

Parts Unknown

by Susan

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day four

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"Must be nice not having someone question your every move, poking holes in all your theories."

"Oh yeah, it's great. I'm surprised I put up with you for so long."

He'd run through their conversation at least a dozen times since she'd been gone, replaying not only her words in his mind, but what her voice had sounded like when she said them.

She'd missed him when they were taken off the X-Files, just as much as he'd missed her, he was sure of it, and at the time, just like him, she'd chosen not to tell him how she really felt.

But why?

Why had it been so hard for them to simply admit that they loved each other?

It was crazy, really, knowing that they'd both die for each other, but were too afraid to open themselves up to being more than just partners.

Just as it was crazy that he was even thinking about it now two months after her disappearance, and yet he couldn't stop thinking about it.

All the things that might have been, the things that should have been...

Throwing his duffel bag across the room, he yanked his helmet down over his head, then grabbed the bag, and headed out to the parking lot, angrily slamming the door behind him.

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He'd ridden around aimlessly for three days.

Traveling on random highways. Staying at whatever motels happened to be alongside the road when night came. Eating next to nothing and wearing the same clothes since the day he left.

But today was different.

Today he was going to the ocean.

He wasn't sure why, but he felt like he needed to be near water, to be alone on the beach with only his thoughts and the steady thrum of the waves lapping up against the shoreline.

And he needed a quiet place to really think about what he wanted to do next.

Sure, riding nowhere and everywhere on the open road on a motorcycle had given him a chance to reexamine his feelings for Scully, but he hadn't really thought about what he was going to do once he finally went back home.

Would he continue to search for her, or would he decide to move on with his life?

Of course, he already knew the answer, knew that he'd do whatever it took to try to find her, but how?

All the other things he'd tried, all the leads he'd followed, all the contacts he'd spoken to, hadn't brought him any closer to finding her than he'd been two months ago so what would he do differently once he got back?

The truth was he had absolutely no idea.

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The day he got the call about Duane Barry he was in the water, a swimming pool at the fitness club he belonged to.

He'd just finished his tenth lap when Alex Krycek walked over to him and told him that he was needed to help with a hostage situation.

Little did he know that less than 24 hours later, it would be Scully who was his hostage.

Replaying the events of those two days was something he did on almost a daily basis, and he was replaying them now.

"Mulder, I need your help! Mulder..."

Hearing her voice desperately calling out for him and knowing that he hadn't been able to do a damn thing to help her had eaten away at his gut for months, just as seeing the photo of her tied up inside the trunk of Duane Barry's trunk had torn him up inside.

The gag in her mouth, the blood running down her chin, the fear in her eyes.

He hadn't been able to stop any of it, just as he hadn't been able to stop her from being taken.

He'd seen the lights, felt the sky churning above him, watched Duane Barry raise his arms in triumph as she was taken away, and all he had done was stand there, completely helpless.

What kind of partner was he anyway?

When she'd needed him the most, he failed.

And now, two months later, she was still gone, and he was still failing.

The ocean coastline now in his sight, he squeezed the handlebars and sped up.

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He used to love going to the beach when he was a kid.

Spending hours in the afternoon swimming in the ocean, building things in the sand, and blowing through all the snacks his mom brought for him and his sister.

He'd swim for a while, then come to shore and dry off, eat some crackers or chips, mess around in the wet sand for a while, then go back in the water again.

Swim, eat, build. Swim, eat, build.

It was what he loved, what made him happy, and when they'd finally pack up and head for home, he was always disappointed, begging his mom to let them stay just a little longer.

But they never did.

"Your sister's getting tired, Fox. She needs to go home now," his mother would say, even though he and Samantha both knew that it was really her that was the one who was tired and wanted to go home.

After they'd get home, they'd wait until their mom laid down for a nap, then put their bathing suits back on and run through the sprinklers outside and play around in the backyard.

It was the perfect plan.

Samantha would be the lookout, hanging around in the hallway, peeking in their mom's bedroom to make sure she was really asleep, then motioning out the window for him to turn on the sprinklers.

Then she'd change back into her swimsuit and run outside to join him, and the two of them would have a blast, squirting each other with the hose and jumping over the cold blasts of water shooting out of the sprinklers.

Knowing that their mom would usually sleep for about an hour, they would make sure to turn off all the water after about 45 minutes, then quickly hurry inside and change back into their clothes before she woke up.

It was something so simple, so exhilarating, having fun with his sister and sharing a secret only the two of them knew about.

And it was one of the happiest memories of his life.

But now as he stood here in the sandy parking lot, his eyes watery as he looked out over the ocean, he couldn't help but wonder if he would ever feel like that again.

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The sky was beginning to darken, the sun a burnt orange as it began its descent into the ocean.

It was a sign that the day was ending, and yet he couldn't really recall how many hours he'd spent sitting here on a small hill away from the main beach.

He thought he arrived along the lakeshore sometime in the afternoon, then staked out his place on the hill soon after that, although he couldn't remember climbing up here or taking off his shoes.

Yet here he was, sitting on a small blanket he'd apparently packed among his things, staring at the glowing ball of sun slowly lowering itself into the cool calm water.

As a child, he always thought it was so cool that the sun could disappear right in front of him at the end of the day, then return the next day just as bright and glorious as it was before.

But now as he watched it disappear in front of him, it was nothing but a painful reminder that after Scully disappeared, she didn't come back.

Shoving his feet down into the sand, he hugged his knees and looked away.

~to be continued