Partners, A Love Story
by
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Officer Ken Hutchinson, better known as Hutch, settled back in a comfortably worn chair at Huggy Bear's. His eyes half closed with just a slit of cool blue showing watched the round globes of his partner's ass sashay across the room toward the bar. He was never sure how Dave Starsky did it, but the man always wore soft, clinging nearly white, worn denim jeans. Hutch had even gone through Starsky's dresser one day without finding one pair of crisp denim jeans. It was a mystery, but a delightful one. The fabric of those soft battered jeans caressed each lush cheek of that fabulous ass. Hutch could watch that all day.

Starsky arrived back in due time with two beers and a small pizza to share. They could have eaten sensibly before coming on duty, but that would have meant getting out of bed. Bed was good. Bed was great.

It started with comfort. Terry, the closest woman to seriously have ever captured Starsky's heart had caught a bullet, one meant for Starsky. Abby had been in Hutch's life then, before she told him that she didn't want to be a cop's widow. Four became three and then two. When did subtraction become a means to increase?

Partners, lovers, best friends, it was unthinkable at first. Just a kiss, playful, teasing; one step beyond the hugs, the casual arm that seemed so natural around a strong pair of shoulders it seemed wrong when it wasn't there. Their smiles had faded as they looked into each other's puzzled eyes. A second kiss led to madness...fumbling at each other's clothes, tumbling over each other as they sought to quench what seemed an unbearable need for each other.

Reaction had sent them both away panicked and apart. Love had brought them back to stay. No more disappointments and no more hiding from each other.
"You dirty rat bastard." Each word was illustrated with a pound on the crumbling red brick wall of the building. Krycek tried to block with his left arm. There was an odd sensation as Mulder slammed the arm back cruelly. It didn't feel right, but Mulder was too enraged to think about it. Gripping the arm implacably, Mulder laid his forearm across the white throat, pressing, listening to the gasping sounds, enjoying the squirming.

A loud clang sounded from the alley. Mulder, startled, eased up and Krycek like the rat he was, pushed at him with considerable strength. Mulder caught at a sleeve and a moment later gaped at a jacket with a dangling weight. He'd pulled Krycek's arm off.

Finally, his horrified mind registered the lack of blood. It was a prosthesis. Krycek had lost his left arm. Mulder dashed off into the alley in hot pursuit. As he rounded a corner, a flash of light dazed him along with a hollow echoing sound. Flame blossomed across his forehead as someone tackled him and tumbled him to the ground.

Krycek's voice hissing in a fear filled whisper said, "Stay down. We've stumbled into something"

Harsh voices yelled as Krycek and Mulder struggled on the ground. "Witnesses."

Mulder couldn't get a clear glimpse. There was just his enemy's voice screaming, "No" before more voices were heard. Freed of Krycek's weight, Mulder rolled to his feet.

A hand tugged him into an alcove, which smelled of incredibly putrid garbage. "Shhh" and he even knew Krycek's voice in that short exhortation.

"They went over there," someone yelled.

The gash on his forehead was bleeding right into his eyes, which weren't at their best at night anyway. Mulder couldn't see anything. Krycek was panting in fear. He pushed Mulder deeper into the crevice, jamming his back against something sharp edged and cold.

A flashlight bobbed and then Krycek growled, "Stay here..."

Before Mulder could protest, Krycek lit out of the hiding place. There were more shots then the shout of "Police."

A cacophony of shots, yells, and sirens followed. Still dazed from the graze and the twisting and turnings of his life, Mulder stayed wedged into his little corner.

A handkerchief clasped to his forehead, Mulder fumbled for his own gun. A flashlight beamed into his eyes and a cocky voice said, "Police! You don't want to do that. Hands up. You're under arrest."

Thinking better of it, Mulder raised his arms and stepped forward. In the light beaming from cars at either end of the alley, he looked into the deep blue eyes of a man with curly black hair who was dressed in a white wool sweater and old light-blue jeans.
"I'm an FBI agent. My ID card is in my pocket." Mulder explained. A sinking sensation hit him as he noticed a familiar outline, crumpled in the alley not far from where they stood.

A blond man with a cheesy mustache joined them and held him in the sights of a formidable non-regulation issue fully automatic gun. The first police officer reached in and withdrew Mulder's ID card. He read it and said, "We weren't told that the FBI had any interest in Cooper."

"I don't know anything about a Cooper. I was chasing someone else. I saw a wanted criminal when I stopped over on my way to a speaking engagement." Mulder related.

Medics were attending to the bodies crumpled in the filth of the alley. Mulder ran to Krycek as soon as the policeman let him go. Medics were examining him, scissoring open the black sweater that he wore. His upturned face looked like a lily in a dark pond. A narrow slit of green showed beneath Krycek's lush lashes. The man reached for him and mumbled, "All right? Are you all right, Mulder?"

Give the man credit, for some inexplicable reason he had seemed intent on protecting Mulder, his faster reflexes keeping them out of the line of fire. His dart into the alley may have been an attempt to escape or, to be honest; it seemed more like a feint to draw the shooters away from Mulder.

The man always was a crazy son of a bitch and his motivations were bizarre. Krycek always threw him off balance from the days of his forced partnership to his betrayal, that fiasco in Russia, and lastly, the kiss...

The wound in the pale flesh wasn't too bad. It had scored a line around the side of his chest, bleeding profusely, but not penetrating far. Mulder grimaced as the medics finished cutting away the cloth. The left arm ended just between the elbow and the shoulder. The stump ended in a wad of flesh, repulsively smooth. Above the surgically created order, other scars marked the flesh. How he must have fought when they did it to him!

"This your man?" The blond man asked.

Mulder said, "Yeah, Alex Krycek..."

"Did you see the shooters?" the first man asked. He twitched from foot to foot as if adrenaline had built up with no place to go. "We were supposed to take over for a team watching over a witness in an organized crime case. Somehow, the other police officers and the witness ended up here dead. We killed one of the perps, but it appears that the rest got away."

Feeling like blushing, Mulder admitted, "Krycek knocked me down before I could see anything. There was a shot, running figures, a lot of voices...one of them was very deep."

The medics were finished with a field dressing. They loaded Krycek on a stretcher and headed for a waiting ambulance. Mulder yelled, "No, wait, I have to ride with him."

One of the medics replied, "No room."
The man with the curly hair said, "We'll drive you. Think he might have seen something?"

That was a distinct possibility. Krycek had run into the alley well ahead of Mulder, as quick and agile as his rat namesake. Nodding, Mulder said, "Yeah, it's likely that he did, but good luck getting it out of him. Krycek couldn't tell the truth if it reared up and bit him in the ass."

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Dead cops. A dead witness. Dobey wasn't happy. He met them at the hospital, black face with even blacker circled eyes sweating from what must have been a rapid trip from the station. He said, "Christ, how am I going tell Salvador's wife and kids? Thank God, Bean was a loner. It's bad enough to lose two officers. I don't think I could face having to break the news to two widows. I heard you have a potential witness?"

Hutch nodded and said, "We hope so. He's unconscious so we don't know how much he saw."

Plodding away, Dobey tossed over his shoulder, "You and Starsky are on whoever the guy is twenty-four seven. You pick whomever you need for back up."

Hutch steered the well-dressed FBI agent towards a treatment cubicle. Starsky as usual had read his mind. He had followed the other man into surgery or at least right to the door. Hutch patted the expensive wool of the suit and said, "Don't worry. My partner's got him. Starsk is incredible. The best cop I ever met. He won't let anyone get to...what's his name?"

"Krycek, Alex Krycek." Mulder answered.

While the agent was having his head wound seen to, Hutch called records and told them to run Alex Krycek and Fox Mulder's names. He'd seen the ID, but he had been fooled before by counterfeits. He wanted to see what the computer said. Besides, what kind of name was Fox for a law enforcement officer?

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Alone, hurting, strapped down and helpless...not the first time, that Alex had woken that way and probably not the last either. His throat felt dry. His chest felt as if someone had strapped burning hot metal around it and his left arm throbbed with relentless agony. Alex couldn't hold back a moan.

Someone rested a hand on his forehead. For a moment, Alex pretended it was Mulder. That Mulder finally realized that Alex was trying to help in his own feckless way. No such luck. He gazed into the most incredible pair of blue eyes that he had ever seen. They were as dark as sapphires, set in laugh rayed eye pockets above a handsome nose and a large sensuous looking mouth.

"I'm Officer David Starsky. Who are you?" The man asked.
A lie started to come to Alex's mouth, but he remembered Mulder in the alley. The FBI agent would have told them...unless. Oh God, the fool must have followed him out and rejected his sacrificial run!

"Mulder? Where's Agent Mulder?" Alex asked, "Did they get him? I'll find them and kill them."

Amused, Starsky said, "Hmm, he wasn't as concerned about you, kiddo. Mulder's fine. My partner took him to a treatment room to have that graze on his forehead seen. Now, did you see what happened?"

It was all pretty foggy and besides, Alex realized that he was going to throw up. The wave of nausea was overwhelming. He opened his mouth to speak, but it was too late. Vomit, mostly stomach fluids, as he had not eaten yet, spilled out as he heaved, unable to do more than to turn his face aside. The humiliation more than anything sent unwanted tears down his face.

Strong hands with the characteristic callus of someone who spent a fair amount of time on the firing range held his head. A basin caught the remaining vomit. Shortly, a muscle bound orderly arrived, cleaning him, changing the bedding, and recovering him as he gave in to a fit of shivering. Alex didn't know what was wrong. He'd run and fought with worse injuries. Maybe he was just getting too old. He'd already lived past anyone's expectations.

The kind voice said, "Hey, as I was saying when we were so rudely interrupted, what did you see?"

Arguing voices...no surprise that one of them was Mulder's. Alex was as always caught between pleasure and pain at the thought of seeing the man who screwed up more of his plans than anyone else alive.

Mulder entered the room with a very fair blond man who wore a denim work shirt and blue jeans with a sports coat slung over the ensemble. "Of course, there's no computer record of any wrong doing. I keep telling you. That's how the consortium works."

"Hey, Hutch." Alex's Good Samaritan said. You had to pay attention to the timbre of the voice. This one changed to a happy, throaty near purr when he saw the blond man.

"Starsk...we have a problem. This man really is a FBI agent although not on assignment. I reached his supervisor, Assistant Director, Walter Skinner who, I quote, said, "Yes, for some reason, I have been cursed with that magnet for trouble, disobedient, accident prone excuse for a special agent. But our other potential witness, Mr. Alex Krycek, is not a wanted man. AD Skinner said that the man has immunity. Apparently, he's supposed to be in a witness protection program in Iowa."

"What?" Mulder spluttered, incredulous, "How in the hell did that happen?"

Resigned to the expectation of being assaulted again, Alex said, "Grow up, Mulder. You think that all those heads rolled on your say so? I went through Skinner and gave 'em up. What was left of them after the...uh, conspiracy packed up and went home."
"You son of a bitch..." Mulder cried, heading for him with a baleful expression.

Sinking back into the bed and slackening his muscles was unnecessary. Starsky was fast and strong. He grabbed Mulder and held him well away from Alex. Good, Alex supposed. There was a time when any touch had been enough, but that was before the world finished chewing him up and spitting him out.

Feeling helpless, tired, and resigned, Alex said, "Detective Starsky, I saw two of the shooters and another man, a large man in an expensive overcoat. He was six feet and maybe two inches tall. Big guy, heavy build, but not fat. He was bald, not even a fringe of hair. He had a really deep voice... The other guy I saw was a really pale blonde, five feet ten and thin."

"Cooper!" exulted Starsky. "And the other one, Moss. Peter Moss. I could kiss you, Alex Krycek."

Lowering his eyes, Alex almost told the man that he might have enjoyed that. Although he'd prefer a kiss from Mulder. He glanced at his former partner, hoping to see that face show a little appreciation of the chance that Alex was taking. Instead, Mulder sneered and said, "What's your game this time, Krycek? Who are you going to sell to whom?"

Closing his eyes, Alex rolled his head in negation, but what was the use? He said, "I'll testify if you can keep me alive to do it." Looking around him, Alex softly asked, "Can one of you see about some pain medication for me?"

The blond officer nodded. "Yes. Right away."

Perching in a friendly fashion on the edge of Alex's bed, Starsky went to work on the buckles that strapped him down. "I always hate being confined, how about you? Mind if I call you Alex? Just call me Starsky."

"Please." Alex replied, responding to the kindness as if all the loneliness had suddenly just erupted in his soul. He had always been proud that he was a survivor and had lived to see the aliens flee an Earth gone poisonous to them and a conspiracy of evil dissolving in the cold, clear light of exposure. Now, he didn't feel that his pride was enough to keep him living.

Instinctively, Alex sought the big warm hand before Starsky could pull away. The cop wasn't pretty, but he had an open face, handsome in a broad featured, crooked nose fashion. The man patted Alex's cheek and said, "You're going to be okay. Don't worry. Me and Hutch are going to take care of you."

Clinging to the hand, Alex closed his eyes. He supposed it was shock or something, but he could not stop the tears. Someone blotted the tears with tissue paper and stroked back his hair.

Mulder commented, "Don't let that act fool you. You're dealing with a low life scum with the morals of a stoat."

Starsky asked, "Agent Mulder, were you born an asshole or is this the product of a lifetime of achievement? If you can't control yourself, get the fuck out of this room."
Locking the world out, Alex let go of Starsky's hand. He turned his face away from the cop. He knew that nothing could make it better. He could cut his heart out and offer it on a platter. Mulder would spit on it.

The nurse came in and fussed over him, swiftly injecting his IV with something. It took a few moments to work, but Alex pretended to sleep instantly. He couldn't stand the look on Mulder's face. That oddly fascinated horror as if at some spectacularly gross specimen had appeared in an X File. Alex knew that he had lost the beauty he'd once had; it died on the cold ground in Tunguska. All that was left was someone who had outlived his usefulness even to himself.

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Watching the FBI agent was a puzzle for Hutch's active mind. Mulder refused to leave even after acknowledging that he really had no grounds to arrest Krycek. The man sat in the hospital room, wrinkling his elegant suit, eyes growing dark circles. When he thought that he wasn't observed, he stared obsessively at the wounded man.

The expression softened at times, became anxious when the witness moaned in his uneasy sleep. Once when Krycek uttered a truly horrific scream and begged, "No, no, no, please don't..." Mulder stood, fists knotted at his side. He took a single step toward the bed before the whimpering plaint subsided back into sleep.

Hutch couldn't recall hovering over anyone like that. Anyone except Starsky. Since Mulder was in the room, Hutch motioned Starsky out into the hall. Star sk leaned against the door, head cocked, mouth in that crooked smile that made Hutch just want to kiss it until his lover opened those lush lips to him. Well, that would have to wait. They were good cops. Better, Hutch thought since they had become lovers. Kind of took the distraction out of things.

"Mulder's a strange one." Starsk remarked. "Seems like he hates that guy, but he can't take his eyes off of him."

Remembering the green eyes, the fine features, the pert nose, and the silken hair, Hutch said, "Well, Krycek is a beauty." He let the humor show in his eyes.

"If you like the pretty boy type." Starsky said.

"Nah, I like the type with curly hair and a crooked smile who always takes the last slice of pizza without asking." Hutch replied.

"Not always!" Starsky said. He grinned and leaned closer. Hutch reminded, "Not here."

"Damn, well, Dobey says that the safe house is ready. The doctor said that he could go. Fever's down and he's healing well." Starsky said.

"What about Mulder?" Hutch asked, "Do we take him or leave him? He gives me the creeps the way he stares at Alex."
Smirking, Starsky pushed his weight away from the wall. He was the only man Hutch had ever known who could swagger even when he was standing still. Starsk crackled with electricity. He was constantly moving, crooked grin in the baby rounded face challenging and big, startling dark blue eyes twinkling with humor. Even after all these years, Hutch still loved to look at him. It was a wonder everyone didn't know from the start that they were made for each other.

"Hell, I doubt that he'd let us ditch him. Pack him up, Hutch. Besides as far as Cooper knows they both saw everything that happened."

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The safe house was located in an isolated area, a disadvantage, Starsky thought, unless you considered that at least they didn't have to worry as much over shooting innocent bystanders. One side was bordered by an overgrown and seldom visited part of a Catholic cemetery. Starsky gazed at a monument, which appeared to be tilting slowly over into the slightly sunken earth it guarded. It was a Gothic angel with bat like wings. The idea of sleeping next to a cemetery made him shiver ...not that he was superstitious. He just didn't like it.

The backyard ran along a tall barbwire topped fence. It was a military enclosure of some sort. A rolling wave of sound explained the number of trees with broken branches. It was a firing range.

Rubble from earthquake wrecked houses told the rest of the story. This unprepossessing two-story house was spared by a quirk. It tilted too, but that gave it sort of Charlie Chaplain charm. Starsky waited for Hutch to finish casing the place so they could move into its shelter. The uniformed cops, currently out of their blues, dressed in blue jeans and bowling shirts, looked happy, anticipating pizza and Chinese on the city for a couple of weeks until the prosecutor had arraigned Cooper.

Krycek was slumped against the car door, face turned toward the cemetery. His face held a closed in expression. He reminded Starsky of a dog he had once seen. It had broken loose from a junkyard where it had been starved and beaten. When Starsky happened upon the scene, the dog had been running down the freeway for at least twenty minutes. Wild eyed and panting, the dog’s tongue lolled from a foaming mouth. The huge scarred body gathered all four feet together and then stretched out again and again. The eyes were white blobs in the gape jawed face.

Kindly people passing by had tried to stop the frantic creature; every attempt to help had terrified the beast that had never known kindness. After several accidents, police were called to help animal control. Starsky was glad that he was not the one whose shot ended the horrible flight. He did remember, would always remember the resigned look as the abused dog had breathed his last.

Krycek had that look; someone had run him hard and heavy. He had been fleeing so long that if he ever had an objective he could not remember it. Starsky didn't know the story behind that mutilated arm or why the two men seemed bound in this nexus with each other. He did know that if they were caught in a firefight that Krycek couldn't be trusted to stay alive. Hell, that stunt in the alley, drawing fire from Mulder had been idiotic. Starsky could have thought of a better way to help his partner if they were pinned down.
Hutch waved from the door. Starsky went round to help Krycek out of the car. Mulder balefully watched him, begrudging the touch and the solicitous gesture equally.

"How you holding up?" Starsky asked in a hearty voice.

The look Krycek gave him could have withered a plastic flower. He replied, "I'm fine. It wasn't more than a scratch. I've survived a thousand times worst without even the aid of an aspirin."

The snort from Mulder meant what? Krycek glared at the man and said, "Ask Mulder. I've got a bunch of scars with his name on them."

Well, so much for bedside manner. Starsky walked Krycek up the front steps into the house, taking him to a bedroom in the basement. It was windowless and not exactly either comfortable or attractive, but it was the safest place in the house. Despite his bravado, the witness went right to the bed. He dropped his leather jacket onto the floor and snarled, "Do you mind? I have things I have to do?"

"Sorry, one of us has to be with you at all times." Starsky explained.

"Grand." Krycek said. He turned away and lifted his sweater to bare his left side. The straps took a moment to loosen and then he put the prosthesis on the dresser. A kind of stocking-like material covered the scarred stump. Krycek gingerly removed this and laid it aside. He took a tube from his jacket pocket and smoothed something on the end of the stump. Finally, decisively, he stripped off. His naked body held perfect proportions. He stretched, winced, and then rolled into a bundle under the covers.

A noise made Starsky turn around. It was Mulder again. The man said, "I don't sleep well. I can watch him."

"Yeah?" Starsky challenged, "and who is going to protect him from you?" He could see Krycek was watching and listening.

"I'm a professional." Mulder claimed, ignoring Starsky's derisive snort. "I know Krycek will screw you about the testimony, but as long as you think he's going to be a good little witness, I'll help you protect him."

Starsky plopped down in an armchair and picked up a Batman and Robin comic book. It was going to be a long four days until the indictment. Mulder fidgeted a while then went out. Starsky's thoughts turned to Hutch. The comic book forgotten, he sprawled, legs akimbo and one hand resting over his sweater clad stomach. The wind was blowing hard. He could even hear it downstairs in this windowless room. On nights like this, he and Hutch enjoyed long hours in bed exploring the riches of each other's bodies beneath the warm covers. A throb from his cock reminded him of what his partner's lean body did to him. His hair was so soft, baby fine, so smooth to wind between his fingers. Hutch's torso was sleek, just right. When he was aroused, all that pale porcelain skin would pink. Hutch would blush from his sharp cheeks to his inward turned belly button.
A moan broke Starsky's pleasant reverie. The man in the bed was groaning like a lost soul. "No, no, no." the man cried, "Not Mulder...don't take him, please." Then a smothered scream further added to the sound of Krycek's torment. He thrashed, tangled in the covers, until frantically he propelled from the bed. He stood panting, green eyes feral in the dim light.

It was natural for Starsky to reach for the man. Physical intimacy had always been easy for him. His confidence in himself was sorely shaken a moment later. He was gasping, looking up at a savage face. Krycek's beauty was still impressive even with lips pulled back, baring white teeth and his whole face tensed to a hardened mask of wolfish defiance.

Scrambling back, Starsky narrowly avoided a vicious kick. He kept backing on hands and knees, taking cover behind the chair, which had overturned in his haste to get to the man. "Take it easy. You're safe. Hey, I'm one of the good guys."

The man was going for the door. Starsky didn't stop him. He didn't want to be rough and open the wound. He followed, sending a steady stream of comforting monologue in Krycek's direction. Nothing seemed to penetrate the panic attack. Krycek scurried toward the stairs, his movements wild yet conveying that he was well able to defend himself. Mulder confronted him half way down the stairs.

Oh, shit, Starsky thought. It was going to hit the fan. However, Mulder didn't attack. His voice, which Starsky had found annoyingly monotone and upper class, suddenly held layers of humor, understanding and warmth. "Hey, Alex, we're here, you know. No aliens, no Smoker, not even the crazed victim of an experiment. Just you and me, a quartet of cops and a safe house. A lot better than Skinner's balcony, don't you think?"

Mulder took a step or two down and stroked the man's arm from shoulder to wrist. Krycek's hand found his. Mulder said, "Okay, it was just a nightmare. We both know about those, don't we?"

His partner and he had their bad times, Starsky thought, but the expression on Mulder's face, in those expressive hazel eyes conveyed horrors beyond crooked judges and vengeful mobsters. What had the man said, aliens? A Smoker? Well, Starsky had heard rumors about a strange conspiracy that had been defeated a year or so back. It was well known now that Roswell was real. So that was the matter with which Mulder and Krycek had been involved?

Interesting to see how rapidly Krycek calmed when Mulder touched him despite all the antagonism they seemed to evidence. Like a snake charmer, Mulder continued to speak in a low rhythmic voice. "What is it this time? The silo? Your arm? Something Spender did to you. Could even be about me, huh?"

Krycek shuddered and started to collapse. Mulder caught him before Starsky could reach him. Hutch was at the top of the stairs, hair standing on end and clad only in his jeans. "What's going on?" Hutch asked.

"He's having a nightmare." Starsky explained as he helped Mulder walk Krycek down the stairs. They eased the man back into bed. He was still breathing in rapid gasps, but sanity had returned to his face.
Almost shyly, Krycek said, "Thanks, Mulder."

The walls dropped back down like an Arctic storm swooping into town. Mulder said, "Don't take it personally. I have them too, only most of my nightmares involve you." Spinning on his heels, the man marched away, nudging Hutch out of the way as he went out the door.

There was a brief silence and then Krycek turned his face into his pillow. Starsky felt helpless. It was obvious that the man didn't want any comfort from him.

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After Hutch took over and Starsky caught a few hours sleep, it was back to the basement. Hutch and Krycek were playing chess. Hutch went down in defeat as Starsky watched. He followed Hutch outside to the hall. They only had time for a quick kiss. As Starsky watched Hutch's ass trot up the stairs, always a treat from this angle, he realized that Krycek had followed them out of the room, seeing them kiss, but Starsky wasn't worried. As far as he was concerned, people could like it or lump it. Hutch just didn't want to make waves.

"Did you need something?" Starsky asked.

"A cup of tea." Krycek said.

Starsky yelled up the stairs, "Hutch, bring Alex a cup of tea before you hit the sack."

Doing one better, Hutch provided a tray with tea and cookies. Krycek didn't have much appetite and had hardly finished a meal since they got here. He did like the cookies though, chocolate and nut covered butter cookies from Starsky's favorite baker. Setting the tea tray down on the table in front of the couch, Starsky grabbed a cookie. He wasn't crazy about tea, but he wanted to keep the man company.

"Must be nice." Krycek remarked. "Being partners the way you two are. I remember there was a time when I dreamed about something like that, but it was never real."

Well at least, he was talking. Starsky said, 'Yeah, it's nice. Even before Hutch and I got together this way, we'd spent most of our time together. It never struck us as odd, that most guys would have found that too much time together."

"I never really...loved any one." Krycek said.

"Could have fooled me." Starsky answered, thinking of what had happened in that alley, the man willing to give his life to protect Mulder.

"I did things that blacken my soul." Krycek remarked.

"Yeah, my grandfather used to say that too. He was a Polish Jew. One of the few survivors of the Warsaw Ghetto. They made him a sonderkommando at the camp. You know what they did?" Starsky asked.
"Yes, they worked in the crematoriums, removed the bodies from the death chambers." Krycek said.

"Grandpa said he killed two capos to survive in there. Took bread from a dying man. Fought another guy to the death for the guard's amusement. When he got out, only falling in love with my grandmother saved him from suicide...that and the legacy." Starsky related.

Looking fascinated, Krycek asked, "What legacy?"

"That he lived and took those other lives. If he laid down and died after all that, then he'd killed for nothing." Starsky said.

Krycek looked very young at that moment. His mouth, which was so soft and pretty, gaped slightly and his eyes were wide, showing all the hues of verdant color. He said, "You're a good man, Starsky. Too good to waste any concern on me."

Smiling, Starsky said, "Just think about it. My grandfather was a very wise man."

"I will." Krycek said.

"Let's watch a flick. Hey, look Killer Tomatoes. Ever seen it?" Starsky asked.

"Mulder had it when we were...when I first knew him." Krycek said.

Well, that was close to a revelation. Starsky settled back. After a few moments, Krycek dropped his guard, yelling right along with Starsky at the ridiculously sublime scenes. Mulder crept out of nowhere and settled in one of the chairs set at the chess table, apparently not willing to share the couch with Krycek. Starsky thought about the tension between the two and concluded that it was more like he didn't trust himself around the man.

The evening passed peacefully. Tomorrow the prosecutor would come and interview the two men. If she felt satisfied then they would be attending the indictment hearing the following day. Word on the street was that Cooper knew about the witness. Either there was a leak or someone had gotten away to tell the mobster about Krycek. However, so far, the only outside eyes belonged to a flock of crows that roosted in the yard and made raucous calls of alarm whenever someone went in or out.

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The prosecuting attorney was pleased. Krycek told his story like a good cop. He was clear and concise, sure of himself. The woman with brown hair was new to the prosecutor's office. She looked like a young Sally Fields, small, pretty, almost plump, and a picture of big-eyed innocence. Her serious business suit didn't make her seem stern, just as if she had escaped from some fancy girl's school with a major dress code.

Alyce Curry was obviously not a lightweight. She drilled Krycek as ruthlessly as the high priced defense attorney would do. They sat in the recreation room downstairs for the interview. The two uniformed cops had rotated out and now a second pair, Harry Belgarde and Rich Amory had
taken their place. They were veterans and had worked with Starsky and Hutch before. It was good to know they were out there, serving as a first line of defense. Hutch leaned on the wall, brow furrowed, arms folded, scowling in concentration.

Closing her notepad, Ms. Curry said, "Once last thing, Mr. Krycek, how's your eyesight. The alley was dark and there was a lot going on."

"Rats see very well in the dark and a little commotion doesn't change that." Mulder remarked. He had straddled a chair and had spent the interview glaring at Krycek. If he'd had a tail, it would have been twitching from side to side so predatory was his gaze.

A dubious look crossed the prosecutor's pretty face. She had questioned Mulder who hadn't seen much. He had been intent on Krycek. Starsky already knew how obsessive the man was. He could have blundered unharmed, more or less through a forest fire when he was on the trail of one of his theories or in the grip of his vehement emotions.

A moment later after trading hostile glance with his nemesis, Krycek said, "I have perfect vision. Put me on a shooting range at night and I'll prove it. I hardly ever needed to use a scope."

"What are they going to find if the defense attorney goes for dirt on you?" the prosecutor asked.

"Nothing. The record shows that I'm a former FBI agent injured in the line of duty." Krycek replied with a sidelong glance at Mulder.

Marionette like, Mulder let Krycek pull his strings. He stomped out of the room, making a side trip to shove Krycek over in his chair.

Helping the man up, Starsky was startled to see an expression of satisfaction in the Krycek's beautiful green eyes. Was he so desperate for a touch from Mulder that even being hit gave him a glint of satisfaction? If so, he was playing a dangerous game. Mulder seemed as if he was a man who was barely in control, hurting badly and striking out at the world because of that.

After a few moments attempting to restore a semblance of normalcy to the situation, Ms. Curry left. She said, as she gathered her notes, "I certainly hope you can keep the man alive. I don't know if I should be more worried about the bad guys or that maniac in the expensive suit. I hope you are keeping them separate."

***

Stealing a few moments to talk while Amory sat with the witness, Starsky pulled Hutch into the bedroom they had been sharing in turns. Somehow watching Mulder and Krycek had made him crazy for his partner. He grabbed Hutch and wrestled him against the wall. His lover's hands kneaded his back as they kissed so deeply that Starsky saw stars. Hutch was peeling up the heavy wool of the Cowichan sweater that he had bought Starsky for Christmas. Starsky got into the action by unbuttoning his partner's worn blue jeans, tugging the flannel shirt from the tight pants.

"Oh, my God, do you have any idea how much I missed you? It's been two days!" Hutch remarked as he tossed the sweater on the floor.
Eager hands peeled off each other's remaining clothing and they tumbled onto the bed. What had at first seemed awkward now seemed natural as the two men nibbled, fondled, reveled in each other's bodies. Starsky worried a nipple, teasing it erect before starting for the other one. "What'cha want to do?" Starsky asked.

It used to be that if one penetrated the other, it was an obligation for the other to allow the same. When had it ceased to be just a part of fair play? All Starsky knew was that he didn't really care any more. Hutch could make him come just touching him. Damn, they knew each other's bodies as they once only knew each other's souls.

Well, Hutch had decided. He reached for the lubrication sitting in plain sight on the table. His finger pushed into Starsky, the opening yielded to him eagerly. One of his lover's hands continued to work him, never letting him get quite enough friction to come, but never letting him fall off the near peak of sensation that kept Starsky close to screaming.

Laughing, Hutch said, "Remember, quiet."

"Like a mouse." Starsky answered, making that a lie with a loud groan. Hutch smothered the sound with a kiss.

"I'm ready." Starsky moaned. "Get in me already, Hutch."

It was their favorite position for this; one of them on his back, legs supported by his lover's shoulders, cock accessible for additional pleasure. They liked to watch each other come, so often together. Joined like this, nothing else mattered. Starsky writhed as Hutch moved harder. He met the thrusts, receiving Hutch, looking up into the face still tender even in his mounting passion. They didn't have to warn each other. Their hearts, their souls were joined. Their bodies sang out as they came.

Collapsing, Hutch said, "Never seems long enough. Only you, Starsky."

"I know." Starsky teased and then he moved to clean up just a bit before lying back down with Hutch.

It was hard to move away, lying here like this, satisfied, tired, and aftershocks of pleasure still humming. At home, this would have been just an interlude before another round. But they weren't home. Starsky sighed as Hutch pulled away. His partner slapped his ass affectionately and said, "Got to work, Stark."

"Yeah, I know." Starsky said.

"You want me to take the next shift?" Hutch asked.

"Nah, Krycek likes me, I think. I want to find out what's going on with him and Mulder. The way it's been going I think there are things they have to resolve before one or the other blows." Starsky answered.
A lingering kiss and a shower later, Starsky went down to the basement. Krycek sat in the recreation room, but he wasn't doing much. He and Hutch had played a game or two of chess and now he sat twirling a black knight in his hands. "It's me, you know. Monty Python..." The green eyes challenged as he jerked his chin toward his shoulder. "Just a scratch."

Nodding dismissal at Amory, Starsky took the opposite chair, facing the witness across the chess table. He said, "So were you really in the FBI?"

"Yeah, not if you ask Mulder, but I was." Krycek said. "I was a blue flamer, as a matter of fact, when I was at the academy. Very eager to do all the right things, imagining that field agent post as if I was going be Batman and Kevin Costner in the Untouchables all in one. One day, I was called to meet what I thought was an Internal Affairs officer. He offered me a cup of coffee and next thing I knew I woke up strapped to a bed. I spend a month having my psyche ripped apart and put back together. When he was done, there wasn't much left of the young man that had sat down in that office."

"Brain washed?" Starsky questioned. He had seen examples of that so it was easy to believe. He shuddered as he recalled the tormented young man who had ended a previous witness protection assignment with a bullet. The poor guy had genuinely believed his victim had killed his beloved wife. The bastards who did it had succeeded in creating a life that never happened except in their devious brains.

Putting the black knight down with infinite care, Krycek said, "Yeah. I woke up as an assassin and a spy. All I knew was that I had to obey Spender. He told me all kinds of shit. That I was doing the right thing; that we were saving the human race; that I was going rule the world as one of the men who had stopped us from going the way of the dinosaurs."

"And Mulder?" Starsky asked.

"I was for him." Krycek answered. "Just like Dana Scully, only they failed with her. She was supposed to be a dead weight on him, destroying him from within by her debunking of his theories. Only they were soul mates. Course, Mulder has his quirks. Scully went on a pedestal, but he was always a sucker for the wrong woman or...as in my case, man. I was eye candy for him, just edgy enough to give him a thrill. They were so sure that he'd jump for me."

Starsky saw Mulder hovering in the hallway listening. Krycek was so involved in his story that for once instincts failed him. He continued, "Only, I wasn't experienced. I mean I knew I could go that way, but I never wanted to risk my precious career. A kiss was as far as he went. I think he was waiting for me to give him a sign, but I was too nervous. So it never happened and then Spender changed his mind. I don't know what I did wrong, but I became very, very expendable."

"So at what point did you remember being brain washed?" Starsky asked, reaching across the board to capture the fretful hand.

"After I did something so ugly to a kid that I still have nightmares. I was talking to another one of the consortium pawns and accidentally used my key words, 'rule the world'. Everything came back to me. By that time, it wasn't much use. I was dirty and I was one arm less than FBI requirements. After that, another one of the conspiracy decided to use me. He had a different
agenda, one that became mine. Spender made me a monster, but like Frankenstein's monster, I turned on my creator." Eyes glowing, Krycek said, "I helped take it all down."

"So what's Mulder's problem? You ever tell him any of this?" Starsky asked. He saw Mulder backing away. He'd heard a lot. Starsky figured the man needed a little more food for thought.

"I tried, but he doesn't believe me. I lied too many times or at least, it looked as if I did. I made a lot of bad moves, got sucked into Spender's schemes. The old man even made me kill someone; the man Mulder thought was his father. I tell myself he could have done it to anybody, but I don't know. Maybe he picked me for a reason, knew I was weak." Krycek said, the closed down look coming back to his face.

"Sounds as if you survived a lot of stuff for someone who isn't very strong." Starsky remarked.

"I used to be afraid to die." Krycek said bleakly.

Mulder had returned to eavesdropping. Starsky saw those words hit him. He took a step closer as if unable to resist. Feeling very smug, Starsky felt as if he had played matchmaker.

Hutch yelled down the stairs, "Starsky, the outside men aren't responding."

Grabbing Mulder, Starsky dragged him into the room. "You two stay here. Mulder are you armed?"

"Yeah." The FBI agent replied.

A glint of defiance in his eyes, Krycek moved his leather jacket aside. He had acquired his weapon back. Damned if Starsky knew when or how...

"Okay." Starsky said, "Just let Hutch and I handle this."

Hutch said, "Phone lines cut. I used the mobile, but I'm not sure if it went through. Dobie answered and then it cut out."

"Just you and me, partner?" Starsky asked.

"What else is new?" Hutch replied.

Poking his head up for a brief view, Starsky saw Amory lying on the lawn. He was still moving, but was pinned down. Belgarde was doing his best to cover for his partner, but he was trapped behind the patrol car. A shot zinging over Starsky's head sent him ducking back down.

"Fucking house is on fire." Hutch yelled.

It certainly was. The place was going up like a gasoline soaked rag. Krycek and Mulder burst up the stairs. Starsky didn't blame them. Of all the ways to die, fire was one of the worst. Mulder disappeared in the direction of the kitchen. He said, "I'll cover the back. Krycek?"

The man had disappeared. Mulder yelled again, "Krycek?"
There was no response. It was hard to search without exposing themselves to bullets, but between the two of them, Starsky and Mulder concluded that somehow or other, Krycek had escaped outside. Mulder grumbled, "And you almost had me believing in him. The rat and sinking ships..."

Ruefully reflecting that Cooper would not believe that the witness had flown the coop, Starsky uttered a satisfied grunt as he saw one of the besieging men fall. Outside, Belgarde kept up his end of the defense. Starsky felt badly for him. The veteran cop was almost as fond of his partner in a different way as Starsky was of Hutch. He must be going crazy trying to get to Amory.

The smoke was choking them and Starsky gathered himself for flight. Just as they were ready to try for the shelter of the patrol car, the big SUV that the department had loaned them pulled onto the lawn with a circling motion, protecting Amory long enough for Belgarde to pull him in behind the police car for protection. Continuing the motion, the SUV crashed into one of the cars that had brought Cooper's men. It kept going, crunching one of the cars against the other, but the impact must have stunned the driver. The three trapped men joined Belgarde behind the patrol car.

"No!" Mulder screamed as men pulled a feebly struggling Krycek from the SUV.

"Damn it, Mulder." Starsky grumbled as the FBI agent charged toward the nexus of danger and lust that was his former partner. He grabbed a handful of air. He crawled forward, aware of Hutch beside him, both of them laying down a heavy barrage of fire in an attempt to cover Mulder.

At Mulder's shout, Krycek must have come back to consciousness. He took out the man who had been dragging him toward the black van. Starsky heard an audible snap and the man's head flopped at an angle incompatible with life.

"Mulder, get down!" Krycek yelled, running in a broken pattern toward his former partner. "Get down."

Starsky couldn't tell whether Mulder's luck had run out and he had finally caught a bullet or whether he just stumbled. Krycek seemed to think it was the former. He shouted something in a language that sounded like the Polish that grandpa used to yell when he was very angry. He ran to Mulder, throwing himself on top the man to protect him.

Cooper's men aimed the van at the two. Starsky and Hutch rose and fired as one person. They took out the front tires and the van veered off, hitting the fence. Unfortunately, it hadn't been going fast enough to do the shooters any harm. They boiled out like bees from a fallen hive. Meanwhile Krycek had managed to drag Mulder to the meager shelter of an overgrown clump of ground cover. They were both arguing with each other...something about who was more stupid than the other.

Starsky grunted as he rolled over on his back to reload as Hutch covered. "You don't suppose..."

Sirens! Dobey to the rescue. Meanwhile, the five men had become a team. Two more of Cooper's men had fallen. Starsky figured that made the odds three to one. At least the mobster hadn't
underestimated them. He'd sent a small army. Ah, a little panic in the ranks. One of the cars went careening off. The ones in the van seemed determined to finish the job. Either Mulder or Krycek was a hell of a shot. Two more frontrunners fell as they targeted the two. Starsky exchanged glances with Hutch and they moved as one, yelling like banshees and firing steadily.

That left three. Krycek whirled out, moving like a dervish of death. Startled, the remaining men froze. With Starsky and Hutch flanking them and deserted by their comrades, the killers gave up. They held up their arms in surrender. Starsky uttered a whoop of triumph as he and Hutch ran up to search the captives.

A moment later, Dobey and reinforcements arrived to take over. Krycek and Mulder were dirt covered. Both had blood streaked faces. Krycek remarked, "I called for backup before I went in. Something you never learned to do."

A tired grin was Mulder's reply. "Very good, Krycek. Maybe Starsky and Hutch might want to hear some DOT statistics later. Gentlemen? I'd like to have a safer, safe house."

*** Some of the captive birds were going to sing. Krycek was still needed, but Cooper was going down for multiple counts of soliciting homicide as well as for bribery, extortion, drug running, and tax evasion.

Amory was in the hospital, but according to Belgarde, the man was just enjoying the private bathroom. The cop had three teenage daughters and two sons in a one and a half bath house. He came in to work early with his shaving kit most mornings just to have a chance to use a sink and mirror.

Hutch whistled as he listened to Starsky singing in the shower. They had a room of their own in this crème de la crème of safe houses and enough back up to make plenty of time for each other. Starsky yelled, "Hutch, go get Krycek's sizes. Ms. Curry wants him to look pretty."

Somehow the FBI agent and the double agent had ended up sharing a room. Hutch was pretty sure that they hadn't consummated the truce yet, but he had interrupted a kiss yesterday that looked as if it was an incendiary device. Knocking, Hutch asked, "Are you two decent?"

Laughing, Mulder said, "Well, I am. I'm trying to make my mind up about Krycek."

Hutch pushed the door open. The two were sitting on the bed. Krycek looked as if someone had given him a drink from the fountain of youth. He was glowing; even his hair seemed to shine brighter. Hutch said, "I have to get Krycek a suit. Alyce wants him to look like a sincere, former FBI agent on a disability. Leather looks good, but that's not what she wants."

Standing up, Mulder said, "Find me a measuring tape. I'll get his suit. Uh, I think he's more my style than yours."

"Okay," Hutch said. It took a few moments, but the tape was found and delivered. Hmm, free time and freshly clean Starsky...sounded like a plan.

*** The tape winding in his fingers, Mulder said, "Now, Alex, you need to strip."
"To be measure for a suit?" Krycek asked. "You can't just do it over my clothes?"

"You want to look really good or not?" Mulder demanded.

"Whatever you want, Mulder." The teasing, tasting play with his name sounded like a come on. They'd been taking it slow with so much pain between them. It had left Mulder with a perpetual case of blue balls, but he knew he didn't want to hurt Alex by taking him before he was sure that it was what they both wanted.

Mulder had done a lot of talking with Starsky and Hutch. The two men represented something he once dreamed that he would have with Krycek. Both of them seemed to think the FBI agent and the former Consortium double agent still had a chance. Mulder wanted to believe.

Maybe now was the time. Alex looked timid as he removed his moss green sweater and unzipped his jeans. He angled away, not wanting Mulder to see the prosthesis too closely. When they had been necking, Mulder had brushed it once or twice, causing Alex to pull away and tense. Standing in his briefs, Alex raised his chin defiantly. He was as gorgeous as ever; more beautiful really than the glimpse in the FBI gym that had fueled a variety of fantasies over the years from the sweet seduction of the green agent to violent dreams of rape.

The tape was just an excuse. Alex knew that as well. His eyes were closed, his body offered in trembling submission to Mulder. The tape slithered over the smooth and elegant neck. Mulder murmured the measurements into Alex's ears, flicking his tongue into the hollows of the delightfully pointed things. He whispered his lips down the throat, feeling Alex swallow nervously. As Mulder took the chest measurements, he let his thumbs circle Alex's nipples. They sprang upright on the smooth skin of the nearly hairless breadth of chest.

The right arm was heavily muscled although Alex must have undergone some kind of therapy as the left shoulder was still developed. Mulder shuddered inwardly as he said, "I really have to check the left side too, Alex."

"Mulder..." Alex said, eyes opening.

"It will be all right. I've looked at it. I won't say that it doesn't bother me, but only because of what it does to you." Mulder assured. He nuzzled Alex's nape, moving back the tendrils of hair. "I'm glad that you grew your hair longer."

"Yeah, well, that was a stupid ass haircut." Krycek answered.

"There, all done. Did I hurt you?" Mulder found his voice was as tender as he sometimes used with Scully.

"No, it's okay." Alex said, his eyes briefly met Mulder's then flickered away. When Mulder rounded the thighs with the tape, he grinned as he saw the bulge in the briefs. Of course right now, his own boxers were straining over his erection. He was sure that the only thing he would ever regret was not making love to Alex. His tongue flicking out, Mulder took the inseam measurement and rocked back on his heels. Alex looked down at him. Reaching his fingers under the white briefs, Mulder asked, "May I?"
"Yeah. Please." Alex breathed.

That was beautiful. He was cut. Mulder remembered that. It was okay although for some reason he'd imagined it the other way at first. It had been something about Krycek's name and his exotic looks. He was perfectly proportioned. Mulder touched his lips to the silken shaft and tasted the slightly bitter pre-cum. Krycek's right hand braced on his shoulder as he virtually howled his appreciation.

Mulder smirked, leaving the man hard and straining with need. He said, "It was rude of me not to match your state of dress."

The pupils expanded in the green eyes as they took in the slow strip tease. Krycek uttered a heartfelt "Mulder." It seemed that Krycek's smart mouth was stunned into nearly inarticulate short phrases.

Alex's hand explored. His lips followed. Groaning they fell onto the bed. Mulder had always wanted to fuck him, but they didn't have the discipline for that. It was all groping and kissing, a frenzy of consumption before each stiffened and cried out in turn.

Alex's head lay heavily on Mulder's shoulder as his hand stroked the silken hair over and over. He could feel wetness on his skin as his new lover wept silently. "It's going to be okay now. I'll take care of you."

A tremulous smile met this comment. "Yeah, I know, Alex. Okay, how about we take care of each other from now on?"

"Yes." Alex said, moving up to kiss Mulder. The lashes were long enough to brush over Mulder's face, a teasing sweet angel caress. They fit together so well as if some hidden hand had sculpted them to each other. "Mulder, I want to tell you something."

Fear gripped Mulder's heart. What could be left unsaid that made Alex so reluctant to speak. He swallowed and determined that he would not be angry. He said, "Tell me then."

Eyes vulnerable, glistening with emotion, Alex said, "I haven't let anyone inside me. Not ever. I was saving it for you even when I figured you'd rather kill me."

That teasing, taunting man who Mulder had called a whore on more than one occasion looked at him with an oddly embarrassed air. "Stupid. I know it was stupid."

"No, Alex, that was... well; no one ever wanted me that badly before. All this time..." His voice broke so he spoke with his hands. It seemed important to touch Alex everywhere, to claim every sweet tantalizing inch of him. There was no hurry. They seemed suspended in a world of their own.

Mulder's hand rested between Alex's legs. He felt the heat and the stir of him. Stroking, he stoked the fire. It didn't take much. Maybe it was that this was the conclusion of a long, long courting dance. Up to now, it had seemed one doomed to end in tragedy.
Taking a deep breath, Alex pressed the lube into Mulder's hand. "When you're ready."

So patient, so longing, Mulder inched a finger inside. He used too much lubrication to the point that it was hard to stay inside. Alex was moaning and his body quivered at each stroke until Mulder's finger found the spot. Alex drew up his legs and pushed against Mulder's fingers. "That feels...I can't believe how that feels. I've read and guys have told me, but..."

"Shut up." Mulder said, but it sounded more like, I love you, even to him.

The body beneath him was strong, even in this mutilated state yet to Mulder it felt fragile. Alex yielded to him, yielded everything to him. "You are so beautiful." He whispered as he thrust. "I love you. And we are never going to be apart, my Alex. My beautiful Alex."

A virgin no more, Alex lay in his arms. He moved closer and said, "Thank you, Mulder. I love you and it was everything I ever dreamed. Even if you decide you don't want me..."

"Bull. Just try to skip out again, Alex..." Mulder threatened.

"What's Scully going to say?" Alex asked.

"Oh, hell, I don't know. She'll get over it. Just thinks of the kid these days anyway and John 'I'm so stable and reliable' Doggett anyway." Mulder said. He said, "I notice you didn't ask about Skinner."

"We understand each other." Alex replied, with a quick toss of his head and an evasive look.

"One of those guys who told you what you were missing?" Mulder asked.

"I'm here with you." Alex replied huskily.

"You are." Mulder said. "Where you belong. Where you were meant to be."

***

Hutch could feel Starsky stirring restlessly on the bench. He was playing with a coin, pulling at his tie. Hutch resisted the urge to straighten the crooked knot. Krycek's voice compelled from the stand. His green eyes pinned Cooper as if he were an avatar of justice.

Sneaking a peak at Mulder, Hutch hid a grin. The man was gazing at his lover in a way that could not be mistaken by anyone with eyes. Krycek did look gorgeous, dressed up in silk and imported wool. The color flattered his eyes and his coloring, not that either needed it. The jacket was so well designed that both arms looked normal. As for the trousers, Mulder must have wanted to show Krycek off a little. Hutch had noticed most of the women and a few men followed that round ass as the man walked toward the judge. Hutch told himself that he hadn't eyed the man himself. Starsky was fidgeting on the only ass that Hutch wanted to see.

The other witnesses were just echoes of the death knell. The prosecutors had gone after separate sentences. Cooper was eligible for parole about the time the Starship Enterprise was docking
from its first port of call. He'd appeal, but Judge Martin ran a tight ship. He had been scrupulous about every motion, yielding to the defense whenever there was doubt.

The two newfound lovers held hands on the way to the airport. Starsky drove, his tomato red classic Torino sparkling in the sunlight. Hutch said, "So you going to bite the bullet and move in together?"

Mulder said, "Yeah, I need a bigger place anyway. I've been in that dark apartment way too long. I think Alex and I both want to live in the bright sunshine a while. I want to thank you too. I don't think I'd have had the courage to ask him without you two as an example."

"No problem. You can put us up sometime. I mean Starsky always wanted to have a gawk around the capital."

Alex was silent; holding tightly to his lover, head resting on his shoulder. At the airport, the man silently hugged first Starsky and then Hutch. His glowing eyes and the soft smile on his face was an ample reward for the struggle.

As the plane carried the lovers away, Hutch turned to Starsky. He said, "Dobey said to take the day off. What do you want to do?"

Starsky's grin and the insolent challenge of his sapphire eyes drifting to Hutch's crotch was enough of an answer. Hutch smiled back and said, "Yeah, me too."