

The triX-Files

Warren Grove, New Jersey

Friday, September 8

10:22 pm

Campbell Smith swore as he stumbled over a fallen log. His flashlight did little to cut through the gloom that had fallen. In fact, it only served to illuminate the swirling mist that engulfed him. The full moon had disappeared beneath ominous black clouds, and Cam wondered, not for the first time, how he had been talked into this. He pressed on, the night sounds of the pine forest giving him little comfort.

"Cam!" His best friend Kenny Butler called, his voice hovering somewhere between a raspy whisper and a controlled holler.

Cam stopped and turned around. "Yeah?"

"Are we almost there?" Kenny said in that not-quite-a-whisper voice that people use when they're trying to be quiet but heard at the same time. His crunching footsteps grew louder as he closed in on Cam. The pitch black combined with the lingering fog made it hard to see the meager light of Kenny's flashlight, even though he was no more than a few feet away.

"I think so," Cam replied as he turned and continued on the overgrown path forged by loggers more than a century ago. *This hasn't been a path for ages*, Cam reflected. *The forest has reclaimed what we humans have taken from it.*

Cam hadn't been out here since he was a boy. His dad had once taken him hunting in the Jersey Pine Barrens frequently, and Cam had enjoyed the father-son weekends spent under the stars in front of a roaring campfire. The seventeen-year-old felt a momentary pang of sadness at what would never be again; cancer had put an early end to those carefree, crisp autumn nights.

Suddenly, the moon came out from behind the dark clouds, casting a pale yellow glow to the forest below just as Cam and Kenny entered a small clearing. Cam stopped and looked around, trying to get his bearings. The cabin they were looking for wasn't far from here for sure.

"Man, we're idiots!" Kenny suddenly piped up as he, too, stopped at the entrance to the clearing.

Cam looked at his friend, amused. "You just now realized we were goaded into this?"

"Not just now. Damn! I've been thinking about it the whole way here! It seemed like a good idea at the time..." Kenny's voice trailed off.

"We'll spend the night at the cabin, take pictures to prove it, and we'll be heroes at school on Monday," Cam said in a matter-of-fact voice, more to reassure himself than his friend. He really hoped his strong words didn't betray the bad feeling that had settled in his gut.

Why had they agreed to spend the night in that old cabin everyone said was haunted?

'Cuz we're seventeen-year-old guys who can be manipulated by taunts from our friends, he thought wryly. Cam paused in his tracks and then thought of the other person who had been present after school the day they had discussed this endeavor. *And a pretty face.* How was he supposed to refuse Bud's challenge in front of Jennifer? Jennifer of the ebony hair and smoldering dark eyes.

"Dude! Why do you have that goofy look on your face?" Kenny interrupted his friend's daydreams.

"Dude, whatever! I don't know what you're talking about," Cam retorted as he started toward a dim path at the opposite side of the clearing. Kenny shrugged and followed.

Insects kept up a chorus, somewhere in the distance an owl hooted, and a gentle breeze whistled through the pines, providing an accompaniment to the crunching and snapping of the boys' footsteps.

Fleep! Fleeowweep! Both boys froze in their tracks, listening for another sharp cry. It was hard to tell whether it was close or far away.

"What was that?" Kenny didn't even try to keep the panic out of his voice. "That doesn't sound like any animal I've ever heard!"

"I don't know, but let's high-tail it to the cabin!"

The two friends starting running, almost reaching the opposite edge of the clearing, before a huge gust of wind came from nowhere, replacing the gentle breeze of a moment before and shaking the trees. As if extinguishing a flame, the moon chose to go back under the dark clouds at that moment, leaving the terrified friends in pitch black.

A dawning, terrifying realization struck the boys as they simultaneously grasped the fact that both of their flashlights had died at the exact moment the wind had appeared to douse the pale light of the moon.

"Listen!" Campbell hissed.

"What? I don't hear anything," Kenny whispered.

"Exactly!"

The forest had become perfectly silent. The air was still--no insects chirped, no pines whistled. A hush had fallen over the whole forest, and the two friends were surrounded by an oppressive silence that exuded evil.

Seconds that felt like days ticked by as Campbell's and Kenny's panicked minds raced, desperately searching for a plan. Something, *anything*, that could be remotely useful.

"Kenny?" Campbell whispered.

"Yeah?" Kenny croaked back.

"Run!"

As of one mind, both young men turned and ran back toward the old logging path they had just come from.

Fleep! Fleeoweep!

Above the loud noise that the two friends were making as they stumbled through the underbrush, the weird forest cry could still be heard. Kenny fell over a stump, sprawling on the forest floor. Cam, out of his mind with fright, did not realize his friend was no longer behind him until he heard a sharp *Fleep! Fleeoweep!* at close range followed by Kenny's scream of horror.

Involuntarily, he stopped. "Kenny?"

Damn it! I can't leave him here! Cam's mind screamed. But I don't want to die here, either!

Loyalty won out, and Campbell headed back to where he had last heard Kenny, or thought he had. "Kenny? Kenny? *Kenny?*"

Campbell was about to give up and head out of the woods when the moon abruptly appeared and illuminated the clearing that he had not managed to make it out of.

Cam looked down and a wave of revulsion and horror swept over him like a tidal wave. The moonlight was bright enough so that Cam could see the mutilated and mangled body of Kenny Butler.

Oh my God! They killed Kenny! Were Campbell's last lucid thoughts before hearing a sharp *Fleep! Fleeoweep!* He turned just in time to see a strange bird-like creature with a deformed head and gleaming talons flying through the air, straight at him.

Campbell managed a dry croak before the beast descended upon him. Then, all was silent.

The breeze picked up again, insects resumed their chorus, and the pines whistled once more. The moon continued to shine down on the little clearing, casting a pale glow over two bloody, lifeless bodies.

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I started this story in December of 2000. At the time I started the story, the date this chapter starts had no significance, and I have decided to let it stand, since it is a year before 9/11. And now I am in *heaps o'* trouble since I am not only using copyrighted print characters, but now I've stolen some copyrighted television characters as well! :) I am using the Mulder and Scully that I remember fondly from many seasons ago—he the truth-seeker, she the skeptic. Forgive my lack of knowledge about the inner workings of the FBI and please willfully suspend your disbelief if I make any glaring errors! Thanks!

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Chapter One

*FBI Field Office, New York, NY
Monday, September 11, 2000
7:02 pm*

Trixie Frayne sat in her office, scowling at the computer screen in front of her. As much as she loved her job at the FBI, she could definitely do without the paperwork involved. She chewed on the end of her pen, trying to decide how to diplomatically phrase "worthless, crack-smoking, drug-dealing, low-life, girlfriend-killing scumbag", when there was a knock on her office door, even though it was open, as she routinely left it since being moved from the cubicles she had once shared with her fellow agents.

She looked up, happy for a respite from the dreaded paperwork, and smiled at the two strangers in business suits standing at her door. The woman looked very serious, while her male companion had a much more relaxed look about him while still managing to look intense at the same time.

"May I help you?" Special Agent Frayne said in her most professional voice.

The man spoke up. "Agent Frayne?" At Trixie's nod, the handsome thirty-something introduced himself. "I'm Agent Fox Mulder, and this is my partner, Agent Dana Scully." He nodded toward the redhead standing to his right.

"What can I do for you, Agents Mulder and Scully?" Trixie asked, curiosity seeping into her voice.

"We've flown up here from DC—" Agent Scully started to say, but Trixie interrupted.

"From Headquarters?" The young FBI agent didn't hide her surprise. In her 18 months at the FBI's New York Office, Trixie had never received visitors from the J. Edgar Hoover FBI Headquarters in Washington DC.

Agent Scully nodded. "There was a double homicide last Friday night involving two teenagers. The homicide took place in the woods surrounding Warren Grove, New Jersey."

"New Jersey? I'm afraid that's not under the jurisdiction of this office." The tone of Trixie's voice indicated that she didn't think it was under the jurisdiction of the two agents standing in her office, either. "All of those cases are handled by the Newark office. Unless this Warren Grove is in Camden, Gloucester, or Salem counties. If that's the case, they handle that over in Philly."

Agent Mulder spoke up. "It's in Burlington County. We've already been to the Newark office and spoke to the agent in charge of the case, Leighton Ogilvie. He's willing to turn the case over to you, if you are willing to accept it." Trixie started to interrupt, but Mulder anticipated her question and

continued. "We've already spoken with your AD. He's willing to let you take the case, if you so choose."

Trixie scrutinized the two agents standing before her. Mulder, she noted, was quite tall and thin, with a devil-may-care expression that she immediately found to her liking. He looked as though he might bend the rules, even break a few if he had to, in the pursuit of justice. His partner, Scully, was about 5'4", just like Trixie herself, and had red hair that she kept in a short but stylish bob. Her green eyes were serious, matching her countenance.

"What are the facts of the case?" Trixie wanted to know, still wondering why an agent would voluntarily give up a case and why she was being approached. Field office leaders weren't thrilled with letting cases leave their jurisdiction. How had these two agents from headquarters convinced the folks in Newark?

Mulder handed the petite blonde the folder he held and waited while she opened it and stared at photographs of the crime scene. They were particularly gruesome, and Mulder noted with satisfaction that she was able to examine the photos without wincing. Trixie looked up at Mulder. "Two kids went hiking in the Jersey Pine Barrens and someone sliced them up. Surely this isn't the first time this has ever happened. Why come from DC? Why involve me?"

Trixie didn't miss the smile that played across Agent Scully's lips at her questions. She deduced that Scully shared her views but obviously trusted her partner enough to humor him thus far. Trixie forgot about Scully's enigmatic smile at Mulder's next words.

"Ever hear of the Jersey Devil?"

Trixie stared at him. Could this FBI Agent actually be implying that the mythical Jersey Devil had murdered these two kids? She decided to have a little fun. "Sure, they're the current Stanley Cup champions. I managed to get tickets to one of the games of the Finals. You a hockey fan?"

Mulder looked amused, and Scully wasn't quite successful in hiding her smile as she turned away.

"I do like hockey, but I'm talking about the alleged beast that causes havoc around New Jersey and the surrounding area every few decades," Mulder explained.

Trixie looked at Scully to see her reaction to her partner's words. The redheaded agent met Trixie's stare evenly, and Trixie was not able to ascertain what Scully thought about her partner's theory.

"Sure I've heard of it. I grew up around here," Trixie explained.

"But you don't believe in it?" Mulder persisted.

"Are you trying to tell me that you think a mythical creature killed these two kids?" The blonde agent's voice was filled with incredulity.

"Agent Frayne, I'm simply asking if you believe in it."

"No, I don't," Trixie stated bluntly.

Mulder's next statement threw her off. "But you do believe in the sasquatch."

Trixie's eyes narrowed as she looked at the two agents standing before her. She wondered if she was being set up for something. Mulder hadn't asked her if she believed in the sasquatch—he had stated it as fact.

"What does a sasquatch have to do with anything?" Trixie's voice sounded defensive, even to her own ears, as she avoided answering the agent's "question" directly.

"With the facts of this case? Nothing. With my choice of liaison field agents? Everything," Mulder said cryptically.

Trixie looked to Scully for help. "I have a lot of paperwork to get done, and it's already after seven. I'd like to get home to my husband sometime before Easter, so can we cut to the chase?"

Scully nodded, apparently happy to take over from her partner. "The two victims were Campbell Smith, age seventeen, and Kenneth Butler, also seventeen. Apparently, some of their friends dared them to spend Friday night at some abandoned cabin back in the woods. They were to take a camcorder to prove they had done it. Each had told their parents that they were spending the night at the other's house. At four p.m. Saturday, Mr. and Mrs. Butler became worried when their son had not returned from his friend's house. They called Mrs. Smith and learned that she had been about to call them to find out where *her* son was. The parents then called some of the boys' friends, but they all denied any knowledge of their whereabouts. Apparently, they were afraid they were going to get in trouble.

"Finally, Mrs. Smith called her son's girlfriend, Jennifer Belarius, age sixteen. Jennifer became quite upset and immediately confessed what the boys had been up to."

Trixie spoke up. "Did you get the names of the boys who put them up to this?"

Scully nodded. "According to Miss Belarius, there were five boys hanging around after school that day teasing each other. In addition to the two victims, Jeffrey Shaw, age eighteen, Brandon McKenzie, age seventeen, and Ryan Jordan, age sixteen, were all present. It was Shaw who made up the dare."

"Have you done a background check into any of the other three? If they orchestrated the dare, maybe they orchestrated the murders," Trixie stated, still trying to figure out why she was being dragged into this investigation. She hated to think that teenagers could be responsible for the brutal murders she had seen in graphic detail in the file, but after being with the Bureau for more than four years now, she knew it was possible.

"McKenzie and Jordan seem to be completely clean. Shaw, however, got into some trouble his sophomore year of high school and was held back a year. That's why he's older than the rest," Mulder put in.

"What kind of trouble?" the blonde agent questioned.

Scully and Mulder exchanged glances and Scully answered. "At his old school in Illinois, he set up an abandoned house with some gadgets to make it appear haunted. He tricked a couple of his fellow students into staying overnight. He terrified them to the point that one of the students actually had a nervous breakdown and was hospitalized for several months. Shaw was expelled from school. He became so notorious in the small town that his parents decided to move to New Jersey, where they had grown up. He started his sophomore year over in Warren Grove."

Trixie snorted. "There you go. You have a teenager who gets his jollies scaring the bejesus out of his friends. He got off on the fact that he sent some kid to a mental hospital a few years ago, so now he decides to go one better—send his 'buddies' to the morgue."

Mulder shook his head. "I don't think that's what we have here. This kid's been clean since it happened. Plus, by all accounts, he was very remorseful after the incident. I think we're dealing with something else entirely here."

Trixie looked at him skeptically. "The Jersey Devil?" she asked in a mocking tone.

Mulder looked nonplussed at her attitude. He grinned and shrugged. "If the talons fit..."

"Has the ME done an autopsy on the bodies yet?" Trixie ignored his comment while Scully shot him a look of reproach.

"Actually, Agent Scully is also a licensed MD. She performed the autopsy today. That's why we've arrived here so late. But your reputation precedes you—we figured you would be working late."

"What did you find, Agent Scully?" Agent Frayne ignored what she considered pandering on the part of Agent Mulder and was all business.

"The cause of death on both victims appeared to be acute blood loss from the jugular following an asymmetrical slash across the throat. All in all, there were more than 70 slashes across each of the bodies—74 on Campbell Smith, and 78 on Kenny Butler."

"What kind of a blade did the weapon appear to be?"

Scully looked uncomfortable for a moment. "It didn't appear to be a blade at all," she admitted, glancing at her partner, whose faced bore the slightest hint of a smug expression.

"What was it then?" Trixie prodded, having no patience for the whatever dynamic it was that the partners from DC shared.

"The slashes appeared to be in a pattern that would be consistent with sharp claws of some sort," Scully admitted.

"Talons?" Trixie asked incredulously and then looked at Mulder accusingly.

"Possibly," Scully confirmed, looking slightly uncomfortable.

Trixie looked the other female agent in the eye. "Agent Scully, do *you* think that the Jersey Devil killed these boys?"

The redhead paused for a moment. "I think that there are some instances in which it may appear that unknown forces are at work, but I do prefer to try to exhaust all scientific possibilities before looking elsewhere for answers."

"Occam's Razor?" Trixie asked, referring to the tenet of science that proclaimed the simplest answer was usually the best.

Scully allowed herself to smile. "When you hear hoofbeats think horses, not zebras."

"Have you interviewed any of the students yet?"

"No, we're visiting Warren Grove High School tomorrow to interview the four students who were present for the conversation that lead to the two boys spending the night at that cabin," Scully told her. "We were hoping you would accompany us."

"Will you take the case, Agent Frayne?" Mulder asked suddenly, looking at her with those intense eyes, and Trixie almost found herself mesmerized.

Should she take this case? It *did* intrigue her, and the prospect of working with Agents Mulder and Scully was not unpleasant—they seemed interesting, at the very least. She was finishing up a case right now, expecting to turn in the final report before she left for the evening. The few cases she had on her desk right now were low priority. Plus, her AD had already given his permission for her to work on this case. Why not?

"Yes," she said firmly, her clear blue eyes locking with Mulder's intense hazel ones. "I will help you with this case."

She wasn't sure she liked the triumphant look that appeared in Mulder's eyes at her acceptance, but there was no backing out now.

She and the two visiting agents made plans to meet the following morning at 8 a.m. in front of Warren Grove High School. After the agents had gone, Trixie phoned her husband in Sleepyside, saying she had been detained and promising to be on the next train home. She finished her report for her AD and was about to shut down her computer when a thought struck her. She fired up the FBI database and soon found the information she was looking for.

Spooky Mulder, eh? She thought as she read the words on the computer screen before her. Apparently Agent Mulder had a reputation for handling cases deemed "unsolvable" by the FBI. His belief in the unknown and somewhat unorthodox methods when working on a case had earned him the nickname of "Spooky" from his peers. Evidently, he believed he had witnessed his younger sister's abduction by aliens when he was eleven years old and had been on a paranormal quest ever since. His cases involved alien abductions, poltergeists, mutants, evolutionary anomalies, and even alleged vampires, among other paranormal phenomena.

Suddenly, his knowledge of her sasquatch sighting made sense to the young agent. As a matter of fact, her sasquatch sighting seemed tame compared to what she was reading in his file. Trixie narrowed her eyes as she had a sudden thought.

He sought me out. I will definitely have to keep an eye out for this man's motives.

It was then she realized she felt it. That intangible, but very real, sensation that told her she was off on another adventure. She smiled in anticipation at the thought.

Special Agent Trixie Frayne then realized the time, and knowing that she needed to hurry to make the next train as she had promised Jim she would, she turned off her computer, shut off the lights in her office, and headed home to her husband at Ten Acres.

One last note: I don't know if you can really get that much information on other FBI Agents from the real FBI database, but when you are playing the X-Files computer game you can from their FBI database, so that's good enough for me! *g*

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