggett frowned. "Jimmy, just don't tell them." He stood, placing his dish in the sink. "C'mon, let's help Mulder with the chores."

"Jimmy, you can help me feed the chickens and collect eggs," Skinner said as they walked over to pull on their jackets.

"I want to help milk the cows, too."

When they stepped outside a helicopter cleared the hill. It was hauling a large crate below it. Mulder ran out of the barn and around the house as the helicopter lowered the crate onto a small clearing in front of the cabin. Krycek followed several feet behind Mulder--not quite able to keep up with the long leg strides Mulder was taking.

Skinner, Doggett, and Bond arrived seconds behind Mulder and Krycek.

Mulder freed the straps and waved up at Sean in the helicopter. Sean smiled and gave him the thumbs up then headed back to the ranger station.

Skinner helped unlatch the crate. Inside were the parts for the windmill, cables, and batteries.

"This was nice of Sean. He doesn't usually use his helicopter to transport supplies," Mulder said.

"Do you think he'll bring out our ammunition and weapons?" Skinner asked.

"He won't make two trips. Besides, I need to ride out and thank him for delivering my windmill, and bring him some eggs, milk, and a jug of corn whiskey. I'll bring back one of the crates of ammo on my way back."

"I'll go with you. What's this about corn whiskey?" Skinner asked.

Mulder grinned and looked at the four men. "You haven't seen my...our root cellar yet. C'mon, I'll

show it to you, then we can get back to tending the animals."

They walked back toward the farm, and followed Mulder into the trees at the side of an incline. Mulder stopped before two trap doors and pulled them open. "I could use this to store the milk and butter, instead of the stream. It's a constant forty-nine degrees, I'm told even in winter. However it's a pain in the butt to come here in the early morning."

They stared down the steep stone steps that lead into an underground room. Mulder lead the way down and lit a lantern at the bottom of the steps.

Krycek whistled. The space was huge. It wasn't like any cellar he'd ever seen. It was built into an underground cave.

Mulder gave them a quick tour. "Old Man Peterson used this place to store his moonshine. In this room he has several large earthen crocks that he used to make blackberry wine in." He pulled a bottle from the shelf and handed it to Skinner. "I haven't found his still, but there's enough corn whiskey to last a life time."

Doggett walked up to the shelf and pulled one of the jugs down. He uncorked it and sniffed it contents then took a sip, and choked. "God, that's smooth."

Krycek took the jug from him and sampled it. Tears welled up in his eyes and he gasped, "Not bad. My Grandfather used to make vodka. I wouldn't mind trying my hand at it this winter."

Skinner took the jug and sniffed it, then took a swig. "Mm, I'd say Old Man Peterson knew how to make good corn whiskey. This has to be the best I've tasted."

"You've had the opportunity to sample moonshine?" Mulder asked.

"When I was in 'nam a lot of the guys tried to make their own booze."

"Mulder this place is so cool," Bond said, looking down a tunnel. "Where does this lead?"

"There's a hidden exit a half mile down."

Krycek wandered over to a row of shelves. On them were hundreds of empty canning jars, and dozens of freshly filled jars. Then his eyes fell on a round block of cheese incased in wax. He smiled. "Fox, is this your experiment in cheese making?"

Mulder chuckled. "Yeah, pretty pathetic, isn't it?"

"No. It looks good. How long before we can sample it?"

"A couple of months. It's suppose to be better the longer its aged, but I don't think I could wait for one to age five years."

Krycek stepped closer to Mulder. "I'd like to help you make another batch."

Mulder took a step back, being this close to Krycek was turning him on. "I've never pegged you as someone with domestic skills."

Krycek stepped back into his personal space. "There's a lot you don't know about me." His voice was low and husky. It sent a shiver of arousal racing down Mulder's spine.

Mulder backed away nervously. "I better get that jug of whiskey for Sean."

A satisfied smirk spread across Krycek's lips. If he played it right today, he might just get to second base.

Skinner was talking to Doggett in the chamber with the whiskey and wine. They stepped back so Mulder could reach the shelves.

"Fox, while we ride out to retrieve the military supplies, John and Alex can start preparing the site for the windmill. You said you had the perfect spot for it, can you show them before we leave?"

"Sure. I want to stop off and see how the Gunmen are doing before we head for the ranger station." Mulder paused and grabbed another jug from the shelf. "For Frohike."

They spent an hour and a half doing the morning chores. Mulder realized that with the four of them, not counting Bond, they'd have plenty of free time in the afternoon.

Mulder and Skinner rode out to see the Gunmen, while Bond stayed behind to help Doggett and Krycek clear the hill for the windmill. The first step would be laying the concrete footings. Doggett was hopeful they'd have that task done well before nightfall. It would take a couple days for the cement to set. In the meantime they had to build a structure onto the cabin for the two-dozen batteries, control panel, inverter, and circuit breaker.

Frohike was sitting out on the front porch when they rode up. He stood and grinned. "Hey, Mulder, Skinman, I see we all made it out alive."

Mulder swung down from his horse and went to hug his friend. "Frohike, when Walter told me that your building was leveled in the attack, I was scared to death you guys might have been killed. It's good to see you're all unharmed."

"It will take more than an alien invasion to shut us down," Frohike quipped.

Skinner shook his hand. "It is good to see you again, Frohike. And watch it with that Skinman crap."

Mulder walked back to his horse and pulled the jug and a bag of coffee beans out of the saddlebag. "Consider these house warming gifts," he said.

Byers came out on the porch and grinned when he saw Mulder and Skinner. "Mulder, AD Skinner, it's nice to see you."

"John, how have you been?" Skinner asked.

"Fine, except for my feet." Byers stood in his stocking feet.

"What's wrong with your feet?"

"Blisters...they didn't like the sixty-five mile hike up here."

"What size shoe do you wear?" Mulder asked.

"A ten. Why?"

"There's a family of sheep ranchers in the valley that make sheep skin moccasins. I can pick you up a pair next time I stop down to trade with them."

"Moccasins?" Byers looked perplexed.

Mulder shrugged his shoulders. "It's better than walking around in your stocking feet."

"Do you have a pair?"

"No. But I have thought about buying a pair. They are lined with thick wool and would be nice to wear inside the cabin during the winter."

"If you wouldn't mind picking me up a pair, I'd appreciate it," Byers said.

"It's no problem. Walter and I are heading out to the ranger station. If you, Frohike, and Langly want to stop out to our cabin this afternoon, we can discuss what's going on with the invasion and our plans."

"If you treat us to something to eat, we'll help do the dishes," Frohike said.

Mulder smiled. "Come out early and you can help cook. I have a few dozen eggs that I need to use before they go bad."

Frohike chuckled. "How come every time I visit you, Mulder, you make me cook?"

"Because you're a good cook and I suck at it." Mulder enjoyed being around his friend again. Frohike would come out and visit him at least once a month, and he'd come to look forward to those visits.

"You've gotten a lot better since you're no longer able to order out for pizza or Chinese food. The last meal we cooked together would have even made Emeril proud. Have you used that pasta machine I gave you for a house warming gift yet?"

"Ah...no...I've stocked up on prepackaged pasta."

"Mulder, there's nothing better than making your own. It's so simple."

"Well, I've been rather busy with tending the animals, gardening, canning, making repairs to the cabin, and chopping wood...."

Skinner listened to the two friends. He enjoyed watching this whole new side of Mulder. His former agent seemed to relax and let his guard down when chatting with Frohike. It was nice to see a smile on Mulder's lips.

"We better get going." Mulder paused, looking at Byers. "I'll leave my horse here for you to use. I can double up with Walter."

"I've never rode a horse," Byers said, looking nervously at the large animal.

"Frohike can help you into the saddle." Mulder petted his horse's neck. "She's really gentle."

Frohike took the reins and tied her to a post in front of the cabin. "John, Langly can walk while we ride."

Mulder walked over to Skinner and quipped, "Do you want to drive or shall I?"

A soft breeze lifted the silky strands of Mulder's hair and Skinner felt a stirring in his groin. "I'll drive." He didn't think it would be a good idea for Mulder to feel his arousal. Skinner put his foot in the stirrup and pulled himself into the saddle. Once Mulder was seated behind him Skinner spurred the horse down the path.

"I'm sorry, Walter," Mulder said, moving his hands to rest on Skinner's shoulders. His long legs rested uncomfortably over the saddlebag, which were full. He needed to be careful that he didn't break any of the eggs.

"Sorry about what?"

"We'll have to walk back to the cabin and we'll only be able to take a fourth of the ammo back with us."

"We don't have to bring everything back in one day."

Skinner leaned back, longing to feel Mulder's body against his. His mind went back to what Krycek had told them about what had been done to him and Mulder. He found the whole idea of them being dual-sexed highly erotic. "It was nice of you to leave your horse so Byers wouldn't have to walk the six miles to our cabin."

"They're my friends and have helped me a lot more than I've helped them over the years."

"You and Frohike seem close. How often has he visited you here?"

Mulder's hands moved down to rest more comfortably on Skinner's hips. "When I first moved here, Frohike would drive up every weekend. Once I settled in, his visits dropped off to once a month. I've never had a better friend than him."

Skinner took the reins in one hand and allowed his other to drop over Mulder's hand. He wrapped his fingers around it, and tightened his grip when Mulder tried to pull it back. "Mulder, I wish you would have trusted me enough to tell me where you were living, and why you felt the need to be out here alone. I would have helped you. We've gone through a lot together and I consider you to be a very close friend."

Mulder glanced sadly at the trees and the heavy overhead canopy. "After I returned from being buried alive for three months, I really wasn't sure if I had any friends. Everyone, including Scully, had moved on with their lives. I didn't feel like I belonged and no one seemed to care what I was going through. I had no family and Scully was pregnant and wouldn't tell me how or who the father was, until after the baby was born."

An anguished tone crept into Mulder's voice, which was now barely above a whisper. "I remembered every second of being tortured and dumped in the woods. I still have the occasional nightmare of being buried alive. In the coffin I couldn't move or speak, but I could hear, smell, and feel. Do you know what it's like to hear your own funeral service? Or to lie in your coffin and smell the damp earth around you with only your own thoughts for company. After I was discharged from the hospital, no one cared enough to ask me if I was all right. Everything felt surreal to me. Then I lost my job and my purpose for living...." Mulder paused. He wasn't sure if he heard Skinner snuffle.

Skinner allowed the tears to fall freely. He wished he could see Mulder's face. This conversation wasn't the type he wanted to have on horseback.

"Mulder, I was going to tell them everything that I saw after you were abducted, but I allowed Scully to talk me out of it. I've regretted that decision ever since. It's been eating at me since we found your supposedly dead body in the woods. I should have had the backbone to stick by the truth. I feel that I let you down. I'm sorry."

Mulder squeeze his hand. Then he wrapped his arms around Skinner's waist, hugging him from behind.

"Don't, Walter. It's in the past." Mulder enjoyed the close contact. "So you missed me?"

"More than you can believe. Please don't doubt that I cared."

"I want to believe."

Skinner stopped the horse by a stream. "Let's stop here for a moment. I want to tell you something, but I need to look at you."

They dismounted and Skinner tied the reins to a bush. He took Mulder's hand and led him over to a three-foot high boulder. They sat side by side. "Fox, after you were abducted, I was barely functioning. I cried for the first time in years. When Scully told me she was pregnant, I immediately assumed you were the father. Knowing you and Scully were lovers didn't stop me from missing you and praying that someday we'd find you safe. Then we found your body and it was like my life ended. I didn't care any more. When they pulled Billy Miles' body from the ocean, and he was found to be still alive, I immediately had you exhumed. I wanted to believe you were still alive, even if I'd never be a part of your life. I didn't check up on you afterwards because I didn't want to intrude on your time with Scully. I had no idea that she didn't care enough to find out how you were dealing with your abduction. It never occurred to me that no one inquired about how you felt and what you remembered. If I had known, you have to believe, I would have been there for you." Skinner gazed into Mulder's eyes while his fingers touched the side of his face, gently brushing over that sexy mole.

Mulder tilted his head and leaned in and kissed Skinner. His hands went around the larger man's neck as his lips parted, deepening the kiss.

Skinner pulled Mulder against his body. One hand moved up to the back of Mulder's head, fingers laced through the feathery strands as he thrust his tongue deep into that lush mouth.

"Oh God," Mulder gasped as he broke the kiss. "What's wrong with me?" He stood on wobbly legs.

"Mulder, are you all right?"

"No." Mulder hugged himself, trembling as if cold.

"What's wrong?" Skinner stood and walked over to him.

Mulder backed away. "I can't control it...."

"Control what?"

"My behavior. First John, now you...I've never kissed another man before today. It's like I can't help myself."

"Fox, you don't have to be embarrassed. There is nothing wrong with finding another man attractive or two men having sex."

"That's the same thing John said this morning." Mulder walked over to the horse and petted it while regaining his composure. "It seems like I'm the only one who's never had sex with another man. I've always suspected Krycek was gay, but I never would have pegged you or Doggett before a couple of days ago. And to think I used to be the FBI's top profiler."

Skinner walked over to the horse and placed his hand on its back so he could meet Mulder's eyes. "The term is bisexual. I like women and men, but because of my job I never gave into temptation with the latter. Now I have nothing to lose and everything to gain."

Mulder arched an eyebrow. "What do you have to gain?"

Skinner placed his hands on Mulder's shoulders then moved in to capture his lips in another kiss. This one was slow and sweet, and ended before either man could lose control. "I think you know what I have to gain. Let me show you how good it can be."

Mulder placed his hand on Skinner's chest, feeling the beating heart beneath his palm. "I'm not the same man I was five months ago. They turned me into a freak. If you knew what they did to me you wouldn't want anything to do with me."

"Krycek told us what they'd done to him and four other men," Skinner said softly.

Mulder's face turned bright red, and he turned to walk away, but Skinner's hand on his forearm stopped him.

"Mulder, I would never consider you a freak. They might have altered your body, but you're still the same man I've admired for years."

"No, I'm not. I have feelings and urges that I never experienced before. I never would have kissed you or allowed you to touch me sexually five months ago."

"It doesn't have to be bad. Let me show you how good it can feel. We'll take it slow."

"How slow?" Mulder wasn't sure if asking was a mistake.

Not taking his eyes off Mulder's face, Skinner reached down and unzipped the younger man's jeans and eased his hand inside. He smiled as his fingers wrapped around the large organ, and he felt it thicken with interest. Easing it out, he slowly stroked it while enjoying the expression on Mulder's face. The younger man's eyes closed and his head tilted back and his lips parted seductively as he moaned, rocking his hips in rhythm with Skinner's strokes.

"Do you like this, Fox?"

"Y-Yesss...."

Skinner smiled. "I want you to touch me. Do you think you can do that?"

Mulder opened his eyes and looked blissfully into Skinner's face, while his hand dropped to the larger man's zipper and fumbled with the metal tab. His hand brushed against Skinner's as the large man continued to jerk him off. Once Mulder had the zipper down, he reached nervously inside and gasped when his fingers wrapped around the hard organ. It felt almost as thick as a beer can, but thankfully not as long as his penis. Mulder was having a hard time concentrating as he felt himself close to coming, but he did his best to jerk Skinner off in the manner he would do himself.

"So good, Fox."

They stroked in time with each other. Mulder suddenly stiffened as he came and let go of Skinner's cock. Milky strands of come shot into the air, landing in the dark mud at their feet.

Skinner caught Mulder as he collapsed against his chest. "Sh, it's all right, I have you." He kissed the side of Mulder's head.

It took several moments for Mulder to regain his breath. "It's been a while since I've come that hard."

Skinner pulled Mulder into a kiss, while he rubbed himself against Mulder's body. It just took the taste of Mulder and the pressure against his organ for him to come, a couple of minutes later.

After they both recovered their breath, they washed up in the stream.

"We better get going to Sean's, if we want to beat Frohike, Langly, and Byers back to our cabin," Mulder said. He wasn't sure what he was feeling.

~x~X~x~

Byers stood in Mulder's bathroom and stared longingly at the bathtub. Frohike was at the sink washing his hands.

"Melvin, how come your Uncle didn't move into this cabin and sell Mulder his place?"

"He loved his cabin, John. My Uncle built that place with his own hands."

"It's just a shame he never got around to adding a bathroom."

"I'm sure Mulder wouldn't mind if we occasional took a bath here."

"Six miles is a long way to walk just to use someone else's bathroom."

Frohike sighed, "John, let's talk to the guys, maybe we can convince them to help us add another room onto our place before winter. It might not have running water for a while, but at least we'll have a place to put that wooden tub."

They walk out of the bathroom into the main room. Langly was pacing nervously. The battery on his laptop needed to be recharged. He'd gone for hours without his computer. Doggett watched Langly pace as he tried to study the manual that came with the windmill.

"Langly, sit down or go outside!" he growled.

"What's your problem, Dogbird?" the lanky Gunman asked.

Frohike interrupted before the two men came to blows. "Langly, can you and Jimmy go outside and pick some green beans, zucchini, lettuce, tomatoes, and a couple of cucumbers? I'm going to start dinner."

Krycek walked in from outside. He'd been sitting on the front porch reading a book. Walking over to the oven he pulled out the two loaves of bread he had baking inside. "Do you need any help with dinner, Frohike?"

"Yes. Can you cube that half-loaf of stale bread then fry it in olive oil then season it with garlic salt and parsley? I want to have croutons for the salad," he said, putting three eggs in a saucepan filled with water and on the stove to boil.

Krycek grabbed a knife and a cutting board, and started cubing the three-day-old bread. "What are you planning on making for dinner?" he asked. He never really gave a second thought about Mulder's friends before now, but Frohike was Mulder's closest friend. He was the only one Mulder had trusted to help him find a place to disappear, and Krycek wanted to find out why Mulder would place so much trust in the small man.

"Fresh fettuccini pasta sauted with eggs, zucchini, and green beans." Frohike placed the pasta machine on the cook's table and started making the pasta dough. He glanced over at Krycek. "Do



you want to help julienne the green beans and zucchini when they bring them in?"

"Sure," Krycek said, heating the olive oil in a skillet. "Frohike, how did you meet Mulder?"

"I met him at a computer and electronics show in Baltimore in 1989." Frohike chuckled. "Byers and I were led to believe he was the psycho ex-boyfriend of a woman Byers had just met. The woman told Byers that Mulder had kidnapped their three-year-old daughter. It wasn't until we cornered Mulder down in the basement at the convention center and were about to kick his ass that we discovered he was an FBI agent."

"Interesting version of how we met, Frohike," Mulder said, he was standing in the back doorway. "I seem to recall two scared men cowering before me in a basement hallway."

"I never cowered," Frohike said, turning back to Krycek. "Did I mention that Mulder called me 'handsome' when we first met?"

Krycek frowned and looked at Mulder for an explanation.

Mulder chuckled. "He was trying to sell me 33-channels of cable and I told him 'no thanks, handsome.'"

Krycek should have known it would be something completely innocent. Mulder hadn't even been interested in men. Still Krycek couldn't explain why he was jealous of Frohike.

"What happened to the woman?" Krycek asked.

Byers took up the tale. "Susanne was an organic chemist, working at the Army Advanced Weapon Facility at White Stone, New Mexico. She uncovered a plot by the government to test an aerosolized gas that she'd help to create, on people living in Baltimore. The gas causes anxiety paranoia."

"Yeah, it worked really good," Mulder said. "After I was exposed to it I spent a day at the hospital in five point restraints."

Byers nodded. "We discovered where the aerosolized gas was being stored and broke into the warehouse. As we were opening the crate Mulder shows up with his gun drawn. He tells us we were under arrest and orders us to get on the ground." He turned to Mulder. "Mulder, what I never understood was how you found us at that warehouse," Byers said.

Mulder shrugged. "I was very good at my job."

"You're not going to tell us are you?"

"And ruin the mystique?"

Byers shook his head and went on with his story. "We were interrupted by two armed men that ordered Susanne to go with them. Mulder ordered the men to identify themselves and they open fire on him. We all ran for cover, unfortunately for Mulder chose to hide behind the crate with the aerosolized gas. The bullets caused the chemical to spill all over him. Mulder was completely out of it at this point. He has his shirt off and is moaning and twisting around on the floor. One of the men was going to shoot him, but Susanne shoots the man and his companion first. It's at this point the doors to the warehouse open and men enter with some sort of detectors. After they gave the okay other men came into the room. The leader walks over to where Mulder is lying and turns to him men and orders them to sanitize it. The men that Susanne shot were put into body bags...one of them is still alive but they zipped him in anyway. One of the men wanted to know if they should bag Mulder, but the leader tells him no one touches this man. In the meantime, I'm

trying to find out from the leader why they are doing this. Who gave them the authority."

"Yeah, Byers came close to getting us bagged," Langly said as he helped clean the vegetables he and Jimmy had picked in the garden. "They forced us on our knees and the big black dude pulled out a big gun and placed it to the back of Byers' head. He pulled the trigger but the gun wasn't loaded. He was trying to intimidate us. After they left, the police arrived and we were arrested. We spent the night in jail. Luckily Mulder came to and was able to verify our story so we were released."

"What happened to Susanne?" Krycek asked as he sliced the green beans into thin strips.

"We tracked her to the Baltimore Guardian, she was trying to get the newspaper to believe her story, but they wouldn't. She left us standing in front of the newspaper building as she headed off down the street. When she reached the corner, she was abducted by men in a large black sedan, it was the leader from the warehouse," Frohike said.

Byers sighs, "Susanne opened my eyes to just how dangerous some agencies in our government were, it was because of her that we started investigating the government and publishing the Lone Gunman and the Magic Bullet magazine."

Krycek looked over at Mulder. "Was this when your eyes were opened?"

"I suppose, shortly after that incident I started seeing Dr. Heitz Werber and he put me through several sessions of deep regression hypnosis. A couple of years later I discovered the X-Files." Mulder shrugged. "You know the rest."

Skinner entered the cabin carrying a stack of firewood. He filled the empty woodbin next to the pot-bellied stove then headed outside for another load. The woodbin next to the water heater needed to be filled.

"Do you want to make the salad, Mulder?" Frohike asked.

"Sure."

Krycek was using a large pan to saut the green beans and zucchini in olive oil and butter. While Frohike boiled the fettuccini, when the pasta was done the little man drained it in a colander and dumped it into the saut pan. Krycek in the meantime, scrambled six eggs with a little cream and poured it over the pasta. While Frohike mixed it, and added garlic salt and fresh parsley.

"Mm, that looks good," Doggett said as he washed the flour and egg mess off the cook's table in the kitchen. They needed to use it since the dining room table only seated six.

By the time the pasta was done, Mulder had the large salad ready with a vinaigrette dressing.

Skinner had returned from loading all of the woodbins and helped Doggett set the table.

Then the men filled their plates and salad bowls at the counter and carried them to the dining room table. Bond and Langly chose to eat on stools at the cook's table.

"This tastes great, Frohike," Skinner said, dipping a slice of bread into the pasta and soaking up the oil and spices.

Doggett concentrated on his salad, spearing a slice tomato with his fork.

Mulder glanced around the table at everyone eating contently. Why couldn't they have done this before their world was attacked? Why did it take the destruction of Earth to bring them together?

"Penny for your thoughts, Mulder?" Byers asked, noticing that Mulder had stopped eating and was looking melancholy.

Mulder picked up his fork. "I was thinking that it was nice having everyone here, and sad that this might not last if our military aren't able to keep the aliens at bay."

"What are your plans?" Byers asked.

Skinner looked over at him. "We're going to prepare this place for winter. John and Mulder are going to John's father's farm for supplies for us. They'll pick some up for you guys, too. Alex is going to see about getting us HAM radio so we can communicate with the outside world. If the aliens break through our nation's defenses we will be ready to fight them. Until then there's nothing we can do but dig in and wait," he said.

"We could use some help at our cabin," Byers said.

"Anything you need just ask, we're all in this together," Doggett said.

"Thanks, guys," Byers said.

~x~X~x~

The Panther and the Wolf

In another cabin

Monday, September 24, 2001

Sixteen miles away, in a hunting and fishing cabin on the shores of a stream fed lake, sat two men looking out at its glistening waters.

"Oh man. Some vacation, we come out here and our home town is destroyed by aliens," Blair said. He stood and started to pace around the deck. "We need to find out if our friends are okay!"

Jim sighed, "We can't go back there, Chief, it's too dangerous. It looks like we're stuck here." The cabin was equipped with a HAM radio for emergencies and a gas-powered generator. Jim had used the radio to contact his friend out west and was told about the destruction to their city when an alien spaceship crashed into the middle of downtown, setting off fires. His friend, who worked in the military, also told him about the total destruction of dozens of Canadian and US cities.

"We should be helping the survivors," Blair said.

"We should be thinking about preparing this place for winter."

"What's the point? Man! We've been invaded by aliens!"

"Our military has been successful, so far, in fighting them off. Chief, if we're going to survive, we can't just go rushing off blindly to help. For all we know those crashed alien spaceships might have some deadly contagion on them. We need to find out more about what's going on."

Blair walked over to his friend and lover. "Okay, Big Guy, why don't we drive up and talk to your ranger buddy. If we're going to be staying here, I want to know more about the area and who else lives up here."

~x~X~x~

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## Chapter 4: Friends and Allies by Jo B

### Author's Notes:

The Frog, Otter, Stork, and Puppy

Blue Ridge Mountain Ranger Station

Sunday, September 23, 2001

Byers shook his head in dismay as he walked around the cabin and started opening the windows. The place was even worse than he'd imagined it would be. It smelled like an old man, a layer of dust covered everything. A large stone fireplace divided the kitchen from the parlor, and there were two bedrooms off the parlor. One had a bed and a dresser, and the other was filled with boxes of old magazines. It looked like it had a bed too, under all the clutter. He watched a mouse scurry across the floor and under the stove.

"Melvin, where does your uncle keep the cleaning supplies?"

"In the broom cabinet in the kitchen."

"We better get started cleaning, if we're going to have this place livable by nightfall."

Jimmy bounded in through the back door, carrying an enormous zucchini. "This place is so cool! Byers, you should see the barn and pens. The vegetable garden is a bit overgrown, but there are a lot of nice sized melons and pumpkins. Frohike, do you think we can get some animals?"

"Whoa, Jimmy, we're not up to taking care of animals," Frohike said.

"You said that Mulder raises animals." Bond pouted.

"Mulder had all summer to learn how to care for them and put up feed for the winter." Frohike sighed, looking at Bond's sad face. The guy just doesn't know how much work raising farm animals would be. "Maybe we can get a cat to take care of the mouse problem in this cabin. I'm sure one of the farmers in the valley might be willing to part with one."

Langly looked into the back bedroom. "So we're going to have to share the beds?"

"Unless you want to sleep on the floor," Frohike said as another mouse scurried across the floor.

Langly jumped. "N-no. I'll sleep with Byers."

Byers carried a bucket of soapy water into the room. He was holding a broom in his other hand. "Jimmy, can you start hauling the boxes of magazines out of the back bedroom to barn? We should be able to use them for kindling this winter. Langly, I want you and Frohike to strip the bed in the front bedroom and take the mattress outside and beat it with a stick to get all the dust and dirt out of it. Once, Jimmy uncovers the bed in the back bedroom, I want the same thing done with it and the blankets. I'll be sweeping out this mess in the meantime."

"Why do you get to be the boss?" Langly asked.

"Langly, give it a rest," Frohike snapped. "We'll hold elections next week. Right now let's get this place cleaned."

~x~X~x~

The Fox, Dog, Bear, and Rat

Blue Ridge Mountain

Sunday, September 23, 2001

Mulder was relieved when they finally made it back to his cabin. The sun had gone down an hour ago. Thankfully, Sean had milked the cows and fed the animals earlier. Mulder was so tired...and nervous. He glanced at Doggett as they led the horses into the barn. Skinner and Krycek had already gone into the cabin.

"Don't worry, Mulder, I don't snore," Doggett said. He had won the coin flip with Skinner and would be sleeping in the big bed with Mulder.

For some reason, Mulder felt like he was some unspoken prize.

"I'm not worried." Mulder took his time unsaddling the horse and brushing it down. He was worried. It was getting close to that time of the month and he could feel his hormones start to play havoc with his libido. At least Krycek wasn't sharing his bed tonight. He was sure that would have ended with him losing more than his virginity. He'd just have to ignore how horny Doggett was making him and hope the agent didn't notice.

"C'mon, Fox. We've fed and groomed them. It's getting cold out here, let's get indoors."

"Okay. In the morning I want to ride out and visit the Gunmen," Mulder said. He was relieved when Sean had told them that Frohike, Byers, Langly, and Bond had made it out of D.C. unharmed.

"I'll come with you. The guys will probably need some supplies. It doesn't sound like they brought much with them," Doggett said, strolling with Mulder back to the house. He liked the Gunmen even if they were weird.

"I'm sure they'll need help getting ready for winter." Mulder thought back to all the time he'd spent chopping wood, and putting up food over the summer. Milford Frohike had a nice supply of wood stacked at his place, but after his death, his vegetable garden had become over grown and his goats and pigs were sold to a farmer down in the valley.

"It looks like we'll have our work cut out for us the next few weeks," Doggett said. "I want to head down to North Carolina and check on my dad and brother. I can pick up some supplies from them with my truck. They raise pigs and cattle, and grow wheat, corn, and potatoes."

"You don't seem too worried about them," Mulder said, as they entered the kitchen through the back door.

"My dad and brother are tough men. I'm more concerned that they're worrying about me."

Skinner and Krycek had lit the stoves and fireplace. The oil and kerosene lamps were also burning. Tiger rushed over to greet Mulder and Doggett. Mulder scooped her up in his arms and cuddled her against his chest. "You miss me, Tiger?"

Skinner came out of the bathroom. "I started a fire in the water heater. It will be at least a hour before it's hot enough to take a shower."

Krycek was at the stove heating something in a saucepan.

"What are you making, Alex?" Mulder asked, walking over to peer in the pan.

He held up a bottle of rum that he'd gotten from one of the marines at the base. "Hot butter rum. I figured we all could use a drink."

Skinner smiled. "Good idea, Alex, I know I could use one."

"Me, too." Doggett hung his jacket on the rack by the front door.

"I could use a drink." Mulder set the cat down and shrugged off his leather jacket. "We're going to have to make several trips to the ranger station to bring back the ammunition and weapons we got from the military. Plus, I want to start hauling the parts back for the windmill and electrical equipment. If we're here through the winter it would be nice to have electricity."

"We can start on all of that tomorrow. I'm pretty good with my hands," Skinner said.

Mulder swallowed back a smutty reply that was on the tip of his tongue. Now was not the time for sexual innuendoes.

Krycek in the meantime poured a little rum into four mugs then filled them with the hot, sweet, buttery liquid from the saucepan. They carried the mugs into the parlor and sat on the sofa and chairs.

Tiger hopped up onto Mulder's lap and curled herself up in a ball. Mulder absently petted her as he sipped his drink.

"Have you considered buying some solar panels or using the stream for power?" Doggett asked.

Mulder nodded. "Yeah, I thought of using the stream for backup, but I wanted to get the windmill installed first. It will supply more electricity than the stream. It gets really windy up here and I calculated if I place the windmill on the highest point of my property, even on days where the wind is only blowing at ten miles an hour, I'll be able to generate six hundred kilowatts of electricity per hour."

Skinner whistled. "With that much electricity you'll be able to light this place, and at the same time run a refrigerator, and an electric washer and dryer."

Mulder took a sip of the hot beverage. "I'm installing a bank of batteries, they should be enough to store up the power for days when there is little or no wind."

Skinner was impressed that Mulder had researched the subject so thoroughly. "Did you pick up enough electrical supplies to wire this place?"

"Yes, I have everything and enough wiring to light this whole place, including the barn and chicken coop."

Krycek looked thoughtfully into his mug. "I think we should try to get our hands on a HAM radio. This place is going to make a great base for us."

"I agree," Skinner said. "I'd like to be able to contact my family, and find out what's going on around the country."

"We're high enough up that we'll be able to get good reception," Krycek said.

Mulder yawned and set the mug on the end table. He lifted the cat off his lap and set her on the floor then stood. "I think I'll wash up and turn in. I want to get up early tomorrow."

Krycek started to get up to follow him.

"Sit down, Alex. I'd like some privacy."

"Are you sure you don't need any help?"

"Yes. Thanks for the drink." Mulder hurried into his bedroom, retrieving his blue pajama bottoms and undershirt from the dresser. It looked like he'd have to do the laundry soon. With Krycek wearing his clothes he only had a couple of pairs of clean boxers left.

He walked back into the main room then into the bathroom and closed the door. The water wouldn't be hot enough yet for a shower. Since he took a shower at the base that morning Mulder decided to just brush his teeth and wash his face. The hot butter rum had made him sleepy and he was hoping he'd be asleep before Doggett joined him in bed.

Mulder tossed his dirty clothes into the laundry hamper in the bathroom. It was overflowing. He definitely needed to do the laundry.

He looked at his image in the mirror and ran a hand over his cheeks. Still no stubble. His upper chest and arms were nicely toned and muscled from chopping wood this summer. He smoothed a hand over his stomach...his abs were flat and hard. Mulder hadn't been in this great shape since he was in his early twenties. The wound on his testicle was healing fast and didn't need the bandage any longer. Mulder washed his face then ran the washcloth over his chest and between his thighs. After toweling dry he pulled on a sleeveless undershirt and his dark blue pajama bottoms.

He walked out of the bathroom and Skinner, Krycek, and Doggett turned to look at him.

Mulder swallowed when he saw the glint of lust in their eyes. Had it always been there and he'd been just too blind to notice it before? "Ah, good night," he said and hurried into the bedroom.

He put another log on the fire before extinguishing the oil lamp on the dresser. Pulling down the bedcovers, Mulder crawled between the cold sheets. He chose the side closest the doorway, since he planned to get up early and do the laundry. Despite his trepidation, Mulder felt more secure than he had since moving to this place, knowing that Skinner, Doggett, and Krycek were here. It's not that he needed them for protection, but at least he was no longer alone.

~x~X~x~

Doggett had caught his breath at the sight of Mulder in a tight sleeveless undershirt tucked into a pair of navy blue flannel pajama bottoms. The material hugged his round buttocks and flared out for the journey down his long legs. He'd never seen prettier feet on a man.

Skinner and Krycek's eyes had followed Mulder's trim form until he disappeared into the bedroom. They turned and looked at Doggett who was still staring at the bedroom doorway.

"He's never had sex with a man, so don't touch him!" Krycek warned, seeing the unmistakable look of desire in Doggett's eyes.

Doggett leaned back in the chair, pulling his eyes away from the bedroom doorway. He took a sip from his second hot butter rum. "I'm not a rapist, Krycek. Mulder does have a mind of his own."

"John, what are you saying?" Skinner asked, looking at his agent in confusion.

"I'm saying that it's up to Mulder if he wants to have a sexual relationship with any of us." Doggett raised his hand, stopping Skinner's protest. "Look, Walt, I'm not trying to take something that belongs to you. We're going to have to learn to work closely together and trust each other. However, you and Krycek have been behaving like you've already staked a claim on Mulder."

Skinner rubbed his temples. "I didn't think you were interested in men."

"I'm no choirboy, Walter. I've swallowed," Doggett quipped. He didn't want Skinner to feel threatened, since he really admired the man. "It was back in the marines before I met my ex-wife."

"God. It's a good thing the marines have that don't ask policy, otherwise they'd lose half their force." Skinner glanced over at the bedroom doorway. "John, I'll trust you to behave and not force yourself on him."

Doggett chuckled. "Did you miss the muscles on him? Mulder would beat the shit out of me if I tried to force him to do anything."

Skinner smiled. "Yeah, he's in great shape."

Krycek frowned. "Look, guys, Mulder was abducted and experimented on for a week back in May. Because of what the aliens did to him, he's now confused about his sexuality and doesn't need the two of you confusing him further."

"What do you mean, he was abducted in May?" Skinner stood and stalked over to Krycek's chair. "What did they do to him? Was it the same thing they did to you?"

"You'll have to ask Mulder. I'm not telling." Krycek stood. "Just leave him alone."

Skinner knew from their conversation yesterday that Mulder wasn't about to talk about it. The aliens had taken him again! Why hadn't Mulder said something at the time? Whatever they'd done, it had forced Mulder to move out here alone. "Alex, you don't seem too set on following your own advice."

"I know what I'm dealing with, you don't," Krycek said, walking toward the bathroom. He'd left the sweats he slept in two nights ago folded on a shelf. He debated going into the bedroom to borrow a clean pair of underwear from Mulder, but decided to hold off until the morning.

Krycek closed the door and started the shower. He stripped and stepped under the hot spray. God, it felt good! He ran a soapy washcloth over his body. He'd gotten so skinny that his ribcage was actually showing. Krycek decided he'd have to start exercising. Bringing the washcloth between his buttocks, he washed over his anus then took extra care over his new orifice. This was the first time he really touched it. Mulder was right; if he rubbed it just right it sent sparks of pleasure coursing through his body. He probed the opening with his finger. It parted, letting his digit inside. Krycek gasped, feeling the hot tightness of the orifice close around his finger.

Swallowing, he pulled his finger free, and looked down at his engorged penis standing hard and proud against his belly. Krycek wondered what it would feel like to fuck Mulder through his new orifice. God, he wanted to do him so badly. He frowned, thinking about the competition he had for Mulder.

It bothered him that Doggett was sleeping with Mulder tonight. He hated it even more that Skinner would be sleeping with him tomorrow night. Whose fucking idea had it been to switch off sharing the big bed with Mulder? Krycek's idea was to have him and Mulder in the big bed one night, then switch off with Skinner and Doggett for the air mattress the next night. He was sure that fucking air mattress would be tolerable with Mulder sleeping beside him. Now he'd have to spend two nights out of three sleeping there.

Krycek stepped out of the shower and dried himself, then pulled on the sweatpants sans underwear. When he stepped out of the bathroom, Skinner was waiting to use it after him. Doggett was at the sink drying the mugs and putting them on the shelf.

"Did you leave any hot water?" Skinner asked, stepping into the steamy room.



Krycek rolled his eyes and continued across the room to the ladder.

Doggett made sure the place was locked up. He extinguished the oil lamp in the kitchen, throwing the space into darkness. Then he placed another log into the pot-bellied stove. He scanned the titles of some of the books Mulder had on the bookshelf and pulled one down about vegetable and herb gardens. He sat in the chair next to the pot-bellied stove and oil lamp and started flipping through the book as he waited for Skinner to finish in the bathroom. He put his feet up on the footstool and looked around the room. It felt like home. Even his own house never gave him this feeling. He suspected part of it was being out in the country, and another part was the company. Even Krycek was beginning to grow on him.

"The bathroom is free," Skinner said, looking at Doggett. "What are you grinning about?"

"Listen."

"What? I don't hear anything."

"That's just it. No traffic, no steady hum that we hear constantly living in the city. I like it here." Doggett smiled. He liked how good Skinner looked standing there in his bare feet and sweatpants. Skinner had on an undershirt this time.

Skinner nodded in agreement. "John, the day the aliens attacked was the day I was going to turn in my resignation...I couldn't take it any longer. I wanted to move away from D.C. to some small community. I also wanted to find Mulder and see if he was all right."

"It seems you got both wishes."

Skinner shrugged his shoulders. "I could have done without the invasion and the total destruction of D.C." His look turned thoughtful. "John, I'm glad that you're here. If we're going to fight the aliens, I couldn't have asked for a better team than you, Mulder, and Krycek."

"Even Krycek?"

"Krycek can be very resourceful. He's an asset."

"Then you trust him?"

It took Skinner several minutes to answer. He wandered over to the window and looked out. "Deep down I want to trust him."

"Do you have any idea what the aliens did to him and Mulder?"

Skinner walked over to the sofa and sat. "No, but I've noticed three things about them. One, they haven't needed to shave in the last couple of days. Two, their skin is smoother and they have no wrinkles. Three, they smell different...pleasant and arousing."

"I think we should try to get them talking. We need to know what was done to them," Doggett said.

"Let's give them time. I'm sure once we've been living with them for a while, they'll open up to us." Skinner stood. "I'm going to turn in. Goodnight."

"Night, Walt."

Doggett waited until Skinner was up the ladder before returning the book to the shelf and turning

off the last two oil lamps in the room. He went into the bathroom and took a shower then added some more wood to water heater.

When Doggett entered the bedroom, he paused beside the bed and stared down at Mulder. The fire in the hearth offered enough light that he could appreciate the sight of the man sleeping with a cat curled up beside him. Mulder was one of the best looking men he'd ever met. Soft silky brown hair fell over Mulder's forehead and thick brown lashes fanned out across high cheek bones. Then there was that delectable mole gracing his cheek and lips most women would kill for. Doggett walked around the bed and crawled beneath the covers. Damn, it felt good to sleep on a real mattress again with feather pillows and a warm down comforter. Doggett turned on his side so he could gaze at Mulder. Walter was right, his scent was different from any man he'd ever been around. It took sheer willpower for him not to snuggle up against Mulder. He closed his eyes and willed sleep to take him.

~x~X~x~

The Frog, Otter, Stork, and Puppy

It was well past dark by the time the guys had the place livable.

Byers washed up in the kitchen sink. There was a large wooden basin in the kitchen that he assumed had been used by Frohike's uncle as a bathtub. It was large enough for one man to sit inside. He'd have to see about having a screen made to provide some privacy to the bather.

Frohike yawned. "I'm tired. I haven't worked this hard in years."

Bond was at the stove, cooking up a vegetable stew. He had found a jar of chicken bouillon cubes in the cupboard that he was using for a broth.

"That actually smells good, Jimmy," Byers said, looking into the pot with chopped zucchini, tomatoes, potatoes, and onions, floating in a rich chicken broth.

"Too bad we don't have any bread and butter," Bond said, pulling four freshly washed bowls from the cupboard.

"Or meat," Langly said. His stomach growled hungrily.

"Mulder raises chickens, we'll just have to help ourselves to a couple of birds," Frohike said.

Bond filled the bowls and the four men sat around the table and wolfed down their contents. Langly was first up for seconds.

"Speaking of Mulder, do you think he'd mind if we checked out his place tomorrow?" Byers asked.

"I don't think he'd mind," Frohike said, "I'm still wondering what he's doing with Krycek."

"Do you want to tell us now why Mulder moved up here?" Langly asked.

Frohike shrugged his shoulders. "He was abducted again back in May. They did something to him that made Mulder uncomfortable around people."

"They tortured him again? Why didn't you tell us this, Melvin?" Byers asked, his face etched with worry.

"Mulder didn't want anyone to know. He didn't tell me everything, only that he felt uncomfortable

and wanted to find a place that was away from people. Old Man Peterson had just passed away and had left his property to my Uncle. They had been best friends for over sixty-years. I helped Mulder purchase it from him."

"Okay, we know how Doggett found Mulder. Do you think Doggett told Skinner where Mulder had moved?" Langly asked.

"More than likely. I only wonder how Krycek found him." Frohike carried his empty bowl to the sink and set it inside. "I'm going to turn in. Jimmy, what side of the bed do you want?"

"The left side, if it's all right with you."

"No problem. I have no preference."

~x~X~x~

Monday, September 24, 2001

Mulder rolled over on his back and opened his eyes. The fire in the hearth had died to embers. The room was lit by moonlight shining in through the windows. In a couple of nights there would be a full moon. He sighed. The last two full moons he'd sleepwalked, waking up outside. Mulder tried to will himself to get up.

"Fox, you awake?"

Mulder froze, aware of the other man's presence for the first time. "Y-Yeah."

Doggett rolled on his side then propped himself up on one elbow and looked down at Mulder. Mulder's smell and warm body had him sexually aroused. He was hard all night. "You don't have to be nervous...I'm not going to bite."

Mulder swallowed, looking up into Doggett's face. For some reason, his hand seemed to move of its own accord, fingers lacing through the short strands of hair on the back of Doggett's head. He pulled the other man's head down until their lips met. His legs spread wantonly as Doggett lowered his body on top of him. Mulder gasped at the feel of the hard cock pushing against his hip. Then Doggett's hand reached down and stroked him through the soft flannel pajama bottoms. Their tongues wrestled back and forth. Moisture seeped into his pajama bottoms as his body burned with unbridled need.

Their lips parted and Doggett combed his fingers through Mulder's thick silky hair. "Are you coming on to me, Fox?"

Mulder swallowed and closed his eyes, trying desperately to fight off the feelings coursing through his body. He sighed, "Sorry, I don't know what came over me."

Doggett squeezed the hard organ through the flannel. "I think you know just what you want. Don't fight it, Fox. Go with your feelings."

Mulder pushed Doggett off and slid out of bed. If he stayed, then Doggett would find out everything that the aliens had done to him. He didn't want to see the look of disgust he was sure would be on Doggett's face at that discovery. "No. I-I can't. I don't know what I'm feeling."

"Come back to bed."

Mulder shook his head, looking at the clock. "I want to get the laundry done before Albert crows and wakes everyone."

Doggett sighed, "You named the rooster?" He threw the covers off and climbed out of bed.

Mulder shrugged as he lit the oil lamp. "I named the cows, the horse, and most of the chickens."

"I can see the horse and cows. You shouldn't become attached to the chickens. It will make killing them for food all the harder."

Mulder sighed, "I don't think I'll be able to kill any of the chickens for food."

Doggett pulled on the jeans he had draped over the chair. "Don't worry. I used to kill the chickens with my dad. My brother and sister never could bring themselves to do it. It's not something everyone has the stomach for."

Mulder smiled weakly. "I'm not even sure I'd be able to eat one of my chickens."

Doggett chuckled. "I make a mean southern fried chicken. I doubt you'd be able to resist."

"Well maybe if I don't see you kill it." Mulder headed for the door, but Doggett's hand on his arm stopped him.

"Fox, about what happened in bed. There's nothing wrong with two men making love."

"John, I've never done it before."

"You want to though, I could feel your body respond to me."

Mulder blushed. "I'm going to take a shower before I start on the laundry. You're welcome to put your clothes in the tall dresser. It's mostly empty. I was going to tell Walter the same thing, but it slipped my mind yesterday."

Doggett decided not to push him. "Thanks, Fox. I'll unpack our bags while you shower." He walked into the main room and carried his and Skinner's two bags into the bedroom.

When Mulder came out of the bathroom, Doggett had a fresh pot of coffee percolating on the stove. Mulder carried the laundry basket to the washer and stretched the hose from the sink to fill it.

"I remember my grandparents having a washer like that before they bought an electric one," Doggett commented. He sat leafing through a cookbook while drinking a cup of coffee.

"It's a pain in the butt. I wanted to get an electric washer and dryer once I had the electricity installed. But it looks like I'm a day late." Mulder added the clothes and soap then started cranking the handle.

Doggett stepped forward. "Let me do that. Go, get yourself a cup of coffee."

"Are you sure?"

"Yeah, it will be good exercise."

Mulder let Doggett take over the cranking, and went to pour himself a steaming mug of coffee.

When Skinner climbed down the ladder a half-hour later, Doggett was putting the laundry through the wringer while Mulder was preparing breakfast.

"Hi, guys, you're up early." Skinner was relieved to see them up and out of bed.

"I have a lot to do this morning," Mulder said.

"Walter, I unpacked your things and put them in the top two drawers of the tall dresser in the bedroom," Doggett said, throwing the wrung-out clothes into the plastic laundry basket.

"Thanks. I'll be right out to help after I shave and dress."

~x~X~x~

Krycek rolled over and sniffed the air. He could smell potatoes frying and if he wasn't mistaken ham. Yawning, he sat up. God, he was exhausted. Skinner had hogged most of the blankets last night. This mattress wasn't big enough for two large men, unless they were lovers. Considering how Skinner felt about him that wasn't likely to happen.

He rose to his feet and climbed down the ladder.

Mulder looked over at him from the stove and smiled. "You're just in time for breakfast."

"Where are Doggett and Skinner?" Krycek plunked himself down at the table as Mulder carried a cup of coffee over to him.

"John's outside hanging up the laundry, and Walter is in the bathroom."

"Do you need any help?" Krycek asked, taking a long sip of coffee.

"No. How do you like your eggs?"

"Over easy. What's in the saut pan?"

"Sliced potatoes, onions, green peppers, and Spam."

"Spam?" Krycek made a face.

Mulder grinned as he cracked a couple of eggs into the skillet. "It's not bad. I have cans of it in the cupboard."

Skinner came out of the bathroom. "Mm, that smells good."

"Sit down, I'll dish you up a plate. How do you want your eggs?"

"Sunnyside up would be fine." Skinner got himself a cup of coffee and sat next to Krycek. The early morning sun lit the kitchen in a warm glow.

"After we take care of the chores, I'm going to start hauling the ammunition and windmill parts back from the ranger station," Skinner said.

"John and I are going to ride out and visit the Gunmen," Mulder said as he scooped the eggs, fried vegetables and Spam onto a plate and set it in front of Krycek.

"I haven't had Spam since I was in the service," Skinner commented, looking at the unmistakable sliced pieces of meat.

"I hope you like it, he has cans of it in the cupboard," Krycek said. Before cautiously tasting the ham like meat and finding it surprisingly not bad.

"I used to like it," Skinner said as Mulder placed a plate in front of him. "Thanks, Mulder. Do you have any bread?"

"Sorry, I didn't have time to bake bread this morning, and the loaf from three days ago is stale."

Doggett came in through the backdoor with the empty laundry basket. He noticed that Skinner and Krycek were already eating. "Fox, can you make my eggs scrambled?"

"Sure. I'm fixing mine the same way."

"Great. I think we should take turns cooking," Doggett said, reaching for a coffee cup.

Skinner nodded. "Agreed. Maybe we should make a schedule--"

"Walter, I'm not going to have my life run by a fucking schedule!" Mulder said.

"It was just a suggestion. We need some sort of structure since there are four of us living here."

Mulder rolled his eyes as he filled his and Doggett's plates. "Look at us. We're all type A personalities. Everything will get done and then some. Let's just see how it goes. If it doesn't work we'll try your idea."

"Okay, Mulder. It's your place after all."

Mulder placed the plates on the table and sat between Skinner and Doggett. "No. I'm sorry, I want everyone to feel comfortable here. So let's dispense with this place being solely mine. Also, I'd like us to switch off using the main bedroom. It's not fair that I get the bed all the time."

Krycek chuckled and continued eating.

"What, Alex?"

Krycek raised his eyes and smiled. "I think we've established who's the head of this household."

"Do you want to elaborate?"

"Nope." Krycek stood and carried his empty plate to the sink. "I'm going to get dressed." He paused in the bedroom doorway and looked back at a puzzled Mulder. "Fox, your being the boss isn't a bad thing."

Mulder tried to figure out what Krycek meant as he finished his breakfast. Was he really being bossy?

Skinner chuckled at the perplexed expression on Mulder's face. "You would have made a good Assistant Director, if you hadn't thrown your career down the drain with the X-Files."

Mulder shrugged his shoulders. "They wanted to make me Section Chief of VCU, but I requested the X-Files instead," he said.

Doggett looked over at him. "You're one of the few agents that the bureau ever allowed to choose their own assignment. I understand why you selected the X-Files, after learning more about your family. I wish I could have worked with you on some cases. I probably could have learned a lot from you."

Mulder gave him a sheepish grin. "I could have used the additional support back then. Other than

Scully and Walter there was no one at the bureau that supported my work."

"Until I worked on some cases, I always thought the department was a waste of money. Too bad you couldn't open people's eyes to what was going on." Doggett stood and scooped himself up some more fried potatoes and Spam.

There was a knock on the back door, it opened, and Jimmy Bond stuck his head in. "Hey, guys, can I come in?"

Mulder stood and shook Bond's hand. "Come in, Jimmy, how did you find this place?"

"Frohike told me last night it was six miles down the path on the other side of the lake." Bond shook Skinner and Doggett's hands.

"We were happy to hear that you guys made it out of D.C. What are Frohike, Langly, and Byers doing this morning?" Skinner asked.

"They were still in bed when I left. I wanted to take a walk. Then I smelled the smoke from your chimney. I was heading here anyway, I wanted to see your animals." Bond's eyes kept drifting to the pan on the stove.

Mulder smiled. "Would you like some fried potatoes and Spam?"

"Yes, please, if you have extra," Bond said, licking his lips.

Skinner stood. "Mulder, sit and finish your breakfast. I'll get it for him. Jimmy, would you like a couple eggs, while the pan is still out?"

"Yeah, thanks, A.D. Skinner."

"How would you like them?"

"Scrambled, please." Bond stripped off his coat, draping it over the back of a chair and sat next to Mulder. "Do you have catsup?"

Doggett rose to retrieve the catsup from the cupboard. He set it in front of Bond along with a coffee cup then went back for the coffeepot.

"Thanks, Agent Doggett," Bond said as Doggett filled his cup.

Skinner set a plate piled high with food in front of Bond.

"Thanks, A.D. Skinner."

"Jimmy, you can use our first names."

Krycek came into the room, carrying Mulder's denim shirt. "Fox, do you have a needle and thread? The button is loose on this shirt."

"In the cabinet above the washing machine."

"Who's the guy?" Krycek asked.

"Jimmy Bond, this is Alex Krycek," Mulder said.

"It's nice to meet you, Mr. Krycek. Frohike mentioned you. You don't look like a rat," Bond said,

squirting catsup on his eggs.

Mulder snickered.

"Frohike should watch what he says about people. Some might not have my mild and forgiving nature," Krycek said, opening the cabinet above the washer. Finding the sewing kit he carried it back to the table and plopped down in the empty chair.

Mulder finished eating and carried the plate to the sink. Skinner was already doing the dishes. So Mulder picked up a towel and started drying.

"Do you want me to collect the eggs this morning, while you and John milk the cows?"

"If you wouldn't mind."

"Mulder, you just got through saying we should think of this place as our home. So why would I mind collecting eggs from our chickens?"

Mulder looked at Skinner shyly. "Sorry, it's going to take a while for it to sink in that I'm no longer alone."

Skinner touched Mulder's hand. "It's okay, Fox. This is going to be an adjustment for all of us."

Mulder gazed into Skinner's warm brown eyes. Then reluctantly pulled his eyes away and sighed, "There just seems to be a lot we need to get done before winter gets here, including helping my friends get settled into their cabin. Fighting the aliens may be the least of our worries."

"We'll get it done. After all, you are right about one thing, we're all type A personalities."

"Can I help milk the cows?" Bond asked.

"Sure, Jimmy," Mulder said. "Do you have enough food at Frohike's cabin?"

"The vegetable garden has some vegetables that haven't been eaten birds and animals. There isn't much in the cupboards or root cellar."

"I was afraid of that." Milford Frohike died before he started putting up supplies for the winter. "We're going to have to get your root cellar stocked. Once winter gets here the roads out of the mountain can be closed by heavy snow. And there won't be any snowplows coming out here this winter."

"Fox, I should be able to pick up enough food from my father's farm. Why don't we drive down there together on Wednesday?" Doggett said. "You'll get to see a real farm in operation."

"I don't think it's a good idea for Mulder to leave this area. Not with the military looking for him. And I'm positive the aliens are searching for him, too," Krycek said. "Why don't you take Walter with you?"

"Why are the aliens searching for you?" Doggett asked, looking at Mulder.

Mulder leaned against the counter. "It's because of what they did to me. I'm certain they would have picked me up before they attacked, but I removed and disposed of the chip they had planted in my left testicle. However, that doesn't mean I shouldn't go to your father's farm. Neither the military or the aliens have any way to track me."

Skinner shuddered, putting his hand on Mulder's arm. "The blood on your pants was from cutting



out the chip?"

"Yeah. I removed it the night before the aliens attacked."

"Fox, what did they do to you?"

"They turned me into a freak."

"You said that before. What-did-they-do-to-you?" Skinner said slowly.

Mulder shook his head. "I don't want to talk about it, Walter." He walked over to the coat rack and pulled on his jacket then hurried out of the cabin.

"Alex, tell us what they did," Skinner said.

Krycek was still staring at the closed door Mulder left through. He sighed, "Okay, I'll tell you what they did to me, only because I want you to stop asking Mulder about it. I went willingly with the alien bounty hunter after he promised to tell me what they'd done to Mulder. The offer of a new arm was only secondary to my decision to go with him."

Skinner walked over and sat at the table across from Krycek. Bond and Doggett remained quiet, listening.

"Go on," Skinner said.

"On the ship, there were four other human males in the room they took me to. They were all strapped into hard stone chairs that conformed to their bodies. Their legs were spread and a mechanical device covered their groins. I was strapped into a similar chair. It was fucking uncomfortable, but it had built in electronic stimulators that prevented the muscles in our arms and legs from becoming weak from lack of use. It took them three months to grow me a new arm. It was more painful than it had been having it chopped off in the first place." Krycek shuddered and looked at his new hand, flexing his fingers.

"During that time I watched what they were doing to the other men." Krycek closed his eyes, remembering. "It wasn't noticeable at first. It took me almost two months to notice the change in them. One of the men was close to fifty and had a lot of body hair. His body hair had fallen out and the wrinkles and age spots had disappeared. He could have passed for thirty. An alien different from the grays came into the room...he looked almost human. He walked over to one of the men, and lowered the device that was covering the man's genitals. The man's chair was positioned so I could see his privates. I didn't notice it at first or it didn't register on my brain, until the alien inserted a thick probe into the man's body."

The men listened quietly as Krycek took a deep breath and went on. "It wasn't inserted into the man's anus. He had another opening just above it."

"What do you mean, Alex?" Skinner asked.

"He had a vagina. The aliens had turned him and the others into a combination of male and female. They hadn't started altering me yet. They had been waiting for my arm to grow back first. I spent over a month watching them test and probe the four men, knowing that they planned the same thing for me. I escaped from the ship shortly after they had succeeded in altering me." Krycek stood and walked over to the coat rack.

"Are you telling me that you and Mulder have vaginas?"

"I see you were paying attention. Walter, Mulder's traumatized enough by what has been done to

him--not just this recent abduction. I didn't want you to continue to pressure him. That is the only reason I told you." He pulled on his coat and walked to the back door.

"Alex, what was the purpose of them giving you, Mulder, and those other men female sex organs?"

"I don't know. For decades they've been experimenting on human females trying to impregnate them with alien babies. It never worked. Maybe they decided to try something different."

"Did it work?"

Krycek paused with his hand on the doorknob. "I don't know. I didn't hang around long enough to find out." He opened the door and stepped outside, leaving the three men in the cabin to stare at each other in speculation.

"Do you believe him?" Doggett asked.

"Yes. Why would he lie about something like this?"

"Frohike is never going to believe this," Bond said, carrying his plate to the sink.

"Jimmy, we'd appreciate it if you didn't mention this to the Lone Gunmen."

"Why?"

Skinner sighed. The kid was so dense. "Because this is embarrassing to Mulder, and if he wanted Frohike and the others to know he would have told them himself."

"Okay, but Mulder didn't want you to know either, and that didn't stop Alex from telling you."

"We're living here with him and Krycek. We needed to know. The Gunmen don't need to know."

Doggett frowned. "Jimmy, just don't tell them." He stood, placing his dish in the sink. "C'mon, let's help Mulder with the chores."

"Jimmy, you can help me feed the chickens and collect eggs," Skinner said as they walked over to pull on their jackets.

"I want to help milk the cows, too."

When they stepped outside a helicopter cleared the hill. It was hauling a large crate below it. Mulder ran out of the barn and around the house as the helicopter lowered the crate onto a small clearing in front of the cabin. Krycek followed several feet behind Mulder--not quite able to keep up with the long leg strides Mulder was taking.

Skinner, Doggett, and Bond arrived seconds behind Mulder and Krycek.

Mulder freed the straps and waved up at Sean in the helicopter. Sean smiled and gave him the thumbs up then headed back to the ranger station.

Skinner helped unlatch the crate. Inside were the parts for the windmill, cables, and batteries.

"This was nice of Sean. He doesn't usually use his helicopter to transport supplies," Mulder said.

"Do you think he'll bring out our ammunition and weapons?" Skinner asked.

"He won't make two trips. Besides, I need to ride out and thank him for delivering my windmill, and bring him some eggs, milk, and a jug of corn whiskey. I'll bring back one of the crates of ammo on my way back."

"I'll go with you. What's this about corn whiskey?" Skinner asked.

Mulder grinned and looked at the four men. "You haven't seen my...our root cellar yet. C'mon, I'll show it to you, then we can get back to tending the animals."

They walked back toward the farm, and followed Mulder into the trees at the side of an incline. Mulder stopped before two trap doors and pulled them open. "I could use this to store the milk and butter, instead of the stream. It's a constant forty-nine degrees, I'm told even in winter. However it's a pain in the butt to come here in the early morning."

They stared down the steep stone steps that lead into an underground room. Mulder lead the way down and lit a lantern at the bottom of the steps.

Krycek whistled. The space was huge. It wasn't like any cellar he'd ever seen. It was built into an underground cave.

Mulder gave them a quick tour. "Old Man Peterson used this place to store his moonshine. In this room he has several large earthen crocks that he used to make blackberry wine in." He pulled a bottle from the shelf and handed it to Skinner. "I haven't found his still, but there's enough corn whiskey to last a life time."

Doggett walked up to the shelf and pulled one of the jugs down. He uncorked it and sniffed it contents then took a sip, and choked. "God, that's smooth."

Krycek took the jug from him and sampled it. Tears welled up in his eyes and he gasped, "Not bad. My Grandfather used to make vodka. I wouldn't mind trying my hand at it this winter."

Skinner took the jug and sniffed it, then took a swig. "Mm, I'd say Old Man Peterson knew how to make good corn whiskey. This has to be the best I've tasted."

"You've had the opportunity to sample moonshine?" Mulder asked.

"When I was in 'nam a lot of the guys tried to make their own booze."

"Mulder this place is so cool," Bond said, looking down a tunnel. "Where does this lead?"

"There's a hidden exit a half mile down."

Krycek wandered over to a row of shelves. On them were hundreds of empty canning jars, and dozens of freshly filled jars. Then his eyes fell on a round block of cheese incased in wax. He smiled. "Fox, is this your experiment in cheese making?"

Mulder chuckled. "Yeah, pretty pathetic, isn't it?"

"No. It looks good. How long before we can sample it?"

"A couple of months. It's suppose to be better the longer its aged, but I don't think I could wait for one to age five years."

Krycek stepped closer to Mulder. "I'd like to help you make another batch."

Mulder took a step back, being this close to Krycek was turning him on. "I've never pegged you

as someone with domestic skills."

Krycek stepped back into his personal space. "There's a lot you don't know about me." His voice was low and husky. It sent a shiver of arousal racing down Mulder's spine.

Mulder backed away nervously. "I better get that jug of whiskey for Sean."

A satisfied smirk spread across Krycek's lips. If he played it right today, he might just get to second base.

Skinner was talking to Doggett in the chamber with the whiskey and wine. They stepped back so Mulder could reach the shelves.

"Fox, while we ride out to retrieve the military supplies, John and Alex can start preparing the site for the windmill. You said you had the perfect spot for it, can you show them before we leave?"

"Sure. I want to stop off and see how the Gunmen are doing before we head for the ranger station." Mulder paused and grabbed another jug from the shelf. "For Frohike."

They spent an hour and a half doing the morning chores. Mulder realized that with the four of them, not counting Bond, they'd have plenty of free time in the afternoon.

Mulder and Skinner rode out to see the Gunmen, while Bond stayed behind to help Doggett and Krycek clear the hill for the windmill. The first step would be laying the concrete footings. Doggett was hopeful they'd have that task done well before nightfall. It would take a couple days for the cement to set. In the meantime they had to build a structure onto the cabin for the two-dozen batteries, control panel, inverter, and circuit breaker.

Frohike was sitting out on the front porch when they rode up. He stood and grinned. "Hey, Mulder, Skinman, I see we all made it out alive."

Mulder swung down from his horse and went to hug his friend. "Frohike, when Walter told me that your building was leveled in the attack, I was scared to death you guys might have been killed. It's good to see you're all unharmed."

"It will take more than an alien invasion to shut us down," Frohike quipped.

Skinner shook his hand. "It is good to see you again, Frohike. And watch it with that Skinman crap."

Mulder walked back to his horse and pulled the jug and a bag of coffee beans out of the saddlebag. "Consider these house warming gifts," he said.

Byers came out on the porch and grinned when he saw Mulder and Skinner. "Mulder, AD Skinner, it's nice to see you."

"John, how have you been?" Skinner asked.

"Fine, except for my feet." Byers stood in his stocking feet.

"What's wrong with your feet?"

"Blisters...they didn't like the sixty-five mile hike up here."

"What size shoe do you wear?" Mulder asked.

"A ten. Why?"

"There's a family of sheep ranchers in the valley that make sheep skin moccasins. I can pick you up a pair next time I stop down to trade with them."

"Moccasins?" Byers looked perplexed.

Mulder shrugged his shoulders. "It's better than walking around in your stocking feet."

"Do you have a pair?"

"No. But I have thought about buying a pair. They are lined with thick wool and would be nice to wear inside the cabin during the winter."

"If you wouldn't mind picking me up a pair, I'd appreciate it," Byers said.

"It's no problem. Walter and I are heading out to the ranger station. If you, Frohike, and Langly want to stop out to our cabin this afternoon, we can discuss what's going on with the invasion and our plans."

"If you treat us to something to eat, we'll help do the dishes," Frohike said.

Mulder smiled. "Come out early and you can help cook. I have a few dozen eggs that I need to use before they go bad."

Frohike chuckled. "How come every time I visit you, Mulder, you make me cook?"

"Because you're a good cook and I suck at it." Mulder enjoyed being around his friend again. Frohike would come out and visit him at least once a month, and he'd come to look forward to those visits.

"You've gotten a lot better since you're no longer able to order out for pizza or Chinese food. The last meal we cooked together would have even made Emeril proud. Have you used that pasta machine I gave you for a house warming gift yet?"

"Ah...no...I've stocked up on prepackaged pasta."

"Mulder, there's nothing better than making your own. It's so simple."

"Well, I've been rather busy with tending the animals, gardening, canning, making repairs to the cabin, and chopping wood...."

Skinner listened to the two friends. He enjoyed watching this whole new side of Mulder. His former agent seemed to relax and let his guard down when chatting with Frohike. It was nice to see a smile on Mulder's lips.

"We better get going." Mulder paused, looking at Byers. "I'll leave my horse here for you to use. I can double up with Walter."

"I've never rode a horse," Byers said, looking nervously at the large animal.

"Frohike can help you into the saddle." Mulder petted his horse's neck. "She's really gentle."

Frohike took the reins and tied her to a post in front of the cabin. "John, Langly can walk while we ride."

Mulder walked over to Skinner and quipped, "Do you want to drive or shall I?"

A soft breeze lifted the silky strands of Mulder's hair and Skinner felt a stirring in his groin. "I'll drive." He didn't think it would be a good idea for Mulder to feel his arousal. Skinner put his foot in the stirrup and pulled himself into the saddle. Once Mulder was seated behind him Skinner spurred the horse down the path.

"I'm sorry, Walter," Mulder said, moving his hands to rest on Skinner's shoulders. His long legs rested uncomfortably over the saddlebag, which were full. He needed to be careful that he didn't break any of the eggs.

"Sorry about what?"

"We'll have to walk back to the cabin and we'll only be able to take a fourth of the ammo back with us."

"We don't have to bring everything back in one day."

Skinner leaned back, longing to feel Mulder's body against his. His mind went back to what Krycek had told them about what had been done to him and Mulder. He found the whole idea of them being dual-sexed highly erotic. "It was nice of you to leave your horse so Byers wouldn't have to walk the six miles to our cabin."

"They're my friends and have helped me a lot more than I've helped them over the years."

"You and Frohike seem close. How often has he visited you here?"

Mulder's hands moved down to rest more comfortably on Skinner's hips. "When I first moved here, Frohike would drive up every weekend. Once I settled in, his visits dropped off to once a month. I've never had a better friend than him."

Skinner took the reins in one hand and allowed his other to drop over Mulder's hand. He wrapped his fingers around it, and tightened his grip when Mulder tried to pull it back. "Mulder, I wish you would have trusted me enough to tell me where you were living, and why you felt the need to be out here alone. I would have helped you. We've gone through a lot together and I consider you to be a very close friend."

Mulder glanced sadly at the trees and the heavy overhead canopy. "After I returned from being buried alive for three months, I really wasn't sure if I had any friends. Everyone, including Scully, had moved on with their lives. I didn't feel like I belonged and no one seemed to care what I was going through. I had no family and Scully was pregnant and wouldn't tell me how or who the father was, until after the baby was born."

An anguished tone crept into Mulder's voice, which was now barely above a whisper. "I remembered every second of being tortured and dumped in the woods. I still have the occasional nightmare of being buried alive. In the coffin I couldn't move or speak, but I could hear, smell, and feel. Do you know what it's like to hear your own funeral service? Or to lie in your coffin and smell the damp earth around you with only your own thoughts for company. After I was discharged from the hospital, no one cared enough to ask me if I was all right. Everything felt surreal to me. Then I lost my job and my purpose for living..." Mulder paused. He wasn't sure if he heard Skinner snuffle.

Skinner allowed the tears to fall freely. He wished he could see Mulder's face. This conversation wasn't the type he wanted to have on horseback.

"Mulder, I was going to tell them everything that I saw after you were abducted, but I allowed

Scully to talk me out of it. I've regretted that decision ever since. It's been eating at me since we found your supposedly dead body in the woods. I should have had the backbone to stick by the truth. I feel that I let you down. I'm sorry."

Mulder squeeze his hand. Then he wrapped his arms around Skinner's waist, hugging him from behind.

"Don't, Walter. It's in the past." Mulder enjoyed the close contact. "So you missed me?"

"More than you can believe. Please don't doubt that I cared."

"I want to believe."

Skinner stopped the horse by a stream. "Let's stop here for a moment. I want to tell you something, but I need to look at you."

They dismounted and Skinner tied the reins to a bush. He took Mulder's hand and led him over to a three-foot high boulder. They sat side by side. "Fox, after you were abducted, I was barely functioning. I cried for the first time in years. When Scully told me she was pregnant, I immediately assumed you were the father. Knowing you and Scully were lovers didn't stop me from missing you and praying that someday we'd find you safe. Then we found your body and it was like my life ended. I didn't care any more. When they pulled Billy Miles' body from the ocean, and he was found to be still alive, I immediately had you exhumed. I wanted to believe you were still alive, even if I'd never be a part of your life. I didn't check up on you afterwards because I didn't want to intrude on your time with Scully. I had no idea that she didn't care enough to find out how you were dealing with your abduction. It never occurred to me that no one inquired about how you felt and what you remembered. If I had known, you have to believe, I would have been there for you." Skinner gazed into Mulder's eyes while his fingers touched the side of his face, gently brushing over that sexy mole.

Mulder tilted his head and leaned in and kissed Skinner. His hands went around the larger man's neck as his lips parted, deepening the kiss.

Skinner pulled Mulder against his body. One hand moved up to the back of Mulder's head, fingers laced through the feathery strands as he thrust his tongue deep into that lush mouth.

"Oh God," Mulder gasped as he broke the kiss. "What's wrong with me?" He stood on wobbly legs.

"Mulder, are you all right?"

"No." Mulder hugged himself, trembling as if cold.

"What's wrong?" Skinner stood and walked over to him.

Mulder backed away. "I can't control it...."

"Control what?"

"My behavior. First John, now you...I've never kissed another man before today. It's like I can't help myself."

"Fox, you don't have to be embarrassed. There is nothing wrong with finding another man attractive or two men having sex."

"That's the same thing John said this morning." Mulder walked over to the horse and petted it

while regaining his composure. "It seems like I'm the only one who's never had sex with another man. I've always suspected Krycek was gay, but I never would have pegged you or Doggett before a couple of days ago. And to think I used to be the FBI's top profiler."

Skinner walked over to the horse and placed his hand on its back so he could meet Mulder's eyes. "The term is bisexual. I like women and men, but because of my job I never gave into temptation with the latter. Now I have nothing to lose and everything to gain."

Mulder arched an eyebrow. "What do you have to gain?"

Skinner placed his hands on Mulder's shoulders then moved in to capture his lips in another kiss. This one was slow and sweet, and ended before either man could lose control. "I think you know what I have to gain. Let me show you how good it can be."

Mulder placed his hand on Skinner's chest, feeling the beating heart beneath his palm. "I'm not the same man I was five months ago. They turned me into a freak. If you knew what they did to me you wouldn't want anything to do with me."

"Krycek told us what they'd done to him and four other men," Skinner said softly.

Mulder's face turned bright red, and he turned to walk away, but Skinner's hand on his forearm stopped him.

"Mulder, I would never consider you a freak. They might have altered your body, but you're still the same man I've admired for years."

"No, I'm not. I have feelings and urges that I never experienced before. I never would have kissed you or allowed you to touch me sexually five months ago."

"It doesn't have to be bad. Let me show you how good it can feel. We'll take it slow."

"How slow?" Mulder wasn't sure if asking was a mistake.

Not taking his eyes off Mulder's face, Skinner reached down and unzipped the younger man's jeans and eased his hand inside. He smiled as his fingers wrapped around the large organ, and he felt it thicken with interest. Easing it out, he slowly stroked it while enjoying the expression on Mulder's face. The younger man's eyes closed and his head tilted back and his lips parted seductively as he moaned, rocking his hips in rhythm with Skinner's strokes.

"Do you like this, Fox?"

"Y-Yesss...."

Skinner smiled. "I want you to touch me. Do you think you can do that?"

Mulder opened his eyes and looked blissfully into Skinner's face, while his hand dropped to the larger man's zipper and fumbled with the metal tab. His hand brushed against Skinner's as the large man continued to jerk him off. Once Mulder had the zipper down, he reached nervously inside and gasped when his fingers wrapped around the hard organ. It felt almost as thick as a beer can, but thankfully not as long as his penis. Mulder was having a hard time concentrating as he felt himself close to coming, but he did his best to jerk Skinner off in the manner he would do himself.

"So good, Fox."

They stroked in time with each other. Mulder suddenly stiffened as he came and let go of



Skinner's cock. Milky strands of come shot into the air, landing in the dark mud at their feet.

Skinner caught Mulder as he collapsed against his chest. "Sh, it's all right, I have you." He kissed the side of Mulder's head.

It took several moments for Mulder to regain his breath. "It's been a while since I've come that hard."

Skinner pulled Mulder into a kiss, while he rubbed himself against Mulder's body. It just took the taste of Mulder and the pressure against his organ for him to come, a couple of minutes later.

After they both recovered their breath, they washed up in the stream.

"We better get going to Sean's, if we want to beat Frohike, Langly, and Byers back to our cabin," Mulder said. He wasn't sure what he was feeling.

~x~X~x~

Byers stood in Mulder's bathroom and stared longingly at the bathtub. Frohike was at the sink washing his hands.

"Melvin, how come your Uncle didn't move into this cabin and sell Mulder his place?"

"He loved his cabin, John. My Uncle built that place with his own hands."

"It's just a shame he never got around to adding a bathroom."

"I'm sure Mulder wouldn't mind if we occasional took a bath here."

"Six miles is a long way to walk just to use someone else's bathroom."

Frohike sighed, "John, let's talk to the guys, maybe we can convince them to help us add another room onto our place before winter. It might not have running water for a while, but at least we'll have a place to put that wooden tub."

They walk out of the bathroom into the main room. Langly was pacing nervously. The battery on his laptop needed to be recharged. He'd gone for hours without his computer. Doggett watched Langly pace as he tried to study the manual that came with the windmill.

"Langly, sit down or go outside!" he growled.

"What's your problem, Dogbird?" the lanky Gunman asked.

Frohike interrupted before the two men came to blows. "Langly, can you and Jimmy go outside and pick some green beans, zucchini, lettuce, tomatoes, and a couple of cucumbers? I'm going to start dinner."

Krycek walked in from outside. He'd been sitting on the front porch reading a book. Walking over to the oven he pulled out the two loaves of bread he had baking inside. "Do you need any help with dinner, Frohike?"

"Yes. Can you cube that half-loaf of stale bread then fry it in olive oil then season it with garlic salt and parsley? I want to have croutons for the salad," he said, putting three eggs in a saucepan filled with water and on the stove to boil.

Krycek grabbed a knife and a cutting board, and started cubing the three-day-old bread. "What

are you planning on making for dinner?" he asked. He never really gave a second thought about Mulder's friends before now, but Frohike was Mulder's closest friend. He was the only one Mulder had trusted to help him find a place to disappear, and Krycek wanted to find out why Mulder would place so much trust in the small man.

"Fresh fettuccini pasta sauted with eggs, zucchini, and green beans." Frohike placed the pasta machine on the cook's table and started making the pasta dough. He glanced over at Krycek. "Do you want to help julienne the green beans and zucchini when they bring them in?"

"Sure," Krycek said, heating the olive oil in a skillet. "Frohike, how did you meet Mulder?"

"I met him at a computer and electronics show in Baltimore in 1989." Frohike chuckled. "Byers and I were led to believe he was the psycho ex-boyfriend of a woman Byers had just met. The woman told Byers that Mulder had kidnapped their three-year-old daughter. It wasn't until we cornered Mulder down in the basement at the convention center and were about to kick his ass that we discovered he was an FBI agent."

"Interesting version of how we met, Frohike," Mulder said, he was standing in the back doorway. "I seem to recall two scared men cowering before me in a basement hallway."

"I never cowered," Frohike said, turning back to Krycek

The alien bounty hunter's eyes narrowed, ever so slightly, as he listened to the commander of the lycanthrope's fleet. It was the only indication of his hatred toward the being. The lycanthropes had enslaved his species thousands of years ago. There were only a few, like him, that wanted to fight for their freedom. Unfortunately, the rest were like sheep, content with their lot in life as slaves. So the bounty hunter bid his time until his enemies became weak enough for his small group to destroy. It was by no coincidence that the lycanthrope race had become barren. If the lycanthrope Emperor ever suspected that a leptan scientist was responsible for creating the virus that infected his species, then the leptan species in turn would be systematically exterminated.

"Leptan, I want you to find and bring me Fox Mulder. Take as many other leptans as you need, but do not allow the humans to discover your true identity," Commander Gnaye said. After the Emperor's tirade, he didn't dare attack the North American continent again without having the Emperor's breeder safely onboard his spaceship.

The bounty hunter raised his eyes, looking calmly into Gnaye's eyes. Then he turned and left. The moment he located Fox Mulder the human would meet with a fatal accident.

## The Panther and Wolf

Blue Ridge Mountains Ranger Station Monday, September 24, 2001

Jim Ellison gazed into the coffee mug, collecting his thoughts, as he sat on the sofa with ranger friend, Sean, and Sandburg. "Sean, we found out that Cascade was destroyed in the last attack, and considering what's happening around the rest of the nation we've decided to stay put in our cabin for the time being."

"Good decision, Jim. Our country already has a horde of refugees from the cities trying to find a place to stay and food. It doesn't need anymore."

Ellison nodded, agreeing. "Sean, we want to help, in some way, that's why we're here."

"What do you think you can do?"

Sandburg spoke up, "We want to meet the other residents in the area and hopefully form them into a community guard to protect this area from aliens and possibly troublesome outsiders." He

knew from studying human nature that when law and order broke down some men would resort to raping and pillaging.

The ranger looked thoughtful for a moment as if reading Sandburg's thoughts he replied, "I like the way you think. It's probably only a matter of time before lawlessness breaks out across our country, the aliens might be the least of our worries."

Sean stood and got a map of the area then spread it out on the coffee table. "Most of the area's residents are craftspeople and farmers. They aren't going to make the best soldiers, but I'm sure they'll be more than willing to help defend our community." He tapped his finger on the map. "Living eight miles from here is a group of former FBI agents that are armed to the teeth and have a first hand knowledge of the aliens. They have already made plans to fight them, but they might be open to being part of this community guard." The ranger pointed out on the map where Mulder's cabin was located.

"What do you think, Jim?" Sandburg asked, looking down at the map.

Ellison frowned. "I don't like the idea of dealing with a bunch of Feds."

"They're on the same side as us."

"Are they? How is it that they already have a first hand knowledge of aliens?"

Sean shook his head. "Jim, these men are above reproach. I consider one of them to be a very close friend. Fox Mulder has been trying to expose what our government knew about aliens for years. His sister was abducted when he was twelve, he has been abducted a couple of times by them himself. Mulder and the other men have no love for aliens."

"Okay, Sean, your word is good enough for me." Ellison glanced out the window. "It's going to be dark soon. Chief, let's come back early tomorrow morning and pay them a visit."

The Fox and Rat

Blue Ridge Mountains Monday, September 24, 2001

The sun was just beginning to set when Krycek found Mulder, sitting on the mossy bank beside a stream, just around the bend from their small farm. Krycek stood quietly for a moment and watched Mulder gazing dreamily into the slow moving water, his long arms wrapped around denim-encased legs.

"Hey, I was wondering where you disappeared to," Krycek finally said.

Mulder looked up at him and smiled. "I needed someplace quiet where I could think."

Krycek sank down on the ground beside him. "The cabin was pretty crowded with the Gunmen visiting. They started back to their place an hour ago. They wanted to make it there before it got dark."

Mulder closed his eyes, enjoying the warmth of Krycek's right thigh pressed against his. Since Skinner had touched him, Mulder had been having uncontrollable sexual urges. He leaned back and took a deep breath, sighing, "You smell good, Alex."

Not being able to resist the pretty sight reclining beside him, Krycek leaned over and kissed Mulder on the lips then pulled back and watched as Mulder's eyes opened. In their jeweled depths Krycek saw only desire, causing him to catch his breath.

"Touch me, Alex," Mulder said huskily, lying back on the mossy ground.

Only in Krycek's dreams had he heard those words from Mulder's lips. He never thought he'd hear them when he was wide-awake. Krycek moved until he was kneeling over the stretched out body from his deepest fantasy. Then he lowered himself on top of Mulder, covering the entire length of him. Their erections pressed pleasurably together through their jeans.

Krycek looked down at the beautiful face then tilted his head as he leaned in to capture Mulder's lips in a deep, long overdue kiss.

Mulder's arms wrapped around Krycek's neck and pulled him closer as he explored his mouth in return.

"Mm, you taste like honey," Mulder murmured against his lips.

Krycek smoothed his fingers through Mulder's hair. "I had a slice of bread with honey on it before I came looking for you. Tell me what you want, Fox?"

"I want to give you a blowjob."

Krycek's eyes widen in surprise. "Are you sure? You've never sucked another man's dick before, do you think you can handle me?"

Mulder chuckled. "Shoot me...I'm curious...I want to see what it's like that's all." He caressed the side of Krycek's face with his fingertips. "Alex, these desires I'm having are so alien and scary to me...but I've decided not to fight them any longer. Besides it's only sex."

Krycek sighed, and rolled off Mulder to lie beside him. "Fox, this isn't just sex to me. I've been in love with you for years." He waited for the look of disgust on Mulder's face instead he only saw sadness.

"Alex, I can't promise, if we have sex, that it will mean anything more than sex to me. I don't think I'm capable of loving another man."

Krycek rolled on his side, propped himself up on his elbow, and looked down at Mulder. "If you would lower that wall you have built around your heart, you would be capable of loving...if not me then someone else."

"I don't know what you mean."

"Don't you? Fox, you've never been in love. You've never allowed yourself to get that close to anyone. You're so afraid of being hurt, like you were when Samantha was taken, that you keep that special part of yourself walled up. Only Scully has gotten behind your wall, and unfortunately she ended up hurting you."

"You ended up hurting me too, Alex. I trusted you," Mulder said softly, then sat up.

"I never wanted to hurt you. That was the worst part of my assignment."

Mulder looked at Krycek. "I don't understand how you can be in love with me. We barely spoke to each other, except in anger. If you were in love with me, as you claim, why didn't you come forward and tell me that you were a CIA agent and about your assignment?"

"Fox, I admired you even before I met you, it isn't that strange that I would fall in love with you. What good would it have done for me to tell you about my assignment? It wasn't like you'd return my love...you were straight, Fox." Krycek climbed to his feet and sighed, "Maybe I should have

told you everything regardless, we might have had more of a chance of doing something to stop them."

Pursing his lips thoughtfully, Mulder rose to his knees. He placed his hands on Krycek's hips and looked up at his face. "You should have told me, Alex, but that's in the past now and it probably wouldn't have made a difference. Now about that blowjob."

"Fox, you don't have to..."

Mulder kept his hold on Krycek's hips as he lowered his mouth to younger man's groin and used his mouth and tongue to unbutton the top button of the jeans. Next he took the metal tab between his teeth and pulled down the zipper over the large bulge. He breathed in the musky scent of arousal, and it made him hard with hunger.

Blood rushed into Krycek's cock as he watched Mulder use his mouth to open his jeans. "Oh God, Fox, touch me."

The sun was now a fiery orange ball on the horizon casting both lovers in a warm color-enriched glow as Mulder nuzzled his face against Krycek's boxer-covered groin. He licked at the tip of the other man's cock that was peeking out of the silky flap and tasted the bitter flavor of urine mixed with precum. It surprised Mulder that it didn't repulse him--instead he became even more turned on as his tongue swiped around the smooth velvet cockhead. His fingers grasped the waistband of Krycek's jeans and boxers, and yanked them down. Krycek's pretty cock sprang free. Mulder licked his lips then wrapped them around the head and started to suck on it while he fondled Krycek's heavy balls.

Moaning with pleasure, Krycek laced his fingers through the soft strands of Mulder hair as his hips rocked forward. He couldn't believe Fox Mulder was kneeling at his feet and sucking on his dick.

After coming close to choking a couple of times, Mulder wrapped his fingers around the base of Krycek's cock, preventing the younger man from pushing more of his shaft into his mouth than he could manage. It might take him a while to get used to having something so large in his mouth. Mulder did his best, trying to mimic the techniques he'd seen performed by women on some of his favorite porn movies. He squelched down the desire to run a finger between Krycek's buttocks to find his new orifice, just in case Krycek was still sensitive, like he had been for months after his change. Mulder didn't want to chance ruining this moment.

"Auuggghh!" Krycek cried as he finally came and tried to pull out of Mulder's mouth.

Mulder held onto him and swallowed as fast as he shot. It was strange, but he loved the taste of it...why had he waited so long to try this?

Krycek sank to his knees and pulled Mulder into his arms, kissing him deeply. He shivered, tasting himself on Mulder's tongue. "God, Fox, that was remarkable."

Mulder shook his head. "I wasn't very good, but maybe with some practice."

"Yeah, practice is a good idea." Krycek leered then stroked Mulder through his pants. "I'd like to return the favor."

Mulder kissed him sweetly on the lips then pulled away and stood. The sun had disappeared below the horizon line and around them the sounds of crickets and bullfrogs started filling the nighttime air. "This time it was all for you, Alex. C'mon, we should be getting back to the cabin."

"Well then tomorrow I want to make love to you," Krycek said, taking Mulder's offered hand and

getting to his feet. He pulled up his boxers and jeans. "Why don't you let Doggett share the big bed with Skinner, and sleep with me up in the loft?"

"What and ruin Walter's schedule?" Mulder quipped. He was sort of looking forward to sleeping with Skinner. The thought of touching Skinner again sent shivers of anticipation up his spine.

"You want to sleep with him don't you?" Krycek accused as they headed back to the cabin.

"I don't know what I want, Alex."

Krycek grabbed Mulder's hand, stopping him. "Okay, Fox, but be careful. I don't want to see you getting hurt." He realized that part of what Mulder was feeling had been brought on by loneliness of living by himself for so long. It must be weird for him to have no one then suddenly having three people coming on to him. Then there was the fact that Mulder always respected Skinner.

Mulder's face was unreadable as he turned and started back to the cabin. Mulder couldn't explain how he was feeling. The last thing he wanted was to hurt Krycek, but at the same time he wanted to explore his body's sexual urges toward Skinner, Krycek, and Doggett. Maybe if he hadn't been celibate for so many years the need for sex wouldn't be so overpowering now.

## The Bear and Dog

Skinner sat out on the front porch with Doggett. He had a foot up on the pine railing as he reclined back in the chair, balancing on the back two legs. The sun had just set. It was a beautiful evening, not nearly as cold as it had been the last two nights they'd spent here. They were drinking corn whiskey and discussing the events of the day while planning for tomorrow.

Doggett yawned. "God, I've never worked so hard in my life. I know I 'm going to be feeling it tomorrow."

"Look on the bright-side, at least you, Alex, and Jimmy were able to get the windmill site cleared and the concrete footings poured today. That's one less thing to do tomorrow." Skinner took a sip from his glass. "I noticed a tube of Heat in the medicine cabinet. If you're feeling pain later I'd be happy to rub it into your muscles."

Doggett smiled. "I'd appreciate that, Walt." He sighed, "We still have so much to do. We need to start building the room onto the cabin for the batteries and electrical equipment. We should start harvesting apples and walnuts from the trees on the property. I can't see how Fox ever managed this place alone."

"I'll ride out and talk to Sean tomorrow morning after breakfast and see if he has a gas-powered chainsaw that we could borrow. We can start cutting down trees tomorrow afternoon." Skinner's eyes fell on the dense woods around them. "At least we won't be hurting for timber."

"Do you know how to build a room using logs?"

"No, but Mulder has a book on log home construction on his bookshelf."

Doggett chuckled. "If we're snowed in this winter, we won't be lacking for reading material."

"I call dibs on the book about cross-stitching," Skinner quipped.

"I found some fishing gear in the tool shed, maybe we can take a break tomorrow afternoon and catch some fish for dinner."

"I'd like that, how many fishing poles did you find?"

"Three."

The window to the parlor was open and through the screen, Skinner heard the back door open and close, then Mulder's voice greeting the cat. He was looking forward to sleeping with him tonight and being able to touch him again. They finally decided on a rotation schedule for the master bedroom. After tonight Skinner would have the room for two more nights with Doggett then Krycek sharing the bed. Then they would switch off.

He liked Doggett and knowing that the agent had had past sexual relationships with other men had Skinner considering the possibilities of spending the winter here with him and Mulder. Skinner chuckled over the image of sharing the bed with both Mulder and Doggett.

Doggett downed the rest of his drink and stood. "I'm going to take a hot shower and turn in. I'll see you in the morning, Walt."

"Night, John."

The Panther and Wolf

Ellison kissed Sandburg's brow as they cuddled in bed. "Don't worry, Blair, we'll get through this together."

"Jim, I can't stop worrying about all of our friends back in Cascade. I wonder how many made it out of the city alive. And if they did, will they be able to find a safe place to live," Sandburg said. His head was resting on Ellison's chest while his hand caressed the warm flesh of his lover's belly. The room smelled of sex.

"At least Simon knows where we're staying. It's possible that he'll try to get here if he's still alive."

"With no commercial airplanes flying, it will make it almost impossible for him to reach us, unless he can catch a flight on a military transport. I don't think he'll get very far by car. It's only a matter of time before the gas stations are out of gasoline or the military starts rationing."

Ellison sighed, "Let's worry about this tomorrow."

"Okay, Jim, goodnight."

The Bear and Fox

For the first time in his life Skinner had butterflies in his stomach. He added another log to the fire burning in the hearth as he waited anxiously for Mulder to finish his shower and join him. Moving closer to the fireplace, Skinner enjoyed the warmth against his bare skin. He had chosen to wear only his briefs to bed.

Mulder stepped through the doorway and looked at Skinner with a glint of lust in his eyes. He turned and closed the door.

Skinner moved to the foot of the bed and waited to see what Mulder would do next.

"I feel a little bit over-dressed," Mulder said as he peeled off his undershirt and dropped it on a chair by the door before walking over to where Skinner stood. He wrapped his arms around Skinner's waist and kissed him.

Skinner hugged him back and deepened the kiss. His hands dropped to Mulder's butt, where he squeezed and kneaded the firm globes. He was dying to sink his cock between them; it'd been

so long since he'd had sex with another man.

He licked his way out of the kiss and purred, "Fox, I want to make love to you. I want to fuck you."

Mulder shuddered as Skinner's fingers stroked over his anus and other opening through his flannel pajama bottoms. He spread his legs wantonly and wrapped his arms around Skinner's neck, resting his forehead against the larger man's. "Walter, I'm not ready to go that far just yet."

Skinner continued stroking. He could feel moisture on the fabric and pushed against its source, causing Mulder to moan and press his body even tighter to Skinner's. Their erections hardened at the contact.

"Fox, I can feel how hot you are for me. I'll make you feel so good...let me."

Mulder's scent was beginning to drive Skinner wild with lust. He didn't think he'd be able to resist ramming his cock into Mulder whether he wanted it or not. The last thing Skinner wanted to do was to rape Mulder. So his mind warred with his body and he was about to flee the room when Mulder without warning grabbed him and with inhuman strength threw him on the bed.

After catching his breath and getting over his initial shock, Skinner found himself suddenly straddled by a naked and totally gorgeous Fox Mulder. For one weird moment Skinner thought he saw a yellow glow burning in Mulder's eyes. He decided it had to be a trick of the light caused by the fire burning in the hearth. It seemed almost dreamlike as Mulder tugged down his briefs and impaled himself, in one fluid motion, on Skinner's thick cock.

To Skinner, Mulder looked wild, sexy, almost animal like, as he rode up and down on his shaft. Skinner didn't care. He was in heaven as his body experienced a multitude of pleasure. His shaft was squeezed in an iron grip and he felt his balls ride up. He tried to fight off his pending orgasm, not wanting this to end so soon. It was a losing battle and all too soon he arched off the bed as he came, spurting his release inside Mulder's body. After he was done coming, Skinner was surprised to find that he remained hard inside Mulder as his new lover continued to ride him.

It didn't take long for Mulder to follow Skinner over the edge. He threw his head back and howled as he came. White milky strings of come spurted out of his cock, landing on Skinner's chest as his orifice spasmed around the hard shaft impaling him as the orgasm ripped through his body, causing Skinner to come for a second time.

Mulder collapsed onto Skinner's chest.

Skinner held him lovingly. He sighed with contentment as he felt Mulder licking the salty sweat from his skin with tender swipes of his tongue. When the younger man started sucking on his nipple, Skinner began to get hard again inside Mulder. Then a low growling sound came from deep within Mulder's throat, raising the hairs on Skinner's arms. He felt a sharp pain as Mulder bit him. He tried desperately to push the younger man off, but the room started to dim and spin. The last thing he saw, before his world turned black, was Mulder licking the blood from his full lower lip while looking down at him with glowing golden eyes.

Up in the loft, Doggett lay on his back listening to the sounds from downstairs. "I don't think I've ever heard anyone howl during sex."

"Shut up!"

"Jealous?"

"Am not!"



"Who do you think was on top?"

"Shut up!"

Doggett smiled and turned on his side. "Sweet dreams, Krycek."

Krycek glared up at the ceiling and wished he still had his palm pilot.

The Bear, Panther, and Wolf

Blue Ridge Mountains

Tuesday, September 25, 2001

The morning air felt refreshing as Skinner rode the horse down the path toward the ranger's station. He smiled remembering how wild Mulder had been last night during sex. Skinner couldn't recall when he had fallen asleep, or much after his second orgasm. This morning he woke up under the blankets with Mulder wrapped protectively around his body.

A sudden wave of nausea struck him, Skinner reined in the horse and leaped off. He rushed off the path and vomited up his breakfast into the tall weeds.

"God, I hope I'm not coming down with something," he moaned, feeling slightly better after throwing up.

He continued on his way, reaching the ranger station a few minutes later. Skinner swung out of the saddle and looped the reins around the hitching post. He noted that in the parking lot, was an unfamiliar SUV parked next to Mulder's car. He walked over to the SUV and felt the hood. It was still hot. Making sure that his handgun was within easy reach, Skinner stepped up on the stoop and knocked on the door.

The ranger opened it. "Morning, Walter, this is convenient. I was just about to take my friends out to Mulder's place."

Skinner glanced into the room and saw two men, sitting at the table, drinking coffee. One looked like he could be in the military, the other looked like a cute, longhaired yuppie.

"Why do they want to see Mulder?" Skinner asked suspiciously.

"It's not only Mulder they want to see. Come in and I'll introduce you."

Ellison and Sandburg stood as Skinner stepped into the room. Ellison had been listening to their brief conversation.

"Guys, this is Assistant Director Walter Skinner of the FBI. Walter, I'd like you to meet Detective James Ellison of the Cascade PD and Blair Sandburg. Jim and I were in the Army together."

Skinner and Ellison shook hands, measuring each other up.

"That would be formerly of the Cascade PD, since Cascade no longer exists," Ellison said bitterly.

"I'm sorry to hear that, Detective Ellison. Unfortunately, it seems that most of the continent's largest cities were destroyed. Now why did you want to see us?" Skinner asked as he shook Sandburg's hand.

"We're here on vacation and staying in a cabin eight miles north of here on a small lake,"

Sandburg said, "Since we have no home to go back to, we've decided to stay put for now."

"It's pretty late in the year to be taking a vacation," Skinner commented still suspicious of them.

"Not that it's any of your business, but we've been busy working all summer. This was the first chance we had to get away. Besides, it's more relaxing not have a bunch of screaming kids running around, like there is in the summer," Ellison said.

"You still haven't explained why you wanted to see us," Skinner said.

"AD Skinner, we want to form a community guard to help defend this area from people that may come here for the purpose of looting and attacking its residents," Sandburg said.

Skinner lifted his wire-rims and rubbed the bridge of his nose as he sighed, "My friends and I have been so concerned with fighting the aliens that we didn't even consider that with our country's current situation, mayhem and anarchy could spread throughout the land."

"I've been working toward a Ph.D. in anthropology," Sandburg said, "I'm pretty good at predicting what human behavior will be in times of disasters. We're going to be in for some rough times ahead unless our military and remaining law enforcement agencies can keep a lid on it."

"We want to do our part to help by protecting the citizens of this area," Ellison added.

"Okay, Detective Ellison and Mr. Sandburg, I agree that we need to protect this area from outsiders. I've only been living here for a few days and haven't even met any of the residents. This will give my companions and me the chance to get to know the locals and the area. So you can count us in."

"Great, man!" Sandburg said, "We still want to head out to your place so we can meet your companions, if that's all right?"

"That's fine with me." Skinner turned to the ranger. "Sean, do you have a gas-powered chainsaw that we could borrow?"

"Sure, Walter, are you going to be building on to the cabin?"

"We need a room for the electrical equipment."

"Let me get the chainsaw. Do you have any gasoline?"

"I have two gas cans stored in the back of John's truck. It should be enough for what we need it for."

After Sean came back with the chainsaw, Skinner strapped it and the gas cans onto the horse's back. It looked like he and the other two men would have to walk to the cabin. It was still early morning so they'd probably make it back in time for lunch. Skinner tried to ignore the throbbing pain in his head and the hot flashes burning through his body as they started walking.

The Fox, Dog, and Rat

Krycek looked cautiously at the cow. This was as close as he'd gotten to the large animal.

"She's not going to bite," Doggett said as he finished washing her udders and stood.

"Are you sure?" Krycek held the aluminum bucket, looking doubtful.

"Pretty sure. Just sit on the stool."

Krycek frowned as he sat on the small stool and started to put the bucket under her as the cow let go of a stream of piss. Krycek jumped back with the bucket swearing, and glaring at Doggett as the agent started laughing.

"The hazards of the job." Doggett chuckled.

"She did that on purpose!" Krycek glared at the cow. It looked back at him with large innocent brown eyes.

"If you'd rather not milk her...."

"No! If Fox can milk a cow, I should be able to handle it." He sat back on the stool and checked the bucket, making sure it was still clean before placing it under the cow. Krycek wrinkled his nose at the strong urine smell and was careful not to get the bucket or his feet in it.

"Okay, Alex, now reach under and take her udders in your hands."

As Krycek grasped the teats he thought about how weird they felt. He squeezed them waiting for the milk to squirt out. "Nothing's coming out."

"You're not doing it right. Pretend you're jerking yourself off. I'm sure you've had plenty of practice."

"John Deer, that would explain why you're so good at milking?" Krycek said as he took Doggett's advice and soon milk was squirting out into the aluminum bucket.

"Oh, I'm good all right, Alex." Doggett leered as he walked over to the other cow and sat on the stool.

Krycek swallowed as he watched the milk from the other cow squirting into the bucket a lot faster than he was capable of milking. He wondered what it would feel like to be jerked off by Doggett's firm hand.

Mulder stepped into the barn with a wheelbarrel and started cleaning out the two empty stalls on the right. He shoveled the waste into the wheelbarrel. The Lone Gunmen still had his mare, so her stall was reasonably clean. Luckily, Sean was allowing them to keep one of his horses for the time being.

Doggett stood and poured the milk from the bucket through a cheesecloth stretched over a large metal milk container. Then he carried the bucket back to the cow to finish milking her.

Mulder walked over to Krycek and leaned on his shovel. "How are you doing with Phoebe?"

"Phoebe? That's a strange name for a cow. What do you call the other one?"

"Bambi."

"I'm doing fine with her, other than coming close to being peed on."

Mulder watched the milk fill the bucket. "It looks like you picked up the technique for milking pretty quickly. Are you sure you've never done this before?"

"I seem to have a natural talent for it."

Doggett barked out a laugh and at Mulder's questioning look he shrugged his shoulders. "It's an inside joke."

Krycek rose and went to empty the bucket into the metal milk container.

Doggett also stood and walked over to empty his half-filled bucket. "I'm done milking her, Fox, you can let her out and clean her stall. I'm going to pick some vegetables, then take a shower before starting lunch." It was Doggett's day to cook.

Mulder led Bambi outside to the path and waited until she started toward the field. He walked back into the barn and started shoveling out her stall. By the time he was done Krycek was leading Phoebe out of the barn.

"What do you want me to do now?" Krycek asked, watching in the doorway as Mulder cleaned the last stall.

"You can spread clean hay in the stalls. After I empty this into the compost pile, and wash up, would you like to learn how to make butter and sour cream?"

"Sure. When are we going to try making some cheese?"

Mulder grinned. He found Krycek's interest in cheese-making endearing. "We should be making it now, while we have plenty of milk. Come winter, I've read, cows don't produce as much milk."

"Let's try making some this weekend. By then you should be back with Doggett from his father's farm, and hopefully, I'll be back with a HAM radio set."

"Alex, I don't like the idea of you going alone. Couldn't you wait until John and I get back then I can go with you?"

"I'll be fine, Fox. I'm used to working alone." He almost added bitterly that he was used to being alone, but that wasn't true...he'd never get used to being alone.

The Fox, Dog, Bear, Rat, Panther, and Wolf

Ellison sniffed the air as his stomach growled hungrily. "Mm, someone is cooking chili and cornbread."

Skinner looked at him questioningly. They were still a mile away from the cabin. "I don't smell anything."

"Jim has a very good sense of smell," Sandburg said.

They arrived at the cabin twenty minutes later. By then Skinner could smell the smoke from the wood stove and food cooking. His stomach churned as he started to feel ill again.

"Wow. Man, this place is cool!" Sandburg said, getting his first glimpse of the small farm.

Ellison stood still, his eyes narrowed, as he smelled an unfamiliar and arousing scent.

"Big guy, what's wrong?" Sandburg feared that his lover might be zoning out.

Shaking himself, Ellison looked at his guide. "I don't know yet."

They followed Skinner around the cabin to the barn where he removed the items he had strapped on the horse's back. He then removed the saddle.

Mulder entered the barn. "Walter, who are your frien--" Before he could get the rest of the sentence out, Ellison threw him up against the wall and started kissing him while tearing at his clothes.

It took both Sandburg and Skinner to pull Ellison off and wrestle him to the ground.

Sandburg felt jealous, until he realized that his lover was being affected by something about the man, most likely some scent. "Jim, stop it. Focus on my voice."

"What's wrong with him?" Skinner asked.

"He's a sentinel, he's zoning out," Sandburg confessed.

"What does that mean?" Skinner asked.

Before Sandburg could answer, Mulder started filling Skinner in.

"Sentinels are part of ancient legend. They were supposed to have heightened senses. In ancient times their tribes used them to watch for danger from other tribes or nature...anything that might threaten their village." Mulder sighed, looking at Ellison. "He must have smelled something arousing about me. Alex will probably have the same affect on him." His eyes fell on Sandburg. "You're his guide aren't you?"

"Oh, man, you're good!"

Ellison moaned and blinked as Sandburg's face came into focus. "What happened?"

"You attacked him." Sandburg nodded toward Mulder.

"God, he smells so...." Ellison groaned and blocked Mulder's scent from his senses.

"Jim, now that we know he's affecting you, you'll be able to deal with his scent."

Ellison climbed to his feet with Sandburg's help. Skinner stood protectively close to Mulder.

"I'm sorry, I hope I didn't hurt you, Mr.?" Ellison said, noticing the torn shirtsleeve.

"The name is Fox Mulder, you can call me Mulder. And no, you didn't hurt me, just took me by surprise."

"I'm Jim Ellison, my friend is Blair Sandburg."

"Are all of your senses enhanced, Mr. Ellison?"

Ellison glared at Sandburg. "Chief, you told them?"

"I didn't have much choice, big guy, we need their help."

"I'm surprised they believed you."

Skinner snorted out a laugh.

Ellison looked at him puzzled.

"Jim, Mulder seems to already have some knowledge of sentinels."

"Only what I've read about sentinels in books," Mulder confessed. "Why don't we head inside and discuss this over lunch? I would like to learn more about your sentinel abilities. I should warn you that you might find Alex's scent arousing."

"Why? Is there something we should be told?" Sandburg asked.

Mulder shrugged, taking an instant liking to the younger man. "Maybe, but not until we get to know you better."

When they stepped into the kitchen, they found Krycek at the cook's table, spooning the butter, he and Mulder had made, into molds, while Doggett pulled the cornbread out of the oven.

Mulder headed into the bedroom to change his shirt.

"We have guests," Skinner said, "I hope you made enough chili, John."

Doggett looked at the men standing in the doorway. "No problem let me add another can of chili beans and peppers to the pot. It shouldn't take too long to heat."

Skinner made the introductions while Doggett opened a can and added its contents into the pot of chili.

Sandburg walked over to the cook's table and watched Krycek spoon the butter into the final mold. "Wow, man, this is fantastic. You make your own butter."

Krycek smiled at the young man's enthusiasm. "Yeah, it's pretty easy."

"I'd love to learn how it's done. Maybe next time you make some, I'll come back out."

Ellison bent and picked up Tiger. "Hey, cat, you have a name?" he said, looking at Mulder, who was just coming out of the bedroom, for an answer.

Mulder walked over to them and scratched his cat behind the ear. "Her name is Tiger. She's not much at catching mice, but she's been a real good companion over the past few months."

Ellison smiled. "You have a nice place here, Mulder. Do you hunt? I noticed quite a few deer tracks on our way over here."

"I don't hunt, but I might have to learn. These mountains are filled with wild game. I wouldn't mind catching one of the wild turkeys." Mulder chuckled and added, "Man cannot live by Spam alone."

Doggett glanced over at them and smirked. "Come back on Saturday, it will be my turn to cook again and I plan on fixing southern fried chicken."

Mulder groaned.

"Don't worry, Fox, I won't kill any of the egg layers," Doggett said.

"I know you won't. I just need to become less attached to them."

"I'm sure with Walter, Alex, and me helping to tend them, and if you stopped naming them, you'll become less attached. But for Saturday I could always pick up a few chickens from my Pa's farm." He and Mulder were heading down to Doggett senior's farm tomorrow. It was a three-hour drive so they planned to leave late morning, after the chores were done, and come back on Friday.

"I wouldn't want to impose on your father," Mulder said.

"Fox, my Pa won't be put out. We probably won't be able to leave without a couple of smoked hams, a side of bacon, and some homemade sausages."

"Where does your father live, John?" Sandburg asked.

"North Carolina. He and my brother have a medium-sized farm," he said, setting a stack bowls on the counter. "If you'd like to help yourselves the chili is done. There's some sour cream and fresh chives on the table."

Everyone but Skinner grabbed a bowl of chili and a piece of cornbread. They sat at the table and passed around the sour cream then started eating and discussing why Sandburg and Ellison had stopped out to see them.

"Walter, is something wrong?" Mulder asked, finally noticing that his new lover was looking pale and sickly.

"I'm not feeling well. I think I'll go and lie down for a bit."

Mulder got up and followed him into the bedroom. He placed his hand on Skinner's sweaty brow. "You're burning up. Lay down and I'll get the thermometer."

"It's nothing, Fox, go back and finish your lunch."

"As soon as I take your temperature." Mulder hurried into the bathroom. He came back with the thermometer and took it out of its case, shaking it.

Skinner had removed his shoes and wirerims and was lying on top of the bedspread.

Mulder held the thermometer to his lips. "Open up. Now hold this under your tongue."

Skinner did as ordered. Mulder smoothed his hand tenderly over Skinner's scalp. "I'll be back in five minutes to check it."

Mulder worried as he walked into the main room and sat at the table to finish his chili.

"How's Walter?" Doggett asked.

"He seems to be running a fever. I don't think I'll be able to go to your Dad's farm tomorrow."

"Fox, Alex will be here with Walter. He probably only has a case of the flu. I wanted you to see my Pa's farm and maybe learn a few things about farming from him and my brother. Things you can't learn from books."

"I don't think Alex will be able to handle the chores on his own."

Before Krycek could respond, Ellison spoke up. "If I might offer a suggestion. Blair and I can stay here and help. I was a medic for a short time in the Army, so I could look after AD Skinner. Plus Blair and I can help with the chores. All we ask is that you pick us up some supplies, too."

"Jim, whatever you need just make out a list." Doggett glanced over at Mulder. "Okay, Fox?"

"Okay," Mulder said reluctantly, he couldn't explain why he was feeling so protective toward Skinner. Sure they had sex, but he didn't love Skinner...did he? He rose and headed back into

the bedroom.

Skinner stared up at him tiredly as Mulder removed the thermometer and read it. "Your temperature is 101, Walter. I think you should stay in bed and rest. Let me help you off with your clothes and get you under the covers."

"Fox, I can't be sick," he said as he sat up. "There's so much we need to do." Skinner felt like hell, his muscles and joints were even beginning to hurt.

Mulder started helping him off with his pants and shirt. "Sh, Walter, I'll recruit Sean and the Gunmen to help. Jim and Blair already volunteered to stay here with you and Alex, while John and I go down to North Carolina tomorrow."

"Do you have to go?" He looked up at Mulder pleadingly as the younger man helped him under the covers.

"I don't want to leave you but John wants me to see his father's farm in operation, and I do want to learn more about farming. We need the extra supplies for our friends and ourselves. Besides, it's only a three-hour drive. We'll come back on Thursday instead of Friday."

Doggett appeared in the doorway with a glass of water and a bottle of Tylenol. "Walt, how are you feeling?"

"Like crap."

"I suppose you won't be up to testing out this mattress tonight?"

"Are you coming on to me, John?" Skinner asked.

Doggett grinned as he helped Skinner sit up and placed two capsules in his mouth then held the glass of water to his lips. "Hey, Alex and I heard Fox howling last night, I was curious about what would cause him to make that noise. I figured it had to be something pretty big."

"I did not howl! Did I?" Mulder was confused. Most of last night was a blur. He remembered how he had shamelessly ridden Skinner's cock until he came explosively, but not much else. A brief image of blood flashed inside his mind then flickered off just out of reach.

Skinner smiled through the pain throbbing behind his temples. "You howled, Fox, and it made me feel really good."

Mulder leaned down and kissed him on the forehead. "I felt pretty damned good last night, too. Now get some sleep. I'm going to ride out later and talk to the Gunmen, and see if they can help us out tomorrow and Thursday."

Doggett and Mulder walked out of the bedroom. Krycek was at the sink, with Sandburg, doing the dishes. Ellison was at the bookshelves studying the titles on the books.

"Fox, how is he?" Krycek asked worriedly.

"He's running a 101 temperature."

Krycek sighed. "We need to start cutting down the trees for the addition if we want to have the electricity installed by your birthday."

"You know when my birthday is?"



"Yep, October 13th. Three weeks from now."

"What are you using for a power source?" Ellison asked.

"Fox bought a windmill, we have the footings laid and just need to assemble it, wire the cabin, and hook it up," Krycek said.

"The cabin where Blair and I are staying has a gas-powered generator and one fireplace. The place really wasn't supposed to be used in the winter."

"What are you planning on doing?"

"We plan on stocking up on firewood and gasoline. If we run out we might be at your doorstep."

"In that case, Walter would have to revise his bed schedule," Mulder quipped.

"Fox, what time on Thursday do you think you'll be back?" Krycek asked. "I still want to take off Thursday to get that HAM radio set."

"We should be back in the afternoon, early evening at the latest." Mulder walked over to him and placed his hand on Krycek's arm. "Alex, do you have any idea where to find a HAM radio set?"

"Yes. I know a few army surplus and survivalist shops that are in the suburbs of Baltimore and Annapolis. If they are still standing, and haven't been looted, I think one of them might have a HAM radio, plus other supplies we could use. If not I do have a few other sources, but they're not as close."

"Why don't you take my car instead of your motorcycle. It has a full tank of gas and should be able to make it from here to Baltimore and back without needing a refill," Mulder said.

"I was going to ask you if I could use it," Krycek said.

Ellison saw an opportunity for gathering some additional supplies for him and Sandburg. "Alex, do you mind if Blair and I go with you? We could use some hunting supplies and winter gear from these shops you mentioned."

Krycek frowned then nodded. "Okay, but you both need to do as I tell you. I'm used to working alone and I don't want you slowing me down."

"Hey, don't worry, man. You'll find having us along will be to your advantage," Sandburg said.

Mulder smiled with relief. "Alex, Jim's a sentinel and Blair is his guide."

"A what?"

"I'll explain it tonight in bed."

"Hmm, you're going to tell me a bedtime story, Foxy? I'm surprised you're not sleeping with Skinner tonight."

Mulder's eyes narrowed. "Alex, if you don't want me to sleep in the loft with you, I can sleep down here on the sofa instead."

Krycek closed his eyes, stomping down the feelings of jealousy that he'd been dealing with since hearing Mulder and Skinner having sex last night. "I'm sorry, Fox, I have no right to expect more from you than you're willing to give."

Reaching out, Mulder tenderly brushed the bangs off Krycek's forehead. "I like your hair long like this. It's much better than that buzz job you get sometimes."

"Fuck," Krycek said as he grabbed Mulder's hand and brought it to his lips. "You just drive me so fucking crazy."

Not being able to resist any longer, Mulder captured Krycek's mouth with his, kissing the breath out of the other man.

Doggett shook his head in disbelief. Yesterday morning, Mulder was shy and scared at being kissed by him. He went from that to having sex with Skinner last night, and now he was aggressively kissing Krycek. Doggett walked over to Ellison and Sandburg, they were watching the two men kiss. "C'mon, guys, I'll show you around the property."

The Frog

Blue Ridge Mountains

Tuesday, September 25, 2001

Frohike rode the horse down to the Elend's sheep ranch in the valley. He'd known Ada and Arne Elend since they were kids together when he used to stay with his uncle during the summer.

Arne answered the door, holding a shotgun. After he saw who it was, he leaned the shotgun against the wall and hugged the smaller man. "Melvin! Praise the Lord, you're alive! Ada, Melvin's here!"

A short gray-haired woman rushed into the room from the kitchen. "Melvin!" She ran over and hugged him. "Arne and I were so worried that you might have been killed when we heard DC had been destroyed."

Frohike returned her hug. "My friends and I barely escaped with our lives. We're staying at my uncle's place."

"Do you have enough food?"

"That's one of the reasons I rode down to see you."

"What are the other reasons?" Arne asked.

"To let you know that I'm okay and see how you're doing. Mulder mentioned that you are still making moccasins. He was going to trade for a pair for our friend next time he stopped down, but Byers is in desperate need of them now."

"What size foot does your friend have?" Arne asked.

"He's a size ten."

Ada took Frohike's hand in hers. "Let's get out of the doorway. I have chicken and dumpling soup on the stove, come in and have a bowl while Arne gets the moccasins."

Frohike followed Ada into a large country kitchen and took a seat at the table.

"Where are Lisa and Elsa?" Frohike asked. Lisa and Elsa were Ada and Arne's twenty-six year old twin daughters.

"They're out in the field attending to the sheep." She pulled a soup bowl out of the cupboard. "Are these friends, that are staying with you, the same men you've been working with for years?" Ada scooped the thick soup into a bowl and placed it in front of him along with a plate of buttered bread.

"Yes. I'll introduce you as soon as we get settled. I also have a new friend who's living with us," he said, eating a spoonful of soup.

"You mean there are four of you living in your uncle's small cabin?"

Frohike shrugged his shoulder. "Mm, Ada, besides being hot, you're still one of the best cooks around. I never should have allowed Arne to steal you away from me."

"Stop flirting with my wife, Melvin, and I didn't steal her away she escaped," Arne said with good humor. He placed the moccasins on the table then dug out a paper bag from cabinet and put them into the bag. "What else do need?"

"Since you won't let me to have your lovely wife, I'll settle for a cat and a couple of your hand-woven wool blankets." Frohike dunked a piece of bread into the broth.

"You're in luck, Tulip had six kittens this spring so you can have your pick. They are usually in the barn."

"Thanks, Arne, but I'll let you pick. I need one that's a good mouser. My uncle's place is crawling with them."

"Okay, I know just the one. I'll go out to the barn and find him and get those blankets."

"Melvin, I'll pack up some food for you to take back to your friends. How are you doing for food otherwise?"

"We've been mooching off Mulder. He has three acquaintances living with him now, too. One of them has a father who owns a farm in North Carolina. He and Mulder are going down there tomorrow and will be picking up enough vegetables and grain to help tie us over through winter. My uncle's hunting rifle is still at his place along with his fishing gear. Mulder has all of Old Man Peterson fishing rods and reels, and then there are his chickens."

Ada laughed. "Mulder isn't about to kill any of those birds. It sounds like a lot of people from the city are taking up residence with friends and family." She placed the paper bag full of food on the table, and nervously wrung her hands together. "Melvin, did you see any aliens? Was the destruction really as bad as they said on the radio?"

"I didn't see any aliens. I did see their spaceships and saw a couple of them blown out of the sky by our military. It was bad, Ada. A lot of people lost their lives and many more are now homeless. We're the lucky ones, at least we have a place to stay."

"Do you think they'll attack again?"

"Maybe." He finished eating and picked up the paper bag with the moccasins and the other with the food that Ada had packed. "I better get going. I'll try to stop back down in a few days." He kissed her on the cheek. "Thanks for feeding me."

"Bye, Melvin."

As Frohike reached his horse, Arne was just walking out of the barn with a canvas bag that was hissing and twisting in his hand.

Frohike frowned. "Arne, I wanted a pussy cat not some hell cat."

"You wanted a mouser, and Rocky is the best mouser I've ever had. He's not that mean just pissed off about being in the sack. He doesn't like horses and if I didn't put him in the bag he'd claw you for sure. I strapped the blankets onto the back of your saddle."

Frohike placed the two bags into the saddlebags on the horse then climbed into the saddle. Arne handed him the hissing sack.

"Thanks, Arne. I'll let Jimmy take it out of the bag when I get home."

"Melvin, don't be a stranger!" Arne called as Frohike rode off.

The Frog, Otter, Stork, Puppy, Fox, and Rat

It was early evening when Frohike arrived back at the cabin. He pulled the bags off the horse and fumbled to open the door.

"Hey, Jimmy, I have something for you!" he called.

Bond came into the parlor from the kitchen. "What?"

He glared at Frohike when the small man handed him the sack. Rocky had switched from hissing to making loud terrified meows.

"The poor thing, you're torturing her."

"Him." Frohike took two steps back as Bond placed the sack on the floor and opened it. Rocky sprang out and dived under the sofa to hide. He didn't stay hidden for long because out from beneath the sofa scurried a mouse with Rocky hot on her tail. The cat caught the mouse in two leaps. Then he turned with the mouse in his mouth to look up at the Bond and Frohike before he chomped down on it.

"That cat has an attitude, but at least he's a good mouser," Frohike said as he looked appreciatively at the already large, six month old Maine Coon. He turned and carried the other two bags and blankets into the kitchen.

At the table was Byers, soaking his feet in a washbasin. He's feet were in poor shape. The blisters had broken, making them look like raw hamburger.

"I brought you something, John."

"I heard, it sounded like it wasn't very happy."

"Not the cat. This." He dropped the paper bag onto Byers' lap then started taking the items out of the other bag and rattled off its contents as he did. "And four homemade apple turnovers, a loaf of freshly baked bread with a crock of Ada's sharp cheddar cheese spread, and a jar of sauerkraut with a bag of Knockwurst sausage."

"Mm, it looks like we're going to eat well, tonight." Byers held up the moccasins. "Thanks, Frohike, these feel really soft and the soles are thick enough for walking outside."

Langly walked in through the backdoor with a bucket of apples. His eyes lit up as he saw the food on the table. "Did your friends give you this, Frohike?"

"Yeah."

Bond walked into the room with the cat in his arms. Rocky was purring contently at being scratched behind his ear.

Frohike just stared at him in disbelief.

"Does it have a name?" Langly asked, briefly turning his attention away from the food.

"Rocky."

"Anyone home?" Mulder's voice called out from the front door.

"In the kitchen."

Mulder and Krycek stepped into the small kitchen a second later. "Hi, Guys, I brought you some eggs, butter, and fresh milk."

"Thanks, Mulder. Look at what Frohike got me from his friends the Elends," Byers said, holding up the moccasins.

"Cool. I guess I don't have to trade for a pair now."

Krycek examined the moccasins. "I wouldn't mind having a pair of these. Fox, when you get back from John's dad's and I get back with the HAM radio, let's ride down and visit the Elends."

Mulder smiled at him. "Okay, Alex."

Frohike puzzled over the tender look Mulder was giving Krycek.

"How are the Elends doing, Frohike?" Mulder asked, pulling his eyes away from Krycek.

"Arne met me at the door, holding a shotgun. They're scared, but trying not to show it."

Mulder nodded. "We just met two men from Cascade, Washington. They want to form a community guard to protect this area. I think it might be psychologically beneficial for the residents here. It will give them something productive to do, instead of sitting around feeling scared and helpless."

"Where are these men now?" Frohike asked.

"They were helping us cut down trees, but they probably headed back to the ranger's station by now, which is why we're here. I was wondering if we could recruit you guys into helping us build a small room onto our cabin? Walter has taken ill and won't be able to help until he's feeling better."

"No problem, Mulder, we'll be happy to help. We'd also like your help in adding a bathroom onto our cabin," Byers said.

"Sounds fair enough."

Langly in the meantime had sliced off a piece of the sourdough bread and opened the crock of cheese.

Krycek's eyes lit up when he saw the cheese. He had a weakness for cheese. "Mind if I have a slice?"

"Help yourself, dude," Langly said, handing him the knife.

"You got a cat," Mulder said, noticing Rocky for the first time. He reached out to pet it, but the cat hissed and leaped out of Bonds arms then rushed from the room.

Mulder shrugged his shoulders. "She probably smelled Tiger on me."

"He," Bond said.

"So what are the Skinman's symptoms?" Frohike asked.

Mulder frowned. "He's running a 101 degree temperature. He has a headache and his joints ache."

"Sounds like the flu. I hope he isn't contagious."

"If he is, then I'll be coming down with it, too," Mulder said. He glanced out the window...the sun had set.

"Open up," Krycek said as he held a small piece of bread with a generous portion of cheese spread on it to Mulder's lips.

Mulder ate the treat and smiled. "Mm, maybe we should pick up a couple of crocks of Ada's cheese spread."

"Hey, Mulder, I found an apple tree out back," Langly said.

"There's quite a few apple, black walnut, and cherry trees on our properties even a couple of pear trees," Mulder said. "We probably should be harvesting the apples soon."

Krycek looked out the window the moon should be out soon. "We should be going, Fox, it's a long walk back." They had left the horse for Ellison and Sandburg to ride to the ranger's station, since the two men were coming back out in the morning.

Mulder was feeling anxious. "Okay, Alex."

"Are you okay?" Frohike asked.

"I'm fine. We'll see you tomorrow," Mulder said, stepping out the back door.

As they hurried down the path toward their home, Krycek started to feel weird. He glanced up at the full moon then over at Mulder as a sharp pain tore through his body. Through pain-filled eyes he watched as Mulder changed into a large brown wolf with yellow eyes. It wasn't until he tried to talk, and ended up barking, did he realize that he was now on all fours and the pain had ended.

'Alex, don't panic.' He heard Mulder's voice in his head.

He barked again then tried to communicate with telepathy. 'Fox, what's going on?'

'We're werewolves.'

'How?'

'I don't know how. It's connected to the aliens.'

'Why didn't you tell me about this before?'

'I didn't remember.' He explained, "The next morning after a full moon, I'll find myself outside with no memory of how I got there.'

'You remember everything now?'

Mulder sat on his haunches looking at his green-eyed sable fur companion. 'Yes. I remember the last five times I've changed. The first time I was too afraid to leave the cabin. The second and third times I stayed close to home and made it back inside before the sun came up. The last two times, I discovered how much fun this shape can be and wandered too far from home.'

'If we're werewolves, shouldn't we be walking upright on two legs?'

'Some legends depict werewolves as looking like half-wolf and half-man creatures, in others, they are depicted as wolves.'

'What happened to our clothes?'

'I don't know where they go...when I changed back I still had my clothes on.'

Krycek looked around. He noticed that he could now see as well in the dark as he could during the day. 'I can see colors, I thought animals didn't see colors.'

'I don't think we're technically animals, Alex. Let's go for a run.' When Mulder was in this shape, he had the impulse to frolic and hunt. He recalled hunting and eating a rabbit the last time he had changed. He took off down the path then veered off into the woods.

Krycek raced after him, surprised at how fast and graceful his new form was while marveling at his keen sense of smell.

## The Dog and Bear

Doggett stepped onto the front porch and looked up at the full moon. It was after midnight and Mulder and Krycek hadn't returned from visiting the Gunmen yet. He'd go out looking for them, but he didn't want to leave Skinner alone. Maybe they decided to stay overnight at the Gunmen's place, he thought, and headed back inside. He walked into the bedroom.

"Walt, do you need anything?"

"No. Is Fox back?" Skinner was visibly shivering under the covers.

"No. I think he and Krycek decided to stay overnight at the Gunmen's. I'm going to lock up," he said, walking back into the main room. He turned off all of the oil lamps and added some more wood to the pot-bellied stove then walked into the bathroom and brushed his teeth. Doggett undressed and pulled on an undershirt and a pair of sweatpants, next he added more wood to the water heater.

Once in the bedroom, Doggett added another log onto the fire. "Walt, if you need anything during the night wake me and I'll get it," he said, climbing into bed.

"I-I could use some of your body heat," Skinner said.

"I'm happy to oblige," Doggett said, snuggling up against Skinner's side.

"John, protect him."

"Who? Fox?"

"Yeah."

"Don't worry, Walt, I'll watch his back." Doggett felt the shivers, running through Skinner's body, start to ebb.

"Thanks, John. Take care of yourself, too." Skinner wished he wasn't sick, so he could hug Doggett back. He felt so weak, so helpless. Closing his eyes, Skinner fell into a restless sleep and dreamed he was a wolf hunting rabbits with his mate.

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Chapter 5: Once Bitten by Jo B  
The Fox and Rat

Blue Ridge Mountains  
Wednesday, September 25, 2001

Krycek never felt freer as he chased after the large brown wolf. His paws digging into the soft earth as he weaved in and out of the trees on his mad pursuit. He finally caught up as Mulder slowed and stopped.

'Fox, what is it?'

'Do you smell that?'

The sable-furred wolf sniffed. 'It smells metallic.'

'Through here.' Mulder padded down a hill while sniffing the air and ground until he came to a bush-covered entrance to a cave. He pushed his way inside, breaking several branches as he did.

Krycek followed Mulder into the cave. 'Is that what I think it is?'

Mulder sat on haunches and looked at the coiled copper pipes and the large metal barrel. 'Yeah, I finally found Old Man Peterson's still. It's too bad we'll forget about it when we change back.'

'Not if we're still here when the sun rises.' Krycek walked over to Mulder and licked him behind his furry ear.

'What do you want to do while we wait?' Mulder asked telepathically, getting back on his four feet.

'Have you ever done it doggy style?'

If Mulder had been able to laugh, he would have. 'No, have you?'

'Yes, but not in this form.' Krycek nuzzled up to Mulder's body then walked behind him and sniffed his ass.

'Alex, what are you doing?' Mulder suddenly felt a tongue lapping at his anus and other opening. Just as Krycek leaped on top of Mulder's back a thin beam of early morning sunlight filtered in through the entrance....

When awareness returned, Mulder found himself lying on the hard ground with Krycek on top of him.



"What the fuck! Where the hell am I?" Krycek growled. For a moment he thought he was back in that prison cell in Tunisia, until he realized that it was Mulder's body underneath him. He rolled off Mulder. His eyes barely making out anything in the dim light.

"Not again," Mulder sighed.

"Not again, what? Fox, what's going on? Where are we?" Krycek looked around at the dark cave there was a little light filtering in through a bush-covered entrance.

Mulder reached into his jacket pocket for the small penlight he always carried, turning it on he swept the small cave. The light landed on the old still. "We seemed to have found Old Man Peterson's still." He swept the light over the walls and found no other entrances. There looked to be a small hole burrowed through the stone in the ceiling, but it was covered from outside. Mulder thought, probably where the smoke from the still went when Peterson was making his shine.

"How did we get here?" Krycek asked again.

"I don't know, Alex. This isn't the first time I've woken up outside after a full moon. It's happened twice before...I thought I might have been sleepwalking, but you being here seems to prove that theory wrong." Mulder stood. "Let's get out of here."

Krycek followed him to the entrance and they pushed their way through the thick bush. "Do you know where we are?"

Mulder's eyes fell on the soft soil. He frowned and kneeled next to two fresh sets of tracks going into the cave.

"What is it?" Krycek kneeled and looked at the tracks. "It looks like a couple of large dogs made them."

"Alex, this was the only way into, and out of, the cave," Mulder said.

It was Krycek's turn to frown. "Where are our footprints?"

"Exactly." Mulder placed his hand over one of the paw prints and looked up at Krycek.

"Fox, you're not suggesting...?"

"It was a full moon last night."

Krycek shook his head. "No. That's impossible."

"Do you have a better explanation?"

"No. But I'm sure there's one other than us changing into large dogs."

"More likely wolves," Mulder said as he climbed back to his feet.

"Do you have any idea how to get back home from here?" Krycek asked, not wanting to be there a moment longer. He was beginning to feel overwhelmed by all of the changes in his life.

The trees and bushes were unfamiliar to Mulder as he looked around. "This way...I smell smoke."

They started up the steep hill until they reached the trail, and were back on familiar ground. Mulder stopped on the path and looked back down the hill, he wanted to remember how to find

the cave again.

"You're not going to tell Skinner and Doggett about this are you?" Krycek asked.

"We can't keep it from them, Alex. Something strange happened to us last night and they have the right to know the details."

"We don't know what happened to us!" Krycek snapped as he walked beside Mulder down the trail.

In his gut, Mulder knew what had happened to them and he was seldom wrong. He stopped and took a hold of Krycek's hand then tenderly caressed the side of the younger man's face with his fingertips. "Alex, we will the next time there's a full moon, Walter and John will be with us. We formed a pact with them to watch each other's backs. We need them to watch ours now."

Krycek collapsed into Mulder's arms. "Dammit, Fox, I don't like not remembering! Why would we turn into wolves? It makes no sense!" He pushed Mulder away and continued his rant. "Isn't it bad enough that our bodies were altered into fucking hermaphrodites? Now you expect me to believe we're B movie monsters, too?"

Mulder sighed, and hugged Krycek from behind, resting his chin on the other man's shoulder while talking softly into his ear. "Alex, I don't expect you to believe anything I say. Believe me, I'm used to people not believing me. Would you prefer I keep my speculations to myself? Just tell me what you want."

After several long moments, Krycek sighed, "No. I don't want you keeping anything from me. I just haven't had time to deal with what's happened to me." He turned in Mulder's arms then kissed and hugged him. "Please, Fox, I need you to be here for me. It's been so long since I've had anyone in my life that gave a damn about me."

Mulder returned the hug. "I'm here for you, Alex, so are John and Walter."

"Skinner hates me...but John's beginning to grow on me."

"C'mon, let's get back home, I want to check on Walter, then take a shower and change clothes."

"Do you mind if I share it with you?"

Mulder shrugged his shoulders. "No, I don't mind."

~x~X~x~

The Panther, Wolf, Fox, Rat, Dog, and Bear

A horse stood in the middle of the trail with its two riders sitting quietly on its back.

Sandburg shook his lover and whispered, "Jim, what's wrong?"

Ellison started. "I-I was just listening in on a conversation between Mulder and Krycek."

"And?"

Ellison glanced over his shoulder at Sandburg. "I discovered why their scent affected me the way it did...and then some."

"Why? C'mon, man, tell me?"

"Shh, they're on the trail ahead of us. I'll tell you when we're alone."

Ellison spurred the horse forward then stopped two hundred yards down the path and stared down the hill. His eyes followed two tracks of wolf prints down and two sets of human footprints back up. Was it possible?

"Jim?"

"Later, Chief." The larger man spurred the horse into motion. They caught up with Mulder and Krycek a half mile from their small farm.

"Hey, guys," Ellison said as he slowed the horse along side them.

Mulder smiled. "Hey, you're back early."

"John invited us to breakfast before we helped with the chores," Sandburg said as he dismounted.

Ellison slid out of the saddle and led the horse down the path. As they talked, his arm unconsciously looped around Sandburg's back. "I think John wanted to get an early start to his father's farm this morning."

"I'd like to get an early start too, so we can be back sooner," Mulder said as they walked through bushes in front of the cabin.

"It smells like John has coffee on the stove," Krycek said.

Ellison tied the horse to the hitching post in front of the cabin then untied their bag from its back. He and Sandburg were spending the night.

Doggett was in the kitchen sautéing vegetables in a skillet. It was suppose to be Skinner's day to cook, but he was still sick.

"John, how's Walter?" Mulder asked, not waiting for an answer as he made a beeline for the bedroom.

He walked into the room and over to the bed. Tiger was sleeping curled around Skinner's ankles. His lover looked so pale. Mulder couldn't remember seeing him like this, even when he was in the hospital because of the nanocytes he didn't look this frail. "Hey, how are you feeling?"

"I feel like crap...what a shit poor time to get sick." Skinner looked up at him tiredly. "Fox, I missed you last night, did you stay overnight at the Gunmen's?"

Leaning down, Mulder kissed him on the forehead then sat on the bed next to him. "No. Alex and I spent the night in a cave."

"In a cave?"

"Yeah, we found Old Man Peterson's still."

Mulder placed his hand soothingly on Skinner's chest. "Walter, I had time to think about my feelings for you. I don't want to frighten you, but I think I may be in love with you."

The pain briefly vanished from Skinner's brown eyes, replaced by hope. "Really?"

"Yeah, really. I didn't think I could feel this way about another man or a woman for that matter." Mulder frowned. He felt physically connected to Skinner now and wondered if that was a normal feeling after having sex with another man. He never felt this way with any of the women he'd slept with over the years. "Walter, it scares me. Please take care of yourself while I'm gone."

Skinner reached up and touched the side of Mulder's face. "I expect to see you back here tomorrow afternoon. Don't make me come looking for you," he said gruffly.

Mulder smiled tenderly while holding Skinner's hand. With Ellison in the next room, Mulder couldn't tell Skinner about his suspicions that he and Krycek might be werewolves. At least the next full moon was a month away, so he had plenty of time to tell him.

"Walter, do you think you could eat something?" Doggett asked from the doorway.

Skinner shook his head. The mere thought of food made him nauseous.

"You need to eat something. How about a mug of chicken broth?"

"Okay, John, I'll try," Skinner replied weakly.

Doggett turned to Mulder. "Alex is showing Blair and Jim what chores need to get done, so we can take off right after breakfast."

Mulder nodded, while not taking his eyes off Skinner's face.

Doggett left the bedroom and headed back into the kitchen, he pulled a jar of chicken bouillon out of the cupboard. The vegetable frittata he was making for breakfast should be done in a few minutes. In the meantime, he'd have Skinner's meager meal to him. He was having second thoughts about leaving Skinner in Ellison's hands. Not that he didn't trust the man, but he wanted Skinner to get the care that only a friend could provide, at least Krycek would be here.

Out back Krycek was sipping a mug of coffee while explaining what needed to be done after breakfast.

"Alex, I don't mean to get personal, but are you and Mulder lovers?" Sandburg asked as they stood outside the chicken coop.

Krycek was about to tell the younger man to mind his business, then changed his mind. "Not quite. My relationship with Mulder is complicated. I've done some things to him that a normal man would never forget or forgive," he said, finding it strange that he felt comfortable talking to Sandburg. Something about the younger man made him believe that Sandburg was interested in him as a person.

"What things, Alex?" Ellison asked. His piercing blue eyes studying the heartbreakingly handsome face.

Krycek frowned. It didn't really matter if they knew about his past. "For one, I assassinated the man Fox grew up believing to be his father. I betrayed his trust, deceived him, and allowed them to abduct his FBI partner. Then allowed him to be experimented upon by Russian scientists, and unknowingly led him into a trap that allowed the aliens to abduct him." He shook his head. "If I were in Fox's shoes, I'd have put a bullet between my eyes long before now."

Sandburg shook his head. "Wow, man, that's a load of wrong! I was thinking maybe you stole his date or cheated him out of some money or something."

Krycek sighed. "See, there's no way Mulder will ever forgive me."

"Alex, Mulder seems to be a smart man, he must see something in you that's worthy of his love," Ellison said.

Krycek snorted out a bitter laugh. "Fox doesn't love me."

Ellison shook his head. "Trust me, Alex, he's in love with you. His heart rate increases when he's near you and I can smell his arousal."

"And who could miss the way he looks at you or the way he kissed you yesterday. If that ain't love I don't know what is!" Sandburg added.

Krycek snorted and shook his head. "What are you two, matchmakers?" He looked out at the chickens. If it weren't for what the aliens had done to them would Mulder even be interested in him? "I've been in love with Fox for years, so I'd like to believe that one day he might return my feelings for him. But until I hear the words from his own lips, I'm not going to get my hopes up."

Doggett appeared at the backdoor and called out, "Come and get it!"

"Man, I'm starving!" Sandburg clapped his hands together then headed toward the back door.

When they entered the kitchen, Krycek looked around. "Where's Fox?" he asked.

"He's trying to get Walter to drink a mug of chicken broth," Doggett said, dishing up the frittata and toast onto five plates. "You're on your own for lunch, guys."

"How's Skinner doing?" Krycek asked.

"He's still running a high temperature." Doggett set a plate in front of Krycek and Sandburg. "Take care of him, Alex."

"Don't worry, John, I'll watch him."

Doggett placed his and Ellison's plates on the table then carried Mulder's into the bedroom. The mug was sitting empty on the nightstand and Skinner was sound asleep. "Fox, do you want to eat in here?"

"No. I'll join you at the table," he said, standing and following Doggett back into the main room.

"Sean is contacting the area's residents and setting up a meeting for two o'clock in the afternoon on Monday at the ranger station," Ellison said as he dug into his breakfast.

Mulder nodded. "Thanks, Jim. Are you planning on heading up the community guard?"

"I haven't really given it much thought. I wouldn't be opposed if you, Walter, John, or Alex wanted to head it up."

Mulder shook his head. "No way Jose."

Sandburg snickered. "It looks like you're it, big guy."

"We're it, Chief. I'm not doing this alone."

~x~X~x~

The Fox and Dog

Mulder sat on the stoop outside the ranger station, skimming over the list of needed supplies that he'd received from the Gunmen, Ellison and Sandburg. He'd already memorized it at first glance and was only using it as a prop to collect his thoughts. There had been no time to take a shower after breakfast; Doggett was in too much of a hurry to leave. Mulder had just enough time to change his clothes. He sighed, feeling self-conscious, since he couldn't find a clean pair of boxers to put on he wasn't wearing any.

Sean was filling the gas tank of Doggett's truck at the pump. They'd have more than enough gas to make it to the Doggett family farm.

"Hey, Fox, are you ready to go?"

"Hmm, yeah, I'm ready, John."

Mulder got into the passenger side of the truck. "Sean, we'll see you tomorrow."

"Drive safe, guys, and keep your weapons handy."

They had two semi-automatic rifles in the backseat of the extended cab truck.

Doggett drove down the dirt road. It took them ten minutes to reach the highway.

After they'd been driving for a half-hour in comfortable silence, Mulder's soft voice broke it. "John, I need to tell you something."

Doggett glanced over at Mulder who was sitting beside him looking out the window. "What's wrong?"

"How open-minded have you become to the paranormal?"

"You're kidding? Fox, our planet was just attacked by aliens, how much more open-minded do you expect me to get?" He wondered where Mulder was going with this.

"What is your knowledge of werewolves?"

Doggett did not expect that question. "You mean like that case you had in Browning, Montana back in 1994? Where you investigated the killing of a Native American male you believed to be a werewolf?"

"Sort of, there are as many types of werewolf legends around the world as there are vampire legends. The case in Montana, it was a Manitou that possessed the Native American, after his death it took over the rancher's son and changed him into a wolf-like creature during the full moon."

"Fox, where is this leading?"

"There was a full moon last night."

"And?"

"And the last thing Alex and I remember about last night was walking home from the Lone Gunmen's place. This morning we woke up inside of a cave. There was only one way into the cave. When we left, I notice two sets of wolf tracks in the soft soil going into the cave. There were no human footprints anywhere near the cave's entrance. So can you explain how Alex and I got into that cave? And where did the wolves go? There were no tracks of them leaving."

"You can't seriously believe that you and Krycek turned into werewolves last night?"

Mulder sighed and went back to watching the scenery.

"Of course you can," Doggett muttered under his breath.

They drove in silence for several minutes before Doggett sighed, "Okay, so, let's say that you did change into a wolf last night, do you have a theory about how or why?"

Mulder perked up. "I've been giving it some thought!"

He shifted in his seat so he could look at Doggett. "The grays have the ability to shape-shift. What if besides altering us sexually they also gave us the ability to shape-shift into wolves?"

"How?"

"John, they didn't alter me through surgery...they did something to me genetically."

Doggett frowned. "Genetic manipulation?"

"Some advanced method of gene-splicing, combining two completely different species into a new one."

"Okay, say I believe you, what do we do now?"

"The next full moon I want you and Walter to lock us up and see if we change." Mulder looked down at his hands, clenching his fingers. "John, I'm afraid we might be dangerous to you and Walter."

Doggett shook his head and placed his hand on Mulder's thigh. "No, you don't have it in you to take an innocent life. Now Krycek on the other hand...."

Swallowing, Mulder looked down at Doggett's hand on his thigh. He fought off feelings of arousal. This wasn't the time to get a hard on. "Alex isn't really that cold-blooded."

"I hope you're right."

~x~X~x~

The Rat, Panther, Wolf, Frog, Stork, Puppy, and Bear

Krycek looked at the pile of trees they'd cut down yesterday. They had used the horse to drag the timber out of the forest and into the open field in front of the cabin. All the tree trunks were the same circumference around.

"Hi, Alex," Bond greeted as he stepped through the bushes and into the front yard of the cabin followed by Frohike and Langly.

"Hi, guys, where's Byers?"

"He's back at the cabin. His feet aren't in any shape to help us build this room," Frohike said.

"Dude, can we get something to drink before we start?" Langly asked. He wasn't used to walking six miles. They had left the horse for Byers in case he needed it.

Krycek nodded. "Help yourselves to water or there's a fresh jar of sun tea on the counter in the kitchen."

"What do you want us to do first, Alex?" Bond asked as they walked toward the cabin.

"We need to prepare the foundation for the addition. In the barn, up in the loft, there is a pile of two by fours. We can start by bringing those down while the others work at clearing the land where the addition is going. They can then start stripping the bark from the trees and removing the branches, while we start on the foundation."

Ellison was coming out of the bedroom when the Gunmen entered the cabin.

"Who's the narc?" Langly asked.

Krycek introduced them. "Jim Ellison, meet Melvin Frohike, Richard Langly, and Jimmy Bond."

Ellison nodded at that strange trio. Mulder had told him and Sandburg about them yesterday. "So you're the Gunmen?" For some reason he expected them to be tougher-looking men.

"Our fame precedes us," Frohike quipped.

"How's Skinner doing?" Krycek asked.

"He's still running a high temperature. I gave him a couple of Tylenol," Ellison said.

Sandburg came in through the back door, carrying firewood.

"Hi, I'm Blair. You must be Langly, Frohike, and Jimmy...Mulder mentioned you'd be stopping out this morning. Where's Byers?" Sandburg thought Mulder's description of his friends was very accurate.

"Byers' feet are still bothering him, so he stayed back at the cabin," Frohike said.

Krycek interrupted, "Let's get started, we still have a couple hours before lunch." He wanted to have a lot done by the time Mulder and Doggett got back tomorrow afternoon. He didn't want Mulder stuck with too much work while he took off with Ellison and Sandburg for the Baltimore area. Krycek was having a bad feeling about taking both men with him.

They headed outside and divided into two groups. Krycek, Sandburg, and Bond hauling the wood down from the barn, while Ellison, Langly and Frohike started clearing the site beside the cabin where the room was going to go.

After an hour of intense work, Krycek pulled his sweaty shirt off and tossed it on the ground.

Sandburg's eyes fell on Krycek's upper torso. He was shocked at how skinny Krycek was. "Alex, have you been sick?"

Krycek looked down at his body and chuckled. "No. I spent the past four months as a prisoner onboard an alien spaceship."

"You're not joking are you?"

"No, I'm not."

"What did they do to you? What do they look like? How did you escape? Why did they take you?" Sandburg rattled off question after question.



"Blair, let's get back to work. I'll tell you about it when we have more time."

~x~X~x~

The Fox and Dog

Doggett eased on the brake...there was a military roadblock up ahead. They'd driven for over an hour and hadn't encountered any other cars until now. Off in the distance Doggett could see a tent city.

"Fox, do you have your handgun within easy reach?"

"Yeah."

He stopped the truck in front of two military jeeps blocking the road. "Is there a problem?" he asked after rolling down the window.

"We're under Marshall law. No unauthorized vehicles are allowed on the roads."

Doggett pulled out his badge from his jacket pocket; glad he hadn't left it behind. "Special Agent John Doggett, FBI, and this is my partner Special Agent Dick Long, we're heading down to Durham, North Carolina to assist the local law enforcement."

The Marine studied the badge then stepped away to talk to another marine. He came back and stuck a sticker on the corner of their windshield. "You may proceed, this sticker will allow you to travel freely for up to a week. After that you'll need to get the new sticker."

Doggett rolled up his window and continued down the highway.

Mulder rolled his eyes. "Dick Long?"

"Hey, I couldn't call you Fox Mulder, there's an APB out for your apprehension. The name was the only one I could come up with on such short notice." Doggett smirked as he took one hand off the wheel then used his finger to trace the shape of Mulder's penis through the fabric of his jeans down along his thigh. "You should try to keep yourself tucked in better, this is a major distraction."

Mulder bit his lower lip, as his jeans became uncomfortably tight. "I ran out of clean boxers."

"I could tell." Doggett chuckled, refocusing his attention on the road.

Mulder blushed. He'd run out of clean pants too, if he didn't keep his arousal in check. What had those alien bastards done to him? It didn't help that he was trapped inside a small space with Doggett and could smell the man's arousal. Doggett's musky male scent was having a heady affect on him. Mulder rolled down the window for some fresh air while he wondered what Doggett would taste like, if his penis would feel different in his mouth than Krycek's?

Mulder glanced down at Doggett's crotch...the man was obviously sporting. What harm would there be in having a taste?

The sound of Mulder's seatbelt being released made Doggett glance in his direction. "Fox, is something..." He stopped talking as Mulder placed his hand over his groin and fondled him.

"John, keep your eyes on the road."

"W-What are you doing?" Doggett asked as his zipper was pulled down and Mulder's fingers

freed his cock from his briefs.

"Practicing."

"Practicing?" Doggett moaned as Mulder stroked him.

"Yeah, I told Alex that I would practice my blowjob technique. You see I'm not very good, and...." Mulder bent and licked around the head of Doggett's cock. "Practice makes perfect," he completed before taking the first two inches of Doggett's cock into his mouth.

Doggett glanced down at Mulder's head in his lap then returned his attention to the road. This wasn't the first time that he'd been given a blowjob while driving, but it was the first time that he didn't think he'd be able to keep the truck on the road. Mulder was causing a wave of overwhelming sensations inside him from pleasure to uncontrollable lust. So he eased the truck over to the side of the highway and parked. His fingers laced through the soft strands of Mulder's hair, holding him in place as he tried to push more of his cock into that hot mouth.

Mulder was finding it easier to take Doggett's shaft into his mouth than it had been with Krycek. It wasn't that Doggett was smaller than Krycek. This time he didn't choke when the head hit the back of his throat. He relaxed and breathed in the heady scent of musk as he continued to suck on the large organ. It felt so right, he wondered if he'd even be able to get his mouth around Skinner's thick tool.

"Oh Jesus, Fox, that feels so good." Doggett's hips rocked as he thrust into Mulder's mouth. Mulder was doing so many delicious things to him with his mouth, teeth, tongue, and fingers.

Doggett cried out suddenly as he came explosively, spurting his release into Mulder's mouth. He enjoyed the sounds of Mulder swallowing his seed then the feel of the other man's tongue licking him clean as he laid bonelessly slumped in the driver's seat.

Mulder raised his head and looked up at Doggett as he licked the remaining fluid off his lush lips. "Mm, not bad, slightly...."

Doggett stopped the next words from passing Mulder's lips as he kissed him with all of the passion he was feeling.

After several minutes, they both were in need of air and Mulder wondered if he'd have a permanent steering wheel impression on his back.

"So I take it you found my technique not bad?"

Doggett chuckled. "It was far from bad, but I do believe you need a lot of practice."

Mulder tucked Doggett's flaccid penis back into his pants and zipped him back up. "Oh, I intend to practice a lot. Now shall we get on our way to your dad's?"

Doggett started the truck and eased it back onto the highway. "Fox, tonight I want you to fuck me."

Mulder's eyes widen in surprise. "What about your dad? Wouldn't he object to us having sex under his roof?"

Doggett smirked. "Considering how noisy you are during sex, I think we'll sleep out in the hired hands bunkhouse."

After another hour of driving they came up on a caravan of military vehicles. Off in the distance

there were more white tents, another refugee camp.

"It looks like the National Guard has been called out," Doggett said.

"You sound surprised."

"No, not really. It's just a shock to see what our country has become since the attack."

"I don't think I could live under military rule. I wonder how much of our government has survived?" Mulder said.

"We'll find out in good time, Fox."

~x~X~x~

## The Panther and Bear

Skinner made his way from the bedroom into the parlor. He couldn't stand lying in bed another moment more. A wave of dizziness struck him, causing him to pause until it passed, then he continued over to the bookshelf. It took him several minutes to select a book. Mulder had quite a few classic novels and books on the paranormal, mixed with his 'how to books'. Skinner sat on the recliner next to the pot-bellied stove with a book on mythology. He searched the index for any reference to werewolves. The dream he had last night had been too vivid. It reminded him of his out of body experience in 'Nam.

The sound of sawing and pounding outside the cabin Skinner found distracting as he tried to focus on reading the different werewolf legends.

"You're up. How are you feeling?"

Skinner looked up at Ellison. He'd been so involved in the book that he didn't hear the man come into the cabin.

"I feel like hell, but I couldn't stay in that bed any longer."

"I came in to see if you needed anything."

"I'm fine."

"How about a glass of water? I have the feeling, Mulder and John will be pissed off if you died of dehydration."

Skinner nodded. "Okay, a glass of water I can handle."

Ellison walked into the kitchen and filled a glass with cold water from the tap. He carried it back into the parlor and handed it to Skinner.

"What are you reading?" he asked.

Skinner closed the book and took a sip of water. "I had a strange dream last night...it just seemed too real. I'm just trying to see if I could figure out what it meant."

"I've had a few of those. Do you want to tell me about it?" Ellison sat on the sofa.

"I dreamed I was a wolf, hunting with my mate. The dream was strangely comforting."

Ellison wondered if he should tell Skinner about what he had overheard between Mulder and Krycek, and the tracks he'd seen.

"Comforting?" Ellison asked.

Skinner took another sip of water. "In my dream the wolf I was hunting with was Mulder."

"You have feelings for Mulder?"

"Yes," Skinner said without hesitation.

Ellison didn't even bat an eye at Skinner's confession. Not after how solicitous Mulder had been to Skinner this morning. "You're aware that Mulder has feelings for Krycek?"

Skinner set the water glass down, frowning. "I've known for years that Krycek was in love with Mulder. It was mainly one-sided on Krycek's part until Mulder was abducted."

"You're not bothered that Mulder is involved with Krycek?"

"Do I like it? No. But there's nothing I can do about it. Mulder's his own man, and it's not like we've been involved for more than a few days." Skinner closed his eyes. He was feeling so weak. The book slid from his fingers, and hit the floor, as he passed out.

~x~X~x~

## The Fox and Dog

Paul Doggett hurried out of the barn when he heard the truck drive into the yard. His eyes widened when he saw whose truck it was.

"Mike, its Johnny!" he called over his shoulder into the barn then hurried over to the truck as Doggett was climbing out of the driver's seat.

Paul Doggett wrapped his son in a bear hug, lifting him off his feet. "Damn, Johnny, I thought you were dead!"

"I'm fine, Pa."

"Where have you been?" Doggett senior asked as another man who looked a lot like John Doggett ran out of the barn.

"Johnny!" He ran over and hugged Doggett, patting him on the back.

Doggett smiled and returned his older brother's hug, before turning his attention back to his dad. "I've been staying with some friends. Pa, Mike, I'd like you to meet Fox Mulder. He prefers to be called Mulder. Fox, I'd like you to meet my father, Paul, and my brother, Michael."

They exchanged handshakes. "It's a pleasure to meet you, Mr. Doggett, Mike."

"Fox used to work at the FBI, he now has a small place up in the Blue Ridge Mountains. I've been staying with him and two other men."

"Well you're home now, son, we have plenty of room for you."

"Pa, I'm not staying. I've come to let you and Mike know that I'm all right, and to pick up some supplies for some friends up in the mountains. I wanted Fox to see your farm, he's raising

chickens and has a couple of cows."

Paul was visibly disappointed that his son wasn't staying. "Okay, Johnny. You're a grown man. I hope you can stay for a few days."

"Pa, one of the men we're staying with is ill...we need to leave tomorrow."

"Mike, show Mulder around the farm while I talk to your brother," Doggett senior said gruffly.

Mulder recognized that tone; he'd heard it often when his own dad was pissed off.

"Sure, Pa. Come along, Mulder, I was just hooking up the cows to be milked."

After Mulder was out of earshot, Paul turned back to his son. "What's going on, Johnny? Why are you putting friends before your family?"

"Pa, I worked with these men. One of them is my former boss. We made a pact to fight the aliens together and to watch each other's backs. You and Mike have been running this farm for years without my help."

"Fight the aliens!" Paul scoffed. "Do you really think you'll ever see one?"

"I already have, last year. My friend, Mulder was abducted, tortured, and killed by them."

Paul looked toward the barn. "What do you mean killed, he looked plenty alive to me?"

"We buried him then dug him up three months later. It seemed he wasn't really dead, but in a state of suspended animation and on his way to changing into an alien replicant, but we were able to stop the process." Why was he telling his Pa about this weird shit? There was no way he'd believe it, but the words just seemed to flow out of him.

"Boy, you've known about aliens all of this time?"

"No. I didn't believe they really existed until the morning they attacked. I seemed to have your skepticism ingrained into me."

"This Mulder did he know about them?"

"Mulder's been fighting for over a decade to uncover what our government knew about them. It's too bad he was undermined every step of the way by people inside, and outside, of the bureau."

"So the government knew about them?"

"Yes."

"You trust Mulder?"

"He's a good man, Pa, one of the best."

"Okay, Johnny, let's go inside and talk over a cup of coffee. You can tell me what supplies your friends need," Paul said.

"Then you're no longer mad?"

"No. Your friend seems to be worthy of your help."

"Thanks, Pa."

~x~X~x~

The Rat, Panther, Wolf, and Bear

Steam rose off the surface of the bath water as Krycek leaned back and closed his eyes. He sighed as the hot water worked its way into his stiff muscles. It had been a tough day, but they had gotten a lot done. The floorboards were laid and the bark had been stripped off all of the trees and the timber cut down to size. He yawned. Good thing he was so tired. At least he'd fall asleep faster. He wasn't looking forward to sharing the bed with Skinner. If the sofa weren't so short and uncomfortable he'd sleep out in the parlor.

In the other room, Ellison sat on the sofa with the cat curled up beside to him. He was studying the book on log home construction. Earlier that day, he had helped Skinner back to bed after the man had passed out. It worried him that Skinner wasn't getting any better. Tomorrow, he'd check with Sean to see if there was a doctor nearby.

"Coffee," Sandburg said, holding a mug in front of Ellison's face.

Ellison took it gratefully. "Thanks."

Sandburg sat next to him and reached over his legs to pet the cat. "Did you ever imagine a week ago that we'd end up here, helping to build a room onto a small cabin while our planet is being invaded by aliens."

"Chief, I'm only glad we're here together, remember you weren't going to join me at the cabin until Friday."

"Don't remind me, I would have been in Cascade when the aliens attacked. I have you to thank for convincing me to leave with you a week early."

Ellison placed the book on the table so he could wrap his arm around his lover's shoulders. He sipped his coffee as Sandburg snuggled up against his side. "I did it for purely selfish reasons, Chief. I couldn't imagine going a week without your sweet ass."

"Oh brother, Jim, you're so not romantic."

Ellison only smirked and continued to sip from the mug.

The bathroom door opened and Krycek stepped out, wearing sweatpants and an undershirt. "It's free if you want to use it."

"Thanks, Alex, I could use a shower. Do you want to share, big guy?"

Ellison nodded. "Do you need to ask? Let me check on Walter first and see if he needs to use the bathroom again," he said, handing Sandburg the coffee mug, he stood and headed for the bedroom.

Krycek walked into the kitchen. He used a bread knife to slice a piece of bread off the loaf, then he drizzled some honey on it from the honey jar Mulder had on the counter. If he had more energy he'd make a cup of hot tea to go with it.

Sandburg carried the coffee mug to the sink and washed it. He yawned. "Alex, I believe I'm going to sleep like the dead tonight."

"Yeah, same here. But doesn't it feel good to see the results of a hard day of work?" Krycek said.

"It does actually."

Ellison stepped out of the bedroom. "He's asleep. Let's grab that shower, Chief."

Krycek swallowed the mouthful of bread before speaking. "Guys, can you extinguish the lamps after your shower? I'm turning in now."

"Sure, Alex. We'll see you in the morning," Sandburg said, grabbing the duffel bag with their clothes.

Krycek finished the rest of his snack as the other two men walked into the bathroom and closed the door. He washed his hands at the kitchen sink then headed into the bedroom. Skinner was lying on his side near the edge of the bed. Krycek put another log on the fire in the hearth then climbed into bed. He was asleep the moment his head hit the pillow.

In the bathroom, the two men had stripped and stepped into the large bathtub, pulling the shower curtains closed.

Ellison stood behind Sandburg, he couldn't resist the pretty sight of his lover's naked body. He lovingly pushed the long, thick hair out of the way as he bent and started sucking on the side of his lover's throat as the water washed over them.

"Hmm, that feels so good, Jim." Sandburg arched back when Ellison started playing with his nipples. His cock swelled with each pinch and twist.

This was the part of sex that Ellison enjoyed the most, when he could smell, hear, and feel his lover's body respond to him. He reached for the bottle of bath oil sitting on the wire shelf tied to the shower pipe. Squirting a little into his hand, he started spreading it between his lover's buttocks. He slipped a finger into the tight puckered opening, working the muscles tenderly until they loosened and Sandburg was moaning his need while pushing his ass sluttishly back on his finger. He inserted a second finger and worked them in and out before replacing them with the head of his cock.

Ellison pushed inside past the tight ring of muscles that squeezed his shaft in an exquisite embrace. He had one arm wrapped around Sandburg's chest while the other sought out his erection.

Sandburg spread his legs wantonly until his feet touched the sides of the bathtub. It was like a steam bath with the shower curtain sealing in the heat of the hot water. Vapors rose off their skin. Sandburg felt total bliss at being filled by his lover's thick cock. There were no walls to grab onto as Ellison pounded into him, only his lover's strong arm kept Sandburg on his feet.

Ellison held on tightly to Sandburg's slick body as he continued to thrust into him while angling his thrusts to hit the younger man's prostate...each time his lover's body shook with pleasure. "Come for me, Blair," Ellison purred, stroking his lover's cock.

Sandburg fought off his release for as long as he could, he didn't want this moment to end. He enjoyed having Ellison's strong arms around his body and the press of his chest against his back.

"Aaughh!" Milky strands of semen spurted out of Sandburg's cock hitting the shower curtain as he came. He's anal muscle clamped down on the hard shaft penetrating him, and he felt Ellison stiffen behind him and then the force of his lover's release as it pumped into his body.

They were both breathing heavily as they sunk to their knees in the shower.

"Oh God, Jim, that was great."

"I aim to please."

~x~X~x~

## The Fox and Dog

Mulder walked around the small bedroom in the bunkhouse. In the building there was one large room with ten bunks, a small kitchen, a shower, and this bedroom used by the Doggett family's foreman. The foreman had been out of town when the aliens attacked, and the small crew of workers for the fall harvest wasn't scheduled to arrive until next week.

Paul Doggett now expected most of the crop would rot in the field because even if they did harvest it, they had nowhere to send it for processing. So he was more than happy to give his son as much food and supplies as he could haul including a large trailer to hook up to the back of his truck. They had started loading it and the back of the truck earlier in the day.

"It's not much but at least its quiet and clean," Doggett said, watching Mulder from the doorway.

"John, your father wasn't too pleased that we're sleeping out here instead of in the main house. I think he suspects."

"No. He bought the story I told him about you waking in the middle of the night screaming from nightmares since your abduction, and that you didn't want to disturb the him or Mike." Doggett hugged Mulder from behind. "Now if you make any loud noises that they can hear back at the house they'll blame it on your nightmares."

"You know, I've never fucked another man," Mulder said as he licked his dry lips.

Doggett chuckled. "I'm happy to be your first at something."

Mulder smiled sheepishly, leaning back into Doggett's embrace. "You were the first man that I kissed."

Doggett smiled. "Fox, you're going to enjoy it almost as much as I am."

"Is it really that enjoyable to get fucked up the ass?"

"I thought Skinner...ooh," Doggett said as he realized Skinner hadn't fucked Mulder through his anus...this was going to take some getting used to. "Well it's pleasurable, but I couldn't describe it, you'll have to experience it for yourself."

Mulder turned around in Doggett's arms and circled his arms around his neck. "That could be another first for us."

Doggett's arms wrapped around Mulder's back as their lips met in a fiery kiss. They continued kissing as they tore at each other's clothes, their lips only separating briefly. By the time they fell upon the small bed they were both naked. They wrestled around kissing and caressing each other's hard body for several minutes. Doggett nipped Mulder's earlobe as the other man's fingers wrapped around his cock and started stroking him.

"Jesus, Fox, I need you in me now!"



"Don't we need lubricant and a condom?"

"In my shaving kit!"

Mulder rolled off him and hurried across the room to his bag. He found the items and carried them back to the bed. Doggett was on his knees with his thighs spread and his forehead resting on his forearms, so Mulder climbed on the bed behind him. Mulder squirted the lubricant onto his hand to warm before spreading it down Doggett's crease. He smeared more lube on his finger and pushed it passed the tight sphincter muscle. Mulder pumped his finger in and out, surprised at the tightness and heat. After he felt the muscle relax, Mulder added another finger and more lube.

"John, you're so tight, I don't want to hurt you."

"You won't."

"I'm pretty big."

Doggett chuckled. "I know."

Mulder patted Doggett's ass affectionately then tore open the condom and rolled it on his large erection. He added more lube then positioned the head of his cock against the small opening. It seemed too small...he didn't want to hurt Doggett.

"Fox, would you just fuck me already?"

Mulder held onto Doggett hips and pushed in, it took a couple of moments before the hole parted and the head of his cock popped inside. He heard Doggett gasp.

"John, I didn't hurt you?"

"You are pretty big. No, you didn't hurt me...give me a second."

Mulder breathed a sigh of relief and waited until he could feel the trembling from his lover's body subside, then he slowly started pushing more of his cock into the tight heat. It felt wonderful to Mulder, even more so than the women he had fucked. He started to slowly thrust in and out as his arousal started to become even more intense. Mulder was aware of the dampness between his thighs as he thrust into Doggett.

Doggett was moaning and pushing back in time with Mulder's thrusts. When the former agent hit his prostate, his body spasm with pleasure and he clamped down on the large shaft penetrating him as his orgasm spilled out of him. He felt Mulder's mouth on his shoulder as his lover started tenderly nipping at his flesh while his thrusts became more frantic. It wasn't long and Doggett felt Mulder's release fill his bowels. Then he felt a sharp bite on his neck next to his shoulder blade. The pain didn't register at first; he was still floating in a blissful cloud of pleasure. Then the room started to spin and he felt Mulder's tongue tenderly lapping at his wound.

~x~X~x~

The Rat, Panther, Wolf, and Bear

Blue Ridge Mountains

Wednesday, September 25, 2001

The rooster crowing woke Ellison, while Sandburg remained dead to the world. A smile spread across Ellison's lips as he looked down at his lover, how many hours had he spent over the years watching Sandburg sleep? It was a personal pleasure that he'd never tell Sandburg about.

Ellison tossed off the blankets and stood. He had to get dressed and check on Skinner. He thought about waking Sandburg and asking if he'd make breakfast, but decided to allow his young lover to get some needed sleep. Yesterday they all worked hard and today they would be working equally hard. On top of it, they were driving down to Baltimore, no telling what they'd run into out there.

He climbed down the ladder and walked across the room to the bathroom. Krycek was just stepping out of the bedroom.

"Morning, Alex. How's Walter?"

"Sleeping. He didn't stir all night, I had to check a couple of times to see if he was still breathing."

"Alex, I'm going to head out to see Sean after we finish the chores. I want to find out if there's a doctor in the area."

"That's a long walk. Why don't you wait until Fox and John get back with the horse?"

"One of us is going to have to walk anyway--"

"I was thinking about that and feel it would be better if just two of us went."

"I need Blair with me."

"Mulder explained your sentinel abilities to me. I think I'll be able to help you focus. Jim, you were in Special Forces. You know the importance of getting in and out of an area without drawing too much attention. We'll need to do that tonight."

Ellison knew Krycek was right. During a brief break yesterday he'd learned all about Krycek's CIA experience and training. Sandburg didn't have the training that he and Krycek did. No telling what they'd encounter later today and tonight. It's not that Ellison didn't think his lover could handle any situation that might crop up he just didn't want to chance losing him. A team of two would be better than three.

"Okay, I agree, Alex. It's going to be tough convincing Blair of the same thing."

Krycek nodded. "I'm going to put on a pot of coffee and start breakfast. How do you like your eggs?"

"Scrambled firm," Ellison said, before stepping into the bathroom.

Sandburg came down from the loft as Krycek was dishing up their breakfast.

"You're just in time for breakfast, Blair. I hope you like your eggs scrambled," Krycek said.

"I've learned to like them scrambled," Sandburg said, sitting next to Ellison at the table.

"Chief, Alex and I were talking."

"Oh great, I can tell by the tone of your voice I'm not going to like this."

"We'd like you to stay here while Alex and I go to Baltimore."

"No way! We're a team!"

"Blair, this assignment would work best with two people, three might put it at risk."

"You're just trying to protect me. I don't need protection, Jim."

Krycek rolled his eyes then decided to play the bad guy. "Blair, as I told Jim, I'm only taking one of you along with me. I don't care which one, you chose."

Sandburg glared at him. "You're not giving me any choice. Of course Jim would be better on this type of an assignment than me."

"Okay, so it's decided," Krycek said, spreading blackberry jam on his toast.

Ellison reached over and touched Sandburg's hand. "I'm sorry, Chief."

Sandburg looked down dejected. "You better not get hurt."

"I'll be careful, Blair."

~x~X~x~

The Fox and Dog

Doggett opened his eyes to the harsh glare of sunlight pouring in through the window. Mulder was sitting on the bed sipping a mug of hot coffee, watching him. There was a look of concern mixed with love in his beautiful hazel eyes.

"John, I thought you'd never wake up. You must have been working too hard."

"What time is it?" Doggett asked, feeling achy all over.

"Ten o'clock in the morning."

"Oh fuck, we promised Alex we'd be back by three."

"We have plenty of time."

"Fox, it's a three hour drive and we still need to finish loading the trailer," Doggett said, frantically pulling on his clothes while ignoring the cold chills racing through his body.

"It's done, John. Your dad, brother, and I finished a half-hour ago. Mike even gave us a present."

"What?"

"Two mountain bikes. They ought to come in handy going back and forth between the Gunmen's place and the ranger station." Mulder noticed how pale his lover looked so placed his hand on Doggett's forehead.

"You're running a fever."

"Fox, I'm not feeling too well. I hope I'm not coming down with what Walter has."

"Oh great. If you are, then I'm next," Mulder sighed. "C'mon, let's say goodbye to your family so I can get you back home to bed."

"I hope Walter is on his feet when we get back," Doggett said, following Mulder out the door.

His father and brother were covering the open trailer with a waterproof tarp.

Paul nodded at his son. "Johnny, Mulder was telling us how hard you've been working since the alien attack and the risk you all took going to the military base at Stapleton. I'm proud of you, son. We had an army officer stop out at our farm two days ago. The man wandered around here like he owned it."

"What did he want, Pa?"

"They're placing farms on the top of the list for fuel distribution right after the defense industry."

"Did he say anything else?"

"No. He was a closed-lipped little weasel. Johnny, I've put some smoked hams and a solar food dehydrator on the trailer. I figured you could use it to dry vegetables, herbs, and fruit to help get you and your friends through the winter. Mike has filled your gas tank so you're all set to go."

"Thanks, Pa," Doggett hugged him and his brother. "I'll try to get down here again in a couple of weeks and help you with the harvest."

"Bye, son. Mulder, take care of my boy and yourself," Paul said.

Mulder nodded. "I will, Mr. Doggett. It was nice meeting you and Mike. And thanks for the tour of your farm. I learned a lot." He climbed into the driver's seat while Doggett took the passenger side.

Once they were back on the main highway, Mulder turned to Doggett. "John, your brother filled a thermos with hot coffee and there's a box of pop tarts in the paper bag, if you're hungry. He said you used to love them as a boy."

"I still do. Fox, you wouldn't happen to have any Tylenol on you?"

Mulder reached over and caressed the side of Doggett's face with the backs of his fingers. "I'm sorry, John, I wish I did."

Doggett grabbed Mulder's hand and locked their fingers together. "If it's all right with you, I think I'll try to grab some more sleep."

"Go ahead. I'll wake you when we get there."

It surprised Mulder how intense his feelings were for Skinner, Doggett, and Krycek. To his shock, he'd fallen in love with all three men. He remembered Krycek's words about lowering his walls and allowing himself to love someone. What had he been thinking? How had he gotten himself into this situation and why had it happened so suddenly? It was only a matter of time before he had his heart ripped out and was alone again. Sighing, Mulder glanced over at Doggett sleeping restlessly at his side. A soft smile spread across Mulder's lips. Well until that happened he was going to enjoy himself for once.

Nearly two hours later Mulder came upon a roadblock, this time it wasn't the military, but a gang of armed men. They chose the ideal spot for it, on one side of the road was a steep incline and on the other a drop off. There was no room to turn with the trailer hitched to the back of the truck.

"John, we're in trouble."

Doggett started awake. "What is it, Fox?" He opened his eyes and looked at the vehicles blocking the road. "Bandits?"

"Yeah, those are my thoughts."

"Out of the truck!" the leader shouted.

Doggett reached into the backseat for his assault rifle then sprang out of the truck. If he wasn't so groggy from being sick, he might not have been so careless. He didn't notice the armed man behind the truck until it was too late, and a bullet ripped through his shoulder spinning him around. He landed on his back in the dirt just a couple of feet away from the drop off.

"NOOO! JOHN!"

Mulder's vision narrowed as hatred and rage tore through his entire being. He suddenly found himself on all fours. Mulder launched himself at the throat of the stunned leader, ripping it out, killing the man instantly. Blood flew everywhere as he attacked the man who had shot his lover. He felt the sharp sting of bullets hitting his body and knew instinctually that they couldn't harm him. By the time he was finished one of the vehicles with several men had fled and the rest lay dead. Their savaged bodies were scattered around him.

Doggett was lying on his back. He had watched most of what transpired, except he had missed seeing Mulder change into a wolf. He shuddered as the large brown wolf stood over him, expecting to meet with the same fate as the bandits. Then it started licking at the bullet wound, surprisingly the blood stopped flowing and the wound closed over. It turned him on his side and started licking the entry wound. Then suddenly, it was no longer the wolf licking him but Mulder.

"Fox, you are a werewolf," he said weakly.

"I know, John. I tried to tell you yesterday." Mulder scooped Doggett up in his strong arms and laid him gently on the backseat of the truck. "The bullet passed clean through...you'll be fine. Now try to get some sleep. I'll get us home as quickly as possible." He kissed Doggett lovingly on the forehead, then retrieved his rifle.

Mulder frowned at the bodies scattered around them. He only had a vague uneasy memory of tearing out their throats.

~x~X~x~

## The Bear and Wolf

Sandburg sat on the closed toilet seat reading while Skinner took a shower. Krycek and Ellison had left on foot for the ranger station three hours ago, hoping to be there when Mulder and Doggett arrived. They also wanted to talk to Sean about getting a doctor out to see Skinner who wasn't getting any better. The Gunmen had just left a few minutes ago. They had half of the small log room built.

Sandburg's attention shifted between a book on Forensic Anthropology and Skinner. He hoped that large Assistant Director didn't pass out again, since unlike Ellison, he'd have a bitch of a time wrestling the man back to bed.

Skinner in the meantime was washing the sweat off his chest with a bar of soap and praying that he didn't get dizzy. He frowned as he looked at the white bar of soap covered in hair. "What the hell?" he muttered.

"Walter, is anything wrong?"

He ignored Sandburg while rubbing his hand over his chest. The hairs detached themselves,

covering his hand until the spray washed them off and down the drain.

"Walter?"

"I'm okay...." He frowned suddenly as the realization of what was happening to him made his heart seize up. "Oh fuck!" Skinner shut off the water and pulled open the shower curtain. "Hand me a towel."

"What's wrong?" Sandburg's eyes fell on the missing patches of chest hair then his attention focused inside the tub. It was covered with hair. He nervously handed Skinner the towel and prayed that whatever was making the man lose his hair wasn't contagious.

As Skinner dried himself, more body hair fell out. It was like a nightmare...a painful reminder of when he had started going bald.

"I don't know how, but I think Mulder infected me."

"Infected you with what?"

Ellison had not gotten around to telling Sandburg about the conversation he'd overheard between Mulder and Krycek. So the young man remained clueless.

"I'm not sure. The aliens turned Mulder and Krycek into hermaphrodites, one of their symptoms was they lost all of their coarse body hair." Skinner held onto the sink as his stomach rolled, threatening to spill the small lunch Frohike had gotten him to eat.

"Hermaphrodites! Oh man! How did the aliens change them?"

"I'm not sure. They didn't go into detail. All I know was what Krycek told us, after the aliens released Fox he was sick for five weeks while going through the change. The aliens hadn't been aware that their experiment was successful, until later," Skinner said as he started pulling on a clean pair of sweatpants.

"Then it wasn't through surgery." Sandburg's full lips pursed in thought. "It had to have been on a genetic level, something that would have taken time for it to change his entire system."

"How is that possible?" Skinner struggled to get his undershirt over his head. His arms ached from raising them that high.

"I don't know. I'm an anthropologist, not a biologist."

"Blair, I need to sit down."

"Oh...okay, man, let me help you." Sandburg wrapped his arm around Skinner's waist and helped him into the parlor over to the recliner. "Stay here, I'll get you a pair of warm socks for your feet."

Sandburg came back with the pair of socks and pulled them on Skinner's feet. "I'm going to make you something that should make you feel better."

"What?"

"Just a concoction I picked up down in South America. I noticed Mulder had most of the herbs in his garden, and I picked a couple more ingredients in the woods."

"This isn't going to poison me?" Skinner asked skeptically.

"Nope, its all organic, nothing toxic." Sandburg smiled reassuringly.

"Okay, I doubt that it could make me feel any worse."

"Cool, man! I'll whip it up and be right back, " Sandburg said enthusiastically, he could never get Ellison to take one of his organic remedies.

After Sandburg had crossed the room to the kitchen, Skinner returned his thoughts back to what was happening to him. Was he only losing his body hair or was he changing into a hermaphrodite? Skinner couldn't accept the latter. While he might find Mulder's dual sex highly erotic that didn't mean he wanted to be anything other than a full-blooded male himself. If Mulder had somehow infected him, would Mulder be able to infect anyone else? How did Mulder infect him? Was it from having unprotected sex with him? And what about Krycek? Would he be infectious, too? Skinner sighed, too many questions and not enough answers.

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Chapter 6: With Six You Get Eggrolls by Jo B

Author's Notes:

Ellison and Krycek come to regret not taking Sandburg with them on their scavenger trip to Baltimore.

The Fox, Rat, Dog, and Panther

Blue Ridge Mountains

Thursday, September 26, 2001

2:00 p.m.

"Fox, he's been shot! What the hell happened?" Krycek asked when he caught a glimpse of Doggett's bloodstained shirt as Mulder helped him out of the truck.

"Bandits. They had the road blocked."

Krycek got on the other side of Doggett and helped Mulder get him up the steps, into the ranger station, and over to the sofa. Ellison and Sean followed them into the building. The burly ranger hurried toward the back room to get his first aid kit.

"Hey, Sean, do you have any painkillers?" Doggett called weakly.

"Yep. Hang on a sec, buddy, and I'll get them!"

Mulder stood fidgeting beside the sofa. "Alex, you and Jim will need to take the truck. The sticker on the windshield will get you through any military roadblocks." He crossed the room to the kitchen to get Doggett a glass of water.

"What happened, Fox?" Krycek asked quietly, sensing an anxiousness in Mulder's movements.

"I told you! We ran into a roadblock on the way home!" Mulder clenched his hands into fists then snapped angrily, "One of the bastards shot John!"

"Fox." Krycek placed his hand cautiously on Mulder's shoulder.

Mulder shrugged his hand off then hugged himself...trembling. "Oh God, Alex, I changed...I killed them...ripped their throats out."

"Changed?"

Sean handed Doggett a bottle of Tylenol and placed the first aid kit on the table.

"He changed into a large wolf," Doggett said weakly. His hand shook as he opened the childproof lid.

Sean and Ellison exchanged disbelieving looks.

Krycek glanced quickly at Doggett then back at Mulder. "In broad daylight? Do you remember how you did it?"

"No. I barely remember anything that happened. Only that I was angry when that bastard shot John." Mulder filled a glass with water as he talked then carried it over to Doggett.

Ellison was sitting on the sofa next to Doggett, looking at his shoulder wound. It was scabbed over. "How did it heal so quickly?"

"It stopped bleeding when the wolf started licking it," Doggett answered. "It still hurts like a bitch."

"Then he wasn't dangerous?" Krycek asked.

"No, but he scared the shit out of me, since I didn't realize it was Mulder until he changed back." Doggett took the two capsules with the water.

"There must be some healing properties in his saliva," Ellison speculated while not sure how much of their story he believed.

"Jim, how's Walter doing?" Mulder asked.

"He's not getting any better. Sean is going to contact a doctor in town to see if he'll come out and examine Walter."

"I think John has caught whatever Walter has," Mulder said worriedly, regretting leaving Skinner while he was sick.

"Maybe we should stay here," Krycek said.

Doggett shook his head. "No, Alex, we need that radio and the additional supplies. I doubt that there'll be too much left to scavenge if we wait too long. Not if there are more groups of men forming into gangs."

"Sean, can we store our supplies in your stable until we can haul it back to our place?" Mulder asked.

"Sure, Mulder. C'mon, I'll help you unload the truck and trailer."

"John, are you going to be okay alone?" Mulder asked.

"I'll be fine. Just hurry back." Doggett laid on his side on the sofa and closed his eyes.

The other four men headed outside to unload the vehicle.

~x~X~x~

The Fox, Wolf, Dog, and Bear

The sun was waning in the western sky when Mulder reached the cabin with Doggett sitting in front of him in the saddle. Mulder's strong arms held Doggett upright as the agent leaned back against his chest.



Sandburg came out of the cabin when he heard the horse ride up.

"Mulder, what's wrong with John?"

"He's sick and is recovering from a gunshot wound," Mulder said, lowering Doggett down from the horse and into Sandburg's waiting arms.

Doggett stood wobbly with one arm thrown over Sandburg's shoulders as Mulder dismounted and tied the horse to the post.

They had Doggett between them as they helped him inside the cabin.

"What happened?" Skinner asked as he rose from the recliner.

"We ran into some trouble coming home, and John picked up whatever virus you have," Mulder said as he and Sandburg guided Doggett into the bedroom and sat him down on the bed.

Skinner followed them. "Fox, did you have sex with him?"

Mulder blushed. "Ah, yeah." He found that he couldn't lie to Skinner nor did he want to.

"Why, Walter?" Doggett asked as Mulder helped him off with his bloodstained shirt and undershirt.

Skinner sat tiredly on the bed. Sandburg's organic brew had made him feel better for the past few hours, but now he was feeling sick and achy again. "I think Fox infected us."

Mulder tensed at Skinner's accusation, but continued helping Doggett off with his clothes.

"He's not sick. How can he infect us?" Doggett raised his hips as Mulder worked his jeans off.

"John, can you name one disease that causes someone to lose their body hair?"

"You're losing your body hair?" Doggett exclaimed.

Mulder frowned and looked down at his own lightly haired forearm. "Walter, you think you're changing into a hermaphrodite because of me?"

"I don't know, Fox. All I know is that I'm losing my body hair and I feel like hell...weren't those your symptoms?"

"Well, yeah, but I was abducted and the aliens did something to me. How can it be possible--" Mulder paused as his mind recalled all of the different werewolf legends, in all of them a new werewolf was created when a human survived being bitten. Maybe they exchanged DNA during sex and it started a reaction in Skinner's and Doggett's bodies?

"Fox, it's not possible." Doggett touched his hand.

Mulder pulled away and stood, he didn't think it would end so soon. He carried Doggett's clothes to the doorway, planning to add them to the large pile of dirty clothes by the washer. "I'm sorry...I had no idea..." His fingers clutched the fabric in his hands as he paused in the doorway and fought off tears. "I suppose you both hate me now."

"Fox, I don't hate you," Doggett said as he struggled to his feet.

Skinner growled, "Fox, it's not like you infected us intentionally!"

Sandburg stood at the foot of the bed watching them. Doggett made it two steps before collapsing.

Mulder dropped the clothes and caught Doggett before he hit the floor. He then scooped him up in his strong arms and carried him to the bed.

"Blair, can you get the bedcovers?"

"Ah, sure, man." Sandburg hurried to pull the blankets down as Skinner used the bedpost to pull himself to his feet. Sandburg stood back as Mulder laid Doggett on the mattress.

"Blair, can you go into the bathroom and bring back a washcloth and a towel? I'd like to wash the dried blood off John." Mulder smoothed his hand over Doggett's forehead then looked over at Skinner.

"C'mon, Walter, let's get you to bed, before you pass out on me, too."

Skinner was feeling weak and dizzy as Mulder took his arm and helped him to the other side of the bed. "Fox, were you really this sick for five weeks? How did you manage on your own?"

"I spent most of my time between the sofa and the bathroom and lost a lot of weight. Frohike came over during the second week; he wanted to see why I wasn't returning his calls or answering my phone. He wanted to call Scully, after he got a good look at me, or take me to the hospital but I wouldn't let him. I finally had to tell him about being abducted again." Mulder smiled as he pulled the blanket over Skinner. "Frohike took care of me until I was better then helped me find this place."

"I'm glad you had him, Fox."

"I am, too. We became closer in those weeks...more than I ever was with my parents." Mulder sighed and sat on the edge of the bed. "I really am sorry, Walter. If I had any idea that I could infect you I'd never would have slept with you."

Sandburg returned with the items from the bathroom and started washing Doggett.

Skinner took Mulder's hand in his. "I was mad as hell at you earlier, Fox, I don't want to change into a hermaphrodite. But, to be honest, I'm not sure that even if I'd known that sleeping with you could infect me, that I wouldn't have slept with you anyway. I've wanted you for a long time."

Mulder breathed a sigh of relief. "Walter, does it bother you that I slept with John?"

"Yes and no. I'd prefer to have you all to myself, but I can understand your attraction to John. I'm attracted to him myself."

"Really, Walt?" Doggett said.

"Hey, I thought you were unconscious?" Skinner glanced over at Doggett.

"I was briefly." Doggett yawned. "Think of all of the fun we could have had in your office if I'd only known."

"I don't mind if you want to have sex with each other," Mulder said.

"Are you sure, Fox?"

Mulder chuckled, feeling better than he had earlier. "Well considering, it would be a little hypocritical of me if I did. Of course I expect my fair share of both of your time."

Sandburg shook his head. "You, guys, are too much. I know I wouldn't want to share Jim with another man. No way."

Skinner closed his eyes. "Kid, someday you and Jim might meet someone you both love."

Mulder stood. "I need to get Ares bedded down in the stable and see about milking the cows. When I get back I'll fix us something light to eat."

"Frohike and Jimmy milked the cows before they left. Let me do the cooking, Mulder. Why don't you rest after taking care of the horse?" Sandburg said.

Mulder nodded. "Thanks, Blair. I really appreciate the help."

~x~X~x~

### The Rat and Panther

To Ellison's relief, they made good time driving to the outskirts of Baltimore. He was having a hard time controlling his arousal as he sat trapped in the truck next to Krycek. Only by focusing on a mental image of Sandburg had stopped him from sexually attacking Krycek. Ellison looked toward the ruined city, where after almost a week, fires still burned. Several buildings in the suburban neighborhood they were driving through were destroyed.

"Shit, it's worse than I imagined it would be," Ellison said.

"You think this is bad, you should see D.C." Krycek took the back streets, avoiding rubble as he pulled into the alley behind the outdoors shop. He wanted to keep their truck and trailer out of sight just in case any military patrols drove by.

Krycek pocketed the keys then popped the hood on the truck and disconnected the battery cable. "Just in case," he said.

Ellison sniffed the air and listened for any human noises. He flinched as his nose picked up the sickening scent of dead bodies. "We haven't seen anyone since we drove through the last town. I don't sense anyone nearby...at least no one that's alive."

"It hasn't been a week since they attacked. Most people are still fleeing." Krycek tried the backdoor and found it locked, so he took out the lock pick set he found in Mulder's dresser. It didn't take long to pick the lock. Inside the building it was hot and musty smelling. There was no power. At least the sun hadn't set yet, so they still had some light to see by coming in through the large barred windows.

"Let's hurry, it will be dark soon, and I have a couple of other stops I'd like to make."

They split, Ellison hitting the clothing section, while Krycek went in search of the Ham radios and a battery powered generator.

Ellison grabbed a shopping cart and started filling it with winter clothing. Krycek found the radios and hauled two sets out to the truck. Next he found the generators and with Ellison's help they loaded one on the trailer. Ellison already had several bags of clothes in the backseat of the truck as Krycek started giving him a hand with the clothing. Mulder had Krycek memorize everyone's sizes, particularly his Gunmen friends; they barely made it out of D.C. with their lives much less

extra clothing.

Krycek tossed several pairs of hiking boots into a paper bag then placed it in the shopping cart along with bags filled with jeans, and flannel, moleskin, and denim shirts. Ellison returned from hauling ten winter parkas and snow pants out to the truck.

"Christmas in September," Krycek quipped, grabbing a pile of boxers, briefs, and boxer-briefs from the shelf, along with dozens of packages of socks and undershirts.

Ellison headed over to the hunting and fishing section and selected a couple of bow and arrow sets, and several hunting knives.

"Jim, can you grab some sleeping bags and backpacks? I'll get a couple of tents, no telling when they'll come in handy."

"Sure, Alex." When Ellison returned from carrying the items out to the truck he stopped at section with freeze-dried foods, and started loading boxes of freeze-dried meat and vegetable meals into his cart. The expiration date on the meals was 2005.

On impulse, Krycek grabbed several pairs of cross-country skis, poles, ski boots, and snowshoes. They would come in handy during the winter.

Krycek and Ellison completely filled the backseat and bed of the truck with their stolen booty and part of the trailer. It was dark by the time they finished and were using their stolen flashlights to see by. Krycek reconnected the battery cable.

"That went easier than I thought it would," Ellison said.

"We were lucky, but we still have two more stops to make before we head back." Krycek got behind the wheel and started the engine.

"Where next?" Ellison asked, climbing into the passenger side.

"Those mountain bikes John's brother gave him. I think we could use several more, at least enough for the Gunmen. Then I also would like to stop at a hardware and plumbing store."

"Do you know where we can find the bikes..." Ellison stopped talking as Krycek stopped the truck two hundred feet down the alley behind 'Rocky Mountain Bikes'.

The door was unlocked. Krycek frowned this was too easy, but his instincts weren't picking up any danger.

No wonder, the front windows were smashed in, he sighed, "Jim, it looks like this place has already been looted. At least they didn't steal all the bikes." Nine bikes were left in the shop that probably had over a hundred. "Let's load them all on the trailer."

Fifteen minutes later they were back on the road. Krycek headed toward the city, the flames were leaping high into the nighttime air.

"Alex, don't you think you're getting too close?"

"Don't worry." He pulled the truck behind a hardware and plumbing store and took out the flashlight he'd gotten from the outdoors store.

"What are we getting here?" Ellison asked.

"A bathtub, sink, toilet, plumbing supplies."

"Why?"

"Because the Gunmen want a bathroom added onto their cabin."

"You're really close to them aren't you?"

Krycek shook his head as they entered the store. All the windows had been blown in and glass crunched under their shoes.

"I barely know them. The Gunmen are Mulder's friends." Krycek paused by the bathtubs, his flashlight falling on a large brass and enamel, claw-foot tub, similar to the old one at Mulder's cabin. "I owe them for being there for Fox through the years. Give me a hand."

"Damn, this is heavy," Ellison grumbled as they lifted the large tub.

By the time they had loaded the tub, toilet, sink, a shower, and tiles onto the trailer they were both sweaty. On the second trip back from carrying pipes to the truck there was an explosion down the street that threw both men off their feet. Ellison landed on top of Krycek. The feel of Krycek's body and his intense scent caused the Sentinel to zone out and he started kissing the green-eyed man. All thoughts of his lover vanquished at the taste of Krycek's mouth.

Krycek started to fight Ellison off, then the man's knee nudge him between his thighs touching his dual sex. Arousal flamed like a bush fire through his body and soon both men were fighting to get out of their pants. There was no thought of foreplay only the animalistic need to find release.

Ellison had Krycek's nude body beneath him. The green-eyed man wrapped his legs around Ellison's waist and pushed up against the detective's rock-hard erection. Krycek's body opened like a blossom, taking the thick shaft inside as he pulled Ellison's head down and kissed him hungrily. He barely registered the discomfort of having his sacs crushed between their bodies as Ellison pounded forcefully into him.

The sounds of grunting and the wet slapping of flesh against flesh echoed through the room as Ellison thrust harder and faster. Sweat dampened Ellison's short-cropped hair and ran down his forehead, stinging his eyes and he missed seeing the burning green light in the depth of Krycek's eyes. He rammed even harder into that tight furnace burying himself to his balls with each thrust. Ellison was so close to the edge. He thrust once, twice, and came with a roar, pumping his release deep into Krycek's body. Ellison collapsed on top of the other man's chest and felt a dampness between their bodies as Krycek experienced dual orgasms.

As the room came back into focus, Ellison was horrified by his actions and tried to pull away, but Krycek tightened his legs around him and grabbed Ellison's ears, pulling down his head.

"Dammit, Alex, let go!" Ellison growled before noticing that Krycek's scent had changed and his eyes were now green glowing orbs. He screamed as Krycek bit into his throat.

~x~X~x~

The Fox and Wolf

Opening the front door, Mulder stepped outside onto the porch and looked up at the star-filled sky. He took a deep breath of the fresh mountain air. Up there was an entire fleet of alien spaceships, laying claim to most of the Earth. It was hard even for him to believe, standing in this peaceful setting.

"It's beautiful up here, isn't it?"

Mulder turned toward the sound of Sandburg's voice. The young man was sitting on the porch swing. He had his long wavy hair tied back in a ponytail.

"I like it. Even if it might not last much longer," Mulder said.

"What are the aliens waiting for?"

Mulder shook his head. "I don't know. The longer they hold off attacking again, the more time our military has to rearm. It doesn't make any sense."

"Alex said that you're an expert on aliens and the paranormal, so if it doesn't make any sense to you...."

Shaking his head, Mulder went to sit next to Sandburg on the swing. "At one time I knew far less about aliens than Alex and the consortium. I still don't know a whole lot, even when I was a captive onboard their spaceship and communicated with them through telepathy. I always had the impression that the grays weren't in charge that there was another superior race of aliens pulling their strings."

"What happened to you on their spaceship?"

"The first time, I was experimented upon...tortured. When I was returned the FBI thought I was dead so they buried me. It wasn't until three months later that Walter realized I wasn't really dead so he had my body exhumed."

"Whoa, you were buried alive for three months without food, air, and water?"

"Yeah."

"Didn't they do an autopsy? I mean that would have killed you for sure...wouldn't it?" Sandburg was beyond shocked by what he was finding out about his new friends.

Mulder arched an eyebrow and smirked. "My former partner had a lot of clout in that area and she wouldn't allow an autopsy on my body unless she did it herself and there was no way Walter would allow her to do one. They both went against bureau policy by not doing one, but since the FBI wanted to bury the incident as quickly as possible they looked the other way." He closed his eyes to keep the tears back. "I hope she's safe."

"You don't know?"

"No. She fled with her infant son and mother during the alien attack. I think they might be trying to make it to San Diego to her Brother Bill's place or maybe to her other brother's place in Oregon, but I'm not sure."

"Don't you want to chase after her?"

"At this point it would be like looking for a needle in the haystack. I have no idea what roads they are taking or where they are going." Mulder sighed and stood. "Blair, I find it hard to leave the mountain for more than a few days at a time."

Sandburg could see the pain deep in Mulder's eyes. It wasn't a recent pain, but one that had been brewing for years. "Mulder, I want to know about your second abduction and the aliens, but now isn't the time. Let's go back inside and I'll fix us each a nice cup of tea."

~x~X~x~

## The Rat and Panther

Krycek groaned as he regained consciousness. Ellison's dead weight was crushing him to the floor. He moaned as he shifted, discovering the other man's penis still inside of him. Krycek wiggled out from under Ellison and off his cock. The flashlight was on and blazed a thin path of light along the floor. Krycek picked it up and searched the floor for his clothes then quickly dressed.

"Jim, wake up!" He shook then slapped Ellison's cheeks.

After getting no response Krycek checked for a pulse, satisfied that the man was still alive he started dressing him, then lifted Ellison over his shoulder and carried him to the truck. It was a struggle to get him buckled into the passenger seat.

"Fuck, maybe we should have taken Blair along," he muttered as he reconnected the battery cable.

Glancing down at his new acquired wristwatch, Krycek noted that only forty minutes had passed since they had sex.

Krycek looked at the gas gage as he started the truck. They had less than half a tank. With the power off in the city, the gas pumps won't be working. Doing the calculations in his head, Krycek estimated they wouldn't have enough to make it back. He spotted a car wreck up ahead. At least they had planned for this situation and brought along a gas siphon pump with them.

He pulled along side the crashed minivan and car. Before getting out of the truck he checked Ellison...the man was still unconscious. Krycek frowned as he got the siphon out of the toolbox in the bed of the truck. He had no idea why having sex with him would cause the other man to lose consciousness. Unless it had something to do with Ellison's sentinel abilities. He unscrewed the gas cap on the truck and van, and placed the plastic end into the truck's tank and placed the metal siphon end into the van's tank and pumped it in and out of the tank until the gas started siphoning.

The van's tank had enough gas in it to fill the truck. He screwed back on the gas cap and put the siphon pump away. Looking at his wristwatch, he figured he'd have them back at the ranger station by around two o'clock in the morning.

~x~X~x~

## The Fox, Dog, and Wolf

"Mulder, I'm shorter than you so I'll sleep on the sofa, you'll be more comfortable up in the loft." They had already agreed that with Mulder being the source behind Skinner's and Doggett's illnesses that Sandburg shouldn't share a bed with him.

"Blair, I'll be fine on the sofa, besides I want to be close to Walter and John in case they need something."

"Okay, man, if you're sure. I wonder how Jim and Alex are doing?"

"I'm sure they found the Ham radio set and the other supplies, and are on their way back here."

"I hope you're right. I just have this feeling in my gut that something's wrong," Sandburg said.

"Blair, if they're not back here by noon tomorrow, I'll take Alex's motorcycle and go looking for them."

Sandburg breathed a sigh of relief, he would have gone to search for them himself, but he didn't know the area like Mulder. "Thanks, Mulder. I'll see you in the morning." He walked over to the ladder and climbed up to the loft.

Mulder walked into the bedroom to check on Skinner and Doggett. Both men were soundly asleep and lying snuggled together in the middle of the bed. He smiled. They looked so cute and comfortable. He placed another log on the fire. Tomorrow he was going to have to clean out the ashes. He was too wired to sleep, so he walked into the kitchen and looked over at the large pile of laundry.

"Might as well get it done," he muttered and started separating out the dark and light colors from the whites. Doing the laundry was his worst chore. Skinner's briefs and their undershirts, white t-shirts, and bed sheets made the largest pile. Doggett wore briefs but his were different colors, mostly blues, gray, and olive green.

Mulder ran the hose from the sink and filled the washing machine with hot water then added detergent and bleach before putting in the white clothes. He started cranking as he thought about the day's latest revelations.

If he had infected Skinner and Doggett with whatever genetic material the aliens had used to alter him, did that really mean his lovers were now changing and becoming the same as he and Krycek? It seemed too simplistic. Then again, Scully had stopped him from changing into an alien replicant with a simple anti-viral so anything was possible. Mulder couldn't picture Skinner or Doggett as hermaphrodites. He glanced up at his reflection in the window. Outwardly there was very little indication of his change. While he had lost all of his coarse body hair, a finer hair had replaced it, except on his chest, which was still devoid of hair, and his facial hair took longer to grow. He even looked ten years younger.

He continued to crank the washer for several more minutes. Then he stopped and emptied the soapy water and replaced it with clean cold water. After he had rinsed the clothes and wrung them through the ringer he walked out the back door to hang them on the clotheslines. The moon provided enough light for him to see by as he clipped the clothes on the line. The sounds of the nocturnal animals in the woods around him gave him a sense of contentment. After he finished hanging the clothes he headed back inside to wash the dark clothes.

By the time he finished the rest of the laundry, it was almost two o'clock in the morning. Mulder walked into the bedroom to check on Doggett and Skinner.

Doggett rolled over on his back and looked up at Mulder. "I could use a couple more painkillers."

"Sure, John, I'll be right back with them."

"Fox."

Mulder paused in the doorway and looked back at him.

"I don't blame you. Don't blame yourself."

Mulder smiled softly. "Thanks, you don't know how important that was to hear."

Doggett smiled back.

Mulder hurried into the bathroom for the painkillers and water, then returned to the bedroom.



"Haven't you gotten to bed yet?" Doggett asked as Mulder handed him the caplets and a glass of water.

"I couldn't sleep."

After swallowing the caplets, Doggett handed Mulder the water glass back. "There's enough room for you in this bed, why don't you get undressed and get under the covers. It's not like you're going to catch what Walter and I have."

"I don't want to crowd you."

"Get your ass in bed, Fox," Skinner growled, rolling over to make room for him in the center.

Mulder smirked. "Since you put it so nicely...I'll be right back after I turn off the kerosene lamps and brush my teeth."

~x~X~x~

The Rat and Panther

Blue Ridge Mountains  
Friday, September 27, 2001  
1:50 a.m.

Krycek turned onto the gravel road to the ranger station. As the truck bounced over a dip in the road Ellison moaned and opened his eyes.

"Where are we?" he asked, sitting up straighter in the seat and squinting out at the road illuminated by the headlights of the truck. His head was throbbing.

"Two minutes from the Ranger station. You've been unconscious since we had sex."

Ellison placed his head in his hands and groaned. "Damn, Blair's not going to be too happy with me."

"I'm not particularly happy with you."

"You didn't seem to have any problem earlier."

"You attacked me!"

"I don't seem to recall you resisting. In fact, you did the opposite. And, Alex, can you keep your voice down, I have a headache."

"Bastard." Krycek pulled into the ranger station parking lot. "Maybe that's why you've been unconscious, you must have hit your thick skull."

The lights went on inside the building. A few minutes later Sean stepped out dressed in jeans and a flannel shirt. "You're back early."

"We found what we were looking for at our first stop and didn't need to drive to Annapolis," Krycek said.

"Is that a bathtub?"

"It's for the Gunmen."

The Ranger shook his head in disbelief. "We're being invaded by aliens and you're spending your time picking up bathroom fixtures?"

Krycek shrugged his shoulders. "It's not like we have much else to do until they invade over here."

"Humph." Sean grunted and looked at Ellison. "You look like crap, Jim, aren't you feeling well?"

"No. I guess I picked up whatever virus is going around."

"You do know that you're wearing your shirt inside out and backwards."

Ellison looked down at his black v-neck shirt. Sure enough the white tab was under his chin. He frowned at Krycek as he pulled the shirt off and put it back on the right way.

"Do you guys want to come in for a cup of coffee? Afterward we can sort through what you looted in the city into three piles one for the Gunmen, Jim, and your place, Alex. We can load your things onto the trailer first, and I'll hook it below my helicopter...." Sean paused and looked at the truck then thought about the food in his stable. "It will probably take three trips to get everything back to your place and Frohike's. Jim can haul his and Blair's goods back to their cabin with his SUV," Sean said.

"That's nice of you, Sean. Mulder mentioned that you don't like using your copter for hauling supplies," Krycek said.

"With Walter, John, and now Jim sick I want to help out a little. Let's get some coffee so we'll have the energy to start working."

~x~X~x~

The Fox, Rat, Wolf, Bear, Panther and Dog

Friday, September 27, 2001

6:00 a.m.

The noise from a helicopter woke Mulder. He was sleeping on his back in the center of the large bed with Skinner and Doggett snuggling up against him. They smelled so good. He'd never been more comfortable or warmer. Sighing, he pushed off the blankets and struggled out from under his lovers' arms and legs then climbed over Doggett to get out of bed.

Doggett groaned and opened his eyes. "What's wrong?"

"I think it's Sean," Mulder said as he pulled on his jeans, socks, and shoes then clipped his handgun onto the back of his jeans.

Sandburg was climbing down the ladder from the loft as Mulder hurried out the front door.

The wind created by the helicopter whipped through Mulder's hair as he stood watching Sean lower the trailer next to the pile of cut logs than landed beside it. A couple of hundred feet away was the large crate with the windmill and electrical supplies. They had resealed it until they were ready to assemble the windmill.

Krycek jumped out first then helped Ellison off the helicopter.

"Alex, what's wrong with Jim?" Mulder shouted over the drone of the helicopter.

"He's caught whatever Walter and John have!"

"Alex, that's not possible! We figured out that Walter and John are sick because I infected them during sex. They might even be changing to be like us." Mulder's voice quieted as the helicopter rotors stilled.

Krycek eyes widened. "You're not serious?"

"Jim, what's wrong?" Sandburg asked, running over to them.

"Chief, I'm sorry, I lost control and attacked Alex...we had sex," Ellison said while leaning a little to heavily on Krycek.

Sandburg looked between the two men. "How could you?"

"Blair, I really am sorry."

"Sorry isn't going to cut it!" Sandburg stormed back toward the cabin.

"Fuck."

Krycek sighed, "I'm sorry, Jim. I'll try to talk to him later. C'mon, I'll help you into bed."

"What did Mulder mean changing?" Ellison was having a hard time focusing, the world seemed to spin and dip with each step he took.

"Don't worry, it's not possible."

Mulder frowned as he watched the two men walk toward the cabin.

"C'mon, Mulder, let's get this trailer unloaded. I have another smaller load for you and one big one for Frohike."

"Okay, Sean."

Krycek came back outside, five minutes later, and started helping them unload the trailer.

As Mulder pulled out a couple of large bags filled with clothing, he turned to Krycek. "Did you pick up clothes for the Gunmen?"

"Yes. We separated our stuff from theirs. Sean is going to fly their things to them after he brings our second load. Jim's and Blair's things he's storing in his stable until they can haul it back to their cabin."

"Do you want to tell me what happened?" Mulder asked as they piled the supplies against the side of the cabin.

Krycek frowned. "As we were picking up the final supplies for your friends an explosion somewhere down the street knocked us off our feet. Jim landed on top of me and he seemed to lose it. He started kissing me and ripping at my clothes. I tried to fight him off, but he touched me down there and I suddenly found myself kissing him back and tearing at his clothes. Neither one of us was thinking about anything but sex. It was almost primal...I've never lost control like that before."

The burly ranger listened as he easily hefted a sixty-pound crate of potatoes. "Do you still want the doctor to come out?" he asked, setting the spuds down.

"No, Sean. We'd rather not have anyone finding out what the aliens have done to us."

"No problem, Mulder. But I want you to talk to me about what's going on with you and your friends."

"Sean, I'll tell you everything." Mulder shook the ranger's hand. "Thanks for everything you've done for me, you've been a true friend."

The ranger smiled. "I'll be back in about an hour with your next load of supplies."

Krycek headed around the cabin to the barn as Mulder started carrying the bags of clothing into the cabin. A few minutes later, Krycek was back with a wheelbarrow. He had taken the time to washout the straw and manure. Krycek lifted a twenty-pound sack of flour and dumped it into the wheelbarrow.

"Fox, why don't you do the chores while I get this put away in the root cellar?" he said while putting another sack of flour into the wheelbarrow.

"Sure, Alex."

In the cabin, Sandburg was brewing his organic remedy for Skinner who was sitting wrapped in a blanket in the parlor. Ellison was in the bedroom sleeping next to Doggett.

"Here you go, Walter." Sandburg handed Skinner the mug and waited for him to take a sip. "Is it all right?"

"Yeah, thanks. It tastes like a herbal tea with honey." Yesterday, he'd been too sick to even taste the hot beverage. He continued sipping until the mug was empty.

"How are you feeling?" Sandburg asked as he took the empty mug from Skinner.

Skinner smiled. "You should package this stuff and sell it as a miracle cure!" He no longer felt tired, nauseous, and achy. Tossing the blanket off he stood.

Sandburg grinned.

"Blair, I'm going to take a shower and dress while I'm feeling good."

~x~X~x~

The Frog, Otter, Stork, and Puppy

Friday, September 27, 2001

9:30 a.m.

Frohike and Byers relaxed out on the front porch of their cabin, sipping coffee.

"When do you want to head over to Mulder's?" Byers asked.

"Let's leave in a half hour, that way we'll be in time for lunch." Frohike paused and listened. "It sounds like a helicopter."

The helicopter came into view. It flew over the cabin then lowered the large trailer it was hauling

into their empty farmyard.

Langly and Bond hurried out the backdoor and over to the trailer. Bond unhooked it and waved up at Sean.

Sean nodded and shouted down at them. "I'LL BE BACK THIS AFTERNOON FOR THE TRAILER!" He then flew off, back to the ranger station.

"Hey, Byers, there's a bathtub on the trailer," Langly shouted.

Byers' eyes lit up as he limped over to the trailer. "Remind me to kiss Krycek. Are those mountain bikes?"

"Cool, now we can make it to Mulder's place and back faster." Bond opened the gate and started unloading boxes of vegetables and sacks of flour and grain.

Frohike inspected all of the food items. "Jimmy, let's start hauling the food down to the root cellar. Langly do you and Byers want to put the bathroom stuff into the barn?"

"Frohike, let's put the bathtub in the kitchen in place of that wooden tub," Byers said.

"John, there's not enough room in the kitchen..."

Byers knew that Frohike was right but he was unwilling to back down. "We could make it fit."

"Fine, I won't object if you and Langly are able to fit it into the kitchen without blocking access to the stove or the washer and clothes ringer."

"Hey, guys, look we have clothes and shoes!" Bond said as he got to several large bags filled with clothing and shoeboxes.

Byers climbed onto the trailer. "Let me see." He dug into one bag that contained underwear. "Hey, Melvin, how did Krycek know you wore bikini briefs?" he asked, holding up two six packs of multicolored briefs.

"Mulder must have told him, he's seen me in my underwear."

"Oh really when?"

"It's none of your business."

"Byers, please tell me that they didn't steal only bikini briefs?" Langly groaned.

Byers dug through the bag. "There are several packages of regular white and color briefs, plus a dozen pairs of boxers, and three thongs."

"Thongs? Those would be mine, too," Frohike said.

"What else did Alex and Jim get us?" Langly asked, leaning against the side of the trailer.

Bond listed the items as he looked in the bags. "Socks, winter parkas, jeans, chinos, shirts, sweaters, shoes, boots, undershirts, long underwear, gloves, goggles, ski hats and pants."

Frohike whistled. "Krycek can do my shopping anytime."

"Frohike, did you give Krycek our sizes?" Langly asked.

"No. I didn't know he was going clothes shopping. Mulder must have told Krycek our sizes."

"How would Mulder know our sizes?"

"He asked me on Monday, I didn't know what he had this in mind."

"Hey, Langly, there's a generator and a ham radio on the trailer."

Langly hopped up on the trailer and looked at the box with the generator. It wasn't very large and needed a car battery to run it. It would give off enough power to operate the Ham radio and charge his laptop for at least a couple of weeks before the battery had to be recharged.

Byers looked up at the sky. "Guys, let's get the clothes inside. It looks like there's a storm coming in."

Frohike glanced up and nodded. "John, you get the clothes into the cabin. Jimmy and I will get the flour and food down to the cellar."

"What should I do?" Langly asked.

"Get the Ham radio into the cabin then anything that might be damaged by water."

The cellar was beneath the cabin. It had two horizontal doors outside that opened to reveal a staircase. Inside the cabin there was a door, next to the fireplace in the kitchen, that led down to the cellar. They had left it open so Rocky could catch the mice down there as well as in the cabin.

~x~X~x~

The Fox, Rat, Wolf, Bear, Panther and Dog

Friday, September 27, 2001  
10:30 a.m.

Mulder finished milking the cows and was going to let them out when he noticed the dark storm clouds and heard the distant sound of thunder. He led Bambi back to her stall. "You'll have to stay in until the storm passes."

Remembering the laundry, Mulder rushed out of the barn and into the house to grab the laundry basket. He hurried back outside and started pulling the clothes off the line as the first fat raindrops fell. Sandburg rushed outside and helped him.

They were back inside just seconds before the sky opened and a deluge of water washed over the yard.

Skinner looked up from the dining room table where he was sorting through the clothes Krycek and Ellison had scavenged in the city. He snipped off the price tags and placed them in an empty shoebox, hoping that someday they'd be able to pay the storeowner for the items.

Mulder set the overflowing laundry basket on a chair while Blair dumped the armful of sheets he was carrying on the table. The young man then went to light the kerosene lamps in the kitchen. The room had gotten surprisingly dark in just a few minutes.

"You're looking better, Walter," Mulder said as he started folding the bath towels.

"I have Blair to thank. He's been brewing me some herbal concoction that makes me feel really

good."

"I want to see if I can get John to drink a mug once he wakes up," Sandburg said as he picked up a bed sheet and started folding it.

"What about Jim?"

"Jim usually refuses to drink any organic remedy I mix up. Besides I'm still angry at him."

"Blair, don't blame Jim for what happened between him and Alex. They couldn't control themselves."

"If they would have taken me with them then this wouldn't have happened!"

Mulder replied softly, "We can't change it now. Jim needs you, Blair."

"I know," Sandburg sighed, heading toward the bedroom. "I'm going to check on him."

Krycek came crashing in through the front door, soaking wet.

Mulder chuckled and walked over to him with a towel. "Did you get everything put away?"

"No. I still have crates of vegetables and cans of cooking oil to put away. I was just coming back from the root cellar when the downpour hit," Krycek said as he dried his hair, face, and arms with the towel.

Mulder leaned in and kissed him. "Get out of those wet clothes. I'm going to start making lunch."

"Good, I'm starving, since we hadn't had breakfast this morning," Krycek said, leaving his wet muddy boots by the front door, he strolled across the room to the bathroom.

Skinner finished separating the clothing into four large piles. He carried one pile into the bedroom. Sandburg was sitting on the bed watching Ellison sleep.

The bedroom had an armoire for hanging clothes, a tall dresser, and a low long dresser with a mirror. He put the clothes on the dresser and with Marine like efficiency divided them between the four drawers assigned to Krycek. Earlier, he had hung the four winter parkas and ski pants into the armoire next to Mulder's old suits. After putting Krycek's new clothes away Skinner walked back into the main room to get another one of the other three tall piles.

Mulder was pulling items out of the cupboard.

"What are you making?" Skinner asked as he lifted the clothes into his arms.

"Moroccan stew."

"What's in it?"

"Onions, cabbage, green peppers, tomatoes, garbanzo beans, raisins, and various spices. It's served over couscous."

"Hmm, it sounds like it could use some meat," Skinner said, heading back toward the bedroom.

"Its vegetarian." Mulder had gotten used to cooking meals without meat and even learned to like some vegetables that he used to avoid.

While thunder boomed overhead, Mulder chopped the vegetables on a cutting board then dumped the sliced onions into a deep hot pan with some olive oil.

Sandburg came into the kitchen and leaned up against the counter. "Mulder, Jim looks so pale. I don't know how he's going deal with the news that he might be changing into a hermaphrodite. I know I'm having a hard time dealing with it or believing it."

"Welcome to the club." Mulder added the cabbage and some salt to the sauted onions.

"You seem to be dealing with it pretty well."

Mulder snorted. "You should have seen me five months ago."

"Was it hard for you to adjust?"

"Extremely. I still haven't completely adjusted. Blair, there's something I haven't told you or Walter yet."

"And what would that be?" Skinner asked coming back into the room at the same time the bathroom door opened and Krycek stepped out, barefoot and wearing only sweatpants.

"Alex and I are werewolves."

Thunder cracked ominously overhead as Skinner sighed and sat heavily at the table. He was feeling tired and achy again. "Great. Fox, I've had a dream that we were wolves."

"You did? When was this?" Mulder asked as he continued to add ingredients into the deep pot, while glancing over at Skinner.

"It was the night you and Alex didn't come home."

"We didn't come home because there was a full moon and we changed into werewolves."

"I thought you spent it in a cave?"

"We spent at least part of the night in the cave...that's where we changed back."

"Guys, we have no memory of changing into werewolves," Krycek said.

Mulder glared at him. "Alex, John witnessed me changing from a wolf back to myself, so you can't deny that we're not werewolves."

"Fox, I'm not questioning whether we're werewolves. I'm just mentioning that when we changed, we had no memory of our time as wolves."

"Sorry, Alex, I didn't mean to snap," Mulder said.

Sandburg stood opened mouth, staring between Krycek and Mulder. Aliens, hermaphrodites, now werewolves...what's next, big foot?

"Blair, do you have any more of your wonder cure?" Skinner asked, resting his elbows on the table and placing his aching head in his hands.

Sandburg pulled his eyes away from studying Mulder's face. "Ah, it doesn't take long to brew. Let me put on a kettle of water, I want to see if I can get Jim and John to drink a mug, too."



Mulder turned down the heat on the stove and allowed the stew to simmer. He walked over and touched Skinner on the shoulder. "Walter, would you like to lay down?"

"I just need to rest. Can you help me over to the recliner?"

"Sure."

Skinner allowed Mulder to help him to his feet. He looked over at Krycek. "Alex, can you put the remaining clothes away. The pile on the left is Fox's and the right pile is mine."

"Okay, sure."

Mulder glanced at the table. "How come my pile has a thong on top?"

"There was only one," Skinner said simply.

Krycek chuckled as he picked up the clothes. "There were four, but the other three must have gotten mixed into the Gunmen's supplies." He had picked them up as a joke, knowing that the other three men would never wear them.

"I can't imagine any of the Gunmen wearing them, unless there's something I don't know about Byers," Mulder quipped as he lowered Skinner onto the recliner.

Skinner grabbed Mulder's hand and pulled him down, kissing him softly on the lips. "Thanks, Fox."

Mulder touched his cheek then grabbed the blanket off the sofa. "Let me get you covered."

Reclining in the chair, Skinner closed his eyes and was soon snoring.

~x~X~x~

The Frog, Otter, Stork, and Puppy

Friday, September 27, 2001  
noon

The rain was coming down in buckets. Bond stood outside on the covered front porch and watched it. Occasionally the wind would shift blowing the cold rain a couple of feet onto the porch.

Byers opened the door. "Jimmy, Frohike has lunch ready."

"What did he make?"

"A Spam stir fry with green peppers, zucchini, and canned pineapples. It smells pretty good."

Bond followed Byers back into the cabin. "It looks like we won't be making it over to Mulder's today."

"We can all use a day of rest," Byers said.

"I'd rather be working on getting their windmill up," Langly said from the kitchen table. The windmill would be used to recharge the battery for their generator.

"Then we better rest today. Tomorrow we'll work our butts off to finish that room onto their cabin,"

Byers said. "As soon as we get their windmill hooked up the sooner they can help us build a bathroom onto our place."

"Can we get some goats?" Bond asked.

"Goats?" Frohike sighed, placing two filled plates on the table in front of Byers and Bond.

"I was reading in one of Mulder's books that goats are great for milk and cheese and they aren't as hard to raise as cows."

Frohike carried his plate of food back to the table and sat. "Jimmy, it's too late this season to start raising goats, but if we're still alive in the spring we can look at purchasing a few from the farmers in the valley." When Bond frowned sadly, Frohike added, "I'll tell you what...we'll ask Mulder to give us some of his chickens and feed. That way we'll have our own fresh eggs and you'll have something to take care of."

Bond brightened. "Cool. I wouldn't mind raising chickens."

Byers speared a broccoli. "Jimmy, I'm fine with you raising chickens as long as they stay in the chicken coop. I don't want to find them in the house this winter...." As he looked at the earnest young man, he added quickly, "or you sleeping in the chicken coop."

"John, I promise I won't bring the chickens into the house."

Byers smiled. "Okay."

Frohike took a sip of water. "Monday we're going to meet a lot of the area's residents at the ranger station. I want to see if we can arrange to trade with some of them."

"Frohike, what do we have that they'd want to trade for?" Langly asked.

"Other than Mulder and Krycek, we know more about aliens and the government conspiracy than anyone on Earth. We'll publish stories about what we know and area news."

Langly rolled his eyes. "How? We don't have any printing presses...."

"We have your laptop. All we need is to get our hands on a laser printer and paper. Maybe we can convince Krycek to make another run to the Baltimore suburbs for one."

"Frohike, we have plenty of supplies now. Let's not have Krycek risk his life for us," Byers said.

"Okay, Sean has an inkjet printer, maybe we can work out an arrangement with him."

~x~X~x~

The Fox, Rat, Wolf, Bear, Panther and Dog

Friday, September 27, 2001  
8:00 p.m.

It had rained most of the day only stopping an hour ago. Mulder was pouring a bucket of milk into the steel milk container as Krycek entered the barn. "Hey, Alex, we have enough milk to start making cheese tomorrow."

"Good. Fox, I've set up the Ham radio set in the loft, we just need to run the antenna up to the roof and hook up the electricity."

Mulder nodded. "Since Blair's organic remedy has made Walter, John, and Jim feel better, maybe we can get them to do the wiring inside the cabin while we take care of the more labor intensive jobs outside."

Krycek walked over to Mulder and wrapped his arms around his waist from behind. "Blair's going to sleep on the sofa tonight, so we'll have the loft to ourselves." He nipped at the side of Mulder's throat.

"Hmm, what are you planning?"

"I'm planning to make love to you." Krycek dropped his hand to Mulder's groin and squeezed him through his jeans. "You've already had sex with Walter and John, I think it's my turn, don't you?"

"Oooohhh, yeah...." Mulder arched back against his chest. "Just let me finish in here and I'll meet you back at the cabin."

"Is there anything I can help you with?" Krycek asked, caressing up and down Mulder's sides.

"No. I just need to fill the feedboxes."

Krycek patted Mulder on the ass. "Then you better hurry. There's some stew left from earlier if you want me to heat you up a bowl."

"Yeah, I'm starving," Mulder said as he walked over to the trap door on the silo.

Krycek strolled out of the barn and across the farmyard, entering the kitchen through the backdoor. He removed his muddy boots and placed them on a mat by the door.

"How's Mulder doing with the chores?" Doggett asked. He was sitting at the cook's table with Sandburg. They were cleaning and chopping tomatoes and stuffing them into canning jars. On the counter there were already jars filled with sliced zucchini, beets, and apples with cinnamon. On the stove a pot sat filled with cold water that they were putting the jars into as they got them filled. When the water was brought to a boil the heat would vacuum seal the jars. In the parlor, Ellison and Skinner were sitting on the sofa, studying a map of the area.

"He's almost finished." Krycek turned on the back burner and started heating the leftover stew. They already had eaten it for lunch and dinner.

Mulder came in through the backdoor fifteen minutes later, took off his boots, and headed into the bathroom to wash up. He came back out and wandered into the dining area.

"Sit down, Fox, and eat. You're going to need your strength," Krycek said. He had the bowl of stew with a slice of buttered bread on the table waiting for Mulder.

"Thanks, Alex."

Doggett sighed and stood. The temporary relief he'd felt from Sandburg's organic brew was wearing off.

"Blair, can I have some more of that hot herbal concoction?"

"John, you're going to have to hold off until tomorrow morning, I'm out of feverfew leaves. I'll need to search the woods for some more tomorrow."

Doggett sighed, "Well, if that's the case I'm going to take a shower and turn in, while I can still

stand on my own."

"I've put fresh sheets on the bed, so you should be comfortable," Sandburg said.

"I appreciate that, Blair," Doggett said as he walked into the bedroom for a clean change of briefs and an undershirt to sleep in.

Ellison looked over at Sandburg. "Chief, do you want to camp on the floor tonight? Alex and I picked up some nice sleeping bags...."

"No, you should sleep in the big bed with John and Walter. The floor will be too uncomfortable."

"And sleeping crowded in a bed with two other men won't be uncomfortable? Admit it, you're still mad at me."

"Am not!" Sandburg walked over to the sofa and sat beside his lover. "Jim, if you want to sleep on the floor with me fine, we'll sleep on the floor. Besides we need to talk about what's wrong with you." He brushed his finger over Ellison's thick arm hairs, he's going to hate it when his lover loses his body hair. Ellison was still in the dark about hermaphrodites.

Skinner groaned as he stood. "I'll see you in the morning, I'm going to turn in."

"Night, Walter," Sandburg and Ellison said.

Skinner paused at the dining room table. "Fox, do you want to share the bed with John and me again?"

"Yes, but I also want to sleep up in the loft with Alex." Mulder stood and kissed Skinner sweetly on the lips. "Once you and John are better, we'll go back to your bed rotation schedule."

Skinner felt a stirring in his loins. "God, Fox, I want you so badly."

Krycek stepped between them and threw a warning glance at Skinner. "Finish eating, Fox."

Mulder placed his hand on Krycek's forearm. "Alex, stop."

"Fox, just finish your meal." Krycek kept his ground. He wasn't about to let Skinner get in the way of him making love to Mulder tonight.

Skinner ignored Krycek as he spoke to Mulder. "I'll see you in the morning." He walked into the bathroom and closed the door. Doggett was still in the shower as Skinner pulled his toothbrush from the medicine cabinet and brushed his teeth, then washed his face. He sniffed his T-shirt before pulling it off and tossing it in the hamper. He stood looking at his hairless chest. The rest of his body hair had fallen out with his last shower.

"Walt, is everything all right?" Doggett asked, stepping out of the shower onto the bathmat. He grabbed a towel and started to dry himself.

"Fine, John."

Doggett dropped the towel in the hamper and placed his hands on Skinner's shoulders from behind. "You're tense. Your muscles are all knotted up." He started massaging Skinner's back. "Relax."

"I hate being sick," Skinner sighed as Doggett's fingers eased his tense muscles.

"Tell me about it. If I don't lie down soon I'm going to fall on my face." Doggett patted Skinner on the back then grabbed his navy-blue briefs and undershirt off the shelf and pulled them on while Skinner used the toilet.

Out in the parlor, Sandburg was kneeling on the floor zipping two sleeping bags together near the pot-bellied stove. Tiger sat on the sofa next to Ellison...both were watching him work.

"Blair, you and Jim would be more comfortable up in the loft. Alex and I can sleep down here," Mulder offered.

"Thanks, Mulder, but Jim needs to be close to the bathroom and I'd rather not chance him falling off the ladder in the middle of the night."

"If you're sure?"

"I'm sure. Maybe next time Alex goes on a scavenger hunt he can pick up a sleeper sofa for your place," Sandburg said jokingly.

"Don't give him any ideas." Mulder chuckled as Krycek wrapped his arms around his waist from behind.

"It would be black leather like your old sofa," Krycek said. "Fox, why didn't you move your furniture here?"

"This place was already furnished, and other than that ugly flowered sofa, I liked all of Peterson's stuff. Besides, this place was too isolated to even attempt moving large pieces of furniture to by myself."

"Wouldn't Sean have helped you?"

"I didn't know him when I moved here. Alex, let's get ready for bed."

They walked into the bedroom where Mulder changed into his pajama bottoms and an undershirt while Krycek stripped down to his underwear.

"I could use a robe," Krycek said, shivering.

"Yeah, it's going to get even colder. Add that to your list of things to scavenge in the future," Mulder said as he added another log to the fire.

Skinner and Doggett entered the bedroom.

"Guys, the bathroom is free," Doggett said as he sat exhaustedly on the bed.

"Thanks, John. If you and Walter need anything during the night just shout," Mulder said.

"Even additional body heat?" Doggett leered.

Mulder bent and kissed Doggett on the lips. "Sorry, John, this bed isn't big enough for four."

"If I wasn't feeling so shitty, I'd show you how we can fit four men into this bed," Doggett said as he slid under the covers.

Skinner shook his head and climbed in the other side of the bed. "Can you get the light, Fox?"

"Sure, Walter." Mulder turned off the kerosene lamp, then him and Krycek walked back into the

main room.

Ellison was tucked into the sleeping bag, and Sandburg was in the kitchen pulling the jars of tomatoes out of the hot water.

"Those looks pretty good," Krycek said.

"It was easier than I thought it would be."

"Blair, Alex and I are going to use the bathroom before we turn in. Do you want to lock up and turn off the lights when you're done?"

"Sure."

"Ignore any screams or weird noises coming from the loft tonight," Krycek said, placing his hand affectionately on Mulder's butt as they walked into the bathroom.

Sandburg walked over and checked the doors. He started cleaning the kitchen as he waited for the bathroom to be free.

Mulder and Krycek came out of the bathroom fifteen minutes later. Both were disheveled as they hurried across the room to the ladder and climbed up to the loft.

After Sandburg brushed his teeth, he turned off the lamps then crawled into the sleeping bag beside Ellison.

"Jim, you asleep?"

"No." Ellison found it too uncomfortable lying on the hardwood floor to fall to sleep.

"We need to talk."

"Okay. Shoot."

"Mulder infected John and Walter, and Alex infected you."

"Infected?" Ellison recalled the conversation between Mulder and Krycek this morning. He remembered Mulder saying they were changing.

"Yeah. I think you're turning into a hermaphroditic werewolf."

Ellison sat up then groaned and held his head. "Fuck. I'm turning into what?"

"Shh, keep your voice down. You're turning into what Alex and Mulder are."

"What evidence do you have?"

"Walter is losing his body hair."

"That's it?"

Sandburg frowned. "Well, yeah."

Ellison lowered himself back on the sleeping bag. "Chief, wake me if I sprout big hairy breasts."

"Jim, this is nothing to joke about."

"Yes, it is." He wasn't about to accept that Sandburg might be right. It wasn't possible.

Up in the loft, Mulder and Krycek stripped and crawled under the covers. They felt like teenagers as they gazed into each other's eyes for several minutes before Mulder leaned forward and kissed Krycek.

While Mulder ravished his mouth, Krycek's hand went behind Mulder's back as he scooted closer until their erections touched. He sucked on Mulder's tongue as his hand caressed up and down his lover's back, feeling the warm flesh and firm muscles beneath his fingertips. This was what he'd fantasized about for years...Fox Mulder naked and in his bed.

Mulder licked his way out of the kiss. "Mm, Alex. Every time I eat honey from now on I'm going to think of you."

Krycek chuckled. "I'm addicted to the stuff, I even like honeyed vodka. It's sort of like your sunflower seed addiction."

"The seeds were a crutch to help me quit smoking. I just exchanged one addiction for a more healthy one." As Mulder talked his thumbs painted circles around Krycek's nipples. "You're too skinny, we need to get some flesh back on you."

Krycek moaned as his nipples hardened. "I've gained a couple of pounds over the past week."

Mulder sucked and nipped on Krycek's neck as his fingers continued to play with the slightly younger man's nipples.

Krycek's hand dropped to Mulder's ass, he wanted to touch him. He pushed a knee between Mulder's thighs as his fingers caressed over his lover's round buttocks then slipped down his crease. His nail scrapped over the puckered anus, he briefly pushed at the opening, too tight. He wanted to have anal intercourse with Mulder, but not yet, first he wanted to see what Mulder's other opening would feel like around his dick. So Krycek moved his finger down until he found the hot moist opening, and slipped it inside. The back of his hand brushed against Mulder's full sacs as he pumped his finger in and out then pushed a second finger in. He would have preferred to do him missionary style, so he could look into those lovely hazel eyes. But he didn't want to crush Mulder's balls while they had sex in that position, his orifice was just too close to his sacs. He'd save fucking him face to face for when he took him anally.

"Alex, fuck me," Mulder moaned as he pushed against Krycek's fingers.

"On your knees."

Krycek removed his fingers and sniffed the clear fluid covering them as Mulder rolled over onto his knees. The scent was intoxicating. He wondered if that was why Ellison lost it yesterday; it was all he could do to not take Mulder roughly.

"Alex, please hurry." His body throbbed with the need to be filled.

"Give me a moment to admire beautiful scenery," Krycek purred.

Mulder's ass was a work of art perfect round ivory globes. He loved the way his lover's sacs hung like two plump plums between his parted thighs. Krycek licked his lips hungrily as he stared at the tight puckered anus then beneath it, closer to the sacs, was the other opening. He positioned the head of his cock against it and pushed all the way in to the hilt with one thrust.

"Oooh, God!" Mulder gasped as the hard object impaled him. His muscles spasmed around the

thick shaft as Krycek pulled out and thrust back inside.

"Jesus, Fox, you feel so hot and tight." Krycek continued to pump in and out, relishing how the muscles tried to keep him inside. "Did John and Walter fuck you like this? Tell me...." He corkscrewed back into the tight heat eliciting a scream of pleasure from his lover.

"Yes...no. Oooh...YES! Harder!"

"Tell me, Fox."

"I fucked John...." Mulder gasped, then giggled. "I sort of fucked Walter, too."

Krycek pushed back in, grunting as he picked up speed. "Sort of?"

"I rode his cock. It was so hot...oooh...."

"As hot as this?" Krycek growled and thrust in while twisting his hips.

Mulder howled, "Oooh God, Alex."

Krycek chuckled and picked up the speed of his thrusts until Mulder came forcefully. His internal muscles savagely clenched Krycek's shaft, forcing his release almost simultaneous.

Krycek's fingers dug into Mulder's hips as he held himself buried deep inside the other man's body as he came. When the last of his semen flowed into Mulder, Krycek pulled out and laid breathlessly on the mattress beside him. When he recovered enough to move, he pulled Mulder into his arms and kissed him.

Mulder kissed him back while brushing at the sticky come on his belly. A horrifying thought occurred to him suddenly and he ended the kiss.

"What's wrong?" Krycek asked.

"Alex, do you think there's any possibility that we could become pregnant?"

"Oh shit-" Krycek rolled on his back and stared up at the pitched black ceiling. "Fuck. The thought never crossed my mind until you mentioned it. Fox, Jim fucked me there. Jesus, what if we're pregnant?"

"Don't panic." Mulder sighed, "It will be that time of the month in a few weeks and for the first time I'm actually looking forward to it."

"You keep track of the date?"

"Yeah, it's usually every thirty-two to thirty-five days."

"Oh great. How am I going to know when I'm going to...you know? I don't want to suddenly start bleeding when I'm out in public."

"You'll feel some cramping and you'll become irritable before and during," Mulder said.

"Do you use...." Krycek sighed, "You know."

"No. Do I use what?"

"Tampons," Krycek whispered.



Mulder blushed and groaned. "Ah, yeah."

Krycek sighed miserably. In all of his life he'd never imagined he'd be having this conversation with Mulder, while they were both lying naked in bed together after having sex. "Fox, I've been through this entire cabin, and never came across a box of tampons. Where do you keep them?"

It didn't surprise Mulder that Krycek would search the place. "In the water heater room, under the wood box is a trap door. I store them next to Old Man Peterson's gold and silver coins."

"Gold and silver coins?" That caught Krycek's interest.

"Yeah, I found the trap door two months ago when I was cleaning the room, and discovered a large metal box filled to the brim with gold and silver."

"How much money is it?"

Mulder rolled on his side and faced Krycek. "I don't know. The metal box was too heavy to lift, and I never felt like hauling the coins out and counting them."

"Do you mind if I count them?"

"No, I don't mind."

Krycek moved closer to Mulder and placed his hand on his lover's hip, then reached down and pulled the blankets over them. "I love you, Fox."

Mulder smiled and scooted over until their foreheads touched. "Remind me next time we have sex up here to bring a wet washcloth."

"I can run down and get one," Krycek said as he started to rise.

Mulder pulled him back down on the air mattress. "No. I'd rather have you right now than a washcloth."

Downstairs in the parlor, Sandburg snuggled closer to Ellison.

"Blair, I really feel awful about what happened between Alex and me. You have to believe, I'd never intentionally cheat on you," Ellison whispered softly.

"I know, just don't leave me behind again. We're not just lovers, I'm your guide, you need me."

"I know that, Chief, I was an idiot for not taking you with us...it won't happen again." Ellison hugged Sandburg and kissed his forehead. He loved everything about his younger lover, and thanked God for Sandburg's forgiving nature.

~x~X~x~

End Notes:

Spoilers: Season 8 and earlier seasons.

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Chapter 7: In Heat by Jo B

Author's Notes:

Skinner gets a little kit in the oven.

The Fox, Dog, Bear, Rat, Wolf, and Panther

The Cabin

Monday, October 1, 2001

3:00 a.m.

Mulder sighed miserably as he eased out of the warmth of Alex's arms. He didn't want to get up, but the laundry needed to be done if they were going to have clean clothes to wear to the meeting this afternoon. His skin broke out in goosebumps as the cool air caressed his bare flesh while he climbed down the ladder. The wood was cold against the soles of his bare feet. A nice sweet ache emanated from his backside where Alex had fucked him last night, it was the only part of his body that felt warm. Over the past couple of weeks he'd had more sex than he had over the last decade. Mulder walked over to the potbellied stove and added some more wood on the dying embers.

Blair and Jim were both soundly asleep cuddled together inside the thick sleeping bags. The room seemed to be unusually cold, so he walked over to the back door and looked outside. There was a layer of frost covering the ground. It was a good thing that Blair had insisted they cover the vegetable garden last night. Otherwise the remaining plants would have died.

Mulder closed the door and lit the kerosene lamp in the kitchen before heading into the bedroom to grab his clothes and to throw some more wood on the fire in the fireplace. He paused at the bed and looked down at the two men sleeping spooned together. God, he wanted to crawl under the covers with them and snuggle up to their warm bodies. Maybe once they were well, and life became less hectic, he'd be able to do just that. He carried his clothes into the bathroom, and after shaving and dressing, he added wood to the water heater and rekindled the fire.

Mulder decided to make a pot of coffee before tackling the huge load of laundry that was piled up next to the hand-cranked washing machine. As he stood at the kitchen sink and filled the percolator with water, Tiger wove her sleek silky body around his legs, looking for attention. He scooped coffee grounds into the basket and placed the coffeepot on the stove before he bent and picked up the cat.

"You hungry, Tiger?" he cooed quietly as he scratched the tabby behind her ear. She purred loudly as he held her while walking over to the cabinet where her food was stored. He set her on the floor and lifted the bag of dried cat food out of the cabinet. It was nearly empty. He'd have to see about making a trip off the mountain to purchase or scavenge some more cat food.

After Tiger was eating, Mulder started to fill the washing machine with hot water. He'd do the whites first. He loaded the basin with every scrap of white clothing, towels, and bed sheets he could find in the large pile before pouring himself a mug of coffee. He sat on a stool by the washer and started cranking as he sipped from the coffee mug.

The noise from the washing machine woke Sandburg. He lay for several minutes listening to the swish swash of the water splashing in the basin and the grinding noise of the crank being turned. The aroma of fresh brewed coffee finally urged him out of the sleeping bag. He pulled on the robe that was draped over the back of the sofa and stepped into a pair of sheepskin slippers.

Mulder looked over at him as Sandburg crossed the room to the stove. "I'm sorry, Blair, I hope I didn't wake you."

"You did, but that's okay, man." Sandburg poured himself a mug of coffee and sat at the cook's table. He enjoyed the taste of the coffee as he shook off the last cobwebs of sleep. After he finished his first cup, Sandburg looked back over at Mulder who was filling the washbasin with clean cold water.

"Do you need any help?"

"Actually, yeah. If you wouldn't mind making the bread this morning?"

"Sure, man." Sandburg had helped Mulder a couple of days ago make bread. They seemed to be going through three loaves every two days. He brought the flour canister over to the cook's table and set it down, then grabbed the largest mixing bowl from the shelf under the table. He collected the other ingredients from around the kitchen and the cooler that they had moved up from the stream to outside the back door. He started mixing all of the ingredients together.

Mulder rang the wash through the ringer while Blair started to knead the dough. He tossed the damp fabric into a laundry basket, and carried it outside to hang on the clotheslines.

While the dough was rising Sandburg went into the bathroom to shower and dress. When he returned to the room Mulder was finishing the second load of clothes. They worked with an easy silence. Sandburg enjoyed watching Mulder work; the man seemed to have an endless supply of energy.

Sandburg punched down the dough then set it back near the stove to allow it to rise again. He pulled out three loaf pans and greased them, then sat back at the counter to enjoy another mug of coffee while he waited.

"Chief!" Ellison called.

Sandburg hopped off the stool and walked into the parlor. "Yeah, Jim, what do you need?"

"Some of that medicinal tea." Ellison turned on his side and closed his eyes. He was feeling miserable.

"Okay, big guy, I'll have it for you in a few minutes."

Sandburg filled the teakettle with tap water, enough to make John and Walter a mug of tea, too.

Mulder carried another load of wash outside to hang on the line. After he came back inside he filled another mug with coffee and sat back at the washer, drinking it, while washing another load of clothes.

Two hours later, a loud hissing noise woke Krycek from a sound sleep. He opened his eyes trying to figure out where the noise was coming from and swore. The air mattress had sprung a leak. He rolled off the mattress and looked for the leak, finding it by the valve. The seam had ripped. "Fuck!" It would be hard to repair. He decided to worry about it later after he had a cup of coffee. Krycek climbed down that ladder and looked around.

Mulder had finished the laundry and was at the stove preparing breakfast. The loaves of bread that Sandburg had baked were cooling on the rack.

Krycek stopped at the stove and kissed Mulder on the cheek. "Hey, have you been up long?" he asked.

"Four hours. I wanted to get the laundry done."

"The air mattress has sprung a leak. I'm going to try to fix it later."

"Damn, what next?"

Skinner stepped out of the bedroom fully dressed. Ellison and Sandburg were in the parlor, rolling up the sleeping bags.

"I better get dressed," Krycek said as he headed into the bedroom.

Mulder scooped the oatmeal into six bowls, and Skinner helped him carry them over to the table as Doggett walked out of the bathroom.

The men sat down to breakfast together, sharing meals had become an important part of their day. Ellison and Sandburg sat at their chosen places at the table as Krycek hurried out of the bedroom pulling a sweater over his head. He sat at the table next to Mulder.

"So what do you have planned for this morning?" Doggett asked as he poured some milk over the oatmeal.

Krycek reached for the brown sugar. "We're going to get the windmill up. Jimmy should be here by nine and between him, Fox, and me we hope to have it up before noon. Langly, Byers, and Frohike are going to handle the chores."

"Walter, Jim, and I should have most of the wiring done before we head to the meeting at the ranger's station this afternoon," Doggett said.

"Don't work too hard," Mulder said, "We don't want you too tired for the trip to the station."

"If we drink Blair's special potion before we go, we should be fine," Skinner said.

~x~X~x~

The Fox, Dog, Rat, Wolf, Bear, Panther, Otter, Frog, Stork, and Puppy

Ranger Station  
Monday, October 1, 2001  
4:00 p.m.

The community meeting had to be held outdoors. Too many residents had shown up to fit them all inside the ranger station. The twenty farm families from the valley were present, along with sixty-five families from across the mountain range. Most of the families had their children with them, too worried to leave them alone and unprotected. Several families had three and four generations of relatives with them.

Mulder looked around. He counted three hundred and seventy-eight men, women, and children. He only knew fifteen of them. A lot of the others came from areas further back in the mountains than he had ventured on horseback since moving to area six months ago. Frohike seemed to know most of them even the kids.

Ellison was on the front porch of the ranger station speaking to the crowd, trying to convince them of the need for a community militia to protect their families and property from outsiders.

"Mr. Ellison, who'd be in charge of this militia?" Arnold Simmons asked.

"If no one else is willing, I'd like to offer my services to the community to organize and lead the militia. I was in the military for several years and was a police detective," Ellison said.

"No offense, Mr. Ellison, but we don't know you," Simmons said. "I think most of us would feel more comfortable with someone we know and trusted heading the militia."

"That's fine with me, who do you have in mind?"

Simmons looked around at his neighbors then he turned back to face Ellison. "Melvin Frohike."

Most of the people in the crowd nodded and made sounds of approval.

Frohike had been shamelessly flirting with Ada Elend when he heard his name and looked around puzzled.

Arne Elend chuckled. "It looks like you're our new militia leader, Melvin, serves ya right for flirting with my wife."

"Whoa, I'm a lover not a fighter."

Hugh Wagner turned to him. "Melvin, we don't know your friends and we'd feel better with you in charge. At least until we decide if we can trust them."

Maureen Blye echoed her agreement. "You know this area, Melvin. You know where all of us live and you also know these strangers," she said, nodding toward Ellison, Skinner, and the other men. "I think you're the perfect choice. You can act as a bridge between us."

"But, Maureen, I don't know anything about organizing and leading a militia."

Ellison felt relieved that he wouldn't have to shoulder the bulk of the responsibility for the militia. Frohike could act as the community contact for their group while he and the others did the actual work. He was starting to feel sick again as the medicinal tea Blair had given him before they headed here wore off. "Melvin, don't worry, Walter, John, and I will help you...we all have military training."

Mulder watched his friend's face as Frohike thought it over. His features went from doubt to resignation.

"Okay, I'll do it."

Several people patted him on the back. Langly and Byers frowned but kept their thoughts to themselves.

"Cool, Melvin, do you get to wear a uniform?" Jimmy asked.

"No, Jimmy, at least I hope not," Frohike grumbled.

Mulder noticed that his lovers and Ellison weren't looking well. "Fro, we need to be heading back home. Why don't you collect a list of our neighbors that want to be part of the militia and we can hold a separate meeting here later in the week with them."

"Good idea, Mulder, I'll see you guys tomorrow," Frohike said as the six men started for the two horses and two mountain bikes they had ridden there on.

Mulder made sure that Skinner and Doggett were well enough to ride the horse back, while Sandburg helped Ellison on the other horse and swung up behind him. He and Krycek climbed on the mountain bikes. It was a beautiful late afternoon day. The trees had just started changing to their fall colors and the temperature was in the mid-fifties. He and Krycek rode behind the two horses to keep an eye on their sick friends.

Mulder was exhausted and looked forward to relaxing after he took care of the animals, and maybe even going to bed early for once. He, Krycek, and Bond had assembled and erected the windmill earlier in the day. It was a labor-intensive task. The other members of their group had finished wiring the cabin and tomorrow they'd be able to hook up the power. Mulder couldn't wait to have electricity and not have to depend on the kerosene lamps for light.

The path widened and Krycek rode up along side of him. "You look tired, Fox. Why don't you let me handle milking the cows and bedding down the horses, while you get some rest."

"That's okay, you've worked just as hard as I did today," Mulder said.

"Not true. You were up four hours before me doing the laundry and fixing breakfast."

"Are you sure, Alex? You're still not used to milking--"

"Fox, I'm sure. I think I've gotten pretty good at milking."

The path narrowed again forcing Krycek to ride behind Mulder.

They arrived back at the cabin twenty minutes later. Mulder helped Doggett and Skinner off the horse and into the cabin, while Krycek took their horse, and Sandburg's and Ellison's horse to the barn. When they entered the cabin, Sandburg already had Ellison on the recliner and was heading into the kitchen to heat a teakettle of water to make another batch of his medicinal tea.

Doggett and Skinner collapsed tiredly on the sofa and Tiger leaped up to sit between them.

"I hate being this sick," Doggett grumbled as he petted the cat. His whole body was stiff and achy, and his head felt like it had been split wide open.

Mulder frowned as he looked at his two lovers' pain-filled faces. "Don't worry, guys, Blair is fixing another batch of his herbal remedy." He placed a throw blanket over them before going to build fires in the potbellied stove and the fireplace in the bedroom.

Skinner was feeling marginally better than Doggett. He'd been fearfully checking his body each morning for any sign that he had changed further or for any openings that shouldn't be there. This morning he'd noticed that the hair on his arms had started growing back. He took that as a good sign, even if it wasn't as dark and thick.

"Mulder, can I see you a moment?" Sandburg called from the kitchen.

Mulder closed the grate on the stove and walked across the room to the kitchen. "What's wrong, Blair?"

"I haven't been able to find any more feverfew flowers on the plants, and after the frost we had last night, I don't expect there to be anymore until Spring."

Mulder glanced over at the men suffering in the parlor. "Oh great. How long do you think your supply will last?"

"I have enough to get them through the next three days. After that we'll have to depend on Tylenol to relieve their discomfort."

Mulder rubbed his eyes tiredly, he didn't like to see the men suffering and knowing that he was responsible for Walter's and John's condition made him feel even guiltier. "Okay, Blair." He headed into the bathroom to add more wood to the water heater.

Krycek finally finished attending to the animals and headed inside. Ellison and Skinner were in the kitchen preparing dinner, and Sandburg was sitting in the parlor reading. He looked around for Mulder but didn't find him in the bedroom or bathroom.

"He's out on the front porch with John," Skinner said. The A.D. felt a hundred percent better after drinking the tea, too bad it would only last four hours.

"Thanks." Krycek walked across the room to the front door and stepped outside. He found the two men sitting on the porch swing talking quietly. Doggett had his arm around Mulder's shoulders.

Mulder looked up at him and smiled tiredly. "Hey, Alex. I was talking to John about you and me taking a scavenger trip into the city. There's some items I want to get before someone else beats us to them."

Doggett shook his head. "Alex, I don't think you and Fox should go until Walter and I are better so we can all go together."

"John, if your change takes as long as mine did, you won't be well for another three weeks," Mulder said, "And one of the things I want to look for is feverfew at one of the herbal medicine stores, that is if any of the stores are still left standing. Blair's supply is only going to last three more days." Mulder also wanted to pick up another few boxes of tampons. With Krycek needing them his supply wasn't going to last for long, but he wasn't about to voice that aloud.

"Fox is right, John, we can't wait until you're better. We'll take the truck and trailer; I want to get a sleeper sofa as long as we're out. We'll take Jimmy with us to watch the truck when we're in the stores."

"You're going to get yourselves shot for looting."

"The military is too busy preparing for the invasion and helping the refugees to care about people looting from the ruins," Mulder said. "Besides, the military has been providing Sean with the latest stickers to allow him to travel freely. He'll let us use it to get through any military roadblocks."

"What else are you planning on picking up?"

"Since we have electricity now, I thought I'd pick up some more light bulbs, lamps, some power tools, some lumber supplies for the Gunmen's bathroom, and a couple of space heaters," Mulder said. "Can you think of anything else we need?"

"A washer and dryer," Doggett said. He had listened to the sound of Fox doing the laundry for three hours this morning.

Mulder grinned. "If we can find an appliance store, I'd love to get at least a washer."

"When will you be leaving?"

"I want to leave before the sun comes up. That way, if everything goes well, we can be back here before the sun sets tomorrow."

Skinner poked his head out the door. "Dinner's ready."

He and Ellison had made pasta tossed in olive oil, with sauted garlic, mushrooms, and zucchini. And a nice large salad. Everything was dished up and on the dining room table along with bread and butter.

Mulder took his place on the side of the rectangular table next to Krycek. Skinner and Ellison sat at the opposite ends with Mulder on Skinner's right and Doggett on Skinner's left.

"Fox and Alex are driving to Baltimore tomorrow," Doggett said as he stabbed a slice of tomato in the salad bowl with his fork.

Skinner looked at Mulder and Krycek. "Why?"

"I want to pick up some things now that we have electricity," Mulder said.

Skinner nodded. "Okay, take your side arms and automatic rifles," he said, "We'll probably need something to entertain us this winter, so if you stumble across a CD player and CDs get them but don't go out of your way looking for them."

Mulder smiled. "Sure, Walter. Blair, Jim, is there anything you need?"

Ellison couldn't think of anything off the top of his head. They'd be going back to their cabin as soon as he was better. "We could use some KY and a few bags of coffee beans."

"A bread machine," Sandburg said. He had the tedious task of making bread that morning.

"Good thinking we could use one of those, too," Mulder said, "You know you're welcome to stay here if you want."

"Thanks, Mulder, but Blair and I will be heading back to our cabin as soon as I'm better." Ellison took a sip of water then picked up his fork. "If you find a liquor store that hasn't been destroyed or looted pick up some wine."

"We could always check some of the unaffected towns to see if they have any stores that are still open," Mulder said.

"I'm sure the prices will be through the roof," Krycek said.

"We can't steal everything," Mulder said. He was beginning to feel guilty about all of the stuff they'd acquired after millions of people had lost their lives.

"Fox, it's not stealing, either we get it or someone else will. Life changed when the aliens attacked, right now its survival for the fittest," Krycek said.

"Alex is right, Fox. Right now we have to focus on surviving, and we might as well do it with as much comfort as we can find," Doggett said as he looked across the table at his lover.

"I know you're both right, but it still is going to feel weird to walk into a store and take whatever we want." Mulder twirled his fork in the pasta.

"Just be careful tomorrow. There's bound to be others scavenging through the Baltimore area," Skinner said.

"Don't worry, Walter, we will be," Mulder said as he brought a forkful of pasta to his lips.

Skinner swallowed as he watched a trickle of olive oil drip off the pasta and down his lover's chin. He wanted to lick it off and would have if it weren't for the other men at the table.

Krycek grabbed Mulder's wrist as he started to pick up a napkin. He leaned in and licked the olive oil off his chin.

Skinner glared at Krycek then went back to his meal.

They finished the rest of the meal while enjoying small talk. After dinner, Mulder excused himself and went into the bathroom to take a shower while Krycek and Doggett did the dishes. Skinner joined Mulder as he was dropping his clothes on the bathroom floor.



"Fox, do you mind if I share the shower with you?"

"No." Mulder grinned tiredly. "You can wash my back."

"You look beat. I'm sorry that I haven't been able to help you with the chores," Skinner said as he stripped.

"Walter, I understand. Besides I'm the reason you've been too sick to help." Mulder turned on the shower and climbed into the bathtub, Skinner stepped under the spray a minute later.

They stood facing each other for a minute as the water rained down on them before Mulder wrapped his hand behind Skinner's neck and leaned in to kiss him. As their lips touched, Skinner pulled Mulder against his body and returned the kiss with uncontrolled passion.

Arousal made them both hard. They ground their groins together as they kissed, moving faster as the need for release spurred them on. Mulder moaned into Skinner's mouth as he spilled his seed. Skinner's arms tightened around Mulder's water-slicked body as his own release joined his lover's against their bodies.

Mulder sighed and rested his forehead on Skinner shoulder. "I'm too exhausted to move."

Skinner chuckled. "Turn around and I'll wash your hair and back."

Mulder lifted his head off Skinner's shoulder and turned. Skinner's large hands caressed Mulder's shoulders before he reached for the shampoo. "You're so fucking beautiful."

Mulder snorted. "You're one to talk, you big bald beautiful man," Mulder said as Skinner started to wash his hair.

"You don't seriously find me attractive?"

"Walter, you exude a raw unbridled sexuality." Mulder moved to allow the water to wash the shampoo out of his hair. "Do you have any idea the number of women that took their lunch break when you did just to be in the cafeteria at the same time?"

"You're making that up," Skinner said as Mulder picked up a washcloth and a bar of soap.

"They used to tell Scully that watching you kept them trim."

"How's that?"

"They saved on calories because they didn't need dessert, watching you was their dessert." Mulder ran the soapy washcloth over Skinner's chest.

Skinner groaned. "Now I know you're making it up."

Mulder smiled sweetly. "No you don't. Now do my back."

Skinner took the washcloth. He washed Mulder's back and ran the cloth over the sweet mounds of his ass. "I want to sleep with you up in the loft tonight."

"Walter, in a couple of hours Blair's concoction is going to wear off and you'll be glad you're near the bathroom and in a nice soft bed."

Skinner knew he was right. "Then sleep downstairs with John and me."

"After you're better we'll go back to your bed schedule." Mulder felt guilty about leaving Alex to sleep alone in the chilly loft.

"Okay, Fox," Skinner sighed.

They finished their shower, and then took turns at the sink brushing their teeth. Mulder pulled on an undershirt and pajama bottoms while Skinner dressed in flannel pajamas. He touched Skinner's arm, as his lover was about to leave the bathroom. Mulder leaned in and kissed him tenderly. "I really want to sleep with you. I hope that you're better soon."

"You will wake me to say goodbye before you leave tomorrow morning?" Skinner knew Mulder planned to leave before sunrise.

"Sure, Walter." They stepped out of the bathroom and Mulder walked across the room to the ladder and climbed up to the loft.

The other four men were sitting in the parlor relaxing with mugs of hot cocoa. Krycek stood and headed into the bathroom. "You didn't use all the hot water, did you?" he asked Skinner.

Skinner smirked. "No. Fox and I conserved hot water by sharing a shower."

Krycek stomped down his irritation with the knowledge that he'd be sleeping with Fox tonight. "Sleep well, Wally," he said as he closed the bathroom door.

~x~X~x~

The Fox, Rat, and Puppy

Baltimore

Tuesday, October 2, 2001

10:00 a.m.

Mulder steered the truck into the lot of the Home Depot and backed it up to the lumberyard. They noticed other scavengers, but they stayed out of each other's ways; there was more than enough loot in the store for all of them. On the back of the pickup truck bed was a sleeper sofa and a queen-sized mattress, box spring, and bed frame that they had picked up at a partially destroyed Slumberland store. The large trailer was empty except for a stacked washer and dryer--Mulder considered that find to have made the trip well worth it. Krycek on the other hand was more excited about the Queen-sized sleigh bed for the loft. It amused Mulder how much care Krycek had taken in choosing just the right bed frame.

Mulder turned off the engine and looked at Bond. They had taken the youngest Gunmen along for added protection and muscle. Someone needed to guard the truck when they were in the store.

"Alex, Jimmy, I'm going to start loading lumber onto the trailer for Byers' bathroom. Why don't you both go into the store and get us the power tools and whatever else you think we'll need."

"We're going to need some drywall, a door, and some roofing materials," Krycek said. "But if we forget anything we can make another run later in the week. Leave room on the right-hand side of the trailer, I want to get a table saw and sander."

"Sure, Alex, the roofing material is out here, I'll get that. You're right; we'll have to make another trip for the drywall. I still want to stop down the street at the Super Target store." Mulder wasn't about to go home without a few boxes of tampons, dry cat food, and the bread machines.

Mulder started loading the two by fours onto the trailer as Krycek and Bond headed into the store. They had no problem getting what they needed. It was at the Target Super store that they finally

ran into trouble. Krycek had just returned after loading a CD player onto the trailer. He passed Bond who had a cartload of music CDs.

"Jimmy, would you stay outside and guard the truck?"

"Sure, Alex."

The other end of the store smelled of rotten meat and spoiled milk. Mulder was down at that end getting cat food and some small kitchen appliances. Krycek was heading in that direction, he wanted to pick up some Queen-sized sheet sets and blankets for the new bed. He turned down the aisle and heard a low growl as he came upon a pack of wild dogs that had entered the store through the warehouse. The leader of the pack was a large pit bull. Krycek heard the wheels of a shopping cart coming toward them. The dogs' heads turned in that direction.

"Fox, watch out!" Krycek shouted. Fear for his lover's safety caused him to morph into a large wolf. He pounced on the pit bull as Mulder hurried down the aisle with his gun drawn. Mulder shot and killed two of the dogs and the others four fled. He watched the large sable fur wolf with green eyes kill the pit bull with supernatural strength.

Krycek looked up from the body at Mulder and walked over to him. He hopped up on his hind legs and placed his paws on Mulder's shoulders then licked his face.

Mulder stood there too stunned to move as the wolf morphed back into Krycek.

Krycek gave Mulder's face a couple of more licks before he pulled back and looked at him in surprise. "Ah, what just happened?"

"You changed into a wolf and killed a pit bull before he could attack us."

"Why don't I remember...?" Krycek looked down at the body of the dog. "God, Fox, I could have killed you."

Mulder smiled. "No, but you might have licked me to death. Alex, I think you knew exactly who I was."

Krycek shook his head in dismay; he hated not having any memory of being a wolf. "C'mon, let's get the rest of the stuff and get out of here."

~x~X~x~

The Dog, Bear, Fox, Rat, Panther, and Wolf

The Cabin

Wednesday, October 3, 2001

11:30 a.m.

A few hours ago Sean had flown the items that they had picked up from the Baltimore area yesterday to their place. Skinner was now out in the barn with Ellison setting up the power tools and putting away the lumber. They would cut it down to size in the barn before hauling it to the Gunmen's cabin. The first thing they had to do, at the Gunmen's place, was build a septic tank, distribution box, and a leach field, where the liquid waste and water could drain. It was going to involve a lot of physical labor.

Krycek was up in the loft assembling the bed frame with help from Doggett.

"Okay, let's get the mattresses on it," Krycek said as he stepped back to admire the highly

polished, mahogany, sleigh bed.

"What made you select a sleigh bed?" Doggett asked as they grabbed opposite sides of the box spring and lifted it onto the frame.

"My parents had one. I remembered all of the times when I was a little boy that I used to crawl into their bed. Sleeping in that bed with them, gave me a sense of security and love that I haven't had since that time. I wanted to try to recapture that feeling."

"It's a nice looking bed," Doggett said as they put the mattress on top of the box spring.

Krycek picked up one of the sheet sets that were sitting against the wall. He'd taken three Queen-sized sheet sets and feather pillows from Target. One set was flannel and the other two were cotton. He chose the flannel one to put on the bed. Doggett helped him make the bed and put the blanket and comforter on it. The bed looked very comfortable.

Doggett liked the loft. It had a couple of windows that looked out over the farmyard and the stream. The ceiling was sloped following the pitch of the roof. It was very cozy.

Mulder was downstairs in the kitchen hooking up the electric washer and dryer. The stacked set took up less floor space than the old hand cranked washer.

Sandburg sat on the new sleeper sofa in the parlor, sorting through the box of herbal medicines that they had picked up at a health food store. They were only able to find three bottles of ground feverfew. It should be enough to get them through a couple more weeks. He had the CD player on and was playing Alanis Morissette's latest CD. The old floral sofa they had moved out to the barn. The new sofa was made of dark navy blue leather and was a foot longer than the old sofa.

He and Jim would be heading back to their cabin tomorrow, to check on it, and drop off the supplies that were still at the ranger station. They planned to stay at Mulder's cabin until they had the Gunmen's bathroom built, the patrols organized, and his lover was feeling better. Sandburg was going to miss this place. He enjoyed the companionship of the other men. Not to mention that this area of the mountain range was beautiful.

Doggett climbed down the ladder followed by Krycek. He walked over to where Mulder was hooking up the outside heat vent from the dryer through the hole he had cut in the thick log.

"How's it going?" Doggett asked.

Mulder smiled. "Almost done, then we can test it."

"I'm going out to the barn to see how Walter and Jim are doing. Call me when you're ready to test the washer."

Krycek started digging through the cabinets. It was his day to cook. He pulled out three cans of tomato soup and dumped the contents into a large pot with three cans of milk. He stirred the contents with a whisk until the soup and milk were well blended, then walked outside to get the package of sliced American cheese out of the outside cooler. He wanted to test the convection oven by making grilled cheese sandwiches.

"Blair, can you go outside and tell the guys that lunch will be ready in ten minutes?" Krycek said as he placed the six cheese sandwiches in the oven.

"Sure, Alex."

Mulder turned on the washer and watched as the basin started to fill. He added towels and

sheets, then the laundry detergent.

"Hey, it sounds like the washer is working," Doggett said as he walked in through the back door followed by the other three men.

"So far so good," Mulder said.

Krycek carried the bowls over to the table then ladled the soup into each bowl. He then cut the grilled cheese sandwiches in half and placed them on a large plate.

Skinner and Ellison walked into the bathroom to wash their hands as Krycek filled a pitcher with ice-cold water from the tap and placed it on the table along with six glasses.

Sandburg filled one of the glasses with water from the pitcher and sat at his place at the table. He reached for half a sandwich and started eating as the other men took their places. "So, do you think we're making enough electricity to run a refrigerator?" he asked.

"Yes," Doggett said, "We're generating enough power to provide electricity for three households."

Everyone looked over at Krycek and Mulder.

"Okay, we'll add it to our list. I just don't know where we're going to put a refrigerator, we seem to be running out of space in the kitchen," Mulder said.

"There's room next to the washer and dryer," Skinner said, "We'll just have to install another electrical outlet on the wall."

"It probably should be on a separate circuit," Ellison said as he looked over at the wall.

"Yep, you're right." Doggett dunked his sandwich into the soup. "We'll start on it after lunch."

~x~X~x~

The Panther and Wolf

Jim's and Blair's Cabin

Thursday, October 4, 2001

1:30 p.m.

Ellison knew something was wrong the minute he and Sandburg turned SUV down the road their cabin was on. He heard the sounds of kids playing, a baby crying, and several people talking in the direction of the cabin.

"What's wrong, Jim?" Sandburg asked.

"I think some people have moved into our cabin."

It was confirmed when they saw the vehicles parked in front of the cabin. Ellison parked the SUV behind a minivan and an old station wagon with New York license plates. He and Sandburg climbed out. A couple of eight or nine year old boys were playing out front. They ran into the cabin and called to their dad and uncle.

"Dad, Uncle Jacob, someone's here!"

A large man walked out on the porch pointing a rifle at them. "What do you want?"

"This is our cabin!" Ellison growled, not liking having a gun aimed at him and Blair.

An even larger man came out of the cabin, holding a handgun, behind him in the open doorway stood two women, one holding a baby, and the other with a toddler. Both men had red hair and resembled each other. Ellison figured they were probably brothers.

"Not any longer," the man said, "My family has been here the last three days and we're staying." He cocked the rifle.

"Jim, maybe we should go," Sandburg said. He could see the man wouldn't hesitate to kill them to protect his family.

"Can't we work this out? Our belongings are in that cabin."

"Mary, get their bags and bring them out here," the larger man said.

"We'll give you your things then you're leaving. Got that?"

Ellison glared at the man, then looked at the small freckle-faced boys hovering fearfully behind him. "Got it," he said as he realized that he couldn't throw them out. No matter how much he wanted to smack the bastard with the rifle.

Mary came out of the cabin with their bags. The man stopped her from carrying them down the steps to them. He grabbed first one bag and threw it underhanded at Ellison who caught it then the other bag to Sandburg.

"Now get."

"C'mon, Chief, let's go and give the guys the good news that we'll be staying through the winter with them."

"At least they have electricity now."

Ellison smiled as he started the truck. "I think we'll be able to become part of Walter's revolving bed schedule. I'd love to be able to make love to you by firelight in that large pine bed in the master bedroom."

"Just so long as we only switch beds and not partners, big guy. I think Walter mainly wants to switch so he can sleep with Mulder. He and Alex don't seem to like each other very much...I wonder what that's all about." Sandburg knew from talking to Alex about his troubled past with Mulder, but he knew nothing about Alex's past with Walter.

"Maybe jealousy."

"Then how come Walter and Alex don't seem to have a problem with John's relationship with Mulder?"

"Maybe because Walter is having sex with John, and I think Alex and John sort of like each other."

"That still doesn't explain why Walter and Alex don't like each other," Sandburg said.

"Let's not pry, Chief."

"How are you feeling?" Sandburg asked as he noticed his lover's face had taken on a greenish tone.

"Fine...sort of. Can you pour me some of that tea?"

Sandburg picked up the thermos at his feet and poured some tea into the plastic cup. He handed the cup to Ellison who took it while keeping his left hand on the steering wheel.

~x~X~x~

The Fox, Bear, Otter, Frog, Stork, and Puppy

The Gunmen's Cabin

Thursday, October 11, 2001

7:00 p.m.

They'd been working on the bathroom at the Gunmen's cabin for a week. It took them three long days to dig the trench for the drainage pipe and a deep hole to install the septic tank and lay the pipes for the leach field. Having power tools cut the construction time in half.

Over the past week Mulder had enjoyed watching Byers. The man had taken total charge of all aspects of the bathroom project. He had a clipboard with the daily schedule of what they should have done. Byers even insisted on going with Mulder, Krycek, and Bond when they headed back to the Home Depot in Baltimore to pick up the drywall and a solar-heated water heater with solar panels for the roof. Byers wanted to select the tiles and accessories for the bathroom; he didn't like the tiles that Krycek and Ellison had picked up, on their ill-fated trip.

During that trip, they had stopped back at the Slumberland store and picked up the matching dresser and nightstand for the sleigh bed. Krycek reasoned that Jim and Blair needed a place to store their clothes. They had encountered more people on that trip than on past trips. It seemed more and more people were venturing into the ruins in search of food and supplies.

Back at the cabin, Ellison and Skinner had been discussing building a staircase going up to the loft to replace the ladder. They didn't want it to take floor space from the parlor, so that led to talks about expanding the cabin, maybe adding another bedroom.

At the Gunmen's place, yesterday they had installed the bathroom fixtures, except the claw-footed tub, and today they were tiling the room. The bathroom was beautiful. Mulder was surprised how good it had turned out. They had installed a bay window and a corner potbellied stove, since the large fireplace that separated the parlor from the kitchen was the cabin's only source of heat, they knew it would not be enough to heat the bathroom, too.

Mulder pulled his mind back to the task at hand as he cut a tile with a tile cutter. He handed the piece to Skinner who was on his knees installing the tile.

Skinner had awakened that morning feeling fine; he didn't need the medicinal tea. To his and Mulder's relief there was no sign of a vagina on his body, so maybe he wouldn't change into a hermaphrodite after all. It had been eighteen days since Mulder had infected him.

Krycek had finished shingling the bathroom roof a few hours ago and had gone back to their cabin, since tiling the bathroom was only a two-man job.

Skinner stood. "Okay, guys, we just need to grout the tile tomorrow then put on a sealer Saturday, and install the bathtub."

Byers stood in the doorway and smoothed a hand over the tiled wall. "It's beautiful. Thanks, Mulder, Walter."

"You're welcome, John," Mulder said.

"So can we use the toilet?" Langly asked.

"You probably shouldn't walk on the tiles until the glue sets for at least 24 hours," Skinner said.

Frohike walked over to them and looked into the room. "Very nice. I have dinner ready if you're hungry."

"Hey, I'm starving. What did you make?" Mulder asked.

"Stuffed acorn squash and pan fried crappies."

"Mm, who caught the fish?" Skinner asked.

"Langly and I did this morning."

Bond came in through the back door with a basket of eggs. Rocky followed him inside and sat looking up at the stove.

"Cat, go catch some mice. Fish is people food," Frohike said as he scooped the fish out of the cast iron skillet onto six plates.

"So, when's the next militia meeting?" Mulder asked as he sat at the round table.

"I plan to hold it Sunday afternoon at the ranger's station. Langly is going to contact the other militia members on the radio. There's a few new families that have moved into the Timberlake cabins who want to be part of the militia," Frohike said.

Skinner frowned. "I'm not sure we can trust them. One of those families held a gun on Jim and Blair and stole their cabin."

"Since you, Jim, and Arnold are my field captains, you'll have a say in whether they are allowed to be part of the militia." After finding out he had the power to delegate, Frohike had discovered that he enjoyed being in charge.

Langly picked out the tiny bones from the trout. "Mulder, let me know next time you and Alex plan on heading out on another scavenger hunt there's something I'd like you to pick up for us."

"Sure, what do you need?"

"I want to get some more solar panels for the roof, to help charge the battery in the generator Alex and John picked up for us, and some back up batteries," Langly said.

"Sure, we'll look the next time we head out. The Home Depot is pretty picked over, but there may be some more stores deeper within the ruins that haven't been totally destroyed or looted."

By the time they finished eating it was dark outside and Mulder was feeling strange. He felt a stirring in his loins as he sat next to Walter. Something wasn't right. The moon wasn't full so that wasn't what was causing his ardor to rise. Skinner's scent seemed to be more intense...arousing.

"We'll see you, guys, tomorrow. We need to be heading home," Mulder said.

"Thanks for dinner, Melvin," Skinner said as he pulled on his jacket.

"Be careful riding those bikes on the path in the dark," Byers said as he walked out onto the front



porch with them.

Mulder climbed onto his bike as Skinner got on the other one, and they started pedaling down the dark path with just the small bike headlights to see by. They made it three miles when Mulder stopped suddenly.

Skinner stopped and looked back at him. It was too dark to make out Mulder's features. He watched as Mulder climbed off the bike and allowed it to topple over.

"Fox, what's wrong?" Skinner climbed off his bike and put down the kickstand.

Mulder crossed the distance between them, and grabbed Skinner by the front of his shirt and kissed him hard.

Skinner was startled at first then returned the kiss with unbridled lust. After several minutes of kissing, Skinner started to feel strange and aroused in an area that wasn't a part of his body. It didn't help that Mulder's hand had found its way down the back of his pants and his finger was pressing against his perineum. Skinner suddenly found himself on all fours. He whimpered, as the urge to be mated became all encompassing. He felt damp as Mulder's long tongue darted out and licked his backside before leaping up on his body and mounting him from behind. Mulder slid easily into him and started to fuck Walter hard and fast. It was only when they tied as a large knot swelled inside him that Skinner realized he was no longer human and Mulder hadn't been fucking him through his rectum.

'What's happening to me?' Skinner mind shouted.

Mulder's voice sounded soothingly inside his head. 'It's all right, Walter. You're like Alex and me...a werewolf.'

'I'm a female werewolf?' Skinner asked, as Mulder remained tied with him.

'More like a hermaphrodite wolf,' Mulder said as he finally shrunk enough to pull out of his lover. 'You seemed to have retained your cock and balls.'

'This is too weird.' Skinner felt strange as Mulder separated from him. He looked around, his deep brown eyes seeing everything in clear detail. His eyesight was perfect...he didn't need his glasses.

'Run with me, Walter,' Mulder said, being in wolf form made him feel playful and unencumbered. He took off down the hill on the right side of the path.

Skinner was over his initial shock and chased after Mulder through the underbrush. They spent over an hour running and playing together before stopping by a stream to drink.

Skinner sat back on his haunches. 'Fox, this is remarkable. I was scared and repulsed at first but I've never felt more free.'

Mulder walked over to him and licked his face, then nuzzled against his body. 'The only drawback is we will only have fleeting memories of this time when we change back.'

'How long can we keep this form?'

'I don't know. Usually I only changed during the full moon, but for some reason we both changed tonight. The only time I changed during the day was when John was shot.'

'How do we change back?'

'I think that will happen automatically at daybreak.'

Skinner saw a small shape move in the brush. 'Shall we catch a couple of fat rabbits to cook up for lunch?'

'Cook up?' Mulder had already caught and eaten a rabbit while in wolf form.

'Lunch, Fox. According to you we'll be human again and I sort of doubt we'll want to eat the rabbits rare.'

'I'm not sure I'll like rabbit as a human.'

'It tastes like chicken.'

'If you say so.'

Skinner gave his lover a wolfish smirk then took off after the rabbit he'd seen.

~x~X~x~

The Rat, Dog, Bear, and Fox

Krycek stood out on the front porch looking off into the night. Fox and Walter should have been home hours ago. He went back inside the cabin and got a flashlight.

"Alex, where are you going?" Doggett asked. He was dressed in a robe and pajamas and sat on the recliner next to the potbellied stove. Sandburg and Ellison were in the bathroom sharing a shower before bed.

"To look for Fox and Walter."

"Let me get dressed and I'll go with you."

"No. John, you're not feeling well and will only slow me down. Stay here. I'm just going to take the path to the Gunmen's place."

"Do you have your gun?"

"Yeah, I never leave home without it."

"Be careful."

"Don't worry about me, I'm always careful." Krycek paused at the front door. "You look like shit, John, why don't you go to bed?"

"Not until Fox and Walter...and you get home."

"I'll be back shortly." Krycek closed the door behind him as he stepped outside. He flipped on the flashlight and started in the direction of the Gunmen's cabin.

The evening was crisp with a sweet fragrance of decay from the leaves that had fallen off trees. Krycek's feet made a crunching sound as he stepped on dried leaves and twigs.

One mile down the path a couple of large shapes darted up the hill and onto the path. Krycek dropped the flashlight and reached for his handgun as one of the wolves walked up to him and

dropped a dead jackrabbit at his feet before hopping up on its hind legs and placing its paws on Krycek's shoulders.

"Fox?" Krycek asked as he looked into the wolf's golden eyes. The wolf licked him in response, which made the other wolf growl around the fat jackrabbit in its mouth.

Mulder morphed suddenly into his human form and was surprised to find himself looking into Krycek's face. "Alex?"

"Fox, tell me that wolf behind you is Walter?"

Mulder turned and look at the large wolf that looked up at him with intelligent brown-eyes. "Walter?"

Skinner set the rabbit on the ground, walked over to him, and pushed his nose in Mulder's groin.

Mulder gasped then pushed Skinner's nose away so he could kneel beside him. He petted Skinner's large furry head as he looked at him. "Can you understand me?"

A long tongue darted out of the wolf's mouth and licked Mulder across his lips, causing him to fall back on his ass. The wolf stepped forward and pushed Mulder onto his back, then stood over him and started licking Mulder playfully. Mulder started chuckling. When Krycek stepped closer, Skinner looked up and growled, baring his teeth.

Krycek glared at him. "Don't push your luck, Wally, you're not the only one that can change into a wolf."

Skinner ignored him and went back to licking and nipping his lover. He suddenly found himself back in human form, on the ground on all fours, with Fox's arms around his body hugging him. The last thing Skinner remembered was standing on the path kissing Fox.

"Are you two about done?" Krycek's annoyed voice startled an already confused Skinner.

"How did you get here?" Skinner asked.

"I came looking for you when you didn't come home."

"What time is it?"

"It's midnight."

"Walter let me up," Mulder said breathlessly.

Skinner climbed to his feet and gave Mulder a hand up.

"Where are our bikes?" Skinner asked as he looked around.

"I think you must have left them somewhere along the path. Why don't you take the rabbits back home while Fox and I go and look for them," Krycek said.

Skinner looked down at the dead jackrabbits on the path. "What killed them?"

"You and Fox caught them," Krycek answered patiently, he remembered how upset he'd been at Fox's suggestion that they had turned into werewolves. "We might as well clean them and prepare them for dinner tomorrow night. We should get used to hunting and eating game animals. We're not going to be able to scavenge Spam or canned meats from the ruins indefinitely."

"Why don't I remember catching them?" Skinner asked.

Mulder walked up to Skinner and hugged him. "Walter, Alex and I watched you turn from a wolf back into a man. I had returned to human form before you and I don't have any memory of our time together as wolves either." He watched the look of doubt and fear on his lover's face.

"Walter, as a wolf you knew exactly who Krycek and I were. You even got frisky with me."

"Okay, I'll take your word for it, although I'm not really going to believe it until I see one of us change with my own eyes." How could he doubt it when even John Sceptic Doggett claimed to have seen Mulder change from a wolf back into a man?

Skinner bent and picked up the large jackrabbits by their ears, each must weigh close to twenty pounds. "I'll take care of cleaning them in the morning. When I was a boy, my dad used to take my brother, West, and me hunting in Wisconsin. We caught and cleaned dozens of rabbits over the years."

Mulder made a face. "I hope it doesn't taste too bad."

"It tastes like chicken," Skinner and Krycek said simultaneously.

Skinner looked at Krycek questioningly.

Krycek shrugged. "When you're on the run sometimes you have to live off the land. C'mon, Fox, let's go find your bikes."

~x~X~x~

## The Bear and Dog

Skinner arrived home thirty minutes later, he hung the rabbits up in the barn before entering the house through the back door.

Doggett had the sofa bed opened and made. He was sitting at the kitchen counter waiting for them. "Walter, where's Fox and Alex?"

"Retrieving our bikes." Skinner looked at the partially opened bedroom doorway; he could hear Sandburg snoring softly.

"What happened?" Doggett asked.

"According to Alex, Fox and I changed into wolves."

Doggett sighed and stood. "So this alien virus Fox infected us with will cause both of us to change into werewolves?"

Skinner walked over and hugged John. "Look on the bright side...unlike Fox and Alex, at least we're still completely male. I think that I can live with turning into a werewolf as long as we're not a danger to humans."

"Do you want to turn in?"

"John, I'm going to sleep in the loft with Fox tonight," Skinner said guiltily.

Doggett chuckled. "That's okay, Walter, if I was feeling better I'd insist on my turn with him, too. Besides, I don't mind sleeping with Alex."

Skinner hugged and kissed him. "I'm going to clean up. Why don't you go to bed, John? You're not looking too good."

"Okay, at least I know that I should be feeling better by Monday." Doggett walked over to the sofa bed and crawled under the covers, it wasn't as comfortable as the big bed in the master bedroom, but it was better than the air mattress had been.

Tiger hopped on the bed and curled up on the pillow next to his.

~x~X~x~

The Fox, Rat, Bear, Dog, Panther, Wolf, Otter, Frog, Stork, and Puppy

The Cabin

Saturday, October 13, 2001

4:30 p.m.

Doggett sat on the sofa as he mixed the chocolate frosting in a small bowl. After it was silky smooth, he started to frost the two layer chocolate cake that Blair and Alex had baked that morning after Fox and Walter had left for the Gunmen's place. The cake was on the coffee table, since there was no room in the kitchen or dining room for Doggett to work. Krycek wanted to make Mulder something for his birthday, something that he hadn't had since moving to the cabin six months ago. So the kitchen and dining room had been turned into a pizza assembly line. To feed ten men they figured they'd need at least five large pizzas.

On Friday, Krycek had left the mountain and rode his motorcycle down into the ruins. He had a list of items he wanted to get for Mulder's birthday. One of them was chocolate for baking. He left early in the morning before Mulder had woken up, only Doggett knew where he was going and why. Doggett had later filled Skinner in when he'd gotten up but kept Mulder in the dark. Later they invited the Gunmen to the surprise party on Saturday. Doggett found it amusing that Krycek would plan a fortieth birthday party for Mulder. It just didn't seem like something the young man would do.

Skinner had promised to keep Mulder away from the cabin until five o'clock in the afternoon. They had spent an hour seal coating the Gunmen's bathroom then Skinner talked Mulder into going fishing with him, so that was where they were now.

"Mulder likes anchovies," Frohike said.

"Mulder isn't going to eat all six pizzas, Melvin," Langly said, "Just put them on one."

"Two. I know Walter likes anchovies and so do I," Frohike said.

"I don't mind anchovies," Bond said as he put slices of pineapple and pepperoni on one of the pizzas.

"Jimmy, you'd eat just about anything." Langly finished adding the mozzarella cheese to the vegetable pizza he was making.

"Man, you haven't lived until you've had a tongue pizza with Gorgonzola cheese," Sandburg said.

Langly made a face. "Yuck! No offense, Sandman, but I think I'd rather eat a can full of anchovies before I'd try tongue."

Byers walked over to the CD player and put in 'The Very Best of Frank Sinatra' CD.

Langly groaned. "Couldn't you put on something good?"

"Frank's good," Doggett said.

"Yep," Frohike echoed.

"At least tell me you hid the Elvis CDs," Langly grumbled.

"Hey, don't insult the King, Blondie," Doggett said.

"Whatever, Dogbird."

Byers stopped beside the sofa and looked down at the plain cake Doggett had just finished frosting. "That looks delicious."

"It does look pretty good," Doggett said proudly as he carefully picked up the plate the cake was on, carried it into the kitchen, and placed it inside the cupboard.

Krycek looked up at the kitchen clock...it was past five, Walter and Fox should be there by now, as if on cue, the back door opened and Skinner and Mulder walked in.

Mulder looked around. "What's going on?"

"Happy birthday!" everyone shouted.

Mulder blushed and shuffled his feet uncomfortably.

Krycek walked over and hugged him. "You didn't think you could turn forty and not have a party?"

"I was hoping no one would know when my birthday was."

"Hey, I've sent you a birthday card every year since we've known each other," Krycek said.

"Oh, so those were from you." Mulder looked at him surprised. "I always thought they were from Vicki in accounting."

Sandburg opened the oven, slid two pizzas onto the racks with the wooden pizza board Doggett had made yesterday, and then he closed the door.

"You made pizza?" Mulder said, surprised, as he looked hungrily at the uncooked pizzas on the kitchen table.

Skinner walked over to the refrigerator and pulled out a couple of cans of beers. He opened them, handed one to Mulder, and kept the other for himself.

Mulder smiled. "Wow, pizza and beer, I couldn't ask for a better birthday present."

"We're using the fresh mozzarella you and I made last week," Krycek said.

"So, if the cheese turned out we could have pizza more often," Mulder said hopefully.

"If we're still alive come spring, I think we should get a couple more cows," Doggett said. "With the six of us living here we can easily clear and plant six acres of land with alfalfa and hay for feed." He never thought he'd want to farm, he joined the marines to avoid it, but right now it felt

like a lifeline...a way to hold onto what this country once was before the aliens attacked.

"That would be a lot of work to clear five more acres without a tractor," Mulder said. Most of their land was hilly and rocky, but next to the one-acre field where the cows go during the day to graze there were at least eight more acres of flat forestland and small fields next to the lake that could be cleared. The rest of the property was too hilly to farm. This summer Mulder purchased the feed that filled the silo from Doris and Daniel Lin who have a farm across the road from the Elend's sheep ranch.

"We could check with the Elends or one of the other farm families in the valley if we could borrow their tractor, or I can check with my Pa about getting his old tractor that he no longer uses. The tractor will take some work to get it running properly," Doggett said as he suddenly began to look forward to tinkering on his Pa's old John Deere Model 530 tractor. He wondered if he could get it up here before the first winter snow stranded them in the mountains until spring.

As if reading his mind, Skinner said, "Why don't you try to reach your Pa on the Ham radio after the party? We could take a trip down to his farm next week to pick up the tractor."

"Good idea, Walt. I'd love to get that tractor up here to work on over the winter."

The Ham radio that they had set up in the loft had been a Godsend the past week. It had allowed both Skinner and Doggett to keep in touch with their families, in Alaska and North Carolina. In addition, Skinner and Ellison were able to contact friends in the military to find out what the situation was like around the world and across the country.

Sandburg removed the first two pizzas from the oven and set them on the cardboard covered cook's table. He put two more pizzas into the oven as Frohike used the round cutter to slice the cooked pizzas.

Mulder was served the first slice. "Mm..." He closed his eyes from pleasure, as he tasted the homemade pizza. The sauce had just the right amount of spices and the crust was perfect. He smiled. "Guys, you outdid yourselves."

"It came out better than I thought it would," Krycek said as he stood next to Mulder enjoying his own slice of pizza. He picked up a can of beer and took a sip while still holding the slice of pizza.

"So did you and Fox catch any fish?" Doggett asked. He was sipping some medicinal tea with the pizza.

Skinner nodded. "Some crappies and a couple of nice size bluegills. I left them tied in the stream out back. I'm going to clean them after the party before the raccoons can get them."

"I saw a couple of wild turkeys on the other side of the stream today," Ellison said, "Maybe after I'm better we can go turkey hunting."

"I'm game," Doggett said as he picked up another slice of pizza.

"Count me in," Krycek said. He looked over at Mulder. "Fox?"

"Doesn't turkey hunting involve sitting quietly outside in the cold brush until a turkey comes along?"

"Mulder, you can sit and wait if you want, I prefer tracking them," Ellison said.

"Yeah, but you're a sentinel, tracking them would be easy for you," Mulder said.

Ellison smiled. "Just stick close to me and stay quiet, we should be able to catch a couple of turkeys."

"Don't worry, Mulder, we'll bring a thermos of hot cocoa with us," Sandburg said as he pulled the next two pizzas out of the oven then put in the last two.

As Frohike sliced the pizzas, Langly walked over to the CD player and put on a Nirvana CD.

Byers moved to stand beside Skinner. "Walter, thanks for your help on the bathroom."

"No problem, John, have you used the bathtub yet?"

"Not yet, we wanted to give the seal-coating a chance to dry. I plan to take a bath when we get home tonight." Byers looked over at Bond and Frohike. "I only hope I can keep the bathroom clean."

"Don't worry, bathrooms are meant to take abuse."

Byers took a sip of beer from the glass he was holding. "So, Mulder said that you, Jim, and John have been discussing building onto your cabin."

"Yeah, we've been working on some ideas since we've been stuck inside sick. We want to add a staircase going up to the loft, a separate room for the laundry and storage, and another bedroom with a fireplace."

"If you need any help, Walter," Byers said.

"Thanks, John."

Mulder walked over to the refrigerator and pulled out another beer. "Does anyone want one?"

"I can use one," Bond said.

"Me, too," Langly said.

Mulder pulled two more cans out and passed them to his friends. He then walked over and put his arm around Doggett's back. "You're not drinking. How are you feeling?"

"I feel all right. I had some of Blair's tea...I just don't want to chance it by drinking alcohol."

"Do you want me to sleep down here with you tonight?" Mulder asked as he reached for a slice of pizza.

Doggett leaned against him. "If you wouldn't mind...I've missed your touch."

"Of course I don't mind. John, I'm feeling rather strange and would prefer sleeping down here with you," Mulder whispered. He was on the onset of his period and didn't want to be with Walter or Alex. His intuition told him that it wouldn't be good, but with John still going through the change it would be safe to sleep with him tonight.

"Strange? What do you mean, Fox?"

"It's hard to explain, but I'll try tonight when we're in bed."

Doggett reached for the last slice of pineapple and pepperoni pizza.



Skinner smiled contentedly as he looked around the warm kitchen filled with friends and companions. After so many years of frustrations and loss, he finally felt happy and at peace. It felt good to be a part of something, to be in love. If they ever got the chance to fight the aliens he knew that he could depend on his friends to protect his back, as he would protect them.

~x~X~x~

The Fox and Dog

The Cabin

Sunday, October 14, 2001

1:00 a.m.

"Tell me, Fox?" Doggett asked as he lay with his head on Mulder's shoulder. If he weren't feeling like shit again he'd be all over his lover, but since there was so little of the feverfew left Blair would only give it to him and Jim twice a day--eight hours of relief and sixteen hours of misery.

"I'm afraid that if I slept with Walter or Alex tonight, I'd become pregnant."

"Why do you think that?"

"It's hard to explain how I know, but my body has cycles similar to females. I probably shouldn't even be sleeping with you but--"

"But I'm too sick to have my way with you."

"No, I don't think you can get me pregnant until you complete the change and become like us."

"How would you know that?"

Mulder shrugged. "Instinct." He was sometimes at a loss to explain how he knew some things, other than he just did. It was what led to his nickname Spooky, his uncanny ability to tie unrelated fact together and arrive at answers that were right on the money.

"But Walter isn't exactly like you and Alex, he's still completely male."

"He's enough like us, he changed into a werewolf."

"Okay, say you're right, couldn't you avoid having sex or just use a condom?"

"It's not that simple," Mulder said as he caressed John's back. "Besides condoms break. Now go to sleep."

~x~X~x~

The Panther, Wolf, Frog, Bear, and Rat.

Ranger Station

Sunday, October 14, 2001

3:10 p.m.

Ellison's eyes narrowed and his jaw tightened as he saw the old station wagon parked in front of the Ranger's station. Several other vehicles were parked out front along with a few horses tied to the hitching posts. He climbed off the mountain bike and put down the kickstand. Ellison pulled the automatic assault rifle from where it was slung across his back and checked it before walking up the step to the station.

He held the door open to allow Frohike, Skinner, and Krycek to enter first. Blair looked at him questioningly as he walked into the station. Ellison allowed the door to slam shut behind him and crossed the floor in three steps. Before the red-haired man could respond, Ellison slugged him in the nose, knocking the man off his feet. The man's brother leaped to his feet and started to go after Ellison but was stopped by Skinner and Krycek.

"That's for stealing my cabin and pointing a gun at my friend and me!" Ellison growled.

The man licked at the blood dripping from his nose past his lips and down his chin. "I suppose I had that coming, but I was only protecting my family, mister."

"You pull a gun on my friends or me again and your children will grow up without a father! Got it?" Ellison threatened.

The man climbed to his feet. "Got it. So are you going to try to take the cabin back?"

"No. My friend and I have somewhere else to stay. If you would have asked nicely, we would have allowed you and your family to have the cabin," Ellison said.

The man looked ashamed. "My family and I barely made it out of New York City with our lives, we spent over a week searching for a place to stay and fighting for every scrap of food we could get our hands onto. After a week on the road and finally finding a place to settle you can understand why my brother and I were a bit hostile."

Something about the way the man stood and spoke piqued Ellison's interest. "You're a cop aren't you?"

"How did you know?"

"It takes one to know one. I'm Detective James Ellison, Cascade PD."

"Detective Noah Woods, NYPD, fifth precinct." Woods held out his hand.

Ellison shook it. "My friends are Blair Sandburg, Alex Krycek, and Assistant Director Walter Skinner of the FBI." Ellison nodded to each of them as he said their names and they exchanged handshakes with Woods. "And our militia leader Melvin Frohike."

Woods gave Frohike an appraising look, surprised that the small man would be the leader. He would have guessed the leader would have been Ellison or Skinner. "This is my brother Sergeant Jacob Woods of the twelfth precinct."

Jacob shook their hands.

At the meeting were three other families that had moved into the Timberlake resort cabins. Noah Woods introduced each of them. They had already met the other militia members before Frohike's group had arrived.

"Let's get down to business," Frohike said as he walked over to the map of the area that Ranger Sean had hung on the wall. "There are two roads where all vehicles have to pass to get into our section of the Blue Ridge Mountains. I want to have a guard station and a gate built at each of these roads." Frohike used a pointer to tap where each road entered the area. "I want each guard station manned 24/7 with two people per station. They should be equipped with a radio to contact us anytime someone tries to enter our community."

"How long are you planning the shifts to be?" Arnold Simmons asked.

"I figure three shifts, eight hours each. We have sixty-nine members, not counting our new recruits, so that means each person will have to put in one eight hour shift once every six days," Frohike said, "I don't think that's asking too much."

"Can we sign up for the shifts we want?" Noah Woods asked. "I don't want to be on the same shift as my brother. One of us needs to stay with our family."

Frohike nodded. "Yes. I'll post a schedule for everyone to sign up for. First we need volunteers to help build the guard stations. We'll need to put in a load of firewood at each station for winter."

"Melvin, I have an old one room hunting trailer on my property that we can move down for one of the guard stations," Simmons said. "It has a potbellied stove that keeps it nice and warm in the winter."

"Great, Arnie, that will save us time."

Rancher Sean bobbed his head up and down. "That reminds me, there's an old foreman's trailer that the lumber company left behind. It hasn't been used in years. We could move that down for the other guard station. It will take a little work to get it into shape, but it would be less work than building a new place from scratch."

"Thanks, Sean, so all we have left is to build two gates. Any suggestions?" Frohike asked.

The meeting continued as the men and women discussed what type of gate to build and how to get the trailers into place.

~x~X~x~

Back at the cabin, Doggett was on the radio with his dad. Mulder stood over his shoulder listening in.

"Pa, you don't have to deliver it, I'll be able to come down there and pick it up. Over."

"Nonsense, Johnny, I want to see where you're living. Your brother will help me load the tractor on the flatbed trailer and I'll drive it up to you on Friday. Over."

"Pa, it's too dangerous for you to come up here alone. I told you that Fox and I were ambushed on the way home last time by an armed band of men who had the road-blocked. Over."

"Johnny, I'm going to be driving big bertha and I have no intention of stopping for any road-blocks. Over."

Doggett looked up at Mulder and sighed, "Okay, Pa, just be careful. Do you think Mike will be okay by himself? Over."

"The military's been guarding our farm along with our neighbors. They have a few men stationed out in the bunkhouse and have helped us with the harvest. Over."

"Okay, Pa, we'll see you on Friday. Over and out."

"Big bertha?" Mulder asked.

"Remember the Dodge truck that required a step ladder to get into it?"

"Yeah, the one on those five foot high tractor tires."

"That's big berth. My Pa and brother customized it. You should see the engine in that thing."

Mulder smiled. "Don't worry, John, no one in their right mind could stop your Pa in that vehicle."

Doggett turned in the chair, wrapped his arms around Mulder's body, and rested his forehead on his lover's chest. "At least by Friday I should be feeling better. Do you think we can get six single beds moved up here before my Pa arrives?"

"How about if we promise not to have sex while your Pa is here? Or better yet have him stay in the guestroom at the ranger's station."

"My Pa is coming to visit me, we can't have him stay eight miles away with Sean." Doggett sighed. "Pa likes turning in early, so I'll share the bed in the loft with him. You, Walter, and Alex can sleep in the master bedroom and Blair and Jim can sleep on the sleeper sofa."

"Okay, Johnny."

"Don't call me that, Foxy," Doggett sighed as Fox's fingers combed through his hair.

~x~X~x~

The bounty hunter made his way through the D.C. ruins. He had hoped that he'd be able to find some information about where Fox Mulder had gone from the agent's former residence, but that building had been destroyed along with the rest of the neighborhood.

It was going to be a time-consuming task trying to locate Mulder. There wasn't even any indication that he was still alive. The bounty hunter decided to start with the refugee camps, then the small towns.

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Chapter 8: Full Moon by Jo B

Author's Notes:

Skinner has morning sickness, Ellison infects Sandburg, and Mulder and Doggett do it doggy style.

"When a lone wolf is spotted in the wilderness it embodies the energy of freedom.

When seen in a pack it embodies a sense of community." - Sayahda

The Dog and Fox

The Ranger Station

Friday, October 19, 2001

12:30 p.m.

At the loud sound of honking, Mulder looked up at the cerulean blue sky as a flock of Canadian geese flew overhead in a V-formation on its way south. It was a sign that winter was rapidly approaching, and it usually arrived earlier up in the mountains. Mulder was sitting out on the front porch at the ranger's station with John and Sean. They were sipping coffee and talking while waiting for John's father who was supposed to arrive sometime after noon. The day was sunny and warm, a perfect fall day.

Back at the cabin, the rest of the group was working on the new addition. On Monday, they had gone over the plans that Walter and Jim had sketched. It took several hours and a few more revisions before they all agreed on how the new addition should look. Then the next day, they started clearing the land on the east side of the cabin for the addition.

Mulder was amazed at how happy Walter was working with his hands and what a talent he had for woodworking and construction. It gave Mulder a warm feeling seeing Walter happy. He thought his former boss had found his calling and should have gone into home construction instead of working all those years behind the desk in law enforcement. Not that Walter was a bad A.D., far from it, but he just seemed much more happy working outside with his hands.

With ten men working on the addition, they should have it finished in a little over a month, hopefully before the first major snowfall. Unlike the Gunmen's bathroom that they had built quickly with two by six frame construction, foam installation, and drywall, their addition was being built completely out of thick logs to match the rest of the cabin. The logs for the walls came from the tall pine trees on the land that they wanted to clear anyway for next spring's planting. The fireplace in the new bedroom would be the tricky part since none of them knew anything about masonry. The book that Mulder had on the subject helped, but it wasn't enough. Luckily, a man who was part of the militia had offered to teach them what he knew about masonry, and according to Frohike, Helmut Schmidt was an expert. He already had them gathering the right sized rocks from around the property that would be used to build the fireplace and chimney.

"Fox, what are you thinking?" John asked as he noticed that his lover seemed to be a million miles away.

Mulder took a sip from the mug he was holding before answering. "How relaxed and happy Walter has been this past week. He seems like a new man."

Doggett nodded in agreement. "I didn't know Walter very well when I was assigned to work on the X-Files, but my first impression of him was that of a man who had been worn down by life. I think your abduction had a lot to do with that, and then there was having to work for Kersh."

Mulder frowned and was about to respond when the loud sound of a truck coming up the road pulled their attention in that direction.

Sean whistled as a pickup truck mounted on five-foot high tractor tires pulled into the station's lot, hauling a flatbed with an old tractor and a truckload of attachments and spare parts on it.

Doggett hurried over to the truck as his dad parked it off to the side. "Pa, did you have any problems getting here?" he asked as Paul Doggett climbed out of the truck with the help of three metal steps that dropped down from the driver's side.

"Nope. It's only a three-hour drive, Johnny. You should drive down to visit your brother and me more often," Paul said as he hugged his son.

"Paul, it's nice to see you again," Mulder said as he held out his hand.

"Fox." Paul pulled Mulder into a bear hug, lifting him off his feet and taking him by surprise. "So you've convinced my boy to take up farming?"

Mulder didn't correct him on the use of his first name. He'd gotten used to his friends' parents calling him Fox. "It was John who suggested that we try to expand the farm this coming spring if we're still alive and free."

"Is that true, son?"

"Sort of, Pa. The place isn't really suited for serious farming, but I figured we could plant at least six acres of feed for the cows we're raising...."

"Nonsense, son. Farms aren't just vegetables and livestock. These hills are fertile in other crops, such as nuts, fruits, and herbs."

Mulder smiled. "You're right, Paul, we have two old chestnuts trees on the property. We've already harvested dozens of bushels of nuts from them."

"There's no sign of blight on the trees?" Paul asked surprised. Almost all of the chestnut trees on the East Coast were killed off from blight during the late 1800s and early 1900s. At one time the chestnut tree had been the most prolific tree on the East Coast.

"Nope. I think they might have a natural immunity or the blight just never made it to that part of the forest."

"Then you have a valuable crop for this area. I wouldn't mind taking back a bushel of chestnuts."

"Paul, you're welcome to as many as you want. We also have quite a few black walnut trees, a variety of fruit trees, and berries. We've been canning and using the food dehydrator you gave us to preserve them for the winter."

Paul smiled. "Fox, it's nice to know that my son won't starve this winter."

Doggett sighed and noticed Sean standing by patiently. "Pa, I'd like you to meet Sean Smith, he's the ranger for this area."

"Ranger Smith, it's a pleasure to meet you," Paul said as he shook his hand.

"Mr. Doggett, I want to thank you for the vegetables that John brought back from his visit to your farm. We have several new families that have moved into the resort cabins, they arrived with very little, and really appreciated the food a lot."

"How many families?" Paul asked.

"Fifteen. Most have moved into the cabins over the past week and a half."

"Well, Ranger Smith, I'll see about getting another truckload of food up here next week. I have plenty of root vegetables that should get them through the winter. The military has plans to distribute a lot of my crop to the refugee camps, but I should be able to get at least one truck load to you."

"That would be great, Mr. Doggett! Mulder, John, and the other men have been making scavenger runs off the mountain the last few days for canned goods and processed food products, but the pickings from around the ruins have been getting pretty slim. We've been taking donations from the other families in the community, but I'm still worried about having enough supplies to get the new families through the winter."

Mulder leaned up against the truck. He hadn't known about the families that had moved into the Timberlake cabins until several days ago when Walter, Jim, Alex, and Blair had gotten home from the militia meeting. Most of the families weren't helpless and had all started to put in a supply of firewood. They only needed help putting in a supply of food. Most of the cabins had electricity that came from the hydroelectric plant fifty miles away. The plant had been unaffected by the alien attack, and only required a few of dozen of employees to keep it operational.

"How are we going to get the tractor back to the cabin?" Mulder asked.

"Its in pretty good running condition," Paul said, "I could drive it there."

"Pa, let me drive it. I know the paths to the cabin and a couple spots can be quite treacherous."

"Okay, son, you can drive it. Let's get the tractor unloaded."

~x~X~x~

The Bear, Rat, Panther, Wolf, Fox, Dog, Otter, Frog, and Puppy

The Cabin

Friday, October 19, 2001

3:00 p.m.

Krycek grunted as he spread his legs, bent his knees, and squatted to pick up one end of the heavy log, while Skinner hefted the other end. They fitted it on top of another log and into the cut out grooves at the ends. It settled into the thick layer of wet clay-mud mixture that was spread out over the length of the log beneath it. His bare chest dripped with sweat as he used a sledgehammer to tap down on the log to set it firmly in place.

In the month since Krycek escaped from the aliens, he had put back on most of the weight and muscle he had lost during his captivity. The muscles on his upper body glistened with sweat as he set down the sledgehammer.

All of the men working on the addition had stripped down to only their pants and boots. It had gotten hot and was a perfect Indian summer day. Jim and Jimmy lifted another log and set it down on the other side of the new log addition while Skinner spread more of the clay mixture on top of another log.

The new bedroom was going to be larger than the current master bedroom, due to the closet that they had planned into the design. It had been silently accepted that the bedroom would be Blair's and Jim's for however long they stayed.

The laundry, staircase, hallway, and foyer were off the parlor and kitchen, with a door off the hallway leading into the new bedroom. It hadn't been hard to find construction material on their scavenger trips off the mountain. Most of the other scavengers were looking for food, clothing, and blankets.

Sandburg walked into the cabin, filled a glass with cold water from the tap, and took a deep drink. They had been working hard the last four days. Thankfully Jim had started feeling better yesterday. Mulder, John, and Walter had picked up windows, sheets of glass, and doors for the bedroom and laundry room on the last trip off the mountain.

Tomorrow he, Jim, and Walter would be heading into the ruins to find a bed for the new bedroom. Although the bedroom wouldn't be finished for a few more weeks they wanted to get the bed while the weather remained mild.

Sandburg was looking forward to taking his first trip off the mountain since the aliens destroyed the cities. He wanted to see the destruction with his own eyes, since he was still having a hard time believing that it was actually gone. Life on the mountain seemed so far removed from what was going on in the rest of the country and world.

He had tried not to think about his mother, Naomi, who would have been somewhere in Europe when the aliens attacked. He was helpless to save her or anyone else outside of North America. If it weren't for their powerful military, the aliens would have enslaved this country, too.

Sandburg headed back outside. He stopped at his lover's side. Jim was looking off toward the path.

"What's wrong, big guy?"

Ellison grinned. "It sounds like it isn't going to require a lot of work for John to get the tractor in running condition."

Blair looked toward the woods as the sound of a tractor reached his ears. He bent and picked up his shirt, pulled it back on, as everyone stopped whatever he was doing.

John drove the tractor through the bushes and around the cabin to the farmyard and parked it. Mulder and Paul Doggett followed him on horseback.

Paul Doggett glanced around at the small well-kept farm with approval. He was holding a canvas suitcase in front of him. Mulder leapt off his horse and took the suitcase from Paul so he could climb down from the horse. Mulder then handed the suitcase back to the older man before taking the reins of the horses to lead them into the barn.

Doggett climbed down from the tractor as the men walked over to meet his father.

"Mr. Doggett, I'm Walter Skinner. It's a pleasure to meet you, sir," Skinner said as he shook Paul's hand.

"Walter, call me Paul."

"Paul, I'd like you to meet Jim Ellison, Blair Sandburg, Melvin Frohike...." Skinner went on to introduce all of the men to Paul.

"It looks like you've all been busy," Paul said as he looked over at the cabin construction project.

"With six of us living here, we figured we could use another bedroom," Skinner said.

Doggett took his Dad's bag from him. "Pa, I'll show you the house."

"Okay, Son. Then I want to check out the farm."

Mulder stepped out of the barn and walked over to where the others were standing. "I think I'll go and start dinner." He turned to the Gunmen and asked, "Are you guys going to be staying?"

"No. We have to head back to our place," Frohike said, "Langly's already there cooking dinner. I'd rather not leave him alone for too long, he's liable to burn the place down."

"You're not having much luck teaching him how to cook?" Mulder asked.

"No," Frohike sighed. Back at their old headquarters they had taken turns cooking, but Langly either called out for pizza or threw frozen dinners into the microwave.

"Fro, I was pretty hopeless in the kitchen until you taught me."

"Mulder, you were never as bad as Langly," Frohike said, "And besides with your photographic memory, I only had to show you how to do something once. And you don't even need to look at a cookbook for recipes that you've already made."

"We'll see you tomorrow," Byers said and started walking to where their bicycles were parked.

"What are you making for dinner, Mulder?" Bond asked, hanging back.

"Lasagna with garlic bread and apple pie for dessert." He made the apple pies that morning. They had agreed that whoever had cooking duties for the day didn't have to do any other chores.



"Jimmy, if we're going to suffer Langly's cooking then so are you," Frohike said as he pushed Bond in the direction of their bikes.

"Wait, Frohike, I baked three pies, you can take one home with you," Mulder said.

Bond looked at Mulder and mouthed, 'Thank you.' At least if Langly's dinner was inedible they'd have the pie.

Mulder winked at him as he hurried into the house for the pie. He brought it out and handed it to Frohike who set it in the wicker basket he had mounted on the back of his bike.

"Thanks, Mulder."

"No problem."

Doggett came back outside with his Pa as Mulder walked into the house to start preparing dinner. The other men went back to working on the addition. There were still a few more hours of daylight.

Their cows, Bambi and Phoebe, walked back into the farmyard heading for the barn.

"Pa, do you want to help me milk the cows?"

"Sure, Johnny, it's been a long time since I milked a cow by hand."

Two hours later, Mulder walked out the backdoor and rang the dinner bell. He had put the extra leaf in the table that Alex had found in the root cellar behind some boxes. He'd filled the wineglasses with a nice Merlot that they had picked up, with a couple of other cases of wine, on one of their scavenger hunts. Candles were lit on the table and he had placed the garlic bread in a basket with a linen napkin.

For some reason, he wanted everything to be perfect for John's Dad's visit.

All the men filed into the house and stood in line for either the bathroom or kitchen sink to wash up before sitting down at the table. Skinner walked into the bedroom to get a clean shirt. When everyone was seated, Mulder stood at the cook's table and scooped the lasagna onto plates. He set the first two plates in front of Paul and John. "There's extra tomato sauce in the bowl," he said as he headed back for the next two plates.

"Thanks, Fox, this looks and smells delicious. Do you handle all of the cooking?" Paul asked.

"No, we take turns, tomorrow is Alex's turn."

Ellison picked up his fork as Mulder set a plate of food in front of him. "Paul, the person handling the cooking for the day also does the baking, and butter and cheese making if it's needed."

"And each of you are able to do all of this?"

"I'm still learning the cheese making part," Ellison said, "But Mulder is a good teacher."

Krycek smirked and glanced over at Mulder. "He's a good student too, in other areas."

Mulder placed Krycek's plate in front of him and whispered in his ear. "Be good."

Paul bowed his head and gave silent prayer of thanks for the food. The other men looked guiltily

at each other then bowed their heads and said grace, too.

Mulder walked back to the cook's table, dished up his own plate, and sat at the table. "There's plenty of lasagna left if you want seconds," he said, watching the men dig in hungrily.

"Seconds and thirds," Sandburg said between mouthfuls. "Mm, man, I'm famished and this is so good, Mulder."

Paul looked around the table. His son's friends seemed like good men and interesting companions. His uneasiness about John living out here had disappeared after meeting them. He knew his son would be safe with them and he wasn't blind to John's relationship with Fox. His son was an adult and could choose his own relationships. Paul was just sad that he'd never have another grandchild.

"Pa, Blair, Jim, and Walter are leaving tomorrow to get some more supplies. Is there anything you and Mike need for the farm?"

"Nope, if we need anything we can get it ourselves. Have you used those hams yet?"

"Not, yet. We're saving one for Christmas and the other for New Years."

"Paul, we really appreciated the food you sent us," Skinner said, "Fox had been only putting up enough food to get him through the winter when we showed up on his doorstep."

Paul took a sip of wine. "Ranger Smith mentioned all of the new families that have taken refuge in the resort cabins. I'm going to get another truckload of my crops to them next week."

"We've been picking up some canned and dry goods for them on our trips off the mountain. I don't think they'll have a problem getting through the winter. Several of the families have men and women that know how to hunt, and can help the others," Ellison said.

Sandburg stood and walked over to get another serving of lasagna. There was half the pan left.

"Pa, I'm going to get seconds, do you want some more?" Doggett asked.

Paul handed John his plate. "Yep, this is damn good. No wonder you want to stay here."

"Save room for dessert," Mulder said, "I made some vanilla ice cream to go with the pie."

Skinner chuckled. "You outdid yourself, Fox."

"Everyone was working so hard on the addition today, it was the least I could do." Mulder grinned. "Besides, I wanted to try out the ice cream maker. It's just too bad the Gunmen couldn't stay."

~x~X~x~

Stork, Frog, Otter, and Puppy

Frohike sighed as he looked inside the pan, he wasn't even sure if it was salvageable. They had the windows in the cabin opened to air the smoke out of the place. "Langly, how could you burn the beans and franks? It just needed to be heated!"

Langly shrugged. "I was talking on the radio with Jenny Myers and I forgot the beans and franks were on the stove."

Frohike shook his head in exasperation. "I give up, you're hopeless. From now on, it will be Jimmy, John, and me doing the cooking," he said.

"That's fine with me, dude," Langly said.

"You're not getting off so easily. Since you won't be cooking, your duty will be chopping wood for the stove."

"That's not fair!"

Byers sighed. "Langly, its fair. We all have to pull our weight. If you aren't able to cook a halfway edible meal, then you need to do something else."

"No, it's not fair! John, I can't help it if I'm a lousy cook."

"Okay, what do you suggest?" Frohike asked as he tossed the pan, beans and all, into the trash. It made a loud clang when it hit the bottom.

"Okay, I'll chop wood." Langly eyed the pie sitting on the counter. "Can I have a slice of pie?"

"After dinner," Frohike said as he pulled a skillet off the overhead rack.

~x~X~x~

The Bear, Panther, and Wolf

The Ruins

Saturday, October 20, 2001

1:00 p.m.

Sandburg still couldn't believe the destruction even as he gazed upon it with his own eyes. It had been a month since the aliens had destroyed the city and smoke still rose from the heart of the ruins. He sighed sadly as he stood next to the truck looking off into the distance, and thought of the millions of people that never made it out alive.

"C'mon, Chief, we just need to stop at Target then we can head home."

"Okay, Jim."

They had found the bed they wanted at the Slumberland store. Its frame was made of a heavy, black, wrought iron with an overhead canopy. He had convinced Jim of the practicality of having a canopy to hang mosquito netting from come summer. They also picked up nightstands, a dresser, and two comfortable rocking chairs for next to the fireplace.

They had stopped back at the Home Depot and picked up the lumber for the staircase, roofing material, and enough hardwood flooring to cover the new addition. Skinner had looked at the prefabricated greenhouse kits that were at the store, but there wasn't enough room on the truck to get one on this trip. Mulder and Sandburg had mentioned wanting to add a greenhouse off the laundry room.

When they arrived at the Target store, they found the shelves mostly empty. They were able to find a few king-sized sheet sets, pillows, and bedspreads still on the shelves. The food section of the store was completely barren. Skinner wandered into the electronics section. There were many television sets and DVD players on the shelves, but he decided it was something that they could do without. He enjoyed their peaceful evens of reading, listening to music, and talking together.

Sandburg stopped in the games section and loaded the cart with several jigsaw puzzles and board games.

When Sandburg returned to their truck, Ellison was loading the sheet sets and blankets into the back while Skinner had a cart with four folding chairs and a card table. He started putting the bags into the back of the truck.

"Did you find everything, Chief?" Ellison asked just as an old Ford pickup truck pulled into the lot with four armed men in the back and two in the cab.

Ellison and Skinner only had time to swing their assault rifles from their shoulders into their hands as all six men aimed guns at them.

"Drop the rifles and we'll let you live! We just want your truck!" one of the men shouted.

Skinner didn't believe him for a minute. If they dropped the rifles they were dead men.

The man then pointed the handgun at Sandburg. "Do it or your pretty friend gets his brains splattered all over the parking lot."

Ellison's eyes narrowed as the man cocked the gun. A low growl emanated from deep within his throat. His jaws widened and his body lengthened as he morphed into a large, black panther with deadly blue eyes.

"What the fuck!" one of the men shouted as all of them began to fire at the black cat. They failed to notice Skinner as he morphed into a large wolf, until the wolf was ripping out one of their throats.

"Ohfuckohfuckohfuck...let's get the hell out of here!"

Sandburg had taken shelter on the other side of Doggett's truck. He covered his ears as the screams and growls grew louder. Once the gunfire had stopped he braved a look.

Two of the men had locked themselves inside the Ford truck. The others were dead or wounded. The wolf and panther circled the truck looking for a way to get at their prey. Sandburg opened Doggett's truck door and called to the animals. "Jim, Walter, let them be! It's time to go home!"

The pair of animals looked up at him smugly then strolled to the truck and leaped into the cab. The wolf climbed into the backseat of the extended cab while the panther sat in the passenger seat and started licking its bloody paw. Sandburg climbed nervously behind the wheel and adjusted the seat and mirrors.

"You do know who I am...right, guys?"

The panther stopped licking its paw and set it on Sandburg's shoulder then leaned in and licked him.

"I'll take that as a yes," Sandburg said as he drove the truck out of the parking lot.

Three miles down the road, Skinner's voice sounded from the back seat. "Don't tell me, I changed?" He had morphed back.

"Yeah, man, it was amazing! You're a pretty good looking wolf, Walter!"

"How come Jim's a panther?"

"Maybe because his animal guide is a panther."

"Oh," Skinner said. It didn't make an ounce of sense to him. He'd have to ask Mulder what Sandburg meant when he saw him.

Ellison suddenly morphed back into his human form. He looked dazed and confused as he glanced out the window of the fast moving truck at the road then over at Sandburg. "Ah, Chief, how the hell did we get here? What just happened?"

"You turned into panther and killed some of the men that threatened to kill us and steal our truck."

"A panther? I thought I was suppose to change into a werewolf."

"I think your sentinel abilities made you slightly different from the others." Sandburg licked his lips nervously. "Jim, I know we've been avoiding having sex since you became infected, but seeing that you, Walter, and John didn't change into hermaphrodites like Mulder and Alex...I'm no longer worried about you infecting me. I'd rather be infected than to continue not having sex with you."

Ellison put his hand on Blair's shoulder and squeezed it affectionately. "If you're sure, Blair. You know you're going to be sick for almost three weeks, and there's no feverfew left to help ease your symptoms."

Sandburg smiled at him. "I'm sure. We'll have to wait until John's Pa leaves tomorrow."

~x~X~x~

The Rat

The Cabin

Saturday, October 20, 2001

2:00 p.m.

Paul Doggett sat at the cook's table while sipping corn whiskey and watching Krycek make butter, sour cream, and mozzarella cheese. The young man seemed to be enjoying himself.

His son and Mulder had taken the tractor to use it to haul some heavy trees that they'd cut down, back to the farm. Helmut Schmidt had stopped out that morning and had started constructing the fireplace and chimney. Paul had spent all morning helping his son, Mulder, and Helmut with the fireplace. Frohike, Bond, and Langly dropped by, helped with the chores, and removed the bark and branches from some of the felled tree trunks.

"You like living here, Alex?" Paul asked.

"At this point in my life, yes I do, more than you can know."

Paul was very observant; he could sense there was more to the young man than was obvious by his good looks and apparently easy nature. "What's your story, son?"

Krycek raised an eyebrow as he set the covered bowl with the sour cream aside. "My story? How much has John told you about us?"

"He's told me everything he knew about the aliens, the government cover up, and Mulder's involvement including his abduction and fight to expose the truth. He never mentioned anything about you."

"I worked from inside the conspiracy as a double agent. Let's just say, like Fox, I fought to stop the aliens and their collaborators. I sacrificed friends, family, and any chance at a happy future in my attempt to stop them. Now that they've finally attacked and most of the world has been invaded there's not much left for me to fight until they try to invade over here. For now, I'm putting my personal needs and happiness first. Paul, I like it here. I like the quiet beauty of these mountains, the companionship of your son, Fox, and the other men living here. I enjoy making butter, collecting eggs, building a life with my own two hands, and I even like milking the damn cows. This place is like an oasis in the middle of a storm."

Paul smiled and took a sip of whiskey. "I'm happy you've found some peace, Alex. It sounds like you needed it. My son seems happier than he has in years living here. At first I couldn't understand why because John always wanted to get away from our simple country life for the excitement of the big city. He was drawn to a life that promised adventure and constant challenges. I don't think he's changed, but I do think he's found everything he had been looking for in the city out here on this mountain."

"Aren't you worried about the future, Paul?"

"I'd be lying if I said I wasn't. I'm worried for my sons' and this planet's future more than my own life. Alex, I believe God is testing us, and with his grace we will overcome his latest trial more devoted and better people."

"You're a religious man?"

"I'm a Christian."

"My parents were Russian Orthodox...I never got into their beliefs." Krycek looked down at his hands and thought about all that had happened to him in the past several months. "I do believe that there is a higher power, but I'm just not sure what it is."

"I never try to sway others to my beliefs, Alex, so don't worry you'll get no lectures from me."

"I appreciate that, Paul." Krycek smiled and went back to work.

~x~X~x~

The Fox, Rat, Bear, Panther, Wolf, and Dog

The Cabin

Saturday, October 20, 2001

9:00 p.m.

Paul was heading back to his farm the next morning. He had enjoyed his brief visit with John and his friends. He'd be seeing them again next week when he came back up with the truckload of vegetables for the families living at the resort cabins. Paul picked up a puzzle piece and fitted it into the jigsaw puzzle that he was making with John, Blair, and Alex.

He glanced around the room. Walter was sitting on the sofa next to Jim; they had the plans for the addition spread out over the coffee table, and were discussing what they wanted to get done within the next few days. Fox had gone outside looking for his cat. Alex kept glancing anxiously toward the backdoor.

Krycek finally stood. "Maybe I better go help Fox search for Tiger, he's been gone an hour already."

Doggett frowned. "I'll come with you, Alex."

"Well, I'm going to wash up and turn in," Paul said as he strolled over to the bathroom.

"I'll be back in a little bit, Pa."

The backdoor opened before they could pull on their jackets and Mulder walked in holding a muddy trembling cat.

"What happened to her?" Doggett asked as he took Tiger from Mulder. The cat meowed loudly in obvious distress.

Mulder took off his jacket and muddy boots. "She's in heat and the Gunman's cat, Rocky, tried to mate with her."

"It looks like she put up a fight," Doggett said as he cuddled the cat against his chest and she started to calm down.

"She might have lost if I hadn't shown up and chased Rocky away," Mulder said, "The last thing we need is a bunch of kittens around this place."

"We probably should give her a bath and keep her inside from now on."

"You both could use a bath too, with the amount of mud she's gotten on you," Krycek said as he touched Mulder's mud smeared cheek.

"After we give Tiger a bath then you can give us one." Mulder smirked as he started filling the deep kitchen sink with warm water.

"Unfortunately the bathtub isn't big enough for three men," Krycek said just as Paul walked out of the bathroom.

"Well, maybe you boys should add a hot tub or a larger bathtub to the list of items you still need to scavenge," Paul said.

"Pa!"

"Oh please, Johnny, what do you think I'm blind?"

Krycek and Mulder were trying not to laugh as John's face turned bright red.

"I'm turning in now, I want to head home early tomorrow morning."

"Good night, Paul," Sandburg said as he fitted another piece into the puzzle.

"Good night, Blair."

Skinner and Ellison stopped talking and said good night to the older man as he climbed the ladder to the loft.

Mulder took the cat from John and kissed him softly on the lips. "I guess it would be okay to share a shower tonight."

"I can't believe he knows," Doggett muttered.

"John, he doesn't seem to mind." Mulder backed the cat into sink, so Tiger didn't see the water until she was in it, and it was too late for her to do more than meow loudly in protest until Mulder

was done washing her.

She was none too happy as Doggett wrapped her in a towel and dried her wet fur.

"You look like a drowned rat, cat," he cooed then set her down on the rug near the potbellied stove. Tiger plopped down indignantly and started licking herself dry.

Mulder peeled off his muddy wet shirt and dumped it in the dirty clothes hamper next to the washing machine. Doggett did likewise. The hamper was empty...Krycek had done the laundry in addition to the days cooking duties.

"I think I'll make some apple cider tomorrow," Doggett said as he followed Mulder into the bathroom. He had cooking duties. On the wall by the door, Skinner had installed six hooks where their robes hung and beneath them on a raised shelf an inch off the floor were their slippers.

"Mm, that will be a nice change from iced tea and water," Mulder said as he turned on the shower then stripped off his jeans and socks. He had left his boots on the mat by the backdoor.

Krycek had followed them into the bathroom and took their discarded clothes to add to the dirty laundry. "I wonder if we could figure out a way to get orange juice up here."

Mulder sighed. "Yeah, I miss having oranges and bananas. It's amazing how you tend to take the small creature comforts for granted."

"I'll check with my Pa, he's might be able to arrange a trade with the military."

"I'd even settle for Tang," Mulder said.

Krycek chuckled. "You would."

Mulder smiled and stepped into the bathtub with Doggett and closed the shower curtain.

Krycek walked out of the bathroom and closed the door so the steam from the shower would stay inside the room. He dumped Mulder's and Doggett's jeans, underwear, and socks into the hamper as he planned another trip off the mountain in search of powdered orange concentrate.

Later that night, after they had gone to bed, Skinner turned to Mulder who was sleeping in the middle of the large, four-poster bed with Krycek on his other side.

"Fox, what is an animal guide?"

"Hmm? Do you mean like a guide dog for the blind?"

"No. Jim turned into a panther today, instead of a wolf. Blair said it was because Jim's animal guide was a panther."

They had discussed running into bandits earlier, out of John's Dad's hearing since they weren't ready to tell him about their being infected with an alien virus that had changed them into werewolves.

Krycek turned on his side and waited for Mulder to answer.

Mulder's brows furrowed as he thought. "In some ancient civilizations they believed there was a spiritual connection between all creatures on the planet...human, animal, and plant. Cave paintings and totems exist today of animal spirit guides from these civilizations. It was believed that each animal had its own power, message, and skill. The animal spirit would choose a



human, not visa versa, and if the human was open, it would impart its skills and knowledge and act as a guide for him or her. It could be that Jim's sentinel ability made him more aware of his connection with his spirit guide. Panther's are believed to have mystical powers."

Skinner chuckled. "Okay, Fox, that makes a little sense." Then he turned serious. "I think on future scavenger trips off the mountain we should go in fours," he said. "There'd be less of a chance anyone would try to attack four heavily armed men."

"Except when I take the motorcycle," Krycek said, "I prefer going alone."

Mulder frowned. "If you have to, Alex, I still think you should take someone with you."

Krycek rolled on his side and placed a hand on his lover's chest. "Don't worry, Fox. My animal spirit guide is the Rat and we're born survivors."

"Brat." Mulder sighed and closed his eyes.

~x~X~x~

## The Panther and Wolf

### The Cabin

Sunday, October 21, 2001

9:00 a.m.

Sandburg stood in the barn's loft. He leaned against the handle of a pitchfork, while he breathed in the sweet smell of hay. He had been pitching the fresh hay down from the loft to the barn floor below where Ellison waited to spread it into the stalls. Now he was just relaxing, enjoying the simple pleasure that living here was affording him. The day was perfect, warm, and the first frost had gotten rid of most of the insects that had been a nuisance inside the barn.

"Chief, are you okay?" Ellison asked, climbing up the ladder.

"I've never felt better."

Ellison grew hard as his eyes fell on his young lover. Blair had taken off his shirt, dark nipples stood out against his hairy, sweaty chest, and bits of hay were caught in his long hair that he was wearing tied back in a ponytail. His musky male scent was highly arousing. Behind him was a soft pile of hay that he had been pitching down to the barn floor. Ellison walked over to Blair, took the pitchfork out of his hand, leaned it safely up against the wall, out of the way, before tackling his lover into the pile of hay.

"Oomph!" Sandburg had the wind knocked out of him. He didn't have time to catch his breath as Jim's mouth captured his in a soul-claiming kiss. Blair's arms wrapped around Jim's neck as he pulled him closer. He returned the kiss with equal passion. Blair felt his lover's fingers unbutton his jeans and pressed against his growing erection. He raised his hips wantonly to allow Jim to pull his pants down while they continued to kiss hungrily. God, he desperately wanted to feel his lover inside of him, it had been nearly a month since they'd last had sex.

Jim's mouth dropped to Blair's nipples, he alternated between them, sucking and nipping at them until they were hard, pert nubs. He chuckled at the sounds of pleasure Blair was making and the sluttish way his legs were spread open beneath him. Jim paused only for a moment to yank Blair's boots off and remove his lover's remaining clothes.

"I like you this way, Blair."

Sandburg looked up at him and licked his kiss-swollen lips. "How's that, Jim?"

Jim's fingers smoothed over Blair's bare sides. "Beautifully debauched and desperately needing to be fucked." He lowered his mouth back to Blair's nipples and continued to tease them while his hand stroked his lover's thick shaft. "You do want me to fuck you...don't you?"

"God, man, I've wanted you inside of me since yesterday."

Jim placed two fingers against Blair's lips. "Suck."

Sandburg did as ordered, taking his lover's fingers into his mouth and getting them nice and wet.

Jim pulled his fingers free, brought them down to Blair's ass, and pushed one of the damp digits into his lover's anus. He spent several minutes stretching Blair before he unzipped his pants and freed his own erection. Jim spit into his hand and slicked his erection as Blair placed his legs on Jim's shoulders.

"Come on, Jim, fuck me already!"

"All good things come to those that wait," Ellison said as he placed the head of his cock against Blair's small opening and pushed inside.

Sandburg moaned as he pushed up with his hips forcing more of the thick shaft inside him. This was what he'd missed so much, since Krycek had infected Jim and they stopped having sex. He wondered if he was now infected. He closed his eyes and enjoyed the feeling of Jim's long cock sliding into him.

Ellison thrust in and out of his lover's body harder and faster. Blair's scent seemed even more arousing than usual. He could hear the blood being pumped through the younger man's veins. His pupils enlarged as his fangs grew.

At the feel of teeth biting into him, Sandburg's eyes popped open and a scream froze on his lips just before he lost consciousness. The panther licked at the wound as he continued to fuck his mate.

~x~X~x~

The Frog

The Ranger Station

Saturday, October 27, 2001

2:00 p.m.

Paul returned to the mountain hauling a truckload of vegetables. Frohike was at the ranger station holding a militia meeting with the members from the Timberlake resort cabins. They'd received notice of Paul's truck driving up to the station on the radio from the new guard station, after it had passed by the station. Everyone headed outside as the truck drove into the lot.

When Paul climbed down from the cab, Frohike shook his hand. "Hi, Paul. John mentioned that you'd be back this afternoon."

"Melvin, it's nice to see you again." He turned to Sean. "Ranger Smith, I brought those vegetables, if you'd like to give me a hand unloading the truck."

"Sure thing, Paul. These are some of the people your crops are for," Sean said then introduced the militia members to Paul Doggett. "We can store the crops in the stable, then I'll work with the

residents on getting them distributed to the families."

With fifteen people helping, it didn't take long to unload the truck. Once they were done, Sean led a horse out of the stable. "Paul, you can use Xena while you're here."

"Thanks, Sean." He took the horse's reins and led it over to the truck. "I've brought a few things for my son and his friends."

"Do you need help carrying anything back to the cabin?" Frohike asked. He had borrowed Mulder's horse for the trip to the ranger station, and was sitting in the saddle looking down at Paul.

"Yes. Melvin, can you carry this?" He removed a large sack from the truck.

"What is it?" Frohike asked as Paul handed him up the sack. It was a lot lighter than it looked.

"It's filled with dried Portabella, Morel, Oyster, and Shiitake mushrooms." Paul strapped his suitcase onto the horse along with a couple of more bags before he pulled himself up into the saddle.

"After I saw the large, underground caves that the boys are using as a root cellar, I thought some of the tunnels would be perfect for growing mushrooms." Paul rode the horse down the path side by side with Frohike.

"Paul, that's a great idea! Since the caves are at a constant temperature, we should be able to grow mushrooms all year round."

"Do you like mushrooms, Melvin?"

"I love mushrooms. You should taste my stuffed mushroom raviolis with a mushroom Alfredo sauce."

"Well, I'll hold you to cooking me that sometime. At least the mushrooms will come in handy during the winter."

They were quiet for a while, as they had to ride single file where the path narrowed.

Frohike thought in the future maybe he could get John to use the tractor to widen and smooth out the paths between their cabins and to the ranger station.

Once they were again riding side by side they resumed their conversation.

"You seem to have a lot of responsibilities," Paul said.

"I spent a lot of my time in these mountains. I know them and the people living here...I had often thought of retiring up here some day." Frohike took a deep breath of the fresh mountain air. "There's no place on Earth quite like this area."

"Do you know much about farming?"

"My Uncle taught me a lot about farming when I used to stay with him up here during the summer. He also showed me how to cook, fish, and to make shine." Frohike smiled as he thought about his uncle. "Your son seems to know a lot about farming. He's been a great help to Mulder and the other guys."

"John was always a quick learner and smart as a whip. He won a blue ribbon at the county fair

when he was ten for the calf he had raised and groomed. I was disappointed that he didn't go into farming, and chose to join the marines." Paul frowned. "I never had much trust for the government or military."

"Word," Frohike said, nodding. He found a kindred spirit in Paul Doggett.

They arrived at the cabin a few minutes later. The men had been working on the addition. They stopped what they were doing and walked over to greet John's dad.

"What's in the bags, Pa?" Doggett asked.

"I brought some seeds, mushrooms, and some green tea for Blair. How's he doing?"

"He's pretty sick," Ellison said. He'd had sex with Sandburg six days ago, the day after Paul had left, and infected him. His lover had been suffering ever since.

"Hopefully he'll get better soon."

"How long can you stay?" Mulder asked.

"I need to head back in the morning. The military is going to start shipping my crops to the refugee camps, and I wanted to go with them to check out the camps. Maybe I can find a way to help some of the families more directly," Paul said.

"That's kind of you, Paul," Skinner said.

"I figured it's the least I can do." Paul looked around and noticed Krycek was missing. "So Alex has cooking duties?"

"Yep, why don't you go inside and get settled," Doggett said.

"I will, son." Paul turned to Frohike. "I hope you're staying for dinner, Melvin. I'd like to continue our discussion."

"We're all staying, Paul. Alex is making a large pot of borsch, and there is nothing I love better than a hot bowl of borsch with sour cream and a glass of vodka." Frohike put his hand on Paul's back. "Let's get your bag in the cabin, then we can share a cup of corn whiskey on the porch while we wait for dinner."

"Aren't you going to help us, Frohike?" Bond asked.

Frohike looked at the men, all sweaty and dirty from working hard on the addition. "Nope." He turned and started walking toward the backdoor. "Come on, Paul. I think we've both worked hard enough for the day and deserve a break."

Paul followed Frohike.

Frohike held open the door for him and asked, "So was John a tough child to potty train?"

Doggett glared at Frohike.

After the two older men entered the cabin, Mulder asked, "So were you?"

"How would I remember?"

Three hours later, Krycek rang the dinner bell and all the men headed into the house to wash up

for dinner. Paul and Frohike came in from the front porch laughing, and quite obviously hammered.

Even with the leaf in the table, they still only had enough room for eight people, so Krycek had set up the card table with the folding chairs.

Frohike smirked at Doggett. "Your dad was telling me that when you were four you used to like to wear your mother's beads and carry her purse around the house. It's no wonder you joined the marines."

"Why's that, Melvin?" Doggett asked.

"Where else could you find a few good men, while getting to play dress up at the same time!" He and Paul started laughing.

"You shouldn't encourage him, Pa."

"You have to admit it was funny. I just wished I would have brought the family photo album with me." Paul sat at the table in front of a large bowl of borsch. "When I come up here next time Melvin is going to show me his farm, so I'll bring it then."

Doggett's jaw tightened, but he held his tongue.

Everyone sat around the table.

"When will you be back up, Paul?" Skinner asked.

"Weather permitting, Mike and I will be here for Thanksgiving."

"We should have the addition done by then," Doggett said, "So you and Mike will have a place to sleep."

"Your brother is looking forward to seeing this place." Paul then bowed his head and said grace before picking up the soup spoon.

After dinner, Paul turned in early, and Frohike, Byers, Bond, and Langly headed home.

~x~X~x~

The Fox, Rat, Panther, and Wolf

The Cabin

Halloween

Wednesday, October 31, 2001

6:00 p.m.

Four days later, Ellison came out of the bedroom with a tray and set it on the cook's table. He placed the empty bowl and glass into the sink.

"How's Blair doing?" Krycek asked.

"He's still really sick...he seems to be getting worse. I was able to get him to eat the chicken soup and drink some hot green tea," Ellison said worriedly.

"Look on the bright side, he should be better in eight days."

"I hope he is. What do you have in the oven?"

"Pumpkinseeds." Krycek pulled the cookie sheet out of the oven. He and Mulder had carved two pumpkins for Halloween. Mulder was outside placing them on the front porch. They were going to light them once it got dark in an hour, then spend the evening on the porch drinking hot apple cider while enjoying the mild weather and waiting for Walter and John to get home.

Skinner and Doggett were on militia guard duty together down in valley at one of the two roads that led into their community. Their shift was from noon until eight p.m. They'd taken Mulder's car from the ranger station and would drive it back there before riding their bicycles home. They should be home by ten o'clock.

Ellison sighed. "It's too bad Blair's sick. He always loved Halloween and roasted pumpkinseeds."

Mulder stepped back inside the cabin. He had a troubled look on his face.

"What's wrong, Fox?" Krycek asked.

"Don't you feel the pull of the moon?"

"Is that what that is?" Ellison had been feeling strange all day.

"There's a full moon in two days. I always start feeling its affect a couple of days before."

"Oh great. So we're going to be changing into werewolves again," Krycek said.

"We should get one of the Gunmen to sit with Blair," Mulder said.

"Why?" Ellison asked.

"Because we're all going to change, Jim, it's unavoidable," Mulder said, "What if Blair needs help?"

"The Gunmen don't know about you guys being werewolves and me a werepanther. Are we going to tell them?" Ellison asked.

"Yes. With five of us changing, and with Blair being infected, we really have to tell them. I wouldn't want to scare them if they saw us in our wolf or your panther form."

"Okay, we'll sit them down tomorrow and have a talk with them," Ellison said.

~x~X~x~

The Bear and Dog

Guard station

Wednesday, October 31, 2001

7:00 p.m.

Doggett strolled back inside the trailer and poured himself a cup of coffee. Since they started the around the clock guard duty a week ago at the two roads off the main highway that entered the valley and their mountain range beyond, other than Paul Doggett's truck, only one civilian car had tried to enter the area. Although there had been a couple of military vehicles that had drove up to the ranger station to see Sean. Otherwise the flow of vehicles that passed on the main highway had been light and primarily military vehicles.

The town of Holton, twenty-miles up the highway north of there, had its population grow from eight hundred people to over two thousand in the first week after the aliens attacked. The town was turning away all new refugees seeking shelter. They just didn't have enough resources to put up more than were already there.

Doggett made a face as he sipped the bitter coffee that had been on the burner since noon.

Skinner looked up from the book he'd been reading and set it aside. "We should have brought some of that cider you made."

"Yeah, we should have. I hate drinking coffee in the evening."

Skinner stood and walked over to him. "We only have one more hour before our shift is over." He reached out and took the coffee cup and set it on the counter before he kissed John.

"So what do you have in mind to get us through the next hour?" Doggett asked as he placed his hands on Skinner's hips.

"John, what do you fantasize about when you're alone?" Skinner asked huskily as his mouth moved to suck on the side of John's neck.

"Mm, I fantasize about what you're doing to me right now," Doggett said.

"Do you fantasize about Fox?"

"Fox, you, Alex..." Doggett moaned as Skinner fingers pinched his nipples through his shirt. He arched his back as his lover's mouth latched onto a patch of skin at the base of his neck and started giving him a hickey. Skinner continued to tease John's nipples with his fingers until they were hard, aroused nubs.

"How do you like to do it with Fox?" Skinner asked breathlessly as he pulled John's shirt up and lowered his mouth to the man's hard nipples.

"Everyway. I like it when he fucks me, and I like fucking him. God, and he gives the best blowjob with that mouth of his." Doggett spread his legs as Skinner unzipped his pants and pulled his erection free.

"I love how Fox's long legs and arms wrap around my body when I fuck him...the way he clings so tightly to me," Skinner said, "He's so beautiful...you're beautiful." He kneeled in front of John and took his plump cock into his mouth.

"What about Alex?" Doggett asked as he started rocking his hips to force more of his shaft into his lover's mouth.

Skinner's answer was to suck harder while taking more of his lover's shaft down his throat. John cried out and came. Skinner swallowed as fast as the come filled his mouth. Then he stood and held John until the trembles of orgasm quieted.

"What about Alex, Walt?"

"I don't know, John. Every time I think I can forgive Krycek, I remember him standing over me with that damned palm pilot as the nanocytes raged in my bloodstream like a million sharp pieces of broken glass through my veins. Or I'll see him on the hospital staircase, while Melissa Scully lay dying, he and his goons stole the DAT tape from me. With that evidence we might have exposed the conspiracy and ended it before anyone else died. How can I forgive him?"

"Fox has forgiven him. I think you owe it to yourself and our future to try and put the past behind you." Doggett tucked himself back in.

"I'll try, John, but I'm not promising anything," Skinner said gruffly.

Twenty-minutes later the next two people showed up to relieve them on guard duty. Skinner and Doggett headed home.

~x~X~x~

The Fox, Rat, Panther, Dog, Bear, Frog and Wolf

The Cabin

Friday, November 2, 2001

6:30 p.m.

Frohike sat at the dining room table in Mulder's cabin...he was going to watch over Sandburg for the evening. He picked up a piece of southern fried chicken and bit into it. The other men were eating quietly, there was a lot nervous energy coming off them. They kept glancing over to the window at the darkening sky. Krycek reached for the honey and drizzled it on a baking-powder biscuit.

"So, when are you going to turn into werewolves?" Frohike asked casually. He didn't believe them and thought they were playing some sort of joke on him, but he was willing to play along.

"As soon as the moon is full," Mulder said as he brought a forkful of mashed potatoes and gravy up to his lips. He had skipped the fried chicken. He just couldn't bring himself to eat any of the birds he had raised over the last six months. Now that the other men were helping with the chickens, maybe he wouldn't become so attached to them.

"So how do you change? Is it painful like in that movie American Werewolf in London?"

"I don't remember if it's painful," Mulder said.

Doggett had no idea if he'd change or not, but if he did, he wanted proof of it. "Do you have the digital camera, Melvin?" They'd be able to download the photos to Langly's laptop.

"Yes." Frohike smirked. "Do you think you'll pose for me before you try to tear me apart?"

"We're not going to hurt you, at least I hope not," Skinner said.

Ellison stood and carried his empty plate to the sink and set it inside. Then he went to see how his lover was doing.

Blair was tossing and turning in his sleep. At least he was sleeping, Ellison thought as he sat on a chair next to the bed. He zoned out as he watched his lover suffering. Ellison thought he heard Frohike cry out in the next room, but gave it no second thought as he hopped up on the bed and stretched his long sleek body protectively along the length of his lover while resting a paw on his chest.

In the next room, Frohike got himself under control and pulled out the camera he had in his pocket and started snapping pictures of the wolves. To his surprise all four posed for him before the wolf that was Mulder walked over to the door and used its jaw to turn the knob and open the door. He wagged his tail excitedly, as he looked back at the other wolves then dashed outside with the others following in hot pursuit.



"Damn," Frohike muttered as he closed the front door then sat back down at the table. His eyes fell on the open bedroom doorway.

"Ah, Jim, are you in there?"

He heard an answering growl. "I'll take that as a yes."

Frohike set the camera on the table then stood and started to carry the dishes to the sink. He figured if Ellison had wanted to eat him, he would have come out of the bedroom and done so already.

After he washed the dishes, pots, and pans, Frohike decided to check on Sandburg. He cautiously walked to the bedroom and looked inside. A big, black, panther was lying on the bed next to the young man. It looked up at him as he stood in the doorway.

"Jim, I'm just checking to see how Blair is doing. Would you mind if I took your picture?"

The large cat lowered his head to rest it on Sandburg's chest. Frohike took that as consent and walked into the dining area to get his camera off the table. He snapped several photos of the panther lying on the bed with Blair.

Outside and miles away from the cabin four wolves stopped on a bluff overlooking the valley. Krycek sat and looked at Mulder, Skinner, and Doggett.

'Do you want to hunt or play?' he asked.

'I'm not hungry,' Mulder said.

Doggett nuzzled against him. 'So do you want to do it doggy style?'

Mulder's voice chuckled in their heads. 'Sure, if you can catch me.' He then took off into the forest.

'He's mine!' Skinner barked as they all took off after the chestnut colored wolf.

Mulder enjoyed the chase. He was by far the fastest wolf. After all, he had spent most of his human life jogging for exercise, and it seemed to have carried over to his wolf form. Doggett proved to be slightly faster than Krycek. His lean body easily wound its way through the thick underbrush to finally corner Mulder in the ravine. Mulder didn't put up a fight as Doggett mounted him from behind. He was breathless and happy as the Doggett's long cock slid into his body.

Skinner trotted out of the woods and sat on his haunches to watch. He had been feeling sick and fatigued the past several days. He even vomited that morning but seemed to recover as the day went on. Now he was back to feeling fatigued.

Krycek circled the two wolves, waiting for his turn. His penis was hard and dripping precum.

Mulder yelped in pain and pleasure as the orange-sized knot that had swelled at the base of Doggett's cock forced its way inside of him, binding their bodies together. Despite the knot, the blue-eyed wolf continued to fuck his mate harder and faster as he started to come. Doggett finally stood still as his essence pumped out of him and into his mate.

'So how long do we stay tied?' Doggett asked as he licked Mulder behind his furry pointed ear.

'Until you shrink enough to pull out,' Mulder said, enjoying the feel of the large knot throbbing inside of him and the warmth of John's soft furry belly on his back. 'Hopefully it won't be too soon.'

Skinner looked over at Krycek. The sable-furred, green-eyed wolf had gotten tired of waiting and had sat, and was now licking his own penis.

Krycek glanced up from his pleasurable task at the older brown-eyed wolf. He smirked. 'Well it's one good thing about being a wolf.'

Skinner stood and walked down the hill to the stream.

Krycek got up and followed him. 'If you weren't such a mean bastard, I'd let you fuck me.'

'I'm not mean and I don't want to fuck you,' Skinner said as he took a drink of water from the stream.

'You're mean to me, and even if you wanted to fuck me I wouldn't let you.'

Skinner barked a laugh. 'As if you could stop me, Krycek, but don't worry I'm not a rapist. And I'm not mean to you either...only indifferent.'

'Go fuck yourself, Wally!' Krycek growled as he stalked back up the hill.

Doggett and Mulder had separated. They were licking each other clean when they stopped to look at Krycek. Doggett walked over and nuzzled against him affectionately. 'Don't let Walt get to you, Alex. He's still not ready to let go of the past. Give him time.'

'As if I care what he thinks of me,' Krycek said and stalked off into the woods.

Mulder sighed and took off after him.

Back at the cabin, Sandburg had awakened soaked in sweat to find a panther lying on the bed with him. "Jim, no offense, but you're too hot."

Ellison stood and licked Blair's sweaty brow before leaping off the bed and walking into the other room. Frohike came into the bedroom a few minutes later carrying a tray with the panther walking behind him.

"Hey, Blair, how are you feeling?" Frohike placed the tray on the dresser and removed a damp washcloth. He walked over to the bed and washed the sweat off the young man's face.

"I feel like I've been stomped by a rampaging elephant."

"You look like it, but don't worry I took care of Mulder when he was sick. It's important to keep fluids in you. I brought a glass of ice cold Tang."

Sandburg made a face. "Melvin, that stuff is all sugar."

"You could use some sugar, besides its high in vitamin C."

On Krycek's last trip off the mountain, he had brought back three, four-pound cans of Tang that was enough to make sixty quarts of the orange drink. Mulder had been thrilled. He also brought back dozens of packages of different flavors of Kool-Aid.

Frohike helped Sandburg to sit up and held the glass to his lips. Ellison sat on the floor watching.

"Do you need to use the bathroom?" Frohike asked.

"Yeah, man, and I could use a cold bath...if you wouldn't mind helping me."

"I don't mind, at least you're only a couple of inches taller than me, unlike Mulder. It was a bitch to haul him into the bathroom." Frohike set the empty glass down. "I'll go fill the tub then I'll come back and help you into the bathroom."

"Melvin, cold water okay?" Sandburg was sweating profusely.

"Warm water, cold would be too much of a shock to your system."

After Frohike had the bathtub filled he came back for Sandburg and helped the young man out of bed. His pajamas were soaked with sweat. Frohike decided to change the sheets after he got Sandburg into the bathtub.

"Do you think you'll be okay, while I change the bedding?" Frohike asked as Sandburg sank into the warm water.

"I'll be fine. Can I have some Tylenol when you get back?"

"Sure." Frohike looked at the panther that had settled down next to the bathtub. "Jim, watch him until I get back."

It was over an hour after sunrise when Skinner and Doggett finally walked into the cabin. Jim had already changed back and was making breakfast while Frohike slept on the sofa.

"Where's Mulder and Alex?" he asked.

"We don't know where they are...we found ourselves three miles from here and it took us twenty minutes to get our bearings straight to find our way back here," Skinner said.

Doggett looked at Frohike sleeping on the sofa. "I take it we changed, did he get pictures?"

Ellison nodded to the digital camera sitting on the dining room table. Doggett picked it up and looked through the twenty thumbnail images on the back. He whistled. That answered that question.

"Melvin was up all night taking care of Blair. He went to sleep after I changed back."

"What are you baking?" Doggett asked. It smelled good and he was hungry.

"Since I wasn't sure when everyone would show up for breakfast, I decided to make some apple-raisin granola." Ellison pulled two baking sheets out of the oven and set them on the counter to cool next to a cup of diced dried apple and a cup of raisins.

The smell of cinnamon caused Skinner's stomach to lurch and he hurried into the bathroom and vomited into the toilet bowl.

"Are you okay, Walt?" Doggett asked from the doorway.

"I think I might be coming down with the flu. I haven't been feeling well the last few days, but thankfully, it's not nearly as bad as I felt after Mulder infected me."

"I hope you aren't contagious."

"I'm sorry, John, if I am then you would have caught what I have when we kissed the other day." Skinner flushed the toilet then walked over to the sink to brush his teeth.

"I guess it's too late to worry. I'm going to get some coffee do you want some?"

"No, I think I'll just have some apple juice. I don't think my stomach can handle the caffeine."

Three hours later Mulder and Krycek walked into the farmyard. They were both covered head to toe in mud. Doggett had been in the barn milking the cows and was carrying the steel container of milk to the house for Ellison, who had cooking duties.

"What happened to you two?"

"I don't know, when we changed back Alex had me on my back in the mud by the stream about nine miles from here. We were both soaked and covered with mud." Mulder sneezed; he was freezing because they had morphed without their jackets on.

"Take your boots and muddy clothes off outside the backdoor then go in and take a hot shower. Walter and I already have most of the chores done and we want to get started on the addition."

"Do you mind if we eat breakfast first?" Krycek grumbled.

"No, Jim made granola...you can have some of that. Helmut is going to be out in about an hour to finish the fireplace and chimney, I want you and Fox to help him," Doggett said. He set the heavy steel milk container down and opened the backdoor then he picked it up and carried it into the kitchen.

Mulder and Krycek stripped down to their underwear, setting their boots outside the backdoor before carrying their clothes inside and placing them in the dirty clothes hamper. Since they'd gotten the automatic washer and dryer there was no longer a large pile of dirty clothes needing to be washed. The person handling the cooking usually did the wash, unless that person had extra cooking duties.

Ellison shook his head as he watched them. "What have you two been up to?"

"I wish I knew," Mulder said, "Whatever it was, I ache in all the right places."

"How's Blair?" Krycek asked as he stopped by the cook's table to cut off a slice of warm zucchini nut bread from one of the loaves that Ellison had cooling on the rack. Ellison had a cookbook opened to the baking section.

"He's still really sick. I just wish we could find some feverfew." They had looked in every health food and drug store that they could find outside of the ruins with no luck.

"At least he should be better in five days," Krycek said before following Mulder into the bathroom and closing the door.

Tiger had come out from hiding and was eating hard cat food from her bowl. Doggett kneeled and petted the cat before heading back outside.

~x~X~x~

The Bear and Fox

The Cabin

Monday, November 12, 2001

2:30 a.m.

It was now twenty-three days since Ellison had infected Sandburg and still the young man

showed no sign of getting any better. Everyone was beginning to worry.

Skinner sighed as he got out of bed and headed into the bathroom. He was having a hard time sleeping, it seemed he had to pee more often and he was still throwing up almost every morning. At least he had a lot to keep his mind off how miserable he felt.

The addition onto the cabin was coming along nicely. They had started installing the roof. Once the roof was on, they would start laying the hardwood floor. They hoped to have it all finished before Thanksgiving, including assembling the bed and moving the washer and dryer into the new laundry room.

After he was done in the bathroom, Skinner walked across the kitchen, opened the door, and walked through the doorway that they had cut into the wall from the kitchen to the new addition. He looked up at the star-filled sky through the still uncompleted roof. The new laundry room was just off the kitchen. They had installed a deep sink and counters. There was a doorway from the laundry room leading into a small, attached greenhouse. They would be venting the heat from the dryer into the greenhouse, and were using an electric space heater to heat the room during winter. The greenhouse would be used to start the plants for their vegetable gardens come spring, and to grow fresh herbs throughout the year. Sandburg was particularly excited about having the greenhouse. He had a list of medicinal herbs he wanted to grow, including feverfew.

The staircase going up to the loft was done. They had built a closet underneath it where their winter coats would be hung. Just off the hallway were an alcove with a built in desk and shelves where the Ham radio would be moved, and a foyer with a new front door. In the new bedroom was a large closet that ran the length of one wall. The fireplace had turned out beautifully. The stone chimney was the height of the high-beamed ceiling, and was a nice contrast to the honey color beams and log walls. They had custom built the windows that were on either side of the stone fireplace. The windows overlooked the woods and mountains. Skinner and Ellison had hand cut the double panes of glass to fit the shape of the windows. On either side of the windows were tall built-in bookshelves.

Skinner walked out of the bedroom and back into the hallway. He crossed the new foyer and pulled back a sheet of plastic that separated the new addition from the parlor. He stepped into the parlor. They had cut a wide opening through the thick log wall to open the room up to the spacious foyer with the staircase. It made the parlor look larger, although they did lose two of Mulder's bookcases when they cut through the wall going into the foyer. The books would be moved to the larger bookcases in Ellison's and Sandburg's bedroom, and the bookcases they had built into the back hallway.

"Walter, come back to bed," Mulder said tiredly from the sleeper sofa as he propped himself up on an elbow.

Skinner crawled back under the covers and into Mulder's arms.

"Are you still not feeling well?" Mulder asked as he hugged his lover and kissed his bald scalp.

Skinner sighed. "I think it's stress. We've had a lot to do these last few weeks before it snows. Once the addition is done, I should be better."

"We've been pretty lucky that it hasn't snowed yet."

"Hopefully it will hold off until we get the roof on," Skinner said as he closed his eyes and enjoyed the warmth and strength of Mulder's body as he fell back to sleep.

~x~X~x~

End Notes:

The Bear: Strength, introspection, and self-knowledge  
The Dog: Loyalty, courage, and unconditional love  
The Fox: Cleverness, adaptability, cunning, and discretion  
The Frog: Emotional healing, cleansing, and peace  
The Otter: Playfulness, efficiency, and healing power of laughter  
The Panther: Embracing the unknown and personal power  
The Puppy: Loyalty, courage, and unconditional love  
The Rat: Success, Restlessness, and Shrewdness  
The Stork: Growth and Unspoken Communication  
The Wolf: Commitment, family loyalty, and teaching skill

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Chapter 9: Family by Jo B

Author's Notes:

In the peaceful bliss of their mountain home, the men celebrate Thanksgiving and learn some startling news about three of them.

Refugee Camp

Tuesday, November 20, 2001

2:00 p.m.

Dressed as a sergeant in the U.S. Army, the Alien Bounty Hunter made his way through the crowded refugee camp located fifty miles outside of Dallas, Texas. Dallas was one of the few major cities that had received only minor damage in the alien attack. Over half of the people living there had fled fearing future attacks. The military was having a hard time maintaining order. Theft and rape had become common at the camps and throughout the country as their society devolved into chaos.

This camp was the ninth he had searched with no luck. All the major camps were being located in the southern portion of the country. With winter approaching and the supply of oil from the Middle East and South America cut off, the country had only its own resources to depend upon, so the need for preservation had become a top priority. With the destruction of so many cities and the deaths of millions of Americans, Canadians, and Mexicans, the need for oil had gone way down as the continent literally ground to a halt. People could no longer travel freely; they needed a sticker from the military that authorized them to be out on the roads. Only a small number of people received the stickers: essential government employees, farmers, military employed truckers, and medical personal. Even with millions of barrels of oil stockpiled in the government's reserves, and a slow-down rate of consumption the reserve would only last them a little over two years. So they needed to maintain production in Alaska and increase production in the gulf.

The Bounty Hunter showed around a photograph he had of Fox Mulder. No one recognized him. He would continue to head west toward San Diego then head up the coast.

The Wolf and Panther

The Cabin

Tuesday, November 20, 2001

6:00 p.m.

"Don't touch me!" Sandburg snapped as Ellison tried to help him into their new bedroom. "I'm not an invalid!"

After thirty-days, Sandburg was still sick, but not nearly as sick as he had been. His body had finally gone through its last major change two days ago.

"Blair, I don't know why you're mad at me. How was I to know that you'd turn into a hermaphrodite like Mulder and Alex? If I'd known, I would never have touched you. Besides you're the one who wanted to have sex."

Sandburg walked through the doorway into their new bedroom. He gasped in surprise. For the last month he had been bedridden and hadn't seen the progress they were making on the new addition. Now that it was complete he marveled at what a beautiful job his lover and friends had

done. A fire burned in the large stone hearth giving the room a warm glow. The two rocking chairs they had gotten on their trip off the mountain were in front of the fireplace. Between the chairs was a small table with a teapot and two teacups. The wrought iron canopy bed had a thick, inviting, down comforter on it. The wood floor was polished pine. He walked over to the fireplace and ran his hand over the smooth pine mantel.

"Jim, it's beautiful."

"Why don't you sit down? I made us some tea."

Sandburg walked over and sat on one of the rocking chairs as Ellison poured the tea. He gazed into the hearth at the leaping flames.

The privacy of having his own bedroom, with Jim, made his change a little easier to bear... but not much.

"Blair, Mulder and Alex have adjusted to their body's changes. I'm sure you'll be able to adjust, too." Ellison handed him a steaming cup of tea.

"How? Look at this!" Sandburg opened his bathrobe exposing a smooth hairless chest.

"We all lost our body hair."

"Yeah, but yours, Walter's, and John's body hair has grown back."

"Yeah, but it's not as thick as it was."

"It's thicker than Mulder's and Alex's."

"We don't know how much body hair Mulder and Alex had before they changed. At least they have some."

Sandburg took a sip of the tea and changed the conversation. "Have you finished the greenhouse?"

"Yes. You're going to like it. We've already started some herbs."

"What about the mushrooms that Paul brought us?"

"John and Alex have built platforms for them to grow on in the caves. With any luck we should have fresh mushrooms in a few weeks."

"I feel like I've missed a month of my life," Sandburg sighed.

"Chief, I hope you're feeling better by tomorrow. Paul and Mike are coming up from their farm and they are bringing a big tom turkey for our Thanksgiving meal on Thursday. I'm looking forward to meeting John's brother."

"I'm feeling better than I have in a month, but I'm not sure we have a lot to be thankful for this year," Sandburg grumbled as he took another sip of tea.

Ellison sighed. His lover was usually the optimist of the two of them. "We have a lot to be thankful for. We're still alive and together. We have a roof over our heads, new friends, and we're not going to starve. And as long as we have each other, we have tomorrow."

"Jim, that's pretty deep."

Ellison smiled and bent to kiss Blair softly on the lips. "I love you, Chief."

Sandburg sighed, "Big guy, you're the only one who can make me forget my problems."

The Dog and Rat

The Cabin

Wednesday, November 21, 2001

1:00 a.m.

"Harder, John!" Krycek gasped as Doggett thrust into him from behind. The bed shook as their passion increased.

Krycek had been hot and horny all day, and with Fox away on a trip to the other side of the mountain with Skinner to gather fresh cranberries from a neighbor's bog for their Thanksgiving meal, Krycek was unable to satisfy his lust with his favorite former FBI agent. Not that he was complaining too much, John was proving to be an exceptional lover, since they'd first had sex it kept getting better.

In the middle of a thrust they both suddenly changed into wolves. Krycek yapped as Doggett's knot forced its way into his vagina while his powerful jaws clamped down at the scruff of Krycek's neck holding him in place. He continued short frenzied thrusts.

Doggett let go of Krycek's neck and howled as the other wolf's orgasm squeezed his shaft so tightly that it sent him over the edge and he pumped his seed deep inside Krycek.

'God, John. That was great.' He could feel the large knot at the base of his lover's cock throbbing inside of him. It was starting to make him horny again.

'Why did we change?' Doggett asked as he started to lick Krycek's furry neck where he had gripped it while he waited for his knot to shrink.

'I don't know.' Krycek said, more interested in grinding his butt back against the hard object inside of him.

The Fox and Bear

The Woods

Wednesday, November 21, 2001

2:00 a.m.

Skinner paused by the stream and took a sip of refreshing mountain water. The moon wasn't full but for some reason he and Fox had changed into wolves. Fox thought that being outside under the clear nighttime sky surrounded by nature had brought about their change.

'Walter, I have to tell you something but I don't think you're going to like it,' Mulder said as he sat on his haunches on the mossy bank watching his lover quench his thirst. He'd noticed a difference in his lover's scent the last time they'd changed but couldn't quite identify what about it had bothered him until now.

'What is it, Fox?'

'I think I know why you've been throwing up for the past month.'

'Oh yeah, and why is that?' Skinner looked over his shoulder at the slick chestnut colored wolf.



'You're pregnant. It is why you smell different.'

Skinner felt a sinking feeling in the pit of his belly as he growled, 'Don't joke, Fox!'

'I'm not joking, Walter, as a hermaphroditic wolf you have all the right equipment.' Mulder looked embarrassed and guilty as much as a wolf could. 'I think it was the first time we had sex in wolf form. You had me so turned on by your scent... I think you must have been in heat.'

'That would mean that you knocked me up.'

'I'm sorry... it wasn't intentional.'

'This is just great!' Skinner sighed.

'Walter, we have another problem,' Mulder said too afraid to approach his upset lover.

'What is that?'

'When we change back, we'll forget that you're pregnant, so we won't be able to seek a medical solution.'

'A medical solution, do you mean as in an abortion?'

'Yeah. Isn't that what you would want?'

'Fox, I'm still stunned... I have no idea what I want.' Being in wolf form, Skinner found that he wasn't as upset by the idea of being pregnant as he might have been back in human form.

He strolled over to Mulder and licked him across the mouth to show that he wasn't upset with him. 'Let me confess something to you. One of the reasons I married Sharon was out of a desire to start a family. I love kids, but unfortunately for us it turned out that she was barren. I still loved her dearly, even though I've always been more attracted to men. Sharon knew this, and she also knew how pigheaded I was... that I'd never divorce her out of a sense of obligation to her, so she filed for divorced as a means to set me free. She knew that I had fallen in love with a man I worked with.' Skinner looked pointedly at Mulder.

'Me?'

'Yes, you.'

Mulder happily snuggled up to Skinner and licked him behind the ear. 'Do you want to do me?'

'Oh yeah,' Skinner moaned, 'But let's get back to our camp first. If we change back now, we might have a hard time finding where we tied our horses.'

Mulder chuckled. 'Always practical, it one of the things I love about you.'

The Dog and Panther

The Cabin

Wednesday, November 21, 2001

6:40 a.m.

The crowing of the rooster woke Doggett who was lying sprawled out over Krycek in the sleigh bed up in the loft. The covers were a tangled mess around their legs. He raised himself off his

younger lover and climbed out of bed as quietly as he could so as not to wake Krycek.

Doggett pulled on his robe then grabbed his clothes, and stepped out into the hallway into the new addition and walked down the staircase. Last week they had removed the ladder and repaired the loft's railing. He whistled happily as he crossed the parlor and entered the bathroom off the kitchen. After he showered and dressed he planned to start a pot of coffee.

As the hot water soothed him, Doggett thought back upon his life. Over two months ago he had been lonely; many of his friends from the bureau had started to ostracize him because of his commitment to the X-Files. Now, with three lovers and several close friends, he was no longer lonely. Regardless of the alien invasion he was happy living here. This place felt like the home he'd fantasized about in recent years. The only thing missing were children.

He soaped up, enjoying the fragrance of the homemade bar of soap. They had traded two jugs of moonshine for a dozen bars from their neighbor, Laura Nightingale, who lived on a few acres of land twelve miles from them. This bar had the soft fragrance of vanilla with a hint of sandalwood and coconut.

Doggett was excited that his brother, Mike, and papa would be arriving today and staying through Saturday. He wanted his brother to meet Walter, Alex, and the other guys, and see his new home.

He stepped out of the bathtub onto a bathmat and dried himself then dressed. When he walked out of the bathroom Ellison already had a pot of coffee percolating on the stove as he waited to use the bathroom.

"Good morning, John," Ellison said as he headed for the bathroom.

"Jim." Doggett nodded. "How's Blair doing this morning?"

"Better." He paused in the doorway. "I think he's well enough to join us for breakfast this morning."

"That's good to hear. How was sleeping in the new room?"

Ellison smiled. "John, it felt really good having a place that Blair and I can consider ours for however long we stay here."

Doggett smiled back. "I can imagine it would. Maybe come spring we can add another bathroom onto the place."

Ellison chuckled before he stepped into the bathroom. "After we get Walter's workshop built first."

They already had a large pile of lumber, roofing material, windows, and electrical supplies, piled up outside next to the barn under a heavy weatherproof tarp. Their recent trips off the mountain had been to scavenge building supplies. They were building the workshop with two by six framed construction materials. It would be a freestanding structure away from the barn, since the sound of power tools had upset their cows.

They had poured the thirty by forty foot cement foundation two days ago. They were hoping to get the structure framed and a roof on it before the first snowfall. Then they could take their time working on the inside.

Doggett was looking forward to working in the workshop. Not only did they have an area planned for woodworking, but also tools and an area to fix motors.

The Fox, Bear, Dog, Panther, Rat, and Wolf

Wednesday, November 21, 2001

10:10 a.m.

The horses puffed out clouds of white breath in the cold morning air as they trudged up the hill. Their riders bundled against the cold, in leather jackets, and wearing gloves on their hands.

Mulder struggled to bring into focus a memory just beyond his grasp. He glanced over at Skinner who was riding beside him. "I feel as if I've forgotten something really important," he said.

"Me, too," Skinner sighed, "Just what happened last night? You don't think we changed into wolves again do you?" They had awakened shivering on top of their sleeping bag entwined in each other's arms.

"We changed, but I don't think we wandered too far from our camp."

At Skinner's inquiring look Mulder added, "I saw a few wolf tracks around our camp when we were packing to leave."

"There wasn't a full moon last night, why did we change?"

"I think it was from being outside in the woods at night. It must have brought out a feral need within us." Mulder licked his lips. "I often feel a pull whenever I'm outside among the trees."

Skinner nodded. He knew what Mulder meant, but hadn't been able to pinpoint the strange urges he'd been having as being the desire to shed his humanity and change into a wolf. "Do you think we can change at will if we tried?"

"Maybe we could try some night after John's father and brother leave," Mulder said as they rode into the farmyard and over to the barn.

They dismounted and Mulder took the reins from Skinner. "I'll take care of the horses, why don't you go inside and warm up... you're looking pale again. How are you feeling?"

"I am feeling a bit queasy and tired." Skinner removed the bags from the horses. "I'll bring our packages inside. After you're done with the horses would you like to share a shower?"

Mulder smiled. "I'd love to. I'll try to hurry."

Doggett stepped out of the barn. "You can take the milk inside and let me tend to the horses, and then you won't have to hurry," he said, carrying a large container of milk.

Mulder's smile broadened as he took the milk container from Doggett. "Thanks, John, you're a life saver. I'll be back out to help with the chores after I warm up a little."

"We'll be out to help," Skinner corrected. He was sure he'd feel better after a shower.

"No need, guys, Alex and Jim already took care of the chickens and cleaned out the barn. After I get the horses fed and groomed there isn't anything left to do," Doggett said as he turned and led the horses into the barn.

Mulder turned to Skinner as they headed toward the house. "I used to spend most of my day tending to the animals, weeding the vegetable gardens, chopping wood, and putting up supplies for the winter. What am I going to do with so much free time?"

"We'll think of something," Skinner said with a leer.

Sandburg opened the back door for them as they approached.

"Thanks, Blair. You're looking better," Skinner said.

"I'm feeling better."

The kitchen smelled delicious of cinnamon, all spice, apples, and pumpkin. Krycek and Ellison were in the process of baking pies for their Thanksgiving dinner tomorrow. Mulder's stomach growled as he carried the steel milk container into the kitchen.

Krycek looked up from pouring fresh pumpkin filling into a piecrust and smiled, silky strands of sable hair fell into his eyes. He unconsciously brushed them away. "Did you get the cranberries?"

Skinner plopped the large bag of cranberries on the counter. "There's more than enough for Thanksgiving, we should freeze the rest." The smell of cinnamon was making him nauseous; Skinner excused himself and hurried into the bathroom.

Mulder quickly followed and closed the door as Skinner bent over the toilet bowl. While his lover was once again throwing up, he filled a glass with cold water from the tap. He handed it to Skinner as his lover straightened.

"Walter, I think we should talk to Sean about bringing a Doctor up here to look at you. It's not normal for you to be throwing up this much."

Skinner rinsed his mouth out and spit in the sink. "It's nothing, Fox."

"It's not nothing, Walter."

"Okay, if you can find one who makes house calls I'll let him check me over."

"I'll radio Sean after our shower," Mulder said as he turned on the water then started to strip.

"I think you're worrying about nothing," Skinner said, feeling a hundred percent better now. He shed his clothes, stepped into the bathtub behind Mulder, and drew the shower curtain closed.

"I hope you're right."

When they finished their shower they pulled on their robes and slippers, then carried their dirty clothes to the new laundry room and placed them in the dirty clothes hampers, separating them by colors and whites, before heading back to the bedroom to dress for the day. With so many men living together in such a small place they finally had to agree to some simple rules, and not tossing their dirty clothes on the floor or over a chair was one of them.

Mulder had reluctantly agreed to the schedule board Jim and Walter had hung up in the kitchen. It listed each man's chores for the week, including who had cooking duty, cleaning, milking, and a number of other tasks that they needed to get to each day. They even added other tasks such as deer hunting, fishing, and trade. Mulder hated to admit that the board did make their lives easier. Even their horse trip to trade for cranberries had been scheduled on the board. Each man still pitched in and helped the others if he finished his chores ahead of time.

Mulder had glanced at the schedule board when he brought the milk inside. It had him down for bringing in firewood, dusting, and mopping the floors, which he planned to do after he ate and radioed his ranger friend.

"I'm starving," Mulder said as he pulled the sweater on over his head.

"Me too," Skinner echoed. "But we'll have to find something that isn't going to require us to use the stove. Jim and Alex seem to have it pretty well occupied."

"How about a bowl of granola, do you think you could hold that down?"

"As long as it doesn't have cinnamon in it, for some reason that scent has been turning my stomach lately."

They walked into the kitchen and Mulder opened a cabinet and pulled out one of the plastic containers filled with granola. He opened it and sniffed; satisfied that this one was cinnamon free he filled two bowls while Skinner grabbed the milk from the refrigerator. They retreated to the dining room, out of Ellison's and Krycek's way, with the cereal and milk. Mulder set the filled bowls and container of granola on the table while wondering where Blair had gone.

They ate quietly. Skinner was refilling his bowl when Doggett strolled in through the back door.

Doggett removed his boots and placed them on the mat next to the door to clean later.

"Don and Wendy Wade are coming over on Saturday to teach us how to collect and make maple syrup from our maple trees," he announced as he ducked passed Ellison and grabbed a cereal bowl from the cabinet and joined them at the table.

Skinner looked across the table at Mulder and smiled. "Fox, out of all the places in the world you could have chosen to disappear to; I'd say you picked the perfect location."

"I'll second that," Doggett said as he filled his bowl with cereal.

Mulder's eyes lit up with mischief. "Just keep those thoughts in mind when there's three feet of snow outside."

"God, I hate snow!" Doggett groaned. "But I don't mind hibernating in front of a blazing fire with good companionship. I think I'll survive winter as long as I don't have to go outside too often."

Skinner chuckled. "When I was a boy I loved winter and the first snow... actually I still do if I don't have to drive in it. In a way I'm sort of looking forward to our first snow. Life doesn't seem as hectic, and I think we are well prepared for winter."

"I'm a winter slut," Krycek said from the kitchen. "I love to ski, snowmobile, and hunt in the winter. It is so much easier to track wild game through the snow. My uncle used to take me hunting with him and he even taught me how to ice fish."

Ellison placed the mincemeat pie on a cooling rack. "I don't mind the winter as long as it doesn't get too cold."

"What about you, Mulder?" Skinner asked.

"I grew up in New England, it was required that we like winter," Mulder quipped. "I know how to ski and ice skate. I'll admit that I never liked shoveling snow which had been my job as a boy."

"I had the same job. I think all sons did." Skinner chuckled.

Ellison suddenly stopped what he was doing and hurried out the back door.

The other men looked at each other before pushing away from the table and following him outside. It took them a couple of minutes before they could hear what had drawn Ellison out of the house. The sound of motors grew louder then two all-terrain, three-wheel vehicles drove through the gap in the bushes.

Doggett smiled broadly as he recognized his papa and brother. His papa had told him not to meet them at the ranger station that they would have no problem getting to the cabin. Considering that his papa had already been out to visit three times, Doggett knew he'd have no problem finding his way back here. He did wish that they had told him they were bringing their all-terrain vehicles along. Both had carts attached to the back, filled with packages.

They pulled up and parked next to the cabin. Paul Doggett pulled off his helmet and climbed off the three-wheeler. He hugged his son first then Mulder and proceeded to greet the other men while Mike Doggett greeted his brother and Mulder then waited to be introduced to the other men. By then Sandburg had stepped out of the greenhouse to join the group. He'd been inside making notes on where he wanted to plant certain herbs and vegetables, depending on the direction of the sun and how much direct sunlight each part of the greenhouse would get.

After introductions, Mike glanced around, looking out over the mountains and the stream. "Wow, you guys have a beautiful place here and talk about a magnificent view."

"You think this is nice, Mike, you should see the view from where our windmill is set up," Krycek said. "You can see the whole valley."

"I would like a tour of the whole place."

Doggett smiled at his brother. "I'll give you one as soon as we get your bags inside."

Everyone helped carry the bags and packages inside. Doggett hefted the cooler with the thirty-pound tom turkey, while Mulder grabbed the other even heavier cooler.

Doggett hoped the turkey would fit in their oven. They needed one this size since the Gunmen, Ranger Sean, and Laura Nightingale would be joining them for their Thanksgiving meal.

"Paul, we just finished the new addition so we have plenty of room now," Skinner said as he carried their bags up the staircase to the loft where Paul and Mike would be sleeping.

The other men placed the packages of food and supplies on the counter. Doggett shook his head in amazement that his papa would bring more food besides the turkey. Meat filled the other cooler: bacon, pork chops, pork tenderloins, pork roasts, sausage, and baby-back ribs. It was enough to fill their freezer.

While everyone was putting away the items the Doggetts had brought, Mulder took the time to call Sean on the radio.

"A military doctor... I don't know, Sean? Over," Mulder sighed as he sat in front of the radio in the alcove off the new front entryway.

"She's good, Mulder, and trustworthy. Over," Sean said.

"Okay, I'll take your word for it. When can you get her to come out? Over."

"Let me call her. We can discuss it over dinner tomorrow. Over."

"I'll see you tomorrow, Sean. Over and out." Mulder set the mike down. He wasn't sure if Walter would want a military doctor and a woman no less.

They could decide over Thanksgiving dinner tomorrow.

The Fox and Rat

Thursday, November 22, 2001

3:10 a.m.

"Shh, Fox, you'll wake Paul and Mike," Krycek whispered as his mouth latched onto Mulder's other nipple and he started teasing it into a hard nub.

Mulder bit his lip to stifle a moan. They were on the sleeper sofa in the parlor while Paul and Mike slept upstairs in the loft.

The mattress creaked as Krycek shifted position to kneel between Mulder's parted thighs. His hand fondled Mulder's penis and balls before moving on to play with his duo openings. One slick with arousal the other tightly clenched. Not for long, Krycek thought as his cock thicken even further with arousal at the thought of feeling that tightness around it. He used the slickness from one orifice to loosen the other. He loved fucking Fox through both but anal sex was still his favorite when he was on top. Once Fox was prepared, Alex pushed into him.

After recovering from a brief moment of pain caused by his lover's thick cock, Mulder wrapped his long legs around Krycek's waist drawing their bodies even tighter together. He reached up and pulled Alex's head down so he could kiss those perfect bowed lips while enjoying the feel of his lover's throbbing sex filling his rectum. Mulder found it hard to believe that he'd gone all these years without knowing the joys and pleasures of making love this way. Like an addict, he now craved the touches and caresses of each of his three lovers and he couldn't resist touching and exploring their bodies in return.

Krycek started thrusting slowly in and out while his lips remained locked in a passionate kiss with Fox. Krycek shivered as wave after wave of intense pleasure shot through his body. Fox's kisses burned through him igniting nerve-endings, sending spikes of fiery pleasure from his lips to his groin. No one had ever kissed him with such an intense scorching passion before and he doubted anyone could match Fox in that area.

As in all good things, it didn't take long for him to erupt inside his lover. Krycek felt the dampness of Fox's come against his belly as their mouths quieted their cries of release before their kiss finally ended. He collapsed fully sated into his lover's arms, resting his head on the warm firm chest. Before he drifted back to sleep Krycek felt Fox's arms tighten around him, holding him protectively, and a tender kiss placed on the top of his head.

The Fox, Bear, Dog, Panther, Rat, Wolf, Otter, Stork, Frog, and Puppy

Thanksgiving

12:10 p.m.

The kitchen was crowded. Frohike had come over early to help with the meal. He brought along some trout that Jimmy and Langly had caught and he had smoked in his Uncle's old smokehouse. The men were standing around snacking on the trout and sipping the strong ale that Ranger Sean had brought with him. All but Skinner drank; alcohol was another thing that had turned his stomach. He just couldn't drink it without getting sick.

Laura Nightingale had gone out for a walk with Mike Doggett. The two had hit it off on first sight. Laura was in her mid thirties, attractive in an exotic way, belying her varied ancestry, a mix of Native American, African, and Irish. Her skin a light toffee, her eyes blue, and her hair tight red curls that she wore tied back in a ponytail. She had moved to the mountain seven years ago to

get away from the repression of city life and her medical career. She had a toughness about her that helped her adjust to the hardship of mountain life.

The temperature had climbed into the low sixties, perfect walking weather, and warm enough that they could open the windows to allow fresh cool air into the hot kitchen.

"Sean, does this Doctor Nash have to report her whereabouts to the military?" Skinner asked.

"She's an Army Colonel. Liz doesn't have to inform the military of her day-to-day activities. Especially now, when all medical personnel have been working nearly nonstop since the aliens attacked."

"If she's that busy, I don't want to her to go out of her way for no reason."

"It doesn't sound like it's no reason to me, besides Liz owes me a favor," Sean said as he picked another chunk of smoked fish off the filet. "I'll arrange to fly her out here next week."

Skinner reluctantly nodded his acceptance. If he hadn't vomited again, an hour ago after taking a bite of the smoked fish, he might have been less obliging.

Mulder placed a comforting hand on Skinner's shoulder. "Walter, it's going to be okay."

"What if it isn't? What if I have something seriously wrong with me?"

"We'll deal with it together as a family." Mulder hugged him. "Besides other than throwing up, you look perfectly healthy. Your color is good, you're not running a temperature, not to mention you look ten years younger."

The affect the alien virus had on their appearance was something they never talked about... each man appeared to have regained ten or more years of their life. The gray had disappeared from Skinner's hair, leaving his previous dark brown in its place.

"Fox, can I talk to you, Alex, and Walter in the bedroom?" Doggett asked, nodding his head toward the bedroom.

After they entered the room, Doggett closed the door behind them.

"What's this about, John?" Krycek asked.

"We've all been infected with this alien virus, what if the Doctor is able to detect what has happened to us? What we've become?"

"I hadn't considered that," Skinner said, "Maybe it's too risky to bring her here, she is a military Doctor after all. She might feel that it's her duty to report this back to her superiors."

Mulder frowned as he wished again that Scully were around. She'd be able to help them. "No. Walter, your health is more important. Why don't we let her examine you, but not allow her to take any blood samples?" He knew that was feeble but he was too worried about Walter's health.

"We can feel her out while she's here and decide just how far we can trust her," Krycek said.

"There are still a lot of good people in the military. I say we do as Alex suggested, get a feel for her. We're all pretty good at judging someone's character," Doggett said.

"I agree," Mulder said.



"I don't," Skinner said, "It's too risky."

Krycek gave him a smug look. "You're out voted, Wally."

Skinner frowned. "We haven't taken Jim's and Blair's votes yet. This affects them, too."

"Fine, we'll take their votes later tonight," Doggett said. "If it all right with you, guys, I also want to tell my pa and brother what has happened to us."

"I think we can trust your family, John," Mulder said.

"Agreed," Krycek said.

Skinner nodded. "Agreed."

"Let's go rejoin our friends," Doggett said as he opened the bedroom door.

Bowls of food filled the cook's table. Paul Doggett claimed the job of carving the large turkey. Skinner stood and watched the amazing skill the elder Doggett had with the carving knife.

"Everything looks and smells delicious," Laura said as Paul placed a couple of slices of breast meat on her plate.

Langly and Bond had claimed the two large drumsticks and were already sitting at the table with their plates brimming with food.

"I think we out did ourselves," Frohike said as he beamed with pride while he scooped some sweet potatoes onto his plate.

"Try the giblet gravy, Laura, it was my mom's recipe," Mike said.

"I'm sure it will be really good then, Michael." Laura smiled as he poured some gravy over the mashed potatoes on her plate.

Mulder whispered in John's ear. "I think your brother has caught the love bug."

"This place seems to have that affect on a man." Doggett gazed into Mulder's eyes and smiled. "I know I've been bitten by it at least three times."

Mulder grinned back as they waited at the back of the line for their turn to fill their plates.

Once everyone was seated Paul led them in grace.

"Lord, you have seen fit this year to put us through a test of our faith in you. While the purpose of your test is beyond my understanding, you saw fit to bless my family with this ample feast. May we grow strong so we can do your will and free our planet from these demon aliens attacking us? Amen."

"Amen," the others echoed.

Paul's brief prayer disturbed Mulder. While he wasn't a religious man, he did believe in a higher power. He wasn't sure if this was some test or not. Of course he now felt guilty while they were enjoying themselves; billions of humans were either dead or being enslaved by the aliens. If it weren't for the U.S. military they would be in the same boat as the other six continents. Still it surprised him that the aliens had retreated from their attacks on the North American continent. It told him that they weren't as all-powerful as he first thought. Did the secret collaboration between

the consortium and the aliens yield vital information on how to fight them other than the magnetite-laden missiles? Mulder knew he could go round and round for days thinking about this so he focused his mind on another subject.

"Paul, how have your visits to the refugee camps gone?" he asked.

"The camps are not a pretty sight, Fox. The military has started asserting lethal control over them. Lawlessness had gotten dangerously out of control. A man caught raping is now taken out and publicly whipped before being thrown in the stockades. I can't say that I have a problem with the military's style of justice. I found several young families that I'm going to allow to live on the farm in exchange for their help with the crops and animals."

"Are you sure you can trust these families?" Krycek asked.

"Yes, Alex, I am a really good judge of people."

Langly was the first one up for seconds.

Mulder noted that Langly had put on some muscle and wasn't as pale as he had been previously. It appeared living on the mountain was having a healthy effect on his friends. It was a joy to see Byers in jeans and a sweater and looking more relaxed than he had in years. Frohike was the only one unchanged. Mulder had a feeling that his closest friend enjoyed living in his uncle's cabin with Langly, Byers, and Bond.

If they were still alive come springtime, they would install one of the three Francis turbines they picked up during their scavenger trips in the stream behind the Gunmen's cabin. They'd measured the velocity of the stream and estimated that it could produce 1200 kilowatts of electricity per hour on the average day. One of the other turbines they planned to install in their portion of stream to provide additional back up power, mainly for the new workshop and barn. The third turbine they were keeping as a replacement.

Skinner pushed away from the table and headed for the bathroom. He needed to pee again. Maybe he had a bladder infection that would explain the constant need to pee, and it could explain why he was throwing up so much.

Frohike leaned back in his chair and unfastened the top button on his pants. "Damn, these are some fine eats."

"How's the militia going, Melvin?" Paul asked.

"Fine, Paul. We have our community well protected. Everyone is pitching in to make sure it stays that way."

"Alex and I have guard duty tomorrow morning," Mulder said not looking forward to having to get up at five in the morning to make to the guard post by eight.

Krycek leered. "I don't mind being stuck in the small guard shack for eight hours with you. I think we should be able to find something to do to ease our boredom."

Frohike looked at the pair of them. "Just don't get too distracted that you allow a stranger to sneak past you."

"Don't worry, Fro, no one will get by us," Krycek said.

After dinner everyone helped clean up, and then they all retired to the parlor or the front porch to enjoy a slice of pie and each other's company.

By seven o'clock, Laura said her goodbyes as she prepared for the twelve-mile horseback ride back to her cabin. Mike saddled up one of the other horses and headed out with her, despite her protests that she'd be fine. He wanted to make sure she made it home okay since it had started to get dark earlier.

After Sean and the Gunmen had finally left for home, the guys decided it was time to tell John's father about what had happened to them. They knew the elder Doggett already suspected something, since he commented about his son's more youthful appearance on more than one occasion.

Paul listened quietly while his son explained about the alien virus and its effect of changing them all into a type of werewolf. John left off that Fox, Alex, and Blair had changed into hermaphrodites.

"Do you have more solid proof that you could show me?" Paul finally asked after several minutes of uneasy silence. "It's not that I doubt what you are telling me, but alien werewolves just seem too B movie for my liking."

"If you come back on November 30th there's a full moon and you can watch us change," John said. "Other than that all we have are these photographs, taken by Frohike during the last full moon." Doggett handed his father several inkjet prints that they had printed off Langly's laptop to Sean's inkjet printer at the Ranger station.

Paul arched an eyebrow as he recognized the inside of their cabin. "Who's the panther?"

"That's Jim."

Paul studied the photos then pointed at one of the wolves. "That's you isn't it, son?"

"How did you figure that out?"

"He has your eyes." Paul handed the photos back. "Okay, I believe you. And I take it since you allowed Melvin to take your photos that you aren't dangerous in wolf form."

"We're not dangerous to our friends, but we have killed while in wolf form to protect our family," Mulder said.

"From what I've heard about wolves they're very protective of members of their pack. I'm glad you boys saw fit to tell me about this."

"You needed to know, Pa. We didn't tell you sooner because we were still adjusting to this change."

"That brings us back to Walter needing a doctor, and the risks involved in bringing a military doctor out here to examine him," Mulder said.

"Jim, Blair, we'd like to have your vote on the subject. We've already explained our views," Krycek said.

Skinner just stood silently against the porch railing with his arms folded across his broad chest.

"I think we should allow her to examine Walter," Sandburg said. "His health is foremost, Jim is a human lie detector, he'll know if she is being deceptive."

"So it's settled then." Krycek smirked at Skinner.

## The Fox, Dog, Bear, Panther, Wolf, and Rat

Thursday, November 30, 2001  
10:00 a.m.

The weather had been unseasonably warm the past week. It allowed them to get a lot of work done on the workshop. Over the past six days, they had raised all of the walls on the workshop and installed the roof, complete with several skylights and a ventilation system. This afternoon they'd be ply boarding and insulating the walls and installing the windows. Tomorrow they'd be putting up the plasterboard walls and painting the cement floor. The workshop had two double doors to allow them to bring in or out large pieces of equipment or wood.

Mulder walked around the spacious interior. He knew that while the space seemed large, it would shrink once they started installing the shop equipment they had stored in the barn, root cellar, and the tool shed. The sound of a helicopter drew everyone's attention outside and they all headed to the field where Sean usually set down.

Skinner stood nervously at Mulder's side as a female doctor climbed out of the helicopter. She was a short and thin woman in her late fifties. She wore her gray hair in a tight bun and had on a tailored uniform with her rank insignia clearly visible. A black doctor's bag was in her hand while slung over her shoulder was another larger bag.

The Doctor stopped in front of them and held out her hand to Skinner. "Doctor Liz Nash. I take it from Sean's description that you are my patient, Mr. Skinner."

"Doctor Nash, I appreciate your going out of your way to come out here. While I don't feel it was necessary, my friends thought differently."

"Sean mentioned that you were reluctant to seek medical assistance. From his description of your ailments, I'd say you're either pregnant," she quipped, "or suffering from a stomach virus."

Mulder felt a shiver race up his spine at the mention of the word pregnant. It was like bringing into focus something he'd suspected all along. He looked at his lover as the sinking feeling settled in his belly. Pregnant? He knew it sounded preposterous but he was now positive that that was what was wrong with Walter. He was pregnant. It explained his throwing up, needing to pee constantly, and his sudden mood swings. But how did it happen? Who's the father? Or is a father even necessary?

He was pulled out of his thoughts by John's voice. "Earth to Fox." He stared down at the doctor who had her hand out for him to shake.

"Sorry, Doctor," Mulder mumbled as he shook her hand.

"You look troubled, young man," Nash said as she shook his hand.

Mulder attempted to smile. "I'm just concerned about my friend."

"Don't worry, I'll figure out what's wrong with him." She patted his hand and moved on to meet the other men.

The Doctor reminded Mulder of a kindly grandmother. He hoped she didn't figure out what was wrong with Walter. Unless he happened to be wrong about Walter being pregnant which was possible but not very likely. Mulder was never wrong when making one of his leaps. He needed to talk to someone about his suspicions.

He looked at the other men, and decided on Sandburg.

"Blair, can I talk to you?" he said as Sandburg started to follow the others back toward the cabin.

Sean had turned off the helicopter and was walking with Ellison toward the back of the cabin to see how their workshop was coming along, while Krycek and Doggett headed inside the cabin with Skinner and the Doctor.

"Sure, Mulder, you look worried. What's this about?"

Mulder nodded his head toward the path leading to the lake, and they started walking in that direction. "I think I know what's wrong with Walter."

"Oh? What's wrong with him?"

Dry brittle leaves crunched under their boots as they walked down the path. "He's pregnant."

"Whoa, man!" Sandburg stopped dead in his tracks. "Did you just say, he's pregnant?"

"Yeah, that's what I suspect."

"Oh man, oh man," Sandburg muttered over and over again.

"Blair, is something wrong?"

"Jim and I... I and Jim...."

"Blair, calm down you're going to hyperventilate."

"You don't understand. I... we...." Sandburg took a deep breath and forced himself to calm down. "Mulder, I was feeling really, and I mean really horny two nights ago so I allowed Jim to fuck me there... you know."

Mulder sighed, "I know." Having gone through the change months before the others he'd become very familiar with his body's cycles, so he'd been very careful about having vaginal sex when he was ovulating. "So you think you might be pregnant?"

"If Walter is then it's very likely that I could be as well."

"It's possible, I'm sorry, Blair." They continued their walk to the lake. "One thing is puzzling me. I have no doubt in my mind that Walter is pregnant, but he doesn't have female reproductive organs how did he become pregnant?"

Sandburg focused on the problem at hand, pushing his fears to the back of his mind. "Maybe Walter, John, and Jim didn't develop all of the attributes of a hermaphrodite, it might be possible that they did develop some of them that aren't visible, such as a uterus and ovaries."

"You probably are right, but that doesn't explain how he became pregnant. Unless it happened while we were wolves...." Mulder frowned as a light suddenly went off in his head. "Let's get back to the cabin, I need to check something."

Sandburg hurried to keep up with Mulder's long strides. "Mulder, there is something else you should know."

Mulder slowed and looked at him.

"I think while Jim and I were having sex, we changed. I'm not positive since I have no memories of my time as a wolf... it was just that I found black and gray fur in our bed the next morning."

Mulder nodded adding that piece of information to the other data in his mind. They entered the cabin through the new front door that opened upon the new foyer. They found Krycek and Doggett pacing in the parlor... the bedroom door was closed.

"Fox, where have you been?" Krycek asked.

Mulder ignored his question as he made a beeline for the desk and pulled the folder containing their wolf pictures out of the drawer. He carried it over to the dining room table and started spreading the photos out. He stopped and pointed to one of the pictures of the wolves leaving the cabin. It clearly showed all of them from behind. "This is Walter," Mulder said pointing to the wolf in the picture.

It doesn't take long for Sandburg to see where he was going with this. "Wow, man. How come we didn't notice this before?"

"What's wrong?" Krycek asked as both he and Doggett leaned in to look at the photograph. Neither saw what had the other two men's attention.

Mulder pointed to the part of the photo that held his interest and waited for their response.

"Fuck, Walter has a cunt!" Krycek gasped as he finally focused on the backend of the wolf. Besides the balls visible between the wolf's legs, there were also two distinct openings.

Doggett looked between the image of him and Walter as wolves, as a sudden uneasiness settled over him. "Where are you going with this, Fox."

Mulder looked over at the closed bedroom door, and said quietly, "I think we should get the Doctor out of here as soon as possible, and not for any reason can we allow her to take a blood or urine sample from Walter."

"Why? Fox, explain yourself," Doggett said firmly.

Mulder led them out of the parlor into the foyer. "I know what's wrong with Walter."

"And what is that, Fox?"

"He's pregnant." Mulder continued quickly before either of them could interrupt him. "He became pregnant while he was in wolf form. John, Blair and I think that you, Walter, and Jim might all have ovaries and a uterus but lack vaginas in your human form but not in your wolf form as was clearly shown in the photograph."

The bedroom door opened before they could discuss this further.

The Doctor stepped out followed by Walter buttoning his denim shirt.

They gathered around them. "Doctor, did you find anything?" Krycek asked.

"He seems to have a lump in his belly. It might only be a cyst or at worse a tumor, I'd like to have him flown to a military hospital for further tests, but he's being stubborn. If Walter would allow me to take a blood sample I might be able to determine if he has any cancer cells present." She looked to the men hoping they would persuade Skinner to cooperate with her.

"Thank you for your time, Doctor Nash, but that won't be necessary," Doggett said.

Nash was surprised by the response. "Aren't you worried about your friend's health? If it's a cancerous tumor it could kill him."

"We'll arrange for him to go to a local hospital for treatment. No offense, Doctor, but we don't trust the military," Krycek said. "Thank you for pinpointing what is wrong with him, though."

The Doctor looked imploringly at Mulder.

"I'll go inform Sean that you're ready to leave," Mulder said quickly.

Skinner just stood there with his mouth hanging open, wondering what had gotten into his friends.

After the Doctor and Sean had left, everyone gathered in the parlor.

"Okay, would someone mind telling me what just happened?" Skinner growled as he looked at the other five men. Ellison appeared to be as clueless as he was. The other men wouldn't meet his eyes.

Krycek gave Mulder a little shove from behind, causing him to step forward into Skinner's direct line of sight. Mulder glared back at Krycek but knew this couldn't be put off.

"Fox, out with it!" Skinner snapped.

"Okay, Walter, but let me show you something first." He walked over and grabbed the wolf photo off the table. "This is a photograph of you from behind as a wolf. Look closely at it what do you see?"

After studying the photograph for a couple of minutes Skinner's face suddenly turned a shade of white. "What does this mean?"

"It means that as wolves both you and John are hermaphrodites. We don't know about Jim since we don't have any photographs of him from behind. That lump the Doctor felt in your belly is a baby. Walter, you're pregnant."

Skinner sat heavily upon the sofa. "How?"

Mulder sighed and sat next to him. "I think you mated with one of us while we were in wolf form."

"So you're telling me that I'm pregnant with one of your babies?" Skinner looked at Mulder and shook his head in disbelief. "No. It's not possible." He stood on shaky legs, hurried into the bedroom, and slammed the door shut.

Mulder hurried after him, entered the room, and closed the door behind him.

Krycek looked a bit unnerved as he stared at the closed door.

"What's wrong, Alex?" Doggett asked as he allowed Mulder to privately console their lover. Walter didn't need a crowd right now. He was mentally having a hard time totally accepting this news, even though his gut told him it was true.

"Remember a week ago when we had sex up in the loft?"

"Yeah."

"I'm worried that you might have knocked me up."

"Oh shit!" Doggett started pacing this was getting worse. "Don't panic, Alex, we only have Fox's word on it that Walter is pregnant. He could be wrong. And if he's wrong about Walter, you're probably not ah...." He made a wide swooping motion with his hands over his stomach.

"John, this is Fox we're talking about here. He's never wrong."

Ellison had been standing there for the last ten minutes in stunned disbelief. He glanced around for Blair and found he was no longer in the room. He headed to their bedroom where he found Blair standing in front of the fireplace staring at the cold ashes.

"Chief, what's wrong?"

"What if I'm pregnant?" Sandburg said as he hugged his middle.

"That is crazy! You are not pregnant!"

"What if I am, Jim!"

"You're not!"

"What if I am!"

"Dammit, Blair, I don't know!"

"I may be pregnant with your child and you don't know!" Sandburg walked over to Ellison and glared up at him. "You better think about it and until you do know you're sleeping on the sofa! Now get out!"

"Blair, don't be this way."

"Out!" Sandburg pointed toward the door.

Ellison sighed and marched out of the room. Damn what was he going to do? He couldn't even wrap his mind around the possibility that his lover could be pregnant. How could he possibly know what to do if he were?

Mulder sank down on the floor next to Skinner and pulled him into his arms. He'd never before seen Walter cry, and right now he was weeping buckets. Skinner hugged him and buried his face in the crook of Mulder's neck. Mulder just held him protectively while rubbing soothingly circles around his back.

"It's going to be okay, Walter," Mulder murmured as he pressed a kiss against the top of his lover's bald head.

Skinner's sobs died down. "God, Fox, I thought I might be dying of cancer, not that I could possibly have a baby growing inside of me. What are we going to do?"

"We need to have an ultrasound done, so we can determine just where the baby is located if it's protected inside a womb or if it has attached itself to one of your organs. You could bleed death if it has attached itself to one of your organs and gets too big for the Doctor to remove it."

"And if I have developed a womb?"

"Then it should be easier for the Doctor to remove it without harming you."



"Fox, if he's protected inside a womb and not a threat to my life, I'm not sure that I can abort him. I'm not sure what I want to do yet. I'm just so damned scared."

Mulder hugged him tighter. "Whatever you decide, Walter, I'm here for you."

"You better be, he's your kid."

"How can you be so sure?"

Skinner rested his head against Mulder's shoulder. "I just am."

Night settled over the mountains and the full moon rose before the men could do any more work on the workshop. Not that any of them were up to doing anything other than moping quietly around the cabin. As the moon shone brightly in the nighttime sky, they found themselves on four legs and racing out of the cabin into the woods.

As animals their problems seemed to melt away as they chased each other through the forest. They finally stopped by the windmill overlooking the valley below.

'At least we now know for sure that Blair and Alex are also pregnant,' Doggett said as he nuzzled up against the mate carrying his child. He could smell the change in both Krycek and Sandburg.

Neither wolf seemed too upset at finding out he was pregnant. They did have time beforehand to prepare themselves for the news. Wolves by nature are extremely protective of their young.

Krycek looked over at Mulder who was licking Skinner's face affectionately. 'You should give it a try, Fox. You'd make a good mother.'

Mulder stopped and looked over his shoulder at him. 'No thank you.'

Skinner sighed, 'Fox, I don't want to abort our child. How are we going to prevent our human forms from taking that action?' He now felt content and happy knowing that a cub was growing inside his belly.

'I think your human form has already ruled out killing our cub.' Mulder looked at him quizzically, not being pregnant he had no idea of the attachment and bond that his two lovers and friend were feeling for their unborn cubs.

He looked over at the panther that was staying protectively close to his mate. Mulder realized that he was doing the same thing with Walter as Jim was doing with Blair, and John was doing with Alex. He felt extra protective toward his pregnant mate. He doubted that they'd allow their human forms to harm their unborn cubs.

End Notes:

Author notes: I was informed that in the south men refer to their fathers as Daddy, not Pa like I had written. But since I've already have John referring to his father this way, I'm going to continue with that instead of trying to switch boats in midstream. I'll know better next time.

This story, like all of my stories, carries the Mulder friendly label.

[Back to index](#)

Chapter 10: So this is Christmas by Jo B

Author's Notes:

People can go a lifetime and never find true love, three couples realize they have found it and more.

So this is Christmas

And what have you done

Another year's over  
New one's just begun  
So this is Christmas  
I hope you have fun  
The near and the dear ones  
The old and the young

A merry, merry Christmas  
And a happy new year  
Let's hope it's a good one  
Without any fear

So this is Christmas  
For weak and for strong  
The rich and the poor ones  
The road is so long  
So happy Christmas  
For black and for white  
For yellow and red ones  
Let's stop all the fight

A merry, merry Christmas  
And a happy new year  
Let's hope it's a good one  
Without any fear

A merry, merry Christmas  
And a happy new year  
Let's hope it's a good one  
Without any fear

War is over  
War is over  
War is over now

~ John Lennon/Yoko Ono

The Fox and Bear

Thursday, December 6, 2001  
3:00 a.m.

A fire snapped and crackled in the hearth, casting shadows that danced on the log walls of the bedroom as a cold wind buffeted the windows outside the cabin. In the bed, under a goose down comforter, Mulder lay spooned behind Walter, sandwiched in the warm softness of flannel sheets. His arm draped over Walter's waist while he relished the solid strength and warmth of the powerful body in his arms.

Unable to sleep, Mulder reflected on his life and that of his five companions. Only a few days had passed since they had confirmed that Walter, Alex, and Blair were indeed pregnant. After another quick trip off the mountain, then back with several home pregnancy kits had concluded their worse fears.

Pregnant. Even Mulder was having a hard time wrapping his mind around the thought that this strong manly man could possibly be pregnant -- and with his baby. Funny, Mulder had no problem with the idea of Alex and Blair being pregnant. Like him, they had the required

equipment for pregnancy. Even Alex's and Blair's hips appeared to have become slightly wider with their pregnancy, while Walter's hips remained trim although his waistline was starting to expand. Mulder had noticed that Walter was having a difficult time fastening his pants.

Under no illusion, Mulder knew that the first opportunity Walter got he'd abort their baby. To be perfectly honest, Mulder would probably do the same thing if he found himself knocked up. That was their main problem. It would require surgery to remove the fetus from Walter. Even if he carried the baby to term it would require a c-section to deliver it. They had to find a doctor who they could trust to perform the procedure.

As Mulder breathed in his lover's scent while snuggling up against his warm body, a pleasant feeling worked its way into his heart. Love. So this was what it felt like to be truly in love. He smiled and kissed the back of Walter's neck.

"Fox, you still awake?" Skinner shifted and rolled over to face him. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing's wrong," Mulder said as he gazed into Skinner's dark sultry eyes. "I just realized certain truths."

"What truths?"

"That I love you."

"You love John and Alex, too," Skinner said, "You have a lot of room in your heart."

"No. The love I feel for you is different ... that's the truth I realized."

"What do you mean by different?"

"I mean, I don't want to bed hop any longer. I want a committed relationship with you." Mulder held his breath while he waited for Walter's response. He knew his lover, like him, enjoyed having sex with John. Mulder was uncertain if Walter would want to give that up to become monogamous with him.

"You're not just saying this because I'm pregnant, are you? Because if you are...."

"No, that's not the reason," Mulder interrupted quickly. "You being pregnant only made me explore my feelings more deeply. I'd gone for years without having sex with anyone to suddenly find myself with three magnificent lovers. I was so overwhelmed that I never took the time to explore how I felt about each of you."

Skinner's hand stroked down Mulder's side and came to rest on his hip. "Are you willing to give up having sex with Alex and John?"

"I'm willing to give up anything and everything for you."

A smile spread across Skinner's lips as he pulled Mulder into his arms and kissed him. "You don't know how happy you just made me."

"So does that mean yes?"

"Don't be dense, of course it means yes." Skinner's strong arms wrapped around him in a powerful embrace as he spoke the three words that would bind them together for life, "I love you."

~x~X~x~

## The Dog, Fox, and Bear

Thursday, December 6, 2001

6:00 a.m.

While Doggett gazed out the window at the white landscape lit in the pre-dawn moonlight he sipped from a mug filled with hot coffee. Mulder walked out of the bedroom. Like usual they were the first ones up and about in the morning.

"Good morning," Mulder said. He was dressed in jeans and a sweater. He bent and picked up their cat that was rubbing up against his leg.

"It's snowing," Doggett said as he turned to face Mulder. "There's already about four inches on the ground."

As Mulder cuddled Tiger against his chest, he walked over to the backdoor and looked outside. "At least we finished the workshop yesterday."

"At the rate the snow is coming down, we're going to have to shovel a path to it and the barn." Doggett wasn't looking forward to going outside; he hated snow, at least he had cooking duties today, so that would get him out of shoveling.

"We're going to have to shovel out the chicken's run, too," Mulder said. "You don't know how happy I am that you and the other guys are living here, otherwise I'd have to do all of the chores, myself."

After looking at the schedule board, Mulder set the cat down. "I better wash up. I'm suppose to clean the chicken coop this morning. Between that and shoveling, I probably won't be back in until lunchtime."

Reaching over his head, Doggett pulled down a skillet from the pot rack. "I'll fix you some breakfast before you go out."

"Thanks, John," Mulder said as he walked into the bathroom.

John heard the sink go on.

Skinner stepped out of the bedroom, humming. "Good morning."

Doggett looked at him curiously. Since Walter found out he was pregnant he'd been moody and depressed. "You're in a good mood this morning."

"I received some good news around three o'clock this morning," Skinner said as he looked toward the open bathroom door with a satisfied smile on his lips.

"Do you want to share it?"

Skinner beamed. "Fox loves me and wants us to have a monogamous relationship."

The news might have been a blow to Doggett if he hadn't fallen in love with Alex. Instead he was happy because that left Alex solely to him. "Hey, congratulations!" he said.

"If you'll excuse me," Skinner said as he walked into the bathroom and closed the door.

In the meantime, Doggett started hashbrowns frying in one pan while making French toast in another. By the time Mulder and Skinner came out of the bathroom he had their plates piled high.

"Mm, that smells good," Mulder said.

Doggett looked at Mulder. The man was so beautiful. He felt some regret that they would no longer have a sexual relationship, but John felt an undeniable bond to Alex.

Doggett walked over and hugged Mulder. "Congratulations, Fox."

"For what?" Mulder looked at him puzzled.

"For committing to Walt."

Mulder sighed with relief, "Thanks, John. I'd been worried about how you'd feel."

"You don't have to worry. I'm happy for you both."

Crossing to the window, Skinner glanced out at the snow. "It's really coming down out there. I wonder how much we're going to get." He walked over and sat at his place at the table in front of the plate of food John had set there.

Mulder passed him the maple syrup. "It's hard to say without access to a weather radar."

"I can get on the radio to Sean," Doggett suggested as he cut his French toast. "He should be able to check with his contacts in the military. They would have access to the military's weather satellites."

"That sounds like a good idea," Mulder said.

After taking a sip of coffee, Doggett said, "At least if the snow keeps up, we won't have to worry about guard duty tonight. No cars are going to be able to get up here, unless the military employs plows to clear the roads."

"Not likely." Skinner looked across the table at Doggett. "They may plow the main interstates, but they aren't going to waste fuel plowing highways unless they lead to their army bases or refugee camps."

"So we can look forward to some peaceful days until the snow melts," Mulder said.

Doggett finished eating. "Tomorrow I think I'll go deer hunting. They should be easy to track in the snow."

"I'll go with you," Skinner said. "So what are you planning for dinner tonight?"

"Is there something you'd like, Walt?"

"I wouldn't mind having those babyback ribs your dad brought us with some baked beans and cornbread."

"No problem. They've been taking up a lot of room in our freezer. We'll need the space if we bag a deer."

Mulder reached for his coffee mug. "John, do you know how to dress a deer?"

"Yep. It's one of the advantages of growing up on a farm. I'll teach you if you'd like."

Mulder nodded. "I would like to learn."

Skinner finished his coffee then stood and carried his dishes to the sink. "I better get out to the barn and milk the cows."

With a sigh, Mulder stood. "There's a chicken coop with my name on it that needs cleaning."

They walked out into the foyer to get their snow boots and winter coats from the new hall closet. Ellison and Sandburg were just coming out of their bedroom as Skinner pulled on a fur-lined cap.

"Good morning, guys," Ellison said.

"Morning, Jim, Blair," Skinner replied.

Sandburg grinned. "Man, was it hard getting out of bed this morning with the snow falling outside our windows. I could have stayed in bed snuggling all morning."

Mulder glanced at Skinner and smiled. "I know just what you mean."

~x~X~x~

The Frog, Otter, Puppy, and Stork

Thursday, December 6, 2001  
noon

Out on the porch Frohike stood with his hands in the pockets of his coat as he watched Jimmy shovel a path from their front steps to the main path that led to their friends' cabin. A lot of good it would do them if they couldn't get the main path cleared. When John radioed earlier, he said he was going to try using his father's tractor with the plow attachment to clear the path.

The snow was still coming down at an inch an hour, so Jimmy would have to shovel again after it stopped. At least it wasn't windy, so they didn't have to contend with huge drifts.

Inside the cabin, Byers was preparing a large pot of chicken dumpling soup. Frohike had to admit that since they arrived on the mountain they'd been eating healthier than they had back in D.C. It was amazing how much they'd taken for granted back then when food was plentiful. When it was easy to run out for a sack of hamburgers and fries or a pizza. Now they had a greater appreciation for life.

Finished shoveling, Jimmy walked up the steps to stand next to Frohike on the covered porch. "It's real pretty out here, isn't it?"

"Yeah, it is," Frohike said. "Like a winter wonderland."

"Can we get a Christmas tree?"

Frohike smiled, enjoying his friend's childlike enthusiasm. He had hit the jackpot when it came to his companions. "I suppose we can, but we'll have to make our own ornaments."

"That will be fun," Jimmy said.

Frohike put his hand on Jimmy's back. "C'mon, let's go in and see if Byers has lunch ready."

~x~X~x~

The Fox, Bear, Panther, and Wolf

Thursday, December 6, 2001

4:00

The snow had stopped after dumping up to fifteen inches across the mountains. The temperature was in the mid-twenties while four men took pleasure from the first snowfall, playing like kids in the fluffy white stuff.

Thoroughly enjoying himself, Skinner had pushed his present condition out of his mind as he helped Mulder lift the large middle snowball onto the snowman they were building. They were competing against Jim and Blair who already had the head on their snowman and were starting to dress it. Right now he wanted to enjoy being alive and in love. He never expected Fox to ask him for a monogamous relationship. Skinner had been willing to share him with John and Alex, since he never thought Fox could love him more than the other two men.

He looked into those beautiful gold-green eyes as Fox placed the head on their snowman.

"Man, you guys are falling behind," Sandburg said as he placed a baseball cap on their snowman's head.

"Blair, this is not a race," Mulder said. "Walter and I are striving for quality not speed."

Ellison chuckled. "With a lopsided snowman? Good luck."

Skinner looked at their snowman and noted that it was slightly lopsided. "Let's look for something for it to wear," he said after putting a carrot for a nose on their snowman.

"C'mon, I know where we can get the perfect items." Mulder grabbed Skinner's hand and pulled him in the direction of the root cellar. They had cleared a path to it earlier and uncovered the trap doors that the snow had buried.

"What items?" Skinner asked as they walked down the path to the root cellar.

"Some of Old Man Peterson's clothes and personal items were still in cabin when I moved in. I packed them away in a trunk and stored it down in the cellar. He had a straw hat and even a corncob pipe." Mulder opened the cellar doors and they walked down the stone steps. He lit the kerosene lantern at the bottom of the steps.

The light revealed the shelves filled with jars of vegetables and fruit, and sacks of grain and flour in the natural cavern. They lit another lantern in the next room. Under a bushel of apples was an old black leather chest. Skinner lifted the apples off the chest so Mulder could open it.

Inside were a bible and old clothes. Mulder retrieved the hat, pipe, and a ratty hand knit scarf.

"Not much to show for his life," Skinner said while looking at those measly possessions.

"What about his gold and silver coins back at the cabin?" Mulder closed the trunk and stood.

"That's not what I meant," Skinner said as he lovingly caressed the side of Mulder's face. "He had no one to share his life with -- he died alone." He leaned forward and kissed his lover softly.

"We'll have each other forever."

Mulder smiled. "Forever ... I'll hold you to that promise."

Skinner returned the smile. "C'mon, it will be getting dark soon and we have a lopsided snowman to dress."

~x~X~x~

## The Dog and Rat

Thursday, December 6, 2001

5:00

The kitchen was warm and smelled sweet and spicy with the scent of apple pie. A pot of ribs was boiling on the stove.

Krycek had decided to stay in and help his lover with dinner, instead of joining in the fun outside. He placed a hand on his belly. It was too soon for him to be showing in the slightest. And unlike Skinner and Sandburg, being pregnant didn't repulse him. He'd experienced too much weird shit in his life to let this affect him negatively. So after his initial shock, he started to seriously consider what it meant to him being pregnant with John's baby. To finally have the one thing he'd been denied since he had joined the CIA and was assigned to infiltrate the consortium only to become entangled for years in the fight for the survival of Earth -- a fight that robbed him of his family and any chance at happiness.

"I'm keeping him," Krycek said suddenly.

Doggett turned, holding a pan of cornbread that he'd just pulled from the oven. "What was that, Alex?"

"The baby ... I'm going to go through with it."

At first his lover's face was unreadable then Doggett grinned and set the pan on the counter. He crossed over to Krycek and pulled him into his arms. "You've just made me very happy."

"You wanted me to have this baby? Why didn't you say something?"

"It's your body, so it was your decision to make."

"It's your baby as much as mine." Krycek gazed into John's warm blue eyes. "You are going to be part of this with me."

"Of course I am. Alex, I love you."

Krycek hugged him. "Me too." Life took strange twists, he thought, he came here in love with Mulder only to find his heart drift to another man.

The backdoor opened and Mulder, Skinner, Sandburg, and Ellison came hurrying inside. Their noses and cheeks were red from the cold, but they were laughing and joking as they took off their boots, not seeming to notice the puddles they were making on the hardwood floor.

"I better get the ribs in the oven," Doggett said and walked back to the stove. "Alex, would you get a mop?"

~x~X~x~

## The Fox, Bear, Dog, Rat, Panther, and Wolf

Ellison leaned back in his chair and sighed. "God, I'm stuffed. These have to be the best damn ribs I've ever had." He'd had a large helping along with baked beans and corn bread.



"They were delicious, John," Mulder said, "How did you get them so tender?"

Doggett set his napkin down. "The trick is to simmer them in salted water for an hour before baking them in the oven."

"The trick worked," Skinner agreed, "The meat was falling off the bones, and the barbecue sauce was really good too ... I usually prefer a sweeter sauce."

Sandburg patted his belly. "Well I still have room for dessert."

Krycek stood and started collecting the empty plates. "Let's clear the table, and I'll put a pot of coffee on ... we can talk over pie."

"I'll help you, Alex," Mulder said as he stood and started clearing his side of the table.

Ellison noticed the look Krycek gave Doggett when he collected his plate and silverware. The Sentinel had been picking up different emotional responses from them over the past week. It appeared that Mulder and Skinner were becoming closer, and likewise with Doggett and Krycek. Ellison felt much closer to Blair than at anytime in their relationship, so maybe it had to do with the men's pregnancies.

He glanced at Blair sitting at the head of the table to his left and smiled. Mulder was at the other end of the table with Doggett sitting on his right next to Krycek and Skinner on his left. All in all they made as good a family as Ellison ever had. He and Blair had been fortunate to end up here after the aliens had attacked.

Mulder came back and set a plate with a slice of apple pie in front of him and Skinner before heading back into the kitchen for more pie. Krycek in the meantime placed coffee cups on the table.

"I feel like I'm at a five star restaurant with the quality of the wait staff," Doggett quipped.

"We did have a first rate chef prepare our meal for this evening," Sandburg teased.

Skinner looked over toward the parlor's window and nodded. "I think a Christmas tree would look good over there."

Ellison smiled. "I was thinking the same thing earlier. Snow certainly puts one in the holiday spirit."

"This could be fun," Sandburg said, "We'll have to make our own ornaments for the tree. Why don't we have a contest? We can split into three teams and each team comes up with ornaments for the tree without letting the other teams see what you're working on. We can have the Gunmen decide who made the nicest ornaments."

"I like that idea," Doggett said, "So what will be the prize for the winning team?"

"The losing teams will have to do the winning team's chores for a week," Sandburg said.

Mulder sat back at the table while Krycek poured coffee from the percolator into the coffee cups. Mulder looked over at his lover. "Walter, we of lopsided snowman fame may be in trouble."

"Don't worry, Fox, I have several ideas that we can use," Skinner said as he picked up his fork and dug into the slice of pie. "It's just too bad we don't have any lights for the tree."

Ellison enjoyed seeing his lover in such a happy mood, after Blair had been pouting about being

pregnant for the past week. He seemed to have gotten over the initial shock.

"Do you want to tell them, Alex?" Doggett asked.

"I suppose." Krycek looked over the brim of his coffee cup at Doggett. "I've decided to go through with the pregnancy."

After a moment of stunned silence, Mulder spoke, "Are you sure that's what you want? Aren't you worried about how dangerous it might be?"

"I'm positive. And of course I'm worried, but unlike Walter at least I have a cunt where the baby can exit my body."

Skinner glared at him. "You would have to remind me, after I've tried to put it out of my mind for today."

Ellison looked at Blair to see how his lover was taking the news. Blair had a sad expression on his pretty face. Oh great, it looked like he was going to have to spend another night with a grumpy lover.

Sandburg set his fork down. "Alex, aren't you concerned about bringing a baby into this world while we are being attacked by aliens?"

"No. I don't expect the aliens to win. They would have hit us with everything they had by now, and while they wait our military is strengthening our defenses."

Doggett cleared his throat to get their attention. "Look, guys, we appreciate your input but this is Alex's and my decision. We want this baby."

"If that's what you want," Mulder said, "I'll support your decision."

"Thanks, Fox." Krycek smiled.

~x~X~x~

## The Bear and Fox

After taking off his clothes, Skinner stood in front of the mirror in the master bedroom. He turned sideways and looked at his belly. If he hadn't known that he was pregnant he wouldn't have noticed the slight swell.

His pants were becoming harder to fasten. What was he going to do? The snow had cut them off from the outside world. Even if they could find a doctor willing to remove the fetus, traveling to him was virtually impossible. Because of the new air travel restrictions set by the military, he couldn't count on Sean to fly him anywhere. All small planes and helicopters were now required to have their flight plans pre-approved by the military -- otherwise they'd be shot down on sight.

He wanted to slug Krycek this evening for his smug holier-than-thou attitude. How could John agree to go along with it? It was insane!

Shivering, his nipples became hard as goosebumps broke out over his flesh. The fireplace wasn't enough to keep this room very warm.

The bedroom door opened and Mulder slipped inside, shutting it behind him. "Now this is a sight I'll never grow tired of seeing," he said.

Mulder walked over to Skinner, wrapped his arms around his lover's torso from behind, and rested his chin on Walter's broad shoulder. "You look upset. Is it because of what happened after dinner?"

"Yes and no. I was trying to forget just for a little while." Skinner sighed. "I shouldn't allow him to get me so upset. Why would he want to go through with it?"

"Family. It's something he wants more than anything," Mulder said, "To be part of a loving family."

"I've always wanted children, Fox, but I never thought I'd be the one pregnant. This is so ludicrous, a bald forty-nine year old man pregnant." Skinner leaned back against Mulder's chest ... it felt comforting being held.

"Would it have been different if I was the one pregnant?"

"What do you mean?" Skinner wondered if this was some sort of trick question.

"Would you want me to go through with the pregnancy?"

This was something Skinner never considered. He glanced at their images in the mirror. It wasn't hard to imagine his beautiful lover pregnant, and yes he'd want Mulder to go through with it if he were sure it wouldn't put his life in danger. "It would be your decision, Fox."

"But would you want the baby if I was the one pregnant?"

"Yes." Skinner turned to face his lover. "Like Alex said, at least you have a place where the baby can exit your body. Why are you asking?"

"I don't want to be pregnant. I was just curious if you wanted to bring a baby of ours into this world."

"What about you?" Skinner placed his hands on Mulder's hips. "Do you want me to continue with this pregnancy?"

"No ... it's too risky. I don't want to lose you."

"If it wasn't risky?"

Mulder shrugged. "I love kids. Under better circumstances I'd love to raise a child with you."

More than anything, Skinner wanted to make Mulder happy. He'd buck up and go through with it if he weren't scared to death. He leaned in and kissed Mulder. "Lose the clothes ... let's go to bed."

~x~X~x~

The Panther and Wolf

"Okay, Chief, get it off your chest," Ellison said as he relaxed in front of their fireplace while watching Blair pace. He was dressed in navy blue flannel pajamas.

"Why would Alex want to go through with the pregnancy?" Sandburg stopped and looked at Jim. "Am I being unreasonable that I want to abort it?"

"No, you're not being unreasonable. It would be hard to raise a child under our present conditions."

Blair looked around their large comfortable bedroom. "Our present conditions are pretty good. This would be an excellent place to raise a child."

"Millions of people have been killed in this country alone. This is not the time to start a family."

"If people stop having children wouldn't that be a form of self-imposed genocide?"

Ellison realized that Blair felt guilty and was trying to work out his decision by exploring all reasons for having or not having the baby.

"Chief, can we talk about this in the morning?" Ellison stood and put another log on the fire.

"Sure." Sandburg took off his robe and hung it on a hook by the door. He climbed into bed. "It's not like I'll be able to abort it until we can get off this mountain and find a doctor. Or I until I can find some mint leaves to make a potion that would cause me to miscarry it."

"Maybe Melvin will know of someone on the mountain that'd be willing to perform the procedure," Ellison said as he turned off the bedside lamp and climbed into bed.

"That means we'll have to tell Melvin about Walter, Alex, and me being pregnant."

Ellison pulled Blair close and kissed him. "Let's discuss it with Walter tomorrow. If he's okay with it we'll talk to Frohike in person as soon as John plows a path to their cabin." Ellison's muscles were sore from shoveling snow that morning and he really was exhausted. All that he wanted to do was sleep.

Closing his eyes, Blair snuggled up against Jim.

~x~X~x~

The Dog, Bear, Rat, and Wolf

Friday, December 7, 2001  
10:00 a.m.

They were following a set of tracks through the knee-deep snow when Skinner spotted the buck first. He raised the rifle to his shoulder and set the sites so he could kill it with one headshot. The last thing he wanted was to cause it undo pain by wounding it. He squeezed the trigger and watched as the deer fell over dead.

"Nice shot," Krycek said.

"Thanks."

"Let's collect it so we can get back home," Doggett said, "I'm freezing my nuts off."

Krycek chuckled. "We can't allow that to happen."

It took them twenty minutes to tie the deer's legs to the wood pole they had brought with them and to saw off the large rack of antlers. Skinner lifted the front end while Doggett took the rear as they hefted the three hundred-pound deer between them. Krycek carried their rifles as they started the two-mile hike back to the cabin.

"After lunch I'm going to plow a path to the Gunmen's place," Doggett said.

"I'll plow it, John. I need to talk to Frohike," Skinner said. "Jim thinks that Frohike might know someone in the mountains or valley that could perform an abortion." He balanced the wooden pole on his shoulder.

Doggett shook his head, a gesture Skinner couldn't see. "Walt, would you trust your life to some backwoods medicine man?"

"I'm not going to have a life unless I can get rid of this fetus. As Alex so nicely pointed out, unlike his body, there is no natural way for it exit my body."

"Just don't make any rash decisions, take your time and find a qualified doctor to perform the operation."

Skinner huffed as they started up an incline his breath puffing out in a white cloud. "Don't worry, I'm giving Fox a say in who we select to do the operation. He won't allow me to choose someone who he doesn't trust to do a good job."

They arrived back at the cabin and carried the deer into the barn where Old Man Peterson had a hook hanging from the ceiling that he had used to hang game to clean.

After they got the carcass hung Skinner stretched. "I'm going inside to warm up a bit before I start clearing the path to the Gunmen's cabin."

"I could use a bite to eat before I start dressing the deer," Doggett said as he took his rifle from Krycek.

"Me, too," Krycek said, "I hope Blair has lunch ready."

Skinner entered the kitchen before them and shrugged off his coat and boots.

Sandburg was sitting at the kitchen counter reading. He looked up and smiled. "Did you bag a deer?"

"Yep, a nice size buck." He walked over to the stove and looked in the large kettle as Krycek and Doggett walked in from outside.

"Mm, that smells good," Skinner said. "Is it ready to eat?"

"Yeah, I left it on a low simmer to keep it hot for you guys."

"What did you make?" Krycek asked.

Sandburg closed the book. "Minestrone soup with a loaf of crusty bread."

"That's just what I need to thaw out," Doggett said as he waited for Skinner to scoop the soup into three bowls while Krycek cut the bread.

"What are you reading, Blair," Skinner asked as he carried his bowl of soup and bread to the dining room table.

"The Physicians Complete Home Medical Guide. Mulder didn't have any books on pregnancy ... this one however does have a small section about it," Sandburg said.

Skinner shrugged. "Fox probably didn't think he'd need a separate medical book that covered pregnancies. And speaking of which, where is he?"

"Out in the workshop with Jim." Sandburg's voice became sad as he continued, "Walter, I hate to be the one to tell you this but we've been dumped."

"What?" Skinner turned in his chair and looked over at Sandburg.

"They decided to team up for the ornament making contest," Sandburg said, "That leaves you and me as a team."

"Why did they decide to do that?" Skinner felt jilted.

Sandburg chuckled. "Don't worry, man. I think they are planning to work together to make us Christmas presents along with the ornaments."

That put a warm feeling Skinner's belly and he smiled. "Okay, Blair, let's get together tonight and discuss what we're going to be making."

Doggett interrupted. "Walt, I think Alex should team up with Blair ... you and I can be the other team."

Krycek looked up from his soup and grinned. "John Jay, are you planning to make me a Christmas present?"

"What do you think?"

"I think I love you, and Blair and I are going to kick yours and Walter's butts in the ornament contest."

"Don't count on it." Doggett chuckled.

~x~X~x~

## The Fox and Panther

The workshop was warm and with the sun shining in through the windows, it made the room bright and sunny. The shop had windows along three walls and skylights overhead, along with fluorescent lights for evenings or on cloudy days. There was a loft over part of the room where they had wood stored and miscellaneous hardware. The room was jam-packed with power tools and had long workbenches along two walls. It was a craftsman's dream. They even had a sewing machine that none of them knew how to use. Skinner, being ever practical, thought it was a good item to have if they ended up spending the rest of their lives in the mountains. On the door outside, Mulder and Ellison had hung a sign that read, "Do Not Disturb, Team Rudolph at Work."

Mulder carefully cut a tiny beard and moustache out of white felt. He had to admit that he was having fun working in their workshop with Jim. The two of them hadn't had much of a chance to talk with each other alone, and working on this project gave them a chance to bond.

After attaching the felt beard with glue, Mulder held up his first ornament. It wasn't too bad for someone with very little artistic ability. "What do you think, Jim?"

Ellison looked over at him. "Hey, that's good."

"I think so, too," Mulder said as he proudly looked at his clothespin Santa Claus. "I never would have thought of making ornaments out of those old clothespins," he said. The round tops of the clothespins did look like heads and the clips resembled long legs. He had painted it with acrylic paints then cut an outfit out of red, white, and black felt to glue on it. "How did you come up with this idea?"

"I made them in elementary school as a boy," Ellison said.

Mulder grinned as he attached the eyehook to the top. "I'm sure Walter and Blair will probably come up with something totally different, but I bet it won't be as colorful or whimsical." He appreciated color more since the aliens had fixed his color-blindness.

"That's one bet I'm not taking. If I know Blair, he'll want to do something with pinecones or nuts, and he'll probably think our clothespin ornaments are tacky."

"Just wait until I finish my Elvis clothespin then he'll probably have a point," Mulder said then turned serious. "So how is Blair doing?"

Ellison shrugged. "He's starting to have doubts about aborting the baby."

"How do you feel about it?"

"Don't tell Blair, but I don't want him to get an abortion."

"Is there a reason you don't want him to know how you feel?"

Ellison set the paintbrush on the counter as he picked up a pair of scissors. "Because it's a purely selfish feeling on my part, and I'm worried about his health. If he knew that I wanted him to keep it, then he might not go through with the abortion and if something happened to him it would be my fault."

"I know how you feel." Mulder chewed on his lower lip. "I'm scared to death of losing Walter, so I completely support his decision for an abortion. At the same time, I wonder about what it would feel like to have a life growing inside me. I don't think I could abort it no matter how much I'd want to."

Raising his eyes from cutting a piece of green felt, Ellison looked over at Mulder. "You're not thinking about getting pregnant, are you?"

"No, of course not! I'd be scared shitless if I were pregnant," Mulder said, "It's just that I'm always fascinated by anything out of the ordinary. So I'm curious about what it would feel like."

"Maybe you should try to imagine what it would feel like to push a six pound melon out a small opening," Ellison quipped as he glued a feather onto the tiny felt hat.

"That would hurt."

"No kidding." Ellison held up his completed ornament.

"Robin Hood?" Mulder guessed.

"I suppose it could be ... I was trying for Santa's elf."

Ellison placed it in a shoebox next to Mulder's ornament.

"Do you want to continue with the ornaments or should we get started on our Christmas presents?" Ellison asked.

"Christmas presents. How are we going to hide them from the guys? We're all going to be using this workshop."

They were making three wooden chests with cushions on top to use as benches in their bedrooms. Ellison had found the pattern in one of Mulder's how-to-books. They had plenty of wood that was stacked in the loft over the workshop. They also had two one-hundred-yard rolls of heavy-duty white canvas -- not that they'd need more than ten yards for the cushions. Mulder was more concerned about what to stuff them with -- Jim had suggested hay and feathers.

Mulder remembered Walter trying to explain why they brought back the canvas and sewing machine. His lover's reply was "because they had room in the truck and it might come in handy." It was probably a good thing they did, since he needed to use the sewing machine on the cushions. Mulder just wished they had picked up some foam rubber at the same time.

Stretching, Ellison said, "When we're not working on the chests we'll cover them with a tarp with a 'Don't Peek' sign on it."

Mulder thought for a second. Knowing his lover the way he did, he knew Walter wouldn't peek. Neither would John, but Alex was another story. "That should work with Walter and John."

"It will work with Blair too, but it's going to drive him nuts." Ellison's blue eyes sparkled with mischief.

~x~X~x~

The Bear, Frog, Otter, Stork, and Puppy

Friday, December 7, 2001

3:00 p.m.

Sun reflected off the bright white snow as Skinner parked the tractor on the path in front of the Gunmen's cabin. He wore a pair of goggles to protect his eyes from the blowing snow.

Bond hurried out of the cabin. "Hi, Walter! Did you get it all plowed?"

"I'll have to make another run at it on my way back, but it should be in pretty good condition." Skinner climbed down from the tractor. "Is Frohike around?"

"The guys are inside. We're making Christmas ornaments," Bond said.

"You, too? We're doing the same thing back at our place."

Bond smiled. "We're going out in a few days to cut down a tree."

Skinner was nervous about having to explain his condition to their friends. It was rather embarrassing to admit to being knocked up by another man, even when it was a man he loved dearly.

The Gunmen's cabin was warm and cozy. It had two bedrooms, a parlor, a big eat in kitchen, and the new bathroom they added this fall. A large stone fireplace separated the kitchen from the living room and was open to both rooms. Their cat, Rocky, lay sleeping on the sofa in the parlor. It raised its head and looked at him then yawned and went back to sleep.

Skinner found them in the kitchen making ornaments out of dough using old metal Christmas cookie cutters. He picked one up. It was an angel. It had been painted then coated with a lacquer glaze.

"These are nice," Skinner said. "Where did you get the cookie cutters?"



Frohike looked up from painting the face on a snowman. "They were my uncle's. He had them stored in a shoebox in the cabinet."

"So how's everyone back at your cabin?" Byers asked.

"That's why I'm here ... we need to find a trustworthy doctor able to perform surgery. Sean only knows military doctors. I was hoping you'd know someone, if not in the mountains, in the general vicinity."

The guys all stopped what they were doing and looked up at Skinner with concern.

"Who's sick?" Frohike asked.

"No one's sick ... it's complicated and rather unbelievable...." Skinner looked at them wondering again if it was a good idea telling them. They'd eventually find out once Krycek started to show.

"Dude, we've helped Mulder out for over ten years!" Langly said. "We can handle unbelievable."

"Okay, I'm pregnant and so are Alex and Blair," Skinner said hurriedly, wanting to get it over with as quickly as possible.

"Then again maybe not," Langly said while looking with doubt at Skinner's belly.

"You're pregnant?" Byers said his eyebrows rising in disbelief.

"Yes, and so are Alex and Blair."

"Them I can believe."

"Me, too," Langly said.

Frohike stood and took Skinner by his elbow. "Here, Walter, take my seat."

"Melvin, I'm pregnant. I'm not an invalid."

"Who's the father?" Bond asked.

"Fox." Skinner sighed, feeling a migraine coming on. "Look, guys, the reason I told you is because I need to find a doctor who can surgically terminate my condition."

"You mean murder your baby," Byers said.

Taken aback by Byers' accusation, Skinner bristled. "John, I'm a man ... we're not suppose become pregnant!"

"Does that make it right?"

"This could kill me, or don't you care about my life?"

"We care, Walter," Frohike said. "There is only one person on this mountain that I know of who can surgically remove the fetus."

"Who's that?"

"Laura Nightingale."

"She's a doctor?" Skinner was surprised.

"She graduated top of her class at John Hopkins University and interned at a hospital in one of New York's most crime ridden neighborhoods. It was shortly after she finished her internship that Laura withdrew and moved to the mountains," Frohike said.

"Why did she give it up?"

"You'll have to ask her."

"I'll do that tomorrow as soon as I can clear a path to her cabin." Nightingale lived six miles up the path from the Gunmen; she was twelve miles from his cabin. Skinner felt a sense of relief now that he might have found someone living so close to them.

"Good, I'd like to be able to check on Laura," Frohike said. "I know she's quite capable of looking after herself, but everyone could use some companionship during the winter."

"It's too bad she doesn't have electricity so we could set her up with a HAM radio," Langly said.

"I better get back before it gets dark," Skinner said, "Thanks, guys."

~x~X~x~

The Rat and Wolf

Friday, December 7, 2001  
7:00 p.m.

Krycek flipped through one of the craft books in the bright glare of the workshop's fluorescent lights. On one of their dozens of scavenger trips off the mountain, they had picked up quite a few woodworking and craft books at the Home Depot.

"Okay, do you have any ideas for ornaments?" Sandburg asked.

"We could use the jigsaw to cut out gingerbread men shapes," Krycek said.

Sandburg frowned. "I was thinking that we could decorate pinecones. We have all of this gold and silver paint that we can use. Plus we could decorate the tops with red berries and ribbon for color."

"That seems simple enough," Krycek said. "Then we'd have more time to spend working on our presents."

"What are you going to make John?"

"I was thinking of making him this for the baby." Krycek opened the sewing book that he had under the woodworking book to a pattern for a Bjorn baby carrier.

Sandburg looked at the picture. "Aren't you scared about having this baby?"

"Of course I am!" Krycek slammed the book closed. "Blair, I've been through worse situations. Try being locked inside a silo without food and water for days while not knowing if you'd ever get out alive! Or having your arm hacked off or spending a year in a Tunisia prison or having to betray someone you loved!" Krycek placed his hand over his still flat belly. "This is a part of me ... how can I kill it after everything I suffered through?"

Krycek watched Sandburg's face as the younger man worked out his feelings. Then he finally asked, "So what are you going to make Jim?"

"I think a Bjorn baby carrier, if you'd help me."

Krycek smiled. "Of course I will."

Sandburg glanced over at the tarp with the 'Don't Peek' sign. "I guess we'll have to find a place to hide our projects."

"Should we peek?" Krycek asked.

"No." Sandburg shook his head. "This is a test of the trust Mulder and Jim are placing in us."

~x~X~x~

The Bear and Fox

Thursday, December 8, 2001

1:00 p.m.

After doing chores and having lunch, Skinner headed out on the tractor to plow the six-mile path to Laura Nightingale's cabin. Mulder followed him on horseback.

It took them an hour to make it to her cabin on the slow moving tractor.

Laura stepped out on her front steps and waved. As Mulder dismounted and led his horse to a hitching post, Skinner joined him.

"Hi, Laura," they said.

"Mulder, Walter, it's nice to see you. What brings you out my way?"

"We have a life and death situation to discuss with you," Skinner said.

"Come in. I'll put some tea on the range."

They followed her inside and took their boots and winter gear off by the door.

"Sorry, Laura. We're getting water on your floor," Mulder said.

"Don't worry about it." Laura laughed as she walked into her kitchen. "It's pretty hard to avoid bringing snow in from outside this time of year."

Skinner glanced around the small homey cabin as Mulder walked over to a green parrot sitting on a perch in the parlor. Skinner'd only been here once before. Laura had plants all over the place. On the potbelly stove she had a wrought iron kettle filled with water that acted as a humidifier. Considering the conditions outside, inside the cabin felt like a tropical forest, and Laura Nightingale was as exotic as any creature that one would find in a rainforest with her dark skin and red curly hair.

"Hi, Jake," Mulder cooed.

"Pretty boy!" the parrot squawked.

"You got that right, Jake." Skinner chuckled.

After several minutes Laura came back carrying a tray, on it were three teacups, a teapot, and cookies. She set it on the coffee table then sat on an overstuffed chair leaving the sofa to Mulder and Skinner.

As Laura filled the teacups, she asked, "You said this was life or death?"

"Yes." Skinner didn't think she'd believe him but he went on to explain. "Laura, you are aware that Fox and I used to work for the FBI?"

"I am," she said, handing him a china teacup before passing one to Mulder.

"Fox worked for a department under me that looked into the paranormal, including the existence of aliens." Skinner balanced the delicate china on his knee as he explained. "He was abducted twice by aliens ... the last time they altered his genetic makeup. He's no longer completely human. And because of what they did to him, neither am I."

"How is that?" Laura asked.

"Fox infected me and it changed me."

"How did it change you? And what is Fox if he's not human?"

"As far as I can determine, I'm a hermaphroditic werewolf," Mulder said.

Skinner could see the skeptical look that she gave his lover. "It's true, Laura. That's why we're here. I haven't been outwardly changed into a hermaphrodite, but I am one in wolf form."

"And the life and death situation?" she asked with a look that could rival Scully's.

"I'm pregnant and I need you to surgically remove the fetus."

"You can't seriously expect me to believe this?"

"Examine me if you don't."

Laura sighed, and set her teacup down. "Okay, I will ... let me get my bag."

Skinner started as Mulder took his hand and laced their fingers together. "Don't worry; she'll believe you after she examines you."

"I'd like this to be behind us ... so we can get on with our lives," Skinner said.

Mulder leaned in and kissed Skinner's cheek. "We're fine."

Skinner looked toward the door where Laura had vanished. "I'm surprised Blair and Jim didn't want to come with us."

"Do you think Blair's having second thoughts?" Mulder said.

"I don't know. He was pretty quiet today."

Laura stepped through the doorway carrying a black Doctor's bag. "Would you take off your shirt and unfasten your pants," she said.

Skinner stood and removed the flannel shirt and long undershirt beneath it.

"How far along are you supposed to be?"

"He's two months," Mulder answered.

"I'm not going to be able to determine much. If you are pregnant the fetus will only be about an inch long. Now if this was the third month I should be able to detect a heartbeat." She pressed her fingers against Skinner's belly and probed. "You do have something abnormal, but I don't know what it could be." When she pressed a little too hard, Laura found her fingers pressing against fur as Skinner morphed into a large gray wolf.

"Jesus!" she gasped and backed away.

The wolf gave her a disapproving look and went over to lay its head on Mulder's lap.

"Don't worry, Laura. Walter won't harm you," Mulder said as he scratched his lover behind the ear. "We think that we maintain the memories of who we are as wolves."

"You don't know for sure?"

"No. Whenever we change back, we don't remember our time as wolves."

"Why did he change?"

"My guess would be some ingrained protective instinct. He might have thought you were harming our baby."

Skinner lifted his head and barked. 'Exactly. Smart, boy.' He licked Mulder's face. Back in wolf form Skinner didn't want his pup to be harmed. If only he could convey that to Fox.

"Is that why you changed, Walter?" Mulder asked, "To protect our baby?"

Skinner barked and nodded.

"Did he just nod?" Laura asked.

Mulder smiled and hugged the wolf. "Yeah."

While he was hugging him, Skinner morphed back.

"What happened?" Skinner asked.

"You changed into a wolf," Mulder said. "I think Laura believes us now."

Climbing shakily to his feet, Skinner turned to face her. "Laura, can you perform the surgery to remove the fetus?"

Mulder interrupted, "Walter, you changed because your wolf self doesn't want an abortion."

"My human self wants one." Skinner ran a hand over his bald scalp then fastened his pants.

"Fox, you know I have no way to give birth to this baby."

"I know that," Mulder sighed. "Laura, we need your help."

Laura walked over to her chair and sat. "I won't abort your baby. I will provide my services to deliver him through c-section."

"I can't go through with this," Skinner said, "Please, help me."

"I've seen too many purposeless deaths to participate in another. I moved here to get away from the brutality of man's inhumanity to man." Laura's eyes were hard as she looked at Skinner. "I will not kill your baby; find someone else."

Mulder put a comforting arm around his lover as he looked at Laura. "What if his life were at risk?"

"I'll tell you what, Mulder. I'll be willing to monitor Walter's condition and if at any time his life is in danger, I will go ahead and do an abortion. But I'm not going to kill a baby without it being a matter of life or death."

Skinner sighed. He used to be pro-life but he now had a whole new perspective on the pro-choice side. This was his body and this woman was not allowing him any choice but to go through with this pregnancy.

He'd allow her to monitor his condition and once the snow melted he'd find a doctor willing to do it.

"Laura, thank you for your time," Skinner said as he pulled on his shirt and then offered her his hand to shake. "If it wouldn't be too much of an imposition Alex and Blair are also pregnant and could use your services too. We'd be willing to trade our labor for your assistance. Unlike me, they have vaginas, so they probably wouldn't require a c-section."

Laura shook his hand as she looked into his eyes. "You're not upset with me?"

"I understand your position, even if I don't agree with it," Skinner said gruffly. He really wanted to hit something -- he was that frustrated -- but he kept his feelings under control.

"I'll be willing to look at Alex and Blair," Laura said.

"Thank you, Doctor. C'mon, Fox, let's go home."

~x~X~x~

The Fox, Stork, Frog, Otter, and Puppy

Mulder knew Walter was angry. His lover took the horse and left him to drive the plow home. He hoped Walter was careful on the slippery path as he galloped out of sight of the slow moving tractor.

At least Mulder's mind was put at ease by Laura's assurances that if Walter's life was ever endangered by this pregnancy she'd perform an abortion. He stopped the tractor when he reached the Gunmen's place, knowing that his lover would want some time alone to work through his feelings -- that Walter would probably lock himself in their bedroom once he got home.

Langly popped his head out of the cabin after hearing the tractor. "Mulder, hurry and get your butt inside before too much heat escapes."

Mulder hurried up the wooden steps and into the cabin then took off his boots and coat while Langly closed the door. "Mm, something smells good," he said as he shoved gloves and a knit cap into the sleeve of his coat.

"That's Melvin; he's cooking dinner."

"What's he making?"

"It's Greek to me," Langly said as Mulder followed him into the kitchen.

"Hey, Mulder," Frohike looked into the oven as he greeted him. "I'm making Moussaka ... I hope you can stay for dinner."

"It smells good; what's in it?"

"Ground lamb, eggplant, onions, and mash potatoes with a beshamel sauce," Frohike said.

"I can stay."

"Where's Walter?"

"Home ... I thought I'd give him a little space."

"What's wrong, couldn't Laura help him?"

"She refused."

"That doesn't sound like her," Frohike said as he leaned up against the counter. "Doesn't she understand that this could kill him?"

"She's going to monitor his condition, and if his life is ever in danger then she'll remove the baby." Mulder sighed. "Walter's pretty upset."

"I don't blame him," Langly said as he stood at the sink washing a couple of pans.

"Neither do I," Frohike said.

"Where are Byers and Bond?" Mulder asked, wanting to change the subject.

"They're out gathering pinecones, acorns, and feathers for Christmas ornaments. We're going to make birds out of the pinecones," Frohike said.

"Jim and I are making ornaments," Mulder said as he glanced around at the cluttered kitchen. They had pots and pans stacked on a small shelf over the wood stove that threaten to topple. It must be a task to get the skillet from the bottom of the pile. He now had the perfect idea for a Christmas present for his friends.

"So when are you getting your tree?" Langly asked.

"The guys want to go out the morning of Christmas Eve day to cut down our tree then we'll decorate it that evening."

Langly sat at the table next to Mulder while Frohike took the Moussaka out of the oven. "We're going to get our tree as soon as we're finished with the ornaments."

The back door opened and Byers and Bond walked in each carrying a basket.

"Hi, Mulder," they greeted and set the baskets on the floor against the wall.

"Hi, guys."

"We found some really nice pinecones," Bond said as he took off his coat and hung it on a hook by the back door.

"I could really use a hot bath," Byers said. He shivered as he pulled off his boots.

"Eat first while the food's still hot," Frohike said as he dished up the Moussaka. He placed a plate in front of Mulder and Langly.

Mulder picked up a fork and sliced through the layers of mashed potatoes, ground lamb, and sliced eggplant in a sauce that smelled of cinnamon and nutmeg. He brought it to his mouth and closed his eyes to savor its flavor. "Mmm, Frohike, you should have been a chef. This is delicious."

"It wasn't that difficult to make." Frohike's voice was matter of fact but his chest puffed out with pride at the compliment.

"Do you think this recipe would work with ground venison? I'd love to make it when it's my turn to cook."

"It works with ground beef, so it should work with venison," Frohike said. "So, who bagged the deer?"

"Walter did yesterday morning."

"He didn't mention it when he stopped by yesterday," Byers said as he picked up his fork.

Frohike placed a pitcher of water on the table then sat in front of his plate of food. "John, Walter had a lot more on his mind yesterday than discussing hunting."

Byers looked over at Mulder. "How do you feel about him being pregnant with your child?"

Having this discussion with his friends was the last thing Mulder wanted to do at the moment. "Truthfully, John, I'm scared to death ... I don't want to lose him."

"What about the baby?"

"Right now I'm more concerned about Walter's health and well-being," Mulder said as he focused back on his meal while realizing that he needed to get home to his lover. Maybe he could take Walter's mind off the baby.

"This was great, Fro ... I should get home." He stood and carried his empty plate to the sink.

"Let me get you the recipe first." Frohike stood, hurried over to the counter, and opened a recipe box. "I think Walter will really enjoy this dish."

Mulder appreciated what his best friend was trying to do. "If you get a chance stop out tomorrow and I'll give you some venison steaks."

~x~X~x~

The Bear and Panther

When Skinner reached the barn, he dismounted and led the horse inside over to her stall where he removed the saddle then brushed her down before filling her feed bin with fresh oats. He closed the stall gate then took a deep breath that didn't help to calm his frayed nerves.



With long strides he quickly left the barn, crossed the frozen ground, and entered the cabin. Ellison was at the wood stove and turned to glance at Skinner.

"Walter, is she going to help us?" Ellison asked.

"She refused!" Skinner clenched his teeth as anger threatened to spill out.

"What do you mean? How can she refuse?"

"Look, Jim, I can't talk about this now...." He hurried out of the kitchen, through the dining room then entered his bedroom and slammed the door. Tears of frustration ran down his cheeks as he leaned against the door. "Fuck."

Only embers remained in the hearth. Shivering, Skinner pushed away from the door, walked over to the fireplace, and put a couple of logs on the embers. His hand shook as he did this. Standing, Skinner moved over to the recliner and sat.

~x~X~x~

## The Bear and Fox

As Skinner sat on the comfortable leather recliner he gazed into the fire. He had to come to terms with what was happening to him. Other than vomiting and urinating more often, Skinner didn't feel any different. He certainly didn't feel pregnant. Maybe if he could take the bull by the horns and force himself to accept his condition he'd be able to look beyond the horror of it.

Could he maintain his dignity when his body started to show more outward signs of being pregnant? Would Fox still find him desirable?

Pulling his gaze off the fire, he looked around his and Fox's bedroom. They hadn't even had to flip a coin with John and Alex for it. The other two men were more than happy to sleep upstairs in the loft bedroom on the mahogany sleigh bed. They'd even moved all of their clothes into the dresser up there and into the new closet at the top of the stairs. So this room was now exclusively Skinner's and Mulder's sanctuary.

His eyes drifted to the large four-poster bed constructed out of polished pine logs. It had a thick goose down comforter on it. This was Skinner's favorite item in the whole house. The memories of making love to Fox and holding him while he slept were amongst his most pleasant. To be so deeply in love made this holiday season one that he was really looking forward to regardless of his present condition.

Where was his lover? It'd been almost two hours since he'd arrived back home.

As if on cue, the door opened and Mulder entered the room. He closed it, walked over to the chair, and kneeled at Skinner's feet.

"How are you feeling?" Mulder asked as he placed his hands on his lover's thighs.

"Where were you?"

"I stopped at the Gunmen's ... I thought you needed some time alone."

"C'mere." Skinner pulled Mulder up onto his lap and hugged him, burying his face against Mulder's chest. When he felt the tender press of lips against his bald scalp, Skinner hugged his lover tighter as he tilted his head up and captured those soft lips with his. His arousal soared as Mulder's thigh pressed against his groin.

All thoughts of being pregnant vanished as his male instincts took over. Skinner moved his hands down to Mulder's ass and cupped the younger man's buttocks as he hungrily devoured his mouth.

"I want you," Mulder murmured.

As Skinner's lips moved down to Mulder's throat, he stopped when his mouth encountered fabric. "Get undressed," he growled and quickly pulled the sweater up over Mulder's head.

Mulder slid off his lap and started to hurriedly strip as Skinner stood and did the same.

Once naked, they fell back in each other's arms in front of the warm glow of the fireplace. It was hard for Skinner to control himself as he sucked on the side of Mulder's throat while his fingers kneaded the man's ass. He ground his hard cock against Mulder's while his lover moaned and held onto him tight.

His fingers delved between Mulder's buttocks and grazed over his lover's anus then probed the other hot wet opening. He pushed a finger inside to coat it, while enjoying the feel of tight clenching muscles and the way Mulder rocked his hips to get more of Skinner's finger inside him. Then he brought it back to the tight puckered opening and eased it inside. Skinner repeated this several times while his mouth sucked and nipped at Fox's nipples. Until his lover was squirming with desire. Skinner wasn't doing any better. His cock was hard as granite and wanted desperately to be buried inside that hot sheath.

"Oh God, Walter, now ... please...."

Sweat beaded on Skinner's forehead as he maneuvered Mulder over to the bed and onto the mattress. Scooting to the middle of the bed, Skinner helped Mulder position his long, sexy legs on his shoulders. He slicked his shaft then pressed it against Mulder's anus. They had an agreement to only have anal sex unless Mulder asked to be taken vaginally, and because of the conditions that Sandburg and Krycek found themselves, it was an agreement that Skinner was determined to keep.

As Skinner entered, he enjoyed how Mulder's hips pushed up against his lover's cock in a desperate attempt to get as much of his shaft inside as possible. "You're going to get every inch, sweetheart."

"God, Walter, just shut up and fill me."

"Your wish...." Skinner thrust the rest of his shaft inside then wrapped his muscular arms around Mulder's legs while he enjoyed the hot tightness encasing his cock. He glanced down at his lover's beautiful cock that was plump and straining against its owner's belly.

After a minute Skinner started moving, slowly at first ... thrusting in and out. While watching Fox's passion-filled face he started to pick up the speed and force of his penetration. Rivulets of sweat ran down Skinner's back as he thrust harder and faster into that exquisite tightness. He reached for Mulder's straining member and started jerking him off in time with his thrusts. It didn't take long. Muscles squeezed his shaft in a viselike grip as come spurted out of Mulder's cock and splattered on his chest and face.

Skinner's eyes closed, he threw back his head, and howled as his orgasm exploded out him. He woke to Fox's hand caressing his back and tiny kisses peppering his head while still deliciously joined. Skinner lifted his head and captured Mulder's lips in a deep passion-filled kiss.

Gazing into Mulder's eyes, Skinner murmured, "I love you."

Mulder's arms wrapped around his neck and held him close. "I love you."

~x~X~x~

The Bear and Dog

Monday, December 17, 2001

3:00 p.m.

Over a week had passed since Skinner and Mulder had met with Laura Nightingale. In that short time Skinner discovered that he could no longer fasten his pants without great discomfort. He now wore them unfastened with a belt to hold them up. Over the pants, he wore a sweater to cover up his expanding midsection. Only Mulder knew about his pants dilemma and for now he wanted to keep it that way.

As Skinner carefully transferred the silhouette of a frog onto the eighth inch thick sheet of maple, he thought back to that morning.

Fox had been especially loving toward him. He had awoken to his lover's mouth around his cock. After being brought to a mind-blowing orgasm, Fox had fixed him a large breakfast. Then Fox had asked him what he wanted for dinner. Skinner requested that his lover make that ground venison, eggplant, and mash potato dish that he had made the last time he cooked. When Fox pampered him this way, being totally attentive to his needs and desires, Skinner felt totally loved.

After he had the frog shape on the wood he carried it over to the jigsaw and cut it out.

Skinner glanced over at John working quietly on the other side of the workshop. The other man was staining a cradle that he had built for his and Alex's baby. It was to be a Christmas gift for Krycek.

Not that Skinner had been intentionally rude, but he felt uncomfortable as he had watched John work on the cradle. So his silence and moodiness had come across as rudeness to John. They barely spoke as they both worked on separate projects for their lovers. Luckily they had gotten their Christmas ornaments out of the way before the rift had set in.

Standing, Skinner walked over to the workbench and looked at the cradle that Doggett was staining with a light oak finish. "You've really done a remarkable job, John," he said, offering an olive branch.

"Thanks." Doggett ran a hand over an unstained section. "I just wish I add some artistic ability. I would have liked to have painted the story of Peter rabbit and the cabbage patch on the sides of the cradle. It is Alex's favorite fable." He glanced over at the brightly painted animals that Skinner had been working on.

Skinner didn't even know what Fox's favorite fable was. "I could paint the scenes for you if you tell me what parts of the fable you'd like to depict."

"I'd appreciate that, Walt. Do you think you'll have time to do that and finished your present for Fox?" John said. "And we still have to make that potters wheel for the Gunmen and herb drying rack for Jim and Blair."

"We still have a week before Christmas. I'll have my gift for Fox finished this evening then I can start painting the figures on your gift tomorrow. If you'd work on the drying rack, that shouldn't take more than a day. The potter's wheel will take us several days to complete."

"We're sharing this workshop."

"I know Fox wants to make his friends a hanging pot rack," Skinner said, "So we can share the workshop while we're making the presents for the Gunmen."

Doggett continued to stain the cradle while they talked. He would apply a coat of varnish after Skinner painted Peter rabbit on it. "Alex and Blair thought they'd make them a pie cupboard since Fox mentioned the Gunmen needed more storage in their kitchen."

"I better get back to my present for Fox," Skinner said. He was making an animal mobile. After Fox had told him about a dream he had where they were all different animals and described each of them. Skinner picked up 'Frohike the frog' and started to sand it.

~x~X~x~

The Rat, Fox, Wolf, Panther, Bear, and Dog

Monday, December 17, 2001  
6:00 p.m.

Outside the snow was falling and the temperature had dropped to zero. Inside the kitchen was warm and comfortable. Krycek had just gotten in from milking the cows. He sat at the cook's table, looking at recipes for cookies in an old Christmas cookbook that had been Old Man Peterson's. Some of the pages were stained and loose.

As Krycek glanced at the recipes, he kept an appreciative eye on Mulder. While John had his heart, Krycek still enjoyed admiring the scenery, and no one fit a pair of jeans like Fox -- with his long sexy legs, tight round ass, and that lovely package pressing against the zipper of the worn denim.

Sandburg walked into the kitchen and Krycek's eyes shifted off Mulder to admire the shorter man.

"Hey guys, we should have bibb lettuce and tomatoes by Christmas," Sandburg said. "I've started new lettuce plants that will mature in another three weeks. At this rate we should be able to have fresh greens throughout the winter."

"I can't wait; it's been four weeks since we've had fresh greens," Mulder said. "This will really be a treat for Christmas."

They were growing the vegetables in hydroponic troughs inside their greenhouse. Sandburg had taken over the work involved in taking care of the plants and herbs. They had solar panels on the outside and a space heater in the greenhouse. They also vented their clothes dryer into the glass room.

"What about the cucumbers?" Krycek asked.

"They're just budding; it will be at least two weeks before we have any to pick." Sandburg looked at the cookbook Krycek had opened. "Have you found some Christmas cookie recipes we can make?"

"I found some I'd love to make if we only had chocolate. With the ingredients we have we can make gingerbread men, Scottish shortbread, and maple walnut sandwich cookies."

"How about a fruitcake?" Sandburg said.

Krycek and Mulder looked at him as if he'd grown a third head.

Ellison had entered the room when his lover asked the question. "Guys, Blair's favorite food is tongue."

"Yuck." Mulder made a face then glanced up at the clock. "Jim can you let Walter and John know that dinner is ready?"

"Sure, Mulder. I'll be right back." Ellison didn't bother with a coat as he dashed out the back door and down the short path to the workshop.

When he came back a couple minutes later, he shook the snow off his clothes and hair. "Team Frosty will be here in a few minutes," Ellison said as he stomped the snow off his shoes on the doormat. "There's already three new inches on the ground, and by the feel of it, it will probably be snowing most of the night."

"Shoot," Mulder said. "We're going to have a lot of shoveling to do tomorrow."

"How come whenever it snows, it's John's turn to cook? And he gets out of shoveling," Sandburg asked.

"Good question," Krycek said. This was the third sizable snowfall they'd had in the last eleven days and each time his lover had gotten out of shoveling.

"It must be an X-File," Mulder quipped as he set the table.

"Well, he's cooking Christmas Eve day," Ellison pointed out.

Sandburg looked concerned. "How's the diesel fuel supply holding up for the tractor?"

Mulder removed the Moussaka from the oven. "We should have enough to plow the twelve-mile path six more times before we'll need to get more from Sean." He carried it to the table and set it on a trivet. Then he placed a plate stacked with sliced bread and a crock of butter on the table.

The back door opened and Skinner and Doggett hurried in from outside. Blowing snow followed them inside.

"It's colder than a witch's tit," Doggett grumbled as he removed his boots.

"How would you know that?" Krycek asked.

"My ex wife."

"I can relate." Ellison chuckled as he took a seat. "Although I do get along with Caro now...." He looked sad. "I hope she survived."

"Me too," Doggett sighed, "I hope Barb is all right."

Mulder served the casserole as the men passed the bread around.

Krycek watched and listened to his friends talk about their day and other interests. Since they joined Mulder here, the evening meal had become the most important part of their day. They did not always eat breakfast or lunch together, but dinner was different. It had become their family time together. After dinner they either relaxed in the parlor or went their separate ways.

Mulder and Sandburg could become quite animated when discussing some scientific theory or ancient civilization. They seemed to share a lot of the same interests. Doggett, Skinner, and

Ellison also had a lot in common from their military service to their careers in law enforcement. At times Krycek felt completely out of place in this tight-knit group, but John made him feel right at home. So did the other men in their own ways. Now with all of them stuck inside for most of the day, Krycek wondered if tempers might eventually become short.

To make matters worse he started having morning sickness and was competing with Blair and Walter for their only bathroom in the morning.

"Alex?"

"Um ... what?" Krycek hadn't heard Mulder's question.

"I was asking how you were feeling?" Mulder said. "You seem awfully quiet."

"I'm fine. I just have a lot on my mind."

"I'm plowing the path to Laura's cabin tomorrow," Mulder said. "I'm going to see if she'll be agreeable to stopping out this week to talk to you and Blair about your conditions. Is that all right with you?"

"I'm fine with it ... besides I have some questions for her." Krycek wasn't about to show how nervous he was or that he was beginning to have second thoughts, so he changed the subject. "I hope you made dessert."

"I made rice pudding."

~x~X~x~

The Wolf, Rat, Bear, Fox, Dog, and Panther

Thursday, December 20, 2001  
11:00 a.m.

Laura Nightingale glanced around the festively decorated parlor. Wreaths and garland made from juniper, evergreen, and laurel leaves with bright red holly berries and pinecones hung on the walls. An evergreen centerpiece with candles decorated the dining room table. The only thing missing was the Christmas tree.

While sipping a mug of hot spiced tea as she tried to get the chill from the twelve-mile horseback ride to their cabin out of her bones, Laura studied the six men -- three separate couples who were obviously in love with each other. Laura knew from meeting with Mulder and Skinner that the two men appeared closer than most married couples she'd met. Now watching Sandburg and Ellison, and Doggett and Krycek she was struck by the deep affection they openly showed each other.

"I'd like to set up an area in your home that I can use as a lab. I have some medical items packed away that I could not use because they required electricity. I'll need to monitor your blood pressure, the sugar and protein levels in your urine, and your weight," she said.

"How much space do you need?" Mulder asked.

"Enough room to set up my microscope and a Bunsen burner with some test tubes and chemicals."

Skinner looked at the other men and asked, "How about the counter in the laundry room?"

"That would make a good place for a lab," Sandburg said. "I suggest we fire-proof the counter

and wall behind with tile or metal sheeting."

"I'll get right on it tomorrow," Ellison said as he draped an arm over Sandburg's shoulders.

"I'd like to discuss with you the foods that you should avoid during your pregnancies," Laura said.

"We know about avoiding alcohol," Krycek sighed as he leaned up against Doggett as the two men sat on the sofa.

"That's right," Laura said, "You should also avoid raw eggs. No eggnog or eating raw cookie batter. Steer away from eating raw or undercooked meats, and soft unpasteurized cheese like Brie or Camembert. Also large fish that can contain mercury such as tuna fish. You may eat some but keep it to no more than half a pound per week."

"What about coffee?" Skinner asked.

"Limit it to a cup a day." She took a sip of tea. "Constipation and hemorrhoids can be a problem during pregnancy, so try to eat a lot of fresh fruit, vegetables, high grain breads, and high fiber cereals. To prevent indigestion avoiding drinking large amounts of fluid with your meals, and avoid gas-producing foods such as beans and broccoli."

"What about morning sickness?" Sandburg asked.

"Try drinking ginger ale or ginger tea and ginger cookies. Also dry toast and crackers can alleviate the symptoms." Laura set the mug down. "I'd like to give you each brief examinations until I can get my lab set up over here. Today I would like to weigh each of you, take your blood pressure, and check your heart rate. You do have a scale, don't you?"

"Yes, in the bathroom," Krycek said.

"Good. When I come out next time I'd like to get a urine and blood sample from each of you and do a more thorough examination." Laura looked at Krycek. "I'll start with you, Alex. Let's go into the bathroom for some privacy."

After they entered the bathroom Laura closed the door. The room was warmer than the parlor. "Please strip down to your underwear."

Krycek removed his clothes and stood shivering in his boxers.

"Step on the scale." Laura had a notebook, where she recorded his weight. She planned to start medical files on each of the three men once she got back to her cabin. "Have you ever had any sexually transmitted diseases?"

"No."

"Is there a history of diabetes, heart problems, or any other genetic diseases in your family?"

"No."

"How far along are you?"

"Four weeks."

Laura took his blood pressure, then listened to his heart. She noticed his areola and nipples were dark for a man and he had a slight swell in his breasts, but nothing that would be obvious to a layman's eyes. His breasts were not outwardly feminine yet, but it was obvious from her probing

that they would be filling out and eventually would grow heavy with nourishment for the baby. Laura wondered if she should mention this to him yet or save it for later. She had a feeling that this aspect of their pregnancy might freak out all three men.

"You can get dressed, Alex. Do you have any questions or concerns?"

"Other than morning sickness, I've been feeling fatigued. Is that normal?"

"Yes, it is. You may find yourself becoming more emotional, having cravings and aversions for some foods and scents. You're going to need to urinate more frequently and you're going to experience some swelling in your ankles. These are all normal aspects of pregnancy."

"Thank you, Doctor," Krycek said as he finished dressing.

"Alex, can you send Blair in?"

Krycek hurried out and Sandburg came into the room and closed the door behind him.

"Strip down to your underwear."

Sandburg was the shortest of the six men. He had long curly brown hair tied back in a ponytail.

Laura asked him the same questions that she asked Krycek and got the same responses.

While she weighed him and took his blood pressure, she asked her final question. "How far along are you?"

"Three weeks."

She jotted it down in her notebook. "You may get dressed. Do you have any questions?"

"If something goes wrong are you capable of doing a c-section?"

"Yes. I've done dozens when I was an intern and briefly as a practicing MD."

"When and why did you quit?" Sandburg asked.

Laura hesitated at first then she said, "Seven years ago, after treating too many teenagers, who had been brought in after they were shot during a gun battle with a rival gang, then seeing my fiancé stabbed to death by a homeless man he was treating. A man who should have been in an institution and not on the street. I just couldn't take it any longer, so I moved here."

"I'm sorry."

"You don't need to be," Laura said. "Please send Walter in."

After she examined Walter they walked out of the bathroom together.

"Can you stay for lunch?" Sandburg asked as he flipped the cheese sandwiches on the grill.

"Thanks for asking, but I can't be away from home for more than four hours in the winter. I can't chance the fire going out in the potbelly stove."

"Laura, would you be able to join us for Christmas dinner?" Doggett asked.

She smiled. "I'd love to. What time do you want me over?"



"How about one o'clock."

"I'll be there and I'll bring the items for the lab."

~x~X~x~

The Frog, Puppy, Otter, and Stork

Thursday, December 20, 2001

8:00 p.m.

The four companions relaxed in the parlor admiring their brightly decorated Christmas tree. They were enjoying freshly made eggnog with a shot of dark rum. The rum had been a present from Helmut Schmidt who wanted to thank Frohike for his work in organizing and leading the militia.

"This spring I want to look into getting a shoat to raise," Frohike said.

"A what?" Byers asked.

"A shoat is a just weaned pig."

"Why?" Langly asked.

"If we're still here next winter I'd like to have our larder filled with fresh cuts of pork," Frohike said. "My uncle used to raise several shoats through the summer and by fall they'd be large enough for slaughter. He'd keep some of the meat then trade the rest to his neighbors."

"Why didn't he just get a sow and a boar then raise their piglets for food?" Byers asked.

"Too much work," Frohike said. "A sow can have up to three litters of eight to ten piglets a year. That's thirty pigs per year. By getting a shoat and fattening it through summer then butchering it in the fall we won't have to feed it through the winter."

"Where would we get a shoat," Bond asked.

"Helmut Schmidt raises pigs. He'd be more than willing to give us a shoat come spring." Frohike took a sip of eggnog. "I'm going to check to see if Mulder and the guys would want to raise one, too. They can be good garbage disposals."

Langly poured a little rum into his mug then filled it again with eggnog. "I don't know, Melvin. Would you be able to kill the pig come fall?"

"I used to help my Uncle ... it wasn't easy. The most important thing is not to become attached to the pig. They can be as smart as dogs." Frohike looked at Bond. "Jimmy, I'm going to be the only one to raise the shoat."

"Okay, Melvin."

~x~X~x~

The Fox, Bear, Dog, Rat, Panther, and Wolf

Monday, December 24, 2001

11:00 a.m.

The woods were cold and the sky overcast as they searched for the perfect Christmas tree. Mulder shivered and sniffed while standing knee deep in snow as he watched Walter walk around a seven-foot tall blue spruce. He was feeling worse by the minute.

"I think this one is the best we've seen so far," Skinner said.

"It works for me," Krycek said.

"I like it." Ellison nodded.

"Me, too," Mulder agreed hoarsely, "Chop it down and let's get back home." He was hoping that John would have a large pot of hot chicken noodle soup on the stove when they got back. Mulder had woken with a sore throat that morning and a stuffy head. He had confided in John, but he didn't want Walter to know since his lover had been looking forward to them going out together to find a tree. Now Mulder just wanted to be home and warm up with something hot to soothe his sore throat. He sneezed several times.

"Are you all right?" Skinner glanced at him while he helped Krycek shovel the snow from around the base of the tree.

"I think I'm coming down with a cold." Mulder confessed. "So can you please hurry and cut down the tree already?"

With a look of concern Skinner removed his glove, pushed the knit cap away from Mulder's forehead, and placed his hand over the smooth skin, while Ellison started chopping down the tree.

"You're warm. When we get home I want you to take a hot bath then go straight to bed," Skinner said.

Mulder's head was too stuffy for him to think of a sarcastic reply to his lover's coddling. Instead he leaned against Walter as Ellison finished chopping down the small spruce.

The Sentinel clipped the ax on his belt then picked up the base of the tree while Krycek grabbed the top and they carried it between them. They were only a mile from the cabin so it didn't take long to get home and carry the tree into the foyer. Sandburg was waiting for them in the parlor with the homemade tree stand filled with water.

"Let's get you into the bathroom," Skinner said as he helped Mulder off with his coat and boots.

"Walter, I can do it myself...." Mulder started sneezing again.

With a patient look, Skinner hung their coats in the hall closet while the other men got the tree set up in the next room.

"Humor me," Skinner said as he placed a hand on the small of his lover's back and steered him toward the bathroom.

Feeling dizzy, Mulder allowed Skinner to help him into the bathroom. While he undressed Skinner started filling the deep claw-foot bathtub.

"Get in the tub," Skinner ordered as he picked up Mulder's discarded clothes. "I'm going to make you some honeyed tea."

As Mulder sank up to his neck in the hot water, Skinner left the room only to return after a couple of minutes with a mug of hot chicken soup.

Skinner knelt beside the tub and handed Mulder the mug. "John has a pot of chicken soup on the stove. If I didn't know better I'd say he knew you were sick."

With stuffy sinuses, itchy eyes, a headache throbbing behind his temples, and a sore throat, Mulder wasn't up to lying. "He knew ... but I wasn't feeling this bad," he said hoarsely.

Skinner placed his hand over Mulder's forehead again. "I'm going to take your temperature."

While Mulder relaxed in the hot water slowly sipping the soup, Krycek came into the bathroom, walked over to the toilet, and unzipped his pants. "How are you feeling?" he asked while relieving his bladder. Having only one bathroom with three pregnant men who needed to pee constantly, privacy had become limited.

"Like crap," Mulder muttered.

"You certainly look it," Krycek said as he zipped up then washed his hands in the sink. "I hope you're feeling better by tomorrow."

Skinner walked back in with the thermometer and Mulder's yellow flannel pajamas. "He will if he gets into bed and rests."

"I hope I'm not contagious," Mulder sighed.

"You've been spending too much time outside working and not enough resting," Skinner scolded. "And don't think I haven't noticed you trying to do my chores for me."

Mulder sank deeper into the water. He had been hoping his lover hadn't noticed what he'd been doing.

"Open up," Skinner said then placed the thermometer under Mulder's tongue. He took the empty mug out of his hand and left the bathroom.

When he returned a few minutes later, Skinner took the thermometer and checked the temperature. "One hundred on the dot." He rinsed it then put it back in the case. "C'mon, sweetheart, let's get you into bed."

Mulder might be sick and miserable but his heart fluttered happily at the look of unbridled love Walter gave him. He stood and Walter helped him dry and dress in the warm flannel.

He paused before walking into the bedroom to watch his friends decorate the tree. They were looping a cranberry, dried apple, and popcorn garland around the branches.

"C'mon into bed," Walter said.

In the bedroom the fire blazed warmly in the hearth, the pillows had been fluffed, and on the nightstand was a mug of honeyed tea. Mulder climbed into bed and sat up against the headboard while Walter handed him the tea.

"Drink it slow," Walter said while arranging the pillows behind Mulder's back.

When Mulder took a sip, he discovered the tea had been laced with whiskey. "Mm, if this doesn't put me to sleep, I don't know what will."

Skinner leaned down and kissed his forehead. "I'll be back in a few minutes."

Mulder finished the tea then slid under the covers. For once he didn't mind going to bed in the middle of the day. He closed his eyes and fell asleep.

~x~X~x~

The Bear, Wolf, Dog, Rat, Panther, and Fox

The tree was finally decorated and Skinner chuckled as he looked at the clothespin figures of Elvis, The Three Stooges, and Spock. Leave it to Mulder to create some of the tackiest ornaments on their tree and possibly the most memorable. Ellison's clothespin ornaments weren't much better but at least they were Christmas figures with the exception of Robin Hood.

Skinner came back inside after milking the cows and feeding the horses. He checked on Mulder who was sleeping fitfully. His lover's forehead was sweaty so he went into the bathroom, wet a washcloth then came back and cleaned the sweat from Mulder's brow. The young man didn't stir, so Skinner sat on the bed and watched him sleep.

"How's he doing?" Sandburg asked from the doorway.

"He's still running a fever but at least he's sleeping."

"I can make him an herbal cold remedy," Sandburg said walking over to the bed.

Skinner smiled up at Sandburg. "I'd appreciate that, Blair."

Doggett popped his head in the room. "Dinner's ready."

Skinner leaned down and kissed his lover before standing and fixing the blankets around him. He walked into the dining room and sat at his place in front of a bowl of clam chowder. The chowder was made from cans of Progresso clam chowder that they had set aside for that night.

With the candles providing the only light at the table, it was quite festive. Everything smelled delicious. After the soup, they cleared the soup bowls and Doggett came back with a platter of fried trout, and bowls of rosemary-mashed potatoes and green beans with breadcrumbs.

Skinner exchanged polite conversation with his friends while his eyes kept glancing toward the bedroom doorway.

"Come spring, I really think we should start construction on the second bathroom," Doggett said.

"Do you have an idea where we should build it?" Skinner asked as he picked the small bones out of the trout.

"I was thinking above the current bathroom with a door off Alex's and my loft bedroom. It would be easier to run pipes from the wood-burning water heater."

"That sounds practical," Ellison said. "Let's hope that we can find bathroom fixtures and plumbing supplies in the ruins this spring."

"I don't think we should have a problem," Krycek said, "Even if the stores are picked over, there are still hundreds of thousands of deserted and damaged homes where we could salvage the items we need."

Sandburg frowned. "I don't like the idea of stealing from people's homes. It's one thing to salvage from deserted stores."

"Blair, the homes are in areas where it would be unsafe for people to ever return to." Krycek reached for the bowl of potatoes. "The contamination from the crashed alien ships would make that area uninhabitable for decades."

"Wouldn't it be dangerous for us to go into those areas?" Ellison asked.

"Not if we don't stay for long periods of time," Krycek said.

Skinner finished his meal then pushed away from the table. "I'm going to heat up some chicken soup for Fox," he said, carrying his empty plate to the sink.

"How's he doing?" Krycek asked.

"He's slept all afternoon. I hope he'll feel better when he wakes."

Retrieving the chicken soup from the refrigerator, Skinner heated it and filled a mug. He carried it into the bedroom then shook his lover awake. "C'mon, Fox. I want you to eat some soup."

"Not hungry...." Mulder rolled over and pulled the blanket over his head.

"How are you feeling?"

"Tired ... achy."

"C'mon, this will make you feel better." Skinner set the mug on the nightstand and rubbed Mulder's back. "You missed our Christmas Eve dinner."

"What's that noise?" Mulder asked, poking his head out from under the covers.

Skinner chuckled. "It sounds like Away in a Manger."

"You're singing Christmas carols?" Mulder sat up and coughed, he rubbed at his itchy eyes and sniveled.

Skinner handed him the mug of soup. "Would you like to get up and join us?"

"Too sick." He sipped the soup, swallowing with some difficulty. "Can I have a handkerchief?"

"Sure." Skinner walked over to the dresser and pulled out a freshly laundered handkerchief. One of the things that they didn't have was facial tissues. They had stocked up on toilet paper but Skinner had no idea what they were going to use when it ran out. Or if they'd be able to find more when they went on another scavenger trip.

"Blair's going to make you some herbal remedy."

"I'll try anything even if it kills me...." Mulder took the handkerchief that Skinner held out to him. He took another sip of soup before setting the mug on the nightstand. He blew his nose then picked back up the mug.

"You're not dying on me after knocking me up," Skinner said gruffly and placed his hand on Mulder's knee. His lover looked so miserable that Skinner wanted to gather him in his arms and hold Fox until he was better.

~x~X~x~

The Dog, Rat, Panther, Wolf, and Bear

With one arm around Alex's shoulder and a foot propped up on the coffee table, Doggett sang along with the others. The last time he'd sung Christmas carols, he'd been a teenager. It was the last Christmas his mother had been alive. Singing them now seemed so natural, as if they needed something this evening that would bring them closer together. Doggett was only disappointed that Fox was sick and wasn't able to join them.

He and Jim were drinking whiskey-spiked eggnog, while Alex and Blair drank apple cider. Walter finally joined them and sank into an armchair.

"How is he?"

"Sleeping...." Skinner sighed, "I hope he's well enough to join us tomorrow."

"I'll fix that herbal cold remedy tonight," Sandburg said.

Krycek looked at Skinner's sad face. "Fox is tough, a little cold isn't going to keep him down for more than a day."

"He'll be fine, Walt," Doggett said. "Have some apple cider and sing with us."

Skinner's eyes fell on the Elvis clothespin. "On one condition: that we sing Blue Christmas."

Doggett followed Skinner eyes and smiled. "Our love for Elvis is one of the things Fox and I have in common."

The five men started singing softly:

I'll have a Blue Christmas without you  
I'll be so blue thinking about you  
Decorations of red on a green Christmas tree  
Won't mean a thing if you're not here with me

I'll have a Blue Christmas that's certain  
And when that blue heartache starts hurtin'  
You'll be doin' all right, with your Christmas of white,  
But I'll have a blue, blue Christmas

~x~X~x~

The Fox, Bear, Dog, Rat, Panther, Wolf, Frog, Otter, Stork, and Puppy

Tuesday, December 25, 2001

10:00 a.m.

After a hot bath that morning, more chicken soup, and drinking the awful tasting herbal tea that Sandburg had prepared, Mulder felt well enough to dress in sweats and sit on the sofa in the parlor.

Frohike and the rest of the Gunmen had arrived a half-hour ago. They had brought two presents wrapped in an old comic section of a newspaper. One was for Laura Nightingale and the other for Mulder and the guys.

"These are really cool ornaments," Bond said.

Byers, dressed in a suit and tie, sipped a glass of wine as he looked at the tree. "I like the tin ornaments the best," he said.

"I don't -- I like the clothespin people," Bond said.

Langly shook his head. "No way, dudes, the gold and silver pinecones are the best."

Doggett and the rest of the guys looked at Frohike, knowing that the short man would unwittingly determine the winner. "What ornaments do you like the best, Melvin?"

Frohike walked up to the tree and studied the ornaments. "The tin are the most professional looking, the pinecones are the most beautiful, but I'll go with the clothespins; they touch my inner child."

"Yes!" Ellison said and clamped a hand on Sandburg's shoulder. "Sorry, Chief, but tacky is in this year."

Mulder smiled as Skinner handed him a hot buttered rum. "Walter, isn't it too early for me to be drinking?"

"It will help soothe your throat." Skinner sat next to him.

Krycek walked into the parlor. "Let's open gifts," he said. He had just put the ham in the main oven and the stuffed goose in the convection oven. John, Walter, and Jim had helped him with the side dishes. The sweet potato and green bean casseroles were ready to go in the oven once the ham was done.

All the men gathered in the parlor with their drinks. Krycek handed out the gifts he had made first. Every gift was the same shape except John's.

Bond was the first to open his. He held up a bottle of clear liquid and frowned. "Alex, did you give us water?"

Frohike opened the cap and sniffed. "Not water, Jimmy, try homemade vodka."

Doggett unwrapped the gift and opened the box. Inside he found a small canvas contraption. It took him a couple of minutes to figure out what its function was. He hugged Krycek. "Thanks, Alex."

"I figured we'd need something to carry the sprog around in," Krycek said.

Mulder watched and smiled sadly. Alex and John seemed happy at the prospect of becoming parents, while he couldn't even talk to Walter about it. Walter's arm wrapped around him as his lover set the two bottles of vodka on the floor under the coffee table.

"Who wants to open our gift?" Frohike asked.

"I will," Sandburg said, taking the wrapped gift. He removed the paper and lifted the lid off the box; inside, lined with wax paper, was peanut brittle.

"I love peanut brittle," Skinner said, reaching for a piece.

"Me, too," Ellison said, taking a small piece.

Sandburg turned white, shoved the box into Jim's hand and raced toward the bathroom. Ellison popped the brittle into his mouth then handed the box to Skinner and hurried after his lover.

"What's up with him?" Langly asked.

Skinner shrugged. "My guess is he's developed an aversion to peanut brittle."

Doggett walked out of the room and returned carrying a cradle. Krycek smiled as he looked at it.

"It's beautiful."

"Walter painted the characters on it."

Krycek looked at Skinner. "Thanks, Walter."

"No problem." Skinner stood, walked out of the room, and returned with the potter's wheel that he and Doggett had made for the Gunmen. "Guys, this is for you."

"Wow, this is very nice," Byers said as he sat on the stool and used his foot to turn the wheel. "I took a pottery class back in High School. I was pretty good at it."

Ellison and Sandburg returned. "I'll get our gifts, Mulder," Ellison said.

He came back with a large gift wrapped in newspaper and handed it to Langly.

Langly ripped it open and pulled out a large pot rack with chains to hang it from the ceiling.

"Guys, this is just what we needed," Frohike said. "Thanks."

Mulder smiled. "I'm glad you like it."

Ellison left and returned with a hardwood chest. "Mulder and I made a chest for each of our bedrooms. The cushions are sort of on the lumpy side but as soon as we figure out how to use the sewing machine we'll remake them."

Skinner stood and kneeled down beside the chest. He checked out the craftsmanship. "This is really nice work."

"My turn," Sandburg said. He picked up three nicely wrapped packages and passed them out.

Doggett was the first to unwrap his and Alex's gift. He held up a Dreamcatcher.

Mulder got his and Walter's gift unwrapped and traced his finger over a feather. "This is lovely, Blair."

"Thanks, Mulder." Sandburg turned to Ellison and said, "I have your present in our bedroom, big guy."

"Our bedroom?" Ellison leered. "I hope it's something I'll enjoy."

"You're too big for it," Sandburg said.

Everyone except Krycek looked at Ellison.

Sandburg noticed the questioning looks. "Guys, get your minds out of the gutter."

Skinner picked a present from under the tree and placed it on Mulder's lap.

Unwrapping the present, Mulder lifted out a brightly colored mobile of animal figures. He recognized them from a dream he'd had. "This is beautiful, Walter." He leaned over and kissed Skinner while thinking that the mobile would be perfect over a baby's crib. Mulder wondered if his lover realized that he'd just made their baby its first present. Probably not since Walter was still



determined to get an abortion. Maybe he subconsciously created it.

~x~X~x~

Nightingale arrived promptly at one o'clock. She could only stay for three hours.

"Merry Christmas, Laura." Frohike greeted her at the front door and took the box from her arms so she could hang her coat in the closet.

"Merry Christmas, Melvin."

"The guys were telling me that you can only stay a few hours because you can't take the chance of the fire going out at your place."

"Jake wouldn't live very long if the temperature inside the cabin dropped too low."

"If you need someone to cabin sit while you're over here, I'd be more than willing," Frohike offered. "Just stop by my place on your way here and I'll head over to your place."

Laura smiled. "That's very kind of you, Melvin."

"No problemo."

Doggett walked into the foyer and shook her hand. "I'm glad you could join us, Laura."

"Thanks for inviting me, John."

He nodded at the box. "Is that your equipment?"

"It's some of it."

"C'mon, I'll show you where we're going to set up your lab." Doggett led her through the short hall and into the laundry room with Frohike following them.

Doggett took the box from Frohike and set it on a tiled counter top.

Laura noticed the greenhouse filled with plants off the laundry room. "What are you growing?"

"Hydroponics: Bibb lettuce, tomatoes, and cucumbers. Blair also has dozens of herbs, but you'll have to ask him what they all are," Doggett said as he unpacked the microscope from the box. "You can keep your supplies in the cabinet above the counter."

Laura nodded in approval of the workspace. There was a chair and a fluorescent light mounted under the cabinet. "I know of some medicinal herbs that I wouldn't mind growing in your greenhouse if you'd be willing to provide me with some space?"

"Just talk to Blair; the greenhouse is his domain," Doggett said.

Frohike piped up, "Next year they're going to enlarge it, if we can salvage another greenhouse kit and solar panels."

"I wish I could have one," Laura said as they walked through the door into the kitchen. It was bustling with activity as Skinner carved the goose while Krycek and Ellison carried bowls of food and the sliced ham to the dining room. Using two folding card tables and folding chairs they had expanded the table. Bond, Langly, and Byers were setting it.

The men stopped what they were doing and greeted Nightingale.

Laura noticed Mulder and Sandburg sitting in the parlor. Mulder had an orange cat sleeping on his lap. She walked over to them. "Merry Christmas, Mulder, Blair."

"Merry Christmas, Laura," they said.

"You sound like you have a cold, Mulder," she said.

"Yeah, it's just my luck to be sick today." Mulder petted the cat as they spoke.

"Would you like me to examine you?"

"That's not necessary. I'm feeling better than I did yesterday," Mulder said. "I just think I needed the extra sleep."

"Okay, stay inside and keep dry. We wouldn't want your cold to turn into pneumonia," Laura said.

"Dinner's ready," Skinner said as he walked over to them. He placed his hand on Mulder's forehead. "How are you feeling?"

"Fine. I'm not very hungry."

"Well, at least try to eat the salad and some vegetables."

Sandburg guided Nightingale over to the table and sat her between Langly and himself.

Laura smiled when she saw a salad plate with fresh bibb lettuce and tomatoes at each of the place settings. The salad had a light vinaigrette dressing on it with toasted croutons. "This is a treat," she said.

"You can thank Blair," Krycek said, "He's the one who has been taking care of the greenhouse."

Everyone picked up his fork to dig in when Laura cleared her throat. "Aren't we forgetting something?"

After seeing their puzzled faces she sighed, "Grace. It is Christmas after all."

They set their forks back down.

Skinner looked at her. "Since you're our guest would you like to lead us in prayer, Laura?" he asked.

"I'd be honored." She bowed her head. "We'd like to thank you God for this feast you have put before us on this special day. While we rejoice in the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, we pray for a peaceful New Year and the end to the suffering of so many people around the world. Amen."

"Amen."

The first few minutes were subdued as everyone took time to reflect on what had brought them together.

Then Frohike raised his glass in a toast. "I'd like to toast good friends and family. Better companions a man could never have asked for," he said and clicked his glass with Mulder's then Skinner's as everyone did the same around the table.

They sipped their drinks and started on the salad.

Laura turned to Sandburg. "Blair, I'd love a tour of the greenhouse after dinner."

"It would be my pleasure to show it to you."

"I was wondering if you'd allow me some space to grow a few medicinal plants."

"I have some eupatorium perfoliatum that I used to make tea for Mulder to treat his cold."

"You mean Boneset?"

"Ah, yes."

"How experienced are you with herbal medicines?"

"I consider myself pretty knowledgeable."

"Only pretty? You do know that if you misidentify a plant it can be lethal."

From the other end of the table, Mulder quipped, "The boneset tea tasted lethal."

Sandburg became defensive. "Doctor Laura, I'm extremely careful."

"Blair, either Laura or Doctor Nightingale, but never call me Doctor Laura, thank you very much."

Langly snickered.

Taking a calming breath, Sandburg said, "I'm sorry, Laura. I know you're only concerned and I'd love to discuss plants and their medicinal uses with you in more depth."

Krycek rose and cleared the empty salad plates, while the men started passing the platters and bowls of food around.

Laura smiled at Sandburg as she scooped green beans onto her plate. "I'd love to discuss plants with you. I have a large herb garden in the summer. I'll introduce you to some of the backwoods mountain folk that have a vast knowledge of the plants in these mountains and their uses."

The promise of meeting these people interested Sandburg. "Cool. I'd love to meet them."

Frohike cleared his throat. "You won't be able to get to their places until the snow melts this spring. And even then they might not want to talk to you."

"Melvin, I'm sure they would," Laura said, "As long as I introduce Blair."

"How far from here do they live?" Ellison asked.

"Fifty to seventy miles," Nightingale said.

Frohike nodded. "You can bank on it that most of them haven't heard about the alien invasion."

"They sound intriguing," Mulder said, "I wonder what myths and beliefs they have."

Skinner placed a hand on his lover's thigh. "You're not traipsing around the backwoods without me."

Mulder smiled sweetly. "I wouldn't want to."

Picking up the wine bottle, Frohike topped off his wineglass then filled Ellison's glass. The Sentinel was sitting next to him.

"Thanks, Melvin," Ellison said.

Laura glanced around the table, feeling comfortable with these men. Her eyes came to rest on Doggett. "John, have you heard from your brother?"

"I radioed Mike last night. He and Pa have put up two families on their farm."

"Will he be coming for a visit again?"

"I expect them to stop up here after the spring planting," Doggett said. "But that depends on any new travel restrictions the military may put in place by then."

Byers frowned as he cut the slice of ham on his plate. "I never thought I'd see the day that this country came under military rule."

"Someone had to take charge," Skinner said.

"Guys, can we not talk about politics, aliens, or the military today," Mulder said, worried that this discussion could turn into an argument.

"Yeah, I could do without those subjects today," Krycek said.

Langly reached for the platter of ham. "I think we should look for another windmill this spring and place it between Laura's and our cabin."

Doggett smiled. "We're way ahead of you, Langly. My Pa is checking into the purchase of a windmill from the military and a company that makes them. The military is helping the company stay in production."

"I'm going to get a shoat from Helmut Schmidt this spring," Frohike said. "I was thinking that you guys would probably want to get a couple from him."

"I think that is a good idea," Doggett said. "Do you think Helmut would want to part with two shoats this spring?"

"Three. We're going to raise one, too," Frohike said. "Helmut probably would love to get rid of ten. His two sows have been overly productive this year."

Skinner interrupted. "What is a shoat? And why would we need two of them?"

Smirking, Doggett held up a slice of ham. "Walter, this is a product of a shoat. It is a weaned pig that is raised through summer and slaughtered in the fall."

"Okay, I can see a use for shoats," Skinner said.

The conversation switched from pigs to bee keeping, since Nightingale had several hives. Then she explained the process of making soap. From there they went on to discuss the spring planting, and the families that lived on their part of the mountain and down in the valley.

~x~X~x~

## The Panther and Wolf

Wednesday, December 26, 2001

1:00 a.m.

Feeling tipsy, Ellison fumbled to open the present Blair had given him as they sat in their pajamas, on the bed.

"You know, big guy, you shouldn't have tried to keep up with Frohike drinking this evening. The man obviously has more experience at it than you."

"But he's so short," Ellison protested finally getting the wrapping paper off. "He must have a hollow leg. No one can drink that much and still walk straight."

Opening the box, he held up the canvas object. "What's this for? It looks like what Alex gave John."

"Here let me demonstrate." Sandburg took the object and put it on. "Now do you understand what it's for?"

Ellison puzzled over it for a moment, his inebriated brain having a hard time putting two and two together.

"Jim, it's for carrying a baby strapped to your chest."

"Why would I need it?"

"Think about it." Sandburg glared at him. "I'll give you two minutes to come up with the right answer."

The Sentinel winced at his lover's tone. Then he finally grasped what Blair was telling him and a goofy smile spread across his lips. "You're not going to get an abortion?" He knew his lover had been looking into herbs like mint that could bring about a miscarriage, but that was a couple of weeks ago. Because of how emotional his lover was about this subject, Ellison had avoided discussing it for fear of upsetting him.

"No. Even if Laura would perform one, I couldn't go through with it." Sandburg took off the baby carrier.

"I'm glad you want to keep the baby," Ellison said as he pulled Sandburg into his arms and kissed him.

Sandburg pushed him away and chuckled. "Jim, go brush your teeth. You smell like a brewery."

~x~X~x~

## The Dog and Rat

With Krycek's cock buried up his ass, Doggett rocked up and down as he straddled his lover's hips while gazing lovingly into those gorgeous green eyes. He rocked back impaling himself on the hard length and listened to moans of pleasure from Krycek. Doggett moved up and down faster, the mattress creaking beneath them. Grabbing his shaft, Doggett started to jerk off. The double stimulation soon pushed him over the edge as milky come spurting from his cock, arching up and landing in splashes on Alex's chest and across his mouth.

A tongue darted out from between those sweet, bowed lips as Krycek licked the come off. Then

he stiffened and cried out as he climaxed.

The sudden feel of Krycek's release filling him had Doggett grinding his butt down trying to get all of the hard length inside of him.

They stayed that way for several minutes. Finally shivering as the cool air dried the sweat on their skin, Doggett pulled off. As come dripped down his thighs, he reached for the damp washcloth on the nightstand and cleaned first Krycek then himself.

They didn't bother with pajamas as they crawled under the covers and snuggled into each other's arms. They had decided body heat, which was far better than flannel.

"I enjoyed myself today," Krycek said. "It's been over ten years since I've celebrated Christmas with anyone."

"I stopped celebrating after my son was murdered." Doggett caressed Krycek's back, enjoying the solid feel of muscles. "I can finally put Luke's death behind me and look toward a future with you."

White teeth flashed in the darkness as Krycek smiled at John's comment. They snuggled closer as a small purring cat hopped onto the bed and curled up on their feet.

~x~X~x~

## The Fox and Bear

The gentle sound of breathing and the snap and crackle of logs burning could be heard in the still room. Mulder rested his head on Walter's broad shoulder as he listened to his lover's heartbeat. He wasn't tired, so he lay awake and relished the warmth and strength of his lover's muscular body. How had he ever gotten so lucky? Mulder moved a hand down to the slight swell of Walter's belly. Inside was their child. After watching John and Alex, and Blair and Jim today, Mulder felt melancholy at the thought of never being able to see his and Walter's child born while knowing that Alex and Blair were now both looking forward to their babies. Mulder briefly wondered how Jim took the news tonight when Blair told him that he was not going to seek an abortion.

There had been a time in Mulder's life, before Samantha was abducted, when his family celebrated both Hanukkah and Christmas. A time when his mother wore her finest silk dress and expensive pearls as they entertained guests and family during the holidays. Until today, thirty years ago was the last time Mulder had felt part of a family during the holidays. Even with being sick, Mulder had the most fun he'd had in years. No small part due to being in love, and surrounded by his closest friends.

To see his otherwise stoic lover smiling and joking like a schoolboy made it an added treat. Despite the fact that the reason he was no longer alone was due to the alien invasion he still felt at peace and happy.

Walter's arms wrapped around him and pulled him closer and a gruff voice tickled his ear. "Go to sleep, sweetheart."

"Walter...."

A sleepy, "Hm?"

"Merry Christmas."

~x~X~x~

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