

# White Roses

*A UFO/X-Files story, © 1998 by Amelia L. Rodgers*

*Dedicated to all my GRG and EBF members.*

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Somewhere in Washington, DC

February, 1994

He was fast. He disappeared behind the bushes.

Run, she thought. Run you bastard. It won't matter. Mulder's in that hospital, and he doesn't deserve to suffer like that. Run. I'll catch you.

You don't know, you don't know that when I picked him up with that knife in his back, he said a man's name. Your name. So run all you want. I know you stabbed him.

He was hers now. There was nowhere else to run. Sweat plastered his hair to his skull and ran down his face in rivulets. His eyes were glassy and full of terror.

"Keep away from me!" he shouted at her. He backed away, nearly stumbling.

PCP, she thought, cocaine, heroin, hashish, some designer drug. He had all the signs of addiction.

"FBI! Freeze! Hands in the air! Don't move, or I'll shoot!" She steadied her gun.

His hand reached into his jacket. Gun, she reasoned. She fired. One, two shots.

He fell. Something in his hand clattered onto the ground with him. She holstered her gun, and approached him. Taking out her cellular phone, she called for an ambulance. He stared at her, moaning, bleeding excessively. He was trying to say something. His lips formed the word help soundlessly. She snapped on a pair of latex gloves and began to search him. No gun. The object beside him was a pager. Damn. Damn it. Has to have a weapon on him. Has to. She found a wallet and a notebook. There was some sort of security pass in the wallet.

Dana Scully looked at the name imprinted on the card. It read :

Edward Straker.

## **The Truth Is Not Always What it Seems**

The George Washington University Medical Center

Emergency room

late afternoon

Dana Scully watched two men hoist Straker's form onto the examination table, and she noted that the gurney had an alarming amount of his blood on it. Someone called for CBC, UA, electrolytes, blood gases, clotting studies, and someone else snapped out an order for a blood typing and crossmatch to be done. They were beginning to put the necessary I.V. tubes in his motionless body.

"Come on people! We're losing this guy," a doctor said. A nurse readjusted the oxygen

mask over Straker's mouth and nose. Scully watched, feeling uneasy about simply being an observer. The man she shot was showing all the symptoms of hypovolemic shock. Within a few minutes, Straker was totally on life support systems. Someone brought in his blood type for an emergency transfusion.

"Vitals," the trauma team leader demanded.

"BP 78/40, Pulse 134 and thready, respirations are shallow and rapid."

Dana watched as the nurse picked up the plastic blood bag attached to one of the tubes in his body and squeezed it, literally forcing blood into Straker's veins. Dana's cellular phone rang.

"It's me, Scully."

"Thank God you're okay, Mulder! I couldn't stay, had to get him. I shot him. He wasn't armed."

"Him? Shot him? Shot him who? Where are you? I woke up to Frohike, Langly and Byers staring at me. That was worse than getting stabbed," chuckled Mulder.

"Hospital, with Straker. The one who stabbed you. You said his name just before you passed out, and when Frohike told me he was in the area, I started tailing him."

"Scully. Listen carefully. I was just asking my pals here a few questions about him. I didn't say he stabbed me. His name just came up when I asked my fearless friends to do some hacking for me on a case."

"My God, Mulder. But--but--I *heard* you say his name--and they told me he was seen here--some military thing--"

"Must have had him on the brain. You shot the wrong guy. Lab turned up prints on that knife they pulled outta me. Small time thug. Old case. Not even an X-File for once, Scully. Picked him up about an hour ago."

"My God!"

"Look, Scully, I--"

Scully hung up. They were moving Straker. One of the doctors came up to her. The trauma surgeon.

"You said you had an ID on this guy?" He looked grim.

"Yes. What's his condition?" Dana managed to mumble.

"That's just it. Wondered if he had wife, family, that sort of thing. Frankly, I don't think he's going to make it. What little blood he had left was full of some synthetic opiate-based analgesic. No idea what it is or how he got it. Guy was pretty scarred up, like he'd been in an accident. Drug's making it hard to treat him."

"You're moving him into surgery? I'm scrubbing up with you." Scully said in a determined way. "I'm a medical doctor."

"Be my guest. Don't expect miracles with this guy." he shrugged. "At his age, they don't bounce back."

## Beach

### Location Unknown

Edward Straker was barefoot. His feet sank into the warm sand as he walked along the beach. A cool breeze caught his platinum hair and whipped a few strands around. He was wearing a loose fitting linen shirt and comfortable linen slacks. The sun bathed him gently, and he walked along the edge of the water as tide drifted in and out.

So peaceful. So very peaceful. I must be away, he thought. I must be on holiday. No pain. No sleepless nights. No aliens. No memories to taunt me. This is wonderful. Ed chuckled softly

to himself.

"Ed. Good to see you. Great place, huh?"

"Walt! Haven't seen you for ages. What are you doing here?"

"Same thing you are, old pal. Pretty stupid, weren't we? Just a pair of idiots thinking we were going to change the world, Ed." The man laughed. "Well, see you around. Be sure to work on your tan. You always were as white as a ghost!"

Ed laughed. The man walked on. Can you believe it? Ed thought. Walter Davis. Enlisted same time I did. Flew anything that had wings. Then that damn mishap--wait----Walt died--his plane--no--can't be--I went to his funeral--can't be--

A man he didn't recognise came up to him. Ed noticed he had on an immaculate white Naval uniform. Captain's bars.

"Look after her, Straker. Look after Starbuck for me."

"Do I know you, Sir?" Ed asked respectfully.

"You did. A long time ago. No reason you'd remember." The man smiled. He seemed to vanish. Why am I not reacting? This all must be some kind of a dream. Alec was probably right, swallowing down that new SHADO drug wasn't good-- but so much pain after that explosion with the UFO. I was lucky, quite a few weren't--

Ed shrugged. Well, I'll get myself to Mayland Hospital, get myself taken care of. It'll be all right. Twenty-three years of being commander of SHADO. From the time it was just on paper up to now, guess I can take that rest Alec's always pestering me to take. . Funny, though. I feel wonderful.

Ed's musings were interrupted by a small figure approaching him with a big smile.

"Dad." The boy smiled.

"Johnny! Oh, come here, God, how I've missed you! Mary wouldn't let me come to the funeral. Come here, let me look at you!"

Ed hugged his son and swung him merrily around, adding his laughter to the boy's. Then Ed hugged him tighter, looking at him solemnly.

"Johnny, I let you die. I'll carry that with me the rest of my days. Please, please forgive me. I couldn't make your mother understand. I couldn't tell her. Please."

"Dad, it's okay. I understand." Johnny smiled at him. "Dad, I have to go now. You do too. It's not your time, Dad."

Ed shook his head in protest. He held his only son against him. Tears welled up in his eyes. .Mental anguish he'd swallowed for years overcame him.

"No! I've gotten you back, I'm not leaving. I'm never going back. I'm tired. If only you knew how tired I am. I did my best but I want my life back, son. I gave SHADO my body and my soul. I want to really live now. I won't go back."

"Dad. Go on. We'll be together again someday. Go back. Alec's waiting for you. That lady is worried about you. You're needed back there." Johnny's image faded.

Ed wept for a while, then slowly looked around. Someone was talking to him, speaking in a soft, urgent tone. He shivered. He saw no one. His surroundings were beginning to shimmer. The wind suddenly became cold. He wrapped his arms around himself to keep warm. Alec, he thought. Where are you, Alec? I need you with me. I can't lose you. I've lost everyone and everything I cared for -- I can't lose you too! Alec, I'm scared--

Ed was swept into darkness.

The George Washington University Medical Center  
Surgery

## Operating Room

"Damn. Come on, come on, don't you die on me now! Respond, damn it!"

Scully's words were filtered by the surgical mask and shield. They'd removed the bullets and stopped all hemorrhage, but he'd gone flatline. In her career, she'd encountered patients that just gave up. This stranger on the operating table seemed as if he might be one of them. His heart rate had been erratic all during the surgery. The cardiac monitor had stopped its steady beep, and she'd injected epinephrine directly into the heart, looking anxiously for any response. The machine flickered then that steady beep had started again. Scully gave a sigh of relief. The trauma surgeon grinned.

"Nice work, Doctor," he told her. "Guy's as stable as he's gonna get."

"Not out of the woods yet. Close him up, will you? I need a short break. I've given you my number if there's any change."

"No problem. We'll take your friend down to the ICU."

Scully nodded, left the operating room. Once outside, she tore off her gloves and mask, and sagged against the wall, exhausted.

Aboard the Concorde, en route to Washington D.C.

Shock, external and internal hemorrhage, drug overdose. Gunshot wounds. Cardiac arrest. Right after we almost lose him during that UFO attack. Idiot insists on being in Mobile 1. Gets his chest sliced up by flying, hot metal in an explosion, ribs busted, in hospital for weeks. Then we go to a state of heightened alert and he's on duty for God knows how many hours straight. In terrible pain from his injuries Drugs to stay awake. Drugs to get a few hours of sleep. Drugs to stop the pain. Some stuff that isn't even fully tested yet and he manages to con the doctor into releasing it. Throws his weight around. Doesn't bother with details. Gulps it down like candy.

Alec looked out the window and sighed.

Oh I'm fine, Alec, he tells me. One drug is as good as the other. What was wrong with me that I didn't see the symptoms of his addiction? How on earth did he slip past my fingers and go to that funeral in the States? Now I find out he had a reaction to that damn drug, hallucinated, runs from some FBI agent who mistakes him for some maniac. He gets shot. Idiot didn't even carry his gun.

Go home, I tell him. Rest, I tell him. He tells me SHADO isn't a nine to five job. He says I'm interfering in his life again. He tells me with a rare laugh that I should hire myself out as a nanny, but that he certainly doesn't need one. Hopeless. Why do I bother?

Because you're all he's got. Because he's one of the finest, most dedicated men you know. Because you've seen the agony he's gone through. Because you've known him practically all your life, Alec told himself. Because you'll always be at his side. Because you're getting far too old to know better. What is Ed now? The big 5-0? What happens when they give him a pat on the back and a gold watch, and march him through the door?

He'll have nothing. Nothing. It will devastate him. But if he keeps up this insane pace, that's exactly what will happen. Foster's being groomed to take over someday. Ed knows it. When it happens, it'll kill him. He'll snap, as sure as my name is Alec Freeman. Probably put a gun to his head.

Maybe that won't happen. Maybe when I get to this hospital in the States, he'll already be dead.

Listen, you pigheaded idiot. You better be alive. I'm going to give you the lecture of a lifetime. Then I'm going to get you to take some time off if I have to sit on you. You better not

die, Ed Straker. You better not die on me.

Alec sighed sadly, and picked up a phone to get a line to SHADO HQ in Washington. DC.

Scully family home  
Baltimore, Maryland  
Night

"Dana, honey, you look terrible. Come in, I'll get you some coffee."

"Mom., I didn't mean to wake you up. It's just--well, there's so much on my mind."

"Sweetheart, you know I'm always here for you. What happened?"

"I--well--Mulder was knifed. I didn't get to him on time. He was on a case--and I--"

"Sit down, dear. You know, I was just looking through some of your father's things. Hard to believe he is gone."

"I miss him, Mom. I miss him a lot. Sometimes I think I hear him call me Starbuck, the way he always used to. I can hear him asking me if I'll ever take down the tree--"

"I know dear. He'll always be with us. Is your partner going to be all right?"

"He's all right, I got a call from him, his friends are with him. But Mom, I shot a man today. It went totally against all FBI protocol. I just--well--I just saw Mulder, and I guess something snapped in me. "

"But Dana, that's your job. Are you having regrets about joining the FBI now?" Scully's mother looked concerned.

"No, Mom, if you'd give me a chance, I'll tell you. This man I shot, he was innocent, Mom. He acted like he was spaced out on something. They have him in ICU, trying to detox him from whatever he was taking."

"I'm sure you had a reason." her mother comforted her.

"No, Mom, I just wanted revenge, and this Straker wasn't even guilty, he didn't--what's wrong?"

"Straker?" her mother blinked.

"Yes. That's who I shot. I was in the operating room a long time with him. The surgery was successful but we're worried about this opiate that's in his blood."

"Honey, I was just reading about a Straker. You father mentioned him in a old letter he sent to me while he was on duty. "

"Mom, can I see it?" Scully asked urgently.

"Of course dear." Her mother went into the bedroom. Scully paced. How common was the name Straker? It couldn't be him. But Frohike had said that this Straker was an retired colonel, in the Air Force, and had once had some hush hush job in the United Nations. And that he was among the many top brass who had turned up at some Air Force officer's funeral. Now he was working as the executive of a movie studio in Southern England. It had taken three days to find him. Now this. Could he have known my father? wondered Scully.

"Here it is dear. Shall I read that part to you?"

Scully nodded.

"Maggie, I can't begin to express my admiration for some of the men who have put their lives on the line," Scully's mother began to recite. "One of the most interesting men I've met is one Air Force Captain Edward Straker. He seems to have this aura around him, a kind of presence. You meet guys who enlist and can't wait to get their butts back home, and relate their narrow escapes to anyone that would listen. This Straker isn't that type. He's a career officer. I swear, Maggie, he carries himself like he's got four stars on his dress blues already. He's doing some sort of investigation. Scuttlebutt has it that he's part of some hush-hush

matter. His area is military intelligence, that much I know. He and I met at a briefing. He kidded me about being on opposite sides, him up in the wild blue yonder and me on the seas. I got to know him pretty well. If ever a man was destined to be a hero, Maggie, he is. Anyway he eventually finished whatever business he had, and he told me he'd call me, but I haven't heard anything from him. Really too bad, but I have the feeling I'm going to hear that name again."

Scully's mother looked up.

"That's it, dear. Nothing else."

"Mom." Scully's eyes filled with tears and she went into her mother's arms. "Mom, this man knew Dad. I almost killed him. I almost killed a friend of Dad's. For nothing."

"Oh, sweetheart. It's going to be all right. Listen, I'll fix up the guest room for you. You're tired. You need to sleep."

"Mom, I should go back to the hospital. There's no guarantee he's going to make it with that drug in him." worried Scully.

"Oh Dana. He had one of the best doctors in the world. He'll make it." Mrs. Scully smiled. Scully managed a smile.

"He has to, Mom. He has to."

The George Washington University Medical Center

ICU

Morning

The young man wearing the uniform of a guard smiled at the nurse, and accepted the coffee she handed him. He then looked at Straker, and at all the tubing in what looked about every orifice Straker had. The smile vanished.

"How is he?" he asked her. He leaned back in his chair.

"Vitals looks pretty good. Blood gases look fine. He must be a fighter. If he keeps showing improvement, we'll move him into another room. Must be a pretty important guy if someone posts a guard inside and outside his room."

He grinned at her. Important? If you only knew, lady. If you only knew that this guy stands between you and the fate of having your organs taken by aliens. If you only knew that Colonel Freeman has got guards all over this hospital, and nobody can sneeze in the direction of Commander Straker without alarms going off all over the place.

"Some movie studio guy. Doesn't much matter to me. All I do is collect the check." he chuckled.

"You have a better job than I do," she laughed. "I'm on my feet all day. Want me to bring you something to read?"

"No Ma'am. Not much of a reader." he shrugged.

"Suit yourself. I'll be back in about fifteen minutes."

Operative Lieutenant Sean Hathaway, head of security for SHADO's Washington DC headquarters watched her go out. Then he pressed the button on the radio he had fastened to his shoulder.

"Report, all stations," he ordered. He listened as in turn he heard the word green from the personnel under his command.

"Negative," one voice said. "That FBI agent just came in. Headed for the elevator. Orders?"

"She's been cleared. I'll inform Colonel Freeman she's on the way up here. Hathaway out."

Hathaway looked for a moment at Straker, sighed. The Commander looked so helpless and so weak. Hathaway shook his head silently, got up. He poured the coffee into the sink. Then he picked up the bedside phone.

Scully looked at her watch. 10:13 am. She never should have allowed her mother to talk her into staying overnight. Scully had hoped to get to the hospital much earlier. She'd called as soon as she'd gotten up, and Straker was in a stable, but guarded condition. Her cellular phone rang as she made her way through the corridors toward the ICU, and she pulled it out of her jacket.

"Scully."

"Scully it's me. I'm stuck here in this rotten place for a while longer. Or so they tell me. What's going on with your case?" Mulder asked.

"Straker's in the ICU, I'm here, headed for his room now. Blood tests are still showing traces of the drug in his system. They're watching him closely, and he's still on life support. How are you feeling?"

"Pretty good. Catching up on all the soaps. Got a nifty color TV in my room. Scully, that guy could somehow be involved with an X-File. He was involved in some accident back in the 70's. Car went off the road. Big shot British official was killed. American Air Force general was injured. Straker was a full colonel then. He was the only guy that walked away unhurt. UK papers called it a miracle escape. I'd like to know what was going on back then, Scully. I don't think people like that get together just for milk and cookies. Your guy then winds up in showbiz. Sounds pretty fishy to me. Talk to Frohike. He'll give you the 411."

"Mulder, my Dad knew him. A long time ago. My Dad wrote my Mom about it before they got married. She read me the letter. Dad sounded very impressed with him."

"Any ideas on what he was up to back then?" Mulder arranged his sunflower seeds into an large X on his hospital bed, and popped one into his mouth.

"Mulder, why does everything have to be a X-File to you?" Scully exploded. "He knew my Dad, damn it. I've got a chance to hear what my Dad was like before I was even born. All you care about is your X-Files. Well I have a life outside of the X-Files, Mulder," Scully snapped.

"Scully, I didn't--"

Scully hung up abruptly, upset. She instantly regretted it. Oh Mulder. That wasn't fair. It's just that I'm so worried about this Straker, about my career, about everything. I miss my Dad, Mulder. I miss him--

Scully turned the corner of the corridor and nearly bumped into a craggy-faced, bear of a man. He blocked the entrance into the ICU. He didn't seem put off by the near-collision.

Damn it, she thought, my instincts are rotten. I should have sensed him there. What if he was an assailant?

"Sorry," Scully muttered. "Could you move, there's a patient I want to see in there. I'm a doctor."

Alec Freeman looked the petite redheaded woman over.

"I know. You're here to see how Ed is. You're an FBI special agent. You shot him. They tell me you may have then saved his life. I'm here to see how Ed is too. I'm a colleague of his at the studio. Alec Freeman." He extended a hand to her. Her dainty hand disappeared into his as she shook it.

"How do you know?" she asked.

He smiled.

"When I heard Ed was shot, I made some phone calls. Really doesn't matter how I know. I understand now you mistook Ed for the man that attacked your partner. Oh, and I had a few acquaintances talk to your assistant director, your boss. Skinner, isn't that his name? There won't be any need for an inquiry into your actions during the incident."

Alec didn't bother to tell her that he'd arranged to keep her nosy partner on ice until Ed was safely back where he belonged, and his cover was secure. He smiled his most engaging smile at a puzzled Scully.

"But what--" Scully stammered.

"Let's go in." Alec smiled. He nodded to the operative outside the door and entered.

Operative Lieutenant Sean Hathaway stood up quickly and shook hands with Alec when Alec came in.

"Good to see you again, Mr. Freeman. Just wish it weren't under these circumstances. They tell me he's showing signs of coming around, though. Nurse was just here, looked him over. They're considering taking some of those things out of him. I hear this whole business is *deja vu* for you. I heard you happened to be with him when he had the accident at the studio." Hathaway watched Scully carefully as she focused intently on Straker, studying the readings on the monitor.

"Ed seems to be accident-prone these days," Alec said. "That's what caused him to get on those confounded pills. He was in bad shape after it. Kept taking them to stop the pain. Of course we had that deadline to get that film out, and he hardly slept. Practically lived at the office. Listen, Sean, you go have an early lunch. I'm going to be here for a while. You'd done a good job. I'll call you when I go."

"Fine, sir." Hathaway smiled at the two of them and left.

"You know what he was taking?" Scully asked.

Alec pulled up a chair close to Straker's bed. He lowered one siderail, and reached over and gently held Ed's fingers, careful not to disturb the IV lines.

"No idea. I checked for any pills at his hotel room. Nothing. Must have gotten them from someone on the studio lot. I called the hospital late last night, they said they'd put him on something to try and undo the damage the pills caused." Alec looked at her. "What are his chances?"

Scully was about to reply when two nurses came in.

"Time for some checks on Mr. Straker. Why don't you go out and get yourself something to eat at the cafeteria?" one of them said.

"I'm staying." Alec said. Scully looked at him.

"We need to do some procedures, try taking him off the ventilator, turn him. Generally it's better if the--"

"You have an objection to me staying here, you call your chief of staff. You'll find that I can come and go pretty much as I please. You'll also find that the only reason you're on the nursing team taking care of Ed is because you'd been recommended to me. The second Ed's well enough to travel, he's going to be under his own doctor's care at Mayland Hospital in England. Now does that cover it, or do I have to make a phone call?"

Scully watched with some amusement. The nurse bit her lip momentarily, and shook her head. The nurse waited until Alec got up and stood on the other side of the room. Scully moved closer to Straker's bedside, as they changed his fluids, checked the ET tube. Straker began to move, coughed a few times. Even unconscious as he was, he appeared to be in considerable pain. Alec looked troubled.



"Mr. Freeman--" Scully started to say.

"Alec. What the hell are all those tubes in him? Aren't they giving him something for the pain?"

"Alec, usually as patients become more able to breathe on their own, they fight the vent, that ET tube in his mouth that's helping him breathe. It's a good sign. They're going to take him off the ventilator and see how he does with just oxygen. They'll do another blood gas study, then they may take that ET tube out completely and give him a nasal cannula. He'll have a sore throat, but he'll feel much better. For now, they have to be careful about the analgesics they give him, the pain meds. He still has traces of that drug in him."

"Why do they have his hands tied down like that?" Alec sounded angry.

Scully sighed.

"So he won't pull out the ET tube. It's very uncomfortable. Most patients try to pull it out as soon as they start coming around."

"So he's in pain?"

"I'm afraid so. He had surgery, the procedures they needed to do, the intubation--"

"Damn it. What was it, a mere two months ago that I had to just stand there and watch him go through all this?"

"You care a lot about him, don't you?"

"If I didn't, there's nobody left that would," Alec said. "He hasn't got a family, few friends."

"Listen, I'd like to be in on the rest of his recovery. I'm already familiar with everything, there's nothing keeping me here with my partner still in the hospital. Once he is stable enough to get on a plane with you, it would be better if I travelled with him and offered my services as a medical doctor. I could take some time off. I feel responsible--" Scully sighed. "Besides, there's something else--"

"What?" Alec asked.

"My father--"

"All done," one of the nurses said brightly. "He seems to be doing fine on the oxygen."

"Get that lab work done stat. he'll feel better with that thing out of him." Scully told her.

"That's something we have to check with the doctor on the case about." the nurse replied.

"Get the doctor here now. I'll talk to him." Scully responded. The nurse nodded, and left with her companion.

Alec had moved back next to the bed, and gently stroked Ed on his forehead.

"Ed, it's okay, it's Alec. I'm here. I'm right here with you. I'll get you home as soon as I can," he whispered to Ed.

Scully dipped a paper towel into cool water and handed it to Alec. Alec smiled at her, and wiped Ed's forehead gingerly with it. Ed moved restlessly, semi-conscious.

"Your friend was a colonel, I found out he attended the funeral of that Air Force pilot. My mother---well--she has a letter--my Dad knew your friend when he was a captain. My Dad was in the Navy."

Alec looked at her curiously. This wasn't something that had turned up in their investigation of Scully. The door opened.

"Good afternoon, how's our patient?" the doctor said. He carried Straker's chart, flipped it open. One of the nurses that had previously worked on Ed followed him in. "I'm Dr. Reed, I've been assigned to this case."

"I'm Dr. Scully--"

"Yeah, I see here you assisted in the OR. Well, you'd be Mr. Freeman right? He seems to be coming along fine. Cardiac rhythm good. Tests show sooner or later we can get the DT and the foley out of him. We'll keep him on oxygen and a few other things. Okay, let's get this show on the road, shall we? I'm going to do an exam. You want to lend me a hand, Dr. Scully?"

"Certainly." Scully said. "What's the story on the opiate still in his bloodstream?"

"Oh my, that, yes. tricky little chemical, isn't it?. The percentage isn't what it was, but it's still complicating matters, I'm afraid." The doctor shrugged. "Everything else seems to be going along fine. He's recovering sooner than we expected. Must have a strong will."

Straker moved fitfully on the bed. Sweat beaded on his forehead. Alec watched nervously as Reed poked and prodded Straker. He reminded himself this place was one of the finest, if not the best hospital in the area. Still, he wanted Straker back in Mayland hospital, back on home soil.

## **Part Two The Truth Must Be Hidden**

Georgetown University Hospital

Ward

Three Days Later

"How are we doing, Mr. Mulder?" Nurse Bernice Kohler asked.

"We would like to go home, that's how we're doing," Mulder complained.

"That's always a sign that a patient's getting better. Here, I brought you a few magazines, and the newspaper. I have to make an adjustment to your IV. Where are your amusing friends this evening?" she smiled. She checked the dosage of a syringe and injected it into his IV lead.

"They'll be here soon. They promised to replenish my sunflower seed supply." Mulder grinned. "Hey, the February issue of Girl magazine! I haven't seen this one yet." Mulder flipped open the magazine to a centerfold.

"You're getting better all right, Mr. Mulder." Kohler grinned. She patted him on the shoulder and left.

Kohler calmly got into a car a few moments later. Operative Lieutenant Sean Hathaway was at the wheel, and kissed her.

"Harrison's with Straker. Freeman and the FBI agent are there too." he said.

"How's Commander Straker?" Kohler asked.

"Doing better, but he hasn't come out of it yet. They think it's because of that experimental painkiller he took after he was injured in the UFO explosion. They finally took that lousy throat tube out."

"The endotracheal intubation? Good. That thing isn't fun." she sighed.

"How's your pal Mulder?" Hathaway grinned.

"He's a happy man. Or he soon will be. That stuff I'm giving him on Colonel Freeman's orders will make it hard to get far." she chuckled.

"Good. Freeman wants him out of the Commander's hair. Sooner or later, though, his friends will smell a rat."

"His little group doesn't scare me." she said. "That FBI agent, the redhead. What's she like?"

"Dedicated. I think Freeman just might take her up on her offer to fly back with the commander." Hathaway smiled.

"Damn."

"What?" he asked.

"That Straker is a gorgeous guy. I'd like to fly back with him." She laughed.

Hathaway grinned. "I'll take that unworthy thought out of that head of yours." He reached over and kissed his fiancée. From the first day he'd laid eyes on SHADO's Washington DC's branch Operative Bernice Kohler, who just happened to be a trained nurse, he'd plotted to make her his. Considering she was one of the many women who found Straker attractive, he figured he better hurry--

The George Washington University Medical Center  
Progressive Care Unit  
Private Room  
Noon

--know you--" Straker muttered.

Scully dropped the newspaper, startled. Freeman had gone to lunch. Lia Harrison, who was filling in for Hathaway, nodded.

"Stay with him. I'll get Mr. Freeman."

Scully nodded and approached the bed, lowering the siderail. She was acutely aware of possibly being the first person Straker saw on awakening. The fact that he might instantly recognize her as being the person who shot him didn't please her.

Straker's eyelashes fluttered. For a moment he looked directly at her.

--Starbuck--" he whispered. His eyes closed again. Scully felt herself go numb. Alec rushed into the room, went up to the bed, bent over Straker.

"Ed?" he said urgently.

Straker did not respond. He looked pale, and was still receiving oxygen from a tube in his nose. A single IV line was attached to a needle in his arm. Alec looked quickly at Scully.

"He coming ar-what's wrong?" She was shaking.

"He opened his eyes. Looked right at me. Called me Starbuck. My father called me Starbuck. How could he have known that?"

"Your father might have--wait--you said your father knew Ed before you were born?" Alec blinked. She nodded.

"There isn't anyway he could have known." Scully said. "How could he know my father's pet name for me?"

"Dana, it's possible Ed's just babbling. Most people have heard of Moby Dick." Alec reminded her. Straker stirred again, his eyes opening.

--hurt--water." Straker said. His eyes darted from side to side, as if he were having trouble focusing. Scully collected herself, used the bed controls to raise Straker up. She poured some cold water into a cup and gently assisted him in sipping some. He looked at her. Fear came into his eyes.

"I saw you!" He pushed her hand away and the cup went flying, dampening both Scully and himself.

"Ed! It's okay. I'm right here." Alec comforted him.

"Alec? Oh Christ, my head hurts. Where am I? What happened to me this time? "

"Dana, would you mind giving me a few moments with Ed?" Alec said.

"Certainly."

"Wait--Alec, that woman--that's who shot me!" exclaimed Ed. Alec grinned at him.

"I know Ed. Maybe it will teach you a lesson about taking drugs you aren't supposed to. You're in a room at George Washington University Medical Center. Recovering from gunshot wounds. What else do you remember?"

"Flying out here--attending Colonel Walter Davis' funeral. I dreamed about him, I think--"

Feeling strange. Someone was following me." Ed looked at Scully. "You. Who are you? " demanded Ed.

Scully sighed.

"Federal Agent Dr. Dana Scully. I mistakenly took you for someone who had tried to kill my partner." She hesitated, and held out a hand. Ed ignored it, she let it drop. "I think I better call my partner, he's probably worried about me. I'll be back soon." Scully didn't wait for a response, but went through the door.

"FBI? What in blazes is going on here, Alec?" snapped Ed.

"Look you moron, don't raise your voice at me. If you hadn't gulped down that damn new SHADO drug--no, don't worry. Security sweeps this place three times a day for bugs. Hathaway, our best man at the local SHADO branch has been guarding you, and he handles security. Thank God she brought you here, Ed. This is one of the best hospitals in Washington DC. They saved President Reagan's life here. Damn it , Ed, when are you going to learn to take care of yourself? I was worried sick about you."

"I'm not impressed, Alec. I'm not even a Republican. Now tell me what happened--" Ed told him impatiently.

Alec grinned at Ed and filled him in.

Straker looked pensive for a moment.

"So this FBI agent, this Dana Scully, claims I knew her father? Interesting."

"She saved your unworthy neck, Ed." Alec said.

"She also put two bullets in me. Let's not forget that, Alec. Hmm, Scully. Funny, that name seems to be familiar. I just can't put a face to it." Ed frowned. "Anyway, when am I getting out of here?" The door opened, and Scully peered in.

"All right if I come back in?" she wanted to know.

"Just don't do any shooting." Ed remarked. Alec chuckled.

"I told him everything that happened." Alec said.

"He doesn't seem too forgiving." Scully said, looking at Ed. "How are you feeling?"

"Why? You want to put another two slugs in me?" Ed asked, but he had a slight smile on his face. "I understand you helped save my life. I wanted to thank you. Alec told me about your father."

"I'll leave you two to get acquainted while I look into getting you released, Ed." Alec started for the door.

"I'm against it. He just came out of it," Scully frowned, "And that drug is still in his system."

"This isn't any of your bus-" began Ed.

"I put you in that bed. I'll determine when you're well enough to be up and about. It's more than likely Dr. Reed will agree with me," she said folding her arms.

Alec just stood there, enjoying the battle of wills.

Ed scowled at him.

"I thought you were going to take care of my discharge, Alec."

Alec grinned. He looked at Scully.

"You feel safe enough being with this grouch alone?" Alec asked .

"I can take care of myself, Alec." Scully smiled.

"Good luck," Alec said. He waved at an angry Straker and left.

"How could you possibly be so stupid as to take that many painkillers that often? And not even prescription!" Scully said. "Do you have any idea how dangerous that was? "

"I take it Alec told you I had an accident on the studio lot?" Ed said calmly. "Well, Doctor, I was in pain. You familiar with pain? Oh, yes, yes, right, you're a doctor. The prescription my own physician gave me didn't do the trick. End of topic."

Scully glared at him.

"It's still in your bloodstream you know. There's even a possibility it might have done permanent damage," Scully sharply informed him.

"Not your concern," Ed said, clearly disturbed by what she told him. Scully pulled up a chair next to the bed, sat down. She softened her voice.

"Nothing indicates that for certain, but I'm sure you must have some familiarity with lysergic acid diethylamide--"

"LSD. Yes." Ed nodded. "However the drug I took wasn't a hallucinatory drug. Alec tells me it had the same effect on me, but that may be because I had a bad reaction to it. Besides, I was under a lot of stress, in pain, and wasn't paying attention to how much I was taking."

"You looked crazed when I saw you. I've seen people in my career who looked exactly like that. Imagined they saw or heard things. I was certain you were on something. It's possible you might have some kind of flashback, similar to what often happens with LSD. That's why I think it's safer for you to stay here, at least for a while, for observation. Until there's no trace of it in your body at all." Scully said.

"I don't have the luxury of being able to stay here as long as I want, Doctor. I have too much work waiting for me at the studio. Besides, I'll be able to see my own physician if it becomes necessary."

"Dad said you were going to be a hero. You strike me as a complete idiot," Scully retorted. Ed scowled at her.

"What? Look, first of all you have no right to speak to me like that. Second, I don't know if I even knew your father. That name sounds familiar. I admit that. What else do you claim your father said about me?"

"My mother has a letter. A letter she got before they were married. My father's name was William. Captain William Scully. I don't know what rank he was when he met you," sighed Scully. It was clear this man wouldn't have any memories of her Dad, she thought. Ed seemed lost in thought.

"He was a lieutenant, if memory serves me correctly. It was a long, long time ago. I was about twenty," Ed said, concentrating hard. Scully sat forward in her chair. She watched Ed intently.

"What do you remember? Tell me everything."

"Your father, he passed away, didn't he?" Ed said, frowning.

"Not long ago. Shortly after Christmas. Heart attack. Why?" she asked.

"I was dreaming. I'm trying to remember it. I think someone came up to me. He wore all white. Looked like a naval uniform. Strange. I have this feeling it had something to do with you. That doesn't seem to make sense. He said something to me. I just can't remember," Ed said. "My memory is not what it used to be," he sighed.

"When you were starting to come around, you looked right at me and called me Starbuck." Scully told Ed, fascinated.

"Yeah, Alec mentioned that to me. I'm familiar with Melville's story of course. Why are you staring at me like that?" Ed asked her, suddenly uneasy.

"What if it was my father you dreamed about?"

"Doctor, listen. You're obviously still grieving for your father, and right now I'm having

trouble remembering anything. I could still have had you on my mind, and somehow mixed it in with the dream. I came out here to be at the funeral of an old friend, and there were Naval officers present. Let's not jump to any farfetched conclusions," Ed cautioned.

"Starbuck was his special name for me," Scully sighed. "It's funny, I'm not one to venture outside of science. My partner, Fox Mulder, he'd suggest you and I have some sort of bond through my father, that my father is trying to speak with me through you. That my meeting with you was destined somehow."

"You want to believe that. I can tell," Ed smiled. "Your father was an interesting person back then. Very eager to get into the thick of things. A patriot. I liked him a lot. I think he mentioned your mother, Maggie, I think? Margaret?"

Scully tried to smile. She bit her lip. She was fighting tears. Ed frowned.

"I'm sorry about your father, Dana." he told her softly. "I didn't mean to upset you like that."

"I'm fine, Straker." replied Scully.

"Ed," he corrected her.

"Ed." She smiled. The door opened.

"Amazing. I was expecting at least one dead body in here," joked Alec. He had a wheelchair, and he turned down the footrests on it. "Well, I've got all your forms signed, and you get out of here in a few minutes. I've got a plane standing by to get you home. Oh, and Dana here offered to accompany us on the plane back, to look after you on the flight."

"No no that's generous, but unnecessary." Ed said.

"I'm accepting her generous offer, Ed." Alec told Ed. Scully brightened.

"Alec." Ed said in a low menacing voice.

"I could always leave you to rot here, Ed." Alec grinned. Ed stared at him. He drew his mouth into a familiar disapproving line. Scully chuckled.

"How long have you two known each other?" she asked.

"Too long." Ed said.

"Way too long." Alec said. He gave Ed a warm look. Ed smiled slightly. The smile faded as Ed eyed the wheelchair.

"Way way too long. All right, all right. Help me into that blasted thing," Ed growled.

"Glad you agree, Ed. Because my next move was to have Dana give you a nice shot to knock you out, and you wouldn't have any say in the matter," Alec told him, patting Ed on the shoulder. Scully laughed. Ed glared at him.

Lear Jet

En route to Gatwick Airport, England

Morning

"Mulder, it's me." Scully said.

"Scully! I wondered if you'd ever call me again. Where are you?"

"I'm on board a plane, headed to England. I asked Skinner for a month off. "

"You what?? Scully, what's gotten into you?" complained Mulder.

"What's that supposed to mean?" snapped Scully.

"Flying off to England, not calling me, not telling me where you went. The last call I got from you was from that hospital where that Straker was." Mulder said.

"Mulder, how many times have you run off somewhere to investigate an X-File and not told me a thing?"

"Scully, be reasonable. That-"

Scully hung up the phone, and headed toward the back of the plane. Alec was curled up in a seat, finally sleeping. Not far from him, Straker lay wide awake on a gurney, medical monitors on a cart near him. One IV line was still attached to him, and the nasal cannula remained in his nose. He pulled the blankets closer around him. He stared out the window. Once he looked at Alec in frustration and then back again. Scully came up to him. Somehow he didn't look at all impressed with having the plane specially chartered for him. Scully had the distinct feeling that the two of them were covering something up. She didn't buy Alec's story about Ed being only the executive of a studio. Yet something kept her from pressing the matter.

"Can't sleep?" she asked softly. She frowned when he shivered.

"I'll grab some sleep when I get home. Damn it, I'm cold, aren't you?" Ed asked.

"No Ed. Let me check you over."

"Again?" he barked. "Aren't you through with sticking that lousy stethoscope on me?"

"I promise to warm it this time," she smiled.

He turned away from her. Gently she lowered the blankets and opened the top of his pajamas, and then picked up the stethoscope from the tray to listen to his heart. He was clearly upset about being touched.

"What's wrong, Ed?" she asked when she was finished. His heart rate was a little rapid. He was obviously agitated.

"Nothing! Everything! Oh, can't you see that I want to be left alone? Go and do whatever it is doctors do when they're not with their patients." he mumbled.

"I am with my patient. You. And you seem distressed about something."

"I'm fine." he replied. She smiled.

"I usually say that when the opposite is closer to the truth, Ed. I have the feeling you're like me. Now what's the matter?"

"Nothing!" He frowned, sighed. "I'm sorry. Truth, huh? Truth is I don't know."

"It could be the drug, Ed," Scully suggested. "It could be that you're finally coming down off it. Actually, it's a good sign."

"Good? You call how I feel good?" Ed muttered. He shivered again. She buttoned his shirt, and smoothed the blankets over him.

"Close your eyes. Try to sleep." suggested Scully. She reached up and stroked his forehead gently. He looked at her for a moment without saying anything. Her touch seemed to comfort him somewhat, so she didn't stop stroking his forehead. "What is it?" she said.

"Hands are soft. Soft hands." he responded. She smiled at him.

"Close your eyes, I said." she reminded him. His eyes closed. She took his hand, and closed her fingers around his. "Ed."

Ed didn't open his eyes. "Hmm?" he said in a weary tone. Scully bit her lip. She realized that for an instant her touching him had suddenly become pleasurable for her, and not entirely meant to be healing. "Nothing, Ed. Go to sleep."

"Ummm," came the response.

For the first time, she really looked at him. Not as a man she had mistakenly shot. Not as a patient. But as a very attractive male. Alec said he didn't have anyone, she thought to herself. I wonder if he ever did. I wonder if he's ever been married, or if he ever had children. He's so different from Mulder. He keeps himself at a distance. The way he looked at Alec a while ago, like he longed to wake him up and talk to him. There's something almost, oh I don't know, sorrowful about him. Tragic.

Scully chuckled to herself. I don't sound like a scientist, do I, Ed? I wonder what it is you see when you look at me. Do you see a woman? Am I still feminine? Scully sighed. Stop it. Think about the matter at hand. This man is your patient, at least for now. That's what you do. You're a doctor. Don't forget that.

"Dana." Alec said softly. Scully jumped. "Sorry to scare you like that." he said. "He asleep?"

Scully watched Ed's respirations for a few seconds. Gently she let go of his hand. He stirred a little but didn't awake.

"I think so." she said.

"Come on over and have some coffee with me." Alec told her.

"Thanks, sounds good." She went over and sat next to Alec.

"What do you think about my problem child?" Alec asked. Scully chuckled.

"Is that the way you think about him?" She accepted coffee.

"Most of the time yes. He has this talent for getting himself in trouble, and I'm getting way too old to keep getting him out of it." grinned Alec.

"He's somebody important, isn't he? That's why he was at that big military funeral. That's why you had guards posted at his hospital door. That's why we're in this jet, and why you're sparing no expense to get him home." Scully remarked.

"He's just a studio executive, Dana. Just a guy I've known half my life. Just a guy I give a damn about. I worry about him. I worry whether he'll ever find any peace," frowned Alec. "It would be a load off my mind if he found some woman, settled down. The way things look now, it may never happen. I know he's a lonely guy. I know he's getting older, dealing with aging, and he's scared, but he'd rather cut off an arm than admit it. He depends on me."

"My father thought he was going to be a hero. Said there was something about him."

Alec looked at her. He had an urge to tell her just how much of a hero Ed was. A colonel who would never get a ticker-tape parade, no acknowledgment, no pat on the back.

"Yeah, I met Ed when he was still on active duty. I had that impression too. He was a lot different back then. Lighthearted. I was his best man at his wedding. Things didn't work out for them. They divorced, Ed's only son died in a car accident. I doubt he'll ever get over it. All that changed him, made him hard to reach. I guess I'm probably one of the few people he still trusts," Alec sipped his coffee.

"I thought there was something sad about him. I just didn't know what it was."

"I've seen the way you look at him. Good looking, isn't he?" smiled Alec.

Scully flushed. "Was it that obvious?"

"I've seen women around Ed. You had that same look." Alec grinned. "He hasn't said anything to me, but I think he finds you attractive too. He'd have to be nuts not to. You're a beautiful woman."

Scully smiled.

"I haven't heard that in a long time. It's nice to hear," she confessed.

"I suppose you'd rather hear that from sleeping beauty over there," chuckled Alec.

"There's some truth in what you say, Alec." she smiled back at him.

"You could stay at his flat. Better than a hotel."

"Why do I get the impression you're trying to set me up with him?" she said, amused.

"Because I am." Alec admitted with a sly grin. "Besides, he still needs somebody with him. If I give him the choice of either going into hospital or allowing you to be his guest for a few weeks, he'll choose you. Oh, he'll complain and scream and whine for a while, but then



he'll settle down. He knows I can handle studio business for a while. Sound all right to you?"

Straker's coughing stopped Scully from replying. She set down her cup and hurried to his side. Ed moaned a little, opened his eyes.

"What's wrong?" she said. She reached for his wrist, started taking his pulse.

"What time is it?" he asked.

"Six-thirty, Ed. Our ETA is at seven. Try and go back to sleep." Alec replied.

"I was dreaming again. I saw Walt, Alec." Ed said.

"His death bothered you, I know," Alec answered.

"They don't even know what brought his plane down, Alec. I saw him die. He didn't know what happened. I remember dreaming about him before. "

Ed seemed very troubled.

"Ed, you weren't anywhere near him when Davis died. You were just having a nightmare." Alec said, clearly concerned.

"No. I was in the cockpit. I saw him. I was there with him. I died with him." Ed's tone was full of terror.

"It does sound like a nightmare, Ed," Dana said, holding his hand.

Ed sighed.

"Maybe. Maybe. I just wish the dreams would stop. Death, dying, decay. I don't want to dream anymore."

"I'll get you some coffee, Ed." Alec told him.

Ed nodded. He looked at Scully.

"You look exhausted. Jet lag can really do a person in."

"Are you always that full of compliments?" Scully smiled. She let go of Ed's hand reluctantly.

"I didn't say you were unattractive, I just said you loo-"

"She is extremely attractive, isn't she, Ed?" Alec grinned. He handed Ed coffee.

Ed looked frustrated. He accepted the cup.

"I didn't say she was attractive, Alec." he exclaimed, irritated.

"So I'm ugly?" Scully pretended to pout. Alec laughed.

"I didn't say that, damn it!" Ed said, exasperated.

"So I'm beautiful?" Scully batted her eyelashes at Ed. Alec nearly choked on a sip of coffee. Ed just stared at Scully.

"I'll go check on the pilot, you two argue it out. Let me know what you decide," Alec grinned, clearly enjoying himself. He made his way up the aisle, chuckling.

"You didn't answer my question." Scully said.

"Question? What question?" Ed gulped his coffee. He looked like he would have liked to grab the nearest parachute and bail out.

"I asked you if I was beautiful." Scully said, enjoying Ed's reaction. It felt wonderful to flirt with him. How long had it been since she was able to flirt? Ed set the coffee down and looked at her, pensively.. God, she thought, he has gorgeous blue eyes. Gorgeous hair, gorgeous body, gorgeous everything, she concluded with amusement.

"Yes. You are. Very beautiful." Ed said softly. Scully gawked. She hadn't expected that direct of an answer. His words sent almost an electric shock through her.

Ed looked amused.

"Cat got your tongue, Dana?" he wondered.

"I didn't know you were going to say that." she confessed.

"Well, I didn't know either. That makes two of us." he told her. "Tell me about yourself. "

"You probably already know all about me."

"Only what Alec told me." he raised his hand and rubbed the bridge of his nose.

"Headache?" frowned Scully.

"Dizzy."

"Lie back. There's still some time before we land. Try to rest again."

"I don't want to rest. I don't want to dream." he told her. His head flopped back against his pillow. He looked out the window.

"You'll be home soon, Ed." she reassured him.

Home. What a joke that is. Ed thought. He continued to stare out the window.

Mulder's apartment

Alexandria, VA

two weeks later

evening

"Drink some more, " Frohike said. "That's a good FBI agent."

Mulder groaned loudly. He gulped down the black coffee.

"Did you get the license of the truck that hit me?"

Byers frowned.

"No but we got the address your partner is staying at. You *do* remember your partner?"

"Her? Vaguely. She isn't too happy with me these days. Now would you three musketeers kindly tell me why you dragged me out of the hospital?" Mulder ran his hand through his hair.

"Mulder, pal, you're so high you don't need a plane. Real sweet stuff, too." Frohike added.

"That nurse of yours. She was adding a little something to your drug cocktail. Not enough to cause any long term damage, just enough to keep you on ice for a while. " Langly said. He had a laptop and was typing rapidly in it.

"What?" Mulder managed to get out.

"Kohler, Bernice. R.N. Only she isn't on staff. Nobody's heard of her. Not a word of what she was shooting into your veins was ever noted in your chart. You were cleared for release ages ago." Byers informed him. "Nobody knows a thing."

"Except maybe for that guy with all the medals on his chest. Straker. And the lovely redhead flew off to Big Ben territory with him in a chartered jet. I bet he knows." Frohike frowned.

"Scully could be in a lot of trouble, bub. I've been following her AmEx activity. Straker's too. My guess is they've gotten cozy. Been at the same place at the same time." Langly said. "She didn't check into a hotel when his jet landed."

"Shit. What's his address?" Mulder demanded. Frohike handed him an gym bag. Mulder got up a little unsteadily. "What's this?"

"First class tickets out of Washington Dulles International Airport to Heathrow via British Airways tonight. Address. Change of clothes. Seeds. Gun. Send us a postcard." Frohike said.

"Heck with the postcard. I'll send you guys the crown jewels." Mulder flashed a smile, grabbed his jacket and headed out the door.

Southern England

Straker's flat

Ed drew his curtains back, enjoying the sunrise. He looked at the table, set for two. There were white roses in a vase atop the table. Ed went over, smelled them. Dana had convinced him his flat needed brightening. He smiled to himself. On impulse, he had bought them for her.

He looked at his watch, picked up the phone. He punched in a number.

"Freeman." Alec replied.

"Good morning, Alec. How are our pesky little friends?" Ed inquired.

"Quiet. We're down from red alert. You sound like you're in a good mood. Do anything lately that would make a good entry for your diary?"

Ed scowled.

"I'm old enough to be her father, Alec."

"Wine and cheese and SHADO commanders improve with age." Alec insisted. "How are you feeling? Any dizzy spells?"

"Now and then. Nothing to worry about. I've fully recovered."

"You don't sound too happy about that." noted Alec.

"It's past the time that I needed her services. I should be arranging for her trip home." Ed said sadly.

"Has she expressed any great hurry to--hang on, Ed." Alec said.

"Trouble?" Ed said.

"I've just been informed that Mulder left the hospital with those colleagues of his. Kohler's cover's been blown. We'll keep an eye on the airport, track Mulder down. More than likely he's headed for you. Moment we spot him, I'll get security out to you."

Ed sighed.

"Thanks Alec." Ed hung up. He entered his bedroom. Scully lie asleep in his bed. He'd insisted on sleeping on his couch, saying that he'd already lost far too many battles, her insisting on returning with him, Alec threatening him with hospitalisation if he didn't let her share Ed's flat while Ed recovered. So she'd given in. Ed sat on the edge of the bed, watching her.

God. How beautiful she is. Stubborn, compassionate, sharp, dedicated. These past days have been happy ones. It's all got to end. I never should have let her under my skin the way I have. What am I going to do with her out of my life? How difficult will it be when I say nice knowing you? And the partner--Mulder. Closing in on the truth. Threatening security. His nosy hacking friends. Irony is, we're on the same side.

Ed studied her. She stirred a little. Sadness welled up in him.

You're just starting your life, Dana. Your whole future is out there waiting for you. A future that can't include me. My fate was sealed a long time ago, Dana. There's not much life ahead for me. Live your life, Dana. Go back to your world. You don't belong here. You don't belong with me.

A single tear rolled down his cheek. He reached down and lightly swept his hand over her hair. Her eyes opened. He quickly stood up, turned away, wiped his cheek with the side of his hand.

"It's about time you woke up. I have breakfast ready for you. Get showered." Ed said curtly. He left the room.

"Ed?" she said. Scully grabbed her robe, slid out of bed and out into the living room, searching for him. He was in the kitchen, putting toast and marmalade and butter on a tray.

"Ed, what's wrong?"

"Breakfast's getting cold. That's what's wrong. Go and sit down."

She grabbed his hand.

"What are you doing?" he said.

"Why are you being so sharp with me all of a sudden? Are you feeling sick? Don't turn

away from me like that. Look at me." Scully told him.

"Take your hand off me." he said in an icy voice.

"Tell me what's wrong. Now."

"Who are you to give me orders?" he demanded. He pulled away from her, picked up the tray.

"Ed, the drug. I warned you that--"

Ed let the tray crash to the floor. Scully jumped.

"Right, right, I'm being irrational. The patient's being irrational. It's the drug. That explains everything, right? That explains why a man my age would fall in --fall in--" his voice cracked. He turned on a heel and left the kitchen. Scully ran after him, she grabbed him and turned him around. There were tears in his eyes.

"Let me go. Please. Don't make this harder on me. For God's sake, Dana. Let me do this my way, let me have what dignity I have left."

"You're a selfish bastard." Scully told him. His mouth dropped open.

"I--I--" he stammered.

"You never gave me a chance, never gave me a clue, nothing since the plane, and the way you looked at me and called me beautiful. We've been together so long, and it took you forever even to let me hold your hand. It never occurred to you that I had feelings for you, did it? Oh no, you wait this long to tell me what I hoped you'd say to me. It never came. You smiled at me, you laughed, you bought me a bouquet of white roses. You made me think that maybe there'd be a chance for me. A chance that you loved me as much as I loved you. No. Something's happened, something awful has happened, and now I want to hear it." insisted Scully.

"Dana--my sweet Dana, you and I--you and I weren't met to be. I'm fifty-three, for God's sake. All you see in me is a reflection of your dead father. A way to be close to him again." he said sorrowfully. "That's the truth. You know it, I know it."

"Fifty-three. All that proves is you can count. And how dare you suggest I don't know what it is I want? What kind of person do you think I am? I loved my dad, yes. I adored my dad, yes. But I'm not some neurotic that goes looking to sleep with anyone who reminds her of her father. But I'll tell you what *you* are, Ed Straker. You're a coward! You have happiness within your reach and you turn your back on it. You'd rather do whatever it is you do, and don't give me that crap about the studio. I know you're involved in something you can't talk about. Some top secret military thing. You'd just rather be a martyr, feel sorry for yourself." Scully sobbed.

"Don't, please don't." Ed begged her.

"You know something? I don't care anymore what happens to you. You can just go ahead and take risks until you finally succeed in killing yourself. Go to hell!"

Scully went into the bedroom and slammed the door.

Ed took a few steps toward the door, faltered, crumbled to the ground and lay still.

The telephone rang. It rang three times. Alec Freeman, on the other end, cursed. He hung up.

"Mulder was spotted getting off the plane. I want all roads covered. I'm going to see Commander Straker. Keep me informed." Alec ordered.

"Yes sir," Ford said.

Scully came out of the bedroom fully dressed, looking composed, carrying her suitcase.. She turned white when she saw Ed lying motionless on the zebra-skin rug. She dropped the

suitcase. Scully gave a inarticulate cry. He knelt beside him, tore open his shirt, pressed her ear upon his chest. Thank God, thank God, heart sounds strong. She slapped his cheeks. Once. Twice. He finally groaned. She helped him into a sitting position.

"Dana." It took a moment for Ed to steady himself.

"No, don't. Don't try to speak, let me exami--"

Ed took her hands.

"Never mind me. Mulder's coming. He's put two and two together. Alec had him drugged, but those friends of his found out about it. He's traced you here. Dana, too much is at stake. There's not very much time. You'll understand. You'll understand everything. What I do is too important for anyone to discover. Alec had to keep him away from me. To buy you and I some time. "

"He's all right, isn't he?" she frowned. "Mulder's all right?" .

"Mulder's fine. That's the problem--Dana--"

"I'm not going back with him. I'm staying with you. I'm stayi--"

Ed put his hands in her hair, tilted her head, closed his mouth down over hers. She returned the kiss urgently. They groped at each other, pulled clothes off, explored each other's bare bodies with fingers and mouths.. Ed stood, lifted her in one sweeping movement, and laid her on the couch. He covered her breasts with his hands, moved them down her body to her loins, probing gently. Scully shuddered. Ed then entered her firmly but slowly and they gasped in unison. Their lovers' symphony of gasps and cries and moans and grunts filled the flat.

A little while later, they both gave a final, intense cry and jerk as their passion was satisfied. They lay against each other, exhausted. Scully broke the silence after a few minutes.

"You've done that before," she whispered to him teasingly. Ed grinned.

"Once or twice." he chuckled. "Does my doctor approve?"

"Your doctor approves all right!" Scully chuckled.

Someone knocked sharply on the door.

"Damn." sighed Ed. He looked at her a final time, committing the moment to memory. He then sprang up, picked up their clothing, tossed hers to her.

"ED!" Alec Freeman growled.

"I'm coming Alec! I'm coming! Give me a minute or two." Ed shouted. He pulled on his pajamas and robe, as Scully got into her clothes.

"Are you all right? I was about to use my key." Alec shouted again.

"He asks me if I was all right." Ed winked at Scully. She laughed.

"You won't get a single complaint from me." she said. "I'm ready. No! Wait! Ed!"

Ed had already opened the door. Alec looked at each of them. Ed's platinum hair stuck out at strange angles. Scully stifled a chuckle. She hadn't had time to warn him.

"New hair style? I like it, Ed." grinned Alec. It hadn't taken him long to figure out what had gone on. Ed quickly pushed his hair down.

"Our FBI friend still on the way here?" Ed asked.

" Actually we caught him. He's in the car. Not too happy." Alec informed Ed.

"Well, well, well. Let's not keep the man waiting. I'm about to make his day. Give me a moment to get dressed. Dana, go out and comfort your partner."

Dana smiled, and went out.

"Alec. Collect all her things. Put them in the back of the car. I'm going to give them the grand tour of SHADO Control. Then I'm going to serve them both complimentary coffee." Ed said meaningfully.

"Ed. You don't have to--" frowned Alec.

"No other way, Alec. No other way. You take care of his nerd companions?"

"Last I spoke to Kohler and Hathaway, they reported all three sleeping like babies."

"Good. Good. All right, give me a few minutes." Ed disappeared into the bedroom. Alec glanced over at the white roses. They'd begun to wilt.

SHADO Control

Guest area

"I can't believe it . All this time, I was sure of it. Now I know. It's unreal," Mulder said.

Ed looked at him. Alec stood next to Ed, leaning against a wall.

"I wish it were, Mr. Mulder. I really wish it were." Ed said. "You understand my need for security. Few people even know that SHADO exists. I intend to keep it that way."

"Aliens taking human body parts," Scully said, wide-eyed.

"I was right all along--" Mulder sighed. He sipped his coffee.

"More coffee, Dana?" Alec asked.

"No thanks, I'm fine."

"If you two will excuse me for a moment, I have something I need to check on. Look after our guests, will you, Alec?" Ed looked for a few seconds at Dana, then went out.

"My Dad was right about him. He is a hero." Dana smiled at Alec. Alec nodded.

"Hero worship, Scully? How very unscientific." Mulder grinned at her. He leaned over and squeezed her hand.

"Shut up, Mulder." she grinned back.

Alec watched, and forced himself to smile. He'd caught the expression on Ed's face.

Ed walked into his office, thumbed the door control, waited for the door to shut securely. He dropped listlessly into his chair. He then squeezed his eyes shut, expression contorted with sadness. He opened his eyes, looked at the colours on the mural. He took a deep breath.

"Goodbye, Dana." he said.

Annapolis, Maryland

Scully's apartment

a week later

Scully yawned. If it was Mulder ringing her doorbell, she made up her mind to kick him really hard. After all, it was Saturday. She had plans to go over her mother's for a family barbecue. She padded over to the door, looked through the peephole . A fresh faced young man stood on her porch with a clipboard in his hand and carrying a gold box. She unchained the door and looked at him expectantly.

"Dr. Dana Scully?" he asked.

"Yes. That's me."

"Package for you. Sign here, please."

Dana scribbled her signature, and the delivery guy handed her the gold box.

"Have a nice day, Ma'am."

"You too." Scully closed the door, brought the box into her room, wondered idly if she should have the FBI lab take a look at it. She shook it. There was no card on it. She broke open the scotch tape that held it shut, opened it and looked under the green paper. A dozen white roses lay in the box. Scully took one out, smelled one. She smiled. So she had some secret admirer. Then she sighed. Mulder would probably suspect it was something from a case they were working on, or had worked on. Just another X-File.

The End